Empress 301

Chapter 301: What's Wrong with Bringing Cannons on a Business Trip? (Part 2)

The Sassanid merchants were stunned. They never dreamed that the Governor would personally come out to greet them.

The bearded leader of the merchants was so excited that he didn't know where to place his hands. Fortunately, Roland was indeed a gracious host, naturally patting him on the shoulder and walking alongside him.

The lips of the Sassanid merchant leader quivered with excitement, and he walked with an involuntary limp.

In recent years, the fortunes of the Sassanid Kingdom had been declining, with domestic officials and nobility becoming corrupt, and regional separatist forces dominating, causing the national power to fall far short of its past glory.

The Sussex Empire, Jin Yuan Republic, and other countries were competing to incorporate the Sassanid Kingdom into their overseas colonial systems.

Anyone with insight could see that the Sassanid Kingdom was nearing its end.

Smart people don't stay on sinking ships, and merchants who can make money in international trade are indeed smart.

Led by Bair, the Sassanid merchants traveled across oceans to the core of the Rodinia Continent to seek opportunities.

Among major powers like Sussex, Jin Yuan, and Vladimir, they first ruled out the Vladimir Empire, which seemed to ask, "What is a business environment?"

Their first stop was the Jin Yuan Republic.

In their view, regardless of appearances, the progressive Jin Yuan Republic was better than a monarchy.

However, what they saw in the Jin Yuan Kingdom was only factional struggles and endless killings.

The Sassanid merchants shrank back.

They only wanted to seek wealth, not death.

When they came to the Hansa Province with trepidation, they witnessed Roland’s thunderous actions against the Samaritan merchants.

They breathed a sigh of relief, feeling they had finally come to the right place.

Merchants who traded based on their abilities most hated those who resorted to underhanded tactics.

The Samaritan merchants were the epitome of those who resorted to unscrupulous means.

They had only one doubt: Was Governor Roland targeting the wealth of the Samaritan merchants or their bottomless greed?

After months of observation, they were almost certain it was the latter.

They also tried giving "gifts" to officials in Hansa Province to open business channels, but they were sternly rejected.

The rejection did not dishearten them; instead, it strengthened their resolve to remain in Hansa.

However, the good situation did not last long; as soon as they settled in Hansa, enemies came knocking at their door.

The Sassanid merchants had heard something of the Oden Kingdom’s way of doing things, knowing their commercial policies were very harsh. Making money wasn’t hard, but keeping their property was very difficult.

Merchants who engaged in commercial activities during this era were capable individuals. As long as there was a relatively lenient business environment, they could always make money.

But what to do after making money? How to preserve the hard-earned wealth?

They could only gamble.

This country needed to be a strong nation and sufficiently enlightened.

After surveying several targets, the Sassanid merchants had no choice but to bet on Roland and the Empress behind him.

Help in times of adversity had arrived!

In the reception room, after taking their seats, the leading Sassanid merchant introduced himself.

The Business Association was established yesterday to unite the Sassanid merchants, facilitate mutual exchanges, and protect their interests.

Bair carefully crafted his words, fearing to anger Roland.

For merchants to establish an organization to "protect their interests" was a sensitive matter in this era.

The thick-bearded Bair kept his head down, not daring to meet Roland’s eyes, but he used his peripheral vision to gauge Roland’s reaction.

If Roland verbally approved but internally opposed, his eyes would certainly betray him.

However, he saw not a hint of displeasure in Roland’s eyes.

"Good,"

Roland said with a smile: "There is strength in unity. The establishment of the Business Association is a good thing. You can form a convoy fleet to protect your interests, and the Imperial Army will also provide you convenience. However, for now, only the Governor’s territory can protect you."

Bair stared blankly at Roland, murmuring softly, "Does the Lord Governor really support us?"

"Why wouldn’t I support you? Overseas trade is full of dangers, and the Imperial Navy cannot provide escort protection for you long-term. Forming private armed forces is inevitable. As long as you register according to the regulations and accept management, that’s all."

Bair let out a long breath.

After arriving in Hansa, Roland had immediately sent someone to explain the laws to them, including the establishment and management regulations for private armed forces.

As long as national interests are not harmed, it is possible to form private armed forces within reasonable limits, but they cannot be equipped with prohibited weapons or construct a First Class Battleship like the Monarch.

The simple summary was that protective private armed forces could be formed, but they must not harm Roland’s interests.

"For help in forming private armed forces, directly contact me or Governor Ados. Within the rules, everything is free."

"Within the rules, everything is free?" Bair murmured to himself, savoring the implications of these words.

Seeing Roland lift his teacup without drinking, Bair knew Roland was busy and quickly stood up, expressing his position to Roland with a solemn demeanor.

"Lord Governor, the Sassan Business Association has decided to set its headquarters in your territory. Please support us. We actually have a private armed force of over ten thousand people. If you need, we can join the fight!"

Roland smiled and nodded, calmly saying: "Mr. Bair, I am honored by your confidence in me. However, there's no need to dispatch troops. I am capable of defending territorial security and protecting everyone's interests."

Bair was awed by Roland's confidence, not daring to say more, only assuring once more that there would be no conflict with Roland's interests.

He also offered financial support, which Roland tactfully declined again.

Feeling slightly troubled, he cautiously said: "Lord Governor, I have a batch of light field cannons from the Said Khanate that can be transported by mules or even donkeys, if you..."

"Wonderful!"

Roland slammed the table, making the teacup jump.

"Mr. Bair, you've come just in time. I'll take all of this stock, and we will trade at market price, so you won't be disadvantaged."

Bair wanted to say more but was halted by Roland's raised hand.

"Mr. Bair, you are my friend. I never shortchange friends. Even if not friends, I wouldn't extort normal business partners."

Seeing the sincerity in Roland's clear eyes, Bair trembled all over with excitement.

This time, they had really come to the right place! Initially worried about secretly carrying hundreds of illegal light cannons, not knowing how to handle this risk, it had finally been resolved.

These light field cannons were easy to move and simple to use, with no drawbacks other than being slightly less powerful.

However, Roland was currently short of field artillery.

The large-caliber cannons manufactured in Hansa City were too bulky, only suitable for siege and annihilation battles.

To fight in the field, field cannons were necessary.

Unfortunately, all the cannons in Hansa City were 12-pound heavy cannons, extremely difficult to move, and couldn't reach the frontline for decisive battles.

Bair was providing 6-pound and 4-pound cannons that weighed between 280-400 kilograms, which could be moved by mules or sturdy donkeys, or even pushed by infantrymen.

Despite not being powerful, they would be enough against infantry.

Invited to inspect the warehouse with over a hundred small cannons, Roland was very pleased.

He did not ask why the Sassanid merchants were carrying so many cannons during their travels.

In these war-torn times, how could one do business without cannons when facing pirates?

After arranging the handover of the cannons, Roland quickly headed to the operations command room.

He had to share the good news with Christine immediately.

Bursting into the operations command room, he saw Christine and Sif playing a game.

Judging by Sif’s sweating brow, there was no question who had the advantage.

Seeing Roland approach, Sif caught a lifeline and promptly halted the game, smiling as she asked:

"You seem in good spirits. What’s the good news?"

Christine also turned her gaze over.

Being forced to change the battle plan had left her agitated, and being unable to annihilate the enemy had fueled her frustration.

She was indeed eager to hear good news.

"Christine, the reason you had to abandon the annihilation plan was that the artillery couldn’t arrive at the battleground during the decisive battle, right?"

"Yes, our cannons are too cumbersome."

"What if there were over a hundred 6-pound and 4-pound light field cannons that can be hauled by mules?"

A flicker of murderous intent crossed Christine’s eyes, "Then they are doomed."

Chapter 302: Major Archaeological Research Discovery

"Captain, this is where I found the superweapon’s ruins."

Tom cheerfully pointed to the concealed entrance leading to the sewers while tightly clutching the large-caliber firearm that just helped him gain merit, as if afraid it would be taken away.

Just now, the Helentz Castle tunnel defenders once again repelled an attack by the Oden Kingdom's daredevil squad, relying on the intricate sewers and tunnels.

Among them, two formidable high-tier berserkers were killed in action.

One unlucky guy stepped on a trap and was hacked to death.

Another stronger one was attacked from both sides by Joseph and Tom, then was hit by a large-caliber firearm excavated from the ancient ruins, dying rather unjustly.

After carefully examining Tom's unexpected find, Captain Jacobs decided to explore the ruins once more.

Defending Helentz Castle with capability alone was almost impossible, unless a miracle occurred.

A miracle was certainly not some so-called bond of friendship or extreme anger.

When a person is extremely angry, they often realize that they were just angry for a moment, and still can't do anything.

Only strong support could change the tide of battle.

Jacobs dared not speculate how much support might still come from the rear.

He received an order to break out, which normally meant no large-scale reinforcements would come.

He didn't report the bad news to the entire army, fearing a collapse in morale.

Breakthrough? He would like to, but it's not feasible.

Helentz Castle was now divided into two worlds.

The surface belonged to the Oden Kingdom, the underground to the Helentz Castle defenders.

As an urban construction model of the Alamanni Border Region during the Magic Empire era, Helentz Castle had at least a 2,500-year history since its founding.

