

The Gods 168

Chapter 168: Don't Rush, Let Me Show You a Shortcut

It wasn't any of the three stunned Torchbearers who responded to Cheng Shi, nor was it the previously silent prisoner who had only introduced himself. Instead...

It was Ji Yue.

Ji Yue, without hiding the admiration in her eyes, stared directly at Cheng Shi and repeated herself:

"I'll join."

Cheng Shi was dumbfounded.

Huh?

Wait, no, sister, I didn't even invite you. Why are you joining in all of a sudden?

Yes, I admit, I made up all that stuff to convince you, but not to this extent!

How did you end up... admiring me?

Where's that brain of yours that's supposed to be illuminated by [Truth]?

Do you really think an organization that rebels against the Gods is going to end up well?

I don't even believe it myself, and yet you do?

As Cheng Shi furrowed his brows, looking incredulously at her, Ji Yue responded with a breathtaking smile.

“Don’t doubt my sincerity. I can swear again, this time to the Gods.

I believe you’re right. I find the Torchbearers fascinating.

To covet the divine thrones is, after all, a path toward [Truth]. It aligns with my pursuit of knowledge and my understanding of the world.

And as you said, the Torchbearers don’t judge others based on good or evil. I don’t consider myself a good person, but I’m not an evil one either.

Moreover, I have steadfast faith, and I am sincere in my intentions.

I’ve walked the path of exploration alone, just like this prisoner here—I’ve never found true companions.

Fang Jue was half a companion, but he was too honest. Honest to the point of being boring.

You—or rather, your Torchbearers—your beliefs align with my research perfectly.

I haven’t felt this excited in a long time. So this is what it feels like to find kindred spirits, to resonate with others.

It’s wonderful, truly wonderful.

I’m willing to share all my research with you. And if you’ve already discovered some information about the Gods, you can share it with me.

Trust me, a scholar who tirelessly studies the Gods will not waste any of the data you’ve gathered.

With the methods of [Truth], I will unravel the secrets of the Gods and build a bridge to their thrones through my research!”

“.....”

“.....”

“.....”

Before Cheng Shi had a chance to respond, Fang Shiqing’s heart had already been stirred.

Her expression was extremely complicated as she looked at Cheng Shi, then at Ji Yue, caught in an intense internal struggle.

She was debating whether or not to accept Ji Yue into the Torchbearers, whether to reveal her true identity and pull this seemingly “sincere” scholar into the real Torchbearers’ group.

But every time she tried to speak, she swallowed her words back down.

She was afraid.

Afraid that the situation Cheng Shi had so carefully crafted would unravel again because of “lies.”

Afraid that this group, which should be heading down the same path, would fracture once more with the revelation of the true Torchbearers.

Afraid that the vision Cheng Shi had presented was more radical than the actual will of the Builders, causing this equally radical scholar to lose interest.

In the end, there was nothing she could do but quietly follow Cheng Shi’s lead.

As Cheng Shi had said earlier, the moment he took over this trial, the real Torchbearers had to step back into the shadows, becoming his support.

Or perhaps not even support.

They had become the silent audience for this drama, with Cheng Shi, the Clown, shining center stage.

All they could do was sit below and quietly applaud as he performed.

Cheng Shi's smile remained on his face, but his muscles felt stiff.

He looked at Ji Yue seriously and said three simple words.

"You'll die."

Ji Yue replied just as seriously.

"I've never feared death. My only fear is not being close enough to Him.

If, one day, the throne we replace is the throne of [Truth], then at that moment, even if I die, I will have no regrets."

We're... already at "we"?

I haven't even agreed yet, sister...

Damn, this is incredible. I made up this whole thing and ended up fooling even myself.

Fine. If you want to join, then join. It's all fake anyway—it doesn't matter.

Cheng Shi quickly shifted his expression, putting on a highly respectful smile as he extended his hand towards Ji Yue.

“Welcome, new Torchbearer.

