

Winter 261

Chapter 261: Flamethrower

But the real difference lies inside—

Beneath the shell, the Fire Scale Ointment slowly flows, like lava veins meandering through metal, faintly emitting an orange-red glow, giving an unbearable sense of heat.

At the core, a Red Platinum Magic Crystal is quietly embedded, its blazing light uneasily flickering, as if it were a burning heart ready to explode at any moment.

Hillco's eyes reflected that glow, his voice hoarse, filled with uncontrollable excitement and pride: "This one...the damage radius has expanded to a heavy explosion within fifty meters, causing severe shock wave injuries within eighty meters, the explosion center temperature...nearly two thousand degrees Celsius."

As he spoke, he couldn't help but grin, the exhaustion and grime on his face seemed to vanish, leaving only pure fanaticism and a sense of accomplishment.

A craftsman immediately stepped forward, skillfully securing the tripod, embedding the heavy Magic Explosion Bullet into the launch slot.

The Fire Crystal Propulsion Device began to hum, like the low roar of a beast.

The angle slowly elevated, finally setting at a forty-five-degree incline, aimed at a rocky mountain foot three hundred steps away.

This was a deliberately arranged long-range strike test.

The foot of that mountain was tough, containing Cold Iron and Profound Ice Vein, impervious to ordinary explosives.

As the craftsman finished counting down, the fuse was pulled, and the heavy Explosive Bullet roared out of the barrel!

Bang—!

The Magic Explosion Bullet traced a crimson streak, dragging a blazing tail like a meteor leaping into the sky, flying for nearly three seconds before striking the mountain foot accurately!

Boom—roar!!!

At that moment, it was as if the God of Fire swung a hammer, fiercely striking the backbone of the Northern Lands!

Not just the surface of the mountain shattered, but it collapsed entirely from within.

The explosion point blasted out a blackened giant hole, several yards deep and dozens of meters in diameter, with rock melting on the spot, edges rolling with crimson flames, like the throat of Hell opening!

High-temperature airwaves and rock fragments spewed forth, surging halfway up the mountain.

The entire hillside collapsed, the snow evaporated by the airwaves, the exposed soil instantly charred, leaving long scorch marks. The surface split open, as if torn by giant claws.

More terrifyingly, the mouth not only exploded but continued to spew dark red fire waves ignited by the Fire Scale Ointment.

Flames danced wildly at the mountain foot, whistling in the wind, with visible heat distortion even appearing in the air.

Even though the people stood a hundred meters away at the observation point, they felt the unbearable heat; the air felt ignited, burning their breath, dust waves crashing, and eardrums buzzing.

Weir was the first to speak: "That's not an explosion...that's digging a hole! That's...the fire that devours mountains!"

Mike gazed at the collapsed and burning mountain foot in the distance, responding quietly: "This is prepared for sieges. One shot can destroy a city wall."

The mountain continued to collapse with thunderous roars, the flames spreading, burning through the snow, even igniting underground natural gas veins, with a series of muffled booms, spewing more dark flames, like a volcanic vent breaking the surface.

For a full thirty seconds, the flames did not extinguish, the explosion center still surged with fire tides, the "flame eye" seemed wide open, unblinking.

The crowd remained silent, the air filled with a burnt stench, the heat and rumbling lingering.

Weir's eyes widened, unaware of the scratches on his face from flying dust: "If I were standing there...I wouldn't even have dust left."

Meanwhile, Hillco could hardly conceal his excitement.

He stared at the churning flames, eyes filled with pride and an almost fanatical satisfaction.

This was the weapon he created, the destructive formula he concocted.

More importantly, this wasn't the strongest version.

Mike raised his head towards the still-collapsing mountain foot, his voice unusually grave and solemn: "This isn't an ordinary weapon...it's a combination of explosion and Fire of Hell."

He turned to Louis, speaking heavily: "Sir, this thing...isn't for clearing the way, it's for ending wars."

Louis slowly nodded: "Begin mass production immediately. We might...need it soon."

Upon hearing this, Mike's heart tightened, and he nodded quickly like a pecking chick.

Chapter 262: Eduardo's Ability

In the chilly cellar, the firelight flickered.

The coffin lay right in the center, black lacquer on solid wood, its lid not fully closed.

Inside was the corpse of a young boy, Aik, a twelve-year-old Snow Swearer.

Louis had it shipped back from the Dongxi Territory a few days in advance, with a simple reason: there might be some disease to study.

He had no special feelings toward the corpse itself, mainly bringing it back due to its connection with the Nest.

"Honestly," Louis sniffed lightly twice, turning his head to look at his brother beside him, "Did you fall into the latrine one day and not wash clean? This smell... how is it more complex than a corpse?"

"Because there's a pile of shit next to me." Eduardo glanced at him, voice flat, "If this weren't an inappropriate setting, I'd press you into the wall right now."

"Tsk, you really know how to talk." Louis's lips curled up, not angry at all, but instead turned and sniffed seriously.

The two brothers have gotten close through several interactions, and both had joking natures, so a little teasing was no big deal.

"I need to use my Bloodline Talent, you should leave for a bit," Eduardo said calmly.

Louis didn't move, as if he hadn't understood this "please leave," but instead raised his eyebrow: "Uh? Your talent can't be seen by others and needs to be used alone?"

"Louis." Eduardo's tone became slightly more intense, "I am serious. Leave."

"The more serious you are, the more I feel there's something wrong with you." Louis spread his hands, showing an expression of 'I really can't help you,' "Does your talent require you to strip naked to use it?"

"This is the last time I'll say it," Eduardo lifted his gaze.

Louis shrugged and finally walked towards the door, muttering as he went: "Tsk tsk, even your own brother you guard against, father's education really failed."

Eduardo's expression didn't change, but instinctively he tightened the front of his cloak, as if to conceal something.

He didn't want to lie, nor could he tell the truth.

Because over in the Golden Feather Flower Religious Authority Country, he was the Bishop's Envoy; while on this Empire's land, he was the son of one of the Eight Great Dukes.

Unique reasons let him traverse between two hostile forces, maintaining a subtle and dangerous balance.

The hatred between the Ironblood Empire and the Golden Feather Flower was too deep, not a rift he could mend.

But what he didn't know was, Louis had already quietly grasped it all through the Daily Intelligence System.

He knew Eduardo was from the Church Court, knew that his true mission on this trip to the Northern Territory was to investigate the disappearance of Grand Mage Jurgen Locke.

Yet Louis hadn't exposed it.

Firstly, because it wasn't necessary.

Secondly, because... he still needed Eduardo.

The door slammed shut with a "bang," its echo reverberating beneath the stone archways.

The basement returned to silence, leaving only Eduardo and the young boy's coffin.

He let out a gentle sigh.

This brother, to be precise, was a brother he hadn't seen many times.

He had initially thought he would be a calm, composed, careful type of guy.

After all, being able to thrive in such a Northern Territory scenario, becoming a Viscount in a short time, wasn't something ordinary people could achieve.

The initial impression was indeed like that, but getting along revealed that he actually could make quite offbeat jokes, sometimes even ones he couldn't respond to.

"Tsk." Eduardo clicked his tongue softly, shaking his head.

Then he put aside his frivolous thoughts, his expression gradually becoming solemn.

Eduardo slowly exhaled, extending his right hand, where a golden pattern like a feather-not-feather emerged in the palm, its golden glow quivering, resembling sacred light unfolding and silently blooming in the flesh.

He bent down, gently placing his palm atop Aik's chest.

In the next instant, Divine Grace activated.

The pattern's shimmer surged like a tide, spreading through the resonances of blood, bones, and memories.

Aik's brief and sorrowful life arose silently like fragments, intertwining, echoing in the depths of his consciousness.

