

Winter 351

Chapter 351: Red Tide Type II Greenhouse (4)

The protein portion, mostly smoked fish, three thousand tons, is being prioritized for distribution due to preservation limitations. Salted meat is fifteen hundred. Auxiliary food supplies total five hundred tons, including pickled vegetables.

For emergency rations, there are one thousand tons of Snow Bone Wheat and three thousand tons of Frostbite Potatoes, which are newly harvested experimental grains mainly for emergency use.

Additionally, military hardtack and bread from the South total twenty-two hundred, with five hundred tons of honey and honey products, prioritized for the wounded and young children.

Only two hundred tons of dried medicinal herbs remain, which might be tight if winter epidemics recur."

After finishing, he added quietly, "The total food volume remains at over twenty thousand tons, stable for the short term, but if the cold snap extends... we still need the greenhouse to accelerate the second batch of production."

"Alright." Louis responded lightly, his gaze sweeping over the neatly stacked boxes of food, then looking towards the slowly closing warehouse door, his expression turning slightly solemn.

On the surface, he nodded approvingly, but inwardly he felt far from relieved.

Though the amount of food was indeed sufficient to maintain operations, facing the entire Red Tide Territory and its subordinate territories, totaling nearly ninety thousand people, these reserves were only enough to barely get through the winter, reducing fatalities.

If unexpected snowstorms, transportation delays, or outbreaks occurred, the situation would become tense immediately.

He knew there was no need to speak these thoughts aloud.

Bradley had already done his job, and what could change the situation was not anxiety, but the next steps in logistics and planting strategies.

At that moment, a porter dressed in coarse cloth, with a gaunt face and arms wrapped in rough burlap, saw Louis on his way to unload goods.

He suddenly knelt, his voice excited and trembling, "Lord, thank you... We, who became homeless, thought we would die this winter... Now we not only have food to eat, but work to do, and... dignity."

Louis glanced at him, said nothing, just nodded and gestured for him to rise.

The porter wiped his eyes, his face full of seriousness and hope.

Apart from the porter moved to kneel in gratitude, a number of workers and refugees gathered around.

Some bowed their heads in respect, some thanked with tears, and others simply stood still, solemnly watching their lord.

"Thank you, Lord Louis, really... thank you."

"We're willing to do twice as much work without complaining."

"As long as we can still eat a warm meal, we're not afraid of anything!"

Such voices rose one after another, making the atmosphere exceptionally fervent and sincere within just a few moments.

Facing this scene, Louis simply smiled and said softly, "The food is earned by your own labor, not from anyone's charity. Don't surround me, getting back to work early is more important than anything."

The crowd, as if kindling dry wood, responded in unison, "Yes, my lord!" "Understood, my lord!"

Full of energy, they returned to carrying and checking work, even the porter who had been kneeling stood up, eyes red, lifting food heavier than before.

Emily stood off to the side, silently watching, without speaking.

This was not a coincidental scene but the true daily life of the Red Tide Territory.

Just as Louis was about to lead his team to the next inspection point, the sound of urgent hoofbeats came from afar.

A Red Tide Knight, cloaked in wind and snow, arrived at a gallop, reining in at the warehouse door, dismounted quickly, and approached Louis to report quietly by his ear.

Louis was slightly taken aback, then his brows lifted gently, a hint of unexpected joy appearing in his eyes.

"People from the Mage Forest? They've finally arrived?" he muttered to himself, unable to conceal a trace of delight in his tone.

Then he turned to the crowd, "We won't go to the next point first, let's return to the castle once."

Emily glanced at him curiously but asked nothing, merely nodded silently.

The group then organized, braving the cold winds, and retraced their steps toward Red Tide Castle.

Chapter 352: Mage Test

Red Tide Castle, within the main building's third-floor conference hall.

The brazier burned brightly, driving away the chill brought by the early snow outside.

Several mages wearing gray-blue cloaks were seated around the round table, sipping tea and engaging in a hushed conversation.

A few aged yet vigorous faces mixed with a few young, composed accompanying apprentices, exuding an undeniable demeanor.

Beside the main seat, an elderly man with gray hair, gentle eyes, and a somewhat rounded figure was taking out a clean handkerchief to wipe the crystal lens on his nose.

It was the Grand Mage leading this team—Herman Elwood.

Upon seeing Louis and his group enter, he immediately stood up and warmly greeted them.

"Ahhh... Is this the Louis everyone in the Mage Forest has been talking about for a year? Even younger than I imagined."

Louis gave a half-bow, speaking with neither arrogance nor servility: "Welcome to our distant realm, Red Tide Territory might be lacking in conditions, please forgive any shortcomings in our hospitality."

"Lacking?" Herman lightly patted the table, his smile bringing crinkles to the corners of his eyes, "I've come across many disaster-stricken territories on my way here, some in ruins, some barely sustained, compared to these wastelands, this place is literally heaven!"

After the pleasantries, the atmosphere slightly settled as Herman took a sip of tea and changed the subject.

"Although the Doomsday Nest has been completely destroyed by you, but..." he took out a parchment map from his pocket and spread it on the table, "We still cannot confirm if the ecosystem of these insect corpses has truly 'died'."

The map depicted a series of broken insect remains and record patterns of demon patterns.

Herman's expression also became more solemn: "In the samples I brought back, I discovered a peculiar magic energy corrosion crystal. On the surface, it seems like residual magic power, but it's more like a fragment of 'spore consciousness'... like a dead brain trying to move again."

He sighed lightly, saying, "We have no choice but to suspect whether what's left in the Doomsday Nest might still contain the possibility of a 'resurgence mechanism,' even if it's just partial, it's enough to create a new disaster."

"So you came personally?"

Herman nodded: "Yes, the Supreme Mage is concerned..."

He paused, then smiled again, "Of course, we're not just here to inspect the insects... A few months ago you submitted an application to the Mage Forest. But seeing the situation in Red Tide, I guess you won't have a few months to go to our headquarters for testing, right?"

Louis nodded and asked, "The mage test... does it require going to a special training ground? I remember there's open space at the northern training ground, at least it's safer."

Herman grinned: "No trouble necessary, we have specifically prepared some small tools, testing here is just fine."

Several accompanying mages placed wooden boxes in the center of the hall one by one, unlocking them with a few clicks.

Inside the boxes were several tools emitting faint magical power fluctuations, simple in structure.

Emily stood to the side, her eyes fixed on Louis, with a look of "What surprises do you have that I don't know about?"

Then her gaze followed the unpacking of those items, carrying a thread of tense anticipation.

"We will conduct three tests," Herman said, pointing to the items in the boxes.

Louis nodded, a quiet intensity passing through his naturally calm eyes.

Finally reaching this step.

He glanced at the mages, with some young faces looking uneasy, a gaze mixed with scrutiny and anticipation.

