

## The Gods 1071

### Chapter 1071: The Faith Resonance Experiment

Cheng Shi had been in a daze throughout the entire ordeal.

After the Fun God had whisked him into the Void, he had witnessed the self-destruction of yet another true god — but [Truth]'s maneuver had been too swift. So swift that Cheng Shi couldn't even comprehend what had happened.

He had wanted to ask his Benefactor what [Truth]'s experiment actually entailed, but the moment [Truth] self-destructed, the gods had been pulled away by the Convention, leaving only a group of mortals adrift in the Void, staring at each other while the world outside churned through endless cycles of reconstruction.

Galusha undoubtedly understood [Truth]. She immediately sensed the torrents of restructuring power surging through the outside world — far more violent than even the Ritual of Truth — and her expression turned grave:

"Reconstruction... the entire world appears to be reconstructing itself..."

"World reconstruction?"

Cheng Shi froze for a moment. Although he had deduced that [Truth] had stolen [Time]'s power to verify the truth of the universe, he still couldn't grasp what that had to do with reconstructing the entire world.

In his view, [Truth] could have reconstructed the world even without [Time]'s power.

And what did reconstructing the current world have to do with exploring the unknown beyond it?

Cheng Shi looked to Galusha, hoping for an explanation.

Galusha was equally baffled. After all, this experiment involved a true god and pointed directly at the universe's truth. She didn't know what [Truth] — who had always been obsessed with apotheosis

experiments — was truly pursuing, nor did she know that [Truth] had seized [Time]'s power during this trial. Without that knowledge, she had no basis for inference.

Seeing her confusion, Cheng Shi thought for a moment. To make sense of everything, he vaguely told Galusha about the existence of another world beyond this one, adding that [Truth] was likely using [Time]'s power to verify precisely that.

But Galusha only grew more puzzled.

"If even you, Mr. Prisoner — a mere follower — already know about this, why would [Truth] still need to verify it?"

"..."

'How do I explain that? I can't exactly tell her that some gods don't know as much as I do.'

For a moment, Cheng Shi was at a loss for words.

But the glint that flashed through Galusha's eyes at his reaction was sharp and knowing. She nodded: "As I suspected — your identity is far more complex than I imagined. The fact that we survived [Truth]'s experiment is undoubtedly thanks to you."

The way Galusha looked at him was somewhat unsettling. Cheng Shi's mind was a tangled mess, and he had no patience for explanations. Instead, he simply pointed at Meng Youfang:

"It has nothing to do with me. It's him.

Old Meng was once a true god, but fell from his Divine Throne due to certain circumstances. This stint in the mortal world is to reclaim his throne. My Benefactor happens to be an old friend of his — so we owe our survival to him."

The moment those words left his mouth, the silence that followed extended far beyond Cheng Shi alone.

Chen Yi was still unconscious. The only awake outsider, Fang Yuan, stood at the far back, his gaze sweeping between the others before fixing on Cheng Shi.

After witnessing the gods' assembly and [Truth]'s self-destruction, Fang Yuan's mind had been thoroughly blown. But bewildered as he was, he could still tell that their survival was definitely because of Cheng Shi — not some delusional patient like Meng Youfang.

Meng Youfang's audacity in calling himself a god before the actual gods was admirable, sure — but Fang Yuan had seen how the gods reacted. They hadn't treated Meng Youfang with any semblance of equality. They hadn't even acknowledged him.

But this Fate Weaver...

Every single god present had turned their gaze upon him!

The trembling Fang Yuan silently absorbed everything, but kept his mouth shut.

Because he knew — as long as he didn't say anything, as long as he quietly stayed close to the Fate Weaver, the biggest loophole in this game was his to exploit.

As for the fact that Galusha had assumed Wei Zhi's identity...

'None of my business.'

Whether Galusha was good or bad was debatable, but Wei Zhi — who had collaborated with the Erudition Presidium — absolutely deserved what he got.

After hearing Cheng Shi's words, Meng Youfang didn't deny it. He simply furrowed his brow in contemplation, trying to understand why [Truth] — who had sought to steal his Divine Throne — had instead chosen self-destruction.

After much deliberation, he finally arrived at a conclusion:

'Truth acted on impulse. One wrong move — and after I saw through his plan, he died of guilt.'

When he shared this deduction aloud, Cheng Shi felt the world truly deserved to be destroyed.

'Where does this extreme delusion even come from?'

'You're writing annotations on the world's timeline now, is that it?!'

'[Truth]'s dying words were wasted — his death-affirming testament somehow became an apology letter to you?!'

Cheng Shi rolled his eyes and ignored Meng Youfang. Galusha, too, lifted her chin and regarded Cheng Shi with a derisive hum — her expression clearly saying:

'You're telling me your Benefactor saved us for the sake of this guy?'

Knowing there was no washing this one clean, Cheng Shi stopped trying to explain and simply urged Galusha to analyze what impact this experiment might have on the universe.

Galusha was not an unreasonable person — otherwise she could never have walked alongside a humorless scholar to begin with.

Originally, after obtaining her player identity, she had planned to approach Cheng Shi again with a few ulterior motives. But now, given the degree of importance the gods placed on Cheng Shi, she no longer dared harbor such thoughts.

Whatever Fang Yuan could see, she could see too — and then some.

She could read the absolute priority that [Deceit] and [Fate], the two masters of [Void], placed on this Mr. Prisoner. Naturally, she understood she couldn't scheme against him — she could only draw close to him and strive to become an ally within the same faction.

So she set aside her probing of Cheng Shi's true identity and fell into quiet contemplation.

After a while, she spoke with a furrowed brow:

"The Department of Consciousness Faith once conducted a Faith Resonance Experiment — an evolution built upon the foundation of slice technology.

By that time, Grandfather Selius had already left the Tower of Logic, and the Life Extension Department's research findings were being applied across other departments. But a persistent concern had always surrounded slice technology.

To confirm slice safety and prevent critical experimental data from leaking, the Department of Consciousness Faith began investigating the links between slices across different consciousnesses. That was how the Faith Resonance Experiment was born.

The experiment worked like this: different slices of the same scholar were implanted with entirely different memories, then sealed in separate locations to conduct the same specialized experiment. This experiment fell outside both memory sets' areas of expertise, and several critical steps had been deliberately obscured — requiring the experimenters to discover the solutions on their own.

After extensive data collection, the results proved that even with altered and obscured memories, slices originating from the same individual maintained a connection on some level of consciousness. During observation, they found that when one subject discovered a replacement solution, the other would frequently arrive at the same answer shortly thereafter — even though their post-experiment theoretical explanations were completely different.

The Grand Scholars of the Department of Consciousness Faith termed this the Delayed Theory of Slice Consciousness Entanglement. Based on these findings, they petitioned the Erudition Presidium to enact

a Slice Protection Act, establishing that scholar slices were not disposable resources — that they held scientific value equal to the scholars themselves...

Mr. Prisoner, what you described about 'another world' is too vague. But I imagine that whatever could drive [Truth] to such obsessive pursuit is probably not some parallel timeline governed by the gods. So I'll premise that this other world also has its own [Truth].

If that's truly the case, then I believe [Truth]'s world-reconstruction experiment isn't actually about reconstructing this world at all. He's probably using this approach to contact his counterpart — the other [Truth] in that other world."

The instant Galusha finished speaking, a streak of flame illuminated the universe and shattered the Void's "firmament."

Under everyone's horrified gazes, the sky collapsed.

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Chapter 1072: When the Sky Falls, the Tallest Will Hold It Up

The shattering of the space-time barrier might have been a breathtaking spectacle for the gods, but for mortals, it was nothing short of an apocalypse.

The reconstructing world froze in place. The remade populace collectively raised their heads to gaze upward.

All they felt was the earth swaying, the world trembling. Before they could even determine whether this was an earthquake or a divine anomaly, the vast blue sky fractured like a spider web and began collapsing in great sheets at speeds no mortal mind could process.

Pitch-black nothingness seeped into reality like mud, dragging shards of existence along with it as it cascaded downward in a torrent, tearing through everything in its path — real and illusory alike — dissolving it all with terrifying ease.

In that moment, no matter where anyone stood, the first thought was to run. Even with no idea where to go, the only instinct was to move — to flee.

Cheng Shi and the others were no exception.

True, they had been sheltered in the Void, inside the cage [Truth] had set up for the gods. During the world's reconstruction, they might have been safe — but now, as the world itself shattered, nowhere was exempt.

"What... is this?!"

"[War]!" Cheng Shi's face twisted with fury, his teeth grinding. "I knew it — all that restraint was a facade hiding ulterior motives. Beneath the surface of that forced calm, the most terrifying madness was always lurking!

He's gone insane! He's actually trying to break through the shackles of space-time to find opponents in a wider arena!

Damn it — He gets His fight, but what happens to the gods? What happens to the universe?!"

Cheng Shi's words struck everyone dumb — though it was equally likely that the ongoing destruction of the universe had already done that. Even Meng Youfang, self-proclaimed seventeenth god, had gone pale. He stared at the world-fractures spreading toward them and declared grimly:

"Could it be that [War] also wants to prevent my return to my Divine Throne?"

This doesn't look like ramping up the difficulty of a trial — He's crossed the line!"

"..."

Galusha's expression was equally severe: "Run! If we don't run now, it'll be too late!"

With that, she took off at full speed in the opposite direction of the spreading destruction. Fang Yuan followed close behind. Meng Youfang hesitated for a beat, then grabbed the motionless Cheng Shi and dragged him into retreat.

