

Winter 481

Chapter 481: Mai Lang Territory Livestock District (Part 3)

Louis nodded.

These are Frost Mane Sheep unique to the Northern Territory, their snow-white curly wool exuding a light blue sheen, and their milk containing natural Cold Energy, considered a high-grade supplement for enhancing physique.

Their dense wool also elevates the production of winter clothing and thermal blankets to a new level.

Continuing along the stream, a large greenhouse came into view, housing a remarkably large bird species.

Their breast feathers looked as if scorched by flames, a dark red hue, with wisps of heat emanating from their throats—these are Red-Throated Fire-Eating Turkeys.

The hot bird enclosure already housed fifty of them, and their feathers were even used by workshops as auxiliary materials for alchemical heating.

Andre led the way to a deeper mountain ravine, where muffled breathing sounds accompanied by a chill filled the air.

There, Ice Tusk Pigs were being penned.

Frost condensed on their tusks year-round, their back muscles rising like rocks, occasionally releasing a low growl that made the surrounding air tremble slightly.

"Compared to ordinary pigs, Ice Tusk Pigs are more like beasts," Andre reminded in a lowered voice, "but their meat is firm, rich in 'Cold Energy Essence,' and is the knights' preferred source for replenishing Fighting Energy."

Currently, there are three hundred seventy heads of this type, mostly penned in the hill slope zones, cared for daily by dedicated Beast Trainers, occasionally requiring dual vine leaf spray to calm their tempers.

Eventually, Louis noticed a separate small pasture.

The fence was taller, the vigilance more stringent, where specialized Beast Trainers were caring for Silver-tailed Abyss Foxes within a fenced area.

Under the moonlight, the fur of these Abyss Foxes would shimmer slightly, gracefully like elves of the snowy night.

Mostly used as a high-end fur source by nobility, though lacking practical use, they're costly, and Louis planned to sell them as luxury items.

Unfortunately, they're scarce, with only ninety-three in the entire Mai Lang Territory.

...

As Andre introduced one by one, Louis' gaze swept over the entire magical beast breeding area, secretly assessing in his heart.

Mai Lang Territory's herding system is quietly perfecting.

Ordinary cattle, sheep, and poultry ensure livelihood supplies.

Special magical beasts serve the Knight Order and elite troops, outputting high-energy resources.

High-Tier Combat Beasts act as military trump cards, deciding battlefield dynamics.

Some of these magical beasts were purchased from the South at a high cost, but most were precisely located through Louis' Intelligence System, and then special expeditions were sent to capture and tame them.

With the expansion of scale, Mai Lang Territory gradually formed a complete chain from breeding to taming, from processing to derivative industries.

Even fish ponds were trialing magical fish farming.

For example, Red-Mane Spring-Swallowing Catfish, which nourishes blood and increases Fighting Energy.

Also, Three-Eyed Moon-Scaled Mandarin Fish, improving meridian qualities, revered by the Knight Order as a health supplement.

Louis gently exhaled, looking at the gradually perfecting industry landscape before him, nodding inwardly.

If everything proceeds according to plan, Mai Lang Territory will not only be the Northern Territory's granary, but also become a pivotal piece in Red Tide Territory's future influence on the northern Empire's layout.

Having examined the last magical beast enclosure, Louis then stopped, his gaze lingering longer on Andre.

The livestock chief had noticeable dark circles under his eyes, evidently marks of tireless toil for the livestock area in recent days.

Yet his words were clear, each reported data well-organized without a shred of mistake.

Louis sighed slightly in his heart, indeed, the intelligence system's recommended talents were never wrong.

"Andre," he suddenly spoke, tone laced with approval, "To elevate Mai Lang Territory's livestock industry to such a scale within just one year requires not only vision and talent but also diligence. You've done excellently."

Andre shook suddenly, nearly unable to believe these words of evaluation came from the Lord's mouth.

He hurriedly bowed, his voice somewhat trembling, "It's...an honor to serve you, my Lord."

Louis chuckled, fetching a heavy bag of gold coins from the knight beside him to hand over, "Consider these a reward from me personally. Take it."

Andre's hand trembled slightly as he accepted, the gleam in his eyes showing not greedy joy but an almost fervent excitement.

"Thank...thank you, my Lord!" he raised his head, eyes glowing.

What truly stirred him was not the bag of gold coins, but the young lord's direct acknowledgment.

For Andre, this was more precious than any wealth.

Chapter 482: Mary Arrives at Red Tide City

The morning chill mist still lingered as the convoy slowly traversed the final hill.

In that instant, the view opened up vividly.

The scenery before her took Mary's breath away.

A city lay quietly between the morning fog and the snowfield.

The half-completed gray-white city walls stretched out like a giant beast, covered in a thin layer of frost on the yet-to-be-polished stone, reflecting a cold brilliance.

Cold iron beams were embedded one by one into the stone layers, hard and sharp, like steel armor draping the city.

Several towers stood erect, piercing straight through the mist, with braziers hanging from iron frames at their tops, and remnants of firelight still exuding faint wisps of smoke.

What was even more mesmerizing was the sight of the fluttering crimson banners, presenting a stark contrast against the vast snowfield.

Like lighthouses in a snowstorm, they signified direction and hope ahead.

The children were the first to lose patience, leaning halfway out to look, shouting, "It's so big! So tall! Mom, look!"

"More orderly than Frost Halberd City... at least it looks that way." A woman clutching her young son spoke with a trembling voice.

"Don't be fooled by appearances, who knows what's inside the city gates." An older man squinted, cautious in tone, but the light in his eyes betrayed his inner astonishment.

Listening to the surrounding voices and watching the city enveloped in fog, Mary's heart warmed slightly.

The city walls and gates looked no less than those of the old Frost Halberd City, even appearing more brand-new and solid.

Yet she still dared not completely relax.

It's a mixture of anticipation and concern.

After all, no matter how glorious it is outside the gates, it doesn't guarantee a good life inside, as long as it's half as good as Frost Halberd City, it would suffice.

As the convoy slowly descended, the details of the city gate became increasingly clear.

The tall, heavy wooden gate studded with dense cold iron nails shimmered with rings of cold light as the morning light fell upon it.

The green-gray stone bricks laid on both sides of the gate formed a gently extending slope, convenient for transporting carts in and out, and for soldiers to fortify defenses.

Knights stood in neat lines, their armor uniform and without blemish, with each breastplate engraved with the sun emblem of the Red Tide.

"Align left, prepare for entry inspection."

The leading knight held the reins, his expression calm, yet he instinctively lowered his voice, seemingly unwilling to disturb the order.

The air carried a cool moisture and an indescribable pressure, prompting one to hold their breath.

Mary leaned slightly forward, looking out past the window, and found their convoy being guided to a special passage on the left.

On the far right side was a completely different scene.

A dense group of ragged refugees crowded together.

They huddled against the wind, with weary faces and eyes filled with longing.

Some clutched burlap bags containing the last remnants of their belongings salvaged from the ruins.

Yet contrary to Mary's expectations of chaos, there was no shouting, nor was there any commotion; order was maintained methodically.

Under several simple wooden shelters, clerks were diligently registering each person's name, origin, and family situation.

"Next, how many in your household? Those with children, proceed to that side." An official spoke calmly, yet with authority.

On the other side, soldiers were distributing hot porridge and bread.

Pots of steaming ceramics were brought out, with women and children receiving them first, cradling the bowls carefully, as if holding a long-lost hope.

"Did you see that? They're giving them bread and porridge, and quite a lot!"

