## Empress 271

Chapter 271: Reaping What You Sow

The speech was a success.

To be fair, the beautiful and noble Countess standing on stage in her glamorous armor, raising the banner and recounting the glorious history of the nation, with a particularly captivating voice, was certainly something everyone loved to hear.

Moreover, the speech of this Countess had been polished by a certain Transmigrator, blending both grand epic narratives and stories of ordinary people.

When Sif concluded the speech with, "The national interest is your interest, and your interest is the national interest; the White Rose battle flag will always be with you," the young people present were all moved.

Of course, no speech can move everyone.

With keen eyes, Roland noticed a few new cadets who reacted indifferently and even a bit dismissively.

Roland silently noted their appearances, intending to have Raikkonen investigate their backgrounds later.

If they can’t blend into such an atmosphere, there might be some issues.

Just as he was silently taking note of people, Sif, who had finished the speech, walked over.

"Roland, there are a few cadets acting strange."

"The ones who didn’t give positive feedback during your speech?" Roland felt a chill in his heart; Sif wouldn’t make random guesses, she truly had Insight.

"Not just them, there are over a dozen people who harbor hostility towards me."

Sif said softly, "It was just a speech, logically speaking, even if they couldn't resonate, it shouldn't lead to hostility. Moreover, they don't know my true identity, so their hatred is directed towards..."

Empress Sylph.

However, the Empress is also the Countess, so the hatred directed at the Empress was transferred to Sif.

Roland and Sif exchanged a glance, seeing the cold killing intent in each other's eyes.

These individuals had major issues.

In this era, there was no strict political screening, and Roland, with his motto of meritocracy, inevitably had some slip through the net into the Military Academy.

In a group of nearly a thousand cadets, having selfish and divergent minds is normal, but how could they have such clear hatred for the Empress?

Without a trace of expression, Roland called over Boen, asking him to start the cadets on a simple drill, with a gathering planned for the evening.

After making arrangements, he immediately sought out Raikkonen.

As a professional paparazzi once, he had an excellent memory for faces, able to remember them clearly with just a glance.

During the upcoming banquet, he would remember the suspicious individuals like a hound, and investigate them one by one.

Roland was curious to know what kind of people would bite the hand that feeds them by plotting against the Empress.

Insight is indeed a very useful Extraordinary Ability.

Although it currently only distinguishes between hostility and goodwill, loyalty and deceit, it is already very powerful.

Insight is practically tailor-made for authority-based professions, thoroughly solving the problem of rulers not knowing what their ministers are thinking.

Raikkonen was invigorated upon receiving the task.

He hadn't had a chance to make a contribution for some time, almost feeling gloomy.

His primary task was responsible for the intelligence system construction. However, this is a long-term systematic project; even though Roland had given him authority and funds, manpower was scarce.

Intelligence personnel can't be casually found off the street; they must possess very strong professional capabilities, and be extremely loyal with solid roots.

The construction of the intelligence system was proceeding with difficulty, currently dependent mainly on the Golden Kite Wanderers. But wanderers are, after all, foreigners who will eventually return home, requiring self-reliance in the end.

During this period, he felt very empty; if not for also maintaining discipline, he would have been quite bored.

The opportunity to make a contribution was rare, and of course, he wouldn't miss it.

At dusk, as the sun set in the west, the busy cadets cheerfully entered the communal dining hall.

Dining is the simplest pleasure, regardless of the realm.

Especially with tonight being hosted by both the Countess and the Governor for dinner.

This was a supreme honor.

Many of them, in their lifetimes, had only ever seen minor officials like mayors, tax officers, and sheriffs.

Upon hearing that the Lord Governor ranks even higher than a provincial governor, many were so excited their lips trembled, barely able to sit still.

The god-like beauty of the Countess made them want to look but afraid to do so, fearing desecration.

Roland clearly saw the trepidation in their eyes.

That was the normal mentality.

His selection criteria for military personnel came from Qi Jiguang's "Records of Military Training," and these young cadets were among the best, mostly from backgrounds as farmers, miners, hunters, and industrial workers.

Few of them had seen major officials, and feeling apprehensive was normal.

In such a setting, those who could maintain calmness inside and out had either seen much of the world or harbored ulterior motives.

The dinner was sumptuous.

After all, this might be the last great meal for some of those with ulterior motives, and no care could be spared.

Before the meal began, Roland stood in the center of the hall, smiling as he delivered his address.

After completing his address, his expression turned serious, his gaze sweeping over everyone.

"Cadets, you have all voluntarily joined the New Army, voluntarily pledged allegiance to the Empress, correct?"

Even the most honest farmer would know the answer to this question, and everyone responded vociferously.

Roland raised his right hand, speaking in a deep voice: "I can offer you opportunities for advancement, a stage for promotion and wealth, but all this is predicated on loyalty and courage!"

"If anyone is disloyal or unwilling to serve the Empress, you may stand up now, and consider this banquet my farewell gift; I promise not to pursue it."

These people might come from Cabinet factions or other countries; persuading them to leave quietly was best, avoiding unnecessary bloodshed.

By this point, if they still wouldn’t leave, then they were enemies and should not be treated kindly.

The entire room was silent, no one moved.

A few people in the crowd glanced around, not daring to look at Roland.

They were also quite anxious, but there was no room for retreat, so they could only do their best to disguise themselves.

Roland smiled, raised his glass, and said loudly, "I know everyone here is loyal to the Empire, cheers!"

The opportunity was given, but if they don’t cherish it, then it’s time to close the net!

Sif squinted, a touch of crimson appearing in her pupils.

Damn it. Eating her food, taking her money, not only not doing their job well but also showing hostility toward her?

If she didn’t want to catch more fish, she would have killed all these ill-intentioned people right now.

After Roland and Sif toasted the students three times, they left the banquet scene, giving Raikkonen the badge numbers of unusual personnel.

They needn’t worry about what came next, as professionals would handle it.

Of course, Raikkonen could handle such an open-book exam.

He wasn’t aiming for high marks; he wanted a perfect score.

Taking the opportunity to toast the students, he carefully observed the targets they had discovered.

These people hid well, but they still had flaws.

No matter how well they spoke the Hansa dialect, after using the rolling "r" for twenty years, it was still unmistakable!

Under the rounds of toasts from the knights of the Knight Order, almost all the students who attended the banquet were drunk.

It’s just that some woke up in dormitories, others in interrogation rooms.

What awaited these people were incessant fatigue interrogations and furious interrogators.

In this era, there wasn't a superhuman with beliefs as steadfast as the sun; even the toughest of men couldn't withstand multiple attacks.

...

After three days, Raikkonen placed the detailed interrogation report in front of Sif and Roland.

There were a total of eleven suspicious individuals, coming from the Cabinet, Vladimir Empire, Jin Yuan Republic, and Tirol Kingdom.

But this was just the tip of the iceberg; the related personnel they confessed involved more than a hundred people.

Sif's eyes reddened, and a murderous aura filled the room.

But she controlled her emotions and said coldly, "Raikkonen, leave this matter to you. Root out every single one of those behind them, not missing a single one!"

The goal of not missing a single one is somewhat idealistic; all intelligence organizations have loss-cutting mechanisms, and how they reduce losses after an intelligence agent's communication is cut off is also an important part.

In the next week, Raikkonen, using the information pried from intelligence personnel, started capturing people following the clues and quickly caught nearly a hundred hidden agents.

The largest number came from the Vladimir Empire and the Jin Yuan Republic, followed by the Tirol Kingdom.

There weren't many intelligence personnel from the Cabinet ministers, and they weren't sent by William but by the Finance Minister Sim.

Perhaps he knew Norton had joined Roland's camp, or perhaps for other reasons, in any case, he firmly stood against the Empress, becoming the most obstinate member of the anti-imperial authority faction.

The three intelligence personnel he sent were thrown into prison, where they enjoyed indefinite solitary confinement.

These three were hard to kill and couldn't be released, so they were temporarily detained.

Upon hearing the news, though Sif didn't lose her temper on the spot, she silently placed Finance Minister Sim on the blacklist.

When it was time to settle accounts back in the Imperial Capital, he would be first.

A group of intelligence personnel from several other countries was captured.

With such a large number of intelligence personnel captured at once, it also brought new problems—how to deal with them?

It's certainly not an option to kill them all, nor would it be meaningful.

The captured intelligence personnel are valuable resources that can be exchanged for things.

