

Winter 391

Chapter 391: Knight Order Reform (Part 3)

"That's right." Louis's expression was firm, "In the past, it was given by me; now it's a clear system."

"In the future, this list of benefits will be the recruitment order of the Red Tide Army. Active knights will feel more at ease when they see it, and knights from other territories will be tempted."

Louis put away the manuscript and smiled slightly. "Lambert, the Red Tide Territory no longer relies on slogans or sentiments."

The Red Tide Territory aims to sustain people with systems, bind hearts with honor, and feed loyalty with benefits."

Lambert watched Louis articulating the plan eloquently, but an indescribable emotion stirred in his heart.

He remembered the boy who used to secretly imitate moves at the edge of the swordsmanship field, falling down and getting back up on his own, gritting his teeth without uttering a word.

Now this child can articulate military systems, decentralization, incentives, and rewards, discussing a thousand-strong knight order as if it were second nature, even surpassing the Imperial Capital's generals.

He said he wanted his followers to share the glory, and now each of those earliest knights who followed has risen, has land, and has people to lead. Even he... has become the president of the Red Tide Legion.

Lambert lowered his eyes and said nothing.

In fact, he could completely stay in the Southern Territory, stay with his family, continue being a praised high-tier knight without having to endure snow and eat salted meat in this godforsaken place. But he was just not reconciled.

He wanted to gamble on his future, bet on a nearly impossible future—whether this young lord could defy fate and truly lead his own army.

As it turned out, he did it.

A surge of intense emotions roiled within him, but Lambert suppressed it, merely tightening his fist imperceptibly.

The wind blew past the edges of the draft paper in the pavilion. He glanced down at those terms and suddenly felt that the back of this Viscount of the North in front of him was more reliable than any honor.

.....

Leaving the training field, Louis returned to the administrative office of Red Tide Castle.

The familiar thick wooden door gently opened, and the rich scent of pine and paper and ink wafted through the air.

The warmth from the fireplace lingered in the air. He took off his cloak and hung it aside, summoning an attendant to call for Bradley.

After a short while, the old butler walked in steadily, holding the newly compiled spring plowing plan from the archives.

"Take a seat, Bradley." Louis rubbed his temples and placed a stack of newly revised blueprints on the table, "We need to discuss the renovation plan for the Red Tide Territory."

Bradley nodded, his gaze steady on those sketches.

"These are some of my preliminary ideas. You can take a look first, but..." Louis tapped his fingers on the table lightly, his tone shifting slightly.

"It's not the time for big moves right now. It's spring plowing season, which is the most critical recovery period for the entire Northern Territory; we can't delay the overall situation for personal reasons."

Bradley offered no rebuttal, only quietly nodding, waiting for him to continue.

"So let's start with some basic preparations," Louis took a red pen and circled several places on the blueprint, "First, dismantle those temporary shelters built during the winter disaster to free up land; then, as planned, start building the basic city walls around Red Tide City, and mark the boundaries."

Bradley opened the city wall construction blueprint, initially glancing over it instinctively, then his movement suddenly halted.

He silently turned the second page, the third, and the more he looked, the tighter his brow furrowed—not out of dissatisfaction, but shock.

This size design... it wasn't just for a defensive structure, it aimed directly at the specifications of a "prosperous city-state."

"...Is this planning to build a city?" he murmured.

He instinctively looked up at Louis.

In the past, he might have thought this was just a young lord's whimsical idea, but the years of accumulation in Red Tide, the precise resource allocation, and Louis's ability to break barriers without a sound.

He suddenly realized: this matter isn't an unreachable fantasy.

If according to these blueprints it really gets built...

Then Red Tide City will undoubtedly become the most prosperous and stable city in the Northern Territory.

Bradley put down the blueprint, his tone as steady as ever, yet involuntarily carrying a sense of solemnity:

"...If we proceed with this plan, resource allocation shouldn't be a problem."

He said, adding a line:

"You're not just building a territory... you're creating a future, a future belonging to the Northern Territory."

Louis merely smiled, his tone relaxed as if speaking of a spring excursion.

"It's just a concept for now," he said, his tone calm, as if unwilling to speak too heavily, "The city hasn't even started construction, just a few pages of drawings, it's too early to talk about the future."

He shrugged slightly, leaning back in his chair with a nonchalant yet subtly confident appearance.

Bradley gazed at the blueprint, then looked at the expression on Louis's face.

It was a sort of calmness that was hard to describe, not ostentatious, not impassioned, nor deliberately inspiring, yet impossible to ignore.

He suddenly realized that even though it was just a concept on paper, this young man had already encompassed the entire situation in his control, steadily, transforming ideals into reality step by step.

Bradley felt a slight, indescribable tremor in his heart.

This young one... has he really come this far?

He lowered his eyes, masking his emotions, and replied in a solemn voice:

"I'll make arrangements at once."

As his words fell, the old butler stood up, his expression returning to normal.

But in the short few steps to the door, his back inexplicably carried a touch of solemnity.

Louis watched him leave, tapping his fingers lightly on the table, a series of plans and processes rapidly flipping and assembling in his mind.

He knew clearly that the true Red Tide City was only just beginning.

After finishing the urgent tasks of the city wall baseline, refugee camp removal, and other matters, Louis exhaled lightly, closed the file, and rubbed his slightly sore wrist.

"That's all for now."

Outside the castle, dusk had begun to settle, faintly carrying the sounds of the marketplace closing for the day.

The Red Tide Territory remained orderly as usual, but the steps ahead were prepared to advance further north.

The vein located deep within the Snow Peak was the next strategic cornerstone mapped out in his mind months ago.

Now that spring plowing was steadily on track, it was time to set off.

Returning to his bedroom, Emily was already waiting by the fireplace.

She wore a light golden gown, covered with a thin cloak, sitting properly, but unable to hide the reluctance in her eyes.

"Leaving tomorrow?" she asked softly.

"Yes." Louis walked over, knelt down to adjust her dress, and held her hand, "I have to go there personally. The terrain is complex and the veins unstable; reports alone won't do."

Emily said nothing, only held his hand tighter.

"But," Louis smiled, his eyes softening, "Once the spring plowing is stable, you can come over. Then we can continue in a new environment."

Emily blushed, couldn't help but lightly hit him, but finally rested her head on his shoulder.

Louis lowered his head and kissed her forehead, "Get a good night's sleep tonight; I'll leave tomorrow."

And so, in that gentle night, the two spent their quiet time before parting.

Until the next morning, the knight order was assembled, and Louis donned a cloak with red patterns, mounted his horse, and headed north.

Chapter 392: Titus Frost Fierce

Deep within the Cold Moon Hall, pale blue ice flames flickered like breathing.

Titus sat curled on the silver-bone-studded chair, as still as a rock in the snow.

The heavy cold wolf cloak hung down to the steps, cradling a jug of snow brew in his arms, the wine not yet chilled, the spirit already sinking.

A warrior rushed over the snow, kneeling on one knee, cold sweat not yet dried on his forehead, his voice like a blade piercing the ice: "The Broken Axe Clan... hung our envoy's head over their northern wall."

He paused, his gaze faintly fearful, "On the skull, there was a blood mark from the Red Rock Clan... they say, it's their consensus."

The fire altar suddenly leapt with a cluster of blue flames, spiraling upwards as if trembling with anger.

Titus was silent for a moment, as if he hadn't heard, gently rubbing the jug of snow brew in his arms with his fingertips.

The firelight outlined his profile, cold and stern like carved from stone.

"...What did they say?"

The warrior lowered his head, speaking with difficulty: "They said you are... a rebellious son who murdered his clan, a thief who seized power amidst chaos. They claim even if you usurped the position of the Frostmane Clan, you have no right to wield the power of the Eight Banners."

Everyone in the hall was stunned.

But Titus did not respond for a long time, then slowly exhaled a breath of white mist.

He slowly stood, placing down the jug, and walked to the Frost Vow Tablet.

It was the sacred monument of alliance left by the ancient Cold Moon Tribe, the mottled inscriptions long eroded by wind and snow.

