

## The Gods 1271

Chapter 1271: What Is Faith For?

The clown had his defenses shattered.

Which clown? Hard to say.

Once Long Jing realized he'd been identified, he dropped the pretense entirely and stormed off in a fit of mortified rage, practically wishing he could vanish on the spot.

But the moment he rounded another small hill, his expression turned serious. He stopped dead in his tracks, spun around, grabbed Zhang Jizu, and dove behind the hill. Ears perked high, he strained to catch the movements of the two on the other side, while simultaneously saying:

"Old Zhang, don't just stand there. Keep an eye out and make sure that Cheng doesn't spot us here. I want to hear exactly what's going on between those two!"

Zhang Jizu shook his head and pulled Long Jing three feet down from where he was pressed against the hilltop.

"You're lying too high. If they start fighting, any jump would give them a clear view of you."

Long Jing blinked, then gave him a thumbs-up.

"Now that's reliable. I won't hold it against you for calling me a clown.

We're all brothers here—and you shouldn't hold it against me for saying your eyes are small.

After all, your eyes really are small. But I'm definitely not a clown."

"..."

Zhang Jizu narrowed his eyes. His fists clenched.

Long Jing, completely absorbed in eavesdropping, didn't notice Zhang Jizu's thunderous expression. He muttered to himself: "Poison said she knows a huge Corruption secret. What do you think it could be?"

Corruption?

Zhang Jizu narrowed his eyes and shook his head. But he suspected the secret might be related to Poison's visible exhaustion.

...

On the other side, while Shadow Chengshi and Poison were in their standoff, Cheng Shi quietly emerged from behind a different hill. He glanced toward the direction Long Jing and Old Zhang had gone—at a mound that just so happened to be the perfect size to conceal two people—and silently rolled his eyes.

He knew there were almost certainly two sneaky Joker members lurking behind it, eavesdropping. But he chose not to call them out.

What was the point? Even if he flushed them out and chased them off, who knew if they'd next pop up underground or overhead?

If the Joker members weren't intensely curious, they'd never have banded together to pursue the universe's true secrets in the first place.

So... since he couldn't stop them, he might as well let them be. It was actually better knowing where they were—at least he could selectively block things when secrecy was required.

Cheng Shi approached slowly. The two Cheng Shis merged into one before Poison's eyes. Watching this wondrous sight, she remarked with fascination:

"So this is the authority you've manifested?"

"..."

'Good thing the Bone Bell had rung in time. Otherwise, all my disguises would've been stripped away.'

Cheng Shi gazed at Poison, casually deflecting: "I have no idea what you're talking about. This is tanning I paid for."

"Pfft—hahahaha—" Poison doubled over again, eyes dancing. "Where did you get it done? I'd love to try."

Cheng Shi rolled his eyes once more. "Just because I pointed you down a path doesn't mean you get to bounce around in front of me. I've said it before—inside the game, I prefer that you address me as Cheng Shi."

His tone was intimidating, but Poison knew perfectly well he wasn't actually angry. Still, she lowered her stance and adopted a humble, obedient demeanor:

"Very well, Lord Cheng Shi. Shall we begin?"

"?" Cheng Shi blinked. "Begin what?"

"You dismissed everyone and left just little me here. Surely that means you want to..." As she spoke, Poison used her dagger to slice open the collar of her hoodie, then trailed the blade downward, along—

"BOOM—"

An abrupt thunderbolt grazed past Poison's hair and scorched the ground behind her into charred earth.

The blast instantly yanked Poison's memory back to that house in Kannar, capital of the Rosna Empire. Cheng Shi had opened their "normal" conversation with the very same thunderclap that time too. Funnily enough, two people had been eavesdropping then as well.

Poison cast a meaningful glance at the distant hill, then feigned alarm: "Lord Cheng Shi, did I do something wrong?"

"..."

"Act normal," Cheng Shi said darkly. "Stop with the nonsense."

Poison looked deeply aggrieved: "How am I not being normal? I accidentally stabbed myself just now and I'm trying to cut some cloth for a bandage—is that not allowed?"

Some people are priests who won't even heal a person...

If you won't do it, at least let me treat myself?"

"I..."

Cheng Shi's eyelid twitched violently.

'Right, right—I see now. You Corruption followers and your endless tricks!'

Seething, he flung a healing spell at her. Radiant, vitality-rich holy light cascaded over Poison. As she felt her flesh knitting together with a tingling sensation, Poison couldn't help herself:

"Ahh~"

"Shut your mouth!"

Cheng Shi's face had gone rigid. He raised his hand and charged another thunderbolt: "Make that noise one more time and I'll bury you in Old Zhang's cemetery—dead until you can't make any noise ever again!

Talk fast. Stop wasting my time.

And be serious—put away all that garbage in your head!"

Perhaps sensing Cheng Shi's genuine impatience, Poison obediently tucked away her earlier expressions, knelt neatly on the ground, and lowered her head in apology:

"I understand, Lord Cheng Shi. But let me mount a defense for myself.

What's in my head isn't garbage... it's the genuine article.

Colors don't have right or wrong. The wrong lies with the people wearing tinted glasses.

Just like human desire—people's prejudices have never disappeared since the dawn of time."

"..."

Cheng Shi's eyelid twitched again. If he hadn't confirmed Zhen Xin had already left, he might have thought the Poison before him was actually Zhen Xin in disguise.

'Girl—have you caught Deceit too?'

'Why are you so chatty today?'

Cheng Shi gave a cold snort and looked down at her: "Do you think you're funny?"

"Probably not as funny as a clown..." Poison's posture grew ever more humble.

"...?"

'Something's wrong!'

'Definitely wrong!'

Given Poison's talent for flattery and her will that excelled at reading situations, the normal her would never repeatedly dance on his "landmines." Today's Poison seemed more like The Prisoner—going out of her way to provoke a fight.

But she knew his identity as Yu Xi. What kind of upheaval could have given her the suicidal courage to pick a fight with the very servant god who had guided her?

He immediately realized everything she'd been doing was deflection and distraction—forcing composure to mask the turmoil beneath.

What had happened to her?

Cheng Shi frowned slightly, thought for a moment, then lowered his hand and asked seriously: "What happened?"

