

## **Apocalypse 1601**

### Chapter 1601: Demon Thread Dance (2)

The white filaments were absorbing the evolutionary energy from Talking Lady—the vast amount required for an level eight being to advance to level nine.

For the white filaments themselves, evolving to level nine likely demanded similar energy.

However, due to conversion inefficiencies, even after draining Talking Lady's energy, it still hadn't completed its evolution—or perhaps, it simply hadn't absorbed enough.

Until its evolution was complete, it clearly had no intention of releasing Talking Lady.

Even after exhausting her evolutionary energy, Talking Lady herself was a top-tier level eight lifeform. The energy contained within her body was still substantial.

But it seemed the white filaments were inefficient at directly extracting energy from evolved lifeforms, which was why Talking Lady had survived this long.

Of course, Ye Zhongming preferred to believe it was Talking Lady's own defensive mechanisms that slowed the absorption, allowing her to cling to life.

These human evolved, however, were different. They were conscious, injured, and unlike Talking Lady, they weren't unique, mutated lifeforms. No matter how bizarre the white filaments were, they were still a variant lifeform, and human evolved were undoubtedly the best source of nourishment.

So when Achinas and the others were thrown into the cave, the white filaments—already having tasted the benefits—began frantically draining their energy.

It was like a person who had been surviving on scraps suddenly being presented with a feast. Why would they still bother with the unappetizing leftovers?

Thus, one of the filaments wrapped around Talking Lady loosened, joining the frenzy to absorb fresh, delicious energy. Then a second one detached, followed by a third...

Until finally, only two remained coiled around Talking Lady. She, who had once been suspended at the very center of the cave, now hung perilously close to the ground.

The surviving foreign evolved hurled the vilest curses at Ye Zhongming, but he paid them no mind. His focus was solely on Talking Lady and the distant demon crystal.

Nine-tenths.

The crystal was now nine-tenths silver. It stood on the very brink of level nine evolution.

But then came the problem that gave Ye Zhongming a headache: no matter how much he healed Achinas and the others, he couldn't make them generate energy fast enough for the filaments to absorb. This bizarre lifeform, already a thorn in his side, was now just a hair's breadth away from evolution—and yet, it wasn't enough.

Ye Zhongming had planned to rescue Talking Lady the moment this thing evolved to level nine.

He wasn't opposed to bringing more people, but with the filaments on the verge of evolution, the energy from level seven evolved was negligible. As for level eight ones—aside from Achinas's group, the rest had either been killed by the female guards and devoured by warbeasts, or were still holed up in the Allied Forces' stronghold. Ye Zhongming and his fighters weren't foolish enough to challenge an enemy a thousand times their number with just a few hundred men.

Five level eight evolved plus one corpse—Ye Zhongming had thought it would suffice. But in reality, he had underestimated the white filaments' appetite.

Pei Jia, the weakest of them, was the first to be drained into a desiccated husk. Then Apudu, followed by Donis.

Only Achinas and Rustig remained, and they wouldn't last much longer.

Once they were gone, the filaments would inevitably turn back to Talking Lady, the only remaining source of energy.

Ye Zhongming gritted his teeth, racking his brain for a solution.

Then—

The black cat moved.

It tore open its own wound and leaped into the cave.

It was offering itself in exchange for Talking Lady's freedom.

Earlier, when the cat entered the cave and even attacked the filaments, they ignored it. The reason was simple: the cat had already broken free once, and the filaments—lacking true intelligence and mainly operating on instinct—saw it as an outsider.

Or perhaps Talking Lady's self-imposed isolation had made the filaments perceive the cat as similar to her—something that, even if captured, wouldn't provide much energy. Not enough to bridge the gap to evolution.

But now things were different. The filaments were on the cusp of advancement, and the black cat's energy might be exactly what they needed.

The cat was too fast. Ye Zhongming couldn't stop it. By the time the filaments coiled around it, he could do nothing.

The silver on the demon crystal spread further.

Xia Bai suddenly grabbed Ye Zhongming's arm.

She didn't speak, but he understood.

Leave.

Xia Bai never denied Ye Zhongming's strength. With ample preparation, the King of Cloud Peak could even clash with level nine lifeforms.

But this wasn't one of those times. He had exhausted many of his trump cards in the battles against the two level-nine beings. If this mass of filaments succeeded in evolving, Ye Zhongming would be facing yet another apex predator of this world.

Even with her at his side, they would likely lose.

