

## Witch 321

### Chapter 321 The Law of Border Town

Early in the morning, the cold woke Roland up. He climbed out from under his cold blanket, put on his wool coat, then immersed his feet into the warm water bucket.

This was one of the corrupting privileges which he could only enjoy as a Prince – every morning, a maid would put out a basin of hot water beside his bed, as well as a clean towel and a cup of warm milk which would warm up his body almost instantly.

Of course, compared to the powerful nobles who had other methods to constantly keep their beds warm, he felt that this was good enough. The former 4th Prince had always attempted to invite Tyre over with exactly that thought in mind, but unfortunately, he wasn't able to enjoy it before his death. However, the new Roland didn't enjoy this practice, so when the position became vacant he had filled it with an elderly but experienced maid instead. In fact, this choice proved to be the right one. Since nowadays there were so many witches staying inside the castle, but she still managed to keep the inside and outside of the castle in good order.

The fire in the fireplace had gone out long before, leaving only white flying ashes behind. Through the cracks in the open window, the cold wind blew into the room, it was so bone-chillingly cold that it was hard to believe that it was still autumn. Roland dried his feet, then washed the rest of his body with another tub of hot water before going over to the window and closing the small gap he had opened through the night.

Even though open fireplaces were very common in this era, he was still worried about the issue of carbon monoxide poisoning and thus he always left a small gap open before he went to bed. This way, with the fire burning the temperature could be kept all the way through the first half of the night, but, after the fire went out there was no difference between the temperature inside and outside when morning came.

I have to come up with an idea to solve this problem, Roland thought, or I won't be able to sleep in the future.

After eating breakfast, Roland took Nightingale, his Chief Knight, and his personal guards on a routine inspection of the city walls.

The vast expanse of grass between the new city wall and the old city has become a vast expanse of white. As they walked over all the thick snow the soles of their shoes made crunching noises.

Lifting his head, he saw a pale gray sky and falling snowflakes that occasionally came floating into the gap between his coat and his neck, bringing with it traces of coldness. He knew that it was very likely that this kind of weather would continue until spring next year... or it might even be longer.

"How is the situation at the defense line?"

"It's much better than the last time," Carter Lannis said, looking relaxed, "Most soldiers of the First Army have already gathered experience on the battlefield. Furthermore, now that we have these revolving rifles, ten guards are already enough to protect about one hundred meters of the city wall, and suppress all the demonic beasts that appear at the feet of the wall. In addition, compared to the old stone wall,

the new wall is about half a meter higher, which is a height that is very difficult for a wolf to reach. Due to this, the defense has turned into mere shooting practice for the soldiers. As long as no mixed species appear these monsters won't ever be able to step one foot past the defense line."

"It seems everything is well."

As Roland boarded the wall, all the soldiers he came across gave him a salute, standing straight with their head held high and their chest out. Just by looking at their spirits, it was already clear that the soldiers had completely changed from the time they spent as part of the militia. At that time, although they stood side by side on the wall, seemingly uniformly stabbing with their pike, it was in truth nothing more than a conditioned reflex formed after repeated training. The expression in their eyes was war numb, their movements were all stiff, and when someone took a closer look they would immediately see that most of them were trembling slightly.

But the soldier's eyes at this moment were brimming with self-confidence. After going through the ceremony, they immediately turned around and continued to monitor the battlefield.

Walking along the city wall toward the Concealing Forest, the area became much livelier.

The temporary shelters for the serfs and refugees was arranged within this area. When Roland looked down from the top of the wall, it seems as if many slopes were arranged in lines parallel to the wall, looking like upward and downwards moving waves. Each of those slopes offered a place for ten rooms, with an inner structure that was identical to that of a cave. The thick walls were able to maintain the indoor temperature, while the kang heated the room and a linen cover at the entry kept the cold out.

The whole area was divided into two blocks, the one close to the wall was called the West Side and was used to shelter the refugees; while the East Side set further away from the wall has been assigned to the serfs.

Every day the City Hall would send out people to distribute food and charcoal, while the refugees had to take over the task of delivering for the soldiers of the First Army who were protecting the walls. As for the serfs, most of them had all the wheat they needed. With the exception of some people who went out to look for a job to earn some extra money, the others all rarely left their warm houses.

At this moment, suddenly a fierce argument broke out at the junction between the East and West side. When Roland became aware of it he went over and saw a group of people standing in the middle of the road that passed through the residential area that were bust arguing out loud. One of them wore a blue and white uniform and seemed to be a clerk who worked in City Hall. It didn't take long for the verbal quarrel to escalate into a fight, both sides began to push each other and strike one another, turning the whole scene into a mess.

"Your Highness," Carter asked.

"Let's go take a look," Roland agreed.

When they reached the place where the disruption was happening the chief knight took the lead and went straight into the fighting crowd, immediately knocking down two or three of the trouble makers. And as Roland's personal guards, having already drawn their swords shouted out for everyone to stop, the scene soon fell back under control.

Discovering that the newly arrived people were actually the Lord's men, the two quarreling sides fell immediately on their knees just like breaking waves.

"What is your name?" Roland frowned as he asked the clerk who had two punch marks on his face, "What's going on here? Who attacked you first?"

"Your Highness, my name is Khoya Harvie," he cried and hid his face with his hands. "It was that damned refugee who hit me first, it's the man dressed in brown linen! I was still busy distributing food when he rushed up to me like a dog who'd gone mad."

Hearing Khoya's words and after being pointed out, the man wearing refugee clothes turned and said, "Your Highness, things didn't happen as he described it. These people and the serfs conspired to blackmail us. Every time they distribute porridge they collect money, but, at the time you took us in you clearly told us that it would be free!"

Hearing him speak left Roland slightly surprised. All of the refugees who had come from the east coast had been combed through by the City Hall; they'd already sorted out all of the craftsmen, people with special abilities, or those who were literate. Those were moved to the inner circle, so the remaining people here should supposedly be ordinary civilians. But judging by his tone of voice and his choice of words it didn't resemble a civilian at all.

In contrast, it was the man from the city hall who had used words like 'damned dog' and other insults, which left a really disappointing appearance. Since he had a well-known family name... in all likelihood, he was one of Duke Ryan's former people.

"I have said that before you are officially incorporated into Border Town the porridge and shelter will all be free of charge," Roland repeated once again in front of the refugees. "Today, those words are still valid!"

"His Highness is merciful!"

"Long live the Lord!"

"Thank you, Your Highness!"

The refugees began to shout while kowtowing.

But at the same time, Khoya Harvie's face turned livid.

"However, fights within the inner territory resulting in injuries are a violation of the law. In particular, attacking a member of the City Hall," Roland said, then ordered his personal guards, "Take all the refugees and serfs who started the fight and bring them to the castle, I will personally try this fight."

He paused, and then looked at Khoya with interest, "I would also like to ask you about this matter of charging for the porridge."

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Chapter 322 Western Territory Security Bureau

Returning to the castle hall, Roland went to sit in the Lord's seat that was overlooking the subjects gathered within the hall beneath him.

In his memory, the only time the 4th Prince has ever used his right to exercise a trial was the first time he had come to Border Town. Later, after his fallout with the nobles and his dissatisfaction with his current lifestyle in general, he had thrown everything into the hands of Barov, never asking him anything about it.

Seeing that everyone was present, Roland called for the trial to begin.

At first, he let all sides state their case, then he asked them questions of his own – with Nightingale there secretly assisting him it wasn't necessary for him to determine who was deliberately lying and who spoke insincerely, nor did he need to have the meticulous mind of a grim reaper, concluding who was responsible became effortless and simple.

Soon the whole truth of the story was revealed.

At heart, Khoya Harvie was unwilling to accept that he was deprived of his identity as a knight, at the same time he had also grown tired of the tedious writing work at the City Hall, which resulted into a stomach full of resentment against the refugees. He made use of the opportunity presented by the distribution of the wheat porridge to purposely charge the refugees a fee and instigate dispute between both sides. He deliberately told them that it was because the serfs didn't turn over all their grain that the wheat stock wasn't enough and for that reason they could not give out porridge free of charge.

In fact, what made Roland the most aggravated was that Khoya was only able to charge them for several days because he had been wearing the eye-catching uniform of the City Hall and that the refugees had been worried about the possibility of retaliation from officials that they kept silent. Until today, when a refugee named Vader had stepped out in protest against his behavior, and from this commotion everything had then been exposed.

When Roland finally understood the whole situation he felt relieved.

An organization on the rise should be brimming with vitality, full of youthful energy. Later on, when the situation was more stable, corruption and rigidity would be inevitable, but that should only be something that happens after the unification with Longsong Stronghold. If those problems were to appear in the beginning, then the organization would be doomed to never go very far.

However, it now appeared that Khoya had acted on his own and that none of the other officials of the City Hall had been related to this matter. Furthermore, it was only a matter limited to extorting money, and not the thing he had feared the most, which was serfs selling and reselling grain in private.

Of course, to some extents, Roland was also the one responsible that the situation had develop to this. Due to City Hall originally being so desperately short of manpower, Roland had placed the surrendered Knights under Barov after only giving them a warning about the circumstances and no further screening or training. The result showed that not everyone had been able to accept the job without complaint or bare the great mental pain of dropping in rank from a knight to a civilian.

