

Apocalypse 1811

Chapter 1811: Killing all

Jie Kui tightened his grip on his weapon as the stampeding Spirit Fire Rhinos charged toward him.

True, Ye Zhongming had already taken out nearly ten of the thirty-seven rhinos, with several more severely wounded—but over twenty remained, including all four level nines. Facing this onslaught, Jie Kui couldn't help but feel a pang of fear.

Still, the fact that the herd was heading his way meant things were proceeding as Ye Zhongming had predicted. I should be fine... right?

As planned, when the rhinos passed his position, he was to strike the alpha—the strongest level nine.

Taking a deep breath, Jie Kui activated Light-Stealing Heartstab once more, combining it with his innate abilities to launch a full-force assault on the lead rhino.

The alpha roared, lowering its head to meet Jie Kui's charge horn-first.

BOOM!

The collision sent Jie Kui flying, while the alpha staggered, its forehead bloodied.

One-on-one, Jie Kui wouldn't have feared this beast.

Then—like a ghost—Ye Zhongming reappeared. But this time, his target wasn't the "small fry" at the rear. It was the wounded alpha.

A beam of light shot out first, followed by two Twin Poison Shadows. Then Ye Zhongming himself lunged in, fists blazing.

A level nine was still a level nine. Despite the dire situation, the alpha reacted with terrifying speed—whipping its body mid-air to present its armored flank toward Ye Zhongming while its tail lashed out like a steel whip.

The first shadow clone shattered on impact. The second's strike, deflected by the alpha's maneuver, only grazed its side before being obliterated by the tail swipe. The beam struck true, staggering the rhino just enough for Ye Zhongming's fist to slam into its ribs rather than its vitals.

The herd, enraged by their leader's plight, surged forward—but Ye Zhongming nimbly flipped onto the alpha's back.

Twin Morphing Weapons appeared in his hands, driving down toward the junction of the beast's neck and torso.

The other rhinos hesitated, afraid of hitting their leader. Only when openings appeared did they strike—each dodged by Ye Zhongming as he wrestled atop the alpha, one trying to buck the other off, the other fighting to pierce through impenetrable hide.

Jie Kui, recovering from Light-Stealing Heartstab's recoil, circled behind to pick off the level eights.

The real battle had begun.

Ye Zhongming's weapons were masterworks—not quite purple-tier, but surpassing gold. Under his relentless assault, they finally breached the alpha's hide, drawing first blood.

The alpha's fury ignited—literally. Its gray-green skin flushed crimson, radiating heat as faint flames wreathed its body.

Now or never.

Ye Zhongming hurled both weapons at two approaching level nines, freeing his hands—one seizing the rhino's horn despite the searing heat, the other cocking back for a devastating strike.

The punch that followed made Jie Kui's teeth ache just watching.

CRACK.

Two fractures echoed—one the alpha's skull, the other Ye Zhongming's hand.

Both collapsed.

Pale-faced, Ye Zhongming ignored the burns and fractures. As he hit the ground, he scattered seeds while countless faint shadows materialized around him—all mimicking his motion:

One palm pressed to the earth.

If energy flows were visible, threads would've been seen connecting Ye Zhongming to each shadow, channeling power into the seeds beneath the charging rhinos.

The shadows vanished instantly after transferring energy—no explosions, no toxins—but their work was done.

Purple vines erupted, entangling hooves mid-charge. Some rhinos stumbled; others tore through the vines, uprooting their fibrous networks—but the delay was enough.

Jie Kui capitalized ruthlessly, blades flashing as blood painted the rainforest.

Ye Zhongming didn't move. Pouring everything into Gravity Control, he strained to immobilize the herd, buying Jie Kui precious seconds.

By the time his hold broke and the vines withered, only five rhinos remained: four level nines, one level eight.

The alpha, rising unsteadily, bellowed in grief and rage—leading its pitiful remnant in a final, desperate charge.

Victory or extinction.

Ye Zhongming smiled through bloodied lips.

"Detonate."

The rhinos' bodies exploded from within—chunks of flesh and gore spraying as Jie Kui barely dodged.

The tide turned instantly. Ye Zhongming downed a potion, then lunged at the crippled alpha—a dagger finding its way into an existing wound before twisting viciously.

