

## The Gods 15

### Chapter 15: The Trial Ended Early

“Based on the information compiled by the experts in the Mage Channel and what I’ve gathered from various trials, some facts are clear:

The Land of Hope should be the largest continent in the [Trial Grounds].

Over its surface, countless nations and factions have risen and fallen. Among the most well-known, and the ones most relevant to the period of our current trial, are several large god-worshipping factions that ruled for thousands of years.

These include the ‘Nature Alliance,’ which worships the [Life] path, the ‘Grand Tribunal,’ which follows [Order], the ‘Tower of Logic,’ devoted to the pursuit of [Truth], and the ‘Nation of [War],’ which emerged from the chaos at the end of the [Era of Civilization].

The attack of the Skeleton Army on the Land of Hope took place during the continental wars of the late [Era of Civilization].

Faced with the growing threat from the underground forces, these three factions, who had been warring with each other, once again allied to fight a common enemy.

Where we are now, Forest County, was part of the ‘Grand Tribunal’s’ territory, an administrative district closest to the entrance of the underground world, the [Abyssal Volcano].”

For most of their journey, Cao Sansui had been providing Cheng Shi with a detailed account of the history of the Land of Hope. After hearing his stories, Cheng Shi finally had a rough understanding of the region.

“The distribution of underground powers is much more complex,” Cao Sansui continued, “and since I’m not a follower of either the [Descent] or [Chaos] paths, I don’t know much about that part.

Furthermore...”

He glanced at Nangong meaningfully, adding, “Followers of those paths generally don’t like sharing information.”

Nangong, caught off-guard, lowered her head and muttered, “Sorry, my rank is too low. I haven’t paid much attention to those things.”

Cao Sansui shook his head. “Nothing to apologize for. Since the Faith Game began, everyone has been fighting for survival. Just staying alive is difficult enough. Not everyone has the luxury to... never mind, let’s not talk about it.

We’re on the right track—up ahead is the Stormwind Mountains. There aren’t many settled groups near the mountain range, mostly harmless nomadic tribes. We can find a secluded spot there and wait for the trial to end.

Cheng Shi was right: after the test of blood and fire, the danger is over. That’s always been [War’s] style!”

Chen Chong continued leading the way at the front, still on high alert despite the fact that seven hours had passed since they escaped the firestorm, and only three hours remained until the trial ended.

“Better safe than sorry. Who knows, maybe the ‘song’ part of the ‘Song of Blood and Fire’ hasn’t shown up yet.”

Everyone froze for a moment at his words, then gradually burst into quiet laughter.

Song Yawen, grinning, added:

“This isn’t a trial of [Deceit], so it shouldn’t be that bad. But...”

He turned seriously to Cheng Shi and said:

“Seriously, thank you, Brother Cheng. Without you, we might not have made it.”

This was no exaggeration, and everyone’s expressions were filled with gratitude as they looked at Cheng Shi. Even though they didn’t fully understand how he had saved them, they knew he had.

That’s the way things worked nowadays. Every high-level player had their secrets, and most people didn’t pry into the hidden cards of a powerful teammate.

Cheng Shi, feeling a bit embarrassed, smiled awkwardly. When it came to the Terror Fiends, yes, he had played a role, but as for the firestorm...

He quietly fiddled with the die in his hand, offering only a modest smile without saying anything.

“Let’s set up camp here, on this small hill,” Chen Chong suggested. “The visibility is good for scouting, and we can set up a ‘coffin camp’.”

They walked a bit further, stopping on a low hill before Chen Chong began digging into the ground with his shield-sword.

The others didn’t stand idly by either, pulling out tools from their personal storage and helping out.

In survival-type trials, whenever the trial location is on the surface and no immediate combat is taking place, players typically dig a deep hole, creating a space beneath the surface to set up camp, similar to how ants create their homes.

Because these camps resemble burial plots, they are jokingly called “coffin camps.” The primary purpose is to avoid surface dangers.

As for threats from the underground, there’s no need to worry about those. The [Underground World] isn’t something you can reach just by digging—it’s more like a separate dimension.

Rather than worrying about underground threats, it's better to focus on preventing the coffin camp from collapsing in on itself.

Soon enough, they had dug a decent space, and as the sunset faded, the group retreated underground, taking out food to replenish their energy.

Each person pulled out light, convenient meals. Song Yawen and Cao Sansui even had hot soup noodles, an impressive and appetizing treat.

Cheng Shi, on the other hand, quietly pulled out a finger-shaped bread roll and a bottle of tentacle slime drink.

“.....”

“.....”

“.....”

As the slimy substance slurped down his throat, everyone fell into an awkward silence.

Song Yawen gagged a few times, covering his mouth as he muttered:

“Now I’m starting to believe Brother Cheng really isn’t the Chosen...”

Nangong frowned deeply, then broke her beef patty in half and handed it over.

Cheng Shi accepted it without hesitation, gratefully saying, “Thank you.”

“You... haven’t done a food trial recently? Why are you drinking... that instead of cola?”

“Huh?” Cheng Shi mumbled through a mouthful of food. “Oh, I did! This finger bread is fresh, just made yesterday.”

“...”

Cao Sansui looked at him in disbelief. “You’re at 2000 points, and you choose to eat that?”

“Huh? Who told you I’m 2000? I’m at 1501.”

“...”

Chen Chong chuckled helplessly. “Why lie about your ladder score? Cheng Shi, you wouldn’t happen to be...”

