Empress 291

Chapter 291: Disguised as Merchants for a Surprise Attack? Courting Death! (Part 2)

The two hundred people entering the city walked on the pitch-black streets, with no lights around, only the sound of footsteps echoing on the street.

The eerie silence was unsettling.

The outpost leader suspiciously scanned the surroundings and suddenly felt a chilling sensation along his back.

Something was off! Although Oro Town was a small border town, it was still an important trade node. How could there be no lights at night? There's an ambush!

He drew his pistol, ready to fire a shot to alert others, when a flying knife whizzed toward him.

He screamed in agony, his wrist severed, as the pistol and hand hit the ground simultaneously.

Accompanying his scream, orderly gunfire erupted around him, followed by intense explosions.

The dull sound of the city gates closing pronounced the death sentence for those two hundred men.

Despite their strenuous resistance, it was futile against the defender's superior firepower, favorable terrain, and pre-arranged ambush.

The ambush quickly devolved into a massacre.

After several rounds of dense gunfire, only sporadic screams and pleas for mercy echoed from within the city.

Outside the city, Mr. Rusong, the guild leader, appeared ashen. He looked up at the Oro Town walls and reprimanded, "We're transporting pine wine for Lord Governor, you..."

His response was a barrage of furious gunfire.

Jacobs gazed coldly at the outraged Rusong, his intent to kill overwhelming.

If he hadn't stayed vigilant, if he hadn't observed the mountain pass intensely every day, if not for that little warning note, things would have been drastically different.

The battle inside the city was indeed one-sided, yet the ambushed enemies demonstrated high combat skills, managing to counterattack and causing casualties among the defenders, despite their total collapse.

If they had broken through, it would have been the twenty-ninth garrison battalion being slaughtered.

The thought of it sent a shiver down his spine.

Seeing the situation exposed, Chairman Rusong dared not waste time. Infuriated, he fired a shot at the city wall before hastily retreating.

He cursed the commander's shamelessness through gritted teeth.

He needed to leave immediately, to wait for the main force to arrive.

Once the artillery arrived, the small Oro Town could naturally be breached, only he would have to face the wrath of His Majesty the King.

The thought made his scalp tingle with anxiety and endless regret.

He should not have concocted such a reckless idea of a surprise attack, not only costing over two hundred men but gravely damaging the army's morale and putting him in a dilemma.

Rusong regretted so much he wished he were dead, yet soon, he would regret even more.

He wasn't aware of someone aiming a rifle at him, not having eyes on the back of his head.

Unlike the flintlock firearms of the era, where hitting depended entirely on faith, Jacobs wielded a hand-crafted bolt-action rifle.

Designed with blueprints provided by Roland, the parts were manually assembled by Hansa's top blacksmiths, with Norton adjusting the shooting accuracy, it was a limited-edition bolt-action rifle reminiscent of the M1841.

Though the reloading speed and shooting accuracy were much inferior to a proper bolt-action rifle, the effective range only four hundred meters and couldn't be mass-produced, it was sufficient.

Jacobs' lips faintly curled as he silently prayed and pulled the trigger.

The bullet flew across nearly two hundred meters, accurately hitting the back of Rusong's head.

In an era before bulletproof helmets were developed, even a crude rifle bullet was lethal enough.

"Bang!"

Rusong's final sensation was a heavy blow to his head before everything went dark, and he fell off his horse.

Staring blankly at the sky, his mind wandered. He was skilled in body techniques, adept with firearms, and proficient in military command, a standout among young officers in the Oden Kingdom, known as the Bear Hunter.

Yet it all ended here.

People did not realize what the bullet from two hundred meters away meant, only that Rusong had terrible luck.

Jacobs blew on the smoking barrel, silently thanking Governor Roland for gifting him the rifle.

He held the rifle like a beloved and issued a loud command.

After repelling the enemy attack, Oro Town lit the beacons to alert the rear. As the beacons were lit, two carrier pigeons and a rider on a fast horse also headed toward Hansa City to report the news.

After issuing all instructions, Jacobs gathered his officers for an emergency military meeting to formulate strategies.

Even though they won, he did not relax.

Clearly, the enemy attacking tonight was just the vanguard, a large main force would likely follow.

The Oden Kingdom was not considered a top nation, yet it was brave and battle-hardened. Even if Oro Town were a fortress, it couldn't withstand the enemy's main force.

The furious enemy might even massacre the town.

The Oden people's ancestors were pirates, often massacring cities upon capturing them, displaying severed heads outside the next city to intimidate defenders.

To hold or to flee, that is the question...

Right?

In the military meeting, nearly all officers opposed abandoning the city and fleeing.

The youngest lieutenant, who was a naive youth half a year ago and used to be a hunter, stood up, loudly proclaiming:

"Our military discipline is strict. Abandoning positions without orders is a capital offense, and it leads to confiscation of all family property, and children cannot receive compulsory education, while direct relatives cannot hold public office. We would die in battle instead of fleeing and bringing disaster to our family."

Jacobs gestured the young officer to sit down expressionlessly.

The handsome young man sitting next to the young officer teased with a smile: "Tom, you don't even have a girlfriend, and yet you care about family?"

Blushing, the youth addressed as Tom retorted loudly: "Even without a girlfriend, I have parents and a brother. Who says I don't have family?"

Jacobs raised a hand to stop the officers from laughing, speaking gravely:

"Tom's suggestion is to hold to the end, what does everyone else say?"

The young officer who had just teased Tom stood up, saluted Jacobs, and said aloud:

"Captain, we should prepare for both plans. First, ensure to hold Oro Town before the enemy artillery arrives. Oro Town is the gateway to the Hansa Plain. If it falls, Lord Governor will have to fight in Hansa City."

After pausing, he continued, "Secondly, we must evacuate the residents ahead of time, the elderly and children retreat inland, while young men are urgently drafted, and grown women are responsible for logistics. This way, we supplement defense forces and prepare for subsequent evacuation."

"Evacuation?"

"Jerry, what nonsense are you spouting? You're shaking our morale, we can't flee without a fight!"

These words quickly provoked dissatisfaction among the other officers, and had Jacobs not allowed him to continue, others would have beaten him by now.

"We've asked for reinforcements, and they should arrive within three days, so we must hold for at least three days. If no reinforcements appear after three days, then it's time to break out."

Silence filled the meeting room.

Jerry was not wrong; if there were no reinforcements, breaking out wouldn't violate military regulation. However, would there still be an opportunity to break out by then?

There were only over a hundred warhorses in the city. Attempting to sneak away without riding showed too little regard for the enemy, so the number of people who could break out was equal to the horses' count.

Jerry implied that over 60% casualties were required before breaking through.

No one asked who could ride and break out then.

Guns and artillery would provide the answer; whoever survived could leave.

Jacobs stood up, coldly saying: "Tomorrow morning, evacuate the old and young, unify control of the warhorses, and no one is allowed to use them without my order."

"I'll stand and fight with you until the final victory. Meeting adjourned! Tom, stay behind."

Everyone dispersed, leaving only the youngest officer behind.

Looking at the young man’s fluffy beard, Jacobs asked gravely: "Tom, how old are you?"

"Captain, I’m eighteen!"

"Bullshit!" Jacobs abruptly interrupted his lie.

"Seventeen... I’ll turn seventeen by the end of the year!"

Tom argued defiantly, eyes wide and puffed, saying, "Count Sif is only a few months older than me, she’s gaining merits for the Empire, why can’t I?"

"Do you have the confidence to accomplish any mission?" Jacobs used a poor tactic to incite him.

"Of course I do!" Tom blushed, rage rising.

"You will ride my horse and set off overnight to find reinforcements."

"Captain, you’re looking down on me!" Tom, though young, was not foolish, realizing Jacobs was finding a way for his safe retreat.

Jacobs raised his right hand, his voice icy, "Colonel Jes’s light cavalry is stationed in the northern Hansa Plain, but they frequently change camps; you must find Colonel Jes within a day and bring reinforcements to save us. Can you guarantee to complete the mission?"

Tom hesitated for a second before sharply straightening himself and saluting Jacobs.

Watching the slender shoulders and youthful back of the young lieutenant, a hint of a smile spread on Jacobs’ lips.

Though the others were young, they were all married, only you kid hadn’t tied the knot yet.

Chapter 292: Even Barbarians Dare Covet the Rose?

Hansa City, Governor's Mansion, Banquet Hall.

The welcoming banquet was held with grandeur.

Attending the banquet were the main officials of the Governor's Territory, senior officers of the Fourth Fleet and officers of the newly formed garrison troops in the Governor's Territory, along with distinguished guests from various fields.

Most of these guests were elites from the business community.

Although the last Hunting Operation targeted only the Samaritan Merchants, making merchants from other countries cheer, it left them deeply anxious in its aftermath.

This time, it was the Samaritan Merchants, who will it be next? In these times, how many can withstand strict scrutiny when doing business to earn money?

Indeed, there are honest merchants, but most have been outcompeted and gone bankrupt.

