

Apocalypse 1606

Chapter 1606: Different abilities

A transparent, palm-sized energy shield encased a glowing, ethereal figure with a human head and fish-like body—no larger than an infant's fist.

These small objects were being launched from various parts of Gyanendra's vehicle. Due to firing intervals, their numbers weren't overwhelming—each firing port discharged one every two seconds.

However, with over a hundred firing ports, at least a hundred energy projectiles were airborne at any given moment.

These energy projectiles were bizarre—not exceptionally fast, but devastatingly powerful. Upon hitting the frenzied marine mutants attacking the convoy, they would pierce through armor and embed themselves into the creatures' bodies. The mutants would shudder briefly before dropping dead instantly.

Crab-like mutants fared slightly better—their shells might not stop the bubble-like energy projectiles, but their corpses only leaked flesh and blood. The serpentine mutants, however, fared far worse. Upon impact, their bodies would explode into clouds of minced flesh.

Clearly, these energy bubbles didn't just penetrate—they triggered secondary explosive damage inside their targets.

The sheer power was staggering.

These marine mutants generally ranked higher in evolution levels than their terrestrial counterparts. The two types assaulting Gyanendra's forces consisted mostly of level five creatures, with a quarter reaching level six. While none were level eight threats, level seven specimens were abundant.

Yet neither level six nor seven mutants could withstand a single energy bubble.

Despite their potency, these projectiles alone couldn't hold back the horde. From the floating armored vehicles in Gyanendra's formation, long-barreled autocannons extended and unleashed a storm of fire.

Instead of bullets, they fired laser-like beams that swept across the battlefield, each claiming dozens of lives.

Additionally, there were armored exosuits that drew sidelong glances from other factions—not towering mechs like Gundams, but full-body mechanical armor protecting vital areas. Ye Zhongming didn't know the function of other parts, but he was surprised by the weapons mounted on their hands and shoulders.

They were emitters that discharged pale blue mist.

The mist remained cohesive for dozens of meters before dispersing into a wide, cloud-like area.

These were deployed where autocannons and energy bubbles couldn't reach. Any mutant touched by the mist instantly froze into ice sculptures—whether dead or not, they were immobilized in the short term.

In such intense combat, being immobilized was practically a death sentence.

Nearly ten thousand mutants were swiftly subdued by Gyanendra's forces. It wouldn't be long before they routed the enemy entirely.

As an observer from the temporarily unscathed Cloud Peak contingent, Ye Zhongming found himself more intrigued by the seemingly crude exosuits than by the alien vehicle (which he guessed was from the alien races).

He noticed something peculiar: each exosuit had a backpack-like device on the wearer's back. At the onset of battle, these packs unfurled, revealing a grid-like structure that rapidly drew in surrounding air. Then, the front-mounted weapons activated.

Given the ultra-low-temperature mist they emitted, Ye Zhongming suspected these suits absorbed and compressed frigid air to generate the freezing fog.

If true, these devices were perfect weapons here, with an inexhaustible energy source.

A thunderous explosion interrupted Ye Zhongming's thoughts as combat peaked in Cannibal Chain's sector.

Compared to the ten-thousand-strong horde facing Gyanendra, Cannibal Chain was unlucky—their attackers outnumbered theirs several times over. Judging by the mutant cores and species, these foes were also more formidable.

Initially, Ruan Xiao, Wu Xiu, and others relied on ranged skills and weapons. But when the mutants closed within dozens of meters, they unveiled a staggering tactic.

Red clouds suddenly gathered in the sky around them before exploding into countless fireballs, forming a 360-degree kill zone that rained down on the marine mutants, annihilating them completely.

The battle ended in seconds.

Every witness was dumbfounded.

Tens of thousands of mutants—wiped out in an instant? Gyanendra's spectacle had been impressive, but this...

Everyone recognized the skill: Fireball—the most common ability available from level one to four wheels, present on 50% of them. It was arguably the most widely mastered skill in the apocalypse.

Yet here, this mundane skill had produced staggering results.

Chapter 1606.5- Different abilities

Why? The answer was obvious: quantity and quality.

Rough estimates suggested at least a hundred evolved had cast Fireball simultaneously.

