Empress 201

Chapter 201: What If?

On the road leading out of the city, Enya remained silent for a long time before slowly speaking, "Teacher, I have an illusion that the ceremony just now, wrapped in a sacred cloak, was like a trade. Everything had a price tag."

She looked down somewhat embarrassed, murmuring softly, "Maybe I was mistaken, but that's really what I think."

"You just realized?"

The Crow Sage looked at Enya, teasing gently, "Enya, the fact that you can see this means the three months of hard journey weren't in vain."

"Ah?"

Enya's beautiful big eyes widened, stammering for a long time, leaving only a sigh.

"I don't like it this way."

"Nobody likes it, but it's the rule of the game," the Crow said calmly.

He stopped walking and cast his gaze towards the Rodinia River not far away.

"Enya, remember. True romanticism is finding beauty in ugliness, not adding trouble to oneself in a beautiful world."

"If you don't like this world, then strive to change it. If you can't change it, learn to adapt to it. Strong people never complain about the environment."

Enya was stunned for a few seconds, carefully pondering her teacher’s words, and after a long silence slowly said:

"Teacher, I understand now."

"Let this journey of training come to an end."

Seeing the determined look in Enya’s eyes, the Crow Sage nodded in satisfaction.

That’s right.

What’s the use of disliking? Go and change things.

Enya is not lacking in strength and potential; what she lacks is the mentality of a strong person.

Enya’s firm gaze turned back towards Val City State, with a hint of regret.

"It’s a pity we can’t do anything but watch them share in the glory."

"We are not completely powerless. If we have no chance to share in the glory, then let’s throw mud on it."

The Crow said quietly, letting out words that shocked Enya.

After a long while, Enya exhaled deeply and smiled, "Teacher, I know what to do now. Go all out, by any means necessary; utter annihilation is a sign of respect toward the enemy."

"Very good, your training score is S-."

"Teacher, why not S level?" Enya protested softly.

"Because you only have the right mindset, you haven’t yet shown results. Once you do, I’ll give you an S."

...

In Val City State, the Governor hosted a banquet for guests from various parties in the grand banquet hall.

The arrival of a miracle in Val City is both an opportunity and a danger.

The Land of Miracles will attract global attention.

Val City, with its advantageous geographical location, developed shipping, situated among several major forces, is a buffer zone accepted by all sides.

To the west is the Jin Yuan Kingdom, to the north the Overseas Sussex, to the northeast the Weimar Federation, and to the southeast the Tirol Kingdom.

Any one of these major powers could easily swallow up Val City State.

Moreover, Val City State implements free trade policies, low taxes, and a lenient business environment, causing many commercial guilds to establish their headquarters here.

In the past, with the tacit approval of the major countries, they thrived independently, making huge profits.

This will likely no longer be the case in the future.

The Land of Miracles, indeed.

But such a good place should belong to whom?

First, exclude the locals, Val City State.

Though the Holy Spring is closest to them, they are also closest to other major countries.

Unless the major countries reach another consensus to continue recognizing Val City as a buffer zone and a free trade city, they can maintain independence.

This is clearly impossible.

The benefits of the Land of Miracles are too significant.

The miracle can improve the surrounding environment, increase food production, and improve the people's physiology, and this is just the simplest benefit.

The influence brought by the miracle is an invisible asset.

A weakling with a halo is asking for death; a strong person with a halo amplifies their advantage.

Aside from the Weimar Federation, which is not stable internally, the relatively weakest, with the smallest expansion ambition, Sussex, Jin Yuan, and Tirol are all giants ranked in the top five concerning comprehensive national power.

Any one of them could easily crush Val City State.

After the advent of the miracle, fierce debate erupted within Val City State.

Although everyone united to crush the visionaries who still fantasized about remaining neutral, they couldn't unite on the next steps.

The voice to lean towards Jin Yuan was the loudest.

The reason is simple, heaven is too far, Jin Yuan is too close.

The Jin Yuan Kingdom is a traditional power on the Rodinia Continent, especially strong in land forces.

While some believe the Vladimir Empire's land forces are larger in number, some think Jin Yuan is the strongest in land forces.

If they offend Jin Yuan and lean toward other countries, they must face harsh realities.

What if Jin Yuan's armies come over?

If they surrender later, their value will plummet.

The voice to turn to Tirol is also significant.

The reason is simple, Tirol is closer.

Val City is over a thousand kilometers from the City of Freedom, while Jin Yuan's armies are relatively farther.

However, the City of Art, Tirol, is only two hundred kilometers away.

They at least have the Rodinia River and mountain forests between them and Jin Yuan, but they share a direct land border with Tirol.

The Tirol Kingdom's comprehensive national power is slightly inferior to Jin Yuan, but the power they can project is stronger.

There are also those advocating joining the Sussex Empire.

The reason is also simple, the Sussex Empire is closer.

At the recent Holy Spring Revival Ceremony, Jin Yuan sent a special envoy, Tirol sent the Minister of Culture and Tourism, and Sussex sent a Governor, a Count, and over three thousand fully armed soldiers as well as a river fleet.

It's not an exaggeration to say this fleet is enough to crush Val City State completely. Even if they fortunately held the city, they would suffer immense damage.

Val City State stands right by the river, with the entire city within the range of naval guns.

If Roland were more extreme, sending a few shallow-water heavy artillery ships, Val City State wouldn't even be able to defend the city to the end.

Since the revival of the Holy Spring, Val City State has had no choice but to pick sides.

Choosing sides has never been about who benefits more, but what's worse if left unchosen.

Jin Yuan can bleed them, Tirol can disgrace them, but Sussex can take their lives.

Bleeding is uncomfortable, disgrace is painful, but losing life means game over.

Although the debate is ongoing, following the analysis of a certain cold scholar, several officials within Val City State have formed a lean.

People first have to survive to consider development issues.

Val City State seems capable of navigating among the three major powers, but it's actually a fragile balance.

There are not many dancers who can perform on three eggs.

Although there's already a tendency, the officials of Val City State still haven't made an immediate decision.

For such a big matter, at least observe for a while.

If the major countries fight it out internally, maybe they won't have to choose.

Although the hope is slim, everyone present still harbors a thought.

What if?

What if the countries still need this buffer zone?

What if they are temporarily unwilling to tear each other's faces?

After all, there's a continental convention, without a justified reason, territory cannot be demanded from other countries.

If someone violates the convention, they will face joint condemnation by other signing countries.

Although the spirit of contract and breach is prevalent in this era, the treaty is at least a legal basis and the source of their faint hope.

Chapter 202: If Everyone Breaks the Agreement, Then It Doesn't Count

Roland paid no attention to what the people of the Val City State thought, nor did he actively engage with them.

He was waiting for the representatives of the Jin Yuan Kingdom and the Tirol Kingdom.

Why should the fate of the Val City State be decided by the Val People?

As a city-state with a population of less than 300,000 and a territory of less than 17,000 square kilometers, their fate was entirely determined by the major powers.

This matter didn't even require Roland to be anxious.

The Cabinet would definitely respond.

Although there were conflicts between the Cabinet and the Empress on many issues, internal conflicts could be resolved. Roland and Sif were expanding national interests overseas, so they couldn't stand by idly.

The power of diplomacy belonged to the Emperor, normally overseen by Sif. Now that she hadn't come to power, it had to be exercised by the Chief Minister.

Before William arrived, Roland did not plan to make any decisions.

Except to take away more than thirty thousand refugees.

Their identity now was not that of refugees, but of the Chosen People.

As a crucial part of the Holy Spring Revival, they were also cloaked in a sacred aura.

Although the puppet government of the Jin Yuan Kingdom wished they would die immediately, it was not convenient for them to act directly against them.

After all, everyone was civilized, and there had to be some baseline in their actions considering international observation.

Since the goal had been achieved, Roland had no reason to linger.

Negotiations of this nature could be left to Mr. William.

The Sussex Fleet headed north.

Officials, envoys, representatives of the Divine Court of Fengrao and the Divine Court of Light, along with the apprehensive officials of the Val City State, gathered at the dock to send them off.

Watching the enormous fleet carry more than thirty thousand people away, most people present let out a sigh of relief.

In their eyes, Roland wasn't necessarily an enemy, but he was undoubtedly trouble. This guy couldn't find peace wherever he went.

Whether as friends or enemies, being far from him was always a good thing.

After sending away the Sussex people, representatives from other countries also left one after another.

