

## Apocalypse 1586

### Chapter 1586: Ice Crystal Swamp (2)

The absence of an evolution level was something Ye Zhongming had encountered before, but only in extremely unique entities—whether it was the green-skinned demons or that monstrous creature in the Cold Bay Rainforest, all of them had left him with profound impressions and experiences.

Especially the latter. Even now, Cloud Peak had yet to uncover its secrets.

That incident had become one of the few things since his rebirth that left Ye Zhongming utterly baffled and bewildered.

And now, another one had appeared?

According to Old Man, these Blowdart Dolls were white in color, clearly distinct from the green-skinned monsters and nothing like that creature with a space in its stomach. Was this yet another entirely new anomaly?

"Mr. Ye, it's not that I'm afraid of death. If you give the order, I'll go in. But if there's no urgency, I'd suggest taking a detour. It'd add over a week to our journey, but it'd be much safer."

Ye Zhongming shook his head without speaking, clearly rejecting the suggestion.

Cloud Peak was strong now, but the major factions behind them were catching up rapidly. The top ten factions in the country had all entered a phase of accelerated development.

Cloud Peak's previous advantage—being able to swiftly hunt level eight lifeforms due to their individual combat prowess—was no longer unique. Other factions could do the same now, and the number of eight-star evolved among the super factions increased daily.

Under such circumstances, maintaining Cloud Peak's lead was a race against time.

This rescue mission had already taken longer than expected. Adding another week was not something Ye Zhongming wanted.

Moreover, while Ye Zhongming had initially prepared thoroughly before setting out to rescue the Talking Lady, scattered intelligence suggested that Yakutsk had been embroiled in turmoil for some time now, and the Talking Lady might still be in danger.

Now that hope for rescue was in sight, Ye Zhongming didn't want to waste any more time.

Beyond that, his own timeline was also a concern.

Since he was already in the northern wastelands, he still needed to head to North America to obtain another Crown—a Ruler-grade artifact. The opening date for that location was fast approaching.

He had to arrive to secure such an item the moment it became accessible. Otherwise, someone else would inevitably claim it first.

After all, quite a few people knew about this.

And truth be told, Ye Zhongming was deeply curious about both the White Tiger Beetles and the Blowdart Dolls. Even that terrifying Ghost Mist intrigued him.

He refused to believe in some all-devouring supernatural fog. There had to be a logical explanation behind it.

Seeing that Mr. Ye had dismissed his suggestion, Old Man said nothing more and immediately ordered his men to prepare some tools.

Xiao Xuan, Xiao Min, and the others watched as they crafted ice balls—slightly varying in size but generally uniform, each roughly the weight of an adult.

Obviously, these were meant to deal with the White Tiger Beetles' pit traps.

These could be made on the spot by digging out chunks of earth or cutting boulders with leveled weapons—simple enough.

"This is just a crude solution. The pits dug by the White Tiger Beetles aren't so easily avoided. Their hearing is incredibly sharp. Sometimes, when they sense life approaching, they'll hide in their tunnels and wait until the target is close before actively breaking through the ice to attack."

Old Man shook his head as he spoke. If the creatures of the Ice Crystal Swamp could be countered so easily, this place wouldn't be known as a "non-dungeon death zone."

Carrying these one-to-two-hundred-pound ice balls—or blocks—was no issue for the evolved. Cloud Peak's forces advanced into the Ice Crystal Swamp using them to clear the path.

Once inside, the experience was completely different from the outside.

The snowstorms and howling winds seemed to vanish, plunging the world into sudden silence. The towering ice pillars of varying sizes formed a vast crystalline palace, making it feel like they'd entered a fairy tale.

Whether it was Old Man's team or Cloud Peak's fighters, a dazed fascination flickered in their eyes.

Lush greenery and blooming flowers embodied the beauty of the southern landscapes, while the icy wilderness held the grandeur of the north. Starkly different, yet each breathtaking in its own way.

The rumbling of the ice balls rolling across the ground somewhat disrupted the serene harmony.

Boom!

After just a few minutes of travel, one of the ice blocks plummeted into a hole after rolling a dozen meters, revealing a pit over two meters wide. Whatever was inside immediately shattered the ice, sending fragments flying out of the opening.

Then, several white figures shot out from the hole, lunging at the nearest Cloud Peak fighter.

It was a squad of female guard warriors. Battle-hardened, they remained utterly unfazed. Only when the creatures were nearly upon them did they draw their weapons and strike with lethal precision.

Old Man and his team watched in astonishment. They knew firsthand how tough those White Tiger Beetle shells were, yet they couldn't withstand a single blow from these compatriots.

Perhaps enraged by their fallen kin, more beetles surged from the pit. But against the seven-star female guard, these creatures posed no threat whatsoever.

The skirmish ended as abruptly as it began. When a squad of female guard fighters rushed to the pit's edge and attacked inside, every last White Tiger Beetle was exterminated.

