

Apocalypse 1806

Chapter 1806: First experience (2)

Ye Zhongming frowned as he stared at the bed before him, feeling thoroughly displeased.

In his past life, he'd slept in all sorts of places—once even spending two days and nights trapped in ruins filled with rotting flesh and excrement.

But that was his past life. In this life, he'd never suffered such indignities. While not exactly fastidious, his living conditions had never betrayed the apocalypse around him.

Now, not only was the bed filthy, but the bedding looked like it had been dredged from a swamp. Was this some perverse humor of the spacefaring races?

"I heard each novice planet rotates periodically, but the novice camp never replaces anything from start to finish. Except... the novices themselves."

Shi Kangbo, slightly more tolerable than Bu Lanuo, shared this tidbit upon seeing Ye Zhongming's hesitation. Though both harbored ulterior motives toward the Star-Eye Clan, at this moment, they shared a sense of solidarity.

Fetid air, grimy bedding, and predictably awful rations—this trifecta threatened to end their Novice Battlefield run before it began. How could anyone fight effectively under such conditions?

Clang! Clang! Clang!

A bell tolled outside the camp, followed by a voice projected through hollow metal poles stationed throughout the novice quarters—reminiscent of 1960s rural Earth, albeit with slightly more advanced acoustics.

"Don issued equipment and assemble at the central grounds within ten minutes. Latecomers will die."

The authoritative voice sent a shiver through every novice—Ye Zhongming included. The speaker had infused the command with potent mental energy, strong enough to stagger even the Cloud Peak King before he recovered momentarily. His wariness spiked instantly.

However dilapidated the camp might appear, the reality was clear: the spacefaring races teemed with powerhouses, and his current strength placed him firmly among the lower ranks.

The group hastily donned their gear and bolted from the tent—not a second longer than necessary.

Though Ye Zhongming had expected hundreds of thousands given the myriad spacefaring races, only about thirty thousand beings congregated—far fewer than anticipated. Apparently, not every faction sent warriors.

Still, thirty thousand diverse lifeforms made for a staggering sight. Alongside humanoids, creatures of every imaginable configuration milled about—including a trio of dragon-like entities with massive wings, serpentine bodies, and dense scales that occupied a sizable area.

Could they be related to Yangos? Ye Zhongming mused, noting their identical morphology aside from missing magic crystals. The rest of the assembly resembled a cosmic menagerie—a zoo of nightmares.

Without military discipline, the gathering lacked order. Some stood quietly, others whispered, while many simply bellowed—until a single figure rose into the air and silenced them all.

As a level nine evolved, Ye Zhongming could briefly hover using techniques and equipment, but this being flew—effortlessly ascending a hundred meters to loom over the assembly.

"Welcome to the eve of death."

His greeting plunged the atmosphere into icy dread.

"I am Zizikaba of the Kenrencuo Clan, overseer of this Novice Battlefield."

He rotated slightly, revealing his grotesque physiology—three torsos branching from a single pair of legs (to Ye Zhongming, any non-humanoid qualified as a monster).

A different torso continued speaking:

"Your clans have explained the rules, so I'll only emphasize key changes."

"First: Private combat remains punishable by death. Second: No restrictions apply on the battlefield. Third: Daily rewards shift to tri-daily. Fourth: Bottom-tier elimination also occurs every three days. Fifth: Camp returns now happen tri-daily. Sixth: Duration extends to seven cycles—twenty-one cosmic days."

Each rule etched itself into the novices' minds—their survival depended on it.

Zizikaba rotated further, his third torso taking over:

"This iteration introduces... entertainments."

The declaration elicited both excitement and dread.

"One: Expanded zones offer more options. Two: A bounty list will designate high-value parasites and mutants. Three: Killing rivals now transfers one-third of their points to you—alongside loot."

The first two provoked murmurs, but the third sent shockwaves through the crowd. While the Novice Battlefield had always been lawless, its core purpose was hunting parasites—aligning with the spacefaring races' greater war.

This new rule blatantly encouraged fratricide. Wouldn't that undermine the event's original purpose? More pressingly, everyone's survival odds just plummeted.

"High rewards demand high risks," Zizikaba continued, his expression taunting. "Kill three rivals, and your location broadcasts hourly to all. Hunt wisely."

Ye Zhongming stroked his chin, arriving at a single conclusion:

We're playthings.

