

Witch 791

Chapter 791: A Coming Crisis in the Dreamland

Phyllis asked in surprise, "What's this light?"

"I don't know. It's probably to send magic power back to this world." Roland shook the dust off his hands. "We have to leave this place as soon as possible. If someone sees us here, we'll have trouble."

"But, isn't this guy our enemy?"

He explained, "Yes, he's our enemy, but in this age, not everyone has the right to kill him or any other nefarious murderer. A special organization and its professional staff are in charge of arresting and punishing these bad guys." As for Fallen Evils, Garcia had told Roland that the martialists with hunting licenses granted by the association also had the right to kill them. In fact, these licenses not only allow the martialists to kill any suspected Fallen Evil but also gave them the right to kill any Awakened who probably harbored evil intentions. Roland believed that if this secret was made public, it would inevitably spark a public outcry.

"What a strange age," Phyllis commented.

They walked out of the KFC and found it was less chaotic. Seeing the Fallen Evil leave in a sudden, all the people still stuck in the McDonald's felt relieved.

Roland soon saw Zero dash toward him while pushing through the crowd.

She looked worried. Her hair band had slipped off, her long white ruffled hair tumbling down to her shoulders. Some people around her tried to make her stop, but this little girl managed to elude them with adroit movements. When she finally reached Roland, her anxious look yielded to a joyful smile.

However, the smile lasted for only a few seconds. She quickly straightened her face and shouted angrily. "Why did you come out so late? Even a tortoise runs faster than you, uncle!"

A flush rose to her cheeks because of the recent exercise and she panted heavily. Looking at her, Roland could not help bending over to touch her head. "Sorry to make you worried."

Zero gritted her teeth and glared at him. "Who was worried about you? This is her first time to visit this city. What if the crowd separated her from us?"

Despite what she said, the little girl still willingly accepted his touch.

After that, Roland spent a lot of efforts explaining to her what had happened to them and why they had come out so late. He made up a story to explain what had been dragging their feet, and Zero finally calmed down after hearing that they had been affected by the Fallen Evil's attack and had nearly lost the chance to escape.

Fortunately, they had a smooth, happy journey after the attack. Roland took the girls to shop clothes and then to have dinner at a hotpot restaurant. As a unique cuisine, hot pot featured a strong flavor and various ingredients. More importantly, it was relatively inexpensive. He ordered a lot of potatoes, starch

noodles and lotus root slices, which could easily make them feel full. By doing so, he could still afford this meal even if they overate.

Phyllis' behavior here was no better than her gluttonous actions back in the KFC. With constantly watering eyes, she kept moving her chopsticks to gorge herself with these spicy, tasty food. Roland was not sure whether she was too moved or was simply burnt by the spicy flavor. At the end of their meal, she even picked up the pot to drink some red, oily soup, making all the people around gape at her.

They went back to the tube-shaped apartment building at 9:00 pm. When they walked up to the 8th floor, heading for Roland's apartment, they unexpectedly ran into Garcia.

She stood in their way with a long face, giving them a considerable pressure.

Roland thought, "Has she been here waiting for me since I hung up the phone?"

His lips flinched. In embarrassment, he tried to explain to Garcia, "Look... I did hang out with my relative—"

She interrupted directly, "So, can we talk now?"

Her tone was quite sharp, making Phyllis frown. After a burp, the ancient witch said, "Please mind your attitude. He's this world's lor—"

Roland hurriedly stopped her and said to the girls, "Ahem, it's fine. You go home now. I need to talk with her first and I'll be back soon."

He had been worried a lot that a proud person like Garcia would have flown into a rage and never wanted to meet him again since he had told her such a tenuous excuse and hung up the phone. Anyone being stood up like that would naturally explode with anger. However, beyond all his expectations, Garcia had still waited here for him. Given that, he thought the association might be really short-staffed.

He followed her into Room 0827. Instead of inviting him to take a seat first, she turned around and asked directly, "Have you thought it all over? Or is this... an excuse you made up to reject joining the association?"

She gazed at him, her eyes glaring as if she had wanted to see through his mind.

Roland shrugged and then walked to sit on the sofa. "Do you have any water? Ice water will do."

At this moment, he thought he saw blue veins throbbing at her temples.

Hearing this, Garcia took a deep breath and then said through her teeth, "I'll go to get you some."

"Thank you."

Roland took a sip of ice water and slowly asked, "I've got a question. I've seen a growing number of reports about Fallen Evils recently and even ran into a newly awakened one in the street today... Does the association have trouble?"

Garcia knitted her eyebrows. "Have you been somewhere near the Green Valley Park today?"

"You know it?"

"Yes. Someone called the police, but it's the association's job to take care of these things. All the martialists close by received the news from the association and I was one of them."

"That monster..."

Garcia said in a deep voice, "It was dead when we got there, and its Natural core was gone. Someone acted faster than we did."

Roland pretended to know nothing about the truth and asked, "Who?"

"I'm sorry, I'm not allowed to tell you that." She shook her head. "In fact, I shouldn't tell you anything about this incident. It's the association's secret. As for your first question, yes, we did have trouble. The Erosion of the alien world is accelerating, and our world will soon face a major crisis. "

"The Erosion again..." Roland quickly captured the keyword. "What kind of crisis?"

"No one knows. Maybe our world will be destroyed in this crisis. Or, all of us will lose our minds and become some monsters. That's why the association needs more people to stand out, fighting against the Erosion. It's the whole world's crisis and has nothing to do with gender, races or nationalities. Everyone who has awakened with the Force of Nature has to shoulder this responsibility!" At this moment, Garcia significantly raised her voice. "As martialists, we may get killed in the fight against the alien world's Erosion, but it's our duty to do so! I can understand if you feel afraid and hesitant. But think about it. If we refuse to fight, who else has the power to protect our world?"

Roland fell silent, surprised at her frankness. She had explicitly admitted that they were understaffed and joining them meant great responsibility and even sacrifice. He believed that no one would act like Garcia in a negotiation. In order to attract more people to join the association, she should have tried to conceal the difficulties the association had instead of being so blunt about the risks of joining it.

Having heard what she said, he understood why some awakened people would rather fight on their own than join this association.

Her eloquent rhetoric about heroism could hardly attract people in this age, as normal people usually placed their personal interests above the benefit of all human beings.

In the beginning, he himself had also planned to join the association just to gain rewards and reputation for himself, but now he realized that this thing was not that simple. As one of the creators of this world, he thought now it was the time for him to find out the cause for the mutation of the Force of Nature and the truth about the alien world's Erosion with the help of the Martialist Association.

He somehow felt that these phenomena must have something to do with the Bloody Moon.

Chapter 792: The Reason Behind the Decision

When Roland was lost in thoughts, Garcia could not wait any more and asked, "I've answered your question. Now, I want to hear your answer."

It took him a few seconds before he made a reply, "Ah, yes, I'll join the association."

"What?" She seemed surprised.

He spread out his hands and said, "I'm willing to join you. Isn't that what you're asking for?"

"Yes... I was just thinking that you..."

"You thought I got cold feet?" He chuckled. "I really just went shopping with my relative in the afternoon. Why can't you trust me? But can I apply to join the association now? You said that the senior is the referee."

Garcia stared at Roland for quite a long time with a serious look, as if she was discerning whether or not this application was sincerely meant. After that she shook her head and explained, "No, she's not a referee. She's my master. I invited her to come to show you how to better use the Force of Nature, but she'll never want to meet you again."

