Empress 351

Chapter 351: Keep Romance Out of Politics

Real or acting?

Marco, having obtained the intelligence, fell into contemplation.

His intuition told him this was a dual act.

But the intelligence from frontline agents from different angles all indicated this was real.

The sailors hanged for public display, Alina and Roland's fierce conflict, the retreat of the Fourth Fleet—all indisputable facts.

"It shouldn't be, how could Roland act impulsively over such a trivial matter?"

Marco fell into contemplation.

He always valued intelligence work, and was especially curious about the rising young talents emerging globally in recent years.

In his intelligence analysis, Roland received high evaluations.

Although unaware of specific details, Roland secretly manipulates the new Empress of Sussex, even peering into Sussex's true power structure.

Roland is a shrewd and calm politician, rarely driven by personal whims.

He always seeks to maximize benefits.

How could such a person disrupt the overall layout because of some wrongdoing sailors?

This is completely unreasonable.

Hours went by as Marco remained in silence until he suddenly understood.

He indeed fell into a blind spot. The problem does not lie with Roland, but with Alina.

He does not hold a high opinion of Alina.

This is a sheltered flower who grew up with a silver spoon, possessing impressive talent but unable to tolerate grievances.

He could even fathom the real reason behind Alina and Roland's fallout.

Although Alina may act impulsively, it's unlikely she would fall out with Roland over the deaths of a dozen police officers.

It's not that she is calm, but in the eyes of these damn nobility, the lives of a dozen law enforcement officers are worthless.

If a dozen officers are just numbers, how could she break with Roland over such a trivial matter?

Are these two planning to trick him with such a simple ruse?

Obviously not possible.

If the enemy isn't this foolish, then there must be a conspiracy!

Marco pondered for a long time and made a bold speculation.

The most likely conflict between Alina and Roland lies in when to head north.

For Roland, it would be best if Alina could return to Xidai and seize the Jin Yuan Kingdom’s great power, but achieving the highest goal is tremendously difficult.

A slightly inferior outcome is for Alina to fail in returning to Xidai, occupy a dozen southern provinces to establish another Jin Yuan Kingdom.

Marco’s eyes lit up.

No, this isn’t an inferior result, this is the optimal result.

Whether Alina succeeds in seizing power or is defeated, a new Jin Yuan Kingdom reborn from the ashes will emerge.

As a Sussex man, Roland naturally does not want to see such a powerful country emerge.

With Jin Yuan north and south opposing each other, Alina must rely on him; it is what Roland most desires and what Alina least wants.

Thus, they fall out.

That’s right. Politicians only part ways due to irreconcilable benefits, never impulsively over matters of pride.

Marco stood up and paced in the small study, muttering to himself, "A week, no later than a week, Alina will surely head north."

If his speculation is correct, Alina will head north once she has assembled her forces.

If Alina persistently refuses to leave the south, then it’s a setup to fish.

Marco’s lips slightly raised, revealing a sly smile.

These young people are really calculative, but unfortunately still too young, and got seen through by him.

...

Off the coast of Genova, on the upper deck of the Monarch.

Lisa squinted her eyes, intensely staring at the sea horizon, forcefully maintaining a calm exterior, but her trembling eyelashes betrayed her true inner state.

She was very angry.

Roland went to great lengths to help Alina reclaim power, to help her seek revenge, yet this ungrateful one executed the Fourth Fleet sailors over a minor matter.

They indeed committed crimes, but even for capital crimes, they should be handed over to Roland for disposition.

Alina is too unreasonable!

While Lisa was fuming and staring blankly at the sea horizon, footsteps were heard behind her.

There was no need to turn around; she knew it was Roland.

With peripheral vision, seeing Roland’s calm expression, Lisa bit her lip and asked, "You’re not angry?"

"Angry? You mean the falling out with Alina?"

"Yeah, she’s really too much."

Roland smiled and shook his head, reminding her, "Think again?"

Lisa stared at Roland’s eyes, observing for a long time yet seeing no anger.

She hesitated and fell into contemplation.

Seeing her earnest look, Roland felt a bit more anticipatory.

If Sylph can become a qualified politician from scratch, Sister Lisa might as well, right?

Though Lisa seems unnecessary to learn political skills, Roland vaguely feels it might be useful.

Even if useless, learning more isn’t a bad thing.

Eventually, she wouldn’t fail to understand what he and Sylph are talking about, always being an outsider.

Watching Roland filled with encouraging eyes, nearly giving up Lisa gritted her teeth to persist, continuing to think.

If Miss Sif can, why can’t she?

Lisa didn’t notice that she also grew a rare sense of competitiveness when facing Miss Sif.

After deep consideration, Lisa’s eyes lit up.

"I've got it!"

"You've got it?" Lisa gave Roland a big surprise, and he was also somewhat expectant of the answer.

As long as Lisa understands some, or even if she's wrong doesn't matter, as long as her thought process is correct.

Seeing Roland's anticipatory gaze, Lisa cleared her throat and confidently stated her conclusion first.

"I think you still want to help Alina."

Roland froze for several seconds; his hesitation made Lisa a bit uneasy.

As Lisa was about to take back her words, Roland let out a hearty laugh, encouraging:

"Keep talking!"

Eh, did she guess right?

The first battle won, Lisa was highly motivated and continued to expand her thinking.

Alina publicly expelled Roland, yet he still wants to help her?

"You value Alina highly and don't want her to fail?"

"Yes, absolutely right, keep going!" Roland's voice was hard to conceal his excitement.

Could she really be a political genius just buried before?

Roland’s excitement had a reason, the initial Sylph couldn’t possibly guess the answer.

Did she guess correctly again?

Lisa’s instant confidence skyrocketted, her thoughts rapidly expanding.

Roland is so willing to help Alina, surely there must be a reason.

Firstly, Alina has nothing.

Secondly, Alina is stunning.

Though not wanting to admit, Lisa knows Alina’s feminine charm exceeds her own.

Additionally, despite being hurt by Alina, Roland still thinks of helping her.

Lastly, and most importantly, Roland steadfastly refused to bring Sylph on this mission.

Previously, he liked to take his Sylph baby wherever he went, except this time being an exception.

All the clues come together, Lisa mumbled:

"Alina met you at her most difficult time, she has nothing, yet you still decided to help her."

Roland’s face filled with delight.

Lisa already had mature thinking logic, very commendable indeed.

Spit it out, the truth is right before her eyes.

Seeing Roland’s delighted expression, Lisa was even more confident she wasn’t mistaken.

Except this answer made her a bit fearful.

An unsupported girl suddenly meets a savior in despair, and the rescuer is coincidentally so handsome, she surely wants to give thanks.

But alas, Alina has nothing, the only way to return gratitude she could think of again and again was only one.

Beautiful and flawless, soft and warm flesh.

"I know it, Alina is your lover, you guys have a relationship beyond friendship, thus you help her without hesitation!"

"You’re right... What are you blabbering about!"

Roland looked at Lisa, three parts shy and seven parts worried; he was utterly dumbfounded.

What a load of nonsense.

He must retract his previous statement; Lisa is definitely not a political genius.

She should be a romance drama director.

Chapter 352: So You Understand Too?

Hansa City, Empress’s Palace.

Ados walked steadily towards the Empress’s office located on the top floor.

Taking a deep breath, he knocked on the door, his magnetic voice maintaining its elegance and composure.

"Your Majesty, Minister Ados has come at your summons."

"Come in." The voice from inside the room was casual.

Ados once again adjusted his appearance, ensuring there was no flaw before stepping forward.

The Empress could be casual, but he could not.

Since the Empress arrived in Hansa, she often appeared as a Count, rarely personally assuming the role of Empress, and even then, only in public settings.

This was the first time she had summoned him alone under the name of the Empress.

Ados couldn’t recall the last time he felt so anxious.

Damn it, he thought he would never be swayed by fame and fortune again, but he was wrong.

Managing to suppress the turmoil inside, Ados calmly saluted the Empress, cautiously observing Empress Sylph with his peripheral vision.

He had a clear feeling, this was the true Empress, not an impostor. Although they looked almost identical, he just knew, without any reason.

If forced to find a reason, it would be the aura and soul.

While the doppelgänger Empress was no less beautiful than the original, she lacked the graceful and dignified aura of an elf, and there was a palpable eagerness as if she longed to get off work every second.

How could Ados not see this worker’s mentality? He had been like this for the past few years.

The Empress’s appearance changed everything.

Perhaps he shouldn’t be exhilarated over the mere title of a Baron, but he would be happy about the Empress’s decision.

Seeing the somewhat nervous expression on Ados’s face, Sif smiled and gestured towards the guest’s seat with her right hand.

"Lord Ados, no need to be restrained. We have worked together for quite some time."

This statement was almost a confirmation that the Empress was indeed the Count.

Although Ados already knew, Sif knew that Ados knew, and Ados knew that Sif knew he knew, this clear indication was a form of favor and trust.

He hurriedly bowed to the Empress as a sign of respect, then returned to his own seat.

"Your Majesty, have you summoned me with any instructions?"

Even though being summoned alone by the Empress was a form of favor, Ados decided to enjoy it sparingly and straightforwardly asked.

"There are some matters I wish to obtain answers to from you. The documents in front of you are the latest intelligence; please read them carefully first."

Ados had already noticed the organized intelligence on the desk. With the Empress’s permission, he quickly picked them up for a thorough read.

He had already seen the brief version of this intelligence, which was a report compiled by Raikkonen on the recent movements in the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

Seeing the tensions between Alina and Roland, the retreat of the Fourth Fleet, and Alina's advancement towards West City, he couldn't help but let a slight smile tug at the corners of his lips.

"Lord Ados, what are your thoughts?"

"Your Majesty, I'm not very familiar with Miss Alina, but from my understanding of the Lord Governor, there's no way he would act so recklessly, so it's most likely a staged act."

It wasn't surprising that Ados could see through this.

Sylph didn't believe that this steady and capable minister's political acumen was any lesser than her own; if she could understand, so could Ados.

