

The Gods 1091

Chapter 1091: The Torchbearers and the God Creation Plan

After briefing Big Cat, Cheng Shi returned to the rest area and called the Blind One.

He wasn't just notifying her about the Destined Ones meeting — there was another matter:

[War]'s fall.

[War] had been erased by Origin's own hand, and His Authority may have scattered into the real universe. This meant the Torchbearer founder — a follower of [War] — had permanently lost his Benefactor's protection.

Of course, under the Convention's safeguard, he wouldn't lose all his power outright. But Cheng Shi worried that as [War]'s will reverted to "frenzy," Qin Xin might be unconsciously influenced into taking rash actions with unpredictable consequences.

The Torchbearers had to be important.

This wasn't just what their vision and beliefs told him — it was what [Deceit]'s attitude toward them confirmed.

When Cheng Shi first learned of the Torchbearers' existence, he'd assumed they were just "toys" the Fun God sheltered to annoy the other gods. But as he came to know the Fun God and the universe's truth more deeply, he realized the Torchbearers had to be a piece in the Fun God's grand design.

After all, they were so alike — both fighters rebelling upward.

The only difference was that the Torchbearers harbored noble ideals, while the Fun God... harbored none.

Compared to that distant Origin, the Fun God was more like a shadow puppeteer — mysterious, perpetually scheming.

Cheng Shi naturally wouldn't tell An Mingyu directly that [War] had fallen. He simply hinted that he'd sensed a new round of strife among the gods — that [Civilization] might have some problems — and asked her to remind Fang Shiqing and Qin Xin to be careful.

An Mingyu accepted without suspicion. After chatting for a moment, she suddenly asked in a hesitant tone:

"I've been feeling uneasy lately — as if I sensed a fluctuation in [Fate]. My divination scores have been low for several readings in a row. Could it be that our Benefactor...

has also lost ground in this latest struggle?"

"..."

The question silenced Cheng Shi completely.

[Fate] had indeed encountered something unexpected — but the issue wasn't in this starry sky. It was in another one.

Don't forget — the current An Mingyu had been swapped in during that [Time] trial. The original An Mingyu of this world had voluntarily departed for an unfamiliar starry sky to save the Zhen Xin of another world.

And now...

Cheng Shi couldn't even be sure whether that other starry sky would have a [Time] salvation... and even if it did, could a world reset bring those people back?

At the very least, the version of himself who had died before Origin's throne... could never return.

For a moment, Cheng Shi fell silent, unsure how to answer.

And it was precisely this silence that made An Mingyu's heart lurch.

She was too clever — not just now, but always.

The moment she'd felt her unease, she'd begun divining. Though she hadn't said what she was reading, the low scores had already revealed an unhappy ending to the Prophet.

Coupled with Cheng Shi's hesitation, she immediately realized that the thing she least wanted to foresee had perhaps already come to pass.

"She... what happened?"

'Was this what they called consciousness synchronization?'

Cheng Shi found this too cruel. So he forced a lighthearted laugh and said:

"Our Benefactor... He is fine."

He deflected with wordplay.

"[Fate] isn't just about the Fixed Destiny. There are always changes along the way. But as the sovereign of this era, He can handle anything.

Don't worry — He just got into a scuffle with His sibling god. And those low scores and your unease are probably just the Fun God's mischief.

[Fate] is fine. [Void] is fine. What's not fine is [Civilization]...

I have a feeling [Civilization]'s defeat bodes ill. That's why I called.

And... don't overthink things. Whether as a Destined One or a Torchbearer, your path ahead is bright.

Chosen An — keep going."

An Mingyu gave a soft "Mm" and hung up.

She forced herself to stop thinking about it, then quietly turned and walked back into the museum.

Zhen Xin was leafing through reports and glanced up when she saw her best friend return: "Cheng Shi?"

An Mingyu smiled: "Yes. The gods had another power struggle. [Civilization] seems to have run into trouble. He asked me to remind the Torchbearers to be careful."

"Did [War] lose, or [Truth]?"

I just heard that certain [Truth] trials have turned their spears on the players. Sounds like [Truth] is making a major move.

[Civilization] united on this front and challenged the Convention?"

"Not sure. He wasn't very specific."

An Mingyu gathered the scattered documents from the floor and sat down quietly at the desk to read.

Watching her unusually silent friend, Zhen Xin's brow furrowed slightly.

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Meanwhile — the Void, the Fire Passing Hall.

With the Flame of Hope in poor condition, Qin Xin had intended to keep a low profile for a while.

But when Fire Seeker Ji Yue walked into the hall accompanied by a familiar face, Qin Xin knew that staying low was an impossibility.

"You, of all people?"

When Ji Yue told me you'd be someone I'd never expect, I didn't believe her. Now I do.

So — Vice President Sun, has the Order Alliance taken an interest in us Torchbearers?"

The moment Qin Xin finished, Ji Yue grinned:

"The vice-president title is correct, but the Order Alliance is too narrow. Qin Xin, you may not realize it, but this Vice President Sun isn't just the Order Alliance's second-in-command.

He's also the vice president of the Reason Association, the God Worship Society... and countless other organizations I can't even name."

Ji Yue, all smiles, led the slightly awkward-looking Sun Miao over and clapped him on the shoulder, introducing him to Qin Xin:

"This is the first piece of kindling I've found for the Torchbearers.

The Eye of Deconstruction lives up to the name — his philosophy aligns very well with ours."

Qin Xin's gaze was sharp as a hawk's. He scanned Sun Miao up and down, then smiled again: "Is that so? What if it's all an act?"

At this, Ji Yue shot Sun Miao an amused look. Sun Miao finally spoke his first words in the Fire Passing Hall:

"It is an act. But what if I keep acting, all the way to the end?"

"..."

For some reason, when Qin Xin heard this, the person who came to mind wasn't anyone from [Folly] — it was a certain follower of [Fate] whose brain worked in equally peculiar ways.

Qin Xin shook his head with a wry smile and turned to Ji Yue: "Is that why you invited him? A pretender willing to be a good person?"

"No, no, no," Ji Yue laughed heartily. "I said — many of his ideas mirror the Torchbearers'. At the very least, they mirror the City Builders'. They fit my temperament well. So I figured it was time to inject some fresh thinking into the Torchbearers."

Qin Xin mused for a moment, then asked directly: "Fresh in what way?"

Ji Yue glanced at Sun Miao. Sun Miao's lips curled with an air of mystery:

"The God Creation Plan!"

"You told him even that?" Qin Xin's eyes narrowed.

"Relax. Hear him out."

With Ji Yue vouching for him, Sun Miao continued:

"Your approach is wrong. [Prosperity] did fall, but His Divine Throne has already been claimed by someone.

Don't ask me who — I don't know. But the veteran mages of the Reason Association have been buzzing lately, analyzing this person who seized the throne. The evidence is quite solid. I can put the report directly on your desk — the Reason Association's report.

That's why I say your direction is off. If you truly want to create a god, truly want to claim a Divine Throne, [Prosperity] is no longer the best option."

Hearing this, Qin Xin essentially understood what Ji Yue was after.

Intelligence — and ideological support!

As the number-two figure of countless organizations, Sun Miao held an astonishing amount of intelligence in his hands — arguably more, in some respects, than even Zhen Xin and An Mingyu combined.

But bringing an information broker into the Torchbearers was also a risk. The City Builders were the radical faction, and Ji Yue was the most radical of them all — so she didn't care. But Qin Xin had to carefully define this person's role.

He studied Sun Miao and smiled once more: "No need for riddles. In your view, what's the best option for the Torchbearers?"

"[Decay]!

[Decay] hasn't summoned His followers in ages, nor issued any divine proclamations. His faith camp, eroded steadily by [Prosperity]'s followers, is in precarious shape at best.

Moreover, substantial evidence suggests [Decay] may be looking to relinquish His influence over the universe entirely.

A god so intent on 'decaying' Himself probably has no attachment to His Divine Throne. And the seat under His backside is exactly what you need."

Qin Xin considered this for a moment, then extended his hand to Sun Miao.

"Not 'you.' Us.

Welcome to the Torchbearers."

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Chapter 1092: So This Is [Folly]!

When Cheng Shi had first lifted the veil on the Torchbearers for Sun Miao, he'd definitely had an ulterior motive.

He wanted Sun Miao to watch the Torchbearers for him — gaining a channel of information beyond Zhen Xin and the Blind One to silently monitor the group's movements.

At the time, he'd assumed someone of Sun Miao's identity could never be formally inducted into the Torchbearers.

But he'd miscalculated one thing: circumstances change. Back then, the Torchbearers he'd known didn't include a blazingly fierce [War] Fire Seeker.

He'd also failed to predict that his planted chess piece would report back so quickly.

He received a signed letter — the History School's official communication method. Via prayer, a letter was delivered to the intended recipient, and anything written on it would appear in real time.

