

Winter 541

Chapter 541: Heavy Blow Against the Evil God (2)

And in the whole world, only this cannon can withstand its roar.

"Activate the stabilization array!" the guardian knight shouted.

The barrel revealed an intersecting pattern of runic lights.

The knights seamlessly inserted the magic explosive bullet into the barrel, making a crisp metallic click.

The runes on the barrel lit up, causing the distant ground to slightly tremble.

"Activate the cooling rune slot, lock the wind direction, adjust the angle by eighteen degrees, engage the triple stabilization ring!"

"Loading complete!"

"Prepare to fire!"

Rumble... Rumble...

The magic cannon gave a deep roar like a wild beast, the entire barrel resonating as a sign of impending mountain tearing.

"Ahahaha!! Fire it quickly!!"

Hillco almost jumped up, eyes wide, staring at the monster he crafted.

Louis simply stood quietly, his gaze constantly fixed on the white expanse ahead where the altar lay.

He slightly moved his fingers, signaling the knight commander to give the order: "Fire."

At this moment, the snowfield was still.

The next second, thunder shook the ground, flames soared skyward.

A ball of blazing magic energy tore through the sky like daylight, streaking across the canyon sky like a meteor, heading straight for the darkness dormant beneath the seal.

This strike was destined to be recorded in the history of this world.

"Boom ————!!!!!!"

The heavens and earth suddenly split.

Blazing white light exploded from the altar center without warning, as if the sun had fallen to earth, devouring all colors on the horizon.

Three seconds later, a shock wave expanded violently, carrying an endless sea of fire, scorching lava flows, and blasting gas clouds, roaring like a furious beast, making eardrums throb and hearts spasm.

The entire ancient canyon area was flattened within a hundred meters radius, centered around the altar.

Permafrost as hard as steel was shattered into countless fragments, high temperatures vaporized the snow instantly, forming a mushroom cloud of white mist that rose into the sky, rolling violently in the wind, blocking out the sun.

The area where the altar once stood had now collapsed into a huge crater spewing crimson lava.

The rock layers were burned through, and underground magma surged out, flowing slowly along the fractured ground like Hell's mouth newly opened.

Countless fragments of stone, ice, and ancient bricks were blasted hundreds of meters away, resembling a meteor shower.

On the observation high ground hundreds of meters away, more than a dozen Red Tide knights were almost all thrown to the ground by the explosive wind.

The cannon operators were blown several meters away, falling heavily into the snow, their protective armor deformed by the impact, blood seeping from their mouths.

"Hahahahahahaha!!!"

Hillco raised both hands, his clothes fluttering, spinning like a madman in the snow: "It's a success!!! Did you see that, Lord!"

"This is no longer just a bomb... It's the war cry of a god!"

He was almost in tears, his voice shaking, as if about to ascend to heaven.

On the other side, Felan, the Cold Iron Knight Order's leader, stood at the half-ruined cliff, staring hard at the place where the ancient altar once stood, silent for a long time.

After the explosion, the surface subsided nearly ten meters, with all remaining snow, stones, and broken rocks melted by the intense heat.

Now only a scorched black wasteland remained, steaming, as if the blank land erased by a deity.

"This cannon... can no longer be stopped by human strength." He murmured, his voice almost drowned by the wind and snow.

Felan had witnessed the stunning performance of the Red Tide's magic explosive bullets in the battlefield during the Nest battle, knowing Red Tide had strong magic explosive bullets, and assumed he was ready mentally.

But when he saw the magma fissure slowly collapsing into the scorched earth, like a demonic giant mouth still gasping, steam rising, blocking sunlight.

"But... who would have thought it has grown this powerful."

In that instant, a strange feeling suddenly arose in Felan's heart.

It was a... subtle sense of loss.

He remembered his youth, leading the Knight Order to gallop across the frost plains multiple times, crushing enemy forces with fighting energy, admired by all as the Northern Steel Blade.

But now?

This magic explosive bullet, without expending a single soldier, could erase an enemy outpost, a hilltop, or even... a city.

What does this mean? It means the backbone of war is no longer these knights.

"Perhaps... the honors I once took pride in will truly be buried by history."

Felan instinctively gripped the sword at his waist, its blade silent, as if feeling its master's bewilderment.

His throat moved slightly, wanting to say something, but ultimately only sighed.

Yet, Louis, who caused all this, stood motionless, simply watching the still-burning crimson embers.

The high-frequency hum after the magic power's shock, like a devil's whisper, unending.

This cannon shot was a remarkable spectacle.

Like ancient legendary dragon flames, or out-of-control forbidden techniques, or the Golden Feather Flower's oracle three hundred years ago.

Louis, however, showed little emotion, but only he knew the excitement in his heart at this moment was almost about to break through his restrained facade.

Louis certainly understood what this meant.

Even if the enemy were the Dragon Blood Legion, as long as they were unprepared, a single strike could uproot them, turning them to scorched earth, leaving not even ashes.

This was the trump card he had dreamt of.

And also the last card for the Ironblood Empire's future in this turbulent chess game.

But despite the excitement, he clearly knew: "This kind of power... should not be used lightly."

It must not be known, understood, nor fall into others' hands.

It should only appear at the moment of "choosing destiny."

Chapter 542: Heavy Blow Against the Evil God (Part 3)

The snow continued to fall, and in the distance, the scorched earth still had lingering flames, emitting wisps of white mist.

Louis slowly withdrew his gaze and turned to look at the silent ranks of technicians and knights behind him: "Today's events must not be leaked."

However, before any response could come, a piercing and mind-shattering scream suddenly erupted from the depths of the flattened land, piercing through layers of smoke.

"Ahhhhhhh!!!"

The sound did not seem human, nor animal, nor like a demon.

It was as if an ancient shadow, breaking free from the abyss, was roaring, or as if an extinguished existence was, in its last moments, lamenting its anger and pain with a soulful wail.

At that moment, the entire snowfield seemed to freeze.

Everyone simultaneously felt their hearts tighten, their eardrums pierced as if by sharp needles, a strange shiver spreading from their feet to the back of their necks.

A young knight, who stood closer to the blast zone, instantly turned pale, his knees buckled, and he collapsed to the ground, his face twitching, mumbling incessantly, seemingly struggling against some sort of invasive will.

"Activate your fighting energy!" Felan shouted sharply, himself also operating his fighting energy to stabilize his state of mind.

Everyone sensed that, for that instant, it seemed something was watching them.

Not with eyes, but with the weight of its very existence, emanating from underground.

The next moment, a plume of gray-black smoke silently rose from the cracks in the scorched earth.

The smoke writhed like a living creature, climbing from the fissures in the earth, spiraling into the air.

As if searching for something, or perhaps struggling to escape.

No one dared to make a sound; they just watched the smoke churn and twist with wide eyes.

Finally, after emitting an ear-piercing screech like metal being cut, it suddenly exploded into invisible dust, dispersing with the wind.

And as the last wisp of smoke drifted away, the eerie scream also abruptly stopped.

As if something, at last, had truly died.

"Everyone, evacuate the core area! Bring along the unconscious knight, handle with care, no further contact!"

Louis's tone was indisputable as he quickly commanded the guards and knights present to retreat.

After an explosion powerful enough to tear mountains apart, the greatest danger was not the explosion itself, but what lingered after the blast had not fully died.

"Wait for the aura to completely settle before organizing a second exploration."

However, just as he finished speaking, a faint, almost imperceptible wisp of purple smoke emerged quietly from the depths of the charred ruins.

