

## The Gods 1121

### Chapter 1121: Why Are You Describing the Path I've Already Walked?

When it came to becoming a god, Cheng Shi had always believed the aspiring deity had no real agency in the matter.

Even if they did, it was useless—because true gods required Origin's endorsement, and Servant Gods needed a true god's permission to wield their authority.

This created an awkward reality: all of a mortal's efforts could only ever amount to begging for a god's favor, after which they'd be "bestowed" a divine seat.

He had never imagined there could be a type of god that didn't require recognition from any other deity.

His mind flashed back to the small note Mi Laozhang had slipped him after San Dales—the one transcribing the Fun God's words when Mi Laozhang had asked about Yu Xi's existence. The Fun God had said:

"He has never appeared, nor has He ever vanished."

"When you know of Him, you do not truly know Him."

"When you understand Him, you do not truly understand Him."

"Only He knows and understands Himself. And the moment an outsider truly knows Him, truly understands Him—then He..."

"Is no longer Him."

Now, combined with the Flame of Hope's words, it all clicked into place.

So even back in San Dales, Deceit had already given the answer to godhood. Cheng Shi simply hadn't connected the dots at the time, still fixated on the container, searching everywhere for clues—until today, when the Flame of Hope spelled it out once more.

'Yes—right now is the moment "He" knows and understands Himself.'

'In truth, Yu Xi probably "came into being" the very instant I jokingly said that name while bantering with Brother Mouth!'

While Cheng Shi was still sorting through his thoughts, the Flame of Hope assumed he was still reeling from the revelation and continued explaining the "path to godhood" he had prepared for Cheng Shi.

"Based on my understanding of Deceit's will, to become His Envoy, first you'll need a divine name compelling enough to make the world 'hear it and believe.'"

"The name can be strange, but it must maintain an air of mystery."

"Then comes the most critical step—spreading your faith and gathering followers!"

"Faith is the foundation of any god, and spreading it takes time. The method of propagation is paramount, and since you'd be becoming an Envoy of Deceit, you inherently won't be trusted by the masses. A strategy of announcing yourself to the whole world right off the bat simply won't work."

"I'd recommend starting small. Though you're a Fate Weaver, I know you're also a seasoned con artist. Use your tricks to deceive a few mortals—ideally followers of Deceit."

"Once you outmatch them in trickery, they'll be naturally drawn to you. Then you need only display a hint of knowledge or ability beyond what any mortal should possess, and given the... disposition of Deceit's followers—ahem, their way of thinking—they'll probably start speculating wildly about your identity without you saying a word."

"Once that step succeeds, the power of faith will flow to you of its own accord."

"I understand His followers. These tricksters will spare no effort to borrow your name as a tiger's pelt, thereby spreading your divine name by proxy. You'll only need to show yourself periodically, leaving

breadcrumbs among different mortals, and they'll naturally connect the dots—digging you out of history on their own."

"After that, you just need to claim a singular event from the historical record, and your lie becomes established fact in mortal consciousness. Your supporters will write footnotes proving you existed all along."

"This is how Deceit corrupts Memory—your trickster of a Benefactor is well-practiced at it. I'd imagine you're no slouch yourself."

"From there, you'll harvest a wave of faith from Deceit's followers. But that won't be enough, because this is still Deceit's faith pool—doing this only counts as riding your Benefactor's coattails."

"Faith isn't about hoarding—it's about competing."

"So what you must do is spread your faith beyond those boundaries. Ideally, you'd recruit a new batch of believers through some grand feat visible to the entire world. Once achieved, your faith will be deeply rooted, and your divine status firmly established."

"Finally, you— What's wrong with you?"

"Why do you keep blinking like that?"

"Are you questioning my strategy?"

"Hmph, do you have any idea how long I spent refining this method for creating an Envoy of Deceit?"

"Over the years, during every exchange with Deceit, I've quietly studied His will. And thanks to my origins in Fate, I can at least perceive essence to some degree. Gradually, I came to understand His will and His temperament."

"This is absolutely the method of elevation He'd be delighted to see. All you need to do is follow it, and that divine seat will—"

"Enough, Fate Weaver—you're looking at me like I'm an idiot!"

"I'm warning you, you're not His Envoy yet. As an ally—and a mortal, at that—you owe me, the sole remaining Servant God of Void, a modicum of respect."

"..."

Cheng Shi blinked, shook his head, then nodded—looking like a malfunctioning robot.

Not because of shock. Because of sheer bewilderment.

He was truly dumbfounded.

'I'm not disrespecting you. If anything, I have too much respect for you.'

'Everything you said is spot-on. That's exactly how an Envoy of Deceit should be born.'

'The problem is—why are you describing the path I've already walked?'

'Did you install surveillance on me?!'

Though most of what the Flame of Hope described was already Cheng Shi's past, he felt no satisfaction at having gotten a head start. All he felt was a crushing sense of helplessness against Fixed Destiny.

That's right—Fixed Destiny, again!

Without a god orchestrating events behind the scenes, how could he possibly have progressed so smoothly?

But was Deceit really the only god pulling the strings?

Granted, his path was leading toward the seat of Deceit's Envoy. But think about it—if even an Envoy discarded by Fate could figure out this road, then surely Fate Himself, Deceit's sibling god with the power to perceive essence, couldn't possibly be blind to it.

Had He foreseen all of this from the start? Was that why He'd agreed to merge with Deceit?

Was He using Deceit's favoritism toward Cheng Shi to complete the refinement of His sacrifice?

Had the so-called "predetermined" path Cheng Shi had walked been a conspiracy from the very beginning—designed to draw the Fear Faction's attention to him, so he could win the divine support of the various fearful gods who had nothing to do with Fate, allowing the sacrifice to achieve a "fusion" of all faiths?

Cheng Shi's thoughts spiraled. The deeper he went, the more inescapable the game seemed.

His answer, his aspirations, his future, and his fears had long since merged into one inseparable whole.

Silence fell over the room once more. In that stillness, Cheng Shi silently posed a question to Brother Mouth:

'Brother Mouth, are even you part of this Fixed Destiny?'

Cheng Shi remembered that the name "Yu Xi" had been locked in precisely because Brother Mouth affirmed it at first mention. He couldn't help suspecting that Fool's Lips might also be a crucial piece in this game.

Perhaps... had it even betrayed Deceit and defected to Fate at some point?

While Cheng Shi was stewing in his suspicions, Fool's Lips finally responded. And its response was, as always...

"Weren't you supposed to be a person? When did you turn into a chicken butt?"

"...?"

Cheng Shi's eyelid twitched violently as he counted on his fingers just how many insults were packed into that single sentence.

Chapter 1122: On Deceit and Fear

Embarrassing as it was, Cheng Shi had no choice but to come clean to the Flame of Hope about certain things he'd already accomplished.

And when the Flame of Hope learned that Yu Xi had long since manifested in the world—and that the mortal playing the role of Yu Xi had already obtained Deceit's container—he was genuinely dazed.

The Candle Man circled Cheng Shi, scrutinizing him with sharp eyes:

"You're not actually some lost Envoy of Deceit who fell through history's cracks and just woke up, are you?!"

"???"

Cheng Shi couldn't help but laugh. He pointed at the other and said:

"Everything I've done is exactly what you just described. How am I suddenly a real Envoy now?"

"Tch, hard to say."

"Every god knows Deceit is full of tricks. Who's to say He didn't tamper with the true records while Memory wasn't looking, making the gods forget you ever existed? I certainly don't remember."

"Otherwise, this is too much of a coincidence."

"Even with Fate's favoritism, your path has been suspiciously smooth."

That remark actually jolted Cheng Shi's thoughts in a new direction. He suddenly remembered Cheng Dashi, who had come to this world and triggered Prosperity's downfall, and Scarred Cheng Shi, who had detonated the scarlet mockery in the Real Universe. They...

Were probably the real reason his own path had been so effortless.

Cheng Shi sighed and shook his head:

"If I had a choice, I'd rather not have this favoritism."