Compared to phones or video, this method was decidedly old-fashioned — befitting the History School's focus on documented legacy.

When Cheng Shi saw the sender was Sun Miao, he first wondered whether An Mingyu's feedback had tipped off Zhen Xin, prompting her to send a familiar face to probe.

But when Sun Miao drew two hands exchanging a torch on the letter, Cheng Shi froze.

The Fire Passing!

This Vice President Sun wanted to discuss the Torchbearers with him!

It was impossible to discuss something this sensitive on paper, so he arranged a meeting in the Void.

It was hard to describe how strange Sun Miao's expression was when they met again. Cheng Shi couldn't determine the man's true attitude toward him either. Though [Folly]'s arrogance hung on his face as usual, something complex lurked beneath — as if he'd glimpsed some profound truth.

After brief consideration, Cheng Shi concluded the oddity was related to Yu Xi. Otherwise, a [Folly] follower who ranked among the very top of peak players would never behave this way.

Sure enough, Sun Miao's first words weren't about the Torchbearers — they were about Yu Xi.

He said:

"The History School voted unanimously to investigate Yu Xi. We deployed virtually every resource at our disposal to study this [Void] Envoy, and we've arrived at some very interesting conclusions. Would you...

like to hear them?"

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow and smiled:

"If you're planning to use this as a bargaining chip in your intel exchange, I'll pass.

If it's free, then sure — why not."

"..."

'As expected of him.'

Sun Miao's face darkened, but he carried on regardless:

"We did find traces of [Void]'s influence on reality throughout history. However, those fragments only demonstrate that [Void]'s power appeared at various points — they can't be directly linked to Yu Xi.

When that path hit a dead end, we changed approaches and began tracing the origins of intelligence about Yu Xi's emergence. This time, we finally had results.

Guess what we found?"

Watching Sun Miao's increasingly complex expression, Cheng Shi's heart lurched. He suddenly felt he may have underestimated the true power of the History School as an intelligence juggernaut.

But he couldn't be sure the man wasn't bluffing, so he merely smiled: "Spill it or don't."

"We found that the sources of this intelligence are, in one way or another, all connected to you.

In other words, in every traceable origin story involving Yu Xi's information, your figure appears.

Don't ask me how — the History School paid dearly for this in classified intel. Information exchange is always an equal trade.

So, Cheng Shi — do you know what this means?

According to the History School's Historical Definition Method, an overreliance on a single source turns history into mere story. We don't have enough evidence to prove Yu Xi truly exists. In fact, His existence may very well be nothing more than a lie you fabricated!

Care to explain?"

At this, Cheng Shi's heart clenched. He hadn't expected the History School to actually have substance — to trace an information chain all the way back to him among such cautious, brilliant peak players.

How much resources and manpower had they burned just to investigate Yu Xi?

And how many people knew these conclusions?

Did Zhen Xin know?

Was Sun Miao here on his own initiative, or had Zhen Xin sent him to probe?

Cheng Shi's mind kicked into overdrive, analyzing every angle of his current predicament.

He traced through every breadcrumb and hint he'd ever left, and concluded the situation was still savable. At the very least, Crown's mask genuinely existed. Worst case, he could do what Li Jingming had once proposed — push the final truth onto that mask.

Besides, as long as he didn't crack, as long as he maintained that he'd seen Yu Xi in person, the History School couldn't produce evidence to disprove a divine audience.

After all, whom a god chose to summon wasn't the History School's call.

So as long as he kept up the clever argument, there might still be a way out.

Outwardly, Cheng Shi beamed. Inwardly, he was already composing his defense.

But the very next second, Sun Miao's follow-up dropped his heart right back down.

"Nothing to say, huh?"

Are you about to admit it was all a self-directed performance — a lie to fool the world!?

Ha — you think I'd believe that?

If there truly were an Envoy of [Deceit] in this world, He would never use such a clumsy lie to hide His identity. He would deceive the vast majority of fools, guiding the stupid masses into believing that no such thing as Yu Xi ever existed.

But He underestimated this world — and its mortals!

Someone will always see through the illusion, pierce the lie, and find the truth hidden behind it.

And that truth is this: Cheng Shi is nothing but a mortal disguise for your little game. You are the very [Deceit] Envoy, the [Void] Servant God we've been searching for!

Am I wrong... Lord Yu Xi?"

"..."

Cheng Shi's mind went blank.

He realized that [Folly] followers' brains did work fast — but in a direction he hadn't predicted. He'd been agonizing over how to subtly lead a smart Wise Man into believing Yu Xi existed, only for the other party to skip the guide entirely and slap Yu Xi's identity directly onto him!

'If that's how you want to play it, bro — don't blame me for rolling with it.'

Indeed — as the Envoy of [Deceit], why would His lies be so transparent?

When everyone else was on the first level, He should be on the second!

And Vice President Sun here? Straight to the third level!

[Folly] follower — massive points scored.

Since the man had already said it, for Cheng Shi not to play along would feel downright rude.

So he instantly activated Chaos Acting, transforming into the tall, lean figure of Yu Xi. For good measure, he pulled out his [Deceit] container, caressing it as he spoke with an eerie smile:

"Interesting. Few can discern my identity. Several of those who have are followers of [Folly].

Like Wei Mu, you have a fine brain. But unfortunately, guessing right earns no reward.

Forget all of this. Even if you've uncovered my true identity, I will not offer you any aid or guidance.

[Void] is meaningless. All of this is nothing but a game."

Light flickered rapidly in Sun Miao's eyes. He remained unmoved, his tone unwavering:

"If it were truly meaningless, why would You have directed me toward the Torchbearers?

Whether City Defenders, City Builders, or City Breakers — they all hold to beauty and rebel against the gods. If Your will weren't behind them, there's no way they'd remain hidden from divine sight.

So You shielded them — correct?

And the so-called Flame of Hope is just another one of Your aliases — isn't it?

And the reason You do all this... forgive my presumption in seeing the whole through a glimpse... is probably because You share the same desire as the Torchbearers — to rebel upward?

You're rebelling against [Deceit]? Or perhaps... against all the gods?"

"..."

Cheng Shi's brain short-circuited.

'Bro — how did you manage to get everything wrong in your reasoning and yet arrive at entirely correct conclusions?'

'So this is [Folly]?'

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Chapter 1093: The True God Creation Plan

Seeing Lord Yu Xi's expression freeze, Sun Miao knew he'd guessed right.

Indeed — with enough intelligence, one could find the world's truth and the gods' will through the tiniest of clues!

Yu Xi was rebelling!

What was He rebelling against? Why? Could it be that He coveted those sixteen Divine Thrones — that even a Servant God's heart wasn't purely devoted?

Sun Miao's mind raced with possibilities.

Cheng Shi's mind raced just as fast. He had to admit Sun Miao's timing was impeccable — this was precisely when Cheng Shi needed allies, and Sun Miao's identity as vice president of countless organizations genuinely had value.

The only awkward part was his faith.

[Birth] was permanently neutral, never involved in any of this. And [Folly] was seemingly just a spectator, doing nothing but heckling the actors on stage.

Neither wanted to get involved, yet both had watched over every event in the universe from the beginning.

Could such a strange faith fusion become his asset?

Obviously it could. Even if only for the intelligence Sun Miao possessed, he deserved a seat in Cheng Shi's camp.

So after a moment's thought, rather than answering the question, Cheng Shi smiled and asked:

"What do you think is the purpose of this game?"

The purpose of the game?

Sun Miao's brow furrowed slightly. He immediately understood this was Yu Xi's test — and if his answer aligned closely enough with the deity's will, he might take a giant leap forward.

Who wouldn't want to know the game's purpose?

Choosing [Folly] meant Sun Miao desired to approach the gods' truth far more than most. And juggling countless vice-presidencies and stockpiling intelligence was just one means to that end.

He'd pondered this question long ago. The gods were virtually omnipotent — why insist on hosting a game to spread faith? Combined with the so-called "Road to Ascension" and "Ladder of Ascent," Sun Miao deliberated briefly and answered earnestly:

"To create — no, to forge a god. To forge a god!"

"?" Cheng Shi was genuinely intrigued. "Go on."

"The Ladder of Ascent represents each god's affirmation of their followers' devotion. That's one method of faith propagation.

But the Road to Ascension is different. The gods bestow trials on mortals of all faiths and score them based on performance. In the peak circle, there's a consensus: the scores on the Road to Ascension correlate with how well a player's actions in a trial align with the trial god's will.

In other words, if someone's comprehension of faith is broad enough — if they can unify all faiths — they could walk farther on the Road to Ascension than anyone. Like the person You mentioned... Wei Mu!

And personally, I believe the Road to Ascension is called 'Ascension to Godhood' for a literal reason.

Wei Mu is the person closest to a Divine Throne!

