

Winter 191

Chapter 191: Notes on Writing Chinese Characters

Bidding farewell to the faces filled with excitement and gratitude, Louis turned and left.

As for the comatose mage, he personally handed him over to the medical staff of the Cold Fir Territory.

"Take good care of him, notify me immediately once he wakes up."

The few medical staff initially thought he was just an ordinary injured person, but when they lifted the blanket off the makeshift stretcher, they couldn't help but gasp.

"Is... is this person still alive?"

"His chest... what bit him?"

"And he can still breathe... it's, it's unbelievable..."

Although shocked, they were not novices and quickly reacted, nodding repeatedly: "Understood! We'll handle it right away!"

The stretcher was carefully moved into the town's medical house, where, amid the strong aroma of medicine, a life-and-death emergency was about to unfold.

Louis did not linger either; he stepped into the Government Hall of the Cold Fir Territory.

Though called a "Government Hall," its appearance greatly differed from what most people imagined.

In fact, it was merely a large, semi-underground dwelling that had been repurposed.

Located in the town center, it was constructed from local wood and mountain stones. The structure was simple yet exceptionally sturdy, with the mottled marks at the wall corners clearly recording the erosion of the Northern Territory's winds and snow.

Pushing open the door, warmth from the hearth rushed in, dispelling the chill from outside.

The interior arrangement, although not luxurious, was extremely tidy.

On the wooden bookshelves were several notebooks and territorial documents, with a few practical writing desks laid out. The one in the center had been polished to a shine, evidently prepared specially for the Lord.

The Town Mayor, Agricultural Official, Civil Official, Peacekeeping Knight, Medical Affairs Officer, and others were already waiting, rising collectively to greet him.

Most of these officials were experienced and loyal personnel dispatched from the Calvin Clan by Duke Calvin.

There were also a few "potential stocks" selected first by the Daily Intelligence System: young, vigorous, and more importantly, absolutely trustworthy.

Louis removed his cloak and gloves, looked around at everyone, and spoke in a gentle tone: "I want to hear about the current situation in the Cold Fir Territory."

The Town Mayor immediately answered: "My Lord, thanks to your policies and support, we have survived the winter and are preparing for the spring."

The Agricultural Official then reported: "The ice has just retreated, and the topsoil has loosened. We expect to plow the land thoroughly within ten days. Seeds and farm tools have been distributed uniformly by the Red Tide Territory, and we can start planting."

"This year, we also opened up over ten acres of new fields," the Town Mayor laughed, "done voluntarily by the refugees. They said since they survived, they wanted to plant something to repay you."

Louis nodded, indicating his satisfaction.

The Cold Fir Territory has no geothermal heat and conditions are tough, but the timing for sowing is about right.

Louis sat in the main seat, listened to the agricultural report, and softly asked: "How are the people after winter? How is the recent settlement?"

A civil official immediately got up to respond: "Reporting to you, my Lord, the census for spring is completed. The mortality rate of refugee winter survival is less than ten percent, and recently there has been a continuous influx of outsiders to the Cold Fir Territory."

He unfurled the recording board in his hand, speaking slightly fast as if suppressing some excitement: "Currently, two refugee communities have been expanded outside Hanshan Town, ensuring basic housing and water supply.

Most refugees are willing to work or learn crafts, arrangements are being made. Now, the permanent population of the Cold Fir Territory... has approached one thousand people."

Louis nodded and showed a satisfied expression: "If more refugees come, try to accommodate them. In terms of food, the Red Tide Territory can still allocate, try to keep the people."

"Next step, how is the security situation?"

A tall Peacekeeping Knight stepped forward, kneeling on one knee: "Reporting to my Lord, the order within the Cold Fir Territory is generally good. Two small groups of bandits were discovered in the woods outside the town at the end of winter, causing no casualties, and have been driven away.

In addition, some bankrupt old noble soldiers have come seeking refuge. We are gradually accommodating and restructuring them according to the plan and so far, no problems have arisen."

"Very good, if they are willing to abide by the rules, they can be taken in."

Louis then asked about several matters: herb reserves, iron repairs, and mountain road clearing progress.

The civil servants answered one by one without hesitation, evidently well-prepared.

"The thermal devices of the Fire-backed Turtle are running stably," the Agricultural Official added again, "and the survival rate of livestock in the breeding area is extraordinarily high."

"Regarding the school workshops," another young official looked up and smiled, "more than sixty children have enrolled, and enrollment will double this spring, mainly teaching general knowledge and hands-on skills, literacy is also taught, but the effect is mediocre."

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After listening to everyone's report, Louis did not speak immediately, but in his heart, he nodded quietly.

These people truly did not disappoint him.

The policies were set by him, but it was these people who slowly carried them out to fruition.

They faced numerous difficulties, with no geothermal heat, no surplus grain, no convenient transportation lines...

Yet the Cold Fir Territory held on, stabilized its population, planted its fields, and even the refugees were organized in an orderly manner.

Louis then turned around, his tone calm yet affirmative: "You have done well."

The officials in the hall were stunned for a moment, then quickly stood up to salute.

Louis continued: "Winter is over. This is spring, and it's a new beginning. You maintained order in Cold Fir during the toughest times, and you kept hope alive for these people. I have noted it down."

The Town Mayor, moved, couldn't help but say: "My Lord, all this is your achievement, thanks to your prior preparations of policies and supplies, we were able to hold on."

To be honest, without you, we people... just relying on our passion, couldn't have done much."

Chapter 192: Notes on Writing Chinese Characters (Part 2)

The civil official nodded in agreement, "We merely followed the framework you set out. Any results we've achieved rely entirely on your foresight."

Though sincere, his words still carried a hint of flattery.

Upon hearing this, Louis slightly curled up his lips, "No need to exaggerate, I'm not that divine,

but I know that Cold Fir was able to endure because of the efforts you all have put in. Words can't compare to tangible actions."

He reached out and patted the box by the table, nodding gently to signal.

An attendant was already prepared, handing out small cloth bags to each official.

The bags were small but weighty.

"Inside are ten gold coins," Louis said in an ordinary tone, "These are rightfully yours. It's not a reward, it's well-deserved."

The officials were momentarily stunned.

Ten gold coins.

Many of them had never even touched such an amount of gold in their lifetime, let alone received it all at once.

The town mayor's mouth gaped slightly, finally able to tremble out, "This... this is too precious..."

After a brief silence, a complex wave of emotions quietly spread through the Government Hall.

Looking at the heavy bags of coins, some officials' eyes reddened, while others tightly clutched the bags' openings.

It wasn't just a bag of gold coins; it was a sign of serious recognition and trust.

"Thank you, my lord." The town mayor was the first to bow his head, his voice hoarse but conveying unstoppable excitement, "We... we will definitely continue to strive to build Cold Fir Territory even better!"

"When my child was born, our family had nothing to eat," a young Agricultural Official clutched the bag of coins with trembling hands, his eyes already red, "Now he can learn how to write at the schooling workshop, has food to eat and a place to sleep, all thanks to you..."

Confronted by the crowd's grateful gaze, Louis merely smiled gently.

He did not take an aloof stance, he just openly accepted their gratitude.

"I said that working under me, effort will be rewarded. Since you have achieved results, you should get what belongs to you." His tone held a sense of rightful promise.

"The territory is managed by me, but its fate is carried on your pairs of hands. I believe in you and hope that you continue to persevere."

After those words, the hall became somewhat quiet.

"However," Louis suddenly shifted his shoulders, jokingly saying, "I'm not made of iron. I haven't rested since morning, so I'm a bit tired. Take me to where I'm staying, I'd like to rest a bit."

"Yes!" everyone responded in unison.

The town mayor personally led the way, with a group following behind, slowly making their way through the streets of Hanshan Town in the early morning.

The streets of Hanshan Town remained modest, with low and practical houses. Snow that had just melted was piled on both sides of the cobblestone roads, but every inch of ground had been meticulously swept, with even puddles directed to the drainage ditches.

Wherever they went, people paused their tasks.

They were old men sweeping snow, young people repairing rooftops, women returning with buckets from the well, and children nibbling on dry bread at the windowsills.

They lifted their heads, looking at the figure slowly moving at the center of the street, surrounded by officials.

They wanted to cheer but feared disturbing this great lord, yet that fiery emotion could still be felt by Louis.

Finally, the group arrived at a courtyard gate.

"This is... currently the best residence in Hanshan Town," the town mayor introduced somewhat nervously, pointing to the newly constructed semi-underground house before them.

"The best" was only relative, of course.

It was a newly styled dwelling embedded into the hillside, built with solid bricks and stones, with thick doors and windows, and a roof covered with straw and slate to ward off the cold.

Though still somewhat rough and simple, it was evidently a product of thoughtful effort.

The courtyard in front had already been paved with floor tiles, and at the corner of the wall, there was a bunch of early spring mountain flowers planted. Bright in color, they somewhat clumsily adorned this sturdy space.

