

Winter 251

Chapter 251: Weapon Upgrade

As Louis and Mike were discussing the mass production armor project, a hurried sound of footsteps broke the fervent atmosphere.

"Lord!" A young knight, sweaty and brisk, rushed into the main hall, stood still, slightly panting, and saluted.

"Lord Hillco asked me to inform you that the magic explosive bullets you ordered to be tested are all ready! They are now waiting for your acceptance and trial in the alchemy workshop!"

Hearing this, the corner of Louis's mouth slightly curved into a smile, clearly in a great mood: "Ha... it seems today is truly a good day."

He turned to Mike, speaking with interest: "You should also bring a few core craftsmen to take a look, I happen to have some matters on that side requiring a craftsman's expertise."

Mike was stunned to hear this: "The alchemy workshop's matters... Can I even be of any use?"

Though puzzled, he nodded straightforwardly, after all, he never refused Louis's orders.

So, surrounded by a group of craftsmen and knights, Louis rode towards the alchemy workshop outside Red Tide City.

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Outside the alchemy workshop, the air still lingered with a thick magic potion scent.

The first thing that caught the eyes was Hillco's face, almost breaking into a full smile.

He personally waited at the door, barely able to contain his excitement as he stepped forward to greet them.

"Louis, you've come just in time!" His eyebrows almost flew up to his forehead, "This time you must see with your own eyes, this is definitely the pinnacle of my alchemical career!"

Even before Louis could respond, he impatiently turned and walked towards a table in the corner of the inner room.

The table was covered with thick multi-layered fireproof cloth, with an irregular bulge in the middle.

"Da da da da—!"

He lifted the curtain with both hands, revealing the item beneath as if presenting a treasure.

A dim red egg-shaped object lay quietly on the platform, half an arm's length, its shell shimmering with a metallic cold light, covered with a layer of deep-colored, semi-transparent strange coating, slightly glowing, as if quietly inhaling the magic power from the air.

"The shell is made of cold iron, I did a lightweight process without reducing its strength." Hillco spoke rapidly, like a child eager to show off,

"As for the core, it's refined demon marrow, red platinum crystal, and fire scale ointment. You know, when fire scale ointment meets red platinum magic crystal, nothing can stand in its way!"

Beside him, Mike sucked in a cold breath, looking at the alchemy egg with a complex gaze.

He vaguely wondered if this thing exploded in the city, would it send the entire alchemy workshop to the heavens.

But Louis simply nodded, not swayed by the fancy terminology and exaggerated explanations.

"Enough talk," he said evenly, his gaze on the magic explosive bullet, as though looking at a piece of craft awaiting validation, "Let's start the experiment directly."

The test site was set on a deserted field outside Red Tide City.

The cold wind howled, the wilderness abnormally oppressive in the anticipation of the impending explosion.

The test targets were already in position.

They were three adult ice wild boars, covered entirely with thick ice crust and ash-blue cold fur.

Their bodies were nearly two meters long, muscles bulging like rocks, a pair of blood-red beast eyes glaring at the crowd, nostrils flaring with heat.

These wild boars were a special variation of the tundra, fierce and unruly, their skin tough and fire-resistant.

Even an official knight with a sharp sword found it hard to break through their skin.

That's why they were chosen as the sacrifices for this experiment, tied separately at ten, twenty, and thirty meters from the magic explosive bullet.

They were firmly secured with thick black iron chains to giant iron stakes, each limb wrapped around, tightly tethered to the ground.

Their heads were even fitted with metal ring gags to prevent biting and struggling free.

These dangerous magical beasts, even when shackled, occasionally squirmed and roared, the iron chains clanking sharply.

And on a distant rock platform, Louis, Mike, and Hillco stood shoulder to shoulder, with a crowd of knights and craftsmen behind them.

Everyone was fully alert, the atmosphere tense yet expectant.

Hillco's face was full of uncontrollable excitement, murmuring to himself: "Come on, come on, come on..."

Louis's gaze was calm, his voice low and clear: "Let's begin."

The command flagman with a flick of the arm, waved the red flag with a whoosh!

The distant knight quickly lit the fuse embedded in the magic explosive bullet, the bomb instantly activated, fleetingly shimmering with an imperceptible purplish-red light.

"Giddy up!" The knight immediately pulled the reins hard, riding away swiftly from the explosion zone.

And that silent magic explosive bullet, as if just a quiet stone, lay quietly in the center of the iron chains.

Yet the moment it was lit, all sounds seemed to freeze in the air.

The deep red casing of the magic explosive bullet trembled slightly, and then— —!

Boom!!!

In the first second, the moment the demon marrow crystal core contacted the red platinum magic crystal, it was as if a small sun ignited.

Dazzling red light abruptly gathered at the explosion point, like a fire eye of consuming everything opened.

The ground cracked rapidly under the scorching pressure, intense heat waves pounded like an air hammer, lifting and burning the surrounding dust and weeds, turning them into smoke and ashes.

In the second second, the core molten layer of the fire scale ointment was detonated.

Scorching liquid red flames erupted fiercely, like an enraged serpent roaring from the depths, surging up a three-meter-high pillar of fire.

Fierce flames sprayed all around, tracing strange yet elegant arcs in the air, tumbling like hellish flowers in full bloom.

The temperature in the blast center instantly surpassed fifteen hundred degrees Celsius.

The twisted heatwaves continuously compressed the air, charred smoke rising, obscuring half the sky.

Boom!!!

The roar, like a thunderous wrath, shattered the heavens and earth, the blast wind surging out.

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Rubble and soil flew like a torrential downpour, even gently trembling the stone wall behind the observation platform.

Scarlet flames spread rapidly along the air currents.

The shock wave carved an oval "fire wave arc" on the surface, spreading indiscriminately to slaughter everything around.

The iron chain emitted a painful moan-like wail, rapidly deforming and turning red-hot in the extreme heat, finally breaking with a "clang" and falling to the ground.

The chain broke, but the three bound Ice Wild Boars didn't escape, instead struggling and roaring continuously in the firelight.

Their so-called "flame immunity" fur quickly started to curl and turn to ash, their Ice Armor shattering and collapsing.

The exposed flesh and skin rapidly charred and carbonized.

Within mere seconds, the boars' howls were swallowed by the merciless flames.

Only charred remains lay against the scorching ground, like melted sculptures.

From a distance, Louis observed and estimated the damage radius to be about ten meters, effectively and precisely covered.

After the fire wave, a large area was left blackened, lifeless, the embers still burning, while the remnants of the Fire Scale Ointment licked everything like tiny tongues.

Even objects not directly hit, as long as they touched these blazing flames, would be scorched, carbonized within ten seconds, with no chance of survival.

After a few seconds, the fire pillar gradually decreased, leaving glowing embers dancing in the hot air, like the victorious embers after burning everything to ash.

After the explosion, only the hum of residual echoes remained in the eardrums.

After the initial roar, the world seemed to fall into temporary deafness, with only the "whooshing" sound of remnant fire burning in the wind, and the echo of stones falling and shattering.

The air was filled with a compound scent of blood and charcoal, mixed with ashes, floating in the firelight.

The flames gradually subsided, but the smoke lingered, and the people on the high platform remained silent for a long while.

Mike was the first to break the silence, not with words but with a sharp intake of breath.

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His eyes widened, staring fixedly at that charred wasteland, even his lips were trembling slightly.

"Can this damn thing really be used on people?" His voice was hoarse, tinged with disbelief, "Even magical beasts... there's not even a bone left..."

