Empress 281

Chapter 281: Did I Allow Them to Leave?

Although Jes moved swiftly like the wind, David's madness exceeded his expectations.

Perhaps sensing something was wrong, David acted in advance, pouring prepared alcohol, gunpowder, and kerosene around the warehouse and quickly setting it alight before hastily retreating with his confidants.

If not for Jes's timely warning, this sudden fire would have burned down the entire warehouse zone.

The blaze would not only engulf over three hundred soldiers guarding the warehouse but also consume more than one hundred thousand tons of temporarily stored food.

This is life-saving grain capable of helping hundreds of thousands of people through a famine period.

Fortunately, Jes detected it in time, and the cavalry sent to rescue were equipped with simple firefighting gear, bringing the blaze under control quickly.

Although the fire was effectively contained, two independent warehouses were still destroyed, resulting in a loss of over seven hundred tons of grain.

In this fire, one warehouse guard unfortunately perished, and three others were injured.

The enraged Jes swiftly led his cavalry unit to take control of Labert and others remaining in the port area.

However, he encountered some trouble when taking over the ships.

Seeing that the situation was unfavorable, David fled under the cover of night aboard a convoy ship.

The stationed sub-fleet pursued overnight, but the convoy ship was lighter and faster, allowing him to escape.

Besides the fugitive David, there were thousands of crew members disarmed.

Labert's guard unit, seeing their boss captured, quickly collapsed and surrendered, but a few diehards attempted to recapture Labert.

They were met with a neat, multi-tiered volley of firearms.

Jes was not a Knight, so he wouldn't bind his own hands.

Even if he were a Knight, he wouldn't talk about knightly spirit with these scoundrels.

With reasonable suspicion that all Samaritans might be accomplices, Jes took out the Silver Short Sword bestowed by the Empress, took charge of the port forces, and rounded up all Samaritan Merchants.

Faced with overwhelming force, the usually arrogant Samaritan Merchant armed forces were terrified, not daring to resist, only continuously proclaiming their innocence.

Merchants from other countries and trade associations didn't stay smug for long; Jes ordered them to proceed to Hansa City for examination.

The reason he didn't detain them too was because the prisons were already overcrowded.

As the sun rose, Jes's swift action had already controlled the entire Port Authority.

He even placed the Port Authority Director, Schmidt, under house arrest.

The reason was simple; even a one percent possibility of Schmidt colluding with the Samaritans, the consequences would be severe. With such a major incident last night, Schmidt also bore responsibility.

Schmidt wanted to explain that he had arranged manpower in advance, but facing the imposing Jes, he knew any explanation would be useless and helplessly accepted to be confined.

The residents of Emre Port were awakened by the disturbances in the second half of the night, running out to witness the spectacle of flames erupting and quickly extinguished.

They didn't know this wasn't a regular fire, but the fuse for a worldwide inferno about to ignite.

Jes also didn't know that as he acted, a scout released a carrier pigeon overnight back to Hansa City, informing them of everything happening at Emre Port.

Shortly after he acted, the hunting operation in the Three Overseas Provinces commenced.

The only regret was that Jes's sudden move caused the Fourth Fleet, which didn't receive timely news, to act half a beat slower, allowing Samaritan Merchants at the Northern Port to escape quite a bit.

The day the operation ended, Jes wrote a personal letter detailing everything that transpired at Emre Port, voluntarily acknowledging responsibility and expressing willingness to bear the consequences for any repercussions due to the hasty action.

Not long after this letter was sent, Brigadier General Dailong arrived at the port zone, assumed command of the troops, and requested Jes to return to Hansa immediately.

Looking at the calm expression of Jes, Dailong spoke softly, "Jes, because of your rash actions, the hunting plan's nine primary targets ran away two, and fifteen secondary targets ran away three."

Jes remained silent for a long time before slowly speaking, "I will request the Lord Governor for punishment. But under the circumstances, I had no choice. I couldn't stand by and watch comrades potentially in danger without helping."

Dailong looked into Jes's determined eyes, sighed lightly, and said somewhat helplessly:

"Jes, what was Lord Governor’s order for you?"

"Inspect, monitor Emre Port’s food handover, and report any issues immediately," Jes’s voice gradually lowered.

What he did indeed exceeded the order’s scope.

If he didn’t consider the three hundred warehouse soldiers, he could have completely ignored the situation.

After all, the warehouse had fire prevention measures; it wouldn’t completely burn down.

Even if it did burn down entirely, these losses were lesser compared to the losses caused by his arresting Samaritan Merchants, which led to some merchants fleeing.

If he hadn’t apprehended them, and merely followed standard investigative procedures, these merchants wouldn’t have been startled and fled.

"Saving a few injured little rabbits, yet letting the wild boars about to enter the trap escape, is a tactical win but a strategic loss."

Jes opened his mouth, but couldn’t utter a word.

He really wanted to ask about those three hundred warehouse soldiers?

The words froze at his lips.

All actions demand a price, these people are likely the price.

Seeing Jes slowly bow his head, Dailong sharply interrupted his chaotic thoughts.

"Don’t overthink, Lord Governor wouldn’t use any soldier as cannon fodder. It’s just no one could’ve expected these men would go so far as to burn the warehouse to settle accounts."

Dailong sighed lightly, reminding, "You weren’t wrong to fight the fire; those are our comrades, of course, we should save them, but after fighting the fire you shouldn’t have reacted so intensely. Pretending not to catch anything and securing the dock to avoid alarming the Samaritan Merchants would have been better."

Chapter 282: Did I Allow Them to Leave? (2)

Jes really wanted to argue that he didn’t know the Governor’s strategic layout, but he couldn’t bring himself to say it.

Roland indeed hadn’t told him, but he was by the Empress and the Governor every day, surely he could see it somewhat, couldn’t he?

Jes bowed his head in guilt, not knowing what to say for a moment.

Seeing his ashamed look, Dailong patted his shoulder and said with a smile:

"Young man, don’t be too discouraged. Her Majesty the Empress and the Governor are reasonable people. Under the circumstances, your actions can be considered correct."

"Go, and remember not to argue. The Governor does not like people who make excuses afterward."

Jes looked at Dailong gratefully and saluted him forcefully.

He transferred the command of the cavalry unit to Brigadier General Dailong and returned to Hansa alone.

Watching his departing figure, a smile played at Dailong’s lips.

This is the exuberance of youth.

If he were ten years younger, he might have been as enthusiastic as Jes.

Frankly, if one were to focus only on Emre Port, Jes's approach had no issues and could even be considered optimal.

The locally optimal solution became the poison to the overall strategy.

He was more concerned about how Roland would deal with Jes than how Jes would explain himself to Roland.

The best outcome he could envision for Jes was a promotion in rank and a reassignment.

This would be a result of Roland being generous enough.

The reason is simple: Leaders can never be wrong; if a mistake is made, it's the fault of the subordinates.

The Empress would never be wrong, nor would the Governor.

However, a once-perfect hunting plan went awry, and who is to blame?

Lieutenant Colonel Jes can't be blamed, so should Roland be blamed?

Dailong sighed and headed to the Port Authority; he had to release Schmidt first.

If Jes was forced to make a seemingly correct yet actually wrong choice, Schmidt did nothing wrong, yet was detained by Jes.

Even if Jes had his reasons, it was still too offensive to do so.

Although Jes was not his direct subordinate, he was still willing to clean up after the young man.

The atmosphere in the Governor's Territory was the best he had seen in his years of service, and he longed to accomplish great things and protect it all.

Jes, wearing his cavalry lieutenant colonel uniform neatly, with a calm expression, changed horses midway, traveled overnight, and returned to Hansa City in just a day and a night.

Whether intentional or accidental, the outcome ultimately led to even worse consequences.

Regardless of whether Governor Roland forgives him or not, he will admit his mistakes.

At the barracks at the city gate, he handed over his warhorse to the cavalry squad leader and calmly headed toward the Governor's Mansion in Central Square.

He felt at peace within himself; no matter how furious Roland might be, he would accept it calmly.

