

Apocalypse 1701

Chapter 1701: First to be eliminated

The Mechanical Genius truly wished he could kill Gyanendra ten thousand times over right now.

He knew his own strengths and weaknesses well.

He was eccentric, but not insane.

The power of his mechanical war puppets lay in the fact that they weren't true living beings. While possessing non-living advantages—like no fear of death, upgradability, and repairability—they also exhibited some traits of living creatures.

For example, their powerful and practical skills, their precise controllability, and so on.

These characteristics combined made these mechanical war puppets incredibly formidable. Even without clear level distinctions, they could contend with the highest-level evolved and their elite teams.

Just like in that previous battle with Cloud Peak.

Honestly, in a head-on fight, the Mechanical Genius feared no one. He loved this straightforward style of combat.

But as Ye Zhongming and Gyanendra had lamented, the Mountain King Wheel's key challenges weren't direct confrontations—they were tests of luck and financial strength.

Fine, the Mechanical Genius wasn't afraid of those either.

Despite his manic laughter, sudden curses, and unpredictable mood swings, he was acutely aware these were minor issues. He was confident he could compete with Cloud Peak until the final round.

But this one strike of lightning had genuinely halved his confidence.

The mechanical war puppets were powerful, but they had a flaw—they were weak against lightning-based attacks.

It wasn't that they collapsed at the slightest touch, but compared to other attacks, their resistance to lightning was the lowest.

According to the space's earlier announcement, if a Bright Star had no Guardian Beast or faction, it would be instantly destroyed.

This didn't mean the Annihilation Thunderstrike was overwhelmingly powerful—it was just a relative "parameter." At its core, this wheel trial was a game, and games didn't require absolute realism.

Even so, having it land on one's head was utterly terrifying.

Earlier, the Mechanical Genius had moved from Bright Star No. 10 to No. 13, which belonged to Greater America. Before he could choose whether to purchase or pay the toll, the thunder descended.

And it came with misfortune.

Bright Star No. 12 belonged to Cloud Peak, while No. 14 was the Mechanical Genius's own.

The thunder struck these two stars first. To onlookers, it wasn't lightning—it was two massive, twisting pillars of light that seemed capable of piercing heaven and earth.

"Annihilation Thunderstrike has struck Bright Star No. 12. Guardian Beast severely injured."

"Annihilation Thunderstrike has struck Bright Star No. 14. Guardian Beast destroyed. Bright Star annihilated."

These two stars were under various effects—Difficulty Surge, Commission, etc.—but those only applied to factions landing on them, not the thunder.

The destruction of the stars was vividly displayed on the light screen, sending chills down everyone's spines.

This was the fate of those who couldn't withstand the strike—utter obliteration.

The two attacked stars had different outcomes: No. 12 survived, while No. 14 was obliterated. After the initial shock, this made sense.

Cloud Peak's Guardian Beasts were all max-level, naturally formidable. Surviving the Annihilation Thunderstrike was understandable. As for No. 14, the Mechanical Genius knew his own situation—the Guardian Beast he'd left there was weak and unupgraded, so it fell with the star.

But he had no time to dwell on that now. The thunder above him was about to strike.

The space hadn't specified how to resist, leaving the Mechanical Genius little time to think.

Instinctively, he dispersed his team and sent a massive mechanical war puppet charging toward the descending lightning.

His logic was simple: if something had to be destroyed, let it be just one.

This puppet was enormous, one of the few giants in his squad, with solid defenses. The Mechanical Genius had some confidence in it—its abilities leaned toward defense, evident from the massive shields on its arms.

The thunder struck the giant dead-on.

Light erupted, blinding all who watched.

The Mechanical Genius let out a bloodcurdling scream.

As the glare faded slightly, another figure was seen leaping into the air, followed by yet another.

The first puppet was struck, and for a brief, almost imperceptible moment, the lightning seemed to pause.

That split second was enough for the Mechanical Genius to react—and for everyone to see clearly.

The mechanical war puppet shattered into fragments under the thunder. The weakened lightning continued downward, met by a second puppet that had vaulted skyward in the interim.

The second collision played out like the first—another flash, another pause—before the third impact arrived.

The Mechanical Genius's screams continued, and the light screen flickered violently with each strike.

When calm finally returned and the Annihilation Thunderstrike vanished without a trace, the surviving evolved glimpsed one last panoramic "shot" before the screen closed.