That thread of purple mist quietly wound out, twisting and spiraling in the air, seeming to have consciousness, avoiding everyone's gaze.

The next moment, "Whoosh!"

It shot toward Louis at an incomprehensible speed!

Louis's pupils shrank, but before he could take any defensive action, the purple mist silently drilled into his forehead!

It was like a cold bolt of lightning piercing his soul.

He shuddered, his steps faltered slightly, and his face turned as pale as paper in an instant.

No one noticed, as everyone was still immersed in the shock and aftershocks of the explosion, engrossed in discussion, without anyone detecting this strange intrusion.

"Again?!"

This feeling was too familiar...

Just like when that thread of red mist from Titus's corpse had forced its way into him, silently attacking once more!

"But it's so far away!"

Louis gritted his teeth, quickly closing his eyes to focus, operating the Primordial Meditation Technique and Tidal Breathing Technique as a dual barrier to seal off his sea of consciousness.

Chapter 543: Memory Fragments

Louis's chest suddenly tightened.

In the next moment, purple mist penetrated his sea of consciousness, instantly transforming into countless insect shadows.

The crisp sound of shells cracking, the sticky sound of antennae striking, groups of compound eyes coldly stared at him.

They chewed and tore, as if trying to swallow everything into their dark abdomen.

Every screech sounded like endless hunger roaring.

This was not simply murderous intent, but a desire to devour everything.

Even his will, memories, heartbeat, were being tugged to be stuffed into the bloody maw of the insect swarm.

"...Again!? Why do all sorts of messy things keep trying to get into my head!?"

Louis cursed inwardly, his head pounding.

Just as he was about to be torn apart by the noise, a platinum-gold pulse suddenly lit up in his mind.

The Primordial Heart shone.

Platinum starlight flowed like a galaxy, instantly spanning the entire void.

Alongside it was a strand of once crimson mist.

The petals of the rage flower unfolded in flames, the blood vine winding, not attacking him, but coiling around the Primordial Heart, like a guardian.

The insect swarm lunged, opening their tooth-filled mouthparts.

White light and crimson flame rose simultaneously, burning through them instantly.

Thousands of insects turned to ash with screams, skeletal figures disintegrated in the flames.

The entire sea of consciousness echoed with the sound of shattering, but no longer had the oppressive suffocating feeling of tearing.

Louis watched this battle, suddenly realizing he was not pushed to the limit like last time.

The collaboration of crimson mist and Primordial Heart left the purple mist almost no chance to breathe.

In mere moments, the insect swarm was completely consumed, turning into a wisp of embers, absorbed entirely by the platinum light stream.

The sea of consciousness returned to calm.

"Compared to last time's anger, this purple mist is much weaker." Louis thought silently.

Perhaps it was just a remnant of will, too weak to truly tear apart his mind.

Just as Louis caught his breath, the world before him suddenly collapsed again.

Before he could react, his consciousness was torn like a torrent, suddenly swept into a foreign river path.

Some memories completely alien to him, carrying the scent of blood and fire, forcibly crashed into his mind.

Firelight suddenly ignited.

Under the shadow of dragons, cities became seas of fire.

Chains dragged countless humans, cries and roars drowned out by the earth-shaking dragon roar.

The Primordial Mage stood among the crowd, eyes bloodshot, gripping a blood-stained stone tightly.

Scene shifted, at a wind and snow altar, a man and woman stood side by side.

Countless Snowfield residents knelt at their feet, foreheads buried deep in snow and ice, as if they were truly ancient deities risen from the ground.

Then, the sound of iron hooves thundered.

The Ironblood Empire's banner was planted in the Snowfield, the knights' long spears pressed like a forest.

Villages burned, women and elders were driven away, children's cries swallowed by wind and snow, turning into silent despair.

Finally, between flames and ashes, the man knelt alone in the ruins, tears streaming.

Purple mist silently rose behind him, like a cold hand opening, slowly enveloping him.

He didn't struggle, just closed his eyes.

Images flashed repeatedly, as if someone forcibly tore open several strands of history before his eyes.

Louis gritted his teeth, no longer being swept away like the first time.

He desperately tried to capture the details of these fragments, wanting to find the truth related to those mists and the Primordial Heart.

Unfortunately, they still disintegrated in an instant.

He could only tightly hold onto these four images, like grabbing a few leaves in a rolling torrent.

Louis suddenly opened his eyes, finding himself lying in a canyon tent, cold sweat soaking his clothes.

The heaviness in his body remained, but faintly in his heart, there was an indescribable power brought by the purple mist.

He instinctively clenched his fist, feeling this power.

If someone attacked him at this moment, the residual power of the purple mist seemed able to convert damage into energy, becoming his new support.

The death and wreckage on the battlefield would silently nourish him, making him increasingly calm and strong amidst bloodshed and chaos.

If suffering fatal injuries, his body seemed capable of spontaneously promoting healing, accelerating coagulation and recovery.

And in a corpse-strewn environment, his presence would be incredibly vivid, as if he could "swallow the battlefield," becoming the core of momentum.

These thoughts were not deductions, but instinctively emerged in his heart as if they were innate.

Louis focused, his eyes showing a hint of coldness.

"...The more power like this, the more it signifies war."

At least for now, he didn't wish to validate these abilities.

Louis closed his eyes, reminiscing those four fragmented images again.

Kneeling barbarians before the altar... they didn't look like this era, more like a distant past's remnant.

He suddenly recalled the mural brought back by the knight, which also had the figures of two people, shrouded by strange mist behind them.

The Nest and Burning Pain Vine Court probably had connections to those two people.

And what did those Empire knight orders represent?

"Let's see what investigation can reveal from the ruins, and as for Old Snow Country's history... it needs to be looked into again." Louis silently noted.

The curtain suddenly lifted, Lambert strode in, his expression with a hint of urgency.

"Lord Louis, you're finally awake."

Louis looked up, his voice calm: "How long was I unconscious?"

"Less than three hours." Lambert breathed a sigh of relief, then asked, "Lord, how do you feel? The doctor examined you and said it was just simple fatigue."

Chapter 544: Memory Fragments 2

Hearing Lambert's response, Louis quietly let out a sigh of relief.

Last time, he slept for ten days straight. This time... perhaps that purple fog was much weaker than the crimson red, and with the platinum galaxy standing beside the red mist, he didn't fall into a deeper slumber.

Louis nodded, his tone understated: "Maybe I've been too tired lately... The underground rumbling disturbed me, and everything went black, just fell over."

Lambert nodded but wasn't truly at ease.

This was the second time. The last was during the ultimate battle against the Barbarian Race.

Louis looked up and saw the unease in Lambert's eyes.

He slightly smiled, his tone calm: "Rest assured, compared to last time, this doesn't even count as a faint. Just too tired."

Lambert remained silent for a moment, whispering: "I am still worried."

"I understand." Louis shook his head and shifted the topic, "How's the situation? How's the aftermath handling?"

Lambert immediately straightened his posture and reported: "Everyone has returned to the camp and is awaiting your instructions. Several knights were injured, but fortunately, none were killed."

"Very good." Louis nodded, though his brows didn't relax, "Send people to investigate the explosion site again tomorrow. No need to take risks tonight."

He paused and added, "Regarding the Magic Explosion Bullet... have Hillco and the others work on improving the barrel. The range needs to be further, and the power must be fully controllable."

Lambert whispered in response: "As you command."

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At dawn the next day, as the sky barely turned light, Louis set off with the team of knights.

The knights were fully armed, their helmets tightly closed, the sound of hoofs thudding heavily in the snow-covered canyon.