However, some nations might be willing to trade, but others might not be.

Sif sighed helplessly, "It's a pity we won't gain much. The current President of the Jin Yuan Republic, Desgrey, is a ruthless person; he would rather abandon prisoners than easily compromise. The Tirol Kingdom might bleed a little, but surely not much."

"As for the Rurik, in their place, failure and death are similar; don't expect them to pay much for the dead."

Roland said with a smile, "I don’t quite agree. If we’re asking for the ownership of the magic crystal ore veins, they definitely won’t give in. But if we’re just exchanging for grain, they’re likely to agree."

"Grain?"

Sif’s eyes lit up.

This year’s climate has been very unusual, and it’s foreseeable that there will be poor harvests by the end of the year.

The Jin Yuan Republic doesn’t care.

They possess the largest plains and high-quality arable land, so even if more than half of the country’s land yields nothing, it won’t affect them much.

Even if the climate is bad, at most it will make the poor farmers suffer.

As long as there aren’t large-scale famines, the lower classes in Jin Yuan won’t rebel.

The Tirol Kingdom doesn’t have that much grain production, but they are neighbors with the grain-producing country Talia, and their military strength is far superior to the internally fractured Talia.

With neighbors having grain and them having guns, they are not worried at all.

They don’t care about grain, so exchanging hostages for grain is not a big issue.

The Vladimir Empire possesses the best grain-producing areas in Eastern Rodinia, and although their agricultural level is low, the total grain output is high.

They are also a major grain exporter, exporting millions of tons of grain to various countries on the Rodinia Continent every year.

Negotiating to exchange grain for hostages won’t be a problem with them.

Chapter 272: You Wouldn’t Want the Empress to Find Out, Would You?

Although the Three Overseas Provinces are plains, they are not the main grain-producing areas. Usually, they are just self-sufficient and import a small amount of grain in previous years for adjustment.

This year is destined to be a disaster year. Roland plans to personally lead a team to the neighboring Oden Kingdom to cut wood in the second half of the year, which requires a lot of grain consumption and must be prepared in advance.

Stanley has already arranged for the Samaritans to purchase grain, which should be more than enough, but you can’t put all your eggs in one basket. More preparation is necessary.

With the addition of the Golden Kite Wanderers and Val City-State People, along with the continuous influx of foreigners rushing to him, ensuring food supply this year is difficult, especially with natural disasters exacerbating the issue.

After preparing the list of captured intelligence personnel, Roland personally wrote letters to the Jin Yuan Republic, Tirol Kingdom, and Vladimir Empire.

"Dear President of the Jin Yuan Republic, seeing the letter feels like seeing the person. Recently, your country’s residents XX, XX, XX visited our Hansa Province..."

"Dear King of Tirol..."

The first two letters were easy to write; the wording was simple, direct threats would suffice.

He wouldn’t take the other party’s grain for free; he could pay, but there had to be a discount.

But the discount had to be greater than the value of these intelligence personnel.

This approach was the result of careful consideration.

Politicians are indifferent; they only care about the lives of front-line intelligence personnel on the surface. If shaking them down empty-handed, there is a high chance of refusal.

If it's a business deal, whether losing or profiting, there is room for negotiation.

This offer could also send misleading information to the other side, making them think he is looking to take advantage of more benefits!

However, his real intention is not that but rather in the grain.

Accumulating grain is the wisdom of the ancestors.

About to go to war, with grain in hand, there is no panic in the heart.

Purchasing grain requires a lot of funds, and just as the Samaritans return, the funds will be in place.

A perfect connection.

For the third letter, after much thought, Roland did not directly write to Sofia but rather to Angelina, who presided over affairs in Val City.

Sofia is extremely extreme, and in her view, the weak are not even considered human.

No matter how loyal these intelligence personnel are, struggling under torture, failure means being weak and must be eliminated. This is Sofia's logic.

Shaking down Sofia?

Roland pondered for a moment; his love for life surpassed his desire for wealth, so he casually tossed the handwritten letter into the fireplace to burn it clean and rewrote a new one.

Writing to Angelina was much simpler.

"Miss Angelina, seeing the letter feels like seeing the person, you wouldn’t want the missing intelligence personnel incident to be known by Sofia, would you?"

Although many considered Angelina to be a little Sofia, Roland thought otherwise.

There is only one terrifying person like Empress Sofia in the world.

...

After the intelligence network completely collapsed, Angelina was somewhat agitated.

Her Majesty the Empress sent her to Val City not just to be in charge of one city.

She also had to manage the western affairs of the Empire, including gathering intelligence from countries like Jin Yuan and Susax.

If it wasn’t for this secret mission, those Rurik Nightwalkers, mobilized only by the Empress, wouldn’t be under her command.

This loss of the intelligence network cost at least three elite Nightwalkers and seven second-level Nightwalkers, along with other grassroots intelligence personnel.

The extent of this loss was enough to nullify all her accomplishments.

When the Empress returned, she would never praise her for a job well done.

Just as she felt restless and uneasy, the intelligence director appeared, holding a letter.

"This is a letter passed on to you by Miss Christine, reportedly from Governor Roland."

Angelina's face instantly turned somewhat pale.

She adjusted her breathing, not even sure how she took the letter from the intelligence director's hands.

Tearing open the envelope, she knew the ending just by seeing the beginning.

Unfortunately, those missing intelligence personnel were taken down by Roland altogether; with only a very few committing suicide by swallowing poison, most were captured.

Angelina slumped back into her seat, looking dejected.

Although she had anticipated this result, people always hold a lucky mindset, and the bad news still left her a bit desperate.

Her work had been going smoothly for some time, allowing her to relax a little.

The first thing she did was expel the Val people from her jurisdiction, finding ways to legally confiscate their assets.

This task was done smoothly.

Within her jurisdiction, there were about twelve thousand Val City-State people, and she originally thought this task would face enormous resistance.

The Val City-State People had lived there for a hundred years; moving them was not that easy.

Angelina prepared over five thousand elite soldiers dressed in police uniforms for these citizens.

If anyone dared resist, she would not hesitate to kill the first resistor as a warning to others.

Despite being fully prepared, she didn't think things would go smoothly.

After all, it's about tearing down homes and expelling people.

To reduce resistance, she chose to first use diplomacy before force, announcing to the Val City-State People that as long as they voluntarily left, they would not be troubled and even willing to buy properties, although at a slashed price of course.

She never expected these people to willingly leave and had kept reserve plans.

However, the situation developed beyond her expectations. Under the persuasion of the former Executive Officer Tony, the residents in her jurisdiction mostly evacuated.

Most of these people settled in Hansa.

Although they lost real estate, they took away liquid assets at least.

Seeing the empty rooms, Angelina initially thought it was a major victory for the Vladimir Empire's national power, only feeling something was amiss afterward.

The gap left by the departing Val people was soon filled by the Rurik people.

Nearly fifty thousand immigrants came to Val City, and this number would double in the future.

Everything went smoothly until Roland appeared.

"That bastard!"

Angelina couldn’t help but curse in her native dialect.

She really wanted to kill Roland, but she knew she couldn’t.

Killing the governor is almost the same as declaring war directly.

She knew the Empress’s strategy was to first clean up the small surrounding countries, stabilize the order, and then expand to the west.

Rashly stirring up war in the west, what awaits her is certainly not the praise of the Empress.

Though very displeased, Angelina did not have the qualification to refuse.

She picked up her pen and quickly wrote a reply.

Her attitude was clear, she could accept Roland’s terms, but some details needed to be discussed; she wanted to meet with Roland.

The agreed meeting point between the two parties was midstream of the Rodinia River. Neither party was to bring attendants, meeting on a small hillock.

There were no cover around here, making ambush impossible, forcing just the two to meet.

Roland did not refuse, and gave her a reply three days later.

"Okay."

Angelina prepared thoroughly, riding a white horse northward.

Although she had to accept the result of compromise, she wanted to display her strength to Roland before compromising.

She needed Roland to understand that the Vladimir Empire was rich in talent.

Not only did the generals have exceptional fighting prowess, but even intelligence personnel engaged in special work were formidable fighters, and civil servants were abundantly courageous!

She was now the person in charge of Val City, and certainly a civil servant.

If Roland couldn’t even win a one-on-one duel against her, a civil servant, he should at least give her a discount.

Soon, at the arranged time, Angelina met Roland.

Roland stood calmly on the hillock, looking at her with composure, "You’re late."

