

Apocalypse 1556

Chapter 1556: Challenging level nine

Some sounds of battle came from the direction where the red-haired woman had risen earlier—the female guards and those mutated creatures had clearly already clashed.

The distance of the sounds changed rapidly. At this speed, the female guards were approaching swiftly.

The eyes of the level-nine Snow Wolf King flickered with surprise.

It was astonished by this human's strength and by the power of his subordinates.

"Who are you, human? Tell me your name."

Instead of attacking immediately, the Snow Wolf King asked Ye Zhongming for his name.

Ye Zhongming sneered. "Don't act so high and mighty. You've only evolved for a few days—what are you pretending for?"

"This is an insult to a king." The Snow Wolf King had clearly not only reached the pinnacle of evolutionary rank, its intelligence and learning from humans had also reached a very high level.

"A living king is the only true king."

Ye Zhongming's response was unyielding, making the Snow Wolf King begin to believe that this human truly intended to kill it today.

It was puzzled.

Indeed, the enemy had eight level-eight beings, but its side also had four, and it itself was a level-nine lifeform, giving it the advantage in strength. That wasn't even counting the fact that nearly half of Black Dragon City was under its control through the mutated creatures. How could this human be so confident?

By learning from and imitating humans, the Snow Wolf King knew that this species, once at the top of the planet's food chain, was a complex existence. They could be brave, kind, humble, friendly, despicable, sinister, submissive, and fawning.

Yet one thing remained the same—after entering the great era of evolution, they all cherished their lives.

The Snow Wolf King believed Ye Zhongming was no exception.

If this human also valued his life, why didn't he retreat in the face of its superiority? Instead, he acted as if he could kill it.

Did he truly have some hidden advantage?

Thinking of the countless wheels scattered across the land, the Snow Wolf King confirmed its suspicion.

This guy must have some method to deal with it!

Humans—truly shameless!

The Snow Wolf King's head tilted slightly, a gesture its subordinates recognized as a sign of its contemplation and decision-making.

Soon, it decided it still needed to test the waters.

But it had no intention of testing them itself.

It raised its head and let out a resounding howl into the sky!

A majestic and heavy sound echoed over the entirety of Black Dragon City.

The mutated creatures on its side heard it and immediately charged toward the battlefield. The humans heard it too, and many realized what it meant—silence fell over them, as if holding their breath in fear.

A level-nine lifeform entering Black Dragon City was nothing short of a disaster for them.

Soon, mutated creatures appeared around the relatively small battlefield, prowling, snarling, crouching, waiting.

By the time the horde of zombies not far away arrived, the people of Cloud Peak were completely surrounded. Even the female guards, upon arrival, were trapped within the encirclement.

The Snow Wolf King's side gained four more level-eight beings.

But the humans also gained two more eight-star evolved.

Xiao Min and another person—both eight-star evolved.

"Attack!"

The Snow Wolf King issued the command in human language to display its authority.

At this moment, the people of Cloud Peak were in grave danger.

Forget the sheer number of high-level enemies—just the quantity of mutated creatures alone was staggering. A rough estimate put their numbers at over 100,000, while Cloud Peak had only a few hundred. The numerical disparity was far too great, even if their average evolutionary level was high. Ants could kill an elephant through sheer numbers.

After all, Cloud Peak had once used overwhelming numbers to kill level-eight lifeforms through concentrated attacks.

The level-nine Snow Wolf King, inherently suspicious, feared that Ye Zhongming might pose a genuine threat. Thus, it chose to drive these mutated creatures forward as a test.

"Ah!"

But suddenly, without warning, the red-haired woman on the back of the undead fish-dragon let out a sharp scream.

The sound wasn't particularly loud to human ears—perhaps only slightly louder than normal speech, around 60 or 70 decibels?

But to the mutated creatures, it was like a demonic shriek.

The entire horde of mutated creatures first fell into silence, then erupted into chaos.

The mutated animals became disoriented, their heads splitting with pain. Some of the lower-level ones even began bleeding from their mouths, eyes, and ears. To alleviate the agony, some rolled on the ground, some ran wildly in all directions, some shook their heads like enraged bulls, and some simply crashed into the creatures around them.

In an instant, their formation collapsed.

Only the higher-level ones fared slightly better, attempting to control the others, but with little success.

The zombies, numbering over 50,000, also fell into disarray, though in a different way.

Under the red-haired woman's sustained scream, they grew eerily quiet. Then, their bodies turned in unison toward the mutated animals.

Their hostility toward Cloud Peak gradually faded.

Some of the higher-level zombies, like the few level-eight zombie kings, still struggled and hesitated. But the lower-level ones had already begun attacking their former "allies."

This happened because the Snow Wolf King's control over the mutated creatures wasn't based on psychic power but on its level-nine oppressive aura.

This method of control was inherently unstable. The mutated creatures were well aware they were being coerced. Though they obeyed orders, their execution was far worse than if they had been under mental domination.

If a psychic-type lifeform had been in charge of this battle—someone like Lie'er—the mutated creatures in Black Dragon City would have gathered silently before launching a coordinated assault on the entrances to Blood Street.

In that case, Black Dragon City would have fallen instantly.

But the Snow Wolf King couldn't do that. It lacked finesse, could only control a limited number of mutated creatures, and even that required the help of its subordinates.

The red-haired woman, however, was a psychic-type lifeform with an innate ability to control other creatures, especially zombies. Her mental interference had now delivered a psychic shock to the other mutated creatures while briefly dominating the zombies.

Even if her strength was inferior to the Snow Wolf King's, in this aspect, the latter was no match for her.

The red-haired woman had resolved the most immediate crisis with a single move. Though she couldn't maintain complete control over the zombies for long, for now, nothing here could threaten Cloud Peak's forces.

Ye Zhongming seized the opportunity. Almost immediately, when the red-haired woman acted, he activated his bloodline and charged alone onto the ruins.

The nation's number one evolved was now moving toward the Snow Wolf King—ranked sixth on the national mutated creature leaderboard.

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Yellow Ball transformed into a golden shadow, arriving almost simultaneously with Ye Zhongming.

During its charge, a layer of pale golden metallic armor appeared on its body, partially covering its head and legs, and protecting even its tail.