The sudden shift in atmosphere instantly stripped Poison of her earlier "courage." She slumped, eyes heavy with exhaustion. She shook her head—then, as if wrestling with something, forced herself back up. She looked at Cheng Shi, locked onto his gaze, and asked, word by painful word:

"You..."

Are you really Yu Xi?"

Cheng Shi's eyes sharpened. Whatever Poison had experienced was very likely connected to Yu Xi. He couldn't be sure how things would develop, nor whether he'd already revealed some flaw. So he kept his answer vague, wrapping it in mystery:

"Yes—so what?"

No—so what?

Believe and it is. Doubt and it isn't. It's merely a servant god's title—what's there to agonize over?

I am Cheng Shi. Same as always. Never changed.

Does that answer satisfy you?"

Poison blinked, carefully parsing his words. Then she shook her head in confusion:

"I don't know..."

I don't know if I'm satisfied. I don't even know what I'm doing—or why I'm chasing this game...

Lord Yu Xi, if you truly are one of those gods high above, could you clear something up for me?

Faith—what is it even for?"

Cheng Shi's inner doubts deepened, but his surface remained calm as a breeze:

"Simple. It's for staying alive."

Poison froze again—then suddenly burst into wild laughter. Her laugh was so lost, so mocking, so unhinged that Cheng Shi thought she'd gone mad.

"Staying alive?"

What a lovely answer—'staying alive.'

If it's for staying alive, then why did He choose to perish right before my eyes?"

"!!!?"

...

Chapter 1272: Which "He" Died!?

Who died?

Surely not Corruption!?

That was Cheng Shi's first reaction. A chill detonated from his scalp and a subtle tremor coursed through every limb. His pupils contracted sharply as he locked onto Poison's eyes, his falcon-keen gaze searching for answers in her irises.

Corruption's whereabouts were unknown even to the gods. He never attended the Assembly of Gods Convention. Would He truly manifest His true body before one of His own followers—and then destroy Himself before her eyes?

Cheng Shi couldn't bear to imagine it.

Nor could he comprehend why Corruption—who represented the universe's very desire—would perish.

Everything in this world, whether human or divine, had desire. Though this was the era of Void, it was also Corruption's golden age. His will permeated the universe; He didn't even need to spread it deliberately. He should have been the one god who could sit back and profit in every era. So what reason would He have to end Himself?

It wasn't without cause that Cheng Shi was fixating on Corruption as the self-destroyed deity. Did he remember his discovery in the Real Universe?

In that Corpse Field of Gods, divine corpses rained down like a storm—yet among them, Corruption and Fate were conspicuously absent!

Perhaps Fate lingered in each slice universe because of His obsession with predetermination. But why wasn't a single Corruption found dead in the Real Universe?

Could it be that the information Poison possessed was the very answer he'd been searching for?

That every version of Him had died within their own worlds?

Cheng Shi's heart clenched. He asked again: "What exactly happened?"

Poison lifted her head to gaze at that face. Her expression shifted through several changes before she asked, pallid: "Your guidance to me... was it all just so that one day, you could extract information about Him from my lips?"

"?"

'So it really is about Corruption!?'

But what did Poison's words mean? Was she guarding against him?

No—if she truly distrusted him, she wouldn't have used Long Jing to summon him here. It looked like she wanted to trust him but harbored doubts. And those doubts seemed connected to the identity of Yu Xi!

Cheng Shi sensed a crisis of trust from her. The servant god identity had carved a chasm between them, one that kept Poison from daring to approach.

Why?

Without hearing the assassin's story first, he couldn't determine his own stance. But regaining someone's trust was no challenge for a deceiver.

So Cheng Shi thought briefly, produced a mask, and placed it face-down on the ground with gravity:

"I won't deny I'm Yu Xi. But I've always been Cheng Shi too.

I'm different from the gods you imagine—at least in this game, I've always stood on the opposite side of the gods.

As for whether I stand with you, that depends on your position, not mine.

Opposing the gods is a matter of enormous consequence. I can't explain it in a sentence or two, and without understanding your stance, I cannot reveal the truth to you.

But I can tell you plainly: I'm working on a way to keep this world 'alive.'

If the identity of Yu Xi frightens you, then today, let's set Yu Xi aside. Here, there's only Poison and Cheng Shi—a heart-heavy assassin and a deceiver who has shed his mask.

Miss Assassin, can you trust me now?"

Perhaps the familiar phrasing reignited Poison's trust. She pressed her lips together, lowered her head, and spoke softly:

"I... went to the Sea of Desire again.

While you all went to the Mockery and Jeering looking for something, I took a detour back to the shores of the Sea of Desire."

"!!!"

The moment he heard "Sea of Desire," Cheng Shi knew this was no small matter.

And the word "again" only deepened his frown.

That wretched place—any sane person who visited once would never want to return. Yet this villainess, banking on her status as a Corruption follower, had gone a second time. What had she been doing there, both times?

Poison spoke slowly, softly:

"I went there to confirm something.

Whether His self-destruction... was real or fake.

The trial came too quickly, and I didn't have time to see everything clearly. But now I'm certain—He is dead. He died at the shores of the Sea of Desire, and before dying, He took something from me..."

"..."

'Girl—now's really not the time for riddles. I'm dying of curiosity here.'

Cheng Shi suppressed his burning curiosity. He didn't dare rush her. He just listened patiently.

"Do you know that my Lord has three 'children'?" Poison looked up.

"Naturally. Sin of Desirelessness—Drasilco. The Mercy Lord—Tria. And the Gate of Joyous Lust—Aph Ros."

Tria was long dead, grass already sprouting on her grave. Aph Ros was doing hard time. That left only Drasilco—who had fallen into the Fun God's hands.

Corruption's "children" had truly been star-crossed.

Cheng Shi was by now half an expert on Corruption. Aside from never meeting Corruption personally, he knew every sordid detail of the envoys' affairs inside and out.

So when Poison brought up those three, the sharp-minded Cheng Shi instantly realized something. His eyes went wide with shock.

'I was wrong!'

The one who had perished wasn't Corruption. It was... Drasilco!?

"Sin of Desirelessness is dead?"

Poison's expression turned extraordinarily complex. She stared blankly at the ground and nodded.

"Yes.

I had never had an audience with my god, so I risked a trip to the Sea of Desire. It was my first time approaching its shores.

I hadn't expected anything, but there I unexpectedly encountered Drasilco, who had just returned from an audience with God within the Sea of Desire.

