

Winter 51

Chapter 51: Battle Array

Time is of the essence, and Louis must quickly enhance the combat strength of the territory in the coming days.

So he took his white-haired little secretary, Sif, to the training ground to check on the progress of the soldiers' training.

Sif watched the orderly and synchronized movement of the battle array, her mouth slightly agape.

It was her first time seeing the soldiers of the Red Tide Territory practicing in formation, and she was filled with awe.

The tactics of the Red Tide soldiers were entirely different from the commonly seen combat techniques in this world.

Most lords' tactics are merely a ragtag army forming a wall of flesh, attempting to withstand cavalry charges through sheer numbers.

But the result is often the knight tearing through the formation, leading to a swift defeat.

However, the Red Tide Territory is different; they use the "Stacked Formation" designed by Louis.

He divided the battle array into three layers, representing cooperative combat for ranged suppression, melee interception, and deadly counterattack.

First layer of the battle array: Archers.

The archers stand at the front, divided into three rows for continuous volley fire, akin to a three-stage strike, thus maintaining a constant rain of arrows.

"Target the horses!" the training officer shouted on the training ground.

The soldiers drew their bows, and arrows rained down like raindrops.

Pop! — Pop! — Pop!

The arrows hit the targets densely; though not accurate, the sheer volume made it inevitable they would hit something.

The simulated targets aren't the knights themselves, as this kind of attack is quite limited against knights with Fighting Energy.

Their real target is the horses beneath the knights!

Other than magical beasts, ordinary horses usually have no armor and cannot utilize Fighting Energy.

A precise shot to the horse's legs or belly could disrupt the enemy cavalry's charging formation, greatly weakening the knight's impact.

Second layer of the battle array: Spearmen.

"Hold the formation! Maintain your pace!"

After the archers completed the first round of shooting, shield-bearing spearmen swiftly stepped forward, forming a dense array of spears.

The spears they hold measure four to six meters in length, neatly pointed forward.

Their role is, when the enemy cavalry is disrupted by the archers and their momentum diminishes,

they step forward, aiming their spear tips at the belly of the horses, forcing knights to slow down or even lose control, toppling the knights.

Third layer of the battle array: Sword and Axe Warriors.

Once the cavalry is forced to slow down, it becomes the stage for the sword and axe warriors.

They hide behind the spearmen, waiting for the spear formation to successfully stall the enemy before leaping out swiftly, wielding heavy long swords or war axes.

Target—hack off the horse's legs, then chop down the dismounted knights!

"Slash!"

On the training ground, at the training officer's command, the sword and axe warriors charged forward swiftly, causing the mock cavalry poles to splinter and shatter.

Even those lower-tier knights, despite having Fighting Energy to protect them, find it hard to leave the battlefield alive when beset by several well-trained sword and axe warriors.

Moreover, this battle array can cooperate with knights to expand the victory.

Of course, this combat technique isn't Louis's original, but rather a reference to the stacked formation used by Wu Lin during his resistance against the Jin Army.

In the historical Song Dynasty battle at Immortal Pass, Wu Lin used this tactic to successfully annihilate the Jin Army's heavy cavalry, the "Iron Butcher."

"Can such a method kill fighting energy warriors?" Sif finally couldn't help but ask.

"It won't be so easy to kill anything above an Official Knight, but it's very effective against low-tier knights," Louis said with some pride.

This set of tactics, of course, cannot confront those high-tier knights; after all, those monsters can destroy hundreds.

But for apprentices and Official Knights, it is a deadly nemesis.

With just a well-trained infantry team, utilizing the formation, they could encircle and kill several knights.

However, these soldiers can only assist on the battlefield; the decisive factor still lies with the knights possessing Fighting Energy.

"Let's go." Louis interrupted Sif's thoughts and continued to walk toward the other side of the training ground.

There, the knights were also conducting tactical exercises.

Unlike the infantry formations, the core of the cavalry training is "Swarm Tactics."

This is a tactic Louis improved based on the environment of the Northern Territory.

On the vast training field, the knights were divided into multiple small teams, each led by 3 to 5 Official Knights and 10 to 20 Apprentice Knights.

They kept launching attacks on mock enemies from different directions.

In summary, the tactic is divided into three stages: Harassment—Feint—Focus Fire!

A team quickly approaches the target, throwing javelins or shooting arrows to harass, then immediately retreats.

Another team attacks from the flank, creating an illusion of a main force charge, forcing the enemy to rearrange their defenses.

The two teams keep harassing the enemy in rotation.

Finally, as the enemy falters, a hidden cavalry team suddenly appears, focusing their attack on a critical target, causing maximum damage in a short time.

Throughout the process, the knights maintain high mobility, not engaging the enemy directly, but repeatedly wearing them down and looking for weaknesses.

As soon as the enemy shows fatigue or the commander makes a mistake, the knights take advantage by concentrating their forces for a deadly strike!

The training field resounded with the thunder of hooves and dust swirling.

Lances pierced the wooden stakes, arrows hit their marks steadily.

After months of training, the Red Tide Territory knights could flawlessly execute swarm tactics.

Veteran knights performed with ease, while newcomers, despite some mistakes, gradually integrated into the system through practice.

Louis nodded with satisfaction.

This combat technique could maximize the protection of his cavalry while continuously weakening the enemy.

Compared to the foolish tactic of mindless charges which end in encirclement and annihilation, this scattered harassment strategy is the fighting style that elite cavalry should adopt.

Sif watched the disciplined and rapidly obedient knights, feeling somewhat stirred inside.

Their actions were precise and every order was executed promptly without the slightest delay.

This was completely different from the Northern Tribe warriors she was familiar with.

In the tribe, warriors were more accustomed to rushing in frenziedly, relying on personal bravery and physical prowess rather than cooperative and tactical combat.

If the knights of the Ironblood Empire were all like the ones in the Red Tide Territory, then the Northern Tribes would be in danger.

She slightly clenched her hand, feeling conflicted.

As a former princess of the Cold Moon Tribe, she certainly hoped all traitors would be killed, especially those who poisoned her father and murdered her mother, brothers, and sisters.

She wished they would not find a place to bury their bones.

But if the Empire really swept the Northern Territory with full force, then the innocent clansmen her father protected...

"What are you thinking about, let's go to the Alchemy Workshop."

Louis's voice interrupted Sif's scattered thoughts.

She snapped back, glanced at Louis, and eventually said nothing, silently following along.

Louis gazed at the increasingly powerful army on the training ground, feeling a sense of joy.

The soldiers were now proficient in utilizing battle formations, and the knights' swarm tactics had also taken shape, making them many times more combat-effective than when they first arrived at the Red Tide Territory.

Very good, next comes the Magic Flame Bullet.

If Hillco's team has achieved results in their research, his upcoming battles will be even more assured.

If it hasn't been completed yet...

Louis let out a light hum, already having a plan in mind.

Then make Hillco work overtime until it's done, hmph, wear him out.

He pulled the reins and spurred his war horse forward.

Sif also mounted her horse, and they, along with the accompanying knights, rode toward the Alchemy Workshop.

Chapter 52: Ice and Fire Two Realms

Louis entered the Magic Marrow Factory with the company, and an acrid alchemist smell immediately assaulted his nostrils.

He raised his hand in a greeting: "Good morning."

In the corner, Hillco, with heavy dark circles under his eyes, glanced listlessly at the odious Slave Master.

"Good morning, sir," his voice carried a hint of complaint, as he casually handed over a fist-sized crude clay pot.

Louis took the heavy pot, which appeared unadorned, with a strip of linen inserted in the mouth, looking roughly made as if casually molded.

He frowned: "Is this it?"

Hillco explained lazily, "Don't be fooled by its plain appearance; it's filled with dangerous items.

Demon Marrow, Ice Armor Bear Crystal Residue, Fire Floss Grass, all packed inside.

The power is not small, and of course, if given more time, I can make it more delicate and even stronger."

"Since you say so, let's try one out," Louis raised an eyebrow, looking towards the already prepared experimental field.

Several Magical Beasts were tied at various places in the field, struggling and making uneasy growls.

The Knights donned specially made protective masks, lit the fuse, and threw out the Magic Flame Bullet.