Xia Bai's duty was to protect Ye Zhongming—she would die for him without hesitation. But right now, retreat was the wisest choice.

As for Talking Lady and the black cat? Ye Zhongming had already done more than enough in Xia Bai's eyes.

Across the cave, the entangled cat cried mournfully, pleading with Ye Zhongming not to leave.

"If we don't try... I'll always regret it."

Ye Zhongming gave Xia Bai an apologetic smile. She released his arm, her massive scythe materializing in her grip.

If he wouldn't leave, they would fight or die together.

But I won't let you die. Xia Bai thought, as she always did.

The demon crystal finally completed its transformation into pure silver as the black cat's body visibly withered. At that moment, all the filaments convulsed violently. The desiccated corpses still entangled—including Achinas and Rustig—were snapped apart like brittle twigs, their remains scattering across the cave floor.

Talking Lady and the black cat were clearly under immense strain. Blood seeped from their eyes, ears, and the areas where the filaments gripped them.

Ye Zhongming and Xia Bai were forced to retreat as the filaments thickened, lashing through the cave like frenzied whips. The solid stone walls were gouged as easily as tofu.

Then—

The section of the wall embedding the demon crystal exploded outward. The crystal floated free, hovering like a malevolent eye, fixing its gaze on Ye Zhongming and Xia Bai.

Freshly evolved to level nine, it craved new prey.

Talking Lady and the black cat were hurled aside with two sharp snaps. The impact twisted their limbs at unnatural angles—bones shattered, their survival uncertain.

Freed from the wall, the monstrous entity lunged at Ye Zhongming and Xia Bai.

Ye Zhongming activated his bloodline instantly, his weapon flashing as he struck at the newborn level nine horror.

But his full-powered slash—augmented by his job skills—was effortlessly blocked by a single filament. Before he or Xia Bai (her wings now fully unfurled) could react, countless threads lashed out, binding them both in an inescapable grip.

Chapter 1602: Ball

Never before had Ye Zhongming felt so utterly powerless.

He had faced level nine beings before—the Holy Father, Armor King, Nine-Winged Crow, Snow Wolf King, and Bear King were all true level nine existences. As his strength grew, he had even reached a point where he could hold his own against creatures like the Snow Wolf King.

He might lose, but he was never completely defenseless!

Yet Ye Zhongming and Xia Bai had no room to maneuver in this cramped cave entrance. When those white filaments lashed out, they couldn't evade.

Under normal circumstances, the two might have chosen to fight head-on. But now, the filaments' resilience left them helpless, just like when they couldn't sever them to free Talking Lady earlier.

Their bodies were ensnared, an immense force tightening around them. Ye Zhongming and Xia Bai both felt as if their bones were about to snap.

The magic crystal, lifted by the filaments, rose to the cave ceiling, looming over them. Though it had no face, its presence radiated unmistakable greed and malice.

Ye Zhongming and Xia Bai could practically feel its hunger.

Xia Bai didn't resist at all. She wanted to push herself to the brink of death—only then could she unleash her strongest attack. Her goal was simple: sever every last filament.

Her unique post-evolution traits prevented her from being completely immobilized like Ye Zhongming. She could still summon her scythe beside her.

She knew she had to act—to save Ye Zhongming, whose Second Life was still on cooldown. If he died now, he would lose his elemental spirit permanently.

The King of Cloud Peak was also strategizing. His equipment kept him in better shape than Xia Bai, who wasn't resisting.

The only move Ye Zhongming could think of that might work was Cloud Slice—staking everything on a full-mental-power gamble.

But it was risky. With his arms pinned to his sides, the attack could easily backfire and wound him instead.

What to do? Take the gamble or not?

He had no choice but to bet.

He hoped his purple-grade gauntlets and Cloud Slice's unique properties could break him free.

A faint glow emanated from the gauntlets—the sign of a skill activating.

Ye Zhongming's mental energy surged violently into the gauntlets. He had made his decision, but frustration gnawed at him.

This level nine lifeform was too bizarre. He had no idea how to counter it.

Now, he was forced into desperation.

Just as Ye Zhongming reluctantly prepared to unleash Cloud Slice, a black energy vortex silently opened on the ground beneath the filament-wrapped magic crystal.

At first, neither side noticed amid the chaos of battle. But as the vortex expanded, both Ye Zhongming and the level nine filament creature became aware of it.

A spherical entity slowly emerged.

