

The Gods 264

Chapter 264: What — You Want a Ride Too?

Cheng Shi nodded slowly.

"That's right. We happened to meet in a trial. That lunatic kept stealing my identity for convenience, and I got sick of it — so I gave her a taste of her own medicine and stole hers right back.

But even though my impersonation caused her nothing but trouble, the lunatic didn't mind at all. She actually found it entertaining.

That made me even more irritated. So I did a bunch of... ahem... rather unsavory things under her name.

You probably know the rest better than I do.

The things you've heard? I haven't even heard them myself yet.

There — that's the story you wanted to hear. Now, how about you tell me what exactly she said to get back at me?"

Hong Lin listened, then snorted coldly:

"Zhen Yi — you're still lying!

You think I'd believe that?"

"Heh." Cheng Shi's eyes turned mocking. "Now I'm genuinely curious. I'd love to know how a Chosen One — so far above that ordinary players would break their necks looking up — got played so hard by that lunatic.

Ms. Hong Lin, since this is a support group, why don't you share your symptoms too?"

At this, the alarm in Hong Lin's eyes finally subsided somewhat. She spat viciously, then let out a long exhale:

"Bad luck!"

'Oh? You know that feeling too?'

"Do tell." Cheng Shi chuckled, his face all mischief.

Cheng Shi's demeanor showed no fear, no hint of nerves. And in the eyes of his teammates, that naturally meant this person had the confidence to go toe-to-toe with a Chosen One — or even take on all five at once.

'Well, obviously. Someone who dares to scam Zhen Yi can't possibly be ordinary!'

And so the way everyone looked at Cheng Shi shifted ever so slightly.

He appeared to be an under-the-radar heavy hitter. Though he hadn't disclosed his score, at his level, scores were beside the point.

Hong Lin finally recovered her composure too. She could see it now — Cheng Shi was probably not Zhen Yi. If he were, everyone present would already have become the punchline of an even bigger joke.

"Ancient history. Not worth retelling..." Her expression darkened briefly — as though she'd recalled something unpleasant — then she forced a strained smile at Cheng Shi. "But you've got guts, kid. Not many people can outplay Zhen Yi. I respect that. Though — are you really a Fate Weaver?"

[Fate] can't exactly out-trick [Deceit], can it?"

She remained skeptical of his identity. And she wasn't alone — everyone was wondering whether Cheng Shi was truly a Fate Weaver. After all, [Fate]'s mystics weren't exactly known for their deception skills.

They were known for bamboozlement.

Seeing that he'd somehow pulled the catastrophe back from the brink, Cheng Shi's taut nerves finally relaxed for a split second.

'Thank god. As long as you don't suspect I'm Zhen Yi, I can spin my way out of anything else.'

'This is too hard. I really have it too hard...'

His mind was a tangle, but his surface reaction was a casual snort:

"Enough. Drop the pointless probing. Whether or not I'm a Fate Weaver — do you really think I could hide that from all of you?"

The farce is over. Let's discuss how to start this absurd trial."

After extended wrangling, the topic finally — through Cheng Shi's dogged persistence — returned to the task at hand.

Though the group still harbored doubts about his identity, at least the "identity war" sparked by Brother Mouth was behind them.

Cheng Shi could finally breathe. And he finally had a moment to have a little chat with dear Brother Mouth.

'Fool's Lips! You'd better behave, or else...'

'Don't make me beg you.'

Through Hong Lin's half-suspicious questioning and Cheng Shi's deliberately ambiguous answers, the ridiculous comedy at last drew to a close.

The group sobered up and turned their attention to the trial environment.

Clearly, [Prosperity] shouldn't congregate in a place shrouded by [Decay]. So to complete the trial and ignite the so-called "prairie fire," they first needed to find the spark capable of starting one — a spark on the verge of going out.

Finding an unknown target in this vast, Sighing Sorrow Tide-swept forest would be extraordinarily difficult. After brief deliberation, balancing safety and efficiency, they decided to split up — teams of two, three directions.

If a clue was found: signal flares to notify each other. If no clue was found but the Sorrow Tide arrived: regroup in two hours and try another approach. If the Sorrow Tide erupted mid-search: flee in the opposite direction and reconvene.

The plan was proposed by the historian. The signal flares were his, too. Given the uncertainty surrounding Cheng Shi's identity, Zuo Qiu personally preferred teaming up with someone else — because no [Memory] follower in their right mind would walk alongside a suspected Zhen Yi.

Everyone shared the sentiment. And so the "ostracized" Cheng Shi naturally gravitated toward Hong Lin — the only one who "didn't seem to mind him" — forming a pair.

Hong Lin wasn't surprised by this outcome. She glanced at Cheng Shi, nodded — acceptance of the arrangement.

With two spoken for, the two singer-class players couldn't be grouped together. The plan was to let the Trap Master — who could actually talk — choose first, so that the Puppet Master would simply pair with whoever was left.

But unexpectedly, the Puppet Master who had expressed no preferences all this time made her choice first. She directed her puppet to stand silently beside the historian. The message was clear: she didn't want to travel with Featherhead.

Featherhead's eyes took on an amused cast. He spared a glance at the Puppet Master who'd snubbed him, then turned to the Trap Master who had no choice left — and offered him an alternative:

"'Singer' is merely a job title. It doesn't define me. I can operate as a solo unit. In a forest under my Master's gaze, I won't slow anyone down.

Hunter — if you prefer going alone, we can increase efficiency. Four groups."

But the Trap Master didn't refuse the pairing. He gave a cold nod:

"I'll go with [Decay]."

That single statement earned him elevated regard from the others. Featherhead himself wore an openly appreciative smile.

"I like you. You know how to read a room."

"Well, I don't like men. Let's go. Stop wasting time."

With that, the cool-headed hunter turned and walked away. Featherhead blinked in surprise, then followed with a smile.

Zuo Qiu had no objections to teaming with the Puppet Master. He looked at the puppet and its master, then said seriously:

"I'm well-versed in underground history and have some knowledge of wilderness survival. Considering your faith, how about I lead the way and you handle security?"

The mature puppet gave a gentle nod. No objections. Then she hoisted the petite Puppet Master girl onto her back and followed the historian, step for step.

Watching this scene, Cheng Shi felt a twinge of envy.

"Tsk. Must be nice — getting carried around."

Hong Lin scoffed and looked in the direction the pair had disappeared:

"What — you want a ride too?"