Empress 401

Chapter 401: Traitors Everywhere

But Prince Feino is different.

According to eyewitnesses, he was swallowed by a gigantic sea shark, leaving no remains.

But this explanation clearly doesn't convince people.

You say he's dead, so he's dead? Do you have evidence?

After Alben questioned the whereabouts of Prince Feino, the atmosphere at the scene completely froze.

With those words, no one doubted Alben's identity as a staunch rebel.

Even Sif was uncertain, wondering if this guy was really on her side or if he was about to betray them.

She had no choice but to look at Roland for answers.

Roland, of course, nodded without hesitation.

What are you thinking, beauty? You can doubt Alben's character, but absolutely never doubt his judgment on which side to stand with.

When Sif was at her most difficult times, he dared to invest and place his bets. Now that it's the harvest season, would he run?

Watch and learn closely, this is what you call a seasoned actor.

With Roland's affirmative response, Sif gained confidence and engaged in a heated debate with Alben.

The debate ended inconclusively, but it bolstered the rebels' confidence.

In their view, since Feino's death wasn't certain, Sif would have to restrain herself, at least not daring to wipe them out completely, leaving no room for criticism.

Through the parliamentary debate, Alben also firmly established himself as the leading figure of the rebel group.

Good news: Alben exposed all the rebels.

Bad news: There are too many rebels, they can't all be captured at once.

After the parliamentary debate, these rebels became shrewd, taking sick leave, annual leave, and some even divorced and remarried quickly to go on a reconciliation honeymoon with their wives.

In short, they would never all appear simultaneously, avoiding being caught by Sif in one fell swoop.

As long as Sif didn't immediately press them, there was room for maneuver.

Whether it was compromise or continued risk-taking, there was hope.

After the unpleasant end to the parliamentary session, the political scene of the Imperial Capital returned to calm, with no personnel changes in the cabinet, as if nothing had ever happened.

But the parties involved knew this was the calm before the storm.

Sif took a deep breath, dispelling her worries, and her calm voice traveled out the door.

"Let him in, I did order a special edition."

The footsteps of the maid echoed to the far end of the corridor.

Soon, the footsteps returned, accompanied by an additional, lighter set of steps.

"Honorable Count, may I come in to present you the newspaper?"

"Come in."

Sif’s voice was calm; she was curious about what Rupert was up to.

The door slowly opened, and the newspaper boy appeared.

It was indeed him.

Roland recognized the newspaper boy at a glance, but he didn’t speak, only squinting his eyes to observe closely.

The newspaper boy held the wrapped newspaper, walked forward, and raised it with both hands.

Sif glanced casually, expecting to see nothing of value, but upon seeing the newspaper’s content, she lost her composure.

She suddenly stood up, swiftly grabbing the newspaper, her eyes flashing with sharpness.

This newspaper wasn’t tabloid news, nor was it political news.

To be precise, if it was three eras ago, it could be considered political news.

The text on the newspaper was in Elven Language.

The Elven Language has remained unchanged for billions of years, its stability is terrifying, so Sif could certainly read it.

However, the content of the newspaper caused tumultuous waves within her heart.

"Blood Elf Grand General, Sylph Wind Talker, calls on all Blood Elves to take up arms, neutralize their treant-turned kin, and destroy the enchanted Ancient Trees."

"Fellow elves, unite and fight for survival!"

"Who are you?"

Faced with newspaper content that absolutely shouldn’t appear in the Sixth Era, Sif didn’t panic; instead, she became even calmer.

You can pretend for a while, but it’s hard to pretend for a lifetime.

The nearly absolute loyalty of the Jinquehua family seemed unreasonable, even absurd. Choosing to become loyal subjects of the New Empire, abandoning the relatively stable separatist condition, was a choice most people wouldn’t make.

If it was just a single generation of loyalty, it would be normal, but the Jinquehua family is different; they have always stood by the Imperial Family during the Empire’s repeated crises.

Loyalty.

But besides their standpoints, in other respects, they are rather unrestrained, especially after the emergence of The Sun, where they let themselves loose entirely.

This little newspaper boy is not simple, or rather, the Rupert behind him is not simple.

Faced with Sif’s inquiry, the newspaper boy’s eyes gradually became dazed until they were vacant, and his original boyish voice gradually disappeared, replaced by a mature baritone.

"You may consider me Rupert, for although this body is not mine, it is I, Rupert, controlling the soul at this moment."

So that’s it.

Rupert didn’t want the secret meeting with Sif to be discovered, so he used the newspaper boy as a medium to perform the secret art of Soul Possession for communication.

He was very cautious.

The murderous intent in Sif’s eyes dissipated, leaving only warmth.

"Mr. Rupert, please have a seat."

"No need, time is precious. I’ll get straight to the point."

Rupert did not explain where the special edition came from, who he was, or how he recognized Sif’s true identity.

He didn’t say, and Sif didn’t ask.

Some things don’t need to be known in detail.

Sif knew the past rift between the Tree Elves and the Blood Elves and could feel her elven bloodline awakening after receiving Roland’s ancestral knowledge. She gradually accepted the fact she was a descendant of the Elf Race.

Elves are beautiful and powerful. Naturally, normal people wouldn't mind having the blood of the strong flowing within them.

Seeing that Sif wasn't too surprised, Rupert's admiration grew a little more.

Sure enough, she was once the Grand General who led the Blood Elves through the Ancient Tree disaster!

The Elf Race venerates bloodlines, with a natural gap between Upper and Lower Elves, and the Imperial Family sits at the pinnacle of the Upper Elves.

Chapter 402: Traitors Everywhere

Grand General Sylph is also part of the Imperial Family.

Due to her excellent performance in the Elf civil war, as long as there are no unexpected events, she will naturally become the new Elf Emperor.

However, the unexpected indeed came.

Just as the old Emperor was about to abdicate, Crown Prince Sylph suddenly disappeared.

No one ever saw Sylph again, nor did they know she was killed on the run, with only a pair of jade feet falling into the Sea of Annihilation.

Rupert didn't know the details, but he recognized Sylph's true identity, knowing the bloodline in her body was awakening.

So he came.

Rupert did not reminisce but went straight to the point.

"Your Majesty, do you plan to replace most of the Cabinet?"

Rupert’s straightforward question left Roland and Sif dumbfounded.

Would a normal person ask so directly?

Bad news: Rupert is not normal.

Good news: Luckily, neither is the Empress.

Faced with Rupert’s simple question, Sif’s answer was even simpler.

"Yes. I hope you can also serve as the Director of Intelligence and the Minister of National Security in the new government."

"National Security?" Rupert’s eyes lit up.

Sif nodded slightly, "Exactly, just as you think."

Rupert was quite surprised.

He hadn’t expected Sif to be so direct, and faced with her invitation, Rupert made a decision after only half a moment’s thought.

"I’m willing to serve loyally."

Newsboy Rupert stood proudly with his small stature, his big eyes full of pride.

Since he was the new Minister of National Security, he naturally had to show his true capabilities, no longer being lazy as before.

He cleared his throat and smiled as he said, "Your Majesty, may I see the other lists?"

"Can you keep a secret?" Sif countered.

Rupert nodded calmly.

Sif’s lips curled slightly, "Lord Rupert, I certainly trust you, but I can also keep a secret."

Her meaning was clear, a refusal.

She deftly laid out the possibility of a leak, while also saving face for the other party, a level of composure that many forty or fifty-year-old emperors couldn’t achieve, like... cough cough, in short, Sylph was still making progress.

This is the level the Elf Race Emperor should have.

Although Sif refused, Rupert could guess something, and without further questioning, he lowered his voice mysteriously.

"Your Majesty, recently led by Alben, traitorous ministers are conspiring, they have even reached cooperation with quite a few of the Nobility."

"I have many enemies, a few more won’t matter." Sif remained calm.

"They plan to find Prince Feino, just like you found a doppelgänger to play your role," Rupert’s expression grew calmer.

This time it was Sif’s turn to be restless.

She squinted her eyes and slowly said, "I am very certain that Feino is already dead, and with the Magic Mirror, I can certainly impersonate accurately, they won't succeed."

"Your Majesty, seven or eight points of similarity is enough. Ordinary people basically haven't seen Prince Feino as an adult."

Rupert's analysis touched upon Sif's blind spot in her enraged state, leading her to a sudden realization.

Sif's gaze was sharp like a knife, containing a violent force threatening to tear everything apart.

"Just say what you have to say."

Given Rupert's status, there was no need for him to act mysterious here.

Then let's be direct.

"Your Majesty, I have a rebellious Noble friend, due to some coincidence, he is very close to the Cabinet group. After you landed, he believed you were the final answer, just without a channel to express his sincerity."