It wasn't large—just two meters in diameter at most. Its round body was covered in long, soft tentacles, and its entire form seemed unnervingly elastic.

This...

Ye Zhongming's lips parted slightly, unsure how to process what he was seeing.

Wasn't this the hellspawn he had summoned after activating his bloodline last time? The one female guard members affectionately called "Ball Ball"?

His excitement immediately halved.

He knew why it was here.

Though he hadn't brought it along, as a bloodline-summoned entity, Ball Ball had been teleported from Cloud Peak's camp outside the city the moment Ye Zhongming reactivated his bloodline.

But...

Ye Zhongming inwardly sighed.

Right now, even Nine Treasure's venom might have been worth testing against these filaments. Yet out of all possibilities, it had to be Ball Ball!

Or where was the Thunder Sand Monster? Shouldn't that guy have appeared instantly? Why was it missing?

Ball Ball's whole deal was its freakish defense and raw strength—neither of which helped against the filaments!

The filament creature noticed Ball Ball, too, and showed no mercy. Several filaments shot out, instantly ensnaring it.

Ball Ball had eyes—tiny ones easily overlooked. It blinked at the filaments coiling around it and let out a soft, "Ooo?"

The interruption made Ye Zhongming hold off on Cloud Slice. If he didn't have to gamble, he'd rather not.

But seeing Ball Ball crushed his hope. He braced himself to unleash the attack anyway.

"Ooo..."

Ball Ball was lifted closer to Ye Zhongming and Xia Bai. Its elastic body deformed under the filaments' grip, like playdough squeezed by shoelaces.

It stared at Ye Zhongming, its expression utterly clueless.

Ye Zhongming was beyond exasperated.

Can't you read the room? Even if your attacks are useless, at least try to resist! Why are you looking at me?!

Then, the filaments seemed to lose patience. The needle-like protrusions emerged, piercing Xia Bai and Ye Zhongming effortlessly—their armor might as well have been paper.

Ye Zhongming smelled death.

He felt his energy draining, his body growing numb.

The filaments' needles carried paralytic toxins.

"Ooo?"

Ball Ball made the sound again. This time, it wasn't looking at Ye Zhongming but the filaments attacking it.

Ball Ball's defense was legendary. Even level nine beings like the Snow Wolf King and Bear King couldn't truly injure it with their claws or strength.

Yet now, Ye Zhongming saw the filaments pierce its body.

"Ooo!"

The same syllable, but now laced with something else.

To Ye Zhongming, it sounded like... anger?

He watched as Ball Ball—usually just a plaything for Yangos and Yellow Ball to kick around—slowly opened a small slit beneath its eyes.

Is that its mouth? Ye Zhongming wondered.

A second later, the area around the slit contracted—and a glob of mucus shot out.

Ye Zhongming's face twitched.

What the hell?! You got captured, can't fight back, so you spit at it like a toddler throwing a tantrum?!

Could you be any more pathetic? Is this really your only attack besides body slams?

As the King of Cloud Peak, Ye Zhongming suddenly felt secondhand embarrassment.

This is so damn humiliating.

But before the thought fully formed, he felt the filaments' grip loosen.

They were letting him go.

Ye Zhongming whipped his head toward the demon crystal.

The level nine crystal, which had been looming over him like a god, was now frantically swarmed by its own filaments. Though silent, their movements screamed panic, as if scrubbing something away.

With difficulty, Ye Zhongming turned to Ball Ball.

Its tentacles were now bent at its sides like hands on hips. One remaining appendage pointed accusingly at the frenzied filament creature.

"Ooo! Ooo!"

(It was, unmistakably, scolding it.)

Chapter 1603: Edge of the straits

The team marched across the vast icy plains. The wind and snow no longer intimidated the warriors of Cloud Peak, but traces of disbelief—and a hint of fear—still lingered on their faces even after a full day.

The level nine lifeform that had nearly killed their leader and Xia Bai was now part of their convoy.

Not as an honored guest, but as a prisoner.

Yes, that bizarre level nine entity that had left Ye Zhongming helpless and forced him to rebirth was now at the center of the procession... being tormented—not by a person, but by Ball Ball.

Even now, recalling yesterday's events, Ye Zhongming found it surreal.

At the time, Ball Ball had spat on the level nine creature's demon crystal. The overwhelmingly powerful white filaments acted as if they'd encountered their natural predator, frantically wiping the crystal clean for some inexplicable reason.

