

Winter 601

Chapter 601: The Impact of Red Tide (Part 2)

Now she lives peacefully with her child, gratefully and reverently calling Louis the true benefactor of the Northern Territory.

Lady Grant stood outside the warehouse, seeing the light in Louis's eyes.

Her voice was filled with uncontrollable excitement: "If it weren't for you, my child and I would have starved to death on that permafrost. It was the Red Tide that saved us."

Louis listened and nodded slightly: "I accept your gratitude. Remember to go back and ensure timely reporting from the warehouse, the Red Tide will not disappoint those it has helped."

It wasn't just these demonstration sites; the entire southeastern part of the Northern Territory had a complete economic chain centered around the Red Tide.

This was not by chance, but the result of the complete economic plan that Louis implemented within the Red Tide system.

Through the Council Hall, he established a cross-territory division of labor and trade agreements, unified the planning of resources and labor distribution, preventing internal redundancy and conflict, so that every bit of labor and output could be accurately placed in the most needed areas.

The Red Tide tailored production plans and quotas for various regions according to local conditions, dividing functions based on geographical and resource advantages: some were responsible for raw material extraction, others focused on agriculture and livestock, while others engaged in smelting and processing.

All nobles and residents were integrated into the system, with the production results proportionally compensated, and demands met through material vouchers allocated by the Red Tide Council Hall or settled with unified gold coins.

This system brought unprecedented benefits.

Trade circulation became more efficient, and internal competition was completely eliminated.

Resource allocation was stable, and the prices of grain and iron no longer fluctuated.

The Red Tide's allocation mechanism allowed resources to form a closed loop within the Northern Territory, and the prosperity of any one place would feedback into the whole.

At the same time, the funds, technology, and transportation network provided by the Red Tide helped regions quickly rebuild, shortening the post-disaster recovery cycle.

In just two years, the southeastern Northern Territory's economy began to operate autonomously, forming a mutually beneficial "Red Tide Economic Circle," astonishing all nobles attached to the Empire's old system with its efficiency.

The northern mining area supplied raw materials, the eastern plains handled grain and livestock, the southern workshops managed manufacturing and processing, and Red Tide City directed and distributed.

All accounts were centrally monitored by the Council Hall, and reports were uploaded to the Red Tide Main City's database.

The economic body unified, resources complemented each other, competition vanished, forming a unique "Red Tide Economic Circle."

As a result, the lives of nobles drastically changed; their wealth multiplied, yet they lost independence, but they enjoyed it because everything was smooth and income stable.

At banquets, nobles would laugh and self-deprecate: "We are no longer lords, but shareholders of the Red Tide."

Thus, all that Louis saw and heard along the way formed a giant picture:

The economy coordinated by the Council Hall, eliminating internal competition.

Education was widespread, allowing literacy and order to take root together.

The separation of military and governance, with knights obeying the Council Hall's directives.

Resource sharing, trade replaced gold coins with voucher tokens.

The monitoring system infiltrated every village and town, ensuring the rules were not broken.

The Northern Territory became an organic whole.

Wealth concentrated in circulation, with the Red Tide as the core heart, and other territories as organs connected by blood vessels.

Of course, anyone who left the Red Tide would immediately wither.

Every corner of the southeastern Northern Territory was rewritten by the Red Tide system.

The mining areas were no longer wasted due to private noble conflicts, and farmlands no longer lay barren due to heavy taxes.

Teachers taught children literacy in schools and told the "Red Tide Story."

Villagers instinctively saluted upon seeing the Red Tide flag, knowing that the warm fire, food in storage, and literate children were all bestowed by Louis.

The Red Tide was no longer just a name but the system itself that sheltered them.

So whenever Louis's convoy arrived, the streets would spontaneously line up in welcome.

Troubadours sang the "Ode to the Red Tide," children shouted "Long live the Red Tide," and women tossed garlands before the knights' horses.

The young members of the Red Tide Knight Order were passionate, surrounded by adoration from the populace.

Yorn and Grey were embraced by the people, truly feeling the honor of being Red Tide Knights.

Yorn rode beside Louis's carriage, looking at the banners and crowds along the way, his heart filled with pride. This team was his leader's dignity and the future of the Northern Territory.

Outside the carriage was a sea of drums, shouts, and floral rain, while inside, there was only the faint sound of pen strokes.

Louis sat in the carriage, gently tapping his fingers on the ledger, his gaze sweeping over the circulation ratio of the Red Tide vouchers and the material statistics.

He calmly looked at these data, listening to the noise outside, as if calculating the next step in the layout.

Bradley sat beside him, softly explaining what each piece of data represented.

After listening, Louis simply said, "Very good, the Red Tide's cycle is taking shape."

Bradley was silent for a moment, then lowered his voice, "Do you really plan to implement this system throughout the entire Northern Territory?"

Louis turned to look at him, "It's only a matter of time."

Bradley gazed at the distant snowfield, his expression complex.

In his mind flashed the enthusiastic faces along the way, the songs under the Red Tide banners.

This young lord was building not just power but an inescapable order.

"This will be a more thorough rule than Duke Edmund's," Bradley said softly, with reverence in his tone, "relying not on swords or family prestige, but on a system that makes everyone unable to leave you."

Louis simply smiled slightly, "That's an exaggeration."

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After leaving the core area of the southeastern Northern Territory, the carriage tracks changed from smooth snowy paths to bumpy muddy ice roads.

The wind grew colder, and the wheels creaked loudly over the frozen ruts.

The last Red Tide watchtower stood on the hill, its flag fluttering in the wind.

The knight guarding the tower saluted upright, until the convoy disappeared into the snowy mist.

Through the carriage window, Louis looked back to see the red of the flag gradually fading in the gray and white.

He silently drew a boundary in his heart: "Here is the edge of the Red Tide."

Going further north, the scenery of the towns visibly declined.

The watchtower was unmanned, the flagpole crooked, and the tax collectors of the old nobility donned their fur coats again, shouting about taxes at the street corners.

The residents by the street showed fear and hesitation when they saw the Red Tide convoy, unsure if they were about to be recruited again.

Yorn pulled open his cloak, observing the grimy-faced people, his brow slightly furrowed: "It's like waking up from a dream and returning to a nightmare."

Louis's gaze remained calm: "This is the reality of the Northern Territory."

Before entering further northern territories, a few small lords along the way had already received the news.

Upon seeing the Red Tide banners and the orderly formation from afar, they first felt fear, hurriedly tidying their clothes, and bowed in the cold wind to welcome them, while the grandeur of the scene made their hearts tremble.

When they heard it was Louis himself, their expressions changed instantly.

Flattering smiles and praises surfaced on their faces.

After all, who in the current Northern Territory didn't know that Louis was the master of the new order?

As long as he bestowed a little surplus grain, their families could live for several generations longer.

Louis only nodded lightly and ordered people to give them some sacks of grain, dismissing them.

Not everyone could be saved, nor was it necessary to save everyone.

Upon entering the further northern villages and towns, the air was filled with the scent of dry grass, rotten wood, and ash.

The streets were fragmented, with snow and mud mixed into icy slurry, and the houses were dilapidated, with faded Ancient God symbols pasted on the wooden walls.

Children in the Red Tide influenced areas would salute proactively and recite the community rules in unison, whereas here, the children ran barefoot, as thin as shadows, chasing one another.

Elders huddled around a fire, whispering prayers, murmuring old forbidden Evil God curses.

Inside houses, fires were reduced to ashes, and mothers held their children for warmth, their eyes empty.

Some people were making soup with rotten grains and bark, the air filled with the smell of burning and despair.

In the distance came the cries of an infant, thin and long, as if tearing through the cold wind.

