

CASTLE OF BLACK IRON

Chapter 7: Commercial Area and Grocery Store



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Naturally, since Blackhot City was founded by the Coal, Steel, and Iron Federation (CSIF), Blackhot City had a rich commercial atmosphere.

Its commercial areas were naturally located in the best place downtown; it was far away from the production area and in the upper eastern region. The commercial area in Blackhot City was very prosperous. Bulk commodities exchanges were established in the prosperous sections of the commercial region, and any trade volume there would make commoners scared. Rich coal, iron, and steel in Blackhot City made it a prosperous city. There would always be trains that carried the specialties outside of Blackhot City around the clock.

The small grocery store that Zhang Tie worked for was also located in the prosperous commercial area of Blackhot City; however, it was much more remote and shabby compared to the magnificent facades and barracks of the large-scale business groups, free trade bodies, and exchanges.

As the railway station was less than three hundred meters away from the store, its guests were from all walks of life. The store was close to a flea market that was founded spontaneously by local residents and foreign pioneers. It was very noisy every day. From the way they dressed, most people here were in the lower-middle class. People struggled to survive here. The people here hoped to become the very vendor in folk fairy tales who found a special object and became rich of it. Those fairy tales also

encouraged groups of uninformed pioneers who traveled from afar to enter the unknown lands west and north of Blackhot City with their chests raised high. Naturally, if one had enough luck and foresight, they could also buy good items here.

When Zhang Tie arrived at the grocery store, Donder, the fat owner, was huddled up on a lounge chair outside the store. He was enjoying the sunset afterglow and peered at the passersby with half-closed eyes. Unless a plump or beautiful woman passed by the grocery store, he wouldn't even slightly move his head. In the event that one passes by, he would always watch them walk off for a long distance.

As usual, Zhang Tie's first task was to clean the store. Next, he had to check and clean the counter. Finally, he would adeptly calculate on an abacus. After a year of practice at the grocery store, Zhang Tie's largest achievement was that he now knew how to use the weird mathematical tool known as the abacus. This was a really practical skill that he had never learned at school. Zhang Tie always thought that it would be helpful for his development later on in life, as his father had always planned for him to be the bookkeeper at the Blackhot Coal Exchange. Naturally, he didn't need to think about it until he finished his military services. For commoners, it was satisfactory to find a job in the downtown area after serving the army, no matter the job.

The moment he finished bookkeeping, a guest entered. Before the fat Donder sat up, Zhang Tie had already closed his accounting book and started to greet the guest.

"Excuse me, sir. What can I do for you?" asked Zhang Tie. The guest was a 40-odd year man who wore the uniform of porters from the Blackhot Railway Station and smelt of coal ash. Zhang Tie guessed that he was a passerby, as it was the closing time in downtown.

"I'd like to see some white crystals!" said the porter while skimming through the cases containing crystals on the counter. Most of them were common Class-I crystals while there were also some Class-II crystals. White crystals accounted for the highest percentage among all crystals. Some white crystals were natural, while others were artificially created. Compared to the crystals with the same size and quality, double-headed crystals were usually more expensive than single-headed crystals, and natural crystals were much more expensive than artificial crystals, although the latter looked more beautiful. Nevertheless, given the effect, artificial crystals were still poorer than natural ones. It was said that crystals were just used for decoration before the Catastrophe. During that time, people had not known that crystals could be used to help humans cultivate. The usage of crystals had become a common sense that even street vendors knew about. Crystals in this age were a standard strategic material which supported the lives of many.

"Is this all that you have?" the forty-odd year man seemed a little bit disappointed. It seemed that he was not satisfied with these common commodities. Zhang Tie was slightly amazed by his expression since even common Class-I crystals were not cheap for commoners.

"We have something better, but they are more expensive. Do you want to have a look?"