The Mechanical Genius's puppet numbers had plummeted by at least one-fifth.

"Terrifying" was the only word anyone could muster.

One strike of thunder had crippled the mighty Mechanical Genius's forces.

And such strikes would come every round from now on.

True, the thunder was random—it could hit any point on the Star Path. But what if luck turned against you? Could anyone replicate the Mechanical Genius's desperate sacrifice to weather the storm?

Recalling what they'd just witnessed, a bitter taste filled everyone's mouths—and their hatred for Gyanendra deepened.

This bastard had screwed them all!

Creating something like this was practically a death sentence.

Life went on, and the stars had to keep moving. The Mechanical Genius's turn ended, marking the start of a new round.

Wu Xiu hadn't felt this tense in a long time. She'd intended to coast, only to be caught in this disaster.

With cautious precision, she struck the crystal, landing on a Bright Star—Greater America's. They paid to pass, neither fighting nor drawing the thunder.

This was the result of her earlier discussion with Ye Zhongming. Under the current circumstances, apart from targeting the Mechanical Genius's stars, Cloud Peak no longer needed the Cannibal Chain to clash with other factions.

As for toll fees? Aside from Ye Zhongming, the Cannibal Chain was the richest here.

When Greater America's turn came, Spade's face was dark. Their desire to compete for first place had faded drastically. They'd realized something: merely surviving to the end was no longer guaranteed.

This mindset stemmed from the thunder, the misfortune, and the fact that every one of Cloud Peak's Guardian Beasts was max-level.

Greater America had money now, but what good was it? Paying tolls while passing wouldn't increase their star count—and without more stars, how could they compete with Cloud Peak and the Mechanical Genius? Keep fighting? Don't joke—even if Spade wanted to, his subordinates wouldn't comply.

The downside of Greater America's alliance-based structure—lack of control—was now glaringly apparent.

They struck the Soaring Crystal, aiming as far as possible.

But as the crystal landed, the space's announcement rang out. Hearing its contents, Spade felt like he wanted to die.

Chapter 1702: First to be eliminated (2)

Strictly speaking, Greater America's strike of the Soaring Crystal this time exceeded Bright Star No. 20, freeing them from the nebula's restraints and the death zone.

They could take advantage of Cloud Peak still being trapped in the zone to quickly advance, putting as much distance between themselves and Cloud Peak as possible. After all, their faction had essentially given up on competing for the Mountain King's Crown—they just wanted to complete the ten rounds safely.

But misfortune truly does bring misfortune.

Since Greater America had paid the toll fee last round, they advanced three steps this round, landing on Bright Star No. 22, which belonged to the Mechanical Genius. This was a stroke of luck amid misfortune—while tougher than the stars owned by factions like the Women Guard or the Cannibal Chain, it was still better than landing on one of Cloud Peak's monstrously fortified stars.

However, as soon as they arrived, the space's announcement rang out.

When no cards were used, the space's announcements were death sentences.

"Misfortune Card takes effect. For the next three rounds, Greater America will face demonic attacks in every round."

"Annihilation Thunderstrike appears this round. Target: Bright Star No. 21."

Greater America was on Bright Star No. 22, and due to the Overclock Card, they were guaranteed to be attacked.

"Bright Star No. 21, owned by Cloud Peak, has been struck by Annihilation Thunderstrike. Guardian Beast severely injured."

"Bright Star No. 20, owned by the Cannibal Chain, has been struck by Annihilation Thunderstrike. Guardian Beast destroyed. Bright Star annihilated."

Just like during the Mechanical Genius's turn, the thunder first struck stars without factions before targeting the faction's current location.

Spade screeched orders, commanding his team to deploy defensive equipment against the impending thunder.

But faced with an attack of this magnitude, over 60% of his subordinates chose to scatter and flee.

It was an instinctive act of self-preservation.

Great America wasn't like the Mechanical Genius—that faction was unique, consisting of just one living person who controlled all the powerful war puppets.

When the thunder struck, he could sacrifice puppet after puppet to neutralize its terrifying might.

But Great America couldn't do that. This was an alliance-based faction, held together by shared interests. At the first sign of danger, everyone's first thought wasn't about solving the problem—it was about saving themselves.

Against the Annihilation Thunderstrike, only the most elite evolved stood a chance of resisting. Everyone else, no matter how hard they tried, would be wasting their energy.

