Empress 139

Chapter 139: Don’t Ask—Just Invincible! (Part 2)

All decisions made, and the fleet fully prepared, the Empress’s retinue was finally set to depart to sea.

The next morning, the send-off crowd filled the pier.

Led by the Chief Minister William, the cabinet members, alongside local officials headed by the mayor and port authority personnel, and the remaining crew of the Fourth Fleet all gathered at the pier to bid farewell to the Empress.

Additionally, there were citizens and merchants from various countries who voluntarily came to see her off.

The Empress’s unparalleled beauty and dignified demeanor left them in awe.

The crowd was transfixed by the Empress’s grace until she slowly stepped onto the deck, ascended to the highest floor where the captain’s quarters were, and disappeared into the room, only then reluctantly dispersing.

William and the others watched the Empress’s entourage depart and finally breathed a sigh of relief.

In the past two months, the Empress had surprised them far too often, turning astonishment into a regular occurrence.

If this continued, the retirement age for cabinet members would likely see a significant reduction.

It’s better now that she’s gone; everyone can be at ease, avoiding mutual torment.

The sky over the strait was particularly clear, in stark contrast to the misty Imperial Capital.

With the Monarch at the forefront, the Fourth Fleet gradually departed Dovor Port and sailed into the sea.

This fleet consisted of a total of fifteen ships.

Including the first-class battleship Monarch, three second-class battleships, five cruisers, several destroyers, and one supply ship.

The entire fleet was built by the Imperial Shipyard, well-maintained, and the ships were in good condition.

"As long as there’s no ambush by an enemy country’s main fleet, our fleet is invincible!"

Bridges confidently introduced the fleet situation to the Empress and concluded as much.

"What if we encounter an enemy’s main ambush?"

"The Sussex Navy will fight any enemy; we have defeated numerous powerful foes."

Bridges paused slightly and said slowly, "Of course, to ensure His Majesty’s safety, the Monarch will leave the battlefield and return to port alone."

The Monarch is exceptionally fast, and in this era, it’s rare for a main battleship to catch up to her.

As long as she is determined to escape, her speed is unmatched.

In short, just one word—invincible!

Bridges’s confidence was infectious, but Roland disliked the term invincible.

He seriously pointed out, "The last fleet claiming invincibility has sunk in the Dovor Strait, losing maritime dominance. General Bridges, I need you to ensure His Majesty's safety, not boast invincibility."

These words were not to Bridges's liking.

He glanced at Roland with contempt, looking down on this fop who rose to prominence through the Empress.

"Lord Roland, you are an excellent Knight, but you don't understand naval warfare at all."

"Naval battles may have elements of luck, but it's the naval legacy and exquisite skills that matter. No one understands naval warfare more than I do, not even General Planck."

Seeing the tense atmosphere, Sif quickly stepped in to mediate, "General Bridges, you're right, but underestimating an undefeated enemy is complacency, be it army or navy."

"Captain Roland, you should also say less; at sea, we all listen to Bridges."

She winked at Roland, with a look suggesting she understood everything.

Bridges was indeed a veteran in the navy, experienced, but his complacency was almost written on his face.

Roland's warnings to him were not misplaced.

But after being cautioned, someone needed to soothe the situation.

Sif understood this.

Both Bridges and Roland apologized to the Empress, temporarily setting aside the conflict.

Despite his disdain for Roland, Bridges was no fool; he knew Roland held a special status and couldn't confront him directly, so he chose instead to introduce navigation knowledge.

Roland wasn't angry; instead, he held more respect for Bridges.

In front of the Empress, being candid even to her favored minister, this straightforward nature and having risen to Vice Admiral in a navy rampant with nepotism, evidenced true merit.

This person was worth pulling over.

Bridges had firm beliefs, a righteous demeanor, outstanding abilities, and was renowned, far more qualified than Planck to be the fleet commander.

But Planck was the brother-in-law of the Minister of the Navy Winston.