These "novices" were clearly just toys for their overseers' amusement.

"Four: Cooperative hunts earn bonuses. Bounty targets killed by multi-clan teams or groups over ten strong gain 10% extra points when split evenly. Each additional clan or ten members adds 5%, capping at double base value."

The crowd reeled. Encouraging both betrayal and cooperation? Contemplating the implications, many fell into frantic calculation.

Zizikaba—his three arms clapping—recaptured their attention.

"This will be the most chaotic Novice Battlefield yet—forging stronger, smarter warriors. Other surprises await discovery."

"Finally..."

"In twenty seconds, the camp comes under attack. Consider this your appetizer. Ready yourselves."

Chapter 1807: First Experience (3)

Boom!

Not from the promised attack, but from the novices erupting into chaos.

Some stood frozen in confusion; others bolted for their tents. A few clustered around hulking lifeforms for protection, while several transformed instantly into combat states—energy auras flaring, wings unfurling as those dragon-like creatures shot skyward.

"What do we do?" Jie Kui asked, brow furrowed.

Shi Kangbo and Bu Lanuo exchanged glances but didn't move. Their original plan had been to split off immediately once the battle began, but the new rules gave them pause. Maybe sticking together was the smarter play?

Their ocular recorders—embedded like contact lenses—flashed with updates, most prominently a bounty list of mutant lifeforms and parasites.

"Survive this, and tomorrow's real battle begins." With that, Zizikaba flew off.

Simultaneously, the camp gates burst open. Sections of the metal walls even collapsed, unleashing a flood of dark silhouettes. Novices near the breaches were instantly swarmed.

"Black Tapirs! It's Black Tapirs!"

"Parasite Bica-17... Segment-Swine Beasts?"

"Underground! Something's—"

"Veizi Clan! Above you, intercept them!"

"#%&@\$!!"

Initial shouts in Shadowtongue devolved into panicked native languages.

Ye Zhongming ignored Jie Kui, scanning the invading horde until—seconds later—he locked onto a target. "Move!" he growled, charging forward.

Jie Kui hesitated, then followed. Shi Kangbo and Bu Lanuo lagged further behind, faces dark with resentment at Ye Zhongming's unilateral decision.

The Cloud Peak King's target was a modest-sized parasite documented in Star-Eye archives: a Spined Skull Crawler, classified as Canis-Alpha Parasite #7.

The spacefaring factions named each Slave Race discovered, their parasites cataloged numerically. Duplicates defaulted to the earliest designation.

Spined Skull Crawlers were among the few parasites without physical advantages. Their threat lay in numbers—swarms of needle-toothed horrors that left barren wasteland in their wake.

This staged assault wouldn't unleash full swarms, however.

Ye Zhongming zeroed in on several scattered crawlers. His newest Morphing Weapon flashed as he hurled it—spear form, slicing through the chaos to impale one creature. A non-fatal hit; the parasite shrieked until Ye Zhongming closed in, crushing its vulnerable mandible with one punch.

The other Star-Eye warriors watched unimpressed. Spined Skull Crawlers posed no threat to level nine beings. They frowned as Ye Zhongming lingered over the corpse, baffled by his inaction—until he abruptly moved again.

His path meandered erratically—pausing at random corpses to scavenge scraps. Other novices sneered at the behavior.

Trash picking? The Star-Eye Clan really are paupers...

Bu Lanuo's patience snapped. After a terse exchange with Shi Kangbo, both stalked off, leaving Ye Zhongming with Jie Kui.

"You're staying?" Ye Zhongming finally paused in a relatively quiet corner, eyeing his sole remaining companion.

Jie Kui smirked. "I thought Bu Lanuo and Shi Kangbo were smart. Turns out they've got no clue what you're doing."

"Oh? Enlighten me." Ye Zhongming kept scanning their surroundings even as he engaged.

"You're avoiding combat—expertly finding gaps. Not once have you been pinned down. Why? Because kills here don't earn points."

Ye Zhongming nodded, approving both the analysis and Jie Kui's perceptiveness—likely honed, like his own, through unaffiliated survival rather than clan spoon-feeding.

"Also, these materials you're collecting might be low-value, but they're not useless. You're a craftsman, right? Premium materials exist, but securing them solo is tough, and fighting over corpses risks conflict."

Faced with such an astute ally, Ye Zhongming had no complaints.

