

Apocalypse 1451

Chapter 1451: Money eating device

Le Dayuan's words left everyone feeling like they'd been hit by a truck.

Even though they hadn't yet seen the robot's combat capabilities, just hearing Le Dayuan's description made it clear that this was an absolute killing machine. Whether it was the dozens of firing ports resembling rotary machine guns, the dual attack modes of crystal cannons and elemental cannons, or the energy-armored melee combat, all screamed power.

However, this power came with significant energy limitations.

A single battle required thirty level-seven demon crystals. In Ye Zhongming's hands, these could at least produce a seven-star evolution potion.

A seven-star evolution potion could only sustain three minutes of combat. Even with Cloud Peak's vast resources, such consumption was unsustainable.

"Master Le, this is a bit excessive. It's hard for us to deploy this robot with such high consumption on the battlefield."

Xia Lei looked troubled. As Cloud Peak's current manager, she knew exactly how much money the faction had. While there was a steady influx of funds, it couldn't sustain a money-devouring robot like this.

Le Dayuan nodded and explained, "I was talking about full firepower. In reality, the design of the arms means the robot can only choose one attack mode at a time. During melee combat, ranged attacks can't be used. So, based on tests, if the robot only engages in ranged attacks, it can last fifteen to twenty minutes. Crystal cannon mode lasts even less, while sniper mode lasts the longest. In melee combat, it can last around twenty-five to thirty minutes. Of course, regardless of the mode, the actual combat time depends on the complex external environment, such as the energy armor's consumption during attacks."

Hearing this, Xia Lei and the others breathed a sigh of relief. While the robot was still costly, deploying it at critical moments to deliver a decisive blow was acceptable.

Good steel should be used on the blade's edge. Sacrifices had to be made.

However, everyone understood that this was still expensive. A single battle would cost the equivalent of a core member, which was too extravagant.

"Master Le, you mentioned two energy sources earlier..." Xiao Li said hesitantly.

"Yes, two." Le Dayuan smiled. "This is the core and central hub of the machine."

The robot's chest opened, revealing a very special cockpit. In the center was a circular platform surrounded by various conduits and neural wires.

"A single demon energy system is too costly, especially with high-level demon crystals. I know even Cloud Peak can't afford that. But by adding life energy, it's different."

Le Dayuan rubbed his hands excitedly. He was clearly proud of this design, which he had created with Liu Zhenghong.

"Sister Hong specifically created a gene lifeform for this robot—a very special one. It has no combat ability, but..." Le Dayuan paused here. "I can't explain it perfectly, but the general idea is that this gene lifeform has exceptionally strong mental energy and contains vast life energy. The connection system in the cockpit can control the robot to achieve true combat readiness, unlike the sluggish state when I was controlling it."

So that was it!

A fusion of gene lifeforms and mechanical technology!

Even though everyone had already held Le Dayuan and Liu Zhenghong in the highest regard, this robot made them feel that their admiration wasn't enough. It demanded praise that reached the heavens.

"This gene lifeform is responsible for the robot's power and control systems. With its cooperation, the magic crystal system is freed from some of its energy demands, allowing for a combined combat time of about an hour."

While still not ideal, it was better than before.

"However, this gene lifeform will die afterward." Le Dayuan's words turned the control core into a consumable, raising the cost again.

"Master Le, theoretically, this gene lifeform could fight independently, meaning it should possess some intelligence. How do you ensure it follows commands during combat?"

Park Xiuying raised a question.

"Sister Hong considered this as well. After all, previous gene lifeforms relied on their bodies to fight, relying on instinct. But now, they have to control machines, which is much more complex. Plus, they're constantly consuming their own life energy to fight, so the risk of losing control is high."

Le Dayuan gestured for his assistants to move the robot back into the metal chamber while explaining to everyone, "So, each of these gene lifeforms is created using neural genes from researchers as a blueprint. In other words, you can think of them as extensions of the researchers. This makes control much easier."

The group didn't fully understand, but that was enough as long as they knew the gene lifeforms wouldn't go rogue.

"The reason I showed you this robot is twofold. First, so you're prepared when it's deployed on the battlefield and don't get too shocked or even end up fighting each other. Second, I want to build more of these robots, but need some materials. When you go out hunting in the future, please keep an eye out for and collect these materials. I'll give you a list later. Thank you all."

After saying this, Le Dayuan told everyone they could leave. He needed to continue his research. If he could reduce the energy requirement for the combat robot from level-seven demon crystals to level-six or even lower, this robot would undoubtedly become a groundbreaking product, much like the crystal cannons.

