

The Gods 215

Chapter 215: Surprises Without End

When Ji Er lost his head, the spectators in the stands offered Cheng Shi neither much applause nor many cheers.

Because this Deathmatch Final had ended too quickly—and too confusingly.

All they saw were two inmates pulling and pushing, playing chase for half the match, then a single flash of movement decided everything.

That level of sensory stimulation was nowhere near as satisfying as the other three bouts, where condemned fighters tangled together with everything they had, unleashing pure animal instinct—cursing, roaring, biting...

Those were the scenes the crowd craved. Their eyes and voices remained glued to the other three arenas, the roars swelling wave after wave.

As for Cheng Shi, the only ones paying him any attention were the Iron Law Knights standing by on alert.

The knights waiting on the sidelines were clearly somewhat surprised. They hadn't expected that Number Two—who had dispatched Number Three so effortlessly just moments ago—would fall to a single slash from Number Four.

They stared for a beat, then entered the arena to clear away the loser's remains.

They walked up to Cheng Shi, shoved him aside, and each grabbed a foot of the headless body—that corpse still hoping for dawn to break—and dragged it away.

Another knight picked up Ji Er's head. As he turned to leave, he cast a casual glance at Cheng Shi and said with a light smile:

"You're lucky. You only need to face one more opponent, and you might just win the Deathmatch Final."

"I'm starting to see you in a new light, Number Four. If you actually win the deathmatch and have nowhere to go, come find me."

"My name is Grind—Vice-Captain Grind of the Seventeenth Squad, Iron Law Knights. I find you... rather interesting."

With that, the enigmatically smiling Vice-Captain walked off, head in hand.

Cheng Shi frowned slightly at his retreating figure, recalling the things Li Yi had once said.

Deathmatch convicts were sometimes selected to become Penal Knights—but that was Penal Knights. What did that have to do with Iron Law Knights?

The Iron Law Knights were no casual fighting force one could simply join. Candidates needed a clean background, had to follow [Order], and required connections within the Grand Tribunal, because the Iron Law Knights operated on a dual system of recommendation and selection. Without both, there was no chance.

So why would this Vice-Captain take an interest in him? What did he hope to get?

Before the question could be answered, his new opponent was dragged into the arena.

Zhao Si—the Master of Trickery who had used [Deceit]'s tricks to fool the knights—had been stalling for time throughout the earlier rounds, but was now finally hauled onto the Colosseum floor.

Yet the instant Cheng Shi saw "him" enter, his expression became spectacularly complex.

Because the person being marched between the two knights was not Zhao Si at all—it was a wild-eyed, crimson-faced Penal Knight!

As for where Zhao Si had gone...

Cheng Shi had no idea. All he knew was that the two Iron Law Knights dragging their colleague onto the stage hadn't even noticed the person under their hands had been swapped.

'What a Master of Trickery!'

Cheng Shi looked at his upcoming opponent and shook his head with an involuntary laugh.

He recognized Zhao Si's technique:

S-rank [Deceit] faith talent—Abstract Imitation.

When you share five or more traits with your target, you can either force the target to take on your appearance or transform yourself into the target's likeness to confuse others.

The fascinating aspect of this talent was that its "confusion" differed from most [Deceit]-type deceptions. It worked more like [Chaos]'s cognitive distortion.

Whichever party successfully imitated the other, everyone else would perceive that person as the one being imitated—for a limited duration.

Zhao Si had clearly used this talent to vanish. And that was precisely why he had refused to enter the arena before Cheng Shi.

Because the talent's duration was limited.

Had he gone in early, he would have lost his window to escape entirely and trapped himself in the deadly Deathmatch Final.

So the situation had become this: of the five [Deceit] teammates thus far, four had already fled. The only one who stayed had died by Cheng Shi's hand.

At least Zhao Si hadn't completely hung Cheng Shi out to dry this time. The dazed impostor before him would recover soon enough, and once the audience—or rather, the Inquisitors—realized something was wrong, Cheng Shi wouldn't have to continue with this brutal Deathmatch Final.

So Cheng Shi watched the Penal Knight who'd been dumped in the center of the arena and slowly retreated, waiting quietly for the man to come to.

But life has a way of defying expectations nine times out of ten, and when a story is being written by enough people, you simply cannot control its direction.

Case in point: right now, just as the impostor's eyes were clearing and he was on the verge of waking up—

BOOM! Something exploded.

The violent blast jolted Cheng Shi to full alertness. An instant later, he felt the ground shudder beneath his feet.

The prison!

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted—the prison had exploded!

The prison beneath the Colosseum had suddenly detonated. Boom—boom—boom—the blasts roared without pause, so powerful that the entire arena shook.

"Damn it..."

'Which inconsiderate bastard did this?'

'Had to cause this much chaos just to make a run for it—would it have killed them to leave quietly?!'

Cheng Shi dropped to one knee to steady himself and immediately turned his gaze toward the Inquisitors in the VIP stands.

Because he knew that whether he could lawfully receive a pardon now depended entirely on how these Inquisitors chose to classify the explosion and handle the interrupted Deathmatch Finals.

Meanwhile, the Penal Knight across from him regained consciousness. Whether the Abstract Imitation had simply worn off or the explosion had jolted him awake was hard to say.

Either way, the moment he came to, he sensed something was off—and lunged forward to pin Cheng Shi down.

Cheng Shi didn't dare move until he could read which way the situation was heading. He could only crouch obediently on the ground, eyes darting furtively in every direction.

As the chaos erupted and the entire Colosseum began to quake, the citizens in the stands fell into immediate panic. Screaming and wailing, they stampeded toward the exits. The flood of bodies surging outward overwhelmed even the Iron Law Knights stationed around the perimeter, and the guards had no choice but to let the populace scatter.

The entire venue plunged into utter pandemonium.

His will had arrived at last.

But [Order] does not take kindly to [Chaos].

And so, at that very moment, the Supreme Inquisitor seated in the highest seat finally rose to his feet. His keen eyes swept across the entire Colosseum. Without so much as a furrowed brow, he pronounced a death sentence on every convict present, speaking in a tone of absolute, frigid detachment:

"[Order] above all—judgment has come."

"The deathmatch convicts have attempted to destroy the Montelani Colosseum to escape their sentences, committing an unforgivable crime. To ensure the safety of Montelani's citizens, I shall exercise the authority granted to me by [Order] and invoke the Supreme Judgment Decree."

"All deathmatch convicts within the arena are hereby convicted of Blasphemy, sentenced to death, to be executed immediately."

"Iron Law Knights—heed my order. Any deathmatch convict found... is to be executed on sight."

The instant those words fell, Cheng Shi's face turned black as ink.

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