Cheng Shi's eyes were heavy with dread. He felt certain this situation had long surpassed anything mortals could resist. Something must have gone wrong in the gods' game — otherwise, neither [Deceit] nor [Fate] would have allowed the universe to deteriorate to this point.

But what exactly had gone wrong?!

Without identifying the root cause, they would never escape alive.

Yet there was precious little time to think. Compared to the speed at which the world's fractures spread, mortal running was inconsequential. Before long, the devouring black cracks had split open all around them.

They felt a horrifying tearing force assault them from every direction. Even with every technique at their disposal, they held out for barely a second before every last one of them plunged into darkness.

All except Cheng Shi — because he was rescued.

The moment cracks mirroring the universe's own fractures began to crawl across his vision, he felt someone — no, something with claws — seize the back of his neck.

Then he was flung through the air. After a nauseating tumble, he landed on the back of a beast — all rippling muscle and sleek fur — galloping at full tilt.

He instinctively clung to the creature racing beneath him. And despite the apocalyptic Void surrounding them, a feeling of safety welled up inside him.

Cheng Shi raised his head, saw that familiar silhouette before him, felt the biting wind whipping past his cheeks, and smiled with immense relief:

"Big Cat!"

Yes — Big Cat had arrived.

In truth, Hong Lin should have arrived much sooner.

The moment the Convention assembly ended, [Deceit] had tossed Hong Lin in this exact direction. His intent was obvious: send the little cat to find the Clown.

But at the time, Hong Lin — still reeling from the twin shocks of the world-ending experiment and the gods' power struggle — hadn't recovered her wits. Before she'd even reached the section of the Void where Cheng Shi was and caught sight of him, she had already turned back toward Tao Yi.

It wasn't until she was halfway there and saw [War]'s flames shatter the Void's firmament — the entire world disintegrating at breakneck speed — that it finally clicked. She belatedly realized that the Fun God's toss must have carried a deeper meaning.

And that deeper meaning, without question, had to be Cheng Shi — because her only connection to [Deceit] was through the Fate Weaver.

Hong Lin's expression shifted. She glanced toward where Tao Yi would be, bit down hard, and without a moment's hesitation, spun around and sprinted back the way she'd come to find Cheng Shi.

She knew that even if she found Tao Yi in this chaos, she could only protect her temporarily. To truly unravel everything and save the world, she needed the Fate Weaver.

So the Dense Forest Spotted Leopard once again demonstrated her speed, snatching Cheng Shi from the jaws of oblivion at the very last second and flinging him onto her back.

Unfortunately, the rescued party showed no gratitude. The words "Big Cat" nearly made Hong Lin's fur stand on end.

If not for the genuine delight in his tone, she would have swiped him with her claws.

The instant Big Cat appeared, Cheng Shi knew she couldn't have found him on her own — coincidences like that didn't exist. So after casting a Healing spell on her, he immediately asked:

"Who sent you?"

[Fate] or [Deceit]?"

What message did they give you?"

Hong Lin answered quickly: "[Deceit], but there was no message."

No message?"

Impossible.

Cheng Shi frowned and said in a low voice: "Then tell me everything you know. Whatever you have — things you heard, postures you observed, expressions you noted — it all counts."

Hong Lin wasn't as clueless as she appeared. The moment she realized [Deceit] had sent her to find Cheng Shi, she understood the [Void] master's intent. She had spent the entire run replaying everything she'd experienced, and she quickly recounted it all to Cheng Shi — [Truth]'s experiment, [Folly]'s commentary, the Assembly of Gods Convention, and the Fun God's cryptic parting words.

And when Cheng Shi listened carefully and pieced it all together, he finally understood what was happening.

The Fun God had pulled Big Cat into the Convention assembly to use her as a messenger. And Big Cat had done an excellent job — though Cheng Shi found it puzzling that her account contained only the gods' spoken words and no other details whatsoever.

'So [Folly]'s Authority is in [Memory]'s hands?'

'Is that what the Fun God was trying to convey? But if He already knew, why didn't He go after it Himself?'

'[Memory]'s guard is too deep — as an opposing faction, He can't easily make a move?'

'That's plausible. If so, I understand — this job probably falls to Li Jingming.'

'But then what did the Fun God's final warning mean?'

According to Big Cat, He had dangled her in the air, delivered one seemingly disjointed piece of advice, and then sent her on her way. Clearly, that sentence was meant to be more important than anything else from the Convention.

Yet it sounded like a perfectly ordinary warning...

"Once your Benefactor dies, there's no one left to protect His followers..."

Cheng Shi mulled it over for a long time without reaching a conclusion. He even began to wonder if it was just the Fun God's way of pressuring Big Cat — a threat not to grow too close to [Fate].

But then Hong Lin, noticing his prolonged silence, glanced back with a question — and inadvertently sparked his breakthrough.

Hong Lin asked: "What exactly happened? Why did [Truth] try to destroy the world?"

That question lit a flash of inspiration. Cheng Shi slapped his palm against Hong Lin's flank and raised his head with excitement:

"[Truth]!"

"?"

The completely incongruous answer and the Fate Weaver's repeated provocations pushed Hong Lin over the edge. She was about to turn her head and roar at him when Cheng Shi launched into rapid-fire explanation:

"B— Hong Lin, turn around — no, change direction!

We need to find people — find the Erudition Presidium, find the Grand Scholars!

My trial settlement hasn't appeared, which means the trial isn't over yet. If it's not over, we can still go back.

I understand what the Fun God meant now.

It's not just [Prosperity] that's lost its protection!

[Truth] is dead too — His followers have equally lost their shield! Which means what they're holding is mine for the taking!

That's what the Fun God meant — He's telling me to go after the Ritual of Truth!"

"?" Big Cat was stunned. "The Ritual of Truth?"

"Yes, the Ritual of Truth!

[Truth] self-destructed. His voting rights went to [Void], His Authority to [Birth]. It looks like nothing's left — but don't forget, His Servant God creations still exist!

If we find the Ritual of Truth, we can carve out our own share in this world-ending experiment!

Hurry, Hong Lin — find a way to get me back there."

"..."

It wasn't that Hong Lin didn't want to — she didn't understand.

Her speed was impressive, but she was barely outpacing the world-ending fractures. She couldn't see how securing the Ritual of Truth had anything to do with saving the world.

The world was about to be destroyed. Was this really the time to hunt for spoils of war — a Servant God creation of [Truth]'s?

The timing seemed all wrong.

No matter how greedy a person was, you couldn't gamble your life for greed.

But trusting Cheng Shi, she did her best to follow his directions and sprinted toward the section of the Void that led back to the trial.

Along the way, seeing Cheng Shi's utterly confident demeanor — as though he no longer worried about the world's collapse at all — her curiosity finally got the better of her:

"Can the Ritual of Truth stop [Truth]'s experiment?"

Cheng Shi burst out laughing at the question, pointing toward the world-fractures visible in the distance:

"The current destruction has nothing to do with the Ritual of Truth.

At first, I was terrified too. But the moment I realized the Fun God was sending me after spoils of war, my fear vanished.

Think about it — if He truly had no way to handle this world-ending experiment, the only thing He'd be doing right now is trying to save this world. All His schemes and secrets are in this starry sky. Even if every other god gave up, the Fun God probably wouldn't — He's not the type to surrender that easily to 'Him.'

Yet in the middle of this crisis, He still has time to concern Himself with trivial matters like sending me to grab loot. That means He must already have a countermeasure!

[Truth]'s experiment and [War]'s eruption look unsolvable to us — but in His eyes, they might not be a bad thing at all.

He's probably using this as another opportunity to scheme something.

Relax — this world won't collapse.

When the sky falls, the tallest will hold it up."

"?"

Hong Lin was even more confused. She blurted out: "[Deceit] is going to save the world?"

Cheng Shi gazed toward the firelight streaking across the horizon, his eyes glinting.

'He said He would — but this time, the savior probably isn't Him...'

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Chapter 1073: A Cosmic Horror Story: The Voice That Made the Universe Tremble

When [Deceit] saw [War]'s figure appear in the real universe so far ahead of schedule, His expression turned undeniably grim.

But since the deed was done, He could only respond to all changes by remaining unchanged — standing at the edge of the Existence Rift alongside the other gods, supporting that corner of the Void while gazing up at [War] and bearing witness to this battle that would surely be recorded in history.

[Deceit] might have been calm, but the other gods were anything but — especially those who had never heard that beyond their world lay countless others not derived from [Time]'s projections. Having seen the universe's truth with their own eyes, they stood rooted in stunned silence.

"So beyond the universe... there are indeed... others who share my visage... It seems... the path of decay... is far less simple... than I imagined..."

"This is impossible! I am a deity! A true god anointed and named by Origin! An avatar of the era who wields Authority! The destination of faith for billions of followers! How is it possible that I am nothing more than a tiny corner of this vast universe?!!"

"So this... is the new order?"

Then what meaning does the order I have upheld all along truly hold?"

"The fool finally learns what foolishness means.

Ha — what a splendid act of folly."

"..."

"So what you have been watching all this time were other worlds — they occupied your time and kept you so busy?"

Hmm, to commit this moment to memory is itself a memory.

Let others walk their paths; I have my own."

"You... knew all along, didn't you?"

The memory I sealed away — it was this truth, wasn't it?"

[Fate]'s voice seemed to have lost its customary coldness, replaced by an infinite hollowness. In this moment, He finally revealed to the world what true [Void] looked like.

[Deceit] let out a derisive snort and glanced at the sibling beside Him, wearing a half-smile:

"Though the one who unveiled the truth for you was [War], I'm afraid you can't seek compensation from Him anymore.

Go ask [Memory] — after all, rediscovering the truth is itself the breaking of memory's seal.

