

Witch 291

Chapter 291 Advance Notice

Within the Royal Palace of the Kingdom of Graycastle, Timothy was tightly grasping his scepter, while he looked at the Chief Alchemist Rayleigh Kenneth standing within the audience, showing such a pleased expression.

“Were you able to get a clue about the alchemy recipe taken by the deserters?”

“Sure! Your honored Majesty, this is the latest snow powder developed by the Alchemy Association. Please permit me to demonstrate it now.” Rayleigh said with a deep bow.

After receiving the new King’s approval, he waved in the direction of the crowd behind him, two disciples holding a bag in their hands immediately stepping forward. He spread two sheets of white paper over the ground, and poured out the snow powder within the bags on top, forming two separate lines. One of them was ash gray, while the other was much darker, being almost ashy black.

“Your Majesty, please take a look. The lighter one is the snow powder originally used during celebrations, while the darker one is the latest development, the fast igniting snow powder.” Rayleigh took out a flint, ignited the powder on top of the papers. The light snow powder merely began to burn slowly and emitted thick billowing smoke, while the dark colored one burned all the powder in one breath and also spread over to the white paper below.

“What does that mean?” Timothy asked with a deep frown, “The toy that my dear sister got, didn’t only burn a piece of paper!”

“Of course not, Your honored Majesty,” Rayleigh said, as a big smile began to spread over his whole face, “I do not know if you had noticed the amount of smoke it released when I ignited it. The faster the snow powder burns, the more smoke is released in a short period of time, and this is the cause of its extreme power. I will prove this with another experiment.”

This time it were two fist-sized parchment bags, which were wrapped up tightly. Each of the disciples ignited a thin rope which was put into the paper bag then covered each with a copper bowl. The sparks moved along the rope, gradually crawling into the copper bowls.

“Attention, Your Majesty, this time the sound will be louder, so please cover your ears.”

The chief alchemist’s voice had just faded as a loud bang ringed out. One copper bowl flipped upside down, while the other actually flew straight towards the ceiling, after falling back to the floor it still bounced several times on the granite slate, issuing a crisp sound every time.

Damn it! Timothy unconsciously swallowed, he had nearly let go of his scepter. Why didn’t this old fool mention it earlier!

One of the disciples gathered the second bowl and placed it back in front of the new King, whereas he suppressed his fury to the bottom of his heart and focused his attention on those bowls. This man was still the Chief Alchemist of King’s City Alchemy Workshop, if he wanted to study the new alchemic weapon, he couldn’t do so without his help.

At this moment, it became apparent that it had changed its form, it just looked as if someone had resolutely hit it on the inside of the bowl with a hammer, deforming the rim of the bowl.

"I have repeatedly verified that the power of the snow powder doesn't lie in its burning, but in this gas. This is also the truth hidden in the receipt the deserters had stolen." Rayleigh stood in the middle of the hall and spoke frankly with assurance, "If you increase the amount of snow powder, and tightly compress it into a ball, it will become powerful enough to break armor and tear bodies apart. I believe that sooner or later, this new type of snow powder will inevitably replace swords and arrows. Even if they are well-trained knights, they won't be a match for a civilian equipped with these bags of snow powder."

This sentence caused a great outburst from within the crowd. Many of Timothy's Knights faces gathered within the hall showed gloomy expressions. Even Knight Steelheart Weimar looked as if wanted to step forward and argue with the alchemist, so Timothy quickly knocked with his scepter against the floor and shouted, "Quiet!"

After the crowd bowed in unison, Timothy turned his gaze back to Rayleigh. "Is your formula exactly the same as the recipe the deserters took away?"

"No, Your Majesty," Rayleigh shook his head, and then put a lot of disdain in his words, "Although saltpeter is one of the Alchemic Workshops stock items, however, the stock won't be too big usually. At the time of mixing the snow powder, he just happened to find this formula. Even if he wanted to run more test, the amount of saltpeter wasn't enough to use it several times. However, the formula for my fast igniting snow powder was developed after going through a large number of test. It is the optimal method and its power is much greater than a product produced by chance."

"That's good to know," Timothy said in a relaxed voice. Although he had known that Garcia had arranged many of her people within all ranks, but he had never thought that she even had some henchmen within the Alchemy Association. The scheme of the deserters was well planned, and at the time he fled he had taken a dozen apprentices along. Usually something like this wouldn't be a big deal, after all, even though alchemists were relatively rare in other cities, King's City had more than twenty of them. So, if one had left its impact would normally be something insignificant, but this time the man had discovered a new highly lethal kind of snow powder before leaving. And instead of contributing it towards the Alchemic Workshop, he had left without a trace the very next day.

In the end, Timothy's spies were only able to capture some of the remaining confidants but failed to intercept the entire group of deserters. The moment he learned about the news, Timothy immediately ordered his Imperial Prime Minister to purchase all of the saltpeter capacities within the city and requested the Alchemic Workshop to reproduce the deserts' snow powder formula as soon as possible. And today, after waiting for two months, they finally showed some results, which made him feel quite satisfied. Even if this man's respect for him was a bit lacking, he was still pleasing to his eye at this moment.

After settling his thoughts, Timothy cleared his throat and said, "You did well. For your contribution, I will grant you twenty-five gold royals as reward. Additionally, I will also open a snow powder workshop in King's City's inner city, which will be responsible for the mass production of the fast igniting snow powder. However, you cannot become lax and have to further study its usage. If it actually turns out like

you said, that civilians would become able to defeat knights, rewarding you with a title and territory won't be a problem."

"Thank you very much, Your Majesty!"

After the chief alchemist had left the hall, Sir Weimar, no longer able to hold himself back, stood up and said, "Your Majesty, even though this stuff looked a bit scary, but wanting to use it to defeat a knight, is absolutely not possible. As you can see, it needs to be ignited to trigger, its killing range is also only half a step or so. At that distance, against a civilian, I have dozens of ways to instantly send them to the ground. Even granted that they are able to use it at a close distance, I can still take advantage of the ignition time to strike and kill my opponent, before calmly leaving. According to Rayleigh's way of speaking, it is clear that he had never been to the battlefield."

"We also think the same, Your Majesty," other knights followed up.

"That's why I let him continue to search for a better way," Timothy said, "For example, by shortening the ignition time or making it throwable, and so forth. Of course, no matter what kind of weapon they use, I'm also convinced that a Knight will be better than a farmer."

Although he spoke like this, within his heart, he also had some traces of disagreement. Civilians indeed completely lacked any usage, they were cowardly and ignorant, and also afraid of dying. But if controlled by pills and equipped with snow powder, they could become a powerful weapon. At least that was if they had needed to storm a city gate or a shield wall, they would only have to send out a few militia holding snow powder, and it would be enough to tear a hole in a solid line of defense.

At this moment, some footsteps could suddenly be heard coming from beyond doors, soon followed by an anxious personal guard who came running into the hall, and fell onto his knees and announced. "Your Majesty, it seems that the militia team you had sent to the Western Territory got attacked, and now the defeated soldiers have come back to King's City. I even heard that they brought back a letter of reprimand, by now many people have heard about it."

"What?" Timothy's eyes became wide, "Make sure that they keep their mouth shut and bring all who are still alive to me here in the castle!"

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In the castle courtyard, a ragged militia group could be seen kneeling on the ground and pleading, "Your Majesty be merciful, please give us some pills, we cannot stand it any longer."

Your group of wastes, in addition to consuming the enemy, there is basically nothing else you can be used for. Since you are alive, you're already wasting food, and now you even dare to ask me for pills?

Timothy looked with cold eyes at the group of people and said in a low voice: "In the end, how was it possible for the enemy to defeat you? Who can tell me something about the course of the battle? Whoever can give me a clear answer, will receive the antidote."

All the people suddenly began to speak at the same time, "We were attacked while we were still on board, which turned the fleet into chaos. The Lead Knight gave the command to go ashore and get in order. However, the moment we landed we were attacked by unending crossbow bolts, so dense that

we didn't even get the chance to fight back. It was the Knights who took the lead and surrendered, we merely followed them and... kneeled."

"What about the group of Knights and the Lead Knight?"

"No... I don't know. They escorted us back to the camp, but we didn't see any Knight."

Timothy frowned and his voice became even colder, "How were you able to come back?"

"It was Prince Roland who let us go," one of them said hurriedly. "Also, he gave us a letter that we are supposed to pass on to you."

"To all of you?"

"That's right, I also have one!"

"Your majesty, I also have a letter!"

The group of people shouted at once and stood up, pulling Roland's "letter" out of their pockets.

To hell with it! He actually gave it to everyone? Timothy gathered the letters only to discover that they all contained the same message.

"Your stupid act makes me feel sorry for you, Timothy Wimbledon. The repeated invasion of the Western Territory was a grave mistake for which you will have to pay the price. I will attack King's City at the beginning of the second month of autumn, I will make you learn that your place is far from being as secure as you imagine. When the day comes, all of King's City's people will see, your kingship is already on the verge of collapse.

"- Roland Wimbledon."

Chapter 292 Precision Guided Bombs

The place where they would be practicing shooting their pistols was arranged at the castle's front courtyard.

Including Sylvie, all of the witches selected for the investigation team had received a revolver.

Roland spent two days to let everyone become familiar with and master the posture needed to shoot a gun, before they switched over to shoot with live ammunition. The major part of the training was divided into aiming while shooting from ten meters and paced shooting from five meters distance so that they could cope with a surprise attack or an open attack of the enemy.