Even as a hard man who had roamed battlefields for ten years, he was now drenched in sweat, his throat like it had been scraped with burnt sand.

Not to mention the craftsmen responsible for monitoring and recording, each pale, as if they just peeked back from the edge of hell.

Although none were literally scared to wet themselves, each forehead was soaked with cold sweat, eyes unfocused, barely able to stand.

"This is my creation..."

Hillco, on the other hand, wore a different expression, arms crossed, with a smile nearly ecstatic in its madness on his face:

"Did you see the moment the fire wave unfolded?! It was truly intoxicating! Ah... I can't resist wanting to test another one!"

Louis turned his head to glance at him, somewhat speechless at his excitement, but his expression also rarely showed a trace of shock.

It's not as if he hadn't seen powerful things before, but this... it indeed exceeded expectations.

"It's a bit too strong." he murmured.

But merely observing from afar was not enough.

So after confirming the temperature in the blast center had slightly dropped, Louis led Mike, Hillco, and several well-protected knights and recorders, cautiously stepping into the explosion center.

Underfoot was vast scorched earth, the soil completely carbonized, producing a crunchy, cracking sound with each step.

Plant roots and stems were not even a shadow, with the air still carrying the scent of burned flesh.

The few Ice Wild Boars, once hailed as "wasteland tanks" with high fire resistance, now had no intact bodies to be recognized.

The one closest to the explosion point had only half of a collapsed skeleton left, the other parts completely melted, carbonized, ashes blowing in the wind, with even the chain only leaving a scorched red segment.

The second barely left a charred carcass, but all fur and skin were gone, only scorched bones with ember marks embedded, the Fire Scale Ointment still licking and burning on the residual bones, the firelight dark red, eerie in the extreme.

The third, located at the edge, although its torso partially remained, its entire back had cracked open like blooms of scorched flesh torn by the hand of hell, devoid of life.

The surrounding ground within an eight-meter radius was completely cleared, nothing grew, and even the rock surfaces showed carbonization and peeling.

From the miserable state of these three Ice Wild Boars, one could infer the power of this Magic Explosion Bullet.

Within ten meters, direct scorching, full carbonization.

Within twenty meters, high-temperature burns, biological entities surely die.

Within thirty meters, explosion wind impacts shattering, with damage and armor penetration capabilities.

"It's not just about firepower." Louis squatted down, observed the remains, and slowly said: "The Fire Scale Ointment has adhesiveness when burning. Even if the target's surface is burnt out, it continues to burn on the bone."

He nudged a piece of broken bone, sparks flared up instantly, nearly igniting his gauntlet.

"There's also the penetration of the blast wind." He looked at the furthest Ice Wild Boar lying dead on the scorched land's edge, his eyes showing a trace of gravity.

"Even though it's twenty meters from the explosion center, the fire didn't touch it, but look, the skeleton has been shattered, the internal organs ruptured on the spot, bleeding from every orifice."

Mike swallowed hard: "God... if these thick-skinned, fire-resistant Ice Wild Boars end up like this, those heat-fearing bugs wouldn't just go straight to heaven if targeted."

Louis pondered for a moment, looking toward the distant end of the wasteland.

"Compared to the previous 'Ice and Fire Two Realms' Magic Explosion Bullet, though it lacks the ice fog and gas parts, this 'High-Purity Magic Explosion Bullet'... has its raw firepower increased at least three to five times."

He squinted as if already seeing the Nest wailing in the flames.

"There are still drawbacks." Louis stood up, brushing off the ashes on his gloves, "The main one being, it's too expensive."

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He raised three fingers while talking: "Demon Marrow, Red Platinum Magic Crystal, and Fire Scale Ointment."

"The first two are fine, we've stocked up quite a bit before—especially Demon Marrow, with stable mining, the supply is adequate."

"But Fire Scale Ointment..." he sighed, "The Fire-Scaled Viper was just caught, even the barely refined amount is only enough for small-scale explosive bullets."

Hillco scoffed lightly at the words, but also understood the limits of reality.

"That's what makes it a piece of art. Anything that can be mass-produced is doomed to have no soul." He shrugged, "So, what do you want to do?"

Louis glanced at him: "High potency version, we can make ten, specifically for core targets.

The rest are medium potency lower tier versions, reduce the proportion of Fire Scale Ointment, weaken the temperature and blast radius, prioritize quantity.

For instance, shrink the radius to within five meters, lower the fire wave height, but retain the shock wave."

What Louis had in mind was that the high potency ones could be used to destroy nests, and the low potency ones could be thrown in large quantities for clearing nests and repelling pests, fulfilling their purpose.

Hillco nodded after hearing: "Okay, I'll go back and adjust the formula and make it into three-tier versions.

But if one day the Fire-Scaled Viper can be farmed, I would still want to make a non-diminished ultimate version. I can even make it bloom into a fiery lotus, burning a sky pit into the entire mountain."

His eyes narrowed slightly, and his voice carried near-frenzied intoxication, as if he could already see the scene of fire devouring the world.

Louis, however, smiled helplessly, long used to this madman's sudden "artistic mania."

After all, he too was a bomb fanatic and could understand the feeling of creating such a level of bomb.

Then Louis turned around and looked at Mike with a smile: "Old Mike, you didn't get scared, did you?"

"Oh, this thing... The power is pretty scary. But well, it's just that."

Mike smacked his lips, with a forced smile hanging on the corner of his mouth, though his eyes couldn't help but glance at the mound of earth that was charred and flipped up by the Magic Explosion Bullet just now.

Apparently he was shaken and almost fell off the stone, but now managed to straighten his back.

"Just that?" Louis raised his eyebrows and looked at him with a smile.

Mike touched his beard, which was curled by the sparks, and coughed, "Cough, well, it's indeed fierce. But to say if I've ever seen such an explosion... Back when I was young, repairing petroleum tanks in the military camp..."

"Mike." Louis interrupted him, getting straight to the point, "I need you to make a launcher. More distant, accurate, and stable than the short cannons you made before."

He casually unfolded a paper folded into quarters, which was a sketch he drew earlier:

A short thick metal launch tube, rear structure for ignition launch;

Equipped with adjustable elevation device for throwing at different distances;

A folding tripod beneath for terrain adaptation and stable shooting.

On the corner of the paper were a few scribbled words: "Modular design," "Rain and snow applicable," "Quick assembly and dismantling for portability."

"None of these conditions can be lacking." Louis looked at Mike, "You have so many talented people under you now, don't say it's impossible."

Mike looked at the drawing, his eyes lit up: "This idea... Tsk, you really dare to dream."

He straightened up, rubbed his chin, and the slight surprise in his eyes had turned into excitement, "If this could really be made, it could cross mountains and blow apart formations. Not just the Snow Swearers, even the Frost Giant could have its brains blown out..."

But honestly, if someone else were saying this I'd treat it as a joke, you say it and I believe."

He said this and his tone suddenly carried a bit of imperceptible sentiment: "My lord, you're the most able Lord I've seen over the years who can use both brain and guts.

Not the type of lord who only dreams, nor the one who only tries desperately. Had you arrived in the Northern Territory ten years earlier, this place might not have so many abominations now."

Louis softly said, "You exaggerate."

Mike then seemed to realize he had said too much, coughed dryly and changed the topic: "Hey, I'll take the job. Need to pick some capable, steady-handed and quick-minded artisans to do it... I'll list the material inventory, will still have to trouble you for allocation."