Louis rode in the middle, turned back, and asked, "Hillco, last night's explosion... what do you think?"

"Its power... far exceeded my expectations, which led to the distance being misjudged." Hillco adjusted his goggles, unable to suppress the tremor in his voice, yet a hint of excitement gleaming in his eyes.

At that moment, the air still lingering with the smell of scorch, residual smoke mingling with the cold wind, carried a sharp scent of burnt flesh.

The permafrost below their feet cracked into countless faults, rubble and debris scattered everywhere.

Ahead, the ground had collapsed into a massive pit, as if struck by a meteor, the ice at the fringes shattered and radiating outward.

The mountain walls presented an even more shocking sight.

The thick rock layers scorched by intense heat and shock wave bore large patches of charred marks as if licked by flames.

Sharp fissures extended to the edge of sight, snow trickling from the cracks, plummeting into the bottomless pit.

Louis reined his horse to a stop, silently gazing at the expanse of charred ruins.

This is the might of the third-generation Magic Explosion Bullet.

He marveled silently at its power, yet kept any emotion off his face.

The knight team first set up a perimeter around the explosion pit, eyes sharp, alert to any lurking monsters or residual black fog.

Several knights probed into the rubble heaps with spears, carefully ensuring no further collapse would occur.

The search continued for half an hour until the perimeter was deemed safe, before someone slowly descended into the pit.

Louis always remained at the hundreds of meters high point, overlooking the entire ruins with a calm gaze.

Lambert stayed close at his side, his expression tense, more concerned about Louis suddenly fainting again than any immediate danger.

They divided into three lines, descending gradually along the sloped collapse.

"Put your masks on." The leading knight lowered his voice.

At the word, everyone took out transparent masks wrapped in silver frames from their backpacks. The inner wall of the mask harbored a pale blue liquid, which diffused into thin mist inside the visor as soon as it was secured.

This is the Frost Leaf Vine Air Purifier recently refined by the Red Tide Territory's artisan workshop, reportedly initially designed by Lord Louis himself.

It can isolate spores and hallucinogenic gases briefly, ensuring clarity even facing the Nest's residual black fog.

"Breathe deeply, don't panic." Someone softly reminded. The breaths echoed groggily through the mask.

The ice soil beneath was brittle, every step accompanied by the sound of cracking, threatening to crumble at any moment.

The leading knight signaled caution while probing the soil layer with a seismic spear.

Each jab transmitted subtle vibrations through the spear shaft to confirm if the ground below was hollow.

Once convinced it was stable after numerous probes, they proceeded to descend.

The intertwined glow of torches and Fighting Energy illuminated the bottom of the pit, revealing an utterly charred wasteland.

They searched through the scorched earth and soon found scattered insect shells.

The shapes were bizarre, some resembling armor, others barely the size of a palm, mostly charred and brittle, shattering at the slightest touch.

A few fragments retained a purple gleam, emitting a faint hum upon approaching, making one uncomfortable.

"Don't touch too long." A knight frowned, nudging the fragment aside, "This thing's dead but not clean."

The team promptly retrieved a sealing jar provided by Mage Forest.

The jar, hefty and lined with special runes inside, could slow the decay or energy dispersion of unknown objects.

They cautiously collected several fragments, sealed the jar, and the rune's glow flickered, providing temporary safety.

Continuing forward, twisted humanoid corpses came into view.

Their flesh torn by shock waves, limbs adhered to the rocks, arms retaining vine-like structures, deformed skulls full of sharp teeth.

Ahead of them lay a pile of collapsed boulders.

Several pieces of stone retained complex symbols and grooves, but most had ruptured or been scorched, nearly impossible to recognize.

"Remnants of an old altar," the leading knight whispered, "It's hard to see its former appearance."

Amongst the sweet scent was rot, interspersed with a fleeting floral fragrance.

"Residue of black fog." Someone immediately tightened their masks, their tone grave.

Several knights' breathing grew heavier, yet they showed no signs of losing control or poisoning. The team quickly judged: "The odor has nearly dissipated, posing little threat."

They exchanged a glance, each feeling a tinge of relief.

Had it not been for the Red Tide Territory's air purifier protection, who knew if these odors would invade their minds.

By the end of the search, the knights returned almost empty-handed.

The power of yesterday's magic high-explosive bullet was so incredible that both the altar and the underground palace turned into ruins.

Even the stone surface that once bore ancient murals had been shattered, fragments lost amidst the scorched earth.

The team could only bring back a few fragments: charred insect shells, twisted limbs, and cracked stone pieces.

All of this was cautiously stowed into sealing jars and respectfully handed over to Lambert.

"Lord Louis." Lambert took one jar, saw the insect shell within through the flickering light, and his expression sharpened.

Its shape was unmistakable, nearly identical to the remnants left from the Nest before.

His brows furrowed deeply, the worst thought emerging: Could the remnants of the Nest still be lurking deep within the Northern Territory?

Yet besides him, Louis knew that the purple fog had been purified by his own Primordial Heart, and the Daily Intelligence System had indicated that the Desperate Witch was dead.

But Louis could not convey any of this.

He could only allow Lambert to remain worried.

Standing beside Lambert, Louis just calmly received the report.

Insect shell remnants, inactive.

Monster limbs, similar to human structure, confirmed to be contaminated.

Altar stone pieces, severely damaged, hard to identify.

Residual weak black fog odor in the air, but no direct harm.

The investigation's conclusion was unsurprising.

Louis secretly regretted that all clues were destroyed, and there was nothing more to pursue.

Louis took one last look from the height, suppressing all lingering doubts within.

No matter the true nature of the fog, for now, the most important matters for the Red Tide Territory lay in the South, at the port soon to lead into the sea.

"Leave a few to continue the investigation, the rest recall the team." He ordered, calm without a hint of fluctuation, "There's nothing here worth staying for, let's go."

The group responded and promptly began withdrawing.

The team turned through the canyon, the hoofbeat thunderous as they headed south.

The canyon gradually returned to silence, with only the charred pit standing quietly like a colossal scar, a reminder to all that the power of the third-generation Magic Explosion Bullet was sufficient to level anything.

Chapter 545: Difficulties and Plans

In the morning at Dawn Port, the fog had not yet cleared, but the sounds of craftsmen and workers echoed with their labor chants.

"Heave-ho—heave-ho—"

They were building what would become the largest and most important port in the Northern Territory.

Strange machines roared in the construction site.

White mist sprayed from valves, swirling through the air. Heavy iron hammers powered by steam were propelled upwards and then slammed down, causing the mud on the ground to bubble.

These steam pile drivers are the latest creation of the Red Tide Territory steam craftsmen group.

Under Louis's suggestion, they added rails and counterweights above the steam hammer frame.

Thus, compared to manual labor, it's more precise, faster, and almost without deviation.

A few young workers stood by the furnace adding fuel, while others held the piles, and another shouted out chants to ensure unified and orderly movements.

Meanwhile, Eliot, the overseer of Dawn Port, was carrying finished piles with a few workers toward the steam machines.

He was one of the earliest knights to follow Louis to the Northern Territory, loyal and reliable, making Louis appoint him as the overseer of Dawn Port.

Under Louis's guidance, after arriving at Dawn Port, he made himself an example in everything he did, so even if things were tough and exhausting, no worker dared to complain.

On the other side, Russell, the technical director of Dawn Port, squatted in the mud, discussing with the craftsmen who came to the Northern Territory with him on how to build a port on this muddy shoal.

