

Winter 311

Chapter 311: Strike!

When all tactics were dismissed one by one, and silence was about to engulf the conference hall...

A young voice echoed from the corner: "Why not try my method?"

Everyone turned their heads in unison.

The owner of the voice was a young man sitting in an inconspicuous corner.

He wore a simple dark gray military uniform, without any insignia of rank.

Only the Red Tide Territory badge on his cuff, known by few, indicated his identity.

"Louis?" A staff officer from the Cold Iron Legion whispered.

Duke Edmund's son-in-law, the young Viscount of the North.

"I have a kind of magic explosion device," Louis stood up slowly, his tone calm, "that can effectively damage the shell of the Nest. I've tried it several times in battle, and it works wonders on the Nest."

The air instantly filled with a subtle hesitation and... light laughter.

"Oh? A magic explosive bullet that can pierce the Nest's armor?" A political advisor, dressed in a custom-made military uniform from the Imperial Capital with a short beard, chuckled lightly, "Where did you dig up this Ancient Divine Artifact?"

Before he finished speaking, a few political advisors had already started whispering, occasionally uttering light phrases:

"Just showing off, the Governor has really misjudged."

"Are the disciples of the Eight Great Clans really this mediocre now?"

"...The Northern Lands are indeed barren, even such tactical fantasies have grown there."

"I thought we would hear some real strategies."

Some of them even showed undisguised mocking expressions.

To them, Louis was just a young nobleman, relying only on his birth, with no experience to show.

And now he dared to interrupt in this top-level strategic meeting?

He was merely trying to attract attention, capturing everyone's gaze.

Yet, Louis, under everyone's gaze, remained unfazed.

"I'm not joking." Louis said with neither fear nor arrogance.

Hearing Louis's confident words, the mocking voices diminished somewhat, but few still believed him.

At this moment, Duke Edmund spoke slowly: "So, you have a ready explosive device, and you know it can effectively penetrate the Nest's shell?"

"Yes." Louis nodded.

Duke Edmund gazed intently at Louis standing there.

He stared at the young man, as if trying to discern any trace of deceit or flaw in his calm expression.

Unfortunately, there was none.

Louis stood there still, without even a hint of urgency to prove himself.

In Edmund's mind, countless memories about Louis surfaced involuntarily.

This young man never relied on boasting to earn anyone's trust.

He simply turned every promise into fulfillment.

Moreover, he was indeed one of the few in the Northern Territory who kept the tide of corpses at bay.

Even if this explosive device sounded absurd...

In the current situation, anything useful is a good thing.

"...Even if there's only a one percent chance," Edmund slowly spoke, breaking the silence, "in the current circumstances, it's useful."

He looked at the recording officer beside him, his tone steady: "Include Louis's explosive proposal in this operation plan as a backup plan. Let Louis himself coordinate the resources and lead the implementation."

Upon hearing this, a subtle atmosphere quietly spread in a corner of the hall, some political advisors from the Imperial Capital even couldn't bother to hide their disdain, snorting softly, their expressions full of contempt.

"Heh... Just trying to save face for his son-in-law, isn't it?"

Some lightly shook their heads, wearing an expression of "as expected."

"Well, even if it fails, it won't hinder the battle, just scratching the Nest."

Some even smirked ambiguously, as if finally understanding why the Duke inserted such a seemingly odd order.

And Louis?

He said nothing, simply exhaled silently in his heart.

Not just for the military merit, position, and prestige about to be in his grasp.

But more so to... quickly end the hatching of that Nest, to end that silently expanding "Hell's Mouth."

The war shouldn't drag on too long.

Frost Halberd City's resources couldn't last that long, the people of the Northern Territory couldn't last that long, and even the will of the Knights... couldn't last that long.

So now it's time.

It's time to let this world see what true explosive art is.

With this little interlude, the meeting briefly returned to calm.

But the atmosphere had quietly changed.

No longer was it the intense confrontation as before, nor were there any more passionate words.

Because no one had a better method.

Time was running short, resources were depleting, yet the enemy still lingered outside the city walls, piecing together revival, hatching hell.

This is a war without choice.

"Since that's the case," Duke Edmund opened his mouth slowly, his voice deep and resolute, "execute according to the plan now."

"Advance with the Dragon Blood Legion, target the core of the Nest."

"First try Louis's magic explosive bullet..." He paused, "If it fails, switch to the self-destructive tactic."

When he finished speaking, there was no applause in the conference hall, no cheers.

Only silence.

Not doubting the decision, but because everyone knew what it meant.

"Alright, let's proceed."

"Mobilize the troops. All units prepare immediately."

Commanders stood up one after the other, their voices chaotic, but order was quickly restored.

Everyone devoted themselves to their duties, like a wartime machine, swiftly running at full speed after a brief adjustment period.

Even those political advisors who had derided Louis no longer spoke.

They understood, in this war, no one could win with just words.

Chapter 312: Strike!

The heavy atmosphere in the conference hall had not yet dissipated, and the people gradually took their leave.

Louis was about to withdraw when a voice with a hint of amusement came from behind, "You did well, eighth brother."

He turned around to see a tall man striding over, his gaze both familiar and foreign in its affection.

Gaius Calvin, the eldest son of the Calvin Family, a popular candidate for future Patriarch, and the Deputy Corps Commander of the Dragon Blood Knight Order.

Unlike the solemnity during the meeting, his tone was now much lighter, his steps filled with a heroic air, like a long-absent brother reuniting with family.

"Eighth brother," Gaius approached and unceremoniously patted Louis heavily on the shoulder, "You've really outdone yourself. I heard in the Imperial Capital that you've been making waves, didn't expect that once in the Northern Territory, you'd have a seat at the highest meeting."

Louis smiled faintly and nodded lightly, "It's just thanks to father's and the Governor's influence."

Gaius paused, then laughed heartily, "Ah, modesty."

The two talked as they walked out of the conference hall, with Gaius pulling an image from his pocket and holding it up to his eyes, "Look at this."

The picture showed a gentle-faced young woman holding a newborn whose eyes had not yet opened.

Behind her stood Gaius in casual armor, grinning with a rare softness in his smile.

"Your sister-in-law, she gave birth two months ago, a boy." Gaius' tone softened unexpectedly, "I never thought I'd see such a day."

Louis looked at the image earnestly and said softly, "He resembles his mother."

"Right!" Gaius smiled proudly, "If he resembled me, it'd be a disaster."

He paused, then suddenly said in a low voice, "I was thinking, once this battle is over, I'll bring them home to see Father."

Upon hearing this, Louis roughly understood his inner worries and comforted, "It'll be alright, you still have to succeed the Calvin Family."

Gaius froze, then grinned, "Oh, you actually care about me?"

"Just the truth." Louis said softly, returning the picture to him.

Gaius took the image, tucked it back into his pocket, and patted him on the shoulder again, "You too, don't die. Eighth brother, I want my son to call you 'Uncle Louis' in the future."

With that, he waved farewell to Louis and turned to leave.

The heroic figure gradually receded, and the lights of the conference hall dimmed little by little along with it.

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The next day, before dawn, the wind and snow were still raging.

Though the day had not yet broken, the north training ground of Frost Halberd City trembled slightly with the weight of heavy footsteps.

