

## **Apocalypse 1546**

### Chapter 1546: News in the city of the north

The nights in Black Dragon City were also very lively.

Nighttime lighting restrictions were not very strict in a city with such special weapons. After all, when there were no beast tides, as long as level eight lifeforms could be resisted, people could basically rest easy. Level nine lifeforms were rare, and unless necessary, they won't attack human cities, as that would invite endless retaliation.

Of course, if there is a beast tide, having lights or not doesn't make much difference.

Ye Zhongming walked through the streets of Black Dragon City, feeling as if he were in Ying City or the Holy City of West Asia—if not for the biting cold.

In the post-apocalyptic world, such bustling places were rare.

Who would have thought they'd encounter one in this icy, snowy wasteland?

However, compared to the Holy City and Ying City, the prosperity here carried a hint of blood.

When the wind blows from the north, it brings a faint scent of blood and stench, emanating from the city center, where humans and various mutated lifeforms were locked in a life-and-death struggle at all times.

Among Black Dragon City's evolved, there's a saying: "Wealth in the center, death in the center." It means that evolved who frequent the city center either became wealthy by hunting mutated lifeforms or die there, leaving behind piles of bones.

This illustrates Black Dragon City's residents' complex feelings toward the city center.

Ye Zhongming strolled through Black Dragon City with Xiaopeng, Xia Bai, and Red Hair, taking in the northern customs. The abundance of commercial streets was quite appealing.

Amid the city's ruins, people built shelters using materials like wooden planks, sheet metal, animal bones, and even ice. For evolved, as long as they weren't exposed to the extreme cold for too long, they'd generally be fine, just uncomfortable.

The people of Black Dragon City were adept at using local resources. Trees, bones, and pelts of mutated lifeforms served as materials for warmth. Some were used to light bonfires, while others were made into fur coats or bedding to help them endure the long, harsh winters.

Black Brother once mentioned that Black Dragon City now had over three million evolved—a staggering number, making it a supercity in the post-apocalyptic world.

This wasn't because the living conditions here were particularly good, but because survivors in the northern regions were relatively concentrated.

With more people came more business. Aside from dedicated merchants, most evolved here played dual roles as warriors and traders. After returning from hunts, they'd lay out unwanted items before their homes, bargaining with interested buyers. They'd browse other stalls with money, haggling for things they needed.

This contributed to the city's lively nights, as many ventured outside during the day to hunt, avoiding the terrifying cold storms.

Ye Zhongming and his group wandered down two streets, spotting many peculiar items—all local specialties.

Of course, a few things caught Ye Zhongming's eye now. After two streets, he only bought the pelt of a level-five snow fox, planning to make shawls or scarves for Xia Lei, Liang Chuyin, and Miya, who hadn't come along this time.

A single snow fox pelt was quite large, enough for three pieces.

Though the streets were lined with stalls, there were no high-quality goods. After browsing, Ye Zhongming and the others lost interest. Upon inquiry, they learned the city had a dedicated commercial street, far superior to these small stalls, lined with major shops backed by Black Dragon City's powerful factions or even owned by them directly. It was said to house many valuable items.

Visiting a new city naturally meant exploring such places. Ye Zhongming gave a wandering 13- or 14-year-old two-star evolved child a level three magic crystal to act as their guide. The child eagerly agreed, even recommending the best shops for buying and selling along the way.

"Go to Jiang Dabao's Shop or Essence Pavilion if you want to buy. Their prices are fair, and the goods are decent. But since you're outsiders, haggle after asking the price."

The boy spoke earnestly, eager to share everything he knew.

As a two-star evolved, he couldn't hunt. He usually did cleaning and washing jobs for major factions, barely scraping by. Earning level three magic crystals was hard for him, often relying on handouts. Over a year, he'd saved up six.

With the average evolved level now above four stars—especially after the sky boxes appeared—level three demon crystals had depreciated, slightly speeding up his savings. But the amount needed for a wheel spin (plus taxes) still felt hopeless. Getting a crystal so easily now filled him with gratitude and excitement.

Sighing inwardly at the hardships of the post-apocalyptic world, Ye Zhongming listened as the child continued, "If you want to sell, it's best to go to Old An's Morning Light Pavilion. They're the most trustworthy, won't lowball you, and even for consignments, they'll pay you the full amount minus fees—no cheating."

Ye Zhongming nodded in understanding, then asked, "Things have been tense up north lately. Do you know the specifics?"

The boy nodded. "It's those redheads causing trouble—breaking business agreements, raiding our hunting teams, even sneaking into the northern district to poach. They've been sabotaging our hunts, too. When we sent people to negotiate, they killed them. Left with no choice, the city's major factions decided to teach them a lesson, rallying evolved from other cities. But somehow, the redheads found out and sent a challenge, demanding a decisive battle outside the northern walls."

Here, the boy hesitated before asking softly, "Are you... Here to help?"

Seeing the hope in his eyes, Ye Zhongming nodded.

The boy's face lit up with a bright smile.

"Then I don't want this."

He handed back the level three demon crystal Ye Zhongming had just given him.

"Why?" Not just Ye Zhongming, but even Xia Bai, Red Hair, and Xiaopeng were stunned.

They could tell the boy needed the crystal badly, yet he was willing to forgo payment for something unrelated to him. Such a sense of collective responsibility was rare in the post-apocalyptic world, especially from an exploited, struggling child.

"The people here haven't treated you well," Red Hair remarked coolly, her gaze lingering on the boy's feet, wrapped in animal hides instead of shoes, and his crude, unranked fur clothing.

It was clear no one cared for this child—at the very least, no faction was willing to take in a two-star evolved after five years in this world.

"If Black Dragon City loses, it's not just about me not evolving further—I'll die. Even if I survive, I won't live as a slave to foreigners!"

The group—all influential figures in the Chinese region—fell silent at his words.

Chapter 1546.5- News in the city of the north

The boy, shaped by the apocalypse, might not be noble in the traditional sense, acting out of self-interest at his core. Yet he was willing to "sacrifice" his own for the collective. Others might never know of his act, or if they did, most would laugh it off, perhaps cynically calling him an idiot.

But the boy did it anyway, resolutely.

"One rice feeds a hundred types of people. The elders' sayings still hold true," Xiao Peng muttered bitterly, realizing that even after Black Brother's hints about the conflict, he'd never considered nationalistic angles or sacrificing his own interests for the city. The only thing that could drive him to such lengths was Cloud Peak.

Ye Zhongming patted the boy's head, then looked ahead. "Are those... redheads truly so vicious and strong?"

The boy snorted. "Some redheads are good, and some of ours are bad. But this situation's escalated—both sides are acting for their own kind, so it's beyond that. As for strength, I don't know much, but they say they have many experts."

The boy spoke with surprising maturity—a necessity in the apocalypse; immaturity meant death.

Soon, he led them to the commercial street, where the crowd was denser, and the evolved' levels and gear far surpassed those on ordinary streets.

"That way leads to Jiang Dabao's Shop, and the other to Essence Pavilion and Morning Light Pavilion," the boy said, awaiting their choice.

After a moment's thought, Ye Zhongming chose Essence Pavilion. He wanted to see what was for sale and was particularly intrigued by Old An, the proprietor of Morning Light Pavilion. Anyone capable of crafting the terrifying Four Dragon Heads must be a skilled artisan.

