

The Gods 1101

Chapter 1101: Sin of Desirelessness — Drasilco

At the mention of Drasilco, Aph Ros's brows rose ever so slightly.

If His eyes had been filled with tender sympathy when recalling Tria, then upon speaking of Drasilco, only one thing remained in them... admiration.

A strange sort of admiration.

Aph Ros's feelings toward this "colleague" seemed complex — so complex that He didn't even bother asking why Cheng Shi was interested in Drasilco.

"Sin of Desirelessness — that is His Divine Name."

Aph Ros sank into memory once more, though this time He seemed more like a spectator — an observer of desire.

"He was likely the world's first malefactor, and the most wicked of them all.

His will was the polar opposite of Tria's. Just as His Divine Name suggests — any ascetic who refused desire was, in His eyes, a sinner guilty of the Sin of Desirelessness.

He tirelessly traveled the land for one purpose alone: to punish these 'sinners.' Every ascetic He found was either forcibly implanted with irresistible desire, or they rejected desire and embraced death.

He was like a dagger, slitting the throats of blasphemers, diligently painting over the blank spaces of desire in our Benefactor's name with their blood.

Granted, His methods were perhaps a touch extreme. But His devotion was beyond question."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi immediately understood why Aph Ros admired Him — because... the Sin Brood Mother!

This Drasilco was essentially the [Corruption] version of Go Lis!

Punishing all who blasphemed against the faith — an existence like Go Lis: a divine whip of belief.

'Well, well — turns out you two are not just colleagues, but kindred spirits.'

Aph Ros seemed to read Cheng Shi's thoughts. He nodded and continued:

"If I hadn't seen clearly that you've genuinely lost your memories of Them, I'd truly think you were steering my judgment — trying to make me suspect Drasilco killed Tria."

"?"

Cheng Shi blinked. "The two of Them didn't get along?"

"Correct. Very much didn't get along.

One only spread pleasure, never inflicting suffering. The other ran rampant, taking joy in planting desire through the suffering of others.

Their wills were diametrically opposed — completely unrelated — so naturally they couldn't stand each other.

Hmm, that's a bit one-sided. It would be more accurate to say Drasilco couldn't stand Tria. Tria never judged. But Drasilco viewed Her non-action as a blasphemy against ultimate desire.

He certainly could have killed Tria. But I don't believe He would have done it near the Sea of Desire.

Because He was the most devout of us three — the one most in resonance with the Sea of Desire. He might unleash His own desire, but He would also respect our Benefactor and never slaughter His own kin near the Sea.

My brother — having heard all this, you must have gotten what you came for.

So, as the price you owe for this intelligence exchange, may I make a request? Could you investigate the truth behind Tria's death?"

Cheng Shi's brow tightened:

"You want to avenge Her?"

Have you lost your mind?

Setting aside whether you can even leave this [Time] prison — whoever killed Tria was at least a Servant God, possibly a true god!

You want revenge against a true god?

I think you genuinely want more shackles on your ankles!

Aph Ros — think clearly. As you yourself said, if you truly believe the next era will come, then Tria... will return."

Aph Ros watched Cheng Shi with a lingering smile. Only after he finished did He shake His head, trace an "x" on the table with one finger, and say playfully:

"I never said I wanted revenge."

"Then what's the point of the investi—" Cheng Shi froze mid-sentence. Then his expression shifted to one of alarm: "Wait — Aph Ros, you're not planning to have me do the avenging for you, are you?"

Clap, clap, clap—

Aph Ros broke into applause: "I knew it, my brother. Yu Xi — you'll definitely help me."

"I will not!"

Cheng Shi refused in one second flat, without a heartbeat of thought.

But Aph Ros seemed entirely unsurprised. He shook His head and laughed again:

"You will. Otherwise, you won't hear another word of what you're looking for today.

My brother — don't forget I'm His follower. Beyond sensing the desire in your lies, I can detect many other desires too.

You put off coming for so long, and now you show up using two mortals' desires as a pretext — clearly because you want to mine lost memories from me again.

Add to that your exposé of [Time]'s true face and your plans against [Time] — I'd wager what you want to learn is related to our warden [Time]. Am I right?"

"..."

'Talking with smart people is genuinely exhausting.'

Cheng Shi was starting to wonder whether Aph Ros had even believed any of his excuses.

But whether He truly believed didn't matter. What mattered was Aph Ros's attitude.

As long as He was willing to let Cheng Shi enter Dolgod again, and willing to have Go Lis continue lending her aid, what difference did belief make?

But on the topic of [Time], Cheng Shi genuinely couldn't understand why Aph Ros was using this moment to raise the price.

He clearly hated [Time]. Why bundle the joint cause against [Time] with investigating Tria's death?

Wasn't that just tripping over His own feet?

Was Tria really that important?

Could Aph Ros be hiding something — some deeper connection between Himself and Tria?

Cheng Shi's brow furrowed. After a moment of silence, he fixed his gaze on Aph Ros and said:

"I'd say there's a traitor in our anti-[Time] coalition. Only it's not me — and as for who... I won't say."

Aph Ros smiled, utterly unbothered:

"Of course I want to resist.

But my brother, you've forgotten something.

You have your Benefactors watching over you. [Void] stands against [Existence], so under divine protection you can act as you please.

I'm different. I'm merely a Prisoner of [Time]. The risk of rebellion is too great. Without sufficient leverage, I can hardly stand up against Him even after learning He's a World Destroyer.

The era's tide will carry me back eventually, yes. But this era is fascinating — and I'd rather not die young in it."

"..."

Cheng Shi was out of options. He could tell Aph Ros genuinely cared about Tria's death. If he didn't budge today, he'd truly learn nothing else — turning this into a visit-the-prisoner day trip.

So, with reluctance, he offered:

"I can look into Tria's death. But Aph Ros, I can't give you a firm promise. All I can commit to is this:

If the killer is a Servant God, I'll try to avenge Her for you.

But if the killer is a true god...

I'll find someone to pick out a nice graveyard plot for Tria, have a fine tombstone carved, and buy two quality wreaths out of my own pocket!

Risking my Benefactors' wrath by getting entangled with [Corruption] to do you this favor — that is the absolute maximum sincerity I can offer!"

Sincerity was one word for it — but even in this half-promise, Cheng Shi had buried a loophole.

He'd said "if the investigation reveals the killer is a Servant God, he'd try to help Aph Ros get revenge." But the premise was actually finding the killer!

'If I just... never find out... well, you can't blame me, can you?'

'I'm not [Folly] — I can't just look and know the answer. And it's not like I didn't investigate. I'm just a bit dim, is all.'

The wordplay's effect was undeniable, given Aph Ros's reaction.

The instant Cheng Shi finished, the moon on the table's edge rose into the sky.

Aph Ros was overjoyed.

He tiptoed up, stepped onto the tabletop, and looked as though He wanted to collapse across it just to close the distance between them.

He gazed at Cheng Shi, eyes alight:

"I have never doubted our friendship, my brother. Whatever you wish to ask — I'll tell you everything."

"..."

Across the table, eyes were glowing. Cheng Shi, however, was trembling. He stiffened and shrank backward.

'What — you can talk just fine from over there! Why are you squirming all over the table?!'

'scared.jpg'

...

Chapter 1102: Aph Ros — We Must Save the World!

"Ahem, so..."

[Time] is destroying a world. Although the world He's targeting isn't the starry sky above us, you and I can't afford to drop our guard!

We must beware of the other world's [Time] retaliating by destroying ours once He learns of this.

We must also beware that if [Time] succeeds this time, He may grow unsatisfied with our world's evolution and attempt annihilation again — then reboot a new world from [Existence]'s ashes.

Neither outcome is one we can afford.

So, to ensure that you and I can continue to exist beneath this starry sky, we must resist and stop Him!"

Seeing Aph Ros closing the distance, Cheng Shi clutched his container and stood up, feigning deep analysis as he circled the table.

"As I've said: know your enemy to defeat your enemy.

To beat [Time], we first need to fathom His will, then extrapolate His next move from that will, so we can intercept and disrupt.

We already know [Time] is sparing no effort to preserve [Existence]'s uniqueness. But why He developed this obsession, and where His will originates from...

These minute details will help us — or let me be blunter — will help my Benefactor, [Deceit], to pierce [Time]'s conspiracy!"

At this, Aph Ros sobered slightly. He lay sideways on the table, somewhat puzzled:

"Every god's will derives from 'Him'..."

[Time] protecting [Existence]'s uniqueness is the universe's orthodoxy. What's there to trace back to?"

"Plenty!

If you believe [Time] listens only to that 'Him,' you're wrong — dead wrong!"

After witnessing the real universe's turmoil, Cheng Shi no longer dared utter that being's name aloud. Whenever He came up, Cheng Shi substituted with silence.

"Before now, [Time] had never committed an act of destruction.

