

## Witch 721

### Chapter 721: Artillery Exercise

Ferlin Eltek was quite surprised seeing the parade of the soldiers of the First Army climb up the wall in order.

Known as the star knight of the Western Region he was naturally familiar with the training of knights, and knew how difficult it was to ensure that people kept order while marching in a group. Whether for knights or mercenaries, when they were under a Lord's purview, their numbers in each row would be no more than five, for if the horizontal line became too long, it would be very easy to become disordered, giving the audience whose seats were far away the sight of a messy eyesore.

In general, the difficulty of keeping order increased exponentially with the number of soldiers. But in this group, the number of soldiers was over 100, with more than 10 soldiers in each column and row, and all of them were in uniforms of the same color with bright ribbons diagonally across their chests, making them look like a moving square.

This visual impact gave Ferlin an unstoppable momentum, once the formation was maintained, the advantage of keeping a large group became most incisive.

This could also be seen from the enthusiastic response of the crowds around him.

"Look at the third row. There is my boy!"

"They're marching in such good order!"

"All of them look like one person!"

"If two armies are confronting each other on the battlefield, I'm afraid that the enemies will be frightened out of their wits just by seeing this kind of formation."

"Ha, I think they'll be fleeing just on hearing the name of His Majesty."

"What's the name of this song?"

"I don't know, but... I feel full of strength!"

"That's the effect made by Miss Echo's magic power."

"It's a pity that May couldn't witness this," Irene said, holding the arm of Morning Light. "If she were here seeing it, she'd surely have been able to reproduce the exciting scene in the drama."

"She's pregnant. Of course, she can't stand on the city wall in the chilly wind with you," Ferlin shook his head and said with a smiling face. "Rest assured that you'll definitely get another chance. I bet there'll be more and more activities like this in the future."

Both the review of knights and artillery exercises were the means for the lord to show his power. The current strength accumulated in Neverwinter was beyond everyone's imagination. There was no doubt that his Majesty was capable of conquering more territories. With such a troop, it would not be

surprising that he could even take all of the four kingdoms under his dominion when the time came. Demonstrations like this one would be absolutely necessary in order to overawe the people.

"My dear, would you like to join this team?" Irene asked abruptly.

"What?" Morning Light was a little shocked.

"I can feel it," Irene said, smiling at him. "Your heart is beating fast."

"Is it..." Ferlin exhaled a white breath. He realized that even if his father did not say the words at that time, he would not be a teacher for his whole life.

Sir Eltek was right. If he really liked books, he would not have decided to be a knight at the very beginning and would not have done his best to earn the reputation, the well-known Morning Light.

The army was the best place for him.

He wanted to join the First Army and become His Majesty's sword, to fight for the king and to play a role in expanding the kingdom's territory to an unprecedented scale.

Although His Majesty had said that he, a knight who had surrendered, would have no chance to pick up a weapon again, there were other ways to join the First Army, according to his father.

He wondered to what extent His Majesty's Adviser Department had developed now.

He watched the artillerymen entering the shooting positions as if he had seen himself in the future.

...

The music stopped.

This was an indication to be ready for the firing.

Van'er gave the order to take aim.

Six Longsong Cannons that were set at the widened area of the city wall dropped the barrels to point at the cages 300 meters away—a distance to which shells would keep flying straight to the target without falling. Because it was uncertain whether the demonic beasts' bodies would trigger the fuze, they must keep the muzzles lower so that the shells would hit the snow under the cages.

"My God, this one is so ugly." Nelson whistled. The mortar team he was in charge of was aiming at a large wolf-bear hybrid. The beast probably had felt a gloomy foreboding and was struggling to get rid of the shackles. The huge body crashed hard against the bars, making the cage shake constantly.

"Be serious," Van'er frowned and warned. "This isn't the usual training. Everyone is watching us."

"I'm a little nervous," Cat's Claw said, his voice a bit stiff. "Being stared at by so many people makes me want to pee..."

Many members at the scene shared the same feeling.

"Yeah, it's more uncomfortable than confronting the duke's knighthood before."

"If you miss the target, you'll be laughed at by all of the citizens."

"Just do it as you did in the previous exercise. No more nonsense!" Van'er shot Cat's Claw a glance, "Remember not to mistake the live shell with the headless shell. If something goes wrong, detention will be waiting for you. Now, load!"

After entering the loading process, everyone at the spot suddenly got busy. No matter how they felt now, they had been so familiar with the procedure after the long period of training that they would be able to complete it even with their eyes closed.

The loading of the 152-mm Longsong Cannon was much faster than the twelve-pound field artillery cannon. After all of the six cannons were ready, Iron Axe's voice of countdown was heard from the top of the wall.

"Ten, nine, eight..."

At the same time, the noise of the audience came to an abrupt end, as if everyone was waiting for the moment when the muzzles burst out flames and thunder.

But Van'er was unexpectedly calm in his heart. Looking at the demonic beasts roaring crazily in the cages, he recalled the days four years ago when his younger brother had died of famine and cold in his arms, when he had practiced day and night for eating one more egg, when he had fought the demonic beasts on the rubble-built city wall with pikes.

The changes that had taken place in recent years were vivid before his eyes.

"Five, four, three..."

He had only been an ordinary miner in the old street of Border Town. He did not make up his mind to stay in the Militia to defend His Majesty's land against demonic beasts until His Majesty had said to him, "I have faith in you. Keep it up." But even so, he did not expect things to come to this state today.

Van'er secretly turned his head and looked at the gray-haired man in the distance, Roland Wimbledon, who had made him calm. As long as His Majesty stood behind him, no matter what kind of enemy stood in front of him, he would not retreat.

"Two, one! Fire!"

"Fire!"

Van'er waved down his arm abruptly.

At the same time, six Longsong Cannons spewed out long flames and green smoke, accompanied by the huge boom that turned the snow on the wall into flying white mist. Within a blink of an eye, the shells shot across the distance of 300 meters. When people heard the deafening bombarding bang, the shells had dropped in front of the hybrid demonic beasts.

The compressed fuze triggered the double-base gunpowder in the warhead, blasting away six mud pillars in a flash and smashing the wooden cages—the beasts' seemingly sturdy bodies were like paper swirling in front of rampant waves. The flakes of wood mingled with hot and bloody flesh were flying straight up into the sky. Meanwhile, intestines and broken limbs scattered all around.

The crowds suddenly burst out fanatic cheers.

## Chapter 722: Resplendent Blaze

According to Roland's plan, the firing would not stop once it had started.

The first, five rounds of the volley turned around 20 beasts, in the first row, into ashes. Then, in the free shooting time, the rapid firing, emptying ammunition, paired with the ignition of black powder, created a grand roaring momentum.

Thus, as the firing continued to ring out, the atmosphere created by this scene ushered in a new upsurge. The frequent blasts created a cloud of almost endless dust that made the surrounding 1,500-foot radius look like an impending doomsday. Occasionally a ricocheting stone would crush a cage and if the beast survived it would flee, choosing to run away, instead of rushing to the wall.

Fear had overridden their bloodthirsty instincts.

However, only a few would escape this land of the dead.

The strong waves radiating from underground had already begun to rupture their guts, deafen their ears, and blind their eyes. Most of the fleeing beasts did not make it far before they fell back to the ground, where they were devoured by the continuing explosives.

"This is nothing when compared to the war against the church," Andrea shouted while covering her ears, her face full of pride. The witches from Wolfheart stared at Andrea, eyes wide with shock. "At that time there were only two cannons, but we still had hundreds of flintlock gun and iron cannons of a smaller sizes. The enemy wasn't demonic beasts in cages, but the men of God's Punishment Army who were fast and strong. At the moment when the battle was most fierce, the bullets were flying all around the entire battlefield. If anyone were to poke their head out from the cover they would definitely get themselves killed. That was a real battle."

Amy looked shocked, "Really?"

"No wonder the church lost the battle." Hero sighed, "It's beyond any human being's skills."

"Aren't you afraid of seeing such a scene?" Broken Sword looked admirably at Andrea.