Jie Kui finished two more in rapid succession. For an assassin, wounded prey was a gift—every injury a lethal opportunity.

The last two fought on, but their struggles were futile.

When silence finally fell, Ye Zhongming and Jie Kui locked eyes—then collapsed in unison.

One from exhaustion, the other from sheer relief.

Surveying the thick hides, fire-imbued horns, and piles of magic crystals, Ye Zhongming—now flat on his back—allowed himself a triumphant grin.

Chapter 1812: Someone is here

The creature with no nose—just a patch of circular pores where one should be—grabbed a handful of soil, sniffed it, then ate it. Sitting cross-legged, its sparse hair fluttered in the breeze as it closed its eyes in concentration.

Dressed in tattered rags that barely covered its slime-coated greenish skin, this being radiated pure revulsion.

Around it, eight figures watched intently, the air thick with silence.

Soon, a blurry image materialized above its head: two figures battling a trio of parasites—one large, two small. The vision lasted mere seconds before dissipating.

The creature opened its eyes and stood, its voice like grinding metal. "This happened hours ago. They've moved on."

The implication was clear: while traces had been found, tracking the targets wouldn't be easy.

"Kuma, don't worry. Ten points the moment we locate him. My word."

A man clad head-to-toe in golden armor spoke coolly, though hatred dripped from every syllable.

The repulsive Kuma nodded. "And if I help kill him? What then?"

The question drew sharp attention from the others. Ten points just for tracking—what's the price for murder?

The golden-armored man hesitated before answering, "I'll kill him myself."

"No. I will."

A woman in sleek purple armor—design mirroring the man's—cut in. Unexpectedly, the man fell silent, his gaze drifting to the bundle clutched tightly in her arms.

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Once recovered enough to move, Ye Zhongming and Jie Kui began looting the battlefield.

Potions? Neither dared use them.

With twenty-one days ahead and this being merely the first, every drop counted. Today's intensity suggested they'd be spending hard-earned points on supplies soon.

"You skin them. I'll handle the rest."

Ye Zhongming took charge of the Spirit Fire Rhino horns—their most valuable material—requiring precision and time.

Jie Kui didn't mind. Back on his homeworld, menial tasks like this were beneath him. But now, surveying the carnage—especially the four level-nine corpses—pride swelled in his chest.

When had he ever taken down four level nines in one fight? Never.

What truly delighted him, though, was his point tally.

Previously: 3. Now: 35.

Thirty-five points might seem modest, but Jie Kui knew their worth—enough to buy decent gear in the shops—or trade for far better deals privately.

With that in mind, the earlier near-death struggle felt justified.

Fortune favors the bold—universal truth.

"Ye, what's your count?"

Ye Zhongming pried out an alpha's horn and magic crystal. "Fifty-two."

Jie Kui did the math: +48 for Ye Zhongming versus his own +32. A 16-point gap, yet he felt no envy.

The battle's MVP was undeniable.

The ingenious traps. The phantom-like short-range teleportation. The fists that hit like meteors. The ability to animate plants. That mountainous spectral strike...

Jie Kui was certain now—he stood no chance against this man.

Oh, and that mysterious beam attack, plus the radiant aura during combat...

"Hey, Ye—what was that final...?" Jie Kui mimed an explosion with a "boom".

While Ye Zhongming's tactics had been pivotal, the detonations that crippled the rhinos sealed their victory.

"Life-Ignition."

Jie Kui froze mid-motion, then gave a bloody-handed thumbs-up.

"Life-Ignition, huh..." He resumed skinning, muttering in awe.

He'd never known which Star-Eye ability Ye Zhongming had learned beyond Twin Poison Shadows. Now he did.

If his own Light-Stealing Heartstab was a killing move, then Life-Ignition was a trump card—one of the clan's ultimate techniques.

Few in the Star-Eye Clan mastered it. Not because it was complex, but due to its brutal requirements.

Unlike direct-damage skills, Life-Ignition was a two-phase ability:

Energy Infusion: Imbue carriers (objects, traps, even living tissue) with stored power.

Detonation: Expend energy to trigger explosions.

The kicker? Power scaled with input. More energy in both phases meant bigger booms.