Eduardo "saw" Aik's childhood...

Amidst a blazing attack, a baby was born crying.

A woman, her face pale, clutched her abdomen, tremblingly handing the child to a bloodied man.

"His name is Aik," she said softly in the end, after which she flickered out like a candle in the wind.

Aik's childhood lacked a mother's embrace, featuring only the rough hands of warriors and tents still hazy with gunpowder.

Every morning, Aik stood on the snow hill as a lookout, the cold wind lifting his cloak, appearing like a little adult.

His favorite time was returning to camp at dusk, gathering around the fire to hear his father tell those "honor" stories.

"One day, you too will wear it," Takalin pointed to his cloak of honor.

At that moment, Aik believed he would eventually become a hero.

He nodded, eyes youthful yet resolute.

Eduardo "felt" the child's enduring fear...

But one day, Herrick suddenly stopped joking. Ula stood motionless in the snow at the edge of the camp, watching the sky at night.

His father ground his teeth at night, muttering words he couldn't understand during his dreams.

Instinctively feeling the familiar camp becoming foreign,

He clenched his teeth, burying his fear deep in his chest.

The boy didn't know what had happened, only that he couldn't let his father worry.

Eduardo "experienced" that escape...

In the dead of night, Aik's hand was gripped tightly by his father as they fled.

The cold wind tore at their cloaks; he fell countless times, his knees long since battered, blood forming into ice crust along his pant legs.

"Go south, don't look back."

His father whispered, the voice detached and unfeeling, yet as if stabbing a knife into his ear, piercing his heart.

Chapter 263: Eduardo's Abilities (Part 2)

"And you?" Aik asked softly.

The response came from the snow forest not far away, a sudden string of footsteps.

They turned around, and standing on the snow were familiar figures: Blo, Heim...

Uncles and elders who once drank and fought alongside his father were now approaching like marionette corpses.

Father drew his sword, roaring as he charged at his former brothers.

The snow turned blood-red, the roar pierced the night sky.

Aik turned back for a final glance; that was the last time he saw his father.

Eduardo "witnessed" the end at dawn...

Aik staggered alone through the vast snowy forest.

He fell, got up, and fell again, never to stand again.

Those small feet were long stained with blood, yet before falling, he clung tightly to a badge and an overburdened short sword.

As if guarding something, or waiting for someone.

Sunlight poured through the forest gaps, casting a silent farewell on the small, stiff body.

The scene halted.

Eduardo slowly straightened, eyes long soaked with tears.

It wasn't an illusion or a mere memory being observed, but life submerged as if personally experienced.

Divine Grace was not a gentle gift, but a costly synesthesia.

Aik's fear, despair, stubbornness, and unfulfilled yearning pierced like needles into his nerves.

"Ha..." He gasped, wiping tears with his hand, yet blurring them further.

His knuckles whitened, gripping his sleeve to stop the trembling, yet a fatigue like a mountain almost knocked him off balance.

It was the agony of being crushed by emotions, not his own, yet as shattering as a broken heart.

Eduardo leaned against the cold stone wall, closed his eyes, and remained silent for a while.

The painful emotions finally subsided slightly, ebbing from his fingertips, leaving only reason slowly returning.

He took a deep breath, exhaled a misty white breath, and began to sort through what he had seen and felt.

"First, Aik indeed made contact with the 'Nest' before his death, or... it left traces of Spiritual Power.

Secondly, the pollution from the Nest is not limited to corpses; it can also erode the minds of the living—chronic, hidden, and silent."

He looked at the half-closed coffin, his eyes revealing an unmasked pity.

"Third... the 'Snow Swearer stronghold' where Aik and his father last escaped, was likely not an ordinary camp from the mental echoes. It might have been a Nest disguised as a stronghold."

The door suddenly flew open with a bang, bringing a gust of damp, cold cellar air.

Louis, waiting outside in boredom, shrugged: "Finally letting me in? I thought you were inside stripping and dancing."

"Stop with the jokes." Eduardo's voice was low, his expression grave, "There's a situation."

Louis's expression immediately tightened, the joking tone vanishing instantly.

He entered the room and, after hearing Eduardo's report, his expression grew even more somber.

"Polluting the living, hiding the stronghold, possibly even breeding right under our noses..." Louis repeated in a low voice, a dangerous glint flashing in his eyes.

He wasted no words, simply raising his hand and snapping his fingers.

"Scout Knights, deploy. The target is a thirty-mile radius around Dongxi Territory. Find the Snow Swearer stronghold."

A response rang out immediately outside, with armor clashing and knights moving, figures retreating in an orderly manner.

Louis then turned his face, his gaze falling on his silent brother, his voice almost whispering:

"If it really is a Nest..." He paused, a sardonic smile suddenly curling his lips, "Then it's just right; I've been wanting to see if my sword is sharp."

.....

Leaves drifted down the slope, the wind stirring dry branches, the forest silent as if even the birds dared not chirp.

Under Louis's orders, the Red Tide Scout Knight Team began a carpet search around the "Chosen Oath Taker stronghold" in batches.

After two days and nights of reconnaissance, a team finally discovered a settlement in the depths of the Northern Forest, far on a slope, unmarked on any map.

Caslo lay behind a rock, his brows furrowed.

He was the captain of this scout team, experienced and steady. At this moment, his gaze was locked onto the unfamiliar village below the slope.

"A place not on the map, yet with a complete stronghold, damn rats..." he muttered in a low voice.

The settlement's buildings were crude and rough, mostly skewed wooden houses with walls built of stone pieces.

But strangely, several structurally complete watchtowers and wooden arrow towers were still operational, as if meticulously maintained.

This was not a naturally formed village, but a well-organized military outpost.

However, more eerie were the people.

They weren't ordinary villagers but Snow Swearers.

Each one's shoulder marks, armor scars, calloused hands, and belt emblems indicated:

This was a complete team.

Adult men, strong and robust, once swore to their beliefs and fought bravely.

But now they stood motionless like soulless statues along the streets, under the eaves, in the watchtowers.

Caslo stared at them intently, his throat dry.

He watched a bear-like man with tattered leather armor, holding a rusted axe stand rigidly before a wooden house, eyes fixed on a corner, not moving a muscle for half an hour.

It wasn't alertness or vigilance, but stupor.

"Are they in a trance?" Alan whispered.

"No," Leo's voice was nearly inaudible, "they... just don't want to move."

Caslo narrowed his eyes slowly: "Not can't move, but won't move. They've sunk in, like... pressed under a dream, even their muscles forgot to contract."

The scouts saw a Snow Swearer sitting against a wooden pillar, head stiffly tilted upward, mouth slightly open, as if reciting ancient words.

But the lip movements, tone, rhythm... were like distorted underwater echoes, itching at the heart.

"Don't you think they don't even seem alive?" Alan gritted his teeth, "Yet their breath is still there."

As they continued to observe, they felt increasingly eerie.

A Snow Oath Warrior was cleaning a knife, but it was air he was wiping; there was no knife in his hand.

Someone was practicing archery with perfect form, yet there was nothing before him.

A tall female warrior stood on a terrace, sunlight enveloping her, lifting her arms as if greeting something.

"...This is sleepwalking." Leo finally spoke up, "They remember their combat moves, training habits, but for some reason, it's like the whole village has fallen into a shared dream, endlessly repeating those long-meaningless actions."

"They're not crazed maniacs," Caslo whispered, "they're lucid puppets."

Suddenly Alan was startled, looking into the distance.

At the village entrance stood a Snow Swearer beside a wooden fence, motionless like a watchful statue.

The person suddenly—ever so slightly, almost imperceptibly, shifted their eyes, looking in their direction.

Threads of blood surfaced in those deathly still pupils, weaving and wending like cobwebs.

