Empress 331

Chapter 331: Is It a Wise Staff?

The main material for the scepter comes from the ginkgo tree marrow core that was acquired during the journey to White Mountain.

The marrow of ordinary trees is soft and unsuitable for making weapons, but ginkgo trees that have developed sentience are an exception.

This once-in-a-lifetime high-quality material must not be wasted.

Roland did not hesitate in entrusting this task to the Magic Association.

Back in the Magic Empire, the most popular weapons were magic staffs, rods, and scepters.

Which senior mage of the Magic Empire didn't have some skill in wand-making?

Roland handed over the materials to the Magic Association's representative in Hansa City and provided the general requirements for the weapon's performance.

He originally thought he would have to wait for a while, but it was ready in just half a month, and even more surprisingly, Sura personally delivered it.

Sura is a direct disciple of Master Anthony and married a girl from the Anthony Family. He holds a respected position in the Magic Association, and especially since he came specifically to deliver equipment to him, Roland could not be indifferent.

Roland personally went to the door to greet Sura.

As soon as he saw Sura, he felt a tremor in his heart.

Roland was somewhat surprised, yet Sura was just as astounded.

"Mr. Sura, you've had a breakthrough? Congratulations and well done."

Sura scrutinized Roland carefully, and whatever bit of self-satisfaction he had vanished entirely.

He said softly, "I've been studying magic with my teacher for twenty years, breaking through to an official mage is nothing special."

"But you, becoming a transcendent in just a few years and breaking through to Tier Seven, you're the true genius."

Sura paused for a moment and softly added, "However, Miss Lisa's talent is just as remarkable."

"Has she had a breakthrough?"

"Not yet, though she is exceptionally gifted, she can only specialize in fire magic and her foundation isn't solid, she needs continuous practice to improve."

Shortly after the Oden Kingdom campaign, Anthony took Lisa away with the reason "Lisa needs careful honing; studying magic at the Magic Association will be more effective."

Roland did not stop him.

This was Lisa's chance to become stronger and surpass herself, and he fully supported it.

Listening to the tone in Sura's voice, it seems Lisa has indeed progressed rapidly.

The trio who teamed up to kill the Old Commander—Roland, Sif—had already broken through to Tier Seven, Lisa was slower but is now fast approaching.

Although he knew Sura had come with the scepter, Roland didn’t rush to ask about it, instead he inquired about Lisa’s training at the Magic Association.

Sura explained with a smile, "Miss Lisa is placed in the Demon Tower library for study, occasionally she comes to spar with me, and her rate of improvement is astounding. But I don’t know much about the specifics of her training."

Roland wasn’t concerned with the specifics of Lisa’s training.

Everyone’s path to becoming strong is different and cannot be replicated, as long as Lisa is still improving, that’s all that matters.

Lisa’s exquisite culinary skills were much enjoyed by Anthony, even Sura visited his teacher several times to join in the sumptuous dinners.

Compared to her magic skills, Lisa might be more suited to being a chef.

This was a thought kept to himself, Sura wouldn’t voice it.

After all, in Sura’s heart, a mage is the supreme profession, while a chef is merely an ordinary vocation, saying she’s better suited to be a chef is not a compliment.

After some small talk, Sura got straight to the point.

He took out the scepter and handed it to Roland.

Opening the box containing the scepter, a gentle light gleamed from within.

Roland’s eyes brightened.

It was clear without needing to think that this was a top-quality weapon that could be used for a lifetime.

The highest grade ginkgo marrow core material even met the standards for crafting a divine artifact, only the methods for creating divine artifacts were destroyed during the Second Era and are no longer recorded.

The existing various divine artifacts are relics from the Age of Gods.

When the three Goddesses left the Theia Plane, they could take very little with them and had to leave most of the artifacts behind.

They distributed these artifacts to their loyal followers, entrusting them to guard their descendants.

However, it wasn't long before these artifacts were scattered across the world, and soon after, their descendants also withdrew from history's stage.

The three Goddesses certainly wouldn't rain divine punishment on their own progeny.

However, as life endures, it naturally gets taken away.

Either by divine punishment or heavenly retribution.

The annihilative waters of the Sea of Annihilation, suddenly surged from ocean and sky, tore the Theia Plane asunder, and perpetuated the "descendants of gods cannot become gods" iron law.

The three Goddesses left the Theia Plane with only thirty-six divine artifacts.

The Magic Association naturally lacked the capability to manufacture divine artifacts, but they drew inspiration from the collected artifacts, finding methods to enhance the quality of magic equipment manufacturing.

Using the cold condensation infusion method, they crafted several pieces of magical equipment with performance nearing divine artifact levels, even surpassing some recreational artifacts.

These pieces of magic equipment were called Magical Divine Artifacts.

The method for creating Magical Divine Artifacts hadn’t been lost, but it is impossible to achieve in the current Return Day.

The item Sura handed to Roland was neither a divine artifact nor a Magical Divine Artifact, but a kind of...

"Teacher said that the ginkgo tree marrow core with developed sentience doesn’t require much extra processing, only the infusion and attachment of corresponding magic attributes."

"The ginkgo marrow core has growth potential, and the attributes of this scepter will continuously evolve as your strength breaks through."

So it’s an evolving weapon, right?

Roland’s lips slightly curled.

Habit is powerful; once accustomed to a handy weapon, it’s hard to change.

History records several strong individuals whose growth slowed down after changing weapons.

Who has the time to constantly switch weapons for fun?

A weapon that can grow with you is naturally the best.

Roland took the scepter from the box, amazed by the refinement of the Magic Association’s craftsmanship, he asked softly:

"Does the scepter have a name?"

"Teacher said the right to name it belongs to you." Sura responded calmly.

Roland pretended to fall into thought, and soon asked softly, "Mr. Sura, I'm not good at naming, do you have any suggestions?"

Sura pondered for a moment and then slowly said, "A weapon that can grow is called a Wisdom Weapon by us. Since your weapon is a scepter and also a Wisdom Weapon, I suggest calling it Wisdom Scepter."

Roland was speechless.

Although in the Magic Empire language and Sussex Language, "Wisdom Scepter" and "idiot" are entirely different words with no ambiguity, once translated into his homeland language, the situation changes.

In short...

"Forget it, let's call it the Hidden Moon Staff."

Roland was also being lazy, naming the scepter made from the Hidden Moon ginkgo as Hidden Moon Staff; it was akin to naming a dog Doug.

Sura wanted to critique Roland's naming ability, but held back.

After briefly explaining the basic attributes and enchantments of the scepter, he softly reminded:

"Mastering all seven curses is quite challenging, so currently only the basic attributes of Armor Piercing, Silence, and Slow have been added, while Magic Break, Shattering, Dizziness, and Annihilation have not yet been infused."

Roland nodded in understanding.

This is only the version of the Seventh Return Day, so it’s normal for some attributes to remain locked.

Who would’ve thought that even in an otherworld you have to unlock pseudo-divine artifacts in stages; Roland felt a sense of resignation.

After completing the exchange, Sura quickly took his leave.

He didn’t need Roland to arrange accommodations; he had someplace to go here.

With Roland’s permission, the Magic Association could set up an office on the surface and recruit a small number of students from among the youth of Rodinia.

This was part of the collaboration.

The Magic Association has strength and foundation, but lacks people, while Roland happens to have no shortage of people.

This was true mutual benefit.

Just as Roland was dazed from his success, Alina arrived.

Her expression was calm, yet excitement was evident in her eyes.

Under Roland’s questioning gaze, she took a deep breath and, with a trembling voice, said:

"Something big has happened in West City, our opportunity has arrived!"

Chapter 332: Alina’s Decision

Alina tried hard to stabilize her excited emotions, but she couldn’t.

Hope came too quickly, and she was caught off guard.

She initially thought that returning to Jin Yuan and going back to West City was just a fool's dream, but unexpectedly, the opportunity was right in front of her.

The Citizens of Xidai conquered the Palace Prison, openly resisting the temporary government, and rescued tens of thousands of political prisoners!

Although their brave resistance was quickly suppressed by Marco's National Army, their sacrifice was not in vain.

Watching Alina's obviously excited expression, Roland didn't say anything, he just poured her a cup of tea, signaling her to speak slowly.

Roland played the role of a patient listener.

When Alina spoke of the drastic changes occurring within Jin Yuan, he was originally not very concerned.

After all, the development of political conflicts in Jin Yuan into real-life confrontations was not unheard of; it was quite familiar.