Roland called Barov to his side and asked him in a low voice: "What would other Lords do in this case?"

“Your Highness, there are two possibilities,” the latter respectfully replied, “If the offender is a nobleman, after paying a few gold royals the situation would be turned over and they could be let go without any further punishment. While the punishment for a civilian attacking a noble can be big or small, from cutting off one hand to flogging.”

“But Khoya is no nobleman,” the Prince responded, “I have deprived him of his title.”

“Yes, that’s true, Your Highness. In this way, the disposition will be based entirely on the mood of the Lord.”

“There are no fixed numbers?”

Barov shook his head.

Hearing this Roland began to frown, that it is entirely dependant on the mood of the Lord means that in the eyes of the nobility it doesn’t matter how civilians are treated, they do not consider them as “people” at all.

“In addition to cutting off hands, breaking feet, whipping and pulling fingernails are there any common punishments? For example, imprisonment?”

“Imprisonment?” Barov asked startled, “You mean to simply lock them away? What kind of punishment would that be? A prison is only a temporary place for holding the sinner, sooner or later they will be brought to trial and their case will be closed. During their imprisonment, you have to feed them the whole time, I’m afraid that it would be a reward for some people.”

Well, it seems that the general term of imprisonment used in later generation won’t be very useful here. After thinking about it for a moment, Roland decided to follow the rules of the castle. He stood up, and let his gaze wander over the people gathered beneath him, “I’m ready to give my verdict now.”

“Khoya Harvie, because of dereliction of duty, extortion of refugees, you are abolished of your position within City Hall, sentenced to work in the mine for ten years, and to be fined with three times the amount you have stolen.

“Vader, as the first to attack a City Hall officer you will be sentenced to ten lashes with the whip.

“All the other refugees and serfs involved in the fighting are fined two silver royals or five lashes with a whip.

“The distribution of the wheat porridge will continue to be free of charge, all previous extorted money will be refunded.” He looked to the Prime Minister of the City Hall, “You will carry out the above ruling and also announce the result to the people in the temporary residential area.”

“As you command, Your Royal Highness,” Barov said.

Back to the office, Roland leaned against the back of the chair and stretched, he then felt a pair of hands resting on his shoulders and gently massaged them.

Closing his eyes Roland enjoyed a moment of leisure.

This matter had made Roland realize that with the increasing number of people in the city, the authority of the City Hall had also expanded rapidly and that they might already have to face the problem of internal regulation by now.

He did not want to set up an institution similar to the prosecutor's office, but he was also unwilling to set up an independent public security bureau of later generations. Not only would the former need a larger number of literacy personnel, they were also prone to attack each other, interfere in the commission of the policies, the appointing and expelling systems of government, and hinder the implementation of new policies. While the latter weakened the Lord's authority in disguise. It would still be better if he kept those powers, such as the formulation and interpretation of the law and holding a trial, in his own hands.

What he needed was a simple yet effective System which didn't require many people to play the role of a supervising organization.

Roland took hold of one of the hands placed on his shoulders.

Feeling her hand being grasped, Nightingale stepped out of the fog and sat on the edge of the table while holding the Prince's hand, she then crooked her head and asked: "What's up?"

Her slender legs dangled from the table, swaying in the air, forming a perfect curve with her high tube moccasins and her close-fitting pants.

Roland coughed twice, "I intend to set up a new department which will supervise the City Hall, as well as arrest other people who attempt to harm the Western Territory or destabilize the community. This department only needs to report to me and will be completely independent of the City Hall or the First Army." Emphasizing every word Roland went on, "I will name it the "Western Territory Security Bureau" and I want the first supervisor to be you."

"Me?" Nightingale blinked confusedly.

"That's right, only you can easily distinguish the truth of the spoken words. Furthermore, any cheats or tricks will be meaningless in front of you," Roland nodded. "How is it? If you wish, I can provide you with my own afternoon tea's ice cream during winter, and also..."

Nightingale gently pinched his hand, "It's unnecessary to say that, I promise I will comply – anything, as long as it is something you want me to do."

"..." Roland suddenly felt a bit embarrassed.

She laughed, but didn't let the silence continue for too long and instead said, "But what should I do?"

"Well, the supervising part will be very simple," the Prince got his emotion back under his control, "I will set up an accusation box at the entrance to the castle area, thus you only have to check the contents of the reporting letters inside."

If he wanted to solve the problem in the least costly way, it would be to use the masses to supervise, as well as make the City Hall supervise itself. Just like last year when they had caught the spies during the Months of Demons.

For future generations, this method wouldn't be easy enough to use. No matter if it was the reported target or the reporter themselves, it would need a lot of effort to verify. Simultaneously, there could also be cases of false reports, mistaken reports about correct situations, and not to mention deliberate framing. But in front of Nightingale's ability these shortcomings wouldn't be a problem. Verifying the information would be very easy for her, she merely had to question the accuser in person – truthful reports would be rewarded while false accusations and false reports would be punished. Centering the implementation around these two points, the system was bound to be extremely efficient.

“As for maintaining the stability of the Western Territory, and eliminating threats and hidden dangers, it will be more resemblant of a national intelligence system. However, for this, I will slowly extend your hands until your eyes are spread over the whole of the Western Territory.”

### Chapter 323 Ministry of Public Security

Roland already had a rough plan of the future public security system for his territory.

At present, the town had a population of about twenty thousand. Besides the local indigenous people, there were also people who had immigrated from Longsong Stronghold as well as the refugees who have escaped from the Eastern Region. By the time the messengers sent by Barov came back, they might already have brought people from the Northern or Southern Region of the kingdom and as a result would further complicate the cultures that the population consists of. With all the different morals, conflicts like what had happened today would only become more and more common.

He would therefore need to establish a public security system to separate the First Army's task of patrolling from internal and external violence. He had already thought of this issue before but had not thought of anything definite because of how few staff he had. However, now that he had the First Army to fight against the demonic beasts and the population was growing very rapidly, the time to implement his plan had come.

By formulating and interpreting the laws himself and holding trials of major crimes, he would be the first and also the final instance; the public security would capture criminals according to the law while also settling civil disputes. The Security Bureau would be responsible for maintaining the purity of the system and to effectively prevent the corruption of the systems, they would also use public security personnel to carry out the corruption cleaning operations and in that way save on human resources. This was the outline for Roland's security system.

The ideal situation would be if he could first try to run the security system in Border Town, and by the time he had established Border Town as a city next year he would expand the system to the whole of the Western Territory.

By then, no matter if it was an autonomous Lord's territory or not, they would all have to implement the same set of laws and accept the rule of a unified department. Only he alone would be able to stand above the law.

As the mightiest noble of the Western Territory, Roland knew that it was unrealistic to say that everyone was equal before the law, nor could he abolish the aristocracy. But at least he could make sure that the traditional system of feudal fiefdom does not exist within his city anymore. If they wanted to get the protection of the Western Territory, they would have to hand over their power of self-governance.

As for the head of the Ministry of Public Security, Roland already had the right person in mind for that. Someone filled with a strong sense of justice while also not being pedantic, Carter Lannis would be a fitting choice.

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When Vader stumbled back to his temporary residence, old man Kukasim came out to welcome him.

“You... never mind.”

“It’s tolerable,” Vader grumbled, “His Highness only sentenced me with a punishment of ten whips.”

“Let me take a look,” Kukasim eagerly stepped forward.

“Go back to the house,” Vader said as he walked into the house where the warmth inside immediately dispelled the chill within his body. As the door closed, it appeared as if the inside and outside were two completely different worlds. Compared to the wooden sheds from before which would let through wind and rain, this somewhat low and narrow mud house gave people a sense of comfort.

That’s right, the locals seem to call this house ‘cave dwelling’.

The old man let him lie on the kang, and when he tore off the clothes at Vander’s back he couldn’t help but suck in a mouth of cold air.

“Your back is covered with blood, I’ll go get some ash to cover it.”

“Wait, there is no need. It’s only dried blood left from from after the torture, the blood has already stopped flowing long ago.” He had to repeatedly pause as he spoke, “Sir Knight has said that it would be best to keep it open like this and to wait for two or three days by which time the wound will have already healed.”

“Two or three days?” Kukasim shook his head in fear, “No, son, by then you may have already fallen into a high fever and your back will swell up into a ball. Even if you might have a strong body, you will still need at least a week to recover. You of all people should be aware of what happens when a disease flares up.”

“You may not believe it,” he licked his dried lips. “But I don’t feel much pain from the wounds on my back. On the contrary, I feel a cool and itchy feeling, which is a sign that its healing. After they finished the whipping they splashed a bucket of water on my back... “

“Saltwater?” The old man frowned.

“At the beginning, I had the same thought, but the scorch I expected did not come,” Vader laughed twice, “The Knight executing the penalty said that this can eliminate all disease-causing microorganism. If I want to let my wounds heal quickly, I shouldn’t do anything superfluous with it, and allow it to dry.”

“What are those disease causing micro... organism?”

“Microorganism,” he curled his lips, “Who knows what they are, most probably something related to those witches.”



