Empress 221

Chapter 221: Peace of an Era (Part 2)

"If we don’t unite soon, the next victim will be us."

Facing the loud appeal from the Empire’s representative, Sofia smiled and teased, "Perhaps it would be more accurate if you removed the word ’us’."

"The weak are devoured by the strong; this has been a rule everyone follows for many years. Why didn’t you oppose the division of Val City State then?"

Sofia mercilessly mocked, "When bullying weaker countries with strength, you strike hard; but when threatened by a more powerful country, you resort to shouting? Mr. Bonek, you truly disappoint me."

The representative of the Empire was stared down casually by Sofia, like a frog being targeted by a poisonous snake, suddenly sweating profusely, his face flushed.

Sofia’s words were blunt but factual.

Just earlier, while proposing to divide Val City State, Mr. Bonek did not oppose it at all; he even smiled happily.

Can’t he take it when it’s his turn to be hit?

Bonek was rendered speechless by Sofia’s rebuttal, but in diplomatic settings, one must find words even if none come to mind.

"Well, well. I’m very curious, what would happen if you, esteemed Her Majesty Sofia, encountered an enemy stronger than yourself?"

"Firstly, such a person does not exist."

Sofia said nonchalantly, "Secondly, if such a person did exist, I would be delighted."

"To either transcend in battle or perish in combat is the glory of the strong."

As she spoke these words, her eyes sparked with brilliance, then slowly dimmed.

Clearly, there was no opponent here she desired, not even worth drawing her sword.

Perhaps feeling bored, Sofia rose and walked towards the exit.

What she needed to say had been said; remaining here any longer would be a waste of time, letting her deputy take over would suffice.

Watching her lonely departure towards the door, everyone present breathed a sigh of relief.

Sif grasped Roland’s hand and drew a thumbs-up sign.

Roland countered with a question mark.

Sif leaned closer to Roland’s ear and softly said, "She is truly cool."

"Cool?"

It was Roland’s turn to be surprised.

Is that not your inescapable nemesis, and yet you fear her not?

"Of course I’m afraid, but that doesn’t conflict with my admiration for her."

"Did you notice the deep disappointment in her eyes as she left?"

Roland nodded, understanding Sofia's mindset.

She is an unassailable presence. But until the Return Day, she is stuck at the same level as mediocre individuals.

She inwardly despises these people, especially those who play dead, hide, and avoid conflict.

Sofia is strong not only in skill but in an unmatched attitude.

You dare to draw your sword, she will dare to bury you.

Sif doesn't lack potential, but has never had such a strong mindset.

When her Schrödinger's confidence turns into a mysterious self-assurance, she indeed feels she is not inferior to Sofia.

But Roland knows it's similar to being drunk, not true confidence.

Most of the time, she can only muster timid compliance and melancholy; just hearing Sofia's name makes her heart race.

But now it's different.

Sif genuinely positions herself as a challenger and initiates a challenge against Sofia.

Her gaze fell calmly upon Sofia's slender back, neither joyful nor sorrowful, only full of admiration.

Someday, I will also be such a strong contender.

Sif thought silently.

Just before leaving the hall, Sofia stopped, turned back, and looked.

Her calm gaze swept across the room, still, no one dared meet her eyes...

Good, now there is.

Sif’s lips curled into a smile, quietly waving goodbye as if parting with a friend.

Her eyes held not a trace of timidity, serene as an unfrozen lake.

Sofia smiled rarely.

Sif was still very young, yet held promise.

The Sixth Return Day is approaching, after all there are still three to five years, she will give Sif time to grow.

Sofia and Sif’s gazes intersected in the air, instantly understanding each other’s determination.

Neither would renew the continental agreement.

The Rodinia Continent would be their stage to determine victory.

Sofia turned and left, the hall’s temperature returning to normal.

Rarely finding a worthy opponent, she did not intend to use a duel to decisively defeat Sif.

Despite Sif's personal combat strength still being somewhat weak, blocking a sword more or less would not alter the outcome of being slain, perhaps not even forcing her to activate the Extreme Cold Domain.

But a contest between nations is different.

As long as she personally doesn't carry out a decapitation strike, Sussex's overall national power remains advantageous.

Defeating a formidable enemy is what makes it interesting.

The path to ascension has two routes, the rightful way being to become a gap-leading Monarch with undisputed superiority, crowned as the Great Emperor by history books.

This is Tier Six [Great Emperor].

The sinister way is to wait until Sif becomes the true Empress, kill this most qualified rival, and smear the Crown of Monarchy with her blood.

This is not the result Sofia wanted.

Walking out of the hall, the smile on her lips became more free and easy.

Everyone knows that Sofia needs a stepping stone to transcend the mundane level, and Sif surely knows this too.

Yet, Sif still accepted the challenge.

Such a lovely opponent, how could she not cherish her.

Thinking of such a beautiful girl falling on the Return Day, even Sofia, with her coldness and ruthlessness, felt a bit lost.

She sighed and walked towards the residence of the Vladimir Empire’s envoy group.

As soon as she stepped onto the long street, someone recognized her.

After all, there aren’t many people as special as her.

Someone tentatively asked her, "Your Majesty the Empress, would you be willing to grant us the long-desired peace for the Val City State?"

"Your Executive Officer Tony put forward two requests. First, Val City State needs peace. Second, Val City State cannot be annexed by any country."

Sofia paused for a moment and then slowly said, "I agreed to both."

After saying this, she walked away without looking back.

Behind her, the officials and merchants of the Val City State delegation cheered with joy.

They did not know that Sofia was indeed telling the truth, but it was not what they thought.

Sofia certainly wouldn’t tell them the truth.

It’s tiring to say so much to fools.

Are their brains all optional, unable to see the international situation?

Letting them cheer one last time was her final kindness.

Soon, the closed-door meeting ended.

Envoys from various countries headed to their respective delegations.

The delegation members who had been waiting for a long time surrounded them, asking about the results.

The representatives of the Jin Yuan Republic looked at Prime Minister Edward, who raised his right hand to signal everyone to be quiet, and then slowly said:

"Through negotiations, our country has expanded its territory, defended its interests, and brought an entire era of peace."

The cheers echoed throughout the square.

The representatives of the Jin Yuan Kingdom threw their hats into the sky, celebrating heartily.

But they did not notice the fleeting sadness in the Prime Minister’s eyes.

He did not lie; it was indeed an era of peace.

The last peace of the Era of the Continental Agreement.

But the Era of the Continental Agreement is about to end.

Just now, through intense bargaining, the attending representatives decided on the division of Val City State among five countries and the collective settlement of three major religions in the Holy City.

At the same time, they unanimously agreed that the Continental Agreement would expire in seven days.

Whether war or peace, it no longer concerns the Continental Agreement.

He did not say a single false word, yet he deceived everyone.

Edward felt a bit tired; he only wanted to go home and have a good soak in the bath.

The Sussex Empire delegation, Prime Minister William, announced to everyone with a smile.

"Empress Tianyou blesses, Sussex blesses, our fleet has won substantial benefits for the Empire again."

Cheers erupted.

Even the most pessimistic people did not think the Empire would lose out; they were just curious about how much was gained.

William remained mysteriously silent, but judging from his cheerfully flushed face, it was definitely a hefty profit.

Representatives from the Wende Empire and other countries also returned to their delegations, announcing good news.

Tomorrow’s worries are for tomorrow; at least today, they made gains.

The Weimar Federation delegate forced a calm demeanor as he returned to his delegation, said nothing, and left hurriedly.

His subordinates clearly knew they had suffered losses, though unclear about the extent.

