

Ocean Lord 561

Chapter 561: The Final Battle, the Fall of the Kingdom of

Bass, Monica's Thoughts

The next day.

With tremendous momentum, a million-strong army marched towards the city of Kaiserven, located upstream along the Eiben River.

Their morale was exceptionally high.

Many soldiers frequently glanced at the young man standing atop the giant octopus, his figure tall and upright.

Yesterday, they witnessed this young man using colossal waves to destroy the Eiben Fortress that blocked them for two days, making it easy for them to conquer it. The colossal octopus, resembling a mountain, had sunk an entire enemy fleet right before their eyes.

With such a powerful ally, confidence surged within every heart.

Sensing the soldiers' soaring morale, Monica felt quite satisfied. The army's spirit was at its peak. She gazed at the figure atop the giant octopus's head, her eyes revealing a trace of joy.

It was essential to build a strong connection between Ji Chen, the Crown of the Ocean, and Lienhardt, as such a young and formidable individual needed to be brought closer to her objectives.

In this world, powerful individuals were always a scarce resource. Failing to act promptly might lead to regrets when other forces moved in.

While the Lienhardt Army advanced with great vigor, the city of Kaiserven was in a state of chaos.

They received news of the fall of the Eiben Fortress, with over a hundred thousand troops stationed inside it annihilated, and the fifth fleet, sent for reinforcement, completely sunk.

This news struck them like thunder on a clear day, leaving the people in the city filled with anxiety. Even this seemingly impregnable fortress, their last line of defense, was breached. With no reinforcements in sight, Kaiserven City would likely fall to the enemy's iron hooves soon.

Many commoners and nobles sought to escape under the cover of night but were met with the King's orders to seal all city gates, preparing for a last stand.

In a sense, King Bass showed a certain resolve, embodying the grand tragedy of a kingdom's downfall alongside its ruler.

However, as the soldiers of Bass fortified the city walls and defenses, preparing for a desperate struggle, a heinous massacre unfolded within the royal court of the Bass Kingdom.

Thousands of Deceivers, wearing iron masks, mercilessly wielded their blades, slaughtering everyone within the palace.

No matter if it was the king's concubines or maids, none were spared.

The palace guards had long been dispatched under the pretext of reinforcing the city's defenses, leaving the entire court defenseless. The towering palace walls and castle concealed everything happening within.

Within the vast castle, the obese King of Bass ran down the long corridor, his expression filled with terror. Behind him, an individual with a silver mask wielded a bloodied blade, trailing him deliberately, their eyes cruel and mocking.

The King's gaze was met with the same indifference as one would look at a pig destined for slaughter.

Even though the King felt exhaustion to the extreme, he dared not stop, for he knew that once he did, the blade would pierce his body without mercy.

However, as he passed by a set of doors, his foot stumbled over a raised threshold, causing him to fall abruptly to the ground. His mind went blank for an instant, and by the time he regained his senses, the sound of footsteps behind him was dangerously close.

A look of sorrow and anger appeared on the king's face. "I've done everything you asked. Why do you still want to kill me?"

Ever since this group of masked individuals poisoned and controlled him, he was forced to obey them, even launching a full-scale war against Lienhardt to save his own life.

Now, as the enemy approached the gates of Kaiserven City, they were turning against him, seeking to eliminate him and conceal their sinister plot.

The silver-masked Deceiver sneered. "You've been obedient, but you know too much. Leaking information would not bode well for our organization."

Desperation filled the king's face as he pleaded, "I can join you, leave with you, and I won't be a threat anymore."

"Perhaps that could be a solution?"

Unexpectedly, the silver-masked Deceiver began to consider the offer, raising the king's hopes. Quietly, the king reached behind his back and retrieved a dagger.

"I also know many secrets of the Bass Kingdom. Even after the kingdom's fall, I can join you with the remaining soldiers under the banner of restoration. This way, you'll have a more legitimate and justifiable means to establish a nation solely for the Deceivers..."

As the king vividly described this enticing vision, he discreetly closed the distance. Just when he was about to enter striking range with the dagger, he saw a mocking glint in the silver-masked Deceiver's eyes. A chill swept over him.

Splat!

The sound of flesh being pierced echoed, and as a heavy thud followed, the king, clutching his bleeding chest, collapsed on the ground, his pupils dilating.

The silver-masked Deceiver wiped his blade clean on the king's clothing, sneering. "A fat pig wants to join us? Do you have the qualifications?"

However, there was no hint of joy in his expression, as an insurmountable shadow lingered in his eyes.

This time, everything had seemingly gone smoothly from the start. They successfully manipulated this foolish pig into starting a war, and with their support, the Bass Army advanced swiftly. But it all crumbled in front of Feiguang City, a defeat they had not anticipated.

Losing one step meant losing every step!

It directly resulted in decades of their efforts and investments going down the drain.

All of this could be attributed to that Glory Lord named Ji Chen!

With the return of the powerful Glory Lord Ji Chen, it seemed probable that his comrades who had embarked with the third and fourth fleets to seek divine relics in the icy wilderness might have met their demise. The divine relic, most likely in his possession, would have greatly enhanced his strength..

Chapter 562: The Final Battle, the Fall of the Kingdom of Bass, Monica's Thoughts (2)

Thinking of this, the Deceiver's eyes filled with anger.

Hateful!

So hateful!

He felt a surge of frustration in his heart.

What frustrated him the most was that, despite the enemy's provocations right in front of them, they couldn't do anything to him.

Nevertheless, their group's scheme faced an unexpected setback, resulting in significant losses to their ranks. While it wasn't currently advisable to pursue further conflicts with Ji Chen in the near future, they were determined to seek revenge eventually!

When a million-strong army arrived, the entire Kaiserven City was already prepared to defend itself.

As the capital of the Bass Kingdom, Kaiserven City had walls even taller and sturdier than Eiben City. Towering arrow turrets stood, and countless siege engines were hidden between the city's battlements. Tens of thousands of soldiers were stationed on the city walls, ready for battle.

Without any delay, Monica immediately ordered the attack.

Hundreds of field alchemical artillery pieces covered the soldiers' advance, and the cannonballs rained down on the city walls, creating ripples of runes.

Several teams of Royal Lienhardt aerial units launched attacks from the sky, constantly inflicting casualties on the Bass soldiers on the city walls.

Lienhardt's three royal fleets sailed upstream on the Eiben River, engaging in combat with the two Bass Kingdom fleets guarding KaiservenCity. Ji Chen also sent out the Kraken without hesitation.

Before this ocean monster, the hundred-meter-long steel warships had little resistance. Under the bombardment of artillery and the tentacles' attacks, they could only sink one after another in despair.

At this point, Lienhardt had completely gained control of the river and began bombarding Kaiserven City with naval artillery, causing countless casualties.

With the continuous replenishment of abundant resources from Eiben City, Lienhardt's army and the player army continued to siege the city. Finally, three days later, the city gate was breached, and Lienhardt's soldiers stormed in, marking the beginning of the fall of Kaiserven City.

The battle inside the city lasted for two days and nights. As the last hundred-person team of stubborn resistance chose to surrender, the entire Kaiserven City fell into Lienhardt's hands.

When Lienhardt's banner was planted at the top of the castle representing the royal power of the Bass Kingdom, all the surviving Bass Kingdom soldiers and countless residents had pale faces and lifeless eyes.