"Okay." Louis nodded, his eyes lightly sweeping over the few artisans present, "You take charge of the main design and manufacturing, I'll think of ways to allocate materials."

"It's up to me." Mike grinned.

Just as Mike and Louis were eagerly discussing the structural details of the launcher, the venue was cleared on the other side.

Hillco made a confident and proud entrance again.

"Lord, since the Magic Explosion Bullet impressed you, allow me to continue displaying the true allure of Fire Scale Ointment." Hillco spoke, waving to have an assistant bring out a Cold Iron Barrel.

The assistants moved quickly, setting the barrel firmly in place, and then opened the lid, revealing the black-red intermixed liquid inside, bubbling slowly like lava.

"This is no ordinary petroleum." Hillco raised his eyebrows exaggeratedly, "Catalyzed by Fire Scale Ointment and added with a tiny amount of Refined Demon Marrow, once ignited..."

He snapped his fingers, and an assistant immediately lit a sample from afar.

Boom!

The flames seemed to leap from the ground, a three-meter-high fire wave shot straight into the air.

Heat waves came crashing, and the air was suffused with the hot breath of burning and mixed sulfur.

Mike clicked his tongue and muttered quietly: "Oh, dump a bucket of this on someone and there's not even bones left..."

Yet Hillco wasn't finished: "Moreover, it won't extinguish in rain, snow, or humidity, and it remains stable burning for several minutes even on mud and puddles."

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Louis squinted his eyes for a moment, then shook his head slightly: "It's not unusable... but it's too complicated, not cost-effective enough. The high temperature and duration aren't enough to match the rarity of the Fire Scale Ointment."

Hillco shrugged, spreading his hands: "You know, my lord, apart from Magic Burst, I'm not very interested in other weapons. How about... you think and I'll do it?"

Upon hearing this, Louis didn't respond immediately. Instead, he lowered his head and remained silent for a moment, his gaze falling on the charred ground left behind by the spent Fire Scale Ointment.

The residual heat still lingered in the air like an unsettled battlefield.

He began to piece together various fragments of inspiration and images in his mind.

Suddenly, Louis lifted his head, a spark of inspiration flashing in his eyes.

"What if it's not splashed," he murmured to himself, "but... directly sprayed?"

He thought of the discarded weapons from his previous life.

Not throwing an explosive, but a flame attack at close range, with continuous spraying.

A flame held in hand, like a released fire serpent, consuming everything it pointed at.

The struggling limbs of insect corpses twisted and deformed mid-air, forced out, twisted, and carbonized by the high temperature.

Yes, that's the flamethrower.

In an instant, Louis already had a rough conceptual design in his mind.

Hillco blinked, asking with a suspicious look: "Spray... out?"

"Yes," Louis' eyes turned sharp, his tone resolute, "Using the viscosity and high ignition point of the Fire Scale Ointment, combined with a pressurized spraying system, to create a controllable flame path."

Saying this, he already picked up paper and pen, his wrist flying as he sketched a simple and clear structural diagram on the parchment.

"This side is the main tank, used to hold the Fire Scale Ointment... You can think of it as an alchemical super petroleum, its ignition temperature can break through 600 degrees, and it can burn continuously in any environment."

"The other tank is for compressed gas, like a powerful air pump, not to ignite, but to 'spray the petroleum out.'"

"The petroleum is 'pushed' by the compressed gas from behind, sprayed through a metal duct to the front nozzle."

"The nozzle should have an igniter inside, like striking flint. Pressing the trigger sparks it. The oil sprays out, the spark ignites, and it becomes a real flame tongue."

Hearing this, Hillco, who initially seemed indifferent, became focused, unable to help but click his tongue softly: "...My lord, you sure dare to think big."

"Don't just stand there watching," Louis slapped the blueprint into his hand, "This requires your cooperation in formulating a special Fire Scale Ointment mix, not too thin or too thick. It has to spray out and stick to targets without falling off. Can you do it?"

Hillco took the blueprint, glanced over it carefully, then shrugged and smirked: "Don't worry, my lord, this is too simple. I can whip it up for you quickly."

"Great." Louis turned to look at Mike.

"High temperature, persistent, controllable, propulsion type..."

The old craftsman stared gravely at the blueprint, his beard lightly trembling, yet a growing gleam of eager anticipation appeared in his eyes.

In a rough voice, he said: "Lord... your mind is truly terrifying."

He paused, then grinned, "But I love it. I love the stuff that comes out of a great mind like yours!"

"Thank you for your effort," Louis said softly, "We might need it soon. Mike, you might have to be busier for a while. Of course, I won't shortchange you in the future."

Mike straightened his back, his sturdy hand patting his chest: "Just say the word, and I'll work myself to death!"

Chapter 255: Information About the Nest

Takalin is one of the rare veterans among the Snow Swearers, nearly forty years old this year.

In these turbulent times, surviving to this age as a Snow Swearer is already a luxury.

Moreover, he has a thirteen-year-old son, Aik, who is his only living concern.

These are enough to make him feel happy.

These Snow Swearers, now hiding in a village in the northern part of Snow Peak County, long erased from the map.

Since the Empire started purging the Snow Swearers last year, this place has become one of the few remaining strongholds within the Empire's borders.

Day after day, they waited here for the leader's orders, capturing those solitary members of the Imperial Nobility and Knights, and then sacrificing them to the "Ancient God of Cold Abyss."

But the sacrificial rites are not their responsibility.

It is a matter handled by a priest wearing a bone-white mask and a black feather robe.

No one has seen his face, nor heard his voice except for when he mutters curses.

At first, everything seemed normal enough.

The scarcity of people was a fact, but morale persisted, at least in Takalin's view.

Yet in recent days, he began to notice something was amiss.

It started with Herrick, a young warrior whose incessant chatter could be annoying, suddenly turning silent and withdrawn, staring at the campfire all day, lost in thought.

His mouth would constantly move unconsciously, as if whispering to someone.

Then there was Ula, who had once been a great lover of wine, not touching a drop for quite some time now.

Initially, Takalin merely furrowed his brow, thinking that this group might have been affected by the "whispers" of the Ancient God.

Until that midnight, when he himself began to talk in his sleep.

And he had no idea what he was saying.

It was his son Aik who woke him up.

"Father... what were you saying just now, you spoke for such a long while, do you remember?"

Takalin broke out in a cold sweat. How could he possibly remember?

More terrifyingly, this sleep-talking began to spread throughout the camp.

Many people started speaking meaningless words. When they spoke, their eyes were empty, and their voices sounded as if coming from a deep well.

And he discovered that people in the camp began to "change."

Those past intimate brothers gradually became unfamiliar.

Looking at their faces, Takalin would even have the illusion: "Is this person... really someone I know?"

He looked down at Aik beside him, sleeping quietly curled under the blanket.

But the firelight on his face seemed to cast upon a block of ice. Not a trace of warmth.

Clearly, the fire was hot, yet he felt increasingly cold.

An unspeakable premonition, like a needle, slowly pricked at his heart.

He finally realized something was wrong in this place.

But Aik... hasn't changed; he still has a chance.

Takalin began to prepare, secretly hiding a few short blades and some dried food, meticulously studying the escape routes on the map.

The back way through the valley was the hardest to traverse, but also the most concealed.

As long as they could pass through that frozen forest, they could flee, going anywhere, just leaving here.

On that night, the surroundings were so silent, only the wind could be heard.

Takalin grabbed Aik's hand, silently stepping into the wasteland of the back valley.

They moved very slowly, each step as if treading on thin ice.

