

## **Apocalypse 1776**

### Chapter 1776: Underground Palace

Ye Zhongming said nothing and directly followed these individuals to their landing point. He felt a force lifting his body, then he ascended into the sky at a moderate speed, leaving this space.

Once outside the confines of the space, Ye Zhongming saw the scenery beyond.

Astonishing.

If he had to describe the sight before him in one sentence, this was a city that existed only in human imagination—no, even beyond imagination.

The first impression was overwhelmingly complex—grandeur, fantasy, novelty, shock, amazement, and more, all at once.

Before Ye Zhongming could examine it closely, the force began pulling him downward. It was then that he realized they were descending into another "reception" space identical to the one before.

Here, they picked up two more beings similar to Ye Zhongming.

In this manner, they visited five identical spaces in total—including the one Ye Zhongming had "awoken" in—and gathered eight individuals before the reception process concluded.

The group flew through the air for some time. During this period, the escorts remained silent, only handing each of them a transparent screen displaying a language called Darkstripes Tongue.

For a lifeform at Ye Zhongming's evolutionary level, mastering a language was trivial with detailed introductions, precise pronunciation, and grammatical demonstrations. By the time they landed before what appeared to be... a sewer entrance (at least, Ye Zhongming thought it was one), all eight beings could roughly communicate in this language.

"Where is this? What are we supposed to do?"

One of the beings finally lost patience, refusing to enter the entrance.

Ye Zhongming understood the sentiment.

Like himself, these beings had all been level-nine apex existences—if not outright rulers, then at least regional overlords in their own right.

Now, without any explanation, they were being led into what looked like the most inconspicuous, even shabby entrance in this dazzling city—a sewer. Anyone would feel uneasy and guarded.

However, this being, perhaps accustomed to dominance, had forgotten the current circumstances—and where they were.

The lead masked escort said nothing. The group only saw a slight movement beneath its wide robe—and in the next instant, a transparent skeletal hand had already pierced through the questioning being's chest.

The being stared in disbelief at its perforated body before collapsing backward onto the ground—its material unknown. The skeletal hand dissolved into energy, slowly enveloping the corpse until, moments later, it vanished as if the being had never existed.

The other seven beings felt a chill crawl down their spines.

This meant they, too, could be killed at any moment.

"Enter."

That was all the masked figure said. The remaining seven, including Ye Zhongming, obediently stepped into the sewer.

Inside, it wasn't the cramped, dim, damp, or foul-smelling space one might expect. Instead, it was minimalist, clean, and... advanced.

At the very least, Ye Zhongming didn't recognize the vehicle carrying them forward.

After several minutes of descending, the vehicle stopped. When they stepped out, they were met with a magnificent underground palace.

The architecture was retro, bearing some resemblance to feudal Western European styles from Earth, yet infinitely more sophisticated. Cliffs, plants, and flowing water blended seamlessly with the structure, while ultra-tech devices hovered or moved around it, proving it wasn't as ancient as it appeared.

The seven beings, including Ye Zhongming, gaped like country bumpkins. All they could do was marvel.

Where they came from, such a structure would take centuries, if not millennia, to replicate.

It wasn't a lack of imagination—just a technological gap.

The three escorts led the way, crossing a towering stone bridge over a kilometer long before entering the first floor of the colossal, city-sized structure.

"Trash, that's where you'll train. Go in yourselves. Hope you live long enough to see me again."

With that, they turned and left without hesitation.

The group exchanged glances before reluctantly heading toward the designated area.

Throughout the journey, the King of Cloud Peak had been observing his surroundings. He couldn't shake the feeling that he—and this place—were fundamentally mismatched.

Not because Earthlings were ugly, but in style.

Whether it was the masked escorts, the jaw-dropping architecture, or even the other "newcomers," there was an air of coldness, silence, and gloom—something Ye Zhongming lacked.

Perhaps that was why the escorts had paid him extra attention, both during retrieval and departure.

Ye Zhongming felt a faint unease.

Passing through a massive metal door, he was startled to see a figure in a black bodysuit waiting for them.

"Trash, you're slow."

What surprised Ye Zhongming wasn't that someone was waiting—but that this being looked almost human, save for its multicolored hair and irises, which struck him as bizarre.

"Follow me."

After scanning the group, the figure led them into another vehicle, navigating the palace's first floor before stopping in a grand hall.

Exiting the vehicle, the group's eyes were drawn to the left—where two enormous screens displayed dense lists of names, alongside an equally massive map marked in multiple colors, its meaning unclear.