"Actually, I've always been curious—why me? Flame of Hope, do you... know?"

The Candle Man's flames swayed. After a long deliberation, he shook his head as well:

"Having been discarded by Fate, I naturally can't fathom His true intentions."

"But everything has its upside. You should count yourself lucky—being chosen as a sacrifice beats rotting in the mud of this world. At least the 'you' of right now can still resist, and still has the right to resist."

"Whether it's Fate's Fixed Destiny or Deceit's rebellion, Void's gaze has always been on you. That scrutiny has certainly brought trouble, but there's no denying They've also pushed you to where you stand today."

"Hmm, since you've exceeded all expectations and already completed the early accumulation of faith, we should move on to discussing the real issue—how to pass the torch."

"The truth about the universe that you've brought me is far removed from my previous understanding. When I revisit Fate's actions through the lens of the Real Universe, it's hard not to think that the Creator is having His samples produce their own 'experiment results.'"

"And that so-called result is very likely the sacrifice that Fate is forging—namely, you."

"Don't look at me like that. It's the most logical conjecture."

"Think about it: if your so-called Experiment Master is using slice universes to conduct an experiment, then He must be anticipating some experimental result."

"Therefore, everything happening in every slice universe—good or bad—should be a necessary step toward that result."

"You said it yourself: beyond this starry sky, countless 'yous' have failed. They died before the Creator's eyes. If the dead ones aren't the answer, then perhaps the 'you' who survived—along with the 'yous' in other rebooted slice universes—might be."

"The evolution of faith follows a traceable pattern. The alternation of Paths isn't meaningless either. The wheel of eras has ground its way here, and the consensus among the gods is that after Void's curtain falls, only endless void remains."

"Those who don't know the universe's truth assume a new era will eventually dawn. But from the perspective of the Creator's universal experiment, doesn't the phrase 'ending in void' suggest that before this era concludes, He will certainly find the experimental result He seeks?"

"If so... I can't help but think that result must come from Fate's hand!"

"Because He is the essence of Void—the god most capable of perceiving the universe's truth!"

"His will is very likely the guiding direction that the Creator hard-coded into this experiment."

"..."

The moment the Flame of Hope finished speaking, Cheng Shi admitted that his fear had grown a little larger.

Befitting a Servant God of Fate, his insights and deductions were razor-sharp. Even Cheng Shi found himself convinced.

He just couldn't figure out one thing: had the Creator gone to all this trouble crafting such an elaborate experiment just to produce a sacrifice?

What did the sacrifice truly represent?

Of course, "all this trouble" was Cheng Shi projecting from a mortal's perspective. Perhaps in the eyes of the true Creator, this experiment—one that squeezed the Real Universe's fear to its absolute limit—was nothing more than something done on a whim.

This heart-to-heart with the Flame of Hope had been tremendously fruitful. Cheng Shi's mind was once again stuffed with a mountain of conjectures.

With the situation growing clearer, it was time to discuss the road ahead—how to resist, and how to break Fixed Destiny.

The Flame of Hope's suggestion aligned perfectly with Cheng Shi's own thinking: as a sacrifice, he needed to throw himself into the game and accelerate Fixed Destiny, amassing as much power as possible along the path of becoming a sacrifice, so that when the time came, he could flip the entire table in one decisive blow.

But when it came to the direction of acceleration, the two had differing views.

Cheng Shi's idea was still to lean on the Fear Faction's protection, play along with Fate, and unite the fearful gods against the Creator.

The Flame of Hope immediately shot this down and told Cheng Shi that the Fear Faction might not be as reliable as he thought.

"The will of gods differs from that of mortals. They've benefited from the Creator's endorsement, ruling the world for countless ages. Even if they learn that this world is nothing but an experiment, would they truly want to break free of it?"

"All because of that so-called fear He told you about?"

"No."

"Fear is Corruption's domain, not Deceit's."

"Deceit disguises, deceives, schemes, swindles, and fabricates illusions to mask the truth. The one thing He would never do is share His genuine feelings with a mortal."

"If fear alone were enough to unite god and man... then wouldn't Corruption be the true god most worthy of protecting humanity?"

"And where is He now?"

"!!!"

What the Flame of Hope had just said went beyond mere advice—it was practically heresy.

He was dismantling Cheng Shi's only lifeline, questioning his source of strength, and striking at the heart of his own ally.

Cheng Shi could tell the Flame of Hope wasn't lying. The problem was that he might be weaving his own agenda into his words.

So after hearing all of this, Cheng Shi's brow furrowed deeply as he asked:

"You're also part of the Fear Faction. You're also cooperating with the Fun God. Why are you telling me this?"

The flames in the Candle Man's eyes flickered faintly, his tone unusually solemn:

"I told you—I represent the will of the smallest minority amidst despair."

"Before today, the Fear Faction was that smallest minority."

"But after meeting you today, I realized that someone exists who is even more fearful than they are. And that someone..."

"Is you."

"Your path of rebellion is the continuation of my will. That's why I can no longer treat you as merely a Fear Faction ally. I need to approach this from your perspective—to find, within this truest form of despair, a road that can carry hope forward."

"This is what it means to pass the torch. And the fire being passed is the fire of your will to survive."

"..."

'Sure enough, the more people gather, the more cliques form—and that logic holds just as true among gods.'

The Flame of Hope was essentially saying that the Fear Faction under Deceit was unreliable. At best, they could use them, but ultimately they had to rely on their own strength.

The problem was that even the Yu Xi Envoy identity had been "inherited" from the Fear Faction, not to mention the fact that virtually all of Cheng Shi's abilities stemmed from the Fun God's machinations. So even knowing he was a puppet, how was he supposed to break free?

The puppet strings in Deceit's hands were far more numerous than Fate's.

The Flame of Hope clearly recognized this as the central problem. After deliberating for some time, he said:

"I'll figure something out. What you need to do right now is accumulate every ounce of strength you can along the path toward Fixed Destiny. As for the rest—we'll have to play it by ear."

"Of course, from your perspective, severing ties with the Fear Faction might be difficult. But think carefully—what I've told you is no deception."

"Nobody knows what Deceit is truly thinking. I find it hard to believe He would sever ties with the Creator and stand alongside a mortal out of simple fear—unless He has some unspoken secret..."

"If I'm overthinking this, then so much the better. But if my suspicions are correct..."

"Your fears may run far deeper than you realize."

Chapter 1123: Return and Escape

Despite their differing stances on the Fear Faction, the mortal and the god had at least reached a consensus: whether it was the Torchbearers or Cheng Shi himself, surviving this experiment required accelerating the accumulation of power.

Seizing the opportunity, Cheng Shi brought up his plan to venture into the Real Universe and collect scattered authorities.

He shared the plan without hesitation—and only after the words had left his mouth did he catch himself with a start, realizing he'd been a bit too forthcoming today.

There seemed to be some ineffable power about the Flame of Hope that made him trust unconditionally.

When the Candle Man noticed Cheng Shi's reaction, he smiled:

"You're perceptive."

"This is one of my abilities, but your sincerity wasn't forced—it's because the hope in your heart is naturally drawing closer to my will."

"The survival instinct drives the helpless to huddle together for warmth, and I am the faint flame that warms them. So as long as you truly carry hope in your heart, you will inevitably be drawn to me."

"Qing-Qing is like this, Xin-Xin is like this, and you... are no different."

"..."

'What's with all these cutesy nicknames? Gross.'

Cheng Shi nodded silently, accepting the explanation, but he made a mental note to look more carefully into the Flame of Hope's true identity later.

Everything he trusted about the Flame of Hope was built on a foundation laid by the Fun God. Yet the Flame of Hope was now warning him to be wary of the Fun God. Cheng Shi knew he should be cautious—but knowing wasn't the same as being able to act on it.

He was already in too deep to pull out.

After a brief silence, the Flame of Hope's fires swayed:

"Through the Prophet's conversations with Xin-Xin, I've already learned a few things about Civilization. Looking at it now, that was probably you passing information to the Torchbearers, wasn't it, Yu Xi?"