"He can invite these people to his house for drinks, and once there's something in the drinks, none of them will escape."

So, through this Noble who wants to overturn the situation's clandestine manipulation, gather these people together and take them all down at once.

This idea is indeed despicable, but I like it, Roland silently evaluated.

With a traitor leading the way, the good days for this damned group of rebels are over.

Chapter 403: So That's How It Is?

To help Sif accept better, Rupert started telling the story of a rebel friend.

This Duke Ricken was also an unfortunate fellow.

Strictly speaking, he wasn't a rebel at all; he was rather a loyalist.

It's just that his loyalty was to Prince Feino.

This man was skilled in army warfare, and although his family's discipline wasn't strict—some years ago, he was ridiculed harshly by the nobility for his daughter's chaotic private life—his abilities were unquestionable.

If this were the world line where Prince Feino ascended the throne, his future position would be Minister of the Army.

Feino is a prince, the Emperor's designated successor. Duke Ricken, not integrated into the old Emperor's circle and unwilling to retire from politics, what's wrong with befriending the prince?

His problem wasn't with him but with Feino.

Feino died, and so the Prince Faction lost its foundation.

But the Prince Faction was merely scattered, not dead; they still existed, and their political resources did too.

They were terrified and helpless, afraid of being purged, yet unwilling to move away from the power center.

After hearing Rupert's story, Sif remained calm and did not respond immediately.

She couldn't give them what they wanted, because she also had close subordinates. Should she have Roland and Ados step aside for Ricken?

The most mercy she could offer was ensuring these Prince Faction members landed safely and withdrew from the political arena.

Choosing the wrong side and being able to safeguard family and property is already a blessing; to expect much more would be impolite.

Power is finite; if some people have more, others will have less. It's a standard zero-sum game, unresolvable unless new power can be conjured out of thin air.

Like the Jin Yuan Kingdom establishing more provinces overseas to create positions for these people?

Sif didn't think that was a good choice.

Having overwhelming overseas forces is not a good thing.

She could use the Imperial Family's influence and overseas troops to successfully seize power, but who could guarantee there wouldn't be a second such event in the future?

Therefore, her stance towards the Prince Faction was very firm: either voluntarily exit the historical stage with dignity or be dignified by others.

Of course, to show her magnanimity, she would symbolically offer a few bowls of soup to the Prince Faction so they wouldn't feel too downcast.

After all, don't expect to eat meat; at most, drink a little soup.

Rupert's mention of the Prince Faction also made Sif alert. She asked quietly:

"What does your friend want?"

Rupert smilingly explained, "He once wanted to join the Cabinet to serve the country, but recently, his secret lover died. He's somewhat disheartened, now just wanting to live comfortably in his territory."

If Sif had heard Rupert's words a few years ago, she might have gossiped about why a dignified duke would be disheartened over a secret lover; was it true love?

But now she could understand the hidden meaning.

The secret lover Rupert mentioned wasn't a secret lover but a reference to Prince Feino.

Hearing Rupert's words, Sif felt somewhat relieved; it seemed this Duke Ricken was still quite sensible.

Nodding satisfied, she smiled and said, "No need to be so disheartened. The times have changed; the Cabinet's previous job settings don't match the new era. I intend to revamp the Cabinet. If Duke Ricken can be loyal to the country, there might be opportunities."

Making a promise first and then figuring out how to deliver is better than rejecting outright.

If Alben could witness this scene, what would he feel?

Rupert understood Sif's words, and his eyes brightened.

He thanked Sif and, after a few more discussions, turned and left.

The newsboy walked out of the Earl's Mansion, his eyes momentarily dazed, then returned to calm.

He felt a blankness in his mind, as if some memory had been tampered with. He seemed to recall needing to deliver a newspaper—where was it?

Looking down at his empty hands, a voice deep in his mind reminded him that the task was complete.

Though he couldn’t remember the details, accomplishing the mission was enough.

The newsboy thought clearly—since it’s a power beyond comprehension, it’s best to act as if he doesn’t know.

He quickly left, planning to return to the newspaper office to pick up another batch of papers for sale.

This month, he still aimed to be the top seller! He wanted to become the best newsboy at the Sun Society, then take a position in administration, eventually becoming a shareholder manager, marrying a beautiful wife, and reaching life’s pinnacle.

Watching the newsboy "Rupert" leave, Sif turned back to Roland, somewhat embarrassed, and softly explained:

"There was an outsider just now, so I had to decide it myself."

"Believe in yourself; I’m not necessarily better than you," Roland casually responded, offering Sif a compliment.

Encouragement is effective, but constant support has a more motivating effect.

Everyone knows that children who frequently hear praise not only perform better academically but are also mentally healthier than those who constantly face verbal abuse.

Sif certainly wasn’t a child, but who doesn’t like to hear praise?

Biting her lip, Sif softly asked, "Roland, are you really unwilling to help me? I mean, if the position is high and not too busy, you still wouldn’t?"

Roland couldn’t refuse Sif’s expectant gaze, and smiling, he nodded, "Alright, as long as I don’t have to handle daily affairs, I’d certainly be willing."

"Great, you can be Caesar!" Sif grabbed Roland's sleeve, drawing closer, her eyelashes trembling slightly, her eyes as bright as the moon.

Caesar?

Roland was stunned for quite some time before realizing—wasn't this the Vice Emperor of the Magic Empire? Did Sussex have such a position?

Seeing his bewildered expression, Sif laughed with joy.

"Sussex didn't have Left and Right Ministers before; isn't there now? People must learn to embrace new things."

Is this a new thing? This is clearly an antiquated arrangement.

Though very touched, Roland still refused.

"No."

"Why?" Sif's smile froze, her mood visibly dropping, and her voice instantly weakened.

"Don't overthink it. If you have problems, how can I stay out of it? But setting a precedent for a Caesar cannot happen. In the Magic Empire's history, how much turmoil was caused by setting a Vice Emperor? Once it's started, ambitious people will surely aspire to be the new Caesar. Left and Right Ministers share the Prime Minister's power, while Caesar divides the Emperor's power—that's absolutely unacceptable."

Roland had long considered Sif as his future wife; the Empire belonged to him and her descendants. How could he dig a hole for his descendants over a petty title?

He only refused the title of Caesar, not the assistance to Sif.

This is her Empire and his Empire; there's no need to delineate so clearly.

Sif accepted his explanation and suddenly remembered what her teacher mentioned before leaving about how to position Roland in the future.

At the time, she thought the teacher meant to grant Roland the title of Grand Duke, but now it seems like the Grand Duke was the least desirable choice.

Roland would never harm him, and the first generation of descendants probably wouldn't either, but over time, would the later generations remember the events of the past?

Having Grand Duke's power and territories without any connection to the Emperor, that's the source of turmoil.

She instantly grasped her teacher's ancient advice.

It turned out her teacher wasn't referring to a Grand Duke but a Prince.

Thinking of this, Sif's cheeks reddened, and her heartbeat quickened slightly.

Teacher, you truly see... so far into the future.

Chapter 404: Joy Turns to Sorrow

Judgment requires evidence, but leveling only needs a list.

Everyone understands the logic, but people tend to relax their vigilance, especially when they see light from darkness, thinking the threat is lifted or there's hope for a comeback.

Late night at Duke Ricken's manor, it was bustling with guests, all attendees of tonight's banquet belonged to the Iron Overthrowing Emperor Sect, commonly known as rebels.

Among them were members of the discontented Prince Faction, Cabinet Ministers worried about their future, and big businessmen fearing loss of monopoly position.

Besides them, there's a "deceased" figure of great prominence.

Old Macbeth.

This former literary titan of the Empire has been dead for many years, and people almost forgot his existence.

But he returned.

He claimed to have crossed the Nether River, survived the Netherworld's dangers, finally received salvation, and returned to the human world.

Yet all the big figures present were shrewd, not fools, and of course knew this was a lie.

Resurrection isn't impossible, but it's extremely difficult.

The dividing line between the Magic Era New Calendar and the Old Calendar signifies both the fall of the Magic Empire and the Holy Son of Light's resurrection from the Nether River.

Resurrection is a grace that can only be bestowed when the eye of God is cast upon the human world to see the Holy Son suffer.

Resurrection isn't that simple, at least it requires True God Level capabilities.

Macbeth's return was awakening from pretending to be dead, but ordinary people don't understand; they'll think Macbeth is shrouded in divine glory.

The fact that he is favored by the gods is respected, yet he cannot change the political arena; joining the Divine Court of Light as a High Tier Divine Scoundrel has more potential.

However, his return invigorated the rebels, nearly raising a toast in advance.

