

Winter 591

Chapter 591: Alchemical Constructs

"Don't be nervous," Louis smiled, his gaze sweeping over the notes and jars, "could you introduce your research from this past month? I'd like to hear it from you personally."

Merian took a deep breath, his fingertips trembling slightly on the notebook pages.

He had almost memorized every formula, but when it came to describing them personally in front of the Lord and everyone else, he couldn't help but feel tense.

A few alchemy apprentices pushed a cart into the room, displaying various reagents and small instruments. Inside glass bottles, a faint light shimmered, while sealed samples were placed within metal boxes.

The apprentices were respectfully anxious, their eyes full of anticipation for the master and admiration for Louis.

Merian looked at the row of familiar yet unfamiliar tools, his Adam's apple moving slightly before he softly spoke: "I... will begin."

Louis gave a gentle smile: "Relax, there's no need to be nervous."

So, Merian placed three materials and several finished bottles on the table: the spore powder of Shadow Moss, the remnant crystal of the Soul-devouring Lizard Beast, and the crystal liquid of Soul Vine Dew.

"These are the core materials. The Shadow Moss amplifies memory echoes, the Soul-devouring Crystal disrupts memory spectrums, and the Soul Vine Dew acts as a stabilizer, preventing the fractured mind from collapsing."

He then picked up a small dark silver bottle, the liquid inside flowing slowly, reflecting iridescent light under the lamp.

"This is one finished product, Abyssal Lure Mist. After dispersing in mist form, it induces fragmented memory flashbacks and cognitive disorder, language system chaos, and weakens mental defenses.

If combined with interrogation techniques, it can compel the subject to divulge subconscious truths in a very short time."

He picked up a slender syringe next, the liquid inside the needle tube a faint gloss.

"This is the Heart-Cancer Inquiry Needle, an injection-type node agent. Once injected, it temporarily opens a compliance window for the subject.

It enhances the authenticity of verbal and memory responses without causing lethal damage, representing a key part of standardized interrogation processes."

Louis leaned forward to take another thin document.

The apprentice explained cautiously, "Master, last week we conducted preliminary validation on that batch of captured pirates, the main aim was interrogation and information extraction.

Results showed that when vaporized, the Abyssal Lure Mist causes language chaos and memory fragmentation within ten minutes, and injecting the Heart-Cancer Inquiry Needle in core subjects significantly increased information yield.

No fatal cases occurred, but several instances of persistent auditory hallucinations and short-term memory loss appeared post-treatment. Further care is required."

Louis's gaze swept through the pages, with neatly tabulated experimental details:

Subjects: Captured pirates; Dosage: Low concentration vaporization and one Heart-Cancer Inquiry Needle.

Interrogation window: Information yield increased by approximately 70%, authenticity 85%.

Duration: 8–20 minutes.

Behavioral side effects: Language fragmentation, loss of sense of direction, occurrence of short-term memory loss.

Subsequent handling: Enforced psychological repair and cross-verification of confessions...

After reading, Louis contemplated for a moment: "If used on enemy commanders or rebellion cores, these methods could directly disrupt command chains.

Include this as an official intelligence and interrogation option, but ensure strict usage protocols and accountability mechanisms are established."

Hillco had previously attempted similar endeavors with comparable raw materials, but due to his talent leaning towards impactful Magic Explosion Bullets, the results were crude and prone to backlash, rendering them impractical.

Yet Merian achieved today's level with merely one month's effort, which left Louis both astonished and delighted.

Louis closed the report: "Archive the samples and data from the pirate trials immediately, and establish a special approval group. All practical applications must have my authorization."

Upon hearing this, Merian quickly nodded, and the alchemy apprentices promptly agreed: "Yes."

Then, Merian donned a pair of thin protective gloves, moving cautiously.

He retrieved a bottle containing a light green liquid from a refrigerated box, with small vine pieces inside, as if steeped in moonlight.

"This is the purified liquid of Soul Vine Dew." He held the bottle up under the light, the rays casting faint spots on the table through the bottle wall.

Soul Vine Dew possesses a strong Magic Essence circulation ability, capable of stimulating the natural restructuring of Fighting Energy pathways. When combined with Fire-Scaled Viper scale powder in specific proportions,

it can produce Soul-Scale Recovery Liquid, which rapidly repairs Fighting Energy channels and minor trauma. With battlefield injection, a knight can recover about 40% of Fighting Energy and alleviate muscle tears in a short time."

Next, the apprentices pushed another cart forward, and Merian signaled an assistant to take out a darker colored reagent, the liquid flowing like deep forest currents within the tube walls.

"This is the concentrated version of Spirit Source Reconstructor, augmented with the catalytic enzyme of Split-Spine Snow Scorpion bile on the basis of Soul Vine Dew.

It can significantly accelerate permeability and tissue repair efficiency, especially effective for patients suffering from Magic Power burns or severe trauma."

He dripped a drop of Spirit Source Reconstructor onto the simulated cortical injury of a laboratory mouse.

Blue-green light patterns spread like small rivers, with the burnt skin slowly closing under the microscope and traces of fiber reorganization becoming apparent within minutes.

The observing apprentices held their breath unwittingly.

"This type of reagent has a distinct advantage in Red Tide; the raw materials are easy to obtain and cost-effective," Merian added quietly.

"Moreover, Soul Vine grows abundantly in the highland regions of the Northern Territory, although the Fire-Scaled Viper is a dangerous creature, its scale powder and bodily fluids can be sustainably collected and processed around Red Tide. In other words, mass production doesn't rely on Southern shipments."

Louis extended his hand to take the bottle: "This will change our rescue and battlefield endurance. Frontline medical personnel can use it to shorten recovery times for wounded soldiers and even maintain knight combat power in short-term engagements."

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Merian smiled slightly under the lamp, with a hint of shyness: "I will continue to improve the formula's stability to ensure long-term storage won't lose activity."

Louis nodded in affirmation: "These can be directly produced in batches. Set up production lines, establish quality control and tracking systems, prioritize supplies for the front line and rescue units."

He withdrew his gaze, eyes showing unprecedented approval, "Excellent, now we have both smarter interrogation tools and supplies that sustain combat power at the rear."

Finally, Merian slowly opened the sealed silver-gray box.

Cold air escaped from the cracks, pale blue vines writhing in the soft light, their sap shimmering like ice crystals.

The temperature in the air seemed to plummet, even the light from the lamps took on a chill.

"Frost Leaf Vine." He whispered, his tone almost like a chant, "The sap it secretes can stabilize magic power fluctuations, suppressing mania and anger. In the Northern Territory, it is one of the most precious resources, and to think Red Tide would cultivate so many."

Merian took out a thin-necked bottle, the liquid inside gleaming in the light with a soft blue-white glow.

"This is Frost Leaf Calming Potion. When aerosolized, it can quickly create a calming field, letting agitated magical beasts swiftly calm down and suppress the group rage effect."

Merian placed the bottle on a tray, and then took out a syringe slightly thicker than a finger, its needle wrapped in fine silver thread, the liquid inside glimmering with a crystalline blue sheen.

"And this is the enhanced injection agent, Frost Heart Control Needle." He paused for a moment, looking up at Louis.

"Used in conjunction with the Breath Charm and the miniature soundfield inducer, it can amplify the compliance effect after injection, making controlled beasts obey commands and act stably for a limited time."

He signaled for the assistant to prepare a demonstration.

The isolation cover descended, and a young magical beast was fixed on a transparent platform, trembling slightly.

Merian operated the syringe, slowly injecting half a tube of the agent into the beast's neck, then attached a thin metal charm between its fur.

As the inducer next to it started, slight ripples arose in the air.

The young beast's breathing gradually steadied, the fear in its eyes receding, replaced by an eerie calm.

It obediently crouched down as if guided by an invisible will.

"After injection and inducer use, beasts enter a controlled training window." Merian's tone remained restrained.

"Aggressiveness is suppressed, and the ability to learn and respond to specific commands is significantly enhanced. The drug effect lasts for about an hour without causing organ burdens."