The old man lowered his head, then after a long time he opened his mouth again: "You shouldn't have stepped forward because of me, if it is only words it's still bearable... "

"If we were to keep on enduring it, we would have to suffer under an even more severe treatment. I know that kind of person, they have the morality and appearance similar to many of the nobles living in King's City," Vader spat. "I've heard that in this area the snow will last for several months, but the money we have won't last until then." He paused, "and... I also deliberately picked that time to hit him."

"Caused, deliberately?" Kukasim asked disbelievingly.

"Yes. After all, the Prince will always appear on the west side of the city wall at this time of the day. Since he had promised to give us free food, he must hate this kind of behavior which is damaging his reputation. Thus, this was also the most effective way. If we had merely caused a simple fight, it wouldn't be certain that it would ever reach His Highness' ear. After all, Kohya Harvie might have received instructions from others. So if any of the City Hall officers wanted to suppress news about this, it would become meaningless regardless of what we said."

"But he could also have been instructed by His Highness..."

"The possibility that this was the case was very low. If His Royal Highness wanted to save his money, then the three meals he promised would be reduced to two meals. Furthermore, I have inquired about him in advance and no matter whether it is the local residents or those serfs, all of them praise His Highness' kindness and wisdom." Vader said, smiling proudly. "You see, I wasn't gambling or anything like that, right?"

"Originally... so that's how it is," the old man sighed in relief, "It seems you really have considered everything already."

But there was also a part I hadn't guessed, Vader thought, that was the penalty.

Working for ten years as a patrol officer in Valencia, he had a profound understanding of the ugliness hidden beneath the city's glamorous appearance. There were more than a dozen of nobles who have used their power to blackmail, even among the ranks of the patrols. Therefore, there wasn't much need for him to want to punish these nobles.

His Royal Highness's reaction had been basically the same as what he had expected, it was only that the amount of punishment was beyond his expectation.

In this kind of circumstances, the Lords who mind their reputation would have ruled the suppressor as the innocent party, but he instead had punished everyone. It seemed that His Highness cared more about the system than of his reputation.

For a Lord, accustomed to doing as he pleased to care so much for his subjects, this was something that was rarely seen.

"What are you going to do next?" The old man asked after a moment of silence.

"Just like Sir Knight had said, rest for two days, then continue as before, and help those guys carrying those strange weapons by delivering groceries."

"You could have lived a decent life together with the craftsmen in the inner city."

“But it would be impossible for you to get in, Kukasim. So, stop talking about this,” Vader said, shaking his head. “I refuse to leave you behind.”

This old man was neither his family nor his elder. Half a year ago, the other had still been a prisoner kept in prison. Everyone knew that the old man had been pushed forward by the black street rats to act as a scapegoat, but this matter appeared too often that the patrol had become too lazy to take notice of it anymore. Later, when a group of pirates looted Valencia, Vader had believed that he would die within the turmoil, but in that critical juncture, the old man hidden within the prison had covered him with his stinking bed sheets which in the end allowed him to luckily escape.

Vader did not expect that he would be saved by one of those prisoners he was normally so unwilling to look at. But at that moment he had finally come to understand that there was essential no difference between how they acted and the disgusting nobility.

The other two people in the room were both aware of Kukasim’s identity, but since he was looking after him they didn’t dare to touch him. However, in case he left, they would certainly try and make trouble for the old man.

“Don’t worry, everything will be fine.” Vader patted his counterpart’s shoulders.

Two days later, he heard the news from the inner city that His Highness was recruiting for the positions in public security.

#### Chapter 324 Signs of the sea

“Hey, girls, do any of you want a bowl of fish soup?” Captain Jack asked after stretching his head into the cabin, as smoke curled up from the pipe he held in the corner of his mouth, “A lucky fellow caught a large tailless trout just a moment ago.”

“Thank you,” Tilly Wimbledon nodded. “We’ll come over right away.”

“Is it fish soup again?” Ashes said regretfully after the Captain left, “Where in the world is such tasteless fish soup even remotely tasty?”

“You can ask for a little salt if you want to add it to the soup,” Breeze laughingly said. “Pepper would also be alright, but that’s more expensive. I’m afraid Mr. Jack won’t want to give it to you.”

“Don’t put anything into the soup. Boiled soup keeps its original flavor, while also keeping the quality of the food itself,” Andrea said, gracefully sorting her long light golden hair, “Lady Tilly, I would presume we were supposed to go to the captain’s room.”

“As long as it is something warm we should go over right away,” Shavi, who had the shortest stature of all of them, muttered, “My toes are stiff.”

Following along the stairs the group entered the captain’s cabin in the Charming Beauty. One Eye Jack stood near the porthole, looking at the white track of the rolling waves spreading out behind the ship.

“This damn weather, how can it suddenly become so cold?” He asked, puffing out a cloud of white smoke, “Oh You Three Gods, it’s supposed to currently be mid-autumn, ah~.”

“Maybe the gods just fell asleep?” Ashes said and shrugged.

“Pei Pei, you can’t say words like that when you are in the middle of the sea,” Captain Jack grinned, “The Emperor of the Sea is always keeping his eyes on us,” he said and put his hands on his stomach before making a praising gesture, “Let it be for now, we shouldn’t think too much of it. Let’s first fill our bellies with warm fish soup.”

In order to fully enjoy the warm food in the captain’s room, he did not hesitate to open a big hole in the floor, put a brazier frame in the middle, and fill the space that was left with sand. In this way he could keep the heat isolated and avoid igniting the whole ship.

A large pot of soup was bubbling above the brazier, making a rumbling sound and filling the room with an overflowing fragrance.

The six people took their shoes off and sat in a circle around the brazier. They buried their feet in the warm sand, completely surrounding their ice-cold toes with the hot gravel and enjoying the warmth from the burning charcoal.

Tilly received the fish soup that the captain had offered her and gently blew on the piping hot soup to cool it. Compared to the milky white surface of boiled black tail fish soup, this bowl of soup was a deep yellow with oil bubbles floating on its surface, giving it a crystal sheen when reflecting the light.

When she occasionally saw some green and white specks within the soup, she knew that the captain had taken some goods from his own reserves. After all, due to frequently sailing for several months on end, it resulted in that the crew could hardly ever eat fresh vegetables and fruits. Thus, these soft green onions were obviously some vegetables which he had deliberately preserved within iced saltpeter. The fragrance of the green onions neutralized the fish’s own fishy smell, and harmoniously mixed in with the ginger and ale, making it taste all the more rich and delicious.

When the soup became cold enough that she wouldn’t burn her tongue, Tilly drank a small sip, before pausing and gently blowing again. She could clearly feel every small mouthful of it, after drinking the soup a warm current flowed along her throat and into her stomach, where it rested, releasing a nice and warm feeling.

The chilliness soon faded, almost as if her body was experiencing a slight fever.

“Try and add some pepper,” Jack said, pointing at the seasoning jar standing next to the brazier, “In addition to enhancing its taste even more, it will also especially expel the cold. It’s even more effective than wine.”

“Although tasting its original flavor is the true meaning of eating food, but I must say, the added ingredients are perfect, bringing out the flavor to perfection,” Andrea praised.

“Won’t you drink something?” Tilly asked while looking at Ashes.

The latter waved her hand, “I would better let it be, I’m really unable to stomach the fishy taste.”

At first, Tilly was also unable to accept the habit of the people of the Fjords who loved eating fish for every meal. They ate it in all kinds of variations, roasted, boiled, and not to forget deep fried. Furthermore, there was also something similar to frozen fish, fish sauce, caviar and other strange preparations... However, after she had forced herself to eat it several times during formal banquets, she’d discovered that its taste was quite good and that once she became familiar with the taste of the

sea it could instead further serve as a contrast for the food's tastiness. Like those sun dried fish, roasted cuttlefish and even the fried fish with its pungent smell, was something she could by now enjoy eating.

"Our High and Mighty Miss Ashes' appetite has already been corrupted by Border Town's barbarous cooking," Andrea said, "It is a pity that the taste of spices and fine salt not only made her lose her ability to identify what's delicious. It now seems that not even any of her courage is left."

"What did you say?" Ashes glared at Andrea.

"Why, isn't it like this?" Andrea issued a series of laughs, "Just a little fishy smell is enough to make you flinch. Willful like a little girl, how do you expect us to believe that you will bravely step forward when Tilly needs it?"

"So it was actually like that... it seems you want to provoke me to play with you," Ashes voice suddenly became gentle, "Give up, Border Town has a terrible weapon. Far more powerful than your arrows. Even then, I was still able to win the duel. So, if you would like to take over the post of Tilly's personal guard from me, you will still need to practice for a few more years..." She paused, "I misspoke, you would have to practice your whole lifetime."

"You –!"

The corner of Ashes' mouth rose as she said, "Besides, the fine food that His Highness Roland invented was not only the layering of spices and salt, only when you try it will you be able to understand. Remember, don't let your drool drip on your clothes, Lady Tilly cannot afford to lose face."

"Nonsense, it will be you!"

Tilly could not help but smile. These two witches were Sleeping Islands most powerful combat witches. They would often fight against each other to determine who would be number one, Tilly knew however, no matter if it was Ashes or Andrea, they were also her best subordinates. During the time of danger, they wouldn't hesitate to fight side by side, both working together to build the impregnable walls surrounding Sleeping Island.