"Their eggs."

One warrior jumped into the pit and retrieved three milky-white eggs, each slightly larger than a goose egg.

Ye Zhongming gave them only a glance before ordering them stored away. He was far more interested in the beetles' corpses.

Though these lower-level lifeforms seemed fragile against the high-grade weapons of the female guards, their shells were, as Old Man had said, incredibly tough.

After personally processing the materials, Ye Zhongming commanded the team to press forward. The flesh of the beetles was fed to the ice birds, who relished these frost-dwelling creatures.

At the same time, Ye Zhongming collected samples of the crystalline ice. He was puzzled—how had these formations come to be, and why did they expand on their own?

As they progressed, White Tiger Beetle ambushes continued relentlessly. The rolling ice balls triggered some, while others attacked outright.

The frequency of these assaults was staggering, and in certain areas, their density was overwhelming. Though Cloud Peak handled them all, the pressure was palpable. Had this been any other team without their superior levels and gear, the losses would've been devastating.

After about an hour, the beetle attacks began tapering off. Whether this was temporary remained unclear. Coincidentally, they'd run out of ice balls, so while some dug for more, others took turns resting.

Then, the ice birds circling above suddenly relayed a message: another evolved team had been spotted not far ahead.

Someone else was in the Ice Crystal Swamp?

Ye Zhongming immediately halted all activity. The team advanced another hundred meters, using the dense ice pillars as cover, and they stealthily closed in on the unknown group.

Chapter 1587: Preposterous Rumour

"Hold on a little longer! We'll break through soon!"

A blond man shouted to his companions while swinging a blade.

Behind them, not only were there hundreds of White Tiger Beetles, but beyond the swarm, faint white figures could also be seen.

Ye Zhongming's pupils contracted—Blowdart Dolls!

Their short stature, pale skin, dense bone spikes, and grotesque faces matched Old Man's description exactly.

Their numbers were hard to estimate for now, as the dense ice crystals provided perfect cover for these creatures.

Faced with the onslaught of White Tiger Beetles, the remaining few dozen members of this Caucasian team were struggling. Their equipment was decent, with quite a few green-grade weapons, but whether due to their evolution level or injuries, their attacks couldn't kill the beetles in one strike. At best, they left deep wounds—non-fatal ones that still allowed the ferocious creatures to counterattack.

Already outnumbered and battered by wave after wave of attacks, while also having to dodge the Blowdart Dolls' sneak attacks, the team was on the verge of annihilation.

The blond man's earlier shout now sounded more like encouragement and wishful thinking than reality.

In Ye Zhongming's eyes, this squad was actually quite capable. The blond man was an eight-star evolved, and his team included several seven-star members, over a dozen six-star fighters, and the rest at five-star. In China, such a team might not crack the top fifty, but they'd easily rank within the top hundred.

And that was after suffering losses. This team would've been truly formidable if their original numbers were accounted for.

To Ye Zhongming, such a team was nothing special, but what surprised him was that they'd been reduced to this state by mere White Tiger Beetles. Clearly, that wasn't the case, so it had to be the Blowdart Dolls.

The blond man was visibly injured. As he retreated, a trail of blood marked his path. One hand gripped his weapon, while the other clutched his chest.

"Boss, should we save them? They seem to have come from the direction of Yakutsk," Xiao Min whispered beside Ye Zhongming.

Her meaning was clear—these people might have valuable information about the Talking Lady.

"Wait a bit," Ye Zhongming replied. He wanted to see just how dangerous the Blowdart Dolls really were.

What he wanted to witness soon unfolded. When the blond man was caught off guard by several White Tiger Beetles, a slash to his leg forced him back, disrupting the team's formation. Seizing the opportunity, the Blowdart Dolls—who had only been sporadically firing—sprang into action.

Emerging from behind the ice crystals, their numbers surged from a few dozen to over five hundred. Darting swiftly across the terrain, leaping between gaps in the ice, they unleashed a barrage of bone needles. The human team was instantly overwhelmed.

The injured eight-star evolved raised his hand, summoning an earthen-yellow energy shield above them, blocking the subsequent volley.

But the first wave had already struck as he was unable to block them due to his injuries. Despite their desperate evasions, over half the team was hit.

Screams erupted immediately.

Clearly, they knew the horror of these bone needles, especially their venom. The cries weren't from pain alone, but from the dread of what came next.

The blond man roared, unleashing a skill toward the Blowdart Dolls. Stone spheres the size of human heads materialized midair and hurtled toward their targets.

But the Blowdart Dolls had already retreated behind the ice crystals. The stones shattered harmlessly against the ice, failing to break through.

Ye Zhongming shook his head in disappointment.

As an eight-star evolved himself, he understood this level well. While Cloud Peak's eight-star fighters—enhanced by modified evolution potions—outclassed their peers, even an average eight-star shouldn't struggle to shatter mere ice with a skill.

