

Apocalypse 1741

Chapter 1741: Western offensive

"Is there anything else?"

Shasha looked at the dozen or so people seated around the table and asked in a low voice.

After some thought, they shook their heads, smiling and saying things like "It's the same every month, everything's fair, we have no complaints."

"Big Sis Shasha, the evolution potions flowing down from above have been a bit scarce lately. Now that Boss Ye is also a nine-star evolved, we shouldn't be lacking these, right? Could you talk to the higher-ups? Even if they don't increase the quantity, maintaining the original amount would be fine."

A man suddenly stood up, speaking to Shasha with a slightly ingratiating tone.

As small organizations within Cloud Peak's sphere of influence, their dependence on Cloud Peak had grown even stronger. Under the increasingly refined system, the more they did for Cloud Peak, the more benefits they could receive—and the more they received, the more they had to contribute.

This rule had become a consensus among everyone.

Compared to the life-and-death struggles of other factions in the apocalypse, working within Cloud Peak's domain, while still dangerous and requiring effort, at least guaranteed that every bit of effort was rewarded. They would never return empty-handed.

There was one more thing—Cloud Peak gave them hope.

Hope might sound abstract, but the strength it brought was undeniable.

Cloud Peak had always maintained an open attitude toward those below. As long as they met many stringent conditions, they could become members of the villa—this hope had become the lifelong aspiration of countless people.

Coupled with various rewards and benefits, it formed a "loyalty system" toward Cloud Peak.

The low-cost purchase of evolution potions was one such benefit.

Normally, obtaining a single evolution potion required spinning the wheel ten times. But at Cloud Peak, depending on the level, one could be bought for between thirty to eighty demon crystals, with higher-level potions being more expensive.

While spinning the wheel was a matter of luck—some might get it on the first try—that was extremely rare. Most people needed at least five spins, with seven or eight being common, and some even needing over ten.

In the long run, purchasing them outright was far more reliable.

Recently, many had noticed that the number of evolution potions flowing down from Cloud Peak had decreased. Logically, they had no right to question this, but this man had promised many of his subordinates that he would buy potions for them, even skimming a little profit in the process. Now, he had taken their money but had no goods to deliver, leaving him in a tough spot.

Shasha's gaze shifted to the man's face, making him shrink back in fear.

This woman was no ordinary figure. With Cloud Peak at the center, the surrounding area was divided into four major zones, and Shasha commanded one of them. She was one of the four giants of Cloud Peak's periphery, leading tens of thousands of fighters and equipped with Cloud Peak's high-end gear—a true life-and-death authority.

Offending her might mean ending up as a corpse in a ditch by nightfall.

"The fact that Cloud Peak can provide cheap evolution potions is something we should be grateful for, not something they're obligated to do. You understand that, right?"

Shasha's voice was as calm as if she were chatting with a close friend, but to everyone else, it felt like a biting winter wind.

Rumors said this woman was Boss Ye's lover—what was I thinking, asking something like this?! The man now deeply regretted his words.

"S-sorry... Big Sis Shasha..."

"Alright." Shasha stood up. "If there's nothing else, I'll take my leave."

With that, she walked out of the room.

Outside, Shasha took a deep breath of fresh air, feeling much better.

These men, all leaders of their own squads, commanding anywhere from a few thousand to over ten thousand people—how could they not bathe regularly despite their status in the apocalypse?

They reek!

"Big Sis, Old Huang's question wasn't entirely unreasonable, right? Our supply of evolution potions has been cut off, too."

A trusted subordinate walked alongside Shasha as she spoke. She had been following Shasha for a long time and was someone reliable—otherwise, she wouldn't have brought this up again.

Shasha fell silent for a moment before saying, "Keep this to yourself."

The subordinate immediately nodded, understanding that what Big Sis was about to say was confidential.

"Cloud Peak is about to launch a large-scale operation, mobilizing a huge number of people. A battle of that scale will inevitably result in losses, and when there are losses, they'll need replacements. How could they possibly keep selling evolution potions like before?"

The subordinate's eyes lit up. "Big Sis, are we going too? Back in the secret realm, we joined in and gained a lot of benefits!"