"Did he... did he see us?" Alan's voice trembled.

"No," Caslo grabbed them, "he's not seeing us. He's seen something in his dream."

"We can't watch anymore." He made a sudden decision, his voice firm, "If we watch any longer, we'll fall in too."

Alan whispered through clenched teeth, "Should we just... set it on fire now?"

Caslo glanced back at him, his voice low but unequivocal: "No. The Lord needs information, and it's easy to mess it up."

Alan and Leo nodded together: "Understood."

They swiftly descended the mountain, not saying another word.

The wind blew through the forest, fluttering the edges of their cloaks, and swept towards that eerily dormant village below the valley.

No dogs barked, no smoke from chimneys.

Only those who murmured softly, living yet sleepwalking, continued slowly to repeat those phrases whose meaning was forgotten.

Chapter 264: Nest Special Ops Team

"This village... is worse than I expected."

Louis stood behind the broken stone wall, with his palm on a piece of crumbling brick, as he gazed towards the village center. The whispers surged like a tide, yet lingered around his ears like shredded flakes in the wind, refusing to disperse.

In the square, the "villagers" moved slowly across the cracked stone slabs like soulless puppets.

Their clothing was tattered, their skin an ashen gray, and their eyes bore the cloudy gleam of dead fish, yet their lips occasionally twitched, mumbling something.

"Don't you think these insect corpses look... different from the ones we found last time at Cold Pine Ridge?" Eduardo spoke first, his gaze sweeping over the wandering figures, "Those were just controlled bodies. But these people..."

"These insect corpses seem to have a bit of 'self' left." Louis replied.

"More like semi-parasitic." Eduardo stroked his chin.

"The question is why preserve 'consciousness'? If it's for control, that's too inefficient. If the mastermind is doing it purely for torment... that's quite artistic."

Louis nodded, his gaze falling on the center of the village.

It was a stone altar, about two meters high, its edges weathered and eroded, it should have been a holy place for ceremonies or offerings.

But now the altar had long transformed.

Dark red vines twisted maliciously around it, dense and interwoven, forming a cocoon-like spider web.

The surface of the vines was a semi-transparent membrane-like structure, with what seemed like black-red liquid slowly flowing inside.

"It's... moving." Eduardo squinted, his voice so low it was almost inaudible.

They both saw the vines were not still—they subtly rose and fell, as if breathing.

"Not like accidental wind or vibrations, there's a life response." Louis squinted at the irregular writhing.

"Or nurturing something." Eduardo added in a low voice, his tone uncharacteristically solemn.

"The Nest?" Louis probed.

Eduardo nodded, "It's quite possible."

They fell silent, both knowing what that implied.

Eduardo gave his younger brother a sidelong glance, finally speaking in a lowered voice, "Are you sure... you can handle this this time?"

"What do you mean?" Louis turned his head to look at him.

"I know you've taken out a Nest before." Eduardo sighed softly, "But that time you had Duke Edmund, a Peak Knight, holding the back. This time... it's too risky."

Louis answered calmly, "Before you came, you already tried to dissuade me once. I won't take risks without assurance. If problems arise, I'll withdraw immediately; the route is already planned."

Eduardo stared at him for a few seconds, finally letting out a light sigh, "Alright, as long as you know what you're doing."

While they were talking, a steady stream of knights had already infiltrated the outskirts of the village.

Groups of five, moving in coordination, quietly sneaking to the four corners of the village.

They wore a new type of black-silver armor, sleek in design, with special flexible protective layers at the joints, not only heat-resistant but also capable of warding off acid and parasitic stings to a certain extent.

In each group, two carried heavy flamethrowers, their gun muzzles resembling the fangs of a beast, connected by pipes to oil tanks on their backs.

Another carried a specially-designed magic explosive bullet launcher, preloaded with ammunition.

The remaining three were equipped for close combat with cold weapons, complete with spears, heavy swords, and protective gauntlets, and each had a light magic explosion bullet and spare oil bottle hanging from their waists.

During their movements, there was almost no sound, only the faintest metallic friction and the subtle rustle of boots pressing into the earth.

"What are those?" Eduardo raised an eyebrow, showing rare interest.

"That's the 'Insect Corpse Special Attack Team'." Louis replied faintly, "We suffered losses in the last battle, so I resolved to form a unit specifically to deal with these creatures."

Eduardo's gaze lingered on the special team members, his brow slightly furrowed.

"What are those bottles hanging at their waists? Petroleum?" He pointed to a row of metallic jars at one soldier's waist, "Aren't they going to topple over?"

Louis said mysteriously, "You'll see in a moment."

The moonlight was dim as the wind swept through the charred ruins of the deserted village, and all the knights were in position.

Louis stood on the dilapidated platform, speaking in a low voice, "Prepare, begin."

The commander beside him kept his left hand behind him as his right hand slowly raised a command flag painted red with golden lines.

"Signal confirmed."

"All groups in position, stealth infiltration."

Five-man knight special team squads, clad in custom black-silver armor, moved like an iron stream cutting through the night shadow.

The night covered them as they silently threaded to strategic points on the village outskirts, taking control and fire positions.

"Magic explosion bullet, prepare."

Light magic explosion bullets were quietly placed in the village center area.

Then, with a barely perceptible gesture, in the next instant—

BOOM!!!

Orange-red flames descended from the sky, like a furious sunset, suddenly detonating in the heart of the village.

Heat waves whipped up ashes, a fireball rose high, instantly consuming everything within a ten-meter radius.

The forms of the insect corpses shattered in the blaze, limbs jerking, convulsing, their flesh and skin blackened and stripped by the intense heat, letting out spine-chilling screams before collapsing lifelessly.

Buildings within a twenty-five-meter radius were affected, wooden houses collapsing with a crash.

The watchtower tilted and collapsed in the wave of fire, as dreamlike "villagers" were awakened and bewildered, being devoured by the flames, screams tearing through the wind.

The ground trembled like a dragon turning over beneath, the scorched earth split into fissures, and the firelight lit up the night sky as brightly as day.

"A good start." From a distant high ground, Eduardo watched the sea of intertwined red flames and corpse shadows, voicing his thoughts in a low tone,

Chapter 265: Nest Special Assault Team II

"Even in the Imperial Capital, the power of this Magic Explosion Bullet is among the best... I didn't expect you to have such firepower in your hands."

"This is just the beginning." Louis stood beside him, staring intently below.

Although these light Magic Explosion Bullets had caused considerable damage, the insect-like zombies were not mindless. Their counterattack was swifter and more bizarre than imagined.

Hissing came from the village. The "humanoid" forms, previously staggering like sleepwalkers, seemed awakened by some will.

No longer dazed, they let out low roars and lunged toward the source of the fire!

Some already had missing limbs, their bellies blown open, yet still managed to lunge with hands supporting their ground.

Others had their throats burned through, but sprinted like phantoms, powered by their knees and feet!

An insect-like zombie, already blasted with blackened half-body, suddenly twitched and writhed on the ground, its chest... slowly bulging.

Something writhed beneath the skin. It seemed like a second heart, beating beneath.

In the next moment, with a "sizzle," the charred skin tore open.

A black-purple totem suddenly emerged, sprawling like a parasitic mark across the chest, arms, and even the back of the neck of the insect-like zombie.

These totems, like living creatures, slowly writhed upon the insect-like zombies, with each pulse sending its flesh boiling.

BOOM!!

Several insect-like zombies suddenly burst forth thick black gas, unleashing a force akin to Fighting Energy, charging towards the knights with a burst!

"Is that... Blood Boiling Frenzy?!" Louis's pupils contracted sharply, uttering almost instinctively in a low voice.

Even he couldn't help but show a hint of surprise.

Eduardo's face changed slightly upon hearing this.