But tell me, dear sister — do you still believe your Fixed Destiny is truly fixed?

Look at all these worlds before you. If a Fixed Destiny does exist, then isn't this predetermined fate... a bit too numerous?"

It was a killing blow aimed straight at the heart.

[Deceit]'s mockery cut into [Fate] like a knife. Yet after a single instant of confusion, [Fate]'s gaze grew only more resolute.

That ancient, unchanging coldness returned to His eyes. With neither joy nor sorrow, He gazed upon this real universe that had exceeded all expectations, and intoned:

"The Fixed Destiny does not depend on quantity, but on truth and falsehood.

I bear the divine name of [Fate]. I wield the Authority of [Fate]. I perceive the universe's true nature. Naturally, I can discern which is the genuine Fixed Destiny."

"Tch—

You think they're all illusions?

How interesting. Have you considered that at this very moment, they look at you and think you are the illusion?"

"Fate has never cared for the gaze of others, nor heeded the slander of the world.

All is predetermined. Divergent paths will return to the true course.

Even if these countless worlds tell me that the universe is nothing more than a preposterous experiment — what 'He' anticipates must be the offering that comes from me.

This is the Fixed Destiny."

"...Utter fool!"

[Deceit] erupted — those eyes burning with the frustration of watching someone refuse to fight for themselves. He wanted nothing more than to shake this sibling awake on the spot, but He restrained Himself. With a deep furrow of His brow, He let out another mordant snort:

"Keep dreaming. What you want — that can only exist in dreams."

He turned away from the obsessed [Fate] and lifted His gaze toward [War] in the real universe.

There, in the Existence Rifts far removed from the world, countless pillars of skyward flame continued to surge higher — strand by strand, beam by beam — each carrying unshakable conviction, each racing to be first.

Firelight blazed through the darkness, leaving footprints of blood in its wake.

Without question, as the [Wars] from countless slice universes broke free of their "shackles" and illuminated the real universe, the entity above the cosmos had long since been revealed to the gods of every world.

Though they could not make out His form or state — perceiving only His location through sheer instinct — the reverence and devotion rooted in the very essence of their Authority told them: that was Origin, and could only be Origin!

And [War]'s target was Him!

However, the [Wars] and Origin were still separated by an immense gulf — a void of uncertain substance, of darkness that had to be crossed.

A single god's power was ultimately finite. That darkness stood like an unbridgeable chasm, blocking every flame that tried to illuminate it.

And so, as countless trails of fire reached the limits of their strength, they changed course. Rather than pressing deeper, they connected — left joining right — "fusing" with their countless selves into one.

Blood and fire converged. Battle spirit soared.

High above, boiling blood burst forth and raging flame roared in spirals. A terrifying storm of blood and fire erupted, devouring the darkness at a maddening pace, howling toward Origin's domain.

Even the iridescent Existence Rifts warped under the pressure of this frenzied fighting spirit, and in that instant, the entire universe boiled.

"How do we survive?

Through! Blood! And! Fire!"

The real universe rang with the synchronized prayer of every [War], its fervent cadence igniting every god who watched. Though the gods held Origin in fearful awe, the contagious power of that cry for survival birthed within them the audacious notion that perhaps they, too, could fight!

This was [War]!

To fight, to strive — regardless of victory or defeat — never retreating!

Blazing flame scorched the heavens, a rain of blood veiled every eye. Under this terrifying display of power, the gods fell as silent as cicadas in winter.

In that moment, even the cosmic terror was seared away by [War]'s inferno. Every being — mortal or divine — who witnessed this scene became utterly convinced: this would be a victorious battle.

The searing fury forged from the gathered fire of countless worlds would drag the lofty Origin down from His Creator's throne and burn through this horrifying slice-universe experiment once and for all.

The universe could hardly wait to welcome a world without Origin. Gods and mortals alike gazed upward, cheering for [War]'s audacity — and for the victory that was about to come.

But then — at the very instant the heavens-scorching flames crossed that dark expanse and were about to illuminate one corner of Origin's throne—

Snap.

A single crisp sound reverberated across the universe.

Was it... a snap of fingers?

No — an illusion!

No one could describe what kind of sound it actually was. It might have been the muffled toll of a bell, or an abrupt whistle, or a rumbling peal of thunder.

But regardless of what it was, after that sound — the real universe went dark.

The flames, the blood rain, the sweeping advance, the fighting spirit...

Gone in an instant!

The dark void returned to its original state. The Existence Rifts were no longer warped. Everything — all of it — settled into silence, as though none of it had ever happened.

In an instant, blood dried, fire died, and the universe fell silent.

"!!!!!"

The gods who had witnessed this with their own eyes felt their pupils contract to pinpoints. If not for the parallel worlds still arrayed before them and the universe's ongoing collapse, they might have believed they'd imagined the whole thing.

Gone?

Just like that... gone?

Where was [War]?

In that moment, the fear that [War]'s fire had burned away came flooding back — doubled, tripled over what it had been. A tidal wave of terror swallowed gods and mortals alike without discrimination, just as [War] had said:

In all the universe, every being now knew fear.

It was a terror rising from the deepest reaches of the soul, forcing the billions of lives in this experiment — no, billions of variables — to their knees, prostrate and trembling.

Cheng Shi's world was hit hardest. Had he not sensed the danger and drawn out [Corruption]'s Container in time, this moment might have frightened him and Hong Lin to death beneath this overburdened starry sky.

Even with [Corruption]'s Container absorbing their fear, the dread did not stop spreading.

Big Cat's limbs went weak, her voice quaking: "This is..."

Cheng Shi's face was ashen, jaw clenched: "...Origin."

At that same moment, while the gods around Him bowed their heads in dread and murmured repentant prayers, [Deceit] looked upward against the current, staring fixedly at where Origin dwelt, His pupils shrunk to pinpricks.

The corners of His eyes no longer curved upward. The grin had vanished from His face.

[War]'s extinction had forced Him to confront a single inescapable truth:

All His schemes and machinations were a joke — nothing more than a self-amusing farce.

To this Creator who presided over the cosmic experiment, gods were merely variables that could be erased with a casual wave of the hand.

Utterly beneath mention.

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Chapter 1074: Cheer for Me — A Bloody Sneer

Just how panicked the gods were, Cheng Shi had no idea.

All he knew was that if he didn't move soon, his spoils of war would be lost.

The gods frozen in place had been so terrified they'd forgotten the world was still collapsing. They had stopped supporting the Void together, and the universe's disintegration was accelerating.

Cheng Shi and Big Cat had still been trying to figure out how to loop back to the section of the Void where the trial was located, but that plan was now meaningless — the Void had nearly fallen entirely.

With no other choice, the two of them fled in the only direction that still showed signs of vitality.

Hong Lin gritted her teeth and pushed forward, burning through nearly all of her divine power. Without the Authority of [Prosperity] sustaining her, she would have collapsed from exhaustion halfway.

But running like this was no solution. With the gods motionless, the universe would inevitably shatter. Fleeing alone couldn't save their lives.

In this moment of desperation, Big Cat had no room for other thoughts — she just wanted to understand what was happening before she died. She wanted to know whether the Fun God's "salvation" was real or not.

"What is He waiting for?"

Indeed — what was He waiting for?

Cheng Shi himself had no answer.

He had assumed that even if [Truth]'s experiment and [War]'s actions exceeded expectations, the Fun God would be able to pivot and exploit everything they'd done, perhaps using it to probe Origin.

But now the problem was clear: Origin's power had exceeded all predictions. So would the Fun God's original method of "saving the world" still work?

Why hadn't that savior appeared yet?

Just as these thoughts churned through his mind, in the midst of the spreading panic, a beam of light suddenly rose in the vast real universe.

It was unlike [War]'s flame. This light was brilliant, radiant — like a pillar refracting the colors of [Existence], and like a comet carrying the wonder of [Void].

It surged upward — an inverted fall — mirroring exactly the way [War] had charged!

In a universe paralyzed by silence, this light shattered the shroud of fear, broke through the spreading panic. It was defiance freed from chains, contemptuous of the infinite darkness with its own luminance — as if crying out on behalf of the trillions of slice universes beneath it, and as if keening justice for the trillions of [Wars] who had vanished!

At first, only a single beam of light existed. But soon — two, three, four... more and more lights erupted from below, weaving together, converging into a sea, once again illuminating that hollow darkness.

Yet that was all they could do — illuminate the darkness. Because compared to [War]'s raging inferno, the brightness of all these lights combined was still far too dim.

In the end, humans could never match gods.

Indeed — humans!

This time, the lights streaming upward against the current were not the gods of any world. They were the mortals of countless worlds!

When the gods discerned exactly who those radiant mortals were... a gasp of shock swept through the real universe, echoing the very first cries when the space-time barriers had shattered.

"It's him... has he gone mad?!"

The gods whipped around. After seeing him within their crumbling world, they turned again to look at all those versions of him in the real universe.

[Fate]'s pupils contracted violently, unable to bear the sight. [Deceit]'s smile vanished completely, replaced by eyes like frost.

The converging mass of light traced the Void-scars left by [War]'s passage, surging upward once more in a fresh "charge" toward Origin's domain.

Though the momentum of this advance compared to the last was like a firefly against the moon — worlds apart — they traveled farther than [War] ever had.

Yet even that greater distance couldn't illuminate a single corner of that throne.

Human strength had its limits.

The brilliant light grew weaker, dimmer, before long melting into the hollow darkness until it could no longer be seen.

They seemed exhausted — or perhaps dissolved.

This feeble assault didn't even attract Origin's attention. It simply dissipated on its own, halfway there.

