

Apocalypse 1686

Chapter 1686: Afraid

Ye Zhongming used an Immunity Card.

For this round, his team cannot use any cards nor be affected by any other team's cards.

Often, the meaning of a statement depends on interpretation.

The Immunity Card's description states: "Grants complete immunity for the current round—no cards can be used, nor will the team be affected by any other faction's cards."

But the space never specified whether a card could still be used if another card had already been played earlier in the round.

In Ye Zhongming's view, it was possible.

So he used it—and the fact that the card activated proved him right.

Now, Cloud Peak's actions for this round (the first round) were concluded. They could do nothing further.

After a moment of stunned silence, everyone understood why Cloud Peak had done this.

They used the Immunity Card solely to prevent Gyanendra from using a card to save himself!

Let's not forget—Gyanendra, as the first to reach the center, had obtained an Occupation Card!

Ye Zhongming had selected a powerful guardian beast and maxed out its upgrades for one purpose: to annihilate Gyanendra on that Bright Star. Failing that, he at least wanted to cripple him so severely that he'd either perish or drop out of contention in the remaining nine rounds.

With the Immunity Card in play, Gyanendra could no longer respond—he'd have to face the monster head-on.

On the Bright Star, Gyanendra's face turned green with rage.

In his heart, he was cursing this hateful wheel space!

This Bright Star already had a guardian beast—why was he allowed to purchase another?! Gyanendra was undeniably strong. After suffering repeated defeats against Ye Zhongming in the West Asia and China regions, he'd gone to great lengths to strengthen himself, hoping to catch up to that man.

He'd believed he succeeded. Even now, he still believed it. Yet here he was, getting humiliated again.

Gyanendra had leveraged his class, paying a steep price to foresee certain developments. Based on these, he'd formulated a plan—one that, barring surprises, would have secured him the Mountain King Crown.

But who could've predicted Cloud Peak would suddenly target him?

With so few Bright Stars, his strategy was to let others fight to the death first. Why had Cloud Peak fixated on him?

Gyanendra didn't realize the impact his Bad Neighbor Card had on Ye Zhongming. To him, Ye Zhongming was just insane.

Even with foreknowledge, he'd only gained a slight edge—not enough to alter the roulette space's rules.

Now, every gaze directed at Gyanendra was filled with pity (at least superficially). That guardian beast was too much.

No one was confident of victory. Many guessed it must be a level-nine warbeast.

Gyanendra took a deep breath and glared toward Ye Zhongming's Bright Star.

"Even if you eliminate me, you still have enemies closer to you. Ye Zhongming, I must say—sometimes you're too subjective, too arrogant. What you're doing now will be the beginning and root of your defeat."

Perhaps because the new guardian beast needed time to prepare, Gyanendra had a chance to speak.

He couldn't challenge Cloud Peak now, but he refused to let Ye Zhongming off unscathed. He wanted to plant a seed of doubt in Ye Zhongming's mind—or, failing that, in everyone else's!

"Whatever happens, you won't live to see it."

Mere words couldn't shake Ye Zhongming's resolve. His calm reply made it clear: this man was unassailable.

"That's fine. But if I don't see it, neither will the others. I wonder... what cards have you prepared for them?"

"This is beneath you."

Ye Zhongming frowned slightly. Such blatant attempts at sowing discord felt amateurish.

"You'll do it anyway."

Gyanendra's light laughter echoed across the Bright Stars, mingling with the increasingly loud roars of the awakening beast.

"I choose to pay the toll!"

The West Asian Saint's declaration sent shockwaves through the crowd.

This man—the one who'd seized every advantage—was backing down!

Even Ye Zhongming was surprised. Not because he hadn't considered this possibility, but because the cost would be astronomical. Surviving this round would likely leave Gyanendra too depleted to continue. Fighting here at least offered rewards that might offset the losses.

Booing erupted from thrill-seeking evolved.

Gyanendra ignored them, methodically pulling out item after item.

The process dragged on—the Saint was bleeding himself dry.