Hearing this, Roland thought, "Uhm, is it because that I stood her up today? She must have been very upset and it seemed that she even reproached Garcia."

She pulled out a piece of paper from her tea table and gave it to him. "You just need to fill out this form to apply. Your signature is required."

Roland was startled. "Is it so simple? It's an association secretly protecting the whole world. Don't you need to hold a ceremony or test my ability first?"

Garcia sneered coldly. "Come on. Do you think we are the ancient Priory of Sion or Knights of the Holy Temple? It's modern times now. Your signature just indicates that we protect your right to know. When the association receives your application form, it'll check your identity and file for social security and grants in your name." She paused. "As for the ability test, anyone who has awakened with the Force of Nature is eligible to become a martialist. You can get much stronger if you work hard. Given this, a test for a newly awakened doesn't determine anything."

Roland felt it was really weird to hear a person brought up in an ancient royal family to talk like this.

When he picked up the pen and was about to sign, she stopped him.

She said solemnly, "I have to remind you again. Once you become one of us, you'll no longer be an ordinary person. You'll enjoy the rights granted by the Martialist Association and meanwhile have to fulfill your obligations. If you betray us or disclose our secret information, you'll immediately become our enemy. When that happens, we won't bring you to a court. We're allowed to punish any betrayer according to our own procedure. I hope you think it over before you sign."

She had fervently hoped that he could join the association, but now she was reminding him of the risks of joining it. This changed his attitude toward her. He found Garcia in this Dream World was totally different. No matter how devious and cruel the Queen of Clearwater had been back in the Kingdom of Graycastle, she handled everything open and aboveboard in this world.

"I know what I'm doing." Roland nodded and signed his name. "Now, can you tell me the truth about the Erosion?"

"No." She folded the application form carefully and put it in a wooden box under the tea table. "It'll take about two days to verify your identity. You just filed an application. You're not an official member of the association, so I can't tell you anything about it."

"Well... then I've another question. You said that a martialist could get a generous reward by killing a Fallen Evil. Is that true?"

"I've clearly explained this to you before," said Garcia, seeming a little disappointed hearing this question about pecuniary returns.

"I'm not asking about how much the reward is. I just want to know how can the association check that I'm the one who killed the Fallen Evil." Roland shrugged. "During a mission, I guess I won't be able to fight against a Fallen Evil while recording the whole process with a camera by myself. Do I have to invite another martialist to witness the fight? Or, you guys adopt the ancient way, counting the heads I bring back?"

Garcia got grumpy and said, "Is money that important to you? No matter who kills a Fallen Evil, the world will end up being clearer. Why do you square accounts in every detail and are so particular about personal gains?"

Roland argued, "You're a well-known martialist whose reward for winning a match is equivalent to a common person's yearly income, but just two months ago, I was still a jobless guy. I have to take care of myself and the little girl. You're right. Money is very important to me!"

He deliberately made use of her misunderstanding to delude her into believing this lie. After all, he just wanted to find out the cause of the Erosion through the Martialist association rather than devote himself to the association.

Besides, money was indeed very important to him.

Garcia stared at him for a moment, still seeming a little annoyed and then said, "To prove that you've killed a Fallen Evil, you just need to give its mutated Natural Core to the association."

"I can hand this thing over to the association?" Roland was slightly surprised. Now he thought that it might not be an accident that the core of the Fallen Evil who had awakened in the McDonald's had remained solid in Phyllis' hand.

"Of course. It's the source of the Fallen Evil's power. Once a mutation occurs, it'll never recover. It can prove the Fallen Evil is eroded. If we don't collect these mutated cores and lock them away, they'll infect other people sooner or later. Ordinary people will lose their minds simply by touching it."

"You mean... a mutated core can be used by different people?"

Garcia said with resentment, "Yes, that's why some people are collecting them. We know exactly what they're thinking. Don't they worry that they'll destroy our world by doing so?"

Hearing this, Roland immediately realized that another group of people were organized to collect the mutated cores and act against the Martialist Association. Garcia who had just let this information slip in a fit of anger was reluctant to divulge any more details about those people.

"But the association must have stored a great number of mutated cores. Aren't you afraid that they'll find the location of the cores or some martialist will betray and leak the secret to them—"

"It's impossible!" She interrupted without hesitation. "Although you're not allowed to know these things at this moment, I can assure you that those crazy guys will never break through the defense line guarding the core area of the Martialist Association. Before they get to the place, the four Defenders will tear them into pieces!"

He really wanted to ask her where this core area was and who the four Defenders were, but he knew for sure that he could not get the answers from her today. Given this, he suppressed his curiosity and thought to himself. What if I get into the place where those mutated cores are stored and release all of their Force of Nature into the air. When that happens, what'll happen to this Dream World and to myself? How strong will my power and the warm flow circulating in my body become?

No matter what'll happen at that time, I really look forward to it.

Chapter 793: The Ancient Witch's Discovery

Roland went back to his apartment after bidding farewell to Garcia.

Phyllis who had been sitting in the living room waiting for him asked, "Your Majesty, who's that person?"

"She's a warrior. You can consider her as an Awakened with magic power in this Dream World." He waved his hand. "You don't have to mind her attitude. No one in this world knows I'm a king."

"But after all, she's also created by you like everything else in this world..." Phyllis still did not want to let it go. She showed him much greater respect after he had granted her request and treated her to tasty food.

He sat opposite to her and explained, "They don't think so. All the people in this world have their own ideas and memories. Their whole lives have nothing to do with me. This world has its own rules which I also need to follow."

When he was talking about this world, Phyllis' eyes shone with excitement. She had been deeply shocked by her experiences here and had been meant to ask something about him. Now, she finally got the chance.

She looked at Zero's bedroom and then whispered, "Your Majesty, is this the real place where you used to live? Please excuse me for being blunt, but I guess you're not Prince Roland of Graycastle, are you?"

Roland raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Why did you say that?"

Phyllis was excited. "Because your Neverwinter looks just like this world! When I first came to your city, I didn't quite understand why you built so wide, flat roads for carriages even inside the city where space is limited... But now I know you didn't build them for carriages. You did it for those fast four-wheeled vehicles! Your amazing weapons, your ambitious plan to build a 10-floor building, your powerful machine powered by boiling water and many other things in Neverwinter all seem to have something to do with this world."

After a little thought, he said, "I'm indeed Prince Roland, but when I came to Border Town, some different memories just somehow popped into my head in a sudden. They're some abstract, incredible knowledge, and I've only mastered a small part of it by now." He decided not to tell her his time-travel story that he only wanted to share with his closest witch.

Phyllis did not doubt what he said at all. "Then those memories must be something from the deities. Taquila witches often said that the deities didn't love human beings, but now it seems that we were wrong. You've got the deities' smile. As long as you are with us, we'll be able to defeat demons!"

Roland was startled hearing her share this idea with a decisive air. He had been trying hard to convince the Taquila survivors that he was able to defeat demons, but it was the first time a Taquila witch expressed confidence in him. He was a little uncertain since he had only brought her to a park and some restaurants instead of a scene of the military exercises.

He subtly mentioned his uncertainty, and Phyllis frankly told him what she thought. "Because of those four-wheeled iron vehicles."

"The vehicles?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. Back in Taquila's age, we had to use lots of horses and carriages to send supplies to the front line camps. Some witches did have the ability to move fast but they could hardly complete this kind of tasks. Once the weight they carried exceeded a certain point, the consumption of magic power would increase by many folds. I believe you've know this phenomenon already."