Hundreds of knights in crimson heavy armor stood solemnly in formation; they were the Empire's sharpest spear—the Dragon Blood Legion.

In silence, a figure draped in a black and red cloak strode onto the high platform.

He removed his helmet, revealing a face marked by resolute strength, none other than the Deputy Corps Commander—Gaius Calvin.

"Everyone!!"

His voice thundered, striking the chest of every knight.

"I won't waste words, you all know the reason you're here today!

The enemy we face is not a tribe, nor a rebellion, or any general that can be assassinated... but a living hell."

As soon as he spoke, several young knights in the front row couldn't help but tighten their grips on their spears, their battle spirit surging.

Gaius waved a large hand and continued:

"This operation... is dangerous, the most dangerous mission we have ever undertaken. The corpses, black mists, reassembled monsters you've seen, those are just appetizers.

The real target is that thing hidden deep in the mountain's belly, a creature so formidable that even our three Peak Knights aren't sure we can crack its armor in direct combat.

But we have no other choice.

If we don't kill it today, it will crawl out from here tomorrow, and then into the Imperial Capital, dragging your families, your children, your comrades, all into hell!

We are the blood of the Empire, the sharpest long spear of His Majesty the Emperor!

If we retreat, then who else in this Empire can stand at the front line?"

Breathing in the ranks grew heavier, morale churned like molten lava.

"So today, I ask only one thing: Who's willing to follow me, charge into the Nest! Swear to follow until death!!!"

The uniform response thundered across the entire northern wall, the red patterns on their battle armor lighting up all at once, as if each knight ignited the flame within their blood.

Standing by the high platform was Arthur, the Legion Commander of the Dragon Blood Legion, the Empire's strongest spear, merely stood with hands behind his back, surveying the formation emotionlessly.

He didn't need to stir them with words.

His presence was the most silent yet strongest of pillars.

Gazing at Gaius, he nodded gently.

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Meanwhile, atop the walls of Frost Halberd City.

The air seemed to have stilled.

In the distance, the black mist still rolled, like the breath of death spewing from the earth's cracks, creeping across the valley and ready to swallow the entire sky.

It was no longer a mere natural phenomenon but a living catastrophe.

"Activate fully! Cold Flame Reactor!"

With the city defense officer's roar, the Cold Flame Reactor buried deep in the ground veins of the city's heart roared to life, the core magic crystal pulsating like a beast's heart, bursting with continuous, unending magic energy pulses.

Energy streams transmitted rapidly through the pre-laid node arrays, sweeping beyond the city walls.

Fifteen magic fortresses (originally seventeen, two had gone dark due to drained power) displayed dense runes, arcs of blue ice accumulating at their tips, intersecting in the sky like a web of the cold night, eventually gathering into a half-transparent giant dome...

The Super Barrier, activated.

In an instant, all of Frost Halberd City seemed to awaken from slumber, emitting a wailing-like resonance.

But this awakening could only sustain a miraculous few minutes.

Chapter 313: Strike! (Part 3)

"Reactor core temperature rising, energy output dropping, entering maximum load!"

"Maintain with all you have! We only need to hold this window of time!"

Meanwhile, the catapult platforms on the main city wall unfolded. A row of giant catapults stretched their frames with a roar, Cold Crystal Magic Explosion Bullets ignited one after another, emitting piercing whistles that tore through the long dark sky.

"Boom—!!!"

Azure tail flames traced arcs, precisely landing in the heart of the insect tide.

The first wave of explosions erupted like a storm interwoven with ice mist and flesh.

The corpses of the insects were instantly frozen where they lay, and the fragments from the explosion flew like countless dancing ice blades, shredding all unfrozen flesh.

The cold flow like blades, the storm like wrath.

On the valley frontline, within just a dozen breaths, a narrow gap was forcefully torn open, leading into the depth of the black mist.

But it's still far from enough.

"Continue the bombardment! Maintain suppression! We must completely clear a breakthrough within five minutes!"

"We won't have a second chance!!"

The soldiers operating the giant levers were drenched in cold sweat; even though they were frozen through under their armor, no one stepped back.

In the distance, the black mist writhed, the insect tide reformed.

It wasn't merely a gathering of creatures but a malicious puzzle from the Abyss.

In that fog like a furnace of flesh, broken body parts, rotting insect limbs, even remnants frozen into ice sculptures, all began to twist, struggle, and merge.

They weren't "dying," they were "evolving."

A monster pinned to the rock wall suddenly emitted a piercing rattle, with bones inverting and limbs fracturing before reassembling into a new jointed form, rising once more, now faster.

An insect corpse that had long been blown into two halves borrowed the severed arm of a fallen Dragon Blood Knight nearby to complete its "recovery," inheriting the warrior's combat instincts, flashing extremely skilled swordsmanship in an ambush.

They distinguished neither friend nor foe, took whatever material they needed.

Comrade's remnants, allied corpses, frozen insect pieces, all became their components.

While writhing, they let out ear-piercing cries like a wailing infant.

Yet even so, Frost Halberd City still fought, still roared.

The Frost Crystal Storm still rampaged, and the entire Magic Defense Line of Frost Halberd City unleashed its power without reservation.

Azure Magic Energy washed over the battlefield like an avalanche, Chain Burst Magic Crystals massively detonated, alternately covering the gaps between catapult strikes, forming multiple layers of lethal waves.

Each round of explosions tore and reformed the insect tide's frontline, yet continually pushed the limits.

It was a gamble of endurance and time.

They weren't trying to annihilate the insect tide; that was nearly impossible.

Their goal was to carve a path through that purgatory of flesh, ice, and black mist for the Empire's elite to charge into.

Just as the seventh wave of bombardment ended, a path was briefly opened.

In the storm's center, the insect corpses momentarily halted their reformation from the freezing.

The black mist, like a curtain torn, revealed a slit, exposing the endlessly churning, flesh-covered, heart of hell-like doomsday beneath the distant mountain.

That was the true target of this operation:

The Doomsday Nest.

Imperial strategic command was instantly issued, horns sounded throughout Frost Halberd City:

"Dragon Blood Legion! Advance!"

"Cold Iron Legion! Form up, charge!"

In an instant, the main gate swung open heavily, a stream of steel surged forth.

The Dragon Blood Legion clad in heavy armor, with Fighting Energy swirling around, plunged into the breach like a tide of fury.

The Cold Iron Legion followed closely, their silver-blue full armor reflecting a silent and deadly gleam under the cold light.

This was a vanguard with no thoughts of return.

Every person knew this was likely a journey of no return.

The Doomsday Nest was the heart of the entire insect tide; entering it might mean never returning.

But even so, no one faltered.

Because they were the Northern Territory's strongest shield and the Empire's mightiest spear.

"For the Empire! For humanity!"

The shouts resounded amidst the wind, snow, and Magic Energy aftershocks, until that stream of steel fully merged into the depths of the battlefield.

Amidst the flood of Dragon Blood and Cold Iron, a small squad of knights, carrying uniquely shaped metal devices, followed in silence.

Chapter 314: Assault and Explosion

Deep within the Nest, the throne woven from flesh and insect shells slowly opened its eyes.