Louis approached to observe, his gaze gliding over the still young beast, his tone low: "This not only reduces casualties but also allows us to directly enlist magical beasts for combat."

If controllable taming units are established at the front line, the mobility of the Red Tide Legion will be greatly enhanced."

Louis looked at the calmed young beast, the corners of his lips slightly raised: "Well done, Merian. Your results far exceed expectations."

For a moment, Merian didn't know how to respond, only bowing his head in slight awkwardness.

Suddenly Louis inquired: "Could you suppose if this agent were used on larger magical beasts, like Frost Giants?"

Merian hesitated, remaining silent for several seconds before cautiously responding: "Theoretically... yes, but no one has tried. The dose may need to be amplified tenfold, and the inducer field also enhanced, otherwise it's hard to cover such a size. Highly risky."

Louis chuckled, a chilling mirth in his smile: "Then let's try it."

Merian's complexion slightly changed, timidly murmuring: "But... there's no sample of a Frost Giant here, without physical experimentation..."

"There will be in a while." Louis interrupted him.

Merian was stunned and hadn't fully understood the young lord's meaning.

Louis then diverted the conversation: "Apart from these, are there any other results?"

"Temporarily... no." Merian instinctively shook his head, then hastily added, "But I have several concepts."

Like the Inspirational Detection Insignia, made from the spiritual factors of Shadow Moss, it can detect lurking magic power waves. Also, the Cold Breath Charm, treated by cold extraction from the Fire-Scaled Viper's venom gland, can suppress magic energy burning."

He paused, his voice slightly trembling: "These are still just prototypes, but if given a few more months, Red Tide's alchemy system will be completely different."

Louis silently scanned the neatly arranged bottles and lights on the lab table; in just a month, this alchemist had produced such results.

He quietly said: "Excellent, Merian. You've turned waste into wealth."

Louis raised his hand, and the attendant behind him carried a heavy wooden box. When the lid opened, the gleam of gold coins shimmered under the light. It weighed several thousand pieces.

"This is your reward." Louis calmly said, "Your research has enough impact to change Red Tide's dynamics."

Merian's eyes widened, evidently never having seen such an amount of money.

Having been confined in the laboratory since childhood, he almost didn't understand the significance of these gold coins, yet he knew it was a substantial grace.

He promptly knelt to bow: "Thank, my lord... thank you!"

Louis extended his hand to lift him up, his voice still calm: "You don't need to. Just continue doing what you excel at."

After Louis left, the laboratory returned to tranquility.

Merian was still somewhat dazed, as if not completely recovered.

Until the assistant softly reminded him, he returned to his senses, exhaling.

He glanced at the box shining with gold, suddenly saying to the several alchemy apprentices beside him: "Each of you, take a handful of gold coins."

The air immediately reverberated with a series of gasps.

The apprentices exchanged glances, then extreme shock appeared on their faces.

These were real gold coins, nearly equivalent to their salaries over several years.

Once confirmed Merian wasn't joking, fiery enthusiasm gleamed in the young apprentices' eyes.

They almost rashly but excitedly lunged at the wooden box, each grabbing a large handful of gold coins, unwilling to let go despite what they couldn't hold.

The room filled with laughter and exclamations, the entire laboratory bathed in warmth and bustle by the gold's glow.

The apprentices reverently bowed to Merian, their words full of respect and gratitude.

Someone even teared up, repeatedly thanking him.

Watching their sincere joy, Merian felt a rare sense of satisfaction flood his heart.

This feeling of respect and trust had never been present in the Green Tide Guild.

That night, he personally carried the box of gold coins back to his dwelling, a small three-story house close to the workshop.

Moonlight slanted in through the window, reflecting on the box's golden glow, dazzling him.

Merian carefully placed the box in a corner of the room, sitting on the bed's edge, watching the flickering light.

He actually didn't know the true purpose of the gold coins, but understood in his heart that it's something belonging to him.

The respect, reward, and warmth here were things the Green Tide Guild could never offer him.

Red Tide City, this barren land of the Northern Territory, was far better than the Federation.

Merian finally felt he might genuinely find peace.

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The next day's morning fog had yet to dissipate.

Merian awoke to a knock at the door, a servant respectfully informing, "Sir, Lord Louis requests your presence in the outer district."

He hurriedly donned his coat, following the attendant to board the carriage.

The wheels rolled over the stone path, producing a deep grinding noise. Along the way, the street scene gradually shifted from orderly commercial zones to desolate military zones, the cold wind howling, the air tinged with scents of blood and snow.

When the carriage halted, he found himself standing in a vast open area in the outer district of Red Tide Territory.

A training ground enclosed with iron fences.

Merian instinctively hugged his notes, raising his head, instantly stunned.

In that field of white, dozens of Frost Giants were bound by thick chains, rings embedded in their flesh, lined up in neat rows.

Each standing several meters tall, eyes flickering with dull and suppressed light, occasionally emitting faint roars from deep within their throats, mixed with metallic friction sounds.

Merian's mind went blank, last night's phrase "There will be in a while" echoed in his ears.

He gazed at this astonishing scene, never imagining such words would come true in just one night.

The row of towering shadows made him question reality.

Just what kind of person Louis was, and what sort of power could capture dozens of Frost Giants overnight.

The cold wind brushed against his cheeks, his fingertips trembling gently.

Chapter 593: Winter and Spring Festival

Alina wrapped herself in a dark gray cloak, the corner of the carriage curtain slightly lifted by the wind and snow.

She sat by the window, lightly stroking the frosted glass with her fingertips, her gaze falling on the straight streets outside the window.

Winter had come, and outside the snow was falling heavily, leaving the world almost only white and cold wind.

But the scenery of Red Tide City was entirely different from other regions in the Northern Territory.

The cold-resistant pines and cypresses along the street stood in rows, their branches and leaves covered with frost, yet still orderly, both blocking the wind and embellishing this city.

The houses along the way were semicircular in shape, the snow-covered domes gleamed with a soft red ochre and dark gold light in the white fog.

Each dome-shaped house was partially embedded in the ground, the eaves bending with the terrain, resembling natural warm shelters growing from the snowfield.

A low sound of water flowing could be faintly heard beneath the roads; it was the heating troughs designed by Louis, filled with warm water in winter to prevent freezing, hence the wheels did not slip even in heavy snow.

Alina quietly observed all this, her breath fogging the glass, after a moment, she softly said, "Remarkable..."

She had come to Red Tide Territory for nearly two years, yet she was still astounded by this city.

The snowfields of the Northern Territory originally symbolized harshness and death, but here, they had become an orderly scenery.

At the street corner, passersby moved along, artisans pushed barrels, children tugged at snow dogs, and women carried food through the mist.

Everyone was busy, but not frantic.

She remembered her initial astonishment at arriving, now she felt a long-lost peace in her heart.

The bell of Frost Halberd City from two years ago still echoed in her dreams.

Back then, Alina held the young Isaac, mourning the passing of the Duke.

The Duke's dying wish was etched firmly in her heart; the territory and the Knight Order were entrusted to Louis Calvin until Isaac came of age.

This arrangement caused her great concern.

Alina couldn't understand why her husband entrusted the power of the Edmund Clan to a young noble not of their bloodline, even if he was Emily's husband, he ultimately did not bear the Edmund name.

Even though she showed no doubts outwardly, she still felt uneasy, after all, granting so much power to this young man could easily change a person's heart.

On her first day at Red Tide, fine snowflakes fluttered from the sky.

She and Isaac were settled in a newly built noble mansion in the center of Red Tide City.

It was a residence funded by Louis, even more bright and warm than the old castle of Frost Halberd, with a ventilation copper tube system by the windows, fireplaces capable of maintaining temperature, and roofs that could melt snow through hidden pipes.

The artisans of Red Tide had accomplished something the Northern Lords hadn't thought of for centuries.

And her status remained "Duchess of Edmund", though she lacked real power, she was still treated with courtesy.