Emily stood at the edge of the hall, seemingly nervous for him, yet also... quietly proud.

He quietly spoke, "Let's begin."

The atmosphere in the conference hall quieted, even the crackling of the fireplace seemed quieter.

Herman took out a small transparent funnel from the test box and handed it to Louis.

"Here, this is the first test tool we use for a Magic Apprentice." He explained with a smile, "Siphon Sand Leak, mages call it the 'Bottle of Patience.' If the magic power is too strong it'll explode, too weak it'll not flow, to stabilize it, you need to guide it as if pulling water through a silk thread."

Louis looked down at the tool.

The sand leak was crystal clear throughout, with tiny gray-white sand grains suspended inside, as if frozen in time.

The surface of the funnel was engraved with pale blue magical patterns, quietly emitting a faint cold light in his palm.

He flicked his fingers, causing the sands to tremble slightly, then deeply inhaled to slowly channel his magic power.

The next moment, the siphon sand leak trembled gently, the static sand grains seemed to awaken and began to slowly spin, floating in the air, as if waiting for the owner's guidance.

Louis concentrated his magic power on his fingertips, gently guiding, as if strumming an extremely fine string.

The first thread of sand flow slowly descended, falling into the glass chamber below.

The air seemed to freeze for an instant.

Everyone's gaze focused on his hands.

The small sand leak, the almost imperceptibly fine sand line, and the unwavering gesture.

Louis's expression was focused, sweat faintly seeping from his temples, as if concentrating on controlling every grain of sand.

Yet, only he himself knew, this was merely the tip of the iceberg of his magic power control.

He even deliberately created a slight ripple midway.

The sand flow suddenly paused, then stabilized again, as if "barely salvaged."

Several young mages gasped, one whispered, "He... hasn't learned the Meditation Technique, has he? How is his control so steady?"

"Such stability, even an apprentice who has stayed in the academy for three years might not be able to achieve it."

"And he's not even using a spell."

Chapter 353: Mage Test 2

Herman squinted slightly, stroking his gray-white beard and nodding gently: "Very good, very good. A rare talent among wild mages."

Emily stood aside, staring at Louis with bright eyes.

When the last grain of sand fell to the bottom of the bottle, the siphon hourglass emitted a crisp "ding" sound, as if announcing the end of this test.

Herman chuckled as he took the instrument, carefully putting it away, teasingly said: "Kid, when it comes to talent, you're set."

Herman chuckled as he took the siphon hourglass, carefully stowing it back into the testing box, moving slowly like his aged appearance, yet with great respect for the tool.

He stroked his beard, a smile on his face: "Kid, your control of magic power is quite good. Not on the orthodox path, yet steadier than many mage apprentices."

His tone was relaxed, with a hint of appreciation, as if probing.

Louis just smiled slightly, whispering: "Perhaps it's because I fiddled around a lot as a child and accidentally grasped some tricks."

He spoke modestly, in a gentle tone, neither hurried nor impatient, showing not a trace of arrogance.

"Control is one thing, but we'll have to see if you have explosive force." Herman continued smiling, raising his hand with a wave, "Come on, let's prepare for the second round."

He then received a gray-black round stone from an accompanying mage, palm-sized, with a rough surface, faintly visible silvery white veins winding through like cracks.

"The second round tests magical burst strength." He placed the stone on the table, tapping it lightly, "Shale Explosion, it will explode if you use overheated magic power to impact its internal structure. Of course, this requires a lot of magic; if your magic is insufficient, you simply can't ignite it."

With that, he made an eye gesture to the mages behind.

Two young mages jogged forward, skillfully setting up a protective barrier around and marking out a safe distance with red rope, even politely advising Emily to step back a few paces.

Louis looked at the shale, exhaling gently and stepping forward.

He raised his right hand, five fingers slightly spread, in the palm, a small flame-red light quietly gathered.

From an outsider's view, it was a slow, laborious gathering of magical power, even fluctuating unsteadily multiple times due to inexperience.

But only Louis himself knew he was suppressing the magic power that almost instinctively surged forth, restraining it to less than one-fifth of its potential.

The flame slowly took shape, not large, but incredibly intense.

He steadied his steps, concentrated his focus, and hurled the fire at the silver-white crack in the center of the shale.

"Boom!!!"

It was like a thunderclap exploded.

The shale abruptly expanded, blasting apart instantly.

Black smoke surged out, and a searing blast of air rushed outward in all directions.

"Seal Technique!" Herman reacted quickly, with a flick of his sleeve a silver-blue light shield formed in midair, perfectly covering the splattering fragments and heat waves.

Even so, some smoke still spread, permeating the hall, as the air filled with the scent of sulphur and charred coal.

"Cough... cough."

Louis retreated a step, shielding himself awkwardly from the smoke and dust, then lowered his head to catch his breath, his expression perfectly composed.

He did not seem exhausted, yet certainly not at ease, like a novice mage who had pushed his strength to the limit, even he admired his own acting skills.

But the mages present were even more shocked.

"Wasn't that explosion... too fast? The heat focusing process was almost indiscernible..."

"He didn't use any auxiliary techniques or spell guidance... how did he hit the critical point so quickly?"

"The fire directly hit the crack... was that instinct?"

Herman pondered for a moment, lightly tapping his magic staff with his fingers, eyes filled with undeniable admiration.

"High fire element affinity, burst strength akin to a bronze level." He paused, adding with a smile, "And extremely accurate judgment, able to find the rupture point at a glance. Quite gifted."

As the shale's smoke gradually dissipated, the guards cleaned the site, and the mages stood ready once more.

Herman smoothed his somewhat disheveled beard, smiling as he said: "The third round is quite simple, no apparatus needed."

He looked at Louis, speaking casually: "Feel free to cast a few of your best spells, let us observe your fluency. Whether it's Illumination Spell, Wind Blade Technique, or Fireball Technique... pick your favorite."

"Remember to keep it coherent and natural, no need to be too restrained, just relax."

Louis nodded, raising his right hand, caressing his palm gently as he murmured: "Illumination Spell."

A gentle light orb rose from between his fingers, like a lantern, hovering midair, emitting stable and warm radiance.

The glow was not glaring but outlined his figure clearly, like some sort of prelude to a performance on stage.

Next, with a wave of his left hand, the light orb was suddenly whisked away by the wind.

A wind blade swished from beside his palm, slicing through the thin mist in the air, emitting a clear wind-tearing sound.

He moved lightly, hands flipping, from his fingertips leapt a group of firelight—Fireball Technique.

The fireball expanded swiftly in the air, precisely compressed to fist-size, spinning, rolling, darting, seemingly alive with vitality.

He spun it at his fingertips for a moment before flicking it out with a snap.

The fireball traced a beautiful arc in the air, landing lightly and extinguishing silently without a spark.