He saw me, stopped me, and said:

'He is not worth an audience. There is no Corruption in this world.

I thought I was myself—but I was never me...'

Then He drew a dagger and drove it straight through His own heart, collapsing to His knees before me.

I was petrified. I stood there, frozen, unable to move. He coughed blood, smiled, and beckoned to me.

I knew He wasn't calling me. He... summoned away my desire.

As He extinguished that spark of desire with His own hands, He smiled and said: 'Why should the wicked be wicked? This is the first good deed I've ever done. Go, child. Leave this place.'

He died. And my desire vanished with Him.

Drasilco stripped away my desire.

Little priest... I have no desire left. None.

Right now, I'm nothing but an empty shell. I'm only 'playing' myself. The real me... 'died' at the shores of the Sea of Desire."

"!!!!!"

Cheng Shi was stunned. He said, barely believing it:

"Are you saying that Sin of Desirelessness—right before death—personally created a person without desire!?"

Poison gave a bleak smile. "Yes. Me. Funny, isn't it?"

That's why I'm asking you—what even is faith?

And why do gods exist?

If the gods brought this game to spread faith, then why, at the very shores of the Sea closest to my Lord, did He strip me of all my desire?

Why did He do it? What right did He have? And what was He trying to accomplish?

Lord Yu Xi, can you give me an answer?"

"..."

Cheng Shi had no answer to give.

He couldn't imagine what an enormous blasphemy Drasilco's final act was against Corruption, let alone what Drasilco might have discovered within the Sea of Desire to make such a choice.

He still remembered Drasilco's words at the end of the Assembly of Gods Convention: "May we meet again." But now, meeting again was impossible. He'd learned of the death through Poison's lips.

And what did Drasilco's parting words mean—"He is not worth an audience. There is no Corruption in this world"?

The statement itself was paradoxical. There couldn't be no Corruption in this world—He was a true god ordained by Origin. Whether He existed or not wasn't His own call to make.

Furthermore, even if there truly were no Corruption, why would the first half of Drasilco's sentence use "He" is not worth an audience?

If He didn't exist, where did "He" come from?

Cheng Shi was lost too. All of this far exceeded his expectations and made the already-opaque truth even more bewildering.

His experience in the Real Universe had convinced Cheng Shi that Corruption held a key clue to deciphering the universe's truth. But the question remained: who could tell him where Corruption was?

Or rather... did He even exist?

No one knew the answer.

Just like the deathly stillness of this moment—even the wind had gone quiet.

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Chapter 1273: Madame Freud's Flaw

Meanwhile, on the other side.

Zhen Xin and Hu Wei had swiftly infiltrated the Imperial City of Kurd.

After coming clean about their faiths, the two stopped hiding. Chaos energy surged and roiled, letting them move through the guard-filled palace as if it were empty.

Hu Wei was curious about why Zhen Xin had fused with Chaos, but that curiosity was tinged with more delight than anything.

After all, if Chaos had agreed to fuse with Deceit, it proved that Lord Ultraman's guidance was correct—Void could be approached. The only regret was that the first to eat the crab wasn't him, but Zhen Xin.

Along the way, he studied Zhen Xin repeatedly, probing in various ways: "You've already met that Lord?"

Zhen Xin was happy to tease him to pass the time, so she answered: "Who? Ultraman?"

Hu Wei's pupils contracted. As expected of a Deceit follower—referring to that Lord by name so casually was a bit disrespectful. But understandable, really. Among players, calling gods by name was commonplace so long as it wasn't to their face.

"So you have met Him."

Zhen Xin smiled and shook her head: "I had the honor once. It was He who brought me to that temple."

Zhen Xin had been to the temple!?

Hu Wei's eyes went wide. Even he, the Chaos Chosen, had never set foot inside the temple. Every audience had been Lord Ultraman summoning him to the landing platform on the grand staircase. How had Zhen Xin, of all people, gained direct entry?

Could this be the "price of admission" for approaching Void?

The Grand Marshal was sour—but he masked it well, continuing in a breezy tone: "So you've already had an audience with my Lord, then."

He delivered the line with great confidence, like a veteran employee who was regularly summoned, checking in on a new hire who'd just reported to work.

Zhen Xin naturally heard the subtext—he was trying to pull rank on her through his closeness to Chaos. She didn't care about that. What this exchange did confirm for her was that the Grand Marshal had no idea Chaos was actually the Fun God.

If he'd known, he'd never dream of trying to outrank the Deceit Chosen in "piety."

This was interesting. A Chaos Chosen who was completely in the dark... What was the Fun God scheming?

"Naturally. He bestowed the second faith upon me with His own hands."

'With His own hands... bestowed...'

On the surface, Hu Wei wore a 'just as I expected' expression. Internally, he was exploding.

He had actually lost to Zhen Xin!

She was one of Deceit's people—by what right had she beaten him to an audience with Chaos?

Were all the things he'd done for the temple truly worth less than a single probe from someone of "Void origin"!??

It wasn't fair!

But on second thought—fairness was Order's domain. Chaos was Order's opposite, and fairness was never part of the deal...

Yet to have given so much effort and still come up short against a "Void pedigree"—the Grand Marshal was deeply unwilling.

Zhen Xin sensed the shift in his emotions. After brief consideration, she guessed what was going on, but didn't react outwardly. She simply filed it away, thinking it might become leverage for future cooperation with the Grand Marshal.

And so, Zhen Xin fielded Hu Wei's probing while the two of them pushed deeper into the palace.

Kurd's Imperial City wasn't large. On top of that, the internal order wasn't as tight as the players had imagined. The patrol guards' discipline was remarkably lax. Before the two even started asking around, they overheard gossip from a pair of gate sentries that revealed Madame Freud's whereabouts.

"With that many prop boxes being hauled in, today's performance must be really grand! I wish I could go watch."

"Nonsense. It's just a few acts. All that show is just for buttering up the royals. Same as us standing guard—the moment someone shows up, we straighten our backs to look dutiful."

"How do you know it's only a few acts? Did you see the program?"

"Are you stupid? Count the people. There are fewer performers than boxes. Where would all these acts come from?"

Besides, Morning Joy is preparing for the Curtain Call performance in a few days. Why would they bring their real show to the palace now?"

