Empress 371

Chapter 371: I Don’t Want Rivers of Blood

If the Jin Yuan News Agency were to write a report about the banquet, it would surely say that this banquet proceeded in a harmonious and pleasant atmosphere, and might even publish a special issue dedicated to introducing the banquet’s delicious dishes.

However, the focus of a banquet at this level isn’t on what is eaten, but who is attending.

The essence of this banquet is indeed a grand feast, but the most important dish isn’t the seafood buffet; it’s the future division of power in the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

An invitation to dance may not guarantee any communication; what matters is the attitude.

Whether or not to accept the invitation, how to refuse if you decline, and how to respond if you accept—every sentence has its unique nuance.

With Marco’s death and Alina’s return to Xidai, the political landscape of the Jin Yuan Kingdom will inevitably undergo a reshuffle.

A number of old eminent families followed Alina back to Xidai.

The five Dukes and over forty Hereditary Counts from the time of the Old Empire are eager for Alina to bring the country onto the track they desire.

They are very willing to support Alina in becoming the new Emperor, as long as they can share in the benefits.

A republic having an Emperor seems strange? Then it’s better to return to being an Empire.

They desire closeness with Alina, but they also guard against each other.

Several dozen major nobles are still a bit too many.

The cake is only so big; with too many people to divide it among, each person’s share becomes small.

And the actual circumstances of these nobles vary greatly.

Some nobles maneuvered smoothly during Marco’s reign, escaping Marco’s purges. Others lacked discernment, found themselves compromised by Marco, and ended up on the guillotine.

More critically, one Duke and seven Counts have no legitimate heirs, leaving their titles vacant and needing a quick clarification on title inheritance.

Whether to retain the title, and if so, who should inherit it?

This all requires Alina to clarify her stance swiftly.

The aged Duke of Champagne extended an invitation to Alina, wanting to share a dance with her.

Looking at the Duke of Champagne, who seemed kindly like a grandfather, Alina originally did not intend to re-enter the dance floor but found it hard to refuse a reason, though the mental duel with Sif had left her somewhat exhausted.

Just as she stood up, preparing to offer her hand to the old Duke, Alfonso the Duke of Champagne smiled and shook his head, sighing softly:

"Alina, I’m getting old, my legs aren’t as agile, let’s just have a cup of coffee."

With full awareness of interpersonal subtleties, he immediately noticed the reluctance in Alina’s eyes.

He certainly wouldn’t insist.

Although Alina was very beautiful, by his age, seeing beautiful girls resulted only in pure appreciation, without ulterior thoughts.

Alina gripped the hem of her dress and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank you."

The two found a table in the corner and sat down.

The court attendant brought coffee and tactfully withdrew.

It’s obvious that when significant figures drink coffee at such a banquet, it’s not for casual chat, and he dares not overhear things he shouldn’t.

The Duke of Champagne sipped his coffee lightly, seemingly casually bringing up Alina’s father.

"Your father was twenty-one years younger than me, yet we were good friends. When he relinquished his fiefdom back then, I had advised him, but his thinking was too romantic."

"He always thought others could be as carefree as he was."

Alina wanted to counter that her father wasn’t so naive, that he had a comprehensive perspective, yet thinking about her father’s fate, some words were impossible to articulate.

Political struggles don’t have ’ifs’, only results.

Failure is failure; seeking more reasons is only an excuse.

Seeing that Alina’s expression was slightly unpleasant, Alphonse’s face also took on a more pained look.

"If Carlo were still alive, he'd be most gratified to see your growth."

This remark seemed casual, but was in fact praising Alina, though she felt somewhat pricked hearing it.

If her father hadn't died, would she not grow?

Thinking of her performance during the mission to Sussex, Alina fell silent.

She indeed was growing, but not nearly enough.

Although she didn't want to admit it, her father's death objectively accelerated her maturation pace. Though she believed her growth came more from Roland's assistance and her own efforts.

Seeing the topic getting a bit stiff, Alphonse gently reminded: "Alina, pleasant words are like honey; consume too much and they cause cavities, so..."

"Uncle Alphonse, just speak plainly. You were my father's close friend and are my elder; of course I will listen to your advice."

Alina's reaction somewhat surprised Alphonse.

His observations showed that Alina's demeanor tonight was a bit unusual, as though she had something on her mind.

He boldly guessed that Alina was missing her father, hence using Carlo to open the topic.

By bringing up memories of Carlo, even if Alina didn't shed tears, she'd certainly feel stirred.

Some matters are easier to broach while she is emotional.

However, Alina’s reaction somewhat caught him off guard.

She felt no grief for her deceased father but was troubled by other matters.

Alphonse, completely unable to fathom Alina’s mind, felt like punching a pillow filled with cotton, leaving him frustrated.

He took the opportunity of sipping coffee to adjust his emotions.

Thinking over and over, he still couldn’t figure it out, so he simply stopped trying.

He boldly bet on Alina and took sides early, already securing his voice in the matter.

Since he couldn’t guess it, he might as well speak openly.

"Alina, what kind of kingdom do you want to build in Jin Yuan?"

"Freedom, justice, equality... well, relative equality."

Under the slightly amused gaze of the old man, Alina couldn’t continue her staged words, so she smiled ironically and spoke the truth.

"Mr. Alphonse, absolute freedom, justice, and equality have never existed in the world. I mean everyone has a free identity, protected by law, and everyone’s dignity is largely equal."

After a brief pause, she sighed lightly, lowering her voice a few notches, "Of course, even in the Land of Freedom, some people are more equal than others. This is a fact, and there’s no need to avoid it."

Alphonse breathed a sigh of relief, his suspended heart settling down.

Unless he wanted to overthrow the regime and become Emperor, his power and position had reached the peak, with no further ascent possible.

He sought Alina not to seek power but feared she was too idealistic, perhaps intending to reverse all of Carlo’s policies.

Seeing Alphonse’s expression, Alina naturally knew what he was thinking.

In a gentle yet undeniable tone, she said, "Mr. Alphonse, the mistakes my father made will not continue, but good policies will also be adopted. Everyone’s legitimate rights will be defended."

"Please convey to others not to focus only on immediate interests, but to look further ahead. They cannot reclaim the lands lost from the homeland, but they can expand overseas."

This was Alina’s bottom line.

She acknowledged the status and power of the old nobility but restoring their territories was impossible.

This was the result of the struggle to overthrow the Old Empire, and going back in history would betray all those who have passed.

Over ninety percent of Jin Yuan Kingdom’s lands were held by the state, a percentage far exceeding other major countries.

With the right development strategy, the future of the Jin Yuan Kingdom is limitless.

No one should reverse this progress.

However, since these nobles supported her, she couldn’t let them be too disappointed.

Alina thoughtfully reminded, "Go to the South Continent, the New Continent, to farther overseas islands, where vast territories remain unclaimed. If you want land, go there to claim it."

Alphonse was stunned for a few seconds, mumbling with his lips, unsure of what to say.

Alina’s meaning was clear.

The domestic lands confiscated from the nobility would not be returned, but they could expand territories overseas according to their noble rank.

What does this mean?

Have their lands been returned? No. But as long as there is a strong private force, they could still expand territories.

But how can ordinary nobles maintain such a large force?

Seeing through Alphonse’s thoughts at a glance, Alina smiled and said, "Mr. Alphonse, in the war against the national traitors, I found that the private soldiers of the local lords had poor combat effectiveness; relying on them alone, it would be difficult to seize territories."

Alphonse breathed a sigh of relief and quickly nodded.

It seemed that Alina finally realized the problem and planned to use state power to help them.

However, Alina’s next words left him utterly bewildered.

"The army must have a unified organization and command to be effective. I plan to integrate all noble private soldiers, unify them, and command them as one force. This army will be funded proportionally by the nobles, with state subsidies, and the spoils will also be distributed according to a certain ratio."

"The purpose of this army is to help everyone reclaim the lands. Once the mission is completed, it will be unified into the National Defense Army, and the lands of the nobles will also be security guaranteed by the state."

Alina smiled and said, "The power of the state machinery can surely be trusted, right?"

Alphonse was left stupefied.

According to Alina's plan, there was indeed a significant opportunity to seize enough territories overseas to compensate the nobles, but the price would be to relinquish their private soldiers.

Although nobles could still retain a small personal guard, they no longer had the power to oppose the state machinery.

Before Alphonse could argue, Alina spoke first, blocking his words.

"Mr. Alphonse, I do not wish to see another civil war with rivers of blood."

"If there is genuine loyalty to the country, why reject this suggestion?"

Alina's eyes glistened with a cold brilliance as she said solemnly, "Too much blood has already been shed, the country cannot bear another Marco."

Alphonse and Alina looked into each other's eyes for a long time until he couldn't resist her clear and determined gaze and merely shook his head, sighing, "I'm old, this world belongs to you young people. I support you, but I cannot guarantee that others will think the same."

Watching the old Duke leave, a trace of weakness never shown in front of others flickered in Alina's eyes.

Roland, Sif, I owe you, and I will certainly repay you.

Even if all Jin Yuan People oppose me, I will stand by your side.

She bit her lip, silently contemplating.

Chapter 372: Tonight, the Blue Moon Is Like Water

The banquet was still underway.

There was a short break between the two dances, allowing the guests to mingle and enjoy the food.

Most guests gained something from the feast, though some thought too much and gained too little, resulting in disappointment.

The Duke of Champagne did not get the result he wanted, but Alina's proposal intrigued him.

Alina's direct refusal to listen to him made him feel that her attitude was somewhat overbearing, but thinking of Marco, he quickly let it go.

Regardless, following Alina was better than surviving under that tyrant's shadow.

Since the Liberator had already made a decision, all that was left was execution.

The Duke of Champagne understood this, and many other high-ranking nobles had similar attitudes.

When the Duke of Champagne shared the information with them, the high-ranking nobles fell into deep thought.

Alina's proposal was not what they had anticipated; they had to weigh the pros and cons.

After much consideration, many nobles clearly realized they could not refuse.

The times had changed.

Although nobility still held significant power, they could no longer decide the country's direction alone.

During Marco's rampage, they barely survived; with Alina, could they suddenly rise?

Alina was no longer the delicate flower in the greenhouse they once knew.

She had proven herself more ruthless than Marco by defeating him with inferior forces.

Alina was willing to offer the nobles a decent alternative as a reward for their support.

They couldn't afford to be ungrateful, which was the consensus among most nobles.

The nobles valued not the momentary gains or losses but how to ensure their family lineage.

The shrinking of their native lands was irreversible, so reclaiming from the overseas New Continent was better than having empty hands and offending the leadership.

The nobles were switching sides, with more and more people planning to join the pioneering blueprint drawn by Alina.

But they also had their limits and wouldn't mix with minor nobles or even commoners.

