

Pet Store 181

Chapter 181 Dragon Grave

Once again, the group approached the broken cave entrance, most of which had been buried behind debris.

On hurried steps, Nie Chengkong entered through a gap first, followed by the other members.

Even with their astrally-enhanced eyesight, people found it difficult to see things clearly inside the unlit cave. What was more, there seemed to be a strange energy in the environment that hindered their senses.

Nie Chengkong suddenly noticed something was off. There were pieces of broken stones on the floor, which was not surprising because the Flame Flood Dragon could definitely have left such a mess by walking around. The problem was, the stones only covered a narrow trail rather than the entire tunnel as if it weren't the dragon, but something smaller who walked through there.

But... that dragon was using this cave moments before. Could there be another monster who called the same place home?

Nie Chengkong put that thought behind his mind and moved faster.

Since no one was speaking, they could hear their own footsteps echoing between the walls while bearing a strong odor that suggested the unkempt lifestyle of the cave's former owner.

As they walked deeper inside, the air around them slowly grew hotter, until they stopped in front of a pool of bright lava, across which lay yet another cave entrance that appeared bigger than the one they were traveling in. Su Ping frowned as he realized that the area no longer looked as he recalled; inside the "dragon scale land," the Flame Blood Dragon had marked the end of the cave. There should be nothing more.

Perhaps the Flame Blood Dragon had excavated a second "room" in its lair?

It wasn't a rare thing to find new elements coming up around these sectors when the system's cultivation planes failed to predict them. With this in mind, Su Ping decided to leave this matter be.

"The treasure is right there. It must be." Nie Chengkong's eyes brimmed with great excitement.

The lava pool should be the Flame Blood Dragon's "bathtub," which meant the second cave in the far end could be its bedroom. That was a perfect place to keep treasures.

"Everyone, wait here. I'll be right back." Nie Chengkong prepared to head there alone.

Since the Flame Blood Dragon was no longer there, jumping across the deadly lava should be no problem. He wanted to take the treasure as fast as possible and be done with it.

"I'll go with you, captain. Just in case that something else is still hiding in the dark." Ye Chenshan suggested with a look of worry.

Nie Chengkong gave him a reassuring smile. "There's no need. Flame Blood Dragons are always solitary. They never tolerate other lifeforms inside their territories. I'll make it

quick.”

The truth was, Nie Chengkong didn't want others to know about the existence of an Astral Spirit Fruit if he did find one in the cave. If the message got out, he as the owner of the fruit would have to constantly expect danger and malevolence due to people's greed.

“Sure, captain.” Ye Chenshan stepped down. “Be careful!”

“I will.”

Chen and Old Mo exchanged a knowing look as they both realized what was going on. They had enough reasons to believe that Nie Chengkong was hiding crucial clues from them.

However, they weren't going to question Nie Chengkong because being selfish was the right stance to take as a settler. On the other hand, they'd get suspicious if Nie Chengkong was way too generous.

Nie Chengkong took a deep breath, walked to the edge of the pool and took a great leap. The bubbling lava beneath him sure looked dangerous as if something were going to emerge. Luckily, this didn't happen. After a safe touchdown on the other side, Nie Chengkong quickly entered the other cave and vanished from everyone's sight.

Su Ping found it strange that Nie Chengkong caught wind of some kind of valuable treasure when this place had yet to be explored by anyone. Though he didn't really care. An Astral Spirit Fruit meant little to him anyway.

His Dark Dragon Hound suddenly sent him an alert; there was the smell of a different creature looming around.

Startled, Su Ping quickly looked around the area.

Boom!

Something exploded on the other side of the lava pool. Precisely speaking, the explosion came straight from where Nie Chenkong disappeared into.

People were already on edge since they didn't know what kind of traps were hidden in this place. They all jumped at the sudden sound.

“Crap. We gotta help the captain!” Ye Chenshan said first. He couldn't afford to lose his Nie Chengkong because he meant a lot to him.

Guo Yuelin looked at Old Mo and Chen. “Quick, let's go together.”

Chen scowled as he struggled to make a decision. Something told him that escaping was the best choice, but his conscience wouldn't let him abandon the team so soon.

He ordered his Earthen Dragon to provide assistance. The dragon slammed a claw at the floor and created a giant stone pillar that connected the two banks of the pool like a bridge.

Ye Chenshan rushed across the bridge first, while Su Ping followed him.

“Captain!” Ye Chenshan called as loudly as he could, but didn’t get any response. The cave went back to complete silence after the previous explosion, and it only stressed everyone out.

Ye Chenshan wanted to go to Nie Chengkong’s rescue as soon as he could, though his sanity got the better of him. He patiently waited for the others to reach him, before sending his pet away to scout ahead. They saw the depth of the second cave glowing slightly. It was a faint, blue light that was enough to help them see their surroundings. “Captain?” Ye Chenshan called again while slowly entering the cave. After moving across the entrance, they saw that the light source was a blue tree growing at the center of the wide cave. All the tree leaves were pulsing with a gentle, blue hue, accompanied by a single blue fruit amidst the leaves that looked rather lovely. Su Ping immediately confirmed that the fruit was an Astral Spirit Fruit. During his dragon scale land exploration, this tree used to be located at a dangerous spot beside the lava pool.

Oh crap. Su Ping suddenly had a bad feeling. The tree cannot move by itself. Either the Flame Blood Dragon carried it here, or

“Captain!” Guo Yuelin called and began rushing to one side of the cave, where Nie Chenkong had collapsed on the floor. He had a large puncture on his chest that was bleeding like mad. “No, come back!” Su Ping called the woman. As an experienced settler, Guo Yuelin heeded the alert without a second thought. She managed to stop in her tracks immediately and took a step back.

She wasn’t fast enough. Countless spikes abruptly emerged from the walls and the ceiling, almost instantly piercing her body all over, including her head.

Her body twitched for a few seconds before completely stopping.

Ye Chenshan and Luo Guxue gasped in despair as they saw their friend and teammate die in the blink of an eye. Meanwhile, Old Mo and Chen quickly asked their pets to protect them.

Similarly, Su Ping summoned Little Skeleton, the Purple Python and the Dark Dragon Hound to shield him. As for the Inferno Dragon, it was too big to freely move around in this cave.

“Something’s here...” Old Mo’s face went pale as he communicated with his Terrestrial Tracker. “It’s— it’s all around us.”

He heard the sound of blood flowing. Everywhere. Inside the walls. He also noticed that Nie Chengkong was still breathing. Just barely. Nie Chengkong would undoubtedly die in a few minutes if first-aid wasn’t provided.

“What—what-what’s that??” Luo Guxue suddenly pointed at some place with a horrified look.

People saw a large crater just in front of the blue tree. Large, and deep. Using the bright light provided by the Holy Flame Bird, people could only see the tip of what was buried down there.

They tried to focus and looked further down below; they all froze in place due to the ghastly sight. Including Su Ping, who never expected to see such a thing.

Bodies.

There were countless dragon corpses. Not the typical dragons, but the slim-bodied “Jiaolong” kind that had died young, telling from the little buds on their heads that had yet to grow into horns.

Chapter 182 Nearly a Beast King

The corpses must have been left there a long time before because they had turned to bones already. And even the bones seemed rotten.

From a quick look, Su Ping could see at least a hundred bodies down in the crater, mixed with occasional human skeletons. There were also a few fresh human corpses lying on top of the pile, whose blood had yet to fully condense. Not far from them, the dead body of a Silver-Winged Dragon was miserably slumped aside. One of its wings had been torn off, and its neck had been snapped in the middle. It had a giant hole where its heart should have been, but the heart was nowhere to be found.

Su Ping felt all of his hair stand on end as if a deadly monster were right behind him, breathing against his neck.

“These people must have been alive a second ago. Did they sneak inside while we were dealing with the Flame Blood Dragon?” someone asked.

Everyone frowned as they all realized that they had probably been used as bait; whoever came first would have gotten their hands on the final treasure easily.

“Is that tree the ‘secret treasure’ then?” Both Old Mo and Chen gazed at the plant that seemed perfectly kept at its top condition.

“Captain, captain!” Ye Chenshan told his Azure Lizard to carry Nie Chengkong closer by manipulating the floor.

“The—the fruit...” Nie Chengkong muttered with a weakening voice. His eyes were no longer responding to light, which meant he didn’t have much in him.

So he did know about the fruit beforehand? Su Ping thought.

“He’s a lost cause!” Old Mo briefly checked Nie Chengkong before saying, “We should get out of here NOW! Before that thing gets us! We should have never come to a place where there’s a thing able to kill the captain this easily.”

