

Winter 371

Chapter 371: New Territory Planning

The returning carriage moved neither too fast nor too slow over the frozen muddy ground, with the axles creaking between snow frost and permafrost.

Outside the window was the gray-and-white interwoven Northern Wilderness, where the remnant snow had yet to fully retreat.

The wilderness was silent as if asleep, with nothing but the sound of the wheels rolling and the occasional cold bird startled from the branches.

Inside the carriage, the temperature was not high, yet because of the dim oil lamp's glow, it felt especially stable.

Louis sat at the table, a hand-drawn map with rough topography spread out before him, as he slowly sketched lines on it with a pen.

Emily nestled across from him, wrapped in a fur cloak, holding a freshly brewed cup of hot tea in her hands.

The aroma of the tea carried a faint bitter wheat taste, rising with a hint of warmth in the cold air.

She glanced at him and laughed lightly: "Are you planning to map out the entire Northern Territory without taking a break?"

Louis did not look up, only replied blandly: "Have you ever seen anyone planting before plowing the land first?"

Emily leaned closer, tilting her head to examine the map under his pen: "So you're plowing the land right now?"

"Paving the way."

His brow furrowed as the pen tip moved back and forth on the map, occasionally stopping to circle a spot, then frowning and erasing to redraw.

The firelight in his eyes shimmered faintly, as if the invisible blueprint in his mind was slowly taking shape.

Emily was momentarily entranced before she softly spoke: "...Introduce it to me."

Louis still did not look up, only raised an eyebrow: "What?"

"You've been drawing this map forever, I almost remember its patterns. Why not teach me, and I'll learn a bit too."

Louis finally put down his pen, glanced at her, his gaze softening a bit: "You really want to hear me talk about terrain zoning and village models? Beware you might dream about dispatching granaries."

Emily laughed, blinking: "The road is long anyway, let me pretend to be a strategist and help you advise."

Louis nodded, turned the map toward her, holding down its corners with his elbow and holding a pen with the other hand, he lightly tapped on the vast brown land.

"This land is our current territory," he said in a low voice.

"If left alone, eighty thousand square kilometers, averaging eight square kilometers per person. Too sparse, too empty, equals no governance."

Emily leaned over to look at the map, dotted sparsely like ashes scattered in the wind, completely without system.

"But if you cram everyone into that small hill area of Red Tide Territory?" He paused, tapping the pen tip on a tiny red spot on the map, "Too crowded. Resources, food, job opportunities, can't be supplied."

"So, you're going to divide the territory?" she asked.

Louis nodded, "Not just the territory, I'm planning to divide the whole land into four zones with clear responsibilities."

As he spoke, he quickly sketched on the map.

"Firstly, Red Tide Territory." The pen tip steadily circled a relatively compact area, familiar topographic contours vividly emerging on the paper, "This is our starting point, and will be our core in the future."

He looked up at Emily with a lighter tone than before: "I plan to rebuild it into Red Tide City. The goal is to make it the new hub of the Northern Territory, like Frost Halberd City, becoming a convergence point of strategy, livelihood, and governance."

Emily blinked, holding the teacup, her tone slightly teasing: "Are you planning to rival my father?"

Louis's pen paused, then he chuckled softly, his voice low and gentle: "Can't dare to think about that."

He looked up at her, a bit of warmth in his eyes: "Not trying to stand on equal footing with your father... but to ensure the Northern Territory doesn't have only one choice."

Emily looked at him seriously drawing the map, her lips softly curved: "Then make it beautiful."

He then pushed the map toward Emily, using the pen to lightly tap the circled areas.

"Apart from Red Tide Territory, those lands are newly assigned to us. Too large to swallow all at once."

He paused, looking up with a smile: "Therefore, I'm planning to develop in three layers."

"Sounds quite professional." Emily chuckled lightly, holding her teacup.

"Of course," Louis held back a laugh, maintaining a serious tone, "The first layer is called—the core development zone. It's the region with the most concentrated resources: rivers, good soil, and several mineral deposits.

This part I want to settle the first batch of people, build bases, villages, stations, and roads. All initial investments are concentrated here."

He drew a clear dark boundary on the map.

"This place is like a seed. If this area thrives, the whole Northeast will be activated."

Emily nodded, becoming serious: "What about the second layer?"

"Resource reserve area." He circled a layer outward, "Though it also has mines, and can be cultivated, the terrain is poor and transportation is inconvenient.

Can't invest too much at once. But could first station a few hundred people, slowly open the roads, preparing for the next stage."

"Sounds like digging canals before planting fields."

"Exactly this mindset."

He circled out the third layer, his hand paused slightly, and his tone also softened: "Finally, the outer untouched area. There might be mines, forests, and water veins.

But the terrain is complex, and magical beasts roam... Our current manpower and resources can't sustain a full-scale development."

"So leave it empty for now?" Emily asked.

"Yes, leave it empty for now." Louis put down the pen, tapping his fingers lightly on the map: "Layer one to sustain people, layer two as backup, layer three... wait for the opportunity."

He then paused, drawing three concentric rings on the map: "These are our 'core development zones'."

Chapter 372: New Territory Planning (Part 2)

Emily leaned forward to look, listening as he narrated with a nearly storytelling tone, one by one.

"The first area is the River Valley Basin."

His pen traced the meandering main river on the map: "One main river, two tributaries, once the waterways are connected, the Red Tide Territory can be linked. The land can be farmed, fish can be caught in the river, and there's a salt crystal mine and spiritual soil layers. We can try some magic energy facilities there."

"How many people are you planning to settle in this area?" Emily asked.

"Fifty thousand." He answered decisively, "Three towns, including the main one, plus twenty to thirty villages, focusing on grain first, fish second, mining along the river, and setting up workshops along the fields."

Emily raised an eyebrow: "Do you plan on growing the entire Northern Territory Southeast's food supply yourself?"

"It's not a plan; it's a must."

She chuckled softly: "Alright, what about the next area?"

"The southern foothills forest belt," he circled another area, "The forest is a temperate coniferous forest, cattle and horses can be grazed, and timber can be harvested. Deeper in, there might be precious minerals like gray glow crystals and qi vein stones..."

He pointed at the edge: "These two towns will serve as the woodworking and forging centers, adopting some military commune systems. The blacksmith village, military preparation workshops, and livestock farms can all develop gradually."

"Population?"

"Thirty thousand, one town with five to ten villages, they must endure hardships, be productive..."

Emily nodded, then looked at the third circle: "What about this northern mining area?"

"Northern hill mining veins." Louis's tone grew more serious, "Currently estimated to house only ten thousand, with flint marrow oil and qi vein stones, and possibly deeper Magic Marrow Veins, but it's dangerous, with frequent anomalies."

He glanced at her: "So we must choose experienced miners and Bloodline Knights to explore, establishing fortress-like villages and towns, and gradually venture deeper."

Two towns, eight mining villages. Small villages for a few hundred people each, with an Agricultural Official or village chief. The town will have militia, granaries, and trading posts. The main town will house the administrative hub and garrison outpost."

Speaking, he traced three circles over the map: "Three areas with different rhythms but sharing a Red Tide core."

Emily looked down at those three circled lines, suddenly somewhat dazed.