Louis and Emily visited often, asking for her insights on certain etiquettes or statutes, their tone filled more with respect than mere form.

Whenever Louis laughed in the drawing-room talking about amusing anecdotes of new policies, or when Emily held little Isaac and played, she would still recall the warm scenes when Duke Edmund was present.

Yet behind the gentleness and etiquette, she remained cautious.

Alina could see Louis's restraint and tact, as well as the hidden strength beneath that tact—a presence of undeniable ambition.

She couldn't help but worry for her own son: in this long game of power, no one could remain desireless forever.

But life in Red Tide gradually made her let go of her wariness, though not entirely.

She began to observe the order of this city herself, from food distribution to town management, from military discipline to the workshop system.

And Louis seemed uninterested in coveting Isaac's title, nor did he touch the wealth of the Edmund family.

On the contrary, he opened Red Tide's education, finance, and military supplies to all social classes, even vagrants could find work in workshops or receive advanced education.

At banquets, Alina conversed with Red Tide officials, surprised to find their discussions centered not on conquest, but on port expansion, mechanical technology, and winter relief.

The tax law was transparent, food coupons were fair, orphans could attend school, and even servants learned to read and write in night classes.

Gradually, she finally understood, Louis's ambition wasn't merely ruling the Northern Territory, but establishing a new order, one that allowed everyone to survive.

Alina's vigilance didn't disappear, but the fear was replaced by an odd sense of respect.

Lost in thought, the carriage slowly stopped in the thick snow, and a maid quietly reminded, "Madam, we've arrived."

Alina lifted the carriage curtain, the cold wind rushed in, snowflakes instantly soaking her cloak.

In front of her was a simple yet tidy courtyard, with Red Tide's emblem hanging at the door, the sun pattern glinting amidst the wind and snow.

This was the Red Tide Orphan Care Institute.

This was Alina's task for the day, to inspect the preparations of the Red Tide Orphan Care Institute.

Since she took charge of managing several orphanages in the city, she personally inspected them every few days.

The children in the institution were very fond of her, always waving at the window whenever her carriage approached.

Amidst the swirling snow, the air was filled with the aroma of firewood and hot soup.

Alina tightened her cloak, stepping onto the stone steps. Behind her, several maids and administrative officers followed, with the staff of the institution greeting her along the way.

She walked through the corridors of the institution, her pace slow yet steady.

The laughter of children spilled out from behind the doors, mixed with the sound of reading aloud.

A small boy was crouched in a corner, holding a wooden carved toy in his hands.

Alina approached, bending down to help him fasten his scarf.

The boy looked up dazedly, and she gently patted his hair.

Chapter 594: Winter and Spring Festival (Part 2)

The maid quickly stepped forward and handed the child a bowl of hot soup.

The nuns in the courtyard were orderly distributing food, with the fire burning in the center.

Several older orphans were reading with the younger children, from the "Alphabet Book" compiled by the Red Tide Academy.

Wooden plaques hung on the walls, engraved with the motto: "Everyone is a child of the Red Tide."

Alina stood for a long time. This was Louis's instruction, that all orphans should receive basic education and, if they wished, could enter various fields of the Red Tide in the future.

At this moment, a little girl ran over, holding a garland in her hands, her eyes sparkling: "Madam! We bought this flower with today's snack money!"

Alina paused for a moment, took the garland, and smiled as she patted her head: "Thank you, it's really beautiful."

At this moment, she remembered how Emily used to smile when she was young, with the same expression.

Afterward, she walked into the storeroom, checking the distribution of charcoal and blankets.

Upon finding the supply insufficient, she immediately turned to the steward responsible for supplies and said: "Add thirty more heating stoves, and install two additional heaters in the children's ward. Replenish the medicine and alcohol by tomorrow morning."

The steward hurriedly nodded: "Yes, Madam! Red Tide will not let the children freeze, I'll adjust the supplies right away."

Alina's expression was gentle, yet her eyes were resolute: "No matter how tight the budget is, the children must not go hungry."

The wind and snow intensified outside, but the courtyard grew more lively. The children's laughter, the crackling of the fire, and the rustling of book pages intertwined into a warm symphony.

As night fell, Alina returned to her residence in Red Tide City.

The fireplace cast a gentle glow, Isaac lay by the window watching the snow, his face warmly lit by the orange light.

She sat at the desk, unfolded a letter, and began writing to an old friend from Frost Halberd, who was also a Northern Territory noble lady:

"You asked if I regret leaving Frost Halberd? No. Louis has not betrayed the Duke's trust...

What he seeks might not be limited to the Northern Territory... but in his order, even winter is warm."

The ink dried slightly as the firelight flickered.

She sealed the envelope and looked out at the snowy night, hoping that everyone could fare better this cold winter.

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Winter finally passed, and the snow on the streets gleamed faintly in the sunlight.

The market in Red Tide City was being decorated with ribbons and flags, the air thick with the aroma of hot soup and bread.

Since Louis arrived, the Red Tide community has celebrated the Festival of Spring Opening every year at this time, honoring the end of winter and giving thanks for the past year of hard work and harvest.

This was the fourth Festival of Spring Opening in the Red Tide Territory, but it was Kosa's first.

The morning mist had yet to clear, and the whole city was draped in festive colors.

On the main street, flags and floral fabrics fluttered along the road, craftsmen were laying the pavement, and children were building snowmen by the roadside, their laughter echoing in the cold air.

Today he had a task, to represent the Knight Order in the parade.

Though he had whispered complaints the night before, asking, "Why do I have to do such pointless tasks?"

But the thought of riding through the whole city and having their formation seen by the people filled his heart with a secret thrill.

He got up early, washed, put on a clean knight uniform, and adjusted the emblem on his chest.

His reflection showed a slightly nervous expression, and he exhaled softly, checking his sword and belt, then turned to tidy the corners of his knight's cape.

The sound of knocking came, "Kosa, hurry up!"

In came Gray, the gray-haired youth.

He was a year older than Kosa, came from a refugee family from the Northern Territory, and had been in the Red Tide for three years now. He was extremely gifted, already possessing the skills of an Official Knight.

The two trained together, got scolded together, and even sneaked food from the kitchen stew together, being the best of friends.

"If you don't come out now, breakfast will be cold." Gray laughed and tossed a piece of bread to him.

"I haven't fastened my cape yet." Kosa caught the bread, replied sullenly, but the corners of his mouth slightly lifted.

They munched on their bread as they walked to the training camp's dining hall.

The table was set with a breakfast special for the festival: rye porridge, stew, and warm milk.

Gray ate and spoke, "I heard today's floats can move automatically, the craftsmen used a steam engine. I'm betting one of them will break down."

"Quit being a jinx." Kosa glared at him, but couldn't help but laugh.

After eating, they donned their capes and rushed to the assembly point.

On the training field, a dozen knights were ready to go, with Instructor Bruch standing in front of the squad.

His voice was deep and powerful: "Remember, the knight formation is a symbol of the Red Tide. Today, while it's not a battle, we must show our spirit to the public and make them feel secure."

"Yes!" everyone responded in unison.

The horse hooves trotted on the cobblestones, creating a steady rhythm.

The main street of the city was already packed with people, children holding small flags, elders holding red ribbons.

The wreaths hanging on the street corner swayed gently in the wind and snow, with a faint charcoal scent in the air.

The knight phalanx was at the forefront of the procession, riding on horses, uniform yet not rigid.

Today was not a military parade, but a celebration, so they were allowed to relax a bit, smiling in response to the crowd on both sides.

A child ran to the roadside, reaching out to touch the horse mane, and Grey leaned down, smiling as he handed him a small badge.

Kosa gripped the reins tightly, his heart racing faster than the drums.

At first, he was a little reserved, but as the cheers of the crowd rose one after another, the light in those gazes made him slowly straighten his back.

He looked at Grey, who grinned back at him.

"Long live the Red Tide!" Grey shouted.

Kosa couldn't help but join in, "Long live the Red Tide!"