Soon, Ye Zhongming received a notification. A chest materialized before him: Gyanendra's toll.

The space wouldn't keep a cut.

Ye Zhongming opened it, scanned the contents, and let out a low whistle.

His goal hadn't been fully achieved, but this outcome wasn't bad. He was 100% certain Gyanendra was now bankrupt. For the remaining nine rounds, unless he landed on his own stars, his only options were cards or fighting.

Endless fighting.

The chest was packed to the brim: magic crystals, potions, scrolls, equipment, and things Ye Zhongming had never seen before...

But one item confirmed Gyanendra's destitution: a gold-grade earring!

Originally a pale yellow (hidden under Gyanendra's hood), its true gold hue was now exposed. Ye Zhongming recognized it—they'd clashed before.

If a man was pawning his personal gold-grade gear, he was broke.

"My thanks!" Ye Zhongming delivered the grating gratitude with relish.

"Don't celebrate yet. The game isn't over."

With that, Gyanendra fell silent.

"Women Guard, strike the Soaring Crystal."

The space's prompt resumed. The Women Guard's black female leader stepped forward, took a deep breath, and hefted the stone hammer.

As she prepared to swing, her lips moved in silent prayer:

Don't land on the star Gyanendra was on.

That place, with its monstrous guardian, had become a checkpoint none could bypass.

Chapter 1687: First round over

The Women Guard members nervously watched the Soaring Crystal, realizing at this moment that perhaps fate rested on where this crystal would land.

Their "fate" landed on the fourth Bright Star.

All members of the Women Guard let out a sigh of relief, followed by deep resignation.

The fourth star belonged to the Women Guard themselves. They didn't need to pay any price for staying there.

This was crucial for them because if they had advanced even one more star, they would have faced the powerful mage team, the Cannibal Chain—a scenario far from ideal.

Of course, starting on the fourth star meant that in the next round, they could still land on the seventh star—the one with the terrifying guardian beast—a hurdle that now loomed over them. Having just witnessed the financial and combat prowess of the other factions, the Women Guard couldn't help but feel helpless.

Yet, despite everything, hope still flickered in their hearts.

They prayed for countless mishaps to befall the other factions, for them to tear each other apart.

Next, it was the Mechanical Genius's turn.

The mist dissipated completely, its purpose fulfilled. From now on, all factions would be visible to each other on their respective Bright Stars.

The Mechanical Genius, manipulating his metallic war puppet, struck the Soaring Crystal.

"First star?"

Many were surprised by where the crystal landed. Even if the stone hammer was difficult to control, hitting just one star's distance was too deliberate—proof that the Mechanical Genius had done it on purpose.

The first Bright Star belonged to Cloud Peak.

Recalling the earlier friction between the two factions, everyone now understood: the Mechanical Genius had chosen this deliberately.

He immediately opted for a challenge.

The battle unfolded on the giant screens above each faction's Bright Star, giving everyone their first clear look at the Mechanical Genius's forces.

The sight defied all expectations.

When the Mechanical Genius abandoned his mechanical soldiers and instead deployed his varied, grotesque war puppets, his true strength was revealed in full.

In terms of sheer numbers, his metallic constructs weren't overwhelming—but each one was a nightmare. Their earlier skirmish with Cloud Peak had already left an impression, but now, fighting at full power, they radiated an unstoppable, razor-sharp menace.

A kaleidoscope of mechanical abilities unfolded, most of which no one had ever seen before. In terms of mechanical warfare, calling them a "kaleidoscope of destruction" was no exaggeration.

The guardian beast left by Cloud Peak on this star wasn't particularly strong—only a fifth-row tier. Even upgraded, it fell within two minutes under the Mechanical Genius's assault.

Of course, the Mechanical Genius didn't escape unscathed. His remaining mechanical soldiers were completely destroyed, and two of his war puppets—already bearing old injuries—were rendered inoperable.

"Surprisingly calm at a time like this."