The Bass Kingdom... had fallen!

When the soldiers entered the Bass Kingdom's palace, they found that a massacre had occurred here several days earlier, with rotting corpses everywhere.

They finally discovered that the Bass Kingdom's king had died on the throne several days ago, holding a dagger in his hand, his heart pierced, and his decaying face showed signs of despair.

It looked like suicide.

But Ji Chen felt that there must be something fishy about it. All of this was closely related to the enigmatic organization, the Deceiver, even though they didn't show up everywhere, this war was inseparable from them.

It seemed that he would have to continue questioning this so-called Revered Envoy, Katie.

But no matter what, this long-lasting war finally came to an end, and it was time to discuss the distribution of benefits with the Thorey Kingdom, the Pelan Kingdom, and even many player guilds.

However, all of this was not very relevant to Ji Chen anymore. As a significant participant in this war who turned the tide several times, he believed that the Lienhardt Grand Duchy and Monica would offer him satisfactory sincerity and rewards.

All he had to do was wait.

Sure enough, one day after the capture of Kaiserven City, Monica sent an invitation for him to meet.

In a side fortress of the Bass Kingdom's palace, after Monica's people cleaned it up, she set it up as a temporary palace where she could rest and handle post-war affairs.

Ji Chen was led by a maid all the way to a side hall and saw Monica, whom he hadn't seen for a day.

At this moment, Monica was wearing a white silk gown with golden threads, and a golden ribbon tied at her waist highlighted her astonishingly slender waist. She wore a platinum necklace on her chest, matching her delicate collarbone beautifully.

Her golden hair was tied up with a ribbon, and the slightly curled ends hung on her right shoulder, making her look both noble and elegant, with a touch of charm.

“Monica, you look beautiful today. Even the stars in the sky can’t compare to your radiance,” Ji Chen complimented in a noble tone as he entered.

To his surprise, Monica’s face immediately blushed, and she stammered, “1-1-Is that true? Lord Ji Chen, do you really think 1 look beautiful today?”

Ji Chen nodded. “Of course, if you were to openly seek a husband, I’m afraid that the talented young men would line up from Tressburg City to Feiguang City.”

Monica blushed even more, and she playfully said, “There won’t be so many, and I haven’t thought about getting married so soon...”

But if it were you...

Monica didn’t say this out loud; she kept it to herself.

Ji Chen didn’t think much of it and chuckled, patting his head. “It seems like I’m overthinking things a bit. It’s indeed too early for you.”

Although Monica appeared very mature in her actions, she was at most in her early twenties. At her age on Earth, she would still be in school.

“Oh, by the way, Monica, what did you want to talk to me about?”

Seeing Ji Chen’s lack of reaction to her earlier words, Monica couldn’t help but sigh inwardly and forced herself to stay focused.

“Lord Ji Chen, 1 recently received information about the Deceiver. It seems that those masked individuals have suffered a setback in the Bass Kingdom and have completely withdrawn from this land. They’ve taken their remaining forces to the Western Continent, where their main headquarters seems to be located.”

The Western Continent?

Ji Chen nodded thoughtfully. He had already planned to visit the Western Continent once the war between Lienhardt and Bass was over. There were two main reasons for this trip.

First, he needed to fulfill his agreement with Thotmudo and gather the dwarf tribes there.

Second, he wanted to expand his market. The Radiant Commerce Guild of the Starshine Islands had provided a channel for Ocean Crown products to enter the Western Continent. To ensure the sustainable development of the Ocean Crown, he needed to further expand the market.

The journey to the Western Continent was inevitable, and it seemed that he would encounter these schemers again in the future.

However, Ji Chen no longer feared them as much as before. The journey in the frozen wilderness had significantly boosted his power.

In this war, his strength had directly crushed their conspiracy, and years of their planning had gone up in smoke. They fled with their tails between their legs, leaving in disgrace.

But the Deceiver also possessed something that made him envious—the “Solar Furnace” they stole from the Dwarven Black Iron Forge thousands of years ago. This artifact was a true treasure of their clan. If he had the chance to snatch it back for the dwarves during his trip to the Western Continent... Ahem, he meant help the dwarves retrieve it, he would be quite pleased.

The Deceivers, who were currently retreating to their main camp, had no idea that Ji Chen had already set his sights on them.

“In addition, regarding the spoils of this war,” Monica’s words brought Ji Chen back to attention. “I will use my utmost authority to secure as many spoils as possible for you, Lord Ji Chen.

We will allocate at least one-tenth of the Bass Kingdom’s national treasury as a reward for your assistance.

Furthermore, we will designate a piece of land in the occupied territory of the Lienhardt Kingdom within the Bass Kingdom as your residence... Of course, this doesn’t require you to accept a noble title as a prerequisite, as Lienhardt no longer has the authority to grant you one.”

After all the actions taken thus far, apart from seeking revenge to some extent, wasn’t it all for the sake of interests?

Ji Chen was not the kind of person to forget his principles for the sake of profit, but he also didn’t want to do things for nothing.

The national treasury of a kingdom was undoubtedly vast, more than enough to fill an entire castle.

In addition to that, a designated residence was a substantial reward, essentially a second territory. In the future, Ocean Crown would have a place to establish itself within the Lienhardt Duchy..

Chapter 563: The Elves’ Rumors and the Nation’s Promise

“Besides, there are many other rewards. You can find out more when you come to Tressburg later.” Monica gathered her hair and smiled. “My father has wanted to meet you for a long time and wants to thank you in person.” Lienhardt Grand Duke, Julius?

Upon learning that this Grand Duke had led armies in numerous battles, expanding the Lienhardt territory twofold, and was a formidable individual at level sixty or higher, renowned for both his combat skills and strategic intelligence, Ji Chen suspected that there was a strong link between him and the Kingdom of Bass’ hasty declaration of war.

Such a formidable native leader piqued his interest.

Ji Chen nodded thoughtfully. “Very well, I will visit the Grand Duke after that.”

Seeing Ji Chen readily agree, Monica became even happier, her eyes forming crescent moons with her smile.

“That’s good. We shouldn’t delay. Let’s set off tomorrow morning.”

After confirming the time, Ji Chen returned to the temporary residence in the city. The first to greet him was Elisya, an elven girl who appeared mature but carried a childlike dependence in her expression.

She opened her arms and hugged his waist, rubbing her cheek against his chest.

“Big Brother!”

Ji Chen, who just entered the door, was almost out of breath. He looked at the heroes who followed Elisya with a strange expression.

“Who taught Elisya to call me like this?”

“Master, it was Lady Anina’s suggestion,” Benbo quickly chimed in.

Anina, casting a scornful glance at Benbo’s overly flattering conduct, placed her hands on her hips and remarked, “We can’t have Elisya pick up terms like ‘master’ or anything of the sort. Considering her current demeanor, addressing him as ‘brother’ should be the most suitable choice.”

Alice showed an approving look. In fact, when she heard this suggestion, she was sure that the lord would accept it. During their intimate moments, the lord always preferred her to call him ‘big brother.’ If it weren’t for the significant age difference between Elisya and the lord, she would have suggested using ‘daddy’ or something similar.

Ji Chen thought for a moment and found it reasonable. Truth be told, being called ‘big brother’ by such a beautiful elf gave him a peculiar feeling.

He reluctantly accepted this reason.

“Have the elves from Vale been settled in?”