In the center of a palace like a nightmare, a gaunt silhouette stood quietly at the peak of the writhing throne.

The Desperate Witch donned a crimson gown trailing along the viscous flesh floor, like a tide of blood surging.

He quietly watched the knights bursting in from the mist, with not a trace of surprise in his pupils, but a slight hint of mockery.

"...So, they've finally delivered themselves here."

His voice was gentle, carrying exhaustion yet a bizarre satisfaction, as if everything was within his expectations.

"How nice... I was just pondering whether to expend more energy on the siege... Let me see how long the Empire's iron will can struggle before death."

With a slight movement of his delicate fingers, innumerable monsters embedded with severed limbs and twisted spines surged toward the charging knights.

Some with over a dozen limb arms, some headless yet full of gaping mouths, and some simply pieced together from three or four fallen knights' corpses, with severed arms that still repeated sword forms from life.

Their presence triggered chaotic resonance in the minds of the strike knights.

The faces of fallen comrades, the cries of wailing infants, the visions of their bodies being torn... everything seemed like firing upon consciousness itself.

Both a physical opponent and a mental plague.

In the charging formation, some knights began to howl in pain, with Fighting Energy leaking out, and their longswords dancing wildly in attempts to dispel the hallucinations swirling in their minds.

"Grit your teeth! Don't think too much!" Gaius roared.

Fighting Energy exploded on him, covering his body like a flaming armor, as he first faced a stitched giant beast in front, moving like lightning and roaring to unleash the Earth-Splitting Strike.

"He's corroding our hearts... Don't let him succeed!!"

The entire line accelerated instantly, thousands of High-tier Imperial Knights, with Fighting Energy spreading like wildfire.

They bloomed clear trajectories in the mist, forcibly tearing into that hellish expanse of twisted flesh.

But not all warriors were so fearless as he was.

A young knight, after slashing with effort, showed a glimmer of fear in his eyes upon seeing a beast made from the head of his fallen comrade.

The monsters charged madly, their remains reassembled, regardless of being sliced into pieces, as long as there was remaining flesh, they could writhe, split, and resurrect within seconds, becoming more terrifying.

And every enemy killed felt like personally sending a comrade back into the enemy ranks.

"Will we become like this?" he asked.

No one answered.

Because they all knew the answer was yes.

Yet even so, no one took half a step back.

Fighting Energy thundered, blades blazed, long spears pierced through bone shells, heavy shields shattered maggot flesh.

It was a doomsday assault written with blood and will, a march with no way back.

"It doesn't matter if we die here!" An old silver-haired knight roared, crashing into the monster horde, severing the spine of a three-eyed corpse beast, though a blade pierced his left shoulder.

He did not retreat, but instead rammed the monster along with himself deep into a wall of flesh, pulling the high-energy Magic Explosion Bullet at his waist, his body becoming the core of blazing flames in an instant.

"Boom!!!"

A searing, blinding explosive flame blossomed between the insect flesh, blood mist splattered, shattering the recomposing corpse fragments.

The passage that was about to close was forcibly expanded by a yard.

With his life, he traded for the space needed for the next charge.

"Move forward! Don't look back!" a captain of the Cold Iron Legion roared, his chest plate shattered, blood gushing like a stream.

He knelt on one knee, leaning on his Broken Spear, grappling fiercely with an oncoming quadruped beast.

He knew he was already too weak to kill, so at the last moment, he suddenly pressed the switch at his waist.

"For the future."

Another deafening roar resounded.

The burning Fighting Energy consumed him and the enemy together, tearing apart an entire wall of flesh and blood.

On that day, the knights on the battlefield seemed to have long forgotten what escaping alive meant.

They pulled the Magic Explosion Bullets' fuses, not for self-preservation, but to pave the way.

Not once, not a chance occurrence, but every ten or so steps, a warrior would charge into the enemy formation, detonating themselves, blasting open a path with their lives.

Their explosions were not choices made in desperation, but already predetermined tactical arrangements.

They were the living fuses of the Nest campaign, the sacrificial soldiers of the death charge.

"Open the way! Keep opening!!"

"The knights ahead, use me as a ladder!!"

"Don't stop! We die so you can continue to charge forward!"

In that blood and fire-forged corridor, knights detonated themselves one by one, like candles burning to the end, lighting the path in the darkness.

Explosions and shouts intertwined, even Hell trembled.

Even if each enemy slain was reborn, with every step forward needing to tread on the corpses and wills of comrades.

Still, they gritted their teeth, their Fighting Energy blazed wildly, long spears slicing, their eyes burning like flames.

Only in destruction could there be a chance for life.

This was dying for the Empire, they roared in death, charged in despair.

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On the other side of the hill, Louis's demolition team finally reached the deployment point.

Ahead was likely a secluded rock platform, but with an open view, directly aiming at the central structure of the Doomsday Nest.

Like a giant statue twisted and intertwined with gods and demons, its arms raised high in a Holy Mother-like embrace of its followers, seemingly ready to accept all approaching life with gentle embrace.

But this "embrace" would only send everything into endless death.

Its lower half had long degenerated into a giant fleshy ovary and incubation cavity, with thick, pillar-like vessels endlessly writhing, rooting deep into the earth.

Chapter 315: x Assault and Explosion

The black mist spewed out like a fountain of blood from its body, enveloping the surrounding battlefield, with whispers of corrosion and mental disturbance filling the air.

Even from a distance, many knights felt dizzy, nauseous, and experienced auditory hallucinations and tinnitus.

"Ah... something is speaking in my ear... it's watching me..."

A few knights from the Cold Iron Legion beside him struggled to resist the mental erosion, sweat beading on their foreheads, their faces pale.

They were among the strongest elite of the Northern Knights, yet still felt an indescribable oppression.

But at that moment, they noticed something even more shocking.

Louis remained calm and composed.

The young Viscount stood by the hillside, seemingly ignoring the presence of the mental oppression, calmly surveying the terrain, calculating the wind speed, and even quietly assigning technical parameters.

Though the knights guarding him dared not question military orders, they were faintly discontented.

They also wanted to charge into battle, but were tasked with escorting a "non-combatant" young noble.

Now they were to accompany him in installing a "Magic Bomb Launcher"?

In facing that nearly god-like Nest, would this work?

"I'd rather charge forward with my spear," a knight muttered under his breath.

At this moment, Louis was silently using the Primordial Meditation Technique, calming his mind like water, actively blocking out the mental contamination released by the Nest.

He had noticed back in the Red Tide Territory that the Primordial Meditation Technique had remarkable effects against mental attacks.

He did not explain, just started to direct.

"Set up the triangular base."

"Adjust the angle."

The Red Tide Demolition Squad he led quickly moved into action, setting up a modular Cold Iron Alloy Launcher on the hillside.

The tripod dug into the rock, stable and efficient.

Next, Louis personally opened the heavy military safe.

A shell sealed with the aura of doomsday was lifted out.

The Ultimate Magic Explosion Bullet.

It was larger and heavier than a large Magic Explosion Bullet.

The interior of its short, thick metallic casing contained active orange-red liquid, which was "Fire Scale Ointment."

Its magic energy concentration was dazzlingly high, with faint vein-like fiery patterns visible on its surface, like the heartbeat of some creature.

