

## Apocalypse 1576

### Chapter 1576: Killing the bear

This spinning windmill-like skill gave the Bear King what seemed like the ability to fly, and at incredible speed. Though the Undead Dragonfish was merely an undead creature, its birth and inheritance of the Nine-Winged Crow's legacy proved it possessed formidable abilities, including speed.

Among Cloud Peak's flying creatures, Yangos was undoubtedly the fastest. After it, the Undead Dragonfish came next.

Yet even such a swift being was chased down and swatted out of the sky by the Bear King, spinning like a top from the ground.

Broken bones and scattered energy traced the Undead Dragonfish's descent through the night, a glaring sight.

After receiving the Snow Wolf King's energy transfer, the Bear King unleashed terrifying combat power. In mere moments, it had repelled and injured four nearly top-tier level-eight creatures—Yangos, the ice birds, and the Undead Dragonfish—while also incapacitating all eight-star evolved, including Xia Bai and Xiao Min, along with an equal number of battle beasts.

The Bear King had shown Cloud Peak the true horror of a level nine lifeform.

Only Ye Zhongming, Yellow Ball, and Nine Treasure were still standing among Cloud Peak's remaining combatants.

The situation had turned dire in an instant.

Yellow Ball was in poor condition, injured from its earlier brief clash with the Bear King. Its beast armor was damaged, leaving it nearly useless against the level-nine creature's attacks.

Ye Zhongming wasn't faring much better. Using the Soul Shattering Bone Staff to injure the Snow Wolf King heavily had drained much of his mental energy. Though he had taken recovery potions, neither time nor circumstances allowed him to recuperate properly. Without sufficient mental energy, his combat power was halved.

Moreover, activating his bloodline had left the energy gates behind in the Snow Wolf King's battlefield, meaning he couldn't use them to ambush the Bear King. The Cloud Peak King had little initiative against a level nine opponent without this ability.

The only one still at full strength was Nine Treasure. But... Nine Treasure, the giant earthworm, was essentially a support-type creature with limited offensive capabilities, mostly relying on brute-force whipping attacks or spitting venom. Asking it to face the Bear King in its current state was pushing it too far.

When the Bear King landed, the earth trembled beneath its arrogance. The powerless Young Army could only watch in frustration.

But they remained calm, knowing charging in would be suicide.

Xiao Xuan and other core members locked their eyes on the battlefield, watching Ye Zhongming. If their leader chose to keep fighting, they would wait. If he retreated, they would cover him!

"I can still fight!"

Xia Bai rushed out from the female guards. The Bear King's earlier attack had left countless small wounds on her body, many merging into gruesome gashes and bloody holes.

Yet, as the strongest among them, she retained some combat ability.

The fact that even Xia Bai had been reduced to this state showed just how powerful the Bear King had become.

She flew straight to Nine Treasure's side. The giant earthworm, overjoyed to see its master unharmed, wriggled excitedly, its strange rabbit-like ears standing erect, tinged with crimson.

"If..." A glow enveloped both Xia Bai and Nine Treasure, pulsing in sync like breath.

"...it doesn't work, you must escape!"

With that, the light intensified, and Xia Bai was absorbed into Nine Treasure's body, not through its mouth, but directly merging into its midsection.

Ye Zhongming frowned. Seeing that he refused to retreat, Xia Bai had chosen to attack, clearly intending to stall the Bear King.

But retreat wasn't an option. Yangos, the Undead Dragon-fish, Red Hair, and the ice birds couldn't quickly disengage, their fates unknown. Could he abandon them and flee?

Even if he survived and became a nine-star evolved, this moment would haunt him forever. Not in the way of cultivation novels, where inner demons might drive one to madness, but as an unending torment.

After five years of surviving and fighting together, these people and beasts had become his comrades—even family.

He couldn't abandon them.

Ye Zhongming's gaze darkened. He stowed the Harvester Mimicry Shooter and drew the Undead Sand Moon Blade, slashing at the ground to create fissures while sending the round, six-tentacled hell creature to intercept the Bear King.

The hell creature, oblivious to concepts like "level-eight" or "level-nine," charged fearlessly, launching itself like a cannonball.

The Bear King, having just landed, was recovering from the impact. Even a level nine lifeform couldn't defy the laws of physics.

Now that it had stopped spinning, Ye Zhongming noticed something—despite its devastating attacks, the Bear King had also taken damage.

The Undead Dragon-fish's Nine-Winged Crow mist had left patches of corrosion on its fur, turning white areas charred black. The mist's corrosive power was terrifying!

Moreover, the Bear King's breathing had quickened, its movements heavier. Continuous skill use had taken its toll.

In this state, the hell creature crashed into the Bear King.

Annoyed by yet another challenger, the Bear King roared and swatted it away.

Ye Zhongming sighed inwardly.

Today's summoned hell creature had disappointed him.

Though it had helped restrain the Snow Wolf King alongside Red Hair, it had otherwise shown little remarkable ability, even seeming somewhat dull.

