

Apocalypse 1541

Chapter 1541: Otherworldly cases

Park Xiuying's hands slowly moved away from Ye Zhongming's eyes. She let out a faint sigh, stood up, and discarded the two white paper patches she had peeled off from his eyelids.

When she turned around, she met the questioning gazes of Xia Lei, Liang Chuyin, and the others—only to shake her head in response.

Disappointment flashed in everyone's eyes.

Ye Zhongming had been back for many days, yet his eyes still hadn't fully recovered.

Though he could now open them, his vision remained weak, far from his previous state.

During this time, the people of Cloud Peak had exhausted every possible method—equipment, potions, jobs, scrolls—anything that might help had been gathered and tested one by one. The slight improvement in Ye Zhongming's condition left them unsure whether it was due to his own formidable recovery ability or the effectiveness of their efforts.

“It's fine, see? I'm getting better. Why do you all look like that?”

Though Ye Zhongming's vision was still blurry, Yellow Ball was by his side, allowing him to "see" through his mentally linked battle beast. Moreover, he had grown accustomed to relying on other senses—his hearing, smell, and touch had all sharpened significantly.

"Always so stubborn!" Xia Lei snapped, her frustration evident. When Ye Zhongming returned to Cloud Peak with his eyes blinded, the usually composed leader was so furious that she overstepped her authority, summoning the members of Chameleon and berating them harshly. Many present had glimpsed murderous intent in her eyes.

No one doubted that if Ye Zhongming's eyes never recovered, Xia Lei—already inclined toward ruthlessness—would slaughter without hesitation to vent her rage.

The blind loyalty of Chameleon, obeying Ye Zhongming's orders even at the cost of leaving him to face danger alone, infuriated her to the core.

"I have the Beautiful Celestial Body. I'll be fine. Given time, I'll fully recover."

While his words were partly meant to reassure, Ye Zhongming genuinely trusted his body's resilience. The faint return of his vision, he believed, wasn't due to the treatments Xia Lei and the others had scrounged up—it was his own extraordinary healing at work.

"I don't know if the Beautiful Celestial Body can heal you, but I do know you were hurt by someone named Ah Xiu."

Xia Lei had previously demanded that God Hall hand over the culprit, but Ye Zhongming had stopped her. Though she understood his reasoning and acknowledged the director's deliberate restraint during the battle, she still couldn't relinquish her grudge against Ah Xiu.

She was Cloud Peak's leader, the unquestioned authority in Ye Zhongming's absence—but she was also a woman. When someone she loved was harmed, her protective instincts erupted like a bristling mother cat, defying logic and sometimes surpassing even a man's capacity for vengeance.

"Let's talk about the chests," Ye Zhongming said, knowing his woman just needed to vent. He gestured toward Guang Yao.

"We've been sending people to search since we first received word. Based on the intelligence we've gathered so far, at least five thousand chests have landed within the country—though this is certainly not the full count. It might not even be a third of the total, but these five thousand are confirmed."

Ye Zhongming nodded, signaling him to continue.

"Early rumors claimed the chests contained only non-wheel items, but that's incorrect. About half hold wheel rewards—though strangely, they're all concentrated in job scrolls, skill scrolls, bloodline crystals, and functional cards. Not a single piece of equipment has been found."

"I've compiled a list of the items we've identified from the chests." Guang Yao handed Xia Lei a stack of over a dozen densely written pages. "If Zhongming wants to hear it, you can read it to him."

Xia Lei scanned the pages and couldn't help but mutter, "This many?"

"And this isn't even everything," Guang Yao replied before turning back to Ye Zhongming.

“After analyzing these items, the answer is obvious—they were ‘dropped’ by those beings from above, through some method.”

He paused there, noticing Ye Zhongming’s deeply furrowed brow. He didn’t want to interrupt his leader’s thoughts.

But Ye Zhongming wasn’t just pondering why the alien races had scattered so many chests. He was also wondering—why hadn’t this happened in his past life?

This event was now common knowledge across the country. If it had occurred in his previous timeline, he would’ve remembered.