Additionally, on the back of the armor were a pair of short metallic wings, closely attached to its sides—too small to lift the now-massive, evolved level eight Yellow Ball into the sky, leaving their purpose unclear.

This armor set was Yellow Ball's current beast gear—Slicing Skin.

The complete set consisted of only three pieces: protective gear, a collar, and a nameplate.

Compared to the previous set, this one represented a significant upgrade in both rank and functionality, perfectly complementing Yellow Ball's abilities.

Back then, Ye Zhongming had traded his previous beast gear and paid other steep prices to acquire this set from Li Daqi and Cannibal Chain.

In the air, Yangos let out a draconic roar.

This was no ordinary roar—it was a mental energy attack.

The saying "Dragons are the darlings of heaven" couldn't be more accurate.

Though not a pureblood dragon, Yangos's physical prowess already made all of Cloud Peak's members envious, while its breath and skills far surpassed those of other lifeforms at its level.

More crucially, its mental energy was formidable, second only to psychic-type lifeforms. Previously capable of telepathy, after evolving to level eight, it could now weaponize this mental advantage.

The evil dragon's massive size and aerial position prevented it from joining Ye Zhongming and Yellow Ball in directly charging the Snow Wolf King, but it coordinated seamlessly with the ground assault through this method.

Meanwhile, Xia Bai merely glanced over before her wings flickered, propelling her before a level eight snow wolf. Her weapon slashed toward its head, thwarting its attempt to assist.

Simultaneously, the female guards also moved.

Under Red Hair's relentless mental assaults, only four level eight snow wolves remained conscious and combat-ready. With one intercepted by Xia Bai, the other three became the Female Guards' targets.

The orderly formation abruptly split into four groups. The first, led by Xiao Min with fifty warriors, intercepted the most robust snow wolf—unlike the king, this one had three heads and tails. Its left and right heads exhaled icy mist while its triple tails whistled faintly when swung.

This was clearly a formidable foe.

Two other hundred-member teams engaged the remaining wolves, while the rest gathered beneath the undead fish-dragon to protect the continuously shrieking Red Hair.

The icebird and Jiubao maintained perimeter control, mercilessly hunting any bold mutated creatures that entered their zone.

"Audacious!"

The Snow Wolf King's roar shook the surroundings. Compared to earlier, its body had retreated ten meters from the ruins' peak, precisely where Ye Zhongming and Yellow Ball now stood.

Clearly, their first clash had ended with the king yielding ground.

Ye Zhongming's current state genuinely unsettled the Snow Wolf King.

Not life-threatening dread, but wariness of potential injury.

After merely grazing Ye Zhongming and Yellow Ball, it leaped backward.

Undeniably powerful—ranked sixth nationally among mutated lifeforms—the king's cautious, suspicious nature made it hesitate against Cloud Peak's overwhelming momentum.

This temperament may have enabled its level nine evolution in the perilous ice plains, yet also cost it some dominance.

Having seized the initiative, Ye Zhongming pressed his advantage from the elevated position. Wind and Thunder shimmered with saber shadows as the radiance of Thousand Seal Blade Slash illuminated the entire area.

Cracks spiderwebbed outward from Yellow Ball's paws toward the Snow Wolf King.

Dazed, the king glared venomously at Yangos before slamming a massive paw, collapsing the ruins instantly.

Ye Zhongming and Yellow Ball's assault was thus neutralized.

However deeply ingrained its lupine suspicion, as a level nine entity with ineffable power, this single countermeasure instantly reversed the advantage.

Seizing the moment, the king became a blur streaking toward the stumbling Ye Zhongming and Yellow Ball.

Yet as it moved, searing dragonfire erupted ahead, racing toward it.

Their opposing elements made the king abort its attack and recoil from the flames.

It refused to endure this fiery assault directly.

But before landing, the ground exploded beneath it, hurling shrapnel upward.

More alarming than debris was the gray-brown maw gaping in the crater, spewing pale green acid.

Jiubao—initially positioned elsewhere—had stealthily extended its lower half to ambush the king.

Midair, the king's eyes flashed crimson, emitting twin red beams toward the acid.

Like headlights, the red waves intercepted the acid before plunging into Jiubao's tunnel.

Jiubao convulsed violently, jaws gaping in a pained screech.

It couldn't evade the king's follow-up strike despite retracting immediately after spewing venom.

Bang!

Gunfire blossomed into an icy flower on the king's body, sending it tumbling backward.

Yangos descended like a falling mountain, its wingblade striking the king down to earth.

Flames erupted from fissures in the ravaged ground, engulfing the fallen monarch.

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Bang! Bang! Bang!

Gunfire continued as enormous metal frames materialized overhead, condensing fist-sized orbs that transformed into solid bombs raining into the inferno.

The besieged king endured this relentless barrage.

Though obscured by flames, none believed it would die so easily—hence the sustained onslaught.

After circling, Yangos loosed its second breath attack of the day.

But mid-attack, it spotted a white shadow expanding over the flames—by the time its breath arrived, the shadow had grown enough to intercept it entirely.

A gigantic ice flower.

Familiar—similar to the earlier, smaller one on the king's body.

Beneath the flower, flames died, revealing the king anew.

Its once-pristine fur now bore vivid crimson stains—minimal yet stark against the white.

Evidence of injury to this level nine being.

Its gaze turned venomous. Despite Yangos's ongoing assault, it stood calmly beneath the ice flower, staring at Ye Zhongming's raised Reaper Mimicry Gun.

"Die!"

With this single utterance, the king howled skyward, its already massive frame expanding further.

The ice flower shattered, its fragments becoming deadly projectiles as the king blurred toward Ye Zhongming.

It knew whose death would collapse this level eight resistance.

Yangos ascended slightly, dodging ice shards while roaring—again manipulating the close-quarters combat.

Ye Zhongming's gun vanished, replaced by Wind and Thunder as specialized black armor materialized on his body, charging fearlessly.

Star Vision, Moonlight Field, and Gravity Leap combined to help Cloud Peak's King track the Snow Wolf King's true form.

No time for skills—only a swing of the Sacred Artifact from Blue's Realm at the level nine entity.

It was so fast that even with debuffs, Ye Zhongming barely tracked it. Yet at the last moment, the Snow Wolf King's striking forepaws elongated unnaturally.