At this moment, flags danced in the wind and snow, the clamor and laughter merging into one.

The cold winter had passed, and for the first time, he truly felt he belonged here.

The end of the parade was just the beginning. The square was bustling with voices, and the aroma of grilled fish, stewed meat, and wine filled the air.

Street vendors lined up with stalls, craftsmen busy displaying their skills, and children weaving through the crowd, holding activity passports covered with stamps, their faces flushed with smiles.

Grey dragged him into the crowd: "Come on! Builder Challenge, we're a team!"

They stood shoulder to shoulder, completing the balance on a wooden bridge, relay races, and assembling models, finally earning a Red Tide Emblem at the finish line.

Grey laughed like a child, shaking the medal at him.

Then they moved on to the handicraft stalls in the artisan workshop to forge iron.

Kosa's first piece of steel was crooked, but the master patted his shoulder, "Not bad, strong."

He scratched his head a bit shyly, but couldn't stop his lips from curling upward.

In the afternoon, they sat on a roadside bench eating a festival meal of roast meat, hot soup, and sweet bread, all free of charge.

In the distance, children were singing around a bonfire, and the windows of every household were lit.

At night, a huge bonfire was lit at the center of Fierce Tide Square, the flames painting the entire night sky red.

Snowflakes melted into mist in the heat, landing on faces with a hint of warmth.

Thousands of people formed concentric circles, layer upon layer, children rode on their fathers' shoulders, craftsmen and soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder, and the old street vendors paused their work to look up at the platform.

Louis and Emily ascended the platform side by side.

The firelight glinted off their cloaks, the golden thread flashing like meteors.

Louis raised his hand, and the clamor instantly fell silent, only the crackling of the bonfire could be heard.

"The Red Tide belongs to everyone who contributes," his voice steady and powerful, echoing in the wind and snow.

After a moment of silence, the entire square exploded with cheers like mountains roaring and seas surging.

The crowd shouted in unison, "Red Tide! Red Tide!"

Flags fluttered, the sound of the wind and the shouts merging into a deafening anthem.

Kosa stood at the end of the knight phalanx, his gaze fixed on the main flag. The firelight reflected on his face, his young eyes filled with fervor.

At this moment, he almost forgot where he came from; he was simply one of the Red Tide.

Next to him, Grey patted his shoulder, "Hey, don't zone out. We need to shout too."

Kosa took a deep breath, raised the flagpole in his hand, and shouted with the crowd, "Long live the Red Tide!"

The shouts echoed in the night sky, the distant snowy mountains sending back waves of sound.

At that moment, the cold night was no longer cold, and the firelight illuminated every young face.

Just a few months ago, Kosa felt like an outsider, but now he could laugh and celebrate with everyone.

Back home, he took out a letter and wrote a few lines:

Father, the winter in the Red Tide is warmer than I thought.

The people here are equal, enthusiastic, and everyone can change their destiny through hard work.

The instructor said I have a chance to become an Official Knight next year. I am doing well, so please don't worry.

A few days later, he received a reply.

His father's handwriting was as it always was, rugged yet gentle:

Good child, live well in the Red Tide. It's a blessing to be in such a place.

Don't get into trouble, study well. Maybe I can come to visit when the snow melts in spring.

After reading the letter, Kosa was silent for a long time.

In the night, as streetlights and bonfires intertwined, he suddenly understood that this sense of belonging was no longer given by others, but something he had walked into with his own hands. Now he was truly a Red Tide person.

Chapter 595: Yorn's Happy Days

One week after the Spring Festival, just after morning exercises had ended, and the mist had yet to dissipate, steam rose from the training grounds of the Red Tide Knight Training Camp.

Instructor Bruck stood on the platform, holding a parchment scroll in his hand: "Every year, Lord Louis selects a few young knights to join his personal guard, which signifies trust, as well as a test."

The training grounds fell silent, dozens of eyes fixated on that scroll.

Bruck unfolded the list with a slight smile, lifting his chin: "This year, the chosen ones are... Kosa Coldfang, and Gray Harlow."

At that moment, it felt as if the air stood still.

Kosa was initially stunned, stuck in mid-air, not even clearly hearing his own name; by the time he realized it, his palms were already sweaty.

Next to him, Gray slapped him so hard it almost knocked him off balance: "Did you hear? We made it into the personal guard!"

Applause and cheers erupted in the training ground, with their companions gathering around to tease and pat them on the back, even excitedly lifting them up and tossing them into the air a few times.

Although a few glances bore envy and jealousy, most were filled with genuine laughter.

Bruck shook his head with a smile from the platform: "Perform well, it's not just an honor, but also a responsibility. Remember, standing by Lord Louis's side is a rare opportunity in one's life."

That night, Gray tossed and turned, unable to sleep, occasionally turning over and throwing a pillow at the bed next to him: "Hey, Kosa, can you sleep? I'm already imagining myself riding a warhorse, guarding Lord Louis."

"Shut up." Kosa turned his back to him, but didn't close his eyes either.

The moonlight outside the window mapped into the dormitory, and he stared at that patch of pale light, a surge of indescribable emotion welling up in his heart—pride, excitement, and a bit of unease.

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Early the next morning, they were summoned to report at the Red Tide City Main Castle.

Weir personally received them.

This legendary figure of the Red Tide was among the first knights trained by Louis, having joined the camp at twelve years old, and reaching the transcendent realm in just five years, a genius among geniuses, known as the "Shield of Red Tide."

Kosa and Gray were so nervous before him that they nearly forgot to breathe.

Weir, however, approached with a smile, patting them on the shoulder: "Welcome to the personal guard. Don't be too nervous, the lord doesn't bite."

In a gentle tone, he bent down like an older brother and added: "Remember two things by the lord's side—heed orders and stay composed. Besides, he is more gentle than you imagine."

Gray couldn't help but grinned, and even Kosa relaxed a bit.

They could hardly believe that the legendary figure before them was so approachable.

"Let's go," Weir turned to lead the way, "Lord Louis is waiting for you in the conference hall."

The two followed behind him, their hearts pounding more fiercely than battle drums.

They had actually met Louis at the training camp and were personally praised for their achievements.

But this time was different; this time, they were meeting Louis alone to become true members of the personal guard.

The door to the conference hall was gently pushed open, and warm light spilled onto the stone floor.

Louis was discussing the schedule with Bradley and several councilors, and looked up with a smile when he heard their footsteps.

"Kosa, Gray, right? I remember you two."

The two instinctively straightened up and saluted, their hearts pounding wildly.

Gray's hands were almost clenched into fists, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

Kosa only felt his chest heat up, nearly choking on his voice.

They had never imagined that the Lord they discussed countless times at night would call out their names himself.

Gray couldn't help but puff out his chest, his tone brimming with unstoppable excitement: "Yes, absolutely!"

Kosa followed suit, his voice trembling but extremely firm: "I will not fail in my duties!"

Louis looked at the two, a hint of a smile on his face, and said calmly: "Learn more, observe more. The future of the Red Tide requires young people."

The two almost spoke in unison: "Yes, Sir!"

Watching them leave, Louis smiled gently: "Young people are great."

Bradley and several councilors echoed, some smiling and sighing: "Their spirit really is nostalgic."

Another councilor joked: "It looks just like you a few years ago, Weir."

Weir, pretending to act like a veteran, commented: "Full of vigor, but their eyes are steady enough, young people should be like this."

Louis couldn't help but laugh, turning his head to jest: "Aren't you only sixteen?"

Weir coughed, his expression slightly stiff, and laughter burst out, lightening the atmosphere considerably.

As the laughter faded, Louis eased his smile and returned to the main topic, standing with Bradley over the open map.

Louis tapped the map's Frost Dragon Territory, his gaze calm: "In this meeting, the Sixth Prince wants to intervene in Northern Territory affairs under the guise of reconstruction; we all know this. What he wants is nominal control, while what we need is the real setup."