But they were somewhat pessimistic, as the port location was a muddy tidal flat, constantly washed by tides, making it easy for piles to sink or tilt.

Traditional construction methods would require years and a massive amount of stone to stabilize.

Someone whispered, "This muddy place might swallow a house... even if the piles are driven deep, who knows if they can hold?"

Russell said nothing but furrowed his brows.

At this moment, a young knight trotted through the mud and water, quietly saying to the two heads of Dawn Port, "Lord Louis is on his way and will arrive within two days."

Upon hearing this news, Eliot immediately showed a relaxed smile.

Although he was highly regarded by Louis, this was his first time independently overseeing such a large territory, and Louis had told him that it was Red Tide Territory's most significant project for the coming years, placing enormous pressure on him.

Sometimes he couldn't sleep at night, worrying about whether he could shoulder such a responsibility and not betray Lord Louis's trust.

Now hearing that Louis was coming, a large weight was lifted from his heart.

In Eliot's heart, Louis was capable of anything; as long as he came, the matter would surely succeed.

But Serral, standing beside him, was somewhat dazed.

Having arrived in the Northern Territory only last autumn, he had met Louis a few times but had held effective conversations only twice.

Once was when he first arrived in Red Tide City, where the young Lord warmly welcomed them.

Another was before leaving for Dawn Port, where Louis had met them separately, offered encouraging words, and highlighted some key points.

Only then did Serral realize that Louis indeed understood some aspects of port construction, being a scion of the Calvin Clan.

He was an extraordinary noble, yet his appearance seemed too youthful, not appearing older than twenty.

But upon hearing Louis was coming, unease still surged within him.

After all, he'd built ports for many aristocrats, and some projects were ruined by the misguided directions of higher-ups.

If this young man simply came for a look, it would be fine, but if he truly believed he had some expertise to guide these professionals, it might likely result in mishaps.

Moreover, in Serral's view, this place wasn't suitable for building a port at all.

The worries in his heart lingered endlessly.

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After resolving the crisis left by the Desperate Witch, Louis rushed to Dawn Port.

He dismounted, his shoes sinking into the semi-wet sand, and his gaze swept across the construction site.

The outer fence was erected, several rows of work sheds emitted cooking smoke, with separate housing for workers and craftsmen, relatively orderly.

Such housing wouldn't be considered crude in the Northern Territory, but could only be deemed temporary accommodation in Red Tide Territory.

Looking further out, the port's prototype had just begun. Pile drivers rumbled, craftsmen drew lines in the mud, and workers sweat profusely as they carried piles forward.

"Lord Louis." Eliot and Russell almost simultaneously stepped forward, halting two steps before him.

They reported their respective progress:

The work sheds and camp were completed, and the craftsmen settled;

Line measurements were done, and port basin bounds were marked;

Steam pile drivers operated normally, with results surpassing expectations;

Some material consumption slightly exceeded estimates, requiring continued shipments from the South.

Although Louis had learned most of these situations through the Daily Intelligence System, he still listened quietly.

After listening, Louis nodded and said, "I know there are many difficulties, like your incoming tide level and some unknown enemies; these difficulties are sure to arise."

He paused, his tone firm, "Some difficulties are meant to exist, but the port must be built. Because it's the Red Tide's throat for establishing in the Empire, only after building this port can there be a chance for development."

Eliot straightened his back, while Russell swallowed subconsciously.

Louis turned and said, "Gather all the foremen and technical personnel, let's have a meeting."

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The meeting was held in a larger wooden house, with various maps and line measurement drawings laid on the table.

Chapter 546: Difficulties and Plans (Part 2)

Even with the door closed tightly, the sea wind still seeped in through the cracks, carrying a damp scent.

Louis stood at the main seat, and behind him was a wooden board. His gaze swept over each craftsman and technician present.

He said, "Speak directly, don't beat around the bush. If there's any difficulty, say it straight; hiding it will only harm yourselves and others.

If you don't say it now, and problems arise later, I will hold you accountable. Not for the sake of punishment, but so all responsibilities are assigned to the right people. Do you understand?"

The wooden house fell silent, and no one spoke first.

In the end, it was still Eliot, who was closest to Louis, who took the lead and said, "Lord Louis, there are strange fishmen nearby who often attack at night. Several laborers have been attacked and are miserable."

Louis replied, "Set up fire beacons at various locations to prioritize personnel safety with a three-layer defense system, and have the posts communicate with each other.

If the fishmen dare to come, they will be exposed in the light. Archers are to be on standby, and there will be an opportunity to deal with them all at once later."

Russell, seeing this, also mustered the courage to speak: "The mud layer under the cofferdam is uneven in depth; driving piles to a uniform depth could cause collapse risks."

Louis pulled out a small black notebook from inside his cloak, evidently prepared: "We won't drive piles to a uniform depth. We'll explore and then partition first.

Drive deeper in soft areas, even grouting to harden it; don't waste effort in hard areas. Each section has its method; only combined are they stable."

The craftsmen frequently nodded, their brows gradually relaxing, and even Russell was taken aback.

This young lord not only understood his professional jargon but could also turn it into the simplest analogy, making it understandable even for the rough-handed masons.

Although the specific feasibility was unknown, seeing that the lord was not giving arbitrary commands reassured everyone considerably.

Seeing this, others also began to raise their issues, and Louis answered each one by one.

"My lord, the ropes are depleting too quickly, and the warehouse only has enough for five days. If they run out, the pile driver and derrick will need to stop."

"First, disassemble old fishing nets to weave spare ropes. Drano, record the shortage and send someone immediately to Red Tide City to allocate the second batch of supplies."

"There's a lack of long timber. The shipyard's keel needs oak; most available timber is hilly pine, which won't hold."

"Use pine to start a temporary ship structure, and replace the main material with oak when it arrives. Don't stop work, just set up the framework first."

...

Everyone brought up issues one by one: materials, work hours, technical parameters, night defenses, medical logistics, disability compensation, worker accommodation humidity issues, slipway load-bearing coefficients, steam engine coal backups...

Those truly able to speak out did so, and even the timid ones were encouraged to voice their concerns.

Some issues could be solved; others couldn't be solved for now and could only be noted down first.

After all the issues were brought up, everyone noticeably felt much more relaxed.

Louis said, "That's right. Only by proposing problems can they be solved. If you always keep it hidden and don't speak, they'll never be solved and will constantly drag on."

In the future, if you encounter other problems, you can report them to me or Eliot immediately. I can't guarantee to solve every problem, but I'll do my best."

After hearing Louis's words, the craftsmen and technicians no longer looked so worried.

Especially those shipwrights and port craftsmen from the Southeast Province, who thought the Northern Territory's nobility always lacked maritime understanding.

Now, they realized this lord was different, easing much of the anxiety in their hearts, feeling that building a port here might not be an impossible task after all.

Louis closed the small notebook in his hand, and his gaze landed back on everyone.

"The issues are raised, and they should be specifically addressed. Without a plan, no matter how many skillful craftsmen and machinery, it's all in vain."

"Phase one, stabilizing the foundation and harbor basin, cofferdams, drainage, test piles, diversion dam prototype; eliminate potential threats like fishmen and pirates.

Phase two, piers and breakwater, raising the breakwater, pile bridges and docks, warehouse foundations.

Phase three, shipbuilding and navigation safety, shipways, keels, light beacons, harbor defense weapons."

The room was silent; only the sound of a pen scraping against wood could be heard.

After writing, Louis paused, his gaze slowly sweeping over Eliot, Russell, and the other leadership: "This is the general direction, step by step, one link following another.