During the posture training, most of the witches were still able to imitate the pattern, but the moment they fired their first shot the truth was soon revealed.

Especially when the deafening sound of gunfire split the air, for most of them, their first reaction was to block their ears, turning the observing Nightingale's brows straight.

Except for Anna.

Whenever he looked at her, both her hands seemed to remain motionless even as she continuously pulled the trigger, completely disregarding the gunfire and smoke. Regardless of the accuracy of her aim, just this posture alone was already absolutely efficient.

Can it be, in addition to learning new knowledge, Anna is just as highly talented in other areas? Roland thought to himself, secretly surprised, even though these are black gunpowder bullets, this is still a large caliber revolver with a strong recoil. So how it is possible for her arms to remain so stable, and how is she able to shoot continuously?

Stepping behind her, full of curiosity, he saw two black flames sticking against the handle of the gun and holding it firmly in the air, while Anna was only keeping a virtual grasping position not even touching the real revolver. After he pat her on the shoulders, he saw her taking out two black flames from her ears as she turned around. She gave him a 'come and praise me' expression and said, "How about it? I always hit the target!"

Roland didn't know whether he should laugh or cry. But since he didn't have any better options he loudly declared: "Everyone, no one is allowed to use their ability to assist you with the practice!"

"Eh, why?"

"So that you won't get flustered, in case you meet an enemy carrying a God's Stone of Retaliation," Rolland explained. He sighed and reached with his hands to help plug Anna's ears. "Like this, you won't be afraid, alright?"

"Yes," Anna's eyes were brimming with happiness. She turned around, changed the bullets, lifted the gun and aimed.

"Maggie quickly come over here, I also need someone to block my ears," Lightning shouted, full of envy.

"Goo?" The latter pointed at herself, the gun still in her hands.

"You cannot shoot the gun after turning into a bird anyway," the little girl said with a wink, "You help me first, and I'll help you cover your ears later."

"Goo!"

The other witches in the castle were also attracted by the successive sounds of gunfire, gradually, they all gathered at the castle's front courtyard. Many of them looking eager to also have a go. At the end of the day, almost everyone had come up to experience how to use a revolver for themselves.

Roland's heart was deeply moved as he looked upon this diverse group of women all in high spirit as they fired the weapons they were holding.

Even now, he could still remember the appearance of each witch when he met them for the first time.

Previously, Anna's hands and feet were thin and weak, just like bamboo poles, her eyes had lost all signs of life, and always had a monotonous expression.

The area between Nightingale's eyebrows always contained traces of stormy clouds. Her smiling expression also had nothing to do with her mood; in other words, its only use was to cover the true state of her mind, so there was always a false smile which was hanging at the corner of her lips.

And Wendy, usually speaking in a low voice, was unable to conceal her exhaustion. Leaves, someone who had thrown away all thoughts of a healthy future and accepted all the misfortunes decreed upon her by fate; and Lily, like a cat, ever on guard.

Furthermore, there was Lightning, Mystery moon, Hummingbird, Scroll, and so on...

After experiencing being oppressed, being framed, and being hunted, they were already lucky to be able to survive. As for where they were supposed to go. They absolutely had no time to ponder over that. Nowadays however, they were already completely differently from how they'd been in the past.

The witches were now emitting a unique charm, their eyes were flashing with rays of intelligence. They no longer seemed unsure about their fate – in addition to being able to live, they now had some effort to spare pursuing some other things, something that was just as beautiful as life itself.

And whenever he came face to face with one of the witches, their eyes would be filled with gratefulness and trust, making Roland's heart feel as if it was filled with strength.

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After lunch, and in the afternoon, it was time for the specially developed high-altitude throwing exercise in preparation for the "Autumn offensive". The number of witches participating in the exercise had been reduced to half, leaving only Anna, Wendy and Lightning.

This was also the minimum amount of people required to complete the air raid.

Setting the attack time at the beginning of the second month of autumn was what he came up with after some careful deliberations. If the time was too short, they would be unable to carry out the mission safely; and if they took too long, Roland feared they wouldn't be able to stop Timothy from attacking again. As long as he decided to launch a large-scale attack on the Western Region and forcefully fed the recruited civilians with the pills, the air raid wouldn't be able to achieve its desired effect.

Therefore, the autumn offensive had to be completed before Timothy could complete the recruitment.

To realize his "promise", Roland planned to drop a 250-kilogram bomb at the top of the castle. That bomb, which was about five times Nightingales' weight, would be dropped from a height of two kilometers, directly smash through the dome of the palace, then detonate inside.

As the hot air balloon slowly lifted off, it also took a basket that was transporting a solid imitation of the bomb into the sky – as Roland was riding in the basket, the solid iron projectile was a number smaller, probably only around four times Nightingales' weight. However, its shape was completely the same as the aviation bomb they would be using in the future. It had a streamlined form, with a thin front and a thick rear, together with stable tail wings and a speed reducing parasol. It would ensure that it remained perpendicular to the ground, and that it would control its maximum speed.

The basket they would throw the bomb from had been especially remodeled. They set up an iron trestle so that the projectile could stand upright in the middle of the basket with one-half of it hanging out of the bottom. So as long as someone pulled the valve, the hook would loosen and the bomb would separate from the basket to fall straight down.

With the rising height, Border Town soon became as large as a fingernail, while the Redwater River had turned into a bright silver band.

“This is the first time I’ve been at such a high place,” Wendy said, as she looked out of the observation window. “It seems as if the whole Western Territory has become small.”

“That’s because it is indeed very small,” Roland said, and lightly chuckled. “Look at the wilderness in the North, that’s the place where we should be going to later.”

“Do you want to go even higher? I already can’t see the target,” Lightning shouted from outside the basket.

“It is more or less right,” he nodded toward Anna, then gave the little girl the ready signal.

Although it was impossible to determine how far away they were from the ground in the end, it was more than a thousand meter – this was an attack altitude that could be described as being entirely safe, while the enemy would also be unable to see the hot air balloon.

However, a distance of more than a thousand meters of empty air meant that the place the projectile hit in the end would depend entirely on fate. If they wanted to hit the target accurately, the bomb needed to have a guidance system.

And it was the little girl, Lightning, who would take over this task.

“Release the bomb,” Roland commanded.

Wendy pulled a valve, the bomb was released and a stream of wind immediately came pouring into the basket. Anna used the cover plate, which had long since been prepared, to seal the dropping hole, then tightened the handle – they had repeatedly practiced this processes while they were on land, which meant that the two women were already very familiar with it.

“Can she hit the target?” Wendy asked while looking through the window.

“We will only know the answer after landing,” Roland said and shrugged.

As the bomb fell, Lightning would drop at the same speed as the bomb while applying a horizontal force against it. In this way she could freely change its trajectory and turn it into a guided missile. By the time it closed in on the target, Lightning would pull on the mechanism at the tail end to separate the parachute from the missile. At the last hundreds meters, the bomb should then gather enough kinetic energy to break through the palace roof.

As a result, the height of the drop-off would be sufficient while the precise control on hitting the impact point would also be guaranteed.

All they now had to do was unceasingly keep on practicing this routine, nothing more.

Chapter 293 The Night before

The week quickly passed, and now it was finally time for the investigation team to set out on their journey.

Roland called Barov, Carter, and Iron Axe over to the castle and informed them that he would be leaving Border Town for two days. During his departure, they were to continue carrying out the affairs of the town in accordance with the general plans and regulation.

Of course, his declaration was met with unanimous opposition from the three of them. Carter wanted to perform his duty as the Chief Knight and stand guard at the Prince's side; Iron Axe asked that a team of one hundred soldiers be dispatched as an escort; Barov used the excuse that Roland was needed to review and approve some important decrees that the City Hall would be releasing, making it necessary that he remained in the castle. This went on, until he finally felt he had no other alternative than to put out a lord's airs and command everyone to act in accordance with his orders.

"Your Highness, I do not understand. In the end, what is so important about these circumstances, that you personally must go?" Barov asked in confusion.

"This is a matter which concerns the Western Territory... so much that it might even decide the life or death of the Kingdom of Graycastle," Roland said, then was silent for a moment before opening his mouth once more, "And only I have the ability to make the best judgment ."

"You cannot... tell us the particular cause?"

"For the time being I can't, but there will come a day when you will understand." He shook his head. "Also, this trip is a secret operation; you are not allowed to reveal this information to anyone."

The fact that the Devils headquarters was merely about two hundred kilometers west of the Western Border, the very Devils who had once destroyed the Holy City of Taqila and forced the last defenders to the edge of the mainland, and turned the wildlands into a forbidden area no one even dared to set a foot, is all too frightening to say out loud.

For me it is tolerable, after all, I got a lot out of all the extermination movies I saw, even so, the thought still makes me feel numb; for them however, I'm afraid that others cannot simply accept something like that. Once the news is leaked, it will only turn into more trouble. In case it was to cause a panic among my subjects, it might even lead to many people fleeing from the Western Territory.

Thus, at present, it is not the right time to declare the truth.

After finishing all political affairs, Roland and the witches entered the hot air balloon, and lifted off, leaving the castle front yard and heading into the sky, in the directions of the snow-capped mountain.

