

Pet Store 161

Chapter 161 Going to the Uncultivated Land

At the store.

At night, Su Ping came out from the dragon king's heritage ground. He placed the two trained pets in the training space and sat down to have some rest.

With much effort, he had explored more than 70 dragon scale lands in the dragon king's heritage ground, leaving 30 or so pieces of land to be explored.

Su Ping believed he could cover all the lands in one day and night.

The Inferno Dragon, the Dark Dragon Hound, and the Purple Python had all reached adulthood and had thus increased in power. As such, Su Ping's exploration had progressed much faster. If it weren't for the slight influence of OCD, he would have gone to another heritage ground.

The dragon scale lands in the dragon king's heritage ground could no longer do wonders for the three pets.

"This is the elementary heritage ground after all, and the most dangerous beings inside are beast kings," Su Ping said to himself. While the beast kings were beings that he couldn't defeat at the moment, there weren't that many beast kings in the dragon scale lands.

Besides, the beast king's stimulus alone couldn't stimulate a fast development in the three pets.

Su Ping rested for a moment, then he heard someone coming all of a sudden.

Someone was knocking on the door.

Su Ping extended his consciousness outside and saw that it was Su Lingyue.

He went to open the door and saw Su Lingyue standing by the door with the lunch box in her hand.

Su Ping remembered what she said the day before. He asked, "Why didn't I see you this morning?" "I had morning classes today." Su Lingyue gave him the box and threw a look into the pitch dark store. Still, she didn't see what she was trying to find, and felt sorry about it. She asked Su Ping, "Why don't you turn on the light?"

"To save electricity."

Su Lingyue curled her lips. She went into the store and said, "I will leave Snowball with you now. Do you have any vacancies left?"

"Some." Su Ping brought his meal to the counter, sat down, and dug in. When he had the pets trained, he would contact their masters to come and pick the pets up. Some people had gone there in the afternoon, so some spaces were opening up. Su Lingyue was relieved. Su Ping was gobbling down his food. She snorted at him and said reluctantly, "One hundred thousand, right?"

"Yes."

"Any discounts?"

“No.”

“How about Ninety-nine thousand?”

Su Lingyue turned on her phone and transferred the money to Su Ping, still unwilling.

Su Ping checked. She did transfer one hundred thousand. Then, he nodded and said, “Put the charcoal here.”

Su Lingyue opened up the pet space and summoned her main pet, the Phantom Flame Beast.

The Phantom Flame Beast showed its fangs to Su Ping and raised its head proudly, giving Su Ping a look full of contempt.

It had fooled this stupid person many times.

Su Ping’s eyes flickered as he saw the Phantom Flame Beast. He remembered that when he woke up in this world on the first day, he had been scared off the bed. He almost broke his nose!

Finally, you are mine!

The Phantom Flame Beast noticed the strangeness in Su Ping’s eyes. Somehow, it felt chilly and it became all fuzzy. But soon, the Phantom Flame Beast calmed down and wondered if it was having a delusion.

“You must take good care of Snowball. And, don’t call it charcoal!”

“Sure.”

Su Ping nodded with a grin.

“I will head to the uncultivated land the day after tomorrow. Will the training be done by then?” Su Lingyue asked. She knew that training in Su Ping’s store progressed quickly. But since this was of critical importance to her, she thought she just might as well make sure.

Su Ping was surprised. “You are going there as well?” “Yes. What? As well?” Su Lingyue picked up a clue after she answered the question. She was confused. “You are going?”

Su Ping had inadvertently blurted out the secret. He shook his head in denial at once.

He wasn’t lying, per se. He was going to the Mysterious Realm, not the uncultivated land exactly.

“Then why did you say ‘as well’?” Su Lingyue was still suspicious.

Su Ping answered, “A friend of mine is going.” “Who?”

“Someone you don’t know.”

Su Ping didn’t waste time with her about this. “Since you’re going there, take the water barrier with you. You can give it back to me when you come back.”

Su Lingyue thought about it. “Sure.”

She loved that water barrier. She had sensed how useful this water barrier was in the previous exchange match. Her opponent's fifth-rank pet attacked her many times but failed to hurt her one bit. The water barrier was incredibly strong. She didn't know where Su Ping had found this item.

But since Su Ping had brought her many surprises and showed her many changes, gradually, she had become used to those mysteries.

"Then, I will take it with me," Su Lingyue said. She wouldn't want to keep the water barrier for her own sake, but she decided to keep it for the moment, since Su Ping just stayed at the store every day without going out. He was safe there.

It was her first time going to the barren area. She looked forward to visiting this place where so many graduates were gathered. At the same time, she was scared. She wondered if she was going to encounter any dangers. With the water barrier, she would feel more comfortable.

"The school year is not over yet. What are you going there for?" Su Ping wondered. The end of the semester was more than ten days away.

Su Lingyue answered, "The exchange match is over and there are very few school events later on. So, some of us top students were recommended to go to the barren area to train."

"Some?" Su Ping wondered, "There are others?"

"Of course." Su Lingyue was speechless. Su Ping was an advanced teacher in the academy. Why didn't he know about such an important event in the academy?

"There are 16 of us in total. We have the top five of grade two, the top ten of grade three are going and two of grade one, me and the guy who won second place," Su Lingyue explained. She smiled a smug smile.

This was an honor for her. When the announcement was made in her class, she was surrounded by praises.

Su Ping did the calculation. "Shouldn't it be 17 in total?"

Su Lingyue rolled her eyes. "There were 17 but that Ye Hao of grade three said he was going for a secret training in another place. He's not going with us."

Su Ping understood. He asked again, "Are you going to a Class C or a Class B area?"

Su Lingyue raised her eyebrows. She learned from that senior Mr. Qin who was favoring her recently about the classification. She didn't know that Su Ping had such knowledge as well. "How do you know about Class B and Class C? Have you been there?" she questioned.

Su Ping didn't satisfy her curiosity. "Answer my question first." Su Lingyue pouted and said unhappily. "Of course it's a Class C. We are all undergraduates and Class B areas are dangerous. Do you think we can go there at will?"

Su Ping was relieved. If they were going to Class B areas, even with the water barrier, Su Ping would be worried that his little sister could not make it back. After all, even a senior explorer like Ye Chenshan had almost lost his life in a Class B area. It was Su Ping who saved him.

“Good.”

Su Ping had another question, “Are you going to train in the barren area or will you enter the space fractures?”

The barren area and the space fractures represented two levels of danger. The space fractures were categorized as high, middle, and low level. In most of the Class C barren areas, there were low-level space fractures. After all, the main reason that the barren areas came into being was that those areas had been occupied by beasts that had escaped from the space fractures.

There were exceptions, of course.

The space fracture Su Ping went to last time was in a Class B barren area. However, that space fracture was almost as dangerous as a Class A barren area.

“How do you know about space fractures?” Su Lingyue was surprised. Su Ping seemed to be more informed than she was.

“Have you visited a barren area before?” Su Lingyue stared at him. However, if Su Ping had visited barren areas, she never saw him leave the house for long. He would not go home every now and then but she supposed he had most likely gone to an internet bar, which was nothing strange.

Su Ping noticed that she had been asking him questions incessantly. “Just tell me which area you’re going to,” he urged her to answer. Su Lingyue found him strange but she did answer. “The Beipo Mountain near our base city.”

Su Ping knew that it was a common Class C barren area.

“When you get there, stay with your team and don’t wander off by yourself. When you see beasts, run away from, not toward them,” Su Ping cautioned her, “To put it simply, don’t go into the woods and stay away from the water. Don’t doubt your own eyes when you find strange places. Keep your guard up at all times.”

Su Lingyue didn’t expect that Su Ping would give her instructions. This made her feel unhappy. She had always been the one commanding Su Ping. Things were different at the moment. She pouted and wanted to talk back but stopped on second thought, since Su Ping was more powerful than she was.

Su Ping didn’t mind if Su Lingyue had taken his suggestions to heart or not. He had done what he could to help her.

“Go back home if you have no more questions. I’m done here.” Su Ping was ready to go back to his training.

All the food was gone. Su Lingyue packed up the lunch box, calmed Snowball down, and left. Before she did, she reminded Su Ping again, “Look after Snowball for me.”

Su Ping closed the door after she was gone. Then, he turned around and cast a look at the Phantom Flame Beast that was on the counter.

The Phantom Flame Beast was like a fat, lazy cat. It was rolling on the counter slightly. The Phantom Flame Beast knew that Su Ping was not a stranger so it wasn’t nervous at all; it glanced at Su Ping

indifferently. It failed to scare this stupid human later on but it still despised this person because of his past embarrassment.

Chapter 162 Last Preparations

“Hey, little guy, remember that it was your owner who sent you here,” Su Ping said as he approached the Phantom Flame Beast while cracking his knuckles.

The creature gave him a sluggish glimpse, not sure what this human was up to.

Su Ping’s smile grew bigger.

