

## **Apocalypse 1616**

### Chapter 1616: Connected

The first thing visible was the glow of skills and the distinct sound of crystal weapons firing.

At this point, everyone knew the camp was under attack.

Yet neither Ye Zhongming, Xiao Min, nor Xia Bai moved.

Since the sentries hadn't signaled for reinforcements, it meant the threat wasn't serious. Cloud Peak had a well-established system for handling such situations.

Ruan Xiao and Wu Xiu, accompanied by a few guards, emerged upon hearing the noise and spotted Ye Zhongming standing nearby. They exchanged greetings before turning their attention toward the direction of the fight.

"Seems someone finds us inconvenient and wants to clear us out before the wheel space opens," Ruan Xiao remarked coldly, his words making it clear that he stood firmly with Cloud Peak.

This wasn't surprising—Cannibal Chain had always maintained excellent relations with Cloud Peak. Their collaboration was mutually beneficial, allowing both sides to gain advantages they couldn't achieve alone.

For example, Ye Zhongming needed materials, while Cannibal Chain required potions or equipment.

And, of course, there was the fact that Ye Zhongming, as a major client, helped solidify Ruan Xiao's unshakable position within his organization.

Now, gathered beneath the Mountain Crown Wheel to compete for this supreme equipment, they were technically rivals. But as fellow members of the country, there was an unspoken bond between them—a shared understanding that, when not competing for the Mountain Crown, they stood on the same side.

The attack on Cloud Peak's camp was clearly an attempt to push out outsiders from the country. Ruan Xiao's anger and empathy were understandable.

Wu Xiu shook her head without speaking, but she knew full well that these attackers had miscalculated. Though Cloud Peak had the smallest numbers, their strength was among the greatest—just the Female Guard alone could crush countless so-called "major factions."

Reality quickly confirmed Wu Xiu's thoughts. The battle ended within minutes, with the attacking force retreating after leaving dozens of corpses behind. Cloud Peak didn't even suffer a single injury.

The report soon came in—the attackers were from an organization called "Z-Type Vengeance Squad," who had assumed Cloud Peak was an easy target and sent over a thousand fighters.

It couldn't be helped. Yangos was off somewhere playing, Yellow Ball was sleeping in a tent, Nine Treasures had stayed on the other side of the Bering Strait as backup, Ice Bird was resting in the hive, and the undead dragon-fish was busy growing flesh...

Without these obvious deterrents, Cloud Peak appeared to outsiders as just a group of women and teenagers, who wouldn't want to bully them?

The major factions hadn't made a move in the past two days simply because they didn't see Cloud Peak as a threat, fearing that attacking them might expose weaknesses to other opportunistic forces.

Only mid-tier organizations like the Z-Type Vengeance Squad—well-informed, sizable but not superpowers, always looking to grab easy advantages—would dare target people from the country without hesitation.

Unfortunately for them, they'd slammed into a brick wall.

The Z-Type Vengeance Squad had enough sense to retreat the moment they realized their target wasn't some weakling but a razor-sharp dagger.

Cloud Peak didn't pursue. An organization like this wasn't even worth the attention of the average female guard warrior—a single squad could carve through the thousand who'd just attacked.

Still, indifference aside, though Ye Zhongming and Xia Bai said nothing, the women of the Female Guards would undoubtedly show no mercy if they reencountered this group.

After all, to outsiders, they were nothing but a pack of "psychopaths" and "murderous demons."

The group returned to the tent, where Xia Bai served tea—a detail that told Ruan Xiao and Wu Xiu Cloud Peak possessed an abundance of spatial equipment. Otherwise, they wouldn't be carrying such luxuries in the apocalypse.

"Still about the previous collaboration?" Ye Zhongming cut straight to the point without waiting for the Cannibal Chain leaders to speak.

At this stage, both Cannibal Chain and Ye Zhongming had realized something: the secret Alamos had revealed might have been confidential in North America, but it was far from top-secret. Every faction with the qualifications had gathered here—no fewer than fifty groups, large and small. If there were a power ranking here, the top fifty were likely all present.

