

The Gods 1171

Chapter 1171: The Container Is of No Use to You

The negotiation went smoothly. Before long, Herobos personally escorted Cheng Shi back to the Trial.

Note — escorted, not dumped.

This was the first time Cheng Shi had departed the void with such dignity. Herobos had even torn open the passage between void and reality Himself, watching as Cheng Shi returned safely.

Still, Cheng Shi knew that regardless of how cooperative Herobos appeared, the Envoy would inevitably question the truthfulness of the whole affair. After all, "usurpation" was perhaps the most insane scheme imaginable beneath this starry sky. A mortal who hadn't even become an Envoy yet couldn't possibly put Herobos at ease with nothing but talk.

So Cheng Shi guessed that Herobos would seek verification from someone — and the best candidate was, of course, his own Benefactor: [Deceit]!

Therefore, the instant Cheng Shi returned to the Trial, his first priority was contacting the Fun God to tell Him "don't blow it."

Given the tacit understanding between this man and his god, [Deceit] would presumably be delighted by such prime entertainment. But the steadiness etched into Cheng Shi's bones wouldn't let him sit idle. Opportunities were never won by waiting — the philosophy of braving wind and waves meant riding the wind when it came, and creating your own when it didn't.

He pulled out his dice and began reciting [Deceit]'s prayer, urgently expressing his "devotion." But no matter how long he prayed, his Benefactor gave no response. This abnormal silence made Cheng Shi's heart lurch, and his mind began to race with anxious speculation.

'Where did the Fun God go?'

'He couldn't possibly be fighting someone again, could he?'

As a matter of fact, [Deceit] had indeed gotten into a fight with [Fate]. But it was already over.

Neither had been able to overpower the other. The passionate infighting concluded anticlimactically, and after exchanging mutual contempt, they went their separate ways.

Shortly after the two sovereigns of [Void] split apart, Herobos — having come to seek verification — intercepted [Deceit] and appeared before Him with a peculiar expression.

Gazing at those playful, mischief-laden eyes that wouldn't stop darting about, Herobos didn't even dare breathe. He simply stood there, head bowed, hands clasped in deference.

He didn't know how to broach the subject, and didn't dare speak first. If this whole affair turned out to be fabricated, then the moment the word "usurpation" left His mouth, [Deceit]'s shameless nature might well pin the whole thing on Him as the instigator.

So He just stood there, awaiting [Deceit]'s "judgment."

Those eyes regarded Herobos with a complex expression — though the complexity didn't seem directed at Him. After a long while, He spoke:

"Tsk—

You want to ask but don't dare. So why are you here?"

That single sentence told Herobos that what Cheng Shi had said was most likely true. But He still couldn't gamble on the remaining chance that it wasn't, so He offered a careful reply:

"With all due respect, True God — there should not be such distance between my Master and [Void]. I've come to see whether there might still be room for reconciliation."

The response was impressively crafted — giving nothing away while tossing the ball back to the other party.

Those eyes rolled slightly, scrutinizing Him for a moment, then gave another scoff:

"The Sea of Desire surges endlessly because all beings — mortal and divine alike — have desires.

I know exactly what you're thinking. Put your heart back in your belly.

You don't actually believe a mere mortal approached you to discuss overthrowing a true god, do you?

Heh. That would be too ridiculous."

"!!!"

'I knew it!'

Herobos's gaze sharpened as certainty settled in His chest.

Just as He'd suspected — this wasn't Yu Xi's scheme at all. It was almost certainly [Void]'s plot against His Benefactor all along. At most, Yu Xi was nothing more than a messenger!

The only problem was that this open scheme struck at His deepest vulnerability, making it impossible to refuse. Herobos examined His own heart once more. Even though it was deeply unfair to His Benefactor, they had said it themselves — only when plunged into the abyss of despair could one burn the boats...

'Without annihilating the self, how can there be rebirth?'

'My Benefactor, for the sake of Your will of [Oblivion], the suffering of the Divine Throne — let me bear it for You!'

Suppressing the turmoil in His heart, Herobos gave a slight bow to those eyes. The matter was settled — He no longer needed to verify anything. But just as He was about to withdraw, those eyes called Him back.

"A Divine Throne does stir the heart, doesn't it?"

It seems you're already fantasizing about the day you'll stand as my equal."

Herobos's heart trembled. Not daring to reveal His true thoughts, He responded dutifully: "I wouldn't dare."

"Tsk—

It's not that you wouldn't dare think it. You just wouldn't dare say it.

Oh well. Someone has to benefit. You're simply the one [Fate] chose.

Since a new [Oblivion] is about to ascend, the title of [Oblivion]'s Envoy should be of no use to you anymore, correct?"

Herobos froze, not understanding what [Deceit] meant.

Those eyes didn't bother with suspense and got straight to the point:

"When the day comes that you ascend to the Divine Throne, leave your container to my follower.

Now go."

Herobos's pupils contracted in shock: "But I've already negotiated terms with Your Envoy, Yu Xi."

"Negotiated?"

Those eyes turned cold, and the void around them began to crystallize with frost.

"Who told you this was a negotiation?"

I'll say it once more — the container is of no use to you. Leave it to my follower. Then get lost.

When you're truly my equal, then you may question me."

"..."

Herobos's expression cycled through several changes before He finally drew a deep breath, gave a slight nod, and departed without another word.

The moment He left, those upturned eyes went cold in an instant. The frost in the void spread everywhere.

He gazed in the direction Herobos had departed, then toward the mortal world where His follower resided, and spoke without joy or sorrow:

"Envoy of [Deceit]... Yu Xi?"

You certainly know how to cater to Him. But His path is wrong."

With that, those eyes blinked twice, releasing the chattering noise beside His ear into the void. And then, from within this frozen expanse, came the urgent voice of a certain Clown:

"Cannot distinguish true from false..."

Lies of yesterday..."

Benefactor, please pick up! Why is the line always busy? Herobos is coming to find you — do you realize that?!

Maybe that bastard didn't forward the call?

What if I pray through the mask and He drags me up there instead?

God, save me."

Those eyes listened to these blasphemous words, growing ever colder — and ever more resolute.

Fixed Destiny was never wrong, and would never be wrong. His follower must not be led astray down the wrong path.

He pondered for a moment, then departed from this stretch of void.

And after those eyes had gone — as the frost across the heavens began to thaw — an identical pair of star-bright eyes quietly opened in the very same spot, clicking His tongue:

"So that's why She insisted on picking a fight with me. She wanted to pick up some of [Deceit]'s aura from my body.

Deceiving people without batting an eye — my dear little sister has finally made progress.

Too bad progress down the wrong path is just another chain.

Your road... has never been the right one."

Chapter 1172: Mo Shu's World Crumbled

Among the gods, it had always been a struggle of schemes and deceptions, each vying to seize what the other possessed.

They had spent eons fighting over each other's authority, so in Herobos's view, the "humiliation" suffered before [Deceit] was utterly trivial.

Compared to that Divine Throne, a few cutting remarks meant nothing.

The only thing that unsettled Him was [Deceit]'s explicit demand for [Oblivion]'s container to be left for Yu Xi. He couldn't help but worry that [Void] was using this as a ploy to seize His newly gained position. Those swindlers were simply too cunning.

Then again, if this "usurpation" deal had come solely from Yu Xi, Herobos might have been somewhat anxious. But now that [Deceit] Himself had spoken — willing to claim a share from this transaction — it actually made the whole thing seem far more feasible.

Regardless, having taken this first step, He needed to make preparations for the eventual transfer of the Divine Throne.

Herobos summoned Mo Shu to a hidden corner of a world on the brink of annihilation. Looking at the bewildered follower before Him, He tempered His usual coldness and did His best to smile:

"I know you have many questions, but the time for answers hasn't come yet.

Change is brewing among the gods, and these changes may ripple down to mortals. But rest assured — as long as you are my follower, I will protect you."

[Oblivion] hadn't technically "abdicated" yet, and Herobos didn't dare be too explicit. But the phrase "my follower" clearly caught Mo Shu's attention.

He furrowed his brow, thinking that Lord Herobos had always made a point of mentioning the Benefactor's name in everything. Whenever matters arose, "the Benefactor" was always on His lips. So why, today, when speaking of the gods' affairs, was there no mention of the Benefactor?

He didn't dare probe further and could only nod in agreement. Then he asked about Cheng Shi. The moment Herobos heard the name, His tone turned complex:

"The divine decree is shelved for now. Do not make any moves against him."

"What?!"

Why?!

Has something really happened to our Benefactor?!"

Mo Shu's pupils contracted sharply, his entire body coiling with tension.

Herobos snorted and shook His head:

"He doesn't have any problems. In fact, He is closer than ever to the true will of [Oblivion].

We should cheer for Him, not weep.

As for you... simply walk the path of [Oblivion] steadfastly. Prove your devotion — that's enough.

And if you encounter other followers who share your piety, tell them the decree is void. Don't pursue it, and don't ask questions."

Mo Shu felt as if struck by lightning.

"Don't ask questions" clearly meant "don't go asking the Benefactor." He could tell that Lord Herobos appeared to be privately countermanding the Benefactor's divine decree. But as for why...

He didn't dare ask. He didn't dare know.

The open and covert struggles among the gods were universally acknowledged by players, but Mo Shu had never imagined the day would come when that conflict erupted within his own faith's ranks!

'What happened to Lord Herobos? Could He have been bewitched by that Fate Weaver?!'

It wasn't impossible!