His gaze quietly swept over the carvings that once represented "faithfulness," gripping the sword hilt, he gently drew it.

"Chang—"

The ancient Cold Moon blade unsheathed, its blade sounding like snowstorm, echoing throughout the hall.

The blue flame was pressed low by the Sword Energy, everyone was apprehensive.

He spoke softly, but his voice seemed to reverberate throughout the Northern Territory: "I wanted to give them a dignified future. But they only know brute strength and not dignity."

He turned, his gaze like icy spears sweeping over the seated generals, his tone chilling yet clear: "If so, I will teach them with the blade, what order means."

In an instant, the Frost Lord, calm like a snowy rock, exuded an indescribable pressure.

He slowly plunged the sword's tip into the ice flame: "Transmit my order, assemble the Eight Banners and all military divisions within two days at White Frost Ridge!"

.....

On White Frost Ridge, the cold wind like a knife, snow night not yet ended.

Titus stood atop the high altar, draped in a great cold wolf coat, the blue-gray cloak flapped like banners in the fierce wind.

Behind him were Cold Moon warriors standing like a forest, encircled by fire basins, blue flames rising, transforming into a fiery sea intertwined with fierce snow.

This was the night of the Frost and Fire Oath, and the moment of old alliances breaking, new orders arising.

He stepped slowly to the center of the oath altar, raising his sword toward the sky, speaking in Barbarian tongue, his voice like rolling thunder piercing wind, snow, and hearts:

"The Broken Axe Tribe, does not keep alliance! The Red Rock Tribe, does not respect the snow oath!"

"I, Titus Frost Fierce, neither for family vengeance, nor for clan shame, but for the children of this snowfield, no longer wandering, no longer kneeling!"

The sword he held high ignited with a blue radiance in the firelight, like lightning and thunder.

"In the past, the Barbarian Race were dogs under the Empire's feet, were slaves grappling each other! But now, we want territory, we want homeland, we want a Snowfield Nation—where fire can burn, where children can grow!"

He paused, looking toward the invisible southern end of the night, his voice low yet filled with all-consuming hatred:

"The Empire trampled our dignity, stole our ancestral snow bones. Don't beg them for a mouthful of porridge, don't hope for half a granary from them.

The snowfield does not breed cowards, nor should it be led by someone like Harold. His posture groveling only suits carrying the Imperial People's whip."

Before his words fell, from below the oath altar came a roar like mountain and thunder.

"Frostfire will not die!!"

"Long live Titus!!"

Warriors waved spears, axe blades, and bone shields, shouted wildly with bare chests, those who knelt pressed their foreheads into the snow, steaming with heat.

Yet outside the circle of fire, those not kneeling stood firmly like iron pillars in the cold wind.

Some elderly generals who had followed Harold Frostmane in battle for decades had no fervor lit by the blue flames, only suppressed anger and deep sorrow.

"He's mad."

With trembling white beard, Orton gritted his teeth, murmuring full of bile: "That was the alliance seat Harold single-handedly carved out, his bones not yet cold, and he tramples the old vow."

His voice mixed with hatred: "He poisoned the clan lord, killed Harold's three sons, burned the Frostmane Hall, and now wants to cleanse his hands with a few words?"

Beside him, General Heigen clenched his fist, blood apparent in the cracks between armor: "What he's done is not only rebellion, but father-killing usurpation."

Another silent elder suddenly spoke: "...But it can't be stopped."

All were startled.

The elder watched Titus's upright figure like a monument among the flames, his gaze complex, "Broken Axe, Red Rock tore the alliance, with the Empire eyeing fiercely from outside, delay any longer in the snowfield, even bones will have nothing left.

Moreover, there's no one left in the Frostmane Tribe, Titus did a thorough job, even if we want to revolt, we have no legitimate cause now."

He whispered the last line, "We hate him, but the grudge might already be too late."

Among wind and snow, those once hesitant young warriors were already pierced through the heart by Titus's fiery sword-like oath.

He wasn't asking them to die, he was telling them: from now on, the snowfield shall no longer be humble.

The blue flames burned fiercer.

Titus quietly watched it all, a barely noticeable curve at the corner of his mouth.

He knew clearly not all people were loyal to him, but he didn't need them to love him, he only needed them to fear him.

He murmured softly to himself, as if speaking only to himself: "This land, I want it to no longer live kneeling."

The wind swept flakes of snow across his cheeks, as if brushing out a certain memory.

He remembered that winter, Harold half-kneeling in front of the Empire's emissary camp.

The old warrior who had once guided him through valleys, taught him to wield the axe, hunt wolves, and brave the snow, was the most unruly old lion of the Barbarian Race.

That day, he half-knelt just to exchange for dozens of carts of old grain and a few barrels of salt.

The messenger from the Empire wore a silver-patterned ceremonial robe, sitting high above, smiling as if feeding a dog.

He pointed to the fire basin beside Harold and said, "You're still not sincere enough—if you can put your hand inside, I'll believe you are truly submitting."

Titus witnessed with his own eyes, Harold was silent for a moment, then really reached in, without using any Fighting Energy, just to please that lapdog.

He didn't utter a sound, but his eyes kept gazing at the distant mountains.

Later that hand rotted away, never to grow back.

But even more rotten was the laughter of the Imperial People, echoing outside the tent all night.

At that moment, Titus felt no hatred or anger, only profound indifference.

"He is a man who can tear a mountain lion's spine with his bare hands," Titus murmured softly, "yet for a few bags of grain, he's willing to bow thrice."

So he sprinkled the powder into that kettle of medicinal soup and quietly left.

The wind and snow swept through the camp, yet inside the beast pelt tents illuminated by the bonfire, there was light, singing, and the mingling scent of alcohol, as if the Frost Clan finally welcomed a brief respite.

This was a banquet personally set by the old chieftain Harold Frostmane, to celebrate the tribe's successful passage through winter.

The banquet began in an orderly fashion until the third round of medicinal wine was poured.

And when Harold raised his cup, Titus stood at the end of the crowd, his brows and eyes serene like a glacier.

His gaze traversed through the crowd, landing on that rough and aged hand, the hand that had once tightly gripped the War Axe yet ultimately bowed to the Empire.

When Harold tilted his head back to drink, Titus didn't move; he only exhaled slowly.

Tens of eyes hadn't processed what had happened yet when the elderly yet still imposing clan leader suddenly collapsed, the wine vessel in his hand shattered on the rocky ground, letting out a crisp wail.

Some were shocked, some rushed forward to check, some called out the Priest's name.

Titus didn't move, nor did he step forward.

In the firelight, he gently turned his head and glanced at his aunt, the clan mother of the Frost Clan.

She was staring in terror at her husband's corpse, her face ashen.

Titus remembered that moment, then turned and quietly left.

Tonight was just the beginning.

Three days later, the clan mother was poisoned to death in her tent, and before her body turned cold, Titus's trusted men had already seized control of her personal guard.

A week later, his younger brother "accidentally" fell from a horse and died, and his sister "accidentally" drowned in the Musnow Creek...

No one saw Titus make a move, there was no evidence, nor were there witnesses.

But everyone understood that from the moment Harold fell, the Frostmane bloodline of Frost Clan was entirely obliterated.

He took exactly twenty-seven days, cautiously advancing, in the name of "purging the clan's Imperial dogs" and "investigating traitors," decisively eliminating all dissenters.

The elders did not dare to speak, the warriors gradually fell silent, and the young men began chanting his name.

A month later, he stood at the old assembly's main seat, draped in bloodstained wolf pelt, his gaze like a frost blade sweeping over everyone present.

"From this day forth, Frost Fierce is no longer just my war name, but the surname of this clan." His voice wasn't loud, yet it drowned out the wind, "We, the Frost Fierce Clan, will never bow for grain again, nor will we lick the boots of our enemies."

"How did Harold die?" someone asked softly.

He just replied with two words: "The Empire."

Thus, the blame for this coup shifted from his hands to beneath the Empire's iron boot.