He paused, his fingertips sliding along the lines, "The grain routes, the ledgers, and the protocols, we've already mastered them. The loyalty test will proceed as planned: voting, grading, marking lines. Who is genuinely loyal, and who is feigning allegiance will become very clear by then."

Bradley smiled slightly: "Coincidentally, we also need such a scene to test the loyalty of each territory. Following the previous approach, it'll be evident who truly stands with us."

Louis nodded, his tone mild: "With the grain routes and ledgers in our hand, his so-called special envoy title is naturally empty.

The meeting process is under our control, and if the Sixth Prince wishes to participate, he'll have to move within our framework."

Bradley responded: "This time, it's merely about confirming the outcome."

Chapter 596: Yorn's Merry Days (Part 2)

"Hmm." Louis smiled faintly and then changed the topic, "Furthermore, there's no need to select the demonstration city anymore; it will be Frost Halberd City. Using that city as the base, we'll build a new Frost Halberd City, which will serve as a window to showcase the Red Tide system and fulfill my promise to Duke Edmund."

Bradley whispered, "This is the most suitable choice, my lord. The terrain is good, the transportation is close, and it holds enough symbolic significance."

Louis put away the map, his tone calm, "We don't need to compete for face, only results. Once the Northern Territory operates according to the rules of Red Tide, his little prestige will naturally be stripped away completely."

.....

After being summoned by Louis that day, Kosa and Gray left the main castle without any special tasks and continued training as usual.

Occasionally, they would accompany Louis to certain places inside and outside the city for small-scale escort missions, yet there were no thrilling or exciting tasks.

Until three or four days later, they received an order and learned that there would be a large-scale outing, and this mission was extraordinary.

Louis would be heading to the Frost Dragon Territory to attend the northern reconstruction meeting, a gathering of all the prominent lords in the North and representatives from the Red Tide Council.

The journey was expected to last fifteen to seventeen days, starting from Red Tide, passing through various territories in the North, and then entering the Frost Dragon Territory.

Of course, Louis decided to inspect the affiliated territories along the way, to examine the implementation results of the Red Tide system, and they would witness all of it firsthand.

And they soon realized the uniqueness of this outing mission.

In the morning, the snow in Red Tide City had not yet melted, the main street swept clean, the cold light reflecting on the stone bricks like a mirror paved for the lord.

The giant carriage Louis was riding in slowly rolled out of the main castle, engraved with the Red Tide emblem, its thick armor reflecting cold light, and the front hung a banner with the Sun insignia, a symbol of rulership.

Eight frosty steeds trotted forward in unison, their hooves sounding like drums, pulling the entire carriage like a slowly moving iron fortress.

On both sides of him was Lambert leading the Transcendent Knights arrayed at the front, followed by a large-scale Red Tide Knight Order.

Over three hundred knights formed into five vertical columns, cloaks and battle armor glistening in the morning light, long spears raised like a forest, creating an indestructible steel torrent along the streets.

Every knight had undergone strict Red Tide training, from physical fitness and tactics to fighting energy manipulation, all above Elite Knight level.

Rumors were that no one in the Northern Territory dared to challenge the sharpness of the Red Tide Iron Cavalry.

Civil servants, secretaries, attendants, wagons of supplies, and a scouting convoy unfolded in sequence, with gunmen guards and crossbow riders patrolling the wings for protection.

The entire team exceeded five hundred people, its organization complete, yet as it advanced, it was like a precise war machine, everything orderly.

As the procession passed through the main street, residents already waited on both sides, whispering prayers or shouting loudly.

Craftsmen tipped their hats in respect, children waved small Red Tide flags, the streets echoing with shouts of "Long live Red Tide!"

Kosa rode toward the back of the convoy, feeling the majesty closely for the first time.

Wind swept forward, carrying the breath of iron and fire, he gazed at the carriage like an iron fortress, his heart filled with shock and fervor.

"This is... the bearing of the Lord of the North."

Gray rode beside him and couldn't help but turn his head to grin and say, "In the future, we will also be knights standing beside Lord Louis, right?"

Kosa said nothing, instinctively gripping the reins tighter.

.....

At Silver Ridge Hill's morning, the snow line still hung in the mountain hollow, the wind murmuring a deep hum through the cracks of the mining veins.

Yorn Harvey clutched the reins, his steed snorting atop the slope.

He raised a hand to shield his eyes, gazing down the mountain to see the silver iron vein like a fishbone lurking in the earth, stretching long through the woods.

"Let the hunt begin!"

At the command, drums roared from the temporary camp below the mountain.

A dozen knights marshaled their horses into a dispersed formation, closing in from the wings, hunting dogs weaving through a set course, startling a fawn and spraying snow half as high as a person.

Yorn drew his bow and nocked an arrow, releasing it, the feathered shaft cutting through the wind and landing swiftly into the deer's shoulder.

"Hit!"

"Lord Viscount, your hand is steady!"

Several young knights spurred their horses forward, swinging their spears as they planned to chase more prey.

An attendant hurriedly advanced to take his bow, handing over a cloak while repeatedly praising, "Truly a hundred shots, a hundred hits, my lord!"

Praises poured onto him one after another, like a warm flow dispersing the morning chill.

Yorn couldn't help but throw his head back in laughter, thrust his bow into the attendant's hands, and dismounted, quickly moving to the fawn to hold its antlers.

"Tonight, let's feast!" He turned his head, smiling like a flame, "Follow me, we can't leave our brothers hungry."

"Hooray!"

"Long live Lord Yorn!"

The compliments carried genuine warmth, which cheered Yorn's heart.

He suddenly untied his pouch from his waist, scattering a handful of golden coins, the gold tumbling over the snow, startling the young knights almost to leap for joy.

"Hold them steady, don't let them fall!"

"Thank you, my lord!"

"Lord Viscount is generous!"

The crisp sound of metal blended with laughter, even warming the wind somewhat.

Yorn looked at them, unable to restrain himself from tossing another handful.

The attendant cautiously reminded from the side, "My lord, today you have given quite a lot..."

"What 'a lot'?" Yorn firmly patted the attendant's shoulder, "Earn more, give more; Silver Ridge won't miss a bit of this."

He turned back to look at the mine sheds on the mountainside; they were standard mine sheds constructed by Red Tide craftsmen, square wooden frames standing on stone foundations, rooftops covered with snow-proof tiles, chimney vents exhaling thin smoke.

Chapter 597: Yorn's Joyful Days (Part 3)

In the distance, a new market street is under renovation, with the ground paved with stone bricks and drainage channels extending straight downstream.

Along the street are warehouses, blacksmith shops, and schools, with the Red Tide Emblem hanging under the eaves.

Two years ago, when the Barbarian Race calamity was quelled, Yorn was still guarding his barren old land, with a dirt road and a few broken houses where the earthen walls would crumble when the wind blew.

Yorn could only rely on his father's assistance to barely support himself, until a letter from Louis was brought by the Red Tide's document.

"Move Baron Harvey's land to the southern border of Red Tide, near the mineral vein. Red Tide will unify the planning, and the accounts will be integrated into Red Tide."

Later everything fell into place as naturally as snow melting in spring: the engineering team sent by Red Tide erected the first mining shed at Silver Ridge Hill, with craftsmen setting up pillars and sealing walls one by one.

And his family further maneuvered in the Imperial Capital and secured the title of Viscount.

Yorn once thought that the glory of the Northern Territory needed to be seized with knives and fire, but he watched as the road laid itself out automatically beneath his feet.

On the first morning he arrived at Silver Ridge Hill, the sunlight reflected off the snow surface and illuminated the red waves on the Red Tide flag.

He stood on the balcony of his new house, holding a cup of hot wine, and saw in the distance the mining of ores, with the residents bustling like diligent beetles back and forth on the ground.

"The boss has lifted me up..." Yorn said with a smile to his close knight.

At first, he felt a bit uncomfortable.

In the past at the old place, he had to make chicken-and-feather decisions daily—who would patrol the mountains, who would guard the grain, which family gave three extra bundles of firewood, which hunting team stole two badgers.