Chen quickly ordered his Earthen Dragon to activate all possible defensive skills. “Everyone, enter the dragon’s mouth. We’ll make a run for it!”

Ye Chenshan put Nie Chengkong down with a painful look. As a settler, the agony of losing someone dear was nothing new. He managed to collect his spirit and quickly follow Chen’s suggestion. It was already a miracle that Chen and Old Mo didn’t leave the team behind. He should be grateful.

Similarly, all the other team members recovered from their grief in time.

As the Earthen Dragon lowered its giant head to let everyone “get inside,” several spikes shot out of the cave walls again. At the same time, the walls grew brightly red as if they were melting. “Oh Gods...” Seeing this, Old Mo gave up their plan and simply told his Death Scythe to carry him to the exit.

However, he was stopped by the large head of a dragon currently directing a deadly gaze at them, while blocking the only entrance they could use. It was a Flame Blood Dragon. But this one was twice as big than the one they had killed.

Su Ping frowned as he sensed the weak signature of a Beast King coming from the target. By his experience, he could tell that this one was not an actual Beast King yet. But it would soon be.

Rowww!!

The dragon opened its maw and belched a fire beam at the group.

Old Mo was too close to the dragon. As a desperate move, he summoned two eighth-rank pets to act as his shield. The pets almost died instantly in the intense fire attack.

“Come on! Together! Let’s break through!”

Chen immediately ordered the Earthen Dragon to apply more barriers onto its body, before ramming into the cave wall. He no longer had time to wait for everyone to get on.

The wall did break. But instead of an escape route, people were presented with the buried body of the Flame Blood Dragon.

Since that way was no good, the Earthen Dragon stomped the ground and leaped upward, creating another opening in the ceiling this time.

Thankfully, the ceiling of the cave was not so tough. The Earthen Dragon charged through the hole and kept moving without looking back.

On the ground, Luo Guxue jumped onto her Holy Flame Bird and beckoned to Ye Chenshan and Su Ping. “Come! Quick!!” She knew Su Ping could fly by himself. Although, humans should never race against flying monsters. They simply would not win. “GET OUT OF MY WAY!!”

Before Su Ping and Ye Chenshan could reach the bird, Old Mo’s Death Scythe slammed the bird aside so he could flee through the new exit first. Either intentionally or not, the Death Scythe sent the bird to the direction of the Flame Blood Dragon.

Luo Guxue yelled as she fell from her pet and landed inside the dragon corpse pit. On top of his Death Scythe, Old Mo laughed madly as he had seen the ceiling gap just within reach.

However, a giant, spiked tail suddenly came into his view and came down upon him.

He fell, together with his Death Scythe. The head of the Flame Blood Dragon lashed out and caught the Death Scythe in midair.

The Death Scythe struggled for a few seconds in vain, before its body could no longer stand the deadly grinding force of the dragon teeth and broke into two parts.

Taking the chance, Su Ping told his Purple Python to open its mouth so he could climb in. Meanwhile, he used telekinesis power to drag Ye Chenshan, who had been completely frozen due to despair, along with him.

As for Ye Chenshan’s lizard, it would have to rely on its own. “GO!”

Upon hearing Su Ping's order, the python charged at the ceiling, while Little Skeleton and the Dark Dragon Hound acted as cover. The python could not fly so it had to crawl along the burning cave wall, causing its body to smell like burnt meat. Even so, it did not slow down.

Seeing its prey getting away, the Flame Blood Dragon spat out the broken Death Scythe and rushed at the python.

Little Skeleton put itself between the python and the dragon and raised its blade.

The Flame Blood Dragon reacted in time by coating its body under intense fire. In the end, Little Skeleton's bone blade only left a shallow white scar along the dragons' body.

The Flame Blood Dragon stirred as it fully moved out of the cave wall. It closed in on the Purple Python at full speed.

Little Skeleton once again tried to stop it, but its weak body of a sixth-rank Astral Pet was powerless against the full assault of a ninth-rank monster that almost reached the level of a Beast King.

Little Skeleton was shattered to pieces against the dragon's ramming attack. It would need a few seconds to reassemble.

The Flame Blood Dragon had already reached its target. It bared its bloody fangs and chomped down at the python's neck.

Using the exceptional fortitude he had gained from all the deadly training, Su Ping remained cool-headed as he forced his brain to work out a solution.

He remembered something that might be of help.

Chapter 183 Capture

While lying inside the python's mouth, Ye Chenshan covered his head and trembled. He had completely lost it after witnessing the death of Old Mo and the ninth-rank Death Scythe. He didn't pay any attention at all when Su Ping dragged him along.

Using what remained of his sanity, he sensed how Su Ping's "strongest pet" Little Skeleton was shattered to pieces by the coming Flame Blood Dragon. Now he had enough reasons to give up; he could think of nothing that might help in getting him out of there alive.

He saw light when the python reopened its mouth as Su Ping ordered. Something flashed past his view and reached outside.

Ye Chenshan could not tell what that was. It looked like some kind of throwing weapon to him.

Of course, he didn't believe that something like that would have any effect against the dragon's scales.

Clang!

The "weapon" reached the dragon's head and was bounced away.

Ye Chenshan sneered in despair. He was ready to welcome his end.

"A miss?" Su Ping frowned and lifted his arm again.

Several more “throwing weapons” were unleashed at the Flame Blood Dragon, which was almost on top of them. It came so close that Ye Chenshan could almost tell how many teeth the dragon had, including a human hand still clung to one of them.

Old Mo’s remains.

Ye Chenshan closed his eyes and said his last prayer. Clang!

The hot and odorous airflow suddenly vanished. Everything went quiet.

Ye Chenshan waited a little longer. He wondered if he had already been sent to the afterlife.

Good. There was no pain in the end...

He slowly opened his eyelids, only to see the same cave again. The only thing different was the absence of the Flame Blood Dragon. It was gone.

But how??

“Phew. That does it.” Su Ping also relaxed after their successful survival.

He lifted an arm again and several objects came flying back to him. Before Ye Chenshan could see what they were, Su Ping stashed them inside his inventory space.

The “desperate measure” he had just thought up with was not about tossing weapons at the dragon, but the middle-rank beast-catching rings he had prepared. According to the system, the strongest Astral Pets those rings could catch were Beast Kings, but with the ridiculously low successful rate of 1.25%, which meant he had to hurl hundreds of those rings at a Beast King at the same time if he wanted a reliable result.

Unless he was blessed with a big stroke of luck, that was. As for ninth-rank Astral Pets, the probability was amazingly, 50%.

Guess I shouldn’t rely on luck unless I really have to... Su Ping showed a disappointed look. I spent four rings to hit that 50% chance. Damn.

Nevertheless, he was alive, so everything was worth it.

He looked at the ground, where another beast-catching ring was dropped, and pulled it back. Unlike the other black rings, this one was slightly glowing. And it was hot to the touch.

Using his astral perception, Su Ping moved his vision inside the ring and saw a large, dark space, inside which the proud Blood Flame Dragon was trying to shake free of several thick chains binding its body.

“Heh. It’s almost a Beast King, but not quite there yet, so the success rate doesn’t change. Or I would have been in serious trouble today.”

Sensing Su Ping’s inquiring will, the Flame Blood Dragon struggled harder and caused the chains to almost sink inside its scales.

LET... ME... OUT!

The dragon couldn’t speak, though it somehow sent its thoughts for Su Ping to understand.

And this was even better. An Astral Pet he could talk to sure sounded fancy.

“You want freedom? Answer me then, how did the Astral Spirit Fruit get there? And what are those dead bodies in the pit? Are you like a guardian who must protect the bodies of your predecessors?”

Su Ping was confident that the dragon could no longer hurt him while imprisoned in the ring. It wouldn't hurt to learn something useful.

LET ME OUT!!

Su Ping shook his head and looked away. It seemed he had to wait for the creature to calm down first.

“Where... Where's that thing?” Ye Chenshan looked around the area with a dumbstruck look.

“Maybe it ran away?” Su Ping played dumb.

“Ran?? Why would it? Didn't it want to eat us all —”

“Who knows. Maybe it ate something bad and really needed the toilet.”

Ye Chenshan was dumbfounded.

Something bad?

He suddenly remembered the human hand he had just seen. Of course Old Mo was “something bad.” That old man had just tried to murder them for the sake of his own survival!

“Will—will it come back? Let's get away, quick!” Ye Chenshan anxiously scanned the area with a terrified look.

Su Ping nodded and prepared to do just that.

But before leaving, he had several matters to attend to.

First, he jumped out of the Purple Python's mouth and found Luo Guxue lying unconscious inside the corpse pit. It looked like she was mostly fine.