Ye Zhongming murmured in appraisal. He had expected the Mechanical Genius to remain erratic, but at this critical juncture, the man had displayed the qualities that had carried him this far in the apocalypse:

Calmness. Strength. Keen judgment. Sharp insight.

The Mechanical Genius hadn't charged recklessly as before.

Instead, he had taken just one step—seizing one of Ye Zhongming’s stars to weaken his strongest competitor—while positioning himself last in the turn order.

This way, he could:

Watch the other factions fight to the death from a safe distance.

Save money—since all teams would now move forward, none would circle back to challenge his star, eliminating the need to spend on guardian beasts.

With a single decision, he had neutralized the disadvantage of going last and even gained a slight edge.

First Round Results: Bright Star Count

Cloud Peak (on Star No. 8) — 49 stars

Mechanical Genius (on Star No. 1) — 49 stars

Great America (on Star No. 5) — 31 stars

Women Guard (on Star No. 4) — 21 stars

Cannibal Chain (on Star No. 3) — 16 stars

Gyanendra (on Star No. 7) — 8 stars

Cloud Peak gained one star.

Mechanical Genius held steady.

Great America and Cannibal Chain each gained one.

Women Guard lost one.

Gyanendra suffered the heaviest loss—two stars gone.

Cards Used This Round

Cannibal Chain: Head Start Card

Gyanendra: Bad Neighbor Card

Great America: Angel Card

Cloud Peak: Minor King Card + Immunity Card

The competition had grown fiercer.

The wheel space didn't give them much time to strategize. The announcement for the second round arrived swiftly.

First up: Cannibal Chain.

Now, they faced two choices:

Advance one star (from Star No. 3 to Star No. 4)—landing on the Women Guard's territory.

Advance two stars (maximum due to team battles)—reaching Star No. 5, now held by Great America.

In terms of faction strength, the Women Guard were the easier target. Governor Spade of Great America was a one-man terror, making the latter option unwise.

But this wasn't a direct faction clash. It was a battle against guardian beasts. What mattered wasn't the faction's strength but their wealth:

Which guardian beast had they bought? How many upgrades?

"Leader Ye... who should we choose?"

Wu Xiu's voice echoed across the starry expanse, drawing scowls from Great America and the Women Guard.

"This is cheating! They shouldn't be allowed to collude!"

Many shouted, but their leaders remained silent.

Cheating?

The opportunity was equally available to all. The real question was: Did you have an ally you could trust?

After a brief pause, Ye Zhongming gave an unexpected answer.

Chapter 1688: Western Alliance

"Women Guard."

The moment these words were spoken, an uproar erupted among the listeners.

Everyone had assumed Ye Zhongming would direct his ally to target Great America.

After all, while Great America's Bright Star count lagged behind Cloud Peak and the Mechanical Genius, they still ranked third. It was easy to imagine that as the top two factions fought fiercely, their star counts would plummet, giving third-ranked Great America an opportunity.

In such a scenario, wouldn't it be better to have an ally eliminate this potential threat? Why choose the Women Guard, who stood little chance anyway?

Moreover, the Women Guard had maintained a relatively peaceful stance throughout, especially toward Cloud Peak.

Yet Ye Zhongming had chosen them?

Even Wu Xiu was momentarily stunned. She, too, had expected Ye Zhongming to instruct her to challenge Great America.

"Boss."

Xiao Min, standing behind him, couldn't hide her urgency. She shared the same thoughts as the others.

The Cannibal Chain's performance in the later stages had surprised many, revealing them as an extraordinarily powerful mage team—one even Cloud Peak couldn't confidently withstand.

Shouldn't such a team be deployed to snipe more valuable targets?

This was no time for courtesy. While the Cannibal Chain would suffer greater losses, Cloud Peak had promised compensation. Besides, their alliance was built on mutual benefit—why shy away from hard battles?

Ye Zhongming shook his head and reaffirmed Wu Xiu's choice.

"Mr. Ye, we've shown you nothing but respect along the way. Your actions now chill our hearts. And given the many women by your side, you should understand that our gender means we can be far more ruthless than men when pushed."