But just as the fear dispelled by the light came surging back like a tide, and the spreading despair shattered the silence once more — from the place where the light had vanished came a series of rolling thunderclaps.

BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM—

Thunder pealed endlessly. The fleeting brilliance lit up that hollow expanse once again.

This time, what every living being in the real universe saw was not merely the infinite darkness beneath that light — but a mocking smile, assembled from countless bursting droplets of blood.

That smile had only a pair of eyes and a mouth, exactly like the brushstrokes on a mask. Those empty, hollow eyes overflowed with crimson, staring directly toward Origin's domain. And the upturned corners of that mouth seemed to be ridiculing something.

As for what...

No one knew.

Except... Cheng Shi.

Cheng Shi's mind went completely blank.

Those countless thunderbolts in the real universe might as well have struck his skull directly. He felt his brain humming, screeching, howling.

His eyes flew wide and his strength left him. He toppled straight off Big Cat's back. Even as he fell, his pupils still quaked, his limbs still trembled. He stared in disbelief at that blood-red smile in the real universe, only one sentence echoing through his mind:

"For the sake of us being 'our own people' — remember to cheer for me when I die. Because that is neither humiliation nor surrender. It is mockery drawn in blood. I will sneer at that Observer, before the

gaze of billions of lives and tens of thousands of worlds, and tell 'Him': Your experiment will never produce any answer!"

He never imagined the chance would come so soon!

He actually did it.

No — they did it!

With astonishing synchronicity, as though they had coordinated in advance, amid the chaos of the universe's truth being laid bare, amid the terror of [War]'s death at the hands of an inviolable power, under the stunned gaze of the gods across countless slice universes — they painted this unparalleled tableau. Facing the supreme Creator, they used their lives to curve their lips into a blood-red sneer!

But... did this mean anything?

Yes!

Of course it did!

Freedom has always been born of defiance. Without the cry that dares to break free from chains, how could there ever be brilliant rebirth amid despair!

So Cheng Shi smiled.

Though his eyes were bloodshot, he couldn't stop smiling.

Smiling, clapping, cheering:

"Show-off — Cheng Shi, you're nothing but a show-off!"

Showing off in front of ten thousand universes — feels great, doesn't it?"

He wanted to say "You got your thrills, but from now on all the pressure falls on the one version of me who never got to face Origin..." — but those words never left his lips. Instead, they turned into a self-deprecating sigh:

"That's fine. As long as you're all happy.

Despair is in the past now. From here on, you'll never have to live in fear again."

He muttered to himself, even as his entire body plummeted toward the shattering nothingness below.

Hong Lin was equally stunned when she saw that scene. Her legs buckled from the sheer shock, and she nearly crashed to the ground — and at that exact moment, Cheng Shi lost his grip and slid off her back.

The instant she sensed him falling, Big Cat nearly lost her mind.

She let out a howl toward the heavens and dove after Cheng Shi. Her outstretched claws didn't reach him — but they touched the tears floating upward.

Big Cat's heart seized in panic. The words tore out of her throat:

"Cheng Shi, don't you dare!!!"

Cheng Shi looked at Big Cat lunging toward him and smiled even wider.

"Of course I won't go. If I did, wouldn't their deaths be for nothing?"

Don't worry — I'll live well. I'll keep living until the day 'He' declares the experiment a failure!"

Feeling the tearing force of the crumbling world growing ever stronger around him, Cheng Shi reined in his smile. His tone turned playful:

"It's about time. This should be the moment."

With that, he raised his hand and snapped his fingers — a snap that made no sound.

And then, under Big Cat's astonished gaze, space-time froze.

...

Chapter 1075: Time Has Its Own Path!

[Deceit] had indeed been probing Origin.

Originally, His plan wasn't all that different from what [War] had just done — He had merely pushed the timeline back, because there was still much He needed to do. Rushing to tear away the final curtain could just as easily bring the actors onstage and audience below not a pleasant surprise, but a terrible shock.

Whether the world could withstand that shock was debatable, but now it was clear — it absolutely could not.

Origin was too powerful. No — perhaps "powerful" wasn't even the right word to describe 'Him.'

When one being of the same species surpasses another, you could call it "powerful." But Origin and the gods...

They weren't even the same category of existence.

Even though the gods had always known Origin had created everything and bestowed upon them their divine nature, as deities who had reigned supreme for eons, they lacked any clear understanding of a "Creator" who had never once appeared.

Today, that understanding was completed.

Before 'Him,' they were mortals — perhaps even less than mortals!

Origin's display had terrified the universe. The Fear Faction seemed to have won a decisive victory — but that was an illusion.

A measured dose of fear was the courage to claw a path to survival from a dead end. But an overdose of fear was simply the last straw that broke the camel's back, transforming the so-called Fear Faction into a Despair Faction.

Like right now — with the gods standing paralyzed in shock.

When that bloody sneer detonated across the real universe, countless worlds were collapsing and perishing. But the gods saw clearly: those worlds that vanished from view were instantly erased and replaced by an imperceptible force with pristine substitutes.

Though these new worlds were wrapped within Existence Rifts and indistinct, the faint vitality seeping through told the gods plainly — a brand-new era seemed to have begun again.

So they were nothing more than mass-produced petri dishes. As for what the Creator was cultivating within them, no one knew.

But that wasn't even the most terrifying part.

What was more terrifying: now that [War] had vanished into nothing and the bloody sneer had faded from the cosmos, what would become of those universes still collapsing but not yet fully destroyed?

These universes had lost their window for salvation because the gods froze in shock. They could no longer support the crumbling cosmos. As their worlds crept toward annihilation, the only fate awaiting them was the exact same ending as the samples that had already been replaced...

Perhaps even worse!

Because the worlds that perished were already gone. And in the worlds that still stood, gods and mortals alike could only sit and wait for death.

That alone was devastating enough — but the reality [Deceit] noticed was even more hopeless than despair.

He observed that even though the [Wars] of countless worlds had ridden [Truth]'s experiment to pierce the sky and confront Origin directly, there were still countless other worlds cocooned within Existence Rifts that had never witnessed this madness at all.

The same was true of the bloody sneer — countless Clowns had sneered at Origin, but countless others remained trapped in their tiny corners. Their worlds hadn't caught up to this "grand show"; some didn't even know — due to differences in "progress" — that a grand show was unfolding beyond the universe.

This meant the infinite slice universes were not progressing in lockstep. Each world had its own pace.

Parallel timelines worked the same way, of course. This wasn't hard to understand or even to guess. [Deceit] had already grasped this when He smuggled Himself into other worlds through the Mockery and Jeering.

So why did this realization still frighten Him?

Because when the perspective zoomed out, jumped dimensions, and shifted from inside a slice universe to the real universe — it became obvious that "time" was flowing here, too. And from that came a ghost story:

How many times had [War]'s charge happened already?

Or rather — how many encores had this "grand show" already seen?

The more you thought about it, the more terrifying it became!

There was no escape!

In that moment, even [Fate] was forced to redefine the Fixed Destiny!

If everything within the real universe was repeating itself, then wasn't that, too, a form of predetermined fate?

Just as this net of fear was about to ensnare every last god, just as the tidal wave of despair was on the verge of swallowing the world entirely, [Deceit]'s gaze sharpened. He realized He had to start saving the world.

More importantly, His only "subordinate" in the Fear Faction — that devout little Clown follower — was about to die. Drifting toward the "predetermined" was not a good omen. So He acted decisively to prevent that outcome.

Of course, the timing was His to decide — but the god who actually moved was not Him.

[Deceit] was the facade of [Void] — a phantasmal bubble, an unchanging falsehood. He could deceive, He could bluff, but the one thing He could not do was save.

So the true savior was not [Deceit], but rather...

[Time]!

The reason [Time] never had time was precisely because He had been continuously aligning the "time" of the universe with the "time" of the real universe. He was synchronizing the progress across every temporal dimension of the Creator's experiment, ensuring that the world behind Him displayed no anomalies and attracted no attention from the Experiment Master.

So from the very beginning, He had been the "savior" — a savior who silently stood guard before the world.

But strangely, when [Truth]'s experiment had revealed the truth to the gods, when [War]'s impulse had torn away the world's disguise — when the slice universe beneath their feet lay exposed under Origin's observation as an anomaly — where had [Time] gone?

He hadn't shown His face since the Convention assembly. Before, His time had been consumed by "synchronization." But now the shattered universe no longer needed synchronizing — so why had He still not appeared?

Because He was hiding!

Not hiding His talents — hiding Himself. He was avoiding a gaze — the Creator's gaze!

He carried within Him the power to save the world from fire and flood — and that power came from the Creator Himself. So He dared not show His face, lest He draw the Creator's attention.

Whether a god's concealment could truly escape the Creator's notice, no one knew. But thus far, the Creator had not personally intervened to accelerate this world's destruction.

Which meant there was still a chance.

As for how to save the world — it was simple.

"Time Has Its Own Path!"

Since the world had gone astray because of [Truth], then simply wind the deviation back to the right course. Restore the shattered world to its former state — turn it back into a normal sample. That way, this world would be indistinguishable from all the other slice universes that had never witnessed "the blood drying and flame dying" or the "bloody sneer" — just another "obedient" experimental sample.

Once "obedient," it could "resynchronize." And resynchronization meant going unnoticed by the Creator.

This was a mad gamble — with the entire world as the stake!

The bet was that the Creator's power could restore the world, and that the restored world would not be noticed and replaced!

But...

Did you catch what was wrong?

This kind of gambler's spirit had previously only been seen in [Fate]. Yet today, for the sake of the world, [Time] was gambling too.