After leaving the Crystal Weapon Laboratory, the group couldn't stop discussing how to use this robot. Expensive as it was, its effectiveness was undeniable. They all had ideas about how to coordinate with it in combat. Ye Zhongming didn't join the discussion, simply following behind.

The Ying City factions in the meeting room had likely decided by now. Ye Zhongming didn't plan to listen in. Xia Lei could handle it—she had drafted the plan's specifics. Instead, he returned to the Gene Life Laboratory.

Since Liu Zhenhong had asked to see him alone, it must be about something too sensitive for the core members to hear. Such matters were usually Cloud Peak's highest secrets.

"You're here." Liu Zhenhong glanced at Ye Zhongming while continuing her experiment, speaking casually. Ye Zhongming wasn't in a hurry and stood by, waiting.

About ten minutes later, Liu Zhenhong inserted a tissue sample into a machine and pressed a button to start the calculations. She then removed her lab mask and walked over to Ye Zhongming.

"Do you know what I found on the corpse you brought back from Cold Bay Rainforest?" Liu Zhenhong asked with a smug smile, her lips curling upward.

Chapter 1452: Space Gene

Ye Zhongming had already seen Liu Zhenhong studying the monster that might have swallowed him and sent him into that mysterious world. He also knew that whatever Sister Hong said was about to say must be related to that. However, it had only been a few days since then, so he hadn't been holding out much hope.

If Liu Zhenghong had taken a year or even several years to research this thing, he wouldn't have been surprised. Compared to the revolutionary achievements of the pre-apocalypse era, which often required investments of hundreds of billions and decades of effort, Cloud Peak's Gene Life Laboratory was already godlike.

But Liu Zhenghong's tone and expression now clearly indicated a breakthrough.

"What did you find?" Ye Zhongming was also intrigued.

"A brand-new gene fragment."

Liu Zhenghong excitedly paced back and forth before continuing, "A space gene!"

Seeing Ye Zhongming's furrowed brow, Sister Hong made a face that clearly said, "Talking to laymen is such a hassle," and explained, "Space genes are incredibly mysterious and difficult to capture. Do you know that these genes are almost entirely transparent? In the microscopic world, that's almost equivalent to being non-existent and impossible to capture. But I got lucky and managed to find some."

"These genes are amazing. They possess astonishing abilities. Can you imagine? Just a single gene fragment can have independent... thought? No, no, that's not accurate. It's not thought."

Liu Zhenghong paced another circle. "Activity! Yes, activity—intense activity!"

"Little Ye, you might not understand gene activity, but you must know the characteristics of genes, right?"

This question left Ye Zhongming utterly frustrated. He wasn't a biology or medical student. He had studied genes, but that was long forgotten.

"Looks like you didn't do well in school," Liu Zhenghong rolled her eyes, ignoring Ye Zhongming's exasperated expression, and continued, "Genes have two main characteristics. One is faithfully replicating themselves to maintain the basic traits of an organism."

"For example, the mutated lifeform I created before, although the process was complex and involved genetic hybridization, overall, each gene fragment remained stable after fusion. This way, the created gene lifeforms were generally stable individuals while still needing periodic returns to nutrient solutions for body repairs. As long as they didn't die in battle, they could survive for a long time."

Even though Liu Zhenghong had simplified the explanation as much as possible, Ye Zhongming was still utterly confused. Fortunately, Liu Zhenghong wasn't trying to make him understand.

"The other characteristic of genes is mutation."

Gene mutation—this term Ye Zhongming had heard of. He wasn't sure if it was the same as mutation, but he nodded quickly.

"However, most mutations are pathogenic. Only a small portion are non-pathogenic. These non-pathogenic mutations are essentially products of survival laws, allowing life to better adapt to constantly changing environments. In nature, they evolve into the most suitable individuals."

"This part has always been a challenge. Mutations are unpredictable, with no clear direction. We can only judge based on the environment, and in experiments, this judgment becomes even more difficult."

But with these space genes, their mutations are easy and controllable, with excellent compatibility. They can form entirely new, mature, and stable chromosomes in any position. Given some time, I can apply space genes on a large scale to gene lifeform warriors."

Liu Zhenghong pushed up her non-existent glasses. "You know, Little Ye, you might end up commanding a space lifeform army."

"I look forward to that day." Ye Zhongming nodded. He believed Liu Zhenghong could do it.

