

The Gods 240

Chapter 240: Divinity Germinates from Fear!

"Even if you kill every last one of me, you'll never leave this place unscathed. Keinlaur is in Montrani right now, and he's watching this laboratory. The moment he discovers you weren't turned into experiment material, your fate will be far worse than mine.

So stop, young man. We can discuss cooperation again..."

"Shhk—"

"Bang—"

"Boom—"

Cheng Shi turned a deaf ear. In the split second that countless Seliuses broke into their "chorus," he seized the opening and toppled four or five more.

This time, Selius truly couldn't hold it together. They began an orderly retreat and swept every die at their feet toward the mountain of corpses piling up at the center of the experiment ground.

Yes — a mountain of corpses.

Cheng Shi had very nearly slaughtered his way through the entire facility.

It wasn't just the Seliuses. He hadn't spared the experiment materials that tumbled out of destroyed equipment during the fighting either — he'd slit their throats on the spot.

The bodies kept stacking higher. The performance grew more and more unhinged. The once-elegant assassin was now drenched in blood, and by the end, he'd become nothing more than a butcher climbing a mountain.

A mountain of corpses.

"What's the matter — scared?"

Cheng Shi sat atop the "summit" of his corpse heap, breathing hard and laughing uproariously.

He gazed down at the remaining Seliuses who dared not advance, then tucked away his bottle of Prosperity of Yesteryear.

Even a landlord didn't have unlimited grain. Best to economize where possible.

The handful of Seliuses remaining on the field no longer posed any threat. These slices had been utterly broken — they stood frozen, too terrified to move.

Cheng Shi studied them, frowning.

The terror on their faces seemed to have faded somewhat, replaced by an indescribable strangeness.

Their gazes were unfocused — confused, even stunned. Cheng Shi didn't know what was happening, but one thing was certain: their attention was no longer on him.

What was going on?

Had they been scared witless?

They were certainly scared — but not witless.

Under the crushing pressure of the Hero of Today, fear had been spreading throughout the experiment ground for some time. The tremendous noise had even reached the original inside his research workshop. He pressed close to the unopenable wooden door, listening to the commotion outside.

The slice that had betrayed him seemed to be fighting someone again, but he couldn't quite make out the result.

Sometimes, though, a story doesn't need sound to be told. When thick, viscous blood began seeping in through the crack beneath the door, the original Selius's expression finally changed.

In that blood — the blood of his countless selves — he sensed a terror so dense and bone-deep it refused to dissipate.

Yet he himself felt no fear. Quite the opposite — he threw himself excitedly at the wooden door, screaming to whoever was on the other side:

"Fear! I can feel fear!

Whoever you are out there — don't stop! Keep going! I'm begging you, keep going!

I can sense it — I can sense [Corruption] roaming, sense 'terror' coalescing!

The Germinating Divinity is mutating — I'm certain it's mutating! Don't let my slices deceive you!

Keep going! It's about to appear!

Let the slaughter keep blooming!

It's coming!"

Cheng Shi froze the moment he heard that cry. He suddenly recalled something Selius himself had said during that extrapolated fantasy.

Selius had explained that the alternating gladiatorial format was designed to trigger the experiment materials' deepest fears — to use their tense, seething consciousness as a cradle for nurturing the exceedingly rare Germinating Divinity associated with [Corruption] and "terror."

But wasn't that something that could only mutate among slices that shared "Common Recognition"? How was the fear Cheng Shi himself had inflicted upon the Seliuses also producing a mutation?

What he didn't realize was that the alternating gladiatorial format was merely a means, not a rigid rule. Selius's experiment had only been half-complete — he'd been testing exclusively among experiment materials that possessed "Common Recognition" and hadn't yet explored deeper possibilities.

And right now, it was precisely because Cheng Shi had embraced the urge to slaughter, prematurely drawing [Corruption]'s gaze, that the fear in the Seliuses' hearts had germinated into the result the experiment sought.

[Corruption], terror, "Common Recognition" — all the elements were in place.

And so, in a single moment, Germinating Divinity appeared.