"..."

Being called Yu Xi was one thing, but what was this "Prophet" business about?

Fang Shiqing was "Qing-Qing," Qin Xin was "Xin-Xin," but when it came to An Mingyu, she just got her job title?

'Hold on—isn't the Blind One also a Torchbearer? Why the double standard?'

The Candle Man noticed the confusion in Cheng Shi's eyes and said in an inscrutable tone:

"I noticed long ago that the Prophet was different from the girl she used to be. At first, I assumed she'd simply taken a blow from Fate—our Benefactor is rather cold-hearted, after all. Beyond Fixed Destiny, He rarely concerns Himself with anything else."

"But now I understand. She really did change—into a different her."

"I should have realized sooner. Every trace of Change brings new turning points, and the truth about the universe was right in front of me the whole time, yet I still missed it..."

"In the end, I'm not the complete Change..."

"And Xin-Xin too—hiding this from me. But then again, that's classic Xin-Xin."

"A Xin-Xin who protects the Prophet is a true Torchbearer."

"..."

'The Chosen One of Fate really gets the short end of the stick. Abandoned by her own Benefactor was bad enough, but now she's being treated as an outsider even by the Flame of Hope. If she ever found out...'

'Hmm?'

'Wait, that doesn't add up. The Flame of Hope is supposed to embody the will of the smallest minority. Doesn't An Mingyu qualify as one of the smallest minority?'

Though being called "Prophet" wasn't inherently malicious, why was the Flame of Hope treating the Chosen One of Fate differently?

Just because she was a devout follower of Fate?

But her circumstances were the same as the Flame of Hope's—both had been discarded. Shouldn't they be huddling together for warmth?

The Flame of Hope himself didn't seem to notice this inconsistency. He continued:

"Xin-Xin is a follower of War and the best candidate. But given your insistence on keeping your distance from the Torchbearers..."

"Never mind, I'll figure out a way. When you're ready to set out, remember to use this mirror to contact me. I'll find an excuse to send Xin-Xin away so he can 'coincidentally' meet you in the Real Universe."

"However, the method for breaking through the spacetime barrier will have to come from you. I'm confined to this little corner and can't help you with that."

Cheng Shi naturally knew Qin Xin was the ideal choice. If this could work, it would add another layer of probability to the authority retrieval mission.

Even if, for whatever reason, Qin Xin couldn't make it, Cheng Shi had backups. Mo Li, who had switched from Order to War, or Hu Wei, who used a body of Chaos to continuously impersonate a War follower—either would likely suffice.

With that matter settled, the mortal and the god spent a while discussing the current state of the pantheon. Cheng Shi didn't reveal everything, only providing a vague update on the gods' various wills. The Flame of Hope, in turn, gave Cheng Shi a rundown of potential power sources for accelerating toward Fixed Destiny. Then they parted ways.

Not because they'd run out of things to discuss—but because Qin Xin had returned.

Upon hearing footsteps outside the room, the Candle Man froze and glanced at Cheng Shi. Cheng Shi shook his head, smiled, and waved farewell to the Flame of Hope. Then, with a snap of his fingers, he transported himself back to the void where he'd had his audience with Deceit.

Time within the mirror didn't count toward reality, so from the moment the Fun God had thrown him in to now, only the duration of a single conversation had passed.

Such a brief window meant Shadow Cheng Shi could easily return to his original position using his talent. As for the main body... he was still working on that.

But just as Cheng Shi was contemplating whether to retrace his path through the Dreamless Mirror to return to the void, his vision went black. An invisible force yanked him out of That Dream My Nightmare.

Before his consciousness scattered, he caught a fleeting glimpse of an enormous shadow—a turbid, yellowed giant hand—flashing past. When he came to, the first thing he saw was Kataro's smiling face.

Kataro gently helped Cheng Shi to his feet and said respectfully: "You're awake, my lord."

"Is this the temple? He sent me back again?"

Cheng Shi blinked, looking around. Only Kataro and himself were present—Dragon King and the mirror had vanished, and the Fun God was nowhere to be seen.

He glanced down and found that his shadow had already safely remerged. He breathed a sigh of relief.

"Where's our Benefactor? Has He left?"

Kataro nodded with a smile: "Yes. He returned you to the temple and then went straight to His next audience."

"Who is He meeting?"

Kataro's expression shifted. He hesitated a moment, carefully scanned their surroundings, then lowered his head and whispered uncertainly: "I don't know, but it's probably not a player."

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'Not a player?'

Cheng Shi blinked. 'If it's not a player, what kind of "audience" would it be?'

'He couldn't be meeting another god's Envoy, could he?'

'Which Envoy would be blind enough to request an audience with the Fun God? Did they want to become the entertainment?'

While Cheng Shi was puzzling over this, Kataro bowed again: "My lord, your own audience should begin as well. The believers are already waiting at the foot of the divine steps outside the hall."

'Huh?'

"Whose believers?"

"The followers of Chaos..."

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Chapter 1125: Fate's Turning Point

"Yu Xi, precisely."

Every time he introduced his alter ego to someone else, Cheng Shi felt a crushing wave of secondhand embarrassment.

He lived in constant dread that one day all these masks would fall away and the world would discover that everything had been a single player improvising his way through every gap—and at that point, he'd truly be reporting for full-time duty before Death's Bone Throne.

"Come to think of it, I once shared a stage with this Envoy of Deceit—we played the same mortal."

"That Fate Weaver is without a doubt the finest opportunity for approaching Void. Should you have the chance to meet him again, the two of you would do well to grow closer."

"In the era of Void, drawing near to Void can never be wrong."

That might be true, but in Cheng Shi's private definition of Void, Fate had already been quietly excised.

Hu Wei nodded thoughtfully, thinking: 'Cheng Shi and I are brothers—comrades who've stared death in the face together. We're already as close as it gets. Next time I see him, I'll definitely pump him for more of Void's secrets.'

Da Yi was also nodding enthusiastically. From every angle, he had no reason to oppose the Fate Weaver. After all, Cheng Shi had saved his life at the 0221 Experiment Site—even if he'd split half the credit with Lao Hu.

Cheng Shi shot Da Yi a peculiar glance, fairly certain the twitching corner of the man's mouth was him suppressing a colorful expletive.

Perhaps sensing his lord's gaze, Da Yi instantly schooled his expression, standing at rigid attention. 'Finally, my turn.'

Lao Hu's path to fusing with Deceit had been charted. So where was his guidance?

He'd been waiting for this day for so long that before Cheng Shi could even open his mouth, Da Yi blurted out: "My lord, then what about me..."

Faith fusion was ultimately the gods' decision, but under the circumstances, it seemed only right to ask the individual in question.

If Da Yi's wish was too outlandish—wanting to fuse with the "untouchable" Folly, or the reclusive Birth—then Cheng Shi's hands would be tied.

Then again, looking at Da Yi, the man probably didn't have the brain for becoming a Wise Man, and he certainly didn't seem inclined to father a litter of Little Yis...

So after a moment's thought, Cheng Shi tossed the question back:

"What are your thoughts?"

As it turned out, Da Yi really had given this some thought.

Since his Benefactor and his lord were both moving toward Void, and Lao Hu wanted to fuse with Deceit, maybe he should go for...

Fate?

Fate was also Void. And the Fate Assassin—the Fate Thief—to a certain extent carried the ability to confuse and misdirect.

When the Refracting Phantom could steal an enemy's destiny on the battlefield, the only outcome awaiting that enemy was death—no second possibility.

This idea hadn't materialized overnight. It had started as a seedling, but given the current state of affairs, he felt the odds were good.

So he steeled himself, made his decision, and voiced his plan.

And when Cheng Shi heard this choice...

"..."

'You'd have been better off with Folly or even Birth.'

He couldn't spell out the reason directly, so he tried to nudge him away: "Fate... isn't entirely out of the question, but He's far too aloof. Much harder to approach than Deceit."