Past and future are merely the angles from which He views the universe. Since He stands above the river of time to gaze upon the world, why would He bring destruction to another one?

That annihilation, in His eyes, could just as easily be that world's past, not its future.

So His intent to destroy worlds is far from simple. If you can't figure it out, don't bother trying — just tell me how you provoked [Time]'s will. If we reason backward from the past, we'll naturally see when [Time]'s ambitions first took root!"

Aph Ros's brow furrowed. He understood now — Cheng Shi was asking why He'd been imprisoned by [Time].

This was an old wound He'd rather not reopen. But the atmosphere was thick with reminiscence today, and His brother had been genuinely sincere. Swept up in the moment, Aph Ros became candid in turn.

Candid as His body.

He gazed at Dolgod's distant sunset, and a nostalgic smile played across His face.

Clearly He was recounting His own "crime" — yet Aph Ros harbored not an ounce of "remorse." From start to finish, He believed Himself... blameless.

"I've always believed that the one who wanted to imprison me wasn't [Time] alone, but all of [Existence]. After all, the first [Existence] I desecrated was [Memory]..."

'Here it comes!'

The Mirror of Delusion!

How exactly had this Servant God-level creation been split into the Dreamless Mirror and That Dream My Nightmare? Cheng Shi was dying to know.

His spirits surged, and both ears practically snapped to attention.

"It was the dawn of the fifth era. Thanks to the opportunity [Existence] brought, I was fortunate enough to become a favored of both Benefactors — a twisted dual Envoy.

But coexisting faiths were far from unified wills. To fully realize my vision, I kept searching for a way to build a pure paradise of Descent.

I observed the world ceaselessly, drifting through various faiths, watching how people worshipped their gods and expressed their devotion — hoping to sketch my paradise's blueprint from the aspirations of these humble believers.

It was then that I found a group — a sect of [Memory] followers.

They called themselves 'Mirror People,' a circle of memory keepers. Though the era's wheel was already half-turned, [Memory] and [Time] had yet to descend. They were essentially Seedling Followers — having sensed the current of memory flowing through the universe, they'd gathered spontaneously to pray for their new god's arrival.

Though few in number, their devotion was plain to see. They exchanged memories with each other, shared every history they knew, and annotated the passage of ages through the act of remembering.

But since mortals couldn't be sure whether such a god would ever notice this fresh devotion, their gatherings, though frequent, were like headless flies."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's eyelid twitched. He seemed to guess what was coming. His tone grew strange as he interjected:

"So you... gave them a little help?"

"Precisely!"

Aph Ros suddenly stood up on the table. He was profoundly satisfied with the word "help" — so satisfied that the gaze He fixed on Cheng Shi once again brimmed with "admiration."

"My brother — in all this universe, only you truly understand me!

I did indeed help them."

"..."

"But I knew their devotion was itself a form of desire — one that shouldn't be warped. So I used no tricks. I simply approached one of their organizers as a foreign traveler, coincidentally crossing paths. And through storytelling, I described how the people of Dolgod worshipped their gods.

Of course, I never mentioned Dolgod by name — I substituted another city. I told him about Object Worship — how dedicating prayers through physical objects best attracted divine attention."

'Wait!'

'Object Worship?'

Cheng Shi froze, suddenly recalling the reward he'd earned in that [Birth] trial — the God-Worshipping Wood Carving.

Indeed — whether it was the wood carvings or the massive divine statue atop the Theocracy of Growth, Dolgod's people had clearly been channeling their devotion through objects.

"I only wanted their devotion to not go wasted — their yearning to receive an answer. So I offered a small nudge.

And that organizer didn't disappoint. Perhaps my story inspired him, for at the very next gathering, he crafted an enormous mirror."

"!!!?"

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted. "The Mirror of Delusion?"

"Correct — that was the Mirror of Delusion's prototype.

The Mirror People — those Seedling Followers of [Memory] — began praying day and night before the mirror, beseeching it to reveal their Benefactor and bring guidance to the world.

But [Memory] seemed unmoved by them. Year after year, the mirror showed nothing.

Back then, time meant nothing to me. So I watched them for many years, until their numbers swelled, their organization grew, and their prayers solidified. I thought: 'Surely this great a plea of faith will catch His eye.' Yet still — nothing.

By then, the voice of [Order] rang across the land. The call of [Truth] surged like tides. Even Wild Gods had their prayers answered.

[Memory] alone remained cold — more aloof than [Truth] itself.

Time meant nothing to me, but it was everything to mortals. With no light at the end of the tunnel, many elder Mirror People saw their faith crumble. They grew disheartened.

They looked ready to give up.

But how could desire be extinguished?"

"..." Cheng Shi understood. He sighed: "So you helped them once more?"

"Yes!

This time, I used my power!

I solidified their desire, thereby reinforcing the conviction of their faith. But I never imagined that this validation — born from desire — would drive them to the opposite extreme..."

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Chapter 1103: The Shattered Mirror of Delusion

"When any organization grows large enough, its members inevitably fall into power struggles — because the wills they champion diverge.

At the time, the Mirror People — their desires surging — split cleanly into two ideological factions.

One faction leaned traditional. They believed devotion alone was the key that could open the gates of the divine. They chose to continue spreading faith and praying day and night according to the Mirror People's existing path, pursuing the purest road of memory to the bitter end.

The other faction believed their faith's scale simply wasn't large enough to attract the Benefactor's gaze.

But reality was cruel. [Memory] had never appeared. The faithful dwindled by the day. Under these circumstances, the Mirror People couldn't possibly expand their faith's scale — let alone summon divine mercy through greater devotion.

So the radical faction devised a plan. They decided to...

...fabricate a God Descent!"

"?"

'Faking a God Descent — now that's something...'

Since time immemorial, conservatives weren't always conservative — but radicals truly lived up to their name in spectacular fashion.

Their intentions were still born of devotion. But using [Memory]'s devotion to pull off a [Deceit]-worthy feat... Sure enough, devotion taken to its extreme became blasphemy!

Cheng Shi wondered what the Fun God would think of it. He hadn't descended during that era, but when the scene replayed in the Void Era, He'd surely be delighted.

After that idle digression, Cheng Shi continued listening to Aph Ros:

"Only if a god truly manifested and responded to the world would more followers come to worship. And once the faithful grew in number again, the god might genuinely answer the call.

These radical Mirror People, drowning in extreme devotion, could seemingly already see the moment a new god descended upon the world.

They kept trying to recruit others, but this near-blasphemous behavior terrified the traditional Mirror People, who firmly resisted and refused.

Countless veteran Mirror People personally stepped in to reason with them — trying to prevent the radicals' sacrilege from ruining the conservatives' devotion. And the radicals did indeed appear to back down. All went quiet.

But it was all a façade. They knew tradition's shackles had already made the conservatives rigid. So instead of proselytizing, they secretly began scheming in the shadows.

They spent a full year preparing. When the second year's grandest collective prayer day arrived, they launched their God Descent operation!

But by coincidence — or perhaps the accumulated years of devotion had finally moved the divine, or perhaps He'd finally deemed this memory worth recording — on that very same day, as all the Mirror People chanted in unison, as the radical faction's mirror guardians splashed the Revealing Potion onto the glass... [Memory] truly cast down His gaze.

The God Descent appeared.

A ray of holy light poured over the altar, affirming that massive mirror forged from countless prayers, and bestowed upon it true meaning in faith.

Memory Delusion was born.

But the conservatives who witnessed it didn't believe it was a genuine God Descent. They assumed the radicals had revived their scheme within the organization and orchestrated everything — albeit with breathtaking results.

The radicals thought likewise. Most participants believed this was the fruit of a year's planning — they just hadn't expected the effect to far exceed their wildest expectations.

Only the radical leader knew it was all real. The god had truly descended. He prostrated himself, crying out [Memory]'s name, urging everyone to greet the true god together. But the conservatives couldn't let this farce continue. They had to ensure this scandal was strangled within the Mirror People's 'home' before word spread.

And so, a battle between convictions began — with both sides fighting over the enormous mirror.

Neither side knew the mirror had already been imbued with new meaning. The conservatives wanted to erase the stain on their faith, to prove their purity and atone. The radicals, rallied by their leader, were electrified — wanting to seize this god-blessed mirror and become the legitimate conduit to the divine.

Both sides' obsessions blazed. They grappled and tangled, and in the chaos — shattered the mirror.

Conservatives and radicals each claimed a fragment. And so, Memory Delusion broke in two on the very first day of its existence.

The names of those two shards were, naturally, the most fitting commentary He could give this memory."

Cheng Shi was stunned.

The Dreamless Mirror and That Dream My Nightmare!

The former represented the conservatives' devotion — their flawless dedication to memory granted the Dreamless Mirror its power to perfectly reproduce memories without omission.

