

Witch Monastery

#Chapter 71:The War of Public Opinion - Read Witch Monastery Chapter 71:The War of Public Opinion

Chapter 71: Chapter 71:The War of Public Opinion

Sephera peeked timidly from beneath the covers, the corners of her mouth still stained with traces of spilled white fluid. She struggled to swallow the last remnants of semen before whispering, "Did something happen?"

"Yes." Charles nodded, his brow heavy. "They've actually put a bounty on me."

He recounted his conversation with Andny word for word, then added, "We'll leave the rest for later. Once the others arrive, we'll discuss this properly."

As he spoke, the dormitory door swung open, and Hattie and the others filed in. With each of them accompanied by one of Andny's mosquitos, every member of the monastery was now present.

"Everyone, I assume Andny has already briefed you." Charles's expression was stern—though the effect was somewhat ruined by his half-reclined position under the quilt, arm wrapped around a flushed Sephera, her lips still glistening faintly. "In situations like this, how has it been handled before?"

The witches exchanged glances. After a pause, Hattie spoke first: "Usually... we lay low for a while. Avoid attention, and it... should blow over?"

Her tone grew increasingly uncertain as she glanced repeatedly at Sephera, silently urging her to explain.

"Hide?" Charles frowned deeply, displeased with the solution.

Beside him, Sephera tucked herself deeper into the quilt, hiding the exposed traces of her delicate form, before speaking: "Here's the thing. The rich and powerful of Liberl Port have little interest in the slums of any district—let alone the poorest of them all, South Harbor."

"Even with a case this serious, all they need is a scapegoat to placate their superiors. The truth itself matters little to them."

"So, if we just lay low and wait it out, they'll eventually lose interest when they can't find you. Then they'll pin it on some Xanathar's Guild boss or the like and call it done."

Her explanation was flawlessly logical. Despite being reduced to pleading beneath him the night before, the moment the conversation turned to practical matters, she regained the meticulous precision befitting a Vice-Abbess of the Monastery.

But Charles remained deeply unsatisfied. The matter of Sophia weighed on him like a mountain, gnawing at his patience.

This is too passive. What if those guys find Sophia's trail first in the meantime?

No. We need a plan—we have to strike first!

His mind raced as he quickly formulated an idea, then asked, "Is there any way to spread a rumor? Say that a month ago, someone witnessed that young mage with white hair clashing with Xanathar's Guild thugs at the Foggy Fisherman Tavern. That's why they're framing us now."

He laid out the scheme, but unfortunately, the witches had no solutions. "Apologies, Master. We don't have our own intelligence network, so this... might be beyond us."

Fine.

Charles pinched the bridge of his nose, then pressed further, unwilling to give up. "That investigation team—where are they operating? Where do they stay at night? If we can't fight them, at least we can avoid them!"

His mind had already been working on a plan ever since Andny mentioned slum dwellers selling their properties at rock-bottom prices. A golden opportunity to buy land and turn a profit.

Now, learning that they were investigating him, half that plan crumbled instantly—at the very least, he couldn't personally go near the slums anymore—but he refused to let go of this rare chance without a fight.

"I—I'm sorry, Master. I don't know." Andny's voice dropped. "When they split up to investigate, I could risk sending mosquitos to eavesdrop. But when they regroup, it's too easy to get caught."

After a pause, she quickly added, "But if Master wants to go to the slums, I can help you avoid their eyes! That much, I can do!"

She tried to sound useful, but sadly, her suggestion did little for his long-term plans.

Charles stifled a groan, then softened his tone. "Not your fault. Worst case, we play it safe—hole up in the monastery for another month..."

But the more he spoke, the more frustration burned in his chest. If they delayed any longer, Sophia's situation would spiral out of control.

Finally, he clenched his jaw and turned to Hattie. "Hattie. Listen. Tonight, you're going to find Alan, the owner of the Foggy Fisherman Tavern. And you'll ask him this..."

Enough waiting. He'd take the fight to them—and turn the tables his way!

...

That night, inside the Foggy Fisherman Tavern.

A few homeless men sprawled across the tables, dead drunk, muttering their sorrows and slurred nonsense. The stench of sweat, fish, ale, and the sickly-sweet reek of vomit blended together, forming the tavern's rightful nightly aroma.

Alan, the tavern's owner, sat behind the counter, squinting under the dim candlelight as he tallied the number of guests staying overnight. A quiet sigh escaped him, a flicker of irritation rising in his chest.

Damn those Xanathar's Guild bastards and those Amazonian lunatics—look what they've done to the slums!

And now, the ones sent by Blackstaff Tower, prowling the streets, dragging people in for questioning... They've turned everything upside down. Folks are fleeing the South Harbor District. Even the nightly drinkers are thinning out...

Alan held no love for Liberl Port's officials. Once a navy man, he'd served the port with distinction—only to retire wounded with a pittance of compensation, barely enough to scrape by.

Worse, his business now included... less-than-legal dealings. Naturally, he kept his distance from authority.

But it wasn't just him. Most in the South Harbor slums shared his disdain.

Even knowing this investigation team was here for the bloodshed, the monsters, the cult—that their work would shape their futures—the people bristled at their arrogance, at old grudges left to fester. Cooperation was nowhere to be found.

No wonder, after all this time, the investigation was crawling at a snail's pace.

Ah, well. Not like I can chase them off myself. Just have to wait it out.

With another sigh, Alan pushed himself up, weariness weighing on his bones. Time to head to the privy in the back, then up to bed.

But the moment he stepped outside—

Under the cold moonlight, a tall, curvaceous nun stood by the outhouse door, as if she'd been waiting for him.

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Chapter 72: Chapter 72: Returning the Trouble(Revision)

Instantly, the tavern's owner Alan snapped to full alertness. His previous drowsiness vanished as his nerves tightened. He took half a step back, regarding her like a cornered beast: "You're... Sister Hattie?"

The standing nun was none other than Hattie herself.

Hearing his voice, Hattie lifted her exquisite face slightly, her frosty eyes settling on Alan. Then, her crimson lips parted: "Mr. Alan. Long time no see. How have you been?"

A bead of cold sweat trailed down Alan's temple. "Well enough, uh... my lord, what brings you here so late at night—?"

"Nothing urgent," Hattie murmured. "I merely heard Mr. Alan is... well-informed. I wished to inquire about certain matters." Her voice softened further. "Rumors say the investigation team from Blackstaff Tower is tracking traces of a certain Mr. Nigel Charles. Might you know why?"

Alan's pupils shrank to pinpricks.

Damn it. Does she think I leaked Charles's appearance during the Twin Moons Night to investigation team?!

Though Alan hadn't stepped outside during the Night of the Witches, his own web of reliable informants ensured he knew everything: Charles's clash with Xanathar's Guild in the slums, how he'd lured away that monstrous abomination—all filed silently in his mind, never spoken aloud.

Hiss...

How to answer?

Stay calm, Alan. Think. If she's here for accountability, she must want something. Killing you gains her nothing.

Her question implied she didn't want Blackstaff's team fixated on Charles...

"Ah..." He opened his mouth slightly and revealed an awkward smile. He felt his throat dry and itchy, and every word he squeezed out was so difficult. "It was the people from Xanathar's Guild who were talking nonsense. They are used to throwing dirty water on people who have had conflicts with them, and then those young people in Blackstaff Tower believed it..."

Hattie gave a slight nod, as if confirming expectations. "So that's it. What an unfortunate misunderstanding."