Of course, the sixteen thrones above are already full, and as a mortal, I don't know which one he's heading toward.

So my conclusion is: this game exists to create a god. It's a game the gods designed to forge the seventeenth deity!

And this seventeenth god — embodying all their wills — would be unlike any existing one.

However, from a mortal's limited perspective, I cannot fathom their true purpose in creating such a being.

Is my understanding correct, Lord Yu Xi?"

"..."

Cheng Shi's expression turned strange. He wanted to tell Sun Miao: 'You're wrong — the seventeenth throne belongs to my Big Bro Meng. Wei Mu's seat would be number eighteen at best.'

But he didn't crack that joke here.

Honestly, Sun Miao's reasoning was flawless from a mortal standpoint. That he could strip away the game's illusion to ponder the purpose of faith fusion — his depth of thought earned the title of [Folly].

But because he lacked knowledge of the gods and awareness of the universe's truth, his theory was still somewhat narrow.

The game's true purpose wasn't to create a god — it was to forge a "sacrifice" to please that true 'God'!

Because only 'He' could embody so many wills simultaneously. The faith fusion the gods were driving was nothing more than a clumsy imitation — a laughable mimicry of 'His' omniscience.

After his showdown with [Fate], Cheng Shi had already recognized this. But now, having witnessed the real universe firsthand, his perspective had shifted.

An even more terrifying thought was taking shape in his mind.

Granted, the current era's method of offering was a "game rule" set by [Void]'s two rulers. But was this Faith Game truly [Void]'s invention?

If even the gods were variables in the experiment — if any variable could be altered or erased at will — then who could guarantee that the gods' wills were actually their own?

Just like the slices in [Truth]'s experiment: when different slices were implanted with different memories, would you — before discovering this — ever believe you were merely a slice of someone else?

Absolutely not!

You'd believe you were a living, independent person with your own intelligence and a correct understanding of the world!

Never realizing that your so-called understanding was merely what the experimenter wanted you to understand.

Following this train of thought, Cheng Shi was chilled to the bone.

He couldn't help wondering: was [Fate]'s pursuit of the Fixed Destiny truly His own desire? Was [Deceit]'s rebellion nothing more than a pre-programmed "procedure" in the experiment?

And this world, surviving amid the real universe's chaos — had the Creator truly accepted [Time]'s reset and decided not to flag it as an anomalous sample?

Was it possible that everything he'd experienced and witnessed was actually part of experimental conditions 'He' had set?

The more terrifying Fixed Destiny the Fun God spoke of... could it be that He, too, had already figured this out?

Cheng Shi fell silent once more.

Sun Miao was perceptive. He'd sensed trace ripples of fear — and that sensation stunned him as well.

Lord Yu Xi truly was rebelling!

No — perhaps even the gods themselves were rebelling!

This game might not be as simple as it appeared. The so-called "players" might include more than just mortals.

What if the gods, too, were struggling within it? Could that be why they wanted to create a seventeenth god to shatter their chains?!

Yes!

Otherwise, why would they "turn a blind eye" to the Torchbearers? And why would Lord Yu Xi shelter them? The Torchbearers' God Creation Plan — wasn't it identical to what the gods themselves were doing?

This...

Could something exist that imprisoned even the gods, trapping them in this impassable universe?

Sun Miao's imagination was boundless — so vast he nearly stumbled into the truth by wild guessing.

Cheng Shi snapped back, banished the fear, and spoke from behind his mask with an eerie grin:

"Creating a god... a plan to create a god. Yes — your understanding is quite good."

The God Creation Plan!

He was right — what the Torchbearers called the God Creation Plan was merely a microcosm of this entire game!

Thrilled to have uncovered the universe's "truth," Sun Miao immediately volunteered every conjecture he had about the God Creation Plan in hopes of extracting more from Yu Xi. He laid out the suggestions he'd given the Torchbearers, then timidly looked up:

"I wonder... might any of these suggestions be useful?"

"..."

Sun Miao was genuinely clever. But mortal thinking was ultimately too simplistic.

This starry sky held sixteen Divine Thrones. Lose one, and everyone could find an opportunity.

But beyond this starry sky?

The Creator's throne had only one seat!

So for the gods, this method was certainly not viable.

However — having the Torchbearers compete for [Decay]'s Divine Throne?

...

Chapter 1094: Maybe It's Not Impossible?

This idea actually aligned perfectly with his own.

So the Torchbearers had a God Creation Plan all along...

Cheng Shi had been searching for a new source of strength for the Torchbearers for some time, and plundering [Decay] was exactly his plan.

When he'd handed the [Prosperity] container to Big Cat, he'd told her that the [Decay] container had another purpose. In truth, he'd already been planning to give the [Decay] container — the one he'd obtained from Yu Go of another timeline — to the Torchbearers.

At the time, he hadn't thought too deeply about it. He figured that since the Fun God wanted him to hand it off, the Torchbearers — who lacked any high-end power — were an obvious choice.

First, the Torchbearers were under the Fun God's protection, so giving the container to Qin Xin would be no more than an internal asset transfer between departments. Second, [Decay] was singularly focused on decaying — having His container wouldn't pose a terrible influence on the group.

The only reason he hadn't done it yet was that he didn't want to put it on the table openly. He'd been waiting for the right moment.

And now, the moment had arrived!

The God Creation Plan?

Perfect — let the Torchbearers create a [Decay] god!

If they could truly use this container to find their opportunity and climb onto that Divine Throne, his vote count could potentially jump from six to seven!

After all, even with "full attendance" at the Assembly of Gods, there were only 15 votes. Seven votes was just 0.5 away from a majority!

Feasible!

So after brief consideration, Cheng Shi pulled the [Decay] container — which resembled rotting wood — from his coat.

The moment Sun Miao saw the container, he immediately recalled something.

"A creation like the 'Fear Tree Core'?"

Cheng Shi smiled enigmatically:

"That wasn't a Fear Tree Core — it was a [Corruption] container.

And this is a [Decay] container."

"Container... what's it for?" Sun Miao's expression shifted. Given that Yu Xi was producing this at a time like this, he had an inkling.

Cheng Shi's answer confirmed his guess and transformed his suspicion into complete shock.

"For creating gods, obviously."

"!!!!!"

"What makes a god a god — aside from possessing Authority — is Divinity. I'm sure I don't need to elaborate on that.

But what you mortals don't know is that to become a god, Divinity comes first, and Authority follows.

Only by gaining faith's recognition can one be formally established as a true god.

The specifics are complex and beyond your need to know. You only need to understand that the container is the sole tool for distilling Divinity."

In the past, "beyond your need to know" had always been what the gods said to Cheng Shi. Using it on Sun Miao today felt entirely different.

Rather satisfying, actually.

Sun Miao was thrilled too. All his intelligence-gathering had been aimed at uncovering the gods' truth — but all that effort couldn't compare to having answers handed over directly!

Just by expressing a desire to draw closer to Lord Yu Xi, the other party had revealed such an enormous secret!

So Divinity wasn't pieced together from fragments — it was distilled through containers!

And were those two containers in the Lord's hands equivalent to two Divine Thrones?!

Sun Miao's eyes blazed with fervor.

True — not everyone wanted to become a god. But if a chance at godhood was placed right in front of you, would you take it?

The Sea of Desire was powerful precisely because desire was infinite.

At this moment, Sun Miao knew he'd been stirred by [Corruption].

Cheng Shi registered every shift in the man's expression, snorted softly, and tossed him the [Decay] container:

"This is [Decay]'s container. Bring it to the Torchbearers.

But don't say it came from me. Make up any excuse you like — as long as they believe it.

As for whether this path leads anywhere, or where it leads... no one knows.

To walk it or not — the choice is theirs.

But I should warn you: distilling Divinity through a container requires faith's recognition. The [Decay] camp is currently 'in shambles,' so collecting Divinity won't be easy. You'll have to manage on your own."

"..."

Sun Miao caressed the container that could elevate one to godhood, his heart pounding so hard his expression nearly slipped.

Gone was [Folly]'s composure. His lips trembled as he murmured:

"You... aren't afraid I'll take this container and run?"

Cheng Shi, in perfect imitation of [Folly]'s mannerisms, raised his chin slightly and scoffed:

"Would you?"

"Never!" Sun Miao's gaze hardened instantly.

Only a fool would trade the chance to follow Lord Yu Xi for short-term gain.

The Wise Man understood better than anyone: power could only be redistributed through "revolution."
So following a rebel was his greatest opportunity in this game!

Setting aside the question of how to gather faith and distill Divinity once he had the container, the state of the [Decay] camp alone was a headache. After all, guessing that [Decay] didn't care about His throne versus [Decay] actually not caring were vastly different — not a simple zero-or-one distinction, but zero versus a hundred!