The clay pot spun in the air, tracing an arc, and accurately smashed into the center of the experimental field.

Boom!!

First Phase: Cold Blast!

The moment the Magic Flame Bullet exploded, a blue light flashed, the Ice Armor Bear Crystal shattered, releasing an extremely cold air current!

The air abruptly contracted, as if the entire space was violently pulled tight by an invisible hand.

The fur of several Magical Beasts frosted instantly, their limbs twitchingly curling up.

Then they were forcibly dragged toward the core of the explosion by a strong suction!

They emitted shrill wails, hooves clawing at the ground frantically, unable to break free.

Second Phase: Fiery Blast!

Just as they were about to break free from the cold current's grip, the next disaster struck.

The Demon Marrow spontaneously ignited, and fierce flames burst forth.

Fire Floss Grass fluff, as if catalyzed by some invisible force, madly devoured the oxygen in the air!

Flames like a layer of flowing liquid adhered tightly to the Magical Beasts, spreading along their fur.

Like bloodthirsty snakes boring into every skin seam, frantically gnawing at flesh.

"Awooo—!!"

The eyes of one Magical Beast were burned by flames, exploding in an instant, body fluids evaporating into a wisp of white smoke, the hot air expelled from its mouth and nose rapidly transforming into dry dust.

The air was filled with the nauseating stench of charring and burning, making one want to retch.

Third Phase: Poisonous Corrosion!

Black smoke slowly rose.

This was not ordinary embers, but the toxic gas released after the Demon Marrow burned!

The affected Magical Beast first convulsed violently, limbs twitching wildly, screams from throats being squeezed out.

The flesh on the wounds began to quickly fester, as if torn by invisible hands, revealing ghastly bones.

They struggled, howled, rolled, and finally—

Silence.

Ashes scattered, the air imbued with a strong sulfur and burnt decay odor, lingering.

The scene was in complete disarray, charred remains embedded in the soil.

Even the earth had been burned a deep brown, faintly shimmering, this land seemed to be tainted by death.

Louis stood silently, gazing at the scene of desolation for a long time without speaking.

Sif, pale-faced, couldn't help but clench her fists.

She had seen slaughter, seen bloodshed, and even been on the battlefield personally.

But she had never seen killing like this.

Silent, yet utterly stripping away all life.

Hillco, however, showed a strange expression, part pride, part heartache.

He blinked his bloodshot eyes, rubbing his sore neck from staying up, and sighed:

"The power is indeed impressive...but sir, the material cost for this one alone is a full four hundred Gold Coins."

He looked at the scorched earth as if staring at a pile of burning, golden coins, heartbroken as if it was his money spent.

Hearing this, Louis finally snapped back to reality, turned, and asked, "How many do we have left?"

"Seven," Hillco sighed, "Any more and we'll be out of materials. After all, the Ice Armor Bear Crystals you brought were only so much."

"A name?"

"Haven't thought of one."

Louis surveyed the lifeless land, his gaze passing over the still-burning black embers, a slight smile on his lips.

"Let's call it 'Ice and Fire Two Realms.'"

Hillco nodded, thinking the name quite fitting.

Louis reached out to lightly tap the rough clay pot of the bomb.

This was his ultimate trump card.

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Count Fos sat on the luxurious chair of the Count's Mansion, his fingers unconsciously rubbing his chubby chin, his face full of anxiety.

"Damn rubbish! Commanding bandit suppression... What do I know about these things!"

It was clear that this sudden task had frightened him.

Inherited the title from his father less than two years, now tasked to eradicate the Snow Swearer, a joke?

The name Snow Swearer was something he'd often heard, notoriously fierce.

His father, the previous Count Fos.

A war-heroic Northern Territory general, ruled Snow Peak County for decades, making the Northern Tribe tremble.

But himself?

Only a fatty forced to inherit the title, unable to even sit firmly on a horse, let alone leading troops into battle!

"My Lord Count, this isn't necessarily a bad opportunity."

It was his counselor speaking, a man with a face full of schemes.

"Think about it, eradicating Snow Swearers is Duke Edmund's order. All Northern Lords must respond, especially those Pioneer Nobles from the South."

Count Fos frowned: "What do you mean?"

The counselor leaned closer and whispered: "You can send them to their deaths directly."

These Southern Nobles are inherently weak, their foundations unstable.

And with this high-risk mission to weed out the Snow Swearers, if arranged appropriately, and they handle the most dangerous tasks, their forces will be depleted.

Once they suffer heavy losses, you can then as Count absorb their lands and resources; why not?"

Count Fos's eyes widened; such a possibility didn't occur to him.

The counselor continued emboldening his plot: "Besides, you know, the old Nobility of the Northern Territory have little favorable views on these Southerners."

If they all perish, the Northern Territory will fully return to the hands of true Northerners.

And those who look down on you, thinking you got the County due to your father's shadow, unable to govern Snow Peak County properly, what would they say?

They would have to confess they misjudged you, that you are the true ruler of Snow Peak County!"

Count Fos paused for a few seconds.

Then a sinister smile grew on his face.

"Makes sense."

He raised his goblet, gently swirling the liquid inside.

Already envisioning the scene of the Southern Nobles being swallowed by snow and ice, himself being revered by thousands.

"Alright, let's do it as you say."

Chapter 53: Setting Out

On the day of the expedition, the streets of Red Tide Territory were bustling with people.

The townspeople gathered spontaneously on both sides of the road to send off the knights and soldiers about to embark.

Louis rode at the forefront, draped in a black and red cloak, with Calvin's family crest embroidered on his shoulder.

Behind him were the ready and armed knights and soldiers, including eight Elite Knights, twenty-five Official Knights, sixty Apprentice Knights, and two hundred infantrymen.

Everyone was fully armed and prepared.

In the Northern Territory, this was a highly elite force ready to engage in battle at any moment.

This expedition saw Louis taking away more than half of Red Tide Territory's combat forces.

First, Red Tide Territory was located in a relatively safe southern area of the Northern Territory, so even if they were short-staffed, there wouldn't be much of a threat.

Second, he had the Daily Intelligence System to learn about dangers in advance and avoid being ambushed and annihilated.

In this case, he must bring enough forces to earn more military exploits.

This would not only solidify Red Tide Territory's status but also help him establish a foothold among the old nobility of the Northern Territory.

His goal for this campaign was to make a name for Red Tide Territory.

In the midst of the farewell crowd, Weir stood at the front, his eyes full of envy.

As an Apprentice Knight, though he had awakened his Fighting Energy, he was too young and not yet skilled in Knight Skills, so he was left in the territory to continue training.

As Weir watched the imposing knights surround Louis, he was filled with longing.

He also wished to become such a person, able to follow the great Lord into battle.

"Alright, that's enough of a send-off." Louis reined in his horse and looked at the townspeople on both sides.

Their faces showed reluctance but even more pride.

Louis raised his voice, "Thank you all for seeing us off,

No matter who the enemies ahead are, we will return victorious!"

After speaking, he pulled the reins and said in a deep voice, "Let's go!"

Their iron hooves struck the ground, the battle flags waved in the wind, and the mighty force moved out of Red Tide Territory.

The sound of the farewell from the townspeople resonated throughout Red Tide Territory.

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In the late spring, the wilderness of the Northern Territory still carried a hint of coldness.

The expedition force camped in a lowland area, with the knights gathering to prepare for today's hunt.

The wild boar beast, a type of rugged magical beast, has coarse but energizing meat.

Louis sat on his horse, watching the charging wild boar beast ahead, and casually instructed, "Be careful, don't damage too much meat."

"Leave it to me!"

An Apprentice Knight jumped up, his spear infused with Fighting Energy struck down, but the spearhead bounced off the boar's tough hide, lacking the strength to pierce through!

"Haha! You need more strength!"

A nearby Official Knight laughed, thrusting his spear downward, breaking the armor with one shot, and blood splattered onto the wasteland.

The boar howled in pain, collapsing on the ground, as the knights quickly moved in to finish the hunt.

Louis had set off early, with plenty of time.

After all, other Lords would likely arrive just on time, and there was no need for him to be conspicuous by arriving early.

So he simply used his Daily Intelligence System to lead the knights on hunts along the way.