The latter represented the radicals' ambition. "That Dream, My Nightmare" — the [Memory] followers corrupted by desire truly had a devout dream. But everything they did was, in [Memory]'s eyes, a genuine nightmare. Even though [Deceit] hadn't yet been formally named by Origin in that era, the opposition between faiths had already left ample traces throughout history.

So this was the truth behind the Mirror of Delusion's shattering. No wonder the Nightmare Shadows inside That Dream My Nightmare reeked of [Corruption] — it truly had been tainted by [Corruption]'s influence.

At this point, Cheng Shi finally understood why Aph Ros had practically "destroyed" the Mirror People yet never faced consequences from [Memory].

Because when He split Memory Delusion in two and bestowed each half, He'd already turned the page on this memory — filing it away in His Collection Hall. To Him, even faith being blasphemed was still a memory.

Moreover, Aph Ros's involvement bore no "malice." The desire He'd stoked had merely intensified the forms of devotion slightly.

But if [Memory] had already closed the book on this, why had [Time] imprisoned Aph Ros?

Cheng Shi looked at Him in confusion. Aph Ros read his puzzlement, and His expression grew complicated, tinged with bitterness:

"After the incident, I assumed the era's masters didn't oppose my identity or my actions. So a few hundred years later, when I came across a group of traveling bards who'd gathered out of shared devotion..."

"..."

'Dude — you went at it again?!'

Cheng Shi's scalp went numb.

Someone dancing on the edge of death without dying wasn't proof of being destined to survive — it just meant they'd gotten lucky.

Getting lucky once was one thing. But what made you think you'd get a second chance?

'Did you think you were like me — a sacrifice blessed by [Fate]?!'

Besides, [Time] wasn't [Memory]. [Memory] would pick up pieces of the past that interested Him. But the moment [Time] saw the evolution of His Existence warped by desire...

'Well — you've seen the result yourself.'

Cheng Shi's mouth twitched. With a half-smile he asked: "You helped again?"

Aph Ros laughed bitterly and shook His head:

"I didn't even get the chance. He locked me in this eternal prison before I could.

He said:

'You pollute the world with desire, taint devotion with pleasure. The paradise you seek does not reside within Existence. And where your Gate of Joyous Lust leads is most certainly not a reality the world would welcome.

Since you find [Memory] and [Time] so fascinating — then stay here, and experience memory and time for eternity.'"

Aph Ros grew increasingly agitated. By the end, He'd cast off every trace of bitterness, His face burning with fury:

"Even if I intended to help — I hadn't yet influenced His followers! On what grounds did He imprison me on fabricated charges?!

! Will not! Accept this!"

"..."

Cheng Shi understood Aph Ros's point. But dude — the one you "provoked" was [Time]!

It bore repeating: future and past were nothing more than [Time]'s labels on Existence. He may well have already seen those bards' future — or perhaps the evil fruit of Aph Ros's meddling had already manifested in one of His simulations.

So the imprisonment looked "fabricated" — but could just as well be seen as prevention.

But Cheng Shi couldn't say any of this. Saying it would be tantamount to defending [Time].

Even if he was a [Time] follower, even if the answers he sought were with [Time] — here, on Dolgod's soil, he could only be Aph Ros's ally. Every strategy for approaching [Time] had to serve one purpose: joining forces with Aph Ros against this world-destroying demon king.

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Chapter 1104: The Honesty Court

Then again...

Was Aph Ros truly so heinous that He deserved to be cast into eternity, never to escape?

He'd already been a dual Envoy at the time. Imprisoning Him meant simultaneously provoking [Birth] and [Corruption] — one being [Life]'s aloof, child-doting origin, and the other the mysterious, unapproachable sovereign of [Descent].

How much audacity did [Time] need to confront two gods at once?

Even if [Corruption] never showed Himself and never refused anything, did [Birth] truly have no objections?

Cheng Shi frowned. He had a growing feeling that Aph Ros's imprisonment wasn't as straightforward as he'd imagined.

And another thing: the Dreamless Mirror inheriting pure [Memory] power made sense. But the unmistakable stench of [Corruption] seeping from That Dream My Nightmare — could that really come solely from the ancient Mirror People's desires?

Even if [Corruption] had manipulated their desires, they'd never actually defected to [Corruption]. They were still devoted. Could this warped devotion truly "contaminate" a Servant God relic to such a degree?

He'd need to get his hands on That Dream My Nightmare before he could properly research what other secrets lay within — and whether the Nightmare Shadow Dragon King he'd suspected was truly plotting something.

Having finished recounting the past in one breath, Aph Ros regained His composure. The fury earlier had been nothing more than an emotional outburst triggered by memory. After countless washes of time in Dolgod, He'd long grown accustomed to it.

He put His clothes back on, returned to male form, walked slowly to Cheng Shi's side, and observed the frowning mortal with interest:

"Deduced anything?"

By then, Cheng Shi's mind had long since wandered. A thought suddenly struck him:

If both the Dreamless Mirror and That Dream My Nightmare were gathered, could they be reassembled into a complete Mirror of Delusion?

He now knew exactly who held both fragments.

And what power would the whole Mirror of Delusion possess?

Cheng Shi was burning with curiosity. So he asked this final question. Aph Ros blinked — He'd assumed Cheng Shi was pondering [Time], but the man was actually eyeing [Memory].

"Nobody knows what that mirror — representing [Memory]'s gaze — can do. It never displayed its true power.

But, my brother, why are you thinking about this? Aren't we targeting [Time]?"

"Ahaha..." Cheng Shi hastily reined in his thoughts and smiled evasively. "Two birds with one stone. Fighting [Time] is real, but so is getting you out.

I was thinking — if that mirror could be found and reassembled, wouldn't it prove you've recognized your crime and voluntarily atoned for the desire you once stirred? If so, for [Memory]'s sake, [Time] might just... let you go?"

"I! Am! Not! Guilty!"

The words barely left Cheng Shi's mouth before Aph Ros's eyes sharpened and He shook His head in flat denial.

"Embracing desire is life's very nature. I never twisted anyone's desire — I merely made them face the desires already in their hearts.

My brother, I know you mean well. But if I were to accept the charges, it would mean abandoning my own will, betraying my Benefactor's gaze, and forsaking [Corruption]'s core.

I cannot. Just as I cannot abandon [Birth]'s guidance.

One lives to revel. If even I cannot revel, how could I ever build a paradise of universal joy?"

"..."

'All right — as expected of a dual Envoy whose faith is perfectly self-consistent. You've really nailed that "born to revel, revel to be born" closed loop.'

Cheng Shi nodded, dropped the subject, and told Aph Ros he already had some ideas. The rest required further investigation before he could discern [Time]'s true intentions and respond accordingly.

They discussed a bit more. Aph Ros, while hostile toward [Time], was clearly more concerned about His own faith fusion. So the conversation circled back to Zangier.

Cheng Shi hadn't forgotten his other purpose here either — the Doctor's anomalous behavior and the suspected awakening of a second personality. He had to tread carefully to keep the Jokers safe.

With Wang Mou and Galusha's senses still sealed, Cheng Shi could speak more plainly — though he obviously couldn't mention the Joker audit. He concocted a cover story about player identities, saying he'd brought two [Truth] followers here to see if they could assist Dolgod's "laboratory."

He said one of them still harbored designs on Zangier. If that person tried anything here, they might as well keep him as Zangier's assistant — or feed.

When Aph Ros heard that this [Truth]-following mortal wanted to stand on a predecessor's shoulders and gaze toward distant truth, He burst into laughter.

"What's so funny? What happened with Zangier?" The laughter made Cheng Shi uneasy.

Aph Ros kept laughing:

"Since he so covets that prisoner's power, why not simply grant his wish?"

Trust me, my brother — this might actually work in your favor.

Come — since you're here, let me show you Dolgod's newly established faith research institution...

The Honesty Court."

"???"

'What now?'

Cheng Shi was dumbstruck.

This place had a track record. The Evil Infant Inquisition had birthed a genuine "evil infant." Would the Honesty Court spawn some bizarre version of himself he couldn't recognize?

This was, after all, [Birth]'s homeland. Who wouldn't be scared?

Cheng Shi halted mid-step, suddenly feeling that ending the visit right here would be just fine.

But Aph Ros was visibly excited. With a grand wave, He restored Galusha and Wang Weijin's senses, then led the way with servants clearing the path, guiding the three bewildered visitors toward the city's most massive building.

The Doctor noticed Aph Ros glancing his way repeatedly and frowned slightly. Galusha, having been "silenced" for so long, was brimming with curiosity. Walking behind Cheng Shi, she whispered:

"You're close with Aph Ros?"

Close?

'I am absolutely not close with Him!'

Well — not entirely not close either. Hmm... how to put it? Schrödinger's familiarity.

When he wanted secrets from Him, he hoped they could talk about anything.

When He started taking off clothes, he only wished [Corruption]'s followers would show some self-respect...