The merchants present generally make money based on their abilities, but there's always some unsavory element involved.

They are truly afraid of being cleared out, but considering the terrifying naval power of the Fourth Fleet, they dare not flee, enduring great torment during this period.

This invitation to the welcoming banquet organized by Empress Sylph slightly eased the anxious merchants.

They eagerly wanted to know the Empress's attitude towards merchants.

Are they to be raised like pigs for slaughter, or would it be a mutual benefit, or a one-sided exploitation?

The merchants' demands are not high; they are here to make money. As long as they aren't deprived of both their money and their lives, anything is negotiable.

The banquet was lavish, and the musical and dance performances were impressive, with Count Sif even taking the stage to present a melodious song to everyone.

Listening to the song, some merchants started to discern the underlying message.

This song is a folk tune from the distant East, telling the story of a law-abiding merchant and forty thieves.

The song is humorous and witty, with the story concluding with the demise of the thieves in a cave.

The Sassanid Merchants, familiar with this story, smiled knowingly.

Count Sif, representing the Empress, was signaling that as long as they roughly comply with the laws and refrain from misconduct, Hansa offers plenty of opportunities for profit.

Sassanid Merchants, whose footprints span the globe, are not as famous or as wealthy as the Samaritan Merchants primarily because they adhere to taboos.

Their business philosophy contrasts distinctly with that of the Samaritans, as they prefer to establish good relations with trading partners and always leave room for profit so that everyone gains.

If the Empress keeps her word, this would be their version of things.

The Talia Merchants also understood the message.

They were slightly disappointed but not entirely so.

If illegal profit can be made, Talia Merchants would not adhere to the law. Their disregard for the law can rival that of the Samaritans.

However, their business philosophy is flexible and they adapt to local customs.

If their trade partners are in a country with strict laws, they will be more law-abiding than anyone. If their trade partners are in a lawlessly chaotic zone, they will be more uninhibited than anyone.

In Empress Sylph's Territory, of course, they must conduct business lawfully.

Although this might impact their profits, making less money is better than making none at all.

Exchanging glances, the Talia Merchants decided that Hansa could become a trade partner and including Hansa in their trade routes was at least worth trying.

Most merchants resolved to increase their investment in the Hansa Region.

They might not fully trust Roland, but since this is the Empress's promise, it is worth trusting.

Understanding the message conveyed by Sif made the banquet much more pleasant.

The merchant representatives joyously toasted the Governor and Count.

The Empress sat high above, her face stern and silent, and they dared not act presumptuously.

Representatives from countries big and small, including the Jin Yuan Kingdom, Weimar Federation, Prudon Kingdom, and Oden Kingdom, also attended the banquet.

Hansa is not the Empire's capital, so there are no embassies, but as it is where the Empress's Palace is located, there are consulates. These consular representatives extended the best wishes of their

governments to Empress Sylph, congratulating her on rectifying the business environment and cracking down on illegal merchants.

Although they congratulated her, some did so sincerely, while others did so with a sarcastic tone.

With an expressionless face, the Magic Mirror playing Sylph responded politely. The real Sif, playing Count, sitting beside her, listened with some discomfort.

This is understandable; you can't expect everyone to be your friend unless you're gold.

The Mirror Empress raised her wine glass to accept the toast from the Jin Yuan Kingdom representative, merely wetting her lips without taking a sip.

She didn't even want to give polite acknowledgment to "blessings" filled with ill intentions.

As Sif sat with a stern face, the Oden Kingdom's consul, Glen Shire, stood up, holding his wine glass, and approached Empress Sylph.

Roland and Sif exchanged a glance—a significant event was approaching.

Just before the banquet began, they had received intelligence from Alina, revealing that the Oden Kingdom Army's surprise attack on Oro Town failed, and in their embarrassment, their organized assault failed again, forcing them to await reinforcements from the artillery units.

The advance of the Oden Kingdom was swift, with the artillery arriving two days later. However, before they could bombard Oro Town, Jes' light cavalry arrived.

Cavalry against artillery resulted in a massacre.

Jes' cavalry bypassed the infantry formations and charged directly at the artillery in the rear, killing hundreds and destroying over seventy cannons by throwing bombs, completely shattering the Oden Kingdom's offensive.

After the great victory at Oro Town, Roland decisively ordered a nighttime evacuation.

Defending the border can only repel the enemy but cannot annihilate them.

It’s better to cut off one finger than to injure all of them; only through extermination battles can the enemy be truly hurt.

Roland let the enemies come in, frustrated their momentum, and then surrounded and exterminated them.

This way, he could eliminate the most enemies with the least cost and complete his logging task.

He was somewhat curious about what the representative of the Oden Kingdom intended to say. Could it be a declaration of war?

Under his watchful gaze, the representative of the Oden Kingdom toasted to Mirror Empress Sylph, and then took out a sealed letter.

"This is a personal letter from His Majesty Sven for you."

Roland and Sif were both a bit surprised.

The war had already begun, what use was a personal letter now? Did Sven the Seventh think he had the upper hand and wanted to take the opportunity to extort?

He couldn’t be that foolish.

Sylph opened the personal letter, quickly skimmed through it, and was stunned for a full five seconds. She asked incredulously:

"Mr. Glen Shire, does your king mean for me to marry him and then merge our two countries?"

"Yes."

"What if I disagree?"

The Magic Mirror's tone was icy, but her expression towards Sif showed a hint of pleasure, completely ignoring how displeased Sif's face looked.

"Then it would be an offense to our country, which means war."

This arrogant statement was akin to Yelang declaring war on the Great Han and left Roland stunned on the spot.

A king seeking marriage with a foreign empress was quite normal; it was impolite but at least legitimate diplomacy.

Launching a war after a failed proposal, while disgraceful-sounding, has happened numerous times in history and is reluctantly considered normal.

But from where did the Oden Kingdom have the confidence to wage war against the Sussex Empire?

This arrogant behavior from Oden was truly absurd.

Roland did not rage; instead, he furrowed his brows with caution. This was too abnormal, there was likely a conspiracy behind it.

While he was pondering, Sif was not pleased.

Under the table, she pinched Roland's hand ferociously, almost tearing off a piece of flesh.

She was indeed very angry; how could Roland not lose his temper over such a disgraceful act?

Sif’s anger awakened Roland.

Whatever conspiracy might be there, this impertinent person had to pay the price now, immediately!

He turned his hand over and held Sif’s hand, writing two words.

Refuse, kill.

Sif showed a satisfied smile; this was what her Guardian Knight was supposed to say.

She immediately passed on the command to the Magic Mirror.

Sylph snorted coldly and said icily: "Both my body and soul belong to Sussex, including my marriage. The savages from the wilderness think they can reach higher, they are delusional."

The Empress’s refusal, which was totally out of character for her usually elegant and icy image, nevertheless thrilled the Sussex people present.

Where did these country bumpkins think they could lay a finger on the Empire’s White Rose?

Her Majesty the Empress’s meaning was clear, she would only marry a Sussex person.

Well, they also had...

Well, they had no chance at all. Her Majesty the Empress already had Governor Roland.

Damned, then let them bless the couple instead.

While the emotions of the young Sussex people were on a roller coaster, Oden's envoy Glen Shire replied calmly:

"In that case, I, on behalf of His Majesty the King, declare war on your nation. The reasons for the declaration of war are the insulting rejection of marriage alliance and the naval battle of one hundred and fifty-three years ago."

The Mirror Empress cast her gaze towards Sif and slowly asked:

"Count, how should we deal with enemies?"

"Kill!"

After asking and answering herself, Sif grabbed the first segment of a three-part Long Spear from beneath the table and threw it out.

"Pfft!"

The spear point pierced through Glen Shire's chest, killing the unlucky fool on the spot.

Sif walked to the center of the hall, pulled out the spear tip, took out a piece of letter paper, and dipped it in Glen Shire's blood, writing a flamboyant line.

"Crown Prince and Acting Emperor Sylph Sussex York, ready for battle."

She grabbed the letter paper and flung it towards Glen Shire's deputy, calmly saying:

"Get lost!"

Chapter 293: Sacrificial Pawn?

Helentz Castle.

With the fall of Oro Town and other places, this became the frontline for the Three Overseas Provinces to resist the Oden Kingdom Army.

From the Suyige Hills to Hansa City, there are no natural defenses, just a vast plain.

Helentz Castle is not a strong fortress, but it is backed by the Jill Canal, allowing it to receive supplies via water, and serves as the last barrier to Hansa City.

Standing atop Helentz Castle, Jacobs, who had just been promoted to Army Lieutenant Colonel and Golden Knight, watched the enemy army setting up camps outside the city with a heavy heart.

The order he received was to hold the line for a week and then retreat when the opportunity arose.

This order seemed both difficult and challenging, and he dared not show the slightest neglect.

Just yesterday, the Oden Kingdom's infantry launched an attack under the cover of a few cannons. What should have been a probing attack turned into a fierce assault as the casualties mounted, stirring the Oden warriors' fighting spirit, leading them to storm the walls twice.