Until Alina mentioned the news of the Palace Prison being conquered and the release of tens of thousands of "political prisoners".

Roland's expression subtly changed.

He keenly smelled the gunpowder behind this matter.

He couldn't help but interrupt Alina, pointing directly at the crux of the problem.

"Is Marco dead?"

Alina’s initially excited expression instantly froze.

She was silent for a long time, her voice somewhat desolate, "No. He has control over the situation, it’s said that the citizens of West City killed numbered in the thousands, and the guillotine blades dulled from overuse."

"No, you’re wrong, he doesn’t have control of the situation at all. If he really had control, so many people wouldn’t have died. These dead had families and friends. Doing so will arouse public resentment."

Roland stood up, pacing around the room, then asked in a deep voice, "Can it be deduced?"

"I’m sorry, I’m personally involved, I can’t deduce my own fate."

This was reasonable, as a healer can’t heal themselves, a fortune teller can’t predict their own future.

Roland pondered for a moment, carefully weighing the known information, a plan forming in his mind.

"Alina, I know you’re anxious, but we can’t rush. To regain power, we must be fully prepared."

"I understand." After the initial excitement, Alina gradually calmed down.

Roland was right.

This wasn’t a child’s game, but a cruel fight to the death.

If over-prepared without needing it, no harm done, but if underprepared and countered, it means a one-way trip down the Nether River.

Alina lowered her head, and in a soft voice asked, "Roland, my head is a mess right now, I really don’t know what to do, could you decide for me?"

Roland had been waiting for these words.

At least Alina hadn’t been overwhelmed by this opportunity and still recognized who was leading.

After a moment of contemplation, Roland reminded, "Alina, the fact that Marco could suppress the resistance shows his power is still in the upper hand. The serious bloodshed in the capital indicates his power is no longer overwhelming. What we need most now is to gather intelligence, prepare, and wait for the right opportunity."

"Of course, we can’t just wait; we need to add fuel to this powder keg."

Alina’s mind was already in complete disarray, since Roland had an idea she was naturally willing to listen.

She nodded like a pecking chicken, accepting all Roland’s suggestions.

The Jin Yuan Kingdom had long been a powder keg, not even on the verge of explosion, but having already exploded once and just barely controlled.

"We can spread messages through various channels within Jin Yuan, inciting opposing sentiments."

Alina continued nodding but still hesitated in reminding Roland, "But I’m afraid that’s not enough. Many people in Jin Yuan are brave enough to resist, yet there is no leader."

"There is."

Roland’s gaze fell on Alina’s face, the meaning was clear.

As the daughter of Mr. Carlo, founder of the Republic, Alina's name at such times was like a light in the darkness, bringing hope to the resistance forces.

It's darkest when walking without a light; resisting the old order is no different.

Alina was still a bit hesitant, "If I directly announce that I'm alive, it will surely alert Marco. He'll most likely think you're sheltering me. After all, enmity is also a kind of relationship, my death having a direct connection with you makes it more suspicious."

"Of course, we can't say it outright, we need a story, a story that can kindle people's hopes."

Alina's eyes lit up.

Roland, having won writing awards before, was a master at crafting stories.

In Alina's anticipation, Roland thought for a moment and immediately stitched together an enigmatic story.

"The Saintess who passed away rose again from the flames, and from Colt, she will inherit the ancient family's will to save the entire Jin Yuan Kingdom! She will end the endless bloodshed, reckoning with the evil that wrought chaos, bringing the country back on track, and saving people from the guillotine."

"Will that really work? I can't pretend to be a Saintess, much less resurrected." Alina lowered her head with some embarrassment.

Roland earnestly looked at Alina, softly saying, "If you can save Jin Yuan, then you are the Saintess in everyone's heart, no doubt about it. As for resurrection, it merely adds to your sanctity."

"You were officially certified dead by the Jin Yuan Kingdom's ambassador and our Empress; to appear alive would make everyone a laughingstock. Therefore, you must be resurrected."

Alina’s heart raced, but she was still somewhat hesitant.

"I have never doubted the feasibility of the plan. But if my authority becomes unshakable, are you really reassured?"

Alina’s words were tactful.

If she’s brought to power by foreign forces, her legitimacy would be seriously called into question, and she wouldn’t dare oppose Roland in international affairs.

If she were the "resurrected Saintess," she’d have absolute authority, and even being elected as Emperor by the populace wouldn’t be unusual, making it difficult for Roland to control her.

She did not want to owe Roland, and some things had to be made clear.

Roland restrained his smile, seriously saying, "Alina, if there’s not even this bit of trust between friends, it’s too sad."

Alina suddenly lowered her head, hiding her emotions, and softly asked, "If the interests of my country and your interests conflict, what should I do?"

She didn’t want to harm Roland’s interests, nor did she wish to betray national interest, and so she was troubled by this.

Although over 1,400 kilometers away from West City, she was already contemplating how to handle her relationship with Roland upon regaining power.

Roland smiled reassuringly.

Alina valued their agreement and did not want to harm her homeland’s interests, and so she was struggling.

This small conflict was something he had considered from the start of their collaboration.

"As long as our interests remain aligned, that’s enough. The future Rodinia scenario will be a struggle between the Sea Power countries led by our Sussex and the Land Power countries led by the Vladimir Empire."

"If you stand with me, Sea Power naturally gains the upper hand. If you choose Sofia’s side, then the Land Power becomes stronger."

Alina looked at Roland incredulously, her voice a bit airy.

"Is that all it takes?"

"Yes, that’s enough." Roland replied frankly.

He didn’t console Alina, as this truly was his bottom line.

The current policy of the Jin Yuan Kingdom clearly aims to become a prominent country, showing a preference for an alliance with the Vladimir Empire.

If Marco consolidates power, the Four Overseas Provinces are likely to get pinned by the two major powers.

Even if the best Marshal were resurrected, they wouldn’t be able to break the deadlock of a two-front war.

As long as Alina stood by him, it would be a huge diplomatic victory.

"We’re friends, right?"

Roland spoke softly.

As long as Alina stood by him on the Sixth Return Day, it would suffice.

Let future worries be dealt with by the future.

Inexplicably, he had a feeling that Tier Seven was the peak of mortal powers, and from Tier Six, the Transcendents would gradually fade from the view of ordinary people.

If he continued to crave mundane power, status, and wealth, progressing further would become tremendously difficult.

As long as he could get past Sofia, the relationship between the Sussex Empire and Jin Yuan Republic didn't matter to him.

Alina's eyes turned slightly red, nodding vigorously.

Even brought down this far, Roland still didn't see her as a subordinate, considering her a friend.

As long as she could gain power, the Jin Yuan Republic would be a steadfast ally to Roland.

That's her bottom line.

Future troubles would be left to the new leader.

She only desired to reclaim everything that belonged to her father and punish the traitors.

As for power? She became increasingly indifferent to it.

Chapter 333: At Your Command, Your Majesty the Empress!

After roughly agreeing on an action plan with Alina, Roland immediately sought out Sif.

Sif was, after all, the Empress, the real Dominator of the Empire.

Roland could make decisive decisions on behalf of Sif, but he certainly had to inform her afterward.

Sif silently listened to Roland narrate the shocking news brought by Alina and the action plan, remaining speechless throughout.

Her thoughtful demeanor made Roland a bit uneasy.

He hoped Sif would have her own ideas, not just be a chess piece moved at will.

At the same time, he hoped she wouldn’t be overly opinionated, becoming a true wildcard.

He tentatively asked, "Do you have any good ideas?"

"Your plan is good, with a not low chance of success, but have you considered one thing," Sif squinted, her voice somewhat ethereal.

"What?"

"If Alina returns to Xidai under the guise of reviving the Saintess, her authority will be supreme, and the entire country will support her. If she then restores order internally and expands territories externally, her prestige will surpass all Monarchs in Jin Yuan history."

Sif’s breathing became somewhat rapid, drawing a seemingly absurd conclusion.

"If managed properly, she could even become the Emperor in the Republic. It’s not impossible; there was once an elected Emperor during the early Republican period of the Magic Empire."

Roland looked at Sif with surprise, expressing appreciation for her judgment, "Your idea makes a lot of sense."

"If all goes smoothly, Alina indeed has the opportunity to become... Empress of the Jin Yuan Republic."

Sif looked at Roland in astonishment, originally thinking he hadn't considered this, only to find he had.

"Aren't you worried Alina will betray you?"

Roland furrowed his brows slightly, "If you're talking about betraying agreements and friendship, no. If you think she is our subordinate, definitely."