Val City State Executive Officer Tony walked in the sunset with heavy steps, as the slanting sun cast his shadow longer and longer.

Watching the still cheering delegates, his throat felt a bit dry.

The tears that should have been shed had long dried up.

He was no fool; of course, he knew strength is the foundation of determining a nation’s destiny.

But he still held onto a faint hope.

What if the countries don’t intend to completely break ties and plan to extend peace for another hundred years?

Unfortunately, fate abandoned Val City State.

As the representatives saw Tony, their ecstatic expressions gradually turned to confusion.

Someone couldn’t help but ask, "Executive Officer, Empress Sofia said peace has arrived, but could it be..."

"She did not lie, peace has indeed come. It’s just..."

Closing his eyes, Tony forced out the trembling words from his throat.

"It’s just that Val City State has perished."

Chapter 222: When the Sovereign Is Absent, Fate Is Not Bound

The division plan for Val City State was published quickly.

The fertile land on the west shore of the Rodinia River was assigned to the Jin Yuan Republic.

This land is indeed good, but its strategic position is somewhat lacking, as it is separated by the river from the main city area of Val City, belonging to a single region.

Although it's not the best place, it's also not the worst, and the representative of the Jin Yuan Kingdom accepted it without much objection.

The Tirol Kingdom was assigned the southern city, the Sussex Empire the northern city and part of the docks, and the Vladimir Empire the eastern city and part of the docks.

The areas occupied by the Wende Empire were sandwiched between the territories of Sussex and Vladimir, all relatively inferior places.

The occupied zones were divided according to the strength of each country, leaving them with no arguments.

All three major religions could establish their Holy Halls within the city for preaching, but were not allowed to cross boundaries.

The Holy Spring of Light naturally was given to the Divine Court of Light.

After the division was completed, most countries were satisfied.

Val City State was dissatisfied, but fortunately, Val City State had already disappeared, so their feelings were no longer a concern.

After the international conference ended, representatives from various countries left one after another.

Prime Minister William, busy with state affairs, could not leave the Imperial Capital for long, and after the foreign guests departed, he too boarded the warship for the return journey.

Before leaving, he visited Sif, tentatively asking if she wanted to return together.

Sif refused, both courteously and firmly.

She had ample reasons.

She wanted to continue investigating her father's disappearance.

Although she did not plan to return, she still acknowledged William's work.

As he left the Empress's Palace, William merely sighed silently and said nothing.

When Sif was in the Imperial Capital, everyone thought she was a troublesome beauty, and her departure was a relief for many ministers, including him.

Once Sif left, William gradually realized the significance of the Emperor's presence.

The Empire was too large.

Every minister had interest groups behind them, and these groups had conflicting interests.

For instance, the Minister of Overseas Affairs naturally hoped to expand more colonies. But the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Minister of Finance did not think the same way.

Colonial expansion could bring benefits to the Empire, but could not supersede the Empire itself.

Not every colony could be as prosperous and compliant as Balat.

Some places were rich in resources but had fierce local customs, making the maintenance of colonies costly.

The Empire spent money, but the benefits went to the external governors, causing discontent within the central Empire.

The governors shared interests with the Minister of Overseas Affairs but had conflicts with the local officials.

Such conflicts were innumerable.

The Empire was indeed too vast, like a tree reaching the sky, with a complicated network of interest relationships.

Even a shrewd and capable minister like Prime Minister William couldn't reconcile all parties' relations.

If only the Empress could return to the Imperial Capital.

Although the Empress was young, she was, after all, the legitimate Emperor, with an exceptional power of rallying forces.

She had been in Hansa not long, and the previously divided Three Overseas Provinces had already united, reflecting the influence of the Imperial Family.

Without the Empress presiding, many of William's plans could not be implemented.

Sighing, the Prime Minister boarded the ship.

When the monarch is away, commands may not be fully obeyed.

He certainly couldn't forcibly bring the Empress back. If he had such an idea, the furious Three Provinces Army would tear him apart immediately.

With all guests departed, Roland could finally close the door and take stock of the gains.

In the small study room, he locked the door and summoned the soul cards.

The main profession card [Inheritor] turned purple.

Passing on the Elf Race's knowledge and abilities to their own strong individuals could enhance the Inheritor's achievements.

With the Elf Race already extinct, the only one to receive the inheritance was Sif. Along with Sif's continuous growth in strength and level, Roland also continually benefited.

With Sif advancing to Tier Seven, he could achieve a hidden accomplishment, allowing the entire Elf Imperial Family to level up.

This was a rare special achievement that would smoothly allow for his own advancement.

His main profession's advancement path was completely bound to Sif.

As Sif upgraded, he could follow along.

Somewhat opportunistic, but such were the rules.

When Sif advanced, would there still be unpaid Elf Imperial Family? No.

Roland's secondary profession Knight also received an opportunity for advancement.

In the fierce battle with the Golden Tree Demon, he protected the Monarch selflessly, allowing the protected to escape death, directly activating a special branch for advancement.

Roland did not miss the opportunity.

His secondary profession also reached Tier Eight [Guardian].

The [Guardian] trait endowed Roland with powerful vitality and defense, significantly enhancing his survival ability.

Only by surviving can one contribute, and Roland was very satisfied with this advancement.

Additionally, he gained a special ability that could only be activated once a day, [Divine Protection].

He could summon a Divine Shelter to protect himself and those he guarded simultaneously.

Unless the Divine Shelter was breached, he and the protected were safe.

This special ability reminded Roland of the gift ring he obtained while shopping at the Magic Association.

This ring had served its purpose, protecting him under the Tree Demon's attack.

Unfortunately, it was a one-time product; although the ring was not shattered, its stored magic had vanished.

He pondered whether to visit the Magic Association to recharge the ring.

The advantage of the ring was that it didn't require him to judge the timing of its activation and could be used passively.

Paired with [Divine Protection], it could provide a second chance to avoid fatal damage.

What about a third time?

If he encountered three fatal occurrences in a short time, it implied too great a power gap with the enemy.

At that point, he would have no choice but to start over. What else could be done?

Roland stared at the soul cards for quite a while before putting them away.

He knew the cultivation system of the soul cards came from the Second Era, supposedly researched by the King of the Gods, designed to help mortals absorb the Power of Stars for cultivation.

With the end of the Second Era, the soul cards went through countless evolutions, eventually forming the existing system.

Reportedly, the end tier for each card system, Tier Zero, is the True God.

The three Goddesses of the Second Era all followed the card cultivation path.

They succeeded, but no one since then had managed to do so.

After all, the attacks from the Divine Punishment Legion were too hard to withstand.

Roland didn’t envision things going so far.

Realistically, he thought of dealing with Mike and Sofia first.

As Roland pondered his life, a knocking sound rang out.

With a specific pattern of long and short sounds, the knocks were unusual.

Roland was somewhat surprised as to why Alina was visiting in broad daylight.

Opening the door, he saw Alina’s excited expression.

"Roland, the flow of fate has changed!"

"Calm down, calm down, have a seat and explain slowly."

Roland closed the door, poured a cup of water for Alina, and gestured for her to sit and speak.

Unable to hide her excitement, Alina spoke softly, "Roland, you asked me to observe the fate of those around you to deduce the course of your destiny. Just now, seeing Sif’s healthy complexion, I re-observed her fate direction."

"Her life initially should have ended in her twenties, but now it’s changed!"

Roland raised an eyebrow, a voice with a feigned calmness tinged with nervousness.

"How much chance does she have to win?"

Alina replied honestly, "I don’t know."

