

Witch 1011

Chapter 1011: Making a Big Splash

Now that the new administrative system had significantly sped up information transmission, the news about the king's coronation and wedding quickly spread from west to north, causing a stir along its way.

In the past, this kind of news was usually spread by merchants and boatmen. Now, however, the local government of each town and city posted bulletins in the busiest streets and sent staff to explain them to the public. It seemed as if the government wanted every person to know the king's decision. Under such circumstances, the news became the hottest topic in all towns and cities within just a few days. Everybody was so fervently talking about it that they had even forgotten about the cold weather.

As always, most civilians loved to gather around a fireplace to drink ale and discuss the recent news and hearsay. This traditional recreational pastime for the people brought brisk business as well as various views and information to taverns. Covert Trumpeter was such a place.

Black Hammer, the new owner of the tavern, grinned from ear to ear in these days. His business usually languished in winters, but this winter, his tavern was flourishing because of the news about the king's coronation and wedding. Seeing the rapid increase in his income, he felt really good.

He predicted that his business would continue to boom until the end of the king's coronation ceremony.

"What a wise decision to hold the ceremony in the Months of Demons!" he thought as his heart melted in gratitude. If he could meet His Majesty in person now, he would immediately get on the ground to kiss his boots.

After all, gold royals were the most adorable thing in the whole world.

Unfortunately, as a former Rat, he probably would not be allowed to meet Roland Wimbledon. He even seldom got a chance to meet Theo.

Black Hammer knew his limits and never expected a sudden status upgrade.

Theo was not a poor patrol leader or an ordinary guard of Prince Roland anymore. Since Timothy's defeat, he had become the most powerful man in the old king's city. He had easily sent the previous owner of Covert Trumpeter, Nagy, who had treated Rats like cr*p, to some remote place. In the clean-up operation against Black Street, Black Hammer and his friends had followed Theo's advice to split off from Skeleton Fingers. That was how they became official subjects of the city and took over this tavern.

Black Hammer could never forget about Theo's help.

He wanted to express his gratitude to him personally, so he planned to visit Theo's home with Silver Ring, Pott and Little Finger before he left the old king's city. Though this might cost him some gold royals, he believed that as long as he could keep a good relationship with Theo, he would earn them back sooner or later.

Despite that, he also knew that he should do his job properly.

He needed to collect information for Theo. Once he heard some valuable information from some bragging trader or traveler, he would write it down and send it to the connector.

At present, he was on watch for potential insurgents.

There were some suspicious-looking people on the 6th table.

"Do you really believe that's just a coincidence?" A red-faced merchant grumbled. "How come the king hastily arranged his coronation ceremony all of a sudden? Do you really believe he just happened to find his eldest brother's widow and son when he announced that he was going to marry a witch who can never bear a child?"

This statement was echoed by some people. "I've heard that His Highness Gerald didn't like women at all. Someone stated that he had an affair with a young knight. How come he suddenly had a fiancée?"

"Really?"

"You aren't from here. Of course, you don't know anything. Unlike Prince Timothy and Prince Roland, he seldom attended banquets, so it's probably true."

"And think about it," the merchant spoke again. "His Majesty only said that he was going to bring them to Neverwinter. He didn't confirm that the child was Gerald's son. He did this on purpose. He wants us to discuss whether the boy is a lawful inheritor of the throne. When we focus on talking about where the boy's mother came from and whether he's an offspring of the Wimbledon family, either of which will take us at least several years. By then, we would've forgotten about the most important thing."

"What... exactly are you trying to say?"

"What's the most important thing?"

"The witches!" He took a swig of wine and continued. "They must have manipulated the king and created the so-called widow and child to distract our attention. They're scheming to control the whole Graycastle!"

Everyone was in an uproar. "Witches can make people?"

"Yes, they're capable of making anything!" The merchant exclaimed bitterly. "They could make stones float on water, not to mention creating a person. Because of these evil stone things, no one comes to hire my ship anymore! Though, they may not be able to make a flawless person. That's why they made up this story. They need more time. When they succeed, they won't need the child anymore!"

"Aha, you must be out of your mind. Do you think that His Majesty stays alone in the palace with only one God's Stone of Retaliation?" The crowd erupted into laughter, bringing cheer to the tavern.

"You guys—hic—keep laughing. The witches have already produced some machine to replace the miners in Silver City and have filled all the inland rivers with their concrete ships. Soon it'll be your turn, and then we'll see who's laughing!" The merchant rumbled.

Well, it's not valuable information, but this guy sounds quite rebellious. With this thought in mind, Black Hammer took out his charcoal and a piece of paper to write down the features of the merchant. He also

commented in this report that this man slandered the royal family and maliciously attacked the witches. After that, he folded the paper and inserted it into an inconspicuous slit in the wine cabinet.

If nothing else, the police department would quickly respond to his report. He estimated that the merchant would get caught the moment he stepped out of the tavern. As for whether he was a rebel, he believed the interrogator would find out the answer. That was not his task.

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At this moment, Yoroko was selecting clothes inside his residence in the Inner City.

"How about this one?" He asked as he lifted a formal high-collared garment made of fine material in front of himself. "Will it make me look fat?"

The person he was asking was Denise Payton, the businesswoman he had met at the Kingdom of Dawn's king's city. She was rolling on the bed and covered her bare chest with just a corner of the quilt. "You never prepared so carefully when you were dating me. You haven't received an invitation yet. Do you intend to go to Neverwinter right after you heard the news?"

"I'm an old friend of His Majesty. Invitations are for outsiders. I don't need it," said Yoroko as he shook the garment. "You haven't answered me. What about this garment?"

"To be honest, you look almost the same no matter what you wear," said Denise as she yawned. "I wasn't attracted by your appearance after all. By the way, when you leave for Neverwinter, what should I do?"

"Ugh," he hesitated. "If you want to have some fun, I can introduce you to some good..."

"Not interested." Denise interrupted him right away. "I prefer choosing targets by myself. Besides, is that how you treat a guest who came to you all the way from the City of Glow?"

Yoroko felt a little guilty. He sighed and asked, "So, what do you want?"

The businesswoman smiled and replied, "Take me to Neverwinter. I've long wished to meet the king who turned the Kingdom of Dawn upside down."

"This..."

"Since you're his old friend, the king will certainly invite you to attend his dinner party, right?" Denise asked as she threw the quilt back and got out of the bed. She stepped to Yoroko and continued, "You only need to bring me there as your plus one. I've brought you to lots of banquets back in the City of Glow. You'll grant me this small request, won't you?" She put her arms around his neck and whispered next to his ear, "Relax, I know you plan to meet someone there... I won't interfere with you, and maybe I can help you."

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The news about Roland's coronation and wedding stirred up all the people, including both the officials and civilians.

However, the king himself was completely unaware of this.

A week later, a shallow water gunboat, the Roland, arrived at the City of Evernight in the Northern Region.

Someone's peace was about to be shattered.

Chapter 1012: Olivia

Walking in the alleys, Olivia heard the snow scrunch under her feet. She felt her chest grow warmer.

Every winter in the Northern Region, she found the sky to be gloomy. It was like a stone roof that covered her from above. Furthermore, all things on the ground below would be covered in snow. Apart from this dull seasonal landscape, she would also suffer from hunger and cold. This made winter a long and tiresome experience for everyone.

Fortunately, this winter, she saw a brand new color in this gray world.

It was even brighter than a rainbow and shone through the snow storm like a dazzling star.

When she was near it, she could hardly wait to get closer to it.

It came out from the little cottage she had rented.

If she did not have to make a living for her family, she would never want to take one step away from it.

It was her baby.

It was Gerald Wimbledon's son.

Every time when she held him in her arms, she felt as if she was holding the whole world.

Thinking of her baby, Olivia subconsciously quickened her pace.

However, after she turned into the last alley, her heart sank to the bottom.

She spotted many footprints in the snow. They appeared to have come from another alley and led directly to the courtyard ahead.

This courtyard was where she and her son were currently living.

Here, all their neighbors were ordinary civilians. They seldom got visitors even during spring and summer, not to mention the Months of Demons. She could not understand why so many footprints had suddenly appeared here.

The next moment, she felt faint as she realized something. An inexplicable fear filled her heart.

"No, it can't be true. Calm down..." She kept telling herself that they must have just been a bunch of robbers or refugees. Though this thought would make others afraid, it conversely would make her feel relieved.

She entered the courtyard, shivering. Unfortunately, what she saw immediately shattered her last hope.

