

Apocalypse 1781

Chapter 1781: Ability chain

Aslan's vacant gaze stared at the simulated sky in the space, feeling that her life had plunged into darkness from this moment on.

Since childhood, she had never suffered such treatment!

Humiliation!

After intense hatred came a numb resignation to fate.

Aslan believed someone must be observing her current situation - even if no one was monitoring internally, Color Man was definitely watching.

Though the garbage trial was cruel, it still had to be controlled. All factions in Dark Strip City desperately needed fresh blood, especially the Star Eye Race. They couldn't let all new garbage die during the trial.

Monitoring was essential - Aslan had been assigned such tasks several times before.

Yet now, no one came to eliminate this garbage, no one came to rescue her.

She knew why.

There were only two reasons: First, someone wanted her dead! Or at least hoped she'd be taught a lesson and humiliated. Second, this garbage's displayed strength had gained recognition - Color Man, the head of this special training camp, or those above him, saw some hope in this garbage.

As long as this garbage didn't kill her, no one would intervene.

If she weren't... perhaps no one would appear no matter what this garbage did to her.

"What did you say earlier? Say it again slowly, more clearly, without accent."

Before Aslan could speak, Color Man and those before the light screen were collectively speechless.

Darkstripe language was just the common language here, not anyone's mother tongue - it was uniformly taught and learned. What accent could there be? Did he think it was like his home planet, where people across a river couldn't understand each other?

Moreover, Star Eye Race was famously known for excellent vocal conditions - how could there be accents?!

Aslan was so angry that blood seeped from her mouth.

Ye Zhongming shook his head and moved that bottle under Aslan's nose again, letting her inhale.

While using it, he muttered: "Birdmen really can't take a hit..."

Aslan nearly died from anger upon hearing this.

You garbage! Like a monster, who could withstand you! Even if we can't, can't you complain in your mother tongue instead of Darkstripe language!

Also, your Darkstripe language has the accent! Your whole family has accents!

"I said, I'm your special training instructor..." Aslan repeated her words from before the second beating, enduring shame as intense as the sun's heat.

Ye Zhongming rubbed his chin and looked at the sky, feeling he might have done something wrong...

"What can you teach me?"

But this sense of regret lasted only a second before being replaced by curiosity.

After the second treatment, Aslan improved somewhat. That substance was Ayr gas, a sacred healing medicine secretly made by the Ayr clan. Though her broken bones couldn't heal immediately, they were rapidly recovering, and her shaken internal organs were already completely restored.

"The abilities I used when attacking you earlier - you can choose one."

Really? Ye Zhongming's eyes lit up.

Though Aslan wasn't his match, this birdman's abilities were all excellent. Whether it was the auto-tracking ability, the exploding poisonous smoke clone, or even poisoning water, all were extremely useful combat skills. Learning just one would greatly enhance his strength.

"Can you teach me all of them?"

Ye Zhongming's attitude improved considerably, making Aslan utterly disdainful internally. Though she didn't show it, since this garbage had a record, and getting beaten again would make her die of shame.

"It's not what you imagine." Aslan's expression turned serious.

No matter how this garbage treated her, this now involved her professional duty - even more seriously, it concerned the survival situation of the entire Star Eye Race.

Even though she didn't believe this garbage could change anything, the values instilled since childhood made Aslan set aside their grudge and patiently explain to Ye Zhongming.

"Abilities aren't about quantity, because these aren't the direct-input type skills from your home planet."

Ye Zhongming also became serious, listening carefully to every word.

"On your home planet, abilities were instilled by the wheel - seems magical, right? Just tear skill scrolls without needing to learn anything." Aslan sneered - Ye Zhongming could tell this wasn't directed at him, but at the wheel.

"But here it's different. The abilities from your home planet will disappear for various reasons. Though not all will be lost, the majority will vanish. How much remains and what remains depends on your talent, your understanding of the abilities, and many factors."

"Also, you might retain a bit of abilities, but equipment - none can be brought out."

Hearing this, Ye Zhongming realized - no wonder all equipment was gone, it simply couldn't be brought out from Earth. He also became more confused about the relationship between the wheel and the cosmic races, feeling deeper awe toward these mysteries.

"Right, bloodlines won't disappear - they remain." At this point, Aslan looked at Ye Zhongming, finally feeling genuine caution toward this garbage.