Liu Zhenghong proudly patted Ye Zhongming's shoulder, as if to say, "Good, you know what's up."

"I called you here not just to tell you this but also to test an idea with you."

"What idea?"

Ye Zhongming was puzzled. He knew nothing about genetics, heredity, medicine, or human engineering. He couldn't think of any way he could help Liu Zhenghong in experiments.

"These space genes are highly malleable, and I can't fully grasp them yet. But they have strong activity. As long as I find a suitable carrier, I can temporarily transplant them."

As she spoke, Liu Zhenghong removed a specially designed cylindrical culture dish from the refrigeration chamber of a large experimental container. She opened the dish and placed it in front of Ye Zhongming.

Inside were several black eggs, each about the size of a quail egg.

"These are the carriers I found—unhatched eggs that contain life energy." Liu Zhenghong then took out an equal number of metal syringes, placed them on a machine, and slowly and precisely injected the contents into each egg.

"Now, these eggs carry space genes. Because of their strong activity and compatibility, and since they're dealing with eggs in an embryonic state, the space genes have become the dominant genetic material."

Ye Zhongming listened, completely lost. Although they were just a few simple sentences, they likely contained decades of Liu Zhenghong's academic expertise. He could only wait for her instructions.

"I heard you used a level-nine lifeform's egg when repairing Sheng Yuan's traditional shield?"

Liu Zhenghong suddenly changed the subject.

Ye Zhongming nodded, unsure why she was asking.

"Good. Take these eggs. You have two hours before they die to craft equipment. Congratulations—you might just get something with spatial abilities if you succeed!"

With that, she shoed Ye Zhongming out of the lab.

Ye Zhongming stood there momentarily, holding the cold culture dish, before remembering the two-hour deadline. He immediately sprinted back to his room at top speed. Many of the Ying City faction members attending the meeting at Cloud Peak saw this and couldn't help but tremble. Was the Cloud Peak boss in a bad mood and planning to wipe them all out?

When he repaired the traditional shield, it was because it had a summoning ability, and the level-nine lifeform's egg had a 'homologous' life carrier.

Now, Liu Zhengong had given him these eggs, and Ye Zhongming decided to try again.

Unable to find equipment similar to the traditional shield on such short notice, Ye Zhongming pinned his hopes on these life eggs 'contaminated' by space genes.

He had been researching this area in his spare time over the past few days. Based on his still-immature ideas, Ye Zhongming began his experiments.

With five life eggs, he selected five pieces of equipment most likely to carry life energy and started crafting them individually. The first attempt at crafting armor failed. In the hands of this top-tier smith, the life egg couldn't fuse and was destroyed.

Next, boots, a shield, and a battle axe all failed, leaving Ye Zhongming with little confidence. Did he really need equipment with summoning abilities? But such equipment was too rare.

Finally, with his last hope, he crafted a ring.

After a flash of light, the originally silver ring turned almost transparent.

Did it work?

Ye Zhongming was stunned and quickly examined the ring. It had only one skill.

Chapter 1453: Phase Shift

"Phase Shift."

"Every two hours, you can teleport with a maximum distance of no more than twenty meters."

"During the teleportation, none of your physical attributes can drop below 10% of their original value, and your mental energy must not fall below 20%. When using this skill, the destination must be within your line of sight, and there should be no obstacles exceeding 50% of your height between you and the destination."

"Teleportation only applies to the equipped individual. If the body is restrained or the weight of carried items exceeds 50% of the body's weight, the skill becomes ineffective."

Ye Zhongming looked at the almost invisible ring on his hand and felt excited as he read about the Phase Shift skill.

Although it was just one ability, Ye Zhongming's mind was filled with ideas on how to use it to kill enemies.

A sudden ambush before the battle begins, a sneak attack from behind the target after the battle starts, or even using the skill to escape quickly if the opponent proves too strong.

These were just the simplest applications. Combined with teammates or other skills, it could be used to execute more advanced tactics.

This skill was undoubtedly superb.

But Ye Zhongming's joy didn't end there. This equipment he had crafted himself meant he could repeat the process. He could theoretically create many such rings if he had enough materials. If he carried countless rings like this, could he continuously teleport? Like a saint?!

However, he quickly calmed down, realizing he was getting ahead of himself.

First, he didn't have a fixed blueprint for crafting this equipment. He had relied on his top-tier smith job and high-quality materials. The ring's level was only silver. For an item with such a powerful ability, being silver grade was clearly inconsistent with its value.