Chapter 223: After-Sales Service

"Don’t know?"

Roland was stunned on the spot.

If it weren’t Alina in front of him, he might have deducted some performance points as punishment.

Seeing Roland’s face gradually darkening, Alina softly explained, "Indeed, I don’t know. Sif’s fate is unusually blurred, and the direction cannot be determined."

Noticing Roland’s displeasure, Alina hurriedly comforted him, "Don’t worry, not seeing the direction of fate is better than certain death, right?"

"Certain death? You mean Sif has no chance of winning with my help?"

Alina gently said, "In the competition between nations, you have a chance for a draw or even a victory, but that would block Sofia’s path to the Great Emperor, so she will act."

Roland understood.

If Sofia, the transcendent powerhouse, were excluded, the comprehensive national strength of the Sussex Empire would still be stronger than that of the Vladimir Empire.

With powerful industry, trade, and maritime strength, they could completely lock Vladimir on the eastern continent regardless of cost.

Although they have abundant resources and can be self-sufficient, they would be excluded from mainstream civilization.

Being excluded from mainstream civilization is an eternal pain for the Rurik People.

Their civilization enlightened too late.

For this reason, they harbor deep-seated insecurity.

When facing the Sussex people, Jin Yuan people, or even Odin People, they feel inferior.

Of course, except for the Wende People, who share the same roots.

The Rurik People feel the Wende People are the real backwaters of civilization.

This time, Sofia insists on demanding an enclave from Val City State, also to have a direct contact opportunity with nations that pride themselves on civilization.

It’s imaginable, before the real war begins, Val City will never be peaceful. Various countries will definitely send elites to test and communicate on the Val stage.

The competition for Val City will inevitably become a prelude to the great war.

As Roland sank into contemplation, Alina didn’t continue to disturb, just as she was about to leave, Roland suddenly looked up at her and slowly asked, "Can you help calculate Lisa’s fate direction?"

"Of course, I often see her. No need to call her over."

Alina took out the special divination card, the Angel Card, thought for a moment, and selected the Guardian Angel most resembling Lisa’s characteristics, placing it in the main position.

Then she took out the Angel Card representing Roland and placed it on the other side.

Roland’s fate is unobservable, so the Invisible Angel Card that represents him cannot be revealed, only serving as a bridge connecting other people’s destinies.

A thin red line formed between the Guardian Angel and the Invisible Angel, linking their destinies.

Alina thought for a moment, then tried to find the next red line, but unfortunately, it couldn’t be observed.

She could only determine that there was another red line entangled with Lisa.

"This..."

"Whatever discovery you have, just say it. We need to be honest with each other."

"Should I really say it?" Alina hesitated, continuing to lay down the cards.

"Go ahead!" Roland was a bit nervous.

Alina, unlike those charlatans, never fakes mystery. Unless aversion won't occur, she always speaks her mind straightforwardly.

However, now she was stammering, showing that this matter was unusual.

Alina hesitated slightly, continuing to lay down the cards, "Roland, we are friends. I have no right to meddle in your private life, but Miss Lisa..."

"If I am not mistaken, she likes you."

"Then?" Roland asked in surprise.

Anyone not blind could see that Lisa likes him.

Is there a need for a special divination for this?

Alina was stunned.

Originally, Roland didn't avoid Lisa's gaze, so why did he need to connect with another red line?

Divination couldn't find the source of the red line, which means the other end of the red line is temporarily unobservable.

There are very few unobservable people. Among the women related to Roland, only two have unobservable destinies.

Sif and Sofia.

First, exclude Sofia.

As long as Roland has a hint of sanity, he wouldn't connect to Sofia with a red line.

After ruling out the wrong answer, only one remains.

Sif.

Though Alina knew the rumors of Roland being Sif's lover were false, she also saw that their relationship was excessively good.

Simply put, Roland was involved in a love triangle.

It wasn't passive involvement; he was actively participating.

Whomever Roland chose, she thought was reasonable and would offer blessings, but Roland wanted them all.

Alina suddenly felt a bit regretful.

She truly had a loose tongue, why did she have to bring up such messy matters?

Even if Roland was a playboy, Lisa a poor soul, Sif a homewrecker, what did it have to do with her?

She was only Roland’s temporary subordinate, future cooperation partner, and someone owing him two lives of debt.

Alina sank into distress; she had no idea how to proceed with this topic.

Got it!

She bit her tongue tip, spit out a mouthful of blood, and fainted.

Roland was waiting for Alina’s answer but saw Alina spit out a mouthful of blood and faint.

He grabbed Alina, about to call for a priest, when Alina weakly murmured:

"S-Sorry, I’ve said too much today and got bitten back. Until tomorrow..."

"Shut up! No more dangerous divinations, this is an order!"

If he had known earlier that Alina would be bitten back, he would never have let curiosity cause him to have Alina calculate Lisa’s fate direction.

He carried Alina to find a priest.

The priests and Temple Warriors sent to Roland by the Divine Court of Light had been arriving from all over during this time, so there was no shortage of healing.

Knowing it was Roland’s important subordinate who was hurt, Christine decided to personally handle the healing.

Originally, she had some prejudice against Roland, but it all disappeared after he became a Knight of Light.

Chapter 224: After-Sales Service (Part 2)

Even if Roland has more questions, he is still on the same side.

Although Roland hasn't directly converted to the Light, he is still one of us.

Christine refused Roland entry into the Prayer Room, and her reason was simple.

"No idle people allowed during the treatment."

Even though not being able to go in made Roland a bit uneasy, he trusted Christine's professional ability.

As the initiator of the Holy Spring Revival Ceremony, Christine was a lucky one blessed by the gods.

If even she couldn't save them, then it was basically hopeless.

Although Alina suffered backlash, her injuries weren't severe, so Roland wasn't too worried.

He has been very busy during this period and really had no time to accompany her, so he had to leave.

The construction in the Governor's Territory was progressing in an orderly fashion.

It proceeded sequentially in the order of industry, military, infrastructure, economy, and education.

Carrying out these constructions required massive funds.

Splitting the Val City State gained some money, but not much.

According to the rules, Val City just joined the Empire, and its existing status would not be changed for the next ten years.

Val City North District's current status is a directly governed territory, neither directly under the Imperial Family nor the Governor's Territory, and naturally, Roland could not take the money from here.

But this time he ultimately had the greatest merit, so William could not give him nothing at all and left three-tenths of the spoils in the Governor's Territory.

Seven-tenths? That's for the national treasury.

As a loyal minister to Her Majesty the Empress and a cornerstone of the Empire, Roland found no argument to refute it.

Even if all these spoils belonged to Roland, the funding gap would still be large.

The hunt plan against the illegal Samaritan merchants had to continue.

Roland returned to the Governor's Mansion, skillfully spinning a weighted quill between his fingers, thinking carefully.

Has anything been overlooked due to these busy times?

The plan to set a trap for the Samaritan merchants was known only to him, Sif, and Stanley.

At least in the planning stage, the officials of the Three Provinces were not informed.

After all, these people once had deep ties with the Samaritan merchants; who could guarantee their loyalty?

But Stanley was different.

He had a blood feud with the Samaritans, and his life's turning point began from marrying a Samaritan wife.

The support from his wife's clan helped him reach a high position, but also quickly brought him down.

These events weren't enough to make Stanley hate completely; what truly broke his heart was finding out their child wasn't his.

He too had an illegitimate child, but at least he didn't bring them home.

He didn't cross the line.

Followers of the Goddess of Fengrao could only have one wife, but there were no limits on lovers.