He smiled slightly, retracting his hand, standing with steady breath, as if he had just casually performed a stretching exercise.

At that moment, the council hall was silent.

A few young mages had their mouths slightly open, seemingly forgetting to close them.

"...He's casting entirely by instinct without using standard spells or gathering magic patterns for guidance?"

Chapter 354: Mage Test 3

"Too skillful, isn't it? The light spell doesn't flicker, the wind blade doesn't veer off, the fireball doesn't explode... This can't just be of a 'basic magic' level."

"His movements... it's like an instinctive release that you comprehend in battle, completely unlike the traces of systematic education from the academy."

Herman was also taken aback, then laughed heartily, leaning on his magic staff as he took a few steps closer:

"You, youngster, are truly extraordinarily talented? You're using it so steadily just by intuition... This isn't talent, it's innate understanding."

He paused for a moment, clicking his tongue: "It's like... a genius awakened by wild instinct."

Emily stood at the edge of the field, her eyes almost sparkling with light: "This man is simply omnipotent..."

Yet Louis merely smiled lightly, seemingly indifferent about the showcase he just displayed.

Herman patted his shoulder and half-jokingly said: "Why don't you skip the assessment and just join us as a lecturer in the Mage Forest?"

Louis smiled gently: "When I was young, I encountered an... aged wild mage in my family. He saw my talent and taught me some basic things."

No one knew that the so-called "basic guidance" was actually the last legacy of the deceased Legendary Mage Loken.

At this moment, he just wanted to acquire a pass, allowing him to legally use magic and obtain other magical materials.

He did not need to be overly dazzling.

Just need to be astonishing enough, reasonable enough to "pass exceptionally."

If he truly displayed all his strength, the mages present today might be terrified and report to their superiors: "A monster has appeared here."

When the residual light of the final spell slowly faded in the air, Herman softly applauded, and the surrounding mages nodded in approval.

This was not mere ceremonial applause, but true recognition of an unshaped genius.

Herman, leaning on his magic staff, stepped forward and announced with a smile:

"Louis Calvin, you have exceptionally passed the Mage Forest's basic entry test. From this day forth, you are granted the title 'Iron Mask Mage.'"

With that, he retrieved a deep gray mask from his robe sleeve, simple in design, adorned with the silver-white demon pattern symbolizing the Mage Forest.

"This is a magic mask, symbolizing your official recognition by the Mage Forest, though you're still at the initial tier."

He waved and a young mage approached, presenting a small scroll edged with gold and a black-covered pocket booklet.

"This is a pass personally signed by the Supreme Mage, allowing you access to some of the Mage Forest's established stations across various regions."

"Moreover," Herman added, "considering you are in the Northern Territory and can't visit the Mage Forest headquarters in the short term, we've already prepared a batch of initial-tier magic books for your study and usage."

An accompanying mage opened a book box at the side, inside neatly arranged several heavily-bound magic books with spell patterns on the covers.

Louis took the mage mask, and at the moment his fingertips touched the metal, there was no profound joy in his heart, but rather an indescribable sense of distance.

This thing is burdened not only with weight but with rules, recognition, and a certain external order's constraints.

Of course, he understood what this symbolized, a legal magical identity, the preliminary recognition by the Mage Forest, a path towards more knowledge and magical resources.

But he knew in his heart, that path would not change his goals, nor dictate his heights.

He reached this step not by others' benevolence but by his own calculations and resolutions, along with his own trump card.

Yet Louis wouldn't show this sense of detachment.

He lifted his gaze, eyes steady, his tone appropriately expressing the gratitude and decorum expected of a young lord:

"Thank you, Lord Herman. I understand, this mask is not only recognition but also trust in me. If you encounter any difficulties in the Northern Territory, I will wholeheartedly devote my efforts as a member of Mage Forest."

This statement contained not a hint of humility, yet carried a sense of propriety.

Herman, hearing this, smiled lightly, a hint of appreciation flashing in his eyes.

He patted Louis on the shoulder: "This is only the most basic entry identity. If you wish to advance to a formal mage, whether bronze pattern, silver pattern, gold pattern...

You will have to personally visit our Mage Forest's core zone, undergo formal trials and contracts. After all, most of the high tier materials cannot be lent out, that's the rule.

But this winter we all have to stay a while in the Red Tide Territory, winter is not a suitable time for mages to travel in the Northern Territory. If you have any questions, feel free to come to our temporary station to inquire. My door is always open for you."

Louis carefully stored the mask and solemnly bowed to Herman: "Thank you, Lord Herman, after this period, I will definitely visit the Mage Forest personally."

Chapter 355: Letter from the Imperial Capital

The wind and snow raged outside, and the sky above Frost Halberd City was as gray as a pot of thick molten iron.

Inside the office of the Northern Governor's Mansion, the fire in the fireplace was weak, unable to suppress the bone-chilling cold.

Duke Edmund, draped in a black military cloak, stood in front of a wooden table, his brows furrowed, staring at the open map.

Frost Halberd City, in the center of the map, used to be the pride of the Northern Territory. Now, it was like a festering sore pinned on paper, too painful to look at directly.

"It cannot remain."

His gaze slowly drifted away, landing on other potential new city sites on the map, but none were completely suitable.

"Corpses, poisonous fog, necrotic remnants... as long as the remnants from the Nest are not cleared, Frost Halberd City cannot be inhabited."

However, the outside cold wave had already arrived, heavy snow blocking the roads. Rashly relocating the city was equivalent to courting disaster; they could only temporarily hold on here to survive the winter.

Edmund's knuckles pressed against the table, pondering for a long while, his brows never relaxing.

Just then, a knock broke the dead silence: "Knock, knock."

A low yet tense voice came from the old butler outside the door: "My Lord, an urgent letter from the Imperial Capital."

Edmund was slightly startled and raised his head.

"Bring it in," he said in a deep voice.

The butler respectfully entered, handing over a parchment letter sealed with a golden dragon crest.

The wax seal was exceptionally striking; it wasn't the Emperor's personal insignia but the exclusive emblem of the "Dragon Throne Meeting."

Edmund took the letter, slightly frowning, a sense of unease rising involuntarily.

He had long known that this letter would eventually come and the general content of the meeting that concerned his fate.

But until he actually opened the envelope, he couldn't calm his heart.

He silently cut the wax seal, unfolded the parchment, and neat, cold handwriting came into view line by line:

In light of the extreme disaster situation caused by the rampant insect plague in the Northern Territory, partial defensive lines have been lost and regional order severely damaged. However, the Governor's Office has made great efforts to coordinate disaster relief and restore order. Therefore, by His Majesty the Emperor's approval, the Dragon Throne Meeting has resolved as follows:

It is confirmed that Duke Edmund's organization and coordination during this disaster have been effective. He shall retain the title of "Governor of the Northern Territory" and be appointed as the "Chief Officer of Post-Disaster Reconstruction," overseeing the comprehensive reconstruction affairs of the Northern Territory region.