Sif was left speechless, her prepared argument suddenly becoming pale and powerless.

Roland saw Alina as a friend, naturally some words couldn't be said.

Noticing the atmosphere was somewhat unusual, Roland realized Sif has always had an unfavorable attitude toward Alina, so he explained with a smile:

"Sif, I'm considering this for you."

The stifled frustration in Sif's chest instantly dissipated, she smiled and asked, "For me?"

Roland surely had his reasons for saying so, she'd listen for now.

Clearing his throat, Roland patiently explained, "Who is our biggest threat right now?"

"Sofia."

Sif knew the standard answer to this question and answered in seconds.

"Yes, without overcoming her, we'd all die. The future is beautiful, but it's a luxury for us."

Roland continued explaining, "From the time we left the Imperial Capital, or accurately from the time we prepared to leave the Imperial Capital, our goal has never changed."

"You mean to support Alina's return and even becoming Empress is more beneficial to us?"

Seeing Roland didn't continue explaining, Sif fell into thought.

A moment later, she showed an enlightened expression, though her eyes held some peculiarity.

"I understand now!"

Roland looked at Sif with relief, she finally possessed the quality to think independently from a political perspective.

"You plan to make her owe an unrepayable favor, then accept an alliance through marriage with us? But the Imperial Family has no suitable candidate to marry her, unless..." Sif's expression grew more peculiar.

Roland: "..."

Scoundrel, what exactly did you understand?

Upon careful consideration, Sif's thought wasn't entirely outrageous, according to the conventions of this era, marriage was indeed the best means of alliance.

Sif's thought was even the only correct answer.

Fine then, even if Alina agreed, who would go? He asked irritably: "Unless what?"

"Unless Alina marries my child."

Roland froze on the spot, turning to stone.

He had considered the wildest outcomes and the most absurd solutions, but hadn’t counted on Sif being so unconventional.

He tried to persuade himself that he had hallucinated just now, but couldn’t.

After a long silence, he slowly asked, "Miss Sif, even if all goes well, your child is at least twenty years younger than Alina, do you think it’s suitable?"

"Very suitable." Sif spoke resolutely.

She even gave Roland several examples, proving there had been similar marriages in the Sussex Empire and Jin Yuan in the Age of Empires.

"Don’t just think twenty years, even thirty or forty years, what difference does it make. Miss Alina doesn’t even need to meet her nominal husband, she can enjoy her life, and my child can find a pure-blooded Sussex girl to be his lover..."

"Stop!"

Roland’s mind had completely unraveled.

Followed astray by Sif.

He seriously sorted through it, finally pinpointing the issue.

"Don’t rush to arrange a marriage for Alina, that’s not what I meant. Alina is different from others, she has a tragic past, we helped her when she was at her weakest, she certainly yearns to repay."

"She will at least stand sincerely by our side until the Sixth Return Day. This is sufficient."

Is this enough? Sif wasn’t quite satisfied with the lenient conditions Roland set for Alina, but Roland truly did this for her.

Roland was correct, focusing on overcoming the immediate obstacles first before considering the future.

She chose to skip this issue.

After inquiring about Roland’s general plan, Sif pretty much understood Roland’s strategy.

It was indeed Roland’s usual style, using various means to weaken the enemy before officially going to war, giving the enemy no chance of a fair duel.

As long as everything went smoothly, Marco’s well-worn guillotine was definitely reserved for him personally.

Sif smiled teasingly, "Alright, I haven’t been to Xidai yet, finally I can go."

"You can’t go."

This time Sif truly felt dissatisfied, "Why? Do you think I’ll hold you back?"

"Of course not. Apart from myself, the person I trust most is you. If you leave too, who will oversee Hansa and manage the Four Overseas Provinces?"

Sif fell silent.

She really wanted to say let the Magic Mirror take care of it, but considering the Magic Mirror's political thinking hadn't updated for a year, and recalling her neurotic operations a year ago, she wasn't reassured.

The current her, although occasionally unconventional, was, after all, a competent political figure.

A year ago?

Sif wanted to kill that political idiot.

Indeed, she couldn't go after all.

But she still felt uneasy.

Girls from Jin Yuan Kingdom were inherently romantic and open. Although Alina hadn't been rumored romantically with any men, letting her be alone with Roland wasn't proper.

A fallen Princess falling for a handsome savior?

Sif's heart tightened, she didn't like this storyline.

Thinking over it, she finally came up with an idea.

"I won't go, but you have to take Miss Lisa with you."

"Wait, why do I have to take her?" Roland was somewhat puzzled.

"It's simple, I'm worried about your... safety. Things aren't peaceful over there in Jin Yuan. Miss Lisa has enough combat power to protect you."

Seeing Roland still wanted to say something, Sif quickly predicted and interrupted.

"Consider it an order, okay?"

All of Roland’s objections vanished into thin air.

He stepped back a half pace and saluted Sif in an exaggerated gesture.

"As you command, Her Majesty the Empress!"

Chapter 334: Missing Him on the Seventh Day

Upon hearing the voice of the secretary of political affairs reminding her of the work meeting, Sif sighed lightly in her heart, closed her notebook, and walked out of the room with her head held high.

As she stepped out of the room, she left the feelings of a young girl and her yearning behind, walking towards the conference hall with seven parts majesty and three parts amiability.

She was the Vice Governor, and in Roland’s absence, the work within the territory naturally fell to her responsibility.

She could certainly play the role of the Empress in attending the meeting, but the high and mighty image of the Empress needs to be preserved. Moreover, as the Empress hasn’t taken power herself, convening ministers frequently isn’t proper.

Observers in the Imperial Capital must not feel that the Empress is an ignorant fool in politics.

This was advice from Roland.

Thus, she had become accustomed to letting the Magic Mirror play the role of a serene Empress, while she accompanied Roland traveling around extensively.

Unfortunately, she couldn't accompany Roland this time.

As Roland mentioned, the pure political level of the Magic Mirror is fundamentally unable to command the complex situation of the Four Overseas Provinces. She doesn't trust anyone else either. With Roland out, she can only personally take charge.

Only she and Roland were aware of the overall strategic layout of the Governor's Territory, and only they could make timely decisions in case of sudden events.

Roland's plan was for Sif to command the army to coordinate with Jin Yuan Kingdom's wanderers at the border to cause trouble, attracting Marco's attention, and encouraging the resistance forces within Jin Yuan.

Unless necessary, the Governor's Territory army must not enter Jin Yuan Kingdom, to avoid surprising allied nations.

There was only one scenario in which she must lead the army into Jin Yuan, and that was if Roland and Alina successfully landed at the southern seaport and advanced north.

Sif internally didn't agree with this plan.

It was too risky.

If the Jin Yuan People are unwilling to accept Alina, relying on those few thousand accompanying personnel, they would be fortunate to leave alive, even with God's protection.

But they had to take this risk.

Southern Jin Yuan is the foundation of Alina's family, and rallying people here is far easier than attacking northern Jin Yuan directly across the Black Forest.

Attacking a fortified line and facing multiple enemies with weak forces mostly indicates problematic commander's thoughts.

The Vladimir Empire and Prudon Kingdom, Tirol Kingdom had an alliance trend, so Sif also needed strong allies.

Wende Empire was surrounded by the Three Kingdoms, unable to care for itself, and couldn't help even if allied.

Talia was ablaze with civil war and had essentially split into several nations. Furthermore, they inherently weren't good at warfare; such allies would only be a burden.

Weimar Federation...was only a step away from becoming food on a platter; it could be won over, but annexation was preferable.

Nubia and other countries are far from the central Rodinia Continent; they could be allied but wouldn't be much help.

If Jin Yuan Kingdom was lost again, diplomacy would become thoroughly passive, trapped in a siege from all directions.

For Sussex Empire, this situation would be no more than a retreat to the homeland to watch other continents battling to the death. But for her, it would mean complete failure.

She would rather stain the Flower Sea with blood than return home as a puppet with the posture of a loser.

Therefore, Jin Yuan Kingdom must be taken down, and Alina was their only chance.

Letting Roland accompany Alina made her uneasy internally, so she insisted on having Lisa accompany them.

She was very clear in her heart; Lisa was different from Alina.

Lisa had been accompanied by Roland since childhood, and there might be romantic feelings between a man and a woman, but surely kinship prevailed.

She might be able to accept only being Roland's sister.

Even if not, it didn't matter.

After all, she didn't have an illustrious background, her relationship with Sif was also good, and as long as the sincerity was enough, she would most likely accept becoming Roland's lover rather than an official wife.

