**Empress 311**

Chapter 311: This Is the Price

Sure, here is the translated text:

```html

Hansa New Army Temporary Camp.

Sif sat in the main seat, her face calm, but the joy in her eyes couldn't be hidden.

Heh, so you're the ones who couldn't hold your breath first!

Looking at the negotiators sent by Sven the Seventh, Sif maintained her calm, carrying the demeanor of three parts arrogance and seven parts disdain of a victor, sipping coffee, waiting for Roland to return.

This is a critical moment; she doesn't want to say the wrong thing and lose out on benefits.

Sif sat steadily, and naturally, so did the negotiator Tovting.

That's how negotiations are, even at a disadvantage, it's not like there's nothing to discuss. Tovting's face was steady, but his eyes secretly glanced at Sif, constantly weighing and trying to glean something from her expression.

Unfortunately, he was destined to be disappointed.

Sif's political skills had improved by several levels compared to last year, and her acting was superb.

Before Roland returned, the two merely exchanged pleasantries, and Sif even asked about Sven the Seventh's diet with great interest.
```

"His Majesty Sven is in great health, he eats three meals a day regularly, and has even gained a few pounds."

Tovting was very stubborn.

Sif didn’t believe a word, she didn’t even need to use Insight to know it was a lie.

It was apparent that Sven the Seventh hadn’t been doing well lately.

Moreover, the hostility from this special envoy was not strong, indicating a high possibility of compromise.

As Sif held her ground against Tovting, Roland returned.

Sif was about to rise to greet him but suddenly remembered that although she was the Vice Governor, she was still a Count, and her raised hips quietly sank back into the chair.

She smiled and briefly introduced the situation to Roland, then handed over the lead to him.

She glanced at Tovting from the corner of her eye, then signaled with her eyes to remind Roland that the other side wanted to compromise.

Upon accurately capturing the information from Sif’s gaze, Roland scrutinized Tovting, mockingly asked, "Mr. Tovting, is there something specific you’ve come for?"

"Your Excellency Governor, no need for such sarcasm. Though our country has suffered setbacks at the front lines, we still have millions of citizens and hundreds of thousands of reserves, the outcome is not certain, Your Excellency is too arrogant."

Tovting looked at Roland without humility or arrogance, arguing with reason.

Roland let out an "oh" and made a gesture of dismissal.

"Since Mr. Tovting thinks so, then please return, we can negotiate once the winner is decided."

Tovting’s face, flushed with a hint of redness, turned pale.

No humility or arrogance, right? Reasonable and well-founded, right? Understanding negotiation, right?

Roland didn’t bother with negotiation tactics, directly using power to suppress.

Even if civilization has advanced, the basis of negotiations remains strength. Without strength, even reason is useless. Moreover, the Oden Kingdom is the aggressor, sitting firmly in a moral low ground.

Roland’s disdainful gaze almost made Tovting’s brain explode with anger, but he held back.

He seemed to not see Roland’s gesture, his tone softened as he gently said:

"To reduce unnecessary casualties, His Majesty Sven of our country is willing to demonstrate goodwill for peace."

"Peace? An invader talking about peace?"

Roland’s mocking laughter made Tovting uneasy, but his next words made Tovting instantly stand up, unable to speak for a long time.

"I only accept surrender, not negotiations!"

Tovting could no longer hold back, he got up angrily, coldly saying:

"Your Excellency Governor, you are too arrogant, farewell!"

Surrender was far beyond the acceptable bottom line for Sven the Seventh, and Tovting naturally couldn’t accept it.

As the negotiations seemed to break down, Sif, understanding Roland’s signal, lightly coughed to stop Tovting.

"Mr. Tovting, if you go back like this, what will His Majesty Sven think?"

Slap the face and then give a handshake, after Roland’s threat Sif offered a way out, to at least find out Tovting’s bottom line.

Tovting paused, sighed helplessly, "Of course I wish to talk properly, but..."

"Mr. Tovting, why don’t you sit down first and tell us the conditions of His Majesty Sven?"

Sif said softly.

In the visual blind spot where Tovting couldn’t see, Roland gave Sif a thumbs up, praising her acting skills.

Tovting returned to his seat with a sullen face, speaking in a heavy voice, "First, His Majesty Sven was misled, and the invasion of your country was indeed wrong, and secondly, our army failed on the battlefield, and we are willing to make reparations."

"Our country is willing to use the mature oak trees that Your Excellency needs as a cost, to exchange for peace between the two sides."

Roland squinted his eyes, softly asked, "You mean, using these mature oak trees as a cost, to revert both sides to the pre-war state?"

Tovting said solemnly, "These oak trees can build a super fleet of over fifty main warships, with immense strategic value, and are the hope for the reconstruction of our navy. Giving them up signals our sincere intent to abandon hostility, do you not agree?"

Roland nodded, speaking calmly, "Indeed, these oak trees are valued at approximately 5.9 million crowns, and are strategic materials, with high value but no market, even if sold for 10 million crowns, someone would pay. Abandoning these oak trees also equates to abandoning the hope of rebuilding the navy within a century."

Listening to Roland's words, Tovting slightly sighed in relief. Though Roland was appalling, at least he wasn't making nonsense, leaving room for negotiation.

However, Roland's next words made Tovting's blood freeze.

Roland looked at Tovting with a smile, suddenly raising his voice, "Mr. Tovting, I'm very curious, how are you using my things to bargain with me?"

"Your, your?" Tovting stared blankly at Roland, his mind blank.

"That's correct, I've already sent someone to collect these oak trees. These oak trees were planted by your country after losing the war 120 years ago, according to the treaty at that time, you are not allowed to rebuild a navy, these trees were illegally planted, and as the victor, I have the right to take necessary measures against these unlawfully planted and hostile trees toward our country."

Not only Tovting was dumbfounded, even Sif was stunned.

Can a treaty be interpreted this way?

Roland, with utmost seriousness, took out a copy of the treaty from over a hundred years ago, waving it in his hand, "Your attempt to rebuild the navy is a violation of the treaty, I haven't asked for breach compensations, which is already considerate."

Tovting couldn't hold back any longer, a mouthful of old blood seeped from the corner of his lips.

He stared intently at Roland, coldly asking, "Your Excellency Governor, I've worked in foreign diplomacy for twenty-five years and never met someone as shameless as you. I'd like to know your price for peace."

"Thanks for the compliment. My price is not that high. These illegal oak trees that originally belong to our country I'll naturally take away. Additionally, your country must, according to the standards of defeat, cede territory, and compensate."

Roland pointed at the map hanging on the wall, speaking gravely, "Suyige State, as the starting point of your country's invasion, must be ceded to our country. Apart from that, your country must pay 2.31 million crowns in war reparations."

The war cost 2,310 lives, and the compensation is a thousand crowns per person; this is the price of opposing him.

## Chapter 312: Loopholes Are Meant to Be Exploited

Sven the Seventh held out for 47 hours, surrendering just before the deadline set by Roland.

Of course, he never admitted it was a surrender; he claimed he was merely making concessions to prevent further war suffering for the people of both nations.

As for starting the war himself, he conveniently forgot about that.

The Hosenburg Treaty was signed on an unnamed hill outside Hosenburg City.

The signatories were Empress Sylph of the Sussex Empire and Mr. Tovting, the representative of the Oden Kingdom.

Empress Sylph flamboyantly signed her full name in full character.

She even paused for a few seconds during the signing to carefully verify the spelling difference between Sylph and Sif.

Tom, Jerry, and Raikkonen, as representatives of the outstanding young officers, witnessed the signing ceremony on-site.

Watching the Oden Kingdom’s representative leave, seemingly calm but actually distraught, Tom couldn’t help but quietly grumble.

"Our Empress personally signed, yet they only sent a representative. So disrespectful!"

Jerry, standing next to him, almost couldn’t hold back a smile and whispered a low explanation: "Firstly, we are the victors; signing is an honor. They are the losers; signing is a disgrace. Secondly, only Her Majesty can sign on our behalf."

Tom stood there dumbfounded, his eyes full of confusion, and asked cautiously: "Why can only Her Majesty sign? Can’t the Governor or Lord Count do it in her stead?"

"Because Her Majesty is the Supreme Leader of the nation, she can decide on foreign wars and peace treaties. However, she has not formally ascended the throne and cannot authorize anyone outside of the Cabinet to do it."

Jerry explained it very clearly, but Tom only became more bewildered.

Politics was too complicated; his brain couldn’t quite handle it.

Seeing his perplexed expression, Raikkonen patted his shoulder and smiled reassuringly:

"It’s okay; actually, I don’t understand it either."