Many patrol team members were standing in front of her cottage. Most of them wore soft armors but one of them was apparently a knight. He dressed differently and wore a special badge which indicated that he served the Kant family, who ruled the Northern Region.

"No—!"

All of a sudden, Olivia felt a burst of strength that came out of nowhere. She dropped the baby food that she had made great efforts to buy, lowered her head and dashed toward the door!

At that moment, she thought she was going to her death.

She was prepared to throw herself at the blade once someone pulled out their sword to block her, even if they did not mean to kill her on the spot.

Unexpectedly, no one stood out to stop her from rushing into the cottage. Instead, the crowd turned to the side to let her through.

At the door of the cottage, she stumbled over the threshold, tearing her dress as her knees bruised from contact with the cold grindstone-like ground. Enduring the physical pain, she crawled non-stop toward the small bedroom with a face full of tears. She just wanted to meet her child for the last time, but when she entered the room, she was stunned.

A cyan-haired young lady sat at the head of the bed whilst coaxing the baby. The nanny Olivia had hired to take care of the child was standing by her side, displaying a look of respect, which one would use to their real boss.

The lady raised her head and glanced at Olivia. Instantly, she understood that the lady was very peculiar. She found the lady to be beautiful but could not describe her with any words that were usually used to depict a woman. She could not say that the lady was mild, fragile, charming or emotional. Even when she held the baby in her arms, she did not have the look of motherly love in her eyes at all.

It seemed as if she was playing with a toy rather than amusing a child.

"Nice to meet you," the young lady said slowly. "My name is Edith Kant. You should have heard of my name."

"The Pearl of the Northern Region—" Olivia's heart skipped a beat. "She's the eldest daughter of Duke Kant, the legendary woman who can lead knights to charge in a battle?" Edith Kant was a household name in the Northern Region. Even Gerald had mentioned her to Olivia many times.

Some people even stated that she was a more difficult opponent than her father.

"Nice to meet you, your ladyship," said Olivia as she swallowed hard. She bent over to give a kowtow before asking, "Would you please tell me why you've come to my home?"

Edith waved her hand to the nanny. The nanny bowed and then she swiftly left the room, shutting the door.

Seeing that, Olivia confirmed that this nanny must have been sent by the Kant family.

Her child had been under their control all this time.

"Well, to make a long story short, the king ordered me to take this offspring of the Wimbledon family back to Neverwinter."

"And then... you'll execute him secretly?" Olivia asked while breathing hard.

"If I wanted to kill him, I could do it anywhere. I wouldn't have to show up at your home at all." Edith unraveled the cloth around the baby's head and revealed his soft gray hair. "His Majesty needs him to appease the people. That's all."

Olivia was dumbfounded. She could not get what Edith meant. "Your ladyship, I still... don't understand..."

"It's not as complicated as you may think." The Pearl of the Northern Region shrugged. "Have you ever heard about witches?"

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After hearing the whole story, Olivia still spent a long time connecting the two together. She had never heard such an implausible plan! Roland Wimbledon was determined to marry a witch, so he decided to use Gerald's son to quell the doubts of the public. She was not familiar with nobles' way of doing things, but she instinctively felt something wrong in this arrangement.

She wondered, "As a king, does he really have to do this?"

She clenched her teeth and plucked up her courage before asking, "Your ladyship, forgive me for being bold. I can hardly believe this decision. Maybe His Majesty thinks that he needs the baby now, but what if he changes his mind in the future, Schelo will..."

"Schelo? Is it his name?" Edith raised her eyebrow. "It seems that you still don't understand your current situation. It's His Majesty's command, you can't disobey it. Now, you've only two choices. No.1, you can get a large sum of hush money for which you must leave the kingdom and never come back again. Or No.2, you can accompany him to Neverwinter, but you must hide your identity and claim to be a maid of a noble family."

Tears were welling up in Olivia's eyes. Granted her low status, she could never become a part of the royal family. "Who will take my place to take care of him?"

"Nobody," replied Edith.

"What?" She promptly lifted her head in surprise. Her tears had yet to stop as they rolled down her cheeks.

"His Majesty isn't that cruel. If you choose to stay with the baby, you just need to conceal the fact that you are his real mother. Apart from that, you don't have to change anything. You can still look after him and watch him grow up. The noble family you served has already been eliminated by the church and Gerald's widow entrusted the child to you. That will be your story." Edith paused for a moment before adding, "In addition, the king has already spread this news to all regions of the kingdom. In two or three days, you'll hear about it here in the Northern Region. If His Majesty really wanted you to die, why would he bother to tell this story to all his subjects?"

Does the Pearl of the Northern Region mean that... His Majesty did this just to assure me that we'll be safe?

Olivia touched her chest and recalled the night she had been in despair and had come to Prince Roland asking for help. Back then, he had indeed helped her. She did not know whether he had some ulterior motive at the time, but she had to admit that if it had not been for Roland, she would have been beaten to death by the tavern owner a long time ago.

She took a deep breath and wiped the tears from her face. Her legs got numb after kneeling down for such a long time, but she still managed to control her body well enough to rise slowly from the ground. "Your ladyship, may I ask... Does this child have any chance to become a king?"

"No." A meaningful look flickered in Edith's eyes. "Before I set off, His Majesty exhorted me to tell you that you'd better not have any illusion of the throne. Otherwise, you'll be very disappointed. Of course, this is just between us. Don't breathe a word to anyone else."

"No, your ladyship. I'll never be disappointed, as long as my son can grow up safely. That's my greatest wish," said Olivia with difficulty. She got slower and slower, as if she had to exert all her strength to say each word. "But, bringing him to Neverwinter can't solve all the problems. What if someday His Majesty changes his mind and decides to make his own child the legitimate heir to the throne. When that happens, my son will become a thorn in their flesh and won't be able to survive!" She looked directly into Edith's eyes and stressed each word with due strength. "I know I can't change a thing, but if you can't give me a reasonable explanation, please kill me right now!"

"Oh?" Edith squinted her eyes.

It was a bloodthirsty look.

In front of Edith, Olivia was as weak as a lamb.

But she still refused to back down. She stood tall before the Pearl of the Northern Region and said, "If you can't, it means the things I'm worried about will happen sooner or later. I can't set Gerald Wimbledon's only son on such a path, your ladyship!"

Olivia did not want to take her child to Neverwinter while worrying that he would be executed a dozen years later. She did not like such long-term psychological tortures, nor did she want to make such a groundless decision by herself. Given her status, she did not expect Edith to give an answer. She believed that even if Edith did have an explanation, she would never tell it to a maid of humble origin. However, she still demanded an explanation from her since that was all she could do for now. She closed her eyes, waiting for a cold blade to cut her throat. I'm sorry, Gerald. I'm so sorry... my dear. I can't change anything.

The baby suddenly woke up and cried. It was as if he felt the departure with his mother coming.

Olivia tried her best to stop herself from opening her eyes.

She was afraid that if she took a look at the baby again, she would hesitate.

After a long time, the blade still did not arrive.

Edith chuckled and said, "I can."

Olivia stared at her in disbelief.

The Pearl of the Northern Region used lip language to tell Olivia the answer. It was completely beyond her imagination, but she somehow believed this incredible explanation at once, just like a drowning person who clutched the straw.

She felt that she was persuaded by herself instead of being persuaded by Edith.

The Pearl of the Northern Region turned away and walked toward the door, leaving the crying baby to Olivia. "We'll set out three days later. Remember to pack for your trip."

"Your ladyship..." Olivia murmured when Edith walked past her. "The tavern owner as well as one of His Highness Gerald's guards probably know the truth about me and the child."

"I'll take care of it. You don't have to worry," replied Edith without looking back.

When the Pearl of the North left, Olivia held her baby in a warm embrace, as if she was afraid that he would disappear at any minute. The baby finally quieted down and buried his head in her chest.

Her heart was racing, she could not help asking herself if it was true.

She deciphered the explanation by reading Edith's lips.

It was a simple but fascinating phrase.

"Eternal life."

This was the king's answer.

Chapter 1013: The Future of the Northern Region

Duke Calvin was waiting in the main hall when Edith returned to the castle.

"You only plan to stay in the City of Evernight for three days? It sounded to me that this mission will take time. You don't have to go back immediately. Why don't you stay here longer?"

"Father, did you send someone to listen in on my conversation?" Edith asked with a frown.

"If I ask you directly, will you explain everything to me clearly?" The Duke gave her a furious glare before adding, "I learned this trick from you. It's better to search for the answer than to wait for it."