Nobility had its circles, and its hierarchy was strict.

The Count was a threshold; those above were high tier nobles, while Viscounts and Barons were only mid-tier nobility; Imperial Knights and Knights were entry-level tiny nobility, often seen as commoners with a noble certification.

Just like an entry-level Mercedes isn't considered a big Benz, could mere Knights be called nobility?

This was the old nobility's last pride in the Jin Yuan Kingdom.

Marco couldn't break this mental barrier, and neither could Alina.

This threshold was an insurmountable chasm.

The upper-class nobility's baseline for the expansion corps was this threshold.

They were willing to accept Alina's leadership since she was of their class, but they didn't want to flock with those humble minor nobles.

The mid-to-lower-level nobles could seek to expand the land for the country and establish achievements for their family, but they had to do it themselves and not leech off the old lords.

Alina offered the nobles opening terms for expansion and planned to offer business groups a tax-reduction free-trade policy, granting city residents freedom and order.

She simply couldn't think of what to bring to the rural farmers.

With a sigh, she acknowledged the limited national resources—upper classes ate the meat, the middle class drank the soup, and the lower classes?

The lower classes were the meat and soup themselves.

Though the Jin Yuan Kingdom was vast, the national treasury was still lacking, so the lower classes had to endure more hardship.

Just as Alina was about to make a decision, she trembled slightly, her eyes brightened, as she realized what gift she could give these truly impoverished lower classes.

A year of tax exemption.

Following Roland for over a year, she had witnessed the astonishing effects of a year's tax exemption.

Though a lot of tax revenue would be lost, the increased cohesion and public support would more than compensate for it, especially as it provided an opportunity to clean up the tax collector ranks.

Most tax collectors were very greedy, and with power in their hands, it was hard to curb desires, which was human nature—even Roland couldn't change that.

But there had to be a line drawn for them.

For those who would exploit the lower people in the name of tax collection when the country clearly declared a tax exemption, they were to be granted VIP treatment for the first batch of gallows.

Having made this important decision in little time, Alina was in good spirits. She raised her coffee cup, taking a slight sip, her gaze searching the dance floor for that slightly annoying figure.

Sif was too hateful.

Even when driven to the brink of suicide and desperation, she hadn't been as helpless as just now.

That soft, fair, slender hand was an angel's caress in the eyes of others, yet on her waist, it felt like a demon's embrace, impossible to shake off.

No matter how she changed her dance steps, she couldn't escape Sif's control.

This feeling was really uncomfortable.

Even though she finally broke free at the end of the dance and could even reverse the situation to hold Sif's waist, she knew it was giving way.

Failure was painful, but purposefully yielding to let her win slightly was even worse.

She felt like a bird trapped in a cage, seeing the world outside but bound by shackles.

She was startled to discover that Sif, who was only slightly stronger than her before, had grown into such a formidable opponent.

Was this why Sofia chose Sif as a stepping stone?

Alina felt a bit bitter inside.

In past years, potential candidates for the Transcendent Empress were not limited to Sif; she actually had the qualifications too.

If her father had supported her completely, couldn't she ascend the throne?

Yet Sofia never considered her.

Being regarded as an enemy by Sofia was painful, but not even qualifying to be her enemy was even harder.

Sif, who completely overwhelmed her, was merely a step on a ladder in Sofia's eyes to reach a higher level.

While she wasn't even a step, just a slab outside the ladder.

Chapter 373: Tonight, the Blue Moon Is Like Water (Part 2)

Alina clenched her fists, dominated by anger.

Moments later, her blood-stained fist slowly relaxed.

When she gets angry, she only stays angry for a while.

Power is the true capital of speech.

She doesn't even have the qualification to be Sofia's opponent.

But once the wheels of fate start turning, those caught within it gradually lose themselves, and the original flow of the river of destiny changes.

Possibly identical or completely different.

Sofia is not the incarnation of a goddess; she does not decide!

Alina's eyes shone dazzlingly, like the stars.

She suddenly stood, her consciousness seeming to roam outside her body, alone gazing at the starry sky.

She seemed to have an insight.

She vaguely touched upon a thread of Astrology's true essence.

Not deduction, not observation, but immersion in the long river of destiny, bathing in the stellar power of fate, constantly strengthening oneself.

When Astrology is cultivated to its peak, it's the Great Prophecy Skill.

Alina's gaze fell on Roland and Sif, she smiled slightly and quietly left.

The banquet continued, but her part had ended.

There are still many things to do next; she will not be lost, she will look up at the starry sky and comprehend her path from the vast universe.

Tonight is the last night for the [Faceless] Alina, as dawn awakens the earth, she will return to the journey of seeking destiny and continue advancing on the path of a Divination Master.

With the end of revenge, she will embrace a new world.

Looking up at the starry sky, humans are so small. Whether Sylph or Sofia, under the vast starry sky, they are just ants.

Open its arms, embrace not only the stars, but the whole universe.

Alina left early, not even waiting for the dance to end or saying goodbye to Roland and Sif.

She believes they won't mind such trivial matters.

At this moment, these two only have eyes for each other, even if everyone around them were to leave, they wouldn't notice.

...

In the dance floor, enjoying the fullness of being held by broad hands around her waist.

Roland's hand was firm and warm, reassuring.

Before Roland, she doesn't need to exhaust herself scheming or wrestling; she can completely relax, enjoying the soothing rhythm brought by the magnificent dance, and elegantly step along, absorbed in it.

The noisy world seemed to vanish from her ears.

She could only hear the sound of the dance and Roland’s breath.

Between them, no need for too many words, just a gaze to complete the exchange.

The counterattack in the power struggle to seize control of Xidai wasn’t easy.

Though it didn’t take long, from start to finish they were at a disadvantage; any negligence could lead to downfall.

If Marco wasn’t so extreme, and there were a few more people they could trust, they might not have had any chances.

A superpower like Jin Yuan must be broken from within.

If Marco were replaced by Alina, they wouldn’t fight this battle at all.

The climax of the dance arrives, less than a minute from ending; Sif couldn’t help but voice her inner query.

"Roland, do you have any special means to restrain Alina? Like a Master-Servant Contract or Proof of Oath?"

Roland nearly laughed at Sif, his lips involuntarily curved up, "Sorry, I really don’t have that."

"Then how do you control her?" Sif’s expression was normal, but inside she was a bit anxious.

"She is my friend, why control?"

Roland calmly said, "At Alina’s most desperate time, I gave her hope; if she can betray friendship because of that, is there any trust left in the world?"

Sif took a deep breath, adjusted her breathing, her most worrying concern still occurred.

Roland, this guy usually cunning, now so muddled.

She gently hinted, "I never doubt her character, nor the friendship between you."

Sif didn’t notice, when speaking of friendship, her tone inadvertently intensified.

"But her status changed; she is now the Supreme Leader of Jin Yuan Kingdom, she must consider national interests. Your friendship with her may not, but certainly will, be placed behind."

"As you’ve told me, a politician is first a political figure, then a person."

Roland couldn’t help but laugh, Sif had learned to use his words against him.

Indeed, that’s what he said.

Seeing Roland laughing so carefree, Sif’s hand on his shoulder couldn’t help but grip tighter, strong power surging through her palms.

Roland gritted his teeth slightly; of course Sif wouldn’t actually hurt him, but the focused power was like a needle pricking his shoulder.

Sif is very angry.

Risking her life to fight this battle, she certainly doesn’t want to collect chestnuts for Alina from the fire.

She really wanted to ask Roland if he fancied the gentle, affectionate, and pitiful Jin Yuan girl, but she held back.

She certainly doesn’t want to spoil her perfect image in Roland’s heart.

An elegant lady will never put her beloved in a dilemma.

Facing Sif’s unspoken question, Roland softly said, "Sif, Alina knows what we want. As long as she stands on our side against Sofia, that’s enough. Everything else should be handled according to normal diplomatic relations between countries."

"Taking such a huge risk, if it’s only about gaining an additional ally, it’s not worthwhile. If it’s about gaining more assurance against Sofia, then it’s very worthwhile."

Sif’s anger melted like snow under the sun.

Roland spoke very clearly.

He didn’t help Alina seize power, but he disrupted the potential Vladimir-Jin Yuan alliance.

If Marco consolidated his power, he’d likely share land with the Vladimir Empire and contest the ocean with Sussex.

He definitely has such ambition.

Sofia’s strength was undisputed; if Jin Yuan Kingdom stabbed them in the back, how could they continue?

Roland’s actions were ultimately for her.

Sif’s cheeks blushed like frost leaves, vivid like wine in a glass, tender and enchanting.

"S-Sorry, I shouldn’t have been angry, but I am really worried about you..."

Worried I’ll be entranced by the Jin Yuan woman?

Roland teased with a smile, "How could I be angry, you care about me."

If there seemed to be ambiguity with Alina and Sif had no response, he would feel disappointed.

Sif cares about Roland, Roland cares about Sif’s caring.

They actually think about the same thing.

Sif raised her head, her eyes as bright as the stars.

The dance ended, and the Magic Lamp slowly went out, plunging the venue into darkness, yet no one screamed or moved chaotically.

This was a little interlude at the ball, creating a romantic small space for lovers.

Only a minute.

Missing it means losing it.

Many young people were just missing breaking the thin barrier of proximity; what they needed was this little concession.

The resplendent hall was exceptionally quiet in the dark.

Yet amidst the quiet came the sound of restlessness.

Some boldly embraced or even kissed their dance partners, of course limited to lovers.

If the relationship wasn't in place and someone tried to misbehave in the dark, they would be scorned by everyone, even expelled from the circle.

Xidai is a place where clique culture thrives; being expelled from the circle means social death.

Upper-class elites constantly lack not the opposite sex, but partners who can be soulmates.

So they won't mess around.

Those who can embrace here are true couples.

Roland's breathing was somewhat rapid.

The last bit of reason in his brain told him to quickly abandon reason and be decisive.

He followed his heart and leaned down.

Just as he leaned down, he happened to touch a soft cheek.

The touch was quicker than he expected.

Roland and Sif's hearts trembled simultaneously.

They both clearly recognized the earlier point of contact.

Clearly, he/she thought the same thing.

Unable to see in the dark, Roland's lips grazing the proactively approached cheek, paused briefly then moved downward along the cheek to find the same fervor.

Pressed tightly together without a gap.

Heartbeat like striking drums, urgent and crisp.

Roland steeled his heart, launching a charge.

He planned to seize this romantic atmosphere, breaking through the teeth's defenses.

However, he miscalculated.

He applied a little force, and what he touched was not the teeth but rather the similarly cautiously stretched tongue.

They thought exactly the same.

Taking advantage of the dark, breaking through defenses, reaching the blissful shore.

In this moment, some misunderstandings vanished into smoke; there was no longer any barrier between them.