She was certain this garbage hadn't used his bloodline during their fight!

If he had, the gap between them would've...

"Now you're in the universe - not your home planet's outer space, but the real cosmos. You've lost most abilities and need to relearn to resist... the Slave Race."

Seeing Ye Zhongming about to speak, Aslan interrupted: "Let me finish. Others will answer your questions about mission targets."

"Learning here means truly studying and mastering. It can't be achieved overnight. You need to memorize, then comprehend, then apply, until finally mastering it or making it instinctive. So yes, this requires significant time and effort. Wanting to learn all desired abilities is impossible."

Ye Zhongming understood Aslan's point - this was normal. On Earth, instantly mastering skills through the wheel was what was abnormal.

"And our rule is you can only learn one skill from each special training instructor. It's not that we're reluctant to teach, but we hope you can use limited energy to quickly and effectively form your own ability chain... an ability chain that matches your combat style and habits."

Ye Zhongming nodded - he understood this too. Biting off more than one can chew; learning many unsuitable abilities is worse than mastering a few suitable ones. In any battle, only a limited number of abilities are actually useful.

"Alright, tell me which ability you want to learn. Or you can describe your combat style and habits, and I'll give my suggestions."

Chapter 1782: Genius or stupid

In the end, Ye Zhongming chose to learn the ability that created clones, which then turned into smoke. Aslan said it was called Double Poison Shadow.

It allowed the user to create two clones to block attacks. When shattered, they would explode into poisonous smoke, controlling nearby targets to some extent.

If not shattered, they could still attack the target, dealing damage while gradually weakening themselves. If left uncontrolled, they would automatically explode at their limit. If controlled, the user could detonate them at any time.

A good ability—at least Ye Zhongming thought so.

Learning a completely new skill naturally couldn't be as simple as the wheel's direct instillation.

Aslan taught with great care. Though the ability was complex, she explained it methodically and even shared her own experience with Ye Zhongming.

According to Aslan, most abilities obtained from the wheel wouldn't remain in the body, but those fused with one's bloodline could be retained—such as bloodlines or abilities like Beautiful Heavenly Body.

Thus, evolution levels could also be retained, along with the Soul Refining Technique Ye Zhongming had learned in the secret realm.

It had to be said—this was truly something remarkable.

Ye Zhongming had always thought that rebirth wasn't much of an advantage for him. After all, as an ordinary person in his past life, he couldn't have known many secrets, so rebirth didn't change that. The extra experience only extended up to level six.

Compared to the Five Keys Alliance, who had known about the apocalypse in advance, this at best evened the playing field.

What made Ye Zhongming feel like he had cheated the system were two things: First, Exclusion Technique—an ability that likely belonged to Mu Xinfei in his past life—was the foundation of his rapid rise to power. Second, the Soul Refining Art.

This ability not only granted Ye Zhongming vast mental strength and the power to forge soul weapons but also gave him an advantage in using skills more frequently than others while being less vulnerable to mental attacks.

Against the lives in Darkstripe City and the true Slave Races he might encounter in the future, Ye Zhongming had some confidence—at least half of which came from the Soul Refining Technique.

Now, aside from the heightened physical and mental development from evolving to level nine, it was unclear whether it was due to the Soul Refining Technique, but Ye Zhongming could always comprehend and master what Aslan taught him with astonishing speed. This left the female birdman utterly shocked, shifting from doubt to certainty—she knew she was dealing with a genius.

Without direct instillation, only comprehension was possible. Even if Ye Zhongming learned quickly, mastering a technique in a single day was impossible. He moved through the jungle with Aslan in tow, taking care of everything since the birdman couldn't move—fetching water, hunting, cooking, and tending to the injured.

Only after two days did he fully memorize the basics of Double Poison Shadow and begin practicing it slightly.

During these days, Ye Zhongming faced some challenges in the rainforest, but none were major. Level six or seven creatures posed no threat as long as he was careful, and even level eight ones only caused minor trouble before being dealt with.

Aslan's injuries had mostly healed. In truth, the so-called Ayr gas healing medicine was only used four times before running out. The birdman's recovery relied more on her formidable regenerative abilities.

Ye Zhongming couldn't help but admire this. Even a level nine evolved human would take at least a week to fully recover from having most of their bones broken—yet this creature was already bouncing around after just three days.

