

Apocalypse 1581

Chapter 1581: Ice Bear Knights

Everyone turned to see an excessively youthful face beneath a white fur hat—still practically a teenager.

Old Man's squad was stunned because Old Man's real name was Wang Zhiling!

But soon, their shock turned to joy.

Because apart from them, no one in Stink Nest knew that name—except for Black Dragon City's contact!

Back then, Old Man had given his real name to them.

This stranger calling out "Wang Zhiling" could only be from Black Dragon City.

Recalling Old Man's earlier words about Black Dragon City needing guides, these four must be the ones.

Yet, after the initial excitement, the squad couldn't hide their panic and frustration.

They were willing to work for Black Dragon City—they were all countrymen, bound by blood and heritage, even in the apocalypse.

Even after five or ten years here, they hadn't forgotten who they were or where they came from.

But that didn't mean they wanted their connection to Black Dragon City exposed.

They still had to survive here. If these foreigners learned they were "collaborating with the enemy," their lives wouldn't just get harder—they'd be over.

They'd be driven out of Stink Nest—no, killed.

Sure enough, Tarokov and the Roaring Ice Bears erupted before Old Man could answer.

"Who are these people? From the East?"

"Never seen them before. Where'd they come from?"

"Damn yellow monkeys! Are they their allies? What are they plotting? We should tell Ivan—kill them all!"

"Spies! They must be spies!"

Tarokov sneered, pointing at Old Man. "Now you'll all be exiled. Your property confiscated. You'll be thrown out of Stink Nest with nothing!"

This wasn't mercy. On the icy plains, without gear, Old Man's squad wouldn't survive, let alone naked. It was a death sentence.

Even evolved couldn't endure these temperatures unprotected.

Old Man and the others paled. There was no explanation—four countrymen stood there, undeniable proof.

Teams from hundreds of meters away began closing in as the commotion grew. The squad's faces turned ghostly white.

They could already see their fate.

"What are they saying? Do you know Wang Zhiling or not? Is this Stink Nest?"

The young man who'd spoken first—Xiao Xuan, sent by Ye Zhongming to find the guide Old An recommended—frowned. He could tell these foreigners weren't being friendly.

After contributing little in the recent level-nine battle, the Youth Army had been itching to prove themselves.

They knew that fight was beyond them, but as passionate youths, they burned to advance, to stand beside the man who'd given them power and purpose.

While all of Cloud Peak admired Ye Zhongming, none idolized him more than the young.

Like starstruck fans in peaceful times, these teens needed a hero, and the top evolved in the nation fit perfectly.

Now, their idol had entrusted them with a mission. Xiao Xuan and his three comrades were determined to succeed—not for rewards, but for his approval.

Seeing obstacles arise, the boys bristled with aggression.

"I—I'm Wang Zhiling. Sigh. You're from Black Dragon City, right? You... sigh..."

Old Man looked at these boys, young enough to be his sons, and didn't know what to say. Kids these days had no tact. Who just showed up in broad daylight like this?

"Oh, it's you. Hello." Xiao Xuan remained polite. "Since you're Wang Zhiling, come with us. Our boss is waiting for you to guide him."

The icy plains were endless, monotonous, and easy to get lost in. Though Ye Zhongming had icebirds and Yangos to scout from above, they were too conspicuous in unfamiliar territory, risking unwanted attention. What if they attracted another level-nine?

Without his second life, Ye Zhongming was playing it safe.

Even with scouts, they needed directions. Guessing could lead them astray.

Talking Lady was very important such that he brought Cloud Peak's strong forces to assist. But it didn't mean that he would give up on his safety and risk the lives of other Cloud Peak members.

If he found out something bad from the guide, he would choose to leave without any hesitation.

So he'd sent Xiao Xuan to fetch the guide—preferably without drawing attention.

Ye Zhongming didn't think it was tough, so he didn't send the big squad.

Xiao Xuan was urgent. Old Man's squad was bewildered. The Roaring Ice Bears and growing crowd grew hostile.

Tarokov wouldn't let these Easterners take charge. Though he didn't understand Xiao Xuan's words, he guessed they meant to take Old Man away—unacceptable.

Riling up the crowd, he leveraged their numbers and strength to pressure the squad.

In the apocalypse, everyone sensed danger instantly. The moment hostility flashed, Xiao Xuan's group acted.

Chapter 1581.5- Ice Bear Knights

They didn't attack outright—this was enemy territory, and they were outnumbered. Instead, they grabbed Old Man's team to retreat, while two positioned themselves as rearguard.

The foreigners wouldn't let them leave. At least ten launched assaults immediately.

The Youth Army fought back hard.