Yet, it hadn’t. It was a change brought about by his rebirth.

Ye Zhongming knew his return might trigger a butterfly effect—some who should’ve been powerful were gone, while others who should’ve died still lived. History had already been altered, and the future would inevitably diverge.

But he hadn’t expected the shifts to be so drastic.

History had become unrecognizable because of him!

The alien races transmitting items from beyond Earth didn't surprise him. As an agent of the Taros Red Dwarves, he had received rewards this way.

But he also knew the method came at a great cost to them—it was supposed to be limited.

So why now? Why were they flooding Earth with their equipment on such a massive scale?

Ye Zhongming couldn't make sense of it. He didn't believe these beings had good intentions. To them, Earth's humans were likely just lowly, uncivilized creatures. The spokesperson system was merely a form of slavery disguised as employment.

If spokespeople like him had to risk their lives for rewards, how would they feel now that others could obtain them through sheer luck? Were the alien races abandoning their agents?

And more crucially—were they preparing to reveal their existence to humanity?

Was this... their way of laying their cards on the table?

"We've secured 175 chests so far. Thirty-two were obtained by Chameleon and merchant teams from other regions and are still en route. Those near the villa have all been transported here, waiting for you to open them."

“A few were acquired through purchases, though not many—the prices are insane. An unopened ‘sky chest’ is now being bid up to a seven-star evolution potion.”

“They’ve lost their minds,” Liang Chuyin muttered.

“The entire country has gone mad over this. There’s even a rumor...”

Guang Yao hesitated. He was meticulous and disliked relying on speculation, but the rumor was too widespread to ignore. He wanted Ye Zhongming to judge its validity.

“Right now, all the chests are white. But some claim the next batch will be silver—and what’s inside... will be even better.”

Chapter 1542: Formation in the valley

"Is this... an instruction manual?"

Ye Zhongming held a beast-skin parchment in his hand, uncertain as he turned to Guang Yao beside him. His vision was still blurry, so he couldn’t make out the details clearly, but he noticed that every equipment box in these sky-dropped chests contained something similar. He guessed it was some kind of user guide.

"Yes." Guang Yao’s expression was grave. He and Ye Zhongming had opened quite a few chests together, and the contents had left him astonished.

"What does it say? Read it to me."

Guang Yao took the parchment from Ye Zhongming, scanned it briefly, and then read aloud:

"Karis Energy Net Launcher."

"Input mental energy to charge the launcher. Once fully charged, aim at the target and fire to release an energy net. Upon impact, the central section generates a binding force of 5,000P and induces a ten-second paralysis effect. The longer the duration, the more severe the paralysis. This function can be manually activated—once triggered, the launcher will deactivate after ten seconds."

When Ye Zhongming heard "5,000P," his heart skipped a beat. This was the same energy measurement system used by the Explosive Mechanic. But this value... it was terrifying! If something got hit by this energy net, what level of mutated lifeform could possibly break free? Level six? Seven? Eight?

"Maximum usage limit: five times."

Guang Yao finished reading the instructions and placed the parchment next to the device—a cube-shaped box with a trigger and a scope, bearing no resemblance to conventional firearms.

Inside this sky chest, there were five items in total. The Karis Energy Net Launcher was just one of them.

The other four included:

A Dual-Blade Warrior job scroll,

A functional card called "Eagle Eye,"

A white-colored landmine,

And a vial of "Golden Bull" essence blood.

Two of the five were wheel items, while the other three were unmistakably products of the alien races.

"Are there any restrictions on the user?" Ye Zhongming asked. Guang Yao shook his head—none.

After a moment's thought, Ye Zhongming said, "Find a level-five comrade with average mental energy and have him test whether he can fully charge this launcher."

Soon, a soldier arrived, visibly excited to be in front of his idol. He began channeling his mental energy into the launcher. The test proved that he could fully charge the device once he exhausted his reserves.

Ye Zhongming's expression darkened slightly.

Even though Cloud Peak's warriors were stronger than the average evolved, under these conditions, just two five-star evolved working in tandem could easily keep this weapon fully charged. And its power?