Her biggest concern was... would Marco see through it?

Perhaps it was to prevent leaks due to the distance, or more likely, to give her a final exam, Roland had not written her a personal letter nor sent envoys to report the situation after setting sail.

Sylph had to decide on her own how to coordinate with Roland.

Should she launch a feigned attack as a diversion, or directly send troops into the Jin Yuan Kingdom, she had to make the decision personally.

Thinking that this was a crucial decision affecting her and Roland's fate, Sylph did not act impulsively; instead, she chose to listen to the opinions of professionals.

"Lord Ados, the part of your resume before the age of twenty-five..."

"It’s fabricated," Ados admitted frankly.

These matters weren’t difficult to verify. Since the Empress brought it up, she was offering him a chance to confess.

This was the Empress’s test for him, but wasn’t it also his test for the Empress?

"I was once Count Lafei of the Jin Yuan Kingdom, and it was due to family changes that I came to the Three Overseas Provinces, becoming the Governor of Hansa was a string of unexpected events."

No wonder Ados was so experienced; he could envelop deceit with such an elegant term as fabrication.

Sylph nodded with satisfaction.

She hinted at her true identity, hoping to exchange sincerity for sincerity.

If Ados admitted, he deserved trust. If he still hid anything at this point, regardless of his reasons, he could not be heavily relied upon.

"Lord Ados, do not dwell on it. Everyone has a past they’re reluctant to share, and I have no intention of prying into yours. Since you were once nobility of the Jin Yuan Kingdom, you must have deep insights into it. I need your advice on some matters."

Ados breathed a sigh of relief.

He easily passed the Empress’s test of loyalty, and the Empress also easily passed his test of character.

The choice was mutual.

If Empress Sylph couldn’t tolerate this small secret, then there was no need for him to devote his wisdom and he could continue pretending to be busy like the Empress’s doppelgänger.

After a simple mutual probing, the atmosphere became much more harmonious, yet Ados remained very humble before the Empress.

"Your Majesty, the situation in the Jin Yuan Kingdom is complex; no one dares claim they understand it fully."

He pondered for a moment, then briefly introduced the complexities of the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

It took him nearly an hour just to provide a simple overview of the political landscape of the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

Sif listened with a smile, clearly intrigued by the narrative.

Ados, second only to Roland in storytelling, explained the tangled political landscape of the Jin Yuan with remarkable clarity.

After Alina departed, the almost fully built intelligence network was handed over to Raikkonen, and with Alina's tacit consent, some intelligence officers defected from Jin Yuan, obtained Sussex citizenship, and became the backbone of the new intelligence system.

Most of these people had lost their families under Marco's tyranny and were filled with hatred for the Jin Yuan Kingdom. Their loyalty was unquestionable, but they were merely gatherers and analysts of intelligence, unable to delve into the deep-seated implications behind the data.

Ados could, as he understood the Jin Yuan too well.

When Sif asked whether Marco would see through their plan, he decisively gave his answer.

"It doesn't matter if Marco sees through it or not; what difference does it make? When all his subordinates think Alina is marching to her death, he won't be able to suppress their thirst for battle."

"In politics, what you think doesn't matter; what's important is what you can do, what you've done."

Perhaps feeling his words were too preachy, Ados quickly amended, "Although Marco is far from as wise as Your Majesty, he is still a Supreme Leader after all, and naturally, he knows."

Seeing Ados's cautious demeanor, Sif interrupted him with a laugh.

"Lord Ados, spare me the flattery; I don't enjoy hearing it."

Sif had a clear sense of her own wisdom.

She certainly had moments of insight but not always consistently.

"I need calm sages to advise me, not minstrels to sing praises; this task is still better suited for Mr. Adam."

Ados merely smiled slightly, without saying more.

The Empress forbade him from flattering, so, of course, he would comply. Yet, genuine praise is never mere flattery.

Skipping over the topic, Ados continued analyzing for Sif.

"After the monarchy was overthrown in the Jin Yuan Kingdom, numerous factions formed internally. Of these, the strongest is the Yayue Faction, which represents capitalists and houses Marco. There is also the Thermidorian Faction, representing urban commoners, and the Flower Moon Faction, representing the interests of the old nobility and military."

"Among these, the Flower Moon Faction was initially the strongest, but after Carlo's death, it lost its leader. The Thermidorian Faction is the loudest, controlling public opinion but lacks true power. The Yayue Faction, after Marco's internal purges, superficially weakened yet actually increased its cohesion."

"Can killing so many people really increase cohesion?"

Sif was stunned, blurting out her question but quickly realized the answer.

"I understand now; by killing all opponents, only supporters are left."

"But I still hold a differing opinion. If you can’t tolerate intense opposition voices, even mild dissent will become particularly grating. The Yayue Faction is not a monolithic block."

This time, it was Ados who was surprised.

What the Empress said was something he had thought about. He had intended to lead Sif around the topic but never expected her to figure it out by herself.

"Your Majesty is wise. Within the Yayue Faction, there are also undercurrents. The guillotine can only sever heads but cannot eliminate divisions. Regardless of whether Marco sees through the plan, he must confront it; he cannot remain holed up in West City."

"If he is trapped in the capital, his legitimacy as president vanishes. A single spark could ignite West City, this gigantic powder keg."

"A gigantic powder keg?"

Sif murmured the phrase several times, smiling teasingly, "What an apt metaphor. In that case, our moment to deploy troops is when Alina and Marco engage in their impending field battle."

Ados refrained from further flattery and instead gazed at Empress Sylph with admiration.

Actions are more effective than words; although the Empress said she didn’t want flattery, she felt a surge of joy from the sage’s approval.

If Roland were here, what would he say?

He would definitely tell her to find her own way.

Sif’s dimples were filled with smiles, as if Roland were standing right there next to Ados, silently observing her, waiting for her to hand in her solution.

With the timing for deployment decided, the next concerns were the scale and pretext for the troop movement.

The number of troops couldn’t be too large, as a larger force would be too conspicuous, but it couldn’t be too small to be ineffective.

The pretext for deployment could never be the Sussex Empire’s aid army.

According to Ados’s account, the Jin Yuan people are proud; unless forced, they would never accept the charity of the Sussex people.

That’s also why Roland was always avoiding suspicion.

After internally disdainfully condemning the Jin Yuan people for their prideful swagger in their destitution, Sif made a decision.

"Lord Ados, when they go to battle, I will lead the troops myself; you will be in charge here."

"Your Majesty, actually..."

Ados wanted to say he understood military affairs and could substitute, but he vaguely realized the true reason Sif intended to personally lead the army, so he fell silent immediately.

There were rumors that Miss Alina was also Roland’s secret lover.

An utterly absurd rumor, but not entirely impossible.

Although Alina held a noble title, she currently possessed nothing, with what leverage could she entice Governor Roland?

Even if only as an appendage to a political deal, Governor Roland likely wouldn't overlook her beautiful, delicate, and pure body, would he?

He was a man, and so was Governor Roland.

He understood all too well.

Chapter 353: Fate's Manipulation Is Unstoppable

"Achoo!"

While enjoying the sea voyage and waiting for Lisa to prepare coffee, Roland suddenly sneezed.

Lisa, who was helping him stir his coffee, put down the small spoon and looked at Roland with concern.

"Roland, are you okay? You haven't caught a cold, have you? This won't do, the medicine on the sea is scarce. Once you catch a cold, it's dangerous. I'll go make you some ginger tea with brown sugar right away."

Lisa hurriedly stood up, ready to head to the kitchen.

"No need to rush, I'm fine. Maybe too many enemies are cursing me behind my back."

Roland smiled as he casually grabbed Lisa's sleeve, indicating for her to sit down.

Lisa lowered her head slightly, watching Roland hold onto her not very politely, but still maintaining a boundary by only holding her sleeve and not taking the opportunity to touch her hand. Her expression was a bit distracted.

Her memory drifted back to the past.

It was probably two or three years ago when Roland's body grew stronger, and he surpassed her height, she could no longer look him in the eye on the same level.

It was from that time that Roland started to develop a vague throbbing feeling for girls.

Unfortunately, his family was poor, and he didn't even have his own house. Most girls his age weren't willing to let him hold their delicate hands.

Maybe he was too hungry; Roland always created opportunities to touch her when they were together.

As his sister, she might have had her heart race from the unexpected touches, but she always tacitly consented.

She always didn't want Roland to feel wronged.

Fortunately, Roland was very restrained, never pushing the boundaries, just satisfied with the gentle scent and occasional unintentional collisions.

Noticing her brother growing up, Lisa played the caring elder sister role, helping him find a partner to satisfy all his needs.

She could sense Roland's anxiety; she was anxious for him too.

However, Roland seemed both urgent and not urgent, and the candidates she found either refused to meet or things remained inconclusive after meeting.

Until Sif appeared.

Unbeknownst to her, Roland had increasingly less physical contact with her.

If it were before, he might have lightly caressed her delicate wrist and felt her hand in his at the opportunity of grabbing her.

But now, there was a layer of not-too-thick cloth between them.

Though not too thick, it made Lisa feel the distance. Her heart felt a little bitter; even when Sif was not there, it was like this, how distant would it be if she were present?

In a flash, Lisa imagined a melodramatic romance novel, her increasingly sensitive heart trembling slightly.

"Sister, have a seat." Roland, unaware that she was imagining a novel, smiled and gestured for her to sit down.

Lisa looked at Roland’s clear eyes, momentarily at a loss for words.

After a while, she inexplicably dropped a sentence, "No, even if there’s only a slight possibility, I can’t be careless. I’m going to make ginger tea now!"

Pulling away from Roland’s hand, Lisa quietly exited the room.

Before leaving, she muttered gently: "Calling me sister makes me seem old, from now on just call me Lisa."

Watching Lisa’s graceful departing figure, Roland was deep in thought.

He hadn’t thought much about it just then, just happened to grab the sleeve.

He and Sister Lisa were close, there wasn’t so much taboo.

If he happened to catch her wrist, he wouldn’t mind enjoying the brief, smooth sensation of her skin. If it was the cloth, then so be it.

