

Apocalypse 1681

Chapter 1681: Magic! Magic!

All eyes were fixed on the Mechanical Genius.

At the first step, it was impossible to see which Bright Star belonged to whom—something the space had just informed everyone of. Evolved were already accustomed to such underhanded tactics.

Of course, this halved the value of the Head Start Card. But since the Cannibal Chain had no real interest in the Mountain King Wheel, it didn't matter much to them.

Still, everyone could see how closely they were aligned with Cloud Peak. Now that they had landed on the Mechanical Genius's Bright Star, people were eager to see what would happen.

After the Cannibal Chain struck the Soaring Crystal, the third Bright Star—belonging to the Mechanical Genius—lit up. A massive screen appeared before the crowd, displaying a vast grassland where a gigantic beast lay sprawled. Sensing something, it raised its head and looked skyward.

Since the image was captured from above, all six teams felt as if the monster were staring directly at them.

"Row eight, number fifty-six." Many recognized the beast's position on the crystal disk at a glance—clearly, it wasn't among the strongest guardian beasts. The only question was whether it had been upgraded.

Previously, for individual evolved, guardian beasts had been formidable opponents. Even the weakest ones could give an eight-star evolved a hard time.

The question now was whether teams could choose to fight collectively.

Fortunately, the space—which had just "played" with everyone using the ten card types—provided an answer that wasn't entirely hopeless.

For challenges, teams could choose to fight collectively without triggering a level-up in the guardian beast. However, if they won as a group, the maximum distance the Soaring Crystal could travel in the next round would be limited to two Bright Stars or fewer.

In other words, they could advance no more than two Bright Stars per strike.

For factions aiming for the ultimate prize, every single round out of the ten was critical. Falling short by even a few Bright Stars now might mean losing by that same margin in the end.

The wheel space had seemingly lowered the difficulty but introduced a dilemma, forcing every faction to make tough choices.

This was a matter of strategy—one misstep, and everything could fall apart.

Wu Xiu nodded at Ye Zhongming, her eyes carrying a hint of apology.

The Cloud Peak King understood. This wasn't genuine remorse, but rather a gesture to facilitate smoother cooperation. They would undoubtedly choose to fight as a team, meaning that in the next round—and every subsequent round—they would advance only two Bright Stars at most.

After ten rounds, they'd cover just twenty-one Bright Stars.

The remaining hundred-plus would be Cloud Peak's burden alone.

Ye Zhongming could accept this choice. There was nothing unreasonable about the Cannibal Chain's decision.

After all, helping didn't mean fighting to the death, sacrificing every last subordinate—or even their own lives.

Every team leader, every individual present, was racking their brains, strategizing how to proceed when their turn came.

Too many cards, too many guardian beasts, too many Bright Stars, too few rounds, insufficient strength... All of this led to one outcome: too many variables.

Nobody liked variables. A good one was called a pleasant surprise; a bad one was called a shock—or even terror. Here, variables undoubtedly belonged to the latter category.

The entire Cannibal Chain team vanished from sight, reappearing moments later on the massive screen.

Two kilometers ahead of the guardian beast, their formation materialized on the open terrain. Both sides spotted each other instantly.

The guardian beast roared and stood up.

Only when the Cannibal Chain appeared on-screen did everyone realize just how massive the guardian beast was.

Earlier, while lying down, its size had been unclear—some even thought it was small due to perspective.

But with the evolved as a reference point, spectators immediately understood: this guardian beast was terrifyingly huge, more like a small mountain!

On the crystal disk, it hadn't seemed this large.

Fortunately, on Earth, while rare, creatures of this size weren't unheard of—especially near coastlines, where even larger lifeforms occasionally surfaced.

Size wasn't always an absolute indicator of strength, but in most cases, it was a reliable one. The Cloud Peak spectators grew tense, silently cheering for their Cannibal Chain allies.

There was no preamble to the battle—just immediate, brutal confrontation.

The guardian beast, spotting intruders, rose instantly, revealing countless tentacles suspended just above the ground. A closer look showed suction-cup-like structures at their bases, expelling jets of air to support its colossal body.