"Your Royal Highness, if we assume that it was indeed the Church who has been fighting against the Devils four hundred years ago, does that make them good or bad?" Since discovering the existence of the Devils, it seemed that Sylvie had become preoccupied by some troubles.

"Of course they are still bad," Roland didn't even get to open his mouth before Nightingale gave her answer. "Have you ever seen a good person hunting a witch for no reason? In the case that we really were the Devils minions, all of us sisters would know about it. But there isn't even a bit of relationship between us witches and the Devils, the demonic bite is also a complete myth.

However, the other person still observed Roland, seemingly waiting to hear his answer.

He thought for a while then started to speak, "First of all, it is still not confirmed that it was the Church who had fought against the Devils. If they had indeed made such great sacrifices, for what reason would they conceal all the information about it and destroy the past? This news would have been the best way for them to expand their base of believers. I am afraid that we can only answer the questions truthfully if we are able to find more clues about the past. Also, good and evil cannot be distinguished so easily; it is always dependent on the place you are standing at." Roland paused for a moment to give her a smile, then he asked, "However, I believe what you really wanted to know was, if I would go to the Church to fight with them against the Devils, isn't that right?"

"I..." Sylvie wanted to say something, but in the end, she couldn't deny it.

"The Church and I are incompatible, even if there were any witches, I would not be able to stand on the same side as them," he said, "That is even more now that I have all of you by my side."

"I also want to speak," Nightingale said, showed a complacent smile. "Even if it was the Church who had fought the Devils before, they still lost, or might even have suffered some other kind of crushing defeat. In His Highness words, 'if you do not know who is going to win or lose, for what reason would you want to rely on the losing side?'"

"... I see," Sylvie nodded gently, and her uneasiness seeming to loosen up somewhat.

Time passed. And when dusk fell, the group of people were vaguely able to see the contours of the snow-capped mountain.

It is indeed incomparable huge, Roland thought, even I have seldom seen such a towering peak with my own eyes. There doesn't exist any other similar mountains within the mountain range, it's as if the earth doesn't have any inclination to rise in general, leaving only one road leading to the skies. The overcast mountain wall occupied more than half of the horizon, if we'd wanted to bypass the mountains by land, I am afraid we would have to spend several months to do so.

The selected camping site was located at the top of a mountain nearer to the sea, making it easy for them to observe the movement around them. Furthermore, it was also far enough from the Concealing Forest, to ensure that it would be impossible for any beast to sneak up on the camp.

After gnawing at their rations, everyone began to set up their tent. Due to the limited weight capacity of the hot air balloon, they were only able to take a single large tent with them. Therefore, Roland showing a noble character and unquestionable integrity, offered the witches the use of the tent and decided that he would sleep in the basket while Maggie decided to take a tree – since, if she turned into a bird, she was able to sleep while standing.

He discovered that in the end, he was still too thin skinned, making it impossible for him to crowd into the tent to sleep together with the witches. Even when Wendy and Soraya suggested that they would take the basket so that the Prince could sleep in the tent, he still refused them.

While they were arranging their accommodations, Sylvie was the only one who was warily staring at Roland, her gaze was so intense that in the end he didn't know whether he was supposed to laugh or cry.

After arranging the night vigil, every one of them entered the tent one after another. Due to the uneven bottom of the basket, Roland had some problems falling asleep. Thus he sat on a rock while facing the sea, stared blankly at the moonlight that was sparkling on the sea's surface.

At this time, he heard some subtle footsteps coming from behind.

When the Prince turned around, he discovered that it was Anna.

Previously, back when he had been attending school, he'd always had some anticipation that "maybe something is going to happen" within his heart when he went on social travel. And even though most of the endings ended with delusion, this never prevented him from looking forward to the next event.

However, when it came true, Roland found out that contrary to his expectation, his heartbeat sped up even more. Feigning as if nothing was out of the ordinary, he lifted an eyebrow and asked, "What happened, can't you fall asleep?"

"No," Anna said bluntly, "I merely want to accompany you."

"That's it?" He coughed twice, "Thanks."

"It should be me thanking you," Anna said as she smiled. The silver moonlight sparkled on her face, emitting a faint radiance; her peaceful blue eyes seem to be deeper than the sea, "Those words you said to Sylvie... although she did not thank you, I could still see that her mood had become a lot better."

"Are you happy for her?"

"No," she shook her head. "I'm happy about my choice."

Roland asked startled, "What... choice?"

Instead of answering, Anna closed her eyes and kissed him on the cheek. After a long time, she whispered, "Good night, Your Highness."

This can be regarded as "something has happened"... right?

Seeing her back disappear into the tent, Roland stretched his body to his heart's content, the moment he intended to return to the basket to sleep, a pair of invisible hands took hold of his face. The area in front of him was obviously empty, yet he once again felt a soft touch, but this time, it was on the other side. "I also thank you, Your Highness, for doing so much for us witches."

Chapter 294 The Devil's attack arrives

In the early morning hours of the next day, everyone packed up their camping belongings as they prepared to set out on their journey once again.

Roland also discovered a new detail: Even if they slept in the wilderness, the witches' appearance wasn't affected in the slightest, something which obviously wasn't the case for himself. Even without taking a look in the mirror, he still guessed that his hair appeared to be a mess, and due to his insomnia, his face lacked color, and his skin was covered in a layer of semi-dry sweat, which felt sticky whenever he touched it. All this together most likely gave him a dispirited and downcast look in everyone's eyes. Only

after he had washed his face and rinsed his mouth with some drinking water from his leather bag, was he finally able to bring some relief to the ill feeling he was having.

Roland was already beginning to miss the water system with its spacious shower in the castle.

An hour later, having followed lightning's directions, Cloud Gazer arrived at the predetermined location – the side of the snow-capped mountain. As they hovered over the vast sea, the people in the group could all see the scene behind the mountain.

It was just like Lightning had said, the landscape at the back of the snow-capped mountain was covered in a red mist, and with the atmospheric pressure of the fog being very low, its color became deeper the closer it was to the ground. In order to see farther, Roland had the hot air balloon continue to rise so that they could see a part of the flat and dry land which was spread out at the end of the horizon.

"Is there anything you could discover?" Roland asked into the direction of Sylvie.

The latter shook her head and said, "No, it's too far away. It is beyond the scope of the Eye of Truth."

"Then let's wait for Soraya to draw a picture of the scene before approaching it further," Roland ordered.

While they were waiting for Soraya to draw the picture, Roland used an observation mirror to look at the coastal line. Aside from the cliffs and the rocky beach, there weren't any wharfs, docks, or other human-made buildings. It seemed that even though there were Devils here, they weren't going to build ships to attack Graycastle from the sea. Observing this let him feel somewhat relieved.

With the hot air balloon slowly approaching the land, Sylvie was finally able to see the actual situation and gave her report. Probably a bit more than ten miles away from the sea, she could see a pile of black stone buildings, with a triangular form reminiscent of a spire.

"That's just like what we saw from the mirage at the barbarian wasteland," Wendy, unable to restrain her emotions any longer, exclaimed aloud, "This really is the Devil's territory!"

"But the height is clearly wrong," Soraya said with a frown, "The spires in the mirage were as high as a hundred feet. Furthermore, they weren't covered by a red mist. They are supposed to be higher than all the surrounding hills."

"Maybe, at that time, you saw the Devils' City, and what we see here, is closer to a Devils' Town?" Anna guessed.

Therefore, we can conclude that the Devils possess a kind of intact and unique urban system, and that they also belong to a higher evolved species that is keen to expand its territory and kill? Roland thought to himself, please, there mustn't be too many of them, "What can you say about the inside of those spires?"

"Uh... most of those towers are empty, while some of them are filled with some kind of liquid... hold on!" Sylvie became shocked, at first unable to believe what she was seeing, before shouting, "Quickly leave, the Devils found us!"

"They discovered us?" Roland once more raised his observation mirror, but everything was still dark red, making it impossible for him to see everything clearly.

“They began to move,” Sylvie yelled nervously. “Before, they were all buried in the ground, and only the pipe on their back was exposed. Over there... there are Devils that began to fly up!”

“Wendy, retreat at full speed!” Roland commanded.

The wind began blowing strongly from the side, the sudden movement of the hot air balloon made the basket slant to one side while the taut ropes all issued a creaking sound.

However, Sylvie’s following warning caused everyone’s heart to turn cold.

“Two Devils are rushing in our direction, and they have mounts that can fly!”

To hell with it! These guys have flying mounts!?! Roland stared with wide eyes toward the red mist. This is simply against common sense, if they are able to carry a tall and bulky person on your back, how large are these mounts?

Before long however, he already caught sight of two black spots which came into his field of view. Looking at the demonic beasts through his observation mirror, he was only able to see the saddle at their hip, their sharp fangs, and their hairless body, with a basic form which was similar to birds. If he wasn’t mistaken... then they were actually two mixed species of demonic beasts!

“Head down to the ground, we are landing as soon as possible,” Roland squeezed those few words through his gritted teeth.

For now, this was the main idea. He had never thought that the Devils possessed the ability to pursue them through the air, and furthermore, the only one who could fight while flying was Lightning. But when he looked at her pale face, he knew that there was no hope for her to win this battle. Once they caught up, even if the other side merely went for a collision attack against the balloon, they would still be able to take the lives of all of the witches – even if the coating would be robust enough to resist the impact and the bite of the demonic beasts, under the resulting violent shaking, it was most likely that they would all fall out of the basket and drop into the sea like stones.