Ye Zhongming conducted another test. He used the launcher on a level-six mutated lifeform, which could not break free. Then, he found a level-seven, strength-type creature—while it showed signs of struggling, once the paralysis effect was activated, escape became impossible.

Though the effect lasted only ten seconds, the level-seven beast was completely immobilized and eventually passed out from the paralysis.

Ye Zhongming didn't bother testing it on a level-eight beast. The weapon likely wouldn't be effective at that level.

But even so, this restriction-free weapon was absurdly powerful.

Sure, a one-star evolved wielding it wouldn't stand a chance against a high-level foe. But a five-star evolved could easily subdue a level-six beast, and with teamwork, even hunt level-seven creatures.

From this single piece of equipment, it was clear just how much these chests were reshaping the country's power dynamics.

"Are there many items like this?" Ye Zhongming asked, though he already suspected the answer.

"The Karis Energy Net Launcher is considered high-tier, but even the other items aren't far behind. The frenzy over these chests in the country isn't without reason. New factions are rising, unknown names are emerging—the entire zone's strength is skyrocketing thanks to these boxes."

Guang Yao had reports from Chameleon. While the data wasn't exhaustive, it was telling—many factions and individuals had suddenly entered Cloud Peak's radar for the first time.

"The country is simmering. While this equipment doesn't drastically affect top-tier evolved, it's allowing lower-level ones to advance at an unprecedented pace. The gap is shrinking fast, and as interests overlap, conflict is inevitable. It's only a matter of time before large-scale battles erupt."

Guang Yao's tone carried concern.

"And with rumors of even better chests on the way, everyone's preparing—even the super factions. People believe the next wave will include items that even top-tier evolved can't ignore."

Ye Zhongming lowered his head in thought before asking, "Is there any pattern to where these chests land?"

Guang Yao shook his head. "None detected. It seems random, but they only appear in areas with human evolved activity. Some have searched uninhabited zones but found nothing."

"Alright." Ye Zhongming rubbed his eyes—a habit he'd developed lately. "Prepare everyone. If more chests appear, we're claiming as many as possible. Expand the patrol range of our territory teams. Also, send word to the Posthumous People and Saint Light Hall—offer them fair prices to collect chests for us."

Guang Yao nodded. If the next batch truly contained items useful to top-tier evolved, Cloud Peak couldn't afford to sit back.

"Open all the chests we have. Catalog the contents, then distribute based on need."

Just as Ye Zhongming was about to say more, his expression suddenly changed. Without another word to Guang Yao, he bolted outside.

The abrupt movement startled everyone. The female guards, Yellow Ball, Yangos, and even defensive units mobilized, unsure what had triggered their leader's urgency.

Ye Zhongming raced out of the manor, mounted Yellow Ball, and tore across the land before leaping onto Yangos's descending back. The dragon took off, carrying him toward a distant valley.

When they descended, they found dozens of stone pillars erected at the valley's base—each engraved with strange patterns and a hollow indentation.

Ye Zhongming dismounted and, using Yangos' vision, quickly installed objects into the pillars' slots. The moment he finished, he vaulted back onto the dragon's back.

As Yangos ascended, Ye Zhongming pulled out one last item and hurled it toward the bizarre formation below.

Then, man and dragon fled at full speed.

Chapter 1543: Legacy

Ye Zhongming didn't dare to stay to watch. Instead, he and Yangos flew far away, circling at a relatively safe distance as they waited.

He had thrown the Key to the Blue Secret Realm into the valley.

After releasing those demonic creatures onto Earth, he had assumed the secret realm would stabilize somewhat due to the reduced lifeforms, perhaps even extending its existence. But the reality was the opposite—instability had intensified, with conditions deteriorating daily.

Ye Zhongming didn't know what would happen to the realm key if the dimensional space on the other side collapsed, but he couldn't take the risk. If something like an energy black hole appeared, it would be disastrous.

This wasn't paranoia—it was a very real concern. To prepare, he had consulted experts—from science graduates to university professors, even a space physicist. None could say for certain what would happen, but they all agreed his fears were justified.