This one was far inferior compared to the last hell creature summoned through bloodline activation.

Logically, a top-grade bloodline summon should be powerful—if not level nine, then at least peak level eight.

This one, though obedient, was practically useless.

Chapter 1576.5- Killing the bear

As Ye Zhongming advanced, slashing the ground to summon undead minions as distractions, Nine Treasure—now merged with Xia Bai—transformed.

Its body shrank, and two bumps formed on its back. Soon, a "mini" flying earthworm, only three stories tall, hovered before the Bear King.

Within its large black eyes, Xia Bai's silhouette was clearly visible.

Beast-Human Fusion—the strongest combat form for any evolved and their battle beast.

Even Ye Zhongming, Yellow Ball, and Yangos lacked this ability.

The transformed Nine Treasure spat venom at the Bear King before circling sharply, its wing-blades slicing at the beast's back from an awkward angle.

Nine Treasure was tiny—but far more agile than the Bear King's bulk.

The Bear King could no longer fly without its spinning attack, and its massive body turned sluggishly.

It swatted away the venom, though some stuck to its paw, sizzling faintly. But a level nine lifeform cared little for such minor corrosion.

As for the wing strike, it barely stung, not even breaking the fur.

The Bear King turned, swiping at Nine Treasure, determined to crush this pest first.

But then—wham!

Something slammed into its back, staggering the mountain-like beast.

The Bear King whirled—that damned ball was back!

Still alive?!

The Bear King knew its own strength. When enraged, it could smash mountains with a single strike.

Seeing the hell creature bounce back for another charge, the Bear King bellowed and put full force into its next swipe, sending it flying again.

This time—DIE!

Turning back, it caught Nine Treasure's wing, slicing its shoulder. It hurt, but not much.

A headbutt sent the "fly" spiraling away, blood trailing behind.

Pathetic.

That was the Bear King's verdict.

Ye Zhongming seized the moment, closing in with a slash at the Bear King's leg—the highest point he could reach without jumping.

A small cut opened. Not deep, but it drew blood.

The Bear King yowled, kicking Ye Zhongming away.

Its almost-human face flickered with pain—but only for a second.

The Undead Sand Moon Blade's debuffs couldn't last long on a level nine lifeform—not even two seconds.

Still, the sensation pissed it off. It lumbered toward Ye Zhongming, raising a paw to crush him.

Kill the leader, break their spirit.

But before the strike landed—BAM!

Its arm was knocked aside, the paw slamming into the ground ten meters away. The impact sent Ye Zhongming bouncing.

The Bear King glared—that damn ball AGAIN!

Now it realized: this thing wasn't normal.

Nothing survived multiple direct hits from it.

The ice birds still hadn't gotten up, writhing in the distance.

Ye Zhongming, spared once more, noticed it too. The hell creature had taken several blows, yet showed no visible damage.

Such insane defense?

Even Ye Zhongming's defenses, among the best of human evolved, were in tatters after facing the Snow Wolf King and Bear King. How was this thing unscathed?

Abandoning Ye Zhongming, the Bear King focused on the hell creature. This time, elemental energy surged around its paw.

A massive ice block materialized mid-air as it swung, while another erupted from the ground.

CRASH!

The two ice slabs sandwiched the hellspawn, deforming its spherical body.

The Bear King grinned. No matter how tough, this ends it.

Then—PAIN!

Something struck the back of its skull.

What now?

It touched the spot—wet. Blood?

The Bear King stared in disbelief at Nine Treasure. Its attacks grew stronger?!

Today's enemies were all freaks—bleeding yet still fighting back.

It unleashed another innate ability with a silent roar (inaudible to others). Nine Treasure convulsed as if struck by an invisible force, hurtling backward and carving a bloody trench into the ground.

Annoying pests—DIE ALREADY!

Now, only Ye Zhongming remained.

The Cloud Peak King stood, blood dripping from his lips. In a flash, he teleported beneath the Bear King, slashing the same wound on its leg before retreating.

But the distance was too short. A casual backhand sent him flying again.

The Bear King raised its foot, ready to stomp him flat.

These ants had been troublesome, but victory was still his.

Then—WHOOSH!

The Bear King almost screamed.

That ball not only didn't die, it knocked it again!

Chapter 1577: A talisman

This time, the Bear King did not continue to struggle with the spherical lifeform but instead stomped down toward Ye Zhongming.

Since that thing refuses to die, deal with it last! Kill this one first!

The massive foot slammed down toward Ye Zhongming. It was easy to imagine that if he were stepped on, given his current condition, he would either die or be severely injured.

As for the spherical lifeform, so what if it got bumped? It wouldn't matter!

The enormous foot descended like a collapsing mountain. Ye Zhongming's vision was blurred by blood, making it hard to see clearly, but that didn't stop him from taking action to save himself.

He stabbed the Undead Sand Moon Blade into the ground, using it as leverage to push himself backward. The frozen soil of the North reduced friction, allowing him to slide away quickly.