This man was clearly at his limit.

The ice birds circling above relayed new intel: roughly seven hundred Blowdart Dolls were present, with over two hundred still hiding in reserve.

These creatures clearly possessed some degree of intelligence.

"Move out."

After relaying the Blowdart Dolls' positions, Cloud Peak's forces struck.

The ice birds dove from the sky, exploiting their aerial advantage to disrupt the Blowdart Dolls' ranks. Ice mist sprayed from their beaks, wings sliced through the air, and talons tore into the small creatures, throwing them into chaos.

The young warriors charged first, bypassing the foreign evolved to engage the White Tiger Beetles. Revitalized and now familiar with these armored foes, they quickly gained the upper hand.

Though the female guards joined last, their superior strength and speed allowed them to overtake the young warriors. Capitalizing on the chaos caused by the ice birds, they launched a ruthless assault on the Blowdart Dolls.

No mercy was shown.

Ye Zhongming feared the venomous needles and wasn't taking chances.

The Female Guard's ranged firepower was devastating.

The battle ended swiftly. Every White Tiger Beetle was eradicated, while half the Blowdart Dolls escaped.

This surprised Ye Zhongming. These creatures' defenses were tougher than expected, their speed astonishing, and their retreat disciplined—the moment they realized defeat was inevitable, they fled without hesitation.

Wary of the lethal needles, the female guards didn't pursue.

Two ice birds landed beside Ye Zhongming, now towering over him. He carefully plucked five or six bone needles from their bodies, storing them for research. Fallen needles were also collected and handed to him.

Chapter 1587.5- Preposterous Rumour

These toxins held significant research value.

The ice birds nuzzled Ye Zhongming's shoulders with their hard beaks before taking flight again.

The Blowdart Dolls' venom did not affect them.

"Hello. Thank God—and thank you—for saving us."

The blond man limped over, bowing deeply. His eyes held profound shock.

The sheer combat prowess displayed by this Asian team, coupled with the two eight-level flying beasts, made him acutely aware of the power and status of the man before him.

Unlike Old Man—a mid-tier evolved holed up in the Stink Nest, who only knew Ye Zhongming was "strong, very strong" but had no grasp of his true significance—this eight-star blond man recognized that this man and his team could rank among the top five in any nation.

Thus, his reverence stemmed not just from gratitude for being saved, but from acknowledging Ye Zhongming's standing.

He was an eight-star evolved, among the highest-tier fighters on Earth in the absence of nine-star beings. But the blond man knew well that power varied even among peers. Just this young man with his two eight-level flying beasts could likely kill him at his peak, let alone in his current wounded state.

After glancing at the dying men writhing from the venom, Ye Zhongming nodded at the blond man.

"See to them first."

A flicker of hope lit the blond man's eyes. If this man intervened, there might still be a chance.

But soon, disappointment set in. The Easterner didn't perform miracles, though he did use some unfamiliar healing items and even administered antidotes. The results were lackluster—the healing crystals only eased the pain without neutralizing the venom. The antidotes had a minor effect, but they were low-grade, and while the six- and seven-star evolved' natural resistance helped stabilize them briefly, the six-star fighters soon deteriorated again. Only the seven-star member held on, neither improving nor worsening.

"Thank you."

Though aware that Ye Zhongming hadn't used his best resources, the blond man was still deeply grateful.

Ye Zhongming waved it off indifferently.

Now, he had a clearer understanding of the Blowdart Dolls' threat. Their venom was potent enough to overwhelm even seven-star evolved—only eight-stars stood a chance, and even then, survival depended on individual constitution.

Fortunately, the toxin responded to antidotes. A seven-star evolved might survive with an intermediate antidote, relying on their evolution level to recover. A six-star? They'd likely need a high-grade antidote—something as costly as a six-star evolution potion.

Soon, all but the stabilized seven-star evolved succumbed to the venom, offering a grim demonstration of its lethality.

While the dead were buried, Ye Zhongming spoke with the blond man, who introduced himself as Zienke.

Though grieving his losses, Zienke quickly composed himself for his savior.

"Where did you come from?" Ye Zhongming asked.

"Yakutsk," Zienke replied. "We're from Western Europe, here on an expedition. But—oh God—it was the worst decision I've ever made. We set out with over two thousand members. Now, as you see, only these remain. It's my fault."

Ye Zhongming didn't quite understand this foreign thirst for adventure. Even in the apocalypse, he'd heard of Europeans trekking to the East for exploration.

Some behaved less like survivors and more like tourists or thrill-seekers, though he knew they had a darker side when necessary.

"Yakutsk..." Ye Zhongming repeated. "Why leave? From what I know, it's the largest city here, rich in hunting grounds and resources. Surviving there should be easier than crossing this swamp."

He spoke in English, avoiding the need for translation like with Russian.