The Imperial Oversight Department will send three departments to the Northern Territory to integrate into the financial, military, and civil governance systems, exercising direct imperial audit and supervision authority.

The "Northern Expansion Plan" is to commence immediately, selecting lineal descendants from the Imperial Capital and nobility to migrate gradually, assisting in the reconstruction and optimizing the power structure.

His Highness, the Sixth Prince Astha August, shall personally establish royal territory in the Northern Territory, representing His Majesty overseeing the reconstruction and fulfilling the role of royal authority in the North.

The reconstruction meeting shall have thirteen seats, with eight seats fully nominated and allocated by the Chief Officer of the Reconstruction Headquarters, assisting in restoring Northern administrative affairs and executing reconstruction plans.

The stamp at the end of the letter is the joint resolution seal of the Dragon Throne Meeting, without the Emperor's personal signature, but it already equates to an imperial decree.

Edmund finished reading, and his fingertips silently tightened for a moment.

Then, he slowly exhaled.

"...We've retained it."

His first reaction was mild relief—Frost Halberd City wasn't directly taken over by the Imperial Capital.

Instead, they chose to give him the appearance of honor and leadership under the guise of "upgrading to the Reconstruction Office."

This was already the best outcome.

Even if he understood that this so-called "good" was essentially compromise, hanging by a thread, maintaining a veneer of dignity on a knife's edge.

He placed the letter down, his gaze heavily falling back onto the map, recalling the letter's content, his brows furrowing once more.

"...The Northern Expansion Plan, the three oversight departments, the Sixth Prince setting up territory." Edmund's eyes turned sharply cold, "Indeed, the Emperor isn't sparing me. He's steadily replacing the blood."

He quickly laid out the logic in his mind:

The three oversight departments meant that financial and military aspects would be fully monitored, and he would no longer have independent control.

The expansion plan involved introducing major noble lineages to the Northern Territory, under the guise of "joint reconstruction," but in reality, it was to seize territory and restructure the power dynamic.

The Sixth Prince's personal arrival meant that the royal envoy was not just a titular noble but the Emperor's progeny, effectively driving in the wedge of royal intervention.

This was a gradual, yet thorough, takeover.

On the surface, the Northern Governor's Office would remain, but in reality, it no longer belonged to the Edmund family.

"The knife is already pressed against the throat; it just hasn't cut down yet."

Edmund stared at the letter sealed with the Dragon Throne Meeting's emblem, pondering deeply.

Although the Empire's blade was poised at the Northern Territory's throat, there was still leeway.

The Post-Disaster Reconstruction Headquarters was still under his leadership.

The reconstruction meeting, shared by northern and southern nobility, had thirteen seats, eight of which he had absolute authority to allocate.

At least that's something he could hold in his grasp.

He gently tapped on the Northern Territory map on the table, various candidates quickly crossing his mind, and the first name that emerged was without suspense.

Louis Calvin.

Snow Peak County, the only entire territory preserved in this catastrophe, not only survived itself but also supported the Governor's Office at the most critical time.

Louis held a complete army, with a foundation among the populace.

More importantly, after this battle, he has been tacitly recognized by the commoners and the remaining nobles of the Northern Territory as a trustworthy strongman.

He had the capacity to quickly integrate new nobles with local surviving forces, and the qualification to sincerely mobilize public support.

Most importantly, he was his son-in-law.

Edmund closed his eyes for a moment and showed a faint, bitter smile.

This wasn't purely for familial benefits but the Northern Territory's only rational choice at the moment.

Moreover, the Calvin Clan had indeed advocated for him in the Imperial Capital meeting.

This favor had to be returned.

"The first seat, give it to him," Edmund quietly said to himself.

As for the other candidates, several noble families had survived in territories farther from Frost Halberd City.

However, their strength had significantly diminished; family heirs were killed in battle, private armies reduced, and many noble houses even had their lineages severed.

After this battle, the Northern Territory's risk-resilience capability drastically fell. Winter hadn't ended yet, and no one knew how many would remain after enduring the extreme cold.

At this thought, his temples began to throb, the buzzing in his mind like a copper bell struck by frost and snow, low and hoarse.

Since the great war, his internal injuries had never healed.

The doctor had implicitly told him that perhaps... perhaps, he really didn't have many good years left.

He might not live to see the day when the Northern Territory returns to peace.

Suddenly, there was a gentle knock on the door outside.

Footsteps, familiar, light, with a hint of breathing.

Without needing a report, Edmund already knew who it was.

The door slowly opened, revealing Alina with her heavily pregnant belly, carrying a steaming bowl of medicinal soup, gently saying, "You're disobedient again; the doctor said you shouldn't be too exhausted."

Edmund softened the weariness in his brows, offering a relaxed smile as he took the bowl, "Don't worry, everything will be fine."

The soup was bitter, yet it carried a trace of warmth.

He looked down at Alina's rounded belly, where their child was growing, perhaps his only hope for the future.

But the ruins of the Northern Territory, the Northern tribes, the Emperor's schemes, and this newly begun storm of reconstruction...

He didn't know what kind of era this child would be born into.

"How long can the Northern Territory endure?" he silently sighed in his heart.

Chapter 356: In the Winter Cold

Outside the window, snowflakes danced as icy winds howled; the Northern Territory had fully entered the coldest time of the year.

Snow and wind swirled around the high windows of the Red Tide Earth Tower, forming layers of white frost.

The streets were deserted, with only knights draped in crimson cloaks patrolling through the wind and snow, their fighting energy surging into a cold-defying red glow.

In the distance, a Fire-backed Turtle was held in place while sleeping, its shell's furnace spewing steam, struggling to carve out a pocket of warmth amidst the blizzard.

This was winter in the Northern Territory, colder than enemies, more ruthless than battlefields.

Yet inside Red Tide Castle's inner hall, the temperature was akin to spring.

Within the thick stone walls, geothermal pipes installed years ago were still operational.

The warmth flowed across the castle floor; insulating fabrics hung on the walls, and the grey-red furnace copper emitted a faint glow.

The teapot on the conference table exuded hot mist, the tea's aroma mixed with the subtle bitterness of frost leaf herbs.

In the center of the room, Louis was silently seated at the head position, draped in a regulation black cloak, with his elbows on the table, staring intently at a stack of densely packed reports, his brow furrowed.

Medical casualty statistics, frostbite conditions among refugees, hot soup station operating records, frost leaf herb inventory balance...

His expression was heavy, without a word spoken.

As he contemplated the medical report, a sudden quick patter of footsteps came from outside the door.