Had the terrain not been grassy, with the airflow flattening the vegetation, this detail might have gone unnoticed.

Despite its size, the beast moved swiftly, charging at the Cannibal Chain the moment it stood.

Silent yet earth-shaking, it closed the distance to just a few hundred meters in seconds.

Given its size, even this gap felt like a looming catastrophe. Had these not been evolved tempered by six years of apocalyptic hell, ordinary humans would have broken down mentally on the spot.

Simultaneously, the monster suddenly expelled countless black, rod-like projectiles, each tipped with a blinding light. Their nature was unclear.

On-screen, they didn't seem particularly threatening—until compared to the evolved. Each rod was as tall and thick as an adult human. Their numbers? Impossible to count, but undoubtedly several times the Cannibal Chain's headcount.

Almost instantly, they were upon the team.

Many spectators instinctively held their breath, silently praying for their fellow humans.

The guardian beast's assault was swift, precise, and vicious. Nobody expected such speed from a mountainous creature—not just in movement but in attack, delivered with lethal efficiency.

These Easterners might not be wiped out entirely, but they'd surely suffer heavy losses. Half of them would likely die in this single strike.

And this was a guardian beast from the second-to-last row—without the difficulty increasing, it was already this strong!

"HAHAHA! DIE! I upgraded it three times!"

If anyone present was thrilled, it was the Bright Star's owner, the Mechanical Genius. His laughter echoed manically from within his mechanical puppet.

"Idiot."

Ye Zhongming muttered the word without taking his eyes off the screen.

Sure enough, the next moment, the scene he'd anticipated unfolded!

Chapter 1682: Magic! Magic! (2)

A massive light shield appeared above the Cannibal Chain team, completely enveloping the evolved.

Many of the Cannibal Chain's mages raised their hands, emitting sustained beams of energy to power the shield.

Though the shield was enormous, it appeared remarkably "solid"—not dazzlingly bright but exuding a plain, unadorned sense of weight.

It was hard to imagine a light shield evoking such a feeling.

Covering the Cannibal Chain members, its size was considerable, yet compared to the guardian beast, it seemed minuscule. The shield's thickness, which had felt substantial when viewed in isolation, now appeared as thin as paper against the colossal foe.

The faint hope inspired by the shield's emergence instantly shattered, drawing soft sighs from many Cloud Peak onlookers.

An un-downgraded, thrice-upgraded guardian beast was simply too powerful.

They didn't hear their leader's barely audible murmur.

The black rod-like projectiles slammed into the light shield.

Though the screen conveyed no sound, everyone could vividly imagine the shockwaves reverberating across the Bright Star.

Like tolling bells, the rods struck the shield, were repelled, then struck again—a secondary attack that sent chills down spines.

After the first wave, some shield-sustaining evolved collapsed, gulping potions to recover. In their state, recovery was all they could manage.

The second assault arrived swiftly, its force surpassing the first.

This time, the shield shattered on impact.

Gasps erupted among the spectators.

Whether struck by the black rods or other attacks from the guardian beast, the human team's fate seemed sealed—annihilation in the truest sense.

In this moment, every human felt their fragility against mutated lifeforms.

"Perhaps only those clad in gold-grade or higher defensive gear can survive."

This thought crossed many Cloud Peak warriors' minds.

Using equipment to gauge outcomes had become second nature to them.

Yet, the unbelievable unfolded simultaneously.

The Cannibal Chain mages—previously idle under the shield's protection—raised their hands, staves, or orbs the instant the shield broke.

A terrifying energy coalesced in a breath, forming a cyan beast behind the shield's remnants.

Small compared to the guardian beast yet large enough to cover the entire team, this energy construct surged forward with a soundless roar, meeting the black rods head-on.

What had overpowered the shield now disintegrated upon contact, vanishing as if never existing.

Most were baffled. Only a handful—Ye Zhongming, Gyanendra, and other top-tier experts—understood.

Magic was widespread in the apocalypse. Many, even top-ranked evolved, coveted spells like Fireball, Wind Blade, or Lightning Strike.