Hatred reignited among the Barbarian Race, and the totem flag of the Frost Clan flapped like Fireworks across the Snowfield.

Titus stood on the northern slope, his cloak billowing, behind him were the newly built walls of the Frost Camp and the endlessly forged crude iron weapons.

He looked to the further Southwest, the territory of the Redrock and Broken Axe Clans.

They were once allies, now quarreling fiercely over border disputes.

So the military banner of the Frost Fierce Clan rose once more over the Frozen Tundra, like the howl of a gray wolf, awakening the long-slumbering war bones.

Titus Frost Fierce donned armor and personally led troops, his silver-gray battle armor as if forged from ice rocks, the snow wolf cloak flapping in the wind, like a god of war.

His orders were like Cold Iron cast, bringing order to the fragmented forces of the clan, stitching together shattered banners, forming the new "Frostfire Legion."

His targets were not just the Broken Axe, not just the Redrock, but the entire Northern Territory.

To unite the Barbarian Race and rebuild their glory.

To ensure that these people trapped in the snow would no longer bow for grain or kneel to the Empire.

He wanted the entire Northern Territory to swallow this humiliation and betrayal with him, then spit it back at the Empire, with frost and flame of wrath.

But he was not moved by mere emotion.

Titus was never a reckless person.

He severed old alliances with his own hands, not out of anger, but because he had seen a path farther ahead.

And he was not staking everything on a single chance.

On the night before he poisoned Harold Frostmane, some ancient presence responded to his call.

Since that night, Titus no longer considered defeat.

And even the oldest prophets among the old clans dared not look him in the eye.

He hid within himself a secret trump card that would overturn the entire world.

Chapter 393: Star Forging Territory

The mountain wind cuts like a blade, slicing through the unending mine ridges along the northern edge of Snow Peak County. The thick snow has yet to melt, but the mountains have already exposed layers of mottled rocky bones, resembling a slumbering steel giant.

Louis stands atop a mountain hollow, draped in a heavy cloak, overlooking the bustling scene below.

The sound of axes and chisels echoes between the mountain walls, carrying rhythm and power.

Artisans wield pickaxes before the mine tunnels, with rows of half-underground wooden cabins neatly embedded into the ground, smoke rising from ventilation shafts.

A few snow-horned cattle slowly amble out from the barn, pulling sleds loaded with stone materials towards the dispatch area.

A small aqueduct channels water through the cracks in the rocks, crystal clear, bypassing a purification device, and into the drinking water tanks.

The entire mining camp has already taken on the shape of a "territory in embryonic form."

This is his newly named Star Forging Territory.

Unlike the Mai Lang Territory, which Louis started from scratch, this critical land, with a mining line stretching thirty miles, located at the northern edge of Snow Peak County, has long been scattered with abandoned mine veins.

Now, under his leadership, it is being reawakened.

Flint marrow oil, gas vein stone, demon marrow ore, burnt iron...every vein seems like a wealth network handpicked by fate, crisscrossing under his feet, waiting to be awakened.

Louis can instantly see that these ores will form the backbone and lifeblood of the future Red Tide military industry.

Louis stands on the snowfield, gently exhaling, draped in a gray-white windbreaker.

This is not the end, but the beginning of fire.

In his mind, he seems to see a future city forged by fire; this is an important cornerstone for his conquest of the Northern Territory.

"My Lord." A middle-aged knight, clad in thick robes and armor, rides up swiftly, bowing slightly, "Supervisor of the Star Forging Territory, Kael reporting to you."

"You've worked hard." Louis pats his armored arm, his gaze sweeping across the surroundings, "This place has developed even faster than I expected."

Kael, hearing this, reveals a proud smile, his somewhat gruff voice tinged with a rasp: "Several foundational constructions have been completed. The dormitory area is built, capable of housing nearly ten thousand residents.

The preliminary support for three main mine tunnels is complete, the truss structures are fully reinforced, and the tracks have already been reserved. Furthermore, there is a dispatch center for daily affairs arrangement and inventory registration."

He pauses, then points to four watchtowers further up the mountain paths: "Of course, the defensive outposts are also completed, even though they are temporary wooden structures, but they're sufficient."

Louis scans the camp, his gaze sweeping from the neatly arranged dormitory area, temporary command post, to the mine tunnel entrances reinforced at the mountain foot.

He slowly lifts the corners of his mouth, with a subtle smile: "Kael, you've done well, I chose the right person."

His voice is not loud, yet carries weight.

Kael instantly straightens his back, unable to conceal the pride and gratitude in his eyes.

Then he solemnly kneels on one knee: "We can begin extracting the first batch of ore layers anytime, my Lord need only give the order."

Louis gently shakes his head, withdrawing his gaze from Snow Ridge.

He looks toward the undulating mine slopes below, speaking steadily: "No rush, let's take it step by step. Not just any place here can be mined freely."

Kael is momentarily taken aback, then suppresses any eagerness, waiting quietly for the Lord's explanation.

"This place..." Louis slowly walks toward an exposed rock layer, placing his hand on the cold stone, "may seem busy from the surface, the mine tunnels are formed, artisans orderly, manpower ample, but in reality, every stone beneath is buried upon bones."

His tone is not high, yet carries a heavy and steady weight, like a knife pressed beneath snow.

"Long before we arrived, too many nobles attempted to develop the mine veins here. They brought miners, technicians, mages, knights, and even an entire train of gold coins and ambition, but in the end?" He lightly flicks the ice shards from his fingertips, "The people were gone, and the mine wasn't opened."

Kael's brow subtly moves, revealing a sliver of concern.

"The main issue is the terrain's complexity, the mine veins are as fragmented as fish bones, and the rock layer has serious fractures. One mishap, and it could collapse entirely."

Louis gazes at the chasms in the mountain slopes, those abandoned mine tunnels like deep and dark rifts: "Beside, among all the mountain tunnels, which are true paths, and which are dead ends? No one knows."

Kael's expression darkens: "I know it's difficult here...but hearing you say this, it sounded more like a cursed land."

"It is a curse." Louis looks at him, yet his tone is exceptionally gentle, "But a curse itself is also an opportunity, an opportunity to dominate. The question is whether you can bear the cost."

Kael hears this and furrows his brows, considering that the task would be tough, however, he hadn't anticipated it being so tough as expressed by Louis.

Louis turns around, smiling: "But just because they couldn't do it doesn't mean we can't. Don't worry, how could I not have been prepared before coming?"

I've been preparing for a long time, and I'll forge this Star Forging Territory into the sharpest blade of Red Tide!"

Kael suddenly lifts his head upon hearing this, a flicker of fiery light in his eyes.

"Pass the orders." Louis surveys the burgeoning camp, "Let the accompanying knight order and artisan teams rest for a day, replenish, repair, and inspect all mine shaft supports."

His tone was decisive: "Tomorrow, the extraction officially begins."

...

The next day arrived swiftly.

Before dawn fully broke, the mountain ridge had taken on a pale blue snowy light, the wind still carried the night's chill, yet voices began to rise before the mine tunnels.

Louis stands at a high point below the command platform, gazing down at the Seventh Mine Ring.

He didn't hurry to mobilize all the laborers but instead set the mining point on the western side of the mine ring, a section of rock belly that had not yet collapsed and had relatively flat terrain.

This place was originally a branch of the old mine shaft and was judged by the mining master Valentine to be a "low-risk area" due to its relatively stable rock layers and minimal temperature variation.

"Here," he nodded to Kael beside him, "let's dig a new shaft from scratch."

Kael took his orders and then sounded the pilot horn.

Those who entered the mountain were all old miners and skilled technicians brought from the Red Tide Territory, experienced, speaking little, and moving steadily.

Louis's goals were very clear and quite straightforward:

Verify the distribution depth of the ore layers, confirm whether the Demon Marrow Ore and Qi Vein Stone are buried 20 feet below as predicted by the maps;

Also, test the stability of the rock layers, analyze the reverberation after blasting, and avoid large-scale collapses;

And monitor the geothermal reactions, observe the flow direction of the hot rock belts and their interaction with the permafrost boundary to prevent high-temperature steam from destroying the main shaft in the future.