Xiao Xuan and one other were seven-star evolved; the remaining two, six-star. Against these mostly three-to-five-star fishermen with poor gear, it was a massacre.

In Cloud Peak's battle manual, they would go all out against their enemies unless special orders were given.

These foreign evolved fishing on thee lakes were basically three to four stars with poor equipment. The gap was huge compared to Xiao Xuan and his group, who had green and blue grade equipment. They were like beggars.

The disparity showed instantly. All four boys killed one opponent each in seconds.

Chaos erupted.

The foreigners screamed curses, attacking wildly—Old Man's squad included.

Soon, over two hundred surrounded them, with more arriving. The situation looked dire.

Forced to fight, Old Man's squad resolved to take enemies down with them. Years of pent-up rage exploded.

But as battle raged, they realized—these kids were monsters.

Those fearsome foreigners fell like wheat before a scythe. The boys' green and blue-grade weapons cleaved through flesh and steel alike.

They even unleashed skills—precious attack scrolls, unimaginable luxuries in Stink Nest. The leader had multiple.

When the outer circle closed in, all four activated job skills—and Xiao Xuan even triggered his bloodline.

They were fifteen. How were they this strong?

When power gaps were this vast, numbers barely mattered—unless they were overwhelming.

These foreigners weren't. After dozens fell in moments, the rest broke.

One slash, one kill. One skill, one corpse. Who could withstand that?

The charge became a rout as survivors fled to regroup.

The battle paused. Between the factions lay over thirty bodies.

Old Man's squad stood dumbfounded.

What just happened?

They'd barely fought, yet so many were dead?

Were these boys gods of war?

Drenched in enemy blood, the four exchanged glances—unimpressed.

Too weak.

These were insects compared to the icy plains' mutated beasts or Black Dragon City's attackers.

Not one had lasted a single exchange—not even Tarokov, now headless beneath the corpse pile.

"Let's go!"

Though the enemy was cowed, their numbers swelled. Several had already run toward Stink Nest—undoubtedly calling reinforcements.

Xiao Xuan knew they couldn't linger.

They retreated with the dazed squad, pursued at a distance.

The foreigners shadowed them, unwilling to engage but refusing to leave.

Xiao Xuan and the other seven-star turned back, slaughtering a few, but the rest scattered, only to regroup once they resumed retreating.

If it were just the Youth Army, they'd have escaped easily. But Old Man's squad was too slow. Even carrying them wouldn't help.

After ten minutes, a thunderous rumble came from behind.

Old Man's face drained of color.

"Ice Bear Knights!"

Stink Nest's strongest force—the ruler Ivan's elite. Three hundred knights, all five-star or above, riding level-four ice bears. The captains were six star evolved, and the two leaders were seven-star.

Their charge was unstoppable—like ancient heavy cavalry.

Against them, escape was impossible.

"Are they tough?" Xiao Xuan asked urgently.

As mission leader, he had to bring Old Man back.

"Too tough. We can't win." Old Man gritted his teeth. "You go ahead. We'll slow you down. They want us—they won't chase you."

"No!"

Xiao Xuan pointed at Old Man. "You two—carry him back to the boss!"

The two six-stars hoisted the reluctant Old Man and sprinted toward camp.

To the rest, Xiao Xuan said, "You go too. We'll hold them off."

Then he and the other seven-star charged the approaching cavalry.

Seeing two teenagers daring to challenge them, the lead knight burned with indignation.

"Lances ready! Crush them!"

A hundred knights lowered their lances, spurring their mounts into a devastating charge.

Chapter 1582: Prismatic Mage

Xiao Xuan's blade lit up in his hand, and his movement speed suddenly increased. The originally bright blade light took on a pale blue hue.

As his body surged forward, his movement trajectory carved out a shallow arc. He rose from the icy plain's surface, the blade light descending toward the oncoming ice bear knights.

Upon closer observation, one would realize Xiao Xuan's actions weren't without reason - this approach allowed him to avoid direct frontal confrontation with the knights, instead cutting diagonally toward their flanks.

While it might not completely evade the cavalry's assault, it at least created an opportunity for single combat against them.

The blue blade light fell into the orderly ranks of the ice bear cavalry, immediately cutting down two knights and cleaving their mounts in half.

As a Seven-Star Evolved, combined with his Cold Warrior job skills and blue-grade combat blade, Xiao Xuan made an impressive first strike.

The other Seven-Star Evolved acted much slower than Xiao Xuan. First, waving his hand, he deployed a scroll across the ice bear cavalry's charge path, where several meter-high, half-meter-wide stone blocks instantly appeared. Given the cavalry's speed, these immediately served as obstacles, causing the lead ice bears to stumble when their thick legs collided with them.

