

## Apocalypse 1506

### Chapter 1506: Different price for different people

Xia Lei provided an explanation regarding their question.

"Ability Resonance refers to the state an evolved is in at a given moment. The Brilliance ability of the Relic Robe selects a random state during its cooldown period and, when activated, grants the wearer a corresponding percentage of the original lifeform's power. For example, if the robe randomly selects a moment when the wearer was fighting at full strength, it could grant 100% of the original lifeform's power as a bonus. It might grant zero bonus if it selects a moment when the wearer was sleeping."

The three leaders pondered this.

Essentially, the ability randomly chose a snapshot of the wearer's state—whether they were exerting 10%, 50%, or 100% of their power—and then granted a proportional boost based on the original lifeform's strength.

This was a god-tier skill!

Who was the original lifeform? Either the Nine-Winged Crow or the Armor King—both level-nine existences. Even a fraction of their power would be devastating.

Xia Lei added a caveat:

"While Brilliance scales with the original lifeform's power, this is still only a Purple-grade item, not seven-colored grade. It can't replicate the full might of a Level 9 being. There are diminishing returns—our tests show it caps at roughly one-third of the original lifeform's strength."

The leaders didn't question how Cloud Peak tested this. If Ye Zhongming could craft such equipment, he'd naturally understand its limits.

One-third... A flicker of disappointment crossed their minds, but they quickly adjusted. Even a third of a level-nine being's power was a monstrous boost—stacked on top of their existing abilities. If they lucked into a 100% state activation, the surge would be enough to dominate peers effortlessly.

After the shock, the three of them sighed. The randomness of the ability halved its practical value. With a 10-day cooldown, who knew which moment it would latch onto? They couldn't stay in combat mode indefinitely.

Their verdict: If it picks peak performance, it's broken. If it picks idle time, it's useless.

The line between heaven and hell was indeed thin.

"Now, the Resonance Mace," Xia Lei continued, cutting short their musings.

"Ability 1: Lash – On hit, the target is knocked back and inflicted with confusion/fear, scaling with the user's mental strength advantage. The effect and time it lasts will be based on mental strength."

"Ability 2: Phantom – Swings occasionally phase through space, shortening attack delays."

"Ability 3: Airburst – Leaves invisible marks in the air that detonate on command, dealing damage proportional to their quantity."

"Ability 4: Shadow Strike – Unleashes a 200% power attack with a guaranteed hit within 10 meters (50% chance at 20 meters). 20-hour cooldown."

"Ability 5: Wave Assault – After 5 minutes of continuous use of the weapon, the user is able to use waves of attacks. The intensity of the hit will remain the same. The number of hits is based on the intensity of the weapon use. The more intense, the more hits there are. If the user doesn't use this skill after five minutes, the Wave Assault will enter the next cycle and store the previous attack. When activating, two will stack. (max three charges)."

"Ability 6: Skybreaker – Once every 100 days, the mace enlarges (scaling with user's level) and delivers a critical strike with multiplied attack power."

The six abilities were a decent amount, but each was exceptional especially the latter ones. The former added negative status and increased attack speed and power. The latter used the number of strikes to increase strength. The final one would cause the weapon to grow by ten times, and he could attack with ten times more strength.

Three Purple-grade items and each a masterpiece.

Now, the million-dollar question: How much?

Xia Lei didn't keep them waiting.

"Zhongming said since we're all friends, we'll skip auctions. Fixed prices, no bargaining. Each of you can buy one piece. If multiple want the same item, the highest bidder wins. If someone backs out, the remaining piece also goes to the highest bidder, starting from the base price."

She then dropped the bombshell when the three bosses frowned.

"Thousand Beast Villa's price for choosing equipment is one eight-star potion and one level-nine crystal. Daybreak Freedom Army's price is one eight-star potion, two War Fortress Reactors, and two green Holy Army Coat sets. Deacon Water's price is two eight-star potions."

The three bosses cursed when they heard the price.

This was too expensive. They were bidding with eight-star potions?

Xia Lei smirked. "Even after reaching nine-star evolution, Purple-grade will remain your core gear. The rarer they get, the more they'll cost. You're free to walk away—Cloud Peak won't give any discounts."

Xia Lei looked at them calmly.

The trio exchanged glances.

Was it expensive?

For the current era, absurdly so.

For the future? A steal.

The three of them chose to avoid competition, and after discussing, they each picked an item and scrambled to gather payment—Cloud Peak's 5-day deadline loomed.

Li Daqian had it easiest; he had an eight-star potion and a level-nine crystal on hand.

Commander Mu needed to raid his armories for reactors and armor sets.

Deacon Water was the most aggrieved—she had to return the eight-star potion she'd just earned and scrounge up another.

In their frenzy over the gear, all three overlooked one critical detail:

Where was Ye Zhongming?

Chapter 1507: Person to tell Cloud Peak's king to scam

Ye Zhongming had gone... somewhere even he wasn't entirely sure of.

After more than five years of the apocalypse, the landscape had transformed beyond recognition. Cities lay in ruins, mountains had been flattened, swamps turned into forests, and deserts had become grasslands or lakes. This was no longer the work of nature, but the result of the terrifying power of mutated lifeforms.

