

What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! #Chapter 4 : Why Don't I Just Do It Myself - Read What Witch? A Deadly Apothecary! Chapter 4 : Why Don't I Just Do It Myself

Chapter 4: Why Don't I Just Do It Myself?

On Bourbon Street in Hamel Town, inside Snake Mouth Alley, Leon finally found that old junk shop.

There was no signboard and no shop name—only a huge word “Recycling” painted on the outer wall of a shack built from wooden planks.

It looked extremely crude.

The only thing that looked half-decent was the shop door: a red-brown solid wooden door with a small window.

As the captain had said, an owl relief was carved above the door panel.

Judging by appearances, even this door was probably a recycled item from the shop itself—perhaps pried off from some vacant house in town.

This block was the largest slum in Hamel Town.

Public order couldn't be called so bad that you'd get stabbed the moment you walked in, but filth and hidden crimes were always present.

The shops here existed to fence stolen goods for pickpockets.

Passing peddlers often tried to sell you suspicious items.

In underground gambling dens, old hustlers skilled at cheating were always on the lookout for easy marks.

In small taverns, women who took the initiative to strike up conversations with strangers always had burly men watching from behind, ready to cooperate in a honey trap.

To avoid being targeted while carrying a big black sack, the moment Leon entered Snake Mouth Alley, he deliberately placed his sidearm in plain sight.

He pushed open the well-crafted solid wooden door, and the bell behind it rang crisply.

As soon as he stepped inside, he nearly tripped over a stack of old books by the door.

The shop was piled high with clutter.

Old furniture was casually stacked against the walls, even the windows were blocked, making the interior especially dim.

Faded dresses were crumpled inside an old wardrobe for customers to rummage through.

Boots, candlesticks, kettles, tableware... all kinds of miscellaneous secondhand goods were arranged haphazardly on the shelves.

Broken scrap metal was piled into small heaps in the corners.

The air was filled with a mixture of dust and the musty smell of rotting wood.

At a glance, Leon knew this was the kind of place perfect for hiding illegal items.

Conducting a search in such a place would be absolutely miserable.

The shop owner the captain had mentioned was behind the counter at the moment, fully absorbed in tinkering with an old pocket watch.

Just as the captain had said, he was a skinny, sharp-featured old man who looked to be around sixty.

Seeing a customer arrive, he merely lifted his head to glance at Leon, then jerked his chin toward the small table beside him, signaling Leon to take out whatever he wanted to sell for appraisal.

"Roddy introduced me," Leon spoke the password.

The shop owner's hands paused.

He raised his head and carefully examined Leon again, then looked at the cloth bag in Leon's hand.

Suddenly, with an agility unimaginable for his age, he sprang up and darted to the door.

He opened the small window on it and looked around, then shut the window, locked the door, returned to the small table, and beckoned Leon with a solemn expression.

"Come."

Leon understood and stepped forward, placing the cloth bag on the small table and opening it.

The shop owner took a look first, then fetched a pair of specially made gloves and put them on.

With nimble movements, he first pulled out a large string of simply processed rabbit carcasses, untied the rope binding them, and began carefully counting the number.

At first glance, they looked like ordinary rabbits.

A skilled hunter with a few hounds could easily catch such a string in half a day on the grasslands.

But on closer inspection, one would notice an extra retractable blade-shaped bone spur growing from each rabbit's hind legs.

Examining the mouths more carefully, one could see sharp carnivore fangs.

These were small magical beasts known as Head-Hunting Rabbits.

They specialized in swarming prey much larger than themselves.

Using agile leaps, they slashed the prey's carotid artery with the blade on their hind legs.

Even the slightest wound inflicted by a Head-Hunting Rabbit would bleed relentlessly.

They would wait until the prey collapsed from blood loss before devouring it.

Leon had heard that the blades on a Head-Hunting Rabbit's hind legs, when mounted onto daggers, had the same effect of preventing wounds from clotting, making them murderous weapons ideal for bloodletting.

