Empress 321

Chapter 321: Fighting Rumors with Rumors

Tier Seven, Elf Empress, activate.

Becoming the Elf Empress is not difficult, but becoming a Tier Seven extraordinary profession as [Elf Empress] is very hard, requiring the recognition of all sages of the tribe.

In the long Third Era, many female elves ascended to the throne of the Emperor, but those recognized by all sages as [Elf Empress] were few and far between.

If Sif had been born in the Third Era, she would have never received the full recognition of the sages, as elves are picky creatures.

However, since the extinction of the Elf Race, this stringent condition has become particularly easy.

In the present time, the only existing Elf Sage is Roland.

Roland's recognition is equal to full recognition.

Is this the world of Tier Seven? Sif could clearly perceive the surrounding birds chirping and insects buzzing; nothing around could escape her Eye of Insight.

Unless vastly overpowered, it would be impossible to launch a surprise attack.

Even if faced with an entire row of firearms, she could see the bullet trajectories and easily evade them.

Attempting to kill a Tier Seven elite with sheer numbers of troops is nearly impossible.

Compared to her, Old Marshal Shank is indeed the shame of Tier Seven.

On her home turf, the Flower Sea, Sif would never fear any enemy.

Except for Sofia.

Only by entering the realm of Tier Seven could one understand how towering Sofia truly is.

To ants with too little power, even gazing at a giant dragon is a luxury.

Now she finally saw Sofia's true strength clearly.

Almost invincible.

Just almost.

Sif smiled broadly, walking barefoot through the Flower Sea, gently treading on each bloom without harming them, leaving only a fresh scent behind.

Occasionally, a mischievous rose thorn pierced into her slender arch, leaving a trace of blood, but it soon healed as before.

In the night, whatever color the roses were, they turned a dazzling scarlet after Sif stepped on them.

She furrowed her brows slightly, enduring the pain of sensitive skin being pierced by thorns, and kept walking.

Knowledge about the Flower Sea was awakened deep in the sea of her consciousness.

She must keep walking without rest.

Wherever the blood smears, the seeds of the Flower Sea extend, and the newly expanded Flower Sea will hide beneath the plains, waiting to bloom as her power grows stronger.

Sif decided to walk to White Mountain.

She had a premonition that her final confrontation with Sofia would be at White Mountain.

There lies the hope for the resurgence of the Magic Empire descendants, the territory she and Roland had designated, and the Snow Mountain Peak is also Sofia's home ground.

When Sofia discovers that White Mountain turns into a Flower Sea on the day of the showdown, will it be a surprise or a shock?

Sif wanted to know the answer very much.

The opportunity for territory expansion will exist in the future, but at Tier Seven, it's a once-in-a-lifetime chance she absolutely won't miss.

After finishing his work, Roland sat on the terrace, enjoying the moonlight and drinking tea, when he suddenly sneezed.

He touched his forehead to confirm that he hadn't caught a cold.

In an era without antibiotics, a cold could be fatal.

There's no historical precedent for a Tier Seven dying of illness, and he didn't want to be the first lucky one.

He was somewhat curious about what Sif was doing. Could she be sleeping in the Flower Sea like Elf Sylph?

He obviously couldn’t guess that Sif was walking to White Mountain.

He also had no time to guess, as someone had arrived.

Listening to the footsteps tinged with a bit of heated impatience, Roland knew who it was.

"Sister Lisa, coming over so late, do you have a midnight snack to share?"

Roland turned around, looking at the anxious-faced Lisa, and asked in surprise, "What happened?"

"It’s to do with you."

Lisa hesitated slightly, sat opposite Roland, and lowered her voice to ask, "Is Sif not here?"

"If you’re asking about tonight, she’s not here." Roland shrugged, responding with Sussex-style dry humor.

"Good that she’s not. I’m asking if there’s anything between you and Saintess Christine beyond friendship?"

Lisa grabbed Roland’s hand, taking his teacup away, her expression serious.

Roland froze for a second, furrowing his brows slightly, then nodded, "Something beyond friendship? We’re political allies now."

"Roland!"

Lisa rarely got angry, and she leaned forward to pinch Roland’s ear. She only pinched Roland’s ear to express anger in the months after his parents had just passed away.

As Roland grew older, she abandoned this method that made her seem quite rude.

Roland didn’t avoid it but softly said, "If you’re referring to an indescribable relationship that goes beyond friendship between men and women, there’s absolutely none."

"None?" Lisa released the hold on Roland’s ear, looking at him full of doubts.

"Of course none!"

Roland flicked his finger towards Lisa’s forehead, looking displeased, "Even if you don’t believe me, do you think Miss Saintess has no self-control?"

Lisa was silent for a long time and slowly said, "I believe you."

"So, what exactly happened?"

Lisa sighed softly, lowered her voice, and said, "Some people say that Miss Saintess is unclean. They say Christine used her maiden status to exchange for your full support. Others say she’s your secret lover and that you support her in recruiting and training Temple Warriors in your domain...

"It’s downright nonsense."

Roland scoffed, "The innocent will prove themselves innocent, no need for justification. Even if there are rumors, what of it? Candidates for the Saintess must be virgins, and the examination by nuns can naturally prove Christine’s innocence."

"No, there’s an additional rumor paired with it. They say Christine received the blessing of the Holy Spring, possessing a super healing ability that can heal all injuries, including there..."

Roland’s face changed.

This is undoubtedly a meticulously crafted vicious rumor.

Christine indeed possesses a super healing ability, and perhaps this healing ability could also repair membranes, but Roland knew it was a malicious rumor.

However, this rumor is highly credible and indefensible.

Even if Christine is innocent, these rumors can significantly damage her reputation and even influence her selection as Saintess.

Because she has no way of proving whether she is intact or restored from a secondhand state.

Roland’s expression was grim, murder intent surging within his chest.

If this rumor ruined his and Christine’s cooperation plan, he would have to kill the rumor-monger.

No, even if it didn’t ruin it, this shameless behavior targeting his ally must be paid for.

Feeling the murderous intent emanating from Roland, Lisa hurriedly held down his hand, softly saying:

"Don’t be impulsive, leave this matter to me."

Anger was swallowed by surprise, Roland widened his eyes, looking at Lisa with more than a bit of expectation in his tone.

"As expected of a sister, you have a plan?"

"Of course I do, and my method not only can preserve Miss Saintess’s reputation but also prevent Sif from developing suspicion, and moreover... In short, it’s quite effective."

"What do you plan to do?"

"Secret!" Lisa revealed a sly smile and prepared to leave, winking.

Seeing Lisa’s smug look, Roland’s heart suddenly trembled.

Sister Lisa is excellent, skilled in social graces, knowledgeable in mathematics, and literate, which makes her an extremely talented woman in this era.

However, this doesn’t mean she is good at strategy.

He grabbed Lisa’s sleeve sharply, asking in a deep voice: "What are you planning to do?"

"It’s simple, often what suppresses a rumor is not the truth, but a more explosive rumor."

Lisa raised her chin proudly, her eyes shone with an intelligent sparkle.

"We need more explosive material. I plan to find a journalist from the overseas edition of The Sun to do an exclusive interview and, in an anonymous voice, reveal the real you to the readers."

"What do you mean to say?"

"I’ll portray you to readers from the perspective of a close female acquaintance." Lisa grinned like a sly fox.

"For instance, that you only like full-figured beauties, not plain-looking girls."

Lisa smiled like a little fox.

"For example, you only like curvy beauties, not plain girls."

The shocking news will dispel the rumors about you and Christine without them even trying."

Christine is great in every way, except that she is somewhat lacking in that particular area.

She is a Saintess, after all, she doesn't need to marry and have children, which is hardly a flaw, and it's even relatively comfortable when wearing armor, becoming an advantage.

The release of this explosive news will dispel the rumors about her and me without us having to do anything.

Roland immediately rejected Lisa's quick-witted idea, saying, "Absolutely not."

Chapter 322: Young Girl

"Why?!"

Lisa was somewhat unconvinced.

This was the fruit of her afternoon of deep meditation!

It could calm Sif, preserve Christine's reputation, and incidentally, completely sever ties between Roland and Christine.

As long as these words were spoken, Christine would never have a relationship beyond friendship with Roland in this lifetime.

Of course, this wasn't out of a little selfishness on her part; she was just afraid of being misunderstood by Sif.

Sif was the Empress of the Empire, how could she accept any ambiguity between Roland and the Saintess?

Although it felt somewhat unfair to Christine, this was for the greater good.

However, Roland refused to accept it. Did he have thoughts about Miss Saintess in his heart?

Seeing Lisa being dominated by the notion of love, Roland patiently explained to her.

"Sister, your method, though unconventional, is indeed a solution. I don’t mind, but what about Christine? How will she feel?"

Lisa remained silent, but her beautiful eyes said it all.

You don’t always think about what Christine feels, but rather consider what Sif might think!

Roland gestured for Lisa to sit down and softly said, "I’ll go find Christine now, tell her about the rumors, and also the solution, letting her decide for herself."

Lisa was a bit anxious; was this something that could be talked about?

Although Lisa was in a hurry, Roland still insisted.

Unable to persuade him, Lisa could only gently remind him, "Christine is proud. I’m really afraid she’ll do something extreme, please persuade her more."

Roland nodded with a smile, swallowing back his retort.

Knowing the Saintess is proud and still suggesting this, afraid of having fewer enemies?

Seeing Roland about to go find Christine immediately, Lisa almost fainted, "Roland, shouldn’t you check the time now? Going to her now would confirm the rumors!"

"If I don’t go, will the rumors not spread?"

Roland left one thing unsaid.

Since Lisa knows, Christine probably knows too.

Rumors are most effective when they’re thrust into the person concerned’s face right away.

Roland changed out of his home clothes, put on formal attire, and walked towards the temporary Holy Hall in the east of the city under the moonlight.

Christine had been staying in Hansa lately, busy all day organizing the military and selecting new recruits.

When Roland arrived at the Holy Hall, the light was still on in Christine’s office on the third floor.

Just as Roland was about to go upstairs, a shadow blocked him.

"It’s you?" The shadow was a bit surprised.

"It’s me." Roland’s expression was calm.

The shadow stepped out from the darkness, revealing his face in the moonlight, it was none other than Joseph.

He frowned slightly and reminded softly, "Lord of Light, it is late at night now, please come tomorrow for matters with the Saintess."

"It’s urgent."

Joseph did not clear the way to the stairs, frowning, he said, "Lord of Light, perhaps you don’t care about your reputation, but Miss Saintess does. Please behave."

As Joseph was blocking Roland, a gentle and tired voice floated down from upstairs.

"Let Lord of Light in."