The Skull Roach had become Cheng Shi's ally the moment they met. The Zhen sisters, shunned by everyone, had also grown close to him. And in this Trial, the Ascetic Monk and that Purgatory Bishop had been willing to risk their lives for him!

'What makes him so special?!'

'He's just a Fate Weaver — at most, a Clown. He's not some incarnation of sin! What gives him the ability to plant the desire to get close to him in everyone?!'

Mo Shu felt as though his sky had collapsed. He looked toward Herobos, wanting an explanation, but the words died on his lips.

'What am I supposed to ask? "What did the Fate Weaver promise You?" That would be too absurd.'

'What could a mortal possibly promise an Envoy worth having?'

'He stood just one step below a true god, sovereign above the universe. What benefit would make a servant god risk blasphemy to defy a true god's will in order to protect him?'

'He couldn't possibly have promised Lord Herobos a true god's throne!'

'How utterly preposterous.'

Seeing Mo Shu's shifting expression, Herobos offered no further explanation. In the end, no matter how special Mo Shu was, he was merely a pious and somewhat capable mortal.

There were plenty of such followers. He wasn't irreplaceable.

It was only because this was a critical period for faith consolidation — when devout followers were useful for condensing divine authority — that He had specially summoned Mo Shu as a show of divine grace.

Once His divine authority was secure, perhaps the new [Oblivion] would also need a new Chosen One. Of course, that would depend on whether the old Chosen One's piety carried any fresh surprises.

Herobos gave Mo Shu one meaningful glance, then His form gradually annihilated into nothing.

Mo Shu stood there with a grim expression, feeling like he was the true Clown.

'First encounter — lost my double. Carrying out the decree — lost my teammate...'

'I finally got an Envoy by my side, only for the Envoy to tell me I can't touch the target anymore!'

'Why?!'

'Privately defying the decree is bad enough, but the Envoy and the Benefactor seem to have actually started an internal power struggle!'

'Is this what [Oblivion] is?'

'Then what exactly is being annihilated — me? My devotion to [Oblivion]?'

'What meaning is there in an [Oblivion] like this?'

...

Meanwhile, Cheng Shi had returned to the Trial and was quickly found by the Torchbearers. Fortunately, the one who found him was Ji Yue, not the Prisoner.

Seeing Ji Yue's taut expression, anxious that enemies might be lurking everywhere, Cheng Shi waved his hand to reassure her.

"It's been dealt with," he said with a smile.

"Dealt with?"

Ji Yue's eyes went wide. "You killed Mo Shu? Alone?"

Cheng Shi pursed his lips and sighed:

"Eh... didn't kill him. Felt too sorry for him, so I let the mutt keep his life.

After all, fair's fair — I did eat his cake back then and never paid. I should leave him something.

His dog life is probably worth two slices of cake."

Ji Yue blinked in bewilderment, then gave a half-snort of laughter:

"Do you think I'd believe that?"

Come on, what are you scheming this time? You know full well they're targeting you with an agenda — there's no way you'd let him go.

I know you're a good person, but your brand of 'good' doesn't work like that.

Torchbearers believe in repaying every grudge. The only reason you'd release him is for a bigger catch.

Don't tell me you've turned Mo Shu and plan to use him to infiltrate Jie Shu's group and root them out from the inside?"

"?"

'Have you been reading my script?'

Cheng Shi stared at Ji Yue suspiciously, marveling at the Torchbearer's uncanny intuition.

She was right — that was exactly his plan.

Until Herobos's "usurpation" plan succeeded, the arrangement prevented him from making any move against Mo Shu. But that didn't mean he couldn't collect some interest in the meantime.

Since this Jie Shu knew certain things and was using Cheng Shi's identity for his own purposes, Cheng Shi naturally wanted to investigate. Sparing Mo Shu was one more opportunity.

Where there were circles, there was leverage. Infiltrating from the inside through Mo Shu was a masterful play.

Whether by offering secrets or exploiting emotions, Cheng Shi now had plenty of cards to play against Mo Shu — meaning yet another pawn had been born.

He had never mentioned any of this to anyone. The fact that Ji Yue could guess this much meant he'd been spending too much time around the Torchbearers lately and his thinking had become transparent.

Time for a clean break.

Cheng Shi pressed his lips together and didn't respond to Ji Yue's words. Instead, he stiffly changed the subject:

"[War] doesn't protect His followers every moment. Rein in your temper when you should, or it'll cause you serious trouble down the road.

That's all. The Prisoner's coming — I don't want to see him. I'm leaving."

With that, Cheng Shi pointed behind Ji Yue.

Ji Yue was still puzzling over how the Prisoner had ended up on the same path as her. The instant she turned to look, she realized the trick — but by the time she spun back, Cheng Shi was already gone.

"..."

'Why does he avoid company like he's dodging a plague?'

Ji Yue sighed helplessly. She quietly erased the lingering traces the Fate Weaver had left behind. If he didn't want to be found, then she'd let him go his own way.

When she looked up again after finishing, however, the Prisoner had actually arrived — though his expression was oddly stiff. Ji Yue couldn't help but ask:

"What happened to you?"

The Prisoner's lip twitched, and he gave a forced laugh: "I know nothing."

"?"

Ji Yue frowned.

'Why is everyone acting weirder than the last?'

Chapter 1173: The Prisoner's World Crumbled

The Prisoner knew everything.

As everyone knew, [Silence] was voiceless yet loved stealing secrets. Most of His followers aligned closely with His will, making them intensely curious about other people's secrets.

If a follower of [Silence] overheard your secret, don't panic — at least they wouldn't broadcast it like certain [Deceit] megaphones.

Even the Prisoner, noisy as he was, would never casually reveal your secrets to the world.

So the good news was that your secret was still a secret.

The bad news was that one person's secret had just become two people's secret.

The Prisoner had overheard Cheng Shi's secret. And the method of "eavesdropping" was, naturally, the so-called S-class Sacred Artifact: the Descending Silent Puppet.

It was indeed a Sacred Artifact bestowed by [Silence], but its function wasn't limited to replicating a momentary "return to silence." It had another ability the Prisoner had kept hidden — as long as someone picked it up, the Prisoner could hear everything the Descending Silent Puppet heard.

This sound couldn't be blocked by the void or any mortal-world means. In other words, even if Cheng Shi had tossed it into his personal storage, the Prisoner would still hear every word crystal clear.

But the Prisoner hadn't originally harbored such intentions. He was an upright man who took no pleasure in eavesdropping on others' privacy — especially not a friend he'd claimed as his own.

He'd given the item away because he genuinely felt it was the most valuable thing he had, and after handing it over, he'd never once listened in on Cheng Shi.

Until he and Ji Yue had begun searching for Cheng Shi again. He'd chosen what he believed was the right path, only to find not a single soul...

In that moment, his competitive streak flared. The Prisoner decided to cheat — just a little. He promised himself he'd listen only once, and only for the ambient sounds. As long as he could determine where his bro-in-law was, he'd find him before Ji Yue and then tell her she'd gone the wrong way.

It was pure mischief, with no ulterior motive. But when he happened to hear Cheng Shi murmuring "I am indeed not a mere player. My name is Yu Xi..." — the Prisoner's world crumbled.

'How can this be?!'

'How did my bro-in-law become Yu Xi?!'

His pupils contracted violently. In the depths of his shock, he forgot "see no evil, hear no evil" and listened to Yu Xi's entire plan from start to finish.

For a while, he tried to convince himself Cheng Shi was just bluffing Herobos. But by the end, when even Herobos had begun to waver, the Prisoner knew he could no longer fool himself.

'My bro-in-law isn't human.'

'He's a god!'

'He's the Envoy that [Deceit] is about to elevate through this game — the greatest beneficiary of this entire era!'

'No wonder he knew Yu Xi. No wonder Yu Xi was the Torchbearers' hope. No wonder he said Yu Xi was hard to find... of course he's hard to find!'

'If he were easy to find, how could I have possibly overheard this truth that no one else knows?!'

The Prisoner was stunned. But beyond the shock, he had no other reaction.

That was what set him apart from other players. Most people, upon learning that this game already had a "winner," would feel all sorts of complicated emotions — jealousy, envy, bitterness, defiance...

But not the Prisoner. The first question that popped into his head wasn't about the Faith Game or the Torchbearers' future. It was: in this one-man-one-god household, was his sister going to be outclassed by her bro-in-law?

'Would she still have any standing in the family?'

'What if bro-in-law tricks her to death?'

'That would be way too wild — no, this kind of family tragedy cannot be allowed to happen!'

The Prisoner steadied himself and decided to take this secret to the grave.

As long as he never spoke, nobody would know Cheng Shi was Yu Xi. That way, every day the man appeared in his mortal identity would be another day of "domestic bliss."

'The things I sacrifice for this little family!'

But the reality was that once someone learned a secret, the urge to share became infinite.

Just like his "I desperately want to say something but can't" expression when he saw Ji Yue, or his completely nonsensical answer when she asked him what was wrong — all of it proved that the Prisoner wanted the Torchbearers to know that Cheng Shi was their hope.

But he held it in. Held it with tremendous effort. He even became uncharacteristically quiet.

Ji Yue found this surprising but didn't press the issue, mainly because she felt this version of the Prisoner was considerably more tolerable than his usual chatterbox self.

Over the next few days, the Trial entered its idle phase. Ji Yue had come for the God Creation Plan, and through Cheng Shi she now knew of Yu Xi's existence. Through the Prisoner she'd confirmed Yu Xi was the plan's key, so she threw herself entirely into figuring out how to gain an audience with Yu Xi, making no other moves.