"That's the Kill Ranking and Honor Ranking. The upper half is Darkstripe City's; the lower half is ours. If you survive long enough, you might make it up there. It's not just about glory—glory means nothing here. But ranking means real rewards. Only the strong get to live."

The figure spoke while walking.

"And the map is...?" one being ventured cautiously, still shaken by the escort's casual murder.

"Battlefield."

No further explanation came. No one dared press further, but everyone sensed the figure's aura intensify—an unconscious reaction.

Clearly, that map held stories worth telling.

Stopping before a light screen, the figure turned.

"Inside is the rookie training zone. But remember—no one here will patiently teach you. Even if they do, you'll need to shed your 'trash' status first. So, rookie training is also a battle. Survive, and you'll learn. Then, you'll graduate from trash... to rookies."

"Go in. A word of advice—I know you were kings and overlords on your planets. But here? Drop the attitude. It might help you live longer."

With a tap on the light screen, it opened—and a sudden suction force yanked all seven inside.

"Good luck, trash."

The screen closed. The figure shrugged and walked away.

Chapter 1777: Stareye Race

Ye Zhongming immediately rolled upon entering—not because of any danger inside, but because another lifeform had thrown a punch at him.

It was a half-beast-like creature with a burly humanoid body, a short, thick tail, and a ferocious, monstrous head.

What had stood out most to Ye Zhongming earlier were its fanged teeth and the heavy, labored breathing. Yet its hands—each with six fingers—were neatly groomed, jade-white, starkly contrasting its sallow skin.

Ye Zhongming didn't know why this thing had attacked him, but his heightened alertness the moment he entered allowed him to react instantly. He rolled away, then darted behind a massive green plant, vanishing from sight.

This space resembled a tropical rainforest—lush vegetation of all colors, towering trees, and bizarre plants filled the area, exuding vitality. It was a stark contrast to the city or the underground palace.

The temperature was at least 40°C with 90% humidity. As Ye Zhongming moved through the jungle, he mentally assessed his surroundings.

No equipment. No battle beasts. No puppets. Everything was gone—only his body remained.

His top priority was checking whether his profession and skills still worked. In fact, this was the main reason he had separated from the group. As for why that creature had ambushed him? He didn't care much. To the King of Cloud Peak, once he figured things out, he'd just find an opportunity to kill it.

Whether it was a spur-of-the-moment attack or a hired hit, eliminating the source would solve the problem.

He hid behind a banana-like plant, observing quietly for a full minute. Detecting no further threats, he slowly placed his hand on a small plant nearby.

It was a Swordthorn Grass—something he recognized from the Blue Realm.

This plant posed no threat to evolved, but once matured, its central stem became razor-sharp. Plucked and wrapped with its own leaves at the base, it turned into a double-edged dagger.

Even a level-three lifeform couldn't withstand a single strike from it.

With nothing else, even a weapon like this would suffice.

Ye Zhongming activated his Gardener job, channeling energy into the immature Swordthorn Grass.

A surge of relief—his job skills still worked!

Likewise, his mental energy, his greatest asset, remained intact.

In this unfamiliar environment, nothing was more reassuring.

As the Swordthorn Grass visibly matured before his eyes, in another space, several figures stood before a wall-sized light screen, watching Ye Zhongming.

"Kill this trash. He doesn't belong here."

A cold voice spoke. Like the escorts, this person wore a mask and robe—but his was silver.

"Reason?"

Another silver-masked figure countered.

"His admission ticket wasn't his. Isn't that enough?"

The second sneered. "And how did he get it? By killing your spokesperson. He earned it through strength—what's wrong with that? Even among trash, he's stronger than the trash you picked."

"Aiyaholi, do you have a death wish?"

The first speaker's aura turned icy, his killing intent palpable.

"You're the one bending rules. If you made a mistake, admit it. Improve your judgment next time. While the Stareye Race has no rule against casually killing trash, and you lot murder at the slightest provocation, think about our current situation. Think about our disadvantages. Are these really just trash? Maybe they're our future hope."

With a cold snort, the second figure bowed to the leader at the front, then walked away, muttering:

"The Stareye Race has never been popular among the universal races. For eons, we've lurked in the shadows. Even in the united front against the Slave Race, we're expendable. Our headquarters is buried underground—"fitting our style,' they say. But what is our style? Must assassins and killers live like rats?"