Shasha frowned, displeased. "That was then, this is now. Do you really think Cloud Peak needs a ragtag bunch like us now? Stop dreaming. For now, raise our defenses a level, but keep it natural."

The subordinate awkwardly agreed, muttering something about "our people aren't that bad."

Shasha looked toward the direction of the villa, the same question lingering in her mind as her subordinate's.

Who is Cloud Peak targeting this time? And why haven't I seen any signs of their mobilization?

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The grand hall was filled with the sound of elegant music. Gold-trimmed tables were laden with delicacies and fine wine, and the people seated around them smiled cheerfully, raising their glasses in toast after toast.

If not for the apocalypse raging outside, one might have mistaken this for a noble banquet.

"With that eyesore Gyanendra gone from my Holy City, and you, Saintess, no longer suffering harassment from the East, let us raise our glasses once more on this wonderful day—to celebrate the formalization of our cooperation and toast to our bright future!"

A man seated at the head of the table lifted his wine glass, laughing heartily as he addressed the woman sitting not far away. Without waiting for her response, he tilted his head back and drained the cup in one go.

If there was one person at this gathering who wasn't smiling much, it was the Saintess of Saint Light Hall.

This woman, who had come to West Asia to establish herself, seemed out of place amid the festivities.

To her left and right sat two of the new triumvirate of the Holy Temple—Zheng Xi and Duo Yan.

"Saintess?"

Seeing the Saintess holding her cup in a daze, Zheng Xi called out softly.

The Saintess glanced at her, barely touching the wine to her lips before setting the cup down. Zheng Xi's expression darkened slightly, but the city lord at the head of the table remained unfazed.

"Saintess, I know you're unhappy about our attack on Cloud Peak's teleportation point. But to earn the city lord's trust, this was necessary. Only by demonstrating our resolve to break ties can we show our sincerity in cooperation, don't you agree? Besides, we're very, very far from Cloud Peak. For a long, long time, we'll have no dealings with them. Between destroying a teleportation point that won't invite retaliation and a mutually beneficial partnership, the choice is obvious. Why dwell on it?"

With that, he boldly leaned past the Saintess to grin at Duo Yan on the other side.

"My Earth idioms aren't bad, right? Those Easterners might be detestable, but you have to admit—their language is profound."

Chapter 1742: Western Offensive (2)

With a heart full of frustration, the Saintess returned to her residence.

Just as she had shown at the banquet, the current Saintess of Saint Light Hall was losing control over them.

This all began with the departure of certain individuals.

Perhaps it was due to the collapse of faith, perhaps because the past glory could no longer be reclaimed, or perhaps because they had lost their roots forever.

Many of the devout believers who had dedicated most of their lives to the Saint Light Hall grew disheartened. After arriving in West Asia, helping their people settle down and establish stable camps, they gradually left, citing reasons like "exploring this unknown world" or "seeing how different it is from the Blue Secret Realm."

The reasons seemed valid enough, and none claimed they would never return—but everyone knew that meeting again would be uncertain, if it ever happened at all.

The Saintess understood that beneath these surface-level reasons lay deeper causes.

For one, the harsh environment of West Asia had dashed the hopes of many who had once dreamed of a brighter future. Even if it was better than the Blue Secret Realm, compared to other places on this planet, it was nearly the worst possible choice.

Did they resent Cloud Peak? Yes, there was some resentment—but not hatred. After all, it was out of mercy that Cloud Peak had allowed them passage through the space-time gate. They could have just left with the Posthumous People and washed their hands off the Saint Light Hall.

Having a place to settle was already a blessing.

Moreover, in the early days of their establishment, Cloud Peak had provided significant assistance, even if it came at a cost. The Saint Light Hall was outsiders; who else would have helped them if not Cloud Peak?

Then there was the matter of their attitude toward the locals.

Even after their defeat in the secret realm, the most loyal believers saw it as fate, not a reflection of their weakness, but simply that they hadn't been prepared.

In West Asia, they wanted to fight again—to carve out a true territory for the Saint Light Hall, even if it meant heavy sacrifices.