So when the thunder descended, what else could they do but run? Wait to be used as cannon fodder to weaken the thunder's power? Sacrifice themselves so others could survive?

Don't joke around. They'd rather all die together than play the role of martyrs.

Spade's face turned green. Seeing only a handful of people activating defensive equipment, he knew there was no way they could withstand the thunder.

He could only scream hoarsely, shouting that if they didn't resist, everyone would die.

This shouting had some effect—at least the high-level evolved knew they couldn't run. If even they fled, leaving no one to block the thunder, they'd truly be doomed.

So the moment the thunder descended, many powerful skills and defensive gear were unleashed toward the sky.

As a trial, the Annihilation Thunderstrike wasn't an unblockable attack—otherwise, this wheel space would lose all meaning, and the Mountain King Plate would never be obtained.

But its power was immense, requiring a heavy price to resist.

Among the current factions, the strongest were undoubtedly Cloud Peak and the Mechanical Genius. After them came the Cannibal Chain and Great America—both elite factions with their own specialties.

If the Cannibal Chain had faced this thunder (excluding the Mechanical Genius, who was essentially a one-man faction), they might have mounted the best defense among all present factions besides Cloud Peak. Even Ye Zhongming had to admire their level of control over their subordinates.

But Great America, despite having comparable strength, fell far short. Again, this was the inherent weakness of alliance-based factions.

Still, with their raw power, they could have survived the thunder—even at great cost.

But sometimes, things that should be achievable fail due to disunity. And when this disunity runs from top to bottom, the outcome is as disastrous as possible.

The ones fleeing weren't just the ordinary evolved—their leader, Governor Spade, ran too.

Yes. Faced with the thunder, after ordering everyone to resist or die, Spade—who had been posturing as ready for a desperate fight—turned and fled.

He was the soul of the faction, its strongest member. Only if he also committed to a full defense could they possibly withstand the Annihilation Thunderstrike.

But he ran.

Unlike the others who tried to escape the thunder's range and let others "take the hit," Spade pulled out an item—a flute or xiao-like instrument. At first, those around him thought it was defensive gear.

But when Spade activated it, the item transformed into another Spade, standing motionless in place.

The thunder struck. The evolved's skills crumbled pathetically against its might—even those that slightly dimmed its brilliance had minimal effect. The high-level evolved's defensive gear fared better, causing the thunder to pause momentarily, just as it had when the Mechanical Genius defended against it.

In that instant, many felt hope, believing they, like the Mechanical Genius, would survive.

But... after the pause, the thunder slammed mercilessly into Greater America's ranks and the Bright Star.

On the light screen, the other factions witnessed the now-familiar sight of a star's destruction. Many couldn't believe it.

Greater America—the faction that had just been in third place—was finished, just like that?

"Look! There!"

A sharp-eyed observer pointed excitedly at the upper left corner of the chaotic light screen.

Everyone looked. Sure enough, amid the billowing smoke, a figure floated in the air.

The smoke obscured details, but everyone recognized him at a glance—Spade. That physique couldn't belong to anyone else.

But... why wasn't he dead? The Bright Star had been destroyed.

"Bright Star No. 22 annihilated. Greater America disqualified. One survivor. Due to faction elimination, removed from space."

"All Greater America's Bright Stars are now unclaimed. Factions passing through may choose to purchase Guardian Beasts. The first to purchase gains ownership."

"Remaining factions: 5."

After five rounds, the first faction had been eliminated.

Outside the space, on a wind-battered mountain peak, a figure materialized mid-air and crashed to the ground. His hill-like frame left a massive crater in the hard earth.

Spade stood up, chuckling. Though he'd expended a precious life-saving artifact, he'd successfully escaped the wheel space. As he'd predicted, elimination meant expulsion.

Once Great America lost all hope, he'd resolved to flee. Though he'd lost his subordinates, he could always recruit more. Though he'd lost a valuable artifact, the wealth he'd gained in the space could buy several similar items. Best of all, the exorbitant tolls paid by Cloud Peak and others no longer had to be shared with his subordinates. They were all his!

Spade opened his dimensional storage, eager to inspect his gains, but what followed was a roar of fury and despair.

"Where's my money?! WHERE'S MY MONEY?!"

The roar lasted only seconds before cutting off abruptly—because Spade saw it.