Andrea smoothed down her billowing hair during an interval between the explosions and said, "Of course, you'll become accustomed to it after you've seen more. I have witnessed the whole process of a battle and personally killed two soldiers of the God's Punishment Army!"

She had completely forgotten that she had been as just shocked and astonished by the scenes of battle when she climbed up the city wall for the first time. It seemed that she now regarded Neverwinter as her second home and she couldn't even control her feeling of pride when she was talking about its weapons.

Most of the witches only stood there watching the show, however, Phyllis observed the events more carefully.

When the demonic beasts in the first row were bombarded, she didn't care too much—Mad Demons from this distance would also threaten the soldiers on the wall with their spears. When the common

people were confronted with the bone spears, that dropped from above as violently as a Mighty Storm, how long would they be able to hold their defenses against the enemy even though their weapons, the so-called Longsong Cannon, were dramatically more powerful?

However, when they turned their fire to the second row of cages, her expression changed.

Was that the common king's reasoning for arranging the beasts in this manner? So he could gauge the cannon range? The last row of cages was over 3,000 feet from the wall. If the Longsong Cannon was able to hit that area, it meant that the cannon had a shooting range that rivaled that of the Siege Beasts', with a much higher lethality.

The Siege Beast had always been the most troublesome demon weapon for the Union. This weapon has a striking distance that is farther than any mangonel or ballista. Which made the witches have no choice but to rely on Transcendents to lead the Blessed Army to charge into the enemy's position. In this way, even if they succeeded in crushing the Siege Beasts, they would not be able to avoid a large number of casualties. However, if they had a long-range striking weapon like this, it wouldn't be impossible for them to successfully defend the Holy City of Taquila.

Phyllis wondered if this was the ultimate weapon of Neverwinter as well as the reason why Agatha had such faith in Roland.

After she asked Ice Witch this question, she just shook her head and smiled.

"Setting the target 3,000 feet away was only to meet the needs of the audience... because a target further away would affect the view of the exercise. According to His Majesty, the shooting range for the new cannon was over six miles, ten times further than its present range," Agatha turned her head to whisper in Phyllis' ear, "In other words, it could hit somewhere out of the manipulator's sight."

Ten times? Phyllis was astonished. Although she did not quite understand what foot and mile meant, a distance that was ten times that of the current range could cover some of the demon's outposts. Did that mean, if the cannons were placed on the wall of Taquila the shells could directly hit the demons' lair?

How was that possible?

How could they ensure that the weapon would hit an enemy that's out of our view?

Agatha noticed her abstraction and continued to elaborate, "But, to hit a target so far away is not easy. It requires a lot of calculation and improvement of the aiming equipment, and I've heard that the astrologers are working on it. It appears that His Majesty intended to write a shooting range list from which they will be able to calculate the location where the shell will hit on the basis of the pre-launch data. Through this method, the shell should hit the enemy precisely, even if it is thousands of feet away."

"Are you sure?" Phyllis clenched her teeth. "Doesn't that mean that as long as we make a few more cannons, the demons won't even be able to get near the city wall?"

"Yeah, His Majesty said that this kind of strike would be called a scrubbing..." Agatha shrugged and said, "probably a name pulled from the idea of 'scrubbing' dirty things on the ground. It's a little hard to pronounce but it sounds very appropriate."

Phyllis hesitated for a second before whispering close to Agatha's ear, "Er... Can you make the cannons?"

Agatha looked at her for a moment and waited for a new round of explosions to pass before saying, "I know what you are asking. I did provide some of the materials in the shell, however, it takes way more than two people to make it."

"Even witches?"

"Far from enough... Do you know how many common people work in the chemical plant of Neverwinter? Nearly 2,000 people and the number is still growing!" Agatha sighed, "But, what they do there is no more than make explosives from acids, greases, and gases, while the production of a cannon is a completely different system. The necessary mine and smeltery have more than 3,000 people working in them, the processing plant has over 1,500 workers, and corresponding technicians to maintain and operate the finished product. How many common people do we have that could work for us even in the Taquila age?"

Phyllis became silent. After Arrieta and Starfall City fell, one after the other, the human beings' territory retreated to the corner of the plains with a plummeting population. By the time Taquila became the last shelter for all people, the number of the common people controlled by the Union was a mere 30,000 to 40,000. However, they were playing the role of supporting the combat witches, logistics, and keeping the city on course etc., it would be impossible to find enough people to manufacture the Longsong Cannons. If Agatha didn't lie to her, even the witches of Taquila at that time were unable to make it, let alone the ones who had been struggling to survive in the underground maze.

Suddenly, the booms from the cannons stopped.

The demonic beasts, in the first two rows, had completely merged with the snow, turning into puddles of blurred flesh and blood. An unearthly silence hung over the wall and no one there spoke. Everyone was staring at the furthest cages as if they were waiting for something.

Phyllis looked quizzically at Agatha, who just smiled back at her.

"Key is coming."

Before Agatha finished speaking, a bright light radiated from the ground, glimmering like a shining sun!

Chapter 723: Power to Shake the Sky

There was no sun in the Months of Demons, which was something that had not changed for thousands of years.

The sky was always like a gloomy dark curtain where the snow was invariably flying and swirling in the wind. People barely noticed the difference in the weather other than the intensity of the snow. Like the weather today, that only one or two occasional snowflakes drifted down might be regarded as a sign that the snow had stopped. Most of the time, the white snow would swarm the entire sky, the heavy fall of snow would float and cover the whole land at all times.

Therefore, this white light was particularly eye-catching under such a background. The moment it broke out of the earth, the glow brightened the surrounding snow in an instant, as if the entire gray world was lit up slightly.

Phyllis could not help but hold her breath.

Her gaze was fixed on the light in this moment when everything seemed swift and yet slow.

As the light dimmed quickly and turned into an orange fireball, the ground 1,000 meters away from the wall was rooted up!

This was not an illusion. She clearly saw the flat snowfield rising upwards and forming a soft arc as if the land under the snow was not made of soil and rocks, but made of water that could randomly change its shape. At the top of the arc, the red fireball was rising as if it wanted to get rid of the shackles of the earth.

It succeeded! The next scene happened almost in the blink of an eye. Smoke and clouds of dust and flames erupted from the ground and tore the curved surface into pieces! The fireball skyrocketed, along with billows of black smoke rising tens of meters high, spreading a high wall that almost obscured the original light of the sky in Phyllis' vision. Both the cages and demonic beasts turned into ashes in front of the fireball. By then the earth-shattering roar came to her ears, making her tremble and her heart thud.

"Boom! Boom!"

Suddenly, the earth shook!

Phyllis subconsciously clutched Agatha, to whom she moved her lips and wanted to say something but was blocked by the coming airflow. The people on the city wall also reeled from the blowing and did not come to themselves until a long while later. They, stunned by this scene, had forgotten to cheer and applaud. The only thing they could do was look up at the rising wall of smoke.

"Is this... Key?"

Swallowing, she had never thought that common people had mastered such a terrible force nowadays. Even a Senior Demon could not survive in such a turbulent underground fire.

The red sun was dimming, leaving only a few scarlet flames looming in the dark smoke, but the billowing smoke had shot up to midair as if it connected the clouds. The specks of dirt and demonic beasts' pieces that had been blown up into the sky now dropped like a rain of blood and dirt in the surrounding snowfield.

Looking at this scene, Phyllis finally understood where Agatha's confidence came from.

With this earthshaking power, common people would even have the opportunity to contend with brutal demons.

But she still could not understand why Roland Wimbledon would call it art.

"Was the explosion art?" She wondered.

...

Retnin was completely intoxicated by the cold wind that was filled with the smoke of gunpowder. The boom of the blast thoroughly awakened his desire.

This was chemistry!

This was the real chemistry!

He looked to his companions beside him, the former Chief Alchemist of King's City, Rayleigh, along with Archer, whose eyes, he noticed, were shining with the same light, which was irreconcilable with their aging looks. He vaguely remembered that last time he showed this kind of radiance was when he was enrolled in the Alchemic Workshop as a disciple at the age of 10.