After a comically stern scolding—which, to Ye Zhongming, sounded like a series of rhythmic "Ooos"—Ball Ball hopped onto the filaments' "head," its tentacles forcefully batting them aside before spitting on the crystal again.

The filaments convulsed violently, nearly collapsing the cave.

But Ball Ball wasn't done. It jumped over, pried the filaments open, and spat a third time. Then a fourth. A fifth...

By the end, the filaments lay limp like discarded threads, barely alive, dragged out of the cave by Ball Ball as if it were nothing.

Now, the filaments were still alive—Ye Zhongming could confirm that much. But if not for the occasional tremors when Ball Ball nibbled on them like snacks, no one would believe they hadn't already died.

The more Ye Zhongming thought about it, the more baffled he became.

Just what kind of creature is Ball Ball?

Why was such a formidable filament lifeform so utterly suppressed by it?

Glancing at the level nine entity being treated as a chew toy—already missing an entire filament after a day—Ye Zhongming almost pitied it.

This must be what "a fate worse than death" feels like.

If the filaments had independent thought, would they see this as karma? When they'd bound Talking Lady in that cave, they'd never imagined they'd one day be imprisoned and eaten alive.

"Boss, Talking Lady still hasn't woken up. Even the black cat, which was conscious earlier, has now fallen into a deep sleep."

After the filaments' inexplicable defeat yesterday, Talking Lady and the black cat were freed—but Talking Lady remained comatose. Cloud Peak had no experience treating mutated lifeforms in this state, and though the black cat had been awake, it was equally clueless.

Now, even the cat had succumbed to sleep. Ye Zhongming couldn't help but wonder:

Were they resuming their evolution to level nine?

But their evolutionary energy should've been drained by the filaments. Could they still advance?

Ye Zhongming had long suspected his understanding of mutated lifeforms was lacking.

Why had the Death King Tree slept endlessly during its evolution? Perhaps due to its desire for a human form, but the duration was excessive.

Why had Red Hair encountered so many bizarre opportunities? Was she even human anymore?

And Ball Ball and the filaments—were they natural enemies? Yet they shouldn't even share the same dimension.

Why had the filaments shown no signs of weakness during evolution, denying him a chance to rescue Talking Lady?

All these unanswered questions left Ye Zhongming both puzzled and vaguely comprehending of Talking Lady and the black cat's current state.

He didn't know what would become of them. They might evolve successfully in a short time, instantly becoming two level nine beings—undoubtedly topping the mutated lifeform rankings in China.

Returning them to Cloud Peak was risky. Ye Zhongming couldn't guarantee their attitude post-evolution. He wasn't naïve enough to think Talking Lady would remain forever grateful for his "rescue."

If they remained friendly, it would be ideal—two level nine allies would solidify Cloud Peak's unshakable dominance.

But if not...

Ye Zhongming refused to leave such volatile elements at the base in his absence. He'd rather keep them close and adapt as needed.

If they were merely recovering and would awaken as level eight beings, no problem.

But if they were evolving to level nine...

A different thought flickered in Ye Zhongming's mind.

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The Bering Strait—a narrow stretch of water separating two continents.

"Narrow" was relative; it spanned dozens of kilometers, its frigid waters barely above freezing even in summer.

In peacetime, crossing it unaided was nearly impossible for humans.

Now, on the Asian side, several factions had converged, their mutual hostility palpable.

When Ye Zhongming arrived, the tension was thick enough to cut with a knife.

It wasn't that the strait was unnavigable elsewhere—but this spot, where a bridge once stood, remained the optimal crossing point, even with the ice-covered ruins.

Surveying the four factions maintaining a deliberate one-kilometer buffer, Ye Zhongming smirked.

He recognized over half of them.

The most conspicuous, occupying prime position, was Jyanendra. The Saint of Sacred City's presence didn't surprise Ye Zhongming. It'd be stranger if he didn't compete for the Mountain King Crown. Clearly, his forces had grown significantly, evidenced by their numbers and unfamiliar equipment.

Chapter 1603.5- Edge of the straits

The real shock was Alamos.

He's still here?

This time, Alamos wasn't aligned with Jyanendra. Competing for a seven-colored grade, ruler-grade, planet-representative equipment made them natural rivals.

But Alamos's forces left Ye Zhongming perplexed.

A hybrid of man and beast.

Not mutated lifeforms—genuine beasts and monsters.

Given Alamos's control over a lab, creating such gene-spliced abominations wasn't surprising.

