

## The Gods 272

### Chapter 272: The Fog Gate

The Fog Gate wasn't actually a door. It was a spatial distortion and subsidence caused by an excessive accumulation of [Decay] power. Since [Decay]'s outward manifestation in the Sighing Forest was mist, the spatial subsidence — when observed by living beings — appeared as a dense clump of concentrated fog, eerily resembling a portal.

Though in a sense, it was one.

Anyone who could withstand the spatial subsidence and tearing forces within could use one end of a Fog Gate to rapidly transit to the other. In some ways, it resembled Mockery and Jeering, except the latter only existed in the Void and was far safer.

The spatial corridor inside a Fog Gate was unstable. Aside from those blessed by [Decay], living beings of other faiths could rarely survive the passage.

So the fact that the Mushroom-Footed Person's trail ended inside the Fog Gate was utterly baffling — tantamount to saying that the individual they'd found was a [Decay] follower.

While that might explain his immunity to the Sorrow Tide, the deeper question remained: how could a Mushroom-Footed Person possibly follow [Decay]?

They were born worshipping [Prosperity]. That faith was etched into their very genes — unalterable by any external means. For a divine lineage race like the Mushroom-Footed People, they would sooner give up life itself than abandon their faith.

So the group found themselves mired in doubt before the gate. Had they followed the right trail?

Could the hunter have led them wrong?

But the cold-faced hunter was clearly confident in his tracking. He stood in front without a word — neither responding to the questioning gazes nor joining the discussion — simply maintaining vigilant watch over the surroundings.

He looked like a diligent bodyguard.

"Would the Baptism of New Life work against the Fog Gate's erosion?" Cheng Shi whispered.

Hong Lin shook her head:

"No. Inside a spatial subsidence corridor, [Decay] isn't erosion — it's protection.

[Decay]'s power shields His followers from the tearing forces of space itself. That's why they can traverse it. The Baptism of New Life counteracts [Decay]. Under these circumstances, using it inside would only kill you faster."

"..."

Cheng Shi had expected it wouldn't work — but hadn't counted on it actively making things worse. He pursed his lips and turned his gaze back to Zuo Qiu, sandwiched between him and Big Cat.

"My dear Poop Scooper, how about you take that insect-lamp back out for another look?"

Zuo Qiu's face froze. Realizing he was cornered, he had no choice but to feign nonchalance, grunt an "Mm," and produce the broken fluorescent lantern.

When Cheng Shi and Big Cat examined it more closely this time, Hong Lin's expression changed.

"That's impossible!"

"What did you find?"

"The breath of [Prosperity]!"

Hong Lin extended one thick paw, popped out a single razor-sharp claw, and gently touched the scant remaining blue-tinted fluorescent liquid inside the lantern.

"An extremely, extremely faint trace of [Prosperity]. Without this tiny bit pooled together, I could barely distinguish it."

Cheng Shi followed her claw and looked — but sensed no trace of [Prosperity] whatsoever.

Neither did anyone else. Zuo Qiu asked in surprise: "Are you sure?"

"Heh. Are you questioning my perception of [Prosperity]? Are you sure about that?"

"..." One retort shut the Poop Scooper right up.

Mid-conversation, Hong Lin seemed to think of something else. She squeezed a thread of [Prosperity] power from her claw-tip and slowly released it into the fluorescent liquid. But to everyone's shock, the instant the [Prosperity] power touched the liquid, it merged in and vanished — while the liquid's glow brightened slightly.

"!!!"

Now everyone understood. This was unmistakably a faith-lamp that consumed [Prosperity] as fuel!

No wonder the glow had faded — the Mushroom-Footed Person who'd provided its "lamp oil" was dead.

But just as one question found its answer, an even bigger one emerged.

Because every person present could clearly sense wisps of [Decay] power evaporating from the fluorescent liquid inside the lantern!

At this, Hong Lin's mind went blank!

The strand of [Prosperity] she'd dropped in — the fluorescent liquid had converted it into pure [Decay]!

This meant the lantern in the historian's hand wasn't merely a faith-lamp. It was a faith converter — one that desecrated [Prosperity] and offered [Decay]!

'Hiss—'

"So... this Mushroom-Footed Person was infusing his own faith into the lantern, using the converted [Decay] output to travel through the Fog Gate. Is that right?"

Cheng Shi spoke his deduction slowly, word by grave word, then looked at Zuo Qiu holding the lantern.

"Poop Scooper, please don't tell me you knew nothing about this lantern!"

Zuo Qiu's expression shifted. He looked somewhat embarrassed:

"I truly didn't know what it did. It's just — it's rare to find an underground cultural artifact, and I got excited. Collector's impulse. This absolutely isn't a lie. Everyone — believe me. I have no connection to [Prosperity] or [Decay]. I was genuinely just curious."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's frown deepened.

'Truth. The historian isn't lying.'

But it also felt a little too convenient. Once again, he sensed an invisible hand pushing him forward — only this time, the force was far more subtle.

"Fine. I believe you.

In that case, the situation is clear. This dead Mushroom-Footed Person carried the lantern through the Fog Gate's spatial corridor from the other end. So if we want to find that so-called 'dying ember,' we need to enter the Fog Gate and see what's on the other side.

Now we have the means, too. The only question is whether this tiny bit of remaining fluorescent liquid can shield all of us through a corridor of unknown length.

So — in or out? Give me an answer."

After finishing, Cheng Shi studied each person's face. But to his surprise, no one responded. Instead, every single one of them turned to look at him.

"?"

'What's with all of you?'

'I already violated my freeloader's oath by giving you this analysis. And now you want me to make the decision too!?'

'Dream on!'

'Am I some kind of tour guide now? The historian seemed pretty knowledgeable — why don't you step up! Go on!'

'Are you the one who stole my freeloader spot!?'

Nobody spoke. Five people stared at each other in a standoff that grew more awkward by the second. Cheng Shi's eye twitched. He turned to Hong Lin.

'You're the Chosen One, sis! Look at how the [War] Chosen One does it — zero hesitation, made every call for the team. And you? You grew this big and actually decided to act like a cat?'

Hong Lin caught his look. She sniffed and rumbled:

"You tricked even Zhen Yi. Your judgment can't be wrong. I trust you."

'Trust my foot!'

Cheng Shi was gnashing his teeth, ready to slug Big Cat — but when Hong Lin finished speaking, everyone else nodded along. Even the cold-faced hunter muttered "trust... or don't trust?" to himself before silently nodding and looking at Cheng Shi again.

'Great. Forced onto the stage like a duck on a perch. Should've kept my mouth shut back there.'

Cheng Shi's face darkened. Then his eyes spun with a new idea. He clapped Zuo Qiu on the shoulder:

"Then let's go in. First, clean off any Baptism of New Life on yourselves. Then Poop Scooper takes point with the lantern. We follow behind. Sound good?"

All in favor, say nothing. All opposed, swap places with Poop Scooper — take the lantern and walk up front.

Let me see... just one vote against. You're swapping with yourself, so you're still up front.

Off you go, Poop Scooper. Don't worry — you're our mightiest meat shield."

"..."

"Oh, sorry — misspoke. We're your mightiest rear guard!"

Zuo Qiu hadn't been particularly resistant — until he heard that. His face went black as a kettle's bottom.

This Fate Weaver... didn't seem to be joking!