

Winter 281

Chapter 281: The Arrival of the Insect Corpses

October 9th, Red Tide Territory.

The morning mist had not yet dissipated, but the sky over the Red Tide Territory was more silent than usual.

There was no hustling sound of the markets, nor the laughter of children or the rumbling of carriages and horses.

There were only families, one after another, dragging luggage, carrying babies in swaddles, silently entering those few Earth Towers.

"Go inside, this is the Lord's arrangement." A gray-haired old woman murmured as if reciting an oracle, "Great Lord Louis... would not harm us."

No one refused, and no one complained.

Even though the space in the Earth Towers was cramped and the crowd was dense, they still queued up orderly to enter.

Because it was Louis's command.

They remembered clearly, more than a year ago, they were still curling up in the icy wind and mud, sleeping in tents with cracks, eating porridge mixed with grass roots and bone shards.

During that time, children froze to death every night, and adults would silently dig pits at dawn.

It was Louis who lit the fireplace in the blizzard, brought medicine during the plague, and personally built granaries during the chaos of war.

Because of him, they could eat till full, have firewood to burn, have clothes to wear.

Tents turned into brick houses, cold nights had hot springs, fields emerged at the foot of the mountain, new canals opened up on the mountain.

Roads were opened, warehouses were sealed, medical huts now had people stationed.

These were not miracles from prayers.

He gave them.

This was the reality brought by Louis Calvin.

So today, when he personally ordered "Enter the Earth Towers, do not go outside, must cooperate," everyone seemed to hear the whisper of a deity.

They did not hesitate, did not question, only said words of faith in Louis.

"The great Lord would not harm us."

"We are his people."

"His orders are divine commands."

The Earth Towers were already stocked with food, water, and necessities, distributed according to the number of people, all in order.

A few boxes of firewood and simple lamps were stacked in the corners, as if they had long anticipated preparations for long-term isolation.

"Just staying for a while, it'll be over soon." A young boy smiled and said to his sister.

But no one knew exactly how long it would be.

And outside in Red Tide City, on the vacant land near the edge of the city walls, one sturdy yet simple camp after another had already been erected.

The main tent was in the center, surrounded by sentry posts and torches, with batches of Red Tide Knights lined up neatly, their armor gleaming, flags silently flying.

No bugles sounded, no stirring pledges were made.

Because they also didn't know who the enemy was.

But they knew who gave the orders — Louis Calvin.

He did not explain much and did not reveal the reasons.

Through Louis's repeated actions, they had been instilled with a fundamental belief: "Even if you can't see the whole picture, you must choose to obey Lord Louis."

So when the orders were issued, they did not waver but only clenched their sword hilts with resolve.

The entire Red Tide, as if entering a kind of silent ritual.

Everyone believed that a storm was imminent.

But their faith was ready to face anything.

Soon it was the morning of October 10th.

The morning light had not penetrated, and outside the camp was silent, with only thin mist low-lying, and a chill that seeped to the bones.

The moment Louis opened his eyes, the intuition in his mind was already sounding alarms.

Today, the prophecy was that day.

He did not delay for a moment, almost reflexively sat up, raised his hand to call out that interface belonging to him alone — "Daily Intelligence System."

A semi-transparent blue-white interface hovered in mid-air with a gentle hum, lines of text rapidly loading and freezing:

[Daily Intelligence Update Completed]

[1: The Desperate Witch has awakened the Doomsday Nest. The mist released by the Nest has completely covered the main formation of the Snow Oath Army last night, with over six thousand Snow Swearers transformed into the mindless Insect Corpse Legion. They will start by destroying Frost Halberd City and move north to fully advance into the Northern Territory, intending to drag the Northern Territory and even the entire world into chaos.]

[2: The Desperate Witch has activated the Nest in Cyan Rock Rift, and the Nest is expected to arrive at the outskirts of Red Tide Territory within three hours. If the defense line fails, the Insect Corpses will affect all local residents and knights.]

[3: The Nest in Frost Ice Valley has also been awakened, and the Insect Corpses will attack Chi Yun Territory, White Fox Territory, and Wuya Territory.]

[4: The Desperate Witch has scattered a total of 23 Nest embryos in the Northern Territory, with 12 places currently activated. There exists a mysterious mental link between the Nests.]

...

Louis read through them one by one, his gaze fixed on the first line of the light screen.

The Desperate Witch has awakened the Doomsday Nest, and the mist released by the Nest has completely covered the main formation of the Snow Oath Army last night...

A chill that was hard to suppress rose from the depths of his heart.

Six thousand.

Not sixty, not six hundred.

A whole six thousand Snow Swearers were already dangerous enemies to the entire Northern Territory.

And now, they had become Insect Corpses.

Undead bodies, retaining their fighting energy and skills, with that instinctive killing intent honed in blood and snow, compounded by their infectivity and swarm behavior...

This was simply—an invincible version of a zombie legion.

Images surged in Louis's mind instantly:

The mist roiling, the Nest presiding, Insect Corpses running in the mist, skin decaying yet moving like the wind, a punch smashing through a stone wall, a sword lifting a shield, even if cut in half, still crawling forward...

The worse part is the source of all this—the "Doomsday Nest."

From the name alone, no further explanation is needed.

It's not just an enlarged version of an ordinary nest, but the ultimate form and extreme construct of the entire system.

He suddenly remembered the vague prophecy from the Daily Intelligence System:

[The malevolent force nurtured by the Snow Swearer is stirring, this crisis will sweep through the entire Northern Territory by winter this year.]

So, this is that "malevolent force."

The malevolent force has long been rooted in the blood and faith of the Snow Swearer, and there's no need for any "sacrifice"—they themselves are the sacrifices.

Now it's up to Duke Edmund to see how he will respond.

Louis exhaled softly, his gaze regaining calmness.

It's not that he was unwilling to help, but he was well aware that the military force he had spent two years building would shatter at any encounter with the Insect Corpse Legion.

And the Red Tide Territory is the foundation he has painstakingly established, and it cannot be lost.

Let alone expanding support, simply holding Snow Peak County in these chaotic times and protecting tens of thousands of people is a victory.

He can stabilize Snow Peak County, at least this land will not fall into chaos first.

Perhaps he cannot confront the Doomsday Nest head-on, but if the Daily Intelligence System provides decisive battlefield information, he will still seize it.

Help a bit, if he can.

Not just for the Empire, but for himself.

If the Northern Territory falls, his domain will not remain untouched.

Then his eyes fell on the second piece of intelligence.

The Desperate Witch has activated the nest in Cyan Rock Rift, and the nest is expected to reach the outskirts of the Red Tide Territory within three hours...

This line instantly made his pupils contract slightly.

This time it is no longer the distant Frost Halberd City or Icebound Valley, but the land beneath his feet.

The Red Tide Territory, his stronghold.

Cyan Rock Rift, the geological fault near the eastern edge of Red Tide, which he also sent people to investigate, but found nothing unusual.

Yet, he never expected that such a thing as a nest was hidden in that silent and neglected area, and would arrive as a combat unit on the outskirts of Red Tide within three hours.

"...Much closer than I expected." Louis' brow finally furrowed.

This is not fear, but extreme vigilance.

He was not unprepared; he had already set up various defensive measures around the Red Tide Territory.

And with his knightly strength, dealing with a single nest is not an issue.

If 'it' comes along the predetermined path... it should be intercepted in advance.

Prepared, but he cannot afford to be complacent.

Insect corpses are not ordinary enemies; they do not feel pain and have no option to retreat.

He knows if they cannot be wiped out in one go, the situation will quickly reverse.

Louis continued to scroll down and looked at the third piece of intelligence.

The nest in Frost Ice Valley has also been awakened and will sweep through Chiyun Territory, White Fox Territory, and Wuya Territory...

These three territories near Frost Ice Valley are all within his jurisdiction in Snow Peak County.

And among them, Chiyun Territory—belongs to his half-brother, Willis.

"Really, one thing after another." He sighed and rubbed his temples.

He cannot ignore the situation there, not out of family affection, but out of responsibility and order.

Unfortunately... he cannot leave now.

Red Tide's situation must first be stabilized, and the movements of the Cyan Rock nest must be suppressed immediately.

As for Chiyun, White Fox, and Wuya...

Louis can only hope they can hold on for a few more hours until he resolves the crisis here and then rushes over with his troops.

He gently slid his finger, and the interface continued to expand downward.

As of now, a total of twenty-three nests have been confirmed to have been revived...

Even with Louis' disposition, his brow furrowed at that moment.

A single nest, without any warning, is enough to consume a county.

But now, the intelligence writes: "Twenty-three."

Even without considering the "Doomsday Nest," this number alone is enough to crush the entire Northern Territory into a wasteland.

This is not a localized crisis but a systemic collapse.

"I hope Duke Edmund's warning truly makes those lords more vigilant." His tone was somber.

His tone was somber.

As early as a few months ago, when Duke Edmund eliminated the first nest, he sensed something was amiss and ordered the lords to prepare in advance.

Unfortunately, not everyone was willing to follow "prophecy" and act accordingly.

If they are not prepared, their territories will fall into irretrievable disaster in a very short time, possibly dragging down the entire Northern Territory.

The Intelligence System continued to update...

Louis glanced through them, but compared to the first three pieces of intelligence, they were not very important to him.

Not useless, but currently not critical.

He silently noted this information in his notebook, which may be useful in the future, but not now.

The most important thing now is only one thing—

In three hours, the eastern part of the Red Tide Territory will face the first truly significant Insect Corpse attack.