As the foot fell, the shadow in his vision grew larger. Though Ye Zhongming's sliding speed wasn't slow, by his estimation, he still wouldn't escape the stomp of this level-nine lifeform.

Yet Ye Zhongming didn't panic. He remained calm, watching the shadow draw closer. At a certain moment, his body suddenly vanished, reappearing at the edge of the shadow.

**BOOM!**

The Bear King's massive foot landed, the sheer force causing the entire patch of ground to collapse. Though Ye Zhongming had barely managed to escape by sliding and teleporting at the last moment, the collapsing ground and violent tremors sent him tumbling downward.

An evolved wouldn't be as helpless as an ordinary person. Even in his injured state, Ye Zhongming reacted swiftly. He pushed off the fractured chunks of earth, trying to leap out, but his luck was poor—these chunks were already falling, shifting unpredictably with the slightest touch, preventing him from gaining enough momentum to escape.

He wasn't afraid of being unable to climb back up, but everyone knew that once the Bear King finished stomping, it would lift its foot for another attack. If Ye Zhongming had been trapped in the pit by then, escaping would have been nearly impossible.

At that moment, as Ye Zhongming struggled to leap upward, he suddenly sensed the Bear King freeze for a brief instant. He barely had time to register this before chains shot out from his shoulders—not to flee, but toward a wound on the Bear King's body, one corroded by the black mist of the Undead Dragon-fish.

Snap!

The chains pierced into the wound. Though not deep, it was enough for Ye Zhongming to pull himself toward the Bear King's head.

He knew why the Bear King had frozen—it was a negative status effect: Stiffness!

And why had stiffness occurred? Because... the Undead Sand Moon Blade was embedded in the Bear King's foot.

When Ye Zhongming had fled earlier, he had left the weapon stabbed into the ground, blade up, handle in the ground.

So when the Bear King stomped down, the blade, driven by the level-nine lifeform's own strength, pierced straight through its paw.

Inflicting a wound on the Bear King would normally trigger negative effects, but they'd be so brief they'd be almost unnoticeable.

But this time was different. The weapon had completely impaled the Bear King's paw, greatly amplifying the severity of the negative effect.

This time, the stiffness was obvious.

BANG!

The hellish lifeform crashed into the Bear King's head, jolting the level-nine beast. Due to the stiffness, the Bear King's retaliatory swipe was slightly delayed, missing the rebounding sphere.

But as its paw extended, a black light flashed past, slicing open another wound.

The stiffness soon faded, and the Bear King's other paw struck Nine Treasures, sending the giant earthworm crashing into the ground and inflicting heavy injuries once again.

There was no helping it—the Bear King's strength was simply too overwhelming.

Ye Zhongming reached the height of the Bear King's head at that moment.

He raised his Harvester Mimicry Shooter and fired rapidly at the Bear King's eyes.

The micro-engraved bullets had already been exhausted during the battle with the Snow Wolf King and earlier attacks on the Bear King. Now, Ye Zhongming could only fire ordinary green-grade bullets.

But even these were high-quality consumables. Only Ye Zhongming could afford to use green-grade bullets as standard ammunition in the entire Chinese region.

Space Stack, combined with Bullet Rain.

A shooting skill paired with the firearm's rapid-fire mode.

A barrage of bullets streaked toward the Bear King's eyes.

Even a creature famed for its defense couldn't ignore the attacks of a purple-grade weapon. Unable to retract its arms in time, the Bear King abruptly lowered its head, tanking the shots with its thick skull, then lunged forward, slamming its head into Ye Zhongming.

Like a kite with its string cut, Ye Zhongming was sent flying.

The forces of Cloud Peak mounted another assault, but once again, the Bear King repelled them.

As he crashed to the ground, Ye Zhongming felt despair for the first time.

To be honest, Cloud Peak had performed exceptionally well today. Facing two level-nine lifeforms, they had already killed one, and though the other seemed invincible in its ferocity, they had still left it battered and bleeding from multiple wounds.

Other factions needed alliances of multiple organizations, sometimes even mobilizing hundreds of thousands of people, just to kill a single level-nine lifeform.

And Cloud Peak was facing the sixth and tenth strongest level-nine lifeforms in the Chinese region—far from ordinary.

Escape? Impossible now. Everyone was injured, and no one could outrun the Bear King, which, despite its bulk, was deceptively fast.

So... what could they do?

As soon as he regained control of his body, Ye Zhongming made a decision.

Perhaps... it was their only chance.

A silent exchange, unknown to the Bear King, passed between the remaining combat-capable members of Cloud Peak.

The first to strike was Yellow Ball, who had been lying in wait. It suddenly appeared beside the Bear King's leg and bit down hard.

The Bear King roared—its defense had been breached.

Its paw swung toward Yellow Ball, but the hellish lifeform crashed into it, deflecting the blow.

Unlike before, the hellish lifeform didn't use the recoil to retreat. Instead, it wrapped its tentacles around the Bear King's paw!