Even minor obstacles create significant impact for high-speed charging creatures, let alone these particularly sturdy stone blocks.

As the front bears slowed abruptly, those behind crashed into them. Despite training for such situations, substantial chaos ensued when it actually occurred.

Next, the young Seven-Star Evolved produced a long horn, holding it with one end's slender metal tube in his mouth as he blew forcefully.

From the horn's mouth emerged multicolored musical notes that swarmed toward the ice bear cavalry, each note expanding as it traveled until reaching adult human size upon contact.

When one ice bear knight lowered his lance to deflect a strange note, his body convulsed violently upon contact, becoming disoriented and tumbling from his mount, only to be trampled by following cavalry.

With their opening moves, these two Seven-Star youths delivered a stunning blow to the infamous ice bear cavalry of the Stink Nest region.

These domineering Stink Nest ice bear cavalry weren't like the Roaring Ice Bears unit - to them, that group disgraced the "ice bear" name.

Their long-cultivated pride meant even this initial setback didn't daunt them.

Under orders, they quickly divided - the vanguard engaging Xiao Xuan and his companion with lances, while the rear guard used various skills and ranged attacks to cut off retreat routes.

Notably, no one bothered with the musical notes.

This alone revealed the hundred-man unit's exceptional discipline, their actions embodying the iron resolve expected of elite forces.

Xiao Xuan's longsword severed two lances while his free hand launched flames that ignited a knight before he retreated.

Upon landing, visible armor damage marked his sides.

After the horn attack, his companion stored the weapon and assumed a reverent pose to summon another scroll.

Tossing it at the approaching cavalry, he withstood a ranged attack using his sturdy armor while retreating.

The unfurled scroll created a meter-thick firewall that the charging cavalry entered headlong.

The hundred-man unit's captain disliked fire intensely.

Accustomed to the icy plains, he found fire-based attacks particularly jarring due to their elemental opposition to ice bears.

Still, he remained unconcerned - the tundra naturally weakened all fire abilities.

Two bears entering the firewall exhaled frost mist, a common icy plain ability.

As the flames faltered, the bears emerged relatively unscathed, but their riders fared worse - severely burned, they dropped weapons to clutch their faces and wail.

Before they could recover, hundreds of wind blades sliced through riders and mounts alike without mercy.

Xiao Xuan, already maneuvering sideways, cheered at the sight.

He felt a pang of envy.

His companion possessed the extremely rare "Prismatic Magician" job - the most precious among Ye Zhongming's rewards for the Youth Army.

During a mission against attackers of Black Dragon City evolved, their outstanding performance earned them this and another (his Cold Warrior) job scroll.

Faced with the choice, Xiao Xuan had selected Cold Warrior over Prismatic Magician - the latter prohibited learning other job, conflicting with his desire for versatile development.

But he knew such restrictive jobs held extraordinary power.

The Prismatic Magician's attacks manifested two ways: sonic waves (via the auto-generated horn weapon producing various sound-based attacks, currently only the disorienting musical notes) and "magic attacks" - actually indirect magic via scrolls generated through sacrificed mental energy.

Earlier earth spikes, the firewall, and subsequent attacks all stemmed from this.

While seemingly cumbersome, this ability to generate any elemental magic scrolls, with increasing potency as the job leveled, potentially up to forbidden spells, justified its exclusivity.

After the wind blades, the fleeing magician generated another scroll, summoning a lightning bolt that struck down three more knights.

Xiao Xuan continued flanking maneuvers.

He understood Prismatic Magicians could neither share scrolls nor stockpile them (current limit: one stored for 24 hours).

With single-job restrictions limiting mental energy, his companion could only generate four scrolls beyond the pre-stored earth spike; one - three already used meant one attack remained.

During this window, Xiao Xuan had to occupy the cavalry.

"Go!" he shouted, rolling beneath lances to slash at bear legs.

The youths' divergent retreats split the cavalry - forty pursuing Xiao Xuan, thirty-five (now diminished by magic attacks) chasing his companion.

After the lightning scroll came icy spears raining diagonally upon the bears.

Even now, the youth remembered their primary mission: delaying the cavalry so Old Man could safely reach their leader.

With the lead bears wounded and slowed, having done all he could, the Prismatic Magician shouted a warning before sprinting toward their origin point.

His Seven-Star status ensured a temporary escape from the slower cavalry.

His burst-damage job left him nearly useless after expending scrolls, whereas Xiao Xuan's sustained combat ability could handle the remaining fight.

Facing the cavalry, Xiao Xuan remained utterly calm - having witnessed level nine battles made these lower-level foes incapable of unsettling him.