A pause. Then: "Mr. Alan, as an eyewitness to that conflict... might you help clarify this misunderstanding?"

Her tone remained gentle, the threat beneath crystalline. "The monastery and your tavern are neighbors. Shouldn't neighbors... support each other? Don't you agree?"

Alan's palm grew slick. She knew he recognized their terrifying strength—and his helplessness.

Defeated, he nodded. "Understood."

Hattie smiled. "Then, on Charles's behalf... thank you, Mr. Alan."

She turned, stepped toward the tavern's rear wall—and phased straight through it, vanishing.

Alan exhaled, only then noticing his drenched back.

Only then did Alan exhale, realizing his back was drenched in cold sweat.

Abandoning any thought of relieving himself, he turned and limped back into the tavern. His gaze swept over the remaining patrons before he grabbed a plate of beef jerky and a tankard of ale, sauntering over to a table of still-sober drinkers with an air of casual boredom. "Troubled times lately," he remarked, sliding the offerings forward. "These are on me."

The men at the table brightened instantly. Alan followed up with a theatrical sigh. "Ah, but Blackstaff Tower's lot grows more pitiful by the day. A few whispers from Xanathar's

Guild, and they're scurrying about like headless chickens—ignoring actual cultists to chase after some white-haired young mage!"

He shook his head ruefully. "Mark my words, they'll let themselves be wielded like blunt weapons, harassing every enemy Xanathar's Guild ever had. By the time they slink off like whipped curs, they'll have pissed off half the city!"

The table erupted in laughter. "And isn't that what we want to see?" one crowed. "Serve those high-nosed investigators right! Let 'em learn the 'rabble' they sneer at aren't so easily kicked around!"

"Aye!" another spat. "That bitch leading them—yapping about 'city stability' and 'public safety.' Damn it, if she spent half that breath fixing the sewers, fewer'd die of filth than in gang wars!"

"Exactly! All talk, no action!" a third slurred. "Bet that white-haired brat's some noble's spoiled whelp. Let the highborn tear each other apart—that's a show worth watching!"

Amid the drunkards' jeers and curses, Alan laughed along—but his eyes glinted, already plotting to replay this same performance tomorrow...

...

In the monastery dormitory, Charles lay with his arms around Ruth and Sephera—both disheveled, bare-skinned, and curled beneath the blankets in exhausted slumber—while studying his system interface, quietly mapping out future plans.

Advancing from third to fourth level required 1,800 Purification Points. He'd already stockpiled enough. Yet for now, Charles had no intention of leveling up again.

First, his progression was already alarmingly swift. In under a month, he'd gone from a classless mortal to a formidable 3rd-level spellcaster mastering 2nd-level spells. By this world's standards, such speed rivaled legendary prodigies.

Consider this: At Strixhaven University, one of the graduation requirements was simply attaining 1st-level mage status and the ability to reliably cast four 1st-level spells.

Yet even so, many students needed two extra years, and some never graduated at all!

So despite his late start, Charles outpaced contemporaries by a ludicrous margin.

But the true reason for hesitation was weightier: At fourth level, he'd gain his class's first attribute enhancement or feat selection. And he still hadn't decided.

Would he even get a choice? Would it function like a Pact Boon's customization, or would the system arbitrarily assign something?

With no urgent need for greater strength yet, he'd tabled the matter.

Yet hoarding unused Purification Points was wasteful. Thus, his current study focused on upgrading the entire monastery to tier two.

How to secure funds... How to purchase adjacent land cheaply...

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Chapter 73: Chapter 73: The Fastest Way to Make Gold

The night was deep, yet Charles remained awake. Burning the midnight oil went against his current regimen for recovery, but tonight's matter was too critical—sleep simply wouldn't come.

He was waiting for Hattie's return. Whether her efforts bore fruit would determine if his next plan could proceed.

The moon crept lazily across the sky. Charles added another note to his plans, his mind growing sluggish. Just as his thoughts began to blur, a gust of wind rattled outside, followed by the door swinging open to reveal a slender silhouette.

It was Hattie. She had returned.

"Master!"

The moment she stepped inside, the Hattie let out a soft cry before flinging herself into his arms. Charles felt the tension drain from his chest as he embraced her in turn. "No trouble, I hope?" he murmured. "How did it go?"

"None at all. Did you really think I'd run into trouble every night?" Hattie chuckled lightly, then nodded. "It went smoothly. That tavern owner knows which way the wind blows. He caught my meaning before I'd even finished speaking."

She proceeded to recount her conversation with Alan in full detail. Hearing this, Charles exhaled in relief. "Good. He's sharp, then. Now we can sit back and let the rumors turn in our favor."

Tonight's scheme had been Charles' doing. He knew Alan, the tavern owner, was one of the few in the slums who had glimpsed the monastery's true, terrifying nature. That was why he'd sent Hattie to deliver a half-truth, half-threat—to nudge the man into steering the gossip their way.

Alan couldn't leave the slums of South Harbor District. For one, he was a cripple—a man society had all but discarded, incapable of surviving on his own.

The life he had now depended entirely on his connections in South Harbor. Leaving would mean abandoning his greatest asset, reducing him to nothing.

The monastery wasn't going anywhere, either. The two would remain neighbors for years to come. And with Blackstaff Tower's investigators set to depart in a few days, Liberl Port's officials would revert to their usual indifference toward this wretched corner of the city. For Alan, staying on the monastery's good side brought no downsides—only benefits.

The tavern owner was no fool. Charles trusted the man understood the stakes. That was why he'd likely help.

Yet even with eighty percent certainty, Charles—having never attempted such a scheme before—had been uneasy. Only now did the tension finally leave his chest. His eyelids grew heavy, the weight of exhaustion crashing over him like a tide.

"I can't hold on any longer." He had to close his eyes. "I'll take a rest first, Hattie. We can discuss other things tomorrow."

As he said that, he lay down on the bed and slumbered into unconsciousness.

Hattie's lips curled into a faint smile. "Goodnight," she whispered before swiftly shedding her nun's habit and sliding under the covers, nestling against his arm as she drifted off.

The next morning, as Charles and the three witches accompanying him ate in the kitchen, three mosquitoes alighted near their ears. Andny's voice buzzed through:

"Master, your plan worked. This morning, people in several districts are already gossiping about how Blackstaff Tower's investigators were made fools of by Xanathar's Guild!"

Charles gave a slight nod, unsurprised. "The scheme proceeds smoothly. But we must let the rumors spread further before attempting to purchase land in the slums for expansion."

"Andny, continue monitoring public sentiment and the investigation team. Also, keep searching for traces of Sophia."

"Understood," Andny replied before the mosquitoes dispersed.

Hattie, who had been standing nearby, paused mid-motion. Hesitation flickered across her face. "Master... how do you plan to gather the funds for the land?"

As she spoke, Ruth glanced up at Sephera. "How much do we have left?"

Sephera answered without hesitation, as if reciting from memory. "Around four thousand gold. If we liquidate some artwork and rare texts, we might scrape together six thousand."

This was the monastery's communal treasury—primarily filled with the meager savings of the humans they had slain. Its purpose? Bribes for inspections, charitable porridge offerings, and minor repairs.

Most of their victims had been poor, with little to their names. Yet their own expenses were minimal, allowing the funds to accumulate into a substantial sum over the years.