Upon Christine’s words, Joseph had no reason to continue blocking. He stared at Roland intently, coldly reminding:

"Lord of Light, becoming a formal Saintess is Christine’s wish, don’t make it difficult for her."

"You can insult my reputation, but you cannot doubt Christine." Roland said calmly, walking past Joseph through the path that opened, without even a glance at the High Tier Sanctuary pressing a hand on his sword hilt.

Joseph’s hand slowly relaxed from the sword hilt, letting out a light sigh.

He wasn’t sure if Christine and Roland’s cooperation was right or wrong, but from the current situation, trouble was bound to happen.

The speed of rumor spreading was very fast, he already knew, but was still hiding it from Christine.

From what he understood of her, hearing such rumors would definitely make her go berserk.

Although Christine had been learning military affairs by her grandfather’s side years ago, he understood this proud girl very well.

He felt a headache. Such matters cannot be hidden for long; hiding it for a day was a day gained.

He couldn’t imagine Christine’s rage and simply thought about finding an excuse to go to Val City tomorrow.

Just as Joseph thought he understood his grandfather’s disciple the most, Roland happened to walk into the Saintess’s office.

Christine was wearing a cream-white home outfit, her usually tied-up long hair was now messily draped over her shoulders.

The cotton slippers on her feet were...pink?

Roland was stunned.

He couldn’t associate the cold-blooded killing machine on the battlefield with the girl in pink slippers.

Seeing Roland’s dazed expression, Christine slowly raised her head, a slight smile on her lips.

"Lord of Light. I am a girl, not yet eighteen this year, a young girl. I am no different from my peers outside of work."

"There’s a cup on the table, pour yourself a drink. If you want Holy Water, there’s still a cup left on the table on the left."

Roland shrugged. Holy Water was from the Holy Spring, which had miraculous healing effects on followers’ bodies and souls, but to an unbeliever like him, it was just a cup of water.

His throat was somewhat dry, so Roland simply poured himself a drink, picked up the cup, and drank it all down.

"Something up?" Christine paused her work, raised an eyebrow, and asked.

"Just happened to pass by, saw you busy, thought I'd come and check." Roland's words belied his intentions.

"Indeed very busy, reorganizing the military and selecting Temple Warriors are inherently busy tasks, and now you throw in tens of thousands of stubborn ones, naturally busier."

Christine referred to the Samaritans as the stubborn ones.

They indeed merited the term stubborn.

Roland jested with a smile, "Only you can handle them."

Christine placed her fingers against her lips, signaling Roland to stop talking.

"Roland, I use that line too. 'Only you can do XX,' I often say such things to my subordinates."

Chapter 323: Young Girl (2)

Her eyes shone brightly, clear and transparent.

Facing her clear eyes, Roland knew it was impolite to keep beating around the bush.

Since he had to face it anyway, he might as well speak directly.

"I heard some rumors, not in your favor."

"Rumors? Like... I'm your secret lover?" Christine put down the quill in her hand, her expression exceptionally calm, as if mentioning a spilled glass of water.

"You already know? Wait, how did you..." Roland's words trailed off.

He suddenly realized he didn't really know Christine at all.

Even though they were allies.

"You didn’t get me drunk and take advantage, did you?" Christine even had the mood to joke with Roland.

Roland was at a loss for words.

"Since it’s a rumor, why bother? The teacher said that rumors stop with the wise. Neither you nor I are fools."

Roland pondered a hundred opening lines, but never anticipated Christine wouldn’t care at all.

Seeing Roland’s strange expression, Christine sighed, picked up her quill, and laughed self-deprecatingly:

"Alright, enough pretending, I’m actually furious."

She released her grip, letting the quill shatter into pieces and fall to the ground.

Her eyes filled with murderous intent, her voice turned much colder, "How could I not care? This is an insult to me, and it could even affect the Saintess selection. I know who did it; she’s as good as dead."

"Who is it?"

"My biggest rival, Erin."

Christine said coldly, "First, eliminate your enemies. This kind of childish rumor does little harm to you, since your reputation is already so bad, it can’t get much worse."

After a few seconds of pause, Christine said softly, "Sorry, I didn’t mean to attack you."

"It’s fine, I understand your point."

"Since it’s not aimed at you, it must be targeting me. Such a vicious and accurate rumor must be done by someone who understands me and the Saintess selection the best."

Christine’s eyes flashed with cold light, "Ever since the Holy Spring Revival Ceremony, the only person who could compete with me for the Saintess title is Erin. This is probably not her doing, but her teacher’s."

"Actually, it’s all the same." Roland supplemented the latter half of Christine’s sentence.

"Erin must die."

Christine, bereft of her earlier calmness, gritted her teeth and said fiercely, "Erin surely wouldn’t guess that I would choose the most primitive method to decide the victor."

The most primitive method is murder.

As long as Erin is killed, the official Saintess is undoubtedly Christine.

As expected of Christine, this method of handling fits perfectly with her character.

Although very angry, Christine seemed to still have a decent mindset, at least she didn’t explode on the spot.

With that in mind, Roland was very frank, "Actually, I have a way, but it would cost you greatly."

"You have a way for this too? As expected of the Lord of Light. Tell me, tell me, I don’t believe it could be worse than this rumor." Christine’s eyes lit up.

"The method is to fight poison with poison."

Roland cleared his throat, prefacing before speaking, "Regardless of whether you can accept it, you're not allowed to get angry."

"I promise, tell me now." Christine was a bit impatient.

Roland bit his lip and laid out Lisa's bad idea.

Christine was stunned.

Her eyes were a bit vacant, and after a long time, she finally regained her composure.

She had promised Roland not to get angry, first, drink some water, drink water!

Miss Saintess picked up the glass, but before it touched her lips, with a crunch, the poor glass shattered in her hand, crimson blood flowing down her fingers and dripping off the back of her hand.

Roland was about to stand up, but Christine pressed down her right hand, signaling him not to move.

She casually tossed the glass shards aside, murmuring to herself, "Such poor quality."

She moved her palm slightly, the area that was injured just a moment ago was already fully healed.

She chuckled to herself, "My training is still lacking, I can still be ruled by negative emotions."

"No, emotions are part of being human, avoiding them entirely is impossible. The suggestion I made was just off the cuff, whether to use it is up to you."

Christine nodded and said softly, "A terrible yet perfect idea."

Her fair fingers reflected a gentle glow under the light, beautiful like a work of art.

"Look, this is the blessing of the Goddess, I can easily heal myself no matter how badly wounded."

"That’s supposed to be a good thing, but now it’s troublesome. The purity screening is meaningless to me. Even if the areas that shouldn’t be damaged get injured, they can be restored."

Christine’s face blushed slightly as she sighed, "If a glass of water accidentally spills in the middle of my pants, it can’t be explained away no matter what."

Roland was silent.

Of course, he knew this. Christine was undoubtedly the Saintess without dispute, but if she couldn’t pass the purity check, she would be disqualified from participating.

When unable to win fairly, resort to underhanded means to disqualify; he’s definitely seen this tactic before.

He also knew Lisa’s suggestion was useful, but he couldn’t persuade her.

Christine was silent for what seemed like a century before she slowly spoke:

"Roland, before making a decision, I have a few questions."

"I will answer truthfully. If I really can’t answer, I will choose silence."

"No silence allowed." Christine shook her head.

Although a bit willful, she knew Roland wouldn’t refuse.

"Roland, if the rumors were true, would you find it embarrassing?"

Roland’s mind went blank.

Even after a thousand more chances, he wouldn’t have guessed Christine would start with this question.

It really is impossible to guess a girl’s thoughts.

After several seconds, Roland’s mind regained consciousness. He knew Christine wasn’t really asking if she should be his lover, but wanted to know her own allure.

What madness, having the mood to ask such a question right now.

"It would be my honor." Roland did not lie.

Christine is one of the top beauties in the Magic Mirror charm rankings, in the top five, who would refuse?

She was only held back by her unassuming figure, otherwise, she would be third.

Christine asked softly, "This idea wasn’t yours, was it, Sif?"

"Why do you think so?" Roland was puzzled.

"I’m asking you. Only a woman could come up with such a jerky idea."

"It’s Lisa. She wants to help you, no malice, you can’t give her trouble."

Christine remained silent.

Roland really doesn’t understand women, helping her maybe true, but no malice is absolutely not it.

In Miss Saintess’s eyes, Roland, Sif, and Lisa’s triangular relationship was obvious even to a blind person.

Lisa would absolutely not want to add another person to it.

For Lisa’s little thoughts, Miss Saintess only wanted to respond with one word.

"Pah!"

There isn’t only love in this world, foolish love-struck fools don’t understand the joy of following the Goddess to the peak.

Only a fool would fall in love, let alone in a love triangle.

"Roland, one last question. Do you like Sif or Lisa?"

Roland was dumbfounded by Christine’s question.

He used to think Lisa and Sif often had erratic thoughts until he met Christine.

After thinking it over a bit, he stretched out both hands, pressed them together against his chest.

"Shameless."

"Let’s go with what you said. Don’t say sorry, this issue is because of me, actually, I’m the one causing trouble for you and your two lovers."

Christine slowly lowered her head, sighing softly.

Roland desperately wanted to comfort her, but couldn't find the words, so he had to bid farewell and leave.

This was the best choice, but also the most helpless choice.

Christine must do this if she still wants to become the official Saintess.

Preserving purity comes at the cost of becoming a laughingstock.

After descending the stairs, Roland took one last look back, gaining more respect for Christine.

As expected of a Saintess chosen by the Goddess, maintaining her composure even in such situations.

Though angry, she never lost her composure, though unwilling, she chose the best answer.

Roland, dragging his weary feet, headed towards the Governor's Mansion.

Just as he was about to reach it, a dull thud sounded from behind.

He turned back in shock, just in time to see the temporary Holy Hall collapsing with a crash.

...

Alright, he took back what he said earlier.

Christine was, after all, just an under eighteen-year-old girl.

Chapter 324: The Fallen Maiden

Two sensational gossip news quickly spread throughout the Governor's Territory, even spreading wildly to every corner of the Rodinia Continent.

In this era without entertainment celebrities, gossip about high society elites, imperial family, and noble ladies is the best entertainment after meals.

Especially when the involved parties are the pure and virtuous Saintess and the infamous Roland.

This kind of naturally hot gossip news swept through the entire public opinion field instantly.

The news of an affair between Governor Roland and Saintess Christine, passed by word of mouth in taverns and caravans, hadn't occupied the headlines for a few days before it was overshadowed by more explosive rumors.

According to reliable sources, the recently highly sought-after Governor Roland does not favor the pure and beautiful Miss Saintess.

The real reason is astonishingly because Lord Governor has very high standards for his female companions' figures.