The black female leader of the Women Guard spoke coldly, her face dark as she raised her chin slightly, addressing Ye Zhongming across the distance.

They had indeed been exceedingly courteous to Cloud Peak, always paying tolls when encountering their stars—a stark contrast to Great America and the Mechanical Genius, who opted for occupation.

With the Women Guard not being a primary rival, Cloud Peak's provocation seemed anything but wise.

No matter how strong the Cannibal Chain was, occupying the Women Guard's star would only reduce their count by one, a negligible impact. Yet it would earn Cloud Peak another enemy. The cost-benefit ratio was abysmal.

This was the prevailing sentiment among onlookers.

"I just want to simplify the situation."

Ye Zhongming's calm reply carried a hint of despair.

What did "simplify the situation" mean? It meant forcing those with no real hope to withdraw from the competition entirely!

Turning their disappointment into utter despair!

In blunt terms, the Cloud Peak King was telling the unqualified to step aside and stop cluttering the field.

For powerful factions accustomed to respect—if not outright reverence—outside this space, these words struck like a hammer, shattering their pride.

"Don't go too far!"

The white female leader's voice was icy, her fists clenched so tightly they trembled. The humiliation she felt rivaled even the time she'd spent with Spade to obtain intel on the Mountain King Crown.

A fierce desire surged within her—to challenge this Eastern man.

"Save your money. Save your strength. Complete the ten rounds. Even if you gain nothing, you'll leave alive." Ye Zhongming's words silenced the entire starry expanse. "But once you join the fray, it becomes a fight to the death."

"Sometimes, knowing when to yield is also a survival skill in this apocalyptic world. Forcing things often leads to poor outcomes."

This was Ye Zhongming's hard-earned wisdom, the rational decision-making honed through two lifetimes.

Fight when you can, persevere with unyielding determination.

But if the odds are truly insurmountable, know when to retreat.

In this regard, Ye Zhongming felt Gyanendra had done well.

"Our fate is ours to decide."

After a moment of silence, the white female leader responded thus before falling quiet.

Seeing no further drama, Wu Xiu tilted her head thoughtfully, then stepped forward and lightly struck the Soaring Crystal, landing precisely on the Women Guard's Star No. 4.

To widespread surprise, Wu Xiu—this woman—chose to fight personally!

Ye Zhongming smiled. Working with smart people was truly effortless.

Why the Women Guard? Beyond the stated reason of thinning the herd, there was a more critical factor:

The Women Guard had spent too much on tolls!

Buying stars cost money. Paying passage cost money. Purchasing guardian beasts cost money... Even if they'd gained some rewards on the stars, Ye Zhongming refused to believe a faction holding only a dozen or so stars could afford to keep this up.

Their only hope for the ultimate prize lay in the top factions mutually annihilating each other or being weakened enough for an opening.

Either way, they had to wait until the final rounds, when they'd make their move based on the situation.

Apart from Cloud Peak and the Mechanical Genius, all other factions shared this mindset. The difference was that factions like Great America or Gyanendra would still fight hard, while the Women Guard relied entirely on luck.

Thus, Ye Zhongming deduced they wouldn't—or couldn't—spend much on guardian beasts, let alone upgrades.

Another clue came from the timing of guardian beast disappearances in earlier rounds, allowing Ye Zhongming to roughly gauge which factions had chosen which tier of beasts.

While not precise, it gave the Cloud Peak King a general idea.

If Ye Zhongming could figure this out, so could Wu Xiu.

Clearly, despite abandoning the Mountain King Crown pursuit, she hadn't slacked off. She maintained a sharp understanding of the situation and each faction's status.

Of course, Wu Xiu also realized that advancing just two stars at a time made them easy targets. If the Women Guard's guardian beast was indeed weak, fighting it herself was manageable.

This confidence stemmed from her belief in her own strength.

Ye Zhongming was genuinely curious: How powerful was this second-in-command of the Cannibal Chain? What he'd seen before might have been just a glimpse.