The defending forces paid a high price to push all enemies back down.

In yesterday's battle, the defending forces lost more than two hundred soldiers, while the attackers lost seven to eight hundred.

Though the casualties ratio favored the defenders, the outcome of war is never decided by KDA numbers. If the Oden Kingdom's flag were to fly above Helentz Castle's city hall, what would the casualty ratio mean?

Jacobs was well aware that Hansa City needed time, and Governor Roland needed time.

Helentz Castle was the wedge to gain that time.

There were no other fortresses on the Northern Plains to block the enemy; he had to hold firm.

Thinking of this order, Jacobs couldn't help but glance back towards Hansa City.

More than a hundred kilometers of plain—large forces could arrive in three days.

The Governor wanted him to hold for a week; combined with the advancing speed of the Oden Kingdom's army, they could only gain ten days at most.

Is it really enough?

Jacobs was not optimistic.

He greatly admired Governor Roland; over the past six months, the Governor, through various strategies, secured a foundation for overseas development for the Empress and united the Three Overseas Provinces with astonishing cohesion.

However, the time given to them was still too short.

Given another six months, the new army would gain combat power, and they would not fear even if the entire Oden Kingdom army mobilized.

Jacobs fully understood Roland's decision to dissolve the old army and form a new one. He admired Roland's courage to uproot the past and believed his strategy was absolutely correct.

Those old veterans from the Three Provinces should indeed be cleared out.

If nothing unexpected happened, the Governor would surely establish a powerful army within a year.

However, unexpected events had indeed occurred.

Jacobs sighed inwardly. He didn't understand high-level politics and didn't want to; he just wanted to complete the task given by the Governor.

Governor Roland needed half a year, which he couldn't provide, but a week was too short.

He aimed to hold the Oden Kingdom Army back here for at least half a month or even a month!

If the war could be dragged into the rainy season here, the muddy roads would significantly slow down the Oden Kingdom's advance, eventually forcing their retreat.

That might be the only way to achieve the greatest victory with the smallest cost.

Jacobs lowered his head, looking at the two silver stars on his collar, feeling the hot blood coursing through his veins.

This uniform is really beautiful, much nicer than the knight's attire.

The two silvered stars represented his Lieutenant Colonel rank.

Thinking of his old father, who retired due to injury after only reaching Major in the Imperial Army, he wore a slight smile.

If his father could see the two silver stars on his collar, he would be overjoyed.

No, it should be three silver stars.

According to Governor Roland's established rules, military personnel who died in the line of difficult duty would be posthumously awarded one rank higher and receive higher compensation.

Jacobs chuckled to himself.

Sadly, he wouldn't receive the golden star representing Brigadier General.

He had to remain on the frontline to inspire the warriors' morale, to make them believe reinforcements would save them.

He could vaguely guess there might be reinforcements, but not many.

Helentz Castle looked like a pawn to be sacrificed.

This was not a mere guess; the Governor had mentioned it in a personal letter to him.

Governor Roland clearly told him, holding Helentz Castle as long as possible was to buy time for Hansa City's defense setup, with the final showdown planned there.

The Governor instructed him to hold as long as possible under minimizing sacrifice, then break out at the right time.

It was a very idealistic mission.

Minimizing sacrifice and holding longer were two sides of a coin, difficult to achieve both simultaneously.

He knew the Governor's real intention was for him to hold firm, but without explicitly asking him to perish, revealing just enough of the strategic intent for him to decide.

The Empress’s decision was to accumulate strength and consolidate power in the Three Overseas Provinces.

The Governor’s decision was a final showdown in Hansa City with the Oden Kingdom.

His decision was to fight to the death to buy time.

If no one had told him of this battle’s significance and difficulty, only using vague words to encourage him, he would have retreated on the seventh day.

But the Governor was very forthright and didn’t force him to sacrifice.

He could only repay this sincerity with his life and loyalty.

If he performed admirably, the Governor and the Empress would not only posthumously award him a Colonel rank but also grant him the title of Imperial Knight.

It might be useless to him, but his child could inherit it.

In that case, it wouldn’t be a futile sacrifice.

As Jacobs calmly observed the enemy positions, a relaxed voice came from behind him.

Chapter 294: Sacrificial Pawn? (Part 2)

"Commander, the eastern city wall has been reinforced."

No need to turn around to know it’s the youngest captain, Tom.

During the defense of Oro Town, this kid actually found Jes’s light cavalry unit and led the unit in a counterattack, earning great merit for the victory in Oro Town, and was exceptionally promoted to captain.

Promoted to captain before turning seventeen, and praised across the entire army, his future is undoubtedly bright.

Jacobs switched to a smiling face, turning around to see not only Tom but also the young officer Jerry, who is now a Major and the Deputy Commander of the temporary garrison regiment at Helentz Castle.

Jerry didn’t claim credit, just made a "mission accomplished" gesture to Jacobs.

Looking at Tom’s cheerful smile and Jerry’s calm expression tinged with some concern, Jacobs smiled and asked:

"Is there anything you need? If it’s just to report mission completion, there’s no need to come together."

Tom chuckled, softly asking: "Commander, once we win this battle, do you think I can earn a Silver Star?"

"You’re really dreaming. Even if you earn a lot of merit, Lord Governor can’t promote you two ranks in just one month; others would be discontent."

Jacobs smiled teasingly: "What, eager to go home and impress the girl you fancy?"

"No such thing!"

Tom’s face turned red, but he couldn’t help but mutter: "But a Silver Star paired with a high-ranking officer uniform is really too cool."

Jacobs laughed heartily, patting the boy’s shoulder, "Alright then, live well, as long as you’re alive, you can continue to earn merits."

Encouraged by Jacobs, Tom jumped joyfully before darting away like the wind after consulting on a few matters.

Jerry didn’t leave, hesitating, unsure how to start.

Jacobs also dropped the smile and calmly asked: "You don’t have confidence in this mission?"

"Commander, I have a persistent feeling that we’re being used as pawns to buy time." Jerry couldn’t help but voice his complaint after holding back for so long.

"Why do you say that?" Jacobs squinted and asked in a deep voice.

"If the intention was truly to hold our ground, at least we should be equipped with artillery and sufficient ammunition, but these are quite scarce."

Jerry lowered his voice and said: "Helentz Castle isn’t a strong fortress at all, unless..."

"Jerry, keep quiet!"

Jacobs interrupted Jerry, speaking sternly: "It’s not for you to concern yourself with Her Majesty the Empress’ and Lord Governor’s strategic deployment, but I assure you we are not pawns."

"If we were pawns, Colonel Jes’s cavalry wouldn’t have supported Oro Town. If we were pawns, there wouldn’t be three thousand regular troops and five hundred temple warriors here. The defense force is nominally a regiment, but its actual strength is two regiments. The small number of artillery is just to prevent us from being unable to carry them when breaking out."

Jacobs paused momentarily, then slowly said: "Lord Governor’s orders are clear, as long as we hold out for a week, we can find an opportunity to withdraw."

"A week? That’s too difficult." Jerry’s expression showed some disappointment.

"Do you not have the courage and confidence to hold out for a week?"

Jacobs was somewhat surprised, gesturing towards the canal behind the city.

"The Jill Canal is our lifeline; as long as the canal remains, the enemy can’t completely encircle the city, giving us a chance to hold and even resist."

"It’s gone."

Jerry sighed lightly, slowly saying: "Commander, have you noticed that the canal’s flow has been gradually decreasing these days."

"This..."

Jacobs furrowed his brow.

Now being summer, the water flow should be abundant, and the canal’s declining water level is indeed strange, but he didn’t understand much about hydraulics, so he simply stayed silent, waiting for Jerry to explain.

"The enemy is storing water."

Jerry’s expression was slightly bitter, "The Jill Canal is a man-made river, and the flow is gentle. It’s quite easy to build a dam upstream to intercept the flow. Just let it accumulate for a few more days, then unleash the stored water on a rainy day, and Helentz Castle will be flooded, cutting off our reinforcements completely."

"What to do?" Jacobs’s face changed instantly.

"There’s no solution, unless we evacuate early." Jerry said softly.

"Absolutely impossible, the Governor’s order is to hold for seven days!"

Jacobs impatiently interrupted Jerry, and seeing Jerry lower his head in silence, he realized he was somewhat harsh, hence his tone softened considerably.

"Jerry, there’s higher ground in the inner city of Helentz Castle; even if the outer city gets flooded, we can continue to hold. Since you know hydraulics, take two battalions to station outside the city, guarding the canal. If the enemy releases the water, evacuate the troops, don’t sacrifice unnecessarily."

Jerry trembled slightly, gazing at Jacobs in disbelief.

"Commander, the inner city is too small; the enemy’s artillery bombardment is impossible to withstand!"

"Who says? As long as we dig tunnels to hide the soldiers, most artillery fire can be avoided. When the enemy charges, we emerge, thus holding out for a long time."

Indeed, it would be possible to hold out for long, but hope for escape would be entirely lost.

The Commander plans to use life itself to build a wall of flesh and blood to buy time.