Since Red Tide took over, they had a professional scribe for accounts, a mining officer for mines, a craftsman chief for renovations, the people...

At the end of each month, the surplus is automatically summarized into the accounts, and quarterly dividends are delivered by specialists.

"What else can I do?" Yorn asked himself like this for a time.

The answer came quickly: he led people on hunts, maintaining morale.

He attended banquets as a successful model of the Red Tide system, demonstrating for those skeptical nobles.

From time to time, he went to Red Tide City to see Louis, writing small issues in the system into notes to tell the boss.

But more often, he didn't need to do much, nor need to.

Thus, he gradually learned to let go, just as the assembly line in the mining area ran smoother, and the warehouse statistics became more accurate.

Today, they repair the market, tomorrow, they pave the streets—everything is developing positively.

"Lord Viscount!" A young knight, hugging a handful of gold coins, smiled toothily, "The brothers all say that coming to Silver Ridge Hill with you is hitting the jackpot. We thought we were being exiled to the Northern Territory, but didn't expect to eat meat every day, have coal in winter, and occasionally share bonuses."

"Exile? Coming to the Northern Territory indeed feels like exile," Yorn laughed heartily, patting his armor, "But when you follow the right person, it's enjoyment, just like me. You follow me, and I follow him; the path won't be wrong."

"Yes!"

The knights' laughter echoed in the mountain wind. Their armor was standard from the Red Tide Workshop, their horses were good ones selected from the northern slopes, thick winter fur, running like the wind.

Originally thought going to the Northern Territory was to suffer, but now they realized that compared to the knights in the South, they were living better.

Yorn led his horse downhill, walking along the newly-built stone steps to the mining shed.

The miners were loading boxes of newly produced silver iron blanks into carts, while a manager was verifying weights and stamping them.

Every stamp bore the Red Tide's emblem, indicating the goods would follow Red Tide's path, enter Red Tide's warehouses, and be exchanged for gold coins.

"How are the accounts?" Yorn asked.

The scribe opened the ledger, revealing a page full of numbers: "This season's ore output from the veins increased by twenty percent compared to last season, with losses controlled below standard. Dividends are estimated to be higher than last season by a level."

"Not bad," Yorn nodded, "Give the miners a hot soup meal; the weather is still cold."

"At your command."

He walked to the other end of the workshop where the civic school was holding classes, and children sat behind wooden desks, writing upright.

On the wall hung the Simplified Civil Regulations, with neat writing: "Don't steal, don't deceive, work according to share, earn according to share."

"Lord Viscount!" Several little ones saw him and stood up in unison to salute.

"Sit, sit, sit. Remember, reading is not to mock others; it's to prevent yourself from being mocked."

The children giggled.

The teacher nodded to him, whispering, "Master, can we request more books for spring? We don't have enough."

"I'll write to Count Louis," Yorn thought for a moment and added, "Get more picture books; I've read up to the eighth volume of Lord Louis's heroic deeds."

He walked out of the school, with sunlight falling on his shoulders.

He suddenly remembered the winter three years ago, when he and others were huddled in the cellar, listening to the sound of the Insect Swarm scraping the ground, while watching the young lord in a red cloak bravely come to his rescue.

Then he told himself that if he survived, he would devote his life to that young man standing amidst the flames.

Now he had achieved it, placing his territory, reputation, and even dignity into Red Tide.

"Boss..." he said softly into the wind, "I wasn't too capable, but well at recognizing people."

"Lord Viscount!" The same young knight ran over again, this time running more urgently, almost jumping up the slope, "Louis is coming! Their team has entered the southern entrance and will reach Silver Ridge Hill by evening!"

Yorn was stunned for a moment, then his eyes lit up, and his whole person bounced up like a spring.

"The boss is coming?"

"Yes!"

"What are you still standing for? Blow the horn! Everyone tidy up their work, move the carts to the right, clear the streets! Take out the best meat from the kitchen, open the wine cellar, set the long table tonight!"

He spat out a dozen orders in succession, all filled with uncontrollable excitement, "Hang the Red Tide flag, call out the choir of school children!"

Attendants scrambled and dispersed.

Yorn pulled the attendant's cloak over his shoulders but found it not proper enough, and turned to the steward, shouting, "Bring that black-edged red cloak—yes, that one! To see the boss, it must look decent!"

The cloak was put on, but the buttons were fastened incorrectly.

He fumbled, eventually tearing off the heavy button and fastening it again.

Yorn glared: "What are you laughing at? Laugh again, I'll dock three days' pay!"

"Yes, yes, no laughing, no laughing!" The attendant held back the laughter, his shoulders shaking.

Yorn led his horse, almost tumbling down the slope.

The wind poured in through the mountain pass, flags rustling loudly, his chest heating up, like when he ran on the training ground in the Imperial Capital in his youth.

"The boss is coming," he told himself, "I must personally welcome him at the city gate."

Chapter 598: Warm Welcome

The evening sky was dyed red by the flags, the snowstorm had just stopped, but there were still ice flakes swirling in the air.

The sound of heavy iron hooves came from the end of the mountain path, orderly and rhythmic, like distant thunder.

Louis's convoy slowly pressed up the hillside.

Vanguard knights lined up, draped in crimson cloaks, forming a steel torrent with the supply carts and heavily armored guards behind, filling the mountain pass.

The city gates were adorned with flags bearing the dueling emblems of Red Tide and the Harvey Clan, symbolizing the fusion of nobility and new order.

The bell tower had long been ringing, and the entire Silver Ridge Hill was boiling.

Yorn originally commanded people to arrange a ceremony, but it proved unnecessary as the people had already gathered spontaneously.

Miners threw down their hammers, children held hand-painted Red Tide flags and sang, women swept the streets and scattered ashes to prevent slipping, and the elderly brought out homemade wine.

The whole city had been bubbling since morning, with no one forced.

Why were they so excited?

Because for two years, they heard the bards sing "Song of the Red Tide" every day.

At night by the campfire, they listened to the theater troupe perform "Dawn Port" and "Light of the Snowfield," watching actors with masks depict how the young Lord saved the Northern Territory.

The children found it amusing, but the adults listened and wept because they knew there would be no Silver Ridge Hill today, no stable life for themselves, without Louis.

Torches lit up on both sides of the street, illuminating the giant iron carriage, with the Red Tide emblem engraved on the door, looking like a burning sun.

The elderly bowed their heads with canes, craftsmen raised their hammers and shouted, miners lit torches, students sang loudly, women stuffed baked bread into the knights' arms, and children jumped with flags.

A young mother held her baby, telling him, "Look, that's Lord Louis."

"Long live Lord Louis! Long live the Red Tide!" The shouts formed a tidal wave.

The procession of Red Tide Knight Order moved forward with the cheers, their steps like a torrent flowing into the city gates, shaking the snow loose.

Yorn rode at the forefront, wearing the most splendid formal attire he specially prepared.

Over his gold-embroidered knight armor, he wore an embroidered cloak, with a medal from Duke Edmund pinned on his chest.

To show his esteem for Louis, he polished his helmet to shine, and his sword's strap was newly replaced.

He looked majestic yet slightly comical due to the thick armor making him appear round, riding on horseback.

Seeing the carriage slowly approach, Yorn's heart beat fiercely with the drumbeats.

Two years of construction were finally being showcased in front of the leader.

Yorn originally worried that the preparations might not be thorough enough, but seeing the street's jubilant populace now, surpassing his plan's grandeur, he couldn't hide his smile anymore.

He smiled so broadly that his eyes squinted, delighted both for Louis's arrival and his successful preparations.

Around him, the knights shouted and miners called out, the lively atmosphere making his chest burn.

As the convoy gradually slowed, Louis sat in the carriage, fingers lightly tapping the armrest, with a somewhat helpless expression.

He originally intended for a low-key inspection of Silver Ridge Hill's governance, checking if the mines, warehouses, and schools operated adequately, but now it seemed everything would have to be rescheduled.