"Your hand seals are wrong! Your left hand is off by one degree—this will affect the overflow of your ability. If your speed is even slightly off, the shadow won't form!"

"Poison! Poison! Don't forget, garbage—the latter half of this ability, or rather its most threatening aspect, is the poisonous gas! Right now, you don't have materials to use, so your clones can't release

poison mist, but you can't pretend it doesn't exist! Why are you making your clones so defensive? When are you going to release the poison? How much damage can two clones even do?!"

"You're so stupid! Control your energy properly—do you want to dump all your power into the clones and then pass out?"

"Pay attention to your movement! The Star Eye Race's greatest strength lies in finding opportunities to deliver a fatal strike. You have to weave around—do you understand?! Why do you keep charging straight in like an idiot?!"

"Distance! Create distance! Distance is life! Why did you beat me? Because I carelessly let you get close!"

"..."

Once Aslan recovered, she began sparring with Ye Zhongming, teaching him how to use the ability, what to pay attention to, and other key points.

Though she kept calling him stupid, in truth, Aslan was a little jealous. Back when she first learned Double Poison Shadow after systematic training since childhood, it took her nearly an entire cosmic month to grasp the basics. Truly mastering it and making it instinctive took almost two cosmic years.

Yet this person in front of her memorized the steps in two days, comprehended the most difficult aspect—clone density—in one day, and after sparring with her, managed to summon a single clone in just two more days.

How could she not envy such talent?! By Aslan's estimate, at most half a cosmic month, this garbage called Ye Zhongming would be able to use this ability in combat. Reaching full proficiency would likely take two months.

She had taken two years—he would take two months. The gap was so vast it made Aslan despair.

Gradually, this insurmountable difference, while stirring envy, also made Aslan take her teaching with extreme seriousness. She poured all her effort into it, genuinely wanting to see just how far this little garbage could grow.

Ye Zhongming could naturally sense the birdman's meticulous teaching and studied earnestly. He didn't resist her harsh attitude or strictness—except during practice, where he occasionally used the ability according to his own understanding. This became the biggest point of contention between them. At one point, after realizing Ye Zhongming refused to change, Aslan snapped in frustration that if he had just obediently followed her teaching, he probably would've been able to summon the second clone by now!

But Ye Zhongming stubbornly stuck to his ways, making Aslan grind her teeth in frustration. If only she could beat him—she'd have done so eight hundred times a day!

Her opinion changed on the eighth day.

After successfully summoning a clone on the fifth day, three more days passed—yet Ye Zhongming still couldn't summon a second one.

Aslan's expectations began to plummet.

She slowly realized that this garbage's talent might not be as incredible as she had thought.

Because the hardest part of this ability was summoning the first clone. Once that hurdle was crossed, summoning a second one should follow naturally.

Yet... he was stuck.

Two more days passed—still no second clone. Aslan's attitude noticeably cooled.

Not toward Ye Zhongming as a person, but rather a disillusionment with her own expectations.

"According to regulations, after ten days of learning an ability, you'll face an assessment. This determines whether your path ahead will be smooth or difficult—whether your trial's challenge increases or decreases."

Aslan led Ye Zhongming to a location where a beast lay sleeping, radiating a powerful aura.

This was a level nine lifeform!

"Kill it using your newly learned ability. Succeed, and your trial's difficulty won't be high. Survive it, and you can learn your next ability. Fail, or if you kill it using other attack skills you've mastered... then your future path will become much harder."

Chapter 1783: Turn around and run

Apocalypse Gachapon

After evolving to level nine, Ye Zhongming had no problem soloing a mutant lifeform of the same level.

Back on Earth, fully armed, even if he hadn't reached the level of the Holy Father, he wouldn't have flinched against the top ten high-level beings on the planet. If he factored in Cloud Peak's support—with Mo Ye, Yangos, Red Hair, and others all mobilized—Cloud Peak alone could probably wipe out the top ten mutant lifeforms in the entire country.

But now, things were different. He didn't have his most reliable weapons, none of the equipment that gave him a sense of security, and none of his loyal companions or battle pets by his side. Using a skill he'd only learned for ten days to kill a lifeform of the same level?

Seeing Ye Zhongming hesitate, Aslan suddenly felt disappointed.