She continued, "We felt great pressure when the Union seized the demons' Siege Beasts. Such a big thing, hundreds of times heavier than a person, could be operated by only one witch. When its iron shield and bolts on the top were removed, its loading capacity was equivalent to that of four to five carriages. Judging from this, we all knew that demons were much better at manipulating magic power than us. At that time, the Quest Society also believed demons' fighting potential was far greater than ours. Given this, Lady Alice started to pin her hope on the God's Punishment Army plan."

"So you guys judge an opponent's potential by their transportation capacity?" Roland asked with interest.

Phyllis nodded. "Yes. The method to transport goods, manually carried or horse-drawn, determines how far we can go. The species who're able to travel farthest are the strongest." She paused here and could not help smiling. "In this Dream World, I saw a four-wheeled iron vehicle several times farther than a carriage could travel. They're as fast as the wind while carrying over 100 people. That shows this world's strength. If your weapons are also created based on something from this world, I believe they'll easily crush demons."

Having heard her explanation, Roland was touched and lost in thought. Limited by their knowledge and era, the Taquila witches failed to defend the Fertile Plains, but that doesn't mean they're stupid. Phyllis is quite smart to infer this world's strength from some crowded bus. Such an insightful observation is really impressive even for people in modern times.

He suddenly thought of a topic frequently discussed by netizens in forums, "How can we defeat aliens who come to invade the Earth?"

In fact, this discussion was meaningless. Human beings worked hard only to send several astronauts to the moon, the closest celestial body to the Earth. This achievement was nothing when the alien invaders were able to travel hundreds of light years or even across the galaxies to the Earth. The energy they had consumed in their travel was enough to burn the Earth to ashes. How could human beings defeat such strong enemies?

He believed that if a civilization was able to travel in space and expand its power to another solar system, it would be strong enough to destroy human beings on the Earth. The moment we saw these alien invaders would be our time of death.

To his surprise, he found Phyllis or the dominators of Taquila also knew this truth about war very well.

In the end, the ancient witch stood up and bowed to him with hand on her chest once again. "Though you aren't a witch and unable to activate the Instrument of Divine Retribution, I still believe you're the Chosen One the deities sent to us."

Hearing this tenuous conclusion, Roland did not know whether to laugh or cry, but he did not point out her mistake. He knew that with Taquila witches' support, his Neverwinter would have a brighter future.

He took a deep breath and rose. "We don't have much time. Let's start testing."

They had to move fast and carefully in case that they would wake up Zero at night.

After setting up a ladder, Phyllis climbed to the top and turned her back to the bed. She fell down from the ladder, but nothing changed after her fall.

That meant she could not leave the Dream World by falling.

Now, there were only two possibilities.

She would leave here when Roland left this Dream World. Or, she would be trapped in this world forever.

When he climbed up the ladder and sat on it, ready to fall, Phyllis walked up to him.

"If I can't leave this Dreamland, don't worry. It's a nice place for me. If I can never come back after I leave here, I'll never forget all the things I went through today and will be always missing this world."

Roland nodded and then fell backward.

In an instant, the world was dark again.

Chapter 794: A Sweet Dream

When he opened his eyes, Roland sensed the weight on his arm.

Gently tilting his head, he saw Anna's serenely sleeping face. She lay on her side, pillowing her head on his arm and slightly curling her lips. She seemed to be having a sweet dream.

Fortunately... he could still get out of the Dream World in this way.

He carefully pulled his arm out and sat up. After covering the quilt for Anna, he quietly left the room.

When he walked downstairs, the soldiers guarding at the corridor hurriedly stood up and saluted him one after another.

He waved his hand to indicate that they could do away with formalities and went to the hall on the first floor.

Then he saw Phyllis.

She was standing in the center of the hall with a look of loss on her face. She bent her head and looked repeatedly at her clenched hands as if she was still amazed at the moment when her body regained its senses.

It seemed the answer was the former one.

The Dream World was still under the control of his consciousness.

When he woke up, the world would come to a standstill, while the outsiders would be expelled from it.

"Your Majesty, I..." When she saw Roland, she pursed her lips to force a smile and said, "I woke up from the dream."

Apparently, the God's Punishment Witch had thought of staying in the Dreamland for a split second. She originally had no other choice but to transform into an immortal soul so as to keep fighting with the demons. But the price she paid became increasingly expensive as time went by. It was not surprising that she would change her mind in the face of a new world.

But she eventually suppressed her desire, either due to the Taquila witches, or her hatred of the demons, or both. Whatever the reason was, Roland was full of admiration for her self-discipline.

"We're not certain yet," he smiled and replied, "we've just finished half of the test. We can't know whether it's an occasional or certain result after the integration of light beams until the end of the test. Let's continue here."

Phyllis was a little surprised, asking, "Won't you go back to your bedroom?"

"That may wake Anna up," Roland shook his head and replied. "Anyway, there's heating in the castle and sleeping in the living room is the same." He said a few words to a guard, who widened his eyes in surprise but still faithfully executed Roland's order.

Half a quarter later, the long table in the living room was spread with a layer of soft cushion and quilt.

In this way, the living room was tightly guarded by a group of completely confused soldiers while Roland was sleeping in it alone. Phyllis, as well as the others, stayed in the hall, waiting for the emergence of the light beam.

He had to admit that it was really difficult to fall asleep after he woke up, especially when it was time to reveal the answer to the puzzle.

Roland tossed and turned for several hours until he finally fell asleep at dawn.

The new world instantly recovered operation.

To his surprise, in the Dreamland it was not the early morning of the next day. Outside the window, the neon lights were still flashing. The ladder was still at the bedside. Phyllis's eyes became clear little by little. She suddenly awoke from her dreamy state, bent her head and looked at Roland in disbelief.

"Your Majesty, is... is this true? Am I dreaming?"

He could not help smiling.

The answer was self-evident.

Whether it was a dream or a real world, it might not matter for this God's Punishment Witch.

What was important was that she finally got her compensation after assuming the pain and responsibility for hundreds of years.

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This time, they only stayed in the Dream World for a short period of time.

Roland had thought that she would eagerly go out and hang around. He did not expect that she would get down on one knee and plead with him to allow her to share the news with her other companions. She promised that the Taquila survivors would remember his kindness forever and would make every effort to serve him.

In the face of this plea, Roland did not respond immediately as usual.

He was not reluctant to welcome the Taquila witches, but he did not know how to feed so many people. More importantly, Zero had already been suspicious of Phyllis, and he could not claim that these additional 100 witches were all his distant relatives.

Roland would never want to get the little girl, the second creator of the Dream World, involved in these things. If she sensed any problem of this world, he could not predict what would happen. Just to be on the safe side, the Taquila witches could not stay at his home.

Then he would need a place for the witches to live, for example, an entire apartment building. And the daily expenses such as food and drinks would also be a heavy burden for him.

After thinking about it for a while, Roland finally decided to let the witches solve this problem by themselves.

His temporary silence probably made Phyllis misunderstand him. She bit her lip and bent the other leg, kneeled down and begged again. This gesture, which was only employed when ordinary people met the dominator of the Union, had gone beyond the ordinary salute of Taquila witches. Roland tried to pull her up, but she insisted. She begged him not to refuse her companions' entry into the new world.