"The Slave Race drains the universe's resources. If unchecked, all races perish. But mark my words—if the Stareye Race doesn't change, we'll be the first to fall!"

"Yet faced with these crises, you fret over petty interests and worthless pride. What does that solve?!"

A door slammed, cutting off the tirade.

The first speaker stood stiffly, seething in silence.

"Aiyaholi isn't wrong," the leader—gold-masked and robed—finally said. "The Stareye Race is already weak among the universal races. Centuries of prejudice have left us struggling. These 'trash' might be our chance to change that."

"Every 'Hope Campaign' after newbies shed their trash status determines resource allocation. Every time, we're just extras—no, background noise. This time, Lord Star and Lord Eye expect more."

"Keep an eye on this new trash from Earth. If he shows promise, prioritize him."

"You mean...?"

After their first trial, surviving trash would become newbies. If prioritized, should his trial be made easier?

"This trial originally had four slots, correct? Reduce it to three. Let the survivors share the extra rewards."

"Understood, Commander Cheng Liuji."

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Plucking the central stem, Ye Zhongming didn't hastily craft it into a dagger. Instead, he closed his eyes—and two spirits materialized on his shoulders.

They had followed him here!

"Make some Fertile Soil for Daddy!"

His previous stockpile was lost with his storage, so he relied on the Earth Spirit to produce fresh black soil.

Obediently, it “produced” a batch.

Ye Zhongming applied it to nearby Swordthorn Grass, accelerating their growth. Harvesting more stems, he then activated his top-tier craftsman ability.

Chapter 1778: Flood Dragon

The numerous Swordthorn Grass stems merged together, forming a short sword slightly over one meter in length. At this point, it no longer bore any plant-like characteristics, appearing completely metallic.

Ye Zhongming swung it a few times, slashed and stabbed at the ground, then quickly evaluated the weapon.

Roughly equivalent to Green-grade quality.

Strangely, while his Smith and Gardener jobs remained intact here, along with all his skills, the items he crafted with his own hands showed neither the glow indicative of their grade nor any specific attributes.

The materials were just too ordinary.

Swordthorn Grass was decent as a material, but relying solely on it was too limiting. If Ye Zhongming had had Ghost Metal or Drill Metal, along with some other materials, the resulting short sword could have easily reached Gold-grade.

Still, having this weapon was better than nothing. Gripping the short sword, Ye Zhongming continued his exploration.

The person earlier had mentioned this was a trial. With that in mind, he wasn't worried about not knowing what to do—"trouble" would come find him on its own.

Sure enough, before Ye Zhongming could locate suitable materials for defensive gear, "trouble" arrived.

Two massive serpents—or rather, flood dragons.

Each had a single horn on its head and four claws along its body. If not for the lack of dragon whiskers, a dragon tail, dragon scales, or a dragon's head, Ye Zhongming might have mistaken them for prototypes of Eastern dragons.

What excited Ye Zhongming wasn't their draconic resemblance, but something else he recognized on their bodies—

Demon Crystals!

In this inexplicable place, encountering something familiar—even if it was an enemy—gave him an odd sense of familiarity.

Unfortunately, these two "familiar" creatures weren't friendly. Worse, they were level eight.

Back on Earth, even ten level-eight lifeforms wouldn't have been a problem—he'd have had over a dozen ways to deal with them. But now? All he had was a Green-grade short sword.

He swung his right arm, attempting to unleash Thousand Seal Blade Slash—but froze when nothing happened.

No effect. No response.

One of the flood dragons roared and lashed its tail, sending Ye Zhongming flying.

The impact forced a grimace, but he quickly regained his footing, darting sideways in a flanking maneuver.

The level-eight flood dragons had assumed that mealtime had arrived. In this jungle, few creatures could withstand even a single strike from them—this puny thing should've been no exception.

They pivoted simultaneously, their massive bodies unnervingly agile. Pushing off with their hind claws, they swung around—

Only to find the human already right in front of them.

Such speed shocked them. Instinctively, they lunged to bite—but suddenly, their bodies grew heavier.

Squelch!

Blood sprayed as one flood dragon's throat was sliced open, the metallic scent saturating the air.

The other, seeing its mate wounded, raged. It launched itself into the air, its horn aimed at Ye Zhongming mid-swing.

A light tap on the injured flood dragon's body gave Ye Zhongming just enough leverage to dodge sideways—

But unequipped and still adjusting, his timing was slightly off. The horn grazed him.

The King of Cloud Peak went flying again.

Yet, like before, he rose immediately, using the dense foliage to reposition.