"Who in the Northern Territory does this? How much grain must it cost..."

Someone in the convoy murmured in amazement.

And those refugees who were registered would be taken by soldiers to a temporary settlement area within the city gates.

There, neat rows of wooden houses had been erected, simple but at least able to shelter from the wind and rain.

The face of a refugee, flushed from the hot porridge, showed, for the first time, some relaxation in their previously hunched shoulders.

An indescribable emotion surged in their hearts, as if something hard was slowly being melted away.

Mary cradled the sleeping Yini, her gaze shifting back and forth between the refugee crowd and the shelter area on the other side of the gate.

Those people were ragged and malnourished, evidently evacuees fleeing from even further north in the Northern Territory.

Yet the anticipated chaos was absent; there were no scuffles, no cries, no infighting.

Instead, a nearly unbelievable sense of order prevailed.

Mary stared dazedly at all this, memories flashing of the scenes outside Frost Halberd City when famine was rampant.

There, refugees would fight each other for a half-moldy hard biscuit, and the dead were almost unattended.

Yet here, in the same displacement, people could sit quietly and drink porridge, and children receiving bread would giggle.

A mother, her eyes reddened from the cold, showed a rare moment of relief upon receiving a woolen blanket from the soldiers.

An indescribable shock gripped Mary's heart.

The accompanying knight noticed their expressions and explained with a smile, "This is the refugee accommodation policy of the Red Tide Territory, set by our Lord. First, register identities, then allocate food and shelter, to prevent chaos and outbreaks."

"Is it free?" Someone couldn't help but ask.

"Yes, all free." The young official's tone was laced with undisguisable pride, "As long as these people are willing to stay, they will all become a part of Red Tide in the future, as decreed by the Lord."

The refugee housing system of Red Tide Territory was unprecedented in the Northern Territory, or even the entire world.

Even the most destitute of refugees, the elderly, infirm, and destitute, could receive a bowl of hot porridge, a piece of bread, and a place to temporarily shelter here,

Chapter 483: Mary Arrives in Red Tide City (2)

More importantly, to find order again on the chaotic land.

Of course, this is not just pure charity.

In Louis's plan, all refugees would be thoroughly documented, including names, original places of residence, relatives, health conditions, etc., all registered and managed categorically.

Women and children would be given priority in being assigned to wind- and snow-proof log cabins and receive food supplied uniformly, while young and strong individuals would be directly arranged to join construction teams.

They would go on to build city walls, pave roads, and set up domed houses...

If someone originally had skills, such as a blacksmith, carpenter, pharmacist, or leather worker, they would be prioritized to be placed into workshops or the military supply system, exchanging their skills for food and shelter, achieving self-sufficiency.

This "work for survival" system not only avoided security risks but also allowed Red Tide Territory to quickly absorb the manpower that was desperately needed.

Thus, on the post-disaster ruins of the Northern Territory, Red Tide Territory created order in another way.

And for these refugees who came all the way, this kind of order was almost an incredible gift.

War and famine push humanity to the limit.

For half a piece of moldy hard bread, brothers would draw knives, a mother would leave the last bite for her child and starve to death herself, yet without the mother, the child wouldn't survive long either.

They have seen such scenes too many times in their escape. They've experienced the coldest refusals and the cruellest expulsions.

So, when they intermittently heard a rumor during their escape: "There's a city taking people in the Southeast."

At that time, almost no one dared to believe it was true, that there could be such a paradise in the Northern Territory.

Even so, they clung to a faint hope, almost extinguished, following the blurry rumor, stumbling one step at a time.

Desiring only a bowl of hot porridge, a piece of bread, a chance to live.

Until they truly reached the gates of Red Tide Territory, and saw the steaming porridge in the clay pot brought by soldiers, officials under the wooden shed looked up and gently asked their names, and children were wrapped in clean cotton blankets.

Only then did they realize for the first time that they were not abandoned by this land.

Some elderly broke into tears on the spot, kneeling repeatedly on the snowy ground, their voices hoarse.

Young fathers, eyes red, kept their faces covered tightly, not daring to let the tears fall.

More children, cupping warm clay pots in their hands, cheeks reddened by the cold, yet smiles trembling at the corners of their mouths.

They laughed out loud while drinking hot porridge, as if surviving a disaster, as if waking from a dream.

To them, Red Tide Territory is not just a city.

On this barren land where even the wind and snow carry despair,

It's like a blazing flame.

In the deep winter night, tearing through the darkness, illuminating a path for survival.

...

But Mary and her group, being families of the Broken Blade Knight Order, did not need to register like the refugees.

Compared to the scene in front of the refugee wooden shed, the reception before them seemed like a different world.

A formation of Red Tide Knights stood in formation, the sound of neat hooves and light clinking of iron armor resounding.

At the front, an elder in a dark robe stepped forward slowly.

He was neatly dressed, his silver-white hair combed meticulously, although traces of age etched his brow, they couldn't conceal his steadiness and authority.

He was none other than Bradley.

Once a barely noticed steward in the Calvin Clan, now the true second-in-command of Red Tide Territory's internal affairs.

Though he still insisted on calling himself "Lord Louis's steward."

Bradley gave a slight bow, his warm yet clear voice reaching everyone's ears: "Everyone, it's been a hard journey. Lord Louis has ordered me to personally welcome you all, please rest assured everything has been prepared for your accommodation."

At this moment, the initial anxiety and tension in many people's hearts were eased somewhat by the calm words of this old man.

"These are the officials responsible for welcoming you, they will lead you into the city to settle in," Bradley smiled slightly, gesturing behind him.

A few young Red Tide officials quickly stepped forward, saluting the convoy: "Family members will be led by me next. I will accompany you along, introducing Red Tide City."

The convoy slowly passed through the heavy city gates, entering the main road of Red Tide Territory.

A gust of air mixed with crisp frost and moist lime rushed towards them.

The young official on horseback at the front raised his hand, signaling the convoy to follow slowly.

There was an unmistakable pride in his tone: "This is the main road of Red Tide, paved with thick stone bricks. In winter, warm water circulates through embedded hot channels, melting snow and preventing slipping, avoiding collapse. It's designed personally by Lord Louis."

Mary stared blankly at the straight and wide road, almost forgetting to blink.

On both sides of the road, pines and cypresses were lined up neatly, thin frost hung on the branches, white and green intertwined, like natural guards.

The wind blew, carrying the scent of pine mixed with the cold air, bringing an indescribable tranquility.

"These pines and cypresses not only block wind and snow," the young official continued, "but also serve as green belt dividers, complementing the drainage system. Winter snow and rain flow through the channels on both sides into the snowmelt pools, preventing the streets from flooding."

Mary instinctively looked over, seeing the equally wide and narrow drainage ditches by the roadside, clean as if just wiped, the trickling snowmelt converging into a small pipe, eventually disappearing into the underground culverts of the city.

"Here in the Northern Territory? How is it possible?"

She could hardly believe the sense of order before her eyes was real.

There weren't many pedestrians on the streets, yet all was orderly.

Vendors called softly, a group of children chased and played under the eaves, quickly stopped by the teacher beside them: "Get back in line!"

The children muttered as they lined up, then were led towards the school.

"That's one of the city's schools," the young official explained following her gaze, "enrollment starts at age six, the excellent ones have the future potential to become deacons, accountants, even knights."

Mary lowered her head, looking at the Yini in her arms, a rush of emotion surged in her heart.

Originally, she planned Yini's life to be that of a Lady Knight, like herself. It was the best future for a girl in the Northern Territory she could think of.