He knew the term as well; it was a forbidden technique originating from ancient clans of the Northern Territory.

Only when truly trapped in a deadly situation, with no retreat, would a Snow Swearer ignite the blood totem buried deep in their chest.

In that instant, the blood seemed to ignite, forcibly amplifying all potential, causing muscles to swell wildly, pupils to turn blood-red, and combat power soaring several times over!

But the price was equally terrifying — skin tearing, organs bursting, bleeding from seven orifices, bones shattering...

At the moment of exhausting strength, the user's body would collapse and die, like an empty shell drained of spirit.

This secret technique was supposed to be known only by true "Northern Barbarian Warriors"...

But now those insect-like zombies could use it too?!

Moreover, these insect-like zombies weren't afraid of death at all!

Amidst the fire, those monsters, marked with black-purple totems, ran wildly, releasing the expanding force of blood and flesh while burning.

An insect-like zombie's arm constantly cracked and reformed while running, its skin pulsating like a live snake wrapping around, its swelling muscles even bursting through remnants of armor.

They roared as they charged towards the knights, like beasts of slaughter emerging from a sea of boiling blood.

Of course, Louis's knights were not unprepared.

Facing the charging insect-like zombies, they quickly maneuvered, swinging longswords and long spears in the firelight, the sound of metal clashing with rot echoing through the night sky!

"Sigh... they can't be stopped." Eduardo, standing on a high slope, furrowed his brow, a hint of concern flashing in his eyes.

These insect-like zombies were not ordinary undead.

They could still run wildly through flames, and their surface even emitted scarlet Fighting Energy, their fighting style mixing the techniques of human warriors with the brute force of beasts.

This was no longer a normal undead, but enhanced combat weapons.

"Your knights... are likely to be completely wiped out."

He looked at Louis beside him, his tone carrying a hint of reluctance.

"Don't rush." Louis, however, merely whispered calmly.

In the next moment——

"BOOM!!!!"

A deafening explosion suddenly resounded.

Among a few knights, the man carrying a round tank and wielding a heavy metal apparatus on his shoulder suddenly pulled the trigger!

Hiss—!!

The pressure valve abruptly opened, the main nozzle spitting forth a thick tongue of fire!

It was a force of burning more ferocious than magic!

Scarlet flames mixed with Fire Scale Oil, forming a high-temperature blazing dragon's tongue in the air, roaring as it lunged towards the enemy ranks!

"What's that?" Eduardo's pupils contracted sharply, his body instinctively leaning forward, his voice carrying an unusual tension and shock.

He saw the flame emitted was not ordinary combustion but like the death god's whip, carving destructive arcs in the air.

The insect-like zombies screamed and rolled in the fire, severed limbs flying, pained and frenzied.

The black-purple totems on those parasitic bodies burst into clusters of charred black ashes under the high heat, even stripping them of the chance to struggle.

Even more horrifying, the flame seemed alive, with high-temperature fire oil clinging like venomous snakes, igniting on contact and refusing to extinguish.

Once an insect-like zombie caught fire, even if it fell to the ground, it would only drag the fire into shadows and dark alleys, pulling even hidden insect-like zombies into the purgatory!

Eduardo's heart thudded heavily.

He had seen the cruelty of war and the effectiveness of weapons.

But this scene shattered all his previous understanding and experience.

"This... this isn't magic." he muttered, not in denial, but seemingly in shocked confirmation, "Nor is it alchemy. Without any Fighting Energy fluctuations, yet it can cause such terrifying destruction..."

His gaze fixed on that flamethrower, resembling a rift from hell, his voice slightly hoarse: "Did you... invent it?"

He didn't know whether it was created by Louis himself or if there was a genius craftsman under his command.

But there was one thing he knew very clearly: such a weapon had never appeared in any other territory.

Louis didn't turn back, his voice calm yet carrying an unmistakable sharpness: "The product of reflection after pain, named 'Fire Scale Style Flamethrower,' born specifically to counter insect-like zombies. Unfortunately, the materials are rare, and complete products are scarce..."

Chapter 266: Nest Special Assault Team III

Before he finished speaking, the fire of Hell had already turned the entire alley into a fiery furnace, the wailing cries of insect carcasses melded into one.

On the battlefield, the five-member Knight team swiftly unfolded, employing the "T-formation" that they had rehearsed multiple times.

The main flamethrower operator advanced steadily like the heart of the battlefield, flames angrily spewing from the nozzle on their shoulder.

The secondary flamethrower operators flexibly maneuvered on the left and right wings, weaving between the fire line, plugging any gaps—no insect could slip through and get close.

The other Knights roamed the formation's sides with crossbows and spears, intercepting enemies.

Each Knight was well-trained, reacting swiftly and coordinating seamlessly; any insect carcass trying to breach the fire line would be pierced through the skull by arrows or lifted by spears within seconds!

The first insects hit didn't even have a chance to react before being engulfed by flames.

The high temperature instantly tore through their remaining skin, flesh vaporized in the heat, tendons curled, and bones erupted with crackling sounds within their bodies.

In less than half a minute, the flamethrowers' overlapping coverage transformed the narrow alley ahead into a purgatory blaze.

Flames swept up the brick walls, climbed onto rooftops, roiled under the eaves—the orange-red sea of fire resembled a monstrous open mouth, devouring every hiding, shifting, struggling insect carcass!

Some insects had their entire arms explode, bones popping out of wounds like popcorn, accompanied by the scent of burned flesh wafting in the night breeze.

Some insects madly slammed into walls in a bid to escape but were instantly swallowed by burning oil on the wall, rolling and shrieking as they turned into a charred mass!

One insect carcass was just about to leap out of the alley when it was sliced in half mid-air by tongues of flame, its underbelly exploding.

The insect eggs and maggot sacs inside its cavity burst open with a pop, spewing a mass of writhing insects that were instantly seared upon landing.

Temperature spiked quickly, the air filled with an overwhelming smell of burnt flesh and decay, nauseating anyone nearby.

Flames spread rapidly on the ground, forming rings of "fire locks."

Should any insect dare to jump or charge forward, it would get scorched through mid-air, turning into a burning fireball, crashing down with bones charred and unable to move!

"Empty!" The main flamethrower operator shouted softly as the tongues of fire abruptly died out, leaving behind swirling smoke.

He decisively took a step back, signaling with an empty canister held high.

"Swap me in!" The secondary flamethrower operator was already poised at the side, diving forward skillfully to take over the primary position, and flames roared as a deep orange blaze surged once again, devouring approaching insects like a roaring dragon!

Simultaneously, the Apprentice Knight had already rushed to the main flamethrower operator's side, quickly kneeling to operate.

Like a flowing stream, only the crisp series of clicks could be heard, impressively swift hands already replacing the canister.

The main flamethrower operator nodded in confirmation, returning to the formation.
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Under the roaring flames, the Flamethrower Squad advanced steadily and orderly like a burning beast, tearing open a charred black path through the night and the tide of corpses.

The Knight team pressed forward step by step, advancing like a rolling iron stream, akin to a wall of fire.

Any insect carcass would instantly combust upon contact, screaming as it plunged into the fiery abyss—not a single one would escape alive.

Yet just as they advanced to the center of the village, the wind suddenly changed.

First, there was a deep breathing-like air current roaming through the ruins, the ground lightly trembled, and surrounding insect carcasses abruptly halted, as if responding to the call of the Mother Nest.

"Retreat." Louis noticed something amiss and immediately ordered the squad to fall back.

A distinct command resounded under the battle standard.

The main flamethrower operator nodded without hesitation, signaling for retreat.

The entire squad swiftly shifted backwards, maintaining formation, leaving behind a bleak expanse of charred remnants, distancing themselves from the terrifying Mother Nest about to fully "hatch".

