

## Witch 1171

### Chapter 1171: The Double Plan

Everyone rested their eyes on the Nightmare.

So did Hackzord.

The Nightmare Lord, Valkries, was the most special lord out of the nine lords. As the very first lord, it had led most of the lords on the floor to their upgrades. During the first Battle of Divine Will, it had established a close relationship with human beings, and it was even rumored that there were still some believers in human cities. Although the Nightmare was not the strongest lord, it was powerful enough to alter its physical appearance. However, it seemed to prefer the look after its upgrade — blue skinned, with a horn sprouting from its head, and a third eye on its forehead.

Although the Nightmare did not look remotely human, its fashion style and act of demeanor were quite manlike, and it was also the first lord who had learned to speak the human language.

In other words, the Nightmare was the complete opposite of the Silent Disaster. Its sheer, delicate white robe displayed every single thread of fabric and afforded the Nightmare a sense of aloofness that separated it from the rest of them.

The Nightmare looked relaxed and indifferent, but Hackzord knew its understanding of the Realm of Mind was astoundingly profound.

Hackzord would not have complained about anything had the Nightmare Lord been startled earlier.

In fact, it was the only lord that Hackzord failed to understand.

If any of the other lords had seated themselves so unceremoniously like the Nightmare, Hackzord would have doubted its loyalty.

Surprisingly, the king also appeared to be perfectly fine with the Nightmare's attitude.

"Well, what did you find?"

"I'm just wondering if there's such a possibility," Valkries said as it straightened up. "Whether there's an upgrade method unknown to us or not, let's just suppose that a male human possessed an ability like a witch, then this ability must have a lot to do with the Realm of Mind. Otherwise, the Silent Lord wouldn't have been so petrified."

A red fleck glimmered underneath the Silent Disaster's helmet. It said, "I've been guarding the legacy shard for nearly 200 years and have seen many humans. Most of them either fled or drowned. Only one person I met two years ago managed to confront me, but she was a woman."

"Witches could possibly achieve that, but I don't really care about that person's gender. I'm actually more concerned about the ability itself. Perhaps, this man hasn't even noticed that he's already powerful enough to leave a mark in the Realm of Mind."

"I agree with you," Hackzord rejoined. After all, the Realm of Mind was one of its expertises. "But I don't really see the point here. The Realm of Mind is vast. It would be almost impossible to find a mark left by a specific individual."

"Perhaps," Valkries neither approved nor denied. "But I still want to give it a shot, using the connection between the different legacy shards. What do you think?"

Mildy taken aback, Hackzord asked, "Have you already learned to sense the connection between the shards?"

The defeat of the underground civilization significantly increased the magic power of the entire race. They were thus able to sense the Birth Towers. Gradually, they realized that both the communication with the Birth Tower and the legacy shards had to be completed through the Realm of Mind. Therefore, in theory, they could always search along the communication line for what was connected on the other end.

Nevertheless, this was simply a theory. The Realm of Mind was chaotic and random like the whirling sea. It was extremely hard to look for a thin thread hidden underneath the surface of the water. The deeper this thin thread was, the more susceptible it was to the influences of the currents. Hackzord could barely maintain its position in the Realm, let alone looking for a faintly discernible "connection line".

It had never thought of using this method.

Did Valkries already surpass it in the understanding of the Origin of Magic?

"Maybe," Valkries answered leisurely. "But I won't know until I try it out. If I could find the mark left by that man, we could probably know the answer."

Hackzord thought the mark would not be much of help. The mind was complicated. Even for the mind of someone of the same race, they had to do a lot of research, feel, and make numerous deductions to learn the truth, not to mention that they were now going to search for the mind of a person of another race. Forcing its way into someone's mind would lead to madness and disorder. Hackzord wanted to talk sense into the Nightmare, but when it saw Valkries' white robe, his words somehow rested on the tip of its tongue.

Perhaps, the Nightmare Lord did have some feasible way to achieve this.

"The Sky Lord is now guarding the legacy shards. Ask him if you want to try," said the king.

"As you command," Valkries said while placing its hand on its chest. "However, it should be noted that there's no guarantee that we could find the answer before human beings upgrade. There are many variables, and the search requires a lot of time. There's a possibility that the upgrade of human race would cause substantial damage to us. I believe the Sky Lord has a Plan B after we lose Taquila, right? If Plan B fails again, everything we've done so far would be wasted."

"You're being too cautious..." the Blood Conqueror said gruffly.

"I held the upgrade ceremony for Ursrook. After it upgraded, it learned a lot about humans from me," Valkries said mildly as it closed its eyes again. "It was definitely gifted, and I don't think its warning is a word out of delirium. Therefore, I uphold its suggestion of sending more troops to the Fertile Plains."

"Seconded," the Silent Disaster rejoined.

The king lapsed into a short silence and looked toward the other commanders including the Bloody Conqueror. "Are you able to increase the forces by ten times to support the Sky Lord while maintaining the current defense?"

"Sire..."

"I'm asking whether you can or can't."

There was a brief silence in the hall.

To Hackzord's surprise, the Mask broke the silence. "Yes, sire, I can manage. As long as you could provide me with more resources for my research, I can develop more powerful, diverse symbiotic demons. They won't be restricted by their parents and will be much more powerful than junior demons. Ten times more powerful! More importantly, they'll not affect the battle at the front."

"But that'll consume many God's Stones," the Resentful Heart said apprehensively. "If we lose control, the consequences will be devastating."

"When we wipe out those low lives, we'll have plenty of God's Stones!"

"Are you sure you can make it in time?" the Bloody Conqueror retorted irritably.

The Mask paused for a second and said, "Well, it'll be a little difficult to provide so many symbiotic demons at a time, but I don't think human beings will react that fast. We may be able to vanquish them with just half of the suggested number. In that case, we could probably save half of our resources. It would be better than nothing..."

"Enough," the king interrupted the conversation. "Let's do what the Mask said. Anyway, we can't let human beings live on the Land of Dawn for another 400 years. We must take the entire continent after this Battle of Divine Will!"

"As you wish!" chorused all the lords as they bent their heads.

Chapter 1172: A New Population Policy

In Neverwinter, Graycastle.

In the castle boardroom.

With the expansion of the Administrative Office, the meeting room became increasingly crowded. Many officials were sitting on benches behind their ministers and deputy ministers, whereas clerks and assistants were forced to stand flat against the wall. The hall was thus packed with around 200 people.

Roland thought it was now time to build a larger conference hall to accommodate these officials. He gathered that once the local officials came to the king's city to report their work, they would probably have to use the first floor of the castle to receive them.

He noted this idea down on a book and clapped his hands, and the meeting room instantly fell silent.

"I believe everyone has learned about the great success of the 'Torch' project that lasted for around 10 months. Now, we've eradicated the demons and expanded our territory to the Fertile Plains. From now on, instead of a deserted land full of traps and dangers, the area to the west of Neverwinter will provide us with resources and food!" Roland paused for a second and then said, "That's right. This land larger than the Four Kingdoms put together will be the land we'll dwell on for the next 100 years!"

The hall erupted into thunderous applause.

Territory expansion was viewed as the most important task for a king, and was also the fastest way for officials to gain a profit. Even civilians could benefit from the newly-acquired land, as this new land was several times the current territory of Graycastle.

"The 'Four Kingdoms' would probably become a part of history in a few years," Barov said jubilantly while stroking his beard. "The other three kingdoms are incomparable to Graycastle in strength and power."

"Quite right. It would be hilarious if we continue to use the word 'the Four Great Kingdoms' to document our history."

"How about 'One Great and Three Small Kingdoms'?"

"A little bit too much of a mouthful. I would rather come up with a brand new name."