While walking towards the eaves with Elisya, Ji Chen asked.

Alice nodded. “The people from the Lienhardt Grand Duchy have been very cooperative. They quickly cleared more than ten mansions for the elves to rest in and immediately delivered a large amount of new food, clothing, and supplies. They all seemed a bit nervous as if they were afraid of causing any trouble...”

First, the elves from Vale were brought here by Ji Chen, so they received such treatment.

Second, perhaps even the secluded Lienhardt Grand Duchy, isolated from the Northern Continent, knew that the Elven Empire was not to be trifled with. Regardless of where Ji Chen brought so many elves from, the fact that they were elves was enough. If something went wrong with these elves here, they couldn’t bear the consequences.

When a nation becomes powerful and prosperous, the status of its citizens also rises, earning respect and awe from other nations.

Of course, the arrogant and protective behavior of the Elven Empire had a significant impact on this.

Whenever harm befell their people and the news reached Elven ears, the Elven Empire promptly dispatched a formidable army to ruthlessly annihilate anyone who had crossed them, a practice that had been consistent since the reign of the then-current Elven Empress.

This led countless nations, whether human or of other races, to form a common notion and impression—never to provoke the Elves, or at least not openly. Any dealings involving the trade of Elves were conducted discreetly, far from the Elves' watchful eyes.

However, there were rumors suggesting that some factions destroyed by the Elves due to involvement in the Elf trade had been orchestrated by the Elves themselves, with the goal of eliminating dissent and securing their own interests.

Yet, nearly five thousand Elves in Vale were already a significant number, considering the diminishing breeding capacity of the Elven Empire.

It should be noted that there were only three to four thousand Elves stationed in the vast Maple Principality. This sudden increase of five thousand Elves would have been a significant achievement for any Elven official or field agent working abroad, and it would surely have been reported to the Elven Empress.

So, Ji Chen had already contemplated how to reap some benefits using the Elves of Vale through Elven Ambassador Miligas' cooperation.

When it came to making money, why hold back?

However, it seemed that Miligas had already returned to the Elven capital to attend the Empress' birthday celebration. In that case, Ji Chen would have to approach Military Officer Brett...

On the other hand, the Elves from Vale were praising Ji Chen without knowing he was currently contemplating how much price each of the elves would fetch him after he transported them back to the Elven capital.

They were completely unaware of the current status of the Elven race.

In their eyes, the respect and treatment they received from these humans were all because of Ji Chen.

Therefore, when they boarded the ship again the next day and saw Ji Chen, their faces were filled with respect and gratitude. The young female Elves, in particular, did not hide their admiration for him..

Chapter 564: The Elves' Rumors and the Nation's Promise (2)

Ji Chen found himself perplexed by what he saw.

In any case, they set off, with Monica accompanying them on the ship, aiming for a swift return from the Kingdom of Bass to Lienhardt via sea travel.

In theory, if they followed the Kaiserven River downstream from Kaiserven City, returned to the ocean, sailed along the route back to Feiguang City, and then continued forward, they could reach Tressburg, which was also located by the sea.

This route would take approximately five days.

However, Ji Chen couldn't afford to wait that long. Leaving behind the Kraken and the legions, excluding the Tyrant Azure Dragon, to protect the Elves of Vale, he immediately took Monica

aboard the Tyrant Azure Dragon as their mount and sped up their journey, breaking away from the fleet.

Under the influence of Ji Chen's Lord Talent and the power of the ocean, they arrived at the colossal blue and white city by the shores of the Inner Sea in just a little over two days.

When Ji Chen first laid eyes on this gigantic city, which was partly built on plains and partly on highlands, he couldn't help but be amazed.

The white walls and blue-tiled roofs, characteristic of the Mediterranean architectural style, were a refreshing sight. The long stretch of white sandy beach, like a milky ribbon sandwiched between the deep blue sea and the green plains, exuded a romantic atmosphere.

As Monica gazed upon this city with a landscape rating at maximum level, a sense of pride filled her eyes.

The fame of Tressburg City was renowned even on the Northern Continent. This place was the cradle of her Valencia family's rise to prominence. Starting as a mere baron in a vast territory once ruled by an ancient empire, they overcame challenges, expelled monsters, defended against invaders, and eventually established the powerful Lienhardt Grand Duchy. The story of their rise and fall, glory and shame, could fill thick volumes of history.

Ji Chen could sense Monica's pride and admiration for her hometown. He complimented her on the beautiful scenery, adding to her sense of accomplishment.

However, before they could get much closer, a patrol boat swiftly approached them. Its cannons were already aimed in their direction, and a voice amplified by alchemical speakers warned them, "Strangers, you have entered the territory of the Lienhardt Grand Duchy. State your intentions and immediately remain in your current location... Lady Monica!?"

The soldiers on the ship were taken aback. Based on the information they had received, Lady Monica should still be on her way back. How had she returned to Tressburg City so quickly?

The patrol boat drew nearer, and the soldiers cautiously inquired, "Your Highness?"

"Yes, it's me. Lord Ji Chen graciously offered to accompany me on his fleet, which allowed us to arrive here more quickly," Monica replied calmly.

The soldiers suddenly understood and cast curious glances at Ji Chen, their expressions showing a mixture of awe and admiration.

Was this the renowned Lord who repeatedly intervened and turned the tide of battle, single-handedly eliminating over a hundred thousand enemy troops and several enemy fleets?

He looked exceptionally young and handsome, standing next to their Princess Monica, giving off an aura of a perfect couple.

The soldiers shook their heads, putting aside these thoughts, and respectfully said, "If His Grace learns that Your Highness has arrived ahead of schedule, he will surely be delighted. Please come aboard, and we will escort you to shore." Monica nodded and turned to Ji Chen with a smile.

"Lord Ji Chen, let's go."

Ji Chen nodded, gesturing to stop the soldiers from lowering the gangplank. With a wave of his hand, he conjured a series of water steps that extended from the back of the Tyrant Azure Dragon, reaching several meters high up to the deck. With Monica and a group of heroes, Ji Chen boarded the deck.

This unheard-of way of boarding left many soldiers staring in amazement.

They soon met the legendary Grand Duke Lienhardt in the castle perched on the steep cliffs, Julius Valencia. He was a man as sturdy as a lion, exuding the dignity of a high-ranking individual. After absorbing the power of the ocean, Ji Chen, too, could feel the strength flowing within Julius, as well as the overwhelming presence.

While Ji Chen observed Julius, the latter was also sizing up the young man standing next to his daughter.

Despite his scrutiny, Julius couldn't find any faults.

His appearance was top-notch, even surpassing that of an elf. His demeanor was confident and poised, and his posture was upright, with an outstanding aura.

What surprised Julius the most was that he couldn't gauge the depth of his strength, as if it were as profound and boundless as the ocean itself.

Who was this young man?

His daughter mentioned that Ji Chen was a Lord of Glory, but those Lords of Glory had only arrived a few months ago. Yet this Ji Chen managed to increase his strength to the point where he could single-handedly destroy tens of thousands of enemies within a few months?

Moreover, he heard that Ji Chen had painstakingly built a sizable territory and established thriving relations, even selling products to the elves. It was quite an accomplishment.

As Julius thought more about it, he couldn't help but feel impressed, and his gaze became more appreciative.

Such a young and talented individual, even in Lienhardt, was a rarity!

Monica looked at her father's changing expression and breathed a sigh of relief, smiling.