As if through this coarse, yellowed sheepskin map, she could vaguely see the future Red Tide land:

Towns and settlements rooting and expanding amidst the wind and snow, with oxen slowly trodding on field ridges, the sound of hammering in blacksmith shops never ceasing, fires from border furnaces illuminating the mining paths, herds roaming under the forest, and smoke rising at river mouths.

It's orderly wheat fields and mining paths, newly established camps and towns, it's the future.

She sipped a bit of hot tea and asked, "How will these territories be managed?"

"Right." He gently placed a small stone over a spot on the chart, as if anchoring a foundation stone for the future, "I'll 'symbolically' grant land to those knights who've made military contributions but only give management rights, not actual power."

He looked up, glimpsing at her, lips curled into a barely perceptible smile: "I'll nominally appoint you as the Manor Master, sounds prestigious. But the granaries, mining veins, smelting workshops, and tax system will all be overseen by civil servants appointed by me."

Emily blinked: "Won't the knights be dissatisfied?"

"They're not foolish," Louis said calmly, "I'll provide them dividends, enough to live a noble life, and give them command over troop movements, sufficient for them to maintain face and prestige."

But if anyone genuinely treats their fief as private property or a cash cow, the civil servants will report directly, and I'll revoke their authority immediately."

At this point, he drew several radial lines on the map with his pen: "Thus, each point falls at the intersection of grain routes, mining paths, or river inlets, forming a large net."

Defense, administration, and transportation combined. The initial villages and towns are these points, the lines are the postal routes, the core is the Red Tide Territory."

"So the Red Tide Territory is like the heart?" Emily asked.

"Yes." He nodded, "It pumps the blood to the limbs."

Having said this, he looked at the interwoven and extended axes on the map, his gaze steady like an undercurrent beneath a water surface.

But Emily was captivated.

Louis wasn't as flamboyant as those gilded nobles of the Imperial Capital nor as innately commanding as her father, but rather possessed a kind of tranquil leadership.

He didn't command yet gave reassurance. Lacking a high position, yet naturally formed the center.

She sighed softly, her gaze still fixed on his long, slender fingers.

"That's what I like about you..." she silently thought to herself, "...never arrogant nor impatient, always like a true lord."

As Louis's pen traversed the map, the lines on the map gradually filled in, and the entire North East map was divided into clear layers and logical networks.

Emily leaned over gently, her teacup cooled in hand, her gaze landing on the map: "These two regions have about the same population density, but you arrange for a town in one and leave the other empty, is it because of the terrain?"

"The former has a water source; the latter adjacent to marshes with unstable foundations." Louis casually wrote down a few survey keywords in the paper corner, his tone consistently calm, "Wait until there are enough technicians, then consider expanding, no rush."

"So can such places also serve as reserve grain lands?" she probed.

"Yes," he glanced at her, nodding, "You're suitable for this."

"Which one?"

"Providing suggestions, being an advisor."

She was momentarily speechless, her ear tips slightly red but sat up straight: "I'm not just a decoration. I've also studied governance in Frost Halberd City."

"I know." Louis's tone remained calm, but carried a hint of teasing.

Emily didn't immediately respond, silently observing as he continued to plan, gradually envisioning a brand-new outline of the Northern Territory in her mind.

And there Louis sat at the center of the map, where the pen pointed, there lay the future frontier of prosperity.

Chapter 373: New Territory Planning (Part 3)

"...Do you really have a way to build all this?" she asked softly.

"Yes." He spoke lightly, but without hesitation, "As long as we don't make big mistakes, aren't too greedy, and take it slow, it will certainly succeed."

Emily gazed quietly at him, her eyes mixed with complex emotions: respect, reassurance, affection.

Suddenly, she realized that unknowingly, she had grown accustomed to spending such nights, in such a carriage, watching him draw maps, make plans, while she offered suggestions, took notes, occasionally sought warmth, and sometimes remained silent.

When they came to their senses, the carriage had slowly entered the border of Red Tide Territory.

The morning light pierced through the heavy clouds, and a wisp of smoke rose in the distance, appearing quiet and gentle in the gray-white sky of the Northern Territory.

Louis put away the map and rubbed the corner of his eyes, which were a bit sore: "We're here."

Emily lifted a corner of the curtain and softly said, "Welcome home, Lord."

"Welcome back," Louis said with a smile, "We still have a lot to do."

Emily leaned against him and gently responded, "Yes, let's take it slow."

The smoke from the town swayed in the cold wind, and the repaired watchtowers and warehouses had begun to take shape.

Bradley had long been waiting at the door, handing over the latest statistics and several request documents.

Louis glanced through them quickly, then went straight to the main hall to gather his subordinates and start implementing the next phase of adjustments.

The first priority was redrawing the territory borders.

Parts of the planned new territories overlapped with the pre-war fiefs of the Snow Peak Nobility.

But the situation had long changed: after the insect disaster, most of the original territories had been burned, populations displaced, Nobility struggled to protect themselves, let alone guard their borders.

So Louis personally appeared before the dozen surviving Nobility to explain the adjustment plan and generously compensated them with broader, seemingly richer new land parcels.

"Your old territories have been completely destroyed by the Nest, and it's not easy to restore them," Louis said sincerely.

"But this new land has good water sources, suitable for farming, close to main transportation routes, and future trade routes will pass through. I'm not trying to deprive you, but rather to build a greater order together."

The Nobility, already grateful for the protection by Red Tide during the insect disaster, were now even more thankful for the new land, and faced Louis with tears of gratitude.

Moreover, their Knights were also returned, and Louis did not seize power for personal glory.

He merely established a cooperative defense agreement: in the case of war, the Red Tide will coordinate for unified defense.

"After all, if the defense line breaks, no one can hold it," he said.

Although some Nobility felt uneasy about this, they did not dare to voice it before Louis.

And thus, the system of "using their grain to protect our walls" quietly established itself.

Meanwhile, the resettlement plan for refugees officially launched.

Based on winter's registered population data, Louis categorized the refugees by region, skills, and physical condition, then led them to each new territory to build new homes.

Farmers were sent to arable regions like the River Valley Plain and Hot Spring Valley to handle spring plowing and the establishment of granaries.

Craftsmen like carpenters, stonemasons, and blacksmiths focused in the "Town Workshop Zone" to begin road construction, house building, and setting up workshops.

Soldiers were placed at border outposts and pre-set forts, tasked with defense duties while also reclaiming wasteland.

Merchants gathered at the two future major towns to participate in the establishment of inns and trading posts.

As for the idle and the weak, they were assigned menial tasks and aid by the town council, along with support funds and communal kitchens.

Under these actions, the population of Red Tide Territory began to spread like a network, connecting dots, lines, planes.

Having completed these, Louis tirelessly embarked on a journey to the River Valley Basin.

That was the "land of granaries" he personally designated, with river-surrounded fertile soil, a geothermal layer that hadn't completely frozen, and large fields abandoned by insect corpses.

"Spring plowing is about to begin," he whispered as he looked up at the overcast sky from atop his horse, "We need to plant the first seeds before the snow melts."

Chapter 374: Massacre of the Frost Giants

"We've arrived at the River Valley Basin."