And at the moment they retreated to a safe distance

"Boom."

The earth resounded with a deep, heart-thumping sound.

In the next instant, ruins behind the stone altar suddenly started to writhe.

Something crawled out from the piles of rubble and corpses.

The Nest, descended.

It grew slowly, emerging from the underground like shedding a shell.

A colossal living mass, akin to a grayish-white tumor, clinging with blood tendrils, like a flesh "flower" blooming atop a sea of corpses.

Its texture comparable to resin enveloped in slime, giving off a nauseating iridescent sheen amidst its wet, soft mass, accompanied by the sound of tearing membranes.

The "hive" structure slowly unfolded, revealing one writhing egg chamber after another.

Inside, insect embryos were visible, endlessly rolling and struggling in bodily fluids, shrieking like infant cries, resembling monsters born inside the Nest's womb.

More terrifying were the shadowy remnants of countless human faces faintly visible on its surface.

Their expressions varied from anger to wails, like twisted snapshots moments before death, eternally sealed within the flesh wall, lips subtly moving but unable to voice.

At the center of the altar, hung a massive core flesh sac, supported and nourished by dozens of thick tendrils.

Blood vessels and veins were clearly visible, each pulsation echoed like a heart being hammered by iron.

With a stench-laden mist erupting, the ground started oozing slime, tendrils probing from below.

With hooked thorns and bony teeth at the ends, they suddenly shot out like live snakes, snapping a roadside remnant pillar and emitting an eardrum-tingling hum.

It was Snow Swearer who "conceived" it with the flesh and blood of Knights and Nobility.

From afar on a high platform, Eduardo gazed at the writhing Nest, his eyes reflecting shock.

"This one is... stronger than the previous Nest," he murmured softly, his voice seemingly caught in his throat, "not just in scale; its structure is more complex, the core deeper..."

Louis merely paused silently for a moment beside him, slightly furrowing his brow.

Eduardo slowly took a step back, turned his head toward Louis, and spoke softly:

"Louis, this thing isn't something your Knight team can handle... This Nest is significantly stronger than the last. You should seek Duke Edmund's help."

Louis simply waved his hand dismissively, keeping his gaze fixed on the Nest.

"Not necessary yet." He replied, his tone poised.

He immediately gestured behind him, prompting an adjutant to step forward and set up a tripod, securely anchoring it on the edge of the platform.

It was a Magic Explosion Bullet launcher, its hefty body gleaming with dull metallic light, the coil slot at the front already in place, accompanied by a crisp "click" as the first Magic Explosion Bullet was slowly loaded.

Eduardo furrowed his brow, stepping forward to glance at the device: "This isn't much different from what your Knights use. You should know, at this level, Magic Explosion Bullets aren't effective against such Nests."

"I have it covered," Louis replied coolly, without turning back, "just watch."

He then succinctly ordered the Knights beside him: "Hold fire. Wait for my command to 'launch' before acting."

"Understood!"

The Knights immediately answered, eyes fixed on the fire line's end, watching the slowly twitching, nightmarishly writhing Nest.

Fingers hovered over the firing button but dared not to act prematurely.

Chapter 267: Heavy Magic Explosion Bullet

A few minutes earlier, Priest Ah Long suddenly opened his eyes, his breath hot in the air.

"...What?" He sat up in bed, feeling a burning pain in his nose.

Outside the window, the intertwining firelight was like a giant beast opening its eyes, slowly approaching in the dark.

He didn't even have time to put on shoes and rushed to the window barefoot.

In the next second, he saw the fire.

It was not a fire disaster.

It was a group of... Knights.

The heavy armor reflected a cold, hard metallic luster in the firelight, like fiends from the Abyss.

They carried strange metal devices on their backs, moving steadily yet swiftly, piercing through the outer defenses set by the insect corpses.

Flames roared and surged from their hands, as if they could devour everything!

"How, how is this possible..."

His voice choked in his throat, staring in disbelief at the rolling, burning flames ahead.

Those weren't ordinary undead soldiers, those were elite insect corpses refined from the elite of the Snow Swearer.

They had once single-handedly defeated armored heavy knights, could shred shield walls with corrosive claws, and even when set ablaze by rockets, could continue fighting for seconds, dragging more enemies to Hell with their bodies.

But now, it couldn't even fight back.

Flames blew its chest open from the inside, and its carapace fragments flew apart like shattered porcelain.

The enhanced insect corpse rolled chaotically on the ground, letting out a scream mixed with beast and human wails, echoed briefly, then was consumed by the blaze.

Within a few breaths, it became nothing more than a charred, curled shell, even its venom sac exploded by the high heat without spilling a drop of venom.

He heard it, the roar of the knight's flamethrower as they approached, like a breath of fury blown from the depths of Purgatory.

The pillar of fire was like a long whip held by a deity, searing and precise, burning the insect corpses clean from the inside out.

"This is not ordinary fire..." he murmured, fear filled his eyes.

The knight closed in step by step, the flamethrower like the fangs of some giant beast, continuously spewing scorching streams of fire wherever the insect corpses couldn't evade.

Even the toughest "enhanced ones" were no more than slightly faster burning kindling in front of him.

"This... this is not right! How do they know we're here!? And these people... they came prepared!"

Ah Long's heart suddenly accelerated, his spine felt like it was sliced open by an ice blade, cold sweat seeped from deep in his skin, a chill rushing straight to his heart.

He almost instinctively raised his right hand, the black iron ring engraved with dark purple demon patterns flashed with a wisp of sinister light.

Inside the ring, the blood of the insect mother blended with sorcery runes, writhing like maggots.

Ah Long chanted softly, blood seeping from his tongue, merging into the spell.

In his mind, over a hundred vague, decayed, yet highly aggressive consciousness nodes instantly appeared. He commanded them with will to gather, entangle, merge, and counterattack!

In the alleys, the insect corpses suddenly exploded like a frightened swarm, those hidden behind walls, inside houses, at the bottom of wells, on rooftops all surged like a tide, pouncing towards the knights!

They ran, climbed, leaped, fell, burrowed!

Squirming with ragged limbs, sharp fangs, bleeding tentacles, they closed in from all directions on the Red Tide Knights!

The wind was permeated with a stench and eerie mutterings, as if hundreds and thousands of dead souls were wailing.

Ah Long's eyes glinted with a fierce light.

This was his trump card, the elite insect corpse army he personally "prepared", even an Extraordinary Knight trapped in it would be hard-pressed to escape!

But it was useless!

"Wh... what is happening!?" Ah Long's eyes widened, filled with confusion and fear.

The knights, did not retreat!

They carried the heavy metal nozzles on their shoulders, like priests wielding the Fire God's Staff, striding straight into the torrent of insect corpses!

Flames erupted!

Not ordinary flames, but fire as thick and blazing as Hell's lava, carrying strange ointment, dispersing scorching heat waves in the air as soon as it was sprayed.

Boom!

The scorching blaze spread mightily, instantly forming several fiery chains at the mouth of the alley, cutting the wave of insect corpses apart!

Anything they touched burned, anything that burned would not extinguish!

The insect corpses struggled, wailed, and screeched in the fire, trying to leap, climb walls, spread to encircle, but from whichever angle they approached, what awaited them was the cleansing by the flames as though engulfing the heavens.

Those advancing insect corpses were instantly ignited, becoming flaming, screeching firemen, crashing around, lighting everything in their path, like a self-spreading plague of Hell.

Ah Long desperately controlled, but could only watch helplessly as those insect corpses lost control, scattered, and burned to ashes one by one!

His mental links felt as if they were being severed by flames one by one, and in his mind, the insect corpse consciousnesses "popped" and extinguished, causing blue veins to burst on his forehead, nearly making him faint!