"Father, this is the Ji Chen I told you about."

Julius also regained his composure and gave a hearty smile. "Indeed, he is the hero who has turned the tide of battle multiple times, just as I imagined."

Ji Chen smiled modestly and said, "Your Grace, you are too kind. I have merely done what was within my capabilities; it's not worth mentioning."

Julius raised an eyebrow. "If killing tens of thousands of enemy soldiers, destroying and capturing several fleets of the Bass Kingdom, and even obliterating the Eiben Fortress in one blow are not worth mentioning, then perhaps there is no accomplishment worth boasting about."

To be honest, I am deeply grateful to you. First, you saved my daughter, and then you wholeheartedly joined a war that had nothing to do with you. You have even helped us turn the tide of the battle multiple times. You are a hero of our Lienhardt Grand Duchy," Julius said with a very serious expression.

“In addition to the reward mentioned by Monica earlier, I can make you a promise. As long as it doesn’t harm Lienhardt’s interests and is within our capabilities, we can do something for you as a nation.”

This was his utmost sincerity towards Ji Chen, and even Monica’s expression changed slightly. She had not expected her father’s promised reward to be of such magnitude.

Ji Chen was also taken aback.

The entire nation doing something for him?

The weight and value of this promise were immeasurable in terms of money and resources.

Feeling the gravity of this commitment, Ji Chen nodded solemnly.

Julius’s expression softened, and his gaze became much gentler.

He chuckled and said, “Truly a dragon among men. You’ve accepted so easily. This is much more straightforward than those noble youths who receive medals from me and still hesitate and shed grateful tears. You are a Lord of Glory worth befriending for our Valencia family!

Monica is lucky to have accidentally entered your territory during her escape on the boundless sea, meeting such a talent.”

Ji Chen also smiled and replied, “I feel very fortunate to have met Monica. Your Grace, having such a daughter who possesses both beauty and wisdom, is truly enviable.”

“You’re right! My daughter Monica is indeed outstanding!”

Watching her father and Ji Chen engage in a pleasant conversation, Monica felt a heavy burden lift from her heart. Hearing Ji Chen’s praise made her feel as sweet as honey.

At this moment, Monica looked around and asked with some curiosity, “Father, where is Mother?”

Julius’s expression paused for a moment. “Your mother has been ill for the past few days. She is currently resting and unable to come out to greet you.”

“What? How is that possible? She was perfectly fine when I left.”

“I don’t know either, but the court physician has examined her. It’s probably just a slight cold, nothing to worry about.”

Listening to the conversation between Julius and Monica, Ji Chen couldn’t help but feel a strange sensation wash over him..

Chapter 565: A Country Within A Country, The Poison Of The Sea Heir

Since gaining the ocean’s power, Ji Chen’s ability to sense things in specific directions had greatly improved. Right now, he sensed a dark, corrupted, and evil presence in the air, spreading and filling the surroundings.

While conversing with Julius and Monica about the Grand Duchess, this feeling grew even stronger.

This was the Lienhardt Court, not some den of monsters. It was the most heavily guarded place in the entire principality, the center of power. How could there be such an ominous, corrupt, and even evil aura here?

Seeing that Julius and Monica seemed oblivious to it, Ji Chen thought for a moment and spoke up.

“Your Grace, I wonder about the condition of the Lady. How is she feeling now?”

Julius shook his head and replied. “Milorna has been ill for several days now. It’s quite strange, to be honest. Although it’s just a common cold, she looks completely drained, can’t even get out of bed, and she’s been talking nonsense.”

Milorna was the name of the Grand Duchess, and upon hearing this, Monica’s face also showed a worried expression. She initially thought it was just a minor cold, but now her mother couldn’t even get out of bed.

She immediately expressed her desire to go see her mother, but Julius stopped her, saying, “Your mother is resting now. You can visit her after she wakes up.”

Monica reluctantly nodded, suppressing her anxiety.

Listening to this, Ji Chen had a vague premonition. This pervasive sense of disdain, corruption, and evil might be related to the Grand Duchess.

However, it wasn’t the right time to confront it directly. Ji Chen took out several bottles of high-level life potions that had been prepared by his subordinate alchemist, Irona, from his backpack.

“Your Grace Julius, these are high-level life potions concocted by my subordinate alchemist. They might be beneficial for the Lady’s condition.”

Life potions?

Julius didn’t place much hope in these life potions, but as the Grand Duke, he naturally possessed an abundance of such elixirs, which he had already given to Milorna.

However, these were Ji Chen’s heartfelt intentions, so he accepted them with a smile. “Thank you for your kind gesture.”

Ji Chen nodded and didn’t rush to resolve this matter immediately. It wouldn’t be appropriate to bring it up abruptly.

After a while of conversation with Julius, he took the initiative to bid farewell. Under the guidance of several maids, he left the Lienhardt Court and temporarily rested in an adjacent mansion.

The next day, Monica came to visit the mansion.

“Lord Ji Chen, my father has already decided on the land division. Considering that most of your troops are ocean-based and you are an ocean-type Lord, your territory will be located approximately eighty kilometers west of Feiguang City, on an island called Fish Tail Island.

There’s a village there with about five hundred people. The actual land area is about twenty square kilometers, and it’s located two to three kilometers from the mainland. Moreover, it’s near a busy shipping route, which is very conducive to trade development.

In addition, the waters within a radius of ten kilometers around Fish Tail Island are your private exclusive zone. Within this range, any resources belong to you, and no one else is allowed to enter or harvest resources without your permission, not even the Lienhardt Court.

Any commercial and economic activities that occur on this land do not require taxation, nor do they require participation in the principality's wars or labor."

Ji Chen's eyes brightened.

Twenty square kilometers, isn't that about one-fifth the size of the main island of the New Moon Islands?

In terms of actual land area, twenty square kilometers was already quite substantial. This wasn't an isolated island in the open sea; it was land close to the mainland, with high economic value.

What pleased him even more was that the designated territory was an island not far from the mainland.

It allowed him to leverage his identity as an ocean-type Lord while maintaining close ties with the mainland.

However, what surprised Ji Chen was that according to Monica's words, this territory seemed to be like a country within a country. As long as he didn't do anything detrimental to the interests of Lienhardt, he would be like a warlord there.

On the other hand, other players had territories within the territories of various nations.

Over the past few months, these players had already reached an understanding with the indigenous people. They had to regularly pay a certain amount of taxes and send a portion of their subjects for labor to maintain their right to exist in the country's territory. Otherwise, they might be expelled by the indigenous people.

This was one of the differences between players who resided on indigenous land and those in desolate, uninhabited areas.

The former received some protection from the indigenous people, making them safer and enjoying richer resources. The latter had to rely entirely on themselves, with scarcer resources but no need to depend on others.

The fact that Julius was willing to give Ji Chen an entire country within a country was a testament to his enormous goodwill.

"I'm very satisfied. Thank the Grace for the generosity."

Monica smiled playfully and blinked. "With Fish Tail Island, you can now directly transport Ocean Crown's products to sell in the Lienhardt Principality without going through customs. This saves quite a significant amount of taxes."

Ji Chen couldn't know whether to laugh or cry. "Why did you just say it so directly? The taxes you're helping me save belong to the Lienhardt."

"The money belongs to the principality's finances and my father. It got nothing to do with me.."

