Empress 261

Chapter 261: No One Knows What They Want

When Roland walked out of the city hall building, Val City State was holding a flag-lowering ceremony.

Perhaps because the flag had not been lowered in a long time, the pulleys made creaking sounds that were particularly piercing in the quiet environment.

The Val City flag, which had flown for over a hundred years, slowly descended, symbolizing the end of an era.

This was not just the curtain fall of Val City, but also the disintegration of the continental covenant system.

Val City was the first, but certainly not the last.

In the face of the Rurik Giant Bear's aggression, all neighboring countries trembled.

But besides the giant bear, the other major powers were not to be trifed with either.

In the foreseeable future, many small countries would not have easy days ahead.

For the people of Val City, the fall of their nation was painful, but at least it was not a bloody collapse, rather a peaceful transfer of power, which could be seen as a calm conclusion.

In each district of the city, officials and soldiers of Val City were handing over power to the occupying nations and forces.

A young officer suddenly started singing "Val Lake Shore," a song most representative of Val City.

Val City State did not have a national anthem; this song was tacitly regarded as one.

They were born from the first Continental Conference, representing the compromise reached after all countries fought to exhaustion.

Of course, the official reasons had to be much more grandiose.

For peace and friendship, Val City State was established.

For peace and friendship, "Val Lake Shore" was created.

Though the continental covenant was a product of power balance, countries largely adhered to it, maintaining a general peace for a century.

Conflicts still existed, but no extinction-level wars broke out between the major powers.

The countries promised by the continental covenant all lasted until the second Continental Conference.

However, the times have changed.

Facing the approaching day of return, people no longer cared about appearances.

A covenant is only kept when the benefits of keeping it outweigh those of breaking it.

If everyone believes that breaking it is the best choice, then the outcome is irreversable.

The birth of Val City State came from the continental covenant.

With the end of the continental covenant, their extinction was only natural.

Perhaps because the fall was so reasonable, the officials, soldiers, and onlookers did not feel too much sadness.

The tears that were meant to be shed had long been shed.

They could hardly cry, and the tears at the corners of their eyes were only due to the rudeness of the wind and sand.

More and more people joined in singing the song, and the voices gathered into a wave that echoed over the square.

Sif stopped, silently watching them, and said quietly:

"Roland, why does it feel like we're the villain Demon King from a novel?"

"Reality isn't a novel. National interests can't be labeled simply as good or bad."

Roland said calmly.

Noticing a hint of disappointment in Sif's eyes, he softly comforted: "Sif, I believe the future world will be more civilized, progressive, and harmonious."

"Is it time for the part where we believe in the wisdom of future generations?" Sif smirked self-deprecatingly.

She had long been accustomed to Roland's way of speaking, where new phrases came easily.

Roland said calmly, "Any progress in civilization requires a heavy price. Each of us could become that price itself."

"I know."

Sif did not linger in sorrow, silently following Roland away.

As they left the square, she heard gasps and screams and glanced back.

A young officer in uniform lunged towards the flag about to be rolled up, a blade piercing his abdomen, and blood gushed out, staining the white flag red.

Her heart skipped a beat.

If she failed, would it be the same?

Roland looked back without saying anything.

If it had been when he first awakened his memories, he might have trembled, might have been moved, but now he was as indifferent as a dispassionate onlooker.

"Let’s go."

He resolutely marched away towards their hotel.

There is no eternal, indestructible nation in this world. Every nation will move from prosperity to decline.

The Sussex Empire will be no different.

At some point in the future, it may become a constitutional monarchy, or perhaps transition to a republic in one step, who knows.

This is not something he needs to worry about.

His gaze turned to the distant east. Thousands of kilometers away, in the pristine Winter Hall, awaited his enemies. They would ultimately duel.

...

Soon after Val City State ceased operations, major news followed.

The biggest news was that the Magic Crystal Ore Vein had been sealed indefinitely.

After intense bickering and disputes, countries still couldn't reach a compromise.

The only consensus was the lack of any consensus.

Ultimately, under the Weimar Federation's suggestion, countries decided to shelve disagreements and jointly refrain from development.

The Magic Crystal Ore Vein was sealed, equipped with various detection instruments to prevent anyone from stealing.

Representatives from the Magic Association were also called in, forced to sign.

They publicly promised that unless they obtained approval from Val City State rulers, they would not take even a single Magic Crystal Stone from White Mountain.

While this international conference drew everyone's attention, there was another matter of moderate importance.

Tony, the original Executive Officer of Val City State, publicly joined the Sussex Empire.

He did not go to the Imperial Capital but headed to Hansa City to become an official under Governor Roland.

This decision left many puzzled.

Roland might not be the main culprit behind the fall of Val City State, but he was certainly an accomplice and beneficiary.

People knew Mr. Tony would never surrender to the Vladimir Empire, but they could not comprehend him surrendering to their second greatest enemy.

Yet they knew Tony had few places to choose from.

The world may be vast, but there are few who can stand against the Vladimir Empire.

...

In the spring of 1792, it came earlier than usual.

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Just after February, most of the central region of the Rodinia Continent had already seen the snow and ice melt away, and all things were beginning to revive.

But the farmers did not feel any bit of happiness.

Last year was a warm winter, allowing many pests that couldn't survive the cold to make it through. The early arrival of spring also disrupted their farming schedule, affecting the harvest.

It is foreseeable that the food production in 1792 will inevitably decrease, but the lords' taxes will not reduce even by a penny.

Many people are destined not to survive this year.

Roland has been away from Val City for more than a month.

He knows Sachalin is biting his teeth, eagerly waiting for him to come to Val City for a bear hug, so he simply doesn't go.

He lacks neither the courage to face challenges head-on nor the wisdom to avoid enemy's sharp edges.

In the past month or so, Roland has not been idle, he has done many things.

Mr. Tony indeed has ability; in a small place like Val City, he's somewhat overqualified.

He and Roland discussed for a long time and formulated long-term and short-term development plans for the Three Overseas Provinces.

Roland has grown a bit more admiration for Tony; he is also the person Roland has appointed as the candidate for Minister of Internal Affairs in his mind.

It's just a shame that he is too honest, really unsuitable for the role of Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister should be someone more slick, like William or Alben.

Roland did not know that his image in Tony's heart was also changing.

Initially, Tony's understanding of him was similar to other Rodinians, as a pretty face.

The difference in their understanding of Roland was just the prefix adjective for pretty face.

Some people consider Roland to be a treacherous pretty face, some say a cunning pretty face, some say a vicious pretty face...