Wu Xiu stood before a guardian beast. As predicted, the Women Guard hadn't invested much in it—a bottom-tier creature, the weakest of its kind.

The Cannibal Chain's deputy manager activated her bloodline and throughout the battle, shifted between three different forms!

Chapter 1688.5- Western Alliance

This left onlookers dumbfounded.

"Actually, it's just one bloodline."

Drawing on past-life memories, Ye Zhongming recalled rumors of a bloodline with multiple manifestations—each appearing entirely distinct.

Such a bloodline was exceedingly rare. Who'd have thought Wu Xiu possessed it?

The three forms showcased: one with extreme defense, one with blinding speed, and another with semi-transparency and short-range teleportation.

Switching forms mid-battle for optimal combat efficiency—this bloodline was enviable indeed.

Another point: the Cannibal Chain was a commercial entity. Wu Xiu was wealthy—exceptionally so.

She'd spent generously on guardian beasts earlier. Now, in battle, she used six potions and disposable scrolls without hesitation.

Any discerning eye could see Wu Xiu hadn't even gone all out before securing victory.

With Star No. 4 occupied, the Cannibal Chain completed their second-round move.

Next up: Great America.

Governor Spade didn't act immediately. Instead, he waited, then suddenly addressed the Women Guard.

"Ella."

Ella was the white female leader of the Women Guard.

"Speak."

The disgust in Ella's eyes for Spade far surpassed what she'd shown Ye Zhongming moments ago.

"If elimination is inevitable, choosing the method that yields additional benefits is the wisest course."

Ella smirked derisively. "No need for pretty words when asking someone to risk their life."

Spade chuckled but didn't waste breath.

"Join us. If I win the Mountain King Crown, upon returning, the Women Guard gets:

One gold-grade equipment

Five seven-star evolution potions

Ten grade-eight magic crystals

A batch of silver-grade gear (500 weapons, 500 armor pieces)"

"Too little. And I don't trust you." Ella barely hesitated before responding.

Spade smiled. "It's generous, given your slim hopes. Aiding us secures these rewards—a sound deal. As for trust..." He gestured around. "Everyone here hears us. I may not be a saint, but I've my pride."

The Women Guard fell into palpable silence.

Ye Zhongming frowned. He'd anticipated alliances, but not this soon. He'd expected them in later rounds, when desperation or sudden advantage would forge stronger bonds.

Now? Too early. The situation wasn't clear enough.

"Mechanical Genius, how about an alliance?"

Without waiting for the Women Guard's reply, Spade pivoted to the Mechanical Genius.

"You see, these Easterners teamed up early, while we've been fighting alone. That's why they still have three factions standing. On our turf, this is shameful."

"Let's wipe them out first, then compete fairly among ourselves?"

As if fearing the eccentric Mechanical Genius might refuse, Spade spoke faster, his tone more earnest than when addressing the Women Guard.

"This favors you. Your star count is among the highest. Eliminate these Easterners, and you'll be uncontested, right?"

Clearly tempted, the normally defiant Mechanical Genius didn't immediately reject the offer.

"The method is fair: we just pressure the Easterners. Whether it's the Cannibal Chain, Cloud Peak, or even that old man with few stars—if I take one of theirs, you take another. Fair, no?"

"As for the Women Guard, you need only play support. If you also seize their stars, I'll compensate accordingly."

Spade's chubby face wore a smile, though none could see it beneath his hood.

"Stars remain individual property. When passing each other's, we pay tolls."

"Share cards—not unlimitedly, but equivalently. Use cards as payment when crossing each other's stars to facilitate exchange."

"Once we crush these Easterners, even losers in our internal competition can surrender. No extermination, and we'll protect their interests as much as possible."

Spade laid out numerous terms—some for the Mechanical Genius, some for the Women Guard—all incredibly enticing.

For the Women Guard, with their dim hopes, aiding Spade meant not just survival but tangible rewards—a pragmatic choice.

The Mechanical Genius also had reasons to cooperate. As the current star count leader, eliminating Cloud Peak would leave him dominant. Dealing with Great America would be far easier than facing Cloud Peak.