"One more thing: observing others' combat styles. Whether they become enemies or allies in the next twenty-one days, intelligence is never wasted."

Jie Kui nodded vigorously—this, he felt, was the most crucial point.

Thus, two figures weaved through the chaos—dodging fights, scavenging discreetly, mastering the art of strategic loafing.

Outside the camp stood a building as crude as the city—but inside, cutting-edge tech hummed.

A massive light screen displayed the camp's carnage in real-time, logging each kill with precision.

Several figures observed, occasionally commenting.

"The Remnant Clan, Enzheng Stellarites, Luoshi Flameborn... The strong grow stronger."

Murmurs of agreement. Those factions' warriors were dominating.

"Where there's strong, there's weak. Several anticipated clans are underperforming."

"Can't be helped. If every batch excelled, where's the challenge?"

Chuckles all around.

"Wait—these two? Star-Eye novices by the garb."

The screen replayed Ye Zhongming and Jie Kui's maneuvers.

"Clever, but lacking valor," Zizikaba judged. The others nodded, already losing interest.

"Clear the field in ten. Open official shops. Rank kills: top five get ten points each; next ten, five; remaining top hundred, one point."

Chapter 1808: Vengeful Mist rainforest (1)

These warriors weren't particularly formidable in terms of strength—at least in Ye Zhongming's estimation, they appeared to be around level nine in evolutionary terms, and even then, fairly average ones.

But with the aid of their mechanical armor and disciplined battle formations, the troublesome mutant lifeforms and parasites were swiftly slaughtered without any chance to fight back.

Soon, order was restored in the novice camp, and all the corpses were hauled away.

The recorder embedded in their eyes displayed a number: 30,143. A few seconds later, the number shifted before settling at 30,098.

It quickly became clear—this was the count of remaining novices.

Meaning, in that brief period of chaos, forty-five novices had died.

Ye Zhongming surveyed the wreckage of the camp, a pang of melancholy striking him.

These warriors had likely been the elites of their respective planets—or at least, carefully nurtured by their factions to compete for quotas. If nothing else, they must have held some status and strength. Yet, they had perished before the main event even began.

Was this their tragedy? Or the universe's?

Zizikaba, who had vanished earlier, reappeared above the camp once the gates were sealed.

"Your recorders will display rewards for this surprise attack. Official shops are now open—exchange points for goods, or trade materials and magic crystals."

With that, he left, his earlier domineering aura completely absent.

The novices turned their attention to the camp's most "luxurious" structure—a tall building where, mere seconds later, some began rushing inside.

These were the ones who had earned points from the skirmish.

"Should we take a look?" Jie Kui asked, itching with curiosity but also sighing inwardly.

He had fully supported Ye Zhongming's earlier approach, believing it the wisest choice.

But now? The rewards had been distributed retroactively. He didn't know how much had been given out, but the thought gnawed at him. At the very least, they had gathered materials—low-value, yes, but in bulk. Maybe selling them could get them something?

Ye Zhongming suspected the materials wouldn't fetch much. Aslan had warned—the shops were exorbitant, designed to fleece them.

Still, browsing wouldn't hurt. It would give them an idea of what was available.

The two waited where they were—the shop was still packed, impossible to enter.

One of those dragon-like creatures even tried shoving its massive head inside, prompting yells of protest from those already crammed within.

Of course, they also had no desire to return to the Star-Eye Clan's rest area. That place was barely fit for living—and now, even their tent had collapsed.

After waiting over an hour, the crowd thinned enough for Ye Zhongming and Jie Kui to enter.

The interior was spacious, divided into two floors separated by an energy barrier. The upper floor was accessible only via a teleportation gate—their recorders indicated a 300-point minimum was required to ascend.

The first floor felt oddly empty, lined with ten machines. Each had a physical screen on the left and a low platform on the right, its center sealed by a fan-blade-shaped metal door. The former was likely the interface, the latter a retrieval port.

Though the crowd had lessened, all ten machines were still occupied. Ye Zhongming and Jie Kui had no choice but to wait.

Coincidentally, before a machine freed up, the Nangmao Clan entered.

Tension spiked instantly.

Private combat was forbidden here, but that didn't stop the Nangmao from hurling insults at Ye Zhongming's group.

They had been watching earlier—mocking them for cowardice, for fleeing instead of fighting.