At the entrance to Essence Pavilion, the boy bid farewell, but Ye Zhongming stopped him, offering to hire him as a guide to familiarize them with Black Dragon City—two level three magic crystals per day.

The boy's eyes sparkled as he agreed.

The group stepped into Essence Pavilion, its structure built from treated, unmelting ice.

"Processed to stay hard and never melt," Xiaopeng murmured, examining the ice. Ye Zhongming nodded.

Inside, they entered a spacious hall—less opulent than some Five Ring Money shops, but ruggedly styled. The semi-circular hall had three floors: twenty small rooms on the first, ten larger ones on the second, and three grand ones on the third. The upper floors' rooms had ice doors.

A massive torch-shaped metal structure burned in the center, flanked by smaller torches near each room, warming the hall like spring. Thick animal pelts—not pure white or red, but patterned—covered

the floor, each pelt intact, their origins recognizable to familiar hunters. The display exuded a fierce pride.

The pelts were all from level seven or higher lifeforms, with the centerpiece being a level eight mutated bear king's pelt, still bearing the holes and scorch marks from its kill. No one found it ugly—it elevated Essence Pavilion's prestige.

"Can you... Wait a moment?" The boy, Xiao Xuan, suddenly spoke.

"Hm?" Ye Zhongming's eyes narrowed slightly.

"I have a friend who knows these shops well. I can call him to help. If you see something you like, he'll tell you its fair price so you won't get cheated. Don't worry—no extra pay. I'll split my share with him."

Seeing the boy's nervousness, Ye Zhongming smiled and agreed, offering his friend the same pay. Xiao Xuan dashed off excitedly.

Watching him leave, Ye Zhongming suddenly asked, "How many children like him do you think are in Black Dragon City?"

Xia Bai and Hong Fa tilted their heads in thought but didn't speak. Xiaopeng ventured, "Probably quite a few."

He didn't understand why Ye Zhongming asked.

The four browsed the shops one by one, starting from the left. The first three had better goods than outside, but nothing useful to Ye Zhongming. The next few had decent items, but the prices were exorbitant—even half would exceed their value. Ye Zhongming wasn't about to be swindled.

They moved quickly until the nineteenth shop, where Ye Zhongming spotted something valuable: a white lotus in a jade box, its lid closed, with a drawing and description beside it.

It was a mutated plant called Ice Mountain Snow Lotus (borrowing its pre-apocalypse name), capable of healing mental trauma—not mental illness, but persistent negative effects from attacks by psychic evolved, or mutated lifeforms.

No medicine or healing ability could treat such trauma effectively, making it a stubborn affliction.

Red Hair, a psychic herself, knew her mental strikes left targets dizzy, headache-ridden, hallucinating, or hearing voices long after the battle.

Finding a cure for this, Ye Zhongming wasn't about to pass it up.

The price on the paper: twenty level six magic crystals.

Just as Ye Zhongming was about to inquire, he sensed someone approaching from behind. He didn't react, recognizing Xiao Xuan's presence—meaning the stranger beside him was likely his friend.

The newcomer studied Ye Zhongming, then discreetly wrote a number on his palm: 7.

Chapter 1547: Frenzied purchasing

“This, twenty six-level magic crystals?”

Ye Zhongming began to inquire about the price.

There were two evolved responsible for selling goods in this room, a man and a woman, both quite young. It was clear that neither had much combat experience, both at the three-star level, but they were handsome and elegant in demeanor.

Upon hearing Ye Zhongming's inquiry, the female salesperson closest to him glanced over his group with a smile, agreed, and then began introducing the uses of the Snow Lotus, including dosage and methods of use. It seemed they had extensive experience with this item.

However, before the introduction could finish, the male salesperson, who had just finished his own tasks, suddenly walked over and gently tugged the female salesperson's sleeve. Following his gaze, she noticed two half-grown children standing behind Ye Zhongming's group—she hadn't seen them earlier due to the angle.

The smile on her face faded slightly, and she hurriedly wrapped up her introduction. Without even asking whether Ye Zhongming intended to purchase, her gaze had already shifted to the room entrance, looking for new customers.

This made Ye Zhongming frown.

The male salesperson's subtle action naturally didn't escape his notice. He understood the reason for the female salesperson's sudden change in attitude—it was simply because they had noticed Xiao Xuan and his friend, realizing they couldn't fleece him, and thus adopted a cold-shoulder approach.

Ye Zhongming didn't know how they had obtained this item, but since Xiao Xuan's friend had quoted him a price of seven demon crystals, it meant that this was the usual price for locals in Black Dragon City, and they still made a profit.

If there was profit, even if reduced, why turn customers away?

At Ye Zhongming's level, it might seem his temper had improved. He simply couldn't be bothered to argue with ordinary evolved—it was beneath him.

But that didn't mean he would laugh it off or endure it silently when someone provoked him.

After all, he was one of the most powerful humans in this region, even on this planet.

'How much are you selling it for?'

When Ye Zhongming spoke these words, his tone carried a chill.

The female salesperson glanced at him and replied stiffly, 'Twenty level six magic crystals. No bargaining!'

'Bullying outsiders?' Xiao Peng leaned forward slightly, his aura slowly radiating. Now an eight-star evolved, he was the undisputed leader of the Linhai branch. He was second to none in terms of ruthless authority among Cloud Peak's core members.

Though the female salesperson didn't understand concepts like 'aura,' she felt a sense of fear, her face showing panic before she stammered, 'Twenty... fifteen level six magic crystals. Can't go lower.'

Ye Zhongming expressionlessly looked at the Snow Lotus on the display.

He had no desire to bully the weak without reason. He even held sympathy for those with principles and integrity, like Xiao Xuan.

But once he decided to disregard the rules, he had no reservations.

Since he had taken a liking to this item, he would obtain it no matter what. The Snow Lotus was useful to him and to Cloud Peak.

Ye Zhongming's intentions were obvious, and the two salespeople immediately sensed it. They loudly called for guards. Within seconds, many people rushed into the room—five guards and other customers in the shop, totaling no fewer than twenty.

After briefly hearing the female salesperson's explanation, the guard captain coldly said to Ye Zhongming, 'Friend, this is the Essence Pavilion.'

A single sentence, but the meaning was clear: Don't cause trouble here. This isn't the place for it.

Hearing this, Ye Zhongming's eyebrow twitched.

The mighty King of Cloud Peak, mistreated, was now being threatened.

'I want this. Seven level six demon crystals.'

To be honest, if the female salesperson had continued bargaining after noticing Xiao Xuan's friend, Ye Zhongming wouldn't have minded paying a few extra magic crystals. But their attitude—refusing to sell unless they made a hefty profit—was infuriating. Now, with someone warning him not to cause trouble, it felt like outright bullying.

Was Ye Zhongming someone who could be easily bullied?

To make matters worse, someone added fuel to the fire.

'Outsiders, probably haven't seen anything good. No money, yet trying to act like big shots.'

‘Earlier, it looked like they were about to snatch it. Where did these country bumpkins come from, daring to make trouble in Black Dragon City?’

‘Don’t they know where this is? The Essence Pavilion! Causing a scene here is asking for death.’

‘Bet they didn’t see the level eight Bear King pelt in the main hall.’

‘Hey, outsider, if you can’t afford it, don’t buy it. Xiao Hua, I’ll take this Snow Lotus.’