In truth, its entire body stretched, but velocity made only the claws visible.

Enraged, the king intended this strike to be fatal.

Thus far, it had deployed three abilities: the crimson eye-beams—"Killing Red"—acquired at its first level.

Next, the ice flowers—a hybrid passive/active ability. Passively protecting against damage (like the earlier small flower), while the massive active version offered supreme defense and controllable icy explosions.

As evidenced by both Yangos and Ye Zhongming being within its earlier blast radius.

The third—its current attack—was the devastating "Swift Shadow Strike".

The king's extreme agility was nearly unmatched, especially at full charge.

This enabled the technique: creating a shadow that attacked first at blinding speed, followed by its physical body.

A devastating dual-strike combination.

Against Cloud Peak's elites, the king had unleashed its trump card.

It deemed this human incapable of evasion.

Few mutated creatures could surpass its velocity—only peak human evolved might compete.

Ye Zhongming was swift, but not faster than the Snow Wolf King, especially against this technique.

Yellow Ball charged golden-blurred, attempting to intercept.

However great their earlier advantage, a level nine's strike could be instantly lethal.

Yangos roared again—yet its previously effective mental interference now failed inexplicably.

The king's crimson tongue lolled, anticipating the taste of this potent human's blood.

Such a high-level evolved's blood must be extraordinarily energizing.

Ye Zhongming stared fixedly ahead, seemingly resigned—yet his blade still swung forward.

Time seemed to freeze as the shadow-claws neared his face.

Then, he vanished.

Reappearing beside the king.

A minimal teleport—just enough to land an unaltered strike.

With a resonant "beng!", both were sent flying backward.

Ye Zhongming hit the ground first, his sword-hand bloodied, once-steadfast arms now trembling.

Wind and Thunder fell nearby.

The impact had split his palms and numbed his arms beyond gripping.

The Snow Wolf King's technique was broken; it crashed down, its ice flower shattering. A 50cm gash now wept blood along its flank, revealing glimpses of white beneath.

Yet within seconds, the bleeding slowed... then ceased.

Such was a level nine's terrifying regeneration.

Rising unsteadily, the king stared at Ye Zhongming in disbelief.

That a human had countered its ultimate strike.

Not its strongest ability—yet still inconceivable for an eight-star evolved to thwart.

And that weapon... how had it breached the ice flower to inflict such damage?

Crouching low, it finally acknowledged Ye Zhongming as an equal. Now it would unleash its full might—its regal dignity demanded nothing less.

Yet before it could act, new sounds froze it mid-motion.

Chapter 1558: Level nine agreement

"That was the cry of its own kind.

Only then did the Snow Wolf King see that the surrounding battles had all ended.

Its four level-eight subordinates had all been defeated and were now under the control of their opponents. Among them, the strongest three-headed, three-tailed giant wolf was already lying on the ground, barely alive, its beautiful fur covered in blood.

One advantage of the frozen tundra was that it rarely gathered dust.

The Snow Wolf King's ferocity immediately diminished significantly.

Though a level-nine lifeform was powerful, it didn't mean it was alone, especially for a creature like the Snow Wolf King, accustomed to living in a pack. Part of its strength and reputation came from its companions.

Their strength was generally greater, especially on the tundra, where the overall number of mutated lifeforms might not be as high as in warmer, more humid regions. Moreover, numbers were relative—each region had its own unique lifeforms.

Under such circumstances, if the Snow Wolf King wanted to maintain its status, its subordinates were its reliance.

Why, among level-nine lifeforms, did the Snow Wolf King dare to actively stir chaos in Black Dragon City, while the Bear King could only watch from outside the city from time to time? The fundamental difference lay in the number of loyal subordinates.

Now, all its high-level subordinates had been subdued, fueling the Snow Wolf King's anger but diminishing its ferocity.

It was unwilling to sacrifice its subordinates like this.

At the same time, it felt deeply uneasy at the strength of this human's forces.

It knew its companions well. Though their strength paled compared to its own, they were among the best of their level—their speed, attacks, and coordination were all exceptional. Yet they had been subdued in such a short time, proving just how formidable their opponents were.

If these humans turned to surround and attack it... The Snow Wolf King didn't believe they could kill it, but it also doubted it could defeat them. If it fought desperately for a decisive outcome, it might be able to kill them all, but what about itself?

The Snow Wolf King shuddered to imagine. How would the other level-eight lifeforms here treat it if it were severely injured?

They would kill it, devour it... That was likely what would happen.

So it was furious, but its will to fight had greatly diminished.

"Human, you are clever. Your subordinates are clever. But you must understand who you are facing!"

The Snow Wolf King lowered its body slightly, still adopting a ready-to-attack posture.

But anyone could hear the bluster in its tone.

This wolf king couldn't bear to lose its subordinates.

Ye Zhongming slowly stood up, his arms feeling much better. He picked up Wind and Thunder. Due to his bloodline, his eyes were pitch-black as he looked at the Snow Wolf King and said, "I don't want to let such a perfect opportunity to kill a level nine lifeform go."

With that, he waved his hand.

His meaning was clear—kill the defeated creatures.

"If you dare, I'll slaughter all of you!" The Snow Wolf King's fur bristled in rage.

"Hopelessly deluded."

Ye Zhongming shook his head and signaled his subordinates to proceed.

"Wait!"

The Snow Wolf King nearly roared.

Sharp blades were already pressed against the necks of the giant wolves.

The Snow Wolf King breathed heavily, its abdomen visibly heaving—clearly, it was in the throes of intense emotion.

"Name your terms."

Ye Zhongming fell silent.

Did he want to kill the Snow Wolf King?

Yes, he wanted to—very, very much.

Apart from in the secret realm, Cloud Peak had never slain a level-nine before. But as their evolution progressed, killing level-nine lifeforms had become part of the plan. Once Ye Zhongming resolved the matter with Talking Lady, the plan would begin—his path to nine stars officially starting.

But level-nine lifeforms weren't easy to kill. Ye Zhongming, Xia Lei, Guangyao, Mo Ye, and many other core members had simulated the scenario countless times. Relying solely on Cloud Peak's strength to kill a level-nine would come at a tremendous cost.

It was certain that core members would die—more than one.