Retnin felt that he finally found the goal to which he would devote his whole life.

That was to attract everyone's attention like the sun,

only chemistry could help him achieve this goal!

Unfortunately, he was nearly 50 years old. How nice it would be if he had seen this scene 20 years earlier and understood the real power of chemistry ahead of time, which was not flames and fumes given off from the burning of rough snow powders but the purer light and heat.

Fortunately, he finally knew it.

Looking at the stunned astrologers beside him, Retnin could not help smiling.

Since then, the lore of Sage would only record one name, while the other would soon be forgotten completely.

He wanted to let everyone experience the power of explosions, to make them praise the greatness of chemistry!

He could not hold back his urge to start more experiments. He had so many chemically explosive plans in "Intermediate Chemistry" to try.

"What are we waiting for?"

"Let's apply for a lab from Kyle Sichi."

"That's what I'm thinking."

The three alchemists spoke out their ideas and suggestions at the same time.

Retnin gave the column of smoke that lingered in midair one last look and then walked swiftly towards the laboratory.

...

"Now do you understand why I want you to stay in Neverwinter?" Edith fumbled Cole's head.

The latter was silent for a long time before asking in a husky voice, "For this?"

Clearly, he was really frightened by the formidable force of the explosion, with his face still being pale and one hand clutching his sister's arm.



"For no one can withstand Roland Wimbledon." Edith said slowly, "The aristocrats, though holding their titles and lands, mean nothing compared with this kind of power. He would make a kingdom in any way he wants it to be. When he ordered the abolition of the nobility, those aristocrats should have handed over their lands and rights. But it's a pity that most people still haven't realized it."

Although she regarded it as a pity, the Pearl of the Northern Region showed no expression of pity, rather she showed a feeling of gloating.

Cole Kant pouted his lips. "We... are aristocrats too."

"But we're no longer titled aristocrats." Edith said, taking her younger brother to the edge of the wall. Now that people were gradually leaving the city wall and the area had become much more spacious, Cole could clearly see the dark burned ground far away as if it had been ploughed severely. Edith continued to say, "Aristocrats are respected for their wealth and power, not the pieces of land under their feet, which means the nobility won't truly disappear. Just like this plain, whether its surface is broken or neat, snow-covered or grassy, its nature won't change. Neverwinter is the starting point of the new era. If you want to be an aristocrat in this era, you have to integrate yourself into the new rules set by His Majesty."

For a moment, Cole felt he had seen and not seen the point at the same time, but he still nodded under his sister's commanding manner accumulated over the years. "I'll stay here and no longer argue for going back to the Northern Region."

"That's right. Don't you think it's far more interesting in exploring new rules and new forces than running pieces of immutable land?"

Cole looked up at her sister's pretty profile.

Her long hair was blowing, like the silkiest satin, in the northerly wind. Her long, narrow eyelashes tilted up, accented with her elegant curve of nose and lips, giving a sight of unspeakable beauty.

The only thing that puzzled him was the flush on Edith's face, something that women would have when they were excited.

"Is my sister interested in the skyrocketing column of smoke?" Cole doubted.

Cole turned away his eyes, hiding his doubt deeply in his heart.

#### Chapter 724: A Higher Level of Power

After the exercise, Phyllis once again came to Roland's castle accompanied by Agatha.

When they entered the office, she noticed that Roland Wimbledon wore the same expression as he had last time. He did not show any self-satisfaction, as if the exercise was nothing but an insignificant matter in his eyes.

However, Phyllis felt that the importance of this common person sitting behind the mahogany table had apparently grown a lot. She unconsciously addressed him with honorifics. "Your Majesty, please allow me to ask you a few questions before contacting the Taquila witches."

"Go ahead." Roland nodded.

"Can the weapons you demonstrated be mass-produced?"

In Phyllis' view, if the plan of seeking the Chosen One did not work out well, the war against demons would undoubtedly last many years. If the production of this weapon really required nearly 10,000 common people and the output could not meet their needs, Neverwinter would still be faced with a hard war.

By that time, she would be able to strive for more positions for the Taquila survivors.

After all, a force of about 100 God's Punishment Warriors controlled by witches was definitely formidable. When the Longsong Cannons could not stop the Siege Beasts that came from all directions, Roland would have to rely on them to break through the tight encirclement.

Roland smiled and gave the answer. "The first thing I must point out is that the Longsong Cannon isn't merely a defensive weapon. It may look too heavy to be carried by manpower or livestock, but for some vehicles, carrying them is no longer a problem. In fact, with a little improvement, it can turn into a weapon that can be used for both offense and defense."

"Ve... Vehicles?" Phyllis repeated. She had heard from Agatha earlier that His Majesty often said some awkward-sounding new words, most of which were straightforward, and that if she did not understand, she could ask directly. Generally, the king would be very happy to answer the questions.

As expected, Roland rubbed his hands and said, "It would be anything that can carry the cannons, such as, the simplest... three-masted big sailing ship, which can be regarded as a vehicle."

"But suchlike big ships can only sail in the Swirling Sea."

"I'm just giving you an example. There will be a free-wheeling vehicle on land in the future. Neverwinter has already embarked on developing such a vehicle, though it can do much more than simply carrying a cannon."

"An equipment that is capable of carrying such a heavy weapon as well as moving freely on the ground? But from the king's statement, it seems not to be prepared for cannons specifically." Just as Phyllis wanted to ask some more, Roland went on, "As for the output, after a new generation of processing tools is commonly used, I believe the cannons will cover all the walls of the border in a year or two."

Phyllis secretly gasped at the answer. "Covering all the walls of the border in a year or two? Even Mangonel and Ballista cannot be produced in such a large number in such a short period of time."

"If so, it will be hard for the Taquila survivors to play a role here."

To Phyllis, it was an answer that disappointed and satisfied her at the same time. Perhaps their positions would be lower than other witch organizations, but, it was always good to have less casualties in war.

However, in light of her previous experiences, she decided not to question him but rather to change the subject.

"I understand, Your Majesty. My second question is, I noticed during the artillery exercise that the last explosion was not caused by the Longsong Cannon, I'm wondering if it's your most lethal weapon?"

When she asked, Phyllis noticed a strange smile appear on Roland's face before he answered. "Judging from the technology we've mastered, it can only be counted as the simplest one."

"The simplest... one?" she said in astonishment. "You can make a weapon that could create a more violent explosion?"

"There's no end in the development of explosion." Roland shook his head. "The current level of weaponry Neverwinter possesses can be viewed as the second level, the third level will be better. At that level, it won't be impossible to burn a city into the ground in one go."

Phyllis was completely startled. She instinctively wanted to consider this statement as nonsense. "Crush a city in one go? No common people or witches can have this kind of power. Only deities can do it." But when she saw Roland's peculiarly shining eyes, she found it hard to deny what he had said.

In the end, she had no choice but to ask in a low voice, "What kind of weapon is that?"

Roland did not give a direct answer. He drank some tea before saying slowly, "What does the scene of the last round of explosion look like in your eyes?"

"Is this about my doubts?" She closed her eyes and a moment later said, "Like a sunrise."

If the smoke and dust were taken as clouds, the rising orange fireball would undoubtedly be the sunrise at dawn.

"Yes, it's just like the red light of the early morning sun. But the third level of weapon is the real sun." Roland raised the corner of his lip, as if he was narrating a thing made by God, "You can't look straight at it because it'll burn your eyes, neither can you come too close to it, for the glittering light will burn you all over. Its core temperature can turn stones into gases, and the air billow it generates is strong enough to smash houses."

The description made Phyllis shudder. She was unable to distinguish whether what he was saying was an overestimation or the truth. "How can we make it?" she asked.

"We have to accomplish two epic tasks. One is called resplendent radiance, while the other is called the distance to the sun, and..."

"Your Majesty!" Agatha interrupted him, frowning.

"Please don't talk nonsense at this time." Nightingale's voice also came to Phyllis' ears.

"Epic tasks? Resplendent radiation?" Phyllis found herself unable to understand even one word and Agatha was shrugging helplessly.