"While it's not an insignificant amount, it's still far from enough," Sephera fretted. "Even with residents desperate to sell now, purchasing eight thousand square meters in the slums would be impossible. And that's before accounting for renovations—we'd need at least ten thousand gold. What about the sisters' personal reserves?"

Hearing this, Hattie's expression turned uneasy. "I've nothing left. The coin I spent on Master's spellbooks was borrowed from Sophia."

Ruth's face darkened. "I've never been one to save. And as far as I know, neither Andny nor Ekta have much to spare..."

The three witches fell into uneasy silence, daunted by the staggering financial gap.

Charles, however, merely smiled—as if he already held the solution. "It seems our next priority is acquiring a considerable sum, then."

"Come, let's brainstorm. Hattie, Ruth, Sephera—tell me: in Liberl Port, what's the fastest way to amass coin?"

"Robbery!" Hattie answered without hesitation. This was the conclusion she and Sophia had reached long ago.

Ruth pondered briefly before nodding in agreement.

Only Sephera hesitated, weighing her words carefully. "Perhaps... financial ventures in the Central District yield far greater profits than theft. Though they require capital upfront, and the risks are substantial..."

Charles nodded approvingly at the witch who managed the monastery's affairs. "Sephera's answer comes closest to the truth."

"Elsewhere—strictly speaking, in most parts of this world—robbery is the fastest method."

"But this is Liberl Port. Here, factions across the realms scramble to back their proxies, trading and maneuvering capital. Don't just see the chaos in the gutters. Look higher—to the impeccable order and gilded excess above!"

His eyes burned with ambition as the witches stared in confusion. Slowly, he revealed: "So here, the fastest way to wealth... is borrowing."

All three witches blinked in astonishment. After a beat, Hattie ventured uncertainly: "Then... Master, you mean to approach the grand banks of the Central District for a loan?"

Charles shook his head. "Wrong."

His lips curled into a smile once more.

"This is called... securing investors."

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Chapter 74: Chapter 74: Targeted Research

The three witches exchanged glances. Though they had vaguely heard of the various financial terms emerging in human society in recent years, they weren't entirely familiar with them. Thus, everything Charles said sounded utterly foreign to their ears.

"This method... does indeed bring gold faster..." Sephera swallowed hard. "But... wouldn't such coin come with steep interest? We..."

Charles stared at their confused faces, and his own enthusiasm dampened considerably. With a quiet sigh, he muttered, "Investment isn't the same as a loan. The former doesn't require interest."

"Ugh, never mind. It's not something easily explained in a few words. In any case, I already have a plan."

Without further elaboration on these convoluted concepts, he began assigning tasks directly:

"Hattie, you're to gather information on the income of middle-management personnel at Amazon Fisheries Company. Last night, I drafted an investigation questionnaire. You and Ekta will track down those Amazon women and have them fill it out."

"Ruth, you'll procure drafting tools. I need you to handle illustrations. Also, secure a copy of Draconic Teaching Materials. I must master Draconic within seven days—the sooner, the better!"

"Sephera, find out what formalities are required to establish a real estate company and acquire slum land under its name. Most importantly, learn which officials we ought to bribe... to ensure they look the other way."

"Everyone—move swiftly. The monastery's future hinges on this!"

...

Three days later.

"Excuse me, madam, may I trouble you for two minutes to fill out this investigation questionnaire? Thank you ever so much!"

In the evening, on the bustling streets of South Harbor District's center, Ekta, draped in a nun's habit, flashed a radiant smile as she stopped a passing Amazon woman and warmly inquired.

The Amazon woman glanced at her and immediately recognized her as a member of the only monastery under the Goddess of Life Church in South Harbor District. Taking in her enthusiastic demeanor, the female warrior quickly assumed that these overly compassionate nuns had recently overspent on their charitable porridge offerings and now had to take on part-time work to cover the monastery's deficits.

What a group of kind—even foolish—women. No wonder their church has fallen into such decline.

The Amazon woman sighed inwardly, but she still held a measure of respect for those who truly lived by their creed of benevolence. After all, if she were ever gravely injured someday, these nuns might heal her without expecting anything in return, right?

So, she didn't refuse. Instead, she politely nodded to Ekta, took the questionnaire, and began filling it out earnestly:

Are you a mid-level employee of Amazon Fisheries Company? Yes.

Do you believe the company has thrived in Liberl Port in recent years? Yes.

Do you agree that establishing roots in Liberl Port will help the company grow stronger? Yes.

Would settling in Liberl Port benefit your career? Yes.

Compared to South Harbor District, do you find housing prices in other districts excessively high? Yes.

Would you be willing to purchase commercial housing in South Harbor District's prime area? Yes.

The questionnaire was complete.

The Amazon woman looked slightly confused. Before today, she had never considered settling in Liberl Port, let alone buying property in South Harbor District. Yet, as she filled out the form, she found herself unable to answer the last question with anything but a "Yes."

"Thank you!" Ekta beamed sweetly, then took the questionnaire and moved on to her next target. The surveyed Amazon woman scratched her head before finally scoffing.

Whatever. As long as I don't hand over any coin, no scam can touch me!

With that unshakable confidence, she turned and went about her business.

Similar scenes repeated across South Harbor District. A highly suggestive set of questionnaire results was quietly taking shape.

Meanwhile, in the monastery's scriptorium, Charles struggled through "Draconic for Beginners," forcing himself to read aloud in a desperate bid to master the language in seven days.

Under normal circumstances, such a feat would be impossible. But now, armed with the Eyes of the Rune Keeper and the scriptorium's Assistance function, every phonetic symbol's pronunciation became clear at a glance, every word's meaning and usage

instantly comprehensible. His learning efficiency soared—within a week, he had largely mastered Draconic's common phrases!

And his purpose was razor-sharp.

Liberl Port—or rather, across the entire world—the two most well-funded banks were one owned by gold dragons, and the other by blue dragons. In short, both were dragon-related.

And the one Charles intended to visit was run by those blue dragon princes, who lounged in deserts feasting on camels, playing in the sand, and breathing lightning—yet had grown obscenely wealthy thanks to the widespread use of electricity.

Naturally, their bank's service windows were staffed by their own loyal dragonborn or half-dragons.

Though these tellers had to master the Common Tongue to operate in Liberl Port, speaking Draconic with them would instantly earn their favor.

Doing so marked you as "one of them."

Charles studied Draconic intently. Behind him, at a smaller desk, Ruth worked in silence, her pen flying across paper. Stacked beside her were hundreds of questionnaires, each meticulously analyzed for statistics.

These were part of Charles's plan to secure investors—a heavily biased survey designed to convince backers the venture was foolproof!

Every question was carefully engineered. In fact, if he'd wanted the opposite conclusion, he could've crafted another set entirely, like:

Do you honor the traditions of the Amazons?

Do you believe the sea is the true domain of Amazon warrior women?

Has Liberl Port's decadence corroded their courage?

Does the homeland archipelago hold an irreplaceable sanctity in your heart?

Do you oppose settling in Liberl Port?

And so on. With the right nudges, a survey could yield whatever results the researcher desired.

But this world hadn't yet entered an age of information overload. Such tricks were known only to seasoned professionals.

Charles, on the other hand, planned to use this set of research results, the authenticity of which was extremely questionable, to raise a large amount of investment from Blue Dragon's bank!

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Chapter 75: Chapter 75: Paladin Anno

"Ugh..."

After reading aloud for a while, Charles paused, stretched, and let his brain unwind.

Even with the aid of two special abilities, learning an entirely new language in seven days was still a daunting task.

