

The Gods 279

Chapter 279: [Prosperity]'s Past and Eposka

Cheng Shi surveyed the room full of silent freeloaders and laughed coldly to himself.

'Oh? So that's how it's going to be? Fine. If you want to play this game, I'll show you what a real freeloader looks like.'

He scanned the room once more. Nobody spoke. So he dropped flat onto the ground and went straight to "sleep." Within a single second, thunderous snoring filled the room.

"Zzzz — Zzzz — Zzzz —"

The fake-sleeping act was so transparently false that every person in the room was rendered collectively speechless.

Hong Lin watched this scene that was equal parts hilarious and infuriating. Her expression finally thawed, and she shook her head with a reluctant smile.

Clearly the workload had been too much. The tour guide had gone on strike.

But by this point, everyone had a fairly clear picture of what needed to happen next.

This trial's objective was either protecting the foraging Mushroom-Footed People inside the Sighing Forest, or sustaining the hope burning in their hearts — their prayer for forgiveness. Either way, one thing was certain: if they could eliminate Eposka — the predator hunting the foragers — the trial's difficulty would drop dramatically.

Because once the threat vanished, hope would surge.

So after a moment's thought, Hong Lin looked to the historian:

"This [Decay] creature called Eposka — Poop Scooper, have you heard of it?"

At last, it was the History School's time to shine. Zuo Qiu smiled, puffed out his chest, and began earnestly:

"As it happens, I know a thing or two.

The name Eposka may be unfamiliar, but if I mention another name, you'll likely recognize it. At least you will, Baldie.

That name is...

Dizel."

!!!

Hong Lin's pupils contracted. A disbelieving gasp: "The Unshadowed Flower Crown — [Prosperity]'s Envoy!?"

'[Prosperity]'s Envoy?'

The hunter and assassin perked up. On the floor, Cheng Shi's snoring volume dropped noticeably — ears pricked, waiting for stories about the divine.

Zuo Qiu caught Cheng Shi's act and let out two hearty laughs:

"Exactly. The former [Prosperity] Envoy.

As everyone knows, the Mother of Prosperity had four children—"

"Wait — these are divine secrets. Since when does 'everyone' know them?" Hong Lin cut in with a suspicious look. "I thought you studied underground transitions?"

How are you so familiar with [Prosperity]'s affairs?"

"Ah, well — the History School has many colleagues who research divine history. We hold regular history-sharing sessions. These aren't open to outsiders — invitation only, for select special members.

And I happened to be invited a few times.

Besides, the history I'm about to share is directly connected to underground transitions. Any further questions, Chosen One?"

Hong Lin's gaze turned slightly odd at that "Chosen One." She studied Zuo Qiu for a long moment before nodding.

"My mistake. Continue."

"The Mother of Prosperity had four children. The oldest two are obscure — we lack sufficient data. But the latter two left ample traces across the Land of Hope and are frequently discussed.

Her third child was Dazel — former [Prosperity] Envoy, whom She had named with the divine title 'The Unshadowed Flower Crown.'

This servant god of [Life] was considered the most suitable successor to [Prosperity]'s divine name. But something happened — no one knows what — and this servant god abandoned [Prosperity]. Abandoned his own mother. And threw himself into the arms of [Decay]..."

"What?"

Cheng Shi's mind went blank.

'Hold on — Le Le'er was also a child of the Mother of Prosperity. She'd betrayed [Prosperity] and embraced [Corruption]. And now there's a brother who straight-up joined [Decay]?'

'Good heavens. Is [Prosperity]'s entire family made up of turncoats and moles!?'

'This is huge news!'

His curiosity ablaze, Cheng Shi didn't even bother pretending anymore. He shot upright, face naked with anticipation: "Then what!? What happened next!?"

The expression was identical to when the group had been clamoring for his gossip at the trial's start.

"The complex relationships among the Gods aren't for mortals to comprehend. Nobody knows what exactly happened in between. In any case, [Decay] took Dizel in and made Him [Decay]'s Envoy.

But before long, He was dead. Killed by [Decay]'s own hand.

The very God who'd personally welcomed Dizel personally put Him to death. Dizel's divinity was split in two: His body became Eposka — the Desolate Walker — roaming the Sighing Forest mindlessly. His soul was sealed inside a dagger.

That dagger is called the Gift of Sores. It remains lost somewhere in the world. It's the holy grail for every [Decay] assassin — indeed, for assassins of any faith. A near-divine weapon.

So now you understand: before body and soul were separated, Eposka was once a child of [Prosperity]. Not only that — he was the Mother of Prosperity's own son.

Which makes me wonder... could the dying embers refer to him?

If so, our mission shifts from protecting the Mushroom-Footed People and killing Eposka... to helping Eposka kill the Mushroom-Footed People.

Consider this: the 'Never-Vanishing Desolate Lamp' in the Mushroom-Footed People's hands is a treasure bestowed by [Prosperity]. Think one layer deeper — even as punishment, why exile them to [Decay]'s territory specifically?

And why would He borrow [Decay]'s power to protect the very sinners He exiled?

Could there be something unspeakable lurking underneath? Is it possible that [Prosperity] is using His own faithful to feed His son — trying to awaken the vanished soul of Eposka?

That would explain why the lamp attracts it to hunt the Mushroom-Footed People, wouldn't it?

Of course — this is my personal 'conspiracy theory.' No disrespect to [Prosperity] intended. So please, Chosen One, don't hit me. My body can't take a single punch from you."

"..."

When this reasoning landed, the entire room fell silent.

Hong Lin's brow creased. Whatever she was thinking, she — surprisingly — offered no defense or rebuttal on her patron's behalf.

Cheng Shi's brow rose. Zuo Qiu's logic was hard to dismiss.

'Ignite a prairie fire' — who was to say whether "prairie fire" referred to quality or quantity?

Returning an oathbreaking Envoy to [Prosperity] would count as a 'prairie fire' too!

"If you already knew Eposka was Dizel's soulless husk, why didn't you stop me?"

Even a wink might have made me think twice before rushing to play this damn [Prosperity] divine envoy."

Zuo Qiu laughed heartily and held up a thumb: "Because I wasn't sure either. This trial's objective is too ambiguous. I would never gamble — I don't even know how. So I didn't stop you.

I think what you did was right. Even as a precaution, we can't afford to hedge only one side. Having absolute authority within the Mushroom-Footed settlement benefits us a hundred ways and hurts us in none.

Oh, wait — there is one downside.

But if the Chosen One can swallow the indignity, then we truly have nothing to lose."

Hong Lin snorted coldly: "Nice mouth you've got. I hope you keep a tight grip on it."

"..." Just like that, the historian who'd been speaking with such passionate eloquence shrank right back into his shell.

"So our top priority is finding Eposka and assessing its condition. Agreed?"

The cold-faced hunter, speaking up for once, offered his own take. The group exchanged glances. Every pair of eyes reflected consensus.

And so the plan was settled: first thing tomorrow, they would investigate Eposka's status.

As for why it had to wait until tomorrow — because...

Night had fallen.

When the dark moon climbed the sky, every [Decay] creature in the Sighing Forest stirred to life, transforming the quiet woods into [Decay]'s playground.

The Sighing Sorrow Tide rolled in wave after wave, sealing the settlement so tightly not a whisper could escape. And in the thick, impenetrable mist, vast rotting serpents slithered past — hisses and shrieks rising and falling in an endless nocturnal chorus.

The Night of [Decay] had begun.