Empress 571

Chapter 571: A Letter Home (Part 2)

Sofia shook her head with some regret and quickly put the matter out of her mind.

She was just curious, not someone who enjoyed prying into others' privacy; she wasn't that bored.

If she couldn't see it, so be it; she could completely guess what Sif would write.

Nothing but the sweet words of a young girl in love.

Such trivial things only young people enjoy; not seeing it is no loss!

With a trace of regret, Sofia turned to the last page of the letter and finally witnessed Roland's hard-earned prowess as a champion writer.

He expressed his emotions using classic Elf poetry.

Northern Elves wandering away from home, longing for their wife and children.

Sofia was silent for a long time, her eyes suddenly brightened.

Wait, wife and children?

She hadn't had such gossipy thoughts for a long time. This semi-public, semi-private letter reminded her of some memories from when she was an ordinary person, but that memory quickly dissipated into the void.

Putting down the Endless Letter, Sofia walked to the window, her solemn expression returned to calm.

It was just an occasional satiation of curiosity; she would never look at this Endless Letter again.

She might as well hand it over to Sif tomorrow so she can conveniently correspond with Roland.

To think they're married and still have so much to say—sickening to watch.

Sofia took a deep breath, adjusting her emotions.

Perhaps because she gave up controlling the Frosty Winter, or maybe due to the massive loss of power, she helplessly found herself more like a mortal now.

Once Roland stabilizes the situation, and she is no longer needed to prop things up, she'll go to the Arctic Glacier to collect Cold Ice Spiritual Energy and reforge the Bright Blue Fury.

She had promised Angelina, and she must fulfill it.

...

Cabinet meeting hall.

The first cabinet meeting since Roland assumed the role of Imperial Cardinal Minister.

When he walked into the office building, the guards on both sides tilted their eyes at a forty-five-degree angle, suddenly raising their guns in salute.

The guards had received emergency training and recognized the new Cardinal Minister.

Though it seemed absurd for a foreign Prime Minister to become the nation's Cardinal Minister, the guards understood this was politics, a realm not theirs to meddle in.

Never mind a foreign Cardinal Minister; even Her Majesty the Empress was once a Prudon noblewoman.

No matter where one comes from, it’s enough that they are now a member of the Empire.

Entering the cabinet meeting hall, Roland ignored the ministers approaching to greet him, heading straight to his seat and turned to survey the room.

Under his cold scrutiny, a few ministers’ expressions were noticeably strained, while others displayed indifference, and some silently bowed their heads, avoiding eye contact with Roland.

Roland put down the folder and drew a scepter from beneath his robe.

A scepter with white chrysanthemum patterns and a double-headed eagle emblem, made from special metal sourced from the Arctic, radiating an imposing gleam, representing the Empress’s authority.

The ministers were stunned, momentarily at a loss for how to respond.

Seeing their confused expressions, Roland spoke coldly.

"Gentlemen, I hope you remember one thing: it was Empress Sofia who called me here for reform and innovation. She entrusted me with her scepter, granting me absolute authority equivalent to that of an Emperor."

"As long as I see fit, I can dismiss or deal with any official."

Roland’s words were resolute, straightforwardly laying his cards face-up for all to see.

He had no desire to engage in political maneuvering with these people for months to reorganize order.

Time waits for no one.

The peace talks would commence soon; he must quickly reorganize the cabinet to echo only his voice.

Should he wish to listen, they may speak.

If he deems it unnecessary, they should just execute commands.

To make these obstinate bureaucrats understand the significance of reform was as challenging as persuading an elephant to wear stockings.

Roland lacked such patience, nor did he care what the cabinet ministers thought.

Should anyone not know their place, he wouldn't mind setting an example by making a spectacle of them.

According to his estimation, the Rurik people were hotheaded, and many in the cabinet had military backgrounds; they surely couldn't tolerate it.

Should anyone spring out, that would be ideal—he could easily replace a few troublemakers with their younger deputies.

In officialdom, no favor is heavier than recognition and promotion.

Some older ministers relied on having served three emperors, treating the young with disdain.

Roland's target was them.

Yet, unexpectedly, no one opposed him.

He puzzledly looked at several cabinet members with military backgrounds, only to find that their eyes held more admiration and appreciation.

Wow, these old geezers were quite the actors.

Roland silently snarked.

Just as he was preparing to improvise his next words, applause erupted.

Led by an unknown pioneer, more and more cabinet ministers joined in clapping.

While Roland was still perplexed, Prime Minister Angelina smiled and explained:

"Roland, you don’t understand the Rurik people. We admire the strong and respect Heroes."

Roland remained somewhat baffled; his reputation was always shrewd, morally bankrupt, and scandal-ridden—how could it possibly align with courage?

Angelina offered no further explanation but glanced in the direction of the Summer Palace.

Roland suddenly realized—challenging Sofia was an act of courage.

To survive such a challenge reflected competence.

Regarding his cunning, everyone had experienced it, so it required no elaboration.

There was one thing Angelina hadn’t mentioned: Roland underestimated the supreme status Sofia held in the Vladimir Empire.

The Rurik people might not believe in God, but they certainly believed in Sofia.

Her standing here rivaled or even surpassed that of a deity.

Chapter 572: A Family Letter (Part 3)

Sofia said that Roland leads everyone, even if they have opinions, they must keep them to themselves.

Roland felt a bit bemused.

This facade of borrowing authority is quite enjoyable, but unfortunately, the process of replacing some old-timers must be slowed down.

After all, they are seasoned Cabinet Ministers, how could they be changed without major mistakes?

Good news: Everyone in the Cabinet supports it.

Bad news: Too many people support it.

Fortunately, Roland reacted quickly. Since everyone supports it, there is no need to make the appointment so ruthless that everyone thinks he is a harbinger of disaster.

Since there is at least a superficial consensus, Roland directly presented the development blueprint, took out the pointer, and began an analysis pointing at the map.

He did his homework thoroughly, knowing the Vladimir Empire as well as a professional official.

The Cabinet Ministers, who originally had reservations about him, gradually changed their attitude.

Everyone is very optimistic about Roland's proposed development blueprint, but does not agree with his plan to emancipate slaves and servants.

After Roland spoke for over an hour and took a sip of water, the waiting Cabinet Ministers finally seized the chance to speak.

"Cardinal, you still don’t understand our Vladimir Empire. Those farmers only know farming and understand nothing else, is it not enough to provide them food and shelter, must we grant them freedom too?"

"Cardinal, private property is sacred and inviolable, it is a policy passed down through generations of Emperors, you cannot change it based on personal preferences."

"Cardinal, this is the law of our ancestors."

The appearance of these doubts was not unexpected to Roland.

In fact, he had been waiting for someone to interrupt, so he could seize the opportunity to assert authority, yet these Cabinet Ministers politely listened to his speech.

Good news: The classroom order is very good.

Bad news: The classroom order is too good.

He had to stop to drink water, giving the Cabinet Ministers the opportunity to speak freely.

After patiently listening to their varied concerns, Roland raised his right hand, instantly quieting the room.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I want to ask, what is the point of keeping serfs?"

"To have them work for the lords and create wealth!" a Cabinet Minister exclaimed.