He felt an indescribable "chill" creeping outward from his heart, not out of fear, but a sense of unease.

Unprecedented, deep-seated unease.

"Who are these people...?" he whispered hoarsely, his throat dry.

Outside, those knights still carried on with flame-like steps, inch by inch closing in on him like judges sent from Hell.

Ah Long's eyes widened, as if awaking from a nightmare, but found reality was the true nightmare.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry..."

His voice was barely audible amid the insect corpses' wails, his hands tremblingly touched the Divine Chain on his forehead, as if caressing a shackle about to be broken.

He remembered the whisper of the goddess, mercy flowing like marrow: "When there is absolutely no other way, you may open that door. But once opened, there is no turning back."

Chapter 268: Heavy Magic Explosion Bullet (Part 2)

At that time, he thought he would never use it, even if corpses lay everywhere and rivers of blood flowed, he was unwilling to take that step.

But now... he watched insect corpses wailing in the fire, watching everything he painstakingly built collapse in the flames.

Perhaps this was what she meant by "the last resort."

"I have no choice... but to use it."

He slowly bowed his head, forehead resting on the Divine Chain, as if praying, but in fact, it was a descent into depravity.

It was no longer a plea to the gods, but an opening of a portal to the Abyss.

The Forbidden Curse was then recited in a low voice: "The passing of a heartbeat, the nesting of blood. Oh Goddess, forgive my desecration of your womb."

In an instant, the air seemed hollowed out.

The surrounding sounds, heat waves, even the roaring flames froze in that moment, leaving only the depths beneath the earth.

"Thump! Thump! Thump!" The heartbeat grew closer, louder, as if some giant being was stirring, struggling, awakening.

"Retreat!!" A Knight shouted at Louis's command.

The Flamethrower Squad swiftly retreated without hesitation, the flames extinguished, iron boots kicking up scorched earth.

Even with their battle-hardened experience, they felt the pressure and fear emanating from deep within the earth.

It was something beyond their capacity to handle.

And at that moment, the ground suddenly cracked with a "crack! snap!"

What followed was a nauseating birth ceremony.

From the earth's veins, an entire expanse of gray-white resin nest body wriggled and emerged, its moist, peeled texture unnerving.

The surface of the nest body was covered with living structures, semi-transparent cavities slowly contracting, like breathing lungs, or like a giant... hive.

And the four nest pillars on the ground squirmed and crawled like twisted limbs, leaving destruction and mud in their wake.

The Nest, as if a living Divine Being, had descended in person!

At the nest's opening, insect eggs rapidly swelled and deformed, then burst open like rotten flesh tumors, splattering murky fluids with a 'splut.'

What crawled out was no longer ordinary insect corpses but evolved pinnacle beings!

Clad in Bone Armor, limbs like blades, mandibles split to ear level, remnants of human armor and clothing scraps still clinging to their bodies!

They emitted twisted, piercing screeches, charging into the fireline, frenziedly hunting the Knights.

Thankfully, the Knights had already withdrawn some distance; otherwise, even the Flamethrowers might not have been a match for these elite insect corpses.

The Priest laughed maniacally to the heavens, his laughter tearing through the air like a spike amidst the flames and shrieks, unsettling the mind.

"Hahahahaha! You foolish mortals!!"

He trod upon the still-wriggling resin nest, the hem of his robe wildly dancing in the scorching hot wind, like a banner, his whole being seemingly edged with flames, standing atop Hell singing hymns.

"Do you know? This is the true power of the Snow Swearer! This is the 'Divine Grace of the Goddess.' Did you think mere flames could shake her?"

He shouted as he raised his hands high, eyes bloodshot, throat nearly hoarse, yet the more he shouted, the more frenzied and deranged he became.

"You will all die here!! In this sacred and joyous blood sacrifice, die gloriously!!"

This was a feast belonging to him! It was the Goddess's grace to him!

And just as he laughed wildly at will—

From the distant highlands, Louis merely raised his hand slightly, palm pointing diagonally forward.

"Fire."

As the words fell, the Knight pulled the trigger of the launcher.

A sudden roar erupted.

A sound like the angry roar of the thunder god cleaved the sky, shattering eardrums.

The heavy tripod suddenly tilted back, and what the Magic Bomb Launcher released was not a bullet, but a descending fury.

It trailed a long tail of light and flames, burning so intensely it seemed to tear open the night sky!

In Ah Long's pupils, the orange-red fireball, a thousand times brighter than any flame, seemed to traverse space, descending from the sky!

The last bit of remaining ecstasy in his heart suddenly froze.

He had only enough time to hear a sharp "whee—" wail, like a blade piercing his eardrums.

The next moment—

The sky shattered with a boom.

An orange-red heavy Magic Explosion Bullet trailed a flaming tail several meters long, roaring as it fell from the night sky.

It was not an ordinary fireball, but a doomsday-loaded meteoric strike, crashing straight into the core of the insect swarm, landing at the junction of the altar and the Nest.

"Boom—!!!!"

As the explosion's heart detonated, the ground seemed to flip.

The entire mountain base violently sank, within a fifty-meter radius it was directly consumed by the scorching fire core, surface rocks instantaneously melted under the high temperature, turning into a churning crimson lava like blood.

The Nest's zone bore the brunt, several tentacles as thick as turrets snapped directly in the shock wave, joints exploded, surfaces unraveled.

Hundreds of insect corpses were carbonized before they could even wail, then vaporized, leaving no trace of residue.

The blast pressure within eighty meters then surged out, the shock wave carrying twisted hot air currents, like a giant wall of flames crashing forward, hurling the second circle of insect swarm on the hill, along with dirt, broken rocks, and corpse fragments, into the air.

Those fortified insect corpses could have taken on a Knight alone but now rolled and burned like leaves, unable to even scream.

The central area of the Nest was like Purgatory come again.

Its huge heart sac swelled to the limit in the heat wave, its insect fluids boiling, shell cracking, only to burst in a roar seconds later.

The hatching sacs and parasitic structures inside were completely shattered, turbulent insect ichor oozed out with black smoke.

The flames had not yet dissipated, but the entire area around the altar had become a charred death zone.

The ground collapsed into a charred pit over three meters deep and several dozen meters in diameter, with molten rocks rolling up from the pit bottom, mixed with the residue of carbonized insect corpses.

The air warped, the stench of charred flesh mingled with gunpowder assaulted throats, the searing pain unbearable even a hundred meters away.

Chapter 269: Heavy Magic Explosion Bullet (Part 3)

An insect corpse struggled to crawl out from the edge. Its entire body was charred, bones exposed, with its left arm melted into a misshapen charcoal, and its right leg fractured in several places yet dragging still.

Just as it supported its upper body, a leftover flame of Fire Scale Ointment rose from the ground, instantly engulfing it in the burning wind, and with a "boom", its limbs exploded, turning into a pile of scorched scraps.

At this point, the core of the insect swarm was completely torn apart, and the regenerative ability of the insect nest was thoroughly ended in the blazing fire.

When the magic explosive bomb fell, Priest Ah Long stood at the edge of the blast center, his whole body seemingly crushed by a thousand-pound giant hammer.

The heat wave rushed over him, tearing apart his skin, burning his eyes, he could even clearly hear the sound of his blood vessels bursting.

He opened his mouth wide, wanting to scream, but only spat out a mouthful of hot black blood.

His body quickly shriveled, charred, and cracked in the flames.

Like a wet cloth thrown into a furnace, exploding into countless charred fragments under high temperature.

His last consciousness was that everything in front of him was burning, collapsing, disintegrating.

Together with his faith, pride, and life, all turning to ashes in the light of the fire.

Ashes fell, the blazing flames slowly died down.

But the residual heat lingered, the battlefield left only a piece of charred blackness, silent, like complete void.