Faced with this invisible pressure, Cloud Peak and Cannibal Chain, both from the country, naturally gravitated toward each other.

Under these circumstances, a limited alliance would only bring benefits.

"Yes," Wu Xiu replied bluntly. "But now, only one form of cooperation remains viable."

Ye Zhongming understood. Most of the collaboration methods discussed earlier by the Bering Strait were no longer feasible—only one still worked.

"We've received reliable intel. Once the Mountain Crown Wheel's space opens, the rewards won't just include the disk itself but many other high-tier artifacts. The competition will be fierce." Wu Xiu took a sip of tea and was mildly surprised—the flavor was unexpectedly rich, and a warm current spread through her limbs, restoring her stamina and nourishing her body. Clearly, this was no ordinary tea.

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"If we can stick together inside the space, we can collaborate to secure these rewards and counter foreign factions. When the Mountain Crown Wheel appears, we'll compete fairly."

Cannibal Chain's proposal was straightforward: cooperate early to maximize gains, then compete for the ultimate prize. This way, even the losing side wouldn't walk away empty-handed, avoiding the desperation of a gambler who'd lost everything.

After all, both sides would still need to coexist and progress together upon returning to the country. This agreement set clear boundaries, ensuring neither crossed the line.

Ye Zhongming agreed. They were all smart—this was the most mutually beneficial arrangement under the circumstances.

"Then perhaps we can start collaborating now, exchanging resources to strengthen and balance our forces. What do you think, Mr. Ye?"

Wu Xiu leaned forward slightly, a smile on her face.

An hour later, Wu Xiu and Ruan Xiao left satisfied—and so did Ye Zhongming.

As the undisputed top figure in the national region, he still needed allies here.

"They really do have good stuff."

Xiao Min glanced at the items on the table inside the tent, impressed. Cannibal Chain, as a major commercial organization, truly lived up to its reputation—even Cloud Peak's members couldn't help but covet their treasures.

To ensure smoother operations, Ruan Xiao and Wu Xiu had engaged in a small-scale trade with Ye Zhongming.

Of course, at their level, even a "small-scale" trade was enough to cause a stir.

These items would significantly aid Cloud Peak.

At Ye Zhongming's feet was a crate of various potions.

The Mountain Crown Wheel's space would undoubtedly be fraught with danger and combat. No matter how strong Cloud Peak was, they couldn't guarantee absolute safety. If their mental energy, stamina, or health were severely depleted, potions would be crucial.

This crate contained over a thousand bottles of varying types and grades, to be distributed as needed.

These weren't cheap—Ye Zhongming had paid a hefty sum.

But the item that delighted him the most was inside a box on the table: the Artisan's Heart.

Ye Zhongming had obtained this item before—beginner and intermediate versions—and later collected advanced ones through extensive searching.

He had assumed that was the end of it, but Ogre Chain surprised him with the Supreme Artisan's Heart, which increased the success rate of crafting high-grade equipment (gold or above) by 10%.

This was a perfect match for Ye Zhongming's needs, and naturally, it came at a high price—five bottles of Seven-Star Evolution Potion and one gold-grade equipment.

Expensive? Yes. Worth it? Absolutely.

The success rate for gold and purple-grade equipment was inherently low, with strict thresholds and limitations. Even Ye Zhongming couldn't craft them casually.

Though he had produced many gold and purple-grade pieces, the number of failures far exceeded his successes.

Each failure meant the loss of precious materials—enough to make even Ye Zhongming, as wealthy as he was, want to vomit blood in frustration.

A 10% increase in success rate might seem small, but it represented a massive leap forward, saving countless materials in the long run. The price he paid was practically a bargain.

For Cannibal Chain, the item was useless—only a top-tier, prefix-bearing Artisan like Ye Zhongming could use it—but they had still offered it at a friendly rate.