Chapter 282 The Trap

The moment he stepped out of the tent, the cold wind and fine snow brushed against his face, carrying the unique chill of the Northern Territory's late autumn.

Louis slightly tilted his head back, glancing at the gray and somber sky.

"...Less than three hours left." Several contingency plans flashed through his mind at lightning speed.

The defense perimeter has been completed, all kinds of traps are ready; the fuel for preheating and the magic explosion bullets have also been transported out, ready to ignite at the time of battle.

Everything was set according to the blueprint, so he wasn't in a panic.

Louis turned to Lambert and instructed, "Notify all the knights to assemble immediately, I have words to say."

In less than a quarter of an hour, the entire Knight Order lined up neatly on the open ground on the east side of the Red Tide Camp.

Louis stood on the makeshift high platform, his gaze sweeping over these knights he had trained himself.

He spoke, his voice not loud but resonant: "According to reliable intelligence, a Nest has fully awakened at the Cyan Rock Rift. The insect corpses will reach the border of the Red Tide Territory within three hours."

With just a few words, it was like a bolt of thunder striking the battlefield.

The whole audience was in a stir, with a low murmur and the subconscious tightening of grips on weapons, echoing one another.

Many knights' expressions changed; it wasn't the first time they heard the term "Nest," and many had even participated in Nest sieges, knowing what it meant.

It wasn't an enemy; it was a calamity itself, something that even though the Lord had defeated twice, could not be underestimated.

But Louis didn't let them think too much; his voice was instantly powerful: "I know what you're thinking. But you don't have to be afraid. Because we're ready! Ready with all the methods of attack, just waiting for it to fall into our trap!

And behind you are the people of the Red Tide Territory, your families, your friends, the homeland you built with your own hands!

Every step you take, behind you is the entire Red Tide, no retreat! Only victory!"

He took a deep breath, his tone as steady as a mountain: "But this is not a battle to send you to your deaths.

We have fire, traps, and plans; each of you has trained, has drilled!

This is not a battle to send you to die! It's not to die, but to win! Win a victory that belongs to us — belongs to the Red Tide!

Let everyone behind us see, that even a Nest, as long as it dares to step into Red Tide territory, we can turn it into ashes!"

He raised his right hand fiercely, clenched like a sword, his voice echoing like a bell: "In this battle, we seek not miracles! We only believe in the human spirit! Only trust the fire! Only faith in the swords in our hands!

Everyone, ready yourselves! Red Tide Knight Order!! Prepare to face the enemy!"

Initially, there was a deathly silence.

The north wind howled past, lifting dust and battle flags on the open ground.

But no one moved.

Each person seemed to be digesting the information they had just heard.

Suddenly, the sound of metal clashing broke the silence.

It was an older Elite Knight, who slowly drew his own sword, the blade glinting with a faint red fighting energy in the sunlight, like a spark ready to ignite.

Then — the second, the third...

Click, click, click.

Row after row of knights unsheathed their weapons consecutively, either holding swords or gripping spears, their gaze intently fixed on the figure on the stage.

"Even if it's a Nest... as long as it's the direction the Lord points, we will charge."

"He won't let us die in vain."

"We've already defeated them twice, and we'll defeat them a third time, and continue to defeat them!"

Lambert stood quietly to the side, nodding quietly as he watched the scene before him.

He once led these knights in training on the martial field, guiding them to swing swords, charge, fall, and rise again, time and again.

He had seen them doubt, waver, and also seen them bleed, persevere.

But now they were like unsheathed blades, their fighting spirit swelling like a tide.

Not a single one shrank back.

Not because they weren't afraid of the Nest, but because — the person standing on the high platform was Louis.

Their Lord, their Sun.

The man who had led them to victory time and again.

Now he said, "We are ready."

So, they believed him.

They believed every word he said, every decision he made, even if an abyss lay ahead, they were willing to follow him in a leap.

These knights, tempered by iron and fire, had silently carved this belief into their very bones.

Gale winds rose again, the war flags flapping loudly.

The knights knelt on one knee, plunging their weapons into the ground heavily, responding to their lord with pre-battle oaths:

"For the Red Tide! For Lord Louis!"

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Three hours flew by in an instant.

Just as the morning wind still lingered on the edge of the valley.

"——Buzz!!!"

The Cold Iron resonance pillars began to hum.

It was a sound like metal tearing through the air, low but piercing, like the tolling of a death knell, carrying oppression from deep beneath the ground.

Louis abruptly turned his head, his gaze like an arrow shooting towards the mountain path direction.

No small scout force.

He listened for just a moment, then concluded — a large-scale insect corpse force was approaching!

The rapid frequency of vibrations and the incessant buzzing indicated a substantial enemy army, moving very swiftly, with pressure on both the surface and underground.

Lambert, beside him, said, "Both the primary and secondary paths are resonating, the scale is larger than anticipated."

"I know." Louis's gaze was calm, "This is the Nest probing from the front, also... giving us a chance."

The buzzing had not even faded when the entire Red Tide Army camp was already in motion.

"The insect corpse is coming!" said one knight.

"Perfect timing." Another old knight sneered, pressing down his visor.

No knight hesitated; they had already been ignited during the previous speech, and hearing this resonance was like kindling bursting into flames.

Some mounted their horses, some hefted flamethrowers, some ran towards the detonation cord at the edge of the trap...

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No screams, no panic, just action.

"Switch all plans to combat mode!" Louis ordered, his voice clearly reaching everyone's ears, "The front line must not retreat, the second line must not be chaotic, and the third line should be ready for backup."

On the other side, at the northern valley of the Red Tide Territory, the army of insect corpses slowly poured in through the narrow valley entrance.

Their forms twisted and frenzied, their skin cracked and peeled, bones jutting out like blades exposed to the air.

In their eyes, mouths, and ears, purple-black mycelium pulsed, as if some form of life was struggling to hatch within them.

They were born from the deep layers of the Nest, having shed human rationality, yet retained a certain terrifying "combat instinct."

These insect corpses had no thoughts, but their movements were not purely blind charges.

The Nest in the Cyan Rock Rift, with its deep-seated will gradually awakening, had begun to command in a primitive yet ruthless manner.

It was learning, it was adapting.

It was slowly becoming a true war machine in every sense.

Understanding how to scout, how to flank, how to analyze the reactions of its prey.

So the army of insect corpses did not choose to attack directly but instead stealthily infiltrated from the northern valley side, aiming decisively at the southeastern flank of the Red Tide Territory.

It was a seemingly weakly defended "no man's land," guided forward by a few light riders harassing and fleeing through the forest.

The Nest perceived no activity at the front, with the Red Tide Army avoiding battle and retreating.

It had sniffed out a "weak point".

Thus it ordered the insect corpses to advance faster, confident and arrogant, as if already seeing the city ruins and the corpse mountains on the scorched earth after corruption.

Little did it know, this was exactly the first deadly trap laid by Louis.

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To the south of Red Tide City, on the top levels of a defensive Earth Tower, layers of citizens surrounded the only small window, sealing it tight.

That small window was the only "eye" on the third floor of the Earth Tower from which one could glimpse the battle situation.

Initially, people scrambled to look, some raising stools, some carrying children, and even some bringing dry food, planning to guard it to the end.

Crying, shoving, and cursing mixed into one cacophony.

Finally, the head of city management couldn't stand it anymore and shouted: "Are you here to watch the battle or to go to a market?! It's a mess like a pot of porridge, the enemy would laugh their heads off!"

He looked around, his gaze shifting before pointing at a lanky young man: "Rock! You, who always shout about tavern stories, saying your ancestors were traveling poets? Now use that skill! You watch, we listen!"

The young man was stunned for a moment, then straightened his back: "Alright!"

He pushed through the crowd, stood before the window, adjusted his shoulder-length cloak, like a storyteller taking the stage.

However, just as he was about to speak, a "doom doom doom" sound came from beyond the distant mountains, as if the earth itself was trembling violently.

Rock's heart tightened, leaning out to see, he found that amidst the billowing smoke, waves of insect corpses were surging forward like a flood.

Their limbs twisted, neither human nor ghost, in the darkness akin to nightmares waking.

Even though they were still far away, it was clear as day that those monsters were wantonly heading toward the valley.

The citizens behind him stirred: "Speak quickly, what's going on?!"

Rock swallowed hard, forcing out a calm smile: "Everyone, don't panic! Seeing this monster tide is actually our Red Tide Lord's ingenious plan—to lure them into our trap!"

In his heart, he was drumming: How could I know Lord Louis's plan, I'm just making this up, aiming to stabilize the scene.

Unexpectedly, the "lie" he spoke next actually came true.

"Boom——"

Atop the mountain, dormant machinery suddenly detonated, huge wooden spikes carried unstoppable force, whistling down the slope.

Landing with a boom, instantly crushing the front row of insect corpses, blood and limbs splattering, the scene terrifying as if a mountain deity had unleashed punishment.

Rock's eyes almost popped out of their sockets, but his mouth quickly kept pace: "Did you hear that!? That is the first deadly trap laid by our Lord—rolling logs into the fray, divine punishment descends!"

"Roar!!" The citizens got excited too, someone shouted first: "Well done!"

No sooner had the words been spoken than the ground suddenly sank, a wall of earth collapsed on one side, black oil spouted, bursting into purgatory-like flames, incinerating the insect corpses in front.

Rock waved his hand in line with the situation: "Now see the second trap—pitfall collapse!"

"Boom——!!"

Rock swallowed hard, barely catching his breath, when suddenly red light flared up on both sides outside the window.