In the early years, highways and expressways could still serve as reference points to locate cities. But now, former urban areas might be dense forests or vast lakes, roads completely destroyed or buried—no longer reliable landmarks.

Ye Zhongming lit a campfire, roasting the hind leg of a level-five mutated boar he had casually hunted. The rest of the carcass? Discarded without a second thought.

These creatures were notoriously vicious—fast, strong, and incredibly tough, with formidable evolved abilities. They were one of the few species whose notoriety had carried over from the pre-apocalyptic era.

Yet, like before, boar meat remained delicious when grilled. With just a sprinkle of seasoning, it emitted an irresistible aroma—tender, fragrant, and even beneficial to an evolved's strength.

In the darkness of night, such a scent was bound to attract other mutated lifeforms. But Ye Zhongming didn't care. He had even deliberately placed the fire near the broken window of this ruined house, ensuring its glow could be seen from afar.

In the nation's current state, very few things could threaten Ye Zhongming. He no longer needed to live with the same caution as before.

Lost in thought, listening to the rain outside, Ye Zhongming felt a headache coming on.

After leaving Chameleon's intelligence outpost, he had assumed he wouldn't get lost. But his intended landmark—a specific mountain—was nowhere to be found. Had he missed it? He realized he was completely disoriented after walking for hours without spotting it. He'd have to wait for sunrise to recalibrate his position.

"Should've brought the Exquisite Floating Ball," he mused, sighing internally. Now, he was effectively blind.

Half an hour ago, he had deliberately released a powerful aura to deter any foolish mutated lifeforms from disturbing him on this cold, rainy night. That would be suicide for those lifeforms.

Yet, barely twenty minutes later, Ye Zhongming opened his eyes, gazing through the broken, glassless window.

In such darkness, without starlight, visibility was practically zero. But these people... what were they doing here?

Ye Zhongming spotted their silhouettes with his enhanced vision when they entered a hundred-meter radius. He could even make out the irritation and frustration on their faces by fifty meters.

Glancing at his nearly extinguished campfire, he sighed inwardly. "Maybe I should've kept a lower profile."

"Brother who is inside, mind if we take shelter from the rain?"

This wasn't some cliché novel scene where people casually barged into abandoned temples. This was the apocalypse. Anyone wandering the wilderness at night was dangerous. The chance of being attacked upon entering uninvited was over 50%.

Ye Zhongming acknowledged.

He wasn't afraid of being robbed, and these people seemed decent enough. Letting them take shelter wouldn't hurt. Otherwise, if they kept moving through the wilderness tonight, half might not survive till morning.

"Thanks, brother!" The leader's voice carried genuine relief. In the apocalypse, finding someone so accommodating was rare.

The group pushed open the decrepit door—only for it to collapse under the slightest pressure. They froze momentarily, activating light sources in their hands, their expressions tense as they scanned the room for threats.

Seeing only Ye Zhongming sitting calmly on the ground, they relaxed.

The leader, however, eyed Ye Zhongming suspiciously. A lone traveler on a night like this? Unusual.

The group of seven—five men and two women—settled in the farthest corner from Ye Zhongming. Under the dim light, they rummaged through their packs for food.

Wet clothes? Irrelevant. Colds were practically nonexistent for evolved.

Ye Zhongming had already assessed their strength the moment they entered. The burly leader was a five-star evolved, as was the gray-haired elderly woman beside him. The last woman to enter, however, was a six-star—the highest in the group. The rest were four stars.

By apocalypse standards, this was a decently strong team.

Of course, by Ye Zhongming's standards? He could kill them all in seconds if he wished.

As for their gear—unimpressive. Only the leader and the old woman had a few Silver-grade pieces. The rest wore mostly White or Gray-grade equipment.

This was normal. Cloud Peak was the anomaly.

The six-star woman, however, stood out—her gear was the worst of the group, all Gray-grade. Odd for someone of her level.

A six-star evolved could qualify as a formal soldier in Cloud Peak. In other major factions, she'd at least be a squad leader. In smaller groups, she'd be the boss.

But Ye Zhongming didn't dwell on it. Strange? Maybe. But he couldn't be bothered to care.

The group chewed on their dry rations, occasionally stealing glances at Ye Zhongming's half-eaten, still-aromatic boar leg. No one dared ask for a bite, let alone try to buy it.

For a while, the only sounds in the ruined house were chewing and the rain outside.

Just as Ye Zhongming closed his eyes again, his brows furrowed.

"What now?"

Another group was approaching.

The campfire was nearly out, and the room was dim. Spotting it from a distance would require sharp eyes.

This new group was larger—over twenty people, accompanied by two battle beasts. One of them visibly radiated a Green-grade glow, indicating multiple Green-grade pieces.

After a brief pause outside, three scouts entered, scanning the room warily before reporting back. Soon, the entire group filed in.

The ruined house—likely a former factory workshop—was spacious compared to ordinary buildings, but with nearly thirty people and two battle beasts, it felt cramped.

Chapter 1507.5- Person to tell Cloud Peak's king to scram

Three six-stars, seven five-stars, the rest four-stars, plus a level four and level five battle beast.