But composite magic? Almost unheard of. Even common spell scrolls like Fireball were pricey, and compiling enough for a grimoire or team book demanded astronomical costs.

Ye Zhongming himself had never considered it.

If even the Cloud Peak King hadn't, others stood no chance. The crowd stared blankly as the cyan beast lunged at the guardian beast.

The guardian beast's air jets intensified, propelling it backward while a dozen conical arms spiraled out from its flanks, stabbing downward.

Proportionate to its size, these arms stretched horrifyingly far, closing in on the mages despite the beast's retreat.

Oddly, the mages stood motionless, as if welcoming death.

"It's over," Ye Zhongming murmured again.

Simultaneously, the cyan beast collided with the colossus.

What followed defied belief—a grotesque rending.

The beast dissolved into lightning streaks, slicing through the guardian's hide like paper. Blood geysered skyward before its dismembered corpse crashed to the ground.

What... was that?

The question echoed in countless minds.

They understood the components—lightning magic, even if the beast-shaped composite was novel—but not its potency.

Those present weren't pushovers. While not all matched Ye Zhongming, Gyanendra, or the Mechanical Genius, most neared six-star strength.

Their assessment was precise: that guardian beast should've been a protracted battle for any team.

Yet the fight lasted under a minute.

This Eastern faction had just intimidated every evolved present.

"These bastards were holding out on us," Xiao Min muttered, irked that the Cannibal Chain had kept such a trump card. In her Cloud Peak-centric worldview, stronger allies owed greater effort.

As the guardian beast's corpse faded, a glowing chest appeared at its center—perhaps a reward.

Before scrutiny could begin, the screen vanished, and the Soaring Crystal reappeared.

The second strike was about to commence.

The obese Spade Governor of Great America—lagging in Bright Star occupation until now—stepped forward personally.

Amid the Mechanical Genius's ongoing tantrum over his lost star and slain guardian, the governor swung.

Chapter 1683: Angel Card

The Cannibal Chain members were recuperating on the Bright Star,

They had essentially sacrificed at least 50% of their close-combat capabilities for this specially trained mage team. This meant that in battle, they either had to cripple or instantly kill their opponents, or else suffer heavy losses themselves.

When facing that guardian beast earlier, one could imagine the devastation they would have suffered if they hadn't resolved the fight immediately.

Before coming here, Wu Xiu had never imagined encountering such a challenge.

In her mind, this team—which pushed offensive power to its limits—should have been capable of crushing any enemy in their path.

Of course, by "enemy," she had always assumed they would be fighting other evolved.

Who would have thought that conflicts between evolved here were just the beginning? The main challenge turned out to be battling monsters selected by the wheel space—unintentionally amplifying their risks and exposing their lack of melee combat prowess.

The other teams in the space were preoccupied with their own objectives, paying little attention to the Cannibal Chain. Even Ye Zhongming didn't fully grasp the depth of this team's capabilities.

Only Wu Xiu knew the truth: her team wasn't suited for this kind of combat. They feared prolonged battles far more than others realized.

This was also a major reason she had voluntarily given up on the Mountain King Wheel.

The recent victory had given her some relief, and the space's decision to wait for all teams to complete the first round before proceeding gave the Cannibal Chain time to recover. With the help of some cooldown potions, they could at least maintain their combat effectiveness for the next round.

"Ideally, we should resolve every fight within two spells. Otherwise, we're still in danger."

Ruan Xiao stood beside Wu Xiu, watching his subordinates sit cross-legged with closed eyes, recovering their energy. He sighed faintly.

At this moment, he genuinely envied Ye Zhongming. As a top-tier craftsman, Ye could equip himself and his subordinates with the finest gear, ensuring balanced development. The Cannibal Chain, in contrast, had pursued extreme specialization at the cost of irreparable weaknesses in other areas.

"We'll adapt as we go. If things get dire, we'll use the potions Ye Zhongming gave us. That little mountain stronghold always has some trick up its sleeve—hard not to envy them."

Wu Xiu sighed before continuing, "The first two Bright Stars—the very first one belongs to Cloud Peak. That's some bad luck. Normally, no one would land on the first star."