Monica gave a charming smile. “Anyway, with all you’ve done for us, this little tax is nothing. If it weren’t for the risk of arousing dissent among other nobles, I would suggest directly granting you a few cities. That way, it would also save you the effort and money of building a new territory.”

Ji Chen chuckled lightly. “If you do that, His Grace might be heartbroken. His most beloved daughter is giving away cities.”

Monica covered her mouth and giggled, her eyes forming crescent moons. Her ample bosom shook uncontrollably, a sight to behold.

“Oh, by the way, how is your mother doing now? Is she feeling any better?”

As soon as this topic came up, Monica’s face immediately turned sorrowful. “I don’t know why, but my mother’s condition has worsened. Father said that yesterday morning, she could still speak, but now she can’t even utter a word, and she has fallen into a coma.”

Ji Chen’s expression subtly changed, confirming his earlier suspicions.

There were indeed some dark elements within the Lienhardt court.

He thought for a moment and decided to share this suspicion with Monica. “What? Is what you’re saying true, Lord Ji Chen?” Monica exclaimed. “Is my mother really afflicted by something?”

Ji Chen nodded gravely. “There’s a certain possibility. Yesterday, when I was at the court, I sensed a sinister and malevolent aura there. It may be related to the

Duchess.”

“But why didn’t Father and I sense anything?”

Ji Chen shook his head, sounding certain.

“This might be related to my recent journey in the Frozen Wilderness and the increase in my strength. It seems to have heightened my ability to perceive curses and malevolence.”

Worry painted Monica’s face. She anxiously bit her lip, and in reality, she had also felt something unusual in the court last night. It was always chilly, and a cold atmosphere lingered around her. She even had nightmares, something unusual for her.

In this state, it felt like an invisible specter was wandering around the castle. “So, what should we do now?”

Monica didn’t doubt Ji Chen’s words at all. Her expression was a mixture of panic and desperation. She instinctively grabbed Ji Chen’s hand, her eyes showing distress. “Lord Ji Chen, do you have a way to get rid of whatever lurks in the shadows and help my mother recover?”

Sensing Monica’s urgency, Ji Chen gently freed his hand and patted hers to reassure her. “I’ll do my best. But to understand the situation better, I’ll need to see your mother in person.”

Upon hearing this, Monica seemed to regain some composure. She realized that she had impulsively grabbed Ji Chen's hand earlier, and her snow-white face turned slightly pink. She quickly let go and said, "Very well, let's go to the court now and inform Father of the situation."

With Alice, Anina, and other heroes, Ji Chen followed Monica back into the court.

As soon as they entered the castle, he instantly felt the ominous presence that was even stronger than yesterday. It was almost tangible now, and he could sense it more distinctly.

A wispy black mist, like a strand of ink, was emanating from the depths of the castle.

It was the same hall as yesterday, and Julius hurriedly entered through a side door. His complexion was pale, and his eyes were bloodshot, showing signs of prolonged sleep deprivation.

"Father, there's something I need to discuss with you!" Monica walked up to Julius and spoke hurriedly.

"My dear daughter, if it's not urgent, let's talk later. I need to be with your mother right now to take care of her." Julius replied with a hint of anxiety, about to leave.

"This matter is about Mother," Monica quickly said. "Lord Ji Chen mentioned that Mother might be afflicted by something!"

Julius immediately halted in his tracks, his thick black eyebrows furrowing. "Afflicted by something? Is there any concrete evidence?"

Monica's complexion changed slightly. "Not yet, but..."

Ji Chen promptly stepped forward, his demeanor composed.

"Your Grace Julius, may I have the opportunity to see Monica's mother in person? That way, I can make a more accurate assessment."

Julius gazed intensely at Ji Chen, like a vigilant lion, his eyes revealing no emotional fluctuations.

After a long pause, he said, "Very well."

Ji Chen nodded and instructed, "Alice, come with me. Anina, you both stay here."

"Yes!"

Monica breathed a sigh of relief and quickly led the way.

Passing through corridors and arches, Ji Chen and the others arrived at an isolated part of the castle. Upon entering, they found themselves in a lush garden. However, the flowers and plants seemed ailing, with a wilted appearance.

Numerous maidservants hurriedly moved about, their faces filled with solemnity and fear.

In a room within the castle, Ji Chen saw a woman lying on a bed, her eyes closed tightly, her complexion pale.

This woman was none other than Julius's wife and Monica's mother, Milorna.

Despite the warm seaside atmosphere, Milorna seemed to be in the midst of winter. She was covered with thick blankets, and her body trembled uncontrollably.

Sensing the evil and malevolent aura concentrated deep within her body, Ji Chen's eyes glinted, and he quickly confirmed, "She has been poisoned." "What? Poisoned?" Julius blurted out, his face filled with shock and disbelief. "The court physicians have examined her multiple times and found no traces of poison. This cannot be!"

Monica also asked softly, "Lord Ji Chen, are you sure you're not mistaken? There are no signs of poisoning in Mother..."

Ji Chen, with a determined expression, shook his head. "She has definitely been poisoned, and it's not a poison that ordinary races use."

"This is... neurotoxin from the Sea Heirs."

"Sea Heirs?" Julius and Monica exchanged puzzled glances, their faces showing a hint of confusion. They had never heard of this race before.

What emanated from Milorna reminded Ji Chen of the neurotoxin used by the Sea Heirs when they attacked the Ocean Crown!

Sea Heirs possessed a natural ability to launch neurotoxin attacks, which not only operated in secrecy but also became more severe over time. Many units of the Ocean Crown had not died from direct attacks but had been tortured to death by the poison.

Their symptoms were almost identical to Milorna's current condition.

Ji Chen briefly explained the Sea Heirs to them.

"Goodness, there's such a terrifying race in the ocean? Hive-like thinking, Sea Heir leaders..." Monica's face displayed incredulity.

Even Julius furrowed his brows deeply. "Lienhardt has stood by the seaside for so long, and has never encountered this race..."

Ji Chen nodded. "Sea Heirs typically remain in the deep sea, several thousand meters below the surface, and rarely venture close to land. It's normal not to have encountered them.

But what's strange is how Lady Milorna contracted the Sea Heir Sea Heir?" Julius looked at Milorna lying on the bed, his eyes filled with concern, and shook his head. "I don't know either. Milorna hasn't left the court in recent years, and most of the time, she's been taking care of the flowers and plants in the garden, hardly ever coming into contact with the outside world."

Ji Chen furrowed his brows. "Is there any certainty that someone intentionally poisoned her?"

Upon hearing this, Julius's expression turned dark, like a lion about to rage. "We can't rule out that possibility. Milorna is kind-hearted, generous to others, and has no suspicion towards those around her. Perhaps someone took advantage of this to carry out this malicious act!"

Julius regained his former dignity and issued a stern command to those outside.

"Spread my orders, seal the court, and investigate anyone who has had contact with my wife in the past month. Interrogate them thoroughly! If anyone forcefully breaks the seal, disable their limbs on the spot and bring them back for questioning!"

“Yes!”

The palace guards rushed outside, and heavily armed soldiers stood guard in every corner and at the entrances. The once peaceful court was instantly shrouded in a solemn atmosphere, and even the air felt stifling.

“Lord Ji Chen,” Monica’s voice trembled slightly, her eyes filled with tears as she looked at Milorna. “Do you have a way to neutralize this Sea Heir Poison and save my mother?”