"Ahem, in short, it's very complicated, so I need more witches to push forward the research and speed up the technological development in Neverwinter." Roland coughed a little. "Of course, the things you found in the ruin may be helpful, so I hope we can start a deeper negotiation as soon as possible."

With a complicated feeling, Phyllis looked at the king, who was a common person, before taking off the ring on her finger. "As promised, I'll contact Pasha and other survivors for you. When I crush this Five-Colored Stone, they'll sense my location, but if you want to talk directly, I'm afraid it'll take one or two more days... I don't know when Pasha can get a magic core ready."

"Can we have a conversation anywhere?"

"Yes, but if the condition permits, a spacious place will be much better."

"Well then, you can crush the Magic Stone in the hall, that will make it a little formal." Roland said before he turned to Agatha and said, "You take her there for me."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

After leaving the office, Phyllis took a deep breath.

She had done all she could do, next was to wait for the response from the rest of the survivors.

Chapter 725: Bet And Promise

The effect of the live-fire artillery exercise exceeded Roland's expectations.

He had indeed got what had paid for. In the last round of explosion, he had ignited 70% of the total black powder reserves and had got an explosion as intense as that of the roadside bombs in the modern world where he had lived before. While the soldiers had been burying the powder, he had had a sudden thought and had mixed some aluminum powder with the gunpowder. As a result, the fireball of the explosion had become even more bright. The moment it had shot out of the ground, it had looked a bit like the rising sun.

With the success of this explosion, the First Army's explosives had been officially upgraded from black powder to chemical gunpowder. As for the nuclear explosives, he could only fantasize about it at this moment. There was quite a lot of uranium in the earth's crust, which was even more than silver and gold. He could have simply asked Lucia to collect uranium, but he was unable to prevent radiation damage from nuclear fallout or manufacture qualified lead plates.

The most important thing was that he didn't know whether Nana could heal radioactive diseases, namely, the biological deformation in genes caused by particle ionization.

So unless he was left with no choice, Roland did not plan to start the "Bright Radiation", a task as epic as the mythical stealing of fire.

After all, it was too dangerous.

After settling the issue of the Taquila witches' meeting, he invited Tilly into his office.

It was time to discuss the bet with her.

Roland poured her a cup of Chaos Drink, cleared his throat, and said, "About the hunting competition...."

"Even though Agatha is a member of the Witch Union, her team didn't represent the Neverwinter city." Tilly seemed to have already guessed Roland's thoughts and narrowed her eyes. "Brother, our bet can only be considered as a draw. I won't accept it if you intend to count Leaf as part of the Neverwinter team."

"Of course, our bet did end in a draw. But I still want you to stay," Roland said honestly.

His straightforward attitude made Tilly stutter, "Ugh...."

"So, how about we count it as a double win?" This was the first time that he saw Princess Tilly's speechless expression, which was actually rather adorable in his eyes. "I'll use one-third of the profits of Chaos Drink as a fund to reward anyone, a witch or a common person, who contributes to the Neverwinter city. And you can take up residence in the Neverwinter city, either in the Witch Building or somewhere else together with the Sleeping Island witches."

As they started discussing business, Tilly soon regained her focus and coughed as if nothing had happened, "Only one third? We had initially agreed on half of the profits."

"Because I estimated that even one-third of the profit would still be a shocking amount. It'll be enough for one lifetime." Roland explained, "The rest of the money will be used for the Neverwinter city's infrastructure, including the witches accommodation and necessary facilities, as well as salary distribution. In general, it'll be used for all the needed areas. If you need more, you can directly take it."

"Even if I spend all the earned gold royals?"

"Of course, they would be wasted anyway in the warehouse if left unused," he replied naturally. In the future, when the metallic currency was no longer able to meet the productivity needs, it would be the time to start using credit currency. When that happened, the gold royals would become just a number for the government, which would print out the money directly. Given that, storing metallic money was not important for him.

Tilly smirked, "Sounds like a good deal."

"That's why it's called a double win," Roland said, "don't you think?"

She sighed and said, "Since you already spoke your mind so clear, I can only agree with you." Even though she acted like she was reluctantly agreeing, her smiling eyes could not hide her real feelings.

Roland could not help but smile too. He had only seen a look of suspicion on her face one year ago, but now she put on a relaxed smile. It seemed like she finally believed that he could bring a stable and comfortable life for the witches.

"Oh right." After some casual chatting, he wanted to change the topic and focused on the retrieval of the Southernmost Region. "I plan to integrate the Sand Nation's domain into the Kingdom of Graycastle this coming winter. Their traditions and power inheritance methods are very different from the ones in the Four Kingdoms. Thus, I need your help to completely conquer it."

Next, Roland described to her the laws and holy duel ceremony of the Sand Nation.

"I don't have a problem with Ashes joining the duel." Tilly said after thinking for a while. "But why do you want to integrate the desert? Since the Kingdom of Graycastle was established, no ancestor had ever shown any interest in that land."

"It only looks deserted, but the underground fire that has never been extinguished for the past dozens of years and the plain covered by white salt are all proofs of the hidden treasures of that land." Roland waved his hand. "If I'm not mistaken, Southernmost Region will be an indispensable part in the future development of Neverwinter."

"In that case, I'll explain to Ashes." Tilly did not ask for more details but nodded in accordance.

Nowadays, the trust between them was slowly increasing. It was obvious that in the future, the Witch Union and the Sleeping Island witches would have a close relationship.

Roland was very pleased as he thought about that.

...

After sending his sister away, he immediately called Echo.

The holy duel could only earn the right of speech for him, but it was not a long-term solution. He did not just need a clan's right to live in the Iron Sand City, but numerous Mojin people that would follow him. For this, he had to become the legendary great chief.

Roland did not have the time to lead the army personally, so he had to find a representative.

As the princess of the Osha clan, Echo was a key figure in persuading the Mojin people.

"I wonder if Iron Axe has discussed with you about returning to the Southernmost Region?" he said directly, "this winter the First Army will enter and station in the Iron Sand City, and I wish you'll go there on my behalf."

"No....he didn't mention anything," Echo looked surprised, then bit her lips and said with a sad expression, "Your Majesty, don't you want me anymore?"

Hearing her first sentence, Roland was happy to know that Iron Axe understood that any military action was the kingdom's secret and had not mentioned anything about it even to his own clan member. However, her last words almost made him choke. Even though he knew what she actually meant, still, those words could be easily misunderstood. At the same time, he felt a cold breath behind him, and Nightingale's hand firmly pinched his arm, "Of course not, this is temporary—once I become the great chief of the Sand Nation, you can return with Iron Axe to the Neverwinter city. I won't force you if you don't want to."

Hearing that, Echo relaxed, "I understand, but the holy duel won't be enough to subdue all the Mojin people."

"Of course, I've another plan," Roland laughed and then slowly described it to her.

"This...." Echo was shocked and expressed her disbelief. "Can this... really be done?"

"Definitely, I'm the king of Graycastle, I give you my word," he said emphatically.

"By the name of Three Gods, the Sand Nation will never forget your kindness." She was not hesitating anymore, but instead she knelt and bowed respectfully, "Echo is willing to complete this task for you."

"Very good," Roland stood up to help the Mojin girl who had suffered a lot to rise. "I'm counting on you."

In this way, the preparations for the retrieval of the Southernmost Region were completed.

Chapter 726: Tide of Demonic Beasts

In the depths of the maze-like cave, the tremor above their heads grew louder and louder.

Pasha knew that they were quickly approaching with unstoppable numbers.

She stretched her tentacles into the soil and rose above ground, where she "saw" everything that was happening outside the mountain—the dark mass of demonic beasts were rampaging between the mountains and all of the entrances to the maze ruins were blocked by Fearful Beast of Hells. The demonic hybrids behind them were furiously tearing apart the flesh and bones of the beasts until they could open up a space between them—they had no choice, or else they would be crushed to death by the rest of the demonic beasts behind them at the cave entrance.