At this time he finally realized what she was thinking, and explained his plan to her, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. After hearing his explanation, Phyllis let out a long breath of relief.

In fact, for Roland, accepting Taquila survivors was not a difficult choice as she had thought.

In the Dream World, they would no longer be a group of God's Punishment warriors who had brutal force, but they would be witches of various types of magic power that were not limited by the God's Stone of Retaliation.

With the help of such a group of people, the means and efficiency of exploring the Dream World could be greatly improved. And they could also help him to memorize and copy the knowledge. In the long run, they might also learn various kinds of knowledge and use modern equipment to study the essence of magic power. Of course, the most important point was that even after the Battle of Divine Will ended, the Taquila witches could still find a place to live in the new world.

After leaving the Dreamland, Phyllis could not wait until dawn before she bade farewell to Roland and rushed to the Third Border City in exhilaration.

Roland yawned and went back to his bedroom.

He climbed into the warm quilt and hugged Anna in his arms again. She also opened her bleary eyes and vaguely murmured, "Why did you wake up so early?"

"Well, I hung around in the Dream World," he said as he kissed her on her forehead. "I ran into something unexpected, and then I couldn't fall asleep again."

"Oh?" The girl's breath was like a soft feather gently sliding along his neck. "Was it a sweet dream?"

"Of course." Roland changed into a more comfortable posture and let her pillow on his arm again, "It's a sweet dream for everyone."

Chapter 795: A Kind Heart

Anna leaned on him while listening to how the God's Punishment Witch accidentally entered the Dream World.

"So they can all recover the feelings they lost, and return to the normal life?" She took a deep breath and answered delightfully, but with a bit of melancholy and regret. "That's so good... If only I could also see the world that you had lived in."

"That means that you have to transform your soul into a light beam. It would be too high a price to pay for you," said Roland, stroking her hair and earlobe. "And we can build Neverwinter into an ideal place which can be comparable to the Dreamland, can't we?"

"That's all right," Anna chuckled. "But are you feeling a little guilty now?"

"Er?" Roland was a little stunned, "No, I just..."

"No need to answer. Just let me listen to it." Anna put her head on his chest and whispered after a while. "Uh-huh. You're a little guilty and worried. You're guilty because Phyllis is a woman and also very pretty. And you're also worried that I'll be suspicious. Am I right?"

"Well..." Roland did not know how to respond to her answer which could not be more correct.

Anna tilted and said, "But you're honest, so don't be worried. I trust you." She paused and said with a more serious tone, "Roland, you've made this decision to help them, just like what you did to help the Witch Cooperation Association and me. How could I be suspicious of your kind action? It's your duty as a king, isn't it?"

Roland felt slightly relieved.

If it were Nightingale, he could not be certain that she would not be suspicious. But Anna was different. If she said she believed it, then she really did. And from her expression, Roland knew that she really supported his decision to find a home for the Taquila witches and help them to regain their lost consciousness.

Anna had a kind heart, which had never changed since the day he met her.

"But from now on you must tell me what you do in the Dream World. Promise me." She blinked her blue eyes and whispered in his ear.

Roland nodded, "I promise."

Anna contentedly smiled, slowly climbed onto him and held his cheeks with both hands. She murmured, "Now you're mine."

She gently bit his collar all the way down...

Their sweet breathing sounds could be heard coming from the bedroom.

...

When Phyllis brought the amazing news back to the Third Border City, the witches burst into a commotion.

"As long as we cut off the consciousness in the range of the light beam, we can return to our original appearance?"

"It's not important at all. The most important thing is that we can restore the sense of touch and smell!"

"Is KFC really that delicious? More delicious than roast meat with honey sauce?"

"Could... could you take me to the Dream World?"

"Me too!"

"I would also like to..."

They surrounded Phyllis, eagerly asked her all kinds of questions and behaved totally different from their ordinary calm selves. They had never been so excited, not even in the face of a swarm of demonic beasts invading the underground maze.

"Stop! If we go to the castle together, they'll suspect that we want to occupy Neverwinter!" Alethea shouted and put a tentacle on Pasha, "What do you think of it? Is this a trap by the king of the common people?"

"Even if it were a trap, I'm afraid that they would probably willingly walk into it," Pasha replied with a bitter smile. Until now, she had not recovered from the shock after listening to the story told by Phyllis. A highly developed Dream World, a place where all souls could regain their new life, was a temptation which none of Taquila survivors could refuse. From the king of the common people, they also found the answer of how to defeat the demons, which they had sought for a long time. After suffering for hundreds of years, they finally saw a glimpse of hope. This incredible feeling struck her with a rare dizziness.

It had been a long time since she dreamed.

Subconsciously, Pasha hoped that all this was true, but she was not entirely convinced that such a good thing could happen. A common person with any magic power became the savior of Taquila witches? No wonder Alethea would be vigilant and suspicious.

Luckily she was aware that she had to send someone to verify what Phyllis had said.

That did not mean that she did not trust Phyllis. After breaking with the Union and going into exile, the survivors treated each other as sisters.

She was just worried that Phyllis might have been deceived.

After all, this sounded like a fairy tale and a sweet dream. She had to examine it with great caution.

Thinking of this, Pasha transmitted her consciousness to everyone's mind, "Is King Roland really willing to let the others enter the Dream World?"

"He said so, but not now," explained Phyllis. "That world has rules that must be followed just as in the real world. To avoid unnecessary changes caused by any exposure, the first batch of people must fulfill his requirements to enter the world. They'll assume the pioneer mission and prepare for the admission of more people in the future."

Hearing that, Pasha became a little less worried. If it were a trap, then he would try to let more people fall into it instead of giving the Pioneers a chance to warn others when they realized it.

"What kind of requirement?"

"Well..." Phyllis hesitated for a moment. "He needs witches who can move fast, sneak around, control and attack."

"That means he needs combat witches?" Alethea questioned, "But didn't you say that the power of that world is far above the demons? Isn't his requirement too self-contradictory?"

"He doesn't intend to let us fight against the whole world, but..."

"But what?"

"Well... to loot in private," Phyllis answered with embarrassment. "Of course, the targets are evil people who deserve it."

The crowd fell into a brief silence.

"Wait a minute. Did he think that we're gangsters and thugs? We're respected..." Her voice was overwhelmed by the sound of the crowd before she could finish her words.

"It sounds interesting!"

"Those guys have no God's Stone of Retaliation, right? Is there anyone who can stop my continuous fireballs?"

"You'll make too much of a loud noise. His Majesty obviously needs quiet actions. My Shadow Dagger is perfect for it."

"You can only shoot within ten steps, not to mention your weak attacking strength."

"I can cover for my teammates. Let's go!"

Pasha soothingly patted the back of Alethea and said, "Don't mind them. They have just been bored for too long."

Chapter 796: First Action of Pioneering Team

The worries and doubts of the Senior Witches lasted only a day or so, and were completely dispelled by the subsequent news.

Everything that Phyllis said was real.

The Third Border City began to seethe with excitement.

In this case, no matter how reluctant Alethea was, she could not stop the other witches who were looking forward to entering the Dream World. At this point, the choice of Taquila was obvious.

Through the phantom instrument, Pasha conducted a meeting with Roland about the covenant.