This squad was noticeably stronger. If they were part of a larger faction, that faction would rank within the nation's top 500—worthy of appearing on the National Power Rankings.

Five Ring Money's rankings now extended to 500 entries, with the individual power list reaching 1,000.

The middle-aged leader scrutinized Ye Zhongming first—lone wanderers in the wild were often dangerous. After looking for a moment, he relaxed.

Ye Zhongming's equipment had reached gold grade. After hiding the glow, others wouldn't be able to tell. He didn't bring Yangos, Yellow Ball, or the female guards to cover his tracks. He even wore two silver-grade pieces of armor on him.

He also covered his aura, and he looked similar to a four or five-star evolved.

His level and equipment didn't look good, which was no wonder the middle-aged man didn't care.

Satisfied, his gaze shifted to the seven-person team, lingering on the six-star woman with a thoughtful frown.

With overwhelming numbers, the newcomers didn't hold back. They could crush this squad.

They brusquely herded the smaller group into a corner, claiming the center of the room. Their voices weren't loud, but they sounded annoying.

Still, they refrained from lighting a fire, opting for flashlights and luminous pearls instead. As they unpacked rations, a few eyed Ye Zhongming's leftover boar leg but were stopped by their comrades.

They were domineering but not reckless.

Of course, it might also be because neither Ye Zhongming nor the seven-person team possessed anything worth robbing. Otherwise, bloodshed would've been inevitable.

Just as the newcomers settled, Ye Zhongming sighed.

"Again?"

Tonight, this place... was getting suspicious.

Ye Zhongming got more serious.

The third group was the smallest—just five people. But their strength was undeniable: all five were six-star evolved, each equipped with at least one Green-grade item. The rest of their gear was primarily Silver-grade, with the lowest being White.

Confident in their power, they strode in and immediately assessed the room. Wary of the largest group, they targeted the seven-person team's relatively sheltered corner instead.

The seven were probably regretting choosing this spot. They didn't say anything and gave it up to the five new people. They came to Ye Zhongming's side. The leader looked at Cloud Peak's king and wanted to sit together.

Although he didn't think Ye Zhongming was strong, he was a four-star evolved. If they stood together, the eight of them would be stronger. To the other two groups, they would be slightly more worried.

Before the five could even sit, one of them spotted the boar leg.

"Hey, wild boar meat?"

Without hesitation, he snatched it up and took a bite.

"Damn, even salted and spiced! Kid, you're living large."

The bearded man—his age indeterminable under the scruff—chewed noisily, grease smearing his face. His loud voice seemed utterly unconcerned about attracting mutants.

Five six-star evolved had every right to be bold.

Ye Zhongming gave him a cold glance but held back.

To maintain his anonymity, killing everyone here would be necessary. But neither the seven-person team nor the larger group had provoked him. He wasn't in the mood for indiscriminate slaughter.

After a few more bites, the man tossed the leg to a companion, wiped his mouth, and glared down at Ye Zhongming.

"You didn't eat a whole boar, did you? This is clearly from an adult. Where's the rest?"

Ye Zhongming ignored him.

The man wasn't worth a response.

"Motherf—"

"Save your energy, Old Four," one of the five leaned against the wall, chewing boar meat.

The bearded man scoffed but backed off, returning to his group.

Moments later, he was back, swiping the dry firewood Ye Zhongming had gathered earlier. Soon, a new fire blazed in their corner, making it the warmest spot in the house.

Strength was everything. No one protested or stood up for Ye Zhongming.

Ye Zhongming merely smirked inwardly and resumed meditating, replenishing his mental energy.

He'd been crafting nonstop before this trip and needed the recovery time. A boar leg or firewood mattered little compared to his depleted stamina.

The uneasy peace lasted barely ten minutes before the fourth group arrived.

This time, it was a single person—but with three battle beasts in tow. Even Ye Zhongming did a double-take.

A seven-star evolved, leading three level six battle beasts!

This was getting absurd. Why were so many people converging on this insignificant ruin in the middle of a storm?

Interest piqued, Ye Zhongming sensed something was afoot.

The five six-stars immediately toned down their arrogance. A lone seven-star might not intimidate them, but one with three level-six battle beasts? That was a different story.

The newcomer left two massive battle beasts—too large to fit through the door—outside, entering with only a wolf-like creature at his heels.

Surveying the crowded space with displeasure, his gaze settled on Ye Zhongming.

One word:

"Scram."

Chapter 1508: Nightrain Lake

Ye Zhongming was momentarily taken aback.

It had been too long since anyone had spoken to him like this.

His subordinates adored him; almost every word they spoke was laced with respect. His opponents respected him; even if they wanted to kill him, they admired his strength.

But no matter how long it had been since Ye Zhongming last heard such words, it didn't stop the surge of killing intent in his heart.

Originally, he had just wanted to see what was happening here, but interrogating these people before killing them was also an option.

However, Ye Zhongming stopped because more people had arrived.

This time, it was a standard ten-person apocalypse squad.

The kind with defenders, melee fighters, agile speed evolvers, and long-range support—some even had the luxury of including support jobs.