He unleashed every last ounce of the Creator's power within Him and performed a regression on the world beneath — a regression that transcended the space-time barrier.

Time reversed. The deviation was corrected!

This time, not only did the shattering world stop breaking and begin to "re-adhere," but even the multiple reconstructions [Truth] had performed were rewound.

And so Cheng Shi went from falling to rising. Big Cat went from sprinting forward to retreating backward. Tao Yi resumed her flickering. Players returned to their trials. Everything ebbed like a receding tide — as if none of it had ever happened!

Before long, when Cheng Shi opened his eyes and found himself back amid the ruins of Tusnat, the heart that had been lodged in his throat finally sank three notches toward calm.

[Time]!

It was Him after all!

He realized [Time] had acted — this Benefactor had taken the entire world back to the beginning of [Truth]'s experiment, depositing him back inside [Truth]'s trial.

But had it worked?

Had the dust settled?

He didn't know how [Time] had done it. He only knew that the memories of blood drying and flame dying, of the blood-red sneer of despair, remained seared into his mind!

Cheng Shi had not forgotten!

Because of...

The Prisoner's Awakening.

...

Chapter 1076: Aftermath

Of course, what made Cheng Shi's expression shift wasn't just [Time]'s marvel — it was also his current situation.

What frightened him wasn't how he'd woken up, but where he'd woken up!

He had woken up cradled in Hu Xuan's arms...

Can you imagine that kind of tension?

When he saw that elegant, refined face hovering three inches above his forehead — even though her eyes were full of concern — the first thing Cheng Shi felt wasn't the relief of being rescued, nor the lingering shock of what he'd witnessed. Instead, a single "fatal" question echoed through his mind:

'Am I currently before the "birth," or after it?'

This question mattered greatly. It determined the generational hierarchy — specifically, whether he was Hu Xuan's father, or whether Hu Xuan would become his mother.

"..."

The moment Hu Xuan saw the panic in Cheng Shi's eyes, she relaxed. Then she shook her head with an amused laugh and slapped him on the forehead.

"Wake up. I may covet your offspring, but I'm not the type to take advantage of someone in peril. Is my image in your eyes really that deplorable?"

"..."

'Since when do followers of [Birth] have any right to talk about image?'

'Do you have any idea what your image actually is?'

'Who wouldn't be terrified of people who are constantly birthing something?'

Though the phrasing was undeniably strange.

Cheng Shi gave an awkward laugh. His expression was a masterpiece of conflicting emotions, but he played along and asked:

"What's... the situation right now?"

He sat up. Hu Xuan rose as well and gazed south with a serious expression:

"The Erudition Presidium set its sights on our player identities, just as you predicted.

While you were reconstructing this experiment, the Grand Scholars tried to remold us along with it.

Fortunately, I'd taken some precautions in advance. We should be past the worst of it now. We're still in Tusnat, but this is the real Tusnat — we've escaped the experiment."

"?"

Cheng Shi listened in total bewilderment. He had to set aside the multitude of shocks and stray thoughts and focus on understanding the current situation first.

As he awoke, his teammates gradually came to as well. When they saw that everyone was unharmed, all eyes turned to Hu Xuan.

After a moment's thought, Cheng Shi understood.

[Time]'s miracle had deposited him back in the latter half of the trial — the point when they had been fighting the Grand Scholars' attempt to dissolve the experimental world through the Ritual of Truth. And it was at that same moment that Hu Xuan had given birth to a... man!

Right — where was that man now?

Cheng Shi scanned the surroundings and found no sign of him. He looked questioningly at Hu Xuan, who smiled softly:

"Don't bother looking. He's already gone.

You guessed correctly — He is exactly who you think."

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted. A name instantly flashed through his mind:

Lu Xia!

The Servant God of [Life], the Envoy of [Birth] — Birth Holy Voice Lu Xia!

So the figure he'd seen parting ways with Hu Xuan in the West District had been Him?

He was inside the trial?!

Had Hu Xuan learned about the experiment's irregularities through Him?

Wait — if this was a Tusnat reconstructed by the Grand Scholars, how could the Ritual of Truth have reconstructed a Servant God?

"You found Lu Xia and used Him to confirm this experiment was compromised ahead of time?"

"Not quite." Hu Xuan shook her head and smiled calmly. "It was precisely because I couldn't find Him that I suspected something was wrong with this trial.

Lu Xia had concluded that the people of this kingdom were too obsessed with [Truth], which was causing birth rates to plummet. So He had stayed in Tusnat, never leaving, in order to help extend [Truth]'s legacy in this land."

"..."

An Envoy of [Birth] — ostensibly helping followers of [Truth] sustain their truth by steering them toward [Birth]...

There were so many things wrong with that statement that Cheng Shi didn't even know where to begin.

"But I couldn't find Him in the experimental Tusnat, which meant the Tusnat I was seeing wasn't real.

So during my search in the West District, I posed as a follow-up doctor sent by Lu Xia and visited couples He had previously helped.

The west side had been badly damaged, and I nearly lost the trail. But fate smiled on me at the last moment, leading me to a child that Lu Xia had personally delivered.

Speaking of which, I should thank the Erudition Presidium's faithful recreation of Tusnat — it meant this child still carried a trace of Lu Xia's aura.

Yes — the child you saw parting ways with me in the West District was him.

I extracted a wisp of Lu Xia's aura from the child and nurtured it, then gave birth to a false child of Lu Xia during the trial.

That would be the man you helped me deliver.

He was Lu Xia — but only an empty shell, without any consciousness. Through the process of 'birth,' I formed a connection with the real Lu Xia that transcended the experiment's constraints, and was able to transmit your auras to Him.

If that's hard to understand, think of it this way: through a method that appears to be childbirth, I backed up your 'data' with Him.

So when the Grand Scholars destroyed everything and we couldn't stop them, Lu Xia used [Birth]'s blessing to rebirth us into the real Tusnat.

And thus, we escaped the calamity.

That's the gist of it. Understand?"

"..."

'How badly I wish I didn't understand...'

'No, seriously, your [Birth] people...'

'Having extra mothers was bad enough — now you're telling me there might be extra fathers too?'

'But even if there's an extra father, don't tell me it was Lu Xia — a grown man — who carried sextuplets and gave birth to all of us!'

Everyone's expressions became extraordinarily colorful.

Seeing this, Hu Xuan chuckled:

"Birth Holy Voice is merely a midwife. He assists in birth, but does not give birth Himself. You needn't worry on that count.

Besides, when it comes to life, being alive is what matters most. Does it really matter how you survived?"

"..."

"His ability can cause anyone to give birth to anyone. So He probably found a suitable host for us. But if that makes you all uncomfortable, then I strongly advise you not to investigate what that host was.

I'll only say this — it might be easier to accept if you think of it as a host rather than a mother."

"..."

Fine. Being alive was enough.

As long as they were still breathing, who was the father and who was the mother was entirely up to them to decide, wasn't it?

Cheng Shi let out a long exhale. He didn't rush to analyze what he'd witnessed in the real universe. Instead, he carefully studied the expressions of his five teammates.

After a long while, once he was certain they had absolutely no memory of what had just happened, he finally confirmed it: time truly had been reset. And it was a world-level reset.

Moreover, even as he was experiencing the reset, the new timeline had already begun moving forward — only this time, it bypassed the deviation and took a different path.

But the question was — on this new path...

Was [Truth] still alive?

...

Meanwhile, on the other side.

The shattered reality was gradually re-adhering, but the shattered Void remained broken — because at this moment, [Fate] was still dragging the universe into Misfortune, and the gods had arrived to support it.

But just then, the Starlight Canon that had been blocking [Deceit] and [Fate] this entire time casually flipped through a few of its own pages — then simply vanished from the starry sky.

It seemed to have calculated that the experiment had no chance of success, and so it abandoned it outright.

This left [Oblivion] — who had rushed over to stand on [Truth]'s side and watch the show — frozen in the Void.

"Wait, [Truth], you...???"

With the architect of the deviation gone, [Fate] no longer needed to threaten the universe with collapse. In the next instant, He withdrew Misfortune and fixed [Oblivion] with a frigid stare.

[Deceit] likewise turned toward [Oblivion], wearing His signature half-smile: "What's the matter — care to stand in our way again?"

"..."

[Oblivion] vanished His own form once more. And the moment He disappeared, [Deceit] didn't linger for a single second before leaving as well.

He seemed unwilling to bother with His follower anymore.

But He knew that even if He didn't, someone else would.

[Fate] stood gazing into the distance, pondering briefly. He was somewhat puzzled by the gods' sudden change of stance, but it didn't matter. As long as the Fixed Destiny held and His follower was still alive, He would pay no attention to anyone else.

And so He turned His gaze toward [Truth]'s trial, bestowing upon His follower the compensation of Fate.

It was at that moment, deep within the Void, at the entrance where the Mockery and Jeering led to [Time]'s rift, that a pair of star-filled eyes opened.

They looked toward another pair of eyes — black-hole eyes that had long been standing there, gazing into the distance — and said nothing.

After a time, the black-hole eyes sighed:

"Don't stuff any more of those things into me."

With that, He returned a wisp of blurred, iridescent power to the star-filled eyes.

The star-filled eyes let out a soft, amused hum: "What, it didn't work?"

"It worked. But it was also terrifying."

"Well, isn't that perfect? That makes you a qualified member of the Fear Faction."

"...I feel fear, yes. But not only because of fear."

And with that, the black-hole eyes departed.

The world was restored. He had lost His time once more.

...

Chapter 1077: The Trial Continues

"What do we do now?"

When Fang Yuan asked that question, Cheng Shi was busy sizing up Wei Zhi.