The God's Punishment Witches in the underground city walked passed the light curtain one by one, lifting the elbow and pressing on the chest to greet the lord of Neverwinter, King of Graycastle and acknowledge him as the only leader of the united front. The Senior Witches who were transformed into original carriers also bent down their main tentacles to show their allegiance. This was a type of salute which had only been received by the Three Chiefs of the Union, signifying that Taquila now had a ruler from the common people after more than 400 years.

Alethea was the last one to show up in front of the light curtain.

As a higher ascendant, Alethea joined the Blessed Army when she was 20 years old and had fought with the demons for more than a decade to defend the glory of Taquila. Pasha was worried that she would do something unexpected. But ultimately Alethea had chosen to put the Battle of Divine Will and the expectations of her companions in the first place and bent her main tentacle to Roland. Regardless of how reluctant she was at the moment, her decision still made Pasha feel relieved.

If it were still in the Taquila age, this would definitely be an incredible scene.

However, a long period of more than 400 years could change many things. The ambitions and convictions that "all mankind will surely defeat the devil under the leadership of witches" were gradually diminished. When a common person showed his amazing potential and grace toward the Taquila survivors, their resistance would seem pointless.

Pasha believed the unanimous view of the Three Chiefs of the Union, that the witches would eventually stand out from the human community. Common people like Roland were only a minority, and the witches would one day return to the position of the rulers. But by then, the relationship between the two sides was bound to be much more harmonious than that of the Taquila age. After all, if they could survive the third Battle of Divine Will, the idea of the witches and the common people working together to maximize their strength would undoubtedly gain in popularity.

She did not mind welcoming such a future.

...

It was already three days later when Roland actually implemented his looting plan.

To ensure that Zero would not suspect, he rented a warehouse near the tube-shaped apartment to serve as a temporary "landing point" for the witches to connect to the Dreamland. As long as the witches assembled here before he interrupted the dream, they would still appear in the warehouse when they entered the next time.

Of course, the first connection would inevitably be Room No. 0825 of the tube-shaped apartment. Roland was puzzled about this and found no explanation for it. Probably Zero was the reason why this room became the key point connecting the real world and the Dreamland. Therefore, he had to wait until Zero went to school every time when a new witch came to the Dreamland.

During these three days, Roland selected four God's Punishment Witches, including Phyllis, as the first pioneers. For the first two days, he bought some fast food and drinks to entertain them and satisfy their extremely strong desire for food and drink. On the third day, he could only afford some instant noodles and mineral water. But even then, they still enjoyed every bite and nearly licked the seasoning packets.

Actually, they had tried but were stopped by Roland.

That would be a discredit to the united front.

As his savings started becoming less, he had to carry out the plan now.

When the night fell, Roland told Zero that he had to work overtime and would go home late. Then he went with the four witches to the villa area outside the third ring of the city in two cabs.

The witches did not just stay in the warehouse to enjoy food and drinks these days. As a former member of the Quest Society, Faldi had a strong detective ability. She was able to create a Magic Bug Nest, link her consciousness with bugs such as moths and bees, and release them to spontaneously search for other Sources of Magic Power. This was very effective in preventing the attack of demons and could also be used to search for some areas inaccessible to ordinary people.

Although the bugs could not provide visions for Faldi, they helped her to feel the types and sizes of the magic power, including the Force of Nature.

After three days of searching, she found more than a dozen magic reaction sources, including Garcia living in 0827.

After excluding the same type, there were still six targets.

Among the six targets, the one living in the villa area was most worthwhile to loot.

That was Roland's plan—searching for the Fallen Evils through effective magic inspection and looting their Force of Nature and property. These mutated monsters did not easily leave their habitats, so even if they were destroyed, their neighbors would not notice. Moreover, even if their bodies were found by the police, the case would be transferred to the Martialist Association. By then, the Association would only believe that they were killed by another group of the Awakened. They would not suspect that another group of superpower bandits were in town.

After getting off the cabs, they came to a dark corner and stood around Dawnen. She then summoned the "matte curtains" to wrap everyone together.

This magical ability could make her companions within the reach of the curtain disappear, but it was far beyond being invisible, as the vision, smell, and magic breath would also be blocked. No one could sense the existence of the hidden people without direct touch. Undoubtedly, Dawnen would play a crucial role in a surprise attack.

With Faldi's guidance, the five people passed straight through the main entrance and walked all the way towards the foothill of the villa area.

Here was the residential area of the rich people in the city. Most villas were built by the hillside with wide yards. Hardly anyone walked around in the evening, which made it a perfect place for Roland's plan.

"Here we are. The target is in it." Faldi stopped and pointed to a vast, detached compound on the side of the road. Its parvis was almost as large as the tube-shaped apartment.

"Damn the enviable rich people..." Roland glanced at the flashing surveillance camera, turned around to look at Ling, the last member of the looting team—no, the pioneering team and said, "It's your turn to help us sneak into the house. Just do as you practiced before."

Ling nodded and slowly faded into the shadow as if she was sinking.

None of the Taquila survivors could directly walk through any obstacles like Nightingale or Margie, but Ling's ability was enough for this task. She could melt into any shadow and move freely like water. Especially in the night when the shadows spread around, the entire parvis became her domain, and she could easily walk through the gaps between the doors and windows.

"Crack!" The door of the house was open with a slit.

Chapter 797: Body of Magic

"Not bad at all." Roland waved towards the black shadow which had deftly entered into the drapes.

A smiling face emerged from the darkness as if to acknowledge his encouragement. This would have been a frightening sight if he had not known that it was a witch hiding inside.

"Your Majesty, enemies are within the hall. I can sense that their magic powers are nearly as strong as hybrid demonic beasts." Faldi cautioned.

"Can you handle them?"

"Don't worry. Ling and I won't have any problems as long as they aren't like Senior Demons." Phyllis replied.

"Then let's act according to plan."

As Roland passed through the long porch, he discovered that the villa's windows were all covered up with boards and tape. There were only a few lights within, making the hall seem rather dim. Due to the weak air-conditioning, he felt as though he had just entered from early autumn into winter. Furthermore, the rancid and putrid smell which filled the air caused him to feel nauseous.

A man dressed in a suit stood motionless in the center of the hall - he was clearly this trip's target. The instant Roland stepped into the hall, he felt a warmth begin to swell inside his body with an intensity several times stronger than when he first saw the fake man.

From the looks of it, Faldi had snagged a big fish.

However, what distressed Roland was a sculpture of a huge monster hung on the two-story mural wall which the man was facing. He could not tell if it was made of wood or seasoned leather. It had a human face and a pair of wings, while its brawny hind legs and slender front paws were curled up in front of its body - a completely mismatching appearance. It was close to four meters in length, while the carvings of feathers and veins on its body were highly lifelike, thus marking out its high value.

"The grotesque taste of rich people," Roland muttered to himself. Judging from the craftsmanship, it was worth at least a million gold royals.

"Time to act." He looked away from it and placed his attention on the target.

"Yes."

Making use of the matte curtains to sneak two meters behind the enemy, Phyllis initiated the first attack.

A claw protruded from her back and lashed with lightning speed toward the suited man. The interference of magic caused the curtains to ripple. At this time, the target seemed to sense something and turned his head sharply. However, at this distance, even an Extraordinary would have no time to dodge. The claw slit through the man's neck and out from his lower back, thereby cutting him diagonally into two.

The enemy's eyes stared wide in disbelief as he collapsed on to the floor, and dark red blood spattered all over.

From the looks of it, even if the natural core of a Fallen Evil was not stripped away, it would not be able to survive if its body was heavily damaged.