The Empress Sylph and Count Sif, who were rumored to have an affair with Roland, both possess a perfect figure, further indirectly confirming the truth of the rumors.

As the rumors continued to ferment, the "angry" Miss Saintess, filled with shame and rage, left Hansa City and returned to the Holy Hall of Light in Val City.

Some schadenfreude people hoped this rumor would damage Roland and Christine's relationship, even causing a rupture in their cooperation, but that did not happen.

Although the damned rumor made Christine and Roland actively keep their distance, her cooperation with Roland continues.

She still travels around the Governor's Territory collecting orphans, selecting Temple Warriors, helping Roland train the army and manage the Samaritans.

Her anger needed an outlet, and the Samaritans became her venting outlet.

She implemented harsh religious policies on the Samaritans.

Rejecting boring preachings, she directly raised her scepter, announcing to them according to the tradition of religious reform.

Convert or die.

This was the most authentic religious policy, original and unaltered.

While the whole world watched the fun, some discovered a blind spot, the other party involved Count Sif never appeared.

Where had she gone?

No one knew she was walking barefoot on the vast plains.

Her footprints stretched from the northern Flower Sea all the way south, albeit slowly, yet with extraordinary determination.

She was headed to the White Mountain, to step on its peak, and leave her mark on every corner of the White Mountain.

When she left the northern valley, the once lush central tree quickly withered.

The giant tree in the Flower Sea was very special; the tree was just a facade. The true essence was the Tree Spirit.

Sif judged that the future battlefield would be in Val City, so she simply gathered up the Flower Sea Tree Spirit and took it with her.

She intended to place the Flower Sea Tree Spirit at the peak of White Mountain, allowing the range of the Flower Sea to envelop the entirety of Val City and the surrounding land with a diameter of hundreds of kilometers.

It was a difficult journey, but she was not alone.

Roland, after quickly handling the main affairs in the Governor's Territory and delegating various matters to officials like Ados, immediately set off to catch up with Sif.

When he caught up to Sif, Sif's footprints had already crossed Hansa City, moving southward all the way.

Seeing Sif's somewhat disheveled hair and blood constantly oozing from her feet, Roland was stunned.

No need for much explanation, he certainly knew what Sif was doing, he was just a bit surprised that Sif could truly persist.

Upon seeing Roland's figure, the always expressionless Sif finally smiled.

"You came."

"I'll accompany you." Roland didn't waste words, this was his bottom line.

Of course, Sif would not refuse, she nodded and walked side by side with Roland.

Her pace wasn't fast; she wanted to scatter the Flower Sea's information along the way, leaving marks.

These marks would not sprout prematurely.

They would remain quietly dormant until Sif awakened them.

Walking side by side, Roland couldn’t help but ask, "Does it hurt?"

"It hurt a bit when I first set off, now I feel like they aren’t my feet."

Roland was silent.

Walking barefoot in this era, it’s not necessary to worry about stepping on glass shards or nails, but various thorny plants and uneven surfaces are still unsuitable for walking barefoot.

He felt a bit distressed, but he couldn’t substitute for her.

Sif smiled and continued forward.

She knew Roland thought she was complaining her feet hurt so much they became numb, but only she knew, upon stepping into the Flower Sea, her memory awakened, and she realized something was wrong with her feet.

Men like to describe young girls’ feet smooth as jade as jade feet.

It’s an adjective, but Sif’s jade feet are a noun.

Her feet have a problem, and a significant one.

Although she didn’t understand where the problem lay, the feet that should have been hers did not exist; instead, they were replaced by actual jade feet.

These jade feet were perfect and flawless, fully functional, but they should not have belonged to her.

On some future day, she must find her own feet, but not now.

These jade feet were so perfect that the always perfection-seeking Sif had never noticed anything unusual.

If she hadn’t stepped into the Flower Sea, if it weren’t for the blood seeping out, she wouldn’t have realized now.

She dared not tell anyone about this matter, she could only bury it deep in her heart.

She didn’t know who the mastermind was, she could only silently take note of it.

She finally understood why the Magic Mirror only scored her ninety-nine out of a hundred.

After all, she was an imperfect footless girl.

Fortunately, these jade feet were crafted extremely delicately, aside from giving her a seemingly imperceptible crack in her otherwise flawless soul, they were no different from real ones.

Walking alongside Sif, Roland always felt a strange feeling. Sif seemed the same as a few days ago yet appeared different somehow.

Perceiving Roland’s unspoken doubts, Sif smiled and teased, "Luckily, with your help, I broke through to Tier Seven smoothly. The aura does naturally change after the breakthrough."

Though he felt something was amiss, this indeed was the most reasonable explanation.

Perhaps feeling it was too dull, Roland then began to talk about the trivial matters in the Governor’s Territory.

As he talked, he still could not avoid Christine’s matters.

After Roland finished talking, Sif held back for a few seconds and couldn’t help but laugh.

The ascetic-like torment she suffered these days made her somewhat dazed, but Roland was still good, always bringing delightful good news.

"That’s nice."

"Is that really nice?"

Roland was a bit speechless. To divert attention from Christine, his rumored affair with Sif was now taken as fact by others.

Seeing Roland’s odd expression, Sif slowed her pace and half-jokingly asked, "What, does the rumor about us make you feel down?"

"Of course not, you’re the most beautiful. It’s my honor."

The compliment came from the heart.

Seeing Roland’s sincere expression, Sif laughed happily.

She tugged on Roland’s sleeve and whispered:

"Roland, let me tell you a little secret. The Magic Mirror can show the most beautiful girl in the world."

Could it be Snow White?

Roland felt a bit tense; he didn’t quite believe there was any girl more beautiful than Sif in this world.

"The most beautiful girl in the world is the Queen of Sussex."

Sif spoke earnestly.

Roland was stunned for half a second, then he and Sif burst into laughter simultaneously.

The Queen of Sussex was none other than Sif.

He finally understood why the Magic Mirror was considered a Divine Artifact. Although it had no combat power and no useful auxiliary capabilities, it was indeed a Divine Artifact.

Unfortunately, the combat power of a Divine Artifact weapon and that of a Divine Artifact mirror meant for daily use are not on the same level.

The Magic Mirror must have other wonderful uses, it’s just that Sif’s strength was too weak to develop them.

The two walked slowly, but fortunately, White Mountain wasn’t too far away.

After five days and nights of trekking, they finally reached White Mountain.

Thinking of the events that happened here, Roland always felt a sense of alienation as if it were a lifetime ago.

Sif softly reminded, "This journey has been too smooth, and I’m worried the White Mountain trip won’t be as calm. I’ll find a suitable tree later and transfer the Tree Spirit over, you protect me."

Roland nodded silently.

The two drew their weapons, walking towards White Mountain in single file.

In autumn, White Mountain’s temperature was much cooler than at the base, with snow at the summit never melting throughout the year.

Numb bare feet stepped on the hard soil, and Sif couldn’t feel the presence of her own feet.

She walked heedlessly, leaving bloodstains in every corner.

Another day and night passed like this.

Roland and Sif were on edge, constantly guarding against the potential emergence of a demonic giant bear.

The giant bear was the fiercest beast on the Rodinia Continent.

In an era when lions and tigers were extinct, the giant bear was the top predator. Beasts near the Magic Crystal Ore Vein were more prone to becoming demonic, so they couldn’t be ignored.

When dawn of the second day arrived, Sif finally stopped in her tracks.

"This is it."

Sif pointed her slender finger at a large tree.

Roland was a bit surprised, "This tree isn’t the tallest, not even in the top three. Why choose it?"

There were at least seven or eight trees taller than this one along the way, some towering trees even twice as high, making this choice quite illogical.

"What you can’t think of, others can’t either."

Sif’s reasoning was solid.

Roland understood, but soon furrowed his brows again.

Even for concealment, the tree chosen wouldn’t have to be so small.

Seeing Roland’s puzzled gaze, Sif gently reminded, "Look closely."

Roland moved closer to the giant tree in the Flower Sea that Sif had selected and had an epiphany.

This tree didn’t seem special at first glance, yet it was a type of ginkgo.

According to ancient texts, this type of Hidden Moon Ginkgo was particularly adept at disguise, capable of masquerading as a redwood or even a conifer.

Ginkgo trees thrived most during the era of Elf Race dominion, being the elves’ best friends.

Sif approached the ginkgo tree, caressing its wrinkled bark, her lips curved into a smile.

"Lucky fellow, you’ve been chosen."

Just as Sif was about to extract the Tree Spirit and inject it anew, the ginkgo tree suddenly started to tremble.

Sif swiftly retreated as its needles transformed into a storm, crazily stabbing towards her.

If Sif had dodged a bit slower, she would have been skewered, if not killed.

"Attack!"

Sif drew her long spear, glaring angrily at the ginkgo tree.

Damn it, this was a Tree Elf's partner and the Blood Elves' foe.

No time to consider why the Tree Elf's tree partner would awaken, Sif channeled full strength into a fierce thrust at the trunk.

Blood splattered everywhere.

Roland took several jars out of his pocket and hurled them directly.

Since it was a Tree Elf's tree partner, there was no need to hold back.

Last time, Norton had researched many special potions to deal with the Golden Tree Demon, and after testing their effectiveness, he improved them. Roland requested many, all hidden in the Moonlit Silver Armor's secret compartment.

In direct confrontation, the rabid force of the ginkgo tree was unstoppable, but it wasn't facing Roland; it was facing the black technology from the top human alchemist.

Although the ginkgo tree was incredibly tough, unable to move, once tortured by special potions, it couldn't withstand the repeated attacks of the two Tier Seven powerhouses.

It resiliently held on for an extended period but was eventually sliced through its life core, falling unconscious.

Sif was panting heavily, her face pale and devoid of any color.

She had been traveling non-stop for days, her energy utterly depleted.

In the fierce battle with the ginkgo tree demon, she had relied solely on sheer willpower. Seeing the ginkgo slain, she could no longer hold on and collapsed into Roland's arms.

Chapter 325: The Beast's Deceit

Roland reacted quickly, catching the fainted Sif.

Sif was deeply asleep, unable to be awakened.

Roland looked around, found a flat ground, took off his coat and laid it down for Sif to lie quietly.

He stared at the lifeless ginkgo tree, still somewhat shaken.

This ginkgo tree was of excellent quality, having grown for countless years. Fortunately, without the help of Tree Elf partners to evolve, it fought merely by instinct, with no combat skills.

The ginkgo tree was powerful, but in front of the many human black technologies, it was a joke.

Living people have many ways to deal with dead trees.

Unfortunately, there was no electric saw, only a giant sword for logging. A giant sword is not an ideal tool for logging, but it's enough against a dead tree.