So, Ye Zhongming made arrangements.

That valley and its strange formation were his solution.

The formation was called the Life-Lock Weaving Formation, purchased from the Taros Red Dwarves at a steep cost in contribution points.

Its primary function was to trap energy within it and convert it into elemental crystals corresponding to the energy's properties.

According to the description, these elemental crystals were near-universal" in application, with exceptional compatibility—they could fuse into almost any system requiring energy.

Originally, Ye Zhongming had never planned to exchange for this array. Not only was it expensive, but constructing it was even costlier. The stone pillars had to be carved from specific materials, inlaid with over a hundred gemstones, including high-grade nature gems and magic crystals.

Building this formation wasn't just time-consuming—the gemstones alone were worth several seven-star evolution potions.

But for safety's sake, he went ahead with it, placing it in a remote mountain valley far from Cloud Peak, inaccessible without flight.

Not long after he and Yangos fled, a tidal wave of energy erupted from the valley. The dragon, already evolving towards level nine, recoiled in terror, retreating further as it mentally conveyed its fear to Ye Zhongming.

At that moment, Ye Zhongming wasn't sure if the Life-Lock Weaving Array could contain such an explosive release of energy.

Simultaneously, he sensed something—a peculiar frequency within the energy. As his strength had grown, he'd occasionally felt this, but never as intensely as now.

Fortunately, the energy surge didn't last long, dissipating quickly.

After waiting cautiously, Ye Zhongming and Yangos slowly flew back. Above the valley, he "saw" devastation—the formation was destroyed, and residual energy rose from the ground to several meters high.

Through this energy haze, shapes were faintly visible, but the distortions made it impossible to discern details.

Cautiously, Ye Zhongming tossed a marked rock into the energy field.

The rock vanished upon contact—then reappeared moments later, already on the ground.

In other words, it had traversed dozens of meters instantly.

But the time gap wasn't short—it was too long. Under normal freefall, it should've hit the ground much sooner.

Where had the rock been in between?

This observation revealed something: the "blurriness" wasn't due to obstruction—the objects below were phasing in and out of existence, creating the illusion.

This made Ye Zhongming even more reluctant to descend. The phenomenon was too unnatural.

Had the key's destruction left behind energy, the array couldn't fully process?

If so, his massive investment in the formation might've been wasted.

As he pondered solutions, nearby mutated lifeforms began gathering, drawn by the anomaly—until Yangos's deafening roar sent them scattering.

In the absence of level-nine beings, the dragon was undisputed apex.

Ye Zhongming's worries didn't last long. Within twenty minutes, Yangos reported that the energy was fading.

An hour later, the dissipation became undeniable.

Reassured, Ye Zhongming spent the day patrolling the area, hunting level-six and above mutated lifeforms with Yangos. By the time the energy fully cleared, his inventory held:

Over a dozen level-six magic crystals,

Three level-seven crystals,

One level-eight crystal,

Plus assorted materials and herbs.

Finally, they landed in the valley.

What awaited them was... far more than expected.

Most conspicuous were the elemental crystals—shaped like pyramids, densely packed across the valley floor, their obsidian surfaces gleaming.

Ye Zhongming picked one up, immediately sensing spatial energy vibrations. These were space-attuned crystals—incredibly rare and valuable.

Though unsure how to utilize them yet, he knew they'd be pivotal for equipment crafting and battle beast cultivation.

After swiftly collecting them, the valley floor lay bare, revealing other objects.

Methodically, Ye Zhongming combed the area, examining each find. By the end, he held over twenty items—half completely unfamiliar, the others vaguely identifiable by type, attribute, or function.

Returning to Cloud Peak on Yangos's back, one word echoed in his mind:

Legacy.

Chapter 1543.5- Legacy

The final legacy of the Blue Secret Realm.

A pang of melancholy struck him.

That realm had been his foundation.

Early in the apocalypse, Ye Zhongming couldn't afford to contest dungeons without the advantages of major factions. Yet Cloud Peak advanced faster than anyone, largely thanks to the Blue Secret Realm.

