

Apocalypse 1436

Chapter 1436: Undead Sand Moon Blade

Ye Zhongming had initially been quite pleased. Although he hadn't managed to upgrade the Earth Sand Moon Blade to seven colored grade, he had already prepared himself for the disappointment, knowing it was a long shot.

Moreover, he had successfully repaired the Traditional Shields, proving that by repairing equipment, he could obtain its recipe. This was yet another overpowered ability. Ye Zhongming could acquire countless equipment recipes, gather the materials, and craft them himself if needed. This meant he was no longer entirely bound by blueprints and could even write and sell his own recipes.

However, he realized they were different when he repaired the Earth Sand Moon Blade and compared the recipe he obtained from the roulette with the one in his mind. It dawned on him that the recipe he gained from repairing equipment might only be usable by him and couldn't be shared with others.

While this was disappointing—it dashed his hopes of selling recipes—it was still a significant advantage. Ye Zhongming didn't dwell on it too much.

But when he chiseled the weapon, which should have been a straightforward process, the once-crystalline blade turned ashen, as if it had aged overnight from youth to decrepitude.

This truly frightened Ye Zhongming.

Even with Cloud Peak's wealth and his own resources, purple-grade equipment was a treasure, not something that could be easily obtained. Even the Earth Sand Moon Blade, which he had crafted

himself, was no exception. If he were to make another one now, the success rate would be uncertain, and the materials alone would take who knows how long to gather.

He quickly picked up the blade to inspect it, his heart filled with doubt.

First, the purple glow representing the equipment's tier hadn't changed—something he had overlooked in his panic.

If the equipment had been completely destroyed, its grade would have disappeared, and the glow would have vanished.

This discovery eased Ye Zhongming's anxiety somewhat.

Next, he tapped the blade lightly with his finger, using about 30% of his strength.

Ye Zhongming's strength was terrifying. Even steel would have dented under such force, but the blade emitted a clear, crisp sound and didn't shatter, proving it was intact.

Finally, Ye Zhongming channeled his mental energy into the weapon.

He sensed a dark power.

Unlike the dark energy of his own bloodline, this was a power of... restless spirits.

"Sharpness: 700, Toughness: 800."

The first change left Ye Zhongming puzzled.

Previously, the Desert Moon Blade had values of 720 and 780 for sharpness and toughness, respectively. This meant the sharpness had slightly decreased, while the toughness had slightly increased.

Less sharp but more durable?

Ye Zhongming quickly turned his attention to the most critical aspect: the skills. He read through them one by one.

Moon Glow... Skill Memory... These two skills remained unchanged. However, the other abilities had changed, and these changes helped Ye Zhongming understand what the rune gems truly were.

The Earth Sand Moon Blade had a skill called Blood Pact. Previously, its ability was that when the blade's attack caused damage, the target's injuries would worsen over time, and the power of Moonlight would be enhanced based on the severity of the target's wounds, increasing its base attributes by 1% to 5%.

Now, Blood Pact had transformed. The continuous damage became curse damage, and while injured, the target would suffer from one of several negative status effects: weakness, confusion, fear, blindness, deafness, pain, stiffness, numbness, or dizziness. The severity and duration of these effects depended on the target's mental strength.

At first glance, this seemed like having a curse caster assist him in battle. But Ye Zhongming, with his vast experience, quickly realized its true potential.

In combat, if he faced a warrior, their mental strength was usually not very high. If they were injured by the Earth Sand Moon Blade's passive ability, the negative status effects would significantly impact them. If they were struck by dizziness, even for just a second, it would be enough for Ye Zhongming to finish them off.

On the other hand, if he faced a ranged or spellcasting class with high mental strength, the blade's sharpness alone would usually be enough to deal with them, making the negative status effects unnecessary.

This single skill alone had increased Ye Zhongming's combat effectiveness by about 10%.

The second skill that had changed was Moonlight Field. Now, when activating Moonlight Field, it would spawn restless spirits that inflicted corruption on targets, adding a corrosive effect to the existing slow and dizziness.

Next was Sandstorm Moonlight Tornado. Previously, canceling Moonlight Field would convert its energy into a Sandstorm Moonlight Tornado, dealing both light and earth damage. Now, it dealt triple damage, adding dark damage to the mix. The power of this ability still depended on the number of tornadoes the user chose to create—the fewer the tornadoes, the greater the damage.

But what surprised Ye Zhongming the most was the new ability that had been added.

"Ability 7: Spectral Rift."

"When the weapon's attack leaves a mark on any non-living surface, these marks will temporarily become spectral rifts. Depending on the depth and length of the marks, undead creatures of varying strength will emerge from them. The speed and number of creatures produced by each rift are proportional to the user's evolution level, mental strength, and the attack power used to create the rift."

"Undead Sand Moon Blade (Purple)."

This named weapon had changed its name and gained a new ability!

What Ye Zhongming had feared would be a ruined weapon had instead made significant progress. He felt the joy of recovering something he thought was lost.

He picked up the blade and slashed it across the ground, leaving a two-meter-long mark. However, this mark was different from usual—it glowed faintly, as if tiny LED lights had been embedded within it.

In less than two seconds, two skeletal hands emerged from the mark, prying open the rift and turning the glow into a gaping maw. Then, a three-meter-tall skeletal warrior climbed out.

It looked around, found no enemies, and stood motionless before Ye Zhongming.