Jerry wanted to persuade, but he couldn’t voice anything as the words stuck in his throat, he just quietly asked:

"Is it worth it?"

"Jerry, we are soldiers, it’s not about whether it’s worth it or not. Don’t worry about me; fewer people would actually make a breakout easier."

Jacobs pointed to another side of Helentz’s defense line, speaking solemnly: "When you leave, make sure to take Tom, this is an order."

Jerry's words got stuck in his throat, ultimately he could only offer a firm salute to Jacobs's retreating figure.

He knew clearly, just moments ago, the commander had made a decision to complete the task, even at the cost of his life.

After the decision was made, the defenders moved swiftly, dividing into three shifts to dig tunnels day and night, filling the excavated soil at the lower terrain inside the city to reinforce inner city defenses.

Though many weren't sure why they were doing this, they still dug tirelessly.

Only one unit wasn't involved in tunnel digging.

The Temple Warrior has tremendous combat power and is the main force for street fighting, hence must conserve energy for the upcoming fierce battle.

The leader of the Temple Warrior was a young sanctuary named Joseph.

He was slender, quiet, liked to observe coldly while holding his twin silver blades, but his strength was formidable.

Jacobs had observed him, concluding that only a combat-type Transcendent could defeat him.

Jacobs did not know that Joseph was not an ordinary sanctuary but a High Tier Sanctuary, equal in level with Christine.

With the relentless efforts of Helentz Castle's soldiers and citizens, nearly eight kilometers of simple tunnels were dug in only three days.

Joseph always observed coldly, but the speed of tunnel excavation surprised him.

Finding an unnoticed moment, he approached Jacobs, lowering his voice:

"Lieutenant Colonel, how did you mobilize them to desperately dig tunnels?"

Jacobs was stunned for a few seconds, then slowly said: "Citizens offered triple wages. Soldiers don’t need additional pay, as digging tunnels means more survival opportunities, they wouldn’t slack."

"Joseph, when the inner city can no longer hold, you should lead them away."

"Reason?" Joseph raised an eyebrow, softly asked.

"You’re not an Empire soldier; there’s no need for you to bleed the last drop for the Empire."

Joseph remained silent for a moment before slowly saying: "I understand."

After saying this, he turned and left.

Watching Joseph’s slender shoulders, Jacobs shook his head with a smile, saying nothing more.

Though Joseph appeared indifferent, he always stood at the front line during combat in the past few days, repairing any breach in the defense.

Without his bravery, the previous probing attack would have caused more serious consequences.

With the presence of the sanctuary, holding out for a week is not...

Jacobs raised his head abruptly, seeing thick dark clouds overhead.

The rainy day Jerry mentioned indeed arrived.

The toughest moment to hold Helentz Castle was also coming.

At least three more days of holding were needed to fulfill the Governor’s orders, yet the rain came so early, the luck is really too rotten.

He quickly headed towards the town hall.

Darn weather isn’t giving him time, then he’ll earn it back by his abilities!

Chapter 295: The Old Man Is No Longer Suited for This Era!

"General Gode Johnson, do you have anything to say about the current war situation?"

The towering King Sven the Seventh of the Oden Kingdom raised his riding whip, pointing towards Helentz Castle, teetering in the midst of the wild floodwaters, his expression filled with pride.

He certainly had reason to be proud.

Before this war started, the Kingdom’s top general, Gode Johnson, who had always been mature and prudent, inexplicably opposed waging war.

The old general’s reasoning was simple, the Sussex Empire was very strong.

This reasoning made Sven the Seventh uncomfortable.

Very strong, huh?

Back then, the Odin Empire was stronger than the Sussex Empire is now, so what?

The Sussex Empire’s naval forces were powerful; their army was also formidable, but how much force could they project across the strait?

It’s one thing to bully a weak country like the Bagash Chiefdom across the sea, but it’s much harder to defeat a resilient state like Oden.

Moreover, the Oden Kingdom was not fighting alone.

They had backing.

Even if the Sussex Empire could defeat the Oden Kingdom across the sea, they could not conquer the military powerhouses of the Rodinia Continent.

What’s more, what did the Sussex Empire’s strength have to do with the Three Overseas Provinces?

The Sussex Cabinet and the Empress were at odds; if they weren’t kicking someone when they’re down, that would be merciful.

No, they were already kicking someone when they’re down.

When the declaration of war was copied to the Sussex Empire, the Cabinet accepted it without hesitation, but only sent a fleet to blockade the coast and did not dispatch any troops to support the Three Overseas Provinces.

Not only that, the Cabinet urged Empress Sylph to return to the Imperial Capital as soon as possible and not to stay in dangerous areas.

The actions of the Sussex Cabinet appeared to protect the Empress, but in fact, they openly told everyone that if they wanted to deal with Sylph, they should hurry up because it was not their concern.

While the Oden Kingdom did not have the courage to declare war on the Sussex Empire proactively, with backing from other major powers, they felt emboldened to deal with the Overseas Provinces, and quite substantially so.

As long as he captured the Three Overseas Provinces, he could obtain the coveted Hansa Province and Jill Canal.

The other two smaller provinces would be divided among his secret backers.

The three parties would sign a blood pact on the corpses of the Three Overseas Provinces, dipped in the Empire’s blood.

And all of this was built upon the Oden Kingdom capturing provinces like Hansa.

The hidden backers could fully support him with military funding, weapons, and even tens of thousands of elite "mercenaries," but they could not directly intervene.

This was enough!

Now Sven the Seventh was holding an army of a hundred and seventy thousand, feeling exceedingly inflated.

Speak not of the three little provinces of Hansa; even if the Sussex Empire sent over tens of thousands across the sea, so what?

He even hoped the Sussex Empire would do so.

This was a chaotic era, and for the Oden Kingdom to rise, it needed to step over the corpses of the old powers.

By seizing the Hansa Province, driving away the Empress, killing the Imperial Governor, his accomplishments would be enough to establish a powerful Northern Kingdom, and perhaps even form a defensive alliance with the northern countries across the sea.

Sven the Seventh’s gaze drifted into the distance.

He didn’t want to look at Helentz Castle.

His target wasn’t even Hansa City, but places far beyond.

If he could expand the Kingdom’s territory several times over, even the title of Emperor was not impossible.

Old Gode was too cautious, and now he must make the old man understand what youthful vigor and strength are.

His expectant gaze turned to Gode Johnson, awaiting the old general’s approval, then smoothly acting out a play of ruler and minister reconciling for others to see.

He wanted to show these people his magnanimous side.

Gode Johnson, looking at Sven the Seventh full of expectation, suddenly felt a bit tired.

Heart tired.

The Sussex Empire was the world’s top power, and although recently there was a trend of being surpassed by the Vladimir Empire, it wasn’t something the Oden Kingdom could provoke.

Provoked by some great powers, contesting the Empire proactively, no matter the outcome of the war, the end for the Oden Kingdom wouldn’t be pleasant.

Being used as a pawn by others without realizing it, lacking any political acumen, was this what the King, famously known as the Fearless Sword, was all about?

Old General Gode was thoroughly disappointed, but still patiently advised, "Your Majesty, although Helentz Castle is not a stronghold, it’s backed by the canal, making it difficult to conquer."

"Old General, are you blind?"

Sven the Seventh hummed a bit displeased, waving his whip vigorously, "Helentz Castle can only be defended by relying on the canal, but now it falls due to the canal, this is destiny's guidance."

"This is the force of nature, a gift from Mother Earth. The flood will tear apart the already fragile defenses of Helentz Castle, and I can't think of a way they can resist."

Gode Johnson sighed, "Your Majesty, using canal water to break down walls is easy, but the high areas are unaffected, and the inner city of Helentz Castle still exists. The flood comes fast and retreats just as quickly; in no more than two or three days, it will fully subside. By then, advancing on muddy lands will be difficult for our forces, while the enemy can continue to provide support through the canal, we..."

"Our army will surely win, General Gode."

Sven interrupted General Gode coldly, sneering, "None of what you say will happen, Roland would never pay a high price to rescue a remnant force destined for destruction."

"He would only cower in Hansa City and wait to have a showdown with us."

"I want to kill everyone in Helentz Castle, pile their heads outside of Hansa City, and utterly crush the morale of these cowards."

Sven's words made Gode's face instantly bloodless.

"Your Majesty, are you insane? It's 1792, not 792! Piling heads will only make us outcasts of the civilized world! Regardless of war victory, we will become the world's public enemy!"

The whip in Sven's hand cracked in the air loudly.

"General Gode, you're truly getting senile; this is our tradition. I never expected an old general like you to oppose tradition."

"Your Majesty!"

Gode tried to say something, but Sven rudely cut him off.

"General Gode, our army needs to secure supplies fighting across the borders, please return to the Imperial Capital immediately to secure the supply line."

Gode stood there stunned, unable to say a word for a long time.

He knew clearly that King Sven was stripping him of command.

Although he had already been stripped of much of his power, he was at least the nominal commander of the corps.

Yet now he no longer even had the right to speak.