The Bear King wouldn't allow this. Its other paw swung down—

But a swift, spinning figure shot forward, its razor-sharp wings slashing into the attacking paw.

Blood sprayed. The Bear King howled in agony. A deep, bone-exposing gash split its paw, nearly severing it at the joint.

The trait of "greater injuries, greater strength" also applied to Nine Treasures, now in its merged human-beast form.

Suddenly, the Bear King opened its mouth—two fangs shot out like projectiles, striking Nine Treasures mid-air. The poor giant earthworm and Xia Bai were forcibly separated from their merged state and crashed to the ground, unable to rise.

The Bear King, eyes bloodshot, prepared to slaughter them all.

A mist of ice and strands of hair shot from afar, entangling the Bear King's other leg.

For now, the level-nine lifeform was rooted in place.

Using those chains again, the King of Cloud Peak ascended before the Bear King's eyes—a yellow talisman in his hand.

Chapter 1578: Slicing head

The icy winds of the tundra howled as they always did every night.

But here, it felt different.

On the ground, several massive dark figures struggled or gasped for breath, surrounded by congealed blood and the faint remnants of a dissipating metallic scent.

Yangos, the Icebird, the Undead Dragon-fish, and the female guards—all had lost their combat strength. Given time, they might have recovered somewhat, but the battle had raged at its fiercest without pause. From the moment Yangos was first struck down until now, not much time had actually passed.

It wasn't that the people of Cloud Peak didn't want to drag things out—they simply couldn't. Facing a fully enraged level-nine lifeform, staying alive was already an achievement.

If they wanted to leave—or rather, if they wanted to live—there was only one possibility left: defeat this level-nine lifeform.

Stalling for time or attempting escape was no longer an option.

The only ones still capable of fighting were Yellow Ball, Ye Zhongming, and that hellish lifeform.

Red Hair and Nine Treasures had already expended their last reserves of strength.

The price they paid for this temporary immobilization of the terrifying Bear King was staggering. Yet everyone knew this restraint might shatter in the next second.

In Ye Zhongming's hand appeared a yellow talisman—his ultimate trump card.

Something he had possessed for a long time but never had the chance—or the heart—to use.

If this card was played successfully, victory was guaranteed.

But the prerequisites were brutally strict, and Ye Zhongming wasn't certain. He was gambling.

Win, and it would be a legendary battle—Cloud Peak's elites slaying two level-nine lifeforms.

Lose, and it would mean death—a second life, cut short once more.

This talisman was called "Fate's End."

Forget its ability momentarily—just activating it was nearly impossible under normal circumstances.

First, the evolution gap between user and target couldn't exceed two levels, and at the moment of use, their mental energy reserves couldn't differ by more than two tiers.

Second, the target had to be relatively motionless when used.

Third, the target had to be under at least one negative status effect.

Fourth, neither the user nor the target could be in perfect condition—both had to be injured.

Fifth, activating the talisman consumed two-thirds of the user's total mental energy.

Finally, the distance between the user and target's head couldn't exceed three meters.

At first glance, these conditions might not seem extreme. But considering this talisman was meant for high-tier lifeforms, keeping the target still was nearly impossible.

Think about it—if you could immobilize a target, even temporarily, wouldn't you have other ways to kill it? Why rely on this talisman?

Additionally, the requirement that both must be injured and the target must be debuffed meant this couldn't be used at the start of battle—only mid-fight, when both sides were worn down.

And inflicting a negative status on a high-level target? For example, right now, what kind of skill would it take to debuff a level-nine lifeform? Even if achieved, could the talisman be activated in that fleeting moment?

Worse, the first and fifth conditions combined made its use highly unpredictable.

A two-level evolution gap was easy to understand—but what did a two-level mental energy gap mean?

Ye Zhongming himself wasn't sure. He could only estimate based on the Bear King's strength, but his guesses were unreliable.

The only certainty was that, even as a level-nine, the Bear King's mental energy reserves were inferior to his.

But the condition compared their current mental energy, and right now, Ye Zhongming's reserves were nearly depleted. The gap was far beyond two levels. So what then?

And activating the talisman required two-thirds of his total mental energy—where would that come from?

Every single condition had to be met perfectly. Just thinking about it made success seem impossible.

Yet, at this moment, this was the best solution Ye Zhongming could think of—or rather, the only solution.

1. The evolution gap between Ye Zhongming and the Bear King was one level—satisfied.

2. The Bear King was temporarily immobilized by Yellow Ball, Red Hair, the Icebird, and the hell creatures, while its other paw was crippled by Nine Treasures—relatively motionless, satisfied.

3. Both Ye Zhongming and the Bear King were injured, not in perfect condition, satisfied.

4. Using the chains, Ye Zhongming had risen into the air, head within three meters of the Bear King's, satisfied.

5. As he drew the talisman, Ye Zhongming downed a fluorescent blue potion—a top-tier mental energy potion, instantly refilling his reserves.

