

Apocalypse 1791

Chapter 1791: All crazy

Earth, Cloud Peak.

"How long has Boss been gone?"

Little Tiger, Young Master Yun, Tonghu, Ah Yang, and a few others were gathered together, each holding a bottle of strong liquor and a golden-brown roasted beast leg. They ate, drank, and chatted while gazing at the sky.

"Almost a month."

Ah Yang took a swig of liquor, letting the burning sensation slide down his throat into his stomach.

In terms of age, he was still young. In peaceful times, drinking—especially this kind of strong liquor—would have gotten his backside beaten black and blue by his parents. But in the apocalypse, he was already a battle-hardened core member of the top faction in the country and the leader of a powerful combat team.

Right now, though, he was just like the others—red-faced, reeking of alcohol, and staring blankly at the sky, missing their Boss.

They all knew that at any moment, their level-eight evolved physiques would metabolize the alcohol, snapping them out of this tipsy state and forcing them to face a slew of frustrating problems again.

"Things were better when Boss was here. Even if he went to North America, the northwest, or even the secret realm, we still had a backbone. Other factions had to behave themselves—no one dared mess with Cloud Peak because plenty of people had already set an example by going to hell. Provoking Cloud Peak is just asking for trouble."

Young Master Yun's outfit was no longer the non-mainstream style he used to wear. A fitted set of golden battle armor made his already handsome appearance even more striking.

"And you think that's changed now?"

Little Tiger smirked, his natural arrogance radiating off him.

Ye Zhongming had indeed been gone for nearly a month, having left from West Asia. But through analysis and covert intelligence gathered by Chameleon, Cloud Peak had basically confirmed that most of the country's level-nine evolved had also left.

When Ye Zhongming was here, Cloud Peak was the undisputed number one. Now that he was gone, they still were.

After all, they still had Mo Ye. As for other factions, rumors said they now had level-nine evolved, too, but no concrete information had leaked—even Chameleon couldn't uncover anything. The only certainty was that someone had spun a level-nine wheel on the grasslands once, and nothing had been taken from it.

Since all rewards on a level-nine wheel were unique except for evolution potions, that meant someone had obtained a level-nine potion.

But Cloud Peak wasn't too concerned because their focus wasn't even on that.

"I always thought Sister Lei's decision was a little crazy." Tonghu was actually older than Xia Lei, but he got along so well with Little Tiger, Young Master Yun, and the others that he called her "Sister Lei" too. The first time he did it to her face, he nearly gave her a stroke.

"That wasn't just Sister Lei's decision. It was first proposed by Sister Lei, Sister Hong, and Chuyin—three crazy women. Sister Xia Bai definitely supported it. What surprised me was that even Sister Ye, Sister Rong, Master Le, Brother Shengyuan, and Sister Xiuying all agreed. Later, Guang Yao, that guy, and even Tang Tian all voted in favor too."

Little Tiger was still amazed. A plan that insane—him agreeing wasn't unexpected, but even steady guys like Guang Yao, Tang Tian, and Shengyuan had gone along with it. No doubt about it, they were all a bunch of lunatics.

As for Namei, Gan Lan, and others, though they were core members, they were still a tier below and had no say in major decisions.

"Honestly, I don't think it's that big a deal." Ah Yang spoke while recalling his sister's unusual behavior after Boss left.

Ah Yang knew his sister had feelings for Boss, but he also knew it was a hopeless dream. Forget that Boss already had Sister Lei, Chuyin, and Miya—even if another woman climbed into Boss's bed, it'd be

someone like Sister Ye, Sister Xiuying, or even peripheral core members like Sister Shasha. Even their ironclad ally, Deacon Water, might get involved. There were even rumors that Commander Mu wanted an alliance marriage between their resistance zone and Cloud Peak. Who knew? Maybe one day Mu Xinfei, that stunning beauty, would become another "Boss's woman."

But from his sister, Ah Yang saw a mental state shared by many after Boss left.

Especially among Sister Lei and the other women.

On one hand, they worried something might happen to Boss up in space. After all, it was an unknown realm, and he was facing the terrifying "aliens"—the Universal Races. Worse, Boss couldn't take his equipment with him, and even Yellow Ball and the others hadn't gone. For Boss's women—or those who wanted to be—or even those who just wanted him alive to keep sleeping with women, the anxiety and unease were no less intense than acute menopause syndrome.