Before closing her eyes, Sif's peripheral vision cast outside the window.

A crescent Blue Moon quietly hung at the horizon, seemingly smiling.

Tonight, the moonlight was truly beautiful.

Chapter 374: Roland, You Don’t Understand Love

In life, there are always things we have to face sooner or later.

For example, the minstrel Adam who was about to report personal issues to the leadership.

Standing outside Roland’s temporary office, Adam inexplicably felt nervous, his heartbeat particularly erratic.

He had to speak unspeakable words in front of Governor Roland.

He wanted to marry a Jin Yuan girl.

This was not originally a big deal, but she was a spy, at least she once was.

An accidental encounter while on a mission led to a fleeting romance that he couldn’t eventually let go of with the female spy.

He dared not imagine how Roland would respond.

Would it be anger, shock, or disappointment?

He knew very well that Governor Roland had high expectations of him.

If Roland didn’t value him, he wouldn’t have risked crossing the Vladimir Empire to take him in back in the Imperial Capital.

This special expedition tasked Adam with the main mission of spreading the story of the return of Saintess Fuchou, which he did very well.

The side mission was to gather as much intelligence as possible, and he excelled at this.

He not only infiltrated the blockaded West City but also got hold of the city defense map and information on numerous city defense military leaders.

This city defense map played an important role in coercing West City into surrender.

When the Fourth Fleet approached the city walls along the wide West River, setting up cannons, and the enlarged city defense map was hoisted on the mast, the morale of the defending army instantly collapsed.

The defenders of West City did not disappoint, feigned contemplation, and then decisively opened the city gates to surrender.

Except for a very few hardliners who attempted to resist stubbornly, everyone else obediently laid down their arms.

Roland spoke highly of Adam, and Her Majesty the Empress, playing the role of Count Sif, generously expressed that he would be made a Baron upon returning to the country.

Besides that, he also received a special reward of five hundred pounds.

This was a huge sum capable of buying four houses in the wealthy district of the Imperial Capital.

Back when Governor Roland won the essay contest, the prize money was about the same.

In this adventure, he achieved both fame and fortune.

However, he soon faced a soul-searching question: Should he insist on his "love" with Miss Lilith?

Or rather, was the spark between them passion or love?

Adam fell silent.

Her Majesty the Empress and the Governor are generous and lenient, but they would never allow an important subordinate to marry a foreign spy as a wife.

Even if she was a former spy.

The political review would not pass.

No one would be willing to take this risk.

Who could see through a woman who was once a spy, who would dare to absolutely trust her?

Adam is an important piece in Roland's future blueprint, allowing no room for error.

Two paths lay before Adam.

Either choose Lilith, and face a dim career and lose the opportunity to avenge his family.

Or give up Lilith and reach the pinnacle of his career.

To be fair, Lilith is a gentle, romantic girl, and an excellent wife, especially her exquisite cooking, which takes Adam back to the tastes when his mother was still around.

How to choose?

Perhaps to others, this is just his affectation; there's no hesitation at all, surely give up.

Three-legged salamanders are rare, but there are plenty of beautiful two-legged girls.

With power and influence, a man can have as many beauties as he wants.

Adam clenched his fist tightly.

No, that’s not it, Lilith is different from them!

He silently screamed in his heart, took a deep breath, and knocked on the door.

"Lord Governor, are you there? It’s Adam."

"Come in." After a brief silence, a gentle voice came from inside.

It wasn’t Roland, it was Her Majesty the Empress’s voice.

Adam wasn’t surprised, everyone knew that Empress Sif and Governor Roland were lovers.

Gently pushing open the door, Adam slid into the room, standing not far from the entrance.

"Have a seat, help yourself to some tea."

Sif didn’t look up, continuing to browse the documents on the table.

Three minutes later, she finally finished reading the document, leaving a graceful signature at the end, before lifting her head.

Seeing Adam’s cautious demeanor, Sif smiled warmly and comforted him:

"General Adam, there’s no need to be so restrained. Is there something you wish to discuss?"

The title of General tightened Adam’s heart.

Due to his outstanding contributions, his rank had been promoted to Brigadier General.

The Three Provinces Army only had one legion, and a Brigadier General was a senior officer, comparable in value to a Vice Admiral on the Empire’s mainland.

He was previously just a Lieutenant Colonel, and this sudden promotion was equivalent to skipping a level, demonstrating the vast grace of the Imperial favor.

Adam felt a headache. If Her Majesty the Empress knew he was going to give up his future for a woman, he couldn’t imagine how disappointed she would be.

He was brewing his words but found he couldn’t speak at all.

Her Majesty’s eyes were full of joy, and she seemed to be in a great mood; he shouldn’t dampen her spirits at this time.

But this was the last chance to confess.

The punitive expedition was returning home tomorrow.

A small part of the elite would move with the fleet, while most of the army would leave along the main road.

Adam’s orders were to follow the fleet.

If he didn’t clarify, he wouldn’t even have a reason to take Lilith with him.

For ordinary people, marriage is a private matter, but clearly not for the officials around the Empress.

Seeing Adam hesitating, Sif smiled and asked, "Adam, now that you're my direct vassal, you can tell me if there's anything personal. I'll do my best to help."

Unlike his time in the Imperial Capital, Sif was now very adept at winning people's hearts, no longer making the foolish mistake of refusing the Minister of Justice's bribery.

Faced with the care from the leadership, Adam was naturally overwhelmed and flattered.

He gritted his teeth and said softly, "Lord Count, do you have time to hear a story? It's something genuine that happened during this mission."

Sif's eyes lit up.

She enjoyed listening to Roland tell stories, but unfortunately, everyone has been busy lately, and the frequency and duration of Roland's storytelling have significantly decreased.

Adam is the best minstrel; his stories may not be as imaginative as Roland's, but they're certainly worth listening to.

"It is my honor." Sif smiled as she gestured for him to begin.

Adam's heart stirred; Sif was the Empress, but she was also a young girl who might understand him?

He quickly gathered himself, cleared his throat, and entered storytelling mode.

To be fair, Adam truly was a top-tier minstrel; his stories were captivating, and had there been a few young girls listening, they would have been moved to tears.

However, Sif was no ordinary listener; she was experienced and wouldn't be moved by such matters. She simply listened quietly until the story ended.

Seeing no change in the Empress's expression, Adam felt a bit dejected, and by the end, there was a touch of desolation in his tone.

"Lord Count, as you have heard, this matter..."

Adam found himself at a loss, unable to find the right words.

A confused encounter touched his heartstrings.

It was all the moon's fault, shining on Lilith's soft body, stealing his heart away.

After hearing Adam's story, Sif calmly asked:

"So, during your mission, you met a girl with... a special profession?"

"Yes." Adam lowered his head, his voice becoming softer.

"And then you had a one-night stand?"

"Yes." Adam hung his head even lower, his voice barely a whisper.

"Then you both went to West City, staying together every night?"

"Yes..." Adam's face burned with embarrassment, his voice as faint as a mosquito's hum.

He couldn't hold back and lifted his head, pleadingly whispering: "Lord Count, I..."

"This is love!"

Sif slammed the table, interrupting Adam’s words.

Adam: "..."

What does Her Majesty mean by this?

He looked at Sif, dumbfounded, his sturdy frame swaying like a wind chime.

Sif raised a finger and softly said, "Your actions defy all logic. If this isn’t love, then I don’t know what is."

Huh? What kind of logic is that?

Adam’s mind went completely blank.

Sif smiled at Adam and gently reminded him, "Go invite that girl. I want to see who could captivate your heart."

Though his mind was still blank, Adam resolutely followed the order.

He left swiftly, nearly knocking off half of the doorway as he exited.

Seeing his excited demeanor, a smile appeared at the corners of Sif’s lips.

She could bet with anyone that this was indeed love.

Shortly after Adam left, Roland appeared at the door.

He glanced curiously down the hallway and jokingly remarked, "Did Adam get provoked? He even forgot to greet me just now."

"It’s nothing; he was just robbed of his senses by the god of love." Sif smiled as she stood up, offering the chair in front of the desk to Roland and moving to sit on the sofa, pouring herself a cup of tea.

Seeing Sif smiling so brightly, Roland was puzzled, yet he didn’t know how to inquire further.

Sif couldn’t help but gesture for Roland to sit, "Roland, want to hear a story?"

Roland wanted to explain that he had to set off tomorrow and still had many tasks to complete, but he couldn’t refuse the anticipation in Sif’s gaze, so he returned to his seat, pretending to relax.

Feeling the lingering warmth on the cushion, Roland’s heartbeat quickened fiercely.

"Of course, I want to hear."

"This is a pure love story defying societal norms." Sif’s gaze softened gradually.

Her storytelling skills were far less than Adam’s and not as creative as Roland’s, but her voice was melodious, as pleasant as singing. Naturally, Roland loved listening to her.

However, the content of the story made Roland somewhat dismissive.

To hear Roland’s genuine thoughts, Sif replaced the characters’ names and locations with aliases to retell Adam and Lilith’s story.

"Roland, how would you rate this love story?"

"That’s not love." Roland shrugged dismissively.

Isn’t this just an urge to visit a brothel? It’s the first time I’ve seen someone describe lust in such an elegant way.

Sif didn’t like hearing that.

She slightly frowned and retorted displeased, "This young man is bright. If he loses his mind over something, isn’t that love?"

Of course, it’s just a case of strong lust.

Roland almost blurted it out but, considering Sif’s good mood lately, he decided to express it more tactfully.

"Being attracted to a girl’s beauty doesn’t count as true love."

Sif disliked hearing that even more; beauty isn’t a crime.

She stood up, her expression extraordinarily serious, and began an Empress’s love lecture.

"Roland, you don’t understand love. The initial form of love is attraction between opposites."

"Whether it’s talent, knowledge, identity, status, these external conditions, or character, personality, these bonus factors, they all refine that primal attraction."

Sif’s eyes sparkled with a dazzling light, speaking softly but firmly:

"Only when you strip away external factors and are drawn to each other, that’s the purest form of love. While growing affection over time is certainly love, is love at first sight not as well?"

Roland was stunned.

He felt there was something wrong with what Sif said but couldn’t find a flaw.

He quickly figured it out.

He was used to linking love and marriage, while Sif spoke of love beyond marriage.

Faced with Sif’s clear eyes, he chose to surrender.

"Alright, I admit you’re right, but in reality, such love doesn’t exist. Your story is beautiful, but it doesn’t happen in real life. Why would anyone give up a title bestowed by the Empress for an unknown girl found by the roadside?"

"This is a love story, not reality."

Sif asked with a smile, "What if it does happen in reality?"

"Then I’ll concede that’s true love, does it exist?" Roland asked dismissively.

Footsteps echoed from the hallway.