However, before the formal mining started, the entrance to the mine shaft did not immediately reverberate with the sound of hammers and pickaxes striking.

Instead, a group of old craftsmen busied themselves around a bunch of strange devices.

Heavy boxes were opened, parts were taken out, wiped, and assembled, some people squatted on the ground to tighten bolts, others carefully hammered copper pins along the rock wall.

The whole mine shaft front seemed not prepared for mining but like an impromptu installation of techniques.

Kael glanced and said, "Is this... a new blasting device?"

"No, it's more important." Louis stood aside, looking at the crowd with a calm expression, "I ordered them to install the 'Earth Vein Sound Wave Device'."

"Sound Wave Device?" Kael frowned slightly.

"To put it simply," Louis turned his head and whispered, "it's a device that charts the mine using sound echoes by striking the ground."

This equipment was the result of an idea proposed by Louis a few months ago, slowly researched, improved, and tested by the experienced mining master Valentine and a group of craftsmen from the Red Tide Territory.

Its structure is crude, even a bit savage — but it's indeed effective.

The whole set of devices is divided into three parts:

The most conspicuous is a machine called the "shock head," which looks like a giant steam hammer.

It uses pulleys and steam to drive a heavy hammer, repeatedly pounding on the rock wall or ground, each blow emitting a low sound, like thunder, tingling the feet.

These shockwaves penetrate the ground and bounce back upon encountering cavities, ore veins, or other structures.

The second part is the "echo reception nails," which the knights drive a dozen metal pins into the rock wall, each connected to a thin copper wire, all leading back to the main equipment.

These pins act like ears, "hearing" the movement when the sound waves return, transmitting the sound back to the main device.

And these echoes finally display on something called the "sound membrane analysis disk."

It's a tightly stretched animal skin drum, with copper rims around its edges.

When the echo returns, the drum surface slightly trembles, indicating hollow spaces, ore layers, or other anomalies beneath where it jumps higher.

A few old craftsmen closely observed the drum membrane, some even taking notes beside it.

Master Valentine patted the drum surface, smiling as he explained:

"Simply put, it's listening for sound by pounding the ground. Where the sound seems off, there's likely something good hidden."

He pointed to a slightly raised area: "This sort of thumping sound indicates solid rock. The hollow sound here is likely an abandoned mine shaft.

And here, repeated echoes... can't say for sure, maybe an interlayer, maybe a dense ore."

He shook his head and chuckled, sighing, "I've been in mining for thirty years and never thought we could explore mines by listening. This is all thanks to Lord Louis's idea."

He paused, his gaze on the young lord in the distance speaking softly with Kael, his eyes full of admiration, his voice involuntarily lowering:

"Honestly, in our line of work, we rely on old experience, and Lord Louis isn't one of those with calloused hands, but he sees clearer, thinks further than us, that's why he came up with this great invention..."

Meanwhile, Kael stood by, watching the tightly stretched animal skin drum surface tremble slightly with the shockwaves, feeling a kind of illusion.

This old mining mountain that had been silent for centuries seemed truly "alive."

They were conversing with this mountain in another language.

Not with flame, steel chisels, or blood and sweat, but with sound waves and echoes.

This instrument, with its crude appearance, had little trace of magic, yet it made the entire pilot exploration shift from "blind digging" to "information-based mining warfare."

It was like lighting a torch, so the path ahead was no longer entirely unknown and life-threatening.

And this was something only Louis, from Earth, could conceive, not magic, but a crystallization of technology.

He looked at that circle of craftsmen busy in front of the device, then at Louis who was poring over the maps not far away, feeling a sense of solidity swell within him.

Soon, they would truly swing the hammers and begin mining.

Chapter 394: Mining

After the Earth Vein Sound Wave Device completed the basic mapping, Louis finally decided on the location of the test mining point.

On the west side of the Seventh Mine Ring, in a depression where the rock layers are stable and the sound waves echo clearly.

Compared to the crisscrossing abandoned mine tunnels across the mountains, this place can be considered an untouched land.

The test mining began immediately, with the process meticulously divided into several stages. Everyone followed the "Operation Deployment Brief" from the Red Tide Lord's Hall step by step.

In the first few days of the construction phase, the entire Seventh Mine Ring was immersed in an atmosphere of tension and order.

The first to move was not the hoe or the mining pick, but the heavy hammer sound of the Earth Vein Sound Wave Device.

"Boom—Boom—" The low-frequency thuds spread in circles inside the mountain, with technicians kneeling on the rock layers, lightly touching the animal skin vibration plates to record each pulse.

The geological survey team, under Valentine's command, carried out the re-mapping of the entire mine area with diagrams and copper wires.

The old mine map was already inaccurate. Louis clearly stated that the mining lines must first be determined to ensure the most basic safety.

Soon, a brand new "Mine Strata Blueprint" appeared on their canvas. Red lines indicated active mines, black lines marked collapsed relics, and blue lines showed areas where water flow, marsh layers, or cavities might exist.

"Seeing this map, it's clear the past nobility were recklessly mining," Valentine remarked, looking at the map. "This isn't merely a mine vein; it's a trap."

Kael looked at Louis standing nearby and couldn't help but ask in a low voice, "My Lord, this map..."

"I know why they failed," Louis said calmly, "so I must ensure our success."

Then followed clearing obstacles; the entrance to the old mine tunnel was as snow-filled as bones, with collapsed rocks mixed with permafrost, making direct access impossible.

Craftsmen and teams of trained refugees worked in groups, using rollers, crowbars, and warming lamps to reopen the main passageway that collapsed ten years ago.

A few young miners tried to pry at the frozen stones but failed. They were soon replaced by experienced craftsmen who carefully handled the fault line seams.

Valentine directed from a high point, alternately scolding and nodding, wielding his seasoned experience effectively.

While the mine tunnel clearing was ongoing, infrastructure planning was carried out simultaneously.

Temporary scaffolding workshops, miner rest areas, and material warehouses were set up on the ground. Bellows and blowers connecting air shafts and mine openings were also installed successively.

The water supply pipeline was rebuilt to follow the mountain's contour, diverting into a collecting well set at the mine's low point, with craftsmen installing manual pumps for scheduled drainage.

"First ventilate, then drain; only then can we talk about safety," Valentine repeated over and over.

The reconstruction of the shaft structure was even more complex.

The old main vertical shaft was chosen as the main vertical transport channel, reinforced inside with stakes and metal support rings, with a small derrick set up at the top, fitted with a "hand-cranked pulley lifting device."

Though not as convenient as large machinery, it was stable and safe enough, best suited for initial operations.

Lighting was also not overlooked, with oil lamps and phosphorus stone lamps methodically set along both sides of the mine tunnel, bright and durable.

Each miner carried a whistle, signal rod, and hand bell to prepare for unexpected collapses or gas leaks.

"The mine is life, wind is the lungs, water is trouble, and light is the eye," Louis said at the first internal briefing. "If you can't guard these four, don't go down the shaft."

Next was the laying of the track wheel slide system, which Louis particularly emphasized.

This was not traditional wooden tracks or beast-dragged transport but a new "embedded track slide rail" module developed by the Red Tide Blacksmith Group.

Each section of the metal guide groove could be pre-assembled and combined, and when assembled, it only required a dozen people to push the cart forward.

Shock-absorbing copper pads were embedded between the track wheels, making almost no noise or jolting during ore transport, remarkably stable.

"This is for the future use, not a temporary goods stack," Louis once said.

Kael was puzzled: "Future?"

"Ten, twenty years later, we won't need manpower to do this," Louis replied, looking back at him.

As for safety protection, Louis proposed a rare "Craftsman-Knight Coordination System."

Each mine corridor team was equipped with a knight standing by outside the shaft entrance, not entering the shaft but mastering the bell cord mechanism.