The two's quarreling lived up the atmosphere in the room, and as she saw the scene, Tilly couldn't help but think of the five witches she had sent to Border Town. Are they doing well in my brother's place?

At this moment, the Charming Beauty suddenly began to shake violently.

"Be careful!" Ashes shouted as she grasped the 5th Princess. The iron cooking pot on top of the brazier turned over and the soup that poured out put out the charcoal fire. The brazier standing on the wok was overturned to the ground, the soup poured out the charcoal fire, while the fish meat ended up on the ground.

A sharp whistle came from outside.

"Enemy attack!"

A sailor rushed into the captain's room and shouted, "Captain sir, Sea Ghosts are coming! More than one!"

Sea Ghost... isn't that another name for demonic beasts Tilly got shocked, how can they even come to this place?

As the group ran out of the cabin, they could see more than a dozen fish monster with crabs legs entering the deck, and some that were still climbing up the two sides of the Charming Beauty. With their six legs they moved fast and nimble like cockroaches, wielding a humanoid arm on both sides of their head; their humanoid arms had an amazing strength, which could easily break a seaman's neck.

"Since you are unwilling to accept my challenge, we will have to compete," Andrea shouted as she snapped her fingers. Her fingers began emitting a golden light which turned into a bow firmly held in her hand, "The one who kills the most monster is the strongest."

"No matter," Ashes countered as she pulled her strange sword from her back, "I'm on."

#### Chapter 325 Arrow of Light

Tilly poured her magic into the flying magic stone then jumped into the air, from where she could overlook the entire deck.

The crew of the Charming Beauty was mostly formed out of experienced sailors, so after the initial panic subsided one after another they picked up their weapons and grouped together to fight against the demonic beasts to gradually guide them to the aft of the ship. It was obvious that it would be impossible for them to defeat such a large number of enemies with their strength alone, so their only hope lay in the witches that were together with them on board.

When Ashes joined the battle the situation quickly changed.

She was like a gust of wind, causing all the monsters to cry and scream as she passed. Any demonic beasts daring to face her sword met with a clean cut; leaving with severed limbs scattered all across the deck.

Unwilling to fall behind, Andrea released one arrow after another. Her magic longbow allowed her to use any object at hand as an arrow and release it with an alarming power and accuracy. So she rarely prepared a conventional feather arrow, but rather a bag of glass beads. The glass beads were solid enough that it could cross a distance of twenty paces and penetrate the demonic beast's head, turning the brain into a mass of paste, only allowing them to weakly twitch before turning limp, without even managing to release a single miserable cry.

Breeze and Shavi pushed their way back and forth over the deck and rescued the injured sailors. Under the protection of an invisible barrier, the demonic beasts weren't even able to come close to them.

Even on seeing the demonic beasts quickly being beheaded, and their number rapidly beginning to dwindle, Tilly still did not dare to relax.

These fish-shaped monsters were clearly not enough to cause the violent shaking that the Charming Beauty had felt at the beginning. Instead, it was as if there was a huge monster hitting the bottom of the ship from below. Without the protection from Molly's servant, the force would have been strong enough to turn the ship into a piles of broken wood floating in the sea if it managed to hit the ship a few more time. At that time, the witches would just barely be able to protect themselves while probably only a few seamen would be able to escape ending up in a fish belly.

Just like she had expected, the moment Ashes' sword had cut down the last demonic beast, a gigantic shadow, which was much too large to be a fish, appeared in the water in front of the ship's hull. It quickly approached them and once again bumped into the Charming Beauty.

"Be careful!" She shouted.

Her voice had hardly fallen when the shadow once again passed beneath the bottom of the ship, causing the sailboat to start violently shaking. Two masts began to issue a series of cracking sounds, as if they would come crashing down at any moment. Fortunately, the shadow didn't attempt another attack, and instead quickly disappeared into the depths from where it could attack the Charming Beauty with its back, shaping its knife and fork for a satisfying meal.

After dropping down back on the deck, Tilly quickly summarized the situation.

"We must force it out of the sea, otherwise sooner or later this damn monster will manage to sink the ship." Ashes declared with a frown.

"I'll try it," Shavi said. "Since it's coming from beneath when it hits the bottom of the ship, as long as it gets in close enough, I could use my barrier to stop it."

"Oh Emperor of the Sea above," Old Jack cried out as he wiped the sweat from his forehead, "If it's really as huge as Lady Tilly said, I'm afraid that ordinary attacks would be unlikely to work against it. So how would you kill it, even if you are able to force it out of the sea—"

"Just let me do it," Andrea combed her loose hair back behind her ears as she showed them a confident smile. "There is no enemy able to resist my full power within a distance of ten steps."

It wasn't long before the shadow appeared again, but this time it had changed direction and was coming at them from the stern of the Charming Beauty.

Monitoring the situation from high up in the air, Tilly immediately called out a warning. When Shavi heard her she quickly ran into position and jumped off the ship. Previously she had firmly tied a hemp rope around her waist, while the other end was in Ashes' hand, who could use it to control Shavi's falling height.

As the shadow approached, Shavi quickly opened her barrier, splitting the dusky sea water, as if it was separated by something invisible.

As the monster rushed into the barrier, its huge bulk stopped and Shavi let out a pressured groan, her hands were hanging down beside her body, as if she was using an enormous amount of strength. Looking down, the shadow beneath her feet was rapidly expanding, and the water was rising violently.

"Quickly pull her up!" Tilly shouted as she rushed downwards.

Using all her power, Ashes single-handed pulled on her end of the rope. The moment Shavi fell on the deck, a huge sea monster came roaring out of the water, causing waves which made the Charming Beauty sway heavily. The monster looked like a mixture between a shark and an octopus, with a triangular head which was covered with several tentacles, all of which shot straight toward the deck.

Even without hearing its cry it became clear that the unfathomable impact has made it incomparably angry, as it let its adult thigh sized tentacles rain down onto the ship, trying to break everything apart, but even from the beginning up until the end it had no way to penetrate Shavi's defense.

"Andrea!" Ashes bent down, entwined her fingers and formed a step with her hands.

"Coming," the latter set a foot onto Ashes' palms and shouted, "Give me everything you've got!"

Thrown by extraordinary power into the air, Andrea turned into an arc and within the blink of an eye, she had already appeared above the monster's head.

She summoned her magical longbow, pulling the string to its fullest, unexpectedly there were flashes of light breaking out between the bow and its string. Rather than flashes of light, it seemed as if the sun had actually come out from behind the clouds, reflecting across the sea's surface in a golden luster.

"Go!"

The light flashed, and with an ear-piercing cry an arrow, made purely out of magic, it drilled right into the monster body like a strike of thunder. The monster's gray-brown skin suddenly swelled, and golden cracks appeared all over its body, before finally, with a loud explosion, it shattered.

The huge explosion created ripples across the surface of the sea. Its blood, which was as black as ink, dyed the sea a pitch-black, while viscera came falling from the sky like rain. The previously attacking tentacles all curled up and sunk back into the sea together with pieces of the monster's blown up head.

Andrea crashed into the sea.

"Ah... Help, help I can't swim! Guru, who... who's going to pull me out?!"

Ashes glanced toward the seemingly tired Shiva before she helplessly sighed. "She is indeed only a handsome fool," she said then unhooked the sword on her back and jumped into the sea to swim to Andrea's side.

As the threat of a sunken ship was lifted, Tilly finally felt some relief. At least she no longer had to worry how they were going to travel on their own to Border Town.

But just at that moment, she suddenly felt something cold on her nose, raising her head, she could not help but freeze on the spot.

She could see snowflakes falling from the gray sky, flying around like white fairies, filling her entire field of view.

"This... is snow?" Tilly asked in disbelief as she looked at the melted water on top of her hand, "Graycastle has snow during autumn?"

"Well, it's like I said. The further West we go, the colder it becomes," One Eyed Jack said as he pulled out his pipe, "It seems you are really returning toward an abyss of suffering."

Tilly was unable to answer, only showing a dignified look. Breeze had originally come from the Kingdom of Dawn, which had a favorable climate throughout the year, while Jack was born within the Fjords,

where even during the strongest winter it was difficult for them to see heavy snowfall. But for Graycastle's Western Region, snow had a special meaning.

Her court tutor had once said, that once the snow began to fall it wouldn't stop for a long time. Just like the Devil's fanfare it symbolized the beginning of the Months of Demons and would only settle after the Months of Demon had come to its end.

Although the beginning of the Months of Demons isn't at a fixed date, generally it won't start before the beginning of winter, can it be that Border Town is already under the attack of demonic beasts? Moreover, those Sea Ghost would usually only appear East of the Burning Fire Island, but right now there are even traces of them at the most southern corner of the Vortex Sea. I wonder if those merchant ships sailing between the Fjords and the Four Kingdoms are also under attack from these monsters.

Tilly was starting to feel more and more worried.

Navigating through the whirling snow for two more days, they finally saw the hazy coastline on top of the horizon.

Chapter 326 Contact

"Is this the place where you landed last time?" Tilly asked, looking at the tall rocky cliff standing in front of them.

From the moment they had first seen the coastline, the Charming Beauty had followed it all the way westwards, until Ashes finally shouted for them to stop when they've reached the known beach.