Next, he looked at the Astral Spirit Tree. He wanted to take the tree away as a whole and perhaps replant it somewhere later, such as inside the pet shop. But... this thing was at least five meters tall. His inventory space was not big enough to keep it.

He considered for a moment and used 10,000 energy points to double the size of his inventory. This way, the tree could fit inside just fine while leaving some extra space to keep other stuff.

“Neither of the Flame Blood Dragons took this fruit away?” He wondered while looking at the only fruit growing on the tree. “Weird. Maybe they had already consumed several fruits, and they knew that eating more was pointless to their growth?”

He sent some astral power to the fruit and picked it.

Meanwhile, Ye Chenshan was asking his lizard to carry Luo Guxue out of the pit. He saw what Su Ping had just done, but considering how Su Ping saved him yet again, he decided not to raise any questions.

The soothing smell of the glowing fruit urged Su Ping to eat it right away. Though he persuaded himself into giving up on second thought; he was going to reach the fifth rank soon. Using the fruit right then would be a huge waste.

Su Ping didn't place the tree into his storage yet, for he didn't want to expose one of his secrets when Ye Chenshan was watching.

He turned to the pit and jumped inside. He wanted to search the fresh human corpses for valuables while he had the chance.

He was surprised to notice that one of the bodies was still warm. The "body" looked at him upon sensing his touch.

"Help... please..."

Su Ping checked the man's chest wound and saw the heart was still beating. But there was a main artery torn up, which was spilling blood like a fully-powered water pump. This guy had managed to stay awake all thanks to his trained settler's body. Although, this would not help him live for much longer.

"You can give up," Su Ping said, "Any last words? Such as telling your bank account password to your wife? I'm all ears."

Chapter 184 The Map

The young man: 8(°4 ° | |)_... When he heard Su Ping's words, the young man almost suffered from a heart attack and kicked the bucket.

Admittedly, Su Ping's remark was very effective. The young man's wandering and blurred consciousness came back at once. He remembered that he did have a fiancé, and they had just gotten engaged.

He was dying but he had not been intimate with his fiancé yet.

The sorrow took root in his heart. Trembling, the young said to Su Ping, "Save me. I will give you anything you want..."

"Really? Can you make me a legendary battle pet warrior?" Su Ping asked.

The young man was speechless. He himself was not a titled battle pet warrior. How could he make someone else a legendary battle pet warrior? If he had this ability, why would he risk his life in this place? This question didn't make any sense.

However, since the young man was the one asking a favor, he had no choice but to say, "You can ask for anything else."

"Then give me ten billion federal coins."

"... That's too much. I can give you 100 million."

"How about one hundred ninth-rank pets?"

"Then, one hundred pieces of treasure?" "C_)..."

Su Ping was going to propose something else. The young man felt he had lost too much blood; his head was becoming heavier and the headache was sharper. The young man tried hard to keep breathing. He interrupted Su Ping and said, "Fine, ten billion federal coins. I will give them to you."

"Oh. Make the transfer then."

"...Can you please save me now? I think I am dying here."

"Be confident. Remove the words 'I think'. You are dying," Su Ping said.

"You..."

The young man could no longer breathe. He rolled his eyes and passed away.

Su Ping heaved a sigh. "Anger is detrimental to life." He reached out and searched the young man's backpack, taking everything out. Apart from the food, phone and other survival equipment, there were no other precious items. Su Ping shook his head and searched for other bodies.

Soon, he found another man that was faking his death.

This was a middle-aged man with a strong build. But there was a huge hole on his belly. He was at his last gasp.

"Save... me..." the man said, his voice hoarse and trembling. "Are you all actors?" Su Ping asked. The middle-aged man: "???" This man was still conscious. Su Ping asked, "Did you sneak in here when we lured the Flame Flood Dragon away? That means that you had arrived here before us. You stayed in hiding and knew about the situation here. Right?"

There was fear in the middle-aged man's milky eyes. He answered feebly, "We... just happened to be here. We didn't know that there were..."

"It is said that people say good words on their dying beds. You are barely breathing but you are still lying. You are committed to your role."

The middle-aged man curled his lips. Maybe his words stung. Or maybe his words stung.

"If I'm right, you have the map. Or, did you give the map to Nie Chengkong?" Su Ping posed his question.

The middle-aged man said nothing. He lowered his head. He knew that the chances of him being saved were slim.

"I checked your other deceased teammates. They weren't particularly strong but you seem to know more than Nie Chengkong did. You knew about the treasure being kept here and about the guarding beasts.

"But you didn't expect that another sneaky flood dragon was hiding here apart from that Flame Flood Dragon. Your entire team was defeated before a battle even started."

Su Ping looked into the man's eyes and continued, "Did you give the map to Nie Chengkong on purpose so that he would clear the way for you?"

The middle-aged man was trembling. He was barely breathing. "Since... you know, why... do you... have to ask?"

Su Ping grinned. "So, I was right. That is to say, you didn't explore the other sites at all. You just waited here all this time so that you could snatch the treasure when both Nie Chengkong and the Flame Flood Dragon were hurt. That is a nice plan.

"But I am curious about this. Where did you get the map? Assuming you used some channels for Nie Chengkong to stumble across the map, where did you get the map then?"

The middle-aged man was breathing heavily. His mind was disturbed. He turned away, refusing to answer the question.

He was dying anyway. He wasn't in the mood to talk to Su Ping.

"If you answer my question, I can think about saving you." Su Ping sounded earnest.

The middle-aged man turned his head back. He saw the serious look on Su Ping's face. His eyes glowed. Suddenly, he began to talk with a solemn tone.

"We found the information and picked up the map from an ancient hall in a space fracture." The middle-aged man revealed the answer.

Su Ping raised his eyebrows. He observed the middle-aged man. He seemed to be telling the truth.

"The space fracture where?"

"At a Class C barren area, No. 291..."

Su Ping knew that was a Class C area outside the Longjiang Base City. "No one else knew, right?" Su Ping went on.

The middle-aged man was very weak at the moment. "Just your team and our team."

"Good."

"Can you... save me now?"

"I would but your wound is too serious. I cannot help you even if I wanted to," Su Ping said.

The middle-aged man was fuming at the mouth. He had been fooled. This possibility had crossed his mind but since this was a matter of life and death for him, he still had some hope. It was just that the hope had vanished all too soon.

His face was beet red due to anger. He stared at Su Ping and said, "You lied!" "I said I would save you but I didn't say I could be successful. I can try my best but you will die," Su Ping replied.

"You!"

The middle-aged man's eyes popped out. It was scary. But that was the last word he could say. He died in anger.

Ye Chenshan took Luo Guxue who had come about to see Su Ping.

He witnessed how that middle-aged man died. Surprised, he asked, "Su, that man was alive?"

"Yes. He was still breathing," Su Ping answered.

"How about now?"

"He's not."

Ye Chenshan didn't know what to say. He had a general idea of what had gone wrong when he saw all those dead bodies. Their team had been fooled.

"Su, shall we go now?" Ye Chenshan asked.

They were the only three alive. Since Su Ping was the most powerful of them all, they had to ask for his opinion on the matter.

"They seemed to be from our base city as well. Do you know them?" Su Ping asked.

Ye Chenshan checked. What he saw stunned him. "They were from Team Poison Fang, one of the top-tier teams. I didn't know they were here!"

Su Ping nodded. "You can step outside for now. I will fill up the ground in case any tracks are left behind, to save us the trouble that someone may come later and think we set up traps for those men here."

Ye Chenshan agreed. Su Ping was more careful than he thought. He supported Luo Guxue with his arms and said to Su Ping, "We will wait for you outside then. Su, be quick."

"Mister Su, be careful," Luo Guxue cautioned Su Ping. She looked ghastly pale.

Chapter 185 Leaving

After Ye Chenshan and Luo Guxue went outside, Su Ping summoned his Inferno Dragon and told it to burn to ashes all the dead flood dragons and deceased explorers.

Having taken care of the corpses, Su Ping placed that tree of Astral Spirit Fruit in his storage space. He headed outside the cave. Before he left, he told the Inferno Dragon to stir up the ground and to utterly destroy the place.

Luo Guxue and Ye Chenshan were waiting for Su Ping outside the cave. They saw how the Inferno Dragon and the Dark Dragon Hound wreaked havoc in the cave. The entire grotto was turned upside down. They knew that Su Ping was getting rid of all the evidence, so that no trace was left behind.

"Brother Su, was that tree still inside? Did you destroy the tree as well?" Ye Chenshan was curious because Su Ping came back empty handed. He didn't seem to have brought that tree with him.