The Jin Yuan Envoy looked at the officials of the Val City State and sneered, "Gentlemen of Val City, you are now the Chosen People of the Land of Miracles, congratulations."

The faces of the officials of the Val City State were exceedingly unpleasant.

They were officials, but more so businessmen.

Their faith in money surpassed that in the Goddess.

The improvements in soil and water quality at the Land of Miracles could increase their profits, but not by much.

In the Val City State, every inch of land was extremely valuable, and there wasn't much farmland. Their food supply mainly relied on Sussex and the Weimar Federation.

This was also an important reason for their preference towards the Sussex Empire.

If they complied, they could fill their bellies.

If not, the gunboats would come knocking.

They weren't fools; they just wanted to leverage other countries for a better price.

Last night, the representatives of the Val City State privately approached Roland, hoping to reach some unspeakable agreement, but Roland flatly refused.

Roland's reason for rejection was grandiose.

He was the Governor and had no diplomatic power.

As a subject of the Empress, conducting private diplomatic activities with other countries would be treasonous.

His reasoning left the officials of the Val City State in silence for an entire night.

They couldn't understand how Roland could calmly utter such shameless words.

The whole world knew that he could make decisions for the Empress, yet he was pretending.

Roland wasn’t pretending; he truly didn’t understand diplomacy, or negotiations.

He had some knowledge of wielding power to bully others, but for serious diplomatic negotiations, he was a complete layman.

Diplomatic negotiations were a highly professional field; how to play one’s cards for the best outcome was something he admitted he wasn’t capable of.

He never looked down on the locals because of his memories from two lifetimes.

Professional matters should be handled by professionals.

Entrusting this to William was also a way to respect the Cabinet and maintain the delicate balance between the Emperor and the Cabinet.

Even if it kept him busy, he should be grateful to Roland for it.

After the Jin Yuan Kingdom, representatives of other countries also extended their "congratulations" to the Val City State.

Val City State was destined to become a place of disputes.

This matter involved too many factors, and no one could make decisions lightly; it would definitely require resolution through international conferencing.

The return journey was very smooth.

Seeing this massive fleet, anyone with common sense wouldn’t come looking for trouble.

Roland settled Mr. Carlo's followers at the border of Selin Province and Hansa Province, marking out a zone for them, arranging accommodations, and supporting them in building their camp according to their homeland's customs.

The area had convenient transportation, a pleasant climate, and a valley for building a stronghold, making it very suitable for these security-seeking people.

In addition, Roland arranged for Priests to provide medical support for the elderly, women, and children.

These Priests were not from the Divine Court of Fengrao, but from the Divine Court of Light.

Although the specific terms had not yet been discussed, both sides tacitly agreed that Roland would become an Honorary Knight of the Divine Court.

Since an Honorary Knight had requirements, sending a few Therapists was just a small thing.

Governor Ados volunteered to provide doctors, but considering the medical standards of this era, Roland politely declined his offer, choosing to trust in the Divine Technique.

This journey was very smooth, with only two elderly individuals, unfortunately, passing away.

They were buried in a cemetery adorned with lilies.

Both expressed a wish to return to their homeland on their deathbed, yet Romeo and others could only respond with silence.

Even with Roland's support and Miss Alina's leadership, they still felt that this dream was too distant.

However, having a dream was always good.

As the news of Roland's heroic rescue of the Holy Spring Revival Ceremony spread across the continent, more and more people came to Hansa to pursue their dreams.

The second recruitment of talents officially started.

The quality of talents applying this time was very high.

No one dared to show themselves if they didn't have some skills.

Confronted with so many talents, Roland raised the standards for personal assessment.

Chapter 203: If Everyone Breaks the Pact, It Doesn't Count as Breaking the Pact (Part 2)

Only applicants with abilities above level A and those particularly unique are vetted by him and Sif.

Even so, he has been quite busy these days.

The interview process is almost fixed.

Each candidate is first assessed by Sif's [Insight] to determine their stance. Absolute loyalty is not required, but ill-will towards the Governor and the Empress is unacceptable.

Roland has unique insights into loyalty.

He doesn't believe in absolute loyalty or absolute betrayal.

If a leader is not humane, why should subordinates be loyal?

But at least candidates should not harbor malice.

After meeting the last applicant, Sif, exhausted from repeatedly using [Insight], returned to the palace to rest.

Just as Roland also planned to rest, distinguished guests arrived as promised.

Christine, the candidate Saintess, and Cardinal Iga of the Divine Court of Light visited together.

The benefits Roland had been waiting for finally walked through the door.

When guests come bearing gifts, his enthusiasm is like fire.

Roland notified the steward of the Governor's Mansion to prepare a dinner of the highest standard as he wanted to entertain them earnestly.

Cardinal Iga did not reject Roland's goodwill.

What mattered to him wasn't the dinner itself, but Roland's attitude.

The dinner consisted of light and elegant dishes, and to express sincerity, Lisa personally cooked several famous dishes from the Third Era.

Initially, Iga and Christine intended to eat a few bites out of politeness, but they were surprised by the exquisite taste of the dishes and ended up voraciously digging in.

After feasting, Roland invited the two distinguished guests to the study for the main course.

Cardinal Iga was about fifty years old, well-maintained, appearing youthful, akin to someone in their thirties.

After exchanging pleasantries, Iga earnestly praised the dinner and then presented his conditions.

"Lord Governor, previously Blackthorn Bishop promised to bear the costs for settling the Chosen People. The Pope and several Cardinals acknowledged his promise, so rest assured."

"Through rough calculations, fully settling them for three years would cost around two hundred and seventy thousand pounds converted to your country's currency, and I will transfer these funds to you soon."

Two hundred seventy thousand pounds is neither a little nor a lot.

For the Divine Court of Light, this sum is insignificant.

Just an appetizer.

Cardinal Iga proceeded to address the powers and responsibilities of Honorary Knights.

The brief summary is that they receive cardinal-level privileges but are not formally inducted into the order, sparing Roland any difficulty.

Roland's request to appoint priests was also granted.

At least fifty priests proficient in basic healing spells would serve the Governor's Mansion privately.

Roland was slightly puzzled; if it was merely about these matters, either Christine or Blackthorn coming would suffice.

The substantial status of a cardinal isn't lower than Roland as a governor; sending a cardinal to travel a thousand kilometers for these matters is somewhat exaggerated.

Under Roland's questioning gaze, Iga awkwardly cleared his throat and put forth the true request.

"Lord Governor, although Val City State witnessed our divine miracle, the faith here is mixed, predominantly Feng Rao Divine Court, which puts us in a difficult position."

"We don’t wish to confront Feng Rao Divine Court head-on, but Miracle City must be secured."

Iga slightly lamented, saying: "If the Land of Miracles falls into the hands of another religion, it would truly be a colossal joke. Of course, we hope for a peaceful resolution, but Feng Rao Divine Court refuses to relent."

"I sincerely hope it doesn’t come to warfare, yet we find ourselves unable to retreat."

Roland nodded in understanding.

The Light Miracle not under the Light Divine Court’s control—that certainly is an international joke.

Religious figures aren’t merchants.

Though they might compromise, when it pertains to faith, they will stand firm until the end.

For instance, a holy war.

That term was stuck on Iga’s lips, left unsaid, but Roland understood.

He smiled and said, "Cardinal Iga, if Val City was my territory, I could decide to let you evangelize there, but unfortunately, it’s not."

"I believe it can be," Iga spoke calmly, as if Val City State were not an independent nation, but a small house by the roadside.

"The summit at Val Lake is about to convene. If you wish to align with us, the Divine Court will support transitioning all or part of Val City State into your domain."

"What about the continental agreement?" Roland curiously asked.

"As long as all parties to the agreement unanimously find it necessary to amend or annul the pact, it won’t count as a breach."

Oh my, if everyone abandons it together, it’s not considered abandonment.

Learned something new.

Roland laughed and asked, "Under my name gaining Val City State, and then turning it over to the Divine Court, wouldn’t I be at a loss? This would offend quite a few people."

Iga replied earnestly, "You’ll have our unwavering support."

"Such as?" Roland asked softly.

"A force of five thousand temple warriors entirely under your command. As long as you don’t use them as cannon fodder for consumption, I’ll provide training and equipment, assisting in replenishing losses."

Roland’s eyes lit up.

Now that’s truly staking everything.

Temple warriors are unlike ordinary armies; they are well-trained, well-equipped, and, most crucially, fanatically devoted.

