

The Gods 64

Chapter 64: A Humbling High-Level Game

Lying on his back on the rooftop, feeling the sunlight of reality wash over him, Cheng Shi couldn't help but feel a sense of relief as if he had narrowly escaped death.

He hadn't expected that the method would actually work!

Winning another life-or-death gamble made Cheng Shi wonder if he really did have some extraordinary luck when it came to risky situations.

He pulled a die from his pocket and held it up against the blinding sunlight. The number one on the die's face glistened in the reflected light, almost mocking him.

"Predetermined fate? Heh, what a load of crap."

Cheng Shi chuckled, casually tossing the die away. It rolled rapidly across the rooftop, spinning for a few rounds before finally settling with the radiant number one still facing up, unchanged.

It almost seemed as if the die were protesting against Cheng Shi's defiance, or perhaps mocking him for his inability to change its outcome.

Cheng Shi didn't look at it again. Instead, he closed his eyes, letting the memories of the past five days flood his mind as he meticulously reviewed every detail of the trial, analyzing each moment in a mental debrief.

Luck was never permanent; it was something he crafted through his silent efforts.

After every trial, he would replay all his actions, honing his instincts, tightening his nerves, and perfecting his ability to deceive.

That was how Cheng Shi won.

But these efforts were exhausting. Being a "freeloader" was so much more appealing.

Cheng Shi's ultimate dream was to find someone powerful to latch onto and coast through trials as a full-time freeloader.

Unfortunately, there were always idiots in every trial, and it was rare to find an opportunity to freeload through the whole game.

This trial had actually been a decent match. There were plenty of high-level players, and he should have been able to coast all the way to the end.

But the trial's answer didn't allow for freeloading. Or perhaps the other big shots had no intention of carrying him.

The five masks he received as a reward after completing the trial made that clear:

None of those 2400+ players had died!

Why hadn't they died? Perhaps because they had already figured out the answer.

"Bunch of geniuses!"

Cheng Shi sighed as his mind replayed the moment the trial began.

[Death] had given a simple prompt: There is only one path to death. Find it, and offer up your sacrifice!

In previous [Death] trials, this clearly indicated that players needed to find a specific offering, kill that person, and present them to the god to complete the trial.

But this trial had a unique twist: Eternal Bloom Town didn't accept death. Or, at the very least, death was extremely difficult to achieve.

Though, it wasn't impossible. In a town influenced by a semi-divine artifact, another semi-divine artifact could still bring about death.

So, at the beginning, everyone's goal was to find the killer and decipher the trial's clues through them.

At that time, everyone was working toward the same direction.

Except Wei Guan. He behaved like an observer, investigating the town for half a day before using his [Folly] abilities to deduce an answer.

Then, with absolute certainty, he used the killer to kill himself!

He "committed suicide!"

That's why no one found any traces at the scene—because it was Wei Guan who had erased them.

A [Folly] hunter had perfectly faked his own death, plunging his teammates into a spiral of unfounded fear.

At that moment, no one realized that they were the offering.

Sacrificing oneself was the only way forward.

The offering [Death] sought in this trial wasn't a person; it was the wisdom and courage to face death head-on!

The second person to stumble upon the answer was Yunni.

As a follower of [Oblivion], she lacked direction. Desperate to speed up the investigation, she recklessly returned to the inn and confronted the killer head-on!

It's important to note that [Oblivion] is the opposite of [Death]. It promotes something even more extreme than [Death]—the idea that death is not an end but a prelude to total annihilation.

To [Oblivion] followers, life is meaningless, not just other people's lives but their own as well.

In their eyes, death is merely a transition toward final oblivion and is nothing to fear.

When Yunni sensed the members of the Grand Tribunal in the inn and felt the presence of the semi-divine artifact in the room, she believed she had found the answer:

To die under a semi-divine artifact's influence in a town protected by another semi-divine artifact!

So, she willingly embraced death, thinking she could both meet her end and save her teammates in the process.

But she had overlooked one crucial detail, a detail Cheng Shi only realized after four people had died:

The line "There is only one path to death" didn't mean just one answer for the trial—it also meant only one method of death per person!

Yunni was fortunate. Before understanding this rule, she had encountered Moxius of the Grand Tribunal and died under his scepter.

But the ascetic monk wasn't so lucky.

This [Silence] warrior had survived a blow from the semi-divine scepter. In that moment, he understood the rule and immediately lunged toward Cheng Shi, toward When Fear Descends!

There had never been a second killer, nor had anyone seized the opportunity to act.

The ascetic monk had chosen himself, using the replica artifact to end his life!

