Empress 361

Chapter 361: Surrender or Die

"What are they doing?"

Lisa, standing beside Roland, didn't understand naval warfare. Watching the Perth launch a suicide attack, her heart was greatly shaken, and she murmured softly.

Roland didn't look at Lisa nor did he specially explain.

His level of naval warfare was not much better than Lisa's, but he could understand Perth's sacrifice.

He slowly raised his right hand and saluted the sinking Perth and the sacrificed sailors.

"They are using their lives to pave the way to victory."

Even though he had a thorough estimate of the brutality of naval warfare, witnessing the fierce battle still accelerated Roland's heartbeat.

The speed of the shells was extremely fast; he could barely see their rough trajectory.

In the face of large-caliber shells, all beings were equal.

Even a Tier Seven Transcendent could potentially be taken directly by a 32-pound cannon shot—except Sofia.

The Perth tilted severely and gradually sank into the ocean.

Her sinking also paved the way for the subsequent battleships.

As the Perth tilted, the distance between the Monarch and the Valmy was less than five hundred meters.

Even though the Jin Yuan Fleet loaded quickly, this distance couldn't organize a volley.

A boarding action was about to begin.

Bridges let out a sigh of relief.

He had no time to mourn the passing of his good friend Grelinn; he had to be fully focused on the upcoming command.

At the cost of a battleship and hundreds of elite sailors, they finally turned the disadvantageous T-crossing into a basically equal boarding battle; his command was impeccable.

But this didn't mean certain victory.

There's controversy over whose army is stronger between the Jin Yuan Kingdom and the Vladimir Empire, but Sussex's land warfare ranks at best third.

The boarding battle tests not naval warfare but land warfare.

Fortunately, the jump board warriors aboard the Monarch were all elite.

Here were the governor's guards, the heroic troop that participated in the defense of Helentz Castle, and young capable officers like Tom and Jerry.

The space on the Valmy was incredibly large, almost like a sea fortress, carrying over fifteen hundred soldiers.

Using combat power superiority to compensate for numerical inferiority, this was bound to be a bloody battle.

Bridges bit his lip and looked back at the top deck.

Governor Roland was there overseeing the battle.

He very much wished Roland, the strongest combatant, would personally lead the charge onto the enemy ship, but he held back.

He had no authority to issue orders to Roland.

Unless Roland was willing, no one could force him to take risks.

Bridges didn't think Roland would personally charge.

He couldn't think of a reason for Roland to take the risk. Before the boarding battle began, there was the brutal act of lining up for execution.

Governor Roland was the Empress's partner, of course, couldn't gamble in the hail of bullets.

After all, bullets are blind to rank and wouldn't recognize whether you were a governor or not.

Not to mention governors, even emperors, would surely die under gunfire.

Bridges squinted and touched the chest armor under his jacket.

This was bear hide armor gifted by Governor Roland, reportedly made from demonized giant bear skin, capable of stopping bullets.

Soon he would personally board the enemy ship and take Vernaf's life.

He hoped the bear hide armor's actual effect hadn't been exaggerated.

This was his greatest wish.

If he had to die, he would at least hold on for the victory of the naval battle.

The distance between the two battleships was getting closer.

To prevent friendly fire, the ship cannons ceased firing, and the sailors came to the upper deck, raising firearms for a shoot-out.

The eight hundred warriors aboard the Monarch were elite, and Valmy was no different.

The soldiers on this battleship were from the Imperial Guard Fifth Regiment, a historically renowned unit that was once the Emperor's Imperial Guard of the Old Empire.

After the coup in the Jin Yuan Kingdom, the Emperor was executed, but the organization and designation of the Imperial Guard were retained.

Despite its oddity under the Republic, to preserve the honor and tradition of the army, the flexible Jin Yuan People chose to respect tradition.

Their combat power and courage were in no way inferior to the warriors of the Monarch, and they were more numerous by twice.

With the officers issuing orders, the Imperial Guard quickly lined up neatly, with the first row of warriors half-crouching, and the warriors in the second and third rows interspersed, aiming their guns. Countless black muzzles were like the sickles of the Death God, ready to ruthlessly reap.

Seeing this scene, Bridges’ expression slightly changed.

The boarding battle was his last chance, was this not viable?

He forcefully dispelled the shadow of defeatism lingering in his heart, stirred himself, drew his sword, and prepared to leave the command room, personally leading the frontline troops onto the enemy ship.

Just as he left the command room and was about to go down to the deck, a figure flashed, and Roland was standing in front of him, looking at him with a not-quite-smiling expression.

"General Bridges, do not leave your post; your position is there."

Roland pointed to the command room.

Bridges shook his head, defending himself.

"I’m not leaving my post. This battle is very perilous; I must be on the front lines myself."

"Who will command the fleet? Does your deputy have your skills?" Roland spread his hands.

"This..."

Bridges wanted to be stubborn, but his deputy truly lacked experience and had never commanded a large fleet in a naval showdown; this was the truth.

Roland patted his shoulder and said with a smile:

"Bridges, return to your post immediately; this is an order."

"Understood!"

Bridges saluted Roland, but still quietly protested, "A boarding action needs courage and momentum, a strong leader is necessary."

"I'll do it."

Roland pressed down with one hand, signaling Bridges to hush, and said in a deep voice, "I may not be good at naval warfare, but when it comes to breakthrough assaults, no one is stronger than me."

Bridges thought of the Helentz Castle battle where Roland personally led the special operations team in a mountain assault, turning the tides, naturally knowing this was not bragging.

He did not argue, nor did he dissuade, but earnestly saluted Roland.

Back at his command post, Bridges' heart nearly jumped out of his throat.

If anything happened to Roland, he wouldn't have enough heads to chop, even with nine.

He could only pray silently for Roland, believing that Roland would create another miracle.

When Roland arrived at the front line, the first round of gunfire had already ended.

In the exchange of shots, where hits depended on faith, the Jin Yuan People had a slight advantage.

After all, they had the numbers.

Although many of Sussex's elite warriors wore wolf leather armor, this armor could only protect vital areas and wasn't very effective.

Feeling the thrill of guns and cannons firing in unison, Roland was also driven by adrenaline.

He summoned the Holy Shield, blocking in front of him, standing with his soldiers, his heartbeat like a fast drumbeat.

Some screamed, some wailed, some died.

More people were fixing bayonets.

This distance allowed for only one volley, so instead of wasting time reloading, it was better to prepare for a bayonet charge.

"Bullets are for fools, bayonets for heroes!"

It was unclear who started shouting first, but then the warriors on both sides joined in.

Although the languages used were different, most people could understand a bit of the opposing side's speech.

Some who understood were momentarily stunned, nearly distracted on the battlefield to ponder life.

But this was the battlefield; they had no time to ponder life.

The two ships collided, and boarding began.

The Monarch was smaller in tonnage, and its deck was more than a meter lower than the Valmy.

This height difference was crucial. The Valmy's warriors could easily jump down, while the Monarch's warriors had to climb.

The height difference put the Monarch's warriors at a disadvantage at the beginning of the close-quarters battle.

Seeing this, Bridges' expression changed slightly.

He knew there was a height difference between the decks but didn't realize it was so much.

He continually gave orders, having the warriors in the rear continue shooting for support.

At this range, shooting would surely cause friendly fire, but he couldn't worry about that.

Friendly fire was better than the line collapsing.

As long as the bullets didn't hit the governor, it was fine.

"Bang!"

A stray bullet accurately hit Roland's back. Fortunately, the Moonlit Silver Armor's defense was remarkable, easily dispersing the impact, not causing a fatal wound.

Roland only felt a blow from behind, causing some pain.

He knew it wasn't a targeted shot, just friendly fire.

Without time to curse his bad luck, Roland threw all the smoke bombs hidden in his silver armor.

The terrain was unfavorable, so he used smoke as a cover.

The Jin Yuan People never dreamed that a smoke bomb would appear in a naval boarding fight, leaving them bewildered.

Amid the confusion, Roland leaped high, landing on the Valmy’s deck.

He held a rapid-fire short gun in each hand, pulling the triggers, continuously killing several people, creating a path for boarding advance.

Barely having time to reload after depleting his bullets, Roland casually holstered the pistol and grabbed the Hidden Moon Staff.

Made from the Ginkgo Tree Marrow Core, it had exceptional toughness and stiffness, perfect for naval boarding combat.

Roland didn’t even need to use special martial arts; he moved swiftly through the enemy lines, targeting enemy officers and sergeants.

"Duang!", "Duang!"

Like smashing watermelons with a hammer, each of Roland’s blows could crack an enemy’s skull open.

Using such attacks wasn’t effective in expert duels, but it was more than enough against these soldiers.

As Roland leaped onto the enemy ship, Lisa, who accompanied him, also sprang into action.

She followed him onto the enemy ship, unleashing scorching flames that turned a dozen enemies into fireballs.

These unfortunate fellows screamed and struggled, madly running around, further disrupting an already chaotic line.

Amidst the chaos as junior officers were decimated by Roland, the line was unable to hold, and a soft singing arose.

The song of the Sea Demon came from the ocean.

The second movement, Chaos.

Munina, lurking beneath the sea surface all this time, finally found her chance to sing.

The Jin Yuan People knew about the Sea Demons and had mature methods to resist their enchanting song; starting the song before the battle didn't work well.

She was waiting for an opportunity.

An opportunity where the Jin Yuan People were too occupied to care about the threat below the sea surface.

When the chance came, she certainly wouldn't waste it.

Munina recalled her tragic life, the near extermination of the Graham Clan, channeling her anger into her song, adding a few more layers of power.

The Chaos Overture, indiscriminate attack.

Fortunately, Munina was sensitive to the propagation range of sounds, carefully allowing the song's range to cover the side of the Valmy, causing greater harm to the Jin Yuan People.

With the dual debuffs of the smoke bomb cover and the Sea Demon's song interference, even the elite Imperial Guard couldn't withstand it, and Roland forcibly opened a path.

Roland didn't even glance at the fiercely fighting deck; he shouted to Lisa, instructing her to stay on deck and help the soldiers in the fray while he dashed toward the command room as fast as possible.

As long as Vernaf was captured alive, the Jin Yuan People could be forced to surrender.

Roland kicked the door open with a strong kick.

Gunfire thundered explosively, shrouding the command room in thick smoke.

Vernaf, holding a strangely shaped gun, laughed wildly.

That idiot Roland actually tried to single-handedly decapitate?

This was the result of archaeological excavations, a large-caliber shotgun loaded with single-slug rounds, capable of blasting even elephants to bloody shreds—let alone a human body!

As the smoke dissipated, Vernaf was about to check on Roland's corpse when a staff emerged from the smoke, pressing against his forehead.

It was the supposedly dead Roland?!

Vernaf was dumbfounded.

Roland, his entire body enveloped in golden light, smiled like a little fox, "Surrender, or die."

Chapter 362: Traitors Can't Be Guarded Against

Vernaf never dreamed that he would lose this naval battle, and in such a comical way.

Roland smiled gently. The scepter in his hand looked quite ordinary except for the colorful gemstone at the top, but he could sense the power of this scepter.

With one strike, even the ship's cabin could be smashed, let alone his head.

Vernaf shrugged, removed his sword, raised it with both hands above his head.

Though defeated in battle, he would not be defeated in spirit.

As a noble, even when surrendering, one must maintain demeanor, and Vernaf did it well.

"Admiral of the Jin Yuan Republic Navy, Vernaf de Kelvin, surrenders to you."

No wonder he’s a guy from the City of Romance, even surrendering is done with such ceremony.

Roland silently criticized.

Vernaf’s appearance was quite tidy, although there were a few crow’s feet at the corners of his eyes, he didn’t look particularly aged, instead appearing more mature.

A standard old Jin Yuan nobility demeanor, much like the lords of the Imperial Capital of Sussex.