His only concern was whether his companion could escape.

Leveraging Cold Warrior's melee advantages, he fought through encircling knights whose lost charge momentum made them inferior opponents.

Still, as a non-Eight-Star fighter, injuries accumulated until he calculated an opening to break out.

While capable of potentially eliminating all knights, doing so risked leaving him too wounded for subsequent threats.

But then, distant combat sounds revealed their six-star escort returning to aid the wounded Prismatic Magician - now with a spear fragment protruding from his thigh.

Cursing, Xiao Xuan gritted his teeth and charged toward them.

Chapter 1583: Massacring the city

Old Man kept looking back, but his squad members had long disappeared from sight.

He really didn't want to be separated from his team and had tried to resist, but the boy now carrying him had sternly refused.

Old Man knew that if he kept insisting, he'd probably be knocked out.

So he obediently stayed on the evolved's back, doing his best to keep his body light.

However, the lingering fear of the Ice Bear Knights made Old Man worry about his people's safety.

He couldn't deny that these four boys were strong, but only three had gone back. The Ice Bear Knights never moved in groups smaller than fifty, and from the sounds earlier, there had to be at least a hundred. How could three of them hold them off?

If these boys failed to stop them, his own people would... The thought alone made Old Man's heart ache.

"Little Liu?"

A voice made Old Man turn his head, and he saw a ten-person squad ahead, around the same age as the earlier boys. Just from their speed, Old Man was shocked to realize they were all strong, likely stronger than he was.

He couldn't help but wonder—how were these boys so powerful at such a young age?

“Big Zhen, you came at the perfect time!” Little Liu, the boy carrying Old Man, exclaimed joyfully, pulling Old Man off his back and pushing him toward a teammate.

“This is someone the boss wants. Send two people to take him over, then inform everyone that Team Xuan is trapped and needs backup—it’s urgent! Big Zhen, you guys come with me to reinforce them!”

Without another word, Little Liu dragged Big Zhen away. The others were stunned—Xiao Xuan was trapped? And the situation was critical?

This was serious! Big Zhen immediately ordered the two who took Old Man to hurry back and report, then pulled out a strange whistle and began blowing it in irregular, disjointed notes.

Along with Little Liu, the nine boys sprinted back the way they came.

Meanwhile, Xiao Xuan and his two companions were desperately fighting.

The previously divided Ice Bear Knight had regrouped, their numbers now reduced to just over sixty. Over thirty corpses lay scattered across the frozen plain, marking the path of pursuit and retreat.

By now, the three boys were covered in wounds, their armor rendered useless. The six-star evolved’s weapon had shattered from repeated clashes, leaving him with only a dagger.

The Prismatic Mage had been hit in the leg by a ranged attack from an Ice Bear Knight, slowing him to a crawl as his companions dragged him forward.

But the Ice Bear Knight exploited this weakness, launching repeated charges. They might lose one or two riders each time, but they also left deep wounds on the boys.

They had lost many, but now they were blood-crazed, determined to kill these three exhausted Asian boys. Only by bringing back their corpses could they justify their losses.

Otherwise, with over thirty of their three hundred knights dead, Chief Ivan's fury would burn them alive.

Only the boys' blue-grade equipment could spare them from punishment.

Another charge came. The white and silver-grade lances—occasionally a green one—stood no chance against Xiao Xuan's blade. But outnumbered and protecting his comrades, he could only deflect the strikes, conserving energy to keep them alive.

But Xiao Xuan knew he couldn't hold out much longer.

All skills were on cooldown, armor destroyed, bloodline effects expired, stamina and mental energy teetering on the brink...

Even escaping alone was beyond him now.

“Go!”

The six-star teammate suddenly shouted, charging ahead before Xiao Xuan or the Prismatic Mage could stop him. In his hand was a demon crystal grenade!

A female guard sister had given it to him—he resembled her late younger brother.

Female guards’ gear was top-grade, and this grenade was the latest model, devastatingly powerful.

But Xiao Xuan and the Prismatic Mage’s eyes reddened with grief.

No grenade, no matter how strong, could kill sixty Ice Bear Knights at once!

“Come back!” the Prismatic Mage cried, heartbroken and furious.

If not for his injured leg, his two comrades might have escaped. Already guilt-ridden, seeing this suicidal act made him grind his teeth in anguish.

Xiao Xuan, also clenching his jaw, held the Prismatic Mage back. Their teammate had bought them a chance—he couldn’t waste it on futile vengeance.

Carrying the mage, he fled toward the camp.

