Empress 491

Chapter 491: Franks, Take Off! (Part 4)

Traditional cavalry only need to repeatedly charge in heavy armor, and they are proficient in using various weapons.

Long-range javelin throwing, mid-range rifle volleys, close-range explosive bomb tossing, few enemies can withstand these three rounds of ranged fire.

Before they launch their charge, there is often artillery fire coverage.

The enemy, overwhelmed by the ferocious firepower, crumbles in disarray.

What follows is a storm-like charge.

The Forbidden Guard cavalry, as fierce as wolves and tigers, will trample every enemy who dares to resist.

Tonight is the first real battle for the Forbidden Guard cavalry to charge as a regiment-level unit.

The hellish spectacle of tonight flashes many strange thoughts in Tom and Jerry’s minds, but as they charge in the cavalry formation, adrenaline replaces their brains, and takes control of their bodies.

Their blood boils, they howl as they charge, swinging sabers at the panicking enemy.

...

This is not war, but a one-sided massacre.

The Prudon Kingdom Army stationed many troops around the fortress, but most were sent away by the super-evolved "Little Boy," and only about fifteen thousand did not die on the spot.

These more than ten thousand lucky ones had not yet awakened from the terrifying inferno of Hell when they found themselves to be the truly unlucky ones.

Those who were blown to death on the spot mostly went to the Netherworld in their sleep, at least not too painfully.

They had to endure both mental and physical torment.

The Prudon people are also religious, they believe in Light.

When they attacked the Wende Empire, the upper echelons of the Divine Court of Light had advised them not to act against their brothers of the same faith, but the kingdom's higher-ups wouldn't listen.

At the time, many soldiers felt this was unscrupulous.

The solemn warning from the Divine Court of Light did not deter the Prudon Imperial Family, but planted a seed in the minds of grassroots soldiers, making them feel that the King was defying the Light.

This seed lay buried beneath the soil, only bursting forth at the right time.

Tonight is that time.

Because we struck our brothers of the same faith in Light, we encountered divine punishment!

This was the first thought crossing the minds of most soldiers.

If it wasn't divine punishment, who could instantaneously destroy a city?

This kind of power is completely beyond the comprehension of ordinary people.

Without unified command, without the will to fight, some even knelt down, blankly staring at the sky dyed red by flames, letting the saber descend on their necks.

Tom, who was commanding the troops' charge, keenly sensed something amiss.

He pulled the reins and quickly dashed toward a small mound.

Jerry was a bit worried, as the small mound was not a strategic point but could easily become a target for volleys.

He hurriedly signaled a squad of cavalry to follow for protection, while he continued leading the charge.

The enemy was still in chaos, this opportunity couldn't be missed!

Jerry, coming from a noble family with a good education, had a little compassion for ordinary people, but not much.

He would mourn the thirty thousand residents buried with the fortress, but that was it.

He would never be merciful to the enemy.

Allowing these people to recover is a crime against his comrades. He kept issuing orders, preparing to take advantage of the chaos to heavily cripple or even annihilate the remnants of the Prudon Army.

However, just as he indulged in bloodthirsty slaughter, Tom, who had climbed the hill, roared loudly.

"Soldiers of the Prudon Kingdom, you have already shown enough bravery. Lay down your weapons, your enemy is not us, this is the Great Goddess's divine punishment."

"Go back and tell your compatriots, do not wield weapons against the Saintess, or the next divine punishment won't be so simple."

"Lay down your weapons, I guarantee your safety!"

Jerry, ready to shred the enemy, looked at Tom's saint-like resolute gaze, sighed silently, forcefully restraining the saber he was about to swing down.

The young soldier waiting to die under his blade was even younger than Tom.

Jerry relented.

Since divine punishment didn't kill them all, let it end here.

Let these demoralized remnants roll away!

Chapter 492: Perfect Footsteps

Hansa City, Governor's Mansion.

This is the focal point of the entire Sussex Empire and even the whole Freedom Alliance.

Although Hansa is not the Imperial Capital, both the Empress and the Vice Emperor are here, so the core of the Empire's power is naturally here.

Everyone in the Governor's Mansion was hastily running around.

The expressions on the staff's faces were not relaxed, but rather anxious.

Just a few days ago, the gateway of the Empire's overseas territory, Frank Castle, fell, opening the door to Hansa City, with an unobstructed path to Hansa.

To minimize unnecessary casualties, Roland ordered the abandonment of several cities along the way.

Those who couldn't evacuate in time were left in place, with only the military withdrawn.

According to the conventions of the times, demilitarized cities that surrender promptly will be treated well.

The Vladimir Empire and the Prudon Kingdom, after all, are members of the Civilized World and naturally would not violate these principles.

Of course, Roland did not intend to leave anything for the enemy.

Everything that could be destroyed had to be destroyed, especially strategic materials.

Better to spend money on rebuilding after the war than to let the enemy gain an advantage during it.

March is the spring planting season, and to ensure the enemy would not harvest grain from the land this year, he ordered hardy wild grass to be sown on the farmland.

The vitality of wild grass far exceeds that of wheat. As long as the fields are covered with wild grass, the crops this year won't just see a sharp decline in yield; they will likely yield nothing at all.

In this era where the chemical industry is still in its exploratory phase and the invention of pesticides is far off, once wild grass occupies an ecological niche, it's tough for wheat to make a comeback.

Only through weeding, plowing, and burning can the grass be eradicated.

By the time all this is done, the spring planting time would be over.

Turning large tracts of fertile land into grassland is cruel, but Roland had no choice. On this issue, he refused any opposition.

In the fifth-floor office of the Governor’s Mansion, Roland was standing at the window, gazing eastward.

These days, all that came from that direction were bad news.

No matter how justifiable the reasons, the fall of Frank Castle was still a heavy blow to military morale.

He could see that this "defeat" not only affected military morale but even caused some unrest in Hansa City.

Staring blankly out of the window for a while, he returned to his desk, his gaze fixed on the sand table in front of him, constantly moving the pieces representing troop deployments, frowning in deep thought.

During this time, the return of Mr. Wald made him a lot more at ease.

Since the old man was willing to take on the burden, Roland was naturally unreserved in delegating many affairs to him, focusing his own energy mainly on military matters, planning to personally... observe Christine’s micro-management.

Roland had a clear understanding of his own military ability.