Fortunately, his past life had made him something of an overachiever—otherwise, he might not have pulled it off.

Behind him, hearing his recitation stop, Ruth quickly stood, picked up the teapot, and poured him a steaming cup. "Master, take a break."

Charles accepted it, warmth blooming in his chest, then closed his eyes. "How's the data analysis coming along?"

Ruth's middle fingers pressed skillfully against his temples, kneading with even pressure as she answered, "Almost done. I've cross-referenced the total growth, net growth, growth rate, growth velocity, and even the rate of change in growth velocity—drawn over twenty line charts for comparison."

"Beyond that, I'm also working on pie charts for Amazon Fisheries' expenditures, market share distribution, and other metrics..."

She stumbled through the jargon Charles had only recently taught her, her phrasing clumsy but serviceable. It didn't need to be perfect—he just needed enough

overwhelming data and flashy graphs to convince the blue dragon bankers that he was the expert.

That was the beauty of blue dragon banks: vast wealth, deep pockets, and little concern for returns. Unlike the gold dragons, who scrutinized every investment with meticulous research and ROI calculations, blue dragons invested mostly to inspire awe.

They certainly weren't lacking in coin. Powerstones in this era held a status comparable to oil, coal, and natural gas combined—and those crafted from a blue dragon's own breath and scales were universally recognized as the highest quality...

In short, who wouldn't love a deep-pocketed patron both wealthy and easily swayed?

"Your efforts are appreciated." Charles opened his eyes and turned back to the book before him with a quiet sigh. "Whether this succeeds... depends entirely on whether I can secure substantial investment from the blue dragons tomorrow."

This was his first time putting such a scheme into practice, and tension coiled in his chest.

A mosquito buzzed through the doorway, alighting near his ear. "Master," it whispered, "there's new movement in the slums."

"Recently, it seems a group has been deliberately spreading rumors—claiming certain individuals were seen in the slums on the Night of the Witches, making contact with the out-of-control Ruth. Over twenty people have been slandered so far, and the number keeps growing."

"I ran some statistics—a significant portion of these targets have... history with Xanathar's Guild."

Charles' expression shifted immediately.

"Where are these rumors coming from?" he pressed.

Andny, however, could only offer helplessness. "Unclear. I didn't pay attention at first, but over the last two days, they've grown too outrageous to ignore. That's when I realized someone's orchestrating this."

"Is Alan stirring the pot?"

"No, Master. I've had mosquitos tailing him in the taverns. He's only spreading what we instructed—that Xanathar's Guild is using the investigation team as pawns."

Charles' brow furrowed.

Hiss. Strange. This situation... is someone secretly aiding me?

Or are they deliberately sabotaging the investigation team, delaying their progress to ensure they return empty-handed?

Or is this a move against Xanathar's Guild, redirecting the investigation team's fury toward them?

Which possibility is it?

If the first—what connections do I have that would prompt someone to help me?

If the second—the scope of suspicion widens dramatically. Could even be the investigation team captain's political rivals. Nothing to do with me.

And if the third... Xanathar's Guild has no shortage of enemies. But recently...

And this tactic—flooding the field with disinformation to obscure the truth...

Is this the Zhentarim muddying the waters?

They certainly have the means. And the motive—retaliation against Xanathar's Guild...

Shaking his head, Charles forced down the whirl of speculation. "Andny, keep investigating. Report any new findings immediately."

"Tomorrow's plan remains unchanged. I'm still going to the Central District to secure that investment. Then we'll discuss our next move in the slums!"

Meanwhile, deep within the slums...

In one of the ramshackle houses, a statuesque maiden with golden hair and piercing blue eyes stood clad in gleaming plate armor, her sword and shield at the ready. As she listened to her subordinate's report, her perfect teeth ground together in frustration.

"Why would these wretched peasants lie to us?!"

"Don't they understand we're investigating these monsters and cultists for their own protection?!"

The maiden was Anno Amcastra, scion of a noble family from Liberl Port and devout follower of Tyr, the God of Justice. From childhood, she'd displayed exceptional martial talent, leading her family to hire specialized combat tutors.

At fourteen, she'd been kidnapped by devil-worshiping tieflings. In that desperate moment, she'd sworn an oath to the world: "I shall avenge all the weak against evil."

Becoming an Oath of Vengeance paladin, she'd cut down her cultist captors like wheat before the scythe, dragging her wounded body home alone to become legend.

This feat earned her a place in Force Grey, the secret operations branch under Blackstaff Tower. After rigorous trials, she'd been promoted to captain just before the Night of the Witches, now commanding fifteen elite warriors handpicked from guard forces across the administrative regions.

This mission to South Harbor District - investigating monsters and cultist activity - was her first assignment as captain. Burning with righteous fervor, she'd endured the district's filth and stench, confident her team would cut through the mystery like a hot blade through butter.

Instead, she met constant setbacks.

Every slum dweller she questioned would cower meekly, either claiming ignorance with excuses like "I was terrified," "I don't know anything," or "I've got fishing to do," or else offering useless, vague responses filled with "maybe" and "possibly" - none of it actionable intelligence.

After days of investigation, her only solid lead was about "a handsome silver kin boy who uses magic." But further probing revealed even this was a Xanathar's Guild smokescreen - using her team as attack dogs against their enemies!

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Chapter 76: Sophia's Hiding Place

All these days, Anno had questioned so many slum residents, patiently explaining the stakes—yet not a single one showed gratitude. Instead, they defended the gangs, sneering as they waited for her to fail!

How utterly infuriating!

Anno wasn't just enraged—she felt deeply wronged. Never before had she felt such malice from "people."

Yes, she'd been kidnapped before, but those were tieflings—evil kin with devil's blood in their veins. It was easy to blame the devil for everything.

But here, these slum residents... they were ordinary folk!

Anno's fervor had curdled into fury. She longed to slash at something, to unleash her rage—yet the sprawling, crumbling slums offered no target for her blade.

Beside her, the team members let out quiet sighs. Most were City Guards hailing from Mithral District—not nobles, but respectable middle-class folk raised on virtue. They had never truly understood the depth of malice festering in the hearts of these wretched slum-dwellers—people crushed under the Amazons' market dominance and the city's brutal taxes—toward those they saw as privileged.

"Maybe... we should withdraw for now?" one team member finally suggested cautiously. "We could rest, review our clues, and plan our next move. There's no harm in regrouping."

The others nodded wearily. Anno clenched her jaw. She knew what this meant: a retreat. To abandon the investigation now would be admitting defeat—slinking back from South Harbor District's slums empty-handed. Proud and stubborn since childhood, how could she accept such humiliation?

Yet she had no argument left to make them stay.

"Captain—we've found something!"

Suddenly, a team member sprinted toward her from the distance, skidding to a halt, breathless. "We... discovered an abandoned timber yard. Suspicious figures are gathering there—likely a cultist hideout!"

Anno's eyes lit up. A surge of determination flooded her veins. She rose from her seat at once, turning toward the exit. "Move out, warriors! We strike now, before they realize we're onto them!"

The others exchanged uneasy glances. Then, a male warrior spoke up, "But Captain, our orders were investigation only. Shouldn't we report this first?"

Anno's brows sharpened like daggers. "Do you doubt my strength?"

Silence fell over the group.

Anno's eyebrows shot up like drawn blades. "You doubt my strength?"

The group fell into stunned silence.

Indeed, this maiden was young—younger than any of them. Yet she was a true sixth-level paladin.