After interacting with Roland, Tony’s impression of him changed greatly.

Tony saw the broad prospects in the blueprint drawn by Roland.

Roland’s ambition is not just to find a foothold on the continent, but to make Sussex a true world dominator.

"Let the White Rose flag fly in every time zone around the world; the noonday sun will always shine on the Empire’s territory."

Roland said this calmly, yet it excited Tony immensely.

The world cannot accommodate two super empires.

Now the territory of Sussex spans fifteen time zones, just like the Vladimir Empire.

Compared to Sussex’s relatively graceful consumption, Tony hates the Rurik who directly destroyed rules, causing the disappearance of his homeland more.

Mr. Tony, bearing the title of Deputy Director of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, does the work of Minister of Internal Affairs, clearly becoming one of the Empress’ most trusted ministers.

Yet other officials did not resist him too much.

After all, Tony has a lower rank than them, initial performance points starting at zero, a much lower starting line.

As long as they do their work well, they will not fall behind.

Roland had long warned them that the Governor's Territory encourages benign competition, but does not allow undermining each other.

If anyone engages in malicious competition, ostracizing colleagues, what awaits him is a significant deduction of performance points.

Performance points are practically the lifeblood of these people now.

Especially those like Ados, who are among the few whose performance points are close to the Baron level, are more proactive in working overtime every day, fearing to miss any opportunity to accomplish.

They are the frontrunners, naturally having no need to envy Tony lagging behind.

Although Tony is honest, he has worked in Val City for so many years, not lacking in the dexterous deftness of long sleeves.

He places himself in the correct position, keeping his performance points tightly, neither lagging nor considering surpass anyone.

As long as the master is followed correctly, there will be opportunities in the future.

With the promised gold from the Magic Association delivered, a batch of new coins was minted in the Governor's Territory.

This gold coin, featuring Emperor Sussex as its portrait, was crafted exquisitely with excellent quality, and upon launch was met with universal praise.

Many of these gold coins flowed back to the mainland with the trade fleet and were laid on the Cabinet meeting table.

Looking at these flawless gold coins, the Cabinet Ministers fell into silence.

If Sylph minted gold coins with her portrait, it would indicate she was shortsighted, frivolous and impatient, hard to achieve greatness.

If Sylph minted gold coins with her father's portrait, though reasonable, the vision is small.

However, Sylph chose Emperor Sussex's portrait for coin minting.

The last batch of gold coins with Emperor Sussex as the portrait was 135 years ago.

So far back that those gold coins have become collectibles.

William held the shiny gold coin, leaving only a long sigh.

Wald looked at the gold coin and was overjoyed, he naturally understood Sif's intention in doing so.

This is an open strategy, and declaration of determination.

What she wants is not to be an ordinary monarch like her father, but to accomplish great feats like Emperor Sussex.

Alben squinted at the gold coin, thoughtful.

As an old actor, of course, he wouldn't show any signs, but internally felt relieved.

He can sense Sif's enormous progress.

Compared to the political idiot who knew nothing back then, now Sif increasingly has the aura of an Empress.

He also feels fortunate to secretly connect with the Imperial Faction.

Don’t be fooled by the current Cabinet faction’s grasp on power, but all these powers are granted by the Emperor.

When Sif retrieves the power, however high standing now, then will fall however harshly.

Unless powerful military force is used to coerce Sif into compliance.

Alben squinted and stared for a long time, turned to the Chief of Military Intelligence, softly asked: "What has His Majesty and her little lover been busy with lately?"

"They seem to rarely leave the Governor’s Mansion." The Chief of Military Intelligence whispered.

This time not only Alben was surprised, but even William was stunned.

"Not doing anything?"

"Not exactly, they just rarely leave the Governor’s Mansion, yet have pushed through quite a few policies."

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William furrowed his brow and asked again, "Tell me carefully, besides minting coins and accepting the citizens of Val City, what else have they done?"

"After the New Year, they mainly did a few things, continued to recruit talent, build factories, encourage trade, and establish schools."

"Establish schools?"

Several ministers were somewhat puzzled, staring at each other, unable to comprehend.

At this time, education mainly relied on private education and religion. Although there were various schools from elementary to university in cities, the enrollment was very low.

Education is a huge investment with very slow returns, a long-term venture.

They originally thought that Roland and Sif went out to build a team, wanting to come back and seize power, but didn’t expect them to spend money in this area.

William felt something was amiss.

He increasingly couldn’t understand what Roland and Sif wanted to do.

Starting education is a long-term investment; are they planning to stay in the Three Overseas Provinces long-term?

What kind of operation is this? Completely incomprehensible.

Just as the ministers were looking at each other, the Minister of the Army coldly asked, "Have they expanded the army?"

William nodded; this question hit the nail on the head.

If Sif wants to regain power with ability, expanding and organizing the army is essential.

However, the next words from the Chief of Military Intelligence left everyone dumbfounded.

"Roland announced the disbanding of the existing army in the Governor’s Territory and re-recruiting to build a new army."

This time, not only William couldn’t understand, but Wald and Alben were also stunned.

"All ninety thousand troops in the Governor’s Territory are disbanded?"

"Only less than five thousand are retained, all others disbanded," the Chief of Military Intelligence said calmly.

"Is he crazy?" Wald questioned angrily.

He was anyway seen as the iron Imperialist Faction by all, so there was no need to pretend.

Seeing Wald upset, other ministers relaxed.

Wald might not be an enemy, but certainly not a friend; if he was upset, they felt relieved.

The Chief of Military Intelligence laid a report on the meeting table.

Wald grabbed the report, and after a quick glance, he nearly spit blood.

Roland dismissed experienced veterans, using the Knight Order as the backbone to recruit large numbers of miners, textile workers, and farmers into the army to form a new military.

The former army of the Governor’s Territory retained only a few young officers and soldiers, with a large number of middle and lower-level officers being dismissed.

Is this madness? Is this how a military is built?

Wald slammed his fist heavily on the table and couldn’t hold back anymore, left in anger, not even bothering with polite words.

He was old and didn’t want to care anymore.

As Wald left, the other ministers in attendance didn’t try to stop him, some even silently wished he would have a stroke at home.

After Wald’s departure, the atmosphere in the meeting hall noticeably relaxed.

Although they couldn’t understand Sif and Roland’s actions, they had come to believe these two were acting recklessly, hence the confusion.

William turned his gaze to the Minister of the Army, signaling him to explain.