The environment in West Asia was indeed harsh, but there were habitable areas. If they could conquer one, after a decade of recovery, the Saint Light Hall could regain its strength. Another decade, and they might even surpass their peak in the Blue Secret Realm.

Unfortunately, this idea didn't gain widespread support. Many were weary of war, and the sharp decline in population made them believe that launching another war now would be unwise.

After all, a war for survival wouldn't be resolved quickly—it would be brutal, a fight to the death.

And then there was the lingering distrust toward the Saintess among these powerful and loyal followers.

Before, they had suppressed their dissatisfaction for the sake of the Saint Light Hall's future. But without external pressure, that dissatisfaction grew increasingly apparent.

This resentment stemmed from the Saintess's act of "patricide."

Yes, even if her true intention had been to save the Saint Light Hall—to prevent the Holy Father from destroying everything—time had passed, and the weight of that "patricide" bore down on her more heavily.

For every person who thanked her, there was another who blamed her.

This might be an exaggeration, but it vividly captured the Saintess's current predicament.

Those people acknowledged her contributions, yet could not forgive her past.

The contradiction left them unsure how to resolve it, so they chose to wander far away.

Among those who left were surviving leaders and many of the finest warriors.

The Saint Light Hall's strength had plummeted by over a quarter as a result.

"Your Grace, you may bathe now."

A maidservant approached softly, reminding the Saintess, who had been sitting in a daze since returning from the banquet. Seeing the exhaustion she couldn't hide, the maidservant—who had grown up with the Saintess—felt a pang of heartache.

"Has Chi Lian arrived?"

The Saintess asked, showing no intention of moving.

"She has..." The maidservant hesitated before continuing, "Your Grace, please let us attend to your bath. You can rest first, handle matters later. Commander Chi Lian will understand."

The Saintess smiled faintly and waved her hand. "Bring her in."

The maidservant bowed and withdrew. Soon, a fully armored female warrior entered—Chi Lian, one of the new triumvirate alongside Zheng Xi and Duo Yan, and the only one who had openly sworn loyalty to the Saintess.

"Your Grace." Chi Lian saluted before sitting at the Saintess's gesture.

"How are things?"

Chi Lian's voice was steady but grim. "Not well."

"Though we arrived here battered and bruised, our numbers are still substantial. The area around the Saint Light Hall remains the most suitable for our survival. Other oases and fertile lands are either too small to accommodate us all, too well-defended to conquer without heavy losses, or under the Saint Light Hall's control, making them off-limits."

The Saintess nodded in agreement. The Saint Light Hall might seem stable now, but dangers lurked everywhere. Internal conflicts were nearly irreconcilable. Choosing smaller oases could lead to fragmentation—or even total collapse.

"What of the breeding program? Any progress?"

Chi Lian was responsible for the Holy Temple's aerial forces, which had been nearly wiped out in the secret realm. Rebuilding this branch was urgent.

With a sigh, Chi Lian shook her head. "Not smoothly. Our breeding methods are mature, but they require certain materials, ones that are almost nonexistent on Earth. Despite our efforts to find substitutes, a few remain elusive. Particularly, a type of fodder grass for the young rocs. Without it, their growth is too slow, and their bones won't harden enough to bear riders."

The Saintess fell silent. This was a problem even she couldn't solve.

"Your Grace..."

Chi Lian hesitated before speaking. "There might be one place where this grass still exists."

The Saintess's eyes lit up briefly before dimming again. "You mean Cloud Peak, don't you? But... alas."

The two shared a wordless moment of resignation. Just as Chi Lian was about to report other matters, startled cries and muffled groans came from outside.

Seconds later, Zheng Xi and Duo Yan strode in, followed by the limping, panicked maidservant.

Anger flashed in the Saintess's eyes. Chi Lian stood, her hand resting on the dagger at her thigh.

"Your Grace, forgive our late intrusion." The two leaders of the Guards and Knights bowed perfunctorily before ignoring Chi Lian entirely.

It was no surprise. Though nominally the commander of the Aerial Corps, Chi Lian's forces were a shadow of their former selves, far outmatched by the Knights and Guards. Even her personal strength paled in comparison to Zheng Xi and Duo Yan.