On the other hand, even if Boss was fine, these women—no, not just the women, even guys like Guang Yao—felt the strategy Boss had left behind was too conservative. Defending? Cloud Peak defending? That was like locking a tiger in a cage!

After Xia Lei proposed her idea, one by one, the eligible core members were convinced. After a day and night of analyzing the country's situation, their own strength, available resources, and future trends, they voted unanimously to abandon the conservative strategy Ye Zhongming had left behind and instead launch a war so insane that even now, Little Tiger and the others couldn't believe it.

Unify the country!

Scary, right? But that wasn't all. There was an expansion plan.

Then unify Asia!

Done? No. There was still a contingency plan.

The ultimate goal? Unify... the entire planet.

In history, whether it was the mighty Roman Empire, the unified Qin Dynasty, the Mongol cavalry that swept across Eurasia, or even the self-proclaimed "empire on which the sun never sets," none had ever accomplished one thing: unifying the entire planet.

Now, a group of lunatics led by one crazy woman aimed to achieve this feat—no, not a feat, a miracle—never before accomplished in human history.

Could they pull it off? Honestly, even though Little Tiger, Tonghu, Yun Shao, and the others had all roared and voted with all four limbs in favor, if asked now whether they had confidence, they wouldn't sound convincing. They wouldn't even dare to say—Yes boldly!

But Cloud Peak's higher-ups had still made this decision—and even set a deadline.

Fifteen years.

They planned to unify Earth in just fifteen years.

"F*cking insane." Little Tiger muttered before tilting his head back and downing the remaining half-bottle of liquor. Then he stood up. At the foot of the hill where he stood, Cloud Peak's cavalry stood in solemn formation.

Five kilometers ahead was the Thousand Beast Villa.

They were Cloud Peak's allies.

But under this mad plan, Cloud Peak was destined to walk alone.

Little Tiger was waiting for an order—attack or retreat.

Far away, at Cloud Peak Villa, a meeting that would decide the fate of many was being chaired by Xia Lei. The agenda had only one item:

Those who oppose us shall perish!

Chapter 1792: All crazy

Xia Lei sat in her swivel chair, eyes narrowed as she gazed at the scenic beauty of the mountain villa outside the window.

Over the years, what was once a vacation resort had completely transformed into a fortress of war, with traces of weaponry visible everywhere.

However, thanks to the recruitment of various talents, an exceptional architectural designer had used his genius to adorn the villa with trees, greenery, flowers, medicinal herbs, and artificial streams, making the place—if not quite a paradise—at least breathtakingly beautiful.

In the blood-soaked apocalypse, living amidst such scenery was a rare blessing.

Yet, there was still regret.

Xia Lei pressed a hand to her stomach and sighed inwardly. This just won't cooperate. For years now, it had failed to conceive a child for that man. It was her regret, and it was Chuyin and Miya's regret as well.

Cloud Peak had grown to become a superpower of unprecedented scale. If peripheral members and their families were included, its population had surpassed three million. Such a massive entity, such vast numbers—sometimes, it needed an heir to stabilize morale.

Just like the nations of old, an heir was necessary to secure many things.

Yet, there was none.

Xia Lei could only resign herself to this reality—one shared by the entire post-apocalyptic world. Fertility rates had plummeted to their limits, a problem faced by all evolvers. Sister Hong had been researching it for some time, but so far, she'd found no solution.

After Ye Zhongming ascended to the heavens, the pile of equipment he left behind haunted Xia Lei's dreams like a nightmare. She couldn't even imagine what life would be like without that man, nor what she herself would become.

In just ten days, Xia Lei felt like she was losing her mind. Worry and fear gnawed at her heart every second.

Because of the matter of level-nine evolved ascending, much information had circulated among factions with clearance. Xia Lei had naturally learned much, and from these fragments, she had formed her own conjecture.

The Universe Races—each was an independent entity, yet they collectively intervened in Earth's affairs.

They possessed mighty warriors, astonishing technology, and the power to dictate life and death.

So, what position would Earth occupy in the future?

There were only two possibilities.

The optimistic outcome: After meeting certain conditions, Earth would be incorporated into the Universe Races.

The pessimistic outcome: It would become a colony—or worse, a resource planet, a slave planet.

If Earth was accepted, would it remain independent? Or would it be allowed to join as the chaotic patchwork of ethnicities it had been since the dawn of humanity?