And at this height, there was no difference between hitting solid ground or falling into the sea.

By now the Devils had come so close to the hot air balloon that even without the help of the mirror, Roland was already able to see these winged mixed species and the big and sturdy enemy it was carrying on its back.

“Be careful,” Sylvie shrieked again. “They are getting ready to throw their spears!”

When he heard the warning, his mind was suddenly flooded with the scenes of the previous battles which had been described by Leaves – last time the enemy had acted in this way; they had taken Scarlet’s life in a flash.

He did not see the Devil extend its arm; he didn’t even see the incoming spear. However, the moment Sylvie had issued her warning, Anna had stretched out her hands, and controlled her fire to form an extremely thin shield to block the front of the basket.

A loud “bang”, “bang” sound rang out a moment later.

Anna released a suppressed groan, took two steps back, while her black fire shattered like glass into numerous pieces. The spears turned into half burned irons, and dropped into the rolling sea.

She'd used a dense black fire curtain to block the attack.

The other witches sighed out in relief; only Roland still kept worrying – after all, he knew that when she used her ability like this, it would greatly consume her magic power. This was something, Roland had already noticed when he saw her smelting steel. If she used it only for heating or cutting, her vast amount of magic power would almost never dry up. However, once she expanded her influence to the macro level and tried to form a dense body to influence the whole object all at once, the amount of magic power she needed multiplied exponentially. For example, when she used her black flame as a furnace, by keeping the molten steel from flowing over to the outside wall, it would increase her magic consumption. And if she wanted to lift up the entire black fire furnace, even Anna could hold on for only a few minutes.

So, it was obviously, that the barrier just now had consumed quite a lot of her power. If they were to throw their spears twice, Roland was afraid that even heating the air for the balloon would become impossible for her.

It seemed as if the Devils had been shocked by the scene they'd witnessed. Because rather than following-up with another attack, they instead chose to sweep past on both sides of the hot air balloon as if they were waiting for the right moment. By now they were so close, it was the first time that Roland could see the enemy's ferocious appearance – it was exactly the same as in the picture. They wore demonic beast's skulls as their helmets, and their eyes were covered with scarlet red crystal pieces, they also had a leather pipe running from their chin, which went past their neck and to the carapace on their back.

In the meantime, the other witches had already pulled out their revolvers, but since the basket was constantly swaying it was almost impossible for them to hit an enemy that was moving at such high speed. Even after depleting two rounds of bullets, they still hadn't hit the target.

At this moment, the Devil's arms extended once again, only this time, they had instead chosen to attack from the front and the back.

There wasn't even enough time for Anna to see the enemy at her back, so when she summoned her black flame, all she could do was cover the one side. Roland however, even though he was unable to follow the path of the spear, instinctively knew that the spear had been targeted at her. He almost subconsciously threw himself at Anna's back to push her out of the way, before he felt an impact on his shoulder, as if someone had ferociously smashed it with a hammer. His whole body lifted into the air, and crashed into the basket's wall.

The burst of unbearable pain almost ripped him apart, followed by a strong sense of dizziness, as if his consciousness was leaving him.

Roland tightly clenched his teeth and turned his head to the side, merely to see that at the place his shoulder should have been, only a huge gap now remained – the hole in the basket at his back was sufficient to show the power of this blow.

This last round of attacks had completely ripped off the corner of the basket. While the blood which endlessly came pouring out, dyed his clothes red.

“No!” Nightingale’s heart-wrenching cry was the last thing he could hear before he lost consciousness.

Chapter 295 Wings spreading out

The moment that Nightingale saw Roland get hit, she could suddenly feel her stomach tightening.

The surrounding noises all became incomparable distant. When she tried to lift his body, she discovered that it had become stiff and cold, only his hands were still slightly trembling. Apart from her subconscious frightened shout at the beginning, she realized that even taking a step forward felt like an incomparable challenge.

She was afraid that Roland, lying in her bosom was steadily losing his warmth.

She was also afraid that he would never wake up again.

Just thinking of these things made it hard for her to breath.

Never in her life had she ever felt so helpless.

It was Anna who responded first – she crouched down and covered the wound with her black flame. White smoke immediately began to rise from the lightless flame while emitting a “zizi” sounds. When the black flame dissipated, the place where Roland’s arm had been torn off had already become scorched black.

However, the unceasingly flowing blood had stopped at least.

That’s right, this was the emergency measure he had taught us during the first aid class, but what was the rest? ‘Wrap the wound and quickly go to the hospital to find Nana’... Nightingale swallowed a mouthful of saliva, sweeping her gaze over the basket, no, no, Nana isn’t with us, she’s in Border Town.

We have to go back.

We must go back as soon as possible!

She slowly turned her head to the Southeast, looking in the direction of Border Town –

At this moment, the Devils’ fierce appearance, with them baring their fangs, and brandishing their claws came into Nightingale’s view once again, pulling her thoughts back to the current situation inside the basket.

The panicked shouts of the witches, the cracking sound of the revolvers, and the low growls of the enemy all came back into her perception. After the coldness subsided, all the various and disorderly thoughts in her mind finally came together to become one.

“Don’t try to beat the Devils, if they catch up; we are unable to return to Border Town.”

“Lightning!” Anna exclaimed anxiously, “Protect the hot air balloon!”

Although the little girl’s complexion was pale, after looking towards the still unconscious Roland, she gritted her teeth and nodded before she flew out of the basket.

No, Nightingale thought, just by looking at her appearance it is clear that she cannot handle the Devils. Like most witches, Lightning has no experience with fighting a real enemy.

I am the only one here who can defeat the Devils.

Nightingale took a deep breath, she forced all of her thoughts concerning the wounded Prince behind a makeshift veil at the back of her mind. The two Devils are still flying, forming a pincer attack, one at the front, and one at the back. Their throwing arms were as skinny and shriveled as firewood; perhaps it will still take a comparatively long moment before they can fully be restored. But from the hot air balloon to where they are is approximately fifty meters, a distance I'm utterly unable to cross – if she cast her fog high up in the sky it was incredibly easy for her slip through and fall, the higher up off the ground she was, the rarer the “lines” she could travel along became. And if she remained on one line for an extended amount of time, the direction of the lines could begin to turn upside down, which could even result in her being torn into several pieces.

Perhaps the Devils were also aware that once the hot air balloon landed their situation could become tricky. Thus, one Devil waved his three-fingered left hand, and shouted something out loud, then pulled at the reins of his mount and came rushing straight at the balloon.

At the same time, the other fiercely pounced toward Lightning. Flapping its immense wings, the demonic beast just looked like a falcon seizing a fledgling, taking its time to wear it out. Just like Nightingale had expected, Lightning was already hard-pressed to protect herself by relying on her nimble movement, making it impossible for her to aim and fire at the enemy. Also, the other witches, now afraid of accidentally hitting the little girl had also stopped shooting.

Meanwhile the other mount randomly bit and clawed at the balloon's sac, but fortunately, Soraya's coating was tough enough to fend off the demonic beast's claws and tooth. Realizing that its action was in vain, the Demon roared and flew far away, seemingly wanting to use the force of an impact to throw the balloon off balance.

Nightingale realized that this would be her best opportunity.

She released her fog, and the moment a slightly glowing thread appeared on top of her head, she stepped on it without hesitation. She took advantage of the quickly changing outline of the balloon, and was standing on top of the air sac a moment later. Although her body was parallel with the ground, it seemed as if she was walking on level ground, thus she was quickly able to run her way to the balloon's peak.

At this moment, the Devil was also rushing toward them.

In her world of black and white, Nightingale was surprised to discover that the Devil also had a sparse and slowly rotating magic cyclone, and its thin arm was also inlaid with a sparkling stone.

Do they also possess magic?

But this wasn't the time to be paying attention to this, for her a dash of ten meters was nothing more than the blink of an eye. So, the moment the Devil was about to hit the hot air balloon, Nightingale had also came out of her fog and appeared behind the Devil.

Because of the sudden increase of the weight, the giant winged demonic beast suddenly dropped. The Devil, as if it was aware that something was amiss, turned around, only to be greeted with the roar coming from Nightingale's 12mm revolver.

"Go to hell!"

The bullet together with a flame and smoke rushed out of its cartridge. And then, entered and pierced through the Devil's head with a great force, opening a bowl like hole at the back of its head. Sticky blood splashed out the next instant, and a pungent smell assaulted her nose.

The enemy twitched before toppling over which deflected the demonic beast's movement and caused it to pass by the side of the hot air balloon. Just as Nightingale was about to leap back to the top of the airbag, an accident happened. The falling corpse pulled at the reins, and the beast abruptly rolled over and threw her off.

Before she even had the chance to react, Nightingale was already out of a safe return distance.

Although the hot air balloon has been reducing its height, at the moment it was still hundreds of meters above the sea. Stepping into the fog while falling was no different from committing suicide – if Nightingale couldn't control her posture and bump into whichever thin line was available, she'd immediately be cut into two.

"Nightingale!"

She heard her sisters cry in horror, but everything seemed useless. Lightning was currently fighting against the other Devil, while Maggie, even if she changed into a sea bird would still be unable to carry her. Thus she knew what would happen next.

The speed of her fall accelerated more and more, and when Nightingale looked down, the ocean, which was originally a blur, revealed its true form. The rolling and splashing waves became more and more clear – it didn't look as if she was falling, rather it was as if the sea was coming towards her.