Hovering not far above him, staring down with icy indifference... was a demon.

Chapter 1703: Special round 6

Since the Mountain King Wheel's spatial trial began, the gathered factions had fallen silent many times—but never for this long.

Finally, a faction had been eliminated.

This meant that the deathly conclusion everyone had anticipated had officially begun.

Six years into the apocalypse, every individual had faced death countless times. Logically, fear and unease should no longer exist.

But when they reached a certain level, death became unfamiliar to them once more.

Thus, the fear that had faded—or been numbed—returned.

Especially when they witnessed Great America's Bright Star being obliterated on the light screen, this emotion peaked.

So... death was right before their eyes. Again.

At this moment, even the weakest factions—the Women Guard and Gyanendra—and even the passive Cannibal Chain tensed up abruptly.

A single thought dominated their minds:

What would happen if the thunder struck them?

Gyanendra expressionlessly struck the Soaring Crystal. Currently, he had almost no cards left, little money, and his forces were severely weakened. Whether he could even survive this stretch was questionable.

Fortunately, this round, luck was on his side. He landed on a star originally owned by Great America. Though he lacked the funds to purchase it, at least he didn't have to fight or pay.

For Gyanendra, who had no chance of a comeback—even with perfect luck securing stars every step—victory was impossible. Thus, nothing mattered more than stability.

Ye Zhongming then struck the Soaring Crystal, landing on the Mechanical Genius's star. Without hesitation, he single-handedly took down the Guardian Beast, needing no assistance. With Yangos on his left and Yellow Ball on his right, who else did he need?

The Misfortune Card still lingered. Even after winning the challenge, Cloud Peak had to pay the toll fee, much to Ye Zhongming's frustration.

Next was the Women Guard. Their luck? Frankly, terrible. They landed on yet another of the Mechanical Genius's stars. Penniless, they had no choice but to fight. Under double difficulty, even a low-level Guardian Beast forced them into another grueling battle.

They won, but their numbers dwindled further. Now, they looked far worse off than Gyanendra.

It was clear to all—this was a faction on the brink. Perhaps next round, they would follow Greater America's fate and be eliminated entirely.

As for Ella or the black leader Gianna's tier and strength, it was unlikely they possessed any life-saving artifacts.

The last of this round was the Mechanical Genius.

Perhaps influenced by the round's overall calm, even this neurotic figure was unusually quiet, obediently striking the Soaring Crystal and landing on one of Great America's stars. After painfully purchasing a Guardian Beast, he added a star to his tally.

But the Misfortune Card spared no one. After buying the Guardian Beast and claiming the star, he was notified that—due to the Misfortune Card—the purchase was void.

Meaning: Money gone, star gone.

The Mechanical Genius erupted on the spot, unleashing his signature screech.

After five rounds, Gyanendra, the Cannibal Chain, and the Women Guard had lost all competitive hope. Only the Mechanical Genius and Cloud Peak remained as potential victors.

The gap between them hadn't widened—Cloud Peak led by just three stars.

Round Six.

The Cannibal Chain entered the "death zone." However, with Great America eliminated, many unclaimed stars dotted the path. Landing on them posed no issue. For the rest? They paid—money wasn't a problem for them.

After surveying the path ahead, Gyanendra used a Free Choice Card this round.

This stretch was dense with Cloud Peak and the Mechanical Genius's stars. Gyanendra had no confidence in landing elsewhere. In his current state, if he landed on the Mechanical Genius's star, he might scrape through with sheer effort. But if he hit one of Cloud Peak's max-level Guardian Beast stars? He'd be lucky to escape with his life.

Fortunately, he still had the Free Choice Card—one that allowed controlled landing.

He selected the only remaining unclaimed star from Great America in this stretch.

Relief washed over him afterward—no thunder struck.

When Ye Zhongming struck the Soaring Crystal, the Mechanical Genius shamelessly booed and even cursed, hoping for the thunder's descent. But even with the Misfortune Card in its final round, no thunder came. Instead, Ye Zhongming had to challenge two adjacent stars' Guardian Beasts simultaneously—a one-versus-three.

Yet, with Cloud Peak's strength, they feared nothing. Deploying their full force, they bulldozed through.

The battle left the remaining evolved in the wheel space speechless.