But in Red Tide, perhaps her daughter's future would be completely different. More choices are always better.

The carriage moved slowly along the main road, the clear sound of hooves gradually approaching from ahead.

Before long, a squad of Red Tide Territory knights turned out from a side street.

They were clad in silver light armor, draped in red capes, bright spears in hand, their horses' manes trimmed evenly.

The sight somewhat surprised Mary.

She is the wife of a squad leader in the Broken Blade Knight Order, and often sees knights, so she should not be surprised by this.

But what stunned her was not the knights' valor but the people's reactions along the road.

An old woman gently pulled her grandson's hand, softly reminding him: "Make way, the Red Tide Knights are coming."

The tone was gentle, even with a touch of respect.

The little boy obediently stepped aside, his eyes bright, staring at the knights, couldn't help but softly exclaim: "When I grow up, I also want to become a knight, of course!"

The vendors nodded and smiled in greeting at the knights, who would respond with a raised hand in return.

A raggedly dressed refugee was just stepping out of a porridge shed with a clay pot, hurriedly retreating when he saw the patrol squad.

Yet one young knight slightly leaned down, reached out, and steadied him, saying softly: "Slow down, don't slip."

The young official noticed Mary's gaze, smiled, and explained softly:

"This is the edict of Lord Louis, the Red Tide Knights are not to suppress the people, but to protect their home and safety. If the people are afraid when they see the knights coming, then it's his failure, and the Order's failure."

Mary felt a slight tremor in her heart.

In Frost Halberd City, knights symbolized power and violence, cold enforcers of order.

But here, knights seemed more like guardians, a shield over people's hearts.

An unusual feeling suddenly rose in her heart, realizing that a different kind of relationship could exist between knights and the people.

She also understood why there was a sense of security in the air of Red Tide Territory that she had never felt before.

Chapter 484: What Mary Saw and Heard

The convoy slowly entered the southern district, the streets gradually widened, and pedestrians began to increase.

The sight before her made Mary stop in her tracks.

The Southern Square had already taken shape; although there weren't many buildings, the arrangement was orderly. On both sides of the stone-brick road, vendors set up temporary stalls in twos and threes.

Shouts echoed back and forth, the air was melded with the sweet fragrance of dried fruits and the salty aroma of smoked fish; from afar, one could even smell a hint of honey wine.

"Come quickly to see the cotton cloth brought from the south! Fine as snow!"

"Fresh smoked fish, just dried from the Red Tide Lake!"

"Raisins, honey wine, southern-specials!"

The sounds of selling, bargaining, and laughter intertwined, creating a long-lost liveliness that Mary felt.

Mary, being a merchant's daughter, was more discerning than others.

Those few rolls of delicate white cotton cloth must be from the prosperous Southern Territory. That basket of raisins and spices also came through the southern trade route.

However, there were also local specialties of Red Tide: smoked fish, honey wine, and coarse pottery woodenware.

This meant goods from the south could be brought here, and Red Tide's products were being organized and produced, entering market circulation.

"More prosperous than Frost Halberd City..."

This sentence floated gently in Mary's mind, yet left her stunned for a long time.

Frost Halberd City, the old capital of the Northern Territory, was now a desolate place, the embers of war not yet extinguished, with markets depressed, vendors scarce, and food hard to come by, even money couldn't buy anything.

But here, people were buying and selling, bargaining.

Even their smiles lacked that cautious flattery and defensiveness, but had a sense of ease.

Inexplicable, a strange sourness and shock surged within Mary's heart.

She couldn't explain this feeling, like watching barren land after years of frost suddenly sprout green.

In this Northern Territory ravaged by disaster and war, Red Tide Territory resembled an oasis abruptly rising, with wide streets, thriving markets, and peace and smiles on the faces of its people.

In fact, the vitality of Red Tide's market wasn't incidental, all stemming from Louis's personally crafted system.

Unlike Frost Halberd City with material scarcity, nor like the southern areas exploited by the nobility.

Almost all of Red Tide's resources were under the control of the Lord's Mansion: food, iron ore, timber, medicines, even the most basic salt, all required registration and allocation by the Resource Coordination Hall.

Bulk commodities were not allowed to be freely traded.

Food, fuel, minerals, etc., were prioritized for the military corps, construction teams, farms, and workshops.

Every household was registered in the government's rolls, receiving ration and salt through ration coupons.

Newly arrived refugees first received basic settlement: warm shelter, hot porridge assistance, but for more, they must work with their hands to exchange.

"Work for food." This was the iron rule of Red Tide Territory.

Mary's gaze fell to the street corner, where a group of young new refugees were carrying bluish-grey stone bricks, their expressions weary yet without complaint.

Beside them, an official with the mansion's insignia recorded their working hours. Upon completing tasks, the workers received extra ration coupons and even a few shiny copper coins.

And the government's tight control didn't make this place stagnant.

On the contrary, the streets of Red Tide appeared exceptionally lively, because Louis didn't completely seal off the marketplace.

On Southern Square, vendors were allowed free trade, small workshops could sell their products, as long as they paid a minimal market maintenance tax, the government wouldn't interfere with pricing.

Thus Mary saw on the stalls lining the square, incessant calls, vendors and customers haggling, children running around the stalls.

At this moment, the air was filled with the breath of life.

Mary quietly watched the intersecting passage of carts, horses, and people on the street, her ears filled with the sound of vendors' cries and laughter.

"Perhaps..." she murmured in her heart, "this is the future center of the Northern Territory."

The convoy continued onwards, turning a wide stone brick street, Fierce Tide Square slowly came into view, permeated with the faint scent of lime and wood shavings.

Here was still under construction, half-built podiums surrounded by sturdy wooden frames and ropes, dozens of workers orderly continued their tasks, hammering and shouting sounds constantly intersecting.

The young official turned around, pointing to the center of the square: "This is Fierce Tide Square, one of the government centers of Red Tide Territory."

His voice slightly raised from excitement: "Here lies the most important heart of Red Tide Territory, all governmental announcements, mobilization orders, and resource allocations are immediately published here for anyone to directly see."

Mary looked up, and her eyes were drawn to a towering bulletin pillar, the ink words starkly visible under the sunlight:

"Food Distribution Order"

"Spring Plowing Mobilization Order"

A few civil servants stood in front of the pillar, loudly reading the latest government orders.

Numerous people gathered around, some holding children, others carrying bamboo baskets, expressions focused.

"The second batch of grains this month will be distributed by the seventeenth; please bring ration vouchers to collect!"

"Spring Plowing Mobilization Order, any resident aged sixteen to thirty who registers for farming, Red Tide Territory will additionally issue subsidies and food rations!"

The officials' voices were loud and clear, occasionally pausing to allow the audience to digest the information, beside them, Red Tide Knights quietly maintained order, no noise or confusion, only a sense of orderly flow in the air.

Mary looked at this scene, inexplicably moved within.

In any city she had been to, she had never seen government orders made so public.

Chapter 485: Mary's Observations and Experiences (Part 2)

Those nobles often keep the benefits for themselves first, and only the leftovers reach the common people, but here the policy is directly read to everyone.

An official turned to explain to the Marys: "These decrees will be posted immediately on announcement pillars, so there's no need to worry about information delays.

The distribution of grain, seeds, iron tools, and oxen is public, and the territory will first ensure everyone's basic needs, then distribute additional rewards based on labor and contribution."

Behind all this, Mary vaguely realized that this city was quietly accomplishing something amazing:

It was absorbing people. Whether they were refugee drifters, displaced artisans, or merchants from the north and south, the Red Tide Territory was taking them in one by one.