Adults must take responsibility for their choices; this was his father's teaching.

Standing at the door of the Governor's office, he knocked on the door and reported his name.

"Come in."

Roland's voice was a bit hoarse.

Jes opened the door and saw Roland explaining the situation to Count Sif over a map.

He, of course, knew the Count was the Empress, but she was currently dressed in the Count's uniform.

"Lieutenant Colonel Jes, you've worked hard, please sit."

Roland pointed to the seat opposite Sif and gestured for him to sit down.

With a belly full of words he couldn't voice, Jes saluted Roland and Sif before sitting opposite them.

He didn't dare sit firmly, only perching on the edge of the chair.

Roland understood his inner fear and did not comment on it; instead, he continued explaining to Sif.

"The two guild leaders who slipped away are Belini and Villon. The business of Belini's guild primarily involves ocean trade, with major dealings in spices, luxury goods, arms, and slaves. This is a person who would be getting off lightly even if hanged ten times."

Sif nodded without speaking.

Jes's face turned gloomy, and he lowered his head slightly.

Roland continued, "Villon's reputation spans various industries. Besides his legitimate businesses, he is also the biggest mercenary leader on the South Continent, controlling over a hundred tribes and is essentially the king of the Silver Coast."

"Unfortunately, we've gained two more troublesome enemies."

Villon could go back to being a local dictator on the South Continent, but the living conditions on the wild South Continent are far inferior to those in the Three Overseas Provinces, which is why he risked coming to Hansa.

Even when he arrived, he was extremely cautious, always staying in the port and would flee faster than a rabbit at the slightest warning.

Sif’s expression was grave, and Jes was sweating profusely. He finally realized the magnitude of the trouble he had caused.

He didn’t even dare to wipe his sweat, obediently listening.

Sif gave him a quick glance and sighed softly, "It’s a pity, these two who escaped are more dangerous than the other seven combined."

"That’s normal. The other seven major merchants, at least on the surface, are engaged in legitimate business. These two, even publicly, are involved in illegal trades."

Roland smiled and said, "There was only one chance to capture them."

Sif shook her head and sighed, and Jes looked ashen.

After Roland finished his summary, Jes couldn’t help but stand and plead guilty to Roland.

"Lord Governor, Lord Count, I am willing to accept any punishment!"

"Punishment?" Roland asked with a smile, "What did you do wrong?"

Jes bit his lip, murmuring despondently, "I acted impulsively, ruining your comprehensive layout and letting the most dangerous targets escape."

Listening to Jes’s apology, Roland laughed heartily, calmly asking, "According to military regulations, what should you do when an allied force is in trouble?"

"Aid with all your might!" Jes answered instantly.

"Then what did you do wrong?" Roland asked with a smile.

Jes was stunned, secretly observing Roland’s expression without detecting any signs of concealed anger or sarcasm.

The Lord Governor’s expression was calm, and his eyes were clear.

Could he really not be angry?

Seeing Jes’s puzzled expression, Roland said calmly, "You didn’t do everything right. Indeed, you did something wrong that day. Who gave you the authority to detain Director Schmidt?"

"He is of a higher rank than you and is responsible for Emre Port. Who gave you the power to detain him?"

Jes was drenched in sweat from Roland’s questioning.

Only in a state of war does the military commander have the authority to temporarily take over city management.

By doing this, Jes effectively defined that day’s actions as wartime actions.

Seeing Jes’s trembling expression, Roland suppressed his smile and said loudly:

"Lieutenant Colonel Jes, your handling is timely and decisive. Your inspection and surveillance were diligent, and you basically completed the task perfectly. I have decided to promote you to Cavalry Colonel. This appointment still requires the Empress’s judgment, but there should be no problem."

"Congratulations, Colonel Jes."

Jes stood there, stunned.

He was in such trouble, yet he could still be promoted?

He even forgot to express his gratitude to Roland.

Seeing Jes's dumbfounded look, Roland smiled and said, "Merits must be rewarded, and mistakes must be punished. You overstepped by detaining Director Schmidt, which is a serious error. First, I will deduct all your Performance Points for this action. Second, you are to apologize to Schmidt publicly. Lastly, I will deduct three months of your salary to buy Schmidt a cart of beer. How does that sound?"

Jes finally woke up from his confusion, immediately saluting Roland.

He bowed his head, hiding tears at the corners of his eyes.

He had never in his wildest dreams imagined Roland would handle it this way.

If it were the Minister of the Army, he would surely be taking the blame.

But he was still a bit worried, asking, "Lord Governor, those two guilds who escaped..."

"Escaped? Did I permit them to escape?"

Roland pointed to the northern port's sea route and said with a smile, "There's only one route to the sea from the northern port. Although the Fourth Fleet has not fully assembled on short notice, as long as they have half a day, they can catch up."

Jes wanted to ask where this half-day would come from, but he dared not.

Seeing his hesitant expression, Roland calmly said:

"To stop those fleeing by sea, we need help from our friends below the sea."

It’s time for the Sea Demon Legion to prove their strength.

Mr. Villon, Mr. Belini, can you resist the Sea Demons’ song, which even money cannot tempt you away from?

Roland’s lips curled slightly, restraining the urge to pop a bottle of champagne.

No hurry, wait for Munina to come back, then we’ll pop it together.

Chapter 283: A Loving Father and Filial Daughter

Belini and Villon ultimately did not escape.

Under the influence of the Siren’s Song, his fleet was slowed down, and some crew members left on the deck fell into the sea and died.

Although Belini, wise in his experience, instructed the crew to tie themselves up to resist the Siren’s Song, the fleet’s sailing speed was still dragged down.

The Sea Demons did not board the ships to fight; they simply slowed the fleet down, allowing Bridges’ Fourth Fleet to complete the harvest.

"This is the true strength of the Imperial Navy!"

Bridges reported to Roland and Sif with his head held high, joy radiating from him.

He indeed had reason to be proud.

In this battle, all targets were captured, and apart from the main targets, few were taken prisoner, greatly reducing the difficulty of the aftermath.

"The target fleet had a total of fifty-four ocean-going vessels, of which nineteen were sunk, three severely damaged and self-sunk, and the rest captured. Unfortunately, these people fought desperately, capturing less than three hundred."

Roland couldn’t help but laugh heartily; was this unfortunate? It was done beautifully!

"Well done, you’re the top merit of this battle!"

He didn’t even hint at how Bridges should proceed, treating it as a bonus question.

Bridges not only scored full marks in naval warfare but had high political acumen.

The times have changed; although everyone’s ancestors were Barbarians, the pursuit of civilization prevents the past practice of beheading prisoners for stacking or turning them into slaves.

Even if one’s appetite is good, they must still maintain decorum.

All ten thousand sailors returned and hanged might be satisfying, but would provoke much discontent.

It is unlucky to kill prisoners—this is ancestral wisdom.

If they can’t be killed and don’t wish to shelter them, feeding them to the fishes naturally becomes the best choice.

They died in sea battle, marked as the Imperial Navy’s achievement, how could they be considered prisoners?

Having received Roland’s approval, Bridges grinned from ear to ear and eagerly supplemented:

"Lord Governor, I dare not claim credit. Your wise deployment is the greatest merit, and Miss Monina’s people played a key role, placing me at most third."

Seeing Bridges being cautious, Roland restrained his smile and slowly said:

"Your establishment of your merits is still my accomplishment; I won't compete with my subordinates for credit. Monina's people did well, and I will reward them separately; the bravery and combat excellence of the Imperial Navy were key to victory!"

Bridges choked up a bit, unsure of how to respond, simply stood upright and saluted.

The Lord Governor truly understands how difficult it was for the Fourth Fleet.

Ever since the Late Emperor and Crown Prince died at sea, the Fourth Fleet has endured too much criticism and pressure, with some even suggesting dissolving this historic fleet.

If not for the Fourth Fleet's desperate resistance, their only warships might have been taken by the Minister of the Navy and distributed to other fleets.

How can a fleet be called a fleet without ships?