Xia Lei doubted the latter. More likely, it would have to enter their system as a unified whole.

If the outcome were bad, then Earth's spine would first have to be broken—its inhabitants stripped of all hope for resistance.

But either way, Xia Lei believed one thing was necessary:

Unification.

One faction. One leader. One decision. One voice... One person.

That faction had to be Cloud Peak. That voice, that leader, that person—had to be her man.

He had gone to the heavens to contend with the Universe Races, so this task fell to her.

Xia Lei had never been an ambitious woman. Even before Ye Zhongming left, she'd been content to manage her own domain. The life she'd yearned for was simple: raising children in peace, occasionally slaughtering whatever displeased her man.

But now, every time she looked up at the sky, she felt a bone-deep sense of crisis.

How is he? What dangers is he facing right now? He feared no battle, but against an entire race—what then? Was his plight tied to Earth's fate?

She had shared these thoughts with Liang Chuyin and Miya, and their unease had only deepened.

So, in the end, this decision was no surprise.

Xia Lei would conquer this planet and make it her man's shield.

So that when he faced any race in the cosmos, he would always have cards to play, always have backing.

What remained was simple.

Those who submitted would join. Those who resisted would perish.

A pipe dream? Maybe. Difficult? Undoubtedly.

But worth it.

As for whether her man would be angry at her defiance of his conservative strategy, Xia Lei didn't dwell on it. At worst, she, Chuyin, and the others could just share a bed and let him vent his frustrations. It wasn't like he'd divorce her over it.

The clamor behind her gradually quieted until the room was so silent that a pin drop could be heard.

Xia Lei's chair slowly turned, revealing her to the furious allies gathered before her.

"Sister Xia, is this really the right move for Cloud Peak?"

The speaker was Mu Xinfei. By framing it as a personal question first, she left room for de-escalation.

"There's nothing inappropriate about it."

Xia Lei's reply did not explain anything.

In such a setting, facing people of this stature, her attitude could only be described as hostile.

Li Daqian's face was dark with anger. Of those present, he had been the most agitated.

Given that Cloud Peak and Thousand Beast Villa had closer ties than even the Five Ring Money or the Resistance Zone, discovering he'd been kept in the dark like everyone else had infuriated him.

"Does Zhongming know about this?"

Xia Lei's gaze settled on Li Daqian's face.

"This was Cloud Peak's collective decision."

Commander Mu's expression was icy as she spoke slowly. "By doing this, Cloud Peak is making an enemy of the entire world."

Xia Lei nodded. "Yes. That's exactly right."

Deacon Water shook her head repeatedly. "Have you all lost your minds?"

"The world always needs a few madmen to do mad things," Xia Lei said. "Otherwise, it'd be too boring."

She stood, surveying the room. "I've laid out the terms. I hope you'll agree to merge with Cloud Peak and fight for this goal together. After so long working side by side, I'd hate for us to become enemies."

"Equivalent to Cloud Peak's core members'—that's your entire condition?" Li Daqian, past the peak of his rage, was eerily calm.

No matter how absurd or laughable this plan was, Cloud Peak's attitude was unbearably condescending.

"It's the most generous offer there is." Xia Lei radiated absolute confidence as she began circling the table. "Before, if you wanted Cloud Peak's exclusive products, you had to trade for them—member discounts, yes, but still at a cost. Merge with us, and that's no longer necessary."

The others listened, inwardly sneering.

Who do you take us for? Free goods? Then what about our assets? Wouldn't they just be handed over for nothing?

Halfway around the table, Xia Lei suddenly sighed.

"Honestly, I wanted to patiently explain the pros and cons to make this easier to accept. But right now—whether it's me or Cloud Peak—we're all too restless, too anxious. So I won't bother."

She raised a slender, jade-white finger.

"I'll say just one thing."

"In the apocalypse, the one with the biggest fists makes the rules."

"Right now, Cloud Peak's fists are the biggest."

"So we demand your..."

"Submission."

As she spoke, a massive shadow fell over the room. A draconic head lowered outside the window, its silver magic crystal glinting under the sunlight.

Yangos—now level nine.

Chapter 1793: Yes or no

Many members who came to Cloud Peak with their leaders would never forget that sunny afternoon, nor the dragon that descended from the sky, radiating killing intent.

They would especially never forget the chilling silence that filled the room.

"Xia Lei!"