During his ascent, he saw the Bear King's expression flicker—it was now under a "Confusion" debuff.

At that moment, he activated the talisman, consuming two-thirds of his mental energy. Simultaneously, Wind and Thunder appeared in his hand.

The King of Cloud Peak stared intently at the talisman. He knew—victory or defeat hinged on this instant.

If it failed—if their mental energy gap exceeded two levels—then... There would be no "then."

He had obtained this talisman long ago from the Gate of Sacrifice, with Xia Bai, Xiao Min, and Red Hair present. They knew what it was—and what he intended to do with it.

Now, lying on the ground, they watched just as intently as Ye Zhongming did. Their lives, his life, Cloud Peak's future—everything rested on this talisman.

Chapter 1578.5- Slicing head

For Cloud Peak, this was a moment of fate—and an agonizingly long one.

Then—

The talisman, mid-flight, dissolved into light, splitting into two strands that pierced Ye Zhongming and the Bear King.

Xia Bai, barely holding on, collapsed. Red Hair closed her eyes. The still-conscious female guard warriors paused, then let out shrieks.

The Bear King, snapping out of confusion, saw Ye Zhongming right before it and lunged to bite.

But then it saw the human raise his sword—not at it, but at himself.

A whisper followed, so soft even the Bear King couldn't hear it—but the intelligent level-nine lifeform read his lips.

"Goodbye."

Then—

The human severed his own head.

.....

Ye Zhongming kept rubbing his neck. Honestly, decapitating himself hadn't been a pleasant experience.

Cloud Peak's forces were cleaning up the battlefield—mostly the Youth Army, since there wasn't much to collect. They were mainly tending to the female guards' wounded. As for the two level-nine corpses, their methods weren't refined enough to process them, even dead ones.

But as they worked, the Youth Army members kept stealing glances at their leader, eyes filled with awe.

They had witnessed everything.

Against the Snow Wolf King, Ye Zhongming's top-grade bloodline activation, combined with Red Hair's efforts, had brought the legendary beast to its knees, culminating in blowing apart its jaw, tipping the scales irreversibly.

Against the Bear King, while the female guards and the Undead Dragon-fish had initially stolen the spotlight, the final moment—Ye Zhongming beheading himself mid-air—was something none would ever forget.

From their distant vantage, many hadn't even seen the talisman. All they saw was their leader committing suicide.

The shock had been absolute.

But it didn't last long—because moments later, the Bear King, which had been on the verge of victory, suddenly sprouted a bloody line across its neck before its head toppled to the ground, rolling far away.

Confusion reigned. Some, thinking Ye Zhongming had died, were devastated.

Then—

In a faint glow, their leader reappeared, unharmed, even his previous injuries gone.

Later, as explanations spread, their admiration deepened.

Put themselves in his place—could they have done it?

Suicide was one thing. But cutting off their own head?

Too brutal. Too bloody. What kind of resolve did that take?

In the end, Ye Zhongming had linked his life to the Bear King's through the talisman.

One dies, the other follows.

He chose suicide.

Of course, there had been alternatives—like letting the Bear King kill him. But that carried risks. What if it only crippled him instead? In that gap, the beast might have turned on the others.

So Ye Zhongming took the sure path—decapitation.

A gunshot might miss the heart. A blade to the neck would not.

And thanks to the elixir, granting him a second life, it wasn't truly the end.

Still, the memory of his head leaving his body lingered. Ye Zhongming kept rubbing his neck to dispel the phantom sensation.

They had won—but it wasn't even a tough victory.

Against two level-nine lifeforms, not a single Cloud Peak member had died. Only a few low-grade or fragile battle beasts from the female guards were lost.

The rest, though severely wounded, would recover fully with time.

After treatment with healing potions and crystals, only a few dozen female guard members would remain combat-ineffective for five days. Due to their fusion, Xia Bai and Nine Treasures were the worst off.

But others—Yangos, the Icebird, the Undead Dragon-fish, Red Hair—would regain 80% of their strength within two days. The Icebird, benefiting from the frozen environment, might recover fully in one.

With stretchers and tools retrieved, the expedition could continue without delay.

Ye Zhongming personally handled the two level-nine corpses. Aside from its demon crystal, the Snow Wolf King's body was mostly useless—its flesh desiccated, its hide ruined. Only a few intact teeth from its shattered jaw held value.

Ye Zhongming felt that the destroyed wolf hide was a waste, but the Bear King's one could work.

The Bear King was a treasure trove. Despite its wounds, the sheer size meant its hide alone could yield twice the material of the Snow Wolf King's.

The battle beasts had already consumed its blood, accelerating their recovery. The meat would feed the group for months.

After processing everything with his maxed-out harvesting skills, Ye Zhongming approached one last subject—

The spherical lifeform, summoned randomly during his bloodline activation, was rolling playfully in the snow, as if the Bear King's brutal attacks had never happened.

Somehow, it hadn't vanished after the bloodline's duration ended.