"Great, it is wealth, right?" Roland extracted the keyword, staring at the respondent.

The Minister of Internal Affairs, who just spoke, felt vaguely uneasy seeing Roland’s lips curl upward, yet he couldn’t identify the trap, cautiously supplementing:

"Cardinal, serfs are also the property of lords."

Roland clapped his hands, glanced around, and asked with a smile: "I understand, you all want to protect your own interests, right?"

This blunt statement made the Cabinet Ministers’ expressions slightly unnatural.

The logic is sound, but is it good to speak so plainly?

It’s like pursuing a girl, who says directly ’I see you are beautiful and have a sweet voice, I want to sleep with you.’

They initially felt they had some barbaric attributes, but it turned out Roland was even more direct.

Though Roland’s words were quite blunt, they nonetheless bridged an intangible gap with the Ministers.

Seeing everyone silent, Roland continued: "If I guarantee that after freeing the serfs, the lords can gain more significant benefits, and the country will become stronger, does anyone oppose?"

Roland ensured the interests of the nobility and lords while presenting the national interest above. With everything said, who dared to object?

Seeing Roland’s confident expression, someone couldn’t help but counter: "Cardinal, anyone can say nice words, how do you guarantee it?"

"Through the successful industrialization and international trade experience obtained in the Sussex Empire."

Roland calmly said: "None of you should doubt the industrial strength and international trade capability of the Sussex Empire, right?"

The Cabinet Ministers were speechless.

Such indisputable matters, forcibly opposing them would only make oneself seem foolish.

Though internally uncomfortable, they accepted Roland’s statement.

Yet there were still those who questioned hesitantly, "Cardinal, industrialization requires technology, international trade requires fleets, which we lack."

"I have them, to be precise the Sussex Empire has them."

Roland smiled and said: "The war is over, post-war reconstruction requires many things, so the prospects for international trade are very bright. Having no ships is easily solved, I can take responsibility for acquiring them, I can even request the Sussex Empire to support with emergency fleets."

No one doubted the authenticity of this promise.

After all, the Empress of the Sussex Empire is his wife, what’s the big deal about that?

Everyone laughed along with Roland, joy permeating the hall.

But soon someone disrupted this pleasant atmosphere.

"We need peace, but the Empire cannot accept peace achieved through concessions."

This statement quieted the hall.

The Ministers gradually cooled down.

Indeed, Roland is a Sussex person, his heart surely leans towards his homeland, surely he would have the Vladimir Empire concede interests for peace, wouldn’t he?

Seeing everyone’s worried expressions, Roland laughed aloud:

"Don’t be so gloomy, everyone is a winner, a guest at the table; what we need to consider is how to claim an extra piece of steak, rather than fighting tooth and nail with other guests."

Roland picked up the pointer and aimed at the large map, sweeping it grandly to draw a circle over parts of the Wende Empire.

"These lands are ours!"

Then he pointed towards the Three Northern Kingdoms.

"These are ours as well."

"These, these, and these are handed to our allies. As for the Sussex Empire and Jin Yuan Republic, their demands are only these."

In fact, what Freedom Alliance demanded was no less than Holy Alliance, but in Roland’s narrative it seemed much less.

Roland’s partition proposal won the approval of most Ministers.

Even though the Wende Empire was temporarily annexed, their awareness of resistance was strong, ruling there would be very difficult.

Roland marked out areas all comprised of the Western Rurik people who preserve traditional Rurik culture, which would be easier to assimilate.

The lands allotted to the two allies were fertile but identified more with Wende people rather than Western Rurik people.

The ruling costs of these regions were too high.

After seventy percent of the territory was partitioned, the Wende Imperial Family retained the core area for revival but must downgrade to a Kingdom.

This preserved land was very clever, mostly royal family direct territories.

Although the Empire lost some areas, it was the nobility's flesh that was cut, not affecting the Imperial Family.

Even though it wasn't completely wiped clean, everyone thought it reasonable.

After all, the Wende Empire is an empire, could it be swallowed in one gulp?

Seeing Roland's sincere defense of imperial interests, the Ministers initially resistant to him now viewed him in a new light.

Everyone enthusiastically gathered around the map to discuss partition details.

As for the opinions of the partitioned countries, no one ever cared, this time was no exception.

Chapter 573: Whose Side Is He On? The Middle

The formal documents inviting peace negotiations were being circulated among the nations.

With the end of the Battle of White Mountain, there was a tacit ceasefire among the countries, awaiting negotiations.

In some places, people couldn’t wait to take to the streets to celebrate the arrival of peace.

Not everyone was so optimistic.

Negotiations don’t always yield good results. The collapse of the last continental conference foreshadowed this short but highly damaging war. Who could guarantee a good outcome this time?

People longed for peace, but peace cannot be awaited.

As paradoxical as it may sound, peace must be nurtured with the blood of war to thrive.

Various countries were also scheming over the time and place of the negotiations.

Sofia’s opinion was to negotiate at Saint Rurik Palace, or if not, Val City, with no other places considered.

The Sussex Empire’s opinion was to negotiate in the Imperial Capital, or if not, Val City, with no other places considered.

The Jin Yuan Republic’s opinion was to negotiate in West City, or if not, Val City, with no other places considered.

Considering these options intersect, Val City seemed to be the optimal choice.

However, the final negotiation location was chosen to be Francis City.

This city can be considered a sister city to Frank Castle.

Frank Castle guards the entrances to Hansa and the Northern Great Plains.

Not far from it, the Prudon Kingdom also had a similar fortress named Francis.

In times of peace, Frank and Francis were trade frontiers; in times of war, they became the mouth of the meat grinder.

The Prudon Kingdom's reasoning was simple; the war started here, it should end here.

If the Wende Empire heard this reason, they'd likely helplessly raise a question mark, but they've been partitioned, their opinion doesn't matter.

The Prudon Kingdom proposed this location also to declare to other major powers that the partition of the Wende Empire was undisputed and didn't require negotiation.

Their stance was so firm it was almost aggressive. King Otto VI of Prudon bluntly warned other countries that if the negotiations didn't take place in Francis, he would refuse peace talks and continue waging war.

The Tirol Kingdom firmly supported the Prudon Kingdom.

Although he didn't quite understand where Otto VI got such courage, Roland intended to refuse based on the principle of not making deals on the enemy's preset ground.

Just as he was personally drafting a politely phrased yet adamantly toned reply, Sofia appeared.

"Negotiate."

Her words were few but left no room for dispute.

Since Sofia made the decision, Roland shrugged ritually, saving himself the trouble of writing the letter.

He summoned the Minister of Foreign Affairs, instructing him to first protest with standard diplomatic rhetoric, then accept the arrangement, not forgetting to add that it was an offense to the Empire.

Since the outcome couldn’t be changed, they might as well gain something; that’s diplomacy.

Sofia agreed, so naturally Roland did too.

With Roland in agreement, Sif and Alina had no objections either.

The peace negotiations in Francis City were thus settled.

The dispute over the negotiation location was indeed significant, but if the power disparity was vast, where the negotiations were held hardly mattered.

Roland couldn’t understand why the Prudons were bold enough to defy Sofia.