"If you know it's late, why come at all?"

The Saintess suppressed her fury. She knew the Saint Light Hall couldn't afford division now.

Zheng Xi smirked. "Urgent business."

"Speak." The Saintess closed her eyes; it helped her stay calm.

"With the Holy City's help, Duo Yan and I have secured the Wangtasi Oasis. It will serve as the new base for the Knights and Guards. Those who wish to join us will be welcomed—after all, the city lord has promised us the two nearby oases as well."

The Saintess's eyes flew open, and she stood abruptly, staring at the man in disbelief.

She understood the implications—this was a move to split Saint Light Hall.

These two controlled over 70% of the Saint Light Hall's remaining forces. If they left, taking followers with them, what remained would be defenseless. The Saint Light Hall's legacy would face annihilation.

This was why she had endured silently for so long—to prevent exactly this.

Without the grand Saint Light Hall, without faith, her authority—tainted by the stigma of patricide—had waned. The people now revered strength above all else.

"And if I refuse?" The Saintess took a deep breath. She could no longer remain passive. If these two insisted, blood would decide the Saint Light Hall's future.

Zheng Xi suddenly smiled. "Well, we don't have to go. We could even sell the Wangtasi Oasis back to the city lord for substantial benefits. It's better if the Saint Light Hall stays united."

The Saintess was confused. What game were they playing?

"Let's be direct."

Duo Yan's voice was as cold as his gaze, even when addressing the Saintess.

"We can preserve the Saint Light Hall's unity, but maintaining the status quo is impossible. We must change, return to our former glory, and declare war on the Posthumous People and Cloud Peak—until they are wiped out."

"But we can't do it alone. If you wish to prevent the Saint Light Hall's fragmentation and downfall, an opportunity now presents itself. Accept it, and we'll receive massive support. Within a few short years, our strength will not only recover but surpass its peak. Then, we'll reclaim everything we've lost!" Zheng Xi picked up where Duo Yan left off, staring unblinkingly at the Saintess.

"For the Saint Light Hall's future..." Zheng Xi's voice, though quiet, resonated like a tolling bell.

"You must marry the Holy City's lord!"

Chapter 1743: Western Offensive (3)

The atmosphere in the room was heavy with silence.

Chilian and the maidservant both gave the Saintess a strange look.

Shouldn't she have refused outright? Chilian was even prepared to fight—if the Saintess made a move, she would follow, even if she was no match for these two despicable men! At worst, she'd die trying!

Chilian was one of the few in Saint Light Hall who fully supported the Saintess's decisions—whether it was the patricide, the subsequent compromises, or the choices made since arriving in West Asia. She believed the Saintess had done nothing wrong and had always acted in the temple's best interests. That was why she remained loyal.

The young maidservant felt the same.

Her strength was modest—at best, a six-star evolved by Earth's current standards. Faced with these two new leaders earlier, her powerlessness had been painfully obvious.

But that wasn't an excuse to cower. To her, the Saintess was not just a revered figure but also her dearest friend. Even if it cost her life, she wouldn't let these disrespectful men walk away unscathed.

Yet—

The Saintess didn't act. Even her earlier anger seemed to have vanished.

Zheng Xi and Duo Yan exchanged glances, excitement—and a hint of disdain—visible in their eyes.

"This matter is too significant for an immediate answer. We'll await your decision. By tomorrow evening, we hope to receive your final reply."

With that, Zheng Xi and his partner Duo Yan gave another perfunctory bow and turned to leave. At the door, Zheng Xi paused and added, "Your Grace, cooperation benefits us both. Our temple's situation is precarious. Frankly, even in West Asia alone, we rank only second. The city lord hasn't yet reached the Holy Father's level, but he's close. Now is the best time to merge. If we miss this chance, as others grow stronger, the outcome may change entirely. Beyond West Asia, we'd likely rank outside the top fifty globally. Our sensitive status means that without strength, we risk being swallowed whole. Since we can't rapidly upgrade our warriors, allying with nearby powers is our best option—it prevents us from being devoured."

"May Your Grace find peace."

This time, Zheng Xi's bow carried slightly more respect.