Through the window, he saw the torches, flags, and countless excited faces lining the street, the continuous shouts blending together, enveloping him with a fervent warmth.

He sighed, but his lips still curled upwards involuntarily.

This feeling of being eagerly watched, even though he was accustomed to it, was impossible to completely reject.

Louis slightly leaned out, snowflakes falling on his shoulders, he stretched his gloved hand, waving to the crowd.

Just a simple gesture instantly ignited the entire street.

The shouts surged like a tsunami, banners raised in unison, drums sounded again, children screamed, women waved, and men doffed their hats in tribute.

Even the distant bell tower quivered in response, the air suffused with fervor.

In the midst of the procession, Kosa and Grey were also overwhelmed by the commotion, riding on horseback, witnessing for the first time the sight of the lord's arrival.

Countless flags and cheers dazzled them, just one wave from Louis could ignite the entire territory.

Grey murmured softly, "This is the Red Tide... this is the master of the Northern Territory."

Kosa tightened the reins, chest burning, suddenly understanding the instructors' words from the training camp: "Red Tide is a belief."

Looking at the people on the street, their fervor and reverence was nearly akin to when they prayed.

The difference was, this faith had flesh and blood, it had warmth.

The convoy halted, guards opened the carriage door, Louis extended that hand again, stepping onto the ground.

The crowd's roar instantaneously became a tide, even the bell tower's chimes became muffled.

Yorn almost ran forward, kneeling with one knee, the armor crashing into the snow: "All of Silver Ridge Hill's people welcome the Red Tide Lord!"

Louis bent over to lift him up, smiling and patting his shoulder, "Yorn, let me see the city you've guarded."

Yorn grinned, nodding repeatedly, speech so rapid it was somewhat stuttering: "Everything's according to your directives, the ore output has doubled, three academies built, no one's going hungry... you'll be satisfied!"

Louis nodded slightly: "I can see you've done very well."

"Boss, you've had a hard journey." Yorn walked slightly ahead, his smile wrinkling his eyes, "I've already prepared a banquet long ago, wine from the South, tonight you must drink to your heart's content."

Louis chuckled, glancing sideways at him: "You've always been willing to spend on wine."

Yorn laughed heartily, taking the opportunity to move closer, whispering: "It's not just drinking, it's respect, and also wanting to chat freely with you. If you don't come, I'll be sick with impatience."

Chapter 599: Warm Welcome (Part 2)

Louis shook his head gently, a smile still lingering at the corners of his lips: "You're still the same as ever."

"That's because the boss taught me well." Yorn puffed up his chest, his tone as serious as making a vow.

The two walked side by side, laughing, their steps as natural as they were years ago in the Imperial Capital's training grounds.

With the Red Tide Knight Order escorting them on both sides, the residents of Silver Ridge Hill spontaneously cleared the path.

Some offered bread, others handed over hot wine, but more just silently watched the back of that Lord.

.....

The air in the hall was warm and bright, with towering walls draped with red and blue banners, and flames gently dancing on metal lamp stands.

The main banquet hall of Silver Ridge Hill was not bustling at this moment; there was only a long table and two people sitting across from each other.

The table was adorned with rare delicacies from the Northern Territory: roasted Frost Mane Bear, Snowfield Lizard soup, salt rock venison steak, and fine wine sent from the South.

A faint aroma of stewed meat wafted through the air, the hearth melting the shadows at the table corners into a soft red glow.

Outside, knights and officials were feasting by the bonfire in the snow, while inside the hall, there were only Louis, Yorn, and a few servants.

"I originally wanted to have a big banquet with everyone in town, but you insisted on keeping it low-key." Yorn laughed and shook his head, raising his glass, "It's alright, I can have a good drink with you, boss."

As he raised his glass, his tone carried a mix of pride and gratitude: "Boss, this toast is for the rescue two years ago. If it weren't for you, I'd have gone to see the Dragon Ancestor."

Louis smiled as their glasses clinked, causing the wine to splash a little: "You cried your heart out back then."

"That was just emotional release." Yorn glared at him, but couldn't help laughing, "When you saved me, my pants had frozen stiff."

The two exchanged a smile, their laughter echoing in the spacious hall.

After a round of drinks, Yorn waved for a servant to clear the cold dishes and personally introduced the food on the table: "This Frost Mane Bear was hunted last month, that pot of Snowfield Lizard soup..."

Louis scooped a spoonful of soup and nodded: "I never imagined your place could eat more lavishly than the Red Tide."

Yorn proudly tapped the table: "It's all thanks to your supply system; I'm just taking advantage."

Firelight reflected off his round frame, his gold-trimmed suit a bit tight, making him look like a merry wine barrel.

Louis looked at him, shaking his head and chuckling: "In that outfit, even the bears would be scared to come near."

"It's ceremonial!" Yorn patted his chest, "Gotta let the boss know I'm honestly waiting for your visit."

The conversation slowly drifted to old times.

Yorn reminisced about their time at the Imperial Capital, speaking of how they were once bullied by noble children at the academy and how they secretly sneaked to the riverside at night for a drink, only to be caught by their mentor.

Those old stories felt like jokes in his mouth, loud enough to drown out the crackling of the fireplace.

The laughter gradually subsided, leaving only the sound of the fire's flickering.

In the silence, Yorn spoke in a lower tone: "The messenger from the Imperial Capital relayed news recently, saying it's getting increasingly chaotic over there. Have you heard?"

Louis nodded, not hiding anything: "The Emperor disappeared, Princes are fighting, the Dragon Throne meeting has sidelined imperial power. The backbone of the Empire is already broken."

"Those nouveau riches still pretend everything is calm," Yorn sighed, "My father even received a letter from them recently, talking about maintaining loyalty and stable trade routes."

Louis lightly tapped his fingers on the table, his tone steady: "They wish for stability, but the world is no longer stable. For the Northern Territory to survive, it must learn to breathe on its own before the Imperial Capital falls."

Yorn was silent for a moment, looking at him, half-understanding, then raising his glass: "Boss, whatever you decide to do, I'll follow your lead."

Louis clinked glasses with him: "I hope you truly understand the weight of those words."

Both downed their drinks.

Firelight shone on their faces; Louis's gaze was calm as ice, while Yorn's expression was fervent and sincere.

Then Yorn suddenly laughed and cursed: "Honestly, at that Chongqing meeting, I should've cursed back on your behalf. What Sixth Prince—what a joke! The meeting should've been in Red Tide City, not in Frost Dragon Territory."

Louis chuckled lightly: "Whether you curse or not doesn't change anything. The outcome is already set, and I can just watch whatever show they're putting on."

"I've got to vent a little," Yorn waved his big hand, "His airs aren't even worth discussing."

Louis didn't reply, just watched the flames in the fireplace, while his thoughts dwelled on the more distant situation.

The Empire's map, the Northern Territory's circumstances, the Red Tide's territory.

Firelight flickered in his eyes, seemingly reflecting an indefinable ambition.

He put down his glass and spoke earnestly: "As long as the Northern Territory stands firm, the chaos in the Imperial Capital isn't necessarily a bad thing."

Yorn didn't fully understand, but smiled and filled his glass again: "Then let's do it!"

"Let's do it."

Their glasses clinked together, producing a crisp sound.

One bore calculation and clarity, the other trust and passion.

Yorn silently vowed: no matter how the Empire crumbles, he would follow this friend.

The next morning, as the snow began to melt, the Red Tide's flag still fluttered atop Silver Ridge Hill's Main Castle.

After a night's rest, Louis set out with accompanying officials, Yorn, and personal guards to inspect various areas.

The workshops lining the street had already opened.

The forge's fire was blazing, craftsmen were hammering out Red Tide-style agricultural tools, their sounds crisp and in rhythm.

Miners were switching shifts, carrying standardized numbered buckets.

Clerks in front of the snow houses were cataloging the quantity of minerals entering and leaving, the ledgers filled with uniform forms printed by the Red Tide's management offices.