Alina, on the other hand, was different; she was born into a prominent family, her father was once the Dominator of the nation, and as long as she succeeded in returning home, she would surely regain power.

The Jin Yuan People are romantic and expressive; to show gratitude towards Roland, who knows what she might do.

Someone must keep close watch on Roland, guarding against the prowling cats of Jin Yuan Kingdom.

If Roland finally couldn't resist outside, Sif would rather it be Lisa.

Lisa could share, but Alina would seize, and she certainly understood which caused more harm.

In this era, the most common romantic model for powerful men was marrying a noble, understanding wife, then having some cute and enchanting lovers.

Such matters had long become unremarkable to Sif.

If Roland was also like this...

Don’t keep thinking about personal issues during work. Time for the meeting!

With a few traces of concern, Sif walked towards the conference hall to convene the first work meeting after Roland led the special action squad out.

Seated at the main position of the conference hall, listening to ministers report work, Sif seemed slightly dazed, absent-minded.

When Governor Ados succinctly finished reporting, waiting for Sif to comment, he found that Lord Count was actually in a daze.

Ados, familiar with societal dynamics, probably guessed why Sif was daydreaming.

He lightly coughed to remind Sif it was meeting time, then summarized the previously reported content more concisely again.

Sif cast him a thankful gaze, her eyes still bewildered.

What did Governor Ados just say?

She felt too embarrassed to let Ados repeat it again after zoning out twice consecutively.

Saying one thing three times, the other ministers might mistakenly think she targeted Ados.

Even if no one overthinks, asking Ados to say it three times would be somewhat impolite.

Sif concentrated her thoughts.

Ados assumed she was pondering countermeasures, but she was actually trying hard to recall what he just mentioned.

A minute later, Sif still couldn’t remember what Ados had just said, but she thought of how to respond.

"Lord Ados, what do you think we should do?"

Sif was still absent-minded, not even noticing the problem with her previous address.

Chapter 335: Missing Him on the Seventh Day (Part 2)

Ados slightly bowed his head.

Even though the ministers present were all confidants who basically knew that the Count was actually the Empress, this was obviously a slip of the tongue.

Ados was somewhat worried about Sif’s mental state.

When a monarch makes a mistake, it is naturally up to the subordinates to fully compensate.

He smiled and reminded, "Lord Count, you indeed can address vassals as ’Minister,’ but this formal title would cause them unease."

Sif realized her mistake as well.

She was presiding over the meeting as a Count and Vice Governor, not as the Empress.

These formalities are indeed troublesome, yet cannot be mistaken. If Teacher Mary heard her using the term ’Minister Ados’ as a Count, she would surely turn furious.

Ados and others hold roles not just as her vassals but also as Empire officials. When serving directly in the Imperial Government, their primary allegiance should be to the Emperor.

At least during working hours.

Sif's address just now had overstepped.

As Count, Sif had encroached upon the domain of Sylph the Empress, crossing a boundary.

If taken seriously, the Cabinet could even use this as grounds to impeach her.

Fortunately, she is the Empress herself.

Sif smiled somewhat sheepishly, nodding to Ados in gratitude.

Ados was not only reminding Sif to be mindful of her identity but also cautioning other ministers not to talk carelessly.

Ados, the Baron under Sif, addressing as 'Minister XX' was somewhat presumptuous, but strictly speaking, it could be overlooked, and the matter ended there.

The old fox Ados, as if nothing happened, proceeded to present his proposals according to Sif's requests.

As a senior official of the Three Overseas Provinces, having followed Count Sif and Governor Roland for so long, he is naturally well acquainted with their styles of working.

In front of these two leaders, there is no need to hold back or play tricks; if one has talent, it should be fully displayed.

He had just reported the plan to build a new industrial zone in the outskirts of Hansa City.

He was, of course, not just making suggestions. The entire construction plan for the industrial zone was also ready.

The steam engine factory, textile factory, coal-chemical plant, paper mill, and glass factory prominently featured on the list.

If it were modern society, wanting to simultaneously launch so many highly polluting projects would surely lead to environmentalists pinning them to the ground, but in 1792, there was no concept of environmental protection.

There wasn’t much pollution to begin with, so why speak of environmentalism.

This time, Sif finally took things seriously, listening attentively to the report.

She affirmed Ados’s overall planning, but the only objection was against building the paper mill around the Rodinia River.

While factories need water, building by the river isn’t much of an issue, as long as it’s not that river.

"Building the factory here will impact shipping and trade; choose another location. Build a new town here, with the factory nearby, then construct roads to connect the two cities."

Sif walked to the map hanging on the back wall of the conference hall and pointed to a location.

The river she chose is only partially within Hansa Province and flows downstream into the Prudon Kingdom.

Building a factory here is otherwise fine, but it could easily spark international disputes.

Ados wanted to remind her, but Sif’s next words made him hold his tongue.

"If the Prudon people have an issue, let them settle it with gunfire."

Although the Prudon Kingdom has risen as a strong nation in recent years and is much stronger than the Oden Kingdom, compared to a behemoth like the Sussex Empire, the gap is still apparent.

Even if they have grievances, it's unlikely they would go to war with the Sussex Empire over a bit of industrial waste.

The Prudon Kingdom is currently engaged in military conflict with the Wende Empire, with both sides suffering thousands of casualties in several skirmishes, at risk of escalation at any moment, leaving no room to care about these matters.

Ados silently thought that the Prudon Kingdom's close ties with the Vladimir Empire likely placed them on Her Majesty the Empress's enemy list.

He knew Governor Roland sailed out with his fleet a week ago, and although unsure of the task, he could vaguely guess some aspects.

The Golden Kite Wanderers, who had been listless and dispirited, recently seemed more spirited, hinting at something joyous having occurred.

Governor Roland going out to sea likely has something to do with this affair.

Though he mused over it, Ados would never inquire further.

The lord holds the reins of the entire situation; the subordinates don't need to know, just attending to their duties is sufficient.

After Ados completed his report, the other ministers took turns reporting on their tasks, to which Sif generally agreed with their appended implementation plans, while offering guidance on some details.

Her nonchalant words caused several ministers to break into a sweat.

Some lacked ability, while others sought personal gain. Although they hid it well, Sif discerned it at a glance.

Seeing the ministers trembling nervously, Sif smiled to reassure them, "No need to be tense, I trust your abilities, and I trust your loyalty. Do well, and dismiss."

A bit of self-interest is allowable as long as it doesn't disrupt the bigger picture; after all, everyone has families to support. But they must not go overboard or think they can fool her.

Her gentle gaze swept across the room, making contact with each minister. In her warm eyes laid both encouragement and warning.

Several ministers with hidden agendas were quite frightened, continuously wiping sweat once Sif's gaze moved away.

Luckily, Sif doesn't indulge in unnecessary talk during meetings; otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to sit still.

The final item on the meeting's agenda was for Raikkonen, responsible for oversight, to report on the illegalities and crimes of officials.

Raikkonen's report was concise.

He categorized the suspects into economic crimes, official misconduct, and criminal offenses, handing the list directly to Sif, eliminating the need for individual readings.

He also provided disposal plans for Sif's reference. His proposed solutions adhered to laws and precedents, being rational and well-founded.

Chapter 336: Missing Him on the Seventh Day (Part 3)

Sif kept drawing circles on the paper to express her agreement, but the last few names made her frown.

"They continued taxing privately under the Empress’s name despite the grain tax exemption policy?"

"Yes."

"Why only three years?" Sif squinted, her eyes filled with murderous intent.

Raikkonen understood Sif was very angry; he could even guess what Sif was about to say, but his duty was oversight, and he had to act according to the law.

He calmly explained, "Abuse of power plus dereliction of duty, with severe circumstances, indeed starts at three years."

"This is not abuse of power and dereliction of duty; this is treason, undeniably a capital crime."

Sif lightly pardoned these tax officials from three years of imprisonment and thoughtfully arranged the gallows for them.

"Her Majesty the Empress is kind-hearted, exempting taxes for the farmers who suffered and are struggling this year. These deceitful bastards are not taxing privately, but undermining the farmers’ support for Her Majesty."

She turned her gaze to Ados and gently asked, "Ados, am I right?"

"Lord Count is right. Treason is indeed a capital crime, but executing more than forty tax officials at once might have a bad impact, right?"

Though tax officials are grassroots clerks, they are still part of the bureaucratic system.