Da Yi shook his head vigorously:

"Grand... boss, He's not that alo— He's not so aloof anymore."

"Uh, my lord, what I mean is that the old Fate was indeed aloof, but He's changed!"

"You've been busy with important matters and may not have noticed the shifts in the game, but recently, many players—even those below peak level—have been praying to fuse with Fate."

"And as long as you pray, He agrees!"

"Aside from Oblivion players, who've never succeeded, I've already heard of numerous successful dual-faith cases involving Fate. That's why I figured if I could get your approval to fuse with Fate right now, I might even be able to infiltrate and investigate—to see what changes are happening within Void on your behalf!"

'Fate has opened the floodgates on faith restrictions and started fusing indiscriminately?'

'How come I didn't know about this?'

Cheng Shi's heart lurched, and an ominous premonition rose instantly.

It had been some time since he'd had an audience with Fate. What had triggered this change?

Had he learned of this before today's encounter with the Flame of Hope, he might have puzzled over it for a while. But after their exchange, a possibility clicked into place immediately:

Fate was using this to expand His faith pool!

He seemed to be going all in!

In hindsight, the early stages of faith fusion among the gods had been cagey—veiled maneuvers, mutual probing. No one was certain who to merge with. Only Deceit had a clear objective, consistently working to bolster the Fear Faction's ranks.

The middle phase saw accelerated fusion, with probes coming from all directions. Occasionally, the gods would bestow a second faith to forge alliances or broker deals with target faiths.

Of course, "early" and "middle" were relative terms for those in the know. For the uninformed gods, perhaps only now were they seeing the tidal wave of faith fusion rushing toward them—and Fate was among them.

Fate had indeed undergone a dramatic turn, but what had caused it remained unknown to Cheng Shi.

The one thing he was certain of: this was Fate seizing new power!

According to Da Yi, this shift might have started before the Truth experiment even erupted—meaning Fate had begun His territorial expansion in the realm of faith before the Real Universe was even revealed to the gods.

This would certainly let Him rapidly concentrate more power of faith, but it also invited more covetous gazes.

What the gods who'd agreed to fuse with Him were truly scheming in their hearts—nobody could know. Especially the Fear Faction...

'Wait—the Fear Faction?'

Cheng Shi frowned and asked:

"With all the recent work on our Benefactor's behalf, I've had no time to spare for you."

"You just said Fate has been lavishing second faiths left and right. Have you heard of any Deceit followers fusing with Fate?"

"Yes!" Da Yi wasn't stupid. He could see the gravity of the situation, and his expression turned stern: "Cheng Shi is one such case."

"..."

'I didn't mean me, you—!'

'I meant besides me!'

Hu Wei, being the sharper of the two, noticed the lord's momentary pause and realized his brother didn't count. After a brief think, he shook his head:

"No, my lord. At least among the current peak players, Deceit's followers have each found their own paths, but none have fused with Fate."

"That said, this is only what I've personally observed. I hadn't been investigating this specifically. If you'd like to know more..."

"Mm, look into it. Let's see what kind of storm Void is about to stir up."

Cheng Shi nodded casually, then sank into renewed contemplation.

Oblivion's absence made sense—Oblivion wanted to annihilate Fate's sacrifice, and Fate would never leave the door open for that.

But if the Fun God hadn't made a move either...

Was it because He didn't want to, or because Fate wouldn't allow it?

Either way, both scenarios pointed to the same conclusion: Void's fracture seemed imminent. The internal Void war that had raged for some time was the clearest proof that the opposing wills within Void had reached a breaking point.

And once Void truly split, what would happen to him—currently the only known Void walker—in terms of his power? What kind of changes would he face?

At that thought, Cheng Shi paused.

Because he realized the Fun God seemed to have planned for this contingency long ago. His shadow had already been carrying a separate set of faith, split from the main body...

Chapter 1126: The Clown and the Audience

Cheng Shi didn't say more. He genuinely needed someone to help probe Fate's intentions. Even if Fate was inscrutable, he still had to gather perspectives from other faiths.

So he approved Da Yi's request and cautioned:

"Be careful with Fate."

"Fate is about Fixed Destiny, not Change."

"For Him to stir up this much Change now, He's probably about to go all-out for Fixed Destiny."

"You two just need to monitor the movements of Fate's followers. Don't get too close to Him, and absolutely don't try to provoke Him. Right now... He's very short-tempered."

"That's all for today. I have other matters to attend to. I hope you find what you need within Void. When the mission is complete, I'll petition our Benefactor to let you both walk the Chaos Steps again."

"Dismissed."

"!"

The words "walk the Chaos Steps again" sent a jolt of excitement through both Chaos followers, because that meant an audience with their god. No matter how many divine audiences one had elsewhere, nothing compared to the gaze of one's own Benefactor.

Watching Hu Wei bow with renewed vigor and stride away, Cheng Shi's expression was indescribably odd.

'The big dreams my good brother once fed me have finally been rebaked and stuffed right back into his mouth.'

Some things were just that poetic—cyclical, as fate would have it.

After sending off Hu Wei and Da Yi, Kataro reappeared at Cheng Shi's side. He stood at respectful attention, silent, waiting for his lord's inquiry. Sure enough, it didn't take long:

"Has Dragon— has Li Jingming gotten out?"

"Did you see him?"

Kataro shook his head with a smile:

"My lord, I didn't meet the Memory follower. Our Benefactor didn't summon him, either. He awoke in the void on his own, still believing it was you who risked your life to rescue him."

"He waited in the void for quite some time. When he couldn't find any trace of you in the mirror, he returned to reality."

'Memory follower?'

Hearing that label, Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow. 'Kataro was rather "exclusive" with his categorization—he'd already bumped Dragon King out of the Deceit camp.'

Then again, fair enough. Though Dragon King was a follower of the Fun God, he didn't know that the Fun God was actually Chaos. And the Memory scent on him was so strong that revealing these secrets would be unwise.

If Memory learned about Chaos's identity through one of His followers, it could cause unpredictable damage to the Fun God's grand design.

Better to play it safe.

Cheng Shi nodded, then turned to Kataro again: "Did He leave any instructions?"

Kataro's expression immediately turned peculiar. After deliberating for a moment, he relayed the words Deceit had left before departing.

But first, a disclaimer:

"My lord, every word I'm about to speak was bestowed by our Benefactor. I have not added or omitted a single thing, nor would I dare."

"He said:"

"The clown's performance isn't confined to the present. And the clown on stage may not truly be called 'clown.'"

"As for what he's called—that depends on what the audience thinks he's called..."

"?"

After hearing this, Cheng Shi's brow twisted into a knot.

The Fun God was clearly conveying something, but come on—He was Deceit! Why did He have to play the riddler like Fate?

Would it kill Him to just speak plainly?

Oh, right. Sorry. Forgot—He's not human.

Cheng Shi pursed his lips. Cursing was out of the question—at most he could grumble internally.

He felt certain these words were an extension of his conversation with the Flame of Hope, likely tied to Yu Xi's identity. But while he understood the "clown" part, the "audience"—who was that?

Seeing the lord's bafflement, Kataro hesitated, weighed his options for a while, then clenched his fist and whispered a cautious hint:

"My lord, forgive my presumption."

"In my humble opinion, having served our Benefactor for so long, the 'clown' He speaks of... is most likely you."

"..."

Cheng Shi shot Kataro an unamused look, his expression plainly saying:

'No kidding. You think I don't know the clown is me?'

'But if you don't make yourself clearer today, which one of us is the real clown here becomes debatable.'

Sensing his lord's piercing gaze, Kataro hastily added:

"And the 'audience' in His words, I believe..."

"Those two Chaos followers would be the audience of Lord Ultraman."

"Meanwhile, that Memory follower counts as roughly half an audience of Lord Yu Xi."

"?"

'Ultraman is me, Yu Xi is also me—how is what you said any differ—'

'Wait!'

'There actually is a difference!'

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted as understanding detonated in his mind. So the Fun God wasn't talking about a stage and an audience at all—He was talking about deception and faith!