The Emperor and high tier Nobles obviously wouldn't be satisfied with one woman.

Their countermeasure was legal lovers.

The status of legal lovers was lower than that of a wife, mainly to satisfy men's needs.

Their children were illegitimate, normally having no inheritance rights.

By convention, as long as the woman and illegitimate child outside weren't brought home, it wasn't considered betrayal.

Stanley's wife knew about his affairs outside, but Stanley didn't know how wild his wife was playing.

Regarding this mess, Roland respected Stanley's choice.

As Roland was lost in thought, there was a knock on the door.

"Lord Governor, someone is seeking to see you, claiming to be your friend who once provided you with special tools."

"Special tools?"

Thinking of the other's identity, Roland smiled as he stood up and headed towards the door.

"Mr. Sura, long time no see."

Roland smiled and extended his right hand to the magic tools shop owner Sura

Sura hesitated slightly but still reached out and shook hands with Roland.

The handshake was a popular custom during the Magic Empire, putting down weapons and extending a hand to signify no hostility.

The Magic Empire was gone, but traces of magic civilization persisted.

Sura, feeling the magic power flowing in Roland's body, was somewhat sentimental.

Roland was a good candidate for learning magic.

But he also understood Roland's reason for not following his mentor to study.

Magic was in decline.

To be precise, magic wasn't in decline but lacked resources.

No matter how good a fuel car is, it can't start without fuel.

Magic is good, but there are no more magic crystal stones.

Fortunately, he came prepared this time.

Roland invited Sura into a small guest room and had the attendants serve tea.

When only the two were left in the room, Roland smiled and asked, "Mr. Sura, you must have a purpose with this visit, so feel free to speak directly."

"I wouldn’t say coming from afar."

Sura smiled and said, "The Magic Association has a secret teleportation array near Val Lake, and I came from there."

"Since it’s a secret teleportation array, you shouldn’t be telling me," Roland smiled and shook his head.

Sura replied with a serious expression, "You accepted the teacher’s wordless book, so you’re one of us. Anyway, you won’t spread it, right?"

Clearly, Sura was trying to build rapport.

Sharing secrets can quickly bring people closer.

Roland lifted the tea, took a sip, and didn’t speak.

The meaning was obvious, the appearance characteristics of the Magic Empire descendants were significantly different from others, and although the Magic Association signed a peace treaty with human countries, this treaty would soon expire.

Whether to renew, how to renew, and for how long were uncertain questions.

Recalling the recently concluded international conference, Roland’s eyes lit up.

Could it be that Sura came for the renewal?

After understanding the other’s intent, he smiled and said, "Mr. Sura, there are still three years and four months before the peace agreement expires, so it’s not too late to talk about renewal then."

"Currently, Sif and I can’t make any decisions."

Sura smiled and asked back, "And when that time comes, can you make a decision?"

Roland smiled without answering.

Sometimes not speaking is also an answer.

Sura shifted the topic, lowered his voice, and said, "If I’m not mistaken, you’ve used up the magic in the ring, haven’t you?"

Roland never denied the wonders of the magic world. He pulled out the somewhat damaged ring and smiled, saying:

"Many thanks, it really saved my life. Mr. Sura, giving this ring as a gift truly seems a bit unjust."

Sura was almost amused by Roland’s words.

A gift?

The items Roland bought last time combined weren’t worth a fraction of this!

A ring that could store magic was common, but one that could store and automatically release life-saving magic was rare.

Sura didn’t point it out but continued, "Mr. Roland, what do you think of magic?"

"The strong and complete power system of mages is the foundation for establishing a strong magic civilization. I highly recognize the rich and powerful nature of magic, but unfortunately, the magic crystal ore is depleted."

Commonly known that no matter how much is praised before, the real intention is the regret/but following.

Magic is indeed good; it can compete with the Extraordinary Power System up to Tier One.

But the Magic System has two fatal flaws.

First, there’s a lack of feasible promotion channels between Tier One and Tier Zero.

There are theories, but no practical results.

But unlike the Extraordinary System based on Soul Cards, this path has already produced three Goddesses.

The Path of Transcendence is confirmed to be traversable with multiple routes leading to the True God.

The magic path is difficult, with an uncertain future and divine retribution looming overhead.

Not to mention, the magic crystal stones are gone.

Roland wasn’t foolish enough to choose a dead end.

Sura understood Roland’s meaning. He took Roland’s ring back, took out a magic scroll from his pocket, where purple light danced at his fingertip, and quickly completed the recharging.

Handing the ring back to Roland, he smiled, saying, "After-sales service is finished."

"Thank you for making a special trip. How much does the after-sales cost this time?" Roland happily took the ring back.

It’s a life-saving divine artifact; even with Divine Protection, who would mind having more ways to save themselves?

"The first after-sale service is free of charge."

Sura smiled and said, "There’s one more thing, Master Anthony would like to meet you."

"Oh my, you should have told me such an important thing earlier. Master Anthony is a senior I greatly respect, and I dare not neglect his matters."

"Give me a moment to prepare. By the way, is there a particular reason the master wants to see me? If convenient, please tell me so I can prepare in advance."

Seeing Roland’s proactive attitude, Sura nodded quietly, somewhat understanding why the teacher had a unique appreciation for Roland.

Potential is certainly an essential factor, and Roland’s social skills were also crucial.

He calmly stated, "The magic crystal ore veins aren’t exhausted."

Roland’s eyes lit up.

He began to understand the reason for the change in Sif’s destiny.

Chapter 225: An Unexpected Lack of Surprises

This time the trip is not short, Roland finds Sif and Lisa to explain matters to them.

He first asks Sif and Lisa if they want to go together.

Sif really wants to go, but she shakes her head decisively.

"I’m a professional in the authority system, and my fighting style is completely unrelated to magic. I’ll go when there’s a chance."

Even though she wants to go, it takes a lot of time to go back and forth, and there are many things recently, so she chooses to stay.

Other than Roland, the person she trusts the most is indeed herself.

These past few months, she hasn’t synchronized her brand-new thinking abilities with the Magic Mirror, causing the Magic Mirror’s problem-solving skills to remain as they were months ago.

Simply put, it’s a political novice.

Seeing Sif’s expectant look as if she wanted to say something, Roland smiled and said, "Don’t worry, I’ll pick out the best gift for you."

"That’s not what I mean, the gift doesn’t matter, you need to be safe."

Sif’s fingertips touched the Magical Weapon Pistol Roland gave her, with a slight smile at the corners of her lips.

Roland laughed heartily, saying nothing more.

She might as well have written 'want' on her face, yet she says the gift isn't important.

Sif can stay, but Lisa must go, and Roland's insistence is based on a simple reason.

To see if Sura can give Lisa some praise.

The three disguised their identities, took a boat south along the Rodinia River, and disembarked at Val City Pier.

The pier was still busy, but the soldiers maintaining order were listless and their eyes vacant.

It was obvious they were all bewildered.

Val City State is finished! Yet they still had to stand post for the last few days.

The Executive Officer informed them of the results of the Hansa meeting and tripled the last month's salary.

When Executive Officer Tony tearfully announced this news, everyone remained silent.

Although it was tough, no one resisted.

They were being divided up by several major powers, not even the strongest country could withstand it, what could they do?

Wiping away tears and sighing, at least they're earning their salary.

In at most two weeks, after completing the transfer of power with various countries, the Val Government would formally cease operations.

Thinking back to the spirited young officer he encountered two weeks ago when disembarking here, and looking at the current desolate scene of the pier, Roland also felt some emotion.