The boy hurled the grenade. The unfamiliar weapon sent knights and bears flying—five or six riders and mounts were shredded, with as many more wounded, their charge broken.

Dagger in hand, the boy vaulted off a dead bear, slashing a stunned knight's throat. Blood sprayed as the man toppled from his mount in disbelief.

Still airborne, he crashed into another knight, slamming both to the ground. His dagger found the man's heart in the tumble, ending him.

But a nearby knight's lance pierced his leg, pinning him down. More lances stabbed in—he blocked with his dagger, but soon blood gushed from his mouth, his body riddled with wounds.

Chapter 1583.5- Massacring the city

The knights, consumed by hatred, kept stabbing long after he died, reducing his corpse to a mangled ruin.

Then they regrouped, chasing Xiao Xuan's trail. Those two boys couldn't escape.

Soon, Xiao Xuan was caught. Carrying someone, he couldn't outrun the bears. Both he and the Prismatic Mage felt despair—fifty knights remained, and they stood no chance in their state. Would they die here today?

Just as they prepared for a last stand, Old Man's squad charged in from nearby, attacking the knights.

After fleeing earlier, they'd spotted Xiao Xuan and turned back without hesitation to help.

They didn't know these boys, but Old Man was with them, and more importantly, they shared the same blood. They had to act, even if the outcome looked grim.

Old Man's squad bought Xiao Xuan and the Prismatic Mage a little more time.

Though fresh, Old Man's team was low-level with poor gear and skills. The brief hope faded fast—one charge from the fifty knights killed three and wounded the rest, while they only managed shallow cuts on the bears.

Gritting his teeth, Xiao Xuan threw his weapon, impaling a knight and saving one of Old Man's men.

They'd turned back for him—he owed them.

Seeing their exhaustion, the knights stopped charging, instead encircling them to slaughter these "yellow-skinned monkeys" like they had the other boy.

But then an arrow pierced a rider's throat. Panicked, they turned to see boys sprinting across the ice, one lowering his bow.

The knights hastily formed up and charged the newcomers.

Yet when the numbers were close, the knights were no longer the bullies.

One charge cost them four knights, and only one boy fell.

The knights exchanged glances, then wheeled around and fled.

If they fought all-out, their mobility and charge could likely defeat the nine boys, but at horrific losses, maybe only a dozen would survive.

So they chose not to die for a pointless grudge.

And so they ran.

“Captain Xuan!”

Little Liu, Big Zhen, and the others rushed to Xiao Xuan, who could no longer stand. One produced a potion, sharing it between the two wounded.

Old Man's men helped bandage their injuries.

Though relieved to survive, none celebrated. Losing two Young Army soldiers—both six-star evolved—left them burning for vengeance.

They didn't realize Old Man's squad saw them as monsters.

Killing fifty knights while losing just two? That was terrifying prowess.

In truth, the Young Army had sent two seven-stars and six-stars—higher-level than the knights, with better gear, ensuring such results.

As Xiao Xuan recovered, Cloud Peak's main force arrived. Old Man, among them, wept at his dead comrades.

Not that death was new, but with fewer of his people left, the grief and fear grew unbearable.

Ye Zhongming saw the two corpses—one mutilated. His face stayed calm, but the female guards saw the fire in the Cloud Peak King's eyes.

Back home, he had to consider Cloud Peak's reputation, his own image, future plans, and hidden enemies...

But abroad, the beast within awoke. Two of his carefully trained Young Army dead for nothing? He'd change their route to Stink Nest.

His men wouldn't die in vain. As their leader, he'd get justice.

"Cremate them. Bring the ashes home to scatter over the manor."

These boys had joined Cloud Peak but had never seen it.

Even in death, Ye Zhongming would fulfill their wish.

Flames and silence turned the bodies to ash.

Two hours later, Cloud Peak stood outside Stink Nest.

From afar, corpses hung on the walls. Up close, Old Man's men trembled with rage—even Cloud Peak's eyes reddened.

The bodies were all black-haired, black-eyed Asians—Old Man’s stronger compatriots who’d worked for a merchant group.

Now, all dead, displayed—punished for Old Man’s defiance.

Frozen solid, blood streaked beneath them like macabre art.

Figures emerged from the gates. Old Man identified the leader—the seven-star Ice Bear Captain, backed by over two hundred knights, including the survivors.

Plus laborers and guards, over a thousand strong.

The captain spoke. Old Man translated: Who are you? Why come? You killed our noble knights—you’ll pay.

Cloud Peak stayed silent. Ye Zhongming ignored him, staring instead at a giant atop the wall, radiating the same eight-star aura.

“That’s Ivan.” Old Man’s voice shook after one glance.