Putting away the scepter, he extended his right hand to take Vernaf’s sword, and said solemnly, "Roland, Leader of the Sussex Empire’s Imperial White Rose Knight Order, accepts the surrender of the person in front of me, and guarantees that you and your subordinates will enjoy prisoner of war treatment."

Vernaf said nothing, he summoned his aide and issued the surrender order.

The young aide opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but was interrupted by Vernaf.

"It’s an order, end the battle, end the meaningless deaths."

As the order was given, the sound of cannons gradually subsided, and the shouts of killing quieted down.

The Chaos Overture disappeared into the night, the sea breeze blowing across the sea brought the painful wails of the wounded soldiers.

The noise from outside echoed in the command room, making the place feel even more deathly silent.

Looking at Vernaf's slightly dejected expression, Roland consoled him in a deep voice:

"General Vernaf, don't be discouraged, you only lost because you weren't daring enough."

Vernaf shook his head, sighed, and said helplessly, "A loss is a loss, no amount of excuses will change that."

"Governor Roland, if you trust me, I'd like to go to the Jia Lai Region to help you get your prisoners back. If there are no surprises, your landing forces should have suffered a lot by now."

Remembering the Perth that served as bait and was blown to pieces, Vernaf couldn't help but jab at Roland.

"Governor Roland's decisive tactics, truly admirable."

"Heavy losses for the landing forces? That's unlikely, I've already made them surrender," Roland said casually.

Vernaf widened his eyes, looking at Roland in disbelief.

"What, don't believe me?"

Roland naturally took the main seat and gestured for Vernaf to sit as well.

Vernaf's mind went blank, and he instinctively sat in the guest seat, only then realizing that Roland had taken his previous spot.

But he did not protest.

His current identity was that of a prisoner, and having a seat was already a sign of respect.

Seeing Vernaf's hesitant expression, Roland recalled the brave sinking of the Perth, and his teasing thought faded a lot, although he could provide the best pension for the whole crew of the Perth and ensure a good life for their families, he could never bring back those brave warriors.

The joy of victory was also diminished by the sacrifice of Grelinn and others, Roland said calmly:

"Stepping onto the battlefield, everyone must have the awareness of sacrifice. As a commander, I will choose the coldest combat technique, but I will also respect everyone's right to know. If Captain Grelinn believed that charging first was being cannon fodder, I would never force it."

"If it was a mission that required certain death, I would inform them in advance, seek their opinion, and provide the best compensation, with military merits calculated doubly."

"War always results in death, but they are not just pawns."

Vernaf did not expect Roland to be so candid, and for a moment didn't know what to say.

He sighed inwardly, deciding to skip the topic, "Governor Roland, you seem confident about defeating Marco? Don't underestimate him, although he is cold-blooded and brutal, his military talent is undeniable."

Roland said emphatically, "General Vernaf, it is absolutely impossible to defeat a nation awakened like the Jin Yuan Kingdom, but defeating tyrants and traitors is not hard."

Vernaf's pupils contracted sharply.

He could understand Roland’s intention. To others, Marco, known for being cold-blooded and brutal as well as his adeptness in various confrontational methods, was considered a tyrant in Roland’s view.

He murmured this unfamiliar term a few times, although he could understand Roland’s line of thought, he couldn’t help but remind:

"Governor Roland, there might be some things you are not aware of, so I must remind you. After Mr. Carlo was killed, his supporters, Robert and others, organized an army of more than a hundred thousand to campaign against Marco, but they were utterly defeated by him with less than ten thousand men."

"Why did Robert choose to go into exile, was it because he didn’t like the prosperity and freedom of Xidai? They simply failed."

Roland’s heart tightened, his eyes narrowing.

Romeo and the others spoke nothing of this event, only mentioning betrayal by traitors and backstabbing by villains.

Marco’s coup to seize power, with only a few thousand loyal followers and without proper legitimacy, could win a decisive victory against Carlo’s supporters with their hundred-thousand-strong army, showcasing his military prowess.

He knew about Romeo and the others’ exile following failure, but hadn’t realized the defeat was so severe.

From Vernaf’s words, it was clear he was very dissatisfied with Marco, only keeping silent before due to lacking the power to resist.

The old chap was quite cunning.

He dared not act himself, but hoped Roland and Alina would defeat Marco.

"General Werner, please continue."

Roland needed more detailed information.

Seeing Roland's humble attitude, Vernaf felt slightly relieved, sat up straight, and began to recount the many unknown secrets during Marco's coup.

After listening to Vernaf's account, Roland was even more surprised.

He had an illusion that Marco's bold and adventurous spirit was somewhat similar to Sif.

But Marco's military ability was more solid.

Fortunately, he had already offended everyone. Politically, he lost completely; no matter how strong his military ability, it would be hard for him to turn the tide.

The more Roland thought, the more frightened he became. Despite offending so many people, Marco still firmly controlled the political situation, eliminating dissidents and concentrating power.

If given another three to five years to reorganize order and restore people's livelihood, he might indeed return an independent and strong country to the Jin Yuan people.

At that time, there would naturally be literary scholars and news agencies to whitewash him.

Almost let this dog succeed.

Roland's back felt slightly chilly. Marco had the ability and the skills, but not the right timing.

Now was Marco's weakest time and also the best window to defeat him.

Seeing Vernaf's tightly furrowed brows, Roland's firm voice sounded.

"Military is politics with blood; no matter how capable Marco is, his will ultimately needs soldiers to execute. Vernaf, choosing Alina is choosing a free future."

Choose Alina?

Vernaf felt somewhat indifferent at heart.

Roland was not a philanthropist; the heavy price Alina had to pay to return to West City was unimaginable.

Thinking of the recently popular lover's literature in West City, he couldn't help but have a somewhat impolite thought.

Alina, she might already belong to Roland.

This is politics; to gain, you must pay.

However, this had nothing to do with him planning to retire after the war. Ultimately, he was old; the last wish to defeat the Sussex Navy was completely dashed, what else could he pursue?

Once Miss Alina successfully restored, he would hand over military power and retire to his territory.

The future world belonged to the young; old things should exit the stage.

Having said what he needed to, Vernaf simply stood up to bid farewell to Roland.

"Governor Roland, please dispatch capable personnel to escort me to the Jia Lai Region. General Soboslo and I have years of friendship; getting back the captives shouldn't be a problem."

After a slight pause, he smiled and added, "As long as you convey your confidence to him, Soboslo will also support Alina and you."

"General Werner, I am short of people here; you should take your own guards."

Vernaf suddenly raised his head and made eye contact with Roland.

Looking into Roland's clear eyes, he felt somewhat bewildered.

He was surprised to find that he couldn't understand Roland at all.

Allowing Roland to send people to escort him was actually to monitor him, just leaving some face.

Roland couldn't possibly not understand.

But Roland let him take his own guards, which was a sign of trust.

Was Roland pretending to be generous or was he serious?

While Vernaf was lost in thought, Roland smilingly explained: "General Vernaf, you are a truly respectable noble. I believe in you."

Roland's words made Vernaf feel as if he had taken a hot bath in cold weather, every pore of his body relaxed.

Who doesn't like to hear pleasant words? Unless the speaker's status is too low.

With Roland's status, even if it was flattery, he appreciated it.

Watching Vernaf leave, the smile on Roland’s lips gradually faded.

His trust was not in Vernaf at all, but in Marco.

No matter how many reasons Vernaf had, in Marco’s heart, he was a waste who surrendered to the enemy. Once Marco suspected someone, death would not be far off.

Vernaf had raised his sword to surrender long ago, leaving him no way back.

Since he couldn’t turn back, Roland naturally didn’t mind showing magnanimity to give him some face.

Old nobles are like that; you can hit them, scold them, even kill them, but you must give them enough face.

As he sent Vernaf off, Roland’s brain began to operate rapidly, and the corner of his lips slightly lifted.

Originally, there was only a thirty percent chance to capture West City; now, there was one hundred percent.

No city, no matter how fortified, could guard against internal traitors.

Chapter 363: The President Smiles, Life and Death Uncertain

"What did you say? West City was breached?!"

Marco squinted his eyes, his tone carrying a subtle tremor that was hard to detect.

He stared hard at the new intelligence director Dubuka standing before him, hardly believing his ears.

At this moment, he was stationed in Leon City on the Central Plateau of the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

This location is almost equidistant from West City and Ives Port, the geographical center of Jin Yuan Kingdom.

If the land of the Central Plateau weren't relatively barren, it would have the potential to become the capital.

Unfortunately, the plateau lacks water transport capability, and Leon City can only support tens of thousands of people.

A city with a population of tens of thousands as the capital does not match the international status of Jin Yuan Kingdom.

Using Leon City as a forward base was not a random choice by Marco, but a well-thought-out decision.

The central plateau is flat, advantageous from a higher position, attacks from any direction can be easily detected by the defending army and met head-on.

Here, there are lakes, rivers, grain supplies, even if the battle turns unfavorable, it can be used to counterattack.

As long as he holds the Central Plateau, he stands invincible.

Supplies constantly sent from the Northern Great Plains where West City is located are gathered in Leon City, then distributed by him to the frontline troops.

With control over food supplies, there's no fear of unrest or defection within the frontline troops.

Just a few minutes ago, he was still placing pieces on the sandbox according to the latest intelligence, plotting how to take down the rest of the old nobility after defeating Alina.

He never thought about losing.

Now, he knows.

Home invasion.

Faced with Marco’s anger, the new intelligence director Dubuka scratched his head and quietly said:

"Mr. President, the city defense at West City is intact, it wasn’t breached, but rather the gates were opened from the inside to welcome the enemy. We have a traitor in our ranks."

Marco remained silent for a long time before bursting into laughter.

He laughed with relief, the intelligence director standing opposite him nearly frightened to collapse.

A presidential laugh, life and death are unpredictable.

Those unfamiliar with Marco fear his stern face; in fact, although he is terrifying, his stern demeanor is still somewhat predictable. When he’s laughing wildly, what he’s thinking even the Great Goddess might not know.

While Dubuka was dominated by fear, Marco restrained his laughter and lowered his voice to ask:

"How many people know about this now?"

"Only I know now. The intelligence officer who escaped from West City was severely injured and died right after reporting."

"Very good."

Marco smiled as he patted Dubuka’s shoulder and softly said, "Dubuka, I will take care of your family, rest assured and go."

With a casual conversation, his hand, like a pair of iron pincers, grasped Dubuka's throat and gently twisted.

Dubuka's neck turned one hundred and eighty degrees and was snapped on the spot.

His eyes bulged wide, life frozen in place.

It had been less than twenty days since he took over as intelligence director.

Marco looked around, took a long spear from the wall, and casually thrust it into the ground, silently gouging out a large patch of earth.

In a few moments, he dug a large pit, pushed Dubuka's corpse inside, and covered it with soil.

Dubuka was, after all, a departmental-level official. If discovered dead in the president's study, it would surely shake the army's morale.

After tidying up the scene, Marco put the long spear back on the wall and carefully stared at the sandbox in a trance.

The news of West City's fall only shocked him for a brief moment; now he was completely calm.

He never cries over spilled milk, and even plans to use this bit of milk to lure new prey.

The fall of West City is a foregone conclusion; he needs to find a way to turn defeat into victory.

The bad news is he lost support from behind; the good news is he still has ample supplies, enough to hold out for a while.

What to do?

From a normal person's perspective, the fastest approach would be to reclaim West City.

But Marco is not a normal person; he is a madman, a brilliant madman.

Heading north would be a disaster.

In a few days, everyone in the army would know about West City's fall, and morale would collapse instantly.

Marco is proficient in military tactics and understands the importance of morale.

He personally led eight thousand five hundred elite troops to defeat a conservative army of one hundred seventy thousand, relying on high-spirited new troops trampling over the confused enemy repeatedly.