Eduardo's mouth was wide open and for a moment forgot to close it.

He looked at the distant ground that had been bombed into a charred purgatory, remaining flames rose like a volcanic eruption mushroom cloud, the scorching waves were like the sea, even the air seemed to have been deformed by the explosion.

"What... what is this..."

He turned around to look at Louis, his voice hoarse and filled with disbelief.

The young lord beside him seemed to have expected all this long ago, his expression calm as a lake, simply replied: "Magic Explosion Bullet."

"... Magic Explosion Bullet?" Eduardo subconsciously repeated, his mind seeming stuck, "Are you sure you mentioned Magic Explosion Bullet? Not some... Forbidden Curse Relic? Lost Divine Artifact? Church's Divine Grace?"

He had initially prepared to retreat.

Seeing the nest awaken, that bizarre nest body and those high-combat-power insect corpses were already no match for ordinary weapons.

After all, the strongest specification magic explosive bullet he had seen before was only one-fifth the power of this one in front of him!

He hadn't recovered from the booming shock, another thought quickly rushed into his mind:

Wait... how did that thing hit so far and precisely?

He abruptly looked back at the launcher still trembling with residual heat, its tripod steadily supported, tail flame just extinguished, the barrel emitting white smoke.

Actually capable of controlled range and precision shooting...?

Perfectly targeted, just smacked at the heart core of the nest.

Eduardo swallowed hard, unable to maintain that bit of relaxed composure any longer, turning into unprecedented suspicion.

"Our usual magic explosive bullets, we throw them by hand."

Such a throw method only relied on luck and close-range life-exchange; they could explode, but it often missed. But this thing?

This wasn't combat, it was surgery.

A shot to the soul, the entire nest's heart directly blasted through.

The Empire possesses such a weapon? He dared say no!

Even the Imperial Capital hadn't yet developed such miniaturized, long-range precision-controlled explosive weaponry.

It wasn't incompetence but simply because they hadn't thought of this kind of weapon.

Eduardo looked at the silhouette still standing on the high ground.

Illuminated by the flames of war, Louis Calvin's side face shone with a layer of cold light, like a blade edge tempered in fire.

"This guy... has come again."

Eduardo turned to Louis, though each time his perception had been refreshed again and again, each time he was still taken aback by his brother.

"Louis, just how many cards do you still have hidden?" he whispered inwardly, yet couldn't help but sigh in admiration.

Last time against the nest, he remembered they were still using the most primitive methods, luring, fire raids, hard chew.

Even though it was a success, it cost quite a few knights.

But how long has it been? Just over a month!

Now, this guy has already conjured up something... heavy magic explosive bullets, tactical fire projection, thermal flow blockade?

And apparently not cobbled together temporarily, but already calculated angles, calculated drop sites, and even intercepted the insect corpses' retreat routes.

Although already rated highly, now he had to add a few more rows up that evaluation board.

Cold and ruthless to enemies, meticulous to his own people, understanding tactical weaponry deployment timing, this wasn't a young lord, it's simply a war machine, right?

"This kind of monster-level talent... no, monster-level brother, his future isn't just the Northern Territory anymore."

Eduardo turned his head, watching the scene of the insect corpses being consumed in the sea of fire, a thought emerged in his mind: "In a few years, the entire Empire will remember the name Louis Calvin."

It wasn't only Eduardo; even those Red Tide Knights were speechlessly shocked.

Many among them had personally witnessed the tests of the magic explosive bullet and were aware of the power of those flames.

However, when this heavy as a falling star magic explosive bullet tore through the night sky in real battle, exploded heaven and earth when it hit, the sense of shock far exceeded their imagination.

It was no longer a simple weapon.

But a miracle-like force, it was their great lord, Louis's fire will!

At that moment, the knights watched the insect nest collapse within the sea of flames, insect corpses vanished in rows, left with only one thought in their hearts:

He is unstoppable!

The light of the great lord has shone into this dark, cold land, his will is gradually dispelling all the despair and decay of the Northern Territory.

And they are the ones standing behind this light.

They followed the right person.

This time Louis spoke up, tone steady, without a shred of intensity or showing off: "Prioritize dealing with possibly recovering insect corpses. If you find areas where insects haven't burned out, use the flamethrower to sweep."

He paused, his eyes skimming over the wounded on the hillside, adding a bit of warmth: "Casualty statistics, treat the injured immediately. Ensure everyone lives to go home."

Chapter 270: Postwar Affairs

The flames subsided, turning the battlefield into a charred, molten purgatory, with the air filled with the stench of scorched remains and the crackling of debris.

Some embers still licked at twigs and shells on the ground. Occasionally, a few insect corpses seemed to twitch slightly, as if ready to spring up the next second.

Louis's gaze swept across this scorched land, his expression unwavering.

"Advance by sectors, clear out the remaining enemies," he spoke with a steady tone, carrying a hint of undeniable chill, "watch for feigned death. Prioritize the flamethrowers, burn them thoroughly."

"Yes!" The knights didn't hesitate for a moment and quickly formed ranks.

The flamethrowers at their backs hissed out hot flames, the tongues of fire danced like dragons, purging the plague from the earth.

The elite insect corpses, just as they raised their heads, were pinned down by the fire line.

The sound of burning mixed with roars as the battle line advanced coldly, almost with cold-blooded efficiency.

This was a silent cleansing.

Lambert rushed over, his face covered in soot but a faint smile at the corners of his mouth: "My lord! Except for a few with minor injuries, no one perished!"

As soon as these words landed, Eduardo almost thought he had heard wrong.

"...No one perished?"

He suddenly looked at the straight-backed figure ahead.

The firelight flickered on Louis's pauldrons, his profile as calm as if this were just an exercise.

"Very good," Louis just nodded slightly, his voice calm yet filled with a certainty, "it wasn't all for nothing."

Eduardo's breath paused for a beat.

The image of the rising nest flashed through his mind, the terrifying heart sacs, the writhing nest columns devouring the earth, and the insect tide capable of crushing half an army...

These knights faced the core firepower of the nest head-on!

Launching an attack in such a place, by general battle damage standards, an estimate of at least five percent casualties would be fortunate.

Yet these knights not only fought their way in but came out unharmed.

Was it the tactics? The training? The weaponry? The magic explosive bullets? Or...was it the young lord's presence itself?

Eduardo walked forward slowly, his gaze scanning over the regiment of knights clearing out the remaining enemies on the scorched earth.

Their movements were clean, their steps unified, and the flamethrower roaring as they burned what residual activity was left in the insect corpses, every tactical maneuvering precise, hardly needing further explanation.

"No wonder they're your men," he spoke with a smile, tone brimming with admiration, "from reaction speed to seamless cooperation, almost flawless.

Not to mention that...that device launching the magic explosive bullets, I'd bet no one else in the entire Imperial Legion possesses it. Did you design it yourself?"

"Yes, the principle isn't complicated. I made some adjustments to increase range and accuracy," Louis nonchalantly boasted, his tone as if discussing how to modify an old carriage.

Seeing Louis reluctant to discuss this further, Eduardo restrained his smile: "However, this particular nest is definitely different. It's far stronger than the one we encountered last time at Cold Pine Ridge."

Louis didn't answer immediately.

He bent down to pick up a small segment of a charred parasitic tentacle from the ground, his fingertips lightly tracing it, as if verifying a certain structure.

"They can enter a blood boiling frenzy, and they have fighting energy," Louis spoke calmly.

"Yes." Eduardo nodded, "Previously, those parasites were at most used as containers, without fighting energy...but this time, you saw, they actually burst with fighting energy skills, almost no different from living warriors."

"And their coordination is better, even possessing some tactical will...not like mere assault soldiers, but rather like 'driven soldiers,'" Louis analyzed calmly, as if examining an ordinary specimen.