The threat of magical beasts was no small matter, but for these elite knights, as long as they weren't high-tier beasts, they could handle them easily.

So every morning before setting out, they would go on a hunt and return to camp with some spoils.

The knights had long become used to Louis's seemingly "prophetic" luck.

Every day before departure, the Lord would casually point: "There should be beasts over there today, go check it out."

And then they would find their prey.

Though they mostly caught lower-level beasts like the wild boar, horned antelope, or iron-feather wolf, the meat was firm and energizing, enough to fill their stomachs and slightly enhance their strength.

Initially, they were a bit surprised, but after many occurrences, they became numb to it.

They simply reasoned: "The Lord is favored by the Dragon Ancestor, and we are just along for the enjoyment."

They'd start traveling in the morning, head out to hunt at noon, roast meat over a bonfire at night, and sleep well.

This was even more comfortable than training back in the territory.

After several days, the knights increasingly enjoyed this lifestyle.

The bonfire blazed, the wood crackled in the flames, releasing a savory smoke.

Large slabs of magical beast meat dripped fat onto the grill, sizzling and wafting an aroma throughout the camp.

"Smells great! Hurry up!"

An Apprentice Knight swallowed hard, eyes fixed on the roast meat.

The knight turning the meat laughed and scolded: "Why rush? It'll taste best when it's cooked properly."

The surrounding soldiers gathered around, the sound of gulping rising and falling.

They usually only had rye bread and salted fish to eat.

Now they were enjoying fresh roasted meat freely, it was like a dream, even if it was just ordinary game.

"Tonight is a gift from the Dragon Ancestor!" an infantryman exclaimed, raising his wineskin and taking a hearty swig.

Another infantryman concurred, "Haha, going on a campaign with the Lord is more fortunate than training in the territory!"

The atmosphere was completely unlike an expedition, more like a spring outing!

Louis glanced around, seeing the knights relaxed around the bonfire.

Some used knives to cut meat, others set up a pot to simmer magical beast bones for soup, some raised cups in laughter, some snatched whole pieces of meat and feasted.

Who had ever gone on a campaign against bandits so comfortably?

But seeing the soldiers with smiles on their faces, eating contentedly, he eventually shook his head and laughed.

Oh well, a balance of work and rest.

At this moment, a knight hurried over to report to Louis: "Lord, we've encountered Baron Jorn's force on the eastern side; they're heading this way."

Louis was slightly taken aback, an image of that round figure immediately popping into his mind.

The chubby fellow who always called him "Boss" with a grin.

Of course, his territory was nearby, and he likely needed to assemble at Snow Eagle City too.

"Oh? What a coincidence."

He had just sighed when soon, a rush of hoofbeats came from the distance.

"Boss——!!"

Accompanied by a familiar shout, a rotund knight charged over.

Yorn Harvey dismounted excitedly and ran to Louis, his face showing a long-lost thrill.

Louis stared at him for a moment.

Yorn had indeed slimmed down quite a bit.

The once round mass now had an oval contour, still essentially a chubby fellow.

However, in the next second, Yorn's eyes were drawn to the roasted meat by the bonfire.

He stared intently, his Adam's apple rolling slightly.

"Gulp."

The sound of swallowing was particularly clear in the night breeze.

Louis's mouth twitched slightly, tearing off a piece of roast meat and handing it over: "Uh... care for a bite?"

Yorn nodded furiously, his eyes lighting up.

He immediately grabbed the roast meat, taking a big bite, revealing a face full of happiness.

Chapter 54: Zachary Diaz

The air was filled with the aroma of barbecue, with the unique lard scent of magical beasts, making one's mouth water.

"Mmm, so delicious..."

Yorn, while gnawing on the barbecue, mumbled indistinctly, "I haven't had fresh demon beast meat in ages!"

He took a bite, his face full of satisfaction, then suddenly remembered his situation, and his mood instantly dropped.

Louis observed Yorn while eating his meat.

Indeed, unlike his initial exuberance upon arriving in the Northern Territory, Yorn now genuinely seemed more experienced and had lost a noticeable amount of weight.

"This broken place, the Northern Territory, it's simply not fit for living!" Yorn complained to Louis as he ate: "The permafrost in my territory, can't even grow any crops!

And the people are lazy and afraid of hardship, give them land and they won't farm, hand them a hunting bow and they don't know how to use it, just waiting for me to distribute relief food! They all treat me like the Northern Territory's number one philanthropist!"

Louis consoled him: "You just have to get through the initial period, plan slowly, and things will get better."

"If my dad didn't send me money every month and transport grain from the South, I'd have starved to death already!" Yorn was desperately clutching his hair.

Sustaining a territory's population by transporting grain and money?

Louis paused, now developing a newfound understanding of the Harvey family's financial capability.

Yorn sighed deeply, looking up at the sky: "I would've known better than to come. Do you think my dad could plead with the Emperor to let me go back?"

Louis's mouth twitched, somewhat speechless.

The Northern Territory isn't a place you can just come and go as you please.

According to the "Northern Territory Expansion Order" law, if a Pioneer Lord leaves their territory without cause for too long, they would be beheaded.

"Enough with the pity act." He patted Yorn on the shoulder, "Even if you want to leave, you'll need at least twenty years."

Yorn, looking hopeless, shook off the oil from the barbecue, changing the subject to complain:

"And before I could even catch my breath after sowing the seeds, Duke Edmund's order came, and I had to lead troops here!"

"Tch, you really are unlucky." Louis agreed.

"Now I don't even know if there will be a harvest this autumn!" Yorn said in distress.

He angrily thrust the skewer into the fire: "Shouldn't this kind of thing be handled by those old Northern Territory nobility? Why drag us newly arrived pioneer nobles into this mess?

Especially against the Snow Swearers! I've heard they're maniacs!"

"You said it yourself, newly arrived pioneer nobles." Louis shrugged, "No background, no foundation, the best cannon fodder."

Yorn's smile suddenly froze, as if realizing something.

A moment later, he shook his head, not wanting to dwell on such a heavy topic, and changed his tone: "Anyway, boss, there's one more thing."

He munched on the barbecue, speaking indistinctly: "You know Zachary Diaz, right?"

"A member of the Diaz family? I remember his territory is also nearby." Louis replied.

"Yeah, he sent out invitations, wants to gather the pioneer nobles from the southern part of Snow Peak County for a pre-expedition feast." Yorn waved his skewer: "Did you get an invitation?"

Louis paused and then shook his head slowly.

Yorn was puzzled, with a strange expression: "Huh? No way, you are..."

"Don't overthink it, the reason is simple." Louis sneered, casually flipping the meat on the fire, "Zachary wants to be the boss of these pioneer lords, he's just shunning me."

Yorn blinked, with a face saying "Aren't you overthinking this?"

"Both Diaz and Calvin are part of the Eight Great Clans of the Empire." Louis smiled mysteriously, "If I were there, would he still be able to act as the 'boss'?"

Yorn suddenly understood, nodding rapidly like a pecking chicken: "Yeah, after all, you're also part of the Eight Great Clans, if you're there, he can't put on airs."

He paused and mumbled: "That guy is really small-minded..."

"No, he's not small-minded. He just knows his limits very well."

"So how are you going to deal with it?"

"When is the feast? Where?" Louis asked casually.

"Just two days from now, at his territory, not far ahead." Yorn replied, still chewing meat.

Louis stood up, brushed off the dust on his clothes: "Take me to have a look."

Yorn was stunned for a moment, then his eyes lit up: "Ha! Boss, are you going to crash the party?"

Louis laughed: "Still got some time, might as well check it out."

Yorn immediately wiped his mouth and slapped his thigh: "Alright! Lead the way!"

...

The next day, Yorn led the way, and Louis was accompanied by the knights. It took them half a day to finally reach their destination.

However, the scene that greeted them was unexpectedly desolate.

Looking out, the land was barren, with only a few patches of barely cultivated fields, the crops swaying weakly in the cold wind.

The scattered houses on the land were mostly built of wood, with simple structures, some even with leaking roofs.

The people wore tattered clothes, with numb expressions, their heads down, busying themselves with their tasks.