Two people, one light, one heavy, their steps disordered, sounding anxious.

Sif pointed toward the entrance with her delicate fingers and softly said, "Love has arrived."

Chapter 375: Rules Matter Most

Lilith stood cautiously behind Adam, clutching his sleeve tightly, her body trembling uncontrollably, her once rosy lips devoid of any color.

When Adam grabbed her hand and walked towards the palace, she was completely dazed.

Ever since hearing the good news of Adam being ennobled after returning to the country, she had abandoned all hopes of becoming Adam's wife.

Of course, she wanted to marry Adam, but she wasn't a fool, she was very aware of how troublesome her identity was.

So she didn't dare to hope.

She had long decided to enjoy this time before Adam returned home, so as not to have any regrets when he did.

She planned to find a quiet countryside to peacefully spend the rest of her life.

She would not be lonely.

Adam didn't know yet that the seed of life had already taken root within her.

This was a gift from the Goddess of Fengrao and also the fruit of their love.

However, Adam had just rushed in like a madman, dragging her away, saying that their love had been recognized by Count Sif.

Lilith didn't quite believe it, but she couldn't resist, so she followed Adam.

She was anxious and even more nervous.

If there was a glimmer of hope, of course, she didn't want the child to be born without a father; she was simply in despair over the cruel reality.

She originally held no hope, but Adam rekindled her longing.

Once a person has hope, they will worry about gains and losses.

Half an hour ago, she was still thinking about how to be a good single mother, and now she was waiting for Count Sif's final judgment.

Lilith cautiously glanced at Sif and Roland with the corner of her eye, her heart skipped a beat.

If it were only Count Sif, she might have some hope, but Roland was the one in charge.

She had heard Roland's name and knew about his deeds.

Seemingly kind yet actually ruthless, she was savvy in political calculations.

This was Lilith's objective assessment of Roland.

The moment she saw Roland, the flame of hope that Lilith had just ignited was extinguished.

She was terrified beyond measure.

At this point, she wasn't thinking about whether she could marry Adam but whether she could preserve her own life and protect the poor little one.

Roland was a ruthless politician; he would never tolerate any issue with Adam, someone so close to him.

Adam originally had no issues; the problems started after he met her, and she was the root of these problems.

As long as she disappeared from the world, all issues would vanish into thin air.

With this thought, Lilith was overwhelmed by fear, her face turned ashen, and her legs trembled.

If she were alone, she might have the courage to die heroically.

But now, she couldn’t.

She now had a reason to live well even if she had to leave Adam.

Roland’s polite smile appeared to her like the sinister grin of a Demon King before devouring a baby.

Lilith almost fainted on the spot, she forced her body to hold on, with sweat rolling down her cheeks.

Seeing her soaked in sweat and desperate appearance, Roland squinted his eyes, examining Lilith with a suspicious gaze.

What was she afraid of?

There must be a problem!

A murderous intent flashed and disappeared, sinking deep into his eyes.

Roland had already doubted Lilith, and now he was even more convinced that she had significant problems.

He was contemplating how to resolve this hidden danger and wasn’t even paying close attention to the conversation between Sif and Adam.

He was lost in thought.

Adam was not an ordinary person but a Transcendent with unlimited growth potential.

Even in facing Sofia, he was by no means useless.

As long as he could help deal with Sofia, even being of little use was good.

Of course, he didn't want Adam to be ruined by a bad woman.

He needed Adam to grow quickly, just like this tour of Jin Yuan Kingdom.

Roland wanted to laugh, the world was so absurd, having to deal with Sofia and protect his own woman ended up requiring him to erase Adam's lover.

But he couldn't bring himself to laugh.

His eyes narrowed further and further, filled with murderous intent.

Although Adam frequently visited the Red Light District, those women, akin to sex toys, were merely pure tools for release.

Roland merely turned a blind eye to Adam often visiting brothels.

Artists, with their lively minds and unrestrained demeanor, having a bit of a rich private life wasn't an issue.

But this time was different.

This time Adam had truly fallen.

When a man who plays with the world falls, he falls deeper than a regular person.

A capable subordinate falling in love, under a woman's seduction, wielding a backstabbing dagger against his liege. This kind of story was abundant in history books, too frequent.

Even if there was only a one percent possibility, it had to be eradicated.

Amid Roland's pounding heart, Sif over there had already completed her observation.

Lilith was indeed a spy, and a seasoned one at that.

With Sif's power, even under Insight, there was a small area that remained unclear.

She could see no malice but Lilith's struggle, bewilderment, and helplessness.

Unlike Roland's wild speculations, Sif comprehended Lilith's emotions completely.

Upon activating the Eye of Insight, she not only saw the frightened Lilith like a startled rabbit but also sensed a pure life energy.

Full of curiosity and love for this world.

People always think babies know nothing, yet they also possess souls.

Unborn, not even a formed embryo, a young life's soul is naturally entirely pure.

Lilith's mindset was too easy to understand; she was just a mother wanting to protect her child.

After figuring this out, Sif's gaze towards Lilith softened greatly.

Before Lilith came, she also worried about seeing the red light representing hostility.

But she had long made up her mind; if Lilith did bear malice, she would deal with it decisively, even if it meant utterly disappointing Adam.

Fortunately, there was none.

Understanding everything, Sif’s lips gently curved upward, and she softly said:

"Congratulations, Adam, you will become a father in a few months."

Adam only felt a buzzing in his head, utterly dumbfounded.

He laughed foolishly out of composure, receiving the definite answer from Lilith’s eyes, almost unable to resist picking up his lover and spinning around.

Realizing that both the Governor and the Empress were present, he restrained his excitement and looked nervously at Roland.

"Lord Governor, I..."

"Roland, we should congratulate Adam and Lilith."

Fearing Roland’s opposition, Sif spoke first.

Pregnant?

Roland fell into silence.

With Lilith taking a hostage in a critical position, the situation had completely changed.

Even if she had problems, it couldn’t be dealt with anymore.

Perhaps some men would painfully sacrifice love for power and status, but as long as they were not beasts, they wouldn’t tolerate their unborn child disappearing.

Roland laughed self-deprecatingly; in this situation, he couldn’t raise a hand.

Sif’s eyes told him that Lilith bore no hostility.

Insight was indeed useful, but not omnipotent, Roland thought silently.

Lilith was an undercover agent, only following orders without independent thought; how could she bear hostility against the head of state of a neighboring country?

Even if she had no issues, what about the ones who trained her?

What if someone coerced Lilith into action in the future?

All of these are latent threats.

Roland withheld the sigh in his heart, smiling as he clapped his hands.

Given the situation, it’s better to offer blessings first.

Lilith’s issue had to be set aside for now as well.

"Adam, congratulations. You’re about to become a father. Pursue some easier work, the military is too dangerous and not suitable for you."

"Report to the Culture Department when you return home; they are short of a Deputy Minister, and you are quite suitable."

Roland spoke calmly.

With flawless reasoning, he reassigned Adam from a significant post to a more relaxed, though relatively less important, position.

Is culture important? Of course, it is.

But during turbulent times, it pales in comparison to the military.

Adam breathed a sigh of relief and quickly thanked both Sif and Roland.

After some polite exchanges, he sensibly left with Lilith.

Though a little disappointed at being reassigned from an important military post, what did it matter compared to his wife and child?

Having the whole family together was more important.

Watching Adam leave, Sif remained silent for a long time before saying in a quiet tone, "You still don’t trust Adam. No, it’s Lilith you don’t trust."

"Quite the opposite, actually, I trust them very much. The latent threat with Lilith isn’t her but the intelligence organization behind her; she herself is quite problem-free."

"Then why let Adam retreat to the second line?" Sif expressed some confusion.

Roland smiled without speaking; it was evidently yet another impromptu test.

Sif's gaze suddenly sharpened.

She greatly enjoyed Roland's random questions.

Such questions often had no ready answers for reference, demanding her to think.

Needing to think meant first excluding conclusions that required no thought.

First to be excluded was that Roland expelled Adam from the core circle out of anger.

Roland wasn't someone who acted on impulse.

Sif's mind raced, considering various possibilities, yet she still found nothing.

Accepting Lilith, allowing Adam and Lilith to marry was a kindness.

Reassigning Adam from the military to the powerless Culture Department, nominally a lateral move, but in reality a demotion.

Though the level remained the same, the power and prospects were vastly different, possibly leading to marginalization.

No matter how magnanimous Adam was, he would feel uncomfortable inside.

Roland acted this way because he had more important objectives than caring about Adam's feelings.

Sif's eyes took on a peculiar look, and she said softly:

"To uphold rules, to consider others' feelings, right?"

This time, it was Roland's turn to be surprised.

His expression went from astonishment to gratification, finally to a sense of relief.

Sif had indeed grown.

He nodded approvingly and said with a smile, "To lead the team well, rules are paramount. Our team now has four provinces, and in the future, it may encompass the entire Empire and even the continent's various countries. Without rules, chaos ensues."

"Adam indeed merits reward, hence the honors. But marrying a foreigner without informing us beforehand and only mentioning it after the fact is irresponsible, if not deceitful."

"Adam must face punishment, or he won't command respect."

Sif sighed in relief, yet still felt a pang when considering the outcome.

She lightly sighed, "It's a pity Adam won't be as dedicated anymore."

"Who said that?"

Roland slowly shook his head, speaking sternly, "If Adam can't grasp this basic principle, then there wouldn't be a place for him in the Culture Department either."

Though reassigned from an important post, Roland was genuinely considerate toward Adam.

Preserving his administrative level, securing his wife and child, and light punishment for the hidden transgression.

If someone harbors resentment despite generous rewards and light penalties, then that's a typical ingrate with ulterior motives, someone unusable at all.

Chapter 376: I'm Waiting for the Enemy

Amidst the flowers, applause, and secret relief of the people of West City, the Fourth Fleet left the Jin Yuan Kingdom, sailing down the broad West River and returning from the northern outer sea to Emre Port, the largest port of the Four Overseas Provinces.

On the flagship Monarch, Roland stood on the top deck, hands behind his back, calmly watching the sea, expressionless.

Three days ago, Sif had led the army back along the original route, and afterward, he led the navy back to Emre Port by sea.

This expedition to Jin Yuan, though perilous, was greatly rewarding.

Eliminating Marco, establishing Alina securely, no longer needing to worry about someone backstabbing him during a confrontation with Sofia.

The night before departure, Roland and Alina formed a secret agreement to maintain consistency on major issues.

Alina's ruling foundation is not solid, and Roland is not in a hurry for her to make a statement. He plans to wait until she consolidates domestic order and firmly grasps power.

Currently, neither Roland nor Sif has the authority to sign on behalf of the country; this secret agreement is merely a private arrangement and has not ascended to national policy.