"This is the best house we have now in Hanshan Town," the town mayor repeated in a low voice.

It seemed that he was worried that its simplicity was unworthy of the newly returned Prefect from the battlefield.

"Very good." Louis's tone was not loud, but it made the town mayor breathe a sigh of relief.

Then he said, "You all can go now. I would like some quiet time alone."

No one dared to question further, retreating one by one, leaving only an attendant to put down his luggage, light the hearth, and then quietly exit, pulling the door closed.

As the door shut, the noise and sounds of salute finally gave way to silence.

The hearth crackled, while in the distance outside, the sound of firewood being split and crowing of roosters could be heard.

Louis took off his cloak, placed his sword by the wall, and sat by the bed, quietly watching the leaping firelight for a moment.

He was alone not simply to rest.

The main purpose of his visit to Cold Fir was to save people.

But how could he only save Lei Xi'er and then leave without dealing with other matters?

"Might as well handle everything that needs to be done now," he murmured to himself.

Louis took a small notebook from his chest.

It was a notebook that had been read countless times, its pages' corners curled, and its cover worn white.

Yet even so, when Louis opened it, his actions were still careful and solemn.

Its cover was filled with lines of twisted and peculiar characters.

To the people of this world, they were an ancient and lost cipher.

But only he knew that they were intentionally written in Chinese.

A script system only he could understand in this world.

"After all, if this thing is dropped one day and someone inadvertently picks it up..." A bitter smile appeared on Louis's lips, "I don't want anyone guessing that I can foresee the future."

Within this notebook were recorded not just scattered thoughts, but densely packed information.

All gathered from the Daily Intelligence System prompts.

Louis didn't trust his memory to be perfect day after day, year after year.

Hence every piece of intelligence was neatly recorded here, carefully categorized.

His fingers flipped through the pages, pausing on one, its title grandly labeled: "Cold Fir Territory Resource Summary."

"There's indeed quite a bit of useful resources," he murmured softly.

"Cold Gravel Stone... produced from the northern ridge mine." He muttered, his fingertip resting on that line, "Though it's just a lower grade material, it's sturdy enough for building roads, bulwarks, and even makeshift city walls... Red-striped Fir too, resistant to splitting and cold-tough."

He leaned back in the chair, a slight smile on his lips, "With these two items used correctly, I can construct my Earth Tower-style castle... Not only against wind and snow but also for defense against external enemies."

He continued scanning downward, below which were some categories of food.

Cold Berries shrubs, Mountain Plum, Frozen Scale Fish...

To his eyes, these names were devoid of poetic charm and carried only stark value.

"Hmm... Although it's a remote land, these food specialties are indeed stronger than Red Tide Territory's early days." He whispered, fingertips gently tapping on the table.

Cold Berries were energy-rich, though tart, they stored exceptionally well, high-quality for making jams or fruit wine.

Mountain Plum dried those excellently for use as ration snacks when dried.

The Frozen Scale Fish, a peculiar product from frigid river sections, with its tight flesh naturally boasting a slightly icy texture, made for an excellent nutritional supplement.

"These... could be food for the people, but also cultivated on a large scale for sale."

His mind quickly ran through the scenarios:

Cold Berries and Mountain Plum, once collected, could be sent to fruit processing workshops for unified boiling, pickling, drying, and then packaged for sale;

While the Frozen Scale Fish could utilize simple smokehouses and cold storage, making long-term preservation not a concern.

With Red Tide Territory's smoking techniques added, the commercialization of these items would practically be second nature.

"Centralized purchase, processing, and storage into a warehouse..."

"With a system in place, I could directly have the Calvin Commerce Association under my control bring these to market." His eyes lit up, "This wouldn't just be mere food; it would become Cold Fir Territory's own industrial chain."

Chapter 193: Cangwen Bee Swarm

Louis's fingers gently traced the surface of the notebook paper, his eyes swiftly scanning line after line of resource intelligence.

But what truly caught his attention was a line of words circled in red pen.

Cyan-striped Bee Swarm, produced in South Forest Gorge, harvests honey every year.

The honey slightly stimulates Fighting Energy coagulation. Although the effect is not strong, long-term consumption can stabilize the flow of internal Fighting Energy, suitable for knights' daily cultivation and consumption.

He blinked, and the next moment, a smile he couldn't suppress appeared on his lips.

"This is truly something precious."

The most daunting challenge in cultivating the Fighting Energy system is instability.

For those with poor aptitude, it scatters at a touch; those with high aptitude may still suffer from cultivation deviation.

However, having such a supplement that can gently nurture and stabilize breathing, though its effect is weak, can accumulate over time and nourish quietly.

Such a thing could be sold for a fortune on the market!

"Naturally, it cannot be easily sold," Louis murmured softly, "Such resources... must be completely under one's control."

His mind quickly conjured the image of the Frost Blood Redberry orchard in Red Tide that was about to mature.

The fruit forest located at the edge of the hot spring thermic zone was now quietly revealing its first batch of deep red fruits.

Frost Blood Redberry.

An extremely rare mutated berry, born at the edge environment where extreme cold and magic coexist.

Its flesh is deep red like blood, and its magical power concentration far exceeds ordinary spirit fruits. Moreover, this magic power, for the cultivation of bloodline knights... has an almost "catalyst-like" effect.

Not only can it directly enhance the intensity of Fighting Energy, but it also helps break through bottlenecks, compressing phases that originally took years into mere months.

If it can be refined and fused with the mild azure patterned honey...

An image of a golden-clear, slightly red-glowing Fighting Energy supplement instantly emerged in his mind.

The perfect Knight Growth Potion!

"Azure honey... paired with Frost Blood Berry..." Louis muttered.

His fingertips swiftly drew two striking red lines on the notebook paper, heavily circling and connecting the two.

This is a sustainable, expandable industry chain.

Moreover, it's a core project that could alter the future structure of combat effectiveness.

It's a true "knight-nurturing" war preparation workshop belonging to Red Tide.

"A core industry that can enhance knights' growth efficiency... is thus taking shape."

Not just for money.

But for the victory in the next battle.

The crisis is approaching step by step, and the future of Red Tide Territory needs more strong young knights.

And I must prepare the best supplements for them.

Louis took some time to list all the resources that could be utilized in his notebook, one by one.

When he closed the notebook, the cold dawn had already appeared on the horizon.

"Resources aren't afraid of being mixed, just afraid of being ignored."

He rubbed his somewhat sore neck and yawned.

Prepared to stage a "Lord personally surveys resources, diligent in governance, and loves the people" performance.

Then he really spent two whole days with people, pretending as if surveying Cold Fir Territory, confirming resource locations.

Until the morning of the third day, Louis finally took out the distribution map he drew himself.

A scroll of parchment was spread on the conference table, pointing at each color-marked area with decisiveness:

"Cold Berries shrub, collectively harvested and made into jam, establish a small boiling workshop, can be stored in winter, with a sweet and sour taste, perfect to be sold to the nobility.

Processed and sold externally as 'Snow Ridge Fruit', will definitely fetch a good price."

"Mountain Plum seeds, select healthy ones, transplant thirty acres on the southeast hillside. These have shallow roots and strong adaptability, perfect for expanding orchards.

Frozen Scale Fish, set a unified capture once per week, refrigerate a portion, and send the rest for salting and drying in Red Tide Territory.

A small processing point can be built along nearby riverways, allowing residents to earn some extra money during work exchanges.

Cold Gravel Stone and Red-striped Fir are even more indispensable, good for road construction and vehicle-making.

First, let people mark out the ore veins and forest areas, logging and mining in batches, and transporting them to each territory."

With each mention, the Town Mayor's eyes brightened.

After Louis finished explaining all the arrangements, the meeting table fell silent for several breaths.

Then the Town Mayor let out a heavy sigh.

"Lord, this... this isn't just an ordinary arrangement, it's paving an industry chain for Cold Fir Territory!"

There was an excitement in his eyes like rain after a long drought: "I originally thought our small, poor place could only produce some wood and dig some stones, relying on subsidies from Red Tide Territory for food... who'd have thought, there's so much potential!"

He spoke while looking at Louis with admiration.

This young boy, who is not yet too old, just circled Cold Fir Territory twice and seemed to see through the earth's veins, understanding the resources of the entire territory clearly and distinctly.

"No wonder he's the Commandery Princess of Snow Peak County..." a strange respect arose in the Town Mayor's heart.

This isn't a nobility that just sits and gives orders; this is a lord who truly knows how to turn a piece of land into a foundation and turn the people into power.

So everyone promptly accepted their orders, with each resource marked on the map detailedly explained, and every task orderly assigned.

The Town Mayor and a few executives nodded repeatedly, leaving the hall holding their notes and diagrams, ready to embark on intense preparations.

Yet just as everyone was getting up to leave, their eyes couldn't help but fall on the area Louis left unmentioned.

At the very bottom of the map, close to the forest line of the Southern Territory, there was a line encircled in heavy crimson ink.