Despite the desperate struggle of the hybrids, the passage would soon be blocked once again by the flood of demonic beasts and the only way to get through was to repeat the previous actions. This had resulted in a bloodbath in front of the entrances before the demonic beasts even launched their attack at the core area.

Chaos ensued underground as the Wilderness Beasts crawled around within the different layers of the earth. Their head full of tentacles could easily sense the weaker parts of the ground, and the oil-like substance on its skin allowed it to burrow through the ground effortlessly, carrying within its long tube-like body a large number of demonic hybrids. Once a monster like that broke through the defensive line, it would often incur a massive amount of casualties within the ranks of the defenders.

Even some mutated Flying Beasts had appeared in the sky, but they could only hover in the air as they were unable to enter the underground ruin.

This was an unfathomable experience. She did not directly witness the scene unfold in front of her, but whether it was the shrieks coming from above the mountains, the tremors within the layers of the earth, or the sounds of rock and soil mashing together, they were all accurately transmitted into her mind through the thousands of tentacles, forming countless vivid images.

This was the largest scale invasion of the demonic beasts since the beginning of this winter.

Pasha withdrew her limbs and descended to an even deeper layer below.

From time to time, some loose clumps of dirt would fall from the ceiling and smash into the braziers at the sides of the passage—she did not need the flames to see every single stone in the ground, but those who had turned into God's Punishment Soldiers did need them. She extinguished the flames in the braziers on her way back when everyone had already moved to the maze hall.

"How's the situation above?"

As she entered the hall, she heard Alethea's voice in her head.

"The closest Wilderness Beast to us has reached the third layer," Pasha transmitted her words to everyone's consciousness, "How's the situation below the maze?"

"There is nothing unusual," Alethea replied, "I only saw some charred black corpses."

Pasha's perception and understanding of fighting had changed dramatically since her body's transformation. The originally flat world had suddenly become three-dimensional, and since their enemies were able to move freely in the ground, the survivors had to keep an eye out for the situation beneath them—As long as they were not standing at the end of the abyss, they should not ignore the deeper hidden threats.

Fortunately, a lava river flowed endlessly beneath the ruin, which sealed the larger part of the bottom of the maze and thus spared them a lot of effort. Up until now, there has not been a demonic beast that was not afraid of fire.

"How long before the Instrument of Divine Retribution is ready?" Pasha looked at Celine.

"I don't know. Half an hour, maybe one hour?" the latter replied anxiously from the magic core's direction, "I've tried my best, but the damaged position in area 43 has just been repaired and Lady Eleanor needs more time to calculate the core!"

"Don't worry. They won't arrive that fast," she calmed her, "The bigger demonic hybrids will be blocked outside of the cave entrances and we'll only have to handle the smaller ones."

"You're right. We can just treat it as daily training," Elena said, "as long as we're here, the demonic beasts will not be able to enter the hall."

"I don't think it may have been the best idea to retrieve the relic of gods so early. Wouldn't it be better to have let Starfall City consume a bit more of their strength?" Someone asked.

"They would still have to defend Hermes. But without the God's Punishment Army, those common people are worthless." Alethea refuted her.

"The walls can effectively block the demonic beasts, and the hot oil and mangonels can also give those beasts a good beating. We would just need to stay hidden in the Pivotal Secret Temple and wait for a break in the city's defenses to retrieve the relic."

"There are many traps hidden under the cathedral. What if the enemies accidentally triggered such a trap? We would have been buried alive, which is still nothing compared to the relic falling into the hands of the demons. No matter what, we can't afford to risk it."

"Stop bickering," Pasha interrupted, "Since we've already brought the relic back, we no longer have a choice but to continue with the plan. Have you already forgotten Lady Natalya's words before the attack on the Queen of Starfall City?"

After she spoke, the others were immediately silenced, all quietly agreeing with her.

During the age of Taqila, scenes like this were rare. The low-level witches had to obey their superiors unconditionally, and anyone who broke the rules would receive severe punishment. The Union's largest-ever conflict was the one between Natalia and Alice. Before Natalia cut all ties with Starfall City, she said those words to all her followers and then initiated the sneak attack on the Queen of Starfall City.

Since that day, the survivors of Taqila no longer held rankings in mind, and thus internal disputes became more frequent. However, Pasha did not mind this change at all—compared to the previously rigid system, she actually preferred an organization full of energy.



Just as the others changed the subject and started to discuss ways to block the demonic beasts, Pasha suddenly received an unexpected signal from one of her tentacles!

A violent tremor sounded through the earth as if a heavy object experiencing free fall crashed into the ground without any resistance. It quickly broke through several layers of the maze, and is now fast approaching the depths of the hall!

How can this be possible?

The ground was densely packed with soil and stones, not allowing any large movements and even a Wilderness Beast would take at least half an hour to drill through a layer. How was it able to move so fast through the ground?

Pasha quickly moved more of her tentacles to the direction of the movement—the more tentacles she used to watch an area, the more "pictures" she would receive.

Then, her heart sunk.

A horizontal crack of six to seven miles had suddenly appeared in that area, splitting the ground into two. It looked like a long chasm that stretched all the way to the darkest depths. A wild beast was just crawling down the soft soil along the hill, tumbling down straight towards the hall.

"Prepare to fight" Pasha warned at full volume to everyone through their consciousness, "At the direction of the magic core!"

Suddenly, while everyone was still in shock, the ceiling of the main hall exploded into pieces, and a long-necked Wilderness Beast slipped down through the gap, covered with scratches and bruises, emitting a sinister dark blue light due to the influence of the magic core. It had sustained massive damage from the crash, but even so, it completed its mission with its dying breath.

The moment the beast fell to the ground, several hybrid demonic beasts tore out of its belly and lunged towards the nearest victim, Celine.

Chapter 727: The Instrument of Divine Retribution

"No—!" Pasha screamed at the top of her voice.

Right after Celine took out the tentacle out of the Instrument of Divine Retribution and knocked two demonic hybrids down, she was bitten by another demonic beast. Her cumbersome blob-like body instantly cracked open. Scales and gray body liquid gushed out and splashed all over the place. Several sneaky mutated wolf species even crept up her coarse skins and clambered to her head, in an attempt to bite her main tentacles on the top.

The other witches all unsheathed their swords and came to her rescue. Springing up like a streak of silver light, Elena was the fastest one. She struck a demonic hybrid who came to block her way and slashed it in half. Afterwards, she dashed into the crowd of demonic beasts and slew fiercely. The beasts' blue blood spilled behind her. Apparently, these monsters, which scared common people so much, were as impotent as normal beasts in front of these God's Punishment Witches who were as

powerful as Extraordinaries. Even in the start of this fight when the beasts had still been in their prime, they had apparently not been in a prevailing position in terms of speed or power.

As more witches joined the battle, demonic beasts were slaughtered one by one. After the short chaos came to an end at last, Pasha withdrew all her tentacles and rushed to the center of the hall, heart in her throat.

Unlike a God's Punishment Witch who could easily switch her body. They, unfortunately, were stuck in the blob they had entered without an option to switch to a new one. Once their bodies were on the brink of shutting down, they would have no choice but to merge with Lady Eleanor.

Pasha was completely satisfied with her fate. After she had resolved to follow Lady Natalya, she was prepared to sacrifice herself anytime. But Celine could not end up like this. Among all the survivors, she had done more research than anybody else on the magic core. If she was merged by the central carrier, nobody would be able to reboot the Instrument of Divine Retribution until a considerable amount of time. It would be perilous for everybody in the Months of Demons when danger constantly lurked around.

"Are you OK?" asked Pasha anxiously, who landed next to the blob covered with wounds and scratches.

"Well... not bad." Celine's answer relieved Pasha instantly. "I'll be fine as long as the holes in my body are blocked. The problem lies in my tentacles. Several of them are broken and it's awfully painful."

"You shall find yourself lucky to still be able to sense pains... I yearn to feel them again." One voice complained.

"Exactly. If Phyllis hears you say that, she'll be jealous. Poor Phyllis. She can only take solace spiritually now."

