

The Gods 159

Chapter 159: Cheng Shi's Disclaimer

Fang Shiqing and the other two Torchbearers hadn't finished their watch yet.

They were hiding in the wine cellar, peeking through small holes in the ceiling to monitor their surroundings, keeping watch for the city guard knights resting nearby.

After a thorough exchange, Cheng Shi finally understood all the details of this trial.

In fact, the war had already begun before the players awoke at the start of the trial.

The [Twilight Church]'s Death's Bell Knights had somehow breached Gasmira's outer walls and were now charging like mad dogs into the residential districts between the outer and inner city.

As part of the outer wall defense forces, the city guard knights had been scattered during their retreat, broken into small groups scattered between the inner and outer city.

Their commander had ordered them to fight to the death with no retreat, so they had no choice but to follow him, regrouping the remnants of their forces while resisting the onslaught.

Fortunately, the commander was a skilled leader, and the soldiers were familiar with the terrain. With the morale born from unity, they were able to repel wave after wave of enemy attacks.

But that didn't last long—on the third day of the war, the commander died.

He died silently, mysteriously, inside a trench where he had been taking a brief rest. His death was bizarre, inexplicable.

Without their spiritual leader, the squads could no longer withstand the enemy's tsunami-like attacks. They began to retreat, regrouping with other scattered city guard knights, preparing to fall back to the inner city.

To achieve their goal, the Torchbearers had to stick close to the city guard.

In a time like this, trying to enter Gasmira's inner city and approach the experimental grounds with just the identity of a lone city guard knight was impossible.

The scholars wouldn't allow random, scattered soldiers to seek refuge in the inner city. They would only accept organized squads, which could then be regrouped into a new resistance force.

And so, under the relentless bombardment of the [Twilight Church]'s Doomsday Brigade and the frenzied assaults of the Death's Bell Knights, the six players fought alongside the squad, making it to the base of the inner city walls.

But it was here that they realized—the outskirts of the inner city had already fallen, and the flames of war had reached the central academy district of Gasmira.

They were too late.

“Our mage teammate has taken leadership of the squad. Along the way, we repeatedly changed routes to avoid the Death's Bell Knights' killing paths as much as possible. But even so, we were still found by small groups of enemies, which wore down our numbers.

Honestly, we've survived up to this point largely thanks to the disorganized chaos of the [Chaos] followers.

They didn't attack in organized waves, nor did they launch coordinated strikes. Instead, they indulged in aimless slaughter and randomly set fires everywhere.

Even though they were everywhere, each of them acted on their own whims, drastically slowing the [Twilight Church]'s advance.

Yet, despite all that, Gasmira still fell...”

By the time Fang Shiqing had finished explaining, Cheng Shi had pieced it together in his mind.

The Tower of Logic didn't lose this war due to a lack of strength; it was due to treachery!

It was clear that something had gone wrong internally in Gasmira!

This reminded him of a recent trial, The Trial of Blood and Fire, where the Grand Tribunal's elemental judges had mistakenly bombarded the wrong location due to faulty intelligence.

It seemed that by the end of the Age of Civilization, the surface powers had been so thoroughly infiltrated that they resembled sieves.

And the Tower of Logic had not been spared.

To have two walls breached in four days by a bunch of disorganized lunatics? Clearly, someone on the inside must have been helping them!

And that someone wasn't working alone!

A mole!

There had to be a mole inside Gasmira.

But it was too late to dwell on that now. The tide of war had already shifted.

Still, it wasn't entirely too late—after all, the trial wasn't over yet. The players still needed to cooperate with the NPCs.

And the first step in that cooperation would be to root out the mole within the knight squad!

That's right—there had to be something wrong within Fang Shiqing's squad as well!

Cheng Shi was 100% certain that a follower of [Chaos] had infiltrated the city guard during the chaos.

Perhaps these infiltrators didn't directly target the squad but used their identities as scattered soldiers to sneak into the inner city. Or perhaps they had even deeper plans. Regardless, it was clear that this squad had been compromised.

For [Chaos], confusing others' perceptions was the simplest of tasks.

The Torchbearers had already noticed something was wrong and had even identified some suspects.