To express gratitude, Alina prepared a large amount of grain, supplies, and cash as compensation for Roland and Sif's assistance.

This remuneration was not in the name of the state but was paid using Marco’s "private assets."

Although Marco was upright and had little private property, now that he is dead, the unsettled accounts have to trouble him a bit.

He caused so much trouble for the country that a little payback after his death is only fitting.

Apart from supplies and money, Alina also handed over a dozen main battleships as compensation for the loss of the Perth to Roland.

With these well-maintained main battleships, the Fourth Fleet’s strength soared to a new level, and with the imminent launching of new battleships, its power has long surpassed its peak period.

Even when compared to the Imperial Navy’s First Fleet, it is not far behind.

Aside from these team-strengthening gains, he also obtained Marco’s magic armor.

This armor contains strange magic power; Roland plans to take it back for Master Anthony’s appraisal.

Marco’s sudden rise to power was certainly due to personal effort, but this abruptly appearing armor certainly played a key role.

Moreover, he acquired a new Inheritor Badge.

Facing the complex internal situation in Jin Yuan, Alina was quite confused and had to seek guidance from Roland. Roland, recalling the history of another world, helped her design a suitable path.

Who says there cannot be an emperor in a republic? As long as the people all recognize Alina, who can oppose?

For providing such precise political guidance, even though he is not of the Jin Yuan people, he still obtained the treasured Prime Minister's Badge.

Carved with an iris pattern, the golden Prime Minister's Badge sank into the base of a Soul Card, further enhancing Roland's strength.

Within Jin Yuan, many opposed compensating with battleships, believing it to be national disgrace, but Alina remained unmoved, persistently firm.

Later on, those ministers who strongly opposed received a gift: the autobiography of Dictator Marco.

This gift gradually calmed them down.

Whether it implied not acting like Marco or hinted not forcing Alina to become like Marco, they dared not say a word further.

Marco was ruthless; Alina was more formidable than Marco.

Some already realized this truth, while others needed time to settle.

While Jin Yuan recuperated and reorganized, Roland and the Sussex military departed.

They had done what needed to be done, taken what needed to be taken, and staying further could easily trigger animosity among the Jin Yuan people.

The Jin Yuan people are proud; they are more likely to accept a domestic tyrant but not external interference.

Standing on the upper deck, Roland did not use a telescope, instead gazing into the distance with the naked eye.

"What are you looking at?"

Lisa’s gentle voice sounded in his ear, bringing a warm breeze.

During the stay in Jin Yuan, while everyone else was busy with their own matters, only she had nothing to do.

Fortunately, she quickly found amusement.

Unlike the culinary desert of Sussex, Jin Yuan and Talia are the culinary peaks of the Rodinia Continent. The cuisines of Jin Yuan and Talia each have their own characteristics, forming their own systems.

Lisa visited the best chefs in West City as a state guest, seeking their culinary expertise.

Since she did not have to worry about trivial matters, she diligently learned cooking every day and would share her creations with Roland and Sif.

Though their praise wouldn’t earn Lisa any extra star ratings, their commendations lifted her spirits greatly.

In good spirits, learning naturally came quicker.

In just over a month, Lisa not only learned from the best chefs of the Jin Yuan Kingdom but also became an honorary vice president of the Continent Gourmet Association and earned the title of Five-star Gourmet.

Embarking on her Path of Transcendence with the profession of [Chef], Lisa holds an extraordinary obsession with culinary arts.

Even though she has now turned to fire magic cultivation, she hasn’t forgotten her cooking skills.

There is something she can only keep to herself, never revealing it to Master Anthony.

Mastering fire is just for better cooking.

Otherwise, she would never have the motivation to learn the tedious magic.

Seeing Roland’s profound gaze, Lisa was somewhat curious. The waters around here were only three and a half days’ journey from Emre Port, and there couldn’t possibly be any enemies. What was Roland worried about?

Though Lisa didn’t ask, Roland knew what she was thinking and explained proactively, "Do you remember Uranie?"

Lisa had a good memory and quickly recalled the name.

"I heard from Munina about her. Madame Uranie is a Sea Demon of the Grim Clan, married into the Graham Clan, but went missing during the massacre at the sea depths."

"I’m waiting for her."

Roland’s words left Lisa dumbfounded for quite a while.

After a moment of silence, she decided to yield to reality.

She gently tapped Roland’s shoulder and quipped with a smile, "Do you think I can figure it out? Just tell me what’s going on."

Though Lisa was strong, the little fists landing on his shoulder were as soft as before.

She was still herself, not a single change.

Roland explained the situation to Lisa concisely.

The Grim Clan was more powerful than the Graham Clan. Both sides were always vying for the legitimate voice of the Sea Demon Race. Although they intermarried, there were irreconcilable contradictions.

The sea massacre was the result of the Grim Clan allying with General Nephropidae as a big backer.

Uranie was no ordinary Sea Demon. She had strong self-preservation abilities, yet she disappeared during the massacre, which is definitely suspicious.

"She’s definitely not dead."

Roland calmly said, "If I’m not mistaken, she’s watching us from not far away."

Lisa was startled and shivered, whispering softly, "Will General Nephropidae come too?"

"Hard to say. Nephropidae’s true form is that of a giant sea turtle. Turtles are known for being timid and cunning, but once their strength surpasses a certain level, they become exceptionally bold. In the current version, General Nephropidae is invincible in the sea, at least that’s what he believes."

"So, the chances are high that he will come."

Lisa’s previously rosy face turned pale, and her voice trembled.

"What should we do? We are no match for him in the sea."

"We might not be able to kill him, but I’ll strip him of his shell."

Roland said calmly, "At Alina’s house, I found a notebook. It’s a draft of a natural history manuscript written by Mr. Carlo, and it includes records about General Nephropidae."

"Mr. Carlo fantasized about establishing a super-nation of harmonious coexistence among races. He had done significant research on Sea Demons, Werewolves, Centaurs, and other mysterious races."

"Nephropidae’s shell is both a lifesaving tool and a burden. The current General Nephropidae’s real strength has reached Tier Six, but he’s completely hindered by his shell."

"If Mr. Carlo’s conjecture is correct, there’s a good chance of leaving Nephropidae shell-less."

"And what if he’s wrong?" Lisa couldn’t help but ask.

Roland didn’t answer, only gave a slight smile.

That’s a question Sif would never ask.

Roland and Sif had too few chips in their hands; every game could be the final one.

The failure means they’ll travel the Nether River together, making company on the way. What else can they do?

Win, or die.

He had no other choice.

Lisa wasn’t a fool. She vaguely guessed Roland’s thoughts but merely sighed internally and said nothing more.

She recalled an old proverb from her hometown.

Once born, one is on the road to die generously; there is no turning back.

She just stood quietly beside Roland, readying herself to face the challenge with him.

No matter how powerful Tier Six may be, today is the Seventh Return Day, even if the Goddess descended, she could only use Tier Seven strength; that is the fundamental law of the universe's operation.

General Nephropidae cannot surpass it either.

Since learning magic from Anthony, Lisa was no longer the small-town citizen she once was; her horizons had broadened significantly.

If all seals were lifted, Teacher Anthony could at least break through to a True Mage (equivalent to Tier Five); moving onward would become difficult.

Teacher's expectation for her was at least to reach Great Mage, equal to Tier Three, and go further if the opportunity arises.

She once asked the teacher his expectations for Roland, but Anthony remained silent for a long time and just shook his head.

The old Mage could not see through Roland.

Roland might die tomorrow, or he might make it to the end; his limit was a question mark.

Anthony implied that everything about Roland was unknown, but Lisa didn't care; she believed that the teacher hinted Roland had the potential to become a God.

What's just a giant sea turtle, in front of a future Great Mage and a candidate God?

Roland caught Lisa's expression changes in the corner of his eye.

Watching her shift from panic to swelling confidence in half a second, Roland fell into complete silence.

He sighed lightly in his heart and continued to gaze at the sea.

A girl's thoughts, indeed unfathomable, better abandon such high-level challenges.

Maybe unearthing General Nephropidae's shell would be simpler.

According to the intelligence he had, General Nephropidae's shell might weigh dozens of tons, although lighter, it didn't lose to Orichalcum in hardness.

The huge shell could be used to strengthen the new flagship's armor.

Thinking about an invincible flagship, Roland suddenly looked forward to the nightfall.

Only when night deepens could these pirates come out of the dark depths of the sea to meet their doom.

He had prepared enough surprises for General Nephropidae.

The exquisite craftsmanship of Alchemy Master Norton and the wild imagination of Naturalist Carlo combined to set an inescapable trap for the beast.

General Nephropidae, will you come?

Roland squinted his eyes, gripped his scepter, feeling inexplicably anxious.

Chapter 377: The Monarch Burns

"Enemy attack, enemy attack!"

The piercing alarm kept sounding.

At four in the morning in the northern offshore area, the last stretch of the Death Channel, what was meant to happen eventually did.

Munina swiftly swayed her tail at the seabed, weaving under the ships, constantly singing the Siren's Song.

She brought only a few clan members, but they were elite, enhancing the battleship's combat power.

Indeed, they were Grim Clan Sea Demons.

They were no longer pretending.

Sharks and plate-armored horseshoe crabs are effective against ocean creatures but cannot deal with human warships.

You can't expect giant sharks to bite through the thick planks of a ship, can you?

Thus, this time, the Grim Clan's elite were dispatched.

Among the crowd, Munina saw a figure that was supposed to be "dead."

Uranie.

She was indeed problematic!

Recalling the tragic death of tens of thousands of clan members, the killing intent in Munina's eyes flickered briefly.

Faced with Uranie's provocative gaze, she was furious and turned to run without hesitation.

Retreat, embark!

Before retreating, Munina glanced disdainfully at Uranie and mouthed to her.

"Wait for death."

Uranie stared dumbfounded at Munina's back, feeling inexplicably uncomfortable.

She served as an informant, guiding the Ocean Legion of General Nephropidae, almost wiping out the Grim Clan, a blood feud of tens of thousands, how could Munina endure it?

She watched in a daze as Munina led her clan back near the human warship, seething with anger.

Relying on humans?

Ridiculous, Sea Demons indeed dare not challenge human authority on land, but this is the ocean.

The vast and boundless ocean is the human's territory, the pathetic Naked Apes can't even swim, they're mere prey in the sea.

Human swimming speed is laughable to Sea Demons, practically no different from not being able to swim.

Though Munina's bizarre behavior made Uranie uncomfortable, she didn't dwell on it and soon commanded her clan to surround the human warship.

The crossbow cannons of the large battleship fired continuously, while the small caliber cannons of the small warship blasted the sea surface wildly.

Many human soldiers stood at the edge with firearms, firing haphazardly.

Though the precision was limited, the human firepower was powerful, causing considerable casualties.