From it, they'd gained:

Millions of demon crystals,

Answers about the alien races,

Powerful techniques,

The ice birds, Soul Shattering Bone Staff,

Upgraded skills,

Even the seven-colored-tier Gate of Sacrifice...

There, he'd met Miya, Ah Tao, and the Posthumous Tribe who'd become Cloud Peak's backbone.

There, he'd earned the title of Honorary King, obtained Holy Water, the Mysterious Hammer, Soul Pearls, and witnessed Red Hair's transformation and the birth of the Undead Fish-Dragon.

The Blue Secret Realm had given him too much to count. Even in its death throes, it provided resources and helped eliminate enemies like Soul Merchant, God Hall, and Pin Palace.

Without it, neither Ye Zhongming nor Cloud Peak would exist as they did today.

Now, the realm that had nurtured them was cosmic dust, leaving Ye Zhongming with a hollow ache.

It wasn't just a dimension—it was a civilization. And now, that civilization had fallen.

Later, he learned that every being from the Blue Secret Realm had sensed its demise at that moment. Many knelt and wept toward the energy's origin, mourning their lost homeland.

Even the demonic creatures in the northwest ceased hunting for three days, remaining silent in their territory or wailing toward that direction.

The Posthumous Tribe's Kings and the Saint Light Hall's Saintess arrived via teleportation to confirm what they already knew. Though prepared, they'd clung to hope—that something might remain, if only for remembrance.

Ye Zhongming didn't send them away empty-handed.

To the Kings, he gave a palm-sized fragment of bone

The kings took a look and knew what it was.

A shrunken remnant from the beast skeleton lining the Sacred Land's entrance tunnel, where Ye Zhongming once been wounded by the Protector.

But this bone was huge previously; now it was several times smaller.

The kings thanked Ye Zhongming solemnly and brought it away. Maybe this piece of bone would be a symbol of their history in the future.

He presented a tiny pearl to the Saintess—the radiant orb that had crowned the Dawn Sanctuary's highest spire, now miniaturized.

The Saintess recognised this pearl immediately. They wanted to take it when they left, but couldn't move it. It was something only a level-nine lifeform could move.

Now that it was many times smaller, Ye Zhongming placed it in her hands.

Saint Light Hall had gained a footing in the desert in West Asia. They had two large conflicts with the evolved there. One was a defeat and one was a victory. Their status was recognised by the people there.

Ye Zhongming and Cloud Peak naturally helped them a lot. But they weren't fools. After time passed, they knew what the dessert was and knew where West Asia was. They were slightly unhappy with Ye Zhongming.

But no matter what, Ye Zhongming was on the side of the Posthumous People. Their grievances wouldn't be solved so quickly. Since Saint Light Hall could understand what he did, they felt fortunate that they could still use the space gate. No Matter what, they couldn't feel closer to Ye Zhongming and Cloud Peak.

But this time, when Ye Zhongming handed the pearl to them, their thoughts of him changed.

Right, they had to pay a price no matter what they did. As the loser, it was good that they were still alive. Now that they had a resting place, even if it was a poor one, they could still live on. In the future, they would just find some fertile land.

Now, Ye Zhongming gave them something that was like their faith. The Saintess was very grateful. This wasn't Ye Zhongming's duty; he was just giving them a favour.

To thank him and to maintain their relationship with Cloud Peak, the Saintess handed many cases to Cloud Peak for free.

Of course, they would keep some for their own; they gave him the cases they hadn't opened. There were many, and it showed their sincerity.

Saint Light Hall did it, so the Posthumous People did the same. Not only did they bring the cases over, but they also handed some of the better materials they had obtained during this period.

Were the bone and the pearl treasures? Undoubtedly. Among the two dozen identifiable items, these two stood out. Though their exact functions eluded him, their extraordinary nature was certain.

But to Ye Zhongming, it was worth it. The Blue Secret Realm had given him everything. Returning two relics to their original inhabitants felt right.