They glanced at the knight troupe with eyes that held little emotion, neither fear nor expectation, as if they were numb to their lives.

Louis frowned.

In Red Tide Territory, such a place would be demolished and rebuilt.

But Yorn crossed his arms, nodding: "This guy did quite well, just slightly worse than me."

Louis was taken aback, doubting his ears.

He looked back at the faces of the people, then at the ramshackle houses and the endless barren land.

This is called good?

He was about to speak when a realization suddenly hit him.

Such a territory is the norm for a pioneer lord in the Northern Territory.

No abundant resources, no proper planning, no stable supply of materials.

In such a harsh environment, just keeping your people from starving, building a few houses, and being able to farm somehow is already a success.

And what about himself?

The prosperity and stability of the Red Tide Territory was nothing like a newly established territory, even surpassing many old family territories in the Northern Territory.

The reason for that was because he was a transmigrator, and he had the Daily Intelligence System as a cheat.

With this advantage, he knew where resources were, where magical beasts lingered, how to avoid danger, and how to make the most of the conditions on hand.

In anyone else's hands, it wouldn't have been possible.

Louis said to Yorn: "After we finish off the Snow Swearer, you can come visit Red Tide Territory, it's much better than here."

Yorn nodded without hesitation: "Of course, you are my boss!"

Chapter 55: Gathering of the Rabble

The lights in the banquet hall were dim, with several flags bordered in gold hanging on the walls, attempting to create a sense of aristocratic solemnity.

However, the wooden beams on the ceiling were exposed, the carpet on the floor had visibly faded, and though the tables and chairs bore carved decorations, they couldn't hide the rough craftsmanship.

The main course was a whole roasted wild boar from the wasteland, with a few plates of simple vegetables and common game as garnish placed beside it.

Evidently, the owner of this banquet hall had done their best to convey a sense of aristocratic luxury, but in the resource-strapped Northern Territory, it was still somewhat lacking.

Zachary Diaz was seated at the main seat in the center of the banquet hall, swirling a glass of wine imported from the South in his hand.

Six or seven Pioneer Nobles surrounded him, their faces full of flattering smiles.

"Lord Diaz, this gathering is truly meaningful!"

A noble raised his glass, his tone enthusiastic: "These Northern Barbarians are too oppressive. We nobles who came from the South must stick together. It's our great fortune that you can stand up and lead us!"

"Absolutely, Lord Diaz. As long as we Pioneer Nobles unite, the Northern Barbarians might not necessarily be able to suppress us."

Another nodded in agreement, with a hint of flattery in his eyes.

Zachary raised his glass and gently swirled it: "Unity is indeed a good thing. After all, they make the rules. If we don't want to be exploited, we must fight for ourselves."

The noble beside him kept nodding, seizing the chance to agree: "You're right! Rather than waiting for their leftovers, it's better for us to take the initiative."

Zachary held the wine glass, enjoying the flattery immensely.

Most of the Pioneer Lords from the South of Snow Peak County had already come.

This turnout was enough to prove his influence.

These people fought their own battles, with no foundation or background, and were easily bullied by the native Northern Nobility. Therefore, they urgently needed a backing.

And the identity of the Diaz Clan was their best choice.

If he could make these nobles depend on him, he would be able to form a genuine force and have some sway in this area.

As for those unwilling to submit, he would use strategy to provide "suggestions" to Count Fos, sending these people to the front lines.

After all, the battlefield always required some sacrifices.

At this moment, a noble cautiously asked, "Lord Diaz, do you think we should join forces for this operation against the Snow Swearers?"

Zachary squinted: "Of course we must join forces, so there is an order of who goes first and who follows."

The banquet hall fell silent for a moment.

The nobles present exchanged glances, and a knowing look flashed in their eyes, but no one broke the silence.

No one wanted to be the first to rush in, but if someone else went to die, they were happy to see it happen.

And the person most likely to be pushed to the forefront was Louis Calvin.

Being from one of the Eight Great Clans of the Empire, Louis's absence from such a banquet spoke volumes.

Zachary was quite apprehensive about Louis, the son of Duke Calvin, due to his status.

But as for Louis himself, he didn't care much; to him, Louis was just someone with high birth but lacking skill.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have been the one to first approach Count Fos and gather so many Pioneer Nobles.

He even thought that this uninvited fellow might already have died somewhere in the wastelands.

Just then, there was a commotion outside the banquet hall.

"Bang—"

The door was pushed open, letting in a gust of cold wind.

Louis stepped in, followed by Yorn.

The nobles present were stunned, especially Zachary, but he quickly regained his composure and put on an elegant smile.

Louis scanned the room and felt a little relieved.

Ha, a gathering of nobodies.

He smirked, "What, not welcoming me?"

Zachary stood up and feigned a warm welcome: "Lord Calvin, welcome, welcome."

Louis sauntered over to the banquet table: "I heard from Yorn there was a banquet here, so I thought I'd drop by after dinner."

His gaze fell on the roasted wild boar on the table, and he spoke calmly, "Is this the main course?"

Yorn was less polite, grabbing a piece of meat and taking a bite, then furrowing his brow, "Hmm... the taste is average, worse than what we feed the slaves."

The air was still for a few seconds.

Some people's expressions turned awkward, while others lowered their heads, pretending to drink.

Zachary frowned imperceptibly, then smiled as he raised his glass: "Your presence, Lord Calvin, truly adds luster to this banquet."

"Add luster? Hardly." Louis casually pulled out a chair and sat down. "I'm just curious why I didn't receive an invitation for such an event."

Zachary remained outwardly calm: "Must have been my servant's oversight."

Louis chuckled softly, "No matter, I came on my own since I thickened my skin."

Zachary was unwilling to pursue the topic deeper, so he immediately changed the subject: "Lord Calvin, since you're here, why not come along to Snow Eagle City?"

We Pioneer Nobles from the South must unite; otherwise, those old Northern Nobles will devour us completely sooner or later."

Louis smiled like he had inside information, "Oh? It sounds like you want to be the leader of this alliance?"

Zachary's smile froze for a moment before he laughed, "Of course not. I just think we need to work together to resist being suppressed by those old nobles."

Louis raised his eyes to look at the nobles present, his gaze passing over each face before finally settling back on Zachary: "Yes, we do need to work together. But who says who goes first and who stays behind?"

He pointed to the roasted wild boar on the banquet table: "For example, with this pig, there's an order to who cuts first and who eats last—there are rules."

The expressions of several nobles grew subtle after exchanging glances.

Zachary's smile faded a little: "Lord Calvin, what do you mean?"

"Meaning?" Louis gently set down his wine glass, his tone casual, "Nothing much. Just that, what you say doesn't count."

The banquet hall fell silent for a moment.

Some nobles looked uncertain, and others frowned as if they had realized something.

Zachary's eyes darkened slightly: "Defeating the Snow Swearers is dangerous; uniting is still a good thing, so we won't be completely devoured."

"Of course." Louis's lips curled slightly, "But since we're from the Eight Great Clans of the Empire, with such a noble status, we should naturally lead on the battlefield."

He paused for a moment, his voice tinged with a hint of regret: "Or are you just waiting for others to fight and die before you swoop in for the rewards?"

The atmosphere grew even more tense.

The expressions of several nobles gradually changed as they quietly looked toward Zachary.

Zachary tightened his grip on his wine glass, his gaze growing colder, but he maintained his smile: "You've misunderstood, Lord Calvin. We Pioneer Nobles should unite against external threats, not engage in infighting."

"Indeed, we shouldn't fight amongst ourselves." Louis chuckled softly and shook his head, "But your methods leave people uneasy."

He stood up, casually straightening his clothes: "The wine's good, the food's mediocre, and the people..."

He paused as if seriously contemplating, then smiled faintly, "Eh, just so-so."

With that, he turned and strolled out of the banquet hall.

It had been just over ten minutes since he arrived, as if he really had just come for a post-dinner stroll.

Yorn shrugged and grabbed the last piece of meat, mumbling, "Waste not, want not." Then he followed Louis out.

The door was pushed open, letting another gust of cold wind in before it shut again.

Silence reigned in the banquet hall.

Zachary's face turned ashen, and the wine glass in his hand nearly shattered from his grip.