Louis noticed it and smiled, "I'll personally handle this."

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The shadows of the forest danced, and vines twisted around branches.

The moment the group stepped into the South Forest Gorge, the air became strangely cold and oppressive.

This place was shrouded in cold mist all year round, the sunlight scarcely penetrated, and the ground was covered with decaying leaves and dense woods, resembling a certain ancient dormant giant beast.

Louis walked at the forefront of the group, draped in a thick cloak, his gaze slowly sweeping over the forest.

The dozen or more people accompanying him were all battle-hardened knights, carefully selected from the Red Tide Territory.

Under the protection of fighting energy, they would be unscathed even if attacked by bees.

However, they were not here to fight on this journey.

They were here to invite the bees home.

"Here we are." Lambert softly reminded.

In front, the shrub suddenly split into an opening, and an incongruous dark golden color swayed gently within.

That was not sunlight, but a swarm of bees.

Thousands of "Cyan-striped Bees," each with wings no wider than a thumb, entirely dark green, with faint blue stripes on their wings, clustered densely on the gigantic hive on one side of the forest wall.

They moved and flew silently, yet exuded an indescribable sense of oppression.

"Truly spectacular," a knight murmured but dared not take a step closer.

"Don't underestimate them," Louis squinted, "if the Cangwen Bee Swarm senses a threat, they'll immediately issue a self-destruct signal, destroying the hive yet slaughtering all intruders."

Lambert smiled wryly, "My Lord, these can't be transported, they can't be forcibly relocated at all."

Louis chuckled softly, but did not panic.

He bent down and took a small bottle of pale blue liquid from his wooden box, and as he opened it, a slight chill spread.

The liquid was a mixture of frost leaf vine dew, cold frost orchid powder, and night snow moss essential oil.

It was a marvelous scent.

Like the flower fragrance of a snowy night, or the grass juice in frost, carrying a profound sense of tranquility that seeped into the bones.

"This is...?" Lambert was stunned.

"It's Hillcot's 'Frost Fragrance Lure,'" Louis revealed a meaningful smile, "specifically prepared for the bee swarm.

When atomized, the plant pheromones released infiltrate the neural pathways of the Cyan-striped Bees, suppressing their attack and self-destruct instincts."

"You've prepared this in advance?"

"Of course, I didn't come to the Cold Fir Territory just for a stroll."

The knight pressed a mechanism, and with a "click," the atomizing device sprayed a wispy mist that quickly dispersed into the air.

The mist was mixed with the scents of several special plants, carrying a faint coolness.

It was a potion specially prepared by Hillcot for this mission, able to calm the Cyan-striped Bee Swarm so they wouldn't become agitated or even explode.

The mist soon seeped into the beehive, and the initially intense buzzing gradually diminished, as though enveloped by something gentle.

Each Cyan-striped Bee stopped buzzing madly and instead clung quietly to the hive entrance, almost hesitantly.

"Now," Louis softly commanded, standing among the trees, eyes focused.

The knights who had been standing by immediately sprang into action, with two carrying a wooden box to the edge of the beehive.

The box was lined with pieces of old hive and beeswax, with even the smell taken from the original hive, making the bees feel it was a familiar new home.

Another knight took out a small brush, dabbing a few drops of the special liquid on the edges of the wooden box.

Soon, a few Cyan-striped Bees were attracted, flying a circle around the box hesitantly and then gradually crawling inside.

"They're drawn in!" someone whispered excitedly.

Once a few bees went inside, more followed.

One by one, they flew out from the old hive, hovered over the wooden box, and then descended into it.

"The rhythm is excellent, keep drawing them."

"Don't rush, wait for the queen bee."

Louis stood aside, not intervening, yet constantly observing the overall situation.

They couldn't forcibly move the hive, as the swarm would lose control.

As long as the queen bee entered the new hive, the entire swarm would follow the relocation.

Several minutes later, finally, the slightly larger queen bee with light blue stripes on its wings slowly emerged from the nest, circling the air filled with fragrance for a while before entering the new wooden box.

The bee swarm erupted into new activity instantly, as if receiving a signal, and the swarm almost scrambled to fly into the new box.

"Close the lid, quickly!"

The wooden box was gently closed, leaving small ventilation holes but not sealing it completely.

The bee swarm buzzed lowly within the box but was no longer agitated, as if they had already regarded this as their new home.

"Move it back, transport it to the South Slope of Cold Fir Territory," Louis ordered, "there's good sunlight and a water source there, suitable for setting up a temporary apiary."

"Yes!" several knights responded in unison.

They carefully lifted the wooden box, as if holding an immense treasure.

Louis stood in the woods, watching as this first box of Cyan-striped Bees was successfully relocated, his lips curving slightly.

Chapter 194: The Mage Awakens

In the southwest corner of Cold Fir Territory, rows of orderly bee hives stood staggered under the sun.

"The terrain here is quite good, sheltered from the wind and facing the sun, and near the creek," Louis squinted as he surveyed the surroundings, his tone revealing a hint of satisfaction.

Beside him, a knight draped in a deep red cloak stood respectfully, occasionally flipping through a record board he carried.

He was the commander in charge of the experiment with the bee swarm.

"The hives are made of Red-striped Fir as you instructed," the Beekeeper Knight reported, "The inner layer is coated with Ice Pattern Stone powder to suitably insulate against the cold."

Louis nodded gently, walked to one of the hives, crouched down, and traced his fingers over the wooden surface, carefully feeling the temperature of the grain.

"Very good. And the mist device?"

"It's already installed." The Beekeeper Knight paused, walked over, and pressed the switch on the back of the hive.

With a light "click," a small bottle popped out from the bottle mouth, and mist began to gently emit.

The mist, as fine as threads, shimmered slightly in the sunlight, carrying a subtle plant fragrance.

This was a specially formulated calming mist.

Extracted from "Frost Leaf Vine," "Night Snow Moss," and a small amount of "Dark Silver Leaf."

It was designed specifically to suppress the Cyan-striped Bee's tendency towards explosively volatile behavior.

"The misting frequency is set to every four hours," the Beekeeper Knight pointed to the set of dials at the top of the hive, "The interval at night is shortened to three hours, and following your last suggestion, an automatic sensing array has been added."

Louis smiled appreciatively.

He walked a few more steps forward and looked up at the somewhat peculiar "covers" atop the hives.

These were not ordinary planks, but rather a kind of transparent animal hide treated from cold-region beasts, both flexible and slightly elastic.

The knights had used it to form a domed ceiling, giving the hives the appearance of being enclosed in a warm miniature greenhouse.

Sunlight poured down through the semi-transparent hide, bathing the hives and even dyeing the mist on the ground with a layer of gentle warmth.

"This way, they won't be too agitated at night," Louis said calmly.

Of course, it wasn't smooth sailing from the start.

The first batch of moved Cyan-striped Bees displayed not adaptation, but agitation in the new environment.

On the first nightfall, the buzzing within one of the hives suddenly intensified, as if something was struggling frantically at the brink of repression.

The walls of the hive were violently struck, the lid bulged several times, and some bees even pierced through the ventilation holes, screeching as they rushed into the cold night.

"The swarm is escaping!" the patrolling knight shouted, bursting forth with Fighting Energy, sealing the hive entrance with a cold light that cut through the night.

Louis arrived upon hearing the news, only to see faint blue glows flicker and vanish in the air—the remnants of the Cyan-striped Bees' self-destruction.

"The self-destruction rate is higher than expected." He frowned, looking at the hive scarred by scorch marks.

Calm, as if not facing a group of near out-of-control dangerous creatures, but rather unraveling a complex puzzle.

"Seal the hive, record. Increase the mist spraying," he ordered, "Tell the Alchemy Apprentices to deepen the proportions of 'Frost Leaf Vine' and 'Night Snow Moss' by another percent, and increase 'Dark Silver Leaf' to the stability limit."

"Yes!"

The spraying frequency of the fogging bottles was also forced to adjust from every three hours to every two hours.

The dense mist, thick enough to almost condense into droplets, spread around the hives, undispersed by the night wind, visible in the moonlight as a faint silver haze.

However, the core of the swarm's agitation was not just environmental discomfort.

It was the Queen Bee.

"The Queen Bee refuses to build a hive..." the Beekeeper Knight reported in a low voice, "They seem to still have a strong attachment to the pheromone scent of the old hive."

Once the Queen Bee refuses to settle, the entire swarm falls into disorder.

Group chaos, self-destruction, is only a matter of time.

Louis stood at the edge of the slope, silently watching a solitary bee fall in the night, feeling quite pained, as it was all money, after all.

The next morning, he personally drafted a new layout for the arrangement of the hives.

"Cancel the original flat arrangement, change everything to a stepped formation, arranged low in the southeast, high in the northwest, with each hive's distance mimicking the hanging height of natural hives in the gorge."