They could defeat a level-nine without losing core members under the most favorable circumstances—perfect timing, terrain, and unity.

Achieving perfection was incredibly difficult. The intelligence of level-nine lifeforms meant they wouldn't let Cloud Peak's plans proceed smoothly, so the ideal conditions could hardly be met.

Cloud Peak, accustomed to achieving maximum gains at minimal cost, wasn't lacking in courage—they simply weren't used to heavy casualties among their own.

Of course, this was only a concern, not a deterrent. When the time came, they would act, ready to sacrifice.

Another prevailing belief among Cloud Peak's core members was to wait for the Death King Trees' awakening. Everything would become much easier once that creature evolved to level nine, leading the charge.

So Liu Zhenghong had now devoted all her efforts to advancing the evolution of that giant tree, determined to mold the Death King Tree into its desired form—a fully human body.

This was no simple task—it was extraordinarily complex. One misstep could lead to disastrous consequences.

Liu Zhenghong was working tirelessly toward this goal.

Now, Ye Zhongming had encountered an opportunity to face a level-nine lifeform, with absolute numerical superiority on his side. He truly wanted to try killing this wolf king.

He was prepared to sacrifice.

Because his Second Life ability had cooled down—he had one chance at resurrection.

But!

Ye Zhongming couldn't guarantee that the sacrifice would be himself!

What if it were one of his companions? Yellow Ball? Yangos? Ice Bird? Jiubao? The female guards? Or even Red Hair or Xia Bai?

He couldn't ignore these possibilities.

Moreover, though the surrounding mutated lifeforms were in chaos now, once the battle peaked, Red Hair would have to join the fight. What if the uncontrolled creatures turned on them? This wasn't his chosen battlefield—what if unexpected dangers arose?

Neither the Snow Wolf King nor Ye Zhongming was an independent entity. Every decision had to account for their companions.

So when the Snow Wolf King said, "Name your terms," Ye Zhongming fell silent.

Perhaps this wasn't the right moment for a life-or-death struggle.

Chapter 1558.5- Level nine agreement

When Ye Zhongming and his people reappeared before Blood Street, the leaders of Black Dragon City could no longer contain their shock.

Earlier, they had been certain that the level-nine Snow Wolf King was on the other side of Black Dragon City—they had heard its terrifying roars.

They knew that "Mr. Ye" was Ye Zhongming, that the elite squad was the female guards, that the dragon in the sky was Yangos, and that the massive golden dog was Yellow Ball.

The number one in the nation's regions, the top faction in the region!

Under normal circumstances, these were figures they could only look up to. They knew that even if all of Black Dragon City united, they might not be a match for this small contingent of Cloud Peak's forces.

But now, a level-nine lifeform had appeared—the notoriously cruel, cunning, and treacherous Snow Wolf King. None of them believed Ye Zhongming's small group could escape unscathed.

Most speculated that even if Ye Zhongming survived the Snow Wolf King's assault, his losses would be heavy.

Yet when this team reappeared, no member was missing—not even injured.

What... had happened?

Upon receiving the news, Elder An and the other leaders rushed over.

Ye Zhongming gathered them together.

This time, he no longer concealed anything. The aura of the nation's number one was fully displayed. The Black Dragon City bosses, who had previously spoken casually in his presence, now trembled in fear.

They were intimidated not only by his status but also by his ability to emerge unharmed from the threat of a level-nine lifeform!

"Do you have a map? Of Black Dragon City."

Ye Zhongming's question was immediately answered as someone brought forth a map.

Such items were near-essentials in the apocalypse.

Ye Zhongming examined it and nodded in satisfaction.

After studying it carefully, he drew a line under the crowd's watchful eyes.

"What if we built a wall here?"

Elder An and the others were stunned.

What did this mean? Why build a wall here?

Though puzzled, they scrutinized Ye Zhongming's line, their minds racing.

This location pushed several kilometers forward from Blood Street, effectively halving the area controlled by the mutated lifeforms.

Building a wall here would render Blood Street a thing of legend. Hunting would become far more difficult. The current balance of Black Dragon City would be shattered.

This was their first reaction.

However, they had risen to power for a reason—they were no fools. In fact, from the perspective of human society, they were elites.

After a moment, they began to see the brilliance of the idea.

First, this was the narrowest east-west point in Black Dragon City. Building a wall here would require less length than Blood Street's current position.

This meant less defensive pressure, higher defensive strength per unit length—undoubtedly a boon for humans.

If a wall were to be built, this location would also require the least construction effort.

Second, a wall here would block one of the external passages into Black Dragon City. Not only would it slow the replenishment of mutated lifeforms within the city, but it would also open a new northern hunting path for humans.

This would give Black Dragon City's hunters three directions: south of the main wall, north through this new passage, and within the city itself.

This would alleviate the current pressure on hunting grounds, expand the available area, and increase yields.

A cascade of effects would ultimately strengthen Black Dragon City.

Moreover, with a wall here, the idea of coexisting with mutated lifeforms in the same city would become irrelevant. Humans would have a complete city of their own!

The mutated lifeforms' territory would effectively become a "valley"—or a natural hunting ground for humans.

Humans would hold the initiative. They could hunt when they chose and simply defend when they didn't, no longer needing to worry about mutated lifeforms pouring in from all directions at any moment. The safety of the city's inhabitants would greatly improve.

Lastly, even Ye Zhongming, an outsider, had noticed Black Dragon City's dense population. Millions were forced to live in half a city, creating a peculiar kind of prosperity, but also countless living problems.

Without proper maintenance, the city's environment would be unimaginable.

During Black Dragon City's brief summers, the stench was overwhelming. Despite efforts to manage it, the root issue remained—too many people in too little space, without modern sanitation systems.

Expanding the city's area by a third would reduce population density, alleviating, if not solving, these problems.

As the leaders pondered, they realized the benefits were numerous, and the drawbacks... few.

"Mr. Ye, your suggestion is excellent. We understand the positive changes a wall would bring. But..."

Elder An frowned. "The climate poses too great a challenge. With our current technology, constructing a wall would be difficult."

In the freezing cold, such a massive project faced countless technical hurdles.