The nearer the inevitable moment came, the clearer were her thoughts.

Nightingale closed her eyes, and once again seeing the moment she'd first met Roland. She'd sat on the edge of the bed, and was playing with the dagger in her hand, waiting for the gray-haired 4th Prince to push open the door and enter. The flickering fire, the door, and the bedroom gradually began to fade, ultimately, only leaving his smiling face behind.

Her only regret was that she wasn't able to accompany him to the end.

"GooGoo!"

Suddenly, a series of high tweets sounded. When Nightingale opened her eyes, she saw a white figure rushing straight down, throwing herself at Nightingale's chest.

It was Maggie.

Just when she wanted to say something, the pigeon began to emit eye-piercing bright ray of light, her body began to expand immediately and a pair of enormous flesh like wings opened themselves at her

back, her feathers all fell off, and her bird's head became both fierce and terrifying. She looked exactly the same as a flying demonic beast!

"Ahoool—!—!"

Maggie released a deafening roar, caught Nightingale with her claws and yanked her upwards. The latter half rolled around in the sky before landing on the bird's broad back.

What exactly is going on? Nightingale was completely shocked.

"Ahoool ahoool!" Maggie shouted once more, apparently, she wanted to remind her of something.

This time even without translation, Nightingale was able to understand the other's meaning. Although she couldn't understand why Maggie was able to change into this form, but right now, the most important thing was to defeat the Devil.

"Come on," she shouted.

Chapter 296 Demon

The situation reversed the instant after Maggie, carrying Nightingale on her back, joined the battle.

Being forced to give up the pursuit of the nimble Lightning, the Devil released an angry howl, rolled around and dived down, throwing itself against the fast-incoming Maggie. The arm, which hadn't been fully restored yet, raised another spear, then expanded so quickly that the skin began to crack and a bloody mist began spraying out.

Even though it spent all of its power, the thrown spear which was thrown this time, no longer had its original might. At least now, Nightingale was able to see the trajectory of the spear.

"Maggie!" She patted the back of the giant creature beneath her, then released her fog and stepped into it.

"Ahoool – Goo!" At the same time, Maggie's body began to sharply reduce in size, once again turning into a pigeon.

As the huge target suddenly disappeared, the spear sped past the two with a whistling sound before falling into the sea.

At the next moment, Nightingale reappeared from the fog, and Maggie returned to her demonic beast form. The whole process of dodging had been as natural as the moving clouds and the flowing water.

The devil let out a painful anguished wailing, its arm began to shrink, until it was only an inch thick then broke, just like an overstrained branch. But its left hand was still firmly gripping the reins, moving the beast to confront them. Looking at its posture, it seemed as if it wanted to crash into the two of them, as if it had given up all thoughts of ever returning.

However, Maggie obviously never intended to fulfill its wish, moments before the collision, she suddenly let her body dropped, letting the enemy pass by instead. When she regained her balance once more, Nightingale had already disappeared from her back.

The latter was just like a ghost as she appeared behind the Devil.

The enemy hurriedly tried to untie the rope it was holding, however, Nightingale would obviously never give it the chance to do so.

It was as if she was releasing all of her pent-up anger as she pulled the trigger and the gunfire sounded out continuously.

This round of shooting not only broke the carapace at the back of the Devil but also ran through its chest. The enemy issued a series of hoarse sounds, gasping for air and quickly collapsed into the evaporating bloody mist.

And lastly, the now masterless demonic beast also died under Lightning's attack and fell into the sea, disappearing soon after.

The cloud gazer slowly landed on the shore.

"What should we do next?" Nightingale asked anxiously as she looked at Anna, it seemed that only she'd only been able to stay cool-headed during the battle.

"We're so far away that even if we flew through the whole night, the hot air balloon will still take until midnight before it can reach Border Town," Anna stated their situation, "Therefore, Lightning and Maggie have to carry His Highness on her back, and set off in advance.

"No problem ahooh!" The giant beast, lying with its head at their side, opened its mouth and spoke.

"I... also have no problem with it, we will deliver him." The little girl's expression seemed somewhat gloomy, probably thinking about her capability as an explorer. The fact that she'd been too afraid to fight the enemy, had caused everyone to fall into so much difficulty.

Nightingale touched her head, "No one has ever been good at it from the beginning, this isn't your fault."

Together, the witches tied the still unconsciously Prince onto Maggie's back, after they finished, Lightning took her place beside him. They then soared into the sky, flying all the way along the Redwater River while heading towards Border Town.

"And we?" Wendy asked, "My magic will soon run out."

"Continue to fly, as far as possible. Perhaps the enemy will dispatch a second troop to look for us. This place is still too close to the snow-capped mountain; we have to leave it behind as far as possible." Anna said, "Wait until we reach a safety zone, we will then look for a place to hide and make camp."

Her decision was unanimously endorsed by the remaining witches.

When cloud gazer rose again, there were only five people left in the basket this time.

"In the end, how have the Devils been able to discover us?" Soraya asked, feeling puzzled. "Both the hot air balloon and the basket are painted with sky camouflage. Furthermore, at the height of two thousand meters, it is hard to identify us even by using an observation mirror."

"There was a colossal Devil," Sylvie said while knitting her brows. "It crouched on the top of one of those black spires, it had a head that was larger than its body. Its head was covered with countless eyes. Even

though I merely gazed at it... it immediately turned all of its eyes towards me. And hundreds of Devils came rushing forth from within the ground, it was as if the whole area had started boiling.

"There really exist such a monster?" Soraya gasped in shock.

"There is still more, those two flying mounts were also very strange," Anna voiced her thoughts, "After getting hit by the bullets, the blood flowing out of them wasn't black as you would expect, but rather a deep blue – this is entirely different compared to the mixed species we'd encountered during the Months of Demons."

"But on the contrary, it is similar to the Devils," Soraya replied, "I saw that the first Devil Nightingale shot, also had blue blood coming out of its wounds."

"In the end, aren't they demonic beasts?" Sylvie asked.

"That I do not know... but it is great that Maggie can change her appearance into theirs," Wendy exclaimed. "If it hadn't been for her saving Nightingale, we would all have been in danger."

"Her ability has evolved," Nightingale, having stayed silent until now, suddenly opened her mouth. "I saw that the magic source inside her body no longer had the form of turning cyclone, it has turned into a fixed shape instead – a pair of outstretched white wings."

*

While holding His Highness' arm, Lightning's heart was filled with endless guilt.

The Devil merely has a malevolent appearance, when in the sky, with its large body, it wasn't able to respond quickly. If I'd just left the basket to block the enemy at the beginning, His Royal Highness wouldn't have been so seriously injured.

To bravely step forward and protect one's companion is the unshirkable responsibility of an explorer. Whenever Thunder went on an exploration in the Fjords, he would always take the lead whenever they encountered any danger. Taking everyone along so as to break through all incoming crises, whether it be against pirates or a monster from the deep sea, he never took a step back.

For the first time, Lightning realized that she had still a huge distance to go before she could call herself a great explorer.

But her father had also mentioned that while fear can be fought off by acknowledging and becoming familiar with it, skills could be mastered through repeated training.

She made a firm resolution that she would wait until His Highness' injury was fully healed. And would then beg him to give her a specialized pistol and request older sister Nightingale to teach her how to shoot and fight.

"How is His Highness, ahoool?" Maggie muttered. Compared with the pigeon's voice, her voice was now rough and muddy, like the wind blowing out of a stone cave. "I felt that his body has become colder, ahoool."

The little girl clenched her fists and turned around to fly back to Maggie.

Only to see that Roland had closed his eyes, his lips were pale, and together with his messy gray hair, he even seemed to be somewhat lifeless. The blood on his clothes had already solidified, while the black burn wound looked like a spectacle which was too horrible to endure. She gently placed her hand on his neck, feeling for a weak beat to prove that His Highness was still alive; only to feel the skin under her fingertips was frightening ice-cold.

“How much magic do you have left?” Lightning estimated the rest of their journey, “We will have to go at full speed.”

“Ahoor!”

When the two witches arrived at Border Town, the little girl’s vision already became faint and blurred. Flying at high speed not only quickly deplete her magic, but it also put a great burden on her body. She gritted her teeth, using the last bit of her strength to directly fly into the castle front courtyard, while shouting to the guards, who had come over to investigate the noise, “Quickly call Miss Nana, the Prince has been wounded!”

Chapter 297 A burning hot heart

Roland opened his eyes. He was lying on a soft bed, with the familiar ceiling above his head, matching every crack in his memories.

This is my own... bedroom

He turned his head and at his shoulders on both sides – whether it was the left or right one, they both looked to be in a good condition. And as he tried to move his hands, he also didn’t come across any problem.

It’s as if everything was just a long dream.

He knew however, that it hadn’t been a dream; the investigation of the Devils, and the attacks they had faced was indeed something which had happened! However, the fact that he was lying safely in the bedroom, meant that they had managed to escape the Devil’s pursuit, and had successfully returned to the castle.

However, did all of the witches make it back safely?

Thinking of this, Roland couldn’t stop his heart from becoming heavy. He tried to prop himself up, but from the direction of his injured arm a burst of powerlessness spread throughout his body. Just when he wanted to open his mouth to call someone, he saw a row of witches leaning against the wall next to his bed. They were Anna, Nightingale, Lightning, Maggie and Nana. They leaned against each other’s shoulders, and were breathing steadily, with their eyes slightly closed, looking as if they were fast asleep.