"Add two more seven-star potions, and we'll ally," Ella said.

"A level nine demon crystal. One, and we'll ally," the Mechanical Genius countered.

Spade paused, then burst into laughter.

"You're both insatiable... but deal!"

In that instant, the balance of power flipped. Cloud Peak, once advantaged, became the primary target—with even the Cannibal Chain caught in the crossfire.

The Eastern alliance's edge vanished against the united Western factions.

Now, the initiative was theirs.

Ye Zhongming swiftly scanned the current star sequence and ownership. He knew: the final showdown had arrived prematurely!

Victory or defeat would likely be decided in the coming rounds—no need to wait for ten!

Then, a voice drifted from a Bright Star, further worsening Cloud Peak and the Cannibal Chain's predicament.

Gyanendra—silent till now, with only eight stars left—finally spoke.

"I'll join your alliance too."

Chapter 1689: Who to target

"Damn your sister!"

"Old bastard!"

"What's this geezer thinking?"

"Does he not realize they just lumped him in with the Easterners too?"

"Trash-tier coward."

"What a disgrace."

"..."

Both Cloud Peak and the Cannibal Chain were furious at Gyanendra's complete lack of principles.

Though he wasn't from the same region as Cloud Peak or the Cannibal Chain, they were all outsiders here. When Spade had rallied the others earlier, he'd explicitly included Gyanendra as an enemy to be eliminated.

Yet even after being openly labeled as "not one of us," Gyanendra was now actively groveling to join them—just how shameless could one be?!

Wu Xiu, Ruan Xiao, Ye Zhongming, and Gyanendra—these were all prominent figures with status, influence, and followers.

Even in the apocalypse, their words and actions carried weight. The higher their status, the greater the impact, and as leaders, they were expected to maintain decorum.

Gyanendra held a lofty, almost sacred position in West Asia. Even if he chose not to ally with Cloud Peak and the Cannibal Chain, he should've at least remained neutral.

Instead, he'd bent the knee to North America's faction—such sycophantic servitude was downright embarrassing.

Spineless. Unprincipled. Bottom-feeding.

This was the consensus on Gyanendra's current behavior.

In the apocalypse, these traits had long faded from prominence, but at Gyanendra's level, they should've mattered again.

Spade was momentarily stunned, then burst into laughter. Many Cloud Peak and Cannibal Chain fighters hoped he'd reject Gyanendra, leaving the West Asian team isolated, preferably to be wiped out by all.

Unfortunately, Great America's leader agreed, offering the same terms as the other allies and assigning Gyanendra the same role as the Women Guard.

"Excellent. Then let's... begin."

Spade, Great America's leader, stepped up to the stone platform and hefted the hammer.

In the first round, Spade had struck the Soaring Crystal to land on Bright Star No. 5, opting for team combat and using an Angel Card. This meant he could now advance at most two stars.

Ahead of him, Bright Stars No. 6 and 7 both belonged to Cloud Peak!

Great America and Cloud Peak were destined for repeated clashes!

Spade grinned greasily, deliberately taunting Ye Zhongming by muttering, "Should I pick No. 6... or No. 7?"

Finally, he struck, and the Soaring Crystal landed on No. 6.

Star No. 7 housed that terrifying guardian beast—Great America wasn't stupid.

While Star No. 6 also had a guardian beast repurchased by Cloud Peak, it surely couldn't be on the same level.

"Cloud Peak's boss, this round marks the beginning of your downfall."

Spade chose to challenge personally, brimming with confidence.

This wasn't empty bravado. With four factions now allied and the Cannibal Chain having already taken their turn, Ye Zhongming would likely face coordinated attacks from all sides. This round's losses would be severe.

Spade's willingness to challenge alone stemmed from the same logic Ye Zhongming had applied to the Women Guard's stars:

After buying so many stars and guardian beasts, Ye Zhongming couldn't possibly have invested heavily in this recently acquired star.

When the guardian beast appeared, Spade's assessment seemed correct.