"And the one before us is the Women Guard's, with Cloud Peak's right after. We'll just have to strike the Soaring Crystal hard. Once we land on Cloud Peak's star, we'll leave them some money as passage."

Ruan Xiao nodded. From this perspective, the situation wasn't bad. Since Cloud Peak would reimburse whatever they spent, landing on their star was the best outcome.

"Now, let's see what this reward is."

Wu Xiu opened the small chest they had obtained and peered inside.

"This is..."

Ruan Xiao's face showed surprise.

"A catalog?" Wu Xiu activated the tablet-like device, which displayed over a hundred images and descriptions of mutated lifeforms.

The two Cannibal Chain leaders exchanged glances, their expressions wry.

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The mountainously obese Spade Governor struck the Soaring Crystal. The higher an evolved's level, the quieter they became—because from Spade's technique, they could discern several subtle refinements.

These were the hallmarks of microscopic control over force.

For a man of his size to possess such precision was remarkable. Compared to Wu Xiu earlier, Spade clearly had a far better grasp of the special stone hammer.

The mist obscuring the Bright Stars parted slightly, revealing where the Soaring Crystal had landed.

"Bright Star No. 5—owned by Cloud Peak."

This result not only made Cloud Peak's members tense but also drew curses from the entire Cannibal Chain team.

If no one had landed on that star, their next move would have taken them there effortlessly, allowing them to pass the second round without losses.

But now? If Great America chose to pay the toll, nothing would change. But if they opted for a challenge, the Cannibal Chain would face back-to-back battles.

What would Great America choose? The answer was obvious. This was a contest determined by the number of Bright Stars controlled, and Great America was lagging behind Cloud Peak.

Sure enough, Governor Spade grinned and selected "Challenge."

"Haha! Your luck's just as terrible! If not for Great America's alliance system, they would've crushed you long ago!"

The Mechanical Genius, who had just lost a Bright Star and been wailing in despair, now switched to manic laughter, taunting the Cloud Peak King with glee.

"Why are there so many lunatics competing for the Mountain King Wheel this time?"

Ye Zhongming ignored the Mechanical Genius, but Xiao Min had no such reservations. Her sarcastic remark drew collective nods from the Cloud Peak team, infuriating the Mechanical Genius to the point of steam practically rising from his ears.

He had no retort—his entire "team" consisted of just himself. No one was around to back him up.

At that moment, the giant screen appeared, transporting Great America's team to the Bright Star occupied by Cloud Peak.

Great America had suffered significant losses in earlier battles, but they had started with sheer numbers. The survivors were essentially the elite, stronger than ever.

"Fifth row? They really splurged."

The Mechanical Genius recognized the guardian beast immediately and muttered under his breath.

Guardian beasts weren't cheap, especially for evolved who had to purchase Bright Stars. The higher up on the crystal disk, the more absurd the prices became.

The power of the guardian beast on Bright Star No. 3 had left a deep impression. This one, ranked even higher, was undoubtedly far more formidable.

Ye Zhongming watched intently—this was a perfect opportunity to gauge the strength of other teams.

This time, the battlefield was a mist-shrouded swamp.

It became clear that the terrain was linked to the guardian beast's attributes or natural habitat. This monster moved effortlessly across the muddy water, its human-sized body capable of diving into any waterlogged pit and reappearing unpredictably from beneath the sludge.

Great America's larger team had been teleported in a somewhat scattered formation. The guardian beast's attacks were silent and sudden—within moments, one of their members was dead, the corpse dragged into the swamp.

The beast vanished again, only for a severed head to fly out seconds later, striking another evolved. As the team rushed to regroup, screams erupted from the opposite direction. By the time they turned, another member was being pulled beneath the water.

Strike and retreat—never lingering, never predictable. This guardian beast was proving even more troublesome than the previous colossal one.

Most spectators began writing off Great America's chances, assuming they'd suffer heavy casualties even if they somehow pulled through.

Just as everyone was pondering how they would handle such a foe, a flash of light erupted from Great America's ranks.

The space's voice boomed:

"Great America uses Angel Card!"