Roland carefully observed his surroundings, confirming no movement before stepping forward to start logging.

Halfway through chopping, he was surprised to find the giant sword had become nicked.

This was an Aurum Steel giant sword specially crafted by Norton, yet it was nicked by the tree?!

The strength of this tree trunk was even more exaggerated than Aurum Steel, it’s simply...

Roland’s eyes lit up.

He had found the material for the scepter he had been searching for.

This ginkgo tree’s hardness exceeds Aurum Steel, yet it’s much lighter and can store magic, simply a dreamy high-quality scepter material.

Roland disregarded the giant sword’s wear and tear, speeding up the cutting without regard for cost.

The finest scepter material is the ginkgo marrow core.

Ordinary tree marrows are soft and unsuitable for making weapons, but this intelligent ginkgo tree is the opposite.

Their marrow core is not only hard but also has excellent toughness.

Roland was very patient, but the ginkgo tree’s toughness was beyond imagination.

Blood continuously flowed down the trunk, increasing the difficulty of felling.

Just as Roland was busy, sweating profusely, a hoarse and rigid voice came from behind, "Blood, give me, help you chop the tree, okay?"

Roland’s soul nearly froze.

He instinctively glanced at Sif with his peripheral vision, finally relieved.

Luckily, the figure didn’t directly target Sif.

Roland released his grip, allowing the giant sword to fall to the ground, indicating no hostility, then slowly turned around.

The mysterious figure behind must be extremely powerful to approach unnoticed, likely a Tier Seven pinnacle expert, skilled in concealing their presence, probably very fast.

A nicked giant sword was merely a joke to such an expert.

Roland discarded the giant sword to show his stance, but his weapons were all hidden in the moonlit silver armor’s concealed space, ready to use anytime.

He made an instant decision.

If the other party harbors no hostility and only wants to take advantage, they’re negotiable.

If handled properly, they might even gain a friend.

If the other party has ill intentions, the arsenal in his pockets isn’t there for fun.

Turning around, Roland smiled and said, "I don’t need the tree blood, feel free..."

He abruptly stopped speaking.

The mysterious creature before him made his skin crawl.

He found it difficult to use either werewolf or wolf-man to describe the creature before him.

The creature resembled a giant wolf with cold eyes like ice, yet had human expressions.

The wolf-like creature tried to support itself upright, standing on two legs, but anyone could see its common form was four-legged.

"Human, I, Givaudan, blood."

In a flash, Roland weighed the pros and cons in his mind, quickly judging it impossible to defeat the creature head-on, while Sif still slept, decisively abandoning using force.

He smilingly stepped aside, gesturing for Givaudan to go absorb the tree blood.

Seeing Roland being very cooperative, Givaudan showed a creepily horrifying smile, leaping past Roland.

Its speed was incredibly fast, leaving a shadow in the air, even producing a sonic boom.

Roland felt a chill down his spine.

Though uncertain about Givaudan’s true combat power, the speed was too outrageous.

Even if not supersonic, it was close.

A physical body close to the speed of sound is a terrifying existence beyond what human Tier Seven experts can reach.

If Givaudan has matching dynamic vision, ordinary firearms pose little threat to it.

Humans below Tier Seven can’t even see its form clearly.

As the Day of Return approaches, indeed the land is full of demons.

Though vaguely worried, Roland was not too panicked.

He still had many items stored in his moonlit silver armor.

To deal with creatures like the Golden Ginkgo Tree Demon, he had obtained alchemy potions with specific plant-targeting effects from Norton, which he used earlier while handling the ginkgo tree.

Last time, he circled the outskirts of White Mountain but did not dare to go in; afterward, he again found Norton, obtaining a batch of potions specifically for demonized beasts.

Norton received werewolf corpses provided by Roland, concocted special potions for canine magical beasts, werewolves, and wolf-men.

The moonlit silver armor contained several canisters of special potions.

If Givaudan harbors ill intentions, Roland is not without strength to fight.

It seems Roland's weakness is Sif, yet he sensed Sif awaken several seconds ago.

She was awake but pretending to sleep.

Her acting was as superb as ever, Roland couldn't discern she was feigning sleep.

It's best to get along peacefully, but if Givaudan harbors ill intentions, then they'll fight.

Roland carefully observed Givaudan, confirming it was a hybrid of wolf-man and wolf, Norton's potion should be effective.

The jungle was particularly quiet, only the eerie sound of Givaudan sipping tree blood.

A few birds happily flew overhead, shrieking and flying away upon seeing Givaudan.

Squinting, Roland was contemplating how to deal with this cursed old wolf when the ground began to tremble.

Both he and Givaudan simultaneously looked toward the mountain path where a massive giant bear was rushing aggressively toward Givaudan.

Givaudan glared at the giant bear, growling ferociously, but the giant bear showed no intention of retreating, responding with an even louder roar.

The giant bear glanced at Roland standing aside, suddenly accelerated, charging at Givaudan.

Givaudan angrily wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth, hesitated for less than a second, and roared as he charged at the giant bear.

As he charged, he didn’t forget to call out to Roland.

"Human, act now. This damned bear doesn’t understand compromise at all."

Roland nodded, responding softly, "Lure it over here!"

In just a moment, he made up his mind.

The giant bear and Givaudan both had to die.

The giant bear was vicious and violent, with no possibility of compromise, and Givaudan was no good either.

When he first started talking to Roland, Givaudan's human language was clumsy and awkward, but in the moment the giant bear pounced, he got anxious and spoke with unusual fluency.

The urgency of the situation meant he didn't notice these details, but Roland did.

Clearly, he could speak fluent Jin Yuan Language, yet he pretended to be clumsy; he was obviously up to no good.

Givaudan was betting on Sif being asleep, forcing Roland to compromise, pretending to be non-hostile to snatch the chance to drain blood first.

Unfortunately, he wasn't a prophet; he hadn't anticipated the sharpness of the giant bear's sense of smell, or that Roland would see through his deceit.

The trickery of beasts, though cunning, was still somewhat rough.

Roland drew his sharp sword while hiding a silver short sword up his sleeve.

Silver weapons were soft in texture and could only be used against werewolves, vampires, and evil demons.

Before making a move, Roland exchanged a look with Sif, who had quietly opened one eye, conveying his combat intent.

Making deals with demonized beasts never ends well.

Don't expect beasts to have a concept of trust.

The law of the jungle, survival of the fittest, governs their behavior.

In the battle between the giant bear and Givaudan, the giant bear used its formidable strength and slightly less but sufficient speed to firmly suppress Givaudan.

Givaudan fought back with all his might, retreating continuously.

"Human!"

Givaudan was genuinely anxious; there was still more than half the tree sap, which was his chance to break through—how could he give up?

He didn't understand the human concept of Rebirth Day, but his survival instincts told him he had to get stronger quickly, or he wouldn't survive much longer.

What the giant bear was after wasn't the sap, but his life.

Just as Givaudan was exceedingly anxious, Roland made his move.

Seizing the perfect opportunity when the giant bear and Givaudan clashed teeth against teeth, his wrist flicked, driving the short sword into the giant bear's nose.

The giant bear's entire body was covered in thick fur; swinging an Aurum Steel Longsword against it would only leave a white mark; shooting it with firearms would be like tickling it, and a light cannon blast would merely cause minor injury.

However, its nose was its weakness.

The downside of its sensitive sense of smell was having a soft, boneless nose.

The scream was earth-shattering, causing the leaves in the forest to flutter down in showers.

Delighted beyond measure, Givaudan pounced viciously, biting down on the giant bear's throat.

Although the bear’s hide was thick, there were differences in thickness.

The fur on its throat couldn’t be too thick, as that would affect its breathing.

Givaudan’s canine teeth were like four daggers flashing with cold light, stabbing fiercely into the giant bear’s throat.

The giant bear felt a moment of suffocation and howled, smacking at Givaudan’s back and limbs, attempting to break free.

Yet this was Givaudan’s only chance, and of course, he wouldn’t give it up.

Though the bear broke several of his bones, he didn’t care at all.

As long as he had food, he could recover from any severe injury.

The harder the giant bear struggled, the tighter he bit; he knew the giant bear couldn’t hold on much longer.

If the giant bear were to bite his throat, he wouldn’t be able to hold on either.

In less than a minute, the giant bear’s struggle weakened considerably, leaving it with barely half a breath.

Roland pulled out the short sword, shouted at Givaudan, "Bite tight, I’ll help you!"

Givaudan narrowed his eyes, a cold smile flashing at the bottom of them.

The moment the short sword slashed toward the giant bear was when a human's guard was weakest, and it was his time to die.

He would bite the human to death, bite the woman on the ground, bite the giant bear, and drain the tree sap.

This hunt's harvest was too bountiful; he almost fainted with happiness.

The short sword accurately plunged into the giant bear's eye socket, violently stirring its brain, sending it on its final journey.

Givaudan loosened his mouth.

Just as he was about to leap, another short sword appeared out of nowhere, shoved precisely into his mouth, and thrust with force.

Severe pain struck, and instinctively Givaudan bit down, confusion overwhelming his mind.

Damned human! To think he launched a sneak attack before I could!

Aaaah!

What is this? Why is it a silver weapon!

Givaudan was seized by terror, heavily injured, utterly incapable of resisting, and could only tumble backward rolling toward the sleeping Sif.

Damned human, I'll repay this sneak attack debt with your wife's life!

Givaudan let out a sorrowful, fierce laugh, viciously pouncing toward Sif.

Just as his claws were about to strike, the "unconscious" Sif opened her eyes.

Her smile was extraordinarily radiant.

She was so beautiful.

This was Givaudan’s last thought in this world.

Sif drew her gun and fired five consecutive shots, each precisely hitting Givaudan’s eyes, throat, and nostrils.

The approaching Roland roared angrily, transforming his shield into a giant hammer, fiercely striking Givaudan’s back of the head.

Givaudan was incredibly fast, but his defense was far inferior to the giant bear.

The back of the head was also a fatal weakness; one hit from this shield splattered Givaudan’s brains, killing him instantly.

Roland exchanged a glance with the standing Sif, both feeling fortunate to have survived the ordeal.

White Mountain was indeed a fierce land.

They didn’t embrace each other crying, fussing, and kissing like protagonists in romance dramas but instead swiftly cleaned the battlefield.

These spoils were fought for with life, and not even a scrap could be left for others.

Chapter 326: Rejection

When leaving White Mountain, Roland’s Moonlit Silver Armor was already stuffed with spoils of war.

To save space, some low-value spoils were even directly discarded.

Almost intact wolf and bear pelts were the biggest haul.

The fur of demonized beasts is far more resilient than ordinary animals.

The pelts of giant wolves and bears can at least be split into more than ten complete leather armors, and the leftover scraps can be sewn into a batch of leather vests.