"Yeah, take a look at them," Ashes said as she pointed at the top of a cliff.

Tilly followed the direction of Ashes' finger with her gaze and saw an orange flag on both sides of the peak flapping in the wind.

"Although it was a sandy beach when came here last, those two flags prove that we haven't taken the wrong road."

"I also had the same impression," Old Jack said, the pipe as always still in his mouth, "But the last time they came, it was with a huge balloon which they had used to carry all the woman over the mountain. So, how are you planning to get over that?"

"Huge balloon?" Tilly asked curiously.

"That's right, it can fly when it is filled with hot air," Ashes nodded in confirmation, "It is said that it's one of His Highness' inventions. The principle behind it is to use the power from hot air to carry the balloon and the people inside up into the sky."

The 5th Princess looked somewhat worried as she stated, "The court mentors have never taught us anything like that." She then spat out a mouthful of white air before continuing, "No matter, I will see him soon, and when I do I will naturally come to know the truth. Let's go ashore."

"Are you sure you don't want to wait aboard until he comes to pick you up?" The captain asked, clearing his pipe from ashes, "How are you planning to cross the cliff?"



“Shiva will handle it,” Tilly said smilingly.

Since it was a naturally formed coastline and no one really knew the depth of the seabed, the Charming Beauty couldn't approach the shore. So the only way to send the people towards the sandbar was by using the landing boat.

When the group of witches stepped onto the thick snow, Tilly turned toward One Eyed Jack and said, “Mr. Captain, please wait here for three or four more days, Lotus and the others will also need your help returning to Sleeping Island.”

“Of course,” the captain agreed immediately, “Without you witches on board, I wouldn't dare to sail back, ah. Who knows whether those Sea Ghosts will attack again on our way back home.”

When everything was said, Tilly went to the edge of the cliff and used the flying magic stone with her ability to head straight to the top of the hilltop. Looking around, the terrain behind the mountain was much higher than the beach, it was almost at the same level as the hilltop. In other words, they would only have to go up and there would be no need for them to go down again to land. The height of the cliff was about fifty paces, and the magic consumption of the barrier would be increased when used against objects, but such a distance should still be no problem for Shiva. Having slowly come to land beside the four woman Tilly said, “Shiva, I will have to trouble you with those three.”

“Yes, Lady Tilly,” the latter said, showing a big smile while patting her chest. Then she summoned her invisible barrier. By now all of them were fully recovered after having rested for two days since last deflecting all the violent attacks from the sea monster. Waiting until all the people had stepped on top of her transparent barrier, she guided her magic, so that the barrier slowly rose up and soon they were above the hilltop.

Then, with Ashes' guidance the group spent half a day until finally arriving at Border Town.

The first thing that caught Tilly's eyes was a steel bridge with its unique shape. It spanned across a wide river with only two bridge piers at the bottom to act as support. Its iron beams neatly arranged, without any unnecessary beam or additional decoration or patterns. The snow laying on top of the deck was in stark contrast to the exposed parts of the black bridge, giving it an initial impression of an air of grandeur.

“This bridge... is really huge,” Breeze sighed, “In the end, how many iron ingots did they need in order to create a bridge like this?”

“It's just a waste of materials. The traffic problem could have easily been solved with a pontoon bridge. What's the point of building a bridge so high?” Ashes said, making it clear that she thought differently, “Border Town lays at the end of the route of merchant fleets, so which ship would want to travel to a river's origin to do business?”

“That's the opinion of people who only have a superficial knowledge and experience,” Andrea said while elegantly shaking her index finger. “Even though I'm not a citizen of Graycastle, I can still see that the forest at the western side possesses a considerable value for reclamation. Even though there is no town there right now, that doesn't mean that there won't be one in the future. If you want to continue to expand your territory, it is a good choice to expand into an uninhabited area. At that time the pontoon

bridge would only become a hindrance for the trading route, Lady Tilly's brother can be considered as someone thinking more long-term than you are."

Ashes raised her eyebrows, "Previously you called him a vulgar nobleman who loved barbaric cooking, but now you've already changed how you address him to Lady Tilly's brother?"

"The two words 'vulgar nobleman' were added by you," the blond witch stated as she flung her hair away in a disdainful gesture, "In addition, thinking long-term and barbaric cooking doesn't conflict, you shouldn't try to stirring up enmity in front of Lady Tilly."

Tilly, however, didn't care about this already common conflict between the two, her gaze instead was directed to the other side of the river.

There she had noticed an incredible phenomenon.

At this time the snow was still falling from the sky, the temperature no different than during the winter, so it was reasonable to say that it was a time the town's people should be hiding in their own homes, either around the fire, or rolled up beneath the quilt. Even in King's City, she had only ever seen a few people who had intensified their physical strength so as to elapse the bitter cold. If they wanted to keep their body warm, they would have to eat more than usual, not to mention the risk of catching a cold whenever they stepped out of the door. Therefore, apart from gathering the necessary food and drink, the overwhelming majority of civilians would always avoid any sort of action in the winter.

However, on the town's riverside there were people constantly coming and going, some pushing carts, some carrying big bags on their back, all walking hurriedly as if they were working. Yet, Tilly could not see a whip holding overseer anywhere among them, that was to say, these people were completely voluntary at their work.

How can this be?

After crossing the iron bridge, they were immediately stopped by two guards armed with peculiar spears, the guards were wearing uniform clothes and looked full of energy. Their demeanor completely different from the common patrols in the big cities. "Stop, why have you come from the South?" One of them looked at them for a moment before asking, "Wait, are you... witches?"

This question left Tilly slightly stumped for words. Even though she was already aware that witches were living openly within the town, when personally hearing ordinary people asking such a question in such a calm manner, it still set off a bursts through her heart. "Yes, we are witches."

"It seems you want to join the Witch Alliance," the guard assumed laughingly. "Please wait here. I'll report to the higher-ups immediately."

"Wait? No, this is —"

"That's right. Then we will stay here and wait." Tilly stretched out her hand to interrupt Ashes, "Furthermore, can you tell me what those people there are busy with?"

"Oh them, they are repairing the dock. Due to the abrupt snow, there were a lot of things which have gotten messed up, but in the end I really don't know much about what is going on over there."

When the guard stepped back to his post, Ashes asked puzzled, "Why didn't you inform him about your identity?"

"Aren't you curious? Aren't you wondering how he would receive a witch from another city?" Tilly told her with a wink.

It didn't take long until a tall woman dressed completely in white to come over. She had long blonde hair and her looks were impeccable. Even without having seen her magic, Tilly could feel a piercing vigor coming from her body, just like a sharp unsheathed blade.

There was no doubt, that the woman in front of them was a combat witch, and a very powerful one at that.

"I really thought that you were new witches who want to join the Witch Alliance. Haven't you already gone back to Sleeping Island?" She first said as she looked at Ashes, before sweeping her gaze over the rest of the crowd. When her eyes finally fell on Tilly she showed an expression of surprise for a moment before the sharp feeling suddenly disappeared, to be replaced by water-like warmth.

"Hello, my name Nightingale," she nodded in greeting. "I presume, you must be Tilly Wimbledon, His Highness Roland's younger sister."

Chapter 327 The reason

"Lady Tilly!"

Guided by Nightingale to the lord's castle, the 5th princess never expected that the first person to greet her would be Sylvie. She ran over cheerfully, skipping the salute and instead bent over to give her a hug, "How come you're here, it's still autumn."

"It's no different from winter now," Tilly laughed, "Where are the others?"

"Lotus is currently building houses for the refugees, Evelyn and Candle are still in the industrial area, and Honey is in the back-garden busy training messengers." Sylvie counted on her fingers, "His Highness has already sent people to go inform them."

"Don't worry, I think you'll be able to see them soon." A familiar, yet strange voice came from behind Sylvie.

Tilly raised her head and saw a gray-haired man with a big smile on his face, his appearance was not much different from her memories, his smile and his demeanor however were completely unlike in the past.

"Welcome to Border Town, my dear sister."

...

Tilly's thoughts were in turmoil, there were too many suspicions she wanted to blurt out, but she kept a straight face as she followed Roland Wimbledon into a room that looked like a study.

"Please sit," the other side said as he poured a glass of warm black tea and placed it in front of her. "A whole year has gone by since the last time we've seen each other. I know you've had a lot of things you

want to talk to me about, it's the same with me... but there's no need to hurry." He looked at the falling snow outside the window and continued to say, "The winter is still very long."

She grabbed the cup, and wordlessly sat down by the mahogany table, quietly sizing up the fourth prince.

Even with only the opening remarks Tilly felt that it wasn't something she could ever imagine her timid and cowardly brother to say. He had always appeared strong on the outside but was actually weak on the inside. He was always looking for the fastest way of escape, never wanting to face an issue directly. The Roland Wimbledon before her was completely different. He was trying to take the initiative of the conversation, and despite his soft and gentle tone, he completely showed the demeanor of a person fully comfortable in his place as a leader.

"Nightingale," Roland tilted his head.

"But Your Highness..." the guiding witch's voice came from somewhere within the room.

"It doesn't matter, she is my little sister."