"That was an Astral Spirit Fruit tree."

Su Ping didn't hide the information. Both had seen the tree; if they wanted, they could search for information when they returned. They would have found out the truth sooner or later. He thought he just might as well tell them the truth.

"An Astral Spirit Fruit tree?"

Ye Chenshan and Luo Guxue were startled. The latter remembered something. She asked in surprise, "The Astral Spirit Fruit, as in the one that can help people move up by one position directly?"

Su Ping nodded.

This came as a shock to Ye Chenshan.

At the moment, he understood why Su Ping would want to destroy the tree. If they were to leave the Mysterious Realm with the tree, they would become the center of attention as soon as they arrived at the dragon heritage place. They would surely be targeted.

By then, the tree could no longer be regarded as a treasure, but a curse that could bring disaster to their lives.

No wonder Su Ping wanted to destroy this place in such a thorough manner! Ye Chenshan and Luo Guxue understood that this was a must-do to protect their own lives. That being said, they felt sorry that such a precious tree had to be ruined.

"No wonder our captain was in such a hurry..." Luo Guxue mumbled. The glow in her eyes dimmed down.

The thought of the deceased captain saddened Ye Chenshan. He heaved a sigh inside. Previously, he had also thought the captain was acting too rashly. He wanted to go into the cave without harvesting the materials from the Flame Flood Dragon's body.

Nie Chengkong must have lied to them. He knew what was being kept there.

An Astral Spirit Fruit was of too much value to Nie Chengkong. No wonder he would be so anxious and in such a rush.

It was a shame that Nie Chengkong didn't obtain the fruit in the end. He had even lost his life. It all came down to nothing.

"We are the only three people who know about the Astral Spirit Fruit. We can get into some serious trouble if we say a word about it. I hope you can keep this confidential," Su Ping said to the other two solemnly.

Luo Guxue nodded at once. "Sir, don't worry. I won't say a word."

Ye Chenshan understood what Su Ping was implying. "Brother Su, you have saved my life twice already. I will keep the secret. I know that speaking about the fruit will do us no good."

Su Ping nodded. He called the Inferno Dragon and the Little Skeleton back. The Dark Dragon Hound stayed with him. He hopped onto the head of the Purple Python and sat down. "Let's go back."

Ye Chenshan felt a bit sullen since Su Ping didn't say a thing about distributing the Astral Spirit Fruit between them, but that emotion vanished in an instant. Their entire trip had been smooth until they suffered a huge loss at the last stop; the number of casualties was great. The three of them were

fortunate enough to still be alive. Being a lucky survivor, Ye Chenshan was not in the mood to covet any treasures. Besides, Su Ping had saved him twice. He couldn't be jealous of him.

Ye Chenshan and Luo Guxue hopped onto their pets and left with Su Ping.

Luo Guxue's Flare Bird had been severely wounded; she called it back to the contract space and summoned another seventh-rank pet of the wind family to use as her means of transportation.

First, they went to where the Flame Flood Dragon had died to meet with Zhou Jing who was guarding the place.

Zhou Jing only saw three people, which frightened him. "Where's our captain?" Ye Chenshan sighed. "Captain... lost his life accidentally, so did Old Mo and Yuelin..."

Zhou Jing stared at him. He could not believe this.

He had heard loud noises coming from that cave, including some dragon roars. The worst he had expected came to pass. "How so? What happened to you?" Zhou Jing asked in a hurry.

Luo Guxue looked awful. She briefly summarized the event, leaving out the information of the tree. She just mentioned "some treasure" instead.

Zhou Jing was astonished by Luo Guxue's account of the event. Their team had not suffered a single major loss on their way there. Almost the entire team had been eliminated at the final stop. He never thought that there could be two Flame Flood Dragons, one of them being at the peak of the ninth rank!

He felt his heart aching over the death of Nie Chengkong and Guo Yuelin. At the same time, he was embarrassed to admit that he was a bit glad.

He might have died if he had gone into the cave with the team.

"Team Poison Fang! How despicable!" Zhou Jing clenched his teeth in hatred when he heard that someone had taken advantage of their team. The target of Zhou Jing's anger was Team Poison Fang. However, since Team Poison Fang had received a fitting punishment, Zhou Jing could only hurl out some verbal abuse to vent his anger.

"Let's take care of this dead flood dragon so we can go back." Su Ping added, "The other flood dragon may come out at some point."

The other three came back to their senses. Su Ping's reminder scared them. Ye Chenshan jumped into the valley, then he took out the sword that had once belonged to Old Mo, and cut off the useful parts from the Flame Flood Dragon.

Su Ping told his Dark Dragon Hound and the Purple Python to have some of the flood dragon's flesh.

This flood dragon was real, not an illusion. Its flesh was quite nutritious. Soon, Ye Chenshan had harvested all the energy crystals, which were the most precious items in the Flame Flood Dragon, then he climbed back up to rejoin the team.

“Let’s go.” Zhou Jing was nervous. He had his hawk out to keep an eye on the surrounding environment at all times, in case the other Flame Flood Dragon that Ye Chenshan mentioned would jump out all of a sudden. In fact, Zhou Jing was too scared to go near the remains of the Flame Flood Dragon.

Su Ping asked the others to recall their pets and invited them to sit on the Purple Python’s head. Then they began their journey back right away.

The energy screens at the edge of each land isolated all the dragon scale lands. Not even titled battle pet warriors could go across those energy screens.

There were portals by the energy screens to teleport people back to the plaza.

Su Ping steered the Purple Python. He knew the path well. Along the way, he avoided the locations where small groups of beasts would gather and only encountered some wandering beasts. They were teleported back to the plaza without a hitch.

They heard some lively noises at the plaza.

They had already arrived at the plaza when Su Ping and the others opened their eyes. They were still sitting on the Purple Python’s head. There was some blood on the floor; some people were discussing heatedly. They weren’t the only team that had returned from the dragon scale lands.

“A Purple Python?”

Someone saw Su Ping arriving. They were surprised when they noticed that Su Ping and his team were sitting on a middle-rank pet. How did they dare to explore the dragon scale lands when their pet was of such a low rank? The other teams shifted their attention to see them as well. They disdained the team when they saw Luo Guxue injured and Ye Chenshan in low spirits.

A guard came over and said to Su Ping coldly, “Please put away your pet while at the plaza.”

Su Ping jumped down from the Purple Python’s head. Su Ping called the Purple Python back after Luo Guxue and the others came down. After throwing one look to the blood on the ground, Su Ping asked, “Has there been a fight?”

The guard snorted. “When a team ran back, they lured a beast at the upper position of the ninth rank and followed them all the way here. Luckily enough, Venerable the Blade was here. He killed that beast with one strike.”

Su Ping raised his head to the sky. A powerful man was standing in the air, looking down at the crowd like a god.

“He’s not a legendary battle pet warrior. But what he did was indeed stunning.” Su Ping squinted his eyes. He looked away and said to the three people who were still frozen in astonishment. “Are you going back or do you want to wander around a bit more?”

Chapter 186 The Check-up

“You’re not leaving with us?”

The three of them figured out Su Ping’s intention. They sounded surprised.

Su Ping replied, "I want to go out there and explore more. After all, this is my first time visiting a Mysterious Realm."

It was understandable that Su Ping would want to stay. However, since Nie Chengkong and Guo Yuelin had passed away, Ye Chenshan, Luo Guxue and Zhou Jing were no longer in the mood to stay. Besides, considering their strength, entering the Mysterious Realm again would only mean being close to danger. If they stayed, they would be lingering at the plaza and just looking on.

Ye Chenshan had built a shield to isolate their sound. He whispered to Su Ping, "What's your plan about the treasures and materials we harvested from the beasts?"

Su Ping thought about it and whispered back, "How about we find some privacy and divide them amongst ourselves?"

Ye Chenshan looked at Luo Guxue and Zhou Jing. None of them disagreed. "Sure."

"OK, let's go and have our stuff checked first," Zhou Jing said. There was a group of men in black stationed at the edge of the plaza. They were in charge of checking the stuff taken by teams leaving the realm. All the items the teams found during their explorations in the Mysterious Realm had to be checked.

That was to say, no one could sneak anything out.

Those men in black belonged to the behind-the-scenes ruler of Longtai Mountain. This ruler was not a single person; most likely, it was a large group. They weren't worried about opening up the Mysterious Realm to the public or about anyone sneaking out any treasures.

Of course, if some team discovered masterpieces, this group would not "rob" them. They would use a fair way to buy the masterpiece, maybe with money or with other treasures.