Should any anomaly be detected, such as collapses, tremors, magical beasts, or gas abnormalities.

The bell cord would be pulled, immediately triggering the "shaft evacuation mechanism," thereby initiating the knight team's response and lockdown.

Kael was silent for a long time after hearing it, finally sighing, "My Lord, you've... thought of everything for everyone."

Valentine was more direct: "What kind of lord is this... it's like treating us as if we are his own sons."

This entire set of preliminary designs, from geological surveys to slide rail systems, from support trusses to hazard escape routes, was all hand-drawn by Louis and implemented by Valentine and his team.

They almost continuously watched the paper map, practically without sleep, unlike other nobility who were aloof; they genuinely shared the work with the workers using their brains.

This greatly impressed the management of the Star Forging Territory like Valentine and Kael.

Thanks to this, before the mine tunnel was even excavated, the "skeleton" of this mine was already in place.

It was not a temporary labor site but an industrial artery leading from the shaft opening to the future of Red Tide.

Once all the preliminary construction work was completed, the next task was to attempt mining.

Valentine, leading a few core technicians in person, brought two different structures of blasting devices to the forefront of the mine tunnel.

"This is a seismic magic explosion bullet," he said, patting the metal casing, explaining to Kael.

"It's mainly used to 'fracture' the rock layer structure. The principle is similar to the old era's explosives, but ours uses demon marrow petroleum combined with a compressed seismic energy core. The shock wave control is highly precise upon detonation, resonating no more than three zhang, avoiding collapse of the echo chamber."

Chapter 395: Mining

Kael nodded, his gaze lingering on another oddly shaped cylinder.

"And this one?"

"This one's even more ingenious, a Rock-Piercing Potion Bullet." Valentine chuckled, "Encased in ceramic, filled with Fire Scale Ointment and refined embers of sinking iron powder; when activated, the temperature can melt iron into water."

He gestured a scalding movement between his fingers, then added, "It's used for those hard rock cores that can't be blasted through, or for sections of rock that need 'no collapsing'—like near veins or tunnel junctions."

After a pause, Valentine lavishly praised, "This thing, entirely invented by the master and Hillco himself... I say, you're not just here to mine, you're here to teach the world what a new era means."

"Quit the flattery, get arranging." Louis responded calmly, yet the confidence in his eyes was unmistakable.

Before the official explosion, the artisan team had already completed the target seam's development tunnel, essentially a working tunnel opened horizontally.

Within the passageway, the rail slide seat system was quietly awaiting, with supporting brackets reinforcing the side walls, drainage channels extending to the rear pit entrance, and oil lamps illuminating along the wall, revealing an intermix of moisture and rust.

The technicians marked the clear blasting range on the rock surface using red powder, distinguishing each ore-laden layer from poor ore layers.

Valentine and a few artisans instructed the detonation point numbers and ignition sequence.

The detonation formally began.

The Shatter Magic Explosion Bullets were placed in the disintegration zone, places with many natural fissures showing signs of rock layer loosening.

Devices were implanted into the rock and gently tightened with a handheld rock drill, then wires were led out to a safety point.

The Rock-Piercing Potion Bullets were used near hard rock layers and main veins, assisted by stable piles and plaster bedding to ensure the cut was smooth and didn't collapse.

"Multiple points, small quantities, batch blasts, advance under five meters." This was Louis's strict rule.

A few artisans nodded to each other and quickly retreated to the rear.

Louis stood at the front end of the tunnel and waved his hand to command.

The ignition line was slowly pulled open, followed by a series of low, muffled booms.

Boom! Boom!

Shatter Magic Explosion Bullets were first to detonate, creating spider-web-like cracks, the rock layers trembled violently, but showed no signs of collapse.

A few seconds later, the Rock-Piercing Potion Bullets activated, red light snaked like a serpent, crawling along the rock surface, scorching through solid stone, burning out mirror-smooth cuts.

The entire mountain belly seemed simultaneously severed by blade and flame.

After the explosion ended, while dust had yet to settle, Valentine had already rushed forward to inspect the result.

His gaze scanned the four walls, the supports intact, rock layers smooth, with some rock surfaces even revealing glistening traces of minerals.

"The entire tunnel is open!" He shouted excitedly, "No collapse, no distortion, the vein is exposed!"

Kael was dumbstruck. He stared at the thin line of luminous rock layer, as though witnessing gemstones opening their eyes from the earth.

"Is this our extraction process? This is too..." He murmured, unsure how to describe it.

"This is just the beginning." Louis said calmly, "Once the next generation of explosive bullets is completed, workers won't need to drill; they'll only need to collect ore."

Valentine laughed so hard he couldn't close his mouth, directly turning and shouting at the artisans and technicians: "See clearly now? This is the damned civilized explosion! Learn it and carve it into your bones!"

Applause and cheers erupted like a landslide.

And amid the deafening cheers, the first batch of broken ore was carefully loaded into the rail cars.

The wheels slowly turned, the car bodies carrying the freshly blasted ore glided silently along the slide path, like a silver dragon leading to the future, moving through the mine's darkness towards the surface's initial screening area.

There, the technicians swiftly sorted the ores, rapidly discarding the waste rocks.

And those stones with a faint blue glow, like the brightest stars in the night sky, were carefully placed into the "ore division area."

"Look! It's a Qi pulse stone! It's a real treasure!" A young sorting technician trembled with excitement, holding the stone with both hands, almost jumping.

Kael hurried over, gazing at the shining ore core, his Adam's apple rolling frequently, his voice trembling: "...We've struck it rich! Truly struck it rich!"

At this moment, the entire mining area fell into a brief silence, following a burst of fervent cheers, applause, shouts, and laughter intertwining, almost overturning the sky.

They seemed to see future mountains of gold and silver, the dawn belonging to the Red Tide Territory.

This wasn't ordinary ore; it was a strategic treasure, a fuel coveted by countless magic artisans!

When the raw ore was neatly loaded onto the sled frame drawn by snowhorn cattle, slowly sliding from the mine entrance to the hillside transfer shed, miners and technicians almost jumped in joy, spontaneously applauding and cheering.

"This is a true miracle!" Someone shouted, "We've truly found hope in this abandoned vein!"

In fact, before the trial extraction, many, including some technicians and veteran miners, secretly questioned Louis's decision.

They dared not say it outright, but quietly murmured:

"Why choose this vein? This place was mined before, couldn't find anything good, that's why it was abandoned."

"This seam is too deep, too cold, the freezing stone harder than iron, even if there's a vein, it's probably already frozen away."

"Does Master Louis... really know what he's doing?"

Some even speculated, it's just a high-up show, picking a seemingly challenging mine to establish power, truly failing to mine will only leave the groundwork to suffer in the end for these bottom-tier workers.

Chapter 396: Mining

But now, that piece of dark blue Qi stone stood before everyone's eyes.

It emitted a gentle yet dazzling light, like a silent slap that shattered all past doubts and contempt.

The technicians who used to shake their heads inwardly now blushed and dared not speak, silently standing where they were, clutching their notebooks tightly, unsure if it was guilt or shock.

"...It really is true."

"In this abandoned mine that's been frozen for over a decade... we actually managed to dig up Qi stone."

They were thoroughly convinced, not because of orders, but because of that stone, which beat like a heart—alive, fervent, undeniable.

At this moment, all doubts vanished.

They finally understood that the young Lord, who seemed so detached and calm within the blueprints and systems, had long seen a future they could not.

And Louis stood on a distant rock hill, his gaze serene and determined.

He did not get excited amidst the crowd's cheers, nor did he show any hint of surprise.

This was already within his expectations, after all, he held the Daily Intelligence System and knew that the resources of this vein were not limited to this.

He had already made many preparations for this.

Thus, what he held was not just the mining pickaxe, but an entire streamlined, standardized, and replicable industrial system.

Louis quietly watched as the Qi stone was held high by the technicians, while the miners danced with excitement, some even kneeling in the snow to kiss the ground.

The pulse of the Star Forge Territory finally roared, passionate and enduring.

