

## The Strongest

### Chapter 79 – Mysterious Black Flame

In the core area of Kuruk Fields, one could see groups of Grassland Lion Cubs every hundred meters or so. If a party's positioning were slightly off, they would attract tens of Grassland Lion Cubs towards them. Moreover, at the large tree located in central region of the fields, there lived a Level 6 Elite Grassland Lion. That place could be said to be a forbidden area for Level 6 players.

However, inside this forbidden area, Gentle Snow's party was constantly clearing the surrounding Level 6 Grassland Lion Cubs. They were clearing out an empty land for the purpose of hunting the Elite Grassland Lion. If ordinary players were to see their daring actions, they would definitely exclaim in astonishment.

A party waged battle against more than ten Grassland Lion Cubs.

Wearing a suit of azure armor, Gentle Snow valiantly battled. She was like a War Goddess, fighting one against ten thousand. A simple slash from her had sent three Grassland Lion Cubs flying. Simultaneously, she was dodging the claws of the remaining two Lion Cubs. If an expert were to see Gentle Snow battle, their eyes might have popped out of their sockets by now. Although her single slash seemed simple, she struck the vital points of all three Grassland Lion Cubs. Her dodges were even more accurate. It was like she possessed eyes at the back of her head. Without even turning her head, she was able to avoid the claw strikes that came from behind her.

On another side, the Flame Witch, Zhao Yueru, was like an artillery cannon. A single Frostflame Blast from her had taken away a third of the Grassland Lion Cub's HP. Just when the Grassland Lion Cub switched Hatred and was about to rush at Zhao Yueru, the woman, herself, revealed a smile of disdain. As her mouth chanted the final verse of an incantation, her lily-white hands finished writing the incantation. Following which, a flame dragon appeared. The dragon spewed scorching hot flames, immediately decimating the Grassland Lion Cub rushing towards Zhao Yueru.

Zhao Yueru's control over magic was extremely subtle, reaching its pinnacle. Her chanting and tracing were even more extraordinary. Normally, players would need 3 seconds to complete both actions, but Zhao Yueru only spent 1.6 seconds. Her Completion Rate was even at 86%, increasing the damage of Fire Dragon's Roar by 120%. This single move instantly took away two-thirds of the Grassland Lion Cub's HP.

A few moments later, more than ten Grassland Lion Cubs lay dead on the ground.

"Rest for a while and prepare to lure those two Elite Grassland Lions over. Shield Warrior, you'll tank one, while I handle the other," after tidying up the loot, Gentle Snow commanded as she looked towards the two patrolling Elite Grassland Lions in the distance.

Just as everyone was resting, Gentle Snow received a single message signed with the name of 'Black Flame.'

Looking at this signature, Gentle Snow's brows slightly wrinkled. Previously, she put out word that she wished to discuss matters of cooperation with the Black Flame Forger. It did not take long before she received a reply. Originally, she had felt rather joyous at the fact. However, a few moments later, she received another pile of similar messages. All of them claiming themselves to be the Black Flame Forger. However, after undergoing a simple questioning and identification, she discovered that all of these players were fakes. Every one of them wanted to swindle some money from her.

"Snow, is it another harassing message? Why not you just set it so you can only receive messages from your friends. That way, these messages won't bother you anymore." Zhao Yueru suggested after noticing Gentle Snow's unnatural behavior.

Gentle Snow shook her head, saying in a serious tone, "I'm not acquainted with the Black Flame Forger. If the real Black Flame Forger were to contact us, and we weren't able to receive his message, wouldn't we have posted that thread for nothing? I'll still take a look at it. In any case, it is very easy to determine the authenticity of the Black Flame Forger."

However, Gentle Snow suddenly froze when she read the message.

That was because this message had very clearly proven the authenticity of this Black Flame. He wanted her to go to the Virtual Trade Center, and using the password he had given, enter a designated Trade Room to trade for the Glimmer Chestplate Forging Design.

"It seems that I finally have some gains after waiting for so long." Gentle Snow revealed a faint smile. From the contents of the message, she could clearly feel that this Black Flame was the real deal. Otherwise, he would not suggest trading the Forging Design at the Virtual Trade Center. After all, Black Flame impostors would not have a Forging Design.