The Minister of the Army cleared his throat and said with a smile, "This is the foolish act of an outsider who completely doesn’t understand military construction."

"The level of military construction is decided not by a few senior officers, but largely depends on middle and lower-level officers."

"In my thirty-plus years of military service, I’ve never seen anything like this. Even looking at the entire continental military history and the history of the Magic Empire, such actions are rare."

"Clearly, Mr. Roland is dissatisfied with the army in the Three Overseas Provinces and wants to tear it down and rebuild. I can only wish him luck."

The Minister of the Army’s ridicule also put others at ease.

But William still felt something was amiss.

To be fair, he didn’t like Roland at all, but he didn’t think Roland was an idiot.

When did this kid ever suffer? Those who underestimated him paid the price, even including the two highest ranks in the Shadow Sanctuary.

He suddenly had a realization and turned his gaze to the Minister of the Navy.

"Mr. Winston, are they building a navy?"

"Oh, Mr. William, you really are an outsider who doesn’t understand the navy."

Winston said with a smile, "The navy is different from the army; there is no quick shortcut. Roland does indeed have the framework of the Fourth Fleet, and Bridges is indeed a capable fellow, but what about warships?"

"Why is the navy called the hundred-year navy? Besides the naval tradition requiring long-term cultivation, the oak and other materials needed for shipbuilding take a hundred years to mature."

"If Mr. Roland sows seeds now, he might have his invincible fleet by the distant 1892."

Winston was unreserved in his speech, mocking whoever he could.

His Sussex-style humor drew laughter in the room.

He was right; navy cultivation is extremely difficult. Experienced captains and sailors are secondary; fleet construction is the real challenge.

To prevent overseas rebellion, Sussex has always prohibited shipbuilding overseas; planting shipbuilding trees overseas equates to treason.

All the trees from overseas colonies and the Three Overseas Provinces combined couldn’t build a few ships.

William smiled as he offered the concluding remarks for the farce, "So, unless they can conjure wood from air or cast ships from steel, it’s impossible to have a powerful navy, right?"

"Yes."

Winston spread his hands, ruthlessly ridiculing, "As everyone knows, things heavier than water can’t float on the sea. Unless Mr. Roland has some magic that can make ironclad ships float on water."

"Goddess of Fengrao above, please forgive my ignorance."

Alben, who had been silent, was somewhat displeased with Winston’s demeanor and coldly said:

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"Don’t speak so definitively. I’ve heard that in the Second Era, there were super ironclad ships hundreds of meters long, and even giant iron birds that flew in the sky."

"I’ve heard about that too, but those were miracles. Is there anything like that now?"

Winston snorted lightly, "If he can sail an ironclad giant ship up the Tamas River, I’ll show you how to eat a warship raw on the spot."

"Well then, be sure to bring some sauce." Alben retorted sharply.

William raised both hands to put an end to their argument.

"Gentlemen, let’s not have pointless quarrels. Let’s hear if there’s any more interesting intelligence."

William still needed to be given face.

Although Alben and Winston didn’t see eye to eye, they did not continue to quarrel but instead sat upright like gentlemen.

The Chief of Military Intelligence continued to introduce Roland and Sif's new policies since the beginning of the year.

They were making large-scale long-term investments in the Three Overseas Provinces, some of which might take ten years or even longer to show results.

William was somewhat speechless, completely unable to understand what Roland intended to do.

He frowned and asked, "Don't they have any investments that can enhance power in the short term?"

"Yes, Roland is now an Honorary Knight of the Divine Court of Light, titled Knight of Light. The Divine Court values him highly, granting him five thousand Temple Warriors and three High Tier Sanctuaries."

William fell silent.

After a long time, he chuckled lightly and mocked, "My goodness, that's five thousand Temple Warriors. I've heard their combat power is incredible. How many regular troops can these five thousand handle?"

"If it's the Imperial Capital Guard, about ten thousand. If it's the most elite Imperial Guard, even with equal numbers, we still win."

The Minister of the Army spoke with confidence.

Sussex's army is not the best in the world, but it is definitely not something a religious army can challenge.

The Temple Warriors are indeed elite, but their numbers are too few.

William sarcastically asked, "So how many troops do we have?"

The Minister of the Army said in a deep voice, "There are four hundred and seventy thousand troops stationed domestically, and the combined forces in all Governor's Territories amount to about three hundred thousand. If war requires, we can expand to over two million at any time."

"We can't expand that much, there's no money in the treasury!" The Minister of Finance, playing deaf, opposed openly.

William laughed heartily and waved his hand to stop the argument.

"In short, Her Majesty and her lover cannot threaten us through force. They have no intention of using military force to resolve disputes. Does she think she can rally the troops to switch sides with a wave of her arm?"

"That's even more impossible. The government pays the army's salary, not the Imperial Family."

William said indifferently, making his final judgment.

But soon, he felt a headache.

He couldn't understand Roland and Sif's enigmatic maneuvers at all.

"What exactly do they want?"

"It's simple. They probably don't want to come back." Alben said coldly.

William was momentarily stunned, puzzled, and frowned, "What do you mean by not wanting to come back?"

"It's just as it sounds."

Alben calmly explained, "Our Majesty the Empress has been frequently traveling between the Three Overseas Provinces and Val City, and she’s having a great time."

"Though they lose power abroad, they gain freedom. This is probably the optimal solution."

William fell silent.

This indeed seemed like a cunning idea Roland might come up with.

If they can’t win power, then they might as well be a local emperor abroad.

Although Northern Rodinia Governor’s Territory can’t compare with the homeland, it is still larger than an ordinary kingdom.

Faced with the choice between being a puppet emperor and having real power abroad, she would still choose the latter.

William couldn’t help but laugh.

Alben’s mockery aptly explained the reasons behind Roland and Sif’s actions.

They plan to enjoy life in the Three Overseas Provinces, hence the long-term construction.

Instead of returning to mutual distaste, why not simply not see each other?

"Is this really possible?"

"Why not? When she officially ascends the throne, just declare Hansa as the accompanying capital." Alben provided an explanation from the legal perspective.

William smiled with satisfaction.

"Ladies and gentlemen, perhaps this is the best outcome. If this is what Her Majesty wants, we loyal subjects have no reason to oppose."

Chapter 265: Only She Is Troubled by Her Overwhelming Strength

Not only does the Cabinet fail to understand Roland's operations, the whole world fails to understand.

When everything Roland did was compiled into intelligence and presented to Sofia by Sahalin, she was silent for a long time without speaking.