Bradley, standing by the carriage, flipped through the record book, the pen tip suspended in the air, looking at these scenes, his voice low and nearly swallowed by the wind: "This is a place without a system."

Yorn and Gray rode side by side in the convoy, looking at the desolate land, an indescribable oppression rising in their hearts.

They were used to the brightness and order of the Red Tide, and everything in front of them felt like another world, making them uncomfortable.

Yorn rode closer to the carriage, his voice somber: "Boss, the frontier of paradise is still too narrow."

Louis did not respond, just lifted his gaze to the distance, "Then let the Red Tide go further."

Chapter 602: Conspiracy

The inner castle of Frost Dragon Territory, the northern cold wind barred by heavy curtains outside the door.

Astha Augustus stood by the map, with a deliberate smile: "I am grateful for your presence."

The guests were few, all old nobility of the Northern Territory, Holmes, Klan, Bolton, Harlov, Simon.

The door closed, and the attendant withdrew.

Astha raised his glass, his posture slightly lowered: "As the Royal Reconstruction Envoy of the Northern Territory, I first toast to you all. This meeting would be impossible without you."

Holmes spoke first: "We are here because the Northern Territory cannot be handed over to a young man at will. He's done well in the Southeast, but he does not value us."

Klan agreed: "I heard he's set up some council, where even grain has to be purchased according to accounts. The Red Tide provides funding but no privileges. We old nobility are treated like novelties."

Bolton muttered: "And this year's aid has to be bought, and for grain in my domain, I still need his vouchers, absurd!"

Astha quickly responded: "I understand everyone's thoughts. Although Lord Louis has made significant contributions to rebuilding the Northern Territory, it can't just be dictated by him and Carl. That's why I'm here to set the rules together with you."

He opened the small box he brought, and a few precious magic stones glimmered under the light.

"This is merely a present." He mellowed his tone, "What truly matters are what you deserve, priority in resource allocation, trade privileges... all documented, signed by me, and submitted to the Imperial Capital."

Harlov looked at the magic stones but held back: "We want southern merchandise, quality salt, winter grain, and tax reductions."

Astha immediately nodded: "All negotiable, your demands, I will send back to the Imperial Capital and report them one by one."

Simon raised his eyes: "That young lord..."

Astha smiled: "As long as he needs recognition from the Imperial Capital. Rest assured, as long as you're behind me, I won't let him suppress the old nobility of the Northern Territory."

The room went silent for a moment.

Klan set down his glass, lowering his voice: "If he only plays king in the Southeast, we can pretend not to see. But now, he's reaching into our territory... he's no Duke Edmund."

At this time Sai Fu spoke from the shadows: "I understand your worries, you're not in the Southeast, naturally not bound by his council. But once that young man's influence expands, even the wine you buy for banquets will require forms."

Everyone showed ugly expressions.

Holmes snorted: "Then don't let him in."

Astha quickly agreed: "That's precisely why I'm here, we want cooperation, not conquest. This reconstruction meeting is not for deprivation but to ensure voices including yours are heard in the Northern Territory."

He pushed the dossier over: "I'm proposing three items, resource priority sequence, trade priority list, and supervisory rights to the reconstruction meeting. You all have voting rights, reconstruction starts with you, you come first."

Bolton looked at the wax seal: "Can you protect us?"

"I am from the Royal Family."

Harlov slowly said: "We don't want it to end in blood, but we also don't want to be treated as slaves by him. We are the old families of the Northern Territory."

"I understand." Astha smiled slightly, "Your dignity, I will ensure it."

Klan closed the magic stone box and pushed it back to Astha: "We want passes, checkpoints, winter grain seals, and your say in the Imperial Capital."

Astha accepted with both hands, his tone gentle: "You will have them. I only ask for your support."

He placed his hand back on the map, his fingertip landing on that red mark in the southeast corner: "He does well there, but the Northern Territory isn't just the Southeast, you shouldn't be ignored."

Bolton said in a deep voice: "Then, please have the envoy speak for us."

Astha smiled: "It's my duty."

The wind seeped through the cracks, the flames flickered, Sai Fu went up to close the window, and the room fell silent once more.

Harlov raised his glass: "For respect."

Klan continued: "For autonomy."

Holmes toasted Astha: "For the Northern Territory, not to fall into the hands of one person."

Astha clinked glasses with them, his smile soft: "And for the future of the Northern Territory."

The wine in the cups was cleanly downed, the nobles exchanged glances and nodded, each taking a magic stone.

Before dispersing, Astha delivered five letters into their hands, containing the seating arrangement, speaking order, and timing of standing for the meeting.

The doors opened and closed one by one, the cold air rushing in and being blocked again, leaving only Astha and Sai Fu in the room.

Sai Fu said: "They won't fight for you."

"I know." Astha looked at the map, his voice lighter, "I never intended to buy lives, I just want them to nod under the lamp. The rest, leave it to my maneuvering.

As for that young lord... we'll discuss the Lord of the North only after he understands what royal power means."

Astha looked up, asking toward the wall nearby: "Has he set out?"

Sai Fu, always in the shadows of the room, stepped forward, placing a scroll of letters on the table: "The Red Tide's banner is already moving from the north east, heading toward Frost Dragon Territory. The entourage... is as many as seven hundred."

"Seven hundred?" Astha raised an eyebrow, a touch of disdain in his tone, "He sure knows how to put on a show."

Sai Fu said in a low voice: "It's not a ceremony guard, it's a real accompanying force. Three hundred Red Tide Knights, along with a whole team of civil servants, and some nobility joining him, greeted by citizens along the way, quite a scene."

Astha picked up the wine cup, unable to conceal the envy in his tone: "He enjoys being seen."

Sai Fu continued: "Like a parade-style celebration."

Chapter 603: Conspiracy (Part 2)

Astha smiled, a coldness in his smile: "What a vain man. The lifeline of the Northern Territory will not be held back by such a person."

He looked at the map on the table, his gaze sliding across the snowfield between the Frost Dragon Territory and Red Tide: "No matter how many knights he brings, it's useless. As long as the meeting starts, he'll have to sit in front of me and listen."

"You seem very confident," Sai Fu probed.

He nodded confidently, a hint of satisfaction playing at the corners of his mouth. He was not boasting idly, but fully aware of his advantage.

This year, he was no longer the penniless prince he once was.

Several Southern nobles had extended a helping hand to him, with gold coins, metals, salt, supplies, and even some knights.

These people wanted a share of the Northern Territory's mines and trade routes, and also wanted to use him to suppress the young Louis of the Calvin Clan.

They were willing to spend money and resources, as long as their families could get involved in the Northern Territory; after all, the expenses were not high, and now the Empire's situation was treacherous, making the Northern Territory a last resort.

In addition to that, the Inspector from the Imperial Capital was also on his side, and he had not hesitated to send him money.

The authority from the Imperial Capital allowed him to surpass all the lords on paper.

Astha knew that as long as he raised the imperial decree at the meeting, no one could directly oppose him.

Many of the old nobles in the Northern Territory were already dissatisfied with the Red Tide system; they preferred to rely on the emperor, and he himself had paid a great price for it, conceding many rights to these greedy old nobles.

On the side of the Barbarian Race, he also had things arranged. They wanted grain, he gave them titles; they wanted land, he promised them an unclaimed area.

This allowed him to have some control over these hidden barbarians, and now was the time to put it to use.

All these factors combined were his confidence.

He who is supported by many is powerful, and that young lord is ultimately alone.

Astha reached out and closed the window, cutting off the wind, and the room fell silent once more.

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Several Barbarian Race envoys were led into the side castle of the inner fort.