Emily entered swiftly, wrapped in a thick cloak, a rare uncontrollable smile on her face, and a rare glint of winter light in her eyes.

"Louis!" she said quickly while removing her gloves, "Good news! Just arrived, Lady Irina has given birth safely! I have a new brother!"

She stood in front of the table, white breath puffing out, eyes filled with joy.

Louis lifted his head, his gaze paused slightly, yet there wasn't much surprise.

Given Ailina's constitution and the scale of physicians at Frost Halberd City, a smooth delivery was only a matter of time.

But he didn't dampen Emily's mood.

"Is that so?" He smiled lightly and nodded, "Then you must congratulate your father."

After speaking, he set down the report in his hand, his tone softening, "Once winter is over, we can go visit them."

Emily's eyes filled with even more laughter, like a warm lamp lighting up a snowy night.

"I knew you'd say that." She sat next to him quickly, her eyes skimming over the dense files on the table, her smile receding slightly, "But looking at your expression... are you shouldering troubles again without telling me?"

Louis didn't immediately answer, merely picking up his teacup, blowing away the foam, and taking a sip of the slightly bitter warm tea.

"Just a little winter trouble." He replied softly, his tone calm.

Emily randomly picked up a folded paper from the table, quickly leafing through it, her fingers moving between paragraphs.

The warm look on her face quickly faded.

"... Frostbite patients have exceeded three thousand, varying severity; influenza is spreading, with four hundred thirty-two suspected pneumonia cases, sixty-two confirmed; death toll... yesterday's count was one hundred and seven."

She quietly closed the paper.

The cold wind outside brushed past, causing the windows to tremble slightly.

Emily didn't utter words of consolation like "It's already very good."

She, of course, knew that for the Northern Territory, these figures were almost miraculous.

In other territories, where resources were scarce, lords abandoned their posts, and subjects were left to fend for themselves, tens of thousands dying were often not even recorded.

She had seen firsthand in other places, refugees frozen to death by the roadside, their bodies unburied, piled in the snow, subject to the mercy of wind and rain.

But she knew better that Louis was not comparing himself to others.

What he cared about was never "doing better than others," but "why can't I save more people."

After a moment of silence, Emily moved by his side, gently closing the report, her voice soft yet firm: "Since it's a little trouble, we'll solve it together."

Louis turned to look at her, a layer of heaviness in his eyes seemed to lift slightly.

He didn't say thank you, nor did he exchange pleasantries, just nodded, a faint yet genuine smile appearing on his lips.

"Hmm." He responded.

He liked this about Emily, no nonsense, no pretense, no sweet talk, nor afraid to face the harshness of reality.

The two stood side by side in front of the conference table, facing the map and the lists, reorganizing a response directive for the winter crisis.

...

This winter arrived earlier, fiercer, and more unreasonable than in previous years.

Outside the Red Tide Territory, snow and wind cascaded from the sky like a raging tide, incessantly day and night.

In the refugee area outside the residential zone, the temperature had plummeted below minus twenty degrees, permafrost cracking into ice patterns, even horse hooves emitted crisp sounds upon impact.

Though no longer were there crude tents exposed, the communal half-underground shelters still appeared oppressive and heavy.

These were winter shelters hurriedly constructed by the craftsmen of the Red Tide Territory before the initial snowfall.

Built with compacted permafrost and stones to form sunken walls, roofs covered with charcoal ash and grass mats, ensuring a certain temperature.

They weren't cozy homes, but in this snow-devoured Northern Territory, they were already a miracle.

People relied on geothermal heat, sleeping pressed together, sharing blankets, exchanging body warmth and the hope to survive.

The interiors were crowded, often mixed with the scent of sweat, but it was better than freezing to death in the wind.

Yet even so, when the cold truly descended, all preparations seemed insignificant.

On the coldest few nights, temperatures plummeted to below minus twenty degrees, wind and snow seeped through the exhaust gaps, condensing frost and the cold penetrating to the bone.

Chapter 357: In the Winter Cold (Part 2)

Some children, even when wrapped in their mother's embrace, woke up in the morning with purple lips and stiff limbs.

At the edge of the Red Residence District, the fixed Fire-backed Turtle furnace stood firmly, with the sound of bubbling steam surging from under its heavy iron shell.

Several heat-gathering rings were embedded in the top of the turtle shell, dispersing heat flow to the ground day and night to ensure that the surrounding buildings wouldn't be frozen.

Even such a meticulous heating system was only enough to cover the core of the city and a limited number of communal houses.

In some of the resettlement areas farthest from the Fire-backed Turtle, the extreme cold finally started reaping lives.

It chose the most vulnerable—the frail elderly, the weak-lunged children, and the malnourished workers.

The first to fall was a mason in his sixties, who suffered sudden chest tightness while inspecting water pipes on a cold night and never woke up again.

Soon after, frostbite, necrosis, pneumonia... like a silent poisonous mist, pierced through cracks in stones and cotton quilts, sweeping across them.

The winter nights of the Red Tide had never been this heavy.

Lights shone brightly at the Red Tide medical station, packed with frostbite patients and weeping mothers inside.

Rough cloth garments were already soaked, and the children curled up in their arms, hands and feet turning blue.

Some children were on the brink of death as soon as they arrived, lips blackened, their chests barely rising and falling.

"Can he still be saved?"

"My little one has had a high fever for three days now, can he hold on?"

"I beg you, sir... can you give her some herbs?"

These voices, mingled with coughs and moans, seemed to weigh down on every healer's heart.

On the other side of the corridor, several bodies hurriedly wrapped in coarse fabric mats were carried out.

Thin children, bent-over elderly, and even some mothers dying next to their children, still clutching the little bodies with no breath in their arms.

Worse was the acute hypothermia pneumonia outbreak.

In one night, multiple refugee camps experienced mass high fevers and breathing difficulties, with as few as three to five dying, and as many as entire camps falling ill.

The medicines were far from enough, and the Red Rock Warehouse was depleted by more than half in a short period.

It was at this moment that the great Lord Louis's command swiftly reached, stopping this trap of death.

"Move the standby Fire-backed Turtle to the refugee camp's shelter and fill it with lava moss fuel, keeping it running all day." When his fingers dropped, it was as if a blade cutting through snow.

Hot cycle medical rooms centered on the Fire-backed Turtle immediately activated, with the help of lava moss as fuel, maintaining room temperatures at fifteen degrees above zero, becoming one of the warmest places in the Northern Territory.

But resources were limited and had to be rotated.

He ordered, "Each person can rotate in once a day, prioritizing sick children, craftsmen, transport soldiers, and mothers with newborns. No one is allowed to seize spots by force."

Meanwhile, the workshops in the Red Tide Territory remained lit throughout the night.

Mike led the craftsmen in the emergency development of the seventh-generation cold-proof cloak, using frost-beast skin mixed with refined cotton, with the outer layer coated in thermal oil.

