

The Gods 178

Chapter 178: The Mantis Tries to Stop the Cart, But the Golden Cicada Swallows the Oriole!

The prisoner took another step forward.

With just a snap of his fingers, a figure materialized on one of the tree branches above the three of them—a person with a severed arm, bound and unable to move, fell straight down in front of Bai Ling with a heavy thud.

The sheer impact of it made Cheng Shi and Bai Ling's pupils contract, their expressions growing darker.

Mo Wu!

The mantis that had been watching the game had already fallen prey to the oriole behind him.

Mo Wu rolled on the ground, his eyes darting wildly, limbs twitching uncontrollably, as if he'd seen some unimaginable horror.

“The Ballad of Torture from the Nightmare Demon.

He's seeing the deepest fears of his own mind. He's no longer a threat to you.

Curious?

Curious how an incomplete Source of Calamity followed you into the void and arrived here through His creation?

The answer is obvious, isn't it?

Of course, it was through me.

He thought he was flawlessly covering his tracks, but the moment he turned to flee, he immediately latched onto a host that would carry him through without falling behind.

But unfortunately for him, despite the many choices available, he chose me.

Interesting.

He was both unlucky and lucky.

Only I could have fooled all of your perceptions better than he could, bringing him to this place...

And such a delightful little game—I knew [Deceit] wouldn't refuse it.

And I was right, wasn't I?

Well then, the story has been long enough. What's the matter? Still not willing to give up?

What are you waiting for?

That reckless Order Knight? That fiery Poet Scholar?

Or perhaps the one who truly impressed me... the wise Scholar?

Don't bother waiting. They're not coming back.

Everyone will assume we're just 'urgently and amicably' making battle plans.

As long as nothing happens in the lab, they'll naturally go about their business."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's expression turned even darker. His peripheral vision confirmed what he already feared: Fang Shiqing and Cui Qiushi had indeed joined Ji Yue on the battlefield.

They seemed to have disregarded this place entirely, unaware of what was happening inside the lab.

"Well then, my patience is limited.

Little bird, tell me—how did you see through my ploy? Tell me, and I might spare...

Hmm, spare the one behind you.

I doubt you care much about your own life, but his? You care about that, don't you?"

Bai Ling, standing guard with unwavering focus, hesitated for just a moment when she heard those words, her lips pressing tightly together.

Cheng Shi was about to warn her to ignore him, but Bai Ling spoke first.

"Desire. I can quantify the desires of others.

The moment you turned around, you...

You wanted my life."

The prisoner raised an eyebrow, realization dawning on his face.

"Interesting. I miscalculated. Well, everyone makes mistakes, and I'm no exception.

Who would have thought that a 1400-point Sensory Hunter would have an S-rank talent?

Not bad, not bad. You're a better match for them than I expected.

Very good. Now that the last bit of amusement has been uncovered, it's time for the harvest."

With that, the prisoner raised his hand again, preparing to snap his fingers a second time.

But just then, Cheng Shi broke his long-held silence, his previous heavy expression vanishing as he suddenly started laughing.

A wild, mad laugh.

He laughed freely, looking at the prisoner in front of him with a playful glint in his eye.

"You high-level players are all so...

Shameless, aren't you?

Harvest?

What harvest are you talking about?

Are you really so certain that you're about to win?

Hahahaha, hahahaha.

To say that in front of His chosen one—how dare you?"

Cheng Shi's laughter abruptly stopped, and his expression turned cold. His sharp eyes locked onto the prisoner's, gleaming with a frosty light as though from the depths of an icy abyss.

"Did I ever say I'd let you win?"

With those words, he snapped his fingers before the prisoner could act.

Snap.

A crisp sound echoed through the room.

Bai Ling whipped her head around, and the prisoner's brow furrowed.

In the midst of their confusion and darkening expressions...

[Existence] twisted. [Memory] faded.

The effects of "Foam on the Sea of Dreams" ended in that instant, and in the blink of an eye, all images of Cheng Shi vanished from everyone's minds.

It was as if he had never existed.

...

Cheng Shi had never trusted anyone.

The moment he was summoned by Fang Shiqing and jumped into the beam of light from the void, he had already overheard fragmented whispers about the Torchbearers' crisis.

And from that moment on, he decided that he would play the role of a background hero in this crisis.

Yes, a background hero.

He didn't mind lending the Torchbearers a hand, but his confidence didn't come from [Deceit]—it came from [Memory].

Floating Dream of the Memory Sea!

This SSS-rank divine artifact was Cheng Shi's secret weapon, the foundation of his plan to remain in the shadows.

So!

The moment he had risen from the corpses, shaking off the blood from his arms, he had already activated the first effect of Floating Dream of the Memory Sea: Foam on the Sea of Dreams.

This meant that for the next 24 hours, he would leave no trace in the minds of anyone in the trial.

And it just so happened that the Torchbearers only had 24 hours left.

So!