“Come. Let’s have some fun.” Su Ping went to take it to the pet room.

The Phantom Flame Beast slapped his arm to warn him not to get too close. Though it didn’t actually resist Su Ping’s move because it had grown familiar with Su Ping’s scent after all the “spooky mornings” when it often rested under Su Ping’s warm blanket.

Su Ping selected the “dragon king’s heritage ground” from the system window, then picked another pet stored in the shop and brought both pets inside.

Of course, he had to sign a temporary pet contract with the Phantom Flame Beast beforehand. The power of the contract further helped the beast warm up to Su Ping instead of hiss at him whenever he touched it.

The anguished howls of the Phantom Flame Beast echoed across one of the dragon scale lands thanks to Su Ping’s “intensive care.”

A moment later, they reappeared inside the shop. As soon as the Phantom Flame Beast recognized the quiet and monster-less room, it rolled over on the floor and gasped rapidly as if it had just escaped from a terrible nightmare. Which was... almost correct.

Su Ping grinned.

He picked up the beast, found another pet to be trained, and entered the heritage land again.

“YWOOOOL-“

This was repeated until the next morning.

After “working out” inside the heritage ground for an entire night, which was equal to several days in reality, the Phantom Flame Beast had taken on a completely new look; its once plump form that looked like an inflated balloon had turned slim and robust like that of a wild black cat. Several strands of flame-red fur stood out in its coat like small embers which further added to the creature’s brightness.

Using the Pet Identification skill, Su Ping had confirmed that the Phantom Flame Beast had reached a Combat Strength rating of 6.5, when it had been 4.9 the day before. It would be strong enough to protect Su Lingyue in a Class C barren area. As soon as Su Ping terminated their pet contract, the creature carefully glimpsed at Su Ping, rested its head on the floor, and stayed that way without making a sound, like a depressed kid in distress.

When Su Ping gave it ridiculous orders such as jumping into a pit or fire or attacking another mighty monster, it did try to resist. Though it soon learned not to do such a thing after getting beaten by Su Ping, which felt worse than suicide missions. The beast didn't feel happy when it regained its freedom. It just remained quiet to reminisce its life; there was no happiness when Su Ping was around.

Su Ping checked the window and noticed it was almost time to open up business. Though he didn't plan to welcome any customers that day. After returning all the trained pets to their respective owners, he would have to begin preparing for the coming task.

The shop was in pretty good shape right then. Losing a day's revenue or two wouldn't hurt. After dragging the Phantom Flame Beast into a nursing pen, he found something to drink and began checking the system shop. It was already time for a daily refresh. Among the five new items presented that day, he saw a middle-rank beast-catching ring again. It seemed this ring was one of the most common items that would appear in a level-2 system shop.

He simply paid the points to buy it without giving it too much thought. He then had about 400,000 energy points stored, which was far from enough to level up the Incubation Pool. Although buying some random items was not a problem.

Since the remaining four items didn't look so good, he chose "refresh" to discard them.

A small fruit called "Crimson Pip" caught his attention. It seemed to be a useful drug that could improve fire-based abilities, which meant he might need it when training his Solar Bulwark next time.

The fruit cost him 20,000 points. Another refresh.

There were no more valuable discoveries. He wasn't going to keep refreshing because the next try would require 500 energy points. Unfortunately for him, he didn't get any skill books or force pellets that day.

Let me see... I need enough drugs to raise the Solar Bulwark to the next rank. Now I already found three different types, which are... not enough. By the end of the expedition, I'll use the merit points to buy something from the settler base.

He closed the system window, found a piece of cardboard, wrote "CLOSED" on it and went to hang it on the door.

But before he could do it, he saw a dozen people already waiting in the chilly morning air, when the horizon had barely lit up.

"Mr. Su!" The customers called in surprise as they expected Su Ping to show up later than this. Almost immediately, they formed a line and looked at Su Ping with gleaming eyes.

"Why are you up so early today, sir?" a short-haired man at the front of the queue questioned, after which he suddenly saw what Su Ping was carrying. "Closed?? What gives?"

"Aw, man. Did something happen?"

Su Ping put the sign in place while explaining, "Sorry, you all. I have other jobs to do, so... I'm not accepting new orders today. The shop's only open to those who are here to retrieve their pets."

The customers were clearly annoyed for having their time wasted, though no one protested.

As Su Ping returned several stored pets one by one, more customers arrived; they saw the situation and left in disappointment.

By noon, Su Ping had freed up most of the occupied nursing pens. It seemed the owners of the remaining pets would go there later that day for various reasons.

Su Ping checked the currently almost empty shop in satisfaction, before he walked to the Incubation Pool and checked his energy point balance.

He managed to persuade himself away from the stirring idea in his mind when thinking about the terrible success rate of incubation attempts. He had decided to wait until he could get the pool to level 4; by then he would need a lot of points to play the lottery.

When he prepared to head out for lunch, a luxurious car stopped in front of the shop, from which Xu Kuang hopped off. Alone this time.

Xu Xuang would never take his sister there again, after what happened the other day. Besides, Xu Yingxue had already returned to her setter team to get ready for the expedition.

“Oh! Hello, Mister Su!” Xu Kuang saw Su Ping at the door and quickly went there. “I’m really sorry for the trouble yesterday. That sister of mine never figured out who she was dealing with.”

“It’s okay.” Su Ping had already put that matter in the back of his mind. “Are you—wait, the shop’s closed today? Why? Oh no, did my sister scare your customers away??” “Nonsense. That woman can’t do a thing to my shop.”

“I—I see. Then why are you—”.

Su Ping sighed. Why did everybody keep asking him useless questions?

“It’s nothing. Just need to head somewhere for work.”

“Where exactly are you going?”

“I’m not sure yet. Maybe it’ll take me to the jungles. Heh.”

“Jungle? Hey, I’m pretty good at jungling. Want to team up? I’m a super top laner too.”

“Get lost.”

Su Ping shooed Xu Kuang away and found a nearby restaurant to fill his stomach. After his meal, he spent the entire afternoon inside the heritage ground until he finished cleansing the 90th scale, while his three pets had also visibly improved.

As agreed with Su Lingyue, she would go there at night to pick up her Phantom Flame Beast.

Chapter 163

Depart

Su Lingyue showed an uncertain look when reuniting with her pet, which looked completely different from how she remembered. Just like the other customers, she would have believed that Su Ping snatched it away and gave her another pet if not for the pet contract still in place.

The Phantom Flame Beast had remained lethargic in the shop since morning. As soon as it saw Su Lingyue coming, it shook free from Su Ping's hand and bounced into Su Lingyue's arms, leaving two streams of tears behind.

"Miaaa!"

Su Lingyue gently stroked its head. She almost asked "what have you done to my pet," but managed to change that phrase into something more proper.

"Why does it look so... odd?"

Su Ping maintained a poker face. "Your pet gained three new skills. Flooding Illusion, Fire Chain and Fire Tornado. Find somewhere vacant and test them out later so you can get familiarized with the new moves in time. That thing is now good enough to fend off a moderate sixth-rank enemy, as long as it stays at top condition. If you can't tell the rank of a monster, you should just run away."

Su Lingyue's mouth slowly dropped open while listening

"But those are—".

As she remembered from books, both Flooding Illusion and Fire Tornado were only available to high-rank pets. More importantly, Fire Tornado was a pretty famous skill with unlimited potential. With enough training and effort, a pet could improve it all the way to the ninth rank. By that point, Fire Tornado would have a new name, which was Fire Storm. It was a ruinous, large-scale move that could wreak havoc as chaotically as a real storm.

Su Lingyue checked Su Ping's plain look and couldn't believe her pet could have gained so much experience in a day. But something told her that her brother was not lying.

More importantly, her Phantom Flame Beast used to be at the fourth rank. It could fight something two ranks higher? Was that even possible?

Su Ping made quick work of his delivered dinner and returned the empty boxes to Su Lingyue. "Go home if you don't have anything else to say. Sleep well tonight. You'll need a lot of strength."

"What-but-was that—was everything true??"

"Do you think I would tell such a dangerous joke just before you left for the battlefield?"

Su Lingyue frowned.

He was right. This wasn't a good time for humor. Giving her false information about her pet on such an occasion was pretty much equal to murder. She didn't believe his brother would do such a thing.

But this meant the improvement of her pet was as true as it could be. Such efficient training was unheard of. This Phantom Flame Beast was probably good enough to defeat a senior champion in the academy at this moment.

“Hey, um, brother?”

“Yeah?” “I mean—it’s nothing. Anyway, thanks.”

“There’s no need. You paid.”

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Su Lingyue had already done her research, talking to her classmates and learning that a training session would grant a pet a new skill most of the time, or two skills when the pet was extremely lucky. It was obvious that her brother had put a lot of extra effort in honing her pet.

And she felt grateful from the bottom of her heart.

That hateful image of her brother suddenly became a lot more adorable in her eyes.