With the first round of trial mining successfully completed, the mining tunnel model and blasting process led by Louis were officially confirmed as feasible.

Not only was the vein confirmed, but the rock layer stability, blasting model, transportation system, geothermal impact, and all parameters reached estimated targets.

Kael was so excited that he patted the mining map like a child, shouting, "We can work it for thirty years without changing the pit! This location is simply tailor-made for you, sire!"

Valentine went further and said, "If this gets out, even those old dogs in the Imperial Capital would come to us for advice on mining explosions."

But Louis did not become rash because of this, swiftly expanding the entire system to multiple sub-wells in the Seventh Mine Ring.

After the trial mining succeeded, the mines in the Star Forge Territory were no longer a pile of temporary burrows crowded with people, but officially entered an organized, disciplined, and future-oriented industrial mining stage.

The first step was the mining operation system set by Louis.

He did not copy the slave system common around the world, instead establishing a more reliable "three-shift eight-hour rotation system."

Twelve hours of the day divided into three segments, each shift working eight hours, with two hours for handover and recording, ensuring that mining operations continue anytime, reducing manpower overload, and minimizing accident risks.

From six in the morning to two in the afternoon is the "morning shift," two in the afternoon to ten at night is the "mid shift," and ten at night to six the next morning is the "night shift."

Each team is fixed and cannot be transferred temporarily.

Miners must sign in daily, and those not meeting the required hours have relevant wages and food deducted directly.

Each shift is led by a group of operation technicians, including one duty technician, one safety supervisor, and two support inspectors.

"Won't this shift system slow down progress?" asked Kael, slightly furrowing his brow upon learning of the regulation.

Valentine didn't answer immediately but looked at the team of miners lining up.

"So what if it's slower?" He asked calmly, which was rare, "Do you know how other places mine? Other territories with mines operate day and night, without rest, flogging till bones are exposed, and still they have to go back down."

He paused, raised his hand pointing at the young miners loading tools: "They're young and strong, can endure at most for five years. After five years, either perish in mining heat, get buried in cave-ins, or become blind, crippled, and tossed into Snow Forest as bait."

Kael was stunned, silent.

Valentine sneered, yet his tone carried respect:

"But look here, there's hot water, handshakes, and records. Three shifts, eight hours each, not because we're numerous, but because..." He looked towards the distant mine entrance opened by explosions.

"It's because Louis said, 'Miners aren't consumables; they are people.'

He suddenly laughed, "Don't think more rules are for show. We're not here to grab mines; we're here to do business for ten, twenty years. If you're thinking about digging intensely one day to return to the town to drink... sorry, you're mistaken."

He patted Kael's shoulder: "We're building a mining district, not digging a graveyard."

Yet at the beginning, few miners believed this place would be good.

Most of them were refugees who fled here in winter to the Red Tide Territory, told they were sent to the Star Forge Territory for mining, their first reaction being: "We're doomed, it's slave work, dying without anyone caring."

Their previous days were hellish.

They never had enough to eat, wore tattered clothes, winter wind chilled their bones.

Their living conditions were even worse, ramshackle huts built from broken planks, roofs leaking, winds whistling through wall cracks, shivering at night from cold.

Few were willing to mine as many went to mines before, knowing it was true slave work.

Almost no safety measures, exhausting to the bone, and no one collected remains, cries swallowed by the snowstorm.

"There, our lives were like grass, trampled casually," one miner said through clenched teeth.

However, upon arriving at Star Forge, they slowly witnessed the difference.

There was regular downhole safety supervision, calculations for controlled explosions, not random blasting.

The food was vastly better than before, even able to savor hearty meat stew.

The ground-level dormitory was also warm, beds neat and clean, even sleeping soundly during freezing winters.

Valentine and technicians often mentioned the lord personally ordered to ensure miner safety and dignity.

"This Louis isn't like other nobility, who only know to extract and oppress," said an old miner pounding his chest, "he genuinely treats us as people."

"Never expected," remarked the young man in surprise, "I thought it'd be a cage, yet it's a thousand times better than our previous shack."

Finally, one day, a miner stood at a ventilation shaft, gazing at the distant snowfield blowing cold winds, and murmured, "Shouldn't have doubted Louis. This place at least gives us hope for rebirth."

They already realized this wasn't a slave camp, but a paradise in their hardship.

Chapter 397: Mine Safety

The rules of the mine not only offer many benefits, but also severe punishments.

Once, a support group omitted some pile placement data on a submitted blueprint.

That day, Valentine, holding the overlooked support diagram, stood solemnly in front of the mine's drawing board, quietly waiting for a whole hour.

The miners didn't know what happened, but no one dared to speak up.

Only after the workers had all ascended and left did Valentine speak in a deep voice: "Did any of you notice that several pieces of data weren't drawn on this section? No one checked it?"

As soon as he spoke, the surroundings fell into dead silence.

His face was ashen, and he heavily slapped the diagram onto the plank wall at the opening of the shaft, reprimanding harshly without mercy:

"Technical drawings must be precise. This isn't a spelling mistake—it's writing names on a gravestone!"

For a moment, the entire mine seemed shrouded in a chill, silenced briefly.

Later, Kael privately learned that the problematic support diagram was picked out personally by Louis from over thirty densely filled pages of records.

He flipped through them repeatedly, without uttering a word of nonsense, just furrowed his brows, and then wrote two words with a pen—"Reprimand."

This made everyone understand that Louis's management of the mine was strict to the extreme, and any slight negligence could not escape his eyes.

Therefore, no one dared to be careless, and all cherished this hard-won work and order.

The mine thus operated methodically under this scientifically rational welfare guarantee and strict reward and penalty system.

Of course, this does not mean everything went smoothly.

...

At the central fault section, within the ninth shaft corridor, the third workgroup was advancing the operations.

It was a section of seemingly calm and structurally complete rock formation.

The group technician confirmed that there were no obvious cracks on the rock surface, then according to the blueprint, implanted a Magic Explosion Bullet, set the wiring, and quickly retreated back to the safety bend.

"Ignite—"

The fuse was lit, and the bullet activated, giving a low muffled sound, then rocks burst out.

However, in the next second, deep within the rock layer that should have collapsed, suddenly caved in a pitch-black hole.

It was as if some sort of void-like "cavity" was hidden inside.

"...Something's wrong!" The lead foreman was about to raise his hand to warn when the ground suddenly shimmered with a metallic icy glow.

Crack.

A spider-like creature silently slid out from the mine seam.

The creature's entire body was crystal bright, its carapace reflective like polished crystal, with six slender sharp limbs carrying barbs, creating a dry and harsh metal screeching sound while crawling.

"It's a Magical Beast!!!" someone exclaimed in terror, but before the voice faded, other mercury-like figures leaped out from the hole, swiftly occupying various parts of the corridor.

Eight Mirror Guts Spiders.

Their crystal-backed shells constantly refracted, disrupting the lamplight, plunging the entire corridor into a "Light Domain blur" in the blink of an eye.

Torches appeared to be covered by layers of ripples, the lights became chaotic, and the craftsmen instantly lost their sense of direction.

"Don't run around, retreat toward the supports!" The foreman shouted loudly.

But it was already too late.

One young craftsman just turned around and was instantly pierced through the chest by a spider limb, blood sprayed on the mine wall, leaving a bright red streak.

Another tried to ignite the spare explosive bullet for defense, but amid the Light Domain chaos, misconnected the fuse, was impaled through the back skull by a spider limb as soon as the ignition stick was raised.

Screaming and crashing sounds echoed in the corridor, and in under a minute, the entire craftsman group was torn apart and dragged away in the fog of light and confusion.

In the end, only a single fallen mine lamp remained, flickering faintly at the blood-stained mine entrance.

A few hours later, an inspector arriving to patrol stood at the entrance of the corridor, face ashen.

The magical beasts were long gone, only the mottled bloodstains, twisted tools, and the miners' uniforms that were gnawed to bits evidenced that the third group had once existed there.