It was a secluded stone hall, dimly lit by oil lamps, the door closing heavily behind them, with a few knights standing coldly on either side, watching them.

The young prince stood in front of the fireplace, his cloak still on, his posture straight.

When he turned around, the firelight reflected on the badge on his chest, like a bright blade.

"Sit." He spoke, his words in the Empire's language, articulated clearly, almost like a command that instinctively compelled them to obey.

Wulu sat down, his gaze sweeping around. The knights' armor glinted under the lights, hands on the hilts of their swords, yet unmoving.

Astha walked to the table, unfurling the parchment map, his gaze sweeping over them with unquestionable certainty.

He spoke softly, "Time to fulfill the promise."

His words were brief, yet carried a cold hardness, causing Wulu a ripple of discomfort, though he didn't dare ignore them.

Astha slowly moved around the table corner, his tone dropping a notch: "What I offer you is not just a fantasy. Over the past two years, I've given you many benefits, and you should know in your hearts, it's time to reciprocate."

He had the knights bring a few bags to the table. A metallic clink echoed as they poured out of coarse burlap, a few silver-embossed badges and pouches filled with grains glimmering under the light.

"These are the promises of the Frost Dragon Territory," he said, "As long as this task is accomplished, your pastures, your valleys, will be recorded in the Empire's ledger, and the Frost Dragon Territory will send a large batch of grain."

Wulu watched the hand moving in the firelight and the badges on the table, his eye twitching slightly.

He understood the weight of these words, this wasn't a plea for help, but an order, not charity, but a temptation.

Astha continued: "I don't need you to die, just to exert a bit of effort. If done well, the Empire will remember your names. The next batch of grain and weapons won't have to wait until the snow melts."

Then he pulled out a wooden rod engraved with the Barbarian Race totem.

Wulu stared at the short staff, silent for a long time. It was something he had given to this prince in exchange for grain before, engraved with the Barbarian Race oath, signifying the Barbarian Race owed him a favor.

He weighed it in his heart, the Empire's promises seemed hollow, but this prince indeed helped them significantly last winter — not by painting a picture, but with actual grain and supplies.

If leveraging this prince's momentum could bring more benefits, it wouldn't be a bad thing, at least more people could survive the winter.

Astha saw that he didn't refuse, turned to the map, and said briefly: "Listen, I want you to move in twenty days, head to Red Tide's territory to cause disruption.

If conditions allow, you may sneak into Red Tide City by night, destroy the city gates, burn granaries, slay the garrison, and take whatever benefits you find; I will not take a share, it's all yours."

Wulu remained silent for a long time, his eyes showing complex emotions, but eventually stood up, walked to Astha, and bowed his head to kiss the back of Astha's hand.

"We will comply, Your Highness," he said, his voice raspy with respect.

Astha withdrew his hand, his expression unchanged: "Very well. The Empire will not forget the obedient ones."

Wulu did not return to the main camp; he knew clearly that time was too tight, and going back and forth would only miss the opportunity.

The Gale Bird delivered the message, relentlessly, deep into the snowfield.

Several hours later, the firelight revealed many faces.

The chieftains with frost-bitten beards, warriors cloaked in wolf skin, scouts carrying longbows, silently gathered around the fire, all notable figures within the tribe gathered, without greetings, only mutual gazes.

"Asta wants us to move," the people's chieftain stated simply as he spread the parchment on the ground, "Harass Red Tide, light fires, create momentum. He says this can be exchanged for grain."

Silence spread in the air.

An elder coughed lightly and said: "Last winter, he sent salt and grain, saving quite a few of us."

"A show, and we can survive the next winter," another old chieftain echoed, "No need for real fighting, a few fires, a few shouts, it's a profitable trade."

"But we've suffered when facing Red Tide head-on," someone sneered.

"We're not the Empire's dogs," said the man wearing a worn iron helmet, a veteran of many battles. "A show still requires life. They drink in castles while we charge the tower?"

"The people of Red Tide are not easy to provoke. Do you really think you can get away unscathed after setting a fire?" another middle-aged warrior said coldly.

Before the words fell silent, a mocking laugh came from the campfire side.

A young voice chimed in, without respect, without hesitation.

"Rather than following orders, why don't we just go and kill."

Everyone turned their heads, and Carl stepped out.

He was only in his early twenties, the scars on his face still fresh, his left arm bandaged with a sheepskin guard, his eyes bright like blades under the snow.

"Frost Dragon Territory," he said slowly, "Nobility are there, lords are there. They are meeting, discussing how to divide our remaining lands."

He took a step closer to the fire, his voice steady but not lowered: "We're not going to fight Red Tide, we're cutting off their roots."

A chieftain frowned: "You want to fight Louis?"

"I want to fight everyone sitting at that table," Carl said coldly, "Whether they are Calvin or August, it's all the same."

He extended a finger, pointing to a spot on the map, "Here, kill them all overnight, and no one in the Northern Territory will command others to die."

Some began to whisper.

"You want to instigate a full-scale war?" the old chieftain asked angrily.

Carl gazed at him: "They drove us for three generations, forcing us to live in the wasteland, and now they even want to assign our positions. You call this war?!"

The fire in his eyes flared up: "Endure for another generation? There might be no next generation!"

The night wind swayed the flames, reflecting the hesitation and desire on each face.

Chapter 604: Arrival

Morning light filtered through the frost flowers on the carriage window, spilling onto the thick fur carpet inside.

Louis opened his eyes, touching a layer of warmed velvet; the temperature inside the carriage was constant, and the fireplace was calm.

Outside was biting wind and snow, yet inside the carriage was as comfortable as a hall.

The specially crafted lord's carriage was tailor-made by craftsmen from Red Tide, with a fireplace embedded in the corner and copper pipes evenly directing steam heat into the seats and bedding.

Maps and tactical boards hung on the walls, while the shelves held statistical records from various Northern Territory areas.

Louis sat up from the thick blanket, donned an inner-lined fur coat, and stepped into the fur boots.

"It's been more than ten days since we set off," he whispered.

Frost Dragon Territory was not far; they would reach today.

He waved his hand to skillfully activate the Daily Intelligence System.

A pale blue light screen silently appeared in the carriage, a line of intelligence gradually unfolding:

[Daily Intelligence Update Complete]

[1: Viscount Bolton, Count Harlov, Viscount Himan, Marquis Klan, and Count Holmes have accepted support from the Sixth Prince Astha at the Frost Dragon Territory base, confirming their joining his new Northern Territory council, attempting to reconstruct the resource allocation system to weaken Red Tide's influence.]

[2: Astha uses his royal identity from the Frost Dragon Territory to entice the Barbarian Race leader Wu, proposing to exchange food, pastures, and empire titles for assistance, ordering him to launch harassment on Red Tide within twenty days and encouraging him to try to attack Red Tide City, causing destruction.]

[3: Various clans of the Barbarian Race have discussed responses, ultimately deciding not to act according to Astha's orders but to proactively strike the Frost Dragon Territory Nobility Conference venue, attempting to eliminate the lords from various Northern Territory areas and create widespread chaos.]

Louis glanced through, his eyes subtly shifting.

"The real show begins," he murmured, with a touch of disdain in his self-talk.

The first piece of intelligence was obviously Astha's testing.

He was merely clutching a handful of powerless puppets, and now by cozying up to a few nobility seeking gains, he wants to reshape the Northern Territory's structure?

Louis's lips slightly lifted, yet his eyes remained indifferent.

"New council..." he repeated quietly, as if chewing over some trivial toy.

He had long anticipated that the old Northern Lords wouldn't stay quiet, especially the ancient Old North Nobility.

But in this intelligence, they finally tore off the disguise, marking down their choice.

This is a declaration of war, as well as a pledge, since this is the case, counteraction is a matter of course.