Correspondingly, to prevent injury from themselves or their own kind, the fur of Head-Hunting Rabbits was extremely tough.

Made into clothing, it could resist cuts from blades and swords; made into gloves, it allowed one to directly grip blades.

The gloves the shop owner was wearing appeared to be made from this very material.

After counting the number of Head-Hunting Rabbit carcasses, the shop owner took out a sealed ceramic jar from the bag and opened it.

Inside was a pale blue semi-fluid gel—processed slime gel.

The shop owner lit a candlestick, examined the quality by the light, then placed the entire jar on a scale to weigh it.

From the files Leon had read during a period at the Inquisition, this classic low-level magical beast that resembled slime was the most common in magical beast smuggling cases.

Slimes could eat almost anything and were very easy to raise.

Once processed, the mucus that made up their bodies turned into a slick gel with a wide range of uses.

Applied to wounds, it could stop bleeding and promote healing.

It could be used as a neutralizing agent in potions, or even as a lubricant.

Leon had even seen a case file where someone had turned this stuff into adult products of various shapes and sold them—quite successfully, at that.

He watched as the shop owner counted and weighed these magical beast materials, continuously recording figures on paper.

Leon focused intently on peeking at the contents.

If the units recorded by the shop owner were Fenni, then the recycling price for one Head-Hunting Rabbit carcass was eight hundred Fenni.

There were ten in total—that made eight thousand Fenni.

Ordinary rabbits sold by hunters on the market only cost seven copper coins.

“Just opening a Head-Hunting Rabbit farm would make quite a bit of money,” Leon thought casually.

Head-Hunting Rabbits were dangerous, but not impossible to deal with.

The blades on their legs were very short.

Forget armor or shields—even thick wooden boards could block them.

Setting aside those dangerous blades, they weren’t much stronger than ordinary rabbits.

Though they ate meat, their appetites weren’t large.

At such prices, the profit margin would be considerable.

That jar of slime gel weighed about two kilograms, with a purchase price of eight hundred Fenni.

Finally, the shop owner took out a sealed test tube no thicker than a finger.

Inside were semi-transparent crystals like coarse salt, mixed with faint red and blue hues.

Leon knew the main event had arrived and watched with full concentration.

This was the most valuable item among this batch of contraband—the Mana said to slow aging and used to brew potions with various miraculous effects.

In this world, magical beasts that appeared in dungeons could generally be hunted with some effort even by ordinary people, and some were even secretly raised.

But precious Mana could only be extracted from specific parts of various magical beasts by Witches.

The Church of the Noren Empire regarded Moira as an absolute heretic.

Mere worship was enough to be sentenced for blasphemy, and attempting to receive Moira's blessing was an even graver crime.

As a result, Witches were extremely rare within the Empire and hid themselves deeply.

Most Mana circulating within the Empire was smuggled in from abroad through various channels, resold layer upon layer, and finally turned into potions sold as end products.

Every link in this illegal trade chain earned a substantial profit.

Leon watched as the shop owner first used a magnifying glass and tweezers to carefully examine the transparency of the Mana under the flame, then took out a delicate small balance.

He carefully poured the Mana onto a silver tray on one side, added carob seeds as counterweights on the other, and finally obtained a result of about twenty-three carats—4.6 grams.

The shop owner recorded another entry on the ledger.

Leon glanced at it, his heartbeat quickening slightly.

The number was ninety-two thousand.

The purchase price of this Mana was four thousand Fenni per carat—twenty thousand per gram!

The shop owner carefully poured the Mana back into the test tube and even scraped the silver tray with a tool.

He repackaged everything, then carried the candlestick back behind the counter.

Squatting down, he lifted the carpet, unlocked something, and pried up a floorboard.

Beneath it was the pitch-black entrance to a cellar.

Holding the cloth bag and the candlestick, he squeezed down with some difficulty.

Leon went over and guarded the entrance vigilantly.