Without another word, she picked up the meal boxes and turned away.

“Wait, I have a message for mom,” Su Ping said and stopped her, “I need to go on a field trip tomorrow, so don’t worry about getting me fed. I’ll find places to eat myself. There’s no need to wait for me to come back. The business is on the rise, so I’ll probably spend a few more days there.”

“Huh? You’re also going somewhere?”

“Yeah.” Su Ping took out some cash and handed it over. “Give this to her and tell her that we have a stable income now.”

That was 100,000 Federation Coins. Su Ping meant to show his mother the prosperity of the business without raising too much suspicion. Su Lingyue, however, wasn’t easily convinced when she had already witnessed how many customers the shop could get in a day. She knew her brother was lying, though she had no reason to point that out.

Then she thought about the same amount of money she had just spent and suddenly felt a heartache. But the sadness went away as soon as she saw the new look of her Phantom Flame Beast. The money was completely worth it. Three powerful skills? She was willing to pay ten times the price if she did have that kind of money.

“All right.” She accepted the bills while wondering if those were her bills she had paid the day prior.

As a matter of fact, they weren’t. To Su Ping, all the money he earned from customers was converted to energy points, so he couldn’t “withdraw” it and use it elsewhere. He had to earn extra money by other means if he wished to help his family, such as teaching students in private.

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Su Lingyue left the shop wanting to find a stadium to try out the new pet skills immediately. Though she successfully suppressed that urge because she had to deliver the money.

Meanwhile, Su Ping entered the heritage ground again to keep going.

By the end of his session, he found a secured spot in the heritage ground to catch some sleep. When he woke up and returned to the shop, It was only a little past 5 in the morning

Someone knocked on the door.

Using his astral perception, Su Ping sensed Ye Chenshan outside.

“Five minutes!”

“Sure, no need to hurry,” Ye Chenshan called back.

Su Ping emptied his inventory and stuffed several boxes of emergency food and water inside; he bought those from a store the day before. Even though he was aware that a professional settler team should have enough provisions in stock, he still did so just in case.

He also took the middle-rank beast-catching rings he had saved up to this point. It was a rare occasion. He wanted to catch several useful pets and sell them later if he had the chance.

As for his “pet team,” he decided to bring all four pets with him, which included Little Skeleton, the Dark Dragon Hound, the Inferno Dragon and the Purple Python. Their pet contracts did allow remote summoning, but he feared that this wouldn’t work if the Mysterious Realm was too far away from his shop.

With everything done, he opened the door and saw Ye Chenshan smiling at him.

“Had a good night’s sleep, Mister Su?”

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

“Sure, sure.” Ye Chenshan gladly showed Su Ping to their car, which looked bigger and more expensive than the SUV used by Fan Yujing last time. The vehicle even had a fortified outer frame that could deflect rifle bullets or attacks wielded by fourth-rank monsters or below.

Inside the car, there was a big crate of monster repellent and top-class tear gas canisters. From all that setup, one could tell that this car was probably no cheaper than a fully-equipped attack helicopter.

Thanks to the special plate of the car, they didn’t have to obey any traffic rules while traveling

“By the way, Mister Su, our leader and the others are already getting ready at the base.”

By this, Ye Chenshan meant to say that he showed up alone for a good reason.

Su Ping nodded casually without looking away from the window.

This specialized expressway built in the suburbs was meant to conveniently take people directly to the barren areas. And it looked a lot busier that day, compared to usual days. Apart from black SUVs loved by most settlers, people could also occasionally see armed buses that had different names painted on their sides.

Ares Academy.

Berserking Blade Academy.

Phoenix Peak Academy.

Those were exclusive vehicles funded by their respective schools. Apart from the seven most recognized schools in Longjiang, there were also several smaller establishments with abundant resources who managed to dispatch several of their students to barren area expeditions.

Other than these, groups of settlers who usually stayed away from public sight had also answered the call for treasure.

Inside his ride, Su Ping curiously checked the different cars moving past his view.

Chapter 164 Nie Chengkong

The bus of the Phoenix Peak Academy was being escorted by several veteran professors, including Cheng Shuanglin. They could have asked more of their advanced professors to join. But most of these people had gone to the Mysterious Realm either alone or with their respective settler teams.

If Su Ping were there, he would easily recognize several familiar faces apart from his sister, such as his “top customer” Zhang Baoxing, who managed to earn a ticket all thanks to the Pyro Canine.

Then there was Lu Pengfei, who was already a famous student that always landed at a nice spot on the academy’s ranking list. He had displayed an unnatural improvement during the annual matches, after which his teacher granted him an allowance and sent him there.

Su Yanying was with them, which was to be expected since she was basically the brightest “star” in the academy apart from Ye Hao.

Her friend Lan Lele didn’t tag along this time because Lan Lele’s family thought the expedition to be too dangerous to their liking. Lan Lele did have a good pet, but she wasn’t so good at fighting. As a matter of fact, Lan Lele chose to become a battle pet warrior student just to avoid being appointed as a manager of her family’s boring company instead. However, after spending some time at the Phoenix Peak Academy, she found out that inheriting the family business was actually the merrier choice.

Since “Ye Hao the Champion” didn’t join the trip, Su Yanying naturally became the center of everyone’s attention.

“This road is reserved for expeditionists like us, right?” a student asked, “Why are there so many private cars going the same way?” Cheng Shuanglin explained with a smile, “Those aren’t private, my friend. See their plates? They are specialized cars used by settlers. Civilians don’t have access to them. Be sure to show some respect if you are to meet with any of them.”

“I see!” All the students appeared excited for going to the barrens for the first time in their lives.

Su Lingyue grinned proudly as she almost had the same answer Cheng Shuanglin offered.

“But there are so many of them.”

“Tsk. I heard that many older students already found part-time work in barren areas.”

“Are any of them with these professional settlers, I wonder?”

“Hey, look at that one! It’s different from the others.”

Hearing those words, the students looked outside and saw a black SUV which was slightly bigger than the “ordinary model.” And with different decorations.

Cheng Shuanglin also looked that way. She said with a serious look, “That’s a ‘T-3 Battlefort’, a premium model that costs a ton. Only silver settlers or gold ones can afford that thing.”

The students grew restless again. They were all briefed with relevant knowledge before coming, so they didn’t accidentally offend influential people at the settler base.

“Silver settlers, huh?” Su Lingyue looked at said car carefully and wondered who was inside. She couldn’t see through the car windows.

“Phoenix Peak?” Su Ping checked the bus not far from his position and wondered how many students were in there. He was sure that his dear sister was among the chosen students as well.

Though he didn’t get to look at the bus for much time before their SUV left it far behind.

Su Ping wasn’t worried about his sister’s safety. He believed that the improved Phantom Flame Beast, added with the “Aquatic Blessing,” were enough to get the girl out of trouble. If Su Lingyue still got hurt, it had to be something he had no control over.

They reached the outer checkpoint soon and slowed down. A lot of SUVs and “school buses” were ahead of them waiting to be inspected.

When it was their turn, Ye Chenshan showed his golden badge and was granted passage right away.

They picked up speed after passing through the checkpoint, allowing them to put several more buses behind their tail. On their way, Su Ping saw a bus that belonged to the Berserking Blade Academy, as well as several faces he recognized sitting in the bus, such as Dai Yan and the big man with a bear pet.

For some reason, Luo Fengtian was not there.

Upon arriving at the settler base, Su Ping was a bit surprised to see that the entrance was as crowded and busy as a wet market. Apparently, many settlers who were heading to the Mysterious Realm had to go through there. There were too many cars jamming the flow.

Bit by bit, Ye Chenshan drove away from the crowded path and headed to an independent villa built inside the settler base.

There were several cars of the same size parked in front of the building, which told Su Ping that Ye Chenshan’s team was indeed well-off.

A group of low-rank battle pet warriors was guarding the entrance, who were probably there to earn some quick cash.

It happened that settlers who used the base as their second homes always needed assistants and errand runners. People who graduated from smaller schools could easily gather some starting funds by working there.

The guards politely greeted Ye Chenshan and carefully glanced at Su Ping to memorize his face. After spending several years at the base, all of them had learned they had to know how to tell people they

couldn't mess with. In this place, angry settlers murdering disrespectful people happened almost everyday.

While it was true that settlers were pretty generous when paying their "employees," these employees had to stay alive to bring their money back.

After going through the entrance and walking past a few courteous servants, Su Ping saw several men sitting on sofas talking loudly in the middle of the living room, while no one was paying any attention to the flashy movie displayed inside an expensive screen.

"Guys, our helper is here!" Ye Chenshan called, making the speakers look his way.

One of the members, Luo Guxue, showed a joyful look and quickly went to meet Su Ping. "Hello, Professor Su!"

The others weren't expecting her to act that way, even though they had heard about how Su Ping had saved her life before.

Su Ping returned the courtesy and asked, "You're going as well?" "Of course. I'm with Team Polaris after all." Luo Guxue was blushing as she spoke, because she thought she would only be a burden if Su Ping was there.