The nobles in the banquet hall quietly glanced at him, their expressions complicated.

Perhaps the Diaz Clan was not as reliable as they had imagined.

Chapter 56: Not Enough

Louis leisurely walked out of the banquet hall, the cold wind hitting his face, dispelling the smell of alcohol and the greasiness of roasted meat from inside.

He gently exhaled, the corners of his mouth slightly raised.

This banquet was even more uninteresting than he expected.

Zachary Diaz was indeed nothing special.

He thought he could control these Pioneer Nobles, relying on some sweet talk and little favors to make people willingly fight for him.

But in reality? Those nobles' eyes had already begun to change.

At first, they indeed surrounded and praised Zachary, like a pack of obedient lapdogs.

But with just my words, the seeds of doubt have been planted.

Is what Zachary said truly for everyone's good? Or only for himself?

Such questions, once in their minds, are hard to ignore.

"Hahaha, boss, you were so awesome just now!"

Yorn quickly caught up, his face full of excitement. "You should've seen Zachary's face, it turned so green it was glowing! I bet he's cursing you in his mind right now!"

"Oh?" Louis raised an eyebrow. "Too bad though, he doesn't have the guts."

"Of course!" Yorn nodded repeatedly, laughing gleefully, "After all, you're a young master of one of the Eight Great Clans of the Empire. Even if he's one too, it doesn't amount to much."

He imitated Zachary holding a wine glass, pretentiously raising his chin: "Oh, Lord Calvin, unity is crucial!"

Then immediately switched to a look of disgust, waving his hand: "Bleh, what a pretender, it's so nauseating!"

Louis couldn't help but laugh out loud.

This guy truly knows how to exaggerate things.

Thinking of Zachary's iron-gray complexion earlier, Louis felt a bit more cheerful.

However, he couldn't be too complacent.

This was just the beginning.

If Zachary is smart, he'll try to repair his image.

Might even use this banquet scandal against me to further strengthen his standing.

But if he's foolish, he'll rush to retaliate against me.

"Hey, boss, do you think he'll send people to bother you?" Yorn leaned close, asking quietly, "The more I think about it, the more I fear he might be cooking up something big."

Louis mounted his horse and chuckled softly: "That would be best."

"Huh?" Yorn looked puzzled.

Louis didn't rush to answer, instead he looked around outside the banquet hall at the knights and soldiers of various nobles stationed there.

The knights' armor wasn't grand but decently maintained, their cloaks embroidered with family crests, showing some sense of honor.

But their mounts were lacking, with many warhorses seeming poorly fed.

As for the regular soldiers, they were in even worse condition, with dilapidated armor and rusted weapons.

Not to mention their spirit, some soldiers huddled in corners for warmth, others leaning listlessly against walls, their gaze vacant.

The guards stood unsteadily, the patrollers moved lethargically, appearing ready to be blown over by a gust of wind at any moment.

Could such an army fight against the Snow Swearer?

Louis shook his head, couldn't resist smiling: "Yorn, do you think this kind of army has any combat capability?"

Yorn followed Louis' gaze and immediately mocked them: "Haha, boss, now that you say it, it's true!"

Though his own knights and soldiers were in similarly poor states.

But he had seen Louis' forces just a day ago.

The Red Tide Territory knights' armor was bright and clean, weapons sharp as new, each warhorse robust and strong.

Even the regular soldiers swiftly followed orders and could quickly change formations.

Truly a world apart from these soldiers and knights.

Listening to Yorn's praises, Louis gave a light smile.

He knew well, Zachary Diaz managed to win over these Southern Nobles not through strength.

But through their shared predicament, abandoned by their families.

These Pioneer Lords are largely marginalized figures within their clans.

They were dispatched to the Northern Territory not to make achievements.

But as a measure from certain clans to comply with the Emperor's Northern Territory Expansion Order, and thus abandoned there.

Louis knew this so well because he was also one of them.

Of course, he was now different from them.

Others were sent to the Northern Territory and truly became pawns.

While he, through hard work and knowledge from his past life, and the Daily Intelligence System, was on a path to greatness.

His father, Duke Calvin, also increased investments in the Red Tide Territory seeing his achievements.

His lands used to be as barren as these, his soldiers as disorganized.

Yet after nearly half a year of training, reorganization, and planning, the Red Tide Territory army had taken shape.

The Red Tide Territory forces are no ordinary pioneering army, but one capable of battle in the Northern Territory.

After laughing, Yorn leaned closer again, lowering his voice: "Boss, I didn't mean he'd send soldiers to fight you, but rather, he might report you to Count Fos, the Prefect."

Louis snorted: "Report me? Let him, I'm prepared to deal with it."

He tugged at the reins, his tone relaxed: "Let's go, gather your knights, and I'll lead you to earn military merits."

"Military merits?" Yorn was stunned, quickly catching on, "Wait... wait! What are you planning?"

Louis didn't respond, merely clamped his horse's belly, urging it forward.

"Hey, hey, hey, boss, tell me clearly! Hey! Wait for me!"

Yorn hurriedly tightened the reins, chasing after him.

And so, the two headed straight for their camp with the knights.

.....

Hiro sat at the long table in the tent, his fingers unconsciously tapping the table's edge.

His gaze fell on the intelligence in front of him, where it clearly stated: "Duke Edmund gathers Northern Territory lords, preparing to march to annihilate the Snow Swearers."

Hiro repeatedly scrutinized these words, a near-hysterical glimmer appearing in his eyes.

"Finally..."

His voice was hoarse, as if squeezed out from the depths of his throat.

He then slowly extended his hand, watching his slightly trembling fingertips.

These hands had personally buried his mother.

Countless painful memories flooded his mind, yet he laughed.

Laughed deeply, laughed louder and louder, until nearly hysterical.

"It's time, it's time for blood debts to be paid!"

However, the sudden cold wind lifted the corner of the tent, the chill biting through.

Hiro's laughter abruptly stopped, his body slightly stiffening.

A soft male voice sounded near his ear, soothingly: "Don't rush, Hiro."

He turned sharply.

Inside the tent, the flickering candlelight revealed a slender and beautiful hand gently resting on his shoulder.

The fingertips were icy cold, seemingly without any warmth.

A strange male voice slowly sounded again: "The ritual to awaken the Ancient God of Cold Abyss is still not enough."

Chapter 57: Ambush

White Feather Canyon.

The wind howled past from the heights, stirring up fine dust.

On a concealed high ground, Yorn lay behind a rock, whispering to Louis beside him, "Boss... are you sure the Snow Swearers will pass through here?"

Today, they set off before dawn, bringing knights and soldiers, bypassing the main road, and entering this strategically complex canyon.

Then they busied themselves all day.

For instance, setting up barbed tripwire traps in the narrow passages, burying steel cables and iron hooks amidst the grass and rubble.

And on the high ground on both sides, they dug rockfall paths, securing boulders at the cliff tops, ready to roll down into the valley with a push.

Louis personally inspected every location, even arranging three escape routes.

They didn't want a fight to the death, but an ambush, ideally without casualties.

Even if something unexpected happened, they had to retreat safely.

But until the sunset dyed the cliffs red, the mouth of the canyon remained empty.

Not even a bird flew in to crap.

Yorn couldn't sit still anymore, muttering under his breath, "Boss, didn't you get some fake information? If we've been tricked, we..."

"Shut up." Louis didn't turn around, just said two words flatly.

"Oh." Yorn wisely kept quiet.

Louis stared at the pass below, and added, "They're almost here."

Louis's confidence wasn't unfounded.

The source was the daily intelligence updated three days ago.

"An estimated thirty Snow Oath Warriors are expected to pass through the northern pass of White Feather Canyon in the late afternoon three days from now."

Yorn squatted behind a rock, looking at the empty canyon, clicking his tongue in boredom.

"Will they really come," he muttered, "or is Boss being played for a fool..."

He sneaked a glance at Louis standing on the high ground not far away; Louis was composed, not a bit nervous.

Yorn was about to complain again when suddenly a faint horse's hoof beat sounded from the woods at the bottom of the canyon.

"...?"

He jerked his head up, frowning and listening carefully.

Another echo of hoofbeats came clearly, and it wasn't just one horse, but a whole team!