He rose, pacing a few steps, pausing for a moment before the carriage tactical board.

The names of these nobles flashed through his mind, some once sought help from Red Tide Territory in the toughest times, some expressed their loyalty after the Duke's death, and now they all stand secretly on the opposite side.

"Ridiculous." Louis chuckled softly, his tone indifferent.

[2: Astha uses his royal identity from the Frost Dragon Territory to entice the Barbarian Race leader, proposing to exchange food, pastures, and empire titles for assistance, ordering him to launch harassment on Red Tide within twenty days and encouraging him to try to attack Red Tide City, causing destruction.]

The second piece of intelligence made Louis snort with contempt.

Astha's ability to buy off the Barbarian Race was no more than empty posturing, intoxicated by his own fantasy.

These Barbarian Race, akin to ungrateful wolves, how could they genuinely follow a prince with a hollow title?

At most, he was attracted to the relief grains and supplies.

Moreover, with Red Tide's current military control, even if they come, it wouldn't stir much trouble.

[3: Various clans of the Barbarian Race have discussed responses, ultimately deciding not to act according to Astha's orders but to proactively strike the Frost Dragon Territory Nobility Conference venue, attempting to eliminate the lords from various Northern Territory areas and create widespread chaos.]

The third piece was truly intriguing.

Despite suffering heavy casualties in the Tistu war, nearly having their spine broken, when the remaining wolves genuinely assembled on the snowfield, they could still form a blizzard enough to disrupt the Northern Territory's structure.

Their wild nature wasn't diminished, not because they forgot the pain, but because they never submitted.

Apart from the Southeast region covered by Red Tide, many corners of the Barbarian Race were never truly incorporated into the governance system.

The prince actually thought a few bags of grain and some paper promises could win the loyalty of these wolves? Absurd and laughable.

Red Tide had used nearly two years of adjusted military and political strategies, implementing systems, yet hadn't fully tamed these clans.

And he falsely tried to lure them with interests to serve him, ultimately ending up foolishly hurting himself.

These barbarians suffered countless deaths but never ceased to survey; they weren't content with mere survival.

Once the snowfield truly ignites, the first to be devoured would certainly be the foolish one who lit the fuse.

"Indeed... The wolf pack begins to open its mouth." Louis spoke softly, his tone like snow and ice falling.

Raid the Frost Dragon Territory Nobility Conference? Absurd, yet precise.

Louis didn't grow angry, instead, he laughed.

This proposal was indeed more reasonable than harassing Red Tide, and yet... more to his liking.

The plan started unfolding in his mind.

If arranged cleverly...

Louis turned, pulling aside the thick curtain, and said to the secretary, "Call Lambert over, I have things to entrust."

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At dawn, outside the Frost Dragon Territory, as the sky light began to break, the fog hadn't dissipated, and the snow-covered mountain path still appeared muddy and difficult to navigate.

The Red Tide convoy slowly drove in.

This wasn't the usual lord's delegation but a deliberately unmasked demonstration tour.

A team of thousands, like a silent steel beast, was pressing into this land of remaining imperial authority.

Leading the way was an armored carriage, like an iron fortress.

Heavy rivets and steam rails surrounded it, the emblem of Red Tide engraved head-on, a golden-edged sun-patterned flag hanging high, fluttering in the morning wind, like a winter sun rising, announcing a new era.

Chapter 605: Arrival (Part 2)

And surrounding the carriage is the true embodiment of Red Tide's force.

The Vanguard Knight Order led by Lambert, draped in silver-red cloaks, and their red-black battle armor perfectly aligned in five columns, resembling the scabbard of a blade.

More than three hundred knights from Red Tide's main force are arrayed solemnly, their hooves steady like war drums, their spears like forests, and their armor reflecting light like mercury spilling over, symbolizing the Northern Territory's sharpest military power.

Behind the carriage, the carriages of the Red Tide's Economic Office, Council Hall, and Military Affairs Office are orderly incorporated into the procession, each one a moving administrative hall.

Scribes, political envoys, and Council Hall observers each in their positions, uniformly dressed, with solemn expressions.

Also accompanying them are representatives of the nobility from the Southeast who have pledged allegiance; they are not mere followers, but witnesses and disseminators of Red Tide's power.

Eight frost stallions lead the way, their iron hooves pounding the snow like war drums, the clashing armor forming a symphony of austerity.

The streets of the Frost Dragon Territory have long been cleared.

Civilians were temporarily driven to the outskirts, so their emaciated shadows wouldn't tarnish the view and dirty the noble lords' eyes.

Above the city wall, beneath the welcoming banner, the nobility of the Northern Territory have been waiting for a long time.

Leading them stands the Sixth Prince, Astha August.

He struggles to maintain a welcoming smile at the corner of his mouth, yet his gaze involuntarily follows the approaching iron torrent, growing increasingly stagnant.

Astha had thought he was well-prepared, having long heard of Red Tide's soldiers and supplies, weapons and systems; but seeing it with his own eyes brought a surge of fear unbidden.

The Red Tide's procession is like a fortress arriving from the South, advancing with relentless yet emotionless force, crushing the old Northern Territory order into the slushy snow, inch by inch.

It makes Astha's plans for the reconstruction meeting seem like a superficial court maneuver, a decorative curtain unable to block the tempest rolling in from the South.

His throat moves slightly, his voice unable to emerge, while inside he feels cold, even afraid to clench his fist lest his palm's cold sweat betrays his composure.

Next to Astha stands Camille, the inspector envoy from the Imperial Capital, whose expression has dramatically changed.

As he sees the main carriage with golden-edged sun wheel slowly approaching, the memory of the dinner where Louis presented the meal box resurfaces in his mind.

There were no accusations, just a raised glass of wine and those unswayed eyes.

Now reunited, he looks at the young lord's procession again, feeling only terror in his heart.

Camille understands that he has lost the initiative and can only comply. Whatever Louis says, he dares not refuse.

He tries hard to maintain his posture, yet his spine bends slightly, his gaze instinctively lowering half an inch as the Red Tide's main carriage passes before him.

Further away, the old noble alliance faction of the Northern Territory, Holmes, Klan, Bolton, and others sit uneasily.

They once symbolized the discourse power of the Northern Territory, preparing to unite with the prince to suppress Red Tide.

But at this moment, watching the advancing procession, their spirits are suddenly hollowed out.

Some clutch their staffs, faces pale, some curse under their breath, grinding their teeth.

Before the agenda has even begun, they have lost their position, with varying thoughts, even reconsidering their stance internally.

In contrast, the nobility pledging allegiance from the Southeast at the end of the procession show overflowing pride.

"Lord Louis seems to be coming to take over the territory, allowing us to share in the glory." A young baron gives a disdainful glance at the mottled walls of Frost Dragon Territory, "This shabby place isn't even as good as my domain."

A lady baroness wrinkles her nose, covering it lightly with a handkerchief, "The air smells damp, the gate's paint chipping off, like a countryside village that has never seen a carriage."

Her gaze follows the Red Tide's main carriage, "This is what nobility should look like."

The pledging nobility hold their heads high, looking at the Frost Dragon nobility on both sides with undisguised contempt and disdain.

"What do these people have left besides their bloodline?" A viscount from the Southeast sneers quietly, "Compared to them, we are the ones truly standing in the future."

The cities here are completely crushed by Red Tide City.

At this moment, all eyes are focused on the main carriage roaring past like a castle.

Louis doesn't need to speak; his mere appearance has trampled all opponents underfoot.

The Frost Dragon main stage slips from the Sixth Prince's grasp to the Red Tide procession led by the young lord.