The cloak hem also had small steam bag interfaces sewn in, which could connect to personal heaters.

Critically, this batch of cloaks was sewn by the refugees themselves.

"Work-for-relief, whoever does more will have their children wear it first."

Those mothers, who had already despaired, threw themselves into cutting and sewing with red eyes, no longer just waiting to die as refugees.

Within half a month, twenty thousand cloaks were dispatched to various shelters in batches. Each was seen as the continuation of life.

On the medical front, the medical support team led by Emily was also fully mobilized.

Pharmacists processed all the Frost Leaf Vines into highly effective soothing agents specifically for those with pneumonia and high fever.

The Red Rock Warehouse's herbal depot was also completely opened, releasing precious herbs that had been stockpiled for a long time.

"As long as we can survive, give them everything." This was the first thing Emily said to the pharmacists.

In the city square, a 'fire soup station' was quickly set up, operated with the assistance of the Red Tide Army, supplying pickled vegetable stews and bone soup day and night, ensuring everyone could drink at least a bowl of hot soup a day.

...

Noon was eleven years old this year.

When the insect plague arrived, he was still out in the village ditches catching a rabbit—that was his promise to his younger brother; catch a rabbit, and he'd make him a hot meat soup.

But when he got home, the entire street was gone.

The carcasses of insects had engulfed everything.

He didn't even have the chance to cry, he could only drag his brother and hide in the forest. Luckily, those insect carcasses didn't find them and were finally saved by the knights of the Red Tide Territory.

After arriving at the Red Tide Territory, someone assigned him work.

He was placed in the construction group, following a team led by an old craftsman named Cole, moving bricks, erecting wood, and building walls.

These heavy tasks were too much for an eleven-year-old child, but compared to freezing to death in the snow, or starving to death, he already felt very fortunate.

There was food here, bedding, and occasionally even soup with minced meat.

He thought life was finally going to get better.

But the real winter still came.

In one night, his brother's fever wouldn't go down, curled up in a tattered blanket shivering uncontrollably.

Noon panicked, carried him to the medical station, and waited in line all day before they were let in.

In less than two days, he too fell ill.

Body burning, teeth chattering, feeling light as if he might drift away at any moment.

He heard Cole sigh, "Alas, what a pity... come this far, yet couldn't pull through."

He wanted to retort, but didn't even have the strength to open his eyes.

Then, that day came.

He heard the rumbling sound, the sound of the Fire-backed Turtle operating, the heavy iron shell exuding scorching heat waves.

The originally cold medical station began to warm, one steam pipe after another connecting, with small stoves burning black fuel installed by each bedside.

Noon didn't shiver in the cold night for the first time, but instead slept deeply.

Chapter 358: In the Heart of Winter (Part 3)

He didn't know what was burning in those stoves, only that they saved his and his brother's lives.

On that day, an "angel" he would never forget in his lifetime, and a genuine "sun" came to the ward.

The wind and snow were blocked outside, leaving only the gentle sound of the stove inside.

The moment the door opened, it was as if light and warmth surged in simultaneously.

Leading the way was a girl in a white cloak, holding bundles of thick blankets, her blue hair like a river under the night sky.

Her eyes were gentle, yet they seemed like the only light in the snowy night.

She was Miss Emily.

Beside her, a young man in a black cloak entered the ward.

He didn't speak, just nodded slightly to signal the soldiers behind him to bring in a large box of medicine and a new fire-backed stove.

This was the Red Tide Lord, Louis.

Two nobles walked shoulder to shoulder into this room filled with the smell of mold and blood, without a hint of hesitation or disdain.

They were not figures in dreams, nor were they standing atop a high tower looking down on their fate; they personally stepped into their despair.

Emily knelt down, walked past each sickbed, and personally covered the children with blankets.

She asked softly, "Are you cold?" "Hang on a bit longer, you'll be better soon."

Every word was not loud, yet like a flame that could pierce through wind and snow, gentle and real.

And Louis also stood between the sickbeds, not looking down from above, but rolling up his sleeves, manually unscrewing medicine bottles, and bending down to check the stove's temperature, carefully confirming each corner met the standard.

His expression remained calm, yet it wasn't the cold indifference seen in the eyes of nobility.

When he reached a little girl trembling from a high fever, seeing the instinctive fear in her eyes, he merely bent down slightly and said softly, "Don't be afraid, I'm here."

His tone was gentle, voice not high, yet it coaxed the girl to unconsciously reach out her small hand and tightly hold his fingertip.

He didn't pull back, simply squatted naturally, sitting with her for a moment.

When it was Noon's turn, Emily knelt down and covered him with a blanket that was new, carrying a scalding warmth and the scent of herbs.

Someone whispered in his ear, "She is Miss Emily, the mistress of the Red Tide."

In an instant, he remembered his mother's face and recalled his brother's hand gripping his sleeve tightly during a fever...

But now, someone held onto him.

Not a god, nor a legend, but a smiling, kneeling, personally delivering medicine and blankets big sister.

She had no wings, yet was brighter than any holy icon under a snowy night.

Emily patted his hand and smiled, saying, "Hold on until spring, you'll get better."

Noon opened his mouth, but could not utter a single word; he just tightly held onto the blanket's corner as if it wasn't just a piece of cloth, but a ray of light that could pull him from the dark night.

He choked up, gazing at Emily, and also at Louis not far standing beside her.

At that moment, he finally understood: she was the holy maiden of the winter night, he was the sun igniting this darkness.

They truly saw him as a person, regarded his weed-like life as one worth saving.

In that moment, he etched the faces of these two people deeply into his heart.

That night, Noon dreamt he was draped in a Red Tide cloak, holding his brother's hand, walking in the snowy night.

In his dream, he said, "We will survive. When I grow up, I want to become a Red Tide Knight."

He wasn't a noble, had no lineage, nor much intelligence.

But on this winter night, he received the true dignity and hope belonging to humans.

Not only Noon, but in this frozen winter, the names of the two masters of the Red Tide Territory were no longer just names, but had become hope itself.

Refugees knelt in the snow praying, whispering, "Sun of the Red Tide, grant us a night of warm wind."

People thus called Louis Calvin—Sun of the Northern Territory.

Not a king, not a god, but a sun that couldn't be extinguished in the night, able to burn in the snow and ice.

And for Emily, the most circulated saying was, "She is the holy maiden who would weep in the snowy night, the second mother to the children."

Women secretly wove white cloaks for her, saying they would give them to the Holy Maiden in the snow.

Children drew her likeness on the walls of shelters: a woman gently leaning down, holding a blanket in her arms, a halo behind her.

Beside the stove, someone told the children stories: "A beautiful holy maiden walked in the snow, fearless of dirt, cold, or illness, bringing medicine and the scent of spring."