He explained while sketching on the blueprint, "Hollow out the internal structure to mimic the recessed cavity-type hive chambers on rock walls, add residual Queen Bee pheromone solution."

This was a new attempt to simulate the natural hanging hive structure of South Forest Gorge.

The hives were no longer cold, mechanical rows of tools, but constructed homes mimicking nature.

The accompanying Alchemy Apprentices were worn-out, their eyes red from exhaustion.

The knights, on the other hand, formed groups of three to take turns keeping watch, recording data three times a day:

Number of bees, Queen Bee activity, honey collection frequency, nighttime activities.

Days later, the wind on Fog Pine Slope no longer dispersed the gentle humming sound around the hives.

Three hives of Cyan-striped Bees had stabilized in building their nests.

The fogging devices still regularly misted the calming essence, and the knights continued their night watch shifts.

But the initial oppressive tension had gradually faded away.

The movement range of the Queen Bees was marked, their status recorded, their behavior predictable.

The once greatest uncertainty was now under control.

There were occasional small disturbances, but no more instances of self-destruction.

"They've really settled down." A knight sighed softly, watching the cyan-striped bees crawl slowly between the hives, barely believing the calm before his eyes.

During daylight, the swarm was already able to fly out on its own and start collecting honey.

Some time later, inside a special hive.

The specially designed honey collector slowly opened, and a faint, mild fragrance accompanied by light mist drifted out.

This was the first batch of Fighting Qi Honey collected.

The color was a soft pale golden hue, and as it poured onto the silver spoon, it shimmered faintly, as if it possessed a spirit, gently undulating with the airflow.

"Smells good." Louis personally took the honey collection key, dipped a fingertip into a drop.

Louis tasted the honey, sweet with a hint of bitterness, a coolness that later turned into a warmth within.

It was a subtle yet real acceleration in the flow of Fighting Qi, like a breeze brushing past the core of Fighting Qi, bringing a slight uplift.

"Not rich enough yet." Louis opened his eyes, calmly evaluating, "But it's already qualified."

After confirming that the trial breeding base at the edge of the Cold Fir Territory could successfully tame the Cangwen Bee Swarm, Louis felt somewhat happy, but it was not yet time to relax.

"Important resources must be transported back to the Red Tide Territory, where there is adequate protection and resource assurance."

The Red Tide Territory is not only his foundational domain but also the core of military power.

Assets as important as the Cangwen Bee Swarm could only be trusted in the Red Tide Territory.

To ensure the safety of the swarm, Louis personally oversaw the preparation of a special transportation plan.

The carriage used for transportation was modified into a "Fog-Locked Box," a sealed hive capable of controlling temperature and humidity.

Equipped with a magic distillation device, it could slowly release a low-temperature aromatic mist formulated from Frost Leaf Vine, continuously and steadily suppressing the swarm's agitation.

And now, affairs in the Cold Fir Territory were gradually getting on track.

The Cold Berries processing workshop was completed and ready to start trial production of the first batch of fruit paste, and Mountain Plum seeds were taking root and sprouting on the mountainside.

The salting workshop for Frozen Scale Fish emitted a salty fragrance daily.

Cold Gravel Stone and Red-striped Fir were being continuously loaded onto transport carts and sent across the land.

Meanwhile, the three trial-bred Cangwen Bee hives were loaded onto carriages, ready to head to the Red Tide Territory.

Everything was coming to fruition as planned.

"Time to go back."

Behind him, a reinforced sealed carriage was parked in a dark alley, the compartment surrounded by multiple Fighting Qi Barriers, containing the three precious Cangwen Bee Swarms inside.

In another carriage, Lei Xi'er lay quietly on a stretcher padded with soft animal skins and herbal packs, his face still pale, with dark marks vaguely remaining on the wounds.

He hasn't awakened yet, but Louis didn't hesitate: "Take him along, back to the Red Tide Territory."

After all, the main objective of this journey was him, so how could he leave him in the Cold Fir Territory?

But to avoid unnecessary commotion and gratitude from the people of the Cold Fir Territory, Louis chose to leave quietly.

Thus in the dead of night, an unremarkable convoy quietly set off, following the mountain path away.

After traveling for three whole days, the Earth Tower City of the Red Tide Territory finally unfolded at the edge of the horizon, as if welcoming the long-lost returning master.

At that moment, Louis lifted the curtain from inside the carriage, watching the familiar city gate slowly open, like an old friend waiting in silence for his return.

"...Finally back."

He leaned against the soft cushion in the carriage, still holding an open notebook in his hand, but his gaze had long fallen from the pages, sinking deep into his thoughts.

There was still so much waiting for him, each thing capable of exhausting a lord's sleep.

Just then, the urgent sound of hooves approached.

"Report—Lord!" A young knight's figure appeared by the carriage window, breathless yet unable to suppress excitement: "The one... the injured person you rescued from the cave, he just woke up!"

Louis's eyes flickered sharply, then he quickly got up.

At the back of the convoy, a small medical carriage was moving slowly, lined inside with clean animal skins.

Louis lifted the curtain and immediately saw the mage.

Lei Xi'er lay there quietly, face pale, forehead covered in cold sweat, lips slightly purple.

His eyes were half-open, but his gaze still seemed a bit dazed.

"Where is this..."

He looked at the decorations hanging from the top of the carriage, hesitantly beginning to speak, his voice hoarse to the point of being nearly inaudible.

"You're awake." Louis crouched down to meet his gaze, his voice low and gentle, "I am Louis Calvin, a Viscount, I saved you by chance in a cave."

Lei Xi'er's eyes trembled slightly, as if he recalled something.

"Thank you, Lord Louis." he said softly, with gratitude.

"My name is... Lei Xi'er." He paused for a moment, as if searching through the broken fragments of his memory, "I'm sorry, my mind is a bit confused right now."

Then Lei Xi'er suddenly bit his lip, a complex emotion surfacing on his face.

As if he remembered something, or was struggling to avoid recalling it.

"Thank you." Lei Xi'er said softly, his voice shaking but clear, "No matter who you are, no matter what, I owe you my life."

The wind outside the window fluttered the curtains, sunlight dappling between them.

Louis slowly spoke, "Can you tell me, what exactly happened?"

Chapter 195: Lei Xi'er's Experience

The creaking wooden wheels gently rattled along with the sound of hooves, leaving a lingering trace of floral mist in the air, mingled with a barely discernible herbal scent.

Inside the carriage, Lei Xi'er leaned against the wall, wrapped in a thick gray-blue cloak.

His face was still deathly pale, with cold sweat on his forehead, yet his eyes were much clearer than when he awoke.

Louis watched him for a moment before speaking softly, "Can you tell me... what exactly happened?"

Lei Xi'er's eyelashes trembled slightly as he slowly propped himself up, struggling to sit upright.

He did not answer immediately, instead looking at the canopy of the carriage, as if pondering his words.

Should I tell?

Should I hide this identity?

"You don't have to force yourself." Louis looked at him, his eyes free of pressure, yet imbued with a sense of inexplicable sincerity.

"After all, it happened near my territory. I have a responsibility to know what you encountered and make preparations in advance."

Lei Xi'er met those eyes, seeing the black-haired youth sitting straight on the other side of the carriage, his brows full of undisguised worry, yet maintaining dignified and restrained politeness.

Such demeanor left him silent for a long time before he finally spoke in a low voice.

"I... am a mage." He spoke softly.

"I was ordered to investigate some... special phenomena nearby, but I didn't expect... our team was attacked in the nearby dense forest."

Louis's expression shifted slightly, as if a certain word had struck a nerve, and he "surprisedly" widened his eyes, "Wait a minute... you said you're... a mage?"

Upon hearing Lei Xi'er say those two words, Louis made the most natural expression.

Shock, confusion, and then an undeniable awe and yearning.

He acted so well that even he almost believed his own reaction.

Seeing his shocked expression, a weary yet genuine smile unexpectedly formed at the corners of Lei Xi'er's mouth, a faint hint of pride appearing in his eyes.

"Yes, I am."

Louis still appeared somewhat incredulous, "But I heard that mages are... extinct? Confirmed to have vanished from history several generations ago..."

It was somewhat exaggerated, as a scion of the Eight Great Clans, he had seen two mages before.

However, Lei Xi'er did not notice this; he smiled slightly, as if satisfied with the other's reaction.

He straightened his back and replied with some pride, "They haven't disappeared. They just never appear before the 'public'. And the conditions to become a mage... are extremely stringent and scarce in number, so most people don't know of their existence."

Louis said nothing, as if lost in a kind of reverent contemplation.

After a long while, he spoke slowly, "I've never seen real magic... if possible, I'd really like to learn some."

He paused, then added with a half-smile, "Of course, not forcing you to teach me while you're sick. You're still very weak, at least wait until you can walk normally."

Lei Xi'er was momentarily taken aback, then laughed out loud, but he didn't intend to delve further into this topic.

After all, the more invested these "curious ones" are, the easier it is to attract unnecessary trouble.