This was the first incident of a "demon attack resulting in the entire group being wiped out" in the history of the Star Forging Mine.

The news reached the administrative office before the night had fully fallen.

Louis unemotionally listened to the report, then immediately issued a terse order: "Seal off the main passage of the ninth shaft. Assemble the knight squads, descend into the shaft within three minutes."

The order was fully prepared by the rescue unit in under five minutes.

Twelve Red Tide Knights appeared at the main shaft entrance, clad in red plate armor, wielding long spears.

"Form two four-man combat units, four on the perimeter for reconnaissance and cover, stagger the searchlights—prepare to descend into the shaft."

Valentine stood at the shaft's edge, watching this group of knights swiftly get geared up and descend into the shaft, finally letting out a slight sigh of relief: "If only they had been down there earlier, maybe it wouldn't have happened."

Underground, as soon as the lights probed into the catastrophe stricken fault corridor, the front instantly lit up with a cold radiance.

Torchlight refracted off the walls, revealing the entire corridor sealed off by layers of densely packed silver shining threads — they intertwined like steel wires, wrapping tightly around the rock walls, supports, and voids, emitting a slightly cold glow, akin to a spider-woven tomb curtain.

"...It's a magic spider web." The deputy captain squinted, voice extremely low.

"Cut through, advance." The captain commanded without hesitation.

"Prepare! Open up the formation!"

The knights in the front row gripped their war axes tightly, a stripe of crimson Fighting Energy burst from his shoulder, instantly entwining the weapon.

Flames ignited along the axe blade, casting a wave of scorching brilliance.

"Break!"

The first axe swung down, fiery blade lighting spun up a blistering whirlpool, burning the spider silk inch by inch, severing it while also forcing out several bright facets in the surrounding light.

At the moment the spider silk was cut, several swift sliding shadows suddenly flashed from the deep end of the passage.

Like mercury, they darted across the rock wall with incredible speed.

Chapter 398: Mine Safety

The Mirror Orb Spider has appeared.

They are slender in form, with legs sharp as hooks, moving without a sound.

Their crystalline shells reflect the surrounding firelight, scattering several blurred illusions that make it hard to discern their true positions.

"Light Domain disturbance, be careful!"

A Scout Knight had just shouted when a spider phantom blade suddenly flashed beside him, and he instinctively raised his shield.

Only to find it was just a shadow, and the real Mirror Orb Spider emerged from the ground, attempting to pierce his chest.

Bang!

A shield-bearing knight took a step sideways, his giant shield smashing the spider against the mine wall, shattering its crystal shell.

A dry and harsh screech of "creak" sounded.

"Second formation, press in!"

The knights quickly reformed, drawing into a triangular formation, creating an intersecting strike zone within the narrow mine corridor.

Another knight strode forward, swinging a long halberd, with crimson Fighting Energy like blood lines wrapped around the tip, sweeping out in a fiery arc, severing two Mirror Orb Spiders climbing the wall.

Bang — Bang —!

Every clash was accompanied by the shriek of metal friction and the dull thuds of severed spider limbs.

Though the Mirror Orb Spiders were agile and quick, facing an organized armed combat unit made it hard for them to have an advantage.

They tried to scatter and escape, but turned into the knights' preset "fire blind spots," falling one by one.

In less than five minutes, the battle was over.

The passage returned to silence, leaving only the low-burning remnants of Fighting Energy flickering among the rock walls.

Dozens of spider corpses lay on the ground, their crystalline shells with multiple cracks, ice-blue body fluid oozing from the breaches, slowly flowing along the rock surface, finally forming tiny crystalline points, solidifying like frost on the ground.

"Confirmed complete, all medium-sized sub-adults, no venom glands, estimated to have hatched in nearby cavities, likely there are still more that were not caught," the scout concluded.

"These creatures... could actually be handled by a single formal Battle Knight," a young knight retracted his lance, his voice tinged with disdain.

The deputy captain didn't look back, just coldly remarked, "But artisans aren't knights, even a single magical spider could take their lives."

Indeed, this small-scale skirmish posed no difficulty for the knights.

But for unresisting and unorganized miners, it was massacre they couldn't fight back.

.....

On the third day after the accident, though the morning chill hadn't dissipated, the walls of major mining areas in the Star Forging Territory were already plastered with new announcements.

Few were the words, but each word was steady:

"From today onwards, a 'vibration detection pillar' is to be installed every thirty meters in all operational shafts of the Star Forging Territory to detect signs of abnormal biological activity."

"No personnel may enter a shaft alone; violators will have their work halted and be reassigned away from the shaft team."

"Each day's work must begin with a knight leading an inspection, and mining may only commence once it's confirmed to be free of lurking dangers."

Of course, most miners were illiterate, so officials would inform them.

"What does this mean?" A young mine slave stood dumbfounded in front of the notice, "I haven't even heard of such 'pillars'."

"It's normal for you not to understand." A middle-aged foreman beside him shook his head, "I don't understand either, but there are indeed a lot of rules."

Their indifference wasn't unexpected to Louis, and to make sure they truly understood these rules weren't just empty words, Louis personally ordered the establishment of "Mining Affairs Lecture Day."

Literate technicians and officials would take turns explaining the new regulations during off-duty hours in the shelters, dormitories, and canteens outside the shafts.

The lectures explained not only "how" but also "why."

With plain and rough metaphors, they explained "how vibrations indicate magical beast activity," how "air changes after tunnel sealing," even what "sonic abnormalities" were.

"Mining is like knocking on the floor of a kennel," Valentine stood personally on the lecture platform at the Seventh Mine Ring, pointing to the shaft entrance, "If there's any creature nesting underneath, knocking on its head surely makes it jump out and bite."

Someone below chuckled but quickly fell silent because Valentine's expression was too serious.

"Laugh if you want, but your lives are yours," Valentine looked at the crowd, "If you don't believe these methods are meant to save lives, then forget the names of those dead brothers."

At that moment, the atmosphere grew so heavy it was almost suffocating.

These workers, mostly of low origins, couldn't recognize many words, let alone have any "safety awareness," but they understood reality.

When they repeatedly heard that "someone is specifically responsible for checking hidden dangers," "entering a shaft alone could cause the whole team to stop work," and "if a vibration pillar alarms, everyone must evacuate," they finally understood:

It's not to trouble them; the Lord wants them to live a bit longer.

They started learning to cooperate, even if they complained, they dared not act recklessly anymore.

Before each day's work, miners gathered together to listen to technicians read the daily dispatches and risk zones, which had become a daily necessity.

Even a knight would walk at the front, ensuring everything was correct before letting people enter the shaft.

Gradually, the mindset of the miners began to change.

They learned the rules, understood the system, and more importantly, realized this point:

This place is meant for survival, not a deadly mine pit.

Most began trying to cooperate, even if they complained, they dared not act recklessly anymore.

In the shaft corridors, the practice of "lined inspections" appeared for the first time.

Before each day's work, miners gathered together to listen to technicians read the daily dispatches and risk zones.

Chapter 399: Mine Safety III

A knight would walk at the forefront, allowing people to enter the mine only after confirming everything was in order.

But not everyone agreed with these new regulations at first.

Some grumbled, "All these rules and inspections—after all this hassle, it would be better to go down early and load an extra cart of rocks."

Of course, there were also those who took shortcuts for convenience, bypassing the warning zones to mine alone ahead of time.

The first time someone violated the regulations, they were publicly named and transferred from the main work shaft to the outermost abandoned mining zone, cleaning out muddy waste paths while watching their companions emerge from the mine to receive wages and eat hot meals.

"Wanna gamble with your life? Then stay away from others, don't drag them down with you."

That's what Valentine said during a briefing at the mouth of the mine. His voice wasn't loud, but it carried clearly to everyone.

After a few rounds of discipline, no one dared to act recklessly anymore.

Even those miners who had been the most resistant to regulations lowered their heads.

They began to accept the rules, understand the system, and realize these weren't meant to bind them but to save their lives.

At the same time, a group of knights personally visited the families of craftsmen who had died in duty to deliver compensation, three official documents, and a condolence letter.