Ye Zhongming used it immediately. If the Mountain Crown Wheel's space didn't open today, he planned to test its effects by crafting high-grade equipment.

There was also a spatial ring on the table, containing a special type of battle beast feed.

It wasn't necessarily better than Cloud Peak's own, but after two consecutive meals, it granted battle beasts resistance to cold and mild toxins.

This was extraordinary. In Alaska's freezing climate, many of Cloud Peak's battle beasts had shown discomfort—few could match Yangos' complete indifference to the cold.

Though their high evolution levels and exposure to Mist Essence prevented any major loss of function, the cold still slightly impacted their combat effectiveness.

Ye Zhongming hadn't found a good solution—he wasn't skilled in crafting beast gear, so he couldn't just "clothe" them for warmth.

This feed solved that problem.

Lastly, there was something called "Zero-Point Fireflies."

Ye Zhongming was well-traveled, but the transparent box containing a thousand meticulously arranged, artificially crafted firefly-like objects still made him sigh in amazement.

Forget their function—just their price was staggering.

Cannibal Chain had charged him one purple-grade equipment (to be delivered), one Eight-Star Evolution Potion, and a hundred of the latest model crystal grenades!

And that was still the "friendship discount"!

Chapter 1617: Open

"Spade, you're not planning to brush us off with just this information, are you?"

Inside Governor Spade's camp, dozens of people sat around a bonfire. Though they were all leaders of various factions with high evolution levels and little fear of the cold, having a warm fire nearby was still a comfort they appreciated.

The speaker was a burly man with no arms—instead, he had two mechanical limbs. His skin tone suggested South American origins.

Among these leaders, fewer than five dared speak to the mountainously obese Governor Spade in such a tone. This mechanical-armed man was one of them: Vincent "Severed Arms", head of the Viscous Guild.

"This information... isn't enough?"

Spade smiled amiably at Severed Arms, his tone deceptively mild.

Yet everyone else felt a chill.

"You know more. Far more detailed than this." Severed Arms didn't back down, staring straight at Spade.

The others knew this was true, but none dared say it aloud.

Governor Spade chuckled coldly, his layers of fat quivering.

His silence was answer enough.

However, he'd obtained this intel, and it had undoubtedly come at a high cost. Spade clearly intended to leverage it for greater gains inside the wheel space—why would he share everything so freely?

The scraps he'd revealed now were only due to pressure from the outsiders. His real aim was to prevent infighting in the early stages, lest foreign factions take advantage of their disunity.

Of course, there was also the matter of payment—even these vague tidbits weren't free.

"If that's how it is, then we're done here."

Severed Arms stood and left with his men without another word.

"I'd love to snap his neck and shove those trash arms down his throat."

Spade said this cheerfully, prompting uneasy laughter from the others.

No one doubted he'd do exactly that given the chance.

"Big Z, report."

Spade turned to a gaunt man clad in a jester's garb, his face covered in war paint.

"Troublesome. That team of women and children has exceptionally high individual combat power. Numerous battle beasts, top-grade gear—their strength far exceeds what their gender and age suggest. Estimated evolution levels: six to seven stars. Blue-grade equipment is common. Their battle beasts range from level five to seven. Most notably, they possess a bizarre but devastating standardized weapon."

He paused, letting the information sink in, then continued:

"The faction with the mechanical constructs is equally formidable. Those machines have terrifying offensive capabilities—my scouts couldn't even get within a hundred meters."

"As for the Europeans? Utter savages. Their mutated polar bear cavalry is unstoppable once they charge. That's where I deployed the most forces. We breached their lines, but the cavalry slaughtered us. Lost over a thousand fighters."

"The rest? Didn't have enough manpower to probe."

After the painted jester finished, the group fell silent, waiting for Spade's decision.

Truthfully, they had no qualms about devouring these outsider factions—they just needed someone to take the lead and absorb the initial losses.

Spade told the jester, "I'll replenish your troops," then lowered his head to gnaw on a massive, bloody raw leg of a mutated creature—bones and all. The crunching sounds sent shivers down spines.