Though he dared not speak loudly in front of the Empress, the resentment in Sahalin's heart could not be hidden.

Seeing his expression of wanting to speak but holding back, Sofia softly asked:

"Sahalin, you've been in Val City for one and a half months, what is your impression of Roland?"

Despite feeling very displeased, he still gave a fair assessment, "This is a despicable and cunning guy."

"His hard power is far inferior to mine, at most on par with Camille, yet he made both Camille and me suffer."

"According to my intelligence, he has never suffered a loss. Once is luck, twice is fortune, many times is skill."

Listening to Sahalin's judgment, Sofia nodded and softly said, "Sahalin, your view is very accurate."

While speaking, she sighed rather wistfully, and softly said, "Sahalin, do you think holding the position at the Shadow Sanctuary undervalues your talents?"

"I do not! It is my honor to serve Her Majesty, what I do is not important, being able to serve Her Majesty is what matters!"

Sahalin was so frightened that he was drenched in sweat.

Although his strength was only one step away from Tier Seven, even breaking through to Tier Seven would not make him a match for Sofia.

He had witnessed the Empress effortlessly slay opponents of the same level with his own eyes.

The Empress's questioning almost made him kneel in fear.

But he knew the Empress did not like cowards, so he could only stand straight.

Sofia smiled and said, "Sahalin, there's no need for this. Ambition is a good thing. The Shadow Sanctuary is just a special organization, high in rank but without real power, the stage is too small."

"I will give you a stage to perform. The military operation against the Boli Khanate will be your full responsibility. I'll give you one hundred and thirty thousand troops and half a year, is that enough?"

Sahalin's heart was trembling.

Her Majesty the Empress intends to let him handle things independently!

Though the Shadow Sanctuary is trusted by the Empress, it is merely a stepping stone.

He had been the head for over five years, and felt some resentment in his heart.

It seems his loyalty has satisfied the Empress, and only then would she give him a chance.

He hurriedly knelt on one knee, raised his head, and solemnly stated, "Your Majesty, the cost needed for one hundred and thirty thousand troops is too great. Five thousand troops are enough for me!"

"The Boli Khanate has fewer than twenty to thirty thousand troops nationwide, even if there is a full national mobilization, they could at most scramble together tens of thousands of undisciplined new soldiers, five thousand elite troops can conquer them in just three months!"

"Sahalin, it is a war to annihilate a country, under the threat of annihilation, the Boli Khanate will surely put up the fiercest resistance. They have a martial tradition and cannot be underestimated."

Sofia calmly said, "Even when a brown bear hunts a moose, it must give its all. Deploying one hundred and thirty thousand troops is extremely costly, but we cannot afford the consequences of failure."

"Your Majesty, I am willing to stake my life, five thousand men are sufficient!"

Sahalin said confidently, "This winter is very warm, pests hidden under the snow can easily survive, and when spring comes, they will ravage the plains full of holes. Climate factors are very disadvantageous to the Boli Khanate."

"Not only that, the current Boli Khan is a dull and incompetent fellow, who does nothing but drink and consort with women, none of the tribes within the Khanate respect him."

"As long as we launch an attack when the horses are thinnest in spring, they will surely lose!"

"I will never underestimate the enemy, I will use bribery and estrangement to divide and disintegrate them, then launch an attack when they are weakest."

Seeing Sahalin’s confident expression, Sofia nodded with satisfaction and softly said:

"You have always been reliable in your work, I’ll leave this matter to you. When you return triumphant, the territory and title of the Count of Lower Gross will be yours."

Sahalin trembled with excitement.

Her Majesty the Empress remains so generous.

His eyes reddened, and only after making repeated assurances did he then slowly leave.

Watching Sahalin's departing figure, Sofia sighed softly, somewhat helplessly.

She, of course, knew that deploying one hundred and thirty thousand troops was extremely costly, and sending five thousand would offer higher cost efficiency, but the Boli Khanate was not a pushover.

They would not surrender directly like Val City State.

They would use the vast steppes to keep maneuvering, prolonging until the Empire's army was exhausted, protecting their country.

This battle would not be easy, which is why she recalled Sahalin.

The Shadow Sanctuary cannot do without Sahalin, but now she needs a battle-hardened general even more.

Thinking of the useless generals and incompetent nobility under her command, she felt a headache.

This group of pests is her greatest obstacle to becoming the Great Emperor.

If the Vladimir Empire could also be brimming with talents like other countries, that would be great.

Actually, the Empire is not short of talent, it's just lacking channels for their upward mobility.

Sofia’s eyes flashed with a cold light, before embarking on a full-scale war, she must clear out these parasites.

Let their heads remain a while longer.

Her cool voice echoed in the palace, "Have Angelina come over."

The situation in Val City has stabilized, there’s no need for Sahalin to continue wasting time there.

To merely maintain stability, let Angelina go there for training.

The Holy Hall’s one and a half brains, half rest with Angelina.

Although her thinking often skips around, when she’s calm, her brain is still usable.

Moreover, she has made rapid progress recently, much stronger than before.

Though she has many faults, she’s worth cultivating.

This is Sofia’s evaluation of Angelina.

In others’ eyes, Angelina is her shadow.

Chapter 266: Only She Is Troubled by Being Too Powerful (Part 2)

The same adeptness in wielding the power of Frosty Winter, the same ice-cold demeanor, the same disdain for men.

But Sofia knew, Angelina was merely a poor imitation of her.

Angelina quickly appeared before her.

"Anjie, what do you think of Roland?"

"A cunning, despicable, shameless enemy," Angelina answered instantly.

Sofia felt a headache coming on; the current Angelina was clearly in a state of having forgotten to bring her brain.

Noticing the Empress's indifferent expression, Angelina shuddered suddenly and hurriedly revised her comments.

"But Roland is not an ordinary person. He is Empress Sylph's mainstay; one could consider him a part of the Empress. Therefore, his personal morals don't matter."

"Because he has no bottom line and is resourceful, he is a very difficult enemy to deal with."

Angelina said softly: "He is definitely not a match for the Prime Minister!"

"What if the opponent is you?"

Sofia asked calmly.

Angelina's eyes lit up. Could the Empress intend to send her to Val City?

She looked up at the Empress, her gaze full of determination, "As long as it's a fair duel, I don't fear him!"

Sofia was instantly speechless.

A fair duel? That's the coldest joke she's ever heard, colder than the Polar Glacier.

She sighed softly, somewhat helplessly said: "Go back to the Arctic Glacier and calm yourself for another six months."