It was only a seventh-row guardian beast—barely mid-tier. With his strength and the angel's support, victory should've been assured.

Yet the battle unfolding on-screen defied expectations.

What should've been a quick skirmish turned into a protracted, evenly matched struggle.

Despite Spade and the angel fighting in tandem, they couldn't gain an upper hand in the first few minutes. At one point, the unupgraded angel was even impaled, nearly dying.

Ultimately, Spade resorted to his trump card—unleashing his full power—to secure victory. But this exhausted his bloodline and skills, leaving them all on cooldown.

Cloud Peak lost a star; Great America gained one. Yet Spade's expression was grim. His sole consolation: the angel survived and even leveled up post-battle.

As everyone waited to see if Great America would play another card, they instead ended their turn.

Next up: Gyanendra.

Rather than striking immediately, he first played a card—the Occupation Card rewarded for reaching the center first.

He claimed Bright Star No. 7, home to the powerful guardian beast, without replacing it.

Only then did he approach the platform and strike the Soaring Crystal, landing on Bright Star No. 15, owned by the Cannibal Chain.

With a smirk, Gyanendra opted for full-team combat. After paying a modest toll, they defeated the guardian beast and seized the star.

Now it was Cloud Peak's turn again.

Ye Zhongming, representing the faction, struck the crystal with measured force, landing on Bright Star No. 11—Mechanical Genius's territory.

The more stars one owned, the higher the chance of being targeted.

Ye Zhongming chose team combat over personal challenge, drawing sneers from the Mechanical Genius and others.

This forfeited their mobility next round.

When cornered, breaking ahead alone could've been a viable escape from the factions' encirclement.

Yet Cloud Peak had seemingly surrendered the opportunity.

Unfazed, Ye Zhongming selected "Challenge," then produced a card—a relatively common one.

An Angel Card.

He summoned an angel, ordered his team to stand back, and entered combat alone with the celestial ally.

Onlookers instantly grasped his plan.

The battle was swift. The guardian beast, only upgraded once by the Mechanical Genius, was easily kited by Ye Zhongming's equipment-based teleportation skills while the angel dealt the killing blow.

With only Ye Zhongming "sharing EXP" in a support role, Cloud Peak's angel gained enough experience to level up.

Then, the Cloud Peak King drew another card.

Having already played the Minor King Card earlier, this move had everyone holding their breath, eyes locked on him, speculating:

What card would it be this time?

And more importantly, who was his target?

Chapter 1690: Crazy

"Cloud Peak uses the Summon Card, target... Great America."

"Cloud Peak uses the Demon Card, target... Great America."

Two consecutive announcements made some factions breathe easier while others seethed with frustration.

The frustrated ones were naturally Great America and Spade.

"Leader Ye, your choice isn't very wise."

During the lull between the space's prompts, Governor Spade venomously addressed Ye Zhongming.

"You repurchased a guardian beast, didn't you? And it must be a powerful one—luring us over to inflict heavy losses, even using a Demon Card!"

The constant prompts to choose between challenge or payment grated on Spade's nerves.

"Targeting the Women Guard or even Gyanendra would've been better options. Yet you chose Great America. Your arrogance will backfire. Sometimes, a single nail loses a war."

Spade selected "Challenge," but not before adding: "You're wasting your trump cards on me when I'm not even your strongest competitor. Doesn't that strike you as ridiculous?"

Ye Zhongming ignored him entirely, instead producing another card.

"Ye Zhongming, have you lost your mind?!"

Wu Xiu watched anxiously.

The wheel space's cards had limited quantities, like the Demon Card, of which only two existed (one now used by Ye Zhongming).

Other cards had higher stocks, but divided among factions, none could afford profligacy.

These cards were meant for critical moments—precise strikes at pivotal junctures.

But what was Ye Zhongming doing? Only two rounds in, and he'd already burned through how many?!

Cards weren't cheap—some cost astronomical sums!

The Cannibal Chain's fate was tied to Cloud Peak's. If Cloud Peak won, they benefited; if Cloud Peak fell, they'd fight desperately. Wu Xiu couldn't stay silent while Ye Zhongming "rampaged" like this.