Everyone knew the Governor was weighing risks.

Only about half of North America's forces here had gathered under Spade's banner. The other half lurked nearby, watching. If they attacked the outsiders and succeeded, all would be well. However, if someone seized the chance to sabotage or strike them during operation, the consequences could be dire.

Spade shoved the last bone fragment into his mouth, his expression sharpening—he'd made his decision.

High risk meant high reward. If they crushed these outsiders, their gear, resources, and battle beast crystals would be theirs—a fortune by any measure.

But before the mountainous Governor could speak, the mountain peak's faint glow suddenly erupted in brilliance. Black streaks cascaded downward like waterfalls, accelerating until they reached the base, where they solidified into pitch-black portals.

The sight stunned the onlookers. When the portals stabilized, realization struck:

The Mountain Crown Wheel had activated!

After a frozen moment, the crowd scattered in a frenzy, leaving only the conflicted, regretful gaze of the obese Governor behind.

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Ye Zhongming's hand slipped.

The gold-tier equipment he'd been crafting failed.

But he had no time to mourn the wasted materials. He sprang to his feet—on the mountain-facing side of Cloud Peak's camp, a massive black energy passage had opened.

Like a gaping maw, it seemed ready to devour everything.

"Boss, recon complete. No changes elsewhere."

Xiao Min had efficiently anticipated his needs. Her report confirmed this sudden black passage was the only entry point.

Ye Zhongming nodded and ordered Cloud Peak to advance immediately.

This passage was unmistakably the Mountain Crown Wheel's signal—there'd be no danger.

The team assembled swiftly. Each member received one of those luminous firefly-like devices before filing into the dark portal in sequence.

Darkness. Then light.

Ye Zhongming's vision cleared.

Before him lay the same frozen wilderness, yet he felt no cold. The surroundings seemed real yet distorted, like a glitched image, evoking deep unease.

Behind him, Cloud Peak's warriors materialized one after another. Within minutes, the entire force had gathered—including Yangos and the undead dragon-fish.

The former had arrived last—the wicked dragon had spotted the mountain's anomaly and raced back at top speed.

The latter, although still undergoing transformation and sluggish, could move. Fleshy membranes now partially covered its body—soon, real flesh would grow.

After a headcount, Cloud Peak advanced cautiously.

The landscape remained monotonous. No other lives or factions appeared. Ye Zhongming suspected the Mountain Crown Wheel had intentionally separated them.

Since everyone had used Zero-Point Fireflies, he couldn't tell whether factions were grouped together or randomly scattered.

He leaned toward the former.

If so, his alliance with Cannibal Chain was effectively meaningless—unless they reunited before the final prize’s contention began.

The others remained equally vigilant, scanning their eerie surroundings.

Then—tremors.

The ground shook with increasing intensity. On the distant snowfield, a black line emerged, racing toward them.

Cloud Peak’s warriors tightened their grips on weapons.

The Mountain Crown Wheel’s first trial had arrived.

Chapter 1618: Huge Burden Challenge

As the distance closed, the people of Cloud Peak realized that the black line was actually row upon row of cavalry!

For those who have never experienced it, it's impossible to imagine the bone-deep trembling and fear that arises when facing a thousand-strong cavalry charge.

This has nothing to do with courage—it's pure instinct.

Perhaps the only ones who could barely suppress this instinct were the most elite infantry of the dynasties in the central plains at their peak during the era of cold weapons.

The members of Cloud Peak, especially the Female Guard, had experienced countless battles. Their mental fortitude was unquestionable.

But that didn't mean they felt nothing. This primal fear couldn't hinder their combat effectiveness—on the contrary, they knew how to transform it into excitement!

In comparison, the Youth Army fared worse. Their rapid rise from low-level evolved to their current strength had left their mental states unstable. Faced with the overwhelming cavalry charge, many of the youths' breathing grew ragged, and a few even trembled.