In the era of cold weapons, they’re a blood-and-iron force that fights to the last man.

The worth of these five thousand equals fifty thousand ordinary troops.

If he became an Honorary Knight, he wouldn’t need to worry about these people’s loyalty.

Roland’s heart raced, curious as he asked, "I’m curious, why is the Divine Court treating me so well?"

"Because you are someone observed by the Goddess," Iga stated calmly.

Roland almost burst into laughter, but he did his utmost to hold it in.

He split his laughter into several segments, transforming them into a gentle smile.

Ah right, indeed you’re right, the Goddess is indeed watching.

But that’s the death glare!

Iga’s demeanor left Roland somewhat puzzled.

Are there so few means of communication between the Goddess and her followers?

Though few can transcend the Plane Wall to hear the Goddess’s voice, there are surely some.

If the Goddess wanted Roland dead, she could have easily notified some listener.

Judging from Iga’s attitude, the Goddess of Light did not do so.

With a little contemplation, Roland quickly understood the Goddess’s intent.

That line "You too" struck a nerve for the high-and-mighty Goddess.

No matter what curse is spoken, in the arrogant Goddess’s view, it’s just an ant’s miserable wail, unworthy of mention.

But Roland’s words were different.

The ant dared to tell the high-and-mighty Goddess, "You are an ant too," not provoking a reaction would be the real surprise.

Lies don’t hurt, truth is the swift blade.

Roland removed the Goddess’s hazy veil and thrust a knife in.

The Goddess of Light was furious.

Perhaps fortunately, until the final day of return arrives, this Goddess would least likely let her followers kill him.

As for how to face the Goddess’s wrath once the Plane stabilizes entirely, Roland currently has no idea.

He believes his future self will surely have a solution.

Faced with an offer impossible to refuse, Roland calmly said, "I want a bit more, give me three High Tier Templars."

Iga’s countenance subtly changed, he said gravely, "Lord Governor, High Tier Templars are not easily cultivated; asking for three off the bat, isn’t that a bit much?"

"Three, not a single one less."

"You!" Iga was somewhat furious; Roland’s request was a bit overreaching.

"In return, I'll set the Honorary Knight title as Knight of Light."

Iga paused briefly, then his smile blossomed, extending his right hand to Roland.

"Welcome to embrace the Light, Knight of Light, henceforth we are one family."

Roland stood up and shook Iga's hand.

Iga's hand was long, white, and very warm, giving a sense of reassurance.

Indeed a Cardinal, merely a simple handshake and a smile can convey goodwill entirely.

To ordinary followers, being greeted by a Cardinal with such a smiling handshake would probably make them excited enough not to wash their hands for three days.

This is the power of religion.

Roland neither liked nor rejected religion; he respected reality.

Iga turned back to Christine, stating calmly, "Christine, you stay; in a few days, two Templars will arrive with the Divine Hall Warrior Order; you'll be leading this force."

"Ah?!" X2

Roland and Christine simultaneously displayed expressions of shock; neither expected Iga to make such arrangements.

Chapter 204: Bleeding Vegetables

After a moment of shock, Christine quickly realized that this was the best arrangement.

She is a key figure linked to the miracle’s descent and will undoubtedly be active from Val City State to the Hansa Region.

Although the internal procedures of the Divine Court haven’t been completed, her permanent assignment won’t change.

Roland traded naming rights for three High tier Sanctuaries, and Cardinal Iga counted her, someone already meant to be there, as part of the deal, so only two more Sanctuaries need to be sent.

If you can’t negotiate the price, you discount in personnel arrangements. This adaptability truly befits a Cardinal.

Christine reacted and accepted the arrangement without a hint of hesitation.

"At your command."

Roland realized this too, but he wouldn’t object.

The Divine Court of Light has its armed forces, the Temple Warriors, and the middle to senior officers leading the Temple Warriors are termed the Holy Hall of Light, with the High tier Sanctuary commanding the Hall.

High tier Sanctuaries are brave, fearless, and master various military skills, making them excellent generals.

As long as he’s titled Knight of Light, their loyalty is unquestionable.

Roland really wanted to replace Christine, who had a bias against him, but Cardinal Iga had spoken, so there was no need to make a fuss over such a small matter.

After all, Christine is a young girl, directly disrespecting her would make another enemy.

Seeing Roland stay silent, Iga thought he doubted Christine's military capabilities and laughed to explain:

"Roland, Christine ranks second in the High tier Sanctuary. If not for her pleasant cooperation experience with you, I'd be reluctant to let her go."

Pleasant cooperation experience? You're right, very pleasant indeed.

Roland resisted the urge to laugh.

Christine bit her lip and looked down.

After finalizing the cooperation details, Iga bestowed the Knight's Medal of Honor to Roland and engraved his title on its surface by hand.

This medal has an unusual composition, with no discernible material. Below was the Divine Court's emblem, and above was a relief of the Goddess with arms spread wide, with a unique, simple beauty.

With cooperation settled, Roland warmly invited the two esteemed guests to stay in the best guest room of the Governor's Mansion, then returned to his own room.

Just entering the room, he saw Lisa idly flipping through a cookbook.

Seeing Roland return, she stood up swiftly and softly asked: "Did tonight's guests rave about my dishes?"

Roland couldn't help but tease while laughing: "I know you can cook well, but you shouldn't be so confident. What if the guests don't like it?"

"I know they did."

Lisa said confidently, "I’m not blindly confident. Just now, I felt that my dishes were recognized by an important figure, and the breakthrough is getting closer and closer."

Recognized by an important figure?

That’s right, Cardinal Iga holds a high rank in the Divine Court of Light, a strong contender for the next Pope, his power and position above a common Duke, indeed a heavyweight.

These Extraordinary Abilities are quite handy.

To discern whether someone hidden is a heavyweight, just have Lisa cook a few dishes.

If they praise it after eating, they’re heavyweight; if not, they’re a minor character.

Roland laughed teasingly: "Then Sister Lisa will have to bother whenever important guests arrive."

"It’s not a bother, promotion naturally requires practice." Lisa said happily.

With miracles opening, Roland’s important guests would undoubtedly increase, so she would have more and more opportunities.

"Cardinal Iga praised your cooking endlessly; it seems the caliber of important diners at least needs Cardinals or Dukes."

"Eh? Not the Cardinal, I meant Christine."

"Ah?" This time it was Roland’s turn to be surprised.

Lisa took out a delicate little booklet from her breast pocket and carefully opened it.

"Hey, the first page is you."

The front page of the booklet shows a cartoonish portrait of Roland giving a thumbs-up to praise the dishes.

"The second page is Sif."

Sif’s portrait is expressionless, but she extends her tongue to lick away the leftover sauce at the corner of her lips.

Though she never praised Lisa’s cooking as delicious, the body doesn’t lie; she acknowledges it.

Lisa sighed regrettably: "Only your evaluation of my cooking got five stars full score; Count Sif gave four stars, and Miss Christine three and a half."

"Such delicious food only gets four stars? That’s outrageous; make them change the rating."

It is commonly known that not giving full marks implies a negative review, which Roland could not tolerate.

This isn’t just a matter of pride; it relates to whether Lisa could get promoted quickly.

Seeing Roland was serious, Lisa quickly grabbed his sleeve and shook her head repeatedly.

"That can’t happen, only heartfelt acknowledgment counts as a true evaluation. An influenced rating doesn’t count. Count Sif’s is easy to manage; invite her more times, there will eventually be moments she’s satisfied, but unfortunately Christine is a candidate Saintess and can’t come often."

Roland was about to remind Lisa that there were plenty of opportunities for Christine to taste fine cuisine when Lisa’s eyes lit up.

"Roland, accompany me to find fresh ingredients!"

"Now?" Roland reached for his pocket watch, nearly pulling out the gold one, then remembered it was given by Sif, hurrying to pull out Lisa's silver watch instead.

The pocket watch needle pointed precisely at ten o'clock.

In times without electricity, this was already late night.

Even if there was nightlife, it was inside palaces, not outdoors.

But Lisa didn't care about any of this.

"Some ingredients are only active at night!"

Facing a topic relating to a professional field, Roland wisely chose to remain silent.

Since Sister Lisa wants to go, even if the ingredients are on Blue Moon's surface, he has to...

Chapter 205: Bleeding Vegetables (Part 2)

You also need to tell her how hard moon exploration is.

