

The Gods 298

Chapter 298: More Absurd Than Absurd...

Eposka could take a beating—far more than Cheng Shi or Hong Lin had imagined. After absorbing Hong Lin's devastating blow, it scrambled back to its feet in no time.

But the giant bear no longer dared to strike.

Because both players had realized the same thing. If the being protecting the Mushroom-Footed People truly was Eposka, then regardless of whether the bear could actually destroy this Envoy's husk, simply imagining what would happen if Hong Lin killed it was enough—the Mushroom-Footed People would instantly lose their shelter and be exposed to the endless Sighing Sorrow Tide. They'd share the fate of their ancestors, with no path left but becoming creatures of [Decay].

The trial would undoubtedly end in failure.

But if they didn't eliminate the Barren Walker, the Mushroom-Footed People's Tribe would continue to exist in this "blasphemous" state, eking out survival. The embers would remain mere embers forever, and their faith would never be set right.

Cheng Shi finally understood. Correcting this corrupted faith was probably the answer to this trial. But the problem was, it seemed like an unsolvable puzzle.

How could dying embers, barely clinging to life, ever be fanned into a raging wildfire?

Setting aside the embers themselves—even the people He'd sent to kindle them were nearly all gone.

The players had their own agendas. Almost none of them cared about these pitiful Mushroom-Footed People. In the end, only a single fraud stood in Eposka's garden, brow furrowed, racking his brains for a solution.

And just as he'd exhausted every idea without finding an answer, the giant bear spoke:

"There's still plenty of time, no rush. Let's find our way back first, then figure things out."

It's just one trial's gains or losses. Relax. Don't take it so hard."

'Relax? Don't take it so hard?'

Cheng Shi smiled. He knew Hong Lin was trying to comfort him. In the past, he wouldn't have cared whether he got bonus points or not—as long as he got something out of the trial, that would've been enough. But today, his competitive edge had kicked in.

He wanted to win. He wanted bonus points. Big bonus points!

Still, Hong Lin had a point about one thing—there were two days left in the trial. No need to rush. He still had time to think it through slowly.

So Cheng Shi nodded, preparing to grab Hong Lin and Amir and retreat while Eposka hadn't launched its next attack.

But right then—something changed!

The giant bear planted all four limbs on the ground and growled, beginning to back away slowly. But as she retreated, she noticed that Eposka's wounds had begun to heal!

Of course, followers of [Decay] weren't completely defined by decay. They could always find a balance between rot and self-regeneration—enough to preserve their lives while devoting themselves as fully as possible to Him.

However, what was mending Eposka's wounds wasn't [Decay] at all. It was a faint [Prosperity] force helping it recover.

Hong Lin caught only a glimpse of that faint, pale green glow—and the entire bear froze on the spot, as if struck by lightning.

Cheng Shi noticed her reaction. His heart lurched and he asked gravely: "What's wrong?"

The giant bear turned her massive head stiffly, disbelief rumbling in her deep voice:

"[Prosperity]'s power. There's [Prosperity] power flowing through its body!"

'What?'

Cheng Shi was dumbfounded. How could there still be [Prosperity] power on a husk that had fully embraced [Decay]?

But before he could even process that question, the next revelation hit him even harder.

"And this force is identical to the one in the Mushroom-Footed People!

Faint, and fresh!

The [Prosperity] power in the Mushroom-Footed People was too meager for me to sense any difference. But Eposka is different—though the [Prosperity] in its body shares the same origin as the Mushroom-Footed People's, compared to mine...

It's completely different!"

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Cheng Shi's mind went blank with another detonation.

'What?'

'The [Prosperity] power in the Mushroom-Footed People isn't the same [Prosperity] as the real one?!'

'Could it mean...'

Cheng Shi swallowed hard, absolutely horrified. A bold, absurd, insane notion rose in his mind:

'The Faith Grafting... succeeded!'

'This was the benefit Eposka wanted!'

It had intercepted the Mushroom-Footed People's Power of Faith meant for [Prosperity], and through that contract, crystallized that stolen faith into a brand-new [Prosperity] force within its own body!

No wonder Abusfer had called it "a new [Prosperity]." Cheng Shi had assumed it was merely a figure of speech, but it turned out the chieftain had meant it literally!