Roland quietly opened the corner of the window curtains, he was greeted by the first rays of the morning sun which came pouring in from the direction of the Redwater River like dazzling golden threads across the earth.

“You... woke up?”

Turning around, he didn't know when, but Anna, rubbing her tired eyes, had already woken up and step by step had come to stand by his side.

"Yes, I'm up. The other witches..."

"They all safely made it back to Border Town. In fact, you were the only one who was injured."

"Is that so?" Roland said relieved, "That's really good -"

"Fool."

He didn't even have a chance to refute before the other side was already nervously hugging him with so much force that it felt like she wanted to embed herself into his flesh.

Due to Anna's commotion, the other witches also started waking up.

"Your Highness!"

They stood up in surprise and then began to circle around him one after another. Lightning was the second to cling to Roland, followed by Nana and Maggie. Nightingale hesitated, but also wrapped her arms around him. In this way, everyone was embracing each other in a group hug, all were reluctant to let go... for a moment it seemed time had come to a stop.

...

After breakfast, Roland went back to his office and listened to details of what had happened after his collapse, trying to understand what had occurred in the end.

The witches, working hand in hand, had been able to defeat their pursuers then had Lightning and Maggie carry him back in advance.

After coming back to the castle, Nana Pine immediately treated his injuries, healed his torn off arm back to its previous state. However, due to his severe blood loss, he'd fallen into a deep sleep for a day afterward. Thus, this was already the fourth day since their departure.

Thinking back to his actions, he had to admit that he had been somewhat careless. He had never expected that the Devils would actually be able to discover a hot air balloon painted in sky camouflage more than ten kilometers away. Listening to Sylvie's explanation, it seemed that the massive multi-eyed Devil hadn't detected anything abnormal in the beginning and had been observing all direction with its eyes. However, the moment she moved her focus to the body of the multi-eyed Devil, the other side immediately responded, instantly turning all of its eyes towards her.

This kind of detection, contrary to what one might expect, was unheard of; it was important to know that at this distance, apart from Sylvie's Eye of Truth, even when using an observation mirror the view would still be fuzzy. In addition, there was also the red mist covering the spires, making it even more difficult to clearly see the happenings within the Devil's town. Accordingly, it should also have been difficult for the other side to discover their whereabouts.

That said, even though they had met with great danger during this trip, the harvest of information was just as bountiful.

The Devils were no longer those mysterious and unknown messengers of hell – instead, they also had cities and towns, an organized structure, and thus can be classified as a higher evolved civilization, just like humans were.

Furthermore, the other side's air force wasn't powerful at all, at least this was the case for the group of Devils behind the snow-capped mountain. Even though there had been hundreds of Devils which had come out of the ground, in the end, there were only two who had pursued them with flying mounts. This indicated that they could safely assume that flying was still a rare ability among them – whether it was the mounts or the riders that was rare, was still unknown. But to sum it up, this was some good news for Border Town. At least he didn't have to worry about a group of Devils bypassing the Southern hills and mountains to go straight for the hinterlands of the Western Territory to burn, kill and loot from them.

Also, the news that the Devils' possessed magic was an important discovery.

According to Nightingale's report, even though the amount of magic power within the Devils coming after them was sparse, it was still enough to form a cyclone, and was also very eye-catching while in its foggy state. However, their way of arousing magic seemed to be entirely different from the witches. They didn't perform it by themselves, but instead used a certain kind of mechanism – for example, by using those shining stones to release their force. Therefore, it wasn't like the witches' ability which could undergo constant changes, but more like a standard weapon which could be mass-produced.

Of course, this was merely his own speculation. Unfortunately, both of those Devil's bodies had fallen into the sea, making it impossible for Roland to verify it further.

The last point was their buildings.

Those small and slender black stone spires were not the Devil's dwelling places. Furthermore, their construction material was also very strange, since it didn't show any traces of corrosion from the red mist. While the inside of some of the stone towers was empty, others were filled with a red liquid, which let them unexpectedly appear to be storage tanks.

Could it be that the red mist in the sky is actually the gaseous state of that liquid?

And could the reason why the Devil's aren't further spread over the wilderness or even further expanded toward the Four Kingdoms be because of the limited amount of this gas?

In any case, after comprehending all of the gathered information, I can conclude that for now, they won't be a threat to the security of Border Town.

But Roland also knew that since they had already driven humanity out of the wilderness more than four hundred years ago, there might come a day where they would attack again. Which he would need to make preparation for.

...

Due to his severe blood loss, when night fell, Roland decided to leave the unfinished government task for another day and left for bed quite early.

As he was sitting on the bedside looking through a history book and preparing to blow the candle out to sleep, a knock came from the other side of the door and resounded through the room.

After a short hesitation, he still climbed out of bed to open the door, to see Anna standing before him.

This time she wasn't holding a thick book in her hands like she had been in the past – neither "Intermediate Physics" or the "Theoretical Foundation of Natural Science", instead she'd come empty handed and wore only a white robe. She stepped into the room. She wasn't even wearing shoes, so whenever her delicate foot kissed the floor, there wasn't any trace of sound to be heard.

Stepping aside, Roland swallowed a mouthful of saliva.

After stepping through the door, Anna turned around, closed it, and shut the bolt. Then she took Roland's hand and went to the bed.

He could see that she had recently washed her hair, and within the candlelight her let down hair also had a golden luster to it. Being so close, an intoxicating fragrance filled his nose – this enchanting fragrance wasn't originating from perfumed rose soap but came from herself.

Her long eyelashes trembled slightly, her cheeks were flushed, and her blue eyes were as clear as limpid autumn waters. Although she appeared to be somewhat nervous, there wasn't any trace of hesitation in her. Instead, her eyes, looking straight at Roland, were filled with resolution.

Even someone as he who'd never weathered such a great battle, at this moment, he clearly understood her meaning.

"Cough, this..."

"I do not want to wait any longer," Anna whispered, "Especially after what we'd experienced." She paused, "I don't want to regret anything."

Chapter 298 Dream

"I see," Roland put his hands around her, carried her by the waist and set her gently on top of the bed. This simple action was already enough to make him breathless. He opened the thin blanket, and went to lay on the bed next to Anna with her head nestled on his arm.

The next step should be... foreplay?

Roland discovered that he was much too nervous, it can't go on like this, as someone known as an "experienced" person, I cannot make a fool out of myself in front of a little girl. Maybe I'll be able to ease the mood with a light chat and then do the action, for example... maybe some lines from a porno?

As he was still racking his brain, Anna's soft voice sounded in his ear: "That time in the hot air balloon when you pushed me out of the way, did you ever think about the possibility that you might die?"

Roland felt shocked; he'd never expected that she would ask him this question, "I just did it without thinking."

"You are someone who will become the ruler of Graycastle, you are also the hope of us witches," she whispered, "I am unworthy of you doing so much for me."

“This isn’t a question of worth,” Roland murmured. “I cannot just stand by the side and watch indifferently as you suffer an attack. As a matter of fact, even now, after waking up and thinking about it carefully, I can tell you that in case it hadn’t happened so suddenly and if I had the time to think it over, I would still have acted in the same way.”

“There is nothing I can do to prevent you from doing it again, right?”

“Yes, there is nothing,” Roland said as he pinched her nose with his other hand.

Anna’s eyelashes fell, and after a moment of silence, she opened her mouth once more, “Can you tell me something about your past... I would like to know more about you.”

“Oh, the past,” Roland said, he took a deep breath then searched through the 4th Prince’s memories, while preparing to tell one or two entertaining anecdotes of his life in the palace. But before the words could leave his mouth, he swallowed them back down. His past wasn’t the life he had here, but the life he’d lived in another, very different world; so instead he said, “I used to live in a big city, in a tremendously big city.”

“Yes, Graycastle’s King’s City is several times larger than Border Town.”

“When I was born, I wasn’t any different from any other ordinary person, I was somewhat clever in trivial matters, but not so intelligent that I could do everything at ease. In regards to studying, I could be considered as hardworking, thus I would often receive praise from the teacher. But he didn’t know, that I was the one who had drawn the hard to erase graffiti on the classroom walls.”

“He certainly wouldn’t dare to blame you.” Anna murmured.

“Haha, that’s unlikely. It wouldn’t have been necessary for him to do anything to me, he merely needed to inform my parents,” Roland smiled, then shook his head. “At that time, they taught me to never start off leniently.

“Then, as I grew older, my teachers kept changing, from primary school teachers, to academic advisors, until I finally completed my studies having had neither good nor bad grades. Of course, compared to other people’s children, in the end, I still fell short by a bit...”

He half-closed his eyes, being able to speak about his experiences after altering them a bit and no longer concealing them, gave him a feeling of freedom he hadn’t felt in a very long time since he’d crossed over. Since his arrival, he had been playing the role of the Prince, but right now, he felt as if he was returning to his past. As if he was only lying in a hotel room designed to fit a classic style, together with the girl he liked, making one another feel safe and warm. Thanks to this, his nervous mood also gradually relaxed.

Is perhaps now the time for the next step?

Roland turned his head slightly, only to discover that Anna had already closed her eyes, and her chest, snugly placed at his side, was calmly moving up and down, looking like a kitten which had stepped into the land of dreams.