Ivan suddenly boomed words across the distance. Old Man paled, struggling to translate, but Ye Zhongming cut him off.

“Are you sure no more of our people are inside?”

Old Man nodded reflexively—those on the wall were all that remained.

“Good.” Ye Zhongming’s calmness confused Old Man.

Then the young leader raised a hand and uttered two words Old Man would never forget:

“Slaughter them all.”

Chapter 1584: Thank you

Old Man would never forget those words, nor the scene that followed.

He couldn’t fathom how a force of fewer than a thousand evolved could declare the slaughter of a well-established base with towering walls and over ten thousand defenders.

He was grateful to this group, yes. Even though today’s ordeal had begun when they sought him out, they had sacrificed two of their own to cover his team’s retreat.

Old Man knew he wasn’t irreplaceable. He understood those boys could have taken only him and left the rest of his squad to die. That was why he felt indebted.

And precisely because of that, he hated seeing his compatriots blinded by rage, charging into a fight they might not win.

Perhaps they truly were strong enough to wipe out Stink Nest. But how many would die in the process?

Was avenging two lost lives worth losing even more?

He wanted to reason with this young leader, but the calm determination on the man's face told him any plea would be futile.

What also shocked him was the reaction—or lack thereof—from the rest of the group. As their leader, perhaps this "Mr. Ye" had no choice. But why didn't his subordinates try to dissuade him? Weren't they the ones risking their lives in what seemed like a meaningless battle?

To Old Man, this fight held no purpose.

Five years in the apocalypse had taught him to avoid reckless vendettas.

Yet what happened next left him utterly stunned.

The first to move were the women warriors wrapped in thick furs.

Old Man had always wondered why most of this force were women. They carried an aura of strength, yet many seemed frail, as if recovering from severe injuries.

But the moment they entered combat, they transformed. In unison, they drew their blades—then, in a flash, the weapon in the lead warrior’s hands morphed into a massive black scythe.

A blinding arc of light sliced through the Ice Bear Knights.

The seven-star captain and his men barely twitched before the light cleaved through them.

Then, stillness.

To Old Man and Ivan on the walls, the sight was horrifying.

Over two hundred knights split cleanly in half.

The bodies slid, then toppled. A few seconds in reality, an eternity in the eyes of those witnessing it for the first time.

What kind of attack was this? How could a single strike kill hundreds?

Old Man's hands trembled violently, though he didn't notice.

The riderless ice bears panicked. Some charged Cloud Peak's lines; others rampaged sideways, straight into their own unprepared allies.

Chaos erupted beneath the walls.

"Kill them all!"

A voice—one of the Young Army—rang out. The furious boys surged forward like enraged bulls.

Only those who had fought and bled beside them daily could understand their bond.

They were all brothers and sisters. Each loss was a wound to the soul.

They weren't saints—just selfish survivors who cared only for their own.

Their blades rose, their eyes burned, and they became reapers.

Then the sky ignited.

A dragon descended, wings beating, breath scouring the battlements. Siege engines exploded; evolved turned to ash before realizing their doom.

"A dragon! An actual dragon!"

People who saw it were stunned and shouted.

To those raised on Eastern legends, Yangos was more a force of nature than a mythical terror. They were more afraid of its level and strength. As well as its giant body.

But here, it was the stuff of nightmares. It was the top of the food chain, and its appearance sent them into panic.

The appearance of the fire dragon extinguished their hope of resistance.

Even Ivan, Stink Nest's leader, took one look at the beast and fled toward the rear gates.

As the leader, he wanted to flee.

The icebirds struck next—silent, lethal. Frost spread, freezing dozens solid before shattering them with a touch.

Nine Treasures emerged from underground, its massive frame crushing everything in its path.

Yellow Ball became a golden streak, vanishing into the city's heart.

Only then did the female guards advance. By now, the Young Army had slaughtered every defender outside the gates.

Resistance on the walls crumbled without leadership. The women raised their crystal rifles, suppressing the last pockets before Yangos finished the job, roasting everything in sight.

Chapter 1584.5- Thank you

When the female guards entered the city, Stink Nest's will broke completely.

The disparity was too vast—in levels, skills, and equipment. Ten-to-one numbers meant nothing when only two or three could simultaneously engage Cloud Peak's elites.

Methodically, they began the slaughter. No hurry. No escape. The icebirds and the undead Red Hair had sealed every exit.

"...Isn't this too extreme?"

One of Old Man's squad whispered it. His teammates paled.

They'd seen their compatriots' brutality firsthand. Earlier, they'd questioned the necessity. Now, witnessing an eight-star dragon, two eight-star icebirds, a nightmarish undead beast, and an eight-star war hound, they understood: Stink Nest was doomed.