Such a long time without flooding from heavy rains demonstrated the sewer system's construction level.

Relying on the sewers and tunnels, with a strong will to survive, the Helentz Castle defenders stubbornly held on.

The vast majority of soldiers believed that the Governor or even the great Empress would come to save them.

This belief was also their courage to hold out.

Jacobs, however, was different; he believed the Empress would not abandon them, but he didn't trust the Governor or that cold-blooded witch.

Rather than unknown reinforcements, he preferred to believe that there were weapons wrapped in oilcloth paper in the underground cave.

In any case, he needed to look around first.

The situation in the underground cave was unclear; to prevent a violent explosion, he dared not light a flame and had to feel his way forward.

Jacobs gave command to Joseph, and he took Tom and a few soldiers to explore downward.

The underground cave was winding and twisting, pitch black, but fortunately, the Helentz Castle city hall had a few leftover magic lamps.

The light from the magic lamps, with magic crystal stones almost exhausted, was dim, barely illuminating one or two meters ahead.

Despite being very careful, two soldiers accidentally sprained their ankles.

Jacobs decided to have the other soldiers carry them back.

A large search party might not even be useful.

Guided by Tom, Jacobs crawled over a hundred meters, finally reaching a slightly spacious platform.

He was somewhat curious about what this place was, possessing such a level platform.

While he was wondering, a "click" sound echoed, followed by a cold mechanical voice.

Uh-oh, could it be that a guardian was triggered?

Jacobs shouted in a low voice, "Tom, fall back!"

He raised his shield, hoping to resist somewhat, but he knew very well that if this place was from a civilization that manufactured large-caliber firearms, a mere shield wouldn’t stand a chance.

As despair gripped him, a blinding light turned on.

"Identity check, unknown target, initiating attack!"

Jacobs felt his soul freeze.

Although he couldn't understand which language the mechanical guardian spoke, he knew he was doomed.

His life flashed before his eyes. From the hopeful beginnings of becoming a member of the Knight Order, through the vast gap between reality and ideal causing his downfall, to the changes after the Empress ascended to the throne reigniting his hope.

Just as change was about to occur in his life, he was about to die here—it was indeed the unpredictability of life.

Even though he knew there was no hope, Jacobs still raised his shield to defend.

If he were to die, he would die like a knight.

A true warrior dares to maintain a fighting stance in the face of an insurmountable enemy.

Even if it meant nothing.

The sound of a trigger being pulled echoed, yet the anticipated gunfire did not follow.

The trigger was pulled again, yet still no roar of gunfire.

As his eyes gradually adjusted, the blinding light also began to dim. Jacobs, still shaken, finally used the faint light to see the guardian before him.

It was a track-based mechanical guardian over three meters tall.

The guardian held in its hands two incredibly large-caliber weapons aimed at Jacobs, yet unable to fire any ammunition.

Evidently, over time, the ammunition in the weapons had failed.

Before Jacobs could ask, Tom hastily answered.

"The large-caliber rifle I got also had its ammunition failed, but I found a box of special bullets in an oilcloth paper."

Jacobs said nothing, he just nodded.

His heart pounded wildly.

Moments ago, he was only one step away from the Netherworld. Even if the mechanical guardian had one usable bullet in its gun, he'd be dead.

Fortunately, the Goddess of Fate was on his side.

Although the mechanical guardian looked frightening, it was clearly out of power and unable to operate.

Jacobs courageously walked forward.

Looking up at the towering mechanical guardian, Jacobs secretly marveled at the advancement of prehistoric civilizations.

No wonder the Magic Empire referred to the new era's people as the Barbarian Race; civilization had indeed regressed significantly.

The Magic Empire was not known for its mechanical civilization, yet it still created glorious mechanical achievements.

By contrast with today’s few powerful countries...

Jacobs took a deep breath to dispel the negative emotions, then climbed onto the mechanical guardian’s body to remove the headlamp from its helmet.

The headlamp wasn’t bright, but it was better than the soon-to-be-exhausted magic lamps.

Treading shallowly through the darkness with Tom, neither spoke.

This place was dangerous, but they had to venture forward.

They needed to find out what was hidden in the sewers.

After proceeding several dozen meters further, they arrived at a storage room’s entrance.

Gazing at the rusty giant iron door and the heavy granite walls embedded in rock, Jacobs and Tom exchanged a glance, both slightly disheartened.

The feeling of hope being replaced by disappointment was truly difficult to bear.

If they had never seen the light, they wouldn’t resent the dark so much.

Seeing Tom’s dejected expression, Jacobs smiled and said, "Let’s look around, as you could find one super rifle, we might find a second or third."

They spread out to search.

After an unknown amount of time, Tom’s joyful voice echoed from a corner.

"I found it! I found it!"

Jacobs rushed over quickly, not minding as he tripped over a protruding stone slab.

A large oilcloth-wrapped package, sealing several large-caliber rifles.

The design looked exactly like the one Tom found.

Clearly, this was standard equipment of the previous civilization.

The locked super warehouse was very likely an armory.

At this thought, more than half of Tom’s joy was diminished.

"Captain, it’s a pity, if we could open this armory, we could definitely win this battle!"

"Young man, don’t be down. We’ve already found several superweapons. Alone we can’t defeat the enemy, but holding the tunnels is no problem."

Jacobs patted Tom on the shoulder, his voice subtly filled with excitement.

"Now we have a reason to hold on. As long as we hold out long enough, Lord Governor’s reinforcements will eventually arrive. The credit for discovering these ruins..."

He didn’t finish, but Tom understood.

He seemed to see the possibility of more Silver Stars adorning his rank insignia.

The captain was right; they had to hold on and they certainly could.

Chapter 303: The Dog is Barking

"The greatest threat is the artillery positions occupying the high ground!"

Christine looked at the battlefield map before her and pointed out the critical issue with precision.

Helentz Castle was understaffed, not only losing the inner and outer city surface positions but also allowing the Oden Kingdom to occupy Helen Mountain east of the castle.

This mountain was neither too high nor too low, just right for mounting large-caliber artillery that covered Helentz Castle and the eastern segment of the canal.

The main positions of the Oden Kingdom Army relied on Helen Mountain and the Jill Canal, making them easy to defend but hard to attack.

The key to the problem was identified, but how to solve it?

Roland remained silent, while Sif turned her gaze out the window to admire the scenery.

Christine was somewhat annoyed by Sif's indifferent attitude, but she never expected Sif to be useful beyond charging into battle personally.

With her fingertips rhythmically tapping the map, her thoughts flew several kilometers to the front line.

The carriage window was lifted, revealing beautiful scenery along the way, but she had no mind to enjoy it.

Winning this battle wasn't difficult; the challenge lay in surrounding and annihilating the enemy.

She owed Roland a big favor, and not repaying it left a knot in her heart that would hinder her path to becoming stronger.

If she could annihilate the Oden Kingdom’s army at a minimal cost, that would repay this favor.

Yet, Roland and Sif had reasons not to give up Helentz Castle, making the possibility of completing the task at a low cost disappear, and increasing the difficulty of solving the problem sharply.

In a way, it’s good. If it were too simple, it wouldn’t showcase her skills.

Christine gathered her thoughts and fixed her gaze on Helen Mountain.

This not-so-high ridge backed the canal and faced the plain, with a gentle slope on its front, but was heavily guarded by troops. Attacking the artillery positions head-on with troops and artillery fire was not feasible.

The only option was to land from the canal and launch a surprise attack from behind.

Thinking it over, Christine could only come up with one plan.

"First, attack the outer positions to mobilize the enemy, then have the Sea Demon launch a surprise attack on Helen Mountain at night from behind."

Sif bit her lip and couldn’t help but remind, "But the Sea Demon can’t climb mountains."

"No matter, just make the people on the mountain come down."

Christine pointed her fingertip at a spot on the map and said in a deep voice:

"The breakthrough point is here. Have the Sea Demon lure the artillery guards at the shore, allowing the Temple Warriors to climb Helen Mountain and quickly destroy the enemy’s cannons."

"The only concern is the enemy deploying a few superpowerful individuals here. If the Old Commander is also stationed here, that would be troublesome."

Christine referred to the Old Commander as Shank Oden, a distant relative of the Oden Imperial Family. He wasn't a typical Northern Berserker but chose a different path.

Rumor has it he carries the bloodline of an Ancient Giant, standing nearly three meters tall and weighing several hundred kilograms, able to tear apart lions, tigers, and even brown bears barehanded, and once hunted three small whales at sea.

Among his hunting list is a rare super demonized giant lizard, and for this, he shamelessly calls himself the "Dragon Hunter."

As is well known, in this era, proper dinosaur descendants are birds, those that look like Evil Dragons are actually lizards, not the Dragon Race; hence the "Dragon Hunter" title is quite exaggerated.

Although it's exaggerated, his strength is undeniable.

To deal with him, only Master Anthony can step in.

Anthony agreed to assist but did not plan to strike first.

If the Old Commander appears, he will covertly intimidate him, forcing Shank to retreat wisely. If Shank acts regardless, he plans to let Roland and the others go first and step in only if they can't withstand it.

