

NORTH X NORTHWEST

Chapter 10

The empire's capital, Sesbron.

Emperor Philip II was in a great mood lately.

The emperor walked past the window and saw some gallows under construction on a nearby hill. Inspired by it, he started to hum an old song.

“...That’s why the gallows are slanted, his legs are slanted, slanted, hmm...”

The lord chamberlain shrugged his shoulders at the sight of a carefree emperor laughing towards a window. After some time, the emperor turned around and noticed the pile of letters brought in by his servant, eyeing them with anticipation.

“Oh. You’re here. Go ahead and read them out loud.”

‘About three months ago, when that Admiral was still pushing back, those letters were full of complaints.’

The Emperor took a seat on the throne.

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

The old servant opened the first letter.

“These are tributes from Pablo of Label.”

“Label? Oh, he bothered me immensely. What is it this time?”

“This is the yoke oyster that the Viscount produced this year. It is a delicacy of the Label territory, which His Majesty was very satisfied with last time.”

“Oh, yeah. I remember. Has it grown already?”

“It’s stated that a unique race has been developed especially for His Majesty. It may be smaller than the year before, but it is said to be expensive and rare because it was bred off-season.”

“Right. Right.”

The emperor’s appetite was instantly stimulated and he began to drool from joy. Compared to the previous emperors, Philip II was particularly greedy. He favoured vassals who offered delicacies to the imperial family. Seeing the emperor’s exiting response to the tribute of Label, the servant began to read the letter.

“To the Emperor, Philip II. Your loyal subordinate from Label offers words of intense gratitude. When I was having trouble in the past, I sent a letter stating that the pirates of the Ingres Sea have been robbing our ships. Your Majesty showed us benevolence by sending Admiral Retiro. I once again admire the dignity of the imperial family by sending the arrogant Admiral. Therefore, as a token of our gratitude, we would like to push for the transfer of ownership of the Saint Verona silver mine...”

The undertakings of admiral Retiro brought tremendous wealth to the emperor. No wonder, because it’s been more than a year or two since a group of pirates from the southern Ingres Sea last pillaged the merchant ships of the empire.

Whether it was in the West or the South, the seas seized by the navy became the exclusive property of the emperor. No other nobles were given a sea as a fief. Meaning that only the emperor could freely use the waters. People who wanted to use it as a commercial route had to pay some of their acquired or traded products as taxes. Therefore, the emperor could enjoy his power in peace within Sesbron, where he ate, saw and owned the rare products of the Southwest and other mysteries of the world without lifting a finger.

It was only natural that the emperor wouldn't engage in lowly commercial activities. Because of this, the imperial navy didn't escort merchant ships. Their main task was to protect the waters and establish new routes to the unknown East. It was unimaginable that a soldier from the empire would escort a nobleman's ship, so no one dared to do so. However, there have been constant requests to clean up the South, hoping for a similar scenario as to how the Mondovi Fleet wiped out the Western pirates that were terrorizing the Anatole Sea.

Even if they both infiltrated the imperial waters, the western and southern pirates were certainly different. The western pirates were roaming the Anatole Sea, the ocean between the mainland and the continent in the West and were mainly made up of remnants from defeated countries. They looted navy ships for their weapons and crossed the borders of the empire, so the emperor ordered them to be wiped out.

However, the southern pirates – or rather the Southern League of pirates – were different. They caused almost no friction with the navy. That didn't mean that the southern pirates weren't active, rather, it was mostly because the southern navy was too focused on finding the eastern continent.

At first, the empire tried to incorporate the southern islands as they did with the western continent. However, this plan failed for numerous reasons. Due to a large number of islands and their shallow waters, the South wasn't suitable for the giant naval ships. There were also several unexplainable incidents. Such as coral colonies suddenly appearing and damaging the keel* of the ships, or a large school of fish swarming around and obstructing the navigation. Even going as far as saying that the people of the South have the ability to control birds and can command them to tear the ships' sails. As a result, the sail-torn ships floated around in the middle of the ocean, unable to continue sailing, leaving the crew to die of starvation. Amiaeng's yellow-billed

white-tailed bird was particularly notorious among the imperial navy and the sea off the coast of Amiaeng was jokingly called the cemetery of imperial ships.