The Prisoner was much the same. His prayer's purpose had been to investigate Yu Xi, and now that he'd uncovered Yu Xi's true identity, his mission was technically complete.

So the two Torchbearers drifted through the small town for several days — sometimes together, sometimes bickering — until there was nothing new left to discover. Each found a pleasant spot and prepared to await the final settlement.

But right then, a figure suddenly appeared before the Prisoner.

He stared at the familiar face, eyes bulging, and let out a startled cry:

"Wei Mu!

You're still in the Trial!

I knew there's no way you'd be matched with me — you've definitely gotten dumber!

Are you here to ask me for the Trial's answers?

Wait, no — this is your Benefactor's Trial. What answers could there possibly be?

Oh, I get it now. Coming to me for answers is itself a foolish act, and personally performing a foolish act is the answer to this Trial, right?"

The newcomer was indeed Wei Mu.

Still wearing his mortal vessel's appearance, he looked at the Prisoner with a smile and shook his head:

"Playing dumb is a fine art. Your skill at it is good enough to fool most, but not me.

As a smart person, you should already know why I'm here.

I did come seeking verification — but not the answer to this Trial.

I want to know: is he truly Yu Xi?"

"!!!!!"

The Prisoner's pupils contracted violently. He immediately slapped both hands over his mouth and stammered: "You eavesdropped on my sleep-talking? Impossible — I never talk in my sleep!"

Wei Mu glanced at the Prisoner with a thoughtful look:

"So it is true, then. It seems the lie isn't in the identity.

Talk. Tell me what you know."

The Prisoner shook his head furiously: "I know nothing."

Wei Mu wasn't in a rush. He simply nodded:

"If you won't tell me, next time we meet I'll share everything I know with that 'lord' of yours.

Coincidentally, I don't know much about [Silence], but there's one thing I do recognize — the Descending Silent Puppet."

"..."

Even someone as formidable as the Prisoner had no choice but to fall silent under Wei Mu's gaze.

Seeing the Prisoner remain mute, Wei Mu smiled again: "One person's secret is a secret. Two people's secret is still a secret. As long as we all keep mum, why can't three people's secret be a secret too?"

"What do you want to know?"

"Good question."

Wei Mu smiled, considering briefly before answering: "I want to know whether Lord Yu Xi is gathering the remnants of the past, or whether he's searching for his own future.

Since his identity is genuine, then the only thing that could have fooled me is 'time.'

So — does he exist in the past, or does he awaken in the future?

[Folly] isn't omniscient either. Sometimes, certain secrets can only be unraveled by [Silence]."

"..."

Chapter 1174: [Oblivion]'s World Crumbled

Meanwhile.

Cheng Shi had not been at ease these past two days. He was waiting for [Death]'s boss to summon him.

Whether it was the Fun God or that sly deity, or [Chaos] and [Time] — none of his four Benefactors had paid him any attention these past few days. This left Cheng Shi so anxious that he could only pin all his hopes on that particular lord.

Fortunately, [Death]'s boss was reliably dependable. Shortly before the Trial ended, the long-waiting Clown finally received word.

An irresistible force pulled him into the void, where he found Herobos — looking even more nervous than himself.

Clearly, all the preparatory work was in place. Now Herobos simply needed to formally request to inherit [Oblivion]'s authority. Then that lord would relay it to [Justice (Order)], who would convene the Assembly of Gods Convention, and the "usurpation" would officially begin.

Yet at this critical moment, Herobos showed signs of "cold feet."

He tried to speak several times, but each time His expression would shift and He'd swallow the words. Seeing this, Cheng Shi offered no encouragement — instead, he went all out with mockery:

"You didn't look like this during our negotiations, Herobos.

What, getting scared?

You don't actually think there's a way back at this point, do you?

I already told you — if I played false in this 'usurpation,' the true gods I lobbied would never let me off. Now I'll say the same to you.

If you back out, not only will they come for you — I'll be the first to inform your Benefactor, who's still in the dark, exactly how you conspired with me to steal His throne."

"You!!!"

Herobos's pupils contracted. He wanted nothing more than to erase this insufferable [Deceit] envoy on the spot.

But He couldn't.

So He drew a deep breath and spoke in a low, resolute tone:

"Once decided, there are no regrets.

You needn't provoke me. I do this not for myself, but for the continuation of the true will of [Oblivion].

I have never betrayed my faith — not in the past, not now, and not in the future!"

Hearing this, Cheng Shi pursed his lips.

'You certainly haven't in the past. In the future, [Oblivion] will be you, so you wouldn't betray yourself. As for the present...'

'I used that pitch to deceive you, but I never expected you'd actually deceive yourself.'

'This "devotion" is truly admirable.'

'But hey — whatever makes you happy. [Oblivion] falling from the Divine Throne? That makes me happy.'

Cheng Shi nodded in appreciation, then raised his hand to urge the Envoy to hurry up and begin.

Herobos clenched His fists, agonized for a long while, then finally relaxed His hands. His gaze turned resolute:

"I, servant god of [Descent], Envoy of [Oblivion], the Hand of Purifying Weevil — Herobos — hereby formally petition the Convention to inherit my Master [Oblivion]'s Divine Throne and authority.

I request that the great sovereign of [Void], [Deceit], relay this petition to [Justice (Order)], so that the Assembly of Gods Convention may be convened for a vote on this matter!"

"?"

'Why the Fun God?'

Cheng Shi blinked. He'd assumed the relay duty would fall to [Death]'s boss, but the Fun God wasn't a bad choice either. He'd certainly vote in favor — such prime entertainment would have Him shouldering aside that lord to claim a front-row seat, which was perfectly in character.

At this moment, the anxiety in Cheng Shi's heart was no less than Herobos's. This was, after all, a mortal's supreme provocation against a true god — far more audacious than the blasphemy before him. It would be a lie to say he wasn't afraid. But even more than fear, what he felt was excitement and anticipation.

As the last echo of Herobos's words faded, two pounding hearts were the only sound in the void. Before long, the void's sky churned — all the hollow darkness came alive with vibrant energy.

Before those star-bright eyes with their upturned corners had even opened, both of them heard a sound drifting from the depths of the void:

"Hee~"

The gleeful exclamation struck like thunder, making both of them shudder. By the time they steadied themselves, those eyes — star-points swirling in frenzied spirals — had already opened above their heads.

"What audacity!"

Throughout all of history, you're the first to ever demand your own Benefactor's Divine Throne.

Given that your original intent wasn't entirely selfish ambition — there's still some genuine piety in there — this favor...

Hee~

I'll gladly oblige!"

"..."

After [Deceit]'s declaration, Herobos's face turned green.

'What?!'

'The way You're framing this, it sounds like I'm the mastermind!'

'I was pushed along to this point by all of you, and now — before the Convention has even started — the blame's already on my head?!'

He didn't dare blame a true god, so He could only glare furiously at Cheng Shi.

Cheng Shi had a headache too.

'Benefactor, oh Benefactor — You truly love watching chaos unfold. We're literally at the finish line. Why did You have to antagonize Him at this exact moment?'

'What if something goes wrong now?'

'Couldn't You just hold it in and save the sarcasm for the Assembly vote?'

But the truth was, the Fun God couldn't hold back for even a second. Though He hadn't laughed out loud, those perpetually upturned eye-corners made it clear His laughter had never stopped.

Left with no choice, Cheng Shi could only do his best to console Herobos:

"Ignore Him — He's got a screw loose.

Besides, once you're on the true god's throne, He won't be strutting around for much longer. When the time comes, don't forget to give me your vote."

Cheng Shi's consolation bound their positions together, putting Herobos slightly more at ease.

He knew He was already on the pirate ship. So He might as well let the pirates celebrate. He closed His eyes, bowed His head, and began thinking about how to face the Benefactor who would soon stand opposing Him.

Those eyes saw there was no more fun to be had. They blinked, relayed Herobos's petition in its entirety to [Justice (Order)], and added:

"Old fossil, you heard everything. Time to do your job.

The Convention doesn't prohibit an Envoy from inheriting authority while a true god still lives. This petition is valid. Hurry — summon everyone. I want to vote!"

"..."

The void stirred once more. A set of Scales — forged of starlight and strung upon beams of flowing radiance — descended from endless darkness. The instant it appeared, the entire void locked into rigid, unyielding order. Its emotionless gaze swept over those eyes, then down to Herobos and Cheng Shi at His feet, and spoke in a resonant hum:

"What you have done — is this not treating the Convention as a farce?"

As befitting the representative of supreme law — [Justice (Order)] — His very first words nearly made Herobos buckle at the waist. Cheng Shi, on the other hand, knew that [Order] had long since fractured into pieces and was nothing to be afraid of. He watched with keen interest as his Benefactor handled the rebuttal.

Yet [Deceit] didn't bother refuting at all. He simply nodded: "So what if it is?"

"..."

"..."

"..."

Had anyone other than [Justice (Order)] been on the receiving end of that reply, they probably would have started a fight with [Deceit] right then. But He couldn't — because just as [Death]'s boss had said, He was so just it bordered on rigidity.

As long as the rules didn't forbid it, He could not deny it.

So no matter how much He detested [Deceit], He was bound by the rules to convene the Assembly of Gods Convention and invite all the gods for a vote on the ownership of the Divine Throne.

One mortal and two gods were drawn by [Justice (Order)] into a resplendent starry sky. Before long, the gods appeared one after another, each taking their place upon their respective orbital tracks in the galaxy.