Ye Zhongming remained unfazed, utterly ignoring them. Jie Kui, however, proved even more impressive—firing back without fear, his mastery of Shadowtongue’s most creative insults leaving Ye Zhongming in awe. How had he mastered so many profane combinations involving female relatives and verbs in such a short time?

Eventually, the Nangmao warriors retreated, reduced to empty threats of vengeance outside the camp. Too furious to even browse the shop, they stormed out.

Jie Kui, rather than basking in victory, wore a bitter smile. "Did I just mess up?"

Ye Zhongming shrugged. "My people have a saying: 'Indulge now, die later.'"

Jie Kui: "..."

Finally, a machine was freed up. The two approached—operation was simple, with items clearly categorized: food, clothing, weapons, equipment, and miscellaneous goods.

But as Aslan had warned—everything was outrageously expensive.

Ye Zhongming sighed inwardly. The Novice Battlefield might seem fair, but the major factions held insurmountable advantages. Their warriors arrived decked in top-tier gear, their spatial storage packed with unrestricted supplies. High-grade potions, scarce even among spacefaring races, were likely stockpiled in their inventories.

Meanwhile, the Star-Eye Clan's best efforts still paled in comparison.

If he had participated as a warrior of the Taros Red Dwarves, he'd have been armed to the teeth—not stuck with outdated equipment from cosmic eras past.

Jie Kui focused on finished gear, while Ye Zhongming scoured materials and unfamiliar items. Then they checked the material exchange list.

The haul from earlier? Worth one point—enough for the cheapest rations.

Disheartened, they left. Jie Kui was certain—he'd never see the second floor in twenty-one days.

Back at camp, Shi Kangbo and Bu Lanuo were absent. The two propped up their tattered tent, tidied up as best they could, and settled in for rest.

They could go days without sleep, but fatigue would only hasten their deaths.

The next morning, the camp gates opened on schedule. Novices streamed out, faced with thirty teleportation platforms leading to different zones—all detailed in their recorders, complete with brief introductions.

One by one, factions departed for their chosen destinations.

Jie Kui turned to Ye Zhongming, a hint of despair in his voice as he asked one last time:

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure."

With that, Ye Zhongming stepped onto the 27th platform.

Chapter 1809: Vengeful Mist Rainforest (2)

"Logically speaking, among the thirty thousand novices monitored by the spacefaring races across the seven Slave Race-controlled planets—excluding those ambiguously trained warriors—at least twenty thousand should originate from these seven worlds. In other words, there should be two to three thousand from the same race, yet we don't see that many identical lifeforms here."

"Earth may be a small planet, but it's still one of the seven. There should be hundreds of spokespeople, each distributing admission tickets. We should've seen nearly a thousand Earthlings here, but the entire country has only sent a handful—likely no more than ten from the whole planet."

"So where did the other novices come from? Why didn't Jikesu or Aslan mention this?"

Hidden beneath the broad leaves of a shrub, Ye Zhongming's mind raced through these inconsistencies, searching for answers but finding none. He'd have to ask Aslan and Jikesu later.

At the same time, his goodwill toward the Star-Eye Clan waned slightly. They hadn't been fully transparent with him.

But what was their motive for withholding information?

Beside him, Jie Kui was proving unexpectedly impressive. Despite his earlier reluctance and apparent lack of confidence in choosing this location, his performance since arriving had been nothing short of professional.

The Star-Eye Clan specialized in assassins, killers, and raiders—their trained warriors reflected this, and Jie Kui was no exception. Only Ye Zhongming, through sheer happenstance, stood apart.

This area, designated Zone 27, was called the Vengeful Mist Rainforest—a newly added trial zone for this Novice Battlefield.

Naturally, this meant its danger level historically exceeded what was suitable for novices, which was why Jie Kui had initially objected.

For Star-Eye warriors, simpler zones were paradise. Their combat style thrived there—lethal strikes allowing them to maximize kills per unit time while avoiding injury, sustaining themselves for the full twenty-one days.

Through gradual accumulation, they might've stood a real chance at amassing points.

But Ye Zhongming thought differently. After studying the provided intel, he chose this place. His reasoning: If you don't improve during these twenty-one days, relying solely on your current strength, the Star-Eye Clan has no hope of ranking well.

Especially under the new rules—where cooperation and betrayal were both incentivized—playing it safe to grind points was no longer viable.