Roland understood it was for them to use Shank as a target to train by battle.

Though Shank's strength is high, with Anthony's protection, the overall risk is manageable.

Christine, of course, knew this.

Since Anthony was going, she decided to involve Lisa in the battle to destroy the artillery positions.

Only Sif was excluded.

Despite Sif’s repeated protests, Christine still refused.

"You are the Empress; if you die, the war ends, I cannot take the risk."

Christine’s reasoning was supported by Roland. Sif was thus arranged to stay behind, accompanying Christine.

Sif was discontent, but could only accept the arrangement.

Christine was right; Sif could join the fray personally, but firearms were indiscriminate. Although bullets couldn’t kill her, large-caliber artillery could send her off.

She could evade swords and arrows, withstand bullets, but she was not invincible.

Even if artillery wasn’t aimed directly, if the Old Commander made a last-ditch effort to take her down, she might still die.

Though Shank is among the weaker Tier Seven, he seems almighty like a War God compared to "weak" in Tier Eight.

Christine did not expect the assault team to seize and hold the artillery positions; her demand was to destroy the Oden’s artillery.

As long as the enemy’s large-caliber artillery is destroyed, it loses its firepower advantage before being repaired.

The newly equipped small cannons can then prove useful. Small cannons are still cannons; a six-pound shell landing on you sends you to the Netherworld just as quietly.

With firepower fair or even dominant, it’s Christine’s time next.

Night falls, the troops find places to camp, and the carriage slowly stops.

Sif left the camp alone and found a quiet place to gaze at the stars.

She was waiting for someone.

She didn’t have to wait long before Roland’s shadow appeared.

"What, still angry about my suggestion?" Roland’s gentle voice came from behind.

"If I don’t even have the ability to face Shank, how can I face Sofia?" Sif softly retorted.

She slowly turned, her expression calm.

She didn’t scream hysterically or complain in a fit of rage, she just spoke calmly.

Chapter 304: The Dog Is Barking (2)

"We don’t have time."

Roland and Sif exchanged a glance for a second and changed their minds.

"Alright, we’ll fight side by side."

Sif was right.

If you’re afraid of danger, then don’t provoke Sofia; find a place to hide with her and enjoy the final tranquility before life’s end.

If it weren't for the imminent return day, retreating to the countryside would seem like a good option.

But the return day is upon us; playing ostrich won't work.

Those trapped in the whirlpool of destiny have nowhere to escape.

Since we can't flee, let's face it bravely.

The next day, the main force of the new army led by Christine continued to advance.

Following the large army was a reorganized infantry brigade led by the Mirror Empress. Although this unit didn't have the designation of the Imperial Guard, it played the role of one.

According to the combat plan, the arrival of the Forbidden Brigade was to put the last nail in the enemy's coffin.

The real decider of victory or defeat would be the battle before the Forbidden Brigade's arrival.

Especially the battle at Helen Mountain's artillery position.

On the night of June 11, 1792, the curtain of night fell.

In the summer of Northern Rodinia, the temperature isn't high— the sea breeze brings fresh rain, washing away the daytime clamor and bringing coolness to the night.

Helen Mountain, Oden Kingdom's artillery position.

The patrolling soldiers walked lazily along the patrol route, showing no expression.

They didn't bother to speak or even glance around much.

The leading captain silently glanced at the city below the mountain, saw the bright lights of the town hall and the flag of the Oden Kingdom, and cursed inwardly.

The damn Helentz Castle battle should be over.

This battle has consumed too many lives, too much time, and morale.

Glancing at the listless soldiers with the corner of his eye, he should have scolded them harshly but couldn't bring himself to do it.

Having to patrol on rainy days isn't a pleasant task, especially when there's no chance of encountering the enemy here.

To ascend Helen Mountain, one must either climb the cliff behind or launch a frontal assault up the gentle slope.

With Hansa Province's current strength, it's simply impossible.

A surprise attack? The captain couldn't help but laugh.

He even somewhat hoped someone would try a surprise attack. If those fools knew that Lord Shank was stationed right at the artillery position, they would be desperate.

The end of the patrol route was by the edge of the cliff.

Every night, he would loosen his pants here and urinate towards the canal. Although it was impossible to reach the canal tens of meters away, he would hypnotize himself into believing it did.

The captain and ten soldiers reached the cliff's edge, ready to start their nightly ritual.

Just as they were about to unbutton their pants, a soldier curiously pointed at the canal and laughed.

"Captain, did you hear that? Someone’s singing on the other side of the canal, and it’s really nice."

"Nonsense, I’m not deaf, stop talking, listen quietly!"

The Jill Canal is a busy one, with many ships passing by daily. The Helentz Castle battle didn’t affect shipping much.

Ships anchor overnight, and sometimes people sing out of boredom.

The patrolling soldiers, listening, gradually became entranced, not even noticing this stretch of canal was empty without ships anchored.

The captain and soldiers’ eyes grew distant, smiling foolishly as they walked towards the cliff’s edge.

In the sound of raindrops, their bodies fell like a leaf, crashing silently at the hundreds-meter-deep cliff’s end, stirring up little dust.

The song swallowed the patrol team.

Yet, minutes later, the patrol team miraculously climbed up from the abyss, as if they fell from a small step instead.

If someone observed closely, they might notice that the patrol team had completely changed personnel.

The patrol team headed for the handoff point.

The uniforms were still the same, only the people changed.

Leading at the front was Roland, wearing a disguise mask.

His physique matched the patrol team captain's closely; with the mask on in the pitch-black night, it was easy to deceive.

Transition time arrived.

Another patrol team unwillingly walked out of the camp gate, lethargically heading to the rendezvous.

The leading captain's eyes barely opened, half-heartedly saluting to Roland, not even bothering to ask if there was anything unusual.

Just as the two captains crossed paths, Roland stopped in his tracks.

The incoming captain also stopped, about to inquire when his vision suddenly went black, losing consciousness completely.

Roland and his cohorts worked swiftly, also taking out the ten patrol soldiers and dragging them into nearby bushes, tossing the stripped uniforms down the cliff.

Taking advantage of the night and rain, Roland's special operation squad approached the artillery position.

Seeing over a hundred large-caliber cannons lined up neatly, Roland was slightly surprised.

With such powerful firepower, along with nearly ninety thousand troops, they still couldn't take Helentz Castle?

No time to ponder, he took out the corrosive agent Norton prepared and got ready to act.

Tonight’s Plan A was to sneak up the mountain, pour the corrosive agent into the cannon barrels, and finish the sabotage.

Plan B was to launch a signal flare upon being discovered by enemies, launching a night assault using the cover of darkness.

Munina herself sang to enchant the enemy patrol team down the hill, switching into their clothes to sneak up and carry out the sabotage mission.

Roland and the Temple Warriors were responsible for the sabotage.

Sif and the support team were ambushed in a hidden spot on the side of the cliff, ready to provide backup at any moment.

If forced into an assault battle, Roland would join them, holding out until reinforcements arrived.

While the artillery position up the hill had several hundred soldiers defending, the real threat was only Shank.

With Anthony in command, Roland wasn’t too concerned.

Eliminating Shank would make taking out a few hundred soldiers not difficult.

They could then hold the hilltop position, waiting for Christine’s encirclement inside and out.

This strategy could roughly be termed "Central Blooming."

Everyone knows the "Central Blooming" tactic is highly dangerous. A slight mishap would make it a reckless advance with heads served on a platter.

Should Shank be alerted prematurely, the plan’s completion would turn into a Hell-level difficulty.

Fortunately, tonight’s operation was going smoothly.

The Goddess of Fortune was also on his side, sending just the right amount of rain.

If it rained heavier, climbing cliffs would be much tougher. If lighter, the enemy wouldn’t cover cannons with tarps, nor leave them unwatched.

The special operation team moved quickly, each holding a bottle filled with corrosive agent, pouring it into the cannon barrels according to the designated amount.

The cannon barrels treated with corrosive agent would suddenly lose strength, risking a burst upon firing.

In the wind and rain, the ghostly special operation team completed the sabotage mission, preparing to leave.

Just then, a soldier came out to relieve himself, vaguely seeing figures move near the artillery position, and cautiously approached.

He warily looked and saw it was the night patrol team, finally easing his mind.

He smiled and greeted the patrol team, "Hey, Brind, why is your patrol over here tonight?"

Roland’s heart tightened instantly; he discreetly held onto the Flying Knife.

This place was beyond the Flying Knife’s range; he needed to wait for the hapless soldier to get closer.

He nodded and gestured for the unfamiliar soldier to leave.

The soldier muttered a few words, turned around, intending to leave.

Just as Roland was about to move, an impatient Temple Warrior had already taken action.

He raised the hand crossbow and shot a poisoned arrow.

The soldier relieving himself fell softly.

Roland put down the Flying Knife, raising a thumbs-up to the Temple Warrior in approval.

The special operation team quickly left, heading towards the support team’s position.

This godforsaken place, every second longer was dangerous.

Passing the fallen soldier, a Temple Warrior drew a dagger and struck hard.

A swift slash; the unlucky soldier’s head detached, dying with eyes open.

Seeing the Temple Warrior’s skilled actions, Roland nodded approvingly inside.