Tom shook his head vigorously, dispelling his worries. Raikkonen was right; politics was way too complicated.

"By the way, we get a week’s vacation when we return to Hansa. Where do you guys want to go?"

In this war, Tom had made several remarkable achievements, was promoted two ranks exceptionally, and was listed for knighthood, making his status dramatically different, with many people approaching him and showing goodwill.

He felt a bit overwhelmed, but he cherished the comrades who shared life-and-death experiences with him more.

During the siege defense, he hadn't directly met Raikkonen; he only learned after the relief that the cavalry vanguard leader continuously harassing the enemy to alleviate the city's defense was Raikkonen.

Though they didn't meet, they fought side by side.

Thus, Tom, Jerry, and Raikkonen, who were not far apart in age, formed a bond of friendship on the battlefield, becoming close brothers.

Tom respected Commander Jacobs very much, but the commander's age was akin to his father's, creating a generational gap.

Though Joseph was younger, he always had a cold face, indifferent to everyone, and Tom rarely spoke to him.

Despite the lack of communication, Tom still listed Joseph among friends he could entrust life and death.

Overall, this was a victory worth commemorating.

Tom planned a full schedule upon returning to Hansa, intending to enjoy a few days of thrill.

However, just as he dreamed of a delightful life, a stranger, a Golden Knight, approached him.

"Are you Major Tom of the Army?"

Tom knew Golden Knights were direct affiliates of the Governor, so he didn't dare to be negligent and quickly saluted.

"Major Tom of the newly formed 19th Regiment, salutes you."

"Major Tom, please receive the Lord Governor's notification, asking you to report to the Military Academy immediately upon returning to Hansa; you've been selected for short-term class training."

"Ah?"

Tom was stunned on the spot. Immediate reporting meant his vacation hadn't even started before it ended. What does this short training class mean? Is it dissatisfaction from the Governor, necessitating additional training?

Seeing his bewildered expression, the Golden Knight smiled and explained: "Don't overthink it; all selected for the short training class performed well in this war as young officers."

Tom sighed in relief; it seemed to be a good thing.

He quickly reported to the Golden Knight and happily headed back to camp.

Before the expedition, he was appointed as a lieutenant due to his proficiency with firearms. Now, not only an Army Major, he's also been titled a knight, with a bright future, certainly having reasons to be happy.

Many were as happy as Tom.

Everyone knew Governor Roland's style, both strict and generous, matching rewards for accomplishments.

While everyone was full of hope for the future, Roland was not as leisurely as them.

He locked himself in a small room, closed his eyes, silently conducting a post-war review, seeking issues exposed during the war.

Firstly on the strategic level.

Months ago, he couldn't have dreamed the Oden Kingdom dared to attack the Three Overseas Provinces.

He considered potential adversaries like the Jin Yuan Republic, already an enemy, the eagerly expansive Prudon Kingdom, or the Vladimir Empire, eventually fighting; the surprise came only from northern brutes.

Fortunately, Alina's intelligence work was excellent, conducting analyses before the Oden Kingdom's war, predicting their movements.

Roland quietly warned himself not to consider everyone a sharp political strategist.

Most national systems in this era are still monarchical; if the Monarch lacks wisdom, irrational decisions may happen.

Where to complain if enemies don't follow political norms?

The Oden Kingdom's invasion seemed to exploit Sussex Empire's internal conflicts with precise timing, but in reality, it was a setup.

The Cabinet clearly hoped Sif faced setbacks overseas, forced back to the Imperial Capital, yet they absolutely wouldn't permit the Three Overseas Provinces' annexation.

Chapter 313: Loopholes Are Meant to Be Exploited

As long as Sif returns in defeat, the expeditionary army from the homeland will immediately set out to reclaim the Three Provinces.

This is also why the Jin Yuan and Vladimir Empires prefer not to act directly, instead inciting that fool Sven the Seventh to make a move.

The failure of the Oden Kingdom made Roland realize one thing: do not attempt to exceed one's capabilities.

Before gaining control of the Empire's power, do not engage Vladimir Empire head-on, or he will become another Sven the Seventh.

Apart from the strategic aspect, Roland must also review battlefield command.

Of course, he is not looking to trouble Christine; her on-the-spot command was almost perfect, except for the somewhat cold-blooded idea of abandoning Helentz Castle, but there are no other flaws.

Roland is summarizing experience and learning from it.

Christine, after all, is not his subordinate. This time, she cooperated out of indebtedness; next time won't be so easy.

Even if Christine helps again for the sake of cooperation, a third time would be unlikely.

He must learn quickly.

The Three Overseas Provinces do not lack excellent generals; Dailong, Bridges, and Jes all excel, and new talents like Jacobs who emerged during this war are also outstanding, but he lacks someone like Christine who can serve as a corps-level military commander.

As Roland pondered, a knock sounded at the door.

Roland frowned slightly but still went to open the door. Only a few people would disturb him at such a time, meaning there was surely something important.

Seeing Alina standing outside the door, Roland was somewhat surprised.

"Miss Fuchou, what brings you here?"

Alina silently entered Roland’s room and handed him a report.

"Roland, among the captured enemies this time, at least eleven thousand are Jin Yuan Kingdom volunteers. I recently conducted a blitz interrogation of key figures among them and obtained some crucial information."

Roland unfolded the intelligence, looking closely, the corners of his lips lifting slightly.

"It’s not surprising; they were always from different groups. They could barely unite before seizing power, but naturally, after seizing power, they started scheming against each other."

The intelligence Alina provided was extremely valuable.

According to the captives’ confessions, the Jin Yuan Republic is now divided into three factions, with the struggle between them growing increasingly bloody.

These three factions are the Yayue Faction, representing capital and merchants; the Thermidorian Faction, representing urban civilians; and the Flower Moon Faction, representing military and old nobility interests.

The Prime Minister who attended the Continental Conference, Edward, was a representative of the Thermidorian Faction. Although he and Alina’s father Carlo had different political views, they still respected each other.

Carlo was purged, but Edward believed that policies should persist beyond individuals and continued to uphold the original policies, thus becoming a common enemy of the other two factions.

Not long ago, this Prime Minister died in a street brawl.

Although the investigation concluded it was an accidental incident, and the thug who accidentally killed the Prime Minister confessed to the crime, the Thermidorian Faction was not satisfied with the result.

They were also brewing a revenge plan, but before they could act, the Yayue Faction struck first.

Thousands of Thermidorian Faction core members were labeled as remnants of the Carlo Faction and purged.

At the most extreme point of the purge, anyone who had ever met Mr. Carlo, or even those who had once disagreed with him politically, were branded as remnants of the Carlo Faction and executed.

The leader of the Yayue Faction, Marco, implemented the harshest purge law, convicting all suspects as guilty. If they could not prove their innocence, they were sentenced and executed.

The bloody and cruel purge caused the political scene in the Jin Yuan Republic to become lifeless, but it did effectively strike down the opponents, achieving a temporary consensus within Jin Yuan.

Reaching consensus is not easy, but achieving consensus by force is not difficult.

Marco's ruthlessly suppressed dissenting opinions came with great hidden dangers but had good effects.

Give him a few years to reorganize the social order and restore national vitality, and not many will remember the brutal days when blood flowed in the square.

As long as the common people have food, they don't care how many politicians die in their power struggles.

The families of the deceased had great opinions, so Marco thoughtfully arrested them too, sentencing them to hard labor in the harshest overseas colonies.

Another group, suspect yet unexecuted, was sent to the Oden Kingdom as cannon fodder. These people’s will to fight was very weak, with over eleven thousand captured.

Roland meticulously reviewed the intelligence Alina brought, tapping his fingers rhythmically on the table.

Seeing Roland remain silent, Alina sighed lightly, "Marco is too ruthless. If Jin Yuan still had three factions fighting, we might have had a chance. Now..."

"An opportunity will present itself soon!"

Roland cut off Alina’s sigh, speaking deeply: "Marco’s bloody suppression of all open opponents is indeed ruthless, but his enemies are not all dead; they are waiting for the right moment."

"He already holds absolute power; the government, military, and law enforcement agencies are all his. Even if people oppose him, there’s no opportunity."

Roland smiled and shook his head, "Marco needs at least three to five, even ten years, to restore order and eliminate the impact, but he doesn’t have that much time."

"Why?"

"Because of the Day of Return."

Roland calmly explained, "According to Master Anthony, the Day of Return arrives three years from now. Hidden forces in the darkness won’t stupidly wait until the last moment; they are the unpredictable factors."

Alina’s eyes lit up, understanding Roland’s point.

The several Tier Seven Transcendent within the Jin Yuan Republic are all from old noble backgrounds; they will not accept Marco, a lawyer, ruling the country.