When the scouts relayed the news from afar, Louis was standing on a protruding rock platform, holding a telescope, his gaze piercing through the snow-covered valley, looking at the frost-laden lowlands.

The land remained pale, the wind carrying the scent of permafrost and withered grass.

Yet, despite this, the basin still appeared exceptionally vast and fertile.

A great river flowed slowly through the center, with broken wooden fences and lingering smoke scattered along its banks.

This was the encampment of the Frost Giants, densely packed and scattered in over thirty locations.

"According to the scouts' report, there are a total of ninety-eight giants, occupying an area that forms a semi-arc shape, mainly concentrated in the central and southeastern hilly areas of the basin." Lambert said quietly, dismounting with the intelligence report, walking over to him.

Louis nodded, his gaze following the giant's trails, indicating they had held this place for some time.

He dismounted, with his cloak sweeping the ground, and unfurled the combat map on the temporary command platform.

This is a typical "wintering group of giants," exploiting the chaos in the Northern Territory post-locust plague, crossing through the Rock Fissure Pass, and occupying this unplanted basin.

They've set up home here, which means these enormous creatures won't leave easily.

This is the first hard battle before spring plowing in the Northern Territory.

"... If the valley passage is not liberated, spring plowing will be entirely delayed. It's not just about defeating the Frost Giants; it's about a swift and thorough cleanse."

Fortunately, he had already confirmed the intel through the Daily Intelligence System and advance scouts:

"Enemy forces total ninety-eight, including eight special individuals, three violent types marked with red, furious flames. Five are heavy armor defensive types, blue eye stone skin."

So before coming, Louis had prepared various plans and forces.

He ordered the existing troops to be divided into two groups.

Fast hunting group: Comprised of fifty-two Red Tide Elite Knights, divided into ten teams led by Lambert, all equipped with light magic explosion bullets;

Heavy bombardment group: The engineering corps transported two heavy magic explosion bullets a day earlier, now set up at vantage points on both sides of the canyon, calibrated for wind to ensure accuracy.

The entire operation would be personally commanded by Louis, who would stand at the northwest observation point, using the command flag for long-distance coordination across the battlefield.

Louis looked down at the basin, the ground trampled as if scorched, and said in a deep voice: "We are going to show these snow-eating, blood-drinking monsters what human warfare means."

For the Red Tide Territory Knight Order, this was not a traditional war; it was a meticulously designed grand hunt.

And the prey was the ninety-eight Frost Giants entrenched here.

"A plain battle? Only a madman would do such a thing." Louis chuckled softly from the high ground.

"Even elite knights are not made of steel, and with giants having immense strength, going head-to-head with ninety-eight of them would result in heavy casualties."

Thus, from the start, he had no intention of engaging these monsters directly.

His plan was to lure them into the trap, lock them in place, and then slice them piece by piece.

These giants, although powerful, had just survived a harsh winter.

Without food reserves, they've relied only on their body fat for two months, their stomachs growling, their bodies weakened.

This was their most vulnerable moment.

So Louis had silently set up thirteen large military cooking pots by dusk yesterday at three valley edges, the kettle mouth, the slope, and under Eagle's Beak Rock.

In the pots simmered a broth mixed with salted fat, roasted meat, and aromatic herb juice, specifically designed to stimulate the Frost Giant's sense of smell.

This seasoning, carried by the north wind, served as an invisible whip, delivering the scent precisely into the giants' camp.

Louis stood at the vantage point, watching as the scouts reported: "They've moved, starting to gather."

From the Frost Giants' perspective, this might appear to be a divine feast.

The aroma was indeed overwhelming.

Even with their dull olfactory senses, they could clearly distinguish this scent now.

Grilled tendons mixed with bone oil and salted fat, sprinkled with some warm, spicy plant extract—the smell was so strong it hooked into the depths of their stomachs, dragging them forcibly from their camp.

Over thirty Frost Giants rose and staggered.

Hunger had driven them mad long ago.

The storm had only just stopped last night, and for two days, the entire clan had not had a meal. The frozen beasts under the snow were inedible, and the bodies of their kin had already been gnawed clean.

This enchanting scent naturally proved irresistible.

A red-marked individual charged out of the camp first, the scars on its shoulder gleaming blood-red in the morning light.

It pushed and shoved its fellow clansmen without concern, breaking two snow pines along the way, after crashing into a weaker Frost Giant and knocking it down the ravine.

"Roar!!!" The howl reverberated across the field, shaking the very ice to breaking point.

The other giants followed, a thundering stampede that shook the mountain slopes.

The giants, weighing several tons, stumbled and scrambled, their clubs wildly swinging, sending stone fragments scattering and heaps of snow tumbling down.

This was a chaotic and brutal scene, the very disorder Louis had been waiting for.

At the end of the gorge, the cold wind swirled, snow rose, carried along with a faint popping sound over the ridges.

Atop both side vantage points, the iron tripods were tightly covered with camo snow cloth, beneath which silently rested the two heavy magic explosion bullets.

Everything was in place, awaiting the final command.

And along the cliff's median line, Louis, hand on the telescope, watched intently the giant-like maddened bulls charging into the valley floor below.

He knew very well: The giants' hearing and intelligence were insufficient to uncover such traps—especially while in a state of hunger.

Chapter 375: Massacre of the Frost Giants

They didn't even realize how they gradually walked from the Land of Freedom into this encirclement.

As expected, most of the giants had reached the valley's center, where thirteen rolling "soup pots" were heaped.

They swung their clubs wildly, crazily fighting for them. Many individuals bit and tore at each other, and even a blue-eyed, thick-armored type was knocked over by two fellow tribesmen by the pot, its head crushed into the stone ground.

The red-striped giant at the center roared in madness, stomping a slightly smaller fellow to death with one foot.

Then it sat down by the soup pot, audaciously reaching out to stuff the searing meatballs by the pot into its mouth, ignoring the hot oil dripping down its chin.

Just right... almost there.

On the cliff, Louis slowly raised his right hand, gloved in black.

The flag bearer stood behind him, the deep red command flag in hand unmoving.

In the next moment, Louis clenched his five fingers.

Swish—

The gold-edged red flag was raised high, flapping fiercely in the northern wind, like a burning blade pointing straight to the valley bottom!

That was the "open fire" signal.

On both sides of the valley, the heavy magic explosion bullets hidden beneath the snow finally erupted at that moment.

Boom!!!!

It was an angry thunder tearing through the sky, almost instantly ripping apart the air at the valley's bottom.

The explosion point was set at the valley center, precisely targeting the largest gathering area around the three soup pots.

Blazing red light surged from the snow, like a volcanic eruption, swiftly turning into a dark flame mushroom cloud devouring everything.

Within a fifty-meter radius of the core, the giants didn't even have time to struggle and were melted into charred remains on the spot.

Their skin twisted, evaporated, and exploded in the high heat, bones deformed and shattered like porcelain.

A red-striped individual even vaporized directly at the explosion center, leaving only a charred spine half-embedded in the earth, like a burnt ghost pillar.

The shock wave of the explosion cleaved the air like a sharp axe, quickly spreading outwards.

Over thirty giants in the outer circle were directly blown away, rolling to the valley's sides.