Cheng Shi sighed, said nothing, and walked on shaking his head.

The group soon arrived before the sprawling tribunal. When Cheng Shi saw the two bold Chinese characters for "Honesty" blazoned across the building, he knew: whatever was inside had to be supremely absurd.

"Chinese? So there's a player helping with Dolgod's research infrastructure?"

Fate Weaver — is that you?"

The Doctor studied Cheng Shi thoughtfully. Before Cheng Shi could answer, Aph Ros spoke first:

"Not him. A Wise Man far cleverer than any of you.

Compared to your restrained desires, I much prefer that candid, flamboyant puppet master."

Wise Man and puppet — anyone would know that meant Wei Mu!

The Doctor froze. He clearly hadn't expected that Wei Mu had outpaced him in the search — having already located Zangier.

"Come. Let me show you Dolgod's progress in faith research."

With that, Aph Ros pushed the doors open and strode inside.

Cheng Shi twitched at the corner of his mouth, politely letting the other two enter first. Only after all three had disappeared inside did he grip the doorframe and cautiously peek in.

But that single glance sent a seismic tremor through his pupils. He froze on the spot.

"This is..."

Both players stopped in their tracks. Wang Weijin's eyes blazed with piercing light, his voice trembling with excitement:

"The Stars Dagger!

The auras of [Birth] and [Corruption] are colliding and interweaving — yet not violently. As if they've found a path to fusion! This is nothing short of a flawless replication of a [Truth] experiment!

Only... that doomsday Hanged Man, holding the sun and moon aloft... why is he wearing a mask?"

"???"

'Yep — things are getting absurd. Just as I predicted.'

...

Chapter 1105: Dolgod — A Miraculous Place

"This is..."

"As you can see, Zangier has resumed his role as the Doomsday Hanged Man. And everything before you is the [Truth] experiment he does best."

Aph Ros gazed up at the inverted Zangier hanging in the great hall of the tribunal, circling beneath it as He marveled:

"That puppet master truly has a brilliant mind. In merely three or five visits, he found a Time Knot void anchor point on this land that [Time] had exiled.

I'm sure you're wondering what a 'Time Knot void anchor point' is..."

Aph Ros was in rare high spirits, playfully taking on the role of a researcher as He introduced the setup.

Though most of the terms coming out of His mouth were things Wei Mu had said to Him at the time.

His mind flashed back. The puppet master had once stood in this very spot, pointing at a place in midair, and said:

"Lord Aph Ros — without Lord Yu Xi divulging any specifics, I cannot deduce what [Void]'s escape route actually is. But I do have some expertise when it comes to researching [Truth].

No matter what [Truth] experiment we're running, it requires massive manpower, resources, and time for repeated verification. Dolgod may be yours to command, and it has limitless biological material, but time remains the yardstick of [Truth]. We cannot skip the process and jump straight to results.

Fortunately, Dolgod isn't just the homeland of [Birth]'s followers — it's also [Time]'s prison. And that gives our concept a chance.

If we borrow a single 'brick' from [Time]'s prison 'wall' to build our experiment ground, we could potentially harness [Time]'s power for a [Truth] experiment.

To be specific — [Time]'s power has different properties: continuity, reversal, loops, acceleration, deceleration... We just need to try a few spots and find a void anchor point with the 'expansion' property. Then, using [Time]'s marvel, we could stretch time within the experiment ground infinitely — turning one day in Dolgod into one year inside the lab.

This way, within our current timeframe, we could witness far longer experimental progressions.

I call this void anchor point a Time Knot.

This is my personal insight from studying [Time]. I once envisioned finding such a point to accelerate my own growth. Unfortunately, I had neither [Time]'s power to borrow nor any Authority of my own.

But here... I could help You... give it a try."

Wei Mu never hid his intentions. He was the shrewdest player of all — even when forced to work for Yu Xi, he seized every chance to conduct useful experiments of his own.

And everything he did sprang from genuine will — which, in essence, was desire. In Aph Ros's eyes, such behavior wouldn't be rejected — only encouraged.

So Aph Ros agreed. And that "brick" was indeed found by Wei Mu.

Returning to the present — after Aph Ros finished recounting the esoteric theory, He wanted to see how these three would react. Would they show the same hint of astonishment He'd felt back then?

After all, He'd been imprisoned for countless ages. This was the first time He'd turned [Time]'s power against Him, and the shock had been real.

Yet of the three before Him, Wang Weijin's eyes blazed with excitement, Galusha arched a curious brow — and despite slight surprise, both seemed to fully comprehend.

Only Cheng Shi blinked, his gaze as clear and guileless as Aph Ros's own had once been.

Aph Ros felt warm. Just as He'd thought — only His brother truly understood Him.

But Cheng Shi wasn't thinking about that at all. His mind was entirely on the Benefactor with the black-hole pupils — [Time].

'Isn't this just time relativity?'

'What the hell did Wei Mu do before the game descended?'

Knowing and doing were different things. Doing and building were different things. Most people could be called clever for merely recognizing something they saw. But someone who transplanted real-world science into the game and achieved unity of knowledge and action...

No wonder he was the untouchable number one on the Road to Ascension.

'What a magnificent sacrifice he'd make. How could [Void] not want him?'

While Cheng Shi sighed over this Wise Man's inability to shoulder some of the Fixed Destiny's burden, Wang Weijin and Galusha had already moved close to the inverted Zangier to carefully observe the experiment.

Though Zangier was suspended at the void anchor point, his frame wasn't nearly as colossal as when Cheng Shi first saw him in deep space. Now he was only slightly larger than a normal human, and those eyes of alternating sun and moon appeared hazy and indistinct through the warped flow of time.

As for the Far Dusk Town he held aloft — no details were visible whatsoever.

The two could only vaguely sense that within those cascading torrents of time, countless lives rose and fell. As they were born and perished, the faith in Zangier's eyes hadn't grown more substantial. But the mask on his face — equally distorted by time — had grown ever brighter.

"...Why is there a mask here?!"

Wang Weijin had held back as long as he could, but couldn't resist the question. Even knowing the inquiry might invite Wei Zhi's scorn, he was too curious. He strongly suspected this mask was the very reason two opposing faiths had blended so seamlessly.

Galusha, wearing Wei Zhi's skin, didn't know either. She likewise couldn't figure it out — but to her credit, she held her tongue.

At minimum, the [Folly] follower claimed the moral high ground of silent disdain once again.

What neither could have imagined was that not even Wei Mu himself could have understood this scene — because it hadn't been part of his design. Aph Ros had done this personally.

Though Aph Ros had hoped to achieve faith fusion through [Truth]'s methodology, His recent observations told Him this experiment would produce two new Wild Gods at best — nowhere near fulfilling His dream.

Since it was useless to Him, He might as well plan for His brother Yu Xi.

So, during a dull intermission between cycles, He casually placed a mask on Zangier's face and, through the experiment's mechanisms, propagated a god called "Yu Xi" among the experimental world's inhabitants.

He understood faith. He knew Yu Xi was reclaiming old power. So He wanted to accelerate the condensation of faith through this method.

What He hadn't expected was that as the name of Yu Xi blazed ever brighter in the experimental world, the previously incompatible faiths of [Birth] and [Corruption] actually began to show signs of merging!

This left Aph Ros with one undeniable confirmation: in this [Void] era, faiths truly could merge — and they'd done so under the influence of [Void]'s ruler, [Deceit]!

Even opposing faiths!

And the timing of this act coincided precisely with Cheng Shi's return from San Dales, when he'd noticed the Divinity dripping rate in his [Deceit] container accelerating.

So it had never been someone spreading Yu Xi's name among the players. It was Aph Ros, quietly nurturing an entire town of Yu Xi followers within Dolgod!

If one were to ask where Yu Xi's faithful were most numerous right now, the answer was clear.

Dolgod.

A miraculous place, tied to Cheng Shi in a thousand invisible ways.

...

Chapter 1106: Aph Ros's "Yu Xi Experiment"

When he heard this conclusion, Cheng Shi was genuinely dumbfounded.

"You're saying that when Yu Xi's name spread through this experimental town, [Birth] and [Corruption] began to fuse?"

He blinked at Aph Ros, certain He was telling some absurd joke.

Aph Ros nodded with dead seriousness: "Indeed. It was the power of [Deceit] that made it all possible."

Cheng Shi's eye twitched. He rolled his eyes.

'Give me a break!'

'Others might not know the Fun God, but I do.'

'If He could influence faith to this degree, would any other god in this world even have a role to play? They'd have been conned into oblivion long ago.'

Logically speaking, faith fusion was something [Truth] had always been driving. Though Cheng Shi didn't know exactly how faith fused, given that this was fundamentally a [Truth] experiment, wasn't it possible that the active force wasn't [Deceit] at all, but [Truth]?

And only because [Deceit] had recently obtained [Truth]'s Authority did this experiment's results display [Deceit]'s apparent influence on faith fusion?

