

The Gods 217

Chapter 217: Teammates Again, Cooperation Again

The rat froze.

It hadn't expected to emerge and immediately see a gleaming blade aimed right at its skull.

Following the blade from tip to hilt and spotting a knight holding it...

Hm? Wait!

Why was this knight wearing a prisoner helmet?!

The rat's beady green eyes went perfectly round. It stared in disbelief at the "teammate" who could end its life at any second, and excitedly raised a paw.

The instant it lifted the paw, Cheng Shi swatted it down with a second scalpel.

"If I were you, I wouldn't make any sudden moves. Next time, it won't be your paw—it'll be your head."

"Watch yourself, my good teammate. Mr. Beast Tamer."

"...?"

The rat froze again. It let out two urgent squeaks, apparently trying to say something—but a rat can hardly speak human language. It tried to raise a paw to gesture, but halfway up it quietly lowered it again.

For one simple reason: fear of death.

Cheng Shi watched it raise its paw once more and casually pushed the scalpel forward, piercing just far enough into the fur to draw a tiny bead of blood from beneath the skin.

"Squeak! Squeak!"

Seeing the rat's desperate state, Cheng Shi furrowed his brow.

He knew Beast Tamers possessed a beast-tongue talent, but he wasn't sure whether a Beast Tamer who had become a beast could speak human words. He studied the frantic, foot-stomping rodent for a moment, then suddenly asked:

"You're not Su Wu?"

The rat nodded like a bobblehead.

"You're Li Yi?"

The bobbling intensified.

"..."

'Damn—Li Yi is a Beast Tamer?'

'No, he's definitely a Magician. That Purification Card looked a bit off, but the Honesty Card checked out. So how did Li Yi end up as a rat?'

Cheng Shi racked his brain but couldn't figure it out. The little rat watched his confused expression and squeaked impatiently.

It pointed a claw at the ground. Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow with a smile. "You get one chance."

The rat nodded, then carefully scratched several tiny characters into the dirt with its toenails.

"I am Li Yi. Soul Parasitism."

So that was it!

It all clicked. The so-called "Purification Cards" in Li Yi's hand weren't Purification Cards at all—they were Soul Parasitism Cards derived from necromancy!

No wonder the "purification light" on that card had been green. It wasn't purification light—it was the glow of soul parasitism.

Li Yi hadn't technically lied, either. The [Death] talent Soul Parasitism did purge the host's minor debuffs before the parasitism took effect, making the soul's hostile takeover smoother.

So this had been Li Yi's play all along. He'd never intended to swap himself with another prisoner. He'd been waiting for someone to die so he could hijack the corpse, then—like Gao San—use death as his escape.

But the explosion had apparently killed off his entire pool of targets... or rather, reduced them to pulp. Left with no choice, he'd parasitized the only corpse available—a dead rat.

This also confirmed one thing: the explosion wasn't his doing.

Interesting.

A solid plan, except for one detail...

Cheng Shi's gaze sharpened. He pushed the blade forward another inch and snorted coldly:

"Why should I believe you?"

"..."

The rat stood motionless, thought for a long while, then scratched a few more characters into the ground.

"Help me find a corpse. I can change back."

After writing, it carefully parted a small tuft of fur on its belly, revealing a faintly glowing miniature Soul Parasitism Card hidden beneath.

'It really is Li Yi.'

Honestly, Cheng Shi found Li Yi far more agreeable than Su Wu. He couldn't pinpoint where the affinity came from, but something about Li Yi just felt right—even though both teammates' faces were hidden beneath prisoner helmets.

Maybe it was because Li Yi more closely matched Cheng Shi's idea of what a Magician should be?

"So you're asking me for help?" Cheng Shi grinned.

Li Yi hesitated a long moment, then scratched two characters: "Cooperation."

"Ha, are you joking? You're a rat right now. What could you possibly bring to a partnership?"

Cheng Shi neither refused nor accepted—and that kind of attitude usually signaled exactly one demand:

'The price needs to go up.'

Li Yi pondered briefly, then wrote his offer:

"I know the way out. It's below us. There's an unfinished sewer tunnel connecting to another space—it has a very high chance of getting us out of this mess."

Space was limited, so the rat had to write and erase as it went. But before he could finish, Cheng Shi was already laughing.

"Oh, is that so? Then all I have to do is follow the trail you left and dig my way along it to freedom?"

"..." The rat's writing claw froze mid-stroke.

"Go on, keep writing. Why'd you stop—did I guess right?"

"You're not questioning my stamina, are you? I'll have you know I'm a Clown with Lies of Yesterday who also stole the faith of [War] and became a War Supervisor. Give me enough time, and between my healing output and potion reserves, I could tunnel through the entire Land of Hope."

"What use are you to me now?"

The rat stared at Cheng Shi for a long while, its eyes flickering. Then it scratched four characters into the dirt:

"Master of Deception."

"..."

Now it was Cheng Shi's turn to freeze. His smile locked in place.

'Careless...'

'Fooled by the rat's tiny body...'

'What the hell?'

'Master of Deception is standard issue for deceivers now?'

'Every liar I bump into today has it?'

'If you had it, why didn't you say so sooner—waiting to watch me make a fool of myself?'

'Heh. Me—the Clown indeed.'

Cheng Shi stretched his stiff grin wider, then whacked Li Yi on the head with the butt of his scalpel, instantly sending the rat reeling.

"That's your punishment for not being honest. Pleasure working with you."

"..."

'I hope that wasn't just you lashing out in embarrassment,' Li Yi thought, one paw clutching his head while the other extended toward Cheng Shi.

Cheng Shi blinked. He didn't extend his hand—just offered the tip of his blade.

The rat's paw gripped the flat of the blade and shook it with solemn ceremony.

"Do all Magicians have this much flair for ritual?"

The rat nodded emphatically.

Cheng Shi shook his head with a chuckle:

"Alright. The deal is: you lead me to the way out and serve as my external Master of Deception for a while. When someone lies, I trust you won't deceive me."

"And I..."

"Will let you go when the time is right, and find you a suitable corpse to parasitize. Sound fair?"

"Good—looks like you agree. Then it's settled. I happen to have a rat cage..."

"What's with that look?"

"We're partners now. You need to trust me. Do I look like the kind of person who'd mistreat a team—an animal?"

Clang—

Li Yi was locked inside the rat cage without any ability to resist.

"..."

His paws gripped the bars, and the shock in his eyes seemed to transport him right back to the moment this trial began.

Only this time, there was no prisoner helmet on his head.

"Say, if I used a Soul Parasitism Card like yours, would I be able to take this helmet off?"

"..."

Li Yi sighed and resigned himself to his fate.

He nodded, then used his sharp claws to scratch two characters into the bottom of the cage:

"Cooperation."

The meaning was clear: once he regained his true form, he could naturally help Cheng Shi remove that troublesome helmet.

Cheng Shi nodded with a smile, then hooked the rat cage onto his belt.

"Hold tight—the Hero Express Tunneling Machine is about to start digging!"

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