Chapter 1579: Earth's own spokesperson

This guy's body could be big or small. Ye Zhongming pressed his hand on its body—it was very elastic, cool to the touch, and the skin was soft.

"Woo?"

Now, the size of a car, the hellish creature hid an eye on the upper half of its body and looked at Ye Zhongming, full of confusion.

As if asking, why touch me?

Ye Zhongming circled around it, then pinched its tentacle, also soft. Under the tentacle were dense strips of flesh, likely capable of piercing the ground when needed to anchor itself in place.

Without any treatment, Ye Zhongming only found a shallow wound on the lower half of the spherical creature's body, probably caused by the two ice blocks thrown by the Human Bear King earlier.

But other than that, he couldn't see anything else.

"Woo?"

The spherical creature made another simple sound.

"Can you understand me?" Ye Zhongming spoke first, but seeing the blank look on the sphere's face, he felt helpless. Could they only communicate mentally? Since it wasn't his battle beast, they could only exchange simple commands, nothing too complex.

This made it impossible for him to figure out why the sphere could remain in this plane instead of returning to hell behind the door opened by the bloodline.

It seemed this would remain an unsolved mystery.

Ye Zhongming also wondered—would any creatures still be summoned when he used the Hell Envoy bloodline in the future?

He needed to take this guy to Sister Hong for research. If they discovered the reason for its strong defense, it might bring another leap in strength for Cloud Peak.

The battle was over, and tonight the icy plains seemed unusually quiet.

Everyone rested well through the night and set off north again the next day.

As Cloud Peak moved forward under the dim morning light, a secret base of Five Ring Money was in chaos.

Director Tong and Director Ouyang sat in a room, frowning as they waited for results.

About ten minutes later, someone rushed in, sweating profusely.

"Two directors, the results are confirmed."

Hearing this, the two directors instinctively straightened their backs.

"Life signals for the Snow Wolf King, ranked sixth, and the Human Bear King, ranked tenth, have disappeared within a short time frame—no more than half an hour apart."

Director Tong glanced at Director Ouyang beside him, then asked, "Can the location be confirmed?"

The man shook his head. "These life signals were emitted by that machine, which only covers half of the country. The north was never a key monitoring area for us, so the range doesn't extend there. We can only scan that area during scheduled adjustment periods. At the time, both level-nine creatures were still alive and near Black Dragon City."

Director Tong's eyes flashed—Black Dragon City?

That name was previously unknown, but recently Five Ring Money's intelligence department had taken an interest because the city had a purple-grade defensive item and rumors of something highly valuable inside—something even level-nine creatures coveted.

For Five Ring Money, both items were extremely valuable. Acquiring them could multiply their resale value several times over.

"During the last scan, they were both in Black Dragon City, alive?" Director Ouyang asked. After receiving confirmation, he and Director Tong shared a thought.

Did they die outside the border?

For the freezing far north, Five Rings Money had no interest beyond the dubious Witch Palace.

"Sigh, looks like we'll have to update the Mutated Lifeform Rankings again," Director Ouyang said, shaking his head.

He and Director Tong instructed the intelligence officer to investigate Black Dragon City, preferably determining the cause of death to provide an explanation to the nation's evolved.

After discussing a few more matters, the two walked out together.

The deaths of level-nine creatures were gradually becoming less significant. Only two died at once this time, which was why the directors paid attention.

They were more interested in what could kill two level-nine creatures in such a short time.

After leaving the area, they saw Deacon Water waiting. The two directors smiled and greeted her warmly.

Though Deacon Water had branched out independently, she maintained close ties with Five Ring Money. In a way, she still worked for them—just freely, under a partnership.

"What brings you here? Aren't you busy opening trade routes and training teams after partnering with Cloud Peak?" Director Tong asked with a hint of fondness.

Deacon Water sighed. "I thought I was ambitious, but Cloud Peak's leader is even more so. For some reason, he went to the freezing Black Dragon City, partnered with the locals, bought a street, and plans to replicate the Puxing Town trading market model there. As a partner, I also bought a shop there."

"Black Dragon City?!"

Directors Tong and Ouyang exclaimed almost simultaneously.

Deacon Water was puzzled but nodded. "Yes, I even took the teleportation array to visit, picked a shop myself, and it's being renovated. It should open in a month."

The two directors exchanged glances, both visibly shaken.

Ye Zhongming went to Black Dragon City, and soon after, two level-nine creatures nearby disappeared. No one would believe this was a coincidence.

If true, it meant Cloud Peak could now kill level-nine creatures without mobilizing large forces, relying solely on their high-tier combatants.

That was terrifying!

If not for Deacon Water—their ally—bringing this news, Five Ring Money might not have learned for a while that Cloud Peak had quietly achieved something so significant.

"We've repeatedly overestimated their strength, but it seems we still underestimated them."

Director Ouyang sighed, and Director Tong agreed.

Cloud Peak's current strength was truly frightening.