"That's all?" Ling peered out from the shadow beside the sofa.

"The plundering we now have to do is the main point," Roland answered while covering his nose. The putrid smell in the air had intensified once more, though he was not sure if it was his own false perception. "Do you still remember what I taught you?"

"Gold ornaments, red paper, and chests with orbs!" Ling raised her hand. "Coins are worthless, and leave the gemstones!"

"That's right. In particular, the more red paper, the better." From his experience of plundering the Holy City of Hermes, he knew that the price of gemstones fluctuated too greatly, and hence it was difficult to sell them off at a suitable price. Gold was certainly far more stable. Of course, the best of all was cash notes. He mused to himself, "Hope this fella isn't too fond of online shopping."

As Roland bent his body and intended to convert the Force of Nature which was mounted on the belly of the man, Faldi suddenly frowned and remarked, "Hold on, why do I still sense the presence of magic reaction?"

"What?" The other three people startled at once.

"The source of magic power isn't gone. Instead, it's growing bigger!" She lifted her head and looked around the hall in search of something. Her eyes fell on the sculpture. "Damn it, that monster is alive!"

Just as she finished speaking, the sculpture abruptly opened its mouth and revealed a frog-like tongue which thrust directly at Roland.

"Careful, Your Majesty!"

With no hesitation, Phyllis shielded in front of Roland and used her claws to obstruct the path of the incoming tongue.

But Roland was much improved from his former self. He anticipated the monster's attack, before catching hold of Phyllis' waist and rolling toward one side in order to avoid the tongue which was as sharp as an arrow.

The tongue thrust into the half-section of the corpse lying on the floor. It entwined the natural core and jerked away violently. With that, the crimson core flew in the direction of the sculpture's mouth.

Roland noticed that the Force of Nature, which had entered into a solid state, began to rotate once again upon the monster's touch.

The monster's movements caused a large swarm of insects to fly out from its back and panickedly flee in all directions. They had obviously been attracted by the monster's magic power, but because Roland could not share what he saw with Faldi, she was not able to discern that there were two different sources of magic reaction in the hall!

"Hah... what do I see, a bunch of martialists delivering themselves to me?" The sculpture swallowed the core and began to speak. "Thieves like you have no place in this sacred territory. Go to hell!"

It raised its neck as if to inhale a deep breath, and then blew a gush of bloodred air at the people in the hall.

It was magic power in its purest form!

In a flash, the furniture in the room was ripped into smithereens. As the matte curtains were struck, Duncan and Faldi, who were hiding within, suffered several wounds on their bodies and fell heavily on the floor. Fortunately for them, they got away from the central and most powerful region of the magical attack by a hair's breadth, or they would have suffered the same fate as the furniture.

On the other hand, Roland was in much better shape. As the magical attack came upon him, the warmth inside him spread all over his body and protected his vital organs like a piece of armor.

"What form of attack is this?" Roland was disconcerted that its ability was completely different from that of witches. He had never seen magic power directly turn into a potent energy before. Ever since he acquired the strange force, he was able to better understand how magic power worked. The monster's attack was certainly not something a Fallen Evil was able to perform.

The expressions on the witches' faces were also that of extraordinary surprise. It was clear that the monster's understanding of magic power was a level above theirs.

"Its magic reaction... is close to the Senior Demons'!" Faldi bit her teeth. "How's this possible?"

"Demons? Is that what you call my ancestors?" The monster grinned and laughed wickedly. It easily snapped off the rivets which fixed its wings to the wall, then leapt onto the floor and stooped like a gargoyle in front of the party. "You try to take energy from the Divine Domain without permission, and now call the Chasers 'demons'? Sheer stupidity!"

"Divine Domain? Chasers?" Roland began to frown involuntarily. "What's it referring to?"

Suddenly, a beam of black light sprung from the shadows behind the monster and flew against its cheeks. It was Ling's shadow! A crisp clicking sound was heard as she stuck a dagger into its eyes and out from the back of its head. Without pausing to contemplate her success, she escaped back into the shadows. The entire surprise attack was as smooth as flowing water.

"Beautiful!" Phyllis clenched her fists and commended.

"Beautiful?" The monster did not collapse like the Fallen Evil did. A crack appeared on its wooden-like face, and it now spoke in a shrivelled voice which sounded cold and indifferent. "You think this piece of common metal and tiny amount of magic power can harm me? You have no idea what the Divine Domain's all about! Now, I shall let you witness the true might of the Lord!"

Before it finished talking, a series of rupturing sounds broke out. The crack on its face extended to its entire body, and subsequently, its pitch-black shell split into fragments and peeled off. The now-revealed interior emitted a dark red glow, as though it was flowing with burning blood.

When all of its true body was revealed, Roland gaped in shock and horror.

Underneath the shell had been a body which was purely formed by magic power. Small clusters of star jades glistened inside its body, and gradually converged into a huge star ring at its chest.

It was what you could call a magical creature.

Chapter 798: The Will of the World

"What's your Lord's name?"

Roland somehow sensed that this creature was much more emotionally rich than the Fallen Evil. He thus hoped to gather more intelligence by asking it more questions. While doing so, he gestured towards behind him for the two wounded persons, Faldi and Duncan, to leave the place at once. If a situation arose where the party had to flee quickly, he would certainly run faster than these witches.

"My lord's a being that's everything and nothing at the same time. A presence that none of you can fathom." The creature spread its phantom wings, which emitted a red glow, and stretched its hands towards the floor. "Your clever tricks are useless here. You want them to escape now? Too late!"

Scarlet blood flowed from its body and rapidly extended across the surfaces of the room. In the blink of an eye, the floors, walls, and ceiling of the hall turned into a bright red.

Ling, whose hiding place was now uncovered, was pushed out of the wall by an unknown force, and she fell by Phyllis' side.

"What... what's this?" Faldi cried out softly from behind. When Roland turned his head, he saw that spiked tentacles had emerged out of the red and black void and ensnared the witches' legs. He recalled that he had seen something similar before.

But he had no time to contemplate further as the situation was fast deteriorating.

With the warm current in his body spinning ferociously, Roland gathered all of his physical strength and charged directly towards the strange enemy.

"Ooh? You aren't affected?" Astonished, the magical creature raised a palm at him. "How about this?"

An extremely powerful force burst forth from its palm towards Roland. It felt like a huge hammer blow upon impact, and sent Roland flying and crashing into the wall. After a heavy thud, he felt like his back was burning, and that all of his organs had displaced.

"Keke..." He coughed involuntarily, and smelled something sweet yet fishy that had expelled from his throat.

"Your Majesty!"

Phyllis let out an urgent cry. She was, at present, the only person who could move other than Roland. The blade claws on her back danced up and down, hurriedly cleaving the tentacles which had protruded from the floor. However, with an endless number of them to deal with, she was not able to draw close to Roland at the moment.

It was now the crunch time.

But Roland's mind remained exceptionally clear.

There was entirely no fear in him, as if he had deleted the feeling of fear from his brain.

The warm current in him surged ever faster, accompanied by the vigorous beating of his heart. He could feel that an extraordinary change was occurring in his body.

Roland could feel that the resistance of the star ring was weakening. The color change also became faster.

"All living things?" He turned his head and glimpsed at the witches sitting feebly on the floor, before he continued in a low voice. "No, the only ones who shall perish are your kind... I've no idea where you're from, or what intention you possess, but certainly, this world will be better without you!"