Most of the realm's final gifts still remained with him. Among them, several already hinted at their purposes:

There were a few that Ye Zhongming took a look and could guess their rough uses.

The first was a skull.

Ye Zhongming sensed the aura of the Undead Hill.

He didn't know if the endless amounts of lifeforms there had turned into this skull, but it gave off an undead spiritual energy.

The fist-sized skull gave off a deathly aura over a few kilometers.

The second was a 1.5m by 1 meter metal board. This board was very special. Ye Zhongming was sure that it was metal, but it was transparent.

This was magical as he hadn't seen anything like this before.

The most special thing was that it sealed magma in it.

Chapter 1545: Dragon Head

These words left Ye Zhongming and his group momentarily stunned.

They could tell these people meant no harm, but... what did "messengers" mean?

"Same as usual—a hundred level-five magic crystals! Here you go."

The leader tossed over a bag as he spoke. Ye Zhongming instantly sensed its contents before catching it.

"Alright, where's the list? Hand it over. We won't keep you. You know the reason. Next time, I'll bring you two level-five snow foxes to try."

The man stretched out his hand toward Ye Zhongming and the others.

Ye Zhongming had no idea what "list" they were talking about, let alone what they meant.

He tossed the bag back to the man and was about to speak when he noticed the group had already drawn their weapons.

"Kid, you looked unfamiliar from the start, but I figured Boss Wu must've briefed you. Didn't expect you to be so ungrateful!"

The leader frowned, his beard covered in ice shards, glaring angrily at Ye Zhongming.

"Cutting off someone's livelihood is like killing their parents. Think carefully before you say no. This business isn't worth losing your life over!"

Ye Zhongming felt a bit helpless. He could tell these people weren't malicious—they'd just misunderstood.

He didn't mind, but Xia Bai and the others certainly did, especially the dozen or so men Xiao Peng had brought along. They were eager to prove themselves in front of their boss, and if they could impress one of the female guards, even better.

Seeing someone dare to glare at their boss, several of them immediately stepped forward.

"Get back!"

Xiao Peng barked, stopping his subordinates.

He then shot Ye Zhongming an apologetic glance. "Sorry, boss. My men are too wild, no discipline."

Xiao Peng had noticed during the journey that while the core members of Cloud Peak might seem arrogant and unruly, they followed orders absolutely. No one would act without permission or overstep their superiors—not even someone with special status like Xia Bai or Xia Lei.

Yet before Ye Zhongming could even speak, his men from the Linhai branch had nearly acted. It made Xiao Peng's face burn with shame, so he quickly stopped them.

Ye Zhongming didn't mind and waved it off. He turned to the group in front of them. "You've mistaken us. We're not here to deliver any... list. We're heading to Black Dragon City."

"Passing through?"

The leader froze, looking skeptical, but he still signaled his men to lower their weapons.

"Where are you going? What for?"

The interrogative tone rubbed Cloud Peak's people the wrong way, but since Ye Zhongming hadn't given any orders, they waited quietly behind him, staying alert.

"Further north. We plan to resupply at Black Dragon City and see if we can find a guide."

Hearing this, the leader's expression inexplicably softened. His earlier coldness melted away, replaced by a smile.

"Brother, you've got guts!"

Ye Zhongming was baffled. His words had been half-truths, only concealing their real purpose. He had no idea why the man was suddenly praising him.

The man walked over familiarly. Ye Zhongming subtly signaled his team not to act.

He had already sensed that this man was a six-star evolved—decent strength after five years in the apocalypse—but even standing right next to the King of Cloud Peak, he posed no threat.

Clapping Ye Zhongming on the shoulder, the man grinned. "After the apocalypse, this place got even colder—cold enough to kill. Few evolved are willing to come. Most of Black Dragon City's people have lived here for years. This time, with the conflict against those Russians, we hired a lot of help, but not many showed up. Seeing your group, you've even brought your family—so many women! You're a real man! Good on you!"

"Come on, come on! Since you're here to help, you're friends with Black Brother here! Good food and drink are on me. Let's get you to Black Dragon City and drink our fill!"