In a sense, the exploration teams entering the Mysterious Realm were just working for others. The actual rare treasures could hardly be taken away. The explorers could only preserve the relatively valuable items. While some of the best treasures could not be taken away, the explorers could trade them for enough money to have a wealthy life or other equally valuable items. Of course, the explorers could also obtain an identity and status that they could not achieve by normal means.

As such, while some of the masterpieces had to stay there, there were still many explorers' teams willing to go there. After all, the relatively valuable items were already good enough for most people. They would not be willing to keep masterpieces that even titled battle pet warriors longed for in their wildest imaginations.

Su Ping, Ye Chenshan, and Luo Guxue were a bit scared about the check-up.

They wouldn't hide the Astral Spirit Fruit at the checkpoint; this fruit was not a treasure of the highest grade, it would not catch the attention of titled battle pet warriors. That being said, it would be enticing for those at the upper position of the ninth rank. After taking this fruit, they could reach the peak of the ninth rank!

Luck and fortune were needed to move further upward and break the shackles to become a real powerful warrior.

Ye Chenshan and Luo Guxue looked at Su Ping. They could pass the check if Su Ping ate the fruit right there. After all, the fruit could not be found if it was in Su Ping's stomach. Even if someone were to find out, it was unlikely that Su Ping could spit it out.

Such consumables were the only items that could be "taken out" easily.

But.

While Ye Chenshan didn't know the specifics about Su Ping's strength, he was sure that he was not at the ninth rank. Therefore, taking the fruit right then would be a waste.

Luo Guxue knew Su Ping better based on what he did at the academy. At the moment, she truly hoped that Su Ping could eat the fruit. Even if he had just reached the ninth rank, the fruit could take him directly to the intermediate position!

Time was money for talents like Su Ping. Taking the fruit was worthwhile even if he couldn't make the most of it.

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Su Ping had thought about it. However, he was at the upper position of the fourth rank and very close to move up to the fifth rank; it would be a waste for him to eat the fruit because he could achieve that small jump with cultivation.

Selling it is a good idea, Su Ping thought to himself. He didn't care for this fruit. Taking it once was effective. Eating it twice would not bring him any benefit.

Since he had the tree, he could grow more fruit when he went back, to take it when he reached the upper position of the ninth rank. That was the best plan for him. Therefore, the original intention he had for this fruit was to sell it so that he could use the money to upgrade the store.

"Let's go," Su Ping said calmly.

Ye Chenshan and Luo Guxue were puzzled, wondering why Su Ping was acting so casually. Since the fruit belonged to him, they didn't know what he had planned for it, nor could they give him any suggestions.

Soon, they arrived at the checkpoint.

There was a spacious room at the plaza. Many people in black uniforms were there. Some people in strange clothes were sitting or standing there. All of them were powerful; everyone was a titled battle pet warrior!

No one could smuggle anything from that place. Venerable the Blade and other titled battle pet warriors were observing the proceedings. The dragon scale lands inside the Mysterious Realm could not be monitored. But every corner of the plaza was under strict surveillance.

A bearded middle-aged man saw Su Ping walking over. The man with a straight face gave them a look and said, "Please move your backpacks here."

This man was at the peak of the eighth-rank, one rank away from becoming a titled battle pet warrior. But this one rank meant a world of difference. The titled battle pet warriors could stay there in comfort

and only intervene when someone roused trouble. However, this man had to sit at the checkpoint and instruct all those who passed to take out their stuff. He was a man that had to work office hours.

Ye Chenshan hesitated for a moment. Eventually, he opened his backpack and poured everything into a white tray on the side.

Apart from the prepared food, the only things in his bag were the crystals they had harvested from the beasts.

The energy crystals were some lumps found inside the beasts. As energy converged in those lumps, they would transform into something like pebbles. The lumps would no longer be pieces of flesh and blood. A profound energy was concentrated in the crystals; the pebbles appeared to be white. They produced a mysterious feeling.

Energy crystals occupied the majority of the space in Ye Chenshan's bag. There were dozens of such energy crystals of various sizes and a few more had been stored in Luo Guxue's bag.

The bearded middle-aged man was surprised to see that many energy crystals. To his bigger astonishment, he noticed there were crystals the size of a fist with bright colors.

The energy in those crystals was rich. Since the man had checked countless crystals, he could tell right away that those crystals were from ninth rank beasts!

There were six such crystals!

That was to say, this team had killed six ninth-rank beasts. Was that possible?

The bearded man was not the only one stunned. Some of the titled battle pet warriors sitting nearby sensed the surge of energy. They looked over in surprise and saw the ninth-rank energy crystals. They fixed their eyes on Su Ping and the three that were with him.

Their surprise deepened when the titled battle pet warriors sensed the strength of the four.

It was evident that none of the four were titled battle pet warriors. They were all just advanced battle pet warriors.

Of the four, Su Ping appeared to be the most mysterious. He seemed to be weak, even below the fifth rank. Was Su Ping hiding or was that his true strength?

The bearded middle-aged man asked Ye Chenshan, "Did you kill this many beasts?"

Ye Chenshan nodded. He noticed the tone of doubt in his words. Ye Chenshan explained, "Our captain and two master battle pet warriors killed those beasts. Unfortunately, they passed away..." The middle-aged man and those titled battle pet warriors understood. Still, they found something strange. The powerful warriors died but the weaker ones came back. Were those people too lucky or were their captain and the two masters too unlucky?

"Your bag." The middle-aged man with whiskers pointed to Luo Guxue.

She opened her bag at once and poured everything out. There were some energy crystals; two were from ninth rank beasts. Apart from those crystals, she had placed some other useful materials harvested from the beasts in her bag.

Since they were in a hurry, they had left behind many valuable materials of the beasts, only harvesting the most useful parts.

Chapter 187 One Billion

The bearded middle-aged man was startled.

This team had killed quite a number of beasts and most of them had been at the seventh or eighth rank.

Some ripples could be felt from some of the materials. The bearded man checked in astonishment. Those materials were from ninth rank beasts. Some scales appeared to be familiar.

“Those scales are from a beast at the intermediate rank of the ninth rank, the Scale Bone.” A middle-aged titled battle pet warrior moved closer. He, too, was surprised to see those scales.

The Scale Bones were regarded as powerful among all the ninth rank beasts. Given the size of the scale, this Scale Bone was clearly an adult and at the prime of its strength. Could this team have really killed a beast at the intermediate position of the ninth rank?

The other titled battle pet warriors were intrigued by those materials and energy crystals. They stepped over in surprise.

The bearded man was stunned by the titled battle pet warrior’s words. The former knew that it would be difficult for him to defeat a beast of such tier by himself. Clearly the deceased captain and the two masters of the team had been powerful warriors.

Another titled battle pet warrior said to Su Ping with a smile, “Could we please check your bag as well?” The man had sensed some rich energy contained in Su Ping’s bag. That energy was different from anything else, which he found interesting.

Su Ping laid down his bag and poured out the contents.

Apart from the food and other sundries, there were energy crystals, materials from the beasts, the Astral Spirit Fruit and the Soul Lantern.

The titled battle pet warriors took a look. They didn’t care about the energy crystals and the materials. Those items were valuable but they had seen enough of them. But that Astral Spirit Fruit and the Soul Lantern had caught their attention.

A titled battle pet warrior with a scratch mark on his face said, “Where have I... seen this fruit before?”

A lady with a well-developed and curvy body thought of something. She looked away from the fruit and asked Su Ping, “This fruit seems to be tasty. Can you sell it to me?”

Su Ping raised his eyebrows. He answered with a question, “What are you going to pay me with?”

“What do you want? Money? Or treasures?” The lady believed Su Ping intended to sell the fruit, which made her even happier. Su Ping smiled, “How much are you willing to pay?”

“How about one million?” the lady replied calmly.

Su Ping grinned. “I can think about it if you add three more zeroes.”

“Three zeroes?” The lady’s smile vanished. A trace of coldness went past her face. “Listen, this is just a measly fruit. I just want to have a taste. One million is a high enough number, don’t let such a good chance slip away.”

The others sneered at Su Ping, thinking that he was dying to make money. They didn’t know what fruit this was. But even a rare kind of fruit would be sold for 100 million, at most.

Su Ping wondered whether the lady was playing dumb, but he wasn’t in the mood to find out. Later on, when he placed the fruit in the scanning machine, it would compare against all the references in the database. The machine could tell what fruit it was anyways. Su Ping replied at once, “This is an Astral Spirit Fruit. I don’t know if you’ve heard about it. Anyone below the ninth rank can raise by one position after consuming the fruit!

“The fruit works best for people at the upper position of the ninth rank. They can reach the peak directly. Now, tell me... Do you think one billion is too much for this fruit?”