"Also, this idea has been proposed before. But reality doesn't permit it. Black Dragon City cannot defend against mutated lifeforms while diverting massive manpower to construction. It would mean facing endless waves of attacks—a battle we cannot afford. If it escalates into an all-out war, that's not what we want."

Elder An's concerns were valid. Before the wall was complete, mutated lifeforms would interfere. Humans would be forced into direct conflict, likely escalating into a full-scale war.

Ye Zhongming smiled. "Cloud Peak will help you solve the technical challenges. We can also provide some materials. As for the wall's design, I believe you already have ample experience."

He was referring to the sturdy front wall—Black Dragon City had built it well.

"As for the mutated lifeforms, I guarantee they won't pose a major threat to the wall for two months."

Elder An and the others exchanged glances. Finally, Elder An coughed and asked, "Mr. Ye, with all due respect, the northern wastes have two level-nine lifeforms. Within Black Dragon City, there are at least a dozen level-eights. Did your guarantee account for them?"

Chapter 1559: Lan You

"There's no need to consider them." Ye Zhongming's response was resolute. Seeing the stunned expressions on Old An and the others, he continued, "During the wall construction period, the mutated lifeforms won't launch attacks—at the very least, there will definitely be no large-scale assaults."

The people of Black Dragon City exchanged glances, unsure how to proceed with the decision.

They didn't dare question Ye Zhongming. As the number one in the nation, he wouldn't speak carelessly. If he said so, there must be a reason. They just didn't understand the specifics and lacked confidence—after all, this was no trivial matter.

"Mr. Ye, even with Cloud Peak's assistance, building a city wall is no small project. It involves everyone in our city. We can't stake our future on the unknown."

Old An was rational. He didn't yield just because Ye Zhongming made the request, but did his best to voice his thoughts.

It couldn't be denied that constructing a wall here would greatly benefit Black Dragon City's evolvers. However, how to build it, the methods, the duration, and other details involved many complexities—it wasn't something Ye Zhongming could simply decide here.

Ye Zhongming's sudden proposal after his return was inherently 'suspicious.'

They feared the might of Ye Zhongming and Cloud Peak, but if it truly came down to survival, the people of Black Dragon City wouldn't hesitate to fight to the death.

Ye Zhongming smiled, understanding their concerns.

"The reason I proposed this suggestion is, first, because it offers immense benefits to you—something you don't deny, right?"

Even though they were baffled by Ye Zhongming's proposal, the leaders of Black Dragon City had to admit that it would indeed be a tremendous advantage if such a wall were built.

"I can guarantee the mutated lifeforms won't attack. First, because I've reached an agreement with the Snow Wolf King, it won't attack Black Dragon City for the next three months. Additionally, I'll dispatch some Cloud Peak warriors here to assist in defense during the wall's construction. Second, aside from the Snow Wolf King, the other mutated lifeforms around Black Dragon City have lost most of their leadership and are now scattered, posing no threat to you."

As he spoke, Ye Zhongming gestured to Xiao Peng, who had been stationed in Black Dragon City. Xiao Peng stepped forward and, with a wave of his spatial equipment, dumped a pile of corpses onto the open ground outside.

The leaders of Black Dragon City took one look and felt their hearts tremble.

These corpses were all Level 7 and Level 8 beings. The Level 7 ones aside, there were over a dozen Level 8 creatures alone.

Among them were some they were very familiar with—old acquaintances, so to speak. For example, that annoying mutated weasel, the flying mutated moth, and the mutated musk ox that had once left a massive scar on Hai Dayu.

These were all overlords of Black Dragon City's mutated lifeform-controlled zones. And now, they were just lifeless corpses on the ground.

The leaders' jaws dropped.

They weren't surprised by the killing of Level 8 lifeforms—hunting such creatures was their primary task now.

But how did they usually hunt Level 8 lifeforms? First, they had to locate one, then observe and gather intel, devise a plan, and execute it through ambushes, traps, poison, or lures.

Typically, it took at least twenty days to a month from discovery to kill.

Even now, with occasional cooperation, they could only kill two or three Level 8 lifeforms a month. If they exceeded four, it was considered a bumper harvest.

That was why Black Dragon City currently had only a handful of Eight-Star evolved.

Not every faction was like Cloud Peak, where any random Level 8 being could solo others of the same tier.

Now, Cloud Peak's people had gone out for a stroll—yes, judging by the time, it really was just a stroll—and returned not only unharmed by the level nine lifeform but also having struck a deal with it. On top of that, they'd cleared out Black Dragon City's mutated lifeforms.

This...

At this point, the people of Black Dragon City had to admit the vast gap between them. Cloud Peak's casual gains surpassed their months of effort.

Old Long walked over to inspect the corpses and nodded to his companions.

They had already noticed something odd about the wounds. Most of the fatal injuries seemed to have been inflicted by canine lifeforms. Upon closer examination, this was confirmed, with clear traces of ice elemental energy in the wounds.

What did this mean? It meant the Snow Wolf King's pack had killed most of these lifeforms!

After all, Yellow Ball wasn't an ice-type lifeform.

It also indirectly proved that Ye Zhongming had indeed made direct contact with the Snow Wolf King, and the agreement was likely genuine.

They couldn't fathom how humans and a Level 9 lifeform could coexist peacefully.

"Mr. Ye, if this is truly the case, then the wall construction proposal is indeed feasible. But this old man still doesn't understand—why are you doing this?"

Old An took a deep breath. Knowing that Ye Zhongming had proposed this and resolved all their concerns, the matter was as good as settled. Since that was the case, he had to ask for the reason. He didn't believe the nation's number one was some saint here to help Black Dragon City with construction.

After taking a sip of tea brought by Xia Bai, Ye Zhongming replied, "Naturally, since I'm helping Black Dragon City, I hope Black Dragon City can help me in return."

The leaders exchanged bitter smiles. Once this top expert spoke, they had no choice but to comply.

“I hope this place can become a friendly city to Cloud Peak. Cloud Peak wishes to set up shops here, establish a teleportation array, and also hopes you’ll allow Cloud Peak to station troops here temporarily when necessary. Rest assured, we won’t compete for hunting grounds—Cloud Peak warriors will never appear within your designated zones.”