"From... hssst... Bottomless Land... no intention... hssst... this is rule..." The monster was no longer able to spit out a complete sentence. Roland further noticed that it was not as emotionally expressive as it was. Its voice had turned flat and monotonous, as if it was one of those answering machines which provided a fixed response.

When it finished speaking, the resistance in Roland's hand vanished instantly.

The star ring began to spin rapidly, and drew all of the surrounding star jades towards itself to form a dazzling white light. For a moment, Roland seemed to hear the heartbeat of the earth.

This time, the scene of the surging of magic power was even more spectacular than the previous two times. The monster shrunk into a round mass and released a column of silver light that shot straight to the ceiling for an extended period of time. Standing in front of it, Roland felt an indescribable satisfaction and bodily pleasure which exceeded the sum of his previous two encounters. There was nothing which could compare to the sight of this light column.

The witches' conditions were nothing too serious, except that they had expended all of their magic power. They were still able to walk on their own. According to Phyllis, when Roland was in a deadlock with the monster, the magic power of all four witches was taken in by him. This was something which could never have happened in the real world.

However, it was simply one more thing to add to a night when so many unimaginable events had already taken place.

After a quick search, Roland, carrying a heavy safe together with the car key taken from the suited man, led the witches quietly out of the foothill villa.

Chapter 799: Changes

Thankfully, driving lessons were all the rage during his university days, and he, too, had signed up for them together with his friends. But he had never thought that the first time he would touch a steering wheel after receiving his license would be in the realm of dreams.

"Your Majesty, what exactly was that monster?" Faldi asked faintly. "Can a Fallen Evil also possess such strength? It seems theoretically unjustifiable that they can obtain so much magic power in such a short time."

While evading the first round of magical attacks, it was Duncan and her who received the greatest damage. Half of her beautiful violet curls had fallen off as a result. Fortunately, none of her wounds were fatal, and her head (except for her hair) and torso were practically unblemished. In other words, she had chosen the optimal form of evasion against the sharp yet unpredictable attacks. It, therefore,

has to be said that all of the Taquila survivors were highly-experienced warriors, as evident by the fact that even a witch who was mainly not combat-type could perform this well.

Because of this, the pioneering operation did not end in failure. Although Roland did not know what would happen if one died in dreamland, he hoped that there would never come a day when this doubt would be addressed.

"Did the Union never have a similar ability?"

"Of course they did... what we call biting, is precisely caused by the damage inflicted by magic power on a body." Faldi gasped as she spoke. "As a witch increases her capacity for magic through continuous practice, her body will become more used to this kind of damage, and her recovery speed will also improve. Whether it be for us, demons, or hybrid demonic beasts, our levels of magic power can only be slowly cultivated."

"I get it now," Roland thought, "this is the first time she has seen a living thing that's purely formed by magic power. In other words, she was only cognizant of life that's formed of flesh and bone. Therefore, it was natural that she couldn't understand an enemy she had never seen before."

He did not have such doubts himself. From the moment the monster revealed its translucent body, he had already regarded it as a spirit or an elemental, and he believed that because it was formed by magic, it was certainly not going to be affected by magic.

However, this was not an easy problem to explain, and his conjecture was not necessarily accurate. He recalled that when the blue light in the monster's body held the upper hand, the monster's visibly declining mood and consciousness could have caused it to revert to a more conventional living form. At last, Roland could only shake his head and reply, "I don't know what it is either. But I can confirm that it's not a Fallen Evil."

"Are there many more monsters like this in the Dream World?" Ling asked, still in a state of shock.

"When the shadows in the room were covered by the black and red void, I felt my body freeze, as if there was something extremely frightening that was observing me all the time. I swear, even facing the Senior Demons wasn't as scary as this."

"I believe there aren't that many, or else the Dream World would have been seized by them long ago," said Roland reassuringly. The Martialist Association could handle the Corruptors, which were not affected by conventional force, but against this type of monster, even 12 martialists might not be sufficient to win. If there were many of them, the Association would probably have been destroyed by now.

In retrospect, he realized that he could finally confirm Garcia's assertion that the corruption of the outside world was inseparably related to the Bloody Moon. The tentacles which protruded from the void was similar to the scene in the Divine Domain.

Yet, why would the Bloody Moon corrupt the dreamland? Isn't this world a part of it? Who's the Lord that the monster spoke about? Is it a real deity or a source of magic power? If it truly detests the Dream World, why did it remain silent when he touched the divine relics?

Roland also took extra note of the "Bottomless Land" which the monster mentioned last. It was perhaps due to linguistic assimilation that the structure of this term was similar to that found in the Land of Dawn. It was only when referring to an entire continent that it would be phrased this way. For example, although the meaning of "Divine Land" was similar, it was expressed in a different way.

Supposing that the Bloody Moon is perpetually observing the real world because of the Battle of Divine Will, does that mean that what it reveals is an actual continent, just as I've understood?

These questions were best left to an explorer to solve.

Of course, not every witch was still contemplating the events of the battle that just happened. Phyllis, who sat in the front passenger seat, had already cast aside the heavy emotions she felt during the battle, and was much more interested in understanding the operation of this limousine. When she was seated in a taxi previously, she was instructed to remain silent due to the presence of an outsider. This time, she could no longer control her wild curiosity, and stared unblinkingly at Roland, as if she was trying to memorize every action that he made.

"You want to learn driving?" Roland asked jokingly, having also relegated his thoughts to the back of his mind.

Phyllis immediately nodded.

"We'll have to perform a few more tasks first." He took the opportunity to entice her. "When the time comes, we'll be able to enjoy different cuisine every day, and having your own room and private car won't be a problem."

"Will the food taste better than KFC and hotpot?" Faldi added.

"Those are entry-level stuff. Once we have money, you'll find out that even if you ate something different every day, you'll never be able to taste all the different types of cuisine in the world."

Though Roland did not turn his head back, he could sense the glowing gazes from the witches behind him.

"When Duncan's fine, let's move on to the next house. I've already marked its location." Faldi's voice remained soft, but it was not as faint as previously.

"I'm okay. We can set off tomorrow once our magic powers have recovered." The petite Duncan replied in a positive manner. "This bit of injury won't be a hindrance."

Even Ling, who had been traumatized, was moved by Roland's alluring words. Though she did not echo the others' words, her eyes were glimmering, as Roland saw through the rearview mirror.

Roland felt deeply touched. It turned out that boosting the team's morale was truly a simple thing to do.

...

In order to prevent policemen from popping by their place, he decided not to drive into Tongzi Street, and instead parked the car next to the neighboring Clover Association's construction site, which was still under demolition and hence was a surveillance blind spot. From there was a nice little pathway which led to the rented warehouse.

Subsequently, it was time to examine the spoils.

Regrettably, there was not much cash in the safe, amounting to only 100000 dollars or so. However, there was a considerable amount of jewelry, consisting of jades and pearls. It was not possible to place a fixed valuation on them. To his surprise, he also discovered several solidified Forces of Nature. It was these small yet exceptionally heavy things which gave him the false perception that the trip was indeed fruitful.

Are cash transactions already out of vogue for these people? Forces of Nature are now a currency?

By the time Roland returned to 0827, it was already half past 11. He gently opened the door and discovered that the lights were lit in the parlor. Zero was lying by the tea table with her back arched and slightly undulating, as if she had already entered dreamland. In front of her were a stack of textbooks and a pencil box. It was evident that she had been revising her homework while waiting for his return.