The massive crevice stretching from White Mountain to the Rodinia River still quietly lay there, and someone couldn’t wait to court death?

Before the Divine Punishment Legion descended, Roland couldn’t imagine anyone who could defeat Sofia by force.

He even thought Sofia could remain invincible until the Divine Punishment Legion was obliterated.

By sticking close to the powerful, Roland was filled with confidence about the negotiations.

Until Sofia sent words to him, "I’m very disappointed with the Prudons’ rudeness. I won’t be attending this negotiation; the Cardinal will act on my behalf."

Roland: "..."

This was a matter of national importance, even determining the continent’s future, so why not go?

Roland stared at the messenger, Angelina, and after a brief silence, smiled, "It’s time to showcase the charm of diplomacy."

Angelina breathed a sigh of relief.

Roland couldn’t fathom why Sofia wouldn’t attend, nor could she.

Sofia’s official reason publicly given was a response to the Prudons, but her private reason to Angelina was to repair the Bright Blue Fury at the Arctic Glacier.

Angelina wanted to say that the Divine Artifact could be repaired anytime, but negotiations were more important, yet the words turned into "Yes, Your Majesty."

She was accustomed to obeying Sofia’s orders, and this time was no exception.

But this time, her thoughts differed from before.

Angelina was startled by her bold thought and quickly took her leave.

Faced with Roland’s perplexity, Angelina too felt helpless.

She didn’t understand the Empress’s arrangement, only able to internally justify it as unwillingness to argue with the mundane.

Angelina vaguely felt that Sofia seemed different from before, but couldn’t pinpoint how.

She could only dispel her worries and discuss the diplomatic event with Roland.

Roland's arrangement was simple; Angelina would go first to feel out the situation, and he would show up during the final confrontation.

This arrangement was normal; after all, many countries had their Prime Ministers doubling as Foreign Ministers, and if the national leader couldn't attend, the Prime Minister could substitute.

If Angelina didn't attend, it would seem somewhat impolite.

Roland's reason for not going was his sensitive identity, being the Vice Emperor of the Sussex Empire, Prime Minister of the Jin Yuan Republic, and Cardinal Minister of the Vladimir Empire.

If the interests of these three countries conflicted, who would he side with?

Better not to attend.

Angelina expressed understanding but couldn't guess Roland's true intentions.

Chapter 574: Which Side Is He On? (Part 2)

How could a shameless guy like Roland possibly feel awkward over something so trivial? He merely wanted to stay and persuade Sofia to change her mind and go in person.

Diplomatic negotiations are truly exhausting; one must assert their position, test the opponent's limits, make appropriate concessions, and outlast their opponent in patience.

Every stage is a contest of wisdom, skill, and patience.

Every diplomat will employ all their efforts to secure interests for their own country.

Even though their job is about compromise, they won't compromise easily.

Only negotiations like those of the Wende Empire, where the enemy's army encircled the capital, are easy to conduct.

Angelina always acts swiftly; once assigned, she wouldn't hesitate and soon handed over her work to Roland before setting off on her journey.

With seventy percent incomprehension and thirty percent helplessness, Angelina boarded the carriage, heading westward under the escort of the diplomatic mission, towards Francis City.

She had an inexplicable feeling towards this city.

The war that conquered the Wende Empire could hardly be called a true war. The decaying and aged Empire quickly collapsed under the impact of three younger and more vibrant countries.

The bizarre parliamentary system and intricate local powers of the Wende Empire made the capabilities that the Imperial Family could mobilize less than a quarter of the nation's total strength.

The fact that the three great powers besieged the declining and aged Wende Empire for over half a year demonstrates the deep foundation of Wende.

Their lack of a full-force assault was merely to avoid excessive depletion.

After all, at that time, the looming threat in their minds was the Freedom Alliance, and specifically Roland.

In Angelina's view, Roland was indeed the core of the Freedom Alliance.

Without him, the Jin Yuan Republic would still be wasting its strength in internal strife. Without him, while the Sussex Empire might remain unbeatable at sea, it would most likely retreat on land.

When that time comes, it would be a showdown between the land power countries uniting the entire continent's strength and the maritime Empire, Sussex.

Unfortunately, there is no "if."

Roland is there, continuously bolstering the Freedom Alliance’s strength.

Sofia doesn’t want to carry out a decapitation strike, and Angelina fully understands. Few normal people would find joy in crushing ants.

In Sofia’s eyes, all life in the world is like ants, and she would not crush ants without reason.

Fortunately, Roland is now her colleague.

With Sofia for military, Roland for literature, and Sif and Alina supporting diplomacy, Angelina couldn’t comprehend what the Prudon Kingdom was thinking.

A week later, in Francis City.

As Angelina stepped off the carriage, she felt even more puzzled.

King Otto VI of the Prudon Kingdom personally came to greet her.

The actual power wielded by the Empire’s Prime Minister might be greater than that of a Kingdom’s King, but in terms of political status, it is slightly inferior.

No matter how small, a King is still a monarch of a nation, whereas a Prime Minister is merely an assisting minister.

Moreover, the Vladimir Empire now has a Cardinal Minister, making her only the third-ranked figure.

According to diplomatic protocol, sending a Prime Minister or Foreign Minister from the Prudon Kingdom to greet her would have sufficed.

In Angelina's understanding, since the Prudon Kingdom wanted to take the forefront, they would most likely send the Foreign Minister to perform a formality.

Yet, King Otto VI greeted her with the full honors reserved for state guests, which left her somewhat bewildered.

Though puzzled, she maintained her composure and followed Otto into the carriage.

Unlike other countries, the carriage of the Prudon Imperial Family is built to the standards of a chariot.

With a bulletproof metal shell, crossbow launcher, and the somewhat intimidating black eagle emblem, it appeared as though it was prepared for the military.

This wasn't surprising.

Other countries established militaries to maintain national defense, while Prudon is the only one that possesses a military of a nation.

The citizens of the Prudon Kingdom, from top to bottom, young and old, are fervent militarists.

Even the pigeons by the roadside enjoy fighting.

Angelina was unfazed by this; what surprised her was their attitude.

Since she couldn't figure it out, she simply chose to say nothing and waited for Otto to make a statement.

Sitting on the soft cushion opposite her, Otto, although over sixty years old, was well-preserved, looking only about thirty or forty.

Angelina had a sense of illusion, as King Otto appeared even younger than he had three months ago, with a radiant smile exuding energy.

She was curious but couldn’t directly inquire.

As she found herself in a bit of a dilemma, Otto spoke with candor.

"Miss Angelina, this is the power of Alamanni technology."

"Not Otto, but Alamanni?" This time, it was Angelina’s turn to be surprised.

It is widely recognized that this world has always seen the emergence of some war-crazed races and countries, driven by fanatical beliefs to wage war against the entire world.

The war-crazed nation of the Sixth Era was the Odin Empire.

In the era before that, it was the Alamanni Empire.

In mainstream continental perception, the Odin People are seen as the descendants of the Alamanni people, or even the Alamanni people themselves.

The Alamanni Empire offended almost everyone in the previous era and was ruthlessly suppressed.

Despite Alamanni technology being the world’s foremost, despite their population having the highest education level, despite their strong combat will, they couldn’t withstand the world’s hatred wishing their demise.

