

The Gods 292

Chapter 292: The God Worship Society and the Descent Faction

After learning An Jing's identity, regardless of whatever unspeakable motives she harbored, the best course of action was to deal with this teammate who had already taken out two of their party members.

But just as Cheng Shi was about to turn back and assist Hong Lin, the Mushroom-Footed People came swarming toward the Main House with the Old Patriarch in tow, crying out in panic at the Divine Envoy standing in the doorway:

"Lord Baldy! The Desolate Lamp is missing! Lord Baldy, the Desolate Lamp is gone!"

"Damn!" Cheng Shi's brow furrowed. The Puppet Master's little move of opening the door had been masterfully played. With the Old Patriarch calling for him, Cheng Shi was pinned at the entrance, unable to turn back.

The timing was far too convenient — so convenient that he couldn't shake the feeling he'd walked into another trap. But he had no choice. To win this round, the Mushroom-Footed People were still the key, so he could only adapt on the fly and bluff his way through.

Cheng Shi's thoughts raced. He smoothed his furrowed brow, put on a smile, and stepped outside, closing the Main House door behind him.

And just like that, it was him outside facing the entire tribe of Mushroom-Footed People, while Hong Lin was inside facing a Puppet Master and her three puppets.

The disappearance of the Desolate Lamp had terrified the Old Patriarch. He'd barely noticed anything off about Cheng Shi, and he certainly had no interest in what was happening inside the Main House. He stumbled up to Cheng Shi and immediately prostrated himself.

"Lord Baldy, the Desolate Lamp bestowed by our Lord has not returned to the altar. Does this mean He questions our devotion?"

The Old Patriarch raised his trembling head. The terror and anxiety in his eyes were impossible to hide. He didn't even dare meet Cheng Shi's gaze, afraid of seeing any hint of blame — even though he had no idea what had happened.

Cheng Shi looked at the sea of Mushroom-Footed People sprawled on the ground before him. With one ear cocked toward the sounds inside the house, he gave two light coughs, smiled, and helped the Old Patriarch to his feet.

"There is no need for alarm. I understand your centuries-long desperation for forgiveness, but since He has already sent me here, you should compose yourselves.

"Your panic, as it stands, looks more like you're the ones questioning Him."

His face wore a smile, but at this moment it looked more like a dagger hidden behind pleasant words.

The Old Patriarch, who had just been helped up, dropped to the ground again with a thud.

"No no no! Lord Baldy, please understand — we would never dare question our Benefactor! We were simply worried about the Sacred Artifact's whereabouts. We came to... to request instructions. Yes, request instructions.

"We were too hasty and tactless. Please forgive us, my lord! Please, may our Benefactor show mercy!"

"Please forgive us, my lord! May our Benefactor show mercy!"

A tidal wave of fearful cries crashed over him. Cheng Shi felt the Mushroom-Footed People's terror and sighed inwardly.

He didn't want to play the heavy hand — smacking the Mushroom-Footed People with the stick of authority. But a silent battle was raging inside the house, and if he didn't divert their attention somehow, his cover would be blown.

"Rise, all of you. We are all His children. There is no hierarchy among us.

"The Desolate Lamp is perfectly safe — it's right here in my possession. When yesterday's trial ended, the lamp had served its purpose, so I reclaimed it. You can put your hearts at ease."

The Old Patriarch blinked in surprise, then the realization hit him like a bolt.

Of course!

The trial was already over. Why would the Benefactor allow a lamp tainted with Decay — a desecration of Prosperity — to remain in the hands of the Mushroom-Footed People?

It made perfect sense. Absolutely perfect sense.

His mood soared from the abyss to the heavens. At the thought that only three more trials stood between them and His forgiveness, the Old Patriarch suddenly found new life in his old bones.

He struggled to his feet and asked with fervent piety:

"Lord Baldy, when will today's trial begin?"

'Ha — you're asking me? Who am I supposed to ask? I'll make something up once they're finished inside.'

Cheng Shi gave a faint smile and was about to stall with some excuse when the Main House door swung open. Hong Lin sauntered out with a flush of satisfaction on her face. She had clearly enjoyed the fight.

Not just enjoyed it — she'd won it.

Cheng Shi grinned. With a raise of his eyebrow, he addressed the Mushroom-Footed People:

"Today's trial is: Unwavering Devotion.

"We, the children of Prosperity, must maintain a state of flourishing at all times. Even here in the Land of Exile, we must eat consistently to promote vitality. Therefore, today we will select one individual from the tribe as the test subject. He will carry the Desolate Lamp and venture into the Sighing Forest to forage.