Ye Zhongming waited. Soon, a skeletal hound emerged, about two meters in length. A few seconds later, a green-skinned zombie appeared, baring its sharp teeth and hunched over, its glowing green eyes scanning the surroundings.

Ye Zhongming realized he could only designate targets for these undead creatures to attack. He couldn't control them as intricately as he could with battle beasts.

Nevertheless, he was satisfied. With just a casual slash, he summoned three undead creatures, each with a strength equivalent to around level three.

Excited by this discovery, Ye Zhongming first informed his subordinates not to be alarmed by his experiments. Then, he unleashed a full-power Thousand Seal Slash at the ground, creating a deep, dozens-of-meters-long fissure.

Having fought all day, repaired two pieces of equipment, and expended significant mental energy, Ye Zhongming was exhausted. Thinking that the undead creatures wouldn't cause any harm, he decided to take a nap, planning to see how many of these creatures he could summon when he woke up.

Chapter 1437: Stomach problem

Not only was Ye Zhongming exhausted, but Li Daqian was also worn out.

Li Daqian had been busy organizing the recent event while managing the daily operations of Thousand Beast Villa. Even as an evolved, the mental strain was taking its toll.

Today, he had experienced betrayal, battles, and negotiations, all while his son lay severely injured and unconscious. The physical and emotional toll was immense.

After parting ways with Ye Zhongming, Li Daqian spent some time by his son's bedside before retreating to a nearby room to sleep.

Tomorrow, he would need to bid farewell to the guests and discuss important matters. He forced himself to maintain a good state of mind.

As for his son, Li Daqian believed that there was hope as long as he was alive. Figuring out how to wake him up was another issue.

However, Li Daqian hadn't slept long before his subordinates awakened him. Glancing outside, he saw that the sky was just beginning to turn bright.

Annoyed, he asked what had happened, but his subordinates hesitated, unable to explain clearly. They simply urged him to see for himself.

Cursing their incompetence, Li Daqian followed them to the reported location. When he arrived, he was shocked.

The area was overrun with various undead creatures.

Skeletal warriors, skeletal hounds, zombies, dark spirits, ghosts, bone birds, corpse tigers...

At a glance, there were no fewer than three thousand of them!

Had some necromancer used their abilities to summon an undead army?

But this was supposed to be... the temporary camp of Cloud Peak, right?

There were no sounds of battle. With Ye Zhongming's strength, he couldn't be silently overwhelmed by an undead army!

As Li Daqian pondered what to do, he noticed a group of people emerging from the undead horde—Ye Zhongming and his female guards.

The two exchanged greetings, and Li Daqian, puzzled, asked about the undead creatures.

Ye Zhongming awkwardly scratched his nose.

He hadn't expected the massive fissure he had left unattended to spawn so many undead creatures.

When Ye Zhongming woke up, he, too, was startled. But upon reflection, he understood.

The Spectral Rift ability's summoning speed and number of undead creatures were tied to the user's evolution level, mental strength, and the attack power used to create the rift. Given Ye Zhongming's vast mental energy, it made sense that thousands of undead had emerged.

After a brief explanation, Ye Zhongming expressed his intention to leave.

Li Daqian glanced at the thousands of undead creatures behind them, guessing that Ye Zhongming had likely been testing some new equipment, which had led to this situation. However, Li Daqian couldn't help but feel that this summoning equipment was too powerful. Although these undead creatures didn't have demon crystals to indicate their level, they seemed to possess the strength of at least level four or five mutated lifeforms.

Once again, while marveling at Ye Zhongming's strength, Li Daqian led him to Thousand Beast Villa's stables to select the promised battle beasts.

Ye Zhongming walked around the stables, knowing this wasn't where the Beast Manor bred high-level battle beasts. The highest evolution level here was only level four.

He chose several battle beasts, mostly for Cloud Peak's laboratory, including dozens of flying types. The rest were load-bearing types, intended to serve as laborers on the journey back. These battle beasts were a small but valuable gain from his visit to the Thousand Beast Villa.

Just as Ye Zhongming was about to leave, Li Daqian suggested taking him to another location. Curious, Ye Zhongming followed him deep into Thousand Beast Villa, through a hidden passage, and into a secluded valley.

Upon entering, Ye Zhongming was stunned.

The valley was a vibrant paradise, filled with blooming flowers, singing birds, lush grass, a babbling brook, distant mountains, and even common domestic animals.

A beautiful four-story building stood at the center of the valley. Before entering, Ye Zhongming heard the sound of children reciting lessons.

The voices were young, some even stumbling over their words, but this scene, reminiscent of peaceful times, deeply moved Ye Zhongming.

Several women were doing light chores in the small square in front of the building. Most were young, speaking softly to avoid disturbing the children inside.

As Ye Zhongming and Li Daqian approached, Ye Zhongming noticed the women's bellies.

They were all pregnant.

"Brother Ye, have you noticed the fertility rate among evolved since the apocalypse began?" Li Daqian asked.

Ye Zhongming nodded.

He couldn't help but notice.

In his previous life, he had heard about this issue, but back then, he was constantly on the brink of life and death. Such concerns were beyond him, and he paid them no mind. Besides, it wasn't as if people stopped getting pregnant after the apocalypse; the fertility rate had simply dropped.

But in this life, the issue had become increasingly important to him.

He had been intimate with Xia Lei, Liang Chuyin, and Miya for some time now without using any protection, yet none of them had become pregnant.