Li Daqian abruptly stood up.

He hadn't interacted much with this woman—his connections were more tied to Ye Zhongming. Now, the master of Thousand Beast Villa was already in a battle-ready state.

Cloud Peak was clearly using force to suppress them—what else could they do but resist?

Level nine? Yes, it was strong. Extremely strong. Li Daqian alone couldn't handle it.

But his companions, who had come here with him, were not far away. If he could regroup with them, they would have a fighting chance. Moreover, by his side were two powerful figures from the Chinese region—Commander Mu and Deacon Water. Mu Xinfei had also become a level-eight evolved. With such a lineup, breaking out of Cloud Peak was highly possible.

The room suddenly felt damp—clearly, Deacon Water was also preparing for battle.

In the apocalypse, none of these leaders were willing to submit to others, even if that person was Ye Zhongming. Just think: Deacon Water had left the Five Ring Money, and Commander Mu had rebelled against the Resistance Zone—both actions proved they had proud hearts.

"You are allies, so I've given you a choice. If it were anyone else..."

Commander Mu stood up and laughed. "Xia Lei, by that logic, you're doing us a favor?"

This man made Xia Lei take him more seriously—after all, up until now, no one outside their own circle had ever seen him fight.

"Yes. At the very least, we genuinely hope you'll join us."

"And if we refuse?"

Faced with this question, Xia Lei said nothing.

She simply waved her hand, and Miya, standing to the side, turned on a large TV that had been placed against the wall. The screen was split into four quadrants, and the first three immediately put everyone in the room on edge.

They all recognized those locations—they were near their own bases.

And in the footage were Cloud Peak's fully assembled troops, ready for battle.

Each unit appeared to consist of at least four battle teams, totaling around 40,000 soldiers. Beyond that, a significant number of gene-enhanced warriors and crystal weapons could faintly be seen.

This number wasn't particularly terrifying for major factions at this point. Take Thousand Beast Villa, for example—they had over 100,000 combat-ready individuals, not even counting their equally powerful war beasts.

But everyone knew what Cloud Peak's combat strength was like. Their 40,000 soldiers could easily match 100,000 or more. And when they had come here, they hadn't expected this woman and this mountain stronghold to be so insane. Their own bases weren't prepared. Against a surprise attack, they likely wouldn't hold.

The last quadrant showed footage from outside a valley. Though the angle made it impossible to see the full picture, after a moment of thought, the Chinese region's leaders recognized it. Cloud Peak had shared intelligence with them, including detailed information and photos of this place.

The Black Star's stronghold—Sakagami Valley.

A super base they had built using a certain piece of equipment and manpower.

Black Star had first appeared on the country rankings at the same time Cloud Peak took the top spot, placing tenth. Later, as the Pin Palace moved away, the God Hall and Soul Merchant suffered heavy losses, and Black Star collaborated with the Resistance Zone and others to reap huge benefits; they had now risen to seventh place.

In terms of strength, they might be slightly weaker than Thousand Beast Villa, but they were at least on par with—if not stronger than—the forces of Deacon Water and Commander Mu.

Everyone in the Chinese region knew this faction wasn't particularly fond of Cloud Peak's faction, always carrying a faint sense of competition, even hostility. At the lower levels, there had even been some friction.

Now, outside Black Star's stronghold, Cloud Peak had also deployed battle teams—another 40,000 soldiers, along with gene-enhanced warriors and magic crystal weapon battalions.

"Watch this, then make your decision."

Mo Ye appeared in the room, speaking calmly. Her words weakened the resolve of Deacon Water, Commander Mu, Li Daqian, and the others, filling them with bitterness.

No matter how unwilling they had been earlier, they all knew now—there was no peaceful resolution today.

Ye Zhongming wasn't here, but the level-nine Death King Tree, the Talking Lady and her black cat, and the now level-nine Mo Ye meant their high-tier combat power was utterly overwhelming.

And now, with the addition of a level-nine fire dragon, the situation had become hopeless.

If Mo Ye and Yangos were here to suppress them, where were the Death King Tree and the Talking Lady? Could they be leading the attacks on their bases?

The roar of magic crystal cannons snapped everyone back to attention. The real-time footage from the Exquisite Floating Ball showed that Cloud Peak had just casually launched an attack on a major faction in the Chinese region.

Then, under the cover of artillery fire, the gene-enhanced army charged toward Sakagami Valley.