Luckily, these ingredients are just outside the city, and a journey of dozens of miles isn't far.

Roland didn't want to dampen her spirit, so he changed his clothes, had the attendant bring the horse, and accompanied Lisa for a night departure.

The physique of a Transcendent far surpasses that of ordinary people, allowing them to see at night, though not clearly.

In this era, traveling at night doesn't carry the worry of running into people.

After about an hour of wild galloping, they finally reached their destination.

"The herbs we found last time were around here, let’s go." Under the moonlight, Lisa’s smile was like a jewel bathed in moonlight, radiant.

She was very happy.

Although earlier Roland almost touched the wrong pocket watch causing her heart to stop momentarily, thankfully he didn’t take the wrong one.

Roland had a hundred reasons to refuse.

For instance, being too busy with work, having too many trivial matters, having to deal with Count Sif, entertaining important guests and being exhausted, etc.

If he didn’t want to go, there were plenty of reasons.

But Roland came.

Accompaniment needs no reason, refusal does.

Lisa rarely acts on impulse, she just had a feeling and really wanted to get some fresh ingredients tonight.

When asked, it’s a woman’s sixth sense.

Roland understands Lisa, so he doesn’t ask, he only acts.

Leaving the horse in the valley, Lisa led Roland into the valley.

As they entered the valley, Lisa’s expression changed slightly.

The scenery here was completely different from what she remembered.

"Did we take a wrong path?" Roland noticed Lisa’s odd demeanor and asked softly.

"I remember the spot being right here, the valley entrance exactly the same, how could it..." Lisa muttered to herself.

"Don’t worry, think about it, is there any obvious marker?"

"Yes, I carved words on the tallest pine tree."

Roland secretly mocked, who says foreigners are civilized and don’t randomly carve words on trees? Please come out and walk a few steps.

Since there’s a marker, that’s good, the two approached the tallest tree and found the carving.

"Lisa’s private kitchen garden."

Seeing these small words, Roland teased with a smile: "Turns out you like it here, I’ll ask Sif later to confer you as an Imperial Knight, make this your domain, no wait, it’s a kitchen garden."

A quiet night, traveling dozens of miles to pick wild vegetables, truly has a touch of romanticism.

If this tree were a pine tree, it would be even better.

Suddenly, Lisa grabbed Roland’s hand, her voice trembling violently, "Roland, I am so scared, this isn’t a pine tree!"

"I know, it’s a Golden Ginkgo, there were many during the Third Era, but they’ve long been extinct..."

Roland’s words abruptly stopped halfway.

He too sensed something off.

The carving on the pine tree had transferred to a Golden Ginkgo, extinct for who knows how long, along with a valley full of flowers and grass still growing in the dead of winter; no matter how you think about it, it’s eerie.

Lisa trembled all over, and Roland felt uneasy too.

He feigned calmness, comforting Lisa, "The world is vast, with many strange things, no need to panic. However, it truly is too late today, let’s pick some random wild vegetables and leave."

A thief makes no empty return, unlike fishing; of course, they shouldn’t go back empty-handed, that’s too unlucky.

Under Roland’s insistence, Lisa picked a few unknown wild vegetables indiscriminately, no longer daring to stay, she grabbed Roland and sped away.

Leaving the valley, the two whipped the horse furiously, never looking back as they headed back to Hansa.

The heavily guarded Governor’s Mansion offered Lisa not even a hint of security, her hand kept trembling.

Roland escorted her back to her room, and seeing her state, worriedly asked, "Sister, do you want me to stay with you for a while?"

Lisa hesitated for a moment before nodding.

She’s timid, and every thunderstorm night frightens her into quivering.

During such times, Roland would stay in her room, telling her random stories, and only leaving after she fell asleep.

As he grew older, Roland also realized it was improper to stay in a girl’s room at night; on thunderstorm nights she’d have to muster maturity on her own.

Years later, hearing this familiar yet strange "stay," there was a fleeting gaze of a feeling as if transcending time in Lisa’s eyes.

She softly said, "Alright, leave a bit early later, don’t let others see."

After all, Roland was the Empress’s rumored boyfriend, if a rumor of a love triangle arose, wouldn’t their reputation be at stake?

The strategy she crafted for Roland was to first conquer Sif’s castle.

As for her...

When had her door ever closed to Roland?

Smiling, Roland sat by Lisa’s bedside, gently asking, "It’s been a while since I told a story, what does sister want to hear?"

"’Oh my, the Empress is pregnant, who did it?’"

"She’s not pregnant yet." Roland was somewhat speechless, is this matter never going to end?

"Then work harder, concoct a scenario to make me happy." Lisa covered half her face with the blanket, sneakily glancing at Roland.

Could such a matter truly bring happiness?

Making up stories is genuinely too difficult, so Roland simply recounted the story of this trip to Val City State.

The night battle with the Werewolf, the ambush of Robert, such combats weren't elaborated to avoid troubling his sister's heart.

Using an antiquated style, he transformed all the dangers into stories, narrating them seamlessly.

His voice was like a warm hand soothing Lisa's flustered heart.

Sleepiness overcame her, she fell asleep.

Quietly, Roland left Lisa's room, returning to his own quarters.

He began flipping through various ancient texts, in search of records about the Golden Ginkgo, yet found no useful leads.

The final records concerning Golden Ginkgo were in the late Third Era, preceding the extinction of the Elf Race.

The extinction of Golden Ginkgo was merely a beginning; soon, the thriving Ginkgo began mass extinction.

With the arrival of autumn, after hundreds of species covering the earth with Ginkgo completely vanished, the Elf Race felt the cold of winter.

Ninety-five years later, the Elf Race perished due to Divine Punishment.

Ninety-five years is but a fleeting moment relative to the long Third Era, not considered long for elves whose lifespan started at a thousand years.

It could even be regarded that the extinction of the Elf Race was synonymous with the Golden Ginkgo's extinction.

Plants withered, the Flower Sea wilted, and the Elves met their demise.

Golden Ginkgo was the first leaf autumn took from the trees, while the Elf Race was the withered great tree after all the leaves had fallen.

The resurrection of Golden Ginkgo doesn't necessarily imply the Elf Race's return.

Roland thought about Elf Sylph, doubting it's possible.

Golden Ginkgo faced natural extinction, while the Elf Race fell to the War of Divine Punishment.

Unlike the Magic Empire.

The Magic Empire managed to secure a pyrrhic victory, thus preserving the embers. The Elf Race, stripped of the Flower Sea and various protective plants, faced obliteration in a desolate land.

Elf Race's demise was indeed unfortunate.

Had there been even a patch of forest nearby, not even requiring the Flower Sea, they could have defeated the Divine Punishment Legion.

Yet their downfall wasn't entirely unjust.

Having dominated the world for so many years, living in a manner not discernibly different from the era's inception.

It's said that Ginkgo tree, Chinese sturgeon, such creatures barely evolved over billions of years are living fossils, yet the Elf Race far exceeded them in the living fossil index.

The Elf Race, a species stagnated in progress, had their extinction written in the stars.

Even if the ancient Ginkgo, Metasequoia, and Davidia trees were to all revive, with the Flower Sea blooming anew, there's no rationale for the Elf Race's return.

As an [Inheritor], Roland possessed the vast and abundant texts and knowledge of the Elf Race, yet the content he mastered was less than a thousandth of the Elf Race's peak era.

They were a race stuffed with knowledge yet devoid of wisdom.

They're not coming back.

Still, Roland harbored a lingering thought.

The Elf Race cannot return, but that doesn't imply individual elves cannot be revived.

If possible, he'd like to bring Elf Sylph out of the Dreamland to meet human Sif.

Although human Sif's strength was weak and her thoughts erratic, her progress was remarkably swift.

With time, Sif would certainly surpass the namesake Dream Elf.

Roland entered Dreamland.

He arrived at the dreamlike flowers, unable to see Elf Sylph, thus he settled into slumber.

Recently indeed exhausted, requiring a death-like deep sleep.

As dawn light crept in, he energetically stood up, intending to visit the Nameless Valley once more.

No matter what supernatural entities there may be, they ought to settle down during daylight.

As Roland prepared for an early departure and return, a piercing scream capable of banishing demons echoed from the room next door.

Roland jerked in fright, his expression instantly changed.

It's Lisa!

He dashed to the next room, staring at Lisa hiding beneath the covers, trembling uncontrollably, stunned.

The floor was scattered with several wild vegetables, those they dug up last night.