Since Planck is no more, letting someone like Bridges, capable and loyal, take the position is only logical.

But this should not be rushed.

Opportunities gained too easily aren't valued; Bridges must strive to compete for the fleet commander's role and higher naval ranks.

For Bridges to make a mark in front of the Empress, this navigation class was naturally full of substance.

Both Roland and the naturally performing Empress Sif were good listeners.

They listened attentively, indicating first if they had questions before asking.

Even though some questions were rather naïve, Bridges didn't mind.

He relished teaching the Empress.

Perhaps in a good mood, even the pretty boy beside the Empress... Roland seemed a tad more agreeable.

In General Bridges's eyes, Roland's status transformed from a useless pretty boy to one slightly capable and polite.

Unaware of how poorly he was still regarded, Roland accompanied Sif through the navigation basics, raising a discerning question after raising his hand.

"General Bridges, you have rich naval experience, having seen many trials and tribulations. Based on your judgment, what are the chances of survival for the Late Emperor and the Fourth Fleet? What might they have encountered?"

This direct question left Bridges with a headache.

In his mind, Roland's evaluation plummeted yet again.

From a polite pretty boy to one a bit capable but full of malice.

Truly a case of bringing up the worst possible scenario.

He replied irritably, "Without any evidence, it's mere speculation. Can random guesses be accurate?"

Sif smilingly diffused the tense mood, "General Bridges, it has been almost three months since the incident, and we've cried the tears we had to shed. Now we need to solve the problem; please speak freely."

Since the Empress herself said so, Bridges naturally wouldn't miss the opportunity.

There were things he had held in for too long and needed to be expressed.

He took a deep breath and said slowly, "Currently, all signs point to His Majesty Edward and the entire fleet being lost, but there’s a huge doubt: no matter how dreadful a shipwreck is, there are often survivors."

"For a shipwreck resulting in over a thousand casualties, such a complete extinction is unheard of. Yet this shipwreck had no survivors at all."

"Moreover, no ship debris was found in the surrounding waters."

Bridges frowned and said, "Warships are mostly made from the best tall hardwoods; even if overturned in a shipwreck, the remains are often drifted by the current. However, after searching downstream at the incident site for half a month, we found nothing."

"Combining the above doubts, I suspect His Majesty Edward’s fleet wasn’t lost but disappeared. It’s as if they were swallowed by a temporal rift, vanishing entirely."

Bridges shook his head, somewhat helplessly saying, "Please forgive my nonsense."

After all, a whole fleet disappearing sounds too bizarre, like a fantasy.

Roland and Sif exchanged glances, their eyes brightening simultaneously.

Seeing a dejected Bridges, Roland slowly said, "General Bridges, your findings are very useful, at least providing many clues. Have you reported these matters to the Cabinet?"

"Of course, I reported it in writing to the Minister of the Navy, but there has been no response."

"General Bridges, today’s conversation stays between the three of us. The clues you’ve provided are very important; rest assured, this matter will be thoroughly investigated, I promise."

Sif’s closing remarks concluded the conversation.

Bridges knew the Empress and Roland had matters to discuss and excused himself first.

Thinking of the intelligent Empress being wrapped around the finger of this pretty boy, Roland, displeased him greatly, further diminishing his opinion of Roland.

From somewhat capable but malicious pretty boy to somewhat capable, malicious, especially skilled at deceiving simple girls, morally corrupt pretty boy.

In short, not a good person.

Watching the somewhat desolate retreating figure of Bridges, Sif couldn’t help but smile and quietly said:

"General Bridges’s loyalty to me is beyond doubt, but he seems to have a big problem with you. Aren’t you going to clear things up?"

"I never explain misunderstandings. Those who truly trust me won’t misunderstand me."

Roland and Sif met eyes in the air.

Sif understood that she was the person Roland referred to.

True trust, what need is there for so many misunderstandings?