After careful observation, Marco's gaze locked onto the south.

Alina was riding high and had already advanced about eight hundred kilometers northwards, now just two hundred kilometers away at Ronald City, aiming directly at Leon.

As she advanced, her followers grew increasingly numerous, now exceeding three hundred thousand.

Marco's lips curled into a cold smile.

Originally, he planned to wait until Alina gathered all the rebels and then capture them in one fell swoop, but it seems he has to close the net ahead of schedule.

He never considered Alina a threat, even contemplating using her as bait to fish.

This should have been an exquisite layout, yet it's regrettably necessary to close the net early.

Marco made a swift decision.

He must advance south immediately.

As long as the advance is swift enough, the dire news of West City's fall won't catch up with him.

Estimating roughly, the bad news would take at least ten days to catch up with the main force.

That's enough!

Defeating Alina would only need a week.

No, not even that long. Two days of marching, one day of battle would suffice!

Marco is full of confidence about this.

Once Alina is shattered, Roland will have no choice but to slink away.

Military is an extension of politics; Roland is an excellent politician and wouldn't mix up priorities.

He might have ways to sneak attack West City, but has no reason to stay uninvited.

Then he could even hold a lavish banquet, thanking Roland for helping him catch all the hidden traitors.

Marco called for his adjutant to relay orders.

"Let the entire army rest, tomorrow morning I'll personally lead the cavalry unit to depart, the main force will follow at the fastest speed, I will crush the rebels at Ronald City!"

The adjutant dared not question why the president suddenly acted; he was just an adjutant, not the chief of staff. Not asking what shouldn't be asked could earn him a few more days of survival.

After leaving the tent, the adjutant heaved a sigh of relief and cursed harshly in his hometown dialect.

His curses were incoherent, only he knew who he was cursing.

Working under Marco is exceedingly difficult.

Who knows when he might lose his head?

He just caught a whiff of blood in the president's room earlier.

He didn't know who was the unlucky soul killed by the president personally, but it certainly was a high-ranking official.

The president wouldn't bother to personally handle someone too low in status.

If only Miss Alina could win, it would be great.

The adjutant was startled by his own bold thought.

He hurriedly dispelled this rebellious idea and swiftly skulked away, keeping his head down.

Better not meddle in the affairs of big figures!

Although he inwardly sympathized with Miss Alina, he didn't think she could win.

President Marco perhaps wasn't skilled in construction, but he excelled in conflict.

Fighting against him, even having nine heads wouldn't be enough.

Miss Alina might have some ability, but could she surpass her father?

Mr. Carlo was secretly manipulating the political landscape but was killed by Marco, could Alina with her ragtag bunch really overturn the heavens?

Although he didn't dare voice opinions in front of Marco, he understood military affairs.

Alina's forces seemed imposing, but they were essentially a ragtag army.

Her troops consisted of noble private guards, merchant militias, mercenaries, dockworkers, and even farmers.

Can such a group fight effectively?

What a joke.

Once President Marco's light cavalry arrives, the battle will turn into a one-sided massacre.

Thinking of Alina bewildered, watching her army collapse, the young adjutant couldn't help but feel some sympathy for her.

She was once the most beautiful iris of West City and the object of admiration for countless young people.

Her neck is so lovely; the blood spurting from its severance must be quite a sight?

Chapter 364: Never Retreat

Marco and his nightmarishly terrifying cavalry force are here!

Upon receiving this shocking news, Alina's consciousness stalled, her mind went blank.

Although she knew this day would come sooner or later, she was still somewhat unnerved when it finally arrived.

She instinctively glanced around, looking for the reassuring figure, but couldn't find it.

Feeling a faint sense of loss, Alina knew Roland had done enough.

This was her destiny, she must face it herself.

Although she had some understanding of military tactics, leading a troop of hundreds of thousands for the first time still left her scrambling.

Fortunately, she had plenty of military experts by her side; she only needed to oversee the overall situation.

Marco's timing was incredibly bad.

Her followers were deploying across a line stretching dozens of kilometers, engaging in relentless skirmishes with Deschamps' Third Legion on a near hundred-kilometer front.

Among nearly three hundred thousand troops, only over ten thousand were her loyalists, the rest had come from various regions to support her resistance against Marco.

Time was insufficient, she couldn't even reorganize these troops in time.

In fact, she couldn’t do it even if she tried.

Would it be possible to take command of the private militias or guards recruited at the nobles’ expense?

Her relationship with these people was less of a superior-subordinate nature and more of a shared interest alliance.

She dared to stand up and lead the resistance, backed by her father’s reputation, these talents followed her; if she hastily claimed power, they would be gone by tomorrow.

A year and a half ago, Alina might have acted recklessly; now, certainly not.

She played the role everyone hoped she would play.

At least for now.

The army moved northward for eight hundred kilometers, mostly marching smoothly, without any city resisting desperately. She had simply allowed part of the forces to act freely.

As long as they didn’t violate the main strategy of heading north, she rarely interfered in the command of each group.

She knew each group had their own ideas, and true battles would rely on the exiles.

In the confrontation with Deschamps’ Third Legion, the numerical advantage played a significant role; though the exchange ratio wasn’t favorable, they were steadily advancing.

Deschamps’ strength was his steadiness; his weakness was also his steadiness.

He dared not take the initiative, maintaining a mindset of seeking neither credit nor fault in facing Alina.

On the nearly hundred-kilometer battlefront, both sides' forces interlocked, occasionally tearing open the opponent's defense only to have it quickly sealed.

Alina was indeed inexperienced, but she was surrounded by military talents.

Several old noble military officers joined her camp, solid in their professional skills, but without a place on Marco's side.

Relying on these old officers with strong military expertise, Alina slowly yet steadily advanced, continuously bleeding Deschamps.

Over the past week, the Third Legion of Deschamps suffered casualties exceeding nine thousand, while Alina's forces also had over ten thousand wounded or killed.

Marco's cruel rule only suppressed conflicts, not solved them.

Seeing Alina gaining victory momentum, many observers decided she could win and joined in.

With each advance, her followers increased significantly; as the disparity in numbers gradually became imbalanced, Deschamps was also feeling strained.

Three against one, naturally, was easy. Alina was confidently asserting that in at most half a month, she could deplete the steadfast veteran general, and point her forces directly at the Central Plateau for a decisive battle with Marco.

As long as she reached Leon City, she could await Roland's appearance from behind, executing a textbook maneuver to encircle Marco from both directions.

Forced into a central collapse, Marco—even with the War God's possession—couldn't persevere under the premise of demoralization.

Once Marco was surrounded in the Central Plateau, the war would be over.

Last night, she received a carrier pigeon from Roland, learning West City had been seized by Roland, she was even more convinced Marco's end was near.

Just as she was envisaging victory, Marco charged out like a madman.

This was entirely different from her anticipated script.

All her arrangements were made for a war of attrition with Deschamps, yet Marco came for a life-and-death struggle without delay.

Alina's heart was pounding.

It made no sense, who would abandon a fortified camp and logistical support to lead light cavalry on an assault?

Though confused about Marco's desperation, reality was that he was here.

What to do?

Roland said he would dispatch forces quickly, but organizing West City's order would undoubtedly require time. If she couldn't halt Marco's desperate assault, this time difference could be fatal.

Alina's palms were sweaty with tension, she instinctively wanted to divine Marco's fate, to see when he might meet his end in the Netherworld, but she couldn't.

Divination required a calm state of mind, and she was currently in disarray, making it impossible.

Even if she wasn’t flustered, it wouldn’t work; Marco’s fate clashed with hers—if he lived, she would die—calculating Marco was equivalent to calculating herself, not only inaccurate but also potentially backfiring.

Alina couldn’t come up with a strategy, so she forced herself to stay calm and consulted her subordinates first.

"Romeo, what do you think we should do?"

Perhaps remembering the past massacre by eight thousand cavalrymen, Romeo’s expression wasn’t pleasant. After hesitating for a moment, he bit his lip and suggested.

"Marco’s cavalry differs from ordinary cavalry. Besides regular cuirassiers, he has five hundred magic armored cavalry; firearms soldiers simply cannot stop them. I believe we should take the initiative to retreat, let the second-line troops deplete his forces and morale, and launch a counterattack when he is exhausted."

Romeo had attended a military academy and served in the army, qualifying him as a campaign-level commander.

But he was only qualified.

His suggestion was the choice aligning with general military principles, yet currently the worst option.

Though somewhat bewildered, Alina hadn’t become muddled to such a degree.

This wasn’t a regular war, this was rebellion; whoever loses is the traitor. In a narrow encounter, the hero wins, there’s no way to retreat at this moment.

Rebellion is a once-and-for-all deal.

The moment the cohesion disperses, the troop becomes erratic immediately.

Romeo’s foolish suggestion caused Alina to gradually calm down.

Her gaze swept over the other officers, observing their somewhat bewildered and even fearful expressions, reinforcing her own judgment.

These are all people who have followed her father for many years, forced into exile abroad.

Their loyalty is unquestionable, but when even they feel lost, what would the followers outside think?

She must win.

Without any immediate solution, a familiar figure appeared in her mind, silently pondering what Roland would do if he were present.

A moment later, Alina had her answer.

She drew her sword, releasing a clear, refreshing laugh, "I feared traitor Marco would escape, never expecting him to come deliver his own death."

"Relay my orders. General Luke should lead the Third Legion along the Luwa River, breaking through the enemy line, circling behind Marco to sever connections and reinforcements. General Jeric should lead the Second Legion to break through from the right flank, cooperating with Luke to intercept enemy reinforcements..."

Alina’s bold decision left the officers present somewhat stunned.

Her plan to have the general battling externally temporarily abandon Deschamps to encircle from behind and cut off enemy supply lines, even forming a pincers encirclement, indicated clearly her resolve to face Marco in a decisive battle.

Her deployment was very clear, she intended to devour both Deschamps and Marco simultaneously.

Judging fairly, her arrangements were extremely comprehensive, leaving no faults.

If not for Marco and the Magic Armored Cavalry Camp, that is.

This special unit’s equipment consists of eight thousand sets of magic armor excavated from the antique armory of the Magic Empire, capable of defending against firearms and magic attacks, and soldiers can be grouped through magic sequence, significantly enhancing cooperative efficiency, with combat power far surpassing ordinary cavalry.

Only heavy artillery can pose a threat to them.

However, artillery lacks mobility and can hardly catch cavalry.

Alina’s plan left Romeo horrified, and he exclaimed loudly to remind, "Miss Alina, what about you? You’ve diverted other units, Marco will certainly come straight for you."

"I’ll be here, waiting for him to deliver his death."

Alina said calmly.

She pointed to the center of the sand table.

This is the small high ground where the exiled are stationed, as well as the artillery position.

A trace of blood flashed in Alina’s eyes. Artillery has difficulty targeting cavalry, but they’ll wait for cavalry to deliver themselves.

Marco has only one target, which is her.

Although the Magic Armored Cavalry is fierce, the energy stored in the magic equipment is finite, and once exhausted, they must stop to recharge.

Marco has no surplus energy to waste on rag-tag units; he must directly find her and break through the defenses.

Even knowing there are artillery here, he would still come.

The officers present, being professionals, naturally understood Alina's deployment. She intended to wager her life against Marco here.

Romeo was silent.

Since Alina had made her decision, all he could do was support it.

He was the first to rally, drawing his sword fiercely and shouting, "Protect Alina! Protect the glory of freedom!"

The other officers also drew their swords and echoed loudly.

The spirit of war resonated through the command room.

Alina nodded with satisfaction; the morale was palpable, enough at least for a fight.

If she fled out of fear, it wouldn't be long before traitors would send her severed head to Xidai, without even needing to queue at the guillotine.