There was only supposed to be a tenant-landlord relationship between them, but there seemed to be a sense of family now. Roland's heart softened as he gazed at this sight.

He walked up and gently carried Zero to her bed. After taking off her shoes, he covered her in the warm quilt.

Oh right, the textbooks.

If she forgets about them tomorrow, she'll blame me again.

Roland shook his head and laughed. He brought the textbooks on the tea table to her room and stacked them neatly on Zero's desk. At this moment, the bold print on a textbook cover caught his attention.

Junior High Math Olympiad.

This was an extracurricular subject which appeared impressive but was thoroughly impractical. He recalled that he was uninterested in math when he was in junior high, and, thinking that Math Olympiad was simply a higher level of math, he kept his distance from it, and would rather spend his summers learning sketching and calligraphy than attend Math Olympiad lessons. Therefore, at present, he had not the slightest idea what the course was about.

Strangely, he began to take interest in its content, if only for a moment.

He could feel his breath becoming shorter.

He took a deep breath and slowly flipped open the first page of the textbook.

The neatly-arranged examples, together with Zero's elegant handwriting, caught his eye at once.

Chapter 800: The Revived Harbor

A flat yet spacious concrete ship slowly made its way into Clearwater Bay and berthed in front of Simbady.

Its size was much larger than that of the small boats which occasionally appeared in the Silver Stream, and its weight made it practically impossible to be rowed by manpower. On its top stood two long metal cylinders that puffed out billows of black smoke. Its sides were painted an eye-catching tangerine color, which together with the smooth gray deck made the ship look like a belly-up rainbow trout at first glance.

Like most of his brethren, Simbady had never left the desert, and rarely if ever saw the ocean. Thus, when he saw that this ship was not made of wood, he could not help but exclaim in marvel.

There was a stir of excitement among the ranks.

"Pah!"

Osha's supervisor immediately snapped a whip towards their heads. "Keep your mouths shut! Line up and get on the ship, faster!"

Simbady felt the crowd begin to stream forward. With the people behind him jostling, it was impossible not to move. As he was carried by the momentum of the crowd on to the ship, a slight fear arose in his heart.

Perhaps, he should never have left Silver Stream Oasis to come to this foreign land. Though there was an endless supply of water here, there was a chance that the Three Gods could not watch over such a remote place, and therefore would not hear their cries for help if the ship carried them into the abyss of Styx's River.

"Hold on to me and watch your step!" Molly's voice caused him to regain consciousness.

A delicate hand wrapped around his palm and led him on to the gangway. Every now and then, someone from beside him would fall into the water with a splashing sound.

Though the people on the pier would quickly pull them ashore, to fall into the river in this sort of weather essentially meant that they lost the qualification to work.

When they pleaded to be reallocated onto the ship, the standard reply they received was a lash from a whip.

Simbady remained close to Molly and followed the flow onto the concrete ship. As his foot met the deck, he did not feel the wobble he had expected. The ship was completely still, and it felt no different from walking on land.

When the gangway was withdrawn, the honcho of Osha clan, Thuram, appeared on the high platform in the middle of the large ship and drew everyone's attention. "Do y'all still remember what I said? The chief values order and discipline above all else! Take a look at your clansmen who fell into the water. The original plan was for everyone to board smoothly and receive a work opportunity, so that you may obtain ample food even in the Months of Demons. But now, they'll have to starve until the next opportunity comes about! This was all caused by your stupidity!"

"It was nothing but a fall. All they need is a change of clothes..." an Ironsand citizen retorted, but before he could finish his sentence, two supervisors had pressed him down on the floor and subsequently tossed him into the water.

"Discipline is everything! There's no collective that accommodates the individual, only individuals who submit to the collective!" Thuram rebuked angrily. "Unlike the clan wars of the past, it's no longer lurking enemies who are being eliminated, but rather your own kin! Take this as my first lesson to all of you and remember it!" He paused before continuing, "Of course, those who lost their jobs today will only go hungry for a while. However, in the future, anyone from the Sand Nation or tribe who doesn't observe order shall be banished from this evergreen land!"

As his voice fell, a booming noise erupted from the metal cylinders and rolled across the sky above Port of Clearwater.

The giant metal wheels on both sides of the hull gradually began to rotate. After a violent shake, the concrete ship slowly sailed out towards the mouth of the river.

" Thank you. If it wasn't for you..." Simbady glanced at Molly.

The latter laughed and narrowed her eyes to slits. "It's nothing. It just happened that I was ahead of you in the order."

"Really..." He lowered his head with some embarrassment.

He and Molly were both members of the Fishbone clan, and they had conversed with each other on occasion. He had always been fond of this hazel-eyed, black-braided-hair girl, but having heard that she already had a sweetheart, he had thought it wiser not to reveal his feelings to her.

After some silence, he gazed at her while she leaned over the side of the ship, curiously observing the scenery on both sides of the river. He could not help asking, "Are you not the least bit worried about where we're going?"

She turned her head back. "Blackwater Valley?"

"Indeed. I've heard from the other clansmen that it's close to the Choke Swamp and Rotten Wasteland, and has been cursed by the Three Gods. Anyone who enters without permission will never be able to come back alive."

"So, did they apply for permission?"

"Eh, about this..."

Molly laughed involuntarily. "Don't they hope that as little people as possible get this job, so that their own clansmen may receive more money? You've also heard from Lady Drow Silvermoon that so long as you do things according to the chief's instructions, you'll never have to worry about the material needs of your family, while your tribe will also receive resource subsidies." She puffed out a mouthful of white air. "Besides, do we have a choice?"

The last sentence truly shut Simbady up. Indeed, the first clans to willingly follow Osha to the Southern Territory of Graycastle were predominantly small tribes which found it hard to continue in the Silver Stream Oasis. Fishbone was one of them. The oasis which they had occupied was currently being devoured by the desert, while the increasingly dry tributary of the Silver Stream made it impossible to guarantee the survival of the clan. In order to survive, they either had to join another big clan, or venture towards the Southern Territory.

"Thinking positively, at least the chief has fulfilled his first promise. We no longer have to worry about starving to death in the desert, right?"

Simbady could not refute this point. According to Lady Silvermoon's explanation, even those who were not able to attain a job out at sea would be able to receive a basic ration. As long as they could perform odd jobs for the reconstruction of the Southern Territory, they would not starve to death.

"Besides, there are Osha people following us to Blackwater Valley. You don't have to worry too much." Molly laughed and pointed at a ruined port in the distance. "Look there... the land allotted to our clan should be near to that black tower, right? It'll be great if we can stay here forever."

Simbady looked towards the direction she pointed at. The Port of Clearwater appeared to have been divided into two. Half of it was a burnt-down wasteland which seemed to have been forgotten and deserted, with damaged houses and scorched wooden frames everywhere, and the courtyards were filled with weed. Conversely, the other half already possessed a budding vitality. Here, the Ironsand people had set up a series of tents, and people could be seen moving within the camp area. The damaged houses were being knocked down one after another, while freshly whittled wood was continuously being transported into the area.

Molly's smile caused a surge of anticipation to rise in his heart.

"Perhaps, after I'm done with the next three months of work and return here, near to the tower will be a line of brand-new wooden houses?"

The being-reconstructed town slowly disappeared in the distance, until the ship began to bobble up and down on the waves. The only scenery at present was the clear and boundless skyline.

They had entered into the ocean.