"I Agree. I trust that the word 'empire' would suit our current status."

The ministers were absorbed in this heated discussion.

Roland did not stop their argument but allowed them to savor the aftermath of the victory over the demons before he steered the subject back to business. "I hope it's our mutual understanding that this victory is just the beginning of the war! Although we drove the demons out of the Fertile Plains, it doesn't necessarily mean that they wouldn't come back. This peace is only temporary. The real threat is the Battle of Divine Will when the Bloody Moon appears. I believe our enemy will put all their efforts into fighting this battle. Therefore, we must be well-prepared!"

"In other words, we shouldn't slack off. Instead, we should work even harder. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

The crowd shouted together.

Roland surveyed the room and nodded at Nightingale next to him.

Nightingale turned around and pulled back the curtain on the wall.

A huge blackboard replaced the map of the Western Region, on which there was only one single word: people.

"This is what I want," Roland announced slowly.

Peace was restored in the Western Region. With the return of the army and the consolidation of the local administration in various municipalities, Graycastle citizens had become, unprecedentedly, united.

Among all the plans Roland was about to implement, increasing the population became the most important one.

To expedite the implementation of this policy, he even placed a higher priority on this matter over the post-war analysis.

Without a doubt, the biggest problem for Neverwinter now was its small population.

Had the First Army had an armored unit during the "Torch" project, they could have easily repelled the demons that had ambushed the witches using the simplest infantry fighting vehicle.

Although it was not necessarily ideal to use the first generation of the piston engine to produce an infantry fighting vehicle, it was better than nothing.

Roland knew that the production rate in Neverwinter had reached its maximum.

The plants could yield no more steel.

The battle had cost them 90% of the shells accumulated over years in Neverwinter.

The railway, which meandered through the plain, had almost consumed all the steel they had.

Agatha now also felt it increasingly hard to catch up with the acid production in the plant.

The production of RPGs further exhausted the ammunition stockpile.

It was undeniable that they had reached dead ends in many areas.

Roland needed people to expand production.

He also needed people to work on new projects.

To put the plan into action, Roland needed even more people to coordinate with different departments.

The population of Neverwinter was currently increasing at a steady pace and had reached 200,000. Compared to other cities, this number was astronomical. It would probably take just another decade for Neverwinter to expand into a metropolis that housed one million residents.

Roland would have peacefully accepted the victory had the demons not acted so unpredictably in the past war. In fact, as the reason for the demons' unexpected behavior still remained as a mystery, Roland felt a little uneasy about the outcome. He would rather see a fierce, bitter battle in Taquila between the First Army and the demons that lasted for over half a year and caused over half of the soldiers to be classified as casualties than the result he saw now.

He had planned to conduct a prolonged campaign.

But the demons had not let him do so.

The deviation from their original operation plan indicated some unforeseen changes had taken place. As the army returned to Neverwinter, Roland's fear of uncertainty grew, which urged him to speed up the process by taking some unusual measures.

"Your Majesty, the Administrative Office has been on top of that," Barov replied as he rose to his feet. "Based on the statistics, the city takes in immigrants every year. I believe in about five years, the number of the immigrants in the city will be doubled— "

"I can't wait another five years anymore," Roland interjected. "I wish to see this happen this year, and possibly more immigrants than what was initially planned, if possible."

Everybody gasped.

"200,000 a year? Your Majesty, I'm afraid that's impossible..." Barov said hesitantly. "Only a famine or a riot could bring in so many people at a time."

"You were talking about the immigration under normal circumstances, but I'm intending to issue an administrative order. If we make relocation mandatory, it won't be very hard to reach this target. In short, this long-term plan can be divided into three parts."

Roland stuck out three fingers.

"Which are relocation, cross-border recruitment, and more births. These are what you should work on next."

Chapter 1173: I Want All of Them

"I'm only giving you the basic frame of this project. You have to figure out how to implement the policy and coordinate with the other departments yourself. Barov Mons should be supervising the whole project."

"As you command," Barov responded while clapping his hand over his chest.

Roland nodded in satisfaction. After years of training, Barov had learned to obey his order without questioning his authority no matter how unreasonable it seemed to be.

The close and intertwined relationship between each department within the Administrative Office enabled Barov to allocate resources for a big project like this.

"Now, listen carefully," Roland said as he instructed Nightingale to stick a sheet of white cloth to the blackboard. "First is the migration within the Kingdom of Graycastle..."

"Wow..." the crowd exclaimed involuntarily when they saw the content on the canvas.

On the canvas were the several main features of this policy, supplemented with clear instructions in both text and picture formats. This was actually a very crude, primitive powerpoint created by Soraya. As a former engineering student, Roland believed that making slides was one of the basic skills to negotiate with employers. Compared to a lengthy, dry speech, slides would obviously be more visually appealing to audience.

The population structure in Graycastle reflected how manpower was distributed in this particular age. Nobles of a higher rank, after becoming a lord, built their own cities and distributed their lands to their subordinates. With the increase in the population and the accumulation of wealth, big cities gradually

found it increasingly difficult to sustain themselves. Subsequently, some city residents moved out to surrounding villages to continue to support those big cities.

As a consequence, cities ceased to expand, creating a huge income gap between the nobles and civilians. Although these large cities appeared to be prosperous and boisterous at the first glance, the population of the surrounding towns and villages was actually much bigger than that of the city they were supporting.

However, Roland knew the fundamental reason for this phenomenon was low productivity. Due to low productivity, civilians were bound by the lands they owned. For the rest of their life, they had no choice but to work laboriously in their fields to support the extravagant lifestyle of the nobles, with little they could keep to themselves.

During the previous years when Roland had been recruiting refugees, the Administrative Office had paid special attention to the change in the local demographic and made a rough estimate. They concluded that the population of Graycastle should be between two million to four million. The wars waged by the second prince and Princess Garcia, and the plague spread by the church had caused a loss of 500,000 to 600,000 in the population and also razed the Eagle City in the Southern Territory and Valencia in the Eastern Region to the ground. Nevertheless, there were still quite a considerable number of people scattered around Graycastle, and only a very small portion of them had chosen to settle down in the Western Region.

But now, Roland was determined to force those people to move here.

It was predicted that they would soon harvest a great quantity of wheat grown from Golden Twos within a month. Meanwhile, high-yield cotton had also been widely grown in the Port of Clearwater. It would not be long before they could supply fabric to people in the entire kingdom. Currently, big cities no longer had to rely on manpower to sustain themselves, for one person could yield products 10 or 20 times they used to.

Further, Roland had, technically, unified Graycastle on an administrative level, as all the power that used to belong to local lords was now held by the central government. The lords would have to obey the orders issued by secondary administrative bodies.

The unification of the kingdom thus provided an excellent opportunity to implement his new migration policy.

The so-called migration equality referred to the equal treatment of any or all citizens' rights to migrate their family members. It was an effective way to reduce conflicts that the mandatory migration policy might spark among the public.

For example, a migrant who used to have two acres of land would be granted the same amount of land by the Administrative Office after he moved to Neverwinter. This strategy would not only expedite the development of the deserted land in the northwest but would also effectively solve the labor shortage problem in Neverwinter.

However, Roland foresaw it was not going to be a pleasant process to drive people out of their native towns to a completely foreign city.

To persuade people to abandon their native land and work in a plant would need a stronger reason than the simple explanation of "emancipation". Historically, the road migrants had trodden on was never unstained with the blood of uncooperative protestors. The government had the nasty tradition of stripping villagers of their properties through illegal purchase and occupation. Some countries even had a history of threatening unemployed refugees to work in factories via legislation and punishments.