"I am not, I even arrived a few minutes early!" Angelina didn’t expect Roland would start with such nonsense, almost making her speechless with anger.

But she quickly calmed down.

Calm, must remain calm, consider how Empress Sofia would respond to such a situation?

She was somewhat frustrated to discover, no one dared speak to the Empress this way, unless they valued their life little. Roland certainly wouldn’t.

Indeed, still too weak, Angelina silently reprimanded herself.

Seeing her still arguing, Roland smiled and asked, "What is your level in your country?"

"If according to your levels over there, it would be equivalent to sub-ministerial level." Angelina tried to remain calm, answering nonchalantly.

Actually, she was somewhat lying. Her current level, if converted, was not sub-ministerial, but equivalent to primary hall-level.

She was temporarily performing sub-ministerial duties at primary hall level.

Roland of course knew her actual level, he was waiting for this statement.

"Angelina, you are acting as sub-minister, while I am authentically minister-level. According to diplomatic etiquette, you should have arrived ten minutes early to wait."

Roland’s words sounded like nonsense, but it was true.

Even private negotiations are diplomatic activities. Angelina arriving only three minutes early was indeed slightly impolite.

Angelina bowed her head silently, nearly losing control, but her remaining rationality stopped her.

Control your anger, Angelina!

Her Majesty the Empress had warned her more than once, people can have emotions, but not become slaves to them.

Roland did it intentionally, seeking to anger her, to gain an advantage in negotiation.

She bit her lip, voice as soft as a mosquito, "Sorry, I am late."

"No worries, we Sussex people are gentlemen, won’t mind such trivial matters."

Roland was somewhat surprised at Angelina, not expecting her ability to control her emotions.

It was said she stayed a long time at the Arctic Glacier, the exclusive training sanctuary of Empress Sofia, indeed the ice there did foster growth.

Roland focused, no longer treating Angelina as a reckless fighter.

"Speak, what’s the matter of asking me to meet?"

"The conditions you propose are too harsh, exceeding my limits. Although my country is a major grain producer, the quantity you demand is too much. Not even considering the price, just the transportation itself is troublesome."

"Transportation needn’t worry you, I can contact the caravan and bear the shipping cost." Roland calmly stated.

After all, it was the Samaritans responsible for transportation, he was happy to be generous.

Angelina was somewhat dazed, was Roland really just here to buy grain?

Seeing her confused expression, Roland smiled and said, "I have more thousands of population added to my jurisdiction this year, need more grain, have to buy more and store them. The relationship between your country and mine is yet undetermined, since no conflict has begun, we are not enemies."

Angelina cautiously watched Roland, asked quietly, "Do you intend to start a war? I will never sell grain to an enemy preparing to attack my country!"

Roland stared at her annoyedly, calmly asking back, "Miss Angelina, do I seem like someone with impaired intelligence? What benefit is there in attacking your country?"

Angelina was momentarily at a loss for words.

Indeed, there was no benefit.

Simply being marked as an enemy by Sofia was enough to give everyone headaches.

Many nations prayed daily not to be invaded by the Vladimir Empire; who would provoke the frenzied behemoth on land?

Angelina spotted no reason to counterargue but felt something was amiss.

Looking at her suspicious expression, Roland calmly said, "You may perhaps doubt, but I absolutely do not wish to be an adversary to Her Majesty the Empress of your country, I can swear."

His gaze was clear, eyes not dodging, full of sincerity.

Angelina carefully watched Roland, attempting to find traces of deceit in his eyes.

However, what Roland said was genuinely true, albeit cleverly phrased.

He indeed would not proactively opposing Sofia, yet the reality was Sofia actively targeted him.

Even if one were not a rival to Sofia, one cannot simply lie still without resistance?

Motionless, doesn’t it become stagnant?

Angelina sighed lightly, feeling somewhat discontented.

The conversation from the beginning was controlled by Roland, she was passively led.

In civil debate, she was not an adversary, and in martial contest, she couldn’t even begin.

Roland had stated he would not proactively make an enemy of the Empress and was merely buying grain for the newcomers in his territory, even willing to voluntarily release apprehended intelligence personnel.

Such generous terms, she of course could not refuse.

Having accepted Roland’s generosity, she could not turn around to challenge him to a duel, she wouldn’t.

After a long silence, she extended her right hand.

"Deal."

Chapter 273: Will Fish That Return to the Sea Ever Come Ashore Again?

Roland knew Angelina would agree.

As long as she wasn’t thinking irrationally.

She might be very angry inside, but in the face of real interests, personal emotions are negligible.

She’s just selling off surplus grain at a low price but can retrieve over thirty intelligence personnel, a trade that’s certainly worthwhile.

Roland secures a stable grain supply channel to prepare for the war in the second half of the year, while Angelina retrieves her dispatched intelligence personnel, a win-win situation.

After concluding the negotiations, Roland returned to the Governor’s Mansion, and just as he was about to check the schedule, there was a knock at the door.

"Come in, the door’s not locked."

There were no footsteps, but the air became a bit more humid.

Roland turned around in surprise and, as expected, saw Munina.

Sea Demons primarily breathe through gills, although they can also use their skin to assist with breathing, prolonged time leads to dizziness, coupled with strict management systems, few Sea Demons leave the Great Lake Region, except for Munina.

Since being taken in by Norton, she mostly stayed at the Norton Laboratory with Nana and returned to the Great Lake to manage the defected clansmen otherwise, yet she’d never met Roland.

Being Norton’s adoptive daughter, Roland couldn’t put on an imposing face as before to intimidate her, so he smiled and asked, "Miss Munina, you look well; have things been good for you lately?"

"Thank you for your concern, Lord Governor. I’m doing well, and the clansmen have gotten accustomed to the new life. You’ve built new houses for them, and they all wish to make contributions for you soon."

Though Roland’s attitude was gentle, just thinking about Roland’s methods made Munina a bit fearful.

A smiling Demon is still a Demon; she wouldn’t dare provoke the Demon.

Roland pointed at the opposite sofa, suddenly realizing Munina didn’t have legs, sitting might be inconvenient; his fingertip froze in mid-air, unsure of what to say.

Fortunately, Munina obediently moved to the sofa’s edge, curling her tail to sit down.

Though sitting like this wasn’t comfortable, she dared not object.

Seeing her trying hard to sit upright, Roland said with a smile, "Munina, relax, don’t be so stiff. Is there something you wanted to discuss with me?"

"I... I wanted to talk to you about the tribe and the matters under the sea."

Hadn’t it been discussed before? Roland was somewhat surprised. He knew Munina probably sought something but hesitated to directly state it, hence starting with small talk.

He smiled and sat down, adopting a listening posture.

"Alright, I always enjoy hearing stories."

Munina cleared her throat lightly and softly said, "Have you heard me mention General Nephropidae?"

"I’ve heard, but you also said the Graham Clan isn’t a significant figure under the sea, so there isn’t much known about it."

"I don’t know much, but I have friends."

Munina softly said, "Our Graham Clan is just a marginalized small role under the sea, but the Grim Clan is different; they are the confidantes of General Nephropidae. I have a very close friend who’s the granddaughter of the Grim Clan’s leader, and I wish to visit her."

Roland furrowed his brows, instinctively wanting to oppose but restrained himself.

"What does Mr. Norton say?"

Munina now being Norton’s adopted daughter, his sentiments had to be considered.

"Foster father agrees." Munina softly stated, her hands twisting from nervousness.

"Since Mr. Norton agrees, I naturally have no reason to object. Stay safe outside, and return quickly if anything seems amiss."

Munina was somewhat surprised; was she let go so easily?

Seeing her incredulous expression, Roland softly explained, "Perhaps you think my methods cruel, but they’re all for enemies. You can ask directly if you need anything in the future."

"No, nothing else. I will bring back news of General Nephropidae as soon as possible."

Seeing Roland agree, Munina didn’t dare linger, promptly bidding farewell and departing, like fleeing a demon’s lair.

Am I frightening?

Recalling earlier dealings with the Sirens, he understood Munina had reasons to be fearful.

Though he found no grounds to object, Roland still worried, promptly visiting Norton amidst his lively labors at the laboratory.

Upon seeing Norton, he couldn’t wait to flaunt his recent research results to Roland.

"Roland, the Steam Tank blueprint you provided has been reconstructed by me! Though it’s not quite successful."

Roland’s eyes showed a hint of surprise, "Really?"