A man dressed in snow-white beast leather squeezed his way in. His outfit was quite beautiful, with a decent level—green grade. Combined with his hat and boots, he had three pieces of green equipment. The spear on his back was even blue grade. Clearly, this was a powerful evolved, like Black Brother, already at six stars.

However, this man’s face was pale, his eyes bloodshot, giving off an indescribable sickly aura.

Ye Zhongming recognized at a glance that this man had suffered mental trauma and needed the Snow Lotus. His intervention wasn’t just because he was from Black Dragon City—he needed it for himself.

Some always loved stirring the pot, even in the apocalypse. Seeing this man step forward to buy the Snow Lotus, some in the crowd began egging him on.

'Da Kang, how much are you offering? What if the outsider outbids you?' someone shouted from the back.

'Nonsense! Would I offer less than an outsider?'

Da Kang cursed irritably. He had already sized up these outsiders—they wore ordinary beast leather, mostly dull-colored, with only the occasional green piece. They didn't seem wealthy.

'Xiao Hua, I'm a regular. Sell it to me for twelve.'

Da Kang naturally knew the true value of the Snow Lotus, but under the watchful eyes of the crowd, he couldn't bring himself to offer the usual seven or eight demon crystals. Besides wanting to suppress Ye Zhongming's group, his offer of twelve level-six demon crystals was also due to his urgent need.

Xiao Hua actually regretted her earlier approach. She should have handled it more diplomatically. Now, with everyone watching, she couldn't back down easily.

When Da Kang offered a price above the standard, she was about to agree immediately.

'Until I explicitly give up on buying this, no one else can take it.'

Ye Zhongming reached out and took the Snow Lotus, even opening it to inspect it. The item was even more beautiful than the picture, its faint fragrance refreshing to the mind.

‘You—’ The female salesperson, Xiao Hua, was about to scold him when Xia Bai took out twelve six-level magic crystals and tossed them onto the table.

At this point, anyone who could produce a dozen level six magic crystals at once was considered a high-level evolved. The sight of these crystals quieted the crowd somewhat.

‘Thinking you can take it with just the same amount of crystals? You—’

Before she could finish, Xia Bai threw another bag of crystals onto the table and coldly said, ‘How many more do you have? I’ll buy them all.’

This time, the silence was absolute. The bag had spilled open, revealing its contents—a pile of at least two hundred demon crystals.

Being able to produce a dozen six-level demon crystals and being able to produce over two hundred were two entirely different concepts.

Only now did the crowd realize that these people might be seven-star evolved. Under normal circumstances, only evolved of that level could amass so many level six demon crystals.

In Black Dragon City, seven-star evolved were the elite—core members of major factions or leaders of mid-sized organizations.

Da Kang was strong, but was no match for a seven-star evolved.

Chapter 1547.5- Frenzied purchasing

‘None left?’

Though Xia Bai had become more ‘normal’ after her evolution and no longer always wore a mask, she was still somewhat angry. Knowing Ye Zhongming wanted this item, she had directly offered to buy it.

In her view, beating these people up wouldn’t be as satisfying as using demon crystals to shut them up.

‘This, we...’ Xiao Hua began to stammer.

Though she had some pricing authority, she wasn’t the boss. She wouldn’t last here if she drove away a big spender due to her own actions. With her evolution level, she’d likely die within a week if she went out hunting now.

As for whether there were more Snow Lotuses, the answer was yes. They were rare but not exceedingly so—a few were found in the wild every month. Demand wasn’t high either. The Essence Pavilion’s storage currently held thirteen more. If sold at twelve demon crystals each, the level six demon crystals in that bag wouldn’t even cover half.

'Yes or no?'

Xia Bai spoke slowly, but each word made Xiao Hua tremble.

'...Yes.'

Xiao Hua lowered her head and gestured for the male salesperson to hurry and fetch the rest.

'Boss, shall we check out the upper floors?'

Xiao Peng also felt a surge of pride. After receiving Ye Zhongming's approval, he pointed at the bag of demon crystals and said to Xiao Hua, 'Take it. Follow us. If you lose it, you'll pay with your life.'

Xiao Hua hastily grabbed the bag and followed closely, leaving the room in the care of the guards, now sweating nervously.

Ye Zhongming's group headed upstairs. Due to the earlier commotion, their entourage had grown to nearly forty people—most of the first-floor customers had joined the spectacle, curious to see what else this wealthy outsider would buy.

The second floor was also alerted, with people asking what had happened and why so many were coming up.

Compared to the first floor, the second had more premium items, and Ye Zhongming spent more time in each room.

Thus, the following scenes repeated:

'How much for this Cracked Frost Stone?' Ye Zhongming asked.

'Thirty six-level demon crystals,' the salesperson replied.

Ye Zhongming glanced at Xiao Xuan's friend, who held up a number.

'Fifteen. I'll take all you have,' Ye Zhongming countered.

'How much per drop of this Frost Marrow Liquid?'

'Five level six demon crystals.'

Ye Zhongming looked down, then back up.

'Three per drop. I'll take this bottle.'

'How much for one Snow-Patterned Ant?'

'It is sold by the nest,' the sweating salesperson replied.

'Oh? How much, then?'

'Five... five level seven demon crystals.'

Ye Zhongming looked down, then back up.

'Three. I'll take it.'

.....

Ye Zhongming began sweeping through the second floor. At first, it was manageable—after all, everyone had seen the bag of two hundred level six demon crystals. But gradually, the onlookers realized something was off. These outsiders were spending far beyond that amount in a short time.

Then, they witnessed something astonishing—the cold, beautiful woman's spatial ring seemed like a bottomless treasure trove, endlessly producing demon crystals. Bag after bag of two hundred level six demon crystals appeared, and when level seven crystals were needed, those appeared too.

By the time Ye Zhongming finished browsing the second floor, he had spent over a thousand level six demon crystals and thirty-plus level seven crystals.

Now, Ye Zhongming's earlier displeasure had vanished, replaced by excitement over the valuable finds. He hadn't expected to discover so many useful items in this remote northern city where humans and mutated life coexisted. This trip to Black Dragon City was truly worthwhile.

Though the spending seemed high, the value these items would bring under Ye Zhongming's hands far exceeded the cost.

In short, it was worth it!

After finishing the second floor, Ye Zhongming immediately headed to the third, now deeply curious about the Essence Pavilion's finest offerings.

Behind them, the crowd had grown to over a hundred, not just first- and second-floor customers, but even passersby drawn in by the commotion.

Normally, the third floor of the Essence Pavilion wasn't accessible to just anyone. The guards tried to block the spectators, but they were outnumbered and easily overwhelmed.

Still, the crowd remained orderly, keeping a respectful distance. The guards could only stand by warily.

The third floor had only three rooms. Ye Zhongming entered the first, and the ice door immediately closed behind him.

The Essence Pavilion's ability to gain a footing in Black Dragon City meant it had contingencies for such situations. Recognizing a big spender, the head manager had already stationed himself on the third floor, opening a private shopping channel for Ye Zhongming.

The spectators groaned in disappointment, itching to know what Ye Zhongming was buying—and for how much.

About ten minutes later, Ye Zhongming emerged from the first room and entered the second, the ice door sealing again. Another ten minutes later, he moved to the third, where he stayed for half an hour before exiting with a satisfied smile, his group and Xiao Xuan in tow.