Such was the psychological terror of a mass cavalry assault.

"Stone horses!"

As the cavalry drew closer, everyone saw that their mounts were brown stone steeds—massive, unarmored, their very bodies serving as impenetrable armor.

"And the riders too."

Xiao Min sighed softly, realizing this was likely a manifestation of the Mountain Crown Wheel's attributes.

"Our battle beasts' abilities are sealed!"

A female warrior with a support-type battle beast shouted in alarm. She had intended to buff the team, only to receive feedback that her beast's abilities were locked entirely—and would remain so.

Others quickly confirmed the same. Even Yangos and Yellow Ball, stubborn as they were, attempted to break the restriction, only to fail.

This humbled the two unruly creatures. The space had proven it could suppress them effortlessly.

"This is a trial."

Ye Zhongming's voice cut through the chaos. Whatever he said, his words always carried weight and reassurance, calming even the most nervous Youth Army members.

Such was the effect of an idol and pillar of strength.

"The Mountain Crown Wheel is testing evolved' abilities to determine who the worthiest candidate is. Battle beasts... are excluded from consideration."

Ye Zhongming drew his warblade, and the rest of Cloud Peak followed suit.

"But there's nothing to fear, is there? Compared to the demonic hordes of the secret realm, these are nothing."

With Ye Zhongming as the spearhead, the entire Cloud Peak force charged forward.

From above, the two formations were grossly mismatched. Cloud Peak's assault force appeared pitifully thin and insignificant compared to the tide of stone cavalry.

Yet when the two sides collided, Cloud Peak's formation proved far more suited to this space's nature. Like an unshakable boulder, they held firm against the stone torrent.

The cavalry's strength wasn't particularly impressive—their evolutionary levels capped at three or four stars at best. Their only notable trait was defense. The brown stone composing their bodies was unnaturally hard; even green-grade weapons from Cloud Peak struggled to shatter them unless striking at precise angles or thinner sections.

Broken stone shards filled the air, never fully dissipating due to the ferocity of the clash. The relentless slaughter ensured a permanent storm of debris, gradually enveloping Cloud Peak's advancing forces.

Then—a haunting horn blast.

In the midst of battle, Ye Zhongming leaped onto a stone horse, decapitating its rider with a single slash. His expression darkened as he surveyed the battlefield.

During the initial charge, only Cloud Peak's warriors had engaged. The Old Man Squad and the battle beasts had remained in the rear, guarded by a Youth Army detachment.

Now, spurred by the horn's call, a new wave of stone cavalry materialized from thin air, charging straight toward the defenseless support line.

"Xia Bai, hold this position!" Ye Zhongming roared, then named two Female Guard captains to follow him back.

The sheer number of stone cavalry had long since stalled Cloud Peak's momentum, forcing them into a defensive circle under relentless assault.

Ye Zhongming's group fought desperately to break through, every step a grueling ordeal.

The stone cavalry seemed endless—no matter how many they slew, more took their place.

And that horn... they were being directed.

With the enemy seconds away from overrunning the battle beasts, Ye Zhongming acted alone.

Without their skills, even the mightiest battle beasts would eventually succumb to sheer numbers.

Every one of these creatures was priceless to Cloud Peak—losing them would be unthinkable.

While Ye Zhongming couldn't annihilate the entire cavalry force quickly, breaking through was no challenge.

He burst free from the encirclement, blurring toward the battle beasts' position. Raising the Soul Shattering Bone Staff, he channeled 10% of his mental energy, unleashing a devastating beam that cleared a path through the stone tide.

Next came the Explosive Mechanic, its barrels roaring as it mowed down the advancing foes.

Behind Ye Zhongming, the Youth Army and Old Man Squad formed a second line of defense. Further back, the physically stronger battle beasts shielded their support-type brethren, led by Yangos and Yellow Ball, their fangs bared as if daring the stone cavalry to test their claws.