Even in a globalized era, the law of the jungle remains a fundamental rule, only it needs more refined packaging as civilization develops.

Sura didn't know what happened here, though he found the soldiers' low morale a bit odd, he didn't pay much attention.

The three left the city, heading towards the White Mountain where the hidden Teleportation Array is located.

About thirty kilometers south of Val City State lies Rodinia Continent's most famous White Mountain.

White Mountain is the tallest and most magnificent mountain range in the entire western part of the continent, with many areas covered in snow all year round, looking like a lying white giant dragon from afar, thus its name.

This mountain range is a life-forbidden zone inside, said to have powerful monsters deep within White Mountain.

Given the technological level of humanity in this era, trying to defeat them in the monsters' lair is extremely difficult.

Lead bullets from firearms have a hard time breaking through the defenses of large wild boars and black bears, let alone stronger monsters.

Fortunately, the Teleportation Array wasn't far from the mountain entrance, no need to go deep inside.

In the evening, the three stopped outside the mountain entrance.

Activating the Magic Array at night would be too eye-catching, and White Mountain becomes a wildlife haven at night. To avoid accidents, Sura suggested resting outside the mountain for the night before heading in.

Roland certainly had no objection.

It was common knowledge that going into the mountains at night is very dangerous, he didn't want to seek thrills deliberately.

Thinking of his tendency to encounter enemies, Roland felt safety should come first.

Bonfire, tents, off-road, barbecue.

Lisa sprinkled the carefully prepared seasoning on the tender meat of a boar leg, skewering the prepared tender meat over the flame to start the barbecue.

Catching a whiff of the aroma wafting from the fire, Sura couldn't help but tease:

"Roland, I thought you were joking, I didn't expect you actually have a monster-attracting trait."

Roland felt a bit embarrassed too.

Just an hour ago, while chatting with Sura, he mentioned why he didn't want to enter the mountains at night.

Sura didn't take it seriously at first, however, a huge wild boar charged out.

The wild boar's eyes were blood-red, with a body as strong as an elephant, smashing directly through two small trees.

This wild boar was obviously stimulated by something, staring straight at Roland and the others, howling as it charged forward.

This wild boar was strong, but it picked the wrong opponents.

Even a mature male elephant would be no match for two Transcendents and a Mage.

Lisa intimidated with flames to control its position; Sura used magic to alter the terrain; Roland pulled out a pistol and fired shots at the boar's eyes and nose.

Blinded, the boar grew even more frantic, unable to see directions.

Roland drew a short sword, precisely piercing the boar's heart.

After a fountain-like spray of blood, the boar collapsed beneath a giant rock over a hundred meters away.

Based on Roland's estimate, the boar weighed at least six to seven hundred kilograms.

At such a weight, this was clearly no ordinary boar but possibly demonized.

In recent years, as the Sixth Return Day approached, incidents of beasts attacking people have become more frequent.

Abnormally behaving wild animals were crudely named demonized beasts.

In short, magical beasts.

Demonized beasts had minor conflicts with humans before quickly retreating into forests and mountains.

Human organizational ability and equipment were not on the same level as in the primitive era.

While one rifle might not take down a demonized beast, dozens of well-trained soldiers using specially made bullets could easily hunt them.

Demonized beasts have much higher intelligence than ordinary beasts, naturally they wouldn't engage in such unprofitable endeavors.

Chapter 226: No Surprises in the Unexpected (Part 2)

Since humans cannot be provoked, they have no choice but to open their bloody mouths and take ordinary wild animals as hunting targets.

This has also led to an increase in the chances of ordinary wild animals intruding into human living areas in recent years.

At first, wild animals tried to get a meal with their sharp teeth and claws, but after being harshly educated by humans with advanced weapons, they learned their lesson.

The Rodinia Grey Wolves, which lost their living space in the wild, became mighty watchdogs.

The High Mountain Lynx entered noble families and became cats that could be stroked at will.

There were also many big bears that couldn't get enough to eat in the wild, nodding and bowing to become big hamsters.

Life will always find a way out, and beasts are no exception.

Being fed while kneeling, they would rather not stand to die.

Intelligent creatures all cherish life, and tonight’s giant wild boar was somewhat strange.

Lisa, with a professional eye, judged that the boar’s meat was good and chose the best hind leg meat to make a delicious roast for the three of them.

Ordinary boar meat is firmer than domestic pig meat, chewier, and more troublesome to process.

Fortunately, Lisa always prepared adequately when going out, so she handled it with ease.

She handed the roasted pork to Sura, full of anticipation.

Sura seemed preoccupied and only ate a few mouthfuls before stopping.

Fortunately, he still gave Lisa a thumbs up.

A slightly glowing magic staff appeared on Lisa’s booklet.

A three-star rating.

While not four or five stars, it’s better than nothing.

Lisa happily added some firewood to the bonfire and cleaned up the leftover bones.

Just as she was about to return to the tent to rest, Roland suddenly stood up, sniffing the faint scent of blood and sulfur in the air, and frowned slightly.

"Sura, Lisa, do you smell something strange?"

"Seems a bit like it." Sura looked at Roland in surprise and said casually.

Lisa also had an unnatural expression, "There is indeed a bloody smell, should we take a look?"

Roland slowly shook his head, "Entering White Mountain at night? I think it’s better to leave for now."

Sura softly reminded, "The nearest town to White Mountain is thirteen kilometers away, it’s impossible to find accommodation so late. Wild beasts fighting in the mountains, the bloody smell is normal."

Lisa firmly supported Roland’s opinion, "Let’s go! Mr. Sura, White Mountain won’t run away, but beasts have legs."

Sura was somewhat indifferent.

This is the outskirts of White Mountain, and the kind of huge wild boar just now is the extent of wild animal mutations.

Even if a pack of wolves came out, he could easily take care of them. Leaving because of the smell of blood, is it necessary?

Although somewhat indifferent, he still accepted Roland’s suggestion.

The three rolled up their tents and left the way they came.

Roland insisted on leaving, not entirely because of the strange smell, but a vague unease in his heart.

Even with two transcendent beings and a mage here, he still felt uneasy, which seemed very strange.

Upon his insistence, they did not stop at Boulder Town, a dozen kilometers away, but returned directly to Val City.

Returning to Val City, it was already midnight.

Fortunately, Val City is a city of international trade, with many hotels and inns open all night, so finding a place to stay was easy.

The best hotel in the city still had two rooms left.

Roland indicated that he and Sura would share a room, and Lisa would have a separate one, but Lisa flatly refused.

"I’m scared."

Roland couldn’t refuse her gaze, so he had to agree.

The remaining two rooms were on the third floor and the second floor, Roland and Lisa stayed in the third-floor room by the window, leaving the other room for Sura.

After entering the room and washing up simply, Roland looked at the distracted Lisa and gently asked:

"Earlier you..."

"If I said it was purely intuition, would you blame me?" Lisa whispered while lowering her head.

"Of course not."

Roland calmly said, "Life is only lived once, you can never cherish it too much."

Lisa, a little embarrassed, lowered her head even more and softly explained: "Although you know Mr. Sura, but he is, after all, from the Magic Association, I’m really not comfortable with you sharing a room with him at night."

"During the battle earlier, I noticed Mr. Sura's strength is very strong and he clearly held back. As you said before, life is only lived once, you can never cherish it too much."

Seeing Lisa's head still lowered, hearing her increasingly faint voice, countless past scenes flashed in Roland's mind.

He could feel that Sister Lisa, who had always stood in front to protect him in the recent months, has changed.