"Come on, follow me to the testing field in the back."

Norton’s eagerness to show off couldn’t be contained, pulling Roland toward the testing ground.

Seeing the so-called "Steam Tank" Norton described, Roland, momentarily, didn’t know what to say.

The steam engine was present. Armor also was present.

But its gigantic size was vastly different from the blueprint; this thing weighed at least dozens of tons.

Lacking quality steel, many parts had wooden replacements for the armor.

Norton enthusiastically leapt into the tank cockpit, starting it up.

The steam engine slowly heated, thick smoke billowing, forcing Roland to continuously retreat.

As the coal filled continuously, water heated to boiling point, the steam engine activated, the tank slowly crept its massive body forward, inching ahead.

After some struggle, the gigantic Steam Tank managed to move less than fifty meters before breaking down.

Norton came crawling out of the cockpit with a face somewhat dark, incessantly coughing.

"Al, although somewhat embarrassing, this is a great first step!"

Roland didn’t mock the tank’s clumsiness like foolishly ridiculing a slow train.

Just as Norton stated, this was a great first step.

He applauded vigorously, offering sincere blessings.

"Very good, Mr. Norton, I'll continue investing. Do you have the confidence to bring this thing to practical use within three years?"

Chapter 274: Will Fish That Return to the Sea Ever Come Ashore Again? (Part 2)

"Three years? Of course, no problem!" When it comes to research topics, Norton is always so confident.

Although Roland appreciated Norton's progress on the restoration, the loud noise and unpleasant coal smoke from the Steam Tank still made him hesitant.

Norton happily asked Roland, "The Steam Tank doesn't have a name yet. Do you have any good ideas?"

"Let's call it... Water Tank," Roland said calmly.

"Water Tank? Boss, even though I'm not good at naming, your naming skill is obviously worse."

Despite Norton's frantic complaints, he couldn't change Roland's firm decision to name the first Steam Tank as Water Tank.

Given the current level of technology, getting it to the battlefield within three years is quite a feat.

In the history of another world, there indeed were ironclad steam tanks, but in the face of efficient internal combustion engines, steam tanks were a joke and were quickly phased out.

The cumbersome and inefficient steam engine made the Steam Tank synonymous with clumsiness.

However, regardless, this thing is a crusher against infantry. So Roland had Norton emphasize anti-infantry and anti-trench in their research direction.

If this thing can be mass-produced, lining up to be shot would turn into lining up to die, and trench warfare would become the biggest joke.

If you use a Steam Tank to carry elite Knights and Mages, the war situation would change.

To defeat Sofia, you must have a special skill.

If there could be a fortress-like, super-heavy Steam Tank with excellent cold resistance to protect Sif, it could prevent beheading on the battlefield and turn the confrontation between the sides into a battle between armies.

That is Roland's ultimate goal.

As for how big this fortress tank would be, that would depend on the load-bearing capacity limit of the plain ground.

This era doesn't have cement roads, and asphalt, a byproduct of fossil fuels, doesn't exist either. In the city, there are some cobblestone roads, and outside the city, having well-paved hardened coal slag roads is considered excellent road conditions.

The biggest enemy of the Steam Tank is not guns and landmines, but broken roads.

Thinking of Goderian's painful past experiences in muddy fields, Roland also felt a bit of a headache.

Fortunately, his requirements for the Steam Tank aren't high. Keeping Sif safe would count as a victory. If it could also smash through enemy lines in the process, that would be perfect.

Roland quickly ended the debate in the research field and turned to the main topic.

"Norton, are you really going to let Munina return to the sea?"

Norton avoided Roland’s gaze, lightly coughed, and said, "Munina is just going to see friends, and she will come back sooner or later."

Roland certainly didn’t believe that nonsense, "Does a fish return to land after going back to the sea?"

Norton sighed helplessly, mumbling, "Munina is pitiful. She’s like a fish out of water here, feeling uncomfortable every day. Even though Nana can accompany her, she ultimately belongs to the sea as a creature."

"I’m sorry, boss, I shouldn’t be willful. If you disagree, I’ll go get her back right away. She’s very obedient and won’t mess around."

Seeing Norton’s timid appearance, Roland couldn’t say much.

Having Munina or not wasn’t important, having Norton work without concerns was crucial.

He patted Norton’s shoulder, smiling, and said, "Since she’s your adopted daughter, do whatever you want, but let it not happen again."

Norton quickly assured Roland that there wouldn’t be a next time.

He knew that when Roland said ’let it not happen again,’ he wasn’t just referring to letting Munina leave but also adopting other races.

After seeing Roland off, Norton wiped the sweat from his forehead vigorously, sighing helplessly.

Munina, this is all I can do. Will you keep your promise?

...

The end of the canal.

Munina, who emerged from swimming all the way, stood by the sea, gazing at the sky with dim moonlight, her expression grave.

She couldn’t help but look back at the lighthouse near the canal mouth.

This is the bustling Golden Waterway, with countless ships passing through daily. A normal person swimming could easily be spotted, but this was no challenge for Munina.

After all, at her core, she is still a fish.

Although Sirens can use skin to aid breathing, with living habits more akin to amphibians, their home is the tumultuous ocean.

The ocean is dangerous.

Even for Sirens, there are plenty of natural enemies, like giant sharks with terrifying teeth up to tens of meters long, and all kinds of bizarre large octopi.

These are the enemies of the Sirens.

But these are not the predators that kill the most Sirens.

Just like humanity’s natural enemy is humanity, the Siren’s natural enemy is the Siren.

The Graham Clan in the Undersea World is just an ordinary clan, not even ranking among the top.

Their territory is very close to humans, with relatively harsh living conditions; clan members are often captured or even killed by humans.

Just like her.

She didn't deceive adoptive father Norton, she really was going back to take a look.

She knew very well that her semi-mechanized body could no longer integrate into the clan. In the eyes of her clan, she is an undeniable monster.

No one would support a monster like her leading the clan, even if she were to become the only remaining daughter of the father, it would be impossible.

After her father passes away, the clan will only re-select a new leader.

But she doesn't feel sorry for her father.

The familial bond between her and her father was long gone. Since her sister's talent surpassed hers, the father treated her with extreme indifference.

She didn't expect her father to be overly doting, but having no basic familial love was still a bit disheartening.

She indeed went to find the daughter of the Grim Clan's leader, but it just so happened that this lady Uranie was the wife of a Wise Man within the clan.

She wasn't lying.

Waving her tail, Munina swam faster and faster in the sea, not feeling tired at all.

With the help of adoptive father Norton, she reclaimed the two Lifebound Scales her sister had stolen and took two additional scales that originally belonged to her sister.

Her talent now is rare throughout the history of the entire Sea Demon Race.

If she wants to reclaim everything that belongs to her, is there a chance...?

Munina looked down at the mechanical parts on her body and shook her head with a smile.

She has no chance after all, for she is not a pure Sea Demon, having even lost the ability to bear offspring with male sirens.

How can a monster lead a clan?

Through Norton adoptive father's modifications, Munina's swimming speed and endurance have far exceeded what they were before. Coupled with the suppressed determination in her heart to make a name for herself, her strength has greatly improved.

Even her father, the clan leader, is not her match.

Within the Siren race, ordinary females have less combat power than males, but those who reach the summit are all females.

Munina, who has already skillfully mastered the Second Movement of Chaos, can easily handle the clan leader father whose strength hasn't improved for a long time.

That's her confidence in returning home.

She wants to talk to her father about the possibility of defecting to humans.

If her father refuses, she wouldn't bear to commit patricide. From then on, they'd just be strangers.

She didn't discuss these things with Roland earlier in the day, as she wanted to see Roland's tolerance.

If Roland could tolerate her little rebellion, he could certainly tolerate the clan.

If Roland cannot accept the clan, she will return by herself.

Roland’s generosity moved her somewhat.

She decided to bring her clan ashore.

The wetlands and lake groups near the Great Lake are enough to accommodate tens of thousands of clan members, far exceeding the maximum population of the clan.

Living together with humans, they can share the achievements of human civilization, without having to mix their days in the cold seabed and lone islands.

After swimming hundreds of miles, Munina felt a bit hungry. She nimbly caught a small fish passing by, stuffed it into her mouth, and the intense fishy smell made her wrinkle her brow.

She had been used to eating cooked fish and shrimp during this time, and eating raw fish really felt a bit uncomfortable.