Those with strength joined the construction teams repairing city walls, opening fields, and paving roads.

Those with skills were sent to workshops, pastures, and pharmaceutical institutions to become "Red Tide mechanics."

The merchants from the south made a big profit in Silver Coins at the southern market square.

As Mary pondered, the convoy slowly passed the edge of the square, and the outline of a tall building made of wood and stone emerged from the mist.

"That's the administrative center," the young official pointed to the tall building, "in the future, if you have any problems such as housing, registration, allocation, or education, all these will be registered and handled here."

Mary looked up to see a majestic three-story building, with its exterior walls of blue-grey stone and cedar interlaced, and window sills inlaid with dark gold trim, the front engraved with the crest of the Red Tide Sun.

In front of the building, officials in uniform red robes, holding documents, walked briskly with a focused demeanor.

There was no idle chatter, no chaos, and the occasional whispered conversation was just to verify information.

The young official's voice carried a hint of pride: "Our Red Tide Territory isn't very big yet, but the administrative system is already in place.

Registration, military preparation, farming, education, and workshop allocation, each has someone in charge, and every decision and each resource allocation is written on the announcement, accessible to all."

Here, the Red Tide Knights maintained order, workers busily carried on construction, and the officials in the administrative center were ceaselessly active.

So many people, yet the air held no chaos, only a reassuring sense of order.

Mary closed her eyes, her mind conjuring up the rumors she had heard before departing from Frost Halberd City.

"Red Tide Territory? That place was just a wasteland a few years ago without a decent lord."

"I heard there are often wild beasts there, not even fields."

"There? It's just a ghost place, a gathering of exiles and paupers."

But what about now?

There were city walls, a square, a school, and a market here.

There were complete roads and bustling crowds.

There was an order that made the people smile in peace, and a guarantee for refugees to survive.

"Is this really... a wilderness?" Mary's gaze subconsciously lifted to the horizon, where the Red Tide's massive waves of the sun fluttered in the wind.

She thought of that young lord who, in just a few years, managed to transform this once-desolate land into a city more livable than Frost Halberd City.

She wasn't the only one thinking this; her fellow travelers from the Broken Blade Knight Order also shared similar thoughts, yet what they saw was just the tip of the iceberg of Red Tide.

The convoy slowly headed south, gradually departing from the bustling southern square.

The noise gradually faded, replaced by a peaceful and expansive neighborhood.

Through the window, Mary's eyes were suddenly drawn to a strange spectacle.

It was a neatly divided residential area, with Red Tide-style dome houses side by side, their external walls in alternating shades of deep gray, dark red, and dim gold, both solemn and warm.

Unlike the dilapidated stone-wood houses of Frost Halberd City, these dome houses were half-buried below the surface,

with eaves curving gently, like a natural extension,

a few strands of morning mist entwining the snowy eaves, reflecting a layer of almost dreamy brilliance.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please take a look." The young official urged his horse forward, unable to hide his pride, his voice slightly higher.

It was as if he were showcasing the Red Tide Territory's proudest achievement to them.

"This is the third batch of housing completed last year, using double-layer insulated walls and a geothermal circulation heating system, ensuring a constant indoor temperature even when the mountains are covered in snow. You will live here in the future."

As his words fell, a low murmur of amazement arose in the carriage.

"Oh my... is this really the Red Tide Territory's residential area?" The knight's wife, Arlene, sitting across, couldn't help but cover her mouth, her eyes full of disbelief.

Her slender fingers clutched tightly to the edge of the window, as if only then could she confirm that the view before her was real.

Some younger family members couldn't contain themselves any longer, leaning out halfway, craning their necks to look.

Their headscarves fluttered gently in the morning breeze, even as their ears were reddened by the cold, none of them retreated.

"Are these really the houses allotted to us?"

An elderly woman sitting in the corner of the carriage spoke in a trembling voice, afraid she might awaken from this wonderful dream.

"Or is it... just for show? Can we really live here?"

The atmosphere suddenly grew lively, and it was clear the young official enjoyed this reaction, continuing to add: "Each dome house comes with an independent kitchen, two-level living quarters, winter geothermal subsidy, and hot water insulation barrels. The lord once said..."

He paused slightly, lowering his voice to imitate Louis: "The knights fight hard on the frontlines, so their families should live better than others."

This sentence flowed like a warm current into Mary's heart.

She hugged little Yini tightly, her nose tingling slightly, yet she couldn't utter a word.

The wheels rolled over the green stone pavement, emitting a low, muffled rumble.

Finally, the convoy gently stopped on a wide and straight main street. The morning mist had not yet dispersed, and the light golden sunlight fell through the clouds, illuminating the dark gray domes with a soft halo.

At the street entrance, Bradley was already waiting there.

"Thank you for your hard work, everyone." He bent slightly, paying his respects, "The houses have been allotted. Please follow the reception officer to complete your settlement arrangements one by one."

Mary looked up and saw behind Bradley, a dozen young civil servants already lined up on both sides, wearing uniform dark red robes with the same Red Tide sun crest embroidered on their cuffs.

This was an order and sense of ceremony they had never seen in Frost Halberd City.

The civil servants quickly came forward, guiding each family off the carriages, verifying the rosters one by one.

"Smith Knight Commander's family? Please follow me."

Receiving them was a young official with a bright demeanor. He held a stack of neatly-documented registries, turning pages as he explained to them:

"This is the third batch of dome house area, every house connected to the geothermal cycle. Winter room temperatures can be maintained at around eighteen degrees, so you and your children will no longer have to worry about the cold."

His words carried a hint of pride between his eyebrows and eyes, as if he were introducing his own home, not just an ordinary residence.

"Additionally, each household will receive an initial settlement subsidy, including food, cured meat, and fifty Gold Coins. If further resources are needed later, you can claim them at the unified distribution office in the administrative center using your registration."

Mary listened quietly until the moment she received that silk-wrapped money pouch, the weight in her palm giving her a sense of reality.

Following the official to their allocated house, as the door opened, a warm breath enveloped them.

The fire in the hearth leapt, casting its glow warmly on the wooden walls.

A wooden staircase wound upward, leading to a spacious second floor.

Cotton and linen curtains hung from the window sills, beds neatly made, and in the corner, clay pots with a few dry flowers, silently welcoming them.

Mary stepped lightly through the threshold with Yini in her arms, the thick carpet beneath her feet soft and comforting, as if the entire ground were whispering a soothing sound to her weary nerves.

Her husband Smith soon arrived, stopping in his tracks as he entered, speechless for a long time.

He slowly surveyed the room, silence marking his gaze until it finally rested on Mary and their daughter.

It seemed an eternity before he murmured: "Are we... living here?"

Mary pressed her lips together and slowly nodded.

She heard in her heart a "thud," releasing some unresolved burden that had been suspended for too long.

Chapter 486: Changes in Red Tide Territory

Louis rushed back to Red Tide City from Mai Lang Territory yesterday, barely getting any sleep.

Last night, he made up for it in Sif's room, and before dawn, he headed straight to the Government Hall.

He arrived at the administrative center, pushed open the heavy office door, and was met by a familiar scent.

Bookshelves lined the entire room, reaching up to the ceiling.

Sheepskin scrolls, household registries, and tax ledgers were neatly arranged, categorized by different colors and numbers, meticulously organized. Policies and blueprints were filed daily, placed where they could be easily accessed, allowing anyone to find the needed information instantly.

Even though he hadn't returned for nearly a month, the office was spotless, obviously cleaned daily by designated personnel.