The wounded flood dragon now kept its head low, trying to staunch the bleeding—but its eyes burned with murderous intent.

Meanwhile, Ye Zhongming's body was now clad in black armor. At the last moment before impact, he'd activated the Black Earth Armor via the Earth Spirit. §

But cracks already spiderwebbed across its surface, on the verge of shattering.

Black Earth Armor lasted up to an hour, its durability depleting with each hit. That single graze had nearly destroyed it outright. A direct hit would've shattered it instantly.

Ye Zhongming also noted that here, elemental spirits consumed more energy. On Earth, this armor could've tanked two to three direct strikes from a level-eight creature. Here? A glancing blow almost broke it.

Recasting the armor, he charged again, ordering the Earth Spirit to maintain the gravity field hampering the flood dragons.

Another slash landed on the already wounded one. Trying to stem the bleeding, it kept its head lowered—restricting its mobility. Between Ye Zhongming's erratic speed and the gravity, one of its foreclaws was severed!

This time, Ye Zhongming learned his lesson. After severing the claw, he didn't waste time retrieving the short sword (whose low tier meant it only worked thanks to his personal prowess). Instead, he pivoted behind the flood dragon and—

Crunch!

A punch landed squarely on its spine.

First, a "pop" reverberated through the air—then the crisp snap of bone.

The flood dragon convulsed once before collapsing, its body limp.

Ye Zhongming's punch had shattered its spine.

The remaining flood dragon snapped. It coiled around Ye Zhongming in a flash, muscles contracting—attempting to crush him into paste.

Unfazed, Ye Zhongming deliberately raised his hands. One pressed against the flood dragon's snapping jaws to keep them from his head; the other punched its body in rapid succession.

The deadlock lasted a full minute.

By the end, Ye Zhongming's armor had disintegrated. His bones creaked under the pressure, his face flushed—clearly, the death squeeze was taking its toll.

Yet the King of Cloud Peak showed no panic. He kept punching until, gradually, the flood dragon's grip loosened. Like its mate, it slumped lifelessly.

Ye Zhongming extracted himself, retrieved his short sword, and finished off the first flood dragon with a stab. Then, he got to work—skinning, deboning, and harvesting.

Right now, he was a penniless upstart. Everything was valuable. The hides would become leather armor; the bones and sinew, backup materials; even the meat was packed—just in case better food sources were scarce here.

The entire encounter, from battle to cleanup, took seven to eight minutes—far too long for safety.

As his figure vanished into the jungle, two silhouettes emerged from the shadows.

One wore the bronze mask and black robe of an escort; the other was the multicolored-haired instructor who'd sent Ye Zhongming's group in.

"Beautiful Heaven Body—impressive! But what was that armor that suddenly appeared on him?" the masked figure mused.

The instructor frowned. "Resembles the Grey Pigeon Tribe's Earth Sealing Technique, but I'm not certain."

Nodding, the masked figure gazed where Ye Zhongming had disappeared.

"This trash... might be passable."

Chapter 1779: Female Birdman

Ye Zhongming found a secluded spot and crafted the flood dragon hides into a set of leather armor, roughly Green-grade in quality. Wearing it gave him a slightly greater sense of security.

Though Green-grade was far inferior to the Purple-grade equipment he'd worn before, it was still better than nothing.

Now armed with a short sword and clad in leather armor—even without his main job—Ye Zhongming felt his confidence returning. He wandered freely through the rainforest, continuing his search for useful items.

Compared to Earth's tropical rainforests, this place was more fantastical and vibrant—and, of course, far more dangerous. Though he encountered no more level-eight creatures like the flood dragons, he came across plenty of level-six and level-seven beings.

Level six was the lowest-tier mutated lifeform he'd seen here so far.

These posed no threat to him, but they did contribute a pair of shoes and some bone spike projectiles to his inventory.

Pausing at a water source, Ye Zhongming carefully assessed the area for danger before slowly approaching to drink. As he drank, he pondered the nature of this trial.

Suddenly, his expression shifted imperceptibly. He kept his head lowered, but the hand supporting his weight abruptly flicked out, sending several bone spikes embedding into the trunk of a nearby tree.

A black shadow leaped down from above, retaliating with two streaks of cold light aimed at Ye Zhongming.

But the King of Cloud Peak had already repositioned the moment he released the spikes. In an instant, he reached the tree, kicked off its trunk, and swung his sword upward at the shadow.