As his status and strength rose, she became more and more reluctant to express her true feelings.

The confident, always cheerful elder sister was drifting away.

Roland sat by the bed and softly said, "Lisa, I would rather you point out problems like before, remind me when I make mistakes, instead of being timid and not daring to express your opinions."

"Such a mindset cannot make a strong person."

Lisa slowly raised her head, seeing Roland's eyes reflected in the faint candlelight.

The corners of his mouth and the depths of his eyes were full of a gentle smile.

She knew very well that no matter what the future holds, as long as he returns home, Roland is still the brother who needs protection.

At least let home be the haven of his soul.

Lisa nodded solemnly, about to say something when the floor emitted a slight tremor.

The tremor grew stronger and even the candlestick started to shake.

It was an earthquake.

Roland grabbed Lisa’s hand and, instead of taking the stairs, headed directly for the window.

Screams and frantic footsteps echoed down the corridor, and everywhere there were panic-stricken guests.

Rather than going out and being trampled by others, it’s better to use the window.

This is the advantage of transcendents.

With physical and athletic abilities far beyond ordinary people.

Standing at the window with Lisa, Roland suddenly thought of a classic line and quietly murmured in his heart:

"You jump, I jump!"

Watching Lisa gracefully leap from the window and land smoothly, Roland followed suit.

The intensity of the earthquake increased, and the crowd on the streets multiplied.

The Val City State’s army was urgently dispatched to maintain order.

A few minutes later, the earthquake gradually subsided. Some people dared not return to their rooms and continued wandering on the streets, while others, unable to endure the cold, begrudgingly returned to their rooms.

Sura squeezed through the chaotic crowd and found Roland.

"Mr. Roland, traveling with you is truly an indescribable experience. The last earthquake in the northern region of White Mountain even dates back to the Magic Empire era."

Roland laughed heartily and did not respond.

He also thought his travels were full of misfortune, no wonder Alina couldn’t foresee his fate.

While Roland and Sura idly chatted, the southern sky seemed a little brighter.

Sura’s face changed slightly, his tone full of surprise, "A volcano eruption?"

"White Mountain was formed due to geological changes, and I’ve never heard of a volcano here, so we..."

"Damn!"

Sura’s tone was clearly a bit angry.

With the volcanic eruption, the hidden teleportation array is likely destroyed.

No wonder there was a giant wild boar fleeing last night; it was the animals’ instinctive recognition of danger.

With the teleportation array destroyed, to return to the Magic Association, one must first go back to Sussex.

Even at the fastest, it would take a week of trouble.

Drifting at sea is no pleasant experience.

Having grown up underground, he suffered greatly from seasickness.

Looking at the southern glow, Roland was also somewhat speechless.

Sura returning was fine, but he didn’t want to return to Sussex at this time; it was too dangerous.

He had become a thorn in the side of the Cabinet Ministers.

If he returned now, he would likely have assassins sent by the Ministers to deal with him.

As everyone knows, it’s common for people to fall and die while walking or drown while sailing.

Roland, with a bit of regret, explained to Sura: "Mr. Sura, it seems I have to break my promise, truly sorry."

"No need to apologize, this is a force majeure."

Sura sighed with a smile, "Rarely going out, and it turns out like this; the teacher probably won’t be pleased."

"Tomorrow, I’ll check around White Mountain. If the teleportation array is truly destroyed, I’ll leave."

Roland patted Sura’s shoulder and smiled comfortingly: "I’ll arrange a ship for you."

Sura had nothing else to say and could only force a smile and nod.

As if realizing something, he lowered his voice and asked: "Roland, that Wordless Book is still with you, right?"

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"Of course I brought it with me. Such an important item is always by my side." Roland took the Wordless Book from the Moonlit Silver Armor and handed it to Sura.

Seeing Roland place such importance on the Wordless Book, Sura’s expression softened a bit.

He took the Wordless Book, gently caressing it, and after a long time, he slowly said, "This Wordless Book not only records history but also has many hidden functions, such as maps."

Sura led Roland to a secluded alley, opened the last page of the Wordless Book, and covered it with his hand, activating the hidden map.

The territory of the Magic Empire suddenly appeared, but now these places are all divided among different countries.

As the inheritor of the Magic Empire, the Magic Association can only exist underground.

According to the agreement, they can enter human cities, but must hide their identity. If discovered, they face fines or even imprisonment.

The existence of the Magic Association itself is a secret, accessible only to top elites.

Opportunities to meet them are rare, preventing destitute civilians from joining the Magic Association.

Unable to eradicate the Magic Association completely, human countries opted for peace, hoping they never rise again.

Trading with key figures in the Magic Association, like Roland, also presents risks if discovered.

Sura looked at the map’s borders and those place names lost to history, remaining silent for a long time.

Roland knew how he felt, and softly comforted him, "I can understand your feelings."

"No, you can’t." The usually gentle Sura suddenly became agitated, unable to control his emotions.

A moment later, he sighed.

"The era of the Magic Empire is gone. Even if we find the best Magic Crystal Ore Vein, we can only expand our living space, not restore past glory."

Roland nodded, speaking softly, "It’s cruel, but indeed other nations don’t wish for you to return to the surface."

"And how about you?" Sura asked quietly.

Roland didn’t answer.

Sometimes silence is also an answer.

He had benefited from the Magic Association and was willing to reciprocate, but this didn’t mean he wanted to support their return to the surface to rebuild the Magic Empire.

After all, Roland was a descendant of the "Barbarian Race," the ones who buried the Magic Empire.

People mourn the Magic Empire and miss that highly developed era of magic civilization, but it doesn’t mean they want them back.

"I understand. During the reign of the Magic Empire, they similarly didn’t want the Barbarian Race entering the core zones of the continent. Now, the situation is simply reversed," Sura said self-deprecatingly.

Even discovering a Magic Crystal Ore Vein, the Magic Empire cannot be reborn.

The population of the Magic Association is too small.

Even with living space, for everyone to open up and procreate, full recovery would take several generations of effort.

The underground cities simply can’t hold too many people.

To increase the population, they must return to the surface.

But the countries of the surface Barbarian Race would never allow that to happen.

This is a deadlock.

Unless a miracle occurs, the people of the Magic Association can only remain underground forever.

The underground cities have everything but no sunlight.

The artificial suns created during the Magic Empire can sustain several large cities, but what happens when the artificial suns extinguish?

Thinking of this brought a wave of despair over Sura.

Seeing Sura’s expression gradually twisting in pain, Roland softly asked, "Sura, have you ever thought about how you would mine the Magic Crystal Ore Vein even if it’s discovered? Previous wars proved you can’t surface, and we can’t descend."

"There will always be a way."

Roland smiled and asked, "Are you planning to use special means to open underground passages and secretly mine Magic Crystal Stones below?"

"That doesn’t violate the agreement." Sura neither denied nor affirmed, but emphasized the mutual treaty.

Roland slowly shook his head, "A contract is only effective until it is broken. Sura, people are willing to follow contracts not because the cost of breaking them is too high."

"Breaking a contract would mean being despised by civilized society, losing reputation, money, possibly everything."

"If the benefits of breaking it outweigh the damage, someone will definitely do it."

Roland’s meaning was clear, a contract is not absolute.

The nations of the "Barbarian Race" are willing to respect the agreement based on their interests.

If the Magic Association believes this contract allows them to safely gather Magic Crystal Ore veins without interference, it’s somewhat naive.

Seeing Roland’s calm smile, Sura sighed, recalling his teacher’s words.