Soon, only the Saintess, Chilian, and the maidservant remained in the room.

"Saintess!"

Chilian called out urgently—she could see the Saintess wavering!

Yes, even if Zheng Xi and Duo Yan weren't entirely wrong, forcing the Saintess to marry an outsider was something the temple's followers could never accept.

Better to fight to the last than let the Saintess suffer such humiliation!

That city lord? One glance was enough to see he was a debauched man.

Of course, Chilian knew that in this world, no one rose to power on vice alone—yet her instincts screamed that he was bad news.

"Enough. I know what you're thinking." The Saintess's gaze drifted to the impenetrable darkness outside, her voice almost ethereal.

"Perhaps Zheng Xi is right. If I sacrifice myself, maybe I can steer the hopeless hall back on course. Maybe an alliance with the Holy City will make us strong enough to contend with other factions on this planet. Maybe... this is how we truly integrate into this world."

Chilian and the maidservant exchanged helpless glances, unsure how to dissuade her.

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After darkness, light must come.

As sunlight bathed the planet as it had for millennia, the land seemed to awaken.

The Holy City was a city that never slept—or so its residents believed. Yet while nights were filled with revelry and wine, daylight brought a semblance of normalcy.

It was one of West Asia's rare havens, seldom troubled by mutated creatures. Occasional sand beasts or aerial threats did little to diminish its status as a sanctuary for the region's evolved.

Stability bred prosperity. Shops and stalls crammed every corner—this was the Holy City's reality.

However, many merchants felt uneasy today.

Because goods were scarce.

Not what they already had, but what should have arrived—and hadn't.

This included supply teams for faction-run shops, delivery crews for trade organizations, and even individual hunters who usually clamored to sell their wares. Few came.

Normally, this would cause shortages—the city's size and population guaranteed massive daily trade.

Yet as goods dwindled, so did customers.

At first, no one understood why—some didn't even notice. But after days, the pattern became undeniable.

The news traveled upward, initially ignored by the Holy City's leaders, still basking in their victory over Janandra and preoccupied with an impending grand wedding.

But soon, they too recognized the issue. A brief investigation revealed its staggering scale.

The same gilded banquet hall from the night before now stood empty of guests and finery, occupied only by the city lord and his inner circle.

"Investigations confirm the situation is worse than reported," said a middle-aged man in traditional dress, his beard thick. "Far worse."

The city lord sipped water, crunching ice between his teeth.

"Yesterday marked our first full day of data collection. Only thirty-odd trade caravans entered, with around two thousand evolved—a drastic drop to just 30% of previous numbers. Two-thirds have vanished."

His voice grew graver. "As West Asia's largest—and only—trade hub, this anomaly defies explanation without beast tides or zombie hordes. Scouts have been dispatched, but answers may take days."

Trade meant taxes. Fewer transactions meant dwindling revenue and jeopardized the lavish lifestyles of the city's armies and elite.

Without ample taxes, the Holy City and its ruler would lose their path to rapid growth.

"Spare me the details. Just tell me—why?"

The city lord set down his cup, his cold gaze sweeping the room.

Silence. Finally, the bearded man ventured uncertainly:

"My lord, absent natural disasters or undead surges, only one possibility remains..."

"Someone is purging our territory."

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"Little Leaf! The Rusty Tong Hu and Stinky Yun's forces will reach their position in three hours!"

Yangos landed triumphantly before Ye Zhongming, its massive wings stirring a sandstorm.

"Looking for a beating?" Mo Ye snapped at the dragon.

This creature truly thrived on the slightest leniency.

"Woman, silence! This is a unique communication between me and my most revered master—beyond your comprehension!"

Yangos knew Cloud Peak wouldn't punish minor insolence, so it retorted haughtily.

Ye Zhongming chuckled. "How long was your flight back?"

"Fifteen minutes."

Nodding, Ye Zhongming did quick calculations before turning to the assembled—Mo Ye, Xiao Hu, Liang Chuyin, Xia Bai, Red Hair, Guang Yao, Tang Tian, Lu Yi, Park Xiuying, Ah Tao, Gan Lan, Mei Na, Ah Yang, Xiao Peng...