There was another, more critical reason Ye Zhongming had set his sights on the Vengeful Mist Rainforest...

The two had been lying in wait for three hours, motionless. The rainforest's mist had soaked their clothes, its mild toxins inducing a maddening itch that tested their patience.

Ye Zhongming and Jie Kui were reaching their limits.

The issue wasn't just the discomfort—the mist's toxins weren't merely irritating their exposed skin; they were rapidly degrading their armor's durability.

The Vengeful Mist Rainforest lived up to its name.

For mobility, Star-Eye warriors wore lightweight leather armor—exceptionally crafted, as even Ye Zhongming, a master craftsman, had to admire its ingenious design and flawless execution.

His own set was roughly purple-grade in quality.

Yet the mist here was already eroding these high-grade pieces within hours.

Their target still hadn't appeared. If they waited much longer, their gear would deteriorate beyond repair—a loss they couldn't afford. Paying for repairs was impossible, and Ye Zhongming lacked both materials and expertise to fix them himself.

Just as they were about to abandon the stakeout, a faint rustling sounded in the distance.

Both tensed.

Something was brushing through the foliage.

Soon, a large, boar-like creature emerged, trailed by two smaller ones.

"Parasite Ping-7: Aesbeasts."

Thick hides, volatile temperaments, immense strength, blinding charges—no obvious weaknesses.

These weren't ideal prey for Star-Eye tactics, better suited to brute-force warriors trading blows until one side fell.

Silently, the two calculated the distance. Then, at the perfect moment—

Jie Kui struck.

He burst forward explosively—astonishingly agile after hours of stillness.

His arm shot out, a glint of steel flashing before the two juvenile Aesbeasts.

This was one of Jie Kui's retained abilities: his arm's afterimage would strike first, though with reduced force.

The mother Aesbeast, seeing her young attacked, snapped. All four eyes burned crimson as her coiled snout shot out, body lunging to shield her offspring.

Jie Kui's strike was blocked, but he pivoted effortlessly, darting sideways before—

Light-Stealing Heartstab!

A Star-Eye technique Jie Kui had mastered.

A suicidal, all-in attack trading life for lethality.

His twin-sectioned dagger—custom-forged for this move—slashed deep into the mother's flank, drawing an immediate fountain of blood.

Parasites were formidable, adults especially. Without the Slave Race's presence here to drain their energy, their growth was unchecked.

But Jie Kui was still a level nine evolved, clad in purple-grade gear, wielding one of the Star-Eye Clan's signature killing moves—and his target was immobilized, focused solely on protecting her young.

The mother roared, her elongated snout and powerful legs driving her toward Jie Kui in a devastating charge.

In head-on clashes, most parasites feared nothing.

Then—a juvenile's shriek.

The mother skidded to a halt, whipping her head around to see one offspring decapitated, the other impaled by an energy weapon, writhing on the ground.

She went berserk.

Abandoning Jie Kui—still locked in his attack's recoil—she turned on Ye Zhongming.

With her weakness exposed, the two made quick work of her.

Their records updated: Jie Kui +3 points, Ye Zhongming +4 (likely for finishing both juveniles).

"We waited here just to kill these things. Now, can you tell me why?" Jie Kui wiped his brow—the fight had been no cakewalk—but his respect for Ye Zhongming had grown.

The decisive blow had been Ye Zhongming's: a single punch that crippled the mother, robbing her of any chance to flee. Something Jie Kui, armed as he was, couldn't have achieved.

Instead of answering, Ye Zhongming carefully gutted the mother's carcass, extracting something with meticulous care.

"This is the reason."

Chapter 1810: Spirit Fire Rhino

Seeing Ye Zhongming lying in ambush nearby, Jie Kui swallowed back the words "Is this really going to work?"

Killing the Aesbeast had already proven Ye Zhongming's insight and strength. Asking now would be pointless.

But he still couldn't shake his unease. After all, this time, they were facing... something far more dangerous.

What Ye Zhongming had extracted from the Aesbeast's belly was a structure that only formed in lactating mothers—known among the spacefaring races as a Nursing Ring.

The Cloud Peak King wasn't sure if the parasite's "lactation period" aligned with Earth's biological classifications, nor did he care. All he knew, from Star-Eye records, was that the scent emitted by Nursing Rings had an irresistible allure for certain lifeforms.