Meanwhile, on the observation high tower on the main wall of Frost Halberd City, several civil servants watched this scene through binoculars.

The military civil servant, who always held a critical attitude, sneered, contemptuously speaking to the surrounding nobility: "So this is the so-called miraculous Demon Burst Plan?"

"To think this could blow up the Nest? Ridiculous."

On the hillside, Louis didn't respond to any doubts.

He simply raised his right hand slowly.

"Loading complete."

"Target locked."

Under his command, the voice was low and firm: "Launch."

Boom——!

Flames spewed, magic energy roared, and the massive Ultimate Magic Explosion Bullet shot forth with a fiery tail, transforming into a crimson meteor aimed directly at the Nest's deceitful "Holy Mother's face."

In an instant, the Nest seemed to sense something, instinctively making the strongest defensive response as if facing a natural enemy.

Countless insect corpses crawled from around the Nest, frantically layering together to form multi-layered insect corpse shield walls, large walls of flesh rising from the ground, writhing to block the front.

Spore sap secreted out, weaving translucent protective layers in the air, attempting to wrap this destruction like biological fabric.

But at the next moment——

"Boom—————!!!!!!"

The blast core hit.

The Ultimate Magic Explosion Bullet pierced into the Nest's body without slowing down, instantly detonating.

The colors of the entire world seemed drained, leaving only blazing white.

At that moment, even the sky was ignited by the flames.

The soldiers on the hillside instinctively closed their eyes, still feeling the burning flash penetrating their eyelids.

That was not light.

That was the birth of a new sun.

The high-energy blast point turned into a wave of fire swallowing everything, vaporizing the insect corpse shield wall in an instant, leaving no time for any reaction.

The massive flesh walls and spore sap protective layers were torn apart, penetrated like paper, unable to even leave charred marks, leaving only ashes swept up by the heat wave.

The ground began to churn.

The rock layers within a radius of several hundred meters melted directly into scorching magma, the air was sucked away by the explosion, and the deafening roar echoed like doomsday thunder after a slight delay.

At the center of the Nest, a massive, charred, squirming hole had been blasted open.

The external defense structure was utterly destroyed, and the embedded breeding structure began to collapse.

Even more fatal was the continuous burning of the Scale Fire Ointment: under high temperatures, it transformed into a Purgatory Fire Snake, penetrating deep into the Nest, scorching the originally regenerative tissue, rendering it irreparable, persistently necrotic, spreading the blaze.

Countless sub-nest cavities, larva breeding zones, and egg parasitoid chambers ignited in succession in the heat.

Chain explosions resounded continuously, thick smoke rose into the sky, insect eggs and spore slurry burst in the air, transforming into a bloody mist that spread across the entire battlefield.

"Ugh ahhhhhhhhhh—!!!"

In the high sky, the Domsday Nest let out a wail piercing heaven and earth.

Its composure like a Holy Mother's face, formed from the amalgamation of thousands of human faces, a false god's visage, finally cracked within the firelight.

Fragments of insects fell like bloody rain; the "mother's" face screamed in agony as it peeled away in the high heat, revealing the grotesque reality of the flesh beneath.

And at this moment, the Desperate Witch commanding from within the Domsday Nest was stunned.

He stared blankly at the outer layer of the Nest, blown open and aflame, unable to speak for an extended time.

"...This is impossible."

He whispered, the smile at the corner of his mouth disappeared for a moment, his expression blank.

That human meteor punched through the future he had envisioned thousands of times.

"Damn it...!"

He suddenly snapped back, extending his arm in a mix of shock and fury, towards the pool of blood and flesh behind him.

"Summon the strongest — the perfect fusion!!" he shrieked, "Hold the core for thirteen minutes!! Just thirteen minutes! I can repair it!!"

The blood pool roared, countless remnants and corpses writhed under the command.

A brand-new hell was about to be born.

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The flame had not yet dissipated, the ground still trembled.

Yet the impact caused by that Ultimate Magic Explosion Bullet was already clearly engraved in everyone's hearts.

On the high walls of Frost Halberd City, the civil servant who had just been sneering stood with his mouth slightly agape, face turning pale.

He could hardly believe his eyes: "This... this... really blasted through..."

The bureaucrat beside him was also dumbfounded, mumbling: "The face of the Nest... shattered..."

And more of those who had scoffed at Louis's so-called "Demon Burst Plan" were left with only one thought in their minds:

He really did it.

All doubts, derision, disdain, vanished in the blazing white light.

Louis's name was etched into everyone's minds.

At the same time, Duke Edmund, leading troops in the frontal assault, also witnessed the earth-shattering strike at the center of the Nest.

"!?" He halted abruptly, eyes narrowing as he looked at the Doomsday Nest, now with a gigantic hole, a glint of surprise flashing in his eyes.

Of course, he knew Louis wasn't one to boast empty, but he hadn't expected—

He actually managed to punch through the Nest.

"Heh... Seems I underestimated you." Edmund murmured softly, immediately his gaze sharpened, "Advance, full army!"

Vice Commander Gaius, closer to the front, saw it the clearest, witnessing that explosive bullet pierce through the sea of insects like a divine meteor, tearing through the core.

He laughed wildly on the spot: "Ha! That kid really pulled it off! Now that's what I call demolition!! Follow me, charge!! Head straight for the core!!"

His laughter roared like thunder, leading the entire Core-breaking Squad's momentum to its peak!

Following closely was Arthur, his battle armor stained with blood, glanced briefly at the fiery wound, said coldly: "...Good, we need not forge a path anymore, go straight for the heart."

Edmund, Arthur, and Gaius, the Empire's top combatants, converged on the frontline at this moment, leading the Core-breaking Squad in the final onslaught!

Behind them were nearly a hundred High-tier Extraordinary Knights, fighting energy like thunder, their fighting spirit soaring to the sky.

This assassination unit, code-named "Core-breaking," had been waiting for a long time.

Now, the time had come!

"Charge! — For His Majesty!"

"For the Empire!!"

"For all those who have died!!!"

The Core-breaking Squad roared in unison.

Their figures pierced through the still burning mountain of corpses and bloody sea, charging through the scorching crack into the inner abyss of the Doomsday Nest!

This was the final assault.

It was humanity's dagger, stabbing into the heart of the Evil God.

Chapter 316: Death of the Witch

The sky remained covered in dense, ink-like black fog, as if a hand had rested over the world, rejecting all light.

While the residual flames of the Magic Explosion Bullet at the epicenter illuminated the entire valley, making it appear as if Purgatory had just begun.

"Screech——!"

The Doomsday Nest let out a wail that tore through the heavens and the earth in pain.

Fiery flames pierced through the surface, burning a path straight to the Abyss; corpses and scorched earth paved the way, with the residual fire not yet extinguished.

The Gate of Hell was completely opened.

The dense fog did not recede, spore mist clung like glue, and the air was filled with the scent of blood, rot, and mysterious whispers.

"No need to say more." Duke Edmund rode forward, the blue-silver cloak on his back flapping vigorously, the long shield in his hand engraved with his family crest.

He turned back to look at the knights behind him: "May the blood of each of you exchange for the dawn of humanity tomorrow."