But [Justice (Order)] had not specified whose throne was at stake when summoning them. The uninformed gods arrived with eyes full of bewilderment.

They hadn't heard of any god falling recently, nor had they—

Wait. Could it be [War], who had been absent for so long?

But what did [War]'s throne have to do with the Clown?

'Why is he here again?'

The gods stared at Cheng Shi standing beside [Deceit], visibly startled. And when they noticed Herobos also present at the Convention, confusion deepened.

It wasn't until [Oblivion] made His entrance — frowning as He swept His gaze across His own Envoy, then turning to the mortal who had dared blaspheme Him — that He gave a cold laugh:

"It seems I've underestimated how obsessed [Void] is with the sacrifice. [Deceit], do you prize this mortal so highly? Surely you don't intend to offer your own Divine Throne just to legitimize him?"

The Fun God let out a snort of laughter, barely containing His delight:

"You guessed half right.

Someone is indeed offering his throne to legitimize this mortal — but it's not me. It's you, [Oblivion]."

"?"

At that moment, all the gods who had agreed to attend arrived. [Justice (Order)] cut short the tit-for-tat exchange between the two and issued the thunderous declaration of supreme order that echoed across the universe:

"The servant god of [Descent], Herobos, seeks to inherit the Divine Throne and authority of his master, [Oblivion]. The Convention contains no clause prohibiting this. The petition is therefore valid. The vote shall now commence."

"!?!?"

"What?!"

"Who?!"

Chapter 1175: Master and Servant, Face to Face

The world was about to end.

That was Cheng Shi's most visceral impression.

He had never seen [Oblivion]'s power in such terrifying density. Even with the Convention suppressing it and [Justice (Order)] intervening, the tidal wave of annihilation still swept across the brilliant starry sky.

To put it frighteningly, a single splash from that wave could annihilate this world countless times over — let alone the full cataclysmic surge.

Fortunately, the two sovereigns of [Void] weren't pushovers. The moment [Oblivion]'s fury erupted, [Fate] blinked once and sheltered His follower; [Deceit] was a beat slower and could only protect Herobos beside Cheng Shi with a look of undisguised distaste.

The debate hadn't even started yet. As the key figure, He couldn't die now.

But even under [Fate]'s protection, Cheng Shi still retreated two alarmed steps and hid behind Herobos.

The gap between mortals and gods was, at this moment, laid bare.

Cheng Shi's face was taut with anxiety. Herobos, by contrast, stood utterly motionless — a pillar anchoring the sea — weathering the full brunt of His Benefactor's wrathful tide.

Just as Cheng Shi was beginning to feel a hint of admiration, [Deceit] spoke in an amused drawl:

"If your knees are too weak to stand, you can always sit. No need to muscle through."

Herobos wobbled, staggering half a step, but ultimately forced Himself not to sit.

"..."

Seeing this, Cheng Shi rolled his eyes. 'We're not so different, you and I...'

[Oblivion] was incandescent with rage. Those constantly collapsing, disintegrating eyes fixed upon His Envoy with shadowed fury — upon the Herobos who had served Him faithfully for so long. Unwilling to accept the betrayal, He asked, word by word:

"Has [Void] taken control of you?"

Herobos froze. When He raised His head, the first thing He met was the playful star-bright gaze beside Him. Though [Deceit] hadn't spoken — only blinked — Herobos distinctly heard the silent message:

'Only in the depths of despair can one burn the boats.'

"..."

Herobos's expression shifted. Then His eyes hardened once more, His face growing cold.

He slowly lifted His head, leveling His gaze with His Benefactor's, and shook His head:

"No."

"You dare lie to me!"

Those two words alone made every trace of [Oblivion]'s presence across the starry sky solidify into substance. The outer stars collapsed with a thunderous roar. Streaming starlight plunged into the void. [Oblivion] could not believe it. He repeated His question — each syllable heavier than the last, ground out through gnashing teeth:

"Has [Void] taken control of you?"

A flash of reluctance crossed Herobos's eyes, but it was instantly replaced by an even deeper coldness. He shook His head again:

"I said — no.

This is my own wish. I seek Your Divine Throne, my Benefactor!"

At this, [Oblivion] laughed in disbelief.

"Very well!

It seems you intend to embrace a true god's will with a servant god's vessel."

With that, every shred of [Oblivion]'s power across the sky surged backward like a dam breaking — flooding toward the seats of [Void]. [Fate]'s eyes turned cold, ready to strike, but [Deceit] held Him back. With a cheerful smile, He addressed [Oblivion]:

"I'd advise you not to act.

Setting aside whether you can fight two of us at once — don't forget, this is the old fossil's territory. Surely you don't want to break the rules at the Assembly of Gods Convention and forfeit your own vote?

Win or lose, once the Assembly begins, it must reach a conclusion.

If you insist on giving up the vote in your hand, I certainly won't object.

There's a certain someone in [Void] with too much energy, always itching for a fight. Perfect — I'll use you to burn off some of that excess vigor. Call it a win-win."

"..."

One sarcastic remark, and the roiling chamber fell still.

The tangible [Oblivion] energy hung frozen an inch above Herobos's head, resonating with the purest [Oblivion] power within Him — as though delivering a wordless joke to everyone present.

'With the true god still alive, how could an Envoy usurp the throne?'

More than one deity shared that confusion — especially the Iron Law of [Order], whose pages flipped at frantic speed, as if reviewing every clause of the Convention. But no matter how much He searched, He found no provision that would permit Herobos to seize the throne. Baffled, He turned to [Justice (Order)]:

"[Oblivion] still lives and retains free will. Why was this petition approved?"

Before [Justice (Order)] could respond, the enormous skull on the other side of the chamber spoke first.

[Death]'s expression was peculiar. The green flames in His eye sockets flickered wildly. He gave a cold snort, His tone cryptic:

"That which... the law... does not forbid — may be done. Does the Convention... state... that while a true god yet lives... an Envoy... may not... inherit... the Divine Throne... and authority?"

The moment these words landed, the entire assembly was stunned.

Not just because of the content — but because of who had said it!

Among everyone present, not a single deity could match the [Life] trinity when it came to tradition — especially [Death]. He was eternally solemn, never one for levity, and certainly not the type to exploit loopholes.

So why would He say something like this?

It reeked of being put up to it by a certain member of [Void]. And as it happened, the subject of the petition was [Death]'s rival — [Oblivion]...

The gods understood at once. [Deceit] had catered to [Death]'s interests, using His hand to deliver a resounding slap across [Oblivion]'s face.

[Oblivion] grew even more furious. Those endlessly collapsing eyes had nearly imploded entirely. He shot a dark look at His old nemesis, then turned to re-examine His Envoy, and spoke through His refusal:

"Tell me you haven't betrayed me — that you haven't defected to [Death]'s camp!"

Herobos exhaled slowly, His expression conflicted:

"Of course I haven't betrayed You. Because I still intend to inherit Your Divine Throne and authority."

"..."

"Fine! Fine! Fine!"

[Oblivion] went completely cold. He swept His gaze across every god in attendance, said nothing further, and returned to His seat.

That silhouette — lonely and desolate beneath the boundless fury — gave the gods pause.

Of course, they all knew this was [Oblivion]'s counterattack. But what [Oblivion] had silently communicated was something they too had reason to fear.

If a servant god dared usurp the throne while a true god still lived—

Once that precedent was set, who would ever dare elevate an Envoy again?

This made the foresight of the later-established Paths of Fate all the more apparent.

[Civilization] had learned from the lessons of [Life] and [Descent] from the moment of its inception. Apart from [Order], who had elevated many Envoys to uphold universal law, the trend starting from [Truth] had been toward creating servant-god-level constructs to spread the true god's will.

The gods who had no Envoy-backstabbing worries naturally remained unconcerned. But not everyone could let it slide.

[Folly] had said nothing since taking His seat, content to watch the spectacle with a sardonic smile. Now, seeing [Oblivion] cornered and [Void] holding all the cards, He let out a scoff:

"I think calling this era [Void] is a waste. It should be called the Era of [Foolish Acts] — because this entire era has been nothing but one big foolish act."

Chapter 1176: I Object! I Agree!

The gods had long grown accustomed to [Folly]'s contempt. No one responded.

Cheng Shi, however, wasn't one to let it slide. Even if he didn't dare openly rebuke a true god, he could at least grumble under his breath.

He stole a glance at those chaotic white-mist eyes, then lowered his head and muttered: "As if you're not part of this farce yourself. Who are you trying to fool?"

But before the words had even faded, the Fun God beside him rolled His eyes, and broadcast the Clown's remark to every deity in attendance.

He gazed at [Folly] with eyes crinkled in mirth:

"As if you're not part of this farce yourself. Who are you trying to fool?"

"..."

Nobody had responded to [Folly]'s jab, and nobody was going to respond to [Deceit]'s barb either. The hall fell instantly silent.

[Folly] was unfazed. He merely gave a disdainful scoff — likely filing [Deceit]'s behavior away as yet another foolish act.

Cheng Shi blinked, startled. He hadn't expected his Benefactor to play it like that.

So he seized the inspiration. Applying the principle of "use it or lose it" when it came to his patron god as a mouthpiece, he fired off another sarcastic quip.

He'd been wanting to give [Folly] a piece of his mind for a while — now was the perfect chance.

Under his breath, he murmured:

"If you were really that smart, the one sitting above everyone would be you, not some 'Origin.'"