Not only did he return himself, but he also brought back wandering Prince Feino, who couldn’t cross the Nether River’s banks.

One must admit, top Literary Scholar’s storytelling ability is indeed strong.

If the guests present didn’t know the truth, they’d definitely lose judgment amid this tear-jerking story.

He told a story.

"Prince Feino fell into the sea to protect the old Emperor."

"According to worldly views, Prince Feino indeed died."

"But his virtue couldn’t move the Netherworld Ferryman, and he lacked extra gold coins, so he could only wander on the other side of the Nether River."

"Yet, the great Prince Feino’s kindness earned the gods’ favor..."

In short, Feino saved the old Emperor, which was laudable; Sif forced the old Emperor to abdicate, which was odious.

Feino’s bad luck finally turned around after two years.

Macbeth appeared on the banks of the Nether River, saved Prince Feino, and returned with him to the human world.

This story was indeed wonderful, and it’s easy to touch people’s heartstrings.

After all, most people build families, they also have children, and naturally hope their children are as filial as Prince Feino.

Feino’s filial piety would also push the Sif who forced his father to abdicate into the spotlight.

It was indeed a fascinating story, though sadly containing little truth.

"But so what, people never need the truth, only the version they desire."

Macbeth looked at the others’ skeptical expressions and snorted disdainfully.

"Independent thinking and judgment are rare skills; most people don’t possess them. We just need massive publicity to blur right and wrong."

After a brief pause, Macbeth said with a smile: "Let’s start by saying Prince Feino is proficient in politics."

"Would the nation be better if Prince Feino, instead of Sif, who never received any political education, were on the throne?"

"This question is an unsolvable deadly kill, let the Imperial Faction shiver!"

Everyone knows, the never chosen one is always the strongest.

Even if Sif had three heads and six arms, she couldn’t make everyone happy.

At such times, news of Prince Feino’s survival spreads, and the despondent surely won’t miss the chance, while the opportunists also stand to gain significantly.

"Do you think so, Your Majesty Feino?"

Macbeth turned to the timid and fearful Fake Feino sitting at the main seat and asked with a smile.

"I, I don’t..."

"No need to worry, Your Majesty, you’ve stayed in the Netherworld too long, you should adapt slowly, luckily we have plenty of time."

The puppet Feino wisely shut his mouth, but a trace of anger flashed in his eyes as he lowered them.

He was indeed a puppet, and the risk of falsely impersonating the deceased prince was high; once something went wrong, he’d definitely pay a heavy price.

Fortunately, he had few family members and didn’t need to worry about implicating them.

The rebel core members were clinking glasses and drinking heartily. They finally saw the dawn of a comeback and needed to relax properly.

Not only must they discuss how to deal with Sif, but also how to share power after the battle.

Sitting silently beside the main seat, Duke Ricken watched this scene.

He even attentively poured wine for Prince Feino.

Looking at these radiant fellows, Duke Ricken felt a bit like laughing.

They had absolutely no idea what was waiting for them.

Besides Ricken, Alben silently observed the near revelry gathering.

These poor souls were all seeking a way ashore, unlike me, who saw from the start that Empress was worth investing in, now it’s finally harvest time.

Just as everyone was slightly drunk, a waiter came to Duke Ricken’s side and whispered in his ear.

Duke Ricken’s lips curved into a smile, the team led by Roland had entered the manor.

Everyone present were lambs waiting to be slaughtered.

Ricken didn’t speak, just anticipated with some expectation.

Footsteps sounded outside the corridor, soft but dense.

Sim looked discontentedly at the hall’s entrance, coldly rebuking:

"If there’s nothing urgent, don’t disturb us, leave quickly!"

"That won’t do, this is the suppression of a rebellion!" came an assertive voice from outside the door.

Suppression of rebellion?!

Everyone present was dumbfounded, they stood up wanting to resist, but found their arm strength couldn’t even reach a tenth of its peak.

Holding a wine cup when drinking earlier felt fine, but now wanting to resist was impossible.

"Someone poisoned us!" an astonished voice sounded.

The hall doors were opened, and the entire building shook.

Roland watched these fellows with a half-smile, gesturing, dozens of wolf-like soldiers had already charged forth.

"Proceed according to the plan I've set!"

As the soldiers charged in, the radiant old fellows seated immediately sensed something amiss.

He used his life to set the trap, aiming to lure Tier Seven individuals here to die.

The opponents came, not just one, but two, three.

The White Rose Knight and Flame Witch were both beside Roland, with combat prowess considered top-tier in Tier Seven, even facing one of them alone wasn't guaranteed a win, yet three had come simultaneously.

Moreover, someone was despicable enough to poison the coffee, using the coffee's bitterness to suppress the hidden poison beneath.

Macbeth immediately raised his hands, starting to plead.

"Mr. Roland, this matter has nothing to do with me, I can report and expose others."

"Want to earn a reduced sentence through merit? Alright, provide valuable intelligence."

Macbeth breathed a sigh of relief and started recounting anecdotes from the Empire's literary circles.

Just as he gathered strength intending to act, Roland suddenly pulled out a scepter from somewhere and smashed it toward his head.

Macbeth wasn't a novice, he had rich combat experience, first dodging, then was about to question and counterattack when the gleaming sharp gun tip pierced through his back.

Just as Sif ended the fight with a swift strike, resolving the traitors the fastest, Roland also acted, raising the scepter again and smashing Macbeth's head.

Red met white.

Macbeth looked reluctantly at the female knight who delivered the fatal blow, recalling someone who shouldn't have come, his vision darkened.

"You, you..."

He collapsed heavily, ultimately unable to finish the sentence.

No one knew what he wanted to say, nor did anyone care.

After all, nobody cares about a corpse's thoughts.

Chapter 405: Everyone Must Die!

Macbeth, the old schemer, had calculated everything, except for the fact that Roland's true strength had far surpassed his.

Nor did he expect that Empress Sylph, whose strength similarly exceeded his, would take action herself, disguised as the White Rose Knight.

He had planned for years, faking his death to escape his enemies' sight, quietly waiting for his prey, hoping to grasp a glimmer of life before the day of return arrived.

But everything has two sides, and faking death without emerging only caused his strength to stagnate.

The most important part of pretending to be dead is not being discovered, so he could only hide in the Underground Palace, unable to leave, even when training it was like building a car behind closed doors.

Most of Macbeth's talent lay in literature, his combat strength was not outstanding, otherwise, he wouldn't have resorted to pretending to be dead.

While he quietly slumbered, waiting for his chance, Roland and Sif were constantly challenging strong enemies, continuously growing.

Roland and Sif were on the path of kings, while Macbeth was on a narrow road.

Intrigue and conspiracy melt away instantly when exposed to the sunlight.

The scepter that Roland struck down with was the best answer to intrigue and conspiracy.

No matter how much you calculate, can you withstand the inheritor's power of the knowledge essence of humans, elves, and the ocean combined?

Of course, you can't.

"Bang!"

The speed of the scepter's descent was not fast, yet it bore an unstoppable momentum, piercing through Macbeth's last futile struggle, accurately striking his head.

A dull thud sounded, his sturdy head shattered like a watermelon, its flesh and juice splattered all over the ground.

Macbeth died a very miserable death, even the words he blurted out were interrupted, and his lifeless body fell like a stump.

The entire scene was stunned, only Sif remained unfazed.

She knew Roland’s strength all too well.

It was the power of knowledge.

Widely spreading the wisdom from the Ancient Era, the Otherworld, and the Mysterious Race, this inherited power even she dared not confront head-on, yet Macbeth didn’t dodge.

He died without injustice.

With Macbeth’s death, the soldiers quickly took control of the situation.

Faced with the soldiers’ sharp blades, these unarmed Cabinet Ministers simply couldn’t resist.

Sim, whose arms were held by two robust soldiers, turned pale with rage and shouted angrily, "Roland, what do you mean by this? Dare to lay hands on Cabinet members, this is trampling on the constitution!"

Roland chuckled dismissively, completely ignoring the furious Sim, and instead asked Alben:

"By order of the Empress to arrest a few traitors, is this violating the constitution?"

Alben did not answer directly, he just calmly countered, "You accuse us of being traitors, do you have evidence? I do not accept baseless accusations."

Roland glanced disdainfully at the fake "Prince Feino" who had already been killed on the spot.

"Forging Imperial Family bloodline, using fake and falsified Imperial Family members to plot usurpation, that is rebellion! The evidence will be provided to you, take them all away!"

He couldn’t be bothered to waste words with these Cabinet Ministers.

Except for a few insiders, everyone here had to die.

There’s no point in wasting words with the dead.