Unwilling, he cast his gaze over everyone, but no one spoke for him.

His body swayed a few times in the wind and rain, as if he had suddenly aged ten years.

Clearly, the young nobles and generals craved greater benefits, more territory.

His steadiness was at odds with the ambitions of the younger faction, whereas the spirited King was deeply supported by them.

Gode knew that the situation was lost and did not resist, instead calmly taking off his sword and handing it to Sven the Seventh with both hands.

"I will return to the Imperial Capital to take charge of logistics... I wish Your Majesty military success."

Seeing Gode's despondent expression, Sven recalled the merits he had achieved following three generations of kings and felt a bit reluctant, so he smiled to comfort the old general.

"General Gode, logistics are crucial to victory in war. When I return in triumph, you will still share in the glory."

Gode's expression was somewhat bitter.

Glory?

He only hoped his judgment was wrong, that Sven the Seventh could indeed return victorious.

If Sven the Seventh won, he would certainly be "magnanimously" released.

If he lost, he would most likely "accidentally" commit "suicide."

After the constant dissenting crow, Gode, was driven away, Sven the Seventh once again raised his riding whip and delivered an impassioned speech.

"Warriors, our troop numbers far exceed the enemy's, and we have a constant stream of supply provisions. The Jill Canal is nothing to worry about, even tossing our camp tents and leftover garbage into it could pave a path."

"All troops heed my command: take Helentz Castle in three days, and capture Hansa City within a month. I want to celebrate victory with you all in Hansa City!"

Sven the Seventh's passionate mobilization inspired the entire army.

As the orders were issued, an elite team left the main camp, boarded the prepared small wooden boats, and launched an attack on Helentz Castle's inner city.

Good news: Helentz Castle was severely damaged, with hardly any houses in the outer city above water.

Bad news: The Sussex people seemed to have been prepared, retreating into the inner city as soon as the storm began, ready for a final struggle.

The elite team rowing the long-tailed small boats was the Berserker Corps.

This was the true elite of the Oden Kingdom.

They were clad in chain armor, wore round helmets, held small round shields in their left hands, and wielded long sabers and great axes in their right, faces smeared with various mysterious paints as they charged fearlessly.

Berserkers could voluntarily enter a berserk state, greatly enhancing strength, speed, and reflexes, but at the cost of exhaustion after the berserk period, unable to continue battling.

Deploying elite berserkers in the first battle showed Sven the Seventh's determination.

He wanted to achieve a stunning annihilation victory to intimidate everyone.

The only regret was that the rain had rendered the cannons useless, unable to support the front line.

If there had been enough cannons, Helentz wouldn't have lasted a few days.

This was probably the side effect of flooding the city with water, Sven the Seventh thought with slight regret.

Unfortunately, these newly arrived cannons could only shine in the subsequent campaign against Hansa.

The Berserker Corps advanced smoothly, nearing the inner city without encountering any resistance.

Sven the Seventh picked up his telescope, observing the battlefield with a solemn expression.

Although he appeared arrogant, he was indeed arrogant, but he was not without brains.

On the battlefield, one could look down on the enemy, but couldn’t truly underestimate them.

Though he constantly belittled the Sussex people verbally, he was well aware of their strength inside.

Who knew what ghosts were lurking in the Three Overseas Provinces? While maintaining an outward "arrogant and bold" demeanor, he was very cautious within.

Those major powers were using him, but wasn’t he also using them?

Old General Gode was not him, never knowing why he took risks.

Return Day was approaching, and the world was heading toward chaos.

You either became one of those dining at the table or the food placed on it.

The opportunity was in front of him; not seizing it actively, was he going to wait for pie to fall from the sky?

The risk and benefit coexisted; without paying anything, a small nation could never grow strong.

Helentz Castle and the Hansa Province must be taken!

Seeing the Berserker Corps land on higher ground, Sven the Seventh finally felt relieved.

The enemies had completely stopped resisting, seemingly deciding to abandon Helentz Castle.

This was normal; they had previously discarded Oro Town, so this was merely history repeating.

The Sussex Empire was old, like General Gode.

They were no longer suited for this era!

Sven’s lips slightly quirked into a smile, just about to declare victory when gunfire erupted.

His face turned sharply, as did the faces of many young nobles and generals.

Damn it, Helentz Castle was still resisting.

Sven was about to issue an order when a smile suddenly returned to his face.

"Haha, listen, those gunshots are sparse, hardly like an organized counterattack! Their main force has fled long ago!"

Sven the Seventh, full of confidence, looked at the generals, "Gentlemen, can I announce that the Battle of Helentz Castle will be over before nightfall?"

"Your Majesty is wise!" the crowd responded in unison.

Though the King’s prediction was somewhat impatient, it was not considered bold.

The Helentz Castle inner city garrison hid in rooms, their firearms not soaked by rain, capable of stealthily firing a few scattered stray shots, but unable to organize an effective resistance.

Could they overturn the situation relying on previously dug tunnels and scattered stray shots?

The Goddess of Victory was showing a charming smile, directed at the warriors of Oden Kingdom!

Chapter 296: The Cold-blooded Witch's Decision

Good news: Helentz Castle is still holding.

Bad news: Helentz is still holding.

The Governor's Mansion, operations command room. Christine sat in the main seat, looking at the battle reports from the front line. She adjusted the pieces on the sand table according to the latest developments, then fell into deep thought.

The defense of Helentz Castle has exceeded everyone's expectations.

When it held on to the fourth day before being breached, Christine was worried to the point of sleepless nights. At that time, the Hansa City pincer formation was not yet set, the artillery was not positioned for ambush, and Mr. Norton's decisive weapon was far from being ready.

By the eighth day, Christine was pleased. The results of the defensive battle were beyond her expectations, the pincer formation was basically in place, just waiting for the enemy to deliver themselves.

Yet, Helentz Castle is still holding.

Fifteen days have passed, the defenders of Helentz Castle have not broken through, and the attacking Oden Kingdom Army has suffered thousands of casualties, still finding themselves battered and bruised.

Moreover, the artificial flood had long since receded, the Fourth Fleet re-entered the canal, and Helentz Castle was even able to receive limited supplies.

Christine was somewhat perplexed. The script was perfect, yet the supporting roles were stealing the show; what could be done?

According to the plan, should she abandon Helentz Castle and battle the Oden Kingdom Army in Hansa City?

If she decided so, Roland and Sif would not oppose, as she was the chief commander.

Ten days ago, Roland appointed her as the campaign commander, responsible for the entire campaign.

Everyone in the Governor's Territory had to follow her orders, including Roland and Sif.

Only the Empress was not under her command authority.

If she needed Sif to charge personally, Count Tyrone and the White Rose Knight would take the field.

Roland, true to his word, never interfered with her command, even adopting a stance of humbly learning.

Christine thought Roland was honoring his promise, but she didn't know Roland simply understood his own limits, and his learning was genuinely heartfelt.

Should Helentz Castle be rescued?

Not rescuing it would harm morale.

But rescuing it would harm the war situation.

In Christine's plan, Helentz Castle was a pawn to be sacrificed.

She dispatched five hundred Temple Warriors and High Tier Sanctuary Joseph, sent cavalry units to raid and support the perimeter, just to make this sacrificed pawn not appear so.

Joseph was extraordinarily capable, able to escape by himself. As for the five hundred Temple Warriors, however many could escape would count, and those who couldn't would return to the embrace of the Goddess of Light.

In war, human lives are just numbers, and as a commander, one must be as cold as a butcher.

Usually, she would gently treat soldiers, striving for their benefits, but on the battlefield, everyone is expendable.

She deeply understood that kind-hearted people cannot control the battlefield. Once in command, she would become a ruthless demon of slaughter, calculating the value of each piece coldly.

Sacrifice, exchange, checkmate.

This is Christine's philosophy of war.

At first, she was worried Roland wouldn't understand, and Sif wouldn't accept it, but thankfully, they just silently watched, never opposing any of her orders.

She successfully deceived Sven the Seventh, making the Oden King not realize this was a pawn to be sacrificed, and they paid a heavy price to take Helentz Castle.

In the past ten days of holding, the Oden Kingdom Army's loss of thousands of soldiers was secondary; their greatest loss was morale and spirit.

Sven the Seventh, who boasted of taking the Hansa Three Provinces in a short time, found himself battered and at an impasse at the small Helentz Castle. His soldiers would surely doubt life itself.

They would further question whether His Majesty the King was truly capable.

Sven the Seventh must pay an even heavier price to quickly take Helentz Castle, or else the campaign on the Three Overseas Provinces would become a huge joke.

However, too successful a disguise might not always be a good thing.

The deception and disguise of this bait operation were done so well that the new army in the Governor District also thought Helentz Castle was not a pawn to be sacrificed.

Christine could not tell other officers not to support and directly abandon Helentz Castle. She could think so and do so, but she absolutely couldn't say it.

So a miraculous scene occurred.

Everyone believed Christine was determined to protect Helentz Castle to the death, only she knew it was a sacrificial pawn.