Thus the war-crazed from the previous era fell.

Before their demise, the unwilling Alamanni sent countless weapons, equipment, and books into the underground city and then detonated powerful super bombs.

The super bombs were not just one, but many.

The terrifying chain explosions not only destroyed the powerful Empire but also made those who besieged them pay the price of eternal nightmares.

Chapter 575: Which Side Is He On? The Middle (Part 3)

Most of them didn't even qualify for nightmares, as they were turned to ash in the explosion.

The Alamanni Empire perished, its history buried beneath the reign of the Magic Empire in the first half of the Sixth Era.

The Magic Empire's technological tree revolved around Magic Crystal Stone and showed no interest in the technological achievements of the Alamanni.

They believed that mechanical technology could never compete with noble magic and did not deliberately persecute the descendants of the Alamanni, the Odin people; however, the Odin people fired the first shot to overthrow the Magic Empire.

History is so wondrous, always drawing irregular circles.

When Otto mentioned Alamanni technology, Angelina wasn't surprised; she merely responded politely to Otto with a few words.

Angelina's attitude did not exceed Otto's expectations. After exchanging a few words with Angelina, he found an excuse to leave.

It's not that Otto was impolite, but a new guest had arrived.

The order in which countries came to the meeting was not directly related to distance, but rather to national power.

Empress Sif of Sussex preferred to pitch a tent at the already ruined Frank Castle and wait for the conference to start rather than enter the negotiation site early.

After all, she was the monarch of the greatest maritime power of the time; how could she arrive before others?

Otto was welcoming the representative from the Talia Kingdom.

The Talia Kingdom had already engaged in warfare before the continental war began.

They first fought back and forth with the local natives in the South Continent, and then under the chaos within the Jin Yuan Republic, they secretly moved boundary markers, attempting to snatch territories through sneak attacks.

This sort of clownish behavior enraged the then-President Marco of Jin Yuan Kingdom.

Can’t handle others, can’t handle you?

Marco, already overwhelmed by internal conflicts, seized the opportunity to vent, unhesitatingly sending troops to counter-attack, not only catching the act of moving boundary markers but also pushing back into Talia, forcing them to surrender and cede three cities as punishment.

This is Talia.

A magical country that perfectly plays the role of a clown without a mask.

However, after the continental war began, they surprisingly sided with the Free Union, which seemed less advantageous at the time.

Sometimes, choices matter more than efforts.

This is the case with Talia.

They had the qualifications to be at the table, while the Weimar Federation, which was stronger than them, and the Oden Kingdom, which had similar combat strength, became the meal on the table.

When Otto Kingdom saw the representative from the Talia Kingdom, Otto was even stunned and forgot his diplomatic etiquette.

Wait, what's going on here?

The representative for the Talia Kingdom's negotiation was actually Lisa?

Otto VI took intelligence work seriously, and he was very familiar with the birds surrounding Roland.

Lisa held a special place in Roland's heart, perhaps not as much as Sif with her perfect looks, but not much less either.

Otto had a sudden revelation.

Lisa was a Talian; the Talia Kingdom needed a negotiation representative, so she came.

Everything seemingly unreasonable became clear.

Damn cunning!

Otto VI couldn't help but curse the opportunistic behavior of the Talia Kingdom internally.

Other countries at the table fought their way out of the meat grinder on their own merits; Talia was different, relying solely on siding with the right ally.

They brought out Lisa just to flaunt their connections, to cling forcefully, but so what? Lisa was now their negotiation envoy.

Even if she didn’t say a word, it would still be enough.

In any case, this was a magical world.

Lisa politely exchanged a few words with Otto before quickly getting to the main point.

"Honorable Your Majesty Otto, did you see Roland? Which side is he on this time?"

Otto’s lips slightly curled up as he responded with humorous candor, breaking the stereotypical image of the Odin people by shrugging and smiling:

"Probably in the middle."

"What does ’middle’ mean?" Lisa was confused; Roland’s stance was her stance, but this time Roland had no stance, so what was she supposed to do?

Lisa suddenly drooped, even losing the mood for pleasantries.

By sheer coincidence, she had formed an association with the Talia people.

After a thorough examination (pure fabrication), the Talia Kingdom finally traced back Lisa’s roots, finding her clan’s origins.

It was the Sala Clan, a noble family of the Talia from the Magic Empire period.

And so, Lisa became a true Duke of power from the Talia Kingdom, representing Talia in negotiations.

Although she left Talia when she was young, Lisa's heart still belonged to her homeland. Now that her country needed her, of course, she was willing to step up.

She thought it was a good task, only to unexpectedly find she had to use her brain to think about politics?

After Lisa's brain crashed for a full three minutes, she finally found her plan B.

"Then what about Empress Sylph?"

"She's staying in the ruins across the way, refusing to come to the meeting area." Otto smiled self-mockingly, using the motion of grooming his beard to cover his awkwardness.

Lisa was even more bewildered.

If those two aren't attending the conference, what exactly are they doing?

They were writing letters for fun.

When Sif received Roland's letter, she immediately replied.

As the letter raced across thousands of kilometers, Sif couldn't help but doodle on Roland's magic letter paper.

She even drew a picture to express her feelings.

Unaware of the special function of the stationery, she laughed and doodled maniacally.

While she was joyfully playing, the words on the paper changed.

"Dear, this letter seems to allow remote communication; did you see my message?"

"I saw it. Too bad my cat seemed to be cursed by magic just now, suddenly going mad, grabbing the quill, and scribbling randomly on the paper. Did you see it?"

Sif nonchalantly made up a story, but her cheeks flushed instantly.

Bad news: Roland saw everything she wrote just now.

Good news: No one else saw it besides Roland.

Roland surely wouldn’t laugh at her, though she couldn’t bear it herself.

To cover her embarrassment, Sif hurriedly continued to write on the paper:

"By the way, when are you coming over? I’d like to go to the negotiation area with you."

"Sorry, I’m the Cardinal Minister; I can’t leave as I please. Angelina’s the one going."

Disappointed that Roland wouldn’t come, Sif casually wrote, "What about the old woman? Is she hibernating again?"

"Sofia is only a few years older than us. If you talk nonsense, be careful she might get upset."

Sif snorted softly, "I’m not afraid. She can’t see it anyway."

Suddenly recalling something, Sif's expression changed, "Wait, are you saying it's just you and the old woman at Saint Rurik Palace now? No, no, this is too dangerous."

Roland gently massaged his forehead, reminding Sif with a sigh, "We're friends, not enemies. What danger could there be? Besides, there are one hundred seventy thousand people at Saint Rurik Palace."

"It's dangerous, all the same; nearly thirty-year-old old women have especially high demands, like a hungry wolf. Be sure to protect yourself out there."

Sif sighed wistfully, putting down her quill, having lost the mood to continue writing the letter.

She felt something was amiss as if there was something dirty staring at her from behind.

That old spinster Sofia must have no good intentions.

Sif could accept Lisa because she was almost family to Roland; she could also accept Alina because she knew her place.

But the old woman was different.

She was truly bad.

Sif sighed wistfully, lying on the velvet cushion, feeling the sharpness of the small stones beneath it, making her mood worse.