These leather armors are lightweight and durable, and can be used as bulletproof vests.

In this era, firearms have very weak penetration and cannot pierce the fur of demonized beasts.

The best furs will naturally be reserved for making inner leather armor for Sif, Lisa, and others, while slightly lesser parts will be used to make various bulletproof leather armor to be distributed to key commanders.

While commanders like Christine are crucial, mid to high-level officers like Jes, Dailong, and Bridges are also key.

Besides fur, the teeth and bones of magical beasts are excellent magic materials and can be used to make magical weapons.

The organs like bear gall and wolf heart can also be used as medicinal ingredients. Bear paws are also a rare and high-quality delicacy.

In short, all high-value materials are to be taken.

After sorting the spoils, Sif found a smaller ginkgo tree to act as the Flower Sea’s giant tree.

The reason is simple, the strength of the Flower Sea mainly depends on the Elf owner; the giant tree is merely a vessel.

At Tier Seven, even the smallest ginkgo tree is more than enough.

She had another thing she didn't say.

If Sofia cannot be overcome, there's no point in thinking about the future.

With pragmatism, she converted all resources into combat power for the day of return.

Future problems can be worried about in the future; right now, she just wants to win.

Roland fully agreed with Sif's decision.

People of the civilized era habitually believe living is a given, yet even in this era, even super powerful individuals may die at any moment.

Did Givaudan and the giant bear think they were about to die when they fought over the ginkgo tree sap?

Did the Old Commander consider he wouldn't see the next day's sun when he drank himself drunk at night?

Sofia is the highest mountain of this era, leading by a large gap.

She heavily weighs on Roland and Sif's hearts, making it difficult even to breathe.

Roland and Sif took a shortcut into White Mountain, dealt with matters, and left without alerting anyone.

No one even knew a giant bear and a giant wolf had died in White Mountain, and a tree was infused with the Flower Sea Tree Spirit, beginning a different life as a tree.

Everyone is busy with their goals, pursuing what they desire.

The officials of the Rodinia Governor's Territory are no different.

Recently, they were hoping for two things.

Some people with their rank in place but whose positions weren't ideal were wide-eyed, staring intently at the numerous vacant positions in Suyige Province.

Especially the three deputy governors, who were restless.

They feared being left out and feared equally that their fellow deputy governor would be the lucky one.

While the three deputy governors worried about the fourth governor position passing them by, the higher-ranking officials were yearning for the ennoblements reported to the Noble House.

Amid everyone's expectations, Roland and Sif returned to Hansa City and held a high-level meeting.

The theme of this meeting was to summarize the defense of Hansa.

Simply put, it was an award ceremony.

Dozens of senior officials and carefully selected battlefield hero representatives sat in order in the small conference room, eagerly awaiting.

With name tags on each desk, there was no concern about sitting in the wrong place.

Hansa Province Governor Ados paused briefly at the conference hall door, noticing Bordeaux and Aramis had already entered and were seated, then walked briskly into the meeting hall.

He waited for them to enter first.

Though all are governors, there are differences among governors.

Hansa Province is not only the largest, most populous, and wealthiest of the Three Overseas Provinces but also where the Empress's Palace and Governor's Mansion are located.

He has the most opportunities to appear before the Empress and Governor, and this time he was ranked second after Roland in the reported ennoblements.

Governor Roland is a confidant of the Empress, and this time directly made Count, so it's reasonable for him to be ranked first.

The subsequent baron rankings are very particular.

Ados first, but second is the relatively weaker Governor of Selin, Bordeaux.

In earlier meetings, Bordeaux was indirectly criticized by Roland for being boastful, so everyone thought he had no chance. Who would have thought he would rank second among all officials?

After entering, Ados sat between Bordeaux and Aramis, smiling as he greeted his old friends, who are both longtime collaborators and competitors.

Exchanging glances with Bordeaux, Ados was somewhat surprised.

After a few months of not seeing him, this old friend's spirit and energy were completely different.

Bordeaux initially had low performance scores, and no one expected this guy quietly made significant gains, later rising to second place.

Ados was far ahead, but his lead over those behind was also very clear.

"Bordeaux, Aramis, my good mates, how long has it been since we had a drink together? Don’t leave after the meeting today, let’s go to my place and have a great drink."

Bordeaux chuckled, nodding in agreement.

Seeing his calm demeanor, Ados was even more surprised and jokingly said:

"Brother Bordeaux, you’re really different from before. Honestly, I never imagined you’d rank so high."

He was joking, but didn’t expect Bordeaux to lower his voice and seriously explain:

"Old buddy, it’s normal for you not to expect it, I didn’t expect it myself."

He laughed at himself, saying softly, "You know, earlier the Lord Governor made us pay up and admit our mistakes, I paid the most because I took the most."

"Because of this, my initial performance was much lower than yours, I thought I would never have another chance and would be replaced by newcomers sooner or later, so I didn’t dare to risk the governor’s wrath and simply hid away in Selin."

"I didn’t dare to pocket money, but I couldn’t sit still either, so I thought I’d do something before stepping down, and simply responded to the governor’s call to build factories, and unexpectedly, I was appreciated for it."

Ados and Aramis suddenly understood, no wonder Bordeaux’s governance score was extremely high, it turned out the governor liked subordinates who sincerely ran factories.

Aramis and Ados were thoughtful, just as they were considering whether to also increase industrial investment and promotion, Bordeaux smiled and said:

"The situation varies between provinces, Selin Province has open-pit coal mines and high-quality iron mines, laying a solid foundation for developing heavy industry. Your provinces are more suitable for trade."

Ados and Aramis were slightly taken aback, pondering whether Bordeaux's words were sincere or a ruse, when a loud voice echoed in the conference hall.

"Well said!"

As the voice rang out, everyone in the conference hall immediately stood up to greet the master of ceremonies.

Roland and Sif walked in front, paving the way for the stern-faced Mirror Empress.

Most people present were used to it, but several first-timers at the meeting were excited to witness the Empress's presence up close for the first time.

Tom, attending a high-level meeting for the first time, secretly admired the Empress's stunning beauty out of the corner of his eye, momentarily dazed.

He quickly snapped out of it, hurriedly lowering his head.

Her Majesty the Empress was truly beautiful, only vaguely feeling that the Empress's demeanor and spirit didn't quite match up to Count Sif.

If only the Empress and the Count could swap roles.

Tom broke into a cold sweat, cautiously looking around, thankfully no one noticed him.

Damn, this thought must be discarded immediately.

The Empress, the Governor, and the Count are far on the mountaintop; their matters should never be questioned!

Tom's heart raced, trying hard to calm his breathing, gradually regaining his composure.

He is a battlefield hero representative and will soon speak on stage.

His achievements include, but are not limited to, holding Fort Helentz and sniping the enemy's main general.

He knew very well there were several others qualified to become battlefield hero representatives, such as Jacobs, who was more qualified than him.

If he hadn't discovered the underground ruins.

The ruins he accidentally discovered were taken over by the Governor, with professional staff assigned to excavate and explore.

Truly, Lord Governor knows how to make good use of talented people.

Tom silently gave a thumbs up to Governor Roland.

Exploration of ruins requires very high professional skills, and the Governor didn't explore the ruins himself like some reckless and greedy adventurer but entrusted a professional team to assist with the excavation.

Although the commission was expensive, the results were outstanding.

There were over a hundred firearms wrapped in oiled paper, and that was just the appetizer.

The truly valuable finds were the various books and strange treasures.

The archaeological team discovered something called a "cassette tape," involving two small circular wheels that moved the tape strip inside a square little box.

It’s said that this thing stores more knowledge than dozens of books.

He didn’t understand it, but was greatly amazed.

As a reward, he received a knighthood as an Imperial Knight and a town of over a thousand people as his territory.

More than these rewards, what comforted Tom was seeing hope for avenging his parents and uncles.

As Tom’s thoughts wandered, the Empress, Governor, and Count took their seats, and the meeting began.

According to procedure, Roland sought the Empress’s permission to start the meeting.

The Empress nodded and then sat there like a statue, saying nothing, handing over control of the meeting to Roland and Count Sif.

Some knew the Count was the Empress, and the so-called Empress was just a stand-in, hence the silence.

But most were unaware; some sensed something amiss, but couldn’t pinpoint what.

The first agenda item was Roland’s summary of the Hansa Defense Battle.

Roland loudly read the contents of the Hosenburg Treaty.

With each item he read, cheers erupted below.

When he announced all mature oak trees were to be used as compensation, the navy cheered.

When he declared the amount of war reparations and territorial concessions, and announced the Suyige Region officially becoming the Empire's thirty-fifth province, the hall burst into prolonged applause.

To be fair, the Hosenburg Treaty was a classic unequal treaty, but the beneficiaries had no objections.

For the victors, the more unequal, the better.

The meeting proceeded in a lively atmosphere, following the planned agenda in an orderly manner.

Tom's first time speaking on stage made him excitedly inarticulate, leading the crowd to laugh heartily.

It wasn't mockery, but teasing for the young man.

The meeting soon reached the final agenda item.

Roland opened the sealed feudal ennoblement report from the Noble House.

The provincial governors and generals in the first row were so tense they couldn't breathe.

Baron is not high, and the fief isn't large, but it's their ticket to high society.

Roland opened the envelope and read with an authentic Imperial Capital accent.

"...The ennoblement of the above personnel fails to meet the provisions of the Heraldic Law and is therefore rejected."

Chapter 327: The Art of Compromise

The room fell into an absolute silence.

Everyone was stunned.

The Empress and Roland, who were aware of the results beforehand, were unsurprised, of course.

Ados and the others, unfamiliar with the high-level imperial policies, never imagined that the ennoblement proposed by the Empress herself would be completely rejected, leaving them dumbfounded.

Ados was so agitated that he almost stood up, but he calmed down as soon as he slightly rose from his seat.

Both the Empress and the Governor were present; it wasn't his place to shout out, so he needed to stay composed.

He squinted his eyes, catching a glimpse of Roland's similarly "shocked" expression, which made him even more disheartened.

Bordeaux's chubby cheeks turned bright red as he was about to stand up and say something, but abruptly noticed Ados had both stood up and sat back down, so he forcibly suppressed his anger.

Officials who were not involved whispered among themselves or exchanged feelings with their eyes. Those whose proposed ennoblement had been brought up and then rejected tried to maintain their composure, but their inner disappointment was visible on their faces.

Such a situation would be hard for anyone to stay calm in.

Tony, the Executive Vice Minister of Internal Affairs seated on the left side of the first row (formerly the Executive Officer of Val City State), squinted his eyes with interest as he observed the array of expressions in the conference hall, deep in thought.