As he almost skipped over this small episode, a sudden flash of insight struck him.

No, there was something wrong with what Sister Lisa said earlier.

He remembered clearly, just over a year ago, Lisa repeatedly emphasized that Roland should call her sister, saying not calling her that was disrespectful and too distant.

In just over a year, Sister Lisa was only in her early twenties, and she already disliked being called sister because it sounded old?

Of course not, she certainly had something in mind.

Although his accuracy in guessing girls’ thoughts was low, Roland still put his mind to it.

Sister Lisa wasn’t like other girls; she was the neighboring sister who grew up with him, he understood her.

Recalling Lisa’s recent bold guess that "Alina is his lover," Roland suddenly understood.

This time, he truly got it.

Lisa was hinting for him to stay restrained, not to make Sif jealous and damage the situation.

Helping Alina return home to seize power would surely make Sif’s heart uneasy. If they got too close, Sif might really get angry.

Although this wasn’t a romantic drama where misunderstandings could always be resolved, it’s always better not to have misunderstandings.

Thank you, Sister Lisa.

Sister Lisa cares about him the most; in the past, she helped introduce girlfriends to him, now she’s drawing him closer to Sif.

Though she may have her own personal interests, it’s primarily out of concern for him.

He wouldn’t let this deep feeling go unappreciated.

"I want it all" isn’t a madman’s raving, but his solemn promise.

But he also knew, now that he was alone outside, surrounded by beautiful girls his age, Sif would surely worry about him, he had to make Sif feel at ease.

After pondering, he found the correct answer.

Took paper and pen, and quickly wrote a passionate letter, almost like a love letter.

Not a single sentence depicted love, yet longing was fully soaked in between the lines.

I truly live up to being the literary giant of Sussex.

Roland was quite satisfied with this letter.

After finishing the letter, he rang the bell to summon Lieutenant Dodger, instructing him to urgently send the letter to Sif using the few remaining carrier pigeons on the ship.

"Remember, use at least three pigeons flying in different directions to ensure this letter gets delivered back."

Dodger saluted decisively to take the order but couldn't help reminding Roland, "Lord Governor, carrier pigeons can only fly based on memory, they may be caught when flying back across the Jin Yuan Kingdom's land."

Chapter 354: Fate's Manipulation Is Unstoppable (Part 2)

"I know, so to ensure safe delivery, I asked you to use three carrier pigeons."

Roland's response was calm.

Dodger was a bit speechless, that wasn't what he meant to remind about. Although leaders may not like their subordinates to be overly talkative, it was his duty to remind his leader, and he had to be clear.

"Lord Governor, what I mean is... aren't you worried about leaks?"

"Don't worry, even if it falls into Marco's hands, he won't understand it." Roland faced Dodger's doubts with confidence.

Since the Governor had said this, continuing to persuade would mean questioning him.

Dodger quickly took the three letters Roland had written and sealed with wax, and swiftly departed.

Just as he stepped out of the cabin and was about to look for the carrier pigeons, he suddenly stopped and, after thinking further, headed towards Bridges' command cabin.

Cradling Roland's handwritten letter, Dodger reported to Bridges and asked for directives on whether to follow it completely.

Bridges unhesitantly glared at the adjutant and seriously warned, "Dodger, I hope you remember one thing, Governor Roland is our direct superior, his orders must be carried out without fail."

"In the future, if this kind of thing happens, just execute the order directly. If it's convenient, let me know afterward; if not, then don't mention it."

"Lord Governor is wise and decisive, how could he not have thought things through? It's okay to remind him to be cautious, but don't be too smart for your own good!"

Dodger seldom sees Bridges with such a serious expression, frightened, he shivered.

He knew what Bridges meant by "too smart for your own good."

Of course, it wasn't about reminding the Governor to maintain confidentiality. As an adjutant, that's his duty, and he did nothing wrong.

"Too smart for your own good" refers to not immediately executing the Governor's orders and instead running to ask Bridges.

Dodger, sweating profusely, quickly departed.

Watching him leave, Bridges merely shook his head.

If it were another leader, Dodger wouldn't be mistaken. Reporting more would mean less responsibility, it protects oneself.

But Roland is no ordinary leader.

He possesses insight and understanding of human nature and societal circumstances.

Under Governor Roland, don't think about all sorts of things, just work diligently.

Gazing at the azure where sea and sky meet, Bridges suddenly became curious about what the Lord Governor wrote in the letter.

From what he knows about Roland, he certainly wouldn't travel such distances just to send a letter without mentioning anything important.

He would mostly send action signals to Her Majesty the Empress, and it would be in a pre-agreed cipher.

The cipher must be clever enough to mislead if the letter fell into Marco's hands.

Even a carrier pigeon being shot down might be within Governor Roland's calculations.

Indeed, he is worthy of being the Governor, so calculative!

Bridges silently thought.

...

"Achoo!"

Roland sneezed again, while reading in the top cabin.

Lisa, who had just brought in ginger tea with brown sugar, saw this and glared fiercely at Roland.

"You keep saying you're not sick, but how come you're sneezing repeatedly? Transcendents aren't immune to diseases, history has terrible lessons about this. Listen, drink the ginger tea first; later I'll get a doctor to prescribe medicine for you."

"Got it, Lisa." Facing Sister Lisa's concern, Roland gracefully accepted.

"What’s Lisa? Being the Governor now even means not recognizing your sister? Call me Sister Lisa from now on!"

Lisa placed the ginger tea on the table, cheeks slightly flushed.

Roland stared at her blankly, his large eyes full of doubt.

He didn’t speak, but his eyes emitted questioning.

Just half an hour ago, Lisa had seriously asked him not to call her sister, but instead, call her Lisa. He obediently complied, so why did Lisa change her mind?

He knew women’s thoughts were hard to guess, but was it this difficult?

Seeing Roland’s puzzled expression, Lisa bit her lip and started to play coy.

"Us girls are just this changeable, is that okay?"

Sure, it’s okay.

Arguing with a girl who needs tenderness is foolish.

Roland isn’t a fool; he picked up the bowl and started gulping down ginger tea, using the action to skip what would be a skippable dialogue if they were in a game.

Seeing Roland behave so obediently, Lisa’s lips slightly curved upwards, and she let out a slight sigh.

Earlier in the kitchen, she suddenly understood.

She was really silly, truly.

With Roland's uncontrollable talents and ever-expanding power and status, he will certainly have more than one companion in the future.

Even if his wife is the Empress, it won't change.

Miss Sif was born into the Imperial Family and can probably accept it.

Roland may have more than one wife or lover, but there's only one sister who surpasses family bonds.

The originally unique Sister Lisa wanted to transform into the rivaling lover, Lisa, who can never compete with Sif and Alina. Truly foolish.

What does she want? Of course, it's to be by Roland's side forever.

Besides, she hopes to have an irreplaceable position in Roland's heart.

A sister who has changed familial bonds but lacks blood ties is certainly more precious than a regular lover.

She understood, Roland was puzzled.

But none of this matters; what matters is that she wants to be his lifetime sister, always caring for him.

Putting down the ginger tea bowl, Roland was hesitating for words, while Lisa across him leaned forward.

Their distance became closer and closer.

Roland's heart suddenly started beating faster.

He's not worried that Lisa might do something strange, just perplexed by her today's erratic and leap-like thoughts.

Faced with the increasingly close Lisa, he finally understood.

He and Sister Lisa won't be separated in this lifetime. Given that, does it even matter how to address each other?

As long as Lisa likes it, any title will do.

Her slender fingertips touched Roland's face, and her fingers stopped near his lips, picking a strand of grass residue, just as she would help Roland pick grains of rice stuck by his mouth in the past years.

Time seems to remain unchanged.

It's been long since she had such proximity with Roland.

Seeing the clarity flowing in his deep eyes, Lisa smiled with relief.

No matter how distinguished Roland's identity is outside, he remains himself when he returns home.

Lisa instinctively reached out her other hand but forgot she was resting it on the table, also forgetting how close she was to Roland.

As her left hand lifted, her upper body lost balance and she stumbled forward.

Facts prove that even clever and sensitive girls become particularly dull in shock, forgetting their own abilities, transcendents included.

Lisa didn’t stop herself with a scream, her mind also went blank.

She naturally fell towards Roland, falling into his arms.

Holding Sister Lisa, feeling her shy, trembling eyes, and sensing the lips barely 5 centimeters apart, Roland instantly realized.

He may not understand girls, but he can read the atmosphere.

Sister Lisa is a transcendent; there’s no way she would be so clumsy as to accidentally fall into his arms. It’s what Lisa desires.

If a girl pretends to trip and fall into someone’s arms but gets pushed away, she’d likely feel very embarrassed.

Even if there’s not hatred born of love, at least there’d be some dejection.

Considering Lisa’s repeated entanglement over the address, Roland certainly knew what she wanted.

Both a sister and a lover.

Lisa can’t win the title of wife, but she’s unwilling to lag behind, so she did this.

Roland pulled Lisa’s shoulders closer; their distance diminished until their lips met, eradicating any remaining separation.

Warm tears rolled down Lisa’s cheeks.

Today’s developments are inconsistent with her expectations, but the final destination aligns perfectly.

Is this the design of destiny?

Lisa closed her eyes, immersed in the twists of fate, unable to extricate herself.

Chapter 355: Night, the Made-up Girl

"The Saintess Fuchou will return from the Netherworld, stepping through the flames, to lead the Jin Yuan People in their ultimate struggle for freedom."

Adam spread his arms wide, adding the transcendent ending often favored in perfect performances.

People love this kind of ending.

Applause continued to ring out, flowers and coins were tossed toward the stage, expressing admiration for the minstrel.

Watching the flames flicker in their eyes, Adam breathed a sigh of relief, quietly packing up his performance props ready for the next town.

Since joining Roland, he indeed gained respect, but for the past year Roland's main focus had been building territories and waging war.

Unfortunately, he's not very good at either.

Governor Roland measures success by both ability and achievement.