There was no denying it—Black Star's headquarters was unique, sturdy, and formidable. They had fully utilized the terrain and wheel technology to turn it into an impregnable fortress.

But under the bombardment of Annihilation Ultimate-Type magic crystal cannons and the assault of the versatile gene-enhanced warriors, the outer defenses didn't even last half an hour.

If even Holy City had fallen, how could this place hold?

When Guang Yao, the commander leading this force, gave the order for the final assault—and when the Death King Tree revealed its true form, occupying half the screen—everyone in the room knew the outcome was decided.

"You know what? The moment all of you came here, you lost any choice." Xia Lei looked at them. "Not because you were trapped here, but because none of you were in the middle of evolving."

They suddenly understood. Of course—since they were all at Cloud Peak, none of them could be in the process of evolving to level nine. That meant they had no top-tier power to oppose Cloud Peak.

This invitation had also been a test.

"And as for level eight..." Xia Lei smiled, walking to another window and pulling open the curtains.

Outside stood a squad of several hundred women.

They all recognized them—the Female Guards, Ye Zhongming's most loyal protectors.

When their gazes fell upon them, the entire squad suddenly emitted a golden light.

It was the radiance of their equipment, no longer concealed.

"They are all level eight—just like you. Their equipment is all gold-grade. Their war beasts are all level seven."

"Right now, even without counting my man, Cloud Peak has five highest-level existences. In the near future, that number will rise to seven. The number of level-eight lives is close to six hundred. So let me ask you—with strength like this, shouldn't we go all out? With strength like this, shouldn't we demand your submission? With strength like this, shouldn't we..."

"...make this entire planet bow before us?!"

Chapter 1794: Prosperous times

"Have they all left?"

Xia Lei stood in a massive stone hall, looking at the figures before her—one person and one dragon.

"Yes."

Liang Chuyin walked to Xia Lei's side, also gazing at the slumbering Undead Dragon-fish and Red Hair.

These two beings, intrinsically linked, had suddenly fallen into a deep sleep, forcing Xia Lei to have them moved here.

Beneath the two laboratories of Cloud Peak lay this stone hall. Though seemingly ordinary, it had been constructed at great cost, and core members referred to it as the "Safe House."

Not only was its defense formidable—its resilience tested by the Death King Tree, making it impervious even to level-nine lifeforms for a short time—but it also had a built-in propulsion system, allowing for a swift escape through a hidden tunnel if necessary.

The entire project had taken over two years to complete, requiring countless superhuman evolvers to labor on it. It was officially finished just one week after Ye Zhongming's departure.

This place was meant to be a last resort in case Cloud Peak fell—an escape route for its members.

No one expected it to be used so soon after completion.

Here, not only were the slumbering Undead Dragon-fish and Red Hair kept, but also the equipment Ye Zhongming had left behind—and Yellow Ball, who had been guarding it all this time.

Perhaps it was instinct. Like his ancestors, the loyal beast stubbornly waited for his master's return.

Xia Lei wasn't too worried about the Undead Dragon-fish and Red Hair. Their slumber likely signaled their evolution toward level nine.

After inheriting the legacy of the Nine-Winged Crow, the Undead Dragon-fish should have long since become a top-tier lifeform. The delay might have been due to Red Hair's influence.

Now, finally, things were set right. When they awoke again, they would stand at the pinnacle of this planet.

Yellow Ball noticed Xia Lei and Liang Chuyin and slowly walked over, lying down beside them. He rested his head on his paws, still facing his master's equipment, looking listless.

Ye Zhongming's departure—especially the complete severance of their mental link—had left the golden beast despondent.

Stroking Yellow Ball's soft, smooth fur (so different from his battle-ready state), Liang Chuyin voiced her concern:

"Sister Lei, they'll never accept this willingly. But the promises you made them, the positions you granted—won't they become future liabilities?"

Under Cloud Peak's overwhelming pressure, Deacon Water, Li Daqian, and Commander Mu had agreed to submit.

This meant four of the top twenty factions in the Chinese region had officially merged.

Of course, their surrender was born of coercion—they had bent to Cloud Peak's overwhelming strength, and resentment simmered beneath. Yet Xia Lei had promised them key roles:

Deacon Water would co-lead a new Commerce Division alongside Cloud Peak's merchant teams, overseeing trade operations and most of Puxing Town.