That's why he dared to ask about Zhao Qian in front of Fang Shiqing and the others, why he could openly admit he was a Clown, and why he could declare himself a Torchbearer in the void without hesitation!

It wasn't because he trusted them—it was because he had already planned for this “trust” to be erased.

So!

When Cheng Shi snapped his fingers to signal the countdown's end, every trace of him in the minds of the others vanished.

I've always said, I can only trust others 50%.

When I trust you unconditionally, sorry, you've already been tricked by me.

Bai Ling's confused expression replaced her earlier suspicion, and the prisoner's bewilderment turned to shock.

And in that moment, as the "forgetting" took hold, Cheng Shi didn't waste the opportunity!

He immediately donned a mask and pulled out a scalpel. Without a word, he charged forward, slashing upward with his blade toward...

Bai Ling!

Her pupils dilated as she saw the glint of the blade coming at her, but this time, she wasn't a helpless target.

Even though she couldn't recognize the masked figure as a friend or foe, her reflexes were sharp—she sidestepped the attack and countered with an arrow, burying it deep into Cheng Shi's thigh!

The arrow bit into his flesh, fueling his emotions. His eyes turned bloodshot as he gasped for breath.

But his reaction was just as swift. Although he couldn't dodge the arrow, he still managed to punch Bai Ling in the side, sending her stumbling backward, and then rolled toward the prisoner's feet, gritting his teeth against the pain.

Half-kneeling, Cheng Shi's breathing was labored, and his gaze was dark.

“Bard, what are you waiting for? Attack!

She’s taken all the petals from the Whispering Tree. If we don’t get them back, how are we supposed to answer to Lord Othman?”

Buzz—

The prisoner, still trying to piece together the situation, froze when he heard that name.

This masked man... he knew Lord Othman?

Was he an ally?

Had Lord Othman sent him to assist?

Seeing that the prisoner still hadn’t moved, Cheng Shi cursed angrily.

“Damn it, I can’t count on anyone—I’ll do it myself!”

Ignoring the blood pouring from his thigh, he pushed off the ground and lunged at Bai Ling again, his scalpel aiming for her once more.

This time, Bai Ling, still disoriented, couldn’t dodge in time. The scalpel sliced into her left arm, sending a line of crimson spraying into the air.

She cried out in pain, but quickly retaliated with her bow, knocking Cheng Shi back.

The bowstring lashed across Cheng Shi’s neck, and if he had been just a fraction slower, it would have sliced his throat open.

Cheng Shi sucked in a sharp breath, and as he leaped backward, he quietly drove his own scalpel into his chest.

Meanwhile, Bai Ling, clutching her bleeding arm, staggered back, retreating until she was pressed against the laboratory's glass wall.

After two failed attacks, both narrowly escaping death, Cheng Shi's genuine struggle had finally earned a sliver of the prisoner's trust. The prisoner stepped forward cautiously, placing a steadying hand on Cheng Shi's shoulder as he was about to collapse.

Cheng Shi's body tensed the moment he felt the strong hand on his back. Instinctively, he thrust his scalpel backward in a counter-attack.

Clang—

The blade's tip was caught between two metal-like fingers. The prisoner sneered, looking down at his "ally" with disdain.

"Going berserk, are we?"

With strength like that, you dare call for help?

How could Lord Othman send someone as weak as you to assist me...?"

But before he could finish his sentence, he saw the masked man before him curl his lips into a smirk.

Too late!

The prisoner tried to pull back, realizing the danger, but...

He wasn't fast enough.

Boom—Boom—Boom—

Without hesitation, Cheng Shi unleashed every ounce of charge left in his ring. The bolts of lightning, gathered from the fallen city guards, roared as they struck the prisoner point-blank.

They were so close that the plasma didn't even have time to accelerate before it reached its target.

“.....”

The prisoner's vision was filled with a flash of violet light. He didn't even have time to utter the word “no” before he was swallowed up by the sea of lightning.

In an instant, he was reduced to a charred corpse.

He didn't even leave a full body behind—he was completely disintegrated by the second and third bolts that followed.

And as the prisoner's ashes scattered, Cheng Shi immediately pivoted and fired another bolt of lightning at...

Mo Wu, lying on the ground.

Barely regaining consciousness after being under the prisoner's control for so long, the Source of Calamity hadn't even fully processed what was happening when he saw a familiar purple arc of lightning crackle toward his forehead.

Boom—

The lightning faded, leaving behind another charred corpse.

In the span of seconds, two of the four people in the laboratory had been struck down.

Staring at the smoldering remains in front of him, Cheng Shi finally allowed some of the tension in his body to ease.

A faint smile played on his lips as he muttered under his breath:

“Tsk, villains always die from talking too much.

This lesson has been passed down for generations—how do you still not get it?

Good thing I’m the kind of villain who talks less.

Uh...

Well, maybe not.

But at least I wait until after you’re dead to talk.

Beep.”