He certainly didn’t want Her Majesty the Empress to set a precedent for sentencing officials to death, so he tentatively proposed a moderate suggestion.

"Lord Count, treason is indeed a capital crime, but in judicial practice, this charge is rarely directly used for sentencing to death. I suggest removing these pests from the ranks of officials and imposing double the penalty, making them serve at least six years, which can also be a deterrent."

Although Ados wasn't very familiar with the tax officials, he was still trying to reduce their sentences.

Other officials also came to their senses and hurried to join in the plea.

They didn't dare to defend these pests, but they also didn't want to see the tax officials swinging on the gallows; persuasion was necessary.

Lord Count always listened to reason, with so many speaking up, perhaps the impact wouldn't be too wide.

Some pleaded, while others just watched coldly.

Vice Minister of Internal Affairs Tony stood motionless like a clay stump.

The newly promoted Personal Guard Captain Jes remained expressionless, though he felt slight disdain internally.

He knew well what these officials were internally thinking.

He certainly didn't deign to scrape profits from the poor. The family business was running well, having expanded into overseas markets with his introduction and lacking for nothing financially.

He decisively supported the Empress's decision but always kept things clear, not wanting to speak up here.

Sif clearly saw through the officials' little schemes.

Though there were many pleading, it was a matter of principle, and she couldn't compromise.

Roland once said that killing one chicken can scare a group of monkeys; these tax officials were the chickens, and the high-ranking officials in the conference hall were the monkeys.

The chicken must be killed.

Sif's icy glare sent chills through those pleading.

They dared not speak further, feeling something indescribable.

They originally thought it was Lord Governor's heavy murderous aura, with Her Majesty the Empress being gentle and easygoing; now it seemed fortunate that Governor Roland reined in Her Majesty.

Governor had only been gone for a few days, and she aimed to execute dozens of grassroots officials; it was too terrifying.

Governor Roland, please return quickly!

Finally enduring until adjournment, watching Sif depart, the ministers felt relieved.

The pressure Sif brought them was no less than Roland's.

She possessed insightful, intelligent eyes, and no ulterior motives could escape.

She didn't punish any of the present people, yet made everyone wary.

After the meeting, Ados looked at the ministers' vivid expressions, growing more admiration for Sif.

Her Majesty the Empress, though young, sometimes impulsive and even a bit naive, but her judgment of people was spot-on.

Never play tricks before her.

Those foolish tax officials, with their blood, helped Her Majesty complete a warning; their death was not in vain.

Under the reverent gaze of everyone, Sif returned to her room, opened her notebook, pondered for a moment, and wrote a line of graceful cursive.

"The seventh day of Roland’s absence, I miss him."

Chapter 337: Missing Her on the Seventh Day

The seventh day without Sif by my side, I miss her.

Monarch, top platform.

Roland clasped his hands behind his back, eyes fixed on the distant horizon.

The wind was fierce, the clouds thick, the waves surged.

In the vast ocean, one truly feels the insignificance of humanity and the grandeur of nature.

Even someone at Tier Seven is merely a slightly stronger ant before nature.

If the three Goddesses were here, could they calm the sea with a single thought?

He was somewhat curious.

He had seen images of demigods and high tier mages in action at the Magic Association.

However, recordings are just recordings, they can only capture the general image, not draw accurate conclusions, only allow bold speculation.

A demigod's power is earth-shattering, by standard division it should be at Siege Level, Roland preferred to call them Nuclear Bomb Level.

Based on True Gods easily crushing demigods, a True God's power must be capable of country destruction, but not enough to destroy stars.

Otherwise, the three Goddesses would have shattered the wall of planes and returned home long ago.

Considering the three Goddesses can only take a portion of the resources from this plane, and they divide it among themselves, Roland boldly judged the real combat power of the Goddesses to be capable of annihilating entire nations.

Though they may not do so, they surely can destroy a country single-handedly.

But these three Goddesses are too far aloof, their pressure on Roland isn't even as great as Sofia's.

They might be county officials, but Sofia is the one in charge.

If Sofia appeared at the ocean horizon, stepping on icebergs to collide with Monarch, Roland's short yet brilliant life would end in a laughable punctuation.

Since reaching Tier Seven, Roland has increasingly felt Sofia's terrifying aura.

He couldn't even imagine how a normal Tier Seven would face the monster that is Sofia.

She can easily kill any Tier Seven she finds displeasing.

Yet she hasn't done so.

Aside from a few idiots early on who wanted to quash her in the cradle, she's rare to strike against equal-level strongmen.

But when she does strike, it means the downfall of those of equal level.

Past records don't mean everything, after all Tier Seven has others who haven't met opponents alike.

Yet Roland has a feeling, none of them are foes for Sofia, and they know it.

This is purely subjective, without any basis.

The only evidence is probably Alina's angel card.

Alina couldn't precisely predict the three's fate direction.

Herself, Roland, and Sofia.

Perhaps bad weather makes people prone to random thoughts, Roland always felt this ocean voyage would not be peaceful. When his mind is restless, he begins to think of Sofia and the Goddess of Light he has already offended, and his mood worsens.

He turned back but could see no trace of Sif.

Sif must play both Empress and Count, commanding Hansa, ruling the Four Overseas Provinces.

This is her mid-term exam.

Roland initially worried for Sif, but now he suddenly realized he is also facing an exam.

Sif had long been accustomed to his presence, and how was he not the same.

With Sif around, he could share any thought. Facing Roland's questions, Sif's answers were sometimes wild, sometimes absurd, but would always surprise Roland.

It's a pity she isn't here.

Accompanying Roland on this journey were Lisa, Alina, and Munina.

Lisa was responsible for his care, Alina for returning from the south to the Golden Kite, Munina for dealing with enemies beneath the sea.

Yet none of them could surprise Roland endlessly like Sif.

Unconsciously, Sif had become an indelible mark on Roland's life.

While he faced the violent winds, lost in wild thoughts, the cabin door behind him opened.

Sister Lisa, dressed in a neat sailor outfit, waved at him with a smile.

"Don't just stand foolishly in the wind, come and have a meal."

Lisa's mood was bright.

As Roland's status and power grew, the people and matters around him reached higher ranks, and the time he spent alone with Roland became less.

This ocean trip wasn't solitude, but it felt akin.

Miss Alina was with the Golden Kite Wanderers, she needs to quickly establish her authority in the team.

Romeo, Reyno, and Elaine were loyal to Mr. Carlo's only heir Alina, but others in the Wanderer group might not be.

There were even many who believed it was Mr. Carlo's inaction that led to their ruin.

From a certain viewpoint, this thinking isn't wrong.

If Mr. Carlo had exposed Robert's true nature sooner, if he had taken down the ambitious Marco earlier, if he hadn't preserved his prestige and withdrawn from the frontline, they wouldn't be in this state.

Even if Alina takes them back home, kills all enemies, lost family, and friends, can they return?

These days Alina was quite busy.

She was not only busy but also had to keep distance from Roland in front of outsiders.

Alina's revival of the kingdom with foreign powers made the proud hearts of Golden Kite Wanderers uncomfortable.

Keeping distance from Roland at least wouldn't provoke resentment among these people.

Another companion, Munina, positioned herself correctly, she commanded Graham Clan's elite underwater following the fleet to prevent other Sea Demon ambushes.

The Grim Clan, also Sea Demons, were close to General Nephropidae, heavily suspected in participating in the massacre against the Graham Clan.

They were once of the same clan, now enemies.

Munina worried about a Grim Tribe ambush, she volunteered to lead the elite along.

Using Sea Demons against Sea Demons is indeed a good idea, Roland naturally agreed.

Lisa had been worried about Munina getting close to Roland, but later found her concerns unnecessary.

Munina’s heart had shattered long ago with her sister’s betrayal.

The sensible and well-behaved girl also knew the difference between Sea Demons and humans, so she carefully gathered her people to live in the Mermaid Lake District.

No one disturbed them, and Lisa finally had the long-awaited opportunity to be alone with Roland.

Lisa warmly invited Roland back to the cabin to enjoy the delicacies, but Roland just smiled and didn’t budge.

She was a bit curious as Roland was always very keen on meals, why was he behaving differently this time?

She didn’t urge him, instead, she stood beside Roland, following his gaze.

The vast sea, with nothing at all.

"Roland, this is the sea, there’s nothing but water. What’s there to look at?"

Roland smiled faintly and softly teased, "The sea indeed isn’t much to look at, and it can be quite dangerous."

"Dangerous?"