This... The leaders nodded reluctantly. Though uneasy, they agreed. After all, Cloud Peak could have simply come here to do business or hunt without asking. Did Black Dragon City really want to declare war on Cloud Peak? That would be like an egg striking a rock.

Once they mentally agreed, they quickly realized the mutual benefits.

Cloud Peak could sell their products here, opening a new market to earn huge profits while collecting materials, magic crystals, ores, and other essentials. Meanwhile, Black Dragon City could purchase Cloud Peak’s signature weapons, equipment, potions, and even demon crystal weapons or gene warriors.

Chapter 1559.5- Lan You

It was a win-win.

As for Cloud Peak’s temporary troop stationing, they didn’t fully grasp the purpose but saw no major issue. If Cloud Peak truly wanted this place, stationing troops or not made little difference.

“Second, I hope that when needed, the leaders of Black Dragon City can provide Cloud Peak with a stable rear base for tasks like... receiving, medical treatment, escorting supplies, and so on. Cloud Peak will offer generous compensation.”

A logistics base? The leaders were puzzled again.

What was Ye Zhongming planning? It sounded like preparations for war—receiving, medical treatment, escorting supplies...

Recalling Ye Zhongming's earlier high-priced intel purchases, they felt less surprised.

Decisions at his level were beyond their comprehension.

"Finally, have you all heard of the Puxing Town Trading Market?"

Old An and the others nodded. They'd heard of it, though details were scarce. It was said to be a thriving commercial hub with rare goods and things previously only seen in fiction—various guilds, mercenary groups, and the like.

"I'd like to implement some of Puxing Town's rules in Black Dragon City. This would require the leaders to designate a dedicated street. I'm willing to pay a fair price to purchase ownership of this street, with the proceeds distributed among you."

The leaders didn't immediately agree. They weren't fools—this was clearly a form of Cloud Peak's influence expansion. Ye Zhongming had said Cloud Peak wouldn't compete for local hunting grounds, but mercenary groups would inevitably form once a Puxing Town-style commercial street was established. If Black Dragon City hired them, it wouldn't violate the agreement.

Additionally, with various shops—Puxing Town’s rules reportedly allowed factions to open stores and trade directly with Cloud Peak at attractive prices—over time, this Cloud Peak-controlled street would become Black Dragon City’s commercial heart, ending the era of scattered stalls.

Eventually, Black Dragon City and Cloud Peak would become inseparable.

“Since Cloud Peak is entering Black Dragon City, we’ll share responsibility for its defense. I can provide ten Annihilation-type crystal cannons free of charge to guard the city, easing the Four Dragon Heads’ burden. If Black Dragon City is attacked and requests aid, Cloud Peak will dispatch troops to assist.”

This was effectively a mutual defense pact—though Cloud Peak only had obligations, not rights. If Cloud Peak’s headquarters were attacked, Black Dragon City wouldn’t be required to send troops.

This was an attractive proposal for the leaders.

No matter Cloud Peak’s intentions—whether infiltration or otherwise—it was ultimately more beneficial than harmful for Black Dragon City. With Cloud Peak’s protection, they’d feel much more secure.

Take, for example, that bear king that often came by to glare. The leaders constantly worried it might storm the city.

Moreover, agreeing to this meant Cloud Peak would inevitably intervene in the upcoming battle against the northern red-haired foes, ensuring victory!

Once victorious, Black Dragon City would dominate the region, free from external threats.

The benefits were substantial, while the drawbacks were uncertain and long-term. There was no reason not to agree.

The leaders saw things clearly—hitching a ride on Cloud Peak’s coattails wasn’t a bad idea.

The agreement was quickly reached, without any written contract—just verbal terms. Both sides understood: if Cloud Peak, the dominant party, chose to honor it, verbal or written made no difference. If they didn’t, even ten thousand contracts would be worthless.

After ironing out details, the matter was settled. Cloud Peak’s warriors began setting up a teleportation array. Soon, the promised technicians and construction materials would arrive en masse, and Cloud Peak’s main forces could appear here at any time.

That evening, accompanied by Old An, Old Long, Hai Dayu, and other Black Dragon City leaders, Ye Zhongming entered the city walls.

This was a small request of his—to see the Four Dragon Heads' energy source, which attracted Level 9 lifeforms.

“Ever since this base energy device was built, I’ve struggled to find an energy source. The Four Dragon Heads’ own power isn’t infinite—it depletes with use.”

Old An led the way, explaining to Ye Zhongming.

“I’m no genius like Master Le, who can use magic crystals or even our own power as energy. So, I had to find alternatives.”

“In the end, I succeeded.”

By now, the group had reached the thickest part of the city walls. Beyond the walls’ protection, there were two additional layers: one of thick ice reinforced by a special job, and another of a meter-thick metal room.

Ye Zhongming saw the base energy device inside the metal room, and at its center, a small, multicolored sprout rhythmically pulsing like a breath.

“This... what is it?” Ye Zhongming was stunned by the overwhelming life energy emanating from the sprout, no taller than twenty centimeters.

“It’s called Lan You!” Old An’s eyes glazed over with fascination.

“Obtaining it was pure luck. It grew at the summit of the famed Changbai Mountain, guarded by two Level 8 lifeforms. We lost over four thousand people bringing it back safely. As you can see, this little thing provides ample energy for the Four Dragon Heads and even nourishes them.”

Old An spoke admiringly.

Ye Zhongming observed closely. The light emitted during the sprout's "breathing" was directly absorbed by the base energy device, presumably converted into energy for the Four Dragon Heads.

The sprout itself drew nutrients from its roots underground.

"Does it not grow larger?"

Ye Zhongming asked curiously.

"It grows exactly three centimeters a year—precisely," Old An replied. "As for the rest—why this thing, which has no level, is coveted by Level 9 lifeforms; why its emitted light can be absorbed and converted; whether it will flower or bear fruit; whether it might harm us in the future—I have no idea. Back then, I just thought it might be useful and took the gamble, never expecting it to work."

Ye Zhongming examined it from all angles before suddenly turning to Old An. "If I can provide Black Dragon City with defensive equipment matching the Four Dragon Heads' strength, or substitute another energy source, would you allow me to experiment on this sprout?"

Chapter 1560: Bleeding

"No way!"

Old An instinctively rejected.