So not just Authority—even faith itself could be stolen?

Then how had Abusfer, a mere Mushroom-Footed chieftain, learned of this method of theft?

Was the current situation the result of some accidental twist of fate centuries ago, or had Eposka and Abusfer planned it from the start?

Had the Mushroom-Footed People, seeking revenge against [Prosperity], also embraced [Decay]?

That didn't seem right—the common tribespeople had no idea Eposka was the god sheltering them...

'Wait—right, the box! The Tower of Logic's box!'

Cheng Shi whipped his head around, instantly realizing there was another possibility for how Abuser had learned about this method of stealing faith:

A Tower of Logic experiment!

Perhaps these Mushroom-Footed People hadn't been exiled here by [Prosperity] at all. A God had no reason to banish His followers to a land governed by an opposing faith. Perhaps these Mushroom-Footed People had simply been captured by Tower of Logic scholars and used as subjects in an experiment... an experiment to steal [Prosperity]'s faith!

Yes—that would also explain [Prosperity]'s "forgiveness" toward the Mushroom-Footed People. He wasn't forgiving sinners. He was taking pity on His own people.

So these Mushroom-Footed People were very likely the scholars' test subjects. Something must have happened that allowed them to escape.

Or perhaps the Sighing Forest itself was the experiment ground those scholars had chosen?

Perhaps at this very moment, those scholars were hidden somewhere nearby, watching everything unfold without moving a muscle!

Cheng Shi was terrified by his own train of thought.

'This is madness!'

'These deranged scholars—they actually want to steal the Gods' faith!'

'Do they truly dare?!'

Cheng Shi's gaze hardened. He recalled the lofty Erudition Presidium. For those who pursued [Truth] with such fanatical devotion, the answer to that question was simple:

'They dare!'

'They absolutely dare!'

'What wouldn't they dare?!'

After all, the Stars Dagger was still simulating the rising sun and setting moon in the depths of the Void. After all, the Conjugate Whisper still flourished in the skies above Gasmira. And the Divinity Germination Experiment was already attempting to manufacture new Divinity. In this entire world, was there anything the Erudition Presidium wouldn't do?!

Under [Truth]'s protection, these fervent seekers of truth were tirelessly plundering everything the Gods possessed!

Divinity, faith, and Authority!

So why was [Truth] sheltering His followers as they did all of this?

What was He scheming—openly seizing the Authority of other gods?

Or was He attempting to become, through these means, what [Deceit] called a true God?!

Cheng Shi felt a massive current raging through his entire body, raising goosebumps across every inch of his skin.

Then another question struck him. If a player intercepted this faith—what then?

Would a person imbued with the Power of Faith... ascend to godhood?!

If so...

Would it be a replacement, or an addition?

Hong Lin had probably arrived at the same question. She suddenly realized this might not be a simple confrontation between [Prosperity] and [Decay]. Somewhere beyond their sight, something else seemed to be watching.

She became cautious all at once, carefully backing up until she stood in front of Cheng Shi, then asked in a low rumble:

"The [Prosperity] power in its body is faint, but it's pulling at my own [Prosperity]—even trying to resonate with the [Prosperity] Divinity sealed inside me...

I'm wondering, did that Puppet Master know about this all along? Is that why she left behind all that Divinity?"

Very possible. The historian's memories might well have contained information about what appeared to be a Tower of Logic experiment. The Puppet Master simply hadn't shared that knowledge with them, for whatever reason.

Cheng Shi didn't know what the Puppet Master was thinking, but he could guess what a warrior would think—something that fell into his hands was never going to be handed over to someone else, especially not an enemy!

A smile tugged at his lips: "Whatever it is, we're definitely not tossing away what's already in our hands. Can you hold on? I might need more time to look for additional clues."

The giant bear nodded: "The [Decay] here is constantly eroding me, but I'll manage. I can hold for half a day. But your Desolate Lamp is running low on [Prosperity]—bring it here and I'll top it off."

Cheng Shi obediently lifted the Desolate Lamp. Then he heard the bear add:

"Cast Concentration on me while you're at it. It'll help me react faster."

His expression froze. He stood rooted to the spot.

"..."