Ye Zhongming acknowledged his technological prowess but winced at his aesthetic sense.

Compared to Cloud Peak's gene-lifeform lab, Alamos's creations were visually massacred.

Yet no one understood gene-lifeforms' lethality better than Ye Zhongming. His wariness of Alamos surpassed even Jyanendra's ostentatious display.

The third familiar faction was Cannibal Chain. Ye Zhongming spotted Ruan Xiao among them.

The fourth group was entirely foreign—a pure European force, the largest at over 50,000 strong. Were they all-in?

What intrigued Ye Zhongming most was their 3,000-strong mutated polar bear cavalry, an undeniably imposing sight.

"Leader Ye, we meet again."

Ruan Xiao approached with twenty-odd subordinates. The regional manager of Cannibal Chain wore a hint of sheepishness.

He'd learned of the Mountain King Crown at Thousand Beast Villa—thanks to Ye Zhongming's dominance over the invaders. Strictly speaking, this was Ye Zhongming's exclusive intel.

Ruan Xiao had merely hitched a ride.

Deacon Water and Li Daqian had also been present, yet neither Five Ring Money nor Thousand Beast Villa had come. Only Cannibal Chain remained—a fact that felt... awkward.

Even in the apocalypse, where fists trumped morals, poaching intel from a stable partner like Cloud Peak was bad form.

Ye Zhongming greeted them amiably.

Did he want to see Ruan Xiao? No.

Cannibal Chain had always been an enigma. Despite long-standing cooperation, Ye Zhongming had never met its upper echelons—unlike Five Ring Money, where he knew the deacons well.

Their true strength? Unfathomable.

But undeniably formidable.

The only name he knew was their leader—Wang Hanran.

"This is our Executive President Wu Xiu—one of three."

Ruan Xiao hastily introduced the middle-aged woman beside him.

Wu Xiu was plain-faced but exuded aristocratic elegance, her well-maintained appearance belying her age. She extended a hand gracefully.

Ye Zhongming shook it—icy cold, inhumanly so.

An ice-element evolved, likely through job or bloodline. On these frozen plains, her power would soar.

"No sign of President Wang?"

Ye Zhongming was more interested in Wang Hanran. Not that he underestimated Wu Xiu—her position proved her capability.

But at his stature, only Wang Hanran warranted equal footing.

Such was the privilege of China's undisputed number one.

Neither Ruan Xiao nor Wu Xiu took offense. Instead, she smiled.

"Risky ventures fall to us subordinates. Hanran oversees broader strategies. He's eager to share a drink with you someday—he holds you in high esteem."

"Hanran?"

Ye Zhongming's eyes narrowed slightly at the familiarity.

"President Wu is our boss's cousin."

"Ah."

Ye Zhongming's expression softened. Family ties demanded respect.

After some small talk, Wu Xiu gave Ruan Xiao a subtle glance. The manager cleared his throat.

"Leader Ye, witnessing ruler-grade equipment is only possible thanks to you."

Ye Zhongming acknowledged noncommittally.

"Cloud Peak and Cannibal Chain have always enjoyed fruitful cooperation. Given our mutual trust, we propose an alliance this time."

"An alliance?" Ye Zhongming arched a brow. "There's only one Mountain King Crown."

"Naturally." Ruan Xiao nodded. "Our proposal: if we jointly secure it, we split ownership 50-50. You already possess the Sea King Crown—we're happy to concede, provided you compensate us modestly in crystals."

Ye Zhongming nearly laughed.

Cannibal Chain's audacity was impressive.

Team up, win, pay us a pocket change, and keep the prize?

Superficially fair, but blatantly tilted in their favor.

Everyone knew Ye Zhongming and Cloud Peak were China's undisputed apex. Even if allies were needed, how could they justify half-ownership? [READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT NOVEFire.NET](http://NOVEFire.NET)

"Trust our strength, Leader Ye. Cannibal Chain isn't as feeble as we appear." Wu Xiu interjected confidently. "We'll also shoulder all losses if we fail."

A pause. Then Ruan Xiao continued:

"Option two: You wait while we handle everything. We deliver the crown to you—another transaction. The price will be steep, but you assume zero risk."

"Option three: we eliminate specified competitors for a negotiated fee."

"Option four: We table cooperation for now. But prices will rise as the situation clarifies."

Chapter 1604: Cooperation

From Cannibal Chain's perspective, these proposals might seem reasonable. But to Ye Zhongming, they felt utterly absurd.