Of course! Viewed from the broadest perspective of faith, Ultraman had long since been inscribed in history and possessed a far deeper foundation of faith than Yu Xi. The proof was that the Chaos container accumulated divinity far faster than the Deceit container.

But the truth was, Ultraman was Yu Xi. They were simply different roles performed by the same person before different "audiences." So why would the same person's faith diverge into different types?

Because under Origin's naming conventions, the world had faith categories for Chaos and Deceit—but there had never been a category called "Cheng Shi."

"Cheng Shi" would never become a symbol of faith worshipped by mortal lives. But Yu Xi just might!

Not only might it be possible—Yu Xi could potentially devour Ultraman's faith entirely, grafting Chaos's faith onto the Envoy of Deceit!

As for how to blur and graft that faith...

The Fun God had already supplied the answer:

"As for what he's called—that depends on what the audience thinks he's called."

Was this sentence saying that when believers believed you were someone, their faith would flow to that someone?

Put simply: Chaos followers worshipped Ultraman, which was why the Chaos container's divinity accumulated faster. But if they came to realize that the Chaos Envoy Ultraman was actually the Deceit Envoy Yu Xi...

Wouldn't the faith directed at Ultraman then redirect to Yu Xi?

It wasn't impossible!

After all, the Chaos Envoy's identity had been created by Deceit using Deceit's own methods to corrupt Memory. It inherently carried Deceit's DNA.

Furthermore, the true Chaos had long since become Order. Today's Chaos had been replaced by Deceit—which laid the very foundation for conflating the two faiths.

A performance of fooling history and deceiving the masses also aligned perfectly with the public's understanding of the Deceit path. So revealing this "truth" wouldn't strike anyone as jarring—it would feel surprisingly logical. After all, the name Ultraman was inherently playful. If a Servant God of Void who toyed with the mortal world had deliberately chosen that name to corrupt memory...

Let's just say it would be reasonable squared—reasonable to the nth degree.

And with that, the Flame of Hope's earlier words...

"So what you must do is spread your faith beyond those boundaries. Ideally, you'd recruit a new batch of believers through some grand feat visible to the entire world. Once achieved, your faith will be deeply rooted, and your divine status firmly established!"

...would be accomplished. And accomplished in the past!

Just as the Fun God had said: the clown's performance isn't confined to the present.

"!!!"

The realization made Cheng Shi's entire body tense, his scalp tingling.

Deceit had seen through everything long ago and had laid the groundwork for all of it.

Every move He made seemed designed to elevate His own Envoy. He had played Chaos, scattering traces throughout history, all so that a Servant God of Void named "Yu Xi" would have evidence to stand upon.

He had paved the road to godhood for His Envoy. And now, the man who had once declared "I don't want to become a god" had become the one reaping all the rewards.

'You saw this day coming all along, didn't You, my Lord?'

Chapter 1127: Dragon King's Choice

After bidding farewell to Kataro, Cheng Shi returned to the rooftop rest area.

He'd been mulling over how to orchestrate the revelation that Ultraman was actually Yu Xi, but no matter how he turned it over, this kind of trick would at best enlighten the players currently in the

game. The Chaos followers who had long since vanished into the river of history obviously couldn't convert to Yu Xi.

But that was enough. Compared to the long-lost Land of Hope, in this era, the players' faith clearly mattered more.

This had to be done without a trace—leaving just enough breadcrumbs for the game's sharp minds or the History School to discover the inconsistencies on their own and expose Ultraman's true identity. Only then would the players believe that history had already been tampered with by Deceit.

Cheng Shi pondered this for a long time, until a phone call interrupted his train of thought.

He glanced toward the warehouse. Though he hadn't picked up yet, he seemed to already know who was on the other end.

He raised an eyebrow, strode over to the warehouse, and answered with an opening line that left the other party speechless:

"It's me."

"..."

Silence followed those two words. After a moment, soft laughter came through.

"So you really did escape the mirror!"

"I sat outside it for ages without seeing any sign of you, so I figured you might have found another way out. That's why I called."

"So tell me, Cheng Shi—how did you do it?"

Cheng Shi was amused. He wanted to drop a breezy "Grandpa has his ways," but thought better of it.

Dragon King had clearly spent a good while sitting outside the mirror, moved by Cheng Shi's self-sacrifice in swapping places with him. A rare personal favor like that shouldn't be squandered. So he smiled and said:

"Does this count as the first memory exchange?"

"..." Li Jingming paused briefly on the other end, then chuckled and shook his head. "No. I'm merely voicing my curiosity. Whether you choose to answer is up to you."

"?"

'Hey, that's not how this is supposed to go.'

'What kind of new-age con is this?'

'Playing the emotional card to freeload other people's memories?'

'Just because you sound magnanimous doesn't mean I have to bare my soul. Do you know how hard it was for this old grandpa to rescue his grandson on these creaky old bones? If you don't cough something up today, it won't do justice to the Fun God's torment of me.'

Just as Cheng Shi was figuring out how to ask what Li Jingming had seen, Li Jingming spoke up first.

"Since you've already escaped, I imagine you're wondering what memories I witnessed."

'?'

Cheng Shi's expression froze.

'I am not! Stop making things up—I'll sue you for slander!'

"Mm, it was always meant to be shared with you. The thing is, what I witnessed is something you already know. If you don't mind, I can tell you again."

"What do you mean?" Cheng Shi frowned, a note of surprise creeping in. "You revisited your own past?!"

Li Jingming nodded, a misty nostalgia filling his eyes.

"Yes. I chose my own past."

"!!!"

Cheng Shi was stunned. He'd assumed Dragon King would never choose his own memories over the Jokers' memories—after all, the whole point of entering had been to scheme for the Jokers' memories and commit them to record. He'd even been preparing for how to respond if Dragon King had chosen his memories, and how to navigate that revelation.

Yet against all expectations, this Memory follower who perpetually sought new memories to record had chosen to re-record one he'd experienced before.

"Why?" Cheng Shi asked, genuinely curious.

Li Jingming replied with a light laugh:

"I've said before—I constantly record the world's memories because I want to do something for this world."

"But at the end of the day, I'm just an ordinary person. Though I came from a Daoist temple, I can't cleave away my seven emotions and six desires. I have my own joys and sorrows."

"And when I stood before the Jokers' memories—when I saw my master's face appearing in a different form before my eyes—I realized that sometimes, it's worth making a record for myself."

"I don't have perfect recall. I can remember eight or nine tenths of my days at Cloud Field Temple, but even that remaining one or two tenths holds a beautiful memory."

"So I chose to step back into my past and grow up at Cloud Field Temple once more. I committed to memory every blade of grass and tree, every flower and grain of soil, every roof tile and wall, every master and disciple—so that my longing would be free of regret..."

"I imagine you chose to return to your past as well."

"I could see the love in your father's eyes. So all this time, everything you've been fighting for... it's been for him..."

Dragon King's voice was thick with emotion and wistful sighs, but to Cheng Shi's ears, it painted a completely different picture.

The memory at the starting point had been nothing more than the scene of Old Jia coming to adopt him. The two had only just met. Even if Old Jia had taken a liking to him, where was this profound, visible-to-Dragon-King fatherly love supposed to come from?

So Cheng Shi punctured Dragon King's lie immediately, snorting:

"Alright, alright—so you're a sentimental guy, I get it. But before you circled back to Cloud Field Temple, you peeked at quite a few other people's memories, didn't you?"

"You probably walked a good stretch of the maze, freeloading plenty, and only then doubled back to pick Cloud Field Temple, right?"

"Now I understand why you warned me on your first trip into That Dream My Nightmare to pick one path and stick to it. You couldn't find your way out through someone else's memories and had to retrace your steps, didn't you?"

"Tsk, Dragon King, oh Dragon King—look at you now. What, did you develop an interest in my profession?"

"..."

The scene turned excruciatingly awkward. On the other end of the line, even breathing stopped.