Second, Ye Zhongming still didn't understand why his experiments with weapons, armor, and other equipment had failed, while only accessories succeeded. Was it just a coincidence, or were space abilities only suitable for accessories?

Moreover, he didn't know if the ability he would get from crafting such equipment again would still be Phase Shift. If not, what would it be?

Ye Zhongming couldn't answer these questions on his own. He didn't want to engage in baseless speculation, so he decided to ask Liu Zhenghong for more of those eggs so that he could conduct more experiments and verify his theories.

As he left the room, he ran into Xia Lei, who was walking with Shasha and Bai Feng, followed by a few others. Seeing Ye Zhongming, Xia Lei was the first to approach.

The big sister of Cloud Peak glanced curiously at the new ring on Ye Zhongming's hand, wondering why her man was wearing silver-grade equipment.

The silver glow of the Phase Shift ring stood out awkwardly among Ye Zhongming's otherwise blue or colorless equipment.

Ye Zhongming immediately understood that these were likely the leaders of factions who had agreed to manage territories under Cloud Peak's banner. He glanced at them and quickly assessed the situation, which was roughly what he had expected.

"Let's talk as we walk," Ye Zhongming said, pointing ahead and leading the way. The group quickly followed.

"Your choices may mean that, after some time, you will be inseparable from Cloud Peak. Have you all thought this through?"

Hearing this, the group nodded in unison. Bai Feng spoke up, "Don't worry, Boss Ye. Like I said before, I've always wanted to join Cloud Peak. It's just that... the more I've seen of Cloud Peak while being around you, the more I feel that this is how humans should live. What we've been doing on our own is like being wild, uncivilized beasts."

The other leaders nodded in agreement.

In the apocalypse, everyone used to think that the ones who lived well were those who had "people and guns." They could exploit their subordinates' resources and have others risk their lives for them. Although being a leader came with its own set of troubles and could be exhausting, it was still worth it for the benefits.

However, after seeing how Cloud Peak operated, their perspective had fundamentally changed. Cloud Peak's model was completely different from other organizations. Every individual was an integral part of the whole, and at the very least, they were treated with respect and fairness.

You didn't need to overthink things; you followed orders, and naturally, you'd receive equipment and evolution potions.

As for risking your life? Well, in the apocalypse, everyone risked their lives. You had to take risks even as a leader; sometimes, it was even more dangerous. They weren't foolish; they knew that Cloud Peak's mortality rate was much lower compared to their own teams. Evolved in Cloud Peak's combat ranks were safer, especially once they reached the rank of squad leader.

So, they had developed a desire to join Cloud Peak but lacked the opportunity.

Now, the opportunity had come. Although it wasn't direct membership, they believed this was a test. Over time, they would naturally become part of Cloud Peak.

"Alright," Ye Zhongming nodded. "Since you've trusted Cloud Peak, I won't let you down. During your process of gaining control over your territories, Cloud Peak will send troops to support you, but you will still be the main force. Cloud Peak will only assist. Additionally, you will receive a batch of weapons and equipment for free. The quantity will vary based on the size of your teams. Middle-ranking members of your teams will each receive three pieces of green-grade equipment, while leaders will receive three pieces each—one blue and two green. As for which parts, you can decide and report them to Xia Lei."

Everyone was thrilled.

Even as leaders of their respective factions, they didn't have full sets of green-grade equipment. They had purchased some from Cloud Peak before, but they could even get blue-grade gear this time. Naturally, they were excited. Even Bai Feng and Shasha, leaders of larger factions, were tempted by the prospect of blue-grade equipment.

Even Cloud Peak's core members didn't yet have full sets of blue-grade equipment.

"In the future, when you trade with Cloud Peak's headquarters, you'll enjoy internal prices 20% lower than those for other territories."

This was another huge benefit. A 20% discount meant they paid 80% of the standard price, almost half the external rate.

"In the future, you'll also receive other benefits for free, such as defensive equipment, battle beasts, potions, scrolls, and more. But this will depend on your performance."

After saying this, Ye Zhongming signaled to Xia Lei to lead the group away while he himself returned to Liu Zhenghong's Life Gene Laboratory.

Chapter 1454: Gold Pendant

Liu Zhenghong was only slightly surprised by Ye Zhongming's sudden return, but she quickly guessed his intentions.

"Little Ye, you didn't think that transferring space genes into life eggs would be as easy as I made it sound, did you?"