Although he was responsible for many matters, his lower rank meant that he was not in line for baronial rewards this time.

Being an Imperial Knight was not bad either, as it at least represented recognition from the Empress and Governor.

Tony was quite content.

After all, he joined midway through and was once the leader of Val City State's Independence Faction, being so heavily entrusted by Roland was no small feat.

The newly established Suyige Province was personally overseen by Roland, with the Deputy Governor being the former Deputy Executive Officer of Val City State.

Governor Roland, of course, would not lower himself to personally manage a province; he merely lent his name. The actual authority of Suyige Province rested with the old Val City State faction members.

Tony detected an unusual taste in the air.

The Governor was diligently maintaining a balance.

The original Three Overseas Provinces had a mature bureaucratic system. Although these officials had their internal disputes, they generally formed a single faction known as the Overseas Faction.

Besides these officials, the ones who had followed the Governor and the Empress from the mainland were not directly connected but formed their own faction known as the Mainland Faction.

After the division of Val City State, the former city-state officials joined the Governor’s territory en masse, forming a new faction led by Tony, named the City State Faction.

Beyond these factions, the talents drawn from various Rodinia countries by Roland’s mantra of "using talents regardless of background" constituted the fourth faction.

Accurately speaking, the newcomers were not a mature political faction; they had no leader, no unified goals, or action strategies. They were more akin to a group than a faction.

This commendation ceremony’s biggest winners were, of course, the Overseas Faction, as they had the most ennoblements.

The Mainland Faction was the second winner; they were at a disadvantage because most started from lower positions; although they rose quickly, they still needed time to accumulate.

The City State Faction, although not grabbing any baronial titles, gained several Imperial Knights and the practical authority of the new province.

The more Tony pondered, the more he appreciated Roland’s thoughtful arrangements.

The Overseas Faction boasted numerous ennoblements, basking in glory, yet their fundamental base didn’t expand. On the contrary, because of their handling of politics, they lost some of their original land.

The Mainland Faction rose the fastest in rank, but lacking a solid foundation, they received the Governor’s focused support.

The City State Faction achieved silent prosperity, evidently valued by the Governor. However, alongside promotion, Roland carefully guarded against them.

Power could be granted, but their corresponding status was restrained with reasonable pretexts.

This way, the City State Faction's power expansion could be curbed, reassuring the old ministers.

Letting Tony govern the political affairs mattered little, as his rank was no higher than that of a Deputy Governor, and his noble rank lagged behind; he was far off.

As for the newcomer group, their future was promising, one might say.

Roland was delicately dividing the power cake among different groups.

The Governor's Territory was currently in a phase of growth, with a steadily expanding base. Civil servants could climb ranks, generals could win battles, merchants could profit, factories received government support, and even farmers enjoyed tax exemption in disastrous years.

The bigger the cake, the smaller the issues with contradictions.

However, none of this was stable; as soon as the thriving situation changed, various contradictions would surface.

Tony felt some worry, as well as curiosity. How would Roland deal with the current situation?

Could the Lord Governor have anticipated this outcome and have a contingency plan?

Putting himself in Roland's shoes, Tony honestly couldn't think of a solution.

The barons of the Sussex Empire held considerable value; not only did they possess privileges and status, but they were granted actual territories.

The Empire was so vast that many Baron's domains were larger than the Earldoms of small kingdoms.

It was better to be a Baron in a large empire than an Earl in a small kingdom.

After all, a small kingdom could vanquish overnight; once it vanished, the Earl’s preservation was uncertain.

After much thought, the only solution Tony could conceive was for the Empress to initially confer a batch of landless titles.

Only titles, devoid of territory, non-hereditary, these titles were mockingly dubbed empty titles.

Empty baronies were far less valuable than hereditary baronies with lands.

Turning a grand prize into a consolation prize, who could accept that?

If mishandled, the painstakingly gathered unity of the hearts might disperse.

Once the unity of hearts scattered, the previously cohesive team would dissolve too.

Just as Tony was worried sick, the long-silent Mirror Empress spoke up.

"Gentlemen, feel free to express your opinions," she said.

To the officials, these words from the Empress signaled permission to vent their frustrations.

How could they resist?

Bordeaux stood up first.

He hadn’t shot his mouth off at a formal meeting for three months, and he was nearly suffocating.

Now that he had permission to speak freely, he certainly wouldn’t hold back.

"This is a deception of the sovereign, a betrayal, a blatant betrayal!"

Bordeaux’s words left everyone around stupefied.

Wait a moment, isn’t this tone a bit too high? Just starting off with such huge accusations, he’s said everything, how can others follow?

Bordeaux’s shocking words silenced the entire audience.

This was exactly the effect he wanted.

Clearing his throat, the Governor of Selin officially began his mode of legal criticism.

"Gentlemen, may I ask, what is the relationship between the nobility and His Majesty?"

This was a question everyone could answer.

"His Majesty is the lord of the nobility."

Bordeaux nodded with satisfaction, casting a grateful glance at the person who responded.

"Subjects should be loyal to their lord, doing their utmost to relieve the lord’s worries, assist in governing the domain, and help achieve the set goals."

"What is the law?"

Bordeaux swallowed the crude term "bullshit" at the edge of his lips, just as he was pondering a more fitting word, Roland spoke up for him.

"The law is a tool to maintain governance."

Bordeaux’s eyes lit up.

No wonder he’s the Governor—his speech is so accurate.

"Indeed, the Empire’s law must uphold His Majesty the Emperor’s interests, and the nobility must consciously uphold the lord’s interests."

"Yet what have the nobles in the Imperial Capital done? They toy with words, straining to find clauses in the law that go against His Majesty. This is betrayal!"

Roland gave Bordeaux a satisfied smile.

Indeed, that’s betrayal.

There are so many legal clauses, apart from undeniable heavy crimes like murder and arson, political laws are often vague, leaving room for maneuver.

If the lords of the Noble House wanted to pass this report, there are a hundred ways to do so.

They could declare the Suyige Province a part of the homeland and reward it to the nobility.

They could declare the Suyige Region a colony and reward it as well.

Yet they chose not to do so, instead racking their brains to dig up obscure and dusty legal articles from the corners of heraldic law to reject the report.

Reasons for rejection, regardless of their grandeur, remain rejections. Reasons for agreement, no matter how absurd, remain agreements.

The home lords' biases are quite severe.

Receiving Roland's acknowledgment, Bordeaux went all out, criticizing the homeland's noble lords mercilessly and justifiably.

Bordeaux's eloquence was impressive.

As he analyzed, the attending officials saw through the true face of the old nobility of the homeland.

Yet, though venting was satisfying, it held no practical meaning.

After venting, they still had to face reality. What to do?

The attending officials were experts at criticizing the old nobility, but weak in offering solutions.

When the Empress slowly inquired, "What countermeasures do you all propose," everyone became sullen.

The Empress cast her gaze toward Ados, indicating for him to speak.

Ados was disheartened, originally not intending to say a word, but unable to refuse the Empress's inquiry, he pondered for a few seconds before sighing despondently:

"Your Majesty, I suggest first bestowing the title of Landless Baron, at least resolving the noble status."

People always prefer compromises.

If Ados were directly given the title of Landless Baron, he would certainly be displeased, possibly thinking the Empress and Governor were too stingy.

But after having the ennoblement report rejected, he could accept it instead.

This essentially was the baseline for the recipients.

First resolve the rank (noble title), then find a way to resolve the actual interests (territory).

The Empress's expression was stern, offering no immediate response, but continued to ask the others.

Several Baronet agreed with Ados's opinion.

If they couldn't have the meat, they could at least sip some soup.

The Empress finally directed her gaze toward Sif, gently asking, "What do you think, Lord Sif?"

Sif stood up, her gaze sweeping across the room, her voice crisp and captivating, yet what she said nearly froze the officials' blood.

"I disagree."

The officials and generals waiting to be ennobled, being the Empress's confidants, knew Sif was the Empress.

If Sif disagreed, the Empress disagreed.

They bowed their heads, their hearts bleeding.

They never imagined in their wildest dreams that the Empress would be so unyielding.

They thought of the months spent voluntarily giving up entertainment activities, restraining themselves, often working overtime voluntarily, all their schemes resulted in nothing, their mindset teetering on the edge of explosion.

Though they were aggrieved, they dared not rebel.

The Empress's authority was something they dared not confront directly.

However, they all lost their enthusiasm for advancement, preparing to slack off once the meeting was over and return to their carefree lifestyles.

Catching the disappointed and dejected side glances from the officials, Sif's lips curved slightly upward.

The officials' reactions were within the calculations.

First raise expectations, then smash them to the ground, finally offering a somewhat satisfactory outcome, the joy surpassing simply giving the highest expectation.

Is this what Roland calls PUA?

His words are always so intriguing.

Count Sif cleared her throat softly, then slowly said, "I plan to allocate several Baron's Domains from my Domain of Count Tyrone to compensate everyone's losses. Please approve, Your Majesty."

Chapter 328: How Do I Repay the Territory I Owe You?

Ados's residence.

In the small dining room in the backyard, he hosted his old pals, Bordeaux and Aramis, whom he hadn't seen for a while.

The three of them had assumed the position of governors of the Three Overseas Provinces around the same time and had been there for three to four years.

Their experiences in officialdom varied significantly, each excelled in different fields, yet all were disillusioned men.

A governor represents the pinnacle of local officials, and the greatest fear for them is working tirelessly without being noticed by higher-ups.

Except for the provinces surrounding the Imperial Capital, being a governor in other regions basically meant the end of a political career.

Aside from amassing some benefits, everywhere they turned was desperate, with no future in sight.

They tried countless ways to get closer to the Emperor, yet all ended in failure.

Starting from town administrative officers, they did partake in off-the-record dealings, and employed some unspeakable measures for progress in key positions, but they were truly capable officials.

However, the Empire abounded with talents, and capable workers were the least uncommon.

If you didn’t do the work, there were plenty who would.

Their typical destiny was an endless struggle between yearning for advancement and gloomy pessimism, aging, and eventually being replaced by newcomers.

Until the Governor and Empress descended.

For them, the Great Goddess was far in the heavens, but the Empress was right before their eyes.

Long live the Empress!

Governor Roland... was two years older than the Empress.

Since the Empress came to the Three Overseas Provinces, their world suddenly brightened.

In the past half-year, they erupted with the ambition they had when first entering officialdom twenty years ago, fighting with all their might.

While there were some setbacks, they got what they wanted.

A ticket to high society.

At the moment their ennoblement report was rejected by the Noble House, their hearts sank, believing the illuminating light of their world extinguished, but the Empress proved otherwise, soon showing them what enlightenment truly meant.

Their barony was retained.