Li Daqian would merge Thousand Beast Villa with Cloud Peak's War Beast Camp, forming a new War Beast Legion under his command, responsible for breeding, training, and enhancement.

Commander Mu was granted even greater authority—his forces would become an independent core combat team led by Mu Xinfei. At the same time, he himself would serve as Cloud Peak's Chief Instructor and head of the Strategy Division, overseeing training and planning alongside Guang Yao.

These were pivotal roles, touching the very core of Cloud Peak's power structure. Handing them over to resentful outsiders seemed reckless—especially since Xia Lei hadn't even bound them with contracts.

"They need immediate rewards to suppress their defiance. Given time, their discontent will fade."

Xia Lei was utterly confident.

In truth, the situation wasn't as dire as Liang Chuyin feared. Each leader had reasons to accept:

Deacon Water's commerce network already relied on Cloud Peak. Merging gave her greater resources and a path to dominating the post-apocalyptic economy. Xia Lei had even dangled control over Five Ring Money and Cannibal Chain as future incentives.

Li Daqian's ties to Cloud Peak ran deepest. His son had been healed here, his family spent half the year within its walls, and his granddaughter—now mentally attached to Cloud Peak's researchers—even called one of them "godmother." His resistance was temporary.

Commander Mu faced the greatest external threats. Without Cloud Peak, his faction would collapse under the Resistance Zone's pressure. Xia Lei had even hinted that Mu Xinfei could join Ye Zhongming's household—if she could win his favor.

Xia Lei stepped in front of Yellow Ball. Even lying down, the beast was taller than her.

Gently stroking his neck fur, she whispered:

"Big Yellow, this won't do. We need you. Your master will need you when he returns."

Yellow Ball opened his eyes, understanding every word.

"Hurry and reach level nine. Otherwise, when your master comes back, he'll only ride that stinky dragon!"

(Elsewhere, in some mountain range, Yangos—currently bullying locals—sneezed violently.)

"Eat this, then take a nap. Be good."

She opened her palm, revealing a small fruit—Lanyou's Seed, ripened using all the Fertile Soil Ye Zhongming had left behind, solely to push Yellow Ball to level nine.

The beast eyed it, then licked it up with his tongue.

As Xia Lei ruffled his head, her gaze shifted to Liang Chuyin.

"Ready?"

The influencer nodded and sat on a nearby bed.

Xia Lei handed her a vial of liquid—a dazzling, radiant potion.

"Prepare to begin your life as a level-nine evolved."

Watching the influencer drink the potion and lie down, Xia Lei turned to leave.

She hadn't been entirely honest with Commander Mu and the others.

Cloud Peak wouldn't have seven level-nine beings soon—it would have nine.

Yellow Ball and Chuyin were her hidden cards.

As the revolving metal door spun open, Xia Lei knew:

The golden age of Cloud Peak was about to begin.

Chapter 1795: God and Slave Race

"Sit."

Jikesu motioned to Ye Zhongming, granting this outstanding trash an unusually high privilege.

Among the mask warriors, few had the honor of being offered a seat in front of the Chief Technical Officer.

But Ye Zhongming didn't know this. Since he was told to sit, he sat—plopping directly onto the chair. Spotting an identical cup to the one before the old man, he picked it up and drained the liquid inside.

Bitter at first, then a surge of sweetness flooded his mouth.

Jikesu watched with an amused smirk, finding this little fellow quite interesting.

"Weren't you afraid it was poison?"

Ye Zhongming glanced at the old man's cup, a mischievous glint in his eyes.

"I've drunk plenty. This is Fragrant Sap—refreshes the mind, heals internal injuries. But too much will numb your nerves, slow your reflexes." Jikesu lifted his own cup and drank, making Ye Zhongming internally grumble about his stinginess.

The King of Cloud Peak had been injured earlier. After drinking this, he felt noticeably better.

"Feigning recklessness isn't a good method of self-protection."

Jikesu wasn't fooled. Someone who could improve an innate skill while retaining two-thirds of its power was no fool.

Unfazed at being seen through, Ye Zhongming laughed. "My homeland has a saying: 'The loudest baby gets the milk.'"

Jikesu pondered the meaning, then chuckled heartily.

"Speak, then. What 'milk' do you want?"

"And you are...?"

Jikesu introduced himself and briefly outlined the Star-Eye Clan's structure: two leaders, three mask-warrior divisions, and functional departments like Training, Technology, and Logistics.