The first thing to suffer upon returning to the clan would be her stomach.

She sighed, released the half-bitten small fish, and watching it struggling in futility, she silently apologized to the little fish.

"Sorry little fish, but you’re just too fishy."

If the little fish could understand the thoughts of the Miss Siren, it would surely be enraged to curse.

If you’re not going to eat, don’t hurt me!

Luckily, a passing giant whale gave the poor little fish a quick end.

With a wide open mouth, the whale swallowed everything, the half bit-off small fish and the little fish and shrimp surrounding it were sucked into the belly, quickly becoming the giant whale’s dinner.

In the dim sea bottom, Munina finally returned to the homeland she had left for several months.

Looking at the ruinous remnants of the abandoned underwater city and the clan members inhabiting there, she sighed lightly, shaking her tail, she drilled her way in.

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Chapter 275: Casting One’s Lot on a Whim, the World Suddenly Expands

As she neared the tribe’s settlement, Munina suddenly caught a strong scent of blood.

The surrounding seawater exuded an unsettling agitation.

Countless ferocious sharks were patrolling the perimeter, as if they sensed a perfect feast.

Munina’s heart was pounding.

Although her relationship with her father was indifferent, he was her father after all, and she was naturally concerned about his and her tribesmen’s safety.

Munina desperately whipped her tail to speed up.

Soon, she passed through a shortcut home only she knew and silently reached the stone pillar at the back of the tribe’s central square.
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Faced with the sight of a brutal battle, Munina was stunned.

Countless ferocious ocean creatures were besieging the tribe, most of them were sea sharks and horseshoe crabs wielding massive pincers clad in heavy plate armor.

Horseshoe crabs and fish are natural enemies.

Through a long evolutionary history, the spineless horseshoe crabs failed to develop civilization, with only a few individuals who lived extremely long gaining intelligence.

General Nephropidae was a prominent figure among the horseshoe crab clan.

These gigantic, plate-armored horseshoe crabs were General Nephropidae's subordinates.

They lacked high intelligence but were exceptionally fierce, their massive pincers easily cleaving the leather armor of the unfortunate tribesmen.

The Siren tribe lacked direct offensive organs and had to rely on sea battle weapons like the trident.

However, tridents are ultimately man-made weapons and are far less flexible than the naturally gifted pincers of horseshoe crabs.

Under the combined assault of plate-armored horseshoe crabs and giant sharks, the sea demons were in disarray, retreating step by step.

The female sea demons sang the First Movement, but to no avail.

The Song of Enchantment was only effective on intelligent beings and was meaningless against these simple-minded creatures.

In the aesthetic perspective of sharks and plate-armored horseshoe crabs, the sea demons' song was not appealing.

Munina rushed out without hesitation, singing the Second Movement of Chaos.

The song was full of anger, brimming with hatred towards the enemy.

Her chant even went beyond the range of normal hearing.

It was her first time using ultrasonic impact to transmit chaos.

Under the ultrasonic impact, the large school of sharks immediately fell into chaos, with some even flipping over to expose white bellies as they slowly sank.

The plate-armored horseshoe crabs fared slightly better but were also confused and at a loss.

Munina glanced at her father and signaled him with her eyes to lead the tribe to retreat.

Without needing more prompts from her, her father knew what to do.

The old clan leader wasted no words, promptly directing the tribe to evacuate through several passages.

Fortunately, Munina returned in time; although the tribe suffered significant losses, their core strength remained intact.

Thinking about the uncertain future, the old clan leader felt a bit dizzy.

After seeing the tribesmen evacuate, the old clan leader returned to the square, grabbed his daughter, who was still chanting desperately, and hastily retreated.

The sharks swayed and the plate-armored horseshoe crabs fell into a stupor, with the few humanoid warriors being promptly cut down by the gathering sea demons, temporarily nullifying the enemy’s pursuit force.

From not far off the ocean surface, the bewildered old clan leader looked at his daughter, murmuring:

"What should we do? Where should we go?"

"To human territory, I have connections!" Munina did not hesitate to provide the right answer.

The old clan leader Murak was taken aback, his maw agape, unable to utter a word for a long time.

"Nina, where is your sister? Why did you come back alone?"

"Sister is already dead, I took some of our tribe to seek refuge with humans. No time to explain, father, quickly follow me."

"Wait, aren’t humans our enemies? Can we make it there?" Murak the clan leader mumbled.

"Do you not trust me, or do you think we have many options?" Munina coldly eyed her old father, speaking indifferently.

Murak was at a loss for words.

His daughter was right; the tribe was besieged by General Nephropidae’s army, yet no one in the tribe understood the Second Movement, unable to repel the sea demon army’s attack, with the escape routes sealed. If not for Munina’s timely return, today would have likely been the end for the tribe.

Indeed, he had no choice, but he still reluctantly looked towards the other tribesmen.

"Tribesmen, do you wish to wander or seek refuge with humans?"

"I don’t want to deal with humans, I want to wander!" a boisterous voice rang out.

"If you want to die, go ahead, I have family; I’m willing to seek refuge with humans, as long as they provide us with decent treatment!"

"Miss Munina, tell us, what kind of treatment can humans offer us?"

...

The tribe’s opinions were not very unified.

Most tribesmen believed the tribe had reached a dead end, and having someone willing to take them in was a blessing, there was no room for picky choices.

Some thought that with so many of them seeking refuge, they should at least demand a good price.

A few stubborn fishman supremacists believed that seeking refuge with humans tarnished their glorious traditions and were staunchly opposed.

Facing these divided opinions, Munina coolly reminded them, "I remind you, Governor Roland whom I know is the smartest among humans, and anyone trying to fool him will face severe consequences."

The old clan leader Murak raised his right hand, signaling the tribe to keep moving forward.

Wandering outside the group, the old clan leader swam shoulder to shoulder with his daughter, softly asking, "Sweet daughter, tell me the truth what happened? Where is Munina?"

Munina knew her father had a belly full of questions, and without hiding anything, she recounted everything that happened after setting out to sea.

His expression changed repeatedly, and hearing that several hundred tribesmen had been settled at a large lake, not all dead, he felt somewhat relieved.

But he was still curious; Munina's innate potential clearly didn't surpass Munina, so how was it she returned to the tribe, but not Munina?

Chapter 276: Seeking Refuge Is a Single Thought, Suddenly the World Opens Up (Part 2)

Upon hearing that Munina personally killed Munina, his expression was extremely grim.

Munina looked at him openly, without any extra explanation.

What she said was all true. It would be best if her father could accept it, but it didn't matter if he couldn't.

She only sought to have a clear conscience.

Seeing his daughter's candid expression, Murak sighed deeply and said softly:

"Munina, you may think I'm indifferent, but I'm truly troubled. That woman hoped I would focus on cultivating the more promising Munina. I never expected them to do such shameless things."

"My daughter, you have suffered. Now it's just the two of us relying on each other, I, I..."

Munina bit her lip, wanting to hold back her tears, but ultimately couldn't.

Her father's words may not have been very sincere, but there was one thing he was right about.

Now it's just the two of them relying on each other.

No matter what they thought in their hearts, they had to rely on each other.

Without Murak, Munina couldn't possibly hold down the elders in the clan.

They weren't willing to go suffer among humans. They had been the leaders of the clan and held significant status, which would drop sharply if they joined the humans.

Everyone had their own agenda and would prioritize their interests, which was normal.

With Murak present, those with different hearts would have to restrain themselves.

For Murak, it didn't matter whether what Munina said was true or false. Even if she set a trap to kill Munina and strip away her scales, what could he say?

He didn't know if General Nephropidae's attack on the Graham Clan was a personal act or an order from above.

If it was the latter, no matter how vast the ocean was, there was no place for the clan to stand.

Even if it was the former, General Nephropidae stood high above, and a small Sea Demon Race couldn't risk provoking him.

By all accounts, seeking refuge with humans was the best choice.

Now he needed his daughter more, and he dared not delve into the truth behind the sisters' mutual slaughter.

As a person, one must remain ignorant when appropriate.

Munina, who mastered the Second Movement of Chaos, was a super genius in the history of the Sea Demon Race, and perhaps she had a chance to avenge the fallen clansmen.

They and General Nephropidae were already mortal enemies and had no road of return.

In the last stretch of sea near human territory, the Sea Demons slowed their pace.

Murak gathered the elders of the clan to discuss their future.