The elders said, "They are the saviors of the Northern Territory."

However, not all people of the Northern Territory were so fortunate.

Not everyone had a lord named Louis Calvin, and not every city was like the Red Tide Territory, with warm geothermal heat, an inexhaustible fire-backed turtle...

Outside of the Red Tide was true hell.

Food shortages had become complete. Many minor nobles started slaughtering the sick and prisoners, and it was said some were drying "human jerky" in basements.

On the streets and alleys, crowds gathered around burning corpses for warmth quietly gnawed on bones, fearing they would wake the guards of the nobles.

The heating system collapsed, everything was thrown into the fire, and there were even elders self-immolating just to secure a night's flame for their families.

Medical treatment? That was already a foreign term.

Epidemics were out of control, with no doctors or medicines, and unburied corpses piled in alleys, wells, and in front of church doors, the stench unbearable.

Yet some refugees would deliberately get close to the piles of corpses for warmth.

Instead of protectors, the nobles and army became predators of food.

The relief grain from the Governor's Mansion was seized, while the castle behind high walls was brightly lit, outside was a ghostly icy pit.

The most terrifying thing was the collapse of humanity.

Many nobles simply sealed doors and abandoned manors, giving up the people, even driving all city residents southward, leaving only empty cities and snow.

Some took the family's last batch of grain and fled at night, abandoning their post; citizens awakened the next day only to find footprints left in the snow, not even managing to hear a shout.

The most despairing were the news coming from those "extreme lands."

Some noble personally led troops to slaughter refugees just to save firewood and medicine.

In some cities, citizens had begun to cannibalize each other, and what burned in the fires were not wood, but family flags embossed with gold emblems.

This was the true portrayal of most territories in the Northern Territory this winter.

The mortality rate from freezing exceeded forty percent, riots spread, epidemics ravaged, and order collapsed.

In comparison, the Red Tide Territory was like a lone fire rising from the snow, not particularly bright, but the only one that hadn't been extinguished.

The gates of the Red Tide never closed, the Red Tide dining hall never ceased its fires, the Red Tide medical tents never halted.

Even on the coldest, stormiest nights of winter, there was still smoke from the "Warm Soup Station" rising in the sky.

Night-patrol knights wrapped in red cloaks walked past the refugee camps, while on the distant high towers, the flag with a red background and golden sun continued to flutter.

But regardless, as time slowly passed, this cold and long winter finally came to an end.

The snow began to melt, the permafrost cracked, and buds stirred on withered branches.

When the first sunlight shone upon all of the Northern Territory, no one cheered; they simply watched quietly, watching for a very long time.

Some knelt in the snow, lightly resting their heads on the ground, as if bidding farewell to those who had passed, or like welcoming a long-lost hope.

In this most despairing year for the Northern Territory, they once believed spring wouldn't return.

But it did.

Chapter 359: In the Heart of Winter

Outside, snowflakes danced in the air, and icy winds howled. The Northern Territory had fully entered the coldest time of the year.

The wind and snow swirled around the tall windows of the Red Tide Earth Tower, forming layers of white frost.

The streets were deserted, with only a knight cloaked in a crimson cape patrolling against the wind and snow, his Fighting Energy surging over his body, transforming into a cold-dispelling crimson glow.

In the distance, a Fire-backed Turtle was securely sleeping, its shell's furnace emitting billows of steam, barely carving out a patch of warmth in the blizzard.

This was the winter of the Northern Territory, colder than enemies, more brutal than the battlefield.

But inside the Red Tide Castle's main hall, the temperature felt like spring.

Within the thick stone walls, geothermal pipes laid for years were still in operation.

Warmth flowed over the castle floors, layers of insulation fabric hung on the walls, and grey-red furnace copper panels emitted a faint glow.

The teapot on the conference table was shrouded in hot mist, the tea fragrant with a slight bitter note of frost leaf herbs.

In the center of the room, Louis sat quietly in the main seat, draped in a military-style black cloak, elbows resting on the table, staring intently at a stack of densely written reports before him, brow tightly furrowed.

Medical casualty statistics, frostbite cases among the refugees, hot soup station operation records, frost leaf herb stock balances...

His expression was grave, silently contemplating.

As he pondered over the medical report, a sudden sound of light footsteps was heard from outside the door.

Emily walked in briskly, wrapped in a thick cloak, a rare, irrepressible smile on her face, her eyes illuminated by a rare winter light.

"Louis!" she exclaimed while removing her gloves, "Good news! Just arrived, Lady Irina has given birth safely! I have a new brother!"

Standing before the table, she exhaled white mist, her eyes full of joy.

Louis lifted his head, his gaze paused, but he wasn't overly surprised.

With Ailina's constitution and Frost Halberd City's medical staff, a successful delivery was only a matter of time.

But he didn't dampen Emily's spirits.

"Really?" he chuckled lightly, nodding, "Then we should congratulate your father."

Saying this, he set down the report in his hands, his tone softened, "Once winter passes, we can go see them."

Emily's eyes glowed even brighter, like a warm lamp lighting up on a snowy night.

"I knew you'd say that." She sat down lightly next to him, her gaze drifting over the densely packed dossiers on the table, her smile slightly restrained, "But seeing your expression... are you shouldering something burdensome you haven't told me about?"

Louis didn't answer immediately, instead picking up the teacup, blowing away the froth, and taking a sip of the somewhat bitter warm tea.

"Just a little winter trouble," he replied softly, his tone calm.

Emily casually picked up a cornered paper from the table, quickly scanning it, her fingers gliding between the paragraphs.

The warmth in her expression soon faded.

"...Frostbite patients have exceeded three thousand, with varying severity; spreading, suspected cases four hundred thirty-two, confirmed sixty-two; the death toll... as of yesterday's count was one hundred and seven."

She silently closed the document.

The wind outside brushed past, gently rattling the window.

Emily didn't utter any comforting phrases like "it's already very good."

She knew well that for the Northern Territory's winter, these numbers were nearly miraculous.

In other territories, where supplies are scarce, and lords have fled, leaving the populace to fend for themselves, tens of thousands of deaths might not even be recorded.

She had seen firsthand refugees elsewhere frozen dead by the roadside, bodies unburied, piled in the snow for the winds and rains to pound.

But she understood even more that Louis wasn't comparing himself with others.

What he cared about wasn't "doing better than others," but "why can't I save more people."

After a moment of silence, Emily walked to his side and gently closed the report, speaking with a warm, firm voice, "Since it's a small trouble, we'll solve it together."

Louis turned to look at her, the heaviness in his eyes seemed to be lifted slightly.

He didn't offer thanks or engage in unnecessary pleasantries, just nodded, a faint yet genuine smile gracing his lips.

"Hmm," he replied.