After concluding the military meeting, the officers left one after another to prepare to assemble their troops for battle, except Romeo remained discreetly.

"Alina, do you have a plan to deal with the Magic Armored Cavalry?"

"Do not worry, we will surely win this battle."

Alina didn’t respond directly to Romeo’s query, instead adeptly continuing to sketch visions.

Recently, her skill in painting visions has grown increasingly refined.

Seeing Alina unwilling to divulge, Romeo couldn’t press further.

Seeing Alina’s reluctance to continue, he had no choice but to salute Alina before departing. At the doorway, he paused, not turning back, merely saying in a deep voice:

"Alina, I will lead heavy infantry at the front to buy time. Tell the artillery not to worry about me, just bombard the most congested areas of the enemy."

Alina did not respond, but just when Romeo thought she wouldn’t, she slowly said:

"I understand, take care."

Romeo was not particularly outstanding among his father’s disciples, but his loyalty was beyond doubt.

His idea was simple, using himself as a meat shield to hold back the Magic Armored Cavalry, buying time for the artillery to adjust firing coordinates.

Feeling his resolve to fight to the death, Alina knew it would be insulting to him to speak words of dissuasion.

"Thank you."

"No need, I’ve awaited this day for too long."

Romeo never turned back, striding away.

He couldn’t turn back; he didn’t want Miss Alina to see the tears at the corner of his eyes.

After his teacher was murdered, what he longed for most was to kill Marco and avenge his teacher.

His innate talent was not outstanding among the disciples of the teacher, even at the bottom tier, but the teacher never slighted him for this, giving him the same treatment as the other students.

Everyone has their obsession, his obsession is the teacher.

The chance to avenge the teacher is right before him; how could he possibly forgo it?

As long as there is a chance, even accompanying Marco to the Netherworld would mean nothing.

Chapter 365: Who Is More Ruthless

"Boom!" "Boom!"

The deafening roar of hundreds of heavy artillery firing in unison.

Huge projectiles hit the ground, dirt erupting everywhere.

Those directly hit by the solid cannonballs naturally turned into a mist of blood, while those grazed were miserably maimed with limbs torn apart.

The cries of agony from those injured by the shelling echoed across the battlefield, exceptionally harrowing.

Smoke rolling, flesh flying, screams lingering.

The battlefield seemed like purgatory.

When Marco launched his attack, the usually composed and prudent General Deschamps uncharacteristically went personally to the front lines to urge the troops forward.

He understood politics, but he never meddled.

He's merely a soldier, bound to carry out the orders of the president.

Who the president is, isn't his concern.

He had some sympathy for Alina, but not much.

In his view, since Alina had left, she should have reclined abroad rather than returned to incite rebellion.

The struggles for power above, yet ordinary soldiers must pay the price with their lives; he was weary of it.

He only wished to quickly end this civil war that was constantly bleeding the country.

Though President Marco's personal virtues could not be called noble, he had a firm grip, an excellent ability to lead the Jin Yuan Kingdom through impending chaos.

Alina lacked such ability, and Carlo, who loved to preserve his reputation, even less.

Despite disliking Marco, Deschamps was still resolutely on the president's side.

He was willing to choose someone capable of leading the country out of its predicament.

Deschamps, with his seniority and high prestige, was a rare civilian general with outstanding reputation in the military. His presence on the front lines greatly boosted the morale of the Third Legion and dispelled the soldiers' resistance against Marco.

"The old general is watching us!"

"We can't let those rebels win!"

Yet, amidst the voices of support, there were many who silently lowered their heads.

The number of these silent ones was not small.

The reason for the soldiers' differing attitudes was simple. Supporters were mostly of civilian background, whose families hadn't been executed by Marco.

However, many soldiers' families had been sent to the guillotine in the past year or more.

Expecting them to understand Marco's grand strategic deployments was clearly impossible.

They only wished to find a chance to shoot the president in the back, to let his mind explode.

Regardless of support or not, with Deschamps at the front lines, the Third Legion temporarily ensured unity and cohesion, and proactively launched an attack.

Feeling the positive changes on the battlefield, Marco was excited; he raised his sword and ordered another attack.

The loading speed of heavy artillery is very slow.

Cleaning the remaining powder in the barrel, reloading ammunition, correcting shooting coordinates, and continuing to fire.

This process often takes several minutes.

In the previous volley, nearly a hundred heavy artillery roared, instantly killing nearly a thousand people.

At least a third were the exiled infantry at the forefront.

Along with them, many more cavalry were taken.

Marco had only five hundred Demon Armored Cavalry under his command, the rest were elite cuirassiers.

Robust reinforced plate armor could withstand bullet fire, but couldn't stand against artillery shells.

The cavalry suffered hundreds of casualties, and worse, the horses were terrified.

The most excellent war horses could charge through artillery fire, but such horses were rare; most horses reverted to basic animal instincts amid the wild bombardment, throwing off the riders and fleeing on their own.

Soldiers have families and must obey discipline; horses don't care about these.

After the shelling, at least three thousand cavalrymen from Marco's troops lost their horses, becoming infantry.

His luck was equally bad.

Marco wore the finest Magic Armor; as long as no vital spot was hit by a shell, he was fine, but his horse was flesh and blood, it couldn't withstand it.

The projectile fired by a 12-pound cannon landed square on his horse, smashing it into mince.

Marco was thrown off the horseback; nevertheless, he was calm and composed, unhesitatingly pulling a passing cavalryman off and seizing the horse, becoming a gallant cavalryman once more.

Marco galloped back onto the battlefield, yet the soldiers willing to stay by his side were gone.

Soldiers aren't fools; who'd want to stand by a tyrant who casually sacrifices soldiers' lives?

They pretended to fight fiercely, yet distanced themselves from Marco.

Marco couldn't be bothered with them; his gaze locked onto Alina amidst the crowd, full of murderous intent.

Being targeted by Marco, Alina felt a sudden chill down her spine like a frog stared down by a venomous snake, but she quickly composed herself.

Marco was a Transcendent; she was well aware of it.

His prowess was already formidable and must have advanced rapidly over the past year.

If she were still the former Alina, she'd surely stand no chance.

But she was no longer the somewhat naive traveler.

She slowly took off her glasses.

With glasses on, she was composed and efficient, like an old captain commanding a fleet to sail the seas.

Removing the glasses simultaneously removed her commander skills, exchanged for stronger personal combat ability.

Though Arts Student Alina seemed naive, her duel capability far surpassed Captain Alina.

Glancing at the interwoven battlefield and Marco's rapidly advancing light cavalry, Alina too locked eyes on Marco.

This decisive showdown was destined to end with a traditional knightly duel.

Even though neither of them were knights.

"Let him come!"

Alina lightly commanded, making the guards before her step aside.

These individuals couldn't possibly stop Marco, nor even consume him.

Rather than let them die in vain and inadvertently keep boosting Marco's morale, it's better to make way.

The distance of two hundred meters was covered in the blink of an eye.

Even though they made way, the exiles' hatred for Marco was too deep.

They raised their firearms and fired one last volley.

Marco's horse was shot dead again.

A cruel smile appeared on his lips as he lightly leapt in front of Alina.

"Alina, long time no see."

He calmly drew his longsword, pointing it at Alina.

Alina tightly gripped her sword in her right hand, holding a specially made pistol in her left, without hysterically questioning Marco about why he betrayed her father, why he killed her father.

She didn’t say a word of nonsense and instead calmly started shooting.

Words are pale; expecting them to hurt Marco was impossible.

If words can’t harm the enemy, then it’s better not to speak.

At the moment she fired, Roland’s smile before the battle flashed through Alina’s mind.

What control is there in war?

By now, the course of battle had long diverged from Roland’s expectations, totally chaotic.

She hoped she could win. But she knew Marco’s talent. This man seemed born to struggle with others.

He excelled at various methods of combat, including one-on-one duels.

If only Roland were here.

Alina silently thought that Roland always came up with clever strategies to deal with strong enemies. Like in the battle to encircle and kill the Old Commander.

If Roland were here, he would most likely take the opportunity to attack Marco from behind while he was fully engaged.

That's what he would do, based on her understanding of Roland.

But sadly, he was not here.

Alina could only face this life-and-death struggle alone.

As she threw away her pistol and charged forward, Alina sighed in her heart.

Roland, where are you?

...

Roland was on the move.

In an unnoticed corner, a small number of light cavalry were galloping across the plains.

They wore Jin Yuan uniforms but communicated with each other in authentic Sussex Language.

In the center of the cavalry, there were clearly Roland and Lisa.

The day West City was taken, Roland didn't have time to reunite with Sylph before he donned a Jin Yuan uniform retrieved from the storeroom and set out on horseback.

Sylph didn't understand, thinking it unnecessary to hurry, but Roland insisted on going.

Under Roland's insistence, Sylph stayed in Xidai to handle various matters, while Roland took Lisa with him.

It wasn’t because Lisa had stronger combat skills than Sylph, but because her political skills were too weak, unable to stabilize the unrest in West City.

Sylph never imagined that one day Roland would consider her to have stronger political abilities.

She didn’t even know whether to feel gratified or angry.

Although she didn’t fully agree with Roland’s judgment, Sylph fully supported him.

After all, Roland had been right too many times before.

Another reason for bringing Lisa was to deal with the Demon Armored Cavalry.

As a disciple of the Great Mage Anthony, Lisa easily dealt with these mass-produced magic equipment.

As long as she released a stagnation spell, she could temporarily stop the magic armor from functioning.

Without the support of their magic armor, Marco’s cavalry was just an ordinary cavalry unit.

Despite his frantic pace, Roland had underestimated Marco’s decisiveness.

Bad news: Marco’s advance was so fast they couldn’t catch up.

Good news: Marco’s advance was so fast, no one intercepted Roland.

Roland and the light cavalry led by Jes, dressed in Jin Yuan Kingdom uniforms, passed through several lines of defense and finally reached the battlefield at the height of the fighting.

Finding the Demon Armored Cavalry, Lisa finally had her stage to perform.

She unfurled a magical barrier and released a stagnation spell, tossing magic scrolls as if they cost nothing.

Mass-produced soldiers couldn’t compare to the personal disciple of a Great Mage.

The magic armor, sturdy in the face of gunfire, was vulnerable in the face of true magic.

The Demon Armored Cavalry collapsed in agony, losing their combat ability.

Seeing Lisa was chanting a spell to prepare a large-scale destructive magic, Roland hurriedly stopped her.

"Stop, I need these magic armors! Leave this to you, I’m going to provide support."

"I can’t stop; once a magic is charging, it must be released, or it will backfire." Lisa’s cute face flushed red, and the backfire from forcibly slowing the magic’s charge made her blood boil.

"Aim there!" Roland saw the duel between Marco and Alina and pointed to the duel scene.

Although Alina’s combat technique was exquisite, she was still slightly inferior to Marco.

Her resistance was fierce, yet she continued to retreat, getting injured in three places.

Lisa hesitated for a moment, then hurled the fully charged giant fireball down.

Alina had long seen Roland, and with his hand gesture as a hint, she quickly withdrew from the battlefield with a risk, taking the hit to escape dozens of meters away.

At the moment Marco was about to pursue, the fireball landed.

Deprived of his magical ability, the magic armor couldn't protect Marco; he screamed in agony, getting scorched terribly.

As he stumbled back and steadied himself, he realized no one was around him.

He was surrounded.

He was at the end of his road.

Chapter 366: Third Movement

When Marco's magic armor ability was paused, the outcome of the battle was already determined.

Marco was indeed powerful, but the real source of his confidence was the magical armor he acquired by chance.

Without this magic equipment, he wouldn't dare to directly confront Alina and seek victory in defeat.

Success due to the magical armor, and failure because of it.

Once the attributes of the magic equipment were temporarily removed, his combat power returned to its proper level.