Ye Zhongming saw that this squad had clearly undergone rigorous training, far beyond the few in the broken-down house. Each carried two types of weapons—one for ranged combat and one for melee—and wore standardized silver-grade combat suits.

What surprised the King of Cloud Peak the most was that all ten were riding battle beasts—low-level but fast four-legged creatures.

Which major faction do they belong to? Ye Zhongming wondered.

Only those ranked in the country's top 200 would have such well-equipped squads.

The seven-star evolved who had told Ye Zhongming to "get lost" no longer paid him any attention upon seeing this squad. He quickly slipped out of the house, standing beside his two battle beasts, and called out:

"Which captain of Jinxiu is this?"

His voice carried, causing the approaching ten-person squad to slow slightly.

"Veterinarian Meng?" one of the squad members responded, clearly recognizing the seven-star evolved.

"It's me. Captain Wang?"

As they approached each other, Ye Zhongming saw that the squad leader was also a seven-star evolved, with over half his team at six stars and only four at five stars—a formidable force.

The man called Veterinarian Meng visibly relaxed and spoke with the squad in hushed tones. The rain and lowered voices made it impossible for those inside the house to hear clearly. Ye Zhongming only caught a few scattered words:

Bounty... many people... rain... price...

From these fragments, nothing concrete could be inferred.

Soon, the group left their battle beasts outside and entered the house.

By then, the largest group of twenty-some people had already vacated their spot, squeezing into a corner as if cowed.

Truthfully, they would have preferred to leave immediately, but with only one exit—now blocked by the ten-person squad—their only option was to break through the walls.

They could do that, but it might cause misunderstandings.

Seeing the newly vacated space, Captain Wang smirked and led his team over.

Even in the rain, his squad could travel safely as long as luck wasn't against them, but he'd rather not push their luck in this weather.

A shelter from the wind and rain was just fine.

Once seated, Veterinarian Meng began to ingratiate himself, pulling out several exquisitely packaged cakes from his backpack and distributing them to Captain Wang and his team.

"Veterinarian Meng, why are you getting involved in this? For a lone wolf like you, this is too risky. One wrong move, and you're dead. As thanks for the cakes, I'll give you a word of advice—stay out of this mess. It's easy to get killed."

A flicker of displeasure crossed Veterinarian Meng's eyes, but he masked it well, forcing a smile. "Fortune favors the bold. Isn't that the way of the apocalypse? We in the northwest don't have as many mutated creatures to hunt as other regions. Now that we've finally got this opportunity, I have to try. Otherwise, who knows how long it'll take to reach eight stars?"

Others in the room, though they didn't dare speak up, inwardly scoffed.

Due to the sparse population, the northwest did have fewer zombies, but mutated creatures were abundant—mountains, deserts, plateaus—all teemed with mutated flora and fauna. The competition here was far less fierce than in the southeast, northeast, or central regions.

Couldn't he at least come up with a better excuse?

Captain Wang curled his lip. Out of courtesy for the cakes, he didn't outright rebuke him but said, "Veterinarian Meng, the apocalypse does offer opportunities, but it also takes lives at a whim. Do you know who's involved in this now? Our Jinxiu, along with Kuangsha, Deep Sky Eye, the Qin Family, Ordinary, Deep Palace Courtyard..."

He listed numerous names, all prominent factions in the northwest. Many were ranked in the country rankings. Some, like Jinxiu and Ordinary, even made the top 50, while Kuangsha and the Qin Family were regulars in the top 100.

"All of them are in on this. The mountains and the swamp plains are crawling with their squads. Do you really think you can find that thing before them? Fine, even if you get lucky and find it, can you kill it? How long would it take you? You'd likely just be doing someone else's work for them."

Captain Wang sounded almost sympathetic.

Veterinarian Meng smiled, though frustration simmered inside.

Against a fellow seven-star like Captain Wang, he might not be weaker in personal combat, but as a lone wolf facing a major faction, he was at a clear disadvantage.

Though he dared not voice it, Veterinarian Meng knew this man was eating his hard-earned cakes while trying to convince him to back off—did he think he was stupid?

The conversation stalled, so Veterinarian Meng's gaze shifted to the others in the room. He forced a dry laugh.

"Captain Wang, look—those five over there must be the Thorn Fortress brothers, and that big group looks like the Riding Wind Team. The rest are small fry I don't recognize. Don't you think they're even more out of their depth?"

Captain Wang gave him a sidelong glance, unimpressed by the deflection, but he still surveyed the room, this time more carefully.

His gaze lingered on Ye Zhongming for a few seconds before shifting to the seven-person squad, quickly settling on the strange woman among them.

After a long stare, Captain Wang suddenly stood and strode over to her.

"Who are you? Where are you from?" he demanded coldly.

The woman flinched. Despite being a six-star evolved—one level below Captain Wang—her reaction was almost like a frightened civilian, tucking her head between her knees.

"The rest of you, get out. You stay," Captain Wang pointed at the woman but swept his gaze across everyone, including Veterinarian Meng.

Chapter 1508.5- Nightrain Lake

The blatant betrayal left Veterinarian Meng red-faced.

Ye Zhongming, observing the woman's reaction and Captain Wang's sudden intensity, had a thought: Could she be from...