Perhaps at his peak, the Mechanical Genius could have rivaled such a faction. But now? It was obvious—his forces were severely depleted. At least a dozen or twenty mechanical war puppets were gone.

Seemingly few, but his total numbers weren't high to begin with.

Then came the Women Guard...

Their luck remained abysmal. This round, they landed on Cloud Peak's star.

Fight? Against Cloud Peak, they lacked both the strength and the confidence to continue.

So they had to pay.

But did they have money? No!

Cornered, even leaders like Ella and Gianna—the backbone of their faction's combat power—began stripping off their cherished equipment.

Their "weakness" was relative to the present factions. Outside, the Women Guard were formidable. Ella and Gianna were elite evolved—their gear was far from shabby. Ye Zhongming alone spotted over three gold-grade pieces between them, including one that, though devoid of glow, exhibited purple-tier power in battle.

Many Women Guard warriors resisted their leaders sacrificing these items. Without them, they'd become defenseless prey.

"At least no one died this round, right?"

Gianna smiled bitterly, comforting her subordinates.

After the Women Guard, the Mechanical Genius took his turn as the round's final participant. Tension spiked as preparations intensified. Inside his war puppet, the Mechanical Genius never stopped cursing.

Because this round, the Annihilation Thunderstrike would strike—and with misfortune plaguing him, he was prime target material.

Having tasted the thunder's fury once, cursing was the least he could do.

But just before striking the Soaring Crystal, his tirade ceased abruptly.

"This is the sixth round... can't we buy a new card now?"

Seconds later, the space announced:

"The Mechanical Genius has purchased the Fortune Card!"

Chapter 1704: Triple lightning

After five rounds, the Fortune Card could be purchased—the last of the ten card types in the wheel space, and the most anticipated yet perplexing.

The Minor King and Major King cards also didn't reveal their specific effects, but that left everyone completely in the dark, so they stopped guessing. After all, once you purchased and used enough cards,

you could obtain these two—what they did would become clear then. Before the final ten-round trial began, the answers would already be revealed.

What you gained and how to use it was something each faction could ponder during their journey.

In reality, aside from factions that couldn't afford them or saw no need, most had already used their Minor and Major King cards in earlier rounds.

The effects? Everyone had seen them—some were eliminated, some disqualified. The battlefield had already become strikingly clear.

The Fortune Card was different. It was mysterious, only purchasable after five rounds. Judging by its name, it likely had something to do with luck, but the specifics were unclear.

Put simply, this was a gambling card.

It gambled on luck—and perhaps, on life itself.

At the very least, the wheel space didn't specify whether the outcome would be good or bad.

Everyone waited in stunned silence for the space's next announcement, their opinions on the Mechanical Genius's actions varying but generally leaning toward the assumption that he was trying to overtake Cloud Peak.

Only the Mechanical Genius himself knew the truth: this was a last resort.

If he could still scream like before, he would have shredded his vocal cords, hurling the vilest curses at the roulette space.

Why? Because the Fortune Card was absurdly expensive, so much so that it felt like all his internal organs had been ripped out.

Fifteen of his mechanical war puppets—all high-tier ones—were gone in an instant. Though he still had some puppets left, his overall combat strength had been halved from its peak.

Against Cloud Peak's max-level Guardian Beasts, he no longer had any guarantee of victory.

With trembling hands, he flipped open the Fortune Card, knowing it might determine the final outcome of his Mountain King Wheel bid.

When he saw its contents, he fell silent for a long moment—then burst into maniacal laughter.

This card, though ludicrously priced, was worth it.

"The Mechanical Genius's Fortune Card effect: State Transfer. This round, he may transfer any existing or impending state to any participating faction. This effect cannot be exempted."

Hearing the wheel space's announcement, the other factions first froze, then displayed a range of expressions.

The Women Guard were numb.

Their only concern now was survival. Who won no longer mattered to them.

Gyanendra felt a flicker of hope. For a moment, he wondered if he still had a chance—but then he smiled bitterly, realizing he was deluding himself.

With his remaining strength and star count, unless both the Mechanical Genius and Cloud Peak were eliminated, victory would never fall to him.

The one truly stirred was the Cannibal Chain.

With this inextinguishable State Transfer Card in play, everyone knew what Cloud Peak would face next: the most terrifying moment of the Mountain King Wheel trial. Whether they could survive was far from certain.

And if Cloud Peak unexpectedly stumbled and was eliminated... could they compete for victory?