With that, he slung an arm around Ye Zhongming and started leading him north.

Cloud Peak's people followed. Without their sleds, they moved slower, but nothing dampened Black Brother's enthusiasm. He chatted and laughed with Ye Zhongming the whole way, occasionally exchanging a word or two with the others, almost as if he were in charge.

Ye Zhongming didn't mind. Before they even reached Black Dragon City, he had already pieced together some things.

He first figured out why this man's attitude toward them had shifted so abruptly.

Originally, they had mistaken Ye Zhongming's group for "list deliverers." The so-called "list" referred to the country rankings published by the Five Ring Money organization, which were disseminated nationwide through various means. Due to Black Dragon City's harsh environment, Five Ring Money hadn't set up remote reception points or teleportation arrays there. So every time the rankings were updated, they had to be manually delivered from a city further south—Wujiang City. A journey that might have taken a few hours before the apocalypse now took two or three days, sometimes longer.

This created an opportunity for certain people. Once the country rankings gained fame, this manual delivery route became a target—specifically for Black Brother's group.

They would intercept the list in advance, send the original deliverers back, and then take the rankings to Black Dragon City themselves. There, they'd distribute the list like newspapers—door to door.

Yes, they delivered a copy to every organization, with a somewhat forced sales approach. But since each copy wasn't expensive—just one level four or five demon crystal—no one made too big a fuss.

The price varied depending on the organization. Stronger groups paid a level five crystal, while ordinary teams paid a level four.

As for the cost? They only paid the original deliverers a hundred level five crystals each time.

How many organizations were there in Black Dragon City? That cost was probably less than a thousandth of their pure profit—maybe even less.

"Then aren't you worried about missing the actual deliverers?" Ye Zhongming asked curiously. If Black Brother was leading them back, what if the real deliverers showed up?

Chapter 1545.5- Dragon Head

"Haha, brother, you don't know, do you? The scariest thing about northern nights isn't the mutated lifeforms—it's the unpredictable weather. You've heard of sandstorms, right? Here, we have something called cold storms. Not only are the temperatures insanely low, but the storms are also filled with countless razor—sharp ice blades. If you get caught in one, unless you're a seven- or eight-star expert or have top-tier defensive gear, you're dead. And the further north you go, the worse these storms get. When we ran into you, it was getting dark. No one would risk traveling at night. Those list deliverers value their lives too much—they wouldn't come."

Hearing about this strange phenomenon, Ye Zhongming and the others grew intrigued. They were also grateful they hadn't encountered such a storm yet in the north—even if it hadn't harmed them, it would've been a hassle.

According to Black Brother, in the Arctic, cold storms reached their peak. Nothing—not level seven, eight, or nine lifeforms—could survive them. They'd be torn to shreds.

Hearing this, Cloud Peak's people fell silent. No matter how strong humans became, nature's fury seemed unmatched.

Humans changed, but so did nature.

Ye Zhongming felt a faint unease.

He had witnessed the collapse of a massive space and the instability of endless darkness. The fate of the Blue Secret Realm still haunted him.

He feared Earth might one day suffer the same fate. With these extreme weather events appearing, was the planet entering a cycle of destruction?

"But people must still travel at night sometimes, right? What do they do then?" Xiao Min voiced the question on many minds.

Black Brother chuckled. "In the past, things were different—too much has changed. As for the future, who knows? But this year, summer was extremely short—just over ten days. Autumn was the same. There were only about a month's worth of snow-free days. This place is buried in ice and snow the rest of the time. Out in the wilderness at night, you dig a snow pit and sleep inside it. Cold storms only rage above ground."

Now they understood—this was how people avoided the terrifying cold storms.

"What about cities or settlements here? How do they protect against these storms?" Ye Zhongming pressed.

Black Brother scratched his head. "In these parts, cold storms follow certain patterns. Some places have never seen one—those are ideal for building camps. Others build their settlements underground. The permafrost here is thick, so there aren't as many mutated lifeforms belowground as in other regions. The rest rely on terrain advantages. Take Black Dragon City, for example—mountains surround it on three sides, which block the storms."