Lisa looked at Roland nervously, her voice trembling slightly as she asked, "Is it the Sea Demons? I heard the Grim Clan is much stronger than Miss Munina’s clan."

Roland nodded and said solemnly, "You’re right, the Graham Clan is certainly no match for the Grim Clan. If we were to face the Grim Sea Demons alone, we’d likely suffer a great loss, but our cooperation would make 1+1>2."

His gaze was fixed on a special device covered with rainproof cloth at the stern.

It was a surprise prepared for the Grim Sea Demons.

The damage caused by traitors can often be worse than that of ferocious enemies.

The Graham Clan’s traitors—bah!—those wise men who turned over a new leaf have long disclosed all the secrets of the Sea Demons.

Norton has been researching in the lab with Sea Demon corpses all day, creating many special weapons.

Pouring a certain special potion into the sea can cause Sea Demons to be unable to breathe through their gills temporarily and must surface.

Sea Demons, like submarines, are invincible when hidden beneath the sea, but once they show up, they are no match for humans.

Munina’s elite team was prepared with antidotes in advance and won’t be affected, but other Sea Demons won’t be so lucky.

The first time he went to sea, he feared encountering Sea Demons, but now he wished they would return.

After glancing several times at the dark clouds floating above the sea, Roland felt slightly disappointed.

"Let’s go, it’s about to rain."

Lisa shrugged and didn’t ask further questions.

Politics and military affairs were her absolute blind spots; she couldn’t learn them and didn’t want to.

Her Fire Magic’s power halved at sea, so she once again transformed into the Chef and dedicated all her energy to preparing delicious dishes for Roland.

Munina’s subordinates could fetch strange and high-quality ingredients from the sea every day.

Some fine ingredients lie hundreds of meters below the sea’s surface, unattainable by humans but accessible to Sea Demons.

These ingredients, seldom seen normally, sparked Lisa’s interest.

She perused the recipes, constantly improving her cooking methods to let Roland feast.

Today’s main dish was a kind of deep-sea fish called the red guiyi. This fish had delicious, fine, and dense meat with an excellent taste, but unfortunately lived at several hundred meters deep, making it impossible for humans to capture.

To infuse taste into the resilient and smooth meat of the sea fish, Lisa marinated it with various ingredients for several hours.

She couldn’t wait to share it with Roland.

Roland walked into the cabin, leaving the sea breeze outside, with a warm small fireplace and steaming delicious fish soup inside.

Lisa didn’t waste such precious ingredients, serving the fish as both soup and grilled, creating a two-course meal from one fish.

"Try it, I’ve never tasted red guiyi before."

Roland shelved his melancholy, ignoring the gusts at the cabin door and the impending storm.

Sea Demons can survive very freely underwater, yet waves and winds also affect them.

Dark clouds can dramatically reduce visibility below the sea.

It’s a fatal impact on the Sea Demons.

The Grim Sea Demons certainly won’t move in such weather.

If the enemy doesn’t come, let’s eat first.

Picking up the ladle, he scooped a spoonful of soup. Under Lisa’s expectant gaze, Roland raised an eyebrow and gave Lisa a thumbs-up, expressing his approval without using a spoon.

Lisa’s smile was full, her eyes squinting delightedly.

Compared to direct praise, Roland’s ravenous eating was the best compliment.

He still preferred the delicious fish soup most.

Roland tasted and laughed, saying, "You’ve worked hard these days."

"Not at all, I’m a Chef after all." Lisa quickly shook her head.

"By the way, how’s your progress learning Magic with Master Anthony going? You’ve never mentioned it, so I had to ask you directly."

Lisa let out a long sigh.

She waited so long; Roland never asked.

Finally, he’s willing to speak!

She smiled and said, "Master Anthony is indeed the best Magic teacher. His teaching is very effective, and I am progressing rapidly."

"Has your Extraordinary Traits been affected?" Roland asked with a smile.

"Of course, it has."

Lisa put on a serious face, watching Roland struggling to find words to comfort her, and her suddenly stiff expression melted in an instant.

"It’s a good influence. Fire Magic lets me accumulate faster. I’m only one step away from Tier Seven now."

Lisa proudly raised her head.

But thinking of Sif already being Tier Seven, her pride instantly wilted.

Just as she was about to say something, a piercing alarm sounded from outside the cabin door.

Roland stood up abruptly.

With Munina’s elites escorting underwater, ordinary dangers are simply not a concern.

However, the lookout issued the highest level of alert, indicating the enemy is both clear and dangerous.

He couldn’t continue eating and strode outside.

The bait is finally caught.

Fishing, start!

Chapter 338: Bloodied Misfortune?

Stepping out of the cabin, his gaze sharpened as Roland observed the astonishing changes outside.

The expected Sea Demon did not appear; instead, several large and astonishing tentacles stretched across the sea surface.

Octopus?

Squinting his eyes, Roland’s mind raced as he searched for relevant information.

Soon, a string of information surfaced in his mind.

Unexpectedly, this was likely the Demon Octopus, a super sea monster not belonging to any oceanic power, moving alone and devouring anyone it encounters.

Simply put, encountering such a creature was likely not a conspiracy, just sheer bad luck.

Roland thought of Alina’s predictions before their departure.

Indeed, she was quite accurate, he thought silently.

Before the fleet departed, Roland had consulted Alina to ease her anxiety, asking her to predict Lisa's fortune.

Under the Angel Card, Alina saw that Lisa was shrouded in bad luck, followed by a crimson mist, obscuring any clarity.

Despite the inauspicious prophecy, Lisa resolutely refused to believe it and insisted on accompanying them.

Having Lisa around meant bad luck was bound to spread.

Facing the Demon Octopus, Roland did not rush to take action but instead handed over command to Bridges.

Let the professionals handle naval battles.

The Demon Octopus had appeared many times in history, and there were well-established methods to deal with them.

While giant octopuses may seem terrifying, the actual damage they cause isn't substantial.

The tentacles cannot inflict fatal damage on ships built of hard oak.

As long as one isn't so unlucky to be caught by a tentacle, the likelihood of being killed by the octopus is low.

Bridges calmly instructed the crew to prepare according to the anti-octopus combat procedures.

Surrounding the Monarch, several Second Class Battleships quickly dispersed to find suitable positions.

The Torrential Rain Celestial Fire Cannon was temporarily unusable; thankfully, dealing with octopuses didn’t require cannons.

The ship’s bow-mounted giant crossbow cannon was the real trump card.

Several crew members swiftly coated the giant crossbow arrow tips with paralyzing potion, readying them for launch.

At this tense moment, a tentacle from the Demon Octopus stealthily appeared on the Monarch’s port side.

"Watch out!"

An observant sailor on the deck spotted the tentacle and shouted in anger.

Unfortunately, his voice was swiftly muffled by the storm, and an unlucky sailor was snatched up by the tentacle and hurled into the air.

The unlucky sailor was flung at least dozens of meters high.

Gazing at the ominous sky, he let out a despairing scream.

Though not dead yet, his life was about to end.

Bridges spared not a glance at the unfortunate sailor, decisively issuing the command to fire.

With a crisp explosive roar, the Monarch’s bow crossbow cannon launched a massive arrow over three meters long at the defiant octopus.

The spear-like sharp crossbow arrow accurately struck the octopus.

At the instant the crossbow arrow fired, another spear flew from the top deck.

"Whew!"

The sharp sound of the metal spearhead slicing through the air was like a soul-stealing melody.

The rapidly spinning spear shot like lightning towards the unlucky sailor at the peak of his flight.

Only a few noticed this scene.

Bridges was among them.

The octopus struck by the crossbow arrow had its fate sealed, and Bridges naturally wished to see the sailor about to heroically land.

However, he noticed the spear flying from the top deck.

The spear precisely pierced through the sailor’s cloak, carrying him towards the mast.

"Thud!"

With a dull thud, the sailor, along with the spear, was pinned to the mast.

The haplessly screaming sailor soon realized he was enveloped in luck.

His savior was not the Goddess of Fortune, but rather Governor Roland.

The brazen octopus, struck by the crossbow arrow, was soon affected by the paralyzing potion.

The octopus, being highly intelligent, quickly deduced that this ship was not to be trifled with.

It discarded a tentacle and swiftly fled.

The enormous tentacle writhed on the ship’s deck, as if still alive.

Bridges exhaled in relief and shouted to the signal officer, "Inform the fleet to remain vigilant and leave this area at full speed!"

"Send a few men to bring down that lucky guy."

Having given his orders, Bridges swiftly ascended to the top deck to report the battle situation to Roland.