"Ah, if possible, I would've stayed in Yakutsk awhile—recruited replacements for our losses before heading east to see your lands."

He glanced at Ye Zhongming, noting his impassive expression before continuing. "But Yakutsk is too chaotic now. Forget recruiting—staying alive isn't even easy."

"Oh?" Ye Zhongming's interest was piqued. As an eyewitness, Zienke surely knew what was happening there.

"What's going on?"

Zienke sighed. "It's... a mess. Over a million evolved have gathered to purge the city's mutant lifeforms. But Yakutsk is a sizable city, teeming with high-level mutants matching human strength. Skirmishes erupt constantly. Every minute, lives are lost. It's a battlefield—a massive... graveyard."

Ye Zhongming frowned slightly.

Under normal circumstances, evolved avoided large-scale battles unless driven by special motives. Conflicts were usually hit-and-run, as prolonged warfare drained resources, weakening survivors even in victory.

Before Ye Zhongming could ask further questions, Zienke volunteered to explain the reason for the war.

"Though I only passed through the outskirts, I heard rumors. They say a mutant lifeform in the city is evolving to level nine!"

The words struck Ye Zhongming like lightning.

So that was why the Talking Lady had time to send word to Cloud Peak—why she could afford to wait for him. She was advancing to nine stars!

But her secret had leaked. The humans there were biding their time, waiting for her to complete her evolution, when she'd be vulnerable. Killing her then would yield not just a level nine demon crystal, but an invaluable corpse.

"There's another rumor, though I find it... absurd." Zienke lowered his voice. "They say if someone claims the humanoid mutant during her post-evolution awakening, they can earn her allegiance, becoming the master of a level nine lifeform!"

Chapter 1588: Go if you want

Apocalypse Gachapon

The dangers of the Ice Crystal Swamp seemed almost nonexistent in the face of Cloud Peak's forces. Whether it was the White Tiger Beetles lurking underground or the Blowdart Dolls, they might as well have been made of paper.

This left both Zienke's and Old Man's teams utterly dumbfounded.

The Ice Crystal Swamp had earned its reputation as a "non-dungeon death zone" for good reason—countless lives had been lost to build its infamy. Yet, in front of Cloud Peak's team, none of it seemed to matter.

Old Man had taught their method of dealing with the White Tiger Beetles, but it achieved unimaginable results in Cloud Peak's hands. Every beetle within the team's path was rooted out, no matter how deeply hidden.

Some of the Female Guard's battle beasts possessed extraordinarily sharp hearing, detecting the slightest movements long before the beetles could strike. Even the most deeply buried White Tiger Beetles were exposed seconds in advance.

As for the Blowdart Dolls, they posed even less of a threat. With the ice birds soaring above—immune to their attacks—the dolls' positions were exposed from afar, making ambushes impossible. Instead, Cloud Peak's forces raided one of their camps, capturing four live Blowdart Dolls.

Aside from their blowdarts, the little creatures had no other significant offensive capabilities. Once caught, they were powerless to resist.

Had Cloud Peak not been in a hurry—and carrying too many Blowdart Dolls been cumbersome—the number of captives could have been far greater.

By the time they exited the Ice Crystal Swamp, they still hadn't encountered the Ghost Mist, much to Ye Zhongming's disappointment. He had a theory about it, but he couldn't verify it without encountering the phenomenon.

Zienke hadn't been asked to follow Ye Zhongming—he'd chosen to do so himself. The reason was simple: his team had been severely weakened. Continuing alone in the dangerous ice plains would likely lead to their swift annihilation.

An eight-star evolved might seem invincible, but nature was always the most formidable force on this planet, and mutated lifeforms were the deadliest threats.

Meeting Ye Zhongming reignited Zienke's ambition to rebuild his team. Following him back to Yakutsk was part of that plan.

Of course, he also genuinely wanted to forge a good relationship with this Eastern powerhouse.

Befriend those stronger than you, dominate those weaker—no matter where you were, that was a solid rule.

When passing through the territories of two powerful mutated lifeforms, Zienke witnessed the might of Yellow Ball, Yangos, Nine Treasures, and the Undead Dragon-fish effortlessly hunting down creatures of the same level. He... promptly knelt before the evil dragon.

At that moment, he was thoroughly convinced. Ye Zhongming didn't even need to lift a finger to kill him—his battle beasts could tear him apart in seconds.

As for why he knelt to Yangos? He said his family lineage spanned over a thousand years, and Western fire dragons had always been their totem.

Ye Zhongming internally scoffed but kept his thoughts to himself.

The team moved swiftly with no nine-level lifeforms blocking their path and no dangers like the Ice Crystal Swamp. Days later, they arrived at a small town dozens of kilometers from Yakutsk.

This was the rear base of the human coalition. Zienke had departed from here earlier and knew the place—and its people—well.