If this was a secret passage, he had to be ready in case the other party simply ran off with the goods.

After all, this was their first meeting—caution was necessary.

Fortunately, the light and sounds below didn't move away.

The shop owner merely rummaged around in the cramped space below, hid the cloth bag, then counted out money from a chest into another bag before climbing back up the wooden ladder.

Leon watched as the shop owner calmly sealed the entrance again, locked it, replaced the carpet, then tore a receipt from the ledger.

He wrote five hundred and four Fenni on it, signed his name and the date, and handed it along with the bag of money to Leon.

“Check it.”

Leon examined the receipt carefully, then took the money bag and opened it.

It was filled with large-denomination gold coins, with only four Silver Wolves.

After carefully counting, it came to exactly five hundred and four Thalers—one hundred thousand eight hundred Fenni.

He quickly understood the trick.

The number on the receipt was for Director Caron to reconcile accounts.

It was written in Fenni, but the actual unit was Thalers.

That way, if anyone skimmed anything in between, it would be immediately obvious.

No wonder the captain had emphasized not to get sticky fingers.

Leon nodded to the shop owner.

The owner's expression relaxed, and he grinned, revealing yellowed teeth.

"Come again."

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At seven that evening, Leon returned to the Inquisition with the money as agreed.

After confirming with colleagues he ran into that the two bishops who had come to visit earlier had already left, he went to the duty room, where he found the captain already sitting and waiting.

"You finally made it back," the captain let out a long breath when he saw him, then went over, locked the door, and asked in a low voice, "Where's the money?"

Leon handed over the money bag and the receipt.

The captain took them, counted quickly, then turned around and left.

Leon followed at a distance, watching as the captain carefully carried the bag upstairs, knocked on the director's office door, and went in after receiving a response.

About ten minutes later, Leon saw the captain come out empty-handed.

The captain walked over, nodded at Leon, and softly said, "Thanks."

"You're welcome, Captain, it's just that..." Leon smiled awkwardly.

The captain had promised to give him a share.

This money wasn't something he could refuse—after all, he had risked being arrested for dereliction of duty to transport and sell off the evidence.

"Oh right, you worked hard. Here, take this..." The captain immediately understood, fumbled in his pocket, and took out a Thaler silver coin, handing it to Leon.

Leon stared at the Silver Wolf in silence, then looked at the captain in astonishment without taking it.

Risking dismissal and detention, only to get two hundred as a delivery fee—was this a joke?

Seeing Leon's reaction, the captain sighed.

He simply took out his money pouch, poured out five copper coins of ten Fenni each, and handed them over together with the silver coin.

"This is all I've got on me."

Leon looked at the total of two hundred and fifty Fenni in the captain's hand and remained silent.

If he didn't know that this number had no special meaning in this world, he would have suspected he'd somehow offended the captain before.

"Can you stop looking at me like that?" The captain said helplessly under Leon's gaze, lowering his voice.

"I know you think it's too little, but do you know how much I got? Nothing! Not a single Fenni! I swear on my parents' names—the director didn't give me a single extra coin in this matter. The money I'm giving you now is out of my own pocket!"

Leon looked at the captain in shock.

The captain shook his head with a bitter smile.

"You've been at this for three years—don't you understand the director yet? When have we ever gotten overtime pay? Even the bonuses for cracking major cases, even the compensation for fallen brothers—he's skimmed from all of it! Do you really think he'd share money on this? If he doesn't give it, what can we do?"

Leon came back to his senses.

There was no concrete proof that the captain hadn't gotten a share, but he was already inclined to believe him.

The logic was simple.

If the director didn't give them any money, there was nothing they could do about it.

Given Leon's understanding of him, that bastard definitely wouldn't give them anything.

Leon still remembered that major case they'd handled back then—six criminals arrested, over eight hundred thousand Fenni in stolen funds seized, plus some unsold magical beast materials.

A colleague who handled the evidence had quietly told Leon that this was already after the director had swallowed at least ten percent before reporting it.