Chapter 1684: Variable

Among the ten types of cards, aside from the final three, the most attention-grabbing were undoubtedly the Angel Card and the Demon Card.

Cards like the Head Start Card or Summon Card were ultimately just tools to seize initiative—their effects weren't as directly impactful on one's own strength.

The Angel Card was different. It could directly enhance a team's combat power, and even more remarkably, the angel could be upgraded, remaining with the team indefinitely. In terms of cost-effectiveness, it was the best choice.

In this regard, the Demon Card fell short. Even though it could also be upgraded, each enhancement came at a price, making many evolved hesitate.

Earlier, during the card purchases, the Angel Cards had been the first to sell out.

Who managed to snatch them? No one knew except the buyers themselves. Now, the first of the five Angel Cards made its appearance.

A lifeform strikingly similar to the angels of Earth legend materialized above Great America's evolved ranks. Its pristine white wings fluttered gently, its body adorned with feathers of the same hue. Its humanoid form boasted slightly elongated arms, one wielding a sharp spear, the other a beautiful round shield.

The moment it appeared, the shield-bearing hand pointed at a wounded evolver. A beam of light shot from its finger, sinking into the injured fighter—whose wounds visibly improved.

Simultaneously, its piercing eyes swept across the swamp before it tilted its head back and spat out a luminous pearl.

The pearl hovered midair, dispelling the surrounding mist and clearing the field of vision.

"There!"

No matter how fast this guardian beast was, its emergence from the swamp's countless water pits would always create ripples. Previously, the evolvers had struggled to detect these due to the obscuring fog. Now, even the faintest disturbance was enough to trigger a response.

A single action had turned the tide.

Governor Spade laughed heartily, his gaze lingering on the angel with a hint of something dark—even licking his lips.

The guardian beast resumed its attacks after a brief pause. This time, it didn't emerge from the water pits but from beneath a pile of sludge.

It burst forth, splattering mud everywhere and obstructing sightlines. Seizing an evolved, it attempted to drag its prey underwater as before.

But the angel—alongside several elite evolved—reacted instantly.

Spade, positioned at the team's core surrounded by trusted aides, spotted the beast's silhouette. His hand moved imperceptibly, launching a fist through the crowd's gaps. As the guardian beast retreated, the blow struck its flank.

A few other scattered attacks followed, most missing. Only a silver-grade crossbow bolt grazed its head, tearing off a small patch of flesh.

Its defense is mediocre!

This assessment flashed through many minds. That bolt had been merely silver-grade, and while the weapon itself was green-grade, its power wasn't exceptional.

The angel's attack arrived next. Without descending, it fired twin beams from its eyes—one missing, the other striking the beast's exposed shoulder.

The beam and Spade's flying fist landed simultaneously. The guardian beast toppled sideways, dragging its captive with it. Subsequent attacks meant for the beast instead pummeled the hapless evolved, silencing his screams in moments.

Dozens rushed forward, weapons indiscriminately pulverizing the area into a crater—only to find nothing beneath the evolved's mangled corpse except a pool of non-human blood.

"Gone?"

A shriek rang out behind them. Turning, they saw only a thrashing arm vanishing into a water pit.

Another evolved had been taken—this time without even the angel reacting.

"Governor, can you control it?!" A man snarled, face twisted—the dead evolved had been his younger brother.

Spade shook his head, eyes scanning the terrain. The angel, once summoned, fought purely on instinct.

Observers watching via the screen shared a collective headache over the guardian beast's elusiveness.

The battle raged on. The beast struck repeatedly from impossible angles, killing with single blows—even a seven-star evolved fell without resistance.

Yet as Great America's numbers dwindled, their formation tightened. They spotted the beast more frequently now. The angel attacked intermittently, sometimes pausing—"sluggish," some muttered.

What should've been a head-on clash had devolved into a deadly game of predator and prey.

After losing over seventy members, Great America finally cornered the now-wounded guardian beast. The angel hurled its spear, pinning the creature to the ground, and the surviving evolved tore it apart.

Cloud Peak lost a Bright Star. Great America gained one.