Upon receiving Roland’s order, even some soldiers who were still hesitating earlier quickly

Seeing the scene out of control, Duke Ricken, as the host, certainly wouldn’t stand idly by.

He "angrily" stood up to voice a stern protest:

"Roland, this manor is my territory, you have no right to arrest people on my land, not even the Emperor can! This is the sacred power given to me by the law."

This was his final defiance as an insider, and also his most brilliant performance.

The concept of inviolability of private land was too deeply ingrained, causing the arresting soldiers to pause momentarily and not take further action.

Duke Ricken’s questioning was reasonable, but unfortunately, he encountered Roland.

But facing Roland, having a reason was best, having no reason, wouldn’t he still take action? Moreover, he had more than enough reason.

With hearty laughter, Roland unhesitatingly pointed out Ricken’s mistake.

"This is your territory? This is just your residence, the entire Imperial Capital is Her Majesty the Empress’s territory! You plotted to overthrow her on her land, this is a major crime."

With this said, Roland gave a command, and several ferocious soldiers rushed forward to capture the still stubborn Duke Ricken.

Duke Ricken did not resist, calmly accepting his fate of being taken away.

He even let out a long sigh.

This time he made a great contribution, luring all Cabinet members here to be captured in one fell swoop and solidifying their charges.

All he needed to do next was to be under house arrest for a while before he could come out again.

According to old pal Rupert, Her Majesty the Empress even planned to give him a Cabinet Minister position.

Although it was only a marginalized role, at least it meant entering the Cabinet.

Once the rank issue is resolved, everything else will be easy to handle.

Just as resistance ceased and everything seemed settled, the Minister of the Army, Steven, who had remained silent, suddenly took action.

His brain wasn’t very sharp, originally having no chance to become a high-ranking official, but because he saved the old Emperor Edward’s life, he was granted a position.

In his youth, he was even known as the greatest warrior in Sussex.

His brain wasn't very sharp, but he became the only rebel who stayed clear-headed tonight.

It wasn't that he was perceptive enough to notice any issues; he simply distrusted a grand noble like Ricken.

He always felt grand nobles and the Imperial Family were aligned, naturally enemies of the Cabinet, and most likely Ricken had ill intentions.

Because of his distrust in Duke Ricken, when drinking, he kept his wits about him and used various fake drinking techniques to discard the alcohol.

To avoid others noticing, he secretly drank his own brought Deer Blood Wine, which made him flush extremely quickly.

The Deer Blood Wine he brought, once swallowed, could accelerate blood circulation and even let him enter a berserk state at any time.

Chapter 406: Everyone Must Die! (Part 2)

At the moment of being taken away by the soldiers, Steven knew his opportunity had come.

This was the only chance.

He also knew he couldn't fight his way out alone, so from the very beginning, he had his eyes on Count Sif.

More accurately, it was the Empress pretending to be the Count.

The Empress loved to disguise as the Count and sneak out with Roland, which was no secret at all.

He was well aware of this.

But what he didn’t know was that the Empress also knew he knew, and had set a trap based on that premise.

Steven snatched the longsword from a soldier and, like a windmill, slashed down several soldiers in quick succession, charging towards Sif.

He didn’t want to kill Sif, only to take her hostage to gain an opportunity to escape.

Taking the Empress hostage and killing the Empress were both acts of rebellion, but the former at least offered some room for maneuver.

Steven didn’t feel he would lose.

As compensation for his relatively low intelligence, he possessed extraordinary martial prowess.

He was neither a Transcendent nor a Mage, but belonged to the Berserker branch.

He suddenly went berserk, catching the soldiers off guard, leaving them powerless.

Two more soldiers who came to intercept him were instantly cut down by his sword.

With each person he felled, his eyes turned even redder, like those of a demon.

Sif was also startled by the Minister of the Army’s madness.

"Retreat!"

She sharply ordered the soldiers to withdraw first.

It was evident that Steven was a Berserker, able to continuously increase his power by slaying enemies.

The soldiers present were merely his blood bags.

Leaving the soldiers there would only increase casualties pointlessly.

Roland understood and used the Holy Light Shield to cover the soldiers' retreat.

Without needing Sif's reminder, these men were already scared out of their wits.

They were loyal and brave soldiers, but they were also ordinary people. The butcher-like horror of Steven exceeded their imagination.

Much like in previous coups, Duke Ricken's banquet hall had also turned into a slaughterhouse.

Seeing Steven charge at Sif, Roland was in no hurry to protect her, instead turning back to clean up the battlefield first.

He exchanged a glance with Raikkonen, who nodded silently, understanding his meaning.

Steven's rampage was indeed unexpected, but it was also a perfect opportunity.

The Cabinet Ministers on the death list were all gravely guilty; they needed to pay the price, but not everyone needed to stand trial.

Apart from a few like Sim and Winston, the others needed to be dealt with quickly.

Especially the various social figures invited to the banquet.

These people participated in the rebel gathering brazenly, which was naturally a capital offense.

But most of them had no concrete evidence against them, making it very difficult to convict them through legal means.

But now, these people finally had a reasonable cause of death.

The vicious Minister of the Army resisted desperately, indiscriminately killing most of the guests present.

After arranging matters outside, Roland returned to the reception hall, watching Sif and Steven fight.

It's not that he didn't want to help, but Sif had clearly signaled that she didn't need his assistance.

She wanted to use Steven as a grindstone, a whetstone to test her strength before challenging Sofia.

Roland was also keen to know Sif's true strength now, so he didn't intervene.

Of course, if Sif were in real danger, he would definitely step in without hesitation.

The long spear in Sif's hand trembled continuously, with the point shifting positions through intense vibrations, like a snake raising its head.

Steven couldn't determine the spear tip's position.

But he wasn't panicked at all, he even initiated a bloodletting self-destruct mode.

The more hurt he was, the stronger his attacks became.

Simultaneously, he temporarily sacrificed his intelligence to gain overwhelming explosive power,

and Steven, who was originally not skilled in combat techniques, couldn't understand Sif's spear techniques.

Not only did he not understand, but Roland didn’t understand either.

Though he didn’t understand, Roland still secretly cheered for Sif.

Who could predict such an unpredictable spear technique?

The spear tip rubbed against the air, producing a sharp popping sound, making it even more unpredictable.

Steven instantly judged that capturing Sif alive was impossible; he was doomed.

Of course, he wasn’t resigned to this.

He considered himself loyal to the old Emperor, believing he had done no significant wrong.

Greedy for power, seeking personal gain? He had indeed done it, but others had done so too, so had the new favorites under Sif, why spare them and not him?

He was unwilling, the new Emperor who abandoned the old must pay the price.

Steven let out a shrill inhuman scream, a strange layer of cuticle suddenly covered his broad back, and two bluish-purple marks appeared on his forehead.

Sif’s face slightly changed, and without hesitation, she thrust her spear into his heart.

"Pff!"

Blood splattered, his heart pierced.

Sif sighed in relief.

Though it looked terrifying, Steven was ultimately a mere mortal, and a pierced heart was fatal.

"Watch out!"

Roland, enveloped in golden light, leaped up towards Steven.

Though a burst heart meant certain death, Steven's vital signs hadn't disappeared; they even grew stronger for a moment.

Evidently, Steven had left a backup plan. Indeed, the former greatest warrior in Sussex lived up to his reputation.

"Die, you all must die!"

Steven roared in a feigned madness, and the candles in the hall all extinguished, bringing darkness.

A giant shadow appeared behind him, coordinating with his offensive, wielding a scythe towards Sif.

A scythe is not particularly convenient as a long-handled weapon for ordinary people, but a super-strong expert skilled in its use could handle it effortlessly.

Sif's heart pounded fiercely, momentarily stunned.

Her short life flashed by like a carousel.

The love from her parents in childhood, the comfort of her noble status, the joy of being declared the 35th Emperor of the Empire, and most importantly, Roland's appearance.

Her memories flickered, finally freezing on the moment of a secret kiss with Roland at the ball.

Her mind was blank, but her hands hadn't given up, acting instinctively.

No, her life shouldn't end like this.

She still had many things unfinished, like wearing a beautiful wedding dress and becoming the most beautiful bride in the world.

In this life or death instant, she finally crossed the most crucial transformation for a warrior.

Body instinct.

Truly powerful warriors, after numerous battles teetering on the edge of life and death, often have their bodies reacting instinctively prior to their minds.

Sif, with pure bloodline, powerful strength, and exquisite combat technique, had not encountered many moments of life or death.

This was her closest moment to death, forcing her body to break limitations and react instinctively.

Combat instinct!

A hallmark of the Elf Imperial Family.

The Elf Imperial Family are naturally extraordinary warriors, top-class even without training.