Hundreds of knights responded softly behind him, their voices joining into a chant:

"For His Majesty!"

"For the Empire!"

"For all the sacrificed! And all those not yet dead!"

The sound of metal clashing was like a squall, the scraping of armor intertwined, Fighting Energy surged through the air like a raging flame.

Arthur quietly drew the Light Blade, its edge gleaming faint gold in the black mist.

On the other side, Gaius squinted, gazing at that massive, twisted, still-breathing Nest.

He slowly grinned, red Fighting Energy blazing like a furnace around him.

At that instant, his entire body was covered in red heavy armor akin to forged iron, like a steel war god walking out of a volcano!

[Bloodline Talent: Undying Charge] activated!

Gaius gained nearly invincible resistance to attacks for a short time, though this greatly consumed Fighting Energy.

Under his feet, the ground trembled and cracked.

Without hesitation, he charged into the closed spore membrane passage, accompanied by a roaring Shock Wave. Insect corpses flew, flesh walls crumbled, and the Doomsday Nest was forcibly shaken open with cracks.

The ground behind him was left with deep red furrows like the tracks of death!

"Quickly follow!!" The knights behind him roared as they charged, the scorching spurting spores and burning fragments at their backs.

And on the other side——

"Bloodline Talent: War Gravity."

Edmond spoke quietly, and an icy blue Fighting Energy spread from him, as if freezing time along with it.

The air hummed, and suddenly the swarm of insect corpses were drawn to him as if attracted by a magnetic pole, all turning toward him alone!

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Massive force struck his raised giant shield, the blue light shattered, and then quickly reassembled.

He remained stationary, letting dozens of corpse monsters rush at him, single-handedly holding back the entire flank.

"Go straight through!" he roared, his voice like forged iron, shattering the shrieks of the insect corpses.

The knights brushed past, their eyes filled with an unspeakable reverence.

And Arthur, clad in silver-white armor, continued to charge, like a sword awakening from slumber.

But in his eyes, blue light flashed, marking and calculating all possible routes ahead, enemy movements, terrain traps, and the Nest's regeneration points.

The knights reached the deeper part of the passage, welcoming a true nightmare.

It was a group of fused insect corpses.

The first monster stepped out from the flesh wall, four legs, six hands, half a face that of a fallen female mage, and the other half gnawed by an insect monster, mouth producing a laughing 'giggling' sound and Curse.

He raised a hand, several Ice Spears suddenly generated, while on the other hand a Greatsword swung down forcefully!

"Cut through its body!" a knight roared as he leapt forward, his Warhammer smashing toward its spine only to have his heart pierced by a suddenly sprouted Insect Sting!

"Heier!!" his companion shouted in rage, wielding a Burning Greatsword, cleaving both Heier and the monster into the Spore Pool, triggering a Blast Flame Rune Stone!

Boom!!!

A mass of flames exploded on the broken platform, causing the entire passage to tremble.

Yet, the next wave of corpse monsters was already leaping over the spore pool.

"Don't stop!" the third group of knights attacked from another side of the flesh stairway, a female knight using a Broken Spear to fend off the sewn monsters, only for her arm to be torn in half, blood spilling like rain.

Alongside her, a Heavy Shield Knight roared, but was impaled through the chest by a tentacle, having his Fighting Energy forcibly drawn out!

"Ahhh!!!" he screamed in heart-wrenching agony, his entire body starting to wither, Fighting Energy drawn into the fusion organism in bloodlines.

"Die!!" another knight rushed bravely, detonating his Magic Core to blow the monster apart.

Spore splash, leaving only a charred helmet rolling on the ground.

The passage grew increasingly narrow, spores boiled underfoot, walls began to writhe and close, as if digesting the intruding odds.

The Nest was learning their moves, sealing every escape route with mutated flesh walls and endless insect corpse monsters.

"I'll cover! You all go!"

"Fourth group, clear that blood sac above!"

"Don't mind me, throw the Flame Bullet over! Blow it up!!"

The knights had reached the second chamber, corpse mountains like hills, spore mist like rain.

In just nine minutes, the fallen numbered twenty-one, yet they continued charging ceaselessly.

"How is this possible?!" deep within the Flesh Throne, the Desperate Witch's eyes suddenly opened.

He showed no expression, but those scarlet irises subtly trembled, revealing unease and urgency.

The Nest was collapsing, the enemy was closing in.

The time for repairs, was not enough.

"Hold them off, throw everything you've got at them." his voice was soft, yet carried bone-chilling coldness.

Threads of insect silk extended from his fingers, dancing wildly as if puppeteering!

Suddenly, hundreds of stitched insect corpse monsters flooded the front-line chamber like a mudslide.

They were forcibly awakened, regardless of injuries or incomplete consciousness, piled into walls of flesh and blood!

"Block them! Even in death, block them!"

The next moment, the ground trembled fiercely!

Chapter 317: Death of the Witch

"War Gravity - fully release!"

Edmond roared, and the cyan blue fighting energy surged like a giant wave, emanating from around him.

Dozens of insect corpses in the surroundings simultaneously turned towards him, forcibly dragged and pouncing maniacally like meteors!

Boom! Boom boom boom!!

He raised the giant shield, standing like an immovable rock in the black fog, allowing the enemy horde to surge like a tide, unwavering and unyielding.

"Go quickly! He can't hold on for long!" a knight shouted furiously.

But in the next moment, the earth veins exploded again!

"Ah hahaha!! Did you see? I'm back again!"

The mad laughter roared like a hell war chariot!

Gaius ignited the "Undying Charge" once more!

From within him, the crimson battle armor surged out like a volcanic eruption, forging a battle intent stream scorching the soul!

His eyes were already filled with blood, his face pale as paper, yet still, he grinned wildly, his voice hoarse, "Brothers! Get out of the way! I'm going to crash!!!"

Boom boom boom boom——!!!

He charged like a battering ram, plowing everything in front of the chamber— insect corpses, meat walls, spore liquid pools, even space itself— into a path of fractures!

Step by step, the ground collapsed beneath.

Every meter, flesh and blood exploded.

Underground bloodlines, like the pen strokes of gods, painted a path of doom in the dark!

And in that moment——

Arthur finally opened his eyes.

He didn't say a word, just gently raised the light blade in his hand.

It was a long sword composed of golden light in high-frequency oscillation, its blade trembling gently, as if sensing a fated summons.

[Bloodline Talent: Light Chasing Technique] unlocked.

"Target locked."

He whispered, and his whole form turned into a white streak in the air!

Boom!!!

A line of white light rushed into the charging path, gliding along the fracture path Gaius paved with his life, traversing like a god at light speed!

The insect corpses didn't have time to turn, the spores couldn't ripple, the air didn't have time to shake.

Their world was cleaved in two.

The arc light had not stopped, nor had Arthur's steps.

The light blade, bearing the enemy's blood and his comrades' will, flickered, leapt, dove, and thrust within the enclosed chamber, cutting through the nest's final defenses!

"It is over." he murmured, the sword directed straight at the depths of the throne, that throbbing, blood-pulsing Throne of the End.

Upon the throne, the flesh quivered.

In the deepest depths of the End Core, the Desperate Witch finally stood up.