The royals need novelty too. If they've already seen everything, how would they enjoy it 'alongside the people'? And without 'enjoying alongside the people,' how do they solidify their rule?"

"You've been guarding this palace this long, and you still have zero political awareness?"

"What do I need political awareness for... I'm just a guard."

"Even guards should dream. What if someday you— Stand straight! Someone's coming."

The two guards snapped to attention, saluting the passersby with a ceremonial gaze. The passersby were, of course, Zhen Xin and Hu Wei, who walked past with peculiar expressions, following the guards' inadvertent directions toward the troupe's staging area within the palace.

Soon, they pinpointed Madame Freud's location and, the moment she was alone in the prop room, appeared before the circus ringmaster without warning.

Madame Freud proved herself a woman who had weathered storms. When two strangers materialized before her, she didn't panic—she merely furrowed her brow and asked:

"Who are you? What business do you have with me?"

Out of "respect" for the Deceit trial, the Grand Marshal refrained from his usual blunt interrogation methods. He extended a hand in a courteous "after you" gesture, ceding the floor to Zhen Xin.

Zhen Xin flashed a radiant smile, appraised Madame Freud for a moment, and got straight to the point: "Where have you hidden Masford?"

"?"

Madame Freud's frown deepened, but she showed no alarm. She shook her head:

"I'm afraid I don't understand what you two mean. If you're looking for Masford, I'm sorry, but he's not on today's palace performance roster.

With the Curtain Call approaching, Masford is working hard on his new act. If you're fans of his, please give him some time. I'm certain he'll deliver a spectacular show for you—for the world.

So please be patient, and don't go disturbing him at the circus."

Madame Freud's response was impeccable—gracious and flawless. As a former clown herself, her ability to improvise was formidable.

Unfortunately, the people she'd run into weren't "people" like her. They were two players.

Zhen Xin applauded appreciatively, her tone playful:

"As expected of someone with a clown's background, Ringmaster Freud. Quick-witted indeed. That routine might work on the Golden House crowd, but for us, it's a touch too crude.

Running into two strangers in the Imperial City must be puzzling, yes?

You're probably trying to figure out where we came from. Don't bother guessing—I'll tell you. We came from Morning Joy. And it was Lake himself who showed us the way."

"!!!"

The moment she heard Lake's name next to Morning Joy, Madame Freud's composure visibly cracked. She retreated a step, preparing to flee, but Hu Wei's greatsword arrived at her slender neck a beat ahead of her.

The heavy blade's weight buckled her back. Just as she was about to cry out, Zhen Xin produced a magic card and pressed it against her lips, grinning:

"Shh!"

Don't shout. Even when a clown botches the act, she should maintain her dignity, don't you think?

Let me guess. Since you employed such a drastic strategy against the Sunset, then whether Masford is dead or alive, you had to keep him hidden. He's the one flaw in this plan—he absolutely cannot be discovered.

But the world is full of surprises. No one can guarantee that a hidden thing will stay hidden forever. And as a busy circus ringmaster, you can hardly afford to constantly monitor your 'collection' to make sure it stays concealed.

So—how do you ensure the plan doesn't spring a leak?"

Zhen Xin smiled, tracing the card along Madame Freud's jawline, wiping away her cold sweat. She surveyed the room:

"If I were you, I'd keep the most important thing close at hand. That way, you'd notice immediately if anything went wrong.

Masford came to the Imperial City with you, didn't he?

I've been wondering since we got here—if there are so few performers, why bring so many prop boxes?

Now I understand. Tell me—one of these prop boxes wouldn't happen to contain something that isn't a prop, would it?"

Zhen Xin chuckled softly, and under Madame Freud's panicked gaze, opened the prop boxes one by one—until she discovered, in the very last box, a corpse!

Chapter 1274: The True Accident!

Masford really was dead!

Though they'd expected it, when Zhen Xin and Hu Wei actually saw the body, their pupils contracted.

In Lake's account, Masford was a clown with whom he resonated on a soul level, and Lake was a purist devoted to the pinnacle of performing arts. It stood to reason that Masford was the same kind of person.

Which meant he would never have agreed to Madame Freud using such "dirty" tactics against the Sunset. Even if he wanted to win, he would have insisted on winning fair and square.

Then his death... had Madame Freud—single-mindedly driving Morning Joy to victory—done it with her own hands?

Neither person present had forgotten that Madame Freud was a member of the Extreme Desire Brotherhood.

Corruption followers would stop at nothing to fulfill the desires in their hearts.

Though the public saw Madame Freud as an upstanding ringmaster, her personal morals—judging by the methods she'd used to deceive Lake—were far from noble.

But the question was: the emotions in the diary couldn't be faked. Would Madame Freud truly be so ruthless as to extinguish her own feelings for the sake of Morning Joy's honor?

Most importantly, there were no ligature marks on Masford's neck—which meant even the cause of death Lake had been told was false.

How had he actually died?

With questions swirling, Zhen Xin turned to Madame Freud. Hu Wei had timely withdrawn his greatsword, and without that coercion, Madame Freud collapsed to the ground. It seemed she'd already lost any will to resist.

The grief on her face alone showed how deeply Masford's death pained her. But as a deceiver, Zhen Xin knew that sometimes seeing wasn't believing.

"Talk, Madame Freud. How do you explain all of this?"

Madame Freud lay on the floor, whimpering softly. Then she swallowed her tears, looked up with furious eyes, and demanded:

"Who are you people!"

Zhen Xin's smile didn't waver:

"Rest assured, we're not secret investigators sent by the royal court, nor are we enemies of the Morning Joy Circus. We're here to help you.

This circus competition has been drawn into a vortex beyond ordinary comprehension. You don't need to know the full picture—just tell us everything you know.

Of course, you have the right to refuse. And we have the freedom to take Masford with us.

Whether the clown gets to rest in one piece is up to you."

"Devils!

You're devils!"

Madame Freud became hysterical. When the crushing grief surged back, riding a wave of fury that overwhelmed reason, she lunged to her feet. She pulled a dagger from her bosom and plunged it straight at Zhen Xin's chest.

With her plan exposed, there was no going back. If the truth got out, not just she but all of Morning Joy would be dragged down.

Rather than watch the circus empire she'd built with her own hands collapse before her eyes, she'd rather fight now. If she could take out these two mysterious strangers, maybe—just maybe—she still had a chance!