The roots of the vegetables were oozing sap.

Not green, but red.

The scent of blood enveloped the scene, the vegetables were bleeding.

Chapter 206: The Elf Princess's Five-Star Review

This eerie sight sent a chill down Roland's spine, leaving him terrified.

As everyone knows, the sap of plants differs from the blood of animals.

Plants don’t bleed.

Yet the wild vegetables before him were bleeding, undeniably so.

Roland spent quite some time calming Lisa, before handing the wild vegetables and blood samples to Norton.

When it comes to research, he’s the expert.

Upon hearing about such a peculiar thing, Norton was so excited his eyes twinkled, eagerly accepting them.

Following Roland for this period, he had seen so many rare materials, he was so delighted he felt years younger.

Sea Demon corpses, Werewolf corpses, and these unknown bleeding wild vegetables.

Such once-in-a-lifetime experimental materials couldn’t be found elsewhere, only Roland could provide them.

In the eyes of someone like Norton, a stereotypical research fanatic, these rare materials were more enticing than pretty women.

He accepted Roland’s materials and, per Roland’s request, prioritized the research on these things, pushing back the studies on the Sea Demon and Werewolf corpses.

Although Norton was somewhat unhappy with the administrative interference in research, he accepted it for the sake of these rare materials.

After handing over the materials to Norton, Roland returned to Lisa’s bedroom, softly speaking to the shivering bundle in the bed:

"Sister, I need to visit the Nameless Valley again, will you come with me?"

"I’m not going, I won’t go even if you kill me!" Lisa’s voice trembled, fear coming straight from her heart.

"Then should I go with Sif?" Roland tried a clumsy provocation.

"Then I definitely can’t go, I refuse to be an eyesore candle holder." Lisa replied instantly.

With the provocation failing, Roland immediately switched to a new temptation.

"Sif hasn’t experienced outdoor cooking; if she enjoys it, she might give a five-star rating."

The quilt flew into the air, and Lisa sat up excitedly, "Really?"

She was just one step away from a breakthrough, needing a full score review from a heavyweight figure.

The only one she could think of was Sif.

This opportunity couldn’t be missed, she certainly wouldn’t pass it up.

"Not afraid of the bleeding wild vegetables anymore?"

"Afraid of what? I’m a Chef, I can kill chickens, why fear vegetables dipped in blood?"

Lisa patted her chest with vigor, her pajamas trembling lightly with her hands.

Roland smiled and turned away, "Alright, I'll wait for you downstairs. No need to put on makeup for an outdoor cooking."

Though he gave a warm reminder, Roland still underestimated the speed of a beauty coming downstairs.

It took Lisa thirty-seven minutes to get downstairs.

She hadn't put on makeup, but she had dressed meticulously.

She wore a beautiful hunting outfit, carried a longbow, and donned a little hunter's hat.

She didn't look like she was going hiking or hunting but rather putting on a show.

After all, she wore a fashionable hunting outfit, a hunting gear imagined behind closed doors by a fashion designer.

Designed by a top fashion designer from the City of Freedom.

It was all about being flashy and impractical.

When Sif came down from the Empress's Palace across the street, Lisa regretted not changing her clothes immediately.

Sif was wearing combat attire.

Complete with Cotton Armor and Light Chain Armor, firearms and a Folding Long Spear all present.

Sif lifted her Masked Armor, a smile at the corner of her lips, "Sorry to keep you waiting."

She wasn’t wearing makeup.

After all, her natural beauty made any makeup a huge detriment.

Seeing Lisa’s slightly disappointed expression, Roland quickly reassured her, "Since it’s an outing, it doesn’t matter what you wear, as long as you’re happy."

Of course, he wouldn’t mention that he was also fully equipped for combat.

After all, his gear was hidden inside the Moonlit Silver Armor, invisible to others.

At this point, Lisa couldn’t let Roland and Sif wait for her together.

Fortunately, she also brought combat equipment.

Patting her backpack containing the outdoor cooking gear, she felt reassured.

Roland was right, they were going for a picnic and exploration, not for a fight, no need to act as if facing a formidable foe.

Sif was somewhat extreme.

They set off prepared; in the daylight, the horses galloped fast, reaching the Nameless Valley in just half an hour.

Seeing many green plants within the valley, Sif was surprised.

"This place has so many flowers and plants even in winter, wonderful."

Hansa’s winter isn’t too cold, but most wild plants are deciduous, the only evergreens being conifers.

Yet this valley was full of thriving broadleaf plants.

Sif dismounted, excitedly heading towards the valley, followed closely by Roland, with a somewhat hesitant Lisa trailing behind.

Though confident at the start, she felt uneasy thinking about last night's strange encounter.

As a Chef, understanding ingredient characteristics and making them delicious is a fundamental duty. Even animal blood, a byproduct of slaughter, she would stuff into casings to make blood sausage, a tasty dish.

She liked vegetables, she liked meat, but she couldn't accept bleeding vegetables, it was beyond her understanding of ingredients.

But Sif was different, she felt excited hearing about bleeding wild vegetables.

She vaguely sensed a combat aura.

On the way to the Val City State, she contributed to the battle to eliminate Robert, earning a silver honor badge on her Soul Card.

With others, she might have cared where they were going and what they would do.

Outing with Roland, she was only prepared for battle.

Feeling the unstoppable, awe-inspiring killing intent emanating from Sif, even Roland thought she was a bit too extreme.

He's not a bringer of disaster, how could they encounter trouble even during a picnic?

Can they really see ghosts in broad daylight?

The three entered the valley, and under Lisa’s guidance, approached the engraved tree.

"Is this the Golden Ginkgo?"

Sif removed her Masked Armor, looking at Roland and Lisa suspiciously.

If she didn’t know their characters, she might have thought they were playing a trick on her.

Chapter 207: The Elf Princess’s Five-Star Review (Part 2)

Even if the Goddess of Fengrao descended to the world, this is undeniably red pine.

Sif quickened her pace, found the words left by Lisa, and couldn’t help but tease:

"I’ve seen many illustrations of ginkgos in books, but it’s the first time I’ve seen leaves that look like needles. I think this isn’t a golden ginkgo, but a golden needle ginkgo."

Roland didn’t mind Sif’s teasing, he walked over seriously, looking at the words on the trunk.

Undoubtedly, it was written by Lisa.

He suddenly drew a dagger and chopped at it, while using his sleeve to cover his face to avoid being splattered with blood and fainting on the spot like Chancellor Cao.

The cover was highly effective.

The flying wood chips were all blocked and didn’t splash onto his face.

Seeing Roland’s slightly comical defensiveness and Lisa’s bewildered gaze, Sif was well aware that the two of them didn’t see the same thing last night.

She tentatively asked, "Were you influenced by some kind of hallucinogenic plant, seeing things differently from normal people?"

"The court chef once said that eating too many brightly colored fungi can cause hallucinations, with little people fighting in front of your eyes."

"Of course not, we didn’t eat anything last night."

"Forget it, let’s come again at night." Sif fell silent for a moment, then made a decision.

"Huh? Again, we have to come again?" Lisa’s tone was a bit flustered.

"Of course we have to come, and we have to be fully prepared, ready with special exorcism tools like the Holy Cross, silver knives, and so on."

Adding a black donkey’s hoof, Roland thought silently.

Sif’s eyes burned with a desire for battle, her fresh voice radiated indisputable determination.

"This valley is only thirty miles from Hansa City. If there’s a problem here, Hansa City will be affected too. Problems need to be solved, definitely can’t be like an ostrich burying its head in the sand."

Lisa stared blankly at Sif.

She still remembered Sif’s frantic plea for help to Roland, just a few months ago.

In just a few months, Sif had changed so much?

I can’t fall behind either.

Lisa bit her lip and made a silent resolution.

The three dispersed to search around, finding no abnormalities.

The bleeding wild vegetables seemed nonexistent, but they weren't entirely without gain.

Sif won a race with a wild rabbit, catching a plump rabbit for cooking.

Roland climbed a tree and picked some wild fruits.

Lisa had the biggest harvest, finding three types of wild vegetables recorded in ancient recipes.

Since they're already here, they couldn't just do nothing.

If there's nothing else, then let's have a meal first.

Lisa took the ingredients to the river for processing and to prepare lunch, while Roland and Sif continued to roam around the valley.

Seeing Lisa's back disappear, Sif finally couldn't help but ask: "You really weren't hallucinating, were you?"