That case had filled that bastard's belly quite nicely.

What Leon got from that operation was a mere five Thalers—possibly already docked—and injuries that plagued him to this day.

But there was nothing they could do.

Director Caron Eso, though also an Inquisitor, held a ranked title within the Church.

His rank was equivalent to that of a Fully Appointed Knight.

He came from a noble family, the youngest son of a baron.

Though he had no chance of inheriting the title, his family background was still enough to secure him a ranked position within the Church.

In terms of background and status, the director lived in a completely different world from them.

In Hamel Town, with the director's power, he could easily crush them.

If they tried to report him, they'd likely only drag themselves down with him.

"Today I really had no choice. I won't trouble you again in the future. Take the money for now—next time I'll treat you to a drink. I'll just have the owner put it on my tab," the captain said apologetically.

Leon took the money, thought for a moment, then asked, "Captain, can you really accept this?"

Doing this job, they worked themselves to the bone only to have their hard-earned pay docked from above.

Even when selling off seized goods, the ones above ate their fill while they bore the risk.

"What choice do I have? From my position, I can't refuse the director. If he makes things difficult for me, I won't be able to survive here at all. I've got a whole family to support..." The captain said gloomily, patting Leon on the shoulder.

"Don't think too much about it. It's almost shift change—let's go drink!"

Leon looked at the captain in front of him.

The man was only a little over thirty, yet already looked prematurely aged, his hair thinning by the day.

In Leon's eyes, the captain was a decent person and worked hard—perhaps because he had no choice but to.

Only now did Leon suddenly realize—wasn't this exactly the kind of middle-aged man from his previous life, shackled by family and manipulated by the workplace?

And that was probably his own future in this workplace.

No—considering the injuries he carried, even if he never started a family, his future would still be far bleaker than the captain's.

He didn't even have the qualifications to pity him.

With his mind full of thoughts, Leon followed the captain downstairs in silence, heading to the duty room to change shifts.

As they passed near the main entrance, he saw an elderly woman in shackles being led out by a colleague.

The Inquisitor removed her shackles and waved at her.

“Alright, you can go.”

Leon looked at the old woman.

He knew her—he had personally escorted her in earlier that morning during field duty.

Mrs. Hannah Weislan, a local who lived in River Mouth Village on the outskirts of Hamel Town.

She usually pushed a cart into town to sell vegetables, but secretly, no one knew through what channels, she had been dealing in magical beast materials.

This time, while entering town, she accidentally collided with a convoy from the guard unit.

Her cart overturned, exposing her goods and leading to her arrest.

The batch of goods worth over one hundred thousand that had been found today was taken from her cart.

Compared to other smugglers, her background was very simple.

Investigating her upstream sources and sales routes shouldn't have taken much effort.

Yet in the end, she was simply released.

After all, the stolen goods had already disappeared.

Most likely, once the director decided to swallow the goods, he had already had someone reach a secret agreement with her during interrogation.

That was exactly what she wanted as well.

If the files hadn't mentioned that Witches blessed by Moira could maintain youth and beauty, then merely possessing Mana would have been enough to make her suspected as a Witch.

"Where did she get her supply from?" Leon thought.

If her cart hadn't overturned, this ordinary-looking vegetable-selling old woman could have sold off that batch of goods and obtained around one hundred thousand.

Leon himself had borne the risk today and successfully delivered that batch of goods to the buyer, yet he had only gotten two hundred and fifty.

At that thought, a crazy idea flashed through Leon's mind:

Since I already dared to bear that kind of risk... why don't I just... do it myself?

"Captain, I won't go drinking after all..." Looking at Mrs. Weislan's retreating back as she headed for the main door, the words slipped out of his mouth.

"Huh?" The captain turned back in surprise.

"I just remembered there are some things at home I need to deal with. I should head back early," Leon continued calmly.

Tip: You can use left, right, A and D keyboard keys to browse between chapters.