In these old nobles’ eyes, Marco is a textbook rebellious traitor.

Seeing Alina’s anxious yet slightly hopeful gaze, Roland calmly reminded her, "What we need to do now is to build up our power."

"I will help you with your revenge, but currently, we lack the necessary power. You need to find a way to handle these over eleven thousand Jin Yuan prisoners."

Alina looked at Roland in surprise, biting her lip and shaking her head, "Roland, I know the contents of the Hosenburg Treaty. According to the treaty, after the Oden Kingdom cedes territory and compensates, we must release all prisoners."

More than ten thousand is not a small number.

Breaching the treaty and not handing over the prisoners is a severe default action.

If the Oden Kingdom seizes this issue, it will severely damage the reputation of Roland and Sif.

Seeing Alina’s cautious demeanor, Roland recalled the scene of their first meeting at the docks, remembering the day in the library searching for legal loopholes but got angered by pocket-filling accusations, his frown gradually relaxed.

"No need to be so restrained; there is a loophole in the treaty content. The contracting parties are our country and the Oden Kingdom; these people are not Oden People, so they are not covered by the treaty."

"Mercenaries are not protected by any treaty and can be disposed of at will; they are all yours to handle."

Although Roland’s explanation was somewhat of a legal twist, it was strict to the wording. Alina, receiving this unexpected boon, felt her mood improve greatly, her lips curling slightly.

Seeing Alina’s long-missing genuine smile, Roland’s thoughts drifted back to a year ago.

At that moment, it was as if Roland saw that always composed and smiling Jin Yuan international student.

Perhaps, there truly is an opportunity?

When he initially took in Alina, Roland merely hoped she wouldn’t despair and commit suicide, painting her a big picture and using intangible hope to encourage her to live on.

He initially didn’t hold much hope for Alina to return to Jin Yuan and seize power.

The Jin Yuan Republic, in overall strength, is only slightly inferior to Sussex; attempting a coup is easier said than done.

In such a powerful nation, unless there’s internal chaos, it’s hard for external forces to subvert it.

Helping Alina establish a government-in-exile was the most Roland thought he could achieve.

However, unpredictable events of the world occurred; who could have foreseen the Jin Yuan Republic truly fell into internal turmoil.

Perhaps there’s a chance to visit the Romantic Capital St. Louis before returning to the Imperial Capital?

Roland’s lips curled slightly as he softly said, "Miss Fuchou, the focus of the next phase’s intelligence gathering will shift to the Jin Yuan Republic."

"Roland, your enemies are the Cabinet and Sofia, there’s no need to change targets for me."

Alina quickly shook her head, softly persuading him.

"I haven’t changed the target; I just don’t want to miss an opportunity. If major internal turmoil erupts within Jin Yuan, our opportunity will come."

Chapter 314: People Always Prefer Compromise

"If I use simple machinery to divert canal water to flood the tunnel, steadily eliminating this army, then bypass Hansa City and directly capture Brookberg and Selinix, how would you respond?"

Christine spoke softly, casually moving the chess pieces, dividing the forces into two to head straight for the capitals of the other two provinces of the Three Overseas Provinces.

This move was indeed vicious, rendering the cannon positions Roland had set up in advance completely ineffective.

"Then I would..."

Roland picked up the light cavalry and temple warriors and pushed them forward forcefully.

"Swap bases!"

When at a disadvantage, swapping bases is an attempt to break the stalemate.

When in a balanced position, swapping bases opens up the game.

When at an advantage, swapping bases consolidates the victory.

The tactic of swapping bases has been widely used throughout history, and many famous generals have left a lasting mark in history with it.

Roland hasn’t read much on military strategy, but he has read a lot of history books.

Faced with Roland’s unconventional move, Christine remained silent for a long time, then smiled and clapped her hands.

"You’ve won."

Christine’s politeness made Roland feel a bit embarrassed.

"The outcome is still uncertain, after all, my forces are somewhat insufficient, continuing to fight, the result is hard to predict."

"In a military chess simulation, I could indeed rely on rich experience to defeat you, but that doesn’t represent the outcome on a real battlefield."

Christine’s expression was very relaxed, she wasn’t dejected from admitting defeat to Roland, she was even happy about Roland’s excellent tactic.

After the battle, Roland pulled her aside to review the game and took the opportunity to ask for guidance on military command.

Christine, of course, understood his motives but agreed readily.

She felt that an imperfect victory wasn’t enough to repay all her favors, but adding a few unreserved military lessons might be.

Christine didn’t hold back, sharing all her insights on warfare through the military chess simulation with Roland.

Roland’s perceptiveness exceeded her expectations.

Originally, she thought Roland hadn’t received formal military training, a complete outsider, but over these days, Roland often had some ingenious ideas that left her amazed.

Just like the swapping bases tactic earlier, most who had received formal military training wouldn't come up with it.

Military skills can be gradually developed, Roland is not short of enemies, there will be plenty of opportunities for practice, but an imaginative mind cannot be cultivated.

Imagination is equivalent to combat power.

Christine suddenly remembered her teacher's teachings, and her admiration for her teacher grew even more.

Unfortunately, her teacher passed away too early, she no longer had the opportunity to listen to his teachings.

The military chess simulation has its limits, pieces are cold and thoughtless, base values and parameter correction determine victory or defeat, there are no miracles in chess simulation, but there are on the real battlefield.

The steadfast defense of over three thousand soldiers in Helentz Castle exceeded the expectations of both commanders, becoming an unpredictable factor.

This is a change that military chess simulations can never predict.

Basic military skills can be learned, but Roland's agile mind and imagination are something that ordinary commanders can never achieve.

Christine has high hopes for Roland.

But in Roland's eyes, Miss Saintess seemed to want to walk away from her duties.

Though Christine praised him lavishly, he was all too aware of his own capabilities.

In theoretical discourse on warfare, he did not even take Zhao Kuo seriously; in practical command, all he could do was hand things over to the true experts.

Naval battles were entrusted to Bridges, and land battles to Christine.

If Christine wanted to withdraw early, Roland certainly wouldn't allow it.

His mind raced, thinking about how to keep Christine working for him.

Being a Saintess, Christine is pious, and temptations such as promotions, wealth, and beauties have no effect on her; what she desires is to become a formal Saintess, perhaps even to take on the Pope's crown one day.

Roland's eyes lit up.

"Christine, you've been a great help to me this time, the number one contributor to our victory. But since you don't need a title, nor do you want to hold office here, it's quite difficult."

"It's nothing, I owe you a favor." Christine remained calm.

She could see Roland's sincerity, but she truly didn't need these.

She only wished to be slightly closer to the Great Goddess.

She knew Roland wanted to win her over, but she couldn't agree, so she smiled and changed the subject.

"His Majesty Sylph hasn't formally ascended the throne yet, titles and rewards should be jointly reviewed and decided by both the Noble House and the House of Commons, right?"

"That’s right, you’re quite familiar with our political system."

Christine nonchalantly said, "I’m a Saintess, a candidate for the Archbishop or even the Pope, having received formal political and military training. I hear you’re asking for an earldom for yourself?"

"How much are you willing to pay for that earldom?"

Roland pursed his lips and smiled, the earldom he was asking for was the Count of Suyige.

The main territory of the Earl’s Domain was the new territory he seized from the Oden Kingdom, plus Helentz Castle.

He even planned to merge the Helentz Castle area in northern Hansa Province with the Suyige Region to establish a fourth overseas province.

As long as the propaganda was in place, to the masses, he and Sif would be seen as superheroes expanding new provinces for the Empire.

As for the fact that the Suyige Province had little territory and a small population, with half of the land coming from Hansa Province, no one would care.

Facing Christine’s curious gaze, Roland spread his hands, "I don’t plan to pay any cost, not a single penny."

Christine was stunned.

She didn’t expect such a politically naive statement to come out of Roland’s mouth.

She didn’t think Roland could be so foolish.

The mocking words remained on her lips, and Christine was lost in thought.

A moment later, her eyes lit up, "You never actually intended for the title application to go through, did you?"

Roland nodded, indicating approval.

Chapter 315: People Always Prefer Compromise (Part 2)

Christine suddenly realized, murmuring, "So you never planned to knight these people from the beginning, just issued empty promises. If the Parliament disagrees, you can just blame them and simultaneously arouse the anger of the overseas officials, making them your die-hard loyalists."

"Was all this part of your plan?"

Christine murmured, suddenly becoming alert.

Could Roland also be scheming against her?

Miss Saintess, although recognizing Roland's strength and means, did not like being schemed against.