What she didn't know was that while she was simply in a bad mood, thousands of kilometers away at the Summer Palace, the old woman she spoke of was now furious enough to kill someone.

Chapter 576: This Is the Price

Destroy, world!

Sofia's fingertips brushed over the letter, her eyes filled with murderous intent.

If anger could kill, Sif would already be dead.

If Sif were right in front of her now, she would...

She would definitely sit quietly.

Because she couldn't defeat Sif at the moment.

That world-shattering sword cut off the path to Ascension to Divinity, which even if completed, couldn't fight the three deserters.

She once stood atop the clouds and mountains, returning to the peak as the foremost under the gods was not difficult.

The real challenge was how to defeat those three traitors who had been in the Divine Domain for five eras, their power incomparable to the past.

She had two choices.

The best would be to find the truly invincible path, where no matter how arrogant the three traitors were, she could kill them with one sword strike.

The second choice was to fight alongside Roland and others, using the advantage of numbers and the home ground to defeat them.

Sofia's proud nature made her choose the former without hesitation, but she wasn't entirely dismissive of the latter option.

Thinking of the three traitors, Sofia felt her murderous intent swell even more.

Compared to them, the sharp-tongued Sif seemed as endearing as a little girl from next door.

Pretty, but noisy.

Out of sight, out of mind, Sofia placed the Endless Letter into an envelope and casually tossed it into the bookshelf.

Walking out of the study, she strolled through the back garden with a grim face.

Gazing at the plum and ice flowers before her, she fell into deep thought.

"Am I really getting old?"

Her eyes landed on the already frozen sea, watching a polar bear laboriously move its body to engage in a life-or-death battle with a small seal, her sharp gaze softened somewhat.

As she pondered life, a deep blue silhouette quietly approached.

Sofia slightly furrowed her brow, reached out, and grasped the deep blue silhouette, holding it firmly.

She slowly stood up, her hair flying in the wind, changing back from blue to jet-black.

Of course, she wasn’t old, just had existed for a long time.

If counting from the era where she retained her last consciousness, how young could Sif be?

She came from the Second Era, Sif and Roland from the Third Era, they were all old things.

If counted in terms of rebirth age, they were only in their twenties; compared to the long lifespans of high Tier Transcendents, they were still very young.

Since she’s not an old woman, Sif’s venomous attacks naturally had no effect.

Sofia released her hand, a hint of a smile appeared at the corners of her lips.

However, her smile lasted only half a second before fading.

Her fair, jade-like hand was holding the deep blue ice spirit.

More precisely, the once deep blue ice spirit, now fragments of the ice spirit.

Born from the extreme cold, the deep blue ice spirit was adept at various ice skills, it lacked a traditional life form but had its consciousness.

It was Sofia’s loyal servant.

Yet, in her recent fury, Sofia inadvertently crushed the deep blue ice spirit that had approached to show concern.

The deep blue ice spirit had no concept of life; as long as Sofia infused it with ice energy, it could be revived at any time.

For the Empress of the Frosty Winter, this was not difficult, yet Sofia currently couldn’t do it.

She had abandoned everything related to Frosty Winter, unable to harness ice energy anymore.

The deep blue ice spirit could not be revived.

This sudden change plunged Sofia into silence.

She wouldn’t be sentimental enough to cry over the fragments of the deep blue ice spirit; she even envied her past self who could cry and laugh.

But that was a memory from five eras ago.

At that time, she felt like a stranger.

Sofia gazed at the ice spirit fragments, silently for a long time, and scattered the pieces onto the frozen sea.

The shattered ice crystals glistened under the sun, sparkling with dazzling, enchanting colors of breathtaking beauty.

The deep blue ice spirit once followed the greatest Empress of the Frosty Winter, and in this charming afternoon, transformed into radiant rainbow light back to nature.

A fitting end.

As the deep blue ice spirit shattered, the lingering gloom on her heart melted away with the rainbow light.

So that sword hadn’t severed everything cleanly.

Her body still held too much ice energy, tempting her to return to the "right path" of shaping the Frosty Winter Goddess’s divinity crystallizes.

"The right path, huh?"

Sofia’s lips curled with ninety-nine parts disdain and one part relief, reaching back, casually grabbing the hilt of the Bright Blue Fury.

She now had two choices.

Shatter the hilt.

Or reshape the complete Bright Blue Fury and then without hesitation gift it to Angelina.

She chose the latter without a second thought.

She promised Angelina, and she didn't want to break her word.

More importantly, she decided to cut the past and bid farewell to everything about Frosty Winter.

Her past self was like a painting filled with deep blue watercolor, magnificent but with no space for new strokes.

Without a complete break from the past, how could one embrace rebirth?

Sofia's eyes gleamed with an unusual brilliance.

It had no color, yet it shone.

She hadn't set the path forward, yet faintly touched upon an unknown world.

With a tap of her toe, a piece of rock flew out.

Leaping in one bound, her slender body stood in an absolutely standard pose atop the rock, flying toward the Winter Palace fifteen kilometers away.

Below the Holy Sanctuary, humans couldn't fly on their own power.

But a significant difference between humans and animals is the ability to use tools.

Sofia only needed a piece of rock and a cape to traverse a distance of over ten kilometers.

Not only her, the ten Tier Five Strong selected in the Battle of White Mountain could all do this.

These ten stood at the peak of human power on land.

Chapter 577 - This Is the Price (2)

She is atop the clouds.

She has only temporarily given up most of her powers, but if her life were truly in danger, she wouldn't mind temporarily reclaiming some strength.

However, she would never do so unless absolutely necessary.

There is no going back; she doesn't want to take that path.

Sofia gracefully arrived at Winter Palace Square.

Sahalin, who was commanding the fountain's repairs, was startled but quickly regained his composure upon seeing the Empress, coming forward to pay respects.

In his mind, Sofia was synonymous with invincibility.

After that awe-inspiring move, this view had become a mental imprint.

Sofia glanced at the fountain being repaired, didn't inquire further, and merely said calmly:

"Send word to Roland, principle issues can't be compromised in any way. If former allies want to be our enemies, give them a proper burial."

"I'll be leaving for a while, pay close attention to domestic affairs."

Hearing Sofia mention her departure, Sahalin's voice trembled, "Your Majesty, where are you going?"

As soon as the words left his mouth, he wished he could slap himself.

Was it appropriate to inquire about the Empress's whereabouts?

Before the Battle of White Mountain, Sofia had already distanced herself from affairs, often leaving Saint Rurik Palace, sometimes for half a year or more.

Some had questioned the meaning behind Sofia's actions.

However, the decisive move at White Mountain silenced everyone.

Just as Sahalin was about to apologize for his slip, Sofia's detached voice slowly drifted over.

"No need for that, I'm merely stepping out, and I'll be back. While I'm away, Roland will be in charge of all affairs, assisted by Angelina."

When Sahalin looked up, Sofia's figure had already dissolved into the distance.

Sahalin breathed a sigh of relief and then squinted his eyes, puzzled.

The Empress did depart swiftly, but not much faster than he could.

She was already a Tier Four extraordinary force, quite close to the Holy Sanctuary, yet why has her speed increased so little?