Ye Zhongming hadn't been concerned at first, but the women were, and even others around them began to worry.

The apocalypse had caused society to regress into a structure resembling feudal clans, and Cloud Peak was no exception. Ye Zhongming was the absolute leader, both in power and spirit, with the entire faction revolving around him.

Although Xia Lei could take his place in his absence—partly due to her abilities but more importantly because she was Ye Zhongming's woman—if something extreme happened, like Ye Zhongming's death, it was uncertain whether Xia Lei could maintain control over Cloud Peak. It might very well fall apart.

While such a scenario seemed unlikely now, many had considered it, including the leaders of Cloud Peak's various combat teams. Many stayed because of Ye Zhongming.

Ye Zhongming was their boss, friend, idol, savior... All these feelings combined made him the object of their loyalty.

But Xia Lei, Liang Chuyin, and Miya couldn't fill his shoes. They each had their shortcomings and could never become figures like Ye Zhongming.

Thus, many began to consider the issue of succession.

Aside from Ye Zhongming, no core member of Cloud Peak had the prestige to command universal loyalty.

But there was one who could—Ye Zhongming's descendant!

That would be the most legitimate and widely accepted successor!

Once such a person appeared, Xia Lei and Ye Zhongming's other women would naturally protect him. Xia Bai and the female guards, who were absolutely loyal to Ye Zhongming, would guard him. Those who had fought alongside Ye Zhongming from the beginning, seeing him as a brother and comrade, would support him. This included people like Little Tiger, Mo Ye, Park Xiuying, Tonghu, Shengyuan, Young Master Yun, Sister Rong, Lu Yi, Ah Yang, and Le Dayuan. Their loyalty would inevitably bring along others closely connected to them, such as Candy, Tang Tian, Little Li, Ah Tao, and Liu Zhenghong.

Cloud Peak would remain stable with these people in place, along with special entities like Red Hair, the twin sisters, Yellow Ball, the Three-nosed Elephant, and Jiu Bao.

Thus, the desire for Ye Zhongming to have a descendant, a legitimate heir for Cloud Peak, became a common wish.

Such a person would make Cloud Peak even more stable, as it would signify Ye Zhongming's legacy and continuation in this world.

The topic of when Ye Zhongming would have a child became a frequent joke among many.

With none of Xia Lei, Liang Chuyin, or Miya showing signs of pregnancy, Ye Zhongming was at a loss. He and Liu Zhenghong had even surveyed the faction's pregnancy and newborn survival rates.

The results were disheartening.

The numbers were shockingly low.

Chapter 1437.5- Stomach problem

In the vast Cloud Peak, with tens of thousands of people, including newcomers and their families, fewer than two thousand women had successfully become pregnant in the four years since the apocalypse began. This was alarming, considering that most survivors from the early days of the apocalypse were young adults in their prime reproductive years.

The survival rate of newborns was another headache. Of the roughly two thousand pregnant women, about two thousand had given birth, all single births—no twins or triplets. Despite having professional

obstetricians and the enhanced physiques of evolved, the survival rate was only about 70%, meaning only around 1,400 newborns had survived.

In peacetime, this number would have been much higher!

At this moment, it seemed class had ended, as a group of children ran out, numbering around fifty or sixty. Seeing Li Daqian, they swarmed around him.

They called out to him with various endearments—Grandpa Li, Manor Lord, and so on.

Li Daqian, now the picture of kindness, patted some on the head and pinched others' cheeks, responding to each child with a smile.

Soon, a few of the pregnant women with smaller bellies came over and led the children away for breakfast, leaving Li Daqian and Ye Zhongming alone.

"These children were all born after the apocalypse. To be precise, their mothers became pregnant after the apocalypse began. The oldest is three and a half years old."

Ye Zhongming was taken aback and suddenly asked, "And the youngest?"

Li Daqian gave him an appreciative glance and replied, "Three months."

After this brief exchange, the two fell silent. After a while, Ye Zhongming sighed.

"I think this issue is more important than the Mantis Snatcher's corpse."

Li Daqian smiled faintly. "Originally, I wanted to discuss this issue with the laboratories I invited this time. But I realized that, at this point, the only people I can trust are you and Cloud Peak."

"I'm honored," Ye Zhongming shrugged.

"You must be wondering why these children look much older than their actual age."

Ye Zhongming nodded. He was indeed curious, as the children appeared to be at least five or six years old.

"I showed you this for two main reasons," Li Daqian said, his expression turning serious.

"Our Beast Villa doesn't have a genius like Liu Zhenghong, nor do we have the conditions or capability to establish a laboratory. So, the first reason is to hope that your Life Gene Laboratory, especially Liu Zhenghong, can take the time to study the reasons behind the low fertility and newborn survival rates."

Seeing Ye Zhongming frown, Li Daqian thought he was reluctant. After all, researching gene warriors brought tangible benefits to Ye Zhongming, while studying this issue would clearly be a time-consuming distraction.

So Li Daqian quickly added, "I'm not some selfless saint or a benevolent savior. I just believe that humanity shouldn't perish like this. Even if it's just to thwart those in the sky or the wheel's controllers, we and our descendants should continue to exist. Brother Ye, to be blunt, you're younger than my son. This issue is a reality you can't escape."

Ye Zhongming agreed with this sentiment. He even felt a personal connection to it. Being unable to get his women pregnant wasn't exactly something to boast about.