Accompanied by the mechanical roaring like rust, flamethrowers let loose with a roar, orange-red tongues of fire wriggling like snakes, instantly forming a fiery barrier at the mouth of the valley. The insect corpses struggled before the firewall, their wailing screeching and piercing.

"Boom——Boom——!!!"

Iron plates fell, flamethrowers extended from the barricades on both sides, like war dragons opening their mouths, fire sweeping across!

"Finally, the third blockade fire wall—flamethrowers activated, demonic flames sweeping across, incinerating bodies, extinguishing courage!"

"The mouth of Purgatory has opened!" Rock shouted, "It is the rage of ground fire, the heart of the Red Tide, the embodiment of our citizens' anger!!"

"Wooahhh——!!!" Even the children screamed this time, everyone stomping on the floor, "Long live Lord Louis!!"

As Rock was about to breathe a sigh of relief, thinking to himself that his rhetoric had barely stabilized the situation, just as he was about to comfort the gradually relaxing citizens.

However, a sudden roar broke his thoughts, shaking the entire Earth Tower.

"Boom——!!"

A deafening explosion, like thunder splitting down, sending hearts into a frenetic rhythm.

Rock turned sharply, eyes sparkling with undisguised shock and excitement.

It was a Magic Explosion Bullet.

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Tactical-Level Light Magic Explosion Bullet.

Dozens of light magic explosion bullets descended from the sky, landing with precision between the sea of fire and the valley floor. A powerful shock wave tore everything apart instantly.

"Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!"

At the moment each magic explosion bullet detonated, the air seemed to be ripped open. Flames and smoke surged, with shattered bones and insect body fluids splattering like a rain of blood, shimmering in the night sky like a scarlet constellation descending.

In just five minutes, the vanguard of the insect corpse army's first wave was almost completely annihilated.

Rock stood by the window, his eyes wide open, staring in disbelief at the stunning scene.

The violent air currents generated by the immense power almost stirred the air for the whole valley.

He could feel the heat and oppressive force in the air, and the aftermath of the explosions compelled him to raise his voice once again: "That is... Magic Explosion Bullet! The fire attack weapon personally chosen by my Lord! Especially designed to deal with these monsters! Their remains have been utterly crushed beneath this sea of fire!"

The onlookers had forgotten their initial panic, their eyes filled with indescribable horror and astonishment.

"Even if these monsters are undying, they cannot possibly escape! This is the true power of the Red Tide!" Rock's voice was hoarse, yet full of pride and passion.

He looked at the bustling crowd, a smile playing on his lips: "We've already won this battle!"

These short words, like the sound of a morning bell, instantly struck everyone's heart.

The crowd fell silent for three seconds, and then

"Long live Lord Louis——!!!"

No one knew who shouted first, but it was like a pile of dry hay suddenly set ablaze, as the Earth Towers erupted.

Men shouted, women cried, children waved their fists.

Every face was filled with excitement and fervor.

"My mother was right! Only the Red Tide Lord is truly our hero!"

"God's blessing? No - it's Lord Louis blessing us!"

"I've been on edge these past two days, but now... I feel that even if hell were outside, we wouldn't be afraid!"

"Lord Louis is like a general descending from the heavens!"

"My son was just born yesterday, and the first word I'll teach him is 'Lord Louis'!" The people all spoke at once, their words full of admiration and gratitude.

An old grandmother with gray hair, leaning on her cane, choked up as she said, "With this Lord among us, our lives truly have value."

Someone else jumped in excitement: "Do you all remember? We used to survive by scavenging roots in the snowy ground! Now we can live in the Earth Towers, and we even have someone to protect us! It's not just luck; we chose the right leader!!"

Rock found himself crowded and pushed forward by the people, some stuffing steamed buns into his hands, others giving him dried fruits.

A little girl tied a bundle of dried flowers and herbs onto his arm with a grin: "Thank you for telling us... you speak like a hero from the plays!"

Rock chuckled helplessly: "You should thank not me, but Lord Louis... I'm just a storyteller!"

The people's cheers were so loud they almost rattled the brick walls of Earth Tower City.

Yet, standing at the edge of the battlefield, Louis showed no trace of joy.

His gaze went beyond the sea of fire and thick smoke, past the charred remnants of the insect corpses, and settled in the distant, yet unburned forest valley.

The wind was quietly changing direction.

He smelled the scent of decaying hatching, a stench more vile than the insect corpses, spreading from the valley.

"It's not over yet," Louis muttered low, his eyes sharp as blades.

"The Nest... the main body hasn't moved yet."

Just as he finished speaking, within the forest valley, deep in the mix of mud and snow, a massive cyst began to twitch.

It was originally half-buried underground, but now it slowly lifted itself.

The Nest sensed the threat.

It had thought that this small territory, Red Tide, was just an isolated outpost, easy to tear apart with some low-tier insect slaves and assault species.

But now, it had to admit, this was a tough bone to crack.

The valley of flames ripping through the landscape proved one fact: to conquer Red Tide, it must deploy its entire force.

The Nest's thought process was slow, yet not devoid of logic.

A simple and brutal strategy formed in its not fully evolved brain—

Consume it.

Swallow the entire Red Tide whole.

And so, it moved.

The forest valley began to collapse, trees were knocked over, the snow layers melted into corrosive slush.

The enormous insect shell cyst crawled slowly from underground, its back covered with mottled black-brown bone plates and oozing flesh.

Dozens of tendrils extended like vines from around the cyst, scraping against the remaining snow and scorched earth, making a wet, slithering sound.

More horrifying was that from the holes on its surface, semi-transparent insect corpses continually "dripped" out.

They appeared like unborn embryos as they slipped from the Nest's shell, hit the ground, and twitched before immediately rushing forward.

A horde, another horde, and yet another.

These insect corpses were not an orderly force like the previous wave but a fallen flood of staggering numbers, leaving no trace of life wherever they passed, as if even the air was corroding.

Rock watched that massive figure advance slowly along the main mountain path, his throat tightening, unable to speak a word.

The fire walls blasted, rolling logs and spike traps triggered, the pre-arranged defenses exploding like a series of mechanisms set off.

But those traps, so effective against ordinary insect corpses, were now useless against the Nest.

The thick outer shell withstood the flames, spikes couldn't penetrate that intertwining of soft flesh and bone plates, and self-healing tissues writhed, regenerated, and sealed before one's very eyes.

"This..." Rock swallowed hard, struggling to squeeze out a sentence, "There's a... rather large monster coming."

Everyone turned to look at him.

But he paused, then raised his voice as if it was nothing: "But... everything is within the Lord's foresight. Everyone, don't panic!"

Even as he shouted these words, he felt a lack of confidence himself.

Chapter 285: The Lord Threw Down a Sun

Rock watched as the massive creature wriggled on the mountain path, its surface heaving with flesh and blood, insect corpses falling like a tide. His lips trembled slightly, and a chill spread through his heart.

He quietly glanced at Louis on the high ground, trying to discern any hint of panic or hesitation on the Lord's face, even just a little.

But what he saw was... a smile.

"It has come," Louis slowly lifted the corners of his mouth and whispered, "I'm not afraid of you coming out, I'm afraid you'll hide and refuse to come out.

Since you're willing to emerge, things are much simpler now."

He raised his hand and waved crisply, his voice not loud, yet piercing through the wind and snow to reach the eyes of each group on the defense line through the command flag:

"Prepare the heavy Magic Explosion Bullet."

"Yes, sir!" the distant knight squads responded in unison.

The firepower soldiers, long hidden behind the earth wall halfway up the mountain, quickly sprang into action, placing the heavy tripod with a "click," steady as a rock;

Then, a pitch-black, thick Magic Explosion Bullet was loaded into the filling slot, shimmering with a dim cold light on its surface.

This was the invention Hillco was most proud of.

At this moment, he stood by the high window on the fourth floor of the main Earth Tower castle, his elbows resting on the windowsill, watching the colossal body of the Nest slowly crawl out from the forested valley.

It was a monstrous deformity formed by the stitching of massive decay, insect shells, and venomous glands, pouring mucus and insect corpses from within itself, covering the entire mountain path like a moving plague.

Yet Hillco showed no fear.

Instead, he smiled, a gleam of madness flashing in his eyes, murmuring, "Only such an opponent is worthy of my Magic Explosion Bullet. Today, let me witness your true power."

On the heights, Louis fixed his gaze on the moving trajectory of the Nest, assessing the wind direction, terrain, elevation differences, and the density of the enemy swarm.

After crunching the numbers in his head, he raised his right hand, pointing like a knife, directly at the still pulsating swollen core between the Nest's chest and abdomen.

"Fire."

As Louis's voice fell, the knight didn't hesitate to pull the trigger.

"Boom—!"

The Magic Bomb Launcher roared, spewing out a violently quivering blue-white blaze.

The tripod abruptly tilted back, and the heavy recoil sent snow flying, causing the ground to tremble faintly.

Unlike traditional magic bursts, this Magic Explosion Bullet was a condensed massive energy body, emitting a captivatingly hot, low hum in flight, like a fiery sanction from the heavens.

The Nest sensed it.

Not through eyes, as it had no true vision.

But through instinct, a perception ingrained in the depths of biological primitive genes, triggered only at the edge of death.

At that moment, it paused.

Its massive articulated body shivered slightly in the snow, all tentacles stilled, even the parasitic insect corpses halted as if sensing the mutation of the main brain.

The falling blaze brought no sound, yet it was more oppressive than a storm and more destructive than a volcano.

In its consciousness, a strange emotion arose.

Not anger, not alertness, not the hunger of predation—but fear.

True fear.

It couldn't comprehend what this was, couldn't name it, couldn't even find a reference in its instincts.