That was the only explanation Cheng Shi could think of.

Galusha arrived at the same conclusion — after all, she'd met the [Deceit] who was impersonating [Truth]. But the other person present, [Truth] follower Wang Weijin, couldn't for the life of him understand why [Deceit] could serve as a catalyst for faith fusion.

As far as the Tower of Logic's history went, every major [Truth] experiment site had guarded against this meddling god in the Void with utmost vigilance, terrified He'd contaminate the results.

But given what they were seeing now, Wang Weijin was beginning to wonder: could it be precisely because [Truth] experiments had eliminated the [Deceit] variable so thoroughly that the Grand Scholars had never found truth?

"..."

'What does that say?'

'The Tower of Logic — standing proud on the Land of Hope for thousands of years — had bricked up its own road to [Truth] with its own hands?'

'But why would the endpoint of faith fusion lie at [Deceit]'s feet?'

Then Wang Weijin recalled what [Deceit] had said when summoning him:

"Only when you take up this mask might you approach the real truth."

He felt the mask in his coat — one that didn't truly belong to him — and looked at the mask on Zangier's face. His mind roared.

He felt as if he could finally see the road of [Truth] that had always been a blur.

So the catalyst to truth really had been the mask all along!

One had to admit — the slice from another world had been extraordinarily lucky to receive His guidance. But now, all of that fortune belonged to him.

A glint of furtive glee crossed Wang Weijin's eyes before vanishing. He maintained his composure and continued listening to Aph Ros's explanation.

Aph Ros was busy explaining matters to Cheng Shi. He couldn't say exactly why [Deceit]'s power had this effect, but He could describe in detail what had occurred within the experiment.

"When I first propagated Yu Xi's faith, I hadn't considered faith fusion at all. I simply revealed Zangier's mask in the experimental town's sky for a brief moment, then introduced them to the Divine Name Yu Xi.

But what I hadn't expected was that the moment coincided with the experiment's day-night cycle. One of Zangier's eyes hadn't closed while the other opened — and for that instant, the blazing sun and blood moon hung in the sky together, sending every experimental life to their knees.

That very night, the name of Yu Xi spread through the entire city. Only — the interpretations of His nature were wildly different from what I'd envisioned..."

Aph Ros's smile turned playful as He glanced at Cheng Shi:

"They believed Yu Xi was a god who stood above both the blazing sun and the blood moon. That He commanded the cycle of day and night. The sun's protection and the moon's poison were both His tools for governing the world — which is why His revelation brought sun and moon together in the sky.

And so, these experimental lives developed many new faiths beyond worshipping the blazing sun:

Some converted to the blood moon, believing the god's punishment held its own meaning. Others began worshipping the alternation itself, seeing that as the world's true principle. Still others abandoned faith altogether, declaring that if a god existed above both sun and moon, then neither was worth worshipping...

But no matter what they believed in, every single one of them began to worship Yu Xi.

Because they understood: Yu Xi was the true god above all — above even the sun and moon!

And by the time I noticed this development, faith had already begun to fuse.

So, my brother — isn't this experiment telling me that Yu Xi is the answer I've been looking for?"

Aph Ros was considerate enough not to reveal Cheng Shi's identity as Yu Xi. But that consideration still made Cheng Shi's blood run cold.

"..."

Cheng Shi's face went rigid.

'If I say no — would you even believe me?'

Given the way He was practically reaching for His buttons, probably not.

No wonder today's subterfuge had gone so smoothly. He'd been in His crosshairs all along.

Cheng Shi forced two dry laughs and retreated two steps, making his stance abundantly clear through action.

Galusha stood to the side, watching their interaction, and nodded thoughtfully.

Only Wang Weijin remained true to his purpose — still studying Zangier. Taking advantage of Aph Ros's lecture, he feigned close academic scrutiny and inched two more steps forward, arriving directly beneath Zangier's dangling hair. The Hanged Man's head was now within arm's reach.

He believed his mask of [Truth]-obsessed fascination could fool everyone. Little did he know — every person present had their eyes fixed squarely on him.

Cheng Shi had never once looked away from the Doctor. He knew the man's eagerness to find Zangier meant something was afoot, and he was waiting for the moment the trap sprang.

Aph Ros, informed of the situation, watched Wang Weijin without the slightest judgment — only delight. He might as well have been a spectator munching popcorn, practically hoping this [Truth] follower would try something with Zangier.

Galusha was the same. She was too clever. From the moment the prisoner had brought her along to meet Wang Weijin, she'd recognized that Cheng Shi's interest lay not in her but in this [Truth] follower.

Everyone knew [Folly] and [Truth] were diametrically opposed. For a [Folly] follower to travel alongside a [Truth] believer meant one thing: finding flaws in the other.

Yet throughout the journey, their conversations revealed they were clearly allies. An ally you needed a third party to keep an eye on — the only possibility was a traitor.

And Galusha had considerable experience dealing with both [Truth] and traitors. She'd long since read Wang Weijin's intentions and knew he was eyeing Zangier greedily.

Only — since the two principals hadn't called it out, she was happy to stay silent and enjoy the show.

But now the show was getting dull. The stupid prey was about to walk straight into the trap. She decided it was time to act — and in doing so, test what kind of alliance the prisoner had with the others.

So she suddenly spoke up, addressing Wang Weijin as he crept closer to Zangier:

"Say... if I were to devour Zangier right now using Life Extension Department techniques, would I essentially inherit all of Zangier's experience and wisdom regarding the Stars Dagger and faith fusion?"

The moment those words fell, the entire room went taut!

Wang Weijin's gaze hardened. Without a heartbeat's hesitation, he thrust his hand straight at Zangier's scalp, now mere inches away.

...

Chapter 1107: The Doctor and Zangier's Great [Truth] Fusion

Consume their flesh, commune with their truth — that was one of the Life Extension Department's techniques.

The former Wei Zhi had used this very method to devour a Grand Scholar's corpse, thereby making contact with the Erudition Presidium that lurked in the shadows.

And now, Wang Weijin was doing exactly what Wei Zhi had done.

In truth, the moment he'd seen Wei Zhi among the party, he'd understood: Cheng Shi had already seen through his intentions. Even if the man wasn't yet certain whether his identity was compromised, precautionary measures were already in place.

Anyone who knew Wei Zhi knew the Reason Association's president excelled at "consuming" people. Bringing him along to visit Zangier was undoubtedly a test.

Yet even having seen through it all, Wang Weijin hadn't called it out. He'd simply played along, feigning indifference, following Cheng Shi's lead all the way here.

So this was a farce in which all three participants knew exactly what the others were doing — yet everyone stayed silent by tacit agreement.

They were all waiting for the right moment.

Cheng Shi held home-field advantage with Aph Ros at his side — naturally unflappable. Galusha had no stake in this; getting closer to the prisoner was prize enough, so her calm was understandable. But Wang Weijin had walked straight into the lion's den. What gave him the courage to pull this stunt under three pairs of watchful eyes?

Because he had his own trump card!

Faith Synchronization!

The Consciousness Faith Department had experimentally proven the entanglement properties of slice consciousness. And Wang Weijin — being 0221's originating "host body," a [Truth] follower who'd schemed against his own slices — naturally knew every department's experiments inside out.

As long as the current slice obtained the knowledge inside Zangier's mind, the countless slices he'd prepared back at the experiment site would simultaneously launch a mental brainstorm, attempting to transmit this "truth" back through redundant entanglement.

This way, he could acquire what he wanted at the cost of a single slice.

And once he possessed Zangier's experience and knowledge, with Wang Weijin's abilities, he could replicate the experiment himself — enter the game personally, build his own Stars Dagger!

Even if the experiment only yielded half its potential, it could still push him toward becoming a Pseudo God!

This was Wang Weijin's entire plan — and the reason he'd bided his time just to get close to Zangier.

Of course, since Cheng Shi was already on guard, everything he was seeing might not be real. He needed to watch for this [Deceit] follower conspiring with Aph Ros to set up a fake Zangier and bait him into revealing himself.

That's why his earlier approach hadn't been purely about studying the experiment — it had also been about verifying authenticity.

Fortunately, after all his time working with Zangier, he recognized the real thing. The experiment before him was genuine — not only real, but showing unprecedented breakthroughs in faith fusion.

How could Wang Weijin not be ecstatic?

Just devouring Zangier — no, he didn't even need to eat all of him. Even a few bites could reveal a wide-open road to [Truth]. And if the secret of faith fusion could be extracted, then someday, with all sixteen faiths converged in one body, he would become the greatest [Truth] follower in history — or perhaps the next [Truth] itself!

A [Truth] far greater than the current one!

And so, when Galusha casually dropped that provocative line, Wang Weijin knew the reckoning had come. He acted without hesitation — hurling down countless tools, erecting walls of [Truth] to stall his opponents for an instant, while simultaneously ripping off Zangier's head and biting into it ravenously.