Only moved from Suyige Province to Tyrone Earl’s Domain.

That was a royal territory less than a hundred kilometers from the Imperial Capital; they were now vassals of the Empress!

"Cheers!"

The three old pals clinked their glasses and drank heartily, their faces flushed.

On the table were the best dishes from the Three Overseas Provinces, golden crispy pork knuckles, carefully prepared blood sausages, plus fresh cod and lobster, representing high-end bar snacks of the era.

Accurately speaking, the three old pals' delight wasn't the dishes on the table, but the freshly acquired barony.

Within the territories of the Imperial Family and Grand Duke, changes in ennoblement only needed to adhere to convention, hence not requiring approval by the Noble House.

This was the royal privilege granted by heraldic law.

The Empress exercised this privilege, dividing her lands among them.

Half-drunk Bordeaux slurred, smiling as he asked his two old pals:

"How much revenue can you say our new baron's domain will yield in a year?"

Listening to Bordeaux, Aramis sighed lightly, putting down his glass, gently reminding:

"My friend, if you don't wish to stop at a baron for life, you shouldn't ask such foolish questions."

Bordeaux was stunned.

While he was bewildered, Ados remarked with a smile: "The Empress honors you, not to let you step on her face."

"Though Tyrone Earl's Domain is prosperous, it is still but an earl's domain, offering a yearly tax of around eighty or ninety thousand pounds, with each of us receiving possibly only several thousand pounds."

Bordeaux was slightly disappointed, raising his glass for another large sip.

Over the past few years, the wealth they amassed exceeded five hundred thousand pounds.

Last time, under Roland’s hint, they sacrificed part of their assets to save themselves, but thankfully, the Empress was generous, forgiving them and returning part of their wealth.

"Fine then, several thousand pounds are still better than nothing," Bordeaux muttered quietly.

Ados and Aramis exchanged glances, somewhat puzzled.

This fellow truly cares about this amount of money, huh?

Aramis sighed lightly, raising his glass, with the spicy mockery turning Bordeaux instantly red.

"My old pal, after all these years, your barren mind still holds only boastful talks and speeches."

"I won’t bother with you, but I will never visit Tyrone Earl’s Domain in my life, nor take even a penny from the domain."

Bordeaux was stunned.

He grasped the hidden meaning behind Aramis’s words.

No one rejects honor. It wasn’t the Empress who gave them the royal territory but Count Sif assisting them with a graceful exit, and it didn’t mean she planned to distribute royal traditional lands.

This baron’s domain was merely transitional; upon the Empress’s full authority, they might be transferred or even elevated to higher ranks.

If oblivious, and indeed made a show on the Empress’s territory, that would be standard insensitivity.

Bordeaux drained another glass, rather dejectedly saying: "So then it’s an empty barony."

"Fool, does anyone else know that you're an empty baron?"

Aramis contemptuously mocked:

"In the Imperial Capital, they only know you as a hereditary baron under Earl Tyrone and a direct vassal of the Imperial Family's inherent lands. This honor is something that many people desire but can't obtain."

Bordeaux chuckled awkwardly, using the act of drinking to mask his embarrassment.

Indeed, he didn't understand the nuances between the ranks.

"Ados, you once let slip that your ancestors were also wealthy. Is this guy right?"

Upon hearing Bordeaux's words, Ados's expression was somewhat grim.

He picked up his wine glass, paused for a long time, then took a sip.

"Bordeaux, remember, never go to Count Tyrone's Domain, never."

"Drink!"

Ados rarely spoke in such a cold tone, sending shivers down Bordeaux's spine, sobering him up quite a bit. He mumbled quietly, "Fine, I won't go. Enough of this, let's drink!"

Ados exhaled deeply, raised his glass, clinked glasses with his two old buddies, and then drained it.

His gaze turned toward the northwest.

That was the direction of the Empire’s mainland.

Bordeaux simply couldn’t go to Count Tyrone’s Domain, but he couldn’t return to the mainland at all.

Sometimes, he really envied these simple-minded folks.

He curiously glanced toward the square where the Empress’s Palace and the Governor’s Mansion were located.

What were Her Majesty the Empress and Governor Roland doing at this moment?

Everyone received compensation, except for Governor Roland.

No matter how generous the Empress might be, she couldn’t possibly give away all her private lands to Roland.

Wait, maybe she really could.

Ados’s lips curled into a slight smile as he poured himself more wine.

"For the glory of the Empire, for Her Majesty the Empress and the Governor, let’s drink another glass."

Aramis and Bordeaux exchanged glances, almost bursting into laughter.

This guy Ados, who is he saying these high-sounding words to at a time like this?

Whatever, drink!

Tonight is joyous, let’s drink to oblivion!

Tonight, many people were going home to open champagne and celebrate, but not Roland and Sif.

After enjoying a somewhat sumptuous dinner, Sif and Roland went to the best spot on the top floor of the Empress's Palace to admire the night view.

The late autumn night breeze was refreshing and crisp.

Sif was in high spirits; today's meeting went exactly as anticipated.

Everyone's reactions were almost exactly what she and Roland had predicted.

Sitting in the seat of honor in the conference hall, she overlooked the entire venue, as if she were controlling the whole world.

However, this was an illusion; there were two people she couldn't control.

Roland and Sofia.

Looking at Roland's calm expression, Sif sighed softly, "Even though I knew the outcome, the Noble House's rejection still disappoints me."

"Why?" Roland asked softly.

"They don't have faith in me."

Sif squinted her eyes, sighing somewhat confusedly, "Did the achievement of establishing a new province for the Empire in the Three Overseas Provinces in just over seven months not stand out enough?"

"It does and it doesn't."

"Lord Roland, please use language I can comprehend." Sif's tone was somewhat dissatisfied, not at Roland, but at the old nobles.

"It's simple: your achievements surpass those of the recent emperors, especially your father, there's no doubt. But the Cabinet's authority is now stronger than ever. Even if you officially ascend the throne, how much power can you reclaim?"

"There's a specific term for this phenomenon, called a 'lame duck Emperor.' No matter how outstanding your ability is, it can't change the century-long trend of the Cabinet growing stronger while the imperial authority diminishes. In the face of such a trend, individual strength is irrelevant."

Sif fell into prolonged silence.

Actually, Roland was protecting her dignity; he left something unsaid.

The old nobles doubted she'd live many years.

Being Sofia's enemy was her greatest misfortune.

If Sif voluntarily abdicated, she would just be Count Tyrone. Would the old nobles bother to curry favor with a powerless Count?

Those who could vote in the Noble House were top-tier nobles; weren't they all at least Counts?

Sif's little fist clenched and unclenched.

She was neither angry nor dejected; her expression was exceedingly calm.

This world had always been so cruel and real.

But beauty still existed in this world.

Seeing Roland’s gentle gaze, Sif’s lips curled into a slight smile and she said:

"Time will prove everything. Have a drink with me."

Sif’s reaction took Roland somewhat by surprise; he smiled and teased, "Do I have any reason? I’ve just lost a Count; I’m not in the mood for a drink."

"Rest assured, the Count you lost will be refunded doubly."

Sif’s voice was full of confidence.

Though not entirely sure of Sif’s reasons for such confidence, Roland raised his glass.

To this confidence!

He certainly didn’t know that Sif had just thought of a way to transfer Count Tyrone’s Domain to Roland.

She intended to win it all.

If she couldn’t win, she could owe everyone in this world, except for Roland.

Chapter 329: Palace Prison

The City of Romance, Xidai, capital of the Jin Yuan Republic.

Once the capital of the First Empire of France and the Jin Yuan Second Empire, it boasts a long history.

It was once synonymous with romance, freedom, and prosperity.

But now it's different, it has become a stronghold of suspicion and fear.

Sussex City is the big city most yearned for by people across the Rodinia Continent.

Although the Sussex people refer to regions like Hansa as the Three Overseas Provinces, in reality they are overseas, while Hansa is on the main continent.

Sussex City rivals Xidai in size and prosperity, yet being overseas, both its historical and current status is slightly inferior to that of Xidai, the capital of the Jin Yuan Republic.

The Jin Yuan Great Plain is also the richest plain, with several rivers, including the West River, that span thousands of kilometers, washing down some of the best land on the Rodinia Continent.

Farming here, there is no worry about natural disasters, nor irrigation issues.

Even in 1792 when there was famine everywhere, the Jin Yuan Republic was relatively unconcerned about food shortages; they even used many fertile lands to grow grapes and barley for winemaking.

In past years, they were more willing to turn surplus grain into fine wine sold worldwide, but this year is different.

When others lack food, but I have it, it becomes not just grain, but gold.

The Republic underwent great unrest last year, which hurt the national strength and caused severe military infighting.

Even so, they still have hundreds of thousands of well-trained standing troops and can mobilize over a million soldiers at any time.

Even the Sussex Empire, claiming to have the strongest comprehensive power, and the Vladimir Empire, with the strongest land army, do not dare to recklessly invade Jin Yuan.

As long as they catch their breath, they can regain their top great power demeanor.

However, the Jin Yuan people have recently found it difficult to breathe, unable to catch any breath.

President Marco's governance is too strict.

His policies are like a noose, tightening bit by bit around everyone's neck, making it hard to breathe.

A few days ago, he issued a new act.

Organizing group activities of more than ten people without prior approval will be considered treasonous and subject to arrest and investigation.

This includes normal activities like concerts, opera performances, and poetry gatherings.

Everyone was astonished.

Is this a policy that humans can create?

Such stringent personnel control policies are only formulated during wartime.

But it's not wartime now!

People remained silent for a long time. Someone suddenly had a great idea.

If everyone is breaking the law, then no one is breaking the law. The idea of not blaming many people has a huge appeal in this era.

Thus, the best opera house in Jin Yuan organized a grand performance, inviting the best opera actors to perform the classic play "Song of the Jin Yuan."

This song praised the stories of early Jin Yuan people resisting the brutal rule of the Magic Empire, spreading the ideas of equality, freedom, and fraternity, considered the soul of the Jin Yuan people.

This is a series of operas, with the most popular one being the second act, Freedom.

The performance venue was not in the opera house, but in the square. Tens of thousands gathered at Triumph Square, matching the scale of Sif's performance at Monarch Square back in the day.

Although these opera actors had singing skills rivaling Sif, the result of their performance was completely different.

Sif's songs evoked nostalgia for the Emperor among the Old Sussex people.

The actors from the West City Opera Troupe awakened the Jin Yuan people's thirst for freedom.

Soon, the White Hat Military Police arrived.

Their helmets, of poor quality and slightly white, earned them the contemptuous nickname "White Hats" among the Jin Yuan people.

They were faithful henchmen of Marco and the Yayue Faction, completely loyal to Marco, very brutal.