She couldn't hold back her complaint, "Pity those officials who are full of expectations yet end up disappointed."

"Who said they'd be disappointed?"

Roland spoke seriously, "This time's knighting application includes a total of seven Barons and me, the Count. Imperial Knights do not require Parliament's review; the Empress can grant the titles at will."

"Her Majesty the Empress knew that the knighting application would likely be rejected, so she prepared a backup plan. She will use the Tyrone Earl's Domain as a territory to reward meritorious officials."

Now it was Christine's turn to be surprised.

The Tyrone Earl’s Domain is the Sussex Imperial Family’s territory, currently under Sif’s direct control. It’s densely populated, fertile, and not far from the Imperial Capital — the best territory.

"You guys are really willing."

Christine had no doubt that this was Roland’s idea. She didn’t believe Sif could be so generous.

Roland smiled and explained, "It’s just a temporary territory."

"How so?"

"In one or two months, bad news will arrive. Those waiting to become Barons will surely be very disappointed. At that time, the Empress will propose dividing the Tyrone Earl’s Domain among them as a temporary territory."

Pausing slightly, Roland continued to explain, "Although it’s called a temporary territory, no one will actually go to manage or collect taxes. This is just to solve their rank issue for now, to be officially granted later."

"So they would be Barons without territories?"

Christine instantly understood Roland’s intention.

Private property is sacred and inviolable, and the Tyrone Earl’s Domain is Sif’s personal territory. Even if she grants it to foreigners, the Parliament wouldn’t have a say.

Sif divided the Tyrone Earl’s Domain into several Baron Domains to lend to this group of new meritorious officials.

Although they don’t have territories, they are at least Barons.

Although Imperial Knights are also nobility, most old nobility do not recognize them, and even Barons find it difficult to integrate into their circles.

Though a Baron is just a lower-level noble, he has formally stepped into the noble threshold.

Seeing Christine’s surprised expression, Roland smiled and explained, "If we proposed the temporary territory plan from the start, surely no one would be satisfied. Even if they don’t say it, they would have grievances in their hearts."

"When the Parliament rejects it and they have nothing, giving them discounted Baron titles will make them overjoyed. Even if they are dissatisfied, they will be annoyed with the elders in the Imperial Capital, not the Empress."

"People always like compromises. If you want to open a window in winter, most people will disagree, but if you insist on removing the roof, they will be willing to help you open the window."

Christine had never heard such a saying before and didn’t know what to say for a while.

Although a little unconvinced, she accepted Roland’s explanation.

She could fully imagine how happy these unfortunate new Barons would be to receive the Empress’s consolation prize after losing their complete titles.

First, make excessive demands, then you can get a compromised result?

Christine silently memorized Roland’s compromise method.

This technique is common in diplomatic negotiations and business activities, but few can explain it so thoroughly.

Roland not only explained clearly but also used this method to win people’s hearts.

Christine felt a chill down her back.

She helped Roland, would she also be sold like those new Barons and still have to count money for him?

Miss Saintess cautiously glanced at Roland, quickly feeling reassured.

Roland’s eyes were clear, without a trace of corruption.

He surely wouldn’t scheme against her!

After explaining, Roland fell back into thought.

Directly asking Christine for what she wants definitely wouldn’t work; even if she had demands, she wouldn’t say them.

Girls’ thoughts have always been elusive for him, but he had to guess now.

Roland’s brain was working rapidly, almost smoking.

Christine’s identity is special, still a candidate for the Saintess. The means of wooing with wine, color, or wealth surely wouldn’t work.

What does she really want?

Unable to think of anything for the moment, Roland could only make small talk and casually asked, "How is the battle damage of the Temple Warriors this time?"

"Three hundred thirty-nine dead, five hundred seventy-seven seriously injured, with thirty-five having limb disabilities. Training Temple Warriors is not easy; this is a huge loss."

Seeing Christine’s undisguisable distress for the Temple Warriors, Roland understood that they were her trusted forces. Officially Temple Warriors, but essentially her private soldiers.

He gently asked, "How long does it take to train a qualified Temple Warrior, and how much does it cost?"

"Temple Warriors are generally selected from pious young orphans. If you let me train them, basic training can be completed in about a year and a half, with seventy percent of the combat power of veteran Temple Warriors."

Piety in faith aside, the restriction condition of being an orphan is very harsh.

Where are there so many orphans?

Roland quickly turned silent, there actually were indeed many.

In this era, seemingly only a hundred years distant from modern civilization, but actually separated by several layers of mountains, war, famine, disease, or even the nobles’ whims, could all create a large number of orphans.

Not to mention anything else, this Hansa defense war alone created tens of thousands of orphans.

Counting various natural and man-made disasters, his territory alone has at least a hundred thousand orphans.

What a truly barbaric world.

Roland suddenly realized what he could trade with Christine.

"Christine, could you help me with one more thing?"

Christine asked suspiciously, "Another war? If it’s just commanding the corps, it’s definitely not a problem. But the Temple Warriors suffered significant losses and need to rest, I hope they don’t participate this time."

Her words confirmed Roland’s guess. The Temple Warriors were indeed Christine’s most valued asset.

This deal is definitely going to be made, as it is an irresistible condition.

"Do you see me as a war maniac? Of course not war. The Temple Warriors need a break, and so does my army. If wars are fought continuously, soldiers will become extremely war-weary."

"Then..." Christine was on alert, staring at Roland.

Her greatest value lies in her military talents, and if it’s not about this, then what does he want?

"Suppose using these more than four thousand Temple Warriors as the backbone, under slightly lower selection standards, and without considering other factors, how many people could you expand the army by?"

"At least one hundred thousand to start." Christine thought briefly and replied directly.

Though she didn’t understand Roland’s intention, she patiently explained, "But this is according to conventional army standards. The reason Temple Warriors are formidable is the higher selection standards. By the lowest Temple Warrior selection standards, it can expand to about fifteen thousand."

"Only that much?" Roland was slightly disappointed.

"Governor Roland, do you realize you’re speaking nonsense?"

Christine was somewhat speechless; Temple Warriors are absolutely loyal, extremely powerful troops. Expanding by ten thousand men could even affect the outcome of the Saintess selection, and this is called only?

Roland understood Christine’s capability limits and immediately offered an olive branch.

"In recent years, due to natural and man-made disasters and numerous armed conflicts, there are at least hundreds of thousands of orphans in my territory. If you can select Temple Warriors from these orphans, it would greatly help me."

Christine was silent for a long time before slowly asking, "Are you serious? These people would no longer be your subjects once they become Temple Warriors, but part of the Defender Army under my command."

"I’m well aware. If you can help, I can cover part of the expenses and provide a base."

"And the price?" Christine’s voice carried a slight tremor; it was an irresistible offer.

"Continue serving as my Military Commander."

"I will give you all my wisdom!" Christine agreed without hesitation.

Chapter 316: Are Colored Cards Really That Rare?

Christine was unable to refuse Roland’s offer.

He offered so much.

Although the losers of the Saintess selection still have the chance to marry into a wealthy family and become noble wives, they lose the opportunity to become the Pope, getting closer to the Goddess.

Being a Saintess is very hard. She must restrain her natural desires, maintain her image, and compete fiercely with other equally excellent candidates.

Because the gap between success and failure is too great, the Saintess selection often ends as brutal competition with not only victory and defeat, but also life and death being decided many times physically.

The Temple Warriors under the jurisdiction of the Saintess are their trump card.

If there is "injustice" in the selection, the Saintess treated unjustly certainly cannot accept it. As long as she raises her arm, naturally someone will fight for her.

The number of Temple Warriors directly relates to the victory or defeat in the Saintess selection.

She can send Temple Warriors to help Roland fight and make a huge sacrifice.

Roland, of course, knows the Saintess selection is extremely cruel, so he wants to help Christine make up for the loss.

Though he is merciless to foes, he is always generous to friends.

In short, this is a win-win cooperation. Christine expanded the number of Temple Warriors she controlled, adding a heavyweight counterbalance to winning the Saintess selection.

Roland also didn’t lose out; according to the agreement, Christine will help him train the army and serve as his Military Commander before the Saintess selection begins.

After a busy day at work, Roland returned to his bedroom, where drowsiness struck, and he once more entered the Flower Sea Dream Realm.

Although he still needs traditional sleep every night to restore energy, he hasn’t visited the Flower Sea Dream Realm in some time.

Since Elf Sylph fell asleep in the Flower Sea, he has been blocked outside the dream.

Roland walked on the verdant land, with light steps and a quick pace.

He could guess Elf Sylph was likely awake and wanted to confirm it as soon as possible.

Soon, he reached the highest tree in the Flower Sea and saw Elf Sylph.