One miner's wife broke down crying, kneeling and refusing to accept the money.

The Knight Commander helped her to her feet and handed her a transfer order:

"The Mine Management Committee has approved that you will be arranged to do material inventory work at the main mine site, with monthly pay."

What moved people the most were the children.

After several miners sacrificed themselves, their children were taken to the chapel-cum-sanctuary attached to the mining area.

They were brought into that warm house, changed into clean clothes, and served steaming hot soup.

Someone was assigned specifically to look after them, and the territory provided them with living supplies monthly, with no need for them to work at all.

"They are now people of the Star Forging Territory." Louis made it very clear at the time, "The miners have given their lives for the territory, and it's the duty of the territory to support their families until the end of their days."

These children, some of whom still didn't understand what "sacrifice" meant, only knew they lost a father, brother, or mother.

"My brother was killed by a spider," a ten-year-old boy wrote in his diary after wiping his eyes, "but Master Louis said he paved a path for us."

"I want to stay; I want to learn the craft. When I grow up, I'm going to work in the mine too, slay those harmful demons, and turn the mineral veins into real treasure troves."

The youngest child held the bowl tightly to his chest, quietly asking the maid who looked after them, "Do I have to mine to get food?"

The maid heard him and immediately her eyes reddened; she knelt down and hugged him, "No. You have a name, and someone to protect you."

This system was not just for one or two families.

Most immediate family members of the afflicted craftsmen were properly settled into various administrative affairs within the Star Forging Territory, some becoming record keepers, others assisting in the canteen management, while others were trained to become junior technicians.

"We are not slaves." A silent and reserved old miner finally murmured, red-eyed, on that day, "We are...workers whose names are remembered."

This phrase spread quickly.

That night, in workshops, under cooking smoke, in dormitories lit by magic crystal lamps, nearly everyone was whispering about that sacrifice.

Discussing those knights in iron armor, entering each miner's house, leaving behind compensation, placement letters, and a handwritten note.

Someone said they never thought they would come to a new understanding of their own lives because someone else died.

"Have you ever seen a place where when a miner dies, there's someone to arrange a job for their family?" a once cynical young miner said as he rubbed his frostbitten red hands.

"I've stayed in other territories' mining areas; there, if you die, you die. They turn your name into a number, burn the body, and replace you with a newcomer."

"But it's different here." Someone softly added beside him, "This is a place where someone remembers who you are."

These workers never dared to hope that their lives would be worth anything; they just didn't expect that one day their lives would truly be accounted for as lives.

People began to truly understand the meaning of "order"—it wasn't just rules and efficiency but also protection and promise.

They started to trust Louis, this young lord who rarely spoke unnecessary words, yet quietly ordered charcoal deliveries and filled gaps in needs.

And because of this trust, they were willing to stay, to contribute, to desperately defend this path to their own mine vein.

Chapter 400: Rise of the Star Forging Territory

The vast majority of migrant workers in Star Forging Territory are no longer struggling for survival.

They have food, clothing, hot water for washing, and clear and definite work arrangements.

Because Louis, with the idea of "survival first," gradually established an operational system centered on group responsibility and performance-based rewards.

Miners are no longer slaves driven to work tirelessly but are producers with identity, rules, and security.

Meanwhile, Qimai stones are continuously being transported from the underground rail.

The workers on the first ore sorting line are already skilled at sorting and processing the ore.

Those faintly glowing azure stones are categorized and stored on numbered racks, with some sent to the test furnace workshop for purification preparation.

The remaining raw ore is also beginning to pile up slowly, like a fuse waiting for the flames to ignite.

The entire transport system operates almost perfectly.

Over the past few months, ox-drawn pathways, rail paths, and winter slope routes leading to each mining area and the main processing station have been fully constructed.

Special stone pavement, tamed ox transport teams, guideposts, and nighttime light symbols have been simultaneously implemented to ensure smooth operation even if heavy snow blocks the mountains.

This not only ensures rapid transfer of underground materials but also provides a transportation channel for subsequent bulk equipment, construction materials, alchemy bases, high-temperature furnaces, and more.

Of course, what is extracted is just raw stone, still far from being truly "usable."

Qimai stones are unlike ordinary ores; they carry extremely high magic energy and active structures and using them without processing not only wastes them but may also trigger unstable reactions.

When Star Forging Territory first set foot in this frozen tundra, there wasn't even a decent furnace here.

No workshops, no assembly lines, and even very few houses.

All of this had to be built from scratch.

So Louis relied on the Daily Intelligence System to draw up the first phase of an industrial plan in the most reasonable way.

It was based on the industrial zoning model he was familiar with from a past life.

Everything from ventilation routes, zoning safety, material circulation, to the layout of worker canteens and bath areas, was meticulously calculated.

The site was selected on a gently sloping platform on the southeast side of the mine, close to the water source and main road. It's only five miles from the main mine entrance, facilitating ore transport and easy defense.

In less than two months, a burgeoning smelting and alchemical industrial area arose.

Five main factory buildings stand in a line, forming the core heart-lung system of the entire industrial area.

First is the ore screening line, the first stage of the industrial area, where the raw ore sent up daily is first gathered here.

The factory is equipped with a complete automated vibrating screening track, directly fed by ox-rail.

The raw ore screening station, where Qimai stones brought by ore carts are directly dumped onto a coarse screening platform, separated through a combination of vibrating screens and manual sorting, extracting gravel, dirt, and valuable ores.

Behind the drying shed is a simple ventilation duct, using winter cold wind and manual blowing to dry the moist ore blocks, preventing moisture from affecting subsequent ignition efficiency or storage.

The second, third, and fourth main factories are the main furnace area, equipped with three large furnaces.

In fact, they are crudely built cracking furnaces, structurally similar to coke ovens on Earth.

These furnaces do not refine pure crystals but burn off impurities in the Qimai stones by "burning, crushing, and screening," leaving high-energy slag and medium-purity combustion blocks.

After grading, they are sent to the energy storage station, iron-casting furnace, or the soon-to-be-operational steam drive system, respectively.

The furnace body adopts a double-layer stone structure filled with sand and iron slag to ensure that the high temperature does not leak out.

Each furnace has an exhaust duct for surplus heat, which discharges exhaust gases to the vents or is used for heating water rooms.

The fifth main factory acts as a kind of energy sub-station, responsible for categorizing and storing high-energy blocks, sealed in iron boxes, and wrapped in moisture-proof cloth for packaging.

Though Qimai stones are not highly toxic, their weak energy field, when exposed for extended periods, can disrupt biological orientation and even cause dizziness, hence the clear graded packaging system.

Seven auxiliary workshops are distributed around the main factory area. Although not essential, these workshops assume various functions, including tool repair, cooling pools, worker meals, temporary dormitories, infirmaries, and storage warehouses.

Currently, more than four thousand artisans and technicians have been mobilized in this energy area, operating under a three-shift system, handling nearly fifty tons of Qimai stones daily, and producing over ten tons of standard fuel blocks.

Though seemingly well-ordered, this system is not advanced.

On closer inspection, it's mostly iron sheet-wrapped wooden frames, coarse rope-drawn ox carts, and woodpile furnaces.

After all, the industrial system of Star Forging Territory did not arise during prosperous times.

Unlike old mining areas like the Jade Federation or the southern Empire, which have been developed for decades or even centuries, many factories have undergone generations of improvement, and they have professional stone refining furnaces capable of continuous operation for days.

However, Louis didn't spend much money on buying high-end equipment, as the available ones were exorbitantly priced, and transportation costs were ridiculously high.

Moreover, what's available is mostly outdated equipment retired by others, often missing parts.

Thus, he could only go for cheap goods, slowly dismantling, repairing, and modifying them, using some structural design knowledge learned in a previous life, and discussing with local artisans and alchemists to assemble what they could.

No fancy magic systems were used, nor any advanced arrays; it was simply human cooperation, rational workflow, and detailed division of labor that built a makeshift assembly line.