While Fireball was commonplace, assembling a hundred practitioners still required effort. And to achieve that level of destructive power, every caster must have Advanced Fireball at minimum.

Indeed, all hundred Cannibal Chain evolved had mastered Advanced Fireball.

Even for resource-rich Cloud Peak, assembling such a team wouldn't be easy. It required not just a hundred Fireball skill scrolls but two hundred skill upgrade scrolls.

The former were cheap and plentiful, but the latter were prohibitively expensive. Cloud Peak could afford them, but gathering that many would take considerable time.

This single display revealed Cannibal Chain's staggering wealth.

As a commercial organization, they might lack legendary exploits or famous warriors. But their true strength lay in unassuming lethality—the kind that stays hidden until it shocks the world.

No other faction would invest two hundred precious upgrade scrolls into a common skill like Fireball. Yet Cannibal Chain had done so, proving there were no weak skills—only weak users.

A low-tier skill, at high ranks, had rivaled—no, surpassed—alien technology.

For the first time, Ye Zhongming began to believe Ruan Xiao and Wu Xiu's claims. They might truly have the means to fulfill their proposed conditions.

His perception of this even-more-discreet-than-Five-Ring-Money organization shifted dramatically.

He'd never underestimated Cannibal Chain—they'd been a major power in both his past and present lives. However, through years of interaction, he'd considered them slightly inferior to Five Ring Money, whether in terms of cooperation depth, regional managers' capabilities, or trade network stability.

Executives like Deacon Water, Director Tong, and others had always outshone Cannibal Chain's regional managers—even the competent Ruan Xiao paled in comparison.

This had led Ye Zhongming to undervalue Cannibal Chain.

Now, he realized how mistaken he'd been. This organization had quietly pursued a different path.

If their philosophy were cultivating large-scale, coordinated combat groups, then even if their elite forces lagged behind others, their model would dominate in large-scale warfare.

And were their elites truly inferior? Probably not...

This was a classic case of a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Ye Zhongming's wariness of Cannibal Chain escalated sharply.

Though not the first attacked, the Motley Crusaders' massive numbers and extended frontline inevitably drew the largest mutant swarm.

Yet their performance matched the other factions' excellence.

Given their size, they should have struggled with formation changes—even pre-apocalypse militaries rarely achieved such discipline, except for a few global powers.

But the moment the attack came, the entire force retreated in perfect unison, maintaining formation as they fell back dozens of meters in seconds.

Under normal circumstances, such a retreat would be meaningless. Here, however, it created a killing zone.

The ice!

As the Crusaders withdrew, the mutants' initial assault missed its mark. Using their limited terrestrial mobility, the creatures surged toward this largest group of evolved.

The vanguard consisted of SUV-sized, hard-shelled oddities that slithered across the ice with surprising speed despite their bulk. Their countless pincers, crusted with frozen seawater, shattered the ice with each movement.

Headless, their upper shells bore a row of cyan eyes that fired disorienting beams upon emerging. Any evolver hit would lose consciousness—only six-star evolved or those with strong mental resistance could withstand it.

But no faction surviving this long could be underestimated. The Crusaders seemed prepared, raising giant clamshell-like shields that blocked the beams completely.

These shield-bearers held the line steadfastly while the rest retreated further, launching ranged attacks that caused chaos but little decisive damage to the overwhelming horde.

As the mutant tide surged toward Cloud Peak, Ye Zhongming's gaze remained fixed on the Crusaders. He wanted to see how these foreigners would counter.

Gyanendra and Alamos were known quantities—future enemies, but ones he understood. This massive, unfamiliar faction demanded scrutiny.

Then Ye Zhongming's eyes narrowed. The shield wall was transforming—its edges curving inward in perfect synchronization, morphing from a straight line into a wedge formation.

Reducing contact area? Ye Zhongming marveled at the textbook-perfect maneuver. But what was their goal? Surely not just showing off discipline.

The answer came swiftly.

The three-thousand-strong mutated polar bear cavalry charged.

Having retreated to sufficient distance, they regrouped and launched their assault.

Each rider wielded three-meter-long cleavers—some high-level evolved dual-wielded them.

As the polar bears accelerated, their white fur enveloped the riders, fusing them into single entities.