It only knew that if it didn't flee, this thing would make it disappear.

But it was already too late...

In just that moment of chaotic hesitation, the fire arrived.

"Boom!!!"

The explosion instantly engulfed that section of the mountain path, within a core diameter of about fifty meters, the surface rocks melted into flowing red magma under the high temperature.

All insect corpses, whether weak or enhanced individuals, didn't even have time to wail before they were directly vaporized, leaving not even a shadow behind.

Beyond the explosion core, the high-temperature shock wave swept across the eighty-meter slope like a wall of burning flame.

The airwave, like a burning giant wall, surged downward, engulfing insect corpses, earth, and broken rocks alike.

Those insect swarms not destroyed at the explosion core also ignited in the airwave, their bodies blackened, crumbling as they writhed, producing a series of explosive sounds.

And the massive Nest, its perception system struggled to analyze that fiery glow descending from the sky.

It could only capture countless fragmented signals: intense heat, distortion, alien properties, lethal.

Its carapace ultimately couldn't withstand this ultimate firepower, condensing alchemy and magic energy.

The heart sac between its chest and abdomen was accurately hit, causing the bloated guts to burst, the insect slurry to boil, and black smoke to rise like a toxic cloud over the valley.

Multiple deep cracks appeared on its outer shell, the tentacles were torn apart by the shock wave, scattered like broken branches.

Those supposedly non-renewable enhanced insect corpses lost their final reliance under this round of attack. Bone armor melted, venom sacs exploded, with no possibility of reconstruction.

The fire had not yet extinguished; in the charred pit, only a burning remnant struggled, trembled, and disintegrated between the flames and snow.

This was a declaration of civilization against the wild, something it could never comprehend in the human endless evolutionary malice.

A few minutes passed, the edges of the charred pit still aflame, mountain winds carrying heat and black smoke howled down the path.

The Nest was no more, leaving only a charred remnant on the surface, continuously collapsing and disintegrating, like sins turned to dust after being incinerated, carried away by the wind.

Hillco stood on the high platform of the Earth Tower castle, the gusts ruffling his disheveled hair, the firelight reflecting dancing flames in his eyes.

"Ah... this is art!" he murmured, almost ready to compose an ode for his designed Magic Explosion Bullet, "Precise, intense, complete purification... perfect. So perfect it makes you want to cry."

And at that moment of explosion, the entire Earth Tower shook fiercely.

Not a tremble, but an impact from underground, like the roar of a mountain.

The wooden planks on the walls groaned, the window frames shook out dust, the oil lamps hanging from the beams swayed violently, some people couldn't keep their balance, exclaiming as they crouched down.

Rock was crouched by the window ready to shout "Hold on, don't panic," but in the next second—

"Boom—!"

The vibration suddenly intensified, a thunderous explosion echoed from beyond the mountains, as if the air itself had caught fire.

At that moment, it was as if something punched down from the sky onto the earth.

His whole body felt soulless, his legs buckled, and with a "thud," he sat hard on the ground, his rear aching, but he couldn't care about the pain because he saw it.

He saw with his own eyes that sun-like magic explosion bullet descending from the sky, landing above the heart sac of the nest, and then bursting open.

That wasn't an explosion, that was the arrival of doomsday.

The nest, like a giant chunk of meat thrown into purgatory, rapidly decayed, disintegrated, and burned into charcoal in the flames.

Boiling bug pulp and burning tissue exploded together, black smoke surging like a venomous dragon rising to the sky.

The entire valley seemed to be flattened by a punch from a giant god, the terrain reshaped in an instant, flames roiled, charred pits scattered, tendrils spread out.

Rock stared blankly, eyes unblinking, mouth agape, unable to utter a single word.

There was only one thought left in his mind:

The sun had crashed down.

Rock could no longer restrain himself, his eyes rolled upward, collapsed on the ground, murmuring:
"...The sun...the sun killed that giant monster..."

"What? What sun?" A stir ran through the crowd.

"What did you say? Did the monster really die?"

"Speak clearly! Hurry, explain!!"

Someone helped him up from the ground, and like a startled pigeon, he suddenly sat up, eyes wide, gasping, and shouted word by word:

"It's true! Lord threw a...sun! It crashed from the sky! Burned that mountain-sized monster to nothing in one go!"

He was so excited that he was rambling: "It... it howled on the mountain, struggled, rolled down in flames, and then 'poof', it exploded!! Do you understand? It blew into ashes!!"

He waved his arms like a madman, yet also like a prophet who had witnessed a divine miracle: "I saw with my own eyes its shell cracked! Tentacles severed! All the bug pulp exploded out! The whole mountain path is burning!

That was not fire, it was the wrath of god! Believe me—the Lord, he is the Master of the Sun!!!"

Inside the earth tower, after a brief silence, something was ignited.

With a boom, cheers erupted like a flood.

"The Sun! The Sun!! The Lord threw a sun!!"

"We're saved!!"

"The Sun belongs to Red Tide!!!"

The crowd excitedly shouted, knelt, cried, and chanted, as if that flame had burned into their hearts as well.

They couldn't see the battlefield, they could only piece together that terrifying yet sacred strike through Rock's temporary commentary.

But they knew one thing, this battle was won.

They survived.

Their Lord really threw down a sun.

On the other side, Louis stood on the high ground, his expression calm as water.

The cold wind carried the scorched earth's aftermath of the explosion from the depths of the valley, lifting his cloak.

Black smoke still rolled in the sky, reluctant to disperse.

He did not look at the charred remains.

Those boiling bug pulps, twisted shells, and shattered tentacles were meaningless in his eyes.

What truly mattered was: that heart sac of the nest was thoroughly incinerated in the flames.

He slowly raised a hand, aligning his forefinger and middle finger, slicing forward.

"Begin clearing."

His tone was not high, but the knights around immediately sprang into action.

They stepped out over the snow, wearing fireproof cold iron armor, shouldering flamethrowers, tips softly roaring.

Orange-red magic flames erupted from the long tubes with suppressed anger, tongues of fire gushing forth, as if fiery serpents sprang from the nozzle, pouncing on the remaining insect corpses on the hillside.

Those maimed and barely breathing deformed creatures began to twitch, struggling, but were soon engulfed by the blazing flames.

The fire quickly snaked into their bodies through their shells and joints, the flames roiling under their exoskeletons, they twisted and convulsed, moments later bursting into charred flesh and tar.

The snowfields sent up mist and burnt odors under the lash of flame, bug pulp and melting snow mixed with mud, step by step being scorched into a deserted battlefield.

Louis quietly watched, finally letting out a slow breath.

He rarely showed emotion in battle, especially in front of the knights.

But at this moment, he did feel a hint of relief from his heart.

They had secured the Red Tide Territory.

The nest, the hardest tumor to tackle, was cleared in one stroke.

It didn't even get the chance to retaliate before collapsing in the flames.

The threat from Snow Peak County was halved at this moment.

What does this mean?

It means his most important foundation is stable.

It means that next, he could allocate more military force and resources to aid other territories in Snow Peak County.

The earth tower castle behind him even rang with explosive cheers, making him smile slightly.

Chapter 286: Doomsday Nest Marches South

Not everyone is as fortunate as Red Tide Territory, blessed with a calm, decisive Lord like Louis and an intelligence system.

For example, Northern Iron Wall Earl Grant's Domain.

This territory is located at a critical junction between Red Tide and Snowfall County, where icefields and forests intertwine, with roads extending in all directions.

Here lies the first iron wall that protects the heartland of the Northern Territory, where the Grant Clan has long since taken root, ruling hereditarily.

In terms of military strength, the Grant Clan commands an intimidating elite army—the "Frozen Blood Battle Group."

This veteran unit, famous for its mountain warfare tactics, is clad in Ice Scale Armor.

With strict military discipline and a vast organization, they conduct real combat exercises around Ice Lake each winter, reportedly able to maintain formation even amidst the fiercest snowstorms.

The central command is the fearsome Inscribed Rock Castle.

It's not merely a castle; it's a colossal fortress embedded into the mountains, melding with the rock layers.

A poet once exaggerated, "If Inscribed Rock Castle falls, the Northern Territory can be abandoned."

They pride themselves as "The Wall of the North."

For years, they have withstood the Northern Barbarians and Cold Land Magical Beasts, never truly fallen.

This is the honor imbibed since childhood by the descendants of the Grant Clan, also the source of all their confidence.

And all this has forged a stable prosperity.

Inside the fortress, order prevails, with clearly defined roles between farmers and merchants, and complete facilities for grain storage, forges, schools, and stables.

Even in snow season, they can organize temple fairs, hunting competitions, and parades.

Compared to other territories struggling against a harsh winter, their people are almost at ease.

Until...

On October 10th, the Grant family was celebrating with lights and decorations.

In the main hall of Inscribed Rock Castle, family flags hung between the high relief columns, the silver and inky blue totems fluttering in the firelight.

The fire burned brightly, even igniting the rarely seen "Winter Eternal Flame," which was usually lit only for celebrations or weddings in previous years.

Today marked the coming-of-age ceremony for the Grant family's youngest grandson, Elton.

This sixteen-year-old boy walked up the steps with firm strides and received an ancient short sword from his father's hands.

It was a family heirloom weapon that had earned merits on the Northern Territory's front lines, symbolizing responsibility and heritage.

He raised the short sword high, his voice still youthful and tender, yet unable to conceal his proud tone:

"I, Elton Grant, swear before the family—I will use this sword to defend the family honor and protect the dignity of the Northern Territory, until the last drop of blood!"

The hall thundered with applause, clan members raised their glasses to drink together, and the elders praised with smiles, "This is truly a descendant of the Grant family."