Thinking about this, Bridges said a bit forlornly, "It's unfortunate that the Three Overseas Provinces lack mature oak trees suitable for building warships. If we can use the prestige from this great victory to build ships and recruit sailors, I'm confident in restoring the full combat power of the Fourth Fleet within two years."

As soon as he finished speaking, he realized his words had a bit of a demanding tone and wanted to change them but didn't know what else to say.

While he felt apprehensive, Roland forcefully slapped the table, frightening him pale. Just as he was about to explain, Roland had already laughed.

"Very good, General Bridges; it's this spirit we need. I'll handle the oak trees; you start recruiting and training sailors."

Bridges was stunned in place, taking a while to react, then asked joyfully, "Lord Governor, your connections are really broad, even securing mature oak trees like these strategic resources."

Roland smiled without saying a word.

Buy mature oak trees? That's almost like buying steel for aircraft carriers in the modern world, even someone as well-connected as a third brother couldn't accomplish that.

Buying is out of the question, but seizing is possible.

Although the Oden Kingdom is a small country, it has a naval tradition of wanting for over a century since its defeat in a naval battle against the Sussex Empire to build a fleet for revenge.

They have spent a fortune planting an oak forest sufficient to create a massive fleet, planting alongside these oaks were tens of thousands of other tall trees.

According to the calculation that five thousand large trees could build one Monarch, the Oden Kingdom's trees could create at least twenty Monarch ships and hundreds of companion warships.

Such a scale of warships would not only restore the glory of the Fourth Fleet but even make it the strongest fleet of the Imperial Navy.

Furthermore, Roland had brought out early ironclad ship blueprints.

According to Norton, the current industrial capability of the Three Overseas Provinces cannot fully recover, but they can build mixed wood and steel ships.

The steam-powered semi-ironclad ships supplementing sail propulsion is the current construction limit.

Though slightly regrettable, Roland respected Norton's conclusion.

Progress in shipbuilding requires time, rushing can backfire.

Looking at Roland’s composed posture, Bridges’ eyes brightened and he softly asked, "Is the Lord Governor planning to borrow some timber from the northern neighbors?"

"Borrow? That term is quite nice."

Roland smiled and nodded without denial, merely speaking calmly, "Bridges, the warriors of the army are desperate for opportunities to win merits; let them handle this matter."

Bridges knew better than to ask further, and promptly left.

As soon as he departed, Monina and Murak arrived from outside.

Murak, among male Sea Demons, could be considered handsome, but did not fit the mainstream human aesthetic standards.

Seeing his slightly dry face, Roland smiled and asked, "Murak Clan Leader, how are you adapting to life on land?"

Unexpectedly receiving Roland’s concern, Murak felt a bit flattered and quickly responded with a grin.

Chapter 284: A Loving Father and Filial Daughter (Part 2)

"Leaving the water for too long makes my skin a bit dry, but I’m adapting well otherwise. Lord Governor has arranged an excellent campsite for us."

Roland nodded with a smile, painting a grand vision for Clan Leader Murak. "Clan Leader Murak, there’s no need to be so reserved. Your current station is only temporary housing. I’ll send people to build new houses for you."

"Since you can’t leave the water for long, there’s no need to come to Hansa frequently. If there’s anything, have Miss Monina report to me. She can stay away from the water for a long time, and you can handle day-to-day management."

Murak’s expression subtly changed.

The implication of Roland’s words was clear; he remained the clan leader, but the real authority should gradually be transferred to his daughter.

He knew this was not a negotiation, but an order.

Having witnessed the true power of the Fourth Fleet, he had lingering apprehensions about Roland’s might.

The Siren’s Song, while effective against humans, was most expertly wielded by his daughter.

The old clan leader glanced at his daughter out of the corner of his eye, feeling a pang of emotion. It was impossible to rely on her—her loyalty to Lord Governor surpassed that to him as her father.

Their familial bonds were already thin, further diminished by Monina’s presence.

His daughter even preferred being close to that old man who tinkered with potions.

With these thoughts, Murak felt a sense of melancholy.

He had no grounds to refuse.

He had already offended General Nephropidae; the ocean, vast as it was, offered no place to call home.

The Graham Sea Demon’s living space was the land.

In a way, it was for the best. He was old and would eventually have to relinquish power; handing it over to his own daughter was at least keeping it within the family.

Monina wasn’t a cold-hearted child; she would always take care of him.

He chuckled awkwardly, replying softly, "Lord Governor is right. I’ve always liked Monina; I’m glad she’s accomplished. I just want to retire early and let my good daughter take over."

Murak’s perceptiveness saved Roland a lot of effort.

Roland smiled and said, "Clan Leader Murak, these few lakes are rarely visited by humans. I plan to designate them as your settlements. Don’t stay cooped up inside; you should actively interact with surrounding humans and integrate early."

"Although integrating into upper society may be difficult, you can start by becoming part of our community."

Murak looked up, disbelief in his eyes as he gazed at Roland.

Roland’s intentions were obvious; aside from temporarily withholding political participation rights, other citizenship rights would be granted.

Thinking about living like humans made Murak’s eyes moist, suddenly feeling that retirement and enjoying life wasn’t so bad.

He couldn’t resist the meticulously prepared human cuisine, not to mention the clean, tidy homes and convenient living conditions.

Of course, none of this came for free.

They had to contribute, such as in this interception operation.

Fortunately, Governor Roland was fair-minded and didn't treat them as cannon fodder.

In this operation, over a thousand warriors went to sea with minimal casualties; only a few unlucky ones were killed by random bombardments.

Their role was merely to intercept and slow down; the actual combat was carried out by the Fourth Fleet.

Under Roland's command, Clan Leader Murak felt valued for the first time.

Even among the Ocean Race, Nephropidae used them as cannon fodder, intending to cover up afterwards; yet the human governor, regarded as an outsider, was reluctant to use them as expendable.

It was a stark contrast.

Murak was no fool; he knew exactly what choice to make.

Sif said nothing, quietly sitting beside and sipping tea, observing Roland's performance.

In just a few words, Roland unobtrusively completed the power transition of the Graham Clan, even without making the old leader too sorrowful about relinquishing power.

You truly are something, Roland.

Sif understood that this was not about the art of conversation; it was simply the crushing force of power.

As long as the power was strong enough, even a blunt way of speaking could be considered elegant.

Just like Sofia, who intimidated nations and dismantled Val City.

With just a few words, Sofia achieved partition with no opposition, not because of her looks or eloquence but due to her strength.

In international relations, all grievances and troubles stem from not being strong enough.

Even though Sif was not directly targeted by Sofia last time, she felt the suffocating pressure.

As an Empress, she had to be like this.

Sif's eyes held no cowardice, only a growing ambition.

Having made a decision, Murak acted wisely, letting his daughter report on the battle situation.

Monina didn't say much, simply introducing the interception position, the actual effect of the second movement of the Siren's Song, and the tribe's losses.

Roland comforted warmly and acknowledged the Sea Demon's contribution.

Although they couldn't obtain official positions and titles in the human kingdom, everything possible was granted.

Seeing his daughter had no intention of leaving, Murak used the excuse of dryness on land, wanting to return quickly to their residence, to depart.

He understood well that his daughter was Roland's confidante, but he was not.

Seeing Monina had no intent to leave, Roland was curious.

"Is there anything else?"

"Lord Governor, I didn’t deceive you before. I indeed wanted to see my friend Uranie from the Grim Tribe, and she happened to marry into our tribe."

Monina squinted slightly, speaking softly, "The day we were chased by General Nephropidae’s men, in the urgency of escape, I didn’t notice Uranie’s whereabouts. When I later inquired with tribe members, I unexpectedly found she left the night before the incident."

Roland frowned slightly. Uranie was an important member of the Grim Tribe; her marriage into the Graham Tribe was an alliance to strengthen relations between the two tribes.

According to Monina, Uranie had considerable strength, and even if killed, there should have been some sign of resistance.

Clearly, she hadn’t returned after leaving.