If he misjudged [Decay]'s will, this container would be a death sentence, not a stairway to heaven.

But since Lord Yu Xi had offered the container, it meant his guess was right — [Decay] likely did intend to abdicate. Even so, how could a rootless mortal ascend to a Divine Throne while the other gods circled like vultures?

Don't forget — gods stealing Authority from one another was hardly a secret.

So chasing short-term gain was nothing but harm. Only by following Lord Yu Xi's rebellion upward could he hope to claim his rightful share.

As for whether this [Deceit] Envoy was simply messing with him through an elaborate ruse...

Being worth a Servant God's deception was, in itself, proof of his value.

Sun Miao deliberated in silence. Under [Folly]'s protection, if this truly turned out to be a con, he was confident he could see through it midway and withdraw. So in this moment, he chose to gamble.

He was betting that following Yu Xi would get him a seat at the table.

So he bowed respectfully:

"I will deliver the container to Qin Xin. Rest assured — every plan will proceed smoothly under my direction.

Does Lord Yu Xi have any further instructions?"

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, inwardly amused. The man could suppress his curiosity in the face of such a mysterious [Deceit] Envoy, asking no questions and simply awaiting orders — he knew who held the cards.

No wonder Sun Miao could be vice president of so many organizations. His ability to read the room and serve his superiors was genuinely commendable.

Having nothing more to assign, Cheng Shi dismissed Sun Miao and returned to the rest area.

Back on the rooftop, inspired by this meeting, a new idea struck him. If vacant Divine Thrones meant opportunity for mortals, then right now, the most promising target was actually [Civilization] — not [Decay].

Except [Order] had been usurped by [Chaos], and [Truth] was being impersonated by [Deceit]. The only genuine opportunity seemed to be [War].

He did hold [War]'s container. But the problem was — His Authority was gone.

The Fun God said the Authority had most likely been lost in the real universe...

Wait!!

Cheng Shi suddenly clenched his fist as a bold idea flashed through his mind.

If the Fun God could venture into the real universe to retrieve scattered Authority — why couldn't he?

A mortal poking around the real universe would create far less of a ripple than a true god, right?

Didn't that mean when it came to picking up Authority, he actually had an advantage over the Fun God?!

Hiss—

'Fortune favors the bold. Starve the timid. Hesitation means defeat. Decisiveness leads to riches!'

The only problem was he didn't know how to retrieve Authority. But if he brought along Big Cat — a "god candidate" sensitive to Authority — and a follower of [War] who'd be attuned to [War]'s presence, then this whole thing...

...maybe wasn't impossible after all?

...

Chapter 1095: How to Understand [Time]

Risk was poison to the Steady faction.

Setting aside whether now was even the right time to scavenge the real universe, the sheer question of how to break through the spacetime barrier was already a massive problem.

The Time Deduction method could only send him temporarily to the Existence Rift. That brief window certainly wasn't enough for a "prison break." So competing with the Fun God for spoils needed a fully formed plan.

And at the heart of that plan lay [Time]!

The Joker Society wished to absorb experiences from other worlds. Scarred Cheng Shi had told him to study [Time]. Spacetime barriers, saving the world — everything revolved around [Time].

But [Time] literally had no time to summon him. Even during the faith fusion, the Fun God had impersonated Him. [Time] had only appeared for the split second of granting the faith before vanishing again.

What was He so busy with?

From Cheng Shi's current understanding as a Fear Faction member, the answer was clear: He was busy "countering" Origin. But if He was that occupied, and Cheng Shi couldn't even secure an audience, how could he possibly learn anything about Him?

Should he pray to his Benefactor to send him over?

[Deceit] would never agree.

He likely already knew about Cheng Shi's little schemes and wouldn't let him disturb [Time]. Given the world reset, [Time] was clearly the backbone of the Fear Faction — a force the Fun God could rely on. Their plans left no room for Cheng Shi's interference.

[Fate]... was even more impossible.

He'd just decided to embrace the Fixed Destiny and accelerate things. If he went to [Fate] now requesting a visit to His rival, who knew if he'd get frozen in the Void.

Even if [Fate]'s magnanimity overlooked blasphemy, such behavior would signal that his heart definitely wasn't approaching the Fixed Destiny.

So the same old conclusion held: even with four Benefactors, not a single one was dependable.

When it came to reliability, that other great one was still the best.

It had been a while since he'd seen that great one. Would He help with this?

With that in mind, Cheng Shi glanced at the neighboring rooftop. He planned to ask Xie Yang for a corpse so he could visit the Fishbone Hall and pay his respects to the boss. But as luck would have it, Xie Yang wasn't around — and just then, another call came in.

Cheng Shi picked up and found the Doctor on the other end. His opening line was:

"Cheng Shi — any progress on the Zangier matter?"

Zangier?

That's right!

Cheng Shi's eyes lit up. He immediately recalled Aph Ros, who was holding Zangier prisoner.

If the goal was understanding [Time], Aph Ros was an excellent window. After all, He was [Time]'s Prisoner — and among all the Servant Gods, the only one with a direct connection to [Time].

Shi Zhen didn't count — just an impostor riding on someone else's name.

So why not ask Aph Ros? While he was at it, he could also investigate what Herobos had mentioned about the history of That Dream My Nightmare.

But one problem remained: how to explain to Aph Ros why an Envoy like himself had needed to borrow His name when dealing with Herobos...

That was the real headache.

Cheng Shi shut his eyes to think. The Doctor didn't rush him. After a long while, he remembered the call was still connected and shook his head with a laugh:

"There's been progress. The Sage told me where Zangier is — he's still alive.

Let's set up a meeting point. I'll take you there.

Though there may be other friends joining us on this trip. I trust the Doctor won't mind?"

Other friends?

A gentle laugh came from the other end: "Of course not. I'm merely going to glean the wisdom of the ancients. If you have other business, please feel free."

"What a coincidence — the other friend is also there to glean ancient wisdom. I suspect you'll have plenty to talk about.

It's settled, then. Let me send you the meeting coordinates."

Cheng Shi gave the Doctor the Void coordinates he'd arranged with Big Cat, then made another call — this time to the Dragon King.

He needed to get someone's contact information from Li Jingming. And that someone was unlikely to be in Big Cat's circle.

The moment the call connected, a familiar voice came through.

"It's me."

Though this was a standard Dragon King greeting, Cheng Shi sensed the tone was subtly different from the usual Dragon King.

His brow furrowed slightly. Playing it safe, he held his tongue, waiting a long time before finally letting out a deliberate "Hee~" as if he couldn't contain himself.

The instant the "Hee" landed, the other side snorted in amusement: "Cheng Shi. If you have business, state it."

"?"

'You guessed even that?'

'Does your phone have caller ID or something?'

Cheng Shi inspected the phone handset in his hand, found nothing resembling a display, then pursed his lips:

"Dragon King, something's off about you. Even if you know I once impersonated that bad-luck magnet, there's no way you could be this certain the caller was me.

Did it never occur to you that I might actually be Zhen Yi?

Oh — I get it.

You are Zhen Yi!

That's why you knew it wasn't her. Am I right?

Zhen Yi — confess! What have you done with the Dragon King?!"

"..." Silence from the other end. Then a disdainful laugh: "Sometimes, certain memories truly aren't worth recording.

If you're just here to tease me, then we're done. The Jokers have assigned me plenty of work — I don't have time for idle chatter."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's brow visibly darkened.

This person was absolutely not Li Jingming. The Dragon King would never treat memories so casually.

But they had mentioned the Joker Society...

Someone holding the Dragon King's phone, possessing the Dragon King's memories, and even familiar with Cheng Shi's personality — someone pretending to be the Dragon King...

Who could it be?

Long Jing? Zhen Yi?

Both possible — but neither quite fit.

Cheng Shi's frown deepened, though his tone stayed light:

"Don't hang up!

Quick question — do you know the president of the Reason Association?

I'm thinking of joining. Could you give me his contact info?"

"That's it?"

"Yep. That's it."

The other end fell silent, then suddenly laughed:

"Wei Zhi. Combat Expert.

The Reason Association was established in the name of the Tower of Logic, but apart from having the same brand of insanity as [Truth]'s followers, it bears no resemblance in any other way.

The organization has essentially become another version of the God Worship Society. If you're trying to keep tabs on Wang Weijin, Wei Zhi isn't a wise choice."

Cheng Shi's gaze sharpened. He smiled thinly and countered: "Why would I need to keep tabs on the Doctor?"

"If you weren't watching Wang Weijin, I can't fathom why you'd bypass the Joker Society's own [Truth]-related resources and seek out Wei Zhi instead.

This man's madness is far more extreme than you imagine. Apart from Wei Zhi himself, there's nothing in the Reason Association worth your attention."

Cheng Shi's expression shifted repeatedly. He was now certain this was not Li Jingming.

Moreover, the person was exceptionally clever.