At the last moment, the shield wall split open like a blooming flower, its members withdrawing smoothly while leaving their shields planted in the ice.

Then the cavalry smashed through the abandoned shields and plowed into the mutant ranks.

A brutal melee ensued.

Chapter 1607: Not smooth

The moment the collision began, the battle was already decided.

Though the polar bear cavalry was small in number, the deliberate contraction of the battle lines had unknowingly concentrated the mutant creatures into a dense mass. When these terrifying riders charged in, the marine mutants fell like harvested wheat, their bodies sliced apart by the massive cleavers, their lives extinguished in an instant.

They weren't without retaliation—cyan beams from their glowing eyes and all manner of attacks, familiar and unfamiliar, rained down on the polar bear cavalry. Yet no matter the assault, the worst it did was stagger a rider or their mount, drawing a few drops of blood from their fur-cloaked bodies. Not a single rider fell. Their formation remained flawless, their charge unbroken.

In moments, the mutant ranks were shattered, collapsing into complete disarray.

The Motley Crusaders' approach was brutally simple—no high-tech gadgets, no dazzling tactics.

Just disciplined, unified execution.

And, of course, the undeniable might of the mutated polar bear cavalry. Their offensive power spoke for itself—both riders and mounts were relentless killing machines.

But what truly inspired awe was their defense. What was that fur-binding skill that merged rider and bear? How could it render this unit impervious to casualties despite the mutants' onslaught?

With this question lingering, Ye Zhongming turned his attention forward—the mutants had reached his position.

At the forefront stood the female guard, unmoving since the battle began. Any creature that neared the formation was met with overwhelming force.

When the largest wave of mutants surged from the sea, Cloud Peak's forces advanced with eerie ease.

No earth-shaking charge like the Crusaders, no flawless defense like Gyanendra, no brute-force annihilation like Cannibal Chain.

Cloud Peak's battle was... quiet.

To observers who'd already finished their fights, Cloud Peak's combat seemed almost effortless.

The female warriors, supported by the youths behind them, moved as if strolling through a garden. Their strikes appeared casual, yet entire swaths of marine mutants fell lifeless to the ground.

They barely even used skills—just swings of their weapons, left and right, and the enemies were gone.

No one could mistake this for weak opposition. On the contrary, though fewer in number, the mutants attacking Cloud Peak included over a dozen level seven creatures!

Yet their fate was no different from their weaker kin—no matter how they struggled, they were carved to pieces.

The message was clear: Cloud Peak was strong. Exceptionally strong.

The reasons for their strength varied by observer.

Gyanendra fixated on their weapons—all blue-grade. As a leader who prioritized crafting jobs, he envied Cloud Peak's armaments. Even with his influence across West Asia, outfitting an entire force with blue-grade weapons was beyond him.

Alamos coveted Cloud Peak's warbeasts. The female guard's one-per-person allocation struck him as wasteful. In his eyes, those creatures belonged in his labs as specimens.

Ruan Xiao, deeply familiar with Cloud Peak, had long known the female guard's prowess. His focus was on the youths.

When did Leader Ye raise this Youth Army? The oldest can't be more than fifteen or sixteen. If they survive a few more years, their potential is limitless.

Wu Xiu's gaze never left Ye Zhongming. Yet he simply stood there—not attacking, not retreating, not advancing, not even speaking—while his subordinates handled everything.

This spoke volumes about Cloud Peak's training and coordination. They operated seamlessly without his direct command.

Or perhaps, battles of this scale didn't warrant his intervention.

As for the Motley Crusaders? Their thoughts remained unknown.

The battle had been swift, its conclusion swifter still.

After each faction displayed strength, confidence in crossing the strait should've surged. Yet no one moved.

Something felt wrong.

Given marine mutants' numbers and temperament, this assault—under 100,000 total, half low-level, with just one level eight Leviathan—was too light.

Now, the shattered ice field lay eerily quiet. The corpses littering the ground went untouched.

Hundred-meter stretches of open water dotted with drifting ice chunks should've drawn scavengers.

"This isn't right!"

Alamos muttered first, his eyes locked on the water, expression darkening.

Gyanendra, inside his vehicle, scanned the surrounding seas with his machines.