Although many opposed it, the majority of elders believed the conflict with General Nephropidae was an unchangeable fact, regardless of the reasons.

While the ocean was vast, there wasn't a corner that could accommodate them.

The Sea Emperor was the Dominator of the ocean, and with the Sea Emperor and several Grand Generals asleep, General Nephropidae was the Dominator of the northern seas.

To offend him was to offend the Sea Palace, with no place to file a complaint.

They had no choice but to use Munina as a bridge to seek refuge with humans.

The demands of most elders were simple, given that so many sought asylum, they at least wanted a fair deal.

Munina did not object.

Through her adopted father Norton, she understood Roland somewhat.

As long as one was valuable to him, one had the right to pursue benefits.

He was a shrewd businessman; no one could take advantage of him. But he was also a generous leader. As long as one worked for him, there were benefits.

After the crowd finished arguing, Munina slowly said, "Trust Governor Roland, he will offer a price that matches our worth. But no matter what his price is, please be sure to accept it."

"Under Lord Governor, as long as you contribute, you will be rewarded."

After hearing her words, the elders remained silent, with only a few murmuring softly: "It's a pity that Lord Roland is only a governor; if only he were the Emperor."

Munina almost couldn't hold back a laugh but said nothing.

She didn't want to tell these people that although Roland was not the Emperor, he could act on behalf of the Empress.

But such words couldn't be spoken recklessly.

Everyone knew that Roland was the Empress's lover.

Once the idea of seeking refuge with humans took hold, the more than twenty thousand surviving Sea Demons immediately felt the world expanding, with the surging sea surface seeming particularly vibrant.

The clan slowed their advance but continued forward, while Munina left the group alone and dove through the canal back to Hansa.

...

When Munina stood before Roland with some dishevelment, unable to wipe the water from herself, Roland was startled by her weary appearance.

"Munina, what's going on? Did you run into some trouble? Feel free to speak up. Even if not for your adoptive father's sake, I trust your loyalty."

Roland wasn’t just offering empty words of comfort; he truly recognized Munina’s loyalty.

He had initially thought Munina was looking for an excuse to slip away and, out of respect for Norton, wasn’t inclined to dig deeper, considering it as not having met her at all.

He never expected Munina to return, proving her steadfast loyalty.

Roland handed a dry towel to Munina and also poured her a steaming cup of red tea, "No need to rush. Have some tea first and tell me slowly."

Startled by the hospitality, Munina held the cup with both hands, tapping the floor with her tail to express gratitude.

She took a few sips of tea, her somewhat chilly body gradually warming up.

Indeed, the red tea was delightful.

Compared to the warm red tea, the seawater was cold and salty, with a hint of bitterness.

Although Sea Demons could filter seawater for nutrients, she had grown accustomed to drinking tea and didn’t want to drink even a sip of seawater.

Not only the sea, but the strange taste of the canal water on the way back also bothered her a bit.

The Great Lake’s water was still the best—clear, delicious, slightly sweet, perfect for making tea.

Munina recounted her experiences on the return journey.

She repeatedly emphasized that her return was only to visit family, with no intention of long-term escape.

Feeling a bit embarrassed, she muttered: "My stomach is already in the shape of human cuisine; I really can’t eat raw fish anymore."

Roland was taken aback for a moment, then laughed heartily.

Trying to capture a man’s heart by targeting his stomach might not always work. But in raising a group of fish, tasty bait was indispensable.

Could this be considered a kind of fishing too?

Munina’s expression turned slightly dim as she continued recounting how the clan was ambushed by General Nephropidae’s subordinates, with her father and clansmen narrowly escaping and being brought over by her.

"Lord Governor, are you willing to take in my clansmen?"

Roland was stunned for a few seconds, feeling a bit hesitant.

If it were just a few hundred or a few thousand people, he would accept without hesitation. But this was, after all, a tribe numbering in the tens of thousands; if any issues arose, it would be a significant matter.

Seeing Roland’s silence, Munina thought he was unwilling, and quickly pleaded, "Lord Governor, our Graham Clan males are brave warriors, and the females can produce pearls, catch fish, and farm fish. My clansmen are all useful!"

Seeing Munina’s anxious expression, Roland smiled and said, "Since you’ve come with sincerity, I naturally won’t refuse. My employment principle is talent-first, regardless of background."

"If I can accept five hundred temporary residents at the Great Lake, I can accept more Sea Demons."

Roland pondered for a moment before asking slowly, "What are your people’s demands?"

Munina hesitated as she conveyed the clan’s requests.

They were willing to join Roland and serve him, but Roland must not use them as cannon fodder, he must ensure their basic living conditions, and they must be allowed to continue living together.

Roland was a bit surprised; these Sea Demons had tens of thousands of people, a bargaining position, yet their demands were so simple?

Seeing Munina’s determined gaze, Roland roughly understood.

The Sea Demons were now at their wit’s end, only seeking refuge, so naturally, they didn’t dare to make too many demands.

After a moment of contemplation, Roland gave his response.

He accepted the Graham Tribe but explained that there were no lakes within his territory that could accommodate everyone at once, so they would be settled in several locations.

Initial basic living support would be provided by the Governor’s Territory. Once they acclimated to the environment, they need to earn a living based on their abilities.

Roland doesn’t support deadbeats, nor does he cater to any grandiose demands.

There were many ways they could make a living—joining the army or setting up freshwater fisheries were good options.

These over ten thousand Sea Demons were assigned to Munina’s command, but their leader, Murak, wasn’t placed there.

Munina was left speechless for a moment, starting to demur, but Roland firmly interrupted her:

"Loyalty is above all. I can’t speak for your clansmen, but you are trustworthy."

Munina’s eyes welled with tears, but she kept her composure and said nothing.

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Chapter 277: A Frenzied Night

April 21, 1792, the last batch of grain purchased through Samaria merchants by Roland arrived at Emre Port. The previous day, similar products bought through merchants from other countries also arrived, but in much smaller quantities.

This final batch of grain came from the distant Nubian Kingdom, traversing the vast Land Sea and Sunset Ocean, finally reaching its destination after a month-long journey.

To welcome their arrival, Director Schmidt of the Port Authority personally led the staff to greet them.

In addition, he hung up an exaggerated red banner as per the requirements of the Department of Commerce.

Though unaware of the origin of this custom, it was said to be a demand of the Lord Governor, and naturally, the Port Authority dared not question it.

Could it be some damned custom from the homeland of those Samaritan merchants?

Standing by the dock, Director Schmidt thought somewhat indifferently.

The Lord Governor was good in all respects, except he trusted the Samaria merchants a bit too much.

These filthy swine have no shame and no bottom line, they only care about money. The Lord Governor surely knows this but still has no choice but to do business with them.

He completely understood Governor Roland's actions in buying grain.

As the person in charge of the Port Authority, he not only had a unique understanding of trade but was also proficient in meteorology.

Last year's abnormal warm winter was rare in decades, and he was somewhat concerned. At the beginning of the year, he wrote to the Lord Governor, advising Roland to stockpile grain in advance.

For this, he received a letter of commendation from the Governor, praising his high alignment with the Governor's thoughts and awarding him 10 Performance Points.

Looking at these ships full of grain, Schmidt felt a deep sense of accomplishment.

Long live Her Majesty the Empress, wise is the Lord Governor, and Schmidt is also smart!

Once this batch of grain arrives at the port, the Three Provinces under the Governor's territory will not have to worry about food issues, even if refugees are added in.

Schmidt let out a long breath as he watched through his telescope the row upon row of sails rising on the distant horizon, slightly alleviating his displeasure from the long wait.

He was not collaborating with greedy merchants; he was receiving life-saving grain for the people of the Three Provinces.

It was already nearing afternoon, and the arrival time was delayed by more than three hours from the scheduled time.

This three to four hours delay also made it impossible to complete the inspection procedures within the day.

Calculating the transportation time roughly, Schmidt furrowed his brow.

With not enough time, the grain would have to be moved into the warehouse first, sealed, and checked the next day.

Although many officials from the Three Provinces have good relations with the Samaria merchants, he was not one of them.

He does not discriminate against anyone, but despises equally behaviors involving short weight and inferior goods.

As an official of the Port Authority, he naturally hopes that Emre Port can prosper, so he can get promoted.

He desires progress but will not stoop to colluding with merchants.

Many colleagues cannot understand his behavior, but his ambition is not something these fools can grasp.