The crowd immediately swarmed the Essence Pavilion's manager for details...

An hour later, all of Black Dragon City knew a tycoon had arrived, spending extravagantly at the Essence Pavilion—over 100,000 level six demon crystals' worth in total.

The entire city was stunned!"

Chapter 1548: Getting a bargain

Although sleep no longer held the same significance it once did in the world of evolution at night, Ye Zhongming still used this excuse to decline many invitations and requests for meetings.

Most of these people had good intentions, though some harbored ill will, but Ye Zhongming didn't particularly care.

Given his current status, at least in Black Dragon City, no one could sit as his equal.

If Ye Zhongming wanted to gather more information about the north, he would inevitably have to interact with the major figures of Black Dragon City. Many things were beyond the reach of someone at Black Brother's level. Logically, this was an opportunity to build closer ties with these people.

However, Ye Zhongming politely declined. The truth was, he had already obtained many good things from the Essence Pavilion.

For example, those on the second floor—Cracked Froststone, a versatile material that could be embedded in equipment to enhance ice-based abilities. It was also the main ingredient for a type of glove called Frost Gauntlets. At the time, because he needed gloves, Ye Zhongming had collected blueprints for various gauntlets, and Frost Gauntlets were one of them. However, he abandoned the idea of crafting them due to his inability to find cracked Froststone.

Another example was Ice Marrow Liquid, a consumable liquid for evolved with ice-based skills or those whose overall attributes were ice-aligned. It could directly boost the power of such abilities. It was even more suitable for ice-aligned battle beasts.

Now, both of Ye Zhongming's ice birds had reached level eight. With the addition of Ice Marrow Liquid, they would become even more formidable.

Then there were the Snow Pattern Ants, a lifeform Ye Zhongming had never heard of before. After reading the detailed introduction provided by the Essence Pavilion, he learned that these were highly trainable battle beasts. Controlling the queen ant, one could command the entire colony, consisting of worker ants, soldier ants, and general ants—a unique hierarchical species.

The worker ants were responsible for the colony's livelihood—building nests, gathering nutrients, and secreting a substance to create food for the entire colony.

The soldier ants were tasked with hunting and defending the nest, protecting their territory, and the worker ants when they ventured outside.

The general ants were primarily responsible for reproducing with the queen. However, they also served as the colony's strongest combat force, safeguarding the queen, the colony's core, from attacks.

This group had a clear division of labor and a strict hierarchy.

Although the queen of this particular ant colony was a newly mutated lifeform with a low level (only level two), and its first brood consisted of just a few dozen level-one worker ants and five soldier ants (with no general ants yet), the description stated that they had immense developmental potential. Once the queen reached level five, a qualitative change would occur. The offspring would begin to include general ants, and the colony would enter a rapid growth phase. With sufficient food and suitable temperatures, they could evolve quickly without bottlenecks, swiftly becoming high-level mutated lifeforms.

Additionally, due to the nature of ants, their numbers could become staggering. People in the northern regions had once witnessed the migration of a colony with a level-eight queen, a scene they would never forget. There were over 100,000 level-five worker ants, more than 10,000 level-six soldier ants, and hundreds of level-seven general ants.

If they had remained as small as before the apocalypse, even 100,000 wouldn't have been much. But one had to remember—level-five worker ants were the size of calves, level-six soldier ants were as large as rhinos, and level-seven general ants were like elephants!

As for the queen? She resembled a boneless whale!

Moreover, the general ants could fly.

With such a combination, they could dominate their territory. Even an isolated level-eight lifeform would retreat upon encountering them.

It was hard to imagine how powerful these creatures would become if the queen evolved to level nine, gaining even greater reproductive capabilities.

“They're impressive, but their early-stage evolution is quite difficult.”

After reading the description of the Snow Pattern Ants, Xiao Peng marveled at their strength but lamented the challenges of their early development.

Ye Zhongming smiled. “If it weren't so difficult, the Essence Pavilion wouldn't have sold them—and at such a low price.”

Indeed, this colony of a few dozen ants had only cost three level-seven monster crystals.

“Ice crystals, ice-aligned gemstones, Ice Marrow Liquid, primordial snow...” Xiao Peng read aloud while shaking his head. “Any of these is extremely rare, yet they’re only meant to be fed to a level-two lifeform, with no clear quantity specified. This is just...”

He didn’t even know what to say. The description stated that the queen needed to consume these items, but the exact amount was unknown. It was likely not a small quantity; otherwise, the Essence Pavilion would have raised them itself. Since they were selling them at a relatively low price, it was clear that the queen was a voracious consumer.

“We’ll take it slow. There’s no rush. If we can successfully raise them, our battle beast division will reach an entirely new level.”

Xiao Peng nodded. He envied the battle beast division of Cloud Peak. He had once wanted to establish a naval force but had failed after many attempts. Though not a complete failure, he could only control relatively weak lifeforms now, and they often lost contact in the vast ocean, giving him constant headaches, even with his own battle beasts assisting.

While Ye Zhongming was talking with Xiao Peng, most of his attention was actually focused on several other items on the table.

These were all premium goods purchased from the third floor of the Essence Pavilion—where the equivalent of 100,000 level-six monster crystals had been spent.

The first was a round box, resembling the packaging of a famous brand of cookies. Inside were three concentric rings of compartments: three small ones in the center, eight in the middle ring, and twenty in the outer ring. Each compartment held a glowing orb—silvery-white and shimmering beautifully.

This item was called Frost Soul.

It had no offensive or defensive capabilities itself; it was merely a material. But it was special—when fused with various types of puppets, it could enhance their abilities, grant them a degree of intelligence, and even enable self-evolution.

To be honest, the effects were incredibly potent. If someone patiently cultivated puppets with these, they could become overwhelmingly powerful.

However, powerful items always came with limitations, and Frost Soul was no exception.

First, it was a complete set and could not be used separately. In other words, all orbs had to be used at once—using just one or a few would render the remaining Frost Souls useless.

Second, each Frost Soul could only be used on one puppet.

Third, the targets of use had to be interconnected.

Combining these three conditions meant that the Frost Souls had to be used as a complete set on a complete set of puppets.

The last condition was something few could fulfill. Even if the same person crafted puppets, it didn't necessarily mean they were interconnected.

But Ye Zhongming happened to be an exception.

Because he had the Ruins Formation Disk! The bronze puppets on it were a complete set—perfectly suited for the Frost Souls.

Although there was a success rate for fusion, the sheer number of bronze puppets meant that even if some failed, it wouldn't matter.

Ye Zhongming also had many other methods at his disposal and didn't need these puppets urgently. He could let them evolve slowly after fusion, waiting until they became even more formidable before deploying them.

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The second item was a piece of beast hide.

At a glance, Ye Zhongming recognized it as the hide of a lifeform on the verge of evolving to level nine, carrying a strong spatial aura.

While not as valuable as the hide of a true level-nine lifeform, in Ye Zhongming's eyes, it was still a precious material.

Using this as a base, he could craft an exceptional piece of armor—at least blue-grade. With his skills and the addition of other rare materials, a gold-grade piece was almost guaranteed.

He already had some ideas in mind. Once refined, he could begin crafting.

Gold-grade equipment was still considered premium even for a wealthy faction like Cloud Peak.

The third item was a Frostheart—an elementary one.