"Don't say that. She was sent to serve ordinary people for the sake of Taquila." Elena frowned.

"She's now called No. 76, isn't she? I wonder how the plan of the Chosen One goes at the moment."

"It has been only a short time. The Union no longer dominates the whole continent these days. It'll take us at least another two or three years to complete the mission since we can't even reach those hidden witches that easily."

"Or wait until the Army of Demons besieges and defeats us at the arrival of the Bloody Moon." Another voice put in.

"Damn, do you really want to say that like we don't know?"

Everybody burst into laughter at this remark.

"Shut up, all of you. We're still in danger." Alethea grunted. "What should we do? There's a hole in the ceiling. If there's one fallen beast, there'll be another. Shall we split up and leave some of us here at the bottom of the cave?"

Pasha contemplated for a while and made an objection. "No. If the fallen demonic beast fights with the witches who stay here only, then that won't be a problem. What if they turn around to attack the outer

defense line? In that case, people who guard the entrances will be besieged. Even if we're as strong as God's Punishment Warriors, it'll still put us in a very difficult position."

Elena gave an approving nod. "I agree with Pasha. We'll be easily split up and surrounded. By then, we'll have nowhere to retreat. I bet it would be better for us to stay close together than separate. Let's gather at the center of the hall to guard the relic and the core. Once the Instrument of Divine Retribution is repaired, we'll all be able to stay alive."

"I agree."

"So do I."

"At any rate, this sounds better than being bitten by a demonic beast from the back."

"Then let's do it." Pasha swayed her tentacles. "Abandon the bottom floor and focus on the defense of the magic core."

That meant they would have to confront the hybrid demonic beasts that swarmed in at the center of the hall. Without a doubt, there was going to be a fierce battle ahead of them. Fortunately, strong, gigantic Fearful Beasts of Hell and flying species that no defense could effectively ward off could not penetrate the maze; otherwise, the situation would be much worse.

Pasha felt a little distressed. The number of the demonic beasts was astonishing, but they God's Punishment Witches were not possessed of incessant physical strength. If the Instrument of Divine Retribution could not be repaired in a short period of time, Pasha feared that they could not hold up for very long with so many monsters swarming in.

If she had known this would happen, she should not have allowed Celine to continue with the test of the cores in the Months of Demons, at least not this most important one.

An hour later, demonic beasts appeared at the bottom floor of the maze, and the battle officially began.

All the witches fought at their best. Beyond a doubt, the result of this battle would determine whether human beings were able to survive. Pasha also joined the fight. She drew lava from the lava river and sprayed on demonic hybrids' heads. Scorching, slimy red water set the monsters' furs afire. Flames flared out. The air was heavy with a burning smell.

In spite of this, the monsters still continued to swarm in and darted toward where the relic was located. The God's Punishment Witches soon formed a wall of flesh and blood to stop them. For God's Punishment Witches, as long as their skulls were not injured, they would never truly die. As such, the battle was a bitter one. Some witches were terribly bitten, but they still managed to chop off their enemies' legs and rip them open while struggling on the ground.

Just at this critical moment, Celine's thrilled voice reached everybody. "The core calculation is completed! The magic power mode has switched to the foreign species annihilation mode. The Instrument of Divine Retribution is ready to go!"

"Pasha, I'll take care of the matter here. You go activate it now!" Alethea ejected a mouthful of lava and forced one of the demonic beasts nearby to retreat. She rushed to the front to cover Pasha.

Among all the survivors, Pasha's key was the biggest and strongest among the keys that could activate the instrument. It was second only to Lady Eleanor's.

Pasha nailed her main tentacle into the slate and sprang up. In a second, she was next to the Instrument of Divine Retribution. She stuck out all her tentacles and tightly wrapped around the spindle-shaped core suspending in the air. Instantly, her magic power streamed from her body, and the gleam of the instrument frame started to become increasingly bright as well.

Pasha could sense her magic power gradually condensed into a strange, semi-transparent polyhedron at the center of the spindle. The polyhedron looked very complicated, with numerous facets and edges, almost ineffable. Pasha realized that this was the core to annihilate foreign species. It worked the same way as the magic representation of Senior Witches, except it was much more powerful. When the ghostly black-blue light turned blinding pure white, the frame of the spindle opened abruptly and lit up the center of the hall, making it as bright as day!

"Right Now!" Celine yelled.

Pasha ordered the other witches to apply their abilities. A pale blue lightwave immediately escaped from the core and rippled around the hall. Within a blink, the lightwave reached every corner of the hall!

Chapter 728: A Surprising Communication

When the lightwave went through her body, Pasha felt a queer pulling force disquiet the little magic power left in her body, as though the magic power was going to be hauled away.

The magic power deprivation only lasted for a few seconds before peace was restored. In the meantime, the hall also fell silent as the magic power was tranquilized.

Through the short tentacles on her back, Pasha could see that the hybrid demonic beasts in the area reached by the lightwave all stiff like a statue as if they had been petrified. They then fell to the floor without uttering a sound.

It was evidently the most efficient massacre. Nothing, not even soil, rocks or brick walls, could possibly stop the wrath of heaven from advancing. Pasha could imagine what the upper floor of the maze looked like even without actually seeing it. There should be piles of hybrid demonic beasts lying dead like swarms of insects. Their magic power, which was their lifeline, would disperse in no time. Without the support of magic power, their mutated bodies would immediately lose the ability to move.

Of course, there would be a few less mutated ordinary demonic beasts with meager magic power surviving the slaughter, but these unintelligent monsters could no longer pose a threat to the relic.

This time, Celine had finally managed to repair the instrument in a timely fashion.

Pasha pulled out the tentacle breathlessly. She looked at Alethea and said, "Go check the upper floor." Then she came to Elena and asked, "Are you holding up well?"

Elena was covered with black and blue blood, half of her arm gone, her hair drenched in sweats as though she had just been dragged out of a river. "I'm fine. Everyone's alive."

Pasha breathed a long sigh of relief.

Looking around, she saw the witches who were still able to move were in a defense mode with their shields in their hands. As to the exhausted ones, they all sprawled across the floor, in hopes of recovering their strength as soon as possible.

Although they had just undergone a fierce battle, they did not look weary or despair by any means. Instead, they all grinned and waved at her, appearing to be pretty relaxed. Apparently, everybody shared the same thought. They viewed every battle as their last one. Even if they had to devote everything to Taquila, they did not regret a bit.

The scene almost brought Pasha to tears. She felt a gust of warmth slowly crept into her heart like a hot spring.

Every witch was equally important. Over the past 400 years, no new witches had joined them, and they had developed an inseparable bond among each other. Nothing could be better than hearing that everyone was alive.

"I have to change to a new body though." Elena sighed. "It took me a long time to find this one. I don't know if there will be any new bodies stronger and more good-looking than this one."

"..." Pasha did not know whether to laugh or to cry. It was definitely not a good time to discuss this kind of matter. She tapped Elena's head with her tentacles. "Anyone else needs to change their bodies?"

"Five or six, I reckon." Elena counted with her fingers. "Betty got her stomach cut in the battle, while Isa was burned by lava when she was covering Alethea. Her entire body was gone except the head. The others either lost an arm or a leg like me. They've been transferred to reserve their souls."

"So you decide to first pick a body you like before transferring?"

"Of course. As I can't feel anything now, I should at least pick a body that meets my taste," Elena answered while twitching her mouth. She sheathed the bloodstained giant sword and carried it on her back, but she soon fell to the ground after stumbling a few paces. "Gee, this damn body."

God's Punishment Warriors could not feel pains or get tired, but they knew when their bodies were shutting down. Even if they were spiritually animated, their bodies of flesh would become extremely weak as though it had got out of their control.

"Let me take you there." Pasha scooped up Elena with her tentacles and strode to the chamber next to the hall. That was the room where all the God's Punishment Warriors from Hermes without a commander gathered, from whom the survived witches would choose their new bodies. "I saw some good-looking ones among the new warriors."

"Wow, you also care about that?" Elena studied Pasha with some interest.