Selius's slice had never imagined that the Germinating Divinity he'd so desperately pursued would sprout not in his experiment materials, but within himself.

So in that instant, he too was stunned.

He was not the true Selius. He was merely a personality extracted via slicing — an obsessive personality.

And his purpose — the driving ambition of his existence — was not to await the emergence of Germinating Divinity, but to replace Selius as master of this laboratory and break free of Keinlaur's control to become the facility's true director.

Because he was Selius's obsession incarnate — a slice born from the scholar's controlling personality. He possessed an intense need for control, but lacked the steadfast devotion to experimentation.

Yet reality was often this theatrical. Those who sought never found; those who never sought stumbled upon it by chance.

So he hesitated. No — he was afraid. Afraid that the divinity germinating within him would be absorbed by the original. Afraid that everything he'd worked for would only serve to dress someone else for the wedding. So he began to compromise, wanting to strike a new deal with Cheng Shi — if only to send away this calamity he'd so thoroughly underestimated.

But Cheng Shi — who had stumbled upon this opportunity by accident — had no intention of leaving!

He looked down at slice-Selius from atop the corpse mountain and asked with a grin:

"Is it true?"

Every last slice-Selius's face darkened, and they turned to run.

He hadn't given an answer — but the answer was already painfully obvious.

The tables had turned. The situation had shifted.

Cheng Shi let out a booming laugh, threw back his head, and drained another bottle of Prosperity of Yesteryear. Scalpel and dice in hand, he took off in pursuit at blinding speed.

The vast experiment ground had become a cat-and-mouse arena once more — only last time the cat had been Selius and the mouse Li Yi. This time, the cat was Cheng Shi and the mouse was Selius.

"You fool! He's manipulating you! I am Selius — the director of this experiment!

Not some lowly deathmatch convict!

Germinating Divinity could never sprout inside me!!"

"Then why are you running?"

"He's conning you into eliminating his enemies!

Wake up — he can't open that door! He can't promise you anything! Only I have the resources to cooperate with you! I can get you out of this laboratory safely!"

"Then why are you running?"

"You... you idiot! You've been deceived!

You've been deceived!!!"

"Oh? Then why are you running?"

"..." Selius's face cycled between ashen and livid, unable to form words.

"See? You don't even dare face me head-on. That means you're scared. That means you've got a guilty conscience!

No — what you've got in there is Germinating Divinity!

And I can already... see it!"

Cheng Shi haunted the experiment ground like an inescapable phantom, materializing beside one Selius after another and reaping them without a moment's hesitation.

He could feel the terror spreading faster and faster, until only a single Selius slice remained — and the dread finally peaked.

So Cheng Shi stopped.

"You madman! I'm the director of this laboratory! I can get you out!

He's nothing — just a fraud who's been locked up so long he's gone insane!

How can you believe him!

You fool, how can you possibly—"

"Thwack—"

Before the tirade could finish, the last Selius slice was knocked unconscious by Cheng Shi's knife-hand strike.

He snorted, scooped up the limp Selius like a dead dog, and carried him to the wooden door.

By now the thick pool of blood on the floor had forced the door open just a sliver.

Through that crack, Cheng Shi could see a single eye — manic, bloodshot, and twisted with excitement — rolling wildly as it peered outward.

It was trying to gauge the battle's progress through the narrow gap, yet simultaneously terrified that its gaze might kill those remaining slices and interrupt the accumulation of fear.

And so the crack in the door presented a ghastly tableau: a blood-red eye appearing and disappearing without pattern, staring outward in frenzied hope laced with dread.

The erratic "peeping" made the entire experiment ground feel ten times more sinister.

Even Cheng Shi, upon locking eyes with that orb for the first time, was startled enough to flinch.

'What the hell is that thing?'

"...Scholar, this is the last slice. How about we discuss cooperation?"

The bloodshot eye in the crack blinked, then crinkled into a smile.

"Good."

The hoarse voice was no different from the wailing Selius outside — save that this hoarseness held not a shred of fear. Only the excitement and elation of an experiment on the verge of success.

"Come in. Come on in."