A noble paladin! Clad in plate armor, shield in hand, protective cloak billowing behind her, blessed with Shield of Faith—she was practically impervious to blades.

The radiant aura surrounding her not only guarded herself but also shielded her comrades from magical harm.

Even if wounded, she could call upon the Light's healing power to purge toxins and mend injuries. So long as one wasn't slain outright, no wound was beyond her power to heal!

With a paladin on the battlefield, even these magic-ignorant guards could fight without fear of enemy sorcery, swinging their swords with confidence!

Games might require balance, but reality did not. Paladins were universally acknowledged as the strongest class—bar none.

And Anno was no ordinary paladin—she had sworn the Oath of Vengeance. This meant that alongside protecting her allies, she could deliver devastating retribution to any foe!

"The opportunity won't last! If we delay and they catch wind of us, they'll relocate—then we'll lose our chance!" Anno pressed, frustration creeping into her voice as her comrades hesitated. "Everyone, this is our squad's first mission! Will you accept failure before we've even begun?"

"What is there to fear when I stand with you? Warriors, only courage brings glory! Hesitation is the mark of cowards—and cowards reap only failure and shame!"

The remaining team members exchanged glances, then felt a surge of valor rise in their chests.

That's right—they had a paladin with them!

Victory was assured!

"Move out—you lead the way!"

Seeing her comrades' renewed resolve, Anno turned and gestured for the breathless scout to guide them. She followed close behind, her heart burning with fury, sworn to make these cultists pay dearly!

...

Early next morning, before dawn.

Charles rose unusually early. After breakfast, with Hattie and others attending to him, he changed into a crisp white business suit.

He carried a briefcase filled with documents, his hair meticulously combed. Though his face still bore traces of youthfulness, his bearing was undeniably commanding.

As she finished helping him dress, Sephera's eyes shone with adoration. These past days—registering the company, procuring his wardrobe—she had handled everything. Now, seeing the fruits of her labor before her, pride welled up in her chest.

Meanwhile, Hattie's gaze held concern. "Must Master go alone? Let me accompany you. I can watch for danger and lend you support."

Her suggestion was sound, yet Charles firmly shook his head. "No need."

After a pause, he offered a reassuring smile. "Don't worry. Liberl Port's daylight order is well-maintained. Shootouts and killings? Those are nighttime affairs."

"Especially where I'm headed—the wealthiest part of the Central District. Even at night, its order surpasses the safest corners of South Harbor District. So really, no need for concern!"

"Besides, I'm now a third-level spellcaster. In this city, that makes me one in a hundred—among the strong. You needn't fret over me!"

Despite his assurances, worry lingered in Hattie's eyes. Finally, with a sigh, he adopted a firmer tone. "Be good."

The nun pouted, looking slightly wronged, but fell silent.

Noting her unhappiness, Charles stepped closer and brushed a light kiss against her lips. "I'm off now. Guard our home well."

Only then did Hattie's expression brighten. She nodded vigorously. "Mhm!"

Charles then gave Sephera a similar kiss before turning away. Under the witches' collective gaze, he strode through the monastery's main gate.

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Chapter 77: Chapter 77: Blue Dragon Prince, Rahman

At this moment, the eastern sky had just begun to lighten. Aside from the fishermen heading out to sea and the few with urgent business, almost no one was awake.

Charles stepped out of the monastery gates—but this time, instead of turning toward the slums, he turned east for the first time, heading toward the only purified land in the South Harbor District.

In the dim light of dawn, he walked through old yet clean streets, moving eastward. It almost felt like strolling through an old city district from the 70s or 80s.

Before long, several streetcars with yellowed, aging exteriors appeared at the edge of his vision. Beside the tram stops, a few District Office clerks, small vendors, and Amazon women stood in separate lines, waiting for the doors to open.

These were powerstone-driven trams, used for travel between the South Harbor District and other districts. Liberl Port was enormous—relying on foot travel alone would take half a morning just to reach another district, making it impossible to get anything done.

And because of the high costs, there was only one morning tram to the central district, which the Amazon Company had negotiated for ages to secure from the tram company.

Thus, those who needed to conduct business there had no choice but to rise this early.

Charles didn't seek special treatment, quietly joining the line. The morning wind carried a biting chill, and with his weak Constitution, he had to tighten his collar—no different from the bespectacled, frail-looking clerks around him. A lightly dressed Amazon woman glanced at them and let out a derisive snort.

Still, the wait passed without further incident. Soon, the tram doors opened, and the group filed inside one after another, purchasing tickets according to their destinations before finding seats.

Charles was lucky enough to snag the last available seat, while those who boarded after had no choice but to stand.

Once everyone was inside, the carriage became as cramped as a sardine can. Then, with a lurch, the tram rattled forward as the driver started the engine.

After leaving the tram stop, it immediately entered the section bordering the slums. Steel fences lined both sides of the tracks—to prevent both suicide attempts and deliberate sabotage by the poor seeking revenge.

Gazing out the window, Charles felt the stark divide: on this tram, people lived with at least one foot in modern society, if not outright 20th-century comforts. But beyond those steel fences, the isolated masses endured conditions worse than the Middle Ages. Even through the window, he could almost smell the rot and decay wafting from the slums, taunting his nerves.

And this was the same city.

The tram accelerated, finally leaving the South Harbor District behind and entering the neighboring university district. At once, stone skyscrapers loomed ahead, flanked by tidy streets lined with flower beds. Well-dressed young men and women walked the pavements, carrying backpacks, holding ice cream or milk tea, whispering sweet nothings with smiles—indistinguishable from any modern society.

The sight made Charles sigh inwardly. In the game, everything was artistically beautified, and the limited perspective softened the harshness.

But today, riding this tram felt like hurtling from a slave society straight into modernity—an indescribable experience.

Truly, on the spectrum of reactionary forces, compradors were even more detestable than warlords and tyrants.

Regardless of his thoughts, people began disembarking here while others boarded. The tram pressed on. The vast South Harbor District had only one stop, but in the university district, it made five.

It made several more stops in the Mithral District and Muse District. Finally, after two hours, it arrived at the central district.

After the conductor checked his ticket, Charles stepped off, steadied his resolve, and turned toward the Blue Dragon Bank.

This plan concerned his monastery's rank. Failure was not an option!

...

The Blue Dragon Bank's top floor.

A massive young blue dragon, Rahman, leaned against the huge one-way floor-to-ceiling windows, gazing down at the city below, searching for some amusement.

His azure body shimmered like the sky, scales fitted so tightly that barely any gaps were visible. The short, gleaming golden horn on his forehead was clearly polished with daily care. His draconic whiskers hung long and thick from his jaw, and each of his ten foreclaws bore a large gemstone ring, each a different color—flaunting both his unique taste and staggering wealth.

Now, his golden vertical pupils scanned the streets below, as if hunting for prey. Occasionally, his eyes flicked toward the distant sign of the Golden Dragon Bank, flashing with unmistakable envy.

He was royalty of the desert kingdom "Kingdom of Fahad", founded by blue dragons—a young prince. Still only a young adult dragon, he had been sent by the family's elders to Liberl Port with a grand mission: to secure profitable investments, reverse the bank's losses, and prove his worth. The final return rate would determine his standing within the family—and how much power he would inherit.

Several other young blue dragons had come with him, each a rival, each adding pressure.