The Pearl of the Northern Region replied with a bark of laughter, "Congratulations, you finally made some progress. Now, I don't have to worry too much about you in Neverwinter."

The duke grunted, "You haven't answered my question. I can't stop you, but why do you have to take Lance to Neverwinter. Are you that attracted to Wimbledon? He would rather marry a witch than marry you. I don't get it. What the hell is the point of bringing Gerald's son to Neverwinter?"

"You seem to be very unhappy with the fact that I can't become queen," Edith shot him a sideways glance and said. "Or perhaps, you're just complaining that my future child can never become the heir to

the throne? I still remember what you said to me when Timothy came to the Northern Region, and I know what you suggested to His Majesty."

"I... I did that for your own good. Are you willing to see a humble maid bring her son to power?" Calvin sounded much less aggressive now.

Edith secretly sighed. She knew that her father cared about her very much but she found that he was quite short-sighted. Calvin Kant was a caring father but he was not a wise man.

Fortunately, the other nobles in the Northern Region were no better than him. Most of them were not capable enough to manage their own domains. Edith agreed with His Majesty's decision to abolish the aristocratic system. She thought that if she was the king, she would also not be able to tolerate such a group of idiots wasting her wealth.

She understood the conventional thoughts of a traditional noble man, but she just couldn't say anything remotely nice to comfort her father at this moment. She enjoyed using her words as swords to hurt and torture others and sometimes even herself.

"A humble maid? No, father, you're wrong. Gerald Wimbledon loved her for a reason," said Edith, with interest. "That woman just lacks a status. If she was born into a noble family of the Northern Region, she would become more capable than you, not to mention my two younger brothers. In fact, what you should be the most thankful for is the ancestors of the Kant family. Without your title as an earl, you would never have gotten what you have today. You probably wouldn't live any better than the ordinary traders on the streets."

Just as she had expected, her father now looked very sour.

"She was reluctant to trust me at first, but once she made up her mind, she gave me all the names of the people who may ruin her and her son's future. What a decisive woman! If Gerald's son comes to power one day, what will she do to me? After all, I once bullied her into going to Neverwinter with me." Edith chuckled. "How will she torture me to vent her anger? Being a woman herself, she must know how to make a woman suffer."

"Enough... I know I was wrong," Calvin finally admitted defeat. "Can you stop talking?"

"Whew," Edith heaved a long sigh. "By the way, he'll never seize the throne. Even if His Majesty doesn't mind it, I would never allow it to happen." She smoothed out her hair and walked to her father. "Let's get back to business. I must return to Neverwinter as soon as possible since I don't want to miss any new changes in the city. Neverwinter is a fast-developing place and the center of the power. Half a month is already long enough. If His Majesty had not sent me to complete this task, I wouldn't have come back at all. As for Lance, I've already asked you to send him to Neverwinter when he turns 18 in the letter. You have a really bad memory."

"But if I send Lance to Neverwinter, the Northern Region will—"

"You'll lose your successor?" Edith interrupted. "But father, the rank of nobility has now become a pure honorary title. If your son is uneducated, do you think he can gain a firm footing in the City Hall? I take him away for the future of the Kant family. We've got a lot to learn in Neverwinter and if we don't want to get kicked out of the game, we have to embrace all the new changes."

The Duke still seemed hesitant. "Didn't His Majesty say that some formidable enemies are lurking in the Barbarian Land? Have you ever thought about it. What if Neverwinter is conquered by these enemies?"

"It's simple. When that happens, all of us will be doomed. At that time, it'll be meaningless even if you have a dozen of successors," Edith said while laying out her hands in a shrug. "And I think we should thank the demons."

"What...?" Calvin was surprised.

"I've a feeling that if it wasn't for the demons, His Majesty would turn all the four kingdoms upside down..." the Pearl of the Northern Region said, her mouth twitched. "He needs to focus on defeating the demons now and thus chooses to make peace with the nobles. But one day, after he eliminates the demons, he'll bring drastic change to the entire world. Keeping this in mind, the demons are actually helping us by giving us more time to keep up with the trend of development. This is our only chance. You should know what to do."

The Duke sighed after a long silence. "Provide preferential treatment to the teachers from Neverwinter, open more primary education classes, and send more people to study in the Western Region. Oh, and listen to the City Hall officials' advice... You've mentioned those things in the letters a number of times. My memory is not that bad."

"It's good you can remember that." Edith patted her father's shoulder and then walked upstairs. "I need to get some sleep now. I've many things to do tonight."

"Wait..." Calvin turned around and said. "As for the tavern maid's... I mean, Olivia's last question, I'm also curious. How did you respond to it at the time?"

"It's better to look for the answer than to wait for it—" Edith smiled slightly. "You've just made some progress. Now please continue your strong performance."

"Hey, it's just casual talking. Wait... do you keep silent deliberately?" The Duke stood agape and then he realized something. "You did this on purpose to shut me up? Well, well, I promise I won't send anyone to overhear your talking. Now, can you tell me? My sweet daughter!"

"Forget about it, father. It's not important." Edith paused before murmuring, "I hope it's true, unfortunately..."

"What...?" Calvin pursued.

The Pearl of the Northern Region did not reply. She just waved her hands and disappeared at the end of the stairs.

Chapter 1014: The Day of Adulthood

Neverwinter was busy preparing for Roland's coronation ceremony.

After releasing the news, the king left the whole thing to Barov. The City Hall Director devoted himself entirely to the preparation job and strived for perfection in every detail. He even fetched Blanche, the ceremonial officer, from the old king's city to assist him.

As for Roland, apart from occasionally checking the progress of the magic movie, he spent most of his time on the final design of the internal combustion engine.

Because of the difference in measurement systems between the current world and his previous world, he needed to conduct a stability test for each prototype he made to make sure that his design was accurate. Furthermore, since the quality of the oil separated by the fractional process was very unstable, he had to adopt a redundancy design method. Without computer simulation techniques, he had to adjust the prototypes repeatedly.

He created a prototype, tested it and then improved it or scrapped it. He repeated this process again and again, which made him feel as if he had returned to his schooling days. He rushed about between the castle and the north slope backyard every day, living a busy and full life. The knowledge that he had forgotten a long time ago became vivid in his head once more.

Unlike his schooling days, this time he had a great companion, Anna.

She was as enthusiastic about new things as he was.

She was so absorbed in assembling the precision components. Even when she stopped to wipe the sweat from her nose, she would still have her eyes fixed on what she was working on. Seeing this, Roland felt amazed. He found that her thirst for knowledge and creation was as strong as her Blackfire.

And he thought she looked exceptionally attractive when she was so earnest in bringing to life her creations.

Whenever they made a progress, Anna would smile so brightly that Roland would believe nothing, not even becoming the queen of Graycastle, could make her that happy.

She had expressed such a thought before. As long as they could stay together, she would not care about the title.

However, Roland still wanted to give her the title as a way of externalizing his commitment to her.

After all, this was a common practice in human society.

After revising the dimensions of the engine, he put down the quill and rubbed his sore neck.

If nothing else, the design could be finalized this time. The last batch of prototypes had run stably for a reasonable period of time. It had only been a few days but was already enough to meet the current needs of the city.

Internal combustion engines, the second-generation power source, worked much more efficiently than steam engines, but in terms of structure, the former were not very different from the latter, except that the latter needed some external equipment such as a boiler and a steam transport pipe. No matter how well-designed a steam engine was, it could not prevent the energy loss caused by the transportation of steam. An internal combustion, however, contained the fuel inside its cylinder. In this way, all the heat generated by the fuel could be used to push the piston.

The mixture of oil and air would burn violently inside the cylinder. When the air became hot, its volume would increase rapidly to drive the piston. Meanwhile, the air pressure inside the cylinder would fall and thus fresh fuel would be sucked into the cylinder. It sounded like a simple process but it was not an easy

project. For example, it had a brand new requirement, the sealing. In an early steam engine, one could easily insert a finger into the gap between the piston and the cylinder wall, and both felt and linen could be used to block the gap. However, such a gap would never be allowed in an internal combustion engine.

This was because it was powered by the fuel inside itself. Once its cylinder had a leak, it would stop working.

Given the high demand for material and manufacturing technology, internal combustion engines came several decades after the electric motors in the previous world where Roland had lived.

Roland had two designs for the first-generation internal combustion engines: cylinder-in-line and cylinder-in-circle. The former one was cumbersome and made of cast iron. It was stable and suitable for the factories. The latter was also known as a star engine. It had shorter crankshafts and a compact structure, so it was smaller in size and very suitable for aircraft. As it was made of aluminum alloy, only Anna could process this delicate engine for now.