Some had their brains splattered against the rock wall, others had their legs blown off, lying on the ground wailing, trying to get up, only able to let out mournful cries in the scorching snow mud.

"Guah-aa—ha-ooh—!"

Screams echoed one after another; these giants like beasts thrown into a boiling pot.

The shock wave spread to the cliff, cracking a fragile ice layer buried under the snow.

Crack—rumble!

The cliff's ice layer collapsed with a roar, and twelve Frost Giant not yet in the valley fell beneath the avalanche, some crashing through the ice surface falling tens of meters into the deep valley below, bones cracking and cries of agony resounding.

Some were crushed beneath the cliff rocks, with only writhing limbs exposed.

The entire gorge had now transformed into a hellish cauldron filled with blood and fire.

Then, smoke grenades thrown from the mountaintops on all sides ignited one after another, thick black fog like ink blanketing the entire valley.

The giants' world blurred suddenly in their eyes, with burning heat and the stench of char intersecting in the air, they lost their sight, smell, and sense of direction.

The forty or so remaining giants began to instinctively withdraw.

They ran back in terror, wailing, trampling and shoving each other, some even crashing into the valley walls, bleeding profusely.

But at that moment, the second heavy magic explosion bullet on the southwest inclined valley also began to fire.

Boom———!!!

This explosion was no longer a vertical drop, but a sweeping barrage attack.

A fiery column rolled outward like a fan shape, accurately cutting off the giants' retreat.

The ten or so giants at the front were engulfed in flames, even flying several meters into the air before dismembering, with severed limbs and charred flesh scattering into the valley path on both sides.

A thick-armored blue-eyed individual attempting to jump was hit by the blast wave just after stepping halfway out, instantly half-charred, with even its helmet-like skull splitting open, falling onto its back, its eyeballs popping and bursting into black smoke in the high heat.

The snow instantly turned black, the surface burned as if in a hot iron pot.

The giants had nowhere left to escape, only able to wail and kneel amidst the embers and blood.

In a mere quarter of an hour, two magic explosion bullets destroyed the main force of the whole Frost Clan.

Of the original ninety-eight Frost Giants, only twenty-two remained struggling, and even they had no place to escape.

Above in the sky, fierce winds carried away the scorching stench, howling past.

The valley was still burning, embers rolling, charred flesh and black smoke intertwining, like some kind of barbaric civilization's sacrifice.

At the moment when the formation of the Frost Giants was thoroughly shattered and chaotic, the main flag on the mountain peak was raised high.

Louis slowly lowered his arm, and the flag officer beside him shouted loudly: "Command Flag — Fly!"

The red flag waved, and the horn sounded long.

"Knight team, move out!"

In an instant, ten elite knight teams charged down the mountain paths on both wings like sharp blades, the oppressive sense of tactical squads advancing in unison enshrouding like a giant net.

They encircled in a pincer movement, needing no more words, coordinating only through flag signals and whistles.

Each group of five was equipped with lightweight magic explosion bullets, controlled by the vice-knight for precise throws into the densest areas of the enemy remnants in the valley.

"Release!" The magic explosion bullets traced sharp, whistling arcs, landing with explosive sounds!

"Boom—! Boom!!"

Three struggling Frost Giants trying to regroup their formation were lifted along with the charred snow beneath them, their flesh instantly torn by the blazing flames, their bones turning to charcoal as they rolled in the valley.

But with the explosion, a Blue-eyed Giant rose with an angry roar!

Its body burst with cold energy, the extreme cold domain expanded instantly, sweeping snow mist within dozens of meters, plunging temperatures!

One knight team approached too quickly, their warhorses neighed and halted, their armors frosted, their breaths freezing into ice beads!

"Fighting energy to repel the cold!" the team leader shouted, and the five of them ignited their fighting energy, repelling the cold with steam, forcefully breaking into the giant's ice domain!

The Blue-eyed Giant roared, with a fierce swing of its palm it split rocks, an avalanche of snow crashing towards the knights!

But the knight formation remained unbroken, two knights charged forward to lure, while three knights attacked from the flanks, instantly severing its hind knee tendons!

The giant knelt down, its roar unfinished, when a fighting spirit longsword pierced up into its brain from its jaw, severing its nervous center, collapsing with a crash!

Another heavily armored Blue-eyed individual, also pressed hard, leaped out from the pile of corpses, its body aflame yet still trying to unleash a frost storm!

"Switch bullets!" the vice-captain whispered, three knights switched explosive bullet forms, igniting high-temperature magic explosion bullets!

"Throw!"

Three fires precisely hit the giant's abdominal cavity, chest, and face armor, chain-exploding in mid-air!

"Boom! Boom!! Boom—!"

This Blue-eyed Giant with the strongest defense collapsed in its chest, its ice crystal armor shattering like cracks in a shell, burnt through its throat, falling like a waste furnace of scorched bronze, unable to move.

Meanwhile, the group of giants attempted to break through.

"Direction of the valley mouth—block them!"

Lines of blockade already set up and two mobile knight teams awaited there long.

"Throw the bombs!"

Three lightweight magic explosion bullets precisely hit the path of the escaping enemies, blasting up a wall of fire and rolling stones.

The giants, in a panic, turned and crashed into the knight formations pursuing from the subsidiary wings, instantly collapsing.

The last red-striped berserk type giant roared, raising its arms high, trying to break through the blockade amidst the chaos.

But before it could take three steps, a silver shadow leapt from the cliff like a meteor.

Lambert's war spear, blazing with fighting energy, pierced through the red-striped giant's throat with precision!

The six-meter tall monster seemed to lose its life support, its eyes lost focus, collapsing with a crash.

Blood gushed like a spring, yet only splashed outside the battle boots.

The valley fell silent, only the charred remains popped softly in the melting snow.

A knight kicked the shattered ice armor with his boot, "...Really, they couldn't even hit us."

Another person softly sighed: "From start to finish, it felt like they were being processed in batches. This isn't a war, it's a hunt."

The Frost Giant clan was annihilated, ninety-eight bodies, not one escaped.

Louis's side had zero casualties, with only twelve lightly injured, mostly from shock waves and scratches.

It was a classic battle of extreme tactical suppression and terrain-induced slaughter.

Louis stood on high ground, overlooking the battlefield in the valley, his gaze as calm as a mirror.

He never drew his sword, relying solely on a plan, half a day's setup, and precise orders to turn these most dangerous enemies in the valley into a pile of charred bones.

A large quantity of remaining Frost Giant body parts in the valley were collected in an orderly manner. Louis ordered them to be boiled, crushed, fermented, and made into fertilizer.

Two years ago, Red Tide Territory had tested a batch of "giant bone fertilizer" with significant effects, and now these bodies conveniently served as raw materials for fertilizer.

As the giants fell, the River Valley Basin posed no more threats, and preparations for spring plowing immediately commenced in full.

Chapter 376: Initial Development

Mai Lang Valley, where the snow has just thawed, mud and water still linger, but there's a hint of life's warmth on the earth.

As the last remains of the Frost Giant were cleared from the valley, Louis stood atop a small hill, gazing at the gradually reclaimed basin plain, and slowly exhaled.

The giant is dead, the threat removed, but the real battle is just beginning.