Yorn instantly perked up, almost jumping up, "Wha-What the hell... there really are!?"

He quickly ducked back behind the rock, his face full of disbelief, "Boss, you foresaw this like a god?!"

Louis didn't respond, staring intently at the canyon entrance.

At the northern entrance of the canyon, a team silently crossed through.

They wore dark-colored leather armor and iron shoulder guards, with most of their upper body muscles exposed, wielding various weapons: heavy axes, spears, even battered Empire-made lances.

But each of their eyes were like ferocious beasts.

Silent, alert, full of murderous intent.

This was an elite warrior unit under the command of the Snow Swearers, though their equipment was rough.

They weren't ordinary wandering bandits like typical Snow Swearers, but well-trained fierce hounds.

Their individual strength was at least that of a mid-tier Official Knight in the Ironblood Empire's power structure.

The leading warrior reined in, scanning the terrain of the canyon ahead, and said in a low voice, "This place... is too quiet."

Another one grinned, "Afraid of what? The trash nobility's unit has just gathered, and today we're just here to show them who's boss."

This operation was ordered to cut in from the north entrance and launch a surprise attack on a nobility reinforcement unit that was assembling.

Such swift and fierce actions were a common tactic used by the Snow Swearers.

In their eyes, this was just a routine decapitation mission.

They were long accustomed to launching surprise attacks at dawn or dusk, trampling the lands of those invaders under their steeds.

Just then, the leading Snow Oath Warrior suddenly reined in, the horse hooves had barely touched the ground when they tensed abruptly.

With a snap, the barbed tripwire hidden under the dirt sprung up suddenly.

The iron hook wrapped around the horse's leg like a snake, pulling it forward with a tug, sending man and horse stumbling ahead.

"Whoa!" Several nearby warhorses screamed in alarm, some even throwing their riders off, rolling through the dust.

Metal hooks embedded into iron armor, emitting a screeching friction sound, blood seeping from the horse's leg.

A brief chaos exploded in the canyon, hooves clattered chaotically, dust roiled.

The Snow Swearers immediately reacted.

They leaped nimbly from their horses, rolled swiftly, drew swords, turned, and formed ranks with smooth movements.

No screams, no panic.

Their eyes were cold as beasts, instinctively sensing something wrong.

"Trap," the leading warrior said softly.

From the tripwire's activation to restoring order took only a few seconds.

The atmosphere was suddenly tense, the previously steady marching rhythm severed by an invisible blade.

They realized they had fallen into a trap, though they didn't know who set it.

In the middle of the formation, several warriors drew longbows, quickly aiming at the cliffs on both sides, while the others guarded the middle, with longswords, war axes, and long spears interlocked in circular defense.

The sound of sword blades striking against iron armor echoed through the formation.

No orders were given, yet everyone silently switched modes, as if they were mere travelers moments ago, now transformed into hunters.

The leader of these Snow Oath Warriors slowly drew a greatsword, whispering, "Prepare to engage."

And just then, a brief command echoed from above the canyon: "Take action!"

Before the command ended, above the cliffs, stone wheels spun, releasing crude chutes and letting loose boulders.

Crack—crack—

Heavy rumbling shook the mountain, several boulders roaring down from the cliff tops.

They sped through the preset chutes, faster and faster, crushing the air with terrifying pressure, crashing forcefully towards the Snow Oath Warriors at the canyon's bottom.

"Watch the top!" someone shouted angrily.

However, before the words finished, the first boulder struck the formation heavily!

Boom!

A warrior was too slow, hit by a boulder as large as a carriage wheel, his heavy armor instantly twisted and deformed, sending him flying and smashing into the canyon wall, blood splattering the stone surface.

"Damn it!" Another Snow Oath warrior rolled awkwardly into the defensive circle of his comrades.

More boulders descended like the scythes of death, accompanied by the roar of destruction, crashing into their ranks. Fragments scattered, warhorses neighed in terror, and the sound of splitting iron armor mixed with the tumult.

Billowing dust rose, instantly plunging the entire canyon into chaos.

"Formation! Maintain formation!" the captain shouted sternly, his voice piercing through the dust cloud.

These Snow Oath Warriors were not a rabble; even when ambushed, they maintained discipline.

Several experienced warriors quickly assessed the terrain, leading the unit away from the main attack direction of the falling rocks to prevent being completely crushed.

Though momentarily suppressed, their focus only sharpened.

In the chaotic dust, the captain squinted, his gaze coldly sweeping across the surroundings.

The ambushers would not rely solely on falling rocks to deal with them; the real battle was just beginning.

Chapter 58: Blood Boiling Frenzy

Clip-clop, clip-clop—!

The urgent sound of hooves shook the earth like a war drum.

Haskell, the captain of the Snow Swearers, suddenly looked up, his gaze as sharp as a wolf's, staring intently at the swirling dust in the distance.

That wasn't the sound of fleeing horses, but the uniform clatter of iron riders!

They have arrived.

The next moment, the neighs of warhorses pierced the smoke, and crimson figures rushed out from the dust.

The armor of the Red Tide Knights reflected a cold brilliance in the sunset, like a sharp sword slashing out from the abyss!

"Warriors, form the line!" Haskell suddenly raised his war axe and growled lowly.

The Snow Oath Warriors quickly mobilized, raising their shields, thrusting their spears, gripping their war axes at an angle, their eyes filled with vigilance, sweat sliding down their foreheads.

But the Red Tide Knights gave them no time to breathe!

Swoosh!

The air was torn apart, sharp javelins and arrows rained down like a sudden storm!

Ranged throwing weapons!

They plan to wear us down like this!

Haskell's pupils narrowed slightly, and his heart sank heavily.

He immediately realized this was a carefully planned ambush tactic.

These knights intended to first use ranged attacks to tear their defense line, waiting for formation to loosen, and then seize the opportunity to strike.

"Shield wall! Quickly!"

The Snow Swearers instantly raised their heavy shields, followed by a series of dull thuds.

"Argh!"

However, a young Snow Oath Warrior was a bit slow.

He stumbled back with a scream, a javelin piercing through his chest, blood splattering.

He opened his mouth in unwillingness, but only foamed blood gushed out, then he fell heavily and immediately twitched, losing his breath.

"Damn it! Damn knights!" A warrior next to him roared, eyes flashing with violent killing intent.

"Don't rush! Hold the formation first!" Haskell gritted his teeth and roared.

The Red Tide Knights' first harassment squad retreated swiftly after throwing their javelins without any intention of lingering.

Raising a cloud of dust, blurring the vision of the Snow Swearers.

"These bastards..."

Not giving them time to adjust, another team of knights was already assaulting from the flank!
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Neeeeigh—!

Warhorses shrieked wildly, iron hooves churned!

The second squad of Red Tide Knights charged into the battlefield, lances blazing with fierce crimson fighting energy, heading straight for the Snow Oath Warriors' flank!

"Their main attack is here!" a Snow Oath Warrior exclaimed, instinctively moving toward the flank.

"Don't move! Don't fall for it!" Haskell barked harshly, but it was too late.

The second tactic of the Red Tide Knights succeeded!

The flank attack was not the main assault but to disorganize the formation!

During the charge, the lances and sabers of the Red Tide Knights flashed with crimson fighting energy, weaving through the enemy ranks!

Splat!

Blood splattered as a Snow Oath Warrior's throat was pierced by a lance, blood spraying everywhere!

Within a few short seconds, the defense line was torn apart!

Haskell's brows furrowed into a frown, his teeth almost grinding to powder.

He finally realized this was a meticulously prepared hunt, and they were merely the toyed prey!

"Damn it..." He clenched the war axe, his eyes growing darker, deep blue fighting energy surging around him.

But at this moment, the third squad of Red Tide Knights quietly emerged.

"Kill!"

A low, cold voice rang out, accompanied by thunderous hoofbeats pounding the ground.

Haskell whirled around.

"Charge!"

Lambert led the squad composed of Elite Knights and High-tier Official Knights, charging out of the dust!

Their speed was faster than the knights before, their lances pointed straight ahead, like a gale sweeping into the battlefield!

Bang!