Now that he could consult a large number of reference material in the Dream World, he developed these two types of engines at the same time. Compared to the tortuous experience of manufacturing the steam engines, this time, his design job was much easier.

The Senior Demon's words were another reason for him to speed up the engine development process.

This expedition had already proved that it was hard to rely solely on the ground-to-air firearms to resist all the attacks from the sky.

If his plan could be realized, for the first time ever, mankind in this world would have an air force that could contest with the demons riding flying mounts.

"Your Majesty, don't move."

Nightingale suddenly spoke.

Roland immediately froze up and moved his eyes to look back.

Is there...an enemy?

Soon he saw Nightingale approach and reach her hand into his hair, and then he felt a little pain from his head. It turned out that she had just plucked off a hair.

"Ugh, is it a white hair?" Roland did not know whether to laugh or cry.

Since his hair color was light gray, a white hair should not be very conspicuous on his head. But Nightingale could easily recognize this white hair because it was dry and lost all its luster from its root.

"And there's more on your head." Nightingale continued to search inside his hair for a while. "Have you been having trouble sleeping recently?"

"Have I?"

"You used to sleep late in the winter, but recently you've been getting up earlier than me every day. At night, you have to enter the Dream World to study. That isn't really sleeping, is it?" Nightingale said.

"You've yawned a lot recently, which means you are very tired. You are getting white hair in your twenties. That's not a good sign."

Roland felt very relieved looking at her even to the point that his work-induced weariness faded. She still cared about him as much as she did previously and his coming marriage did not affect her very much. Roland guessed that it must have had something to do with the agreement between Anna and her.

"Don't worry. I've not reached my limit yet. I've experienced it before."

"..." Nightingale looked puzzled, but apparently she could tell that it was not a lie.

Roland did tell her the truth. "Generally speaking, when I reach my limit, I'll have a palpitation and feel as if my chest is empty. After that, I need to be extra careful since I'll feel weak and sometimes, I'll start coughing a lot and even cough blood—ahem—"

Halfway through the speech, he suddenly coughed violently.

"Hey, are you alright?" Nightingale got nervous and patted his back. "Do you need me to fetch Nana for you?"

Roland took a deep breath. "No... I'm fine. I just choked on my saliva."

"Really?"

"Relax, I—"

He turned around and stiffened with embarrassment at once. He was surprised to find that Nightingale was so close to him at this moment. They looked into each other's eyes and simultaneously held their breath.

"Your Majesty." Just at this moment, Wendy opened the door and walked into the office. "I need to tell you something... Uh? What are you doing?"

"What?" Roland blinked only to find that Nightingale had already disappeared. Now, he was bending backwards while holding his head back, which was a really weird-looking posture.

"His Majesty is practicing gymnastics," said Nightingale, who was lying on the couch beside the tea table and chewing her dried fish leisurely. "He's been in his chair for a long time and got sore, so he decided to be the first to try his gymnastics."

"Oh, I see," Wendy said thoughtfully. "Is this the gymnastics you wanted to promote in the school? But... do you really think that such a strange pose will work?"

"Ugh, it works. Trust me." Roland returned to a normal sitting position. He felt that Nightingale, who was acting innocent, was trying her best to hold back laughter. "Well, what did you want to tell me?"

"Your Majesty," said Wendy, while leafing through the record book in her hand. "According to the records of the previous year, today is Lightning's Day of Adulthood."

Chapter 1015: Soaring Through the Skies (Part I)

The coming of age for witches had always happened at the stroke of midnight.

This can be considered one of the unsolved mysteries of the witches. Even though magic power exists everywhere, there was no way to explain why it was the most active at this time. Even witches like Anna with immense magic reserves could entirely exhaust their magic power and still fully recover within an hour or two after midnight. On the contrary, if the witches' magic power only recovered at the pace during the day, then even a week's time would probably still not be enough for them to get back to full strength.

Most of the witches did not care about this, and the Taquila survivors were no exception. When Roland asked them about it, the answers they gave were always along the lines of "isn't that just the start of a new day?" For most people, time was divided into days. Therefore, the magic power of each day should be spent on that same day. Just like the weather showing changes every day, there was nothing weird about this to them.

But Roland knew that the days were nothing but a human construct created out of convenience. This led to the creation of the leap year. To correct this error, people came up with the leap month and with the advancement of the time-measuring apparatus, leap seconds were also invented (i.e., 59 or 61 seconds in the last minute). Basically, people created whatever would make life easier for them.

With that said, it was strange that the witches' magic power would only consolidate within a certain period of time.

It was as if there exists a biological clock in every Awakened so that she could always remain in sync with the flow of time. Regardless of when she was born and whether she lived in the Southernmost Region or the Hermes Plateau, she would always be linked to this phenomenon.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of more advanced observational devices such as the further research of magic power or the accurate measuring of time, both would be too difficult to accomplish at this time; so this theory would just remain a theory.

"Your Majesty." Wendy's words pulled him back to reality from his thoughts. "In addition to the above-mentioned measures, would you like to add anything else?"

The so-called measures were mainly designed to deal with the dangers of consolidating one's magic power. Since Lucia's Day of Adulthood, this factor had already been incorporated as part of the Witch Union's standard protocol.

Even Taquila could not provide much more in terms of advice regarding this point.

"Let's proceed according to your plan." Roland thought for a moment and said, "By the way, don't forget to inform Margaret and Sander Flyingbird. I think they would also like to know that Lightning has safely reached adulthood."

Wendy was a little surprised. "Ms. Margaret would not be a problem, but as for Mr. Flyingbird..."

"He'll be fine," Roland said softly.

"Yes, I understand." Upon seeing his expression, Wendy no longer asked any more questions and agreed without further ado.

...

Night had long since fallen, yet the top floor of the Witch Building was still bright as day.

The top floor had already been transformed into a bedroom for the witches to use for adulthood. The room was the size two normal rooms so that it could accommodate more visitors, and the wall became a moveable door. If magic needed to be released, the two door panels could be opened directly, and the outer wall would no longer be blasted apart like last time.

Lightning laid on a large, soft bed, and seemed to be extremely excited. This was the exact opposite of Lucia's nervous behavior when she was going through her coming of age. It seemed as if the young explorer had been waiting for this moment for a very long time.

A wooden table was fixed next to the big bed, with Lightning's left hand tied onto it. She held the Sigil of God's Will in her hand. According to Lucia, the moment painful contractions could be felt in her body, would be the moment when she would need to pour all the magic power into the Sigil. One hand was tied to avoid the young witch from losing control due to the intense pain, and inadvertently pointing the Sigil at others. After this danger was eliminated, the absence of Countess Spear and her powers was no longer that big of a deal.

Lightning was surrounded by her friends who had come to visit.

"Will I awaken with some derivative skill? If it can solve the weight problem, then I would be able to bring along a lot more food and tools to fly over the Land of Dawn!" Conversations on similar topics like that continued throughout the night. Lightning's fluttering eyes seemed to shine as she listed out one possibility after another. She looked just like Roland back when he was a child and was trying to guess what kind of birthday presents his family had prepared for him.

But of course, he would end up disappointed most of the time.

For example, if he were hoping to receive a huge Transformer model, he would instead receive a prep-book with over 300 exercises.

"There might not be any derivative skill," Mystery Moon muttered, "how can a derivative skill be that easy to obtain? Only a few people have this talent in the whole of Neverwinter."

"Ahem..." After this sentence, Roland seemed to hear a nasally voice, full of pride in her rising tone.

"Watch your words!" Lily stared at her.

"Mystery Moon isn't completely wrong," Agatha said with a laugh. "The Union had some research statistics. A witch who can awaken a derivative skill when she becomes an adult is about one in a hundred, but compared to the raise in rank, this is nothing. The most important thing for witches is the ultimate ability to expand their main magic power, so you don't have to worry too much about it and just focus on consolidating your magic power."

"By the way, weren't the Union witches trying to analyze the process of the witches' adulthood?" Scroll interjected and asked, "How were the results?"

"What we found can only be used for reference. After all, there aren't enough examples to verify it," said Wendy, looking at the record book, "but Lightning's score is really high. 85.9 points."

"Eh? What's that about?" Andrea asked curiously.

"It's an assessment method we came up with," said Agatha. "It was also a revelation from Lucia— Because the surge of magic power during adulthood is very obvious, it'd theoretically be easier to consolidate. We took all the promotion of Senior Witches as samples. A preliminary assessment was made, and points were scored based on the four factors of total magical power, academic scores, control ability, and individual will. Of course, we're still at the guessing phase at the moment."