The crowd held their heads high.

They didn't believe the Military Police could arrest them all.

They were numerous, nearly eighty thousand of them!

But they were wrong.

Marco decided to make an example.

Even if this "chicken" was as big as their ancestral dinosaur, it doesn’t matter—they would still arrest it.

Tens of thousands of Military Police surrounded the square, driving women and children out, taking all displeased adult men and teenagers away.

No one knew how many people were arrested that day.

But the most conservative estimate was over ten thousand.

People were stunned.

The Jin Yuan Kingdom, vast as it was, did not have a prison that could hold over ten thousand people.

This could stump ordinary people, but Marco was no ordinary person.

No prison? Simple. They could use the run-down castle of the last emperor of the Jin Yuan Second Empire!

What to do with the dilapidated castle?

These prisoners are ready-made labor, right?

Make them work hard, laboring sixteen hours a day! Sixteen hours isn’t Marco’s conscience limit; it’s the limit of human physical endurance.

Under Marco's ruthless drive and the Military Police's whip persuasion, at least twenty thousand Citizens of Xidai were arrested for watching an opera performance, starting forced labor.

This prison was named Palace Prison.

Marco was very pleased with the prison expansion blueprint, praising it as an impregnable, fortress-like place of confinement.

The harsh labor and poor living conditions caused many to die during construction.

Every day, dozens of bodies were carried away.

Initially, there were people to collect the bodies, but eventually, realizing the inefficiency, they simply brought in a group of trained spotted hyenas to dispose of the corpses.

These creatures had excellent teeth, professional bone gnawers.

On the hellish construction site, wails were heard everywhere.

It took only two and a half months to complete the reconstruction of Palace Prison.

Designed to hold thirty thousand people, the prison felt somewhat empty; after all, even the designer Marco hadn't expected three thousand deaths during construction.

Seeing the designed prison filled with only half its capacity, Marco was dissatisfied.

He continued to search for prisoners, sending more people into Palace Prison.

Palace Prison, capable of housing thirty thousand, now held as many as forty thousand.

Moreover, he had his eye on the site of the old Rose Palace outside the city, planning to build a second Palace Prison there.

Everyone thought Marco was ill, suffering from a mental disease.

But Marco was clear-minded; he was not sick, the world was, the country was.

The Jin Yuan Republic was seriously ill.

The last revolution hadn't thoroughly eradicated the old nobility, allowing many nobles to transform into high-ranking officials.

An incomplete revolution is equivalent to no revolution.

This was Marco's belief.

Due to this ideological conflict, he launched a coup, killed Carlo (Alina's father), legally eliminated several close allies, sent tens of thousands to prison, and created the largest number of political prisoners in the world.

Standing at the edge of the highest terrace of the President's Mansion, his gaze could encompass the entire city.

He looked towards Palace Prison, his eyes cold.

The inmates here were all enemies, all products of an incomplete revolution.

He wanted to use a fiercely burning flame to destroy the old world!

Hold on, what's happening over at Palace Prison?

Flames rose into the sky, the sound of explosions came through, the wind carried the cries of people, though they were indistinct.

Someone was attacking Palace Prison?!

Marco was furious, loudly calling for his secretary.

Soon, his secretary came over, looking worried.

"President, what are your orders?"

"Go see what they're doing, what slogans they're shouting?"

A quarter of an hour later, the secretary returned with a grim expression.

He recounted the dire situation of Palace Prison being besieged and whispered:

"They're saying... revolution."

Chapter 330: Professional Team

The exploration of the Helentz Castle underground ruins is completely over.

Roland certainly wouldn't enter a dangerous underground cave with an adventure team like the protagonist of an adventure novel, risking life and death only to find a pile of junk.

His life is valuable, and he doesn't want to take risks.

Exploring ruins is different from fighting; if there are deadly traps governed by rules, even the strongest combat skills won't help.

He doesn’t have a Resurrection Coin, so unless it’s absolutely necessary, he’s not going to take risks.

The chances of escaping after a failed ruins exploration are very low, unlike a battle failure where there might be a retreat option.

A wise man doesn’t put himself in a desperate situation; such adventures should be left to the professionals.

He found a top-ranking professional team in the industry called "Armadillo."

This ruin is quite valuable, but it seems more like a result of technological civilization than a relic of ancient races capable of changing Extraordinary Abilities.

Roland negotiated the commission with the exploration team and waited for over half a month, finally getting the results.

As expected of a professional team, the "Armadillo" expedition team not only excavated all the good stuff but also drew the internal structure of the ruins and handed it to Roland.

He spent only one thousand pounds to acquire valuable weapons, equipment, and precious materials.

Such a rich harvest made even Roland feel a bit embarrassed.

He intended to give some extra rewards to the expedition team, but they refused.

"Our ’Armadillo’ team has always respected contracts. What was agreed upon was one thousand pounds," said Kael, the captain of the "Armadillo" expedition team, with righteous and solemn words.

Just when Roland had formed a stubborn and honest stereotype of him, Kael changed his tone and smilingly made a new suggestion.

"Lord Governor, if you think we've done a good job, could you also entrust future exploration tasks to us?"

Roland suddenly realized, so he wanted to earn money in the long run?

He smiled and said, "Of course, no problem. Since Mr. Kael respects contracts, let's sign a cooperation intent contract. In the future, as long as ruins appear in my jurisdiction, I'll prioritize you for the job. The specific price will be determined based on the content of the work."

That's exactly the statement Kael was waiting for.

His "Armadillo" expedition team is of a quasi-first-class level in the industry, still quite a gap compared to top teams like "Sand Digger" and "Pangolin."

Although the team has unique skills, it lacks a top platform to showcase its talents.

He had faith in Roland and believed his team could achieve further glory.

Seeing Kael's passionate gaze, Roland knew this "Armadillo" man was also pursuing progress, just in a different direction.

People with pursuits and principles are always worthy of respect and can be collaborators.

Roland drafted a relatively lenient and generously conditioned cooperation intent agreement.

He not only guaranteed future ruins explorations would be prioritized for the "Armadillo" team but also offered them privileges akin to those of Imperial Citizens, waiving some taxes in his jurisdiction.

Among these conditions, what reassured Kael the most was Roland's attitude.

Having heard that Governor Roland employs talent-based considerations, he had come all the way from the distant Talia Kingdom to take on this task.

The Helentz Castle ruins are just a small ruin, and the one thousand pounds commission can only be considered a token of hard work.

If Roland recognized his abilities, he would propose future collaborations.

If Roland considered his team worth only one thousand pounds, there would be no future cooperation.

Fortunately, he won the bet.

Kael didn’t plan to leave in a hurry, Roland’s words subtly hinted that his team was welcome to settle in Hansa City.

The "Sand Digger" is currently providing services for the Vladimir Empire, "Pangolin" is deep-rooted in overseas markets, making a strong presence in the New and South Continents. Given how Rodinia’s adventurers prefer self-exploration, Roland was the most ideal partner he could find.

Watching Kael leave, Roland was in a good mood as well.

Kael’s team needed him, and he needed such a capable but not very famous team.

He was very sure that he would encounter more ruins in the future.

Some ruins couldn’t be handed over to others, no matter how dangerous, he had to go himself.

However, some ruins could be handed over to professionals, who were more skilled.

Roland broadly categorized the ruins into opportunity-type, trap-type, abandoned-type, and regular-type.

Except for opportunity-type ruins that required him to go in and try his luck, the other three types could be handed over to professional teams.

The vast majority of ruins were not originally constructed as dedicated maze ruins.

For example, libraries, armories, and warehouses from thousands of years ago.

Very few people specifically built ruins for future generations to explore, so most ruins formed by accident.

Just like ancient creatures didn't anticipate becoming fossils to be unearthed and studied by future generations.

After sending Kael away, Roland opened the ruins investigation report and read it carefully.

Sure enough, this report was very detailed, deserving of the name of a professional team.

The discovered ruin this time was an armory from the Fifth Era's Alamanni Empire.

The Alamanni Empire was a military powerhouse in the late Fifth Era. Their technology was significantly inferior to the Second Era, but remarkably advanced compared to Roland's current era.

According to Roland's estimation, the armory's overall level roughly equated to Blue Star's pre-World War I era.

The excavated weapons mainly included large-caliber shotguns, bolt-action rifles, and sniper rifles.

These weapons were wrapped in oil paper and stored under airtight conditions, well-preserved.

Unfortunately, there weren't many stored bullets.

These weapons were only enough to arm a reinforced company, and the bullets only for one or two battles.

This was already enough.

He planned to hand over a small number of firearms to Norton and Hansa City's best mechanician Vernaf to see if they could be replicated.

Even if the processing technology wasn't sufficient to fully replicate, at least it could enhance existing military-industrial standards.

Beyond these armaments, what Roland valued more were the unearthed classic texts.

It's well-known that it's quite normal for armories to contain books about weapon processing and maintenance.

Kael's work was very effective, astonishingly finding these books.

Looking at these documents being rapidly corroded by age, Roland's heart surged with excitement, his fingertips slightly trembling as he opened a booklet, only to be surprised to find he couldn't recognize the writing.

Though the basic letters forming these words resembled the mainstream language of the New Era, the spelling rules and grammar were entirely different.

After flipping through the pages for a moment, Roland sighed and closed the text.

He shook the Bell, instructing his secretary to notify Norton, Vernaf, and the librarian Russell to come over.

Soon, the three academic luminaries appeared before Roland.

"Do any of you recognize these words?"

The three cautiously took the text, glanced at it, and were each dumbfounded, shaking their heads repeatedly.

Roland, though anticipating this outcome, still felt a bit disappointed.

No wonder it’s alphabetic writing; never mind being buried underground for thousands of years, even over a few hundred years, it changed significantly.

Unless it was a dead language like the one used in the Magic Empire that hasn’t changed in thousands of years.

Seeing Roland’s disappointed expression, Norton forcefully patted his chest.

"Lord Governor, although I don’t recognize it, fortunately, there are enough book samples, and we can find a way to decipher them. Leave this to me!"

Seeing Norton’s quick response, Vernaf and Russell were not pleased.

You’re indeed good at alchemy, but do you understand deciphering?

Vernaf and Russell also expressed their desire to undertake the deciphering task.

Seeing the three unwilling to give in, Roland laughed and mediated.

"There are plenty of texts. Each of you takes a few books back. There’s a reward for the fastest and best deciphering."

Only when the subordinates are diligent can Roland enjoy leisure.

Watching the three academic powerhouses each carrying a box of books leave, Roland pondered silently.

Not long after he sent off the translation trio, his secretary returned.

"Mr. Sura has arrived."

Roland’s eyes brightened.

Sura has arrived, which means his Scepter should be ready.