Pasha coughed. "Don't you forget, I'm also a witch like you."

After all the wounded received treatment, Alethea and Celine brought one piece of good news and one ill. The good news was that the demonic beasts in the maze were practically all dead and that all the flying species hovering outside had fled as well. Therefore, there would not be any attacks on a big scale in a short period of time. The bad news was that two parts of the Instrument of Divine Retribution broke

down, which might be attributed to the hasty manner in which the new core had been constructed. In conclusion, they were not going to be shielded by the instrument in the following week.

The bad news made Pasha uneasy. "If an activation like the one today can bring damage to the core, then how is instrument supposed to cope with the activation done by the Chosen One? Does it mean that it can only be used once?"

The more complicated the Key was, the broader the effective area of the wrath of heaven was. The effective area generated by Pasha's activation could only cover the whole maze, which was about a radius of several hundred meters, way too limited to defeat demons. By the time the instrument was filled with magic power, both she and the instrument would have been destroyed by a spear thrower. If the Chosen One activated it, however, she could spread the lightwave somewhere at least 10 miles away, making the Instrument of Divine Retribution the most powerful and lethal weapon against their enemies.

Celine said drily with a look of resignation, "we don't have good quality materials that could sustain magic power, save some fragile bone ware from the relic, so it's perfectly normal that they don't meet the core's standard. The instrument is, after all, the deities' product. If only the Quest Society still exists. We can use as many golds and silver as we want and don't have to mend it every time we use it."

"Anyway, don't test it again this winter. I don't want to go through such drama every day." Alethea complained.

"Well, we won't have such an opportunity anymore... What?" Celine's words caught in her throat. "Hang on."

"What's the matter?" Pasha asked.

"Look at the phantom instrument." Celine glided to another smaller magic core with the help of her main tentacle attached to the roof. "The sheen of the core has changed. The Five-Colored Stone is broken!"

"What?" Both Pasha and Alethea exclaimed with a start. A sense of evil forebodings prevailed them.

Only when Phyllis had to contact the maze would she break the magic stone. It was very unlikely that she could find the Chosen One within merely a month or so. There were two possibilities: one was that Phyllis encountered some trouble and had no choice but to turn to the maze for help. The other was that... the ring had been destroyed by somebody. Either was not considered to be good news.

"Can you locate her?" Alethea questioned in a low voice.

Celine inserted her tentacles into the core. "In the southwest direction, about... She should be in the territory of the Kingdom of Graycastle, close to the entrance of the Fertile Plains."

Numberless thoughts flashed across Pasha's mind. "The Western Region of Graycastle. It looks like that Phyllis has reached the destination of this trip. What could then force her to break the magic stone? Has she exposed herself by accident, or rather—witches in the new era keep a hostile attitude toward her? Can it be... No, it can't be." Pasha shook her head, trying to put these ideas behind. Most likely Phyllis had run into some difficulties.

"What are you going to do?" Alethea looked at her.

Pasha said ponderously, "turn on the phantom instrument a day later as planned."

This was the shortest time within which they could manage to have the instrument ready.

If the Magic Stone was broken by somebody with malicious intent, they would probably be exposed to ordinary people earlier than they desired. Nevertheless, in any event, Pasha would not abandon Phyllis. They were the last surviving witches from Taquila, who shared the same fate and destiny.

Chapter 729: Recasting the Broken Sword

"Welcome to the Witch Union."

Wendy unrolled the contracts on the desk and said to the witches from Wolfheart happily, "sign after you read the pledge on the back of the contract and then you'll officially become a member of the union."

They should have gone through this procedure earlier had Princess Tilly not suggested a hunting contest. Wendy did not care about who the winner would be, but she had been concerned about whether all the preparation work for the hunting had been completed. On the very day of the contest, she had been restless. Every minute had been torturing for her. Due to her concerns, she complained to His Majesty for quite a while and the subsequent cannon exercise further postponed the matter. To her surprise, however, Annie, who was always the more self-controlled one, ventured to see her first.

"Wendy, don't you usually test our abilities first?" Amy asked.

In the ten days after their group had arrived in Neverwinter, this airy, dainty little girl had won everybody's affections. Due to her innocent character, Amy soon established bonds with the other witches. She now felt very comfortable calling Wendy "sister".

"We normally test your ability after you sign the contract," Wendy answered in a soft voice. "If you have any questions or concerns regarding the terms of the contract, please don't hesitate to ask me now."

"Alright!"

Out of the four witches from Wolfheart, Amy was the only literate one. So Annie, Broken Sword, and Hero all sat around her to listen to the terms while exchanging their thoughts on the matter.

Wendy studied the murmuring witches attentively. She recalled the day when she had signed her contract.

At first, she had thought the terms were a little too generous to be true and they were very likely just an empty promise through which the Prince showcased his benevolence. The terms would probably be changed completely shortly afterward, or there would be another set of implied rules that actually regulated the witches' activities. But as she soon discovered, she had been totally wrong as the basic frame of the contract had gone through very few modifications in the past two years. Thinking back on it, Wendy believed that she had made the greatest decision in her entire life.

"Wow, one gold royal for us each month!"

"Can we buy whatever we want?"

"A paid vacation... Is it true?"

"Witches are entitled to terminate the contract in the event that His Majesty fails to fulfill his obligations to provide safety, food or accommodations... Is this really not a lie?"

Wendy answered all their questions with a smile as they asked the questions that she had done so herself. She pretty much knew exactly when the four witches would utter an exclamation of surprise as she had been equally astonished by the contract when reading it for the first time.

In granting the witches freedom and acknowledgment, His Majesty had given them what they desired most and the fate of the Witch Union had been intertwined with that of Roland Wimbledon's ever since. Wendy believed nobody in the union would ever abandon His Majesty, even in the event of a crisis in which Roland could no longer shelter or support them.

Such a bond was not explicitly expressed in the contract, but was much stronger than any plain words or language could describe.

However, she could also foresee that these thoughts and feelings of contentment would gradually diminish as newly awakened witches would have a completely different living environment. It would be a time where there was no threat from the church and no hostility from their relatives or their close family members. With that being the case, new witches would naturally feel less grateful for the new life than old witches did.

Following the terms came the pledge and the signature line.

There were no mandatory rules of any kind in the pledge. That part only stated that Roland and the Witch Union should act with honor and utmost good faith as it was totally voluntary to join the union. After the four witches read and signed the contract, Nightingale pinched Wendy to confirm to her that they had signed it with a genuine intention.

"Now, we're sisters." She hugged everyone happily.

The Witch Union now had four more members.

...

The ability test location was outside the Witch House and could be found at Leaf's "Yard Forest."

Annie was the first to take the test and Wendy had learned a lot about her ability beforehand from Amy. Although Annie could increase the temperature, she could not create fire like Anna as only her palms turned warm. During the earlier stages after Annie had awakened, the best she could do was making an object as warm as a torch. After entering her adulthood and her ability had consolidated, she could heat up ironware until it glowed red. In addition to ironware, she could also melt lead and bronze.

During the entire process, Annie looked upset. Wendy could tell that she did not have much confidence in her ability. Wendy fully understood why she felt this way because Annie had once been rejected by the Bloodfang Association. In fact, Wendy had seen many witches like Annie who seemed to only have



"useless" abilities. For example, Mystery Moon and Echo were once deemed "useless". Yet no matter how stupid their abilities appeared to be, they all eventually found a suitable position in Neverwinter and put their abilities to good use.

"A great ability." Wendy encouraged her. "The machining plant in the industrial zone would love to have you."

"Re...really?" Annie replied in surprise, "Even if I can only warm up my own palms?"

"Of course, and on top of that, the furnace area and chemistry lab would also be glad to have you. You'll certainly become a busy woman in the future." Wendy wrote down several advisable positions on the notebook. As far as ability assessment was concerned, King Roland had a better insight into each witch's ability. Wendy knew she was not the perfect person to do the evaluation and often recorded her thoughts and ask His Majesty to review them. In this way, she could, little by little, improve herself and thus do a better job in the future.