And the Death King Tree and Talking Lady...

"These past days, we've only cleared the Holy City's outskirts." His voice carried clearly.

"Next, we take their two largest remaining oasis strongholds within the hour, encircling the Holy City. In three hours, the Western Offensive begins in earnest."

His words were simple, yet they set every heart ablaze.

"I'll soon depart for a time. To avenge our fallen and ensure the villa's peace, I must take action. And I believe fear is the best way to silence our enemies!"

Chapter 1744: Holy War Decree

Snap!

The whip spun in the air before landing heavily among the crowd.

These ragged people could only grit their teeth and endure, not daring to move.

Because they knew—if they dodged, countless more lashes would follow!

More than ten strikes could kill a man.

True, they were evolved; the weakest were one-star, while some even reached four-star. But it was useless. Those wielding the whips were five- and six-star experts. Though the whips were ordinary, in

their hands, they carried terrifying force. If swung with full strength, the whip would snap—and so would the body.

Before them stood a massive, crude machine, roaring loudly and spewing black smoke.

On either side of the machine were gaping openings like mouths. On one side, the whipped people fed in various plants. On the other, others poured in a thick, black substance.

At the front of the machine, a row of thin pipes trickled clear water, collected in barrels below.

In West Asia, water had always been precious. In peacetime, wealth was measured not just by estates, luxury cars, and racehorses, but also by the greenery in one's mansion—luxuries requiring vast amounts of water, costing millions yearly.

After the apocalypse, though evolved individuals gained superhuman abilities, basic needs like food, water, and sleep remained.

West Asia had little fertile land and scarce water. Post-apocalypse, some areas vanished or were claimed by mutated lifeforms, straining already scarce resources. While competing against non-humans, West Asians also faced fiercer internal strife.

The Enos Oasis became a focal point of conflict. In the first three years of the apocalypse, bloodshed was constant—until the Holy City seized it.

Now stabilized, the oasis served as the Holy City's resource base, its prime product being water. Whether natural or "artificial" (condensed from plants by machines), the water here contained essential trace elements.

In the Chinese region, Cloud Peak's pills were bestsellers. In West Asia, this water guaranteed health.

The Holy City prioritized the Enos Oasis, stationing a strong defense—a 3,000-strong force averaging five-star evolution levels. Another 500 of the same rank handled other tasks, chiefly water production. The whip-wielders were part of this group, also managing transport and logistics.

If trouble arose, Holy City reinforcements would arrive within half an hour.

Today, the overseers were furious—supplies hadn't come for two days.

Thanks to the Holy City's "generous welfare," its 3,500 evolved here enjoyed excellent treatment. Water was abundant, and food—high-quality, often including luxuries like alcohol and cigarettes—was provided by the Holy City, since hunting wasn't needed.

With the supply team delayed, they'd gone two days without fresh food, let alone alcohol or smokes.

"Tell Rashid on the other side to whip those plant-growth support job users! Our 'material' is running low. If no new plants arrive soon, production will halt. If the City Lord finds out, he'll be the one lashed. Mercy to slaves is cruelty to ourselves!"

A burly man, bare-chested with a thick beard covering most of his face, roared at his subordinates.

The Enos Oasis was large, housing seven of these water-producing machines—requiring plants and oil as raw materials—crafted by a production-type professional.

As a seven-star evolved, one of the oasis's two highest-ranked overseers, his irritation was understandable. But—why was the ground shaking? Were sand monsters attacking?

"Mayouf, go see what's happening!"

He bellowed, tossing aside his whip for a green-grade one.

Though agitated, he never neglected his duty.

At the door, he doused himself with a bucket of water, the coolness calming him slightly. But the tremors persisted. Deciding not to wait, he went after Mayouf. **RαNÖbĚš**

Seconds later, he saw his subordinate sprinting back in panic.

"E-enemies!"

He froze. Who'd dare attack the Holy City in West Asia? Remnant followers of Gyanendra?

"What enemies? Explain!"

Grabbing Mayouf's collar, he yelled.

"E-Easterners!"

"Rooaar!"

Mayouf's reply overlapped with a monstrous roar. Looking up, he saw a flash of fiery red—then nothing.