That remark gave the two [Void] deities closest to him a proper scare.

[Fate]'s eyes shifted color, His gaze toward His follower filled with sharp warning.

[Deceit]'s smile froze, and He turned to His own follower with a half-amused, half-incredulous look — 'This reckless Clown isn't trying to make me the clown, is he?'

But quitting halfway wasn't [Deceit]'s style. So His eyes rolled once more, and He relayed Cheng Shi's words verbatim...

...by broadcasting them to every god present!

That's right — He didn't relay. He live-streamed it.

And when the gods heard a mortal casually disrespecting Origin at the Assembly of Gods Convention...

Never mind the gods' reactions — Herobos's eyes went wide with disbelief as He stared at Cheng Shi. The shock on His face clearly screamed:

'You really think having [Void] behind you means you can do whatever you want?!'

'I never thought that!!!'

Cheng Shi was dumbstruck.

He never imagined his Benefactor would use an occasion like this to hang him out to dry.

'Benefactor, are You sick of having too many followers or something?!'

'Or do You actually have the power to protect me from all these gods?'

'If You're really that strong, the one sitting on top should be You — not Origin or [Folly]!'

But it was too late for regrets.

Seeing every divine gaze converge on him, Cheng Shi closed his eyes and decided to take a page from Big Cat's book.

Indeed — that was exactly what Big Cat was doing at this very moment. As the holder of the restored [Prosperity] seat, Hong Lin had once again received an invitation from [Justice (Order)]. Even without voting rights, she was qualified to attend the Assembly.

Understanding the Convention's significance, she naturally wouldn't miss such an important intelligence-gathering opportunity. But since arriving, she'd kept her eyes firmly shut, relying solely on her ears to absorb everything happening in the chamber.

She'd heard [Oblivion]'s fury. Heard Herobos's rebellion. Heard [Deceit]'s instigation. And then — heard Cheng Shi's voice...

'Wait.'

'Whose voice did I just hear?'

'Cheng Shi???'

'What's he doing here?!'

Big Cat's eyes flew open. There, behind the massive frame of [Oblivion]'s Envoy Herobos, stood a familiar figure — resisting the weight of every god's gaze in an all-too-familiar fashion!

Big Cat felt a flash of delight, then a jolt of alarm. She quickly shut her eyes and sat back down, resuming her role as a seeing-impaired audience member.

'If Cheng Shi's here, does that mean I can slack off?'

She visibly relaxed, shifting to a more comfortable position. From start to finish, she never once worried that the gods could actually do anything to Cheng Shi.

After all, even if the sky fell, the tall one — [Void] — would be holding it up.

The other gods, at most, were displeased by Cheng Shi's blasphemy against Origin. But remembering that his Benefactor was actively distancing Himself from Him, most concluded that [Deceit] had simply used a mortal's mouth to voice His own true feelings.

But [Oblivion] saw it differently. From the moment He'd laid eyes on Cheng Shi, He was convinced that today's Assembly — or rather, Herobos's entire betrayal — was inseparable from this detestable [Void] sacrifice!

If he'd dared to blaspheme [Oblivion] to His face using [Death]'s power, then it wasn't far-fetched that he'd dare to bewitch Herobos into rebellion!

A shadowed glint flashed through [Oblivion]'s eyes. Seizing on Cheng Shi's remark, He petitioned [Justice (Order)]:

"A mortal who dares disrespect Origin has committed the most unforgivable blasphemy in the universe and should be executed immediately! [Order], don't tell me you've also joined [Deceit] in distancing yourself from Him — or show me where your precious order is!"

For Cheng Shi, this might have been terrifying. But in the gods' eyes, [Oblivion] looked more like He was raging impotently.

Everyone present knew that even if a single blasphemous remark justified executing a mortal, who could bypass the two [Void] sovereigns to kill the Clown?

[Justice (Order)]?

Please. The very petition that had transcended the gods' comprehension was one [Justice (Order)] had personally approved. How could this inflexible proxy of the Convention hope to out-argue the Clown?

Even more so when behind the Clown stood [Deceit] — the greatest loophole-exploiter in the universe, who wielded the very authority of sophistry!

If [Justice (Order)] didn't get Himself dragged in as collateral, that would already count as a win.

But [Justice (Order)] was indeed just. Regardless of who made a demand, He would respond — and respond strictly according to the Convention's rules.

He looked at [Oblivion] and spoke in His resonant hum:

"The Convention does not govern mortals. Therefore, no clause exists for sentencing a mortal to death for blasphemy. I cannot execute.

The current enforcer of universal order is [Order]. If He is willing to carry out this justice, I will not stand in His way."

"You!!!"

[Oblivion] seethed. He whipped around to face the Iron Law of [Order], only to find that the tome shimmering with [Order]'s radiance was already looking at Him. When their gazes met, the Iron Law replied with honest simplicity:

"If I fall, the universe will have no order at all. So I am powerless.

However, this petition clearly violates proper order. I will cast a vote against it — in your support."

'Do I look like I need your one vote?!'

[Oblivion] completely lost it.

Despite His lingering defiance, He'd already realized that Herobos's usurpation was unstoppable. He was powerless to prevent it — and could only accept.

But the petition proceeding didn't mean He had no chance at all. He surveyed the chamber, running the numbers, and concluded that [Void]'s side couldn't possibly reach nine votes.

Currently in attendance — minus [Corruption], who never attended, and [War], who had been absent for a long time — all fourteen remaining gods were present.

[Prosperity]'s voting rights were still held by [Truth], making that the biggest wildcard. Setting those two votes aside, the rest were, in His view, all but certain.

He didn't need to count how many would vote yes. He only needed to confirm that abstentions and nay votes totaled eight seats.

[Birth] always abstained on principle — guaranteed. [Corruption] wasn't here, so that counted as an abstention. [War] as well. And [Folly] — He would never personally enact what He called a "foolish act," so He'd abstain too.

That made four abstentions.

Add the Iron Law of [Order]'s opposition out of maintaining order, His own opposition, the opposition of [Decay] — a fellow [Descent] member with whom He'd recently cooperated — and the opposition of [Memory], [Deceit]'s rival!

With those figures, the "usurpation" was simply laughable.

[Oblivion]'s confidence renewed. He gave a cold snort and declared outright:

"I object!"

The next instant, two voices rang out in unison:

"I agree."

Chapter 1177: I Choose... to Abstain

The two voices didn't belong to both [Void] sovereigns — they came from one [Void] deity and one [Civilization] deity.

When [Truth] declared "I agree" and dropped a weight that tipped the Scales out of balance, [Oblivion]'s expression turned utterly grim.

He wasn't the only one — several gods in attendance were visibly surprised.

Only [Folly] watched the foolish act unfold in silence, eyes brimming with contempt.

[Oblivion] couldn't comprehend it. Strictly speaking, He didn't need to worry about [Truth]'s vote, but He still turned to confront Him:

"How many times has [Deceit] meddled in your experiments? How much of your pursuit of truth has He sabotaged? And you're voting for Him? [Truth], have you lost your mind — or is [Prosperity]'s child about to become [Deceit]'s child?!"

At this, [Deceit]'s expression turned peculiar, while [Truth] offered no comment.

Hong Lin, however, nearly jolted out of her chair, thinking anxiously: 'I don't have a son that old...'

Seeing [Truth]'s cold indifference, [Oblivion]'s eyes flickered. He could scarcely imagine the chaos that would ensue if the most restless [Truth] joined forces with the most audacious [Deceit].

What He found even harder to imagine was that even without [Deceit]'s partnership, [Truth] alone could punch a hole through the sky — and had already done so once.

The voting continued. The next several votes held no surprises.

[Birth] murmured "Children... children..." and abstained.

[Death] cast His vote in favor without a moment's hesitation.

The Iron Law of [Order] solemnly expressed His opposition to [Void]'s disruption of order and voted against.

[Chaos] said nothing, simply raising a hand — a vote in favor.

[Folly] abstained as expected, the mockery in His eyes growing thicker.

[Fate] wasted no words and cast two votes in favor.

When the gods saw [Fate] cast two votes, every deity in attendance was stunned. [Oblivion] immediately challenged:

"Why does He have two votes?! Whose voting rights is [Fate] acting as proxy for?! [Justice (Order)], you owe the gods an explanation!"

[Justice (Order)] was about to explain when [Fate] cut in with a cold voice:

"Matters of [Fate] need not be explained to you.

The only connection between us at this moment is that I have foreseen the future in which you lose your Divine Throne.

Beyond that, you are not even worthy of speaking my name.

If you have doubts — come and fight. Compared to stripping your throne, I'd rather send you back to true oblivion with my own hands."

An icy gale from the depths of the void tore through the star curtain and began churning above the [Void] seats. [Oblivion] locked eyes with [Fate], grinding out word by word:

"I annihilate the sacrifice [Deceit] chose for your own good! Yet you turn around and bite the hand that feeds you?! [Fate], the day will come when your Fixed Destiny is dragged into the abyss by [Deceit]! I will watch you regret it and come crawling back to beg me!"

"You won't see that day — because you die now!"

Whoever touched Fixed Destiny was [Fate]'s enemy.

In that instant, the vote no longer mattered to [Fate]. He erupted in fury, unleashing boundless, indiscriminate freezing winds that engulfed every god present.

Every god — except Fixed Destiny.

The gods' expressions all shifted, but there was no alarm — only weary resignation.

This wasn't the first time [Fate] had tried to drag the universe down with Him. The only difference was that today's venue was particularly poor timing.