But his earlier hesitation wasn't due to reluctance. He was recalling the first time he met Liu Zhenghong. The mad scientist had been researching pregnancy, but her subjects were human women pregnant with the offspring of green-skinned monsters.

If she were to research this issue, would it awaken the cruel tendencies she had exhibited in his previous life?

After all, she was the infamous "Human Creator Red."

"Alright, I'll discuss this with Sister Hong when I return," Ye Zhongming agreed. He couldn't find a reason to refuse.

Like Li Daqian, he wasn't a saint, but he wanted his people and humanity as a whole to continue surviving on this planet, including his descendants.

Li Daqian was pleased and continued, "I can provide you with all sorts of data on this issue. I can even conduct some clinical trials under your guidance. Just let me know what you need."

Ye Zhongming neither refused nor agreed. He would wait to hear Liu Zhenghong's thoughts on the matter.

"And the second reason?"

Li Daqian pointed to a room on the building's upper floor. Ye Zhongming's keen eyesight allowed him to see a little girl sitting inside, reading a book.

He recognized her—she was the girl who had shown him the level-nine creature's eggs earlier.

"That's Yuanyuan, my granddaughter," Li Daqian said, his expression fluctuating between affection, worry, and sorrow.

"She's almost four years old, the earliest born among these children and the first child born in the Beast Villa after the apocalypse."

Ye Zhongming was surprised. He knew Li Daqian was about to share something truly valuable.

"Brother Ye, you're also a representative of one of the factions in the sky, right?"

Li Daqian shifted the topic slightly. "Given your fame, you must be. I am, too, and I might be one of the earliest. Not long after the apocalypse began, I was unexpectedly chosen."

"The race I represent told me, after I completed a mission, that aside from two ordinary humans conceiving before the apocalypse having a higher chance of pregnancy, pairing an evolved with an ordinary human also increases the chances. If you want the unborn child to be strong, have the woman, as an ordinary human, become pregnant and then take evolution potions during pregnancy. The earlier she takes them during pregnancy, the higher her evolution level, and the child born will not only have a higher survival rate but also grow faster and stronger."

Ye Zhongming pointed upstairs, and Li Daqian nodded.

"At first, I was thrilled. Although this method wasn't some core secret, as humanity evolved, ordinary humans would become increasingly rare. When people realize this issue, it might be too late to find non-evolved humans. Wouldn't humanity go extinct after a few years?"

"Moreover, I doubted the truthfulness of those in the sky. Seeing my granddaughter, not yet four, looking like a teenager, I truly worry. Is this accelerated growth causing side effects? If the price is her lifespan, what should I do?"

"When you leave, I want you to take Yuanyuan with you. Hand her over to Liu Zhenghong and ask her to examine my granddaughter to see if she's normal."

Chapter 1438: 40 thousand ordinary people

Standing on the hill beside the Beast Manor, Li Daqian watched the distant Cloud Peak group with a complex expression.

"Dad, will Yuanyuan... be okay?"

Beside him, the Spotted Giant Bear lazily sprawled on the ground alongside a white level-six unicorn horse. A young woman, eyes red and voice trembling, gazed at the departing group.

She was Li Zhizhong's wife, Li Daqian's daughter-in-law, and Yuanyuan's mother.

In just two days, her husband had fallen into a coma, and her daughter had been sent far away. The blows were almost too much to bear.

"Zhizhong's condition is critical, and I'm tied up with the villa's affairs. For now, you'll have to take care of him. Once he wakes up, you can go to Cloud Peak to be with Yuanyuan."

Hearing this, the woman felt slightly better, though the thought of her husband's coma still brought her grief.

"Dad, do you think Yuanyuan will suffer?"

"She'll likely endure some hardship during the examination, but Yuanyuan is sensible and strong. Don't worry too much. Ye Zhongming and Liu Zhengong will take good care of her. You can rest assured."

"Also," Li Daqian turned to his daughter-in-law, "you've been in charge of the Red Building. Starting today, increase its security by one level. Before, those women were just people we supported. But now, they'll become a bridge between us and Cloud Peak. They must be well taken care of."

The woman quickly agreed. She had married Li Zhizhong after the apocalypse and knew she had to prove her worth to gain acceptance. Otherwise, her father-in-law might replace her, especially since Li Zhizhong is in a coma.

"Hmm..." Li Daqian hesitated momentarily before continuing, "Try to instill a sense of gratitude toward the Beast Villa in these women. When the time is right, promise them that if they go to Cloud Peak, we'll provide them with evolution potions up to level four. We don't need them to become spies, but they must never forget our kindness. When necessary, they should influence their future partners at Cloud Peak to favor our villa without compromising Clouddtop's interests."

The woman was momentarily stunned. Though she didn't fully understand her father-in-law's intentions, she nodded in agreement.

"The future... may belong to him..."

Li Daqian murmured to himself, his voice so low only he could hear it, as he watched the distant figures disappear.

.....

"The first three undead creatures you summoned lasted one hour and twenty minutes. The later ones had varying durations, with the shortest lasting three hours and five minutes, and the longest being the bone bird that just shattered, lasting eight hours and fifty minutes."

Xiao Min stood beside Ye Zhongming, reporting the data while looking at the scattered bone fragments on the ground. She seemed even more excited than Ye Zhongming.