A top theorist who mastered the military theories from ancient to modern times, of two worlds, a qualified military commander with insufficient practical experience.

Simply put, in the Otherworld, he was like a grand strategist who had no problem dealing with ordinary enemies but would collapse when faced with top generals.

His military theories combined with Christine’s concrete implementation were invincible. His outstanding contribution in it was probably equivalent to "scoring 81 points with Kobe."

He was very self-aware, never engaged in micro-management and boldly delegated power.

Staring at the sand table, Roland felt a headache coming on.

Although the residents of the Northern Plains had been evacuated and the necessary destruction carried out to ensure that even if the enemy occupied it, they would gain nothing, he still had to face a severe problem.

How to block the pursuing Prudon Army.

His defensive focus was on Val City, and the decisive battle location was the White Mountain, but that did not mean he could abandon Hansa City and flee.

To give up the Vice Capital before the battle even started, anyone would know there was a problem.

Hansa City had to be defended, and the enemy had to feel that he had no choice but to relinquish it.

However, tens of thousands of Prudon elite troops were about to cross the ruins of Frank Castle and march west.

With Hansa City's current defensive capabilities, could it withstand this blow?

If perspiring before the Prudon's offensive, what could stop the mightier Vladimir army?

Looking at Frank Castle marked in red and the four redesigned Prudon Kingdom's armies stationed nearby, Roland felt a bit overwhelmed.

Defeating this army might not be difficult, but to offset the negative impact of the fall of the fortress, they must be annihilated or heavily crippled, not merely defeated or repelled.

According to the usual deployment of five times the force in an encirclement battle, at least five hundred thousand great troops would be needed to achieve this strategic goal.

That would be too embarrassing.

Roland was somewhat curious about how Miss Saintess would break the situation. After thinking it over, Roland could only come up with the conventional tactic of holding Hansa City, blunt the enemy's momentum, and then encircle and annihilate them.

The benefit of this tactic was its steadiness, but its downside was that it was too steady.

If the enemy was not reckless, but instead stayed at Frank Castle, continually eroding the territory and compressing his living space, it would be difficult to encircle and annihilate them.

After careful consideration, Roland ultimately made the right choice.

Pass the ball to Kobe.

Oops, handing the problem to Christine.

Christine was still on the front line these days, so let's wait until she returns.

As soon as he thought about taking it easy, he felt as if a great weight was lifted.

Staying in the combat command room was of little use, better to go elsewhere and have a look.

On the way to the Affairs Hall, no matter how anxious the staff were, they would stop and salute him.

Looking at Roland's calm expression, these staff members had eyes full of genuine admiration.

No wonder he is the great Caesar, still so composed. He must have a way to deal with the enemy!

If these staff members knew that their most admired Lord Caesar was leisurely taking it easy, they might faint and fall flat on the ground.

Chapter 493: Perfect Footsteps

Entering the administrative hall, Roland saw several senior officials reporting work to Ados, who'd been temporarily transferred here from Hansa to oversee operations.

Their speech was rapid, language crisp and efficient, devoid of the long, convoluted sentences typical of Sussex's local bureaucracy that conveyed no real information.

This was also Sif's requirement.

No bureaucratic jargon or empty words, speak if necessary, otherwise don't bother.

Too much blather results in wage deductions at best, performance penalties at worst.

The performance evaluation system Roland implemented firmly grasped those officials eager for progress, making Performance Points their lifeline.

They feared nothing except having their Performance Points tampered with.

The entire administrative hall was bustling; even old Wald was perusing documents, occasionally jotting down a few lines.

Only one person was an exception.

Sif, with her dedicated office, lay quietly on the sofa, back to the door, facing the floor-to-ceiling window, gazing at the Rodinia River, completely at ease, even more leisurely than Roland.

Perceiving Roland approaching, she didn't turn around, just greeted him softly.

Roland smiled and teased, "Everyone is so busy, yet you seem relaxed."

He sat casually on the other chair beside Sif.

No need for formalities in front of his own wife.

Sif glanced at him from the corner of her eye, murmuring softly, "Seeing me so relaxed, does it make you less anxious?"

Roland nodded silently.

He certainly understood Sif's point; leave professional duties to professionals, as a leader, not causing chaos is the biggest help.

In professional matters, Sif certainly couldn't match the professionals selected layer by layer.

Thus, maintaining a relaxed demeanor, providing reassurance to these officials was better than micromanaging.

Being involved in everything only leads to exhaustion.

Roland needed to focus on the military; Sif only had to prepare for the ultimate confrontation.

She and Sofia had an unspoken understanding, no meetings before the final battle.

But she and Sofia would ultimately face off, deciding victory and life or death.

This was the fate she couldn't escape.

Over the past three years, she'd countless times wanted to run away, countless times felt dejected, countless times abandoned hope, yet now she no longer feared, even anticipated.

The appearance of the Soul Blood Link filled her with confidence.

Alina and Lisa were the link's providers, Roland the catalyst and core, while she stood at its pinnacle.

She not only grew stronger every day, but could also share insights with Roland.

And Roland could share the cultivation results from Alina and Lisa.

Simply put, Roland absorbed energy from Alina and Lisa solo, while she could exchange with Roland.

Perhaps gleaning from her experience, his initial hostility towards Alina had vanished.

If they all survived to the end, a few setbacks were just scenery in their long life journey.

The Soul Blood Link had changed not just her, but them as well.

Their destinies were already intertwined, only by all breaking through to Tier Three could they sever the bond.

But if they reached the Third Return Day hand in hand, would there be any need to sever it?

At least Sif found it unnecessary.

"How's the front line?" Seeing Roland remain silent, Sif casually asked.

"No new intelligence." Roland shrugged, shaking his head.

Without Roland saying, Sif knew the answer.

Military intelligence was copied to her concurrently as it was reported to Roland; she didn’t receive it slower than him.

"Looks like our Saintess War God is running into trouble too."

Sif shrugged, her demeanor relaxed as she spoke.

As the Soul Blood Link formed, she gradually recognized the format of the Sixth Return Day’s showdown.

Army versus army, strong against strong.

Sofia and other powerhouses wouldn’t strike armies of ordinary people, but the strong could perform decapitation strikes.

Sif closed her eyes, seemingly seeing a mountain of corpses and a sea of blood, with the Elf Flower Sea appearing incongruous in such an environment.