Roland did not rush to end Marco's life.

A cornered beast still fights; someone like Marco surely has a backup plan.

His gaze turned to Alina, silently inquiring about her situation.

Alina bit her lip, barely managing to nod.

Earlier, to withdraw from the battle, she paid a heavy price, being stabbed by Marco. Though the bleeding was stopped for now, the piercing pain still made her tremble slightly.

Her combat power wasn’t even a third of her best state; in the upcoming battle, she could at best assist Roland.

After confirming Alina was alright, Roland’s focus locked onto Marco.

He could sense an eerie, elusive power lingering around Marco.

The victory was certain, and he didn’t want to endure Marco’s dying counterattack.

Roland gave Alina a nod, and Alina understood, saying coldly to Marco:

"Marco, you have no chance, surrender now and you might still..."

Marco didn’t look back at Alina for a moment, interrupting her words directly.

"If I surrender now, will you spare me?"

Alina was instantly rendered speechless. The hatred between her and Marco was insurmountable; some promises were so unbelievable that even Marco didn’t believe them, nor did she.

She didn’t want to waste words with Marco and instead turned to Roland.

No more words, let’s do this. Her intent was crystal clear.

Roland nodded and raised his scepter.

"Marco, you've killed too many, I have no right to forgive you on behalf of those unjustly slain. You may depart now."

Listening to Roland's words, Marco suddenly burst into wild laughter.

He sneered and shouted: "You remnants of the old era will eventually be swept into the garbage heap of history, and everyone will get a fair evaluation from history."

"Even if I depart, you will accompany me in my grave!"

A hint of liberating smile appeared at the corner of his lips, preparing to take a few with him upon his death.

Just as he was about to act, the soul's voice from the depths of the magic armor echoed in Marco's mind.

"Marco, have you gone mad? Why refuse the terms? This is your last chance, foolish human, ah!"

Marco did not respond, even wanting to sneer.

Trade one's soul for power? He wasn't a fool; how could he make a deal with the devil?

Those who trade with the devil, their souls cannot enter the Netherworld post-death; the waters of the Nether River will swallow the devil's marks deep within the soul.

The devil seems to offer transparent prices, very fair, but they never tell you how much hidden costs you must pay.

While he did desire power, he wouldn't trade with the devil.

This magic armor is high-quality loot, likely to fall into Roland or Alina's hands. With their nature, they might accept the devil's trade.

Thinking of this, Marco's lips curled in a chilling smile.

He wanted to build a free new world, not a world ruled by devil's arrival.

Even if everyone considered him a cold-blooded devil, there were some deals he firmly refused.

His gaze locked onto Roland, identifying him as the target to bring along.

Whether Alina, sheltered by her father's reputation, lived or not was of little consequence. His goal was to ensure Roland joined him.

Once Roland was dead, Alina, like a greenhouse flower, would be devoured by the brutal chaos.

The girl wielding magic beside Roland would face the same fate.

Marco moved.

His figure like an apparition, a flickering afterimage appearing before Roland.

This was a preview offered by the devil's trade.

Just the preview was tantalizingly tempting; normal people would not withstand such allure, but Marco could.

Aside from liking conflict, he barely enjoyed any personal pleasures, not like others in power indulging in the joys of authority and wealth.

In many people’s eyes, he seemed born a madman, born for destruction.

Perhaps so, he indeed came to destroy.

What he wanted to destroy was the decaying system that drove his whole family to death, countless feudal lords like Alina and Roland.

Just break the old world, the new world will naturally arrive.

Whether it was completed by him personally wasn’t so important.

The sharp blade was drawn, sword edge flashing toward Roland’s neck.

No matter how Roland dodged or blocked, Marco could adapt accordingly with shifting moves; his only thought now was to take Roland with him.

Without Roland, Alina alone couldn’t possibly hinder him.

He clearly discerned his true adversary.

Roland only saw a figure flash, and the blade lights were right in front of him.

He felt a chill down his spine; he suddenly realized this was Marco’s strongest burst of force. He almost had the illusion that Marco’s prime target wasn’t Alina but him.

Without time to think deeper, Roland instantly activated Divine Protection.

The superb defense of the Holy Knight was fully revealed within the golden light.

In split seconds, Marco’s fatal strike pierced through Roland’s Divine Protection, yet his final attack was thwarted.

Roland unhesitatingly slammed down the scepter.

The simple yet powerful strike hit Marco’s head precisely.

Two crisp sounds came almost simultaneously.

Marco shattered Roland’s defense but couldn’t advance further.

Roland shattered Marco’s... he had no defense, only the crown of his head.

Marco’s absolute speed inherently sacrificed defense, aiming for an all-out trade.

He almost succeeded.

If his opponent wasn’t Roland, but an ordinary Tier Seven not specialized in defense, he would have reversed the situation.

Unfortunately, his opponent was Roland, his last hope was also extinguished.

Marco’s consciousness gradually blurred; the final sound he left behind was somber and indifferent.

"I lost, but don’t expect to win either."

Leaving behind the final riddle, Marco’s body softly collapsed.

Watching the ruthless man who turned the entire Jin Yuan upside down finally fall, Roland could hardly believe it.

His heart pounded fiercely.

Marco’s final strike far exceeded his expectations, even piercing through his Divine Protection head-on.

This was highly unusual.

According to Roland’s estimation, Marco’s raw strength only barely reached the threshold of Tier Seven.

And his Divine Protection was very sturdy, able to withstand even a Tier Seven opponent for a moment, yet Marco broke through it head-on.

If Marco truly had such power, he would have taken them down long ago.

Roland’s gaze lingered on Marco’s body, focusing on the Magic Armor.

The pitch-black armor still emitted a strange magic power.

Earlier, Lisa used special magic to temporarily disable all Magic Armors; now it was recovering.

Roland stepped forward, confirmed Marco’s death, removed the Battle Armor, and prepared to take it back for study.

Now is not the time to think about that; what needs to be done is to end the war.

Roland found a Long Spear and lifted Marco’s body high, his voice echoing across the battlefield.

"Marco is dead, Marco is dead!"

With Roland's roar, a melodious and mournful song began to play.

Not far away, Munina, who had followed Roland ashore for the battle, sang a new Chapter.

Her body, modified by Norton, was very different from before. She could stay ashore for long periods with the aid of respiratory equipment, without relying on the water.

However, singing on land would double the consumption.

Previously, Roland did not let her act, hoping that her song would turn the tide at a critical moment.

Marco's surprise attack came too fast for her song to be of use.

Perhaps having witnessed too much death, perhaps recalling the tragic ambush of their tribe, perhaps thinking of the tribe being forced away from the Ocean, or maybe remembering a sister who changed her life, she was overwhelmed with emotions and unintentionally started singing the Third Chapter.

Ocean's Third Chapter, a lament.

This song was a perfect match for this battlefield.

Marco's corpses left the soldiers of the Jin Yuan Kingdom bewildered.

Did the esteemed President truly die in battle?

They had no time to think because their minds were immediately consumed by immense grief.

The power of the Third Chapter lies not in sadness itself but in its transmission.

The song evokes inner pains, making listeners involuntarily sing along.

Under the influence of Munina's song, more and more soldiers recalled the tragedies of the past year and more, the innocents who died tragically, the lost loved ones, and they began to hum mournfully.

The Third Chapter seemed to possess strange magic, infecting everyone.

The eyes of those who heard the song, once stained by blood and hatred, gradually cleared up.

Soldiers slowly lowered their weapons while officers' pistols were frozen in the air.

The war had ended.

The upper echelon's power struggle had reached a conclusion; there was no need for further self-destruction.

Who knows which soldier started it, but someone cried due to sadness.

Crying was even more contagious than singing.

Munina's singing voice was also weeping.

The magnetic voice echoed over the battlefield.

Her voice, though penetrating, could only reach less than a kilometer, while crying spread along the entire front line with the response of the soldiers.

People who were just a moment ago holding Firearms and stabbing each other with bayonets now stared blankly at each other.

Quickly, weapons were dropped to the ground, and soldiers clasped their heads, weeping bitterly.

They seemed trapped in an eternal nightmare, finally awakening.

"Marco is dead!"

This phrase echoed above the battlefield.

Though some were frustrated, trying to maintain order and continue the war, it was futile.

More people were weary of war, having had enough. Too much blood of the Jin Yuan people had been shed; it was time to stop.

In the center of the battlefield, Alina stood frozen like a statue, tears rolling down her cheeks slowly.

She could finally open her eyes from the suffocating nightmare, take a breath of relief.

She rushed forward like a madwoman, gripping a sharp sword, and drove it fiercely into Marco’s heart.

Repeatedly, she pulled out the sword and drove it in again as if venting her anger.

Roland didn’t dissuade her.

If he had been through what she had, he’d want Marco thoroughly destroyed.

Alina finally exhausted her fury, slowly lifting her head, her fair face covered in blood, looking somewhat fierce.

Lisa, standing next to Roland, let out a soft sigh without speaking.

Her parents died from disease, and while there was regret, there was more sadness.

Alina’s father was healthy, living comfortably, with much life left ahead, but died unjustly due to Marco’s treachery.

Lisa understood Alina and supported her.

While Lisa was lost in thought, Alina, having vented, cried and lunged forward.

She lunged hard at Roland.

She needed a wide embrace now, allowing her to cry freely.

As she lunged into an embrace, opening her blurry eyes, she was stunned to find that Lisa had replaced Roland where he stood.

She had lunged into Lisa’s arms.

Before Alina could speak, Lisa’s gentle voice had already reached her ears.

"Alina, I know you want to cry, but not now. So many people are watching you."

Alina paused for a few seconds, sniffled, and softly whimpered, "I know, thank you."

Seeing that Alina ultimately did not dive into Roland’s embrace, Lisa finally let out a breath.

Crazy! Who throws themselves into a man’s arms in broad daylight?

Even if she didn’t care—well, she kind of cared.

In any case, Empress Sylph couldn't bear to see such things.

She genuinely considered Alina.

She could swear to it.

Chapter 367: Title?

The war has ended.

There always has to be a reason for war, and with Marco's death, the reason for continuing the war no longer exists.

Several legions have sent representatives to verify the identity and confirm Marco's death.

After receiving the affirmative answer, the four legions organized by Marco quickly chose to surrender.

Yet the war still caused indelible pain.

Starting from Alina's landing, this campaign took over seventy thousand lives and left tens of thousands with incurable injuries from the war.

Compared to this total casualty of tens of thousands, the pain of the Jin Yuan Kingdom is even more severe.

The entire nation, under Marco's cruel rule, was shrouded in an atmosphere of terror, with everyone fearing for their safety, let alone focusing on construction and production.

To heal this terrible damage, Alina still has a lot of work to do.

The first thing she did was announce a pardon for everyone except Marco and a very few die-hard followers.

"All of this was Marco's sins,"

This remark is both a summary of the chaos of the Jin Yuan over the past year and a disguised amnesty decree.

Since Marco has died carrying all the sins, naturally, the others bear no responsibility.

At least everyone was willing to think this way.

Although Alina didn't explicitly say she was pardoning everyone, it was implicitly accepted by all.

However, many ignored one point.

Assigning all sins to Marco may sound forceful, but it's actually devoid of binding power.

How much evil can Marco accomplish on his own?

Did he have accomplices?

Surely he did, and many of them.

Once the political situation stabilizes, a group of scapegoats must be selected to relieve the people's pent-up anger.

The guillotine will be stored away after completing this final historical mission.

This method of execution by a single decisive blow is somewhat barbaric, and Alina doesn't plan to use it for executing criminals in the future.

Hanging is more humane, at least it leaves the whole body intact.

According to the teachings of the Divine Court of Fengrao, the head is the most mysterious organ, the soul resides within the head, and those beheaded cannot cross the Nether River, destined to become wandering spirits.