"I have no evidence, but I can’t shake the feeling that the Grim Tribe might be related to the old Emperor’s disappearance."

Monina whispered, "The super-powerful figure of the Sea Palace has been asleep for many years; it’s rumored they await a special day to awaken. Currently, the Sea Palace is managed by several generals."

"Only a general would have the capability to take away an entire fleet."

Sif abruptly stood, her teacup falling and smashing to pieces.

While she also hoped her father was safe, she had resigned herself to believing her father and brother had perished. Now, learning they might have been captured, she was naturally emotionally chaotic.

Roland knew her concern clouded her judgment and didn’t say much, instead asking Monina, "Where is your hometown approximately located?"

Monina studied the map for a while before saying slowly, "It’s about two days and nights’ swim west-southwest from where we first met. This is almost the extreme range for our Sea Demons to launch abroad."

Roland silently calculated the Sea Demons’ swimming speed, making a rough mark on the map.

"What about the location of the Grim Clan?"

"It’s about three days and nights’ swim south from our tribe’s old location."

Following Monina’s guidance, Roland marked the location of the Grim Clan and then drew a circle—this circle represented the Grim Clan’s effective operational radius.

Sif’s fingertips suddenly trembled.

The rough location of the Emperor’s incident was within this circle, precisely the effective control range of the Grim Clan.

Even if the Emperor’s disappearance wasn’t their doing, they couldn’t be unrelated.

Roland signaled to Monina to step back for now.

Monina obediently left.

Once Monina left, Sif could no longer control her emotions, tears streaming down her face.

Fortunately, she was much stronger than before, silently crying without breaking down to wailing.

After an undetermined period, she softly asked, "Roland, is my father still alive?"

"He should be alive."

Roland said calmly, "Adults need a reasonable motive for their actions. There are no benefits in killing His Majesty Edward."

"What should I do?" Sif asked helplessly, her eyes showing confusion.

"Do what needs to be done. You must possess power to have the right to save people."

Sif pondered for a long while before her voice turned cold, whispering, "When Father returns, how should I face him?"

"What do you think?" Roland replied with a question instead.

Gradually closing her eyes, her elegant eyelashes fluttered as Sif's voice grew cold.

"I will arrange for him to retire peacefully in the family territory, not to leave without orders."

Chapter 285: The Empress's Decision

Sif's answer was not unexpected.

If she didn't even possess this basic political literacy, wouldn't all the lessons have been in vain?

Sif softly explained, "Father is aging, and after this turmoil, he must be utterly exhausted. Letting him return to the family territory to enjoy his later years is for his own good."

Roland smiled and nodded, "That would be best. But what about Prince Feino?"

The blood drained entirely from Sif's face; she clearly understood the implication behind Roland's words.

Father can abdicate, but what about Brother Feino, who is the legitimate heir?

If they both return, the Heraldry Institute and the Cabinet may not be willing to accept Father's abdication. After all, Father's actions are predictable and controllable, unlike her unconventional ways.

Even if Father abdicates, it should be Brother who succeeds, not her.

If it were six months ago, she might have thoughtlessly said, "Then let Brother succeed, I firmly support it."

But now she wouldn't.

She is no longer alone but the leader of an overseas team.

Roland and the others follow her not to share her misfortune. The officials and military of the Three Overseas Provinces support her for progress.

Even if she wants to retreat, she might wake up from a nap at her desk one day to find a crown symbolizing Imperial Authority on her head.

She has no way out.

Even if she disregards everything and insists on returning the throne to her brother, Prince Feino might not appreciate it. To eliminate hidden threats, she, as the temporary emperor, might die in an "accident."

It's not that Feino can't tolerate her, but he has no choice.

Breathing became a bit rapid, her chest heaved violently, and Sif's eyes grew slightly red.

While her relationship with her father is somewhat estranged, her bond with Feino is much closer.

Thinking of the warm scenes of sibling interaction from the past, her slender hands trembled fiercely.

Her lips quivered, and she finally asked the question, "Is there really no way for him to live?"

Roland did not speak; at such a time, he couldn’t say a word.

Sif could make the decision to eliminate a competitor herself, but he couldn’t take the initiative to instigate.

Her whole body went limp as she collapsed back into the chair, closing her eyes in pain, tears streaming down.

The air was deathly still, with only a gentle breeze blowing in through the window, rustling the scattered papers on the desk.

After an indeterminable amount of time, Sif’s slightly hoarse voice was full of fatigue, softly murmuring:

"Brother Feino met misfortune protecting Father, I will take good care of his family, and let his son inherit his Count’s title."

Roland remained silent, looking at the tear stains at the corner of Sif’s eyes, sighing lightly in his heart.

This is the price of growing up, this is the heaviness of Imperial authority.

The birth of every Great Emperor title is accompanied by the deaths of millions, if not tens of millions.

Achieving success as a general already requires countless sacrifices, let alone as a Great Emperor?

No one can help Sif; she can only walk out on her own.

According to the ancient rules of another world, not a single member of Prince Feino's family could be spared, but this is Sussex, where the rules are different.

Sif's succession priority far exceeds that of Feino's children.

They are too young, completely unable to lead Sussex in seizing the right to survive amid the impending chaos.

Sentimentally, rationally, and legally, Sif should inherit the throne.

Of course, the precondition is that the Late Emperor is willing to decently step down.

If he, the elderly, is unwilling to step down, then it's truly a touching scene of a father's love and daughter's filial piety.

There is a standard answer to this question; Sif recognizing the correct choice is not difficult, the difficulty lies in how she faces this brutal reality.

After sitting dazed for a long time, Sif finally came back to her senses, softly asking:

"Roland, have I become bad, becoming more and more unfamiliar?"

Roland calmly said, "Your Majesty Sylph, the simple labels of good or bad only exist in children's fairy tales. In the adult world, there are no simple goods or bads. Politicians must certainly maintain their personal image, but leading the country onto the right track is more important."

Sif's spirits lifted.

Roland seldom used the name Sylph to address her. This time he used not only her formal name but also added a title, reminding her to recognize her identity.

Sif sat up straight, pulled out a handkerchief to wipe away the tears at the corner of her eyes, softly saying:

"Taking care of Brother's family and taking care of the country is my way of repaying him."

She didn't want to continue this heavy topic, so she smiled and asked: "When shall we go to the Oden Kingdom to borrow oak trees?"

"What do you think?" Roland asked with a smile.

Sif's spirits lifted, momentarily forgetting her demoted father and condemned brother, and began to ponder.

It was her favorite pop quiz session again, and she had to perform well.

After a moment of thought, she said somewhat sheepishly, "I think I need to verify some information."

Roland did not speak, seriously saluting to Sif, then went to find Alina.

He used this gesture to convey his sentiments to Sif.

This military operation was now Sif's to plan; he was only the Governor.

Alina was quickly summoned.

"Miss Fuchou, I need detailed information on the Oden Kingdom."

"Lord Count, please wait a moment."

Alina placed the prepared intelligence in front of Sif.

The Oden Kingdom is not large, with an area slightly smaller than the Three Overseas Provinces, and a population only half of that, but their people are tough, and their martial virtues robust. Before Sussex established the Empire, they even landed on the Sussex Continent to establish a colony.

After centuries of see-saw battles, they were driven out by the increasingly powerful Sussex people, but still managed to suppress the Sussex people at sea.

The naval battle over a hundred years ago completely snapped the backbone of the Oden Kingdom, also pushing the enmity between both sides to its peak.

Chapter 286: The Empress’s Decision (Part 2)

The Oden Kingdom has over seventy thousand standing troops, and they can mobilize more than two hundred thousand in total.

This is a tough nut to crack.

The Three Overseas Provinces have had several historical skirmishes with the Oden Kingdom, with victories and defeats on both sides.

It’s not easy to take on such a resilient nation.

Especially when it comes to seizing the Oak Forest, their hope for a comeback, it’s almost like taking their life.

Moreover, the Oden Kingdom boasts numerous formidable warriors.