Ye Zhongming was momentarily stunned. He hadn't really considered this issue and had instinctively assumed it would be a straightforward process.

"If you want more, you'll have to wait. I estimate that I can give you five more eggs in five days."

Ye Zhongming felt slightly disappointed, but he also knew that science couldn't be rushed. Liu Zhenghong had already done an excellent job.

Just as Ye Zhongming was about to leave, Liu Zhenghong stopped him. After hesitating momentarily, she said, "To implant space genes into suitable life eggs, the eggs need to undergo a special treatment. We don't have ordinary eggs available now, but one of the level-nine life eggs you brought back has already been treated. Do you... want to use it?"

After saying this, as if reluctant to part with it, Liu Zhenghong quickly added, "But you should think carefully. After all, there's a chance of failure in crafting. If that egg stays in my lab, even though it's just an experimental subject, the likelihood of achieving significant results is high. At the very least, based on my preliminary research over the past few days, I'm confident that we can hatch it. Cloud Peak will definitely gain a few level-nine lifeform offspring."

Ye Zhongming was torn.

He wasn't confident that he could successfully craft something with this egg, and even if he did, he wasn't sure whether a level-nine offspring would be more beneficial to Cloud Peak or if a space equipment piece would be more valuable. After all, there were too many uncertainties during the growth process of a level-nine offspring—it could die in battle or fail to reach level nine.

But if he gave up now, he would feel deeply unsatisfied.

After careful consideration, he finally decided to take the egg.

As a smith, a top-tier craftsman, how could he give up crafting out of fear of failure? That would be ridiculous.

Ye Zhongming adjusted his mindset, smiled, and took the level-nine life egg with him. Liu Zhenghong glared at him from behind but then smiled as well.

This was how a leader, especially a leader in the apocalypse, should be!

Take what you need, use what you have, and be selfish when necessary!

In fact, Liu Zhenghong thought that if Ye Zhongming were more ruthless, Cloud Peak would have already become a true war machine.

But simultaneously, she admitted that she preferred following someone like Ye Zhongming. No matter how strong she was, she was still just one person. The feeling of having a strong shelter to rely on without fear of betrayal was something she cherished.

Ye Zhongming took out the egg in his room and shook his head slightly.

These level-nine materials had been handed over to Liu Zhenghong for research before being returned to him for crafting. Due to the low success rate, Ye Zhongming felt that materials of this level were still too scarce.

He couldn't help but entertain a thought.

Should Cloud Peak start attempting to hunt level-nine lifeforms?

Once this idea took root, it became hard to suppress. In his mind, Ye Zhongming recalled the presence of a certain level-nine lifeform. Perhaps that one would be a suitable target for Cloud Peak.

Setting aside these thoughts, Ye Zhongming pondered for a while and decided to continue crafting accessories. As for whether space genes were only compatible with accessories or not, he would figure that out later.

This time, Ye Zhongming chose to craft a jade pendant, one for which he had a blueprint.

Originally, this was a blueprint for a piece of green-grade equipment called the Dust Sand Pendant. Once crafted, it would grant three abilities: increased speed when walking on sand, a sandstorm attack (a ranged skill with low damage but a unique cooldown mechanism—the first five uses had a one-minute cooldown, but after the fifth use, it entered a five-day cooldown period), and the ability to condense sand into a tower.

After performing a sandstorm attack, if enough sand remained on the ground, it would automatically form a sand tower that launched solid sandballs at enemies. After ten shots, the tower would explode, scattering multiple sandballs in a ranged attack. ґ A NŃBґs

Among green-grade equipment, the Dust Sand Pendant didn't have many skills, but they were practical. However, due to its overall low attack power and the relatively high cost of materials, Ye Zhongming didn't mass-produce it. He had only crafted a few for those who needed them.

But this was one of the few accessory blueprints he had that was relatively high-grade.

Ye Zhongming didn't start crafting immediately. Instead, he made a regular pendant to familiarize himself with the process. Only then did he begin the formal process of embedding the level-nine life egg with space genes into the pendant.

The entire process was far less difficult than Ye Zhongming had imagined. It felt almost effortless, as if everything fell into place naturally. After embedding the egg, the modified pendant showed no instability, making Ye Zhongming wonder if accessories were inherently compatible with genetic lifeforms.

At the same time, the process took a while, and Ye Zhongming's mental energy was significantly drained. But in his eyes, this was a good sign—it matched the status of level-nine materials.