He appreciated this about Emily; no unnecessary words, no pretenses, no sugarcoating, and unafraid to face the harsh reality.

The two stood side by side before the conference table, facing maps and lists, drafting another set of winter crisis response directives.

...

This winter arrived earlier, more fiercely, and more unreasonably than in previous years.

Outside the Red Tide Territory, snow and wind fell from the sky like an angry tide, raging day and night.

In the refugee zone outside the residential area, the temperature had suddenly dropped below minus twenty degrees, and the permafrost cracked into icy veins that even hooves could audibly snap against.

Although makeshift tents had long been removed, the collective semi-underground houses still appeared oppressive and heavy.

These were winter shelters hastily built by the Red Tide Territory's craftsmen before the first snow.

Constructed with compacted permafrost and stones, sunken walls with roofs covered by ash and straw mats, ensuring a certain level of warmth.

They weren't comfortable homes, but in this Northern Territory ravaged by wind and snow, they were a miracle.

People relied on geothermal warmth, sleeping closely together, sharing blankets, exchanging body heat and the hope to survive.

Though crowded and often mixed with the smell of sweat, it was better than freezing to death in the wind.

Even so, when the true cold of winter descended, all preparations felt insignificant.

On the coldest nights, temperatures plunged to minus twenties, with wind and snow seeping through ventilation gaps, freezing into frost, cold seeping into the bones.

Chapter 360: In the Depths of Winter (Part 2)

Some children, even wrapped in their mother's arms, wake up with purple lips and stiff limbs in the morning.

At the edge of the Red Residence District, a firmly installed Fire-backed Turtle stove stands, with a heavy iron shell beneath which the sound of bubbling steam can be heard.

Several heat rings are embedded at the top of the turtle shell, emitting heat flows day and night to ensure the surrounding buildings are not frozen.

Even such a strict heating system only covers the core of the city and limited collective housing.

In some resettlement areas farthest from the Fire-backed Turtle, the extreme cold finally begins to claim lives.

It selects the most vulnerable—the frail elderly, children with weak lungs, malnourished workers.

The first to fall was a sixty-year-old mason who suddenly had chest pains while inspecting water pipes on a cold night and never woke up again.

Soon after, frostbite, necrosis, influenza... like a silent poisonous mist, it permeated stone cracks and cotton quilts, sweeping everywhere.

The winter nights of the Red Tide had never been so heavy.

The Red Tide medical station is brightly lit, crowded with frostbite patients and weeping mothers inside.

Coarse cloth clothing has long been soaked, with children curled up in arms, their hands and feet turning blue.

Some children were already dying when they arrived, their lips black, their chests barely rising and falling.

"Can he still be saved?"

"My youngest has had a high fever for three days, can he still hold on?"

"I beg you, sir... can you give her some herbs?"

These voices, mixed with coughs and groans, seem to press on every medic's heart.

On the other side of the corridor, several bodies hastily wrapped in burlap mats were carried out.

Weak children, hunched old people, and even mothers died next to their children, still clutching the little bodies that had long since lost their warmth.

Worse still was the outbreak of acute low-temperature influenza.

Overnight, several refugee camps experienced group high fevers and shortness of breath, with as few as three or five dying or entire camps falling ill.

Medicines were far from enough; the Red Rock Warehouse had been depleted by more than half in a short time.

At this time, a swift command from the great Lord Louis halted the death trap.

"Move the reserve Fire-backed Turtle to the refugee camp shelter house, fill it thoroughly with lava moss fuel, and keep it burning all day." His hand fell like a sharp blade cutting through snow.

A high-temperature circulation medical room, centered on the Fire-backed Turtle, was immediately activated, and with lava moss as fuel, maintained room temperature at fifteen degrees Celsius above zero, becoming one of the warmest places in the Northern Territory.

But resources were limited and had to rotate.

He ordered: "Everyone can enter once a day by rotation, prioritizing sick children, craftsmen, transport soldiers, and mothers of newborns, and forbidding anyone from forcibly occupying."

Meanwhile, the workshops of the Red Tide Territory remained lit overnight.

Mike led the craftsmen in the urgent development of the seventh-generation anti-cold cloak, using Frost Beast fur mixed with refined cotton wadding and coated with heat-conductive grease.

The cloak's hem also had small steam pack interfaces sewn in, connecting to portable heating flasks.

More critically, these cloaks were sewn by the refugees themselves.

"Work for relief, whoever sews more, their children wear the cloaks first."

Those once desperate mothers, with red eyes, threw themselves into cutting and sewing, no longer just refugees waiting for death.

Within half a month, twenty thousand cloaks were sent in batches to various shelters, with each viewed as a continuation of life.

On the medical front, Emily led a comprehensive deployment of the medical support team.

Pharmacists concentrated all the Frost Leaf Vines, formulating them into highly effective soothing agents specifically for flu patients with high fever.

The dry herbal storage of the Red Rock Warehouse was also fully opened, releasing long-stored precious herbs.

"As long as they can survive, give everything." This was the first thing Emily said to the pharmacists.

A 'Fire Soup Station' was quickly set up in the city's square, operated with the assistance of the Red Tide Army, supplying pickled vegetable stew and bone broth day and night, with each person receiving at least a bowl of hot soup each day.

.....

Noon was eleven years old this year.

When the insect plague came, he was outside the village catching a rabbit in a small ditch; he had promised his brother that if he caught a rabbit, he'd make him a hot meat soup.

But when he returned home, the whole street was gone.

The insect corpses had devoured everything.

He didn't even have the chance to cry, only pulling his brother to hide in the forest. Luckily, the insect corpses didn't find them and they were eventually rescued by the knights of the Red Tide Territory.

After arriving at the Red Tide Territory, he was assigned work.

He was placed in the construction group, moving bricks, erecting wood, and building walls with a team led by an old craftsman named Cole.

This hard labor was too much for an eleven-year-old like him, but he considered himself fortunate rather than freezing or starving to death.

Here, he had food to eat, bedding, and occasionally could drink soup with bits of meat.

He originally thought life was finally going to get better.

But the true winter still came.

Overnight, his brother couldn't stop the high fever, shivering under a ragged blanket.

Noon panicked, carrying him on his back to the medical station, where he queued an entire day before getting in.

In less than two days, he went down too.

His body was burning, teeth chattering, feeling as light as if he could float away at any moment.

He heard Cole sigh: "Alas, what a pity... made it this far but couldn't hold on."

He wanted to retort, but didn't have the strength to open his eyes.

Then the day came.

He heard a rumbling sound, that was the sound of the Fire-backed Turtle running, with a heavy iron shell radiating scalding heat waves.

The once-cold medical station began to warm up, steam pipes connected, and each bedside was equipped with small stoves burning black fuel.

For the first time, Noon didn't shiver in the cold night, instead, he slept soundly.