So he went along with it, gently steering the conversation back:

"At that time, I was resting with my companions... but unexpectedly, that place harbored a will manipulating insect swarms. We... were careless."

"Manipulating insect swarms?" Louis frowned, instinctively catching the keyword, "What is it?"

That's what he really wanted to hear.

Lei Xi'er spoke softly, "At first, I also thought it was a common attack. But when they pounced out from the bushes, we realized how wrong we were."

He raised his gaze, the color of recollection intensifying, "They looked human, white-haired, wearing tattered leather armor, with some twisted totems on their chests, but they weren't alive, like something was controlling them."

Louis was stunned, a figure of a Snow Swearer appearing in his mind.

Being attacked by Snow Swearers in the Northern Territory was all too normal, but what did it mean that they weren't alive?

"You mean... they're like puppets?"

"Hmm... to be precise, they're corpse puppets controlled by insects," Lei Xi'er nodded, his voice lowering,

"Their joints bent back like broken puppets, moving oddly, as if tugged by strings, without any sense of pain. Beneath the muscles, there's a writhing swarm of insects, like maggots, constantly squirming...

One had its arm broken, yet it still lunged at me with its elbow bone, gnawing like a wild dog."

The carriage went momentarily silent.

After all, his words were indeed terrifying, and Louis needed some time to digest them.

Seeing Louis remain silent, Lei Xi'er continued speaking, as if unloading a nightmare hidden in his heart:

"Their bodies... are filled with insect eggs. When they burst, their body cavity explodes, spewing out swathes of translucent insect swarms."

Louis's face changed, feeling nausea rising in his stomach.

"And the scariest thing is," Lei Xi'er paused, his voice lowering to almost a whisper, "they can invade the human brain... controlling consciousness. The parasites retain some memory, skills, even language. One of my companions was possessed this way."

The air inside the carriage became stagnant.

The heavy silence fell like a slowly descending curtain, sealing the small space airtight.

Louis didn't speak immediately, his face no longer as gentle and composed as before.

"Those things, are already active on the border of my territory?"

Louis whispered, as if confirming to himself, or repressing the surging waves within.

No wonder Lei Xi'er was injured this heavily.

Insect Swarm, manipulating corpses, consciousness parasitism, possibly even retaining combat instincts from life...

Each word seemed to be unveiling a prologue of calamity.

Every sentence horrifying, every word deadly.

And perhaps related to the "Great Crisis" foretold by the intelligence system.

He looked up, wanting to continue his inquiry, but saw Lei Xi'er's face pale as paper, showing signs of drowsiness just as he finished speaking.

"No more." Louis whispered, with some suppression, "You rest first."

He took a deep breath, his tone solemn, "I will send people to the place where you were attacked... to see if there are any traces left."

Lei Xi'er nodded with difficulty, his voice so low it was almost inaudible, "Be careful... they're not... afraid of death..."

After saying that, he slowly closed his eyes, falling back into slumber.

The carriage gently swayed, the wind howling outside, like the echo of insects' wings rubbing in the distance.

Louis drew back the curtain, jumped off the carriage, and saw Lambert riding ahead at first glance.

"Lambert."

"Yes, Lord."

"Immediately send two elite knights to investigate the cave where the mage was found, and be cautious. If anything unusual is discovered, don't engage, return immediately."

Lambert's expression also grew solemn, "Understood."

After giving the instructions, Louis returned to the carriage.

The carriage resumed its journey, the Cangwen Bee Swarm humming softly, maintaining a steady course towards the Red Tide Territory as always.

Chapter 196: Two Letters About the Marriage Alliance

When they returned to the Red Tide Territory, the sky was at twilight.

Outside the city gates, Bradley had been waiting with a group for quite some time.

The old butler, impeccably dressed, took a few steps forward as he saw Louis approaching from afar:
"My lord, welcome back."

"Mm." Louis dismounted, his gaze sweeping past the specially designed bee transport carriage behind him.

Three boxes of Cyan-striped Bees were securely fixed inside the carriage.

"No abnormalities in the hives?" he asked casually.

"There were two instances of slight agitation on the way, but the mist spray worked its effect; everything is stable now," the Bee-taming Knight reported succinctly.

Louis nodded, looking toward another carriage behind him. That was the carriage for the injured; Lei Xi'er was lying inside, her forehead wrapped in white cloth, her complexion pale, yet she still managed to keep her eyes open and smile at him.

He waved his hand, signaling to several medical staff from the team who immediately stepped forward to carefully lift Lei Xi'er down and take her to the medical room inside the main castle.

As for the bee hives, they were arranged to be placed in a plot of land in the southern part of the Red Tide Territory.

The area was full of sunlight, water sources were convenient, and it was far from the crowd. It was a special cultivation area designated by the Red Tide Territory.

Once everything was settled, Louis let out a long sigh, as if finally relieved from a silent battle.

He removed his gloves and glanced at the Red Tide Territory, gradually becoming peaceful under the twilight, then turned and walked with Bradley toward the depths of the main castle to the office.

He initially thought that after being away for many days, official duties would pile up like mountains. Unexpectedly, upon pushing the door open, the desk was unexpectedly tidy.

Apart from a few urgent documents awaiting approval, most affairs had been properly handled by Bradley.

"You did very well." Louis sat down, his gaze landing on the meticulously organized file cabinet, and said softly.

"I don't dare to claim credit." Bradley bowed slightly, his demeanor as humble and steady as always, "It is merely my duty."

As he spoke, he took out two tightly sealed letters from his bosom and presented them with both hands.

"These two letters were urgently delivered by courier early this morning. One is from the Duke, the other from Duke Edmund."

A flicker of surprise crossed Louis's eyes, but when he took the letters, he didn't say much.

The content of these two letters was probably about the "arranged marriage."

Louis first opened his father's letter, the familiar family seal and handwriting came into view.

The words on the letter confirmed his premonition—the arranged marriage had been settled.

The wedding would be held on July 12th. To avoid arousing the Emperor's suspicion, all ceremonies would be kept simple, not extravagantly inviting noble guests.

Both the Calvin and Edmund families would handle it low-key, only inviting familiar relatives and such.

The letter also mentioned that due to the Empire's turbulent situation, Duke Calvin would not personally attend the wedding.

Instead, Louis's third brother, the third son of the Calvin family, would attend, representing the family in the wedding ceremony responsibilities.

Reading to the part where "Third Brother" would come representing the father at the wedding, Louis paused for a moment.

His impression of this elder brother, to be honest... was almost non-existent.

Since he could remember, that "Third Brother" had not been in the Calvin family residence.

It was said he was sent far away for special training.

But almost no one in the family knew where he went.

He didn't expect the family to send such a person to represent in the wedding.

But this wasn't an important matter, and Louis didn't think much of it.

"July 12th, the wedding..." Louis softly repeated, his lips unconsciously curling into a slight smile.

He refolded the letter from his father and placed it in the desk drawer.

In this harsh Northern Territory, as he walked step by step to where he was now, he understood better than anyone the significance of a stable alliance.

And the young girl Emily Edmund, who would soon become his wife.

She was not only the daughter of a Governor but also a symbol of his deep bonding with Northern forces.

More importantly, she was quite beautiful!

He took out a clean piece of letter paper, dabbed it in ink, and began to write.

The first few lines were merely pleasantries and confirmations, the tone restrained and appropriate.

He informed his father that he was already aware of the wedding date and would make all arrangements to ensure no mistakes occurred at the wedding.

Regarding his father's inability to attend, he expressed understanding and promised to meet with his third brother properly.

The wording revealed little emotion, but it carried a sense of ease and confidence.

At the end, he briefly mentioned the current state of his territory and thanked his father for his help.

After finishing the letter, Louis slightly blew on the ink, confirming it was dry, before neatly folding the letter, placing it in an envelope. With a gentle press of his finger on the Fire Lacquer Seal box, the Red Tide emblem was immediately embossed on the seal.

"This letter, have someone send it back to the family later," he handed the letter to Bradley, his tone calm.

"Understood." Bradley respectfully accepted it.

Louis's gaze lingered on the corner of the table, where there was a letter still unopened, sealed in deep blue wax stamped with the Edmund family's Northern Territory crest.

Louis opened it directly and began to read.

The content of the letter was not long but measured, with a stable style carrying the typical cold austerity of the Northern Territory:

As he expected, the letter confirmed the marriage arrangement.

Duke Edmund expressed recognition for his past military achievements in concise language, especially the night raid on Qingyu Ridge, calling it a "Northland-shocking decision."

The letter then expressed satisfaction with the formalization of the marriage contract, frankly stating, "This is not only an alliance between families but also an important step for the future of the Northern Territory."

Subsequently, the tone of the letter became slightly softer.

Although Emily is my daughter, she is not a weak and ignorant person. She has been educated in equestrian arts and political principles from an early age, possessing both grace and rationality.

I hope that in the future, you will not only treat her as an ally but also as a husband should.