At every step, her skirt trailed long bloodstains, sewn from living tissue, where it dropped not water but warm, writhing spore liquid.

Her face was androgynous, sculpted like the Goddess of Beauty, yet disturbingly bizarre.

A mocking smile appeared on that face, but deep in her irises, there was anxiety, anger, and a tiny bit of...fear.

"...You should not have come here."

Her voice was as warm as a mother's, yet as hollow as a dead man's.

With a raise of her finger, the insect threads sliced through the air like thousands of harp strings, the entire nest's flesh walls pulsed along like the pulse of a giant organism!

The Insect Curse [Group Devouring Wave - Black Curtain] activated!

Black as ink, the insect tide rushed like a bursting tide with an unspeakable devouring intent, prying on all invaders, especially to tear at the Knight's Fighting Energy!

Following swiftly was the Spiritual Interference Technique [Heart Curtain Whisper]!

A whisper emerged from the bones and underground, knights' pupils contracted, feeling as if they saw their future death.

Some saw themselves with a bug through the heart, others saw their loved ones' bodies lying in the insect swarm...

"Stop."

A voice, clear as a pool of clear water, yet with an irreproachable dignity.

A beam of starlight fell from the high sky, tearing the black fog into a path of light!

The Supreme Mage, descending upon the Doomsday Nest!

"Star Wheel Technique!" Aurelian raised his hand, six Fixed Star Magic Wheels descended from the firmament, encircling the sky over the nest.

Each wheel was engraved with anti-gravity runes and space-time distortion lines.

They rotated slowly, drawing in the entire space structure of the nest area, halting and freezing all of the Desperate Witch's folding and teleportation techniques!

The witch herself was forcibly locked!

As the magic wheels resonated, starlight surged.

Aurelian then thrust his left palm forward, flames burst forth from the array's depths: "Fire Research Technique: Fire Vortex!"

As if a whole lava flow was poured into the nest, a blazing red vortex storm spiraled into the chamber, incinerating the patched monsters' bones, souls, and fighting energy cores!

A few polymorphic amalgamation corpses attempting to protect the witch, without enough time to struggle, turned to ash in the firelight!

Sensing the threat, the Desperate Witch immediately released the powerful black curse - Black Fog Technique: Curse Surge!

Yet he never expected, Aurelian was well-prepared.

"Void Reversal!" Drawing a straight void line with his right hand, as space tore like a mirror, then bounced back,

The entire Black Fog Technique was forcibly returned to its source, instantly enveloping her!

The witch's shoulder and neck were immediately devoured by her own technique, creating a circle of gory insect flesh tearing wounds, with spore liquid gushing out.

Aurelian said nothing, only looked at the nest with disdain, as if looking at an insect.

The Desperate Witch howled: "Do you think...this is all I have?!"

As she finished, the area behind the throne suddenly collapsed and ruptured, the chamber walls vibed intensely, raising blood plasma and shards of bones, turning the entire throne area into a squirming bloody vortex, echoing with a shrill like whispers of a constellation.

She abruptly raised her arm, a crazed yet divine smile appeared on her lips.

In the next moment——

Her form exploded and reassembled, as if breaking out from a human skin, an eerie and enormous insect-like monster slowly slithered out.

It was a maggot as large as a palace

Its entire body made of semitransparent insect flesh of gray-white, pink, and dark red, with a shell that swelled and receded like breathing, its blood vessels visible on the surface, its wriggling emanating insect cries with memory echoes.

Chapter 318: Death of the Witch (Part 3)

The back tore open with dozens of insect-wing-like spiritual tendrils, dancing like sticky threads, leaving invisible curses in the air as they moved.

Every swing of the tendrils made the space ripple like a water surface, reality began to shake and twist, as if the entire battlefield was being dragged into a nightmare.

He roared in anger, incantations spouting from his mouth, twisting and flying through the air like living text: "I am the End! I am Fate! The primordial wanders within me!"

Black mist pervaded, tendrils flying, as if the entire chamber was engulfed by the Insect God's domain.

Aurelian stood between flames and spores, his cloak billowing, starlight gathering at his fingertips.

He looked up, staring at the gigantic maggot, his brow slightly furrowed, yet he did not retreat.

In the blink of an eye, they had already clashed several times.

[Void Reversal] and [Tentacle Soul Devourer] collided head-on, space shattering like a mirror.

Aurelian's form was repeatedly forced back, the robe in front of his chest charred, blood seeping from the corner of his mouth.

The witch seemed to grow stronger, with each soul absorbed from the Death Knights; a bit more divine resonance echoed, sending eardrum-tearing vibrations throughout the nest.

His tendrils even pierced through the very fabric of space, at one point cornering Aurelian completely.

But Aurelian did not panic.

When driven to the deepest part of the folded barrier, he slowly extended his hand, a silver-white magic ring spinning at his fingertips.

"Broken Sky Corridor·Now"

At the instant Aurelian whispered, the entire nest's space shook violently.

Starlight spread beneath his feet, the veins of a six-pointed star extending into the distance.

The air shattered abruptly, and a straight silver-white path tore through, piercing the chaos, and pointing directly at the core.

This magic consumed immense mental energy, rendering Aurelian unable to cast other spells for a short time.

But it was enough, he turned to look at the silent Dragon Blood Knight.

Arthur slowly raised his head, the light blade humming softly, as if responding to its master's heartbeat.

Bloodline Power erupted with a boom!

[Bloodline Talent: Light Chasing Technique]

Maximum magnification, unlocked!

He did not roar, there was no unnecessary movement.

Just one step, stepping out.

The space was completely flattened into a line.

"—Slash."

Light as a whisper, yet seemingly thunderous, splitting the sky.

Under the watchful eyes of all, a pure white line of light suddenly pierced through the darkness, slicing through all the witch's constructed defenses, domains, and insect curses.

Arthur seemed to transform into the "Light Apostle," slashing into the Heart of the End with near time-ending speed!

The light blade plunged deep into the pulsing insect core, and the next moment—

The blade body quivered, high-frequency resonance!

The shock spread, all biological structures began to collapse!

"No, no... no!!!"

The Despairing Witch shrieked aloud!

It was unlike a human voice, more like a soul-wrenching wail.

As if some existence's spirit was being drawn out, shattered!

The shriek instantly turned into a soul sonic boom, dozens of Extraordinary Knights bled from their seven orifices, collapsing heavily, fainting and unconscious!

The originally indistinguishable god-like face, in despair, crumbled, liquefied, and shattered like a melting wax figure.

The entire giant insect body began to tremble, like a fragmented puppet...

"...why... how could this... fail..."

In the moment before the body collapsed, that twisted consciousness still madly questioned.

This calamity, I have plotted for four years!

I lurked, infected, laid out plans, turning the entire Northern Territory into a breeding ground...

Clearly, I calculated everything in advance!

But why...

Why was Edmond able to organize a complete defense in just two days!?

Why did the Imperial Capital's Dragon Blood Legion arrive so swiftly!?

Why did the Grand Mages from the Mage Forest appear here!?

And that damned...

Magic Explosion Bullet...

That extraordinary Magic Explosion Bullet, directly blasted through the shell of the nest!