When Dragon King stayed silent, Cheng Shi knew he'd hit the mark. His eyes gleamed with mischief, and he deliberately let a few stifled "pfft" laughs leak through from his end, making the other party's predicament even more unbearable—payback for Dragon King's little fib.

He didn't actually care how many surface-level memories the other had seen. What he cared about was: however many you saw of others', that's how many you owe me.

Li Jingming was quiet for a long time. Then he sighed, let out a resigned laugh, and conceded:

"I admit defeat this time."

"I knew this gambit was risky, but I insisted on taking the bet because I didn't want you to see my sorry state."

"I got lost in the mirror with no way out. I didn't manage to dig up any of the Jokers' deep memories, and I burned through a lot of my items. In the end, I had no choice but to retrace the old path before I could finally meet up with you..."

"But through this experience, I've also realized something. Recording memories is one thing, but indiscriminately recording every last detail of someone else's memories can destabilize a person's consciousness."

"It's not like acting—it's more like splitting."

"Perhaps it's a method for splitting off a new personality, but it's far too dangerous. Even a god wouldn't dare attempt it."

"Otherwise, His Collection Hall would be crammed with complete, uninterrupted memories of every kind, instead of only select masterpieces."

This actually struck a chord with Cheng Shi.

He'd just traversed the Memory Junkyard, and the kaleidoscopic memories there truly could blur a person's consciousness—even contaminate them until they became memory refuse themselves.

But he obviously wasn't about to let Dragon King's deflection slide. He gave a chuckle and said:

"So? Don't change the subject. Tell me what you saw and how much. I'm quite curious—what exactly is lurking in the Jokers' surface-level memories?"

Chapter 1128: You're Saying the Dark Dragon King Didn't Return to the Mirror?

Left with no choice, Dragon King shared the surface-level Joker memories he'd witnessed with Cheng Shi.

However, most of it was mundane trivia from the past—nothing particularly thought-provoking. What he'd seen aligned with the dreamlike fragments Cheng Shi had observed on the maze's surface layer and with what he already knew about everyone's histories.

By the end, Cheng Shi was pursing his lips with diminishing interest.

Who would've guessed that the greatest reward from That Dream My Nightmare would be watching Dragon King make a fool of himself?

'Rare indeed—even this Memory follower had an off day.'

"You didn't try the seventh path?"

"Seventh path?" Li Jingming's voice halted on the other end. "What seventh path?"

"!!??"

'Dragon King didn't see the seventh path?!'

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted, his expression freezing momentarily.

'No wonder!'

'I knew something was off—why would there be a path leading to Void inside an Existence artifact stuffed full of memories? Turns out it really was a backdoor the Fun God opened just for me!'

'But why can He even tamper with an Existence artifact?'

'Did Memory get robbed? He can't possibly have lost His authority without even realizing it, can He?'

'Deceit can't be that powerful, can He? Otherwise, what's He waiting for? Why hasn't He unified the universe already?'

In that instant, Cheng Shi recalled what Wei Mu had once said to his Benefactor, Folly: "If you're truly so wise, why would you let the other fifteen gods stand as your equals?"

Right now, swapping "wise" for "powerful" fit perfectly.

After a long silence on the other end, Li Jingming spoke again, puzzled:

"Cheng Shi, is this seventh path you found the reason you escaped?"

Cheng Shi reined in his thoughts, utterly unflustered, and lied on the spot:

"Exactly. I followed the seventh path straight out."

"I didn't expect it to lead directly to the void outside the mirror."

Li Jingming's brow tightened. He carefully reviewed the maze's layout in his memory, confirmed he absolutely hadn't missed any path, and grew even more curious: "Where was this seventh path?"

Cheng Shi smirked:

"Dragon King, you seem to have gotten dumber. I think you must've left your brain inside the mirror."

"Think carefully—you and I entered the same maze. When you couldn't see that path, shouldn't you ask yourself whether you missed something?"

Li Jingming was far from stupid. There had been no such path before him—naturally he couldn't see it. But Cheng Shi's hint immediately pointed him toward the one direction in the maze besides the cardinal points: up!

A sharp gleam flashed in his eyes as he said gravely: "The walls?! You climbed out through the mirror walls of the maze?"

"Exactly!" Cheng Shi curled his lips and spun his yarn along Dragon King's line of reasoning. "I nearly got lost in the memories too. In desperation, I went all in and scrambled upward as hard as I could. Then, in a daze, I found an exit in the wall and jumped into the void."

"But when I woke up and tried to retrace it in my mind, I couldn't remember how to get there."

"..."

This was practically an open admission of lying, yet Li Jingming couldn't challenge it—because the power of Memory genuinely could produce such effects.

But the main reason was that he'd lied too, which left him no ground to expose Cheng Shi.

Silence settled over both ends of the line. After a long pause, Cheng Shi finally asked, curious:

"Has something like this ever happened before?"

"If the person swapped in escapes on their own, does the Nightmare Shadow automatically get pulled back into That Dream My Nightmare?"

"No, and it can't."

Li Jingming's tone shifted, becoming rather laden with meaning: "Because my Nightmare Shadow—the fake Li Jingming who'd been impersonating me—has already left."

"?" Cheng Shi blinked, a little lost. "What do you mean, 'left'?"

"He left Cloud Field Temple. And before he did, he even left me a letter."

"Wait, hold on—you're saying the Dark Dragon King didn't return to the mirror and has become an independent entity that left your rest area?!"

'Dark Dragon King...'

Li Jingming's eyelid twitched. He gave a quiet affirmation.

Cheng Shi was dumbstruck: "Huh? Then the mirror..."

"I don't know if it's because of his departure, but I no longer have a Nightmare Shadow inside the mirror. That Dream My Nightmare seems to have stopped working on me."

"!!!"

'Stopped working?'

'No way—then how am I supposed to contact the Flame of Hope in the future?'

Cheng Shi's brow darkened as he hurriedly asked: "Has it stopped working on just you, or..."

"I don't know. I haven't had a chance to have someone else test it."

Before Li Jingming could finish, Cheng Shi jumped in:

"I'll do it—let me test it. Just bury the mirror at the Jokers' meeting graveyard like the Dark Dragon King did. I'll go retrieve it when I have time."

"Don't worry, I won't have any funny ideas about your mirror. I'm simply overcome by an urge to help others."

"..."

'More like you're overcome by an urge to lie.'

Li Jingming shook his head with an amused laugh and agreed:

"Fine. Since this mirror is no longer of use to me, it can be 'donated' as shared Joker property, so all of you can access His Collection Hall whenever you wish."

"I've tested it—the Collection Hall can still be reached."

No sooner had the words landed than Cheng Shi said shamelessly: "What a coincidence—the Jokers just appointed an asset manager, and that would be yours truly. Rest assured, I'll take excellent care of this first piece of communal property."

"...When was this appointment? How come I don't know about it?" Li Jingming's eyelid twitched again.

"What do you mean? You know now, don't you? And you're the first to know, at that."

"..."

Li Jingming's mouth twitched violently. 'Classic him.'

Though still bantering, Cheng Shi hadn't forgotten that the Dark Dragon King had left Dragon King a letter. He wanted to ask what it said, but then he heard Dragon King say with deliberate weight:

"That falls outside our earlier 'debt repayment.' If you want to know what the letter says, let's trade."

"Tell me what you saw on your way out of That Dream My Nightmare, and I'll tell you the message he left me."

"?"

Cheng Shi didn't miss a beat: "The back of the mirror's engravings, repeating patterns, and endless darkness. There, I'm done. Your turn."

Li Jingming chuckled: "What I want is the truth, not lies. You can't fool me, Cheng Shi. Think it over and come find me when you're ready. I have things to attend to."

With that, Dragon King hung up.

Cheng Shi stared at the phone in his hand, his expression odd as he muttered under his breath:

"It's not like I can tell you the Fun God opened a backdoor for me inside That Dream My Nightmare. If a Memory follower like you found out about that, what would I do if you got jealous?"