All memories condensed into a point, and Sif's thoughts returned to reality.

Just when Sif was ready to give her all to counterattack, Roland's Divine Protection had already descended.

Even if Sif couldn't withstand Steven's lethal attack, there was still Divine Protection as a safety net.

At the moment her hands reacted, Sif's consciousness instantly cleared, seeing through various flaws on Steven's body.

Unlike humans, his weaknesses were deeply hidden.

Sif didn't hasten to act but first summoned the Ancient Tree's shadow.

One, two, three, four!

Sif's spear was highly precise, simultaneously striking four of Steven's weaknesses.

Break!

The spear transformed into lightning, illuminating the dark night sky, simultaneously piercing four weaknesses.

Steven's massive frame abruptly halted, his muscular arm stretched out, stopped barely less than twenty centimeters from Sif's throat.

But he could no longer advance.

With the breaking of his four weaknesses, his life force ended completely.

Steven stood there, glaring angrily, like a War God, yet now just a corpse.

Sif withdrew her spear, gently shaking it, splitting it into three segments, which flew back into the spear case.

As she retrieved her spear, the world Ancient Tree's shadow appeared behind Sif.

Amidst the forest shadow, the Elf Princess emerged.

The Elf Imperial Family generally shared similar appearances, and to most people, the Elf Maiden appearing in the shadow looked remarkably similar to Sif.

If this were a concert, the audience would surely applaud Sif's spectacular performance.

But it was a battlefield, and there was still plenty of aftermath to handle.

After dealing with Steven, Sif couldn't help glancing at Roland, her eyes clear.

"Praise me, hurry and praise me!"

Facing this reasonable request, Roland certainly wouldn't decline.

"Congratulations, you've finally reclaimed your own memory."

Chapter 407: Tomorrow's Troubles Belong to Those with a Tomorrow

In the spring of 1794, there was no old man drawing a circle in the Beihai, but a group of high-ranking overseas officials stood at Emre Port, eagerly awaiting the most distinguished guest.

This guest was none other than Roland, the former Imperial Knight Commander and Governor, now the Vice Emperor with the honorary title of Caesar.

Over the past year, the political landscape of the Empire had undergone massive upheavals.

The Cabinet left by the old Emperor was almost completely eliminated.

Their public charge was treason.

Among the original members of the Cabinet, only three or four, including William and Alben, continued to serve; the others were either executed or forced into early retirement.

Since ascending the throne, Empress Sylph's governing style could be described as vigorous and resolute.

She showed no mercy in suppressing dissidents, spared no effort in overseas expansion, and was only somewhat gentle with the lower classes at home.

In the past year, she almost entirely transplanted the successful experiences of the Four Overseas Provinces to the homeland.

She promoted mandatory education, emphasized industry, encouraged trade, raised military benefits, and downsized redundant troops.

Qualified soldiers were recruited from workers and farmers; the army was reorganized and expanded with the Knight Order and Overseas Legions as the backbone.

Moreover, the Imperial shipyards operated continuously, striving to process oak from the Oden Kingdom. Aside from this batch of sailing battleships, ironclad ships built with new technology and blueprints were also launched continuously.

Although it had only been a year since Her Majesty the Empress ascended the throne, the atmosphere within the Empire had been completely renewed, and the aging Empire seemed to be bursting with vitality again.

Everyone knew that while the Empress's wisdom was undoubtedly crucial for these achievements, the man silently supporting her from behind might be even more important.

Yet, Roland was indeed too meritorious, overshadowing the sovereign.

In the annals of history, people like him generally did not have good endings.

People were also wondering how the Empress would ultimately deal with Roland.

Would she continue to reward him, or simply make Roland disappear as well?

While many were watching and speculating, the officials of the Four Overseas Provinces never doubted.

Oh, who couldn't see the relationship between Her Majesty the Empress and Roland?

It's a classic romance.

Though they were somewhat worried about the Empress destroying the foundation herself, they were more eager to become honored guests at the Empress's wedding.

Amid guesses and anticipations, Empress Sylph suddenly announced an explosive piece of news at the 1794 New Year.

Roland was granted the honorary title of Caesar.

Everyone was stunned.

Some didn't even know what Caesar meant and rushed to the library to find out.

It turned out it was the title of Vice Emperor during the Magic Empire period.

In the history of the Magic Empire, Caesar was not just an honorary title; it held real power, and there were even records of Caesar replacing the legitimate Emperor and ascending the throne.

The Empress's absolute trust in Roland dispelled the illusions of opportunists.

Forget it; their relationship is solid, with no gaps; flies would have to crawl far away.

Roland's elevation to Caesar completely dispelled William and Alben's competition for the Chancellor's office.

Previously, both of them had used the Left and Right Minister positions as stages, hoping to achieve enough merit for the Empress to restore the Prime Minister's office.

Though they respected Roland, he had no formal position after all, and sometimes could neither suppress them nor quell the restlessness within the Cabinet.

This Cabinet was a new team under the Empress, and without special reasons, it would not easily be replaced.

Such is the nature of politics in great nations; without absolute necessity and assurance, it's better not to act than to alter things at will.

Every change could alter the destiny of thousands upon thousands of people.

Governing a great nation is like cooking a small fish; it must be handled with caution.

To stabilize the Cabinet and quell disputes, Sif brought up an old subject and once again requested Roland to become the Vice Emperor.

Her reasoning was simple: establishing a Vice Emperor certainly posed long-term risks, but the short-term benefits were greater.

If they couldn't concentrate the nation's power to crush Sofia, there would be no future for them.

The future problems should be left to their future selves or descendants.

Trust that tomorrow’s self will have enough wisdom.

Roland initially intended to refuse, but Sif’s one remark silenced him.

"Tomorrow’s troubles belong to those who have tomorrow."

Her meaning was evident: the decisive moment was approaching, and the massive machine of Sussex had to be operated now to seize the opportunity.

As for how to eliminate the aftermath, first survive and then worry about it.

Sofia was missing.

Since entering the Arctic Glacier one spring, she had never been seen again, and the Vladimir Empire had been running independently for two years without the Empress’s guidance, revealing several issues.

This was Sif’s opportunity, but most likely also a trap.

Roland and Sif did not believe that Sofia would suddenly disappear.

The day of return was near; there was no reason for Sofia not to appear.

They had to be prepared to face this great test.

Roland did not refuse; the title of Caesar was indeed significant.

The Empire had gradually formed two major sectors, at home and overseas, and with the Four Overseas Provinces officially enjoying the status of inland provinces, the overseas faction had become a powerful political force.

The overseas faction not only included steady and capable Cabinet members like Ados but also middle forces like Dailong and Bridges, and emerging figures like Raikkonen and Jes.

Their current power wasn't too large, but their rapid growth could not be overlooked, even by Cabinet members.

The overseas faction knew their foundation was weak, hinting in their words that the Empress's rise overseas made her their greatest patron.

Furthermore, Caesar Roland, as a leader of the overseas faction, was an essential figure.

As the Governor of Northern Rodinia, he epitomized the overseas faction!

Becoming Caesar, Roland can make decisions in place of the Emperor on many occasions.

For instance, overseas.

Before the decisive battle begins, Sif must stay in the Imperial Capital to coordinate various interests, and the only person she completely trusts to perfectly execute strategic decisions is Roland.

Imperial Tutor Wald, although trusted like Roland, is ultimately old.

The Empress couldn't bear to see him continue working hard, so she let him retire with the highest treatment, keeping only the title of Senior Advisor.

If the country has important matters in the future, the Empress will still consult with him.

If not, then he can enjoy his retirement.

Of course, although his fief is overseas, the Empress did not urge him to leave the Imperial Capital.

With the teacher nearby, she feels more at ease, especially since Roland is going out to sea again.

He is headed to the Four Overseas Provinces to stir up another storm.

Governor Roland is back!

The officials of the Four Overseas Provinces were all invigorated and eagerly looking forward.

Governor Roland is their benefactor.

In just over a year overseas, he brought Ados and Aramis into the Cabinet, and other officials received considerable rewards, with promotion speeds like rockets.

However, after Roland returned to the Imperial Capital, the promotion speed of overseas officials slowed considerably.

Overseas officials felt bitter, but dared not complain that Roland had forgotten them.

They could only hope Roland would return soon.

With hope in minds, there will be a response; their sincere wishes touched the heavens and finally brought their governor back.

Along with him returned the fourth and fifth fleets, two massive fleets, and hundreds of thousands of elite Central Army soldiers.

Such a large-scale army is surely not just escorting Roland alone; there must be a larger scheme.

Bordeaux was impatiently waiting at the dock, finally seeing black smoke on the horizon.