They have several Berserker Leaders with strength equivalent to Tier Eight and even a semi-retired Commander Level Berserker, roughly equivalent to Tier Seven.

While their hard power is naturally far inferior to the Sussex Empire, they are by no means weaker than the Three Overseas Provinces.

The Sussex Empire's formidable warriors certainly outclass them, but these individuals have their own agendas and aren't completely obedient to the Imperial Family.

Especially the Tier Seven warriors, whose greatest ambition is to advance to Tier Six.

They rarely engage in national conflicts unless there are substantial benefits involved.

Sif spent at least an hour carefully going through all the information.

No one disturbed her.

Roland was waiting for her report, while Alina usually spoke little with Sif.

She adjusted her glasses and sat down in a seat Roland indicated, picking up the teacup in front of her, only to find it was Roland's teacup.

Though it showed no signs of having been drunk from, and was likely freshly brewed, it was still Roland's cup, a direct sip seemed odd, yet putting it down felt distant.

The teacup froze in Alina's hand, like a bomb she couldn't throw away.

Seeing her awkwardness, Roland poured a fresh cup and exchanged cups with her.

His gaze carried a hint of inquiry.

Alina merely nodded silently, indicating that everything was fine.

Since the Golden Kite Wanderers stationed in Hansa, they formed a small group, fully obedient to the management of Romeo, Reyno, and Elaine.

But they didn’t know that these three followed only Alina’s orders.

These over thirty thousand people hadn’t formally established a government in exile, but in practice, they already were one.

Worried about Roland’s opinion, Alina resolutely opposed establishing a government in exile.

Her nominal reason was not wanting to attract the attention of the Jin Yuan people, but she knew this was an excuse. Even without proclaiming a government in exile, the Jin Yuan people would still watch them.

She simply didn’t want Roland to be concerned.

Though they had an agreement, it was paramount to maintain the right position.

Roland was her greatest support for revenge, and she couldn’t afford to lose his trust, not even a little.

As Sif pondered deeply, she noticed Roland and Alina exchanging glances, a thought suddenly sparked through her mind, jolting her.

"I’ve got it!"

Roland and Alina simultaneously turned to look at her.

Sif calmly stated, "To win a war, you must strive to secure favorable timing, terrain, and unity of people."

This was Roland’s teaching, certainly correct.

Though her mind was still blank, to prevent Roland and Alina from secretly exchanging glances, Sif's thoughts raced.

Timing, timing? Got it!

She smiled and said, "First, we must strive for a favorable international environment and choose the most appropriate time to conduct operations."

"The Vladimir Empire is currently attacking the Boli Khanate; although Boli isn't strong, it's vast with a sparse population, and its people are all excellent nomads, not easy to annex. Recently, the Prudon Kingdom and the Wende Empire have also had several frictions and might engage in battle."

"The time to launch this war is before the Vladimir Empire annexes the Boli Khanate and while the Prudon Kingdom and the Wende Empire are at war!"

Roland smiled and asked, "What if they're merely in a standoff?"

Sif hesitated, wanting to say just wait, but felt that approach was too passive. Suddenly recalling Munina who had just left, she softly said:

"Have Munina's kin intervene to provoke conflict between their naval forces. They already have issues, all they need is a spark."

This time, it was Roland whose eyes lit up.

To come up with such a devious plan, Sif was indeed making rapid progress.

Although Roland had quite a few plans in mind, none were as straightforward as Sif's.

He didn't know Sif was currently in a thought storm, performing extraordinarily well.

Encouraged by Roland’s approval, Sif gained more confidence and continued, "Terrain is also on our side. Even though the Fourth Fleet is at only one-third strength, the Oden Kingdom Navy isn’t strong either. We can blockade the coast, feign a landing, and then breakthrough from behind to seize the Oak Forest directly."

"They definitely wouldn’t expect us to launch a land assault while reorganizing our new army."

Sif’s eyes glowed with confidence, and her air of command amidst the void had the semblance of a military strategist.

"In any case, with a maritime blockade and land advance happening simultaneously, the terrain is in our favor in this war."

After her confidence peak, Sif quickly calmed down.

Favorable timing and terrain are merely advantages, not decisive victories.

To achieve war objectives, it ultimately relies on people.

She squinted her eyes, furiously thinking.

Good news: the new army is very disciplined and well-equipped, but lacks combat experience.

Better news: The Oden Kingdom Army also lacks combat experience.

Sif was slightly disheartened; even if the fifty thousand new troops were greater than the seventy thousand Oden Kingdom Army, what if the opponent fully mobilized?

She once again turned her gaze to the map, observing intently.

Staring blankly at the map for about ten minutes while Roland and Alina continued their eye contact communication, her inspiration surged again.

"The Oden Kingdom isn’t weak, but the power of the Oden Imperial Family isn’t strong. We must strictly target the royal directly-controlled territory where the Oak Forest is located."

Unable to currently think of a good excuse to separate the Oden Imperial Family from the nobility, then...

"The justification will come in time; no war is paused because an excuse couldn’t be fabricated."

Sif’s words had a bit of a cunning tone, but Roland still gave her a thumbs up.

War excuses are always available; if you really want to fight, even a bottle of detergent will do.

The simplest reason could be "your trees possibly pose a threat to us."

The Vladimir Empire didn’t even bother thinking of an excuse to conquer the Boli Khanate, declaring war just because they fancied the land.

At least Sif was willing to make an effort to concoct a reason.

With Roland’s approval, Sif once again entered a state of boundless confidence, ideas surging forth.

"We don’t have the numbers, but our training and equipment are our advantage; that counts as unity of the people too."

"Not necessarily, who says we are outnumbered?"

Roland said with a smile, "As long as we can sever the roots of the Oden Imperial Family, and avoid annexing the land of the Oden Kingdom, those major nobles might even side with us."

Sif instantly understood.

If the war's goal was to annex the Oden Kingdom, the nobility would likely become alert and even stand with the King.

If it's just about cutting down the royal forest's oak trees, the nobles wouldn't find that motivating.

To protect the King's forest by confronting the world's most powerful nation? That's too loyal to the point of folly.

Roland's words unlocked Sif's thinking, and she quickly made more plans.

For instance, inviting Temple Warriors to join the crusade, inviting the Magic Association to send Anthony to deal with the opposing Commander Level Berserker, among others.

She even planned to hire mercenaries to fight as cannon fodder.

Listening to Sif's arrangements, Roland was pleased yet not overly surprised.

Sif had been growing quickly; as long as her thinking was correct, making sensible arrangements wasn't hard.

His pop quiz wasn't meant to present unsolvable problems beyond the syllabus.

Roland thought it normal, but Alina was wide-eyed.

Was this still the politically naive Sif she knew?

Her understanding of Sif remained at the naive and sweet princess stage.

Since transforming into Miss Fuchou, she and Sif had hardly communicated and naturally didn't know how fast the latter was progressing.

Seeing Sif filled with confidence, Alina was also moved.

One cannot dwell in the past and must look forward.

Her father was gone; she couldn't only seek revenge, she also had to grow and progress.

Watching Roland and Sif exchange glances, she suddenly made a decision.

"Sif, Roland, please let me join the fight."

If she wanted revenge, she still had a long way to go. Only by marching against the storm could she grow swiftly.

Chapter 287: Who Gave Them the Courage?

Standing at the window of the Governor's Mansion, watching the surging crowd in the square across the street, Roland was expressionless.

Today is the day of public execution.

Unlike the indiscriminate slaughter of other countries, none of the captured Samaritans were innocent.

Being hanged on the gallows, dying once was already a leniency for them.

After more than three months of interrogation, the evidence of their crimes was finally gathered, giving them the most impartial trial.

Roland was of course not concerned about them, but about the merchants from other countries.

Arresting and killing them might be satisfying, but it would only make the other merchants fearful.

If they could execute Samaritan merchants today, who would be next tomorrow?

This public trial was also a warning to everyone.

If you dare to trample on the law in his jurisdiction, the consequence is legal punishment and property confiscation.