She stared blankly at the sand table, suddenly feeling a bit guilty.

She recalled what her military teacher, Chushko, had said: War is not the art of the chessboard but a cruel struggle between life and death. Everyone in war has thoughts, whereas chess pieces don't. If war is treated as a chess game, facing lively pieces, one will eventually be at a loss.

At that time, she didn't take her teacher's words too seriously; now she finally understood him.

If it were a war game simulation, the defenders of Helentz Castle would at most be a veteran infantry brigade, quickly losing organization and combat power under the frenzied attack of tens of thousands of troops and artillery, becoming a white pawn with a roster but without combat capability, even being directly discarded into the box of abandoned pieces.

But this is not a war game simulation.

The miracle of dozens of pieces not consuming a single piece just happened.

Faced with the miracle created by the frontline warriors with their lives, Christine was torn between laughter and tears.

The frontline troops exceeded their mission, leaving the enemy scrambling. She should be happy, but she couldn't be.

If Helentz Castle always holds, and the Oden Kingdom withdraws after failing to conquer it, leading the Governor's new army to pursue across borders, it would be the new army facing logistical difficulties.

The new army's equipment and morale were very good, but they lacked combat experience and adaptability.

In a siege, they were defending their homeland, with a solid position, no retreat, and a very firm fighting spirit, able to fight to the last man.

Chapter 297: The Cold-blooded Witch's Decision (Part 2)

In a pursuit battle, their combat effectiveness can at most exert half.

Christine bit her lip, took a deep breath, and suppressed the guilt in her heart, preparing to give a cold-blooded yet correct order.

For some reason, her fingertips were actually trembling slightly.

She had commanded large-scale battles before.

Three years ago, during the Wende Empire's succession war, she commanded to suppress the rebels, ruthlessly using five thousand Imperial Guards as bait to annihilate the rebels on the Oder River Plain.

Exchanging five thousand men for seventy to eighty thousand of the rebel main forces was a perfect battle model that could be inscribed into military textbooks.

Because of this victory, she was hailed as the Cold-blooded Witch.

In the Hansa Province, she wanted to replicate this successful battle case, but unexpectedly encountered trouble.

The trouble did not come from the enemy, but from within herself, leaving her somewhat bewildered.

Roland looked at the side of Christine’s face with solemn respect.

Worthy of being the Cold-blooded Witch, facing such a critical battle situation, she could remain calm and fight with an expressionless face.

In her hometown, there’s an old saying, "He who has lightning in his chest yet remains calm on the surface can be a great general!"

Christine clearly has such potential.

She’s not even twenty yet, and has a lot of room for growth.

It’s a pity that such a military genius is tainted by religion, insisting on becoming some Saintess.

Really hope she fails in the Saintess selection, by then he’d recruit her with the highest level of treatment.

Why chant prayers when she could achieve merits, gain titles, and leave wealth for the descendants?

Roland silently murmured.

Looking at Christine’s profile, Sif also gained a few more points of admiration.

Truly worthy of the title Cold-blooded Witch, she indeed blocked the Oden Kingdom’s main force, buying time for the defense of Hansa City.

It’s just not clear on what basis she’s confident about holding Helentz Castle?

Need to learn a bit.

Sif sat up straight, waiting for Teacher Christine’s demonstration.

Just as Roland and Sif assumed a student posture, Teacher Christine ultimately couldn’t make up her mind.

She paid a lot of attention to the morale of the army, concerned about the soldiers’ private discussions. She knew that the warriors of the Helentz Castle defense battle had been given more significance.

They became a symbol in the eyes of the new army soldiers, a symbol of bravery and inevitable victory.

Treating ordinary troops as pawns was one thing, abandoning hero troops could cause unrest in the entire army.

After much hesitation, she decided to return the difficult problem to Roland and Sif.

These two bastards are the Empress and Governor of the Empire. Not making decisions themselves and leaving everything to her, do they really intend to sit there like students and listen to a lecture?

Christine cleared her throat and softly asked, "Roland, Sif, what do you think should be done next with Helentz Castle?"

"We listen to you!" X2

Roland and Sif answered simultaneously.

Christine’s face slightly paled, instinctively clenching her fist. She felt a bit suffocated, annoyed by these two bastards.

She coldly said, "I’m asking you two!"

Before Sif could speak, Roland wrote a line of small words in her palm.

"Pop quiz."

Sif suddenly realized.

Turns out Teacher Christine, like Roland, valued interaction in teaching.

Thinking that Roland could definitely give a high score answer, to prevent herself from looking like a fool, Sif hurriedly answered first.

"I think the objective of the Helentz Castle blocking battle has been achieved, we can..."

Sif abruptly stopped mid-sentence.

Wait a minute, this won’t do.

These warriors joined the new army of the Governor District for fame and fortune, but also had some loyalty to her.

Even if nine parts were for profit, who could say there wasn’t one part of loyalty?

Can’t chill their hearts.

"Uh, General Christine, you don’t want to treat them as pawns and discard them, right?"

Christine stared at Sif with a blank expression, "It’s me asking you, Count Sif."

"Alright."

Sif shrugged, with a smile on her lips, not caring about Christine’s somewhat stiff attitude.

Teachers ought to be strict.

Teacher Wald was even stricter when giving her lessons, and she wouldn’t mind.

Sif’s mind was racing, just as she was about to speak, she suddenly remembered Roland had cautioned her.

War is bloodless politics, war is the continuation of politics.

Therefore, the rules of war must also align with political principles and adhere to advantageous principles.

Now there are three choices.

Abandon Helentz Castle and have the decisive battle in Hansa City.

Rescue Helentz Castle and move the decisive battle forward.

Rescue Helentz Castle, cover the breakthrough of the defenders, with the decisive battle still set in Hansa City.

The first choice is the militarily optimal solution, but not necessarily the best overall solution.

The second choice is the militarily worst solution, even with additional advantages in other aspects, it may not surpass the first choice.

The third choice seems like an independent option but is actually similar to the first.

With the outer city of Helentz Castle completely fallen, the supplies obtained from the canal are very limited. To save face and intimidate the enemy, Sven the Seventh might level Helentz Castle and kill everyone.

In doing so, Helentz Castle is essentially still a pawn, just better packaged.

After much deliberation, Sif finally decided on the third choice.

Simply abandoning the warriors who fought bloody battles sounded terrible. Not only must we save, but we must save with all our might.

Just as Sif was about to answer, she abruptly stopped.

Feeling a bit guilty, she grasped Roland’s hand and quickly wrote in his palm with her fingertip.

"How much of a blow to morale is it to abandon surrounded allies?"

Roland paused for a few seconds, recalling some teams that remained unmoved when allies were in trouble, he slowly wrote a "¿" in Sif’s palm.

Watching Sif and Roland communicate with nods and gestures using fingertips, Christine felt a bit weary.

Chapter 298: The Cold-blooded Witch’s Decision (Part 3)

This is the command center, not a place for romance!

She turned her face, staring at the frozen sand table of the battle situation, lost in thought.

Seeing the question mark Roland wrote down, Sif stuck out her tongue in embarrassment.

She had an answer.

"General Christine, if I were the commander, I would wholeheartedly rescue Helentz Castle, creating a chance for the garrison to break out."

"How will you rescue them? How much chance do you have for a breakout?" Christine raised her head sharply, her tone somewhat aggressive.

"Select elite troops, led by General Jes, for a full rescue. Meanwhile, deploy the Fourth Fleet's river gunboats for fire support."

Christine snorted lightly, her slender fingers pointing at the sand table.

Her meaning was clear, stop theoretical talk and get down to action.

Sif glanced back at Roland, and with his encouraging look, her confidence swelled rapidly. She stood tall and faced Christine.

She picked up the pawn representing the light cavalry unit, placing it upstream of the canal, and said softly:

"Cross the river by night!"

At this moment, the blue strip representing the canal had river gunboats, capable of providing fire support. The canal's flow was calm, making river crossing indeed not difficult.

Christine completely ignored this force, directly aiming the artillery's guns on the hill at the river gunboats.

"Suppressive fire!"

Sif's face changed slightly.

The river gunboats, unlike proper battleships, had poor protection and speed. Although possessing considerable firepower, their defense capability was awful.

Against shore artillery, river gunboats were at a disadvantage.

If facing well-constructed artillery on shore forts, river gunboats could easily be taught a lesson.

According to intelligence, the Oden Kingdom Army had already occupied the hilly area near Helentz Castle and set up artillery there.

These cannons did little damage to the inner city with well-dug tunnels, but for nearly stationary river gunboats, it was a dimensional attack.

Sif's face changed slightly, tapping the inner city, "Breakthrough."

Christine sneered, pointing at the inner city, "Set fire."

Water and fire are merciless; setting fire and breaching dams is a particularly cruel combat technique but inflicts immense damage.

The ground of Helentz Castle's inner city was mostly occupied; once the enemy arranged firewood, alcohol, and kerosene, they could easily ignite this city.

The garrison at Helentz Castle attempting to break out was nearly impossible.