The calm was unnatural. And in the apocalypse, unnatural meant deadly.

Ruan Xiao lowered a model sailboat into the water, monitoring a handheld device.

Ye Zhongming, previously motionless, strode to the ice's edge and projected his mental energy into the depths.

Only the Motley Crusaders seemed unperturbed—they were looting, harvesting mutant cores and materials.

However, a closer look revealed that their rear guard was retreating stealthily.

"GO! NOW!"

Alamos suddenly screamed, his team bolting for intact ice on the far side. Gyanendra, positioned at the flank with superior mobility, wheeled his forces around in a wide arc, racing for the opposite shore.

Cannibal Chain and the Crusaders followed suit, all sprinting for safety.

"What? What's happening?" Old Man, trailing Cloud Peak's ranks, panicked.

Ye Zhongming didn't answer immediately. Instead, he pointed across the open water. "No time—jump the ice floes! Move!"

He leaped onto the first floating chunk, then the next, the female guard and Junior Army following without question.

Old Man, clueless but trusting, copied them. Midway across, the truth reached him:

A monstrous presence was rising from the depths, scattering all other marine life in terror.

The panic of these seasoned evolved told him everything.

Level nine.

Chapter 1608: Level nine ocean lifeform

The sea surface began to emit dense bubbles at a certain moment. Even within a relatively small area of water, people could sense something rapidly rising from the depths.

Whether it was the several teams on either side or the Cloud Peak swiftly crossing the ice-covered sea, everyone accelerated their pace. They knew that terrifying creature was about to emerge from the water.

The Female Guard near Old Man's team directly grabbed and threw their companions outward. Those within reach landed on the ice, while those too far were caught by others before being flung forward onto the ice.

Since every Female Guard had a combat beast, those with speed-related talents or the ability to glide or jump short distances carried their masters swiftly across the exposed sea.

Though Ye Zhongming was the first to run, he repeatedly stopped to assist his subordinates, mostly members of the Youth Army, whose evolutionary levels were relatively low and lacked sufficient speed.

The bubbles in the sea grew increasingly dense, as if the water were boiling. By this point, even the lowest-level evolved could clearly sense the presence of that lifeform. When Ye Zhongming, still on the sea surface, peered deep into the water with his enhanced vision, he could already make out a massive shadow rapidly ascending.

Most of the Cloud Peak members had already crossed the sea and reached the ice on the other side, quickly retreating into the distance. However, a portion still hadn't escaped.

The reasons varied—some ice slabs shattered under the force of evolved, depriving them of footing, while others drifted out of position, requiring extra jumps.

Regardless of the reason, it meant they wouldn't reach the ice before the level-nine lifeform surfaced.

Moreover, Ye Zhongming didn't believe this level-nine creature would fully emerge before attacking. The moment evolved entered its range, it would likely strike mercilessly.

Just a few more seconds, and these people could have made it to safety. But in this apocalyptic world where every human was a superhuman and every monster a divine beast, a few seconds could feel like an eternity.

Ye Zhongming stopped, summoning the Soul Shattering Bone Staff, and unleashed an attack into the sea.

His mental energy, once abundant, plummeted to just a quarter of its full capacity.

Without waiting to see the result, he moved at his fastest speed to help his subordinates escape.

Just as the last Cloud Peak warrior was thrown to safety by Ye Zhongming, the sea behind him erupted. Countless jets of water shot outward like arrows, and a deep, furious roar reverberated through the air. The sonic waves, combined with the water jets, knocked many low-level evolved to the ground.

A shadow so vast it made humans feel insignificant burst from the sea, soaring dozens of meters into the air. Ye Zhongming shielded his vital areas as the water jets and shockwave sent him flying backward.

Seizing the moment, he glanced back and saw an exceptionally grotesque monster. It resembled an oversized seahorse, with eight fleshy wings on its back—whether for swimming or actual flight was unclear.

Its enormous head bore ten rows of eyes, numbering in the hundreds. One of them was bleeding, clearly wounded by the Soul-Shattering Bone Staff.