Before he could finish, a violent spatial distortion rippled through everyone’s bodies.

The group froze, eyes wide as they exchanged stunned glances.

The feeling was unmistakable—it was the signal that the trial had ended.

“What the hell? It’s only been 23 hours?!”

Cao Sansui pulled out his pocket watch to double-check his anchor time. He hadn’t made a mistake—it had only been 23 hours, with another full hour remaining.

Everyone was equally baffled. This had never happened in any trial before.

But rather than being excited for an early end, everyone furrowed their brows in concern.

Change often brings risk.

No one could say for sure whether the trial ending early was a good or bad thing.

However, these were matters beyond the control of the players. Before anyone could say more, the six figures began to fade away, leaving only the food they had been holding, which promptly fell to the ground with a thud.

As he stared at the fallen food, a sinking feeling gnawed at Cheng Shi's heart.

"Dammit, my 'Scorn of the Dead' and 'Prosperity of Yesteryear' potions... they haven't paid me back yet!"

[Special Trial (Song of Blood and Fire [War]) Challenge Cleared]

[Scoring in progress, calculating rewards...]

[Player: Cheng Shi, Performance Score: S]

[Reward Item: Mask of Mockery (B) x1]

[Reward Item: Mask of Confusion (A) x1]

[Reward Item: Mask of Gratitude (A) x1]

[Reward Item: Mask of Satisfaction (S) x1]

[Reward Item: Mask of Desire (B) x1]

[Path to Godhood +12]

[Ladder of Ascent +2]

[Current Path to Godhood Score: 2116, Global Rank: 471,998]

[Current Ladder of Ascent Score: 158, Fate Path Rank: 69]

[Trial complete, exiting...]

His vision went black, and when Cheng Shi opened his eyes again, he was back on the rooftop. He glanced at the opposite building and saw the young man surnamed Xie, covered in blood, slumped at the edge of the rooftop, staring back at him.

In special trials, no matter how many days passed within the trial, the exit time was always synchronized for all players, just as the entry time had been.

Seeing Xie's miserable state, Cheng Shi offered some words of sympathy:

"Hey, brother, you've got skill. Survived another 7 days, huh?"

The young man nodded silently, his face still pale with fear.

It looked like his trial hadn't been easy.

Then again, Cheng Shi's own trial hadn't exactly been a walk in the park either.

Suddenly remembering something, he quickly checked the global population count.

[Current Global Follower Count: 7,211,293,956]

!!!

A billion people had died!

In most special trials, losing a few million was considered a lot. This time, they had lost a billion?!

The gods... they're accelerating.

A shiver of fear and helplessness gripped Cheng Shi's heart. He glanced at the storage warehouse he had built on the rooftop and then reached out, touching the invisible air barrier in front of him, laughing bitterly.

"Player? More like a pawn in their game."

Without any unexpected events, he and his team should have been among the billion who were eliminated. But for some reason, the Meteor Firestorm had given them a way out.

Could it be because...

Cheng Shi pulled a pale die from his pocket.

This was the [Divine Artifact] he had chosen when selecting his path of fate—a die that could only ever roll a 1.

But over the course of various trials, he had learned that bone dice were typically the [Fate] god's artifact, able to land on any number. So what did his die represent?

And then there were the masks he had just received...

Quickly, Cheng Shi stepped into his storage warehouse, opening a special door. Inside was a row of white masks displayed in acrylic cases, and he fell into deep thought once again.

Flattery, sycophancy, disdain, admiration, indifference, frustration... dozens of masks were arranged in rows, each one with a distinct expression.

But their design was strikingly similar—just a snow-white face with expressive eye holes.

Cheng Shi had tried putting the masks on his face before, but they never seemed to fit, and their size was always a bit off.

“Ever since I gained that talent, special trials have stopped giving me anything other than these masks. What on earth are they for?”

He sighed, staring at his player profile, feeling more lost than ever.

—

[Cheng Shi, Male, 22 years old]

[Fate: Void]

[Faith: Deceit]

[Class: Priest]

[Path to Godhood Score: 2116, Global Rank: 471,998]

[Ladder of Ascent Score: 158, Fate Path Rank: 69]

[Talents:

– Lies of Yesterday (SS): Deceit faith talent, active. Temporarily replace your faith with that of your most recently deceived follower.

– Master of Deception (S): Deceit faith talent, passive. Your lies are more easily believed, and unless the target experiences cognitive dissonance, they will not detect your deception. You can also sense all other forms of deception.

– Offering to the Void (S): Deceit faith talent, active. When an object you fabricated is widely accepted as real by others, it becomes real.

– The Many Faces (S): Deceit faith talent, passive. Special trial rewards will be replaced by the special item [Masks of the Many Faces]. This talent cannot be replaced by other talents.

– Shared Divine Grace (S): Priest class talent, active. When healing members of the same species, healing will be transferred from one to another. For each additional target, healing effectiveness and range are increased.

...]

[Items:

– Die of Fate (Predetermined) (S): You can never change the fate of this die.

– Fool's Lips (Fused) (S): It likes to lie whether you like it or not; it enjoys deceiving, and that includes you.

– Masks of the Many Faces (SABC): One face for all, all faces for one. Quantity: 47.

– Prosperity of Yesteryear (A): Healing potion. Searches through memory to restore the user to their peak physical state. Quantity: 93.

...]

[Skills:

– Basic Healing, Chain Heal, Light of Healing, Calm, Sleep, Curse Removal, Resistance Shield, Prayer of Radiance...