She also saw the Elf Princess brandishing a Long Spear in the Flower Sea, severing all.

As she reopened her eyes, she glimpsed the unintended fatigue in Roland’s eye corner.

"Tired? Then rest for a while."

Sif stood up, casually shutting the room door, sealing the clamor outside.

She pointed at the soft bed nearby, indicating for Roland to lie down.

Though it was daytime, Roland didn’t refuse; he was indeed tired, weary of mind.

Though he ate and drank well every day, he constantly monitored the changing battle situation, endlessly simulating battlefield dynamics.

This kind of waiting consumed mental resources easily.

Since it was his wife, no need to act reserved like a friend.

Roland removed his outer garment and boots, pulled back the velvet blanket, laid down with his clothes on, and within seconds entered deep sleep.

In his dreams, he re-entered the dreamlike flowers.

He approached slowly, seeing Elf Sylph lying in the blooms, quietly speaking.

Roland sat beside her, gazing at her profile, somewhat lost.

Perhaps it was an illusion, he always felt Elf Sylph's pointed ears were gradually shortening, more human-like rather than traditional elf.

Not only that, her appearance increasingly resembled Sif.

Although they were already similar, it was more in form than essence. Now as she lay quietly, she was nine-tenths like Sif.

The doubts in Roland's heart grew denser.

He always felt there was an unspeakable bond between Elf Sylph and Sif.

Initially, he suspected Sif was Elf Sylph's reincarnation, but since Elf Sylph hadn't entered the cycle, this guess was quickly dismissed.

Chapter 494: Perfect Footsteps

Elf Sylph remembered very clearly everything after escaping from the Netherworld, including the triple deaths.

These memories are not conjured up.

Where did Sif come from, does it really have a connection with the elf in front?

Just as Roland was lost in thought, a gust of wind blew and lifted Elf Sylph's skirt.

Roland quickly turned his head, avoiding seeing things he shouldn't.

Thinking of how Elf Sylph would always tuck her accidentally exposed jade feet back into her skirt, he quickly reached out to press down the skirt, protecting her most delicate private area.

However, the moment the skirt was pressed down, Roland's movement came to an abrupt halt.

He saw something he shouldn't have.

The smooth, jade-like legs were severed at the ankles, and those carefully protected jade feet were long gone.

Roland's hand trembled, his face contorted.

Who did this?!

Although Elf Sylph had been dead for many years, what remained was merely a consciousness, he still preferred to treat her as a living person rather than just a consciousness.

The moment when Elf Sylph helped him become dual Profession, exchanging stories with him, scene after scene appeared, as if it were yesterday.

Yet she quietly departed.

Roland pounced forward, his hands passing through the skirt, as if passing through air.

Elf Sylph's body gradually became transparent, void, disappearing into the air.

Roland stared blankly at the empty Flower Sea, wanting to shout in anger but unable to make a sound, wanting to cry in sorrow but unable to shed tears.

In this dream, he was no longer corporeal but turned into void.

Sadness rose from his heart, yet he could grasp nothing, not even able to exit this nightmare-like place.

His vision went black, and he fainted in the dream.

...

While Roland was experiencing a purgatory-like nightmare, the Sif watching beside him inexplicably felt a bit sleepy.

She chuckled self-deprecatingly.

Sure enough, her composure and calm were all a façade, she was just as anxious as Roland.

The stronger she became, the more she could feel Sofia's suffocating pressure.

She wasn't afraid of Sofia, even had an inexplicable mysterious confidence, but since Sofia's debut, she had never been defeated, not even faced worthy resistance.

No matter how famous the strong are, in front of Sofia, they would all be crushed like clowns.

Can she achieve such a display of crushing power at the same level?

Sif fell silent.

Although comparing power in the void is meaningless, there is a sense among the strong.

Just like a leopard seeing a tiger in the wild, even if they are both terrifying predators in the eyes of cattle and sheep, the leopard knows it's not a match for the tiger.

No reason, it's as if it's engraved in the bones.

Sif overcame the fear in her heart, built confidence no matter what it's based on, yet deep in her soul, inexplicable fear remained etched.

Forget it, don't worry about unsolvable problems.

Who said this again? Oh, it was Roland.

Looking at Roland's handsome side profile, the traces of frost in Sif's heart vanished instantly.

Recently, everyone had been so busy, who knows how long it had been since she quietly cuddled with Roland for a little rest.

She locked the door, took off her coat and long skirt, and snuggled into Roland's arms.

With a cute curl on her lips, she soon fell into Dreamland.

...

In her dream, Sif opened her eyes in surprise, looking at the picturesque and stunning scenery, momentarily unsure if it was a dream or reality.

If it was reality, why was it so beautiful as if in a dream?

If a dream, why did it feel so tangibly real?

In a dense grassland, there was a tree towering into the clouds, with a red flower sea beneath it.

This was the Elf Flower Sea, the legendary Elf Flower Sea!

Sif was somewhat excited.

Although she was human, after choosing Elf Princess as her Path of Transcendence, she was no longer purely human.

She could even be said to be a new-age elf.

A new-age elf with both human creativity and the extraordinary abilities of an elf.

In her heart, she held a special feeling for the Elf Race.

This was also why she chose the Peak of White Mountain as the battle destination.

The Peak of White Mountain was a vast snowy mountain; the Empress Sofia, who commanded Frosty Winter, would certainly not refuse such a duel location that favored her environment.

But she was already prepared, the White Mountain could transform into the Elf Flower Sea at any moment.

The earth marked by her bleeding feet, all would become Flower Sea.

When Sofia confidently summoned a blizzard, only to find the mountains of ice and snow turning into flourishing flowers, her expression would surely be extraordinary.

Yet her Flower Sea wasn't perfect; it always felt like something was missing.

It would be good to see the real Flower Sea, even if just in a dream.

Sif quickened her steps, approaching the Ginkgo Tree in the center of the Flower Sea.

The core of the Flower Sea is the Ginkgo Tree, which is also an elf.

She was the Elf Empress; here there was a Flower Sea and a Ginkgo Tree; if all went well, she might command this Flower Sea.

Though this Flower Sea was within a dream, she couldn't think of its use temporarily, but she always felt it wasn't in vain.

Walking in the scarlet Flower Sea, a sharp pain came from beneath her feet.

Sif looked down and saw that thorns suddenly appeared where she stood.