For a piece of garbage, in her eyes, it didn't matter if they were a bit weak, a bit stupid, or even unruly and hard to tame.

But the worst thing was if the garbage lacked courage!

That kind of garbage was truly garbage.

"I've already taught you everything about Double Poison Shadow. What you do next is up to you."

With that, Aslan took two steps back, flapped her wings, and flew away.

Ye Zhongming stared at her disappearing figure, momentarily stunned, unsure why the birdman had suddenly left so coldly. After a moment, he realized.

Seems like, no matter where you go, females are emotionally unstable!

I was just thinking whether I should reveal my trump card now—why'd you have to fly off?

Though he wasn't particularly fond of this birdman, Ye Zhongming was still grateful for her patient teaching. After watching her leave, he turned his attention to the slumbering beast.

Right now, it was sleeping so soundly that snot bubbles were forming, but Ye Zhongming was certain—the moment he stepped into its perception range, it would wake up instantly and attack.

Unless you were a true master-level assassin, ambushing a level nine lifeform was about as difficult as evolving to level nine itself.

Ye Zhongming didn't rush to attack. Instead, he first sorted through his equipment:

A repaired short sword

A newly crafted leather armor

Two bone daggers

And a box he'd made using materials gathered over the past few days

Aside from eating, sleeping, training, and mocking the birdman, Ye Zhongming had spent his free time working on something mysterious, slowly assembling it into this box.

After checking his gear, he still didn't move. Instead, he took out food and water, eating and drinking slowly to let his body absorb nutrients as quickly as possible.

This routine lasted at least twenty minutes. During this time, aside from silent chewing, Ye Zhongming didn't move a muscle.

For a piece of garbage who had beaten a special training instructor to a pulp, the Star Eye Race was paying close attention. Right now, not only were Color Man and Masked Man watching nearby, but Aslan, who had flown away, had also rejoined them. Meanwhile, in the surveillance hall, over a dozen people were gathered, led by Commander Cheng Liuji, the highest-ranking officer present.

"Hmm, not bad."

This Gold Commander, who had nearly issued a kill order when he saw Aslan getting beaten, didn't show impatience at Ye Zhongming's prolonged stillness. Instead, he unexpectedly praised him.

"A skilled assassin, a true Star Eye Race warrior, should have this kind of patience when hunting. How many times have we prepared for days—even months—before making our move?"

A Silver Masked Man nearby seized the moment to add some meaningless but agreeable fluff.

Right now, hearing praise from other races was nearly impossible for the Star Eye Race, so they had to entertain themselves.

"He's moving!"

Someone alerted the group.

After staying still for so long, Ye Zhongming finally moved—but instead of attacking as everyone expected, he began circling just outside the beast's perception range.

"Is he looking for a weakness?"

A staff member, who had some combat ability but not much, could only guess based on his limited understanding of the Star Eye Race's skills.

"Sky Pillar has multi-limbed traits—visual organs on every arm. Its weakness isn't in its field of vision. If this garbage is trying to exploit that, he's wasting his time."

A Gold Masked Man shook his head. The garbage clearly didn't know what kind of lifeform he was facing. In truth, this wasn't fair to Ye Zhongming—the beast they called Sky Pillar wasn't an easy opponent.

"Raising a level nine lifeform isn't easy. If this garbage can't kill Sky Pillar, then he can become its food. A useless piece of trash is no match for Sky Pillar."

Commander Cheng Liuji snorted coldly. The others exchanged glances, unsure whether to take his words at face value or not.

"Is he setting traps?"

Since the Gold Commander's words were hard to respond to, they turned back to the screen. They noticed that after circling once, the garbage didn't stop—he kept going, this time faster. At certain spots, he'd pause, take out his box, and carefully set something up.

It did look like traps.

This drew sneers from many in the room.

Traps weren't useless—but it depended on the target. Sky Pillar, a mutant lifeform with thick, rugged flesh, only had weak points at its joints. The chances of ground or plant-based traps hitting those spots were practically zero.

Besides, in Darkstripe City—or any battlefield—what kind of traps were used? It was a high-tech skill, requiring precision materials and mechanisms, often involving factories from multiple races.

A truly effective trap was a luxury item.

The people here knew exactly what resources were available in the garbage trial space. They seriously doubted there was anything in there that could make a trap threatening to a level nine lifeform!