Cui Qiushi calmly observed the situation around them and began detailing the identities of those they suspected.

"Arkade, a city guard knight we dug out from the ruins of the outer city on the second evening. He's a warrior of [Truth], an expert in hand-to-hand combat, but he's been using an injury as an excuse to stay off the front lines ever since.

Yesterday, while I was on watch, I noticed drops of blood falling from him during the march, as if he was signaling to someone outside.

Jacali, a Wind-Tamer Ranger who, on the third morning, broke through the alert zone while being chased by a small group of Death's Bell Knights. He claims to be able to transform into wind, but we've never seen him do it.

Allen, the deputy commander of a small city guard squad who joined us yesterday. He's a learned scholar, supposedly meant to guard the truth and hold back the enemy, but he's been trying to persuade us to flee to the central academy."

"And..."

With each name, Cheng Shi's frown deepened. Eventually, he gave up trying to keep track of them all.

“So, there are more newcomers in your squad than the people you’ve been fighting alongside all this time?”

Fang Shiqing nodded gravely.

“Yes. We couldn’t refuse these soldiers’ assistance because we’re too weak. Without gathering the remnants of the army, we’d die even faster.”

That made sense, but it also made the situation much more complicated.

In the chaos of war, a ragtag army composed of soldiers from various sources was full of holes.

Calling them a “sieve” was being generous.

They didn’t even have a screen—everything leaked through!

Cheng Shi furrowed his brow, lost in thought for a moment, before asking:

“Is there anyone you can trust? They don’t need to be completely cleared of suspicion—just someone you trust 50%.”

“Fifty percent?” Bai Ling blinked, then asked, “How can you trust someone with only fifty percent?”

Cheng Shi smiled.

“Fifty percent is the most trust I can afford to give anyone right now. Why can’t I trust with that?”

Fang Shiqing gave Cheng Shi a complex look but eventually nodded.

“Gelfis, the quartermaster of the squad. He’s a defector from the Nation of [War], an Overseer.”

An Overseer?

A quartermaster is a military position, whereas an Overseer is a faith-based profession.

Overseers are [War] priests, tasked with overseeing soldiers on the battlefield.

When a soldier collapses under the weight of battle, an Overseer can whip them back onto their feet, using healing instead of harm to restore their vitality and send them back into the fray.

Put simply, while others use weapons to kill, Overseers use them to heal.

When an Overseer activates their talent, their attacks become healing.

But there’s one catch—you have to be sure the Overseer has activated their talent before accepting their “healing.”

Otherwise, the Overseer might not just fail to send the soldier back to the battlefield—they might send them straight to the afterlife.

Cheng Shi’s expression shifted upon hearing that they had an Overseer in their squad. “Wait, so you do have a healer?”

As soon as he asked, the three of them looked visibly uncomfortable.

Cheng Shi immediately understood. They did have a healer, but they didn’t trust him.

Perhaps they were still debating whether Gelfis could be trusted, but the truth was, Gelfis was probably evaluating whether he could trust them too.

Without the healer's trust, well, no heals for anyone.

Which was fair.

Cheng Shi would have done the same.

It seemed that the Torchbearers' situation was even more dire than he'd imagined. He sighed and asked:

"I've been listening for a while now, and whether we're talking about trustworthy or untrustworthy people, you still haven't mentioned your other three teammates.

What, do you trust them even less than 50%?"

Fang Shiqing gave a bitter smile.

"Besides the silent prisoner, the learned scholar and the elemental judge share the same goal as us...

For now, they're only 'teammates' in the temporary sense."

Cheng Shi clicked his tongue and nodded.

"Got it.

I'll go back with you. I'll disguise myself as a city guard knight, a straggler you picked up along the way. At this stage, it's not the most valuable identity, but it's good enough to hold up.

The situation is too complicated. I need to see things for myself to get a clear picture.

But let me give you all a friendly warning: if things get out of hand later, please...

Bear with me.”

Huh?

Bai Ling’s look of admiration froze in her eyes, and Fang Shiqing’s smile stiffened.

Even Cui Qiushi, who had been keeping watch, turned around in disbelief, staring at Cheng Shi and silently wondering:

Is this 2400-point reinforcement from Sister Qing...

Really reliable?