At one point, the entire room was bathed in golden light, spilling through the windows. Those outside could tell that the boss was crafting equipment, and it seemed to be a gold-grade piece.

Indeed, Ye Zhongming now held a gold-grade jade pendant in his hands.

"Unhindered Dust Sand Pendant."

This was the name of the equipment. With just a glance, Ye Zhongming knew that the space genes had successfully left their mark on it.

Looking at its abilities, Ye Zhongming's face lit up with joy.

The first ability, which originally only increased speed when walking on sand, now had some characteristics of Phase Shift, though the teleportation distance was only one meter. Each teleportation had a ten-second cooldown, and after ten uses, it would enter a five-day cooldown period.

The second ability had changed significantly. Originally, the sandstorm attack was a large-area attack that started in front of the wearer. Now, it was launched one meter in front of the target. Since it was an area attack, it was almost impossible to dodge at such close range.

Moreover, this attack could now only be used once per day. When activated, it would move back and forth over the target's area peculiarly, with each directional change starting one meter in front of the target.

It relentlessly attacked the target, no matter how they moved or dodged!

Ye Zhongming wasn't sure about the exact power of the attack, but given that it was now gold-grade equipment, it should be formidable.

The third ability was somewhat complementary to the second ability. The sand tower would appear randomly when the second ability was activated, attack once, and then disappear. It would reappear randomly, repeating this process ten times. Finally, five sand towers would appear around the target, all exploding into sandballs for a ranged attack!

Chapter 1455: Plan is not smooth

The number of skills remained the same, but the skills themselves had changed. The level of the equipment had also increased, going from green grade on the blueprint to gold grade in reality.

In terms of skills alone, it did indeed fall slightly short compared to other gold-grade equipment. However, this wasn't necessarily a flaw. Equipment of the same grade naturally had its strengths and weaknesses. For example, the Bloodstepping Boots, one of Ye Zhongming's earliest gold-grade pieces, didn't have many skills but were highly practical.

Now, thanks to its space attributes, the Unhindered Dust Sand Pendant had fewer skills, but they were excellent. Ye Zhongming went out to test it and found its power to be quite impressive. It posed a threat even to eight-star evolved, and the latter two skills were particularly suited for group attacks.

Wearing this space equipment, Ye Zhongming knew that his crafting of space equipment would have to pause for now. Liu Zhenghong didn't have much time to produce more "spatial eggs" for him—she had more important tasks to handle.

Ye Zhongming had to suppress his impatience, knowing that these things couldn't be rushed. If Liu Zhenghong could make a breakthrough in her research on spatial genes, it might greatly aid and enhance his crafting.

The leaders of the various factions had already left Cloud Peak to prepare for battle. Whether they were planning to operate under Cloud Peak's banner or retain their independence, they were excited about the prospect of controlling their territories, as it signified a fresh start.

Cloud Peak, too, was bustling with activity. Collaborations with Thousand Beast Villa, Water Deacon, and previously agreed-upon partnerships with the Five Ring Money and Cannibal Chains, among others, all required vast amounts of resources and products. Additionally, Ye Zhongming needed to prepare for the impending wave of trade. Once the major factions in Ying City secured control over their territories, they would undoubtedly enter the secret realm en masse. Combined with the smaller factions that would begin venturing into the secret realm starting tomorrow, Cloud Peak's financial and material reserves would be put to the test.

Leaving other matters to Xia Lei, Ye Zhongming threw himself into a crafting frenzy.

Ye Zhongming moved directly into the material storage warehouse to facilitate material retrieval. His presence there set the entire Cloud Peak in motion.

The main combat teams, and even the defensive forces, were dispatched to hunt various mutant lifeforms and collect materials.

Many surrounding factions were notified a day in advance that certain areas would become Cloud Peak's hunting grounds the following day, and they were advised not to enter, lest they be treated as enemies.

These restricted periods typically lasted only a day, occasionally two or three. Afterward, when teams entered these areas, they would find only traces of blood but no other signs of what had been hunted. They had no idea what Cloud Peak had been targeting, as they had never noticed any particularly special mutant lifeforms in these regions before.

Occasionally, rumors spread that Cloud Peak was testing new weapons and genetic lifeforms, but no one had concrete evidence.

In addition to Ye Zhongming and the dispatched teams, others, like Xia Lei and Miya, who were responsible for logistics, were also incredibly busy. They had to handle many tasks daily, such as compiling data, categorizing items, organizing trade lists, coordinating team schedules, and managing resources from the secret realm.