It was no wonder. Since the undead creatures appeared yesterday, the female guards had been itching to test their skills. The strength displayed by these skeletal warriors and rotting corpses had piqued their interest.

However, when Ye Zhongming was asleep, they dared not act without permission.

After leaving the Beast Villa, Ye Zhongming selected some undead creatures for the women to practice on. The female guards had thoroughly enjoyed the exercise, as the undead creatures, with their level-five strength, posed enough of a challenge without being overwhelming.

What made Xiao Min even happier was that her boss had gained a brand-new ability.

Ye Zhongming listened and nodded slightly. At his level, the opponents he faced were top-tier powerhouses. These level-five undead creatures weren't much of a threat to them, but they could be a useful distraction.

What preoccupied Ye Zhongming was the other place Li Daqian had taken him to before they left.

It was a valley with conditions far worse than the children's. Inside were a few dilapidated red-brick buildings with faded, barely legible signs. It once seemed to have been a processing base for a logging company.

Ye Zhongming saw many young, even beautiful, women eating in the cafeteria. They smiled, but their eyes were uncertain about the future. They feared Li Daqian, so when they saw him, they instinctively stood up.

Nearly ten thousand women were crammed into a few buildings, eating in shifts. Their living conditions weren't exactly harsh, but they were far from comfortable.

These women shared one common trait: none of them had evolved. They were all ordinary humans.

They were people Li Daqian had taken in, specifically for... reproduction. And these were only a portion of them. There were others, deemed of "lower quality," in other locations, totaling over thirty thousand.

People from peaceful times might view their treatment as unfair, but this was a form of salvation for Ye Zhongming and Li Daqian.

Compared to those who had been devoured by zombies at the start of the apocalypse, leaving not even bones behind, these women—crowded eight to a twenty-square-meter room, sharing toilets, eating communal meals, and spending their days sewing, washing, and preparing feed for war beasts—were living a relatively stable and secure life.

Li Daqian said that Cloud Peak could take these women at any time, allowing them to become spouses of its warriors and increasing the birth rate.

Of course, the best solution would be for Liu Zhenghong to conduct research and solve the problem entirely. While forty thousand women might seem like a lot for Cloud Peak and the Beast Villa, it was a drop in the bucket for the entire country.

Ye Zhongming was troubled by the dilemma of whether to accept these women. Each choice seemed to have pros and cons.

"Boss, Five Ring Money is catching up."

A female guard handed Ye Zhongming a note. It was from Chameleon, who had taken over perimeter security as soon as Cloud Peak left the Beast Manor. This would continue until they reached a Chameleon contact point and used the teleportation equipment to return to Cloud Peak.

Ye Zhongming ordered the group to halt and wait for Deacon Water to arrive.

"Cloud Peak continues to amaze me," Deacon Water said as she approached alone, showing no concern for her safety. This was a sign of trust in Ye Zhongming, though she knew that if he wanted to kill her, the people she brought wouldn't be able to stop him.

She was referring to how Cloud Peak had detected Five Ring Money's approach early and stopped to wait. Deacon Water hadn't noticed anyone monitoring Five Ring Money, yet Cloud Peak had known.

"Deacon Water, you couldn't have missed our boss so soon after parting, could you?"

Xiao Min sneered from the side. She always felt that this woman had designs on her boss. With Xia Bai not taking charge, Xiao Min was effectively the female guards' commander. As a seven-star evolved with her sisters backing her, she had no fear of a heavyweight like Deacon Water.

Deacon Water's eyes flickered, but she suppressed her anger.

"I came to discuss something with Mr. Ye—about the equipment rankings."

Chapter 1439: Machine that sees through all equipment

Perhaps because of Xiao Min's words, Deacon Water seemed eager to finish her business and leave.

Ye Zhongming shot Xiao Min a glare but said nothing.

Glancing at the remnants of the undead creatures scattered on the nearby open ground, Deacon Water's eyes flickered. She couldn't help but think that being a craftsman was a great job. Why couldn't Five Ring Money's own craftsmen reach Ye Zhongming's level?

"Equipment rankings?"

Although this list was provided free of charge to major factions, its influence was immense. Evolved and major factions had increasingly accepted the rankings, and Five Ring Money's reputation had grown alongside it.

The advertising effect brought by this list was something Five Ring Money valued highly as a commercial alliance. It was the foundation of their business.

This effect had already manifested. In their competition with Cannibal Chain, Five Ring Money had gained the upper hand in many areas due to their greater fame and recognition. Evolved were more willing to trade with Five Ring Money.

The profits gained made Five Ring Money take the rankings even more seriously. They were doing their utmost to make the data on the list more detailed and accurate.

Cannibal Chain had also started releasing their own rankings, but they hadn't gained much traction yet. Five Ring Money was already on guard. They were no longer satisfied with using the rankings to boost their reputation; they wanted to make the country rankings the most authoritative!

Only then would they not fear any competition. By then, Cannibal Chain's rankings would either have to copy Five Ring Money's or simply withdraw from the competition.

"Yes, equipment rankings," Deacon Water said. "We discovered a very peculiar machine in a certain place. It has no offensive or defensive capabilities. Its only function is to display the most excellent equipment above gold grade after paying a certain price."

This brief statement shocked Ye Zhongming.

How could such equipment exist?

"Actually, it's not that strange," Deacon Water explained. "Whether it's a gray-grade dagger or a seven-colored grade battle blade, none of these are things we originally possessed. They're all... byproducts of

the wheel. So, it's not surprising that there's a machine capable of detecting all wheel equipment across the country, or even the planet."