But they couldn't get far.

The few who pursued them appeared behind at an uncertain moment.

They did not shout, nor did they give orders,

just quietly followed, like shadows attached to their backs.

Takalin turned back, recognizing those faces.

They were comrades who fought alongside him, people who once drank, joked, and battled with him.

"Blo? It's me, it's me! Takalin!"

He shouted, trying to wake them.

"Heim! Heim! Wake up! We are brothers!"

But they did not speak, just slowly approached, their eyes empty.

At that moment, Takalin truly felt fear.

Not the fear of death, but the nameless fear of "them still being alive but no longer themselves."

He clutched Aik as they fled desperately.

The footsteps behind them were like maggots on rotting bones, not fast, but unceasing.

Finally, at a riverbank where streams converged, he stopped.

"Aik," he knelt, gripping his son's shoulders, eyes full of pain, "Run south, as far as you can, don't look back."

Aik's eyes widened, "Father? What are you going to do?"

"Run!" Takalin growled lowly, drawing his long sword.

He turned to face those familiar yet strange figures.

And behind him was everything he needed to protect.

Aik ran desperately.

The cold wind sliced around his ears like a rusty knife as he heard his own rapid breaths.

And that heavy and slow sound of hacking behind him.

The clash of metal and flesh.

Each sound, like a clock striking the heart.

Aik didn't dare to look back.

There was no snow, yet the sky felt like it was freezing over.

The ground was chilled hard, each step carried a bone-chilling tremor.

His boots had long since cracked, his feet numb, yet he kept running. His father's voice calling still echoed in his ears.

"Aik, run south! Don't look back!"

He didn't look back, didn't dare to look back.

Just kept running, clutching his father's short sword and that cold emblem, like holding the entire world as he fled to the end of the night.

Until his legs could no longer lift.

Until the sounds behind finally stopped.

He curled behind a frozen stone, hid in the wind, hid in the silence.

At first, he tried to suppress his trembling, but later even opening his eyes became difficult.

That night was bitterly cold.

It was a chill whipped out from the bones.

He didn't know how long he slept, only remembered dreaming of his father standing before the firelight, his shadow so long it nearly swallowed the entire valley.

When he awoke again, it was already bright, and the wind had ceased.

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He held the badge and short sword, as if he were still guarding some unfinished oath.

His face was pale, lips tinged with blue, yet he showed no fear, no panic.

Just quietly... remaining in that morning where no one was present anymore.

...

The brief summer of the Northern Territory had quietly slipped away, and the morning wind brought back a chill.

Fortunately, the hot spring circulation system in Red Tide City had been restarted.

The entire castle seemed gently wrapped in a layer of warmth, the room cozy, making it hard for people to rise.

Louis opened his eyes, a gentle blue light before him.

It was Emily's hair, quietly spread on the white pillow, like ripples on a lake in spring.

Her face was serene and beautiful, her eyelashes long, the tip of her nose slightly red, lips still carrying a hint of last night's lingering smile.

One hand rested on his chest, like a kitten.

Louis quietly watched her, his Adam's apple moving slightly, eyes showing an emotion unclear whether of contentment or reflection.

Since getting married, he indeed had been diligently "sowing seeds", yet... had not reaped any harvest.

Of course, it wasn't a problem with his body.

It's just that in this world, for those knights with extraordinary powers, offspring seem never easily born.

The flow of Fighting Energy interferes with the birth of life; the stronger one is, the longer the wait needed.

And his father, the renowned Duke Calvin, having over twenty children, was indeed a miracle.

Of course, that was also the result of his day-to-day "tilling".

By contrast, Louis, though young and vigorous, was not in haste.

He preferred to let things take their course, waiting for fate to deliver that gift.

But Emily... was more enthusiastic than he was.

For the sake of family continuation, Emily had recently been quite proactive.

Even though she maintained the noble lady's reserve with words, her gaze increasingly implied "We should give it another try today, shouldn't we?"

Thinking of this, Louis couldn't help but show a smile, both helpless and doting.

He gently reached out, brushing aside a strand of hair that draped across Emily's cheek, his fingertip sliding past her temple.

Emily turned over, curling into his embrace like a cat, quickly falling back into slumber.

Louis didn't indulge too long in warmth; he gently lifted the quilt, getting out of bed.

The steam from the hot springs hovered near his feet, the warmth beneath imperceptible to cold as he stepped on the tiled floor.

He donned his robe, walked to the window, and pushed open a slice of the view.

Gazing at the distant mountains shrouded in white mist, he lifted his hand, his fingertip lightly tapping the air.

A semi-transparent light screen quietly unfolded before him, a stream of cerulean blue light flowed upward, accompanied by a soft hum. The familiar interface loaded, a line of text flickered before his eyes:

[Daily Intelligence Update Complete]

[1: Duchess Alina is pregnant. Expected to birth a son for Duke Edmund in ten months.]

[2: The grain crops in Red Tide Territory have matured, with the peak of autumn harvest expected in four days.]

[3: The Snow Swearer warrior Takalin tried to escape from Nest control three days ago, died in the valley while covering for his son.]

[4: His son "Aik" failed to escape, frozen to death outside Dongxi Ridge this morning.]

Upon seeing the first few words of the first item, Louis froze, one corner of his mouth twitching.

"...Ha?"

He stared at that piece of intelligence for a good while, finally sighing softly, sitting down in a chair while massaging his brows.

"I'm young, strong, diligently toiling day by day, yet the first to bloom and bear fruit... unexpectedly is my father-in-law?"

But he had to admit, he was quite happy for them.

After all, given Duke Edmund's current age, this was probably his only and last son.

He would be the future Duke Edmund, the titular Lord of the North, the focus of all Northern Lords.

Louis, regarding this father-in-law, of course, harbored thoughts of "supplanting him".

But now wasn't the time; he estimated it would take at least decades, or possibly his son could achieve it.

"There are still many games to play in the future... Let this child warm up the stage as the 'Little Duke' first."

He snapped his fingers, continuing to scroll down.

The crops in Red Tide Territory were maturing, heralding the arrival of the autumn harvest.

The text on the light screen was brief, but in Louis's eyes, it was good news gilded with gold.

The geothermal system in Red Tide Territory wasn't just for show; ever since the hot spring circulation system was fully integrated into agricultural irrigation, he knew this year's harvest wouldn't be poor.

What's more, there had been an influx of people this year, and newly cultivated lands had multiplied several times.

If all went well, this year's grain yield would be at least four to five times more than last year's.

He couldn't help but recall Mike gleefully reporting a few days ago, "Lord, we'll have a bountiful harvest this year! The warehouses won't be enough soon!"

The smile was as joyful as if he had heard his wife had given birth to triplets.

And now indeed was the moment to deliver on that report.

Louis knew well that it's not just about the grains.

The winters in the North had always been one of the toughest adversaries, and this year, with the Nest and Insect Swarm added...

This winter, the Northern Territory undoubtedly would not fare easy.

"All of these rely on grain defense," Louis sighed lightly, rubbing his temples.

Grain was not only for getting through the winter; it was also the second weapon in war.

The army's provisions, the populace's food, horses' fodder, logistical reserves...

These were no less significant than steel and knights.

"Winning wars has never been about weapons alone. Also, those rye breads that one can bite into. I must see it first-hand come harvest day."

Then his peripheral vision caught sight of the third item, and then the fourth.

Which made his body, initially leaning back against the chair's backrest, suddenly sit up straight.

