

The Gods 166

Chapter 166: The Vows of Trust, and The Prisoner Speaks!

“.....”

“.....”

“.....”

[Silence], as always, arrives just when people need Him most.

Ji Yue didn't care about the shocked looks from the others and continued speaking:

“I am a scholar who seeks the essence of things, a follower of [Truth] who explores the laws of the universe. This has never changed, whether before or after the [Faith Game] descended.

When I realized that carrying a battlefield on my back could help me better understand Him, my research began.

But a scholar must remain composed, and research requires calm. I could not advance further without eliminating His influence on me.

That's why I came.

Because I've found a way to remove His influence!”

Her eyes blazed as she looked at Cheng Shi, her tone serious but sincere:

“That method is the unwithering petal of the Conjugated Whispering Tree.

The Conjugated Whispering Tree possesses the power to coexist between reality and void, and its petal is the concentrated essence of that power.

By turning a petal into a 'twin elixir' and drinking it, my soul will split, creating another version of myself...

In doing so, while one part of me bears the taint of [War], the other can continue to research [War] without restraint."

"....."

This world has gone mad.

Cheng Shi no longer even had the energy to mock it.

This scholar was insane. She wasn't splitting her soul to lessen her burden—she wanted the split soul to carry on her beloved research!

How is this different from creating a clone to play video games while you go to class?

What kind of generosity is this, sister?!

But Ji Yue wasn't done with her experiment plan yet!

It seemed that she had already entered a scholarly state, fully immersed in the excitement of her upcoming research. She continued passionately:

"However, the self that coexists with the void has form but no substance. It cannot perform physical research.

So, I had another idea!

After countless experiments, I discovered a way to infuse the soul with necromantic powers!

All I would need is a sufficiently intelligent human corpse, into which I could extract the soul from my void-born self and fuse it into the body!

In this way...

There would be a second me in this world.

A second scholar of the Void Matter Theory department—Ji Yue.

And that, by the way, is why I didn't trust you before.

Because the Necromancer's Guild...

Was something I created purely to find this method!"

Cheng Shi wanted to laugh, but he couldn't bring himself to do so.

Fang Shiqing and the others felt like crying, but no tears came out either.

If I'm the fake running into the real deal, then these three are just imposters trying to fool Zhuge Liang in front of his own nose.

Fine, perfect, this is getting fun.

What else can I say?

Cheng Shi didn't utter a word, quietly taking a step back.

Hmph, my mom told me not to talk to lunatics.

Oh wait, I don't have a mom. Never mind.

Cheng Shi sighed, his face contorting with the absurdity of the situation.

He realized that now that Ji Yue had finished laying out her experimental proposal, it was his turn to share his story.

This scholar, who hadn't uttered a single lie the entire time, wasn't just sharing her experiment. She was building a bridge of trust among the group.

Through her transparent and unreserved attitude, she was trying to pave the way for the team to work together seamlessly, without suspicion, with the ultimate goal of obtaining the petal that, for her, represented the future of her research...

The Whispering Petal.

To reciprocate her absolute trust, Cheng Shi—or rather, the Torchbearers—would have to bare their souls as well.

But the problem was that what the Torchbearers were doing, while not an insane experiment, was even more outrageous than an experiment.

Could they reveal the truth?

No, they couldn't!

None of them could!

Not even Fang Shiqing, seasoned as she was, could muster such honesty in this situation.

They had already been betrayed once. If it hadn't been for a stroke of luck and the discovery of the [Flame of Hope], the Torchbearers would have been erased from history like so many other fallen players.

Now, faced with a nearly 2600-point scholar as formidable as Ji Yue, how could they dare to openly expose the Torchbearers?

And so, the three Torchbearers fell silent.

But just because they couldn't speak didn't mean Cheng Shi couldn't.

Seeing Ji Yue's fervent and trusting gaze grow colder with each passing moment of silence, Cheng Shi weighed his options and slowly stepped forward.

He cleared his throat twice, drawing everyone's attention, and began his act of open-hearted honesty.

"Under the gaze of [Deceit], let it be known—what I am about to say contains no lies..."

"....."

"....."

"....."

The silence was deafening.

In an instant, the scene had turned into a pilgrimage site for the prisoner. Even the normally silent man seemed to be struggling to suppress a smirk.