Wu Xiu's heart raced. She interlaced her fingers and pressed down hard, listening to her knuckles crack as she slipped into a state of exhilaration.

As for Cloud Peak and Ye Zhongming, after a brief moment of resignation, their expressions hardened.

They'd faced too many disasters, too many challenges. It had forged in them an unyielding spirit: the greater the pressure, the more they refused to break.

In fact, they thrived on defying the odds, smashing apart dangers and enemies that seemed capable of swallowing them whole.

Some called them insane. So what? Those words weren't spoken with scorn or disgust, but envy.

Others wished they could be like them, but lacked the qualifications.

Once the Fortune Card's effect was revealed, Cloud Peak knew what was coming.

The Mechanical Genius would undoubtedly dump every negative state onto them, combining with the impending Annihilation Thunderstrike to create a doubly devastating attack. That was the true horror. Other states were negligible in comparison.

But this enhanced thunder was genuinely terrifying.

This wasn't about duration or frequency doubling—it was raw power doubling.

In other words, if it struck twice or lasted twice as long, everyone believed Cloud Peak could endure. With two level-nine beings on their side, they could tough it out.

But this was amplified power, and the thunder was nearly instantaneous. If they couldn't withstand it in that brief window, they'd be annihilated.

They'd already witnessed the thunder's base power. Even Cloud Peak's max-level Guardian Beasts—comparable to level nine—were left severely injured.

And that was normal thunder. This was Overclocked thunder—doubled, or rather, tripled in power.

Not even level nine could withstand that.

Would this mighty Eastern faction be reduced to ashes under the thunder?

"Overclocked Annihilation Thunderstrike. Difficulty doubled. Countdown: 5... 4..."

The wheel showed some mercy, giving a brief warning.

On the light screen, everyone watched intently, waiting to see how Cloud Peak would respond—or perish.

First, a glowing dome rose above the entire team, shaped like a massive palace.

Those familiar with Cloud Peak recognized it—Dai Zhi's core defensive equipment, the Zhuangxiang Eight Trigram Palace, wielded by the Female Guard.

Next, Xia Bai stood atop the palace's phantom form, head held high.

Clearly, she would serve as the Female Guard's spearhead, using their collective power to clash head-on with the thunder.

On the ground, the rest of Cloud Peak's members and war beasts raised their weapons or bodies, ready to fight if the first two defenses failed.

"Need my help?"

The Talking Lady, cradling her black cat, turned to Ye Zhongming.

She'd promised unconditional aid once. In her eyes, Cloud Peak needed her level-nine strength now.

If Ye Zhongming asked, she'd act—even against tripled thunder, despite having no confidence in survival.

Oddly, Ye Zhongming shook his head.

"Not this time."

Chapter 1705: Handling (1)

The Talking Lady shrugged in imitation of Ye Zhongming and said nothing more, even taking a step backward.

Her meaning was clear—since you don't need me, I'll stay out of the way.

Ye Zhongming waved his hand, and Xiao Min let out a sharp whistle.

At that moment, the wheel's countdown officially ended, and the most terrifying thunder descended from the sky.

Simultaneously, Xiao Min placed her hand on the translucent barrier of the Zhuangxiang Eight Trigram Palace, while the rest of the Female Guard unleashed their attacks, converging their power onto Xia Bai. The captain fully activated her abilities and swung her scythe outward.

This move had been seen many times by the Youth Army. The team-amplified attack was horrifying—even level-nine lifeforms would think twice before facing it.

The expression on the Talking Lady's face confirmed that this newly ascended level-nine lifeform was indeed wary of such an attack.

But many in the Youth Army felt that this strike seemed even more powerful than before.

Some recalled the potions the Female Guard had taken when the space announced the impending thunder. Was it related to that?

Admittedly, Ye Zhongming's response to the Talking Lady had seemed a bit arrogant, but in truth, he had no confidence in withstanding the tripled thunder.

He had seen the normal or 1.5x amplified thunder before. To be honest, Cloud Peak could block it—Ye Zhongming himself could even withstand it alone.

But there would definitely be damage. If it were just him, he'd likely end up with destroyed equipment and severe injuries.

The equipment was purple-grade, and the injuries would be critical.

So, how could he possibly have confidence against tripled thunder?

But this assumption was based on tanking the hit. Since brute force wouldn't work, they had to rely on tactics.