Welcome, new companion.”

Ji Yue smiled back, shaking his hand.

“Now, can you tell me who the player leading the challenge against the Gods is? Who is the leader of the Torchbearers?”

“It’s...”

Cheng Shi’s mind raced as he tried to think of a high-ranking player to pin this on.

But before he could speak, Ji Yue cut him off with a knowing smile.

“I already know. I’ll keep the secret.”

Huh?

Wait, what?

You already know? How?

What’s with that look in your eyes?

Is it me?

Yes, I admit I mixed in some of my own experiences while telling the story, but that doesn't mean the leader is me!

But at this point, denying it would just ruin the lofty image I've built up. So Cheng Shi could only begrudgingly accept it, as if he'd swallowed a bitter pill.

Unsurprisingly, with Ji Yue's declaration, the others had no room to refuse. Even the silent prisoner spoke up again, saying that he could give it a try, though he was worried his strength might drag the Torchbearers down.

Cheng Shi reassured him with a kind smile, accepting everything with open arms.

Wonderful. The second Torchbearer organization has been established today.

And I've even poached three members from the original Torchbearers.

“.....”

“Aren't any of you curious why we dare to operate right under the eyes of the Gods?”

This was Cheng Shi's soul-deep question. Ji Yue chuckled and pointed at the mask in his hand.

“The moment I saw that mask, I knew that [Deceit] had prepared a grand feast for the Gods.

This is certainly in line with His will. But we need to be careful—His betrayal would amuse Him just as much as His protection.

So while He still has the patience to cover for us, we must quickly build our strength to the point where we can challenge at least one of the Gods.

Or, we should seek out another God besides [Deceit], one who can tolerate us, as a backup plan.

[Truth] or [War] would both be good choices.

Conveniently, I'm already researching both."

"....."

At that moment, Cheng Shi couldn't help but think it would be a waste if the Builders didn't recruit Ji Yue.

But on second thought, it would be a waste if Ji Yue did join the Builders.

Because the Builders weren't as radical as the story Cheng Shi had just fabricated. They "borrowed power from the Gods," but still confined their vision to finding a new homeland. They had no intention of defying the Gods.

"And that thunderbolt during the battle in the ruins earlier..."

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, thinking, Finally, here it comes.

Since Ji Yue knew Fang Jue, the fact that he wielded [Execution Hour] was no longer a secret.

"It was that."

There was no need for a long explanation between clever people. Sometimes, three words were enough to convey the full picture.

Clearly, Cheng Shi had modified [Execution Hour], because originally, it was a staff, and there was no sign of a staff on him now.

What did this imply?

It implied that the Torchbearers had found a way to modify the relics of the subordinate gods... and the power to do so.

Not bad.

Ji Yue smiled, genuinely delighted. She truly felt like she had found kindred spirits.

“Yes, the Torchbearers’ vision is distant, but we still need to focus on the present. Since you’ve spent so much time inviting us, I assume you already know how to reach the Void Experimental Site No. 69, correct?”

Ji Yue smiled at everyone, then shifted her gaze to Fang Shiqing.

“Actually, I’m part of the Neighborhood Mutual Aid Society. I’ve always had a soft spot for people who are willing to lend a hand. But I’m still curious—what exactly brought you three here?”

You weren’t part of the Torchbearers before Cheng Shi arrived, so why do you need the Conjugated Whispering Petal?

That petal is far too dangerous for you at this stage.”

At this point, Fang Shiqing had no choice but to follow Cheng Shi’s lead and continue the performance.

With a faint smile, she replied:

“We had already decided to join the Torchbearers.

But as you can see, at this rank, we haven't contributed much to the Torchbearers.

So, we wanted to prepare a 'gift' as a gesture of respect and honor toward the Torchbearers."

Ji Yue raised an eyebrow. "That's quite a generous gift. You could die."

Fang Shiqing's smile only grew brighter.

"We don't fear death. We only fear that the light of the flame won't be passed on."