Adam did make some contributions over the past year, but not much.

He was listed at the bottom among the main ministers on the performance evaluation chart.

Of course, he was not content, so he volunteered to participate in the campaign against the Oden Kingdom, but his performance was average.

He understood cavalry, but not as well as Jes.

He had some knowledge of artillery, but was not as good as Dailong.

He understood the sea... er, he was a landlubber.

His greatest advantage was being a Transcendent, with considerable personal combat strength, but he had only just started on this path.

He achieved merits, but not many.

Watching his colleagues receive Imperial Knight titles and even Baron titles, Adam felt envy and discontent.

He lamented not having a stage to showcase his talents.

But now he did.

This time, Roland himself chose him for a special mission, asking him to follow into battle.

Thus, Adam, the landlubber, boarded the Monarch with Roland.

The sea journey nearly made him vomit his spleen and stomach, but fortunately, his physical condition was excellent, so he barely held on.

After landing at Ives Port and barely resting a few days, he received a special task.

All the way north, paving the way for the Saintess Fuchou's return through a spectacular performance.

In this era, without the internet, most people were illiterate, and newspapers could only convey information to the upper echelon.

The lower class had better access to information via minstrels.

They traveled through countless countries, were well-informed, and could bring fresh stories along with brilliant performances, which were highly popular.

Though Adam joined the military, he had not been hindered in the old profession of minstrel; he was even more skilled.

After all, he wasn't busy usually, with plenty of time to hone his performance skills.

This time, the script he performed, "The Return of the Saintess Fuchou," was penned by Roland himself. The language was very vivid and accessible, even a farmer who couldn't read could understand.

Though Adam felt this form of art undermined dignity, he also admitted it was the best propaganda.

In each location, he first commemorated Mr. Carlo's prosperity, then remembered the Empire's glory, finally prompting people through his performance to recognize their current dire straits.

People's memories always come with a beautifying filter.

During Mr. Carlo's covert reign, although the Jin Yuan Kingdom's national strength was on an upward trend, the common people's living standards weren't much different from the Empire's era.

The lights of West City never reached the countryside of Jin Yuan Kingdom.

Bad living is tolerable, as long as there's no comparison.

Whether it was the Last Emperor or during the Carlo Era, the nobility and officials, although exploiting harshly, the land of Jin Yuan Kingdom was fertile and life for the common people was passable.

There was still plenty to brew wine at year's end, accompanied by pickled cucumbers and steaks, they could always enjoy moments of bliss.

However, since Marco came to power, everything changed.

Even though Marco thought he was acting for everyone's good, the gap between reality and ideal was enormous.

He demanded the feudal lords to reduce taxes, and although they agreed on the surface, they continued charging under the pretext of defending against bandit threats.

There were indeed many bandits in recent years in Jin Yuan Kingdom, but they were forced by the lords and officials.

Because there was a need to eradicate bandits, they had to collect money; because they collected money, more bandits emerged.

A perfect closed loop.

In such suffocating circumstances, Adam carried the story of the Saintess Fuchou through the countryside.

Through his passionate performance, audiences resonated, rapidly spreading the news that the Saintess Fuchou was currently waging war against the Demon King occupying the capital.

Who was the Demon King?

The minstrel didn't say, he didn't mention any real place names, but the audience knew the answer.

There was only one Demon King, the brutal embodiment dwelling in West City who fancied beheading.

The era's elites mostly resided in cities, with Jin Yuan Kingdom's top-tier concentrated in West City.

The upper society viewed the lower-tier peasants similarly, as long as taxes were paid, these rascals wouldn't rebel.

Marco didn't even know that stories were spreading in the countryside.

Allen's death severely damaged the intelligence system.

Many single-line linked spies could only be activated by Allen, these agents had no lists, all inscribed in Allen's formidable memory.

Allen died too suddenly, leaving no time for final words.

These intelligence agents would forever hide their identities within various social ranks.

Allen's death caused Marco to become mentally sensitive, considering that there might be moles in the intelligence system, Marco quickly initiated a purge without hesitation.

The intelligence system was contaminated and needed cleansing.

Marco's thoughts weren't necessarily wrong, but untimely.

When the intelligence system needed to operate efficiently, he raised the butcher's knife against his own, sending countless competent agents to the guillotine to clear very few moles.

Thus, his intelligence channels ended up nearly destroyed.

Within West City, he had another intelligence system to grasp the situation; outside West City, his intelligence was less accurate than the Mercenary Guild.

Adam cautiously moved around different locales: delivering the story and stirring hearts before fleeing, never realizing that Marco wasn't aware of his actions.

As the sun began to set, he planned to leave the "Once had Seven Old Ginkgo Trees" town, journeying overnight to the next town, but several children stopped him.

"Uncle Adam, is the story you told made up?"

"Of course not."

Faced with the children's clear eyes, Adam found it hard to lie, so he quickly patched up his statement.

"Of course, art must evolve, beautify, and refine. Just like a beautiful girl attending a banquet needs to do exquisite makeup."

A little boy nodded frequently, "I understand, Miss Lilith puts on makeup every night and goes on dates with different people. She's much prettier than my mom, yet she still wears makeup."

"Oh?" Adam's eyes lit up, putting on makeup every night and going on dates with different people? A girl with a proper profession wouldn't do this.

Obviously, the profession Miss Lilith engaged in wasn't quite proper.

He heard she was also very beautiful? Adam's lips curved slightly upwards.

It seemed there was no need to rush the journey tonight.

This time joining the expedition, he even maintained his image by not going ashore with the sailors at Ives Port to seek fun, which had frustrated him for some time.

He was seasick to the point of nausea and couldn't get up on the ship.

It was time to find some amusement.

After telling the kids two more fairy tales, Adam finally indirectly asked about Miss Lilith's residence and left satisfied.

Dusk was just falling.

The night's tranquility in the small town was enough to frighten ghosts.

Those who could afford candles typically wouldn't reside in such a small place, so every evening, the town became exceptionally quiet.

Miss Lilith was one of the rare people who could afford to light candles.

What she did wasn't a proper profession, so she needed lights at night.

Looking at the pitch-black night sky outside the door, she stared blankly for a while, yawned, and it seemed like it would be another boring, empty night.

It seemed no one would come tonight. Lilith reached out towards the half-opened door, preparing to close it and rest.

She vaguely heard news from West City, which made her wait every night in fear for someone who would never arrive.

She wasn't even sure if she was hoping someone would come or never come.

In a daze, her hand didn’t press the door handle but instead landed on a broad hand.

"Oh dear."

A somewhat absent-minded Lilith gasped softly, took a half-step back, and instinctively wanted to reach towards her waist but suddenly stopped.

An unfamiliar face appeared at the door.

Handsome, with a bit of unruliness, like sunshine pouring into the room.

Lilith’s heart inexplicably thumped hard.

She lowered her head slightly, asking softly, "Sir, it’s late. If you need something, please come tomorrow."

Adam looked at Lilith in astonishment, somewhat puzzled.

Isn’t she in that kind of business? Why is she pretending here?

Lilith’s makeup was strange, indeed looking beautiful, yet it always seemed to hide something.

Adam hesitated for a second, pulled out three Gold Livres from his pockets, and straightforwardly said:

"Is it enough to be your temporary husband tonight?"

Lilith’s expression froze.

She finally understood what Adam wanted.

What on earth does he take her for?!

She fiercely reached towards her waist, where a soft dagger was hidden in her belt, ready to pierce the heart of a lecherous man easily.

The handle of the dagger was linked with the belt buckle.

To pull out the dagger, she had to undo the belt buckle.

With a "click," the dagger handle was gripped in Lilith’s hand, but she suddenly stopped.

"Beautiful girl, are you afraid of the night?"

"You...what do you mean?" Lilith bit her lip, her hand trembling slightly.

"I’m afraid of the night, so I need the company of a gentle girl."

Adam spread his hands and said openly, "But I’m definitely not a john, just the temporary husband of those lost girls, even if only for one night."

"You...will really treat me like a wife?"

After saying this, Lilith wished she could stab herself.

Her face flushed red, but fortunately, her makeup was thick and the candle was dim; he certainly couldn’t see clearly.

Just over a fortnight ago, her superior didn’t send the customary signal.

For an intelligence agent, losing contact is the greatest fear, whether it’s the superior or the subordinate.

Unable to sleep every night, her dark circles were severe, requiring heavy makeup to conceal them.

Surely someone thought her heavily made-up appearance was for doing that kind of business, attracting this handsome yet lecherous man in front of her.

If it were usual, she’d definitely take advantage of Adam’s moment of distraction to stab him.

But tonight, she was moved by Adam’s words.

She indeed was afraid, afraid of the night.

Adam’s voice was too appealing for her to resist.

She desperately needed the warmth of an embrace, even if only for a moment, even if the other was extravagant.

"Of course."

Adam was just talking nonsense; how could he possibly treat a prostitute like a wife?

But the fear and helplessness in Lilith’s eyes made him soft-hearted and inclined not to refuse.

Anyway, tomorrow they would go their separate ways; what harm in making her a bit happier?

"May I know the name of my temporary husband?"

Adam initially planned to use an alias but couldn’t bear to wound Lilith’s clear gaze.

Though it was odd associating a clear gaze with a prostitute, that’s what he thought.

"Tomorrow, before the journey, I’ll tell you."

Lilith released the handle she was gripping, locked the dagger, and unbuckled her belt.

Like a wounded little animal, she threw herself into Adam’s embrace.

Chapter 356: x Advance Toward Yve Port!

"March to Ives Port!"

Marco finally made up his mind.

After the guillotine blade dulled and was repaired again, the order in West City had been restored, and he regained control of this ancient city.

This city’s history even predates the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

During the Magic Empire era, this was an important city in the Clover Border Region.

Before being occupied by the Magic Empire, it was home to brave natives.

This is a glorious city.

And it must be a free city.

Standing at the end of Triumph Avenue, Marco looked back, seeing the Triumph Arch engraved with the marks of time quietly standing there, as if bidding him farewell.