A large number of refugees are being orderly guided by the Red Tide Lord's Hall, entering the valley once occupied by ice and monsters.

Ox carts loaded with all their belongings and groups of refugees drove in, smoke rose at the valley's entrance, the cries of children, the rhythmic clanging of the blacksmith, and the crisp sound of hoes breaking the earth, together created a new rhythm of life.

This will no longer be a dead land.

Louis named it "Mai Lang Territory."

It's not just a name, but a hope.

He hopes that one day, this basin will grow enough grain to feed all his territories, becoming the largest granary under the Red Tide banner.

Those entering Mai Lang Territory this time are mostly refugees accepted by Red Tide after the locust plague during the harsh winter; they had no choice.

Back then, it was Louis who opened granaries, built huts, and organized relief through labor, ensuring they neither froze nor starved to death.

Some still carry a "Red Tide Admission Tag" made from a piece of rag, hidden in their bosom like a life-saving talisman.

So when the spring farming summons came, they followed the officials with little hesitation.

The valley is far, conditions are harsh, but as long as it's "land designated by Lord Louis," they dare to plant, are willing to plant, and can plant.

They trust him, not only for the food but not just because of the residence or land, but because he never treated them as disaster victims, but as people who could take root in this land and uphold a territory.

Of course, they have nowhere else to go apart from leaving Louis.

Besides those who lost their homes due to the locust plague and now rely on Red Tide, there are also a small number who once helped Louis build Red Tide Territory but now voluntarily leave the stability.

They didn't have to come, as Red Tide Territory was gradually recovering, with food, roads, and houses, staying there could at least ensure a stable spring.

Yet they packed their bags, following the territorial decree, voluntarily stepping into the still undeveloped valley where even smoke hasn't risen.

The reasons are only two.

One is Louis Calvin, the young lord they have personally witnessed and supported by their own hands.

He is not a noble who merely talks in the Council Hall.

He personally donned armor during nocturnal monster battles, carried medicine pots during winter inspections of huts, and fought for food, people, and resources in the Council Hall for them.

They came to this barren land mainly to support him.

Of course, there is another more practical reason.

Lord Louis said that in Mai Lang Territory, he would provide some of his own land as private plots to these Red Tide pioneers willing to open up territory.

It's not barren land, nor temporary fields, but formal private fields.

"You are opening this land with me, so you should have your place." Louis's words at the mobilization meeting were simple and plain, without slogans, but they made people want to nod.

Because they recognized this person and believed this promise.

Louis never gave false promises to these commoners.

Three years ago, he ventured into the barren land bare-handed, without walls, granaries, or a garrison, only an imperial order and a mere few hundred refugees and slaves.

But there, he turned a blank slate into the current Red Tide Territory.

They watched the houses line up, the grain sprout green shoots from the permafrost...

Seeing him wage war while building roads, gathering food while recruiting people, he never shirked, never backed off.

Every promise he made turned into visible smoke, edible food, and windproof roofs.

So this time, when he stood at the valley and said he wanted to build another "Red Tide Territory," they believed him.

Even if there's nothing here now, the tree shadows sparse, and the wind cold with frost.

But they know that as long as they follow this young lord, even on permafrost, one day they will create a second Red Tide, land where wheat waves can roll.

And the land distribution is clear and fair, with most being public land, owned by the lord, managed by the Council Hall.

Louis didn't choose to privatize the land but set up a "hired labor land" system.

The Council Hall is responsible for distributing seeds, tools, and forage, hiring the refugees to farm for a share of the yield based on labor time or output.

The output of these fields will all go to Louis for food distribution and storage, not entering the market, not circulating, solely to support the entire Red Tide system's grain supply.

In addition to the public fields, Louis also allocated some extra "private fields."

These plots are small, just enough for a family to plant some vegetables, sow some beans, and bury a few fruit tree saplings.

Of course, these cannot be rented or sold. This directly curtails consolidation.

This small field is Louis's promise to the original Red Tide residents willing to migrate.

And he also promised that after five years, any refugees still working in Mai Lang Territory will own their land.

If they contribute to road building and disaster relief, they can get it sooner, even trading for broader, more fertile acreage.

The news caused a moment of silence, then an undeniable excitement spread like ripples on water.

Chapter 377: Initial Construction (Part 2)

Some had red eyes, while others pressed their lips in a smile, as if holding their breath to stop themselves from calling out on the spot.

"It's true."

"If we follow him, we can truly have our own land."

"Master Louis has always been true to his word."

Low murmurs rose in the fields, but no one stopped working.

Instead, the rhythm of shovels hitting the ground quickened, the wooden beams were carried more steadily, and even those mixing the mud began to sing as they worked.

It's not that no one was tired or cold, but everyone worked harder.

They all knew in their hearts that this time, as long as they could endure, build the roads, clear the fields, and plant the first batch of seeds.

Their children, their names, could take root on this new land.

They did not ask for much, nor did they expect any rewards or glory. What they wanted was truly their own land, food to fill their stomachs, and a lord who kept his word and could shield them from the wind and snow.

They worked desperately, not because they were forced, but to fulfill Louis's promise and to repay him for this trust.

A lord gave them land, and they were willing to give him an entire spring.

Thus, under Louis's promise and plan, the development of Mai Lang Territory entered an intense building period with clear division of labor.

The pioneers started from the most primitive tasks, cleaning up the environment.

They chopped down twisted fir trees in the forest, cleared the giant rocks and permafrost soil on the ground, filled in the beast dens, melting pits, and abandoned insect disaster holes.

If they found decaying bones or magical beast claw marks along the way, it was searched and cleared by designated knight squads.

Every shovel that turned up the permafrost seemed to tell them that this land no longer belonged to monsters, but to humans.

New homes were being built simultaneously.

The "semi-underground communal dwellings" patterned after the Red Tide Territory prototype quickly rose from the valley floor.

This was a residential structure integrating insulation, windproofing, and rapid construction, resembling mounds of grass on the outside, yet warm and compact inside.

Logs served as the bones, grass mud was the skin, and the half-subterranean design could isolate the piercing cold of the Northern Territory.

During the day, they allowed light and ventilation, while at night, fires could be burned without losing heat.

For these people who had experienced the wandering of insect disasters, these earth mound houses were temporary havens and also the embryos of future hope.

"It's sturdier than my old house."

"When spring comes, plant some onions and yellow root grass by the door, and it will feel more like home."

And of course, there was a water source team, as this was the lifeline of everything.

Survey teams set out early, exploring the groundwater veins at the foot of the mountain, and began constructing water collection pools and canals along the streams.

On one side was a clean water well specifically for drinking, secured with filter cloth, sand, stone, and purification stones.

On the other side, there were planned irrigation canals, connecting future fields and nurseries.

"This year we won't rely on the heavens, but on this canal system."

The roads were also gradually being laid out.

Mountain paths were leveled, and the original muddy paths leading to various villages and the main Red Tide roads were widened and restructured. Inside, a "cross-axis" road layout was planned for future district and market development.

"This isn't just setting up a shelter for survival, it's building a city."

Thus, under countless shovels, hoes, and bonfires, this once-dead valley began to take shape.

Roads connected, canals formed, and semi-underground dwellings mushroomed out of the ground, with wooden stake fences watching over the newborn boundaries in the wind and snow.