The shadow split midair—one figure becoming three. One blocked the bone spikes, while another lunged straight for Ye Zhongming's short sword.

Thud! Thud!

Two shadows shattered, erupting into thick smoke that carried a cloyingly sweet fragrance. Ye Zhongming recoiled as if from a venomous snake.

Aborting his charge, he let himself drop, then pushed off the ground with one hand to propel himself sideways. The two streaks of cold light he'd dodged earlier had somehow reversed course, slicing two gashes across his shoulder.

Simultaneously, a flash of light cut through the smoke—the shadow's unseen weapon slashing toward Ye Zhongming's chest!

He raised his short sword to block.

Clang!

The freshly forged weapon snapped in half. The cold light continued unimpeded, leaving a wound on his chest and splitting the Green-tier leather armor open. ҔАҢоБЕЅ

Rolling backward, Ye Zhongming hurled more bone spikes—not to kill, but to force the enemy back.

The shadow dodged aside, clearly wary of the projectiles.

The two entered a brief standoff.

Now Ye Zhongming could see his opponent clearly: a being nearly identical to a human, save for one distinct feature—

A pair of wings.

Had they been white, he might've mistaken her for an angel—black, perhaps a demon.

But these wings were pale pink.

A birdman?

Narrowing his eyes, Ye Zhongming wondered if she was part of the trial here.

The female birdman studied him with equal scrutiny, her gaze lingering on his shoulder and chest wounds with undisguised disdain.

Ye Zhongming produced two more bone spikes, smiling faintly. Gravity suddenly warped around his opponent, and a tiny planetoid materialized above his head, mirroring his movements.

The birdman clearly hadn't anticipated this. Her normally agile body grew sluggish under the unexpected weight. Caught off guard, she couldn't dodge the incoming spikes—

Her wings snapped shut around her body like a cocoon, generating a gust that formed an air barrier, slowing the spikes' momentum.

Ting! Ting!

The spikes deflected harmlessly, leaving only faint white marks on her wings. But as she unfurled them to counterattack—

Bam!

A streak of light slammed into her, sending her staggering back.

Seizing the opening created by his elemental spirits, Ye Zhongming closed the distance. Without his main combat job, he still had his body and the cumulative enhancements from countless strength and speed potions.

Under the effects of anti-gravity, he unleashed a barrage of punches and kicks.

Ye Zhongming didn't know how power levels were classified in this Darkstripe City, but one thing was certain: Nine-star evolved were the lowest tier here. This birdman was undoubtedly stronger than him.

Yet whether it was the masked escorts or the multicolored man who'd brought them here, while formidable, none struck him as invincible.

Take this birdman: clearly a speed-based fighter or assassin, with tricks like clones, wings, smoke bombs, poison mist, and that unseen weapon that had wounded him.

But once Ye Zhongming closed the gap?

She stood no chance.

Reality proved this true.

Having learned martial arts from Mo Ye and Xia Lei, combined with his apocalypse-honed combat instincts, Ye Zhongming had developed a close-quarters style uniquely his own. Though the birdman's wings provided formidable defense, under his relentless assault, she was forced into constant retreat. Were it not for her higher level and raw power, she'd have shared the flood dragons' fate—beaten to death on the spot.

Then, deliberately, Ye Zhongming's strikes slowed by a fraction.

Seizing the opening, the birdman broke free, flapping unsteadily into the air.

Her wings weren't broken, but bone fractures were likely.

With a cold snort, she raised glowing hands, preparing another attack—

Wee-oo! Wee-oo!

Strange whistles cut through the air. Reluctantly, she abandoned her stance and flew off.

Ye Zhongming clutched his abdomen, where intense cramps had begun. His gaze shifted to the water he'd drunk—drugged, undoubtedly.

Yet he felt no fear. His Beautiful Heaven Body granted innate poison resistance, and this toxin clearly wasn't the instant-death variety. The more potent the poison, the easier to detect. Given time, his body would purge it naturally.

Watching the birdman vanish into the distance, Ye Zhongming smirked.

Lucky she fled. Even poisoned, he'd have killed her.

The King of Cloud Peak's trump cards ran deeper than this.

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"Why didn't you let me kill that trash?"

The female birdman landed before the masked man and the multicolored instructor, her tone accusatory.

The masked man remained silent, but the instructor answered flatly:

"The moment you failed to kill him in your first assault, you lost your chance. Had you continued, you'd be dead."

"Bullshit!" She bristled with rage. "That trash couldn't kill me! I may not be your equal, but I'm a special training instructor—equal in status to a Bronze-rank!"