Every time the judge announced someone's crimes, the crowd would erupt into a mountain-crashing and tsunami-like outcry.

In the past few days, quite a few ordinary people were sent to the seabed by the Fourth Fleet, but they chose the wrong employer, and could only meet the same fate.

Roland did not want to incite hatred, but hatred certainly existed.

Ordinary people's painful lives always need a way to vent; it can't be the Emperor and nobility taking the blame, right?

Thinking about the progress of civilization still being a long journey, Roland sighed lightly, returned to his chair, and closed his eyes for a moment of rest.

This hunting operation indeed earned a great deal.

It united the team's spirit, acquired substantial funds, and improved the business environment.

To earn so much of course comes with a price, which is becoming a deadly enemy of the Samaritans.

Roland was indifferent to this.

Compared to the likes of Sofia and the Goddess of Light, Samaritans were nothing.

Watching the enthusiastic crowd outside the window, Roland sighed inwardly; no wonder the descendants of the Magic Empire called them barbarians, Rodinians were still too far from civilization.

Not to mention compared to the Age of Gods, they were far inferior even compared to the peak of the Magic Empire.

Roland had seen civilization, but he wouldn’t be arrogant enough to think he could change the course of civilization by himself; he would only quietly push for the end of the barbaric era sooner.

While pondering the world and life philosophy, the door gently opened, and Lisa walked in with cut fruits and freshly squeezed Solano Juice.

"These are the first batch of ripe Solano Fruits, try them quickly."

Lisa said with a cheerful smile, "The teacher said this batch of Solano Fruits grew very well, almost reaching the average yield of the Magic Empire era."

"Reaching average yield isn’t considered high."

Roland grabbed a fresh apple and took a bite. It was tender and juicy with a good texture, but the taste was average, slightly sour.

Before the breeding technology boosted agricultural progress, agricultural products were indeed original and natural but tasted hard to describe.

It would take a long time for fruits to taste delicious.

Fortunately, the Solano Juice tasted great, lifting his mood considerably.

Seeing Lisa standing by waiting, Roland smiled and teased, "Sister, please sit, I dare not let Master Anthony's disciple stand while talking to me."

"Roland, I'm not anyone's disciple, I'm just... Lisa."

"Then you should sit even more, making sister stand is even more unreasonable."

Lisa liked hearing these words; she sat opposite Roland and shared the fruits with him.

"Roland, is there going to be a war?"

Since studying magic with Anthony, Lisa's time was completely consumed, so she resigned from the position of Chief Logistics Officer and focused on researching magic.

In her leisure time, she would thoughtfully study cooking.

Over the past few months, she gradually collected Five Star Approval Cards from Roland, Sif, Alina, Christine, Anthony, and others, and the background color of her Soul Card gradually turned golden.

Once she completed her strength accumulation, she could successfully advance.

After the baptism of life and death in volcanic lava, Lisa's physique had undergone a significant change.

The Phoenix Blood in her ring merged into her body, allowing her to completely transform.

If not for the merged Phoenix Blood, she definitely wouldn't have survived the volcanic eruption.

This made learning fire magic come easily to her.

Anthony felt she was somewhat specialized, not versatile enough, but she didn’t care.

Being specialized is just specialized; not everyone needs to pursue versatility. Excelling in one thing can also lead to transcendence.

For instance, in culinary arts.

Lisa devoted quite a bit of time every day to researching cooking, which caused Anthony deep distress.

Though he had advised her many times, her stubbornness made Anthony more troubled.

With the Old Mage sighing, Lisa continued advancing further on the path of specializing in the fire element.

Facing Lisa’s casual question, Roland smiled and nodded, "Yes, the Continental Pact has expired, it seems not many want to renew it."

"Four months ago, the Vladimir Empire invaded the Boli Khanate; two months ago, your homeland Talia erupted in civil war; last month, a conflict broke out between the Prudon Kingdom and the Wende Empire; half a month ago, factional strife erupted in the Jin Yuan Republic; a few days ago, large-scale unrest occurred in the Weimar Federation. And this is only the beginning."

Roland stood up, held a slender stick, and pointed out the locations of outbreak conflicts on the map.

Lisa watched for a while and exclaimed in surprise, "Oh no, they’re fighting all around us."

"It’s not that bad."

Roland said with a smile, "Fighting is good, when we clean up the Oden Kingdom no one will interfere."

Lisa’s gaze shifted towards the north of the map, noticing the Oden Kingdom, a trace of confusion in her eyes.

"Are they our enemies?"

"Not really, but there is a conflict of interest." Roland said smiling.

He pondered how to explain it to Lisa in simple terms, but Lisa took the initiative to let it go.

Chapter 288: Who Gave Them the Courage? (Part 2)

She smiled and shook her head, "Roland, don’t waste time, I don’t want to know these things either, but you must take me with you on the next expedition!"

"Of course, I really need your help." Roland had sparred with Lisa before and knew her current prowess was formidable, so there was naturally no reason to refuse.

Just as Lisa nodded happily, there was a knock on the door, two long and two short—a signal from Alina.

"Come in, the door’s not locked."

Roland was a bit surprised; Alina rarely came directly to report to him unless there was urgent intelligence.

Alina looked serious, and she hesitated to speak directly with Lisa present.

Lisa, understanding the situation, stood up voluntarily, "Roland, you two talk first, I’ll go prepare lunch."

"There’s no rush, Sis, there’s still time before lunch."

Roland insisted that Lisa stay, but she just smiled and shook her head.

"I know you trust me, but I’m really not interested in listening."

That made sense, as Lisa wasn’t interested in politics or military matters, often dozing off with vacant eyes during high-level meetings; there was no need to torture her.

As she left, Roland picked up a teacup, indicating that Alina should sit casually.

Alina didn’t stand on ceremony, sitting in the spot Lisa had just vacated.

The chair emanated warmth; it seemed Lisa had been sitting there for a while.

She suddenly awoke to her senses, smiling self-deprecatingly.

This occupational hazard was really troublesome; what difference did it make how long Lisa sat there, it should be Empress Sylph worrying about it, if at all.

Through close observation and divination, she saw a red line between Roland and Sif, growing deeper in color.

Such a deep red line—it’s either a hate that pits them against each other or a love that does the same.

Clearly, it was the latter.

Alina and Sif weren’t particularly close, so she naturally wouldn’t worry for Sif.

She even carried a bit of a watch-the-show mentality.

Because she also saw a red line between Roland and Lisa, though not as deep as with Sif, it far surpassed that of average couples.

It was such a thrilling spectacle; how could she miss it?

Seeing Alina silent and in a daze, Roland knew the matter was most likely severe, and he masked his shock with a sip of tea.

"What could be so serious that it has you zoning out like that?"

"Oh, it’s nothing. If my analysis is correct, the Oden Kingdom will launch a sudden attack on us within a week."

"Pfft!"

Roland spat a mouthful of tea onto the table, his eyes widening instantly.

"You’re not joking?"

"Of course not. Do I seem like someone who can’t measure the gravity of a situation?" Alina’s tone carried a hint of dissatisfaction.

Despite accepting the reality, Roland still found it hard to understand, "Alright, I’d like to understand the situation better. Who gave them the courage?"

Has the Oden Kingdom gone mad? On what grounds?

Alina placed the intelligence on the table and gave a concise summary, "The current king of the Oden Kingdom, Sven the Seventh, is a young and promising monarch. He studied earlier at the Prudon Military Academy and was friends with King William II of the Prudon Kingdom. Perhaps it’s the Prudon Kingdom that gave them the courage."

"King William II of Prudon believes he can stand on his father Frederick’s shoulders to achieve great feats and revive the Odin Empire, while Sven the Seventh admires Odin culture and is a spiritual Odin person."

Well now, even a spiritual Odin person?

Though he wanted to laugh, Roland knew it wasn't surprising. William II's father, Frederick, had quite a few admirers, even monarchs who disregarded their own national interests to show him favor.

The Great Emperor Odin had once ruled vast territories in central Rodinia, garnering many admirers.