But here's the catch: a minimum threshold existed. For a level nine, meeting it usually meant total energy depletion—leaving the user helpless post-blast.

Jie Kui grimaced. That Earth saying Ye mentioned—"Indulge now, die later"—fits this skill perfectly.

How much energy was needed to be able to blow up the skin of a defensive-type level nine lifeform? Yet Ye Zhongming had shattered level-nine defenses and was now casually harvesting crystals without even using potions.

Monstrous.

Jie Kui felt that he had made the right choice following Ye Zhongming.

Checking their rankings, Jie Kui couldn't see Ye Zhongming and himself at the front. Even if he patiently searched, he would take a minute to find it.

Now, he found himself at 2,102nd, while Ye Zhongming sat at 1,950th.

Of the original 30,098 novices, 29914 remained.

184 deaths in half a day.

"Ye, about this meat—"

"Shh!"

Ye Zhongming's sudden silence froze Jie Kui mid-sentence.

Someone's coming.

Chapter 1813: Too thin

Nine lives lingered among the corpses of the Spirit Fire Rhinos, occasionally searching for useful items.

"All the magic crystals have been dug out, the horns removed, and the inner fire pills taken," said a life-form completely wrapped in a white robe. Upon closer inspection, one would notice it floated slightly above the ground, its hood standing upright but revealing nothing but darkness inside.

"Twelve have been skinned, one half-skinned, and the rest still have their hides intact."

The speaker of these words looked almost human, except for its unusually long arms and hunched waist, its fingertips nearly brushing the ground.

"Nothing valuable left," said a third life-form, a companion of the long-armed one.

"These hides aren't bad," piped up a little girl with pigtails, standing only about 1.3 meters tall, her voice sweet and childish.

Were it not for her bulging goldfish-like eyes, she might have been called adorable.

The two-meter-long polearm she wielded looked bizarrely out of place compared to her petite frame.

"Probably worth... around fifteen points. Not bad," remarked a human as he tore into the flesh of a Spirit Fire Rhino, shoving raw meat into his mouth. Blood dripped from his chin and body as he chewed.

The sight made the man in golden armor and the woman in purple armor frown in disgust.

"Hofkaf, must you do that? Humanity has long moved past the age of eating raw flesh. Are you regressing?" snapped the purple-armored woman.

"Heh, at least I'm not dragging around a dead—"

"Shut up if you want to live!"

Another man strode over and slapped Hofkaf across the head, sending the half-chewed meat flying.

Hofkaf didn't dodge, just chuckled without apology, though he obediently fell silent.

"Keep your brother in line, Wade," the golden-armored man said, shooting him a glance before turning toward a grotesque life-form with patchy hair and a nose full of holes.

Wade shrugged but said nothing.

"Kuma, any progress?"

The golden-armored man crouched beside Kuma, who sat on the ground.

"Working on it," Kuma muttered, clutching a handful of dirt.

The golden-armored man glanced at the purple-armored woman, who nodded.

"Five more points for you."

Having successfully extorted more, Kuma's monstrous face twisted into a grin. "Then I'll hurry."

He swallowed the dirt, and moments later, hazy images appeared—scenes of Ye Zhongming delivering the final blow to the level-nine Spirit Fire Rhino.

When they saw him plunge his weapon into the beast's body, several of them whistled in excitement—no fear, only thrill.

"Hawkins, we've changed our minds. These two killed so many Spirit Fire Rhinos—they must have a ton of points. We've been helping you instead of hunting, so our scores are pitiful. We're at the bottom of the rankings now, and you know what happens to the last place after three days... death. You owe us. How about we split their points after killing them?"

The pigtailed, bug-eyed girl tapped her massive blade against the ground, staring at Hawkins and Amus.

Though the others didn't voice agreement, their gazes said enough.

"That wasn't the deal," Amus said coldly, clearly displeased.

"But you never mentioned these two would be so tough," countered the long-armed life-form, finding a convenient excuse.

"Are they really that strong to us?" Hawkins asked sharply.

"Of course! Two people took down four level-nine Spirit Fire Rhinos. Even the nine of us would struggle to do that."

"And don't forget all the level-eight ones. These two are no joke," the little girl added, giggling without a trace of fear.

Hawkins and Amus exchanged a glance. They knew these people were exploiting the situation, but they needed their help. After a moment's hesitation, they nodded.