Sif's face turned numb, continuously throwing all available forces into the fray.

Eventually, the rescue operation turned into a disaster.

The Oden Kingdom Army took the opportunity to cross the Jill Canal, continuously segmenting and surrounding the Hansa New Army.

According to the rules, although the New Army's initial morale was high, it collapsed particularly quickly under consecutive strikes.

As each piece representing independent combat units turned white, the rescue turned into a rout.

The frontline's defeat strained the already insufficient troops, eventually affecting the defense line of Hansa City.

Christine stopped in time, giving Sif a half-smiling look, her meaning apparent.

You've already failed.

Sif's face went pale, cold sweat sliding down her cheeks.

Was her thought wrong? Did she really have to treat the garrison at Helentz Castle as pawns to be discarded, and conceal the truth of this battle?

If that were the case, even winning this battle would turn her promise not to abandon anyone into a joke.

Although monarchs of this era often broke their promises, she didn't want to be like that.

Sif was drenched in sweat, almost wanting to turn around and flee.

But she only took a step back before thinking of a solution.

"Roland, what do you think we should do?"

Roland stepped forward a few steps, stood by Sif's side, and smiled, saying: "Abandoning Helentz Castle is definitely not an option. This would lead to our political credibility utterly collapsing; our bragging will come crashing down and bury us."

"Since a small force for rescue won't work, then let's advance the decisive battle."

Christine glared at Roland with annoyance, snorting lightly, "Our military is numerically inferior, and our overall combat power is less than the enemy's. Moreover, the enemy has frontline artillery. How can we have a decisive battle?"

Roland smiled as he explained: "Our army has at least five advantages! First, as long as we find a way to destroy the enemy's artillery positions, we have the river gunboat supporting us, with superior firepower. Second, in terms of supplies, we have Jill Canal shipping, while the enemy can only use land transport, giving us the logistical advantage. Third, our army defends Helentz Castle and destroys enemy offensives, holding the morale advantage. Fourth, we have excellent commanders, giving us the command advantage. Fifth, our side has absolute trust in the commanders, while the enemy has expelled the veteran Gode, giving us the advantage in personnel!"

Roland wanted to make up ten advantages, but could only think of five temporarily.

After listing the five advantages, he smiled, looking at Christine.

"Please let the world's best commander, Saintess Christine, lead us to victory!"

Christine: "..."

Forget about it, asking these two military novices is pointless.

But they were right. Advancing the decisive battle, which appeared to be the worst solution, was actually the best.

The new army has the potential to become an ace force; all it needs is time.

Even if they can't annihilate the Oden Kingdom Army this time, as long as they achieve a beautiful victory, it will completely overturn the situation.

The new army's combat power will gradually take shape, and after defeat, the Oden Kingdom will only decline.

Though Roland had elements of flattery, she was filled with self-confidence.

Who says she can't become the world's best commander?

Iron ore needs the tempering of blood and fire to become the best steel.

She's the same.

Christine was filled with fighting spirit.

Winning is not enough; she wants to achieve a brilliant annihilation battle.

Chapter 299: Red, White, and Yellow Spilled All Over the Ground

Helentz Castle, underground tunnel.

Joseph leaned against the earth wall, resting with his eyes closed.

He was covered in blood and grime, even with the enemy's brain matter congealed on him, looking somewhat disheveled. However, his golden hair was still tied into a neat ponytail, not a strand out of place.

This was his final defiance.

Just half an hour ago, he had slain several of the enemy's elite troops who had infiltrated the tunnels, including one who had nearly reached the threshold of a Transcendent.

The brutal battle had left his golden hair soaked with sweat, in complete disarray.

After the battle, he immediately found a mirror to tidy up his hair, then sat here catching his breath.

Soon, he opened his eyes, judging from the footsteps, it was the youngest deputy commander, Tom.

He patted the spot beside him, indicating for the other to sit down.

Helentz Castle was once a model of small city construction in the Odin Empire, with a developed drainage system and an already mature sewer system.

The garrison dug deeper, connecting these sewers to form a mature underground tunnel system.

If they relied solely on a few thousand people to dig, they couldn't have dug this deep even if they worked themselves to death.

Tom skittishly came over and sat down next to Joseph, "Brother Joseph, you must be no ordinary Holy Hall."

Joseph opened his eyes wide and quietly asked, "Why do you say that?"

"The Holy Hall who sacrificed himself a few days ago was not even one-tenth your strength. I’m sorry, I mean no disrespect to him, just discussing strength."

Joseph said nothing, a hint of displeasure flashed in his heart.

One-tenth? Clearly, it was one-twentieth!

Though he wanted to retort, he couldn’t say it out loud, as it would be too disrespectful to the sacrificed.

Seeing Joseph not denying it, Tom smiled and said, "The captain and Jerry even wrote their wills, I’m the only one who knows we’ll definitely win."

"Reason?" Joseph liked Tom a lot, this kid’s optimism was genuine, easily infecting others. Fighting side by side over these days made Tom familiar with him, daring to joke around.

"You’re no ordinary Holy Hall. I don’t quite understand the rules of your Divine Court, but you must be a big shot, right?"

Joseph was stunned for a few seconds and leisurely said, "Sort of. But compared to Saintess Christine, I’m quite inferior. She’s even the overall commander of this war now."

"Is that Saintess Christine stronger than you?" Tom was full of curiosity.

"Stronger than me...wait, you brat, why are you asking all this? I’m the one asking you."

Tom chuckled, scratched his head, and quietly said, "Even if that Saintess is about the same as you, you must still be an impressive figure. Someone like you wouldn’t be easily abandoned, so the Saintess will surely come to rescue us, right?"

Joseph couldn’t bring himself to shatter Tom’s illusion, so he smiled and said, "You’re very smart."

He didn’t deceive Tom, as he wasn’t sure anyone would come to the rescue.

But he gave Tom hope nonetheless, as logically, there should be a rescue.

Watching Tom’s nimble, joyful departure, Joseph’s smile gradually faded.

He had participated in the pacification operations three years ago, even served as Christine’s deputy.

Before the decisive battle, he staunchly opposed using the Forbidden Guard as bait, but Christine insisted.

Her reasoning was simple, "No one would use the Forbidden Guard as bait, so the enemy will surely be fooled."

Indeed, a baiting method that transcends human comprehension. No one could understand it.

Using five thousand as bait to annihilate the rebel core forces in one encounter, decisive victory through brilliant strategy.

However, the fish caught, the Forbidden Guard’s loyalty was lost.

The Forbidden Guard is indeed the royal family’s staunch sword and shield, but being used as expendables, who would be willing?

Joseph acknowledged that Christine’s tactical choice at the time was the correct one, but he also believed it would lead to endless trouble.

After all, people are not chess pieces, they are beings of flesh and blood.

They feel fear, joy, anger.

Joseph sighed softly, thinking to himself, Tom, my young brother, the real reinforcements you hope for may never arrive.

Even if there's a High Tier Holy Hall, Christine still won't change her mind.

Before leading five hundred Temple Warriors on a mission, Christine explicitly told Joseph that he could withdraw alone if necessary.

This was an open message to Joseph that Helentz Castle was bait.

Joseph really wanted to tell Christine that even bait deserves the right to survive.

If the true intent of the bait can't be openly disclosed, at least there should be a full-force rescue effort.

Christine, if you can't understand this, you'll never become a renowned general like your grandfather.

Joseph closed his eyes again, preparing to regain his strength for the next battle.

His lips curled slightly, seeming to think of something pleasant.

Christine was the most proud yet most regretful disciple of Grandfather.

Three years ago during the suppression, Grandfather had already passed away over a year, the Imperial Family could only ask his best disciple, Christine, to take charge in his stead.

The loss ratio Christine achieved in the battles would have made Grandfather exclaim in admiration even if he were alive, but along with the victory, seeds of disaster were sown.

Very likely a future threat that could overthrow the Wende Empire's royal family.

He probably understood Christine's stance, she was a commander, not a politician. She promised to win the battle, but never promised to solidify the royal family's position.

Christine has always been clear about her position, she desires the crown of Pope of the Divine Court of Light, closest to the Goddess, to receive her teachings.

Joseph sighed, somewhat wistful.

Grandfather couldn't change Christine, and he certainly couldn't either.

All he could do was to share the fate of Helentz Castle.

It might seem foolish to others, but he couldn't bear to abandon the comrades he had fought alongside for over a dozen days.

Their optimism, composure, and bravery touched his heart.

Here, he found a long-lost sense of team belonging.

He would never leave his comrades behind to escape alone, especially since escape wasn't an option.

Sven the Seventh's forces might lack capable ministers and generals, but they never lacked brave warriors.

In yesterday's battle, he faced off against a high-level Berserker nearly two meters tall.

The opponent's immense arm strength almost knocked the Warhammer out of his hands.

Fortunately, his concentration prevented any mishaps.

If he attempted to escape alone, he would undoubtedly be stopped by a High tier Berserker.

Joseph gripped his Warhammer tightly, wore a relaxed expression, but was already prepared to be buried here.