Odin admiration is quite common on the Rodinia Continent.

Alina wasn't speaking nonsense; her intelligence analysis was meticulous.

The Oden Kingdom had stored up large amounts of grain and crafted enough armor, firearms, and cold weapons to outfit fifty thousand regular troops, and they had purchased war horses from northern nomads.

Not just that, they had also started felling oak trees to build warships.

Roland dismissed the previous points with little concern, but hearing about the oak trees being cut down, his temper flared instantly.

"Those are my trees, they just happen to grow there!"

Alina bit her lip, swallowing back the words of critique.

Roland really had no shame. If she were in a neutral position, she would surely have condemned him harshly, but she was in Roland's camp.

In a way, it's for the best; her father had been too concerned with honor, which ultimately cost him his life and political future.

Given the chance to wield state power, why diffuse it?

If it were up to her, she'd directly campaign for enthronement and declaration as emperor.

Father cherished his reputation too much. However, renown only benefits the victors; seeking empty honor without a complete victory is truly wrong.

Looking at Alina's collected intelligence, Roland fell into deep thought over the sand table before him.

He had read various military works, but that didn't mean he could magically become an excellent battle commander on the spot.

Though both he and Sif could talk at length about the overall strategic layout of a war, strategic deployment ultimately had to be implemented in specific battles.

Roland was severely lacking in qualified battle commanders.

Generals like Delong were excellent division and brigade-level commanders, but battle command exceeded their capabilities.

Roland commanding troops via keyboard was at the level of a martial temple adept, where even Zhao Kuo would have to stand aside in conversation, yet he had no hands-on experience commanding battles.

Sif... she might excel more at charging at the forefront holding high the White Rose banner.

Though reluctant to admit, Roland's only option was Christine.

As an exemplary figure of the High Tier Sanctuary, she was proficient in various military skills and had commanded battles involving tens of thousands of troops more than once.

Not only had she led Divine Court armies, but she had also guest-appeared as a battlefield commander in the Wende Empire.

Although Christine was a heretic and rather indifferent towards Roland, imminent issues call for flexibility, so she must be used.

With a battle commander on hand, Roland had much more confidence.

He felt somewhat indignant; could he truly be unaware of military tactics?

He discreetly placed enemy pieces on the sand table according to intelligence, then added his own troops, marking each with different weight values according to the simulation rules.

Just arranging all this had taken him twenty minutes.

Seeing the multicolored pieces placed across the sand table, Roland felt a headache coming on.

What happened to controlling the board with elegance, treating the battlefield as a chess board?

War was indeed too specialized.

Seeing Roland's serious demeanor and composed contemplation, Alina was somewhat surprised.

She had never heard of Roland having any experience leading troops in battle.

The largest operation he had been involved in was escorting Sif to the Three Overseas Provinces.

During that action, Roland indeed demonstrated remarkable adaptability, but General Bridges was in charge of the specific command, and it had little to do with Roland.

Could he really be a genius? A genius who, without systematic military training or battlefield practice, receives military advice from the Goddess in his dreams?

Just as Alina’s assessment of Roland was on the rise, Roland asked in a deep voice:

"Alina, can you help divine the fate of Sven the Seventh and key enemy figures?"

Alina: "..."

She was somewhat embarrassed, looking down as she softly spoken, "Sorry, there are too many involved in the course of war, I can’t do it."

"I’m not asking for a divination of the war’s outcome; we will surely win this one, no need to predict that. I just want to know their fate’s course, like how long they might live, where they will die, can you figure that out?"

Alina hesitated for a few seconds, then softly replied, "If we are sure to win, then certainly."

"Go ahead with the divination then."

Alina took out the Angel Card from her chest, turned over the Holy Throne Angel Card representing victory, placed it in the middle, and then arranged the other cards in sequence.

Once the outcome was confirmed as victory, it was much simpler to calculate.

Moments later, she raised her head with some surprise, murmuring puzzledly, "The fate visible through divination is very blurry, but Sven the Seventh’s fate course is exceptionally clear; he will die in the Dellan Earl’s Domain."

"Good, what about the others?"

"The fate of most is quite vague, but the renowned commander Gode Johnson’s fate is to die in the Oden Imperial Capital. It doesn’t make sense; since he can return to the capital, how could he die, perhaps from battlefield injuries?"

Chapter 289: When It Comes to Cunning, Roland Is the Master

This is Roland’s style of employing people: trust those you hire, and do not hire those you doubt.

He invited the Divine Court of Light to send a High Tier Sanctuary to act as a commander.

Since there is a need, of course, a High Tier Sanctuary must be invited to take charge.

The other two Sanctuaries were assigned to the military academy to serve as instructors, instructing the naive locals.

The best commander, Christine, naturally needs to be used on the cutting edge.

A carrier pigeon flew out from the Governor’s Mansion, summoning Christine to come.

One day later.

Christine, having traveled non-stop, arrived at the Governor’s Mansion, reporting to Roland.

"Lord of Light, High Tier Sanctuary Christine at your service."

"Knight of Light" is Roland’s title, and Christine used this way to remind Roland that she was not his subordinate, only temporarily following his orders because he is an Honorary Knight.

Roland paid no mind to these details; as long as she was willing to help, that was fine.

"Christine, you reached here in just one day; you must be exhausted. Rest first, and we can discuss matters tomorrow."

"I am not tired. It was the horse that was running, not me." Christine's tone was indifferent, with a sense of aloofness that kept people at arm's length.

Roland teased with a smile: "Your sweat is dripping down your cheeks, yet you say you're not tired?"

"Lord of Light, I am not playing games with you. We are in a state of alert; it could be understood that the war has already started."

Looking at Christine's serious expression, Roland's smile gradually faded.

She truly deserves the title of the best High Tier Sanctuary; her dedication already far surpasses the generals of the Governor's Territory.

It's a pity this capable commander belongs to someone else.

Christine accepted the intelligence Roland handed over and also looked at the war map Roland had set up.

Seeing her focused expression, Roland asked somewhat self-consciously: "Is the setup problematic?"

"There are minor flaws, but they do not affect the overall situation; the placement is fine."

Christine's lips curled into a slight smile, "Since the Lord of Light understands military command, discussing some matters becomes much easier."

"Now you will command the Governor's Territory army, and I will command the Oden Kingdom army; we will conduct a simulation."

Hearing Christine's praise, Roland was instantly drenched in sweat.

He preferred to avoid military simulations altogether.

His entire understanding of military simulations only extended to the basic rules.

This feeling was akin to a novice who just learned the rules of chess having to go up against an international grandmaster.

It would start evenly matched, only to lead to being overwhelmingly crushed.

"Lord of Light, no need to be constrained; it is just a simulation."

With the conversation at this point, retreating further would be somewhat impolite.

Roland could only brace himself and proceed.

Yet some matters cannot be faked; after only a few steps, Christine realized Roland’s level.

In less than half an hour, Roland was completely defeated.

He could not even worry about wiping his sweat as "victory reports" kept coming in from all fronts, leaving him numb.

He felt a bit frustrated, but fortunately, Christine was not here to pick faults; she said softly:

"According to the standard for beginners, your response was already quite excellent."

"My earlier strategies were the best solutions; now let’s switch roles, and you try attacking with the tactics I used earlier."

Copying homework, is it? That’s simple enough.

With super memory, Roland remembered every move Christine made.

He launched an attack with full confidence.

No wonder it was a High Tier Sanctuary's offensive strategy, as sharp as a fierce storm.

Christine advanced and retreated, Christine found herself in a quandary, Christine was driven into a corner.

Christine launched a counterattack!

As Roland commanded the Oden Kingdom army to advance further, even reaching Hansa City where the Governor's Mansion is located, Christine launched a counterattack.

The Oden Kingdom army's line was stretched too thin.

Insufficient logistical support greatly reduced the army's morale and fighting strength.

Yet unbeknownst to them, Christine had completed battlefield deployment, using city defenses to wear down the Oden military's morale and launching a counterattack, dividing and encircling the enemy.