"Academic scores... Do you mean test results?"

"Yes. That's the largest part of the assessment."

"I see... That means someone can never even hope to surpass the Transcendent in this life." Andrea glanced at Ashes with pity.

The latter just shrugged.

"This is... crazy." Roland suddenly heard Phyllis sigh.

"What's wrong?" He turned towards Phyllis.

"In the Taquila age, high-level evolution was an extremely sacred thing for every witch. Everyone was eager to win the favor of the deities but never dared to openly talk about it, because it just seemed like such a distant dream. If any witch dared to tell others that she was confident of evolving her powers, she would surely be scoffed at by other people. But now..." Phyllis murmured for a bit then recovered her senses. "Sorry, I'm not saying that it's not good, but the contrast between the two situations made me think..."

"I know what you mean." Roland smiled lightly. "It's like a merchant who woke up one day and found that the gold royals that he'd saved with his blood and sweat were no longer valuable. This would certainly be difficult for people to come to terms with."

"On this point, I really can't compare to Lady Agatha," Phyllis whispered. "She had only come here a year earlier than me, but now she's already in charge of the High Awakening research. She's undoubtedly the genius of the Union."

"Actually, this isn't that difficult to understand. If we're not stronger than our predecessors, how can we improve?" He said frankly, "As long as we're still moving forward, this kind of scenario will continue to appear. Just look at them, doesn't this feel like what hope is?"

Phyllis followed his glance and also looked at the girl on the bed.

"But the more ability you have, the better it is, right?" Lightning said confidently. "I think that not only will I consolidate my magic power, but I'll also gain several derivative skills because the most outstanding explorer will surely get the most rewards!"

"Yeah!" Maggie who was standing at the bedside also raised her arms, in support of the latter.

"That's not how logic works!" Complained Mystery Moon.

The room suddenly became boisterous.

Roland looked at the lively scene, shook his head with a smile, and headed toward the door.

"Are you not going to go in?"

After closing the door, he spoke to a man who stood in the corridor against the wall.

That person was Thunder.

Chapter 1016: Soaring Through the Skies (Part II)

The explorer was still dressed like a wanderer. He was covered in feathers and wore an eye patch embroidered with rose petals on his right eye. No one would be able to recognize that he was Thunder from his appearance. Roland could not figure out why, but his image was a stark contrast from the way he was at the banquet.

"When you're disguising to be another person, you need to devote your heart and soul to become that character, so that you can deceive even yourself. Only then would you be able to fool other people. This was the first thing that I learned when I was learning how to disguise myself." Thunder inhaled his cigarette, and the weak red light looked like a looming firefly in the dark walkway. "Your Majesty, I'm afraid I can't concentrate on disguising myself as Sander Flyingbird right now... She will certainly see through it."

So that sense of strangeness was due to this. Roland realized that because there were certain dangers in a witch's adulthood, Thunder could no longer pretend to be an outsider and be pay no attention to his daughter.

If he showed too much concern, then it would become obvious that he was not the real Sander Flyingbird.

"Don't tell me that you want to keep hiding your identity?" Roland raised an eyebrow. "You should've heard what Lightning said just now. She's destined to become an explorer."

This question made Thunder silent for a long time.

Just as Roland thought that he would not reply, Thunder suddenly spoke up: "Your Majesty, do you believe in fate?"

At that moment, Roland had some doubts about the identity of Thunder the Explorer.

Isn't this a classic starting line when preaching?

Of course, similar questions were also common in the love letters of high school students.

However, Thunder was certainly not seeking for an answer. "I've been told that geniuses will always die doing what they are best at, and God would make up for it by giving such people an unmatched talent—This is fate. A road that's destined to be good will cause the one who walks on it to succumb to temptation because of one's extraordinary talent and eventually fall from grace. On the contrary, those ordinary people without much talent will tend to live longer."

"Who said that?" Roland could not help but ask.

"Sander, a person who introduced me to the path of an explorer." Thunder then breathed out a puff of smoke.

"Wait, there is such an explorer in the Fjords? Aren't you afraid that Lightning might've heard of his name?"

"He's been dead for a long time, and his identity remained obscure until and even after his death... By the standards of the Fjords, he couldn't even be considered a true explorer." With the smoke swirling around, Thunder almost merged with the shadows on the walls. "Before he died, he still hadn't found a brand new island or an unmarked route on the map. Sander didn't care about reputation. He said that adventure itself was fun and that the lack of talent didn't matter. At least he wouldn't have to worry about having a short life."

Roland seemed to suddenly realize something. "How did he die?"

"He died trying to save me," Thunder said slowly. "The ship encountered an attack from the Sea Ghosts. When Sander dragged me back to the cabin, he got clawed by the Sea Ghost. Although the wound wasn't big, the herbs were useless in treating it. His flesh quickly rotted and stopped breathing three days later. At that time he said to me that he died anyway doing what he was best at—He had no other outstanding qualities in life, other than his kindness."

"..." Roland suddenly did not know what to say.

"After Lightning was born, she had shown outstanding talents as an explorer. Whether it was identifying routes or drawing charts, she learned much faster than the average person." When Thunder said these words, his face revealed his complicated emotions. "When I learned that she'd awakened and become a witch, I became extremely worried. You should understand what this ability means to an explorer."

Indeed, if courage, curiosity, and knowledge were the intrinsic natures of human beings, that meant anyone could acquire them, given time. But having magic power could be said to be a gift from the deities.

"That's why I made this decision," said Thunder as he raised his head, and the light in his eyes seemed to reflect the red light in the pipe. "If fate is hard to avoid, I might be able to cut it off in another way—if I can uncover the veils of those mysterious places before Lightning sets out to be an explorer, the chances of her encountering danger would be greatly reduced. Leaving aside the land occupied by the demons, no one has yet set foot in the east of the Sealine, and the bold cliff seen from the Shadow Seacity ruins. Once you defeat the demons, I should be able to draw a map of these two places. Before that, however, it would be the best if I traveled alone."

If there was no more need for expeditions, there would naturally be no risk. This logic made Roland dumbfounded for a moment.

Although the world might be much larger than even what Thunder had imagined, it was still amazing for him to have such thoughts. This took more than just courage.

Gravity firmly anchored everyone onto the ground, but it certainly could not limit the wild dreams of some people

Thunder was obviously amongst the most capable of those who dared to dream.

—Flying was not just a witch's privilege.

"In that case, I shall leave her in your hands, Your Majesty," Thunder said, grabbing his chest.

At this instant, a loud noise came from inside the room.

Roland nodded at Thunder before returning to the bedroom.

One side of the wall had already been pushed open, but he did not hear the Sigil of God's Will being triggered.

"Your Majesty," said Wendy excitedly. "Lightning her... her magic has consolidated!"

Here was another witch who was evolved on the Day of Adulthood. He saw a clear excitement in the eyes of Agatha and Wendy, as this meant that their research was indeed feasible.

"Really?" Roland walked over to the bedside and looked at the eager-looking girl. "Was there any discomfort?"

"Not at all," Lightning patted her chest and said, "I feel like I'm full of power! It's a pity that I couldn't release the Sigil. Lighting the fourth stone was already the limit."

"That's good to hear," Roland let out a deep breath and said, "then you should take a rest today, and tomorrow you can—"

"Your Majesty, I'd like to try it now. May I?!" Lightning jumped out of bed. "I feel like my something is calling me and I can't help but want to fly immediately!"

"Is she talking about the magic power within her?" Roland couldn't help but laugh. She was certainly the most energetic member of the Witch Union. Since she had already said that, he had no reason to refuse. "Take Maggie with you, and don't fly too far away."

"Yes!"

"Coo!"

One side of the wall was still half-open, and after Maggie became a pigeon, she landed on Lightning's head—Lightning then held the pigeon with both of her hands and swiftly flew out of the room and disappeared into the cold and windy night sky.

"I don't know what her ability will be like after her consolidation..." Wendy murmured as she stared into the night sky. "We'll be busy tomorrow."

"Please also let me observe with the Five-Colored Stone during the test," Phyllis said.

"Anyways, let's stop here for today, and the rest can wait until tomorrow—"

Just as Roland was in the middle of his sentence, a thunderous explosion sounded through the sky!

The force of the sound was so strong that it was if all those present could actually feel it! The snow on the roof was shaken and became white fog. Ice was falling like raindrops. The glass windows of the castle cracked as if they had been smashed by an invisible giant hand.