Just then, a beast's roar shattered the silence, freezing the room.

Captain Wang's expression changed. He grabbed the woman, tucked her under his arm, and barked at his team: "Move!"

The ten of them bolted outside, mounted their battle beasts, and vanished into the rain.

Close behind, Veterinarian Meng and the five Thorn Fortress members also rushed out, heading toward the source of the roar.

The room was left with only the original three groups. The twenty-some hesitated briefly before trailing after the others.

"They took Xiaohua!" a young man from the seven-person team cried out, frantic. He had been one of the few who treated the woman kindly.

"Shut up! I saw it!"

The middle-aged leader's face was dark. He hadn't dared resist when Captain Wang took Xiaohua—against such power, he was nothing. But letting her go just like that was unacceptable. They'd taken great risks to shelter her and had only just begun to shape her potential.

"The Ghost-Eyed Sand Fox and the mutated buckthorns are symbiotic. Even Jinxiu's squad can't guarantee a kill. If we follow, we might still have a chance!"

The elderly woman spoke, her tone grim.

The leader nodded. He'd been thinking the same. He wouldn't give up unless absolutely forced to. Following might still yield an opportunity.

But whether it was Jinxiu's squad, Veterinarian Meng, or the Thorn Fortress brothers, none were foes he could afford to provoke. Even the Riding Wind Team, which had just left, outmatched them. Who knew how many more evolved would converge at the site? With their meager strength, just getting close was risky.

His gaze fell on Ye Zhongming.

This was someone who could kill a level-five boar—likely a five-star evolved. If he joined them, their strength would increase significantly, improving their odds.

He clasped his fists toward Ye Zhongming, but before he could speak, the King of Cloud Peak beat him to it.

"Let's go together. Everyone's here for the same reason. If we succeed, it's luck; if not, it's fate. Working together improves our chances. If we get it, I'll take a third."

The burly man blinked, then grinned.

He hadn't expected Ye Zhongming to agree so readily, saving him the trouble of persuasion. Asking for a third was fair—among their remaining six, two were five-star, and so was Ye Zhongming.

Without further discussion, they hurried toward the roar.

Ye Zhongming followed silently, intent on uncovering the truth. Aside from nearly confirming the identity of the woman called Xiaohua, he'd also gleaned another clue from the scattered words.

Perhaps these people could lead him to his target faster.

The night was dark, and the earlier passage of Jinxiu's squad had alerted nearby mutated creatures. Ye Zhongming discreetly eliminated several threats, but the low-level Baowen Team noticed nothing.

About ten minutes later, they emerged from the woods to a lakeshore. Between two mutated buckthorn trees stood a small fox-like creature with eight eyes on its face—the Ghost-Eyed Sand Fox.

The fox was ramming against a translucent energy barrier. Two corpses lay nearby, their glowing green indicators suggesting they were at least mid-tier evolved.

"The Jin brothers! That's their signature Energy Arena! No wonder the Ghost-Eyed Sand Fox roared—it's trapped and desperate."

The burly leader, though weak, knew the area well. He identified the corpses and the cause of the disturbance.

Clearly, the Jin brothers had overestimated themselves, thinking two six-star evolved could take down a level-seven Ghost-Eyed Sand Fox. Instead, they'd died together.

"The Energy Arena is one-way—nothing gets out unless it's broken. It lasts thirty minutes, so there are maybe ten left. Wonder who'll make a move now."

The speaker was the leader of the Riding Wind Team from earlier.

By now, over a hundred evolved had gathered along the lakeshore, the strongest closest, the weaker keeping their distance.

Ye Zhongming studied the fox briefly before focusing on the two mutated buckthorns. His sharp senses confirmed both were level seven, though their magic crystals were well hidden.

Three level sevens...

Were these people braving the stormy night just to hunt them?

"Someone's going in! It's Ordinary!"

The burly leader pointed as a squad charged across the sandy stretch between the lake and woods, entering the Energy Arena.

Their levels were decent: two seven-stars, four six-stars, and ten five-stars. Among the crowd, they stood out like Jinxiu's ten-man squad.

The battle erupted instantly.

While others watched nervously, Ye Zhongming shook his head inwardly.

Three level-seven symbiotic creatures were terrifying, especially with their complementary abilities. Two seven-star evolved stood no chance, and the lower-ranked members were just cannon fodder.

Sure enough, within minutes, Ordinary was overwhelmed. The Ghost-Eyed Sand Fox mercilessly tore out their throats one by one.

The evolved' faces paled, but no one else stepped forward.

A minute later, someone began calling everyone to gather.

Reluctantly, the crowd complied. Ye Zhongming saw it was Captain Wang.

"You've all seen it. The Ghost-Eyed Sand Fox and the two mutated buckthorns are all level seven. None of us can take them alone. The Energy Arena will collapse soon, and if they escape, finding them again will be near impossible."

Captain Wang scanned the crowd. "We're all here for the bounty, but it's not easy money. Rather than everyone walking away empty-handed, let's team up. We'll split the reward based on contribution. It won't be as much as soloing it, but it's better than nothing. We'll go to Pin Palace together to claim it!"