And one such lifeform just happened to reside in the Vengeful Mist Rainforest.

This time, they didn't have to wait long. The ground began trembling, the vibrations growing stronger as Jie Kui's expression darkened.

There are too many of them!

Since they weren't engaging immediately, he glanced at Ye Zhongming, hoping to see at least a hint of caution on his face.

But there was nothing. His calm was infuriating, as if he were merely watching clouds drift by.

"Thirty-seven."

Ye Zhongming suddenly spoke the number.

Jie Kui froze, then realized he was referring to the approaching creatures. A shudder ran through him.

And for good reason.

Their targets were Spirit Fire Rhinos—a family-oriented, stampeding species of mutant lifeforms, each at least level eight.

The leaders were typically level nine, as were their mates. In powerful families, even a few dominant males could reach that tier.

Jie Kui had assumed a group of ten-plus rhinos with two level nines would be more than enough to handle. But thirty-seven?

By probability, that meant at least three level nines and the rest level eights. This was suicide.

"Four level nines. Thirty-three level eights."

Ye Zhongming's follow-up made Jie Kui want to curl up and die.

"Maybe... we should retreat?"

He felt it was a perfectly reasonable suggestion.

Instead, Ye Zhongming charged forward.

A sharp whistle pierced the air, instantly drawing the rhinos' bloodshot eyes toward them.

"I'll handle the small ones first. Guerrilla tactics."

Ye Zhongming's voice floated back, leaving Jie Kui no choice but to resign himself.

Boom!

The sudden noise startled Jie Kui. One of Ye Zhongming's traps had triggered—a Spirit Fire Rhino lost its footing mid-charge and crashed sideways. Before Jie Kui could blink, a solid-seeming shadow materialized, driving a dagger deep into the fallen beast's eye.

Blood sprayed. A piercing shriek followed.

Jie Kui didn't wait to see the outcome. He veered to the flank, taking up position at one of Ye Zhongming's prearranged ambush points.

Honestly, he had no idea why this spot was chosen, nor how hiding here was better than joining the fight.

But he'd overlooked one detail: that trap had just tripped a level eight creature at full charge...

The shadow clone drew the rhinos' fury, exploding on command into a toxic, mind-numbing mist.

Ye Zhongming emerged briefly on the mist's edge, leaving another rhino bleeding out before vanishing again into the rainforest.

The consecutive strikes enraged the family's alpha.

It could sense its first wounded kin fading fast. The second had lost a leg—among Spirit Fire Rhinos, such injuries meant being culled by younger members practicing their kills.

But its rage was interrupted by a psychic shockwave. By the time it recovered, another member lay crippled, its back split open.

The scent's location shifted. The alpha bellowed, redirecting the herd. The four level nines took up positions at the formation's corners—wherever the attacker struck, two would counter.

Then—another explosion.

Debris flew from the ruptured ground, mingling with lingering mist to throw the herd into chaos.

Ye Zhongming descended from above, landing at the blast's epicenter. The earth beneath the rhinos sank abruptly, freezing them momentarily—just long enough for hidden blades to slice upward, gutting several beasts.

More shadows materialized among the herd, weapons plunging into eyes and ears—their weakest points.

By the time counterattacks came, the mist had thickened. Ye Zhongming was gone again.

Watching from hiding, Jie Kui was dumbstruck.

Charging into a pack of four peers and dozens of near-equals? He'd never have the courage.

Yet the assault continued. Projectiles—Jie Kui couldn't tell what—rained from the trees, pinging harmlessly off thick hides but further enraging the herd.

The rhinos retaliated with gouts of flame, igniting the rainforest. What had been damp foliage dried instantly under intense heat, bursting into wildfire.

The level nines stomped rhythmically, sending shockwaves of fire rippling outward in scorching rings.

If they couldn't catch the slippery foe, they'd burn everything.

Watching flames lick past his hiding spot, Jie Kui marveled—How did Ye Zhongming predict their attack range so precisely without prior encounter?

Then—a mountainous silhouette materialized overhead, crashing toward the herd.

The alpha roared, its own spectral double launching skyward to meet the descending colossus.

BOOM!

The rhino's projection shattered. The mountain flickered but held, continuing its fall—until the other three level nines joined forces, their combined impacts finally dispersing it.

But in that split-second distraction, two more rhinos fell.

This time, the alphas caught sight of their killer.