"It's fine." Ye Zhongming remained courteous to his ally, offering reassurance without elaboration.

His activated card triggered a system-wide alert:

"Cloud Peak uses the Nebula Card, designating coverage from Bright Star No. 2 to No. 11."

Madness. Sheer madness!

Yet... there was method to it.

Currently, aside from Gyanendra, only Cloud Peak and Great America (summoned via Summon Card) were outside Stars 2-11. The Mechanical Genius at Star No. 1 would soon enter this zone.

With the Nebula Card's effect, traversing these ten stars would become arduous, likely permitting only minimal advancement.

Cloud Peak owned several stars within this range. Any faction struggling through would face relentless battles, inevitably depleting their strength.

While this seemingly disadvantaged the Cannibal Chain too, the impact matched their existing two-star limitation—a trade-off Wu Xiu's team accepted.

Still, Ye Zhongming's card expenditure after just two rounds unsettled her.

"Ye Zhongming, what's your game?"

Spade finally snapped, his voice dripping with malice.

"Expediting your exit."

The casual reply landed like a sledgehammer.

Such offhand confidence about eliminating Great America—what audacity!

Spade trembled with rage, his bulk quivering. Never in the Americas had he suffered such an insult.

"We'll see!"

With his turn actions spent, he couldn't play more cards—only confront the guardian beast Ye Zhongming had purchased.

He could've paid the toll, but Great America's pride wouldn't allow it.

Then Spade saw the guardian beast, and instantly regretted everything.

Ye Zhongming had installed another of the triangular zone's six elite guardians as this star's defender.

Were battle not imminent, Spade would've cursed for two hours straight to vent his fury.

Oh, and there was also that formidable-looking demon.

Angel vs. demon. Great America vs. Guardian Beast. The battle unfolded on-screen.

A hushed silence fell.

Not from fascination, but horror at the brutality.

Great America boasted the largest numbers among factions, granting inherent advantages against solitary guardians.

Yet this beast's combat prowess defied all expectations.

"Leader Ye... how many upgrades?"

Wu Xiu finally blurted out, unable to contain her curiosity.

Ye Zhongming paused. "Five."

Expletives erupted universally.

Everyone knew these guardians' exorbitant costs—each upgrade a fortune.

Yet Cloud Peak had maxed it out.

Just how deep were their pockets?!

"And... the previous star?"

Ella of the Women Guard asked hoarsely.

As enemies, she shouldn't expect answers. Yet Ye Zhongming replied matter-of-factly: "Five."

No one even cursed anymore—the air itself felt frozen.

Two of the six elite guardians, both max-upgraded by Cloud Peak—what unimaginable wealth!

The battle raged on. So did the deaths.

Perhaps due to the Demon Card's rarity, this obsidian twin of the angel matched its leveled-up counterpart, even occasionally diving to assist the guardian beast.

"Nine-star strength. Possibly higher."

The faction leaders—all having slain a nine-star before—recognized the beast's caliber.

It made sense. Even mid-to-low-tier guardians had eight-star peak strength—let alone a five-upgraded elite!

Fighting nine-stars required extensive preparation, numbers, and ideal conditions.

But facing one head-on—a powerhouse among nine-stars—everyone empathized with Great America's despair.

Great America fought desperately, unleashing every trump card.

Yet the casualty rate still horrified onlookers.

By battle's end, Great America's forces had dwindled by one-third. Without their elites' sacrifices, losses might've doubled.

The demon perished, but it took the angel down with it in a final exchange.

Surveying the carnage, Spade howled at the sky.

These were elites—mostly six-stars, with significant five-star and seven-star contingents!

They'd even lost a captain—one of their few eight-star evolved.

Even if Great America withdrew now, they'd plummet from super-faction status to merely first-rate.

Cloud Peak's round ended with Great America's pyrrhic victory. Now, it was the Women Guard's turn.

At Bright Star No. 4, they treaded on thin ice.