People were no longer refugees fleeing disaster but pioneers about to cultivate their homeland.

And it was already late March, time to prepare for spring sowing, the most important period of the year.

So Louis decided to hold a spring plowing mobilization conference to boost the enthusiasm of the people.

The temporary administrative hall was a building converted from an old granary, with crude wooden beams still bearing the smoke marks from burning pest corpses.

But now, it was painted with the Red Tide emblem, equipped with new glass windows, and the walls hung with symbols of the Red Tide.

Although the meeting had not yet started, the crowd had already gathered.

Some were elders from various villages, some were capable hands brought in from the Red Tide Territory, some were blacksmiths, foremen, and agricultural officials, and there were farmer representatives with frostbitten faces sitting up straight.

And just as the sun shone perfectly into the porch, Louis Calvin, draped in a black cloak and carrying a sword, entered.

He did not let any formal ceremony usher him; he simply walked steadily to the front stage, standing firmly and gazing at the full hall.

In the eyes of everyone, Louis, cloaked in black, walked up the dais, his steps steady and powerful.

"I know everyone is very busy." He began with a smile, speaking calmly, "For the past month, many of you have barely closed your eyes."

"There are those clearing land, those building canals, those organizing relocations, and those who stayed up late drawing land contracts and family division maps."

He paused for a moment, surveying the hall, and earnestly said, "But all of this is what you should be doing because you are the backbones of the Red Tide Territory. Most of you have walked with me from the ruins of the Red Tide to where we stand today."

"Many village heads, settlement heads, and foremen were lifted from refugees or even slaves, by me, one by one. We endured the insect disaster and bitter winter together. Now we stand here, not to hold a meeting, but to begin a new wave of conquests."

There was no sound from the crowd, but several pairs of eyes had already quietly reddened.

Louis raised his hand, and his adjutant unfurled a roll of parchment engraved with the scarlet pattern.

"From this moment, the 'Spring Plowing Mobilization Order' is officially issued!"

His voice rose, resonating like a sword unsheathed: "All villages and communities enter the spring plowing preparation state effective immediately, with village heads as the first responsible people for the farming preparations, providing daily progress reports."

"All requisitions, labor, and resources should be prioritized for agricultural use, and inspection officials will be dispatched in groups to tour the villages within three days;"

"A 'Spring Plowing Mid-Term Summary Meeting' will be held by the end of next month, launching three follow-up projects: canal excavation, livestock breeding, and border farm settlements."

"Each village, each settlement, each workshop: your own fields, your own canals, your own territories, will be yours to lead this time!"

"I am not here to make decisions for you, but to ask you to lead your people and take this year's first round of sowing!"

Several village heads were flushed with youthful excitement, eager to try, as if Louis had just issued a battle command instead of an agricultural order.

Louis stepped off the podium, slowly walking to the foremost village head, patting his shoulder, and then gazing around at everyone.

"I also have an announcement. From today, all villages, settlements, workshops, and administrative groups, will be integrated into the 'Performance Incentive' system."

"Those who meet targets and lead in increased production will receive bonuses, get land allocations, be commended, and have priority in joining the regular ranks. Outstanding performers may even be selected early for prefectural officers, assigned to the Red Tide Main City."

Then he changed his tone: "However, anyone found slacking, falsely reporting, embezzling, or forming cliques will be lightly punished with labor deductions and food ration cuts, and severely demoted or exiled, with no one able to protect them."

The entire venue fell suddenly silent, understanding this was not an empty gesture.

Yet soon, those present clenched their fists, eyes filled with hope.

Because everyone knew that under Louis's leadership, rules and opportunities were never just empty words.

"Let me put it more straightforwardly," Louis slowly surveyed them, but his tone became passionate: "Spring plowing is not merely farming; it's a war against hunger!"

"I do not demand every inch of land to produce grain, but I do demand that you do not give up on any hope."

"This land is called Mai Lang. In the future, it will be planted full of wheat, it will feed the entire Red Tide, and it will establish the Northern Territory's roots firmly!"

"And the future depends on you!" He suddenly swung his arm, and his adjutants distributed official plaques one by one to each village representative and officer.

These were pieces of wood engraved with the Red Tide Emblem and village number, symbolizing:

From now on, this land would be watched, owned, and guarded with sworn lives by someone.

Many people's eyes turned red, and their backs straightened.

They were not afraid of hardship, but they feared having no one to believe in them.

Yet now, the great Lord Louis had bet the entire future of the Red Tide on them.

It was a mission and an honor.

Chapter 378: Spring Plowing

As the weather warms, spring farming begins.

Only a day after the mobilization meeting, the sky over Mai Lang Basin still drifted with bits of snow, and the frost from the night hadn't completely melted away, but the entire valley was already bustling with activity.

The drums from the villages echoed one after another, measuring ropes spread across the fields like a woven net, the sound of hammering incessant, wooden stakes being driven into the soil one after the other.

Everywhere, there were busy figures, lines marked by ropes, and voices giving commands.

"One more foot to the north! The terrain is higher there, which aids drainage."

"Make sure to write down the number, this is 'Field No. 7 of Village Three,' and don't forget to leave two paces of space for easy ditch repairs."

The measuring team was composed of the Agricultural Official, village chiefs, and experienced old farmers familiar with the land's topography.

They trod on the wet mud, with steadfastness written on their faces from years of reconstruction experiences, their speech brisk, their work efficient.

Announcements stood at the edge of the fields, depicting: village boundaries, drainage lines, field numbers, soil grades, and uses.

Clear at a glance, although most villagers were illiterate, they could understand.

Farmers lined up at registration points to report their numbers; all this needed to be recorded in the books.

On the other side, the construction of greenhouses was being carried out at the same time.

Unlike other scattered camps where spring farming was still at the initial stage of turning over soil shovelful by shovelful, Mai Lang Valley's initial positioning destined it to be different.

This was the core hub of Red Tide Territory's "large-scale spring farming strategy," destined to be one of the largest grain planting centers in the entire Northern Territory.

Thus, starting from the demarcation of the land, every step was no longer a fragmented attempt but the opening of organized agricultural engineering.

The valley possessed an exceptional shallow geothermal resource, with heat flows constantly released from the underground rock veins, it was a natural warm bed.

That meant as long as wind barriers were set up and the drainage network was arranged properly, the interior temperature of the greenhouse could stably maintain the temperature of a late autumn afternoon, which was a miracle in the Northern Territory.

So, under the morning light, the frames of the greenhouses slowly began to rise.

"Quickly get the main beams up! Five-inch spacing, no deviations allowed!"

"Women's group! Pull the covering film outward by three feet, remember to nail it tight in the direction of the wind, the wind can tear it easily!"

The team of craftsmen was responsible for constructing the main components, while the able-bodied villagers assisted by passing materials and securing them.

Youths transported coal bags and fire bricks, and the women stepped on ladders in the cold wind to stretch the thick semi-transparent film.

Rows of white roofs spread across the gray-brown earth, like waves crashing against distant mountain shadows.

Beneath each greenhouse, a heated bed system was pre-installed, with geothermal pipes extending inside from the edges of the greenhouse, connecting to the central furnace chamber, which was the structure of the "geothermal heated bed" first created by Red Tide Territory.

