

The Gods 88

Chapter 88: Day Three: The Day of the Freeze

My head... it hurts.

The pain was sharp, like the aftermath of a hangover, yet also like countless needles stirring inside his skull.

Too painful.

Cheng Shi woke up from the pain.

But even though the pain was overwhelming, he didn't dare frown or open his eyes.

He didn't know if Su Yida was still nearby, and he wasn't sure if the surroundings were safe.

When someone is unconscious, their breathing is noticeably different from when they're awake. Most people probably wouldn't notice the difference, but Tao Yi would—because she was a master at playing unconscious herself.

"You're awake?"

It was the voice of the famous star?

Cheng Shi's heart skipped a beat, but he still didn't reply.

Tao Yi could feel the revival of energy coursing through Cheng Shi's body. She chuckled softly.

"It's alright, open your eyes. It's safe now. We made it out."

Out?

Out of where? Where have we ended up?

After carefully considering it, Cheng Shi slowly opened his eyes.

The sight of pink hair falling against her shoulders greeted him. It really was Tao Yi. No one was disguising themselves.

“You’ve been unconscious for 12 hours. Quite the feat. Do you know how we managed to survive without a priest during those hours?”

Twelve hours?

Cheng Shi felt his body chill. He hugged his arms around himself, and in doing so, stealthily checked for the ring on his fingers.

1, 2, 3, 4. All four were still there.

He was shocked but kept his expression weak as he asked,

“What... happened?”

Tao Yi’s face was filled with anxiety as she pointed upward.

“The freezing cold. After we came out of the void rift, we landed in an ice field. The wind outside is howling, the world is frozen solid. If you hadn’t woken up, the four of us probably would have succumbed to the cold by now.”

“Four?”

Tao Yi’s face darkened as she nodded.

“Yes, Zhao Qian... he’s dead. There wasn’t even a body left, just a pile of ash.”

Zhao Qian? Dead?

The [War] follower who wielded blood and fire... dead?

Who killed him? Su Yida?

Where was Su Yida?

Cheng Shi’s mind, still foggy from near-death, was brimming with unanswered questions.

But now wasn’t the time to sit and think. He needed to know what had happened during the time he had been dead.

So, he made a bold move:

He reached out and grabbed Tao Yi’s hand.

Tao Yi blinked in surprise but then smiled and let him hold it.

“We’ve run out of firewood; it’s all burned away. If you’re cold, you can hold on to me instead.”

Cheng Shi’s expression didn’t soften at her gesture of warmth. Instead, he looked at her intently and asked,

“Can I trust you?”

Tao Yi wasn't expecting such a direct question. Her eyes widened, and she furrowed her brow.

"How much trust are we talking about?"

"Complete, heart-to-heart trust."

She looked into his eyes, and her gaze flickered for a brief moment.

"Whose follower are you, really?"

Cheng Shi didn't flinch. His gaze was steady and sincere.

"[Death]. I am a follower of [Death]."

"....." Tao Yi's lips parted in surprise, her face filled with shock. "I should have known you were a Gravekeeper. But after you've lied to me this whole time, do you really expect me to be honest with you?"

"Can I trust you?"

"Hmm... 50%. When you're not lying to me, you can trust me."

Cheng Shi finally allowed himself a small smile. In a low, quick voice, he said,

"Tell me everything that happened. I need to know it all."

"Where should I start?"

"Start from when you found me."

—

Let's go back to the beginning of the trial.

As soon as Cheng Shi had confirmed the lineup, he had already planned which god's follower he would pretend to be for the trial.

[Order].

Clearly, in a trial where fellow deceivers were present, a [Order] priest could perhaps constrain the actions of his fellow deceiver and prevent him from causing too much chaos.

But just before making the proclamation, Cheng Shi had a bolder idea.

Since his [Lies of Yesterday] were all about deception and false faith, what if he "tricked" a god into believing him?

After all, his power came from [Deceit], and that god had already acknowledged his previous deceptions.

So Cheng Shi made another bold attempt.

He quietly plucked a blade of grass and offered its insignificant death as a sacrifice to the being on the throne.

This wasn't an invocation of [Deceit] but an invocation of [Death] itself.

Cheng Shi hadn't done it for any special reason, just to show a bit of courtesy to the faith he was about to borrow.

Then, he prayed to the Dice of Fate, asking to become a follower of [Death].

And to his surprise—it worked.

The Trickster God supported him, as always!

He abandoned the constraints of [Order] and gained the exemption of [Death].

As for the supposed [Birth]... that was simply another layer of disguise, another card to play.

Definitely not because he was used to lying.