When he led Ye Zhongming's group into the town, the level eight battle beasts had mysteriously vanished. Zienke didn't dare ask where they'd gone. Instead, he guided Cloud Peak to meet the local human coalition leader, Peijia, the town's overseer.

Peijia was a tall, burly Black man whose presence alone exuded immense pressure when he wasn't smiling.

At a glance, Ye Zhongming deduced that this town must be the coalition's supply depot—their logistics hub. Otherwise, they wouldn't station an eight-star evolved here.

Peijia embraced Zienke warmly, suggesting a decent relationship between them.

After introductions, however, Peijia's warmth toward Ye Zhongming cooled significantly, his gaze turning scrutinizing.

When Zienke requested temporary lodging for Cloud Peak, Peijia didn't immediately agree.

"Peijia, Mr. Ye saved my life. I vouch for him—he won't cause any trouble. He just wants to rest among fellow human evolved before heading further north."

Seeing his friend hesitate, Zienke grew visibly embarrassed and quickly pledged guarantees. He was desperate to prove his worth to Ye Zhongming. How could he expect future benefits if he couldn't even handle this simple request?

Peijia studied Zienke curiously, noting his unusual deference to the Easterner. Even when meeting Akinas—the coalition's recognized top leader—Zienke hadn't acted this way.

Assuming Zienke must be seeking something from Ye Zhongming rather than being awed by his strength, Peijia deliberated before speaking.

"You can stay, but you'll follow our rules. Each person must pay one level five demon crystal per day. In return, we'll ensure your safety and privacy."

It was protection money. Zienke's expression darkened.

A daily toll of one level five crystal per person meant Cloud Peak would be shelling out nearly a thousand crystals daily, equivalent to seven or eight five-star evolution potions.

Even for an eight-star evolved like Zienke, that was steep.

His old friend wasn't doing him any favors.

Just as Zienke prepared to assert himself, Ye Zhongming agreed without bargaining.

Zienke immediately shut his mouth.

Whether Ye Zhongming genuinely intended to pay or planned to renege later, Zienke was ready to back his decision unconditionally.

Peijia was taken aback. He'd expected haggling—maybe settling for a dozen five-star potions or one six-star. But the Easterner hadn't even countered.

"Then... let's cooperate happily." Peijia narrowed his eyes and extended a large black hand toward Ye Zhongming.

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Cloud Peak was assigned the western edge of town—an area that was, in a word, too good. It was the safest spot in the entire settlement, adjacent to the heavily guarded supply depot. Here, they could rest without fear.

Zienke's mood improved upon seeing the location. At least Peijia hadn't taken their money and dumped them in a pit.

After bidding Ye Zhongming farewell, he retired to recuperate, his injuries still not fully healed.

Cloud Peak set up camp, posted guards, and settled in.

When night fell, Red Hair—who'd vanished earlier—returned. With her strength, the foreign sentries never stood a chance of detecting her.

"Well?" Ye Zhongming set aside a freshly crafted material—a fang from the level nine Snow Wolf King he intended to use for something.

Red Hair naturally stepped behind him, her hands gently massaging his shoulders—a habit she'd picked up from Xia Lei.

"It's tricky." Red Hair, now nearly indistinguishable from a human, frowned. "I couldn't locate the Talking Lady. If not for Yangos and the ice birds accompanying me, landing in the city would've been difficult."

"Oh? The mutated lifeforms inside are that strong?" Ye Zhongming raised an eyebrow.

"Very. I sensed thirteen power fluctuations at my level, plus a few... ambiguous ones. I couldn't pinpoint them."

If Red Hair—with her keen senses—was uncertain, the situation was truly unusual.

Ye Zhongming fell silent. He hadn't expected a single city to harbor so many level eight lifeforms. Those ambiguous readings were likely also level eight, possibly with unique abilities.

Could there be a level nine?

Logically, no. If a nine-level existed, the human coalition wouldn't dare maintain its current formation. A million evolved might besiege a lone level nine, but against an army led by one? That was suicide.

But things weren't always so straightforward. Perhaps a level nine was hiding, biding its time to devour the Talking Lady the moment she evolved, thereby amplifying its own power.

Either way, Ye Zhongming would have to face it.

"I saw the black cat. The one mentioned in Zienke and Old Man's intel—it is the Talking Lady's twin lifeform."

Another anomaly.

The Talking Lady and the black cat shared a lifebond and energy exchange as twin lifeforms. If she was evolving, the cat should be too. Upon awakening, they'd both reach level nine.

That was their strength—and their vulnerability.

Once evolved, they'd possess unmatched power for their tier. But during the process, they were utterly defenseless.

Since the Talking Lady was a psychic lifeform, Ye Zhongming had assumed she'd rely on controlled zombies for protection. Yet, the black cat wasn't in an evolutionary state!

That... wasn't normal.

"Heh." Red Hair smirked. "Maybe because the Talking Lady and I were rivals, the black cat didn't trust me. It wouldn't reveal her location. But it did say... it wants you to go."