So Madame Freud gritted her teeth, hurled herself forward, and drove the dagger into Zhen Xin's heart.

The unmistakable sensation of blade meeting flesh—and the resistance of the blade tip—made Madame Freud pause.

It worked?

She stared in disbelief at her own veined, trembling hands, at the blood splattered across her chest, at the blade sunk into flesh...

The devil was dead?

No—wait. Those weren't the devil's clothes. Those looked like... Morning Joy's performing costume?

Madame Freud jerked her head up—and the face before her was no longer the female devil's. It had become Masford's.

Yes. She had driven the dagger into Masford's heart with her own hands!

"No!!!"

Madame Freud's mind went blank. She didn't understand how the dead Masford had come back to life and taken the devil's place. All she could see were his disbelieving eyes and the shock-terror written across his face. She wailed, flung the dagger away, and stumbled backward in panic.

"No—no!! It's not like this! Masford, I didn't want to hurt you!"

"BANG—"

Madame Freud crashed to the ground.

The sharp pain sobered her for an instant. When she saw Masford collapse with his hand pressed over his chest wound, she scrambled over like a madwoman, gathered him in her arms, pressed down on the wound, and screamed:

"Don't! Don't die! You can't die!"

Her mind was empty. She crumpled over Masford's body, wailing and sobbing. And then the dead Masford suddenly opened his eyes, smiling warmly:

"Well, Ringmaster—now I believe you didn't kill your clown.

Ready to tell us your story?"

Madame Freud froze. She looked up blankly, only to find that the Masford in her arms had at some point turned back into the female devil.

The entire ordeal had been like an illusion—dragging her into the abyss of despair, then casually spitting her back out to roll softly across the floor.

Madame Freud stared blankly for a second. She shoved Zhen Xin away and threw herself at the prop box. When she saw Masford's body still lying inside, intact, relief flashed first—followed by another bout of heart-rending, lung-splitting sobs.

The circus ringmaster was completely broken.

Watching all of this, Hu Wei's eyelids twitched violently. He tightened his grip on his greatsword.

In this moment, the Zhen Xin before him looked less like the elder sister and more like the younger one—Zhen Yi. Because Zhen Yi was the one who drove other players "mad" using exactly these techniques.

Zhen Xin sensed the wariness behind her. She turned slightly, flashing an innocent smile, then looked back at Madame Freud:

"You have one chance. Otherwise, I'm not sure Masford won't climb out of that prop box himself."

"Devil... you're a devil..."

Madame Freud's voice had gone hoarse from crying. She couldn't bring herself to look at Zhen Xin, but she didn't dare stay silent either. Clutching the corpse inside the prop box, she told the true story in a ragged, broken voice.

"No one harmed Masford. He wasn't murdered. He died... in an accident..."

Zhen Xin started, then something clicked. She raised an eyebrow in shock: "The drinking?"

"Yes!"

Madame Freud had lost all capacity for rational thought. She had no mental energy left to wonder how these people knew so much. She just wanted to finish talking so these two devils would leave—get far away from her and Masford's body.

"That day, he went to a tavern to drink away the pressure of the Curtain Call performance. There, he ran into Lake, who'd come for the same reason.

They hit it off immediately and drank heavily. But Masford couldn't handle that much alcohol. His body had always been frail. The excessive alcohol killed him that very night.

He died... from nothing more than a night of drinking...

Why! Why did it have to be this way!?

This wasn't the release he was looking for, and it wasn't the future I wanted!

When I received the news that night, I refused to believe it was an accident. I went to the tavern. I questioned every witness inside. They all told me the same thing—everything had been normal. Nothing unusual. Just two strange men cheering and bonding over drinks!

That's when I knew—Masford had died at the hands of 'fate'!

But why?

Why did they have to meet? Why wasn't it Lake who died? Why did even the heavens favor the Sunset!

I wouldn't accept it. I refused. I hated it!

So I used Masford's death to scheme. I tricked Lake into coming to Morning Joy.

I was going to make Lake pay. Make the Sunset pay. Make the unfair hand of fate pay!

Morning Joy would not lose—and neither would I!"

Madame Freud's face contorted with hysteria. She looked around wildly at the two demons before her, blinked once, and was suddenly lucid. Then she crumpled again.

"But I've still lost... It's all gone..."

There will never be another Morning Joy. And no one will remember a clown named Masford.

Kill me. I've lost any reason to go on living..."

Madame Freud collapsed in despair.

The two, now knowing the truth, felt no sympathy. Each furrowed their brows for different reasons.

Hu Wei was still scrutinizing whether Zhen Xin had switched personalities. Zhen Xin, meanwhile, had dropped her smile entirely, her expression turning gravely serious:

"This is bad. We've got a problem."

...

Chapter 1275: Is Brother Cheng the Answer to Void?

Hu Wei was certain Zhen Xin wasn't joking, because he had never seen such a serious side to this magician.

Zhen Xin casually drew a magic card and put Madame Freud into a deep sleep. Then, brow deeply furrowed, she thought for a long while before fixing Hu Wei with a grave look:

"Grand Marshal... can I trust you?"

"?"

'Zhen Xin isn't Zhen Yi—she's Brother Cheng?'

Hu Wei blanked for a moment, but quickly realized this was baseless association. The person before him was Zhen Xin—"full-throttle" Zhen Xin.

She looked like a magician about to take the stage—momentum blazing, spirits soaring.

What had she discovered? What was she planning?

Hu Wei frowned slightly, unhurried in his response, and probed with a counter-question: "Trust in what sense?"

Zhen Xin's words came slow, resolute as iron: "As fellow humans—advance together, retreat together!"

"???"

Language was a wondrous art. The word "human" was used constantly—after all, the Land of Hope had many races, and "human" was a common term of distinction. But when a peak player used it in a setting devoid of other races, its meaning pointed in only one direction:

As distinct from gods!

And "advance together, retreat together" sliced humanity and divinity apart completely, splitting them into two irreconcilable camps.

Hu Wei was startled—but not afraid. On the contrary, his blood ran hot.

As a player who wanted to go further in the Faith Game, the Grand Marshal never closed himself off to any path forward. That was why he'd always used Lord Ultraman's guidance as his sail, constantly pressing ahead, riding the waves.

And now, it seemed he'd stumbled upon another opportunity—this one offered by a player.