He just stared blankly at her for a moment, but soon after he couldn’t stop himself from laughing out loud.

So it was like this... she was also tired.

Think of it, to conceal their whereabouts; the witches had looked for a small hidden place within the mountain ridge two nights ago. But they still needed to guard against any possible beast or Devil attacks during the night, which had meant that they'd almost gotten no sleep during the night. And then, the next morning, even as the sun had only just lightened up the sky, they'd already continued their race on Cloud Gazer while heading back towards Border Town. At the castle, Anna had also spent the last night in his bedroom, constantly keeping watch over him. Thus, during the last two days and nights she hadn't even had one moment of rest, making it very easy for her tiredness to overwhelm her the moment she let herself relax. It would be a wonder if she weren't exhausted right now.

The other side's reason for coming this day, might be because she was too anxious to wait any longer.

Although it was a pity, Roland did not care about this opportunity passing, after all, there were still many days ahead of them.

He moved closer, kissed Anna's eyelashes, then whispered, "Good night."

*

When the morning light fell through the window curtains into the room, Sylvie climbed out of bed unable to suppress her yawn.

The experiences of the last days seemed just like a dream, from the discovery of the Devils to the fight in the air, and lastly their escape back to Border Town, gave her the thought, that even if they had been encircled and chased by the Church's Army of Judges, she wouldn't feel as tense and exhausted like now.

"Good morning," Wendy, having changed her clothes long ago was now carrying a basin of water prepared for washing their face and rinsing their mouth.

"Good morning," she nodded, "You got up quite early."

"I'm old," Wendy smiled, "So the time I need to sleep has also become less and less."

"Oh, it is already dawn?" Nightingale said sleepily as she rubbed her eyes, "It seems I have to take a nap at noon."

"Didn't you sleep well last night?"

"Yes, I had many dreams."

Sylvie curled her lips disapprovingly; she had clearly seen that the other side had stealthily went off to the third floor of the castle, moving back and forth in front of the Lord's door for a long time. However, because of Nightingale's unique ability, she couldn't see what Nightingale was doing. Anyway, it had already been late by the time she'd come back. "Last night, you didn't..."

The moment she began to speak, Nightingale suddenly turned around, staring straight at Sylvie. Her slightly narrowed eyes made her meaning self-evident – thus, the latter had immediately closed her mouth. Everyone with eyes had been able to see the strength of the number one combat witch in the Witch Alliance. The image of her swiftly moving through the sky and killing the Devils like a wraith was

still vivid in her mind. If she ever came to Sleeping Island, Sylvie feared that even Lady Ash wouldn't be her opponent. So, when she received the silent warning, Sylvie felt that it would be better if she didn't act too curious.

"What happened last night?" Wendy asked in wonder.

"Keke," she said, "I heard her snore last night, it must be because of the large amount of energy she'd used up in the past few days."

"That must be it," Nightingale agreed while shrugging her shoulders. She took off her nightgown, revealing her well-proportioned and harmonious body, and began to put on the undergarment which had been gifted by His Highness.

That said, by now, even Wendy had fully accepted this clothing, even going so far as recommending it to her.

Sylvie had no choice but to say, His Highness Roland was indeed a very fearful man.

But when she thought of him, Sylvie's heart was also filled with warmth.

There actually exists a noble who willingly sustain injuries for a witch.

When she had seen Roland bravely dashing forward, with no thought to his personal safety, and push Anna's body out of harm's way, at the bottom of her heart, she felt touched. All the witches of the Witch Alliance weren't some tools he intended to control. But they are important people to him, even... companions. His reaction at that moment couldn't have been a lie; he is indeed standing on the side of us witches, just like Tilly Wimbledon.

If Roland and Tilly can stand together hand in hand, and unite the strengths of both cities, they might truly be able to create a new country. A place where witches and ordinary people make no distinction between what's their's and what belongs to the other.

She decided to write a letter to Lady Tilly.

"Your older brother, His Highness Roland, is truly a good person."

Chapter 299 Information and Messenger

Graycastle, within a garden of a mansion inside King's City's inner city.

Today was the scheduled day for the exchange of information. While sitting on a soft chair in the living room, Theo was waiting for the arrival of the members of the acrobatic group "Pigeons and Hat". Since the beginning of autumn, the closing of the inner gates had shifted to an earlier time in the evening, so the time for their secret meeting also needed to be changed to the afternoon.

Like always, the first to arrive at the mansion was Hill Fawkes.

On his upper body, he wore a blue collarless jacket made of velvet and around his neck he was wearing a white tie, while on his lower body he was also wearing shallow gray leggings and moccasins. He was dressed remarkably similar to an aristocrat. After giving his salute, he took the book "The Kingdom's

History of social custom” which was clipped between his armpit and returned it to Theo. The latter took the book, glanced at Hill and asked with interest, “Done with reading?”

“Yes,” Hill nodded, then hesitated a moment before asking, “Won’t you teach me some wrestling; fencing... or maybe, assassination techniques?”

“Why?”

“At the time of the demonic disease’s outbreak, you said you were going to train me to be a qualified spy,” he scratched his head, “But so far, you’ve only been giving me these strange books to read.”

“Are you speaking about the ‘Kingdom’s History of social customs’?” Theo asked as he took a cup of wine, and threw two ice cubes into it, then went on to say, “This isn’t something you should call a strange book, within it is written the origin of the nobles, their traditions and heraldry, as well as the specialties of all the regions within the kingdom. As a spy, you must first be experienced and knowledgeable, to roughly be able to distinguish between the information with value and those without. As for fencing and assassination?” He smiled, “I never intended to let you infiltrate into some organization or penetrate deeply into the enemy territory to scout for information. That kind of task is dangerous yet requires a lot of time and effort. Before we put in so much effort, it might be better if we directly step forward and bribe the informed people with gold royals.”

“But you cannot buy everyone,” Fawkes insisted.

“And those organizations from which not even a drop of water can leak out, are equally awful targets to try and insert an eye in. Without putting in ten to twenty years of effort into it, it is unlikely that one can submerge into them.” Theo shook his cup, and drank a mouthful of ice wine before he further said, “There are only two things required from a qualified spy: distinguish between information and keep yourself hidden. The reason I gave you these books was to lay the foundation for you to be able to identify information, as for the second point... as a former member of the acrobatic troupe, you should already be more experienced with it than I. For instance, the clothes you are wearing today, are excellent.”

“...” Just as Hill Fawkes was lowering his head to think about the meaning of these words, Clown and the others finally arrived at this remotely placed residence.

“Sir, everyone is present.”

“This being the case, we’ll start at once,” Theo said, put his cup down and opened a notebook, “Who will be the first?”

“I’ll go first, Sir,” Rocky Mountain, the tallest and strongest person among them said, “There’s a new batch of people who’ve moved into the camp East of King’s City.”

This unexpected message made the personal guard’s brow jump slightly, he hadn’t expected that the first news he received would already be something bad. Since Timothy had lost more than half of his Royal Knights, the garrison built on the outskirts of King’s City had now become the base for the militia. All the rats, refugees, and criminal Timothy had drafted were placed in the strategically placed camp east of King’s City before they would head into battle. It’s just a bit longer than a month that a team of

more than a thousand militia had last left for the Western Territory, but they already found new people to replenish?

“How many have come?”

“There are only two or three hundred people at the moment, and it seems that most of them came from the Northern Territory... apart from them, there are also some Blood Sail rats, but the ratio of those are one to two. There aren't many rats left who are willing to leave.”

“Keep a close watch on their movements, and whenever more than two hundred new people come to the camp, you have to report to me at once,” Theo ordered.

“Yes, Sir.”

These people only have one use, which is, to be used as a consumable after being fed those pills. Now after the Queen of Clearwater has gone northward, there is no longer any opposition at the Southern Border. Thus, Timothy will undoubtedly continue his attack on His Royal Highness's territories. I have to send this information back to Border Town as soon as possible.

“The next one to go is this humble Clown, this one bares some confidential information, or to be more precise, information shared due to the wondrous influence of alcohol,” Clown said in an exaggerated manner. “I'm unable to verify whether it is genuine or false, but according to a group of merchants, with a lot of face and a nose for money, this story can be regarded as the truth. They've said that Garcia Wimbledon's Black Sail Fleet has appeared in the Kingdom of Eternal Winter, where they launched an attack against the Church, and with this also bringing the siege on the Wolfsheart Kingdom's city walls to a stop. The merchants were all preparing to take advantage of the time before the beginning of winter, and wanted to try and sell some needed goods.”

The Queen of Clearwater actually went to the Kingdom of Eternal Winter? This information came somewhat unexpected for Theo. However, it wasn't important whether this information was true or false, since she has chosen to leave Graycastle and sail northward, it was equivalent to having given up her right to fight for the throne, “That's it?”

“Alright, I know that the source of the matter is a bit far from Graycastle,” he stuck out his tongue. “Next time I will make some inquiries about more immediately useful information.”

“Keke,” Hill coughed twice, “Sir, I found some new clues regarding the task you have entrusted with. Timothy has opened a new workshop in the inner city, recruited a lot of clay artisans, and is also shipping the recently acquired large amount of saltpeter to that place. However, the workshop is heavily guarded, which made it impossible for my people to learn anything more about what the saltpeter is being used for.”

“Oh?” Theo's spirit was lifted, “They brought the saltpeter towards the workshop?”