Ye Zhongming noted with frustration that even his Undead Sand Moonblade's summoning ability was nullified here. Only Red Hair, whose connection to him had grown increasingly ambiguous, remained unaffected. The rest, like Ice Bird, were completely powerless.

At least their weapons still functioned.

Yet as Ye Zhongming, Xia Bai, and Xiao Min fought, a gnawing worry took root.

This was only the first trial.

If the difficulty escalated further, how would Cloud Peak survive?

Then—a deep rumbling.

The shattered stone fragments on the battlefield began moving, coalescing into new forms.

From each cluster emerged a stone knight, towering several times taller than the standard cavalry, their bodies now jet-black, their weapons transformed from simple lances into massive, curved stone blades.

Chapter 1619: Huge Burden Challenge (2)

Just in terms of aura alone, these towering cavalry units were far more imposing than the ordinary ones before. Ye Zhongming estimated their strength to be roughly equivalent to Level 5 mutated lifeforms.

These cavalry appeared among the previous ranks, standing out like cranes among chickens.

The sudden shift dramatically increased the pressure on Cloud Peak. Individually, these knights posed no threat—even the Youth Army warriors could easily dispatch them.

But the problem was sheer numbers. The ordinary stone cavalry could be killed in a single strike, but they couldn't be ignored. Even if their attacks couldn't breach defenses, the sheer impact would send tremors through the body.

A single uncontrolled movement could lead to a cascade of blows, trapping a warrior in a helpless cycle of defense.

The soldiers wouldn't allow that—once caught in such a situation, they'd be beaten to death without a chance to retaliate.

Under these circumstances, the height advantage of these new knights—allowing them to strike over the heads of ordinary cavalry—became a major problem for Cloud Peak.

"Thunder!"

Xiao Min, in charge of command, didn't bother worrying about her boss. Seeing the situation, she barked the order.

Without their battle beast support, the Female Guard fighters were slightly off-balance, but their superb combat instincts kept them steady. At the command, a group of them fell back under cover, swiftly retrieving crystal grenades from their spatial storage and hurling them toward the towering knights.

The latest-model grenades packed devastating power. Though the stone knights were tough, they couldn't withstand Cloud Peak's signature weaponry.

Explosions cleared vast swathes of enemies, easing the pressure on the formation.

Seizing the opening, the team unleashed a wave of skills, clearing surrounding foes and reorganizing their formation, placing the most defensive fighters on the perimeter.

"Regroup on the boss!"

Xiao Min issued the next order, and the entire Cloud Peak force shifted backward.

With the situation unclear—no one knew how many more cavalry would appear—splitting forces was unwise.

Crystal grenades continued flying from Cloud Peak's battle formation, carving out pockets of safety and turning wave after wave of stone cavalry into shattered debris.

Soon, the team reunited with Ye Zhongming, encircling the battle beasts that couldn't fight physically.

The maneuver cost a third of the Female Guard's grenade stockpile—but the results were undeniable. Within visible range, the stone cavalry had thinned drastically, no longer resembling the dense swarm from before.

A quick scan revealed missing faces—all from the Youth Army. The tidal assault had claimed lives.

The reunion brought brief relief, but it was short-lived.

The shattered stone fragments began moving on their own again, coalescing into new cavalry units.

This time, however, alongside the towering Type II knights, an even stronger Type III emerged.

"Level 7!"

The thought flashed through many minds.

Though few in number, these new Type III stone knights boasted strength on par with Level 7—matching the Female Guard and surpassing the Youth Army.

"Wipe them out!"

Ye Zhongming knew letting them assemble was fatal. At equal levels, even Cloud Peak's formation would struggle to hold.

The Eight-Star elites—Ye Zhongming, Xia Bai, Xiao Min, Red Hair—sprang into action, targeting the Type IIIs.

The King of Cloud Peak led the charge, his Harvester Mimicry Shooter roaring like thunder. Every shot blew apart a Type III's head, sending its body crashing down—even with basic green-grade rounds.