Unlike Frost Souls, Frosthearts were akin to Artisan's Hearts in nature. When consumed by evolved, they enhanced ice-based abilities, typically increasing power by 30% to 40%. In other words, their potency could rise by a third or even two-fifths at once.

To achieve such an improvement through normal leveling would require advancing to the next level.

This item was straightforward and brutal in its function—simple yet clear. Among the things Ye Zhongming had obtained, it was also the most expensive.

Frosthearts were best suited for evolved with ice-based jobs. None of Cloud Peak's core members fit the criteria, but one in Chameleon did. The Frostheart would be perfect for that person.

The last item was a small stone, about half the size of a fist, crystal-clear and smooth, cold to the touch.

While everyone knew what a Frostheart was for, no one knew the purpose of this stone. Because Ye Zhongming had spent generously, this item was practically given to him at a low price.

Even Ye Zhongming couldn't pinpoint what it was, but he sensed a familiar energy from it—one that didn't belong to the wheel.

The Essence Pavilion didn't know the stone's origins either. They had only recognized its uniqueness and consulted many people, but no answers were found. Eventually, it was placed on the third floor for sale, usually at a high price, hoping someone knowledgeable or willing to gamble would buy it. In the end, it went to Ye Zhongming.

He decided to take his time recalling where he had encountered this type of energy before.

There were other items as well, decent in quality, but none struck Ye Zhongming as particularly rare, so he briefly inspected them before storing them away.

As Ye Zhongming reviewed his gains, Xiao Peng, Xia Bai, and even Red Hair had nothing else to do, so they observed the Snow Pattern Ants moving about in their specially crafted ice nest.

Perhaps the worker ants seemed anxious due to the lack of food, displaying signs of agitation.

Xia Bai tossed an intermediate ice-element gemstone into the nest, and the worker ants immediately swarmed toward it like sharks drawn to blood.

Because of their low evolution level, their bodies were still small, making it difficult for them to move the gemstone.

Soon, however, the queen was carried out. She directly climbed onto the gemstone and began eating.

The gemstone visibly shrank and disappeared within minutes.

Since Ye Zhongming had bought these ants to raise them, he wasn't bothered by this. He even took out all the basic ice-element gemstones he no longer used and let Xia Bai feed them to the ants.

Afterward, he contemplated crafting armor from the beast's hide.

However, he was called back to the nest a few hours later.

"After feeding them those ice-element gemstones, we went to rest. But I'm certain that when we left, the queen showed no signs of evolution. Yet just now, when I passed by, I noticed its level had increased—it evolved quickly!"

Xiao Peng stared wide-eyed at the now level-three Snow Pattern Ant Queen, utterly astonished.

Wasn't it supposed to be extremely difficult for these things to evolve? Didn't they require massive amounts of rare resources? How had just one intermediate and a dozen basic ice-element gemstones triggered an evolution?

Ye Zhongming observed carefully and noticed that the queen seemed lethargic after evolving, surrounded by general ants, likely preparing for another breeding cycle.

The next brood of Snow Pattern Ants would be of a higher level than before.

After some thought, Ye Zhongming began to understand.

He guessed it was something like this: During the time between when the ants were discovered and sold to him, someone—whether the original discoverer or the Essence Pavilion—had likely fed the queen many evolution-boosting resources but saw no results. Assuming the quantities were insufficient, they gave up and sold them to Ye Zhongming.

In reality, the queen had been on the verge of evolution, and those ice-element gemstones provided the final push.

Ye Zhongming had unwittingly scored an enormous bargain.

Had the Snow Pattern Ants been sold at this level, especially after breeding, the price would certainly not have been just a few level-seven monster crystals.

Early the following day, Black Brother arrived. In truth, he had been around the night before, witnessing how many faction leaders wanted to meet the visiting tycoon but were turned away. Black Brother didn't presume upon their prior connection to knock on the door either.

But this morning was different. Ye Zhongming had sent word that he would meet everyone today.

Behind Black Brother was the leader of his faction, Moonfall Frostplain.

Others with similar intentions had also gathered—all prominent figures in Black Dragon City, much like Black Brother himself. Even if the top leaders hadn't come personally, these individuals represented half of the city's elite forces.

However, before they could enter, one of Black Brother's subordinates panicked, clutching a thick stack of papers.

Black Brother and the others knew what it was—they just didn't understand why the messenger seemed so flustered.

When Black Brother took the papers and looked, he froze, speechless momentarily.

A faction leader beside him grumbled, "Old Black, this must be the latest national rankings, right? What, did the list grow knives? Scared you stiff?"

Black Brother glanced at him, swallowed hard, and handed over one of the sheets. "See for yourself."

The man took it, looked down, and nearly dropped the paper in shock.

Chapter 1549: Are you Doraemon or Aladdin's lamp?

Ye Zhongming saw these representatives of Black Dragon City's local forces in the residence's hall, their expressions varied and clearly somewhat distracted.

Exchanging a glance with Xiao Peng beside him, Ye Zhongming didn't know what had happened—was it because of his neglect last night that made them unhappy? But from their faces, he couldn't see anger or resentment; instead, they showed expressions of surprise, disbelief, and deep thought.

Black Brother, serving as the intermediary, took the initiative to speak and introduced those present to Ye Zhongming.

"This is my boss, the leader of the Moonfall Icefield Battle Squad, Sister Ru."

"This is Shopkeeper Jiang Dabao, owner of Jiang Dabao's Store."

"This is the captain of the Linchuan Hunting Team, He Qinchuan."

"This is the chief steward of Morning Light Pavilion, Mr. Li Long."

"This is the young master of the Cold Extreme Team, Young Master Qing."

"This is..."

Black Brother introduced everyone in the room and then stood behind his boss, Sister Ru. The remaining matters were not something he could interject in. The people here were basically the leaders or representatives of various factions, all seven-star evolved, representing almost half of Black Dragon City's core strength.

After listening to the introductions, Ye Zhongming nodded. The people he sent out yesterday had already gathered a general understanding of the local forces. He knew that those present were all influential figures in the city. Although the most powerful major factions hadn't sent anyone, the combined strength of those here was still not to be underestimated.

Naturally, this was relative.

With Black Brother's introduction as a starting point, these people adjusted their attitudes and began exchanging pleasantries with Ye Zhongming, gradually steering the conversation toward the main topic.

They didn't know Ye Zhongming's identity, only that this person was generous with his spending and had strong purchasing power. Those who came here basically wanted to do some business with Ye Zhongming.

Unlike Xiao Xuan, they didn't think Ye Zhongming had been invited to assist in a fight. They knew he was purely a passerby.

Under normal circumstances, they wouldn't have paid him such attention, but Black Dragon City was currently in a special period. With the impending battle against those foreigners from the north, everyone was trying every possible means to strengthen themselves and their factions' power.

Having needs didn't mean they could easily obtain what they wanted. Currently, Black Dragon City lacked items that could directly enhance combat effectiveness.

Everyone was searching for good items, but Black Dragon City's supply was limited in the short term, and opportunities were scarce for each person.

Facing the outsiders' invasion of their base, the people of Black Dragon City showed relative unity. They had no intention of retreating and were determined to fight a bloody battle against those foreigners. However, reality constrained the effectiveness of their "last-minute preparations."