Zhen Xin—this magician who was forever creating "headlines"—wanted to cooperate with him from the "human" perspective?

Wouldn't that mean going against his Lord's guidance?

Before today, such a request would have been hard for Hu Wei to accept. The sunk costs were too high—he had "points" with Chaos, and discarding them made no sense.

But by sheer coincidence, learning today that Zhen Xin had beaten him to fusing Chaos and Deceit—and had already met Chaos in person—had produced, if only for an instant, a flicker of disenchantment toward the gods' "grand promises"!

And it was in precisely that instant that Zhen Xin, seizing every gap like a needle, had extended her invitation.

Hu Wei wasn't stupid. He knew that anything the magician treated this seriously had to be fraught with risk. But would a man who'd been impersonating the "Grand Marshal" for years—and intended to keep doing so—be afraid of risk?

Not in the slightest. In fact, he thrived on the cheers that came with risk. Otherwise, he wouldn't take the unconventional approach in every trial, branding himself into everyone's memory!

He had always been courting attention. This was simply a different method.

So Hu Wei accepted. He agreed with a roaring laugh:

"Fellow humans'—what a phrase!

I've never claimed to be some tough, principled man. I just like standing high and admiring the view.

If I'm given the fortune of scaling the mountain called 'the gods'—that peak that makes your neck ache from craning up at it—then what's the harm in one gamble?

Haha! Zhen Xin—go on. Convince me with your ambition."

In that moment, Zhen Xin knew today's "self-exposure" had bought her an opening. So she pushed further, leading with a bombshell:

"Chaos is actually Deceit!"

This wasn't her guess—it was the "answer" Cheng Shi had given her.

Back in San Dales, Cheng Shi had shared a secret with her: "Order is actually Chaos. So then, who do you think Chaos is?"

The answer was obvious. Zhen Xin had guessed Deceit on the spot.

The Fate Weaver might be a deceiver, but on matters this critical, he had never lied—especially after revealing the truth of the universe to the Joker members at their assembly. She knew he had no reason left to deceive her, at least regarding the true identity of Chaos. She was the only one who both knew and could assist him.

And in this trial, upon learning that the Grand Marshal had failed to fuse with Deceit, Zhen Xin immediately understood: Chaos's identity was merely a tool in Deceit's grand design. Chaos followers weren't truly "inner circle," which was why, even though faith fusion had been underway for so long, Hu Wei still hadn't received Deceit's response.

A known secret held no novelty for Zhen Xin. But for an uninformed Chaos follower, it was a critical strike.

"?????"

Hu Wei was dumbstruck.

'I told you to convince me, not uproot my entire foundation!'

He was sure he'd been played—this had to be Zhen Yi using her sister's account.

All that buildup was just to witness his humiliation at this exact moment.

The Grand Marshal's eyelids twitched violently with fury. He drew his greatsword in an instant and brought it crashing down toward her head!

But Zhen Xin didn't move. Not even her grave expression changed. The blade grazed her scalp, sheared off a few strands of hair, and slammed into the floor with a thunderous boom. Hu Wei's heart thudded at the same time.

"You're serious?"

Zhen Xin was perfectly calm: "Of course. This explains why I fused with Chaos first, and not the other way around."

Hu Wei's grip on the sword hilt tightened.

If Zhen Xin was right—if Chaos was really Deceit—then what had all his completed missions been for?

A pretext about approaching Void had kept him running around in circles, only for Void to have been right behind him all along—even at the very starting line...

Wasn't that just toying with people?

Then again, Deceit did love toying with people.

Hu Wei's face was black as the bottom of a pot. He took two deep breaths, forcing down the agitation and anger, and asked coldly: "Then Ultraman..."

Zhen Xin wasn't sure about Ultraman's identity. Cheng Shi had once told her Ultraman didn't know about the switch. She hadn't verified it and could only treat it as uncertain. But now, if Hu Wei's presence in this trial was also by the Fun God's will, then Ultraman's allegiance was clearly with Deceit. So did He truly not know?

Zhen Xin shook her head. She couldn't afford to toss out unclear intel and cloud Hu Wei's judgment at this critical juncture. She told him honestly that she didn't know—only that the Chaos in power was not the original.

Hu Wei's brow darkened. He asked again: "Then where did the real Chaos go?"

"Those questions can wait. Today's issue has nothing to do with the real Chaos—only with the current one!"

Hu Wei's gaze sharpened: "Deceit!"

"Yes.

The Fun God's will is never simple. To unravel all of this, we must race against time—at the very least, we need an answer before this trial ends.

And before we figure things out, she..."

Zhen Xin pointed at the unconscious Madame Freud on the floor, her expression deadly serious. "...must not be discovered by Cheng Shi.

The Fate Weaver is a smart man. The moment he learns the truth from Madame Freud's lips, with the information he already has, he'll see the trial's allegory just as I have—and possibly divine the Fun God's intentions outright.

His devotion to the Fun God is... complicated. He believes and doubts in equal measure.

I fear that when he learns the truth, he'll break with the Fun God entirely—and bring an unpredictable ending upon this world.

I cannot accept a future without certainty.

So what we must do now is figure everything out before he sees the Fun God's allegory, then find a way to preserve this world.

If we can't, then you and I—all of humanity—can only retreat. No more advancing together..."

The gravity of those words was extreme. Though Hu Wei was still largely in the dark about the full picture, he believed her—he simply hadn't expected Zhen Xin, of all people, to stand on "humanity's" side and oppose the gods for the sake of "advancing and retreating together."

This wasn't the self-serving Zhen Xin he knew.

Zhen Xin was as perceptive as they came. She saw the doubt in Hu Wei's eyes and knew that among the limited allies available to her right now, she couldn't afford his lingering suspicion. So she pressed her lips together and revealed her true motive.

"Ming Yu would charge headlong into danger for me without a backward glance. So I cannot let Ming Yu come to harm.

The world means nothing to me. But she does..."

That single statement was enough. Hu Wei gave a firm nod.

The rationale was completely sound. Everyone knew Zhen Xin and An Mingyu were bound by deep affection. For each other's sake, either would go to any lengths.

The title of Grand Marshal had never been earned through bluster—it was won through real action.

Once he'd confirmed Zhen Xin's motives were genuine, he frowned and mused:

"It seems you hold far more intelligence about the gods than I do. I can't help you with information or analysis.