The sharp ringing sounded again, and Joseph leapt up, dragging the heavy head of the Warhammer on the ground as he quickly ran towards the warning location.

In the fierce battle, the defenders of Helentz had long devised a method of signaling and combat coordination within the tunnels.

The teams dispersed, forming multiple combat groups, with the more capable individual fighters (like Joseph himself) acting as support points to rush to each fire.

Joseph didn't know where the next battle would occur, but he knew he would be involved.

Dragging the Warhammer wasn't because he couldn't lift it, but to save energy.

After all, it was over a hundred pounds, and using it for long was quite exhausting.

He soon saw the enemy.

Berserkers with round helmets were frantically hacking and slashing.

Joseph twisted his waist, hoisted his pelvis, swung his arms, and precisely smashed the 100-pound Warhammer onto the berserkers' captain's helmet.

Red and white scattered all over the ground, and the berserkers' captain died without a sound.

The move wasn’t graceful, but it was practical.

This was the correct posture to exert maximum force within the tunnel.

The roar echoed, shaking the tunnel and causing dust to fly.

Joseph’s expression was solemn as his formidable rival returned.

When warriors meet on a narrow path, the brave will win—there was no avoidance this time; it was win or die.

A smile played on Joseph’s lips as he tore a cloth strip to bind his wrist, charging toward where the High tier Berserker was.

Two unfortunate Temple Warriors and three new soldiers were chopped to pieces by the High tier Berserker wielding a gigantic battle-axe like a windmill.

The High tier Berserker turned his head warily and saw Joseph.

"Hey, coward, can you run this time?"

"I’m not running anymore, sending you off."

Joseph smiled as he swung his arms wide, smashing the Warhammer towards the opponent’s head.

The High tier Berserker knew well the power of the hammer’s strike; he roared angrily, his skin rapidly turning red, stomping the ground forcefully, and charged forward with a roar.

With a powerful stomp, he shattered the hardened sewage stone slabs, and the swinging axe created a sharp blast as it traveled through the air.

This axe actually produced a sonic boom effect.

Joseph’s expression changed slightly.

Being a strategist-type talent, combat wasn’t his forte, and he naturally suffered when meeting a High tier Berserker specialized in battle.

But he had no choice but to raise his Warhammer and brace himself.

"Clang!"

Sparks flew; the massive shockwave from weapon collision caused Joseph’s tiger’s mouth to bleed profusely.

Damn brute!

He cursed internally, using the excuse of wiping blood to stretch his hand towards his waist.

Reluctantly, but he couldn’t delay any longer.

He grasped a specially-made explosive, about to throw it when his peripheral vision caught sight of Tom behind the High tier Berserker.

Joseph grew anxious, casting Tom a "get away" look, yet Tom flashed a confident smile.

Joseph saw the weapon in Tom’s hand.

It was a large-caliber firearm of ancient design, likely an archaeological find.

A smile appeared on Joseph’s lips as he threw the explosive out.

Thick smoke billowed, and the pungent smell swept through the tunnel.

"Bang!"

The gun barrel let out a thunderous boom, the immense sound surprising even Tom himself.

The High tier Berserker fell with a crash, his formidable vitality making him continue to struggle.

Of course, Joseph wasn’t about to show any courtesy; he charged into the smoke, relying on memory, and found the High tier Berserker.

Three continuous blows finally cracked open the massive watermelon-sized head.

Red, white, and yellow splattered all over the ground.

Chapter 300: What’s Wrong with Bringing Cannons on a Business Trip?

The entire Governor’s Territory was bustling.

Since they had decided to carry out a rescue operation and engage in a decisive battle near Helentz Castle, preparations had to be made.

A mobile rescue team composed of Light Cavalry set off first.

Jes, who had recently been acting like a firefighter captain, led this troop. This time, he had a total of three thousand cavalry under his command, nearly all the cavalry in the Governor’s Territory.

Cavalry is a technical branch, not something that can be quickly trained, mostly reconstituted from the former Three Overseas Provinces units.

There's no doubt about their professional ability, but their tactical thinking was outdated, with a strong tendency towards rowdy military habits. Their main task these past few months was to receive ideological education, commonly known as brainwashing.

After all, it was difficult for them to accept the new army's military building philosophy due to habits cultivated over many years.

Their minds were full of traditional military concepts.

However, in certain situations, old-style thinking wasn't a bad thing.

For instance, now.

Upon learning that the Empress would personally lead the army, the passion of these cavalry lords was instantly ignited.

After all, entering the army and going to battle was for the sake of promotion and wealth.

What stage could be better than performing in front of the Empress?

Though it was dangerous, risks and opportunities coexisted, and the fire in their hearts was ignited.

Even if they unfortunately died in battle or were disabled, Governor Roland would provide them with a safety net.

If they died in battle, they could leave their family with sufficient wealth; if disabled, they could retire comfortably for the rest of their lives, which wasn't a loss.

The cavalry unit, still dazed half a year ago, quickly found a new surge of energy, shouldering their lances and rifles, advancing towards Helentz Castle under the banner of the White Rose.

Jes, leading the Light Cavalry unit, sighed in relief.

In the previous few days, he had been worried that the Empress would abandon Helentz Castle.

To be precise, he wasn't worried about the Empress, as he always believed in Her Majesty the Empress's kindness and benevolence. He was concerned about Christine, that cold-blooded character.

She had a record of sacrificing even the Imperial Guard of her home country, so what baseline could she possibly have when stepping in as commander?

Luckily, Her Majesty the Empress suppressed her madness.

Jes would never know that he, who worshiped Her Majesty the Empress like a goddess, had briefly considered similar thoughts as Christine but changed his mind after weighing his options.

Looking back at the Governor's Mansion and the Empress's Palace, the flame in Jes's heart was ignited as well.

He was now a Colonel, and if he established meritorious service in this battle, the golden star of a Brigadier General was within reach.

As long as he earned that golden star, his father wouldn't force him into business to make money.

He couldn't understand why his father had such a hunger for money. The family already possessed a massive fortune that could be squandered for dozens of generations without the need to start a business.

He really had no interest in money, as he didn't lack it.

He needed to establish accomplishments to acquire the power to safeguard the family fortune.

Even though his father had paved a path through the Cabinet Finance Minister, helping him enter the army, it wasn't enough.

The family's wealth had far exceeded its power, attracting more and more people eyeing their assets, which was dangerous.

Fortunately, his father wasn't too stubborn, having invested in a Cabinet Minister, but also not opposing his becoming part of the Iron Imperialist Faction.

In this battle, he had to achieve remarkable success!

The military and civilians of Hansa City lined the road on both sides, seeing off the Light Cavalry unit as they left the city to rescue their fathers, husbands, and brothers.

They were all well aware that this was the crucial battle determining the fate of the Three Overseas Provinces.

In this ultimate test, everyone had to submit their answers.

The Empress and Roland submitted their answers with the new policies and new army.

Christine answered by personally commanding the battle.

Jes's answer was to fight with all his might and kill the enemy.

The answer from ordinary people was to wholeheartedly support the Empress.

Meanwhile, the merchants remaining in Hansa City also faced choices.

Would they offer help in the midst of snow, strike while the iron is cold, or continue to observe?

If they could ascertain Roland’s inevitable victory, many would choose to offer help; if they could ascertain Roland’s failure, many would strike while the iron is cold.

However, with the current stalemate, bystanders couldn’t discern victory or defeat.

Remaining neutral? Obviously not a viable option. Unless one possesses supreme power, not aiding either side would offend both.

What strength do you possess to be neutral?

The last one to remain neutral was Val City State, which had already been destroyed.

Standing on the balcony of the Governor’s Mansion, Roland maintained a confident smile, waving to the troops marching along Central Avenue, smiling at the crowd.

Although he felt a little anxious inwardly, he would never let his anxiety show.

He wanted everyone whose gaze met his to feel his confidence in victory.

He was indeed full of confidence, not just making a show.

Anyway, it was Christine responsible for the battles; he just needed to be CPU for her.

While displaying his confidence, his administrative secretary appeared behind him.

"Lord Governor, a representative of the Sassan Business Association seeks an audience."

"Business Association?" Roland turned around, somewhat surprised as he looked at the administrative secretary, hearing the term for the first time.

"Lord Governor need not be shocked; the Business Association is an organization newly established by the Sassan merchants."

"Notify them that I will receive them in the parlor."

Just as he finished speaking, Roland stopped the administrative secretary, "Wait, I will personally go to welcome them."

At such times, the formation of a Business Association and a proactive request for an audience was mostly a gesture of goodwill, deserving of sufficient respect.

In this era, merchants had low status, and even if they possessed enormous wealth, it could easily be encroached by feudal lords; offering them some respect could yield significant results.

Roland strode toward the entrance.

When he arrived at the staircase on the third floor of the Governor’s Mansion, several merchants in long robes stood there, waiting somewhat uneasily.

"It was my discourtesy not to greet esteemed guests at the door."

Roland gestured invitingly, "Esteemed guests, please come in."