I will return, with the enemy's heads! He thought fiercely, raising his whip.

When everyone thought he wouldn't dare use war tactics to quell the rebellion, he silently eradicated almost all dissenters and regrouped his army, which included 170,000 seasoned veterans and 230,000 spirited new recruits, making a total force of 400,000.

Alina's main force had less than 40,000.

Against 40,000 with 400,000, he couldn't fathom how he could lose.

The only regret was that the old nobility were too cunning, leaving West City immediately when they sensed danger and hiding in their own territories.

Marco had no time to deal with them now, but he would not accept them closing their doors to act high and mighty.

After chopping off the head of the rebel Alina, he would then take care of these remnants of the old era one by one.

Marco was full of ambition, pointing his sword two thousand kilometers south towards Ives Port.

The 400,000 troops were divided into four routes, joining forces with the local nobles along the way.

Obedient nobles could live a bit longer; the disobedient would be flattened immediately!

Think you can stand by and watch? Dream on!

Once the four armies converge at Ives Port, it would be Alina's death day. Carlo's old supporters would be buried with her!

Everyone thought he was only good at political struggle, but he wanted to teach the world a lesson in textbook Marco-style pincer attacks.

"March to West City!"

Almost simultaneously, Alina raised the flag emblazoned with "Freedom" and issued a call to arms.

She had no lack of followers.

Despite the significant differences between the werewolves and the were-beasts, they finally reached a consensus on supporting Mr. Carlo’s descendants.

There were also the Sea Demons who came ashore.

After Mr. Carlo passed away, their situation worsened, and nobody ever treated them as equals.

With Miss Alina’s return, of course, they had to follow.

Additionally, there were the Centaurs.

Both the Black striped Centaurs and Brown striped Centaurs were in complete agreement on advancing towards West City.

Aside from these mysterious races, many disenfranchised individuals and opportunists joined Alina’s ranks.

Alina’s rebel force was so diverse that even the third brother tearfully saw it.

Though there were many suitable recruits, following Roland’s criteria, she selected only 40,000 as her main force.

Over a thousand Centaur scouts, 3,000 werewolves for the night battle brigade, and under 300 Sea Demon special forces.

This comprised all of Alina's mysterious race warriors.

Nobody understood why she did this, but she remembered Roland's words: mysterious races are just mysterious races, not one with us. Maybe in the distant future, humanity could be civilized enough to live in harmony across species and groups, but that wasn't now.

Alina wholeheartedly agreed.

Her father moved too fast with integration, causing a split.

If only Roland had been her father's assistant instead of the ambitious Robert, things would have been different.

Alina sighed inwardly, directing her battle flag northward.

No matter how Marco divided his troops, she had only this one route.

Dividing forces has its advantages and disadvantages.

If the enemy was too scattered, she might seize the opportunity to defeat each separately.

Seeing the surrounding warriors brimming with confidence, Alina herself wasn't so sure.

If it weren't for Roland being such a quality ally, she'd want to retreat.

Others didn't know Marco was skilled in military strategy, but she did.

Although war gaming is just theoretical, Marco achieved high success rates against her father’s disciples and even her father himself.

Even if it was theoretical, he was the best at it.

Moreover, he excelled in organizing and training troops.

If he could organize an army of hundreds of thousands, he could command in battle.

Alina had no assurance and was somewhat anxious, but she knew she had no retreat.

"Land in the Jia Lai Region!"

Not long after Marco left West City, Roland, who had been drifting at sea for over half a month, also issued an attack order.

Jia Lai was Marco’s backyard.

It was Marco’s hometown, where he assembled his main team.

Capturing Jia Lai would be as damaging to Marco as capturing West City.

Landing wasn’t easy, but fortunately, he had organized once outside Ives Port and had the experience.

Upon receiving the order, Bridges, who had bottled up his eagerness for days, flushed with excitement.

He personally climbed the mast, signaling the fleet with flags to convey the orders.

Once the orders were transmitted, he waved the signal flags again, rallying all the ships.

"Sussex needs everyone to fight to the end!"

This phrase ignited the Fourth Fleet’s fighting spirit.

Nearly a hundred warships set sail, heading straight for Marco’s homeland.

"Advance towards the Jin Yuan Kingdom!"

While "inspecting work" at the border of Selin Province and Jin Yuan, Count Sif raised his Long Spear towards the neighboring country, both ally and foe.

Governor of Bordeaux was so excited he almost fell off his horse.

War is good; how else could he rise in rank and wealth without war?

"Lord Count, what excuse for war should we use?"

He shouted loudly, seemingly consulting but actually reminding Sif that this was a formal war between two major powers and required a valid reason.

It needed to be justified.

Glancing at Bordeaux, Sif calmly said:

"Alina once tried to assassinate me; I want revenge, that’s the reason."

Bordeaux was dumbfounded.

Huh? Wasn't this a declaration of war against the Jin Yuan Kingdom?

Wait, wasn't Miss Alina an ally? You can declare war for this?

Seeing Bordeaux dumbstruck, another accompanying high official, Aramis, was much smarter.

He instantly understood Sif's intention.

Although the Empress had ascended the throne, she hadn't officially crowned; declaring war between nations would overstep her authority.

The Cabinet could even use this to impeach her.

But Sif used an indisputable excuse to turn this war into a feudal lord's personal vendetta.

Did Alina try to assassinate her?

Yes.

Could she exact revenge?

Yes, this was a sacred right granted by the Goddess of Fengrao, transcending country and law.

What if someone blocked her path to revenge?

Of course, they would be eliminated.

No issue at all.

As vassals of the Count, Ados, Bordeaux, and Aramis naturally had the responsibility to lead troops and join their lord's army.

Even the world's most critical critics couldn't find fault.

Worthy of Her Majesty the Empress, to come up with such a peculiar yet sensible plan.

Chapter 357: The Female Agent's New Identity

On March 1, 1793, the Jin Yuan Republic mobilized an army of 400,000 into four legions, advancing south from four routes. Leading the vanguard, the commander of the Third Legion was the country's celebrated general, General Deschamps, who had held the rank of Army General since the days of the Old Empire.

It was not surprising that General Deschamps, a leading figure in Jin Yuan, was entrusted with being the sharpest blade of the great sword composed of 400,000 men.

What surprised people was that Marco was willing to employ Deschamps, who was on the verge of retirement and politically neutral, not aligning with any faction.

The fact that Marco, who always valued political stance, exceptionally employed Deschamps, showed the importance he placed on this battle.

In times without large-scale wars, only abnormal countries like Nubia still retained the marshal's title; most mainstream countries' highest military rank was General.

Out of the four great armies, besides the First Legion where Marco was stationed in the back and Deschamps' Third Legion, the Second and Fourth Legions as flanks were commanded by Army Lieutenant Generals.

This lineup could be called a battle to the death for the country; Marco was serious this time.

He certainly wasn't going after Alina.

His vision was long-term; he intended to use the opportunity of suppressing the rebellion to round up all his opponents in one fell swoop.

The old nobility sucking the nation's blood, the greedy merchants, all needed to die!

As the suppressive army moved south, many took the opportunity to leave West City.

Marco was full of confidence for the future, but the ordinary people of West City didn't think so.

They might still have faith in the nation's future, but they were anxious about whether they could see the next day's sun.

While Marco wasn't around, it was a good chance to flee.

This was the genuine thought of many.

What did it matter how good the Jin Yuan Kingdom was if they were about to face the guillotine?

They were just ordinary people wanting to live a peaceful life; was that too much to ask?

With Marco taking away the majority of the elite, the long city walls of West City couldn't be constantly guarded everywhere; the city defense soldiers turned a blind eye to escaping citizens, letting those who could pay leave.

Of course, if they didn't pay the 5 Livre Coin exit fee per head, the soldiers had no qualms about showing these scoundrels their loyalty to the nation.

Watching the citizens leaving hastily, the City Defense Army's Chief Commander, Vice Admiral Pierre, standing atop the city tower with binoculars, wore a slight cold smile on his lips.

This bunch of scoundrels probably didn't know that the money was the stability maintenance tax they resisted.

Paying to leave was tacitly approved by President Marco.

If he didn't nod, who dared to open the city gates to let people out?

Demanding that these scoundrels pay the 5 Livre Coin stability maintenance tax, none were willing, saying there was no such item in the tax law. If not for President Marco's exceptional prestige, they might even have taken to the streets in protest.

Livre Coins were not a small sum; converted, it equated to 38.5 grams of gold, enough to maintain an ordinary West City citizen's expenses for two and a half years if saved.

If you don't want to stay, then get out fast!

Pierre put down the binoculars, thinking fiercely.

He just saw, amidst the tide of people exiting the city, a few carriages and quite a few pedestrians entering from outside the city.

Pierre walked towards the official residence, with a trace of mockery in his smile.

These people probably didn't realize that West City was like a prison now; entering the city was easy, but leaving was difficult.

If they wanted to get out, they'd have to pay the exit tax.

No money? Then stay and do forced labor on city defenses or become cannon fodder defending the city.

Thinking of this, the loyal Pierre couldn't help but grumble internally.

The President was still too cautious.

With over thirty thousand city defense troops under his command, they wouldn't even fear a siege by a hundred thousand; there was no need to use these scoundrels as cannon fodder.

More importantly, who would dare be so audacious as to attack West City? Were they crazy?

Nations with such capability wouldn't be that reckless, and those daring enough didn't have the ability.

Despite his grumbles, Pierre remained vigilant.

He sent out scouts daily to patrol around West City, preventing any audacious acts by the old nobility while the President was away.

Pierre even hoped someone would attempt such a thing.

If someone truly dared to be so foolish, he would have a chance to earn merit.

Unfortunately, no one did.

Returning to the official residence, Pierre went to his office to begin that day's work.

Just as General Pierre was feeling a bit bored, an inconspicuous carriage blended into the crowd entering West City.

This carriage had only two passengers.

One was a female spy who had maintained a single-line contact with her superior but had lost connection, appearing as a minstrel but actually conducting operations behind enemy lines, the Golden Knight.