Are you trying to stop me?

Sif let out a light hum and quickened her pace.

Indeed, it’s an ownerless Flower Sea, hence such weak instinctual attacks.

Though each step forward sent piercing pain from beneath her feet, she had endured a more painful journey to open the Flower Sea, this pain was merely a slight drizzle.

The closer she got to the Ginkgo Tree, the more frantically the thorny attacks came.

Sif’s feet were a bloody mess, yet she never stopped moving forward.

She saw clearly every detail of the Ginkgo Tree, its giant canopy, dense branches and leaves, golden leaves gently falling.

Chapter 495: Perfect Footsteps

Because it is ownerless, the Ginkgo Tree is losing its vitality.

I’m here to save you, fool!

Roland cursed inwardly and continued forward.

She finally stood under the Ginkgo Tree, but her feet had already been swallowed by thorns and hidden carnivorous flowers.

Fortunately, this is a dreamscape, and even though it hurts, she hasn’t truly lost her feet.

Even if she lost them, it wouldn’t matter.

Roland always felt an awkwardness towards her feet.

Though they were exceptionally beautiful, delicate as carved jade, and Roland couldn’t resist kissing them every time he caressed them, she always felt these feet hindered her forward movement.

If not for Roland’s love for them, she had even considered the idea of replacing the useless feet with mechanical ones.

Since she couldn’t discard them in reality, she might as well try in the dreamscape.

Roland cut her palm and pressed it onto the wilting bark of the Ginkgo Tree.

"Forest companion, awaken, your Elf friend is here!"

With the chanting of a lengthy spell, the initially restless Ginkgo Tree miraculously calmed down.

It could feel Roland’s kindness.

It had no choice but to accept the new friend.

But why did this new friend feel so familiar? The Ginkgo Tree was not fully awake yet, with only a vague consciousness deep within the marrow.

Since it was a familiar companion, it chose to completely drop its mental defenses and allow Roland to act.

Consuming quite a bit of blood, after a long casting process, the Ginkgo Tree and the Flower Sea finally accepted their new companion.

The thorns and carnivorous flowers that were frantically attacking Roland just moments ago swayed their branches to express their joy to her.

Roland sighed in relief and collapsed onto the ground.

She looked at her bloodied legs; the pair of exquisite, beautiful jade feet were gone.

It seems in the dreamscape she was going to become a girl without feet.

Roland thought mockingly to herself.

Just as she was about to rest for a while, a golden sunflower kept waving its flower head at her, as if trying to tell her something.

"Are you saying, there’s something good for me?"

Roland understood the sunflower’s intent and asked, puzzled.

The sunflower shook excitedly to affirm.

Even though she didn’t quite understand what it meant, Roland followed the direction pointed out by the sunflower.

Thankfully, she had already tamed the Flower Sea, so she no longer had to endure the pain of thorn entanglement.

With her lips pursed, she walked to the spot indicated by the sunflower and searched carefully, soon finding her target.

Under a light yellow canna, a gift was laid out for her.

A true work of art.

A pair of charming, tender jade feet, as if carved from pink jade.

Clear blood texture, even the blue and red veins were clearly visible.

If these jade feet were on the legs of some beautiful girl, Roland wouldn't be able to resist touching them, let alone himself.

Even Roland, who was always so picky, said they were good, then they must truly be jade.

Roland put away her curiosity and picked up the jade feet.

As soon as her hands touched them, she was startled.

These jade feet were not sculptures but actual flesh and blood?

Her hands trembled, a crazy idea flashing through her mind.

If these lovely, tender jade feet were attached to her legs, would the Magic Mirror still dare to rate her 99?

She dreamed of having a pair of perfectly compatible, flawless feet, and now she finally had them.

Since it's a dream, why not be bold and attach them!

Roland was not someone who would hesitate when she saw something she liked in a dreamscape; she did what she wanted and directly aligned the artistic jade feet with her severed ankles.

A gentle green light emanated from the joint.

No pain, no burning, only a soft touch.

The green light, like water, kissed the wound, with the severed ends healing at a speed visible to the naked eye.

Roland trembled with excitement.

Even though this was a dreamscape, she couldn't help but be overcome with emotional tears.

Her dream was finally realized; she now existed as a perfect, flawless being.

She had no more regrets.

If this was a dream, she'd rather remain in it forever, never waking.

But she was well aware, this was just a dream, and there were still important people awaiting her in reality; she couldn't remain sleepwalking in the dreamscape, she needed to awaken.

She silently made a wish in her heart.

If reality were like the dreamscape, she would be willing to pay any price.

As long as she could keep these flawless feet.

Chapter 496: Everyone Is Struggling to Survive

Roland and Sif woke up almost simultaneously.

There was a faint trace of tears at the corner of Roland's eyes.

He was saddened.

There was a faint trace of tears at the corner of Sif's eyes.

She was happy.

Roland was saddened by losing track of the Elf Sylph, while Sif was happy for finding the lost foot of the Elf Sylph.

The joys and sorrows between people are never connected.

Seeing the tear marks at the corner of Sif's eyes, Roland, although not understanding why his beloved wife was crying, instinctively thought she must be sad.

Seeing the tear marks at Roland's eyes, Sif, though not understanding why he was crying, instinctively thought he was most likely joyous.

She embraced him, joy must be shared.

He embraced her too, sorrow needs to be shared.

Just as the two embraced each other tightly, forgetting the world, the world did not forget them.

There was a knock on the door.

"Sif, Roland, are you inside?"

A voice, cool but bearing traces of fatigue, came from outside the door.

It was Christine.

She was the Allied Commander-in-Chief invited by Roland, but she was also the Saintess of the Divine Court of Light, serving as commander only part-time, so she wasn't a Sussex subject and did not have to address Sif as 'Your Majesty.'

Outside of public occasions, she usually addressed Sif and Roland by their names.

"Just a moment!" Sif's voice trembled slightly.

She and Roland were both in their underclothes, their expressions somewhat unnatural, and they were barefoot, which was somewhat discourteous for meeting Christine in such a state.

"I'll wait for you in the war command room." Christine's footsteps gradually faded down the hallway.

Sif sighed with relief and hurriedly looked for her shoes and socks.

Before putting on the soft white stockings, she couldn't help but glance at her ankle.

Smooth as jade, seemingly naturally so.