Truly elite forces cultivated by the Divine Court, completely unlike the religious private troops he imagined.

Harsh enough, not a hint of light visible.

Perhaps seeing through Roland’s doubts, the Temple Warrior who finished the soldier explained in a low voice:

"Lord of Light, using dark means to pursue light, the Goddess wouldn’t mind."

Roland smiled and nodded, accepting his explanation, gesturing to hurry up and leave.

The special operation team departed quickly.

Just seconds after they left the artillery position, a black dog came running out of nowhere, pouncing on the fallen soldier, sniffing and not sensing its master's life, letting out a shrill howl.

"Woof! Woof! Woof!"

Chapter 305: Who Is More Shameless?

"Fxxk!"

The barking shattered the quiet night sky, causing Roland's face to change, and he couldn't help but utter a curse from Sussex Country.

If an accident can be anticipated, it's not an accident.

Since an accident happened, we can only activate Plan B.

Roland quickly fired a signal flare and then dashed towards Sif's support team's position.

The Temple Warrior using a hand crossbow raised his arm again and shot the black dog that had barked in the middle of the night, but the piercing bark had already alarmed the soldiers in the camp.

The only good news might be that it's raining hard tonight, so firearms can't be used, and the guards at the artillery post can only fix bayonets to the firearms to use them as ordinary long spears.

The special operations team retreated to the rendezvous point and joined up with the support team led by Sif.

"Roland, are you okay?"

Seeing that Roland wasn't hurt, Sif quickly lowered her voice and asked, "What went wrong?"

Looking at Sif's tense face, the Temple Warrior who had just acted lowered his head, "I'm sorry, I should have dragged the body away."

"It's not your fault. Even if you dragged the body away, the dog would have barked."

Roland smiled, exonerating the Temple Warrior, "It was an accident."

"Forget the accident for now, let's get moving. If they react, it'll be hard to leave."

Since Roland spoke, Sif didn't want to delve deeper. She grabbed Roland's hand, trying to lead him away.

"We can't leave now; the corrosive agent needs time to take effect. If we leave and they discover it immediately, it'll all be for nothing."

Sif paused for a few seconds, released Roland's hand, and began assembling a three-section long spear.

Roland was right.

They weren't here for a leisure trip; they were risking their lives.

The Old Commander is right here? Then bring it on!

Sif held the three-meter-long spear, standing like a War God at the front of the team.

She was the sharpest blade, and tonight she had to stand out.

The black dog’s dying shriek alarmed the artillery post guards.

Although this guard team wasn’t large, they were all elite.

Just because the two patrol teams were charmed by the Siren’s Song and ambushed doesn’t reflect their true strength.

The awakened guard team quickly mobilized, starting a mountain-wide search.

The guard team commander was a Major, his face livid as he quickly found traces.

"Over there, follow me!"

He drew his pistol, coldly staring at the position where Roland and the others were located.

Finding the culprits wasn’t hard, as Sif didn’t hide at all; she just stood there, waiting for them.

Attention from the enemy must be drawn.

As long as they hold out for half an hour, those cannons will become scrap.

Seeing Sif’s brazen demeanor, the guard team Major was nearly driven mad with rage.

"Who are you? Who ordered you to attack our military, speak!"

Facing the guard team Major, Sif elegantly raised her long spear, her crisp voice even sweeter than the Siren Munina’s by a few degrees.

"Does an invader have any right to accuse of ambush?"

The Major’s face changed slightly, and he slowly raised his right hand.

Behind him, dozens of soldiers raised their firearms.

Standing not far behind Sif, Roland was somewhat surprised—could firearms really be used in such rain?

Seeing Roland’s surprised expression, the guard team Major couldn’t help but laugh loudly.

Not long before departing, the King’s expedition team acquired a batch of ancient divine weapons through relic excavation.

These rifles can be used in any weather and have five rounds, with very high shooting accuracy.

Apart from the limited quantity, they have virtually no drawbacks.

"Bang!"

"Ding ding ding!"

After a volley, the guard team Major was surprised to find Roland and Sif unharmed. Upon closer inspection, a giant steel shield had somehow appeared in Roland’s hands.

The dense bullets were all blocked by the steel shield.

Although the steel shield was battered beyond recognition, it had fulfilled its task.

"Change rounds, reload!"

The guard team Major furiously issued the command; however, it was too late.

Though changing rounds and reloading only takes a few seconds, for Roland and Sif, it felt as long as a century.

Screams echoed one after another.

Like lightning, Sif charged into the enemy camp, her long spear carving a perfect arc, sweeping away all enemies within a four-meter radius.

Roland also swapped for a long spear, transforming into a whirlwind, harvesting freely.

The guard team Major didn’t have time to issue his next command.

Because before swinging his long spear, Roland had thrown a Flying Knife, hitting him directly in the throat.

The elite Temple Warriors, led by another High Tier Saint Hall Magilla, launched an assault during the reload period.

Though the number of Temple Warriors was fewer than the guard team, their combat power far surpassed them, especially when those unfortunate soldiers were reloading.

They would reload in their next life.

The screams alerted more people.

"Who dares disturb my Commander’s rest?"

A thunderous voice rang out, making their ears buzz.

Roland and Sif exchanged a glance, feeling slightly anxious.

Although they had speculated Shank had a high chance of being on the mountain, actually facing him was still a bit nerve-wracking.

Roland tossed aside the long spear, replacing it with a short spear and shield.

This was the standard close-combat equipment of a Holy Knight.

Lurking behind, Lisa also appeared, her face solemn as she spoke in a deep voice:

"The teacher, he..."

"What about Master Anthony?"

"He said the three of us could defeat Shank." Lisa’s expression was grim.

Seeing Lisa a bit distressed, Roland swallowed his sarcasm, flashing a bright smile.

"Since Master Anthony says so, there must be no problem."

"Prepare for battle!"

Lisa nodded forcefully, her eyes ablaze.

Roland was right; if Master Anthony dared to say that, there must be a reason.

"Boom!"

A tent was blown away, and a giant hulking figure as massive as a mountain stood up from within, angrily gazing at Roland and the others.

Looking at Shank's burly physique, Roland's heart suddenly sped up.

Size is equivalent to combat power.

Why can't the perfect hunter leopard, proficient in various hunting skills, defeat the lion and tiger? It's because of the disadvantage in size.

Although in animation works, there's a setting where larger beings are destined to lose, this is the real world.

The oppressive feeling brought by Shank's massive body was suffocating.

Sif's hands trembled slightly, and her breathing was rapid.

It wasn't fear, but the excessive tension causing adrenaline to be secreted frantically.

The old commander's height even exceeded the long spear in her hand.

From a distance of hundreds of meters away from Roland and others, Shank took the huge warhammer off his back and slammed it onto the ground, stirring up countless fragments of rock.

Then he swung the giant hammer, striking the fragments.

The fragments flew like cannonballs.

Roland let out a light shout, "Get behind me!"

He lifted his shield, struggling to block the flying stones for Sif and Lisa.

The fragments hit the shield like a rain of bullets, making a dull sound and shattering into debris.

Roland’s tiger mouth bled from the shock, and he stepped back two paces to ease the force.

No wonder he’s a Tier Seven powerhouse, is that all?

Roland was somewhat puzzled, then relieved.

Previously, he had only seen Anthony and Sofia. Although Sofia hadn’t made a move, her terrifying aura alone could frighten people to death, and Master Anthony’s strength was superb, his combat power astonishing.

But they are not ordinary Tier Seven.

Not to mention Sofia, Anthony is also the pinnacle of the conventional Tier Seven.

It’s not that the old commander’s combat power is lacking, but that normal Tier Seven are like this.

Powerful enough to crush hundreds of ordinary soldiers, but that’s all.

No wonder Anthony was unwilling to make a move; he probably thought Shank wasn’t qualified enough.

Indeed, a high-quality practice sandbag.

Roland pushed off the ground forcefully, charging at Shank.

Shank was stunned.

He was somewhat baffled, his stone attack should absolutely have injured this damned opponent, why dare to charge at him?

Why?

Of course, it’s because of courage!

Roland’s mind flashed with a famous quote from a historical Holy Knight, victory requires strength, but a charge only requires courage!

Shank can be said to be the weakest Tier Seven, while he, Sif, and Lisa are all standing at the top of Tier Eight.

After more than half a year of lurking, he completed over a dozen inheritances, and the base color of the soul card as the main profession inheritor finally turned colorful.

The colorful inheritor card also promoted the Holy Knight sub-profession, and a large amount of overflow "experience" filled the sub-profession, making his strength progress by leaps and bounds.

He was improving, and Sif and Lisa were not idle.

The largest inheritor badge Roland obtained came from Sif.

Although she is human, she was unexpectedly compatible with the elf race inheritance, mastering Elf Imperial Swordsmanship (usable with a spear) and other various skills over the past half a year, and her combat power increased several times compared to half a year ago.

Lisa, under the guidance of a great teacher, rapidly became a master of Flame Manipulation.

Roland smelled the strong scent of alcohol on Shank, further confirmed Master Anthony’s judgment.

Shank, the fool, even drank alcohol.