"What if we die?" someone shouted.

"Then your team gets your share!" Captain Wang snapped. "Let's be honest—us seven-stars will carry the fight. The rest just need to block escape routes."

The offer was tempting. The bounty was substantial—even a small cut could net a five-star evolution potion.

"Our region's remote. We missed Cloud Peak's bounty last time. Are we really going to pass up Pin Palace's too?"

That sealed the deal. Soon, everyone agreed. There was no intricate plan—Captain Wang just assigned positions based on strength.

No sooner had they taken their places when the Energy Arena flickered out.

The three level-seven creatures charged forth!

Chapter 1509: One sided battle

Ye Zhongming was also seeing such high-level symbiotic mutated lifeforms for the first time.

Talking Lady and her black cat were the strongest symbiotic lifeforms Ye Zhongming had encountered—a zombie and a mutated animal, an unusual pair. However, the two had likely shared a connection before death, which allowed them to form such a bond.

So, how did this sand fox and the two buckthorns come together?

The thought flashed through his mind before Ye Zhongming shook his head. Spending too much time with Sister Hong had even influenced his way of thinking.

The Ghost-Eyed Sand Fox and the mutated buckthorns were a formidable combination. Their earlier slaughter of the evolved had been swift and ruthless. However, mutated plants were inherently slow-moving. Even though the two buckthorns had evolved into treants, each step took them nearly three seconds. Though they could cover ten meters in a single stride, it still wasn't enough to shake off the pursuing evolved.

As a Gardener, Ye Zhongming had a deep understanding of mutated plants. His time in the Gene Life Lab had further honed this knowledge.

He recalled the treant in the lab. Though it had been a human transformed into a tree, some of its abilities were common among mutated plants, including a short-term speed boost. He wondered if these two buckthorns possessed a similar skill.

Captain Wang led the seven- and six-star evolved in surrounding the three mutant lifeforms.

Under normal circumstances, with four seven-star evolved and nearly twenty six-stars, they should have been able to take down the Ghost-Eyed Sand Fox and the buckthorns. Yet the battle remained deadlocked.

These people weren't from the same faction, and their selfish caution—prioritizing their own safety—meant progress was slow.

"Veterinarian Meng, have your battle beasts flank them!" Captain Wang suddenly shouted. The others quickly echoed the suggestion.

Veterinarian Meng's face darkened. He knew what they really meant—sacrifice.

As the only seven-star evolved without a faction backing him, he was the perfect scapegoat.

With a whistle, his three battle beasts launched a fierce assault from the side. The others brightened—he was surprisingly cooperative! They watched closely, ready to strike at the first opening.

On a night like this, they all wanted to end this quickly.

But... Veterinarian Meng's battle beasts only attacked once, using ranged abilities, before retrieving their master and bolting into the woods.

Captain Wang and the others froze before cursing loudly.

Losing a seven-star evolved and three six-star battle beasts drastically increased the pressure on them.

Seizing the opportunity, the Ghost-Eyed Sand Fox's eight eyes suddenly gleamed. The nearest seven-star evolved let out a cry before going berserk, attacking indiscriminately. Several unprepared six-stars were killed instantly.

The encirclement collapsed under Veterinarian Meng's desertion and the berserker's rampage.

Moving in eerie unison, the mutated buckthorns followed the fox's lead. Dozens of wooden spikes shot from their branches, raining down on the surrounding evolved.

Those with higher levels or strong defenses barely held on, but the less fortunate were impaled. A few writhed briefly before going still.

Yet humanity wasn't so easily defeated. Captain Wang hurled an object that struck the buckthorns mid-attack. The liquid it released made the two treants shudder violently. Another seven-star evolved's weapon transformed into a blade shadow, slashing across the sand fox's flank, staining its beautiful fur crimson.

The blade shattered after the strike, but the evolved already had a new one ready—clearly a unique ability.

The Ghost-Eyed Sand Fox retaliated fiercely. Its fluffy tail swept out, releasing a deep pink poison gas cloud. The evolved scrambled back, but those caught in the mist collapsed, screaming as their bodies rotted into pus.

With that, the encirclement shattered entirely.

The three mutants didn't press their advantage, instead fleeing deep into the woods. The two treants, enduring their injuries, intertwined their roots into wheel-like structures. The sand fox leaped onto them, and the treants sped away, soon reduced to distant shadows.

"After them! Those buckthorns won't get far with my Soul-Dispelling Water on them!" Captain Wang roared. Two of his six-star subordinates had died—a blow to his squad's strength and his standing in Jinxiu. Only capturing the sand fox could make up for it.

"That fox won't last long with the wound I gave it," the seven-star blade user added, following Captain Wang in pursuit.

The others hesitated briefly before giving chase.

Ye Zhongming followed the main group, but once in the woods, he quietly veered off. His temporary teammates in the Baowen Team didn't even notice.

After moving through the trees for a while, Ye Zhongming stopped silently behind a trunk, watching a figure twenty meters ahead.

It was the woman who had been with the Baowen Team before Captain Wang took her.

In the chaos of pursuit, he'd forgotten about her, and she had slipped away.

But after running for a while, she now stood lost, looking around helplessly.