Louis's carriage comes to a steady stop before the nobility, and all conversation halts, eyes fixed on that carriage.

In the silence, the armored door slowly opens, a hand wearing a silver-patterned leather glove holding the edge, a young man steps out calmly from inside.

He is draped in a long red cloak, his figure upright like a spear, without saying a word, yet his presence already dominates everyone present.

This is the true master of the Northern Territory, most of the nobility thought.

Astha turns his head, seeing the amazement, hesitation, indignation, and speechlessness on the nobility's faces.

A burning humiliation arises within him, finally realizing he can no longer remain silent.

No, he can't let him continue to lead.

Thus, Astha suppresses his emotions, using his signature gentle smile, stepping forward and loudly saying: "Welcome, Lord of the Red Tide, the glory of the Northern Territory, Count Louis Calvin."

All eyes focus on the two individuals, beginning to assess the situation.

Astha continues smiling, gesturing to all the nobility: "This is the most important meeting of the Northern Territory, and the moment for me, the Ironblood Empire's Sixth Prince, Royal Reconstruction Envoy, to discuss the future with all of you. Today, Frost Dragon Territory hosts you in the name of the royalty, wishing we can work together to build a new order in the Northern Territory."

He intentionally emphasizes the word "royalty," asserting his identity.

As long as this identity remains, he hasn't lost.

Louis smiles faintly, maintaining elegance as he performs a standard yet noble aristocratic gesture.

His tone is gentle and fitting: "Being summoned by Your Highness is the fortune of the Northern Territory. Red Tide is willing to contribute our humble efforts, to work with all of you in planning grand schemes and crafting a new map for the Northern Territory."

Louis's words are sincere, his choice of words polite, his tone soft, each word perfectly embodying the respect and humility expected among nobility.

To an outsider, this may seem like standard formal pleasantries, even evoking a sense of Louis's deference to the prince.

But to Astha, the words weigh heavily on his heart.

The tone was too natural, too composed, as if he was the host of the meeting, not a summoned participant.

More irksome was the phrase "humble efforts," subtly reminding everyone that he was not obeying orders but attending out of cooperation and goodwill.

Each sentence was flawless, each word impeccable, yet Astha felt like needles pricking him uncomfortably.

He maintains his smile but feels tightness in his throat, needing to cough lightly to hide his discomfort.

"Though the army won't enter the city, they can station outside Frost Dragon Territory." Astha adds with a smile, trying to sound natural as if it's just a routine meeting arrangement.

"Of course." Louis nods lightly, seeming to have anticipated, "Lambert."

"Yes, my lord." Knight Lambert bows to receive orders, leading the knight order quietly to turn their horses around, circling to the south side of Frost Dragon Territory.

Iron armor grinds, hooves move in unison, over three hundred knights in the morning light, like a retreating iron dragon into the snow-laden woods, silently yet pressing heavily on everyone's hearts.

"This knight order might be the most elite in the Northern Territory..." A noble observes closely with a low voice of exclamation.

"Even each vanguard is an extraordinary knight..." Another noble's face turns pale, unable to believe what he sees.

Silence prevails, conveying not fear of Red Tide, but profound awe for Louis himself.

Under the city gate, no one dares whisper.

In the air, only the distant echoes of hoofbeats and the rustling sound of the Red Tide banner remains.

Chapter 606: Underlying Currents Surging

North of the Frost Dragon Territory, deep within the valley, the snow was heavy, and the white forest shaded the sky.

In this forsaken land of lingering snow overlooked by the Northern Territory, an endangered power was quietly awakening, preparing for its final counterstrike.

Deep in the cave, dimly lit by animal fat torches, the firelight stretched the shadows of dozens of figures.

They wore beast skins and wielded iron blades. Some wore feathered bone helmets, some had ancient tattoos on their faces, and some stood barefoot on the ice, barely clothed, as if the cold wind had never driven them away.

These were the remaining leaders and chiefs of the Barbarian Race.

To be precise, this was all that the Snowfield could muster.

Wulu stood silently beside the fire, watching the crowd, his shadow cast by the firelight as a dark outline.

His title was Special Envoy, temporarily elected by the various clans, sent to the Prince to convey the opinion of the Barbarian Race.

Outside the ice cave, branches such as Black Rock, Snow Wolf, and Lament had gathered nearly six hundred Blood Boiling Warriors.

They excelled in charges and close combat, trained from a young age, battle-proven raiders, the elite of the Barbarian Race, carrying the memories of blood.

These people were what remained of the Barbarian Race's strength.

They were gathered for one purpose only.

They would not engage in a head-on clash with the Northern Territory's Knight Order; such a confrontation was a gamble of lives for an uncertain outcome.

What they planned was a decapitation strike, to overturn the long table at the moment of the meeting day, allowing those nobles and decision-makers who raise their glasses and laugh to taste fear amidst the firelight and chaos.

If they succeeded, the Northern Territory would plunge into disorder, and they could seize supplies, land, and a slim chance for the future amidst the chaos.

If they failed, it would mean total destruction, and the name of the Barbarian Race might disappear from the memory of this land.

By the fire, the eyes of the people were filled with both fear and determination.

The young warriors gripped their hand axes tightly, and the elders whispered the names of their ancestors.

Everyone knew this was not a simple act of revenge but a final gamble.

This was the Snowfield's last strike.

A gamble for survival, a raid that might change fate.

Wulu was actually a bit flustered and at a loss; his original plan was just to convey Astha's orders, letting each clan decide their course of action.

According to his initial plan, these clan leaders might at most send people to harass the borders of the Red Tide a few times, to give the Sixth Prince some face, in exchange for a few bags of grain.

But the situation had completely slipped out of his control.

When he learned that everyone intended to use the opportunity of the meeting to attack the Frost Dragon Territory and wipe out all the nobility, he almost thought he had heard wrong.

"You're crazy," Wulu said in a low voice, sweat at his temples crystallizing in the cold air, "that's the Frost Dragon Territory, not some minor noble's land! The Empire's knights are all there guarding it! To act would mean genocide!"

A short silence fell by the fire, and some of the older clan leaders began to hesitate.

"Perhaps he's right," an elder murmured, "if we can get some grain, that's enough for the clan to make it through the winter."

Wulu thought that reason would finally surpass the momentary madness, and he prepared to analyze and convey Astha's intentions gradually, letting the tribesmen weigh their own choices.

Then the young Barbarian leader, who now commanded the most warriors, stood up suddenly, his toes scraping a slight sound on the ice surface.

His eyes showed a growing fanaticism, his voice suddenly rising: "We've come this far, and should we retreat now? Where else can we retreat to?"

If we retreat, they will laugh at us, crush our doorsteps, burn our hearths, and send our children begging. That's not living; that's merely surviving, and waiting is a dead end."

This time, it's not for anyone's command, not for a sack of flour, but for the future of the young, for the bones of our ancestors!

Overturn their meeting table, let those in power taste fear, that is our correct choice!"

He spoke forcefully, as if staking the repressions of decades.

Once his words fell, the cave was first met with brief silence, then wave after wave of whispers and responses rolled in like an avalanche.

The young leaders stood almost instinctively, fists clenched, eyes filled with the excitement of blood.

They had seen the Empire's banners flying, had returned drenched in blood at midnight; Carl's words ignited their anger and desire.

The elder generation was silent for much longer.

Finally, a white-haired elder said softly, "We can't act blindly, but if we don't resist, what else can we do?"

Another clan leader's voice trembled, "All we want is to live."

Wulu, caught in between, let his hands fall powerlessly; he realized he could no longer stop this action.

If mere harassment could exchange for a few bags of grain and some grazing rights, that would be enough for many to spend their remaining years peacefully." Wulu's rationality made its last resistance.