To be honest, when Deacon Water first learned of this, she was also shocked. But the facts had made her bow to the wonders of wheel equipment.

"All equipment... can be detected?" Ye Zhongming narrowed his eyes. Although his expression didn't change much, he felt a sense of unease.

Didn't this mean that everything about him would be exposed?

If his opponents knew all about his equipment in future battles, the fights would become much more difficult.

"Yes, all of it," Deacon Water said, straightening her posture.

"What about the attributes?"

Ye Zhongming's voice turned cold as he analyzed the potential impact this could have on him and Cloud Peak.

"Yes, those too."

After saying this, Deacon Water noticed Ye Zhongming's raised eyebrow and felt a pang of anxiety. She quickly explained, "Here's the thing. This equipment is currently only gold grade. Equipment at the same level can display very detailed information, such as skill data. But it can't for equipment above its level, like seven-colored or purple grade. For purple-grade equipment, it can only show the number of skills, and for seven-colored-grade equipment, it only displays a few characters from the name."

"You're saying that seven-colored grade equipment has already appeared?" Ye Zhongming keenly caught the information revealed in Deacon Water's words.

Deacon Water hesitated for a moment before nodding.

"There are two pieces. One has the character gate in its name, with no other details displayed. The other has the character box and is labeled as sealed. Which faction or person owns them isn't shown."

"There really are?!"

Ye Zhongming's face showed genuine surprise.

Currently, his equipment could be described as luxurious. He might not have the most purple-grade equipment in the world, but he was certainly among the top few.

But he had never imagined that someone else could possess seven-colored grade equipment like him. The Gate of Sacrifice was something he had obtained only after killing the level-nine Holy Father, and the dangers involved were known only to him.

Fortunately, although that person's seven-colored grade equipment maintained its level, it was sealed. It might not be as useful as partially unlocked equipment like the Ocean King's Crown, which, while not seven-colored grade, could still use some abilities. This thought somewhat balanced Ye Zhongming's feelings.

"Some people just have incredible luck," Deacon Water sighed with a hint of envy.

She herself yearned for seven-colored grade equipment, especially after the battle in the Spatitu Space, which had made her realize the importance of powerful gear.

Ye Zhongming nodded. In truth, he was the luckiest person in this world, having died and been reborn to start over.

"Did you come just to tell me this news?"

The beautiful woman shook her head. "Of course not. First, I wanted to seek your understanding. After all, having your equipment listed for the world to see will inevitably affect you somewhat."

Ye Zhongming responded with a cold laugh. "If I disagree, will you leave my equipment off the list?"

Deacon Water smiled awkwardly but politely. "I'm afraid that's not possible."

Ye Zhongming answered with a snort. While the news this woman brought was unpleasant, mentioning seven-colored grade equipment with the character gate suggested she wasn't lying to him. Whether she was hiding anything else, however, remained unknown.

Deacon Water didn't mind and continued, "Second, we're actively working to upgrade this equipment. Perhaps soon, we'll be able to obtain detailed information about purple-grade equipment."

After saying this, Deacon Water looked at Ye Zhongming with a smile.

"I see," Ye Zhongming nodded. "So you're here to blackmail me? If I disagree with your conditions, will you publish the equipment data?"

"Do you believe that if I capture you now and trade you to Five Ring Money for this equipment, they would agree?"

Deacon Water patted her chest and laughed. "Mr. Ye, don't scare me like that. Five Ring Money and Cloud Peak have always been good partners. How could we use this to threaten you? The conditions for not publishing the detailed equipment information would naturally be mutually beneficial cooperation, not just you making unilateral concessions."

"Even if you don't publish it, who's to say you won't secretly sell this information to others, especially my enemies?"

Ye Zhongming was feeling increasingly irritable. He even briefly considered wiping out Five Ring Money, but reason prevailed. Cloud Peak couldn't yet eliminate the major player of Five Ring Money and their forces in one fell swoop. This wasn't about strength but the organization's sheer size and widespread nature, leaving no opportunity for a decisive strike.

"That won't happen. Once you hear our cooperation terms, you'll know I'm not lying to you," Deacon Water said confidently.

"Oh? Then tell me, how do we cooperate?" Ye Zhongming asked coldly.

Chapter 1440: This woman is crazy

"One option is that our Five Ring Money—no, I—establish a strategic partnership with Cloud Peak. We form an alliance."

Ye Zhongming listened without any visible reaction.

Deacon Water knew why.

Strictly speaking, Five Ring Money was on the same level as Cloud Peak. Ye Zhongming could represent Cloud Peak, but she, Deacon Water, could not fully represent Five Ring Money. There were three other major figures in Five Ring Money apart from her.

Moreover, Ye Zhongming had likely already inferred from her words that this gold-grade machine—which might soon turn purple grade—was not under her control.

To put it bluntly, proposing cooperation wasn't impossible, but one needed the qualifications to cooperate. Ye Zhongming's lack of reaction was essentially a silent expression of refusal.

Deacon Water's face flushed. She knew that he wouldn't agree to cooperate with her if she didn't offer something substantial.

"Indeed, I'm not the sole decision-maker in Five Ring Money, but I am one of the decision-makers. I also control significant power, with trade dominance over several provinces. At least ten mature trade routes in these provinces, each generating immense profits at all times."