Countless "whys" coiled in the depths of his thoughts like a viper, gnawing at his sanity.

"No... it shouldn't be like this..."

But the enormous Insect God body was rapidly appearing, internal organs collapsing, limbs breaking, spiritual tendrils twitching as if paralyzed.

Time was running out.

The "Heart of the End" beat violently one last time!

Then——Boom!!

It exploded completely under Arthur's light blade resonance!

Countless spores, insect blood, body parts, and white mist gushed out.

Time stood still for just a moment.

Then a distant, weak, yet deeply soul-penetrating baby wail echoed endlessly in everyone's ears.

Chapter 319: The End of the Nest

After the death of the Desperate Witch, the Doomsday Nest finally fell into complete madness.

The giant nest that once dominated the Northern Territory, as immovable as a god's body, let out a piercing wail after its core was severed, nearing death yet refusing to collapse.

Its final struggle began.

Flesh rolled like waves, and the corrupted meat walls suddenly closed, attempting to swallow all remaining intruders.

Countless remaining stitched monsters convulsed wildly, like puppets whose nerves had been cut, rampaging in a counterattack.

Even with torn body cavities and rotting brainstems, they still lunged at the nearest human, biting, clawing, and roaring with their broken bodies!

Spores storms rose from all directions, swirling with hot, highly toxic, and corrosive gases.

The Knights, violently vomiting, rolled and twitched on the ground, some raising shields for protection, yet even their Fighting Energy began to corrode!

The ground swelled, cavity walls burst, and the entire nest crashed into its inner structure like a mad beast.

The final madness, devoid of logic, aimed only to drag its enemies into the abyss together!

The ovary tore apart and spore fluid backwashed, erupting in blood columns dozens of meters high like volcanic eruptions;

Meat walls shattered and collapsed, like the shedding skin of a giant beast, torrents of blood mingled with bone fragments surged through the cavities.

And at the end of the collapsing tunnel, one figure remained kneeling, unwavering like a statue, majestic and solemn, the crimson battle armor silently burning amidst the fragmented light and dust mist.

Gaius Calvin.

To protect Arthur's Light's Track, he forcefully initiated the "Bloodline Talent: Undying Charge" four times!

Each charge was an act of self-destruction and burning.

Blood boiling, nerves tearing, and the sound of bone fracturing echoed within like thunder.

His eyes had long been as blood red as molten gold, eardrums ruptured, and blood flowed from nose and mouth, every part of his body screamed—yet he never retreated a single step.

He roared and laughed madly, using his flesh as a battering ram and shield, charging into the abyss four times.

And in the instant the fourth charge fell,

he saw with his own eyes the light, the moment Arthur cut down the Heart of the End.

He finally knelt down.

Not collapsing, but kneeling with the dignity of having fulfilled his mission.

The crimson heavy armor dimmed inch by inch, the Fighting Energy slowly settling into silence like an extinguished furnace.

His armor still faced forward, the direction Arthur rushed through, the hope he safeguarded.

The wind blew over the ruins of blood and spore fluid, reflecting his remnant silhouette.

But fate was not done with his last warmth.

"Guda..."

From within the Doomsday Nest, tentacles suddenly went berserk!

A nerve whip as thick as a stone pillar suddenly dropped from the sky-like cavity ceiling, carrying tons of weight, along with lethal spores and corrosive nerve pulses, slamming straight at Gaius's already motionless figure.

Arthur suddenly turned back.

At this moment, his pupils contracted sharply, having no time to think.

He almost forced his already exhausted Fighting Energy, acting on instinct to rush out of the flames and shockwaves, the Light Blade turning into a streaked shadow, pouncing toward Gaius!

[Bloodline Talent: Light Chasing Technique] initiated!

Every inch of his body burned, the speed of Fighting Energy breaking through limits, his body almost unable to withstand—

But he still blocked in front of Gaius!

"Boom!!!——"

The tentacle slammed heavily, shattering the ground, the splashing corrosive fluid fell like rain of fire.

With Fighting Energy depleted, defense incomplete, and the Light Blade not returned.

The tentacle, though slashed apart, had its corrosive spore toxin rush into Arthur's right arm through the wound!

"Ahhhhhhhh—!"

Within mere seconds, his right arm turned from flesh to charcoal ash.

The entire arm, along with the Light Blade, shattered and fell, leaving only a section of broken bone and armor dripping blood.

"My lord!" a Knight far away cried out.

Arthur did not respond, only hoisting Gaius to charge toward the exit.

Meanwhile, a figure appeared at the edge of the collapse.

Duke Edmund supported the broken shield with one hand, blood oozing from his mouth, dragging several survivors behind him.

"Don't stop... everyone, retreat!"

Boom! Another cavity wall fell, corpse water burst forth, and corrupt flesh collapsed like a mountain.

The tunnel had collapsed, time waited for no one.

"All personnel—evacuate!"

Edmund's roar echoed within the collapsing cavity, shaking dust from the rock walls.

Arthur, carrying Gaius, led the charge into the flesh tunnel that hadn't completely closed. The remaining survivors closely followed, stumbling through blood and spore mist, behind them the continuously collapsing, sinking, writhing hell!

They were fleeing.

No one fought anymore; they had long since reached their limits.

Someone lost a leg, being carried by comrades; someone, blind in one eye, still firmly supported a comrade forward; someone's lips were bitten through, throat whimpering, yet they refused to stop.

The living must exit for the deceased.

The interior of the nest collapsed, spore fluid waterfalls backflooded into the cavity, as if devouring the last war scars.

Duke Edmund stayed at the rear, singlehandedly supporting the last fragment of the wall, shouting hoarsely: "Hurry—go!!"

Finally, before the core of the nest collapsed completely, the last Knight fell out of that fleshy purgatory rolling.

The Broken Core Squad, 103 set out, only 42 returned.

They once were the Empire's proudest blade.

High-tiered extraordinaries, the most promising among noble Knights.

Many were the sole heirs of their families, sons of generals, all were cornerstones of the Empire's future.

Yet now, the majority of their names would forever remain on the path into the Doomsday Nest.

After everyone evacuated, the terrifying existence that once crushed the Northern Territory finally reached its end.

After the final madness, the Doomsday Nest finally collapsed.

Spores membrane shattered, cavity walls fell, control core shattered, central nerve severed, stitched monsters fell like puppets with strings cut, turning into corpse water and corruption.

The nest which once brimmed with strange vitality, was now a gutted corpse, overflowing with endless spore fluid, flesh debris, and a sea of blood.

Black fog receded, the earth trembled, storms echoed in the sky.

The entire Doomsday Nest, in flames and gravitational collapse, plummeted into the abyss of the Earth.

Like a fallen temple, submerged into the depths of history and oblivion.

And almost at the same moment...

Mother nests across the Northern Territory also collapsed.

In the mountains, beneath the glaciers, and deep in dead lakes, smaller nests emitted intense tremors and structural destruction echoes.

The insect corpses crawling densely over wastelands and city ruins froze abruptly.

It was as if they had lost their ruling will, toppling collectively in the next second, convulsing, rotting, and collapsing, turning into black spore fluid and foul sludge, flowing like an avalanche among the ruins.