"Your Majesty, I want to work for you!" Angelina was anxious.

Although training in the core zone of the Arctic Glacier was fast, becoming stronger couldn’t be achieved by secluding oneself; constant experience was also necessary.

Her current strength was much greater than during her visit to Sussex. Why shouldn’t she serve the Empress!

Sofia sighed softly and said:

"I’ll say this only once. Fair duels are reserved for exchanges between strong individuals and situations where victory is assured. At other times, defeat your enemies in the most certain way, even if the means are vile."

Angelina was stunned but still firmly stated, "I remember this!"

"If Roland returns to Val City and there’s a conflict of interest, how will you deal with him?"

"Show no mercy, and use every means to deal with him!"

Sofia continued to ask: "What if powerful individuals from Jin Yuan Kingdom also have conflicting interests with you?"

"Similarly, show no mercy, and use every means to deal with them!"

Sofia was amused and smiled, "What if they ally together?"

"This... Roland is at odds with Jin Yuan Kingdom, how could they ally?"

"I'm asking how you would respond, not how they would ally!" Sofia raised her voice.

"Then I will also ally with the powerful individuals from Tirol Kingdom and Prudon Kingdom! That way, it's three against two; I still hold the advantage." Angelina responded quickly.

Sofia nodded in satisfaction and continued to ask, "What if they too have conflicting interests with you?"

"This..."

Angelina was puzzled, weren't they friendly nations?

Seeing her sweating profusely, Sofia calmly said: "Remember, if the situation becomes too complicated to handle, prioritize allying with Roland to deal with others."

"As you command."

Although Angelina accepted the arrangement, she still couldn't understand why Her Majesty had arranged it this way.

Sofia apparently did not wish to explain, merely announcing that she would manage Val City affairs. The bottom-line goal was not to lose the city and to prevent the Magic Crystal Ore Vein from being secretly mined.

Angelina breathed a sigh of relief.

This is too simple.

The thought of dealing with both Roland and other national powerhouses made her a bit nervous, but merely maintaining the status quo was something she could surely accomplish.

Sofia pondered for a moment, then took off the Deep Blue Ring and flicked it towards Angelina.

"Take it."

"Your Majesty, this is your engagement ring; I, I..." Angelina was terrified.

"I've been widowed for many years; this ring means nothing to me, but it's of some use to you. Use it to crush any foes truly undefeatable."

A flash of coldness flickered in Sofia's eyes as she said indifferently: "It's approximately a tenth of my strength at full power, sufficient." She didn't tell Angelina that the ring's power exceeded what she described, and Angelina could also recharge it herself. Overpowered equipment easily causes dependency; it was meant to be a life-saving tool.

Angelina could feel the entire palace enveloped in coldness, every hair on her body stood on end.

She knew, this was the Empress's most unwilling memory.

Although royal marriages have nothing to do with emotions, it doesn't mean the Empress could accept being neglected by her husband.

She couldn't understand why the Late Emperor would overlook such beauty and grace as the Empress's?

It was rumored that Her Majesty the Empress never received the Late Emperor's affection, and was even a virgin.

No one dared discuss this affair, whoever mentioned it would die.

Angelina knew this was a disgrace.

On her wedding night, her husband couldn’t even be bothered to pretend and went to be with his lover, a humiliation anyone would find unforgivable.

Especially for the Empress.

So, she killed her husband, seized the crown and scepter.

Angelina carefully kept the ring, preserving it as a treasure, not daring to wear it casually.

After watching Angelina leave, Sofia sighed softly and continued summoning other ministers.

She knew the true intellect level of this group of fools, so she didn’t give them room for creativity, but directly informed them of the goals and methods.

After she had arranged the last task, it was already late at night.

Slowly rising, Sofia walked towards the north.

She intended to stay beneath the Arctic Glacier for half a year.

She could hardly suppress the rampage of power within her and had to hibernate beneath the Arctic Glacier for a period before the spring and summer.

Every power has a price.

She possessed invincible power of her level, and naturally paid a price far beyond imagination.

The day of return was near, and the whole world considered her the most certain to ascend.

Indeed, she had no rivals; her only opponent was herself.

If she couldn’t control the rampaging power before the return day, she would be torn apart by the Supreme Law.

The world’s strong individuals were troubled by weakness, only she was terrified by her excessive power.

She hoped these fools wouldn’t mess up.

Her speed was swift, gliding through the night like a ghostly shadow, unnoticed by anyone.

Before entering the Arctic, she paused, casting a glance to the west.

If only she had a Prime Minister like Roland, capable and unorthodox.

But alas, there wasn’t.

What were he and that little girl busy with?

Sofia barely hesitated for a moment before disappearing in the first light of dawn.

Neither Roland nor Sif were strong enough, unqualified as enemies or allies.

...

Roland was busy establishing a university.

While the whole world speculated on his next move, he and Sif attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Rodinia University.

This university consisted of five colleges: Philosophy College, Science and Technology College, Alchemy Academy, Military Academy, and Magic Academy.

The university's name seemed rather grand, and many cautious, seasoned officials advised Roland not to be so ostentatious, but he refused them all.

Low-profile wouldn't cut it.

To attract talents across the continent, a striking name was needed.

Recently, many talents from various sectors came to join him, yet those reaching the S-level threshold were practically nonexistent, and even those meeting the A-level standard were rare.

Clearly, the real talents were still on the fence.

They not only watched Roland's attitude but also his capability and breadth of vision.

To gather all talented minds across the continent and yet dare not use the name Rodinia University—how does that work?

As for whether such extravagance would offend others, Roland didn't care.

True strong individuals never lack enemies.

As long as one is sufficiently powerful, numerous enemies are inconsequential.

Empress Sofia had the most enemies, yet whom did she fear?

He would personally serve as the university president, nurturing a base team.

After all, as the Inheritor, only this way could he advance rapidly in strength.

The confrontation with Sahalin made Roland somewhat fearful.

While strategic machinations are crucial, strength is the foundation.

He could outwit Camille, even Sahalin, but could he outwit Sofia?

In the face of absolute strength, stratagems are just farces.

Only by having roughly equal power would there be qualification to calculate against Sofia.

Under the gaze of all the officials, Roland and Sif walked together towards the university entrance.

He raised his right hand and solemnly announced to everyone.

"Rodinia University welcomes everyone to join, regardless of race, regardless of nationality, as long as you have a thirst for knowledge."

Chapter 267: I Want to Focus My Main Efforts on Teaching

What on earth is Roland up to?