Asking this directly might be impolite, but with Lisa not present, it was fine.

Roland was a bit surprised.

He wasn't surprised that Sif noticed something was wrong, given her observational skills, it was normal. What surprised him was that Sif was considerate of Lisa's feelings.

Sif was proud and even arrogant.

Her eyes could only see blossoms, unable to notice the weeds by the roadside, yet this time she cared about what Lisa thought.

Anyhow, it was a good signal.

Roland slowly shook his head.

"Last night I was with her, did I also have hallucinations?"

Of course, Sif wouldn’t doubt Roland, she started to contemplate further, quickly proposing a few hypotheses.

"I have a few possible explanations in mind. First, this tree has a problem; second, someone deliberately hides the truth; third, there’s an issue with this valley. Naturally, it could be all three."

Roland lowered his voice and asked, "Which do you think is more likely?"

"I think the entire valley has a problem. A shape-shifting golden ginkgo and daytime bleeding vegetables are strange existences never documented in books."

Sif was a bit troubled, "There are too many doubts, I don’t know where to break through."

"Not knowing is okay, we can try the control variable method."

"Control variable?"

"Yes, let’s come back tonight, just the two of us." Roland said calmly.

Lisa was timid, coming at night she might not be able to help much, swapping her with Sif was also part of controlling variables.

"I understand. Your sister is coming over, let’s eat first."

Although there was some unease, and the surroundings were somewhat eerie, Lisa’s culinary skills, on the other hand, were at their best.

The three of them set the tablecloth at the mouth of the valley, forming a standard equilateral triangle, sharing the food.

The rabbit was roasted to a golden brown, sprinkled with various spices, the aroma was alluring.

Taking the crispy yet tender rabbit leg Lisa handed over, Sif carefully blew on the slightly hot tempting roast, elegantly and quickly ripping into the rabbit leg.

"This is the most delicious rabbit meat I’ve ever had!"

Lisa initially thought this was Sif’s polite remark until she felt the power of the compliment.

A five-star rating from the Elf Princess Sif.

Lisa excitedly stood up.

Roland, knowing what was exciting her, gestured with his eyes for her to quickly sit down.

Sif, not knowing what was exciting her, was stunned for a few seconds, still couldn’t figure it out, so she simply put down the boring speculation, and continued to battle with the delicious roasted rabbit leg.

She was quite aware that a woman’s rationality occasionally goes offline.

Maybe Lisa was just bitten by a bug on her butt.

Mm, this rabbit meat is so delicious, better eat a few more bites while they're dazed.

...

The exploratory action ended without additional findings.

Besides having flowers and plants during winter, Nameless Valley seemed normal during the day.

Lisa was eager to return to the Governor's Mansion, hinting at the exploration team to head back early.

Compared to exploring the valley, Lisa wanted to advance in an undisturbed environment more.

The advancement process was both simple and troublesome, she had to make the corresponding dishes in order.

Lisa found an excuse to send Roland and Sif away, to complete the advancement ceremony.

Roland and Sif conveniently slipped out of her sight, setting off once again.

Before setting off, they found Mr. Norton, opened his Alchemy Warehouse, and took away many precious finished tools.

Norton watched the two take countless items, and couldn't help but complain:

"Hey, what on earth are you planning? Why even take the Dragon Slayer Potion!"

"You should reflect on why you have such a thing first." Roland said with a smirk as he tucked a bottle of light purple potion into his chest.

Norton was speechless.

It was said that some unknown islands and valleys far from the civilized world still had giant dragons, but it was only hearsay.

The "dragons" used as trophies by those legendary dragon-slaying warriors were mostly large lizards or medium-to-large crocodiles.

The Dragon Slayer Potion Norton made was certainly not for these small creatures, but for real dragons.

In front of his boss, Norton’s protest was merely a jest.

In fact, he desired Roland’s approval more.

Watching Roland and Sif rummage around, he couldn’t help but offer reminders and helped them prepare plenty of items for dealing with trees.

As for where these things came from, Roland didn’t ask, and he didn’t want to say.

Ask, and it’s intellectual property.

Loaded with tools, ready with various long and short weapons, and taking along three simple traps, Roland and Sif set off once again under the moonlight.

This night, the Blue Moon hung high, silent and windless, but Lisa’s culinary skills, on the other hand, were at their peak, the surroundings were also somewhat eerie, but the atmosphere was filled with anticipation. Roland and Sif each rode a fast horse, speeding through the moonlit night.

Tonight, under the Blue Moon, there was an air of solemnity and mystery. Despite the tension, the atmosphere had an undercurrent of excitement, as both of them somehow sensed that something significant was going to happen.

Roland felt that he didn’t need to mobilize the army.

First, for fear of leaking information, and second, because an ordinary army wouldn’t be able to help much in this kind of situation.

They galloped under the moonlit sky.

Silent and serious, their only goal was to reach the valley quickly.

At the valley’s entrance, the two of them dismounted the horses.

"I am wearing three layers of armor," Sif said calmly, her hand gripping the assembled long spear with its withering potion smeared on the tip, alert as she walked forward.

Cotton armor, light chain armor, enchanted plate armor, none were skipped.

Sif’s current defensive capability was formidable, equipped with everything from cotton armor to enchanted plate armor.

Normally Roland protected her, but now she was leading the way.

Roland wasn’t bothered, he drew his dagger and followed behind, squinting to observe their surroundings.

The two walked directly toward the tallest tree in the valley.

Sure enough, at night it transformed into a golden ginkgo again.

She lunged at it with a thrust, applying the withering potion to the assembled spear tip, her voice calm as she advanced cautiously.

Her expertise didn't lie in protecting plants, nor was she a forester.

She didn't understand the value of this ginkgo.

All she knew was that a thing beyond comprehension must be dealt with decisively.

...

The exploration ended without any additional gains.

The Nameless Valley during the day appeared quite normal besides having flowers and grass in winter.

Lisa was in a hurry to return to the Governor's Mansion, subtly suggesting that the exploration team head back early.

More than exploring the valley, Lisa was keen to advance in an undisturbed environment.

The advancement process was both simple and challenging, necessitating her to prepare the corresponding dishes in a specific order.

Lisa found an excuse to send Roland and Sif away, so she could complete the advancement ceremony.

Roland and Sif managed to stay out of her sight, once again heading towards the valley's center under the cover of night.

Fulfulling the exploration plan had yielded no extraordinary discoveries.

During the day, the Nameless Valley, apart from its unseasonable flowers and vegetation, outwardly seemed quite normal.

Chapter 208: Let’s Go Burn the Tree!

Perhaps one day, human technology will advance enough to unlock the mysteries of the transformations of the Golden Ginkgo and the Red Pine, but not today.

Perhaps one day, human civilization will progress to the point where they can conduct effective and friendly exchanges with wise beings, but not today.

Faced with incomprehensible events, Sif’s response was, eat my spear.

The spear tip pierced the air, emitting a piercing screech, indicative of its incredible speed.

The combination of extreme speed and the momentary burst of all her strength concentrated at one point made this strike powerful enough to break through a small city wall.

Standing behind Sif, Roland silently watched the unstoppable impact.

Truly deserving of the genius who once unlocked the hidden combat profession of the War Princess.

Sif’s political ability swung back and forth between genius and fool; no one knew how she would perform next, but in combat, she was a genius.

Heaven is fair. While granting Sif power and beauty, it also deprived her of weakness that could be envied but not protected.

The long spear that pierced the night sky roared with the momentum of a train hitting a tree.

"Stop!"

An aged voice sounded.

Sif’s expression changed slightly, and she accelerated once more.

Whatever the enemy did not want her to do, she would certainly intensify her efforts.

"Duang!"

The spear tip struck the trunk with a loud bang, as if stabbing into a thick mountain wall, most of its force absorbed and rebounded.

Blood splattered, spraying all over Sif.

Sif’s palm was bleeding from the shock, but she didn’t care. She pulled out the spear and stepped back a few paces, preparing to charge again.

"Humans, why do you harm me?"

The pained voice was somewhat strained, surprisingly speaking the common language of the Third Era.

Others might not understand, but Roland and Sif understood some Elven Language and comprehended the Golden Ginkgo’s words.

"You have the ability to threaten my city!" Sif said without hesitation, the spear tip still aimed at the tall, sturdy trunk.

"To neutralize the threat, I must resort to force."

Sif threatened with her words but did not intend to strike again.