No one paid attention to the fact that beyond the main fortress, several scout riders had gone missing in the wind and snow.

Outside the fortress, the city was peaceful.

Villagers were busy with the final preparations for winter, some bundling dried fish and storing them in cellars.

Some brought worn leather boots to the cobbler's shop on the street, while peddlers set up stalls selling salted snow radishes and cured meat balls.

In the corner blacksmith shop, the sound of anvils echoed, and an old blacksmith, sweating, was forging a crossbow limb for snow use, chatting as he hammered with his apprentice: "This year is strange, the snow is late by half a month, and even wolves are rarely seen... perhaps we can have a good year."

At North City Academy, a group of schoolchildren was loudly reciting the "Records of the Iron Blood Empire" with their instructor.

That was the empire's textbook, mostly praising central order and conquest achievements.

In the West City Small Temple, an old woman with a head of white hair knelt at the incense table, tremblingly lighting an old bronze oil lamp.

She muttered, "Last night in my dream... the Snow God wept..."

A few young men who believed in the empire's orthodoxy laughed and shook their heads, "The old lady has started her old god dream talk again."

"Who still believes in the Snow God these days? Everyone believes in the sacred grace of the Dragon Ancestor."

"Yeah, the Grant family is guarding well, there's nothing to be afraid of."

Their laughter, mixed with the children's voices in the snow and the clatter of hammers, wove an image of peace wrapped in time.

Suddenly, ominous clouds gathered over Earl Grant's Domain, like a dark tide rolling back. A cold wind roared down from the north, carrying the stench of a foreign land.

The sky seemed to be obscured by something colossal, the sunlight instantly dimmed, as if the apocalypse had arrived early.

A Scout Knight hurriedly rode out the south gate, but before he could exit the city, he reined in his horse in shock at a mountain road bend.

He saw the "wall."

A "wall" made of corpses and insect nest resin, more than a dozen meters tall, blocking the entire mountain road.

The bony shell held fragments of armor, severed limbs, and heads, and the resin seemed to be "breathing" slowly.

It was a living "Corpse City."

The Order Knight's Adam's apple moved as he murmured:

"...Corpses... a city built of corpses."

The next moment, the Doomsday Nest emerged from the mist.

It slowly advanced on the main mountain road, dragging a tunnel of insect shells miles long, every inch wriggling with not-yet-hatched larval sacs.

Corrosive fluid dripped from its massive abdomen, melting the snow into black mud, and steaming out a dense, blood-tinged red fog.

The vanguard consisted of swarming ordinary insect corpses.

These grotesque mutated creatures were clad in human armor remnants, their limbs twisted, eye sockets hollow, mouths split to the ears, constantly spewing corrosive venom that could dissolve metal and rock from afar.

A band of insect corpses charged to the mountain's front outpost; soldiers sounded their bows and prepared to fight, but not before three volleys, the wall crumbled under the corrosive venom.

Shadows plunged into the city, screams, wails, and cracking sounds merging into a symphony of flesh and blood.

Someone raised a sword to resist, only to have their spine bitten through by an insect corpse sneaking in from behind.

Someone tried to escape, only to find that the mountain paths on all sides had long been surrounded by the insect swarm, with the only way out being death.

A young girl hid among a pile of firewood, covering her mouth so as not to cry out.

She saw an insect corpse dragging her mother's body along, that body only had half a face left, still muttering, "Help me... make a fire to cook..."

A young father tried to block an insect corpse climbing onto the windowsill with a firewood knife, but the creature's claw tore him open from his neck.

The blood splattered on his son's face behind him, the little boy collapsed on the ground, wailing and immediately discovered by the insect corpse...

The entire outpost fortress held on for less than a quarter of an hour before it completely fell.

Next was the village.

The insect corpses that escaped the fortress rushed into the village down the mountain at great speed, collapsing houses, igniting cow sheds, and the warning bells in the bell tower ultimately became a dirge.

Some mothers fled into the forest with their children, but there they encountered more encirclements of insect corpses.

On the white frost ground, blood stained shattered totems, recording the last moments of life's struggle.

Meanwhile, on the upper floors of the Inscribed Rock Castle, the Grant Clan's banquet was in full swing.

In the lavish banquet hall, the aroma of roasted meat filled the air, silver cups clinked, and the fireplace burned brightly.

The young Elton, draped in a silver-embellished cloak, proudly raised his goblet to toast his kin.

Suddenly, a tremendous crash sounded from outside the banquet hall.

It was not thunder but the resonance of the insect tide crashing into the mountainside and defensive walls, like war drums pounding.

Soon came a second, a third, closer and heavier each time.

The banquet hall doors burst open with a bang as a Knight Commander stumbled in, half of his armor melted, blood flowing from the seams.

His face was filled with horror, and he shouted in a low voice: "Enemy attack!! Monsters are coming!!!"

The scene instantly turned to chaos, as the Count sprang to his feet, his expression shifting from anger to icy coldness, immediately ordering: "Close the inner castle! Gather the Frozen Blood Battle Group, join me on the wall to meet the enemy!"

But everything... was already too late.

Through the rear window of the banquet hall, the distant mountain path seemed to collapse.

Amidst the rolling insect tide, Count Grant saw the Doomsday Nest for the first time.

It was a terrifying giant figure, with an upper body resembling a Holy Mother embracing with open arms, but its face was composed of countless pained human faces, eyes tightly closed yet shedding tears like blood, spawning writhing swarms.

Below the waist was a swollen, twisted fleshy ovary and incubation chamber, continuously spewing tendrils and progeny.

Its presence was like death made tangible, a blend of cries like infants wailing, rendering one's mind obscure.

The Count stood frozen, staring at the monstrous fallen maternal figure, suddenly realizing this was not a battle but an apocalypse.

The black tide had already rolled in from the weakly defended southern slope, breaking through the sentry towers, crashing down the mountain gate, and destroying the inner city's drawbridge, sweeping in like an apocalyptic tsunami.

His eyes widened as if hearing the warning delivered by a messenger sent by Duke Edmund months ago:

"Do not underestimate the insect corpses; they retain their pre-death combat instincts and do not die. Once infection begins, it will spread exponentially from hundreds to tens of thousands."

At that time, Count Grant had dismissed it with disdain.

After reading the warning letter from the Duke of Snow Peak County, he merely chuckled lightly, tossing it into the fireplace.

"The Duke is old and prone to alarmism," he told his advisors, "Our Grant Family has guarded the Northern Territory for a century, would we fear a few alien insects?"

But now, he finally understood that the letter's words were not false alarms, but a genuine "calamity."

The day following the near-fall of the rock castle, he finally roared with anger, donning his armor, draped in a frost-patterned cloak fluttering in the wind, wielding the family sword, summoning the Frozen Blood Battle Group for a last-ditch counterattack.

However, the insect tide was not a wild beast charge; it was rhythmic, strategic, aided by the wisdom of the Nest.

The knights retreated step by step, the main city besieged, various refuge forts gradually losing contact, messenger hawks falling from the sky, scrolls burning carbon black.

The once-proud Grant Defense Line crumbled like a layer of snow-covered tiles with a mere touch.

Even more bizarre: some captured nobility, knights, and fighters with Fighting Energy were not executed on the spot.

They were taken into the Doomsday Nest.

There, an altar built of insect bones, surrounded by thick fog, exuded a decaying yet seductive aura.

A figure slowly rose from the insect array.

He wore a blood-red dress, long hair like burning silk over his shoulders, yet his voice was a hoarse, deep male tone, as if hundreds of souls murmured from a single mouth.

He smiled and commanded the insect corpses to "seal" the captives one by one into insect cocoons.

These cocoons quivered and trembled, cracking open after a few hours, from which emerged new insect corpses.

Their armor remained, their faces vaguely recognizable, even possessing combat skills, as if the deceased had been "faithfully replicated."

Count Grant led his army in a bloody battle, alongside a few Extraordinary Knights slaying numerous insect corpses, vowing to protect the remaining inner city.

But in the dead of night, he heard terrified screams behind him.

Turning around, he saw his personal soldiers kneeling on the ground, trembling all over.

The insect swarm parted, revealing a gap.

From within, two figures slowly emerged—

It was his grandson, and his second son.

They wore tattered knight's armor, their steps slow and stiff, eyes hollow and lifeless, their chins split open to reveal deep insect mouths, emitting a raspy and familiar voice:

"Grandfather... we... have returned..."

The Count was struck as if by lightning, staggering back a step, his sword-hand trembling violently.

"No... not you... you shouldn't be...!"

The "grandson's" face and mouth squeezed out mimicked syllables: "...Honor... eternal..."

"Shut up!!!"

Count Grant roared, charging forward, his longsword striking fiercely down, only to be overwhelmed by the next moment's surge of insect swarm.

He struggled and roared, striking again and again, but was eventually exhausted and captured.

The Red Witch approached him slowly, eyes narrowed, assessing him as one would appreciate a piece of jade awaiting carving.

"A fine specimen... The once Wall of the North? Now, merely a malleable shell."

Insect silk climbed over the Count's body like a tide, slowly "enshrouding" him into a cocoon of enormous proportion.

Finally, a newborn insect corpse was birthed.

Its back bore remnants of armor, the Grant Clan's emblem still hanging on its chest, yet its face was twisted, eyes vacant.

The Doomsday Nest keened low in the dark, the insect tide surged anew, treading upon snow and blood, moving slowly southward...

Chapter 287: Pal's Fate

Two months before the Nest made its appearance, Pal Calvin's frontier territory finally saw a turnaround.