Angelina sat in the office, her brows slightly furrowed, looking at the intelligence reports submitted by her subordinates. She remained silent for a long time, still unable to figure it out.

Her thoughts drifted far, carefully recalling the events of the past month or so.

The spring of 1792 arrived particularly early.

Aside from the peak of White Mountain, which was perpetually snow-capped, the snow in other places had almost completely melted.

Around Val City, there was already little snow during winter, and now everything was coming back to life, a scene of vibrant energy.

Angelina was appointed as the special representative stationed in Val City, fully responsible for the affairs around Val City and the oversight of the White Mountain Magic Crystal Ore Vein.

She was well aware that these were just basic tasks; doing them well only ensured no deductions, but wouldn't earn her any extra points. The Empress definitely expected more from her than just this.

She also had to expand the intelligence network here, assemble a flexible and mobile armed force, maintain good relations with representatives of other countries, and at the same time, use various means to gain benefits for the country.

Additionally, she needed to find a way to disperse the Val People in the territory, creating living space for Rurik immigrants.

Beyond the tasks assigned by the Empress, she also needed to restore face for the Shadow Sanctuary.

She had to test Roland's true strength and, if the opportunity arose, make him lose face severely.

She was full of confidence about this.

According to the chief of Sahalin, Roland's hard strength was not strong, far worse than hers after months of rigorous training at the Arctic Glacier.

Her actual strength now surpassed Camille's, ranking second within the Shadow Sanctuary.

Camille, after a humiliating failure, was demoted to the Eastern Wilderness to grow potatoes. His deputy position was filled by Angelina, indicating the Empress's trust in her.

Moreover, the Empress also gave her the Deep Blue Ring as her trump card.

No matter how capable Roland was, he couldn’t withstand a full strike from the ring.

She couldn’t imagine what Roland had to counter even one-tenth of the Empress’s power.

She patiently awaited Roland’s arrival in Val City, intending to give him a severe blow when he did.

Yet, she had waited for almost two months and still hadn’t seen anything.

She certainly couldn’t understand Roland.

Although many saw Roland as an arrogant pretty boy, he knew his position well.

The special representative of the Sussex Empire stationed in Val City was not him, but someone sent by the Cabinet.

Running to Val City all the time would be overstepping his boundaries.

The Empress and the Cabinet currently maintained a delicate balance of surface peace, which he did not wish to disrupt.

While inspecting the construction of the Great Cathedral as a Knight of Light was possible, he didn’t want to go.

After all, he was a citizen of the Fengrao District; openly consorting with the Divine Court of Light would greatly annoy the Divine Court of Fengrao.

There’s no need to offend people for no reason.

He had already offended the Goddess of Light; it wouldn’t do to offend the Goddess of Fengrao as well.

Val City was a deep water now, and he wasn't inclined to enter at all.

What Angelina didn't know was that Roland, whom she anticipated might go to Val City at any moment, was actually staying put as the headmaster at Rodinia University, educating students.

Angelina put down the intelligence report and couldn't help asking, "Any recent movements from Roland?"

"According to the clues we've gathered, he really is assuming the role of headmaster, even teaching classes. He's promoting basic education in the Governor's Territory, building roads, starting factories, and constructing new docks."

Angelina was even more surprised. These were extensive investments with slow returns. She couldn't understand Roland's motives and mumbled to herself:

"Does he really plan to settle overseas for a long time? Wait, you mentioned based on clues we've gathered...you mean our intelligence personnel in Hansa Province have been expelled?"

"Yes, at least over forty intelligence personnel are missing."

The intelligence officer's face looked a bit grim.

If the other side found some clues, it's possible they dug up a few agents. However, this time the entire intelligence network was completely uprooted, a heavy loss.

The intelligence networks in Hansa and the other two provinces, overt or covert, were uprooted. Only a few unimportant peripheral members escaped back, while all core members were missing.

In this scenario, missing meant either death or capture.

Angelina's face was extremely displeased.

Planting spies in each other's countries was a common practice among nations, and during peacetime, all parties had an unspoken rule for dealing with such conflicts.

Captured intelligence personnel were generally exchanged for prisoners of equivalent value or redeemed with money if there were no equivalent prisoners.

Roland taking out so many people at once meant a redemption price that wasn't cheap.

Exchanging this number of intelligence personnel was not a decision she could easily make.

Thinking of this, Angelina reluctantly waved her hand, signaling the intelligence officer to withdraw.

Standing by the window, she looked northward, the countryside fields already lush with green, flowers and plants also beginning to bloom.

She still couldn't understand how Roland could remain so comfortably detached from the situation.

Every one of Roland's actions was precisely beyond her comprehension, differing completely from what a normal person would do.

During this time, there had been several minor and major skirmishes between various forces in Val City.

To fight for the city's population and commercial resources and to resolve grievances, there were people bleeding every day.

She couldn't understand why Roland would not attend such an occasion.

Of course, she couldn't fathom that Roland wasn't a born battle maniac and didn't enjoy combat as much as she did.

He was on the path of a scholar-profession, what kind of image would it be if he spent all day fighting?

One could increase strength by imparting knowledge; who would risk their life to go on adventures every day?

During this period, Roland's days were simply too comfortable.

After leaving Val City, he immediately convened true experts from various industries to gain a detailed understanding of the actual levels in each field.

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According to the intelligence he gathered, the productivity and technological level of this world in 1792 roughly equates to the early to mid period of the first industrial revolution before his transmigration.

Perhaps it's the particularly nourishing small grains of the Otherworld, or perhaps the different gravity, but the average physical quality of people and animals on the Theia Plane is noticeably stronger than in the pre-crossing world.

Besides, due to the existence of Magic and alchemy and the exhaustion of petrochemical energy, the technological tree on the Theia Plane is heavily skewed.

Industry is on a single line, that is, boiling water — ahem, steam power.

Gigantic, noisy, crude steam engines are the mainstream machinery in this world.

High-Level technology basically relies on archaeological excavation.

Whoever can find relics from previous eras and excavate precious tomes can gain technological power surpassing the times.

Of course, not all excavations yield treasures. If one is unlucky enough to uncover relics of internal combustion engines or fuel combustion tomes, they can only curse their luck.

After all, Dragon Slaying Skill requires dragons to be useful.

With the strengthening of Soul Card power, Roland can now directly extract tomes from the memory library and automatically translate them into Sussex Language versions.

Rewind time to more than a month prior, with Rodinia University completed, Roland became the principal, staying in the university every day guest-lecturing and passing on knowledge.