"You'll get the points after, but we deliver the killing blow."

"Deal."

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"What's wrong?" Jie Kui grumbled, still upset they hadn't taken all the spoils. Those materials were far better than what they'd scavenged at the beginner's camp yesterday—easily worth over ten points.

"Someone's heading toward the battlefield. Quite a few of them."

"How'd you know?"

"Detection Sense."

Jie Kui scoffed. "The clan really spoils you, teaching you everything."

Detection Sense was a long-range scouting skill, useful for broad warnings but not precise details.

"Because I can actually learn it."

The retort made Jie Kui's face twitch.

Back in their clan, their preparation time had been short. They'd had to master parasite knowledge, study the races of the universe, and familiarize themselves with their gear—hardly any time for extra skills. Jie Kui hadn't managed it, but this guy had—a brutal reminder of the gap between them.

"What now?"

Having grown used to deferring to Ye Zhongming, Jie Kui asked for direction.

"Ignore them. We have other things to do." Ye Zhongming held up the Spirit Fire Rhino horn he'd been fiddling with.

"What's it for?" Jie Kui thought they should take it back to trade for points.

This time, Ye Zhongming didn't keep him in the dark. "The main material for the Spirit Fire Formation. It's for dealing with No. 36 on the list—the Biset II parasite, the Aqua Fox."

"WTF?! Are you insane?!"

The creatures on the list were ranked by points, descending from top to bottom. Even the lower-ranked ones offered more points than unlisted targets.

With thousands of entries, the top creatures were tempting, but given the new rules, they were clearly meant for team hunts—boss-level threats, not solo endeavors.

For example, Ye Zhongming's target, the Aqua Fox, was worth 280 points. Killing it would practically guarantee access to the official store's second floor!

To put it in perspective, a level-nine Spirit Fire Rhino was worth maybe five or six points, and even the Rhino King wouldn't exceed ten. A 280-point Aqua Fox? How strong must it be?

This wasn't something two people could handle.

No matter how much faith Jie Kui had in Ye Zhongming, he vehemently objected.

Ye Zhongming just smiled. "We're not going now. We need to buy supplies at camp first."

Seeing his protests ignored, Jie Kui rolled his eyes. Then he remembered something else. "Why not just kill the ones following us?"

Ye Zhongming sprinted ahead, calling back, "Too scrawny. Let them fatten up first."

"If they even dare to keep chasing us."

Chapter 1814: Who is following us?

"Getting old, can't walk much anymore." Ji Ruiguang stopped and sat down on a rock.

The entire team turned to glare at the Earthling, their expressions dark with irritation.

"Ji Ruiguang, what exactly are you trying to do?"

Ji Ruiguang chuckled and pulled open his clothes, revealing a wound that stretched from his left abdomen to his right chest—a gruesome gash over thirty centimeters long. Though it had scabbed over, fresh blood still seeped out with his movements.

"Got injured. Can't keep up like you all."

The group fell silent.

In the recent battle, this Earthling had indeed played a pivotal role. His abilities and timing had been crucial in slaying that powerful parasite.

As a result, their team—comprising over twenty members from six different races—had earned a 135% bonus on their base points after hunting a parasite ranked 310th on the target list. The final tally? 230 points, distributed among them at 9 to 12 points per person based on contribution.

This was just a warm-up. They had already set their sights on a colony of parasites—lower-ranked but far more numerous. If successful, each member could net another 30 points or so.

Combined with the scattered gains along the way, they could easily rack up 40 to 50 points by day's end. They acknowledged Ji Ruiguang's contributions, but he wasn't indispensable. The only reason they tolerated him was that his presence as an Earthling boosted their point rewards by 5%. Losing him now would be a net loss.

Of course... by the time the battlefield's deadline loomed, he might just become a walking point stash...

"How long do you need to rest?" rumbled a towering, giant-like lifeform.

Had Ye Zhongming been here, he would've recognized them—three members of the Numao Clan.

"Half an hour. Once the bleeding stops, we'll move. You can use the time to hunt nearby, squeeze in a few extra points."

Ji Ruiguang smiled amiably.

The group exchanged glances and dispersed to scout for prey. Every point counted, especially since their current rankings were still dangerously low.