Her Majesty the Empress is in Hansa; if not striving now, when?

Schmidt turned back and shouted at the hired dock workers behind him, "Move quickly and finish unloading the grain before sunset, wages doubled!"

The previously sluggish workers instantly perked up, their eyes on the grain ships now sharp like hawks.

That was not a grain ship, but double the pay!

Amidst everyone’s anticipation, the grain ships slowly entered the port.

Perhaps the captain had drunk too much and couldn’t steer, or maybe the sailors were slacking off, as today’s docking was surprisingly slow.

Furthermore, a sailor accidentally fell from a height while climbing the mast to lower the sails, becoming a bloody mess on the deck.

The sudden accident disrupted the order of the cargo ships entering the port, causing a commotion.

After a hard time restoring order, more time was lost.

If it were on schedule, they wouldn’t even think about unloading all the grain today, but fortunately, Schmidt offered the dock workers double wages.

Stimulated by money, they worked with high spirits, working up a sweat, and the transport progress was rapid.

The fleet owner, Mr. Labert, approached from an unknown angle, offering a flattering smile to Schmidt. Along with it, he handed over a delicate little box.

"This is a pie made by my wife’s own hands, you can take it home to share with your family."

"That’s not necessary, my wife’s cooking is excellent." Schmidt showed no courtesy at all.

He coldly looked at the Samaria merchant and snorted, "Mr. Labert, you better think about the aftermath, this is a serious matter involving a fatality."

Labert was short, more than a head shorter than Schmidt, yet his stature was exceptionally round, more than double Schmidt’s width.

Seeing Schmidt unmoved, Labert with a sheepish grin was about to explain the uniqueness of the pie when Schmidt already turned and walked away, commanding personnel from the Port Authority to maintain order.

More than fifty massive merchant ships and a dozen escort vessels made the port extraordinarily crowded.

Apart from traditional donkey carts, there were also quite a few steam trucks transporting goods.

Emre Port is one of the first ports in the world to implement mechanized loading and unloading. There is a smooth hardened road between the dock and the warehouse zone, facilitating the passage of these big machines.

Seeing this efficient transport system, Labert was momentarily at a loss for words.

At least ten such large fleets led by him had recently arrived at the port, unloading over 600,000 tons of grain in total, basically filling the surrounding granaries.

Animal-drawn carts and steam trucks transporting grain were coming and going nonstop from morning till night.

Although he did not quite understand why Governor Roland needed so much grain, it was not his place to inquire; he only wanted to make more money.

Though he dared not ask, he could vaguely guess at some reasons.

Chapter 278: A Frenzied Night (Part 2)

They're probably going to war, Labert thought silently.

It can't be for ordinary people, right? In his view, if they encounter a year of famine, it means the Gods are angry, and those who starve to death have weak faith.

The government spending money to buy grain for ordinary people is beyond his understanding.

He originally wanted to find a chance to send out the pie containing the large checks from Hansa Bank, but Schmidt didn't give him any opportunity.

Seeing the crowded and complicated situation at the dock, he could only put the box away, planning to make a visit when the night was deep and quiet.

Busy until nightfall, the transport work was completed on schedule.

Although various "unexpected" incidents occurred, the efficiency of the workers, buoyed by double wages, was astonishing, and they managed to complete the task.

Schmidt watched the last ox cart head toward the warehouse, laughing heartily, and made a gesture of invitation to Labert and others.

"Mr. Labert, you have worked hard. The Port Authority has prepared a welcome banquet, please!"

Although the events didn’t unfold as he expected, Schmidt’s enthusiastic attitude put Labert at ease somewhat.

Doesn’t matter, as long as the counterpart is an official, it’s impossible not to be able to win them over.

After the banquet, inquire with the other pioneers of the chambers of commerce about Mr. Schmidt’s hobbies.

Fear not an official for being corrupt, but for having no interests.

Whether it’s money, women, or something else, it can all be satisfied! Labert thought silently.

Seizing a moment when others weren’t noticing, he called his assistant David with a gesture.

David hesitated somewhat, wanting to remind a few things, but was forced back by Labert’s murderous glare.

"You have a family, my friend."

This sentence immediately dispelled all of David's hesitation.

The guild leader was right, he had a family and had long since had no way out. This transoceanic grain delivery journey was not easy, and submitting the grain strictly according to the requirements could make money, but not a hefty profit.

According to President Labert's standard, not making a hefty profit means a loss.

A shrewd Samaritan merchant cannot possibly lose money, Mr. Labert already had a plan, but thinking about the horror of this plan still made David anxious.

It doesn't help to panic; some things have to be done.

He quietly slipped away from the crowd, ostensibly returning to the fleet to arrange for tonight's action under the guise of arranging mooring matters.

Schmidt caught sight of Labert and his assistant whispering but did not intervene.

Doing one's own job well and not minding other people's business is his philosophy of being an official.

He believed the wise Lord Governor already had a strategy in place.

The mobile cavalry unit stationed near the Port Authority must not be here for leisure and sightseeing.

Since the Lord Governor had arrangements, he didn't need to take matters into his own hands, just cooperate accordingly.

Schmidt warmly invited Labert and his party into the banquet hall.

Today’s banquet was simple yet festive, with dishes made from local specialties, not considered extravagant but abundant in quantity. Blood sausages and pork knuckles were filling, and there was plenty of black beer, in addition to local delicacies like fried meat rolls, salted crusted codfish, and apple pie.

Looking at the table filled with sumptuous dinner, Labert was a bit embarrassed.

Although Samaritan merchants liked leeching off the countries of Rodinia, their dietary habits rejected animal blood.

The blood sausage, a favorite delicacy of the people of the Three Overseas Provinces, was a disaster for them.

Seeing Labert’s troubled expression, Schmidt burst into laughter.

"Mr. Labert, if you wish to establish yourself here in the future, you must get accustomed to our diet. Not eating blood sausage is not an option here."

"This is the best blood sausage, even Her Majesty the Empress said it was good, and the Lord Governor has ordered us to provide it periodically, not to mention this crispy knuckle, all local delicacies."

Labert hesitated, murmuring: "But it contradicts our doctrines."

"Your doctrines?"

Schmidt frowned and loudly reminded: "Mr. Labert, the Governor’s Territory implements a relatively free religious policy, but this freedom is limited to choosing between Fengrao and Light."

"Our country is in the Fengrao District, where Feng Rao is the mainstream belief. The Lord Governor is a Knight of Light; therefore, followers of the Faith in Light are also welcomed. Other beliefs are heretical in the Governor’s Territory."

"I advise you to think clearly as soon as possible, whether to believe in Fengrao or Light."

Perhaps thinking his words were too aggressive, Schmidt pierced a delicious blood sausage, chewing it fiercely, then washed it down with a large glass of beer, saying with a smile:

"Mr. Labert, there's no need to be too conflicted; whether it's Fengrao or Light, both advocate for no dietary taboos, you can enjoy the food without worry."

Labert's face turned dark, but he knew there was no avoiding it.

If he didn't eat the blood sausage, Schmidt would make things difficult for him.

Emre Port is the largest port in the Governor's Territory, and the Port Authority Director has significant power, not someone to be offended.

In his heart, Labert silently cursed Schmidt's ancestors before reluctantly picking up the blood sausage with trembling hands bringing it to his lips.

Gritting his teeth, he swallowed it like poison.

He couldn't taste anything, just felt waves of nausea.

He had to grab the beer mug in front of him, drinking it down fiercely.

He kept his head down, letting the raucous laughter of the Port Authority officials fill his ears.

Since the President ate, the others in the chamber of commerce couldn't say anything, only biting the bullet and eating.

Watching the Samaritans' pained expressions, Schmidt sneered inwardly.

These people would never change.

The Lord Governor is still too merciful. In his view, they should be nailed onto a cross like in other countries.

Chapter 279: A Frenzied Night (Part 3)

During the reign of the Magic Empire, they rebelled, killed the Governor, and were exterminated by the enraged Magic Empire, becoming a wandering tribe.

However, wherever they went, they refused to assimilate, wouldn't accept local customs, and even attempted to assimilate the locals.

Schmidt sighed helplessly.

Lord Governor is kind in every way, perhaps because he is often with the Empress, he is truly too merciful.

Despite some complaints, Schmidt still performed his duties well.

He did his utmost to intensify the pressure on the Samaritans.

If they refused to change, then pressure them from all aspects of diet, culture, and lifestyle until they succumb to pressure or seek their own demise.