The various affairs of the Governor's Territory were entrusted to Sif.

Roland's reason for becoming an absentee landlord was simple, "You must start by governing the three provinces and gradually get used to managing the entire Empire. I'm very busy. I need to focus mainly on knowledge transfer."

As per Roland's request, only Sif and a few key personnel could directly approach him; others were not allowed to interfere with his teaching activities at the school.

On his second day as principal, the Secretary of Education came to find Roland.

"Lord Governor, a set of textbooks is needed for the promotion of compulsory primary and secondary education. The start of the school year is imminent, and we are sorely lacking systematic textbooks."

"Let me correct you, this is the school, please call me Principal. What you mentioned is easy to solve; I have ready-made textbooks, have professional personnel modify them first, and then print them at the printing factory."

Roland had plenty of books, like the "Sussex Language Textbook for Primary and Secondary Schools," from the Langwen Group, very authentic.

Except for a few actor names that are somewhat Seres-like, they basically do not require translation.

The Secretary of Education took the book handed over by Roland, flipping a few pages and showing a surprised expression.

"Oh my, there are color illustrations, these are very precious relics from the previous era! Alas, we simply don’t have the capacity to print such exquisite textbooks."

It was still the era of lead-type printing, and color printing did not exist.

Roland smiled and said, "This is simple, please have educational experts make appropriate modifications, especially simplifying them as much as possible so that children without foundation can quickly learn."

"I understand, some names here are quite strange, such as this Han... Meimei? I’ve never seen such a spelling."

"You are the expert in this aspect, you are responsible for translation modifications."

Roland smiled, delegating authority to the Secretary of Education.

The Secretary of Education was immensely grateful. Making modifications was certainly not difficult; what thrilled him more was Roland’s trust.

Lord Governor always fully trusts technical personnel, and even if he knows more, he fully respects technical personnel.

Worthy of being the best leader.

The Secretary of Education left happily, holding the full set of textbooks Roland took from the bookshelf.

He was happy, Roland was happier.

Without lifting a finger, others would work overtime, while he could sit quietly drinking coffee and receive the corresponding Inheritor Badge.

Each additional badge would make the golden glow of the Soul Card even more dazzling.

The Scholar star path's drawback is the difficulty of promotion, but its advantage is the huge potential.

Normally, no one has Roland's opportunity for large-scale knowledge promotion; to upgrade the underside of the card to gold is already a stroke of luck.

What Roland desires is not gold, but a more brilliant colorful card.

The sly old Macbeth is still waiting for him; without enough strength, the day of promotion is the day he'd perish.

Just after sending off the Secretary of Education, the Secretary responsible for industry hurriedly arrived.

"Lord Governor, I heard from others that you have many books here, could I borrow some?"

"Of course you can."

Roland had already organized the relevant materials for him.

Besides various technical books related to steam engines, he even secretly tucked in some 19th-century science fiction works.

Imagination is combat power; these science fiction works are important too.

Though Roland possesses many tomes, he is not a professional by any means.

He understands steam engine principles, but asking him to manually craft a steam locomotive capable of running at 300 km/h is truly demanding of him.

He chose to trust the professionals!

Those popular science works, though, are his own private interest. He hopes to inspire experts by providing sparks of imagination through such an approach.

As for partially replacing internal combustion engines with steam engines, and gradually transitioning to the electric era, that’s for the scientists to solve.

He merely handles inheritance, not specific research.

The Secretary of Industry briefly went over the materials and was almost about to jump with joy.

This is exactly the ancient tomes he needs.

"Submersible capable of diving underwater, vessels able to travel on the sea without reliance on wind!"

The Secretary of Industry murmured to himself, "No wonder it’s the wisdom from the Ancient Era!"

Roland couldn’t be bothered to correct his mistaken conception, only nodding his head.

People from this era understood technology as archaeology.

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This is also good, saves him the trouble of finding ways to cover up.

From now on, he can openly bring out various ancient texts, claiming they’re archaeological discoveries.

As for where the dig was, of course, no one would be foolish enough to ask him directly.

Seeing the ecstatic expression of the Minister of Industry, Roland knew it wouldn't be long before he had a new badge.

Just after sending off the Minister of Industry, the sweaty Minister of Agriculture walked in.

"Lord Governor, I've observed that this year's climate conditions are very unusual, and the reports of pests are significantly more than in previous years. How should we respond?"

"Please call me Principal here. This is the 'Wheat Pest Control Manual', an ancient text discovered through archaeology. The unfamiliar remedies are lost to time, but there are some methods you can try."

Roland said calmly, "This year, the central-western plains of the Rodinia Continent will definitely see a significant reduction in agricultural output, we need to prepare in advance. Do you know of any quality grain-producing zones?"

"If the central-western Rodinia Continent has problems, then we can only import grain from the Wallachia Kingdom or even the distant South Continent. Those places are known large granaries with low grain prices. Actually, the Vladimir Empire is also a grain-producing country, but buying grain from them is not easy."

Right now, prices are indeed low, but once all countries face a grain shortage, they'll soar.

Roland lightly tapped his finger on the table, gestured silently after a moment for the Minister of Agriculture to leave.

Buying grain is no small matter.

Small volume purchases are naturally no problem, large quantities could easily raise alarms.

What’s the intention behind stockpiling grain?

With Roland’s notorious reputation, others will likely think he’s preparing for war.

It’s quite the wrongful accusation; he truly has no intention to start a war this year.

At least, no intention for a large-scale war.

Unless provoked or there’s profit to gain.

Roland pondered for a moment, then sent a secretary to find someone.

Before long, the mysterious Imperial Family-appointed merchant Stanley appeared.

Roland summoning him was no surprise; what startled him was the reason for the call.

He originally thought Roland wanted to know the progress of the [Hunting Plan], yet was surprised when Roland opened the conversation by discussing grain imports.

In this era, international grain trade is quite scarce.

Transportation costs are too high, and grain easily suffers losses en route.

Various highway bandits are a secondary concern; the main issue is the extremely high toll fees from feudal lords at checkpoints.

Stanley pondered for a moment and raised objections, "Lord Governor, importing one ton of grain from Wallachia costs over three times the local grain prices, and it’s even more expensive from Nubia and other countries. Only importing from a few neighboring countries can reduce costs."

"We cannot import from neighboring countries nor let them know how much grain we're importing."

Roland pondered for a moment and softly said, "Let's go with sea transport; costs are lower by sea."