Ji Yue could hear the sincerity in Fang Shiqing's words, and she couldn't help but feel a deep respect for these three newly-joined Torchbearers.

This is the spirit of the flame!

This is the power of the flame!

Seeing the resolve in Ji Yue's eyes grow stronger, Cheng Shi began to feel a sense of dread.

I hope I never have to meet this "Torchbearer" again...

"Alright, Cheng Shi, tell us—how do we get close to the Conjugated Whispering Tree in the void?"

"You're sure I have a way?"

"Yes, because you're far too relaxed. You're not concerned at all. That kind of attitude doesn't come from thinking their 'gift' is unnecessary—it's because you know how to get them to the experimental site.

I'm curious as well. Show me, how exactly do we bypass the High Wall of Truth and enter the experimental site?"

Hearing this, Cheng Shi finally felt a wave of relief.

Alright, no matter what, at least we're back on track now. Even if we went off the rails for a while, the path is still the same.

"Smart!" Cheng Shi grinned confidently. "I do have a way, but it might require your help."

"Tell me, and I'll do it."

Good. Practical.

Cheng Shi glanced around, thinking for a moment, before stomping his foot.

"Well, in that case, let me show you a shortcut.

Right here—beneath my feet. Use your Void Matter Theory knowledge to tear open the surface and take us deeper into the void!"

Ji Yue's eyes narrowed, her expression becoming serious.

"The deeper we go into the void, the easier it is to get lost. Cheng Shi, are you sure?"

"Yes, the void can lead you astray, but reality won't.

Don't worry. Be bold. I'm certain that beneath the void here isn't more emptiness.

It's something... far more extraordinary.

Don't be surprised—this involves some of His secrets. And trust me, the Torchbearers and He have a decent relationship.”

After he finished speaking, Cheng Shi thought to himself:

I didn't put on this performance just to fool the scholar and the prisoner.

Patron, you're watching, right?

Me pretending to be a Torchbearer must be quite the amusing spectacle for You.

So... is the peephole open nearby?

If You're enjoying the show, it's only fair You pay the ticket price, right?

It's a fair deal.

I provide the entertainment, You provide the path.

Seems reasonable to me.

What do You think?

Listening to Cheng Shi's words, Ji Yue didn't hesitate. She gathered all her energy and focused it on her spear, thrusting it toward the ground beneath Cheng Shi's feet.

This was the power to tear open the deeper void—a power Void Matter Theory scholars rarely used, and only with caution.

Because while He might tolerate [Truth] followers playing in His toybox, He wouldn't be so forgiving if they barged into His home.

But today was different!

The moment the void beneath Cheng Shi's feet was torn open, a brilliant, multi-colored staircase, shimmering like glass, unfurled from the depths of the void and extended toward their feet.

The rift in the void didn't rush to close, nor did any void storm erupt from it.

The staircase gently twisted and coiled like a lazy snake, stretching itself "gracefully" before the "Torchbearers."

Everyone's pupils constricted and their minds reeled in shock.

None of them could understand why such a thing existed in the void!

But Ji Yue was different. As a scholar of Void Matter Theory, she knew more than anyone else about the void.

When Cheng Shi had uttered the words "the reality beneath the void," she had already formed a hypothesis.

But knowing was one thing; seeing it with her own eyes was another.

Up until now, she had never heard of anyone discovering the "river" that was only mentioned in historical experiment records.

So when she saw this divine creation from the history books appear before her, she was so shaken that her voice cracked.

“This is... [Laughter and Mockery]?!”

For the first time, this composed scholar’s eyes showed disbelief!

Cheng Shi, seeing her reaction, beamed with delight.

Finally, I’ve managed to impress this 2600-point scholar.

Thanks, Patron, for the assist.

“You’re quite the scholar, knowing so much.

Now then, let’s speed things up on this journey.”

With that, Cheng Shi stepped confidently onto the staircase.