A clear consciousness flashed through her mind, reminding her that these feet indeed belonged to her, only recently obtained in a dream.

For the past twenty years, her feet had been false.

The white silk glided smoothly over the rounded toes, moving upward to envelop the ankle and firm calves completely.

Sif caught sight of Roland from the corner of her eye; he was indeed staring blankly at that spot again.

Though a little shy, she couldn't help but fantasize about how Roland would cherish these brand-new jade feet in the evening.

The sudden imagination made her cheeks slightly flush and her heartbeat somewhat irregular.

Roland secretly retracted his wandering gaze, striving to maintain his dignified image.

He didn't want his beloved wife to think of him as a weirdo with a foot fetish.

Although the Nobility of this era engaged in all sorts of extravagant things, he wasn't like them; he valued his reputation.

Luckily, Sif was busy putting on her stockings and didn't notice his intense, devouring look.

Exposing it after the night falls wouldn't be too late.

After all, night would slightly veil the intense gaze, sparing them from excessive shame.

Christine wouldn't have come knocking without reason; it must involve urgent military affairs, and it's likely related to the Eastern frontline campaign.

Despite wanting to forget this world and fondle his wife's feet, Roland quickly got dressed, prioritizing the important matters.

When he stepped out of the room, he was again the smiling, composed Caesar.

Walking beside him, Sif also exuded a calm and elegant demeanor, showcasing her noble Imperial Family aura.

Every staff member they passed stood at attention and saluted them.

Seeing the calm and composed demeanor of the two Majesties, staff members who were initially anxious felt a wave of relief in their hearts.

With such great figures holding up the sky, it’s not going to collapse, and even if it does, the Empress and Caesar would hold it up first.

...

In the war command room.

When Roland and Sif arrived, Christine was swiftly removing a few chess pieces from the sand table.

Skilled at her task, she picked up and tossed aside pieces representing four enemy army-level units from the ruins of Frank Castle.

Roland couldn’t hide his amazement upon witnessing this scene as he stepped into the room.

"Christine, are all those hundreds of thousands of Prudon soldiers gone?"

"Yes, they’re gone. Except for nearly ten thousand who were captured and then released, the rest are all dead. This includes one General, two Lieutenant Generals, and about seven or eight Vice Admirals."

After a slight pause, Christine’s lips couldn’t help but curl upwards slightly, "Including the two most elite ace army units."

Roland’s breathing became a bit rapid.

The new army of the Jin Yuan Republic still needed time to become combat effective. Relying solely on the Sussex Empire’s overseas troops could indeed defeat them, but not without considerable losses.

Letting these Prudon brutes storm into the Northern Plains would certainly be disastrous.

As long as the Prudon people’s advance could be delayed, even if only for three months, it would be enough.

Yet Christine had brought news better than expected.

Roland couldn’t figure out how a frontline force of just over ten thousand fortress soldiers and aid troops could completely destroy this formidable ace unit.

Truly Christine, a contemporary goddess of war!

Roland didn’t hesitate to offer his lavish praise.

Sif wasn’t as effusive as Roland but nodded affirmatively with her eyes.

However, Christine just smiled and shook her head, "Roland, I am indeed an excellent commander, but I cannot defy the laws of war. No matter who commanded this battle, a total annihilation of the enemy was impossible."

"This was a miracle."

She detailed the process of Frank Castle taking flight.

She didn’t compete for credit with Tom and Jerry, but factually narrated each person’s accomplishments.

This bizarre turn of events shook Roland’s pupils to their core.

He knew the scale of Frank Castle’s grounds, and by his calculations, to lift the castle into the sky would require at least two hundred thousand tons of high explosives.

Or perhaps several nuclear bombs. What kind of dreadful thing was hidden underground in the fortress?

Chapter 497: Everyone Is Striving to Survive (Part 2)

Although the unearthed relics are just the tip of the iceberg, the technology of the Alamanni Empire still left Roland awestruck.

However, such an advanced technological civilization couldn’t escape the Divine Punishment, proving the destructive power of the Divine Punishment Legion.

This really is...

Roland certainly didn’t feel any pressure, he was simply shocked.

The Divine Punishment Legion? Let’s make it past the Sixth Return Day first.

Roland vaguely had the illusion that the difficulty of passing the Sixth Return Day was no less than the Final Return Day; the Return Days in between weren’t necessarily as frightening.

Don’t always gaze into the distant void, think about Sofia right in front of you.

To ensure no useful information was missed, Roland carefully inquired about every detail at the time, finally confirming that this wasn’t a Divine Punishment, but rather something terrible buried beneath the ruins that had exploded.

He couldn’t help but ask, "Did your organization excavate afterwards?"

"We did, but unfortunately, only ruins remained, the weapons and equipment hidden deep inside were all damaged, although we unearthed a small number of books, we couldn’t understand them."

"Give me the books, maybe I can figure something out." Roland’s eyes lit up; indeed, not many people could understand ancient Alamanni language, but he just happened to be able to.

He could understand the script of the Magic Empire, which had deep research on the previous era and had compiled a dictionary of ancient civilizations.

As long as he cross-referred, he could roughly understand.

Christine nodded, "The books are in my carriage, I'll give them to you later. Do you have any instructions for the next war situation?"

"Can we take the opportunity to counterattack?" The complete annihilation of the enemy's elite troops sparked a glimmer of hope in Roland.

"No." Although understanding Roland's thoughts, Christine unceremoniously poured a bucket of cold water on him.

"Alright, I trust your judgment." Slightly disappointed, Roland saw that Christine wanted to explain in detail, and quickly interrupted her long speech.

He wasn't planning on micromanaging, so why ask so meticulously.

A leader doesn't need to be an expert in every field; trust the professionals with professional issues.

Thinking about how such a good opportunity could not expand the war effort, Roland couldn't help but sigh, "Such a good opportunity, what a pity."

"No need to sigh, we certainly cannot miss the window period; there are many things we can still do."

Christine pointed her finger to the map, directing to a country marked in golden yellow.

"Before understanding the cause of this disastrous defeat, the Holy Alliance should not dare to send themselves to die willingly. We can strike the Weimar Federation and annex them in the meantime."

Sif couldn’t help but frown slightly, reminding, "Miss Christine, the Weimar Federation is very compliant with our country, almost indistinguishable from a vassal state. Defeating them may not be difficult, but it would seriously damage our international reputation, who would dare to follow us in the future?"