The two fell into silence for a moment.

The scorched earth still had lingering warmth, with the flamethrower units in the distance thoroughly inspecting every shell, as if the flames couldn't entirely calm the doubt in their hearts.

"One more thing," Louis spoke suddenly, his gaze slightly narrowing, "Did you notice, that nest...was moving."

Eduardo's eye twitched slightly: "I suspected it was an illusion at first, but later when the nesting column it climbed collapsed against that stone slope, I confirmed it was indeed moving."

"Unlike the previous one that was stationary, it seemed to mimic the gait of some arthropod..." Louis murmured, his fingers sketching the limb-like nesting columns, "that isn't a habitat. It's a mobile hatchery."

Eduardo raised his head, looking at the distant, collapsed charred flesh wall, a sense of unease quietly spreading within.

"So, next time, what we might face is not a mother hidden underground, but rather..." he lowered his voice, "a walking nest."

Louis nodded, his expression devoid of excess emotion.

"This is no longer a defensive 'breeding nest,' but an 'organic war platform' for active offense.

More complete parasitism, a stronger combat consciousness, even self-propulsion capacity...this is...directed evolution."

Eduardo squinted: "If they really start moving...the situation thereafter will become very bleak."

Then he sighed: "With something like this, you can't hold off on your own. You'll need Duke Edmund to prepare early."

"I know." Louis's tone was steady, without a hint of hesitation.

He turned back to the camp, picked up a pen, and wrote a composed yet pressing secret letter at the operation table, sealing it with red tide seal wax on the envelope.

Then he instructed the knights: "Go and get some slices of the nest body, living tissues, and the remaining poison sacs, process them well, and seal them in glass."

Within less than a quarter of an hour, a knight native to Frost Halberd City entered the tent briskly.

"Take these to Frost Halberd City, and deliver them to Duke Edmund, personally escort them," Louis handed over the sealed letter and box, his gaze stern.

The knight knelt on one knee: "By your command!"

.....

Frost Halberd City · Governor's Mansion.

Governor Duke Edmund sat at the bedside, gently wiping the sweat on his wife's forehead.

Duchess Irina, her face pale but her gaze tender, had her hand resting on her slightly protruding belly, a smile on her lips.

"It moved," she said softly, "He just moved a little."

Duke Edmund's eyes flickered briefly, and then he smiled, his hand lightly covering her hand.

The smile was rare, belonging to a father's tenderness.

Since Emily was born twenty years ago, he hadn't had another child.

Moreover, he was over fifty, and since his eldest son's death in battle, he had no heir.

As a Peak Knight, having another child was truly a heaven-sent joy.

Now that Alina was pregnant, he almost tossed and turned sleeplessly every night—fearing to disturb this long-awaited hope.

At this moment, he intended not to make a big fuss, to avoid sudden changes.

Then an attendant stepped in quietly and reported, "My lord, a knight from Viscount Calvin seeks an audience, claiming to bring important letters and battlefield samples."

Edmond raised an eyebrow slightly, "Louis? Take him to the conference room, I'll be there shortly."

Before turning around, he glanced once more at his quietly smiling wife on the bed.

Alina lay on the bed, smiled, and said, "Go ahead, that child must have urgent matters."

...

In the meeting room, flames flickered, and the brass wall lamps illuminated the old war maps of the Northern Territory on the walls.

Duke Edmund pushed the door open, his gaze falling on the gray-robed knight in the room.

He was draped in frost and snow, his whole body stiff with cold, yet stood straight, silently presenting two items: a letter and a heavy iron lockbox.

"Thank you for your hard work." The Duke said casually, sitting directly in the main seat, and opened the letter.

His eyes scanned the page, and his originally stern face quietly darkened a bit.

"In the northwest of Snow Peak County, a suspected Nest body was found and has been destroyed. This Nest showed significant signs of evolution:

Firstly, the Nest itself can actively move, and exhibit certain melee response capabilities;

Secondly, the insect corpses retained Fighting Energy residues and could actively deploy martial techniques, with combat intensity far surpassing previous records..."

He gently raised his hand, signaling to open the box.

"Yes."

The knight unlocked the latch, and the lid of the box opened with a "click."

Instantly, a cold air mixed with the stench of char and decay hit his face.

Even with a sealing film, it was hard to conceal the oppressive biological presence that made one uncomfortable.

In the box were several horrifying items displayed:

Remnants of hive pillars, like otherworldly tentacles, still showing signs of wriggling;

A mass of grayish-white, incompletely carbonized neural sac, its surface seeming to retain fine nerves;

A transparent insect nucleus the size of a bean, as if some residual will was faintly pulsing;

And several drops of viscous hive liquid in a reagent bottle, exuding a faint glow, as if "breathing."

In an instant, even the light of the burning fireplace in the meeting room seemed to dim momentarily.

It seemed Louis wasn't exaggerating or indulging in dramatic interpretation.

This was a nightmare that had indeed materialized and wasn't far from them.

The knight said in a low voice, "Viscount said that if he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, he wouldn't believe such a thing could evolve."

Duke Edmund was silent for a long time, his fingertips slowly sweeping across the glass encasing of the hive pillar, his brow deeply furrowed.

He had, of course, seen the Nest before, and he thought it was a terrifying thing—not because of its inherent combat power, but because of its highly infectious nature.

Finding two indicated there were likely dozens hidden in the Northern Territory.

Moreover, the Nest was evolving, purposefully evolving into higher tier, more proactive combat forms.

He let out a slow breath, thinking, "This isn't a simple mutation... it's like... a continuation of some will."

And he had sent out an investigative delegation, yet still couldn't elucidate the connection between the Nest and the insect swarm, whereas Louis, that young lad, had already independently destroyed a stronger Nest and conveniently brought back this thing as evidence.

It wasn't just bravery.

That ability to handle situations, the mastery of combat power, the control over rhythm...

Made him confirm once again that he was right to let his daughter marry this young man and took a good gamble.

Edmond stood by the window of the conference room, silent for a long time, looking at the distant city wall cloaked in the night.

He slowly turned around, his gaze falling on the tired yet resilient young knight, and nodded.

"You did very well." His tone wasn't heavy, yet carried an undeniable authority, "Convey to Louis for me, his judgment was correct, also timely, and well done."

The knight immediately knelt on one knee, "As you command, Sir." *freewebnovel.com*

"You've worked hard. Go rest, the upcoming matters don't need your concern."

The knight rose, saluted, and withdrew from the conference room.

The heavy wooden door closed slowly behind him, returning to silence.

Edmond stood there for a few seconds, as if organizing his chaotic thoughts. Then he turned and walked to the table, pressing down the suspension bell.

Before long, several personal attendants and clerical knights arrived, and he had already reverted to the iron-fisted Governor of the North, with not a trace of wavering in his expression.

"Notify my three direct knight commanders to assemble in the war room in fifteen minutes." He said sternly.

"Yes!"

"Then, draft an official document, inform all current Lords in the Northern Territory, telling them the Nest is suspected to have multiple forms, some of which have begun to exhibit evolutionary characteristics."

He paused, his gaze deep, "Each Lord may deploy knights as per their actual situation to autonomously conduct investigations. Report any information directly to me to prevent delays."

"Compile a record of the remains samples we've received this time and send it to the intelligence agency at the Imperial Capital and the Imperial Academy of Sciences, under my signature."

It was as if he had long anticipated these instructions would cause quite a stir, yet his tone remained consistently calm.

"This kind of enemy comes and goes without a trace and is extremely dangerous. We can only advance one step ahead."

Duke Edmund looked out the window, the cold wind sweeping in, as the Empire's Northern Territory quietly entered another wartime mode.