Of course, that was the result of his brother Seldon Calvin's secret intervention.

To salvage his younger brother's reputation in the Northern Territory and prevent him from becoming a complete laughing stock, Seldon discreetly dispatched a crack team, bringing winter provisions, leather goods, and simple stone fortress components.

He also deployed several seasoned knights with strict military discipline, along with grassroots officials who had notable achievements on the frontier, to form an "advisory team" to assist Pal in reorganizing the camp.

From an outsider's perspective, it seemed as if Pal suddenly "got lucky" and was finally on the right track.

Within two months, a fire-watch tower was erected by the riverbank, and rough yet functional lookout towers were constructed between the mountain passes;

At the center of the camp, reclaimed from wetland, began to take the shape of a castle.

The hearths and grain storage areas were clearly demarcated, patrols began strategic deployments, and even a small "beast hunting competition" was held, slightly boosting morale.

Pal sat on a temporarily constructed wooden balcony of the main building, watching the smoke rise and fall over the territory, at last revealing a long-missed smile.

"I am not a failure," he whispered to himself, holding a feather pen and spreading out a parchment.

He intended to draft a "battle report" proposal, planning to send it back to his father in the Southeast:

"The extreme cold of the North is fierce, yet I, Pal, have not flinched. The territory now hopes for self-sufficiency, the watchtowers are solid, expansion is in sight. Rest assured, Father, the blood of the Calvin Clan will not cool in the Snowfield."

As he wrote, he fantasized about returning to the family one day, clad in golden armor with the dust of snow still on him, stepping into the Calvin Clan's banquet hall.

Along the sides of the long table, the brothers all rose, their eyes bewildered.

His usually silent and reserved father also put down his cup, stared at him, a rare emotion showing in his eyes.

"You... you really survived... and succeeded?" his father mumbled, his voice hoarse.

He answered not, but instead laid down several battle reports on the table, like scattering a handful of brilliant chips.

He saw Louis, the fortunate half-brother, kneeling at his feet and softly saying:

"I'm sorry, I am unworthy to be the son-in-law of the Governor of the North... please take over my wife and this Northern Territory, Brother Pal."

Emily also stood by, shedding her pride, donning simple clothing, and hugged his leg, her eyes brimming with tears:

"Please let me stay by your side... even as a maid... It would be enough. I once underestimated you, but now I understand, the true strength lies with you."

He imagined himself gently helping her up, a regal smile on his lips: "You need not be a maid, I will give you a better place."

And outside the city, tens of thousands of vagrants shouted his name, songs spreading throughout the Northern Territory, knights emblazoning his name on their shoulder plates.

He even contemplated that his father might raise a toast at the winter family banquet, announcing: "From this day forth, Pal Calvin shall be the heir of the Calvin Clan."

Thus all past failures, humiliation, and ridicule would be overturned and crushed, serving as stepping stones to his ascent.

The recent successes convinced Pal that this "Northern Territory turnaround" was merely a matter of time, he was already standing on the edge of a reversal of fate.

Yet he was unaware, before he had taken the first step, a second-generation Nest had silently appeared in the northern part of his territory.

Black fog spread from the forest, insect corpses' tendrils piercing through the night, creeping towards the borders of his territory.

The brighter the fantasy, the harsher the reality's destruction.

October 10, Pal's territory.

The sky seemed leaden from early morning, clouds dark and grim, not a ray of sunlight in sight.

Unnoticed by all, a new "second-generation Nest" was slowly descending at the edge of the mountains.

Its body covered with insect shells and black metallic-like structures, dragging limbs, as if a colossal shadow emerging from the apocalypse.

The insect cadaver advance troops spread like a black tide, leaving only ruins and scorched earth in the villages they passed through.

The river surface floated dead fish and rotting waterfowl, wild dogs along the bank began frenziedly biting their kind in panic.

The mountain pass outpost had long lost contact, birds in the sky fled south in a hurry.

In the dense forest, insect mist silently spread, as if the world were being enveloped by some unspeakable "miasma."

Pal remained immersed in the sense of victory as "bitterness turned to sweetness."

Until his mount suddenly neighed violently, raising its front hooves.

A sentry stumbled and dashed forward, covered in blood, chest collapsed, eyes rolled back, resembling a torn remnant.

He fell to the ground before Pal's horse, and in the next moment, astonishingly convulsed and climbed up, spewing forth a long insect foot like tongue from his mouth, fiercely lunging at Pal!

"Protect the Lord—!!"

His Personal Guard swiftly severed the sentry's head and cleaved him into minced flesh.

Though unharmed, Pal's face was ash-gray, nearly falling off his horse.

"What... what is that... what is this?!"

He stammered, eyes terrified, the guards exchanged glances, sensing a foreboding drawing near.

And within just a few minutes, the crisis descended in full.

Pal hastily ordered all personnel to assemble, three hundred heavy armored soldiers left by Seldon and several dozen Fighting Spirit Knights lined up outside the camp, trying to block the enemy.

But they held out for less than a few minutes.

Gigantic insect cadavers came like mountains, leaping out of the fog, directly tearing the breastplates of the frontline soldiers.

A few massive insect cadavers perched on the defense lines, sweeping away like toppling straw men.

Streams of slime were hurled from above, igniting soldiers' bodies, Fighting Qi Barriers crumbling like paper.

Pal stood terrified at the rear, watching as the camp turned into a purgatory on earth.

The "castle" he had personally designed crumbled amidst flames and thick smoke.

Chapter 288: Pal's Fate (Part 2)

The newly erected sentry posts had turned into pillars clung to by insect corpses.

Familiar knights howled as they fell into the thick fog, dragged away by insect legs.

He even saw that enormous insect corpse, composed of dozens of bodies and writhing like a centipede, crushing its way down the mountain pass, covered with the faces of knights from his territory.

Pale-faced, Pal turned to flee, even kicking away the knights blocking him, shrieking:

"Quick! Prepare the horses! I must leave! To Red Tide Territory for help, immediately! I have to personally... No, I am of the Calvin Clan's bloodline, I cannot die here... Hold them off!!"

In the chaos, he discarded his armor, mounted a horse with a dozen personal guards, and charged through the side valley behind the camp, abandoning the soldiers and officials still resisting.

In that moment, he had no time for "honor," "duty," or "command."

Only one thought remained: "Survive... I must survive... This calamity is beyond me."

Pal was forcibly escorted by his subordinates in a breakout, fleeing desperately.

His face covered in ash, cloak scorched, utterly disheveled.

Behind him, the camp was a sea of flames in complete defeat, while ahead lay the fog-enshrouded, insect-howling snowfield.

He dared not look back until a familiar figure leapt out of the firelight.

It was his Guardian Knight, who had protected him since childhood, now turned into an insect corpse, eyes vacant, face writhing with insect threads, lunging to bite a knight.

"Kill him! Kill—" Pal screamed, frantically drawing his sword, only to throw it away seconds later, climbing onto the horse to escape.

After hours of fleeing, they took a brief respite in a temporary mountain cave behind them, preparing to break westward, only to meet even greater despair.

The scouts brought back news: most breakout points have fallen.

Worse, a "familiar-looking" insect corpse army was closing in on the cave.

Pal looked into the distance and saw their faces clearly.

His captain of the guard, who once shielded him from arrows on a cold night, now wore tattered armor, with insects writhing in his eye sockets.

The steward sent by Seldon, who had taught him etiquette in his youth, now twisted with a torn mouth, moving forward in an eerie posture.

And his Knight Order he had boasted about countless times, their emblems now stained with blood and filth.

Their faces twisted, seemingly still calling "Lord Pal," yet filled with false repetition and echoes.

Pal slumped to the ground, muttering, "No, impossible... They... They shouldn't be like this..."

No matter how he thought, the reality was that he was soon surrounded.

He tried to flee but was pierced through the limbs by insect stingers, nailed to the stone wall of the fortress ruins.

He struggled desperately, bleeding profusely, face pale, yet he did not die immediately.

In his final moments, he instead grinned madly, his eyes filled with madness and a curse:

"Louis... I'm waiting for you! See how long you can hold out?"

I shouldn't have come to the Northern Territory... shouldn't have listened to them... damn old man, brother, and you, Louis... How could you be right about everything..."

His eyes before death were filled with resentment.

But unfortunately, no one heard, no one saw.

Pal died in anger and despair, choking painfully on his final breath of blood.

His body was carried before the Nest, "rewoven": body deconstructed, spine hollowed, will erased, leaving only the instinct to fight.

Eventually, he became one of the insect corpses in the insect army.

A knight clad in armor, yet with a mouth split to the ear and entrails crawling with fibers, a vanguard on the battlefield.

Pal's territory fell within half a day, the surface devoured entirely by insect corpses, leaving only broken flags and decaying steam.

Soon the Nest seemed to hear some "summoning," and immediately wriggled southward.

Its size expanded again, its bones denser, its spore mist thicker, the swarm below surged like a tide, moving faster than before.

Its direction pointed directly at the next critical stronghold: Frost Halberd City.

.....

Under the guidance of the "Desperate Witch," the Doomsday Nest finally tore open the Northern Territory's blockade, leading a vast insect corpse legion southward with its twisted and massive body, heading straight for the Empire's Northern Territory's key stronghold—Frost Halberd City.

And it was not the only Nest, as twenty-three "first generation" and "second generation Nests" dormant beneath the Northern Territory emerged along with the Doomsday Nest.

Some resembled collapsing trees, others like hanging cocoons, carrying their specialized sub-nests, parasitic systems, and the swarm's will, awakening en route, forming a destructive impact across the entire Northern Territory.