Chapter 1589: Alone

The sunrise on the ice plains is always rather indistinct, but in places where human evolved gather, the sounds alone can tell whether the day has begun.

At a certain moment, the camp, which had been quiet for hours, became bustling with noise again.

After a night's rest, Zienge's injuries had improved further, and his mental state was better than before. After tidying up, he went to greet the powerful warrior from the East.

But the guard who stopped him informed him that Ye Zhongming was busy and couldn't see him yet.

Zieng had no choice but to leave, feeling frustrated. After some thought, he took his men to the frontline camp of the human alliance to see if there was a chance to recruit some people into his team.

Inside Ye Zhongming's tent, Xia Bai, Red Hair, Xiao Min, Xiao Xuan, and a few others were present. However, everyone looked at Red Hair with some helplessness.

Red Hair smiled apologetically. "I'm sorry, but this was his decision. You know I have to listen to him."

Xia Bai and Red Hair usually got along well. Though neither spoke much, they shared a silent understanding. Seeing Red Hair like this, Xia Bai couldn't bring herself to be angry, but her brows remained tightly furrowed as her fingers slid along the long handle of her black scythe, deep in thought.

"But... but the boss is going alone. It's too dangerous. Even though he's there to help, how would those mutant creatures know? You said there are nearly twenty level-eight creatures inside. Can that black cat really stop them if they want to harm him?"

Xiao Min was nominally one of the deputy captains of the Female Guard, but since Xia Bai rarely involved herself in management, everyone knew Xiao Min was the de facto leader. Due to the guard's strength and Ye Zhongming's trust, her status in Cloud Peak was quite high.

Under normal circumstances, Xiao Min wouldn't speak to Red Hair like this—Red Hair's strength and relationship with Ye Zhongming were undeniable.

But now, she was anxious. Ye Zhongming had entered Yakutsk alone, a place teeming with countless mutant creatures. Even if all of Cloud Peak were there, they might only barely achieve victory. For Ye Zhongming to go alone? The danger was enough to drive anyone mad.

The man who carried the glory and disgrace of Cloud Peak was risking his life recklessly. Xiao Min couldn't help but resent her boss a little in her heart.

Red Hair wasn't angry either. "Since he made this decision, he must be confident. Even though none of us went, Yellow Ball was with him, and there were two ice birds and Yangos in the sky. If danger arises, they can handle it. I..."

She tapped her slender, pale finger against her temple. "...can sense it here. If something really goes wrong, we'll go rescue him."

Xiao Xuan listened quietly as the others spoke. In such a setting, merely being allowed inside the tent was a recognition of his future potential, but he had no place to speak up yet. Still, that didn't stop him from understanding the situation.

The boss... actually went into Yakutsk?

Isn't that place super dangerous? But... he should be fine, right?

No one in the tent spoke further. All they could do now was wait.

However, the silence didn't last long before it was broken by noise outside.

The group exchanged glances and stepped out of the tent, seeing a crowd gathered at the entrance of the Cloud Peak camp.

Several whistles rang out as they approached before they even reached the spot.

Handling such matters wasn't something Xia Bai or Red Hair would do, so Xiao Min took the lead. She asked their own people in a low voice what was happening.

It turned out these were evolved under Pei Jia's command. Drunk, they had noticed many clean, well-kept women in the Cloud Peak camp and decided to cause trouble. Even if no one understood their words, their expressions and gestures clarified their intentions.

Most of the Female Guard had dark pasts they'd rather forget, so facing such humiliation made it hard for them to stay calm. The female guards on duty at the entrance wore terrifyingly gloomy expressions. If Xiao Min gave the order, they'd twist these men's heads off without hesitation.

Some of the juvenile soldiers were also seething with anger. Due to Black Dragon City's geographical location, some of them understood foreign languages.

Xiao Min glanced back at Xia Bai and Red Hair, who nodded, signaling for her to handle it.

"Where's Old Man and his team?"

Though Xiao Min was also furious, with Ye Zhongming absent, it was best to avoid conflict if possible. Too many variables could jeopardize their entire plan.

She wanted Old Man's team to mediate, to explain that Cloud Peak had been placed here under Pei Jia's protection.

But the juvenile soldiers said a few members of Old Man's team had gone out earlier. When the conflict started, Old Man had left to find Pei Jia—since he spoke the language, he could explain things properly.

Xiao Min nodded, then spoke a few sentences in English. Whether these men genuinely didn't understand or were pretending, they continued making lewd gestures at the Female Guard women, even escalating their behavior.

Anger flashed in Xiao Min's eyes. Suddenly, she drew the battle blade from her back and slashed it toward the ground in front of the camp.

As an eight-star evolved with a complete set of professions, skills, and bloodlines, the power of her strike was immense. The blade left a fissure over a meter deep in the ground.