The newly established factories, production lines, and the Battle Beast Unit added even more to their workload.

Eventually, Xia Lei had to call in Guang Yao and Mo Ye, having their deputies take over their command duties. One of them was tasked with overseeing military coordination, while the other temporarily took charge of Cloud Peak's overall defense. Xia Lei herself was fully immersed in logistics work.

The constant equipment flow from Ye Zhongming's hands was crucial to ensuring all trade deals proceeded smoothly. This represented an astronomical amount of wealth, and Xia Lei naturally took personal responsibility for it.

Seeing the flood of green-grade equipment, Xia Lei, who was accustomed to high-quality items, was both shocked and delighted.

She was pleased that Ye Zhongming, as a top-tier smith, had significantly improved in crafting speed, success rate, and diversity.

Now, Ye Zhongming could produce over twenty pieces of green-grade equipment and three hundred pieces of silver-grade equipment daily. He had completely abandoned gray-grade equipment. Occasionally, when inspiration struck or when he used high-quality materials, he could even produce blue-grade equipment. *RaNO B Eş*

It was worth noting that all the equipment Ye Zhongming was currently crafting was for "export." He created these pieces based on his understanding of equipment, combining materials freely. While these items might not match the functionality of those crafted from blueprints, the fact that he could produce blue-grade equipment—which previously required specific blueprints—was a testament to his tremendous progress. On average, one or two blue-grade pieces were produced each day.

His success rate had also improved significantly. Of dozens or even hundreds of crafting attempts, there were only a few failures due to bad luck.

Moreover, the variety of equipment he produced was astonishing. There were items for wearing, carrying, and using—each crafted based on the characteristics and state of the materials, using the most suitable methods.

Under these conditions, the equipment's quality was excellent. At least in the eyes of others, it was on par with blueprint-crafted gear.

Because Ye Zhongming worked so quickly, he had two crafting-class jobs and three female guards assisting him. The crafters helped by selecting, organizing, and preparing materials and occasionally handling simpler tasks. The three female guards were responsible for meticulously recording the skills of each piece of equipment Ye Zhongming crafted, then packing and delivering them to Xia Lei, who would select the best items for Cloud Peak's own use.

Thanks to his powerful mental energy, Ye Zhongming needed only five hours of rest each day. Every minute and second, he was creating immense value.

Xia Lei was exasperated because Ye Zhongming's crafting speed was so fast that the daily consumption of materials was staggering. Cloud Peak, having a master craftsman like Ye Zhongming, had always emphasized material collection greatly. Few factions in the entire region could rival Cloud Peak's material reserves.

But once Ye Zhongming entered his frenzied crafting mode, these materials began to disappear alarmingly. The speed at which they were consumed made Xia Lei's scalp tingle. Although new materials were constantly being delivered, they couldn't keep up with the consumption rate.

The fact that a super faction's full-scale material acquisition efforts couldn't match the consumption rate of a single person's crafting was a revelation that left Cloud Peak's core members in awe.

Their admiration for Ye Zhongming was beyond words.

When Little Tiger found out, he blurted out after a long pause, "He's a beast."

Chapter 1455.5- Plan is not smooth

Rumor had it that one day, when Ye Zhongming took a break and called Little Tiger to the crystal weapon testing grounds, he engaged in a "friendly sparring match" with him. The outcome was unclear, but Ye Zhongming returned to continue crafting while Little Tiger sported bruises for several days.

As time passed, ten days had gone by since the plan for the upcoming period was finalized. Reports began to trickle in, and surprisingly, the territorial expansion plan wasn't going as smoothly as expected.

These regions were on the fringes of Cloud Peak's influence and were somewhat affected by it. During the meeting, Ye Zhongming stated that the original forces in these territories would either be absorbed or eliminated. This had given the Ying City teams a lot of confidence, even making them somewhat arrogant.

They had reason to be arrogant. As affiliated teams of Cloud Peak, they enjoyed the most benefits. They didn't need to rely on luck to obtain evolution potions—they could purchase them at low prices. They could also acquire equipment from Cloud Peak at similarly low prices. Additionally, they could hire warriors from the Posthumous people to venture into the secret realm, earning substantial profits each time. Many people didn't even engage in combat in the secret realm; instead, they relied on information from the Posthumous People people to guess where battles had taken place and specialized in digging for demon crystals. This even gave rise to a short-lived role—crystal diggers.