“An Astral Spirit Fruit?!”

“Are you serious?!”

When Su Ping mentioned the name “Astral Spirit Fruit,” the titled battle pet warriors were stunned stiff.

Trying to improve their strength was on their minds at all times. They were naturally aware of this fruit’s existence, which was in fact quite famous. But this fruit was hard to find; they couldn’t even find it in some unknown areas of the space fractures.

However, this fruit right in front of them was indeed that mysterious and rare Astral Spirit Fruit!

The lady’s expression changed. She seemed to be enraged; she didn’t know that Su Ping could recognize this fruit.

“The Astral Spirit Fruit, well, well...”

The titled battle pet warriors could not keep their eyes off the fruit. This was something that could help them improve by one position directly. For a similar attainment, they would have to spend years in cultivation while using rare treasures that contained rich energy.

“Feng, so you had already recognized this thing. No wonder you were willing to pay one million for it.” A man with short hair made fun of her. She wanted to buy the Astral Spirit Fruit with just one million. Su Ping would have made a terrible deal if he had not known this.

That curvy lady named Feng snorted. “I would have offered 100 million straight away if I had recognized it.”

The others sneered at her in secret. That was a very poor lie. They just regarded her reply as a joke. Nobody took her explanation seriously.

"I want this," a learned and refined man who had remained silent until then interposed, "One billion, just like you said."

The others looked at this man. They weren't surprised by his move.

"Brother Shuhai, how generous you are. I might have thought twice about the one million if it were for me."

"I don't have any problems with Brother Shuhai buying this fruit. You'll reach the upper position once you consume it. After some years of cultivation, you may be able to catch up to Venerable the Blade."

"Don't make fun of me," the refined man said.

Then he turned to Su Ping and continued, "I'm Qin Shuhai. I believe you are from Longjiang Base City, right? Quite the coincidence, I'm from Longjiang Base City as well."

"Qin Shuhai..."

Luo Guxue and Ye Chenshan were taken aback by the name.

Ye Chenshan whispered, "Are you the warrior titled 'Poet-a-holic' from the Qin family?"

"Yes, I am." Qin Shuhai smiled.

He admitted it. Luo Guxue and Ye Chenshan looked at each other speechlessly. Luo Guxue had a friendly feeling about this man. "Mr. Qin, I work at the same academy as Qin Yuanfeng. I've heard so much about you from Mr. Qin Yuanfeng. He said that you are the man he respects the most."

Qin Shuhai looked at her in surprise. Then he put on a soft smile. "I'm glad we have some connections. Yuanfeng is also from my generation. It's a pity that he lacks some talent but he does work hard. I believe he's about to become a titled battle pet warrior, isn't he?"

Luo Guxue felt embarrassed. At the academy, Qin Yuanfeng was a man of both noble character and high prestige. He was admired by many students. However, going by Qin Shuhai's standards, he found Qin Yuanfeng lacking. The students would have been left dumbstruck if they had heard this.

"Mr. Qin Yuanfeng should be there soon. He's in the Mysterious Realm. Didn't you see him?" Luo Guxue asked.

Qin Shuhai shook his head. "I have to stay and guard the security check here. But since he's here, I'll see him when he comes out."

"Of course." Luo Guxue nodded.

She was inferior to Qin Shuhai, both in age and strength.

The other titled battle pet warriors saw that Qin Shuhai was catching up with Su Ping and the others. They knew that they could no longer have the fruit even if they wanted to by this point.

Qin Shuhai went on, "Who's in charge here? Since the fruit has been revealed, I suggest you sell it. This fruit is quite rare; even I would have to consume it right after I buy it. Otherwise, some people may cast their greedy eyes on it."

Luo Guxue understood this. Greedy people were worse than thieves.

“Mr. Su made the biggest contribution when we obtained the fruit. He will make the call.”

Luo Guxue turned to Su Ping. In her eyes, there was some admiration. She revered Qin Shuhai. But apart from reverence, she had some admiration for Su Ping. After all, Su Ping had become quite powerful at his young age. In the future, he could have an even more promising future.

Qin Shuhai was surprised by her words and the look in her eyes. He realized that Mr. Su was the youngest member on the team, Su Ping.

Why was it the weakest and youngest person on the team calling the shots?

Chapter 188 Astral Telekinesis

“Are you sure you’ll trust this, well, young man?” Qin Shuhai questioned while carefully inspecting Su Ping from the outside. He had cooperated with many famous families and clans in Longjiang City, yet he couldn’t remember ever seeing Su Ping anywhere.

Even while traveling outside, he more or less kept in touch with the city. No one had ever mentioned a “Su family” suddenly gaining fame and power.

Luo Guxue nodded. “Professor Su is my colleague. Don’t let his looks fool you though, he’s already a titled warrior.”

“What did you say??”

Both Qin Shuhai and the other titled warriors in the room went wide-eyed. Even Ye Chenshan and Zhou Jing were wondering whether their teammate had lost her mind.

As a matter of fact, even Su Ping himself didn’t expect Luo Guxue to overstate his strength like this.

Must be my Astral Telekinesis skill... She saw it and overestimated my level?

Su Ping wanted to clarify the truth, but didn’t do it on second thought, for he didn’t want to reveal his Astral Telekinesis skill to anyone. Besides, he was at an advantage if people saw him as a titled warrior; this would help him sell his items faster.

Thinking about this, he remained quiet and decided to keep up with the show.

Ye Chenshan tugged Luo Guxue’s arm. “Are you sure?? Mister Su is a titled warrior?”

“I am.” Luo Guxue looked determined. “I saw his power with my own eyes. He can fly. You know only titled warriors are capable of that, right?”

“Fly??” The others were shocked yet again.

“But how is that possible when he’s only, you know...” Zhou Jing looked unconvinced.

“He’s what you call a born genius, perhaps.” Luo Guxue sighed in awe.

Su Ping listened to all the flattery while feeling a bit embarrassed.

Qin Shuhai was checking Su Ping's aura again. He had already confirmed that Su Ping was only at the fifth rank or so, which... didn't quite add up. No one with a sound mind would take a fifth-rank burden on a Mysterious Realm expedition since that would get everyone killed.

If Su Ping was truly a titled battle pet warrior, that meant he had enough to become the final champion of the Elite League at such an age. Everyone present had realized that. Qin Shuhai, as the young master of the Qin family, was already a peerless genius rarely found in human history. He had reached the seventh rank at the age of 20, which was a miracle on its own.

Su Ping's case was downright impossible in their view.

Naturally, many people present were doubtful of Luo Guxue's claim. They thought Luo Guxue was using such an excuse to scare off coveting folks so she could take their loot away.

Or perhaps she had simply lost her mind.

"I... must say I've never seen such a budding boy with such supreme aptitude." Lady Feng gave Su Ping an alluring look. "Supposing it's true, then this little handsome boy is not any less talented than Venerable the Blade in his early years. Can you perhaps show us what you can do?"

"Yeah! I want to see it!" another man followed up. Su Ping raised an eyebrow but didn't respond.

Someone sneered as if their "conjecture" had been proven right.

"Hey, Mister Su, right? Come on, show us your tricks. You don't need to move around in the sky or something. Getting your feet off the ground for a few seconds will do."

"Do it! Do it!"

Su Ping gave them an amused smile. "Why would I listen to you?"

"What? It's not like flying right now will hurt you."

"You claimed to be a titled warrior, so why aren't you proving it to us?"

"He's just a lying clown, that's why!"

Since the buyer of the Astral Spirit Fruit had already been determined, the other titled warriors didn't hold back and insulted Su Ping.

Speaking of the fruit, they suddenly noticed that it was floating in midair, instead of lying where it should be.

"Will this do?" said Su Ping, as he pointed a finger at the flying fruit.

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The sight had silenced everyone who was questioning him just then; using astral power to levitate objects without touching them was indeed a sign that suggested a titled warrior's level.

But I just left the city for a few years! Qin Shuhai couldn't believe his eyes. Where did this guy spring from?? Su Ping controlled the fruit to glide past everyone's noses to shut them up.

The display just told everyone that he was not only talented, but was also blessed with abundant resources. A natural genius could not grow up without help after all.

Ye Chenshan and Zhou Jing stared at Su Ping with mouths agape. They would have never believed that the strongest member in the team was not their captain, but a young man they had been underestimating at the beginning. Both Su Ping and his pets were top-class!

Qin Shuhai recovered from the shock first and flashed a friendly smile. "That was marvelous, Mister Su. May I have the honor of knowing where you hail from? I'd make sure to pay you a visit when I find the chance."