While the witches were looking at each other dumbfounded, the echoes caused by the thunder roared back and forth continuously in the Impassable Mountain Range and did not disappear after a long time.

Chapter 1017: Derivative Skill

Just like Lucia's Day of Adulthood, Lightning's promotion was a joyous one, but it also caused a bit of trouble for Roland.

"Did anyone in the area get hurt last night?"

The next day, after listening to Barov's report, he could not help but raise his eyebrow.

"Yes, Your Majesty..." Roland could hear him lamenting from the other end of the phone. "An unlucky guy was planning to go to the toilet, but the explosion scared him so much that he fell and broke his foot. There are another two guys who rolled off their beds and hurt their heads. In the morning, a large group of anxious citizens came to the City Hall and asked if Neverwinter was being attacked by the demons or demonic beasts. The staff spent a great deal of effort before persuading them otherwise. Your Majesty, if such a thing were to happen in the future, could you kindly tell me beforehand?"

Roland could just see Barov's woeful face even through the earpiece.

The chief himself was probably scared out of his wits and couldn't wait for the sunrise.

"How are the wounded now?"

"They've all been sent to the hospital. Their lives aren't in danger, but the citizens are still talking about it. In the central square, people are still crowded in front of the bulletin boards and waiting for the announcements. This must've been caused by the witches' ability, right? If you'd informed me ahead of time, I wouldn't need to bother you in the aftermath of such a small incident."

"I know, but things related to magic are inherently unpredictable. It's not because I don't trust you." Roland consoled him by saying, "As for the announcement, just tell the citizens that I'm researching new weapons, so there will be similar incidents in the future, so rest assured about their safety. When there's a real enemy attack, the emergency alert will be the sound. By the way, City Hall will pay for the medical expenses for those that got injured."

"Yes... Your Highness," Barov answered unwillingly.

Roland shook his head and hung up the phone.

Roland did not understand why the City Hall Director was starting to be quite clingy. Although he handled the government affairs well, this tone of "Your Majesty, I've dedicated my heart and soul to serving you, you can't let me down" gave Roland goosebumps.

On the contrary, his communication with Pearl of the Northern Region was much quicker and smoother.

He wondered where she was now.

As he recovered from his distractions, he looked at Lightning who was at the desk and playing with her hair. Roland asked laughingly, "You must've heard the conversation just now, right?"

"Oh..." the little girl said despairingly, "Your Majesty, I've made a mistake. Please punish me by making me do two exercises."

Roland once again turned his gaze to Maggie who was on top of her head, and she struggled to turn her gaze away, and put on a disinterested expression, "Coo—"

Although the members of the Exploration Group were close, when Maggie was faced with these mixed exercises, she chose to remain silent.

He tried to resist but still burst out laughing. "Haha... Come on and lift your head, it's not your fault— After all, I was the one who agreed to let you fly. I should also bear some of the responsibility."

"Rea... Really?" Lightning raised her head and her eyes sparkled.

"Of course, you didn't know that your new power would cause any harm. Anyways, the damage wasn't too bad, so you don't have to worry about the practice exercises."

As Lightning's flight route last night was towards the direction of the Impassable Mountain Range, the impact on the residential area was minimal—other than cracking some glass windows in the castle and the diplomatic building; the other buildings were still well intact. While passing through the Furnace Area, Lightning had already climbed to a certain height, so the damage was further reduced, and no additional damage was done.

"Your Majesty, you're really... so kind!" She seemed to have regained all her energy in that instant, and Maggie was so relieved that she spread her wings.

Seeing that both of them were about to tackle him, Roland quickly raised his hand and stopped them in their tracks. "But does high-speed flight really consume that much magic power? Didn't you only fly for fifteen minutes last night?"

As soon as he asked this, Lightning suddenly felt embarrassed. "I was very surprised as well. I wanted to leave part of my magic for testing at that time. I tried to speed it up to test where its limit was, but I didn't expect the magic power to be consumed so quickly, and I even almost fell out of the sky."

"Could you still get faster?" Wendy, who was recording her account, immediately raised a key point.

"Yes," said Lightning with confidence, "as long as I have enough magic—there wasn't even any sound of the wind in my ears at the time. I even felt that nothing would stop me from flying even faster."

"What about Maggie? Was she always squatting on top of your head?"

"Coo!" Before Lightning answered, Maggie had already turned and said, "Too fast, dizzy, bosom coo!"

Was she saying that it was too fast and uncomfortable, so she was taken into Lightning's arms? Roland realized that his ability to understand pigeon language had significantly improved and his mind could automatically fill in the blanks.

"You only felt dizzy?" Agatha, who was also in charge of the ability test, said, "Didn't you feel the change in the airflow?"

"Uhhh..." Lightning pondered for a moment and said, "although I was wearing wind goggles at the time, when I was halfway through, the wind seemed to have suddenly disappeared."

"What do you think?" Roland looked at the Ice Witch. "Was this type of derivative ability recorded in the Union?"

Lightning almost accidentally exhausted all of her magic power and had disrupted the assessment. But the Witch Union had already established a system of assessment procedures. That, together with the experience of the Union, would be enough to form a rough estimate using the Stone of Measuring even if the ability could not be displayed.

According to Lightning, she spent only about three minutes to cross the Impassable Mountain Range before she flew into the Barbarian Land. This part usually took about half an hour to travel. The thunder in the night sky could also confirm this—Her ability after evolving had given her the ability to break the sound barrier in flight.

Regarding the concept of sound barriers, Roland did not have to spend too much time on it— Agatha's ability to learn had always been one of the best among the witches. A little bit of explanation was enough for her to understand the reason for the thunder.

There were no shortages of creatures in nature that could reach the speed of sound in a short period, and even human beings had managed to travel at the speed of sound in their flesh and bones. However, this did not mean that this could be easily achieved. There was no doubt that the reason why Lightning was not affected was related to her derivative ability after awakening.

"I think this would be 'magic synchronization.'" Agatha pondered for a moment then said, "This kind of derivative skill usually appeared in those witches whose main ability was dangerous to themselves. Hence, there weren't too many records about it. It'd usually expand into a cocoon and wrap witches in it, providing a safe environment within the cocoon. But maintaining it requires a lot of magic power. The bigger the gap between the internal and external environment, the higher the speed of magic consumption. In other words..."

"So Lightning exhausted her magic power in such a short time not because of the flight, but because of her derivative ability?" Wendy replied.

"That's right," Agatha nodded her head and said, "most derivative abilities were formed to aid the main ability, like Scroll's Book of Magic, and Lucia's colored world—Without them, the effect of the main ability would be greatly reduced and difficult to use to their potential. The synchronization of her magic powers was the same. Rather than incurring severe injuries, it would be a wiser decision to fly less instead."

Chapter 1018: Spread of News

"But my magic capacity can continue to grow through training, so there's no limit to the number of evolutions, right?" Lightning did not seem frustrated at all. "This is good—it makes me so excited thinking about being able to exceed my own limits! I can also be considered as half a combat witch now!"

"Battle coo!" Maggie chipped in.

"I know you're thrilled, but remember not to speed up over the castle and make trouble for His Majesty Roland again." Wendy coughed twice and said, "And you have to conserve your magic power for the next few days until we are finished with all the tests. Understand?"

"Yes, big sis Wendy." Lightning cheekily stuck out her tongue.

On the other hand, Roland had a different view. Even though flying at supersonic speed could bring unparalleled mobility, once the magic power was exhausted, she could easily be forced into a dangerous situation. Lightning was also much smaller than an airplane, so it was still unclear now how much damage she could deal with a demon when she rams it after breaking the sound barrier. It was obviously not worthwhile to use her as a combat witch.

And those Magic Slayers that could easily disrupt the flow of magic power within a large area will always pose a huge threat to her.

What he was more concerned about was the duration at which she can maintain subsonic speed—the speed of 800 to 900 kilometers per hour was absolutely unprecedented in this era. Whether it was used to expand the maps of the unexplored areas, or have her serve as a scout to make up for the battlefield blind spots of Sylvie's discovery area, it would certainly be much more efficient than to have her participate in battles.

When Lightning was about to leave, Roland suddenly stopped her.

"By the way, I have another question that I want to ask you," he said while considering the right words to use. "If... after ten years, the world no longer had any places to explore, what would you do?"

"No places... to explore?" Lightning was slightly surprised.

"Imagine if every continent has already been set foot on, every area of the sea has been recorded in detail on the charts, the entire world was crystal clear, and there are no longer any unknown places. Although that sounds a bit far-fetched, if it did happen, would you still want to become an explorer?"