Alone, Ji Ruiguang sat motionless, seemingly lost in thought—but in reality, he was scrolling through his record log.

"Mu Hanyi, 38 points... huh, just gained three more? Not bad."

"Gong Chai's score is pitiful—only six? Did something happen?"

"Kim Ri-seung's doing alright, over twenty."

"And Ye Zhongming? Let's see... damn, nearly fifty already. As expected of the former number one in China."

He scanned the rankings, noting the scores of every Earthling he recognized.

As the former leader of Zone C and de facto head of the Resistance Zone, Ji Ruiguang was a man of deep calculations. No one truly knew what went on in his mind.

In fact, his demeanor before and after reaching Nine Stars had become utterly unrecognizable—a shift many Resistance Zone officers had noticed.

The old Ji Ruiguang had been ruthless, pragmatic, and coldly efficient. But in the short time since ascending to Nine Stars, he'd adopted an air of detached serenity.

Some called it enlightenment. Others said his perspective had simply expanded.

This team was his creation, forged in his new mindset.

Of the twenty members, more than half had been personally recruited by him—strangers from different races, bound together under rules that allowed mutual slaughter. The difficulty of such a feat was staggering.

His injury? A calculated move—proof of commitment, a way to show these beings the benefits of cooperation.

A burst of combat noise echoed from nearby. Someone had stumbled upon prey.

"Such a target-rich environment... only possible in the Novice Battlefield."

Ji Ruiguang smirked.

"Safety in numbers." At least for now. As for later... well. Everyone had their own plans.

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"Ye, you feel that?"

Jie Kui didn't wait for orders before starting to dismantle the corpse. Some habits stuck fast.

Ye Zhongming gave a terse nod, his expression turning grave.

Someone was tracking them.

From the moment they'd finished harvesting the Spirit Fire Rhinos, all the way through the first day of the Novice Battlefield, a group had been closing in.

Thanks to Ye Zhongming's supernatural awareness and the Star-Eye Clan's Detection Sense, they'd managed to evade each approach.

For now, avoiding conflict was key.

First, they were outnumbered and outgunned—these weren't pushovers.

Second, killing now was pointless. The risk of counterattack was high, the points gained meager, and it'd only expose their location.

So they'd kept moving.

At first, they'd assumed it was just curiosity—other participants drawn by the battles. But every time they relocated, the same group reappeared.

That wasn't a coincidence.

Ye Zhongming checked his record log. The kill trackers—those who'd slain three or more—numbered in the dozens now, but none were nearby.

Not hunters... yet they kept coming.

The most likely culprits? The Numao Clan. But a glance at the rankings ruled that out—their points had spiked recently, meaning they'd been fighting, not chasing.

Then who?

"Fight?" Jie Kui, now sitting at 40+ points, was practically itching for action.

Ye Zhongming shook his head—no need to reveal themselves yet.

Jie Kui shrugged and went back to butchering, leaving Ye Zhongming mildly exasperated.

"You're a Nine-Star. At least offer some input?"

Soon, the corpse was processed. The pursuers were getting close.

"There."

Ye Zhongming pointed toward a denser stretch of rainforest, where the trees loomed taller.

"More prey?" Jie Kui's eyes gleamed—he'd become a point addict.

"No." Ye Zhongming broke into a sprint, no longer hiding their trail.

"I just want to see who's been following us."

Chapter 1815: Doll in arms

Ye Zhongming and Jie Kui stood within the canopy of an ancient towering tree, gazing in a specific direction.

If their pursuers were still following them, they would inevitably enter their line of sight.

They wanted to see who had been dogging their steps.

Being shadowed like this—like maggots clinging to bone—was an unpleasant feeling.

Jie Kui wasn't overly concerned. He agreed the situation was odd, but if they didn't want a direct confrontation, avoidance had worked fine so far, hadn't it? They'd been earning points while forcing their pursuers to exhaust themselves. Wasn't that ideal?

The two of them had been meticulous about covering their tracks, something that wasn't particularly difficult for them. The Star-Eye Clan's techniques in this regard were among the best in the universe.

"Drag it out. See who gets eliminated first in three days."

But Ye Zhongming was the leader, so Jie Kui deferred to him.