Honestly, Cheng Shi was a bit puzzled that Hu Xuan had saved Wei Zhi along with the rest. By that point, Wei Zhi had clearly betrayed the player faction out of greed and self-interest — and given Cheng Shi's hostile attitude, he couldn't think of any reason Hu Xuan would rescue him.

The only logical explanation was that Wei Zhi was still a follower of [Truth], and might yet prove useful in this trial. So she had pulled him along as a precaution.

But Cheng Shi was certain Hu Xuan had left a failsafe in Wei Zhi's Recovery. Only that assurance would make him believe the Sage would save a traitor.

So he looked at Hu Xuan, flicking his eyes subtly toward Wei Zhi in silent inquiry.

Hu Xuan gave a meaningful nod — confirming his suspicion.

That eased Cheng Shi's mind... except it didn't, because he still needed to confirm whether the current Wei Zhi was the pre-fusion Wei Zhi, or actually Galusha.

He couldn't ask outright in front of the others. Instead, he chose to probe carefully:

"What a shame. Grand Scholar Pe Laya helped us so much — I'd hoped we could fulfill her wish. But now it seems it was all an illusion. A slice is a slice, after all."

The others weren't stupid. They could tell Cheng Shi was directing the comment at Wei Zhi, though they didn't know the full story. All they had observed was that when the time came, Cheng Shi had chosen to modify the experiment rather than destroy it — and Wei Zhi had emerged alive within the modified version. So they figured the Reason Association president must have struck some deal with Cheng Shi during that window, one that had gone unfulfilled due to external interference.

Wei Zhi himself was baffled. He frowned, cautiously stepped back, and ignored Cheng Shi's inexplicable remark. Instead, he turned to Hu Xuan with a respectful nod:

"Regardless of your motives for saving me, I'm deeply grateful.

What happened before was my fault. I underestimated the Grand Scholars of the Erudition Presidium — they weren't merely pioneers on the path of truth, but master manipulators of the human heart...

Forget it. It's too embarrassing to bring up.

I'll make amends through my actions. I will never again betray any of you — not until we've won this conflict."

Before Wei Zhi could finish, Chen Yi — his expression dark — sent a dagger spinning through the air.

He glared at this combat expert who had nearly derailed his path of devotion, and snorted coldly: "Why should I trust you again?"

Wei Zhi's brow furrowed slightly. His gaze swept across everyone present, his expression hardened — and then he did something no one expected.

He tore off his own arm!

Rrrip—

A blood-trailing limb hit the ground. Wei Zhi clutched the wound through gritted teeth, managing a bitter smile:

"Is that enough to earn your trust?"

I owe none of you an explanation. Nor do I need to repent for embracing my own desires. After waking up, I could have simply left — and none of you, focused as you are on the Erudition Presidium, would have wasted resources chasing me.

But I stayed. Because I can't swallow this humiliation.

Believe me — right now, I want revenge on those old bastards far more than any of you do.

I can lead the way. But only if we win."

"..."

It had to be said — Wei Zhi made a decent point.

But no amount of logic would make anyone trust someone who had already betrayed the player faction. The real reason no one had attacked him yet was to conserve strength for the trial ahead — they couldn't afford to let internal strife create openings for the Grand Scholars.

Cheng Shi, however, didn't buy a word of it. He studied Wei Zhi with an odd expression, the curve of his lips tinged with amusement.

"So you're renouncing all the spoils from this conflict?"

Wei Zhi nodded solemnly: "That's right."

"Good. In that case..." Cheng Shi's eyes gleamed as he said cheerfully, "No one here trusts you, but for the sake of profit, I'm willing to give you one chance.

Here's the deal — we'll handle the Grand Scholars. We've been humiliated, and payback is definitely on the agenda.

But a single Erudition Presidium won't satisfy my appetite, and it certainly won't repay the Sage for what she's done. So, Wei Zhi — go kill Galusha.

Galusha has been a follower of [Folly] managing the Underworld for years. She must have something valuable. Trade whatever she's got for your life.

And don't feed me that garbage about wanting revenge on the Grand Scholars. The only reason you haven't already left is because you suspect the Sage planted something inside you.

Don't try lying to a fraud — it's pointless."

"..."

Wei Zhi's face turned ashen. He couldn't refute a word, and the look in his eyes as he regarded Cheng Shi gained a new layer of... complexity.

But Cheng Shi didn't care. He pointed toward the West District, in the direction of the Grand Scholars:

"That's settled, then. Sage, would you mind going ahead to scout their position? I need to brief him on a few things. I'll catch up shortly."

Hu Xuan gave the two of them a thoughtful glance, then nodded and led the others away.

Once they were alone, Cheng Shi let out a derisive snort at the "traitor" before him:

"Cat got the traitor's tongue?"

How does it feel — betraying your original side?"

That sarcastic tone made Wei Zhi's voice catch. Then, to Cheng Shi's surprise, he relaxed into a knowing smile and chuckled:

"Impressive. How did you figure it out, Mr. Prisoner?"

Wei Zhi was still Galusha!

When Cheng Shi spoke of betraying "the original side," he wasn't referring to Wei Zhi betraying the players — he meant Galusha betraying the NPCs!

Of course, the current Galusha didn't understand the concept of "NPCs." Her fusion with Wei Zhi was merely a physical reconstruction — it hadn't transferred memories.

Cheng Shi knew this, which was precisely how he'd pierced through Galusha's disguise.

"Want to know how?"

And what about the debt of saving your life?"

Galusha's eyes took on a [Folly]-like gleam. She glanced in the direction Hu Xuan had departed and smiled:

"It was that elegant lady who pulled me out of the experiment. What does that have to do with you?"

Cheng Shi grinned: "You clearly have no idea what our relationship is."

"I can see she has physical desires regarding you, while you have... absolutely zero interest in her.

Don't forget, Mr. Prisoner — I have some expertise in matters of love. On this front, you can't fool me."

Cheng Shi's lip twitched. He shook his head with a wry laugh:

"Wrong. There are more kinds of feelings in this world than just romantic love.

Great Lady Galusha, have you ever heard of something called friendship?

I imagine not — after all, you never had any to begin with."

"..."

That barb was a bit too sharp. Galusha's expression darkened and she whipped out her lash.

But the instant Cheng Shi saw that whip, he relaxed completely.

Galusha had simply used the opportunity to escape the Grand Scholars' experiment. She, too, had no memories of the world shattering or the real universe being revealed. Otherwise, knowing what she truly was, she would never have had the nerve to threaten him.

So the time reset had indeed brought some coincidences and changes.

Could this be the catalyst for Galusha's separation from this world?

Cheng Shi studied Galusha thoughtfully, ignoring her anger. He first answered her question with a smile, then turned serious:

"What you call a 'conflict' is what we call a trial.

And this trial is already unwinnable. The best we can do is clear it.

Wei Zhi would have known this. Only you wouldn't.

But honestly, Galusha — now that you've obtained a player identity, have you considered robbing yourself?

From now on, you and the original you are essentially two different people. She'll continue sinking into the sediment of history, waiting for the next prospector. But you — you've become a prospector yourself.

This road may not be as easy as you imagine. A little extra preparation never hurts, does it?"

Galusha scoffed: "How much do you want?"

Cheng Shi blinked, rubbed his hands together, and said sheepishly: "Well, when you put it that way — helping a friend is helping yourself. By that logic, I'd say we're friends now, aren't we?"

"Heh. I don't have friendship."

"?"

'Did that boomerang really come back this fast?!'

...

Chapter 1078: Infinite Good Luck...

Cheng Shi laughed awkwardly:

"Things are always changing, you know. Look — now you have it.

True friendship is about sharing, so..."

"There's an old saying in the Extreme Desire Brotherhood:

Once you see through someone's greed, they lose all their allure.

Heh, Mr. Prisoner — you're not looking so mysterious anymore."

"..."

Cheng Shi rolled his eyes and thought:

'You haven't seen anything yet. What would you say if I pulled out my credentials as Friend to [Prosperity], Employee of [Death], Proxy of [Decay], Guardian of [Order], Envoy of [Chaos], Servant God of [Void], and the esteemed Master Shi Zhen?'

Galusha showed no interest in robbing herself. As she put it:

"I am me, and she is she. I've become Wei Zhi — a Drifter. That naturally severs any connection between us.

She probably doesn't even know that one of her slices has broken free of this world and been reborn. And when you think about it, my life was given to me by the Erudition Presidium.

That being the case, why maintain any ties to the past?

Starting fresh on a new path of faith — that's probably what I need to do next.

Mr. Prisoner, I'm happy to help you deal with the Erudition Presidium. But Galusha...

Forget it. I know her better than you do. I know exactly how much trouble provoking her would bring."

"?"

That was a first — someone trash-talking their own original self right after "breaking up."

Cheng Shi pursed his lips. Still unwilling to give up squeezing some benefit out of Galusha, his eyes glinted as he played another card:

"Since you know how troublesome she is, all the more reason to lighten history's burden a little.

Drifters are people — but NPCs aren't?

Here's the deal. I'll go find my spoils. Meanwhile, by whatever means you choose, bring back a suitable compensation before the trial ends. That compensation is what the Sage is owed for saving your life. Once I have it, I'll get the Sage to remove whatever failsafe she planted in you.

Don't try to bargain. Otherwise I'll tell Galusha about how you became a Drifter.

Don't tell me she wouldn't be interested in your identity.

I imagine fusing with a slice is much easier than fusing with Wei Zhi. Wouldn't you agree, Lady Galusha?"

"You...!!!"

Galusha was furious. She raised her whip and lashed it at Cheng Shi. He dodged nimbly, let out an amused hum, waved his hand casually, and jogged off after the other players.