Since the last battle with the "experimental Nest",

The Nest seemed to have utterly gone into hiding beneath the ice layer, with no new clues surfacing.

Not only was there no gain from daily intelligence, but even the Mage Forest, Governor's Mansion, and those towering investigation agencies had returned empty-handed these days without discoveries.

This could only mean one thing, it was hidden deep enough, well enough, exceeding all their expectations.

Yet now there was a piece of intelligence directly related to the Nest.

Although it was just a brief record of a warrior's escape, beneath the information hid immense possibilities.

"Takalin..." he muttered the name, frowning, "The Nest can control living people? How did he break free from control? Mind restoration? Or... the Nest's power is insufficient to control the human brain."

More importantly, the fourth piece of intelligence.

"That child, Aik," he murmured to himself.

He was dead, perished in the wasteland outside Dongxi Ridge.

And according to the description, this child was likely an escapee from the Snow Swearer stronghold with the Nest.

This means he knew where the Nest was.

Even though he was already dead, but...

Louis's eyes suddenly flashed with an idea, he suddenly remembered someone.

"Eduardo," he murmured his third brother's name.

Eduardo had once shown him a rare ability, the ability to trace back the memories of the deceased.

To glimpse into the last memory fragments of a deceased individual before their soul completely dissipated.

Once this idea formed, it couldn't be suppressed anymore.

What seemed insignificant now transformed into a pivotal clue capable of "turning the tide of battle".

He immediately took up his pen, swiftly writing a secret letter.

Upon completion, he walked towards a metal birdcage beside the bookshelf, inside which stood a Black Feathered Gale Bird.

This bird wasn't his, but was left by Eduardo when he left Red Tide Territory, specifically to contact him.

Louis opened the cage door, and the Gale Bird seemed to have sensed something, flapping its wings and perching on his shoulder.

He inserted the secret letter into the small tube attached to its leg, whispering, "Go find your master."

The Black Feathered Gale Bird seemed to understand, suddenly taking flight, leaving behind a sound slicing through the air.

Louis looked up, watching the black figure gradually disappear, vanishing into the high sky.

Chapter 257: Bountiful Harvest of Grain

The morning frost had not yet dissipated, and the sunshine had just crossed the southern end of the Red Tide Ridge, casting its light upon the vast fields.

In the rye fields, golden waves rippled as they swayed with the wind. Potatoes were piled up like small hills, and droplets of morning dew still clung to the turnip leaves, shimmering with a crystalline glow.

The air was filled with the scent of earth, grain, and a faint aroma of stew; it was the farmers' breakfast.

"Hmm, it smells nice." Louis inhaled deeply, a smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

He wore a light grey-blue riding outfit, his boots still speckled with dew and mud, yet he paid it no heed.

This land was once barren, now it buzzed with the vitality of a bountiful year.

He walked slowly along the ridges between the fields, raising his eyes to see the rows of wheat heads, neatly aligned and full, as if nodding in greeting to him.

"Sir Louis!" A voice, breathless and tinged with hard work, called out.

Mike, the old farmer, was running over from the turnip field, wiping the sweat from his brow as he hurried to greet him.

"You... you've really come in person; I was thinking I'd report after working a bit more."

"I had to see it myself," Louis patted his shoulder, "After all, Mike, your report a few days ago was so exaggerated. I was worried you were boasting."

"Then let me show you," he responded excitedly.

So Mike led Louis through the fields, their feet treading the newly turned wet earth, the faint warmth of the soil seeping upwards.

"This year's wheat, the color is right, the kernels plump, and the ears are even... just like gold."

He pointed to the left at the half-harvested wheat field, his voice brimming with unconcealed pride, "We've nearly doubled last year's yield; these first two fields alone are enough to get four villages through the winter!"

Louis raised an eyebrow, turning to look at the farmers transporting sacks, those heavy bags lined up neatly, like a fortress welcoming autumn.

Mike hadn't stopped; he led him towards another side, his arm swinging as he pointed further to the sloped land:

"The potatoes are solid this year too; I've never seen such consistent sizes. Digging them out one basketful after another, it's enough to make your eyes light up.

We planted early this year, and harvested quickly. This hot spring irrigation system is truly magical... the ground doesn't freeze, and the sprouts emerge fast!"

He walked, breathless yet speaking rapidly, as if eager to spill months of pent-up excitement in one go.

"You've seen the turnips, haven't you? This year the roots are deep, the leaves tender and juicy, the soil underground is truly nourishing.

We also experimented with new crops, winter carrots, dark beans, and the fine-skinned buckwheat brought back from the south; not only have they sprouted, but they've also seeded.

The red-skinned radishes are sorted by grade, the frosted celery is picked tender for drying, the harder ones are used for soup, and none of the wild mountain goods like moss mushrooms have gone to waste."

Mike's face was animated as he spoke, even the mud flecks on his face seemed to sparkle.

"Besides staple grains, we've got dried wild vegetables and pickles stored too.

The smokehouse is nearly full; we'll have to make new space..."

"Honestly..." he paused, looking up at Louis, "I've been a farmer all my life and have never seen such a sight, sacks stacked like mountains. Sir, your method... it truly works like magic."

Louis crouched, grabbing a handful of new wheat in his palm, gently rubbing the grains under his thumb, feeling their fullness and warmth.

"The color is indeed nice," he nodded with a smile, "But even the best method needs skillful hands like yours to work."

Mike rubbed his hands, revealing a shy smile, "Yes, yes... but mostly it's thanks to the Lord. Last night I pondered over it, this grain might just be the best in the Northern Territory this year."

Bradley added from the side, "Our reserves have reached five times last year's amount. The surplus from the Red Tide not only suffices for the local winter, but if distributed properly, can not only support the Red Tide Territory but also aid other territories."

Louis nodded, indicating they had done well.

At that moment, by the field ridges, many farmers were resting by the wheat stacks, holding steaming bowls of turnip porridge in their hands.

White steam rose beside pots in the field; women were pouring soup from jugs, and children squatted on the ground, licking fingers covered with crumbs of flatbread.

"Ah... this time it's truly different." An old farmer, whose hair was turning white, stirred his porridge, sighing with heartfelt emotion.

"In past years around this time, we had to count the grass stalks to make it through the days. Now look, even the kids can eat their fill of porridge!"

"Isn't it?" The burly man next to him gulped down a mouthful and grabbed half a flatbread, chewing, "Unlike other territories where they plant thirty percent, rot twenty percent, and have to hand over a large part of the harvest... back then, hoping for a piece of flatbread was harder than hoping for the snow to melt!"

"No wonder, in the past few months, a bunch of people have snuck in from other regions, saying they're here to 'join relatives,' but we all know they just want to get a meal here!" someone added with a low chuckle, sparking a round of laughter.

"Why do you think we've harvested so well this year?" a young fellow rolled up his sleeves, his arms shiny from the sun, "My wife says it's the Lord's something... fire turtle greenhouse and that black powder that drives away pests and loosens the soil."

"Yes, yes!" the old farmer nodded immediately, "I've grown turnips for thirty years and never seen so few pests. That black powder, when spread, makes the soil breathable!"

"Ah, truth be told," someone else sighed, lowering their voice a notch, "Over the years... I've heard many nobles claim they care for the people, but who really steps into the fields? Who stands at our field's edge and asks 'Have you eaten your fill?'"

"But the Lord, he... really has picked up a hoe and worked. When hasn't he watched with his own eyes, tried with his own hands? Remember last year when he stood at the field's edge trying the fire turtle greenhouse? I saw it myself, his pant legs scorched and blistered, yet he never uttered a word of pain!"