Red Hair and Xia Bai were only slightly slower. Fighting solo, their overwhelming speed and power turned them into blurs of death, leaving trails of shattered stone in their wake.

Thanks to the chaos from the grenades, the assault was highly effective, clearing most nearby threats.

But the bigger picture remained grim.

In the distance, more cavalry charged, soon to encircle Cloud Peak again.

With no better options, the team fought on—shooting, slashing, enduring.

Gradually, the stone cavalry closed in, mixing Type IIs and IIIs to crush the humans under relentless pressure.

As more advanced types appeared, the pattern became clear:

Type I (ordinary) deaths → form Type II

Type II deaths → form Type III

Strength escalated with each revival.

Fortunately, it took 2-3 Type I deaths to form a Type II, and the same ratio for Type IIIs. Though the enemies grew stronger, their numbers dwindled.

Under the onslaught, Cloud Peak periodically unleashed crystal firearms or grenades to ease the pressure.

The battle was brutal. Casualties, though minimal, mounted steadily—seven Youth Army dead, many more wounded. Even brief respites in the formation's center couldn't fully offset the toll.

Ye Zhongming's brow furrowed. These were seeds he'd painstakingly nurtured—losing them here was a waste.

He considered emptying the grenade stockpile, but if this was only the first trial, conserving resources was critical for what lay ahead.

Even the Explosive Mechanic had been deployed, now cooling down. Ye Zhongming had used Cloud Slice multiple times, draining a fifth of his mental energy.

The deadlock continued:

Stone cavalry encircling, attacking endlessly.

Cloud Peak defending, killing relentlessly.

Then, at a critical point—the feared escalation arrived.

When enough Type IIIs fell, something worse emerged.

Type IV.

Chapter 1620: Huge Burden Challenge (3)

Level 8!

Many couldn't help but cry out.

If it had been just a single Level 8, Cloud Peak wouldn't have been so shaken—after all, they had faced Level 9 lifeforms before.

But even though these Type IV stone cavalry were the fewest in number—requiring the debris of two or three Type IIIs to form—their sheer base numbers meant that in just this short time, over a dozen of these formidable Type IV cavalry had already appeared.

And the count was still rising.

"Hold your positions!"

Ye Zhongming's voice was low and steady as he flashed forward, weapons in both hands, cutting a path toward the nearest Type IV stone cavalry.

Within Cloud Peak, there were many who could defeat Level 8 lifeforms—but here, only Ye Zhongming could do so easily.

Red Hair and Xia Bai might have managed it too, but first, it would take them much longer, and being surrounded in enemy ranks was extremely dangerous. Second, the formation still needed high-level fighters to anchor it and oversee the overall situation.

Alone, Ye Zhongming plunged into the sea of enemies, using relentless slaughter to ease the pressure on his team. His strength, speed, equipment, and skills all far surpassed these stone cavalry—even the Level 8 Type IVs could only hold out for a few strikes against him.

A few minutes later, Ye Zhongming returned to the formation. His face was pale, his chest heaving violently, beads of sweat forming on his forehead. His armor bore multiple dents and cracks.

In just that short time, he had nearly exhausted his mental energy, and his stamina had dropped significantly. While his defensive gear had spared him external injuries, the internal shocks left him far from comfortable.

Still, his brief sortie had eliminated most of the Type IVs that had appeared earlier.

"More are coming."

Ye Zhongming downed two potions—one to restore mental energy, the other to heal internal injuries. As for stamina, between Bloodstepping Boots and Beautiful Celestial Body, his recovery was swift.

In the distance, several more Type IVs emerged, along with even more Type IIIs. A faint sense of helplessness rose in the King of Cloud Peak's heart.

He needed a few more minutes to recover before launching another attack. Normally, such a short time would pass unnoticed—but now, it felt like an eternity.

Fight. There was no other choice.

In this white expanse, within this mystical space, the battle raged endlessly.

Shattered stone, shouts, impacts, flashes of light, explosions... All of it seemed to proclaim one thing:

The Mountain Crown Wheel welcomes you!