"It’s the flagship of Lord Governor!"

Compared to Caesar and Count, the officials of the Four Overseas Provinces prefer to call Roland the Governor.

Though it’s not Roland’s highest position, it feels more personable.

Bordeaux was invigorated, his breath somewhat hurried.

Ados and Aramis already successfully entered the Cabinet, becoming high-ranking officials with actual power, reaching the zenith as subjects, yet he had fallen behind.

No help for him, the Cabinet seats were limited, and his performance rating lagged behind the two old friends, leaving him to continue overseas.

To soothe his injured feelings, the Empress especially let him take over her dual role as Vice Governor.

Bordeaux was grateful for the Empress’s generosity, yet somewhat melancholic.

He wants to progress too.

Unfortunately, once the opportunity is missed, it won’t come again.

Originally he thought he would rot overseas, yet unexpectedly his great benefactor Roland returned.

Thinking of Roland’s overwhelming power and Caesar title, his dormant heart started to stir.

He knows well what kind of subordinates Roland likes, naturally not daring to slack off.

Fortunately, he hasn't relaxed these years, still advancing the construction of the Governor's Territory according to Roland's left policies, and it's been effective.

It took a full hour from seeing the black smoke of the flagship on the horizon to Roland stepping onto the dock.

It was also Bordeaux's most anxious month.

He both hoped Roland would return soon to let him partake in the soup, yet feared drinking the soup would be uneasy, and even more feared the Empress sent Roland overseas merely to stabilize.

In his oscillating feelings, the salute guns roared.

Bordeaux's heart finally settled.

The welcoming salute guns totaled twenty-one shots, also his request.

It's widely known, most countries' welcoming salutes are at most twenty-one shots. Among them, welcoming the national leader is twenty-one shots, government head nineteen shots.

Although Roland is Vice Emperor, going straight to twenty-one shots would exceed, the Governor surely dislikes that.

If they shot nineteen, it would be somewhat impolite.

Roland's status is much higher than the Prime Minister.

Ultimately they could only compromise.

Seeing Roland stepping onto the dock with a gentle smile, Bordeaux breathed a sigh of relief.

He won the gamble.

Lord Governor is still the same Lord Governor.

Bordeaux hastily went up to greet, and caught a glimpse of the Golden Staff in Roland's hand, his heart skipped a beat.

That scepter represents the Emperor's authority, which even Her Majesty the Empress did not carry when she left the Imperial Capital back then.

His expression was slightly stiff, vaguely feeling some distance between himself and Roland.

Just when he felt a bit dejected, Tony standing beside him reminded with a smile:

"Bordeaux, don't rush to be dejected yet, just think, if it's only returning to the Governor's Territory, is there a need to carry Her Majesty's scepter?"

"Besides, look at this gigantic fleet, try guessing how many soldiers it can carry?"

Although Bordeaux loves to brag, he is definitely not a talentless waste.

His corpulent body shivered, understanding Tony's implied meaning.

Her Majesty the Empress sent the most trusted Roland, carrying the Golden Staff and such a vast fleet, certainly not as a joke.

He’s very clear, the Empire is going to make a big move.

Chapter 408: What Are You Afraid Of? Just Do It!

Roland indeed has big moves.

With just one sentence, he made the Minister of Internal Affairs, who stayed overseas, break into a cold sweat.

After the welcome banquet, Roland kept Tony and Bordeaux, along with a few important subordinates, for a brief meeting.

As the meeting just began, Roland asked Tony a question that nearly suffocated him.

"Tony, do you want to rebuild the Val City State?"

Mr. Tony’s mind froze instantly, his brain went blank.

He didn’t rush to answer, but instead pondered Roland’s purpose for asking this.

Was it a test, or a judgment?

Such a dangerous topic meant he should bluff with pleasantries or even lies, but considering the person asking was Roland, he was a little indecisive.

Roland was not someone to be fooled, and the consequences of trying to do so were severe.

Everyone present held their breath; Bordeaux’s hands were even trembling.

Over the past year, Bordeaux and Tony had cooperated seamlessly, worked together harmoniously, and even seriously considered becoming in-laws.

If Tony fell, it wouldn’t be good for him either.

Roland’s words nearly made the others present think he was there with a secret task to deal with Tony.

But these people were political elites, calm and composed.

Speaking out without understanding the situation could easily lead to trouble.

Faced with Roland’s explosive question, everyone chose silence, except Bordeaux, who couldn’t avoid it.

Instead of waiting for Roland to take down Tony and then press him, it was better to take the initiative to explain for Tony.

"Lord Governor, Mr. Tony is surely a loyal servant. He couldn’t possibly keep anything hidden for long. If there were indeed actions detrimental to the nation, I would report them immediately upon knowing."

Roland looked at Bordeaux with a faint smile, half-mockingly: "Bordeaux, human hearts are unfathomable. Do you really understand him?"

This... Bordeaux was somewhat hesitant, it sounded like the Governor was giving him an out, he should sensibly step forward. However, a voice in his mind kept reminding him.

Governor Roland despised backstabbers the most.

If he could show a candid and loyal side of his character, it would definitely be a plus with the Governor.

Bordeaux pounded his chest forcefully and shouted loudly, "I can vouch for him!"

Roland didn’t expect that this seemingly unreliable guy, Bordeaux, was quite sincere.

He nodded, not speaking.

His silence indicated the matter wasn’t settled. Other officials also turned their eyes toward Tony.

As the person involved, Mr. Tony, you should speak up.

Tony remained silent for a few seconds before saying slowly, "Lord Governor, indeed many old and young from Val City State have approached me. They also recounted the tragic conditions under which Val City was ruled by other nations. As a former leader, I truly sympathize with them, but I know what is lost will never return."

"I help them with difficulties in life but firmly refuse their requests to restore the order of Val City."

Tony sighed softly, somewhat helplessly saying, "I ask for your understanding, Lord Governor."

He didn’t expect Roland to fully understand, but what needed to be explained should be explained.

Roland nodded, accepting Tony’s explanation, but he quickly raised a new question.

"Why not?"

The entire room was stunned.

Tony even thought he was experiencing a hearing hallucination.

Pinching his hand hard, the Tony who finally woke from the "this is a dream" haze, naturally understood what Roland was saying.

He could hardly believe it, but he still stared intently at Roland, his voice trembling.

But the glimmer of hope in his eyes quickly faded.

What are you thinking, Tony?

Though the Sussex Empire wasn't the mastermind behind the initiative to carve up Val City, they certainly weren't ambiguous during the division process.

To expect the Empire to give back what it swallowed was nearly impossible.

Although he felt it was impossible, Tony, still not giving up, softly asked, "Lord Governor, are you talking about rebuilding the Val City State?"

"Yes."

Roland didn't equivocate, directly declaring the outcome.

He looked at Tony with a smile, his tone unarguably firm.

"Empress Sofia led the division of the Val City State for her reasons, which I respect. But it's all over; the occupying countries haven't presented a reasonable development plan nor have they allowed Val People to live the life they deserve in a civilized nation."

"Since the division was a failure, let's go back to the starting point."

Tony was shocked, then his eyes reddened.

This time he fully understood Roland's intention, no guessing needed, it was made very clear.

He abruptly stood up, excited as a student who's scored full marks in the final exam.

He also knew that Val City State couldn’t have the privilege of being perpetually neutral.

He understood more that Roland wanted to monopolize the interests of Val City State, but this was tantamount to declaring war on other nations, could it really be done?

Tony still couldn’t help but offer a reminder: "Lord Governor, forcibly reclaiming Val City State will offend all participating countries in one go, please reconsider."

"It’s not me who needs to reconsider, but them."

Roland calmly stated, raising his right hand to halt the debate, and composedly summarized the meeting.

"As long as they have any rationality left, they won’t get involved in our war with Sofia."

Tony scratched his head, quickly figuring it out.

Before the Sussex Empire and the Vladimir Empire decide victory, standing too early would drag the country into a quagmire.

The best approach is to let the Sussex and Vladimir Empires tear each other apart.

Since Roland had already set the tone, Tony no longer said anything, only tentatively asking:

"How do you plan to handle the upcoming diplomatic disputes?"

Roland raised the Golden Staff in his hand, his expression serene.

"I will write to them, expressing our nation’s determination to support the restoration of the Val City State, and the dire consequences of opposing our nation."

A mixture of hard and soft tactics, indeed a very rational approach.

Tony was still a bit hesitant, after thinking it over, he decided to remind Roland.

"Lord Governor, Miss Alina from the Jin Yuan Republic should support you, but otherwise, who would willingly give up the benefits they've eaten?"

Tony spoke bluntly, yet it was a reminder for Roland not to get carried away.

