

The Gods 235

Chapter 235: Witness My Valor?

If the best escape method from the prison before the collapse was disguising oneself as a penal knight, then the safest bet after the explosion was impersonating a corpse.

Too many had died in this disaster. Bodies were piled high like mountains. Becoming just another corpse and joining their ranks was the most natural and simplest approach.

That was exactly what the Master of Trickery had reasoned, so he mimicked a corpse and fooled all those knights frantically digging through the rubble.

But his luck was a touch short. Just when he'd finally endured long enough to be unearthed and tossed onto the body pile, Cheng Shi arrived.

Not a moment too early, not a moment too late — right as Zhao Si was being dragged out of the pit.

And so, brimming with delight, Cheng Shi decided to write a scene for this Master of Trickery who had once claimed to be a Screenwriter — an impromptu performance.

"Don't you dare disappoint me, Nicolas Zhao Si."

He didn't move to expose his teammate directly. Instead, he scanned the surroundings, searching for something, and before long he found it — rats.

Many rats.

Disasters always brought rats. Even though the collapsed prison had crushed countless rodents, some lucky survivors remained.

As the saying went, those who survived a great calamity were blessed with good fortune. And so, a few of these "fortunate" rats had the "honor" of falling into Cheng Shi's hands.

He stealthily retrieved an ordinary deck of playing cards from his personal space, glued cards to the rats' bellies with adhesive, squeezed an irritant solution into their noses and mouths to drive them into a frenzy, and then hurled the whole batch of "modified" rodents toward the body pile.

Prison rats were omnivorous to the extreme. They loved meat — dead human flesh included. After enduring their "inhumane" ordeal, they desperately needed a feast to ease their distress. A swarm of red-eyed rats instantly scattered in every direction, following their noses.

To the city guard knights nearby, this might not have seemed particularly unusual. But in Zhao Si's eyes...

It was a death sentence.

Like Cheng Shi, he had long since realized this was an internal war among [Deceit] followers. So the moment he spotted a horde of red-eyed rats closing in, his first thought was of the vanished Hunter — Su Wu!

He had to be a Beast Tamer, and he was still alive!

Were these rats his doing? What was he planning?

No, wait... why were there playing cards stuck to the rats' bellies?

A Magician? The Magician was alive too? And working with the Beast Tamer?

Had they discovered he was the one who detonated the explosives and teamed up for revenge?

This was bad. Very bad.

Zhao Si couldn't lie still any longer. Danger was closing in, and he couldn't just play dead and wait for doom. No one knew what kind of unthinkable stunts these trickster teammates might pull!

So he made his move. Too many knights surrounded him to risk a gamble, so to play it safe, he silently shifted his form and activated Abstract Imitation, disguising himself as...

A rat.

A very large rat.

This trick was useless against the city guard knights — Zhao Si's actual target was the rats themselves. It was a ruse to deceive the rodents before him!

He'd chosen the simplest approach: fool the rats into thinking he was just another member of the feeding swarm, so they'd bypass him and not gnaw at his body.

It had to be said — this was the lowest-risk and most ingenious method available. The Master of Trickery's thinking was superb, his reaction time and performance nothing short of perfect. He'd truly brought this impromptu act to life!

Anyone who witnessed it would have had no choice but to applaud and shout "Bravo!"

Not even a screenwriter could have penned such a flawless script!

The only pity was that there happened to be one picky audience member on the scene — and that audience member happened to be the "Screenwriter" himself.

After witnessing the entire performance, Cheng Shi barely contained his laughter and offered a suggestion to his fellow knights.

"Rats breed disaster. I don't think we should just keep digging through rubble — these roaming rats need to be dealt with too, or they'll bring disease to the city.

Look at that swarm on the corpse pile — they've already gone mad with hunger. If we let this continue, I'm afraid they'll endanger the residents nearby.

How about... we burn some of them first?

Everyone, please step back. I'll set the fire!"

In all fairness, Cheng Shi wasn't lying. He hadn't even touched his nose.

He'd simply tucked his little scheme inside a perfectly sincere suggestion — solving Montrani's pest problem while conveniently addressing his own objective.

The knights agreed he had a point and stepped back several paces, clearing a perimeter around the body pile.

But those few steps stripped Zhao Si of every last inch of buffer between himself and the city guard knights. No matter what [Deceit] talent you possessed, activation always demanded a degree of plausibility.

You could alter details others hadn't quite seen. You could conceal truths people didn't clearly remember. You could even fish in troubled waters and impersonate someone else entirely. But the prerequisite was: never create a cognitive contradiction too absurd to swallow.