An hour later, the battlefield fell silent.

The tidal waves of stone cavalry were gone, leaving behind over twenty dead, a dozen severely wounded, and nearly everyone else lightly injured among Cloud Peak's ranks.

The casualties were heavy, but annihilating all the stone cavalry in under two hours was a feat worth celebrating.

Yet no one cheered.

Every eye was fixed on the ground, where fields of shattered stone lay.

The Type IVs had been the highest-level stone cavalry to appear. By the end, over a hundred of them had formed.

Yellow Ball, Yangos, and other battle beasts capable of physical combat had all joined the fray, paying a bloody price for victory.

Most of the casualties had occurred during the final assault, when these Level 8 enemies swarmed them.

Now, everyone watched the debris of the fallen Type IVs, waiting—or perhaps hoping—that they wouldn't merge again.

Because that would mean the emergence of Type V stone cavalry—Level 9 entities, or perhaps... even stronger.

Then—the rubble moved.

The hearts of Cloud Peak's fighters sank. The feared outcome was unfolding.

All the fragments converged toward a single point. Some warriors, unwilling to accept it, launched attacks, hoping to reduce the debris and prevent the Type V's formation.

But at this moment, the rubble was invincible—even Ye Zhongming's Wind and Thunder couldn't so much as chip the smallest fragment.

A colossal silhouette began taking shape—a behemoth whose mere unfinished form exuded crushing pressure.

"Attack the ground beneath it!"

The command rang out from Ye Zhongming, who had been silently watching, feeling powerless. He struck first, and a barrage of attacks followed.

The rubble itself might have been untouchable, but the ground beneath it wasn't.

The might of evolved assaults was immense. Cloud Peak's concentrated fire carved out a massive pit, causing the still-forming Type V to sink deeper. What had been a ten-meter-tall figure now stood only five meters above ground.

"Keep going!"

The earth was hard, but hope flared.

Time was short, but Cloud Peak poured everything into the effort. The pit deepened—twenty meters by the time the Type V fully manifested.

Yet even this gaping chasm couldn't fully contain it. The twenty-meter-deep pit still left another twenty meters of the stone knight towering above ground.

In its presence, Cloud Peak's fighters were still insignificant.

Its mount remained unseen, but its upper body was clad in thick stone armor, wielding two massive stone flails.

Even half-buried, its aura was mountainous. Behind its stone helmet, pupilless eyes gazed down as if surveying a swarm of ants.

Fzzzt—BOOM!

The crackle of crystal grenades erupted. At the final moment of its formation, Cloud Peak had hurled their entire remaining stockpile into the pit.

Even a Level 9 entity would suffer under such concentrated explosions. The monster lurched, its flails—not yet swung—slammed into the ground from the sudden impact.

The explosions were a signal. Cloud Peak's assault shifted upward, focusing on the Type V's head.

Every fighter unleashed their strongest attacks.

Ye Zhongming joined in, though none dared approach—ranged strikes only. His Harvester Mimicry Shooter spat beams of light, loaded with his highest-grade ammunition (save for the Linked-Heart Five-Stage Rounds), enhanced by marksmanship skills.

Caught off guard, the Type V seemed momentarily dazed, its body losing chunks of stone under the barrage. But then, it retaliated.

Its flails whirled, and though its body couldn't move (fused with its mount), the weapons' reach put the entire Cloud Peak formation in danger.

A Level 9's assault was terrifying. Under the dual flails, Cloud Peak's offensive collapsed, forcing a frantic retreat. Updates are released by [Novel-Fire.net](http://Novel-Fire.net)

**BOOM!**

The flails struck earth, cratering the ground, sending shrapnel-like debris flying. Dozens of warriors were sent sprawling, some motionless where they fell.

No one could tend to them yet, because as the others retreated, their leader had done the opposite.

Ye Zhongming had charged forward, scaling the Type V's colossal body in a series of rapid leaps, now nearing its head!