She is not a bargaining chip, but a companion on your journey through the snow and wind.

These words slightly moved Louis.

The letter concluded with the arrangements for the wedding:

The wedding will be held in the Red Tide Territory, with simple arrangements, and distant nobles will not be invited to avoid attracting excessive attention from the Royal Family.

Only a few trusted relatives and nobles will witness the ceremony.

The materials and paraphernalia required for the wedding will be dispatched by the Edmund family.

After reading the letter, Louis gently rubbed the paper sealed with the Ice Wolf Badge, as if savoring those unexpected reminders and praises.

"Truly unlike the so-called cold-faced iron-blooded Duke would write," he murmured, a slight smile on his lips.

It was as if he could see a father's restrained affection for his daughter between the lines.

Louis pulled out a clean piece of letter paper to reply.

The content written to Duke Edmund was not long, yet every word was appropriate.

It expressed gratitude to the other party and officially responded, emphasizing the value placed on the marriage contract.

He wrote at the end of the letter: "Please do not worry, my lord, she will not be my vassal, but a partner on my journey through life."

Having finished writing, he dried the letter, folded it, sealed it, and pressed on the Red Tide Territory's fire lacquer seal, then handed it to the waiting Bradley beside him.

"Send this letter to the Edmund family."

"Yes, my lord."

Louis withdrew his gaze out of the window, seeming to mention casually, "By the way, I should let you know about this."

He paused, looking at the mature and steady old butler: "I am going to enter into a marriage alliance with Duke Edmund's daughter, Emily."

For a moment, it seemed like the air stopped.

Bradley's eyes widened slightly, his whole body shook gently, as if even his breathing skipped a beat.

He hadn't expected that Louis would eventually marry.

But he never imagined that the bride would be the daughter of the Lord of the North.

The Duke's family, who represents the military power and traditional honor of the Empire's frontier, is now entering into a marriage alliance with Louis of the Calvin Clan.

"Is it confirmed?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes, it's been arranged by both my father and Duke Edmund, and the wedding will take place on July 12th," Louis replied calmly.

Bradley fell silent for two breaths, then immediately bowed with rare enthusiasm and joy, "Congratulations, my lord! This marriage alliance holds great significance!"

Louis smiled slightly and nodded softly.

"You can start preparing for the wedding in advance, keep it simple, no need for extravagance," he said, "But don't let it be too modest either."

Bradley understood, his expression became solemn: "Understood. I will select a suitable process that is both dignified and reflects the Lord's demeanor."

As he left the room, his steps were slightly quicker than usual.

The door closed gently, leaving tranquility in the room.

Louis leaned back in his chair, looking up at the ceiling.

This marriage alliance is extremely important for him.

It is like a meticulously crafted key gear, setting the whole Northern Territory plan into formal motion.

First is the elevation of status.

Duke Edmund, who is the supreme symbol of power in the Northern Territory.

His son-in-law is not just a familial title, but a direct endorsement of Northern legitimacy.

Although he already holds the position of Prefect of Snow Peak County, he still lacks a title to truly suppress local forces and unite people's hearts, which he now has.

Presumably, no one will act blindly or irrationally in the future.

Next is Calvin's role transition.

As the "Northern Territory Representative" of the Calvin family, he has obtained Level 2 Permissions, which means he can mobilize part of the resources from the Southeast System, including materials, knights, and the civil servant system, etc.

Now, with this marriage alliance, he has become the convergence point of the interests of the two great families, leaving no room to question his necessity.

The Northern Territory's strongest sword and the Southeast's most prosperous wing thus converge on him.

The Northern Territory has mines, but lacks external markets and supplies.

Calvin controls the southern ports and trade routes. Once managed by him, the Northern Territory can continuously send minerals, ice beast materials, and rare herbs to the South in exchange for grain, salt, iron, and luxury goods.

The divide between the ice and snow of the north and the warmth of the south is no longer an isolation, but a passage of intertwined interests.

And the hub of this passage is him.

Furthermore, when he and Emily have children, they will be joint heirs of the Calvin and Edmund clans.

Not only will they naturally inherit the authority of both regions by blood, but they will also become key figures in the Empire's political landscape over the next twenty years.

Of course, this is just his imagination. Politics is not as simple and naive as that; it will depend on the future's specific moves.

Chapter 197: Teacher, I Want to Learn Magic!

On the south slope of Red Tide Territory, the newly built apiary has begun to take shape.

The entire site is located in a leeward, sunlit valley, covered with a translucent animal skin dome to prevent the cold.

The Red-striped Fir hives are arranged neatly, occasionally emitting a pale blue calming mist, exuding the scent of Frost Leaf Vine and Night Snow Moss.

The Cangwen Bee Swarm flutters quietly in the air, maintaining orderly discipline.

"The state of the swarm is excellent." The accompanying Beekeeper Knight reported to Louis, "The Queen Bee has adapted to the new hive, the collection of Fighting Qi Honey is stable, and it's expected that we can expand the colony next month."

Louis nodded, his expression satisfied.

The honey produced by this swarm, while not enhancing Fighting Energy significantly, excels in stability and longevity.

It pairs perfectly with Frost Blood Redberry to create a supplement suitable for a knight's regular consumption.

He turned and instructed his old butler, Bradley, beside him: "You take charge of this matter, from honey collection to storage, and subsequent processing. Once the Frost Blood Redberry ripens, coordinate with Hillco to combine it with the berries and develop an efficient knight supplement."

Bradley listened, and a rare hint of excitement flickered in his eyes.

He understood well what this symbolized, not just a simple resource of honey, but the birth of wave after wave of knights, signaling the rise of Red Tide Territory's military foundation!

"Understood, my Lord." He took a deep breath and nodded solemnly, "I will personally oversee everything to ensure not a drop of honey is wasted."

At that moment, someone rode into the apiary, interrupting their conversation.

"Lord!" A knight in armor dismounted, slightly sweaty, and saluted.

He was one of the knights sent by Lambert to search for the mage battle remnants.

"You're back." Louis stood up, brushing grass clippings from his cloak, "How did the investigation go?"

"Reporting, my Lord, we searched the vicinity of Cold Pine Ridge according to the route." The knight unfurled a parchment map and tapped a marked spot with his knuckle, "Indeed, signs of intense combat can be seen, such as scorched forests and fractured earth veins."

"Any bodies?" Louis's gaze was calm.

"... None at all." The knight hesitated, "Not a trace of blood either, almost like... it was intentionally cleaned."

Louis remained silent, looking at the map for a few seconds, then gestured for him to continue.

The knight continued to add, "Even the traces don't look like those from a Fighting Energy battle."

"What do you mean?" Louis didn't look up, his eyes fixed on the open map.

He knew it was a battle between mages and corpse worms, yet he wanted to hear how the scene appeared.

"The ground indeed suffered severe damage, but not like weapon strikes, more like... high-temperature corrosion." The knight paused,

"Some surfaces collapsed, charred and brittle, as if splattered by some potent corrosive liquid. Yet the surrounding vegetation remains untouched, as if only designated areas were scorched."

Corrosion, yet without spreading?

Louis gently tapped a gray shadow on the map with his fingertip, "Where are these traces concentrated?"

"Tent wreckage, near the campfire site, and around some large boulders. In the most severe locations, even the soil is gone."

The knight paused, pondering his words, "It's not fire, more like... something 'corroded' it and then evaporated."

"Additionally, there's another peculiar detail."

"Speak."

"There's a pervasive... indescribable smell on the scene."

Louis slightly raised an eyebrow, "Is it a blood smell?"

"No, a blood smell is stronger and more acrid. It's like... the stench of a corpse rotting in hot weather for a week or two, mixed with a metallic and rotten egg odor."

The knight shook his head, frowning in recollection, "The smell was particularly sticky, clinging to the nasal cavity. Even after returning for two hours, it seemed to persist on our clothes."

"Is it from a single source or the entire area?"

"The whole area... when the wind blows, it can spread to the trees on the other side." The knight's eyes showed a trace of unease.

"And those charred areas are barren. But a little further away, the grass is unaffected, as if... someone had precisely drawn a boundary, inside which everything burned, corroded, erased, while outside not a bit touched."

"No signs of wild animals getting close either?" Louis asked slowly.

"Yes... absolutely none. We initially thought wolves might approach to scavenge post-battle, but that area was eerily silent, not even a single insect sighted."

He paused for a few seconds and cautiously supplemented, "It's like... it's cursed."

Louis gazed at the woodland mark on the map, wordless.

The knight waited for two seconds, "My report is complete."

"I understand. You may leave now, remember not to speak of this matter."

"Yes." The knight saluted and left quickly.

By the hives, bees buzzed like a tide, leaving dappled light and shadow on the wooden boxes in the afternoon sun.

Louis stood before the fence, gently brushing a slowly crawling worker bee with his fingers, yet his gaze was far from the present.

He waited until the sound of the knight's footsteps gradually faded.