Apart from those who are good at Drunken Fist, drinking alcohol only reduces combat power.

He never anticipated that Roland dared to take the initiative to attack, Shank furiously swung his massive warhammer down with great force.

His mouth curled into a cruel smile.

Since you are a warrior, you must take this hammer head-on, right?

This hammer was his hard power condensed over a century, even a small mountain could be shattered by it.

Even if Roland is a Steel Warrior, he would be hammered flat.

"Boom!"

The ground shook, and stones flew.

The warhammer pounded heavily onto the ground.

In the instant the heavy hammer fell, Roland lifted his shield, eyes filled with determination, a steadfast gaze like that of a fearless martyr facing death.

Yet, after the hammer’s trajectory could no longer be changed, he released his grip on the shield and deftly rolled away from the range of the hammer’s shockwave.

Only an idiot would take a frontal attack from a giant warrior.

Of course, Roland wasn't an idiot; he was very cunning.

In the moment he rolled away, Roland's hand filled with specially enhanced smoke bombs and explosive bombs instantly hurled toward Shank's face.

In the smoke, there was top-grade pepper powder, black pepper, and quicklime, and even the profession-specific tear gas mist supplied by Master Norton.

Although Shank was powerful, he was ultimately flesh and blood.

Misjudging Roland's reaction, his hammer fell into empty air, causing a discomfort similar to missing a step on the stairs. The shameless explosive bombs that followed made him unable to open his eyes, tears streaming down his face.

He covered his eyes, screaming in agony.

Roland drew a short sword, taking advantage of Shank's momentary bewilderment, stabbing the short sword into Shank's rear.

He had wanted to stab the heart, but Shank's defense had not yet broken, plus his height was too great, forcing Roland to reluctantly choose a secondary target.

Lisa manipulated flames into the form of a phoenix, smashing it onto Shank's face.

Sif did not rush to attack, instead drawing a pistol and firing five rapid shots.

After consecutive hits, Shank finally realized the seriousness of the problem.

He realized he could become the second Tier Seven to be killed by a lower-tier opponent in the New Calendar.

The pride of a warrior made this result unacceptable to him.

He let out a roar and turned to flee.

Roland was stunned.

Sif and Lisa were also stunned.

Would a brave and fearless giant also run away?

Running and shouting in fury, Shank swore that as long as he recovered slightly, he would immediately return and kill these three shameless scoundrels.

As long as he got a little time!

"Ah!"

The sound of a scream rang out once more.

A massive wall of fire, accompanied by scorching heat waves, blocked his escape route.

Shank stared blankly at the fire wall, finally realizing he had no escape.

He gritted his teeth and turned around, seeing Anthony standing at the top of the cliff pretending to enjoy the scenery.

He had no way out, nor any chance of survival.

All he could do was take a few people with him to the grave.

Chapter 306: The Opportunity Was Given to You

Looking into Shank's bloodthirsty eyes, Roland felt like a small animal being watched by a fierce beast, his heart momentarily stopped.

Clearly, the Old Commander was about to fight desperately.

The safest choice would certainly be to frown and retreat behind Master Anthony, letting a Tier Seven battle another Tier Seven.

But Roland chose to face the challenge head-on without hesitation.

If he couldn't even face a weakened Tier Seven, affected by the debuff of drunkenness, with a sword in his butt and compromised condition, there'd be no point in continuing.

He raised his Giant Shield again, meeting Shank's gaze without flinching.

The rain had stopped.

From the foot of the mountain came the constant clash of weapons, mingled with the sounds of gunfire and screams, fires breaking out everywhere, the battlefield resembling Hell.

As Roland fired the signal flare, Christine launched an attack from the front.

Despite being outnumbered, the New Army had absolute superiority in morale, organization, and firepower.

All the Kingdom Army's artillery was concentrated on Helen Mountain, rendered unusable by corrosive agents, causing them to lose the advantage once gained through foreign aid and be without artillery support.

At four o’clock in the morning, the Helentz Region became a nightmare for the Oden people.

Sven the Seventh awoke in a daze from his sleep, staring blankly at the flames rising all around, completely confused about the situation.

When he realized it was the Hansa New Army attacking, he furiously yelled at the adjutant.

"What are you waiting for? Fire the Helen Mountain Battery! Immediately!"

"Your Majesty, we can’t do it; Helen Mountain..."

"What’s wrong with Helen Mountain? The Old Commander is there; who can threaten Helen Mountain?"

The adjutant lowered his head, his voice trembling, "Something’s happened at Helen Mountain. We can only see warning signals."

"What about the Old Commander?" Sven the Seventh’s voice began to tremble; this time, he was genuinely panicked.

"No news." The adjoint’s voice was filled with despair.

Sven the Seventh grabbed the adjutant by the collar, his mind blank.

Just as his eyes glazed over with incomprehension, the sound of cannons boomed.

"You’re giving false reports! Our cannons are still firing, these are our cannons!"

The adjutant mumbled, afraid to speak.

Judging by the cannon fire, it should be a light cannon, with shells weighing about 6 or 4 pounds.

The Kingdom Army did not have these light cannons in their arsenal.

Their artillery was imported large-caliber cannons from countries like Jin Yuan.

The adjutant knew the truth, but he dared not say anything. The King's mood was terrible; right now, he only wanted to hear what's pleasing to him, not the facts.

Just as the adjutant was at a loss for words, Sven the Seventh released his grip on the adjutant's collar and let out a harsh laugh.

"Pass on my command, let General Rune handle the frontline command; I'm returning to Oro Town to gather forces to support him."

The adjoint was momentarily speechless.

Tonight's battle was extremely chaotic, but the enemy's numbers might not be extensive. As long as they hold the King's banner until dawn, they might not lose.

Sven the Seventh leaving now was equivalent to abandoning any hope of victory.

He opened his mouth but couldn't utter a word.

It was evident that His Majesty Sven, usually so proud, was now scared out of his wits.

Expecting a coward to act bravely was unrealistic.

The adjutant retreated three steps and said in a deep voice, "Take care, Your Majesty. I'll pass on the orders immediately."

Seeing the contempt in his longtime adjoint's eyes, the blood within Sven the Seventh boiled instantly, almost driven by the scarce courage left within him to call the adjutant back.

But he resisted.

He was the King; he could not let himself be in danger.

He hastily donned his armor, loudly calling for the Imperial Guard to protect him as they broke through.

As Sven the Seventh lost his courage and prepared to flee, Christine was observing the battlefield from the vantage of a hot air balloon.

Her eyes were like the Arctic Glacier, cold without a hint of emotion.

The battlefield had become a chessboard once again, but the player opposite had changed.

Her gaze shifted to Helen Mountain, where she saw Roland, Sif, and Lisa engaged in a fierce battle with Shank, feeling a bit nervous.

But she quickly found Anthony watching through a telescope, instantly feeling reassured.

Since Master Anthony was present, Shank was certainly doomed.

He was merely using the opportunity to train Roland and the others in real combat skills.

This opportunity to face Tier Seven power without significant risk was extremely rare.

Though Shank was at a disadvantage, he had the Giant bloodline, with explosive power, and if something went wrong, there was still a risk of casualties. The intensity of this battle was high.

But under Anthony's protection, the risks were manageable.

A flash of envy crossed Christine's eyes fleetingly.

After pausing for a second, she shifted her focus back to the main battlefield.

Seventy to eighty thousand Kingdom Army troops were in complete chaos.

But the chaos was temporary; by dawn, they could reorganize and even launch a counterattack.

After all, there was a huge disparity in numbers between the two sides.

The New Army participating tonight was only about twenty-five thousand, and a significant portion of the infantry was exhausted from a long march.

Only the Temple Warriors, Light Cavalry, and the Empress' Personal Guard maintained a complete combat force.

And the window to break through the enemy lines only had the last two or three hours left.

Christine, like a cold-blooded surgeon, continuously sought opportunities to strike, using signalmen to convey orders through flag signals to the battlefield.

The hot air balloon patrolled the battlefield, observing enemy weaknesses and then issuing orders through flag signals.

This was the most advanced command method.

The only drawback was that the hot air balloon was difficult to control, and if caught in strong winds, it could fly erratically.

Christine thought to herself, how wonderful it would be to have the wings of free flight.

Overlooking the earth gave her a sense of controlled composure.

Chapter 307: Your Chance Is Given_2

She precisely issued orders, dividing the stubborn resistance of the Oden Kingdom Army.

An advantage of commanding from the air is providing artillery with accurate shooting coordinates.

Wherever fire support was most needed, she could see it very clearly.

Time passed by the second.

The two hours before dawn were Christine's most precious time, and she would not let it slip by.

As Christine raced against time, General Rune, who temporarily took over command, felt the night was dragging on like a century.

Upon learning that the King had moved with the Imperial Guard to Oro Town, he was dumbfounded on the spot.

In his mind, Sven the Seventh was a true hero, a wise ruler capable of changing the strong yet not vast situation of the Oden Kingdom.

The events of tonight almost drove Rune to despair.

But he quickly regained his composure.

His Majesty simply did not want to take unnecessary risks on a chaotic battlefield.

Sven the Seventh is a Monarch, and should not personally be on the front lines. What monarch takes part in the battle themselves?