"Sigh, the hardships of being a grandpa—always worrying about the grandkids..."

...

Reality. An unknown Daoist temple in an unnamed province.

Li Jingming sat cross-legged on a meditation cushion. Before him lay six thick accordion-fold books arranged side by side, each bearing a name on its cover. A closer look revealed they belonged to the six members of the Jokers—himself included.

The edges of these books were dark with dense ink, clearly filled with writing. Judging by their thickness, the stories recorded within were far more extensive than what he'd shared with Cheng Shi.

He stacked all the books together, carried them into the scripture vault, and pressed them beneath a stone. Then he returned to the main hall, lit incense, and prayed:

"All mortals suffer, whether the gods descend or not."

"All deeds are virtuous, whether the world crumbles or not."

He bowed three times, placed the incense in its holder, and glanced at the white paper on the desk. Eight characters were written on it:

"Desire is no sin. I'll spare you this once."

Li Jingming's eyebrows drew together slightly. After a moment of silent contemplation, he soundlessly mouthed a name.

## Chapter 1129: New Trial: Folly

The matter of the Dark Dragon King weighed on Cheng Shi's mind.

He had a nagging feeling that That Dream My Nightmare harbored secrets beyond its connection to the Dreamless Mirror, but he couldn't find an excuse to wheedle the information out of Dragon King. For now, he'd have to shelve the issue and observe quietly.

Two tasks currently lay before Cheng Shi. The first was venturing into the Real Universe to retrieve War's scattered authority. The second was investigating the Folly town that Scarred Cheng Shi had mentioned, to search for clues about the Eye of Mockery.

The former still required finding a method to break through the spacetime barrier, and the Flame of Hope hadn't sent word about arranging Qin Xin yet—that one couldn't be rushed. So the only viable option at the moment was the latter.

He'd originally planned to recruit some Joker members to investigate together, but considering that information from the other world might differ slightly from his own, he ultimately decided to scout first and call for reinforcements once he had more accurate intel.

Still, for safety's sake, he brought along one person.

The call connected, and Cheng Shi got straight to the point: "Hey, Old Zhang—there's news about the Fool's Play Mask. Come with me somewhere."

Zhang Jizu's expression turned serious on the other end. He replied immediately: "Got it. When, who else, and where?"

"Leaving now. Just the two of us. Chaos Epoch, Civilization Lonely Tower, Folly town."

Cheng Shi wasted no words, quickly relaying the prayer time and invocation. Then he sat cross-legged on the ground and waited for the appointed time.

Meanwhile, in the void, Zhang Jizu set down his phone and looked up at those spiraling, star-speckled eyes with a grave expression, squinting:

"You foresaw this call, didn't You, my Lord?"

"That's why You summoned me beforehand and pulled me into the void."

Those eyes chuckled softly:

"I'm not Fate. What are you going on about, 'foresaw'?"

"It was merely a coincidence."

"In recognition of your devotion, I summoned you to bestow a grace. I know the ambition in your heart runs deep—but a bit of ambition is always good. Otherwise this world grows far too dull."

"Aren't you carving tombstones for the gods? Finish Truth's tombstone. He'll be needing it."

"!!??"

Zhang Jizu's eyes went wide.

Well, not that wide...

He said in disbelief: "You're making a move against Truth?"

"Any moves worth making have already been made. Don't ask what you shouldn't ask—just keep your head down and carve your tombstones."

"Also, make mine look nice. Even if it never gets used, it'll make a fine decoration."

"I am your Benefactor, after all. Surely mine shouldn't look worse than Old Bones's, right?"

"Hee~"

"That's all. I have other matters to attend to. You're dismissed."

With that, those eyes brooked no argument, whipping up a gale of nothingness that swept Zhang Jizu away. A final remark trailed after him:

"Oh, and one more thing—ignore the clown. Anyone can visit Folly's territory. Old Bones's little bones, however, cannot go for now."

Landing back in the cemetery, Zhang Jizu stood before the tombstones of the gods, staring blankly. His gaze swept across the three Civilization graves, lingering for a long time on Truth's unfinished tombstone, his mind churning with shock and uncertainty.

'Why has Truth fallen?'

'And why can't I go to Folly's territory?'

...

On the other side.

Completely unaware, Cheng Shi closed his eyes in devout prayer when the appointed time arrived:

"Truth and lies, indistinguishable. Reality and illusion, beyond debate."

"Your devoted follower prays to You. Open a trial..."

"A trial of 'observing the daily life near the town of Redi Core beside Civilization Lonely Tower No. 413!'"

The prayer faded. His vision bled red.

[Wish Trial (Session No. 12814229109136, Foolish Act — Folly) has begun]

[Matching teammates (1/6)]

[Trial Objective: Yet Another Foolish Act (5-day time limit)]

"?"

'As expected—it's a Folly stage!'

As the pinnacle of universal wisdom, every trial He administered came without guidance of any kind. Just two words: "Foolish Act."

Perhaps in His eyes, everything in this world was a foolish act—including Himself.

'But this time I'm only going to scope things out. I won't do anything. That can't possibly count as a foolish act, right?'

While he was thinking this, Cheng Shi's vision gradually went dark.

[Match successful (6/6). Entering trial]

...

A dry wind roused Cheng Shi. The moment consciousness returned, searing pain erupted from every inch of his body.

His eyes burned as though set ablaze. His torso felt pierced by a thousand needles front and back. His wrists and ankles felt like the bones had been ground to powder, leaving him unable to feel his hands or feet at all.

The sudden agony triggered his brain's emergency response, cutting off all pain sensation instantly—but it also put him on high alert.

He needed to determine whether his current state was a product of the trial environment, or whether a teammate had ambushed him from the very start.

Fortunately, though Cheng Shi lay on the ground with eyes full of blood and no light in sight, Shadow Cheng Shi could still see the surroundings.

This was clearly a prison cell, built into the side of a cliff. The iron bars facing the interior were embedded deep in the stone wall and looked impossibly sturdy, while the exterior was completely open, dropping straight to a sheer precipice.

The gaping opening let in gusts of mountain wind that dispersed the smell of blood in the cell—but couldn't budge the six critically wounded prisoners lying on the floor.

These appeared to be all the players in this trial. At least he wasn't the only one injured, which meant the situation wasn't completely dire.

'Makes sense—it's supposed to be an observation-only trial. No way the difficulty is this extreme, right?'

'Though... prison again... prisoners again...'

'Does this cursed game have to chain me to inmates every single time?'

Cheng Shi sighed helplessly. Unable to lift his arms, he had his shadow extend a hand behind him to quietly heal himself. Before long, he was back on his feet.

And when he stood up and got a clear look at the teammate lying closest to him, the smile of recovery froze solid on his face.

"Brother-in-law!! Save me, brother-in-law!"

A certain bald man opened his mouth and immediately started running it. "I knew it—when I heard the magpie outside my window this morning, I knew something good was coming! What are the odds, huh? Warrior plus priest—we're invincible, brother-in-law!"

"..."

'Why is it him?!'

Cheng Shi went numb. He'd never imagined running into The Prisoner in a place like this.

Running into The Prisoner was bad enough—but where was Mi Laozhang? Had the matching system failed to pair him?

And even if it missed the Chosen One of Death, surely it didn't have to match him with the Chosen One of Oblivion?!

'What kind of brain-dead matching algorithm is this? Is it trying to make sure Oblivion's followers can find me?!'

Sure enough, the second person to stand was none other than Mo Shu—luggage case in hand despite both arms being broken. And the instant Cheng Shi laid eyes on him, all the memories about this Scavenger that had been blurred and erased came flooding back, letting him recognize the man immediately.

'What's going on—did the power of Memory vanish here?'

Not far from Mo Shu lay two women. One Cheng Shi recognized—Ji Yue, the Erudite Scholar he'd hoodwinked during that Chaos trial where they'd plucked Fate's bitter fruit. The other was a cold-eyed female player he'd never seen before.

She looked at him with thinly veiled hostility. Clearly, she knew who he was.