The greenhouses sprang up one by one, the semi-transparent windproof film emitting a faint silvery light under the sun, like thermal wings covering the earth.

These structures called "geothermal greenhouses" were not just simple wind and snow shelters, but fortresses nurturing the hope of an entire season.

"Now it's just right for turning the soil," Mike murmured as he felt the ground beneath his feet. "The heat, the heat pipes are functioning normally, the temperature is steady and concentrated, perfect for sowing."

As Red Tide Territory's Agricultural Official, Mike had the most experience and the keenest eyesight.

He could tell which land should be planted with green wheat and which soil should be mixed with ash at a glance.

The chores here in Mai Lang Territory were central to the entire Northern Territory's grain planting plan, and when Louis decided to focus on this area, Mike was the first to be appointed from Red Tide Territory.

As soon as he said this, the surrounding farmers heaved a sigh of relief and started calling out to move hoes and rakes into the greenhouse to prepare for work.

Louis nodded.

After the greenhouses were erected, the geothermal pipelines could be thoroughly tested to ensure there were no leaks or blockages. Only when temperature was uniformly delivered into the soil layer, the wheat seeds wouldn't freeze to death in the cold nights.

Moreover, the canals, wind directions, and slope drains were all considered in the planning of the greenhouses.

Farming was not about rushing headlong into swinging the hoe; it was a carefully strategized battle.

"It's just as you said, fortunately, we didn't hastily plow the land before erecting the greenhouses. Otherwise, our freshly tilled soil would be trampled over and over, not only requiring rework but also compacting the loosened ground so deeply the seedlings wouldn't take root," Mike praised Louis.

Louis nodded without speaking, his gaze lightly sweeping across the soft earth beneath his feet.

A slight mist rose inside the greenhouse, a wave of warmth greeting them; the geothermal was in place, the boundary lines clear, only waiting for the plow to be drawn.

...

The morning mist over Mai Lang Territory hadn't yet dissipated, strands of geothermal steam rose from the fields, merging into the golden light atop the transparent greenhouses, making it appear as though this seedling greenhouse was enveloped by gentle light and smoke.

This was the crucial moment of the spring farming— all the greenhouses across the region had been fully constructed, and the seedling soil layer adjusted.

Today was the day to commence plowing.

In front of the largest greenhouse in Mai Lang Territory, the village chief, seedling officials, craftsmen representatives, militia leaders, and elder farmers of various villages had long lined up, their attire varied, yet all appeared very solemn.

Farmers outside gathered early, silently watching the door of the greenhouse.

And amidst everyone's anticipation, Louis approached, stripping off the black cloak, wearing only a simple white shirt, his sleeves rolled up, his steps steady but unhurried.

He said nothing, but walked straight into the seedling greenhouse. The light from the rooftop fell upon him, resembling a divine light that made him appear sacred.

Two knights were carefully carrying a specially designed iron plow into the greenhouse, the iron tip of the plow glinting coldly under the light.

Two strong, dark-haired oxen were already in place, harnessed with freshly changed iron rings for the plow, occasionally snorting in the silence.

Mike stepped forward, speaking softly: "This, this... this is the initial plow, it emphasizes 'steady start, straight track.' This job needs you personally."

Chapter 379: Spring Plowing (Part 2)

After speaking, he gently handed over the reins, his eyes filled with solemnity: "Whether this year's harvest in Mai Lang Territory is good or not depends entirely on this moment."

Louis took the reins, and as he gripped the plow handle, he took a deep breath and slowly exhaled, the cold air dispersing into a light mist in the steam.

He glanced at the untouched black soil ahead, as if seeing countless fields of Mai Lang, countless meals, countless families being fed.

"...Then let me make a good start for the year," he whispered.

The ox's hooves moved with steady force.

The iron plow slowly broke the soil, turning over a thick layer of earth, revealing a straight, deep brown furrow.

The rising steam coiled with the turning plow blade, like warm mist emerging from the depths of the earth, shimmering in the golden light, resembling the cooking smoke of early summer.

Louis held the plow steadily, moving forward inch by inch.

All around was silent, no one spoke, but every pair of eyes was tightly following that furrow, watching it come into being, from something imaginary to something real, as if seeing the hope of an entire year being sown into the soil.

Finally, someone started clapping.

Then applause spread from the village chief in the front row, quickly reaching outside the shed to the villagers watching.

The sound of clapping brought a sense of reassurance, spreading among the people.

Of course, Louis knew that this "plowing ceremony" was merely symbolic, as the real spring sowing had already commenced according to plan.

He did not need to personally hold the plow, as those precise schedules, detailed processes, and professional agricultural officials were the guarantee of efficiency.

But he also understood, some things cannot be solely accomplished through efficiency.

The eyes watching him weren't just looking at a lord farming, but were seeking confidence, proof that their lives would improve.

The simple hopes of the villagers never came from cold, hard orders, but from seeing you personally undertake the first plow of spring.

Louis slowly stopped, gently patted the ox's back, then turned to look at Mike, with a relaxed smile.

"Next, it's up to you," he said.

Mike nodded heavily, unable to contain the smile on his face.

The next morning, the work of preparing seedbeds began in each village.

The fields had been frosted for days; if sown hastily, the seeds could freeze to death before sprouting.

Thus, under the coordination of the Agricultural Bureau, villages conducted thermally preheated plowing.

The plowing order strictly followed the distribution priority of the geothermal pipeline network.

In areas where geothermal activity was stable, labor was gathered to loosely turn the soil a day in advance, dispelling the cold; the loose dirt still steamed, with ice shards softly cracking in the morning breeze.

Village chiefs tread on the heated mud, checking temperature differences, preparing to chart a heat map for spring sowing.

Next followed the stage of applying base fertilizer.

"The mixed compost is here, hurry! Mix one bushel of straw ash with half a bushel of dried manure, spread three buckets per acre!"

The fertilization team moved swiftly along the fields, ensuring that each sowing area was tilled with a depth of at least a palm of fertile soil.

For barren plots, special additions of clay powder and fish bone powder brought from the Red Tide are needed to supplement trace elements.

The water used for fertilizing was also selected with care.

The geothermal water pulled from wells was warm and suitable, not only helping to decompose the fertilizer but also further softening the permafrost.

Every village kept a fertilization log, recording how many buckets were used, and how many times it's watered, everything was clearly documented,

The General Affairs Office sent inspectors daily to verify if "the acreage matched the amount fertilized," even a disparity of one bushel would be noted in a bad record.

Simultaneously with plowing and fertilizing, the seedling greenhouses operated nonstop around the clock.

Wheat and potato seeds had entered the germination phase ten days earlier and were guarded by agricultural officials and female workers, with temperature and humidity checked every two hours, making the air inside feel like humid warm soup.

The seed distribution system was also exceedingly strict.

Each village had to register uniformly on the designated day, with personnel from the Agricultural Bureau distributing seeds in person.

"Put your fingerprint here, sign to confirm."

"The village chief personally supervises, and there will be random checks tomorrow."

"Those caught reselling will have their cultivation rights revoked and permanently expelled from Mai Lang Territory."