"Rest assured, I’ve already considered this point. The Weimar Federation is indeed compliant with the Sussex Empire, but they don’t have a good relationship with the Jin Yuan Kingdom, so they have not been included in the Alliance."

"I’m not only the Commander in Chief of the Sussex Empire, but also the Marshal of the Jin Yuan Kingdom. This battle can rely solely on the Temple Warrior and Jin Yuan Kingdom’s army."

Christine elegantly smoothed her hair, softly saying, "I have confidence that in three months..."

"That won’t do, I’ll give you a maximum of two months!"

Roland interrupted Christine without hesitation.

Three months to exterminate XX; no matter how you hear it, it doesn’t sound auspicious. Though he wasn’t superstitious, he couldn’t tempt fate willingly.

Christine didn’t know Roland’s concerns; she pondered for a moment and accepted Roland’s request.

"You’re right, although I judged that the enemy cannot launch an attack within three months, that time was just an estimate. If the enemy attacks prematurely, we can’t protest against them."

"Speed is of the essence in war, I’ll send a message to Alina immediately to get her prepared, and I’ll join her as soon as possible."

Christine always acted swiftly; since she decided to strike the Weimar Federation, there was no reason to delay.

Watching Christine leave, Sif and Roland said nothing.

To be fair, launching an attack on a benevolently neutral country like the Weimar Federation would arouse international resentment no matter what form it took, and could even push some hesitant small nations into the enemy camp.

But they had no choice.

The new army must see blood to grow; no matter how thoroughly the Jin Yuan Kingdom's new army is trained or how high their morale is, without combat experience they are still rookies.

The new army needs a training punching bag.

Unfortunately, the unlucky Weimar Federation is that leveling punching bag.

After all, they're part of the former territory of the Odin Empire, sharing the same roots and culture with the Prudon Kingdom and Tirol Kingdom.

If ignored, what if they stab in the back?

This is a life or death war, mercy has no place here.

After a long silence, Sif pointed north on the map, softly murmuring, "What about here?"

Sif pointed to the Oden Kingdom.

This country had previously invaded but was defeated, then signed a defeat treaty and ceded territory.

The Oden people are brave and belligerent; they hold grudges and won't easily give up on revenge.

When the Holy Alliance attacks, they will definitely seize the opportunity to cause trouble.

We must completely resolve them during this period.

Roland didn’t rush to provide a solution, instead he asked in return, "How do you think it should be handled?"

"War."

Sif’s tone was calm, as if discussing what to eat for dinner.

Roland nodded, agreeing with her broad direction.

The two sides are already enemies, do they really think they can turn their coats and lay down arms for a few words of persuasion?

War is inevitable, the only question is how to fight it?

Chapter 498: Everyone Is Striving to Survive (Part 3)

Sif pondered for a moment, then slowly said, "This battle is also a race against time. I plan to gather the main force of the overseas legion, led by..."

In her heart, she hoped Roland would be the Commander in Chief. At critical moments, she was more willing to trust Roland. However, Roland always considered his military capability limited and was unwilling to lead the army into battle, and she couldn’t force him.

"Led by me personally, we will launch an attack from land. You will oversee Hansa on my behalf."

After much thought, the only people she could trust besides Roland were herself.

Roland had said that when it came to desperate measures, one could only trust oneself.

He also mentioned that during the defense of Hansa and the decisive battle at White Mountain, he would definitely join the battle in person.

Since that’s the case, she would take on this appetizer herself.

With full confidence, Sif said, "The Oden Kingdom may still have hidden strong warriors, so I must go personally. Sven the Seventh is a monarch of outstanding valor; I’ll see him off on his last journey."

"Meanwhile, I’ll deploy the navy to blockade the coast and shatter their final illusions."

Sif approached the sand table, explaining her battle plan to Roland.

Her battle plan could be summed up in one word: direct confrontation.

Anyone who stands in the way will be destroyed. She aimed to invade the enemy’s capital at the quickest speed, taking it in one swift move.

The plan seemed a bit rough, but Roland couldn’t think of a better strategy.

If they had time, he would suggest gradually eating away, disintegrating, and splitting the enemy from within, achieving the greatest victory at the smallest cost.

However, they didn’t have time.

The only choice was a direct clash, shattering the pride of the Oden people in a frontal confrontation, forcing them to bow down and submit.

Going direct also had the advantage of possibly prompting other nobility of the Oden Kingdom to surrender.

The Oden people revered strength. If Sif could show might far surpassing Sven the Seventh, she could potentially win over these nobles.

Their loyalty might not be very firm, but it was better than a firm disloyalty.

Since evening was still far away, Roland set up the pieces on the sand table, indulging in a military tactical simulation with Sif, simulating the campaign against the Oden Kingdom.

If it were a real battlefield command, Roland would be a bit nervous, but discussing paper tactics had never daunted him.

Even Christine found it no easy task to defeat him in tactical simulations.

Luckily, Sif was also skilled at tactical simulations, and the two joyfully engaged in a chessboard debate.

After two rounds of role-swapping simulations, the battle outcome was already determined.

Unless a miracle occurred, the demise of the Oden Kingdom was certain, but the Sussex Empire would face considerable losses as well.

After all, the Oden Imperial Capital was famous throughout the Rodinia Continent as an impregnable city that had never been breached through direct assault in history.

This fortress was known as the city that never falls; capturing this stronghold wasn’t easy.

The Oden Imperial Capital was bordered by mountains on three sides, with only one valley leading to the city.

The other side of the city faced the sea, meaning any landing would fall under artillery coverage.

This city had a water source, stockpiled food, and crisscrossed walls and fortifications; theoretically, under 300,000 troops, it was unassailable.

Even if both sea and land blocked the Oden Imperial Capital, the city could endure for a year or two without issue.

Conquering the Oden Kingdom was easy; taking the capital was hard.

If they couldn’t achieve a swift victory, even winning the war would equate to failure.

Sif didn’t tell Roland her trump card; she planned to ascend the city walls personally, opening the gates of victory for the entire army.

This confidence stemmed from reclaiming the Flawless Foot and gaining a perfect body.

Planting trees, advancing, storming the city—no matter the cost, she had to win.

Although she couldn’t think of a better way to reduce casualties, Roland didn’t oppose the action.