Although Roland did not intend anything like this to happen and was actually planning to provide social assistance to migrants, he was determined to restructure the demographic.

He knew what he was doing.

The second requirement was cross-border recruitment, which was basically the same as mandatory migration only that the targetted demographic was residents living beyond Graycastle.

Unlike the Kingdom of Dawn that survived the war, both the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart lost their sovereigns after the church's invasion. According to Hill, these two kingdoms had not fully recovered yet. All the lords claimed that they were the blood of the royal families, and nobody seemed to be able to persuade the others.

Given that, it was out of the question to establish a puppet government like Roland had done to the Kingdom of Dawn.

"Do you mean... that we should send the First Army?" Barov blurted out as he saw a new sheet was put onto the board.

"Do you think that the nobles will allow us to take away their properties while doing nothing?" Roland said matter-of-factly as he sipped his tea. "They care about nothing but power, wealth and more lands. They don't give a damn about the demons or the Battle of Divine Will. Of course, we still need to reason with them first. As for whether they accept it or not, that's another story."

"I'll let them yield, Your Majesty," Iron Axe said sternly.

Cross-border recruitment would definitely be more savage than mandatory domestic migration. Without Golden Twos, many civilians would have to relocate to other cities. The loss of population and food would then lead to the destruction of the entire urban ecosystem. It was, therefore, another form of war, only that the loss would be relatively small compared to an aggressive one.

The First Army was the key to this plan.

The population of the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart was around 3 million. Except for those killed in the battles against the church, they could provide Neverwinter 1,500,000 immigrants. The relocation might take several years but it would also be the fastest way to increase the population. That was why Roland asked Barov to double the population within a year, or even within half a year.

"Your Majesty, do you have any requirements for those immigrants?" Barov asked. "Like they have to be skilled workers, farmers or literates?"

Roland had screened refugees before, but at that time, due to limited resources, he had not had the liberty to take in all of them. However, things were quite different now.



"No," Roland answered as he clenched his fist. "I want all of them."

"I... I see," Barov said while mopping his sweat-dampened forehead.

"Last but not least," Roland continued as he instructed Nightingale to show the last slide. "The Administrative Office shall encourage births through advertisement, tax reduction and rewards. Although compared to the previous two policies, you won't be able to immediately see the result of this one. However, it's going to be the most important policy in the future."

Roland paused for a second and then said smilingly to his audience, "For this last policy, I hope everyone in this room could set a good example for the public."

Chapter 1174: A Permanent Currency Solution

Somebody in the room sniggered.

With the rapid expansion of the Administrative Office and the establishment of a graduation exam system, the average age of governmental officials reduced by years. Since youths were naturally more willing to accept and learn new things than old people, it was common for a young man to finish school at the age of 20 and elevate himself to a key position in the government at the age of 25.

In fact, Roland saw many young officials in the conference hall.

He curled up his lips as he saw some new officials flush fugitively and lower their heads.

Although these young men were relatively inexperienced compared to the old generation, they injected hopes and energies into the institution, which were essential for a newly-established governmental body.

"Anyway, you all need to do your best to increase the population of Neverwinter. Obviously, we'll need more residential buildings and facilities to accommodate these new residents. Doubling the population isn't our ultimate goal, as I'm not going to set a target for this project. All you should know is that the more, the better. Everyone is obligated to make a contribution." Roland concluded after the laughter died down, "To make it easy to memorize, let's round up the number and call this project the 'Project of A Million'."

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

The officials all clapped their hands over their chests.

The next few executive orders were all supplementary orders to the Project of A Million, such as the exploitation of the resources underneath the Fertile Plains, the establishment of day schools and specialized ones, as well as the further regulation of universal education. Roland also intended to outsource medical professionals from the public instead of recruiting from the army while setting up clinics in various neighborhoods to reduce the pressure of the hospital. Correspondingly, the Ministry of Education should add another subject to the middle school curriculum, medical science, and train semi-professionals working at the field medics using the textbooks collected from the Dream World.

It would not be very easy to expand a city with a population of 200,000 into one with a population of 400,000 or even a million. With the increase in the population, they would, inevitably, had to improve the infrastructure of the city to prevent pollution from waste water and human excreta. The epidemic prevention work would also become more demanding due to the dense population. Although Lily could help with disease control, Roland still had to find a way to establish a monitoring and prevention system.

Education was another key to further development. Illiterate population would only impose a huge burden on the system as opposed to providing assistance to the industrialization.

That was why Roland only laid out the basic frame of the plan because he knew a large city with a population of over a million would not instantly invent itself just after one meeting. The Administrative Office had to figure out how to execute the plan themselves through constant exploration and practices.

While everyone was excited about the future of Neverwinter, Barov suddenly asked, "Your Majesty, are you planning to send all these people to the plants?"

Roland said with a nod, "Or the construction team, the First Army or the laboratory. Anywhere that needs people."

"But the Administrative Office probably isn't financially capable of supporting these people." Barov said hesitantly, "The main revenue of the Administrative Office comes from the sale of Chaos Drinks, perfumes and steam engines. You know that the Joint Chamber of Commerce pays us the bill for the steam engines every three to six months. However, we have to pay subjects their salaries every month, which was around 80,000 gold royals in total. There's no need to worry about any financial problems at the moment because we earn much more than we pay out. However, if the number of the subjects doubles, I'm afraid..."

"You're worried that if the payment is delayed for a few months, the municipality won't be able to pay their people, right?" Roland asked with some interest, his eyebrows raised. He was very pleased that Barov, the former assistant to the Treasurer, quickly foresaw a potential financial crisis.

"Exactly," Barov said as he wrote frantically on his notebook. "As salaries increase annually, the expenses on payroll will only grow higher every year. However, the annual production of Chaos Drinks won't change much, and with the residents in the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart swarming into Neverwinter, they'll no longer need to purchase products from here. I'm afraid that the treasury of the Administrative Office will soon be exhausted when our revenue rapidly decreases. I made a rough estimate here. If we take in more than 100,000 people each year, our financial risk will increase by 30%, unless you could find some other sources of revenue..."

Nightingale's eyes instantly glistened. She whispered to Roland, "There's an unexploited gold mine within the domain of our family."

Roland replied in amusement, "I'm not that desperate yet."

"Who cares? Use it if you like."

"Well... don't worry, I'll use it when it's absolutely necessary, but not now," Roland whispered back, then turned to Barov and said, "I've thought of that, and I find you a solution that could solve all the problems you're worried about."

"An ultimate solution?" Barov said, a little taken aback.

"Correct. I see that the cause of these problems is insufficient funds. If we could generate indefinite revenues, there won't be any problems."

Printing notes would be the fastest way to get rich.

When the industrialization of a city reached a certain point, the current monetary system that was heavily based on precious metal currency would inevitably cease to work. Due to the rapid development of technologies, eventually commodities whose values were much more than precious metal itself would emerge. When customers could no longer provide enough precious metal currencies to pay for the values of those commodities, the monetary system would automatically collapse.

However, credit currency did not have such a problem.

Roland had conducted a pilot project before by distributing the witches nominal notes. He noticed these notes were extremely hard to counterfeit because they were printed in Darkcloud's ink, pressed with Anna's moulds and attached with an anti-forgery mark made out of the rubber worm's slime.

Otherwise, the witches would have forged notes on their own to snap up the Chaos Drinks in the castle convenience store.

Further, Neverwinter now had the capability to distribute credit currency.

Roland had planned to discuss the details about the currency format, currency value, and rules pertaining to currency exchange with Barov after he drafted a basic guideline. However, since Barov had raised this question, he would not mind slipping some information.

While Roland was explaining the principle of credit currency to a group of bemused, flabberghasted ministers, the door of the conference hall was flung open and Phyllis burst in.