Times have changed. In the era of cold weapons, armor could block damage, but bullets are not so discerning.

Rune dared not think more and quickly made Helentz Castle's city hall his command center, starting to direct operations.

To be fair, his military skills were excellent, though his prestige was slightly less than Old General Gode, his combat strategy thoughts were more advanced.

Sven the Seventh allowed Old General Gode to return and passed command of the troops to him, without much objection within the army.

Not only Sven the Seventh disliked Gode's defeatism talk, others didn't like it either.

Everybody fights in hopes of gaining benefits; who likes to hear a crow continually wailing about misfortune?

Rune perked up, even gaining a few more fantasies.

If he could turn around the dire situation tonight, his position in His Majesty Sven's mind would surely be different. If given a stage, he could realize his ambitions.

He must win this battle!

Rune, invigorated, continuously issued orders.

He instructed each unit to first gather independently by regiment and battalion, using their own camps for defense. Simultaneously, he dispatched mobile units with intact organizations to connect the isolated divided units.

As Rune made adjustments, Christine, confident of victory aboard the hot-air balloon, even having the leisure to admire Roland's trio's dog-fighting tactics, had a slight change in expression.

The current commander of the Oden Kingdom Army was not Sven the Seventh.

The movement of the royal carriage, if exposed, would severely hit morale, but it was now the darkest night, and the soldiers couldn't see.

Sven the Seventh's escape didn't have the negative impact of the King moving; instead, it was replaced by a more excellent commander?

Christine's brows furrowed slightly.

The Goddess of Fortune would never favor anyone for a long time, and tonight her luck was terrible.

Despite the bad luck, Christine was not upset. She calmly and coolly adjusted each army on the battlefield according to the situation, cold as a robot.

While commanding the battle, her peripheral vision cast towards Helen Mountain.

The fight between the Old Commander and Roland's trio also reached the final stage of life and death.

Shank's body carried Giant's bloodline, though somewhat diluted, his physique far surpassed ordinary humans.

Earlier, ambushed by Roland's smoke bomb, then stabbed in the back; an ordinary person would've lost the ability to fight, lying on the ground wailing, but his regenerative ability was extremely strong, and the wounds scabbed and healed within minutes.

Although it was very painful, and his movements were somewhat affected, he could still move freely.

Roland, Sif, and Lisa formed a triangle, maintaining distance and covering each other in turn, not giving Shank the chance to attack simultaneously.

Lisa, mastering magic below Level 3, cast spells instantaneously without standing in place to chant, making her very agile.

Flames surged from her palm, fiercely striking Shank's massive body.

The flames surged quickly, covering a large area, Shank could only dodge some of them.

After several rounds of fiery baptism, the battlefield was filled with rolling heat waves, Shank's thick beard became singed and burnt, looking extremely embarrassed.

Sif, the strongest in the assault among the three, switched to an armor-piercing spearhead, keeping distance with a Long Spear over three meters long, with the spearhead constantly aiming at Shank's eyes, throat, and lower body.

If it were half a year ago, Sif would never use such crude attack methods, but under Roland's influence, she had left behind the Knight's rigid doctrines long ago.

A living Knight is a good Knight, a dead one is nothing.

Roland, with a Short Spear in his right hand and a Giant Shield in his left, stood at the forefront.

Although he could use a Longsword, the attack power of the sword was far inferior to the Short Spear, even hard to break through defenses, so he chose the Magic Short Spear with four special effects: Enchanted Armor Piercing, Weakness, Bleeding, and Paralysis.

It was a gift from Master Anthony, very useful.

Shank started bleeding uncontrollably at just a scratch, and his movements slowed significantly.

Faced with the three's unrestrained combat technique, Shank was thoroughly enraged. But he hadn't lost his rationality.

If Anthony intervened, he would surely die. He was waiting for an opportunity, waiting for the moment Roland's trio was impatient for victory.

All he needed was to seize one of them to take hostage and exchange for freedom to leave.

His eyes flashed with madness.

From the earlier battle, he found the most suitable target.

Firstly, eliminate the girl throwing fireballs; from her fighting style alone, it was clear she was a disciple of that old Anthony.

In his fury, Anthony had once killed a strong person of the same level, and he dared not provoke him.

Roland, whom he hated the most, was too slippery and impossible to catch.

Only one target remained, Sif, who persistently aimed to pierce him with her spear.

She was the Empress of the Sussex Empire, the highest value, so it was her!

Creed by shock, Sif's Long Spear precisely stabbed between his legs.

Though Shank wanted to lure the enemy, he never dreamed that Sif would strike so mercilessly.

The sound of an egg breaking was as if hit by an iron rod, even causing Roland to feel a chill down below.

When did Sif become so ruthless?

Seeing Shank screaming and falling, Sif leaped high like lightning, clutching her Long Spear, ready to pierce Shank's throat.

In her high leap, Roland suddenly felt something was amiss.

Shank's fall was somewhat peculiar.

Though the injury to that area is practically lethal to men, Shank was ultimately over a hundred years old, and those parts likely weren't much use, yet he didn't immediately fall.

Recalling how Shank could still walk briskly after Roland attacked him, Roland shuddered and threw his Shield forward.

His target wasn't Shank; expecting to finish Shank with a Shield smash wasn't realistic.

His Shield flew towards Sif.

Sif turned back in shock, seeing the giant Shield spiraling toward her.

Was it really Roland?

She didn’t hesitate for a moment, immediately eliminating the possibility that Roland intended to harm her.

In that lightning moment, she didn’t fully grasp what was happening, but she knew what Roland intended.

She recalled her lance teacher’s teachings.

Unless absolutely confident, don’t let both feet leave the ground. Humans aren’t birds; once airborne, it’s tough to change course.

Roland threw the Shield to give her a chance to change direction.

With a thrust on the Shield, Sif used the force to fly away.

The Giant Shield fell, smashing towards Shank.

Shank, who was just groaning on the ground, held the Giant Shield with a sinister grin and shouted:

"Stop everyone!"

While yelling, he looked at the Shield in his arms, stunned.

This moment of confusion decided his fate.

In high-level confrontations, life and death are determined in an instant.

Shank, having sustained continuous injuries, already had a somewhat dizzy mind, and his plan completely failed when the hostage he was capturing turned out to be a Shield.

Roland’s freed left hand skillfully threw a Flying Knife.

The Short Spear in his right hand flew out simultaneously.

Sif almost moved in unison with him, her Long Spear striking like lightning at Shank’s throat.

Lisa, not to be outdone, lightly clapped her palms, and a Fire Phoenix’s shadow flew out, directly charging at Shank’s head.

"Ah!"

The sound of a scream echoed.

Shank’s eyes were pierced by Roland’s Flying Knife and Short Spear, his throat struck by Sif’s Long Spear, and his massive head consumed by the Flaming Phoenix.

Roland withdrew his spare weapon, but before he could act, he saw Sif, like a nimble cat, charge in, and a short dagger pierced Shank’s heart.

The three pounced madly, hacking Shank, who was engulfed in bad luck that night, to pieces.

Standing by the mountain cliff, Anthony watched, dumbfounded, until the large Fireball in his palm burned his skin and awakened him in pain.

Chapter 308: Hunter

From the hot air balloon, Christine was dumbfounded as she witnessed Roland and his team killing Shank.

She even felt a cold chill down her back.

She had long known about Roland’s flexible combat technique, but she hadn’t expected Sif to be the same.

Watching Sif fiercely stab at the enemy's nether regions with her three-meter-long spear, Christine felt a little uneasy.

She silently vowed to reinforce the armor in certain areas in the future.

That area is not only a male weakness; even the Saintess couldn't withstand a stab there.

She observed Sif's battlefield performance clearly, strong and agile, but with the Goddess's blessing, she could fully handle...

If it were one-on-one, she had at least a fifty percent chance for victory, but Sif had Roland.

She genuinely envied Sif a little.

Roland, with quick thinking, threw out a shield, and Sif could absolutely trust Roland without the slightest doubt, instantly making the best choice.

Christine silently bowed her head, enviously clenching her fist at this kind of tacit understanding.

She raised her right hand and coldly said, "Begin the all-out attack!"

The messenger behind her didn't hesitate and issued the general attack orders to each unit according to her deployment.

It's too bad, if only I had a few more hours.

Christine sighed silently.

The day was about to break, and the light cannon ammunition was almost depleted.

Once it's daylight, the enemy will surely discover the plight of Hansa's new army being short-handed, and then it's troublesome.

If they could behead the enemy's main general, there'd still be a sliver of chance. Unfortunately, she had no strong warrior under her command who could kill the main general within the enemy's ranks.

Even Master Anthony would find it difficult.

Rune cautiously set up the command center in the Helentz City Hall.

Though a small number of guards were hiding in the tunnels, they were powerless to counterattack, and flag signals couldn't be conveyed to them either.

Christine regretfully shook her head.

Could such a level of victory be considered paying off the debt?

Tonight's victory was certainly not enough, but she still had a chance. As long as she could defeat the enemy's main force and then grit her teeth to pursue, there was an opportunity.