Deacon Water took a deep breath, her earlier embarrassment now completely gone. "Perhaps I alone don't have the profitability of Cloud Peak. After all, whether it's your crystal weapons, gene lifeforms, or the equipment crafted by you, they all yield massive profits. You also have armed caravans that regularly bring in huge profits."

"And," the Water Deacon looked at Ye Zhongming, her eyes hinting at something inexplicable. Although she had known these things for a while, saying them out loud still left her in awe.

"Your trade in evolution potions has made it clear to us that you, or one of your core members, must possess a high-level skill like 'Exclusion Technique,' which grants an extremely high success rate when spinning the wheel. This business also brings you enormous profits."

"Of course, there's also Cloud Peak Cuisine, Puxing Town, the Mercenary Guild, and now the dungeons, all of which generate substantial income."

"Oh, right!" Deacon Water continued as if listing treasures. "There's also a major source of income I haven't mentioned yet—the Secret realm and the invisible benefits brought to you by those who come out of it."

Ye Zhongming waved his hand. "Did you come here to tell me all this?"

Deacon Water smiled. "Of course not. I just want you to know that I fully understand the value of you and your Cloud Peak. And it's under this premise that I'm proposing cooperation."

"Our strategic alliance would require synchronized offense and defense, mutual reliance. When Cloud Peak needs to fight or requires intelligence, I can assist. Similarly, I hope Cloud Peak can help me when I need to do these things. Additionally, I want to establish a guard unit of about a thousand people, and I need you to equip them with green-grade gear. I also want a gene lifeform combat team mixed with various functional gene lifeforms like yours, with an average strength of no less than level five."

Ye Zhongming also smiled but remained silent.

"Also, I've established a base, one that truly belongs to me. I need crystal cannons for defense—at least a hundred of them. They don't need to be the latest models; the previous generation will suffice."

Deacon Water was practically counting on her fingers.

Ye Zhongming snorted coldly, signaling her to continue.

"Then there's my own equipment. I hope to obtain one purple-grade item, one gold-grade item, and five blue-grade items. The specific parts don't matter."

"Between Cloud Peak and my base, I also want to establish a fixed teleportation device for convenient travel. I hope to receive a discounted price on equipment, potions, gene warriors, crystal weapons, and other items from Cloud Peak.

"Has this girl been hit in the head by Kim Jongyuan?" Ye Zhongming initially found these demands ridiculous, but as he listened, he felt Deacon Water was becoming increasingly unreasonable. Was she making requests or demanding a dowry? Was she worth this much?

Was this woman insane? Did she think she was the sun, with everyone revolving around her?

"I'm not insane," Deacon Water said, as if reading Ye Zhongming's thoughts.

"These are what you need to provide. As for what I'll offer..." Deacon Water waved her hand, and a package appeared. She tossed it to Ye Zhongming and said, "This is the level nine materials I obtained from the Beast Villa. They're all yours now. Not just mine but also some from Ruan Xiao. I privately bought them from him last night."

Ye Zhongming was surprised. This package was of significant value.

"This backpack is a special piece of equipment. Materials stored inside won't lose their energy. I'm giving it to you as well."

Originally, Ye Zhongming had planned to refuse outright. But as a smith who had just reached the highest level, he was tempted when he saw the world's most excellent and rare materials.

"Still not enough," he said. However, he wasn't planning to agree to Deacon Water's demands just yet. Level nine materials were indeed precious, and combined, they might be worth an eight-star evolution potion. But what Deacon Water was asking for was equally valuable.

"I control twelve mature trade routes, each with twenty-five to thirty trade stations. I can allow you to participate in their operations, selling Cloud Peak's goods through them. I'll only take ten percent of the sales revenue."

"Hmm?" Ye Zhongming was once again surprised by Deacon Water's offer.

In the current post-apocalyptic world, commerce was heavily reliant on channels. Ye Zhongming had sent Lu Yi to establish trade routes and set up some shops, but the scale was incomparable to Five Ring Money. Firstly, Cloud Peak didn't have enough people to set up outposts in every camp along the way. Secondly, Ye Zhongming knew that post-apocalyptic bases were unstable. With the second wave of mutated lifeforms approaching, he didn't want to waste Cloud Peak's lives in poorly defended camps.

Moreover, Cloud Peak's goods were currently in high demand. Gene lifeforms and crystal weapons were self-explanatory, but even equipment and evolution potions were selling out instantly. Lu Yi often returned before reaching his destination because the goods had already been snapped up.

This was also why Ye Zhongming wasn't too concerned about establishing trade routes.

Of course, he never considered himself a merchant and had no intention of following the paths of Five Ring Money or Cannibal Chain.

From this perspective, Ye Zhongming didn't particularly need the conditions proposed by Deacon Water.

But Ye Zhongming wasn't just looking at the present.

Currently, Cloud Peak Manor had a surplus of goods.

For example, the monster eggs from the Secret Realm or dungeons couldn't be sold off quickly.

More and more materials were piling up, which were essentially "taxes" paid by Cloud Peak's affiliated forces in the form of demon crystals. Ye Zhongming couldn't spend all day crafting equipment, so these materials had already filled countless warehouses.

At Ye Zhongming's current level, crafting low-level equipment was a waste. Many of these materials were unusable, and their value decreased every day they sat in the warehouse. As the post-apocalyptic world progressed, the demand for low-level equipment would drop, rendering these materials useless.