The scene was beyond insane — bordering on deranged.

True, from Wang Weijin's perspective, his decisiveness was impeccable and his plan was proceeding smoothly. But to any outsider, this looked grotesque.

How to put it — watching a madman wearing a Joker's skin gnaw frenziedly at Zangier's face: those in the know could understand he was extracting truth. Those who didn't would think the Doctor was making out with Zangier.

Cheng Shi desperately wanted to yell "No kissing allowed on the premises!" — but he'd been "silenced."

The instant Wang Weijin made his move, all three others acted simultaneously.

Galusha shot backward at breakneck speed, distancing herself from the chaos. She chose to watch. Especially since this show had been triggered by her own words — the plot felt even more entertaining.

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted. He snapped his fingers.

But the snap wasn't for himself.

He was currently [Deceit]'s priest-class Clown — lacking effective direct-combat options. Normally, he'd switch back to [Fate] and let the Hero of Today handle it. But now, he no longer needed to switch faiths.

One snap to draw everyone's attention, and his shadow instantly donned an assassin mask — transforming into a hybrid of the Another Day Assassin and the Fate Thief. Through shadow-swapping, it slipped into the Doctor's shadow, evading every eye, and silently drove a blade into the Doctor's flank.

Aph Ros moved at the same time.

Go Lis — who'd been absent all day — tore open the tribunal's roof and crashed into view. Countless pitch-black, viscous tentacles rained down like a monsoon, binding Cheng Shi and Galusha tight — yes, those two specifically — in a strangling embrace.

"???"

Tentacles exploded everywhere — yet the only one spared was the madly-gnawing Wang Weijin.

This turn of events, beyond everyone's predictions, made all three players' eyes go wide.

Wang Weijin instantly sensed a trap. But the "truth" in his belly confirmed Zangier was real. He couldn't parse Aph Ros's intentions in the moment, so he could only keep eating while watching — buying time to complete his plan.

Galusha hadn't expected Aph Ros to move against both Cheng Shi and her. But clever as she was, she quickly deduced this had to be a scheme — and the poor [Truth] follower had walked right into it.

'Heh — foolish [Truth].'

As for Cheng Shi, his heart lurched.

He wasn't afraid Aph Ros would betray their "friendship." He'd also guessed Aph Ros had set a trap for the Doctor. What he couldn't predict was what kind of trap.

He was terrified Aph Ros had secretly pulled some unpredictable stunt behind his back — like creating an absurd new god named Yu Xi who somehow reigned above the sun and moon in an experimental town.

"..."

'What is He doing?'

Aph Ros sensed Cheng Shi's confusion and flashed him a gleeful smile:

"Don't worry, my brother.

I told you — this [Truth] follower's covetousness toward Zangier might not be a bad thing.

As for just how good it is...

You'll see shortly."

Hearing that, Cheng Shi panicked even harder.

...

Chapter 1108: The Doctor — Muddied Faith and Yu Xi's Devotion

Though somewhat surprised by Cheng Shi's never-before-seen ambush technique, Wang Weijin still blocked the strike.

The instant Shadow Cheng Shi's dagger pierced his flank, an identical stabbing force erupted from inside his abdomen, colliding with the blade head-on. The two forces locked in a stalemate, preventing the dagger from advancing a single inch further.

Immediately after, the Doctor — still single-mindedly devouring Zangier's head — freed one hand and ripped open his own belly. As blood sprayed everywhere, the onlookers saw nothing inside but entrails hollowed out, replaced by arms clutching each other in a tangled mass.

The Faith Stitching Experiment!

The feat 0221 had once pulled off behind Zangier's back was now being replicated here by his host body, Wang Weijin.

The arms burst into daylight and shot outward, latching onto the inverted Zangier, frantically tearing at his flesh.

Wang Weijin stood beneath, bathing in blood as he fed. The scene was nothing short of hellish.

Cheng Shi frowned deeply. Playing it steady, he had Shadow Cheng Shi activate the Another Day Assassin's ability to run simulations — but after dozens of attempts, the opponent never failed once. Cheng Shi's expression darkened further.

"You're not the Doctor. Who are you, really?"

Wang Weijin dropped the act. He could already feel the other slices' consciousness beginning to absorb the "truth" from Zangier's mind — proof his experiment had succeeded. He'd merged Zangier's knowledge in plain sight.

He threw back his head and laughed, tossing the gnawed skull aside, and looked at Cheng Shi — drenched in blood — shaking his head with a smile:

"Fate Weaver, I know you're a cautious man. But even the most cautious person slips up against a meticulous plan.

He always held out hope for you. Pity — this time, I can make him accept his fate."

"He"!

The moment Cheng Shi heard that pronoun, he realized his suspicion was correct. This person was absolutely not the Doctor — and "he" referred to the original Doctor he knew.

Given the personality on display, this was more like 0221!

Could the personality that split off during the Doctor's slice-fusion have been a dormant 0221?

"Who are you? A resurrected 0221?" he asked, voice low.

"Sharp guess — but wrong.

I'm not 0221. I'm... Wang Weijin."

With that, Wang Weijin produced a dagger with a sinister smile and without a moment's hesitation plunged it straight at his own throat.

Villains often die from talking too much. But Wang Weijin neither over-talked nor sought survival. Once the objective was complete, he intended to erase himself immediately to prevent further complications.

But this land ultimately belonged to Aph Ros. Without His permission, no one — mortal or otherwise — got to choose between life and death.

Go Lis's tentacles — which had never once restrained Wang Weijin — instantly coiled around every one of his limbs, hoisting him upside down in the air just like Zangier.

Restrained but unperturbed, Wang Weijin looked at the playfully smiling Aph Ros and laughed in return:

"I should thank You, dual Envoy. Were it not for Your arrogance, how could I have achieved my goal?"

But the one I must thank most is you, Cheng Shi.

If you hadn't killed my rebellious slice 0221, perhaps my return wouldn't have come so soon!"

'It's him!'

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted. He finally understood what the name "Wang Weijin" signified.

That wasn't the Doctor's name, nor a split personality. It was the original host body that both the Doctor and 0221 had branched from — the first [Truth] follower, Wang Weijin, who had sliced himself apart only to be killed by 0221.

He hadn't died!

No — more accurately, he'd left failsafes inside his slices. He was the host body, the original architect of the slice experiment. What hidden mechanisms had been edited into those slices? Only he would know.

'No wonder!'

So the Doctor had been compromised.

Fury kindled in Cheng Shi's heart, but his surface remained breezy as he mocked:

"Tch—

A con artist getting outplayed by a [Truth] follower. What a brain the Doctor had.

Oh, my apologies — I forgot. You're the same person.

Strange, then. If you're the same person, how is it that you alternate between stupid and... even more stupid?

Wang Weijin, you don't actually think you've won, do you?

Use that shriveled little brain of yours and think. Standing before you is a dual Envoy of [Birth] and [Corruption], a [Void] walker who subdued 0221, and a [Truth] top-ranker who's obsess... essed with the Life Extension Department's techniques!

Even if 0221 was your glorious past — do you really think you're stronger than he was?

And where does the confidence come from that you can escape unscathed right under our noses?

See what's wrapped around me? Go Lis's tentacles!

Aph Ros would rather bind me than bind you. Care to guess why He let you gnaw Zangier's skull clean?

Can't figure it out?

He's right here. Why not ask Him directly."

Cheng Shi's mockery was at maximum. Wang Weijin did have doubts, but he couldn't detect anything wrong. Unwilling to believe the experiment he'd completed had any flaws, he chalked it up to Cheng Shi throwing a tantrum of impotent rage.

Still, his gaze drifted to Aph Ros. And that's when Aph Ros began to smile.

Though Cheng Shi had spoken with absolute conviction, He knew His brother was actually burning with curiosity about what trap had been set. Yu Xi had simply used Wang Weijin's mouth to ask the question for him. Since it had come to this, it was time for the reveal.

He stepped forward with a light laugh, looked up at the dangling Wang Weijin and Zangier's carcass, and said softly:

"I did nothing."

"?"

"?"

"?"

All three were dumbfounded.

"But it seems you've all overlooked something. Haven't you considered..."

When this Stars Dagger experiment shifted every experimental life's faith to my brother Yu Xi — as the experiment's supporting structure, its very environment — what kind of effect would that have on this [Truth] follower Zangier?

Just as I thought. None of you considered it.

Well then — allow me to reveal the answer!"

Aph Ros threw back His head in uproarious laughter and casually withdrew all of Go Lis's tentacles.

Everyone present — including Wang Weijin and Zangier's remains — was unbound and dumped onto the ground. And before Wang Weijin could recover from his shock, a surge of devout faith suddenly flooded his consciousness, seizing complete control of his thoughts.