"Oh, talking about it makes me want to cry," a young woman stifled a laugh and said, "My child said, 'It's like the Lord is casting magic on the land, and the land wants to grow more food!'"

"Hey, well said, living in the Red Tide Territory is like being favored by the gods!"

In the midst of laughter, suddenly a soft cough was heard.

Turning around, they saw that at some point, Louis had brought Bradley and Mike to stand at the edge of the field, calmly looking at them.

After a moment's silence, an old farmer suddenly realized, hurriedly putting down his bowl and standing up, "Lord, Lord!"

Almost in an instant, a large section of the crowd stood up with a "swish".

Then all the farmers put down their meals and farming tools, kneeling uniformly and warmly to Louis, their voices merging into one:

"Long live the Lord of the Red Tide—!"

"Lord, thank you for your hard work!"

"Thank you for letting us have full meals!!"

The shouts rose and fell in the fields, those coarse voices radiating with a fiery heat, sincere and powerful, even more surging than the afternoon rolling wheat waves.

Louis was slightly taken aback, evidently surprised by this sudden enthusiasm.

A moment later, he smiled and raised his hand: "Everyone, get up, your meals are still warm, don't let them get cold because of me."

But the crowd's enthusiasm couldn't be extinguished with just one sentence.

Someone handed him a bowl of soup, and several peasant women eagerly urged him, so he had no choice but to accept it and sat down on a long bench at the field's edge, taking a few sips of hot soup.

The warm vapor carried the fragrance of wild celery and stewed bones, mingling with the scent of distant herbs and earth, warming the heart.

Not long after, he got up to bid farewell, and walked around some key ridges, checking the growth and harvesting progress of various crops.

Everywhere he went, there were always farmers putting down their work to cheer.

The rye had been harvested nearly halfway, turnips and potatoes were being brought into the warehouse, and occasionally one could see a few children carrying mud-clad carrots as trophies to show off to adults.

"...Very good." He finally stood on a high slope corner, gazing at the golden wheat waves tumbling in the distance, squinting his eyes, "Mike, you've done a great job."

Mike stood beside him, scratching his head, his face glowing red, unsure if it was from the sun or happiness: "I don't deserve such praise, it's all thanks to those strategies you came up with back then... I just followed suit."

Louis nodded with satisfaction, then turned to look at Bradley beside him.

"Briefly report the current harvest and stock status."

Bradley had been waiting by his side, and upon hearing this, he slightly bowed, opened his personal ledger, and spoke in a steady yet slightly proud tone:

"Yes, my lord. Currently, seventy percent of the Red Tide Lord's three types of grains have been warehoused, with rye in the largest quantity, and both turnips and potatoes three times higher than the same period last year."

"Early crops and trial crops from the fire turtle shelter area, such as winter carrots and dark beans, have also had their initial harvest, and though small in quantity, they can serve as supplementary food."

He paused briefly, turning to another page: "Furthermore, in terms of fishery, the various fishing points have respectively completed their catches.

Smoked salmon, pickled carp, and dried fish have all been stored according to proportions, accompanied by smoked venison, air-dried wild fowl, root mushrooms, and dried wild vegetables, altogether sufficient for six thousand people, maintaining over three months' standard consumption."

"As for herbs and backup by-products, they have now been sorted and classified by the Medical Workers' Guild, with some already stored in the medicine warehouse."

After finishing his report, he stepped back half a step, standing by with hands at his side.

Louis nodded slightly: "What about the other territories?"

Bradley whispered: "In Canglu Territory and Snowfield Territory, due to altitude differences, some early matured crops are already in the harvesting phase; Cold Fir Territory, affected by soil conditions, is delayed by about a month; Ice Ridge Territory and Dongxi Territory remain colder, expected to have large-scale outputs only in late autumn.

However, all have adopted the improved planting methods you proposed, including crop rotation planning and Golden Fertilizer usage... Though lacking geothermal advantages, overall, production should be one to two times more compared to other lords' territories."

Upon hearing this, Louis pondered slightly: "So, although the Red Tide yielded the earliest harvest, this year should be a bumper year for my dominions."

"Yes." Bradley nodded.

In the distance, accompanied by a call, the pushcarts among the field ridges gradually rolled, with sacks being packed and stacked neatly.

Rye, potatoes, turnips... fully loaded, flowing back and forth with the manpower pushcarts, the field heads already bustling like a temporary transfer station.

Louis's gaze fell on the bags of heavy grains, and after a moment of contemplation, he said: "Half of these grains, transport back to Red Rock Warehouse, and divide the other half for the Earth Towers in various locations."

Upon hearing this, Bradley hesitated slightly, then lowered his voice to remind: "My lord... Red Rock Warehouse is constant temperature, moisture-proof, and insect-proof, allowing for longer preservation."

He was referring to the granary built last year in the territory, which was specially expanded to store more this year.

Now, with its deep corridors and interconnected rock rooms, even the surface temperature differences hardly affect it, truly a precious storage site.

Louis looked toward the distant mountains, his expression slightly grave: "There might be significant changes forthcoming, be it war or disasters. Just in case of major changes, distributing grains from the Earth Towers will be faster."

His voice was not loud, but it shocked Bradley, who immediately bowed his head and responded: "Understood."

Today's "Earth Towers" were no longer just the main city of Red Tide Castle.

Under Mike's supervision, replicating the main city's structure, two simplified circular Earth Towers were newly built on the eastern side and southern segment of Red Tide Territory, used for resident resettlement and material transshipment.

And in the other six subordinate territories, each had constructed a simple Earth Tower that's easy to defend and hard to attack, distributed like stars, reciprocating with one another.

They were built to withstand winters, wars, and the Nest.

"Furthermore..." Louis withdrew his gaze, turning to Bradley, "through Calvin Commerce Association, purchase more grains from the South. Assuming this year's entire harvest goes to storage, we should have another layer of preparation."

As Bradley noted the instructions in his ledger, he nodded gravely: "Understood, I'll get in touch right away."

He paused and then added in a gentle tone, "Everyone's been talking these days, saying thanks to you, we'll have a good winter this year."

"I hope... it truly will be so."

Louis didn't turn back, just quietly stood at the edge of the field ridge, watching the sunlight spill over the wheat tips, as if beneath that layer of gold, lay another layer of unseen shadow.

Chapter 258: Flamethrower

Eduardo Calvin crouched in the charred underbrush, cloaked in a battlefield cape long sullied by ash and muddy water, looking every bit the bounty hunter of noble descent.

"Are you sure there are valuable clues to be found here?"

He tugged at his gloves, addressing the greyhound beside him.

The dog, bred specifically for locating decaying corpses, quivered its nose and occasionally perked up its ears, pacing restlessly over the scorched ground.

"...Nothing? Another wild goose chase?"

The hound gave a couple of whines, indicating there was something there.

"Hah..."

Eduardo sighed, flinging his cloak back with no regard for the bloodstains and dust on his clothes.

He casually peeled away the crusted ground, prying apart a heap of burnt vines, and finally unearthed a fragment of remains smeared with black bone residue.

It was almost beyond recognition, like a wax figure crumpled in a furnace, emanating a half-dead stench.

His face instantly soured; "Lord, what sins have I committed..."

Eduardo complained as he fished out a clean white cloth from his pocket, wiping the mud off his fingers with a nobly restrained grace.