The oasis erupted in flames and explosions.

A minute later, the force causing the tremors obliterated the Enos Oasis.

Against Cloud Peak's army, they stood no chance.

By the time Ye Zhongming stood amid the oasis, inspecting the machines, the battlefield had been cleared.

"Zhongming, you won't believe what the Holy City left us."

Guangyao approached, grinning.

"Oh? What?" Ye Zhongming, having deciphered the machines' mechanics, claimed them as spoils.

"Thirty-seven production-type jobs—all willing to join us." Guangyao shook his head. "I don't get it. These guys, treasures in China, lived like slaves here. What were these West Asians thinking?"

"Also, nearly 10,000 slaves—mostly low-level, but most volunteered to join, even offering to lead the first attack. How much did the Holy City oppress them to earn such hatred?"

Liang Chuyin chuckled. "Probably their ingrained caste and class systems."

Guangyao shrugged in agreement.

"Boss!"

Ayang ran over. "The Floating Ball's feed shows a 200-strong mutated camel squad spotted our attack and fled toward the Holy City. Intel suggests it's their famous Flying Camel Royal Guard. Should we chase? Yangos could intercept them!"

Ye Zhongming shook his head.

"No need. Let them know. A taste of impending death is... fitting."

He turned to his troops. "Rest for ten minutes. Then we advance. Notify all squads: We'll meet at the Holy City's walls."

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Holy City

The City Lord smashed everything in sight—not from fear, but rage.

How had those damned Easterners crossed apocalyptic wastelands to reach his domain? The teleportation array was destroyed! How had they silently cleared the surroundings and neared the Holy City?

Who gave them the audacity?!

"Order all defenses activated. All troops on highest alert. Full martial law. Issue the Holy War Decree: All resources confiscated by the royals. Every evolved in the city must comply. Execute resisters."

His face twisted with fury as he declared war.

"And inform Saint Light Hall—their loyalty is due. Bring the Saintess here. Send Zhengxi and Duoyan to battle."

A cold smile curled his lips as he locked eyes with a subordinate.

"Sayid, handle this personally. Take that item. If Saint Light Hall disobeys..."

"Then let them all die!"

Chapter 1745: Face front Saintess

The Saintess sat in her chair, watching the setting sun dye the distant horizon a deep red.

This was a sight never seen in the secret realm.

There, if you looked up, you would only see the same monotonous gray-black, despairing, and oppressive.

Though West Asia could hardly be called a good place, compared to the Blue Secret Realm, it was like heaven.

At times, the Saintess couldn't understand why so many of her people were dissatisfied with such a life.

Perhaps it was as the people of this planet said—greed knows no bounds.

"Your Highness, have you made your decision?"

The uninvited arrival of Zhengxi and Duoyan did not surprise the Saintess in the slightest.

She turned around, a smile on her face, but her words were as sharp as knives, stabbing into these two new powerholders who had already resolved to sideline her.

"You know I will agree—that's precisely your vileness."

"You don't dare make this public, and you've surely planned for me to shoulder all the responsibility, using the last vestiges of my people's trust in me to achieve your goals."

"Afterwards, my sacrifice will grant you control over the Hall, while I become a worthless pawn, living like a walking corpse, maintaining ties with the Holy City until I'm expendable."

Zhengxi and Duoyan remained silent, their heads slightly lowered.

Everything the Saintess said was true.

"Your Highness, sometimes sacrifice is necessary. The only difference is when and what kind of sacrifice is most worthwhile."

At this moment, Zhengxi was no longer frivolous—his expression was solemn.

"If the day comes when I must sacrifice, I will do so without hesitation." Duoyan placed a hand over his chest in salute. "Now, it is your turn to sacrifice."

The Saintess nodded and stood up.

"Perhaps you are right. Perhaps this decision is best for the Hall. But you've overlooked one thing."

Zhengxi and Duoyan exchanged glances, confused by her words.

"Here, or in our original home, cooperation is built on both sides standing on roughly equal footing. Do you truly believe the Holy City will cooperate with us sincerely in our current state? You pressure me, disrespect me, even humiliate me, all because you assume I will endure it for the sake of the Hall. But there's one thing you've all failed to realize."