"Your Majesty, we made a new discovery. Pasha wishes you and your party to come down to the underground hall immediately."

"That urgent?"

"Yes," Phyllis confirmed while knitting her brows. "We've already deciphered the Magic Slayer... no, the demon lord, Ursrook's letter!"

Chapter 1175: Ursrook's Letter

In the central hall of the Third Border City.

Roland heard a hysterical shriek as he led his ministers off the underground corridor to the hall.

"What's that?" Wendy asked in surprise.

"Kabradhabi's wailing," Phyllis, who led the way, replied. "He broke down after hearing Ursrook's defeat. Not only did he lose his composure but he also made several attempts to commit suicide as well. It took us a while to sedate it."

"I suddenly feel that it might be a better idea to let it live," Tilly rejoined coldly.

"He must live," Phyllis said while nodding vigorously. "The encrypted letter written by Ursrook provides us an excellent opportunity to get a more profound understanding of our enemy. We could probably even know how they mastered our language, which is something the Union yearned but failed to do."

"I can't believe that Kabradhabi would agree to cooperate," Nightingale remarked.

"No, it didn't. It's a little complicated to explain the whole thing. You'll see when you meet it."

Roland and his party came to a halt before an interrogation stand, where the Senior Demon, who took the form of a God's Punishment Warrior, was tethered to a metal post, with a tube inserted into its abdomen. Its eyelids were forced open, before which was a sheet of paper with foreign characters on it.

"So, this is the encrypted letter reconstructed by Summer?" Wendy asked.

"Yes. Maggie spotted it in midair, otherwise we would have probably missed it," answered Agatha, who looked a little pale and weary. There were dark signs of sleeplessness beneath her eyes.

After the war ended, Roland immediately sent the Neverwinter Detective Group to the front to help the army collect information that was typically hard to obtain by ordinary means. Roland believed that the letter, which accidentally slipped out, would be more reliable than the information the demons deliberately divulged to humans.

Considering that Summer's magic power was limited, initially they had just planned to reconstruct the battle between the ambush unit and the demons, and how the Magic Slayer had deceived Sylvie and set up his counter ambush.

But in reality, Roland saw more than he had expected.

He did not expect to see Ursrook, perched on the giant skeleton, write this letter in the golden rays of sunset.

Summer had faithfully reconstructed this particular scene.

"Aaaaargh!" Kabradhabi howled while wriggling, making a desperate attempt to avert its eyes.

Agatha nodded at Breeze who stamped her foot, and the Senior Demon instantly fell silent.

"I see. You're asking Breeze to manipulate it into reading the encrypted letter," Nightingale commented with a look of dawning comprehension.

"And then we'll ask Ms. Camilla to channel it to see how it'll react to the letter," Celine added. "Although it tried to fake its reaction, we could still distinguish real, spontaneous reactions from fake ones by constantly changing the content of the letter. We actually got this idea from Your Majesty."

"From me?" Roland asked in bewilderment.

"In the intermediate biology textbook, you mentioned that a dog will salivate when being presented with food. This type of unconditioned response applies to all creatures, including demons."

"We thus pieced the information in its head together and deciphered the content of the letter using a similar approach. Thanks to Ms. Camilla's assistance, we were able to obtain the intelligence rather quickly." With these words, Celine waved her main tentacle at Camilla in gratitude.

"I'm just hoping... hoping that I could help Lady Tilly," Camilla said while biting her lip, a little embarrassed.

That was the beauty of witches' abilities. Although every witch had her own limitation, each of them was irreplaceable. Some ability was so rare that it might take more than several hundred years to see a witch awaken with such an ability. Perhaps there had been witches with abilities similar to Camilla Dary's during the past two Battles of Divine Will, but unfortunately, they had not managed to survive the day when human beings captured a real Senior Demon.

That was probably why Ursrook had been so keen on the elimination of the witches. However, were Ashes, Sylvies and the other witches really more important for the demons than Taquila? The demons, after all, needed God's Stones to erect the Obelisk. Once they seized Taquila, the Red Mist would pervade the Impassable Mountain Range. By that time, demonic beasts would be able to easily climb over the mountains and invaded the interior of the Four Kingdoms. It would then be almost impossible for human beings to drive the demons out of the Fertile Plains.

Both the General Staff and the ancient witches had believed that Taquila was the demons' top priority.

Why was the reality so different from their prediction. Perhaps, the letter would give them some clues.

"So, tell me about the content of the letter you have deciphered," said Roland slowly.

...

As all the sentences had been broken down into short phrases for interpretation, some of the paragraphs did not sound very articulate. Nevertheless, they could still roughly make out what the letter said. As Celine slowly transmitted pieces of information, Roland suddenly had a strange feeling that Celine was whispering to him.

"Dear Sky Lord, the final settlement is around the corner. I'm well prepared, not only for the battle but also for myself."

"In the past one month, I heard... the summon numerous times. It is such a strong sign that I'm confident that I'll upgrade in this upcoming battle..."

"I know my action will subject you to criticism, but I don't think it'll affect your plan for the Western Front."

"If I succeed, our enemy will lose their only means of... and we'll, once again, be able to control the pace of the battle."

"... Send troops ten times what we have now, and human beings won't stand a chance..."

"Nevertheless, I cannot guarantee our victory at this moment. If I fail..."

"Please treat humans as equal and annihilate them with all our strength. If necessary, we might even have to abandon the Fathomless Abyss."

"... As long as we could obtain their legacy shard, there will still be a ray of hope to crush the Sky-sea Realm."

"Finally, please send my regards to the king and the Nightmare Lord."

Roland felt his back was covered with a sheen of cold sweat after he read Ursrook's letter.

He now understood why Phyllis looked so anxious.

Ursrook had definitely failed his mission. He had not only failed to annihilate the ambush unit but also got himself killed in the end.

This meant that the demons would probably adopt the second proposal on the letter.

Although there were missing words here and there, Roland could still tell that Ursrook had been advising his kind to abandon their battle against the Sky-sea Realm and put all their efforts into the eradication of the human race.

What the hell?

A leaden feeling suddenly stole through Roland. This was probably the worst news he had ever received since the war.

"We probably have to put aside the development plan for the Fertile Plains now," Wendy muttered.

"If the demons dedicate themselves to killing us, it'll be too dangerous to build the residential area outside the defensive line."

"But what about the Red Mist?"

"The Demons could establish the Obelisk in Starfall City."

"But then the Red Mist won't be able to permeate the entire Fertile Plains, and we could still have another 400 years of peace before the next Battle of Divine Will. It won't be very different than what we proposed earlier, right?"

"The difference is that the demons will go to all lengths to exterminate our kind."

"No..." Edith interrupted the heated discussion. "There's something wrong with this letter."

Chapter 1176: A [Flaw]

Roland cast Edith a surprised glance.

After the miserable failure of the ambush tactic, some governmental officials criticized the judgement of the General Staff, and the Chief of General Staff, Edith Kant, naturally became the target of these unkind attacks. In addition to the Administrative Office, the Sleeping Spell also raised objections. Tilly waved these skeptical voices into silence immediately and thereby reduced the impact of this temporary outbreak of resentment to the minimum.

Edith had also requested for disciplinary action when she had come back from the front. However, Roland had declined her request and hushed up the whole thing.

Because he knew this was not Edith's fault.

On the contrary to a defeat, the "Torch" campaign was indeed a great success. They had slaughtered nearly 20,000 demons at the cost of only 500 casualties and recovered the Taquila Holy City lost to the demons hundreds of years ago. Undoubtedly this was a major victory.

Everybody knew how much the General Staff had done for the war.