The hound looked at him, whimpered, and flicked its tongue over his sleeve, as if to comfort him for another fruitless search.

"Yes, yes, I know you're even less satisfied than I am."

He patted the dog's head, then looked up to the distant gray sky.

Just as he began to question life, doubt the dog, suspect the church, and even ponder why the world so cruelly tasked him with grave digging...

A dark shadow flitted across the gray sky.

Its wings spanned like blades, slicing through the dull wind, diving towards Eduardo.

Eduardo didn't look up, just squinted his eyes, his mouth twitching.

"...Tsk, this one is for Louis."

He maintained his crouched stance, extending his left arm.

The gray-feathered bird adeptly flapped its wings, landing on his shoulder, nipping lightly at a Silver Ring.

He deftly retrieved it, unfolding the slightly crumpled letter.

The paper was far from delicate, even bearing traces of moisture.

The letter roughly stated: "Found a special corpse, possibly linked to the Nest's mental core. If you have time, come to Red Tide Territory to check it out."

In the first second, he frowned.

In the second second, he took a deep breath.

In the third second, he looked up at the overcast northern sky, as if seriously gauging whether destiny itself was playing a trick on him.

Then he looked down at the heap of freshly dug mud, so dismal even Divine Grace wouldn't resonate, his mouth twitching slightly.

"I spent over half a month, personally digging thirty-six graves... and he just 'happens' to find a 'special corpse' so easily?"

Eduardo murmured almost as if his soul had departed, then sat down, pulling the "corpse-scent hound" into his arms.

"Gray, let's go. At least it's warmer at Red Tide."

The hound licked his chin in response, while the gray-feathered courier on his shoulder focused on grooming its feathers, completely ignoring his internal collapse.

Eduardo stood up, dusting himself off: "I hope this time there's a real outcome. The dread in my heart grows ever deeper."

.....

The north wind howled, and the wasteland on the northern side of Red Tide City seemed to be scraped by icy blades, the exposed ground long frozen hard.

This was the "explosive test wasteland" used for weapon testing; the Magic Explosion Bullet was previously tested here.

The Knight silently carried two heavy iron boxes to the center of the wasteland, raising a thin layer of dust as they hit the ground.

"Lord, both weapons you designed are completed, please take a look." Mike blinked his bloodshot eyes, yet his face bore a barely concealed excitement and pride.

Louis stood behind him, nodding quietly.

Mike deftly opened the first box, and a cold metallic gleam burst forth.

It was a black and red flamethrower, akin to a slumbering beast.

The main unit resembled a hefty metal backpack, covered with engravings and explosion-proof welds, connected to a thick tube stretching out to the nozzle.

The front of the nozzle opened like a beast's maw, with a blue-tinged Flint Crystal Stone embedded in the inner wall, ominously suggesting death.

Mike knelt cautiously, pulling out the hose, as if grooming the wings of a child he had personally cared for.

He tapped the metal canister: "This is the primary model flamethrower, weighing about thirty pounds, designed for carrying on the back. It propels Petroleum through a pressure system, with an automatic ignition mechanism at the front end that lights by pulling the trigger."

Mike stepped back half a pace, gesturing to someone in the distance, "For the Petroleum part, I'll let the formulator explain it personally."

Hillco, with a smug smile, walked over to the flamethrower, giving the metal canister a gentle pat.

"This is the fourth generation of Fire Scale Oil I formulated," his voice was low yet clear and steady, "it's thick, with an extremely strong adhesion, able to cling to armor, leather, or even snow blocks and continue burning."

In tests, it can burn through three layers of leather armor, ignite a whole pile of wetland. The range is controlled between three to four meters, balancing coverage and precision. A single spray can last up to twelve seconds...

Of course, if you continuously hold it, in less than a quarter-hour, a whole squad of Snow Swearers can pretty much become a charcoal illustration."

Louis, not quite grasping the concept from the description, directly ordered: "Begin the experiment."

The cold wind roared across the wasteland, sweeping up snow and dust from the ground.

Chapter 259: Flamethrower

Today's "target" is still an Ice Wild Boar, after all, this fire-resistant Magical Beast is most suitable for such experiments.

At this moment, it is tied up tightly on the test stake, roaring incessantly, the hot air spraying from its nostrils condensing into white mist in the cold wind, its four hooves furiously pawing the ground, its eyes filled with a bloody ferocity and unwillingness.

Louis signaled someone.

A robust Apprentice Knight stepped forward slowly, his face tense but without hesitation.

Under Mike's personal guidance, he shouldered the primary flamethrower model, checked the pressure valve, trigger latch, ignition crystal stone... every step performed meticulously and with skillful training.

"Aim for the stake's center, don't get greedy for the head," Mike whispered a reminder.

The Apprentice Knight stood firm, feet apart, stabilizing his stance.

He held his breath and concentrated, the nozzle aimed at the boar's chest.

All the onlookers retreated, withdrawing beyond the defined safety line.

The air seemed to freeze, leaving only the sound of cold wind and metal friction.

"Begin," Mike commanded.

The trigger was abruptly pulled.

"Boom!!"

A deafening explosion echoed across the wasteland, a wrathful flame serpent suddenly shot out from the nozzle, deep orange intermingling with red, as if Hell's mouth had opened, spewing a roaring tongue of fire.

The fiery tongue raced along the ground, advancing at ground level, instantly scorching weeds, twisting the air, the scorching burnt stench slicing the nostrils like a knife.

The moment the flames engulfed the Ice Wild Boar, it was as if a fierce tiger bit into its prey.

The burning Fire Scale Ointment clung fiercely to the boar's fur, the fire rapidly spreading along the fat, forcefully bursting into a series of explosive oily flames.

"Roar!!"

The bound boar let out a wretched scream, struggling wildly, dragging with it the Cold Iron chains in a frenzied charge left and right, those limbs as thick as tree trunks still producing a spray of sparks despite being bound tight.

Amidst the rolling smoke, the black fur swiftly charred, fat bursting, the air beginning to fill with a stench reminiscent of roasted corpses.

Among the onlookers, some exclaimed and stepped back, some couldn't help but cover their mouths and noses, but more kept their eyes fixed on this fiery massacre.

Hillco lowered his head, pressed the stopwatch, timing while observing the details of flame attachment, burning, and the target's reactions.

Ten seconds, eleven, twelve.

The fire finally began to wane, the boar let out one last low roar, collapsing with a crash, its burning body still smoking, resembling a remnant from Hell.

"Attachment met expectations." Hillco wiped the soot from his nose, nodding, "Twelve seconds of spray is just right, firepower didn't deviate. The ignition crystal stone triggered successfully in one go, zero delay, performance is very ideal."

He stepped forward, pointing to the Apprentice Knight's shoulder strap:

"However, the carrying structure still has room for optimization. The recoil during the spray is too strong, the shoulder straps too tight, affecting aim stability."

He turned to Mike, "A waist belt can be added to share the impact, and softer inner padding leather can be used to relieve pressure."

"Noted." Mike nodded.

Louis stepped forward, gaze fixed on the still smoking carcass, then looked at the young knight standing firm, reaching out to pat his shoulder lightly.

"Well done."

In his mind, however, he was swiftly analyzing the battlefield viability of this terrifying weapon.

If this is the power, a three-man team taking turns to operate could suppress an entire enemy breach.

And... just an Apprentice Knight could stably control the flamethrower, not to mention higher-tier Knights.

With the flames finally extinguished, only a pile of blackened charcoal remained in the center of the wasteland, with the faint outlines of what used to be part of the boar's skeleton visible.