"Perhaps we should adjust our strategy," Director Ouyang suddenly mused.

Director Tong's eyes widened. "You don't mean..."

Director Ouyang nodded. "Exactly. Since Ye Zhongming has grown this powerful, helping him meet the conditions sooner could temporarily curb Cloud Peak's expansion, balancing the major factions, and truly give Earth its own spokesperson."

As he spoke, Director Ouyang's eyes narrowed.

Chapter 1580: Stink Nest

Stink Nest—this was the name of a small town after the apocalypse.

The meaning was quite straightforward: the place was dirty, chaotic, and foul. Due to the weather, it might not look particularly ugly, but a persistent stench had formed over time. The stench would spread throughout the entire town whenever the winds from the icy plains weakened.

As for "nest"... that was also easy to understand. What else could it be called a dirty, chaotic, foul place?

Yet even such a place was home to over ten thousand people.

Because not only were there seven spinning wheels scattered within the town and its surrounding ten-kilometer radius—ranging from level two to level eight—but it was also situated behind a frozen lake and in front of a mountain range, shielding it from ice storms. The frozen lake and the mountains beyond also provided an abundance of mutated creatures for the hunters.

Compared to the elusive land-based creatures in the snowy mountains, most people in Stink Nest preferred making a living on the frozen lake, as the fish and crustaceans there had decent evolutionary levels but were far less intelligent.

Creatures of the same level were much easier to deal with than their land-based counterparts.

For example, this frozen lake had a specialty called Helmet Fish. Not turtles, these were mutated creatures about a meter long, classified between levels four and five, with hard shells covering half their bodies. Their teeth were sharp and strong, and they could spit ice arrows. More importantly, they were social creatures—beneath this frozen lake, there were at least five schools of Helmet Fish, each numbering over ten thousand, with countless smaller groups of hundreds or thousands.

Among the mid-tier creatures of the frozen lake, they were apex predators.

But despite their dominance, these fish were extremely gluttonous, especially for the flesh of land-based creatures.

The hunters of Stink Nest exploited this habit. They would break through the ice, use special fishing rods, and if they picked the right spot, used high-grade bait, had sturdy hooks, good teamwork, and a bit of luck, they could catch seven or eight—even ten—in a single day.

These cold-water fish had delicious meat, rich in energy and calories, making them one of the best foods on the icy plains. The half-shells on their bodies were excellent materials for crafting armor, while their spines, teeth, and other parts were also valuable.

And, of course, there were the demon crystals.

Earning enough to spin a wheel in a day was already a huge attraction.

So it was no surprise that the hunters of Stink Nest preferred fishing on this vast frozen lake.

The diverse life in the lake sustained the town's ten thousand hunters.

On this day, like countless others before it, hunters began emerging from Stink Nest's low walls as soon as dawn broke, heading to the frozen lake to fish.

The temperature was still bitterly cold, at least ten degrees lower than Black Dragon City. The hunters bundled up tightly against a level of cold unseen in peaceful times.

It wasn't that they were overly eager—it was just that while the lake was vast, the best Helmet Fish spots were limited. If they arrived late, others would take them.

This group of about a dozen hunters, half wearing snowshoes and the rest seated on two sleds pulled by four level-three mutated dogs, sped across the ice.

After an hour of scouting, they found the day's hunting grounds for a large Helmet Fish school and began chiseling through the thick ice.

"This spot was probably taken by the Kafka Squad yesterday. Just one night, and the ice is over a meter thick again—what kind of cursed weather is this?"

One hunter cursed as he pulled a spiral drill bit from the ice.

He was speaking Chinese.

"Ah Jie, how many times have I told you? Here, we speak the local language!"

An elder with a thick beard and dyed reddish hair—his burly frame almost making him look like a native, save for his distinctly Eastern features—scolded the young man sharply.

Looking closely, most of this squad were of Eastern descent, with the remaining three likely mixed-race.

Ah Jie lowered his head and continued drilling, though his expression was resentful.

"I know none of you like it, but to survive here, we must keep our heads down. Once a few of us reach six stars, we'll head south! To Black Dragon City!"

Many brightened at this.

They dreamed of returning to their homeland.

Before, their low evolution levels made crossing the icy plains impossible—any danger could wipe them out.

"Old Man, we've sent plenty of intel to Black Dragon City. Can't they send someone to bring us back? I'm sick of living like ghosts here. These damn foreigners don't even treat us as human!"

A young man clenched his fists.

Their Eastern blood made them targets in this foreign land.

In peaceful times, it was manageable—laws protected them, and their homeland’s strength meant they could do business, study, or travel without major issues.

But after the apocalypse, racial and national differences made every day a struggle. Businesspeople, students, tourists, even those who had settled and had mixed-race children found their differences magnified infinitely.

The sheer hostility nearly destroyed them.

Through unity, resistance, sacrifice, and compromise... they survived, but their numbers dwindled. Now, fewer than a hundred of their people remained in Stink Nest—aside from them, another group worked long-term for a foreign guild, living slightly better but not by much.