He didn’t want casualty figures; he only wanted victory.

To ensure victory, he instructed Sif to take the majority of the main force and appointed Bordeaux as deputy commander.

"Bordeaux is an experienced general; let him handle the specific commands. You just need to make the important decisions and eliminate the enemy’s hidden strong warriors. Remember, don’t take rash risks."

"Understood, I’m not alone." Sif smiled and nodded.

Her words held a dual meaning.

Under the Soul Blood Link, if she died, Roland would accompany her in death, so she wasn't alone.

Moreover, she and Roland had a marriage agreement, making them a factual couple; naturally, she wasn't alone.

Sif stood on tiptoe, wrapping her arms around Roland's neck.

"Roland, I just had a strange dream. In the dream, I attained a perfect body. When I awoke, I realized it wasn't a dream. We will win; we definitely will."

Watching his beloved wife's gradually closing eyes and the quivering eyelashes, Roland too was deeply inspired. Without saying another word, he tenderly kissed her.

After an eternity or so, the nearly breathless couple reluctantly released each other.

Sif opened her eyes, a peculiar light dancing in them, and softly said:

"Roland, until the Day of Return, can you adore only me?"

"I always..."

Delicate fingertips touched Roland's lips, Sif's voice exceptionally gentle, "Roland, the Soul Blood Link changed my perspective. If Alina doesn't wish to sever the link by Tier Three, I'm willing to share with her. But until then, no."

Her message was clear: Alina could join this family, but only after withstanding the test of time.

If by Tier Three, Alina sought to sever the Soul Blood Link, her fate with Roland would be finished.

Roland opened his mouth, countless words reduced to one, "Okay."

What else could he say, deny that he had thoughts about Alina?

Such disingenuous words would be easily seen through as soon as spoken.

Sif had a pair of insightful eyes that probed hearts. Even without the Insight Skill, she could tell if he was lying.

Chapter 499: Everyone Is Striving to Survive (Part 4)

Sif set up a challenge, which is quite reasonable.

After all, Alina is a newcomer, and her willingness to accept it already shows great magnanimity.

The time before the Sixth Return Day was exclusively for him and Sif. If they can survive, Sif's mindset might change. Her higher pursuit is the pinnacle of power.

Roland didn't argue, nor did he say anything insincere, which pleased Sif. However, she still couldn't resist biting Roland's shoulder lightly.

She didn't use much force, just left a mark.

"And your Sister Lisa, since she doesn't plan to marry, let's just live together."

Compared to Alina, Sif is more willing to accept Lisa.

Lisa seeks companionship and won't compete for anything.

She doesn't compete for anything, which actually makes Sif feel a bit embarrassed. Lisa and Roland aren't related by blood, they grew up together, and are well-acquainted, having gone through so much together. Separating them would be a colossal joke.

As for how they choose to accompany one another, let them decide.

Sif and Lisa already had an understanding. Now, it was just being clarified in front of Roland.

But this tolerance also came with a price.

Sif left a bite mark on Roland's other shoulder. Neat and tidy, like a crescent moon.

Roland's apology melted into Sif's gentle eyes.

She said nothing, only gave Roland a look.

She was about to set off for an expedition, and tonight she needed to be filled with Roland's courage repeatedly.

Such a reasonable request, Roland, of course, would not refuse.

Just when the two were about to leave hand in hand, there was a knock at the door.

"Lord Roland, is this a convenient time for you?"

Roland paused for a moment before recognizing the hoarse voice. It was from the recently captured and now loyal new leader of the Graham Sea Demon clan, Munina Gram.

Roland initially planned to make the Sea Demon tribe an important supplementary force, but he gradually realized that this group of Sea Demons had rigid thinking and not many talents worth using. According to his selection criteria, he could only form a special unit of about a thousand.

Moreover, with Munina becoming Mr. Norton’s adopted daughter, Roland felt it was improper to exploit them excessively, so the Graham Sea Demons gradually became marginalized.

This decisive battle for destiny was primarily a land war, so he simply didn’t conscript the Sea Demon tribe to participate.

One couldn’t expect the Sea Demons to fight the Empress of the Frosty Winter at the Peak of White Mountain, could you?

Even if they managed to climb the snowy mountain by luck, they would freeze, unable to care for themselves.

Although the Graham Sea Demons were temporarily out of use, Roland believed they would be of great use when advancing into the Ocean in the future. Thus, their task was to recuperate and have more children.

He even implemented incentive and support policies for promoting childbirth within the Sea Demons.

After a long pause, Roland still couldn’t figure out what Munina was seeking him for at this time.

Seeing Roland unresponsive, Sif gave a light cough and responded on his behalf, "Miss Munina, please come in."

With a creak, the door to the command room opened.

A charming face slowly appeared at the door.

Munina was dressed in human clothes, even wearing a skirt to cover her fish tail.

Dressed conservatively, she didn’t look like a Sea Demon, nor like a cyborg, but rather like a strictly-raised noble lady.

"Your Majesty, Lord Roland, I have a report."

"Please, go ahead."

Even though Munina was encroaching on her and Roland's night, Sif maintained her patience and smile.

Timidly, Munina didn't dare meet Sif's gaze. For some reason, she felt the Empress seemed rather displeased.

She quickly got to the point, "Your Majesty, the Graham Clan is also a part of the Empire. We have both duty and the right to contribute."

"I wish to lead an elite force to join the navy and serve the nation."

Sif hadn't expected Munina to make such a request, raising her eyebrows slightly, she spoke softly, "I only wish for this special force to have fewer numbers, considering the Graham Clan is still in recovery."

"Not many, just over five hundred, and mostly middle-aged who can't reproduce."

Munina quietly replied.

The Sea Demon tribe loses their ability to reproduce after the age of thirty-five, and these warriors aged around forty can no longer contribute to population growth, so instead, they win the clan benefits through their blood and flesh.

She knew well that this was a battle to decide the Empire's fate, and if the Graham Clan didn't contribute, they wouldn't have a say when dividing the spoils afterward.

These middle-aged warriors and singers in the clan are the backbone, much stronger than the young ones.

They’re prepared to burn their all to win benefits for the clan.

Munina felt distressed, yet she couldn’t refuse, as this was the choice that best aligned with the clan’s interests, despite being somewhat cruel.

She understood that a clan couldn’t rise by relying on others’ charity but must strive for it themselves.