"What is it? Did the real Black Flame contact you?" Looking at Gentle Snow nodding to her question, Zhao Yueru became immediately excited. Wishing to meet this mysterious Forger, she asked, "When do we meet him?"

Currently, the Black Flame Forger was known by everybody. He was even in possession of a Forging Design that could increase a Guild's influence. After carrying out one questionable action after another, only now did they find out his true motive. Zhao Yueru couldn't help but admit the brilliance of the Black Flame Forger's methods.

He paid such a huge price all to control the initiative in the game played by the various Guilds. Now, every Guild within the area of White River City could not help but get caught up in this spiral; otherwise, they would be eliminated by the other Guilds. His unpredictable actions even caused her to feel admiration.

He was unlike a certain someone who was clearly just a lucky bastard, yet, still pretended to be an expert. Just thinking about that person made Zhao Yueru's blood boil in anger. Compared to the Black Flame Forger, the difference between them was thousands of miles apart.

"I just contacted him. However, he does not want to add us as friends. He only said he wants to meet at the Level 8 map, Physis Canyon, in four hours. Physis Canyon isn't that far away from our current location. I'll buy the Forging Design first; then we'll quickly clear up these Elite Grassland Lions. If we hurry over, we should be able to make it." Even Gentle Snow was clearly excited right now. There were

so many first-rate Guilds in Star-Moon Kingdom, yet, she didn't imagine that the Black Flame Forger would actually be willing to cooperate with them. She couldn't help but admit that they were extremely lucky or maybe that Black Flame had some other plans. In any case, she wouldn't be able to see through the thoughts of this Black Flame.

"Great! Then let's hurry! If we make him wait too long, it would be terrible if he didn't want to meet us anymore," Zhao Yueru abruptly stood up, excitedly saying so.

"Look at you in such a hurry... We still have time." Gentle Snow rolled her eyes at Zhao Yueru. She did not imagine that Zhao Yueru would be so interested in Black Flame. Normally, she would not be as enthusiastic towards other people she met.

Meanwhile, Shi Feng, the target of Gentle Snow and Zhao Yueru's conversation, had already departed from Red Leaf Town. He was running towards the White Sand Ruins.

The White Sand Ruins was a Level 10 monster area. It was also one of the must-come leveling areas for players of Red Leaf Town and several other nearby Towns. That was because the Quests available here were very numerous. Amongst them, there was no lack of Guild Quests and Reputation Quests. There were even two Unique Quests here. The rewards for these two Unique Quests were extremely bountiful, and they would bring plenty of benefits to Shi Feng when he officially entered White River City in the future. Hence why Shi Feng was running to the White Sand Ruins.

Just as Shi Feng arrived at a sea of white sand, a message from Gentle Snow arrived. The message stated that they had to delay the meeting time by an hour suddenly, and as a compensation, aside from buying the Forging Design at price of 24,000 Credits, they would give him an additional 20,000 Credits. Their wealth was practically overbearing.

Shi Feng did not really mind the delay in time. In any case, he also needed quite some time to complete the Quests here.

Meanwhile, 20,000 Credits was two month's worth of salary of a gold collar worker[1]. Gentle Snow used it as compensation for being late.....

Moreover, this was only the start of the business between them; yet, he had already earned more than 40,000 Credits. He could not help but admit that there were many benefits for working with a person like Gentle Snow, especially when the person herself was not lacking money. Even the rich from other virtual reality games could not compete with her.

Following which, based on his memories, Shi Feng searched for a secret path in the White Sand Ruins. After walking this path for nearly half an hour, he caught sight of a bunker buried in the white sand. Two Level 10 Elite Blacksteel Dwarves guarded the bunker's entrance.

One of the two Unique Quests, "Steel Fortress Barrutia," could be found inside this bunker.

TL Notes:

[1]gold collar worker: Highly skilled professionals who may be in high demand, such as chartered accountants, surgeons, anesthesiologists, engineers, and lawyers.

Chapter 80 – Steel Fortress Barrutia

Blacksteel Dwarves, they were a group fanatics addicted to forging. The civilization of the Blacksteel Dwarves was once incomparably brilliant, and their shadows could be found in the creation of countless pieces of Legendary Equipment.