Shops like Essence Pavilion and Jiang Dabao's Store had some good items, but first, their inventory also had costs and wouldn't be given away for free. Selling to Black Dragon City residents at cost price was already considered generous. Additionally, these shops wouldn't stand aside during this event—they had their own needs. What could be sold would be sold, and what couldn't would be kept for their own use.

Second, the items they could sell that could immediately enhance combat effectiveness were already mostly sold out. What remained were things that required time to cultivate or had other conditions. For example, apart from the Ice Marrow Liquid and Frost Heart, the other items Ye Zhongming bought, such as Cracked Cold Stone, level eight beast hide, Ice Soul, etc., were materials. The Snow Pattern Ants even required long-term cultivation. These were all items with potential but couldn't deliver immediate results.

As for the boss of Morning Light Pavilion, Elder An, who had crafted the Four Dragon Heads, wasn't a monstrous craftsman like Ye Zhongming, who could mass-produce equipment. In a short time, it was impossible to manufacture large quantities of gear. It was said that the elderly man, already over seventy, was willing but lacked the energy.

Under these circumstances, Ye Zhongming arrived—and most importantly, he had money.

In the apocalypse, money meant demon crystals. A person carrying many demon crystals meant that once obtained, they could be used to spin the wheel and immediately acquire useful items.

For wheels above level six, even if one didn't land on evolution potions, the other rewards were still quite good.

This was why they had come to visit since last night. Even after being rejected and waiting all night, they didn't show any dissatisfaction.

Because they needed something from him.

Otherwise, even if Ye Zhongming were a seven-star evolved, it wouldn't warrant so many people of the same level adopting such a humble attitude toward him.

It was true that Ye Zhongming and his group had strength, and these people didn't dare act recklessly, but that didn't mean they had to behave like this. Simply put, they still wanted to see what they could gain from Ye Zhongming.

After hearing their intentions, Ye Zhongming understood. He also sympathized—if it were for other matters, he might have refused, but since these people were preparing to resist foreign enemies, he wouldn't hesitate to help where he could.

"Can you tell me what you need?" Ye Zhongming's question left those present exchanging glances.

Our needs?

The people of Black Dragon City didn't show it on their faces, but in their hearts, they thought Ye Zhongming's words were a bit too bold.

We need seven-colored grade equipment, nine-star evolution potions—do you have those? We need level nine battle beasts and an elite army of 100,000—do you have those?

Although they felt somewhat displeased, considering Ye Zhongming had spent roughly 100,000 level six demon crystals in one go last night, they held back their frustration out of respect for his status as a tycoon.

Sister Ru, Black Brother's boss, was in her forties but appeared much younger due to evolution. Though not a stunning beauty, she was still quite attractive. Her personality carried the straightforwardness of northern women. Hearing Ye Zhongming's question, she inwardly scoffed before speaking directly: "If Mr. Ye still has demon crystals on hand, I'm willing to trade items for them."

Ye Zhongming nodded, then shifted his gaze to the young master of the Cold Extreme Team, Young Master Qin, sitting beside her.

Young Master Qin was taken aback. What did this mean? Asking each person about their needs? After asking, could he fulfill them? Did he think he was Doraemon or Aladdin's genie?

Being young and lacking restraint, his expression darkened. He snorted and said, "I need a golden-grade weapon!"

The others immediately understood that Young Master Qin was unhappy. Golden-grade equipment was inherently rare, and golden-grade weapons were especially precious. Even Elder An couldn't manufacture golden-grade equipment at will. Over the past few years, only about four or five pieces had been produced. The Four Dragon Heads were his proudest work, benefiting from the rarity of the materials used, but they were also the only purple-grade equipment he had ever crafted.

Now, asking this outsider for a golden-grade weapon was somewhat of a provocation.

However, they noticed that the young outsider sitting at the head of the room didn't show any surprise. Instead, his gaze moved to the third person—He Qinchuan, captain of the Linchuan Hunting Team.

This middle-aged man, known for his bravery, spoke up: "If Mr. Ye has an eight-star evolution potion, that would naturally be best. If not, a golden-grade weapon would also suffice. If even that is difficult, level seven or level eight demon crystals would also work."

The others found this amusing. Though He Qinchuan's words sounded polite, they carried an undertone of mockery toward Ye Zhongming—first mentioning eight-star evolution potions, then golden-grade weapons, things that were clearly impossible to provide.

But He Qinchuan ultimately softened his tone, echoing Sister Ru's request for high-level demon crystals. They all needed these to spin the wheel of fortune, making it a common demand.

Ye Zhongming continued to the next person.

"If you have any materials not found in the northern regions, Elder An would certainly appreciate them. Also, I have some items here—I wonder if Mr. Ye might be interested."

Li Long, the chief steward of Morning Light Pavilion, spoke this. As the oldest in the room, his tone was composed, speaking purely to achieve today's objective.

"I don't have any special demands. As long as Mr. Ye has anything that could be immediately useful to me, I'm willing to offer a reasonable price."

"Mr. Ye, do you have anything useful for battle beasts? Such as beast gear, high-quality food, or potions that can enhance a warbeast's strength directly? If so, I'm willing to pay a high price."

"Mr. Ye, I have two very special items here. I wonder if you'd be interested in taking a look. They definitely won't be inferior to what you obtained at Essence Pavilion yesterday."

"Mr. Ye, may I ask which faction you belong to? How strong are your subordinates? I'd like to hire them as bodyguards to accompany me in the battle against the foreigners if possible. The compensation will be high, and for any injuries or losses, I'm willing to provide ample compensation based on their strength."

Chapter 1549.5- Are you Doraemon or Aladdin's lamp?

One by one, these people stated their requests. After all, today was about trying their luck. If they gained something, that would be great; if not, there was no loss. Thus, they all made their intentions clear.

Once everyone had spoken, they all looked at Ye Zhongming, waiting for his response. Only then did Ye Zhongming slowly stand up.

"Let's do this: those who want to sell me something, present your items first. Let me take a look."

Ye Zhongming's tone still rubbed some people the wrong way, but they endured it for the sake of money. These people also knew that selling items was the most realistic option because this person had money.

Ye Zhongming began inspecting the items individually, asking about their uses.

At the first person, he looked and shook his head, then moved to the next. Again, he wasn't interested; the same happened with the third. More heads were shaken.

People started thinking the worst—was this guy here to mess with them? Pretending to be picky when he wanted nothing?

Many narrowed their eyes, flashes of hostility occasionally appearing.

They didn't want to provoke this outsider. After all, he was likely a seven-star evolved, and his subordinates in the room also seemed strong, probably seven-star as well. He also commanded a team of several hundred, which appeared formidable. Targeting him might result in losing teeth even if they succeed.

They didn't want unnecessary trouble before the upcoming battle.

But that didn't mean they were willing to be toyed with. Right now, this guy seemed to be mocking them. If so, they wouldn't mind stirring up some trouble.

"How much for this?"

Their thoughts were interrupted by Ye Zhongming's question—his first inquiry about price today.

Li Long was momentarily stunned. Like the others, he had assumed the young man was either signaling he wanted nothing or had exhausted his funds yesterday and couldn't afford anything today.

Hearing the sudden question, he paused before replying, "This is Elder An's work—High-Speed Snowboards. A set of three: the main board and two poles."

This turned out to be a set of equipment. Though not high-grade (only green-grade), in Ye Zhongming's eyes, it was still a quality product.