After pondering for a moment, Sahalin finally gave himself a hearty slap.

Sahalin, oh, Sahalin, it's because the Empress took pity on you, a weaker being, that she slowed down her pace a bit. If Her Majesty moved at supersonic speed, what could he hear?

The Empress wasn't slow; it was her silent kindness.

Her Majesty is indeed so gentle, why does she meet someone as blind as Ivan IV?

Sahalin was indignant, though he dared not voice it, yet he still felt it unworthy for Sofia.

...

Francis City.

The hotels arranged for diplomats from various countries were located in adjacent neighborhoods, close enough for ease of visiting each other's rooms and conducting transactions, yet allowing for a certain distance to avoid conflicts.

On the Tulip Hotel's terrace, Roland was swishing a goblet, savoring the Milan Champagne royally selected and brought by Lisa from Talia.

As it turns out, Milan Champagne in this world had no negative effects, and might even be a lucky buff, so there's no harm in indulging.

Lisa squinted her eyes, sitting cheerfully across from Roland.

The chair beneath her had traces of warmth.

Not hers; she had just arrived.

After the Battle of White Mountain, she successfully broke through to Tier Five extraordinary profession [Scorching Flame] and simultaneously mastered Level 5 Flame Magic, Meteor Fire Rain, becoming a Great Mage.

She, extremely sensitive to temperature, could easily deduce the previous guest's identity from the residual warmth of the chair.

The warm breeze from the forest carried a hint of the elf.

It was indeed Sif.

In this city, there seemed to be some unspoken accord reached among Sif, Lisa, and Alina.

Except at public events like banquets and meetings, they wouldn't appear simultaneously.

Initially, Lisa and Sif just missed each other, visiting Roland one after the other.

Then, Alina invited Roland to stargaze together.

Once, twice, thrice, they all showed up consecutively.

The perceptive girls sensed each other's presence.

They came to a mutual realization that perhaps Sif/Lisa/Alina thought it best not to meet for now.

Since that's the case, let's respect each other and maintain this understanding.

Afterward, the meticulous Lisa realized it was a misunderstanding she couldn't easily resolve.

Some things are better left unsaid; once said, everyone would be in a sticky situation.

They too cautiously sought a manner of interaction acceptable to all.

Sharing drinks, reveling, or slumbering together might be a man's dream, but the dream was shattered, leaving behind nothing but a sea of flowers void of even a blossom.

In any case, Lisa would surely never ask who just arrived; she was here to share her joy with Roland, not to add to his troubles.

"Wait, the wine's temperature is too low."

Lisa casually reached out, holding Roland's wine glass, precisely transferring warmth.

Seeing her cheery demeanor, Roland's lips curled into an appealing smile.

"Four years," he said gently.

"What four years?" Lisa paused.

Four years was an unfamiliar figure to her, having known Roland far longer.

Four years ago...

Suddenly, she felt a tightness in her chest, as four years ago marked the day Roland met Sif.

She could accept Sif holding more importance in Roland's heart; who wouldn't find a beautiful elf delightful?

But she still hoped Roland wouldn't be so blatant about it in front of her.

Just as she lowered her head slightly, Roland laughed, saying, "How much do you think this hotel is worth."

"Eleven thousand pounds, maybe." Although feeling a bit stifled, Lisa would never project negative emotions onto Roland, forcing a polite smile and softly responded.

"Could buy a hundred houses at 117 Belphar Street."

Roland softly spoke, "Yet in my heart, that's our home, invaluable."

Lisa abruptly lifted her gaze, looking at Roland.

Chapter 578 - This Is the Price (3)

His gaze was especially clear, drifting leisurely towards the direction of the Imperial Capital.

It was evident that he genuinely missed that house.

It was a small courtyard he had bought with the prize money from a literary competition, and it was also the cozy home Lisa had carefully tended to.

However, with the furniture Sif had sent coming in, Lisa always had a feeling that the room was too crowded.

Later, she finally understood that it wasn't an illusion.

Lisa felt a bit forlorn, but she quickly let out a sigh of relief.

At least during the time from Roland's parents' death until his fate was bound with Sif, Roland was exclusively hers.

Neither Sif nor Alina had ever had such complete possession.

Too bad that at that time, both she and Roland were in a bewildered state, missing the most beautiful moments together.

This is probably life.

Beauty and regret sometimes are dance partners.

Lisa was no longer melancholic, but raised her glass and smiled at Roland, "Although I can't think of a reason, let's toast anyway."

Roland certainly wouldn't refuse.

The glasses clinked lightly, then they drank it all in one go.

The world's beauty is always like wine in a glass, seemingly plentiful, gone in a single sip.

Footsteps sounded, someone was coming.

"Cardinal, urgent message."

With the voice of the diplomatic attaché ringing out, the time for popping champagne was over.

Roland opened the door, received the urgent message from the attaché, and when he turned back, Lisa was already gone, leaving only the scent of wine and her unique perfume fragrance.

Public issues are public, private ones are private.

Now she represents the Talia Kingdom, and Roland represents the Vladimir Empire.

They could meet in private, but she would consciously avoid suspicion while Roland was working.

Opening the envelope, Roland read the contents of the urgent message, then took out a lighter to burn the letter to ashes, and cleaned up the ashes diligently.

No trace of expression could be seen on his face.

The contents of this urgent message were not beyond his expectations, the only surprise was that Sofia had no intention of attending the meeting at all.

Originally, he thought she would come to support him, offering a strong backing.

Roland shrugged, not taking it too seriously.

He wasn't so incompetent that he needed a leader to sort things out at every turn.

Since he accepted a palace from others, he had to fulfill his duties earnestly.

With Sofia's clear stance, the task became easier.

The Wende Empire must be restored, and the direct dominion of the original Imperial Family must be returned.

Of course, if the Prudon Kingdom and the Tirol Kingdom gave face, letting them have some share wouldn't be out of question.

After all, everyone contributed, no one should come out empty-handed.

If the defeated country didn't pay a price, wouldn't the victorious country become a joke?

Roland didn't consider the negotiation to be too difficult.

As long as the Vladimir Empire, Jin Yuan Republic, Sussex Empire, and Talia Kingdom pressured together, would Prudon and Tirol really dare to fight a war on two fronts against the whole world?

The negotiations over the past few days confirmed this point.

Although the Prudon Kingdom and Tirol Kingdom maintained a firm stance, they never acted aggressively, instead, conducting the negotiations fully in accordance with diplomatic protocols.

They never resorted to threats, only repeatedly emphasizing how much they lost in annexing the Wende Empire and the subsequent war with the Freedom Alliance.

"We demand reasonable compensation!"

This was the phrase most frequently on their lips.

Their demands were relatively reasonable; it was just that the territories they requested were a bit excessive.

The ones arguing against them were not the Wende Imperial Family. Having retrieved their direct lands, they were already fortunate to be able to restore their country, so they didn't dare to haggle.

The greatest obstacle was instead Christine.

Miss Saintess insisted that the Holy City of Bozinia and the surrounding Silesia area become a permanent neutral zone, directly governed by the Divine Court of Light, not belonging to any country.

Her reasoning was simple: this would minimize the Divine Court of Light's involvement in secular wars.