“That's right,” Hill confirmed, “I have personally tracked one of those carts to the workshop.”

This was a very valuable information. Since Theo had been at His Highness Roland's side for such a long time, he naturally knew that the all-conquering gunpowder was a type of alchemic good, the main ingredient of which was saltpeter. Thus, when he noticed that the King began to acquire the saltpeter

from the surrounding tanning fields in large amounts, he'd arranged Hill Fawkes to go and inquire about its whereabouts and use.

Now, after the other side had transferred it to a workshop of the Alchemy Association, their intentions have become very apparent – taking the next step from alchemic experiments to workshop manufacturing, indicated that they have now grasped the prescription of gunpowder. The priority of this intelligence was even higher than the need to gather new people in the Eastern camp.

“Well done.” Theo praised.

...

After the end of the secret meeting, everyone left the mansion in batches.

The moment before Hill left, he suddenly turned around and asked, “Sir, by doing all of this, will we really be able to topple Timothy from his throne?”

“Of course,” the personal guard answered, “Haven't you seen the letter sent by His Highness? Timothy's throne is already shaking.”

Later in the evening, when he returned to the tavern “Covert Trumpeter”, Theo was greeted by an unexpected acquaintance: Sean.

Just like himself, he was also one of the 4th Prince's personal guards.

After arriving at his room on the second floor, they exchanged some greeting for a moment, before Theo closed the curtains and whispered, “How did you know where I was staying?”

“His Highness gave me a letter, and told me to look for Miss Margaret, who already knows about your whereabouts.” Sean took out a sparkling, pure red gem and waved it around.

“Does he have a new task?”

“It's not a task, it's a gift,” Sean said, and smiled as he walked to the window. He opened it to a slit and blew a whistle. Soon Theo saw three beige colored birds come flying into the room and drop on the table then immediately call out, “Googoo”. After feeding each of the birds with some wheat, they finally settled down.

It was Theo's first time to see such intelligent birds, “This is...”

“These are a witch's trained messengers.” Sean explained, while he stroked one of those beige colored bird's neck, “The difference between them and a carrier pigeon is, that they can independently travel back and forth between two places, without needing a person to take them away. So, they can fly home on their own afterward. You only have to say a specific keyword to the birds; and they will deliver the message right into His Royal Highness' hands. If everything goes well, you'd only have to wait a day before you'd receive a reply.”

Chapter 300 Witch House

“Ahoool, Ahoool!”

At the newly rebuilt castle backyard, Maggie, fiddling with her wings and tail, was moving around under everyone's appreciative gaze.

Although Roland had already heard about it from the witches' own mouths, when seeing Maggie's "demonic beast form" for the first time, he still felt genuinely shocked.

This enormous brown-skinned bird was ten meters long from the top of its head to the top of its tail, it had a wingspan of around fifteen meters. Its wings were similar to the fleshy wings of a bat, and when facing the sun, he could clearly see its thin blood vessels and its skeleton. Likely because its body was too long, the bird had four limbs altogether, which was as thick as an adult arm with claws at their end, which it used to support its body.

However, the most eye-catching thing was the head – it had three eyes, forming a triangular shape, on both sides of its head. Furthermore, the rest of the head was an entirely bloody mouth which was able to open itself as wide as a sacrificial bowl, very unlike a normal bird's beak. Whenever Maggie opened her mouth to speak, she'd expose a row of sharp teeth and a long tongue, a sight which cause the other witches to shout out in fear.

"Is this the Devil's flying mount?" Leaves exclaimed. "Fortunately, we didn't run into such a monster during our time in the wilderness, or we would have never been able to run away."

"If not for her evolving and getting this new ability, I'm afraid I wouldn't have been able to come back," Nightingale said while petting Maggie's smooth neck. "I will prepare a pocketful of small pieces of grilled fish for you every day."

"Ahoor-!"

"I know, I'll pour some honey over them."

Hearing this promise, the bird's tail began swinging more cheerfully.

Those fish are obviously all mine, Roland secretly sighed, without permission, she just takes the kitchen food to reward others, don't make it sound as if you are doing something great ah!

"Alright, then let us check your new skill according to the old rules."

"Ahoor!"

...

After a morning of endless repeating, Roland obtained all the details about Maggie's new beast form.

Following the previous convention of magnification, her brown skinned giant bird form was larger than the original Devil's mounts, in addition, her lifting capability was also a increased, allowing her to carry two witches. However, the flight speed she could maintain when fully loaded was only about eighty kilometers per hour, which compared with Lightning was much slower.

Anyway, Maggie's strong point was that she had sufficient enough persistence to carry heavy weights without having to reduce the height she was flying at, unlike Lightning. At the same time, this new transformation also consumed more magic, but after completely changing into a giant bird, no matter if

she was flying at a high or a low altitude, or carrying one or two people, her magic consumption remained extremely little. The only issue to consider was her own physical power.

Nowadays, the amount of magic power Maggie could contain within her body had also increased by a significant margin, allowing her to jump from a place at the bottom of the Witch Alliance to among the middle level. Meaning that she could now change her form seven to eight times a day.

Apart from this, through Maggie, Roland could confirm one of his previous speculations.

The witches' chance to evolve was due to their understanding of their own ability, regardless of whether they grasped this kind of knowledge through learning or in a sudden flash of realization, it could always provoke a change of their ability.

This also implied, that there existed a possibility for natural evolution – as long as they lived long enough, there would always be one or two lucky ones who could rise above others. When one compared their first ability with their ability after their evolution, it was like comparing heaven and earth, so much that even something rotten could become something mystical. Was that the reason why the Church was trying to suppress the wild witches?

After consuming lunch, the Lord's castle area welcomed a major event.

After nearly four months of construction and decoration, it was finally the day that they would put the witch house to use.

Looking at the merely three-layer building, with less than fifty suits, Roland sighed endlessly. When placed into the future, this kind of house could only be regarded as being at the level of a self-constructed countryside home; but here, it represented the highest degree of architecture in the mainland – not because of its scale, but rather the technology behind it.

It was the first house made out of a mix of bamboo reinforced concrete, and bricks.

Roland could still remember how Karl, pouring the first column of reinforced concrete, had said to him with all sorts of feeling welled up in his heart, "That cement could originally also be used like this, that it can be shaped into any desired form when mixed with cobble, and also be used anywhere in the house... Your Royal Highness, I think it won't be long until the stonemason occupation disappears from the masonry work.

Apart from the beams of the roof, all the other floors of the witch house were made out of precast concrete slabs. When he looked at those pieces of concrete slabs with holes in the middle, Roland felt like he'd returned to the time of his childhood – only back in the eighties could this kind of ancient building material still be seen. However, by the time he was ten, cast-in-place concrete floors had already replaced it, and in time the technique had been completely abandoned.

And now in Border Town, the "backward" technique of precast concrete slabs was once again reborn.

The Witch House was located on the left side of the castle, forming together the letter "L". After the expansion of the garden, its area was three to four times larger than before, so even with those two buildings there was still enough open space left for Leaves to improve her various kinds of fruits and crops.

*

Evelyn, with a somewhat anxious and frightened feeling, checked into the brand-new house.

It was already more than one month since she'd come to Border Town, but until now it seems that besides serving His Highness wine she had done nothing else. Furthermore, with merely five points in the last exam, she was also at the bottom of all of the witches... Although Scroll had never announced the results to the public, this kind of thing was easy enough to guess as long as she did some private inquiry.

Even Honey, who only spoke to birds the whole day long had gotten seven points!

She suddenly felt that there was no difference between herself and an idiot.

Even so, she couldn't detect any difference in the way His Highness treated her and the others. He would still find her to talk about the characteristics of the wine from time to time, often under the pretense of bringing a newly-made painfully burning white spirit. Furthermore, she had also got one gold royal as last month's salary, something which aggravated her feeling of insecurity even more – compared to the other four, she felt like nothing more than a freeloader.

"There is actually a kitchen dedicated to cooking next to the living room, in addition, there is a strange little room which they'd painted white. Quickly come and look," Candle, opened the bedroom door and started talking excitedly.

"Hmm..." Evelyn responded weakly without strength.

"What happened? Are you feeling unwell?" Candle asked in concern, while squatting down in front of her and feeling her forehead, "You're not too hot." Then she suddenly laughed and said, "Don't tell me, are you missing sleeping in one bed together with our sisters from the Witch Alliance?"

For a moment Evelyn was silent, then whispered, "We have been here for over a month, right?"

"More or less."

"Lotus is responsible for the construction of the new wall, which she will soon be finishing. Honey is in charge of training new messengers, and Sylvie, even accompanied His Highness to investigate those terrible monsters," She said frustrated. "Only I still have nothing to do. I didn't even get an arranged training plan, my exam's results were also the worst... I really do not know why His Highness wanted me to come."

"Oh." After pondering about it a bit, Candle answered, "Why don't you go and ask him in person?"

"Huh?"

"His Highness, Roland is Lady Tilly's brother, you have seen how he treats us witches with sincerity. Even Sylvie, who always kept saying, 'Keep away from Roland, be vigilant of the Prince,' has changed her words, and even went as far as saying some words of praise yesterday." Candle shrugged, "As long as you asked him with someone else present, it is impossible that he will chew you out, isn't that right?"

It seems her words contain some truth. Evelyn thought, in order to no longer torture herself, she decided to act in accordance with Candle's suggestion.