With the earlier lead, the Mechanical Genius and Cloud Peak had been frontrunners for the Mountain King Crown. Now, despite both losing a star, they still held a numerical advantage.

The implication was clear: to win, others would need to eliminate these two factions outright.

Yes, eliminate—total annihilation was the only way.

Alternatively, an alliance could gradually erode their Bright Stars—though with the gap so wide, crippling one faction might be possible, but both? Unlikely.

This was why those cards had been so feverishly purchased. Many believed hidden opportunities lurked within—the wheel would never let victory come easily.

Overthinking it led to madness, as this problem was too complicated.

Move too fast, and you surrender fate to others. Too slow, and you'd drown in relentless challenges.

Alliances were unreliable—everyone coveted the final prize. Only preexisting arrangements like Cannibal Chain and Cloud Peak's, bound by deep mutual interests, could work. Yet refusing to cooperate meant conceding victory to Cloud Peak and the Mechanical Genius.

Every decision carried existential weight.

Next was Gyanendra, the West Asian Saint. His earlier strategy—racing to the center—had earned him numerous rewards.

But with so few Bright Stars, everyone wondered how he planned to overturn the odds.

The Soaring Crystal flew out, steady and swift.

“Bright Star No. 7—owned by Gyanendra!”

He’d landed on his own territory.

As everyone pondered whether this was good or bad, Gyanendra’s team vanished, reappearing on their star.

Then, the Saint produced a card. It split midair, streaking toward two adjacent stars.

A system announcement left everyone stunned:

“Gyanendra uses Bad Neighbor Card, seizing Bright Stars No. 6 and 8. Women Guard loses No. 6. Cloud Peak loses No. 8.”

What the hell was a Bad Neighbor Card?! The wheel space had never mentioned this!

Frantically, many queried the system—only to receive silence.

“A reward from his earlier advance?”

Ye Zhongming and others reached the same conclusion—the only plausible explanation.

Yet even if this card was a reward for speed, how had Gyanendra known about it beforehand?

“Stellar Prophet!”

Ye Zhongming refused to believe Gyanendra had prior knowledge of the rewards. That left only one explanation:

The old man’s job. An utterly mysterious and esoteric job.

Ye Zhongming’s expression darkened—not because of another lost star, but because Gyanendra’s abilities had once again introduced a cataclysmic variable.

Chapter 1685: Killing early

After Gyanendra, it was Cloud Peak's turn to act. Ye Zhongming personally stepped forward and swung the stone hammer, immediately feeling a strange recoil force that was extremely uncomfortable.

No wonder Wu Xiu had struck so lightly earlier.

Moreover, the hammer's force application was noticeably different from the first round.

Ye Zhongming pondered for a moment but did not strike immediately. Instead, he took out a card.

The factions watching from behind erupted in an uproar.

Because, aside from the Head Start Card, no other cards could be used during the initial phase.

No, to be precise, the first seven types of cards couldn't be used.

In other words, the card Ye Zhongming was using now had to be one of the last three.

That is, the Minor King Card, Major King Card, or Luck Card.

The Major King Card and Luck Card had purchase restrictions, so it could only be the Minor King Card!

But to use the Minor King Card on the very first move—had the leader of Cloud Peak gone mad?

After all, the Minor King Card could only be used once. Once used, it was gone!

Yet, against all expectations, Ye Zhongming used it.

"This idiot has lost his mind!"

The Mechanical Genius naturally seized the opportunity to mock, tossing out sarcastic remarks.

The Women Guard evolved, who hadn't left yet, also shook their heads, thinking this Easterner was far too reckless. How could he use such a precious card now? What would he do for the remaining nine rounds? Just wait to be beaten?

Even Cloud Peak's own members hadn't expected their leader to do this. But out of trust in him, they believed there must be a reason.

At the same time, whether it was the taunting Mechanical Genius or the sighing Women Guard, everyone was intensely curious about the Minor King Card's effect. The wheel hadn't specified—so what was Cloud Peak's card's attribute?

Ye Zhongming waved casually at his team with a confident air, and the entire group vanished.

When they reappeared, they were on Bright Star No. 8—the one that had originally belonged to Cloud Peak but was now under Gyanendra's control due to the Bad Neighbor Card.