Unfortunately, Ye Chenshan read her reaction in the wrong way. He thought this woman was fond of Su Ping. And he felt annoyed, because Luo Guxue was the only "available woman" in the team.

Still, he was in no place to judge.

Meanwhile, Su Ping was assessing the other team members. The same went both ways.

"Boss." Ye Chenshan walked ahead and addressed a muscular, middle-aged man.

This man wasn't exactly big, but his build looked perfectly refined, while those chunks of his seemed to pack some serious strength.

He nodded to Ye Chenshan and spoke to Su Ping with a smile, "You're the 'big savior' Chenshan and Guxue told us about, no? I've always wanted to thank you, my friend. Otherwise, our team would have lost not one but two valuable fighters."

He reached out with his hand; Su Ping accepted the gesture and shook it. Even though Luo Guxue told her team about Su Ping's exceptionally young age many times as a precaution, seeing Su Ping in person still shocked the other members for good. No one would believe it if somebody told them about a genius who was barely an adult surpassing seasoned battle pet warriors with ease.

A teenager who had killed an eighth-rank Magical Corpse Beast? That was beyond impressive. It was terrifying.

If someone so young entered the Elite Pet Warrior League, he would surely make it all the way to the continental games with a good score.

Ye Chenshan proceeded with a proper introduction. “Boss, this is Mister Su, the shopkeeper I told you about. I guess I don’t have to tell you again how he saved me and Luo Guxue, right? And Mister Su, this here is Nie Chengkong, our team leader, a renowned eighth-rank pet master.”

Chapter 165 Parcel 92

“I just earned some name, I’m not renowned.”

Nie Chengkong was modest. “I have heard so much about you, Brother Su. You killed a Magical Corpse Beast at the upper position of the eighth rank at such a young age. You’re not any weaker than I am. I believe in the future, Brother Su will for sure grow to be a titled battle pet warrior!”

“You flatter me. I believe the same thing for you,” Su Ping gave a simple answer because he wasn’t used to the exchange of pleasantries and flattery.

Luo Guxue blushed when she heard Nie Chengkong’s words. She had just returned to the team so she hadn’t had the time to inform the team about the news from the academy. Su Ping was not going to grow to be a titled battle pet warrior. He already had such abilities.

“Nice to meet you.”

“Mr. Su, hi.”

The other two team members, a girl, and a boy, who were sitting on the couch stepped over. Their smiles made them look friendly.

Since Su Ping was young, people would have questions, more or less. However, they all trusted Luo Guxue and Ye Chenshan. Besides, Su Ping had saved Ye Chenshan’s life. For that reason alone, Su Ping deserved a nice treatment.

Su Ping nodded to them.

The two team members introduced themselves. Su Ping learned their names. The boy was Zhou Jing and the girl was Guo Yuelin. Both were advanced battle pet warriors just like Luo Guxue.

“Brother Su, come and have a seat.” Nie Chengkong was quite hospitable. He asked Su Ping to sit down on the couch.

A guest should suit the convenience of the host. After everyone took their seats, Su Ping asked, “Captain Nie, when can you share the map of the Mysterious Realm?” Nie Chengkong answered, “No rush. Two more helpers are coming. We will study the map when everyone is here.”

Su Ping was surprised. This team had invited three helpers. Counting the original team of five, they would be eight people in total.

Su Ping sat there and waited since this was what Nie Chengkong wanted.

“Mr. Su, I heard that you run a pet store. Is that true?” Guo Yuelin was curious.

Su Ping nodded. “If you are interested, you’re welcome to pay a visit. I sell many kinds of pet food in my store, high quality at a reasonable price.”

Ye Chenshan curled his lips slightly but said nothing.

“We will when time permits.” Zhou Jing smiled.

They chatted for a little while when they heard someone arriving. A young man came in first and shouted, “Captain, Mr. Mo, and Mr. Chen are here.”

“They are the outside help we were waiting for,” Ye Chenshan said to Su Ping when noticing the latter’s confusion.

Everyone looked over the young man’s shoulder. Two people stepped in. One of them was skinny with a handlebar mustache, like a teacher. The other man was bulky, almost two meters tall, and appeared to be quite doughty.

Nie Chengkong stood up to greet them at once. “Mr. Mo, Mr. Chen.” “Captain Nie, how are you doing?” The bulky man laughed.

The skinny old man smiled as a reply.

The other team members stood up to say hello. They were all quite polite to the two outside help. They were there to assist and they were both well-known masters. It was natural that the team members would be respectful to the two.

Su Ping got up to say hello as well.

After the small talk was done, Nie Chengkong waved his hand and asked that young man to close the door. Nie Chengkong told everyone to sit down and then had the desk cleaned by the servant.

“Since everyone is here, let’s talk about the Mysterious Realm.”

When the desk was cleaned, Nie Chengkong took out an aged, yellowish map from his chest pocket. The map looked like a parchment scroll but it was quite large.

Nie Chengkong unfolded the map on the table and said, “This is the treasure map for parcel 92. I bought the map from a secret channel on the black market. I heard that some grave robbers took it from an ancient tomb. I hired some archaeologists to translate the words on the map and noticed that this was related to the Longtai Mountain. After my secret research and investigation, I finally concluded that this is a map of parcel 92.”

As he explained, everyone was casting their looks over the map. Maybe due to the weathering of time, some lines had become blurred. Still, they could make out the shapes of some rivers and mountains.

There were some strange marks at certain locations in the mountains and rivers.

“I heard from the archaeologists that this mark meant danger in the old days; this one is a treasure, this one is a restricted area and this one stands for an open path...” Nie Chengkong explained one by one.

Everyone was observing closely, attempting to memorize the map.

“There are so many marks for treasures.” Zhou Jing was surprised to see several of those marks.

Their team had obtained a map before but it was only a fragment without illustrations. However, this one was very detailed, marking out the dangers, open paths, and treasures. Following the map, they could practically go there and grab the treasures, right?

The old man Mo and the strong man Chen stared at Nie Chengkong, stunned. This map was so specific. If so, why would he invite them?

Nie Chengkong must have noticed the other people's doubts. He smiled and said, "Take a look. The marks here are larger. In the old times, the large marks indicated larger treasures. However, around this area, those places are all dangerous. Based on our experience, there must be beasts guarding the places with precious treasures.

"I invited you because I hope you can help us to obtain those treasures."

Old man Mo and strong man Chen both understood. Nie Chengkong was trying to grab all the treasures.

"Besides," Nie Chengkong continued, "While the map is detailed, a long time has passed. Beasts are living animals. They move around. Therefore, we cannot trust this map entirely. Nobody can tell for sure how those dangerous places have shifted after so many years. Maybe, some dangerous places have vanished and some paths that were originally clear have become risky.

"So, this map is only for reference. We cannot rely on it completely. When we get there, we must be extra vigilant and take care of each other. I hope that we can all get out safely!"

Everyone nodded. They thought of those possibilities as well.

Old man Mo smiled. "Captain Nie, since you were so thorough, I do not disagree."

That strong man Chen smiled from ear to ear. "By then, when we obtain the major treasure, remember that I will be the third person in line that gets to pick from the other treasures."

Old man Mo was surprised. He looked at Chen and then at Nie Chengkong. "Captain Nie, you told me that I would be the second in line to pick treasures. Who is going to be the first?"

Mo had thought that Chen would be the first one to pick. Chen was at the same rank as Mo and at his prime. While Mo didn't think he was any worse than Chen, he could accept the fact that Chen could choose before him.

Mo didn't expect that the first one to choose the treasures was someone else. Was that someone on Nie Chengkong's team?

The strong man Chen was taken aback as well. He had thought Mo would be the first one to pick. He didn't foresee that there would be someone else.

Nie Chengkong smiled. "The first one to pick is this Brother Su, Su Ping here. He saved Chenshan and Guxue's lives and is quite powerful himself. Hence, we promised that he would be the first one to pick."

Mo and Chen both looked at Su Ping. Both were stunned.

They had noticed Su Ping before because he was the youngest of them all, a little bit too young in fact. He was like an undergraduate student. Mo had thought that Su Ping was a potential candidate for Team Polaris. How could he be an outside helper as well?

Besides, he was deemed more important.

Old man Mo and strong man Chen were not happy about this. Chen frowned and said to Nie Chengkong, "Captain Nie, is this dude an advanced battle pet warrior?"

old man Mo looked at Nie Chengkong as well. If Su Ping was not an advanced battle pet warrior, then it would be too much to consider Su Ping as more important than they were.

Nie Chengkong nodded. "Brother Su has an ability similar to a master battle pet warrior. He once killed a Magical Corpse Beast at the upper position of the eighth rank. He is no weaker than I am. He once saved Chenshan and Guxue's life. I hope you can understand."

Both Mo and Chen were startled. Su Ping had an ability similar to a master battle pet warrior? He once killed a Magical Corpse Beast at the upper position of the eighth rank?