She quietly lay sideways under the tree, with her eyes gently closed, her dress spreading out like splendid blossoms, looking as if she's taking a nap.

Roland knew she was at least not asleep, as this time her position was different from last time, evidently having woken up in between.

Roland stopped in front of her and slowly sat down.

Elf Sylph looked in poor spirits, and he didn't want to disturb her, so he waited quietly.

Roland pondered as he looked at Elf Sylph's delicate toes peeking out from her dress, suddenly realizing he had never seen her wear shoes before, which he found quite strange.

Not only hadn't he seen her wearing shoes, but he'd only caught a fleeting glimpse of her complete feet upon first meeting.

In Roland's impression, Elf Sylph was always clad in a long dress with a flowing hem.

Considering she once was a Grand General, this attire indeed seemed somewhat odd.

Just as Roland was lost in thought, Elf Sylph gradually woke up, supporting herself as she sat up, looking particularly frail.

Drawing back her foot exposed from the dress, Elf Sylph's complexion showed a bit of rosiness, whispering softly:

"Long time no see, Roland."

Her voice was very soft, with a few moments of weakness as if she had just recovered from a severe illness.

Roland looked at Elf Sylph in surprise, swallowing the words that came to his lips.

Seeing the confusion in his eyes, Elf Sylph softly said: "Is it strange to see me sick? Clearly, I'm not life, but can also be ill?"

Roland said nothing, tacitly acknowledging Elf Sylph's words.

"Actually, I don't understand my current state either. I've lost my body, my soul has been shattered, with only the last consciousness attached to spirit fragments, falling into the lowest layer of the Sea of Annihilation."

"That place is absolutely deathly silent, without life, sunlight, or even energy fluctuations."

Elf Sylph sighed softly: "I don't know why I appeared in your dream world either, fortunately, this dreamlike flowers can provide me with weak energy to maintain my consciousness, allowing me to see you."

"But I always feel somewhat uneasy, maybe these kinds of days will..."

"I'll find your spirit body, and help you reconstruct your body and soul." Roland interrupted Elf Sylph's disheartened speech, speaking resolutely.

Elf Sylph said nothing, merely smiling.

She greatly appreciated Roland's confidence.

Although his strength was weak now, time was short, and enemies surrounded him, he seemed fearless.

"Alright, it’s rare to meet, let’s not talk about these things. Haven’t seen you for a while, have any new stories?"

"Of course. Recently I’ve been..."

Roland feared Elf Sylph might overthink, since she wanted to hear stories, it was simple enough.

He began with establishing a university, opening factories, developing commerce, continued till the recent war.

Elf Sylph was an outstanding listener, she didn’t interrupt from start to finish, only looking at Roland gently, full of admiration in her gaze.

Her gaze greatly satisfied Roland’s vanity.

Everyone needs praise; as status and strength rise, ordinary people’s ordinary flattery can no longer touch Roland’s heart, but Elf Sylph was different.

She was once the Grand General of the Elf Empire, knowledgeable and well-informed, her approval truly delighted Roland.

After hearing Roland’s story, Elf Sylph smiled and said: "Seems you’ve made quite a bit of progress recently, let me see your Soul Card."

The Soul Card is the true secret of Transcendents, even the most intimate people mostly only know each other’s star path.

But Roland wouldn’t keep secrets from Elf Sylph.

A colorful card rose from the sea of consciousness, floating in front of Elf Sylph.

Just now, still calm, Elf Sylph suddenly stood up, looking incredulously at the Soul Card.

Chapter 317: Are Color Cards Really That Rare? (2)

"It’s actually colored?" She couldn’t hide her surprise.

"Is colored very rare?" Of course, Roland knew that soul cards with a colored background were very rare; he just wanted to hear Elf Sif praise them a bit more.

Elf Sif gently touched the colored card with her fingertip.

At the moment her fingertip made contact, the card emitted a dazzling light, with seven colors gradually merging and bursting forth with a sunshine-like brilliance.

Elf Sif was even more surprised. The light that poured over her made her feel exceptionally comfortable, and her gradually blurred consciousness also stabilized significantly.

Noticing the change in Elf Sif, Roland softly asked, "How can I help you?"

Elf Sif didn’t speak; she simply closed her eyes to enjoy the golden light.

Unfortunately, it was just a Tier Eight soul card, and its release time was very short. In less than a minute, the golden light gradually faded, and the card’s background returned to its colored state.

Elf Sif slowly opened her eyes, her cheeks slightly flushed, and softly said:

"Thank you, Roland. I can hold on for a few more years now."

"If after I advance, I upgrade the soul card to a colored background again, can it help replenish your energy?" Roland’s voice was noticeably anxious.

Elf Sif was not only half a mentor to him but also a friend and his best listener.

There were worries he couldn’t share with Sif and Lisa, but he could tell the elf.

He couldn’t accept the consequence of Elf Sif disappearing.

"Don’t think too much; I can go into dormancy and wake up when needed. This way, I can minimize energy loss. Maybe I can keep up with your advancement speed."

Elf Sif smiled lightly, but Roland’s heart was unusually heavy.

She made it sound easy, but advancement was not that simple.

Who could guarantee a smooth advancement every time? If stuck at a certain stage for too long, Elf Sif might completely disappear.

In the depths of his mind, a voice seemed to tell Roland that the state of consciousness in the Flower Sea was Elf Sif’s last chance. If the consciousness vanished, it would be complete annihilation.

Elf Sif couldn’t enter the Netherworld; she was a fugitive wanted by the Netherworld and couldn’t possibly cross the Nether River to reincarnate.

The arrival of the Final Harvest Day made Roland feel urgency, and the countdown of Elf Sif’s life suffocated him.

Racing against time became a more motivating force.

Elf Sif didn’t think too much; she carefully observed Roland’s soul card, muttering in disbelief:

"The Age of Gods has already ended; how could a perfect card appear?"

"What is a perfect card?" Roland’s curiosity was piqued.

Elf Sif gestured for Roland to sit down as this story would be long.

She patiently explained, "You should have heard of the Age of Gods, right?"

Roland nodded, somewhat embarrassedly saying, "I’ve only heard the name and know the Age of Gods is the Second Era, but that’s all I know."

Elf Sif’s thoughts drifted to the distant past, and after pondering for a while, she softly said:

"This world has never been equal, and neither is it between planes. Material planes exist in the endless starry sky by relying on stars. Depending on the stars they rely on, the tiers of the planes also differ."

"You should know that brown stars are the failures among stars; they lack sufficient mass to emit sustained light. Unless they defy the odds and absorb enough mass, they’ll always remain in decline."

"Massive white stars have too volatile energy, unable to support a plane with life. The main stars most suitable for the birth of life are often yellow or red. The star Alpha which Theia Plane orbits is a yellow star, and our planet happens to be in the habitable zone, hence life was born."

"There are many planets where life is born, but planets with conditions suitable for the evolution of advanced life are rare; these are called Divine Favor Planes. The Theia Plane is a Divine Favor Plane."

Elf Sif paused for a moment, softly saying, "I once found ancient texts left from the Age of Gods and saw some anecdotes. They may not be accurate, just listen as a story."

"A Divine Favor Plane can potentially give birth to True Gods, but at great cost. The Goddesses of Abundance, Light, and Nature successfully ascended to True God, but the price was consuming more than half of the plane’s resources."

"It’s said that during the Age of Gods, the Theia Plane was very prosperous, with highly advanced technology, and everyone had the chance to become powerful. But as the Three Goddesses left, the Theia Plane headed for decline. Fossil fuels were already depleted in the Age of Gods, achieving the divinities of the Three Goddesses."

"However, they also blocked other people’s paths to ascension on the Theia Plane. Although their relationships weren’t the best, they were united in cutting off access to the Divine Domain for others."

"The following Natural Era belonged to us and the Earth Spirits, but ultimately perished by divine punishment."

Roland’s heart trembled slightly.

Not only the Third Era but also the Sixth Era’s Magic Empire was like this.

Although he didn’t understand the reasons for the Three Goddesses cutting off others’ paths, God’s will shouldn’t be meaningless.

There must be a reason for their actions.

"They probably regarded the Theia Plane as their own garden, just waiting for the harvest when the crops were ready."

Roland was just saying this casually, but as soon as he said it, he was stunned.

Elf Sif was also dumbfounded.

Roland’s thought was too wild, but upon careful consideration, it was the only reasonable explanation.

True Gods cannot enter the material plane; their divine power could easily destroy the material plane, and the Supreme Law does not allow planes to be destroyed by human actions, by anyone.

The Three Goddesses were True Gods, also unimaginably powerful humans.