Deducing his true intent from a single thread proved them at least as sharp as the real Li Jingming. Yet despite such acuity, they hadn't put the slightest effort into disguising themselves as the Dragon King — even leaving obvious flaws for others to find. They clearly didn't care if their identity was exposed.

A pretender who didn't care about being exposed at all — who could that be?

A thought struck Cheng Shi. His pupils contracted as he probed:

"Interesting — nobody knows me like the Dragon King.

Indeed, I am investigating the Doctor. After the last Joker Society meeting, I noticed he'd changed — become different from before.

To ensure internal security, I need to confirm his identity quickly.

Wei Zhi is his rival — his competitor on the [Truth] path. Only an enemy truly knows their opponent. So I asked for Wei Zhi's contact to verify the Doctor's identity.

But if you're willing to help, I may not need to approach Wei Zhi.

I recall from the Joker Society meeting — we all looked into a mirror. If you, Dragon King, would lend me that mirror so I could use it on the Doctor again, who knows what it might reveal?"

"..." The other end suddenly laughed. "That's That Dream My Nightmare — not some demon-revealing mirror."

"But a nightmare... isn't that essentially a demon?"

If an actual demon slipped out, being able to expose its true form would be rather useful."

Cheng Shi's words were practically laying his cards on the table. But to his utter shock, after a brief silence, the other party agreed.

"Fine. I'll lend you That Dream My Nightmare."

"?????"

'Wait — what?'

...

Chapter 1096: I'll Lend You That Dream My Nightmare

That Dream My Nightmare was his now?

Cheng Shi blinked, momentarily unable to process.

The logic should check out, right? Long Jing had lent Brother Tongue to Zhen Yi, so ownership passed to her. Applying the same logic — the Dragon King lending That Dream My Nightmare to him...

Hey — one free mirror.

Cheng Shi smiled. He knew the fake Dragon King had to have some scheme behind lending the mirror. But this was That Dream My Nightmare — a fragment of a Servant God-level creation of [Memory], virtually equivalent to a Servant God relic!

Who could refuse?

Whoever could, he sure couldn't.

"How could I impose?" Cheng Shi feigned reluctance for exactly one second, then immediately followed with: "Will you mail it, or...?"

"Come pick it up. That Dream My Nightmare is, after all, my Benefactor's creation. During the handover, I need to ensure nothing goes wrong in transit."

Go pick it up in person?

That was obviously a trap.

Cheng Shi's brow furrowed slightly. His eyes darted, and he said: "I've been a bit busy lately — can't find the time. How about this: leave the mirror at the Joker meeting ground in the Graveyard. Just pick any tombstone, dig a hole underneath, and bury it. Then tell me which tombstone.

I'll go dig it up the first chance I get. And once I use it on the Doctor..."

He stopped himself. Even if the fake Dragon King had lent it, the real one would eventually come asking for it back — and he couldn't leave any leverage.

He absolutely couldn't say the word "return." So he merely cleared his throat twice, the implication being: I'll definitely give it back.

The Li Jingming on the other end clearly caught his real meaning — but still didn't seem to care. He simply laughed:

"You're as cautious as ever.

Fine. I'll place it beneath [Memory]'s tombstone for you to retrieve.

If the Doctor's identity really does turn out to be compromised, remember to contact me. I'm very interested in that memory."

With that, Li Jingming actually hung up first. Cheng Shi stared at the handset in his palm, suspicion swirling.

His initial guess was that the person on the call was the Dragon King's Nightmare Shadow — escaped from the mirror — meaning Li Jingming had fallen for the Nightmare Shadow's trick and been swapped.

But he couldn't reconcile it — given the Dragon King's shrewdness, how could he have fallen for the mirror's trap?

And if the caller truly was the Nightmare Shadow, why wasn't it afraid of Cheng Shi obtaining the mirror and helping the real Dragon King escape?

Could the mirror itself actually be the trap?

Cheng Shi found himself uncertain about the identity on the other end.

To verify whether Li Jingming had truly been compromised, he had no choice but to contact the other Jokers and cross-reference their information.

But then again — why had so many problems cropped up among the Jokers right after the meeting?

Was [Fate] making a move?

Cheng Shi called Zhang Jizu first. Mi Laozhang said the Dragon King — who usually exchanged messages with him frequently — hadn't contacted him recently. This further corroborated the fake Dragon King theory.

Then Cheng Shi reached out to Long Jing. Long Jing knew quite a bit about the fake Dragon King situation. He also believed the Dragon King had been replaced — though he wasn't sure by whom.

The two exchanged observations. Toward the end, Long Jing made several attempts to say something but kept holding back.

He figured: until it was confirmed that Jie Shu and Mo Shu were actually targeting Cheng Shi, there was no need to bring it up to the person involved. If it turned out to be a false alarm, his reputation as the "Clown" among the Jokers would be cemented for good.

So he decided to wait — at least until they approached him to infiltrate the group — before telling the Jokers about Jie Shu's plan.

After wrapping up with Long Jing, Cheng Shi held the phone and hesitated for a long time. The last Joker was Zhen Xin. He wasn't sure whether to call — he was worried she'd notice something.

But without consulting this head of the History School, his own limited knowledge of That Dream My Nightmare wouldn't be enough to determine what the fake Dragon King was plotting.

After much deliberation, he called anyway. Zhen Xin's first words were:

"What happened to Ming Yu?"

That sent a jolt through Cheng Shi's heart. But he didn't panic or fall silent — he immediately fired back: "Huh?"

He suspected Zhen Xin hadn't actually figured anything out. Given her cunning, this was likely just a probe!

Sure enough, after his seamless counter-question, her tone shifted to one of genuine puzzlement:

"After she spoke with you, she's been acting strange. Did you say something to her?"

That was close...

Cheng Shi tensed inwardly, keenly aware of how formidable Zhen Xin could be.

Had he hesitated for even a second, the [Deceit] Chosen One would have deduced that the other An Mingyu had run into trouble.

Cheng Shi wasn't intentionally hiding anything. He simply understood the pain of losing something you depended on, and wanted to find a gentler way to break it to Zhen Xin. He just hadn't found that way yet.

"She didn't tell you?"

The gods had another round of power struggles. [Civilization] was thoroughly defeated, but nobody won either."

Zhen Xin immediately surmised that this struggle likely involved matters beyond the universe. With furrowed brow, she exchanged views with Cheng Shi for a while, until he brought up the fake Dragon King situation. Zhen Xin said, somewhat uncertainly:

"The History School doesn't know much about That Dream My Nightmare. We only know it's a mirror that can swap a person with their Nightmare Shadow. As for other effects, the limited historical fragments we have don't record any.

However, one of our vice presidents theorized that when the Nightmare Shadow is on the outside, anyone else who looks into the mirror might swap out the person previously imprisoned inside. This way, That Dream My Nightmare could acquire new memories by cycling 'hostages.'

So — if the person you spoke with really is the Dragon King's Nightmare Shadow, could it be trying to trap you inside?"

"?"

Was it helping its Benefactor search for his memories?

Not impossible!

Cheng Shi's eyes widened in sudden realization. He immediately asked: "This vice president wouldn't happen to be Sun Miao, would it?"

Zhen Xin laughed: "No — it's a different [Memory] follower. But this is still just speculation. Nobody actually knows what a Nightmare Shadow intends."

She then added: "Cheng Shi, be careful. The Jokers can't afford to lose you right now."

"?"

'What does "right now" mean?'

Cheng Shi's face darkened. He couldn't shake the feeling it meant: once the Jokers had squeezed dry all your intel and connections, you'd be free to move along.

Milked to the last drop — how 'vicious' of you, Miss Zhen!

Cheng Shi pursed his lips, grunted an acknowledgment, then got Wei Zhi's contact info before hanging up.

Since nobody understood That Dream My Nightmare, it seemed he'd have to visit Dolgod first. The ordeal of facing Aph Ros's questions head-on was unavoidable.

He only hoped that after paying such a "steep" price, the road ahead would be a little smoother.

What had really gone wrong with the Doctor? Had a second personality — steeped in [Truth]'s fanaticism — germinated inside him?

And had the Dragon King truly been trapped inside the mirror? What was this Nightmare Shadow — which made zero attempt to hide its identity — actually scheming?

Trivial matters piled up until Cheng Shi's head was pounding. He lay back on the rooftop and gazed up at the sky, and there, faintly, he could make out a great gate.

The door leading to Dolgod seemed to call to him from the Abyss of Desire.

"My brother — what's taking you so long?"

...

Chapter 1097: What Must Come, Will Come

Here they were.

Cheng Shi had finally arranged things with Galusha, and the three of them met up with the Doctor in the Void.

The moment the Doctor saw Wei Zhi present, he looked at Cheng Shi with a flicker of surprise: "This is the friend you mentioned? Wei Zhi?"