But Carl stood his ground, walking to the fire, bending down to pick up a torch, holding it like a flag in his hand.

The firelight danced on his young face, casting a long shadow.

"You are all right, perhaps living is important. But to live while bowing daily, what meaning does that have?

We are not the Empire's vassals; we want them to remember that the Snowfield can decide its own fate too."

His voice carried no resentment, only a determination that turned despair into resolve.

The shouts of the young grew ever louder, the cave like a vast field swept by the wind, voices advancing layer by layer, ultimately overwhelming hesitation.

Several senior clan leaders exchanged glances, after a prolonged silence, they slowly nodded.

It wasn't a proactive fervor, but felt more like helplessness.

Chapter 607: Surging Undercurrents (Part 2)

Someone quietly whispered spells to protect the ancestors, while another person patted the shoulder of a young man beside him with rough hands, as if entrusting his blessings and fears together.

Wulu closed his eyes, and the cold within him deepened.

He felt the blood-red tide rising inside the cave and heard the ringing steps of youth echo.

His expression was complex as the clan leaders all tacitly agreed, eventually compromising by revealing the information he knew one by one.

Wulu pointed at the crude map spread on the ground, his voice hoarse and cautious: "The Red Tide elite guards the South.

The east gate is the camp of the old nobility's group, the only entrance to the main hall from the north door's perimeter is guarded only by the Fourth Prince's troops, we have insiders there who can open two secret passages."

He paused and added, "And the day after tomorrow, there will be a Red Tide fireworks celebration, which is essentially a spectacle of magic explosive bullets. The grand display will cover any movements. If we intend to act, that will be the only chance."

After hearing all this, the clan leaders began to discuss quietly, and shadows swayed and intertwined beside the fire.

"Then let's do it," Carl summarized, "Seize the moment when the nobility gathers in the main hall. First step, open the north door secret passage when the fireworks rise.

Second step, Blood Boiling Warriors break into the main hall, using petroleum to seal off the four doors. Third step, I personally lead the assault squad straight to the main stage, targeting Astha and Louis, the two most powerful figures in the Northern Territory; killing just one would be worth it."

The plan was crude yet deadly enough.

Everyone understood that even if they couldn't destroy all the nobility, just killing the strongest few would throw the Northern Territory into chaos.

At that point, they could scatter, plunder resources, and rebuild their tribe.

As everyone departed, Wulu sat alone on the icy cliff, gazing at the lights of the Frost Dragon Territory in the distance.

Snow and wind beat against his shoulders, ice particles grazing his cheeks like sharp needles.

He looked up at that faint light, unsure if it was the last chance or the prelude to true extinction.

.....

This year, Camille spent his time too comfortably.

To him, the Northern Territory's cold winds were just background noise outside the banquet hall.

The Fourth Prince Astha welcomed him as an honored guest every day with feasts, balls, delicacies, and beauties, making him almost forget he was sent as an Inspector Envoy.

Here people called him the Imperial Capital's eyes, and he was happy to pretend he still held the authority of the Imperial Capital's Inspection Bureau.

He drank the Northern Territory's wine, listened to the nobles' false laughter, slowly letting even those terrifying memories fade.

Yet fate loves playing jokes; when the Red Tide Knight Order's iron hooves stepped into the Frost Dragon Territory, Camille's hand started to tremble again.

At today's banquet, Louis was polite to him.

His smile restrained, etiquette perfect, without any hint of hostility, yet this made him more fearful.

Because he didn't know what Louis wanted him to do.

He knew Astha was no match for Louis.

This young prince spoke of rebuilding and ideals, but to him, it was just a court jest.

The focus of the Frost Dragon Territory had shifted from the moment that Red Tide Iron Cavalry entered the city.

And with just one word, Louis could inform the Imperial Capital that he was a spy for the Jade Federation.

After the banquet ended, Camille drank excessively, needing alcohol to chase away that maddening unease.

He staggered back to the official residence.

The candlelight weak, the room was so silent even his heartbeat was audible; a wave of cold air hit him.

On the bed lay a letter neatly placed, the envelope white, the seal wax bearing the Red Tide's crest.

The golden sun pattern slightly gleamed in the candlelight, seeming to mock him.

Camille's hand paused in mid-air, his breathing became quick.

His throat felt as if choked, unable to make a sound.

He suddenly turned around, his glance sweeping across every corner of the room, windows shut tight, the wall corners shadowless, not even the air out of the ordinary.

He rushed out and asked the guards: "Did anyone come in just now?"

The guard looked puzzled: "No, sir. No one approached."

Camille stood silent for a few seconds, then slowly returned to the room.

He stared at that letter, pupils quivering, fingers trembling, hesitant for a long time, finally reaching out a hand.

.....

The night banquet dispersed, the main hall of the Frost Dragon Territory still held remnants of warmth and the scent of wine.

Astha August sat at the head position, the wine cup in his hand was empty, yet he was reluctant to put it down.

Outside, the sound of snow rustled, the lights extinguishing one by one, leaving him alone.

He recalled the scenes from earlier; inside the banquet hall, the crystal chandeliers cast flickering glows, silk drapes exuded the scent of warm wine and spices.

The Northern Lords, old families, envoys from the Imperial Capital, wearing luxurious outer robes, clustered around the young Count.

Laughter and the crisp sound of silver cups clashing continued, servants offering aged spirits, maidens' skirts shimmering gold in the candlelight.

The whole party lively like an Imperial Capital gathering, only the center wasn't on him here.

Astha sat at the main seat, watching those people turn to Louis, with compliments, pleasantries, and humbled smiles.

At that moment, he felt like he was just scenery, a redundant shadow in the grand feast.

"That's my stage..." he murmured softly, his tone tinged with a hint of bitterness.

Louis Calvin's name was now like a nail pinned to his heart.

That guy needed not say much, just by standing there, everyone involuntarily looked at him.

Astha tightened his grip on the wine cup, his lips trembling.

If this reconstruction meeting continued being led by the other, the order in the Northern Territory would completely belong to Red Tide, not him, the so-called Royal Envoy; at that time, he'd have no chance of overturning the situation.

Repressed anxiety churned in his chest; if he failed, he'd be nothing.

Astha suddenly stood up, donned his coat, commanding to bring Wulu to meet him.

Wulu arrived after quite a while, carrying the chill upon him.

Astha looked at him, anxiously saying: "The attack on the Red Tide Territory, how is the preparation going?"

Wulu stood in place, his expression as calm as ever: "Everything has been arranged according to Your Highness's orders. The troops are already back in hiding, awaiting the command."

Astha tapped his fingers lightly on the tabletop: "Did they confirm the target?"

"The defenses of Red Tide Territory are slack; we will choose the right moment to attack without giving them a chance to react." Wulu's voice was dry yet affirming, his eyes unblinkingly steady.

Astha stared at him for a few seconds, a flicker of unease in his gaze.

His lips twitched slightly, as if suppressing something.

After a moment, he raised a hand calmly saying: "Dismissed, Wulu."

Wulu bowed slightly, turned, and left.

The door quietly closed behind, leaving Astha alone inside.

The air seemed to freeze, his smile slowly vanished, leaving only a repressed, near-twisted emotion rolling in his eyes.

He was not always like this.

Since the Emperor's disappearance, Astha's world felt collapsed.

He suffered insomnia nightly, alarmed and uneasy, always feeling as though an invisible hand lurked in the dark choking his throat.

He feared waking one day, only to find himself forgotten, abandoned, or killed.

To survive, and to prove he was still worthy of the title "Prince," he started frantic recruiting.

Recruiting Camille, buying off old nobility, even trading with the Barbarian Race...

For this, he paid too much: wealth, reputation, power.