The arms of Blacksteel Dwarves were as thick and robust as their thighs, and their muscles were as hard as stone. In addition to their dark skin color, often they were mistaken for rocks during nighttime, and many people would sit on them accidentally.

Of course, the consequences of such an action were very grave, as the thing these Blacksteel Dwarves hated the most was being treated as stools.

Shi Feng straightforwardly walked over.

This bunker in the White Sand Ruins was extremely well hidden. In Shi Feng's previous life, it took a long time before the many Guilds doing Quests in the White Sand Ruins discovered the bunker. They received many good Quests from this bunker, and some Quests even gave away Mysterious-Iron Equipment. However, such Quests usually required a party in order to complete them. It was absolutely impossible for a person to complete them alone.

However, compared to these Quests, the Favorability of these Blacksteel Dwarves was much more important. This secret was also only discovered after players had already reached more than twenty levels.

There was a Unique Quest called "Steel Fortress Barrutia" available here. However, because the Unique Quest required a certain amount of favorability before a player could receive it, many players missed the chance to obtain it. On the contrary, an unknown average player received the Unique Quest. Moreover, after completing the Unique Quest, the player instantly become the recruitment target of many Guilds.

Arriving in front of the bunker's entrance, the two Elite Blacksteel Dwarves standing guard let Shi Feng enter after giving him a simple glance.

The inside of the bunker was very large. It was just like an underground Town. Blacksteel Dwarves were everywhere, and the majority of the streets were composed of either Weapons and Equipment shops or bars, with very few places of entertainment.

Moving along the main street, Shi Feng arrived before a steel building after making several turns and detours. The building was the City Hall, and when Shi Feng entered the building, the Town Mayor, a Level 30 Elite NPC, quickly noticed him. As it has been a long time since any outsiders entered this small Town, the Mayor happily went up to welcome Shi Feng.

"Hello, Adventurer! Welcome to Stonehammer Town! I am Blackbeard, the Town Mayor!" Blackbeard warmly said.

"Hello, Lord Mayor. It is my first time coming here, so I wonder if I could be of any use to you?" Shi Feng performed respectfully, as such actions would give NPCs a more favorable opinion of him.

Blackbeard caressed his thick beard. After thinking for awhile, he said, "Adventurer, our small Town indeed needs help. The weather of area around here is getting hotter by the day, and our water supply is continuously diminishing. As a result, it is getting harder for the inhabitants to live in this small Town. I will pay a sufficient price, so I hope you can help us obtain a large water supply or something that can help with the heat."

System: Do you wish to accept the Quest, "Blackbeard's Request"?

Shi Feng revealed a faint smile. He was here exactly because of this.

"I will be happy to help," Shi Feng responded.

The most important thing in Rockhammer Town was the Town Mayor's Favorability. However, the Town Mayor's Favorability was not that easy to obtain. That was because the Quest he gave was not easy to complete. Moreover, the rewards of the Quest were few, causing many players to give up on grinding for the Town Mayor's Favorability.

System: Quest "Blackbeard's Request" accepted. Offer 100 bags of Clear Water or 5 cups of Cold Beverage to the Town Mayor Blackbeard.

Following which, Shi Feng retrieved the Fruit Juice he had prepared.

For every 5 cups of Fruit Juice Shi Feng offered, he could obtain 2 Copper Coins, an increase of 1 point to Blackbeard's Favorability, and 100 EXP.

To a Level 8 to 9 player, 100 EXP could be considered negligible. Just by simply killing a Level 10 Common monster, they would be able to obtain over 200 EXP. Moreover, 100 bags of Clear Water were sold for 5 Copper Coins in other Towns, and 5 cups of the cheapest kind of Cold Beverage would similarly cost 5 Copper Coins. After deducting the cost, that meant that players would be spending 3 Copper Coins in exchange for 100 EXP. Only a lunatic would be willing to do such a thing.

However, Shi Feng was very willing.

To his current Level, 100 EXP was not a small amount. It was a lot more than the EXP he would obtain from killing a Level 5 Common monster.

Following which, Shi Feng handed over Fruit Juices without stop. After he handed over 1,000 cups of Fruit Juice, he obtained a total of 400 Copper Coins and 200 points of Favorability. He also obtained 20,000 EXP, instantly bringing him up to 69% of Level 4.