Roland, of course, wouldn't heed the warning, but he decided to explain Tony's comments.

"If they don't accept, then it will be war."

His gaze swept across the room, exchanging glances with the civil and military officials.

Raising the Golden Staff again, Roland calmly announced, "Choosing war today means handling it by the rules of war. Ladies and gentlemen, I need you to fight for the Empire; whether you rise to the top or remain mediocre, you decide."

Roland's words stirred anger among the conservatives.

What did Lord Governor mean? Daring to question the martial spirit of the four provinces.

Given the Governor had provided this great merit, how could they miss it?

Not just the Vladimir Empire and the few smaller countries like the Tirol Kingdom and Prudon Kingdom.

They were enemies, moreover, they were moving achievements.

This enormously challenging and lucrative opportunity allowed overseas officials to smell the scent of impending storms.

Bad news: they couldn’t remain uninvolved.

Good news: their backing was the world’s strongest country.

If that’s the case, what is there to fear? Onward!

Chapter 409: No Need for a Buffer Zone Anymore

No one knew what Roland wanted to do.

Upon receiving his handwritten letter, the heads of several major nations were puzzled, completely unable to understand Roland’s intentions.

Alina carefully read the letter several times, confirming it was Roland’s handwriting. She hesitated repeatedly, not because she was concerned about the land on the west shore of Val Lake, but more worried about Roland’s state of mind.

The governance cost of the land on the west shore of Val Lake even exceeded its output, and its geographical location was not very good, basically a useless area.

Since Roland wanted it, she might as well give it to him.

After much consideration, Alina picked up her quill and wrote a sentence.

"As you wish."

After writing those words, Alina bit her lip and pondered for a long time before adding her signature.

"Yours faithfully,

— Alina."

Not knowing whether to write "friend" or "ally" before her name, she decided to write nothing at all.

The word "ally" felt too cold, while "friend" seemed insufficiently weighty.

It wasn’t just about the land on the west shore of Val Lake; even if it were more, she would find a way to get it for Roland.

After sealing the handwritten letter and giving it to the Secretary of State, Alina stood in front of the large map hanging behind her desk, staring at it and becoming lost in thought.

This map was marked with colorful symbols to record the territorial changes on the Rodinia Continent over the years.

Since the Continental Treaty expired, those small countries finally understood one thing: what protected them was never neutrality, but the great powers’ need for a buffer zone.

With the end of the Continental Treaty and the return day approaching, the great powers no longer needed buffer zones but more expansive living space.

Almost every powerful force and country had touched upon the divine oracle.

The Goddess would descend before the world ended and take the devout followers with her.

What counts as devout was not explicitly stated by the Goddess.

Since the Goddess did not say, people below could only make wild guesses. Yet, no matter how they guessed, there were no conclusive results.

If they couldn’t figure it out, there was only one path left: eliminate those who might be more devout than oneself.

If you can’t solve the problem, then solve the people creating the problem. This has been the universal solution throughout history.

Only the strong have the right to survive, surely the Goddess wouldn’t need a bunch of useless people, right?

It wasn’t that the Continental Treaty was bad, but the ticket to the Divine Domain had a higher cost-benefit ratio.

War was inevitably coming.

In the past three years, over fifteen small and medium-sized countries vanished in the long river of history, with Val City State being the first.

Roland helped Val City State to be restored, not because of his love for peace, but because it was profitable.

Alina’s gaze wandered over the map for a long time, vaguely guessing some of Roland’s thoughts.

He wanted the home-field advantage.

History has proven more than once that expeditions to Saint Rurik Palace were the most foolish actions.

The long supply lines and the terrifying General Dong would treat every stubborn enemy equally, especially given Vladimir Empire’s appalling transportation roads.

Backwardness is sometimes a weapon.

Only by forcing the terrible Rurik Legion out of their nest does one have a chance at victory.

Roland helped restore Val City State openly and honestly as a strategic ploy.

He set up a challenge in Val City, provoking the enemy and waiting for their arrival.

Would Sofia take the bait?

Alina smiled and changed the question mark to an exclamation mark.

Sofia would certainly take the bait; she never feared challenges.

Her gaze fell again on the map, and Alina saw an old, vast country.

The Wende Empire.

This was a vast, populous, historically rich, and once powerful country.

However, in the past hundred years, the nation had produced several disastrous rulers, plunging the country into chaos.

As the prestige of the Imperial Family declined, power gradually shifted to the parliament.

This was nothing unusual; imperial authority and parliamentary power were always in a tug-of-war. In many countries, when a foolish ruler arose, the parliament cabinet took charge, and with a wise ruler, power reverted to the Emperor.

If it were only that, the Wende Empire wouldn’t be so tragic, but the Wende Council conducted earth-shattering maneuvers.

The one-vote veto system.

As long as one High tier Councilor disagreed, major matters could not proceed.

This included the cancellation of the one-vote veto system.

The problem wasn't the veto itself, but that too many people had the right to use it.

In recent decades, the entire Wende Empire was in a state of serious disorder. Any change that touched upon interests was relentlessly rejected by the parliament.

Even plans to build warships were opposed.

The army's opposition reason was simple: although the Wende Empire was a coastal nation, its coastline wasn't very long, and there were only two or three deep-water harbors, so it was better to abandon the ocean and firmly defend the land.

This foolish proposal would likely cost heads in Sussex and Jin Yuan but was passed with pomp in the Wende Empire.

With rulers like these, it's a miracle the nation hasn't perished yet.

However, such good days won't last long.

The border conflict between the Prudon Kingdom and the Wende Empire had been ongoing for more than a year, and although the Wende Empire had a large army, it was not agile, being toyed with by the numerically inferior Prudon Army, having already lost half of a province's territory.

Although this territory wasn't much for the Wende Empire, this conflict exposed the Wende Empire's inner weakness.

Bloodthirsty wolves would not hesitate to extend their claws towards already declining prey.

Gods cannot bleed, nor can great powers.

If the Wende Empire was the first to bleed, it would naturally be the first to die.

Alina picked up a pen dipped in scarlet ink and drew a blood-red X over the Wende Empire on the map.

Earlier than the Wende Empire, the Weimar Federation had already been marked.

She then drew a few more strokes, highlighting the Talia Kingdom in red.

These countries all had various issues and would likely exit the historical stage.

Next, she hesitated for a long time between the Prudon Kingdom and the Tirol Kingdom, marking them with a question mark representing the unknown.

These two countries were strong and on the rise, but unfortunately, their territories were not wide enough, and they couldn't be self-sufficient in resources. Unless a miracle happened, they couldn't break the stalemate.

Moreover, although they both originated from the Odin Empire, there were conflicts between them.

Who could represent Odin? That's a question.

So...

Alina pondered for a long time, her expression growing more serious.

If these two countries, along with the Weimar Federation, all of the same origin, were unified under a singular powerful ruler, a giant would emerge in Central Rodinia.

Currently, there were only two and a half top players: Sussex, the Vladimir Empire counted as two, and the Jin Yuan Republic, still in recovery, counted as half.

If the countries split from the Old Odin Empire were reunified, their strength would rank among the top tiers.

Alina sketched the outline of the Odin Empire, her expression even more grave.

No, absolutely not.

Three strong countries in this world were already abundant; there wasn't room for a fourth.

She quickly summoned back the Secretary of State and rewrote a letter, fully presenting her analysis and warning Roland to prevent the revival of the Odin Empire.

After resealing the letter written in cipher, Alina finally felt somewhat reassured.

No matter what Roland intended to do, she would support him.

Just whether Roland was prepared to meet Sofia on the battlefield remained unknown.

Chapter 410: Your Majesty, Save Me!

Although several major countries protested against the Sussex Empire and even threatened war, they chose to remain silent when faced with an advancing army.

Roland mobilized over one hundred thousand elite troops and hundreds of warships to occupy Val City State by force.

The Tirol Kingdom, now overwhelmed with its own issues, did not wish to take the lead and had to choose a dignified retreat after protesting.

They had only a few thousand troops stationed in Val City to maintain order and protect the interests of its citizens and merchants; they were powerless against the hundred thousand troops of the Sussex Empire.

They burned their camps, looted the wealth of the occupied zone, and left with swagger.

The Wende Empire, now deeply mired in the quagmire of war, was already strained, and had long wanted to abandon Val City State but lacked an excuse.

Roland's ultimatum gave them a way out; although they cursed under their breath, they swiftly withdrew from Val City without even burning their camps or looting the territory.

To outsiders, the Wende Empire, being an ancient empire, left room for maneuver, unlike some newly risen tycoons.