[Justice (Order)]'s power was limited — He couldn't handle anything outside the Convention. But as long as the Convention was involved, He was the aggregate of all authority, the unity of all divine power.

At the Assembly of Gods Convention, no god could break the rules by force. So in the next instant, the Scales wrought of flowing light blazed with brilliance. The ancient tone of order pulsed across the universe in the rhythm of flickering stars, and within moments, those endless freezing gales dissolved into gentle breezes drifting past the gods' eyes. The raging [Fate] was dragged back to the [Void] seats by the inescapable true power of [Order].

[Justice (Order)] looked down from above, His resonant voice a warning:

"Any act that disrupts the fairness of the Assembly of Gods Convention vote will be stopped. This is a warning. Should there be a next time, [Fate], you will forfeit your voting rights."

[Fate]'s cold eyes tilted upward, looking as if He wanted to fight [Justice (Order)] too. But His peripheral vision caught His follower ducking behind [Deceit], and with a sharp frown, He silently abandoned the impulse.

[Justice (Order)], seeing this, turned to [Oblivion]:

"[Fate] is acting as proxy for [Prosperity]'s voting rights. This is in accordance with the rules and requires no further questioning."

[Prosperity]?!

'But weren't His rights in [Truth]'s hands?'

[Oblivion] cast a frigid glance at [Prosperity], only to find the god reclining with eyes closed, perfectly at ease. He then turned toward [Truth], unable to fathom what price [Void] had paid to win [Truth]'s support and obtain [Prosperity]'s voting rights.

[Deceit] watched the scene with a grin, guessing what was going through the other's mind. 'The price was indeed steep,' He thought. 'We spent one [Truth], after all.'

'Oh, right — plus one [War] on top of that.'

Since [War] wasn't attending, His vote — like [Corruption]'s — would be counted as an abstention at final tally. Of the fourteen present, ten had now voted. The tally stood at 7:2:1 — in favor, opposed, abstention.

Though the "in favor" votes held a commanding lead, in [Oblivion]'s eyes the remaining few had virtually no reason to vote yes. So His expression grew increasingly contemptuous, and the way He looked at Herobos filled with dark amusement.

The most anxious person in the chamber at this point was undoubtedly Herobos. Cheng Shi at least had some idea of who would vote which way, but Herobos was relying entirely on guesswork about which gods might lean toward [Void]'s camp.

They were in the lead, but every remaining vote was utterly unpredictable.

Cheng Shi was just as tense. He kept his gaze fixed on [Memory] and [Decay], desperate to see just what kind of "I know" these two intended to deliver.

Every eye in the chamber was on those final few. Before long, [Existence] moved first. [Time] silently cast His vote before departing the venue without a word.

As expected — He voted in favor.

The gods weren't surprised by this. After all, He was Cheng Shi's Benefactor and had merged with [Void]. Since this entire matter was clearly tied to Cheng Shi and [Void], casting a supportive vote was simply putting their alliance on public display.

But [Memory]'s vote caught everyone — mortal and divine — completely off guard.

He abstained.

That's right — abstained!

[Oblivion] was stunned, though still relieved. To Him, an abstention was the same as an opposition — both counted as "assists."

What He'd never expected was that [Deceit]'s rival, [Void]'s mirror, this steadfast devotee of Origin... would fail to vote against.

The gods shared the same bewilderment. They looked at [Memory], who smiled and said:

"Someone told me that the universe is destined to drift toward [Void].

Perhaps this truly is the era of [Void] — everything is drawn toward nothingness, and even my sibling god cannot resist the current.

But...

I am [Memory]. I am the manifestation of [Existence] — the fragments and details that He recalls when He looks back upon this starry sky.

I cannot draw closer to [Void], nor should I. Because memory cannot be rendered meaningless.

Therefore, I cannot cast a vote in favor.

Yet if all things returning to nothingness is His will projected upon this era, then neither can I stand against it.

Therefore, I cannot cast a vote in opposition.

And so — I choose to abstain."

Chapter 1178: Surprise After Surprise — A Deadlock

The fact that [Memory] had cast an abstention rather than a vote against on a motion championed by [Deceit] already proved that someone had influenced His decision.

But the will of the gods would never bend to the whims of mortal affairs. Even if certain mortals could leverage circumstances to sway a true god's decision, it was always the god's own choice made after weighing various considerations — never because He'd truly listened to some mortal's advice.

[Fate] being the exception.

With [Memory]'s abstention, the most uncomfortable person in the chamber was undoubtedly Cheng Shi.

It wasn't that he felt [Memory] had broken a promise — the god had never actually promised anything. But without that vote, the only gods who hadn't yet voted were [Decay] and [Silence].

For the petition to pass, neither of them could vote against.

[Decay]'s vote was at least a coin-flip. But [Silence]... that deity had once tried to assimilate him!

Given such an unpredictable god, had [Death]'s boss actually succeeded in lobbying Him?

The moment the thought formed, the low-profile [Silence] directly cast His vote — in favor.

Cheng Shi's spirits surged. He immediately looked toward [Death]'s boss, only to find the massive skull seemingly looking right back at him.

He bowed in respect, assuming the lord was offering silent reassurance. Little did he know that at this very moment, [Death] was drowning in utter bewilderment.

Don't forget — the one who had summoned Cheng Shi in the false Fishbone Hall wasn't actually [Death] at all. It had been [Deceit]!

[Deceit], for reasons unknown — perhaps purely for the entertainment value — had not told [Death] a single thing!

Which meant that when [Justice (Order)] had dragged [Death] into the Assembly, the lord had assumed [Deceit] had finally devised a plan and was making a move on [War]'s Divine Throne.

But when [Justice (Order)] announced that the petition was for Herobos to inherit [Oblivion]'s throne, this ancient true god of [Life] felt old for the first time. Felt like He couldn't keep up with the times.

'The true god isn't dead. Isn't imprisoned. How can a throne be inherited?'

While He was still puzzled, a voice inside His skull had answered on His behalf, uttering that rule-defying loophole.

At that point, He'd understood everything.

He didn't even need to guess where the voice came from — even without a brain in that enormous skull, He knew it was [Deceit] who'd used His identity to orchestrate this setup, then pulled Him in along the way.

But the setup was...

'Perfectly to my liking!'

Never mind the details — [Oblivion] was going to suffer. And whenever His rival suffered, He would support it wholeheartedly.

So He'd cast His vote quickly, and afterward kept watching the [Void] section — especially Cheng Shi's reactions to the other gods.

It was plain to see that this cunning employee had played a pivotal role in this "usurpation" scheme. Otherwise, [Deceit] wouldn't have brought a mortal to the Assembly of Gods Convention. So [Death] began wondering whether Cheng Shi had orchestrated the entire thing.

And His glance happened to coincide with [Silence]'s vote — leading Cheng Shi to the false conclusion that [Death]'s boss had spent major capital to successfully lobby [Silence].

'Everyone says [Silence] covets the universe's secrets. What kind of secret had the boss traded away?'

With [Silence]'s vote cast, only one god remained.

[Oblivion] glanced at the barely-alive sibling god beside Him, and the light of victory already gleamed in His eyes.

He turned to look at [Deceit] and Herobos by His side, then sneered:

"The facts will show you that all your schemes and plots are meaningless! I am [Oblivion], and only I am [Oblivion]! Your machinations have failed! What follows is my internal family matter — everyone else may leave!"

"!!!"

Hearing this, Herobos shuddered. He didn't even look at the final voter — instead, His nervous, unwilling gaze shot first to [Deceit] beside Him, His voice trembling with anxiety:

"You lobbied [Decay], didn't You?"

The complex tone sounded less like a question and more like a plea.

[Deceit] scoffed and gave no reply. It was Cheng Shi who, to steady morale, nodded:

"Yes, I lobbied [Decay]."

Herobos whipped around in disbelief, exclaiming:

"You?!"

With your status, how could you possibly sway [Decay], who shares the [Descent] Path with [Oblivion]?!"

"..."

'Why couldn't I sway Him?'

'I'm at least the proxy of the Faded authority.'

Cheng Shi couldn't afford to undermine his own side's confidence at such a critical moment. Though he had no idea how [Decay] would vote, he put on an air of absolute certainty:

"What status am I?"

Oh right, I forgot to tell you — actually, I'm—"

"Abstain!"

Before he could finish, the last-breath [Decay] made His choice.

"!!!"

The gods were stunned once more. Even [Oblivion] stared at the dying god with eyes full of shock.

He seemed unable to accept that a sibling god from the same Path of Fate had shifted his stance — refusing to cast the opposing vote.

While the effect of an abstention and a vote against were identical for this petition, the gods saw beyond the immediate result. They would wonder: what had caused [Descent] to fracture?

And why had [Decay] done this so openly before all the gods?

But among everyone present, the one who could accept this least was undoubtedly Cheng Shi.

When [Decay] cast that vote, his mind went blank for an instant. He nearly lost the ability to think.

'It's over. It's all over.'

Herobos, unable to believe the result, stood frozen in place. He looked toward the dark, shadowed eyes of His Benefactor, and for the first time — felt fear.

It was at that moment that the motionless Cheng Shi's mouth continued to move:

"...Clown."

"..."

'Brother Mouth, are you twisting the knife too?'

Cheng Shi gave a self-deprecating smile, rubbed his nose with his fingers, and nodded:

"Indeed. I, Cheng Shi, am nothing but a clown."

