Empress 177

Chapter 177: Uninvited Guest

The Empress, surrounded by her maids, returned to the palace.

Various troops boarded the ships sequentially, and the plaza gradually became sparse.

Sif carefully approached Roland, holding the reins. Before Roland could speak, she lifted the masked armor and smiled radiantly.

Roland intended to say something but forgot when he saw her smiling face.

"You were right. This operation is not only a military action but also involves various factors. Having you by my side makes things easier."

"Oh, you're not blaming me?" Sif asked softly.

"You're the Monarch; I'm the subordinate. What right do I have to blame you?" Roland replied calmly.

Sif lowered her head slightly and said gently, "I'm sorry. I only realized I should come with you after leaving the palace. There's nothing major happening at the Governor's Mansion for now, and even if there is, the Magic Mirror and they can handle it."

"I have a feeling going to Val Lake won't be easy, and I want to help you."

Roland's last bit of resentment disappeared into thin air.

Facing Sif's eyes, clear as the blue sky, what temperament could he possibly have?

"Then let's set off. All aboard!"

Roland and Sif's flagship was established as the destroyer Mary Rose.

In this era, destroyers and cruisers were not significantly different.

They couldn't engage in a passionate bombardment on the battleship line, so they roamed the periphery as cruiser destroyers.

The Mary Rose had a displacement of 1200 tons, equipped with 32 18-pound and 12-pound cannons, easily handling small ships or armed merchant ships of the same class.

The nearly two hundred crew members on board also ensured sufficient combat strength in close quarters battles.

Although not as imposing as battleships, it was more than enough to deal with the trivial Val City State.

Despite being well prepared, Roland dared not be complacent.

Val City State was not the problem; the problem was the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

This group of people were refugees from the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

Since they championed freedom and republicanism, the authorities couldn't completely eradicate them, but they would never allow these people to fall into the hands of hostile countries.

Sussex and Jin Yuan had fought countless wars in the past thousand years, although their relations were decent now, they were not considered particularly friendly nations.

The last place the Jin Yuan Kingdom wanted these people to go was probably Sussex or Vladimir.

In any case, they couldn't be careless.

The fleet maintained formation, sailing at approximately eight knots on the vast Rodinia River.

At this speed, resting for a night, they could reach the border of Selin Province and Val City State by midday the next day.

Roland did not urge the fleet to speed up.

After all, the fleet's main force consisted of transport ships, and such flat-bottomed ships were challenging to accelerate.

Eight knots was the lower limit for warships but the upper limit for them.

Standing on the top deck, Roland raised his binoculars to observe the territory.

The Rodinia River wasn't the longest on the continent but the busiest in terms of water transport, without exception.

The Three Overseas Provinces of Sussex, Jin Yuan Kingdom, Weimar Federation, Plaiden Kingdom, and many independent small states and duchies relied on the Rodinia River for development.

This golden waterway also made the region the most prosperous area on the continent.

This was why the Empire was willing to spend a fortune to maintain the Three Provinces.

The Three Overseas Provinces were extremely wealthy, capable of matching the economy of ten home provinces if operating normally.

Unfortunately, this outcome depended on that "if."

The Empire had occupied these lands for over a century, yet couldn’t localize them.

Each year, it had to spend enormous funds to maintain the territory, even at the cost of antagonizing neighboring countries, causing the conservatives within the Empire to despise this place deeply.

But this was an internal dispute within the Empire, which Roland didn’t concern himself with.

To him, this was his domain and more so the bridgehead for expanding continental interests.

His vision was not limited to the mere Three Provinces.

Taking the binoculars handed by Roland, Sif observed the distance through the lens, her curiosity prompting her to ask Roland questions incessantly.

Roland swiftly flipped through the encyclopedia in his mind, providing answers.

"Roland, you’re amazing, just like an encyclopedia!" Sif praised with a smile.

Roland smiled silently.

Not like, he was the walking encyclopedia.

Sif’s curiosity grew more active upon seeing a few tall smokestacks.

"Roland, what is that?"