With a smile on his face, the man casually patted his waist pack. Zhang Tie knew what the man meant. He put on a pair of white gloves and took out a more delicate case from a container drawer behind him. Zhang Tie placed it on the counter carefully and opened the case in front of the man. The case contained four white crystals, two of them being double-headed crystals while the rest were single-headed crystals. They were crystal clear with little impurity. However, what was most attractive about the crystal was the hazy and pyramid-like fine sand in each crystal. The two larger two-headed crystals

contained the better pyramids. When observed carefully, each side of the pyramid shined mysteriously. It was the divine workmanship between the heaven, the earth, and the natural combination of the energy in the universe. Not only could white pyramid crystals help the user enter meditation quickly, but it also enabled its user to absorb the energy from the universe faster and arouse their physical potential and vitality.

As expected, much like Zhang Tie when he first saw them, the forty-odd year man didn't want to avert his gaze when he saw the pyramid-based crystal. Class-III crystals were the highest-end commodity in the store; each crystal's market price was more than two gold coins. In Blackhot City, a single gold coin could sustain a family of three for two months.

The price of each crystal was marked beneath it. When the man saw the price of the crystal, he became hesitant and pointed at the single-headed crystal. "Is it possible... for the price to be lowered?"

"218 silver coins is the lowest price we can afford. Our commodities are all marked honestly. Pardon, sir, are you buying this as a present?"

"En? my son will be sixteen next year, and I want to give him a surprise. He's a genius!" saying this, the forty-odd year man smiled with warmth and pride on his face which reminded Zhang Tie of his own father.

"Well, 215 silver coins, and I will gift you a packing case and 100g of crystal sand. This is the lowest price we can provide..." explained Zhang Tie honestly. As the 40-odd year porter might have been introduced by a friend, he might have understood the situation and the reputation of this general store and knew that this was a very fair price in Blackhot City. Given the bonuses, he agreed instantly.

The man carefully took out his purse from his clothes and paid with two gold coins and fifteen silver coins before he left with the commodities and presents

that were well packed by Zhang Tie. A business worth more than two gold coins was big even for the store.

The store's luck might have been used up because besides two loiterers, there was no more business an hour after the man had left.

Zhang Tie sat behind the counter with his hands supporting his jaw as he watched the street outside and thought about the events that transpired today.

The sun had finally set, and darkness had arrived. The dead fish on the lounge chair moved and twisted as he stood up reluctantly and moved his chair back into the store.

"What's happened? Did you get beaten up today?"

The boss smiled pleasantly when he saw the wounds on Zhang Tie's face.

"It's nothing, I fell!" responded Zhang Tie.

"Well, boy, no more pretending. It's nothing serious. When I was your age, I also got into fights often. Beat or beaten, it was normal. Fight back when you lose!" Donder lectured him generously.

The only thing in Zhang Tie's mind was his stupid look when Miss Daina saw him. Hearing what Donder said, he couldn't help but murmur, "What if I can't fight back?"

"Boy, so you're a green bird. You can always fight back. Only idiots and good-for-nothings dare not to win. If your opponent is stronger than you, then you have to surpass him with ten times more effort. Then, you can beat him with a more powerful strength. If you can't reach their level, you'll have to play tricks. Under the mask, you have to beat them stealthily!" the boss lectured him while making gestures. Seeing Zhang Tie's idiotic look, the boss seemed to be dissatisfied. He patted Zhang Tie's shoulder heavily. "Boy, I think that you're clever, so I'll teach you what I've learned in my life over the past dozen years.

When you can't fight your opponents with your fists, then you have to compensate in this way..." pointing at Zhang Tie's head, he raised his head high. "Listen! A soft tongue is sharper than any weapon as it can even break hard bones and smart brains!"

The last words of Donder slightly moved Zhang Tie; he felt that it was reasonable. "Who's proverb is that?"

"Donder!"

"Liar, I don't believe you!"

"Whatever, erm. I will not provide you supper as usual!" Donder added meanly.

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