This was the heart of Red Tide Territory and the future heart of the Northern Territory.

And at the moment Louis sat on that high-backed chair, a phrase came to his mind — Red Tide Territory, your king has returned.

Hanging in front of his seat was a huge map of the North East, occupying almost an entire wall.

The map was densely strewn with wooden pegs, each representing a piece of cultivated land, newly reclaimed fields or mining areas, and rivers.

Red marks were for important storage points, blue for residential areas, and golden flags represented newly established territorial boundaries.

Now it was filled with vibrant flags, which filled Louis with a sense of achievement.

"You're back." Bradley had been waiting for a long time.

The old man was as usual, but his eyebrows and eyes revealed an undeniable weariness.

Louis nodded slightly, "Long time no see, Bradley. You've worked hard."

The old man performed a steward's bow, "Not as hard as you, my lord."

They exchanged a smile at that moment, as if all pleasantries were unnecessary.

They both understood that Red Tide Territory was no longer the small domain it once was, and any decision affected countless lives, so there was no need to spend too much time on pleasantries.

Bradley brought out a stack of neatly organized documents and placed them in front of Louis.

"This is the entire summary of Red Tide Territory during your absence."

Louis looked at the stack of documents, as high as a small mountain, feeling a bit overwhelmed and unsure where to start.

Seeing this, Bradley first pulled out a dossier and placed it in front of Louis, "Let's start with urban development, my lord."

Louis opened the first page, which featured diagrams of city gates and walls.

Bradley introduced from the side, "The east gate and west gate of Red Tide City have been reinforced.

We've replaced them with newly made ironwood wrapped with Cold Iron, and the bolts have been fully updated. Now they can withstand two rounds of bombardment from large Magic Explosion Bullets."

"What about the south gate?"

"Still under construction." Bradley's finger slid across the parchment, "Expected to be completed in half a month. We've prioritized the best Cold Iron Ore, ensuring the reinforcement materials won't fall short."

Louis turned to the next page, unfolding a blueprint of the city's southwest corner.

It was a planning blueprint for the fourth batch of domed community houses in Red Tide City.

The diagram showed rows of alternating deep red and dark gray small domes spreading in a radial pattern, with faint lines marking the positions of geothermal pipelines for the semi-buried foundations.

A small gathering square was marked in the center of each community, adjacent to public wells and storage rooms.

"The fourth batch of Red Tide-style domed community houses is already under construction." The old man spoke with a tone of undisguised gratification, "A total of six hundred units, with three hundred expected to be topped off by early autumn."

Louis glanced at the dossier, raising his eyebrows slightly, "What's the allocation plan?"

"Still prioritizing contributions," Bradley replied calmly, "Regardless of origin and background, it's based solely on one's contribution to Red Tide. Craftsmen, military families, and officials among the old residents will have priority."

"What about the refugees? Where are we going to house so many people?"

"The communal longhouse area we planned in advance is already in use."

Bradley opened another, thicker booklet, revealing a new hand-drawn sketch.

On the paper, clean lines detailed three large strip-like wooden house areas, drawn meticulously like a chessboard pattern.

"The communal longhouse area we planned in advance is under rapid construction, and some parts are already in use."

Bradley explained, "We anticipated the refugee influx before the war, so we reserved land and geothermal well positions. Thus, construction was quick."

He pointed with his fingertip at several ventilation symbol lines marked on the map:

"Each longhouse is made of two-story wood, with stoves and communal kitchens on the lower floor, while the roof embeds simple geothermal ducts, maintaining an indoor temperature of no less than fifteen degrees."

"Each longhouse can accommodate thirty to forty people, equipped with uniform wooden storage cabinets that are fireproof, moisture-proof, and theft-proof. The first batch consisted of six hundred houses, enough to shelter more than twenty thousand people."

Bradley turned to another page, pointing to the detailed markings alongside, "These are the locations for soup distribution points, herbal stations, public wells, and drainage ditches. According to the plan, the three longhouse areas will each form a self-sufficient entity, without interfering with each other."

Louis's eyebrows gradually relaxed, "At least they won't have to sleep in the snow anymore."

He then turned to the next page, which depicted the Mai Lang Territory.

Bradley's eyes flashed with a hint of admiration, "As the grain core of Red Tide, Mai Lang Territory has already begun expanding two new granary clusters, with a total capacity of seventy-five thousand tons of grain."

The drawing on the dossier was slowly unfolded by Louis, depicting the Mai Lang Territory in vivid detail:

The northern side housed the first granary already in use, with thick stone walls and an underground insulation layer illustrated meticulously.

The two blank plots on the southwest marked the locations of two new semi-underground granaries, with symbols for double-sealed valves and ventilation shafts drawn beside the foundations.

Chapter 487: Changes in the Red Tide Territory (Part 2)

Bradley continued his report, his tone filled with pride: "We are using a double-layered cellar-style granary, with the outer layer providing ventilation and heat dissipation, and the inner layer reinforced and sealed, utilizing geothermal and ventilation shafts to maintain stable temperatures, effectively preventing moisture and mold."

Louis smiled and said: "This is good news. This winter... I hope to see these granaries filled."

Upon hearing this, Bradley smiled and said: "They will be, I'm afraid there might not be enough space."

Then Louis flipped open a new report.

On the thin booklet was attached an exploration map sent from Star Forging Territory, with several dark-colored vein lines resembling blood vessels stretching across the land, extending to the deep northwest.

"This is the situation of Star Forging Territory." Bradley lowered his voice, "The geological workshop's exploration team has confirmed that a Magic Marrow Vein has been found in the ninth mining area. The reserves... may far exceed Red Tide Territory."

Louis gently slid his fingertips over the dark vein marks, not actually surprised.

After all, he had already learned of the existence of this vein through the Daily Intelligence System.

However, at that time the population was insufficient and miners were limited, and recklessly mining would only add a burden to himself and the territory's residents.

But now with the influx of refugees, more hands are available, so he can naturally act accordingly.

"Has the expansion already begun?"

"Yes. Workshops, smelting furnaces, and craftsmen dormitories have all been proposed. The mining town is also being planned."

"Inform Star Forging." Louis leaned back in his high-backed chair, "Mining can commence, but proceed with caution, start from the periphery, safety first, avoid collapses."

Bradley responded and noted it down.

"Also, send more refugees there. Priority should be given to expanding the mining dormitories to prevent workers from sleeping in the wild."

"Yes, my lord."

After reading the last page of the dossier, Louis leaned back, gently rubbing the paper's edge with his fingertips.

He paused and raised his head, his gaze landing on Bradley: "Bradley, our construction workers, are already insufficient, aren't they?"

Bradley replied softly: "Yes, my lord. The scale of Red Tide's construction has already far exceeded initial expectations. We are now continually selecting strong and young ones from the accommodated refugees for training through the master-apprentice system to cultivate a new batch of construction craftsmen."

Louis nodded slightly, his voice carrying restraint: "Very well, remember to let them know that effort and reward are equivalent. If they are willing to learn, willing to work, Red Tide will offer them a future."

Bradley smiled subtly and said softly, "Yes, my lord."

Louis gently closed the dossier, opening the next thin booklet pushed by Bradley, his eyes quickly sweeping over the large characters of "Spring Plowing Mobilization" on the cover.

"The next one is regarding spring plowing." Bradley understood, slightly bowing, "You are aware of Mai Lang Territory's situation, having just returned from there."

In the southeastern other districts of Red Tide, a total of 3,200 acres has been newly cultivated, mostly achieved by the labor of refugees."