"Very well," Nightingale was silent for a moment, then her body appeared, before she unhappily left the room.

"Now the only people here is you and me," he laughed a little as he returned to the table.

Tilly was silent for a while, "In the end, who... are you really?"

She thought that the other party would hesitate or pretend to be mysterious, never would she expect that he would answer her so quickly, "I am your older brother, Roland Wimbledon, Graycastle's 4th Prince." Then he laughed, "I know I changed a lot, but I'm willing to explain it to you slowly."

Tilly suddenly remembered what he had written in the latter. 'As for what let me make this decision, and what made me no longer indifferent to this as I was in the past, these small trifling things can be slowly discussed at a later opportunity.' It probably had been this sentence that prompted her to decide to come to this remote town.

She couldn't help but open her mouth, "I'd be happy to hear what you have to say."

The whole story wasn't complicated, but was very exciting. After Roland told her of his experiences after being given Border Town, Tilly discovered that her cup had long since been emptied. She let out a long breath, then reviewed his story once again. Simply put, a witch named Anna moved Roland, and through the saved witch, he became aware of the evil acts of the Church and the sinister lies they told the people. Then, with Garcia's assassination attempt it brought him to realize the dark side of the royal power, even when he hid in the corner of the kingdom he still would not be able to evade their viciousness, so finally he decided to change it all.

Even though this sounded somewhat dramatic, but with some difficulty, it could count as an acceptable explanation. However, there still remained the question about the strange knowledge, whether it's the steam engine or the guns, it's impossible that it came from a moment's perception and awareness.

"So, you are saying, that the ultimate cause of all this is the memories which suddenly appeared in your head?" Tilly asked.

“Indeed,” Roland said honestly, “I know this is hard to believe, but it’s a fact... After I luckily evaded 3rd sister’s assassination attempt, that was when I woke up from the coma and came to realized these things. If we say that meeting Anna was the impetus, then the content of the memories was the driving force behind my wish to change the status quo.”

Was it a witch? Tilly thought, the possibility of either replacement or control are both slim, Sylvie has already confirmed that the Witch Alliance’s abilities weren’t unknown, every day they would undergo a special practice, none of them have powers relating to those two areas, not even remotely.

The only possibility left was possession, she didn’t eliminate the possibility that they had this kind of ability, which allowed them through invade and occupy the body and obtain the other person’s thoughts. But this speculation is equally uncertain, no matter how father thought about Roland, he is undoubtedly one of Graycastle’s princes. Therefore, always wearing a God’s Stone of Retaliation was normal for him, and there were always knights and personal guards around to protect him, which made it impossible for a witch who has no hiding ability to get close to him.

But, even with such a witch, how can she possibly know so many things that are out of the ordinary? When she was a child, Tilly besides liking to rummage through the Palace Library, she also received teaching from several white-haired, erudite and multi-talented court mentors, but even they had never talked about using the power of steam and snow powder to replace animal power and swords.

So it seemed that his quirky knowledge had something to do with his bizarre encounters.

“How will you prove that you are indeed Roland Wimbledon and not just the part which appeared with those extra memories?”

Tilly knew that this question was quite rude, if he were to act like the former 4th Prince she knew, he would undoubtedly have exploded into a rage by now, flipped over the table and stamped out of the room.

“Because I still remember the matters which happened on the court,” the other party’s tone remained calm. “I think it is a person’s unique memory that distinguishes the essence of a person. If a well-known witch was to become exactly the same as you, with only her memories not the same, she would still essentially be another person. Even though I have a lot of strange memories, I do not remember where these came from. However, your weeping expression as you left me when I threw you onto the broken glass is still vividly embedded in my memory, so there is the proof.” He paused, “Of course... I haven’t had the time to apologize to you, but I still hope that it will not be too late.”

Tilly fell silent, the Roland before her eyes wore a clean attire and an expression of sincerity. As if to tell her that it was needless to doubt since it was all true. Obviously, no matter from where she looked at him, the new him was much better than the dandy Prince from before, but there were some doubts remaining within her heart.

“Truly... hard to believe.”

“That’s normal,” Roland said as if he had seen through her thoughts. “There are a lot of things which are unthinkable before you personally experience them. For me, I would never have expected my younger sister would have awoken as a witch, even concealing it from all the people within the palace.

However... As I've said at the beginning, this winter is still very long, we will have a lot of time to slowly come to understand each other."

It's probably the best solution, at the moment, Tilly nodded, "Then for the next few months... I'm sorry to be troubling you."

"Let me handle it, you'll love it here."

Chapter 328 Formal talk

After Tilly had left his office, Roland finally breathed out in relieve.

Obviously, when in front of a smart person, having to hold serious conversation while also talking complete nonsense created a lot of pressure. Especially, if you want to maintain a sincere and genuine expression. Fortunately, Nightingale's report allowed him to take a breather – Roland took the fact that the witches from Sleeping Island have all returned to the castle as an opportunity to end the conversation.

"How come you don't have any special feelings when facing your younger sister who's become a witch?" Nightingale said as she turned around to sit on the table, occupying a high ground to overlook the prince.

He rolled his eyes and ill-humoredly said, "Can't feeling strong pressure also be regarded as a special feeling?"

"I thought it was a touching reunion," Nightingale said, curling her lips.

"Previously I didn't have a good relationship with her," Roland sighed. "During the time we lived in the palace, I used to bully her. Later when we grew up we both became estranged from one another, so it was an unexpected pleasure for her to come here."

"Oh?" Nightingale said meaningfully, "It is unlike you to confront an unfamiliar witch alone, as I see it you are quite trusting of her."

That's because I didn't want you to see me lying, Roland decided it would be better not to answer, instead he refilled his cup and leaned back in his chair slowly sipping a mouthful.

"In short... you will come to understand it later."

Nightingale reached out, touching his lips, "You will tell me everything, won't you?"

"...Yes."

"I'll take that as a promise then," she laughed and disappeared.

Roland leaned back against his chair, recalling his whole conversation with Tilly, searching for any possible flaw – he had given her the "most appropriate" explanation that he could think of. Many years of work experience had told him, the more exaggerated a lie, the lower the possibility that it would survive speculation. Therefore, deliberately hiding one's clumsiness during childhood to save face, accidentally finding ancient books, or meeting a hermit who taught him were the kinds of lies that would be easily exposed as long as the other side kept on asking. Furthermore, in addition to being his sister,

the other side was also from a witch organization, thus every lie exposed before we form a stable relationship could bring on a heavy blow to our mutual trust.

So he chose to tell the truth about the parts that could be uncovered and explained the additional from a sudden appearance of new memories – even though it sounded incredible, but in contrast to an even more incredible thought of crossing over it at least did not have too many negative consequences and also couldn't be claimed to be false. If the latter event was to take place, it wouldn't be certain whether or not she could come to accept a complete stranger from another world.

As long as he insisted on his identity as Graycastle's 4th Prince there would be no way to deny it. Furthermore, Roland believed that all she had wanted was to hear an explanation personally from his mouth. Within his heart, he knew, that a good leader shouldn't entangle themselves with the past, instead the most important thing would be to move towards the future. The winter would allow him to show her the vast prospects that the Western Region held so as to ensure their cooperation, only then would this be seen as a successful first meeting. As for the relationship between her and him, there would be a lot of time to repair it in the future.

That evening, they hold a grand banquet in the castle hall.

Not to mention the commonly seen pepper steak, fried egg, and white bread there were also all kinds of liquor on display, sweet smelling fried bird kiss mushrooms, steamed dumplings as well as ice cream. With the desire to bring the taste of the dishes to a new level, he simultaneously introduced the concept of fancily arranged sampler platter. Placing small pieces from the main dishes on top of a big china plate and sprinkle it with soy paste, creating an excellent visual effect that entices everyone who sees it to reach out for it.

Crisscrossing their wine cups under the sparkling candle light, the dinner finally ended with a warm and lively atmosphere.

That was when the more formal talk started.

Within the living room in front of a burning fireplace, Roland and the members of the Witch Alliance sat in a long row of seats, while Tilly and the other witches of Sleeping Island sat in the opposite row. Maggie however, because of her sensitive role, had simply turned into her pigeon form and squat down on the chandelier above their heads.

Tilly took the lead and started the discussion: "I, in addition to wanting to help Border Town resist the invasion of demonic beasts, also intend to send back the first batch of five witches." She summarized Sleeping Island's current situation, "Next spring, Silver Moon Bay are going to send us a group of ordinary immigrants to the island, so we will have to rely on Lotus and Honey to prepare extra food and housing for them in advance."

Roland got a headache, if he wanted to resist the invasion of the demonic beasts the First Army would be enough. With the exception of nimble and extremely fast types of mixed species, there was hardly any situation which demanded that they send out witches.

But in the construction area, the role of the witch was irreplaceable. At the moment, the path through the mountains toward the new sea hasn't yet been opened, the dock was only halfway constructed and

he would still like to build additional cave dwellings for the newest batch of immigrants. Thus, he decided to ask, "Can you delay their journey for half a month?"