In fact, Roland had discussed this matter with Tilly, Agatha and Alethea in private, and all of them believed the misjudgement was largely attributed to the unexpected behavior of the enemy. Even the Three Chiefs back in the Union would not have been able to predict that the demons would let the opportunity to take over the entire continent slip just because of a few witches.

Nevertheless, it was undeniable that Edith had indeed lost to Ursrook. Roland anticipated that she would succumb, for once, to despondence because of the scathing criticism, but to his great consternation, Edith remained poised and confident as ever, and again, blurted out a completely different view.

"... What's wrong?"

"First is the last two sentences," Edith said while pacing up and down, her head hanging. "If he succeeds, the demons should increase their forces tenfold. Doesn't it sound strange? If the demons' ultimate goal was to wipe out the human race, then they should have taken Taquila more seriously. I understand that they're now struggling to deal with their enemy in the Sky-sea Realm, but they shouldn't have given up on Taquila completely either, for the letter suggests they should come back and eliminate us."

Momentarily stunned, Wendy asked, "It does sound strange. Why didn't they do that in the first place?"

"Because of the Red Mist?" Nightingale said tentatively while propping her chin on her hand.

"The demons aren't likely to send all their forces, but they could have increased the troops by ten times as long as they sent more transportation units. Plus, they have weapons like giant skeletons," Agatha said, frowning. "It took us over half a year to build the ten railway stations, so the demons should have had enough time to make a choice."

"The General Staff made the operation plan based on the information from this guy, Kabradhabi's testimony. According to Kabradhabi, the demons are having a battle of life and death against the enemy in the Sky-sea Realm," Edith said while glaring at the Senior Demon who glowered from the interrogation stand. "However, this letter is suggesting that even if they lose the battle, the demons would still survive and possibly even have a chance to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. So, why didn't the demons send reinforcements to Taquila instead? It doesn't make sense. Their operation intention contradicts their action."

Everyone lapsed into thoughts.

"Also, this one, 'I know my action will subject you to criticism, but I don't think it'll affect your plan for the Western Front'," Edith read meditatively. "There seems to be nothing wrong with this statement at

the first glance, but it doesn't bear close examination. He went to pursue the witches and did lose Taquila. Will it really not impact their entire plan?"

"Perhaps, Ursrook was trying to hoodwink his superior?" Roland said thoughtfully. "Nobles usually tend to do that..."

"Your Majesty, please view him as the most difficult enemy we've ever come across!" Edith said tersely. "Just treat him as another version of me who works for the demons. Do you think I'll do things like that?"

Looking at her clenched fists, Roland suddenly came to the realization that Edith was not as unflappable as she appeared. She was not completely immune to the skeptical remarks behind her back either but simply had chosen not to listen to them.

Deep down inside, she did not want to lose to Ursrook.

"Alright. Since he's serious, it means that Taquila has become their second choice... I would be inclined to believing that the demons have found a way to attack the Four Kingdoms without erecting the Obelisk or the Red Mist."

"We discussed this at the early stage of the 'Torch' project," Agatha sighed. "I still think it's impossible. Otherwise, why did they still have to save Taquila? If the demons were not relying on the Red Mist anymore, they should have infiltrated our land by now."

"Er... why are you all arguing about the impact?"

While everyone was puzzled about the demons' unusual behavior, Nightingale asked in confusion, "Doesn't that 'Western Front' sound awkward to you? The demons are on our opposite side, so the area to the west of Neverwinter should be the east for them. Don't you think so?"

"We talk about positions always in relation to our own location. Plus, the world isn't flat," Celine explained good-naturedly. "The demons are coming from another continent. If Ursrook views the continent they are living on as the center of the world, then not only Taquila but the Four Kingdoms are also to the west of the Land of Dawn."

"I see... So, the west he's talking about isn't the same west we normally refer to, right?"

"Hang on. What did you say?" Edith asked as she looked up suddenly.

"Their west... isn't the same as our west," Nightingale answered hesitantly.

Edith's eyes sparkled. She hurried to a long desk littered with different maps, unrolled every scroll while casting it a fleeting glance before she put it aside, and then finally rested her eyes on a very crude map.

Roland studied the map for a while until he realized that it was a map of the Kingdom of Everwinter.

She pointed at the blank area to the north of the Snow Ridge, which was the most northern part of the Kingdom of Everwinter, and asked Celine, "What's that there?"

"Mountains, endless mountains that stretch away for thousands of miles between the south and the north that almost encircle one side of the Land of Dawn. We call them the ridge of the continent."



"Did the Union explore that area by any chance?"

"Of course. The Quest Society drafted a full map of the entire Land of Dawn, naturally including the ridge of the continent."

"Just a map?" Edith asked earnestly. "No other more detailed records?"

"What are you trying to say?" Agatha asked in surprise. "It wasn't easy to draft a map because there are just so many mountains there, and they are huge. The Impassable Mountain Range is just at the very end of the whole mountain range, and its widest part could house the entire castle. The mountains are treacherous and covered in snow all the year round. Even if we marked every single mountain, how could that possibly help us?"

"I believe we overlooked an important fact here. The plan for the Western Front that the Sky Lord is talking about here probably doesn't refer to Taquila at all but the plan to attack the entire human population. Taquila is just one of their options!" Edith said while running her finger along the Impassable Mountain Range. "The demons' ultimate goal is to let the Red Mist cross over this mountain ridge. As long as they could approach the Four Kingdoms, it doesn't matter which city they choose to enter from. They simply need to erect the Obelisk!"

"You mean..." Agatha's manner tightened abruptly.

"Is there a possibility that there are unknown God's Stone mines around the ridge of continent?" Edith asked gravely.

Chapter 1177: Before the Storm

"Well..." The ancient witches exchanged looks, bemused and lost.

At long last, Pasha broke the silence. "Yes, there might be."

"Can I ask a question? How did you find God's Stone mines in the past?" Roland asked.

"I can't remember the method used 1,000 years ago, but I believe it was by pure coincidence," Celine replied. "After the establishment of the Union and the Quest Society, looking for God's Stone mines became our main job."

Roland thought of the map that marked Taquila, the Misty Forest and the North Slope Mine, through which Lightning had located Agatha and thereby uncovered the old history that had once been shrouded in secrecy.

"As God's Stones can block power, we started to search for them based on this feature. Witches like Sylvie, Nightingale, Lightning and Isabella could all become researchers 600 or 700 years ago. In peacetime, there were nearly 100 witches in the search team. We found six mines in total, three of which were suitable to build a large city around." Celine went on, "Later, we discovered the technologies of the underground civilization and started using the magic core to conduct the search. Once the core generates power, the sensor could cover an area with a radius of 100 kilometers. It actually helped us find the southern end of the Misty Forest and Hermes Plateau. Unfortunately, by the time we found them, the Bloody Moon had appeared, and the demons destroyed everything."

"In other words, there was no point in the Union searching the mountain ridge," Roland said slowly. "It's inaccessible for common people, and even witches would find it hard to get there. So, it should be very inconvenient for the demons to build an Obelisk there."

"That's right," Edith said as she gave a nod of approval. "It isn't likely that they'll send all their forces, but this area is large enough to replace Taquila as their stronghold to exterminate humans. Besides, the number of the troops they could send to the mountains also depends on their preparation time. If the 'Western Front Plan Ursrook referred to included many contingency plans..."

"The demons would have been preparing for this operation for over half a year," Iron Axe supplied the answer heavily. "Your Majesty..."