This was an undeclared war, a massacre akin to a natural disaster.

Wherever it passed, insect corpses surged into human strongholds like tidal waves, insect eggs, parasitic bodies, and contaminant tendrils spread rapidly like a plague.

Petroleum, poisoning, earth walls, arrow towers... methods that once stood against the Snow Swearers proved nearly ineffective in the face of this completely unfamiliar and overwhelming "group intelligence."

Only count-level major nobility fiefdoms, with ancestral accumulations, could briefly withstand.

While most medium and small nobility fiefdoms were extinguished in the insect tide like paper lighthouses.

Some Lords didn't even have time to send out a plea for help, and entire territories, populations, manors, and watchtowers were eradicated within days.

In just a few days.

The map of the Northern Territory was left with numerous dark spots representing areas cut off, darkened, or lost.

The noble post system was severed, the original communication network collapsed gradually, and the concept of a "defense line" no longer existed in actual tactics.

All of this was just the prologue.

.....

October 11th, before dawn.

In the main fortress's highest war room, Duke Edmund wore a heavy cloak rimmed with black and gold, holding a parchment of intelligence.

The parchment he unfolded was the fifth emergency report, the heaviest and most definitive so far.

The corners of the parchment were stained with dark brown blood marks, the ink slightly blurred in the wind.

It was Count Grant's handwriting, a Northern Territory figure renowned for stability, decisiveness, and significant military achievements.

Throughout the Northern Territory, if only discussing military power, Count Grant would absolutely rank in the top five, a left arm and a right arm.

The content of the letter generally reported that the insect swarm was moving south, the Nests were awakening, noble fiefdoms along the way were successively falling, the army annihilated, only a few survivors.

"What was meant to come, has come," he said quietly.

This calamity, he had long anticipated, but he didn't expect it to arrive so soon, thinking there were still two or three years.

Moreover, it came with such ferocity, so comprehensively.

Not just one Nest, but twenty-three first and second-generation Nests simultaneously appeared across the Northern Territory.

The insect tide simultaneously breached multiple fiefdoms, the Northern Territory lord's defense lines fragmented layer by layer like fragile ice.

Each noble domain turned silent.

He frowned, but his face, carved with determination by years and battles, showed no panic, no fear.

It was a calmness forged by years of warfare.

It wasn't his first time facing a natural disaster, nor his first time watching friends and subordinates perish on the snowfield.

In comparison, the panicked noble messengers and the kneeling requests for reinforcements seemed particularly harsh.

He didn't send troops to aid.

Not because he wouldn't, but because it already had no meaning.

"All fiefdoms that can still resist will persist by themselves; those that can't... have long since sunk."

After saying this, he merely extinguished the symbols on the tactical map one by one.

Then, he ordered: Frost Halberd City to close completely, with the Cold Iron Legion taking over the city gates.

This war fortress will seal itself, becoming the Northern Territory's last shield.

At the same time, he ordered his trusted aide to take his seal and sealed documents straight to the Imperial Capital, to send the Empire's highest alert for assistance to the Emperor.

He knew this was no longer just a "disaster for the Northern Territory."

This was a threat to the entire Empire.

This fortress would seal itself, becoming the Northern Territory's final shield.

Chapter 289: Rescue

The wind and snow poured into the shattered watchtower, the smell of blood and spore pulp blending into a nauseating stench.

Willis Calvin stood on the broken watch platform of the city wall, staring at the enormous thing slowly emerging from the fog and snow in the distance.

His hand clutched the sword hilt, yet he found his fingers trembling slightly.

Even though he was already a High-tier Knight, he couldn't control the heavy, anxious suffocating feeling in his chest.

That was the Nest.

It was more gigantic and bizarre than he imagined.

Like an overturned tree trunk, or the back spine of some creature that shouldn't exist, dragging a whole river of writhing insect corpses across the icefield.

Willis gritted his teeth and looked down at the territory behind him.

This little valley, took him a year to build slowly.

He remembered every stone path, every house, and every name of his subjects.

He had sweat and bled for this land, personally inspected the masonry seams at night, and hauled logs with his people during the day.

Now... it might all be destroyed.

He couldn't help but let out a bitter laugh, "Even if the Nest doesn't attack me first... it's my turn."

The two territories closer to Frost Ice Valley than his had already fallen.

The intelligence brought back by his Scout Knight contained only indistinct screams and flames, not even complete corpses, lasting only half a day.

The Nest couldn't be bothered to fully devour them, quickly moving on to the next prey.

"Can I hold out longer than they did?" he murmured, his eyes somewhat vacant.

Willis knew very well that what he faced before were just the vanguard.

Those black-shelled, undying insect corpses were merely appetizers for the Nest.

And himself... he had already lost nearly a third of his knights to clear them, even with Louis's warning, knowing their weaknesses.

And now that the terrifying Nest had personally arrived, could he withstand it?

At the edge of his sight, a massive shadow appeared like a shipwreck in the fog.

Dragging countless writhing tentacles, turning the snow into a mire of spore pulp wherever it went, causing the forest to groan and the earth to tremble.

When he saw the entity, he almost dropped his sword and fled south,

but then he recalled the letter Louis wrote.

A letter written in the simplest words, yet he read every word three times.

"Your location is the Nest's next target. After I resolve things here, I'll send support. If you can hold on a bit longer, you'll save more people."

At that moment, looking at the line "I will arrive," he had an urge to laugh.

That kid actually thought of saving people? Facing such an enemy? Who did he think he was?

But he also understood, only Louis dared to say "I'll be there" when the Nest was pressing in.

Willis turned back and looked at the rundown yet still standing stone walls.

Retreat? Of course, he could retreat.

The knights were there, the warhorses too, and even the escape route on the flank was prepared.

He could ensure his survival.

But he thought of those still hiding in the cellars, by the warehouses, under broken walls, thought of the eyes watching him, of the people he had protected for a year, and couldn't turn away.

Nor did he want to turn away.

"...Maybe hold on a while longer," he said.

He gritted his teeth, lowly growling, "Just a few more hours... just a few hours!"

A signal fire rose from the command tower behind him, and he brandished his sword fiercely.

It was a signal, also a vow.

"Everyone get into defensive positions! Don't let these beasts set foot in Chi Yun!"

Even if he died, he wanted to use this blood-stained snowy land to secure a path for reinforcements.

The main body of the Nest finally approached.

Like a mountain of disaster come to life, dragging hundreds of writhing limbs, it slowly emerged from the thick fog and snow.

The swarm of insect corpses followed closely, surging into the valley like a black tide, turning the snow into spore pulp mire, with the air filled with the stench of decay and death.

The soldiers on the city wall turned pale, some gripping their weapons yet unable to stop trembling.

Willis Calvin donned his armor for battle, his cloak like blood, raised his longsword and roared, "Hold the line! Don't let the enemy set foot in Chi Yun!"

Morale was shaken, but soon plunged into deeper despair.

Because he saw that terrifying sight with his own eyes.

He saw the abyssal behemoth like the mouth of hell, seemingly capable of devouring all courage and hope.

He was speechless for a moment.

Even though he was an Elite Knight, a Lord, the protector of Chi Yun.

Yet at that moment, he wavered.

Willis forced himself not to look at those huddled in the ruins and cellars behind him, not to hear the cries of children.

Forced himself to believe, "Hold on a while longer... just a while longer..."

But he knew this time they might really not wait for rescue.

When the Nest suddenly swung a limb as thick as a city wall, tossing the entire western defense line into the air.

At that moment, soldiers were flung skyward like sandbags, and the entire fortification collapsed with a roar, his last internal resolve crumbled too.

Willis murmured softly, "I'm sorry... everyone..."

He was about to order a full retreat.

When suddenly—

"Whoa—!!"

From the sky, came a piercing scream that tore the air.

A cannonball trailing a fiery tail streaked across the night sky, its speed and momentum, like a meteor crashing into the mortal realm.

"Boom!!!"

At that moment, it seemed as if the earth and sky had cracked.

A gigantic explosion erupted in front of the Nest, flames surging into waves hundreds of feet high, the scorching shock wave crushing everything in its path.

The insect corpses were charred to cinders or flung into the sky on the spot, even the surrounding air seemed to be sucked dry, forming a vacuum-like oppression.

The Nest, the massive entity that had just seemed like the Grim Reaper pressing upon them...

It let out a scream, low and distorted, as if the entire abyss beneath the earth was roaring.

Its front chest burst open, a large expanse of crimson viscera and writhing tubes exposed, blood and flesh splattering as the massive body, weighing tons, began to retreat.

Not moving slowly, but retracting and falling back in terror, like a beast with its nerves set ablaze.

Willis opened his mouth wide, almost able to fit his fist in without noticing.

He couldn't speak, only able to stare at the embers and black smoke, at that "something" still burning.

"What is this...?" he murmured, his voice blown by the wind.

He wasn't the only one stunned.

The knights beside him all halted their movements, staring at the flames and the fleeing Nest, an existence that seemed mythically terrifying yet was repelled with a single blow, almost forgetting to breathe.

This fearsome entity had once crushed a lordship in an instant, a calamity almost insurmountable in their eyes.

But now, it was afraid, afraid of that terrifying explosion.

"It's... it's him!" A young knight was the first to react, trembling as he said, "It's Lord Louis... he has arrived!"

On the hillside, the wind swept the snow, a battle flag with a blood-red background and golden sun emblem rose high.

It was the banner of the Red Tide Territory...

The golden sun ascended amid flames and iron fire, as if to dispel this darkness and despair.