Enraged, the sea monster flapped its eight wings the moment it appeared. The sky itself seemed to shift as the life-threatening gales froze midair, forming visible tornadoes. These horizontal funnels rapidly stood upright, connecting with the sea. As they spun violently, sucking up seawater, the liquid froze mid-ascent. By the time Ye Zhongming landed, eight colossal ice tornadoes—seemingly bridging heaven and earth—had formed.

Anyone who witnessed this, including top-tier human experts like Ye Zhongming and Gyanendra, felt a deep-seated terror and trembling in their hearts.

This was the power of a level-nine lifeform—earth-shaking, utterly horrifying.

Ye Zhongming had encountered level-nine creatures before, but aside from the Nine-Winged Crow and Armor King, none had displayed such overwhelming strength. ҀANóĤEŞ

Marine life was indeed far more formidable than its terrestrial counterparts.

Run! Escape!

This was the unanimous thought of everyone present.

All believed that even if every evolved here joined forces, they stood no chance against this level-nine creature.

The sky-spanning ice tornadoes began moving, hurtling toward the evolved. Eight in total, they nearly encompassed every evolved in their path.

Ye Zhongming had no time to worry about how other teams handled this. He swiftly issued orders, gathering Cloud Peak's forces. Together, they turned and unleashed their strongest attacks at the incoming ice tornado.

Xia Bai and the Female Guards' combined skills, Ye Zhongming's full-powered Thousand Seal Blade Slash, the assaults of Yangos, Yellow Ball, and the other combat beasts—all were directed at the ice tornado.

Without waiting to see the result, Cloud Peak turned and fled at full speed.

No one knew if their attacks could stop the ice tornado, but they all understood that even if they did, it wouldn't halt the level-nine creature's subsequent assaults.

The only option left was to run.

A deafening explosion sounded as their attacks collided with the ice tornado.

Ye Zhongming controlled his speed, staying at the rear of the group. He glanced back and saw their combined assault had shattered the tornado into segments. Large chunks crashed into the sea, breaking the ice, while smaller fragments—still the size of small hills—skidded across the ice toward them with terrifying momentum.

Though "small" relative to the intact tornado, these fragments were still massive enough to crush any human in their path.

Speed, weight, force, inertia—these factors turned the remnants into instruments of death.

Every evolved had one thought: Run. Run faster!

Ye Zhongming, Yangos, and other level-eight beings repeatedly turned to attack, trying to slow the advancing ice. It helped, but not enough. Within ten seconds, the remnants would overtake them.

Sweat beaded on Ye Zhongming's forehead as he desperately sought a solution. What do we do? The question echoed endlessly in his mind.

"Look! Ahead!"

A shout drew his attention. When he saw what lay before them, his heart sank.

Chapter 1609: Pact Tome

On the ice surface stood rows of black, rod-like objects protruding like flagpoles.

This was a common lifeform in the northern regions, typically growing on frozen bodies of water—lakes or seas.

Their circular roots and magic crystals lay beneath the ice, while their tough, yam-like black stems extended above the surface, densely covered in thorns. Small pores dotted the stems, emitting a peculiar scent to lure land-based mutated creatures.

Once a creature succumbed to the scent and approached, the thorns would pierce its body, instantly draining its energy. These mutated plants, called "Ghost Narcissus," would simultaneously inject a potent paralyzing toxin, rendering their prey helpless as they were slowly sucked dry.

The scent had no effect on humans, and Ghost Narcissus were easily recognizable. Under normal circumstances, they posed little threat to evolved.

In fact, evolved often welcomed encountering them. As long as they avoided touching the flagpole-like stems, they could chip through the ice to dig out the roots and harvest the demon crystals.

With luck, they might even find high-level Ghost Narcissus.

Of course, breaking the ice would destabilize the entire plant. Since Ghost Narcissus was heavy and lethal to touch, evolved had to dodge carefully. A single misstep could lead to tragedy.

Nevertheless, over the years, Ghost Narcissus had nearly been wiped out in lakes and rivers within human territories. Only in the open sea could such large patches still be found.

Under normal circumstances, evolved would be overjoyed to see these mutated plants—it meant a windfall of magic crystals. The patch before them now numbered at least ten thousand, with some stems towering high enough to suggest level five or six. Harvesting them all would be a massive fortune.

But now, these usually lucrative plants filled everyone with a single feeling—despair.