Once Cheng Shi disappeared, Galusha's rage evaporated in an instant. She gazed in the direction he'd gone and chuckled softly.

"Interesting.

Greedy people make the best partners, don't they?"

With that, she turned her gaze toward the Three Suns Tower at the city center. Her expression shifted several times before she finally set off in that direction.

She wasn't going to find herself — she only wanted to say goodbye to Pe Laya. Even if the Pe Laya here didn't belong to her.

...

Meanwhile, on the other side.

After their failed attempt to steal the Drifters' identities through the reconstructed experiment, the six Grand Scholars departed the experimental grounds with ashen faces.

They knew the escaped Drifters would return for revenge. So for temporary safety, they split up and scattered in every direction.

This meant the Tower of Logic's decline was now irreversible. They had squandered their best opportunity, losing not only Tusnat, but the Erudition Presidium itself.

Scholar Volent seethed with frustration. To this moment, he still couldn't fathom how this experiment had failed despite their Benefactor's advance instructions!

That was a true god! If a mortal targeted by a true god could still escape, could such a mortal truly be called mortal?

And more terrifyingly — were the so-called true gods really as omnipotent as they claimed?

Any other god's follower would have wondered whether another deity's will had interfered with the experiment, causing its failure.

But the Grand Scholars were different. Having spent their entire lives pursuing the path of [Truth], their first instinct when something went wrong was to question [Truth] Himself!

After all, truth was approached through relentless questioning and pursuit.

So throughout his escape, Volent kept mulling over what had gone wrong with [Truth].

Unfortunately, as a mortal confined to one corner of history, he would never figure it out.

Of course, the world was full of things beyond understanding — like right now. He had carefully disguised himself as a fleeing civilian and even evaded the first sweep by the Drifters. Yet he still ran into the last person he wanted to see.

Credit where due — as the craftiest old fox of the Erudition Presidium, Volent understood human nature.

While the other five Grand Scholars had all bolted toward the city outskirts, he went in the opposite direction, disguising himself as a refugee and heading toward the city center.

In a Tusnat engulfed in chaos and carnage, this behavior was certainly suspicious — unless said refugee was constantly muttering the names of his beloved and children. Then it made perfect sense.

A father braving the fires of war, rushing toward the heart of conflict — all in search of his family's last hope.

That kind of performance would earn sympathy anywhere. So when Fang Yuan and the others swept through the area and Chen Yi heard the names the man was mumbling, he simply shook his head and signaled — all clear.

And the group continued toward the West District.

Volent seemed to have truly found a moment to breathe amid the crisis — but his good luck came to a screeching halt when he ran into a certain someone.

Or rather, that someone's good luck was so overwhelming that it had siphoned all of Volent's away.

Cheng Shi bumped into this refugee.

Honestly, Cheng Shi had no idea this person was Volent. He'd simply grabbed a random NPC — the same way he'd casually grabbed a Funeral Bell Knight before, or stopped two scholars to ask for directions. He just happened to spot someone ahead and pulled them over to ask which way his teammates had gone.

After all, the Grand Scholars wouldn't just sit around waiting to die. And since he hadn't kept pace with Fang Yuan's group, it made perfect sense to ask a passerby about the direction of the loudest commotion.

But Volent misread the situation — or rather, his acting was too good for his own sake. He tried to play the sympathy card again, putting on the most convincing display of terror with a trembling body and wary eyes, wailing the names of loved ones and children, hoping to deter this nosy questioner.

Unfortunately, Cheng Shi's mind was completely consumed by the Ritual of Truth. He couldn't stand the man's dawdling, so he pulled out the Lush Horn Crown and said bluntly:

"Sorry buddy, I know you're in a rush, but so am I.

How about this — you cooperate and die real quick. When I'm done asking, you go find yours, I go find mine, and we both have a bright future ahead. Sound good?"

"?"

He said "sound good," but there was really no choice — because before Cheng Shi even finished asking, the lightning at his fingertips had already charred the refugee to a crisp.

But what he absolutely did not expect was this: just as he was about to pull out the Finger Bone Brooch to interrogate the charred corpse, a dim, lightless orb rolled out from within its clothes.

...

Chapter 1079: ...And Limited Truth

If Cheng Shi had never overseen a Truth Limit experiment, he would never have recognized this thing as nearly identical to the star at the very center of the Truth Limit. But in its current state, it looked more like a star encased in ice.

A fine layer of frost covered the celestial body, as though it had entered its own ice age.

"!?!?"

Why would a refugee be carrying something like this?

Cheng Shi was stunned. He didn't rush to grab it. Instead, he cautiously stepped back and frantically scanned his surroundings. Only after confirming there was no ambush did he — shock still plain on his face — use the Finger Bone Brooch on the charred corpse from a safe distance.

He kept his distance and asked only one question:

"You're... Volent?"

Driven by the pale green and deep blue glow, the corpse's jaw fell open and rasped: "Yes."

"...Hm?"

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted sharply.

He'd suspected as much — but wasn't this a bit too absurd?

He'd randomly killed an NPC he'd stopped for directions, and it turned out to be the number one Grand Scholar of the Erudition Presidium, Scholar Volent — who also happened to drop the Ritual of Truth?

That frozen star had to be the Ritual of Truth!

Was this right?

What kind of dumb-luck protagonist storyline was this?!

Cheng Shi was dumbfounded — but quickly recovered, his expression lighting up!

He triple-checked that nothing was amiss, then sprinted over, snatched up the "cooled" Ritual of Truth, shoved it into his spatial storage, and blasted Volent's remains into ash with two consecutive lightning bolts.

Now, no one could tell a Grand Scholar had ever been here.

Cheng Shi was grinning from ear to ear, utterly satisfied. The trial's greatest prize was already in the bag — winning or losing no longer mattered.

Of course, extra points would be nice, but that clearly wasn't happening anymore.

Still, in the end, fortune had smiled upon him. All praise to [Fate]—

Actually, forget that. Praise [Time] instead.

Thanks to [Time], this world was still alive.

But he still couldn't figure out why [Time]'s power had been able to restore an experimental sample belonging to Origin.

Cheng Shi left the spot and headed out, brow furrowed in thought as he walked. If gods were constantly stealing Authority from one another, was it possible that [Time] had been so busy all this while because He was researching how to steal...

Origin's Authority?

The audacity of that thought startled even Cheng Shi himself. But without it, he simply couldn't explain how a variable within an experiment could transcend the experiment's dimension and restore a sample belonging to the Creator.

That reminded him of Scarred Cheng Shi's advice — urging him to learn more about [Time].

But [Time] was wrapped in too much mystery. How could he possibly get close?

And another thing — the Ritual of Truth had fallen into his hands so easily. Did that mean [Truth] had conceded defeat?

Was He still alive? Was [War] still alive?

How many secrets lay hidden beneath this truth that had shaken the universe?

Cheng Shi gazed upward with furrowed brow and thought:

'Let this trial end soon. I need to see the Fun God. Benefactor, I have far too many questions.'

The players scouring the city managed to eliminate several Grand Scholars, but two still remained at large.

Unable to find them, they reluctantly abandoned the pursuit and regrouped.

Five reunited at the experimental grounds in the West District. Only Chen Yi was missing.

Chen Yi was too obsessed. He was convinced that [Truth] was interfering with his relationship with his Benefactor, so he had launched an unrelenting hunt against [Truth]'s followers, vowing to eliminate every last Grand Scholar within this trial.

No one commented on this. Seeing Cheng Shi's slightly disappointed expression, Meng Youfang offered consolation:

"You really wanted the Ritual of Truth?"

Well, I hear you. Even if you can't get it now, don't worry — once I reclaim my Divine Throne, I'll definitely borrow it from [Truth] and let you play with it for a few days. How's that?"

"..."

Everyone else's expressions grew more bizarre by the second, but Cheng Shi actually believed him.

He knew Old Meng wasn't lying — assuming he actually had a Divine Throne, it would absolutely happen.

Too bad he didn't have one, and the Ritual of Truth was already in Cheng Shi's possession.

Naturally, Cheng Shi kept this to himself. He merely grumbled about how viciously [Truth] had designed this experiment — using the lure of faith to endanger players' lives. Even if the players cracked the puzzle, they'd fail the trial by wrecking the experiment, earning zero points.

The players sighed in resignation and echoed his sentiments, but given that this was a Special Trial, they came to terms with it.

And so, the trial hadn't yet ended, but the remaining time was garbage time. With the clock still ticking, everyone dispersed to explore the history of things that interested them.

Cheng Shi walked alongside Hu Xuan, asking about Lu Xia.

Hu Xuan smiled as she described this "older brother" she had only recently met:

"He's quite peculiar. He doesn't like meeting familiar faces. He tirelessly spreads [Birth]'s philosophy across the world, yet He avoids attention — quietly delivering one life after another.

He believes the universe's essence is continuation. The more desperate a place, the more it needs Him — and that's His reason for not returning to [Birth]'s side.

He feels [Birth] already has more than enough children nearby. Rather than drowning in [Birth]'s ocean, He'd rather carve out His own stream and enrich more soil.

So encountering Him in Tusnat was, in itself, a stroke of luck."

"..."

Cheng Shi had been listening earnestly, but the moment phrases like "[Birth]'s ocean" entered the conversation, the imagery in his head spiraled out of control.

He forced an awkward laugh and offered a vague agreement: "Luck is great. I'm pretty lucky too."

But just then, Hu Xuan stopped abruptly. She tilted her head, smiling at Cheng Shi:

"There's something I never told you. Before the trial even started, I saw [Fate]."