A Snow Oath Warrior didn't even have time to defend before being impaled through the chest by a lance shrouded in crimson fighting energy.

The whole person was nailed to the ground, blood slowly sliding down the lance blade, the fighting energy burning and corroding the wound, making even the corpse tremble slightly!

"Bastards!" Haskell roared, deep blue fighting energy surging, his war axe sweeping ferociously!

Clang—!

The lance blade precisely blocked the war axe, crimson and deep blue fighting energy clashing fiercely.

A violent energy shock wave spread out, raising a turbulent airwave!

The surrounding warriors were forced back, even the ground cracked!

"Interesting." Lambert's lips curled slightly, but his eyes remained cold.

He swung the lance with a backhand, the lance blade slicing through the air, tracing a chilling arc!

Splat!

A Snow Oath Warrior attempting to stealthily attack had his throat slashed by the lance blade, clutching his neck, gasping painfully before collapsing into a dusty pool of blood.

"Damn it..." Haskell growled lowly.

As the knights continued their assault, blood splattered on the ground, staining the shattered armor red.

By this time, the majority of the Snow Oath Warriors were either dead or wounded.

Haskell knelt halfway on the ground, breathing like a bellows.

His war axe was full of nicks, his armor shattered, soaked with mingled bloodstains of allies and enemies.

His gaze swept around, only a dozen or so Snow Swearers remained standing, but each one's eyes had turned cloudy.

Their legs trembled not out of fear, but because their strength was reaching the limit.

They had been driven to the brink by the Red Tide Knights.

"Already... at the limit?"

Haskell gritted his teeth, his expression so dark it seemed to drip blood.

He clenched his fists tightly, nails digging deep into his palms until the intense pain cleared his mind.

No, they had not lost yet!

He slowly stood up, scanning his remaining comrades.

"Snow Swearers..." His voice was hoarse and low, "Fight to the last man! Make them pay in blood!"

"Fight to the last man!! Make them pay in blood!!" the remaining Snow Swearers shouted in response.

Despite being battered and bruised.

At this moment, the fierce fighting spirit reignited in their eyes.

"Charge—!"

Haskell took a deep breath, raising the war axe in his hand.

In an instant, a blood-red totem lit up on his chest!

That was not ordinary fighting energy, but a life-burning curse—Blood Boiling!

Boom!!

Scalding blood boiled in their veins, crazily burning their bodies, their muscles swelling instantly, veins twisted and protruded beneath the skin, and their pupils transformed into scarlet flames!

A dozen or so Snow Oath Warriors simultaneously entered the Blood Boiling Frenzy, their aura soaring instantly.

A mad killing intent surged into the sky, pressing the air as if it were trembling!

"Hahaha!"

Haskell laughed madly, fresh blood seeping continuously from his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth.

Yet he still gripped the war axe tightly, fighting energy surging, rushing toward Lambert!

"Come! Witness our Snow Swearers' hatred!! Let us all descend to hell together!!"

"Fall back!" Lambert decisively shouted seeing this.

The Red Tide Knights immediately dispersed, but it was too late!

Chapter 59: The Ambush Ends

The clash of Fighting Energy stirred up the dust on the ground.

On the battlefield, Lambert engaged Haskell once more.

This time, Haskell was in the Blood Boiling State, his entire being resembling a beast, feeling almost no pain despite the continuous bleeding.

He roared, swinging his axe down, forcing Lambert to retreat several steps. The axe's edge cracked Lambert's chest armor, blood flowing through the fissure.

Lambert chose not to clash head-on but used agile maneuvers to delay time, preventing Haskell from getting close again.

"Haaahhh!!"

The surrounding Snow Swearers were also inspired by this strike, entering the Blood Boiling Frenzy and charging madly at the Red Tide Knights.

The Red Tide Knights reacted quickly, swiftly consolidating their formation amidst the chaotic battle.

But even with Louis's foresight and pre-battle preparation, one young knight became careless.

Hit square in the chest by an axe, he was sent flying, crashing heavily against a stone wall, his spine fractured, dying instantly.

Lambert's expression grew heavier upon witnessing this.

Although victory was assured, several knights would still be dragged down in this manner.

Moreover, warriors in the Blood Boiling State wouldn't last long, so there was no need to confront them directly.

"Adjust formation, disperse!"

He shouted lowly, prompting the Red Tide Knights to swiftly change their tactics.

They distanced themselves, ceasing direct confrontation and resorted to mounted maneuverability and long-range harassment.

The Snow Swearers in the Blood Boiling State indeed didn't last long, their movements gradually sluggish.

Their bodies began to suffer backlash: skin rupturing, mouth spitting blood, cries turning to wails.

"Ughhhhhh!"

Some Snow Swearers fell to the ground, rolling in pain.

Others chose to continue fighting through the agony, but their Fighting Energy was chaotic, hastening their own demise.

Lambert did not let the troops approach but continued to restrain with a war of attrition.

As long as they dragged it out, this battle would eventually belong to them.

Haskell still persisted, staggering to stand, his muscles rupturing, blood flowing down the axe handle to his fingertips.

His gaze had lost focus, yet he continued forward.

"Charge with me!!!"

He roared, with his last ounce of Fighting Energy, rushing at Lambert.

Lambert did not retreat this time, steadied his horse, and raised his lance to meet the enemy.

"Come on."

The war axe and knight's lance clashed mid-air; Haskell's axe finally shattered, pieces of iron flying off.

His chest was also pierced through by Lambert's lance, blood gushing forth.

However, he did not fall.

"I'll drag you to hell with me!"

He shouted, pouncing forward, clutching Lambert like a beast.

Fighting Energy around him began to rampage, hot air permeating, ready to self-detonate and take Lambert down with him.

Thankfully, the nearby Red Tide Knight rushed forth, slashing horizontally with a sword, severing Haskell's right arm, sending him flying.

Haskell fell heavily to the ground, Fighting Energy scattered, lying sideways, gazing at the sky.

The sunset was red as blood.

"Father... I... ultimately couldn't..."

Before finishing his words, he unwillingly closed his eyes.

The battlefield returned to silence.

.....

The dust had not yet settled, Yorn lay flat at the edge of the cliff, his mouth forming an "O" shape.

He had forgotten how many times he had been shocked.

The battle, starting from an ambush, falling rocks, arrows raining, to the three-front knight encirclement.

The whole process was as thrilling as performing a drama.

Each step was precise; each warrior coordinated seamlessly.

But on the opposite side were Snow Swearers and those terrifying Blood Boiling Frenzy fighters.

He initially thought the Red Tide Territory knights would pay a severe price, yet within half an hour, the situation was settled.

"I've... been shocked several times." Yorn muttered softly.

He turned to the man beside him, his mouth twitching: "Boss, how exactly did you do it? Prophecy? Or do you have... connections with the Snow Swearers?"

Louis glanced at him lightly: "Shut up."

He looked at the knights tidying the battlefield below and said, "A knight has died; this ambush can't be considered successful."

Yorn was taken aback by the words.

"Are you... serious?" His mind couldn't comprehend for a moment.

His first reaction: this person was showing off.

But he dared not say.

Yorn recalled the entire battle, from the ambush setup, to the control of combat rhythm, and the restraint over the Blood Boiling Frenzy.

If he or Zachary, that arrogant and impulsive fellow, had knights encounter these madmen...

He even suspected if there would be time to react before being crushed into pulp by the madmen.

Total annihilation.

This word circled his mind.

Is this the enemy we'll face in the future?

Duke Edmund clearly intended to push the Pioneer Lords from the South into a pit of corpses!

Yorn swallowed, his Adam's apple moving up and down.

Previously, he only assumed Louis was slightly stronger than them, smarter, better at managing personnel and formation.

But now he understood, this isn't a slight difference, it's a world of difference.

That's the level of overwhelmingly suppressing, hanging out to dry, and digging pits three days ahead for them to jump.

Not even the same scale.

A thought suddenly emerged in Yorn's mind, unprecedentedly firm:

To cling to a powerful ally, he must cling unwaveringly.

He stood up briskly, dusting off, straightened his back, stood seriously beside Louis: "Boss, do you need money?"

"Shut up."

"Okay!"

Yorn immediately shut up, with a smile, chest out, standing next to Louis.