This was a justifiable reason, and she indeed had the power to demand it.

If she chose a different location, no country would oppose, but unfortunately, Bozinia was not only a Holy City but also the region richest in coal, iron, and non-ferrous metal resources in all of Rodinia.

Moreover, Silesia and the other two provinces were high-quality industrial zones, with a thriving textile industry.

The Prudon Kingdom and Tirol Kingdom went to war precisely for this land.

Faced with Christine's insistence, they had no choice but to change their strategy, proposing to offer a larger territory along with substantial economic compensation to help the Divine Court of Light establish a new Holy City.

As long as they vacated, they'd compensate Christine with five provinces, larger territories, more population, more fertile lands, and closer to the Holy Spring.

It was quite a lucrative deal, yet Christine refused.

Not only did she refuse, but she did so with very strong resolve, not even willing to provide any explanation.

Even Roland felt she was being somewhat overbearing.

But since she's an ally, Roland couldn't oppose her directly, so he invited her for a private conversation.

Soon after the diplomatic attaché left, the sky brightened, milky white holy light descended upon the terrace.

Without needing to guess, this grand entrance surely belonged to the former Holy Daughter of Light, now the Pope of Light.

The light became stronger, even a bit dazzling.

Roland slightly turned his head, waiting for Christine to complete her grand entrance before turning back.

"Welcome, Your Majesty the Light."

His tone carried a hint of banter.

"Christine."

The face of the Pope of Light, white as ever, carried a sacred glow, with the subtle Holy Mark adding a touch of sharpness to the sanctity.

Though her tone was a bit cold, the content was warm.

"Christine, you look much stronger now," Roland probed.

"I can hear the voice of the Lord of Light and bathe in divine favor every day. It's reasonable for me to grow stronger," Christine's somewhat stern face softened slightly.

"Then I'm no longer your match now," Roland shrugged.

"Christine will never lay a hand on Roland, never," Christine said softly, her tone as resolute as an immutable force of nature.

Roland was willing to believe, but he felt this topic was heavy, not like casual chat between friends.

He even wanted to ask, what if the Divine Oracle commanded to kill Roland?

But he wouldn't ask.

If one treasures humanity, they should not test it.

Moreover, the human light in Christine seemed to be fading, with a chilling aura gradually building around her.

"Roland will also never lay a hand on Christine, ever."

After saying this, Roland took the opportunity to probe further, "I must also affirm, my loved ones are a part of me."

Christine did not respond.

Just when Roland thought she wouldn't answer, she softly said, "Unless they oppose the Goddess, the same promise applies to them."

"You are my only friend, this is an exception. By the way, Sofia isn't your wife, right?"

Christine's face showed a long-lost liveliness, almost making Roland believe she was still the somewhat naive, stubborn Saintess.

He quickly shook his head.

"My regard for the sanctity of life exceeds your imagination."

Christine's lips showed a nearly imperceptible hint of a smile.

"Bozinia is not my Holy City; it was the chamber of the Goddess before she went to the Divine Domain. If I were to give the Holy City as booty to the enemy, how could I face the Goddess, or the millions of devout followers?"

"Roland, can you help me this once?"

Her gaze carried a hint of plea.

Roland understood; this was Christine's line in the sand.

He gave a firm slap to his chest, loudly saying, "Your Majesty the Light need not worry, Knight of Light Roland is willing to follow the guidance of Light and fight to defend it."

Seeing his determined gaze, Christine's heart trembled slightly.

The title "Your Majesty the Light" meant handling matters officially.

Though she gained everything, it felt like she lost it all.

Her fingertips rose and then slowly fell, Christine stood up gracefully.

"Knight of Light, the Goddess will remember your effort."

The milky white light dissipated, leaving the seat empty, with only residual warmth.

Chapter 579 - The Apocalypse Prophecy Emerges

Roland could, of course, understand Christine's promise.

She would never turn against Roland under any circumstances, but this applied only to him personally.

If those around Roland were to oppose the Goddess, she would show no mercy.

That was enough.

At least she wasn't completely brainwashed by religion and hadn't forgotten the camaraderie of fighting side by side.

In all fairness, if their positions were reversed, Roland couldn't promise more either.

Perhaps Christine had heard the call of the Goddess, or perhaps she was concerned about the restoration of Wende. She spoke without her usual composure.

Roland silently pondered what she would do if he were truly on the opposing side of the Goddess and Christine neither wanted to harm him nor disobey the Goddess.

Her position would make her future very difficult.

"No matter what, you are my best friend, a comrade worthy of entrusting my life to."

As Christine's figure disappeared at the doorway, Roland murmured softly.

Christine's visit was just a minor episode in this continental summit.

The negotiations continued afterwards, but there was no progress due to the significant differences in both sides' positions.

Christine had reasons to safeguard the Holy City, and both the Prudon Kingdom and the Tirol Kingdom had an urgent need to take this industrial zone.

Fortunately, everyone was exhausted from the fighting. Though difficult, they didn't want to resort to force, so the negotiations continued.

Just as the negotiations reached an impasse, the Nubian Kingdom representative proposed a new suggestion.

The Wende Empire wanted to be restored, the Holy City needed to be preserved, and the two kingdoms wanted the industrial zone; everyone had reasons.

If so, why not release the Weimar Federation, giving part of it as compensation to the two kingdoms, while the two kingdoms relinquished claims over the Holy City and the Wende Imperial Family's territory?

This compensation proposal was quite good, taking into account all parties' interests, but Alina disagreed.

The annexation of the Weimar Federation was a highlight of her political achievements after taking office.

If she were to give back the Weimar Federation, not only would she cease to be Emperor, but even her title of Liberator would be stripped away.

It's easy to swallow interests, but spitting them out is difficult.

Then someone proposed that the Talia Kingdom give up two provinces as compensation in exchange for the Jin Yuan Republic relinquishing half of the Weimar Federation.

Now it was Lisa's turn to be displeased.

The Talia Kingdom, though they performed ridiculously on the battlefield, first getting beaten up by the Jin Yuan people and then getting hammered by the Holy Alliance, had already paid the price.

They had already ceded land and paid reparations to the Jin Yuan Kingdom; there was no justification for compensating twice for a single defeat.

In response to Lisa's argument, Alina took a step back and suggested that the Nubian Kingdom give up two vassal states to be annexed by the Talia Kingdom as compensation for their ceding.

Now it was the Nubian Kingdom's turn to refuse.

They had fought tooth and nail, losing their entire navy, and it wasn't to cede land and pay reparations.

Those two vassal states were only nominally independent; in reality, they were essential zones that they had painstakingly managed.

If they sacrificed, who would compensate them?

At this point, someone proposed that Nubia use the former lands of Samaria between the Rodinia Continent and the South Continent, as well as the Red Sand Peninsula controlling the Land Sea, as compensation.

Although the Nubian Kingdom's navy was entirely destroyed, they still have a large army, along with the Crow Sage who broke through to Tier Five during the Battle of White Mountain, plus full support from the Divine Court of Nature, putting their paper strength even above the Odin Countries.

If they were to make concessions, they would need compensation.