"Sura, don’t try to restrain Roland with contracts or emotions. Offer a condition Roland can’t refuse. This is a disadvantageous trade for us, so raise the stakes."

Indeed, his teacher judged people accurately.

Sura hesitated for a moment, then slowly said, "Roland, are you interested in doing business with us?"

"Let’s hear it."

"My teacher predicted that the largest Magic Crystal Ore Vein lies near the Val City State, maybe even within White Mountain. We need your help."

"In return, we can offer you an equivalent amount of money and resources."

Roland slowly shook his head.

"It’s not enough."

Sura looked at Roland in astonishment, "Even equivalent trade isn’t enough?"

"That’s not equivalent. The relationship between supply and demand determines the value of goods. According to the exchange rate of the Magic Empire, where can you buy Magic Crystal Stones?"

Now it was Sura’s turn to be silent.

Roland was right; at past prices, Magic Crystal Stones simply couldn’t be bought.

Large-scale mining would inevitably be discovered.

With the strength of the Magic Association, they are no match for the surface countries of the Barbarian Race.

Only Roland could cover for them and naturally had the right to demand a premium.

After a moment of silence, Sura slowly asked, "What do you want?"

"The full support of the Association!" Roland said resolutely.

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He grew increasingly impressed by Alina's divination.

Sif's fate curve had changed; it became unobservable, but that didn't mean she would escape absolute death.

If things continued on the current trajectory, perhaps Vladimir's army would come before Sif could ascend the throne and consolidate domestic resources.

Roland needed more power, no matter where it came from.

He didn't care even if it came from devils.

To others, devils might be terrifying, but to Roland, they were excellent businessmen.

They respected contracts, traded fairly, and didn't deceive people, epitomizing law-abiding merchants.

He even suspected that the so-called devils were a slander against honest businessmen by scholars.

The Magic Association might not be devilishly lovable merchants, but they had no choice.

Compared to the firm stances of other countries, Roland's prejudice against the Magic Association was at least not as deep.

Because of Master Anthony, they could even be considered half of his own people.

Certainly, expecting this connection to make Roland lower prices was impossible.

Roland highly respected business rules.

Sura did not answer directly but pointed to several light spots on the wordless book map.

"These places are where the teacher deduced possible magic crystal ore veins based on substratum fluctuations."

Roland was a little surprised. There were three locations in total: one at White Mountain, another at Hansa, and one far away in the Alar Mountain Range of the Vladimir Empire.

Alar Mountain Range was too far and located in that woman's country; it could be disregarded. The other two were either on Roland's territory or nearby where he could reach.

Sura explained, "These areas were all wilderness during the Magic Empire period, not included in the Empire's rule, so it's quite normal for unknown magic crystal ore veins to exist."

Roland carefully observed the map and found that the location of the magic crystal ore vein was surprisingly the Nameless Valley.

The Holy Spring of Light would revive, and the Golden Tree Demon would resurrect, most likely related to the magic crystal ore vein.

Roland asked in a deep voice, "Luckily, you came to me first. If you had confidently dug tunnels to mine the vein at White Mountain, you would surely have been discovered."

"Exposing us does you no good, and I hardly believe Val City State has the capability to discover us. White Mountain is a prohibited area for human activity; no one wants to go there," Sura said calmly.

Roland calmly explained, "The times have changed, Sura. Val City State is about to disappear. This place will soon become a shared territory of the five great nations, and the three major religions will also settle here."

Sura's expression changed.

The teacher particularly mentioned that the other people of the Barbarian Race shouldn't be taken too seriously, but Sofia was different.

Under no circumstances should one provoke this woman.

Encountering her, one must avoid her.

For this reason, they never considered the vein within the Vladimir Empire’s territory.

With Val City being divided, that woman would undoubtedly send competent lieutenants to garrison, and she might even inspect it herself.

The mining of magic crystal ore veins would create special fluctuations, hard to hide from great nations.

Sura sighed and said helplessly, "It seems only one vein is left."

"No, two veins,"

Roland said calmly, "Val City State will eventually be my territory. If I can control this place, White Mountain will be ours as well."

Sura was somewhat surprised.

"Do you plan to drive out other countries? But you currently..."

He didn’t state it outright, but the meaning was clear: Roland’s strength wasn’t enough.

"That’s the deal I want. You help me win the war, I’ll help you mine the magic crystal stone."

"Aren’t you afraid the Magic Association will rise again?" Sura was a bit curious.

"Why fear if you're strong enough? If fate truly favors the Association, then I'm practically half of my own people and might as well directly pledge my allegiance,"

Roland said with a smile.

Sura felt he wasn't joking.

If it went back to the Magic Empire version, Roland would indeed dare to switch sides.

With previous collaboration and Master Anthony's favor, he truly wouldn't be rejected.

But this thought was snuffed out by Sura just as it arose.

The Magic Empire once ruled the best parts of the Rodinia Continent and created a powerful civilization but ultimately fell under divine punishment.

The strengths and weaknesses of magic were very evident; relying solely on magic could not resist the Divine Punishment Legion.

He sighed and said slowly, "Roland, mages and transcendent beings cannot single-handedly resist divine punishment; we are comrades."

Roland remembered the video Anthony played and nodded in agreement.

"That's why I'm trading with you."

Sura nodded with a smile, "The teacher was right, you're indeed different from them. It seems there's no need to go to White Mountain tomorrow."

"You may not go; I must go tomorrow,"

Roland said calmly, "Faced with such a big event, being nearby and not checking it out would openly tell others that I’m suspicious."

"Mr. Sura, you can go back tomorrow and discuss a mutually satisfactory cooperation plan with Master Anthony. We can clearly see your sincerity, and I believe in you."

Roland’s meaning was clear: offer whatever help you deem fit but don’t try to fool me.

Sura pondered for a moment and slowly said, "The mage empire descendants are distinct and definitely can’t directly join the battle, but they can provide equipment."

Roland smiled and extended his right hand to Sura, who, without hesitation, shook hands with Roland.

"Pleasant cooperation."

After confirming the main direction of cooperation, Sura hesitated slightly but still gritted his teeth and said, "There is something Master Anthony didn’t have time to tell you; we are just a part of the Magic Association, not the entirety."

"After the Magic Association was forced underground, it established three underground city circles centered on artificial suns. During the war, the three city circles communicated with each other, coordinated, and cooperated quite pleasantly."

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"But after the war ended, there have been some subtle changes in our relationship."

Sura mumbled, "The other two city circles are gradually losing alignment with us. I’m worried they might also seek cooperation with other countries, you need to be careful."

Sura briefly mentioned the locations of the other two major branches.

One is located on the outskirts of Saint Rurik City and has dealings with the Vladimir Empire. The other is hidden in the South Continent. The association has set up entrances near the capitals of various countries to facilitate communication.

After listening to Sura's account, Roland smiled and said, "It's not surprising. Where there are people, there are conflicts of interest, and where there are conflicts of interest, there are struggles. Thank you for your candor."

After chatting with Sura for a long time, Roland looked south, where the volcanic eruptions were becoming more evident.

However, as the volcano's eruptions stabilized, the earthquakes gradually subsided.

Fortunately, it was only an accompanying earthquake from the volcanic eruption, with not much intensity.

Only a few houses were damaged in the quake.

Camping for a night at the open space by the dock, they finally waited for dawn.

Sura didn't linger much, he directly took a boat north, preparing to return to the association.

Even though he was seasick, he could only grit his teeth and endure.

Roland and Lisa set off again for White Mountain.

This time they didn't hide their identities but switched directly to horses to continue their journey.