After the strike, regardless of whether these men understood, she coldly declared, "Cross this line, and you die." Then she led her people back into the camp.

Chapter 1589.5- Alone

The group of burly men stood frozen, the silence suddenly oppressive.

Two things had stunned them into silence.

First, the woman had just wielded a blue-tier weapon!

Even their leader, Pei Jia, only had a handful of blue-grade equipment. This woman had one too? Anyone who could obtain and keep such gear was undoubtedly powerful.

Second, they knew how hard the ice plains' terrain was. Even their strongest fighters, using their prized green-grade weapons and most powerful skills, might barely manage to leave a mark like that. Yet this woman had done it with a casual swing, proving her terrifying combat prowess.

They exchanged uneasy glances and quickly dispersed.

Before long, Old Man returned, drenched in sweat, relieved to see the troublemakers gone. Xiao Min asked and learned that Old Man hadn't even gotten to see Pei Jia—no one had paid him any attention, no matter how hard he tried.

Xiao Min and the others glanced at the now-quiet camp entrance, but their hearts weren't at ease.

She had a feeling that something seemingly simple... might not be so simple after all.

Ye Zhongming walked through the streets of Yakutsk, unable to hold back his admiration.

Due to the ice plains' extreme cold, the city's architecture was remarkably well-preserved. The distinct northern aesthetic was evident everywhere, with rounded domes and vibrant colors adding life to the otherwise white-dominated landscape.

Beside him, Yellow Ball walked slowly, while above, ice birds and Yangos circled at low altitude. Surrounding them were countless mutant creatures.

They lined the streets like an honor guard, watching him with predatory eyes.

A human walking alone into a city overrun by mutant creatures? Anyone would think Ye Zhongming had lost his mind. Yet the King of Cloud Peak had done exactly that.

At the end of the street, the densely packed horde of zombies suddenly parted, and over a dozen figures emerged.

Some were towering like mountains, others shadowy like spirits. Some radiated fury like fire, while others were cold as blades.

Each was a ruler among mutant creatures.

Their appearance forced nearly every mutant lifeform present to lower heads that would never otherwise bow.

Ye Zhongming stopped. Yellow Ball stood behind him. The two sides faced each other across the long street, silent and still.

In the sky, swarms of flying mutant creatures encircled Yangos and the two ice birds within a sizable radius. However, the innate pressure of the dragon and the ice birds' natural dominance in this environment kept them from acting recklessly.

The black cat emerged slowly from the group of level-eight mutant creatures.

It had been a long time since they'd last met, but the level-eight feline looked almost unchanged—except for the wound on its body.

Its eyes were blood-red, brimming with wildness as it stared at Ye Zhongming. Having been isolated from humans for so long, the cat seemed fiercer than before, though some of its intelligence appeared diminished.

After studying Ye Zhongming for a while, the black cat's bristling fur finally smoothed down.

"You called me here. I've come."

Ye Zhongming's soft words sent a ripple of unrest through the mutant army. The sound of a human voice seemed to unsettle them.

A few level-eight mutant rulers growled, restoring order.

"Come. Alone."

The black cat's telepathic message reached him.

Ye Zhongming narrowed his eyes, pausing for a few seconds before turning and ordering Yellow Ball, Yangos, and the ice birds to leave and wait for him outside the city.

The beasts were reluctant but obeyed. Before leaving, Yangos unleashed the full force of its draconic might, forcing most of the mutant creatures to their knees.

It glared at the level-eight rulers, its warning unmistakable. Having touched the threshold of level nine, it feared none of them.

The surrounding mutant creatures gradually thinned out following the black cat deeper into the city. Even the level-eight rulers disappeared one by one. When they entered a dilapidated church, the black cat suddenly turned.

"Keep up."

Then it dashed into a basement.

Ye Zhongming followed without hesitation. While his raw speed couldn't match the cat's, he managed to stay close.

To his surprise, the basement connected to an underground passage. The sloping tunnel descended steadily, and after a minute of running, they entered a natural cavern.

The massive cave sprawled in all directions, with hundreds of branching tunnels visible at a glance.

"Follow."

The black cat spoke again before slipping into one of the tunnels. Ye Zhongming nearly cursed—the opening was so narrow he could barely squeeze through.

But having come this far, there was no turning back. After navigating the winding tunnel for several minutes, the space abruptly widened, revealing an underground river with crystal-clear water and golden fish darting beneath the surface.

The black cat had already arrived, perching on a rock. Following its gaze, Ye Zhongming saw Talking Lady.

Chapter 1590: Weird white threads

On the ice plains, the howling wind and snow made this place increasingly inhospitable to life.

Yet life stubbornly persisted here.

An army trudged through the ice and snow, its long formation stretching hundreds of meters.

What made this an army wasn't just its numbers—though with over a thousand people, it barely qualified as one—but its equipment.

Not personal gear, but armored vehicles, robots, mechanical devices, and even... aircraft.