The Theia Plane must have incredible secrets for the Three Goddesses to keep their eyes on it, fearing it would fall into others' hands.

On the Final Harvest Day, the Three Goddesses will surely return to complete the last harvest.

The crops in this garden are growing too well, they probably can't wait to harvest but are restricted by the Supreme Law and cannot descend before a certain time point.

The Final Harvest Day will be the ultimate showdown between humans and those self-proclaimed gods, who betrayed humanity.

Thinking of this, Roland's heart surged with emotion.

If the Three Goddesses could be buried in their homeland, the energy they took would return to the material plane, and Theia would flourish once more.

They deserve this ending.

But before that, Roland must become stronger.

Elf Sif contemplated for a moment, softly stating, "The soul card is the foundation for the Three Goddesses' path to godhood. Their ascension also blocked the promotion paths of Light, Abundance, and Nature."

Thinking of this, Elf Sif's expression turned a bit somber.

Due to the presence of the Goddess of Nature, the Elf Race had smoothly followed the path of nature, but it turned out to be a dead end.

Unless the Goddess of Nature could be torn apart, shattering her divinity and returning it to the plane, only then could a second True God of nature arise.

Elf Sif dispelled the clutter in her mind and gently said, "Your soul card is a perfect card with the potential to become a god; now do you understand?"

Roland’s pupils suddenly contracted.

"Then isn’t my promotion path going to be very difficult?" Having the potential to become a god ≠ being able to become a True God; instead, it will be even more challenging.

"Both difficult and not difficult."

Elf Sif calmly said, "A perfect card has a higher promotion difficulty and also a higher ceiling. But perfect cards also have extra benefits."

"The base color of an ordinary soul card is white, above which there are several levels. As long as the base color of the soul card becomes golden, you can ascend. After promotion, the card’s base color returns to white and continues to accumulate. But perfect cards are different, they don’t downgrade. Even if you promote to Tier Seven, it remains colored."

"You now meet the conditions for promotion. I’ll help you see how to advance."

Elf Sif touched the two soul cards with even greater amazement.

The auxiliary profession was influenced by the perfect card, and the experience accumulation rate far exceeded the average.

As long as the right direction is chosen, Roland’s future will be smoother.

After some thought, she found the optimal solution for Roland.

"Main profession advances to [Instructor], spreading knowledge to become stronger, this is your foundation. Auxiliary profession advances to [Pioneer], how do you feel about this?"

Roland didn’t question why he could choose, nor did he ask what other options there were.

He chose to trust Elf Sif.

Chapter 318: Only Extremes Can Restrain Extremes

The [Instructor] is a hidden profession at Scholar Star Path Tier Seven, only unlockable by [Inheritors] who have made outstanding contributions to knowledge transmission.

As the president of Rodinia University, Roland possesses knowledge from the Elf Race of the Third Era, the Magic Empire of the sixth era old calendar, and modernized knowledge from another world.

His library contains countless books; his worry was never about having insufficient knowledge, but about having too few who can understand and accept it.

Compulsory education across the four overseas provinces has just begun, and currently, less than 5% of people in the entire Governor’s Territory can read and write, mostly religious figures, merchants, and social elites, with literate commoners being very few.

Promoting education is a long and arduous task.

Elf Sylph made the best choice for Roland; his primary goal for the next stage is to distribute the stock in his knowledge library.

Promotion of education, spreading knowledge strengthens oneself, and this is [Instructor].

The characteristic of the Holy Knight star path is strong defense, but the downside is a lack of attack methods at lower levels.

In the battle at Helen Mountain Battery, Roland teamed up to slay the old mountain commander, activating the most offensive hidden profession of the early Holy Knight star path [Pioneer].

The traits of [Pioneer] precisely compensate for the lack of Holy Knight’s attack power, filling the last gap for Roland’s progression towards Hexagon Warrior.

Upon activating dual hidden professions, Roland felt a surge of power flowing through his body, eager to find a hapless opponent to practice on.

With his arms outstretched, he was ready to feel the power when suddenly he realized he didn’t have a suitable weapon.

Looking at Roland’s empty hands, Elf Sylph smiled and said:

"Blades and swords have limited range, firearms are good but have fixed damage, long spears and axes lack flexibility, and magic-based weapons can’t exert knightly traits; is this what you’re hesitating over?"

Roland smiled and nodded affirmatively with his gaze.

Indeed, as his dream mentor, she understood him best.

Elf Sylph spread her arms, materializing a silhouette in the air, "How about this?"

What appeared before Roland was a plain wooden scepter, adorned with colorful gemstones at the top.

The scepter could pound as a warhammer, fitting well with knight and noble identities. It also could serve as a teaching stick and ruler, matching the traits of the instructor profession.

Its seemingly ordinary appearance was actually perfectly fitting.

"This is it!" Roland reached out to grab the scepter.

The moment his fingertips touched the scepter, the gemstone scepter turned into an illusion and disappeared.

Along with the scepter, Elf Sylph also faded into obscurity.

Roland exclaimed, but no sound came out. He could only see Elf Sylph silently shouting.

He understood the Elf’s lip language.

"Don’t worry, I’m just tired. I will continue to slumber; call me when needed."

"Instructor’s special ability can assign an absolutely trusted partner, establishing a link to share cultivation experiences and knowledge. Choose carefully. If both the instructor and the instructed are of the Elf Race..."

Elf Sylph’s last half-sentence vanished along with her fading figure.

Roland wished to ask what to do if both were elves, but Elf Sylph had already disappeared.

Gazing at the empty flower sea and giant tree, smelling the scent of flowers and grass in the air, Roland knew she wouldn’t wake up soon.

Somehow, a voice seemed to remind him that only if he broke through would Elf Sylph briefly awaken.

Elf Sylph’s existence defies logic; maintaining her consciousness is extraordinarily challenging and requires increasingly more energy.

"We will meet again."

No lamenting nor hysteria, just a promise etched in the heart.

Roland opened his eyes; the first morning light just streamed into the room.

He remained calm, summoning the soul card.

On the left was [Instructor], resplendent with dozens of silver badges.

On the right was [Pioneer], with a golden warhammer icon at the bottom, representing his significant contribution to the siege battle against the old commander.

The soul card is like the Transcendent's resume, recording the career of the Transcendent. Achievements meeting the profession's traits are documented.

Although Roland previously defeated Transcendent of the same Level Stanley, he didn't kill nor was it achieved using profession traits, so naturally, it wasn't considered a notable performance.

The siege battle against the old commander was concrete achievement, even if not a solo kill, and somewhat opportunistic, victory speaks no lies. Killing is killing, and this achievement indeed counts and is at the golden level.

Roland put away the soul card and fell into contemplation.

The Instructor's trait allows sharing knowledge and strength with a reliable partner, achievements shared.

This is mutual sharing, naturally given to a reliable yet strong partner. Who should this spot be given to?

Roland feigned deliberation, swiftly making the decision.

In fact, this isn't a multiple-choice question; his choice was solely Sylph.

Reliable and trustworthy individuals are only two, Sylph and Lisa. Alina and Christine, though skilled, have their own goals and are merely traveling with Roland temporarily.

Lisa, emerging from Lava Volcano, has the foundation to become strong, yet lacks a strong heart.

If facing Sofia, Lisa would have long fled, hidden away in an unknown corner.

If there were a second spot, he would gladly give it to Sister Lisa, but sadly there isn't.

He still remembered the last half of the sentence from Elf Sif, that if both parties were from the Elf Race, the effect would be completely different.

The words weren't finished, but it must be a good thing.

Although he and Sif were not elves, he held the last volumes of the Elf literature, and Sif had obtained the profession of "Elf Princess" in her dreams, so she had some connection to the Elf Race.

As long as luck isn't too bad, perhaps even if we don't get the meat, at least we'll drink some soup?

When Roland found Sif, she was already in the office reviewing documents.

The position of a hands-off manager can only be taken by one person. Roland does it, naturally Sif cannot.

However, this was originally her country, her territory, so Roland handing the Governor's duties to her wasn't completely offloading responsibilities.

Sif held half a loaf of bread in her left hand, swiftly flipping through documents with her right hand, scribbling notes at speed, then remembering to stuff the half bread in her left hand into her mouth.

Lifting her head to see Roland, Sif did not speak but gestured for Roland to sit down, then quickly swallowed the bread.

"Why did you come so early, have you had breakfast? If not, there’s still a piece of bread here."

"Thank you."

Having not had breakfast anyway, Roland didn’t stand on ceremony with her and took it directly.

While eating, he half-jokingly teased, "Eating without focus is not the lady’s etiquette, next time please dine in the restaurant."