As everyone knows, when both sides maintain their formations, casualties won't be too many; it's only when one side collapses that the slaughter begins.

She had to force Rune into a collapse.

Rune's advantage lay in numbers and occupying a favorable position. Besides that, he was at an overall disadvantage in terms of morale, equipment, and organization.

Though the numbers were twenty-five thousand to seventy thousand, the advantage was still hers!

Christine calmly issued her orders and continued to observe the battlefield situation.

The first ray of dawn slowly unveiled from the East, and Christine yawned.

These past few days, she had been sleeplessly pondering the enemy's movements, utterly unable to sleep.

She posed a calm and composed image to others, but was actually so nervous that she suffered from insomnia night after night, even losing a small tuft of hair, which broke her heart.

Once this battle is over, she'll need to rest for a few days to recover.

The most exhausting part wasn't the body; it was the mind.

It was a battle they couldn't afford to lose; even the slightest mistake was unacceptable, and under such pressure, her mental stamina was somewhat exhausted.

Just as Christine was yawning, she glimpsed a few shadows darting out from a straw stack.

That was actually an entrance to the tunnel?!

At a place only a few tens of meters from the City Hall, the figure of Helentz Castle's guards appeared.

They were not many and seemed somewhat disheveled, but the weapons in their hands were...

Christine rubbed her eyes, grabbed the binoculars, and stared at these nighttime assailants, focusing on the weapons in their hands.

She couldn't identify the model of these weapons, but she knew what they were.

They were Ancient Era weapons discovered while excavating ruins.

In this era where technology largely relies on archaeology, excavating ruins often yields unexpected findings.

Seeing a young man awkwardly set a lightweight, portable cannon on his shoulder, Christine’s eyes widened.

"Whoosh!"

A shrill sound cut through the sky as a strange shell was fired.

"Boom!"

A violent explosion blew the City Hall apart, bricks flying, and shattered windows aplenty.

Although Rune wasn’t blown up, the sudden explosion made him realize this place was absolutely unsafe.

Rune’s escape speed was not slower than Sven the Seventh’s.

Covered by a few guards, he scurried out in disarray.

Bloodied, Rune was dizzy and disoriented, being dragged by the arm towards a safe place by the guards.

He didn’t even notice that a dark muzzle was already aimed at him.

The two golden stars on his epaulet were glaringly bright.

...

"It’s the Vice Admiral!"

Tom, holding the large-caliber rifle, held his breath, forcibly suppressing his excitement.

To assassinate a Vice Admiral, what an achievement—would it be enough for a promotion? With the Lord Governor’s generosity, at least he would get promoted to Major, right?

Thinking of this, Tom’s spirits lifted.

He held his breath, memories rushing back to the scene a few years ago when his father first took him bear hunting.

His father, along with his uncles, were all hunters, renowned for hunting all kinds of large predators.

To ensure the fur of large predators remained intact, his father and uncles always aimed at the eyes of the prey.

Little Tom, too, honed his shooting skills with his father and uncles.

Though the single-barrel shotguns they used had a very short range, their power was tremendous, and their shooting accuracy was much better than flintlock guns.

The shotgun his father used had even been excavated from a ruin, a top-quality piece, accurate to a hundred meters. He was the best hunter in his hometown, worthy of that shotgun.

However, Little Tom’s happy life didn’t last long.

The shotgun was coveted by a noble and borrowed for hunting.

During the loan period, a demonic giant bear troubled the village again, and his father's hunting team went out once more to hunt the bear.

What seemed like an ordinary hunting operation turned out to be Little Tom's final parting with his father and uncles.

His father's body was never recovered, only a piece of his clothing.

After his father's death, the grief-stricken Little Tom found the noble's manor, trying to request the shotgun to avenge his father.

However, the noble returned a gun that looked similar but was very ordinary.

Little Tom surely knew his father's relic was swallowed by that damned Baron, but he was powerless.

If he dared show the slightest resentment, the noble might kill him to silence him.

Luckily, his acting skills satisfied the arrogant noble, and he managed to keep his life.

Afterward, he wandered many places and, on the brink of starving to death, was unexpectedly noticed by a passing Knight at a recruiting station, giving him the chance to serve Governor Roland.

He thanked Knight Jacobs for promoting him and thanked Governor Roland for giving him a chance to earn merit.

Was the Baron so great?

Once he gained merit and a title, he would personally kill the one indirectly responsible for his father's death!

Flames of fury flickered in Tom’s eyes as he pulled the trigger, just like when he first shot a gray wolf as a child.

"Bang!"

The gunshot echoed, the bullet precisely hitting Rune in transit, a headshot.

Tom breathed a sigh of relief; this shot had a bit of luck involved.

Before he could celebrate, he was grabbed by Jacobs and ran frantically toward another tunnel entrance.

His smile bloomed in the morning light.

Haha, this time he’d surely earned merit!

Chapter 309: The Price of Dignity

The bloodthirsty pursuit of the Hansa New Army basically concluded after three days. Sporadic battles continued, but the overall situation had been determined.

With Rune being assassinated, the Oden Kingdom Army’s command system collapsed. The remaining generals were utterly lost, eventually making the most rational choice driven by the instinct to survive.

Escape!

This choice was originally sound, but without unified command, the escape naturally devolved into a rout.

Christine revealed the true nature of the Cold-blooded Witch, continuing to ascend the hot air balloon to command with ease. Under her direction, the various armies pursued and slaughtered relentlessly, leaving no escape for the Oden people.

The pursuit battle started from Helentz Castle, passed through Oro Town, and finally reached the gathering point of the war launched by the Oden Kingdom at Hosen Castle.

The unfortunate Sven the Seventh planned to fight a defensive counterattack here, aiming to drain the Hansa New Army's morale and fighting spirit, waiting for a chance to counterattack.

He issued summons to all vassals, demanding they lead their private soldiers from their territories to assist.

However, his defeat affected not only the royal family's direct troops but also terrified the local lords by the combat prowess of the Hansa New Army.

They ostensibly complied with the king's call, but in reality, only committed troops verbally.

The Hansa New Army was now riding high on morale and successive victories; who would dare to challenge them?

Over thirty thousand new troops surrounded Sven the Seventh, who had less than ten thousand men left, at Hosen Castle. They did not launch an attack, only intermittently bombarding them with shells to pressure the garrison.

Hosen Castle was a formidable fortress, with heavy casualties inevitable from a direct assault. Naturally, Roland was unwilling to use these precious, battle-tested soldiers as cannon fodder.

Over a month of warfare, although resulting in glorious victories, also led to over five thousand casualties in the new army, which pained him dearly.

This was not just five thousand soldiers, but the future sergeants and junior officers of an expanding army.

Calculated differently, with each veteran able to lead five to ten men, the loss was indeed significant.

Such is war; it always comes with a price.

Though Roland and Sif braved the front lines, fighting valiant battles and slaying enemies; Christine brought her commanding artistry to its zenith; and the coordination between the naval and land forces was seamlessly smooth, yet the Oden Kingdom Army was elite too, making these losses rather commendable.

The next step was cleanup and aftermath management.

Roland didn't proactively send people to engage in negotiations with the Oden people.

Initiating negotiations was also a psychological game; whoever appeared to concede first would lose the upper hand.

The combined strength of the Oden Kingdom and the Three Overseas Provinces was comparable, with foreign powers backing them as well; their hard power might even exceed that of the Three Provinces.

As long as they held Hosen Castle till winter's arrival, with Roland's side struggling for logistical supplies, the tide of war might turn.

Roland had almost fully mobilized his new army to fight this war, leaving only a few garrisons at the three provincial capitals. Any unexpected changes would only increase the pressure on Roland.

To boost morale, the Empress, portrayed by the Magic Mirror, personally came to the front line, camping in the Suyige region.

Though the situation was alarming, Sven the Seventh, who retreated back to Hosen Castle, remained calm, knowing Roland could not launch a strong offensive against such a fortified stronghold. He had to grit his teeth and hold on, waiting for the situation to change.

The siege of Hosen Castle dragged on for over half a month, with Sven the Seventh anxiously waiting in silence due to severed communications for over half a month.

Finally, amidst the oppressive heat of midsummer, a messenger arrived.

The messenger was tidy in appearance but his face didn’t look good.

Sven the Seventh noted the messenger’s expression and felt a jolt in his heart. Before he could inquire, the messenger handed him a confidential letter.

Just a few glances into the letter, and Sven almost spat out blood.

"Those treacherous traitors!"

His blood surged, desperately wanting to return to the Imperial Capital to punish those who betrayed him.

This confidential letter was delivered by trusted aides left in the Imperial Capital, risking great danger, summarizing the recent domestic and foreign affairs.

Roland had not attacked Hosen Castle but instead dispatched a vast fleet to blockade the Imperial Capital from the sea and land, cutting down oak trees.

Sven the Seventh took a long time to realize these oak trees were for rebuilding the navy.

He spat out blood and nearly fainted on the spot.

The Oden Kingdom’s navy had been devastated by the Sussex Empire over a hundred years ago. The entire nation couldn’t field thirty warships, with experienced navy commanders and sailors sorely lacking.

Even facing the mightiest pirates, this navy would avoid confrontation, let alone contend with the Fourth Fleet.