Seeing the bewildered expressions on everyone's face, Cheng Shi let out a couple of awkward chuckles.

"Ahem... just a joke, to lighten the mood.

But, Scholar, Prisoner, I need you to swear an oath. Swear that even if our cooperation yields no results, even if we have disagreements later, you will not share anything I'm about to say with anyone else.

Otherwise, we'll never be able to walk the same path.

This void will be where we part ways."

Cheng Shi's serious and solemn demeanor made Ji Yue raise an eyebrow, while the prisoner merely stood there, silently watching.

"You're a smart man, Cheng Shi. You know that such an oath holds no real power."

"No, it does."

With that, Cheng Shi pulled something from his personal inventory...

A golden mask.

"Clearly, this is a gift from Him.

If you two swear upon this mask, should you break your vow, you will never again be able to discern truth from lies, nor will you ever be able to trust in truth."

Ji Yue's expression sharpened, her eyes filled with doubt.

“This is a gift from Him? Impossible. I’ve never heard of a mask with such an effect.

Cheng Shi, you must remember—I’m a scholar of the Void Matter Theory. My knowledge of the void—”

Cheng Shi snorted, cutting her off.

“He is not the void.

The void is just one of His toys.”

“.....”

No rebuttal.

Not just the void—reality itself was His toy.

“I need to see it...”

“No!” Cheng Shi interrupted her again, standing firm as if he were holding the juiciest piece of gossip hostage. “If you want to hear what I’m about to say, you’ll have to trust me.”

Ji Yue’s gaze darkened. Her eyes swept over Fang Shiqing and the others, lingering on Cui Qiushi for a long while.

She had already noticed that this Order Knight was the most sincere of the group—he hardly ever lied.

But this time, she couldn’t read anything from his face.

Cui Qiushi had noticed her gaze, but he remained completely at ease.

I don't know what's true or false either, nor do I know what Cheng Shi plans to do next. So what use is there in looking at me?

With this "confidence" in his own ignorance, Cui Qiushi weathered Ji Yue's scrutiny.

Fang Shiqing continued smiling calmly, though internally, she was also pondering whether the mask in Cheng Shi's hand was real.

If it was, then it was highly likely that Cheng Shi was about to reveal the existence of the Torchbearers.

But after such a revelation, what would happen? Could the safety of the Torchbearers really depend on an oath sworn on a mask?

If the mask wasn't real... then Fang Shiqing only needed to worry about whether Cheng Shi would steer the situation into a catastrophic collapse.

At least a collapse of the situation would be easier to accept than the collapse of the Torchbearers.

As for Bai Ling, she wasn't thinking about any of this. She was entirely preoccupied with trying to figure out how to become Cheng Shi's "real one-day girlfriend."

The aura of [Corruption] had thickened considerably during the course of Cheng Shi's aura-building performance.

Contrary to Cheng Shi's expectations, Ji Yue didn't hesitate.

After scanning everyone's expressions, the scholar decisively swore her oath upon the mask.

"With this sincere heart, I bear witness to [Truth]; with this pledge of trust, I entrust myself to [Deceit]."

I, Ji Yue, scholar of the Void Matter Theory department, hereby swear:

If I disclose anything I hear today, may I never again see truth, nor discern a lie, for the rest of my life.”

Her speed and confidence left Cheng Shi somewhat impressed.

As expected of a scholar of [Truth]. Their confidence and decisiveness are akin to [Folly].

After Ji Yue had sworn her oath, Cheng Shi turned his gaze toward the prisoner.

“.....”

“Brother, look, you probably don’t have much of a choice here.”

The prisoner stood for a long moment, silently gripping his chains, before finally succumbing to the weight of everyone’s gaze and dropping his shackles.

With a clatter, the chains fell to the ground.

He had surrendered.

The frail player stretched his jaw slightly, and from his long-silent throat came a hoarse voice.

“Chen Shu...”

Prisoner...

1842...

I... have had enough... of the solitude...

So I... pray... to find...

companions... to walk alongside.”

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow and glanced at Fang Shiqing.

As soon as the prisoner spoke, Fang Shiqing’s eyes lit up with a sincere smile.

She had heard it.

This prisoner’s heart played a song of hope, a melody of order.