With only Ivan as their sole eight-star evolved, nothing could stop Cloud Peak.

No wonder they declared slaughter so casually. Even without lifting a finger, their tamed monsters alone could turn this place into a graveyard.

Now, Old Man's team wondered: Were these ruthless allies a blessing... or a future threat?

If they offended them, what if he killed them?

Ye Zhongming, standing nearby, showed no anger at the whispered doubt. He simply gazed at the corpses on the walls and said softly:

"If I were weak, they would have slaughtered us instead."

Silence.

This was the apocalypse. The law of the jungle, stripped bare.

Weakness wasn't misfortune—it was sin.

Right and wrong didn't enter into it.

The battle ended in an hour. A speed that left Old Man's squad dumbfounded.

Killing ten thousand should take longer—until they remembered Yangos's breath incinerating hundreds in seconds.

Looting took far longer. By dawn, every valuable item in Stink Nest lay piled outside.

Casualties? None for Cloud Peak. A handful of minor injuries. The resistance had been too feeble to matter.

The spoils:

100,000+ low-tier demon crystals (only 2,000+ at six-star or above, a pitiful seven at eight-star).

Equipment—one intact gold-grade piece, thirty-some blue, two hundred green. (Cloud Peak's forces wore all blue or better; the haul was laughable by their standards.)

Assorted materials, scrolls, potions—a few impressed Ye Zhongming.

After claiming the best, Ye let Old Man's squad pick ten items each from the leftovers.

"Wait—we can take evolution potions too?"

Their eyes locked on the vials. Most six-star potions were gone, but plenty of five-star remained. For a team where only a few were five-star evolved (the rest stuck at four), this was a windfall.

At Ye's nod, they dove into the trove like starved men at a feast. Even Old Man, usually composed, joined the frenzy.

Smiling slightly, Ye left them to it and entered his tent. Inside, Ivan lay curled on the ground.

The former warlord had tried to flee yesterday. Yellow Ball caught him in under a minute.

"Made your decision?" Ye asked.

Ivan glanced up, then away. Silent, as he'd been since capture.

"I know you understand Mandarin."

Ye had noticed Ivan's reaction during the slaughter order—foreigners had been confused; Ivan had understood.

"Last chance. Tell me what I want, and you die clean. Refuse, and the pain will make you regret being born."

He sat, watching. "Ten seconds."

"...You'll keep your word?" Ivan's accent was thick but intelligible.

"Belief is your concern, not mine."

A bitter laugh. Then, haltingly, Ivan spoke:

"Yakutsk is the largest nearby city. Recently, a beast tide hit. Wiped out a major faction's branch. Their main force sent an expedition, allied with locals, and is still fighting the mutated creatures there."

He detailed Yakutsk's factions, nearby powers, and rumors, including the attacking organization's name and strength.

But nothing about the black-clad zombie woman.

Ye tried again: "Ever hear of a female mutated zombie carrying a black cat?"

Ivan frowned. "No zombie. But... one of the beast tide leaders was an eight-star mutated black cat."

Ye's eyebrow twitched. He fired off more questions—some about Yakutsk, some random—occasionally repeating earlier ones to check consistency. Satisfied Ivan wasn't lying (the man clearly hoped for mercy), he turned to leave.

At the tent flap, Ivan suddenly called out:

"I—I could join you. Serve loyally."

Ye paused. Then, without turning, he gave Ivan the last words he'd ever hear:

"Thank you."

Chapter 1585: This is Ice Crystal Swamp?

"Is this the Ice Crystal Swamp?"

Ye Zhongming looked at the expanse of glistening white ice crystals ahead and asked Old Man next to him.

After annihilating the Stink Nest, the group traveled for two more days, passing through the territory of an eighth-level lifeform, which the young warriors of Cloud Peak collectively hunted down, before arriving at one of the most dangerous stretches on the way to Yakutsk.

"Yes," Old Man replied, staring blankly at the scenery ahead—he had never been here before.

As the saying goes, "If you take from others, your hands are tied; if you eat from others, your mouth is tied." Old Man was determined to complete this mission flawlessly to justify the resources Cloud Peak had given them.

Now, every member of his squad had upgraded their gear. Not only had they all become five-star evolved, but their equipment had also shifted from gray and white to mostly silver, with each person even receiving a green-grade item.

These were things they had long dreamed of.

Having taken the payment, Old Man was eager to escort Ye Zhongming and the others to their destination as quickly as possible.

But halfway through the journey, they arrived at the Ice Crystal Swamp.

Old Man knew this place was treacherous—he even had a rough idea of what lurked inside—but he truly didn't know how to navigate it.

