

The Gods 120

Chapter 120: You Shouldn't Be Here

“!!!”

Li Bola's eyes flew wide open, staring at Cheng Shi in shock as if a revelation had hit her.

“You... you're saying...”

“You've figured it out, right?”

If you die, won't the secret be left out in the open for anyone to discover?

If that's the case, what's the point of guarding it for so long?

So, a self-destructive attack surely isn't meant to deal with the immediate threat!

It's highly likely... it's to protect the final secret!!”

A manic grin spread across Cheng Shi's face.

“Who says the secret has to be behind that door?”

Why can't the secret be on the guardian himself?

Or even better, why can't the secret be the guardian?”

“!!!”

Li Bola stared at Cheng Shi for a long while, her expression torn with indecision. Finally, after seemingly making up her mind, she spoke:

“We’ve been through life and death together. I don’t want to doubt you, but, Cheng Shi...

Are you really not hiding something from me?

How do you know so much? How did you know... that he’s a puppet, and about all these details?”

“?”

Cheng Shi was caught off guard.

At a moment like this, when I’ve just pieced together such a brilliant and dazzling clue, you, my most trusted teammate, don’t even praise me? Instead, you start doubting me?

Do I really look that much like a villain?

“...”

But...

If you must ask, I can only say that it’s all fate’s doing.

It just so happened that in a previous trial, I found something related to this one...

But how do I explain that?

Coincidence?

Maybe. Maybe not.

Cheng Shi realized something, but he didn't want to dwell on it too much.

He preferred to believe that his future was something he carved out himself, not something driven by predetermined fate.

So, after a moment of thought, he decided to be a bit more straightforward.

"Is it possible..."

Just a hypothetical, okay? Is it possible that I'm just a tiny, tiny bit... smarter than you?"

He pinched his fingers together, indicating the tiniest amount.

Li Bola, seeing his playful gesture, couldn't help but let out a snort of laughter.

"Though it doesn't exactly align with my instincts about people... Fine, I'll trust you this once.

Cheng Shi, don't disappoint me."

Kidding me? Cheng Shi never lies!

With that, Cheng Shi bent down again and whispered a name into the black-robed figure's ear.

"Zangier!"

The leader of Alchemical Creations Department, the great scholar from the Tower of Logic, the once-in-a-lifetime genius of creation!

Could this be the “reset word” that would unlock the answer?

Cheng Shi called out the name, glancing at the puppet.

And then...

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

Nothing happened.

Not even a fart.

The grin on Cheng Shi’s face froze.

The hopeful, admiring glint in Li Bola’s eyes dimmed as she blinked in confusion.

“Hah... ha ha... This is just... a minor blip, totally unexpected.”

Cheng Shi quickly rubbed his face, forcing a confident smile as he mentally pumped himself up.

No worries, I was just simplifying things. The next one will definitely work!

So, he leaned in again and tried:

“Ardos!”

“...”

“Alchemy! Wait, no—Alchemy School!”

“...”

“The Tower of Logic!!”

“...”

“Truth!!!”

“...”

“Open Sesame!”

“...”

I give up. Let the world burn.

“Ku ku ku ku—”

It sounded like someone was struggling to hold back their laughter.

Cheng Shi whipped his head around in fury and immediately spotted a face flushed red from suppressing laughter.

Li Bola, with a tiny hand of wind pinching her back, was struggling to keep a straight face. She tried her best to look serious, even offering a small encouragement:

“Try... ku... try again!”

Thanks. That really “ku ku” got to me.

Cheng Shi forced a crooked smile, pinching the bridge of his nose in exasperation.

Slumping to the ground in defeat, he muttered, “Just laugh already.”

“HAHAHAHA!”

...

Today, the wind was annoyingly noisy.

And my silence was deafening.

—Excerpt from *The Clown’s Recollections*

...

Li Bola stood at the door to the room’s far end, bow drawn, arrow nocked, and solemnly asked:

“Are you ready?”

Cheng Shi’s smile was strained, but he nodded anyway.

The ranger sensed his resolve before reminding him:

“We don’t know what’s behind this door, nor what traps the bard and warrior might have laid. You must stay close to me. If things get dangerous...