[Deceit], even with stolen methods of [Chaos] at its disposal, was still fundamentally about "deception" and "fraud" — not confusion.

Right now, in every knight's eyes, the corpse pile contained only rats and dead convicts. If a knight suddenly materialized out of that heap, it wouldn't be a masterstroke of deception — it would be an audition for the role of Clown.

So when Zhao Si heard Cheng Shi's words, his expression turned absolutely murderous.

How could the timing be this perfect?!

Who was orchestrating all of this?!

Was that knight actually the Magician?

Or were the Magician and the Beast Tamer hiding among these knights, watching from the shadows?!

Rats had been running rampant all day and no one had batted an eye. Why had they suddenly become a nuisance at the exact moment he was tossed into the corpse pile?

There couldn't possibly be this many coincidences in the world. Someone had to be pulling strings from behind the scenes!

Fine. Just fine. What a brilliant scheme you've devised!

Zhao Si gnashed his teeth but had no recourse. And Cheng Shi, naturally, wasn't about to give Zhao Si time to concoct some new plan. The corner of his mouth curled slightly, and he casually lobbed a torch stuck in the ground toward the pile.

As if by sheer coincidence, the torch landed right beside Zhao Si's feet. The flames caught on the convict garb of the corpse beneath him, and fire began creeping steadily toward his body.

The instant Zhao Si saw where the torch had landed, he was certain — that bastard knight had to be one of his teammates. As for which one, that remained unclear.

"Screw it. All in."

The Master of Trickery snapped. He could no longer calmly deploy his tricks, so his only option was to explode into action and attempt a breakout toward the side with the fewest knights.

He charged and simultaneously tried to blend into the crowd to deceive the knights' perception. But the scene was too bizarre — bizarre enough that no one could believe the fleeing figure was a fellow knight.

Without Cheng Shi even needing to lift a finger, the surrounding city guard knights closed in with grim faces.

Of course, Cheng Shi wasn't about to miss this opportunity.

He wove through the ranks of knights, lance in hand, jabbing seemingly at random — yet every casual thrust landed precisely on the path Zhao Si needed to escape, snuffing out each flicker of hope in the man's eyes and plunging him back into despair.

After three or four such denials, Zhao Si finally noticed the city guard knight trailing behind him.

It was him!

The trickster teammate!

But who was he?!

It was an unfamiliar face — decent-looking, but infuriating. Zhao Si couldn't recall ever seeing it before, yet something about it felt oddly familiar.

Li Yi, the Magician?

Or Su Wu, the Beast Tamer?

Whoever it was, killing him in the chaos was the best move. Otherwise, there'd be no escape.

And so, cornered with almost no room to maneuver, Zhao Si suddenly wheeled around in an impossibly agile reversal and lunged at Cheng Shi. His face twisted with menace, he hurled a thunderclap spell straight at him — only to find that his opponent looked even more thrilled at the sight of him charging back.

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The question mark didn't belong to Cheng Shi. It belonged to Zhao Si.

He froze for just an instant — but in that instant, his vision blurred.

Cheng Shi dodged the lightning elemental attack with reflexes and speed beyond normal comprehension. A single explosive step carried him inside Zhao Si's guard. Then, with utterly irresistible force, his left hand clamped around the man's throat while his right hand hoisted the lance overhead. Eyes glinting with amusement, he asked:

"Witness my valor?"

Without waiting for an answer, the lance drove downward in a vicious thrust. The keen tip punched clean through Zhao Si's chest. Raw power carried the Master of Trickery — eyes wide with horror — crashing to the earth, pinning him to the dirt in the blink of an eye.

"Boom—"

Dust erupted. Gasps filled the air.

The Hero of Today touched down from his leap, pivoted, dusted his hands — one seamless motion.

The knights around him were startled by Cheng Shi's combat prowess, but they didn't dwell on the outcome of this skirmish. Instead, the moment the dust settled, they bellowed in every direction:

"City guard knights, be advised! There may be more imposters playing dead among the corpses! Form up — surround, count, and commence the pyre!"

No sooner had the order been given than over a dozen helmet-clad convicts in various colored garb burst from the body pile with anguished howls, scattering in all directions.

Cheng Shi watched them flounder just as Zhao Si had, and smiled with quiet sentiment.

"Of course. The protagonists of [Chaos] were never just the players..."

With that, he dragged Zhao Si's corpse toward a deserted corner.

It was time to confirm the answer to the hypothesis in his mind.