As for the last teammate in this cell...

It was an unfamiliar man. He had a very plain face—the kind you wouldn't notice in a crowd, wouldn't remember afterward. An utterly unremarkable everyman.

Yet he studied Cheng Shi with keen interest, completely ignoring his own injuries. He stood up directly and offered a greeting:

"We meet again, lo... Fate Weaver?"

Cheng Shi's brow furrowed. 'I've never seen this person before—so why does he seem so familiar with me? And that aborted word—what does he know?'

Just as Cheng Shi was blocking out The Prisoner's chatter and racking his brain to identify the man, The Prisoner's booming voice blew the stranger's cover wide open.

"Wei Mu?"

"Are you washed up or something?"

"How else did you end up matched with me and my brother-in-law?"

"..."

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted violently, his heart clenching.

'WHO?!'

Chapter 1130: "I've Found My Answer"

The man with the forgettable face was indeed Wei Mu.

Cheng Shi knew this couldn't be his true body—that was a puppet marionette. The flesh-and-blood form before him, impervious to pain, had to be one of his actual puppets.

'Where did he hide the real one?'

Cheng Shi instinctively scanned the surroundings. Wei Mu, meanwhile, smiled and nodded to everyone, then swept his gaze around the cell. He pinched some soil from the ground and studied it briefly, then leaned out through the cliff opening for a look before declaring with total certainty:

"Red volcanic ash, a mountain prison, machine-spun coarse clothing, sacrificial garments. If I'm not mistaken, we're somewhere near the Civilization Lonely Towers in the four-hundred sequence."

"To be more precise, given the severity of the punishment inflicted on our bodies, we're likely in the early range—under four hundred twenty."

"The History School originally numbered the Civilization Lonely Towers of the Chaos Epoch to help pinpoint the location and historical context of trials as quickly as possible. It seems they succeeded—at least for players who enjoy studying Folly, it's extremely useful."

Wei Mu's presence was commanding. Though he knew full well that Cheng Shi was Yu Xi, he made no indication of it whatsoever, simply doing what he felt needed doing.

When he finished, he walked to the cliff's edge, turned to face the group, and gave a casual wave. Then, before everyone's astonished eyes, he fell straight backward.

He'd thrown himself off the cliff!

His only parting words: "I've found my answer."

Moments later, a thunderous crash echoed from the base of the cliff. The group flinched. The Prisoner, ignoring his injuries entirely, sprang to his feet with a carp-like flip, rushed to the opening, gripped the cliff face, and peered down.

While watching, he muttered:

"Come on, it's not that bad. Getting matched with me isn't exactly shameful. Why end it all?"

"..."

"..."

"..."

The shock of Wei Mu's suicide instantly curdled into something else entirely. The scene lapsed into silence.

But while the non-Silence followers fell silent, the actual Silence follower kept right on yapping.

The Prisoner turned around to face his remaining cellmates, stepped aside, pointed at the opening, and offered:

"If any of you feel too embarrassed to stay, you're welcome to jump too. Don't worry about my feelings. Really, I can take it."

"..."

"..."

"..."

'I don't know about your resilience, but I could definitely offer a review of your shamelessness.'

Cheng Shi had lost the will to speak. He rolled his eyes at The Prisoner while keeping all his attention fixed on Mo Shu.

This Scavenger had too many overlapping identities stacked on him: the twisted pastry chef, the delivery boy for Deceit's items, the life-or-death rival who'd barely fallen short, the lackey of the Oblivion camp...

Cheng Shi had to stay wary of whatever tricks the man might pull with that luggage case. He was also wondering—now that even Mo Shu's power of Memory had vanished, would that old "trick" for testing whether someone carried Oblivion's will still work?

While he was pondering this, Mo Shu opened his suitcase with a stony face and crammed all six cakes inside into his own mouth.

With each swallow, the wounds on his body healed a little more. By the time the last one was gone, he was fully recovered.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi was confused.

'What's the meaning of this?'

'No more testing other people for Oblivion's will?'

'But as the cakes get annihilated, your body recovers—isn't that the opposite of Oblivion's will?'

'What, did you also figure out that "the pinnacle of devotion is blasphemy"?''

Mo Shu glanced up at Cheng Shi. As if reading his confusion, he snorted coldly:

"This isn't recovery—it's the oblivion of self-inflicted pain."

"Fate Weaver, you've clearly strayed from my master's will."

"?"

Hearing that, Cheng Shi gave a dry chuckle.

'Sorry, but I was probably never anywhere near Oblivion's will. It's your Benefactor who keeps shamelessly trying to sidle up to me.'

'And if eating a few mutton-fat cakes counts as "drawing close to Him" ...'

'I can throw them back up and return them.'

Of course, trading barbs before understanding the situation would only create headaches. Seeing that Mo Shu wasn't about to attack immediately, Cheng Shi held his ground and continued observing the relationship between the Scavenger and the unknown woman.

They clearly knew each other.

Because right after Mo Shu devoured his first suitcase of cakes, he produced a second one—and this new case appeared to be prepared for the female player.

"..."

'Dude, are you running a wholesale bakery?'

Mo Shu was being cautious as well. He pulled the female teammate close and fed her the cakes, oblivioning the pain from her wounds. But he'd barely fed her two before he reached for another and found the case empty!

His brow sank, his gaze sharpened, and he whipped around—only to find The Prisoner had somehow materialized right behind him, mouth packed to bursting with cake, chewing furiously while gesturing with both hands:

"Deesh ahr... wawwy gwood."

"..."

"..."

"..."

The scene turned excruciatingly awkward. Cheng Shi nearly failed to hold in his laughter.

He might be laughing, but that didn't mean the aggrieved parties found it funny.

Mo Shu's expression turned arctic. Without a word, he drove a fist straight at The Prisoner's face. But The Prisoner didn't even dodge—he actually opened his mouth wider and leaned into it.

BOOM—

The fist connected dead-center with The Prisoner's mouth, sending him flying. The explosive force of Oblivion also annihilated every crumb of cake in his mouth.

The Prisoner tumbled across the ground, completely unharmed, yet still looked pained as he lamented:

"What a waste! Such delicious cake, all gone."

"Comrade Scavenger, no more wasting food in the future! Choking me to death is one thing, but wasting food is a disgrace!"

"DIE!"

Mo Shu had reached his limit. Or rather, for a Scavenger, problems that could be solved with violence were best solved with violence. In an instant, the two warriors collided.

They were evenly matched, blow for blow. After a brief exchange, neither could gain the upper hand—but they'd nearly demolished the cliff-side cage in the process.

Seeing things going south, Cheng Shi frowned slightly. Spotting an opening, he slipped through the shattered bars and out of the cell.

He knew he'd come here with a mission and couldn't afford to get tangled up with these people for long.

The prone Ji Yue watched the two combatants with an eager look, as if she wanted to jump in, but after careful deliberation, she chose to follow Cheng Shi's lead—escaping through the broken bars and vanishing from sight.

Her injuries seemed to have never affected her at all. In fact, "watered" by her own blood, this Purgatory Bishop moved with the agility of a warrior.

She left without hesitation, sparing no lingering glance for anyone present.

The Prisoner, for his part, showed zero reaction to her departure—he was too busy fending off Mo Shu's attacks with body and mouth alike.

"Comrade Scavenger, I think you're—"

"How are you even—"

"Hey, I'm trying to say—"

"You are so unreasonable... let me finish..."

"Wait!"

"Brilliant! Obliterating someone else's words—that's the very essence of Silence! Why not join us? Together with my brother-in-law, the three of us could... hm?"

"Why'd you stop obliterating?"

"Scavenger, you've strayed from my master's will this quickly?"

"..."

The boomerang spun back with devastating precision, catching Mo Shu completely off guard.

He'd never imagined there would come a moment when he'd feel this conflicted. Obliterating The Prisoner would prove the point, but not obliterating him was just as problematic. He was stuck—trapped between two equally terrible options, left with nothing but revulsion.

'What rotten luck!'