"I see," Roland said as he threw his eyes over the others. Whether or not Edith's deduction was correct, he had to confirm this intelligence first. After all, it concerned the other three kingdoms as well as the future of the human race in the next hundred years. If the demons did plan to invade men's territories via the mountain ridge as speculated, it would be a total disaster if Neverwinter continued to direct all the resources to the development of the Fertile Plains. Roland straightened up and said solemnly, "Now, hear my orders!"

"Yes, Your Majesty!" shouted the witches and officials together.

"Wendy, bring Lightning and Maggie back to Neverwinter immediately."

"Got it. I'll go right away."

"Iron Axe, implement the migration policy as soon as possible. I don't mind resorting to force."

"As you command!"

"Finally, I need the Taquila witches to provide another magic core," Roland said as he turned to Pasha. "Considering air reconnaissance alone may miss something, I need your assistance to make sure that we discover everything."

"As you wish, Your Majesty."

As the crowd was dispersed, Celine stopped Roland.

"I want to show you something, Your Majesty."

Roland thus followed Celine into the underground laboratory. To his surprise, he saw four yellowish brown stones almost identical to the Magic Ceremony Cube on the desk.

"You've already created four replicates?"

Roland went up to the workstation in earnest and fiddled one of the stones. Compared to the real Magic Cube, the replicate looked sharper, newer, with clearer patterns on it.

"Yes, but they functioned a little differently. I reckon it has something to do with their raw materials. Perhaps, the radiation race put something else in it when they made the Cube. Nevertheless, I tested them on chickens already and confirmed those tiny differences don't affect its use."

"That's even better," Roland said while he lamented the poor chickens within himself. "We need its power to last longer. I don't care about its lethality to be honest. Keep up the good work."

"No problem. Do you still need these prototypes?"

"Of course. You discovered a new energy source!" Roland praised ardently. "You can't imagine how important your research actually is. You made such a great contribution to the development of the human race that you've certainly carved a glorious place in human history!"

The next step was to design a device to convert the thermal energy released by the Magic Cube into kinetic energy. If this attempt was successful, there would soon be another industrial revolution in Neverwinter!

At these thoughts, Roland contemplated Celine's blob-like body with mournful presentiment and said, "You should be receiving a Special Award for Services to Neverwinter and congratulated by the public on the stage on the central square..."

"That's nothing, Your Majesty. I knew this kind of honor wouldn't be available to me when I decided to transfer my soul," Celine said smilingly. "I'm just doing my job. Plus, you've already fulfilled my dream in the Dream World."

...

Roland's orders were immediately spread throughout the entire kingdom.

Every day, a dozen birds rose into the air from the top of the castle and brought encrypted messages to the northeast. Every port and every fleet were making their contributions to this great relocation.

The First Army departed for the Port of Clearwater, Seawindshire, and other port cities on paddle steamers. From there, they took another ship before heading to the north.

Although the details of the operation plan had not been disclosed to soldiers and the soldiers had no idea what exactly their mission was, they immediately assembled and commenced their journey to another country without the slightest hesitation after receiving the order.

In the City of Glow, the Kingdom of Dawn.

After Horford Quinn received Hill Fawkes' letter, he summoned his son at once and said to him, "Go to the Beach Bay and Dragon Castle to let the local lords know that they should prioritize the ships from Graycastle over all other ships. Make sure they leave a docking area specifically for Graycastle. The royal family will bear all the necessary expenses!"

"Father, are you sure?" Hawn asked, frowning. "That'll cost a large sum of money and will also affect the businesses of other merchant vessels..."

"Enough!" Horford interposed irritably. "Just do what I said!"

Hawn bit his lip, his head bowed, and conceded, "Yes, father."

He turned around again and said reluctantly, "At least you should tell me what Graycastle is up to."

But Horford remained silent.

He heaved a deep sigh after Hawn withdrew and closed the door.

Horford walked up to the window and gazed upon his neighbor, muttering, "Everything's going to... change now."

In the meantime, in an underground limestone cave in the suburb of the City of Glow.

Banach Lothar settled himself into his wheelchair while studying the 200 "Unspeakable" who stood erect next to him and his 20 masked managers coldly. For years, he had relied on these followers to operate "Black Money".

"You made a lot of investments in the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter in the past few years. Now it's time to reap your profits." After gazing at his followers for quite a while, Banach croaked, "I've received information from a reliable source that Graycastle's troops will soon enter the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart. No matter what they're doing, your mission is to provide as much assistance as you can, including money, food and intelligence. 'Black Money' shall do its best to meet their needs. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Very well. Off you go."

Everyone immediately obeyed and trooped out of the underground hall.

Banach produced an empty vial from his inner pocket. This had been the fifth vial of liquid medicine since the Oracle had killed Appen Moya.

One more vial... He just needed one more vial to reach immortality!

Banach's hand trembled as he held up the little bottle.

"Rest assured, Oracle. I'll not let you down."

Chapter 1178: Being a Grown-up

Two days after the issuance of the order before the actual implementation of the migration policy, Lightning and Maggie returned to Neverwiner.

Roland was a little shocked at the changes in the two little girls as they came into the office.

Maggie had not changed much except she was a little fuller than half a year ago, making her now terribly resemble a goose instead of a pigeon.

He was, as a matter of fact, surprised at Lightning.

Her hair was a lot longer, which cascaded down to her shoulders, a little unkempt as a result of a long-haul flight. Her face was dirty. Several ugly pouches sprouted from her patched flight suit near her legs, chest and shoulders, which Roland highly suspected they were the work of her own. Although Lightning was disheveled and windswept, she looked more like a true explorer now.

The biggest change, however, lay in her eyes and the expression she was wearing.

Roland suddenly realized she was no longer that little girl he used to know.

"Your Majesty, did you request to see me?"

Lightning said as she swept a bow.

For a second, Roland did not know what to say. Finally, he told her about Ursrook's letter and Edith's deduction from it. "If the demons do plan to do what the letter suggests, the consequence will be disastrous. Therefore, I want you guys to fly to the Kingdom of Everwinter and explore the untraversed mountain range in the north. Demons can't survive without the Red Mist. If they wanted to enter the mountainous area, they should have left some traces there."

"That's unbelievable..." Lightning remarked, her brows contracted. "It's very fortunate that Maggie found his letter, but Your Majesty, what if the demons operate underground? You must understand that what I could do is limited. It's really hard for me to spot deliberately hidden objects from above."

"That'll be the worst scenario," said Roland. "The God's Punishment Witches will bring a magic core and take off at the Shallow Beach to join you. If you can't find the demons, they'll resort to the magic core to conduct a final search." Judging from the result of the "Torch" project, Roland noticed that the demons were not as good at excavation as human beings who possessed the devouring worms. However, as the demons had, at one time, occupied half of the Land of Dawn, they were definitely more proficient in magic. As such, it was unlikely that the demons would have no knowledge of the relic of the underground civilization when even the Union had made some discoveries of the carriers during their exploration of the ruin. On the contrary, there was a big chance that there were other carriers around the ridge of the continent.

"I see. I'll do my best," Lightning replied with a nod.

"But it'll take you at least a month to get to the north of the Kingdom of Everwinter from the south of Graycastle, so you may not be able to receive support in a timely fashion. Also, the residents there, as I fear, may still remain hostile against witches. It may not even be safe in a city, so you have to be careful."

"Explorers are particularly good at surviving in the wild, Your Majesty," Lightning returned quickly. "I could live in the wilderness for a year, not to mention just one month."

"Coo, coo!" Maggie rejoined as she flapped her wings in approval.

"Sorry," Roland sighed. "You just came back, and you have to take another expedition again..."

"Your Majesty, don't feel sorry for us..." Lightning said while averting her eyes, her voice lower.

"Compared to those who sacrificed themselves for the victory, compared to Ashes... this is nothing." She soon recollected herself and continued, "Since this is a new expedition, then as usual, could you..."