A year ago, a team from Black Dragon City had arrived, selling homeland goods. Though many locals coveted their wares, a show of force deterred most.

Someone had secretly approached Old Man, asking him to provide local intel, materials, ores, and specialties in exchange for payment.

Helmet Fish shells were a key demand.

Every three months, someone from Black Dragon City would sneak in, buy their stock, and leave.

Thanks to this covert trade, Old Man's squad had grown stronger. Now, Old Man himself was a five-star evolved, with two others at five stars and members like Ah Jie at four stars—placing them mid-tier in Stink Nest.

Chapter 1580.5- Stink Nest

Their improved strength made life slightly easier, but only because they kept a low profile, avoiding the notice of powerful foreign factions.

"Bring us back? What have we contributed? Just some Helmet Fish shells? They paid us! Sending protection sounds easy—one or two strong people can come collect goods, but they'd need six or seven to escort us out. Do you think that's free?"

The group fell silent.

Old Man had a high standing—many owed him their lives, and most of their evolution potions came from him. The title "Old Man" was more a term of respect.

If he said it, it was true. Black Dragon City wouldn't send escorts for nothing.

They hadn't proven their worth.

"But..." Old Man chuckled, drawing everyone's attention.

"Black Dragon City sent word recently. Someone's coming to find me—they need guides to Yakutsk. If we succeed, they'll give us a six-star evolution potion!"

"Really?!"

Everyone dropped their tools, eyes gleaming.

A six-star potion just for guiding? That was incredible.

"Old Man, I heard something's happening near Yakutsk lately. If we go... will it be dangerous?"

Ah Jie voiced his concern.

Yakutsk wasn't far, but the route passed through the infamous Ice Marsh and territories of powerful mutated lifeforms. Few in Stink Nest dared go.

For their squad, it was even riskier.

"We're just guides, not fighters. They're strong enough if they can cross the icy plains from Black Dragon City. Any danger, they'll handle it. Should be fine."

The others nodded. In the apocalypse, nothing was risk-free. Even fishing for Helmet Fish had dangers—one wrong move, and an ice arrow could kill.

Compared to that, guiding was nothing. And a six-star potion was worth it!

With renewed motivation, they worked faster—drilling holes, preparing bait, setting up defenses, sharpening ice blades—finishing in forty minutes what usually took over an hour.

"Prepare the rods!"

Old Man called out. The squad's other five-star evolved lifted a thick metal fishing rod, ready to lower it into the hole—

When hurried footsteps interrupted them.

They turned, faces darkening.

Though Old Man's squad had arrived early, scouting and drilling had taken two hours. Now, the lake was busy, with other groups hundreds of meters away—none close enough to matter.

But this group had appeared suddenly, closing in before they noticed.

Roaring Ice Bears—a fifty-man team led by "Filthy-Nosed Dog" Tarokov.

Tarokov was only five stars, but his squad had three other five-stars, over twenty four-stars, and the rest three-stars.

Slightly stronger than Old Man's squad.

In a fight, Old Man's squad wasn't afraid—killing them all would cost Roaring Ice Bears dearly, possibly a dozen lives, including core members. That would cripple them.

Normally, such squads avoided conflict unless necessary.

Yet the Roaring Ice Bears surrounded them, grinning without fear.

"Mr. Tarokov—" Old Man began, head bowed, but was cut off.

"Scram! This spot's ours now."

The squad glared.

This was their spot, found and prepared after a morning's work. Giving it up meant no harvest today.

At this hour, all good spots were taken. Fishing elsewhere risked catching nothing—or worse, attracting predators like Blood Eel Snakes, which could kill them.

This was outright robbery.

"What? Not moving? You yellow-skinned monkeys!"

Tarokov laughed mockingly.

Old Man's squad clenched their fists.

This wasn't the first time Roaring Ice Bears had stolen their spot. These lazy bastards slept in, then took their hard-earned locations, sometimes even stealing their bait.

Just this month, it had happened five times. Today made six.

"You son of a—!" Ah Jie, hot-blooded, stepped forward, but Old Man yanked him back.

Seeing the Roaring Ice Bears' dangerous glares, Old Man forced a smile. "Mr. Tarokov, we'll leave. Right away!"

Tarokov sneered, looking skyward in disdain. His men smirked, unsurprised by their cowardice.

"Old Man!" Ah Jie and the others seethed.

"Shut up! Pack up, now!" Old Man's voice turned sharp.

"Leave the bait!" Tarokov's order made their eyes burn.

The bait—level four ice beast flesh, Helmet Fish's favorite—had cost three level five magic crystals!

"Give it to them!" Old Man barked, suppressing his team.

The squad lowered their heads, faces twisted in humiliation.

This was too much.

"Excuse me, is there someone here called Wang Zhiling?"

A young voice, speaking Chinese, cut through the tension.

The squad whirled around in shock—and hope.

That was because those words were in chinese.