The multicolored man shook his head. "This trash is different. Not only does he possess Beautiful Heaven Body, he's likely inherited exclusive traits from his home planet. Had the fight continued, he'd have unleashed them. Aslan, trust my judgment. And now, you will teach him one of your abilities."

Chapter 1780: Strong trash

Ye Zhongming watched the returning female birdman warily, contemplating whether to kill her from the front or the back.

He couldn't understand—were all these cosmic races mentally deficient? Hadn't she realized during their last encounter that he could easily end her? What gave her this baffling confidence to reappear before him so brazenly?

"Trash, I despise you."

The female birdman spoke with venomous contempt, her tone dripping with arrogance.

Ye Zhongming's brow furrowed.

Since arriving in this higher realm, while no longer the strongest—with experts capable of defeating him everywhere—neither the murderous escorts nor the multicolored man had targeted him so blatantly. To suddenly have this winged creature barking orders at him was... unfamiliar. Instinctively, killing intent surged within him.

Back on Earth, even his bitterest enemies wouldn't dare speak to him this way.

The aura Ye Zhongming now exuded made the female birdman livid. Light shimmered around her hands as she prepared to strike—

Then she remembered the multicolored man's warning and restrained herself.

Their long acquaintance, from rookies to trainers, meant she knew he wouldn't exaggerate without cause. If he said this trash possessed means to threaten her, it must be true. Best to endure for now. With over 90% rookie mortality rates recently, she'd likely hear of his death soon enough.

"I'm here to—"

The birdman began, forcing herself to fulfill her duty—

Then the "trash" lunged without warning.

Blindingly fast.

In her face before she could blink.

As an assassin who thrived in shadows, not head-on clashes (as their last encounter proved), this proximity spelled disaster.

She was now standing before Ye Zhongming to negotiate. They weren't far away. Although the Cloud Peak King didn't have any teleportation equipment, he was extremely quick. His sudden movement caught her off guard, and she was hit.

She was astonished. What was going on?

CRACK!

Her barely raised wing took the brunt of Ye Zhongming's punch. Pain exploded as she shrieked—

WHAM!

A roundhouse kick sent her careening sideways. Only her superior rank kept her standing—but effectively defenseless.

What followed was a methodical, bone-shattering beatdown.

Her already fractured wings snapped completely. Bruised and battered beyond recognition, the once-proud trainer became a punching bag.

Nearby, the masked observer and multicolored man winced with each impact. Strong rookies weren't unheard of—but one manhandling an elite trainer? Unprecedented. í A NǒßE\$

"Intervene?" The masked man deferred to his superior.

After a pause, the multicolored man shook his head. "Let Aslan learn her lesson—so long as he doesn't kill her. Her recent instability harms our Stareye Race."

Meanwhile, in the observation hall, attendants stole glances at the gold-masked commander. The air vibrated with his suppressed fury.

While lower ranks might not know Aslan's significance, they did. Watching their supreme commander's [redacted] endure this humiliation was...

"I'll—" Commander Cheng Liuji began—then choked back his words as the fight concluded.

Ye Zhongming now held the birdman by her throat. He understood why victors favored this grip—total control, primal satisfaction.

"Questions. Answer truthfully. One lie..." His fingers flexed meaningfully. "Understood, birdman?"

He eased pressure just enough for her to stand—though with shattered limbs, it was less standing than suspended torture.

"How did I get here? What is Darkstripe City? Who are you people? Why call us trash? What awaits us? What is the Slave Race? The apocalypse? Why return? And—where's my gear?"

The barrage made the birdman's eyes roll back as she fainted.

Ye Zhongming's lip twitched.

Apparently, he'd misjudged her durability. That warning squeeze had been... overenthusiastic.

Dropping her like garbage, he began rifling through her belongings—

Cue horrified gasps from observers

—emerging with a small vial. Without opening it, he sniffed, then unhesitatingly waved it beneath her nose.

Collective heart attacks among spectators

(Who tests unknown potions like this?! That could've been poison!)

The birdman revived swiftly—her injuries, while dramatic, were deliberately non-lethal.

"I'm your trainer," she blurted, preempting further violence. "Since you survived my attack, I must teach you one of my techniques."

Seeing Ye Zhongming's blank stare, her heart sank.

She'd spoken too fast.

The "trash" hadn't understood.

Thus began Round Two of educational persuasion—

SLAP! SLAP! SLAP!