When necessary, even she could be sacrificed.

When Munina raised her head again, there was no hint of weakness in her eyes, only determination.

Sif couldn’t refuse such a gaze. She nodded and calmly said, "Alright then, you will lead them to join the navy to support in reconnaissance and protection."

"Your, Your Majesty, this force will be led by Elder Nigma. I intend to follow you and Lord Roland to offer support."

"But our battlefield is primarily on land; your follow-through holds little meaning." Sif looked at Munina with some confusion, somewhat puzzled.

Sea Demons lose half their fighting strength once on land; when exposed to the dry air, they can barely sing a few notes. Munina surely understood such a simple principle, so why insist on following the main forces?

Munina bravely met Sif’s gaze, loudly explaining, "I, I can perform the complete three great movements in a dry environment, but no longer than half an hour."

First movement, Charm.

Second movement, Chaos.

Third movement, Sorrow.

All are very practical group auxiliary abilities.

Sif's lips curled slightly upwards, and she softly said, "Munina, I am about to set off on an expedition. You will stay by my side. I have some singing techniques I want to discuss with you."

Chapter 500: The Empress's Thoughts

Saint Rurik Palace, Summer Palace.

Empress Sofia's summer residence.

She dislikes the hot climate, so this palace is built atop a mountain, very cool.

To be precise, this is not an imperial palace, but Sofia's private residence, belonging to her other title, the Duke of Nizhny Novgorod's mansion.

I have a Summer Palace, facing the ocean, spring is not warm, flowers do not bloom.

This is Sofia's leisurely life.

She very much dislikes flowers, so the places she passes through become withered.

Barefoot, standing near the cliff, letting the piercing sea wind brush her cheeks, her long hair blowing, her eyes deep as an abyss, without a hint of expression.

Unlike when attending the continental meeting, now she is less aggressive and more profound.

If you watch carefully, you'll notice her appearance has some subtle differences.

Her eyebrows and long hair have somehow turned a faint blue, like a frozen ocean.

As she stands like a sculpture facing the sea wind, a gust of wind rises behind her, and blue mist condenses into form, revealing a Deep Blue Ice Spirit.

The voice of the Ice Spirit is completely unlike humans, rigid with some sharpness.

"Master, your human servant requests an audience."

Sofia slowly turns, nodding slightly, and walks outward.

It is the day of the monthly meeting with key ministers, she needs to provide confidence and guidance to those eager imperial ministers awaiting instructions.

Since returning from the Arctic Icefield to the empire, her mood is entirely different from before.

Her interest in politics, diplomacy, and warfare is waning, even to some degree of disgust.

Previously she loved having full control, but after returning from the icefield, she only wanted to delegate power.

Unfortunately, she used to be accustomed to being autocratic, the ministers she heavily utilized were strong in execution but lacked independent thinking abilities.

She wants to delegate power but simply cannot.

If there was a choice, she would only wish to quietly sleep under the icefield until the day of return, but she does not have that choice; this is, after all, her empire, she cannot simply ignore it.

If only there were a Prime Minister as capable as Roland.

That thought is indeed outlandish, Sofia laughed at herself.

Why invite Roland? To help me build the nation for convenience of hammering your homeland afterward?

The corridor to the reception room is lined with luxurious crystal mirrors.

These mirrors are placed at different angles, able to perfectly present anyone passing through the corridor in full view, leaving no blind spots.

People with good figures love this place, calling it the Angel Corridor.

People with poor figures loathe this place, calling it the Path of Demons.

Sofia neither likes nor hates it.

Everyone has an instinct to pursue beauty; she is no exception. Yet, she does not think that delicate features and a symmetrical figure are the so-called beauty.

Slaying enemies with swordsmanship, freezing them in ice, the wails from the depths of their throats as they struggle desperately but cannot escape death.

This is the ultimate beauty.

Her unique aesthetics.

No one can understand her, never has been.

In the corner of her eye, seeing the flawless, naturally unadorned face in the mirror corridor, Sofia suddenly felt a bit dazed; turning her face, she seemed to see herself at sixteen.

At that time she was carefree, daily practicing swordsmanship, reading books, accepting military skills training, striving to become stronger and more outstanding.

She never used makeup; after all, she was naturally beautiful with no equal, why mar the natural beauty with cosmetics that emitted strange smells?

Sofia's steps suddenly halted, she thought of someone, as if a pebble dropped in the calm heart lake, slightly rippling.

Well, except that short-eared elf.

She had once set a life goal for herself, imitating a famous female Great Emperor in Alamanni Empire's history, leading the entire continent towards unity and prosperity.

However, her goal had ended before it even began.

Her parents arranged a political marriage for her, completely without emotional foundation, for family interests.

Her husband is the Emperor of Vladimir Empire.

Resistance, silence, Sofia ultimately accepted the mockery of fate, embarking on the journey to the distant Land of Frost.

She originally believed this would be neither a happy nor too unhappy marriage, even if there was no emotional connection between them.

After all, they are both people of noble status, both have boundaries in their actions. If some form of tacit understanding could be reached, she did not mind fulfilling the marriage contract.

However, Ivan IV's actions truly opened her eyes.

Ivan IV is a standard Rurik chauvinist, he equally looks down upon all nations and states, believing Rurik people are the most excellent nation in the world.

He cannot accept the royal bloodline mixed with the lowly Odin people's lineage.

Ivan's views are completely different from mainstream opinions.

In the traditional hierarchy of contempt, Magic Empire > Barbarian Race, and among Barbarian Race, Sussex and Jin Yuan rank as upper-class barbarians, Odin people, Talia people, and other nations as middle-class barbarians, Rurik people, Wende people as lower-class barbarians.

Ivan IV's upside-down understanding does not even have a market within Vladimir Empire.

The Empress Dowager insists on marrying Sofia to improve the Rurik people's lower-class barbarian bloodline.

However, Ivan IV does not adhere to this at all.

Despite Sofia having an absolutely stunning appearance, a perfect figure full of youthful charm, and an exceptional temperament, he still treated Sofia roughly with cold violence, not even bothering with superficial courtesy.

Not only that, he also endeavoured to procreate with beautiful young women of his lineage, even intending for Sofia to claim his bastard child born elsewhere.

Sofia feels no emotional attachment towards Ivan IV, and naturally, cannot endure this humiliation.