"I wish I could agree, but circumstances have changed," Tilly reluctantly shook her head, "We have already met with Sea Ghosts in the southern part of the Vortex Sea, which are fish type demonic beast. I suspect that this has to do with the advanced beginning of the Months of Demons. According to legends, the longer the Months of Demons is, the more aggressive and fearsome the demonic beasts will be. Therefore, they will have to travel as soon as possible, if we want to guarantee a relatively safe trip.

"They are not fit to fight."

"I know, that's also the reason why Breeze will escort the ship – her ability is very effective against mentally inferior enemies, we also don't intend to return in the same way we came. Instead, we'll be sailing northward along the coastline until we can reach Port of Clear Water. From there we will take the usual trade route to Sleeping Island. According to recently arrived messenger birds, there haven't been any demonic beasts detected on the routes between the Fjords and the Four Kingdoms.

Roland still had to make at least one final effort, "Uh ... So, besides Lotus and Honey, would it be possible for the other three to stay? Currently, they are only halfway through their Primary Education, so leaving now would be the equivalent to them giving up halfway..."

"Puff Haha," Tilly couldn't suppress her laughter, "It seems you are quite interested in them."

"..." he did not know how to respond to this statement.

"I would like to know how you are planning to use Candle's and Evelyn's ability?"

"Curing metal parts and brewing, the former can greatly improve the efficiency of mechanical operation, the latter well..." Roland slightly paused, "Wine is a very good thing, there are many other uses to it besides drinking."

"Well, on Sleeping Island they've always been worried that there wouldn't be an actual use for their ability, furthermore, they were also often..." Tilly didn't elaborate further, but Roland could already speculate that she was actually talking about discrimination. The same experience Mystery Moon had to face during her time with the Witch Cooperation Association. "I am very happy to hear that you want them so urgently to stay. Sure enough, every witch has their own unique and unmatched role, and it doesn't make the least sense that their ability would be meaningless." She looked at Evelyn and the others and asked, "What do you think?"

"I want to follow you, Lady Tilly," Sylvie stated.

"..." Candle touched her head, "Am willing to go anywhere."

"Lady Tilly, if you need me, I will go back to Sleeping Island," Evelyn fell silent for a moment before she continued to say, "Otherwise, I would like to stay in Border Town. I... there are still so many things that I hope to learn from Teacher Scroll."

"Don't be so nervous, I'm not forcing you to choose if you want to stay or go – it isn't a two choice question," Tilly smiled and shook her head. "I just want to know what you think about living in Border



Town. You can return to Sleeping Island at any time. The same is true for Lotus and Honey, it is unlikely that they will leave forever. I even hope to invite the witches from Border Town to come to Sleeping Island. We hope that through our efforts, whether it be the North or the South, in the future all witches should be free to live where they want. Don't you think so too, Elder Brother?"

Roland was slightly shocked, this was the first time he had heard her addressing him like this. Even within the memories of the 4th Prince, it was also more than a decade ago. He smiled and nodded, "There will definitely be a day like this."

#### Chapter 329 Clarion

After coming to an agreement, Roland cleared his throat and continued in a serious tone, "Next there is some news regarding the Devils and the ruins."

He informed Tilly about Border Town's recent discoveries within the Concealing Forest and behind the snow-capped mountain, "I'd intended to send witches and soldiers of the First Army to bring the trapped person back to Border Town, but the heavy snow arriving more than a month ahead of time has messed up my plan."

"That the Devil's legendary army was in such close proximity, and that there are still some people left within the ruins from more than four hundred years ago..." Tilly became dumbstruck in amazement, "I'm slowly starting to believe what you've told me..."

Anna looked at Roland and he coughed twice, "According to the scene we observed and the reaction shown, it seems that the Devils must have been behind the snow-capped mountain for many years already. I suspect that they are limited to the area covered by the red fog, and thus unable to continue their expansion toward the Four Kingdoms. So, for now I don't think that they will be a threat to Border Town. Within the next two years, I will set up a coastal warning point to monitor their movements." He paused, "As for the woman sealed in the remains of the tower, she might know the truth behind the Holy City Taqila and the utter defeat of the Church."

"I have the same thoughts," Tilly closed her eyes and pondered about it, "Is there any way to avoid taking a land route, could we perhaps reach it directly from the air? Ashes told me that you have a tool that can be driven by hot air."

"You want to bring her out of ruins now, in the middle of the Months of Demons?" Roland asked, full of disbelief, "The number of people which can board the hot air balloon is ten, or if we exchange it for a bigger one, we could perhaps expand the number of people to fifteen. However, no matter how many we are, if we encounter the Devils we are likely to suffer casualties. Furthermore, there is also the risk which comes from encountering roaming demonic beasts... it's too dangerous."

"If you only depend on the Witch Alliance, it will indeed be very dangerous," Tilly agreed, "But Shavi and Ashes are here now. With them the degree of danger will be reduced by a lot. According to your previous statement, the Devil's current attack patterns is throwing spears from a far off distance and using the same amount of strength as an extraordinary. If it is like this, then Shavi's invisible barrier can block several spears, while Ashes could suppress the enemy during close combat. Right now the Months of Demons is still in its early stages, so the power of the demonic beasts is still not that strong, if you want to go to the ruins, now would be the best opportunity."

Roland felt a little hesitant, the last fight with the Devils was also an air battle which had been to their disadvantage so if he wanted to fly over there he felt quite unstable within his heart. But the words Tilly had said also made sense. Sylvie's magic eye could ensure that they would discover the enemy first. Furthermore, as long as they maintained an altitude of 10 to 15 meters, flying only a bit above the tree-top, he had confidence that they could reach the ground before the enemy spotted them. Then with Nightingale's and Ashes' powerful offensive abilities, defeating a group of around ten Devils would easily be accomplished. Even if there were some who managed to slip through the net, the double protection of from Shavi's and Anna's shields should be able to assure the team's safety.

After irresolutely muttering to himself for a short period he asked, "Are you really sure you want to go?"

"I feel that this might be an opportunity to unravel the mystery," Tilly said frankly, "This year's advanced start for the Months of Demons and the Sea Ghost emerging from the Southern Sea Vortex is always giving me a bad feeling."

Roland's heart skipped a beat, this feeling he also knew quite well. The early start of the Months of Demons was unlikely to be abnormal phenomena caused by climate change, he faintly felt that it had something to do with the Devils and the Church.

"In that case, who will fill the ranks?"

"I do not know which witches Border Town will send, but I will be going," Tilly declared without hesitation.

...

As far as the eye could see snowflakes were dancing in the air under the gray sky, after repelling the last attack Mayne and Tayfun unhurriedly boarded Hermes' city wall.

Some of the snowflakes landed in the black and warm blood river flowing at the foot of the wall, diluting the thick blood as it melted. Fortunately, all this blood belonged to the enemy, while hundreds of soldiers from the God's Punishment Army stood straight along the wall and were waiting for the launch of the next wave of demonic beasts.

"Your Excellencies, Sir!" the shoulders of the Army of Judges who assisted the God's Punishment Army shouted while placing their fists on their chest. Most of their faces appeared to be somewhat young and tender, but their eyes also held two distinct emotions, fear and excitement.

"It seems that some of them are still children," Tayfun commented after reaching an open space and overlooking the wilderness, then he sighed and continued, "When I was their age, I was still milling flour for some nobles."

"The priority of the God's Punishment Army is to protect the New Holy City while parts of the Army of Judges that are more experienced are still caught up in Wolfsheart City cleaning up the last remaining evil elements. Those people are only recently promoted believers, they have never been on a real battlefield before," Mayne explained, "The snow has come too early."

Tayfun hesitated before he asked, "There isn't such a situation mentioned within the Holy Book?"

“The Holy Book is also only written by the Pope, so it’s unavoidable that there would be some parts that are overlooked that will appear,” the bishop said as he leaned against the ice-cold wall while overlooking the pile of corpses at the foot of the steep cliff. Ordinary demonic beasts would never be able to climb up such a steep wall, the only ones that could threaten the Holy City were the mixed species, “It’s fine as long as it can point out the general direction we need to follow. From the demonic beasts which have appeared, it can be inferred that there are still approximately ten years remaining.”

“Using two years to unify the Four Kingdoms and spending the remaining eight years to build up the God’s Punishment Army, by then the Church should have a large contingent of more than ten thousand people.” After stopping for a moment he went on to say, “Using the firm walls and Hermes’ terrain, we will stick to this plateau until the enemy’s strength reverses.”

“I’m old, I’m afraid I won’t be able to see that day come.”

“It’s unrelated to age, Your Excellency Tayfun,” Mayne said in a comforting tone, “There are many people who are unable to see that moment, like Allan, Stone, Liji...”

“And Heather,” Tayfun added.

“Yes, and Heather.” He nodded, “but in any case, there will always be people who will carry on our mission and continue to move forward.”

“Do not say such discouraging words,” the old man shook his head, but then smiled as he asked, “Wait, was Zero able to get a hold on the fierce snow powder formula? Did the Pivotal Secret Area already start their test?”

“Mortal’s toys aren’t of any help to the Church,” Mayne said full of disdain, “It may be possible to use snow powder to clean up a group of demonic beasts, but our real enemies are the Devils from hell. Used in an open area its lethality will be greatly reduced, if you want to create a force strong enough to break the Devil’s heavy armor, you are going to need a very large amount of it. In addition, besides the soldiers from the God’s Punishment Army there is no one who could go out and throw half a body-sized bag of snow powder over a great distance.