The two of them were master battle pet warriors but they were much older than Su Ping. They could kill Magical Corpse Beasts at the upper position of the eighth rank as well, but it was astonishing that Su Ping could do that too.

The two of them looked at each other. They did not voice any doubts or vent their anger, either.

They were well-aware that exploring a Mysterious Realm was a matter of life or death for the entire team. Nie Chengkong would not tell lies or drag any rookie into the team in such conditions. After all, even if Nie Chengkong didn't care about the treasures, he would have to worry about his life.

A weak teammate could make the entire team perish.

Since Nie Chengkong the senior explorer had said so, then the story about Su Ping had to be true.

Mo and Chen gave Su Ping a meaningful look. Apart from the young man's strength, the two of them were more interested in the background of this talented youth.

A poor person was unlikely to have such outstanding abilities. No matter how talented one might be, one's development had to be based on massive financial support. To become a battle pet warrior was the most costly career path.

"Since he once saved Chenshan and Guxue's lives, then I have no more questions," the strong man Chen mentioned. He looked rough but he was attentive. His kind gesture would benefit him in the future.

The old man Mo nodded but said nothing else. Inside, he was a bit displeased. The two of them were famous eighth-rank battle pet warriors. They might be slightly weaker than Nie Chengshan who had been exploring the uncultivated lands. That being said, the two of them were master warriors nonetheless. Su Ping was talented and had strong connections. However, exploring the Mysterious Realm relied on strength. Who would care about backgrounds?

While unhappy, Mo didn't show any emotions. He had been living for too long a time to let people see his feelings.

“Alright. It is getting late. Let’s get ready so we can head to the Mysterious Realm. We can save the rest of the discussion for the rest of the trip,” Nie Chengkong said and stored away the map.

Chapter 166 The Qin Family

“Sure.”

Everyone accepted this proposal. Before they set off, Nie Chengkong asked the servants to put the prepared supplies such as dry provisions on the cars. They got in the cars and left after everything was ready.

“Mr. Su, would you like to ride with me?” Luo Guxue asked Su Ping with reverence.

Ye Chenshan noticed that Luo Guxue was quite respectful and polite. This wasn’t a two-way affection. Was... Luo Guxue pursuing Su Ping? “It’s okay. I will ride with Brother Ye.” Su Ping was too lazy to change to another car. He was going to stick with this one car.

The disappointment in Luo Guxue’s eyes was hard to conceal. Nevertheless, she nodded.

“Sure.”

Ye Chenshan admired Su Ping for declining her. What an excellent application of “playing hard to get”!

Everyone got into the cars. Nie Chengkong took the lead and drove away.

Cars V

ers

All five cars were T3 models. Many explorers on the way would stop to see. The onlookers were stunned when they saw the word “Polaris” printed on the side of the cars. They knew the cars belonged to Team Polaris. Naturally, members of Team Polaris were in the car!

At this base site, Team Polaris was the best of all and had established great fame.

They had arrived at the exit. The entrance was still packed. Many cars were lined up with some buses mixed in.

“Is this the explorers’ base?”

“There are so many people here. Are they all explorers?”

“This is awesome. Gee.”

Students sitting in the buses were curious about everything around them.

Some students noticed a fleet of cars driving away from another path nearby. Interested, they asked, “Are those cars driving back to the base city?”

The teacher in charge threw a look. He was startled by the word “Polaris” printed on the side of the car. He had heard some stories. With respect, he said, “That is a top team amongst the explorers. The weakest on this team are advanced battle pet warriors. They should be heading to... the Mysterious Realm!”

“The weakest are advanced battle pet warriors? For real?”

“I heard about this team from my dad. They are good!”

“Sir, what is a Mysterious Realm?” “Tell us.”

The teacher didn’t answer their questions. He kept his voice down. “This is not something you should know. Alright, quiet down. Many important people are here. Do not anger them.”

Some students were afraid to pursue their questions further.

Some of the students who came from stronger families were intrigued when the words “Mysterious Realm” were mentioned. Their eyes glistened. They watched as that fleet of cars traveled further and further away. Those students had made up their minds. They were determined to explore Mysterious Realms in the future!

The fleet left the base and soon drove to the sixth highway, going straight forward along the road.

The highway was wide but with little traffic. The highway was usually deserted, without a soul to be seen. Rarely would any cars travel on this path because the sixth highway was an inter-city road that led to the edge of other base cities? Usually, people would only travel in this way if they had other business to take care of in other cities.

Recently, every now and then, some cars would be seen there. They were all traveling from the Longjiang Base City to the Mysterious Realm.

Beasts around the highway were few and far between. Feces of powerful dragons were scattered around the highway to keep away the beasts.

In the car, Ye Chenshan explained to Su Ping, “Longtai Mountain is one of the three Mysterious Realms on our continent. Not only will Longjiang Base City send over some top-level teams, but other base cities will also send their teams. Some teams from base cities a bit further away had set off since yesterday.”

Su Ping was not worried. “That is to say, the Mysterious Realm gathers many powerful warriors.”

Ye Chenshan, on the other hand, appeared to be concerned. “Whenever the Mysterious Realm opens up, it turns into a gathering of talents. Team Polaris has some fame in the Longjiang Base City, we can do whatever we want here. But in the Mysterious Realm, we have to be careful.”

Su Ping nodded.

On the highway, the fleet moved along fast. In less than an hour, they had driven away from the territory of the Longjiang Base City. They were officially in the wilderness. Some base cities were neighbors, but some of the other base cities were located in remote areas with depopulated zones. Those depopulated zones were not recognized as the barren areas. The depopulated zones have a mixture of good and evil beings, which made those zones incredibly perilous. Even the best explorer teams could perish in the depopulated zones. Having entered the depopulated zone, Ye Chenshan put on a more serious look. He was even a bit nervous. The entire fleet began to travel even faster.

Luckily, they did not encounter any dangers. After roughly 10 minutes, they were out of the depopulated zone.

Having driven away from the depopulated zone, Ye Chenshan breathed in relief. The speed slowed down.

Another half an hour later, the fleet moved off to another road. Going straight on the sixth highway, they would head to Yanbei Base City, a base city that was Longjiang Base City's neighbor. This new path would lead them to the Longtai Mountain. The Longtai Mountain was quite close to both Base cities. It was said that the name of Longjiang Base City was somewhat related to the Longtai Mountain.

Not long after they moved onto the new path, the fleet met with another fleet with cars of a dark red color.

"Those are from... Yanbei Base City."

Yan Chenshan squinted.

Su Ping looked their way. At the back of those cars were a pair of wings with the color of blood.

From the rearview mirror, Yanbei's people saw the fleet of Team Polaris as well. The former didn't respond at all. They kept moving at the previous speed.

Gradually, the speed slowed down. More fleets of other teams began to show up. Some were from the Yanbei Base City, some from the Longjiang Base City. Ye Chenshan saw some familiar teams from the Longjiang Base City and he introduced them to Su Ping one by one. All those teams were the best.

The average teams, first of all, were not qualified enough to go. Second, even if they could, it would be a suicidal trip for them.

All those fleets pressed forward slowly. Not long after, they arrived at the Mysterious Realm.

The entrance to the Mysterious Realm was at the peak of a mountain.

At the foot of the mountain were many roads that extended to all sides like a complicated spider web.

The explorer teams from different base cities were coming along from different roads which were then packed.

"Let's go." Ye Chenshan got off first.

Su Ping followed him.

The other teammates got out of their cars as well.

"Let's park the car here and walk up the mountain," Nie Chengkong said.

Su Ping was surprised. He asked Ye Chenshan, "Parking the cars here? Aren't you afraid that they could be stolen?"

Ye Chenshan laughed. "That's what I thought the first time I came here. But the Mysterious Realm is covered with satellite monitoring. After all, this is an important place and no losses are allowed here. Nobody would dare to steal cars here. If someone did that, we could report that when we get back to the base city. We can pull the surveillance footage to find out who was responsible. Hmm, they would find themselves in serious trouble!"

Su Ping was still puzzled. "Since the satellite monitoring can be used here, then why not check the barren areas?"

Ye Chenshan shook his head. "The space fractures there will interrupt the signal. The signal can be scrambled at the Mysterious Realm as well. However, the super satellites used here are considered rare even in the world and they were bought by the federal government. However, to use them in the barren areas, the base cities would have to pay."

That explained it. The old man Mo and the strong man Chen threw another look at Su Ping. It was strange that Su Ping didn't even know this which was commonplace. In principle, if he came from a powerful background, it was unlikely that he would be unaware.

Anyways, they were there in the Mysterious Realm. Neither of them could say anything at this point. On the off chance that Su Ping would hold a grudge against them and set them up, it wasn't worth it.

Mo and Chen were senior explorers. They knew that some weak teammates could not deal with the beasts. However, when it came to backstabbing, those sort of teammates were better than anyone else.