Ye Zhongming examined it carefully. With his top-tier craftsman's eye, he immediately recognized it as blueprint-based equipment.

"Ten level seven magic crystals."

Li Long thought for a moment before quoting the price. It was steep since this was merely a means of transportation. Even as a set, that fact didn't change. Moreover, it could only be used on snow, imposing significant limitations. If the buyer came from the south, where it never snowed, this item would be nearly useless.

The inflated price was a merchant's tactic, hoping the wealthy man might impulse-buy out of novelty. Otherwise, upon reflection, he'd surely decline, no matter how cheap.

No one's magic crystals grew on trees.

Ye Zhongming set the item down, disappointing Li Long.

As expected, this man wasn't foolish. The item truly had little use. If he wanted something like this, a white-grade set would suffice. Green-grade was pure extravagance.

But Ye Zhongming's next words left the steward utterly stunned.

"I want 600 sets. White-grade is fine. How much?"

The room fell silent.

Not one set, but six... hundred?

Fine, even if white-grade wasn't expensive, 600 sets added up to a considerable sum.

Considering the size of this man's team, it seemed he intended to equip every member with a set.

Li Long quickly adjusted his mindset. After brief consideration, he replied directly: "Five green-grade sets, fifty silver-grade sets, the rest white-grade—1,000 level six demon crystals total. Delivery in three days."

Snowboards were essential in Black Dragon City. Almost every hunter venturing outside owned one, but most wouldn't opt for Morning Light Pavilion's set due to the cost. A previous miscalculation had left them with roughly 500 sets in stock, mostly white-grade, plus a few dozen silver-grade and several green-grade. They'd only need to produce another 100 white-grade sets to meet Ye Zhongming's request.

Given Elder An's skill and the simplicity of crafting blueprint-based white-grade gear, 100 sets in three days was feasible.

"Eight bottles of six-star potions. These are only useful in the north and have limited functionality."

Li Long immediately agreed.

This price was more than fair. He feared insistence might make the buyer reconsider.

Seeing that Ye Zhongming wasn't unwilling to buy but only sought specific items, the others perked up, presenting their goods eagerly. Even those who hadn't planned to sell anything rummaged through their belongings for potentially desirable items.

The room grew lively.

Ye Zhongming picked and chose, purchasing six items in total—a small fraction of what was offered, but all were high-quality, costing him a significant sum.

Considering he'd already spent nearly 100,000 level six demon crystals yesterday and was spending again today, everyone finally confirmed: this Mr. Ye was truly loaded.

At this point, many couldn't help but wonder:

Could this man really only be a seven-star evolved? The magic crystals he'd spent so far should be enough to trade for an eight-star potion, right?

Chapter 1550: Who doesn't know him

After finishing shopping, Ye Zhongming returned to his seat.

The people of Black Dragon City quieted down. Those who had brought out items but weren't favored also suppressed their disappointment. They all knew this outsider tycoon was about to speak.

Sure enough, Ye Zhongming said something that immediately drove them into a frenzy.

"I happen to have some six-star and seven-star potions here, and even one eight-star potion. If anyone needs them, I can sell them to you."

Many people trembled instinctively upon hearing this.

Right now, they all wanted to boost their combat power in a short time. But what method or item is the most direct? Without a doubt, it's evolution potions.

Most of them were seven-star evolved. To evolve to eight stars, all they lacked were demon crystals. Now, with a ready-made eight-star evolution potion right in front of them, how could they not be tempted?

And not just tempted—wildly tempted!

Some impulsive ones, like Young Master Qing, even stood up, forgetting all about manners, and bluntly asked Ye Zhongming if he was lying.

He had already decided: if this person really had an eight-star evolution potion, he would go home and ask his father for money!

Ye Zhongming didn't mind. He directly took out ten six-star evolution potions, five seven-star evolution potions, and one eight-star evolution potion, placing them on the table.

Everyone's eyes nearly popped out.

The six-star potions weren't a big deal—most people here didn't really need them. But the seven-star and eight-star ones were different. Even if the bosses didn't need seven-star potions themselves, their subordinates did. For example, Black Brother stared at the seven-star potions with unblinking eyes.

As for that eight-star evolution potion, it shimmered with an alluring glow, making the people below feel it looked even more beautiful than on the roulette wheel.

Young Master Qing immediately sent someone back to notify his father to bring money.

"Mr. Ye, how do you plan to sell this potion?"

"Yeah, are you settling with demon crystals or bartering?"

“Mr. Ye, tell us what you’re thinking.”

Everyone eagerly asked Ye Zhongming for his intentions, showing impatience.

There was no other way. If the big shots of Black Dragon City who weren’t present discovered this, they might miss out on the potion they’d been dreaming of.

Many had already decided they must obtain it. Because once they evolved to eight stars, they would instantly become top-tier figures in this city—or even the entire region. Their path forward would only get smoother.

While waiting for Ye Zhongming’s answer, they were already mentally calculating what they could trade for it.

“If you have demon crystals, that would be best.” Ye Zhongming was already very familiar with the routine of trading potions for demon crystals and then converting them back into potions. This time was no exception. He could trade one eight-star potion for two if luck were on his side.

Of course, his ambitions didn’t stop there.

The others fell silent for a moment, looking troubled.

They couldn't obtain eight-star evolution potions because they lacked eight-star demon crystals. Every hunt for an eight-star lifeform came at a great cost, and accumulating enough crystals for one spin on an eight-star wheel took a long time. Many here still hadn't gathered ten eight-star magic crystals.

And this potion? Its price wouldn't be less than several dozen crystals. Even if they wanted to buy it, they couldn't afford it—their hearts were willing, but their strength was lacking.

Trade for it? How? What could possibly be exchanged for an eight-star evolution potion?

"Mr. Ye, how many demon crystals do you want for it?" The owner of Jiang Dabao's shop suddenly asked.

"Yes, Mr. Ye, please be clear," Li Long added.

Hearing this, the others' faces fell.

In terms of wealth, they were no match for these two major merchants of Black Dragon City. Their asking now likely meant they could afford it.

"Eighty."

Ye Zhongming stated a number.

With his super-exclusion skill, the probability of landing on an eight-star potion from the seven-, eight-, or nine-star wheel was 20%. Five spins would net him an eight-star potion, so eighty crystals guaranteed a profit.

Jiang Dabao and Li Long didn't respond immediately, clearly weighing the pros and cons. After all, eighty crystals could buy eight spins with a standard eight-star wheel. With decent luck, they could probably land an eight-star potion.

The choice before them was simple: take a risk or play it safe. Risk meant spinning themselves—they might get one, or even more, but also possibly none. Playing it safe meant definitely getting one, but only one.

It was a dilemma.

"What about the seven-star potions?" Black Brother couldn't hold back, looking eagerly at Ye Zhongming.

"Same."

"And the six-star ones?"

"Fifty."

Black Brother was tempted.

Counting the spin from the day before yesterday, he had already spun the seven-star wheel three times without getting a seven-star evolution potion. Though three failures weren't statistically significant, he couldn't help feeling anxious.

Those three batches of seven-star crystals had been hard-won—he'd spent the entire year risking his life for them. In Black Brother's memory, aside from the desperate struggle for his first one-star evolution potion in the early apocalypse, he'd never fought so hard.