Previously, Ye Zhongming hadn't thought much of it, but now he realized it was quite wasteful.

Additionally, Cloud Peak's population was growing rapidly and would continue. Even the number of gene lifeforms, crystal weapons, and the laboratories serving them were expanding. The amount of

high-quality goods being produced was increasing, and these would eventually need to be sold. Relying solely on Lu Yi's caravans wouldn't be enough.

There were also newly established factories, like the pharmaceutical plant, whose outputs would soon face the same issue of needing to be sold.

If ready-made trade stations were provided to Ye Zhongming, Cloud Peak's goods could be distributed without Lu Yi and his team risking their lives in the wilderness. Cloud Peak could immediately gain a battle-hardened main combat unit.

At the same time, Ye Zhongming could expand these profitable industries without worrying about overstocking.

In the future, he could simply sit back and collect money. Moreover, Deacon Water only asked for ten percent, which was entirely acceptable.

But was that all? Ye Zhongming still shook his head. It still wasn't enough.

Chapter 1440.5- This woman is crazy

Just the green-grade equipment alone would take Ye Zhongming a significant amount of time to craft, even at the highest level. Don't forget he had to meet the needs of his own forces and craft equipment for Thousand Beast Villa, too.

And this woman even asked for purple and gold-grade equipment. The value of these two items alone could match the level nine materials.

Deacon Water let out a long breath. She had anticipated that Ye Zhongming wouldn't agree so easily, but at least he hadn't outright refused. That was a good sign.

"I can also keep your and Cloud Peak's equipment confidential when publishing the rankings."

Ye Zhongming was unimpressed. "If I'm strong enough, it doesn't matter if people know what equipment I have. Besides, if they know mine, I can also know theirs."

The Water Deacon smiled mysteriously. "You don't think we're only discussing this with you, do you? We, the deacons, have already divided the tasks. Each of us is approaching the top-ranked individuals to negotiate this matter. Essentially, we're asking for hush money. We won't disclose their equipment in exchange for something valuable."

"You're my responsibility."

She continued, fearing Ye Zhongming might not believe her. "No one wants their equipment to be publicly known, so this small request for something of value will likely be accepted by others. If all goes well, when the new equipment rankings are published, the top twenty, or even thirty, won't have detailed descriptions!"

Ye Zhongming was momentarily stunned, then chuckled wryly. "You really know how to play on people's psychology."

From Ye Zhongming's perspective, he probably would have agreed if Deacon Water hadn't brought up all these conditions today and had simply asked him to keep his equipment confidential in exchange for something like an evolution potion.

If he would do that, others likely would, too.

Seeing Ye Zhongming's wry smile and then his return to a calm expression, Deacon Water secretly gritted her teeth in frustration. However, the current situation demands that she establish her own power and find a strong partner like Ye Zhongming and Cloud Peak. For this, she was willing to go all out.

"Two secret realm keys."

Ye Zhongming's eyes lit up.

"Ten equipment blueprints."

That also seemed acceptable.

"A firearms production line and a combat vehicle production line—not Earth's vehicles, but something from... there."

The Water Deacon pointed to the sky.

Ye Zhongming's heart finally wavered. A production line for alien combat vehicles?

But considering the demands, including the never-before-sold crystal cannons, purple-grade equipment, and more, Ye Zhongming's resolve hardened again.

Deacon Water glared at Ye Zhongming, expecting him to agree now. Instead, he merely opened his mouth and then closed it.

"Don't push it too far. Do you know how much benefit these things will bring you?"

Deacon Water was almost shouting.

Ye Zhongming replied calmly, "Don't make it sound like I'm getting these things for free."

The woman took a deep breath, her hands clenched as if making a difficult decision.

Finally, she seemed to deflate, looking exhausted.

"One last condition. If you agree, then we have a deal. If not, then forget it. I'll find someone else. I refuse to believe that I can't find a major power willing to accept me in this vast world." 水

There was something hidden in her words. Had the Water Deacon encountered some unsolvable problem?

"Regarding the trade routes, I'll add ten more, making it twenty-two in total, with nearly six hundred trade stations. Cloud Peak can place goods in all of them for sale. These trade stations cover almost a fifth of the country!"

Deacon Water forced out these words. "I'll also provide enough building materials for you to construct five large factories, along with a thousand skilled technicians and the necessary production equipment. I'll cover it all. Cloud Peak can produce to its heart's content, and I'll handle the sales!"

Ye Zhongming frowned. "Deacon Water, it seems you were holding back earlier. You have twenty-two trade routes, but you only offered twelve before."

"Those ten aren't mine!" The Water Deacon nearly growled.

"Whose are they then?"

"Deacon Tong's."

Ye Zhongming shook his head. "If they're not yours, how can you decide about them? This is too unreliable and doesn't guarantee my future interests."

Deacon Water looked at Ye Zhongming as if he were her mortal enemy.

"I can guarantee it!"

"Empty words! How can you possibly make decisions for Deacon Tong?"

The Water Deacon suddenly grabbed her hair, messing it up instantly.

"Because I can make decisions for her!"

"Why?"

"Because... we're lovers!"

Ye Zhongming was completely stunned. Lovers? That... might give her some authority, but it still wasn't absolute.

Then Ye Zhongming suddenly thought of a question and blurted it out without thinking, "Is Deacon Tong... a man or a woman?"

"...A woman."