“It’s like that? What a pity.”

“If you want to beat the Devils, there is no time to play tricks,” Mayne said stressing each word, “Only by confronting them head-on will we be able to survive.”

At this moment, from the watchtower to the side of them came the sound of a long horn blow.

One long horn blow stood for an invading wave of demonic beasts.

“Let’s go back to the cathedral since there is going to be another fight soon.”

“Okay,” Tayfun nodded and turned around to go as the horn sounded again.

Woo-woo

Two long sounds meant that the wave of demonic beasts contained a lot of mixed species. Hearing this Mayne’s heart quickened, it was undoubted that the God’s Punishment Army would have to face a fierce battle.

But... why is it so fast? This is only the first month of the Months of Demons, ah.

However, just as the horn sound ended the third one already rang up. An oppressive and unbroken sound like the sudden clap of thunder, rolling over Hermes for a long time without subsiding.

Woowoo – woo –

Mayne almost couldn't believe his ear, looking at Tayfun, he saw that the other's face looked as shocked as he felt himself. Three horn blows stood for a very urgent situation, a situation at which Hermes' survival stood at stake! Even last time, when the demonic beasts were able to reach the outskirts of the cathedral, it wasn't a situation where the blows have reached that number.

What did the watchman see?

It wasn't long until Mayne got his answer.

Within the black tide of demonic beasts were two strangely formed enormous beasts. They possessed four thick fangs, four feet, and two hands. Their bodies were covered in pitch-black fur and one foot alone already possessed the size of a mixed wolf species. From afar, those two beasts looked like moving fortresses. With every step they took they left a deep mark in permafrost covered plains. If those demonic beasts which surrounded them were not avoided on time they would be smashed into the ground by their feet and turned into a pool of flesh and blood.

There were several records of them within the Holy Book, The Death's Herald, the Hell's Nightmare, the Devil's fangs... But what Mayne feared the most wasn't their terrible appearance, but what they represented.

Why? His mind was completely occupied by horror. Why are those terror striking monsters, which according to the Holy Book should only appear five years before the disaster already appearing at Hermes right now?

Chapter 330 Farewell

The next day, Roland bid Lotus and Honey farewell in the castle backyard.

Even though the two women didn't want to leave so soon, but when he heard that the Charming Beauty and its crew were still waiting at the beach he decided not to delay their departure any further. In this way he could show off his magnanimity, and keep from causing Tilly any further embarrassment. Putting himself into her shoes he had to recognize that even though she needed to finish their large scale construction on Sleeping Island first, the fact that they will continue to send the all important witches to Border Town still counted as a sincere gesture on their part. Since their situation was already like this he also couldn't be too demanding.

In order to to avoid a long journey through the snow, Anna and Wendy would be there to send them off using Cloud Gazer, in so doing they could easily reduce the travel time to reach the beach to thirty minutes.

"Thank you for taking care of us these past few months," the two witches said while bowing in front of Roland.

"It should be me thanking you," Roland said laughingly. "You two have made many contributions towards the construction of Border Town, so I have gifts I would like to give to you."

"G-gift?" Lotus said with her cheeks having turned slightly red from embarrassment.

While Honey touched her chest and looked over at Lotus' and then excitedly asking: "Will we also get them?"

Roland took two bags from Nightingale and handed it over to them, "Yes you can have them."

Unable to wait any longer, Honey opened the gift and pulled out a long white cloth, "Hey, what is this? It isn't a corset."

"Keke, it's a scarf," he stepped forward, took the fabric made of cotton from her before wrapping it around her neck, "This way, you won't need to be afraid of the wind and snow pouring onto your neck. Wrap it around a bit higher and you can even cover your ears with it."

"Hmm... nice and warm," the latter cried out with a contented face.

It was unsure whether this was an illusion, but it seemed that Lotus' face had become even redder.

"There's more," Honey said after having played with the scarf for a moment, she then took out a small box from the bag and asked, "Your Highness, is this also a gift?"

"Yes, open it and take a look."

"Wow, it is so clear!" She jubilantly exclaimed after lifting up the top of the box, "Lotus, come and take a look, you can clearly see for yourself!"

It was a small mirror embedded in a wooden box, a gift which was also available at the convenience market. In Roland's life experience, as long as they were women, there was no way they would be able to resist such a sparkling present.

Honey's voice, which was filled with excitement, immediately attracted the other witches, and so the Sleeping Island's witches clustered in a group. They used the mirror to look at their own appearance and couldn't help but show an undisguised love and envy towards it. After all, the image reflected by the mirror made using Soraya's reflective coating was far better than a silver mirror, which also allowed Roland to discover a new way he could bribe them.

After the gifts were all handed out and the hot air balloon fully inflated. The group boarded the basket and waved their goodbyes to Roland and the other witches. On seeing this scene, it seemed that now that they were about to leave town they have started to feel a slight bit reluctant to parting ways.

"I can't help but admit that this is indeed a good place," Tilly came over to him and whispered, "With a convenient water supply and comfortable rooms. It's very difficult to believe that in just one year you were able to transform such a desolate place into its current appearance."

"Do you regret it?"

"You mean that I've sent the witches to your town?" She laughed, "How could that be? As long as they can live a better life, how could I ever regret it? Do not forget, I too am a witch."

In the white garden, Tilly's smile was pure and beautiful, not a trace of color to be seen. If he had a younger sister like this in his previous life, he would have caused a 100% rate for turning heads if he were to bring her out. But Roland knew, compared to her identity as his sister, his actual relationship with her was more like a partner, a natural ally. From yesterday's decision he could already see that she wouldn't hesitate to take on personal risks to deal with any possible threats .

"Do you really intend to go to such a dangerous place?" Roland asked her, "Although you are an exceptional witch, in the end, your ability isn't suited towards fighting."

"Do not worry, it isn't as if I don't have any self-protection ability," Tilly said as she stretched out her hands, showing him the ornaments she wore. On the ring finger of her left hand, she carried a blue crystal ring, while on her right hand she wore a white silk glove with a red gem embedded in the back. To be honest Roland had to acknowledge that this collection looked a bit strange clothing looked similar to the asymmetrical mix and match style of dress used by artist of the later generations. He had been very curious about this since yesterday, but out of courtesy had kept from asking.

"It is a magic stone. This one, in particular, is the magic stone we found within the ancient ruins," she explained, "After putting your magic into it, it can display all kinds of abilities. For example, this ring allows me to fly like Lightning."

After she spoke, as if to prove her words, her feet lifted from the ground. As if her whole body had turned weightless, she stayed suspended in midair which had given Roland quite a shock.

A witch's ability can actually change through a magic stone?

He soon realized the significance this held.

If it was possible to order custom-made abilities in batches, a witch's work efficiency would increase drastically. For example, Lotus', if the Witch Union could have several magic stones with a copy of her ability the construction of the temporary residential area could be completed within a single day.

When Tilly landed back on the ground, she pointed at an open space with her right hand, and soon after Roland saw a bright light flaring from her fingertips. After hitting the snow it left an ankle deep bowl shaped hole which revealing the dark earth of the ground.

"Does this mean you can use both abilities at the same time?" Roland asked in surprise.

"No," Tilly shook her head, "Within a certain range, the magic stone allows you to use one ability. If I push magic simultaneously into two stones nothing would happen," she smiled, "Originally, I didn't intend to reveal this information to you this early on, but after our conversation from last night, I've come to think that I might have misunderstood you... The fact that you've honestly told me about what had happened in the ancient ruins, made me happy... but also a little apologetic."

"No harm, I can understand where you're come from."

"Oh that's right, there is still something I want to ask you, what is this corset Honey just mentioned?"

Roland almost choked on his own saliva, "Keke, I have no idea... maybe you should go and ask Sylvie or Evelyn about it."

"Well," Tilly shrugged, "It seems you still have some reservation towards me."

For some time, the Prince didn't know what to say.

With a wink, she said, "Let's not talk about this for now. Since last night I've had a problem I've been thinking something, if these sites really did belong to the Church why would they leave these magic stones behind? According to what happened to Ashes, it is most likely that the Church is raising their own group of witches. Thus, these items should also have the a similar importance to them. Even if they wanted to deliberately bury knowledge of the war after being forced to flee from the Devils, it wouldn't hinder them from continuing to use these stones, it just doesn't make sense."

"Does that mean the Church doesn't care about this loss at all?" Roland thought aloud, only to quickly reject his conjecture, "No, they should not be able to mass produce these magic stones, or it would have been completely impossible for the Witch Cooperation Association to flee. After all, if they had been able to fly, it would have been completely impossible to escape the Church's witch hunt."

"Indeed, I recall that I've found a very strange point when I looked through all the books in the palace library about the Church and their God... Not only does their historical records stop at around four hundred years ago, even their god's origin is somewhat vague. He has no name, no epic legend, except for propagating his omnipotence there is nothing more, no more details. Compared with the Three Ancient Gods, he appears to be a vague notion with nothing to it. With those two points together, I can't help it but feel that something is strange about all of this."

"What?" Roland's heart trembled with fear.

"It feels as if the Church just suddenly has appeared from out of nowhere."