The warhorse neighed, hooves raising dust as a young commander leaped down from horseback, landing like an eagle, the cloak draped over his heavy armor fluttering fiercely in the wind.

He removed his helmet, black hair reflecting the firelight, eyes sharp as blades, voice steady as a hammer beating a drum.

"Fire attack team, advance! Flamethrower formation number two! Target the insect corpse cluster!"

He was naturally Louis Calvin.

In Willis's eyes, at this moment, Louis was no longer human, but a god descended to earth.

With flames and fury, he came on behalf of the Dragon Ancestor, fighting for the hopeless.

"Boom—!"

Another heavy Magic Explosion Bullet whistled out from a portable launcher, slicing through the night sky, precisely hitting the open chest of the Nest.

The remaining core area exploded completely amidst flames and thunder, as if infused with heavenly lightning, black blood and spore mist surged out, the insect shell shattering into pieces.

The Nest let out a distorted wail, half of its body collapsing, dozens of limbs twitching as it fell.

It wanted to escape, to retreat, yet it was suppressed by flames, unable to move.

"First line of flamethrowers! Advance three steps! Burn the spore-infested bodies!"

"Woo— —!"

At Louis's command, dozens of knights in the flamethrower team simultaneously ignited their nozzles, Fire Scale Ointment spraying out scorching pillars of fire in the night, weaving into a purgatory-like fire curtain, incinerating the remaining insect corpses in batches.

Those howling, struggling insect corpses exploded, twisted, and turned to ash in the high temperatures.

This Nest's level of evolution was quite strong, so it hadn't died even after two Magic Explosion Bullets.

It swayed painfully, trying to open its mouth to release insect mist, only to be hit in the head by the third Magic Explosion Bullet...

With a thunderous sound, its skull exploded open, collapsing on the scorched earth like a rotting fruit, immobilized.

The entire battlefield fell silent for three breaths.

"...Dead?" Willis murmured, his voice full of disbelief.

Just like that?

This terrifying Nest was thus completely terminated in this sea of fire and blast flames.

The embers of the blaze still burned, a faint bloody scent spreading among the scorched earth.

Willis stood on the ruined city walls, hair singed by sparks, face full of soot and scratches, the whole person seemingly climbed from a pile of corpses.

He panted and wiped away the dirty blood on his face, watching the fire attack team orderly withdraw, unable to help but smile bitterly.

Just then, a heavy-armored warhorse stepped into the ruins, the familiar red-gold cloak fluttering in the wind.

"Lou... Louis!" Willis hurriedly greeted him.

Louis dismounted, unfastening his gloves while glancing at him a few times, his tone calm but with a bit of fatigue and concern: "You held out for quite a while, well done."

Willis relaxed his previously tense nerves, smiling wryly as he shook his head: "Almost couldn't hold on. If you were a few minutes later, I would've really had to run."

"Then I wasn't too late." Louis patted his shoulder, "What about your men, how are the casualties?"

"More than twenty knights dead, around seventy lightly and heavily injured combined. The militia's losses are even worse... you could see it."

Louis nodded, his gaze not reproachful but attentively listening, then softly said, "You didn't lose the city, and you saved many people. This battle, was fought without disgrace."

Having said that, he looked at the distant pile of charred insect corpses before turning back to Willis and said:

"I'll leave you with two groups of flamethrowers and a medic. Let your men rest a bit, finish off any insect corpses that aren't completely dead. I've also arranged with logistics to set aside some supplies for you, try to replenish a bit."

Louis continued, "I have to head to other places in Snow Peak County, the northern nobles' defensive line is about to collapse, need to block the openings before the insect swarm spreads."

Willis nodded, asking no more.

At this moment, Willis suddenly realized that he and Louis no longer inhabited the same world.

Even though they were both Upper Lords, himself being a Baron while Louis was just a Viscount.

After arriving in the Northern Territory, there were times he couldn't help but feel envious.

Thinking that Louis was luckier than him, coming to the Northern Territory early allowed him to rise with so many opportunities.

Yet at this moment, he was left only with admiration and gratitude, and relief.

Relief that he chose his territory with determination right next to the Red Tide Territory.

Relief that he thick-skinnedly begged for help in front of Louis.

Willis looked at the still-burning Nest carcass, once again raised his sword covered in dust and blood, seemingly responding to the receding battle flag.

Chapter 290: Lord Louis Has Arrived!!

The night wind was like a knife, with remnants of fire still on the snow, and the embers of Chi Yun Territory flickering in the distance.

Louis mounted his horse, not glancing back at the ruins just purified by flames and soaked with rain of corpses.

The knights behind him were silent, each eye reflecting the deep red mushroom flame from the Nest's explosion.

"Next one," he murmured to himself, devoid of emotion.

Dozens of horsemen trudged through the snow, advancing southeast along the mountain range.

The knights spoke not a word, only the sound of hooves crushing the snow was like a heavy war drum weighing on everyone's heart.

"From Black Pine Ridge to Cold Deer Plain, all seven beacon towers remained unlit." A scout knight galloped over with a grimace, "The Gwen Clan is annihilated, the crests of Heller and Tawen Castle have been torn down from the watchtower, not a single body was found."

"What about Green Hill Castle?"

"The entire territory was cleared by insect corpses within three hours, the Nest was built right in the city center, but the primary Nest has since moved, location unknown."

These were all territories close to the outside of Snow Peak County.

Louis remained silent for a long time, unfolding a map of Snow Peak County before him.

What he once deemed natural barriers—canyons and snow forests—were now collapsing one by one.

The frequency of insect corpses crossing the rift was increasing, relentless day and night.

Louis was not in a hurry.

He looked up at the crowd: "From now on, Red Tide Legion enters 'Directed Rescue Mode'."

His tone was calm, as if facing not the insect tide devouring the North but a complex chess game.

"Priority Type One—Strategic Hubs.

Territories with road nodes, mountain pass control, and fortress locations must be secured."

He pinpointed three core nodes: Glacial Canyon, Muailing Ridge Passage, and Cyan Rock Rift.

"Type Two—Loyal Lords.

These people once partook in the 'Revival Fund', accepted Red Tide arms dispatch, and cooperated with our plans. They trust me, and I must not disappoint."

Names like Yorn Harvey and Lady Grant were highlighted, with a deputy quietly recording beside him.

"Type Three—Controllable Forces.

Some new nobles and minor noblehouses have weak resources but could be integrated. If we can save them, they will become members of the future Red Tide system."

He looked at the southeast corner of the map, where a cluster of small yet unfallen territories lay.

"Lastly—Non-Cooperators.

Nobles who ignore orders, attempted to leave command, and withdrew on their own. Mark survival odds, do not actively assist."

His tone was without a ripple, as if discussing resource allocation, not human lives.

"Red Tide forces are limited, Magic Explosion Bullet reserves are insufficient, we are not gods. We cannot save everyone.

What I must ensure is this land still exists post-war; that the people can still survive..."

With the plan set, Louis's team began swiftly moving to battle across various regions.

...

"Everyone into the cellar, don't make a sound!"

Yorn Harvey squeezed a child about to cry out, glaring fiercely at him, his lips close to his ear, hissing low: "If you don't want to die, keep quiet."

The child sobbed and nodded, while Yorn found it hard to keep his own composure.

His body felt submerged in icy water, fingers too stiff to grasp the sword, chest heaving violently, nearly suffocating.

The sound of "clack, clack" came from outside, uncertain if insect corpses gnawing on the door or if someone's bones finally gave in.

A scream suddenly came from afar, abruptly muffled by something else.

It was as if hell had opened its mouth.

Yorn covered his mouth, pressing hard against the wall.

He had once been the pride of the nobility circle in the Imperial Capital, the wealthiest noble heir.

Riding horses with golden saddles, gem-encrusted sword hilts, always having noble maidens vying for his attention at every appearance.

Now hiding in a moldy cellar, didn't even have time to wash his hair, armor turned into that of a beggar.

"What on earth... was I thinking..."

He cursed himself in a low voice, wishing he could travel back in time to slap his oneself who eagerly volunteered to "take up the Northern Territory post last winter to prove himself."

Wasn't being a vase noble in the Imperial Capital who indulged and waited for death much better?

He had thought it would be at most seeing a few refugees causing trouble or distributing some grain to the people, never imagining that upon arriving in the Northern Territory there would be crises one after another

First, the rebellion of the Snow Swearers almost drove him mad, followed by the winter famine, nearly freezing half the territory's population to death.

And now the insect plague came, nothing like the "gilding in the Northern Territory" he had imagined!

Yorn glanced at the dilapidated cellar ceiling, insect corpse noises from outside close at hand, as if they could break in at any moment.

Then he looked at a woman curled up in the corner, who had followed him from the Imperial Capital, pale-faced and weak.

"If reinforcements don't come soon, we're all dead." He murmured softly.

For the first time, a serious thought crossed his mind, "Maybe, life ends here."

He truly wanted to cry, knowing the odds of someone coming to rescue was slim, although a vague image hovered in his mind.

Just then, a deafening explosion echoed from afar...

Like a volcanic eruption, or an angry thunder roar.

The entire cellar shook slightly.

The howls of insect corpses suddenly weakened.

Yorn's eyes widened, body stiffened.

Then, in the next moment, he crazily scrambled to the cellar entrance, clutching the cracks to peer out at the sky.

Amidst the flames, the golden sun flag of the Red Tide slowly rose on the distant hillside.

Boom—!!

A pillar of fire shot up from the east, the blaze coiling like a furious dragon, engulfing the besieging insect corpses.

Then the second and third explosive bullets landed accurately, thick smoke and flames slicing the entire besieged city into several scorching "fire rings."