This condition was naturally acceptable for Nubia; although Samaria's former lands to the Red Sand Peninsula had few areas suitable for cultivation, the geographic location was extremely important.

If they captured the Red Sand Peninsula and built a grand canal connecting the southern outer sea with the Land Sea, their status in the global trade system would rise dramatically.

No one opposed this plan now.

After all, the ones to make a sacrifice this time were the Sussex Empire and the South Continent.

Roland, who proposed the suggestion, naturally wasn't opposed by the Sussex Empire.

The tribal chiefs and small nations of the South Continent might object, but that was up to the Nubian Kingdom to figure out how to convince them with force.

Since neither the Vladimir Empire nor the Sussex Empire objected, the deal was set.

Simply put, every nation present made some concessions and gave up some interests, but everyone maintained their bottom lines.

The truly significant concession was made by the Memphis Emirate, which originally owned land near the Red Sand Peninsula.

But they didn't even have the qualifications to be at the table, so naturally, no one cared about their opinions.

This was diplomacy.

A grand division of spoils masked as negotiations.

With the framework set, next came the discussion of details.

Each nation's negotiating representatives would argue based on their country's strength and battlefield performance to secure more authority for their nation.

The chief representatives and national leaders only set the negotiating framework; the specific details would have to be contested in a verbal battle by each nation's diplomats.

In controlling specific details, the original interest of 100 points could potentially be increased to 130 points, or compressed to 70 points.

There could be a twofold difference in fluctuation.

Over the next week, national leaders and dignitaries continuously attended banquets organized by the host country, tiring themselves out.

In the meantime, diplomats argued over a city, a mountain range, or a river.

They argued until their throats nearly ignited with sparks.

They had to argue; if they didn't argue now, would they wait to be blamed by their descendants?

After a week of encounters, negotiation progress was not very satisfactory.

The biggest obstacle was the Prudon Kingdom and the Tirol Kingdom, which desired more than what matched their perceived strength.

According to Lisa, they seemed somewhat out of touch with reality.

But Roland didn't think so.

The two countries' foreign ministers were seasoned diplomats who had been in the diplomatic service for years. They should've known better than to be so rigid.

Chapter 580 - The Apocalypse Prophecy Appears (2)

Since they insist, they must have a reason.

After much contemplation, Roland decided to be straightforward. He summoned the foreign ministers of the two countries and demanded they provide a legitimate reason, not to waste time.

"We're all civilized people here, no need for any childish tantrums. Take on as much as you can handle. If an agreement can't be reached in three days, I'll return home immediately and have Her Majesty Sofia negotiate with you."

Roland's ultimatum was full of threat.

Will Sofia negotiate?

She won't.

Her negotiation tactic is to put a sword to the opponent's neck and ask them whether they agree.

But her success rate is the highest because negotiations at sword-point are always the most efficient.

Roland's message was simple; he's tired of this. If the Prudon Kingdom and Tirol Kingdom can't come up with a reasonable explanation, prepare for a beating.

His ultimatum was quickly met with a response.

"Tomorrow at noon, all nations' heads and representatives are invited to visit their latest archaeological results at the old city ruins thirty kilometers east of Francis."

This response made the representatives of all nations realize that these two entities had unearthed treasures, hence their boldness.

The representatives didn't care much.

In this era where technology relies on archaeology, who hasn't dug up some treasures? They just didn't want to reveal their trump cards so early.

Representatives were curious about why the two countries believed that excavation results could change the balance of power among nations.

At the Franks' defense battle, linked explosions set by Tom unintentionally triggered an underground ammunition depot, causing a nuclear bomb level explosion, sending a hundred thousand troops sky-high.

Such level of archaeological excavation is already at its limit, but the explosion that killed ten thousand people was due to a host of favorable circumstances, not replicable.

Even if the two countries unearthed a similarly sized ammunition depot, it would only slightly benefit them, not change much.

Representatives analyzed the outcomes of the Odin ruins, some with worry, some with curiosity.

First, ruling out country destruction level war machines.

Even at its peak, the Odin Empire didn't possess such power, and it is even less likely they buried their trump card underground.

After a round of guessing and reasoning, most believed the excavation results to be immensely city-destroying level, likely super-gigantic machinery inherited by the Odin Empire from the Alamanni Empire.

The Odin Empire had organized nationwide excavations in those days and obtained significant industrial scientific heritage from the Alamanni Empire, once causing bloodbaths across the continent.

It's not unusual to unearth several super machines.

Some even speculate about what kind of war machines these could be.

In a mix of curiosity and anxiety, night fell.

The representatives and diplomats of various countries were slightly anxious, even sleepless, but Roland didn't care, already changed into silk pajamas, embracing his beloved wife, enjoying the night's tranquility.

Though separated from Sif for less than a month, longing had already tormented the young couple.

Previously pretending, both had to stay in their respective hotels.

Now that the negotiations were nearing the end, there was no need to pretend.

Sif closed her eyes slightly, lifting her head, her luscious lips as fresh as ripe strawberries.

Roland could barely restrain himself, kissing without hesitation.

Just as passion threatened to engulf him, he suddenly remembered Sif was pregnant, quickly loosening his grip.

"Sorry, I'm almost overwhelmed."

"Why hold back? I'm your wife." Sif opened her eyes, her gaze dreamy.

Roland shook his head slowly, his fingertips pointing to her still flat belly.

Though it was flat, their child was there, a fragile little life maturing healthily.

Seeing Roland's painful restraint, Sif bit her lip, pulled his neck closer, letting his ear rest against her belly.

"Listen yourself."

Roland chuckled silently; the little one wasn't even two months yet, not developed enough to have a heartbeat.

Still, this did not trouble him.

A Transcendent sensibilities are sharp; even through the skin, they can detect life within.

Roland's expression changed instantly.

He sensed no presence of life, the tranquil palace void of occupancy.

He wanted to get to the bottom of it but knew losing a child impacts a mother more deeply, quickly embracing Sif and comforting softly.

He finally understood why Sif was so anxious.

She wanted another child.

No time to mourn the lost child, Roland adjusted his emotions and resumed his advance.

...

The couple continued till the wee hours, only stopping when Sif couldn't endure any longer and begged for mercy.

Noticing Roland's grim efforts to bear his sorrow, Sif couldn't hold her laughter anymore.

Roland: "..."

Even though elves' family sentiment isn't as deep as humans', there was no need to laugh at such a time.

He couldn't bring himself to criticize Sif, but neither could he join in her laughter.

Just as his complexion turned slightly blue, Sif leaned close to his ear and murmured softly:

"Fool, the little one is on the Hidden Moon Ginkgo Tree."

Roland was stunned for several seconds before finally realizing.

Sif used the once popular Elf Race method of delegated pregnancy.

Elf Race women generally cherish beauty, and the duration elf babies spend within their mothers far exceeds humans, leading to immense damage to the elf women.

Those seamlessly beautiful women until their death usually hadn't given birth.

Once childbearing, body shape might change dramatically, or they miss the prime window for cultivation progress, lagging behind within their peers.

This is the true reason for the low birthrate among the Elf Race.

Otherwise, with the Elf Race's long lifespan and excellent physique, even a couple bearing a child every twenty years would see their population continuously growing.