The elder blue dragon lords of the blue dragon family were deeply crisis-driven. Years ago, they had invited renowned divination wizards to foresee how long their monopoly on powerstones would last. The answer? "A century, at most."

And so, the blue dragons' sense of crisis sharpened.

A century? That meant in a hundred years, their dominance could crumble.

To humans, a century might seem an unfathomably long time. But to blue dragons, whose lifespans stretched three thousand years, it felt like telling a human, "You'll lose your income in two years."

How could they not panic?

So, they mimicked the world's wealthiest conglomerate—the bank founded by gold dragons—and established their own Blue Dragon Bank, hoping to sustain their vast wealth through investments.

So far, the results were... lacking. Though mighty and united, blue dragons lacked the gold dragons' expertise in investment—or their ability to project overwhelming force worldwide.

After all, gold dragons had allies among other metallic dragons. But chromatic dragons?

Well.

Heh.

At least their losses were still a drop in the ocean compared to their hoarded wealth. Otherwise, the Blue Dragon Princes' anxiety would've soared even higher.

And so, under this shadow, Rahman and his peers had been sent to Liberl Port—to prove themselves.

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Chapter 78: Chapter 78: The Prince's Invitation

Yet, despite bearing such a mission, this blue dragon held no regard for the task.

Though blue dragons shared the innate greed for treasure, Rahman had never experienced the bitterness of an "empty hoard."

From birth, he possessed mountains of gold and silver, gems, and artworks—so much that his lair could scarcely contain them. Even his frantic digging to expand his den could not keep pace with the torrent of wealth flowing his way.

Each year, he had to invent excuses to gift away his "least valuable" treasures, lest he be buried alive beneath his own hoard.

This surplus of wealth and privileged upbringing forged a new generation of blue dragons utterly unlike their ancestors. Thus, Rahman could neither comprehend nor share their sense of crisis.

At most, he might grow irritated when his investments failed or his rivals at the Golden Dragon Bank profited handsomely—but never once had he felt the dread of "I'll go bankrupt if this continues."

Nor was he alone. His draconic peers were much the same. In Liberl Port, these young blue dragons invested not for gold, but for recognition—to prove their race's greatness, to indulge their eccentric tastes.

This, in turn, gave outsiders the illusion that blue dragons were "rich, hands-off, and easy to please."

As for Rahman? While not as frivolous as some, he hadn't come to Liberl Port to fatten the bank's coffers. He sought diversion, and to savor the world's beauty.

Fine wine. Gourmet fare. Sculptures. Paintings. Music. And above all...

Beautiful women.

When the white-haired young human appeared at the street's end, his posture proud, the blue dragon's golden vertical pupils flickered with appreciation.

Dragons were creatures of elegance and grace—blue dragons especially. Their ability to admire beauty in all beings birthed the many dragon-blooded races of the world.

And now, gazing at this human, Rahman could not suppress a silent sigh.

A Silver Kin human...

No surprise they're descendants of silver dragons.

History recorded that the Empire of Sein was founded six millennia ago by an aasimar of emerald pupils—the self-styled Green Emperor—and an ancient silver dragon in human guise, who took the title Silver Emperor. Thus, the empire's humans proudly called themselves Silver Kin, flaunting their emerald eyes and silver-white hair.

Though their aasimar and silver dragon bloodlines had diluted to mere whispers, leaving them no different from other humans, dragons still saw this as proof of their ancient alliance with metallic kin.

This one was a silver dragon's scion. Blue dragons, the second mightiest of the chromatics, were natural enemies to their metallic kin—instinct bred hostility.

Yet no one, not even a dragon, was immune to beauty's universal allure.

Least of all blue dragons, with their refined tastes...

Ah, as always—any race touched by silver dragons becomes unbearably exquisite.

Even I'm captivated. Mother would adore him.

A pity he's likely bound for our rivals at the Golden Dragon Bank. No connection to me...

Rahman thought with disappointment, only to then see the white-haired young man slowly walk through the grand entrance of his building.

Instantly, the young blue dragon's eyes lit up.

Meanwhile, on the first floor of the bank, Charles couldn't help but marvel at the transparent tempered glass revolving door before him.

The technological level of this era was limited. Producing perfectly clear tempered glass was impossible through mundane craftsmanship—it required magical intervention.

As a result, tempered glass was rare and prohibitively expensive. It was never used for decoration, reserved instead for the finest alchemists' laboratories as delicate apparatus.

Yet the blue dragons had used it to make a revolving door.

A testament to their obscene wealth and extravagance.

Perfect. Exactly what I'd expect from dragon princes.

Blue dragons should be this wasteful, prioritizing pride over sense. How else am I supposed to squeeze coin out of them?

With that thought, Charles pushed through the door.

The moment he stepped inside, an intoxicating fragrance enveloped him—expensive incense and exotic flowers lined the walls, arranged as if they cost nothing. A thief could steal just one and live comfortably for a month.

Perhaps it was still early, or perhaps business truly was slow, but the lobby was eerily quiet. No long queues—just a quick walk to the service counter.

Charles's little heart pounded like a war drum, yet he maintained a practiced smile. Clutching his document package tightly, he marched straight to the "Investment Services" counter.

Behind a pane of tempered glass sat a female blue dragonborn. Her crisp white suit strained against her generous curves, while her azure draconic head sported a single horn protruding from the nose ridge.

"Greetings," he began smoothly in Draconic, sliding his proposal across the counter. "I am Nigel Charles, legal representative of Life Real Estate Company. I've devised an exceptional venture requiring merely eight thousand gold in investment. The proposal details everything..."

The dragonborn woman gave the barest nod, accepting his documents without a word. Her flared nostrils and upturned snout radiated absolute disdain.

Then her sending stone flashed.

She placed one clawed hand on the glowing stone. Within two seconds, her entire demeanor transformed. Rising abruptly, she addressed him in suddenly respectful Common: "Our apologies, Mr. Charles. Given the substantial sum involved, we must ask you to wait in the adjacent lounge. Prince Rahman himself will discuss this partnership with you shortly."

Charles froze.

What in Tiamat's name?!

Eight thousand gold was pocket change! Why would a genuine blue dragon deign to negotiate this personally?!

This... this...

This was beyond excessive!

What's really going on here?!

The sudden VIP treatment left him both flattered and deeply unsettled.

Can my little tricks actually fool a century-old true dragon?

Before he could ponder further, a male blue dragonborn in immaculate formalwear approached. With perfect poise, he bowed slightly and spoke in flawless Common: "Mr. Charles, this way please. We've prepared desert-specialty goat milk tea for your enjoyment."

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Chapter 79: Chapter 79:The Matriarch's Favor?

Charles nodded mechanically and followed the attendant down a side passage in the lobby. When they reached the door at the end and pushed it open, what greeted them was an enormous room carpeted in soft, pale brown fabric.

At the center of the room's ceiling hung an extravagant chandelier—dozens of circular lights blazing brightly despite it being daytime, an undeniable extravagance. Below the chandelier stood a round table with two steaming cups of goat milk tea placed opposite each other, clearly freshly prepared.

Across from the lobby entrance loomed an even larger wooden door, its size clearly designed not for humans, but for the passage of a massive blue dragon.

"Please have a seat. The Prince will arrive shortly," the waiter said with a respectful bow. "Should you require anything else, simply ask, and we shall accommodate you."

"No, thank you," Charles replied, swallowing hard as he took his seat. He continued in Draconic, "The tea will suffice... Though, if I may ask—I'm just an ordinary merchant here to secure investors. Surely there's nothing about me that would warrant the attention of a great blue dragon?"