Hearing this, Cloud Peak's people couldn't help but think that surviving in the north meant battling mutated lifeforms and struggling against nature itself. Life here was much harder than in other places.

As they chatted, they soon arrived at a city before nightfall.

Cloud Peak's people stared awestruck at Black Dragon City in the dim light.

The city resembled a giant dragon coiled within a winding and sprawling mountain valley.

Huge bonfires burned atop the towering city walls, their flames connecting in the distance to outline the entire wall's shape.

Though Ye Zhongming's eyes hadn't fully recovered, the light here was decent, and the distance wasn't too great. He could make out four massive, dark objects evenly spaced along the walls. He couldn't quite tell what they were yet.

"Heh, those are dragon heads."

Noticing Ye Zhongming's gaze, Black Brother spoke with pride.

"Real dragons?"

Xiao Peng was astonished and quickly pressed for details.

"Haha, of course not!" Black Brother laughed and shook his head. "Two are mutated snake heads—the kind that evolved four legs and wings, like flood dragons. Who knows, maybe they'll become real dragons someday. The other two are fish heads—the kind that 'ascended' and could leap the Dragon Gate. If you ignore the body shape and just look at the heads, the whiskers and all, they really do resemble dragon heads."

"Old An of Black Dragon City modified these four dragon heads. Together with some devices on the walls, they form a defense system. When activated, they can unleash devastating energy beams. I don't know if they can kill a level nine, but they definitely threaten level eight lifeforms. Just a month ago, they drove off a level eight mutated tiger king and its cubs that came looking for food."

"They didn't kill it?"

Black Brother's pride lasted less than a second before Xiao Min's question cut him off. He glanced at her, noting she was a pretty girl, and thought, Since when are level eights so easy to kill? But he kept that to himself and explained, "The tiger king's mate was also level eight, plus two level eight cubs. The rest of the litter were level seven—over a dozen of them."

It wasn't that Black Dragon City didn't want to kill them—they simply couldn't. They could rely on the four dragon heads for defense. But if they ventured out, no one could face four level eight mutated Siberian tigers, known for their combat prowess.

After saying this, Black Brother glanced at the group and led them toward the city gates.

"Has Black Dragon City been completely secured by humans?" Ye Zhongming asked curiously as they walked.

"Not a chance. Even though mountains surround it on three sides and sturdy walls block the remaining side, this place isn't a dead end. Between the mountains are many gaps—some wide, some narrow. Some lead to large lakes, others to pine forests, and some simply exit the mountains. The city is split into two. Only our side is fully controlled by humans. The other side belongs to the mutated lifeforms."

He chuckled self-deprecatingly. "In other cities, downtown is the most prosperous area. Here, it's the most dangerous. People die there every day. Both humans and mutated lifeforms treat it as hunting grounds."

Black Brother led Cloud Peak's people into the city as they spoke. Ye Zhongming sent a mental message to Yangos, Yellow Ball, and the others, telling them to hunt on their own. If they could find that tiger king's den, even better. Three against four—they'd still win easily.

With Black Brother guiding them, the group entered the city without trouble, though many women in their party drew many stares.

Black Brother's organization was called Moonfall Ice Plains—a poetic name. It was one of Black Dragon City's major factions. Though he wasn't the strongest in the group, he had extensive connections and quickly arranged lodging for Ye Zhongming's people. After settling them in, he left, saying they should rest well and that he'd return tomorrow.

"Boss, this man..."

Xiao Min hesitated, but Ye Zhongming nodded. "He's sharp—much smarter than his rough exterior suggests. He already realized we weren't here for what he thought, but didn't give us a chance to explain. He figured we needed to enter the city and disliked trouble, so he enthusiastically brought us in, hoping to align us with his side. At the very least, he didn't want us as enemies."

"Send people out to gather intel—discreetly. Stick to the original plan and ask about the north, but also see what's been happening in the city lately. Whatever it is, it must be serious for Black Brother to take such a risk to keep us close."

Ye Zhongming issued the orders.