Louis's gaze slightly brightened, raising his eyes to look at the large map on the wall. Though not as much as Mai Lang Territory, 3,000 acres in today's barren Northern Territory also represents the survival of countless lives.

"Have the techniques and experience of Mai Lang been sent to various villages?"

"A transfer order has already been issued." Bradley's voice carried a hint of pride, "Mai Lang Territory's farming methods, cold-resistant wheat, and geothermal greenhouses are all being replicated. Increased food production this year can be anticipated."

Louis lowered his head, looking at the "Expected Yield" figures on the booklet, his fingertips gently rubbing the paper, his long-unfurling brow slightly relaxed for the first time.

This was what he cared about the most.

In the Northern Territory, there can be no Iron Armor, no city walls, but there can never be a shortage of food.

"There still isn't enough food." Louis murmured softly, "If the territory's people starve, all order will collapse."

Bradley nodded respectfully: "Therefore, we must expand our granaries in advance as a precaution."

Louis had just closed the dossier on spring plowing, rubbing his brows wanting to rest for a while, but Bradley had already switched to the next heavy booklet, with "Population and Settlement Report" written on the cover.

"The number of refugees accommodated after the war has so far reached over eighteen thousand," Bradley introduced, "Currently, food is uniformly dispensed daily from the granary, ensuring the most basic stability."

Louis flipped open the pages, his gaze scanning over the rows of dense names.

Eighteen thousand people, this is a wealth, but also a burden.

"What about diseases?" he asked.

"The epidemic of cold winds at the end of winter has been mostly controlled." Bradley answered, "The medical and pharmacological workshops work around the clock, distributing herbal medicine daily in regulated amounts. But the Northern Territory is damp and cold, vigilance against a second outbreak is necessary."

Louis nodded slightly.

The population surge is an opportunity, but a slight mistake, and famine and disease can destroy everything faster than war.

Bradley continued: "To settle refugees, the Government Hall is implementing a household contract system. We provide them with farmland, cattle, tools, and temporary accommodation. Upon signing the contract, they officially become citizens of Red Tide, enjoying territorial protection laws, reasonable tax burdens, education, and redemption opportunities."

This contract appears to be benevolent, but it is essentially the bond of Red Tide.

After all, what he needs is not just a population but Red Tide People, who can be mobilized, educated, and trusted subjects.

"Furthermore, the first batch of three thousand skilled slaves purchased through Calvin Commerce Association is already underway. We only select slaves with valuable skills like craftsmen, herders, blacksmiths, and pharmacists to contribute to basic construction."

Louis did not lift his eyes, he merely said softly: "Don't buy too many at once, trial first, gradually integrate, to avoid any unforeseen circumstances."

"Understood."

The booklet turned to the latter part, with a few hand-drawn red lines added, marked on the edge of the new town in Red Tide's southeast.

"This is the Border Guard Village pilot project." Bradley tapped his fingertips on a few small dots, "We are accommodating willing remnants of the Barbarian Race. Most of them have lost their clan, food, and shelter, so they are very willing to comply, holding onto a thread of salvation."

Louis's gaze fell beside the marked symbol on a small name: Sif.

"Is her identity used to appease them?"

"Yes." Bradley answered frankly, "Although they may not worship the Princess of Cold Moon's clan, it at least offers them a psychological leeway."

Louis breathed out gently, not immediately responding.

This is a delicate game.

These remnants of the Barbarian Race are potential combat forces and labor, yet also a hidden risk, thus Red Tide delineates a "buffer zone" for them institutionally.

On the surface, it's autonomy, but the real power is firmly held in Red Tide's hands.

"Military Household System, educational training, Lianzuo System, patrol battalions, all executed simultaneously."

His voice was calm, as if issuing an order that was naturally unquestionable.

"On the surface, giving them the illusion of autonomy, but every lifeline, every grain, every weapon, must be held by us."

Bradley's eyes brightened, slightly bowing: "Understood, my lord."

His tone carried a rare sharpness, as if infected by a hint of iron blood from Louis:

"If they wish to celebrate the so-called clan glory, let them celebrate. But their food, their soldiers, their offspring, all belong to Red Tide."

Speaking of this, the elder's eye was as calm as water: "Do not worry, they will soon understand that their only future lies under Red Tide's protection."

Louis smiled slightly, not expressing an opinion.

"By the way," Louis suddenly remembered something, asked softly: "How is the overall morale of Red Tide?"

"Higher than ever before, my lord."

The elder slowly raised his eyes, looking at the young lord sitting behind the desk, his tone carrying a hint of reflection, seemingly speaking on behalf of countless Red Tide people:

"Whether newly arrived refugees or old residents of Red Tide, they all understand that their survival now is because you are here."

He slightly bowed his head, his voice firm: "They call you the Sun of the Northern Territory."

Louis's brow slightly raised, the corners of his mouth lifted slightly, yet he did not immediately respond.

Bradley observed and continued: "They believe that as long as they work hard under your protection, they will be rewarded, even those who have fled from war and famine as refugees, someone said, Red Tide Territory is the only place where one can see the future."

Just then, the morning light outside penetrated through the thick clouds, casting a pale golden light trace onto the map.

Chapter 488: Red Tide's Future Plans

The morning light outside penetrated the thick clouds, casting a beam that landed precisely on the large map in front of the desk, as if responding to Bradley's words.

Louis glanced at the beam of light and chuckled lightly, "The Sun? That seems a bit exaggerated."

"I was merely quoting the words of the citizens," Bradley bent slightly, yet his tone remained exceptionally firm.

After a moment of silence, Louis did not continue with the matter, only closed the report in his hand.

He leaned against the back of the chair, his gaze sweeping over the table full of dossiers, feeling a hint of satisfaction.

During his time away from Red Tide, the administrative affairs continued to operate smoothly. Whether it was urban construction, granary management, or population control, all developed faster than expected.

This showed that the administrative system he had established had already begun to operate autonomously, without requiring him to personally oversee everything.

Moreover, the achievements had far exceeded the territories of the Northern Territory by a hundred percent, even surpassing eighty percent of the Empire's territories.

Yet even so, he still felt it wasn't enough.

"You did very well," Louis began, his tone steady and measured, "even exceeding my expectations."

Bradley smiled softly but did not take the credit, only bowed.

"But I have an idea about the administration," Louis said casually.

"Please go ahead, sir," Bradley promptly took out his personal booklet, prepared to jot down every word.

"First," Louis began slowly, "we need to completely restructure the governance framework of Red Tide. A two-tier division of central and local administration."

"Two-tier?" Bradley frowned.

"Yes, with the central governance located in Red Tide Main City." Louis pointed to the map on the table, "I will directly rule the entire territory, concentrating all military, political, and financial powers. Orders from here must be swiftly executed, with no room for any discrepancies."

As for the local level, officials are directly appointed there, only responsible for executing central orders, without any legislative power. Every piece of grain, every road, every soldier must be controlled by the central authority."

Bradley could not help but remark softly, "In this manner, the risk of governance chaos can indeed be thoroughly eradicated."

"Precisely." Louis's tone was stern, "The citizens obey not the local officials but Red Tide itself."

"Second," Louis exhaled gently, shifting his tone, "I will subdivide the central governing affairs."

Bradley quickly picked up his pen, "Please elaborate, sir."

"For example, Agricultural Office, Crafts Office, Trade Bureau, Education Department, Defense Bureau, Civil Affairs Office, and Health Department." Louis listed seven names in one breath, having pondered them for a long time.

Bradley looked up, "Sir, this compared to the Empire's department system..."