"I see," the little girl suddenly realized, "what you meant to say was, what would I do if the Fjord explorers already discovered the entire land and sea during the Battle of Divine Will?"

"Uh... I guess you could put it that way." Roland was secretly baffled. He had already tried very hard to be indirect about it, yet she still understood the main point immediately. Peers in the same industry were certainly hard to deceive.

"Unless they are all as powerful as my father, but even so, I will continue to explore," Lightning said without hesitating, "because there are some places that only I can reach, not even my father can do it."

"You mean..."

Lightning pointed to the top of her head and said with confidence, "There is still a big gap in the sky!"

Only when she left did Roland burst out laughing.

Should he say "like father like daughter?" Her tone was not only similar to Thunder's but was even stronger than his. He didn't know if the explorer's fate would be as Thunder described, but there was indeed truth in what she had said. In terms of the ability to maneuver the skies, Lightning was certainly well above the rest.

"What're you laughing at?" Nightingale asked curiously.

He stood up, walked to the French window and looked at the cloudy sky. His glance seemed to have penetrated the clouds and reached further into the distance—although it was still elusive and mysterious, some people were already paying attention to it.

"I'm laughing at... how nice being young is," he said with emotion.

...

After dealing with Lightning's matters, Roland asked Wendy to stay behind.

"I intend to add a department in the City Hall." He went straight to the point. "In addition to dealing with emergencies like today, it'd also give the public a credible channel for discussion."

"You mean... it will be mainly used to announce messages?" asked Wendy.

"Yes, this department will be called the Ministry of Public Relations." Roland nodded and said, "However, the way it spreads news will be somewhat different—Firstly, if something is not an emergency, it'll no longer be announced through the bulletin board in the Central Square. Secondly, its content will not be limited to Neverwinter, some novelty events from other lands will also be included."

"If we don't publicize in the square, how do we let others know about it?" Nightingale pursed her lips.

Roland picked up a scrap of paper from the table and unfolded it in front of them. "We need a brand new method of spreading information—and that's the newspaper."

In fact, setting up bulletin boards in the central square and sending people to repeatedly announce the news was done only because Roland had no other choice back then. The literacy rate of people in that era was extremely low. In such circumstances, word of mouth had become the only way to promote a decree.

However, with the rapid expansion of the urban population and the domains, this method could no longer keep up with the actual needs of the subjects—In the past, gathering 3,000 people would be enough to have the news spread to the whole city. But now, at least 80,000 to 90,000 people would be needed to cover the rapidly increasing population.

This not only exceeded the capacity of the central square, but the extraction of such a huge crowd also resulted in the suspension of Neverwinter's industrial operations.

Barov's report made him realize that the so-called "if you don't occupy publicity locations, then enemies will occupy it" was not just talk. If there were no reliable channel for discussion, various rumors would spread in the pub. These rumors would continue to brew, and it would be too late to stop them once they had spread.

Now that the education for primary education had already been carried out for two and a half years, the materials available to Neverwinter had become much richer than in previous years. The introduction of newspapers as a means of communication was then of course inevitable.

If the first step was the foundation for running newspapers, then the second step would be to ensure the efficiency of the channels that would issue these newspapers.

What does an official newspaper need? A large circulation and reporting of current content that would generate discussion. Therefore Neverwinter needed to have a large amount of paper and efficient printing technology.

The problem of paper could be easily solved. In the central and eastern developed commercial cities, paper products had already spread to the middle and upper-class families. He even remembered Lucia's parents, who have passed away, used to run a paper mill in Valencia. According to the statistics of the City Hall, there were many migrated craftsmen from the East who had mastered papermaking. As long as those craftsmen were gathered together, the production capacity could be expanded, and they would soon meet the needs of large-scale distribution.

For Neverwinter, any problem that could be solved with money was not considered a problem.

The printing skill was even more straightforward. The movable metal type plus drum reels were all tried and tested technologies. The ink could be provided by Darkcloud which was theoretically even easier than papermaking.

But it was unnecessary to explain all these details to Wendy. Putting aside the technical aspects, newspapers still had to be written by people, so the most important thing was to find people to gather and record the news.

He asked Wendy to stay behind as he wanted her to pick out a few suitable candidates—whether it was the Witch Union or the Sleeping Spell, she understood the abilities of her sisters the most.

"I roughly understand what you mean..." After listening to Roland's explanation, Wendy pondered for a moment. "So you need a witch to get involved in this matter. She'd need to discover the incident when it's happening and also run faster than anyone else so that the message can be sent as soon as possible to the publicity department?"

"Ahem, she doesn't have to run fast." He almost choked on his own saliva. "As long as she knows where the incident is happening, she could dispatch someone else to send the message."

"In other words, she would be a core member of the Ministry of Public Relations? Well... I do have a suitable candidate in mind." Wendy laughed and said, "Your Majesty, what do you think... about Honey?"

Chapter 1019: The Secrets of the Witches

When Honey was summoned to the office, she was apparently very glad. Once she entered the office, she examined the mahogany table very carefully, as if she wanted to look through it.

"What's wrong?" Roland curiously asked, "Is there something about this table?"

"Do you put precious things inside?" Honey even sniffed at the table and asked, "Or does it maybe have some other functions, such as automatically heating up at night?"

"How could it..." he could not help laughing, "This is just an ordinary table. There is nothing but documents and official letters inside."

"Oh, really?" said Honey suspiciously. "Then why does Sister Nightingale bend over it for a long time every night?"

"Wait, what?" Roland and Wendy were stunned, while Nightingale immediately leaped up from the couch.

"Grayhair told me so when I trained it, although it could only express it with its actions." Honey replied seriously, "Sister Nightingale always sits in your place when nobody is around and leans her face on the table— Em—"

Before she could finish her words, Nightingale already jumped forward and covered her mouth tightly. "I, I was just a bit sleepy and leaned on the table for a while! How could a, a bird know what I was doing? You must have got it wrong!"

Wendy put her hand on the forehead, speechless.

"Ahem," Roland coughed and said. "Maybe Grayhair did not see it clearly? After all, it is very dark in the night..."

Honey mumbled in Nightingale's palm, "But Grayhair is an owl."

There was a brief silence in the office.

"Anyway, you should be mistaken," Roland cleared his throat and waved his hand at Nightingale who blushed at Honey's words. The latter stamped and disappeared into the Mist.

It seems that she will not show up for some time again.

"Really? I got it." Honey did not continue to ask, "If the table could heat up, I would have wanted one."

"Why?" asked Roland, raising his eyebrows, "Isn't there a heating system in both the Castle and the Witch Building?"

"But not in the garden. When Sister Leaf is away, it's very cold there. Grayhair and other birds have been unwilling to move as of lately. I was afraid that they would catch a cold, so I built a platform under the olive tree and slept with them in my arms. If the table could heat up, they'd be more comfortable."

"Is that why she was so interested in the table?" thought Roland. He noticed that there were several feathers on Honey's soft curly hair which looked like a disheveled nest at first glance. He realized that he had indeed ignored the living environment of the Animal Messengers. He thought that they had the ability to adapt to nature but ignored the fact that it violated natural rules to have them fly in the wind and snow during the Months of Demons.

"Although the table can't give out heat, I can have people build a heated brick bed in the garden," he laughed and gestured, "It'll be almost as large as a bed, so you can get all the animals you train to sleep on it. How about it?"

"Really?" Honey's eyes lighted up, "Thank you!"

"It's nothing, but can you really talk to them?"

Honey rubbed her head shyly, "In fact, as Sister Nightingale said, most animals can't speak, so they can only use simple actions to imitate what they see. I often fail to guess what they mean, so it can't be counted as a real conversation."

"I see," thought Roland, "although the magic power can make trained birds and beasts follow Honey's orders, it can't endow them with human-like intelligence and transform them into another species." He asked, "What if you order them to look for anecdotes and then indicate directions to you?"

"Anecdotes?"

Honey pondered for a while. While Roland was thinking how to explain the word "news", she suddenly asked, "Sister Wendy and Scroll often get together to drink and sing on the balcony once they get drunk. Is that an anecdote?"

"I've never heard of it." Roland was surprised. Wendy, as the head of the Witch Union, was gentle and warm as a spring breeze. As the Minister of Education and the teacher of primary courses for witches, Scroll was patient and full of intellectual beauty. She might not smile often, but she was concerned about every sister in the Union. It is difficult for him to imagine the scene of the time when they were drunk, and more than once, according to what Honey said. He could not help asking, "Why have I never heard them sing?"