Yet... shouldn't they have appeared by now?

Based on their earlier estimates, the trackers should've already come into view.

Ye Zhongming's brow furrowed instinctively. A sense of unease settled in his chest.

"Let's go," he said abruptly.

"Abnormality signals danger." If the expected pursuers hadn't shown up, there were too many possibilities—and none of them were good.

"Wait." Jie Kui stopped him, tilting his chin toward the distance. "They're here."

Ye Zhongming halted mid-turn and followed his gaze.

At the edge of their vision, seven figures emerged.

That number alone made Ye Zhongming's unease deepen.

"Weren't there more when I first used Detection Sense?"

"Netherrealm Star People?"

Jie Kui's expression darkened as he pointed at a white-robed figure floating midair.

Ye Zhongming had skimmed their profile during his crash course on cosmic races, but time had been limited.

This race was a sentient energy-based lifeform, few in number but universally powerful, often possessing bizarre abilities. Their strengths lay in individual combat prowess and devastating skills, while their weaknesses were low population and glaring vulnerabilities—particularly against mental attacks.

"Huh? That brat?"

Jie Kui's attention shifted to a diminutive figure. At this distance, her oversized blade was more visible than she was.

Ye Zhongming recognized her, too. The reason for Jie Kui's tone was simple—during last night's trial, this girl had been notoriously aggressive, bulldozing through the camp, picking fights with anyone in her path. The two of them had even scavenged discarded materials from her kills.

"Shit."

Jie Kui's voice dropped to a whisper, his body tensing.

"That half-bald freak with patchy hair—he's from the Tearhound Ghost Clan. A master tracker!"

The previously indifferent Jie Kui now radiated lethal focus. Ye Zhongming could practically feel the killing intent emanating from him.

Not fear. Not panic. Just the cold desire to eliminate the threat.

"Tearhound Ghost trackers don't follow aimlessly. Once they lock onto prey, they never let go. Only two outcomes: they give up, or the target forces them to."

Ye Zhongming knew of them, but only vaguely. Jie Kui clearly had deeper knowledge.

"Can't shake them?"

"Nearly impossible." Jie Kui hesitated, then admitted, "At our current level? Basically, no chance."

A pause. "Thank the stars we're from the Star-Eye Clan. Our ability to erase traces is top-tier. Anyone else would've been caught already."

Ye Zhongming didn't respond; instead, studying the remaining four figures.

Aside from the Netherrealm Starian, the Tearhound Ghost, and the dwarf girl, the other four looked entirely human.

Earthlings? Ye Zhongming wasn't sure. If they were, why team up with aliens to hunt him?

He shot Jie Kui a questioning glance, prompting an immediate, defensive reply:

"Not me. I don't know them."

"Wasn't accusing you."

"They look like you, though."

"And you look like Peppa Pig."

"What's a Peppa Pig?"

Ye Zhongming chuckled. "Let's move." He signaled retreat.

The enemy outnumbered them, and their strength was undeniable. That little girl alone was a problem.

But the moment they turned—

ATTACK.

"You're not leaving."

A voice laced with killing intent reached them a split second before two spiraling fists slammed into their bodies.

No warning. No approach. Just sudden violence.

Caught off guard, they could only dodge blindly.

THUD. THUD.

Both were hit, hurled from the tree.

Ye Zhongming felt white-hot agony explode in his right chest. His lungs seized, and he coughed blood mid-fall. A desperate grab at a branch barely diverted his trajectory.

Jie Kui fared worse. The blow had shattered his left shoulder, rendering the arm useless. In combat, such an injury was worse than a stab wound—crippling his fighting capacity.

Near-fatal.

In the distance, the seven pursuers hadn't missed the commotion.

The dwarf girl grinned, hefting her massive blade. "Plan worked. Looks like those two pinned down your targets. Let's go!"

A battle junkie at heart, she charged ahead without waiting, her small frame somehow shaking the ground as she sprinted, kicking up debris in her wake.

Hawkins and Amus exchanged a glance, their eyes alight with predatory glee. Unlike their impulsive companion, they didn't rush. Instead, their attention locked onto a bundle in Amus's arms—

A luxurious golden quilt, within which lay a withered, blue-skinned doll, its neck stitched shut with black thread.