For a moment, Roland did not grasp what Lightning meant. Then he came to the realization just in time.

"Of course, yes," he said as he stood up and walked around the desk.

Lightning raised her hand but retracted her arms abruptly as she caught sight of her blotchy sleeves.

"Oh, no, that's OK... I forgot to get changed. I smell bad. That's fine — "

Her words, however, were drowned in Roland's crushing hug.

"You did a great job. I'll ask the tailor to make you more flight suits so that you could wear them by turns."

Lightning instantly fell silent. At long last, she stifled her sniff and replied a "yes".

"And me, coo," Maggie rejoined as she craned her neck.

"You did a good job too," Roland said as he stroked her smooth feathers.

Nightingale also walked up to them and gave both a hug. "Please stay safe."

"We will."

After Lightning and Maggie withdrew, Nightingale remarked, "Lightning would have never said 'what I could do is limited' before."

Roland nodded vigorously. The old Lightning he knew would have definitely promised everything before even hearing the full account.

Leaf had told Roland that after Ashes had died together with Ursrook, Lightning had cried her eyes out and sunk into a state of despondency for several days. However, now he could not see the faintest trace of distress in her. Roland could tell that Lightning had still not got over with Ashes' death, but she no longer wallowed in sorrow. Instead, she became more determined to fight against demons after this unfortunate loss.

"She's grown up," Roland commented.

...

Roland wished the migration campaign to start as early as possible; nevertheless, it took months to travel from Graycastle to the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter. Due to the extra long commute, it was impossible for the Administrative Office and the First Army to increase the population of Neverwinter in a short period of time.

Insufficient manpower, therefore, hindered the further expansion of industrial projects he had conceived a long time ago. As the threat of the demons was still hung above his head like a naked sword suspended by a single hair, Roland was stressed out.

Fortunately, the success of the replication of the Magic Ceremony Cube offered him some consolation. He stayed at Anna's laboratory at the North Slope all day to see whether he could develop a new energy source with the cube replicates. After Lightning, Maggie and the God's Punishment Witches departed from Neverwinter on the "Roland" with the magic core, Roland invested more time in his research.

The magic steam engine would definitely benefit every industrial project in a more profound manner than any other inventions.

Celine also volunteered to help with the research. As the laboratory was located in a relatively remote area and was also heavily guarded, nobody was likely to bump in by accident. Roland was very impressed with Celine's assembling ability. Her dexterous auxiliary tentacles could install flywheels and pistons effortlessly, which really made Anna's life a lot easier.

Thus, the scene where a man, a woman and a tentacled monster worked together on a machine became the norm at the North Slope.

It wasn't long before a peculiar prototype materialized in the laboratory.

Chapter 1179: Tri-tank Magic Power Unit

Anna studied the prototype up and down before she expressed her thought on the machine.

"It's pretty... small."

"But it looks nice," Celine said meditatively. "I like those tubes. They're just like tentacles."

Roland smiled. Anna and Celine viewed this new machine from a completely different perspective, and naturally, they reached different conclusions. Nevertheless, both of them pointed out the exact features of the machine.

Compared to the first cast-iron steam engine Anna had created, this prototype was much smaller. Needless to say, Anna's skills had improved a great deal since then, but most importantly, the reduction of size was mainly ascribed to the absence of a boiler.

The steam engines currently used in Neverwinter was of its fourth generation. In spite of that, the boiler portion of the machine remained pretty much the same for each generation. The steam engine still required a large combustion chamber and a furnace to operate, no matter what kind of combustible materials were in use — whether it was charcoal, wood or heavy oil. Now, the boiler was replaced with a rectangular steel box one meter in length, half a meter in width and less than 20 centimeters in height.

This box was the core power unit of the whole mechanic system.

The cube and water were put in an enclosed container with a high pressure tolerance to power the machine. The system was technologically demanding, so Roland did not think they would have been able to create such an advanced steam engine back in the Border Town even if they had obtained this cube that had once belonged to the radiation race at that time.

The steel box, which was the power unit of the machine, was embedded with three magic cubes. Its bottom was plastered with lead to block excess radiation, the top of which was lined with a dozen conduits that passed through a water tank and a condenser around the bottom. The whole "heating-converting-cooling" process was conducted in an enclosed system without any contact with the external environment. Theoretically, there would be no need to replace the thermal conductive material as long as the device was functioning properly.

Roland could have produced a smaller steam engine.

He could have replaced water, the most accessible and affordable thermal conductive material with more efficient one, such as liquid alkali metal, to further reduce the size while maintaining the same power.

However, the main purpose of building a prototype was to see if this system worked. Roland did not want to see any leak during the test. If the evaporated alkali metal and water vapor reacted, the entire laboratory would be probably blown away.

The thermal energy created by the cube would reach the water tank through the conduits to boil the water in it. After the water was heated up, everything would then be quite similar to ordinary steam engines that they were very familiar with.

Celine really liked the condensers on both sides of the machine. To maximize the heat-transfer area, each tube meandered around the box just like tentacles.

Compared to cumbersome traditional steam engines, this prototype was small and delicate with its dazzling silver box at the center and reflective copper conduits around it. Even a regular lay man who knew nothing about machinery would be able to tell which steam engine was more advanced.

It was almost like artwork.

"So... let's begin?" Roland suggested while turning to Celine and Anna.

Anna nodded as she rested her hand on the operation rod and said, "Together."

Celine placed her main tentacle on both Roland's and Anna's hands after a moment of hesitation.

"Testing on the prototype of the magic steam engine. Three, two, one, go!"

As Roland counted to three, the rod was pulled down to the bottom, turning the three magic cubes on. The new steam engine, which marked the dawn of a new age of industrialization, started running for the first time.

Yet the laboratory was perfectly silent as though nothing had happened.

"Er... did we fail?" Celine asked hesitantly as she looked at the motionless machine.

"No, it's still heating," Roland replied confidently.

After around two minutes, the central steel box trembled slightly, and the indicator light on one of the tubes emanated a soft yellow glow. The indicator light, which was actually a pressure gage made of the tablet discovered in the cave, showed changes in the air pressure within the tubes.

It took a much longer time to transmit the heat. After around another five minutes, vapor finally escaped from the water tank, and the piston started to move.

As the temperature in the tubes steadily increased, the flywheels of the steam engine spinned faster and set the water pump of the condensation system in motion. The main purpose of this water pump was to expedite the circulation of the system and send the cooled thermal conductive material back to the central box, which thus completed the whole cycle.

"It seems the machine works pretty well," Anna said while heaving a deep sigh smilingly. "The only drawback is that it's a bit slow at the beginning."

"All steam engines have that problem," Roland assented while nodding. It took time to transfer heat. Even the most efficient thermal conductor would be slower than an internal combustion engine that



could almost start working immediately. As this new steam engine required at least three water tanks in theory, it would be still a lot larger than an internal combustion engine. Another shortcoming was that the Magic Cube consumed a lot of uranium, which made this prototype almost had no practical value.

Nevertheless, every industrial undertaking was time-consuming.

Once Celine figured out how to sustain the system, Roland believed this new steam engine would soon benefit the whole society. Its relatively small size made it easier for mass production and also enabled people to attach it to most transportation tools. Meanwhile, the new power source would also save a lot of space for cargos, as fuels were no longer necessary for operation.

Half an hour later, the speed of the steam engine reached its height. The whole machine shook dangerously, and the bubbling sound of water vapor gradually dissolved into an angry shrill. Apparently, three magic cubes overloaded the system. Roland thus turned off two magic cubes and finally tranquilized the prototype.

The next step was a lengthy reliability test.