Opposing gods was never a matter of simple brute force. That means what you need from me isn't any of that. It's... Chaos!

You want me to cloud someone's eyes and ears?

Brother Cheng?

But merely disrupting his perception won't give you the solution you're looking for. That means you also need someone who can analyze the situation—someone who understands it even better than you.

From what you've said, Brother Cheng fits the bill—but you want to keep it from him.

Brother Zhang moves in lockstep with Brother Cheng, so he's probably not ideal either.

The remaining two teammates haven't shown themselves yet, though I'd imagine a low-profile player would have a hard time outmatching you.

So the only person who'd meet your criteria would be someone outside this trial.

You want to go find him?

But that man has always been eccentric and solitary. You think he'd help you?"

Zhen Xin wasn't sure either. But she had no other choice.

"I have to try. Let's go now."

Hu Wei understood. He nodded, but before leaving, he asked one more question with utmost sincerity:

"Are you certain Brother Cheng can't know about any of this?"

Zhen Xin's brow was knitted tight, her tone complex:

"He can. But not yet.

No one can stand against the gods alone.

What we're doing isn't abandoning him to face danger alone. It's engineering room for the ending to turn—creating more options for him.

One person can't carry the stage. That's why there are leads and supporting roles.

The Curtain Call performance can't be just a clown performing solo. The pressure would be too much, and the show too dull. Even if we aren't the leads, we should fight for the spotlight a supporting role deserves, shouldn't we?

He's writing his answer. We should be writing ours."

Hu Wei blinked: "Brother Cheng is the answer to Void?"

Zhen Xin lowered her eyes and nodded quietly: "Yes. From the moment he fused with Fate, he became that answer."

...

Chapter 1276: Void Is About to Take Its Final Bow, Isn't It, Magician?

Zhen Xin and Hu Wei departed, taking Madame Freud and Masford with them.

They stepped once more into the Void—destination unknown.

Because they weren't searching for a fixed location. They were searching for a person.

Wei Mu!

This Folly Chosen, the runaway first place on the Road to Ascension, had to possess the most unique insights into the entire Faith Game. That was why he'd become the focal point of the gods—and the person players believed was closest to Them.

Zhen Xin had interacted with Wei Mu a few times. His temperament was pleasant enough. Though he was a Folly follower, he wasn't arrogant in the way those "nose-in-the-air" types were. His arrogance seemed reserved for places nobody could see.

Zhen Xin had once asked Wei Mu what "perks" came with being number one on the Road to Ascension. Wei Mu had said with a laugh that there had been some, but they'd all been stolen by one person.

At the time, Zhen Xin had been puzzling over who could possibly steal from Wei Mu. It wasn't until she joined the Joker that she belatedly realized—that thief was Cheng Shi!

What the Fate Weaver had stolen wasn't some reward that should have belonged to Wei Mu. It was the attention that should have belonged to the number-one player on the Road to Ascension!

In this era of Void, the gods' gaze had shifted due to the Void sovereign's choices, warping the original game's will and bypassing the Road to Ascension's mechanisms to select a... clown... as the game's answer.

This was a theory she'd formed after joining the Joker, and it had been preliminarily validated in this trial.

So the top priority was finding Wei Mu and leveraging his unparalleled perception to salvage this failing endgame.

She wasn't certain Wei Mu could be relied upon. But she believed the trial's ending—or rather, the era's ending—concerned every human being.

If the world fell into nothingness, no matter how strong Wei Mu was, he couldn't survive alone.

So on the matter of survival, they still shared common ground.

But Wei Mu had always been a lone wolf. Where would they even find him?

The answer lay not with Zhen Xin, but with Hu Wei!

The reason the magician had dared to reveal such explosive intelligence in front of the Grand Marshal wasn't merely because Hu Wei was the only person available. It was because she trusted Hu Wei's connections—trusted that he could lead her to the elusive Folly Chosen.

Sure enough, the moment Hu Wei entered the Void, he charged forward like a compass locked onto true north. Zhen Xin trailed behind, feeling a touch of unease. She even wondered if the Grand Marshal was being a bit too certain—how could he be so sure this direction would lead to Wei Mu?

Hu Wei sensed the doubt behind him and laughed heartily:

"Since I learned to cleave through the Void, I've been obsessed with exploring this space that's so utterly different from reality. And let me be frank—even though you're followers of Void, your understanding of it is still far too shallow.

This is reality's flip side. It's where Void's will permeates everything. And with Void ascendant, that means enough abstraction and absurdity will manifest here.

The Mockery and Jeering may be the most absurd thing in the Void, but it's far from the only absurd thing.

Like this!"

Hu Wei halted, triple-checked his position, and brought his sword down in a vertical slash—cleaving through the Void and piercing into its deepest layer of nothingness.

Zhen Xin had been to such depths before. The Tower of Logic conducted many experiments here—the Stars Dagger among them. But she truly didn't know what lay beneath even this.

Venturing too close to nothingness meant losing oneself. In a world where everyone was trying to stay alive, no one would gamble their life exploring the endless depths of the Void.

But there were those who weren't quite "people"—and who would always experience wonders that ordinary humans could never touch.

The hollow nothingness continued to fracture along the greatsword's edge, the darkness growing ever thicker, engulfing the two of them like quicksand.

If she wasn't dead certain that Hu Wei's interest in "opposing the gods" outweighed his desire to "screw her over," Zhen Xin might have thought this was the Grand Marshal's revenge for everything Zhen Yi had done.

Fortunately, the suffocating embrace of nothingness didn't last long. Before long, Zhen Xin felt herself plunge into an entirely new space. It was no longer dark, but neither was it truly light—because the starlight here alternated between bright and dim at a fixed frequency.

When dark, it was as if they'd returned to the Void. When bright, the stars blazed in dazzling splendor.

Zhen Xin was stunned. She couldn't believe that she—head of the History School—had never known this place existed. She turned to Hu Wei, only to find the Grand Marshal was similarly moved.

"Every time I come here, nothing quite feels real.

Do you know why these stars flicker on and off?"

Zhen Xin furrowed her brow, considering: "A pattern?"

"Yes and no." Hu Wei raised his sword and pointed skyward with utmost gravity. "Wei Mu told me this isn't the stars flickering. There's a massive pointer—invisible to us—sweeping past according to some law, synchronizing time that doesn't belong to our world.