With all eligible voters having cast their ballots, [Justice (Order)] personally certified the validity of the vote. The current tally stood at 8:2:4 — in favor, opposed, abstentions. One vote short. The "usurpation" had failed at the final hurdle.

Seeing this outcome, [Oblivion] sneered endlessly. [Fate] fixed His cold gaze on the proceedings. [Deceit] stopped smiling.

Under the rigid impartiality, [Void] appeared to have conceded defeat.

But—

'[Void] losing has nothing to do with me, Cheng Shi!'

The fingers rubbing his nose suddenly stopped. He began to laugh — loud and wild. The laughter grew louder and louder, more and more unhinged, loud enough to interrupt [Justice (Order)]'s announcement of the result, drawing the gaze of every deity present.

Even Hong Lin, who'd been pretending to sleep, nervously cracked open one eyelid.

She suspected Cheng Shi couldn't accept the result and was about to cause a scene!

That was without a doubt the most insane possible decision. Yet Hong Lin didn't spend a single thought on how it would end. In her mind, there simply was no option for refusal or retreat. Her entire body was coiled and ready to throw herself into a battle she had zero chance of winning.

Beyond that, she had only one thought: how to protect her friend in the divine melee that was about to erupt.

[Oblivion] watched the instigator lose his mind and mocked:

"I finally understand what [Folly] meant by 'foolish acts.' He was indeed ahead of us in that regard. Now that I've witnessed one in person, I must say — it feels rather good. Mortal, I can accept my Divine Throne falling to another. But can you accept that you're about to lose your life?"

With that, [Oblivion] moved to strike. But before He could take a step, [Death]'s boss on the opposite side had already drawn that colossal scythe — forged from untold amounts of concentrated divinity.

He said nothing. Yet said everything.

For a tense moment, [Oblivion] eyed the eager [Void] and the cold-eyed [Death] across the way, then sank back into His seat with a shadowed expression.

And just as [Justice (Order)] deemed the matter concluded and prepared to announce the final result, Cheng Shi interrupted Him again.

He lifted his head. His gaze swept past his two [Void] Benefactors, past [Death]'s boss, past every god who had supported the petition. Finally, it settled on [Oblivion], and he smiled wryly:

"When you said you could accept your throne falling to another, you'd better have meant it."

Then he turned to face the Flowing Light Scales — eyes fixed solemnly upon [Justice (Order)], that embodiment of the Convention — and asked, word by deliberate word:

"When there are still gods who haven't voted, how can you declare this matter concluded?"

Chapter 1179: I Want... [Corruption]'s Vote

"All attendees have cast their votes. The result speaks for itself.

Allowing a mortal to observe the Assembly of Gods Convention was already an exception. You... have no right to question my impartiality."

Though [Justice (Order)]'s tone still carried that same stiff, unyielding cadence of pure order, everyone could hear that He was displeased by Cheng Shi's challenge.

Throughout the universe's history, even the gods seldom questioned His impartiality. At most, someone like [Folly] would argue that His fairness was being exploited by the ill-intentioned, applied to the "wrong" situation.

So Cheng Shi's words carried serious consequences — but then again, not that serious. After all, the Convention didn't govern mortals. No matter how angry [Justice (Order)] was, He couldn't punish him.

But He could expel the mortal.

The Flowing Light Scales cast down a shimmer of [Order]'s radiance, preparing to remove Cheng Shi from the chamber. But just then — just as [Fate] narrowed His eyes and was about to intervene — the Clown laughed again.

He lifted his head and stared directly at [Justice (Order)]:

"Fairness that cannot withstand questioning — what kind of fairness is that?!"

You're so eager to dismiss my challenge — is it because the [Order] of this universe has long since strayed from justice?!"

"..."

One sentence, and the gleaming Scales fell silent.

[Oblivion] watched the expulsion light dissipate and sneered:

"Worthy of being [Deceit]'s follower! At least in the art of self-deception, you've truly inherited your Benefactor's mastery! I admit your scheming was impressive and caught me off guard. But the vote is done — you've lost! Refusing to accept defeat while endlessly questioning [Justice (Order)]... what, will [Deceit]'s sophistry somehow argue this loss into a win? Pathetic!"

Cheng Shi kept his eyes fixed forward, but his lips curled into a scoff:

"If I recall correctly, the first one at this assembly to challenge [Justice (Order)] was you.

So why is it that now, suddenly, you believe [Justice (Order)] is without fault?

Quick to defend Him when the verdict suits you, quick to attack when it doesn't — heh, it seems these lofty gods are nothing more than fair-weather opportunists like me."

"You!!!"

One more sentence, and the "victorious" [Oblivion] nearly lost it.

The kicker was that Cheng Shi had included himself in the insult. He freely admitted he was a petty opportunist who played the winds, which left [Oblivion] unable to find a good angle for a comeback. His eyes shifted several times, the cold in His gaze growing sharper.

The assembled gods watched a mortal stand here sniping sarcasm at deities — without naming names, as if every single one of them had been roasted — and their reactions ran the gamut.

[Justice (Order)] fell silent for a moment, then withdrew His radiance. He spoke once more in solemn vibration:

"You are correct.

Any fairness must withstand questioning.

I grant you the right to challenge. But a challenge is not the same as slander. If you cannot produce evidence, I will still eject you from this chamber and revoke your right to attend future assemblies."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's laughter grew even wilder. He stepped forward and pointed brazenly at every divine seat in the chamber:

"How absurd!

What evidence is needed?

Even my mortal brain can count perfectly well — surely you esteemed true gods can manage simple arithmetic?

From time immemorial, Origin appointed sixteen to bear His name. Yet only fourteen are present. Two have not voted! So how can this matter be concluded?"

"Another foolish act."

After hearing Cheng Shi's words, [Folly] gave a derisive scoff. He glanced at [Deceit], then at [Oblivion], left one contemptuous remark, and departed on His own.

The gods paid no mind to His exit — but after Cheng Shi's challenge, their gazes turned toward the empty seats of [War] and [Corruption].

Most had heard at least some rumors: [War] had vanished after contact with [Deceit]. So was Cheng Shi's brazen posturing now a sign that [War]'s vote was [Void]'s hidden trump card?

Herobos saw a glimmer of hope. His eyes lit up, and when He looked at Cheng Shi, He wasn't seeing a mortal, or even an equal-ranking servant god. He was looking at... [Deceit] in person!

From start to finish, He'd never believed a mortal could wield any real voice at the Assembly of Gods Convention. As for why Cheng Shi had become the star of this show — presumably there were things that couldn't come directly from [Deceit]'s mouth as a true god.

[Deceit]'s eyes were tilted at their usual gleeful angle, pupils darting about, making His thoughts unreadable. But everyone present knew He had to be enjoying this immensely.

Of course, those from the Fear Faction who retained their memories knew [War] couldn't possibly cast this vote. So, following the implications, they stared with astonishment at the other empty seat: [Corruption].

[Justice (Order)] had essentially already guessed what Cheng Shi was about to say. But in deference to the principle of "responding to challenges," He explained with meticulous precision:

"Those who have not attended the Assembly of Gods Convention will, once all attending gods have finished voting, be automatically tallied as abstentions.

Therefore, your challenge is invalid. The result of this petition is—"

"Wait!"

Cheng Shi took another step forward, standing at the very edge of the [Void] section. His eyes were bloodshot as he pointed at [Corruption]'s empty throne and laughed with manic abandon:

"As you yourself said — only after the attending gods have finished voting will absentees be counted as abstentions. So before the final tally, as long as an absent god responds, their vote should be included in the result as well, should it not?!"

Before [Justice (Order)] could answer, [Oblivion] cut in with a sneer:

"What a nimble brain! What a vicious tongue! [Corruption] never refuses — you're planning to exploit His will to secure your final vote, aren't you? But you've forgotten why [Corruption] never refuses! He accepts every desire that comes His way — but He never responds to any of them! Go ahead, show us what a true clown looks like! I'll give you this chance — right here, right now, display your desire before my sibling god! Let's see how He takes it in... and says nothing!"

With that, [Oblivion] stepped aside, giving Cheng Shi a clear line of sight to [Corruption]'s seat.

Cheng Shi had indeed been banking on "[Corruption] never refuses" and wanted to take a shot. As he saw it, dignity was irrelevant — if there was any chance of winning, he was willing to gamble.

Besides, the Fun God still hadn't made a move. Normally, the deity who loved nothing more than making him look like a clown would have turned around to mock him by now. The fact that He hadn't... meant there was still a turn in the cards.

But where that turn was, Cheng Shi couldn't figure out — until he remembered [Corruption]'s nature of never refusing, and then remembered the [Corruption] container he carried, the one from Tria!

The Secret Peeping Ear had once said something:

"Why did She give you that thing? Trying to plant you as a mole in the Sea of Desire?"

That remark had made Cheng Shi believe that his acquisition of [Corruption]'s container must have been connected to the Fun God. At the time, he'd assumed the Fun God was using it to probe the Sea of Desire — after all, his Trial assignment back then had been to investigate the relationships between [War], [Order], and the Sea of Desire.

But now, looking back — while the events involving [War] and [Order] in the Sea of Desire had become clear, what about the Fun God's probe of [Corruption]?

He didn't seem to have ever mentioned the result.

Cheng Shi refused to believe his Benefactor was that straightforward. While every other god kept their distance from [Corruption], if [Deceit] had done the same, He wouldn't deserve the name [Deceit].

So, weighing every consideration, he staked everything on this single gamble.