Useless effort—that was the unanimous verdict in their minds.

Color Man also understood Aslan's expression when she returned. This guy really did give hope first, only to disappoint later.

"Let's go. Why bother watching? Total waste of time."

Aslan, visibly irritated, wanted to leave.

"Let's keep watching. He... should be making his move soon."

Color Man hesitated but decided to stay. He was disappointed too, but a tiny sliver of hope remained.

What if...

Under the collective gaze of zero expectations, Ye Zhongming finally stepped into Sky Pillar's perception range.

The beast's eyes snapped open, locking onto the stranger with a murderous gleam.

It stood up, shaking off grass and debris, revealing a body covered in thick, black-bristled arms.

Its face was ghastly green with protruding fangs, and its lower body supported by four legs arranged in a square. When it moved, its steps were small but rapid.

Ye Zhongming took two steps, stopped, changed direction, and repeated the process—studying his opponent.

After sizing him up, Sky Pillar suddenly roared and charged, two of its arms swinging forward with a sound like popping a wine cork.

Two invisible air blasts shot toward Ye Zhongming.

Faced with an attack from a peer, the King of Cloud Peak... turned and ran.

Chapter 1784: How is that possible?

To be honest, when they saw this scene, neither Aslan—who had taught Ye Zhongming for ten days—nor Color Man, who still held a sliver of hope for him, nor those watching behind the light screen like the Gold Commander and the others, felt particularly surprised.

The combat style of the Star Eye Race was often like this.

Strike when the enemy is unprepared, or lure them into a trap.

However, when they saw the direction Ye Zhongming was running in, everyone frowned.

Logically, since he had gone to the trouble of setting up so many traps earlier, he should now be leading the monster toward them. But this garbage was running in entirely the wrong direction.

"Is he nervous? Panicking?"

The same staff member voiced his guess again.

The others considered it briefly before dismissing the possibility.

Any garbage that made it this far was a top-tier figure on their home planet. While it was possible for someone like that to feel nervous, it was unlikely they'd be so flustered as to make such a basic mistake.

Yet, they truly couldn't figure out what this garbage was trying to do.

"Is his goal to reach this open area?"

A Silver Mask suddenly pointed at a basketball-court-sized patch of flat ground some distance ahead on Ye Zhongming's escape route, where only a few weeds and short flowers grew.

Was there some skill he could unleash in an open space? Cheng Liuji and the others considered the possibility.

But then—

Ye Zhongming swerved before reaching the clearing.

The observers collectively felt the urge to lower their heads in secondhand embarrassment.

Was this guy seriously just running around blindly out of nervousness—or even fear?

"Pathetic."

The Darkstripe language had a phrase close to this idiom, and Aslan used it to describe Ye Zhongming.

At the same time, the last traces of any special sentiment she had for this garbage vanished without a trace.

In the universe, fear and cowardice had no place.

Watching the "pitiful" garbage, Cheng Liuji was already considering how to punish him.

If this garbage failed to demonstrate his worth, then everything he had done to Aslan would be repaid with suffering.

"Look, he's starting to lure it toward the traps now."

Once again, it was the staff member, with his tendency to overreact, who stopped many of those who had been about to leave.

On the light screen, everyone seemed to hear a snap as one of the traps sprang up from the ground, hurling a sharp stone toward Sky Pillar's lower body.

Many shook their heads again.

Sky Pillar was a monster, not some carbon-based primate with vulnerable weak points. What could a rock possibly do?

Sky Pillar didn't even bother dodging. Without slowing, it continued chasing Ye Zhongming.

At its level, it could instinctively gauge whether an attack posed any real threat.

Next, Ye Zhongming began leading Sky Pillar through the rest of his traps.

But just as the spectators had predicted, these traps only served as minor obstacles, posing no real danger to Sky Pillar.

People in front of the light screen started leaving.

To be fair, the traps were quite ingenious—their placement, triggering mechanisms, and integration with the environment were all well-executed. If made with higher-grade materials, this would have been an extremely efficient series of linked traps.

But as they were, with low-quality materials, they were useless.

Having lost most of his abilities, lacking equipment or allies, many believed this garbage stood no chance against Sky Pillar.

Level nine lifeforms weren't something even the Cosmic Races could casually tame—only a select few species could be domesticated, and each was well-documented. The Star Eye Race, as a minor faction among the Cosmic Races, had very few level nine lifeforms under their control, and Sky Pillar was one of their stronger ones.