This test would take approximately a week, which was also a test that would expose many potential problems. It was easy to build the machine and make it work, but it was hard to ensure that it would function properly every time.

Watching a puffing and huffing steam engine was boring, but Roland liked to talk with Anna. He felt relaxed and calm as if he and Anna had suddenly traveled back through time to the moment they had first met.

Celine left the laboratory quietly, leaving the couple alone.

Anna rested her head on Roland's shoulder. The noises produced by the machine suddenly became muffled and distant.

"If this thing works, I'll then be one step closer to your previous world, right?"

"Yes, and probably you'll be much closer than you think. There has not been any technologies like this in that world yet."

"Can we also create those four-wheeled vehicles that you once talked about?"

"Yes, we can. I can design a simple one for you if you like."

"Sounds great!" Anna said, her face lighting up. "By the way, what will you call this machine?"

"Does it have to have a name?" Roland asked, smiling.

"Of course," Anna replied solemnly.

"Alright then. Black Technology No. 1 or Magic Cube Power Unit. Which one do you prefer?"

"It's not black at all... Oh well, I choose the latter. But how do we distinguish its various models if we use this name?"

"That's easy. One Magic Ceremony Cube represents one tank. So, this prototype can be called tri-tank magic power unit. How does that sound?"

"Sounds a little strange for some reason."

"It doesn't have to be perfect..."

Their laugh and the roar of the machine mingled together and lingered on in the air like a long murmur of music above the yard.

Chapter 1180: Rose Café

The test lasted for several days. Apart from testing on the Magic Power Unit, Roland also found another way to combat stress, which was to take the witches to the Dream World. Nothing would be more relaxing than being surrounded by a group of witches who seemed to always have an insatiable curiosity about everything they saw.

In the meantime, Roland was also busy with his coffee shop business.

A month and a half later, Rose Café officially greeted its grand opening.

To keep a low profile, Roland decided to hold the opening ceremony and start the fireworks display at around 10:00 after breakfast hours. By that time, students and young professionals would have left for school and work, and elders should have gone grocery shopping. It would be the quietest hour of the day in the neighborhood.

The two-storey coffee shop was right next to the warehouse, with a rent of \$3,500 per month. He knew this number was a little higher than the average rent around this area.

However, it was not Roland's intention to make profits anyway, so he signed the paper without much negotiation with the landlord. His only request was to connect the warehouse and the coffee shop together so that he could more easily manage his inventory. Roland also promised to rebuild the wall before he surrendered the tenancy.

As Roland agreed to pay a full-year rent in advance, the landlord immediately gave his consent.

Nevertheless, this was not the real reason Roland conducted his business in this way.

He was not planning to become an entrepreneur by any means, and the Taquila witches were obviously not interested in serving customers either. In fact, the coffee shop was set up solely for their own entertainment rather than attracting businesses.

If truth be told, Roland rather hoped that nobody would visit his store.

To attain his end, Roland specially put up a sign outside the shop, listing the prices of all the drinks offered in the cafe. All of them were ridiculously expensive, around ten times the normal prices. For example, he put a regular latte ¥ 260 and ¥ 300 for a small caramel macchiato.

It should be noted that the soy milk next door only cost ¥ 1.5.

Roland did not think that any sensible person would choose to order here.

If someone knowingly visited the shop regardless of the daunting prices, then he must be the person who had left the note in the book.

But Roland was not quite sure whether this "Rose Cafe" was the same one the messenger was looking for.

"Your Majesty, is that OK now?" Phyllis asked as she put down the ribbon.

"Yes, once the ribbon is cut, Rose Café is officially open," Roland replied while nodding. "Let's have a celebration."

There was a bar and a few round tables in the coffee shop, each table decorated with a lit candle and a bouquet of roses. Soft music murmured quietly. However, when Phyllis and Roland went upstairs, the romantic atmosphere downstairs instantly gave way to raucous noises that typically existed in a restaurant.

Roland had bought a complete set of cooking utensils and a barbeque rack for the ancient witches. As KFC and the McDonald's could no longer satisfy the witches' unquenchable hunger for food that had not been fulfilled for hundreds of years, they started to cook themselves. The experience at that buffet enlightened them as to the science behind cuisines, so they became extremely excited to try out on their own. It took them a while to learn how to use stoves and microwaves. However, they soon got the hang of cooking and started to follow the steps on recipes.

Many of them, for example, Phyllis, were surprisingly talented. The food they made was indeed very professional. They not only had excellent cutting skills but seemed to just know the secret of brewing and simmering as well.

"Your Majesty, I just learned how to make braised eels. Would you like to try it?"

"This is roasted pork loin I just made!"

"Your Majesty, could you help me find some recipes for cold dishes?"

From their exhilarated looks, Roland judged the witches enjoyed cooking as much as they watched a movie or took a tour.

Roland felt a little sorry that they could not live in this world forever. After Elena died, Roland had made several attempts to look for her in his dream but to no avail. Nothing had changed in either the warehouse or the apartment.

This meant that they would eventually leave him one day.

Death, whether a natural death or being killed in action, would transform everything into a thin thread of memory.

Probably that was why the witches treasured every single trip to the Dream World.

Perhaps, he should sleep more at night, just to let them stay here a little longer if not for himself.

Ding.

Just at that moment, the bell downstairs rang.

The witches instantly fell silent.

"Your Majesty, there's a customer coming," Phyllis reminded Roland.

Roland did not expect to see the messenger come that fast right after his opening. He cast a glance at everyone and said in a hushed voice, "Do what I planned." With these words, Roland and Phyllis went downstairs. Among all the ancient witches, only Phyllis, who had once disguised as a maid in "Black Money", had customer service experience.

"Not a single person at the bar. Are you really planning to provide job opportunities to your relatives?"

The customer who stepped into the store gazed at Roland suspiciously, her arms folded and her brows knitted. Her eyes lingered on Roland's cheeks and collar for a few seconds.

This customer was Garcia.

Roland was hugely relieved. Garcia knew about his business and she had actually helped him a lot with the moving. He beckoned Phyllis to bring two coffees and then gestured Garcia to sit down. "Of course. I always want them to get out of their village."

"Hang on, I'm not going to — "

"My treat. It's free."

Garcia took a seat and said, "Anyway, the prices you list out there are just highly unrealistic. It really makes people doubt your true intention to open this store."

"You're wrong," Roland said truthfully. "The most important thing for them now is adapting to the new environment. They just moved here from the countryside. If tons of customers swarm in at a time, do you think they'll feel at ease? They'll probably freak out. I don't care about profits but more about them getting used to the city life. That's the reason I opened this Rose Café."

"R-really?" Garcia asked skeptically.

"Of course. Also, I have to thank you for the invitation card last time. It helped me a lot," Roland steered away the subject.

"So, all settled?"

"Not only did he fix their status but he also sent them to school. It's the same school as Zero, but they're in high school," Roland explained smilingly. "The three girls wanted to thank you for your help."

"I'm glad to hear that..." Garcia said, her expression softened. "They don't have to thank me. You did all the work. After all, I didn't come forward to confront my father and media."

Roland shook his head and said, "You did all that you could."

There was a mute interval.

"Coffee. Enjoy," Phyllis broke the silence.

Garcia came out of her reveries and picked up the cup. After a moment of hesitation, she said, "I need to tell you something."

"Regarding the Martialist Association?" Roland asked. He knew Garcia must have some important business to share.

Garcia nodded and said, "Yes, there's a task, and the Association wants you to deal with it."

"I hope it's not a show or anything like that. I've heard the Martial Arts Contest this year is drawing close."

"No... it's a joint mission to annihilate Fallen Evils," Garcia corrected him gravely.