Cheng Shi nodded without much fuss: "That's right. I've been interested in the Life Extension Department lately, and it just so happens that Galu... obtained the Reason Association president's contact info. He's also very interested in Zangier.

And even more coincidentally, President Wei helped me greatly during the last trial. As a return favor, I promised he could come with us to see this Zangier — imprisoned by [Birth].

Since the Doctor already knows him, no introduction needed."

Cheng Shi had played a subtle trick — he didn't say Hu Xuan was the one imprisoning Zangier. Instead, he pinned it directly on [Birth].

A prisoner of a true god wasn't something mortals could covet. Even a [Truth] follower's ambition would have to think twice when confronting Zangier's new status.

Besides, [Birth] had already declared She wouldn't summon him again — which meant he needn't worry about getting called out for the deflection face-to-face.

An exploit like that simply demanded to be used.

As for Galusha — he'd just told her he needed a companion for a trip to Dolgod. Whether she knew the place or what they'd be doing there, he mentioned none of it.

The less she knew about the Doctor, the less purposeful her gaze would be — reducing the risk the Doctor would catch on. Cheng Shi had still been pondering how to convince Galusha to cooperate, but to his surprise, the moment he mentioned the invitation, she accepted immediately.

And her tone was more eager than his own.

When Cheng Shi asked why, Galusha didn't answer. But she knew: she'd figured out exactly who the ta "Truth" had mentioned was.

'So you're His follower?'

'Being so favored by a god, Prisoner — you truly are different from ordinary people.'

Galusha's gaze toward Cheng Shi was deeply meaningful.

Wang Mou's expression was also peculiar. No matter how he thought about it, he couldn't picture Cheng Shi being friends with Wei Zhi. So the reason Wei Zhi was here was simple enough: the Jokers' organizer had grown suspicious of his identity.

'Perceptive Fate Weaver — but suspicion alone is useless. Once I lay eyes on Zangier, [Truth]'s convergence will make me powerful again!'

And so, carrying their hidden agendas and wary appraisals of one another, the three stood before the Gate of Desire, each wearing a different expression.

The desire emanating from within was so terrifying that even Galusha — who dealt with the Extreme Desire Brotherhood daily — wouldn't have dared step through without Cheng Shi's assurance.

"This gate leads to...?"

Galusha asked curiously.

The Doctor, overhearing, was surprised. If you were going to find Zangier, you should know that beyond the gate likely lay Go Lis's lair — and since Go Lis and Aph Ros shared one body, it was probably Aph Ros's lair too. That would explain the overwhelming desire.

But this Wei Zhi seemed to know nothing at all?

Cheng Shi stepped through and glanced back with a smile:

"Dolgod — the homeland of [Birth]'s followers, and the birthplace of desire."

As darkness shifted around them, Cheng Shi found himself back in Dolgod. Before the familiar building stood the Evil Infant Inquisition. He hadn't even knocked when the doors slowly swung open.

A strikingly handsome man in a gilt-and-moon black robe stood at the threshold with an amused smile. He hadn't crossed the doorstep, yet the desire in his eyes clung to Cheng Shi like invisible threads.

He looked at Cheng Shi and beamed:

"My brother — you've finally come."

"..."

No matter how awkward and nervous Cheng Shi felt, he couldn't show weakness in front of two outsiders. He nodded, then turned to gesture at his companions, about to introduce them — when Galusha stepped forward and muttered softly:

"What's his connection to Meng Youfang?"

"?"

Cheng Shi blinked.

'Sis — is your focus a bit too... unique?'

'Yes, fine — the word "brother" does sound a bit twisted coming from either of them. But you're having an Audience with God here! Sure, Aph Ros is [Time]'s Prisoner, but He's a bona fide Servant God!'

'A dual Envoy, no less!'

'How are you this relaxed?'

Cheng Shi shot Galusha a curious glance, only to hear her casually appraise Aph Ros for a moment, then whisper:

"Aph Ros — I know of Him. As I told you before, learn too much... and the mystery disappears."

"???"

'Know too much?'

'Where did you learn too much?'

Galusha noticed his confusion and, dodging the Doctor's earshot, whispered again:

"Don't you think this Servant God's will is quite similar to something?"

Oh? Your surprised expression tells me it never crossed your mind. Fine — I didn't expect Him to still be alive either, let alone thriving like this.

We always assumed He was slain after angering the gods. Now it seems... history really is all rumors."

'We?'

Cheng Shi seized on that word. One train of thought later, he understood what she meant:

The Extreme Desire Brotherhood!

His pupils shrank: "You're saying...?"

"Exactly. The Extreme Desire Brotherhood's motto — 'indulge the self, plunge into pleasure' — was, to a degree, also shaped by Aph Ros's influence.

He wanted to build a paradise where all could revel. After His supposed 'death,' that will lived on and influenced countless [Corruption] followers. And so, the Extreme Desire Brotherhood was born.

He's basically Shi Lolin's 'founding patriarch.'

I'm using that term correctly, right? I've been studying the culture of the Drifter world recently. Quite interesting — though not so different from the Land of Hope. It's all just the evolution and distillation of patterns."

"..."

Galusha's remarks were so loaded with bizarre tangents that Cheng Shi couldn't even decide where to start retorting.

Meanwhile, Wang Weijin — observing the two whispering like old friends — frowned and took it upon himself to introduce himself to Aph Ros:

"A seeker of [Truth] — Wang Weijin. I pay my respects to the dual Envoy of [Birth] and [Corruption], Lord Aph Ros."

Aph Ros gave Wang Mou a lazy sidelong glance, utterly ignoring his greeting. His entire attention was fixed on Cheng Shi, waiting for an explanation.

He didn't care how many guests Dolgod had to accommodate. What He cared about was how many secrets this "brother" of His, Yu Xi, was hiding.

Under Aph Ros's gaze, Cheng Shi's scalp tingled. He had no choice but to face those eyes and plaster on a smile:

"Ahaha — what a coincidence! This one's also a [Truth] follower. His name is Wei Zhi.

They're both here to visit your Benefactor's Prisoner, Zangier."

"And you?" Aph Ros heard the deflection in Cheng Shi's words, but neither stepped aside nor relented.

Cheng Shi's voice hitched. He quickly composed a solemn expression: "I naturally have something very important to discuss with you."

"What could be more important than my brother borrowing my name to scare off Herobos?

Or have you finally decided to tell me why His container ended up in your hands?"

Aph Ros's tone was playful, and the information packed into that sentence visibly shocked the other two. But Cheng Shi's expression remained dead serious.

"It concerns... [Time]!"

I've discovered that the reason He imprisoned you is far from as simple as we thought!"

"!?"

Aph Ros's gaze sharpened. He scanned the one god and two mortals, then nodded slowly and stepped aside.

"You'd better not be lying to me, my brother."

Cheng Shi strode through the door without missing a beat, his face the picture of earnestness:

"I never lie."

...

Chapter 1098: Lies Must Be Half-True, Half-False

Dolgod's sunset was as enchanting as ever. Had today not been a mission, the evening breeze on this terrace would have been the most soothing massage for frayed nerves.

Unfortunately, what should have been a pleasant dinner had devolved into an interrogation. Aph Ros and Cheng Shi sat at opposite ends of the long table — one boring an unrelenting stare, the other letting his gaze wander. Anyone could tell there was something between them.

By this point, even the densest person could see these two had things to discuss. Combined with Cheng Shi's visibly hesitant demeanor, Galusha considered the situation briefly and tactfully suggested:

"Rather than food to fill the stomach, what we [Truth] followers truly crave is knowledge for the mind. So — I humbly request that Lord Aph Ros allow us to visit Zangier first.

Besides, two scholars would spoil such an atmospheric setting. Sunset and evening breeze intertwined should create..."

She looked between them with great interest, clearly getting the wrong idea. "...a beautiful 'friendship,' not cold reason."

She even raised her wine glass in a toast to Aph Ros.

Cheng Shi was dumbfounded.

'Sis — what exactly are you implying?'

His expression was beyond strange as he glanced at Galusha, then at Aph Ros. But Aph Ros completely ignored Galusha's gesture, His eyes fixed on Cheng Shi, waiting for an explanation.

That playful expression clearly said: 'If your explanation doesn't pass today, then I'm sorry, my brother — your Prisoner status might truly become my Benefactor's to claim.'

'As for these two [Truth] followers — if not for your face, they'd have no standing to set foot in Dolgod, let alone visit any prisoner.'

"..."

Seeing the situation about to stall completely, Cheng Shi sighed, straightened himself, then pulled a white mask from inside his coat, slapped it on the table, and put on a fresh smile. He propped his head on his left hand and tapped the table lightly with his right:

"Aph Ros — you may refuse to let them see Zangier. But what I'm about to say...

is not for mortal ears."