The blue dragonborn attendant merely smiled. "The Prince has his reasons. The wisdom of blue dragons is vast—far beyond what we might presume to comprehend."

Charles fell silent, resigning himself. Well, no choice now. Desperate times call for desperate measures—I'll just have to improvise.

As he steeled himself, the massive wooden door ahead slowly swung open.

A blue dragon, standing over three meters tall with a gleaming golden horn, stepped gracefully into the room.

Charles held his breath, his pulse quickening. This was his first time—completely unprotected—in close proximity to a living, carnivorous behemoth.

The largest creature he'd ever encountered before had been an African elephant at a zoo, separated by barriers as he fed it fruit.

But this? This was a blue dragon—larger than a full-grown bull elephant and sitting at the very top of the Material World's food chain.

Beside him, the blue dragonborn attendant bowed slightly. "Your Highness."

Charles hastily rose to his feet, dipping his head as he delivered the meticulously rehearsed praise in Draconic: "Nigel Charles, at your service. It is an honor to stand before the ruler of the desert, the apex of the Material World—the great blue dragon, Prince Rahman."

"From the moment I beheld you, I realized—all the art I've ever admired pales in comparison to your majesty!"

The syrupy flattery made even the dragonborn attendant glance sideways. This human came prepared. I wouldn't have the nerve to lay it on that thick.

Across the table, the massive blue dragon dipped his head, visibly pleased by the sycophantic praise. "Sit. This investment you seek... I shall discuss it with you personally."

With deliberate grace, the dragon settled at the opposite end of the table, folding his wings against his back. He raised one foreclaw to rest against his whiskered jaw—a calculated gesture that prominently displayed the ten massive, magic-pulsing gemstone rings adorning his talons.

Charles risked a glance. His stomach lurched.

Most were unfamiliar, but two he recognized—each easily worth ten thousand gold on the market.

Extravagant.

Swallowing hard, he murmured, "The honor is mine."

As he sat, he steeled himself. Stay calm, Charles. Remember—show enough deference, acknowledge their dominance, and blue dragons become the easiest creatures to deal with, evil or not.

After all, metallic dragons would impose moral constraints, but a blue dragon? No such scruples exist.

Across the table, the blue dragon's golden vertical pupils gazed down at him with unsettling warmth, as if beholding a long-lost friend.

"Explain your proposal," the dragon continued.

Charles didn't dare delay. He quickly retrieved the documents from his case. He had prepared three copies; an attendant took one and placed it before Rahman. Only when the dragon was settled did Charles begin, forcing confidence into his voice:

"The opportunity I've identified lies in the Amazons' housing demands..."

He presented market research—a questionnaire-based investigation surveying over four hundred Amazons. Ninety percent believed settling in Liberl Port would benefit their advancement. Other districts' housing prices were prohibitively expensive, but affordable options in South Harbor District would be enthusiastically welcomed...

His team saw tremendous economic potential. Data analysis comparing other large enterprises' growth suggested Amazon Fisheries Company was still expanding rapidly. Within two years, up to a thousand Amazons could have both the means and desire to purchase property...

They proposed acting before competitors noticed this market. With South Harbor District currently plagued by monsters and depressed land values, this was the perfect time to acquire property...

Of course, they recommended starting small—an initial 8,000 gold investment for phase one, with potential follow-up phases if successful...

The financial systems of this era were primitive compared to his previous life's sophisticated rounds of funding—seed rounds, angel investments, Series A through D.

Though Charles only grasped the basics, he'd been confident these modern concepts would revolutionize local investment practices, offering superior protection for both investors and entrepreneurs—an overwhelming advantage over conventional methods.

But now...

He spoke passionately, yet the blue dragon across the table seemed utterly disinterested, flipping through the proposal with polite detachment as if enduring a tedious tale.

Charles felt his heart sink like a stone.

What was happening?

Why did this blue dragon seem so impatient?

Was the amount too trivial?

Then why summon him personally?

Just where had he gone wrong?

Beads of sweat formed on his forehead as he struggled to comprehend. Only when he finished the final page did he release a shaky breath, his throat dry as he ventured cautiously, "Great Prince Rahman... what are your thoughts on this proposal?"

Rahman suppressed the faintest hint of a yawn. Economic matters bored him—yet this wouldn't hinder his true objective.

"Mr. Charles," he rumbled, "what would you be willing to sacrifice for this funding?"

Charles blinked. "You mean... company shares?"

"No." The dragon's tail twitched. "I refer to you yourself."

A frown creased Charles' brow as ominous realization dawned. "I beg your pardon, Prince Rahman? I fear I don't quite follow..."

"An analogy, then." Rahman plucked the petite proposal between two claws—ludicrously small against his massive frame. "Suppose—hypothetically—a blue dragon matriarch of royal lineage took... an interest in you. Serve her well, and she might grant investments far exceeding your modest proposal."

He let the document flutter to the table.

"Say... fifty thousand gold. Would that tempt you?"

Charles' mind went blank.

What?

A blue dragon matriarch... wanted him?!

This...

Damn it all! Why did this keep happening!

Charles cursed inwardly. When he first transmigrated into this handsome new body, he'd thought it would be an advantage. Yet so far, these striking features had brought neither him—nor the body's original owner—anything but endless trouble!

First, the original owner had caught Hattie's attention because of his looks, ending up with his soul completely drained.

Then Charles himself, being too conspicuously handsome, got marked by Xanathar's Guild thugs and subsequently investigated by Blackstaff Tower's investigation team.

And now, some unknown blue dragon sugar mommy wanted to buy him as a pet...

Screw this! Maybe I should just disfigure myself and be done with it!

After a moment of internal debate, he steeled himself and met Rahman's gaze firmly. "My apologies, honored Rahman—"

"Eighty thousand gold," Rahman interjected.

Charles' breath hitched, but his voice remained steady. "I'm afraid I must—"

"One hundred thousand gold," Rahman countered smoothly, then added, "Her heart yearns for companionship. Should you please her, her generosity may far exceed this sum."

The blue dragonborn attendant shot Charles a sidelong glance, only to see the man—though visibly stunned—draw a deep breath and stand his ground. "With all due respect, Prince Rahman, before stating my position, I must first express that being acknowledged by a great blue dragon is truly an honor."

"However, what I seek is a legitimate business partnership. Should I acquire funds through the... favor of a hypothetical blue dragon matriarch, it would blur the lines between personal and professional dealings."

"Such mixing of affairs would inevitably lead to negligence in my duties, as I'd devote my efforts to pleasing this hypothetical matriarch. In the long run, this would harm our mutual interests—and likely incur her wrath, leaving me in pieces."

He bowed slightly. "To avoid this lose-lose outcome, I must respectfully decline the hypothetical matriarch's... appreciation."

As he finished speaking, cold sweat drenched his back.

In essence, his lengthy spiel boiled down to one simple message: I don't do personal service!

Of course he refused. Who knew what twisted tastes this "hypothetical" blue dragon matriarch might have? Alcohol torches and steel brushes might be the least of it—a three-hundred-year-old, lonely blue dragon matriarch surely had mastered countless cruel amusements!

No amount of gold was worth crippling himself over.

As a former player, Charles had seen real wealth. In the late game, he'd casually tossed around hundreds of thousands of gold without a second thought. Did Rahman really think he'd sell his body and dignity for a paltry hundred thousand?

Still...