"Get ready. Let's go," Nie Chengkong said.

Everyone took out the supply bags from the cars. There were water and dry provisions inside the backpacks, as well as other camping equipment such as tents and pesticide powders. Su Ping noticed that the other teams' supplies were about the same.

Nie Chengkong led the team and started climbing the mountain.

At the foot of the mountain, someone stopped him, "Captain Nie."

Nie Chengkong turned around. It was an old friend. Nie Chengkong greeted that person with a smile.

They exchanged some words and then that person left.

The team continued to climb up. More and more teams were going up. The teams were not only those from Longjiang and Yanbei, but also ones from other base cities as well.

The way up the mountain was quiet. Nobody talked. Everyone seemed to be indifferent, fierce and tough.

Su Ping noticed that almost everyone was an advanced battle pet warrior. Sixth-rank ones were hard to find there.

Halfway through the mountain, Su Ping noticed that next to him, Ye Chenshan suddenly became scared. He looked at someone with fear visible in his eyes.

Su Ping was puzzled. Ye Chenshan kept his voice low, "Up ahead is a top-level team from a Class A barren area in the Longjiang Base City. Do you see the captain there? He is the current young family head of the Qin Family of Longjiang City. He is young, about 25 years old but he is already an eighth-rank battle pet warrior and he has two adult ninth-rank dragons!"

"Even some senior titled battle pet warriors would have to yield to him!"

Su Ping looked over where Ye Chenshan pointed.

A team of seven was going up the stairs upfront.

The one leading the team was a young man with a fair complexion wearing black clothes. He carried a long spear on his back. The spear was wrapped in cloth and only the sharp head was exposed.

Chapter 167 Heritage Ground

Su Ping turned away and followed the team up the stairs.

When they reached the final step, they found themselves in a huge plaza.

The plaza was crowded with powerful, senior explorers.

While there were many people present, the place was neither noisy nor chaotic. People were talking in whispers. If someone wanted to discuss important matters, they would build up astral power screens to stop any sound from getting out. "Our Longjiang Base City section is over there."

Nie Chengkong was quite familiar with this place. He led the way.

The explorer's teams were not standing randomly in the plaza. There were different regions for each base city. At the moment, Nie Chengkong took Su Ping and the others to a corner of the plaza, the section for the Longjiang Base City. All the teams from the Longjiang Base City had to stay there.

There was a signboard in front of the area with the word "Longjiang" written on it and a number "28" below the name.

Su Ping asked about the number and learned it represented their turn to enter the Mysterious Realm.

The fact that they were the 28th to enter the Mysterious Realm was related to the power of the base city; it was unrelated to them, the explorers.

This section had an area of several hundred square meters. Over a hundred people were gathered there.

The Qin Family team that Su Ping had seen earlier was there as well. There were another 10 people in addition to the original six around that young family head of the Qin Family. This was quite a large team.

The other teams, because of wariness, kept a safe distance between them and the Qin Family.

Some team captains knew Nie Chengkong. They approached him to say hi and exchange some pleasantries.

Nie Chengkong's eyes glowed when he saw one of the teams. He told Ye Chenshan and the others to wait here while he went to greet that team.

Ye Chenshan looked in that direction and said to Su Ping, "That is the Team Dragon Fang. They spend time in a Class A barren area all year round; it is one of the best teams. The captain of Team Dragon Fang once helped our captain with his career and used to invite him to join Team Dragon Fang. Unfortunately, our captain didn't join because he had his own ambition."

Su Ping checked that team. Everyone on Team Dragon Fang was overwhelming, similar to Nie Chengkong in power.

The middle-aged man that Nie Chengkong went to greet stood there like an imposing mountain. Somehow, there was a pressure coming out from him, as if there were surging violent energies inside him.

Su Ping was taken aback. He had a feeling that person was a titled battle pet warrior!

Soon, Nie Chengkong finished with his small talk and came back.

The others from Team Polaris stayed in a corner, looking around but no one said a thing

Soon, more teams came. The area with a size of hundreds of square meters was fully packed.

Some teams that arrived late would have to wait in the public area by the staircase.

Not long afterward, some people suddenly flew up from the plaza and stood in the air in front of the many teams from different base cities. There were five of them in total. The overwhelming aura coming from them indicated that they were all titled battle pet warriors!

The people chatting on the plaza quieted down at once.

Many people raised their heads high to look at the five people.

Some, however, just raised their heads slightly. They didn't like looking up at the five people like this. In the middle of the five, a middle-aged man wearing a black short-sleeve shirt shouted, "The Mysterious Realm is open. The teams from all the base cities are here. Please enter in order. Do not stir up any chaos!" His voice lingered around the entire plaza and his eyes were glowing

He sounded calm but his voice was so penetrating that everyone felt the sound was heard directly in their ears.

"It's Venerable the Blade!"

Ye Chenshan looked up to see that middle-aged man. There were traces of respect and excitement in Ye Chenshan's eyes. "Venerable the Blade is a titled battle pet warrior that established his fame several years ago. He became a titled battle pet warrior at the age of 28. He is more talented than any of his peers! "He is 42 years old this year. His pets are formidable. Also, he himself has learned amazing sword skills which are appalling. There was one time, when his hometown base city was invaded by beasts, he cut up to eight ninth-rank beasts on his own without summoning his battle pets!"

Su Ping was astonished.

It was rare that someone could have done that without relying on pets.

The battle pet warriors that Su Ping had met so far, for the most part, relied heavily on their pets. People would train them more than themselves. Without their pets, battle pet warriors would not be able to defeat beasts of their same rank.

Among those present at the plaza, many knew Venerable the Blade; they stood in awe while they looked at him.

Venerable the Blade had completed many lofty achievements. Some were convinced that he would very likely become a legendary battle pet warrior.

The other four people standing around Venerable the Blade were renowned battle pet warriors as well. They had been famous for years. Usually, the ones that had just become titled battle pet warriors lacked the courage or the right to stand in front of everyone in the air, looking down at the crowd.

After all, some titled battle pet warriors in the crowd came from many base cities.

After Venerable the Blade said his piece, the personnel in charge of maintaining the order began to act. The teams in the first area were then allowed to enter.

The others would have to wait in anticipation but quietly.

Among the five in the air, an old man with bleached sideburns clasped his hands behind his back. He stated a question with a smile, "I wonder if five parcels can be explored this time."

But his voice vanished before it reached the ground.

A strong man that had the build of a mountain answered calmly, "To explore three parcels is good enough. Anyways, we're not in such a hurry. To open up all the parcels is of no use at the moment. I'm just curious about what kind of treasures can be dug out this time."

The old man with gray hair laughed and replied, "I'm so envious of you because of that secret skill you obtained last time."

"Same here. That cyan flute of yours is good as well. One song is enough to destroy the soul. Even ninth-rank beasts would have their souls collapse," the strong man answered.

Standing in the middle, Venerable the Blade looked composed. He observed for a moment and then turned around and said, "I will head into the Mysterious Realm to have a rest."

With that said, he flew away without hesitation.

The others looked at each other and forced a smile. Only Venerable the Blade could ignore the leader's orders and leave at will.

"It's our turn now."

Nie Chengkong put away his smile. He adopted a more serious attitude.

The teams of the other areas had already entered. It was finally their area's turn.

The Qin Family was the first team to set off. They stepped on the stairs and went further up.

Following them was Team Dragon Fang and two of the other top-level teams. The three teams were small, with merely five or six people.

Next in line were some of the other outstanding teams, including Nie Chengkong's team.

They walked steadily up the steps to the top of the mountain. They saw a space vortex like a crack in the sky that was suspended in the air more than ten meters above the ground.

One by one, people jumped in.

Su Ping's eyes glistened. He jumped into the vortex after Ye Chenshan.

The change in space and time was familiar to him. Su Ping soon got used to this feeling. He opened his eyes to look around.

The first thing that leaped to his eyes was a magnificent plaza. Above him were the scorching sun and many stars. This sun seemed to be quite massive and very close. However, around the sun was a starry sky and the infinite universe that appeared to be able to suck people in.

Soon, Su Ping's attention was caught by a mountain-sized dragon head.

That was the dragon's skull. There was no piece of flesh left on the bones but the horns were still there. One of the horns reached to the sky like a towering mountain!

Standing on the plaza, Su Ping looked up but he could not get a full view of the skull.

The simple and vast aura of recklessness rushed toward his face, accompanied by a heart-pounding pressure from the dragon. The aura was beyond that from ordinary dragons and beasts, enough to make any lifeform tremble.

Su Ping was stunned.

He had... seen this.

Not only had he seen this, but he was also more than familiar with this place!!

The Dragon king's heritage ground? Su Ping stared at this huge dragon skull in front of him in a daze. He couldn't believe this. The dragon king's heritage ground he found on the list of cultivation sites was here. How?