Forget about the key. Your own survival comes first.”

The “key” she referred to was, of course, the black-robed puppet that Cheng Shi had been dragging along.

After several unsuccessful attempts to break the puppet out of his self-contradiction loop, Cheng Shi had finally given up.

He and the ranger had decided that it was time to stop wasting time and continue forward.

Since the trial’s fate node hadn’t yet revealed itself, it meant that Qin Chaoge and Ji Ran, who had entered earlier, also hadn’t found the answer yet.

There was still hope!

This also meant that even if the black-robed man wasn’t the answer, he might still be the key to finding it!

Cheng Shi was confident in his theory. Li Bola, unable to argue against his persistence, reluctantly agreed to carry the “key” forward.

“Let’s go!”

As soon as Cheng Shi gave the word, Li Bola kicked open the door, firing two wind arrows in rapid succession. They flew too fast for the eye to follow as they whistled into the room.

The wind howled, but the arrows hit nothing.

The room was empty.

No, perhaps it was more accurate to say that this door didn't lead to a room after all.

Behind the door lay the void.

The chapel they were standing in seemed like a buffer zone between reality and the void, a liminal space bridging the two realms.

When Li Bola realized that the door led directly into the void, her expression darkened.

Fighting a [Fate] follower who had already entered the void ahead of them... was never a favorable scenario.

Cheng Shi, on the other hand, perked up as soon as he saw the void, regaining some of his energy.

I knew it!

There's no way a gambler loses every time, and no way a child cries every day!

Full circle, and I'm back on familiar ground!

He patted Li Bola on the shoulder, signaling her to stay calm, and then, dragging the heavy "key," he stepped through the door.

Once again, Cheng Shi's vision darkened and his consciousness began to blur.

This time, entering the void felt different from any of the previous times. He could distinctly feel himself pressing against a transparent membrane, like a barrier separating existence from the void, keeping reality out.

Cheng Shi fell through this barrier for what seemed like an eternity, like drowning with no way to fight against it.

The oppressive weight and suffocating blindness gnawed at him, and an unfamiliar sense of panic welled up inside him.

“Am I... dying again?”

His head began to throb.

His normally calm mind felt like a meteor had crashed into it, boiling his thoughts in chaos.

Memories began to flash before him, one after another, as images from the past bubbled up from the depths of his consciousness.

Lonely days in the orphanage, the struggles of being adopted, the old man’s joy when he got into university, the old man’s pride when he found a job...

As the timeline drew closer, the memories became sharper, the details more vivid.

Especially the recent trials—they all replayed in his mind, every scene, every moment, as if he were living through it all over again.

The longer the flashbacks continued, the more Cheng Shi felt like he was truly reliving his life.

That crushing exhaustion of surviving and the looming fear of failing to make it filled his entire body, leaving him utterly disoriented.

Why did I come here?

He began to doubt himself.

Was his life really flashing before his eyes? Was he going to die this time for real?

In his previous deaths, he had never had the chance to reflect on his life.

So it's true... that when you're about to die, you see your past. You remember everything.

Old man, did you ever think that I'd be seeing you again under these circumstances?

I guess... I'm going to disappoint you...

I hate this.

Dying like this.

The fall continued, and the memories seemed to freeze.

Just then, a voice called out from the far reaches of the void.

"Come, over here, I'm waiting."

The voice pierced through the void, through the barrier, through everything, and reached his ears.

Like a thunderclap, it jolted Cheng Shi's fading consciousness.

He snapped his eyes open, and suddenly, an immense strength surged through his body. In an instant, he broke free from the sticky, suffocating state.

The countless bubbles of memories burst and vanished into the depths of his mind.

He glanced around, spotting the path toward the voice, and with all his might, he swam toward it.

The barrier that had seemed impenetrable now felt as fragile as paper. With a single burst of effort, Cheng Shi broke through it and fell back into the void.

And now, his feet were truly planted in the void!

An endless expanse of black, vast and limitless.

Cheng Shi's eyes reflected both the relief of surviving and the dread of impending trouble.

He stared at the familiar figure in front of him, the person who had just saved him, his face growing darker with every passing moment.

"Surprised?"

"You... shouldn't be here."