Moreover, we need to establish daily specific plans and goals. Everything must have a schedule and a responsible person. Who does what should be clear, with no shirking.

Of course, what I've written is just an example; the real details still require you to formulate in conjunction with on-site conditions. And as long as we follow the order, no matter how difficult the project, it can be achieved."

After his words fell, the tent was silent for a moment.

With a clear direction, the eyes of the management no longer held the previous kind of dejection and confusion.

Eliot looked at the few lines on the wooden board, feeling a long-lost sense of peace rising within him.

He had charged with a sword on countless battlefields, but after becoming the overseer of Dawn, he realized that leading the construction of a city was more difficult than facing the enemy head-on.

What Lord Louis said seemed simple, but it was something he was far from achieving.

"It turns out... I still have a long way to go." Eliot felt an unparalleled respect for Louis rise in his heart.

Everyone looked at the clear handwriting on the wooden board, feeling as if a flame had been rekindled in their hearts.

.....

The plan had been set, and with the foremen's promotion, the atmosphere on the construction site had become somewhat positive. Most of these laborers had joined Red Tide relatively late last year.

There was little resentment in their hearts for being sent here to work by Louis. Most were grateful, as Lord Louis had given them a meal to eat and a place to stay.

So they carried and lifted, shovels and hoes rising and falling without rest, starting to dig out loose silt and rubble.

The center of the mudflat gradually hollowed out, slowly revealing the outline of a future harbor basin.

Eliot directed the workforce, constructing a wooden cofferdam at the perimeter to block the seawater.

The workers braved the sea wind, driving wooden planks into the mud and filling gaps with sandbags.

Just then, a section of the excavation area suddenly collapsed.

The silt poured out instantly, trapping more than a dozen laborers, their cries cutting through the site's noise.

However, there was no danger because, based on reminders from the Daily Intelligence System, Louis had already dispatched support in advance.

Eliot led a team into the mud, pulling up the ropes, dragging the dozen or so laborers out, thankfully without any casualties.

Louis stood by the dike line, pointing to the collapse area: "The site must be safe; lay wooden planks on the mud and weigh them down outside with sandbags. Dig another drainage channel to disperse accumulating water."

Following Louis's orders, planks were brought in one by one, forming makeshift paths, allowing workers to walk steadily on the mud.

The drainage channels were dug, and the accumulated water gradually receded, and the inner working areas were no longer swallowed by mud waves, making the site much safer and reducing accidents by ninety percent.

Thus, as days passed, the central clearing of the mudflat was gradually dug into a deep trench, the accumulated water was dispersed by drainage channels, and the cofferdam lines stood firmly on the mud.

What used to be a mire was now revealing the outline of a circular waterway, the edge lined with piles of timber, resembling a coarse skeleton.

The harbor basin's outline finally emerged.

The craftsmen stood in the mud, looking at the scene with a slightly dazed expression.

Someone raised a hand to wipe the mud from their face, unable to hold back a laugh: "It really got dug out..."

The nearby companion couldn't help but grin too: "The harbor... It really can be done."

Those who originally had doubts now moved faster and with more vigor.

Of course, the site was not without its troubles, and external crises gradually became apparent.

Sentinels stationed outside the dike often heard splashing sounds at night.

When the torches shone, they saw a string of bubbles rising on the water's surface before it fell silent again.

A wooden pile edge of the cofferdam was also found with half-tooth marks, wood shavings floating on the water.

But when knights raised torches to investigate, the traces had already been washed away by the tide.

The craftsmen working in the mud occasionally felt the mud below slightly vibrate, as if something was lurking beneath.

Eliot ordered enhanced vigilance, with watch posts lit every night. Those fishmen would show their fangs sooner or later.

Chapter 547: The Fishman Calamity

The tides surged through the night, shadows looming over the edges of the dyke.

A group of knights held their breath, cloaked in gray capes, lurking in the shadows.

But all around was quiet, with no signs of impending war.

"Are they really coming?" a young knight asked, unable to hold back.

Eliot furrowed his brow: "Stay quiet; Lord Louis said they would come, and they will."

Then he turned and asked his adjutant in a low voice, "Have the timber and barrels of oil been moved?"

"Everything has been moved, except for some old wooden racks. Let them burn those, it's fine."

Eliot nodded, reassured, and continued to stare at the black water.

Before long, a loud "boom" tore through the night.

A deep-sea giant fish, over ten meters long, driven by a swarm of fish-men, suddenly rammed into the dyke.

Wooden stakes trembled, mud splashed skyward, and the droplets landed like an arrow shower.

The camp on Dawn Port erupted into chaos, noise filling the air, with laborers disguised as soldiers fleeing everywhere.

The fish-men leader in the shadows curled his lips into a slight smile: Plan successful.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the dyke, dozens of fish-men quietly climbed up.

The scales of the fish-men emitted a strange glow; their hands wielding bone spears coated with venom, and the pouches on their shoulders bulged, exuding a faint petroleum scent.

Not all fish-men are mindless monsters. A few retain intelligence, even surpassing regular humans in cleverness.

Thus, they devised a scheme to lure the tiger away from the mountain, aiming to destroy the suddenly established human camp and reclaim their backyard.

Of course, they didn't anticipate the cunning humans possessing the ability to foresee the future.

"Now's the time!" Eliot shouted angrily, red fighting energy erupting from his body as he charged at the fish-men.

With Eliot's charge, knights continued to emerge from the shadows of the stakes, fighting energy leaping between their sword edges.

A young knight charged ahead, blue fighting energy sweeping out with his sword force, slicing a fierce fish-man in half with one strike.

On the other side, an Elite Knight swung his greatsword, spinning to knock down a group of fish-men along with their oil pouches onto the muddy ground.

Swiftly, companions moved forward for the final strike, each blow delivering a fatal cut.

Yet these fish-men were not entirely disorganized.

Despite the initial surprise, they quickly regrouped into a battle array, trying to delay, waiting for their comrades to ignite the fire.

They roared, wielding long spears on the narrow dyke, maneuvering with the humans.

But the knights pressed on relentlessly, forcing the fish-men into retreat, blood mixing with muddy water splattering onto the stakes.

Fish-men fell one after another, oil pouches shattered on the ground, but not a single inch of the camp caught fire.

Most fish-men were slain on the dyke, blood flowing through the unsealed wood seams into the sea.

The remaining ones hurriedly plunged into the waves, swallowed by the night tide.

At that moment, a massive silhouette appeared in the distant ocean waves.

A bizarre bone crown on its brow, he was the leader of these fish-men.

His eyes flickered with a ghostly blue light, emitting a hoarse and piercing scream, seemingly cursing his failed subordinates.

Then, he abruptly sank into the dark currents, disappearing without a trace.

Eliot slowly sheathed his sword, gazing at the distant, dark sea line.

The camp remained agitated, yet not a single area had been burned, the human camp safely intact.

News spread back to the camp, with soldiers' fear gradually transforming into excitement.

The guards, once tense, now realized that no matter how cunning the fish-men were, the Lord was always a step ahead.

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"The night raid has been halted, the main battle array intercepted. No casualties, warehouses and materials intact. Upon inventory, over eighty corpses at the scene, the few remaining fish escaped were swallowed by the tide."

Eliot reported the battle results to Louis in detail.

Louis listened and nodded approvingly with a smile: "Well done, clean and decisive."

"It's all thanks to your meticulous preparations. Without your arrangements, it would have been difficult to ensure the camp's safety today," Eliot spoke with unreserved admiration.