Wei Guan's death, though intentional, was carried out by Ardos. He died by When Fear Descends, the result of a murder.

Yunni's death was caused by Moxius. She died by Execution's Hour, also a murder.

But the ascetic monk? He was the first to truly commit suicide, killing himself through When Fear Descends.

After these three means of death were used, they were locked. They could no longer be repeated.

This left Cheng Shi, Du Xiguang, and Fang Jue with very limited options for how they could die.

Du Xiguang realized the truth by reading Ardos's memories. He discovered that the puppet hadn't followed Wei Guan to clean up the murder scene, and from this, he deduced Wei Guan's true intent.

However, Du Xiguang was trapped in such a dire situation that he had little opportunity to kill himself. So, he took a different route—using a special method to travel back in time, replacing the ascetic monk's death with his own and altering the memory!

In doing so, he shifted the timeline.

Since the ascetic monk had already left the trial and his memory had been twisted, he disappeared from everyone's minds.

Meanwhile, Du Xiguang exploited this loophole, using When Fear Descends in the memory to kill himself, dying by suicide with When Fear Descends.

But his excessive manipulation caused Fang Jue to miss all the clues, even erasing the faint traces left by the original memory. The revised timeline threw Fang Jue directly into the Law Enforcement Bureau's prison.

Cheng Shi realized the final answer even later.

It wasn't until Moxius's strike failed to kill him that he suddenly understood—the answer required offering oneself through different methods of death.

That's when he devised his plan.

After Moxius's death, Cheng Shi had a surefire way to win the trial—by using Execution's Hour to commit suicide.

But that came with a risk. If there was even a 0.1% chance that the answer wasn't death, Cheng Shi would meet his end in a sea of regret, his life as a player coming to a premature close.

So, fearing death, Cheng Shi conducted a bold experiment first:

He used the alchemical notes he had obtained from Chernosly and Moxius's corpse to stage the alchemist's death. Then, he submitted the Law Enforcement Bureau's judgment of "nominal death" as his trial answer.

It was a risky move.

After all, this was a [Death] trial!

Cheng Shi's attempt to cheat the system could have backfired, turning his clever plan into a sacrilegious act that would have led to his demise.

Fortunately, [Death] accepted his answer.

Though the god gave him a score of 0,

At the very least, [Death] appreciated his performance and believed he had successfully deceived the god.

Cheng Shi had gambled and won.

He didn't just complete the trial; he also walked away with When Fear Descends and Execution's Hour!

Two semi-divine artifacts, brought back into reality!

"Sigh... A 2400-point trial, and I didn't gain a single point. What a waste."

Despite his words, this had undoubtedly been the most grueling trial Cheng Shi had faced since joining the [Faith Game].

In lower-level trials, players worked together out of necessity, but at this level, cooperation had been replaced by mutual suspicion.

Each player was sharp beyond belief. If it hadn't been for the ingrained habits of early cooperation, Cheng Shi might have been singled out from the start due to his [Chaos] faith.

But this trial had finally given Cheng Shi a glimpse of how the top players at this level truly embraced Divinity.

In this awe-inspiring trial:

The follower of [Folly] was the least foolish.

The follower of [Oblivion] obliterated herself.

The follower of [Silence] left a deafening impression.

The follower of [Memory] secretly altered memories.

The follower of [Order] broke the rules to shatter “order.”

And the follower of [Deceit] was pitifully deceived to the very end.

Except for Fang Jue, every one of them had been the perfect actor.

They not only completed their roles flawlessly, but they left no clues for their teammates.

Though their actions had pushed others further from death, they also forced the remaining players to chase after the wrong answer.

The survivors were left trembling in fear, desperately searching for the “offering to [Death],” utterly unaware that the victors had already completed the trial and were laughing at them in silence.

To be fair, guessing that “death” was the answer wasn’t the hard part.

The hard part was whether or not you had the guts to die.

They had all figured it out early on and had the courage to test their hypothesis with their own lives.

Their bravery and confidence made Cheng Shi feel somewhat ashamed.

As for the follower of [Order] who remained in the dark until the end...

Well, every trial needs at least one freeloader.

Even the best players have off days.

Isn't that right, Mr. Fang?

This trial had been worthy of its high level, and Cheng Shi hadn't played the freeloader this time.

Though he hadn't carried anyone else to victory, he had still won in a careful and calculated way for himself.

Even if others had deceived him at every turn, in the end, he had "deceived" [Death] itself.

"Does that mean I tricked the god?"

The moment he uttered those words, a deep, eerie wave of energy from the abyss enveloped the rooftop where Cheng Shi lay.

"???"

Not again?!