But only internally did they know it wasn't about dignity; it was just that the parliament failed to reach a result, and the military leaders felt it wasn't worth offending Roland.

Christine Saintess of the Wende Empire had good relations with Roland; even if only for the Saintess's sake, they need not offend Roland over such triviality.

When Val City State was divided into occupied zones, there were five major countries, with Sussex and Jin Yuan being Roland's supporters. The Wende Empire and Tirol Kingdom withdrew honorably, leaving only the Vladimir Empire.

Stationed in Val City State was the Shadow Sanctuary's fifth seat, Frost Grip Angelina.

After receiving Roland's ultimatum, she could hardly believe her eyes.

How could anyone so blatantly oppose the Empire and defy the Empress?

Though furious, Angelina remained calm.

She had seventeen thousand troops, Val City was indefensible, and the Sussex forces coming to receive the city exceeded one hundred thousand, with fleet support.

Even without much thought, the outcome was clear.

Angelina was unafraid of death, but she did not want these loyal, brave warriors to die in vain.

To hold out and not retreat would not only mean death but also add another defeat to the Empire’s record.

She did not want to retreat but couldn’t fight, so she had to pen a request to Roland.

Her request was simple: to avoid unnecessary warrior casualties, the commanders-in-chief of both sides would duel for victory.

If Roland won, she would immediately withdraw, leaving the camp unscathed, departing without looting.

If she won, she would retain the Vladimir Empire’s interests.

Roland’s reply came swiftly, within half a day.

"Given your food supply support, I agree to a duel for victory, but if your side is defeated, you must leave behind weapons, armor, and the military flag."

Roland’s conditions were very harsh.

Abandoning weapons and armor upon defeat might be explained, but losing the flag represented the disbandment of the unit.

Though strict, he knew Angelina would certainly accept.

If they resisted to the end, the seventeen thousand troops wouldn't last until reinforcements and would be wiped out, the flag would still be lost.

Roland's meaning was clear.

The reorganized nineteenth division of the Vladimir Empire stationed in Val City was sure to be annihilated; this point was non-negotiable.

He could allow disarmed soldiers to return as civilians; this was his bottom line.

Everyone was dignified, concerned with face. The loss of military flag without disbandment would only invite ridicule.

Roland intented to completely defeat the reorganized nineteenth division; whether as prisoners or annihilation was secondary.

As expected, upon receiving the reply, Angelina angrily swept all documents with the desk.

But after rage, she had no choice but to accept the conditions.

Sitting calmly in her office, Angelina caressed the ring gifted by the Empress, containing energy equivalent to one-tenth of the Empress's full power.

This was her grand present for Roland.

Though killing Roland would have serious repercussions, she had no choice.

The Empress had vanished for too long, enough to unsettle the Empire internally, allowing enemies to seize the chance.

She had to kill Roland with a thunderous gesture, restoring the Empire's dignity.

Though maintaining a certain cooperative relationship with Roland, that was past tense.

Facing national interests, personal gains and losses counted for nothing.

The agreed battlefield was atop a flat mountaintop in the depths of White Mountain.

The duelists must travel alone to the duel site, without escorts, and personnel from both countries must not enter the White Mountain area on the day of the duel.

The duel manner was unrestricted, weapons unrestricted, until one side died or surrendered.

These conditions were quickly affirmed by both sides.

After settling affairs, Angelina breathed a long sigh, heading to White Mountain without looking back.

She knew Roland's current strength was formidable and had a record of soloing Tier Seven powerhouses; she was just a step away from Tier Seven, definitely not a match one-on-one.

But she had the Empress's bestowed ring.

This was her biggest trump card.

She believed Roland also had cards, but could any be bigger than the Empress's ring?

As Angelina set out, a hot air balloon was slowly drifting towards White Mountain.

Roland was on the hot air balloon, accompanied by Lisa and Christine.

Lisa was visibly tense, constantly twisting the hem of her clothes.

This was a duel of life and death; although she believed Roland would win, she was inexplicably uneasy.

But with the duel imminent, she dared not disturb Roland’s confidence, hiding her full worries.

Seeing her troubled expression, Roland smiled, patting the Moonlit Silver Armor and touching the white wolf leather armor draped over it.

"Relax, I have double armor protection, an injury-immune Magic Spring Ring, and life-saving Divine Protection; that’s four layers of defense. Even if Sofia herself comes, killing me won’t be easy, let alone a mere Angelina."

"Of course, I will not underestimate; I will go all out from the start."

Christine did not speak, only silently walked closer to Roland, placing both hands on his shoulders.

The milky holy light surged into Roland’s body.

Although most of it was rejected, a small portion still merged into his body.

"Thank you."

Roland’s gratitude was heartfelt.

Miss Saintess, recognized by the Goddess of Light, could infuse divine energy into allies to enhance their attributes.

Although he was disliked by the Goddess, this divine energy did not discriminate.

His stamina and strength were greatly enhanced, and his ability to regenerate life also significantly optimized.

"No need to thank me, we are allies."

After buffing Roland, Christine took a few steps back and returned to the cabin.

At such times, saying anything would only weaken Roland’s momentum, so it’s better to say nothing.

With the Saintess’s buff, Roland was more confident as he leaped from five hundred meters high.

He waved goodbye to Lisa while opening his parachute.

As Angelina arrived at the dueling arena, Roland landed just in time.

Watching Roland descend from the sky, Angelina remained slightly silent, looked up at the sky, and asked softly:

"Roland, when you said neither side should set foot on White Mountain, did you mean this?"

Flying above, of course, didn’t count as setting foot.

Roland once again played a word game.

Angelina remembered the past confrontations between the Shadow Sanctuary and Roland, feeling a bit of a headache.

The Shadow Sanctuary had already suffered two defeats at Roland's hands, and to lose again would be a severe blow to the organization.

She sighed softly, foregoing further protest, and instead drew her sharp blade.

"Second seat of the Shadow Sanctuary, Frost Grip Angelina, please."

With Camille Yang defeated and removed, Angelina's position in the Shadow Sanctuary advanced significantly, directly becoming the second seat.

With her strength very close to Tier Seven, she even had hopes of competing for the chief seat a few years ago.

As the day of return approached, the power of experts from various factions increased rapidly.

She improved quickly, but still far slower than Roland, who had ascended three tiers in three years.

She focused her mind, dispelling all distractions, readying herself for battle.

"Caesar of the Sussex Empire, concurrently Governor of Northern Rodinia, Leader of the White Rose Knight Order, Count Roland Rundbell, please."

Angelina remained silent, her lips trembling slightly.

She had already lost in terms of titles; she couldn't afford to lose in the upcoming fight.

Without wasting words, she tapped her toes and transformed into a dazzling blue light, rushing forward.

Since it’s a life-and-death duel, why bother talking? Just make the move.

In spring, White Mountain was still covered in snow, and the location of their duel was on snow-covered peaks that remained icy and snowy all year round.

Though there was flat ground, it was also snow-covered.

This terrain was Angelina’s home ground.

She leveraged the might of ice and snow, striking with lethal moves.

Blue afterimages appeared as her speed constantly increased until it peaked.

Her two blue daggers gleamed with cold light, aiming directly at Roland’s throat.

In a blink of an eye, Angelina appeared before Roland, a coldness emanating from her body, sending shivers over Roland’s skin.

Roland casually raised his scepter, precisely striking the daggers. Meanwhile, he raised the Shield of Light in his left hand, blocking another dagger.

"Well done, now it’s my turn!"

Roland let her have the first move as thanks to Angelina for helping with the supplies.

But that was the limit.

He would never pretend to be a master by letting Angelina use her strongest moves while binding his hands and feet to fight.

Using his strongest lethal move to tear the opponent apart was the greatest respect.

"Duang!"

A violent clash sounded.

Roland easily swept away Angelina’s daggers and without hesitation, followed through to swing his scepter at Angelina’s head.

Since it’s a life-and-death duel, naturally, it’s either the enemy dies or I live.

As Angelina wasn’t willing to surrender, she could only die.

Although it would be unsightly for such a beautiful girl to die with a smashed head, Roland wasn’t in the mood to pity her.

Angelina wasn’t weak; any form of mercy would be suicidal.

But at least knowing each other for a while, Roland was willing to offer her a way out.

"Surrender or die!"

There were two blinks of an eye before the scepter fell; she had to make her choice.

Angelina felt her whole body enveloped by a chilling lethal intention.

Roland was going for the kill.

This was a Tier Seven crushing a Tier Eight, leaving her no means to fight back.

She had to choose between death and surrender.

If it weren't for the Empress Ring.

Angelina didn't hesitate for a moment, squeezing the Ice Crystal Blue Ring hard.

Your Majesty, save me!