Those often beheaded know well that being decapitated is not a pleasant memory.

In any case, while granting amnesty to all, Alina also retained the right to pursue charges.

The reckoning must continue, only this time it's not Marco reckoning with his foes, but everyone reckoning with him.

After ending the war, Alina called upon all ranks to return to Xidai.

She intends to convene a tri-level meeting to discuss the future of the nation together.

No one objected.

Although theoretically Alina had no eligibility to take over national power, no one stood up to remind her.

After all, she killed Marco.

If Marco was a devil, wouldn't the one who could kill the devil be even more formidable?

Public opinion shifted from questioning Alina's status to how to make Saintess Fuchou Alina's leadership of the nation legitimate.

Amidst everyone scratching their heads, the Duke of Champagne proposed a suggestion that rendered all silent.

Call for Miss Alina to ascend the throne as Empress.

The Duke of Champagne is one of the five remaining Dukes of the Jin Yuan Kingdom, with a family legacy spanning a millennium, and his title predates the Old Empire.

He indeed has the authority to suggest this.

However, more people gently reminded him, "Sir, the times have changed."

Now Jin Yuan is a Republic.

An Emperor in a Republic, are we joking?

Just as the atmosphere grew particularly awkward, Alina herself stood forth and expressed her stance.

"Since it is a Republic, let’s not fiddle with the theatrics of ascension. I rose in arms simply to restore order to the nation, to eliminate traitors. If there was a personal motive, it was also to avenge my father."

"Having completed these revenges, both publicly and privately, I should also retire."

Alina humbly expressed that she is young and inexperienced, lacking the ability and qualification to govern a nation, and requested that someone more respected take on this heavy responsibility.

Her words were well-spoken, but the people were not fools.

If she truly wished to retire, she wouldn't have disbanded others' armies while retaining her own group.

If she truly wished to retire, she should have returned to the southern territories instead of marching resolutely north towards West City.

Some things can be spoken by leaders, but it's foolish to believe them.

With Alina's continuous northward advance, the officials in West City felt like ants on a hot pan, wracking their brains daily to find legal loopholes for Alina's smooth accession.

Jin Yuan, after all, is a great nation, still with its dignity.

Alina's rise to power is acceptable, but the nation must be given a dignified stance.

Before Mr. Carlo's incident, Alina's official position was a diplomatic envoy.

What level is an envoy? No level.

Diplomatic envoy is originally a part-time job, based on the original official position.

Alina's original position was a senior assistant in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with an administrative level of B3.

At this level, she could easily be a mayor, and being a governor would be due to nepotism, let alone directly becoming the country's leader.

There is no precedent for this, neither in law nor in practice.

If Alina were to become president, the Jin Yuan Kingdom would certainly become a laughing stock worldwide.

But Alina's army is steadily marching north, and no one can stop her from taking over state power.

The officials in West City not only have to face Alina but also another girl who gives them a headache.

Sif.

Although the officials rack their brains over Alina's legal status, one thing is clear: Alina is the actual ruler of the country.

So what does Sif count as now?

Fortunately, she appears as Count Tyrone, saving face for the officials of West City and the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

If the Queen of Sussex were to occupy Xidai, the Jin Yuan Republic would never be able to hold its head up again.

To avoid a complete diplomatic rupture, Sif generously stationed outside the city and merely sent troops to take over the city's defenses.

Before considering Alina's feelings, these officials had to consider Sif's feelings even more.

After much deliberation, the officials couldn't find a way to compromise.

After all, Sif entered the Jin Yuan Kingdom under the pretext of declaring war on Alina.

With Alina about to become the national leader, does Count Sif's declaration of war still stand?

If it does, should the war continue?

The mere thought nearly made the brains of the West City officials explode.

As per the agreement, to ensure the safety of citizens' lives and property, West City announced it would cease resistance and temporarily belong to Count Tyrone, under Sif's orders.

Until Sif and Alina decide the winner, they are even considered Sif's subjects.

If Sif demands the war to continue, should they join Sif's side and oppose Alina?

This problem thoroughly fried everyone's brains.

Though most people don't think Sif would be that foolish, what if she is?

No one can guess what a woman thinks.

If that woman is powerful and young, it's impossible to guess.

Just as the officials were watching Alina gradually approach West City, seriously contemplating resigning to avoid disaster, their savior finally arrived.

As the advance personnel before Alina's entry into the city, Governor Roland arrived.

Many people disapprove of Roland's character and lifestyle, but they know Roland has the ability to influence Alina's decision, and he can also make decisions on behalf of Count Sif.

Only Roland can achieve balance between these two women.

After careful deliberation by the remaining officials of West City, Mayor Hila was chosen to host a banquet for Roland.

This choice was quite thoughtful.

If the remaining A1-level (national level) officials were to host Roland, not only would the levels be uneven, but there would be no room for salvaging negotiations if they broke down.

If someone of too low a level were to host Roland, it would be disrespectful to him.

After some thought, the A2-level Mayor of West City was deemed the most suitable.

As a de facto powerful mayor of the capital, he is an A2-level high official, with a level equal to Roland.

Though his level is high, he is nominally just a mayor.

Having the mayor of an occupied city host the occupying force's leader is very appropriate.

If negotiations fail, the Speaker could still invite him.

When the invitation was delivered to Roland's residence, he was reviewing the war with Sif.

They were placing pieces on a sandbox, replaying and simulating the battle.

Not reviewing was fine, but once they did, they realized how perilous the war was, and that winning it indeed involved some luck.

This was also normal.

They only had the resources of three and a half provinces and had just taken control not long ago.

To defeat the Jin Yuan Kingdom with the resources of three and a half provinces, there must have been problems within Jin Yuan.

If they had launched the attack a few months earlier, Marco wouldn't have offended everyone, and so many people wouldn't have defected at the last minute.

If they had attacked a few months later, Marco would have eliminated dissent and completely consolidated power. Jin Yuan's comprehensive strength would have significantly increased, likely leaving them no chance.

Just as the two were sweating more and more as they continued to review, Mayor Hila's butler arrived with the invitation.

After accepting the invitation, Roland smiled and asked Sif, "Guess what they're inviting us for?"

"Is there even a need to guess? They surely want us to leave quickly," Sif joked with a smile.

"No, I think they are troubled over Alina's title."

"What do you think we should do? I've told Alina to take the throne, but she refuses."

Roland's lips curled slightly as he softly said, "She might ascend the throne, but not today. I do have an idea, let Alina inherit her father's title as the Liberator."

"Huh?"

Sif was completely taken aback; can such an honorary title really be inherited?

Chapter 368: Destroying the Guillotine ≠ Abolishing the Death Penalty

The entry ceremony of Liberator Alina was exceptionally grand.

The officials who remained in West City greeted the [Liberator] and her followers according to the standards for welcoming a Supreme Leader.

The people of Xidai are free and inclusive.

No one jumped out to say the [Liberator] was an honorary title and cannot be inherited.

Everyone knows the guillotine is only paused, not truly broken.

Not many relish in talking nonsense in front of the guillotine.

Flowers, applause, cheers, and even excited young girls rushed into the crowd to embrace the soldiers of the liberator's team with fragrant kisses, showcasing the romance of the Jin Yuan People.

There are joys and sorrows.

While people are jubilantly welcoming the liberator, some lives are drawing to a close.

Alina promised to spare everyone, but the officials left in West City did not agree.

They rushed to capture all of Marco's followers before Alina entered the city, holding the principle of rather wrongfully killing than letting go, sending thousands to the guillotine.

The orichalcum guillotines built by Marco worked till their blades dulled, while the remaining convicts were led to the gallows to take their final steps.

These guillotines, having fulfilled their historical mission, were temporarily sealed, serving as evidence of Marco's tyranny, awaiting the new master of West City.

With their retirement and sealing, an era finally comes to an end.

The blood of the Jin Yuan People has flowed too much, so today all the necessary killings are done thoroughly, sparing the descendants from trouble.

The remaining officials are well aware that a new era is coming, but they bear too many marks from Marco's era.

They must find ways to separate themselves from the old era.

Executing Marco's followers is the best way.

They all made a move against Marco's followers, of course, they can prove their innocence.

Actually, whether they are innocent or not is not important; what matters is how Alina thinks.

Many inside and outside Xidai are watching, waiting for Alina's thoughts on the disposition.

They most fear Alina becoming a disruptor of order like Marco.

Under the gaze of anticipation, Alina rode a white horse through the Triumph Arch, reaching the high platform built on Freedom Square.

She is going to give a speech here.

This speech will also establish her policy direction.

The cheers gradually subsided, and the young people holding flowers passionately watched Alina, high above as if she was both a girlfriend and a goddess.

The mature and prudent people looked at Alina with somewhat complex eyes, an expectation mixed with concern.

If it were Mr. Carlo coming, they could certainly feel reassured.

Carlo is a mature politician, unlikely to act rashly, and will fully consider the interests of all classes, allowing order to swiftly recover.

Miss Alina possesses skills and strength no less than her father's, but she is young and has suffered much; it wouldn't be strange if she acted impulsively.

Even if it's just expanding the revenge on Marco's party, everyone would suffer.

Who knows if the wind of an iron fist would hit themselves?

The Jin Yuan Kingdom and West City have been chaotic for too long and cannot withstand more turmoil.

In the eyes of the crowd, whether anxious or expectant, Alina ascended the platform.

Her calm and gentle gaze swept across the venue, looking at the busy crowd, without rushing to speak.

She is looking at me!

Everyone felt a sense of illusion in exchanging glances with Alina, as if she was looking at them.

In reality, Alina was looking at no one, yet she was looking at everyone.

This is a special performance technique; although she is an art student, frequently being among people from other fields has taught her much.

She raised the tricolor Iris flag, her soft yet firm voice resonated across the square.

"Free people, the hardship forced upon you by the devil has ended. I am not a destroyer but a Guardian of free will."

This sentence set the tone for the speech.

The cheers soared to the heavens.

Countless citizens were in tears.

For over a year, they lived too miserably. Almost everyone had family and friends who lost their lives in the terrifying bloodshed.

With Miss Alina’s return, their right to survival is assured.

Freedom? When life cannot be guaranteed, they couldn’t afford this high-end luxury.

Alina’s speech wasn’t long, but her attitude was very sincere.

She didn’t entirely shift the blame onto Marco but also implicated the previous government.

Marco was no good, that’s a given.

If so, why wasn’t his plot detected earlier and prevented?

After subtly criticizing everyone, making the remaining officials sweat profusely, she switched to comfort.

"I can understand your plight, after all, even my father didn’t foresee Marco’s ambitions."

The entire assembly was silent.

She could criticize her father; others dare not follow suit.

Bringing up Mr. Carlo also gives everyone a way out.

If the wise Carlo couldn’t see through Marco’s ambitious plot, it was natural for others to be deceived.

Alina reprimanded all the officials but also gave them a way out.

The officials were indeed resentfully ridiculed by her, but their suspended hearts were finally settled.

Alina still intends to employ them, therefore she gave them a warning.

If she didn’t plan to use them, they would have been taken away under the guise of Marco’s leftovers long ago.

Though risky, they managed to get ashore.

The Vice President Donovan and other officials exchanged glances, stepped out of their ranks, stood at the front of the crowd, and opened their arms, capturing everyone’s attention.

"Liberator, you are right, we were deceived by the villain; only you have insight into everything and ultimately uncovered the villain’s plot. The nation needs your guidance, please heed the people’s cry and lead us forward!"

Actually, Alina had arranged supporters within the crowd.

If no one wise enough came forward, the pre-arranged supporters would jump out and say similar words.

People are always blind.

In the current atmosphere, as long as someone raises their arm and calls, there will surely be a response.

Even if someone opposes, they won't dare to speak up at a time like this.