Louis chuckled, waving his hand dismissively: "Enough with the flattery."

He looked at the calm sea, speaking firmly: "But this is only treating the symptoms, not the cause. As long as the fish-man leader remains in his cave stronghold, yet unbroken, merely defending on the shore leaves us at a constant disadvantage."

Eventually, there might be negligence, leading to unimaginable consequences. So we must take the initiative to attack, thoroughly destroy their lair, and eliminate any future threats."

Eliot nodded but hesitantly spoke: "You're right, my Lord. However, we currently lack enough ships, and our capability for a sea expedition is insufficient. We also don't know the exact location of the fish-man stronghold."

Louis took out a notebook, flipping to a few sketches, saying: "I've had people scout the specific location already. I have some ideas about the plan, listen and see if they're feasible."

Then they immediately shared their thoughts, and called Hillco over.

After resolving the Desperate Witch's crisis, Louis brought him to Dawn Port, assigning him work related to explosives.

Next time, they'd return together to Red Tide City; now he was just the right person for the job.

Once Hillco arrived, Louis directly said to him, "Explain in simple terms the two types of magic explosion bullets you prepared in advance at Dawn Port."

Hillco immediately held the prepared items, shaking them as if displaying a dangerous toy to Eliot and Louis:

"Well, simply put, we have two new types of magic explosion bullets. The first is the flotation mud block, throw it into the gap of the cave entrance, it expands like dough upon touching water, hardening after dozens of minutes, blocking the entrance.

Chapter 548: Fishman Calamity (Part 2)

Another kind is called directional Magic Explosion Bullet: After fixing it on the rock and igniting it, it will cause that spot to collapse immediately.

Louis nodded, but didn't overlook the details: "Will the tide wash away these Magic Explosion Bullets?"

Hillco's gaze became serious: "We put floating mud blocks in shells with anchor hooks, after tossing them in, first hook the anchor into rock crevices or wreckage, then tighten it with a short rope, so the tide can't move it.

The outer layer of the directional Magic Explosion Bullet is wrapped with a splash-proof pack, inside there is a small timer fuse and a slow-burning core, giving you enough time to retreat.

Simply put, stabilize the items first, then leave.

He explained very thoroughly, and not only Louis nodded, but Eliot beside him also nodded repeatedly.

Louis turned his gaze to Eliot: "Eliot, take thirty men, infiltrate the Fishman's lair, use these two kinds of Magic Explosion Bullets to eliminate these Fishmen, can you do it?"

Eliot looked at the two items in Hillco's hands and said firmly: "It can be done, sir."

Then he began to think about the details of his tactics and spoke them out: "With a hundred Knights, it's more than enough.

The first team will scout and pave the way; the second team carries floating mud blocks and directional Magic Explosion Bullets for setup and securing; the third team provides cover and emergency retreat support.

Everyone carries floating mud blocks and three directional bullets, along with ropes, anchor hooks, and diving gear.

Time should be chosen when the fish population is thinnest, the first team reconnoiters near the shore to confirm safety, the second team simultaneously dives in from both sides to deploy and secure, the third team covers from the outside.

If there is a counterattack within the cave, the third team uses fire tubes and signal bullets to attract attention, ensuring the retreat path is open. The sticky mud must solidify within the scheduled time, directional bullets are operated by experienced Knights, never let the recruits operate alone.

Louis interrupted: "What if the return flow blocks the path or small boats are hindered from landing?"

Eliot responded immediately: "There are three safeguards: tidal windows, firepower on shore and smoke screens for cover, and emergency explosive closure of side walls as a last resort for buying retreat time. Of course, that's the last resort."

"Casualties?" Louis pursued an answer.

"Target is zero casualties, but preparing for the worst case. Injured are to be brought back to the near-shore medical station by small boats immediately; if trapped, teams cover and prioritize rescue with firepower from shore."

Louis closed his notebook, gazing at the horizon, calmly commanded: "First do two rounds of drills nearby: test the deployment and securing onshore, complete retreat drill. Once everything meets standards, launch the attack as planned."

Remember, the attack must be clean and neat, the retreat even cleaner and neater, make sure everyone returns safely."

Eliot nodded, his voice steady: "Please rest assured, sir."

.....

Phosphorescence flickers on the wet walls of the cave, reflecting grotesque faces.

This is the Fishmen's nighttime feast, resembling some kind of ritual gathering.

Several strong adults strike each other with bone spears, as if testing strength, occasionally drawing blood.

Beside them, someone strings freshly torn sea beast innards into a chain, handing it to others to sniff, as if exchanging compliments.

The more mature ones smash captured shells into pieces, singing brief sneering laughter to some rhythm.

For them, such chaos is both entertainment and a way to maintain group order.

Right in the center of the feast, on a stone seat, the Fishman leader sits alone, head tilted back gazing at the stone wall, as if contemplating something.

A group of humans suddenly appeared on the shore, erecting wooden stakes and piling up a wooden enclosure, treating the beach they had long controlled as their backyard.

He once tried to raid them, attempting to regain control.

But several attacks failed, even the largest one was ambushed and slaughtered by humans, forcing them to leave behind almost half of the warriors.

Yet this didn't make him feel despondent, only angry.

He's determined to block these shore invaders one by one, no longer allowing them to place claws in the shallows.

Of course, the previous failures have made him aware that he can't charge as recklessly as before, cunning strategies must be used.

If direct confrontation doesn't work, lure them into deeper areas with trickery, then finish them all.

The corners of his mouth slightly upward, calculating how the next attack should be more hidden and deadlier.

Of course, he doesn't know, at this moment on the other side of Sunken Wave Reef, a group of silhouettes are slowly but orderly moving.

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Rocks are soaked, seaweed sways, like a silent warning.

The Red Tide Knights dressed in black shallow garments, infiltrated amongst reefs and sea mist in multiple rows, every motion striving for silence.

Eliot stands on a small boat, his swimming skills are not strong, but for this operation, he still came to the frontline as the commander.

He wears a gray cloak, ready with various signal bullets for emergency.

"Forty-five minutes after the tide ebbs, flow speed enters a calm phase." A Knight knowledgeable about waters reports softly nearby.

Eliot exhales a breath filled with chill, orders in a low voice: "First team, go."

Upon the command, tiny ripples appear on the water's surface.

The first team slips into the nocturnal sea like fish, all chosen meticulously from Red Tide, Knights skilled in water.

Their diving suits cling to their skin, Magic Explosion Bullets pressed into specialized backpacks, floating mud blocks tied at the waist, anchor hooks wound between finger bones, heading towards various points of Sunken Wave Reef.

The task is to uncover the terrain of this reef and the location of the Fishmen.

"Gurgle... Gurgle..."

Three stealth Knights slowly swim to the crack's edge, the leader places a hand on the companion's shoulder, signaling to pause.

Then they quietly approach the cave wall, cautiously extending their upper bodies.

"Seen it."

They have never seen the Fishmen's revelry up close like this before.

The cave arches, centrally there is a sunken stone tray, packed with torn sea beast remnants.

Dozens of Fishmen, some marking each other with bone spears, some swing their arms tossing fish bone pins towards the top rock, some even snatch a string of slimy innards, biting each other.

The scene is bloody and bizarre, blood mist gradually spreading underwater.

The Red Tide Knights remain motionless watching this scene.

Even a single bubble could trigger a frantic riot among these creatures.

Silent eye contact.

The leader slowly raises his hand, gesturing: "Retreat."

The other two nod, without any hesitation, swiftly retract back.