This thing was hard-won. Back then, Black Dragon City didn't have as many experts as it does now. It was Old An risking his life and making countless promises to unite everyone. The journey to the summit of Changbai Mountain alone costs over 500 lives.

By the time they obtained Lan You, nearly 4,000 people died in a single battle. On the return journey, they were intercepted by many mutated creatures that had caught wind of it, and even more lives were lost.

It could be said that the value of Lan You was so high that the evolved of Black Dragon City considered it a priceless treasure!

Old An felt this even more strongly! He had sacrificed too much for this little thing.

Now, Lan You could be said to represent the safety of Black Dragon City in a way. No matter how much Old An revered Ye Zhongming, he would never offer it as a bargaining chip to curry favor.

So he didn't even consider Ye Zhongming's proposal and outright rejected it.

Ye Zhongming wasn't surprised. He stood up and walked over to Old An.

The big shots from Black Dragon City who had accompanied Old An grew tense.

If Ye Zhongming truly wanted Lan You, they knew they couldn't stop him. The fact that he had stated his intentions outright showed some sincerity, but like Old An, they didn't believe anything could match the value of Lan You.

If the number one in the Chinese region really intended to force a sale, they could only resist with all their might. Thus, they couldn't help but show a hint of hostility.

Ye Zhongming waved his hand, signaling them to calm down.

"Old An, everyone, I know this thing is very important to you. It has been protecting you here for a long time, and you have a special attachment to it. I understand."

Ye Zhongming took a slight step back, giving these big shots a greater sense of security.

"Like you, I'm not entirely sure what this thing does, but I'd like to experiment with it. It might help with one of my abilities. However, after the experiment, I can't guarantee whether it will remain as it is now or can still provide energy to the Four Dragon Heads. That's why I want to trade it for something of equal value."

Seeing Old An frown and about to speak, Ye Zhongming gestured for him to wait and pointed at Lan You. "It may indeed be priceless to you, but everyone knows that everything has a price in the apocalypse—even my life. If someone offers a high enough price, perhaps the entire Chinese region would unite to kill me."

"The same goes for Lan You."

Ye Zhongming's words quieted the Black Dragon City big shots. They knew he wasn't lying. In the apocalypse, nothing was truly priceless. For example, if someone offered a nine-star evolution potion in exchange for Lan You, even Old An would agree without hesitation.

Through their interactions with the Cloud Peak King over the past two days, they knew the number one in the Chinese region had a solid reputation and wouldn't resort to underhanded or greedy tactics. Seeing Ye Zhongming speak so earnestly, the people of Black Dragon City began considering his words for the first time.

"Lan You is precious, but what about the things I have? Aren't they just as precious?"

Ye Zhongming pointed upward. "The Four Dragon Heads, powered by Lan You, are incredibly powerful—enough to pose a threat even to level-nine lifeforms. But it's just a threat. If a level-nine lifeform is determined, the Four Dragon Heads might not stop it. It's not that their power is lacking, but there are too few of them. Against a high-speed charging level-nine creature, it's uncertain how many strikes the Four Dragon Heads can unleash, let alone how many will hit. But I suspect it won't be many."

Old An and the others were speechless because Ye Zhongming was right.

The Four Dragon Heads' attacks were undeniably strong and could even switch between multiple attack modes.

But their firing rate was mediocre, and their accuracy... well, was somewhat luck-dependent.

Ye Zhongming's words showed he had already sent people to gather intel on the Four Dragon Heads, learning about the weapon's few demonstrated strengths and weaknesses.

Since he wanted Lan You and was willing to pay a price for it, he naturally wanted to minimize that price and avoid giving Black Dragon City any leverage to demand exorbitant terms.

“The solution I’m proposing can perfectly address this issue for you. Not only that, but the overall defensive power will surpass that of the Four Dragon Heads—by a lot.”

Dragon Elder, who carried seven swords on his back, was the first to speak. “Empty words mean nothing. It’s hard for us to believe you based on just that.”

“Isn’t my name a guarantee in itself?” Ye Zhongming replied with an air of dominance, leaving the Black Dragon City representatives with nothing more to say.

They had heard of Ye Zhongming’s ruthlessness, vengefulness, protectiveness, and underhanded tactics—but never of him breaking his word.

Even Ye Zhongming’s enemies had never accused the number one in the Chinese region of going back on his promises.

In the Chinese region, Ye Zhongming was one of the most trustworthy among the top-tier leaders. If he said it, then it must be true.

“The Four Dragon Heads are strong, but have they ever withstood attacks from multiple major factions of evolved? Have they ever held off millions of mutated creatures? No! But Cloud Peak has.”

“If you hand Lan You over to me, Cloud Peak will provide twenty Annihilation-type demon crystal cannons in exchange, five of which will be the Ultimate variant—each capable of threatening level-nine lifeforms. After adjustments by Master Le, these cannons will have flexible and wide firing arcs. When all are activated, there will be no blind spots within their range.”

Ye Zhongming revealed what he intended to trade for Lan You: magic crystal cannons!

And not just any cannons—he was offering Cloud Peak’s most advanced model, the Annihilation Ultimate-type!

There was no other way. To convince the evolved of Black Dragon City to part with Lan You, he had to offer something truly valuable.

As expected, the mention of demon crystal cannons—especially the most advanced variant—immediately piqued the big shots’ interest.

However, Hai Dayu soon objected. “Mr. Ye, Lan You is a source of energy. With it, we don’t have to worry about the Four Dragon Heads running out of power. But if we switch to demon crystal cannons, that’s different—they consume demon crystals. Every battle would come with a hefty cost. What do you say to that?”

Ye Zhongming nodded. “You’re right, that is indeed an issue. My promise is this: Cloud Peak will handle the maintenance of these twenty demon crystal cannons indefinitely, free of charge. As for the demon crystals, we’ll also provide enough energy for two hundred full volleys. Additionally, we’ll construct a comprehensive defensive system for you, learned from the races in the sky, turning all of Black Dragon

City into a massive defensive formation. We'll also supply two years' worth of energy for non-combat operations."

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Seeing the Black Dragon City big shots still looking unconvinced, Ye Zhongming analyzed further. "Truthfully, you don't face attacks on the city every year, and situations requiring the Four Dragon Heads are even rarer. From what I've heard, the Four Dragon Heads have only been used twice in the past year, with fewer than ten activations each time."