Louis withdrew his gaze, calmly calling out: "Lambert."

Lambert walked briskly from under the shade, his face devoid of any smile. He had caught the gist of the previous conversation, his expression already turning grave.

As one of the few informed, he knew that area was no ordinary battlefield.

That was where Lei Xi'er and two other Silver-faced Mages were attacked by corpse worms.

And according to the knight, nothing remained on the scene but the lingering scent of decay.

"You also heard the situation." Louis looked at him, "Not a single body was left. Even bloodstains seemed to have been... completely wiped clean."

Chapter 198: Teacher, I Want to Learn Magic! (2)

"And that stench." He paused, a trace of coldness flashed in his eyes, "It's not the smell of an ordinary corpse."

Lambert silently nodded, his Adam's apple moved slightly.

According to the knights, it was a scent gnawed by some "non-human creature," as if death had been fermented and then spewed back to the mortal world, so strong it could make battlefield knights nauseous.

"I don't think it's natural cleaning." Louis's eyes lowered, "Nor should it be any animal's meal. It's more like they're the ones 'covering up their tracks.'"

Lambert's expression was extremely serious.

If even these insect-corpses understand how to clean the scene, it means that behind them... there is organization, intelligence, or they are being controlled.

"We must act." Louis turned and ordered, "Immediately send more knights, expand the search radius, conduct a carpet search within a five-mile range."

"Understood."

"Station five to six knights in that area for routine patrols. Rotate the guards in three shifts daily, not letting up at night either."

"Yes."

"And..." Louis's voice suddenly lowered, "Tell them to be cautious. Extra cautious. If they see any strange corpses, stench, or even moving 'shadows'... do not approach, immediately retreat and report back."

Lambert clenched his mouth shut, bowed his head to accept the orders.

If the knights' search and what Lei Xi'er said were true, then these orders were not exaggerated.

Louis stood in front of the beehive, watching Lambert's figure stride away, feeling heavy inside, pondering other methods of response.

He couldn't rely on himself alone; he had to inform Duke Edmund of this matter.

He has more resources, greater combat power, and is in charge of the true defense intelligence of the Northern Territory.

If these "insect-corpses" were really released by some kind of enemy...

This Lord of the North would probably know what they are, and there's a high chance he's encountered similar cases before.

This wasn't a simple skirmish, nor was it just about two mages going missing.

"I must make him take this seriously."

Of course, the matter of the mages cannot be kept secret, but it cannot be fully disclosed either.

Even Duke Edmund shouldn't know the true identity of the Silver-faced Mage and how he met Louis.

Louis prepared to report in a vague manner:

A patrol knight of the Red Tide detected an abnormal battle site, with scorched ground and a strong stench lingering in the air, suspected to be affected by an unknown demon or technique.

A severely injured survivor was found nearby, identity unknown, whom Louis happened to pass by and took in for treatment.

Simple enough, yet hidden with dangerous signals.

And this "unknown danger" is precisely the thing that would easily attract the Duke's attention.

"Let's prepare him sooner." Louis muttered softly, as if speaking to himself.

The hum of bees was all that lingered in his ears at the bee farm for a moment.

The sunlight slanted down, landing on the wooden cover of the beehive, warm and toasty.

Yet a heavy stone weighed on Louis's heart, which he couldn't relieve.

He sighed, looking up at the sky.

Great Daily Intelligence System, some info on these insects would be nice.

.....

The weather was clear, the sun was warm against the skin.

Lei Xi'er quietly sat on the wheelchair, letting the nurse behind him gently push him along the streets of Red Tide Territory.

The sunlight wasn't glaring, and the breeze carried a scent of smoked fish, somewhat enticing.

He wore a woolen cape, and although his face was still pale, there was a hint of vitality in his eyes.

This chair, which could glide over the ground, was said to have been invented by Lord Louis.

The axles and armrests were specially designed, allowing even a single person to easily maneuver it.

The people of the Red Tide Territory called it a "wheelchair," and it seemed to be quite popular, especially convenient, almost like some kind of magic, when used by the elderly and injured.

"He thought of even such details... The Red Tide Lord is truly not an ordinary person," Lei Xi'er murmured softly.

Lei Xi'er slightly moved his fingers, trying to draw magic power, but his body was still an empty shell.

The familiar flow of magic seemed to have vanished, leaving only a dried-up husk.

He lowered his head, fingertips trembling slightly, a hint of gloom rising in his heart.

Though he had woken for days, the aftermath of that near soul-burning overexertion hadn't ended yet.

He still couldn't perform magic, not even the most basic Summoning Technique could be triggered.

The connection he once had with the world now seemed like a broken string, neither responded by companions nor echoed with spiritual energy.

Lei Xi'er couldn't even cast a simple Fireball Technique now.

Worse still, this emptiness wasn't temporary; it might...

Forever change his path in magical practice.

Even if his magic power gradually recovered, he might never return to peak state.

This wasn't ordinary fatigue, but a sign of foundational damage.

He felt a tumult of anxiety, frustration, and even a touch of fear inside.

More importantly, he had countless times wanted to immediately report this crisis and encounter to the Supreme Mage

But without magic power, he couldn't even send a message.

So he was forced to stay here, quietly waiting for recovery, or waiting for his companions to come to him.

For some fresh air, this was his third outing stroll in the Red Tide Territory.

He had expected a long and boring wait, but this land unexpectedly caught his eye.

The streets, though simple, were clean and orderly, and although there weren't many merchants, it was bustling.

What surprised him the most was the expression of the people here, they actually wore smiles on their faces.

In a place like the Northern Territory, such smiles were exceedingly rare.

Children chased and played by the streets, women carried fish baskets back from the market, men sat on terraces repairing tools, drinking hot soup.

"Such a rare sight..." Lei Xi'er watched as a pair of children ran past beside his wheelchair.

Hearing them laugh shouting something like "Do you believe in the light?" made the corners of his mouth involuntarily lift slightly.

This territory was different from other places in the Northern Territory.

The wheelchair slowly moved along the street, Lei Xi'er sat atop it, draped in a light gray cloak, watching the children chase and play in the distance.

His mouth moved slightly, just revealing a hint of a smile, when a light-hearted greeting came to his ears.

"Yo, Lei Xi'er, you're looking good today."

His lifesaver, Louis, seemed to have casually wandered over, standing by his side with a relaxed expression.

Lei Xi'er looked up, seeing the familiar face, he quickly nodded in greeting.

"Thanks to you, I can already walk a bit by myself... But," he lowered his head, his tone slightly paused, "for now, I still can't use magic, and even the Summoning Technique has lost its response. I'm afraid I must stay a little longer and trouble you."

"It's no trouble here," Louis chuckled lightly, his gaze swept with the wind toward the distance, "Stay as long as you want, no one's rushing you."

Lei Xi'er was briefly startled, then bowed his head and softly said, "...Thank you."

He was deeply moved, believing Louis to be truly a good man.

Louis slowly crouched next to the wheelchair, casually picking a blade of grass by the roadside between his fingers: "I sent people to check the place where you had your incident."

Lei Xi'er was slightly startled, his eyelashes gently trembling.

"That area indeed experienced intense combat." Louis looked at him, a bit of apology in his eyes, "Unfortunately... we didn't find the bodies of your two companions. Nor any insect-corpses, not a single trace of blood."

Lei Xi'er was silent for a few seconds, a dark hue passed through his eyes.

He slowly gripped the armrests, softly saying, "That means... they were never truly eliminated."

The wind blew across his pale side face, the pride once belonging to the Silver-faced Mage, now transformed into undisguised worry and anxiety.

Just as he slightly lowered his head, falling into brief contemplation.

Louis suddenly spoke, his tone seeming casual but carrying a touch of seriousness: "By the way, when your injuries get better... may I ask you to teach me something about magic?"

Lei Xi'er blinked briefly, raising his head, "Huh? You mean, you want to learn magic?"

Chapter 199: Louis's Magic Talent

"You mean..."

Lei Xi'er gently lifted her head, a hint of hesitation and surprise on her face, "You... want to learn magic?"

"Yes."

Louis didn't avoid the question, instead, he nodded.

At that moment, Lei Xi'er's expression subtly paused.

After all, it wasn't a question that could be easily answered.

If an ordinary person wishes to step into the realm of magic, they must first undergo layers of identity checks and talent certifications.

Moreover, teaching others magic, especially outsiders who aren't from the Mage Forest, is clearly against the rules.

This isn't something he could bear the consequences of on his own.

But he... found it difficult to refuse.

If not for the person in front of him, he would probably be a cold corpse by now, with his bones gnawed clean by wild beasts.

And to save his life, Louis must have used many resources, considering the kind of injuries he had suffered.

"Magic is not an ordinary craft." Lei Xi'er deliberated, as if trying to find a way to refuse, "It requires an extremely high level of talent, far beyond a common person's spiritual perception and elemental affinity. Most people can't even pass through that door."