No roars, no laments, the Insect Swarm, died just like that.

No transition, as if some indescribable central consciousness was extinguished, billions of alien species fell silent as one.

At the bottom of the collapsed Doomsday Nest, a group of black insect shells slowly surfaced.

It was a palm-sized insect host, like a soul's incubation pouch.

It had not died.

This was the Desperate Witch's last will, and this calamity quietly slid into the depths of the earth's cracks, escaping into the distance by instinct.

Once reaching a safe place, it remained motionless, wrapping itself like an infant sleeping in a womb.

Waiting for the next... hatch.

Chapter 320: After the War

On the third day after the battle ended, no trace of insects was visible a thousand miles north of Frost Halberd City.

All the nests seemed to wither, dissolve, and collapse overnight.

The black tide that once covered the mountains was like a beheaded creature, spasming uncontrollably a few times, and then falling eternally silent.

The surviving knights, fully armored and wearing gas masks, stepped into this death zone, each step accompanied by the sound of decaying flesh collapsing and spore slurry splattering.

The air was filled with a stench of blood and decay, as if the entire land was slowly rotting.

The Doomsday Nest was destroyed, and the giant shadow that once oppressed the world like a god finally fell amidst the flames.

And with its collapse went all the "will" controlling the insect swarm. Those monsters that once dominated the nightmares of the Northern Territory were now nothing but a puddle of sewage.

Though the war was over, bringing relief to everyone.

When they looked around at the burnt ruins, the collapsed cities, and the terrain eroded by insect eggs, people could not ignore the most brutal truth.

This war... was won, but the cost was terrifyingly high.

According to rough estimates, the Northern Territory's total population reduced by over four-fifths.

Millions of lives disappeared like tides within a few weeks, without even having their names etched on tombstones.

Dozens of once-prosperous towns became the breeding grounds of insect nests, littered with skeletons and broken walls.

Each of the ancient families in the Northern Territory was completely wiped out, with their bloodlines severed and flags no longer flying.

The terrain was no longer as it was; the cavities from the exploded nests formed new ravines, rivers changed course, plains rose, roads turned into wild forests, and fortresses sank into swamps.

The Northern Territory is no longer the Northern Territory it was yesterday.

The future reconstruction... is bound to be incredibly difficult.

The one most affected is undoubtedly Duke Edmund, Governor of the North, who exhausted everything in this war called "Doomsday."

It's not just his physical collapse but also the collapse of his political landscape.

The Northern Territory is his foundation.

But now, four-fifths of this land's population has become remnants, the nobility that once supported his ruling system is weak, towns have perished, knights have been severed.

Most of the vassals who once spoke eloquently in the council chamber have completely disappeared from the Empire's map after the disaster and are all listed as missing.

The defensive system he carefully set up for the Northern Territory is now virtually nonexistent.

The most critical crisis is his body; after the Doomsday battle, his internal organs were nearly half destroyed, and his Fighting Energy severely depleted.

Worse yet, his only heir is still inside Duchess Alina's belly.

An unborn child faces a future lacking protection.

If no opportunity arises, the Edmund Family, one of the Eight Great Clans since the founding of the Empire, may rapidly decline.

Without the duke, the Edmund Clan is just an empty shell for sale.

The impact of this war will change not just the structure of the Northern Territory but will undoubtedly affect the entire Empire's layout.

The Dragon Blood Legion, representing the sharpest will of the Empire, suffered a brutal toll in the Doomsday battle.

Commander Arthur lost an arm; although he can still fight, his combat capability has greatly diminished.

Vice Commander Gaius has exhausted his Fighting Energy and is in a coma, his fate uncertain.

Of the over a hundred top combatants under them, the elite from various major clans of the Empire, only forty-two returned after the war.

The major clans will not miss this opportunity to challenge the powerful Emperor.

The future of the Empire's core nobility circle is about to face turmoil.

And Louis, who made significant achievements in this war, is already at the center of this storm.

.....

The wind in Frost Halberd City still carries a chill and stench.

Arthur walked slowly wearing a black cloak, his right arm only a sleeve tightly wrapped in bandages.

"I'm leaving." His voice was as deep as usual, but there was an added warmth compared to before.

After a moment of silence, he spoke softly: "Gaius... will survive."

I will personally escort him to the Imperial Capital for the highest level of treatment. No matter the cost, we will make him wake up."

Then he paused, his gaze falling on Louis.

"And you. Your contributions in this battle, I will report them in full... personally to His Majesty."

At this, the usually taciturn man showed rare hesitation but finally spoke:

"You did well, your older brother is really proud of you. He... spoke to me about you, more than once."

Louis slightly lowered his head, seemingly concealing his emotions.

Then Arthur turned and left, taking the remnants of the Dragon Blood Legion back to the Imperial Capital.

.....

After bidding farewell to Arthur, Louis also had to leave Frost Halberd City, returning to Red Tide Territory, but first he had to say goodbye to Duke Edmund.

On the stone wall that had been washed by blood dozens of times, he saw Duke Edmund again.

He stood at the ruins of the city wall, his complexion as pale as snow, wearing the imperial-style black and gold cloak.

Louis knew that Duke Edmund's condition was very serious.

Not just the fatigue and aging that appeared on the surface, but the genuine pathological collapse torn from within.

The Daily Intelligence System had long since sent messages: He had forcefully overdrafted his heart before the battle with the Domsday Nest. Now, his Fighting Energy is turbulent, with internal injuries fiercely backfiring, sleepless nights, and pain like knives burning his lungs.

The Duke is still alive purely relying on willpower. If there weren't still too many things that needed him to hold up, he might have died two days ago.

Without any miraculous encounter... it seems unlikely he can hold on for a few more years.

Louis was extremely saddened; Duke was a significant figure standing behind him all along.

Without his support, trust, and resource distribution, his Red Tide Territory might not have developed so smoothly.

If someday, the Intelligence System discovers some miracle remedy, he will also send it to the Duke.

With these thoughts in mind, he arrived in front of the Duke.

"You've come." The Duke's voice remained as firm as iron and stone, despite that chest having long been battered.

He turned around, his tone seeming as if handling official duties, yet as if entrusting the only son.

"You've achieved great merit this time; the entire Northern Territory... owes you a debt."

"But you should go back. Return to Red Tide, and properly settle those who survived. The rewards due will soon arrive—His Majesty will personally issue the decree."

He lightly coughed, using a handkerchief to cover his mouth, as a trace of blood quietly seeped out.

"Also." He added in a lower voice, "If there are refugees, orphans... take in as many as you can. The Northern Territory is gone, but people shouldn't be without roots."

The wind carried the scent of blood.

Louis did not immediately reply, his gaze silently resting on the man who once dominated the Northern Territory.

This figure who once single-handedly suppressed the Northern Territory, severing rebellions, now appears incredibly frail under the setting sun.

"...Take care of Emily for me."

This instruction was more like a plea for guardianship than a command.

Louis gazed at him with a complex expression, a heaviness in his chest he had never felt before.

This shield, the most unyielding of the Empire, is quietly cracking.

"...I will do it." He nodded solemnly.

The Duke waved his hand as if issuing an order: "Go."

Louis turned and descended the city, his silhouette stretched long by the sunset.