"It's different." Louis shook his head, "The decay of the Empire lies in its division of labor without accountability, having titles yet no one truly responsible.

I demand each office to manage a practical matter and establish an evaluation mechanism.

The Agricultural Office oversees farming and the granary.

Spring plowing, autumn harvest, distribution of seeds and farming tools, construction of canals and greenhouses to ensure the people have food year-round.

So whether they can feed more people becomes their test.

The Crafts Office oversees workshops and handicrafts.

Blacksmiths, carpenters, alchemists are all included, responsible for armor and weapons, farming tools and machinery, and the construction of city walls and bridges, as well as invention and creation.

All aspects of production and crafts are managed by this office.

If anyone cuts corners, they will certainly be punished. And anyone who creates new tools or methods will be richly rewarded.

The Trade Bureau governs trade and material circulation.

Market taxation, caravan movements, roads and rest stations, all maintained by them, ensuring smooth flow of goods between Red Tide and north-south.

The Education Department is responsible for educating and nurturing talents for Red Tide.

Setting up schools to teach children reading and arithmetic, cultivating clerks capable of writing and calculating to fill the talent gap in Red Tide Territory.

Also propagating laws to let the people know the rules, and when the time is ripe, promoting literacy universally.

The Defense Bureau handles defense and security, which the military will manage, I will have Lambert arrange it.

Responsible for training ordinary soldiers and apprentice knights, patrol of towns, eradication of bandits, guarding of borders, these minor crises ensure there is no disorder within Red Tide Territory.

The Civil Affairs Office records household register and allocates land.

Accommodating refugees with housing, collecting reasonable taxes, ensuring everyone can be traced, and everyone has a place to live.

The Health Department manages epidemic prevention and territorial health.

Managing medicinal herbs, liaising with physicians, setting up epidemic prevention stations. If an epidemic spreads, immediately isolate and treat, safeguarding the lifeline of the Red Tide People."

Bradley wrote furiously, recording every word Louis said perfectly.

Although his mind hadn't fully grasped it yet, he understood it was very important, the result of Louis's thoughtful contemplation.

Louis continued to speak steadily, "Furthermore, they must submit monthly briefings to me and be assessed annually.

Those unqualified will be demoted and punished, while meritorious ones will be rewarded and promoted. There can be no slack in Red Tide's order.

Of course, the central government is only the backbone, without the local limbs to execute, even the best decrees are mere words. The local system must also be established."

Louis did not give Bradley any chance to catch his breath, continuing, "Every subordinate territory must appoint a superintendent, the highest local official dispatched by the Lord.

They must absolutely execute central orders, such as maintaining order, collecting taxes. A deputy superintendent will be assigned beside them, who can perform their duties when necessary."

He paused, fingers lightly gliding across the map over Mai Lang and Xingduan, "Under them, other subordinate officials corresponding to the seven offices must be established.

Agricultural Official overseeing farming and harvest, patrols maintaining local security, tax collectors handling taxation and trade.

Chapter 489: Red Tide's Future Plans (2)

"All these people are appointed centrally, and there must be no private local appointments."

Bradley nodded slightly, his pen rustling on the parchment.

"The policy directives must be smooth," Louis's voice was low, "they must be delivered on time, and every directive must be transmitted by a knight to the locality at the first moment.

The supervisors must also submit a monthly brief, clearly detailing matters such as food, taxation, and security.

Furthermore, every quarter, they must come to Red Tide in person to report on their governance, face to face, and there must be no vagueness."

The morning light outside the window cast on Louis's side face, revealing a sharp arc.

"The central departments must send personnel for patrols, and the Inspection Department must also conduct independent inspections, ensuring dual oversight; no one should expect to pass unnoticed."

Bradley responded softly, "Sir, you truly intend to have Red Tide's reach cover every inch of land."

Louis's tone was icy, "Only in this way can the order I set be stable, not easily shaken."

"But how to supervise all these?"

Louis slowly curled his lips and uttered three words: "Inspection Department."

Bradley slightly opened his mouth, as if he understood something.

"The Inspection Department is directly under me, led by the person I've entrusted the most. Moreover, all inspectors do not serve locally, and they rotate periodically.

They are my eyes and ears, capable of reporting on any official at any time. Anyone, regardless of rank, who dares to be corrupt or negligent will be immediately dismissed, or even executed."

Bradley, upon hearing this, felt a slight sweat in his palms.

He certainly knew that the Empire also had a similar inspection system, but in the past century, it has become largely ceremonial, mostly superficial, with local nobility arranging things through connections, eventually turning into a tool for corruption.

Louis's approach was different.

The Inspection Department he envisaged was not a mere facade, but a razor-sharp system: directly reporting to the Lord, not serving locally, rotating regularly, and having no entanglement with local interests.

Most crucially, they can report at any time and dismiss immediately.

This means that once someone embezzles, there's no need for layered reporting, no need to wait for lengthy approvals; the dismissal can happen on the spot.

A complex emotion surged in Bradley's heart.

This young Lord's approach was much stricter than the old systems of the Empire and more executable.

It's not just a paper tiger; it's akin to a sword hanging perpetually above officials' heads.

Compared to the Empire's loose and crude inspections, this was a truly effective way to reign in all officials.

"The Lord is truly a talent for governing..."

He silently marveled in his heart, gazing at the youth behind the desk, feeling immensely fortunate to be able to serve such a leader in his lifetime.

Just as Bradley was still immersed in awe, Louis's tone changed: "There's another thing for you to note."

The elder immediately raised his pen, leaning slightly forward, afraid to miss a single word.

"Once all departments are well arranged and the framework is established, I want them to submit a five-year plan."

Bradley paused, his pen hovering over the parchment, seemingly not understanding.

Louis ignored his expression and continued, "Relying solely on short-term measures can, at most, alleviate immediate difficulties but cannot establish a long-term foundation.

If Red Tide wants to go further, there must be a blueprint, letting the settlers know what needs to be done and where to go over the next five years."

Louis paused, then continued to think aloud, "For example, how many acres of farmland should be expanded, how much storage capacity should the granary have, how many workshops should be constructed, how much will the population increase, how many clerks can the schools produce, and how much can the army be expanded.

And the necessity of doing this, you should understand, if we only focus on the seasonal harvests, Red Tide will forever merely be a surviving stronghold in the Northern Territory's wilderness.

With a long-term plan, no matter how great the wind and snow, we can still see the direction of the future."

At this moment, Bradley understood in his heart that Louis's thoughts and strategies were written in the posture of a king, not only for Red Tide but even for the entire Northern Territory.

Louis leaned back in his chair, his voice unhurried, "I simply provide some directions; specific goals still need to be proposed by the departments themselves.

But they must be set after investigation, and cannot be arbitrarily compiled to exaggerate achievements. Of course, the final step will be reviewed by me."

His tone carried no exaggeration, only a pragmatic approach that was convincing.

Bradley bowed his head slightly, "I understand."

A complex feeling surged within the elder's heart. The young Lord not only possessed exceptional foresight but also understood not to rush, ensuring policies did not become mere empty talk.

After pondering for a moment, Bradley remained silent, seemingly weighing his words.

"Sir..." He slightly leaned forward, his tone probing, "Apart from consolidating governance and the five-year plan, there's another matter worth considering: annexing the territories of surrounding small nobility."

Upon hearing this, Louis sneered, "Indeed, although we already control much of the southeastern territories, they are still scattered, unable to piece together our own lands.

Many small noble forces are already empty, with plagues and wars consuming almost half of their labor and land.