Uranie frowned lightly and issued a new order.

"Dive, scuttle the ship!"

Sea Demons have three common methods against humans.

The first is sneaking aboard ships under the cover of night for shameless surprise attacks.

The second is using the Siren's Song to charm them, causing human sailors to jump into the sea themselves.

The third is scuttling the ship's bottom.

It's well-known that merely opening the seabed valve can sink a ten-thousand-ton ship within nineteen minutes, let alone these few-thousand-ton ships.

Humans have similar tactics, frogmen scuttling ships.

Using frogmen for ship-scuttling is an unconventional combat technique but it's very effective.

Only, training frogmen is difficult, preventing the widespread use of such tactics.

But Sea Demons are different, they are formidable ocean creatures, even the weakest swimming Sea Demons can easily defeat human frogmen.

Hundreds of soldiers took special tools and headed towards the ship's bottom.

It's not that forced boarding isn't good enough, but scuttling is more cost-effective.

Uranie was not driven by anger to choose the more dramatic tactic, instead opting directly to scuttle the ship.

Humans were already prepared, boarding is not feasible; Munina, the traitor, was over by the humans, the Siren's Song was not advantageous, leaving only scuttling as an option.

Fortunately, humans are not good swimmers, this move is sure to succeed.

Just as Uranie awaited good news, screams constantly echoed, the water dyed red beneath, the smell of blood permeated the sea below the horizon.

Uranie's face changed dramatically.

There are many swimming Sea Demons, but few adept with scuttling tools.

She couldn't bear the heavy loss of the scuttling team, immediately issuing the order to retreat.

The embarrassed escapee Sea Demons frontline brought bad news.

The cunning humans were prepared, reinforcing the seabed with steel plates, making their special tools ineffective.

When they were at a loss, the despicable humans even poisoned the sea, hindering them further.

In short, it wasn’t possible.

"Retreat, Miss Uranie. The damned humans are already prepared!"

Uranie remained silent, knowing retreat was the best choice, ocean technology lagged behind, forcing them to use stone and various special materials to craft weapons and equipment, ordinary clans couldn’t even smelt or forge.

Only the minions of the Sea Emperor had the privilege of using forged weapons.

Given human preparedness, a frontal assault was clearly inadvisable.

But General Nephropidae was right behind, she couldn’t retreat.

Reluctantly, Uranie blew the whistle, seeking aid from General Nephropidae.

Thinking of being rebuked or even punished by the General after the operation, she bit her lip without saying a word.

With the sound of the whistle, the Sea Demons gradually withdrew, trailing behind the human ships, but not daring to act rashly.

This strange skirmish temporarily quieted down.

Yet both sides knew, the storm was about to come.

Standing on the upper deck, Lisa’s palms sweated nervously.

"Are they gone?"

She asked shakily.

"Perhaps, but we'll have more visitors soon."

"Who?" Lisa asked Roland nervously, in a low voice.

"The Big Turtle." Roland came up with a fitting nickname for General Nephropidae.

Despite the tense situation, Lisa couldn't help but let out a small laugh.

Just as her smile blossomed, a dull thud came from the bottom of the ship, and the whole vessel shook.

Lisa wobbled, nearly falling into Roland's arms.

Before she could react, Roland had already vanished like lightning to the deck's end.

Lisa quickly followed, afraid that Roland might get into trouble.

General Nephropidae had arrived.

As if to vent his power or announce his arrival, he viciously rammed into the hull of the Monarch.

The shell was very hard, not inferior to steel, and it collided with the bottom of the ship with a dull thundering sound.

The ship wouldn't cry in pain, but the beast would.

General Nephropidae used all his strength, intending to punch a big hole in the bottom of the Monarch, but didn't expect to hit an iron plate.

He wanted to show off in front of his underlings, but instead hit an iron plate, making General Nephropidae's expression very unpleasant.

He quickly slid his limbs, surfaced from the water, and with a powerful leap, jumped directly onto the deck of the Monarch.

Huh?!

Roland was somewhat dumbfounded.

What combat technique is this?

Is there a fish that leaps onto the ship to fight with fishermen?

He originally just planned to remove the shell, not expecting someone to deliver themselves to the door.

Roland pulled out a flare gun and shot a red flare into the sky, notifying Bridges to change the combat target to fishing.

A turtle is still a terrapin, which is broadly considered a fish, and must be caught!

Seeing Roland's flare, Bridges was particularly excited, savoring the fragrant scent of a medal of honor.

He quickly gave orders, instructing the soldiers to prepare for fishing.

Did the Monarch think it could come and go at will?

Several large nets were thrown from all directions.

General Nephropidae was unfazed, pulling his limbs into his shell and spinning rapidly.

As long as the speed is fast enough, what net can stop him?

The rapidly spinning shell was like a blade cutting through the net, making General Nephropidae laugh heartily and feel overly satisfied.

After failing to break the ship, General Nephropidae knew he couldn't completely annihilate the human fleet this time, and in his fury, he boarded the ship to wreak havoc, hoping to turn the tide with his bravery.

His idea wasn't wrong; ordinary human nets couldn't stop him.

After all, no one would prepare a custom net for a hundred-ton super sea turtle, nor could they carry it around.

Thus, he was invincible.

Screams and collision sounds constantly erupted.

General Nephropidae seemed like a god descended from heaven, rampaging on the Monarch, at least killing dozens of human soldiers with his spinning shell.

The plate armor of elite soldiers was a joke in front of his gigantic shell, and firearms hitting the shell clattered like roasting beans, causing no harm.

General Nephropidae let out a wild laugh, changing his mind; even if he couldn't destroy the entire human fleet, he wanted to satisfy his lust for slaughter, planning to kill at least a thousand people before leaving.

Just as he intended to continue the massacre, several transparent nets fell down.

General Nephropidae impatiently began spinning again, thinking he could crush these pesky nets like before.

However, this time it was different; he couldn't move.

Dozens of soldiers rushed out of the cabin, pouring unknown liquid on him.

These nets were of excellent toughness and had great stickiness, adhering tightly to his outstretched limbs.

General Nephropidae's expression changed dramatically.

Something's wrong!

He felt as if the shell had signs of breaking off, what were those damn human soldiers doing earlier?

This was definitely not water, but something dirty!

General Nephropidae panicked; he wanted to escape, but was stuck to the deck by code 502's special glue, struggling was especially difficult.

He squirmed desperately but couldn't break free.

General Nephropidae saw the situation turning bad and simply retracted his limbs back into the shell, leaving not even his head outside.

He simply didn't believe that those damn liquids could hold him for long.

It would be fine in a while.

As long as he shrank back into his shell, what could humans do to him?

The pathetic human weapons couldn't penetrate his defense, and Transcendents couldn't break him with bare hands.

As long as that terrifying woman wasn't here, he was invincible.

Just as General Nephropidae changed his strategy, dozens more soldiers rushed out, pouring more liquid.

This time the liquid couldn't stick to General Nephropidae's body, making him very pleased.

Foolish humans, running out of stock, huh?

Just wait, when I leave, I'll give you a big surprise!

General Nephropidae roared inside.

Not daring to stick his head out, he naturally didn't notice the human soldiers evacuating the Monarch.

Nor did he know that this time the liquid was kerosene.

Kerosene capable of burning down the entire ship.

Just as General Nephropidae was acting as the proverbial turtle without a neck, Roland and Lisa walked out together.

"General Nephropidae, I'll give you one last chance. Tell me Emperor Edward's whereabouts, and I might spare your life, otherwise..."

General Nephropidae's arrogant laughter interrupted Roland's words.

He simply didn't believe humans could threaten him. Artillery couldn't pierce armor, firearms were a joke. Were they going to punch him to death? Or drown him with these strange liquids?

Roland knew General Nephropidae wouldn't talk honestly, smirked coldly, and snapped his fingers to Lisa.

"Light it up!"

Lisa's lips trembled slightly.

Only Roland would do something like this, using the emperor's flagship as a grave, cooking up a dish named braised grand turtle.

What a grand gesture.

Lisa spread her hands, flames erupted, igniting the kerosene.

The Monarch, was set alight.

Chapter 378: Braised Soft-Shelled Turtle

"Stop it, stop!"

General Nephropidae shrank inside his shell, clearly feeling the rising temperature around him, and panic gripped his mind.

He was truly afraid.

He never dreamed that Roland could be so ruthless.

Personally acting as bait, luring him onto the ship, and then using prepared filth to firmly bind him to the ship.

If that was all, he would think Roland was cunning but wouldn’t be panicked.

Until Roland set the flagship on fire.

As an Ocean General, he often captured unlucky human sailors to interrogate for information, so he was very familiar with the types, power, and cost of human warships.

The Monarch, the glory of the Imperial Navy, in service for over fifty years, was a well-maintained old lady with notable achievements in battle.

But that’s not the point, the point is that this ship was the Emperor’s personal vessel on the sea, and had long served as the flagship of the Imperial Navy.

This warship was more than just a warship, it was the spiritual pillar of the Imperial Navy.

General Nephropidae couldn’t dream that anyone would dare use this ship as bait and a grill.

This insane behavior scared General Nephropidae out of his wits, and a foul-smelling stench emanated from his lower body.

He howled loudly, "Human, I beg you, put out the fire, we can talk it through!"

Roland couldn’t be bothered with him, he calmly turned his head and asked, "Lisa, in your estimation, how long will it take to cook this big turtle thoroughly?"

"He’s too big, even if I control the heat, it will take about an hour," Lisa responded seriously, cooperating with Roland.

"Very good, remember to put more chili, it makes it easier to add flavor." Roland shrugged, speaking with a rare Sussex humor.

Lisa, of course, followed Roland’s words.

She found a large barrel filled with sauce from somewhere and, holding a brush, began spreading chili sauce on General Nephropidae.

General Nephropidae could no longer resist poking his head out and stared dead at Roland, "Are you really going to oppose the great Sea Emperor?"

"You have one more hour to howl to your heart’s content." Confronted with General Nephropidae’s threat, Roland was unmoved.

Can the Sea Emperor be stronger than the Goddess of Light?

Clearly not.

He dared to offend even the Goddess of Light, what is the mere Sea Emperor? Under the constraints of the Day of Return, everyone competes not in brute strength, but in combat technique and flexible combat strategies.

Without this constraint, General Nephropidae could easily kill him, but now it’s the seventh Day of Return, he could easily set traps to handle this big turtle.

Roland had already understood the version, while General Nephropidae was still acting on instinct, the distinction was clear.

As long as the growth rate keeps pace with the Day of Return, one won't be crushed by the enemy's strength and can play mind games with the enemy.

...Except for Sofia.

Thinking of that woman, the joy of catching the turtle with the pig-killing dish quickly dissipated.