This stretch of Ghost Narcissus blocked their escape route. With time, they could have chopped through the stems to pass. But now, even a second's delay meant being crushed by the massive icebergs behind them.

Many frantically attacked the plants with skills or ranged abilities, unsure if they could destroy them all. They had no choice—it was all they could do.

Gunfire erupted, and soon the entire fleeing human army was in attack mode.

With so many people and such overwhelming firepower, the above-ice portions of the Ghost Narcissus were shattered. However, without unified coordination and with evolved moving at high speed, many attacks missed or concentrated in one area, leaving some of the giant "yams" still standing in their path.

Everyone's faces turned ashen.

They had no chance for a second attack—the icebergs were almost upon them.

Turn and attack the icebergs? Some had tried earlier, but to what end? These were the skills of a level-nine lifeform. At their colossal, sky-spanning scale, even the strongest combined attack might break them apart, but could never destroy them completely. The best outcome was fragmentation, but even

then, the resulting ice chunks—each the size of a skyscraper—would still crush evolved with the force of a top-tier lifeform.

For the highest-level evolved, it might make a difference. For the majority, it made no difference.

Ye Zhongming tilted his head back and gulped down a high-level mental energy recovery potion, then directly absorbed several level-eight magic crystals, converting them into mental energy through his equipment.

His depleted mental energy, previously at just a quarter, surged slightly—but only to about half its full capacity. He turned, brandished the Soul Shattering Bone Staff, and unleashed an attack at the ice mountain behind Cloud Peak.

In this situation, brute force was his only option.

The Soul Shattering Bone Staff, a soul tool whose power scaled with mental energy expenditure, was perfect for this scenario—attacking a stationary target.

In one-on-one combat, Ye Zhongming rarely used it because opponents wouldn't just stand there and take it.

But while effective, the staff consumed mental energy voraciously. Ye Zhongming reserved just enough to keep fighting and channeled the rest into the staff. A beam of light shot out, shattering the iceberg directly behind them. Countless fragments flew in all directions, though some still hurtled toward Cloud Peak's ranks.

Ye Zhongming stowed the staff and joined Cloud Peak's level-eight lifeforms in intercepting the debris, covering their retreat.

The other teams employed their own methods—some clearing paths ahead, others attacking the pursuing threats.

After the iceberg onslaught, every team had suffered—though in different ways.

For Gyanendra's team, the losses were those mechanical tools. At the critical moment, their extraterrestrial tech once again proved its marvels. The self-destruction of several machines collapsed a vast section of the ice.

Alamos' team suffered more in gene-lifeform casualties. Their self-destructing units were less effective against inanimate ice than against living mutants, necessitating a greater number. The crisis also revealed a new gene-lifeform type—human-sized, headless creatures with broad upper bodies and spherical lower halves that rolled across the ground. Their wide torsos emitted beams that could briefly immobilize targets.

Ten of them firing together could stall the largest iceberg for a second or two; only dozens or hundreds working in unison had a meaningful impact.

Alamos' team and the Crusaders, being the slowest, suffered heavily. Post-crisis, Alamos had lost over two hundred gene warriors.

The Crusaders, though disciplined, could do little against such overwhelming force. Despite a heroic rearguard action sacrificing a thousand, they still took the heaviest losses, around two thousand dead.

The Cannibal Chain also paid a steep price, expending dozens of mysterious high-grade explosives to blast open the thick ice, sinking the icebergs.

Chapter 1609.5- Pact Tome

Ye Zhongming could break ice too, but not on that scale in such short time—a testament to the explosives' power.

Such ordnance couldn't be cheap. Using so many at once must have pained the Cannibal Chain deeply.

Cloud Peak's losses were more about pride than lives. Thanks to Ye Zhongming and their other high-level fighters, the icebergs were reduced from mountains to manageable chunks. With their overall strength, they escaped mostly intact, only two deaths: one from Old Man's team, one from the Youth Army, both due to unhealed injuries affecting performance.

No team dared linger after breaking through. As strange noises echoed behind them—likely the level-nine creature attacking again—they pressed forward. Even Ye Zhongming didn't look back. With the creature temporarily out of sensory range, distance was their only safety.