"Heh, miss, can't find your way home?"

A voice suddenly spoke beside her, making her jump.

Veterinarian Meng and his three battle beasts emerged from the shadows.

He hadn't fled far—he'd been hiding nearby all along.

"You... you..." The woman was too terrified to speak.

"Heh, those fools think the Ghost-Eyed Sand Fox is the only prize. Little do they know, you're the real treasure!"

Veterinarian Meng's gaze roamed over her rain-soaked figure, lingering hungrily.

"Play nice with me, then I'll trade you for a fortune!"

He patted his mutated wolf, and the group prepared to pounce.

Thud!

Chapter 1509.5- One sided battle

A hole suddenly appeared in the largest battle beast's head. It swayed before collapsing with a heavy thud.

The sudden turn stunned both the woman and Veterinarian Meng, who let out a howl of anguish.

This battle beast had taken him years to nurture—already at six stars, on the verge of seven. Now, it was a corpse.

After a few seconds of grief, Veterinarian Meng forced himself to calm down.

Whatever had killed his six-star battle beast so effortlessly could likely do the same to him.

His remaining wolf growled low, its gray fur bristling as it faced a particular direction.

"Who's there?"

Ye Zhongming stepped out from behind a tree, his left hand raised, index finger pointed at Veterinarian Meng.

"You?!"

Veterinarian Meng's eyes widened in disbelief. It was the lone evolved from the ruined house.

His gaze dropped to Ye Zhongming's raised hand, where a plain black glove covered his fingers.

A purple glow was fading at the tip of his index finger.

Purple equipment!

Veterinarian Meng's heart pounded.

Though his evolution level was high and his battle beasts were well-trained, most of his resources had gone into them. His best gear came from wheel spins.

He'd never even seen gold equipment, let alone purple.

Everything made sense now!

This man wasn't strong himself—he relied on that purple gear, something powerful enough to one-shot a six-star mutated lifeform!

Veterinarian Meng's despair turned to greed.

Even if he lost his remaining battle beasts, obtaining that purple equipment would be worth it.

The gloves on Ye Zhongming's hands were indeed a formidable purple-grade weapon—this was their first real combat test.

Why would he neglect himself if he could craft three purple items for others?

He'd forged seven purple and twelve gold pieces using materials from the Nine-Winged Crow and Armor King.

With four additional purple items, most of his gear was at that level.

"Misty Dread Gauntlets."

That was the name of this equipment, boasting six abilities. The one he'd just used was "Tranquil Finger."

It converted a percentage of his mental energy, stamina, and endurance into a single long-range attack (up to 50 meters), with a 20% damage boost from the gear itself.

Earlier, just 1% of his reserves had been enough to obliterate a six-star lifeform.

Ye Zhongming's stats in those areas were monstrous—even 1% was terrifying.

Best of all, the ability had no cooldown. He could spam it indefinitely if he was willing to keep paying the cost.

Regaining his composure, Veterinarian Meng attacked immediately. His two remaining battle beasts charged while he hung back—clearly wary of the purple gear.

But he was confident. If he could just close the distance, victory would be his.

Ye Zhongming still hadn't drawn any weapons. As the battle beasts closed in, he raised both hands, making grasping motions.

The charging creatures suddenly halted, lifted into the air by unseen forces.

Their paws flailed uselessly at their necks, unable to reach whatever held them.

Veterinarian Meng yelped, whipping out a long whip to pull his battle beasts down.

But before he could act, two soft cracks sounded. The mental links to his battle beasts snapped.

Their bodies dropped, necks twisted at unnatural angles.

Ye Zhongming flicked his wrists, satisfied.

Another ability of the Misty Dread Gauntlets: "Invisible Arms."

It extended his reach by five meters, completely formless and immune to attacks. The only counters were the user voluntarily releasing or moving their arms.

Though lacking direct offensive power, this skill was just as deadly. Even restricted from wielding weapons, it let Ye Zhongming seize enemies by their vitals without warning.

Against foes two levels weaker, a slight squeeze was all it took.

"You... you!"

Veterinarian Meng finally realized the truth. Even purple equipment shouldn't be this overpowered.

"Did you really think I would let you walk away alive after you said 'get lost' to me?"

The lone wolf of the apocalypse knew he'd messed with the wrong person. Veterinarian Meng suddenly dropped to his knees, begging pitifully:

"I was blind! I didn't recognize your greatness! Please, spare me! I know the rules—take everything I have, just let me live!"

Pride meant nothing when survival was at stake.

"Then tell me what you know," Ye Zhongming said coldly.

The man spilled everything immediately. By the end, Ye Zhongming fully understood tonight's events.

Nodding, he met Veterinarian Meng's pleading eyes and repeated:

"Did you really think I would let you walk away alive after you said 'get lost' to me?"

As he spoke, his right palm swung down.

At the same moment, Veterinarian Meng moved, rolling several black orbs outward while leaping back.

**BOOM!**

His body had barely left the ground when an enormous spectral hand materialized, slamming him back down. Through the translucent palm, his crushed form was clearly visible.

Pop! Pop! Pop! The black orbs burst under the giant hand's pressure, releasing thick smoke.