The dragon king's heritage ground was one he had randomly selected from the list of elementary cultivation sites. There were other such sites such as the bone demon's heritage ground or the voodoo's heritage ground.

Those heritage grounds were unlike the common cultivation sites. Everything in the heritage grounds had been built with illusions. The system stated that it learned from the tests set up in real-life heritage grounds to train pets.

However, Su Ping had found the real-life location of the dragon king's heritage ground he had picked out casually!! This place was on the blue planet, on the continent, right in front of him!

Chapter 168 Pioneer's Ranking

As far as Su Ping remembered, there were several million low-level cultivation planes in the system menu, while the dragon king's heritage ground was only one of them. He couldn't believe his eyes when he realized that he was going to its exact counterpart in real life.

According to the system, the heritage ground had been left behind by an ancient warrior who had long perished. It had been categorized as "low-level" because this warrior wasn't exactly strong. In modern times, these old relics had either vanished or somebody had already looted them clean. There might be several ones that remained intact, all of which should be hidden inside alien planets no one could explore.

Su Ping stared at the dragon bone with widened eyes as he remembered another important matter: since the dragon king's heritage ground was supposed to have a great legacy tucked away somewhere, how about this Mysterious Realm? While he couldn't physically take away anything from the heritage ground generated by the system, he could definitely get his hands on real treasures in the real site.

However, his excitement soon cooled off as he remembered how he needed to reach the top floor of the dragon tower and excavate all the "dragon scale lands" to be deemed qualified to inherit whatever was waiting in the end. From what he learned from Ye Chenshan, only 57 out of 109 sectors in Longtai Mountain had been successfully charted. People had a long way to go. Perhaps he could return and try his luck after all sectors had been mapped out. At the moment, however, there wasn't much he could do.

Another theory suddenly struck his mind. If this place was identical to the dragon king's heritage ground, were the layouts inside the 109 sectors exactly the same as the "dragon scale lands" as well? That is, including what he could find from them?

His eyes briefly gleamed upon reaching that idea, before he quickly hid his true thoughts from the others. He wasn't going to reveal this matter to anyone yet.

Similar to him, most settlers nearby were all gazing at the towering dragon bone in awe. Rumors had it that this dragon was a mightier presence compared to Beast Kings when it was alive.

"Mister Su, you're now looking at the Longtai Mountain Mysterious Realm," Ye Chenshen explained with a serious look, "The dragon remains you're seeing are said to be from ancient vile beast. It was many times deadlier than your average Beast Kings."

"Guess even something as powerful can't survive the woes of being old," another team member nearby commented.

"The dragon tower is just up ahead. I wonder which level we can reach at the moment?" Luo Guxue and Guo Yuelin gazed at the tall structure.

"Time waits for no one. Let's get some exploration done first. We'll check out the tower when we have time to spare," said Nie Chengkong.

The ladies seemed disappointed but didn't say otherwise, for they both knew that they couldn't afford to fall behind the other teams, even though they had a treasure map. Su Ping frowned and spoke up, "Captain Nie, I want to check out the tower first."

Nie Chengkong looked at him. "Well, I can understand how young people are all eager to test their strength. But we should take care of our bigger task first. As I said, we'll hit the tower later."

Su Ping had to confirm whether this place was the same as what he knew. Even though everything looked familiar, the dragon's will he felt from the dragon bone was weaker compared to the heritage ground. He needed to make sure just in case.

Knowing the answer meant he would have an easier time exploring the different sectors later, because he could more or less remember what to expect.

“Sorry, I have to go. I’ll be quick.” Nie Chengkong frowned as dissatisfaction was written all over his face, though he wanted to avoid trouble among the team members if he could.

“...Fine, we’ll go with you. It just happened that Guxue had the same idea.”

Luo Guxue and Guo Yuelin exchanged a happy look.

Ye Chenshan sighed in annoyance. He knew Su Ping was strong, but he didn’t expect Su Ping to succumb to the recklessness of youth. Going after the treasures was clearly the better option right then.

The other two helpers didn’t look pleased either, but none of them stopped Nie Chengkong. They were willing to follow Nie Chengkong’s decision for the moment. Though this didn’t stop them from giving Su Ping angry looks.

The dragon’s will intensified as they approached the dragon bone. The settlers who went there were all strong enough to resist the pressure at such a distance, although not all of them could actually challenge the tower.

At the moment, a group of people who planned to enter the tower were already waiting in front of the entrance. When Su Ping found a vacant spot to wait, the others in the team stayed nearby while observing the surroundings.

A moment later, another group approached the waiting area, with an outstanding woman walking right in the middle. She appeared rather eye-catching among all the settlers because she only looked a little over the age of 20, whereas the youngest settlers nearby were approaching their 30s. Also, people had all the more reasons to pay extra attention to her upon seeing how her companions were acting as if they were escorting a princess.

However, as soon as people recognized her, they quickly looked away in order not to draw trouble their way.

The woman gave the others an unamused glance and looked at the tower ahead, until she fixed her eyes on the fifth level.

An old man beside her smiled gently. “I believe you will reach the sixth level without a problem, my lady. Then you’ll become the champion on the Pioneer’s Ranking.”

The woman didn’t seem interested. She said, “Tell this rabble to make way. I don’t have time to waste with them.”

The old man nodded and moved ahead to address everyone. “Ahem. Move aside, if you will, so our young mistress can get through.”

His voice sounded friendly enough, but many people were unhappy with his message.

“Who the heck is it??”

“Some kind of big-shot from a rich family, huh?”

“Get in line and wait if your little lady wants to use the tower! Who do you think you are, the president’s wife?”

“What he said!”

Whereas some of the people protested openly, the rest of them who recognized the old man obediently left the queue with terrified looks.

The old man was no longer looking so amiable.

“My word. Is it so difficult to be a little more tolerant?”

He took another step ahead while fully disclosing his hidden power, which immediately froze the air as well as people who stood too close, rendering them immovable.

“He-he-he’s a titled warrior!”

Upon hearing that, several smart people with quick reflexes escaped from the scene as well. “That woman’s Tang Ruyan??”

“She’s the one who made it to the fifth level of the tower last time. I saw her on the Pioneer’s Ranking!”

“Sh*t. That’s why she got a titled warrior to be her bodyguard?”

Those who were still trying to resist the old man’s might decided to quit. They all knew that Tang Ruyan was a renowned superstar with exceptional flair. Her family had always been a dominant one across several base cities in the subcontinent. Common folk were powerless against her.

“Hmph. You always want it the hard way.” The old man turned away impatiently.

Tang Ruyan didn’t look bothered by what had happened since she had been through similar things many times.

She moved ahead to enter the tower, but stopped in her tracks because the entrance was still blocked by someone.

The old man looked that way with an angry gaze. “Are you deaf, kid? Get out of my master’s way! Or was I too forceful just now and you no longer feel your pathetic legs?”

Su Ping looked left and right and was surprised to find that all the people waiting around him had left.

“Huh? Are you talking to me, old man?”

Chapter 169 Clash

“Who else could I be talking to? Do you hear me? Move it!” the old man shouted with a threatening look.

Su Ping frowned. He did hear someone yelling and exerting his power back there, but didn’t think it had been directed at him because that petty trick was basically nothing compared to the dragon king.

However, he didn’t get to respond when someone else nearby suddenly applauded.

Yet another group of seven or eight people were approaching the entrance, while a handsome-looking young man walked in the middle of it.

“Ha ha! I see that the Tang Family sure lives up to their name. There are good folk who obey the rules, yet you force them to leave. I mean, is this the Mysterious Realm or your private training house?”

“He’s Situ Feng, another man on the Pioneer’s Ranking!” an bystander uttered out loud.

“My gosh. He’s also at the fifth level, right?”

“Now this will be fun. We can’t do anything to the Tang Family, but the Situ Family sure won’t back down so easily.”

All the people who had scurried away to avoid trouble came back to watch the show.

Tang Ruyan scowled. “Are you challenging my authority?”

“Challenge your authority? HA!” Situ Feng sneered and glanced at her old servant. “Too bad we’re not allowed to fight here. And yes, I do wish to have a taste of such a... pretty chick, if I get the chance.”

“What-YOU’RE GOING DOWN!”

Tang Ruyan’s eyebrows almost stood in rage. She channeled her seventh-rank astral power and summoned her pet space, from which people smelled the stink of blood.

Situ Feng humphed and spoke to Su Ping without minding the woman, “Feel free to go ahead, young friend. These bastards from the Tang Family won’t do a thing under my watch.”

“I dare you to try!” The old man threw Su Ping an aggressive glare. “Stop it already. Does it feel good to bully kids as a senior pet warrior?” another middle-aged man in a gray robe beside Situ Feng spoke. The old man spat but didn’t answer.

Meanwhile, the other observers nearby gave Su Ping a sympathetic look when they believed that this young man had become the victim between two clashing forces.

Nie Chengkong’s team were anxious to provide help but couldn’t, for they could oppose neither families. The only thing they could do was silently pray for a better outcome, that Su Ping would get out of this unnecessary conflict.