A thunderous crash shook the ice, followed by the telltale cracking of fracturing sheets. Everyone redoubled their flight, desperate to avoid the freezing waters.

Minutes later, relative safety arrived. Looking back, they saw the ice hundreds of meters behind them had fully shattered, the churning sea turning the fragments into drifting islands.

Further out, the level-nine monstrosity had revealed most of its body—a demonic colossus dwarfing their initial glimpse. Including its still-submerged bulk, its sheer size defied comprehension.

That last "attack" had simply been its emergence—the ice shattered by its sheer mass.

Gulping at the distant behemoth, the survivors moved on.

Perhaps due to the level-nine's presence, the remainder of their journey through the Bering Strait passed without incident, and they soon reached North America.

Upon entering Alaska, tensions spiked. With the Mountain King Crown's emergence point nearing—perhaps a week's travel despite the harsh conditions—the teams were now direct competitors.

Distrust ran deep. Past the strait, the groups split entirely, choosing separate routes for mutual comfort.

But nothing's absolute. The day after reaching North America, Cloud Peak was intercepted—not for battle, but for business.

"Buy equipment? Potions?"

Ye Zhongming was stunned. He'd have expected assassination attempts from Alamos sooner than trade requests.

Alamos gave a wry smile. "Ye, it's not so strange. I know your reputation—equipment and potions are Cloud Peak's twin economic pillars. Just treat me as a customer."

Ye Zhongming studied the mad scientist's face, finding no deceit—only confusion. This was bizarre.

"But we're... hardly allies."

They'd clashed directly, fought to the death. Just two days ago, they'd parted ways in mutual suspicion.

Now cooperation?

In unfamiliar territory, Ye Zhongming had to be cautious.

"No eternal enemies, right?"

Seeing Ye Zhongming unmoved, Alamos knew he needed leverage.

"If you agree to sell me what I need, I'll withdraw from the Mountain King Crown competition."

At Ye Zhongming's raised eyebrow, Alamos produced a book—a "Pact Tome."

Like contract scrolls, Pact Tomes ensured mutual honesty, but with negotiable terms. Parties could stipulate penalties for breach—loss of skills, jobs, bloodlines, even items. Once signed, violations triggered the agreed-upon consequences.

More flexible than scrolls, Pact Tomes could typically be used three to ten times.

This convinced Ye Zhongming of Alamos' sincerity—but not his motives.

Alamos immediately listed all his skills, jobs, and bloodlines, swearing to abstain from the crown competition after purchasing equipment. Violation would erase them all.

After consideration, Ye Zhongming agreed.

Then the scientist's demands floored him.

"Five thousand sets of equipment! Twenty thousand evolution potions, levels three to six!"

He wanted to outfit an entire level-six evolved army! All silver-grade gear, with two hundred in full green, ten in blue. For himself, two gold items and one purple.

Ye Zhongming refused outright. Purple gear? He didn't even have a full set himself!

Alamos offered an exorbitant price—enough to buy purple equipment on the open market—but Ye Zhongming held firm.

After back-and-forth, Ye Zhongming suddenly said, "Give me five hundred of those crystals, and I'll agree."

Alamos' face changed.

Chapter 1610: White Cave Crystal

What kind of crystals were those?

Alamos naturally knew which ones. But what he didn't know was how Ye Zhongming could possibly be aware of them. When he blurted out, "How did you know?" he froze for several seconds before letting out a bitter smile.

He had been played.

Ye Zhongming knew such crystals existed—but likely had no idea what they were used for, much less their origin.

Had Alamos simply denied it, he might have gotten away with it. Instead, he had confessed outright.

Looking at the young man before him, Alamos felt a pang of admiration.

This man, the undisputed leader of China's evolved—if nothing else, his discernment was truly remarkable.

Several teams had been present, including seasoned figures like Gyanendra and the Cannibal Chain's leadership—all widely experienced.

Yet only Ye Zhongming had seen through the true nature of those gene-lifeforms.

Alamos dismissed the possibility that others had noticed but stayed silent. If that were the case, he might already be facing a coordinated attack from multiple factions.

This alone spoke volumes about the crystals' value.

Ye Zhongming smiled.

Guessing Alamos's secret hadn't surprised him—there had been ample evidence.