Now, eighty seven-star crystals could reliably trade for one evolution potion. He thought it was worth it.

Those who the wheel hadn't screwed over couldn't understand the overwhelming frustration of spinning with high hopes, only to realize their luck was terrible.

But Black Brother didn't have enough crystals. His boss might not have them either, and even if he did, he probably wouldn't spend so many on him—the organization had too many people to support.

However, Black Brother was resourceful. The idea of intercepting the rankings earlier had been his. After some thought, he immediately began rallying people in the room—those he'd cooperated with before, had decent relationships with, and good reputations. They were six-star evolved, some from his own faction, others from outside.

He even asked his boss and other leaders. Shockingly, within minutes, he gathered enough seven-star crystals and handed them to Ye Zhongming in exchange for a seven-star evolution potion.

Ye Zhongming had observed the room and saw how Black Brother did it. This man first united fellow six-star evolved striving for seven stars, forming a mutual aid agreement. They pooled their seven-star crystals to let Black Brother advance first. In return, he'd help them hunt seven-star lifeforms until they also evolved.

In the apocalypse, such behavior was rare—trust was too scarce. That Black Brother could persuade so many quickly spoke volumes about his connections and character.

They couldn't gather the full eighty seven-star crystals, falling short by over twenty. Black Brother borrowed the rest from his boss and others—high-interest loans requiring double repayment within a set time.

Soon, the six-star potions sold out. At fifty crystals, they were more affordable. Black Brother's approach also set an example, and through collaboration, the remaining four seven-star potions found buyers.

Chapter 1550.5- Who doesn't know him

Only the eight-star potion remained.

Crystals of that level were too precious. Even pooling resources, the bosses couldn't gather eighty. They could only gaze longingly. Ultimately, only Jiang Dabao, Li Long, and Young Master Qing, still waiting for his father's money, hadn't given up.

“You brat, if you're lying to your old man, I'll break your legs!”

Soon, a loud voice sounded outside. A burly, bearded man barged in, followed by four or five lackeys.

But the moment he entered, his eyes locked onto the potion on the table and didn't move.

He was an eight-star evolved and had consumed such a potion before—but he'd never obtained a second one.

Perhaps unable to resist, Young Master Qing's father strode forward and reached for the eight-star potion.

But halfway there, he stopped. Not only that, his expression flipped into a fawning smile at Ye Zhongming before he turned and sat beside his son.

This man, named Hai Dayu, had heard a soul-chilling question during his reach—the man beside Mr. Ye had turned and softly asked, just two words:

“Kill him?”

Hai Dayu immediately backed down.

If anyone else had said that, he wouldn't have feared them. But coming from someone who could produce an eight-star evolution potion? He was terrified.

He'd only been testing. If the other party seemed weak, he'd have snatched the potion. But if they were strong, he knew when to fold. A real man knows when to bend and when to stand tall.

Ye Zhongming looked at Hai Dayu, not angry but almost amused. This behavior was all too familiar—it was how post-apocalyptic evolved acted. Even in his past life, he'd been like this occasionally.

But in this life, he was stronger. He didn't need to be that way anymore.

The stiffness of one's spine is proportional to their strength.

Before the apocalypse, strength meant money or power. After, it meant fists.

Not long after Hai Dayu arrived, others trickled in—only four, but they were the true pillars of Black Dragon City.

All were eight-star evolved.

At first, Ye Zhongming found it odd that a city had so many eight-stars. But considering the population base, the half-city of mutated lifeforms, and the abundant resources of the icy plains outside, it made sense.

“Extreme Cold!” “Night Kill!” “Blood Hands!” “Holy Snow Mountain!” “Black & White Landscape!”

These were the five major factions of Black Dragon City, each led by an eight-star evolved.

There was one more—Old An of Morning Light Pavilion, also an eight-star. But he was reclusive and rarely seen.

The leader of Extreme Cold was the flexible Hai Dayu, and his son was Hai Qingtian...

The boss of Night Kill was Ah Kai, a cold, lanky man with blood-red hair—likely due to his bloodline—somewhat similar to Red Hair.

Blood Hands’ leader was a woman. Her real name was unknown; everyone called her Yan Shuangfei. She was young, probably not even twenty, with a cute but not stunning face. Her smile curved her eyes into crescents, framed by deep dimples, and her skin was flawless.

But intel from Ye Zhongming’s subordinates yesterday revealed that Yan Shuangfei was the most ruthless person in Black Dragon City, with the highest body count. She lived up to her faction’s name—her hands were drenched in blood.

Holy Snow Mountain’s leader was a serene old man with kind eyes. Yet, across his back and sides, he carried six swords, with a seventh in hand—a striking image.

Black & White Landscape's boss was nicknamed White Skin, dressed in leather from head to toe.

Their arrival was solely for the eight-star evolution potion. Though they'd already reached that level, they knew the value of adding another eight-star ally—or trading it for something useful.

Seeing Hai Dayu sitting meekly, the newcomers adjusted their attitudes. They didn't mention the potion at first, instead inviting Ye Zhongming to a banquet at Essence Pavilion.

Ye Zhongming agreed. Soon, the group arrived—not at yesterday's location, but at another branch specializing in exotic delicacies.

“Speaking of Essence Pavilion, it's an anomaly. Their headquarters is supposedly in Liancheng, but in the apocalypse, aside from massive commercial groups like Five Ring Money and Cannibal Chain, who's heard of successful franchises? Yet Essence Pavilion pulls it off, even in this godforsaken northern wasteland. Weird.”

Hai Qingtian stood beside Ye Zhongming, staring at the building and sighing.

The group chuckled without comment. Upstairs, in a spacious hall, they sat and began chatting.

Naturally, the topic was Ye Zhongming. They probed for useful info, but he deflected with smiles, revealing nothing.

He wasn't being secretive for no reason. This trip had two objectives, and premature exposure could bring unwanted trouble.

When they got nowhere, the conversation shifted to the day's biggest news: the latest country rankings.

Even the eight-star bosses were stunned—Brother Hei and the others weren't the only ones.

“Sigh, we're all just trying to survive the apocalypse, but the gap is ridiculous!” White Skin of Black & White Landscape lamented. “We thought reaching eight stars was impressive, that owning gold gear made us hot shots, that strutting around a city was glorious. But compared to those on the rankings? We're fucking trash!”

A drink later, his emotions flared.

“Does it really affect us? The north is too remote, and the environment is too harsh. Who knows how long before it becomes uninhabitable? We might have to move south!” Jiang Dabao, who had good relations with the eight-star bosses, spoke casually. The seven-star faction leaders mostly kept quiet and ate.

Such was the class divide.

“Oh? Bosses, I just got back from downtown and missed the news. Fill me in?” Yan Shuangfei blinked her big eyes at the group.

“Shuangfei, listen to your uncle. Stop focusing on killing. At your age, you should be dating. What about my kid? Say the word, and Extreme Cold is yours—I’ll work under you!”

The others reacted with cold smiles. Hai Dayu’s scheme was transparent. Did he really think his son stood a chance with this lethal girl? Even if she agreed, would he dare sleep beside her?

“Uncle, I’ve told you—I already like someone. I’ll go find him soon.”

“Who? Since when?”

“Ye Zhongming of Cloud Peak. He’s definitely my man.”

Splash—Xiao Peng, drinking water, spat it out.