A "crippled" garbage like this couldn't possibly defeat it.

Among the crowd, only one person grew increasingly focused.

"What's wrong with you? Why aren't you leaving?"

Aslan was annoyed that Color Man remained standing there, still watching. The special training instructors had a mountain of work to do when new garbage arrived—it was the busiest time of the cosmic year.

"Let me watch a little longer."

Color Man had a suspicion, but he wasn't sure. Right now, he desperately wanted a closer look—to see if Sky Pillar had what he suspected on its body...

"You—"

Aslan was about to say more, but stopped when Ye Zhongming turned and launched his first counterattack.

A layer of black earthen armor covered his body as he gripped his short sword like a long dagger. Then, with that near-teleportation-like ability that defied belief, he went from facing away from Sky Pillar to appearing at its side in an instant, slashing at one of the multi-armed beast's eyes.

"Won't work."

As the leader of the Gold Masks, Cheng Liuji was naturally highly skilled. The moment he saw Ye Zhongming's move, he made his judgment.

And just as predicted—despite the suddenness and speed of the attack, Sky Pillar, with no blind spots in its vision, instantly tracked Ye Zhongming's movement.

The targeted arm twisted aside while two others launched another of those cork-popping airwave attacks.

Ye Zhongming had already witnessed the destructive power of these shockwaves—they could blast craters into the ground.

The spectators, familiar with Sky Pillar's offensive capabilities, knew the garbage would have to dodge. This assault would end in failure.

But to everyone's shock, Ye Zhongming didn't evade.

He stood there and took both hits head-on, his body sent flying backward from the impact.

It's over.

A few who had turned to leave shook their heads and turned away again. Taking a direct hit from Sky Pillar meant death or crippling injury—even a Bronze Mask would be severely wounded, let alone a rookie garbage.

But then gasps made them look back.

They saw a shadowy figure appear directly above Sky Pillar.

"Double Poison Shadow!"

The staff member exclaimed as if seeing the ability for the first time.

"Look at its hands!"

Someone of Cheng Liuji's caliber naturally wouldn't be as clueless as the staff member. He immediately noticed the difference.

The shadow clone Ye Zhongming had summoned was flawless.

"Flawless" referred to its form.

Normally, when the Star Eye Race used this ability, they didn't focus much on the shadow's offensive capabilities. Their requirements for the clone were simple: first, act as a shield; second, explode into poison gas.

As long as it could roughly take shape, it didn't matter if it resembled the user or not.

But Ye Zhongming's was different—the clone he created was a perfect replica of himself.

And what truly stunned the spectators was that the shadow was holding two weapons in its hands!

How was that even possible?!

Chapter 1785: Key point

The shadow clone appeared abruptly right beside Sky Pillar, gripping two bone daggers in its hands.

These were weapons Ye Zhongming had painstakingly carved from the bones of mutant lifeforms he'd hunted over the past few days—normally, they hung at his waist.

Yet now, after summoning the clone, they had somehow appeared in the shadow's grasp!

Even the staff member remembered this detail clearly—after all, an evolved being’s memory and ability to capture environmental details far instantly surpassed that of an ordinary person.

But how had those two bone daggers ended up in the shadow’s hands?

And there was an even more critical issue: Double Poison Shadow was an ability many had mastered—even Cheng Liuji himself knew it.

Yet no one had ever made a shadow clone hold weapons before!

This wasn’t a matter of skill proficiency—it transcended the ability itself.

It was like everyone was practicing self-defense techniques—grabbing, kicking—only for someone to pull out pepper spray suddenly. No matter how you looked at it, something was off.

Double Poison Shadow had two universally recognized strengths: defense and poison attacks. This had been the "standard application" since the Star Eye Race first created the ability.

Yet now, a scene that defied all conventions was unfolding before their eyes.

Pfft! Pfft!

Two sounds, like bubbles bursting, rang out almost simultaneously as the daggers pierced two of Sky Pillar’s arm-mounted eyes.

The agonized shriek was so intense that even those watching through the light screen could feel it.

Many were too stunned to speak, their minds racing with a single thought:

If it were me—no, if even Commander Cheng Liuji himself used Double Poison Shadow—could they inflict this kind of damage on Sky Pillar in one strike?