Their granaries are empty, mines collapsed, and seven out of ten Knight Orders have been destroyed.

Currently maintaining themselves barely is not due to their own strength but because of Red Tide's support.

In other words, while they appear independent, they are essentially pockets hanging at our waist, and we only need to reach out to take whatever we wish.

Once these strategic areas are brought into our fold, Red Tide can form a whole.

Then, this chaotic southeastern area can be thoroughly transformed into a core of order, allowing us to eventually consume the entire Northern Territory, becoming the true Lord of the North."

His tone was calm, yet carried a chilling decisiveness: "Red Tide should take proactive actions, using exchanges, cooperation, and even force, to gradually annex them."

He then began to elaborate on methods, as if sketching a certain victory strategy:

"We can use some peripheral territories along with materials to exchange for their strategic areas."

Louis's fingers lightly traced over several pieces of land on the map, "Or propose joint development, co-building territories, letting them perceive benefits, thus voluntarily handing over their authority."

Louis thought for a moment and continued, "First supply, then restrict. Once they lack food for knights and servants, raw materials for workshops, iron materials for military supplies, all relying on Red Tide... they will no longer be able to struggle."

"Of course, there will be stubborn ones holding onto ancestral domains, refusing cooperation." Louis slightly squinted his eyes.

"Against these stubborn factions, we must strike hard, possibly initiating border friction or deploying troops under the guise of 'bandit suppression.' Just striking down one will be enough to intimidate the rest."

His words fell, and the Red Tide marks on the map flickered gently in the firelight.

Bradley silently paused, then slowly exhaled and relaxed his brows.

"Sir... I understand now." He bowed in salute, "First divide, then integrate, employing both soft and hard tactics, leaving them no retreat."

Louis nodded slightly, his expression unwavering, as though all this was expected.

"Red Tide's territory and influence must expand in the shortest time," his voice was calm and steady, "we need to actively shape the situation, not passively respond."

Bradley replied, his tone now devoid of earlier hesitation and instead carrying some eagerness: "It is the most direct and effective method."

I will proceed at once, ensuring intelligence is gathered first everywhere, evaluating which small nobility is suitable for cooperation, and which should be struck."

Louis did not look up, merely uttering two words: "Very good."

Two succinct words, yet they felt like a hammer.

Those small noble territories still marked on the map were, at this moment, akin to chess pieces at one's disposal.

Simply because of the young Lord's few brief words, their futures are now clearly arranged.

Chapter 490: Territory Exchange

Inside the Government Hall, the map on the long table was pressed flat, and the candlelight reflected on the parchment, making the various markings clearly visible.

Bradley held the pen and marked a spot, his voice steady: "Most of the territories that need to be exchanged are around the Red Tide Territory."

This way, all the key areas can be woven into a complete road network, making future travel convenient and defensive points easier to establish."

Several officials nodded in sequence, continuously adding information on the side.

However, their eyes occasionally fell on a few red markings.

Those places were remote and barren, neither near waterways nor connected to trade routes.

Compared to the prosperous areas around, they held no value.

Finally, a young official couldn't help but speak softly: "Those places seem rather unremarkable..."

Before he finished, the elder official beside him coughed lightly and said sternly: "Be cautious with your words, these marks were made personally by Lord Louis. Have you ever seen the lord make a mistake?"

The young official was taken aback, then immediately lowered his head, his face flushed.

Bradley observed this, his expression unchanged, and said: "Lord Louis' orders are beyond our comprehension, which only shows our lack of vision. Remember, our duty is to execute, not to question."

The hall fell into a momentary silence, and everyone bowed and nodded.

Of course, Louis did not mark randomly. Through the Daily Intelligence System, he mastered most of the secret resources of the surrounding areas and only marked places with strategic value.

Some had veins of Demon Marrow buried underground, some harbored rare magic plants, magical beasts, or concealed transportation hubs.

These seemingly barren wastelands could very well influence the future of the entire Red Tide Territory.

Of course, Louis wouldn't tell these officials the actual reasons but let them interpret it themselves, just like the Sun never explains why it shines.

After a brief silence, Bradley spoke again: "Our negotiation strategy is divided into three steps. First, diplomacy.

Use other territories, food, and gold coins as bargaining chips to exchange with those small nobility. Make them feel like they're getting a good deal and willingly sign the contract."

He paused, his fingertips gently tapping on the map.

"Second, if they still have doubts, cut off their lifelines, like food, iron, or raw materials needed by workshops.

All these essentials are controlled by Red Tide. Let them taste the loss, and eventually, they will come to us."

Finally, Bradley's voice grew colder: "Lastly, if there are still those who refuse to understand, report to Lord Louis, and under the guise of 'defending against the Barbarian Race,' send troops to take it.

One strike should be enough to show others the cost. But it's best not to reach this point, as it would make Lord Louis feel we are too incompetent."

After listening, all the officials lowered their heads, solemnly responding: "Understood."

After a final precise deduction and calculation, the list of special envoys was finalized.

They would set off with contracts symbolizing goodwill, embarking on this journey of 'diplomacy before force.'

.....

East of the Red Tide Territory, along the solitary cliff of the Wind Howl Heights, there was a small territory called "Ghost Vine Slope."

It was dry and barren, with no trade routes surrounding it, and aside from vines suitable for making ropes, it lacked resources, with just over a hundred residents.

But according to the Daily Intelligence System's prompt, a rare magic plant called Abyssal Silk Flower was hidden near the cliff's edge.

This is a magic plant that only grows in extreme environments.

If carefully refined, it becomes the core ingredient for the next generation of 'Magic Explosion Bullets.'

The land belonged to a baron named Garris Wei Lan.

He was, like Louis, a family outcast sent to the Northern Territory due to the Northern Territory Expansion Order.

Upon learning that a special envoy from Red Tide Territory was coming, Baron Wei Lan prepared the grandest feast since the territory's inception in his old dilapidated fortress.

The shabby hall was temporarily adorned with brocade from the South, and sacks piled in the corners were covered with straw mats, appearing somewhat decent from afar.

He ordered the household's last three bottles of wine mixed with honey and slaughtered the few remaining fat sheep.

Cut into portions, they were made into charcoal-grilled and fragrant stews, lavishly seasoned, as if trying to mask the cold drafts from the unrepaired roof cracks and wall gaps over the past three months with that spicy fragrance.

Even the damaged silver cups were polished to a shine and neatly placed on the table.

Not to show off, but to show respect.

Wei Lan was well aware that the livelihood of his land had long been quietly tied to the grain carts of the Red Tide Territory.

Food, seeds, ironware, salt... almost all supplies that sustain the livelihood and maintain the Knight Order's operations come mostly from Red Tide trade routes.

If he lost favor with Red Tide, his so-called noble status would not be worth even half a copper coin.

Moreover, the envoy this time was Horn Grayland, reportedly a person highly trusted by Lord Louis.

Even if Wei Lan harbored doubts, he could only respond with a smile now.

After all, in the Northern Territory rebuilt amidst wind, snow, and bones, he knew too well who truly held the power in these circumstances.

Knight Horn Grayland, tall and upright, with attire simple yet elegant, never parted from his sword.

As he entered, he said little, merely opening several wooden boxes carried by the accompanying soldiers, revealing jars of golden honey wine inside.

"This is newly brewed honey wine from the Red Tide Territory. It can enhance the activity of fighting energy within... consider it a token gift for you, Baron."

Wei Lan was momentarily stunned.

He hadn't expected that the envoy, instead of putting on airs, had brought a gift, slightly easing the tension he felt.