"Because they generally meet when you're out. After all, only when Sister Nightingale is away, they can easily drink her beverage." Honey said, "They're not just singing. Greentail tells me that they sometimes talk about you— Em—"

This time it was Wendy who covered her mouth and explained, "I was only ha-happy for Your Majesty's achievements. What's more, she said that the bird can't speak, so how could they understand what we were talking about?"

"Greentail is a parrot..." Honey mumbled.

Seeing that everyone was falling into silence again, Roland quickly changed the topic and said, "Well, that is indeed an unusual anecdote. You're qualified."

"Qualified?" she asked confused.

"Wait, Your Majesty. I suddenly feel that it might be inappropriate for her to serve as the core member of the Ministry of Public Relations and Communications..." Wendy said, coughing.

"Don't worry. All articles are ultimately released only once they're reviewed. The newspaper will mainly about the public events. There won't be too much about the witches." Roland made the final decision, "In addition, common people can't enter the Castle District, so you can rest assured. After all, only her Animal Messengers can quickly get news from all over the country."

"Your Majesty, may I know what on earth you're talking about?" Honey shouted while raising her hand.

"Of course," Roland tried to suppress his smile. "It's a very interesting job. Come here and I'll explain it to you in detail."

With the news center and the newspaper printing technology, the next step is to recruit hands and establish an interview-writing system. Barov is undoubtedly the most appropriate one for the job. As for the position of the minister, Roland decided to take the position himself.

Taking into account the degree of acceptance of people, the newspapers would be issued only in Neverwinter once a week. In addition to the major events that take place in various locations, there would also be sections that would record non-governmental news and trivial things of life. With the official background of the City Hall, Roland believed that before long the newspaper would be the most credible channel of publicity, which would greatly improve the current lack of publicity. At the same time, it would also provide a wealth of talks for the public in the taverns as to squeeze the rumors out the market.

However, these were just official records. What Roland was more interested in were the words Honey had not finished.

Of course, he does not have to be in a rush. Since he would be the minister, he could summon Honey alone and ask her about the hidden anecdotes. For instance, what did Wendy and Scroll say when they were drunk?

He was really curious about it.

Chapter 1020: Release Day

Victor sat in a private room of a tavern in Neverwinter, reading through the latest trade bills.

Unlike the noisy hall downstairs, this was undoubtedly a room of superior quality. With a woolen carpet on the floor and a heated brick bed underneath the soft couch, he would not feel a bit of coldness on his feet.

At his request, the tavern also installed a movable wooden table next to the soft couch, which could serve as a low table when needed. Especially in the winter with chilling wind and snow, leaning on the couch to work could be considered a kind of enjoyment.

At the moment, a plate of roasted chicken breast slices was placed next to his left hand, and a cup of dark purple Chaos Drinks on the right side. This meal was worth 10 gold royals, not to mention its taste.

As a jewelry trader on the surface, he was, in fact, the fourth son of the Lothar family. These expenses, which were a huge amount of money in the eyes of common people, were nothing to him. It has been his unconscious habit to spend gold royals on physical comforts. Whether it was worthwhile or not, it was not within his consideration.

After watching the debut of the giant machinery named "train" two months ago, he bought a room on the third floor of the tavern to serve as his business residence.

Of course, with his wealth, it was not difficult for him to buy one or two houses. Nevertheless, Victor preferred this sense of detachment—he could stay in a quiet state while feeling the noise and excitement downstairs at the same time. Compared with the huge mansions favored by traditional nobles, he has always been full of longing for places like taverns.

It was convenient for him to negotiate with various caravans in the tavern. However, there was another reason.

Nothing else could reflect the vigor and prosperity of a city more directly than a downtown tavern.

After reading the last page, Victor closed the sheepskin notebook in his hand and lifted the crystal clear drink. In the candlelight, the purple-red liquid was like a beautiful gemstone.

There was some trouble with the recent bills.

He has failed to purchase any gemstones in the Western Region for a long time.

The battle for the throne had caused great changes in Graycastle. The cities were destroyed in the war and the nobles no longer owned domains. These changes caused the price of luxury goods to keep falling. To maintain the original profit, he had to increase sales. Be that as it may, without gemstones, his jewelry craftsmen could not make any jewelry.

The Longsong Stronghold was originally one of his main gemstone sources. However, since Roland Wimbledon announced to build Neverwinter, the gemstones became increasingly scarce. Victor had gone to Longsong Area several times but found that all mining areas had been occupied by the young king. It was not strange, as the occupation of wealth was the common nature of lords. Nevertheless, all gemstones disappeared since they were transported out of the Border Area.

That is right. He has failed to find any jewelry shop in Neverwinter so far.

The king could either directly sell the gemstones or invest money to sell jewelry. If the king chose the former way, Victor could make profits by reselling the gemstones at a higher price. If it was the latter, he could cooperate with the king. Whether it was the selling channel or jewelry craftsmanship, he had the strength which the king would not refuse.

Yet, the king has not given him any chance to be involved.

It is as if Roland Wimbledon did not plan to make money by selling gemstones.

This made Victor a bit distressed.

He also tried to sell the jewelry in Neverwinter and the result was equally terrible. The jewelry, which commonly cost dozens of gold royals, were not affordable for civilians. It was always sold to wealthy noble families so that they could show off and compare them at the banquets. However, there are not any nobles in Neverwinter!

That is right; in such a huge new city, he could not find anyone who was interested in jewelry, which was something completely unforeseen by him.

He had come to Neverwinter several times, but he only purchased goods instead of selling. So the bills on the sheepskin notebook showed a huge trade deficit.

This was undoubtedly an unhealthy signal.

The emergence of the train made Victor realize that the future arrived but not everywhere. To better expand his business, he naturally had to go to the place which was nearest to the future. The shift of business focus from the old king's city to the new one was an inevitable choice for him.

The question was what he should do if there was no such industry in the future.

He was not short of money. Even if he did nothing, he could enjoy a prosperous life. However, he must prove his ability in trade so that those businessmen who coveted his family and "Black Money" would have nothing to say.

He can not let his father down.

When Victor was thinking about how to solve this problem, the noise downstairs suddenly exploded, and even the floor shook slightly.

It is still early, so there should not be a crowd of people drinking downstairs. What happened?

He pulled the string of the brass bell to summon a maid.

"Excuse me," a pretty woman quickly opened the door and walked in. "Can I help you, Sir?"

At the moment the door was open, the noise became louder. There appeared to be someone reading aloud.

Victor pointed outside and asked, "What're they doing downstairs?"

"I'm sorry, Sir. Have they bothered you?" The maid smiled apologetically. "Please forgive them. After all, it's the release day of the newspaper. They're jostling to buy it."

"News... paper?" he repeated awkwardly.

"Yes, His Majesty made the announcement a week ago. The newspaper is used to replace the bulletin board on the square. Everyone has been looking forward to it for a long time. We're eager to see what the newspaper is."

"Oh, a new product? No wonder it's the new king's city." It immediately aroused Victor's interest. He asked, "How much is it?"

"I heard that it costs ten bronze royals for each."

"Buy one... no, 10 for me!" he said immediately.

"Yes." The maid trod downstairs and returned quickly, panting. "Sir, sir... The newspapers delivered have all been sold out."

"So fast?" Victor blinked in surprise. If it were a commodity, it would be too popular. However, this was also alright for him, as he could get it as long as he paid with more money. "Then buy it from people who have bought it. No matter how expensive!"

He threw a gold royal to the maid and said, "As long as you can get it, all that's left is yours!"

"Yes, Sir!" The girl replied with a huge grin.

About seven minutes later, six piles of newspaper in gray color were handed to him.

"The price has risen to 20 silver royals. I have done my best..." the maid said hesitatively.

So they raised the price as they found out that he was eager to buy it. The maid's expression clearly exposed her thoughts. Though she failed the task, she was unwilling to return the remaining money. Victor did not care about it and asked, "What's your name?"

"Tinkle, Sir."

"Keep the change," he said, waving the newspaper in his hand. "By the way, would you like to read this with me?"

Since he already had delicious food and wine, what was missing was naturally self-evident. Her heaving breasts and beads of sweat on her nose tip all gave off a breath of youthful vitality. Having met too many noble ladies, he felt this slightly clumsy girl had a certain, different flavor, not to mention that she was a resident of Neverwinter and could answer his questions when needed.

"Sir..." The maid lowered her head and a pale blush appeared on her cheeks. After a while, she bit her lip and nodded before she whispered, "I'd like to."

"Hahaha," he laughed and patted the soft couch. "Then thank you very much for your company."