Just a few days ago, Adam, who had endured for long, mistook Miss Lilith for a prostitute and released his tension hard for a reward of three Livre Coins.

Yet he never imagined that Lilith was not a prostitute, but a maiden.

The internally conflicted Lilith hadn’t been able to sleep at night, fearing she’d be taken away by the black-clad enforcers responsible for purging, to be "destroyed" upon waking.

The most likely outcome for intelligence operatives who lost contact was being quietly disposed of.

She felt truly aggrieved.

She had never done anything against the organization, merely stayed in the small town, collecting intelligence, monitoring the nearby lord, organizing information for her superiors to retrieve.

It was the organization that abandoned her, not her betraying the organization.

She didn’t accompany Adam for money; she was three parts uneasy and seven parts fearful, wanting release.

Being so young, how could she die without even having experienced being a woman?

Adam thought he was the one consuming, but in Lilith’s view, he was the one being consumed.

The young and handsome minstrel, possessing a calm yet slightly rogue temperament, eased the anxious heart of the young female spy.

When the next day's sunlight woke them, both felt a bit dazed.

Chapter 358: The Female Agent's New Identity (Part 2)

Adam was no novice, of course, he could feel that Lilith was inexperienced, but last night he was completely overwhelmed by his desires and couldn't stop, only realizing the gravity of the situation come daylight.

What to do?

If she was a prostitute, it would be easy to deal with, but Lilith was a girl from a respectable family. He couldn't just walk away.

Adam never wanted to owe anyone anything emotionally; it was always a fair exchange.

But this time, he couldn't afford it.

Looking at the bloodstains on the sheets, Adam panicked.

If Lilith wanted him to take responsibility, he truly didn't know how to handle it.

No matter how expensive a prostitute might be, a maiden's purity is priceless.

Marry her?

His special status made marrying a foreign girl fine, but marrying a spy was definitely out of the question. Even if Governor Roland didn't interfere, it would force him to leave the Knight Order.

His career would be ruined.

He and Lilith had no emotional foundation, just a night of passion, and by right, he shouldn't be overthinking it. Yet he couldn't help but picture Lilith in a wedding dress.

Damn it!

Under the morning light, watching Lilith’s pure face without makeup, Adam was surprised to find she wore makeup daily to conceal her true appearance.

Thinking of the passion from being strangers to perfect synergy last night, his mind was in turmoil.

Just as Adam was hesitating on how to end things, Lilith bit her lip and softly yet firmly said:

"Escort me to Xidai, and we’re even."

With that, they teamed up and headed north.

Adam knew full well that things couldn’t possibly settle down so easily.

To save money, they rented a carriage, shared a hotel room, and grew more familiar with each other.

Upon entering West City, the affection that had developed over time led them to mutually ignore the agreement to part ways there and continue traveling together.

Lilith tried every means to finally get news of her superior.

Dead.

With the assassination of Intelligence Director Allen, an enraged President Marco purged the intelligence system, and unfortunately, her superior was on the purged list.

After waiting in line for three days, they finally reached the guillotine’s turn, and the journey began.

To be fair, Lilith didn't even know her superior's name; they were merely work-related, which didn't make it particularly distressing.

Amidst her confusion, she suddenly noticed a more serious problem.

What about her future?

With her superior's death, she couldn't prove her identity, becoming an unstable factor, and if discovered, she would certainly be eliminated.

Technically, she wasn't an employee of the Intelligence Bureau, just a subordinate developed by her superior.

With her superior's death, the contract ended, temporarily restoring her freedom.

Freedom? Freedom!

Lilith was utterly confused.

She never attended school; all her knowledge came from the spy camp, where she stood out by luck in a camp with high elimination and death rates, only to be stationed in a small town as a sleeper agent.

She thought her life would be planned out this way forever, but freedom came so suddenly.

Freedom isn't a necessity, it's the most extravagant luxury.

When freedom knocked on the door, poor Lilith was somewhat at a loss.

She didn't know when she would be exposed or caught and executed.

The suffocating pressure was more terrifying than death.

She returned to the hotel disheartened, opened the door, and saw Adam leisurely enjoying the street view from the balcony.

Although she didn't know Adam's true identity, she knew the minstrel facade was a sham; his aura of a peer was too obvious.

Previously, she would have watched Adam closely, even considered turning him over to the Intelligence Bureau for some merit.

But now, circumstances had changed.

She herself was already a suspicious figure, so why take the risk?

Sensing Lilith's return, Adam didn't turn around, just sighed softly and said:

"The sunlight in West City is still so beautiful, but it's a pity that this city has lost its vigor."

Lilith's fingers trembled slightly, her head lowered suddenly, and her right hand reached for her belt.

Her hidden dagger was there.

Adam's words, though seemingly random, implicitly suggested he was here to stir up trouble to Lilith.

The instant her right hand subconsciously touched the dagger, Lilith froze; she couldn't find a reason to draw it.

"You didn't draw your knife last time, is there a need now?"

Adam slowly turned, his gentle gaze resting on Lilith, his voice especially tender.

The words lightly exploded in Lilith’s heart, making her weak in the hands and feet.

Any words she wanted to defend herself with were stuck on her lips.

Did he see through everything from the start?

Lilith laughed self-deprecatingly, recalling Adam’s rough action on the first night, when he flung her belt and trousers far away.

He indeed knew everything.

If death is certain, the exact day doesn’t seem that significant.

It’s just as well; at least Adam wouldn’t torture her.

Lilith spoke hauntingly with hollow eyes, "You’re right, that night I did plan to kill you. You’re an unidentified intelligence officer spreading rumors; of course, I wanted to take action."

"So why did you change your mind?" Adam asked calmly.

"I’ve already lost my organization."

Perhaps due to seeing no hope in life, Lilith spoke almost self-destructively about the assassination of the Intelligence Director and her superior’s purge.

She knew very well that without a sneak attack, she would not be a match for Adam.

She was not known for her combat ability anyway.

Even if it was just to silence her, she would have to die soon.

Since death was imminent, what else did she care about? Her life was so pathetic, being trained as a spy and then placed in a small town as a sleeper.

She had no friends, no family, and didn't dare to dream of love and marriage.

She wasn't a person, but a tool.

The organization saw her as expendable, just like an observation post stationed in a small town.

Over these years, only in the past few nights did she feel somewhat human.

Though he coveted only her young and beautiful body, Adam was really gentle, even knowing she was a spy and had murderous intent.

Even if it's just lust, this gentleness was enough to reminisce during a Nether River journey.

After finishing her story, Lilith raised her head, showcasing her graceful curves.

"I'm done. You can proceed."

"Proceed? Please, it's daytime now." Adam chuckled teasingly.

Lilith opened her eyes, puzzled, and looked at Adam, "I had murderous thoughts against you."

"I know, so you owe me a life."

"Mm, I’m ready to repay it, please be gentle." Lilith suddenly felt tired; the world held nothing worth her nostalgia.

"Since you owe me a life, pay me back with a life."

Though knowing that this was the conclusion, Adam’s words still left Lilith somewhat disheartened.

This world was inherently like this, truly not worth clinging to.

She closed her eyes, feeling Adam’s nearing footsteps, inhaling his unique scent, her heartbeat inexplicably quickening.

His strong hand caressed her neck; it seemed he intended to strangle her with his own hands.

Lilith felt a sense of relief.

Just as she waited peacefully for death, her lips were suddenly heated by a burning sensation.

She wanted to resist but found herself powerless.

Although only acquainted for a few days, he knew all her weaknesses.

If resistance was futile, she might as well savor the last entanglement.

The girl thought to herself, letting go of her inhibitions.

When she thought she’d be stripped and thrown onto the bed soon, Adam’s lips slowly withdrew.

A magically resonant voice—like a celestial melody—whispered in her ear.

"I intend to take this city as a gift to wed you. Will you join me?"

"I will."

The girl, having found new hope in life, wept uncontrollably and fell asleep in her lover’s embrace.

The life of the nameless spy came to a close.

From now on, she had a new identity, the wife of the minstrel.

Chapter 359: A Pair of Gamblers

"Lord Count, ahead is Walden."

The Governor of Brook Province, Aramis, calmly introduced the advancing route to Sif.

After hesitating for a moment, he quietly reminded, "Walden is the capital of Count Lafei’s domain. You should have let Ados accompany the expedition; he is more familiar with this place."

Sif raised an eyebrow, remembering that Ados had once mentioned he was the Count Lafei of Jin Yuan Kingdom.

Facing Aramis’s suggestion, Sif responded softly with a composed expression, "That’s unnecessary. I never planned to pass through here."

"Huh?"

Aramis was a bit bewildered and didn’t know how to respond at the moment.

If they weren’t going through Walden, then why spend money on military passage rights? This was not a small expense.

While he was trying to decipher Sif’s intentions, Sif’s gaze had shifted westward, and she said with a smile:

"From here to West City is less than fifty kilometers. With the defense troops of Walden being relocated, the road to West City is unobstructed. What do you think of this?"

Aramis was stunned.

He never imagined Sif would be so reckless.

She planned to take West City with just these fifty thousand troops?

Wait, whether they can take it or not doesn’t seem to be the point. Advancing on West City isn’t really a military issue; it’s a political and diplomatic issue.

Although he didn’t want to contradict the Empress, he must dispel his lord’s unrealistic fantasy.

That was the duty of a loyal minister.

"Lord Count, attacking West City would change the nature of things. It wouldn’t just be a conflict between lords but a war between nations, causing extremely adverse international repercussions. It might even give those scoundrels in the Cabinet an excuse to impeach Her Majesty the Empress."

Watching Aramis’s anxious monitoring, Sif said with a smile:

"Aramis, if the power-holder of Jin Yuan after the war is Marco, indeed. But after this battle, Alina will become the master of Jin Yuan."

Aramis opened his mouth, unable to utter a word for a long time.

He understood that Sif was gambling.

She gambled that Marco would fail in his campaign and that it would cost him dearly.