He even ceded to the Southern Nobles the trade rights and mining rights they coveted, just to gain resources and support.

Just to make himself stronger, not a mere ant easily pinched to death.

But one person always blocked his way—Louis Calvin.

That guy was his inner demon.

"Very well." Astha whispered, his voice mixed with a suppressed anxiety, "Very well... this time, must succeed, or else..."

As he spoke, a repeated dry laugh escaped, sharp and piercing, as if to dispel the cold within.

But the laughter soon broke off, as he abruptly raised his hand to cover his eyes, fingers slightly trembling.

Breathing growing rapid, he muttered low: "If I fail... I'll take everyone down with me."

At this moment, his expression was nearly insane.

Chapter 608: Crimson Fireworks (Part 1)

On the eve of the meeting, the Frost Dragon Territory was brightly illuminated, the snow reflecting the candlelight and flames, warm as day.

Astha's manor was decorated lavishly, with gold thread tapestries hanging on the walls and ruby chandeliers casting a cold light.

The Northern Lords stood in the hall, holding goblets, praising each other's fiefs and bloodlines, the air filled with the scent of spices and false laughter.

All this was to welcome Louis's Red Tide fireworks.

At the banquet the day before yesterday, Louis casually suggested, "The fireworks from the Red Tide are a new craft. Perhaps they could add some color to the Northern nights; you might see them at the banquet."

These Northern Lords, except for the few from the Southeast's Red Tide faction, had never seen the so-called "fireworks."

As idle talk, the suggestion had everyone perked up because who wouldn't want to try something new?

"Fireworks? What's that?"

"I heard they're a wonder from the Red Tide Territory, capable of making the night sky burn!"

Thus, this Red Tide fireworks celebration became the focus of tonight.

"Boom!"

When the first firework bloomed in the night sky, all the nobles held their breath.

The purple and gold intertwined flames bloomed like flowers in the firmament, illuminating the entire Frost Dragon Territory.

The explosions echoed in the valley, with the nobles' exclamations rising and falling.

"Oh my... is that fire? How can it bloom like flowers?"

"This color... gold, purple, and blue! How is it done?"

"Is this the technology of the Red Tide? If I could get some for my own banquet, how grand it would be!"

Exclamations rose and fell.

Every time a firework went up, it drew a burst of admiration and applause.

The music at the banquet grew more fervent.

Servants wove through the crowd with silver trays, the scent of spiced wine wafting, and the golden candlelight flickering in every crystal glass.

The nobles laughed loudly, drank indulgently, as if no storm would come tomorrow.

Except for two people.

Astha Augustus sat in the main seat, wearing a standard smile, but his knuckles had dug into his palm.

In the reflection of the lights, he saw faces full of flattery.

He watched those nobles, one by one, surround Louis, smiling sycophantically in a flattering frenzy.

"Lord Louis, the North should truly thank you!"

"Your fief is truly a miracle of the age."

These words should have been his.

He was the Sixth Prince, the bloodline of the Empire, the leader of this reconstruction meeting.

But now, no one looked at him.

Louis just sat there, smiling, nodding, raising his glass, saying little.

But the space around him seemed to be drawn by an invisible gravity, attracting all the light and attention irresistibly towards him.

Astha's smile began to stiffen, with only one thought swirling in his mind: "It's okay. Once tomorrow's meeting concludes, everything will return to me."

He kept reassuring himself deep down, after tomorrow's meeting, the Red Tide would be stripped of power, and Louis would fall from his high position.

Then everyone would look at him again.

He needed victory, needed Louis to lose power, so he could prove that he was not the Empire's joke.

Elsewhere, Wulu stood among the crowd, cloaked, with his head low.

Attending the banquet as Astha's advisor, he stood in a corner, bearing a gentle smile he could no longer suppress the agitation churning within his chest.

At this moment, beneath the dark path of the North Gate, those barbarian warriors were fully prepared.

Tonight, they would break in and massacre the Frost Dragon Territory's banquet hall.

If successful, the barbarians could earn the Empire's recognition and winter provisions; if they failed, it would mean annihilation.

Gripping his wine glass, his fingers trembled.

He quietly turned his head to look out the window, where fireworks bloomed one after another, yet in his eyes, he saw only the light of death beneath the fireworks.

What unsettled him more was that his wife and daughter, last night, he had secretly sent out of the city. It was his last selfish intention.

"If I succeed, I'll bring them back. If I fail... let them never return." He murmured the words to himself over and over.

Just as he was lost in thought, a light breeze brushed past his ear, and a young voice whispered:

"Just say Sai Fu asked you to do it. Lord Louis will ensure your wife and daughter's safety."

Wulu's blood froze instantly, and he turned his head suddenly.

The banquet hall remained lively, with glasses clinking, servants serving food with bowed heads, the nobles laughing uproariously, with none looking at him.

Everything appeared normal, bright, bustling, innocent.

Yet the voice was firmly etched in his mind.

His hand trembled, breathing uneven; that short sentence had such a sheer volume of information, it nearly overwhelmed him.

The barbarian's plan... exposed?

Does Louis know?

Even... are his wife and daughter in that person's grip?

"How could it be... how could it..." he mumbled, with sweat beads trickling down his cheeks.

He wanted to flee, but he couldn't even lift his feet.

At that moment, he finally understood—

Whether it was the Barbarians, the Sixth Prince, or himself, they were all drawn into the same vortex.

This vortex was woven by the hand of that Red Tide Lord.

He looked up to see Louis gently raise his glass, a faint smile on his lips.

The smile held no malice, yet was colder than the frigid wind.

Flames soared into the sky, Wulu's eardrums nearly shattered, the sound roared like thunder within his mind.

The air trembled, and instinctively he could only raise his hand to cover his ears.

At that moment, his vision blurred, heart scattered, only a roar filling the world, as though the entire night sky had flipped.

Chapter 609: Blood-Red Fireworks (Part 1)_2

"— — Boom!"

The deafening sound of explosions continually echoed over the Frost Dragon Territory, swallowing all the laughter within the manor.

The nobles had to lean closer to speak, whispers only audible near the ear, blending laughter, clinking glasses, and music into a singular cacophony.

The harp played by the musicians faltered intermittently, while servants traversed with trays, the crisp collision of silver cups resonating amidst the firelight.

One firework after another blossomed in the sky, illuminating each upward-looking face.

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As the third round of fireworks ascended, the north gate of the Frost Dragon Territory quietly opened.

Snow and wind seeped through the crack, carrying an icy chill like death.

In the shadows, over a hundred warriors of the Barbarian Race emerged slowly.

Cloaked in wolf skins, their bodies adorned with metal shards and bone ornaments, iron axes glinting in the snowlight.

Just before they appeared, a squad of soldiers clad in the frost dragon knight armor emerged before the dark passage, secretly arranged by Wulu, themselves of Barbarian descent.

Their eyes flickered, remaining silent, only using slightly trembling fingers to point forward, indicating the agreed route for the Barbarians.

One insider murmured, "Leftwards, then up another corner... pass underneath the garden's water channel."

Another couldn't help but swallow, "Remember, you have only ten minutes."

Carl nodded, sneering coldly, "Enough."

The insider squad exchanged glances filled with both fear and greed, before swiftly retreating into the shadows.

After a brief hesitation, the Barbarian assault team followed the indicated direction through the frozen stone gate, entering the interior corridors of the Frost Dragon Territory.

Each eye burned with the same firelight, a mix of hatred, excitement, and a death wish.

This was the last elite of the Barbarian Race, the Blood Boiling Warriors.

Their blood could burn in the extreme freeze, their fury enough to transform into a snowfield storm.

