

Apocalypse 444

Chapter 444 Eat This

Before they could catch their breath, Sparrow handed each of them a clean crystal core.

"Eat this," he commanded, a hint of glee lacing his voice.

It was as if he relished the thought of watching them grimace and struggle with the same disgust he had felt when he first consumed one, fully aware of the origin of these items.

They didn't need to guess what Sparrow was thinking; it was written all over his face.

His lips twitched uncontrollably, and he bit down on his lower lip to stifle a grin that threatened to spread from ear to ear.

His eyes narrowed into crescent shapes, giving him a slightly sinister look that reminded them of Hisoka from 'Hunter x Hunter' when he was plotting something.

They all shuddered and instinctively averted their gazes from Sparrow.

While the thought of eating the crystal core was indeed disgusting, Sparrow's unsettling enthusiasm overshadowed their revulsion.

Feeling targeted by his intense gaze, they mechanically swallowed the crystal cores, their faces betraying no emotion.

However, their lack of reaction quickly deflated Sparrow's enthusiasm, and he pouted in disappointment.

He had hoped to see their faces contorted in horror and disgust, seeking validation for his own feelings during his first experience.

This little prank was meant to amuse him, but instead, his team swallowed the crystal cores without so much as a flinch.

Soon, the five of them radiated a brilliant light, illuminating the forest as if the sun had risen for just a moment.

The intense white glow enveloped the area before fading, leaving them in a dim afterglow.

As the magical energy coursed through their bodies, they exchanged glances, a newfound strength evident in their eyes.

"Is that it?" one of them asked, skepticism creeping into his voice.

He had expected the leveling-up process to be a grueling and excruciating experience, and the sudden ease of it left him questioning his earlier nervousness and fear.

"No pain? Just like that?"

"It happened so fast!"

"Are we really done? Did we actually level up, or did we fail?"

The uncertainty lingered in the air as they exchanged glances, still trying to process the swift transformation they had just undergone.

Everyone was filled with questions, their confusion palpable in the air. In unison, they turned to Sparrow, seeking answers, as none of them fully understood what had just happened.

"Yes, you guys have successfully leveled up. The bright light that radiated from your bodies was the proof of your achievement," Sparrow said, his tone lacking enthusiasm as he rolled his eyes.

"Now, check how much your spatial ability has increased with this level-up. That way, we can determine if we can increase the number of cargo trailers we can bring back."

Only when Sparrow reminded them of that crucial detail did they recall why they had hurried to level up in the first place.

Without hesitation, the five STAU members settled into meditation to explore their spatial abilities.

One by one, they gasped in astonishment as they opened their eyes in surprise, their faces lighting up with wide smiles.

"I think mine increased to 200 cubic meters! That's a 50 cubic meter boost!"

"Same here! Mine's at 200 cubic meters as well. With this, we can fit three cargo trailers and pack them full of supplies!"

"This is amazing! I expected only a 10 to 30 cubic meter increase, but gaining a whole 50 cubic meters is huge!"

The five were buzzing with excitement.

Previously, the 150 cubic meters had been just enough to fit two cargo trailers, leaving little extra space.

But now, with the added 50 cubic meters, they could utilize that small area more efficiently and accommodate one more cargo trailer.

They felt lighter, stronger, and more in tune with their abilities.

Where before they had to touch each item individually to store it, they could now, like Kisha, use their mental capacity to control what they wanted to store and selectively retrieve items from their space with ease.

However, there was still a limit to how much they could store without direct contact.

They could only manage a yard's worth of items at a time; to add more, they needed to move closer to another yard's worth of items.

Despite this constraint, the upgrade was still a welcome improvement after their level-up, and they felt that the pain they had endured earlier was well worth the effort.

The five of them exchanged delighted smiles as they sensed the changes in their bodies and abilities.

They felt more confident than ever, with their stats now nearly in the 20s.

Their strength, defense, and agility had all seen significant boosts.

While they knew that compared to Sparrow and the others, their improvements might not seem impressive, they took pride in the fact that they could now send someone flying with a single kick.

Given that they weren't originally battle-type superhumans, they had no reason to compare themselves to others; their progress was more than enough for them.

Seeing them all happy and content, Sparrow allowed himself a slight smile before sending them home for a warm meal and much-needed rest.

He, too, returned to have a comforting meal, a hot bath, and finally collapse into his soft bed.

It didn't take long before he drifted into a deep sleep as soon as he hit the mattress.

The other warriors who had accompanied him felt the same way—mentally and physically exhausted from their time outside the walls.

Now, back in their own beds, they felt a wave of relief wash over them as their bodies relaxed and the tension of battle faded, allowing them a rare, peaceful rest.

Duke and his team, meanwhile, chose to rest in an eight-story building at the eastern and southeastern border.

They stationed themselves two floors below the rooftop, providing a strategic buffer.

This way, if any mutated rats tried to sneak up on them, they could detect the activity on the stairs or within the building and gain a brief window to escape to the rooftop, repeating their previous tactic against the rats.

They avoided the rooftop itself for additional security.

Given the presence of mutated rats, the possibility of other mutated creatures—like birds or bats—wasn't far-fetched, and they also had to remain cautious of evolved zombies.

Without any detection or scout-type awakened ability users on their team, and considering that even Duke's heightened senses had their limits and could be delayed at times, resting directly on the rooftop was simply too risky.

Everyone trusted Duke's judgment completely; his decisions had saved them more times than they could count.

By nightfall, they'd already reviewed contingency plans, ensuring that if they became separated, each team member would know exactly where to go, what actions to take, and how to handle situations independently.

Duke meticulously planned for every scenario he could think of, offering reassurance to the team and reinforcing their chances of surviving and making it back home to their families.

One of Duke's strengths was his ability to coach his team in real-time, pointing out mistakes, correcting postures, and refining techniques as they fought.

His commitment to teaching never wavered, and the team found his guidance invaluable, especially in high-stakes moments.