As she spoke, Julius also turned his gaze towards Ji Chen, his hands clenched tightly. In the lion-like eyes, a glimmer of hope seemed to emerge.

Facing their gaze, Ji Chen, expressionless until now, slowly revealed a reassuring smile.

“Of course..”

Chapter 567 - 567: Milorna Awakens, The Deep Sea Church

In the past, during battles with a group known as the Sea Heirs, many soldiers and residents in the territory of the Ocean Crown suffered from their poison. This toxin was extremely hard to detect and challenging to eliminate.

The only expert alchemist in the territory, Lady Irona, conducted research and manufactured antidotes to neutralize this neurotoxin under the guidance of Ji Chen.

Ji Chen turned his hand and handed over a vial containing a shimmering silver liquid, saying, “This is the antidote to neutralize the poison.”

After drinking the antidote, Milorna, who had been in a coma, gradually regained some color in her face. Her eyebrows relaxed, her breathing steadied, and her body stopped trembling. For the first time, a serene expression appeared on her face, causing Julius and Monica to breathe a sigh of relief.

Especially Julius, visibly relaxed when he saw his wife’s condition improve. He sat by her bedside, tightly holding Milorna, his eyes fixed on her, like any ordinary husband deeply concerned for his wife.

Ji Chen and Monica left the room, leaving it to the Grand Duke and Duchess.

“Based on past experience, after taking the antidote, it won’t be long before she wakes up. However, her body is still weak and needs sufficient rest and proper nourishment.”

“The advanced life potions 1 provided earlier will help to some extent in facilitating the duchess’ recovery.”

Monica nodded quickly, wiping away a tear from the corner of her eye, and said with a choked voice, “Lord Ji Chen, if it weren’t for you this time, my mother might have...”

Ji Chen shook his head. "What's more important is that you should quickly find out how Lady Milorna was poisoned and, more urgently, determine the source of this neurotoxin. Otherwise, if it spreads on a large scale, it will attract attention and could pose a serious problem."

Based on his own impressions and the accounts of oceanic heroes like Anina, the Sea Heirs, aside from their leader, were not known for their intelligence. Most of the time, their only thought was to devour. They were unlikely to use such methods as poisoning a human duchess.

There was no necessity or feasibility in it.

The eerie and otherworldly appearance of the Sea Heirs was something that anyone would find extremely malevolent.

Therefore, he speculated that it was the work of humans, who had somehow obtained the neurotoxin and used it to poison someone, possibly with some hidden agenda.

Monica nodded with a grave expression. If what Ji Chen had said earlier was true, then this matter was not just about her mother; it also concerned the safety of the entire duchy.

"I will take it very seriously and ensure that everyone remains vigilant."

Ji Chen nodded and was about to say something when they suddenly heard Julius's excited voice from the room.

"My wife, you've finally awakened!"

Ji Chen and Monica exchanged glances and entered the room together. Milorna, lying on the bed, had indeed awakened. She leaned against the headboard, but her eyes still held a sense of confusion and weakness.

Her well-maintained face exuded grace and elegance, with a regal air. It was evident that Milorna had been a rare beauty in her youth.

"What happened to me? I feel like I had a very long and terrible nightmare with lots of evil monsters trying to devour me..." Milorna said with a frown as she looked at Julius.

Julius, full of concern, gazed at his wife and whispered, "It's nothing, just a dream, nothing serious."

Suddenly, Milorna looked at Julius and furrowed her brow. "You must be hiding something from me. Is there something between us that cannot be spoken of?"

Julius initially wanted to conceal something, but after being glared at by Milorna, he sighed helplessly and briefly explained the events of the past few days.

"Does that mean someone secretly poisoned me?"

Julius nodded heavily and softly inquired, "My wife, do you remember encountering anyone suspicious before this happened?"

“Suspicious individuals?” Milorna looked a bit puzzled. “I don’t think I paid much attention to that. But the people around me were my maidservants who have been serving me for decades, so it’s unlikely to be them.

I do remember that I was watering the garden at the time, and then I sat in the pavilion to have some food. It was the fruits and wine offerings. After that, I felt a bit tired and went back to my room, and then...”

Ji Chen and Monica exchanged glances. “Fruits and wine offerings?”

Julius suddenly realized, gritted his teeth, and said, “Those fruits and wine were originally offerings for me. Milorna accidentally consumed them, which is why...”

This man’s face was filled with self-blame and guilt.

He would rather have been poisoned himself than let his wife endure such a nightmare and suffering.

“What are you talking about? The duchy cannot afford to lose anyone, especially not you...”

Milorna noticed Monica and Ji Chen standing behind and her eyes suddenly brightened.

“You must be Ji Chen, the one Monica mentioned earlier, right?”

Ji Chen smiled slightly and bowed. “Yes, I am Ji Chen, Lady Milorna.”

“Previously, you saved Monica, and now you’ve saved my life as well. In addition to the contributions you made in this war, I truly don’t know how to repay your kindness.”

Milorna looked at the distinguished Ji Chen and chuckled. “You look much more handsome than the Grand Duke did in his youth.. How about as a token of gratitude, we betroth Monica to you, and you come to serve in our Valencia family as our son-in-law?”

Chapter 568 - 568: Milorna Awakens, The Deep Sea Church (2)

“Mother-” Monica’s face suddenly turned shy, and even her neck reddened. She sat by the bedside and coquettishly said to Milorna, “I haven’t even thought about getting married yet! And when you woke up, you didn’t pay any attention to me, your daughter; instead, you gave your attention to Lord Ji Chen instead. What’s going on?”

Milorna had a smile on her face, and Monica was whispering in a caring manner, completely unaware of Julius, whose face had darkened on one side.

Her daughter was going to get married!?

No, he wouldn’t agree!!

If someone wanted to marry his daughter, they had to pass his test first!!

And how did Ji Chen become more handsome than he was when he was young? Back in his youth, he was known as the most handsome man in Lienhardt, capturing the heart of his wife with his handsome and masculine face!

Ji Chen felt Julius' sudden hostility and malice towards him and couldn't help but twitch at the corner of his mouth.

He cleared his throat and said, "Lord Julius, the immediate priority is still to trace the source of the poison."

Monica also nodded. "Exactly, Father and Mother are victims of the Sea Heir poison, and we need to find the culprit as soon as possible!"

Julius nodded heavily, his eyes seemingly filled with the eruption of a volcano,

"I will definitely find the culprit and make them pay!"

Now, with a very clear lead, all they needed to do was find the person who provided the poisonous fruits and wine for the tribute.

Julius immediately ordered an investigation and soon traced it back to a baron named Bessos, who had offered the fruits and wine.

Soldiers quickly stormed his mansion and arrested Bessos, who was about to leave. They escorted him all the way to the palace, where Julius personally interrogated him.

"Your Highness, you must have made a mistake. I haven't done anything!"

Baron Bessos, who was tall and thin, had a look of panic on his face.

"As a noble of the Grand Duchy, do you know what crime you've committed!?"

"I... I don't know."

"You dared to offer poisonous fruits and wine with the intent to harm the Valencia Family?!"

Baron Bessos froze, his face filled with fear. "Those fruits and wine!? I bought them from a merchant in the Mid Ocean. I've personally tasted them, and they couldn't possibly be poisoned!"

Julius was on the brink of rage, angrily questioning him, "If that's the case, why were you in such a hurry to leave Tressburg?"