These were ironclad rules, no one dared to violate them.

From seeds to soil, from heat to fertilizer, everything seemed drawn into a precise set of gears.

Turning slowly yet steadily, laying a firm foundation for the spring sowing across the entire Mai Lang Territory.

Each field, each greenhouse, each village was running in its rightful place.

And each day, the first sounds came from the copper gongs and assembly whistles in the villages.

As dawn broke, the thin mist over the fields had yet to fully dissipate, the first main labor force from the Morning Cultivation Village was already fully prepared to set out, their shoulders carrying hoes, pushing plow carts, stepping onto the newly thawed land.

Their task was the hardest yet most crucial, involving large-scale plowing, fertilization, and sowing, setting the pace for a whole day's spring cultivation in one go.

As the midday sun fell, the young and strong, female workers, and youths of Noon Cultivation Village came into action.

They were responsible for repairing sheds, inspecting plastic film, and the meticulous work on the seedbeds.

"The angle of the sixth shed's plastic film is incorrect, the wind will get in!"

"The stove's heat is leaning westward, needs to be adjusted by an inch!"

In the seedbeds, steam rose, while technicians and seedling officials in charge of the records took turns examining every detail.

When the sun set in the west, it was Night Cultivation Village's turn to take over.

The militia and village pavans donned short armor, carrying lanterns as they patrolled irrigation channels, warm sheds, and supply piles in the growing cold of night.

The lights revealed the vague steam inside the warm sheds, with footsteps, dripping water, and the occasional soft whispers and laughter weaving through the silence.

Chapter 380: Spring Plowing (Part 3)

This is the first time Mai Lang Territory has implemented a three-shift operation system since the start of spring plowing.

The days never stop, and neither do the nights.

Every village has its own work period, each linked in a chain, allowing no errors, like a misaligned gear in a precise machine, which could affect the entire schedule.

And behind this seemingly day-to-day labor is the earliest large-scale agricultural scheduling experiment under the entire Red Tide system.

If Mai Lang succeeds, the future spring plowing across the Northern Territory could follow this model.

To ensure this grand spring plowing is truly implemented, Louis also specially ordered the promotion of a brand new management mechanism.

Each village is assigned an agricultural record officer.

This is not an idle position but is specifically responsible for daily summary work in measuring, sowing, fertilizing, and shanty repairs.

All data will be compiled before nightfall and submitted to the General Affairs Hall for registration and archiving.

And outside the temporary Government Hall in the center of Mai Lang Territory, a large wooden bulletin board has also been erected, painted with striking red letters: "Cultivation Leaderboard."

The leaderboard is updated daily, densely recording the acres sown by each village that day, the progress of shanty repairs, fertilization, and irrigation, even "tardiness" is not overlooked.

Around lunchtime is the most bustling time for the cultivation leaderboard.

Every afternoon, record officers would replace the board in front of the General Affairs Hall with a new leaderboard.

Thick parchment unfolds, displaying the latest sowing progress, acres plowed, and fertilization records, with village rankings clear at a glance.

"Hey! Our 'Village Five, Group Two' made it! We're ranked sixth!"

"Look here, look here, 'Village Three, Group One' is still at the top! Three consecutive days as number one, incredible!"

Children chatter as they run around the leaderboard in circles, unable to understand the numbers, just listening to adults read them out loud.

But they also remember which column belongs to their village group.

Youths aged slightly older regard it as a leaderboard of achievements, standing taller when their fathers or brothers rank higher.

"My dad plowed ten acres today!"

"Heh, our ox pulling the plow doesn't need steering, it can drift on its own!"

Nearby, a farm woman smiles and shakes her head, her eyes shining with pride, a pride that comes from the heart.

The older laborers, village chiefs, and settlement leaders often stand in front of the leaderboard, nodding to each other:

"Your settlement plowed six more acres today; I need to urge old Zhao on our side."

"No rush, our few plots here are on slopes, sowing is slow, but the canal construction is fast; we'll catch up next week."

That drive to outdo each other wasn't forced by orders but inspired by the tangible sense of honor invoked by the leaderboard.

And these honors are not just for good names.

After the propaganda, villagers all know that by year-end, the General Affairs Hall will nominate an "Agricultural King" based on the annual data on the cultivation leaderboard.

This person not only gets the permanent cultivation rights to a whole acre of high-quality land but also receives grain as a reward.

People from families selected as the "Top Ten" could even receive material aid priority for the next season and be invited to join the village council, participating in policy-making as agricultural advisors.

Who wouldn't be tempted?

"As long as our family strives this year, we can get that plot by the river next year!"

"I heard the Agricultural King's land doesn't even have to pay land tax; it truly becomes your own land!"

Their mouths speak of land, grain, leaderboards, yet in their hearts, they understand that these are all given by that young lord in a white shirt, plowing and opening furrows.

Not charity, not pity, but a path, a selection system where "if you do well, you can stand tall."

An elderly person carrying tools stands before the board for a long time, finally just murmuring: "Lord Louis... may he live a long life."

On this Northern Territory wasteland that has been overrun by snow disasters and pestilence countless times, people understand for the first time what it means to earn their future with their own hands.

So, early the next morning, before the leaderboard could be updated, the villagers were already on their way.

Shoulder carrying, hand pushing, plow driving, spade swinging.

They toil not only for their meals but also for a place on that leaderboard, for the pride on their families' faces, and for that young lord, Louis Calvin, who never deceived them.

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Several consecutive days of sunshine, sunlight filtering through thin clouds, spilling over the valley, as spring plowing progresses, fields in each village community start to take shape.

The whole Mai Lang Valley, viewed from a high place, is neatly divided like a chessboard, with each channel, field number, and shanty silhouette unfolding orderly under the carving of systems and sweat.

Louis walks slowly at the edge of a third village's field, accompanied only by a record officer and an attendant.

On the ridge, a few young boys run with buckets, laughing, sounds of singing from female workers float from a distance in a shanty.

There are farmers rolling up their sleeves, turning the soil, fertilizing, and covering the ground with membranes under the warm vapor in the fields, with traces of resilience and diligence on their brows.

He pauses, standing in front of a semi-transparent greenhouse.

Inside, steam rises, the ground finely tilled; the first batch of young wheat sprouts has quietly emerged from the soil, tender green like jade, with slightly curled branches and veins.

"The temperature is well maintained."

Louis crouches down, lightly touching the soil beneath the greenhouse with his fingertips, feeling a slight warmth, soft yet dry, with good fertility.

The record officer reports softly: "Five tenth of the area has been tilled, seventy percent of the seedbeds are complete, and the stability rate of shanties has reached eighty percent. If there is no late spring cold spell, we can uniformly sow the second batch of main crops in five days."

Louis nods, his gaze sweeping across the bustling land.

Amidst those silhouettes, some are driving the ox to plow, some carrying manure buckets, an old farmer leads his grandson carrying a hoe, explaining while gesturing, and a mother feeds water by the shanty, her child clings to seeds nearby, face full of seriousness.

He suddenly whispers: "...It's a bit like when Red Tide Territory was first established."

Though this is only the beginning, and there will be more land, more people, perhaps more storms and snow in the future.

But at least this spring, he personally sowed the first batch of hope in the Northern Territory.