"There’s simply no time, there’s still a lot of work."

Sif put down the feather pen, took a sip from the teacup, shrugged her shoulders, "I also want to bathe in the dawn in the backyard and enjoy breakfast, but why is my governor busier than me."

Although Sif was complaining a little, Roland was thick-skinned enough not to hear it, so she had to raise the documents on the table.

"There’s a big news, Oden Kingdom’s famous general Gode Johnson suddenly died of illness."

"That’s not surprising, Sven the Seventh lost the war, General Gode naturally has no way to survive."

Roland had just finished the bread, poured himself a cup of tea, drank a few sips leisurely, and said:

"Sven the Seventh is a man who cares about face, General Gode opposed him before the war, got sent back from the front line to the Imperial Capital by him, just to prove that he’s old and his judgment is wrong. Yet Sven the Seventh lost miserably on the battlefield, not even able to cover up."

"If Sven the Seventh won, General Gode would have had a chance of survival, but unfortunately, he lost."

Sif thought for a moment, then slowly said, "With such an irresponsible monarch, it’s no wonder he lost."

Roland put down the teacup, smiled and asked, "Any other news?"

"Yes, but they’re all bad news, the teacher sent someone to inform me that the report to confer titles to everyone was rejected by the Noble House."

Sif shrugged, her expression a little helpless.

"Why is this bad news? In my view, this is even good news. This can make the officials in the Governor’s Territory fully stand with us."

Sif looked at Roland’s calm expression, sighed lightly, "The conferment can be remedied, but what about your countship?"

"Just owe it for now."

Roland understood Sif’s meaning, the Tyrone Earl’s Domain could be divided into several Baron’s Domains, anyway, they were all her private domain, what she did the Emperor couldn’t care about, let alone the parliament.

But the conferment of a countship for Roland cannot be remedied. A countship is not a low rank, even the Emperor cannot grant it lightly.

Sif nodded, and then took out several documents and handed them to Roland.

Roland took the documents, seeing her graceful handwriting, his lips slightly raised.

Just like her person, Sif’s handwriting was also particularly beautiful, like dancing elves on stage.

Roland doesn’t like signing, the review of documents is only marked with circles below, after all, his handwriting is simply decent, not particularly appealing.

These documents involved livelihood, military affairs, and infrastructure respectively.

Many matters were delayed during the war and had to be addressed afterward.

Sif complained with some distress, "Other things are easier to say, but what about the tens of thousands of Samaritans?"

Because of Roland’s business promotion policies, many Samaritan merchants came to Hansa, and with them, quite a few Samaritan civilians.

These people were different from the upper-level merchants, but equally difficult to handle.

They couldn’t all be killed. These people didn’t gather, but smartly lived dispersed, making it impossible to clear them all at once.

Roland also felt a bit troubled. This era was somewhat barbaric, but massacring civilians was still judged by morality, it’s definitely not okay to do that.

Expulsion? Not a good choice either, only slightly more civilized than outright killing, but only slightly.

Even if only to demonstrate one’s difference in stature from other nations, these people have to remain.

While Roland was contemplating, Sif muttered softly, "The biggest problem with these guys is they’re too stubborn, they should be handed over to someone more extreme to manage!"

Sif was just venting, but Roland’s eyes brightened upon hearing.

"I know how to settle them now."

The Samaritans have faith in primitive religion, very extreme. Then let more extreme religious people come.

If they still refuse to repent, the Inquisition won't be playing around with them.

He helped Christine solve the recruitment issue for Temple Warriors, Miss Saintess should also help him a little bit.

Chapter 319: Elf or Human?

After easily resolving what shouldn't have been a problem, Roland's mood improved.

Listening to Roland's solution, Sif also felt uplifted.

But her good mood lasted only a few seconds before it vanished.

"Roland, I seem to have hit a bottleneck. My current Extraordinary Profession is [Elf Princess], and the next promotion route could be Elf Empress or Empress. If it's the former, I need to gain recognition from the Elf Sage on behalf of the tribe. If it's the latter, I'd have to return to the Imperial Capital to ascend to the throne."

She sighed helplessly, "The war with the Oden Kingdom has already allowed me to accumulate enough, but unfortunately, neither of these conditions can be met."

Indeed, it's troublesome. Gaining the recognition of the Elf Race Sage? The elves have been extinct for many years, where can we find an Elf Race Sage?

Seeing Sif's melancholic expression, Roland's lips curved into a smug smile and he softly said:

"I know of a secret method recorded in the royal Elf Race texts, which can allow us to share some knowledge and training experiences, but there might be side effects. Are you willing to try it?"

Elf Sylph’s words hadn’t been entirely said, although Roland believed it was a good thing, and believed linking two humans wouldn’t have the exclusive effects of the Elf Race, it’s still better to clarify beforehand in case there are indeed side effects.

Sif didn’t hesitate at all and nodded forcefully, "I accept."

She had much more confidence in Roland than Roland had in himself.

Although Roland often found himself drenched in sweat, in Sif’s eyes, he was almost omnipotent.

What side effects? It’s just like a doctor’s disclaimer before giving medicine. If there were truly side effects, how could Roland bear to let her try?

Looking at Sif’s determined gaze, Roland stopped being pretentious and said softly:

"Alright, let’s find a place similar to a sea of flowers."

Sif’s eyes lit up, and she smiled, "During the last expedition, I discovered a small valley filled with many flowers and plants I’ve never seen before. Let’s go there."

Unseen flowers and plants?

Sussex’s royal gardens have rare plants brought back from around the world by botanists, even those that only grow in tropical regions.

Sif had never seen them, so most likely they are common folk flowers and plants.

Though he internally disagreed with Sif’s judgment, Roland chose to go along with it.

The Nameless Valley is located thirty-five kilometers north of Hansa City. Sif had once personally scouted the surrounding terrain, looking for suitable spots to ambush with artillery.

This valley was also a result of scouting.

The two donned light hunting outfits, mounted their horses, and raced across the plains with the early autumn wind.

Autumn on the Hansa Plain is the best season of the year, without the scorching heat of summer or the chilly cold of winter.

Although the weather is nice now, it was awful throughout the spring and summer, leading to many fields having poor or even no harvest.

As they rode past the fields, seeing several farmers handling crops with blank expressions, Sif paused in silence and suddenly asked:

"Roland, with the tax collection season in October approaching, these farmers don’t look like they can pay taxes. How should we collect this year’s tax?"

Indeed, a good question and an excellent impromptu test.

Roland withdrew his gaze and calmly asked back, "What do you think?"

"If it were up to me, I’d rather not collect their taxes. I’ve heard tax officers are very strict, and I’m afraid they won’t fare well this winter."

Strict? Roland thought internally, Sif clearly doesn’t understand the harsh reality.

In the past, the Three Overseas Provinces implemented a tax farming system, where tax merchants and tax officers were not just strict, they were downright ruthless, as long as the fixed tax amount could be collected.

They would mercilessly squeeze the last drop of oil from the farmers. It would be merciful if these farmers could even survive until next year.

"Then we won't collect taxes and will send people to every village to notify everyone, ensuring no one exploits this loophole."

"Ah, is that really possible?" Sif looked at Roland in surprise, her eyes filled with doubt.

She hesitated for a moment but still softly said, "Teacher Wald mentioned that paying taxes can give the people a sense of belonging and is a way to remind them of who their lord is."

From a feudal lord's perspective, Wald's view is quite correct, but it still made Roland's brows furrow slightly.

He pondered for a moment, then slowly said, "Times change. Although we've acquired a lot of food, this year's poor harvest is far worse than I imagined. Only through reasonable distribution can we ensure everyone survives the winter. Inevitably, tax collection would lead to significant loss, causing many to starve through winter."

"Having large-scale starvation in the region would significantly damage our reputation."

When Teacher Wald's views conflicted with Roland's, Sif indeed felt a bit confused, but she quickly made a decision.

Listen to Roland.

Teacher Wald indeed knows a lot, but the achievements Roland made were something Teacher Wald couldn't.

Wald is an excellent official, but Roland, who prefers to avoid responsibility, is not that.

But Roland has opened a door to a new world for her.

"Alright, I'll follow your lead!"

Seeing Sif's clear eyes, Roland nodded in satisfaction.

Sif is not yet deeply contaminated by this world. A blank slate has its advantages, at least there's no need to erase incorrect content first.

Skipping over the topic, the two accelerated their journey.

Soon, guided by Sif, Roland arrived at the Nameless Valley.

Leaving the horse outside the valley, Roland carefully set up a few traps and warning devices, drew his pistol, raised the shield, and walked into the valley.