If they neither accept change nor are willing to die, then it would be difficult to handle.

The banquet proceeded in a pleasant atmosphere, at least from the perspective of the Port Authority personnel.

Watching the Samaritans eat as if swallowing filth, their appetite greatly increased, and they drank several more cups of spirits heartily.

There was only one person who didn't drink at the banquet, Jes, the Lieutenant Colonel sent by Hansa.

His cold gaze swept across the room, carefully observing everyone's expressions.

Although the banquet consisted of officials and wealthy merchants, all of whom were good at hiding their innermost thoughts, expressions could be disguised but not the emotions in their eyes.

He could discern what these people were thinking.

The hostility of traditional bureaucrats, represented by Schmidt, towards the Samaritans; the greed and ruthlessness of Samaritan merchants, represented by Mr. Labert; the silent fury of other accompanying merchants.

Jes observed silently, without saying a word.

Do your job, don't overstep boundaries, he silently admonished himself.

After serving as a Major at home for three years, with no opportunities for promotion, he was demoted by the Minister of the Army to overseas lands.

He thought his life was bleak and without a future, but then he met the Empress and the Governor.

His life took a turn.

In just a few months, he was promoted to Cavalry Lieutenant Colonel, directly serving the Empress and the Governor.

Although his rank wasn't high, his actual status was equivalent to that of a Guard Captain.

He cherished everything he had now, not wanting to be thirty and still not have been promoted to Brigadier General, forced to return home to take over his father's business.

He wasn't short of money and wasn't very interested in it.

He longed for a chance to showcase his talents on the battlefield and hoped to stand out.

Coming to Emre Port to oversee the grain exchange was a task given by the Governor.

It appeared ordinary, but there were undercurrents beneath the surface.

He vaguely felt something was amiss. Governor Roland was too lenient with these Samaritans, unlike his usual character.

In previous grain exchanges, the shameless greed of the Samaritan merchants was evident.

Some guilds tampered with scales to shortchange by weight; others stuffed unhulled wheat into flour bags, passing fake for real; or used inferior flour to impersonate top-grade flour, passing off the inferior for the superior.

His keen eyes caught all these disgraceful actions.

However, Governor Roland didn't take much issue with it, nor did he clearly express a stance, allowing the Samaritan merchants to act wantonly.

Others thought Roland dared not react out of desperation for assistance, but Jes knew he was conserving strength.

The Governor had once sent someone to convey verbal orders to him.

Maintain inspection intensity, don't overlook any issues.

From this seemingly ordinary command, Jes discerned an underlying killer intent.

If Lord Governor truly didn't wish to press the matter due to needing something, he might as well not investigate, sparing everyone the difficulty.

Yet he continued to investigate.

The greed of the Samaritan merchants blinded them, making them mistakenly believe Roland was no different from previous officials.

The prey had entered the snare, it was time to close the net.

Jes suddenly found the banquet utterly boring and found an excuse to leave.

His departure made others sigh in relief.

After all, he represented the Empress and the Governor, always bearing a sullen face which made others also unable to act freely.

After Jes left, the officials of the Port Authority became even more blatant, soon drinking until they were lurching and swaying.

They hugged the shoulders of Labert and others, calling each other brothers while shoving crispy pork knuckles into these ostensibly refined merchants' mouths.

They were happy, but the Samaritans' fists were clenched.

After arduously enduring until the banquet ended, the Samaritan merchants fled in embarrassment. Merchants from other countries were rarely able to see them so disheveled, hence their spirits lifted, indulging in food and drink even more enthusiastically.

Returning to his lodgings, Labert's face was ashen; he took the soap water handed by a servant, swallowed it hard despite the nausea, and squatted on the ground, vomiting incessantly.

He kept reciting scriptures, claiming that he accidentally ingested, not willfully violating the teachings.

Just as he was retching violently, the assistant who had just gone out to prepare quietly approached him, lowering her voice to ask:

"Boss, everything is ready. When do we start?"

"Around four in the morning, when those fools are dead asleep, invite them to watch the beautiful bonfire!"

Seeing the hatred in Labert's eyes, the assistant lowered her head in fright, her hands trembling.

Mr. Labert was utterly mad; at least twenty percent of the grain he transported was short, which is why he was hesitant, hesitating to enter the port during the day, hoping to delay the handover and find a chance to bribe the Port Authority officials.

If that failed, he would ignite a "coincidental" fire in the granary to settle accounts directly.

Mr. Labert had drifted at sea for many days to bring back the precious grain, only for it to be destroyed due to local mismanagement.

If he was brazen enough, he could even claim compensation from Roland.

Not many participated in tonight's action, only Labert's long-nurtured loyalists. After committing arson, they would be silenced.

Chapter 280: A Night of Madness (Part 4)

They know too much.

Thinking of this, the deputy’s heart trembled slightly. He knew more, how would Mr. Labert treat him afterward?

Perhaps seeing through the deputy’s fear, Labert smiled and said: "David, don’t worry, I will arrange for you to go to the New Continent. You can enjoy life there, but you can’t come back."

The deputy breathed a sigh of relief and quickly expressed his gratitude to Labert.

Even though the living conditions in the New Continent are poor, as long as there is money, anywhere can be heaven.

This was his last time risking his life for Mr. Labert.

Finish this job, and he could retire!

He disappeared into the night like a swift cat.

Watching David leave, Labert’s face gradually darkened. He snapped his fingers and called over the butler who had loyally served the family for two generations, whispering a few words.

David, the new world I spoke of is the Pure Joy Pure Land, and you will definitely reach it.

I’m sorry, you know too much.

Promises? Promises are only valid when needed. Now Mr. Labert doesn’t need them.

...

Shortly after three in the morning, Jes, still at the lookout tower, observed the surroundings again through his telescope.

Unfortunately, the surroundings were too dark. Tonight was moonless and windy, making it impossible to see clearly.

He vaguely felt something was wrong but couldn't pinpoint what.

He decided to personally inspect the area near the warehouse zone.

Switching to night gear, he crouched low and circled around a small grove.

He heard no footsteps but still stopped cautiously.

Though he couldn't see, he could smell alcohol and kerosene coming from the other end of the grove.

This is...

This band of desperados planned to set a fire!

Jes was stunned. He had considered that these people might cause trouble, but he didn't expect them to be this reckless.

These warehouses had been built over many years, equipped with various sentries and solid walls, making it difficult to seize them by conventional means.

But a fire attack was different.

These warehouses, after all, were a mix of brick and wood structures, containing many grains inside, making them highly flammable.

Once the fire started, fueled by tonight's strong winds, the entire warehouse zone would go up in flames.

Jes instinctively wanted to run back to the camp but suddenly halted.

Wait, could this be a part of the Governor's plan?

If this were bait, would acting prematurely ruin the Governor's overall scheme?

Jes's heart pounded wildly; he hesitated.

No matter if the Governor had set a trap, he could first muster the troops and arrest the arsonists as soon as the fire broke out.

The cost would be severe losses to the warehouse guard units, with 60,000 tons of fine grain going up in flames.

He could achieve great merit by capturing the arsonists timely.

What about the warehouse guard units? What about the more than 100,000 tons of grain still in the warehouses? What about the refugees relying on this grain for survival?

Jes's soul was being tortured.

It took him only a second to make a decision.

Arrest them!

If the Governor had set a trap waiting for these people, the crime of attempted arson was enough. Although a burning warehouse would more easily incite public outrage and make the achievement more direct, the loss was too costly.

Jes craved progress, but he couldn't bear to watch his comrades burn to death, using their bodies as stepping stones for advancement.

Maybe one day he would be self-serving, maybe one day he would become numb, maybe one day he would be ruthless.

But not today!

Now he must go arrest these madmen who had lost all sense.

Jes quickly returned to the barracks, blowing the whistle to rally the troops.

The cavalry, resting in leather armor, quickly responded.

Jes stood murderously in front of them, loudly announcing, "Someone is attempting to set the grain warehouses on fire, this is treason, follow me, arrest them!"

The cavalry's eyes gleamed.

Having not rested well for many days, they were long bottled up with fury, now finally having a chance to vent.

Jes mounted his horse, holding a flintlock firearm in his left hand and a lance over two meters long in his right, charging out first.

The hoofbeats sounded like muffled thunder breaking the night's silence, roaring with the wind.

Tonight, someone was going to meet misfortune.