"Your Highness, it's because the Grand Duchy won the war, and the newly acquired land urgently needs various supplies. So, I planned to lead a team personally to see if there were any business opportunities." Baron Bessos looked wronged as if he had been genuinely misunderstood.

From his words and actions, this Baron Bessos didn't show any signs of deception. Everything he said seemed to hold up under scrutiny.

The Kingdom of Bass suffered during the war, and the vast land ravaged by conflict did indeed require a large amount of supplies. There were many business opportunities present.

Baron Bessos wanting to investigate the situation wasn't unusual.

"Your Highness, I am loyal to you, there must be a misunderstanding!"

Julius furrowed his brow deeply. In reality, the fruits and wine that Milorna consumed had already been disposed of, leaving no concrete evidence behind.

In other words, there was no solid proof that the fruits and wine were poisoned since the evidence was gone, and there was no way to prove it.

However, at this moment, Ji Chen spoke up calmly.

"May I ask, Baron Bessos, from which Mid-Ocean merchant did you purchase these items?"

Baron Bessos looked at Ji Chen's attire and raised an eyebrow.

"You are a Lord of Glory?"

"That's correct."

Upon hearing this, a hint of disdain flashed in Baron Bessos's eyes. He thought, how could a lowly Lord of Glory dare to speak to him, a noble, like this?

Shouldn't he bow deeply first and then respectfully request information?

Suddenly, Monica spoke up.

"This is Lord Ji Chen."

Ji Chen?

That name sounded familiar... Wait a minute.

Baron Bessos's face showed a trace of shock. Could it be the Lord of Glory who had repeatedly helped the Grand Duchy turn the tide of war in various battles?

Such a powerful individual should be treated with the utmost respect, even by nobles. Shouldn't he, as a lowly baron, bow deeply and make a formal request after that?

He couldn't help but gulp nervously, revealing a smile that looked even uglier than someone crying.

"I bought them from a merchant named Fite. He claimed these were locally sourced specialties from the Mid-Ocean Island, transported back with a special alchemical preservation device. It was something... oh yes, from the Starshine Islands!"

Baron Bessos' face took on a resolute expression, speaking with confidence.

However, Ji Chen slowly revealed a smile.

"I ordered the Starshine Islands to stop exporting their products a few months ago. How did that merchant obtain fruits and wine from there?"

Baron Bessos's expression froze. "Lord Ji Chen, what do you mean..."

“Just what it sounds like. The Starshine Islands have already submitted to me and are part of my territory.”

Julius was slightly surprised, and Monica covered her mouth in astonishment. When did Ji Chen conquer another group of islands?

Ji Chen stared intently at Baron Bessos and said, word by word, “You’re lying.”

Baron Bessos’s body trembled, filled with regret.

Damn it, how did he coincidentally run into the lord of the Starshine Islands?

A bead of cold sweat trickled down his forehead as Baron Bessos stammered, “I must have made a mistake; it wasn’t the Starshine Islands, it was...”

But Ji Chen cut him off, speaking loudly, “Your Highness Julius, Baron Bessos is highly suspicious. I believe a thorough interrogation is necessary.”

Julius glanced at the bewildered Baron Bessos and said solemnly, “Can we entrust you, Lord Ji Chen, to assist in the interrogation?”

“Of course.”

Upon hearing this, Baron Bessos’s spirits lifted. He was confident that he had left no traces behind in his actions.

As long as there was no concrete evidence, even a Grand Duke couldn’t accuse him of attempted murder. At most, there would be a punishment.

With this thought in mind, Baron Bessos straightened his posture.

Ji Chen looked at him and said with a smile, “I have a method to easily examine a person’s memories to prove their innocence.”

“Alice is a Siren, naturally gifted with the ability to access memories and souls.

If there are no issues after the examination, then Baron Bessos is likely innocent.”

Julius, silent since entering the court and following Ji Chen, showed a surprised expression once more. He recalled Milorna’s condition, and his eyes turned cold as he slowly nodded.

Baron Bessos’s face turned pale instantly.

Several minutes later, Alice slowly opened her eyes and released her hand from Baron Bessos, who was already foaming at the mouth, unconscious.

She whispered softly, “The residual memories tell me that Baron Bessos is a devoted follower of the Deep Sea Church.

He visited an underground gathering at 66 Avenue des Champs-Elysees a few days ago.”

The Deep Sea Church?

Ji Chen looked puzzled, but Julius furrowed his brow, appearing thoughtful.

“Your Highness, what is the Deep Sea Church?”

He ordered Baron Bessos to be taken away, his tone heavy.

“The Deep Sea Church is a religious group that emerged along the coast of Lienhardt about a year ago. Most of its members are fishermen, and its main purpose is to protect the ocean and seek its blessings.

There are countless such faithless religious organizations in Lienhardt, and as long as they don't pose a threat, I don't pay them much attention. But I didn't expect this incident to be connected to such an ordinary religious group, and even a Baron has become their follower...”

Ji Chen raised an eyebrow.

Great, this matter is getting more and more complicated, and it's becoming quite interesting.

It was quite intriguing that a seemingly fisherman-dominated religious group was somehow linked to this poisoning murder.

Interesting

This trip to Tressburg City was indeed worthwhile..

Chapter 569: Embrace Evolution!

The night grew deeper.

The sky was as dark as ink, and the once-bright moon that had shed its white light upon the earth was obscured by layer upon layer of thick, black clouds.

At this moment, Tressburg City had already fallen into silence and darkness. The streets were empty, with no one in sight except for the occasional sound of footsteps from the night patrols.

Jon hid in a corner, draped in a black linen robe that concealed him in the shadows. He waited until a group of patrolling soldiers passed by on the street before carefully crossing it, navigating through a labyrinth of dark alleyways, and finally arriving at the unassuming door of a four-story building with a grimy facade.

After ensuring that there was no one around, Jon extended his hand and lightly knocked on the door in a specific pattern.

With a soft click, the door opened, revealing a small window about the size of a palm. A pair of alert eyes peered out.

Jon crossed his arms over his chest and spoke in a low voice, “Embrace the deep sea, embrace evolution, and thank the Lord for His blessings.”

With another click, the door swung open, revealing a middle-aged man clad in a black linen robe. His face bore the roughened skin of exposure to wind and rain, and his back was slightly hunched. Large calloused hands betrayed his occupation as a fisherman, as the lingering scent of fish clung to him.

After letting Jon in, the middle-aged man also crossed his arms over his chest and whispered, “Embrace the deep sea, embrace evolution.”

In the faint light, Jon could see a few greenish scales on the man's exposed neck, surrounded by pale skin.

The green scales seemed to pulse with life.

Jon couldn't help but feel a tinge of envy. Those scales were a gift from the High Priest, proof that the man had consumed the Water of the Deep Sea.

Rumor had it that this gift had not only increased his swimming speed but also allowed him to stay underwater for over an hour.

This enabled him to catch more fish, earning him extra silver coins each month. It had significantly improved his quality of life.

Jon thought to himself that if he could receive such a blessing from the High Priest, he could earn more silver coins, perhaps enough to afford an extra blanket for his wife and make sure his children slept more comfortably at night.

"Why are you so late? You're nearly a quarter-hour late."

Jon cursed softly, "I was delayed on the way, trying to avoid the patrols of soldiers. It seems like the patrol routes and frequencies of those hawk-dogs have changed."