As the counterattack continued, the final battle line stalemated 170 kilometers within Oden Kingdom's territory.

This was the logistical limit of the Governor's army.

If they continued the chase, the logistically strained Governor's army would also lose morale and combat effectiveness, retracing the path Oden Kingdom took.

Christine concluded with a soft sigh.

"Pity, this is our counterattack limit, the northern part of the Oak Forest. To annihilate the Oden Kingdom, we would have to wait for the enemy to make a foolish move."

"This is enough!"

Upon hearing Oak Forest, Roland’s eyes lit up.

His preparation for war was aimed at this forest.

The Oden Kingdom’s history is no shorter than the Sussex Empire’s; it is a nation with deep roots, making it not so easy to eradicate them.

But having the defeated party cede some lumber is simple.

Christine curiously asked: "You’re waging war for this forest?"

She suddenly understood the use of oak and fully grasped Roland’s ambition.

She could neither evaluate nor wanted to evaluate Roland’s ambition.

She only wanted to complete her task soon and use a grand victory to gain leverage for her election as a Saintess.

With a solemn look, Roland said to Christine: "Christine Sanctuary, I wish to appoint you as the temporary Commander in Chief of my army, granting you the temporary military rank of Lieutenant General."

The previous highest rank in the Governor’s Territory was Vice Admiral. Without the rank of Lieutenant General, it would be impossible to command respect from those veteran soldiers.

Christine did not hesitate for a moment, saluting Roland.

"At your command, Lord of Light."

"Christine, since you are temporarily joining my army, let us avoid religious titles; you may call me Governor or Roland."

"This... at your command, Lord Governor!"

Christine certainly understood what concerned Roland. The mainstream faith in the Sussex Empire is Fengrao.

There is no issue with Fengrao Believers employing the Holy Hall of Light for warfare, but commanding Temple Warriors and the Sanctuary long-term under the guise of a Knight of Light would be inappropriate.

With the commander’s issue resolved, Roland’s mind opened up instantly, smiling as he said:

"Perhaps we can find a way to make the enemy drop their guard and advance recklessly, effectively reducing our army’s casualties."

"Do you have a way?"

Christine thought Roland might be overthinking it.

While Sven the Seventh may look down on young people who succeed through connections, the battlefield is ruthless; once engaged, he will surely take matters seriously.

Deceiving the enemy is not easy.

Just as Christine was pondering hard, Roland said with a smile: "A celebration plus an invitation will be sufficient."

"I plan to use the guise of Samaria's illegal merchants falling out to host a banquet for the Central Mansion officials and merchants from around the world, even inviting representatives from Oden Kingdom and other countries to the evening banquet."

Christine's eyes lit up.

Facing an army whose commander in chief is holding a banquet celebration in their stronghold, what would the Oden Kingdom think?

They would surely see it as an unmissable opportunity, then swiftly charge out.

This was the best opportunity to defeat the Oden Kingdom with minimal losses.

This was Roland, always so adept at playing sneakily.

Christine silently thought.

Chapter 290: Disguised as Merchants for a Surprise Attack? Courting Death!

Northern border of the Hansa Province, Oro Town.

This is a military fortress and a crucial checkpoint to fend off northern invasions.

Since Roland took over the Three Overseas Provinces, the garrison here has changed twice and is now manned by the New Guard Team.

The current station in Oro Town is the integrated infantry twenty-ninth battalion, primarily composed of coal miners from the Hansa Province.

These miners became qualified firearms soldiers after receiving simple but rigorous military training. Although their combat skills are somewhat lacking, their discipline and morale are exceptionally high.

Compared to the coal mines which could collapse at any moment, serving under the Governor not only offers better treatment and higher social status but the military uniforms are also particularly stylish.

Roland, adhering to the design concept of a certain artist, invited professional fashion designers to make the military uniforms extraordinarily stylish. Young men reluctant to take them off and young women dazzled upon seeing them.

The commander of the twenty-ninth battalion, Jacobs, was a Silver Knight from the original White Rose Knight Order. While retaining the Silver Knight title, he was also promoted to the rank of army major.

Standing on the watchtower of Oro Town, Major Jacobs raised his binoculars, his hawk-like sharp eyes fixed on the northern mountain pass.

The Suyige Hills form a natural border between the Oden Kingdom and the Hansa Province, where patrols from both sides often meet, occasionally exchanging greetings and even local specialties.

Though the upper echelons of the Oden Kingdom held deep hatred for the Sussex who crushed the kingdom’s navy a century ago, exchanges among the people were quite frequent.

Hatred belongs to the top tier; what does it have to do with ordinary people?

The Oden Kingdom is geographically small, requiring many industrial products to be imported from the Hansa Province, with merchant caravans frequently passing through the Su Yige Pass to trade goods.

However, just a few days ago, Jacobs received a warning from the Hansa Province.

"Stay alert!"

It was a small, vague piece of paper with scrawled handwriting, clearly written haphazardly with an unskilled left hand.

But Jacobs dared not neglect it.

The paper was the Knight Order's office paper, though masked, it was still apparent.

This warning was meant to alert him to be vigilant, yet without exposing anything.

In Oro Town, who else can be on guard against but the Oden people?

However, three days passed after receiving the note without a hint of disturbance.

Every day, caravans came from the Oden Kingdom.

For example, right now, a large caravan was slowly approaching.

Jacobs exhaled a long breath, putting down the binoculars, planning to notify his subordinates to prepare for reception.

This caravan was large, moving too slowly, maybe even requiring an extension on the closing time of the city gates.

The caravan consisted of at least seven to eight hundred people, even more than the town's garrison. Such caravans often bore significant commercial tasks and had to be taken seriously.

Jacobs took only two steps before stopping warily.

Wait, recent caravans to the Oden Kingdom were only about a hundred people. How could such a large caravan suddenly appear here? Does the Oden Kingdom's trade need this much?

A story flashed through his mind, about a super macho man who had his home robbed by people disguised as a caravan, leading to their defeat in battle.

This was a lesson taught by Governor Roland, warning them to stay vigilant at all times and scrutinize any anomalies.

Disguising soldiers as merchants was a very despicable act but highly effective.

Jacobs grabbed his binoculars, continuing his surveillance, instantly drawing a cold breath.

Are these damn merchants? Where in a caravan are there burly men on average, without a single fat person?

It's well known that merchants enjoy good living conditions; wine, meat, and women are their main entertainments, so many merchants tend to grow sideways.

In an era where health education is yet to be popularized, at least three out of ten merchants are fat.

In a caravan of six or seven hundred, even if the obesity rate is low, there should be at least a dozen fat people.

But this caravan had none at all.

Jacobs snapped his fingers, called the messenger, and ordered his subordinates to prepare.

Knowing the suspicious nature of the caravan, a trap could be set, like the Governor's hunting operation.

A faint smile touched the corner of Jacobs' lips.

Half an hour later, this caravan, moving noticeably faster than average, closed in on the already closed gates of Oro Town.

The caravan leader waved a small white flag, signaling they were unarmed, and loudly called for entry from the soldiers on the city wall.

"The gates are closed. Please, members of the Rusong Commerce Association, come back tomorrow morning."

"Hey, buddy, this is the top-grade pine wine ordered for the celebration by your Governor. It must be delivered quickly. I have a letter of introduction from the Governor's Mansion, so I implore your leniency."

The squad leader on the wall hesitated before asking the caravan to send the letter of introduction to the gate.

The caravan had no idea that this "squad leader" was actually Jacobs from the garrison camp.

Nor did they know that Jacobs had already discerned the authenticity of the letter.

After a silent moment, an unassured voice came from above the gate, "The city's reception capacity is limited. Please enter the city in batches. The first batch may include two hundred people."

The caravan leader Rusong couldn't help but lower his hat brim to hide his smile.

Two hundred people were enough.

The opposing side was unprepared, and two hundred could easily cooperate to seize the city.

He smiled and replied, "At your command, officer!"

He called for two hundred people, secretly armed, to slowly enter through the open gate.