"Before departure, I will block his memories of our party so he can act as he normally would. We will then record all of his actions and rigorously inspect whatever food he brings back, to ensure your offerings to Him contain no impure thoughts.

"This, too, is a test of your devotion. Judging by the food stores in your tribe, you've already passed.

"But know that His trials are not to be taken lightly, so we will carry this out today regardless.

"As for safety — worry not. We will follow discreetly behind him to ensure your tribesman's well-being."

The moment he finished, the entire tribe erupted in excitement.

What thrilled them wasn't the Divine Envoy's approval of their tribe — it was that a trial had finally come where the Mushroom-Footed People could demonstrate their devotion.

Nearly every one of them leapt to their feet, thumping their chests and swearing they were the most qualified candidate, begging the Old Patriarch to put them forward.

Cheng Shi was somewhat surprised. This tribe was genuinely devout.

The Old Patriarch didn't dare choose on his own and deferred to the Divine Envoy. Cheng Shi glanced around, then randomly pointed out a "bachelor."

He'd noticed this particular Mushroom-Footed Person had no one of the opposite sex nearby, so he picked him — the tribe's "Hero of Today."

The chosen young man was ecstatic. He ran to the Old Patriarch's side, standing tall with a face full of pride, awaiting the Divine Envoy's command.

"What's your name?"

"Amir, Lord Baldy! My name is Amir, and I am His most devout follower!"

"Good. Spirited. Wait here for me a moment, and then we'll set off."

With that, Cheng Shi finally exhaled in relief, grabbed Hong Lin, and turned back into the Main House.

The instant he stepped inside, he shut the door and turned to look at the Puppet Master with a grave expression — only to find that she bore... no injuries or restrictions whatsoever.

Huh?

Cheng Shi blanked for a second, then glanced at Hong Lin, waiting for an explanation.

Hong Lin scoffed and pointed her chin toward the Puppet Master, who sat primly with all four of her party — herself and her three puppets — lined up in a neat row.

"Another lunatic from the God Worship Society."

"The God Worship Society?" Cheng Shi frowned, recalling this organization of sycophantic fanatics that rivaled the Descent Faction in absurdity.

The world never lacked for fanatics, nor for those who worshipped strength. And when those two traits merged in the same person at the exact moment the Gods descended — the God Worship Society was born.

Everyone in this organization was a special kind of lunatic — self-aware and yet utterly delusional at the same time.

Self-aware in that they knew they were mortal. They would never defy the Gods' game. So they chose submission, acceptance, devotion, and fanaticism.

They believed the Faith Game was the true nature of this world. They believed the Gods were the supreme beings of the entire universe. And so they willingly turned themselves into the Gods' lapdogs, hoping that one day, the Gods would deign to look their way and elevate them beyond the mortal condition.

And delusional in that they were absolutely convinced their bootlicking would eventually pay off. If they were devout enough, the Gods would surely take notice and grant them everything they desired.

Compared to the straightforward zealotry of the God Worship Society, the Descent Faction was far more complex.

The Descent Faction wasn't a formal organization with a defined structure or system. It was merely a label — anyone who believed the Gods should fully descend into the world got lumped in.

Its membership was extraordinarily diverse. There were people like Xie Yang — unemployed losers "grateful to the Gods for solving the unemployment problem." There were rich brats who thought "the world was too boring, and the Gods' arrival brought new entertainment." And there were nihilists who figured, "My life is already a dumpster fire; if the Gods descend, at least everyone else can burn with me."

And so on, and so forth — too many types to count.

All in all, both the God Worship Society and the Descent Faction were essentially on the Gods' side. In the eyes of players who still felt any allegiance to humanity, these people were no different from traitors to the world.

Cheng Shi looked at An Jing. He truly couldn't imagine that such a quiet-seeming little girl could be one of the God Worship Society's lunatics.

But if she really was, then he could roughly guess why Hong Lin and the Puppet Master had stopped fighting.

Because these lunatics would do anything for an audience with a God.

In other words, they were notorious faith-chasing toads — infamous for their eagerness to broker deals. As long as you could offer them a path leading toward the Gods, they would do... anything.

Cheng Shi snorted and asked with an amused look:

"So, Baldy — what exactly did you trade with this Puppet Master?"

Hong Lin snorted right back:

"I sold her the same intel I'd already sold to that stinking bird."