Aramis never imagined that Her Majesty the Empress would leave no retreat and place all her bets openly.

He had seen many compulsive gamblers, but none as ruthless as Sif.

While the momentum was strong, Aramis didn't trust momentum alone; he only believed in strength. He couldn't help but remind:

"You might not like what I'm saying, but I must say it. There's no reason to do this. While the rewards of success are high, the consequences of failure are something you cannot bear."

Sif looked at Aramis with a smile, wanting to explain but held back.

She couldn't bear to leave a loyal minister in the dark, so she subtly suggested, "Aramis, my enemy is not Marco but Sofia."

Aramis's body shuddered slightly, his pupils contracted sharply, almost doubting his ears.

After confirming that Sif wasn't joking, his emotions became a bit confused.

Following Sif was not an easy decision.

His biggest worry was not Sif's lack of ability but her lack of ambition.

As a monarch, one need not master everything, but must have a drive.

Aramis yearned for power greatly and hoped for a monarch with ambition who sought progress.

But he didn’t expect Sif to crave progress this much.

He knew of Sofia’s capabilities and had heard of her formidable reputation.

There was a consensus among the continent’s strong figures: challenging Sofia head-on was extremely foolish, a suicide mission.

His Majesty Sylph seemed smart; didn’t she know this?

She surely knew.

Facing such a fierce enemy, if she still intended to challenge, she must have some assurance, right?

Aramis never imagined that what Sif desired wasn’t the absolute power of the Sussex Empire, but rather, the title of Great Emperor.

Aramis’s face flushed bright red, his blood boiling.

He smelled the intoxicating scent of power, something he couldn’t refuse.

He might die on the path to reaching the pinnacle of ministerial power but couldn’t give up the opportunity to fight.

He withdrew all his defeatist arguments, and his tone grew spirited.

"Since you’ve made your decision, I’ll fully support you! Do you know which hidden experts Jin Yuan Kingdom has?"

"I know a few, but you surely know more than I do. Tell me about it." Sif's lips curved into a smile.

She wasn't guessing wrong; Aramis was also a Jin Yuan person.

Though his accent didn't have a hint of Jin Yuan tone and sounded like a native Brook person, that was precisely the biggest flaw.

The Three Overseas Provinces weren't closely connected with the Empire's mainland, but quite tied with neighboring Jin Yuan.

The elite in this region are mostly proficient in both languages, often with a hint of Jin Yuan accent in their speech.

Aramis's speech lacked a Jin Yuan accent, indicating he was hiding something.

Concealing but without ill intention, it's just personal privacy.

Sif was very open-minded and wouldn't force Aramis to confess.

Unless he was willing to voluntarily share.

Clearing his throat, Aramis said in a deep voice, "The top experts in Jin Yuan Kingdom rarely serve directly for the state. About half of them are from old nobility, the other half are academic scholars."

"Jin Yuan Kingdom has a developed university education, and transcendence is a focal point of research at major institutions, so many Transcendents stay within the academies, forming a circle."

"If we handle it correctly, letting these people realize you're not here to destroy the nation, there's a chance to keep them out of the fight..."

After Aramis finished introducing the power structure of Jin Yuan Kingdom, Sif nodded gently, her lips curling into a confident smile, raising her Long Spear.

"Target, West City, move out!"

...

Everyone was busy, and Roland was no exception.

He and the Fourth Fleet made a wide loop, bypassing the Sunset Ocean from the Land Sea, and returned to the outer waters of the Sussex Strait.

The massive fleet, composed of nearly a hundred warships, couldn't be concealed. Everyone concerned with the war knew the Monarch was about to return to the Three Overseas Provinces, but few knew Roland never intended to go back.

He intended to make big news, like landing in the Jia Lai region.

Under his command, after a long trek, the Fourth Fleet finally arrived at the outer waters of Jia Lai.

Such a high-profile operation is not something that the commander of the Northern Defense Zone of the Jin Yuan Kingdom would be blind to; of course, he has seen it clearly.

The commander of the Northern Guard District, Andre, was infuriated by Roland's audacious marching route.

He adjusted the defense lines while requesting reinforcements from the First Fleet stationed at the West River Estuary.

The moment of landing is the most vulnerable for a fleet; if handled properly, the powerful First Fleet has the full capability to teach the Sussex people a harsh lesson.

At its peak, the Jin Yuan Navy had seventy percent of the Sussex Navy's official strength, and although it has since declined, it still retains about fifty to sixty percent of that strength.

The First Fleet concentrates more than half of the nation's main battleships, making it extremely powerful in hard strength.

If they seize the opportunity to annihilate the invading Fourth Fleet, it would be a heavy blow to Sussex's sea power.

To completely annihilate a complete fleet of the Sussex Empire!

Such an achievement, how could Andre resist?

There was no need for his reminder; Fleet Commander, Admiral Vernaf, had already led the fleet out.

Vernaf had been waiting for this day for too long.

The Sussex Empire has dominated the seas for hundreds of years; someone has to come out and break this hegemony, why can't it be him?

This is a generous gift that the Sussex have delivered to their doorsteps!

They are the invaders, so Vernaf's retaliation is completely justified.

First Fleet, launch!

...

The sky was blue and the sea breeze was gentle.

Roland stood on the top deck, leisurely watching the ongoing landing operation, as calm as if he were an outsider.

Roland was very composed, but Bridges couldn’t sit still.

After receiving the latest intelligence, he couldn’t help but climb up to the top deck.

Seeing Roland still discussing with Lisa about the different ways to eat lobsters, he couldn’t help but cough to remind Roland that they were at war and should be more serious.

When Bridges approached, Lisa used the excuse of preparing lunch to slip away, leaving the not-so-friendly-looking Vice Admiral alone with Roland.

Looking at Bridges’ unfriendly gaze, Roland smiled as if nothing happened and said:

"General Bridges, I don’t quite understand the landing matters, no need to consult me."

"Lord Governor, I’m not talking about the landing; it’s about the incoming Jin Yuan First Fleet!"

Bridges took a deep breath and used the mildest tone possible to explain to Roland.

"Lord Governor, naval battles are different from land battles. If you lose a land battle, there’s still a chance to retreat; losing a naval battle often means total annihilation."

"I know, I trust you, so naval battles are your responsibility."

Roland’s trust lifted Bridges’ spirits for a few minutes, but only for a few minutes.

He coughed lightly and continued, "Thank you, Lord Governor, for your trust, but that’s not what I’m talking about. What should we do? The landing operation has begun, the fleet has deployed its

formation, and is currently suppressing the opposite shore with firepower. Now the enemy is here, what should we do?"

"You mean that if we don’t array quickly to meet the enemy, the naval battle might be lost, but if we focus all efforts on the naval battle, the landing battle would be lost?"

Bridges’ expression remained grave, but his heart finally relaxed a bit.

Although the Governor doesn’t understand naval warfare, his thinking is always clear.

Roland nodded, smiling and teased, "Such unity between the land and naval forces is rare. Since the enemy fleet is here, let’s face them."

Bridges breathed a sigh of relief.

Although this choice was difficult, it was the only right choice.

It’s just a pity for those thousand landing troops; even though they’re not his navy, losing them for nothing still hurts.

Though it was hard to speak, he struggled to ask, "What about the landing troops? Without fire support, it will be hard for them to hold the beachhead."

"Surrender them."

Bridges almost fell to the ground, he stared at Roland in shock, speechless for a long time.

"I can’t let the army be trapped without supply support and expect the warriors to bleed dry."

Roland calmly said, "Jin Yuan is also a civilized country; being captured is tough, but at least they can keep a life, give the order."

Bridges’ eyes were complex.

Objectively speaking, this is the best choice.

If they win, the captured soldiers will return today.

If they lose, after paying the war reparations, the soldiers can go home.

Ordering the beachhead troops to surrender is responsible for the soldiers, but it would tarnish Roland’s formidable reputation.

He had thought about it but dared not mention it.

Roland glanced at Bridges, knowing this general understood everything, so he said nothing more, simply pointing his Scepter westward.

In no more than three hours, a massive fleet would appear there.

Even one-on-one, they’d not lose to the peak Fourth Fleet’s super fleet.

"The Jin Yuan fleet is our prey."

"Yes, sir!" Bridges suppressed his excitement, stood straight, and gave Roland a very standard military salute.

Roland raised his hand in return, casually adding, "I need the enemy flagship; make sure to capture her."

Bridges said nothing, nor did he ask why; he took the order loudly, and turned to leave.

Capturing the enemy flagship is indeed very difficult, but he didn’t care.

Without difficulty, how could his skills be showcased?

He abandoned the plan of winning by T-advantage, deciding to do the opposite, personally maneuvering the Monarch to launch a no-return assault, directly engaging in side-to-side combat with the enemy flagship.

This is the only choice.

Watching Bridges leave, Roland gripped his Scepter tightly, looking solemn.

He certainly wasn’t trying to make things difficult for Bridges.

He truly needed the flagship, and even the enemy’s commanding officers alive.

Launching a frontal attack on West City is international folly, but using the enemy’s flagship for a surprise attack?

This is the only way to break the impasse.

The stakes aren’t many, so it’s all-in.

Chapter 360: Sussex Needs Everyone to Fulfill Their Duties

Naval battles are completely different from land battles.

Naval traditions need hundreds of years of accumulation to form.

Bridges stood at the command post, and the moment he drew his sword, it was as if the legendary naval commanders of Sussex’s long history were possessing him.

At this moment, he represented the naval tradition of Sussex.

This was a battle for the Fourth Fleet to reclaim its dignity, with no retreat and no room for failure.

The Imperial Navy, engage whenever faced with an enemy!

Full sail, set off!

Although the enemy had a numerical advantage in battleships, with their main battleships on the battle line almost doubling ours, and their flagship Valmy having a displacement of nearly six thousand tons, dubbed an unsinkable fortress at sea, he felt no fear.

Since Monarch was launched, it had never been defeated.

This was his confidence.

The Imperial Navy's invincibility relied not only on bravery and fearlessness but also on superb naval combat techniques.