In the battle off the Imperial Capital's seas, twenty-seven warships set out, with only thirteen limping back to the port, giving the Fourth Fleet a significant achievement boost.

Upon returning to the Imperial Capital, General Gode saw that naval warfare was futile, so he cannibalized the cannons off the ships for the port's defense batteries and scuttled the ships themselves.

Hearing this, Sven the Seventh was too angry to speak.

Scuttling ships to block the port and dismantling cannons for defense, at first glance, seemed attempts to minimize loss, yet it was quintessential army thinking.

Even if the Hansa New Army withdrew, the Oden Kingdom's navy was completely ruined.

In this era, a coastal state without a formidable navy was like a beautiful maiden walking unclothed on the streets, inviting abuse.

Rebuilding a navy wasn't so easy.

With all remaining warships scuttled and the shipbuilding timber seized by Roland, any hope of rebuilding the navy within a century was dashed.

In his youth, Sven the Seventh had studied at a military academy in the Jin Yuan Republic and even served in the Jin Yuan Navy for a year and a half, fully understanding the importance of a navy.

Unlike Gode, Rune, pure army commanders focused solely on land, Sven had a fervent desire to build a powerful navy.

"My ships, my trees! Ah!"

In anguish, Sven the Seventh closed his eyes and only after a long while did he steady himself again.

Chapter 310: The Price of Dignity (2)

He continued reading, his face growing gloomier. He finally understood why Gode did what he did.

The issue now wasn’t about keeping the navy but whether he could hold on to the monarchy.

The local powerful nobles and family branches were colluding, preparing to seize the opportunity of his absence from the Imperial Capital to support a new king.

He was so angry that he trembled all over, wishing he could immediately lead the Imperial Guard back to the Imperial Capital to capture these rebels in one fell swoop.

However, he couldn’t leave, for Roland was just outside the city.

The terrain of Hosen Castle is unique, built by the mountains; a complete siege is impossible. Sven the Seventh could easily slip away with a few bodyguards, but leaving alone was useless.

Only the king with military support was truly a king; without military protection, he was just a vagrant called Sven.

Sven the Seventh took several deep breaths and waved to signal the messenger to withdraw.

He shook the bell on the table, giving orders through gritted teeth to the deputy who hurried over.

"Send someone to contact Roland, I want to negotiate with him!"

The deputy was shocked and was about to persuade him when Sven already threw the secret letter in front of him.

After a quick glance, the deputy’s face turned pale, stammering and unable to speak.

Although Sven behaved like a coward in the Battle of Helentz, this time his choice was correct.

A small country like Oden only has the chance to rise when it can take advantage of the balance of power among great powers.

If they could seize the Three Overseas Provinces in one go and gradually absorb the new territories by exploiting internal conflicts in Sussex Country, they would have a chance to join the ranks of major powers.

Though in the short term they could not compare with big powers like Jin Yuan and Vladimir, they could at least have a position.

The intelligence of the Rurik people was accurate; indeed, the Sussex Empire had internal issues, and no troops from the Empire itself were invested in the war.

They got a precious historical opportunity.

However, they never dreamed that the Hansa New Army, which they looked down upon, achieved a great victory despite being outnumbered and out-equipped.

It’s not that the Oden Kingdom didn’t try, but that they were unlucky to encounter Roland and Sif.

If not for Roland and Sif, relying only on the old army and bureaucratic system of the Three Overseas Provinces, the land of the provinces would most likely be lost.

Although it was frustrating, Sven decided to bow to reality.

Perhaps the Oden Kingdom was never destined to become an empire.

At least maintain the family’s ruling position, and leave future matters to the descendants.

...

Outskirts of Hosenburg City, small hills.

Roland was taking a walk, accompanied by Golden Knight Raikkonen and Tom, who had just been promoted to Major.

Raikkonen was Roland’s trusted subordinate and felt quite at ease. Tom, having met the Governor for the first time, was nervously at a loss.

Seeing Tom’s anxious expression, Roland smiled and said, "Is the young hero of Helentz Castle so nervous?"

Tom smiled sheepishly, wiping sweat from his brow with his sleeve, and softly said:

"I never dreamed I could meet Lord Governor, it’s my first time seeing such a high-ranking official."

Raikkonen standing beside him suppressed laughter, secretly thinking, you were just received by the actual Empress, weren’t you? If you knew the truth, you might faint.

In Tom’s eyes, Countess Sif was the Vice Governor, whose status was not as high as Roland’s; he didn’t know this Empress had a penchant for cosplaying as the Countess.

Roland laughed and teased, "You should learn from Raikkonen. He’s only a year older than you, yet he’s not nervous at all."

Tom chuckled, not daring to respond.

Raikkonen had been following Roland since the Imperial Capital and was an old associate; Tom was a new recruit overseas.

The military is a place that values seniority and rank.

Raikkonen was both a Golden Knight and a Cavalry Lieutenant Colonel, far above him in status and closeness with the Governor.

Roland understood what Tom was thinking and did not push, instead smiling and changing the topic.

"Tom, I read the battle report of the defense of Helentz Castle, but the details aren't very clear. Tell me about it."

Raikkonen gave Tom an encouraging wink, signaling him to speak boldly.

Tom was a key figure in the Battle of Helentz, performing outstandingly in the city's defense, discovering a mysterious ruin, and ultimately sniping the enemy commander.

These three merits, each remarkable on their own, fell upon a boy just under seventeen, making it even more astonishing.

Raikkonen also knew why Tom was nervous; the lad feared not only Roland thinking he was too overbearing but also worried about the jealousy of Raikkonen, who was similarly young.

Tom still didn't understand the Governor, Raikkonen silently thought.

Working for Governor Roland required no internal strife with colleagues, just doing one's job was enough.

All merits achieved would be unmistakably reflected in Performance Points.

If you felt your achievements weren't recognized, you could appeal. As long as the reasons were adequate, Governor Roland would naturally consider suggestions.

But it was normal for Tom to be cautious; leaders like Governor Roland weren't common.

Tom carefully recounted the process of the defense at Helentz Castle.

He did not exaggerate in the slightest, even transferring his achievements quietly to his colleagues.

Captain Jacobs commanded well, Jerry and Joseph were invincible, and he merely followed behind contributing a little.

Discovering the ruins was just luck, and sniping the enemy general was the Empress's blessing.

After listening to Tom's account, Roland only gave a faint smile, neither approving nor disapproving.

Raikkonen kept signaling to Tom, but being their first meeting, Tom couldn't understand his eyes, and even spoke more conservatively.

After Tom finished recounting the siege, Roland laughed and teased, "Captain Jacobs says the credit is yours and Jerry's, Jerry says it's you and the captain's merit, yet you say it's theirs, what's going on?"

"I, I..." Tom was flustered and at a loss, sweating profusely.

Seeing his awkwardness, Roland smiled and patted him on the shoulder, solemnly saying:

"Tom, your achievements are yours; you need not be modest. It wouldn't be fair to those who risk their lives if great achievements aren't rewarded. Captain Jacobs and Jerry certainly achieved merit, but your credit shouldn't be buried."

"I promoted you to Major because you were just a private a few months ago; ascending too quickly makes it hard for others to accept. I remember all your honors, and they will be gradually realized later."

Tom's eyes reddened with excitement, and tears fell involuntarily.

He had never seen a leader like Governor Roland.

Perhaps, he really had a chance to avenge his father and uncle.

Seeing Tom’s reddened eyes, Roland smiled and gently said, "After this battle, I will consult Her Majesty the Empress to bestow titles to all who achieved merit. Your title will be Imperial Knight, and your fief will be near Helentz Castle."

Military rank promotions must be rigorous, considering abilities, merit, and seniority comprehensively, but title bestowal does not.

Granting a title to Tom was compensation for not being able to promote military rank continuously.

Tom nearly knelt on one knee to declare his loyalty to Roland, but was seized by Roland, who sternly said, "We are all subjects of Her Majesty the Empress, understand?"

Tom nodded quickly, hurriedly expressing his stance, "I will do my utmost to serve the Empress and follow your orders."

"Countess Sif’s orders are equal to mine!" Roland earnestly added.

Tom nodded repeatedly like a pecking chick.

He suddenly thought of the frightening rumor widely spread in the Governor’s Territory, that Governor Roland was the Empress’s lover, while Countess Sif was the Governor’s lover.

He shivered, quickly dispelling these thoughts from his mind.

Mind less about the affairs of big characters!

Regardless of their relationship, they were together, so his job was just to remain loyal!

As Roland encouraged Tom, a galloping horse came flying from the direction of the main camp.

The knight on the horse dismounted at the foot of the hill and ran swiftly to within a few meters of Roland, about to report loudly, but hesitated upon seeing the two young men beside Roland.

"Speak!"

"Lord Governor, the Count requests your immediate return to the camp, Oden Kingdom’s negotiation envoy has arrived."

Negotiation envoy?

Roland’s lips curled into a slight disdainful smile.

It seemed Sven the Seventh’s mind wasn’t quite clear yet; he wasn’t in any position to negotiate. The best he could achieve was a slightly dignified surrender.

For that dignity, he must pay a heavy price.