"!?"

Cheng Shi blinked. "An audience?"

Hu Xuan shook her head:

"No — in my rest area.

The trial notification had already appeared in my vision. But one second before I entered the trial, I saw Him descend right before my eyes.

And then, what should have been my [Fate] trial suddenly became a [Truth] one.

So, Fate Weaver — let me ask you: was that lucky?"

"!!!

You were sent in by [Fate]?!" Cheng Shi's pupils quaked.

Hu Xuan smiled and nodded: "Yes. So when I saw you here, I wasn't particularly surprised. And finding Lu Xia was also inspired by that event.

I had a feeling He wanted me to come help you.

And it seems I didn't let Him down."

"..."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi plunged into deep thought. If [Fate]'s appearance was no coincidence but a "rescue," it meant He had seen through [Truth]'s plan — just a beat too late.

And that also meant [Truth] had been targeting him all along. Not as a potential backup material for the experiment, but as someone who had been placed on the operating table from the very start.

Well played, [Truth]!

Cheng Shi recalled the trial's initial prompt: "Limited truth is never truth..."

Ha — that was never a hint to the challengers. It was an epitaph [Truth] had written for Himself!

So He'd been prepared for self-destruction from the trial's inception — waiting only for the [Time] power within Cheng Shi.

Sigh... what could he say? [Truth]'s targeting of him was infuriating, but it had to be admitted — like [Prosperity], He was truly someone who practiced what He preached.

But in this absurd world, what good was living by your convictions? The will you championed was nothing more than experimental conditions imposed on you by the Creator.

You championed it, spread it, proved it, upheld it — and in the end, all you were doing was following the rules 'He' had written for all living beings.

When you thought about it that way, it was truly despairing.

What was 'He' even observing?

And was [Truth]... still alive?

The first question was nearly impossible to answer. But the second seemed to find its answer the moment the trial ended.

[Special Trial (Pursuing [Truth]) — Challenge Successful]

[Evaluating performance and calculating rewards...]

[Player: Cheng Shi — Performance Rating: C]

[Item Obtained: Universe Truth (C) x1]

[Road to Ascension +20]

[Ladder of Ascent +3]

[Current Road to Ascension Score: 2301 — Global Ranking: 291,306]

[Current Ladder of Ascent Score: 190 — Path Ranking: 24]

[Trial Cleared — Preparing to exit]

...

Chapter 1080: Audience, Audience, Audience, Audience...

The Void — an unknown space.

While Fang Yuan was still lamenting that his Road to Ascension score had indeed been docked, his consciousness was pulled into a stretch of infinite darkness.

Soon, the darkness gradually receded, and light rekindled across his vision.

The piercing brightness left him dazed for a moment. He looked around — and realized he seemed to have arrived at...

Katouting?!

Wasn't this the Supreme Court located in Katouting?!

Given where he was, there was no need to guess who had pulled him in.

[Order]!

Benefactor!

An audience!

Fang Yuan was overwhelmed by the honor.

Honestly, it wasn't that he'd never had an audience with a deity. He'd just never had one with his own Benefactor.

Whether it was because he exploited too many loopholes, [Order] had never once summoned him. But after making inquiries, he discovered that his Benefactor apparently hadn't summoned anyone else either. So he leaned toward a widely circulated theory among [Order] players:

Personal audiences would compromise the fairness of the entire faith faction. Therefore, [Order] never summoned followers.

So what was this audience for — a judgment on his loophole-exploiting, or a special favor that broke the norms of collective fairness?!

Fang Yuan was deeply anxious. He didn't know how to face this absolutely "just" Benefactor.

But he understood the basics of proper praise and greeting. So he immediately bowed his head and spoke with utmost devotion:

"Praise be to the great—"

But before he could finish, the codex placed high upon the Supreme Court bench flipped its pages and spoke:

"What is [Order]?"

"?"

Fang Yuan froze. A tremor ran through his body as he lifted his gaze toward the codex, wondering if this was some kind of test.

But why did his Benefactor's tone sound so... lost?

Could it be that Mo Li had been right — [Order] had lost His order?!

...

The Void — an unknown space.

The moment Chen Yi felt himself being pulled into the Void, his reaction was unmistakably panic.

Because his Ladder of Ascent score had been docked — the first time since the Faith Game began. This meant he had forgotten important memories from the previous trial.

How was that possible!

He had memorized everything! Why had there still been an omission?!

Where had the gap started?!

The Time Battlefield?!

True, the Time Battlefield could affect one's memories. But as long as you remembered the final overwritten version, there shouldn't have been a problem. Every previous trial involving a Time Walker had gone smoothly. Why was this the one time he'd been penalized?

Unable to make sense of it, Chen Yi poured all his grievance and fury onto [Truth].

It was all [Truth]'s fault!

If [Truth]'s trial hadn't been so hostile toward his relationship, how could his Benefactor have docked his score!

Did He... not like him anymore?

No — He liked him. He must. Why else would He pull him into the Void?

Deities wouldn't summon mortals they didn't care about!

Amid this turmoil of apprehension, anticipation, and nervousness, Chen Yi saw those eyes.

This was his first audience — no, his first date with his beloved.

In the privacy of the Void, they would finally bare their hearts to each other.

So when those divine eyes — steeped in the weight of history's millennia — opened above his head, the words spilled from his lips unbidden:

"I DO!!!"

"..."

Silence was the audience's answer.

It took those eyes a long time before they finally looked down at their follower, devoid of joy or sorrow:

"Speak not in vain."

"!!!"

Chen Yi snapped back to reality. His expression changed instantly. He dropped to his knees, body shaking uncontrollably — whether from the afterglow of excitement or the regret of overstepping, he couldn't tell. He began shuffling forward on his knees, desperate to draw closer to his Benefactor and prove the purity of his love. But those eyes were far above him in the heavens — no amount of distance on the ground could bring him any closer.

"Benefactor, I... I..." Chen Yi was losing his mind. The usually silver-tongued version of himself had vanished. The man who passionately proclaimed the beauty of human-divine love before other players now couldn't form a single sentence.

Fortunately, the awkwardness didn't last long. Those eyes glanced at him and spoke in a deep voice:

"Your memories — they've been obliterated."

"!!!?"

Obliterated?

By whom?

[Oblivion]?!

Was it because of Him that his Ladder of Ascent score had been docked?!

But why? And which memories had been destroyed?!

Chen Yi was beside himself. In that instant, his hatred shifted from [Truth] directly to [Oblivion]. He wanted to ask his Benefactor why [Oblivion] had done this, but he was also afraid of wasting this precious time together. And so, paralyzed by indecision, he watched helplessly as those eyes faded from the Void.

The moment he returned to the rest area, Chen Yi — his expression dark as a thundercloud — pulled out a dagger and carved two words deep into the floor: OBLIVION.

"Damn it — damn [Oblivion]!"

...

Reality — a private estate in an unknown city.

Meng Youfang looked at himself in the mirror.

...

The Void — an unknown space.

A frigid voice echoed through the emptiness, stirring gusts of biting wind. Yet the summoned woman felt no chill whatsoever.

She gazed up at those star-filled eyes with a smile, watching the constellation points within them interweave and spiral, marveling at the wonder of [Void].

"You and fate have been entwined for a long time.

A follower of [Fate] once rewrote your destiny. And now, you have helped guide a deviation back to the Fixed Destiny.

In the universe, every drink and every peck is destiny.

So, Hu Xuan — would you walk the path of [Fate] and become one sheltered by [Fate]?"

"..."

Perhaps having anticipated this "invitation," Hu Xuan smiled brightly. But then she shook her head with firm resolve:

"Praise be to [Void]. Praise be to [Fate].

This humble one receives [Fate]'s grace with nothing but awe and gratitude.

But I have already devoted myself to [Birth]. My heart holds no room for another path. Though [Fate] is wonderful, it is not the road I wish to walk.

To have earned the Fate Weaver's regard is already the fortune of a lifetime. To covet [Fate]'s gaze on top of that would be Hu Xuan not knowing her place.

I have resolved to remain by my Lord's side. This stroke of luck — I can only let it slip through my fingers.

But since I've been granted the rare honor of this audience, Hu Xuan does have one small request."

The moment those words left her lips, the Void froze solid.

Now, for the first time, the summoned woman felt the true cold of [Void]. A fine layer of frost crept across her brows, her eyes, her skin.

Yet Hu Xuan remained composed and unwavering — for in this moment, she represented not herself, but... [Birth].

The Eternal Sun had already been acknowledged. Any god who wished to erase her would effectively be declaring war on [Birth].

But [Fate] clearly didn't care about such things. He fixed Hu Xuan with eyes as cold as ice and spoke with utter detachment:

"One who refuses to walk into [Void] dares to demand blessings?"

Do you know what you're doing?

Mortal — even if you truly become His child, in this Void, [Birth] cannot protect you!"

To claim she wasn't afraid would have been a lie. But Hu Xuan held steady. She forced a kind smile through her struggle, chose not to respond to [Fate]'s challenge, and spoke through gritted, trembling teeth:

"Great [Fate], I wish to beg You — please transfer this good fortune to Your follower, Fate Weaver Cheng Shi.

I wish to plead for a second gaze on his behalf from You.

May his road ahead be free of worry. May fortune follow him in all things."

The moment she finished, the biting wind vanished.

The entire Void fell still, leaving only a complex, lingering glance from [Fate].

"I sense your sincerity. But I must remind you — without fate's favor, your path will not be easy."

Hu Xuan smiled radiantly: "And will his path be easy?"

[Fate] said nothing more and departed in silence.

The Void lapsed once more into stillness.

...