Since Roland said so, Stanley naturally had no objections.

He took his position correctly; he never asked questions he shouldn't nor spoke unnecessarily.

Previously, he only raised opinions from the perspective of trade costs.

Given Roland's insistence, there must be a reason, so Stanley certainly wouldn't be stubborn.

Adapting is a basic quality for a merchant.

He pondered for a moment and suddenly came up with a bright idea.

"We can commission Samaritan merchants for procurement. Based on my understanding of them, these parasitic worms would definitely manipulate things, providing just another reason to deal with them."

Stanley snorted disdainfully, his tone full of contempt, "These greedy fools will only realize how plump they are when they're on the roasting rack."

Seeing the flames of hatred flickering in Stanley's eyes, Roland knew he had found the right person to handle this matter.

He was just somewhat worried that Stanley's judgment might be clouded by hatred and promptly reminded:

"I know you want to catch them all at once, but don't rush it. Wait until they lower their guard before taking action."

"I understand." Stanley nodded, his expression gradually becoming calm.

Having calmed down, he quickly formulated an action plan.

He knows exactly with which merchants to sign contracts and from where to import grain.

He also suggested a quite cunning plan.

"I suggest His Majesty Sylph sign contracts with them under the Imperial Family's name. Since it's royal trade, those fools won't miss any chance to make profits."

"Infringing on the Emperor's interests is a crime punishable by death; they won't escape. Moreover, we only need to pay a small deposit, which can save funds."

Roland's eyes lit up.

What defines professionalism; this is professionalism.

Stanley is not only very familiar with international trade but also knows Samaritan merchants thoroughly, how to set traps and closing nets are all within his calculation.

After receiving Roland's approval, Stanley quickly departed.

His eyes flickered with anger, his nails digging into his clenched palm, almost drawing blood.

He indeed has a personal vendetta to settle, which is why he suggested commissioning Samaritans for grain purchasing.

The hunt is about to begin; he won't need to endure for much longer.

After handling affairs of state, Roland checked the schedule; he had to accompany Sif for a lesson with new recruits at the Military Academy in the afternoon.

The lesson’s content primarily revolved around patriotism education.

Military moves are preceded by political ones; it’s essential.

This batch of elite short-term trainees are future candidates for junior officers and sergeants; they come from different countries and ethnic groups, must indoctrinate them thoroughly from the start.

Let them know for whom they are fighting.

He won’t shout slogans like "Seek promotions and wealth elsewhere."

This is 1792.

He’ll also make sure the trainees know they’re in the right place if they’re seeking promotions and wealth.

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After resting for a moment in the office, Sif arrived.

Seeing the slight dark circles under Sif’s eyes, Roland felt a bit heartsick.

"You’ve worked hard these days."

"I’m working for you, and you’re working for me. We’ve both worked hard," Sif replied with a smile.

She casually found a sofa to sit on and closed her eyes to enjoy a moment of peace.

Roland didn’t disturb Sif because she actually fell asleep on the sofa.

For her, this sofa was essentially no different from sitting on a stone.

She was really tired, sleeping on a stone.

After all, he was the Governor; if he wasn’t too busy, he should indeed fulfill his duties.

Now was a critical time to lay the foundation in the Governor’s Territory, so he couldn’t slack off.

The gold Anthony brought was indeed plentiful, but compared to the vast construction plans, it was still tight.

The Magic Association’s gold reserves weren’t much; their most valuable assets were various magic materials and equipment.

Before the discovery of these three Magic Crystal Ore Veins, the world’s Magic Crystals were getting scarcer, with prices being speculated higher and higher.

With the mining of the Magic Crystal Ore Veins in Golden Valley, the returns from the Magic Association to Roland would also gradually increase.

This was a long process, and the urgent task was still to make money.

Roland urgently needed prime opportunities.

He didn’t intend to exploit farmers and workers to the bone. Making them pay taxes was mainly to create a sense of belonging, so they know whose subjects they are.

He didn’t intend to squeeze the poor dry; whoever had money, he would target.

In this era, merchants were almost synonymous with villains, especially in the Samarian business circle.

He was somewhat impatient.

Once the grain was back in the country, the reserves to deal with this year's food crisis would be secured.

While the countries of the continent's central and western parts generally lacked grain, his stockpile was invaluable.

He would seize the opportunity to attack the northern coastal neighboring Oden Kingdom.

The Oden Kingdom had a good geographical location and a solid naval tradition from its affluent ancestors.

A hundred and twenty years ago, they were defeated by the Sussex Empire, losing most of their warships.

The Oden Imperial Family viewed this as a great humiliation and planted a large-scale forest of timber, enough to build hundreds of warships domestically.

Over a hundred and twenty years, these trees had matured and could be used to build warships.

Since last year, the Oden Kingdom began logging oak trees, preparing to build ships.

The neighbor has trees and I have weapons; the trees will be mine.

Considering the previous wars between the two nations, who the large-scale shipbuilding of the Oden Kingdom was targeting was obvious.

The Oden Kingdom Navy wasn’t weak, but they were no match for the Sussex people. Rather than waiting for them to build the warships to make a new delivery, it was better to help them solve the problem at the source.

If they couldn’t build warships, they wouldn’t lose in naval battles, nor would they have to send thousands of sailors.

This wasn’t about contention, but about eliminating the hidden danger of war.

Roland wasn’t even planning to annex any territory, just wanted to take some wood.

Just as he was dreaming of using the neighbor’s trees to build his ships, Sif slowly woke up.

She sat up nervously, looking blankly at the wall clock, and was finally relieved once she confirmed she hadn’t missed anything.

However, seeing Roland’s concerned gaze, she became even more flustered.

What should she do? Roland must have seen her sleeping on the sofa!

"Roland, was I ugly just now?"

Roland was stunned.

The word "ugly" couldn’t be associated with Sif no matter what.

Though he wanted to retort, he smiled and said, "Of course not, even asleep, you’re a Sleeping Beauty."

"Sleeping Beauty?" Sif’s curiosity was piqued, she smelled a story.

Seeing that it was still early, Roland wasn't shy. He sat down across from Sif, cleared his throat, and began today's story.

Another love story of a prince and princess.

Roland's stories, Sif loved listening to them.

But she suddenly realized that she now seemed to enjoy Roland telling the stories more than the obviously made-up stories themselves.

Could only a prince wake a princess with a kiss?

A romantic story, but not realistic.

If a princess cursed by witchcraft could be awakened so easily by a prince, she even suspected the prince and the wizard were in cahoots.