Amid their shock, Sky Pillar's third scream tore through the air.

This time, it wasn't the shadow clone's doing—it was Ye Zhongming, who had just been sent flying, somehow returning to its side in an instant and driving his short sword into another eye.

The spectators winced at the sight of splattering fluids, almost feeling the level nine lifeform's pain themselves.

Sky Pillar, of course, wouldn't take this lying down. After the initial onslaught, it counterattacked, its many arms lashing out wildly. Both the dagger-wielding shadow and Ye Zhongming were struck—the latter sent flying again, while the former exploded into dissipating smoke.

At this, Color Man could no longer hold back. He lunged forward, needing a closer vantage point to confirm his suspicions.

Aslan and Masked Man, equally baffled, followed.

When they reached a spot nearer the battlefield, they heard Color Man mutter two words:

"Slower."

Aslan bit her lip but couldn't resist whispering, "What's slower?"

They were now at the edge of the garbage's detection range—any louder, and they'd violate regulations as training instructors.

"Sky Pillar's speed. Not just movement—its attacks too."

Color Man offered no further explanation. Even he wasn't entirely sure yet.

Under the collective gaze of the spectators, Ye Zhongming stood the moment he hit the ground—and hurled his short sword.

But the trajectory... was off.

It wasn't aimed at Sky Pillar's body, but above its head.

A collective sigh rose from those watching the light screen.

After witnessing Ye Zhongming and his shadow shatter three of Sky Pillar's eyes, their initial skepticism had morphed into hope.

Yes, Sky Pillar was a prized asset of the Star Eye Race, but it was still just a mutant lifeform. Ye Zhongming, even labeled as garbage, was half a clansman—if he passed this trial, he'd become one of them.

From that perspective, they wanted him to win.

His revolutionary twist on Double Poison Shadow had only strengthened that desire.

So when Sky Pillar staggered, seemingly dazed from its injuries, this was the perfect opening to press the advantage.

Yet he'd missed.

Cheng Liuji gritted his teeth and spat, "Useless!"

His thoughts ran deeper. If this weapon-wielding Double Poison Shadow could be replicated, the entire clan's combat prowess would skyrocket.

He needed this garbage to win—to extract the secret behind this breakthrough.

The short sword sailed toward Sky Pillar's head—and in the next second, should have whizzed past harmlessly.

But then—

A shadow materialized mid-air.

"Double Poison Shadow!"

The staff member's shout was the most exhilarated one all day.

The clone snatched the blade mid-flight—and plunged it into Sky Pillar's central eye.

Pfft!

The sound was familiar, but this strike was far deadlier.

Sky Pillar howled, instinctively swatting the shadow apart—but the same debilitating force from before resurfaced.

Then—

A final, skull-crushing impact.

The beast swayed... and went still.

Its quadrupedal stance kept it standing even in death.

The battle had ended in utter absurdity.

Hard-fought? Perhaps—the garbage had been sent flying twice. Against Sky Pillar's might, surviving alone was a feat.

Effortless? Undeniably—from the first counterattack to the kill, mere moments had passed. Barehanded slaughter of a level nine lifeform in such time? That was the definition of easy.

Color Man moved. In seconds, he reached the battlefield, striding straight to Sky Pillar's corpse. Ignoring the fatal head wound, he inspected its limbs—especially the arms and legs.

"Just as I thought..."

Straightening, he turned slowly toward Ye Zhongming, who sat gasping on the ground. His voice was calm, but no one missed the awe lacing it:

"Those traps—their purpose wasn't to injure Sky Pillar, was it? You were coating it with Black Sand Sap."

"What's Black Sand Sap?" Ye Zhongming played dumb.

"Those pitch-black stems only found in swampy mud near water sources."

A nod confirmed it.

Color Man's suspicion was validated—yet as he mentally replayed the battle, his brow furrowed again.

"Testing its perception range... laying traps... luring it to study movement patterns... using the sap to slightly hinder mobility, creating an opening... wounding it to produce a blind spot... the clone exploiting

that gap... then delivering the killing blow yourself—all flawless. But why... did Sky Pillar freeze after the first injury? That shouldn't happen!"

His piercing gaze locked onto Ye Zhongming, who was now rubbing his bruised chest with zero dignity.

This—this was the real mystery.