The road was tidy, and the queues orderly; even seeing the Lord arrive didn't stop them from working. They simply bowed and then returned to their tasks, as someone had informed them beforehand.

Yorn was all smiles as he pointed out the surroundings, "Boss, look at this! All built in your style! These two years haven't been in vain."

Louis looked around while flipping through the data brief handed by Bradley.

The accounts were clear, the dispatch of resources almost synchronized with the Red Tide Territory; tax records, allocation ratios, storage plans—all looked like replicas of the Red Tide.

"Impressive efficiency," Louis praised.

Yorn laughed more brightly, patting his saddle: "As long as you're satisfied, that's good. All these officials are genuinely convinced by you. Back then, they dreaded the Red Tide directors, but now they vie to enforce the regulations."

Kossa and Gray riding slightly behind were somewhat accustomed to such a scene, especially since the Super City dwarfs this place a hundredfold.

The miners and craftsmen, upon seeing Louis, showed genuine gratitude and respect in their eyes.

Gray whispered: "They truly regard the boss as a god."

Kossa nodded: "In Red Tide City, this sight was familiar... They truly believe from the heart."

Louis looked ahead at the semi-underground communal building.

Warm air emanated from underground ducts, children wrote at the windowsill, and women hung clothes to dry.

The walls were plastered with the Red Tide-issued "Simplified Civil Regulations" and slogans declaring "Everyone learns, all are children of the Red Tide."

Louis nodded slightly: "Seems like the replication of the system is indeed effective. Population stability, normal production, even vagrants are beginning to settle."

An accompanying scribe added: "The mineral output increased by thirty percent, primarily due to the Red Tide-style resource coordination and unified storage. Winter provisions still rely on the Red Tide but are well-distributed."

Louis softly said: "Reliance is also a form of stability."

Yorn enthusiastically introduced: "Boss, look at these main roads, these geothermal channels—all modeled after the Red Tide!

Once, the area was all mud pits; now the snow melts faster here than anywhere else, and the inhabitants praise it."

Louis smiled at him: "Well done, seems like you've grasped the core essence of the Red Tide."

Yorn grinned broadly, his tone filled with pride: "Yes, with the Red Tide system supporting us, I sleep soundly."

Kossa and Gray exchanged a glance, even feeling somewhat moved.

They journeyed from Red Tide City and experienced firsthand the significance of Red Tide to the Northern Territory.

It represents not just order but a hope that sustains life.

Louis withdrew his gaze, silently appraising: The governance results of these affiliated territories have already proven the complete feasibility of the Red Tide model, providing confidence for broader future promotion.

Whether they realize it or not, this model will eventually weave the entire Northern Territory into a unified entity.

Chapter 600: Impact of the Red Tide

Before dawn, the city gates of Silver Ridge Hill were already bustling.

The sound of hooves crunching on snow was incessant, mingling with the chill of metal and the white mist of steam in the air.

Yorn rode alongside the convoy, urging his horse closer to Louis's carriage and lifting the curtain for a brief greeting: "Boss, I imagine the journey north must be dull. Luckily, I received an invitation from Astha too, so we can travel together."

Louis glanced at him and smiled slightly, "I suspect it's you who's bored in the territory."

"A bit, indeed." Yorn naturally fell into step with him, joking half-heartedly, "I've arranged everything at Silver Ridge Hill, so why not take this chance to visit other territories? Besides, it's a rare opportunity to travel with you."

Louis nodded gently, "Then observe well and learn."

In truth, Yorn knew that staying in Silver Ridge Hill left him with little to do.

Life was now so stable it bordered on boring, as the Red Tide administrators managed everything in his territory.

Rather than hunting idly, following Louis north to gain some insight seemed more exciting.

Moreover, he was now among the top twenty nobility of the Northern Territory, making his participation in the northern reconstruction meeting both justified and appropriate.

At Louis's command, the entire convoy slowly set off.

The vanguard knights formed up, the standard-bearers raised the Red Tide and Harvey flags, the banners snapping proudly in the wind and snow.

Yorn rode on the flank of the convoy, feeling both proud and elated. Turning to shout to the knights beside him, he exclaimed, "Now this is a sight! Tell me, where in the Northern Territory could there be anything more magnificent?"

Riding behind him were nearly a hundred officials and knights, their spirits high, as their armor and lances gleamed dazzlingly white in the snowy light.

Louis's carriage cut through the morning mist, departing from Silver Ridge Hill and advancing grandly north.

This journey was not only about traveling; it was a tour to assess the spread of the Red Tide system in the Northern Territory.

At every stop, Louis would pause for half a day to inspect the storage, civil affairs, education, and production systems.

Every place they arrived was a reflection of the Red Tide model, with clean streets, full granaries, and open schools.

The Red Tide system was like an invisible order, reshaping the rhythm of the Northern Territory.

In each demonstration point, Louis lingered, speaking little, just observing quietly.

For instance, in the former noble territory of Snow Peak County, families that once resisted the Red Tide rule were now fully integrated into the administrative hall system.

When they first joined, their arguments were intense, complaining that the Red Tide's management was too broad, suffocating, with some cursing at banquets that the administrative ledger was heavier than the Empire's shackles.

But soon they found that the precise allocation of the storage system prevented grain from spoiling in warehouses, the distribution system ensured timely workshop profits, and unified ledgers left no room for deceit or conflict.

Grumblings gradually turned to silence, and after silence came reliance.

They understood that this was like shearing the wool from their backs; the Red Tide took resources from them but gave them back stability and prosperity.

Though they knew this, none were willing to return to the past.

A life of wealth made them increasingly lazy, with banquets replacing council meetings and dividends substituting for power.

These nobles spent their days drunkenly sighing, "This isn't governance; it's being conquered by happiness."

The old city was incorporated into the Red Tide, and Louis reallocated their territories, achieving division and cooperation in mining, farming, and workshop activities under the Red Tide's dispatches, eliminating internal strife and conflict.

The lives of the people improved significantly, with less famine and more stable security.

When Louis returned, those once most stubborn nobles nearly welcomed him at their doors.

The banquet was brilliantly lit, and they hurried to pour him wine, their mouths full of flattery.

Someone half-jokingly said, "If it weren't for you, we wouldn't have days like these."

Louis simply smiled lightly, his gaze sweeping over the many docile faces: "Just remember, don't forget who's keeping you alive."

That smile was calm, yet it caused a brief silence among everyone present.

After a moment's pause, a round of dry laughter erupted in the dining hall.

The nobles raised their glasses again, plastering fawning smiles on their faces, their voices more fervent than before.

For they knew, without the Red Tide, they had no way to survive.

Without Louis, their wealth and stability would also turn to dust in the wind and snow.

Even if they felt humiliated, they still smiled compliantly, for this happiness was too warm to let go, resisting the return to the cold past.

The Winter Dawn Territory, now filled with a dense cluster of warehouses sprawling across the snowfield, steam cranes rumbling.

Managed directly by the Red Tide Economic Administration, it became a transit hub and standardized storage center of Lady Grant's territory.

As one of the earliest lords to join the Red Tide system, she nearly fell apart when she initially took over the territory.

The land was barren, staple crops wouldn't grow, with no mineral veins or trade routes, and both her sovereign and husband's family had cast her aside.

After the Snow Peak County meeting, she sought to meet with Louis.

That night, she said, "I really have no way out. I want to join the Red Tide system."

Louis replied, "Everything you can't handle alone, we'll take care of."

Afterward, Red Tide craftsmen and administrators conducted on-site assessments, discovering rare mineral salt hidden underground.

The Red Tide sent people to build roads and warehouses, and within just a year, this barren land became a source of winter salt stones.

The special local product winter salt stones established a long-term supply agreement with the Red Tide Alchemy Workshop, with the workshop recycling finished products, then distributed throughout the Northern Territory or sold to the South.

Louis's intervention became the turning point in her fate.

She turned her fortunes around with the Red Tide's dividends, becoming the wealthiest widow in the Northern Territory.

Her ex-husband's family tried to approach her again, but she kicked them away with one swift movement.