Over an hour later, Roland arrived outside the entrance of White Mountain.

He looked up to see volcanic ash continuously rolling out, and lava flowing from the newly emerged crater.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed several groups of people.

From their clothing, they appeared to be representatives sent by various major powers to Val City.

Since he was already there, Roland did not avoid them and boldly went up to meet these representatives.

The representatives of other countries didn't catch Roland's attention, only the representative from the Vladimir Empire made Roland take a few more glances.

The representative, not at all intimidated by Roland's gaze, instead actively approached him.

"I am Camille Yang, the chief representative of the Vladimir Empire in Val City. Governor Roland, I've heard of your reputation, I didn't expect you to be even more impressive than the rumors, it's an honor to meet you."

"Hello, Mr. Camille."

Roland took a good look at Camille and with a smile asked, "May I ask which rank you hold in the Shadow Sanctuary?"

"You've even heard of the Shadow Sanctuary? Thanks to the Empress's promotion, I am the second seat, Blade of Frost."

"Not only have I heard of it, but I've also met Miss Angelina, the fifth seat, in the Imperial Capital. I thought I could meet an old acquaintance, but I didn't expect a new face," Roland said with a hearty laugh.

Angelina's temperament and mindset were clearly inferior to that of Mr. Camille.

It seems the ranking in the Shadow Sanctuary is likely based on strength and ability.

That makes sense, too.

With an Empress who advocates strength supremacy, it’s reasonable for the Shadow Sanctuary to rank by strength as well.

After a few perfunctory exchanges, Roland tentatively asked, "Mr. Camille, what do you think of this volcano?"

"Is Mr. Roland testing me?"

Camille smiled and said, "Though I don’t like to speculate, based on the currently known clues and information, this should be the beginning of a series of events."

"How so?"

"The Holy Spring Revival, the volcanic eruption. If viewed in isolation, these two events might not mean much. But happening in quick succession, they certainly have a connection."

A confidence glinted in Camille’s eyes as he calmly said:

"I must enter the mountain to search for clues. Would Mr. Roland like to take a look together?"

"I’m not accustomed to teaming up with strangers." Roland politely declined.

Roland wasn’t sure of Camille’s true strength, but it was definitely above Angelina’s.

He was likely a veteran Tier Eight strongman, with a wide power gap compared to someone like Angelina, who was newly Tier Eight.

With Lisa, there was a high chance of winning two against one, but the other side surely had trump cards, posing a risk of counterattack.

Without knowing the opponent’s information, it’s unwise to act casually.

Roland’s refusal did not surprise Camille, who handed Roland a specially made flare.

"Mr. Roland, this flare can show direction even in thick fog and volcanic smoke. If you encounter trouble, you can launch it."

Roland accepted the flare and casually asked, "What if Mr. Camille encounters an accident?"

"I would also fire a flare, and if it’s convenient, I’d ask Mr. Roland to lend me a hand."

"You’re quite humorous."

Roland jestingly remarked, "I’m a bit curious; you’ve never hidden your caution against me, yet you don’t seem to harbor any obvious malice, what’s up with that?"

"Your country and mine have openly and secretly clashed many times. It’s normal for me to be cautious of you. As for malice, I’m here to Val City to serve the Empire’s interests, not to cause trouble. Is that response satisfactory to you?"

Looking into Camille’s gentle eyes, Roland was quite sure this guy wasn’t telling the truth.

But that’s normal too, given their unfamiliarity, who tells the truth?

After parting with Camille, Roland chose a different direction to go into the mountain.

The volcanic lava hadn’t spread yet, making it the last chance to explore, so they had to seize the opportunity.

The distance between the two of them was quite far.

As everyone knows, the greatest threat to humans is other humans. Compared to the volcano, it’s clear that humans are more dangerous.

Even though he couldn’t sense Camille’s murderous intent, such intents can emerge anytime, who can guarantee Camille wouldn’t strike if given an absolute chance?

Watching Camille’s departing back, Lisa, who had remained silent, finally couldn’t help but ask:

"Roland, do you really plan to seek his help if there’s danger?"

Roland laughed heartily, "Am I that stupid?"

What was originally just danger, asking Camille for help might just turn it into a dead end.

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"Even if he didn’t intend to kill me at first, could he hold back when he sees us in danger?"

Lisa hesitated a bit but still asked softly, "What if we really encounter danger?"

"How could that be possible?"

Roland said calmly, "I know there’s a secret here, I’m just pretending to investigate, not really going in deep. Let’s go, we’ll wander around the periphery and return in a few hours. Representatives from other countries have also entered the mountain, let’s move."

Lisa almost got a crick in her back from Roland.

She wanted to ask what the secret was but held back.

Since Roland wouldn’t say, it must be a big secret.

Sigh, her position in Roland’s heart was indeed constantly declining.

If Sif were here, would he hide it from her?

Just as Lisa was lost in her thoughts, Roland leaned close to her ear and whispered softly, "There’s a magic crystal ore vein hidden here."

"Ah?!"

Lisa quickly covered her mouth, not daring to make a sound.

After walking with Roland for a while and confirming that strong individuals from other countries were far away, Lisa finally lowered her head and said softly:

"Roland, actually, there’s no need to tell me about such a big matter. I’m not Miss Sif; I don’t understand these things."

"It’s okay, I just don’t want to hide it from you."

Roland said calmly, "You can’t keep things in your heart, so there are some things I don’t tell you, just to prevent those with ill intentions from picking up on clues from your behavior and expressions."

Although a bit unconvinced, Lisa knew it was true, and her pretty face instantly drooped.

"What should I do, now that I know, isn’t it bound to leak sooner or later?"

"It doesn’t matter, I planned to announce this to the world from the start."

"Ah?!" Lisa widened her eyes, not understanding what Roland was talking about.

"Think about it, what does a magic crystal ore vein mean?"

"Stronger magic!" Even such a simple question Lisa wouldn’t get wrong.

"Not only that, but it also signifies profit. The existence of the Magic Association is no secret. As long as you want to trade with them, you can always find a way."

Roland said calmly, "Magic crystals are a necessity for the Magic Association. If any force finds a magic crystal ore vein, they will definitely try to monopolize that profit."

"If everyone knows about it, then no one can make a move, it’s that simple."

There was one more thing Roland hadn’t said. After he publicly announced the magic crystal ore vein, all eyes would be drawn there, allowing the Nameless Valley to be freely mined.

Mining magic crystals can’t have any mishaps, so the Tree Demons have to be worked hard overnight.

Sharing the profits from the magic crystal ore vein at White Mountain is difficult?

Then no one shares, and no one mines!

After a tour pretending to search for clues around the White Mountain, Roland and Lisa turned to leave.

The dangers inside White Mountain were no longer his concern.

As the time seemed right, Roland casually tossed a signal flare at an angle where no one would notice and left White Mountain with Lisa.

As he was leaving, Camille, who was advancing into the valley, stopped and looked in slight surprise at the spot where Roland discarded the signal flare.

That was indeed a signal flare, but it was equipped with a concealed magic signal to mark the location.

If Roland encountered danger, he could just send a signal, and Camille could go to the rescue.

Unfortunately, Roland didn’t trust him.

Roland’s caution made Camille’s lips curl slightly upward as he thought to himself:

"Such a cautious guy. It’s a pity Her Majesty the Empress instructed us not to hold a hostile attitude toward you."

Although Her Majesty the Empress always had good judgment, he truly couldn’t see what made Roland so impressive.

There was no need for the Empress to step in; he could surely win against Roland.

He hoped he was the one misjudging and not the Empress being wrong.