Though he'd phrased it as politely as possible, he knew the dragon understood his refusal. This "Rahman" wasn't an NPC from the game, making his temperament unpredictable. Now, tension coiled in Charles' gut—would he even leave this bank alive?

Damn it, this is a true blue dragon!

And this was its lair. Who knew what other horrors lurked within?

A bead of sweat traced his temple as Rahman's golden vertical pupils bored into him, studying every microexpression. The lobby hung in deathly silence, that eerie calm before a storm.

After an agonizing pause, the blue dragon suddenly chuckled.

"Excellent, Mr. Charles," he rumbled. "Congratulations—you've passed my test."

"I've long sought partners with both flexibility and unshakable will—those who won't bend even before a blue dragon," he continued, sighing lightly. "Yet until now, I've only encountered sycophantic worms. How could I entrust funds to such spineless creatures?"

The tension in the hall dissolved. Charles exhaled discreetly while inwardly scoffing: Bullshit. You're only saying this because I refused.

Had I agreed, you'd be spinning some opposite nonsense right now.

The male blue dragonborn attendant shared similar thoughts: Your Highness, you've never personally tested clients before. Since when do you "evaluate" random humans?

This was clearly about finding your mother a new consort!

Though both mortals harbored doubts, Rahman cared not for their silent judgments.

He raised one talon, the red gemstone ring upon it pulsing with gentle arcane light. Crimson magical threads extended, reforming into an official seal that floated onto the table.

"Let's begin with an initial investment of twenty thousand gold," he declared. "Blue Dragon Bank deals in no petty sums—spend freely."

"Be bold, Mr. Charles. Your proposal reveals rare talent. Unleash it without restraint!"

His encouragement flowed generously, yet each praise only deepened Charles' unease. This feels like some hidden conspiracy...

Is he waiting for me to fail, so he can claim me as compensation?

Hiss... This gold burns hotter than I'd like.

"The contract details, you may discuss with my staff."

With that, the massive blue dragon rose, his tail—long as his forebody—swaying lazily as he ambled toward the exit.

Yet just before leaving, that great head rotated 180 degrees, fixing Charles with a razor-edged smile:

"Work hard, young man. I eagerly await your glorious success."

One final step. The doors sealed shut. Only then was the Blue Dragon Prince truly gone.

Charles finally released the breath he'd been holding. Beside him, the male dragonborn attendant approached with practiced courtesy:

"This way, sir. We have standard contract templates—please review any desired modifications."

"Should all terms suit you, we may sign today itself."

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Chapter 80: Chapter 80:The Investigation Team Wiped Out?

At the Blue Dragon Bank's top floor, Rahman, who had just returned to his room, gazed downward with calm vertical pupils. His eyes followed the figure of Charles as he slowly stepped out of the bank's main entrance, watching until the man disappeared into the streets. Only then did he let out a quiet sigh.

The gift for his mother was within reach—but it still needed a little more time to prepare.

Last year, Rahman's mother had lost her second husband in a battle against an ancient mummy. Worse yet, the corpse had been turned into a dracolich, rendering resurrection impossible.

Though the family had swiftly destroyed the blasphemous undead, his mother had fallen into deep grief, from which she still hadn't recovered.

Rahman himself hadn't been particularly close to his stepfather, but he cared deeply for his mother. He longed to find a truly exquisite gift—one beautiful enough to pull her from her sorrow and restore her joy.

And Charles... was the most perfect candidate he had found so far.

The human's captivating charisma had ensnared Rahman's attention, convincing him that this man would bring his mother immense happiness.

During their negotiations, the blue dragon had been sorely tempted to simply seize Charles—to bind him, adorn him, and stuff him into an ornate gift box before presenting him to his mother.

He was confident that, given his mother's beauty, generosity, and gentleness, the human would eventually understand his good intentions rather than resent him.

Yet after careful consideration, he abandoned the idea.

His mother was still drowning in grief, unable to escape the shadow of her lost husband. In this state, what she needed was a devoted pet—one that could soothe her pain—not a terrified, resentful human doll requiring her warmth to soften its heart.

Besides, the family already had plenty of beautiful playthings seized through force—creatures ranging from celestial unicorns to lovely svirfneblin—all harboring quiet resentment. One more silver-kin human wouldn't make a difference.

So, no. Better to find a way to make Charles willingly, sincerely, love and serve his mother.

With that in mind, Rahman had approved the staggering sum of twenty thousand gold, allowing Charles to spend it freely.

To him, the amount was negligible—hardly worth a second thought. Even the lowest-ranking bank teller could authorize a dozen such investments in a single day.

But for Charles? It was an unimaginable fortune.

Even as he stepped out of the Blue Dragon Bank, the signed contract in hand, his consciousness remained hazy, his steps unsteady. He could scarcely believe it—not only had he met a real blue dragon, but after refusing the creature's initial demand, he had somehow secured 150% more funding than expected.

Twenty thousand gold?

Just... like that?

This...

Yet, the moment he recalled the blue dragon's proposal, Charles shuddered in disgust.

Damn it all—that overgrown lizard actually wanted to ship him off to some middle-aged female blue dragon's bed as a plaything!

I'd rather starve, die in the gutters, or leap off South Harbor's cliffs than become some rich wyrm's toy boy!

Dignity aside, the real issue was that a dragon's "plaything" had a horrifically short life expectancy.

Shaking his head to dispel the grim thoughts, Charles realized his stomach was growling.

The sun had dipped past noon, so he wandered the streets, weaving through the shadows of towering buildings until he found a minotaur-run grill. After ordering an absurdly expensive lamb chop, he dug in.

Hmm. Not bad. After years of monastery gruel, a proper meal was a rare luxury.

The feast cost him five gold—a steep price in an age before industrial farming.

Then again, this was the Central District, where every inch of land bled coin.

Any business here had to charge exorbitantly just to break even.

Ever since the Empire of Sein collapsed under its own rot, the once-oppressed minor nations had awakened, diving headfirst into global trade.

The Amazon Kingdom was one example, but countless others followed. Their independence fueled an economic boom, with thousands of merchant ships crisscrossing the seas daily—hauling ore from the Blacksoil Continent, dwarven-forged steel, blue dragon-crafted powerstones, and elven-woven magical artifacts...

This endless trade birthed fortunes. A single price swing in commodities could mint new tycoons or ruin speculators overnight. Ambitious opportunists sniffed out deals daily, their schemes bankrolled by conglomerates hungry for growth.

And Liberl Port, blessed with natural harbors and the University District's patronage, stood at the heart of it all. The Central District? A gilded cage reserved for international megacorps.

So yes. Five gold for a skewer of meat was downright reasonable.

After eating, Charles roamed Central District's streets, hunting for spellbooks (second-circle or higher) and trinkets for the nuns.

The tram back to South Harbor wouldn't depart until evening, so he had time to browse—and to reminisce about strolling through a modern city's towering skyline.

Alas, with no reliable contacts, the spellbook search proved futile. By sunset, he trudged to the tram stop, laden with jewelry boxes, and boarded the rattling carriage home.

As twilight faded, the gleaming spires of Central District gave way to South Harbor's squalor. He finally reached the monastery, where a cluster of nervous nuns waited at the gate.

The sight warmed his heart. Smiling, he stepped forward, gifts in hand—

—only for Hattie to rush up, face pale.

"Master! There's trouble in the slums."

She swallowed.

"Blackstaff Tower's investigation team... it looks like they've been wiped out."

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