What gave Cannibal Chain such confidence? How could they believe they could assist the current number one in China? What made them think they could achieve what even Ye Zhongming—the undisputed top evolved—wasn't entirely sure he could accomplish?

The King of Cloud Peak never underestimated others, but he also didn't belittle himself. He acknowledged Cannibal Chain's hidden strengths, yet he refused to believe they could succeed where he himself lacked full certainty.

Hearing these terms, he couldn't be bothered to argue. His status made such debates beneath him. He simply nodded and uttered three words:

"Noted."

Ruan Xiao glanced at Wu Xiu. This operation was her lead—he was only here because of his familiarity with Ye Zhongming. His rapport with Cloud Peak had brought him considerable benefits; a fifth of his achievements stemmed from their cooperation. He'd said what needed saying and wouldn't overstep. Offending Ye Zhongming wasn't in his interests.

Wu Xiu offered an elegant smile. "I know you doubt us, Leader Ye. No explanation will convince you. But facts will prove it."

With that, she led Ruan Xiao and their guards back to Cannibal Chain's ranks.

On Cloud Peak's side, Xiao Min and others curled their lips, all thinking Cannibal Chain was overestimating themselves.

Ye Zhongming pondered. Cannibal Chain must possess some intel or asset fueling their confidence. What exactly? Time would tell.

The second visitor was Alamos.

The old man had audacity, bringing only four escorts—no, four gene-spliced abominations. Though their movements were fluid, indicating high fusion compatibility, their aesthetics were... unbearable.

Alamos's minimal escort spoke volumes about his confidence in their strength.

"Ye, we meet again."

Alamos moved for a hug, but Ye Zhongming didn't budge, merely narrowing his eyes. The scientist awkwardly retracted his arms.

Since when were we this close?

Ye Zhongming studied the old man, exasperated. I'm wary of you attacking me—aren't you afraid I'll strike first?

Then again, Alamos's demeanor was likely deliberate.

"What's there to discuss? Aren't we rivals?"

Unfazed by Ye Zhongming's bluntness, Alamos chuckled. "True, we're rivals—even enemies. But not yet."

"Explain."

Ye Zhongming never quite adapted to foreigners' roundabout phrasing.

Alamos pointed into the distance. "We'll become enemies when competing for the Mountain King Crown—not now. Currently, we should cooperate."

Ye Zhongming waited silently.

"See the broken bridge? We could've crossed there before, but the gaps have widened. Now, we must traverse the ice—and beneath lies the ocean."

Alamos outlined the situation. Ye Zhongming finally understood: the factions weren't gathering here by choice—they were stuck.

Previously, the Bering Strait Bridge's fragments were close enough for evolved to cross with makeshift methods.

Now, unless one could fly, the only path was the frozen sea.

Logically, the Arctic temperatures should've solidified the ice enough for passage. But marine mutated lifeforms dwarfed their terrestrial counterparts in lethality. Every faction feared attacks from below—a plunge into those waters meant certain death, even for eight-star evolved.

In the days before Ye Zhongming's arrival, scout teams had attempted the crossing. None returned.

Perhaps Gyanendra or Alamos could cross alone—but abandoning their forces wasn't an option. The Mountain King Crown required manpower.

Even in the apocalypse, leaders preferred letting others test the waters first.

"So why approach me?"

Alamos grinned. "Cooperation. You, me, the Saint, Cannibal Chain, and the Crusaders—together, we can overcome this."

Ye Zhongming laughed outright.

Why should Cloud Peak cooperate?

Cloud Peak's forces numbered under a thousand—the smallest group present. Without aerial transport, the others were ice-bound.

But Cloud Peak had Yangos, the Undead Dragonfish, Icebird—even Xia Bai and Yellow Ball could assist. Multiple trips would suffice.

So why share advantages? Ye Zhongming would rather watch them stranded here, eliminating future competition.

Reading his expression, Alamos laughed.

"I know you've got a dragon. It can ferry dozens at a time. But that won't work."

Ye Zhongming frowned. Was the airspace compromised? He sensed no level nine presences.

Chapter 1604.5- Cooperation

"Two reasons." Alamos raised fingers. "First, the upper winds here are vicious—non-level-nine fliers can't stabilize. The central zone is a death trap."

Ye Zhongming gazed at the white-streaked sky, seeing nothing unusual. But Alamos wouldn't lie—others could verify.

"Second, low-altitude flight is no safer. Marine life can leap or attack through ice."