Today he was going to teach Vernaf a good lesson.

This lesson was called courage and determination.

The naval cannons of this era were primarily front-loaded solid shells, with their lethality coming from massive impact force.

The cannons were precision-designed and arranged in compartments on both sides of the ship, maximizing lateral fire output.

Solid shells striking the hull would cause irreversible damage.

When the damage accumulated to a certain extent, the ship would capsize and sink.

Based on the features of battleships, naval battles of this era always followed one principle: seize the T-advantage.

Whoever could swing their fleet across with their broadside facing the enemy could easily win.

This was common knowledge in naval warfare.

But today, Bridges wasn't planning on seizing the T-advantage at all.

Though he was confident in victory, he would not underestimate the enemy.

The Jin Yuan Fleet's overall strength was inferior to the Sussex Navy, but in this part of the sea, they held the upper hand.

After carefully observing the wind direction and currents, and considering the number of warships and the quality of sailors on both sides, Bridges quickly calculated the result.

The probability of successfully seizing the T-advantage was less than 20%.

If the attempt to seize the T-advantage failed, this naval battle would become a one-sided massacre.

He would not only lose the naval battle and his life, but also ruin the Imperial Navy's undefeated reputation, being forever nailed to the pillar of shame.

He had a family, and he couldn't lose, so he had to take an unexpected approach.

Since there was no T-advantage, just abandon it altogether.

Bridges ordered the entire fleet to arrange the main battleships in a single line, full sails unfurled, to reach maximum speed.

This was an order that defied naval warfare principles.

In the age of sail, speed and maneuverability were contradictory.

Achieving maximum speed made adjusting course and fleet formation extremely difficult.

But Bridges had no intention of adjusting course at all.

He let the fastest Third Class Battleship, Perth, take the lead.

This battleship served as a meat shield and bait, very likely to be riddled by the enemy’s volleys.

Perth’s Captain Grelinn wasn’t a fool, he naturally understood this.

Grelinn used signal flags to inquire if the order was mistaken, and Bridges gave an affirmative reply.

"Victory requires everyone’s courage and sacrifice. I can’t guarantee your safety, but I promise that your merits won’t go unnoticed after our victory."

Perth’s Captain paused in silence, then responded with signal flags.

"Understood, General!"

He knew very well that this charge was likely the end of his military career, but he didn’t refuse.

Bridge’s honesty dispelled any slight resentment he might have had.

As a soldier, dying of old age on a sickbed was the ultimate shame.

He could die, but he wouldn’t die in vain.

He understood General Bridges, and he also understood Governor Roland.

As long as they could win, his merits would not be buried.

Although he himself couldn’t enjoy the title he earned, he had a family, he had children.

And that was enough.

The Lando Clan would flourish in the future, and his descendants would remember his name, Grelinn Lando.

Captain Grelinn turned to look ahead, tidying his neat uniform and adjusting his hat, smiling as he watched the enemy warships emerging on the horizon.

He was a neat-freak, and even after being at sea for one and a half months, his uniform remained crisp and clean.

Not that he was particularly industrious, but his attendants wished to avoid lashes.

Heading to the final feast named death, naturally, he had to be impeccably dressed, like an untouchable gentleman.

He raised his sword and issued the acceleration command.

Full sail, with a tailwind, pushed the Perth to its highest speed since its launch.

12.5 knots.

In an era where the maximum speed was generally 8-10 knots, this speed was akin to Bolt participating in a sports meet at a physical education school.

The Jin Yuan Fleet wanted to seize the T-advantage and maintain strict formation, meaning they had to constantly adjust the sail direction, making their speed far from rapid.

The entire fleet had to maintain formation while turning, generally keeping their speed at around 6 knots.

This speed was already their limit during a grand fleet maneuver, showcasing the strength of the Jin Yuan Fleet.

Their commander, Vernaf, stood in the control room of the flagship Valmy, calmly observing the sea through his binoculars.

He saw the Perth charging like a sword.

He was stunned.

Wasn't the approach incorrect? Or was he just too tired lately?

Vernaf was a bit puzzled. He put down the binoculars and rubbed his eyes vigorously. Confirming his mental state was normal, he raised the binoculars again.

A Sussex battleship was indeed charging at full speed.

He wasn't mistaken.

Though sure he hadn’t made a mistake, Vernaf was even more bewildered.

The enemy’s completely unorthodox tactics had thrown all his plans into disarray.

In his script, the Sussex Fourth Fleet was a hateful yet respectable enemy, and even with fewer ships, they would create massive unpredictability for him.

He had thought not only about how to annihilate the Sussex Navy after gaining the T-advantage but also how to adjust formation if unable to secure the T-advantage.

He had thought of everything, except that the opponent wouldn’t scramble for T advantage.

The feeling of carefully descending the stairs only to step into air is truly awful.

Stunned for several seconds, Vernaf’s face instantly turned red.

The opponent’s completely reckless actions made him feel deeply insulted. This humiliation must be washed away with the enemy’s blood.

Suppressing his anger, he gave orders to the messenger beside him.

"Maintain formation, continue to seize T advantage, no premature firing without my orders."

Although he couldn’t comprehend why the Sussex people would act so foolishly, he wouldn’t stop the enemy from committing suicide.

The rules of naval warfare remain unchanged; T advantage allows one to act at will. This blood-stained lesson comes from hundreds of years of naval history.

No scramble for T advantage, playing tricks?

There were those who tried to be clever in naval battles before, but they were all harshly educated by cannons.

He thought General Bridges was a famous commander of the Sussex Navy, but it turned out to be a fool.

The enemy's foolishness made Vernaf feel somewhat uninterested.

The victory was too easily achieved, hardly satisfying him.

The sea breeze gently blew, waves surged.

Over fifty main battleships on both sides incessantly approached each other, while numerous auxiliary warships began to chase and fight around the peripheries.

Cruisers and destroyers had no right to line up against battleships.

Their task was to expel enemy small warships, gather intelligence, and launch sneak attacks when the opportunity arose.

Ultimately, the decisive factor in the war would be the main battleships.

The Perth Ship was drawing closer and closer to the Jin Yuan Fleet.

As the distance closed, the captains of both ships could see each other's expressions through their telescopes.

Vernaf saw Captain Grelinn's face.

He sensed something was amiss.

The opposing captain’s expression was calm, without any signs of anger, frustration, or desperation.

He was as composed as if attending a royal banquet.

Vernaf’s fury was ignited.

He couldn’t understand, on what basis did the enemy gain confidence?

He tried hard to calm himself, not letting negative emotions take over.

No matter how you sliced it, the numbers of main battleships were 34:18, and he had the advantage.

Moreover, the enemy’s flagship, the Monarch, had barely half the displacement of his flagship, the Valmy.

And with the advantage of snatching T being certain, he simply didn’t know how he could lose.

"All ships focus fire on the Perth Ship, sink her!"

Of course, he understood what the Sussex people intended to do—charge in for a boarding battle.

There are always fools who think their ship can outrun cannonballs; they have to be shown otherwise.

Once the Perth Ship is blasted into pieces, the Sussex people’s morale would waver. Their general might have unique ideas, but the soldiers don’t care about those; they’d only think their commander was an idiot.

Without confidence, how could they continue the fight?

This many battleships fired together, and the Perth Ship would undoubtedly sink.

Vernaf had every confidence in this outcome.

As Vernaf issued his orders, Bridges was calmly observing the battle situation.

He wasn't focusing on the opposing commander but rather on the enemy warships' gun barrels.

Upon seeing the cannons of the enemy ships swivel and aim at the Perth Ship, he exhaled a long breath.

Grelinn, my friend, your sacrifice will not be in vain.

He murmured.

He would insist before the Governor to award the first merit of this battle to Grelinn and all the sailors of the Perth Ship.

This was what they deserved.

Fortunately, every one of their records was well-documented, with a copy kept in the Imperial Archives and another at the Governor's Mansion in Hansa City, ensuring their sacrifices would not be in vain.

Thinking about some of the young lads without families, Bridges fell silent.

The distance between the two fleets was shrinking rapidly, and the Perth Ship finally surged into the Jin Yuan Fleet's range.

"Accelerate!"

After issuing his final command, Captain Grelinn adjusted his military cap, wearing a gentleman's smile at the corners of his mouth.

The ear-piercing roar and the sharp whistle of shells tearing through the air arrived.

He couldn't see how many shells there were, but he knew there wouldn't be few.

He tightly gripped his sword, with the tip pointing directly at the Valmy, his roar drowned out by the waves, wild winds, and bombardment.

The area where shells landed was vast, with the majority splashing into the sea, throwing up giant water columns.

The hit rate of naval guns in this era was very low. But after all, it was a salvo of hundreds of cannons, so accuracy didn't matter.

The Perth Ship wasn't too unlucky, only hit by five shells.

But Grelinn's luck was terrible; one shell hit squarely on him, turning him into a mist of blood.

The first officer took over command without changing his expression.

He stood in Grelinn's spot, picked up Grelinn's sword, and continued giving orders to advance.

Vernaf ordered callously for the reloading speed to accelerate and to continue the salvo.

The Perth Ship's speed was slowing down, and with just a few more rounds, it could be sent to the seabed.

The caliber and firepower of naval guns far exceeded army cannons, but the downside was a much slower loading speed.

While the Jin Yuan Fleet frantically loaded, the Perth Ship was getting ever closer.

This was a charge driven by courage, but also a reckless action leading them into the abyss of death.

The second and third rounds of salvos came quickly.

The loading speed of the Jin Yuan people was far faster than regular warships.

The main mast of the Perth Ship was hit, and its speed decreased further, almost akin to a target ship.

The hit rate of the Jin Yuan people was also increasing.

The captain of the Perth Ship, the first officer, the second officer, and the third officer, all perished, leaving the ship without command and more than half of the sailors were casualties.

But they needed no command.

All the sailors watched as their comrades beside them fell one by one, blood boiling, with no intention of retreating.

Their only target was the Jin Yuan flagship, the Valmy.