"The great Sea Emperor is about to awaken, his power will sweep across the world, he will avenge me... ah, hot, hot!" General Nephropidae's defiance lasted only three seconds before he was burned into screams.

Roland watched the unlucky General Nephropidae with amusement and snapped his fingers, "Lisa, don't slack off, add more fire; Mr. Nephropidae is still so articulate, you're doing too poorly."

Since General Nephropidae is still a carbon-based life form, being fireproof is not inevitable.

Especially ocean creatures, they are more likely to become matured and delicious in flames.

General Nephropidae does not suffer a loss; the flagship of the Imperial Navy, the Monarch of over fifty years of service, will accompany him on his way.

Out with the old, in with the new; before long, there will be a new Monarch, and of course, there will be a new Ocean General to replace Nephropidae, but the old turtle will never return.

"Okay!" Lisa bit her lip in response.

The greatest disrespect to a chef is for the ingredients in the pot to speak.

She knew Roland was joking, a tactic to scare Nephropidae, but she didn't want to be looked down upon by Roland, not even if it was acting.

Lisa gave a light shout and quickly chanted a lengthy spell.

The Fireball Skill is a bit too merciful for this damned turtle; it’s better to use the Flaming Demon Wall to give a proper greeting.

If a thousand degrees of fire still struggles, then switch to two thousand degrees of extreme high temperature.

Lisa’s eyes turned fiery red, a miniature Phoenix danced in her pupils, the fire gradually gathered overhead, and with a soft shout, the flames engulfed General Nephropidae.

The big turtle let out a lamenting wail.

Roland watched coldly, occasionally adding some enhanced glue.

General Nephropidae didn’t know that this glue became stickier with heat, and even Roland couldn’t remove it.

Nephropidae was doomed to die today, and his shell would also be taken; the information was just an unexpected bonus.

Roland never intended to let Nephropidae return to the sea.

Once they were enemies, annihilation was the greatest respect.

General Nephropidae, of course, didn’t know Roland was this ruthless; burned by the flames Lisa raised, he screamed endlessly and finally howled.

"The human emperor isn’t dead, he was imprisoned by the Sea Witch Adina! The Sea Witch’s territory is between the offshore of the New Continent and the South Continent, I don’t know her well, can’t help you, put out the fire, ahhh!"

Edward is still alive?

Roland’s heart shuddered, and he asked in a deep voice, "What about the accompanying personnel?"

"All dead! The Sea Witch is ruthless, she wouldn’t keep useless trash; she only kept the human emperor as a hostage, I’ve told you everything I can, put out the fire ahhhhhh!"

General Nephropidae’s wild roar echoed in the air.

Roland stared at him for a few seconds, then roared loudly:

"Still lying! Even if the Sea Witch were ruthless, there’s no reason to harm Prince Feino. His Majesty Edward has already been harmed by you, yet you dare to deceive me!"

"Lisa, do it!"

Roland grabbed an Explosive Bomb and threw it into General Nephropidae’s big mouth.

The violent explosion sound drowned General Nephropidae’s voice.

Roland’s killing intent had reached its limit.

Edward had already died; the old guy in the Sea Witch’s place was an impostor!

The damage caused by the returning prairie students is even greater than the prairie Khan, it’s a historical lesson.

His Majesty Edward was still alive, but Roland and Sif needed him dead, the Sussex Empire needed him dead, so he had to die.

Some people are still alive, but he is already dead.

Some turtles are still struggling, but he is already done.

The Explosive Bomb Roland threw injured General Nephropidae's vocal cords, interrupting his nonsense.

Feeling Roland's murderous intent, Lisa immediately crushed the red Magic Scroll in her hand and began to chant.

Sweat continuously trickled down her forehead, gurgling down her cheeks.

This is the highest level magic she can release.

Mages with lesser qualifications can only release magic of lower levels, ordinary mages can release magic of the same level, and the most gifted mages can cast spells beyond their level through various methods.

Lisa's talent was top-notch even in the Age of Empires filled with geniuses, so she could of course perform spellcasting beyond her level, although it's not as effective as complete High Tier Magic.

The flames engulfed the deck and swallowed General Nephropidae.

The raging fire left General Nephropidae powerless to struggle, and Roland, very considerately, added a lot of fierce ingredients to the flames, helping General Nephropidae have baby-like sleep in the blaze.

General Nephropidae soon died in the flames and toxic smoke.

The soaring flames lit up the night sky, and Uranie trembled with fear, her face ashen.

She never dreamed that an Ocean General who dominated an ocean would die so miserably.

Like a soft-shelled turtle thrown into a pot to cook, his death was quite peaceful.

Uranie slipped away.

Her power was insignificant before General Nephropidae; a human warrior strong enough to kill him, she couldn't handle.

Survival or death didn't require a choice.

Life will always follow its heart.

Chapter 379: There's Always a Way

The Fourth Fleet has returned to port.

At Emre Port, the Empress impersonated by the Magic Mirror came in person to greet and give the highest honors to the returning fleet.

Officials from Brook Province, along with those from the Emre City Government and Port Authority, lined up on the shore to welcome them.

The military band played triumphant songs, and a 17-gun salute was fired.

A 21-gun salute is for a national leader, 19 for a head of government; for someone of Roland's rank, even a 17-gun salute is somewhat excessive, but at Sif's insistence, it was done according to the protocol for a deputy head of government.

Sif's reasoning was simple.

It wasn't just Roland who was returning but the entire Fourth Fleet that had fought bravely abroad.

Surprisingly, the Monarch was nowhere to be seen.

Sif’s expression changed slightly as she stood on the pier, her breathing somewhat labored.

The Monarch was the flagship; if it was gone, the battle must have been fierce.

Her heart was somewhat unsettled, almost unable to resist rushing over to grab Roland for an explanation. Fortunately, Roland seemed in good spirits, and she held back.

After the grand welcoming ceremony, the sailors of the Fourth Fleet disembarked in batches, the ships anchored at Emre Port, and the officers and soldiers began their leave.

The bodies of sailors killed in several naval battles were not brought back but, following tradition, returned to the ocean.

The Warrior Cemetery is their resting place, but only their belongings are buried there.

After enduring the long welcoming ceremony and finishing the banquet, Sif, who always maintained her elegant demeanor, finally waited for the reception to disperse.

She closed the door, looking at Roland’s slightly tired expression, all her doubts boiled down to one greeting.

"How was the journey?"

"It was fine, although some things happened."

Roland smiled and said, "If you want to know the story of the Monarch, then sit down and listen to me."

He knew Sif’s curiosity was almost at its limit, so he stopped teasing her and began the story without exaggeration.

"Unfortunately, the glorious Monarch went down with that big sea turtle. It’s fortunate you’re okay, otherwise, it would be too much of a loss."

Roland shook his head slowly, "If we returned to the Imperial Capital on the old Monarch, we would lose a great publicity opportunity."

Sif’s heart moved, and she began to ponder the meanings behind Roland’s words.

A moment later, her eyes lit up brightly, "Are you saying the New Monarch represents the new Emperor and a completely new style?"

"Exactly. In fact, the new flagship was constructed before we set out to sea, and it’s a very unique ship."

If Roland said it was unique, then it must be extraordinary. Sif didn’t speak, but her eyes, which could speak, seemed to grasp Roland’s hand and say, "I’m very curious!"

Facing the curious Sif, Roland didn’t keep her guessing and straightforwardly said:

"It’s a semi-ironclad ship with iron armor wrapped around it."

"Wrapped in iron armor?" Sif was baffled.

She hesitated for a long time, thinking even the smartest person could make mistakes, and timidly reminded, "Roland, iron of the same volume is much heavier than water, it simply can’t float. Are you sure it’s an ironclad ship?"

"Of course."

Roland continued the story, "The density of iron is greater than water, you’re right, a solid iron ball can’t float in water, but what if it’s a hollow iron ball?"

Sif almost blurted out "even if it’s hollow, it’s still iron, it can’t float," but she held her tongue just in time.

Seeing Sif seriously contemplating, Roland didn’t waste words but took out a book titled "Physical Common Sense" and handed it to her.

This is a book from the Elf Race library.

It is far more advanced than the human physics research of this era.

Receiving the book, Sif didn’t immediately flip through it. Even though the ironclad ship was somewhat strange, since Roland said there was no problem, then there surely was no problem.

She was more concerned with another matter.

Did General Nephropidae provide any useful information, such as her father’s whereabouts?

Seeing Sif’s tense expression, Roland didn’t tease her and said solemnly:

"You need to be mentally prepared for what I’m about to say."

Sif’s fingertips trembled slightly, her eyes reddened, tears nearly fell.

She knew well that her father returning would only harm the country and cause trouble for her. Under Roland’s guidance, she had become a qualified politician, no longer prone to childishness.

She also knew her father must die.

She knew everything.

But at this moment, it was hard to control her emotions; after all, he was her father.

Sif trembled as she asked, "Father, he..."

"The Late Emperor unfortunately encountered a sea accident, confirmed to have passed away."

Sif's breath stopped instantly, biting her lip as she softly asked, "Who killed him? Was it General Nephropidae?"

"It was the Sea Witch Adina, she's a ruthless and cruel figure. The Late Emperor..."

"Father isn't dead," Sif asserted firmly.

"The Sea Witch is one of the Four Ocean Generals, with power and status far above Nephropidae. Anyone capable of reaching such a high position has remarkable political acumen; she wouldn't waste time doing something foolish. Killing the Emperor would have no benefit; I believe Father is most likely being held under custody."

"Roland, we..."

"He's dead, the Late Emperor has passed, that's beyond doubt!" Roland was unyielding, his voice low but his stance firm.

Sif's eyes reddened, biting her lip as she asked, "From what I know of Father, he's not a tough and resilient strongman, but a common person with a fragile heart. Can't we save Father, let him retire to the family estate in peace?"

Roland wanted to agree but remained silent.

Silence was a stance too.

Edward might be able to relinquish power and not contend with his daughter, but what about his old ministers from back then?

They were loyal to the Emperor and were doing well.

An accident turned them into ministers of the previous regime.

In the foreseeable future, these old ministers would gradually fade from politics, distancing themselves from the power center.

Would they be willing to accept this? Of course not, they just had no way to resist.

They had no support, no anchor, like headless flies.

But if Edward returned, it would be different.

These old ministers would surely rally around Edward, hoping for restoration.

Whether successful or not, it would be detrimental to national interests.

Some people, even without doing anything, cause immense harm simply by being alive.

Sif understood this reasoning clearly and finally couldn’t hold back her tears, sobbing, mumbling, her voice dwindling.

"I know, I know it all, but he is still my father, my only family. Is there really no way for him to live without disrupting us?"

Crying, Sif bitterly laughed at her predicament.

There really was no such way.