"I saw it all."

Roland smiled and raised his right hand, signaling Bridges that there was no need to elaborate.

Pointing at the tentacle still writhing on the deck, Roland smiled and asked, "General Bridges, how do you think this would taste?"

Bridges was momentarily taken aback, then spread his hands, half-jokingly saying, "Octopus is the delicious gift of the ocean, but the flesh of a Demon Octopus is too tough, I’m afraid..."

"I have a way!"

Lisa interrupted Bridges, her eyes full of anticipation.

"Roland, I know how to cook the Demon Octopus, do you want to try it?"

"If it’s octopus, how about teppanyaki?" Since Lisa was interested, Roland naturally wouldn’t kill the mood.

"Of course!"

Excitedly, Lisa leapt from the top deck, tapping her toes on the railing, then used the middle deck to launch herself again.

A distance of over ten meters was no obstacle for her.

Like a nimble bird, she quickly moved towards the tentacle.

Lisa pulled out the Magic Short Sword gifted by Anthony and forcefully stabbed it down, quickly cutting off the most tender portion.

What Demon Octopus? This is clearly an ingredient, a very rare one.

The Magic Short Sword in Lisa’s hand is the Song of Lava, a famous weapon used by a notable Governor during the Magic Empire era. Although it’s not a Divine Artifact, it does possess some Divine Artifact traits.

This level of Magic Weapon is also called a Holy Artifact, usually only eligible for use by Senior Mages and Mages.

Anthony allowing Lisa to use a Holy Artifact somewhat goes against the ancestral rules.

Fortunately, he’s already the most powerful Mage in the Magic Association; with no one above him, he can secretly bend the rules.

If Anthony saw Lisa using a Fire Attribute Holy Artifact as a fish-filleting knife, who knows if his beard would tremble in anger.

Such an act, deemed blasphemous by orthodox mages, seemed only natural to Lisa.

Roland had said, tools are meant to be used.

She believed Roland was right.

The Song of Lava's material is exceptional; even without activating the magic contained within, its sharpness surpasses most masterpieces by top craftsmen of this era.

Such a sharp knife, not using it to cut fish fillets would be a waste.

Lisa, with a discerning eye, looked at the Demon Octopus's tentacles and only chose a few sections with the most succulent flesh and thinnest skin to slice.

Her cutting skills were precise, and she quickly completed the ingredient selection.

On the top deck, standing beside Roland, Bridges barely had time to call out "be careful" to Lisa before he saw her floating down like a flame.

He stared in astonishment as Lisa pulled out an unremarkable short sword and with a few swift motions, severed the exceptionally tough tentacles.

He knew how resilient those Demon Octopus tentacles were, requiring the most sharpened spear, fully charged with power, to barely pierce them.

Using just a short sword to slice so effortlessly, what kind of strength was this?

Bridges fell silent.

He knew the gap between individuals was large, but seeing Roland's chef so formidable was still hard for him to accept.

He laughed at himself and found an excuse to leave the upper deck.

With a glance back, Bridges saw Roland showing no surprise, sighed, and headed to the command room with renewed spirit.

Although he might never have the chance in this lifetime, following Lord Governor and Her Majesty the Empress to create meritorious deeds was still a beautiful prospect.

Within less than a year of following the Empress and the Governor out to sea, he became a Baron.

Although this title was transitional, and he would never truly run to the Empress's domain, becoming a vassal of the Empress's private territory was still a great honor for him.

Following the Empress and the Governor provided ample opportunities to gain merit, and he wanted to advance further.

He aspired to become the Minister of the Navy and aimed to be a Count!

Everyone has things they long to achieve.

Lisa was the same.

She carried the most delicious tentacle slices into the kitchen, hoping to showcase her extraordinary culinary skills with this special ingredient.

Roland wanted to observe her cooking process, but Lisa firmly refused.

"This is not ordinary cooking; it’s a culinary challenge. I don’t want to be distracted."

Her reasons were compelling, and Roland couldn’t refuse.

But that was just the surface reason; the real reason was her lack of absolute confidence, prompting her to slice several pieces of tender tentacle slices.

These many slices were all materials for her trial and error.

She could make mistakes but didn’t want Roland to see her unsuccessful cooking.

Watching Roland leave, Lisa locked the door and began to cook while humming a light tune.

Narrowing her eyes and focusing on the tentacles, Lisa’s knife moved like lightning, quickly slicing a section into thin pieces of meat.

Her fingertips pulsed with flames, the iron plate quickly heating up, with temperatures rising.

No time to wipe away sweat, Lisa evenly spread the oil and arranged the meat slices.

"Sizzle!"

Carefully prepared seasonings were continuously sprinkled on, and the octopus slices emitted a tempting aroma.

Lisa stretched out her delicate fingers, picked up a meat slice, and tasted it.

The taste was good, but there was still room for improvement before it was perfect.

She didn’t intend to present this teppanyaki of octopus slices to Roland.

She placed the blade towards the second slice.

Soon, the third slice was also used by Lisa.

With each attempt, the flavor improved, yet she remained somewhat dissatisfied.

Lisa wanted to see Roland taste the delicacy and display an incredulous expression of amazement.

Although Roland had already given her a five-star rating, it was said that above the five-star rating, there was an extraordinary soul praise surpassing full marks.

Only food that touched the soul could receive such a review.

Ordinary ingredients and common cooking methods would definitely not suffice.

To achieve a soul praise beyond five stars, she had to showcase some extraordinary skill.

She turned her gaze to the final slice.

"Little Octopus, please, it must taste good!"

Lisa muttered, as she raised her knife and brought it down.

"Ah!!"

A scream echoed.

Roland, who was reviewing the nautical charts in the next room, heard Lisa’s scream, his face changed dramatically, and he even jumped out of the window without taking the door route.

Slamming his palm against the door, he discovered it was locked from the inside, and feeling anxious, he punched open the kitchen door.

Lisa mumbled, looking at the tentacle still wriggling on the ground, with fresh blood flowing down her fingers.

"Is it... is it still alive?"

Roland, looking at Lisa’s fingers, suddenly understood.

Could this be Alina’s prophecy?

Would Lisa be plagued by bad luck at sea, facing danger or even bleeding?

It turned out to be a false alarm after all.

Chapter 339: The Unexpectedness of No Surprises

If an unexpected event could be anticipated, then it wouldn’t be unexpected.

After the Demon Octopus was repelled, any sensible person could guess that the subsequent journey wouldn’t be smooth sailing.

There was no need for Roland to remind him; Bridges was on full alert, not having slept well for several days, fully vigilant.

He had to guard against the vengeful parent octopus, worry about the Grim Clan and General Nephropidae staging an attack, and fear the continuous worsening of the weather.

However, none of the anticipated events occurred.

Since the stormy day when the Demon Octopus appeared, the sky had become particularly clear, even the wind was accommodating, allowing the fleet to reach maximum speed.

Bridges spent each day in unease.

Looking at Governor Roland’s calm expression, though saying nothing, he was full of admiration internally.

No wonder he’s the Governor; he can keep his composure.

Of course, he didn’t know that Roland wasn’t keeping his composure, but was relying on Alina’s prediction.

After the appearance of the Demon Octopus, Roland invited Alina to enjoy grilled octopus.

After enjoying the meal, he asked Alina to predict the upcoming journey.

Concentrating, Alina made a serious calculation and concluded with one sentence.

"Peaceful sailing."

Since the Prophet said it would be fine, Roland could sleep well.

Though not completely relaxed, he wasn’t overly anxious either.

If everyone expected an incident yet none occurred, it’s also a sort of unexpected event.

In short, the fleet peacefully and successfully arrived at the offshore of the southern coast of the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

The fleet conducted final adjustments here, ready to land at the opportune moment.

The southern coastline of the Jin Yuan Kingdom isn't short, but only has two major ports; Roland's target was the larger Ives Port.

The place was heavily fortified, with more than thirty thousand elite troops stationed throughout the year.

Along with three permanent batteries in the nearby mountains and mine-controlled waterways, even the peak force of the Sussex Empire's main fleet couldn't break through.

Landing operations are tough enough; using the fleet to assault a super port is even harder.

Of course, Roland wasn't foolish enough to assault Ives Port head-on.

His plan was to land 30 kilometers east of Ives Port and attack from the rear.

The landing plan was simple and crude, using the moonlight and the force of the rising tide to launch small boats onto the shore, then advancing inland at low tide.