First, Cloud Peak was the world leader in gene-lifeform research, the foremost authority on the technology. Though not a technician himself, Ye Zhongming had access to all its core secrets. He might not understand the specifics, but he knew the broader picture.

When Alamos first appeared with his army of seemingly perfected gene-soldiers, everyone, including Ye Zhongming, assumed his technology had achieved a breakthrough.

But upon reflection, Ye Zhongming realized that couldn't be right.

Achieving a technological breakthrough wasn't easy. It required not just capability but stringent external conditions—chief among them were research facilities and equipment.

Alamos wasn't from China, nor even Eurasia. Ye Zhongming had already uncovered his true identity—a North American! His lab and most researchers were based there.

Could he have made such an advanced breakthrough in a foreign land, in such a short time? Ye Zhongming doubted it.

Second, when it came to technology, Ye Zhongming had absolute confidence in Sister Hong. For years, she had researched undisturbed at Cloud Peak under optimal conditions, incorporating the work of the Treant, Guancheng Chun, and even Dr. He. Calling her the foremost expert in gene technology was no exaggeration.

Even she hadn't yet created flawless gene-lifeforms. How could Alamos have succeeded?

Lastly, based on his understanding of gene-soldiers, Ye Zhongming sensed that Alamos's creations lacked the distinctive "flavor" of gene-lifeforms. It was an intangible feeling, but a real one.

Now, with Alamos's inadvertent admission, the Cloud Peak King realized a major opportunity might be at hand.

"I can't just tell you for free."

Alamos, after all, was no ordinary man. After a brief adjustment, he counterattacked.

Ye Zhongming, straightforward as ever, nodded. "Name your price."

"One thousand sets of silver-grade equipment."

After consideration, Ye Zhongming agreed.

Only then did Alamos smile. Slowly, he explained, "These crystals originate from the White Cave aliens above us."

After briefly describing this extraterrestrial race, he continued, "They call them White Cave Crystals—a unique product of their planet. Their primary function is to fuse with any lifeform, altering its traits

without changing its fundamental composition. They can also absorb various energies to strengthen and integrate the host lifeform continuously."

Alamos's explanation was simple, but Ye Zhongming grasped it immediately, his eyes betraying astonishment.

In essence, White Cave Crystals could serve as artificial "hearts."

The limitation of gene-soldiers had always been genetic incompatibility during fusion. Different gene sequences naturally clashed. Harmonizing them required extensive neutralization processes.

Though Ye Zhongming knew his understanding was somewhat crude, the practical challenges were even greater. Even Liu Zhenghong's most advanced gene-lifeforms required constant "maintenance"—soaking in specialized solutions or receiving injections.

Yet these White Cave Crystals inherently possessed lifeform-fusion properties. Though Alamos didn't explicitly state it, they clearly worked on gene-lifeforms. Once implanted, they became the core—the heart—seamlessly integrating disparate genetic components.

They had solved the problem through an entirely different approach.

No wonder Alamos's creations looked so bizarre. With White Cave Crystals, he no longer needed compatibility testing or precision assembly. He could freely combine functional modules, leaving the integration to the crystals.

Even more terrifying, the crystals didn't just solve fusion—they enabled continuous evolution.

By absorbing various energies, the enhanced lifeforms could keep growing stronger.

Alamos revealed that biological energy worked best for these crystal-enhanced gene-soldiers. The flesh of the slain Sea Kun, a level eight lifeform, had already significantly boosted their power.

"I can't give you five hundred crystals. Once implanted, White Cave Crystals can't be extracted. Two hundred is my limit, plus your pick of one hundred gene-soldiers from my forces. That's my bottom line."

Alamos understood his creations' potential. If they survived, they could evolve indefinitely. Though their ultimate ceiling remained unknown, it was undoubtedly high.

Were it not for his desperate need for equipment and potions, he would never offer such terms. In his view, even fifty White Cave Crystals should suffice to trade for Ye Zhongming's resources.

He was confident Ye Zhongming would agree. Anyone who grasps the potential of these crystals would recognize their value.

They far surpassed fixed-level equipment or evolution potions.

"Not enough."

But with those two words, Cloud Peak's king shattered Alamos's confidence and daydreams.