Much like when she once wished to return the crown but couldn’t, as long as her father lived, he was a colossal political figure. Even if he didn’t intend it, someone would place a crown on his head.

Seeing Sif in such grief, Roland suddenly thought he might be the only elder who would bless them in the future, and abruptly changed his mind.

"It’s not impossible; he can live under the sea forever, for a lifetime."

Chapter 380: The Name of the Netherworld

Roland couldn’t bear to see Sif sad, and from his standpoint, he couldn’t directly persuade his future wife to kill her father-in-law.

Sif could take action, but he couldn’t counsel her to do so.

On the other hand, it might actually be better if the old Emperor could wisely decide to stay at the bottom of the sea.

If he couldn’t figure it out, then someone should talk to him until he understands.

Roland believed that Edward could figure it out; if he voluntarily abdicated, at least he could live well. Did the old man really have to be the Late Emperor?

Edward, after all, had been in politics, so he should understand this reasoning.

But Roland couldn’t figure out what exactly the Sea Witch Adina wanted to do.

What benefit could capturing the old Emperor bring her?

Did she honestly believe that controlling the old Emperor meant controlling the Sussex Empire?

The decision of power has never been dictated by status or lineage but by strength.

Regardless of whether the power next falls to the new Emperor Sylph or the Cabinet, it’s no longer related to Edward.

Except for a few disgruntled old-timers, who would care about an abdicated old fellow?

Not being able to figure it out, Roland wouldn’t bother himself with worries. He smiled and comforted Sif.

"Don’t worry, your father is after all the Emperor of a top powerful nation. Even if he’s under house arrest, his life wouldn’t be difficult. The Sea Witch Adina can’t keep him forever, you two will eventually meet again."

"I know, I will govern the country well so that he can retire with peace of mind."

Sif quietly wiped away her tears, her attitude firm.

Being mindful of family ties doesn’t equal political naivety; she could differentiate the two.

If her father’s existence posed a threat to her rule, she’d rather be an orphan.

Roland didn’t continue this heavy topic; he merely held Sif’s slightly trembling shoulder, offering her the most genuine comfort.

...

Hansa City, Governor’s Mansion.

Back at the headquarters, Roland had many things to attend to.

The appearance of General Nephropidae made him feel the return day was nearing.

The strength of the Sea Palace indeed couldn't be underestimated, though General Nephropidae died leaving his shell, he was killed by arrogance, not by a loss of strength.

With his massive physique and defense as hard as orichalcum, it was hard for human Transcendents to kill him.

Hence he arrogantly leaped onto the deck, thinking to awe the insignificant human Ocean General.

But he underestimated Roland, underestimated humans.

Humanity stands tall among the world's powerful races not due to strong bodies or sharp fangs, but intelligent minds.

The Monarch accompanying him in death was a glorious burial, not everyone was so fortunate.

Many sailors of the Fourth Fleet lamented the sinking of the Monarch, even the usually composed and capable General Bridges hung his head in silence.

But in Roland's view, this was the perfect opportunity to change the flagship.

The Monarch represented past glory, the long-standing history, and brilliant battle achievements of the Imperial Navy, but its actual performance was not outstanding.

The glorious achievements couldn't hide the over fifty-year age of the ship.

This old lady was already faltering, her tonnage not particularly large among First-Class Battleships.

She was a perfectly designed warship when launched.

But perfect design also meant zero upgrade redundancy.

Glory and obsolescence coexisted; this was the Monarch.

In the hearts of officers and soldiers of the Imperial Navy, known for its illustrious naval tradition, this storied ship held an irreplaceable status as flagship.

But in Roland’s eyes, obsolescence is obsolescence; the data speaks volumes.

Nominally, Roland was grilling a giant turtle; in reality, he was burning the shackles hindering naval development.

The giant semi-ironclad ship was under construction.

This giant ship could not only become the "father" of all navies but also effectively counter speaking seafood.

This was the flagship Roland wanted.

In Sussex, a nation with a long naval tradition, even with his high status and great power, Roland couldn’t easily replace the flagship.

Unless the old flagship sank.

As long as the new flagship was also named the Monarch, the navy’s mood wouldn’t be as heavy.

Roland fully understood the navy’s feelings toward the Monarch, was willing to respect them, but would not be shackled by them.

The new Monarch was a month away from launch for sea trials, and Roland was full of anticipation for this giant ship.

But before that, he had a more important task to accomplish.

Uncover the secret of the Magic Armor.

He even felt the path to becoming stronger lay within it.

For this, he specially invited Master Anthony to Hansa to serve as the appraiser.

In terms of knowledge in the field of magic, Master Anthony was undisputedly the first person today.

Roland didn’t wait long; three days later, the old mage, as robust as a giant bear, arrived.

The host and guest met, and entering the study, before Roland could speak, Anthony’s hearty laughter nearly lifted the roof off.

"Hahaha, Roland, how did you know my last disciple Lisa passed the Mage examination and has already become a distinguished True Mage?"

"Ah?" Roland was momentarily stunned; no one had mentioned this to him.

A few days ago, Lisa returned to the Magic Association for meditation and conveniently delivered the invitation to Anthony.

This trip, Lisa experienced several battles, gaining considerable combat experience, and with a master like Anthony guiding her, her progress would be swift.

Of course, Roland wouldn’t hinder her progress.

Anyway, there wasn’t much happening during this time; everyone was busy with their own things.

He had a premonition that Lisa could break through in the near future, he just didn’t expect it to come so soon.

Amidst the joy, Anthony seemed to think of something regretful, shaking his head and sighing:

"It’s a pity, that child Lisa underestimates herself, she’s just unwilling to take the path of dual-specialization."

The more Anthony thought about it, the more upset he became, and Lisa’s breakthrough joy was greatly dampened.

Walking on one leg can never go far. At the beginning of the Magic Empire’s founding, specialisation in a single element and being a full element mage were both mainstream cultivation schools.

Some believed dual-specialization had no obvious weaknesses and had stronger overall abilities, so they chose it.

Others believed that not having a special strong suit meant all were weaknesses, so they chose specialization.

The debate on cultivation routes lasted for hundreds of years, and both methods had produced superstrong mages equivalent to Tier Three.

In the exchanges between these powerhouses, both dual-specialization and single-specialization mages had their wins and losses, with no single school completely dominating.

People once thought both paths could lead to a powerful other shore, until higher-level extraordinary mages emerged, ending the debate.

All these Saint Mages, equivalent to Tier Two, were from the dual-specialization school.

The argument started leaning one-sidedly, but the specializing faction was not convinced; they believed that being dual just meant advancing first, not that specializing was wrong.

They wanted to prove the correctness of specialization, so they accelerated their training pace.

However, in the following decades, the top mages of the specializing faction all vanished in the river of time or failed to break through.

In conclusion, they all died.

You can boast about victory, but life and death cannot be faked.

The debate between specialization and dual-specialization ended with the death of the top mages of the specializing faction.

Since then, there were no more single-specialization mages.

Even those with a pure attribute constitution, very suitable for single element magic, would be required to learn other elemental magic.

To ensure they could learn, pioneers also created attributeless magic.

Attributeless magic uses the purest magic power, without any elemental attribute, yet it can also blend with any elemental magic.

Attributeless magic is very versatile, but because it doesn’t have elemental attributes, it isn’t particularly strong in any area.

Even the most extreme dual-specialization mages would train in a main element and attributeless attributes.

Anthony hoped Lisa could also emulate the sages and walk the path of fire and attributeless dual-specialization, but Lisa firmly disagreed.

Her reason was simple: she was a transcendent, and dual-specializing in magic was already taxing enough; she simply couldn’t manage dual-specialization.

Anthony then advised her to just give up the path of transcendence and just study magic, but Lisa refused even more.

Her given reason was that the path of transcendence had a promising future, but the truth was that she wished to continue being a high-level chef, preparing more delicious dishes for Roland.

This reason, of course, she told no one, not even her teacher.

Seeing Anthony’s expression of sorrow, Roland feared the old man would ask him to persuade Lisa, so he quickly changed the topic.

"Master Anthony, I recently acquired a piece of magic armor, can you help me take a look?"

Anthony nodded listlessly, saying without much spirit, "Bring it here."

His somewhat empty gaze fell on the magic armor, and Anthony suddenly stood up, with a bit of astonishment in his voice.

"This is White Demon Armor, where did you get this?"

"Obtained from battle spoils. As expected of the erudite Master Anthony, you recognized it right away. Does this White Demon Armor have any special attributes?" Roland raised an eyebrow and followed Anthony's words.

"Demonized Armor was the battle armor for elite magic-armor warriors during the Magic Empire's heyday. This armor itself isn't too valuable, but White Demon Armor is different. Through it, one can contact the devils of the Netherworld and even make deals with them."

Netherworld? Netherworld!

Sweat beaded on Roland's palms as he recalled a few places mentioned by Elf Sylph.

She once said, "To revive me, one must traverse the Nether River, cross through the Netherworld, and pick up the shattered spirit fragments at the deepest part of the Sea of Annihilation, piecing them together to re-gift the soul and body."

Elf Sylph had provided Roland with much assistance, and Roland remembered it all.

Originally, he thought there wouldn't be any opportunity to visit those places in the short term, but he hadn't expected the distant Netherworld to connect with him in this way.

Anthony looked at Roland with a strange expression, his face slightly changing, "Roland, you aren't thinking of making a deal with the devils, are you? I must solemnly warn you, those who do business with devils never end well."

Roland shook his head with a smile, decisively denying, "I'm not stupid."

This was standard misleading rhetoric.

He only said he wasn't stupid, but didn't say he wouldn't trade with devils.

Anthony had no idea Roland had such a clever mind. He also thought Roland wouldn't trade with devils, so he didn't say much more, rather continued to praise Lisa.

When Anthony lamented for the fourth time Lisa's refusal to dual-specialize, Roland finally couldn't help but interrupt his lamentations like Xianglin's wife.

"Master Anthony, has any mage walked the path of dual-specialization and reached the Divine Domain?"

Anthony's face looked unpleasant.

Roland was rubbing salt in the wound.

If the Magic Empire had such a peerless genius, it wouldn't have perished from divine punishment.

Seeing his unpleasant expression, Roland smiled and comforted, "That's why dual-specializing in all elemental magic isn't necessarily a bright road; instead, the Path of Transcendence has produced three goddesses. Lisa dual-specializing in the Power of Stars and fire magic might just be the correct path."

Unconvinced, Anthony lightly growled in retort, "What if it's not correct?"

Roland didn't speak.

Anthony was taken aback for a moment, then laughed at himself.

Yes, there's no absolutely correct path. The Path of Transcendence indeed produced three goddesses, perhaps dual-specializing in the Power of Stars and magic really is a good path?

Anthony laughed heartily, letting go of his concerns.