Simple, yet likely highly efficient.

Strictly speaking, this wasn't how a true race should be organized. Governing an entire race involved far more than these few departments. Ye Zhongming found it strange—it felt more like a corporation.

Perhaps sensing his confusion, Jikesu grew solemn.

"Where we are now is beyond your planet, in the cosmos. This place... is actually a semi-biological, semi-mechanical artificial fortress."

He tapped the table. What Ye Zhongming had assumed was a metal surface suddenly lit up, projecting soft, flowing light upward. Varying in brightness and hue, it formed a holographic image.

A spherical... structure? That was the only term Ye Zhongming could use—its artificial markings were unmistakable. Like skin stretched over a metal orb, with sections revealing a distinct sheen.

Ye Zhongming studied it, then abruptly asked: "How big is this sphere?"

Jikesu paused, swiped on a three-inch wristband, and replied, "Roughly 3.564 times the size of your planet."

Ye Zhongming nearly toppled from his chair.

This massive? Man-made?

Earlier, he'd had no idea this was a fortress—he'd assumed it was just another planet.

Jikesu gave a bitter smile. "We had no other choice."

Regaining composure, he continued, "You may call it 'Kibubu No. 5.' 'Kibubu' is a term from a certain race's dialect. Translated into Darkstripes' language, it means 'Survivor.'"

Survivor No. 5?

Ye Zhongming narrowed his eyes. The name itself spoke volumes.

"There are seven such artificial stars in the universe."

"The Thousand Races of the cosmos are all concentrated here." The words struck Ye Zhongming like a shockwave.

The Thousand Races didn't live on their home planets but on these artificial constructs?

Then where were their homeworlds?

"Already destroyed."

Ye Zhongming's lips parted, but no words came.

"Because of the Wheels... and the Slave Race."

Beneath the table, the King of Cloud Peak's hands trembled. The answer he'd sought since his rebirth was finally within reach—and now, he felt something akin to stage fright.

"You know of 'gods,' yes? Your home planet must have such legends."

Jikesu rapped the table, triggering some mechanism. The two cups slowly melted into the surface, reappearing seconds later, refilled with Fragrant Sap.

But Ye Zhongming barely noticed, his focus locked onto the old man.

"Gods... have little to do with power, and everything to do with faith." After this cryptic line, Jikesu continued, "They are merely a mysterious, immensely powerful race beyond our comprehension. To us, they seem omnipotent. They guide primitive lifeforms off their home planets, into the universe, to truly understand the space they inhabit."

"The creators of the Wheels?" Ye Zhongming ventured.

"Yes. The creators of the Wheels." Jikesu's voice turned somber, as if discussing something grim.

"But gods, too, are selfish."

"Their goal was never just to elevate civilizations. They sought... soldiers. To fight their enemies."

Jikesu downed his cup in one gulp, as if swallowing bitter resentment.

"But forging soldiers demands a price."

Silence hung between them until Ye Zhongming, voice strained, asked:

"A virus? The zombie plague?"

Jikesu nodded slowly. "Not the same terms, but the essence matches."

"The universe operates on survival of the fittest—a natural rule. But our gods compressed this process into an instant. Then they used that same rule to sift through survivors, selecting those who could serve them."

Ye Zhongming clenched his fists. His mind flooded with images of the apocalypse—faces twisted in agony as loved ones mutated into monsters.

Before bestowing gifts, the gods had been ruthless.

Ye Zhongming refused to believe such advanced beings lacked gentler methods. Why this brutality?

Were lives so cheap in their eyes?

It wasn't mere sentimentality. The gods' choice was brutality incarnate.

"Have you never... confronted them? Demanded answers?"

Ye Zhongming's eyes were faintly red as he stared at Jikesu.

The old man sighed. "We cannot find the gods. We can only follow their directives, abide by their rules, operate within their framework."

"Can't find them?" Ye Zhongming was baffled. If they were unfindable, how had the Wheels reached Earth?

"And their enemies? Can't find them either? Then how are they enemies?"

Jikesu shook his head. "The enemies are real. They oppose not just the gods, but all life."

A name flashed through Ye Zhongming's mind. He spat it out:

"The Slave Race?"

"Yes. The Slave Race." Jikesu tapped the table again. A new projection emerged—a stretch of cosmic void. The old man pointed.

"There. That is the Slave Race."