Su Ping lowered the fruit. "Shall we get to our business first?"

Qin Shuhai wanted to blame all the careless people who had displeased Su Ping, but tried not to show it on his face.

"Of course, Mister Su. A billion as promised. I can make the payment right away." "Sure." Su Ping nodded casually. As common people would see it, selling the fruit for money was a very bad trade. If the fruit couldn't be used, it could be exchanged for other treasures.

To Su Ping, however, earning extra cash was more crucial to the shop. Whereas titled battle pet warriors didn't usually require money on a daily basis, he needed a lot of it.

Chapter 189 The Title Leaderboard

"Mister Shuhai truly is affluent, both in body and mind. He can part with one billion like it's nothing." A man grew a bit jealous when seeing Qin Shuhai paying such a big sum without much of a thought.

More people nodded to agree.

Even for titled warriors, one billion was no small number. They always needed large amounts of cash on various occasions, such as this one, where they had to buy important treasures from others. If they happened to see multiple items they liked, they'd soon exhaust their savings and start selling essentials to make up for urgent needs. "I don't mean to brag, but know that I own a 2-star VIP account at the Astral Union Bank. I can make any immediate payments below ten billion," said Qin Shuhai.

The Astral Union Bank had offices and subdivisions throughout different planets where Federation colonies were established; it was famous for their efficiency. If people were to use a local bank to transfer such an amount of money, they'd need to go through a lot of burdensome processes.

Su Ping nodded, deploying a simple astral barrier around them and messaging his account number using his phone.

Qin Shuhai was quite surprised to see Su Ping showing him an ordinary bank account issued by a common bank in Longjiang City. Titled battle pet warriors were usually allowed to apply for VIP accounts managed by the union bank, which were way more convenient in many aspects.

Although, he didn't question this matter. He simply entered the account and made the transfer. Even if he accidentally sent the money to the wrong recipient, he had many ways to force a small bank to transfer the money back

Su Ping checked his phone and saw the lovely zeros shown behind his balance. It seemed everything was in order.

“Thank you very much, Mister Su.” Qin Shuhai smiled contentedly.

“Likewise.”

Luo Guxue watched the whole matter and almost felt sad. For a settler, raising a billion would imply taking on many difficult missions. And even if she could earn the money, she had to stay alive after all those missions to enjoy the fruits of her labor. The work of settlers didn't appear as rewarding as people thought.

“Are you selling this lantern as well, Mister Su?” Qin Shuhai pointed at the Soul Lantern nearby.

“No, sorry.”

To Su Ping, the lantern was way more important than the fruit. Although the other people probably couldn't see it.

Qin Shuhai didn't know what the lantern was. He sensed peculiar energy signatures from it and wanted to try his luck. Although he was disappointed in the end.

“My family will always keep its doors open for you, Mister Su Ping. Please be sure to pay us a visit in the future.” Qin Shuhai tried befriending Su Ping as he always did when dealing with influential people.

Su Ping nodded slightly.

Next, it was Zhou Jing's turn to empty his backpack, which mostly contained more energy crystals and monster body parts.

Naturally, the scales of the Flame Blood Dragon drew a lot of attention. Although, they couldn't tell the rank of the dragon just by looking at the scales, which meant there wasn't much to say.

Bit by bit, the inspectors used a specialized device to accurately tell the origins of all the crystals and materials, as well as the properties of the treasures the team had brought back.

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Su Ping was quite surprised to see the device giving a detailed explanation regarding the lantern as well. As far as he knew, the lantern was an ancient item which hadn't been mass-produced. He had thought modern devices would have been unable to recognize it.

Qin Shuhai saw through his thought process and explained, “We shipped the tool from the ‘outside’. Instead of relying on a database that needs constant updates, the device can analyze the inner structures of all items and work out their general design and effects accordingly. You don't find many things that can keep secrets here. By the way, this thing might be small, but each one costs almost a trillion to manufacture. I think there are only a few of them currently in service on this planet.”

Su Ping nodded in acknowledgment. “Outside” probably meant other planets. “Let's see... No Class A objects detected.” Qin Shuhai read the result with his co-workers. “Mister Su, you're free to take them away.”

The Astral Spirit Fruit was considered restricted and would have to be reported to the higher-ups. Though there was no need for that since Qin Shuhai had already bought it. Such an action was against the rules, but it was usually “no complaint, no case.” Besides, an Astral Spirit Fruit was still not considered to be a forbidden Class A merchandise. Taking it would not get Qin Shuhai behind bars.

As for actual Class A items, the inspectors present didn’t have the right to decide where to put them. They would have to wait for the authorities to arrange them. Or in most cases, fight over them. The team sighed in relief since the inspection had ended swimmingly.

A titled warrior spoke to Su Ping, “Mister Su, I see you brought a lot of energy crystals. Could you sell some of them to me?”

The man tried to be polite after witnessing Su Ping’s level. It was up to Su Ping’s team to decide what to do with the crystals after the checkpoint, so he had to show some manners at the very least. Tyranny and forced trading were not allowed there.

Su Ping shook his head and rejected the proposal. He already had enough money and he wanted to use the crystals as pet food. The speaker stepped away, disappointed. When Su Ping’s team left the inspection room, Lady Feng looked at Qin Shuhai and said to him, “Hey, since when did Longjiang City have such a young rising star?”

Qin Shuhai shook his head with a bitter smile. “No idea. He seems to barely be 20 or so. A titled battle pet warrior... He’ll soon make it into the top ten of the Title Leaderboard, no doubt. And if he’s lucky, he might become a legendary pet warrior.”

Lady Feng frowned and glanced at Qin Shuhai’s fruit. “Top ten? Maybe. But definitely not legendary. That stuff asks for more than good talent and luck. You know, since he was willing to sell that fruit, chances are he ate one already or he found more than one in the Mysterious Realm. If he became a titled battle pet warrior by eating an Astral Spirit Fruit, then he’s not that good.”

Qin Shuhai wanted to agree, since Su Ping’s cheap bank account also told him that Su Ping didn’t have an impressive background.

But still, reaching that level at such an age was already a monumental feat. At least Qin Shuhai had to admit that Su Ping was way ahead of him.

“Gods. I really should have paid more attention to what was happening around my home...”

“Well, the Supremacy League is just after the Elite League, right?” Another titled warrior joined them. “With this fruit, I believe you can get a good result in the end, Mister Qin.”

Qin Shuhai shook his head. “I doubt it. You know well what the Supremacy League is like. It’s a stage for all kinds of scary freaks. An upper ninth-rank warrior like me will only win some matches to eventually be knocked out.”

“Don’t sell yourself short, Mister Qin!” people cheered.

“Yeah, we’ll all root for you.”

Qin Shuhai sighed in frustration, though the gleam of ambition never vanished from his eyes.

The Supremacy League was a gathering for all the titled warriors around the world. It was an important event where he had to participate.

He checked the Astral Spirit Fruit safely stored it.

After leaving the inspection room, Su Ping and the other members found a vacant spot outside and placed an astral barrier around them so they could talk in private.

“Let’s distribute the remaining energy crystals and materials,” Su Ping offered.

“But... how do we do it?” Ye Chenshan asked. He had just learned that Su Ping was a titled battle pet warrior and such a notion was barely sinking in. Out of instinct, he asked for Su Ping’s opinion.

Zhou Jing felt anxious as he waited for his decision. He knew he was mostly a stranger to Su Ping. There would be nothing he could do if Su Ping wished to take all the loot.

Su Ping considered, “We’ll divide everything four-six. I’m four. You guys decide how to share the rest, all right?”

That surprised everyone. It was quite a generous offer.

Luo Guxue spoke up, “Professor Su, we were able to take back so many things thanks to you. I mean, you and the captain handled most of the kills while we only watched from behind. We can’t have such a big portion.”

Ye Chenshan agreed; their captain used to divide their reward similarly, although Nie Chengkong always took the “six”. Deep down, Ye Chenshan would gladly accept the outcome and have his share for free. But since Luo Guxue brought it up, he thought it proper to at least show some courtesy. “What’s your opinion then?” asked Su Ping. “Urm, we can follow our old rules, meaning, we take four while you take six. Is that okay?”. “Sure.” Su Ping nodded. Delighted, Ye Chenshan and Zhou Jing quickly allocated everything accordingly. “And here’s the money I got from selling the Astral Spirit Fruit,” Su Ping continued, “How much should I give you?”

Luo Guxue was shocked, as she never expected to earn anything from that transaction.

“Well, you seized the fruit all by yourself, Professor Su. I mean, we would all be dead if not for you. We already took enough. Please, you can keep the money.”