At this, Aph Ros's eyebrow arched. He was finally interested.

With a casual wave, He stripped both mortals of their five senses. Then He fixed a burning gaze on Cheng Shi and gestured: "Please."

The next instant, Cheng Shi activated Chaos Acting and transformed into the tall, lean Yu Xi. He then pulled out the [Deceit] container and tossed it on the table. Fingers interlaced beneath his chin, he leaned forward with an eerie grin:

"I've recovered some more of my power. Now, I can finally meet you in my true form."

"!!!"

When the aura of [Deceit] grew thick enough to nearly mask the desire on Cheng Shi's body, Aph Ros knew: His brother hadn't deceived Him about his identity, at least.

The other party had to be an Envoy of [Deceit].

Since the identity checked out, then regardless of why Cheng Shi had borrowed His name — it didn't matter.

Cheng Shi had been conning Herobos at the time, and Herobos wasn't close to Aph Ros anyway. Whether or not Herobos got duped was none of His business.

What Aph Ros truly cared about was the container in Cheng Shi's hands. While reclaiming the [Deceit] container, His dear brother seemed to have acquired someone else's container too.

He needed to understand how Cheng Shi came to possess [Corruption]'s container.

If his brother had actually struck against [Corruption]'s Envoy for some reason, then Aph Ros would need to reassess whether their so-called anti-[Time] alliance was still valid.

He hadn't forgotten that Cheng Shi was currently disguised as a follower of [Time]. But whether that disguise was real or fake — that depended on today's explanation from Yu Xi.

Cheng Shi had his script prepared. To lay everything out, he calmly narrated how he'd incrementally reclaimed his power from the great [Time] tyrant.

"[Time] has a hidden agenda!"

That opening line alone erased half the doubt in Aph Ros's heart.

"Long ago, I noticed that [Time] had stopped appearing before the gods and no longer descended into the mortal world.

That's why I was so shocked when He descended upon Dolgod to summon you.

He seems to be chasing something new — and this something involves secrets above the universe!"

"Oh? What secrets?"

"Beyond this starry sky, there are other starry skies!"

"?" Aph Ros froze, then His smile gradually vanished. Expressionless, He regarded Cheng Shi — suspecting He was being toyed with. "My brother, meaningless stalling won't earn you more trust. [Time] wields the Deduction Authority. Of course there are countless starry skies beyond this one.

Where else do you think these so-called 'players' come from?

Isn't the Land of Hope itself another realm beyond the mortal world?"

"No, no, no — Aph Ros, you've misunderstood me.

If it were merely simulated worlds, why would I go to such lengths to speak in private?

The starry sky I'm referring to isn't one created by [Time]. It's a brand-new starry sky that [Time]'s reach cannot touch!

There, our [Time] has no authority. Only that starry sky's own [Time] gets a say."

"!!!"

Aph Ros was stunned.

His first instinct was that Cheng Shi was lying — mocking Him even more blatantly than before. But He quickly steadied Himself and spoke coldly:

"Evidence.

I cannot believe the ramblings of a [Deceit] Envoy.

Yu Xi — do you understand how absurd your claims are? If that starry sky truly existed, do you realize that even your Benefactor — that ruler of [Void]..."

"Yes — you're absolutely right..." Cheng Shi cut Him off. "There is also a version of my Benefactor there. And not only that — every Divine Throne beneath this starry sky has a corresponding god in that place.

They've formed their own factions. They don't know we exist.

Until... [Time] discovered them!"

"!!!!!"

Judging by Cheng Shi's serious expression alone, none of this sounded false. But Aph Ros couldn't bring Himself to believe something so preposterous.

Because accepting it would mean accepting that He had two additional Benefactors.

[Birth] and [Corruption] were both true gods! How could they possibly have "counterparts" unknown even to themselves?

Aph Ros's brows knotted tightly. He scrutinized Cheng Shi's desires, trying to determine whether he was lying. But under the [Deceit] container's influence, the man's desire currents were indistinct.

And then came the most interesting part: Cheng Shi voluntarily put the [Deceit] container away, letting its aura dissipate so Aph Ros could clearly see how his desires surged and churned.

Yet no matter how He looked, Aph Ros arrived at a staggering conclusion:

Yu Xi was not lying.

At this, Aph Ros's eyes went wide. He sank back into his chair in disbelief.

"You... weren't lying."

"Of course not. As I've said — my lies are merely the means by which I embrace the desire to deceive and draw closer to you. On serious matters where lying isn't an option, I never deceive."

With that, he pulled the [Deceit] container back out and placed it on the table once more.

In Aph Ros's eyes, this looked like Cheng Shi proving his devotion. But only Cheng Shi knew: the moment the other party believed he wasn't lying — that was the perfect moment for lies to begin.

And the [Deceit] container on the table would be the best shroud for every lie to come.

...

Chapter 1099: World Destroyer — [Time]!

"[Time]'s deduction is much like [Fate]'s change.

He has been using countless deductions to depict [Existence] as He sees it. But from my observations, beyond His own deductions, He resists all external change.

These changes come not only from [Fate] but also from countless anomalies attempting to break free of the simulation's control.

He wants to ensure that all of [Existence] exists exactly as He wills it!"

Cheng Shi had his reasons for saying this. From Herobos, he'd learned the approximate reason [Time] had imprisoned Aph Ros. So naturally, these words were designed to resonate.

In a sense, Aph Ros's attempt to desecrate [Existence] was precisely one of those "anomalies."

"But stumbling upon another starry sky clearly exceeded His comprehension.

I must say — the first time I learned this secret, I was even more shocked than you.

I could hardly imagine another world existing beyond this one, independent yet identical to ours. Of course, sixteen additional gods wasn't impossible to accept. But the truly terrifying question was...

How many of 'Him'... are there?"

"Enough!"

Aph Ros broke out in cold sweat and cut Cheng Shi off immediately. The conversation had veered far beyond expectations. He'd only meant to trace the origin of the [Corruption] container — never imagining the discussion would lead all the way to Origin.

One [Time] alone had imprisoned Him for eons. If idle talk here angered Origin...

Aph Ros didn't dare imagine the consequences.

His greatest dream was simply to build a paradise for [Birth] and [Corruption], carrying His devotion and unifying both Benefactors' wills into one.

Beyond that, He didn't care and had no interest.

Compared to other Envoys, you could say Aph Ros's ambition was "strange" — but not grand.

Still, even a small ambition came with curiosity.

While He didn't dare discuss that being, He was intensely curious about [Time]'s secrets. So after calming Himself, He looked at Cheng Shi with a complicated expression and asked how he'd discovered all this.

Cheng Shi's answer was watertight:

"I'm just a Servant God. How could I spy on a true god's secrets?"

Naturally, my Benefactor told me. Remember what I said before?

Get close to your enemy to understand your enemy. My Benefactor helped me approach [Time], and during the process of stealing Authority, He uncovered the secret [Time] had found.

You should feel fortunate — no, we should feel fortunate. If any god other than my Benefactor had learned of this, they'd likely have become [Time]'s accomplice or a silent co-conspirator. But [Deceit] is different.

He lives in fear that the universe doesn't have enough chaos — that it's not big enough!

So He immediately informed me, telling me that [Void] held leverage over [Time].

[Time] doesn't want a second [Existence] in the universe. He wants to guarantee His uniqueness. So while the other gods remain ignorant of that other starry sky, He's silently plotting to destroy that world!

Yes — you heard me right, Aph Ros. [Time] is a bona fide World Destroyer!

And the reason I'm certain my Benefactor [Deceit] told me the truth and not a lie — is because on the very day you saw me deceiving Herobos, I encountered a Servant God from the other world. [Decay]'s Envoy — Yu Go!

A simulated parallel world wouldn't produce a second Yu Go!

I didn't just see Yu Go — I obtained a [Decay] container from His hands, one from beyond the universe!"

At this point, Cheng Shi casually took back the [Deceit] container from the table — though his gesture was nonchalant, more like idly toying with a symbol of identity.

Aph Ros, bombarded by chaotic information, had completely fallen into Cheng Shi's rhythm. Seizing the moment, Cheng Shi let Him read his desires once more, and the conclusion was:

Not lying.

Truth both ways — Aph Ros no longer doubted His brother's sincerity.

"You killed the other world's Yu Go?" Aph Ros continued in shock.

"No. I didn't kill Him. He gave me the container voluntarily."

"Gave? He abandoned his own Divine Throne — why would he give it to you? And why to a you who, from his perspective, belonged to another world entirely?"

Hearing this question, Cheng Shi knew Aph Ros was thoroughly hooked.

He'd lost the composure to think critically, completely submerged in the lies.

But Cheng Shi didn't press harder. Instead, he deliberately pointed out Aph Ros's lapse, coaxing back His shrewdness to continue building trust.