And so...

Today, Cheng Shi was a follower of [Death], a Gravekeeper.

—

“Elder Cui and I found you unconscious, along with a barely breathing Gao Yu...”

Unconscious...

So, it's true. He had indeed died.

Cheng Shi could feel the Gravekeeper talent inside him had activated once. That meant his memory wasn't faulty—Su Yida really had killed him.

But the precaution Cheng Shi had set for himself had saved him.

The Gravekeeper talent anchors the user to life, and it was the inspiration behind Cheng Shi's infamous "Potion of the Dead" series.

As priests of [Death], they carried out the god's will. They could turn healing light into the darkness of death, or choose whether their healed targets would live or die.

They were like gatekeepers of Hell, selecting which sacrifices to offer up to their god.

Of course, they couldn't simply reduce the number of sacrifices owed to [Death]. For every one they stole back, they had to offer a replacement.

This had made the Gravekeepers the deadliest of all priest professions—the healers who truly brought death.

Now, Cheng Shi owed [Death] a sacrifice.

"After we found you, Elder Cui and I dragged you and Gao Yu through three different void rifts before finally escaping the void and landing in this icy wasteland.

But by then, you and Gao Yu were nearly gone. We dragged you across the tundra, searching for shelter from the wind, and that's when we encountered Su Yida."

"You ran into him on the ice field?"

"Yeah, he was in bad shape, frozen stiff from head to toe. He nearly died out there.

Luckily, he was clutching a bundle of broken wood and twigs...

We figure he didn't have a way to light them, which is why he froze like that.

But we didn't have a way to start a fire either. In the end, I had to use the last of my [Prosperity] power to wake Gao Yu, and he managed to get the frozen wood burning."

"And then?"

"But the wind was too strong, and the fire barely stayed lit. So we set up camp right there, taking turns watching over the fire. It took us half the night to get everyone warmed up again."

But now... we've run out of fuel."

Cheng Shi followed Tao Yi's gaze to his waist and saw a pile of ash.

"Gao Yu and Su Yida woke up, but you were still unconscious. No matter what we tried, we couldn't wake you up."

In the end, it was Su Yida who secretly pulled out a potion and brought you back."

"?" Cheng Shi was confused. "Su Yida? He saved me? Where did he get a potion? The storage spaces are still locked..."

Before Cheng Shi could finish, Tao Yi interrupted.

"They're still locked. It was from that batch of 'Fleeting Radiance' you made earlier, remember?"

Su Yida isn't as simple as he looks. When he stole the potions, he made sure to keep some for himself, stashing them away.

We never thought one batch could make two pills, or I would've taken some too.

Even though he didn't have much left, it was still effective. You're awake, aren't you?"

Cheng Shi's expression grew complicated.

His fellow deceiver was truly impressive.

Even after learning Cheng Shi's identity, Su Yida had used the "Mirage in the Rift Between Reality and Illusion" trick to recreate the potion Cheng Shi had fabricated with [Offering to the Void], which couldn't be stored.

And the only pill Su Yida had saved... he used it on Cheng Shi?

Why?

He killed me, yet he saved me?

What is he up to?

Cheng Shi wanted to ask outright, but that would be too obvious. He'd have to play this carefully.

"Why haven't you all come inside the tent?"

"....."

Tao Yi didn't answer, but the sorrow on her face seemed to say everything.

Cheng Shi furrowed his brow and, using the dim light filtering into the "tent," glanced around. It didn't take long for him to realize something about the material seemed familiar...

"Is this...?"

Elder Cui's... skin?

Cheng Shi was shocked.

The tent, which was barely big enough for two or three people to curl up inside, was made from Elder Cui's peeled skin, stitched together as a makeshift cover!

"Yes, you can see now... Elder Cui is in bad shape. The... the tent might collapse at any moment. That's why we're taking turns outside, guarding it to make sure this shelter isn't destroyed by the wind..."

"And outside...?"

"The wind is howling, the ice stretches for miles. In the distance, there are mountains of ice that we can never seem to reach. Beneath us is frozen ground that no magic can break through, and there's nothing but endless ice as far as the eye can see.

The conditions are so harsh that we can't dig a trench for protection or find materials to build a shelter. The cold wind is only getting stronger, and we have no other options..."

"....."

Cheng Shi hadn't yet fully processed what had happened in the void, and now the current situation was even more dire than he could have imagined.

"But now that you're awake, things will get better. Quick, Cheng Shi, cast a healing spell. They can't hold out much longer."

Just as she finished speaking, Cheng Shi felt a sharp gust of freezing wind seep into the tent at his feet.