Ye Zhongming fell silent. If true, this was problematic. Neither sky nor ice offered safe passage.

Then his eyes drifted back to Cannibal Chain's camp.

Do they have a solution? Is that why they proposed terms so confidently?

"Our past conflicts don't matter. The apocalypse has no permanent enemies. Consider it. The Crusaders agreed. The Saint will likely comply. Your participation ensures success."

With that, Alamos departed.

"I'll scout."

Xia Bai moved to take flight, but Ye Zhongming stopped her.

"Unnecessary. Alamos told the truth."

As if on cue, two dark specks streaked across the sky—Yangos and the Undead Dragonfish. (Icebird remained hidden in the hive, preserving surprises.)

Even this limited display awed the other factions.

"F\*cking winds! I hate wind dragons—this feels like their turf!"

Yangos's curses preceded its landing. It immediately demanded food from the Youth Army—days of scouting had left it hungry. As a fire dragon, the icy environment accelerated its energy drain.

Ye Zhongming inspected the dragon, noting shallow marks on its scales. The Undead Dragonfish's bones bore similar scratches.

Now he understood Alamos's warning.

Winds capable of harassing Yangos and the Undead Dragonfish? Unprecedented. Ye Zhongming estimated their force equaled intermediate-grade wind-based skills.

Visually, the strait's gales were akin to Mo Ye's blade winds—endless, lethal. Even Yangos couldn't emerge unscathed.

This was bad.

After that, Gyanendra arrived, halting 200 meters away. Ye Zhongming met him halfway.

"Alamos spoke to you. Your thoughts?"

The Saint cut to the chase.

"Seems we've no better options."

After seeing his battle beasts' condition, Ye Zhongming leaned toward cooperation.

Even he dared not underestimate the ocean's horrors.

China's mutated lifeform rankings only covered land creatures. Including marine species would overwrite the top ten entirely.

"Going alone isn't impossible, but why shoulder all the risk? More allies benefit us."

Ye Zhongming instantly grasped his meaning.

The Motley Crusaders—largest in number but weakest in average strength—would be the primary target during any attack. Their sacrifice could buy others' safe passage.

You don't need to outrun the danger—just outrun the others.

Ye Zhongming wasn't saintly. He agreed immediately.

Satisfied, Gyanendra turned to leave—then paused.

"Remember my words in the desert?"

"Which ones?"

"I said we might fight side by side someday. Didn't expect it so soon."

With that cryptic remark, the Saint departed.

Ye Zhongming watched his retreating figure, unsettled.

He had theories, but confirmation would wait.

It would be after this North American venture.

The factions finalized preparations, eager to depart the treacherous strait.

But cooperation wasn't so simple. Sequence became the next dispute.

Nobody wanted to go first—the vanguard bore the brunt of danger. Arguments raged for half an hour.

Finally, they settled on... advancing simultaneously.

Whoever got attacked? Tough luck.

The leaders knew this "collaboration" was superficial at best. True cooperation would've assigned roles based on strengths.

But among rivals, this was already remarkable tolerance.

Cloud Peak was positioned second from the south. Cannibal Chain led, the Motley Crusaders occupied the center, Alamos's group followed, and Gyanendra's forces anchored the north.

The march began.

Yet barely ten kilometers into the crossing, disaster struck.

Chapter 1605: Sea Kun

The ice surface suddenly exploded, almost without warning.

The first point of eruption was not the Crusaders that Ye Zhongming and Gyanendra had anticipated would be easiest to deal with, but Alamos's camp.

It was unclear whether these genetic organisms held some special attraction for the sea creatures.

The scene was extremely shocking—the entire sea surface seemed to suddenly be torn open as large cracks rapidly spread across the ice before it all exploded, surging toward the human evolved.

From the humans' perspective, it was as if they were facing a towering wave of ice.

Behind the ice came a real giant wave. And behind that was an even larger, seemingly sky-blotting black shadow.

"Sea Kun!"

Someone shrieked sharply, though it was unclear how they knew the name of this creature.

Hearing these two words, Ye Zhongming's heart sank.

Any lifeform associated with the character "Kun" was a gigantic creature, and this was no exception.

Ye Zhongming couldn't yet discern this creature's evolutionary level, but just from the size of the black shadow now emerging from the sea, he knew it was at least a level eight entity!

The higher the evolutionary level of a Sea Kun, the larger its body.

It was easy to imagine—disregarding other abilities—just what kind of devastation its sheer size could cause if it slammed into them.