Though while speaking, he conveniently pushed the [Deceit] container back out again.

"This isn't like you, Aph Ros.

Where's your cunning gone?

I told you — [Time] wants to destroy that world to ensure [Existence]'s uniqueness. Yu Go somehow learned of this and fled.

He may be cowardly, but He's clever. He knew that by surrendering His Divine Throne, He might survive [Time]'s blade.

So giving me the container was all upside for Him, no downside. It's me who's stuck holding a hot potato, forced to collect evidence to bring [Time] down before the other gods.

Aph Ros — in the fight against [Time], I have never betrayed our friendship."

The moment those words landed, Aph Ros spun on the spot and began shedding clothes.

"..."

Cheng Shi's expression changed in a heartbeat.

'Bad — got carried away with the con. Forgot about that.'

Watching Aph Ros's desire practically drooling, Cheng Shi quietly leaned back, putting distance between them, and said in a strained tone:

"That's enough — I can see your trust. But if you want to hear what else [Time] has done, rein in your desire.

My Benefactor may tolerate me getting close to [Corruption] for the sake of fighting [Existence], but He won't tolerate me embracing [Corruption].

If you still want to fight [Time], don't get me thrown into prison too."

Aph Ros had only been expressing His feelings — and showcasing a touch of appreciation. He naturally wouldn't actually make a move. [Fate]'s threat was still fresh in mind, and He didn't want another chain on His ankle.

But hearing that Cheng Shi was still working tirelessly against [Time] as always, He began convincing Himself.

The [Corruption] container probably had a similar story behind it. In any case, Yu Xi would never slaughter [Corruption]'s Envoy.

Aph Ros stared at Cheng Shi with sparkling eyes for a long time — until Cheng Shi had to gaze at the ceiling — before reluctantly picking up His clothes and reverting to male form.

Once passion subsided and composure returned, He asked another critical question:

"But I'm still curious — why do you have His container?"

Is it also from another world's version of Him?"

Cheng Shi paused, realizing "His container" referred to the [Corruption] container. Knowing Aph Ros still had doubts about its origin, he answered "honestly":

"After Le Le'er died, someone found Her container near the Sea of Desire. I then took it from them."

Aph Ros frowned: "What does this have to do with Le Le'er?"

"?" Cheng Shi was baffled. "How could Le Le'er's container have nothing to do with Le Le'er?"

"Le Le'er's container?"

You mean you have a [Prosperity] container too?

But I was clearly asking about the [Corruption] container — the one that belonged to Tria."

"???"

Cheng Shi blinked.

Who?

...

Chapter 1100: The Envoys of [Corruption]

[Corruption] had three Envoys:

Drasilco, Aph Ros, and Tria.

This was information the Dragon King had once provided.

Had Aph Ros not mentioned Tria again today, Cheng Shi would have nearly forgotten such a person existed.

But what had Aph Ros said?

Tria's container?

That [Corruption] container had clearly dropped from Le Le'er's body. How could it be Tria's...

Wait!

Why wasn't Le Le'er listed among the Dragon King's three [Corruption] Envoys?

Cheng Shi was suddenly dumbfounded. He recalled his first confrontation with the Dragon King — the man's certain tone had clearly stated that [Corruption] had only these three Envoys. So where was Le Le'er?

As [Prosperity]'s daughter who'd betrayed Her and plunged into the Sea of Desire, as the Mother Tree of Fear who absorbed the universe's terror for the Sea — how could She not be a [Corruption] Envoy?

That's right! Le Le'er had said She didn't jump willingly. Some unknown force had pushed Her into the Sea of Desire!

Could it be that Her "desire" hadn't been recognized by the Sea, and Her status had never been accepted by [Corruption]?

Cheng Shi looked at Aph Ros in bewilderment and voiced his greatest confusion:

"The Mother Tree of Fear, Le Le'er — is She not an Envoy of [Corruption]?"

Aph Ros was equally taken aback: "Who told you that [Prosperity]'s daughter was a servant of my Master?"

"...?"

'This is bad. Something's seriously wrong.'

Cheng Shi suddenly realized he'd been mistaken about something all along. Not all Envoys who switched faiths automatically retained their status.

Previously, influenced by the cases of Dizel and the Wrath of Abomination, he'd always assumed an Envoy who changed faith remained an Envoy. But now it was clear — Le Le'er's case was entirely different!

She'd become the Mother Tree of Fear against Her will, so Her devotion had never been recognized!

Then what was Her actual situation?!

And what about the [Corruption] container that had dropped from Her body? He'd never even met Tria — how had it become Tria's container?

Still dazed, Cheng Shi pulled out the [Corruption] container. When Aph Ros saw it, His expression grew solemn once more.

"Tria is dead. Otherwise, She would never have relinquished this honor that was rightfully Hers."

Cheng Shi was silent a moment, then said only five words:

"I didn't kill Her."

"Mm. I believe you, my brother.

From what I can see today, you've clearly never met Her. And I find it hard to believe anyone in this world could 'bear' to kill Her."

That only piqued Cheng Shi's curiosity more. He asked:

"You know I've lost my memories. But even without them, I can't recall hearing about Her from anyone else.

An Envoy worthy of such praise from you — what kind of deity... was She?"

"She..."

Aph Ros grew uncharacteristically serious, lowering His head in thought.

"Was a girl who carried compassion in her heart.

Tria was born in the Descent Era. In that age, desire ran rampant and [Corruption]'s influence overflowed — even I was shaped by it, becoming the Aph Ros you see today.

She, however, was the continuation of my Master's radiance in that era.

At the start of the Descent Era, after the initial [Life] phase concluded, my Master began spreading His will.

She was born in a territory held by an alliance that worshipped our Master. Raised amid boundless desire, she naturally grew into one of His followers.

At that time, people wildly indulged their desires and ambitions to catch the Benefactor's eye. They'd do anything for power — and followers in that territory died senseless deaths every day.

Tria grew up in that environment, witnessing the scheming and killing. Yet she despised all of it.

She often said: 'No matter how swollen one's own desire may grow, there's no need to crush another's. We're all the Benefactor's followers — why can't we live in harmony and bask in the Sea of Desire together?'

Guided by that conviction, she treated everyone with 'kindness' and forgave with 'generosity.' She never harmed a soul, bringing only pleasure to others.

Perhaps her joy moved their hearts, or perhaps they saw her as utterly harmless. In any case, during an election for alliance lord, those power-hungry ambitionists refused to withdraw yet knew they couldn't win — so they threw their votes at Tria, treating them as throwaway ballots.

Unexpectedly, when enough votes went to Tria, the lordship itself seemed to walk to her feet.

But the result caused an uproar across the temple. The disenfranchised cried it was a mockery of desire. The bystanders insisted it was divine guidance. The two sides screamed at each other until it came to blows.

To quell her compatriots' fury, Tria smiled and immolated herself.

In the flames, she said:

'All people deserve pleasure, not suffering.'

'When suffering comes, I am willing to dissolve it for the world. That is my desire.'

'Since the world takes no pleasure in me, I shall vanish from it and yield to someone worthy. Thus, the suffering I have caused shall evaporate at once.'

She was that resolute — not a moment of hesitation. Unfortunately, amid the surge of desire, no one could comprehend her will.

But what no one expected was this: the very instant the [Corruption] follower Tria burned away her last shred of flesh, the [Corruption] Envoy Tria was reborn from the flames.

The people saw divine light descend upon the world. They fell to their knees, prostrated, chanting Her name. And they called Her... the Mercy Lord."

"Huh?"

Cheng Shi was stupefied. He'd never imagined that [Corruption]'s priest class — the Mercy Lord — was actually a Servant God's Divine Name.

And this Tria — beyond the theme of pleasure, what part of Her actions remotely resembled [Corruption]?

Performing acts of mercy with a compassionate heart — that alone made Her better than eighty percent of people in the current world.

Then again, saintly was saintly. At the end of the day, anything linked to [Corruption], even on the straight path, could never be fully righteous.

The endpoint of desire was always the abyss — Old Jia had taught him that, and it was the real truth.

Cheng Shi's thoughts churned. He digested this information and furrowed his brow once more.

Whose hand could have killed Tria?

Or rather — which god would dare provoke [Corruption] by slaying His Envoy?

The culprit had to be one of the true gods sitting on those sixteen Divine Thrones. Mortals couldn't kill a Servant God unaffected by the erosion of eras.

What was the connection between Her death and Le Le'er?

Was the container dropping a coincidence, or had he stumbled into some kind of crime scene?

Le Le'er had never mentioned Tria before Her death. Had She even known Tria's relic had ended up near Her?

Too many questions, and not a single lead. Cheng Shi thought it over fruitlessly, then shook the tangle from his head. Seizing the moment, he asked about another topic that interested him:

"Drasilco...

I seem to have no memories of this [Corruption] Envoy either."

...