"Those are chimneys from the steel mill," Roland explained patiently.

"That’s nice," Sif murmured.

"Nice?"

"Of course, without steel, how would we arm the military?" Sif said firmly, focusing on the factory instead of lingering on the farmland and windmills.

Unexpectedly, she had an industrialist's mindset, which reassured Roland, prompting him to introduce the comparison of steel and coal production among the continent's major powers.

Finally, he concluded, "Our country's steel output ranks first in the world, road mileage ranks first, industrial capacity ranks first. This is the foundation of our invincibility."

Sif wanted to ask if steel could block Sofia, but the words retreated at the tip of her tongue.

Blocking Sofia was her responsibility, not that of ordinary soldiers and workers.

Merely thinking of Sofia caused her good mood for the day to vanish instantly.

Sif handed the binoculars to Roland, saying softly, "I'm a bit tired. I'll go rest first. Leave this to you."

Roland knew what troubled Sif.

Schrodinger's confidence had shifted to a state of depression and despondence.

He said nothing, simply took the binoculars and continued observing.

This was also an excellent opportunity for him to understand the territory's situation.

The Rodinia River wasn't only a golden channel, its abundant water also nourished the lands on both banks.

Though it was winter now, with no crops in the fields, the tidy farmland and surrounding windmills indicated advanced agriculture here.

On the riverside road, he also saw several steam cars.

The gentlemen of the Imperial Capital wouldn’t allow these bulky, noisy metal lumps into the city.

The reason was simple; what if they startled their horses?

A horse carriage was much more comfortable than this thing.

Not only the Imperial Capital but there were few steam cars throughout the Empire’s homeland.

Don’t ask, if asked, the ancestral ways are to blame.

As an ardent admirer of the Imperial Capital, the cities in the Three Overseas Provinces also didn’t allow steam cars in, making this Roland’s rare opportunity to observe steam cars up close.

Through the binoculars, he saw these cars, mockingly dubbed "the fastest moving big teapots," driving by.

In a world without fossil fuels, clunky steam power was the industrial foundation.

Watching the steam and coal smoke choking the drivers until they had to park by the roadside, Roland couldn’t help but shake his head.

The craftsmanship was too rough.

No wonder the Imperial Capital’s gentlemen didn’t like them. He also disliked riding them.

The future can wait for a better future.

Supporting the development of steam cars doesn’t mean riding them now.

At least wait for a better ride experience.

After watching for over half an hour, Roland also felt a bit bored and planned to return to the cabin to be with Sif.

Just then, a ship suddenly lost control on the wide channel, heading towards the fleet.

"Prepare to open fire!"

Without waiting for Roland’s command, Bridges had already given the order.

He wouldn’t allow any threat to the fleet to exist.

The Empress acting as the Count was still on board.

He raised his binoculars, nervously watching the out-of-control ship, releasing a sigh of relief after a moment.

A false alarm.

The out-of-control ship showed no intention of colliding with the fleet.

Unfortunately, this ship did collide—just with another sailboat.

The two ships were close in displacement and crashed firmly.

Dozens of passengers and sailors fell into the water.

Bridges remained indifferent and unmoved.

Everyone had their destiny, and he wouldn’t slow the fleet down to rescue people.

Just as he was about to ignore them, the ship ahead of the flagship lowered a lifeboat.

Bridges frowned, watching as the young knight Jes personally rowed the lifeboat towards the furthest swimmer.

Idle sympathy.

Fine, as long as the fleet’s pace is unaffected, let him do as he pleases.

Meanwhile, Bridges silently complained, Jes’s lifeboat returned.

Instead of approaching the ship ahead, it came near the Mary Rose.

"General, this is the Bishop of the Holy Hall of Light and their entourage. They are also heading to the Val City State."

Bridges furrowed his brows tightly, somewhat displeased.

Just as he was about to refute, Roland’s voice floated down from the upper deck.

"Since esteemed guests wish to board, our lack of hospitality would seem disrespectful. Please allow the guests to come aboard."