Moreover, oceanic lifeforms like this had an exceptional affinity for water and could manipulate it to some degree. The waves behind the ice were entirely under its control—otherwise, such an effect would have been impossible.

Only when the ice and waves began to fall did people from other directions catch a glimpse of the Sea Kun's general appearance. If it had to be described, it was like a fusion of a shark's head and a whale's tail—only both were enlarged and grotesquely distorted beyond measure.

Faced with such a creature's assault, even Cloud Peak might find it troublesome.

Yet Alamos showed no trace of panic. He merely waved his arm as if greeting someone.

With his gesture, hundreds of genetic creatures—each over two meters tall with pointed heads and broad bodies—emerged from the chaotic ranks behind him. As soon as they appeared, they puffed out their chests, where their muscles squirmed before splitting apart to reveal fiery red crystals embedded within.

In the next moment, these crystals emitted energy beams of the same color, shooting toward the incoming "ice wave," "sea wave," and the Sea Kun itself.

Both sides moved with terrifying speed, and the collision came swiftly.

However, sharp-eyed high-level evolved like Ye Zhongming and Ruan Xiao noticed that the energy beams stopped just before hitting the ice, their tips silently dispersing into faint red sparks.

These sparks floated in the air, instantly linking together to form an inconspicuous energy shield.

When the ice struck, the shield abruptly brightened, blocking the three-layered towering wave.

A terrifying contest of strength unfolded midair!

The hundreds of genetic creatures continued firing their energy beams, rendering the Sea Kun's determined assault futile. After the ice and waves crashed down, its massive tail slammed against the energy shield with a deafening impact, causing over fifty genetic creatures to explode into chunks of flesh.

Alamos didn't even blink. With another wave of his hand, over a hundred more genetic creatures appeared. This time, they were small, almost dwarflike, but their speed was astonishing. Within seconds, they darted beyond the Sea Kun's attack range, curling into fleshy balls on the ice and rolling rapidly.

Gaining momentum, they suddenly launched themselves like cannonballs toward the Sea Kun's colossal tail as it began sinking back into the sea.

Explosions erupted upon impact, accompanied by a drawn-out, mournful screech from the depths.

Chunks of flesh rained down from the sky, splattering across Alamos's camp—now unprotected by the vanished shield—dyeing most of the genetic creatures crimson.

The mangled tail sank into the sea, causing violent churning beneath the surface as if countless creatures were now attacking the wounded Sea Kun.

This was no surprise. In the ocean, no creature was truly invincible. Even a level nine lifeform could be overwhelmed or killed by swarms of mid-level creatures—after all, some marine populations were as countless as stars, enough to exhaust even the strongest through sheer numbers.

Moreover, any creature that died—or even just suffered injuries—would immediately be devoured by surrounding predators.

Clearly, the same fate awaited this Sea Kun.

The entire ordeal lasted barely a minute, yet Alamos's forces had swiftly and decisively neutralized this visually staggering assault.

This drew wary glances from other factions. Just the two types of genetic warriors displayed had already surpassed many people's expectations.

Ye Zhongming, too, was deeply unsettled—especially by the self-destructing genetic creatures, whose power even he found threatening.

Cloud Peak's own self-destructing units, even the most powerful among them, couldn't match the destructive force of these. Had Alamos's technological prowess already surpassed Cloud Peak's?

This was not good news.

Judging by Alamos's genetic army, if each distinct appearance represented a unique variant, then there were at least a dozen types, meaning over ten more genetic creatures with unknown abilities remained unseen.

If they were turned against Cloud Peak...

Ye Zhongming internally elevated this mad scientist's threat level to the maximum.

As the Sea Kun shattered the ice, countless marine creatures surged through the hundreds of meters of fractured sea surface, attacking the surrounding forces. Several teams were immediately caught in the chaos.

Elsewhere, though no other creatures broke through the ice on the same scale as the Sea Kun, they still emerged in their own ways, launching assaults on the humans.

On Gyanendra's flank, their attackers were primarily two types of creatures: one resembled a mutated crab with a hard shell, while the other was akin to a sea serpent, except with three heads and three tails, slithering across the ice with lightning speed.

Gyanendra's forces, leveraging their superior mobility, swiftly formed a defensive ring around the Saint's chariot, establishing a combat formation.

Amid the onslaught of nearly ten thousand of these mutated creatures, they unleashed firepower that defied Earth.