Ye Zhongming had used the gauntlets' third ability: "Mountain-Crushing Palm."

Three skills. Four lives taken. Less than a minute.

He blurred forward, effortlessly cutting off the woman's attempted escape.

"Leaving without saying goodbye? That's not very polite."

Ye Zhongming smiled.

Chapter 1510: You are meat pig

The woman let out a soft gasp, offering a faint smile before lowering her head again. She silently clutched the frayed edge of her shabby gray leather armor.

In the wind and rain, her body trembled slightly—whether from cold or fear was unclear.

"Truthfully, even if I hadn't intervened, you could have handled that man. Even killed him, right?"

Ye Zhongming stared at her for several seconds before speaking abruptly.

The woman immediately looked up, her face filled with confusion. When she finally spoke, her voice was hesitant.

"W-what do you mean?" She glanced at the nearby corpse and whispered, "I'm no match for him. I don't dare fight anyone. I... I don't know how."

Ye Zhongming stepped forward, closing the distance between them, his gaze never leaving her eyes.

Only when they were nearly nose-to-nose did he speak again.

"That tear on your left sleeve isn't just a tear—it conceals a bullhead needle launcher. The tips are poisoned. If his battle beast hadn't detected me, he might already be dead by your hand."

As he spoke, the woman's left hand twitched almost imperceptibly.

"And that thick rope belt around your waist? That's no ordinary item. At the very least, it's gold-grade equipment. More valuable than everything that dead man owned combined."

The woman took a step back, the pretense of fragility and confusion slowly fading from her expression.

"You possess the Medusa bloodline. Not just that—you're at least an intermediate-level job. Because it's not just snake hair you've mastered, but the Petrifying Gaze as well."

"Who are you?!"

Her sharp demand marked a clear shift. The timid, victimized persona vanished. Where once she seemed like someone the world could trample without consequence, now her hair writhed into living black serpents, hissing with crimson tongues. Her eyes clouded over like spectral gray mist, and an aura of dark energy clung tightly to her form.

"Done pretending?" Ye Zhongming smirked. "Oh, and one more thing—you're not a six-star evolved. You're seven-star."

His words struck like a hammer, shattering the woman's composure. She teetered on the edge of violence.

"Don't push me to kill you!" Black, razor-sharp nails sprouted from her fingers, repelling raindrops on contact.

"You escaped from Soul Merchant."

His statement triggered her attack. Ye Zhongming felt his body grow heavy—petrification—before a storm of serpentine hair and glinting black claws lunged at him.

Medusa Bloodline Abilities: Stone Bind and Serpent Strike.

Fierce Ghost job Skill: Phantom Talons.

First, cripple the target's agility. Then follow with venomous, lethal strikes. This was no helpless victim—she was a cold-blooded assassin.

This ambush might have worked against someone of equal level—like the late Veterinarian Meng. Especially with the infamous bullhead needle launcher in play.

But her opponent was Ye Zhongming.

The petrification lasted only an instant. He was already gone when her serpent hair and claws reached where he should have been.

The icy edge of Undead Sand Moonblade pressed against her back, deflating her killing intent.

"Too slow."

Two words summarized the exchange.

Ye Zhongming had reached the northwest for three targets: Pin Palace, God Hall, and the Soul Merchant.

He knew Pin Palace's location—an isolated island fortress, difficult to infiltrate. But given the enmity between Cloud Peak, God Hall, and Soul Merchant, he wouldn't waste his demon monster hordes on Wen's faction.

The intelligence only suggested that God Hall and Soul Merchant had likely relocated to the northwest. Their exact whereabouts remained unknown. Two secretive organizations weren't easily found.

Ye Zhongming hadn't expected to pinpoint them immediately. Knowing their general region would suffice—then he could unleash his millions of demonic creatures to hunt them down.

But this woman changed everything.

Her behavior and others' reactions to her betrayed her past identity: a meat pig of the Soul Merchant.

Just like the female guards once were.

What did that imply if she was outside, being treated as a meat pig?

She had escaped Soul Merchant. Which meant she might know their location. Even if not, she could provide crucial intelligence.

That's why he'd abandoned the other lead to pursue her.

Ye Zhongming pressed the blade forward slightly. The woman immediately succumbed to debuffs—Weakness and Terror.

Her hand moved sluggishly toward her sleeve. With a light kick, Ye Zhongming sent the concealed bullhead launcher flying.

Suicide?

This puzzled him. Why pretend to be helpless earlier? It was probably because her identity as an escaped meat pig was known—high-level evolved stripped of skills, deemed useless.

She hid her strength and followed the Baowen Battle Squad. In truth, she had bloodline, job and good equipment. Why? If self-preservation was the goal, her readiness to die now contradicted that.

It was as if... she was terrified of being captured and interrogated.

What was she hiding?

"Your name. When did you escape Soul Merchant? Why come here? What do you know about them?"

Ye Zhongming's voice was ice. "Tell me, and I'll let you go. I despise Soul Merchant. I sympathize with people like you. But lie or refuse, and I promise—I have ways to make your life worse than any meat pig's."

At his last words, her body tensed. Her breathing turned rushed.