The middle-aged man furrowed his brows. Jon was brought into their secret circle by him. If Jon's presence somehow led to the exposure of their church's secrets, they would both face punishment from the High Priest.

With a serious tone, the man asked, "Did they discover you? Did you leave any traces?"

Jon quickly shook his head. "No, I was extremely cautious the entire way. They haven't found me, or they would have chased after me by now."

The middle-aged man thought for a moment and seemed to agree with Jon's assessment. He relaxed slightly and continued, "The other brothers and sisters have already arrived. You're the last one."

Jon nodded and followed the middle-aged man deeper into the house.

The middle-aged man continued speaking as they walked.

"Tonight is the church's semi-annual gathering, so the ceremony will be more complex. But with it comes the High Priest's blessing, as more of our brothers and sisters will embrace evolution and share in the Lord's grace."

His voice grew more excited with each word.

"In addition, I heard that the Archbishop will be attending this gathering!"

Jon paused, surprise evident on his face.

"Is it true? I've heard that the Archbishop was nurtured and grew up in the ocean, noticed by the Lord at an early age, and blessed with tremendous power?"

The middle-aged man chuckled. "You haven't been in the faith for long, so you might not know much. Archbishop not only possesses the power to manipulate weather but also has frequent communion with the Lord Himself."

So, if you wish to get closer to the Lord and seek his blessings, winning the favor of the Archbishop is the best way. Who knows, we might even have a chance to witness the majesty and appearance of the Lord.”

Seeing Jon’s hopeful expression, the middle-aged man patted his shoulder. “As long as you sincerely devote yourself to the faith, offering all your loyalty and belief, you will inevitably receive blessings, get closer to the Lord, and become a faithful disciple under his seat.”

Jon nodded earnestly, but in his mind, he thought about how receiving the Lord’s blessings could grant him tremendous power and potentially improve his family’s life.

The two of them arrived at a room deep within the underground. The middle-aged man fumbled on the floor, lifting a piece of floorboard to reveal a staircase leading underground.

Jon, being quite familiar with the routine, stealthily made his way to the entrance. He descended into the underground passage, taking advantage of the dim torchlight on either side of the walls until he reached a relatively spacious underground hall.

Apart from the route he had taken, this underground hall had several other passages, one of which led directly to the sea, providing a quick escape route in case of emergencies.

The underground hall was already filled with hundreds of believers, all dressed in black robes with their features obscured. They stood in orderly rows, waiting in silence. Not a sound echoed through the huge hall.

Jon observed this scene, his heart skipping a beat. He quietly lowered his steps and joined the rear of the queue, waiting in silence..

Chapter 570: Embrace Evolution! (2)

Soon, a priest dressed in a silky black robe emerged from one of the passages and walked to the front of the hall.

Jon lifted his gaze slightly to get a better look. The priest, who had received more blessings from the Lord, had neck scales of a deep blue hue and grayish skin on his face. Compared to the middle-aged man who had introduced him to the faith, the priest possessed even greater power.

When Jon had first joined the faith, he found the scales and gray skin rather peculiar and unusual. But now, he saw a certain beauty in it, as if this was what humans were meant to transform into, the evolution they should undergo.

Being a fisherman, he had spent most of his life dealing with the ocean, understanding its dangers and its vast treasures.

He knew that before they could explore and excavate, a necessary evolution was indispensable.

Only by receiving the Lord’s blessings could people like them, born at the bottom rungs of society, gain enough capital to embrace the boundless ocean.

The priest surveyed the hundreds of believers before him and spoke in a raspy voice, “Thank you, my brothers and sisters, for gathering here for this biannual assembly. I am deeply honored.

But before we commence our gathering, there is something regrettable and infuriating that I must share with you all. We have a traitor among us!"

As these words were uttered, a murmur of surprise and discussion swept through the crowd.

The priest gazed at the bewildered and angry faces of the believers and firmly struck his staff on the ground.

The dull sound reverberated throughout the hall, silencing all voices.

"I can openly declare that one of our former brothers, Baron Bessos, who was also one of the five stewards of Tressburg City, has betrayed us!

He willingly disclosed to the enemy the type of poison the Lord Bishop bestowed upon us and even assisted the enemy in neutralizing the toxin!

Otherwise, the enemy would not have survived until now!"

Jon's mind was shaken, his eyes filled with confusion.

Enemy?

Did the church he had joined have enemies?

At this moment, he heard a believer in the middle of the crowd asking, "Revered Priest, may I ask who our enemies are?"

The priest glanced at him, a glint of determination in his eyes, and spoke in a deep voice, "Our enemies... are the nobles who rule Lienhardt and the Valencia family!"

As this revelation unfolded, apart from a few believers who remained unfazed, the rest wore expressions of shock and disbelief.

Wait a moment, weren't we gathered here to offer our faith to the Lord in exchange for power, so that we could help each other and improve our lives?

How did we suddenly jump to the point of being hostile to noble lords?

Most of the believers present were impoverished residents. In this strictly hierarchical world, commoners had no capital or thoughts of rebelling against the nobility, who possessed unlimited resources and absolute power.

They just wanted to gain strength to earn more money and support their families.

The priest, observing the reactions of the believers, couldn't help but curl the corners of his mouth in a wry smile.

It was unfortunate that they had to reveal the church's intentions so early. Baron Bessos was one of the five stewards of Tressburg City, and a few days ago, he was pursued for poisoning Duke Valencia.

According to the initial plan, the poisoned offerings, which had been bestowed by Lord Bishop, were supposed to be consumed by Duke Julius of Lienhardt. If Julius had died from the poison, it would have thrown the entire Lienhardt into chaos, and they could have openly recruited more believers to fulfill the Lord's decree without the need for covert operations.

The idea was crude but effective enough.

The priest knew the potency of those toxins. They were odorless, tasteless, and nearly impossible to detect by ordinary means. Ingesting them would likely result in a near-death experience.

By having Baron Bessos, a noble, offer the tainted offerings, Duke Julius would have lowered his guard considerably.

However, according to reports from the court believers, the offerings meant for Julius was consumed by the Duke's wife, leading to the failure of the plan. Baron Bessos was subsequently apprehended as well.

The priest believed that Baron Bessos, who had been in the faith for a long time and had gained the Lord's attention, wouldn't reveal everything about the church. However, the failure of the plan would undoubtedly have a significant impact on their missionary activities in Tressburg City.

In such a situation, they needed to accelerate their plans.

The captured Baron Bessos would most likely not survive, and they could use him as the spark to ignite the anger of the believers.

Watching the reactions of the believers, the priest was well-prepared for their response and continued to speak.

"Yes, our enemies are those nobles who control vast resources and exploit us, especially the Valencia family who rules this land!

We are ordinary citizens struggling to make ends meet. However, we are constantly exploited and humiliated by those nobles and their lackeys, making our lives even more miserable!

The money we earn from selling the fish we catch at sea is subject to a tax, and then the rotten and vile soldiers at the docks take another portion from what's left. In the end, we are left with a pitiful half-silver coin!

Is this fair? Should we endure all of this?"

The persuasive words of the priest stirred up resentment on the faces of many believers.

"That's right, those soldiers at the docks always extort from us because of their status. My one-year-old child starved to death because of this!"

"Those soldiers even protect the bullies.. After my poor wife was humiliated, there was nowhere for her to seek justice!"