In the past, emperors who wanted to expand their empire, more often headed to the fascinating and mythical East, while leaving the cursed South unattended. It was a great opportunity for aristocrats, seeing that on an island that was not subjugated under the emperor, they were free to commit loot. As long as they paid the full amount of taxes for the use of the sea route, no further sanctions were imposed. And at that time, the pirates didn't show much cohesion when the navy gave up on them.

However, several decades later, an organisation called the Southern League of Pirates emerged out of nowhere. They stated that they were a different generation than the pirates who fought against the empire, so the former emperor didn't see them as a threat and left them be. Nobles with investments in the growing commercial business in the South had other ideas. Their concerns turned out to be correct, the Southern League of Pirates didn't attack the navy but made it their purpose to rob the merchant ships. In addition, the League cleverly left the cargo, used for taxes, alone. And even if they touched it, there was no way of proving it.

Looting suffered by individuals can only be punished by lawsuits, which wasn't simple either. How could it be easy to drag these looters to the empire? The resentment of people from the empire, especially the aristocrats, spread like a wildfire in Sesbron. Meanwhile, the emperor didn't care about the wailing of the nobles, he only had to receive their taxes. The Southern League of Pirates even functioned as a suppressant for the nobles' wealth, giving the emperor another reason to not eliminate them.

After the league has grown steadily over the past years and the commercial union, which accumulated tremendous wealth, promised a huge reward. The

emperor couldn't ignore it any longer and ordered admiral Retiro of the Mondovi Fleet to wipe out the southern pirates.

That's when another hiccup occurred.

The admiral was an incredibly eccentric fellow and didn't listen to anyone. It was widely known that the members of the Retiro family were unique, but the admiral was in a class of his own. It was the first time that a subordinate denied an order. By recklessly saying no, he made the normally composed emperor shout. However, to the public, the mentally incompetent one was always the one barking the loudest.

{ *"Punish this lunatic right now!"* }

By memory, Ed immediately recited the reasons why he couldn't be executed. The emperor had grabbed the back of his neck and collapsed right after, only to wake up three hours later. Feeling humiliated, he told the imperial physician that it was nothing.

The heated emperor sought the advice of congress for three days and nights, debating his options to kill the admiral. Ed wasn't worried in the slightest about the assembly, there were too many aspects in which he had control, not to mention the influence he had in the naval operations of the empire.

It was said that the northern continent consists of several small countries, and rumour has it that one of those small countries is ruled by the admiral's family. Wood and minerals, the main trade products with the empire, came from that very land. Oakwood with the highest quality and durable, insect-repellent wood that can withstand any corrosion, were all produced in the North. Their building technique for navigation ships operating on the sea was also unrivalled. And above all, the gold ores and crystals from their mines were popular within the central continent. So much that they were even coveted by the imperial family as a way to display their grandeur. Clearly, there were countless reasons why trade with the north continent couldn't be cut off.

{ *“What about assassination?”*

“Your Majesty, before Sir Edgar was promoted to the rank of admiral, the Navy was struggling against the western pirates. There was even a naval battle in which most of the fleet sank. The tides turned after he took office. A true genius shouldn’t be wasted. We can’t assassinate such an important asset to the empire.”

“That’s your opinion. It’s all just lines in a rapport. How about Sagastar or Lemoine?”

“Commander Sagastar is not yet capable of succeeding the admiral, and Captain Lemoine hasn’t recovered from a serious injury he sustained some years ago and thereby, isn’t able to jump back to the frontlines. Then there is also the lack of discipline within the ranks...” }

The emperor had to face it. It felt like the gods were playing with him from above.

{ *“If so, we just wage war with the northern continent.”*

“What?!”

“We will cross the Strait of Monferrand.” }

Footnote:

Keel: The bottom part of a ship.

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