According to normal procedure, if the President is unable to perform duties due to an accident, the Vice President should act as proxy.

Although Alina has the upper hand, legally she doesn't even qualify to run for President.

If the officials remaining in Xidai are greedy for power, another bloody storm will engulf West City.

Thinking of this, Alina just feels tired; she doesn't like this.

The atmosphere has already been set up to this point, and being modest is meaningless.

The style of the Jin Yuan people is not typically fond of humility; being more assertive is better.

Fortunately, the remaining officials are quite sensible, which is for the best.

Except for the most critical powers of military, finance, and personnel, she doesn't mind sharing other powers with others.

She is not Marco and won't be so autocratic.

The loyalty of the exiles is commendable, but apart from a few like Romeo, most are not capable. To govern a country, the old officials and the old nobility are still very important.

This is the current situation in the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

The old forces objectively exist and are strong.

Even Alina herself carries the label of the old nobility.

After her father and brother died, she naturally inherited the family's territory, becoming the new Count Jacques.

Even if she wanted to cut ties, she couldn't erase this brand.

Moreover, she never thought of cutting ties at all.

Donovan's petition gained the support of the masses. The agitated people shouted slogans like "Long live Miss Alina" and "Please, Liberator, save the country" to express their support for Alina.

The voice of the people is above all.

Even if it doesn't quite fit the procedure, no one raises any objections.

The Speaker wanted to say something but was abruptly awakened by a colleague standing beside him with a sharp elbow.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a team appear at the entrance of the square, making their way into the square with a carriage.

The items loaded on the carriage were covered with black cloth, adding some mystery.

Others might not recognize what was on the carriage, but he could.

The guillotine personally crafted by Marco.

These terrifying instruments of execution have claimed countless lives, including the last Emperor of the Old Empire.

The Speaker thought of at least a dozen A1-level officials of his rank who were sent to the guillotine, and the fear within him was instantly awakened.

He trembled.

Alina's gaze fell upon him, causing cold sweat to drip down his back, scaring him out of his wits.

Luckily, Alina merely glanced at him casually without saying anything.

Just as the Speaker was scared out of his mind, the black curtain covering the carriage was lifted.

Sunlight shone on the guillotine, reflecting an eerie glow.

The guillotine lay there silently, as if narrating that cruel part of history.

Almost everyone's face changed.

This thing nearly made them think Marco had returned.

Those who stood closer noticed the obvious nicks on the guillotine, and their faces turned pale.

Thinking about how many lives it had claimed, they were understandably afraid.

The guillotine had been washed with water and wiped very clean, but the water stains hadn't completely dried, making it look as if it had just been used.

That was indeed the case.

These guillotines had just played their final role, sending away all of Marco's die-hard supporters.

The blood that needed to be shed was shed all at once as a warning. Shedding blood sporadically isn't a deterrent—it's a sign that Marco has returned.

The entire scene fell silent.

No one knew what Alina intended to do. Those officials who once worked for Marco's government were particularly nervous, pondering whether Alina might plan to take action on the spot.

Just as the tense atmosphere was about to explode, Alina sighed and said softly:

"Both my father and brother died by such a device, and many of you also lost family members to Marco's tyranny. This is an ominous instrument; destroy it."

On receiving the order, dozens of strong soldiers clumsily dismantled the guillotine and wielded sledgehammers to smash it.

With the crisp sound of metal striking metal, the instruments that symbolized terror, blood, and slaughter were destroyed under the heavy blows of the hammers.

Seeing this scene, the officials and citizens who had just been scared out of their wits finally came back to life.

They burst into applause, cheering for Alina’s enlightened action.

At this moment, no one opposed her assumption of state power.

While Alina was consolidating her power by various means, Lisa, sitting in the spectator stands, couldn’t help but mutter softly, "Destroying the guillotine is certainly good, but abolishing the death penalty would make criminals more rampant. I feel it’s not quite right."

Roland smiled faintly without saying a word, but motioned for Sif to explain.

Sif looked at Lisa, her gentle voice resounding:

"Miss Lisa, destroying the guillotine ≠ abolishing the death penalty. Did Alina ever say that?"

Lisa was taken aback for a moment, then understood Sif’s meaning.

Alina never said she would abolish the death penalty, nor did she amend the laws.

Since that was the case, the death penalty still existed in the Jin Yuan Kingdom; it was just replaced by the gallows, which appeared less bloody.

Not everyone is willing to support Alina.

Destroying the guillotine might lead some to misunderstand, thinking it means the abolition of the death penalty, lighter punishments, and they might get restless and try something.

Alina would prefer opponents to emerge rather than hide in the shadows.

Politics is indeed too complicated.

Lisa shrugged, beginning to look forward to the delicacies at tonight's banquet.

Jin Yuan's cuisine is well-known, comparable to Talia's cuisine, and she is full of anticipation for the banquet.

Chapter 369: Dancing as a Pair

Lisa looked forward to the dinner, but Roland and Lisa felt indifferent.

As everyone knows, the dishes at a state dinner must balance the level of cuisine, culinary culture, and ceremony.

They might not be delicious, but they will certainly be visually appealing.

Except for a few meager state dinners resembling roadside stalls from small countries, most respectable nations prioritize their state dinners meticulously.

Even in the culinary desert of Sussex, they invite chefs from traditional gourmet countries like Jin Yuan, Talia, and Nubia to cook dishes at their state dinners.

The state dinners of the Jin Yuan Kingdom are renowned across the continent.

Even the descendants of the Magic Empire, who typically disdain the Barbarian Race, cannot help but praise the Jin Yuan Kingdom's state dinners after attending them.

This state dinner is of an exceptionally high standard.

The Supreme Leader and all the high-ranking officials in Xidai participated, along with invited diplomats from various countries and elites from various sectors of society.

Before the state dinner began, Alina signed a pardon decree, releasing political prisoners and criminal offenders with lighter sentences. She also signed a series of laws to lift the curfew, end the state of emergency, halt mobilization orders, and allow conscripted non-professional soldiers to return home.

Though the time was short, the residents of West City were highly sensitive to political winds; they already sensed a return to order.

By that afternoon, over half of the shops on the streets resumed business.

It’s not that the Jinyuan people are so heedless, but rather the allure of Livre was astonishing.

Shops that opened for business today received financial aid—not much, but enough to match several days of revenue for small shops.

This was the government’s compensation for them.

Of course, the premise is that they open for business today, showing trust in the new government.

It was Roland’s idea.

Alina initially didn’t quite understand, but Roland’s explanation lit up her eyes.

"Alina, as long as the people’s hearts remain intact, any difficulty can be overcome. Jin Yuan Kingdom was ravaged by Marco for nearly two years, with industries declining and the people’s spirits scattered."

"Tonight, although the curfew is lifted, normal people will choose to observe. There won’t be many businesses open. Seeing the streets cold and deserted while the West Palace is brightly lit, citizens can easily feel alienation and detachment."

"Once a bad impression is planted, nothing will go smoothly afterward."

Alina nodded repeatedly, showing a look of sudden realization.

She accepted Roland’s suggestion, instructing the government office and West City Hall to carry out the plan.

Where there is great reward, there must be those driven by greed.

Even if more than one-third of the shops opened, it would be considered a victory.

When Marco was in power, there was a nighttime curfew, and gatherings of more than three people would lead to interrogation, or even execution.

When Alina assumed power, people could enjoy culinary delights and seek joy in the streets that very night.

No comparison means no harm.

With this comparison, the better choice becomes obvious.

Nightfall arrived.

Lights returned to West City.

Although it couldn't compare with the bustling scene when half the city was lit up during West City's most prosperous times, the revival was underway.

People's confidence was gradually returning, unknowingly.

Tonight, the most successful businesses were the taverns and the red light district.

Of course, these two did not conflict. Many first went to the taverns to indulge before heading to the red light district to seek passionate release.

Wine and pleasure always go hand in hand.

As the citizens of West City enjoyed their long-lost joy, the new government of Jin Yuan's hosting dinner was also beginning.

The host of the dinner was naturally the new Great Liberator and Supreme Leader, Alina.

What if Alina wasn't qualified to be president?

Simple, abolish the presidential position and have Alina serve as the leader as Great Liberator and Supreme Leader.

Laws often have a lag.

But under the threat of death, the law can sometimes display astonishing foresight.

When Alina walked into the banquet hall, her identity as the Supreme Leader was fully aligned with the laws freshly enacted that afternoon.

As long as one has enough power, the law will change for you.

Alina suddenly remembered Marco's words, feeling inexplicably uneasy.

She didn't want to agree with this tyrant's words.

Yet she had unconsciously become what she despised the most.

Nevertheless, she could only act this way.

This dinner must be held as quickly as possible.

She must finalize this matter before foreign diplomats can react.

If she followed procedures and delayed, troublemakers instigated by foreign forces might arrive.

In any case, speed was essential.

As Alina entered the banquet hall, the people who were speaking softly instantly fell silent.

The lively banquet hall turned quieter than a library.

You could hear a pin drop.

Alina stepped onto the podium, waving and smiling at everyone.

She was wearing an elegant and grand purple evening gown today.

Purple evening gowns are the most noble in color and difficult to wear with charm.

Her status and power matched the purple evening gown, but her demeanor and experience fell short.

Rather than a Supreme Leader, her demeanor resembled more that of a wanderer leader.

Similar, yet always falling short.

Alina didn’t mind.

It’s unusual for someone to exhibit such a charming regal presence just after becoming a nation’s leader.

She can be a bit naive, making her more genuine and approachable.

She doesn’t want to turn into a despotic figure like Marco.

Thinking of the magical term Roland created, she felt something indescribable inside.

If only Roland were the Prime Minister of Jin Yuan Kingdom.

He always sees through to the essence beyond appearances.

Though his political skills might lag behind those veterans steeped in politics for decades, his keen insight far surpasses them.

Her eyes fell on Roland, standing between Empress Sif and Lisa, and she sighed slightly in her heart.

It seems unlikely.

Roland has already become Empress Sif’s exclusive, untouchable by others.

But she was still a bit surprised; she knew Roland and Sif had an ambiguous relationship, but why did he also look unclear with Miss Lisa?

This guy actually stands openly between two girls? Roland, are you serious?

The information in this standing triangle was too much for Alina to process at once.

Fortunately, the etiquette officer reminded her with a light cough.

It’s time for the speech, Supreme Leader.

Alina pinched her skirt hem, took two steps forward, and bowed slightly, first expressing her gratitude to the guests present.

Having attended many banquets since she was young, she was familiar with this, so there was no problem.

Until her gaze fell on Sif again.

Strictly speaking, she was still in a state of war with Sif, and dealing with Sif was troublesome.

Returning to reality, without Sif's loyal support, she wouldn't have been able to return to Xidai, much less climb to the pinnacle of power.

In this world, there's no good without reason, nor hatred without discrimination.

Sif helped her for a reason.

She intervened because of Roland's influence.

Roland wasn't a philanthropist; he helped her with a clear purpose.

Roland says it's to help a friend, but that's just talk.

Who risks their life to help a so-called "friend"?

Roland's attitude toward her went far beyond the realm of friendship; she couldn't play dumb.

She was very clear about Roland's intentions. Remembering how she once wanted to repay the favor but was flatly rejected by Roland, Alina understood.

Roland likes Sif; there's no room in his heart for anyone else, so thoughts of marriage alliances should stop.

Since Roland's person of interest is Sif, and Sif's nemesis is Sofia, what Roland wants most is to help Sif solve her survival crisis.

Aligning with Roland in dealing with Sofia is his bottom line.

This, of course...

Is not easy at all.

In the eyes of Jin Yuan people, Sussex people are the real enemies; the Vladimir Empire is far away; attacking Saint Rurik Palace is very distant, and the opposite is equally true.