It is well known that in this age of underdeveloped navigation, nighttime sailing is dangerous. Launching small boats onto the shore at midnight is very prone to grounding.

Not even Bridges, or the most famous naval commanders in history, would dare to do so.

But Roland dared.

He wasn't reckless; he was well prepared.

Five hundred small boats, guided by five hundred Sea Demons, landed to minimize danger.

As long as luck wasn't too bad, landing wasn't difficult.

The only real threat was the illuminating moonlight.

It was a full moon these days, the bright moonlight greatly increased the risk of being detected during landing.

Even though landing in the moonlight was risky, Roland couldn't delay.

A long march and halting is very dangerous.

No matter how valid the reasons, halting could severely dampen morale.

Soldiers don't understand strategy; they only think something went wrong.

The Jin Yuan Kingdom possesses the world's second-largest navy. Although their naval traditions are inferior to the Sussex Empire, concentrating their full strength to deal with a half-strength Fourth Fleet isn't difficult.

Looking up at the cloudless sky, Roland slowly raised his right hand, giving the order to land.

As the Governor, he could trust the professionals and delegate command to Bridges, but major decisions had to be made personally.

This wasn't autocratic but taking on personal responsibility.

Seeing Roland raise his right hand, the long-awaiting Bridges breathed a sigh of relief, saluted towards the top deck, and returned to the combat command room, steadily issuing orders to each ship.

He laughed at himself, tonight the moonlight is so bright, the only advantage is being able to use signal flags for command, and the communication system is very smooth.

No wonder Governor Roland, the cherished lover of the Empress, could make a decision with just a moment of deliberation.

This is not the time to hesitate.

All possible extraordinary situations had been thoroughly prepared for before departure, even specific readiness for dealing with the Demon Octopus, Sea Demons, Werewolves, and even Centaur Cavalry.

With everything prepared, what's there to hesitate about?

One by one, the small boats set off, paddling towards the coastline under the moderate waves.

Fortunately, there was guidance from the Sea Demons, and the small boats wobbled onto the shore.

Among these over five hundred small boats, quite a few were simple wooden rafts, and without the Sea Demons' guidance, many would have been lost during the landing.

The tide rose and fell rapidly.

A dozen small boats hadn't reached the beach yet and were swept away by the receding tide.

These unfortunate soldiers who fell into the water were swept away by the waves just as they were about to call for help, becoming part of the surf.

Bridges watched the landing scene through binoculars, his expression indifferent.

A nighttime landing involving more than ten thousand people, with only a few hundred lost, was hardly significant.

Anyway, those landing were Jin Yuan people, and he didn't feel a bit sorry for them.

The accumulated hatred between Sussex and Jin Yuan over the years made relations between them difficult at all levels, and Bridges, a staunch Sussex nationalist, found it hard to be friendly toward the Jin Yuan people.

He wholeheartedly agreed with Governor Roland's arrangements, with the only regret being that the Governor himself was mixed in with the landing team, going ashore with Alina.

Hmph, the pampered flowers of Jin Yuan truly are useless!

Our Sussex Empress is indeed wise and valiant, capable of handling everything even in the Governor's absence.

In his mind, Bridges downgraded his assessment of Alina from 70 points to 50 points.

Chapter 340: The Unexpectedness of No Surprises

He held a certain disdain for the leader of the Golden Kite Wanderers.

Without Governor Roland's help and Her Majesty the Empress's leniency, her pretty head would have long been chopped off and sent to Xidai as a warning.

Bridges appeared relaxed, just about to put down the telescope when he suddenly noticed something seemed amiss.

Something's wrong, it's too quiet!

Although this beach was unsuitable for landing and not a port, being unguarded at night was understandable, but it shouldn't be devoid of birds and animals.

The vanguard of the Golden Kite Wanderers landed on the sand, creeping towards the edge of the jungle, yet no roosting birds were startled awake.

Something’s not right!

Bridges didn’t have time to communicate with Roland; he pulled out his signal gun and fired a yellow flare into the sky to alert Roland.

He didn’t need to remind him; Roland had already noticed something was wrong.

If something that is expected to go poorly suddenly goes very smoothly, it’s usually not a good thing, but rather a trap.

Roland also fired a signal flare, shooting three red flares in the direction of the jungle depths.

Bridges only felt something was wrong, but Roland directly determined there was an ambush in the jungle.

Bridges blew his whistle, issuing an emergency order.

The battleships closest to the shoreline quickly adjusted their turrets and began a volley.

The soldiers who had landed withdrew from the jungle and quickly formed ranks outside it.

The first row of soldiers quickly dropped to the ground, the second row crouched on one knee, and the third row leveled their gun barrels, aiming into the pitch-black jungle.

"Boom!"

The battleship that had been prepared for fire suppression began its volley.

A significant portion of their shells were incendiaries.

These specially made shells have a potent effect on forests and grasslands.

Setting a forest on fire is extremely harmful, but given the dire situation, Bridges couldn’t afford to worry about that much.

After all, this isn’t Sussex, so let it burn.

This jungle, though dense, is not connected to the Southern Great Forest, so it won’t have severe consequences.

At most, it would just clean out this stretch of jungle.

Seeing the forest ignite, Alina, who was directing the Wanderers to form up, had her expression change slightly, but she only sighed to herself without speaking.

Having received the orders and about to head to the front lines, Romeo became anxious. He hastily protested to Alina in a suppressed voice, "Alina, this is our forest!"

Alina didn’t reply, merely warning him with her eyes to stop talking.

Romeo understood Alina’s meaning, clenched his fist, lowered his head, gritted his teeth, and turned away.

Watching Romeo’s retreating figure, Alina also felt somewhat helpless.

Romeo was different from her. He was a standard Golden Kite supremacist and secretly looked down upon the Sussex people.

Receiving Roland’s help made him grateful but also full of pain.

Romeo, Reyno, and Elaine understood politics and could consider the bigger picture, able to restrain their feelings, but Romeo’s attitude represented the true thoughts of many.

They were grateful for Roland’s refuge and willing to express their gratitude through actions.

But they couldn’t accept foreigners meddling in Jin Yuan’s internal affairs.

She felt a headache coming; they had just landed and hadn’t even seen an enemy, yet it was already like this. She didn’t dare imagine what it would be like in the future.

Fortunately, she didn’t have time for idle thoughts. The screams, wolf howls, and roars from within the jungle proved Roland’s arrangement was entirely correct.

The cries from the jungle revealed their identities.

There were human soldiers, Centaur Nightwalkers, and Werewolves.

There was no time to ponder why the enemy knew of her return and the landing site. Alina bit her lip and gave combat orders to her followers.

Roland stood beside her, not saying a word the entire time, his expression exceptionally calm.

With a scepter in his right hand and the Governor’s Manual in his left, he looked less like a combatant and more like a young university lecturer.

After issuing a series of commands, Alina turned to look at Roland.

"Roland, I’m sorry, there might be a traitor in my group, I..."

"Don’t rush to blame yourself; it might not be a traitor."

Roland comforted her softly, "Such a large fleet sailing thousands of miles, with resupply in a neutral country along the way, our movements were hardly a secret."

"Moreover, the seas aren’t calm. The Grim Clan hasn’t made a move, but that doesn’t mean they’ve given up on targeting us. With General Nephropidae’s personality, he will surely retaliate. He doesn’t need to act himself; he only needs to leak our route to the Jin Yuan Kingdom."

Roland’s words made Alina’s expression improve slightly, but not much. She asked softly, "Did you know from the start that the landing wouldn’t be smooth?"

"I don’t know how to divine, how could I have known all this?" Roland shrugged, spreading his hands.

He didn’t outright deny it, so he wasn’t lying.

Indeed, he didn’t know how to divine, but he had conducted countless simulations with Christine.

In all simulated outcomes, Alina’s counterattack was akin to a moth flying into the flame, doomed to failure.

There was only one way Alina could win: if Marco completely lost the people’s support.

Once Marco offended everyone, these people would yearn for the moderate policies of Mr. Carlo, who was compatible with all factions.

If it were Carlo himself landing in the south, it would likely succeed.

Alina may be Carlo’s daughter and could rightfully inherit the family title, but her father’s prestige and connections wouldn’t transfer through bloodline alone.

Only if Marco acts with utter disregard could Alina have a chance.

Is there hope?

Probably.

Even if there is only one percent hope, one must invest one hundred percent effort.

Only the strong have the privilege to be cautious; the weak can only go all-in, all-in, all-in again.

This isn’t gambling, but the only strategy where the mathematical expectation is not zero.