He wasn't betting that [Corruption] would respond and cast a supporting vote. He was betting that the Fun God had already made a move on [Corruption] — and left a contingency — which was why He could remain so... calm in the face of impending defeat!

This was the true gamble!

Every god's eyes turned to the Clown. [Justice (Order)] made no move to stop him. Clearly, if Cheng Shi could truly awaken [Corruption] and secure a vote for this petition, the Convention's rules would require Him to recognize it.

Every gaze in the chamber converged on the Clown. This was no mere spotlight — it was the weight of divine scrutiny pressing down like collapsing stars, crushing the air from Cheng Shi's lungs.

But he still stood tall, spine straight, teeth clenched, and roared toward [Corruption]'s empty seat:

"All beings have desires, and I've never hidden mine!

Though my greatest desire doesn't lie here, I still want to say: I want to win!

This is not a mortal's defiance of the divine, nor an ordinary man's act of erasing the extraordinary. This is nothing more than the death cry of this world's most impossible desire — the Sea of Desire's most powerful pull toward an inexpressible selfish wish.

All praise to the great [Corruption]! If You truly resonate with every desire above and below the universe, then You will answer my plea — just as You yearn to behold the Creator! At this very moment, with the naked desire in my heart, I beg an audience with You!

I want... Your vote!"

Chapter 1180: A Response from the Sea of Desire!

Cheng Shi's words were dangerous.

Even the gods didn't dare approach [Corruption] lightly. The moment the tides of the Sea of Desire began to surge, not a single being in the universe was unafraid.

What they feared wasn't [Corruption] itself — it was their own desires, uncontrollable, unstoppable, inescapable.

As Cheng Shi had said, all beings had desires. But once such desire was amplified without limit, even if the intent behind it was good, the outcome rarely was.

Gods took root in faith. The Sea of Desire fed on want. When the water rose, the roots rotted; when the water receded, the roots withered.

Without the Sea of Desire's influence, roots grew naturally. But drawing too close would flood the soil of faith with desire, transforming it into a new Sea of Desire. That was precisely why the gods kept their distance from [Corruption].

No deity would allow their followers to approach [Corruption]. So the instant Cheng Shi spoke those words, [Deceit] gave a cold laugh and looked at the Clown with something like bitter disappointment:

"In any gamble, there are wins and losses.

If one could only win and never lose, why would [Deceit] need to exist at all?

I valued you so highly, yet you would betray my will over some meaningless [Oblivion] throne — going so far as to approach [Corruption] with your own body...

Pathetic!

A clown through and through — good for nothing but making people laugh.

It seems I misjudged you just this once. Very well. Since you're so obstinate, let all of today's spectacle serve as the clown's final curtain call.

[Void] has no need to borrow [Descent]'s hands for legitimacy — much less in the Era of [Void]!

To distance yourself from [Void] in this era — you will pay for that choice.

By my authority as sovereign of [Void], I sentence you — a laughingstock of a traitor — to immediate death."

With that, those eyes turned cold in an instant. The perpetually upturned corners dropped for once, and from above, countless icy gales of the void descended, sweeping directly toward Cheng Shi.

He actually intended to execute His own follower right here!

The entire chamber was shocked.

[Justice (Order)] said nothing, patiently waiting. [Oblivion] sneered, content to watch the infighting. [Memory] lowered His gaze, quietly recording. [Prosperity]... couldn't sit still.

Hong Lin — who had opened her eyes only once this entire Assembly — heard [Deceit] disavow Cheng Shi entirely and sentence him to death. She instantly roared, transformed into a bear spirit, and lunged toward Cheng Shi.

She knew she couldn't stop [Deceit]. But she could at least block the void's howling gales — even if only for one second, it would be one more second her friend lived!

She had always said she would protect her friends. She had always lived by that conviction.

But this time, she failed.

She had barely cleared the top of [Death]'s skull when the tip of that colossal Scythe hooked her in midair — like an angler reeling in a fish that had taken the bait. No matter how hard she thrashed, she couldn't advance an inch.

"Let me go! I need to save him! Let go of me!!"

She roared furiously at [Death]'s boss, but the enormous skull merely intoned:

"Easy now."

And at that very moment — while this sideshow played out — a pair of eyes suddenly appeared above Cheng Shi's head. Those star-points swirling in frenzied spirals looked toward His sibling god, His voice frigid as a descending abyss, each word carved in ice:

"The manifestation of [Void] does not get to speak for [Void].

If all things are destined to return to nothingness, then why shouldn't [Corruption] be allowed to draw near [Void]?!"

"?"

[Deceit] laughed in true fury. He jabbed a finger at His incomprehensible sibling and snapped:

"He doesn't know what [Corruption] is — fine. But do you not know either?!"

Where is the [Fate] who never deigned to even glance at [Corruption]?!

Just to protect him — a mortal — you would break your own principles and approach [Corruption]?!

[Fate], I think you've truly lost your mind!

The sacrifice for [Void] doesn't have to be him!"

[Fate]'s gaze grew ever colder. The terrifying aura of nothingness permeated nearly the entire chamber. The gods once again caught the scent of Misfortune, and in an instant transformed from idle spectators into frowning, watchful "combatants on standby."

They had to guard against [Fate] dragging the universe into Misfortune once more.

[Fate] glanced coldly at [Deceit] and responded with just six words:

"Fixed Destiny. It must be him."

"Looks like we're fighting whether we like it or not?" [Deceit] scoffed. "Good. Just in time to crush this traitor completely. Once he loses four votes for breaking the rules, no amount of sucking up to [Corruption] will save his chances!"

With that, [Deceit] moved to attack. But at that instant, [Fate] suddenly withdrew — channeling every last drop of His remaining "Change" authority, using His own "desire" for Fixed Destiny to trigger a response from the distant depths of the Sea of Desire.

In the next moment, every god's expression shifted — because the unmistakable sound of the Sea of Desire's tides was now echoing clearly through the brilliant starry sky!

[Corruption] had answered.

Monstrous waves surged. Water churned in whirlpools. The surface of that sea — representing every desire in the universe — began to rise.

"Damn..."

Even Cheng Shi was stunned.

He'd considered the possibility that [Corruption] might respond, but he'd never imagined the response would look like this!

'I wanted your vote, not the entire Sea of Desire flooding the Assembly of Gods Convention!'

He whipped around to stare at his Benefactor — not [Fate], but [Deceit] — only to find the Fun God's eye twitching violently.

Clearly, He hadn't anticipated His sibling going this far off the deep end either.

In truth, when Cheng Shi had heard the Fun God sentence him to death, he'd immediately realized his Benefactor was bluffing again. Personally killing a traitor might make sense, but it made for lousy entertainment.

Don't forget — He was [Deceit], the Fun God. If there was one god in the entire universe who could tolerate betrayal, it was Him and no one else. So why would He publicly execute a "traitor"?

Especially when this "traitor" was a Clown.

Until the last drop of comedy had been wrung from the Clown, He would never let the act end — much less allow the Clown to go work as a proper employee at some old bag of bones' outfit.

It was precisely because [Death]'s boss had seen through this that He'd stopped Hong Lin from her "heroic charge."

But if [Death] could see through it, surely [Fate] — a fellow [Void] sovereign — could too?

Of course He could. He'd seen through everything long ago. He was simply seizing the opportunity.

He'd been unable to probe [Corruption] on His own, so He used this moment to test His sibling [Deceit] — to discover exactly what sort of twisted alliance [Deceit] had formed with [Corruption].

If [Deceit] had truly found [Corruption], then under [Deceit]'s mediation, the current Sea of Desire crisis wouldn't be a crisis at all.

If [Deceit] was bluffing and hadn't found [Corruption] either, then it meant the "assimilation" route was a dead end — and this Assembly would inevitably end in [Void]'s defeat.

And since [Void] would have lost anyway, giving the gods a taste of suffering was only "fair."

No matter the outcome, [Fate] came out ahead. So He'd deliberately amplified His emotions, triggering the Sea of Desire's eruption, and under the gods' noses, within [Deceit]'s scheme to shift blame, He quietly won a round.

[Deceit] was genuinely laughing in anger.

He had indeed been planning to shift the blame.

Letting His follower shout at [Corruption] — if [Corruption] simply voted "yes," wouldn't that confirm He was in bed with [Corruption]?

That couldn't go public yet. So He'd devised a plan: let [Fate] take the fall. Amid the quarrel, pin [Corruption]'s agreement on [Fate].

After all, His sibling only knew how to fight. When anyone came asking questions, they could go have a fight with Him. Problem solved.

That way, [Fate]'s combat urges were satisfied, and [Deceit]'s hands stayed clean. What was not to love?

But He hadn't expected [Fate] to go this big — clearly determined to ruin His day, insisting on making things difficult.

Of course, whether any of this was performative showmanship for the benefit of His follower was anyone's guess.

But it didn't matter too much. Priority one was getting the vote count settled. As for the consequences of the Sea of Desire flooding the Assembly... who cared? It was bound to be entertaining.

So [Deceit] blinked — and while the gods' attention was split by the rising tide, He made His quiet little move within the chamber.

Moments later, as the Sea of Desire continued to climb, a voice suddenly rang out from [Corruption]'s empty seat in the brilliant starry sky.

"I agree."

"!!!"

Every mortal and god in attendance turned in astonishment — and saw a figure who had been missing for far too long appear once more before the gods' eyes.

Cheng Shi was stunned too. He didn't recognize the hunched man wrapped in black robes, but that voice — he knew it all too well.

"How can it be...

Dragon King?!?"