Ye Chenshan nodded along. His conscience told him that was the right course of action.

Since the other members said so, Zhou Jing had to obey their decision as well.

Su Ping gladly accepted the result. In truth, he didn’t wish to share the money with anyone. It was just that, he found it necessary to pay a price to quench unnecessary trouble. He didn’t want people to hold grudges against him just because he took too much. “Okay, the fruit is all on me. You can have this sword.” He handed over Old Mo’s sword to the others.

Ye Chenshan accepted it. “We’ll later decide who keeps it. If no one wants it, we’ll sell it for merit points and evenly divide the income.”

“Sure thing.” Luo Guxue and Zhou Jing did not reject the proposal.

Since the final work was done, Zhou Jing and Ye Chenshan said their goodbyes and prepared to leave.

Luo Guxue wanted to accompany Su Ping for a bit longer, but Su Ping didn't let her.

Ye Chenshan saw Su Ping's action and silently complained in his mind. Man... Guess that's how you lure a woman slowly.

Left with no choice, Luo Guxue left the Mysterious Realm together with her team. Su Ping placed everything he had gained inside his backpack and headed to the dragon tower.

Chapter 190 Material for the Solar Bulwark

Although there were fewer people on the dragon tower, the place was still bustling.

When Su Ping arrived, he overheard people discussing

“It was such a surprise to see that the Tang girl reached the sixth dragon bone this time. Well, in a few more years, reaching the seventh and eighth dragon bones will be a piece of cake for her!”

“I stopped at the third dragon bone. Those talents are stunning.”

“Comparisons are odious. I heard that reaching the ninth dragon bone is quite beneficial. But for us, that is an extravagant hope. I suppose that those from the big families will be the ones able to reach the ninth dragon bone, sooner or later.”

Su Ping was surprised to hear that reaching the sixth dragon bone was considered as the focus of everyone's attention.

“Which is the highest dragon bone someone has ever reached?” Su Ping asked a passerby.

This man didn't expect this question from a young man but he didn't belittle him, nor did he react impatiently. Instead, the man checked Su Ping up and down. The young people that could enter the Mysterious Realm were most likely from powerful backgrounds. Only a few would go there merely for fun.

“People say there was once a person who reached the seventh dragon bone. But that is just a story and no one can prove it. At the moment, guys like Tang Ruyan and Feng Tianming can only reach the sixth dragon bone,” the man answered. Su Ping breathed in relief.

That was to say, those people had a long way to go when it came to reach the ninth dragon bone.

The real tests started at the seventh dragon bone. Only those who had a below-average or above aptitude could survive the seventh dragon bone.

To reach the eighth dragon bone, they would have to be at least average in aptitude. His Inferno Dragon was only able to reach the eighth dragon bone!

At the ninth dragon bone, they would have to be above average in aptitude at the very least! The dragon bones had been set up by the old dragon king to test the potential legacy recipients' abilities.

From the fourth to the sixth level would require the hopefuls to be advanced battle pet warriors. People would have to have abilities equal to the ninth rank at the sixth dragon bone!

But from the seventh dragon bone onward, the challenges would be adjusted according to the actual abilities of those who tried their luck in the test. At the seventh dragon bone, if people who came were at the seventh rank, they would encounter an eighth or a ninth-ranked dragon soul. But if the warriors were at the ninth rank, they would meet the soul of a beast king!

That was why those aiming for the test were the young and talented people. The older generation could pass the first six dragon bones easily, but it would be hard for them to pass the other dragon bones. After all, even the strongest of all, the ninth-ranked titled battle pet warriors would find it difficult to face the soul of a beast king. They would practically have to fight a beast king-level dragon! That was for the seventh rank. Above the eighth and the ninth rank, titled battle pet warriors might even encounter beings stronger than beast kings!

Su Ping had yet to reach the fifth rank. Once he reached the ninth dragon bone, he would encounter a ninth-ranked dragon soul. But he could solve the problem with the Inferno Dragon and the Little Skeleton. After all, as a battle pet warrior, pets were a part of his powers.

That being said, if he were to summon pets for the fight when the Inferno Dragon and the Little Skeleton were in action, they could not leverage Su Ping's strength. That was because of the restraints of the contract. Su Ping was the master and the pets were the subordinates.

The subordinates could not overrule the masters.

The masters could not fully control the subordinates.

Su Ping could borrow his pets' strength, and see them as a part of himself but it did not work the other way around. The best Su Ping could do was to use some augmentation skills to help his pets.

Gazing at the towering dragon bones, Su Ping thought to himself, She's already the center of attention just by having reached the sixth dragon bone. If I take the challenge now, I suppose I will alert many big potatoes...

He made up his mind a moment later. He decided to return later, to take the challenge before he had to leave. The current priority was to explore the dragon scale lands.

Su Ping left the dragon tower and went to the entrance portal.

Many teams were still lined up there. Some teams were recruiting new members but few would accept such offers. Anything could happen inside a Mysterious Realm. Cannibalism was a common occurrence when rare treasures were uncovered. In such cases, the teams would get rid of the temporary outside help before they divided the treasures among their original members.

Su Ping threw a casual look and went to the back of the line.

Not long afterward, some teams noticed that Su Ping was alone, so they went to invite him to join.

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Su Ping turned them down. He wasn't interested.

Soon, it was Su Ping's turn to enter the portal. He paid the one million fee and stepped into the formation. On his mind emerged the image of the 109 dragon scale lands which formed the shape of a dragon.

Su Ping tried to recall the dragon scale lands he had already explored in the cultivation site. He considered his choices and chose one in the central region.

The cultivation site did not number the dragon scale lands. Therefore, Su Ping had to try his luck there, in real life. In worst-case scenarios, he would have to visit all the dragon scale lands. However, that meant that he would have to pay over a hundred million just for the teleportation fee.

He selected the land and gradually disappeared from the portal. He was in a desolate desert when he reappeared. "Is that so?"

Su Ping raised his eyebrows.

One look around and he quickly recognized the place. At the same time, the locations of the treasures and the roadmap came to mind.

Did I choose the wrong place? Never mind. I remember there are two valuable items here. This is parcel 48, I think, a land that has already been explored. I wonder if the items are still here...

While Su Ping was thinking, he summoned the Purple Python, the Inferno Dragon, and the Dark Dragon Hound. He sat down on the Purple Python's head. Some scales on its head stood up and protected Su Ping within like a shield.

"Let's go."

Su Ping told the Dark Dragon Hound and the Inferno Dragon to lead the way. They were heading directly to the locations of the valuable treasures.

The sand was filling the sky. They met a few beasts along the way. Half an hour later, Su Ping had searched all the locations. All the treasures had been taken away. None was left behind. Besides, he noticed there were only a few tracks from the teams. It seemed that the explorers would usually choose lands that had yet to be explored.

"I have just wasted one million." Su Ping was speechless. He had to teleport back to the plaza and then travel to another land.

That was a lesson for him. This time, he chose an unexplored land.

That was No. 52.

In total, 57 of those lands had been explored but they were not following the number. For example, No.1 and No.8 remained to be explored.

Su Ping smelled a pungent smell of blood as soon as he arrived. It seemed that some teams had fought there. He summoned the Purple Python and the Dark Dragon Hound at once. Su Ping stayed within the

protection on the Purple Python's head in case of a surprise attack. Then, he summoned the Inferno Dragon to lead the way with the Dark Dragon Hound.

They arrived at the source of the smell of blood. Su Ping saw many dead bodies on the ground and a square coffin.

This coffin was square, clean, and neat. One look and Su Ping could tell that it had been made by a pet of the stone family. The deceased included both beasts and explorers.

Su Ping didn't linger in that place. The roadmap and the treasure map of that land emerged on his mind. He immediately dashed toward a location with a valuable treasure.

Along the way, he took detours around potential beast lairs. He soon arrived at the location he had chosen.

The Dark Dragon Hound sniffed around when he arrived. No smell of humans was found. Su Ping was relieved

"Let's go!"

Su Ping commanded the Inferno Dragon and the Dark Dragon Hound to charge in.

Su Ping had had experience exploring this land in the cultivation site. He managed to obtain the treasure not long afterward.

It was a helmet that could fend off spirit attacks and could be considered as a rare article. In usual conditions, the shields and helmets could only defend against physical or energy attacks. Those accessories were more common, even though their selling prices were high.

Su Ping wore the helmet at once in case of emergencies. He would place the helmet in his storage space to smuggle it out. I remember there's an area with underground lava... Su Ping remembered he could find a kind of material he needed for Solar Bulwark cultivation in this land. That thought excited him. Without further ado, he turned around and hurried to that location with his three pets.