Noticing their surprised expressions, Ye Zhongming smiled and continued. "At that rate, each Dragon Head only fires about five times a year. Switching to demon crystal cannons would mean five full volleys at most. Let's be generous and say twenty volleys per year. The magic crystals I'm providing would last you ten years! Fine, let's account for unexpected factors and cut that in half, five years! And that's not even counting the invisible benefits of having a complete defensive system that makes Black Dragon City impregnable."

Old An and the others listened and thought it made sense. Even if it were just five years, if they were still alive by then, they might have already evolved to nine stars, rendering such defenses almost unnecessary.

"Once this deal is done, I'll give each of you a gold-grade piece of equipment. Every seven-star evolved will get a green-grade piece, and every six-star evolved will receive a full set of silver-grade equipment. Plus, fifty thousand white-grade pieces."

After laying out the replacement plan, Ye Zhongming began sweetening the deal for the decision-makers.

In Black Dragon City, gold-grade equipment was considered top-tier. These individuals only had one or two pieces each, and the less fortunate might not even have any.

Six-star evolved and above were the backbone of Black Dragon City. If they stood to benefit, they wouldn't oppose the trade.

"But Lan You nourishes the Four Dragon Heads! Who's to say they won't level up one day and become seven-colored-grade equipment?"

Hai Dayu muttered this, then shrank back, afraid Ye Zhongming might take offense and kill him on the spot.

Ye Zhongming laughed. "Brother Hai, do you really think that's possible? Even if it is, how long would it take? Three years? Five? Ten?"

"Lan You only grows three centimeters a year! Right now, it's still a sprout. The energy it emits is just enough to keep the Four Dragon Heads from deteriorating and allow them to fire when needed. How much is left to nourish them? You've all witnessed their changes since the Four Dragon Heads were created. Have you seen any signs of their quality improving?"

Though they wanted to argue, the big shots had no grounds to do so. The Four Dragon Heads might have changed slightly, but it was hardly noticeable—they weren't even sure if it was just their imagination.

"How about this? I'll also give each of you a seven-star evolution potion."

At these words, the big shots fell silent. After about five seconds, a timid voice spoke up.

“I... I think it’s acceptable.”

It was Yan Shuangfei. Ever since learning that “Mr. Ye” was Ye Zhongming, the young woman had been following him around like an eager puppy, not saying a word—just batting her big, adoring eyes at him. The lovestruck look on her face was almost comical.

Now, she raised her delicate little hand like a fragile maiden. The other Black Dragon City big shots could only sigh inwardly. No matter how much she pretended, she was still a bloodthirsty little devil. And now, without even exchanging a word with her, she was already siding with the outsider.

“Gene lifeforms. I want a unit of gene lifeforms.” Old An gritted his teeth and made his final demand.

Ye Zhongming frowned.

“Here’s the thing. Even if you had gene lifeforms, you couldn’t utilize their full combat potential. Maintaining and nurturing them requires a certain level of technical expertise, which Black Dragon City currently lacks. Even if I gave them to you, they’d gradually lose effectiveness over time.”

“Instead, I’ll offer a hundred self-destruct gene warriors. These don’t require complex maintenance—just some sealed cultivation pods and nutrient solutions. Once they launch their suicide attacks, they can threaten seven-star lifeforms. Even an eight-star lifeform caught in the blast radius of several dozen would be in mortal danger. How does that sound?”

Old An exchanged glances with his comrades, then nodded firmly.

“Lan You... is yours!”

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News from the northern wilderness continued to pour in. Some Black Dragon City residents had even spotted the Talking Lady leading thousands of zombies across the ice plains.

As Ye Zhongming compiled this information, he also oversaw the installation of the demon crystal cannons on the city walls.

Once the deal was struck, the teleportation array was set up that very day. Cloud Peak’s resources, weapons, and personnel began pouring into the northern wilderness in large numbers. Three days later, the demon crystal cannons had replaced the Four Dragon Heads as Black Dragon City’s guardian deities.

Many people gazed in awe at these massive, thick-barreled weapons—especially after the test firing. The devastating power of the Ultimate variant left the evolved of Black Dragon City utterly stunned. Old An and the others were completely convinced: these cannons were no weaker than the Four Dragon Heads. Their range was even greater, and they were far more flexible.

The Four Dragon Heads were relocated to the ruins of the tallest building near Blood Street at the city center, where they would serve as a supplementary defense system.

With all this settled, Lan You was handed over to Ye Zhongming.

Ye Zhongming returned to Cloud Peak via the teleportation array and sought out Liu Zhenghong without delay.

“Little Ye, the Death King Tree’s evolution is at its final stage. Why drag me out now? If the evolution fails and it doesn’t attain human form, do you realize it might turn on us after reaching nine stars?”

Sister Hong’s tone didn't hint at jest—she was dead serious.

Ye Zhongming offered an apologetic smile. “Sister Hong, it’s just... this thing is truly extraordinary.”

The moment Lan You was brought out, Liu Zhenghong was captivated.

“Such intense life energy... How is this possible?”

Sister Hong leaned in so close that her face almost touched Lan Glaze.

“Are these its roots?” she asked, eyeing the massive root system—over a thousand cubic meters in volume—that had been dug up from beneath the soil.

“Yes. We feared damaging it, so we excavated it with the surrounding soil. But once unearthed, the soil quickly dried up and crumbled away, revealing the roots. I rushed back immediately.”

Liu Zhenghong nodded. Unsure of what this thing was, she didn't dare simply cut off a piece for study, fearing she might kill it. Lan You did seem rather delicate.

"What's your plan?" After observing for a while longer and noticing Lan You beginning to wilt slightly, Liu Zhenghong knew they had to act fast.

Ye Zhongming pondered for a moment. "I want to experiment with it using my Gardener job."

"Have you considered the risks?" Liu Zhenghong asked.

"Yes, but it should be fine."

Sister Hong was decisive. She immediately prepared a testing site in the back mountain's research area, gathered a few researchers skilled in this field, and—along with Ye Zhongming and Xia Bai—began the experiment.

Ye Zhongming placed his hand on Lan You and activated his Gardener job!

A sudden mutation occurred!