There is a natural possibility of an alliance between Jin Yuan and Vladimir Empire.

In fact, they were once traditional allies; it's just that after the alliance expired, both sides had no immediate plans to continue.

But anyway, the upper echelons of Jin Yuan are quite fond of the Vladimir Empire.

If they had to choose, they would surely be willing to ally with the Vladimir Empire to jointly face potential enemies across the sea.

This kind of scenario where the second and third unite against the first has happened many times on the Rodinia Continent and is not surprising.

To change national policy, one must persuade the elite class.

Thinking of this gave Alina an inexplicable headache.

But she had no time to be troubled by the headache because she had to face Sif.

Meeting Sif’s gentle gaze, Alina did not avoid it; she raised a glass of deep purple wine and walked toward Sif.

"Em..."

"Count Tyrone Sif," Sif quickly interjected.

Thankfully, she was attending as a Count today, Alina thought to herself.

She raised her wine glass and extended an invitation to Sif, "May I toast to peace and friendship with you?"

Sif did not raise her glass, only saying lightly, "Is that all?"

Alina bit her lip, softly saying, "Though it’s difficult, I will firmly stand by your side in dealing with your enemies."

Sif remained calm, raised her glass, "Peace is hard-won and worth toasting. Discuss the specifics with Roland."

Alina said nothing, only raising her glass in response.

Just as Alina and Sif clinked glasses, melodious music began to play.

The dance has begun.

There will be a total of three dances tonight, and each gentleman can invite a lady to dance, typically, the other does not refuse.

As for how long they dance depends on their relationship.

As Alina hesitated whether to invite Roland for the first dance, Sif had already extended her right hand to her with a suave gesture.

"Honorable Liberator, may I have the honor of being your first dance partner tonight?"

Alina was a bit bewildered.

This was not what she had expected.

But she didn’t refuse and gracefully extended her right hand, placing it on Sif’s.

"It would be my honor."

Chapter 370: No One Understands a Girl’s Heart Better Than I Do

Actually, Sif didn’t want to dance the first dance with Alina, but she had no choice.

She was the most important guest of the evening, and by convention, her first dance should be with a Jin Yuan Kingdom person, as the host of the banquet.

If Roland weren’t there, she might not have cared about these things, as long as she didn’t take off her gloves while dancing, unnecessary physical contact could be avoided.

But Roland was already by her side.

At some point, she began to consciously or unconsciously consider Roland’s thoughts.

Did Roland want her to do this?

She wasn't sure, but she was very certain that dancing with Alina wouldn't make anyone uncomfortable.

Including herself, of course.

So she took the initiative to invite Alina.

Alina was only slightly surprised and accepted the invitation.

Though she internally wished it was Roland inviting her for the first dance, that was obviously unrealistic.

Given the generally conservative style of the Sussex people and Sif's ambiguous relationship with Roland, stepping into the dance floor with Roland in front of Sif would definitely displease the Empress.

Sif was there to help, and she had no reason to upset Sif.

Thus, the two unconsciously chose each other as dance partners.

When Alina placed her hand on Sif's palm, the gentlemen in the room all cast envious glances.

The two most feminine and noble ladies in the room both had dance partners.

These two ladies were special, they would likely only dance once, and the following invites could gracefully be declined.

The opportunity to admire the noble and beautiful ladies up close was thus gone.

While envious, the guests present also pondered another question, which of the two ladies had more feminine allure?

Alina, wearing a purple evening dress symbolizing nobility, was undoubtedly the brightest star of the night.

Her sleek long hair was slightly tied up, not styled into a married woman's bun, combining the innocence and charm of a young girl with the alluring appeal of a mature woman.

Her ivory-like delicate skin shone brilliantly under the lights, making her exceptionally striking.

Every part of her attire was uniquely crafted, from the golden iris brooch on her chest to the hollow gold bracelet on her wrist, all exuding the grandeur of a sovereign and the pure romance of a youthful girl.

Her facial features were flawless, and the faint golden frame of her glasses expertly concealed the solemnity in her eyes.

No matter how picky, it was hard to find a single flaw in her.

People recalled stories circulating nationwide recently.

The Saintess Fuchou had returned from the flames, leading everyone on a path to freedom.

No one doubted the existence of the Saintess Fuchou anymore.

The Saintess Fuchou was Alina, right in front of everyone at that moment.

Though Alina was almost flawless, she was still not perfect.

Because Sif arrived.

Alina was merely near-perfect, while Sif was the incarnation of perfection.

When people reluctantly tore their gaze away from Alina to look at her dance partner, their souls seemed to freeze in that instant.

She walked from a dimly lit area elegantly, resembling a magnificent painting slowly unfolding, an elf emerging from a sea of flowers and groves.

Sif had not dressed up deliberately today, with only her lips adorned with a light crystal gloss.

Her eyes shimmered with a mysterious color, visible yet indistinguishable, filled with vitality, like windows leading to a sea of flowers.

Her smile was faint, and her dimples, budding with life, embraced the whole resplendent spring.

She wasn’t wearing a trailing evening gown, but a simple lady’s dress.

On this grand night where ladies strove to outshine one another, her unadorned appearance stood out as transcendently beautiful, with a serene, independent bloom rather than seductive charm.

Her presence made the elaborately made-up ladies look as vulgar as pink light fixtures.

Even Alina, in front of her, seemed somewhat eclipsed.

Just her simple entrance stole all the colors from the hall, as if reducing others to black and white, with only a few managing to exhibit color within her realm.

Alina sensed this unusual change, and couldn’t help but grip Sif’s hand a little tighter.

Noticing Sif’s puzzled gaze, she slightly bowed her head, apologizing with a blush for her faux pas.

"Sorry."

Sif smiled and shook her head, reaching out to embrace Alina’s waist, casually seizing control of the dance.

It was well-known that social dances required someone to play the male role.

Alina and Sif were both girls, making the male role assignment rather subtle.

When they first entered the dance floor, both were still inclined to play the female role, instinctively waiting for their "partner" to hold them by the waist, providing support to maintain their footing.

As they realized the absence of a male dance partner in this dance, they simultaneously reached for each other’s waist.

These actions were initially unconscious, but upon recalling the male and female roles in this dance, their attitudes shifted somewhat.

The male dancer controlled the rhythm of the entire dance.

In their hearts, they were more eager to become this crucial role.

Even if it was just one dance, they hoped to maintain relative dominance in front of each other.

Perhaps it’s an innate aversion among beautiful women, neither of them wanted to be overshadowed by the other.

Alina, slightly taken aback, exerted force, almost turning the dance into a struggle; in a moment of confusion, Sif had already gained the upper hand.

She could certainly resist, but using body techniques in the elegant dance music would be too impolite.

Moreover, Sif's personal combat power far surpassed hers.

She had only just touched the threshold of Tier Seven, with one foot in, while Sif's strength was outstanding even among Tier Seven.

If she resisted, she would be the one taken down.

That would be even more humiliating.

Having lost the initiative, Alina had no choice but to follow Sif's rhythm, gracefully dancing along.

In the dance floor, a dozen pairs of dancers spun in irregular circles.

The men's gazes were all directed at Alina and Sif, suddenly unsure whether to envy the embraced Alina or Sif, temporarily acting as the male dancer.

The ladies bit their crimson lips, with a mix of admiration and a tinge of jealousy.

They dressed meticulously, choosing the best gowns and jewelry, to showcase themselves at the first banquet after the new ruler took power, not to become someone's backdrop.

Even if the ones overshadowing them were Liberator Alina and Count Tyrone's Sif, it was still unacceptable.

Everyone is the protagonist of their own life, who would willingly be the supporting role?

Everyone present is a social elite, a person who holds resources at the top.

For the gentlemen, accustomed to being the center of attention, occasionally playing the supporting role is a refreshing experience, with the bonus of admiring the top beauties of two great nations, which is a rare joy.

But for these ladies, those who stole their dazzling colors were undoubtedly loathsome.

They quickly thought of the rumors between Roland and the Empress, and the originally tense faces finally relaxed a bit.

In the face of absolute power, a beautiful shell is just a bonus, not an absolute advantage.

Although many knew that Sif was Sylph, not everyone did.

Most noblewomen attending tonight's banquet were unaware.

They even secretly rejoiced that Sif had to sneak around to meet Roland, hiding from Empress Sylph.

This mindset is quite common.

If they can't have it themselves, they hope others can't either, which keeps things balanced.

Sif did not care about these glances.

She stared at Alina, giving Alina no chance to change roles.

This is the dance floor, and there is a silent understanding between them not to use movements beyond dance to gain the upper hand.

Sif had already seized the initiative, but Alina was not without opportunities.

With graceful steps, Alina tried to escape Sif’s annoying slender hands through a spinning move, placing her own hands on her waist.

However, she found no opportunity at all.

In combat, Sif was indeed an extraordinary genius.

Every time she moved, she could nimbly avoid the direction of Alina’s force, rendering all the strength Alina could muster under the rules of dance useless.

She was like a clear spring; no matter how strong Alina’s hands were, they could only stir up a few splashes in the spring.

While they were exerting themselves through dance movements, Lisa, dancing beside Roland, frowned and glanced at them.

"Something’s not right,"

Lisa murmured softly.

Roland squinted his eyes; he wasn’t blind and could certainly see that something was amiss.

These two folks could go into battle and cut down dozens of enemies without breaking a sweat, and now a single dance had them breaking out in sweat on their foreheads, clearly not normal.

Roland and Lisa exchanged a glance and spoke simultaneously:

"They’re fighting!"

"They’re competing!"

Though not the same word, their thoughts were essentially identical.

Roland was even more puzzled. Although these two weren’t particularly close, they were prominent political figures; surely, they wouldn’t start a fight at a ball?

People of their caliber, if conflicts arise, there must be a reasonable cause.

Roland fell into deep thought.

Sif supported Alina in restoring her country only to hope for more benefits after the war.

If it were just this conflict, it wouldn’t lead to such a direct confrontation at the ball; they could sit and talk it out slowly.

Although he noticed the problem, Roland decided not to intervene.

It’s better not to intervene because once you do, it gets more complicated.

It’s well-known that when girls fight, the worst person to intervene is a man who is on good terms with both. Without intervention, it’s fine; once you do, it becomes endless.

If one dares to intervene, the two girls might temporarily put down their conflict but would immediately throw a soul-searching question at him.

"Which side are you on?"

Saying you’re neutral is definitely not acceptable, and choosing a side is absolutely out of the question.

The only solution is to muddle through with various means given the context.

Roland admitted he didn’t have this ability, so he simply chose not to cause trouble.

Fortunately, the dance music only lasted a few minutes, so it wouldn’t lead to an actual fight.

When the time was up, each returned to their place, and the matter ended.

Roland breathed a sigh of relief, not paying attention to his feet and accidentally stepped on Lisa.

Before he could apologize, Lisa already placed her fingertip on his lips.

"No need to apologize for such a small matter. Are you guessing what caused their conflict?"

Roland’s eyes brightened.

He didn’t understand girls, but Lisa, being a girl of a similar age to them, surely did.

"Yes, do you know why?"

"Of course, I understand girls’ thoughts better than you do." Lisa said confidently, lowering her voice, and leaned slowly towards Roland’s ear.

The moist airflow lingered at his ear, tickling slightly, arousing Roland’s gossipy curiosity.

"Tell me quickly."

Lisa lightly coughed, leaned closer to his ear, and softly said, "They both like you, so they started fighting."

Roland: "..."

He indeed was wrong; he shouldn’t have listened to Lisa’s nonsense.

"Sister, did you see over there?"

"Yes, it’s the newly served delicious seafood buffet."

"In a moment, go over there and eat heartily; don’t worry about anything else."

Lisa nodded with a smile but was still a bit puzzled, "And then?"

"No ’then’, eat more and talk less."