He clutched his head in panicked bewilder, yet his mouth moved on its own, pouring out praise:

"Praise be to the great Lord of the World. Praise to the Creator above sun and moon. Praise the protector of all people, the great Lord Yu Xi. Your most devoted follower... Wang Weijin... sends his respects."

With that, Wang Weijin collapsed to his knees and stretched his hands toward the sky in supplication.

"?????"

'Dude — what is even happening?!

Cheng Shi was stupefied. Galusha blinked — then burst out laughing.

"Do you know why Wei Zhi only eats [Truth] followers?"

Because he's afraid of swallowing the wrong faith."

"Precisely," Aph Ros laughed heartily. "The puppet master also shared a piece of wisdom with me: faith is, itself, a form of knowledge.

Zangier used to be an unwavering [Truth] follower. But under the experiment's influence — no, more accurately, under the influence of that mask — his faith had grown muddled.

He wouldn't have gone this way on his own. But the trouble was that every heart harbors desire. He wasn't content being an obedient prisoner. Just like before with the real Stars Dagger, he'd been searching for a way to escape.

And borrowing the Power of Faith from that mask was the first step of his prison-break plan.

I sensed his desire — but I didn't stop him. Because I found it amusing. Not only that — I helped him."

"..."

'Are you sure "helped" is the right word?'

Ever since learning what Aph Ros had done to the Mirror People, Cheng Shi could no longer look at the word "help" with a straight face.

"I snuffed out all his other desires, preserving only his obsession with faith. Through repeated filtration, his desire finally shifted.

In other words, Zangier's muddied faith pool now contained a new element called Yu Xi — one that grew stronger by the day.

So naturally, this young man who assimilated Zangier's faith... had his own faith muddied along with it."

"..." Cheng Shi seemed to understand. He stared, wide-eyed, at the kneeling Wang Weijin. "You mean..."

"Exactly what you're thinking. He's become a devout Yu Xi follower." Aph Ros cast Cheng Shi a meaningful look and smiled. "Let's hope he didn't share the knowledge with his other slices too quickly. Otherwise..."

The great Yu Xi is about to gain a whole new batch of devoted followers."

"..."

'Wait — hold on!'

'The Doctor... became my follower?!'

...

Meanwhile, on the other side.

Wang Mou — the original Doctor, locked in his cell — heard the experiment chamber echoing with chorus-like hymns to "Yu Xi." And despite himself, he too began to chant along.

"Praise be to the great Lord of the World, praise..."

He couldn't understand why a strange devotion had risen in his heart. He didn't know what was happening in Dolgod. But he knew it had to be Wang Weijin who'd been affected — and the effect had cascaded to him.

Though he and Wang Weijin were currently adversaries, it was important to remember: whether it was 0221 or the Doctor, they were all the same kind of slice — slices of a player named Wang Weijin.

So Faith Synchronization worked on them all the same.

...

Chapter 1109: Grandpa Rescues the Calabash Brothers

The Honesty Court fell into a brief silence.

Aph Ros beamed, Galusha brimmed with curiosity, Cheng Shi wore no expression at all — and only Wang Weijin remained kneeling on the ground, still chanting prayers.

The sight of this fanatic was making Cheng Shi's eyelid twitch nonstop.

He studied the scene for a moment, then asked: "Now that Wang Weijin's personality has been affected — will the Doctor... be affected too?"

Aph Ros smiled: "If they share the same origin, then most likely, yes."

"..."

Cheng Shi rubbed his numb cheeks. His expression was something to behold.

Good news: the crisis was resolved. Yu Xi's will represented the Joker's will. Wang Weijin's host personality — now devoted to Yu Xi — would likely never pose a threat again.

Bad news: a new crisis had been born. If his identity were exposed, his equal-footing friendship with the Doctor could very well turn into a superior-subordinate relationship.

On second thought — hissss—

That wasn't exactly bad news either.

More than the Doctor's shifting status, Cheng Shi was concerned about his brain. After all, the current Wang Weijin didn't exactly look as... intelligent as before.

"Does assimilating another faith automatically turn you into a mindless zealot?"

"Not at all," Aph Ros shook His head. With a wave, He sent Wang Weijin off to dreamland. "The fanaticism is influenced by Zangier's memories. The experimental lives' worship of Yu Xi was fervent — years of accumulated frenzy poured into his consciousness all at once. Naturally, it causes a temporary shock.

Once he weathers this period, he'll return to normal. But... only intellectually.

Individual faith compared to collective faith is like a firefly against the full moon. His faith can never revert. The outward intensity of his zeal, however, depends on his personal emotional control."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi felt as though a weight had been lifted.

As long as the intellect was intact, that was fine. What the Jokers needed was the Doctor's brain — the rest didn't matter.

Besides, Yu Xi fanaticism was a bonus, not a penalty.

Even if the Doctor chanted Yu Xi's name every waking moment, the worst that could happen was a bit of personal embarrassment. The world had no shortage of lunatics — and least of all among the Jokers.

With the Wang Weijin situation settled, Galusha — who'd been observing from the side — let her eyes dart around, then smiled at Cheng Shi:

"This so-called Lord Yu Xi — is that you, Prisoner?"

"?"

'No — don't go making things up. That's not me.'

Until Cheng Shi understood why Galusha had been pulled out of the trial, he wasn't ready to deepen his rapport with such a keen Wise Man. He feared those sharp eyes would see too much and become an external variable affecting his judgment.

But before he could deny it, Aph Ros cheerfully answered for him:

"Oh?"

You didn't know?

The one you're following happens to be a divine favored of this era's greatest [Void] ruler — the Envoy of [Deceit], Yu Xi.

If you didn't know his identity and he's just a player to you, then why have you been watching him so closely?"

'The prisoner really is a Servant God?!'

Though she'd had her suspicions, Galusha's pupils contracted and her eyes went wide.

In that instant, every thread of evidence clicked together in her mind!

No wonder the [Truth]-impersonating deity had shown such favor. No wonder he had the power to pull her out of a trial. No wonder he dared defy [Truth] and challenge their experiments. He was like the other gods — a deity himself.

This made everything he'd done perfectly explicable. He and his Benefactor were clearly orchestrating a grand conspiracy.

As for what it was, Galusha couldn't guess. But she was intrigued. She realized the world was far more fascinating than she'd imagined. Now, beyond her dream of destroying [Truth], she harbored a new wish: to witness with her own eyes the moment this conspiracy detonated across the universe.

Watching the glint in Galusha's eyes, Cheng Shi was at a loss for words.

'Great — lately, this Yu Xi skin seems to be glued on for good.'

But since Galusha now knew, he couldn't let her imagination run wild unsupervised.

So he shifted back into Yu Xi's form, put on that eerie grin, turned to appraise Galusha, and said meaningfully:

"Very few know my identity — and most of them are [Folly] followers.

Galusha, if you're truly clever, you know what that means. Without my authorization, do not mention any of this in front of outsiders. Otherwise — I'll send you right back where you came from."

It was an unmistakably hard threat. But Galusha wasn't the slightest bit afraid. She was too busy wondering whether [Deceit] was trying to recruit [Folly] — why else would Yu Xi only reveal his true self to [Folly] believers?

She could see that Yu Xi had pulled her in as an ally. Combined with [Deceit]'s talk of a "backup substitute variable," her safety seemed assured for now.

But having no issue with her standing didn't mean things wouldn't get awkward. Facing two Servant Gods, she wasn't about to throw tantrums. Galusha nodded thoughtfully and agreed with a smile.

With the threat neutralized and new intelligence gained, Cheng Shi finally exhaled.

He pulled out the Lush Horn Crown, casually resurrected the gnawed-up Zangier so it could resume its labors at the Honesty Court, then had an in-depth discussion with the other two about why worshipping Yu Xi had caused [Birth] and [Corruption] to fuse.

But the question was too complex. The two who knew the full picture each had their own agendas. Only Aph Ros kept His gaze locked on Cheng Shi the entire time — the message crystal clear: Yu Xi was undoubtedly one of the keys to realizing His life's aspiration.

Cheng Shi's skin crawled under that stare. Before long, he hastily excused himself on the pretext of investigating [Time] and left Dolgod with Galusha in tow.

As for the Wang Weijin slice — he handed it over to Aph Ros as compensation and let Him feed it to Go Lis.

Someone had to answer for this farce, didn't they?

Back in reality, Cheng Shi promptly parted ways with Galusha — who clearly wanted to ask more questions — and headed alone to the Jokers' gathering place.

After an exhausting day, it was finally time to reap some rewards.

That Dream My Nightmare — no matter how ominous, it was still a [Memory] Servant God relic.

And the Dragon King was most likely still trapped inside that mirror. Day after day, he was running around gathering intelligence and now he had to rescue people too.

How strange — everyone else had the calabash brothers saving grandpa. How come for him, it was grandpa rescuing the calabash brothers?

Save one and there's another to save. Could you Jokers please give me a break?