From above, just the armored vehicles alone numbered over fifty. These weren't the traditional armored vehicles of Earth but hyper-technological constructs, evident from their hover-based movement.

While these vehicles still fell within the bounds of human imagination, the other war machines in the procession were entirely products of the wheel or alien races.

Humanoid robots of varying sizes, resembling Transformers, fully mechanical beasts, and grotesque hybrids of machinery and organic tissue.

Beyond these, flying machines were towed by evolvers on sledges through the frozen wasteland.

Heavy-duty trucks, modified for travel across the ice, carried cargo concealed under white tarps—contents unknown.

Three motorcycles raced in from the distance, kicking up a storm of snow in their wake.

Soon, they merged with the main force, stopping beneath a colossal mechanical beast at the front—five meters tall and over a hundred meters long. After a brief pause, a beam of light shot from the belly of the machine, enveloping the bikes before both vanished.

A moment later, the three dust-covered motorcycles reappeared inside the mechanical beast.

The riders dismounted, removed their helmets, and walked down a high-tech corridor before entering the cockpit at the front.

Inside, a man stood within the beast's "eyes," gazing at the endless white outside.

"Saint!"

The three riders saluted respectfully, their faces filled with reverence for the man's back.

The man turned, revealing a clean, fair face—it was Gyanendra.

Compared to the last two times Ye Zhongming had seen this West Asian Saint, he looked much younger, now appearing to be in his forties.

"Yakutsk city is currently swarming with mutated lifeforms lifeforms. A human army is camped outside, and the two sides have clashed multiple times, though there's no sign of an all-out battle."

"Hm." Gyanendra nodded in acknowledgment.

"We've made contact with Alamos' people. They're on the move, but they didn't disclose their route."

The same speaker relayed another piece of intelligence.

"What about the others? Any news?"

Gyanendra pressed further.

The man before him was his intelligence chief, also his most skilled scout-type evolved. With the aid of his job skills, he could survey an area exceeding a hundred kilometers in a single sweep, though such a wide-range scan sacrificed detail.

"The Thousand Beast Villa from the China shows no signs of mobilizing toward us. They're still hunting that mutated elephant herd with four level-eight creatures in a mountainous region. As for Deacon Water... forgive me, Saint, we still haven't located their camp."

Gyanendra waved a hand. "No matter. This is already useful intel. As long as the Thousand Beast Villa stays away, that's enough. They... have quite a few troublesome assets."

"And Cloud Peak Mountain Villa?"

Gyanendra asked the question that concerned him most.

The intelligence chief bowed his head in shame. "Forgive me, Saint. Initially, I couldn't get close to Cloud Peak's territory—their security was too tight. Later, even when I infiltrated near the villa at night, I couldn't breach their defenses. So... I can't confirm whether Ye Zhongming has set out."

He knew full well who the Saint was most interested in. This mission to the China had prioritized Cloud Peak above all else—yet he'd clearly underperformed. The reconnaissance on Yakutsk had been incidental.

"He will come."

Gyanendra turned back to the blizzard outside, murmuring to himself.

The intelligence chief bowed and retreated, guilt weighing on him.

The moment he left, the pilot's seat swiveled around, revealing a veiled face.

"Saint, the King has rejected your proposal."

Gyanendra glanced at the screen before the pilot and smirked. "Not surprising, is it? He needs to preserve his strength to secure his throne."

The woman shrugged but said nothing.

"What he forgets is that this world isn't just ours—nor is it just Earth's. There are far greater forces out there. Without sacrifice, how can he guarantee his throne in the future? If this planet ceases to exist, whose king will he be then?!"

It was rare to see Gyanendra, the Saint, so agitated. The female pilot stood and poured him a glass of water.

Taking it, Gyanendra spun the cup rapidly in his hand—yet not a single drop spilled.

"But then again, whether it's civilizations on this planet or beyond, who doesn't need a puppet now and then?"

Outside the window, the snowstorm seemed to intensify as the procession quickened its pace.

Ye Zhongming stood motionless at the entrance, his gaze shifting from the black cat to Talking Lady, whose eyes were closed, before finally settling on the white, thread-like filaments that filled the cave.

These silken strands intertwined, forming a three-dimensional web at the center of which Talking Lady was ensnared, eyes shut.

Ye Zhongming's breathing grew heavier, his muscles tensing because he sensed danger.

Not the urgent, life-threatening kind, but a faint, creeping sensation of being watched.

Yet, apart from Talking Lady and the black cat, there was no other presence here. That was what unsettled him, because it usually meant the source of this feeling far surpassed him in strength.

After several seconds of scrutiny, Ye Zhongming pinpointed the source: the white filaments themselves.

But why did they evoke such a reaction? Focusing his fully recovered vision, he examined the threads inch by inch—until he noticed something.

There were slight protrusions where the strands coiled around Talking Lady's body. They... were piercing into her flesh.