The wind dispersed the charred smell, and the crowd slowly approached, still savoring the breathtaking scene from before.

Hillco crouched down to examine the remnants, checking the thickness of the carbon layer and grease marks, muttering to himself: "It's practically art..."

Louis quietly watched the charred boar carcass, his mind already simulating another combat scenario.

Flamethrowers, plus heat-resistant armor custom-made for Knights...

This is simply a deadly weapon against the Insect Corpses!

Can they be shot? It doesn't matter, just burn them.

The Insect Corpses have almost no long-range attack capabilities, all they do is close in for bites.

As soon as the fire opens, the charging Insect Corpses are like moths drawn to a flame, unable to last five seconds.

He couldn't help but chuckle softly, a hint of cold tactical delight flashing in his eyes.

This is frontal suppression, it's crushing, a pure weapon prepared for the "human defense lines."

Louis stepped forward, raising his hand to pat Mike on the shoulder.

"Good job."

Mike immediately stood straighter, his whiskered face full of excitement, speaking half a beat faster:

"This... this is all thanks to you, Lord! It's your design that's really amazing, I... I couldn't come up with such a sophisticated structure in eighteen lifetimes!"

The heat guide of this nozzle, when you drew it out, I thought it was a doodle, but it actually came to fruition! Not only did it come to fruition, but it's also so impressive!"

Facing Mike's incessant praise, Louis merely smiled slightly, as if listening to a breeze passing by.

"Don't just flatter, the second one, tell me," he said, his tone unhurried.

Mike was momentarily stunned, then nodded vigorously as if a switch had been flipped: "Yes! This second treasure — I dare say, is absolutely one of your most insane ideas!"

He quickly walked to the second iron box nearby, lifted his hand, and with a "click" of the iron lock, lifted the cover cloth, revealing a short, heavy launch tube.

The tube body was made of Cold Iron alloy, with bold lines, its surface faintly glimmering with casting patterns, emitting a heavy presence.

On one side, it's connected to a simple yet stable tripod, with steel claws attached underneath for stabilizing the landing.

Chapter 260: Flamethrower

"This is the Magic Explosion Bullet Launcher." Mike stood upright, his tone solemn.

"It's not a single weapon, but a whole firing system—depending on battlefield needs, it can switch between handheld and tripod modes."

As he spoke, he lifted the launch tube, supporting the base with one hand and holding the midsection with the other, hefting it onto his shoulder.

The diameter of the muzzle was so large that it exuded an intimidating deterrence even unlit.

"The Light Magic Explosion Bullet is relatively light, equipped with an anti-recoil leveling device, allowing an Official Knight to fire it from the shoulder during field operations, suitable for ambushes or guerrilla warfare."

"And the real 'teeth' of this thing are here."

He bent down to adjust the launcher position, firmly planting the tripod into the ground, extending the support claws, and slowly adjusting the launch tube to a forty-five degree angle.

Then he took out a heavy Magic Explosion Bullet head from the bottom of the box.

Unlike gunpowder bombs that rely on physical explosions, it compresses Demon Marrow into the core crystal, releasing a focused Magic Energy Shock Wave when triggered.

"This is the Heavy Magic Explosion Bullet." Mike said quietly, "Also the type that succeeded in the last experiment."

"This kind of thing must be launched with a tripod. It's not because human strength is insufficient, but to control the recoil at ignition. Too strong, and the operator would have their shoulder bone shattered on the spot."

He carefully loaded the bullet head into the launch tube, ensuring the engravings and slots were aligned before stepping back half a step.

Mike raised his head and looked at Louis. The craftsman's unique confidence on his face subsided slightly, replaced by a rare calmness and seriousness.

"We don't know what enemy it will ultimately face," he said, "but if the target is a city wall... it's practically a siege weapon."

Then came the trial segment.

The testing ground was chosen in a patch of scorched earth, a blackened area left from the last test.

The surface was charred and barren, with remnants of carbonized stakes and twisted iron pieces, the air faintly carrying the smell of ash and scorched metal.

Mike waved his hand, and several knights worked together to drag two Ice Wild Boars, tightly chained, to distant points, fixing them at sixty and eighty-meter markers.

They struggled and roared, their massive tusks scraping the ground, but escape was impossible.

Hillco carried a heavy metal canister to the front, taking out a Light Magic Explosion Bullet.

It resembled half a forearm's width of iron canister, its shell emitting a dull shine, evidently cold-forged and heat-treated.

At the bottom was a fuse cap of compressed Demon Marrow, both delicate and deadly.

He seemed uninterested, introducing in a detached manner: "The maximum range of the Light Bullet is about a hundred paces, propelled by Demon Marrow, suitable for knight squads to throw by hand or fire from the shoulder. Damage radius: heavy injury within ten meters, burns within twenty-five meters. Impact point accuracy can be controlled."

With that, a tall Official Knight took the test firing position and securely loaded the Magic Explosion Bullet into the launch tube.

Securing the locking ring, he aimed at the sixty-meter target, took a deep breath, and abruptly pulled the trigger.

"Bang!"

A muffled sound echoed, the Magic Explosion Bullet arced into the sky, trailing a faint magic energy tail flame as it flew toward the distant target.

In an instant, Weir instinctively turned his head to avoid the light.

BOOM!!!

A brilliant orange-red fireball suddenly exploded in the distance, like a burning giant hand slapping furiously onto the ground.

A wave of fire surged into the sky, a scorching blast sweeping over, as if igniting the entire sky.

The shock wave cracked like rolling thunder, causing the ground to tremble slightly.

The Ice Wild Boar at the sixty-meter mark was engulfed by the fire pillar, its Ice Armor melting, flesh burst, bones reduced to flying ash amidst the blast wind.

The one at eighty meters was also affected, its body scorched black, its wails intermittent.

Thick black smoke billowed near the explosion's core, even the test shed a hundred meters away was shaken as dust fell in a cascade.

"Oh, my God..." Weir instinctively took half a step back, eyes filled with shock.

Even the accompanying young knights' expressions changed, many covering their ears, faces showing fear.

Even an Elite Knight, without Fighting Energy, if hit directly would likely be incapacitated or even exploded on the spot.

Yet in the face of such overwhelming power, Louis simply squinted his eyes, displaying a satisfied look.

In contrast, Hillco had already backed far away.

He was well aware of this Light Bullet's true power, after all, he had crafted it with his own hands.

Yet he didn't quite like the finished product; it was a compromised version, after all.

The Fire Scale Ointment was running out, forcing him to lower the ignition temperature and explosive intensity, barely producing this batch of light combat bullets.

Meanwhile, Mike had already gotten up from the ground, dusting off the dirt from his body, unable to hide his excitement.

The aftermath of the explosion had not yet fully dissipated, the air filled with the scent of scorch and gunpowder.

Louis stood in place, squinting at the half-pit created in the target area, nodding after a long moment.

"The explosive force is sufficient," he said blandly, but Mike heard it with bright eyes, energized as if taking a little stimulant.

Seeing Louis satisfied, Mike proceeded to the second test.

Offering a salute to Louis, he announced in an elevated voice: "Next, entering the Heavy Magic Explosion Bullet test phase!"

Hillco carefully removed the Heavy Magic Explosion Bullet from the second iron box, his actions steady but fingers slightly trembling as if handling a holy relic.

The appearance of this Magic Explosion Bullet and the Light Bullet was nearly identical, still a thick, heavy metal casing, with differences only discernible up close.