Turning and diving into the shadows, not disturbing the water behind them at all, leaving silently as if never been.

Returning to the near shore, swiftly climbing back onto the commander's boat.

The leader sketches symbols with water on a stone slab: "Target confirmed, most Fishmen gathered inside cave for feast, patrol sparse."

Eliot takes the stone slab, feeling pleased.

He orders quietly: "Second team, down."

Second team's silhouettes quietly leap into the sea, dividing left and right paths, diving towards Fishman lair from both wings of Sunken Wave Reef.

They move like silent shadows, cruising close to the rock wall, progressing very orderly and quietly.

Two-man groups, one grips the thrower shell, the other protects the side flank, blocking possible drifting currents.

Floating mud blocks wrapped in oilcloth, shells twined with slip-proof layers and waterproof short ropes, hooks' tips gleaming faintly.

Knight reaches the rock groove, deftly pushes the shell into the recess, swiftly drawing out the rope, anchor hooks drive deep into the rock wall, rope is pulled, tied, folded securely.

The protector retrieves a directional Magic Explosion Bullet from a waterproof bag, embeds it into the run-off side wall recess.

Fuse coils around the rock mouth, slow-burning core inserted into reserved mouth, finally the safety pin clicks shut.

From the first floating mud block deployment to the final directional bullet securement completion, a full ten minutes, without any error.

At the twenty-fifth minute, under the third team's protection and reception, all deployers have quietly retreated to the assembly points, no one missing, clean and neat actions, after all, they've practiced over ten times.

Eliot crouches on the small boat, clutching a pocket watch in one hand, eyes fixed on the waves.

He counts silently in his heart: "...Twenty-six... Twenty-seven..."

Chapter 549: Fishman Massacre

"Haha!" A sharp, grating laugh mixed with the sound of bone spears clashing.

Several young males were competing in biting and stabbing in the puddle, causing scales and armor to fly.

A fishman with algae spikes on its back viciously stabbed a bone spear into its companion's shoulder socket, splattering filthy green blood, which elicited shrill cheers from around.

On the throne made of decayed rock, the bone crown on the fishman leader's forehead gleamed faintly. He watched the fight below, chuckling with a low mumble.

This was his second favorite form of entertainment; his first was naturally slaughtering those upright-walking apes.

Suddenly, a faint "click" sound came, though very subtle, it was still captured by the fishman's ear fin.

The leader frowned and was about to turn his head when he saw the originally flowing tide suddenly become stagnant in a crack in the rocks.

Boom!!!

A mass of mud-like grayish-brown substance exploded from the depths of the crevice, accompanied by muffled sounds and pressure, filling the entire passage in a sticky mess.

Numerous water currents were instantly blocked, causing turbulent backflows.

At the same time, several spots on the sidewall suddenly erupted with a second round of searing hot explosions!

The directed magic explosion bullet was ignited.

The stone walls exploded like a volcano, with mud, phosphorus stone, bone fragments, and fishman flesh all swept into the collapsing flood!

"Gah!!!"

The leader screamed in shock and anger, desperately rushing towards the main passage, where all he saw were falling rocks, drowned clan members' corpses...

He was one of the few in the group with bloodline memory and possessed intelligence higher than ordinary humans. He believed that as long as he got out, there would be a chance to rise again.

Thus, the fishman leader held a peculiar horn and made a mad dash to the cave entrance, trying to escape this hellish scene.

But waiting on the shore were five Red Tide Knights.

Amidst the roaring, magic explosion bullets and crossbow bolts fired in unison, flamethrowers swept across the water, turning the stragglers into ashes.

As the fishman leader stepped forward, three fighting energy slashes crisscrossed and descended in the air.

"Puff!"

Blood foamed from his throat, the bone crown shattered, and as he fell, the horn in his hand rolled into the tide, kicked away by a knight on the shore.

Eliot stepped forward slowly, spun the longsword in his hand, and completely severed his head.

"It's over."

This was a massacre; the residual skirmish lasted less than ten minutes after the explosion.

Outside the cave entrance, a hundred knights had already completed the blockade and enemy clean-up.

Fishman remains surfaced like ocean waves, and the blood spread around the cave entrance into a bizarre purple-black hue.

.....

The knights clad in armor returned by boat, carrying the scent of fresh blood and salt.

What they dragged back were fishman corpses wrapped in burlap, shattered bone armor, and a few remaining curse tools.

Notably peculiar was an exceptionally strange bone horn, bent like a piece of sea beast's spine, with several rings of mysterious text at the tail end, still slightly trembling with residual warmth.

In the Dawn camp's main tent, Louis was reading the latest construction report.

Eliot stepped in, lightly tapped his chest with his fist: "Mission accomplished, fishman cave sealed. Leader slain, over a hundred enemies dead, no casualties on our side."

"We also brought back the supplies." He paused, gesturing for two knights behind him to present the spoils.

Louis nodded lightly, saying in a calm voice: "Well done, clean and efficient."

Everyone showed joyful expressions.

Yet Louis did not exhibit any triumphant excitement: "But this is just the beginning. It was just the closest small fishman tribe."

He paused: "But victory is victory, deserving of reward."

"Every participant, thirty gold coins each, to be distributed according to the roster, no deductions."

The knights' spirits lifted, their faces revealing uncontrollable joy.

Thirty gold coins was considered a hefty sum; it was not just money, but recognition from the Lord.

Standing in the corner, Hillco chuckled as he approached: "I contributed quite a bit too. If it weren't for the explosive bullets I supplied, would it have been so easy? Lord Louis, I want a bonus, how about fifty gold coins?"

Louis glanced sideways at him, sighed, and instructed the knight next to him to give him fifty gold coins.

"Oh my, thank you, Lord!" Hillco immediately beamed, stuffing the bag into his arms.

Beside him, Eliot couldn't help but mumble under his breath: "His monthly salary, isn't it much more than this?"

Lambert whispered back: "More than twice, not even counting various bonuses."

After distributing the bonuses, the knights returned to the barracks, the commotion dissipating, leaving only Louis and a few guards in the command tent.

Louis sat by the crudely made temporary long table, turning an object in his palm.

It was one of the spoils just returned, the fishman horn.

In Louis's palm, it trembled slightly, as if some unreleased wildness still lingered.

"It's still moving," Lambert quietly reminded, his hand unconsciously resting on his sword hilt.

"I know," Louis said faintly, still playing with it in his hand.

Louis wasn't afraid of being cursed by it, because he knew of its existence from the Daily Intelligence System a few days ago.

The fishman's ancient and broken divine artifact, used for warfare summoning ceremonies.

Its function was to strongly attract nearby fishermen in near-sea environments, stimulating their group consciousness and aggressiveness.

Though today they successfully destroyed the fishman tribe, there are dozens of such tribes in this sea area.

And the true threats are the distant fishman royal family, wandering pirate fleets, and other forces both inside and outside the Empire.

But this horn is indeed a good thing.

"If it can attract fishermen to gather, we can lure them ashore. If they really come... then they'll be annihilated in our prepared trap."

Chapter 550: Fishman Massacre_2

Louis placed the horn into the sealed box and slowly closed it.

In the short term, he still focused on establishing a defense system around the port.

Taking the initiative? That could only be discussed after the long-distance fleet was launched.

He stood up, his gaze fixed on the nighttime coastline: "That day won't be too far off."

.....

On the third day after the extermination of the Fishman nests, a craftsmen corps from the Red Tide Territory also arrived at Dawn Port.