The two guards at the north gate barely raised their heads before their throats were slit by sharp blades.

As blood splattered, several Blood Boiling Warriors swiftly lunged at the second row of guards, the brief metal clash drowned by fireworks in the night wind.

One knight barely had time to draw his sword before a war axe smashed his helmet, causing brain matter to splatter.

Another soldier barely managed half a warning cry before being cleaved by a diagonal axe, his body and armor impacting with a muffled thud. Even screams were utterly masked by the explosive fireworks above.

Blood blossomed into two dark red flowers on the snow, breath swallowed by the cold wind.

Bodies swiftly dragged into shadows, footfalls unperturbed.

Carl led the way upfront.

Young, his not fully grown beard was stiffened by the cold wind, yet his eyes shone like a beast's, a smile at the corner of his mouth.

"Tonight," he spoke, half as a vow to himself and half to his clan, "we'll make the Empire remember our name."

The warriors pounded their chests with fists, creating a deep rhythmic sound.

The passage was narrow, damp cold moisture clinging to the stone walls, the air mixed with the scent of blood and iron.

Firelight flickered across their faces, shadows stretching sinisterly.

The group advanced, iron boots thumping dully against the rock floor.

With each step, it seemed you could hear the heart crashing against the chest.

The stone door ahead was pushed open, a colder wind hit their faces.

They had arrived, at the outer underground cellar of the Frost Dragon Territory manor.

Through the crevices, they saw light shining down from above.

There was music, fragrance, fireworks bursting in the sky.

"All die..." Carl grinned, voice deep like a growl.

The warriors behind him bowed heads, beginning to pray for the incoming deaths.

"The snow of the Northern Territory will remember us." Finished speaking, he tightly gripped his war axe, abruptly pushing the stone door open.

Cold wind poured in, flames followed charging into the night sky.

The first dozen warriors charging out were like beasts crawling from hell.

The scent of blood burning on them, rushing into the garden, cleaving the first knight approaching head-on.

The sound of steel collision muffled beneath the fireworks' roar, unnoticed.

Firelight danced on their armor, axe blades flickering with eerie red light.

Distant musicians continued playing, laughter uninterrupted,

but not far outside the manor, blood had already spilled on the snow, becoming new fireworks.

Carl raised his war axe, eyes locked towards the manor interior.

His laughter echoed in the night wind, maniacally shouting, "Charge into the main hall! Let them see the Barbarian's flame!"

Horn sounds arose, low and wild.

The remaining hundreds of Barbarian warriors surged from the darkness like a flood, heading towards the manor.

Their roars melded with the exploding fireworks sound.

Firelight from the sky reflected the blood on the ground.

Tonight at the Frost Dragon Territory, amidst fireworks and slaughter, both burned.

As the first alarm bell rang, Astha was still conversing with the nobility, assuming it a servant's mistake or false report from patrolling guards.

But then the wind swept in from outside the manor, reeking of blood and tar, just as he was about to frown, the second bell sounded promptly, a third abruptly blared, its sound as urgent as war drums.

Before reacting, he heard chaotic hoofbeats and cries of battle from afar, mixed with the blast of burning grease.

Silhouettes and flags running appeared faintly at the street's end, the Barbarian Race advancing in arson towards the manor, flames creeping along rooftops, lighting up half the night sky.

Astha's smile became utterly stiff.

"It's... an attack! Barbarian Race! The Barbarian Race has invaded!"

A guard burst through the door, bloodied and rushing into the hall.

The firelight outside the windows spread across the streets, cries of battle approaching, the air thick with scorch, smoke, and iron rust.

Chapter 610: Blood-Red Fireworks (Part 1)

In the distance, the sound of rooftiles crashing filled the air as flames lit up the street corner—barbarians were spreading oil and setting fires to cause chaos.

Astha's face was deathly pale, and he collapsed into the main seat.

The wine in his cup spilled onto his boots, resembling a pool of blood.

The nobles rose in panic, chairs overturned, silver plates clattered to the ground, the sound of impacts intertwining with screams forming a chaotic symphony.

Some shouted to escape, some rushed to the door but were blocked by the guards' spears.

"Calm down!" Sai Fu shouted, drawing his sword, as fighting energy gleamed golden on his body.

The light drew an arc in the hall, forcibly dampening the rampant panic.

At this moment, the estate's defenses were sparse, each noble only bringing one personal guard, totaling just over thirty—in truth, the real defense was Astha's hundred knights.

They hastily gathered in the outer court, their fighting energy shimmering in the night, with gold, silver, and occasionally a trace of pale blue, interwoven like burning stars.

The fireworks continued to explode overhead, masking the screams and the clash of steel on the ground.

Meanwhile, the barbarians' roars were closing in from the north garden.

A deep and tearing beast roar, accompanied by deafening shockwaves.

Leading the charge was Carl's assault team.

Every barbarian warrior's fighting energy was a dark blue, like a frozen cold night, yet in their rage, it transformed into blazing torrents.

They shattered the stone gate of the garden and charged into the estate's outer corridor.

Two knights from Frost Dragon Territory faced them head-on, barely raising their swords before being engulfed by the blue light, an axe blade tearing through the air with a heavy thud, and two heads flew off.

At that moment, the fireworks in the sky bloomed, sparks raining down like golden rain, intermingling with the mingled light of blood and flames.

"Stop them!" Sai Fu roared, swinging his sword to meet the enemy.

Several gold-glowing Imperial Knights leapt forward, their fighting energy clashing fiercely.

Gold and blue lights interlaced, the shockwaves flipping tables and chairs, splinters and blood sprayed simultaneously.

The explosions overhead repeatedly drowned out the screams, as if contrasting two grand feasts—one in the heavens, one on earth.

Above was the nobles' celebration, below was the revelry of death.

After a brief skirmish, the barbarians advanced again.

The deep blue flow like a surging tide, turning everything it passed into a sea of blood.

Even if there were screams, they were all drowned out by the blasts of fireworks, becoming silent routs.

Camille's face turned livid as the wine cup slipped from his hand, the liquid splattering on the ground, spreading like bloodstains.

He hid in a corner, looking around, only seeing nobles fleeing, and servants lying in pools of blood...

Astha sat stunned in the main seat, his lips colorless, countless questions flashing chaotically through his mind:

Why? How did the barbarians appear here? How did they get in? Who leaked the city gate?

His heartbeat was chaotic like drums, thoughts scattered into a blank void.

"This... impossible... this is my estate... my Northern Territory..." he murmured in disbelief, his eyes filled with fear and incredulity.

But the continuous shouts reminded him, he had awakened from a dream.

Carl was already in a killing frenzy, his axe blade soaked in blood and fire, his laughter echoing among the flames and screams.

With each slash, sparks and blood mist accompanied it, like dancing in a burning hell.

The fireworks illuminated his blood-covered face from above.

Turning around, he casually split a fleeing knight in two with an axe, hot blood splashing on his face, but instead, he showed an almost intoxicated expression.

Suddenly, his gaze was drawn to a figure at the end of the crowd.

The person stood quietly, face calm, the surrounding chaos seemingly irrelevant to him.

Black hair shimmered cold under the firelight, his figure tall and composed.

Carl squinted, a chill creeping up his spine to his head. He recognized him immediately; it was the man Wulu had shown him a portrait of.

He immediately identified Louis, from the image Wulu had shown him.

"That guy! It's him! The Lord of Red Tide!" Carl roared, his voice thunderous, piercing through the chaos.

He motioned with a wave, leading four transcendent fighting energy-barbarian warriors toward Louis.

The deep blue fighting energy on those four almost materialized, the stone slabs beneath their feet shattered, their charging shockwave caught fire, cascading down the corridor toward him.