"Then let's first test whether I have the 'talent to learn magic'." Louis looked at him seriously, as if he had anticipated this response.

"..." Lei Xi'er suddenly felt a headache.

He was actually serious.

However, upon reflection... the magic power test wasn't actually difficult.

Furthermore, having the aptitude for it is rare, so Louis probably doesn't have the talent for magic.

So, since Louis was so insistent, doing a test wouldn't hurt.

He might just be momentarily interested, and when there's no response, this young noble would naturally give up.

Lei Xi'er had already prepared himself, looking at Louis with a subtle sense of apology in his eyes: regretfully, you'll likely be disappointed soon.

But Louis just nodded, as if he wasn't concerned about the result at all.

Lei Xi'er glanced into Louis's eyes and ultimately sighed lightly, "To use magic, you must first possess magic power, and the first step to confirm if you have magic power is meditation."

Louis nodded, his expression earnest.

This, in turn, made Lei Xi'er more worried, fearing Louis would be too disappointed upon knowing the outcome.

"I'll teach you a basic meditation technique, for perceiving if magic power resonates with you... However, the real challenge in this spell isn't the technique, but the mindset."

Lei Xi'er paused, his tone calming like a teacher's patient explanation:

"First, you must let your mind enter a pure state. Like clear lake water, like the midnight breeze. There mustn't be any distractions, any agitation.

Then, it's not about you reaching for the magic power, but waiting for it to approach you voluntarily.

Magic power isn't a beast to be conquered by brute force; it's more like a tide that will naturally sweep over you when you are calm."

After speaking, he said no more and began to demonstrate, closing his eyes and taking gentle breaths.

A moment later, he opened his eyes again and said, "Give it a try, my Lord. Cast your awareness to the ground beneath you, the air, the flow of the wind... if you truly have the potential for magic power, it will respond to you."

Louis nodded, sitting cross-legged beside him.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath.

This, of course, wasn't his first time meditating.

He was even accustomed to using the "Primordial Meditation Technique" to train his magic power for an hour.

But he couldn't reveal too much, as the origin of the Primordial Meditation Technique was quite unique.

Additionally, he needed to know what this mage would teach him, and to what extent.

Using the meditation technique taught by Lei Xi'er, Louis's body indeed resonated with magic power, but he also felt a strange sense of dissonance.

The way this meditation technique operated... was odd.

The process, structure, rhythm were correct, yet there was an indescribable awkwardness in its details.

The guidance path seemed carefully trimmed by someone, removing all the complicated details.

Leaving only a straightforward main route, even intentionally adding some obstructions at several key points.

That kind of guidance path seemed deliberately "weakened," like an overly simplified heirloom magic diagram, leaving only the outer framework.

It was almost like... some kind of castrated version of the "Primordial Meditation Technique".

He chuckled softly in his heart.

Interesting.

Whoever originally designed this version of the technique, he had the intuition that this wasn't a naturally evolved "simplified version," but something deliberately trimmed.

The person who trimmed it obviously had an extremely high understanding of magic structure but was forced to suppress it.

Was it because of fear the original technique would be leaked?

Meanwhile, Lei Xi'er stood nearby, watching Louis, who was seated cross-legged with furrowed brows, seemingly trying hard to enter the meditative state.

"Is it really too much to ask?" he murmured softly.

He knew very well that the threshold for the meditation technique was actually high, especially for someone uninitiated in magic, a "mortal," so to speak.

Even just guiding one's consciousness into the "spiritual calmness" stage could hold ordinary people with talent back for months.

Sensing magic power, even rarer.

So, he sighed gently, keeping his tone as gentle as possible, "There's no need to rush. Not everyone can sense magic power on the first try. Well... actually, it's normal for most people not to sense it throughout their lifetime."

Louis didn't answer.

He remained with his eyes closed, breathing slowly and evenly, sinking into an almost "motionless" state.

Chapter 200: Louis's Magic Talent (Part 2)

"...? " Lei Xi'er's eyebrows slightly raised.

He originally thought the other was frowning just out of frustration from a failed perception attempt.

Yet he didn't expect that the other was completely unaffected by his consolation, instead... sat deeper, deeper into concentration.

Not pretending, more like immersed in it?

Pretending that well? Lei Xi'er thought in his heart.

No, it should be said... it's impossible to pretend that well.

Ten minutes passed, and Louis still hadn't opened his eyes.

Twenty minutes passed, his breathing still as steady as a monk in meditation.

After thirty minutes, he finally slowly exhaled and opened his eyes.

At that moment, Lei Xi'er was truly a bit shaken.

"Did you sense anything?" he asked cautiously, lowering his voice.

Louis nodded slightly, his expression calm: "Just a little... a faint, cool thing, as if it floated in from the air."

"..." Lei Xi'er was stunned.

His first reaction was: What a joke?

Sensed magic power? First time meditating and he succeeded? And meditated for a full half hour?

What a joke!

But that earnest, simple tone without a hint of boasting made it hard to easily dismiss this "nonsense."

Especially those eyes, calm as water, neither exaggerated excitement nor flattering.

This doesn't seem made up.

Suddenly Lei Xi'er's throat felt a bit dry. He was silent for a moment, trying to stay calm, "Can you repeat what kind of feeling you sensed?"

Louis thought for a moment: "It's like... when you breathe in, it's not air, but something 'lighter.' A bit like... fog?"

Lei Xi'er's pupils shrank slightly.

He wasn't talking nonsense; he really sensed it.

Although the description wasn't accurate, that was indeed the typical perception when magic power seeps in.

For a moment, Lei Xi'er's heart felt complicated.

He originally just wanted to find an excuse to politely refuse, but he didn't expect to really encounter a "genius who can successfully start magic upon first contact."

And it was someone he owed his life to.

Lei Xi'er pressed his lips tightly, lowered his head, and his voice was so low it was almost like talking to himself: "That's unbelievable."

He still didn't believe it, so his gaze fell on Louis, his eyes becoming a bit sharper.

"Louis," he slowly spoke, "since you can really sense magic power, we can try a basic practice."

"What?" Louis looked up with curiosity, his gaze clear.

"The Light Emitting Technique."

Lei Xi'er softly said and stood up straight.

He extended his right hand, palm slightly upward, fingers naturally spread.

The whole person instantly became quiet and focused.

"This is one of the most basic shaping magic, used for sensing magic power flow and basic configuration control."

He said, beginning to slowly guide the magic power within: "Imagine a warm breath rising from the heart, flowing through the arm to the fingertips, no need to force it, just go with the flow."

He took a deep breath, his gaze slightly lowered, softly intoning: "guang."

As the syllable fell, a gentle, soft white light quietly lit up at his fingertips.

The light was like dewdrops at dawn, clear, quiet, yet carrying pure magic power waves.

Suspended like a star at Lei Xi'er's fingertips, the faint light fluctuations subtly outlined ripples in the air.

Was this... Pinyin?!

Louis kept his expression tense, feigned focus, but inside a tempest had already arisen.

Something was wrong, wasn't that the Pinyin for 'light'?

And except for a bit of an accent, nothing else changed.

Was the person who designed this magic a Chinese?

And they directly used Pinyin as the spell?

He unconsciously glanced at Lei Xi'er, who was composed and looked as if it was matter-of-fact.

Lei Xi'er also noticed Louis's expression, but just thought it was Louis's shocked expression at seeing magic for the first time.

He continued, "You see, it doesn't require forceful driving, but rather requires you to 'resonate' with the magic power and gently guide it."

He then shifted his gaze to Louis, "If you truly have magic power, you should be able to do this."

This tone was nonchalant but hidden with probing.

Louis calmed the storm inside, decided to think about it later, and focused on learning magic for now.

But he only smiled: "I'll give it a try."

He mimicked Lei Xi'er's actions, also extending his right hand, fingers slightly spread.

But under the seemingly focused expression, Louis's mind had already started operating another set of systems.

First, lightly activate the Meditation Technique's surface framework, not activating the core magic power circuit, only summoning that small, most manageable spot of magic power on the surface.

The magic power flowed slowly along the arm downward, gathering at the fingertips like ripples under a light breeze on the sea.

At the same time, he silently recited the spell: "guang."

In an instant, he deliberately let the magic power's flow slow and path slightly chaotic to simulate the state of a "new Magic Apprentice."

Unsteady breathing, eyes slightly concentrated, fingers even trembling a bit.

But the truth was: he only used less than 1% of his magic power.

Even so, after two or three seconds, there was still a slight light glowing at his fingertips.

Lei Xi'er's eyes widened, almost thinking he saw wrong.

"This is impossible," he whispered in his heart.

The Meditation Technique was just taught half an hour ago, the perception of magic power not stable yet, and he's attempting magic projection at the guidance level?

And he succeeded?

Even a tiny bit of light indicates that this person can truly sense magic power, and possesses high control and subtle mental intensity, otherwise it would be impossible to precisely guide magic power to gather at the fingertips without dispersing.