Her ability was not as powerful as most sisters and her grades were not the best either, and yet His Majesty entrusted the Witch Union to her. She dreaded failing him.

Annie stepped aside, looking doubtful. The second one to take the test was Amy.

Wendy felt reluctant to conduct a full assessment of her ability because Amy actually had to hurt herself in order to showcase her power even though self-healing sounded very appealing. The only good thing about Amy's ability was that Amy did not need to worry about the negative impact of magic power bite as she constantly received minor injuries and used her power all the time.

After a brief interview, Wendy noted down the position of a healer. It appeared that Amy's ability could only be used for healing.

The same applied to the third witch, Hero.

Since she could only transfer diseases rather than offer treatment, the only place she could work at seemed to be the hospital. Wendy remembered that the so-called plague was caused by microscopic creatures and thought that Hero could potentially help Lily conduct research on microbiology. With this in mind, Wendy marked Hero's name with a circle. She believed once Hero received universal education and gained a basic understanding of Natural Science Theoretical Foundation, her ability might experience some changes.

The last one was Broken Sword.

Unlike the previous three witches, the silver-haired witch had never shown her ability to Yorko or Phyllis. With this being the case, Wendy had never heard anything about her power.

"You can go ahead now." She nodded toward Broken Sword.

Broken Sword took a deep breath and closed her eyes. As she summoned her magic power, her body started to glow and radiate. Soon she was surrounded by a blinding, flaring light.

Wendy squinted her eyes and stepped back a few paces. Judging from Broken Sword's performance, Wendy judged that she was stronger than any of the other witches from Wolfheart.

When the light dissipated, Wendy gasped. She could not believe her eyes.

The silver-haired witch had vanished into the thin air. In the snow, where her feet had just been, stood a strange-looking sword.

Chapter 730: News from the Mountains

"This is... your ability?" It took Wendy quite a long time to recover from the shock.

Annie answered, "she can't hear you. After Broken Sword becomes a weapon, she'll be completely cut off from the outside world. Only when you hold her can she regain her senses through you."

"I didn't know it worked this way," Wendy thought. She held up the hilt gently after a moment of hesitation. In a second, she sensed another mind in her head. The blade acted with her as one as if it had become a part of her body. Meanwhile, Wendy also felt her sight and hearing improved a lot. She was full of energy and strength.

"Wow, this is..."

"Co-existence." Broken Sword's voice popped up in her head. "When you hold me, you'll gain all the strength and senses I have." There was a hint of regret in Broken Sword's voice at this moment. "The sad thing is that I've been always weak since I was a kid, so what I can give you is very limited. Even if I'm fused with you, I can't be of much help."

Wendy now knew that it was Broken Sword's ability that made her feel powerful.

Wendy held up the weapon and studied it carefully. The hilt felt warm and soft like a living thing. The shape of the blade appeared weird. It was at an arm's length but was as slim as a finger. The front part was flat and the part close to the hilt round. It looked more like a magnified needle than a sword. If taking a closer look, she could see dense stripe patterns on the blade, as though the sword were tied up with numerous fine threads.

It reminded Wendy of Broken Sword's distinctive silver hair.

"How long can you maintain the sword shape?"

"If I don't constantly switch back and forth, I can be a sword as long as you like."

It seemed that Broken Sword's ability worked the same way as Maggie's. Only the transformation would consume a large amount of magic power.

"Maggie? Are you talking about that giant pigeon?"

Wendy did not realize what had happened until a moment later. She was a little uneasy to learn that Broken Sword could read her mind when they were combined together. There was always something she did not want anybody to know.

"You seemed to be a little perturbed... What's this? A cloth strap?"

"Nothing." Wendy put the blade back to the ground immediately and looked to Annie. "Ahem, can anyone merge with Broken Sword?"

Annie inclined her head. "Technically, yes, as long as she's willing to accept that person, even if he's just an ordinary man. However, in that case, Broken Sword will simply act as an extremely sharp and deadly weapon. Only witches could demonstrate her real power."

"Witches?"

"Yes." Annie seemed to perceive what Wendy was thinking and replied placidly, "By the way, the connection between you and Broken Sword doesn't mean that she can read your mind. As long as you don't concentrate on your thought, Broken Sword won't know what you're thinking."

"I see." Wendy managed to calm herself down and once again reached the hilt.

"Did I say something that upset you? I'm... sorry. I won't recklessly ask you such questions again." Broken's Sword anxious voice came to her head at once.

"No, nothing..." A question suddenly flashed across Wendy's mind. "What will you see if I put you down without notifying you?"

"It'll be pitch-dark. I can neither hear anything nor sense anything like I'm floating in the air."

"It must be terrible to be deprived of all senses," thought Wendy. At this thought, she tried to sound as friendly as possible. "It's me that has to make an apology... Don't worry. I won't abandon you at random anymore."

Broken Sword appeared to be struck. She responded a "yes" in a soft voice at last after a long silence.

"Right. Annie just said that only witches can demonstrate your real power?"

"That's right. If I just fight as a normal weapon, I'll also get hurt when the person using me strikes too many blows. But witches could sharpen the blade or expand its attacking range by filling it with magic power. In that case, I'll be able to stab enemies without even touching them."

Wendy started to apply her magic power to the blade as Broken Sword had instructed. The silver steel was instantly obscured by a thin layer of white light that stirred like milky fog. In the meantime, she felt the magic power in her body was decreasing rapidly. Apparently, she could not keep things going like this for very long.

Urged by Broken Sword, Wendy swung the long sword at a branch of an olive tree. A gust of air streamed from the tip of the sword and cut the twig in half brusquely.

"This is... wind?" Wendy asked in surprise.

"The magic power you put into the sword will more or less reflect your strength. I didn't expect you're a combat witch." Broken Sword was also a little astounded. "If Annie holds the sword, her power range won't exceed the length of the sword."

"I see." Wendy somehow thought of Anna's Blackfire. What would happen if Anna gave the sword a full swing with all her strength? It would probably be an earth-shattering explosion as intense as the Sigil of

God's Will that summoned thunderbolts. Nevertheless, Anna was the most crucial witch in the union and also the beloved one of His Majesty's. It was very unlikely that she would partake in the war personally.

As to the other combat witches... Wendy contemplated for a while but could not find a perfect match. Therefore, she put a circle next to Broken Sword's name as well and decided to let His Majesty determine which one Broken Sword should pair with.

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Roland put down the quill in his hand and stretched himself when he heard a high-pitched whistle from the dock.

The whistle blew thrice, one long and two short. Its sound reverberated across the whole shipyard. That was the signal that commanded the army to get ready for the journey.

After the preparation for the war was completed, the expedition corp of the First Army spent the whole morning boarding the boat. Accompanied by the roar of the whistle, the concrete boat carrying the first batch of soldiers departed the city of Neverwinter and officially commenced her voyage for Fallen Dragon Ridge.

There would be more boats transporting supplies and ammunition later. Indeed, the battle to retrieve the Southernmost Region would not start until both new recruits and veterans assembled at Fallen Dragon Ridge.

But at least, he had taken the first step.

Roland glanced at his desk covered with draft plans of the internal combustion engine. As the second generation power source that had fully replaced steam engines, internal combustion engines had played an irreplaceable role in the development of industries. They had even, to some extents, changed the course of history. Whether it was the simplest piston compressor, the more complicated combustion turbine or the latest jet, they were all powered by internal combustion engines. Roland could confidently say that internal combustion engines had, at one time, dominated the entire industry, until they were later substituted by electric motors.

Beyond a doubt, as one of the most significant machines in the history of time, internal combustion engines would definitely benefit Neverwinter a great deal in the near future. The oil project at Blackwater in the Southernmost Region was pivotal to the whole program. If they could, by any chance, extract fuel oil, the subsequent industrial development would be a matter of course. If they, unfortunately, could not, he would then have to consider alcohol as a substitute. In that case, the industrial expansion would be greatly limited even with advanced technologies.

Just at that moment, Agatha pounded the door and entered the room.

"Your Majesty, Taquila's witches have gotten back to us."