It wasn't that he was paranoid, but that's just how his travels went; nothing happening was the exception rather than the rule.

Sif did not think Roland's caution was misplaced.

Having encountered werewolves while moon-gazing and tree demons in valleys, it was prudent to be cautious.

She deftly assembled the three segments of her long spear and followed behind Roland.

As they walked into the valley, Roland looked at the lush green grass and vibrant flowers, and was stunned.

This place was somewhat akin to the dreamlike flowers, with a central tree surrounded by flora, but no other trees.

Upon closer inspection, Roland felt a bit disappointed.

The Elf Race’s flower sea differed from a normal flower sea.

In truth, the Elf Race’s flower sea was a living entity of flesh and blood; the flower sea itself was the central tree, and the surrounding flora were symbiotic.

Though the flowers of the Elf Flower Sea were vibrant, they were all red; when the stem was cut, it bled rather than seeped juice.

This was clearly not the case here.

The flowers in the Nameless Valley Flower Sea were multicolored, with reds, yellows, greens, pinks, and purples.

Although early autumn still saw a carpet of flowers, which was a bit strange, it was not a big deal.

Roland decided to establish a connection first, then collect plant specimens to study.

Following Roland’s instructions, the two reached the central tree.

Sif looked up and exclaimed, "This tree resembles a ginkgo, but it isn’t."

"Ignore it, let’s complete the ritual first."

Roland went over the ritual process once more, while Sif calmed herself, slowed her breathing, and steadied her heartbeat.

She cleared her throat and began to sing.

The first part of the ritual required chanting an ancient poem using the poetic method of the Elf Minstrels.

Considering his disastrous singing, Roland delegated this task to Sif.

Her hair casually draped over her shoulders, Sif stood barefoot on the grass, arms outstretched, her gaze flowing, her voice resonating throughout the flower sea.

As Sif sang, the flowers in the sea seemed to be swayed by the wind, gently swaying.

Roland looked around at the plants in surprise, his mind puzzled.

Could these plants understand as well?

No time for doubt, Sif had finished singing and awaited Roland to continue the ritual.

Roland stepped forward and recited a few lines of poetry.

Oddly enough, when reciting poetry, his voice had a rhythm and power comparable to that of a minstrel; at least it wasn't unpleasant, though singing was another matter altogether.

After reciting, Sif opened her eyes and both simultaneously bit their fingers.

Their fingertips touched, exchanging blood.

What was supposed to be a simple ritual felt electrifying as their blood made contact; their eyes glazed over and bodies froze.

The sea of their consciousness flooded with myriad memories.

The rise of the Elf Race, the glorious past, the decay, the downfall.

History and knowledge not recorded in tribe records flooded their memories.

They opened their eyes simultaneously.

They didn’t speak, but they understood clearly.

They once belonged to the Elf Race.

The Nether River’s cycle could annihilate memories, but it could not erase the imprint deep within their souls.

This was why they could activate the hidden extraordinary professions unique to the Elf Race.

The day of return was near, distant tribes would return, and former champions would awaken.

It turned out they were a part of the return.

The fingertips slowly parted and the electricity faded. Sif remained silent for a long time, and then softly asked, "Are we elves or humans?"

"Elves are humans."

Roland calmly replied, "We are both elves and humans, it’s that simple."

Sif froze for a second, a smile brighter than the flower sea bloomed in her dimples, and the entire world lit up with her smile.

All at once?

Indeed, a Roland-style answer.

Chapter 320: Fighting Rumors with Rumors

The link ceremony was completed.

Amidst the grandeur of the Flower Sea, Sif walked barefoot, casually sitting under a tree, her smile blending with the sunlight, radiantly blooming.

Roland was transfixed.

In that instant, the image of Sif overlapped with the Flower Sea Elf, then separated.

But he knew well that the Flower Sea Elf had never crossed the Nether River, with no possibility of reincarnation.

He remembered something else.

In the Third Era, a prophecy circulated among the Elf Race, essentially stating that elves would, in the distant future, merge with humans to become a new race.

At the time, the elven nobility were furious upon hearing the prophecy.

They believed the elven bloodline was noble and could not be tainted by a lesser race, which to them, was the unheard-of human race.

Throughout the Third Era, the enemies of the Elf Race were the Earth Spirits, their friends the forests, and all other races were seen as slaves.

They made every effort to find traces of the Human Race, wanting to preemptively prevent disaster by altering the prophecy's outcome. Yet, they never found the Human Race before the end of the Third Era.

This was also the regret that the Elf Race could not put down in those years.

Knowing the truth, Roland silently mourned for the Elf Race. The Elf Race wouldn't find the Human Race, which only emerged in the Fourth Era, making their plan to preemptively annihilate them futile.

The vow made by the elven nobility to never let the bloodline of a lesser race pollute their noble elven blood returned to them like a boomerang in a wonderful way after three eras passed.

The original elves were gone, yet the new elves merged with the Human Race still lived on.

Roland believed that such elves were not only he and Sif, there surely were more. These people were also his potential future team.

Sitting beneath the tree, Sif seemed to sense something, slowly lifted her head, and said softly:

"Roland, you should return first; I want to stay here for a while."

Roland raised an eyebrow, looking at Sif's skin, smooth as ivory, her being radiant, knowing she had some realization, and took his leave.

Before leaving, he set many traps around the valley, then left at ease.

Sif was not someone to be trifled with.

Unless Sofia personally acted, no one could harm her here.

Returning to the Governor's Mansion, Roland immediately felt a headache.

With Sif absent, the mountain of paperwork had to be handled by him personally.

Looking at the documents one by one, Roland’s blood pressure continuously rose.

"The East City District Poor Area Sewer is in disrepair and urgently needs attention."

"Do it quickly!" Roland scribbled, signing his name.

The officials surely knew what to do, but they needed someone to sign and authorize.

Without his or Sif’s signature, the finances wouldn’t release money.

Seeing every matter, big or small, being sent to Sif, Roland felt slightly annoyed.

Why send every trivial matter to the Governor here? What are the officials of various provinces and departments doing?

Putting down the pen, he quickly understood the mindset of these people. They knew exactly what to do, with perfect solutions attached to the report.

What they wanted was attention, attention from Her Majesty the Empress.

Roland quickly signed his name on more than a dozen documents, rang the bell to call the secretary, and distributed the signed documents.

Having completed the heavy work, standing by the window, watching the gradually setting sun, Roland was somewhat curious about what Sif was doing at that moment, where her gaze was directed.

He certainly couldn’t know, tens of kilometers away Sif was dancing amidst the Flower Sea, her hair flying with the wind, and the once colorful Flower Sea beneath her feet gradually turning red.

The flowers seemed dyed by the sunset, or soaked in blood, a crimson expanse.

As crystalline tears rolled down her cheeks, she remembered vividly the ancient memories filled her consciousness, taking her back to that desperate and tragic era.

The Elf Race had once been immensely glorious, but in the end became a joke.

The path walked by the Goddess bore only footprints, no future.

The Elf Race's pursuit of the Goddess of Nature, their reverence for nature, adherence to the Goddess's teachings, in the end proved nothing but a grand illusion.

The starlight and glory of the natural star path fully belonged to the Goddess of Nature, and those who came after could only kneel on the ground, bathing in residual brilliance and shadows.

The Wise Men of the Elf Race gradually perceived something amiss, changed their thinking, and sought to expand a new ultimate path to the Divine Domain.

Instead, they were met not with new starlight but divine punishment.

The Theia Plane was a divine-favored land, richly resourced, had once birthed three Goddesses, and originally had opportunities to birth more True Gods, yet the three first Goddesses severed the path for those who followed.

The deities who first ascended stood at the peak, beheld endless vistas, they did not wish for more people to ascend, but to block the path to the summit.

The elves of the Third Era and Earth Spirits, as well as the subsequent era's pinnacle races, were the same.

They painstakingly sought to transcend the mortal path, only to be doomed time and again when nearing the summit.

Humans gazed at the starry sky, stars seemingly within reach, yet in reality always out of reach.

When night fell and starlight twinkled, Sif looked up, unable to find a star that belonged to her.

But she would have no more confusion.

Without starlight guidance, then become one's own star.

This was her choice, also Roland's choice.

Gazing down at her fingertips, the crimson bloodstains added a touch of ferocity to her snow-white skin, but she had no regret.

This was the best gift Roland had given her.

The same mark could be found on his fingertips. They shared knowledge, shared cultivation experience, and upon activation, could even share life.

The initiation rights to the life link were even in her hands.

She dared not imagine such trust, but she would never betray it.

Sif looked up at the sky, arms open to welcome the light of the Blue Moon, tears streaming down her face.