With only the spear in her hand, she could not possibly fell the giant Ginkgo Tree that evolved intelligence and stood several tens of meters high.

The subsequent communication was left to Roland.

Roland let out a long breath and stepped past Sif to the front.

"This is my territory. State your identity and intentions, Tree Demon!"

"Your territory? Ridiculous. I have lived here for countless years, and you say this is your territory. So many years have passed, and you are just as shameless as those pointy-eared humans!"

Pointy-eared humans?

Isn't that just Elves?

Roland's eyes lit up.

He gestured Sif to step back first to avoid angering the Golden Ginkgo, smiling as he spoke:

"Let's not argue over whose territory it is. Perhaps we can find a way to coexist peacefully."

"The pointy-eared humans you mentioned, are they handsome males and beautiful females, especially skilled in using magic, capable of wielding the Power of Nature, and living harmoniously with nature?"

"Harmonious? Your so-called harmony means massacring my kind on a large scale, using their trunks to build houses, and eating their reproductive organs?"

Roland fell into silence.

From the standpoint of humans or elves, trees are resources, to be used at will, as after all, they can’t speak.

Looking at this furious, talking giant tree, Roland suddenly thought of the endless debates in another world.

Why eat animals? They are wailing, they are crying!

Now great, plants also damn well wail and cry. What do we do?

Roland pressed his hands downward, trying to soothe the giant tree’s agitated emotions.

As everyone knows, Tree Demons have wooden brains, particularly stubborn at that.

The ginkgo is an ancient entity among trees, naturally more stubborn than ordinary trees.

The Golden Ginkgo, being the ancient of the ginkgo family, is naturally the most stubborn among them.

Standard negotiation tactics are likely useless.

Then switch the approach, first ask what the other side wants.

"Mr. Tree, don’t be quick to anger. Take a good look, am I an elf? What does your hatred for elves have to do with us humans?"

"My companion did indeed accidentally harm you, but a talking tree itself is rather strange; we were just defending ourselves."

"Self-defense?" The Golden Ginkgo Tree was somewhat astonished.

"Yes, self-defense. You see, once we knew you were sentient, did we not cease our attacks?"

"That’s because you don’t have the ability to kill me!" The Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon roared, shaking the entire valley with its thunderous voice.

It’s a wooden head, but it’s no fool.

The coarse and heavy voice made Roland want to cover his ears.

He assessed the damage and strength of the Golden Ginkgo Tree and quickly came to a conclusion.

With his and Sif’s current strength and equipment, they could only scratch the tree bark but couldn’t break through the defense, let alone slay it.

So gather more information and then retreat.

The Golden Ginkgo Tree’s evolution is difficult; this Tree Demon hasn’t evolved completely, at least it can’t walk.

"Mr. Tree Demon, you can’t imagine the technological development of humans. Even if we can’t break your defense, I can burn down this valley. Do you understand fire?"

Upon hearing this, the volatile old tree suddenly fell silent.

Roland knew it had yielded, smiling as he said, "Let’s not dwell on this divisive topic. I’m interested in knowing the terms for peaceful coexistence with us."

"Humans, leave the valley and never approach again!"

The Tree Demon’s thinking is just that simple, fitting Roland’s stereotype.

Roland spread his hands, smiling as he said, "You have a big mouth, so we'll listen to you. We're leaving now, hoping we can coexist peacefully in the future."

He gave Sif a look, preparing to leave.

Just as they turned around, the Tree Demon burst into a harsh, wild laugh.

"Want to leave? Stay here! I am also defending myself!"

Chapter 209: Let's Go Burn Some Trees! (Part 2)

The Tree Demon swung its branches, with leaves transforming into a rain of feathers, pouring down.

Sif leapt forward, wanting to use her armor to protect Roland.

"Dodge!"

How could Roland let her take the hit with her armor? Who knows if these damn leaves were poisonous?

He held Sif, rolling quickly and ungracefully to evade the assault of leaf storm.

A fierce wind rose from nowhere, as the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon swayed its crown, the surrounding trees danced along, stirring up gusts of strange winds, enveloping Roland and Sif in the center.

The ring on Roland's index finger shattered with a "bang," and a pale green protective shield formed in place, shielding Roland and Sif.

His expression changed slightly.

This was a gift from shopping at the Magic Association.

Shop owner Sura’s smile seemed like yesterday, "This ring itself has no offensive power, it will shatter automatically when you suffer fatal damage, forming a protective shield to block some of the damage."

In other words, could the damage just now have killed him?

Roland dared not delay, he grabbed Sif’s hand and ran towards the valley’s exit at the fastest speed of his life.

Perhaps the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon hadn’t anticipated that Roland could escape this deadly blow, and its subsequent attacks all missed.

The other Tree Demons dancing along were far less powerful than the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon and couldn’t stop Roland and Sif at all.

Roland and Sif threw Blast Burn Bombs chaotically, taking the opportunity to escape.

The flames sparked by the Blast Burn Bombs caused the Tree Demons to scream in fear.

They frantically sprayed sap, barely extinguishing the flames, but those two damned humans were already nowhere to be seen.

The Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon watched Roland and Sif escape with their lives and sighed, unable to conceal its suffering.

Humans were far less powerful than the Elf in memory, but they had legs.

As Roland said, they might not be able to defeat the trees but they could destroy the forest.

The blazing fire could burn the valley to ashes.

The Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon decided to act after observing and judging it could kill the humans and dispose of the bodies easily.

Humans became suspicious, and even if it didn't act, they would be devoured completely.

It had to act to have a slim chance of survival.

However, it miscalculated the opponent's strength, and the result of this miscalculation was death.

In the valley, trees and flowers swayed their branches and leaves, communicating silently.

They had ways to convey thoughts to each other.

The Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon was particularly pained, "Children, it's my fault, I have harmed you."

"No, Chief, this is not your fault, this is our fate!"

The flowers and trees mourned silently.

"Chief, immediately release your lifeblood, hide it in the earth, and there is still a chance of revival!"

"I have revived three times, and each time the ending was destruction; even if I revive again, it would be no different."

The aging voice of the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon carried a hint of sadness, soon replaced by anger.

"Children, there is not much time left. This time I decide to face death with you together. Even in death, don't let humans gain any benefit!"

"Chief, we are always with you!" the flowers and trees roared silently.

...

Under the moonlight, Roland and Sif climbed on horseback, whipping the reins hard.

"Damn Tree Demon!" Roland’s face was like water, murderous intent evident.

Ordinary flames could not burn the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon; he needed allies.

Cross-species communication was meaningless.

Only iron, blood, and fire could secure survival space.

Sif lay quietly on the horse’s back, as if asleep.

Lola, seeing her slender body limp, called out repeatedly.

Sif’s voice was as soft as a mosquito, "Don’t make noise, I’m fine, just poisoned."

Poisoned yet saying it’s fine?

Roland quickly jumped over to catch Sif who was falling off the horse.

He struck a match, casting a small halo of light.

Sif’s face was green like a tree, vibrant, she squeezed out a smile, painful but beautiful.

"Would you be sad if I die?"

"For God’s sake, shut up!" Roland held her, took out all the medication stored in the Silver Armor, but couldn’t find anything to counteract the Tree Demon poison.

No matter how abnormal a person is, they wouldn’t carry antidotes for non-existent creatures on them.

In a flash of inspiration, Roland thought of the Elf in the Flower Sea.

He comforted Sif, softly instructing, "I’m going to Dreamland to find an antidote, be quiet and don’t disturb me."

Huh?

Sif struggled to open her eyes, seeing Roland just sitting there, sleeping while holding her.

At a time like this, not even a few farewell words, and he fell asleep?

The soon-to-die Sif was very angry, she decided not to die yet.

Even if she had to die, it would have to wait until this jerk woke up.

Sif viciously bit her wrist, watching the already green blood flow out.

This could delay death, the price would be a damaged body and an ugly death after death.

She had intended to die in the most beautiful posture, but it fell short.

Sif didn’t shake Roland like a fool, calling out loud, but watched him enter a dream on the spot.

Her trust in Roland was unwavering, no matter how ridiculous the request, as long as it came from Roland, she would oblige.

Hold on a bit longer, Sif!

There are still the most important words yet to be said.

...

In the dream, the Flower Sea.

The man’s speed made leopards gape and antelopes dumbfounded.

"Save someone, save someone now!" he shouted as he ran.