He had risen so much just within ten short minutes. It was literally faster than grinding on Level 10 Elite monsters.

After his Favorability reached 200 points, Shi Feng started asking Blackbeard about the Unique Quest. However, Blackbeard remained silent, his eyes darting about, pretending to know nothing about the Quest.

"As expected, my Favorability is still not high enough." Shi Feng had more or less expected such a result. Hence, he brought out Violet Cloud's new type of Fruit Juice, "Lord Mayor, what do you think about this kind of Fruit Juice?"

After seeing this new Fruit Juice, Blackbeard took it in his hands and gave it a whiff. Suddenly, both his eyes shone as he excitedly said, "This cup completely surpasses the previous five cups. Adventurer, I wonder how many of these do you have? I am willing to pay an extra 1 copper Coin to purchase it."

Shi Feng couldn't help but be stunned when he saw Blackbeard's extremely satisfied expression. He did not imagine that Violet Cloud's craftsmanship would be so good as to tempt even an NPC into willingly to concede. Such a situation was very rarely seen in God's Domain.

Since Blackbeard liked the new Fruit Juice, Shi Feng naturally continued the transaction without stop.

He had a total of 750 cups of the new type of Fruit Juice. Every cup earned him 3 Copper Coins, 1 point of Favorability, and 100 EXP. It could be seen just how much Blackbeard loved this item.

In such a way, Shi Feng easily received 2,250 Coppers and 750 points of Favorability. He also received 75,000 EXP, instantly bringing him to 46% of Level 5. His leveling speed was like a rocket. Unfortunately, making the new type of Fruit Juice required a lot of time. Moreover, Violet Cloud still had other matters to tend to. Otherwise, Shi Feng really wanted Violet Cloud to make up to 10,000 cups for him, instantly rushing to Level 10 and over.

With 950 points of Favorability, the Town Mayor Blackbeard finally opened his mouth. Moreover, he did not hide any secrets this time. He was treating Shi Feng like his close friend. Shi Feng had even received the Stonehammer Key, which had not been mentioned by the player in his previous life.

System: Unique Quest "Steel Fortress Barrutia" accepted. Player is required to go to Physis Canyon to look for the fallen Steel Fortress Barrutia and obtain the Titan's Heart from within it. Town Mayor Blackbeard will provide an extremely bountiful reward for it.

With such a high amount of Favorability, Shi Feng could also purchase Forging Designs from Blackbeard.

Shi Feng was shocked after taking a rough look at the available items. There were a total of ten Forging Designs for sale; five of them were Common Equipment Forging Designs, three of them were Bronze Equipment Forging Designs, one of them was a Mysterious-Iron Weapon Forging Design, and the last was a Mysterious-Iron Equipment Forging Design.

Blackbeard must've even taken out his inheritance with this!

These Forging Designs were all for Level 8 to Level 10 equipment.

However, the Bronze Equipment Forging Designs were sold for 60 Silver Coins each, while the Mysterious-Iron ranked Forging Designs were sold for up to 1 Gold and 50 Silver Coins. Even if an average player were to discover them, they would definitely be unable to purchase them.

Fortunately, this time around, Shi Feng had sold another three pieces of the Glimmer Chestplate Forging Design. The money he possessed increased by more than 9 Gold Coins once more. Otherwise, even he could only look at the items with envy.

"Lord Mayor, these three Bronze ranked Forging Designs and two Mysterious-Iron ranked Forging Designs, I want all of them," Shi Feng simply handed over 4 Gold 80 Silver.

Unfortunately, these Forging Designs were bound upon purchase. Otherwise, he would be able to earn at least double or triple the amount just from reselling them.

The weakest amongst these Forging Designs was a Level 8 Bronze Equipment. However, even that would bring about an unimaginable improvement to the current Guilds. After all, the current highest leveled players were just nearing Level 6, while a large majority of the players were still using Level 1 or Level 2 Common Equipment. Just imagining when everyone rose to Level 8 and every member of a party possessed a piece of Level 8 Bronze Equipment was frightening.

After completing the transaction, Shi Feng suddenly received a System Notification.