If there was one thing Cloud Peak had in abundance, it was methods.

Those potions were one such method.

They were a diluted version of the Berserk Potion—the most valuable personal research achievement of Candy, Cloud Peak's chief alchemist.

Based on the original Berserk Potion formula, after countless experiments and burning through funds at a rate that even made Ye Zhongming wince, Candy finally developed a low-side-effect, lightweight Berserk Potion. It provided roughly half the boost of the original but reduced side effects by two-thirds—an incredible feat.

However, due to limitations—only Candy could produce it, materials were expensive, and success rates were inconsistent—it remained a high-end potion exclusive to Cloud Peak's core members and the Female Guard.

After consuming it, the Female Guard collectively entered a mild berserk state, including Xia Bai. Their strength saw a noticeable increase, and the team-amplified strike became terrifyingly powerful.

But that wasn't all. No one noticed that Xia Bai had taken something else besides the lightweight Berserk Potion.

It wasn't a potion—just... venom.

A toxin extracted from the body of a level-eight marine mutant lifeform, originally provided by Xiao Peng as material for Ye Zhongming. During testing, Xia Bai had observed its properties and understood its toxicity.

Later, when Ye Zhongming found no use for it and stored it away, Xia Bai took it for herself.

Because she had an idea.

Xia Bai's evolution was bizarre—she followed both the normal human path and the aberrant mutant path.

But one thing had never changed: the more severely injured she was, the stronger her attacks became.

In theory, she could grievously wound herself at the start of battle to instantly annihilate her enemies.

But reality wasn't that simple.

Self-inflicted injuries couldn't impair mobility—otherwise, no matter how strong the attack, it'd be useless if she couldn't execute it. So how could she strike the perfect balance—not too light to be ineffective, not too heavy to be suicidal?

Even as Xia Bai grew stronger and situations requiring self-harm became rarer, this problem still haunted her.

How could she maximize her combat power in an instant when Ye Zhongming's life was at stake? This question occupied her thoughts daily.

In the heat of battle, finding that precise threshold—where injuries boosted her power to the limit without crippling her—was nearly impossible.

Until she saw this venom. Her perspective instantly broadened.

So, like a madwoman, she dragged Park Xiuying, Candy, and a detoxification specialist into a grueling, half-month-long ordeal of self-poisoning experiments.

She sought the perfect balance—ingesting enough venom to bring her to the brink of death without crossing it, allowing her to unleash her strongest strike before being healed by potions or skills.

Too little venom, and the effect was negligible. Too much, and she'd collapse entirely.

Under the conflicted gazes of Park Xiuying, Candy, and the alchemist, Xia Bai endured inhuman torment until she found that equilibrium. She portioned the venom accordingly and carried it with her for emergencies.

Like now.

Xia Bai drank a vial of venom. Instantly, the toxin corroded her body, ravaging her internal organs. The pain was unbearable, making her tremble uncontrollably.

But near-death critical injury was exactly what she wanted.

With both the potion and venom amplifying her, this strike was the strongest attack Xia Bai and the Female Guard could muster.

A streak of light slashed across the sky, fearlessly meeting the Annihilation Thunderstrike.

Then, Xia Bai plummeted, barely managing to swallow a detox potion.

Any delay, and the venom would kill her.

On the light screen, many watched with mouths agape, feeling genuine terror, both at the thunder and Cloud Peak's counterattack.

Perhaps this was the planet's most devastating clash.

Either force could likely kill even a level nine lifeform in one hit.

Now, these two monstrous energies collided midair.

The Annihilation Thunderstrike was split in two!

However, the division wasn't clean—starting from the point of impact, the thunder was torn apart upward in a mutual cancellation.

There was no denying Cloud Peak's attack was formidable. Yet... after splitting the thunder halfway, it exhausted itself and dissipated.

The thunder then struck the Zhuangxiang Eight Trigram Palace.

The entire light screen seemed to tremble at that moment.

This sight made one thing clear: even after being weakened by Cloud Peak's strike, the remaining thunder was still far more powerful than the standard version.

A question arose in everyone's mind: Could Cloud Peak's majestic palace barrier withstand it?

Most doubted it. The thunder was too terrifying—the moment it touched the Zhuangxiang Eight Trigram Palace, the defensive barrier showed signs of collapsing instantly!