Startled by Roland’s frantic demeanor, Elf Sylph stood up from the Flower Sea, not even noticing her skirt being lifted, exposing her slender feet completely in front of Roland.

Perfect feet.

Roland couldn’t see at all, his vision was a bit hazy, only consciousness remained.

"There’s no time to explain, is there a way to detoxify the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon’s poison?"

"Poison from the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon? The Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon has no toxins, only an unparalleled detoxification ability."

"Detoxification ability?"

Roland’s feet halted, incredulously questioning, "But my companion was hit by the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon, her face turned green, she seemed doomed."

"That’s not poisoning, but over-detoxification. Ah, yes, over-detoxification itself is also a toxin, Roland, Roland?"

Elf Sylph had just lowered her skirt, looking up to find no one in front of her.

Roland opened his eyes.

He understood.

The Golden Tree Demon’s detoxification power was too strong, and Sif wasn’t poisoned, so the special substance used for detoxification started indiscriminately destroying the closest thing to poison in her body.

Without hesitation, he took out a poison pill and pressed it to Sif’s lips.

"Eat!"

There was no time to explain, every second was a race against death. By the time he explained, Sif’s normal body functions would be completely destroyed, beyond saving.

Of course, Sif knew this was a poison.

The poison Roland fed her took effect quickly, death within five seconds was certain.

Five seconds were enough.

She would say those words and see if this bastard Roland would feel guilty for a lifetime.

Without a hint of hesitation, she opened her mouth and swallowed the pill that would bring death in five seconds.

The poison quickly spread through her body, her face instantly turned black.

"Roland, I..."

"Don’t speak, you lived!" Roland pressed her mouth, not letting her waste energy.

Half black, half green in the face, Sif twisted her body in pain, curling into a shrimp ball, hot sweat dripping down, soaking her hair, drenching her clothes.

But she didn’t scream out.

In the last few seconds of her life, she didn’t want to leave behind ugly memories.

She bit down hard on Roland’s hand.

This time she showed no mercy, biting Roland’s wrist until it was a bloody mess, countless tooth marks imprinted like a seal on Roland’s right wrist.

"Ah!"

Teeth are the body’s hardest organ.

This attack was from the strongest organ of a Tier Eight being’s body!

Roland certainly couldn’t withstand it, instantly bleeding profusely.

"Roland, I..."

"Hahaha, you really survived!"

"Eh? I survived?" Sif was astonished, looking at Roland, stunned on the spot.

"Yes, stand up and move around?"

Sif struggled to her feet, flexing her arms, stretching as if never poisoned.

She exhaled partly, suddenly tensing up, "Am I really unkempt and ugly right now? Turn around, don’t look!"

"Of course not, you are always the most beautiful girl in the world, if you don’t believe, you can ask the Magic Mirror."

Oh, right, can go home and ask the mirror.

Sif breathed a sigh of relief, yet her gaze turned southward.

"No rush, there’s still something to do first."

"What is it?"

"Call your sister, let’s burn the trees."

Chapter 210: Petrified Elves and Elvenized Trees

Trees can, of course, be burned.

But not now.

Even if you burn an ordinary tree-covered valley, you have to prepare a firebreak to prevent the fire from spreading and causing a large-scale wildfire, let alone these trees are not ordinary trees.

No one knows what extreme actions these Tree Demons might take when they’re dying.

Full preparations must be made.

Under Roland’s persuasion, Sif strangled the devil named Impulse in her sea of consciousness.

Returning to the Governor’s Mansion, it was already late at night.

Sif was tired, and after taking a shower, she sank into a deep sleep.

Roland also entered dreamland in his own bedroom.

He wasn’t sleeping; he was searching for the Third Era botanical expert.

In the Flower Sea, amidst the ancient trees, Elf Sylph sat quietly as if in a deep sleep.

Roland saw her in this pose nearly every time.

A wide, long dress hid her lower body, as if she feared someone seeing her beautiful legs and feet.

Though slightly regretful, Roland didn’t dwell on it.

Though only consciousness remained, he still regarded her as an independent entity, both teacher and friend.

"Sif, I came across a Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon."

"Tree Demon?"

Elf Sylph stood up, carefully pressing down her skirt, and her previously dull eyes suddenly brightened.

"You mean the extinct Golden Ginkgo of the Third Era?"

"Yes."

Without waiting for Sif to ask questions, Roland recounted in detail the events encountered in the valley.

This included the previously discovered earless parsley and the bleeding vegetables.

Elf Sylph slightly bowed her head, remained silent for a long time, and then slowly said:

"Do you know how almost all ginkgo trees, including the Golden Ginkgo, went extinct?"

"I don’t know, but I have plenty of time." Roland found a place to sit opposite Elf Sylph, his eyes full of anticipation.

It seemed Elf Sylph knew a lot.

After a moment of silence, Elf Sylph sighed softly, and with a gentle voice, said, "During the Third Era, the environment was suitable, and gymnosperms were very prosperous, growing hundreds of meters was commonplace."

"Aside from the common pine, cypress, and fir, ginkgo was also a major species at the time, and additionally, there were special large trees that could grow up to thousands of meters and even develop intelligence."

"These intelligent plants were known as Ancient Trees. The Elf Race and Ancient Trees were friends and interdependent. Our candidates for the deity-creating movement were two, namely Elf King Yaslan and World Tree Hill, indicating our interdependent relationship."

"Ancient Trees needed nutrients to grow and rare materials to evolve. Elves provided materials to the Ancient Trees, and Ancient Trees protected the Elves, fighting alongside us."

"Originally, we coexisted harmoniously, but later, some elves and intelligent Ancient Trees collaborated to breed offspring, giving birth to the Tree Elf branch. The Tree Elf physique was close to Ancient Trees and required no pregnancy; they only needed to place the fetus in an Ancient Tree to conceive."

Roland was a bit surprised; such a convenient breeding method should mean the Elf Race had a large population.

"However, the Tree Elf was ultimately a deviant path. Plants are plants, and animals are animals; even if plants have intelligence, they are completely different from flesh and blood life. The birth of Tree Elves blurred the boundaries."

Elf Sylph's eyes flashed with a trace of bitterness, and she sighed softly:

"No matter how many benefits it brings, blurring boundaries is never good. But Tree Elves are our kin, and Ancient Trees are our brothers and sisters. They exist; what else can we do?"

"The number of Tree Elves increased, and their evolution accelerated."

Roland grew more curious because the elf scriptures acquired from the Inheritor's profession never recorded the once-dominant Tree Elves, hinting at hidden secrets.

Fortunately, Elf Sylph was a witness; this part of history would not be sealed away.

"The Tree Elf population grew larger, and as their numbers increased, the Elf Race population also exceeded five hundred million, dominating in the struggle against Earth Spirits."

"Five hundred million?"

Roland showed an expression of amazement.

It was well-known that the Elf Race population was scarce, not exceeding one hundred million even at its peak.

Combining the term ’billion’ with the Elf Race was somewhat dissonant.

Considering the convenient breeding method of Tree Elves, exceeding a hundred million wasn’t surprising.

After all, the Elf Race had long lifespans and a low infant mortality rate; even a slight increase in fertility rates would be significant.

Roland didn’t interrupt Elf Sylph, he just rested his chin on his hands in a listening pose akin to Sif’s.

While doing so, he didn’t realize this was Sif’s usual pose, and he always liked crossing his legs while listening before.

Elf Sylph took a deep breath, her eyes growing pained, revealing that the memories ahead weren’t pleasant.

She struggled to control her emotions and said wistfully, "The Tree Elves’ formidable breeding ability turned them from a minority into an overwhelming majority."

"When there were only one million Tree Elves, they said we are all Elves and should coexist peacefully; as their number approached the Blood Elves’, they began to vie for a voice, saying that Nature was the elves’ true home; when the Tree Elf population exceeded one hundred million, they told us to shut up."

"They said red blood was despicable and wild, like those crude Barbarians. Green blood was the most noble. They even opposed the term blood, calling the damned green fluid Holy Liquid."

"When the Tree Elf population exceeded five hundred million, Blood Elves no longer had a voice."

Watching Elf Sylph's heaving chest from her intense emotions, Roland remained silently thoughtful.

There's nothing new under the sun; this kind of thing has happened countless times in history, making it hard for Roland's emotions to stir significantly.

Elf Sylph's emotions gradually calmed as well.

After all, she had experienced threefold death, she was neither alive nor undead, only consciousness remained.