A look of "I am your most loyal underling."

Meanwhile, Louis stood on the cliff edge, gazing below at the blood-stained battlefield, pausing in silence.

Even with victory, a trace of fear lingered in his heart.

If not for the Daily Intelligence System's warning, if not for preemptive traps and lines in this canyon, catching them off guard.

Red Tide Territory would absolutely not have won.

"The Snow Swearers' Blood Boiling Frenzy, it's too dangerous." He muttered lowly. "If every future battle involves facing these madmen, it'll truly be troublesome."

We must quickly find a way to counter these warriors."

At that moment, footsteps sounded from below.

It was Lambert, with bloodstains, his armor chipped at one corner, a diagonal wound on his shoulder, yet his expression remained calm.

He walked to Louis's side, kneeling on one knee: "Sir, the battle is over, enemy forces completely annihilated."

Louis nodded, speaking with approval: "Well done, Lambert."

Lambert looked up, calmly saying: "Deservedly so."

He paused for a moment, then continued asking: "How should we handle the enemy corpses?"

Louis glanced at the blood-stained valley floor, his voice cold: "Cut off their heads, leave none behind. Wash them clean and bag them.

I'll send them to Count Fos as a gift."

Chapter 60: Nothing but Eating and Drinking

The banquet hall was brightly lit, resplendent with gold and jade.

The tall dome above was illuminated by hundreds of magic crystals, lighting up the entire hall.

The walls were adorned with tapestries woven with golden threads, each embroidered with the emblem of the Forrester Clan.

The long table was covered with a silk tablecloth, with silverware and crystal glasses neatly arranged.

Servants stood by the walls, carrying plates in and out.

The air was filled with the aroma of meat and the scent of wine.

The dishes were outrageously extravagant.

Roasted Snow Mountain Demon Deer sizzled under its golden skin, and a whole rack of Snow Rock Bear ribs was served, the thick meat piled on a silver plate like a small mountain...

There was also the wine beloved by Southern Nobles, almost unseen in the North, yet here it was continuously poured into crystal glasses.

Such extravagance, not to mention in the Northern Territory, is not commonly seen even in Southern nobles' castle banquets.

The Forrester Clan's foundation as an old nobility of the Northern Territory is evident from this.

Yet this opulence, in the harsh and resource-strained Northern Territory, appeared particularly glaring.

The banquet hadn't even begun, yet many local Northern nobles were already frowning.

Count Fos sat at the main seat, his entire being like a round ball of flesh.

A robe woven with gold threads enveloped his corpulent body, the collar slightly open, with his oily sheen extending from his forehead to his chest.

His hands casually rested on the armrests of his chair, all ten fingers adorned with magic crystal rings, the knuckles reddened from pressure.

He was giggling, like a drunken pig, his laughter echoing through the hall.

"Count Fos, you are naturally wise and brilliant; the Northern Territory will surely flourish because of you!"

"Without your guidance, we minor nobles would be utterly lost!"

Said the Pioneer Nobles from the South.

Each of them dressed in extravagant attire, their hair impeccably groomed, their words filled with courtly manners.

But they had no military achievements and no foundation in the Northern Territory.

Besides flattering and bootlicking, they were utterly worthless.

They surrounded Count Fos, lavishing praise on him.

Someone said he had "the demeanor of a crown prince," another patted his chest and praised him as "more graceful than the late king."

Some even claimed he would "make the Northern Territory great again."

Count Fos laughed so hard he couldn't close his mouth, even his hand holding the wine glass trembled.

He laughed while returning the compliments, but ended up choking on his drink, spraying half of it out.

Most pleasing to him was Zachary Diaz's commendation.

"Count Fos, your organized and orderly conduct of this Snow Eagle assembly is exemplary for the Northern Territory. Even my father would likely feel ashamed if he were here."

This sentence made Count Fos feel elevated.

Zachary was a member of the Diaz Clan,

one of the Eight Great Clans of the Empire, alongside Edmond!

With someone of such noble birth praising him, how could he not feel elated?

"Hahaha! No, no, I'm merely fulfilling my duty!"

He waved his hand, yet was so delighted that his mouth was crooked with joy.

In one corner of the banquet hall, the lights were dim, and the atmosphere was much colder.

A few nobles wearing uniforms of the Northern Army sat quietly, watching the group at the main table flaunting and bootlicking, their faces as dark as the sky on the eve of a snowstorm.

They were all former subordinates of the Forrester Clan and among its earliest vassals.

They had once followed the old master to campaign across the Icefield, fight magical beasts, and hunt down the Barbarian Race.

Now they could only sit here, watching their clan's position occupied by a rotund fool, surrounded by a group of bootlicking southern sycophants.

"... If the old master were still here, he'd have kicked over this sordid scene long ago," the oldest general murmured, eyes cold.

The unshaven man beside him sneered, "Besides eating, drinking, defecating, and babbling in some useless southern accent, have you ever seen them wield a sword?"

"Never," another replied bluntly, "Their armor is as shiny as an actor's costume, and there's not a single scar on their bodies. If they went to war, they'd probably have to clean off a single drop of blood first."

Their whispers mingled the smell of alcohol and cold air, clashing starkly with the lively banquet hall.

"The Forrester name was won with the old master's life."

"Not to be used for hosting some Southern cabaret."

The more they spoke, the more silent they became, eyes filled with suppressed anger and disappointment.

They had tried to advise the new Count, teaching him to train soldiers, handle military and political affairs, even willing to take the initiative themselves.

But that fatso simply wouldn't listen.

If not hosting a banquet, he was taking perfumed baths.

At most, a house servant was sent back to brush them off with a few perfunctory "The Count is busy."

Quietly, they all knew that if this continued, the Forrester Clan would be in a bad shape, especially since the Northern Territory had been particularly turbulent lately.

The corner's stifling atmosphere seemed strikingly conspicuous in the banquet hall.

Yet Count Fos paid no heed.

He was being flocked by the Southern Nobles, laughing so hard his eyes were nearly invisible, the flesh on his face trembling.

Even if someone reminded him that those Northern veteran nobles were in a foul mood, he would just wave dismissively.

"Them?" He curled his lip, "A bunch of old fogies, still stuck in the fighting and killing from decades ago."

In his view, these people were not only useless but a hindrance to his affairs.

Dressing shabbily, their words unpleasant, they kept a stern face all day, as if someone owed their family thousands of Gold Coins.

He complained publicly more than once: "My grandfather accompanying the former emperor to overthrow the Snow Country had already finished all my life's work!

The Northern lords are just lords, eating and drinking all day, nothing else!

What's the point of aimlessly doing anything? Who is it for? Risking life and death? Stop fooling around!"

Midway through the banquet, the music intensified.

Magic Crystal Lamps shimmered brilliantly, nobles exchanged toasts, laughter never ceasing.

Just as everyone was in high spirits, Zachary approached the main seat, holding a wine glass.

His demeanor was casual, his tone light: "By the way, I wonder if Count has heard of... 'Louis Calvin'?"

Count Fos's eyebrows twitched, his mouth still stained with meat residue, he mumbled an unclear response: "Who?"

"Oh?" Zachary feigned surprise, "It seems he hasn't personally visited you or sent an invitation.

Almost every noble in Snow Peak County is here, yet there's not even a glimpse of him. Could it be he thinks this assembly unworthy of his presence?"

Count Fos's smile slightly faltered.

Zachary squinted: "It is said that despite his youth, he was sent to the Northern Territory to 'temper himself,' but in reality, he neither handles military affairs nor trains soldiers, with his troops merely there for family façade."

He lowered his voice, as if telling a secret, yet deliberately ensured the surrounding nobles could hear:

"Said to be a banished outcast by his family, yet after arriving at the Northern Territory, he remains in the castle drinking tea and writing poetry, even complaining that horse riding is a pain in the butt."

The surrounding Southern nobles all showed amused expressions, someone quietly agreeing, "Noble scions tend to be aloof."

Someone chuckled, "Could Louis be planning to appear only after the banquet to save himself the courtesy?"

"Hmph, who on earth would dare disregard me, the prefect of Snow Peak County?" Count Fos snorted, setting his wine glass heavily on the table.