

The Gods 16

Chapter 16: Surviving the Calamity

Reality, Unknown Province, Empty Parking Lot:

Chen Chong slowly opened his eyes, staring at the familiar car roof above him. He let out a sigh, a mixture of emotions swirling within him.

He had survived once again.

Not only that, but the trial had rewarded him with his second A-rank talent.

[Talent Acquired: Hold the Line (A) – Warrior class talent: When using shield-type skills, all defensive effects are increased by 25%.]

As a 1600-ranked player, in addition to the two initial talent slots, he had two extra slots available for customization.

Silently, Chen Chong replaced his last C-rank talent with the newly acquired A-rank one.

With this change, his talent configuration shifted from a mid-tier 1A2B1C setup to a stronger 2A2B, pushing him into the upper-middle tier of his current rank.

For someone just over 1600 points, this talent configuration was excellent. It would give him more confidence and better survival odds in the upcoming trials.

“Cheng Shi... do all big shots like to show off?” Chen Chong muttered to himself, shaking his head with a smile. He reached over to the pile of beer cans on the passenger seat and grabbed a bottle, guzzling it down.

The beer spilled over, soaking his clothes, but he didn't care. He downed four bottles in a row, letting out a belch before slumping back against the seat.

“Heh, this godforsaken world... I'd rather be dreaming.”

Chen Chong chuckled bitterly and casually tossed one of the empty bottles out of the window.

Instead of smashing against the ground, the bottle made a clinking sound as it landed. Glancing in the direction of the noise, Chen Chong saw that the entire parking lot was already piled high with beer bottles.

It looked less like a parking lot and more like a junkyard.

A junkyard for recycling beer bottles.

Chen Chong was never the type who needed a couple of beers to fall asleep.

He drank two cases.

He wasn't seeking sleep—he was seeking... numbness.

“Please, just end it already—this screwed-up world.”

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Reality, Unknown Province, Apartment:

Cao Sansui stared blankly at the pocket watch in his hand, still struggling to process what had happened.

A trial ending one hour early had never occurred before. He had no idea what this change meant.

But one thing he did remember was seeing Cheng Shi's smile the moment the trial ended.

“Why was he smiling? Why wasn’t he afraid? Did he know all along the trial would end early?”

Cao Sansui’s expression grew more suspicious.

He had always believed that time doesn’t lie, especially since he had activated the [Time Battlefield] during the trial.

But the question was, if time doesn’t lie, could people?

If someone could deceive everyone and even manipulate time...

It could only be the person who gave everyone that cola...

Cheng Shi!

“Wait a second!”

Cao Sansui’s eyes widened. He quickly rushed to his desk, grabbed some tools, and began disassembling the pocket watch. Using a magnifying glass, he meticulously examined every detail.

Sure enough, after a little searching, he found faint, tiny fingerprints on the back of the clock hands.

The marks formed a subtle expression:



“...”

Time indeed doesn’t lie.

But someone had deceived time.

As the realization hit him, Cao Sansui burst out in laughter, gripping the pocket watch tightly.

The trial hadn't ended early. What had been manipulated was the time in his hands.

"Cheng Shi... impressive."

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Reality, Unknown Province, Basement:

Nangong sat cross-legged on the floor, staring at the empty half of a beef patty in her hand before suddenly bursting into laughter.

"I survived again... how wonderful."

Her score was as low as ever. Even with the points from this trial, her ladder ranking had barely just passed 1400.

At this level, in a world where trials were becoming increasingly difficult, it was hard to survive.

But she didn't mind. Surviving under the watchful gaze of [Decay] was already a remarkable feat.

"You could've lived more easily. Accelerating others' decay is also a form of offering to Him."

A raspy voice echoed through the damp, dark basement. Yet, looking around, Nangong was the only one there.

It was a voice from the void.

But Nangong seemed accustomed to its presence. She pulled out a knife, shaking her head firmly:

“I can’t harm others.”

“Foolish. Embracing decay is the destiny of all life.”

“I can’t harm others.”

“...Idiot. Fine. Begin today’s offering.”

Nangong hesitated for a moment, then asked, “Didn’t I just make an offering during the trial?”

“The offerings made during the trial were for Him. Now, it’s time for my share.”

Nangong’s face paled slightly. She gritted her teeth, removed her pants, and deeply cut a line into her thigh with the knife.

The cut completed one stroke of a “正” character, a pattern that nearly covered her entire legs.

Scarlet blood rushed from the wound, quickly pooling on the knife. Nangong’s face grew paler by the second.

When her body temperature began to drop, the knife finally stopped absorbing the blood, letting out a satisfied hum.

“Is that enough?”

“Hmm, you can heal yourself now.”

Nangong forced herself to cast a healing spell, then pulled out a small, worn notebook from beneath a rotting wooden bed, carefully writing down a name.

Cheng Shi.

“You still want to repay him? Ridiculous. The gods will never let you meet him again.”

“I still want to write it down. You never know.”

Nangong flipped through the pages. The notebook was filled with countless names, each representing someone who had helped her in the past.

“I’ve helped you too. Why don’t you write down my name?”

“I’ve already given you your payment.”

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Reality, Unknown Province, Park:

Song Yawen stared at his trial score, dumbfounded.

[Ladder of Ascent +3]

“What the hell?? 3 points?? The Ladder of Ascent can increase by 3 points???”

He checked it over and over, unable to believe it, and then started jumping around, screaming in excitement.

“Holy crap! I gained 3 points! Guys! I got 3 points on the Ladder of Ascent!”

Other players in the park heard him and shot him looks that clearly said, “This guy’s lost it,” but that didn’t dampen Song Yawen’s spirits. He ran around his living area in circles, shouting at the top of his lungs:

“Just ask yourself: am I amazing or what? I just gained 3 points in one go! Have you ever heard of anyone gaining 3 points?!”

Finally, someone who had had enough of his shouting yelled back:

“Song Yawen, are you out of your damn mind? The Ladder of Ascent only gives a maximum of 2 points. Are you dreaming about getting 3?”

Song Yawen didn’t stop, continuing to shout:

“What do you know? Do you think I can’t read my reward screen? I had a big shot carry me—one ultimate move, and I went straight to the gods! I’m on a whole different level from you guys now. Get it?”

“Oh yeah? Who’s this big shot? What’s their profession and faith?”

“Like I’d tell you! You think you’re worthy of knowing a big shot’s name?”

Ignoring the reactions of those around him, Song Yawen kept bragging until he had exhausted every last drop of excitement. Finally, he returned to his tent to calm down.

And then...

He began typing in all the different channels:

“I just got 3 points on the Ladder of Ascent. Am I awesome, or what?”

“Lol, no one cares.”

...

Reality, Unknown Province, Private Villa:

In the shattered reflection of a broken dressing mirror, a faint outline of a snow-white figure could be seen.

If one focused, they could just make out a hand, calloused from drawing a bow, hesitantly reaching toward a pair of long, beautiful legs.

“Cheng Shi...”

A soft whisper, and [Birth] blossomed.

He gazed upon her once more, dispelling the frost from her face and granting her new blessings.