This didn't even account for the fact that they could sell the corpses of mutant lifeforms to Cloud Peak, a nearly cost-free business.

With so many advantages, the Ying City teams were naturally much stronger than the surrounding factions.

In the past, they had relied on Cloud Peak to live comfortably in the relatively safe Ying City, which had made them somewhat complacent. Now, with the opportunity to expand, they had taken the initiative, expecting easy victories. Instead, they encountered fierce resistance.

Whether it was Bai Feng's team, Star Beauty Corporation, or factions controlling territories in smaller towns, almost every organization faced strong opposition from local forces. The original inhabitants of these areas showed a fierce determination to resist those trying to take over their "homes."

Few were willing to accept the "amnesty" the Ying City forces offered, and conflicts became inevitable.

On the map Ye Zhongming had prepared, centered around Cloud Peak and Ying City, the entire territory was ablaze with battles.

This situation not only caught the Ying City teams off guard but also surprised Cloud Peak's members.

"It's not hard to understand, is it? If you try to take over someone else's home, they'll naturally fight back," said Tong Hu, who had just returned from a mission and still reeked of blood. He shared his perspective on the current situation with a few core members at home.

"It's probably not that simple," Liang Chuyin, who had recently been assigned to oversee matters related to the secret realm, chimed in. Once a lively internet celebrity, she had matured over the four years of the apocalypse into a capable team leader and mid-level manager. She could handle responsibilities independently, but she still reverted to her playful self around Ye Zhongming.

"Essentially, they're being absorbed. These factions should see that clearly. I can understand why larger factions wouldn't want to submit to others, but what about the smaller ones? They're struggling to survive—one failed hunt could wipe them out. How do they have such a strong will to resist?"

The internet celebrity wasn't the same person who used to rely on brute force without thinking. Now, she pondered the question while idly playing with her whip.

"Of course, they've been infiltrated," a voice came from behind. Everyone turned to see Ye Zhongming approaching.

They all stood up to greet their leader. Over the past few days, they had been direct beneficiaries of Ye Zhongming's efforts. Every day, he would produce a few blue-grade pieces of equipment, which were distributed among the core members. Now, they had nearly all achieved full blue-grade gear. The next step was to aim for gold-grade equipment, which would be far more difficult and likely unattainable for years.

Liang Chuyin hugged Ye Zhongming's arm and led him to a chair, massaging his shoulders from behind. The thought of her man working tirelessly every day, only taking breaks to eat and recover his mental energy, made her heartache.

This wasn't how a leader should live. While leaders of other factions in the apocalypse enjoyed their power, her man was toiling like a laborer. It wasn't fair.

"Boss, what do you mean by 'infiltrated'?" Ah Yang asked.

Ye Zhongming closed his eyes, enjoying Liang Chuyin's massage, and replied, "Cloud Peak is right here, a clear target. Whether they're our enemies or our friends, everyone is watching us. The only difference is whether their attention is friendly or hostile."

At this point, everyone understood.

"You mean these teams are spies from other factions?"

Ye Zhongming shook his head slightly. "It's unlikely that they're all spies, but various factions have sent people to our surroundings over the past two years. Some pretended to be survivors migrating here, while others infiltrated and took control of existing factions. Over time, they've grown in number. Once the territorial plan was announced, as soon as the Ying City teams knew about it, these 'spies' would also have known. Naturally, they wouldn't willingly give up their territories or lose the opportunity to monitor Cloud Peak up close. Once the territories are established, they'll be pushed out of Cloud Peak's sphere of influence. Gathering firsthand information will become much harder."

Everyone nodded in understanding. It seemed that, besides the obvious reasons, Boss's territorial plan also aimed to expel these spies.

In truth, Cloud Peak also sent people to monitor the surroundings of other factions, not necessarily with malicious intent, but at least to stay informed. R&NØBÈS

The work of the Chameleon included this as a crucial task. Other factions would ruthlessly eliminate Cloud Peak's spies given the chance. It was an unspoken understanding and success depended on skill.

"It seems it's time for Cloud Peak's forces to step in," Ye Zhongming said, looking at the group. They all understood—Boss was going to have the teams assist the Ying City forces.

At that moment, Xia Lei entered and was surprised to see Ye Zhongming there.

"Are you hungry?" she asked, sitting beside him with concern. Usually, Ye Zhongming wouldn't be out at this time.

"No, it's because someone wants to see me," Ye Zhongming smiled. "Well, not someone—it's not human."