

The Gods 283

Chapter 283: The Unshadowed Flower Crown? No — The Wind Chimes of Decay

The battle was fierce. The shockwaves from the two colossal beings crashing together whipped up storm after storm, accelerating the mist's spread.

After the wave of the Sighing Sorrow Tide rolled through, both figures gradually became visible. What the players saw was a massive, lumbering bear with devastating power locked in a furious exchange with an agile but offensively limited treat.

Yes. Bear versus tree.

Eposka's appearance was deeply disturbing. He stood as tall as Hong Lin's bear form, yet lacked the beast's mass. He looked more like a colossal, withered old man — thousands of wrinkles covering every surface, festering skin stuck directly to exposed joints. His entire frame was hunched, and on his back he bore a massive cluster of dead, blooming tree branches.

On closer inspection, the dead branches were actually a giant crown of a tree. But the canopy was so thoroughly desiccated that not a single leaf remained. Instead, it was strung with corpse after rotting corpse of Mushroom-Footed People!

The bodies swayed with Eposka's every movement, like strings of ghastly, macabre [Decay] wind chimes — haunting and horrifying in equal measure.

"This is the 'Unshadowed Flower Crown'?"

"Yes. He once sheltered the entire rainforest with His lush canopy. They say the crown on His back was even larger than the World Tree of Gasmira — yet despite spanning the heavens, it blocked no sunlight. Every tribe under His protection basked in warmth and grew unafraid of storms.

But now... the crown has long withered away..."

In bear form, Hong Lin's combat power skyrocketed. Every swing staggered Eposka. And yet Eposka's [Decay] power seemed... restrained, as if something was pulling it back. Wounds He inflicted on the bear

barely broke the skin before [Prosperity] healed them completely. It looked as though He couldn't deplete Hong Lin's health at all.

But the reason the two titans remained deadlocked was that Eposka could take a beating even better than the bear.

Even when Hong Lin grabbed Him bodily, slammed Him into the ground, and followed up with a barrage of heavy punches and shearing claws, He rose like a specter — instantly back on his feet for the next round, without a single wound on his body!

He simply didn't take damage. Ever.

His agile frame combined with this seemingly invulnerable constitution couldn't give him the upper hand, but it couldn't be defeated quickly either.

Watching the exchange, Cheng Shi saw it clearly: this was a stalemate. Neither could touch the other. They could fight until nightfall without a result.

Recovery that couldn't be outdamaged versus a body that couldn't be harmed at all.

So Cheng Shi frowned and called out:

"Don't just stand there — help!"

Everyone had been itching to move already. The moment Cheng Shi gave the "order," all of them sprang into action.

The cold-faced hunter said nothing, leaping high to land on a treetop. He drew an ornate longbow and loosed a rapid volley at Eposka, every arrow striking the dead branches on its back — clearly probing the Desolate Walker for weaknesses.

The Puppet Master had vanished at some point. When her puppet reappeared, it was behind Eposka. The mature puppet stood at its feet — tiny as an infant before an elephant — yet her fingers seemed to

trail countless threads through the air. Before long, Eposka's movements grew noticeably sluggish. Hong Lin closed in and ground Him into the earth with a savage flurry of blows.

Cheng Shi wasn't idle either. He was supervising the singer's performance.

Something about Zuo Qiu nagged at him. The historian kept gravitating toward him — subtly, almost unconsciously. The feeling was hard to pin down, because as a hot topic of gossip Cheng Shi naturally attracted attention. That alone wasn't enough to divine Zuo Qiu's motives.

More importantly, the historian knew an enormous amount and seemed willing to share — so why had he slipped in a lie about history? And conveniently, it was a lie Cheng Shi happened to know was false!

So Cheng Shi started questioning Zuo Qiu's identity.

'Could this be another trickster disguised as something else?'

He'd mocked Hong Lin for seeing snakes in every shadow, but after last trial's chaos, he himself now saw con artists everywhere.

If he could confirm that Zuo Qiu couldn't actually perform singer techniques, that might expose the disguise.

Unfortunately — Zuo Qiu could sing. Not only that, he was genuinely good at it.

His voice wasn't pleasant, but it was effective.

The [Memory] follower's history book contained records of many legendary battles. When he channeled his singer's gift to perform those blood-pumping sagas, everyone present felt their pulse quicken.

Even Cheng Shi — who never charged the front — found himself itching to rush in and pummel Eposka with his bare fists.

'He's really a singer?'

If he truly was a singer, then his history book was probably genuine too. Cheng Shi squinted suspiciously at Zuo Qiu, but the historian ignored the look, solemnly channeling buff after buff onto the team.

'Could this official historian really be after nothing but unofficial gossip?'

He was no longer sure.

"Seen enough? We're in the lead and uninjured, sure, but as a priest — shouldn't you be restoring our spent spirit energy?"

"?"

Cheng Shi was lost for words. 'I haven't even figured out YOUR identity, and you're already probing mine?'

'Fine. You want to play that game?'

He snorted, then lazily flicked a hand toward Hong Lin and called out with great theatrical gravity: "Spirit Spell!"

"..." Zuo Qiu's jaw dropped. "That's it? What about the rest of us?"

"Tch — you support types haven't even broken a sweat. You want spirit restoration too?"

My spirit power doesn't come cheap!

Good steel goes on the blade's han... blade's edge."

"..."

Watching Cheng Shi's unabashed laziness, Zuo Qiu's face went completely black.

'Fine — even if that lightless spirit spell you flicked out was real, why aim it at the [Prosperity] follower of all people?'

'Their spirit power was an ocean. Did yours even make a drop of difference?'

'And the recipient was the [Prosperity] CHOSEN ONE. Your sad little pellet would probably evaporate from sheer inferiority before it even reached her!'

Meeting Poop Scooper's skeptical glare, Cheng Shi pointed at the rampaging Hong Lin and clicked his tongue:

"Well? Did it work or not?"

Zuo Qiu's eye twitched. He turned his back without another word, focusing exclusively on team buffs and refusing to engage with this utterly hopeless freeloader.

But Cheng Shi — watching Zuo Qiu's back — quietly drew a scalpel and began waving it suggestively behind him. He only stopped his probing gesture when Zuo Qiu's spine visibly tensed, stiffening line by rigid line.

That confirmed it: Zuo Qiu definitely had a problem.

The historian's surface reaction to Cheng Shi's behavior appeared perfectly normal. But that very normalcy was the biggest abnormality!

Because Cheng Shi's own behavior was objectively problematic. When faced with a teammate freeloading this shamelessly, any normal person — no matter how patient — would show some irritation.

But Zuo Qiu's tolerance was too high. Unreasonably high — as if he'd already accepted that "this is just how Cheng Shi is."

Now that was interesting. It meant the historian had known about him for some time.

But when? Last night? At the trial's start? No, no — too brief to develop an understanding of a stranger. It had to be from before the trial.

'This man probably knew who I am long before we met!'

'Every reaction he's had to my "identity" has been an act!'

'Interesting. Who exactly is this historian — or rather... whose friend is he?'