Since the team had already arrived on the Bright Star, all factions—whether they had taken their turns or not—could observe the situation. Every eye was fixed on the card in Ye Zhongming's hand.

Sure enough, the space's announcement followed:

"Cloud Peak uses Minor King Card. Card attribute: Super Annexation."

Hearts raced as everyone formed their own interpretations.

But the space's announcement ended there. What exactly was the Super Annexation Card? They would have to wait for the results.

Then, in an instant, Bright Star No. 8—which had just been seized by Gyanendra's Bad Neighbor Card—was once again under Cloud Peak's control.

Was this the Super Annexation Card?

But something still felt off.

Next, everyone learned the meaning of the word "Super."

"Cloud Peak selects Bright Stars No. 6, 7, and 19 as annexation targets. Gyanendra loses Bright Stars No. 6, 7, 8, and 19!"

The announcement sent shockwaves through the crowd.

Gyanendra's earlier seizure of two stars had already stunned many, since gaining control of Bright Stars now required either bloodshed or exorbitant payments. To effortlessly claim two stars was an absolute windfall.

But Ye Zhongming's Super Annexation Card? It snatched four stars at once—all from the same person!

This was downright broken!

"Ye Zhongming!"

A voice echoed across the starry expanse—Gyanendra's furious roar.

No one had expected the space to have this function. Many tried speaking, but only faction leaders had the "privilege" of having their voices broadcast to all.

Ye Zhongming didn't respond. He saw no need for dialogue.

As the faction with the highest chance of claiming the Mountain King Crown, his goal was simple: seize as many Bright Stars as possible and eliminate all potential threats.

Previously, Ye Zhongming had considered the Mechanical Genius the greatest threat. They had one more Bright Star than Cloud Peak in the initial phase, and surpassing them would require tremendous effort.

But Ye Zhongming was confident. The Mechanical Genius's personality and his team's composition made them ill-suited for ten consecutive battles. Defeating them was within reach.

As for Great America, the Women Guard, and Gyanendra—given their lower Bright Star counts—Ye Zhongming had already mentally written them off as competitors.

Who could have guessed that Gyanendra would immediately make a power move, becoming a major variable?

This was unacceptable to Ye Zhongming.

The best way to deal with a variable was to eliminate it.

So he struck hard, using the invaluable Minor King Card in the very first round.

At this stage, he couldn't afford to sit back and watch. He had to crush all threats in their infancy.

Whoever dared to rise, whoever posed a threat—Ye Zhongming would bury them.

Now that Gyanendra had revealed his trump card, Ye Zhongming's first shot was aimed squarely at him.

"Since the occupied Bright Star is no longer under your control, Gyanendra, please choose: fight, pay, or play a card."

"Cloud Peak, please select a guardian beast and decide whether to upgrade it."

Smiling, Ye Zhongming tapped a guardian beast on the crystal disk visible to all.

"Madman!"

"Do you even have that much money?!"

"This guy really wants Gyanendra dead!"

"Cloud Peak—we should remember them and stay far, far away."

"This kid is ruthless. Getting on his bad side means death."

The first remark came from the Mechanical Genius, whose earlier schadenfreude had vanished. He now felt relieved he hadn't taken his turn yet—otherwise, that Super Annexation might have been aimed at him.

The following comments came from the Women Guard and Great America. After witnessing Cloud Peak's move, their hopes of claiming the treasure—boosted earlier by the cards—instantly dimmed.

The last line was Wu Xiu's lament. Like the Mechanical Genius, she felt fortunate. With a faction like Cloud Peak, it was far better to be a friend than an enemy.

Ye Zhongming had chosen one of the six strongest guardian beasts in the triangular zone—one of the two in the second row!

In terms of strength, it was second only to the multi-headed dragon at the very top!

But he wasn't done.

Under the horrified gazes of Gyanendra's subordinates, he selected upgrades.

Not just one—five consecutive upgrades!

He had maxed out this already formidable guardian beast.

And then—yes, Ye Zhongming still wasn't finished.

He took out another card.

He was about to use a second card in this round!