'Ah, forget it. Dragon King, oh Dragon King — grandpa's coming to save you.'

Cheng Shi moved silently through the dim graveyard. The magic lamp fashioned from a [Deceit] tombstone at the center still cast its feeble glow. Beneath that light — no one. The hushed, murky atmosphere was eerily unsettling.

Fortunately, this wasn't a place just anyone could enter. At least there was no danger. Cheng Shi quickened his pace toward the [Memory] tombstone. Just as he was about to act, his steady instincts kicked in, and he bluffed casually:

"Stop hiding. You think I don't know you're there?"

Do I really have to call you out before you'll show yourself?"

The moment he spoke, a figure slowly materialized before the [Truth] tombstone.

The figure looked somewhat disheveled, but their spirits seemed intact. With a hint of apology, they addressed Cheng Shi's direction:

"Sorry — my negligence during the experiment put the Jokers in a security crisis.

Going forward, I'll review the experimental procedures and reexamine the failsafes those slices left behind, to ensure it doesn't happen again. Though given the current situation, even if their hidden personalities reemerge... it's meaningless now.

Praise Yu Xi."

"..."

'Doctor??'

'What's he doing here?'

Cheng Shi froze. To be honest, his little bluff hadn't been aimed at anyone in particular — well, it had been aimed at the fake Dragon King who'd hidden That Dream My Nightmare. After all, only that entity knew he'd be coming for the mirror.

But instead of smoking out the fake Dragon King, he'd flushed out the Doctor.

'What — it's pitch black in here. What are you even doing?'

...

Chapter 1110: That Dream My Nightmare — Obtained!

"What are you doing here?"

Cheng Shi couldn't immediately tell whether the Doctor before him was the real one or the faith-tamed Wang Weijin. But judging by his demeanor, he seemed genuine.

Still, the timing was suspiciously convenient. They'd just dealt with his second personality, and now the real man shows up at the very spot where he was about to retrieve That Dream My Nightmare.

Had he received some tip-off? Or was this just coincidence?

Even if it was coincidence — what was he doing at the Joker Gathering Place at this hour?

Cheng Shi kept his doubts to himself. Rather than immediately confirming the Doctor's identity, he let his eyes dart around and tossed out a bluff:

"Did Zhen Xin call you, or Long Jing?"

The Doctor blinked — clearly not expecting those three had arranged a meeting. He shook his head:

"Nobody called me. I simply felt it was a shame not to attend the Joker Society in person, so I came to look around — to feel the convergence of Joker wisdom.

Even though I retrieved the memories from my slice, the 'me' at the time wasn't truly me...

Praise Yu Xi."

"?"

'Converging wisdom? More like converging scheming!'

Cheng Shi never in a million years expected that answer. He studied the Doctor with an odd expression and said:

"Playing the emotional card right off the bat — are you trying to con me again, you fraud? Really, nobody called you?"

"Truly, nobody. And I wouldn't deceive a friend who saved me from ruin at a time like this.

Cheng Shi — thank you.

I admit I underestimated Wang Weijin. No — it's more accurate to say that 0221's overwhelming power made me overlook the host body.

I know you stepped in. The moment Wang Weijin targeted Zangier, he was doomed to lose to the Jokers.

And you, as the Jokers' convener, would never have allowed his scheme to succeed.

Praise Yu Xi.

I just didn't anticipate your method of disposal would be so... distinctive.

A new faith has been anchored in my consciousness. As one of the slice collective, I can't shake off this influence. When the fanaticism has no outlet, the accumulating obsession makes me blind and inefficient.

So, after freeing myself from Wang Weijin's confinement, I immediately devised a method to balance emotion, efficiency, and religious fervor — namely, ending each sentence with a sincere praise to Yu Xi.

Direct expressions of devotion help me suppress the fanaticism in my consciousness, minimizing its impact.

Praise Yu Xi."

"..."

By this point, Cheng Shi had confirmed this was the genuine Doctor. Nobody else could deliver such bizarre content with a perfectly straight face.

It was truly bizarre.

"Every single sentence?" Cheng Shi's smile was somewhat rigid.

"Ideally, yes. For longer statements, additional praises should be interspersed.

I think the balance between forced-faith side effects and fanaticism venting methods is an excellent research topic in itself. However, since the second-personality research is still incomplete, this will have to wait.

Praise Yu Xi."

"..."

'You know what, Doctor — how about we shelve the second-personality research entirely? You barely started and it nearly dealt the Jokers a killing blow. Thank goodness Wang Weijin was single-mindedly focused on Zangier and held back from leaking what was discussed at the Joker Society.'

'But if you cook up another new personality — who knows whether it'll be friend or foe?'

The Doctor read Cheng Shi's concern and explained gravely:

"Wang Weijin had ulterior motives, but his core idea was sound. A single consciousness can only carry so much capability. Under Fixed Destiny rules, multiple personalities genuinely enhance individual power laterally.

However, after absorbing Zangier's knowledge, I believe the experiment's goal needn't be confined to 'human' personalities. If a [Truth] experiment could fuse a pseudo-divine entity like Zangier's god-status with my own personality, could that fundamentally transcend the bounds of mortal life?

I'd like to try. If it works, it would certainly benefit the Jokers' future.

Praise Yu Xi."

Cheng Shi felt numb. For a moment, he almost told the Doctor: even [Truth] itself believes there's no more truth in this world. Why are you still so obsessed with these not-quite-truths?

Divinity couldn't be stitched together — only dripped. Divine Thrones couldn't be reforged — only legitimized. This world was an elaborately preset "program." Nobody could break its rules to create new gods — not even [Truth]!

Then again, if the world really was a program, it didn't seem to run perfectly. At least there were some bugs.

Like the new authority of Fear that had germinated in the Divinity Germination Experiment. Or Aph Ros's modified Yu Xi experiment that enabled [Birth] and [Corruption] to merge. These results all pointed to one thing: faith was the sole clue to decoding the status quo of divine authority.

So if the Doctor had this much energy, why not channel it into researching the root of faith?

Cheng Shi shared his thoughts with the Doctor in a measured, methodical manner. Wang Mou paused, then mused:

"Your understanding of [Truth] seems to have undergone a qualitative leap. Cheng Shi, did recent experiences give you some sort of epiphany?"

This is indeed a worthy topic. If the Jokers need me to pursue this research, I believe I'm up to the task.

Hmm — I'll start with studying Yu Xi's faith. Leveraging my own condition for efficiency.

Although, if you could introduce me to Lord Yu Xi personally, I imagine efficiency would improve even further.

Praise Yu Xi."

"..."

'You're literally looking at him right now. Feeling any more efficient?'

Cheng Shi's expression was indescribable. He remained noncommittal, merely saying Yu Xi's movements were unpredictable and that even he rarely got an audience. In short: stalling with one word — delay.

The Doctor understood that gods weren't easily met. He said nothing more, thought for a moment, then asked: "You three arranged to... Praise Yu Xi."

'Arranged to praise Yu Xi?'

'That'd make us way too devout...'

Even knowing what the Doctor meant, Cheng Shi desperately wanted to clarify that this had absolutely nothing to do with Yu Xi!

"Oh — we're planning to sneak into [Memory]'s Collection Hall for a look. They haven't arrived yet, probably held up. We'll do it another day.

If there's nothing else, I'll head out?"

He said he was leaving, but his feet didn't budge.

The Doctor naturally caught the dismissal. Having no standing to challenge Cheng Shi's lie, he tactfully took his leave.

Watching the Doctor's retreating figure, Cheng Shi muttered with an inscrutable expression:

"Con artists really don't have a single honest word between them.

He wasn't here to 'feel the Joker Society's atmosphere' at all. He was trying to get closer to the Fun God's will.

Looks like the Doctor truly treats [Deceit] as [Truth]. Otherwise he wouldn't have come back.

Tch. How to put it — a happy accident.

After all, who could've imagined that one day, the world's [Truth] really would be [Deceit]?

[Fate]... sure has a way about it."

Cheng Shi chuckled softly. After confirming no one else was around, he turned and dug up the [Memory] tombstone.

And buried beneath it was indeed a mirror. Judging by the frame's patterns — it was That Dream My Nightmare!

Cheng Shi was overjoyed — yet dug with utmost care. He was terrified the fake Dragon King had booby-trapped it, leaving the mirror face-up so he'd accidentally look into it and get caught. So he excavated from the side the entire time.

Only after unearthing the entire mirror did he prop it up by the back, rap on it with a peculiar expression, and mutter:

"Hey — Dragon King, you in there?"

Grandpa's here to save you. Say something."

As expected — no response.

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, rolled his eyes, and sent his shadow scurrying to the mirror's other side. It squeaked out a single syllable:

"Squeak."

And then, with deep satisfaction, he declared:

"Well, since you answered — grandpa has to rescue his grandson no matter how tired he is, right?"

...