The meeting table was set up in the newly repaired makeshift office, with unpainted wooden walls through which the wind blew, carrying a salty scent.

Yet inside, it was already crowded with people.

Louis sat at the head, surrounded by a few neatly organized sketches.

He got straight to the point without wasting words: "With the Fishman problem resolved, our port construction should also enter the next phase."

Mike, leading a dozen craftsmen from Red Tide City, stood to one side.

Louis said: "Dawn Port isn't just a simple port. It should become a node on maritime routes and also the earliest coastal city of the Red Tide Territory.

So from now on, it's not just about digging the harbor basin and building the dockyard; we also need to construct warehouses, residential areas, workshops, and market congregations."

He pointed to several circles on the map on the table: "First step, the warehouse and workshop areas must take shape within two weeks.

Residential areas for citizens must keep pace, first building the Red Tide-style dome-shaped houses, moving the first batch of craftsmen in within half a month."

Mike responded immediately: "Construction materials have been transferred from Red Tide City, the crane was assembled yesterday, the rail car tested this morning...if the rain isn't too heavy, we can do it."

"What about manpower?" Louis asked.

"Two hundred and twenty skilled construction craftsmen, plus thirty machine operators, and seven blacksmiths." Mike paused, "They know what to do, but they still need a clear construction schedule."

Louis nodded and said: "You have a clear division of labor, the schedule will be posted at each work area entrance by tomorrow morning. Inspections every two days, rewards and penalties will be issued on time."

He paused, looking at everyone and emphasized: "This is the first city facing the ocean. Don't build it like a temporary port camp."

Everyone nodded quickly, promising to complete the task.

After the meeting, people gradually left, while Louis stayed behind, looking at the port area blueprint on the wall, as if seeing a city yet to be built.

.....

The morning fog of the port hadn't completely dispersed, and a group had already gathered on the high ground near the dike line.

Mike, carrying a tool bag, held folded blueprints in his left hand and several marker flags in his right, taking small steps but walking quickly.

Behind him were several craftsmen leaders from Red Tide City who came along with him, each with measuring ropes and peg hammers, discussing in low voices as they walked.

"This place has good terrain, sheltered from the wind."

"The soil layer is firm, making the foundation work easier."

"The ship unloading point can be set up nearby, making the transfer route short."

Upon reaching the middle of the high ground, Mike stopped, waved his hand: "Using this natural rock as a point, the west section is for storage, the east section reserved for the market."

Several craftsmen immediately dispersed to act; some sprinkled stone powder to mark lines, others took out marker stakes to measure distances point by point.

With feet on the damp soil, zigzag lines gradually outlined the area's contours.

Mike looked up toward the direction of the harbor basin, the wind blowing from there carried a hint of saltiness.

He casually added: "Try to place the warehouse closer to the harbor basin for easy unloading. Move the market over there, open and facing the sun, making it easier to do business in the future."

A young craftsman beside him chuckled: "You've even thought of the stall positions for vendors?"

"The Lord said this isn't a temporary dock, it's a city meant to last in the future." Mike replied without turning his head, "If you don't use your head, you'd better go back."

After speaking, he stepped into the next section, comparing slope as he mumbled: "This side drains naturally, no need to dig too deep, go back and tell the carpentry team to prepare materials per the Red Tide Warehouse blueprint."

The craftsmen exchanged remarks, no longer as cautious as when they first arrived, even adding light-hearted laughter during measurements.

.....

On the west end of the port area, the clacking of steam winches rose and fell.

A massive stone foundation slowly lifted on a rail crane, steadily moving toward the newly designated warehouse foundation.

A craftsman with a shaved head sat on the gear transport vehicle's back seat, holding a wooden beam, slowly sliding along the tracks, a smile unintentionally appearing on his face.

This was Dawn Port's first time using a rail crane and gear transporter, brought by the Red Tide Craftsmen Corps' new technology.

The equipment was improved by the Red Tide Craftsmen Corps at the main city, initially based on blueprints personally drawn by Louis.

The rail crane's tracks were laid flat on the ground, with a winch and pulley on the boom's front end, driven by a steam powered pulley, steadily delivering heavy objects several steps away.

The gear transporter was even more ingenious, with human power rotating the front axle, driving its internal gear ratio, aided by lightweight steam assistance, allowing a whole massive stone to be steadily transported, without dozens of men pulling together.

"It's much lighter than carrying shoulder-to-shoulder..." gasped a workman, watching the crane steadily place a full keel-grade beam into the marked spot, "This thing, it's a real monster."

"Not a monster, it's Red Tide technology." Another person smiled, affixing hookup ropes, "You haven't seen the steam workshop's monster. Just burns wood, yet it can power all three hammer rooms in the forge."

By noon, Louis arrived on horseback for an inspection.

Mike was about to instruct someone to lay a warehouse wall but was stopped by him on the spot.

"This wall is too low, too close to the harbor basin." Louis glanced at the blueprint, speaking slowly, "Must be raised more than two feet. Winter tides reverse flow, coupled with salt mist, will corrode wood lightly and soak the base heavily."

He opened a notebook, pointing out three issues: "The foundation pad needs a dual-layer drainage board; the walls use thermal insulation panels, the exterior coated with resin. If unavailable, get materials from Red Tide City."

Mike responded gravely: "Understood."

He turned to instruct the removal of the previous materials, ordering: "Re-check all laid foundation bases, redo them tonight."

In the evening, workers in the dusk replaced the foundation with a new batch of taller stones, sending the old materials back to the yard for reorganization.

No one complained; this wasn't wasting materials, but planning for the future.

On the east section, the area reserved for the future residential area, the atmosphere was lighter compared to other construction sites.

"This will be a tavern in the future." Louis stood on a slope, speaking to Mike, "Beside it is the bathhouse and stage. The carpentry team will handle the drawings, but let's fix the locations first.

If we want people to stay, there must be places for dining, drinking, bathing, and watching performances."

Mike nodded and immediately instructed the carpenters to set marker stakes.

Not far away, a young craftsman grinned upon hearing about the bathhouse being built: "Really setting up a bathhouse? Thought I'd only take a hot bath in Red Tide Main City for life."

Someone carved an image of the sun on the warehouse door pillar, with two wave patterns beneath.

That was the symbol of the Dawn Territory, representing the sun and sea tides.

Further away on the construction fence, several plaques carved from scrap wood were hung, inscribed with wobbly words:

"Port completed and resided in peace," "Opening soon," "Hope family arrives safely to settle here..."

These weren't arranged by Louis.

Some illiterate laborer asked someone to write them and hung them up, and others did the same after seeing it.

As time passed, the outline of the residential area had emerged.

Several prototype wooden houses were erected in order, with roofs covered by double-layer moisture-resistant wood shingles, walls coated with resin paste, door frames following the Red Tide style rounded arch structure, and doors etched with Dawn motifs.

Mike led the craftsmen in inspecting the structure, wiping sweat as he said: "Build according to this standard for the rest, one row after another."

Young craftsmen carrying wooden planks nearby couldn't resist pausing as they passed by.

They looked at that house, eyes filled with a look they had never shown before.

"It looks somewhat like over at Red Tide City..." someone whispered, their tone airy, slightly incredulous.

"I stayed in a house like that last winter; it was warm as spring." Another chuckled.

The subsequent construction speed clearly quickened, with volunteers working overtime, sweeping wood shavings spotlessly clean.

By evening, campfires lit up by the port; an elder craftsman looked up at the dome prototype on the high ground, silently placing a new wooden plaque beneath the fence.

The plaque read "May the Lord of the Red Tide bless us."