After contemplating, he decided to share everything he knew with Ye Zhongming. What they chose to do with the information was up to them.

"The Ice Crystal Swamp wasn't originally this big, but over the past two years, its area has expanded dramatically," Old Man said, pointing at the jagged, crystalline forest-like terrain ahead.

"This is a death zone. I'm not sure about other factions, but at the very least, no one from the Stink Nest dared to hunt here." Old Man continued, "There are three main dangers here. First, it's called a swamp because many areas of the ground are hollowed out. One misstep, and you'll fall through. This isn't natural—it's the work of a mutated insect called the White Tiger Beetle. They leave only a thin layer of ice, not fully connecting it to the ground. When a living creature steps on it and falls through, they become prey."

"Because this place is constantly covered in snow, every inch of ground looks the same, making it impossible to guard against."

"White Tiger Beetles?" Ye Zhongming repeated the name.

"Yeah. Rumor has it they're a variant of the Tiger Beetle. Don't laugh, but when I first heard the name 'Tiger Beetle,' I thought it was related to actual tigers. Later, I learned it's just a type of beetle similar to a longhorn."

Old Man chuckled, rubbing his hands together—not because he was cold, but out of habit.

"These little things have grown bigger now, each about the size of a house cat. Their front pincers and the claws on their sides are razor-sharp. What's worse is that their entire bodies are covered in white armor, incredibly tough. Attacks from evolved even one level higher than them are basically useless."

Ye Zhongming's expression shifted slightly.

Old Man had just said these creatures were generally around levels four or five, with the occasional level six. Did that mean he'd have to step in if they encountered a White Tiger Beetle king?

"Also, these beetles are communal. The traps they dig house entire families—some as small as a dozen, others as large as fifty or sixty."

The others nodded. Given the beetles' size, the ice pits they dug probably weren't very spacious. A human falling in would have little room to maneuver, making survival unlikely once attacked.

"Strangely, though, these White Tiger Beetles never leave the Ice Crystal Swamp." Old Man shook his head, unsure why. If these insects weren't confined here and spread across the entire ice plains, human casualties during hunts would be devastating.

"The second danger is the Ghost Mist. The Ice Crystal Swamp doesn't have ice storms, but it does have this eerie mist. People say it appears and vanishes mysteriously, silently sweeping through and causing both evolved and other lifeforms to disappear without a trace. Very few escape once caught."

Old Man had some authority on this matter. A few years ago, a fellow countryman led his squad to explore the Ice Crystal Swamp. Before even encountering the White Tiger Beetles, they ran into this Ghost Mist.

Dozens of squad members vanished in an instant. The rest fled in panic, but only five or six made it out alive.

Later, the trauma from the Ghost Mist caused the leader's combat ability to decline. Soon after, he was killed during a hunt due to his distracted state.

"Ghost Mist?"

Ye Zhongming stroked his chin. This place really had all sorts of bizarre phenomena. Without experiencing it firsthand, he couldn't even begin to imagine what the Ghost Mist looked like.

"And the third danger?"

Ye Zhongming's curiosity about this place had grown, and he asked with genuine interest.

"Blowdart Dolls."

This time, even members of the female guards and the young warriors turned to look at Old Man.

"There's a unique lifeform here that somewhat resembles humans, but they're only about fifty centimeters tall, with pure white skin that blends into the environment. They'd be nearly impossible to spot if not for their black eyes."

Old Man had seen the corpse of a Blowdart Doll before. Placed in the snowy wilderness, it was truly hard to distinguish.

"They're very frail. Individually, their combat ability isn't particularly strong, but they're incredibly fast, light, and agile. You could say they move like ghosts through this swamp."

Old Man drew a small, imp-like figure in the snow, saying, "They look roughly like this. These little things are born with a kind of bone tube. As they grow, parts of their bones protrude through their skin. When they fight, they break off these bone needles, load them into the tube, and blow them out with their mouths. The darts fly extremely fast and can even slightly change direction midair, making them nearly impossible to dodge."

"Another annoying trait is that these bone needles are highly toxic. So far, aside from a few individuals rumored to have resisted the poison through sheer physical strength, every evolved struck by these darts has died—and their deaths were gruesome."

Fast, agile, deadly accurate attacks, and poisonous, combined with their natural camouflage in this environment, these long-range specialists were a nightmare.

"Are there many of them?" Ye Zhongming asked.

"I'm not sure, but there's no shortage," Old Man replied.

Nodding, Ye Zhongming asked another question that left him stunned by the answer.

He asked, "What's the evolution level of these Blowdart Dolls?"

Old Man's response: "They don't have one."