The Saintess unfastened her cloak, revealing the white Robe of Faith beneath!

"I am still the strongest existence in all of Saint Light Hall!"

Her fair right hand reached into the void, and a halberd materialized in her grasp.

"Glory Staff!"

At the same time, an exquisite crown shimmered into existence above her head.

"Crown of Clarity!"

The two new leaders took a step back in unison.

Saint Light Armoury.

They seethed inwardly.

Once the Saintess was no longer the Saintess of Saint Light Hall, the first thing she would have to surrender was the Saint Light Armoury.

Now, her stance made her intentions crystal clear.

She was not going to meekly sacrifice herself for the Hall as Zhengxi and Duoyan had expected. Instead, she had chosen a path they never anticipated—

To fight to the end!

"Come. Today, let us settle this once and for all!"

"You're insane! Do you know what this conflict means?" Zhengxi never imagined the Saintess would be so unyielding—she was actually preparing to fight!

"I do. It means our respective supporters will engage in a life-and-death struggle. Saint Light Hall will erupt into civil war. The losers will die, and the victors will be exiled."

"But so what?"

At this point, both sides knew there was no room for negotiation.

Zhengxi and Duoyan slowly retreated—not to flee, but to position themselves for a decisive battle against the Saintess!

"Your Highness! Commander!"

Chilian and one of Zhengxi's subordinates rushed into the room almost simultaneously.

Seeing the tense standoff, they froze for a moment before delivering the same message:

Deliver the Saintess to the City Lord's palace!

Send Saint Light Hall out to face the enemy!

"Bullshit!"

Before the Saintess could react, the cold-tempered Duoyan was the first to curse.

Their allegiance to the Holy City didn't make them fools.

"Your rudeness displeases me."

Sayid walked in—alone.

"Assemble your forces. You have one hour to march out and engage the enemy. Saintess, you will come with me. That's all."

His attitude infuriated everyone in the room.

Zhengxi took a deep breath and, for the sake of the bigger picture, calmly asked, "What enemy requires our entire force to engage?"

"Eastern invaders." Sayid sounded impatient.

The Saintess and the three new leaders immediately realized what he meant.

"And if we refuse?" The Saintess stared straight at Sayid.

"I knew it." Instead of answering directly, Sayid muttered under his breath. In the next instant, without warning, he activated an object. Almost instantly, a tattered, ghostly banner appeared above Saint Light Hall's encampment.

"Since you refuse, enjoy your stay here. Consider it your contribution to the Holy City's war effort."

With that, his body twisted into a wisp of green smoke, floating upward into the massive, spectral banner.

The Saintess and the three leaders exchanged glances, their faces ashen.

They found themselves unable to move—and worse, a strange force seemed to be draining their energy!

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"Light the lamps."

With all of Cloud Peak's forces in position, the King of Cloud Peak issued the first command of the final assault through the Battle Contribution Badges.

Countless flare-like projectiles shot into the sky from all directions of the Holy City. Even after rising past fifty meters, they continued ascending without falling, each burning as bright as a thousand-watt bulb. Hundreds—no, thousands-of them turned night into day.

The entire Holy City gaped in shock at the blinding lights above.

"Target: the four city gates. Attack."

The second command followed immediately, and the assault began simultaneously on all fronts.

From above, the Holy City was surrounded on all four gates by dense formations of Cloud Peak warriors. The moment the order was given, as if rehearsed a thousand times, four massive aircraft ascended—modified Exquisite Floating Balls.

At a certain altitude, their weapon bays opened, unleashing a relentless barrage of projectiles trailing fiery tails, one after another.

These were the air-to-ground missiles, jointly designed by Cloud Peak and Commander Mu's Resistance Zone, specifically for the new-model balls.

At the same time, four colossal figures appeared outside each gate, each nearly half the height of the Holy City's walls.

War Fortresses—also upgraded models.

From their backs, launch racks slid out. Their heads tilted slightly, and the racks unleashed a relentless volley of small missiles, filling the air with a terrifying, continuous BOOM-BOOM-BOOM!