Su Ping sighed.

Are these people seriously starting a fight just because they had to wait in line? Big families? My a**.

He decided not to argue with the old man and simply walked toward the tower’s entrance.

“OH NO YOU DON’T!”

The old man glowered at Su Ping’s back and lifted an arm, unleashing a giant, translucent shadow of a hand made of pure astral power, which aimed to slam Su Ping away.

The gray-robed man also released his own astral power to block the attack, causing a giant explosion in the middle of the face-off.

Infuriated, the old man raised both arms and began shooting multiple “hand attacks” in the same direction.

The gray-robed man managed to deflect the attacks, but accidentally let one of them slip because this one in particular had been well hidden inside blinding astral power.

“Damn, the geezer’s going to kill that kid for real!”

Su Ping felt the dangerous power coming at his back and discharged a “needle” made of astral power he had prepared to block off the attack; he had never trusted some kind of unspoken rule to protect his life in the first place.

Boom!

Yet another terrible force descended upon the battlefield, causing Su Ping to look back.

He immediately recognized the newcomer as a titled warrior, Venerable the Blade, about whom Ye Chenshan had just told him.

Tang Ruyan, Situ Feng as well as their companions were visibly shocked when seeing this famous figure approaching, especially the old man and the gray-robed man. They were both titled warriors, yet they felt as if they would lose their heads the moment they made the wrong move while Venerable the Blade was there.

Venerable the Blade dispersed the “astral hand” and briefly cast a surprised glance at the entrance of the dragon tower where Su Ping stood. He widened his eyes slightly when he noticed how young Su Ping looked.

“The Mysterious Realm is intended for peaceful explorers,” he spoke as he changed his expression to that of aloofness again. “If your clans wish to settle a dispute, do it elsewhere. But not here!”

His voice carried a sharp force that invaded the minds of the offenders, causing them to flinch in pain all of a sudden.

No one spoke a word under the commanding might.

Su Ping gave Venerable the Blade a careful glimpse as he felt a small fraction of power that appeared to be the same as that shown by a Beast King. But only a fraction.

This had told him that Venerable the Blade was indeed not far from reaching the rank of legendary.

“Thank you, good sir.” Su Ping did a fist-in-palm salute. He was grateful for that.

“There’s no need.” Venerable the Blade gave him another curious look. “I can see that you didn’t really need my help.”

He then returned to the tip of the dragon bone to maintain discipline as a guardian.

Without waiting any longer, Su Ping turned around and walked inside the tower, while Venerable the Blade watched him go.

The people outside felt the pressure subside and suddenly began sweating all over.

Tang Ruyan bit her lips and clenched her fists with a cold look.

Her old servant glanced at where Venerable the Blade was hovering and looked back. "Are you unhurt, my lady?"

"I'm fine."

Situ Feng's helper did similarly; Situ Feng answered absent-mindedly and looked around, only to see that the young man he had meant to assist was no longer there.

The other spectators began whispering to each other in awe.

"That's what a titled warrior is capable of. It was scary, man."

"Tell me about it. I felt as if I were facing a real Beast King!"

"Seriously. All the ninth-rank monsters I encountered added together probably wouldn't stand a chance against that kind of strength."

"Those fools! They knew Venerable the Blade was watching, and they still did this sh*t? Do they really believe they own the place?" "Weird, where's that little guy?"

"Oh, I think he already went inside the tower."

"He did??"

"Did Venerable speak to him back there? What did he say?" "I don't know. Maybe we were just seeing things." "Who was that guy anyway? Some kid who ventured away from his family for the first time? I wonder which level he can reach."

Chapter 170 Confirmation

The entrance closed behind Su Ping as soon as he entered the first level of the dragon tower.

He checked the dark and empty space which looked very familiar.

"So this is the same place..."

Following his previous experience, he moved to the center of the area and sensed something creepy edging closer. The presence did not try to hide. Instead, it made sure he could detect it, albeit barely.

And this comforted Su Ping greatly.

"Come out already."

A shining dot appeared in the dark distance, which grew bigger until Su Ping could see it as the ferocious head of a dragon. It hovered at a distance that made anyone who saw it believe that the dragon's giant body was nicely concealed in the darkness, waiting to close in.

Of course, the dragon didn't show any particular reaction against Su Ping's words. It simply displayed its intrusive power to Su Ping, as if it would devour him in any second. Su Ping used the Astral Telekinesis skill and a small strand of his astral power to reach out to the dragon head. Just as he expected, the power didn't hit anything.

“Huh. An illusion.” Su Ping sighed in relief. Most people who went there would probably get scared away by this illusion at first sight.

He kept moving forward, provoking the dragon head into lunging at him all of sudden. The image passed through his body without producing any effect.

He found the “ceiling entrance” and directly jumped to level 2. As he remembered, this level had been intended to test his endurance by sending an intense dragon will against his mind. The mental pressure would get a hundred times worse compared to what could be felt at the entrance. Cowards would have no hope of passing.

As soon as he showed up, he heard a deafening dragon roar which sent a crushing burden upon him.

He was then sure that this dragon tower was the same as the one inside the system menu. The elements, the setups... not a thing was different.

The onlookers outside the tower had all learned that the particular young man was currently inside the tower, thanks to several passionate gossipers. They watched as the first level stopped glowing, which was followed by the second level that had suddenly been lit up.

“He’s on the next floor. That was fast!”

“Did he walk straight across the first floor without stopping at all?”

“Big deal. It’s just an illusion. You ignore it and everything’s done.”

“You make it sound so simple. But that thing’s scary as fu*k. What will you do if you don’t know it’s fake beforehand?”

“That’s why you were so slow back there, idiot.”

The second level of the tower also stopped shining

“But how?? The second floor is a real test of spirit. You can’t just walk past it!”.

People slowly looked higher, but the third floor didn’t brighten up as they expected.

They looked down again and saw the young man appear at the entrance.

“Ah, so he lost?”

“He can only beat the first floor. Well, even a kid with enough guts can do it. I’m not surprised.”

“He scared me. I thought he was another big genius or something. Turns out he’s a bum.”

People mumbled in disappointment and looked away.

Tang Ruyan somewhat showed a calm look as she realized that the young man she was worried about was only a nobody, which meant she had no reason to mind him.

Her old servant, too, lost interest. He had made some dirty plans against Su Ping just then, but he found them to be unnecessary after realizing what a “loser” Su Ping was. Stepping on an ant was not fun at all.

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Similarly, Situ Feng also looked elsewhere in discontent.

Su Ping found where Nie Chengkong was waiting and headed there. Checking out the second floor of the tower was enough for him to determine that he was dealing with none other than the “dragon king’s heritage ground.” For the moment, going treasure-hunting sooner was more important. The tower could wait.

Venerable the Blade frowned upon seeing Su Ping coming out that soon. He could tell that the “needle attack” was only possible for a titled warrior, which meant this young man was likely to perform better than Tang Ruyan and reach the sixth or even the seventh level.

But the result showed him otherwise.

“Was I wrong about him? Strange...” “You’re done already??” The team was also surprised by Su Ping’s return, especially Luo Guxue, who clearly knew Su Ping was much better than this. She was expecting Su Ping to surprise the living spirits out of everyone by going to the higher floors.

The other two assistants gave Su Ping a disdainful look as they thought Su Ping’s fame was unfounded; common battle pet warriors should be enough to make it past the second floor.

Nie Chengkong checked the strange looks of his members and realized the matter was not so simple.

“Sorry for the wait, captain,” said Su Ping, “I’m good to go.”

“You... did not pass the second floor?”

“We need to get on with the mission as soon as possible, right? So I stopped sooner.”

“Huh? Then why did you come here in the first place?”

“Just checking things out.”

Of course Su Ping couldn’t reveal his true purpose. For the moment, he would use his young man’s curiosity as an excuse.

“Let’s go then.” Nie Chengkong decided not to question Su Ping’s intention. Meanwhile, Luo Guxue and Ye Chenshan would not ask what had happened either. They all trusted that Su Ping chose to quit for some reason.

However, the extra helpers who knew nothing about Su Ping couldn’t say the same. In their view, Su Ping had wasted everyone’s time and offended two influential groups in this country. This was downright laughable.

Following Nie Chengkong’s lead, the team arrived at a magic circle designed to teleport people to different sectors. For a fee.

“Ten people at a time. A million per use!” the handler claimed and asked everyone to wait in line.

Their turn came soon; Nie Chengkong paid the money without asking questions. A million might be a big expense for common families, but it was an acceptable cost for a veteran settler team like them.

The magic circle lit up as it was recharged with energy, until it was covered by a bright barrier that prevented people from seeing across.

As planned, Nie Chengkong selected "Sector 92."

Su Ping felt the air around him change, before he opened his eyes and saw the burning ground and registered the smell of sulfur. These elements were enough to tell him which "dragon scale land" he was in.