The darkness we see is the shadow cast by that pointer."

"Lord Shi Zhen!?"

Hu Wei raised an eyebrow: "Who's that?"

"Suspected to be an envoy of Time. But the History School has never traced its origins."

Zhen Xin's pupils contracted. She immediately grasped the significance of this space. After all, Cheng Shi had explained the slice universe theory in great detail at the Joker Society. This place was very likely a gap in the rules of the slice universe—the juncture where each universe's experiment ground synchronized its time with the Creator's experiment!

"This is Time's domain?"

He's hidden beneath the Void?"

"No—even Time can't reach this place. This is outside the world, yet not detached from it. It's a gap in the universe, a loophole in the rules, a bug in the game.

According to Wei Mu, the gods are blocked from entering because their 'data' is too large. We, precisely because our 'data' is small enough, can slip through.

Which means, beneath this starry sky, no gods are watching. You, I, and he—we can speak freely."

With that, Hu Wei produced a bell carved from wood and gave it a gentle shake. It emitted the muffled sound of wood scraping against wood.

Before long, the moment the pointer's shadow swept past and plunged the space into darkness, a figure appeared at the far edge of the starfield.

Zhen Xin gazed at the distant puppet, her pupils narrowing.

"You've been in contact with Wei Mu all along."

Hu Wei waved at the puppet, laughing broadly:

"That's right. After he and I were roaming through the Void and stumbled upon this place by accident, we established a cooperative relationship free from the gods' gaze.

But I knew that until our strength was sufficient, escaping Their eyes served little purpose. So I never activated this place.

I still prefer getting together with everyone, shooting the breeze in the desert.

But everything you've told me today makes me feel the time has come. And besides, I'd like to know what this era's Curtain Call performance truly means.

Talk, Zhen Xin. From this moment on, you and I truly advance together and retreat together."

While Hu Wei laughed, the puppet slowly drew near. He first nodded to Hu Wei in greeting, then studied Zhen Xin—a first-time guest in this place. After a brief moment of thought, he spoke:

"So Deceit has found its answer. Void is about to take its final bow, isn't it, magician?"

Zhen Xin's heart tightened. She almost couldn't bring herself to meet those puppet eyes that seemed capable of seeing through everything.

She closed her eyes, feeling the atmosphere that didn't belong to this world, and nodded:

"...I'm not certain. But I believe the Curtain Call has already begun."

...

#### Chapter 1277: The Story's Allegory

Sharing Joker affairs with an outsider was an extremely troublesome matter. It could very well earn her a label of "biting the hand that feeds" from the other deceivers.

But the magician wasn't afraid of wearing hats. She knew she had to do this. Among the Joker members she knew, apart from Cheng Shi, no one could address the current emergency.

And the Fate Weaver himself was precisely the emergency at hand, which was why she had no choice but to seek out Wei Mu.

Before two eagerly waiting "audience members," the magician's "solo show" commenced immediately. Her very first words shattered the tranquility of the starfield.

"The universe we inhabit is merely a corner of the Real Universe. There are many other worlds identical to ours.

By 'identical,' I don't mean parallel timelines under Time's framework. I mean fully independent, exact replicas of the divine system—existing entirely outside the gods' domain.

This is what the Fate Weaver told us."

Anywhere else, these words would have set off an uproar. But here, Hu Wei simply widened his eyes slightly and turned to Wei Mu—who merely nodded, utterly unsurprised:

"As I thought."

Zhen Xin's eyes narrowed, her surprise showing: "You knew?"

The puppet smiled: "It was only a guess."

Hu Wei's expression was deeply complicated:

"I refuse to believe a 'guess' can be identical to the fact. Though I can hardly fathom that countless other versions of me exist beyond this universe..."

Magician, you can never understand how I feel right now.

When we first discovered this place, he stood beside me, just as calm, and said:

'The frequency of the light-dark alternation contains time-related data that defies deconstruction, which means the "time" here does not belong to our world. It stands to reason that beyond our visible world, there should be other worlds. This is not Time's extrapolation—it's an entirely different starry sky that lies outside Time's control. Otherwise, the "time" here wouldn't feel so foreign.

If so, "time" is very likely a necessary condition for synchronizing what lies beyond the world. This also confirms my hypothesis about Time—He rarely appears because He's been spending His time here."

Hu Wei let out a bitter laugh. "I should have been shocked by the 'Real Universe' you just described. But that shock was already partly spent in advance..."

"..."

Zhen Xin pressed her lips together and turned a similarly complicated look toward Wei Mu.

This was the terrifying aspect of the Folly Chosen. He could always see the grand from the miniscule—and in many cases, what others saw as conjuring something out of thin air. No one could follow the leaps in his reasoning or trace how his logic closed into perfect loops. Yet time and again, events proved a single truth:

Wei Mu was right.

This was also why those chasing him from below felt such despair.

Most people climbed the Road to Ascension under tremendous pressure, at best speeding up with hands and feet working together. But him... he jumped.

And you never knew how many steps he'd clear in a single leap.

Had Wei Mu's Road to Ascension score ever been docked in a trial? No one knew, because he'd never said.

Before Zhen Xin could continue, Wei Mu thought briefly and named several people:

"You, Li Jingming, Zhang Jizu, Long Jing, and perhaps an old friend once devoted to Truth—Wang Weijin..."

That's the 'we' you're referring to, isn't it?

An organization made up of deceivers who've fused with Deceit."

"..." Zhen Xin blinked, feeling the helpless exasperation of being seen through. "Because of the Mockery and Jeering's disappearance?"

The puppet nodded: "Yes. You were all ejected from the Mockery and Jeering simultaneously. It looked more like a gathering that was interrupted."

"Why didn't you mention Cheng Shi? I clearly said he was the one who told us everything."

Wei Mu paused for a moment, then frowned: "He's different from the rest of you. You are pieces recruited onto the board. He... is the player moving them from behind the scenes."

He is Yu Xi!"

"!!!"

Two contorted faces appeared on the spot.

Given the Joker's understanding of Cheng Shi, learning this "truth" wasn't particularly shocking. But Zhen Xin's pupils still contracted—because the first thing that came to mind was the moment on the stage in San Dales when Cheng Shi had played them all!

'Hah—so that day, besides the clown who wasn't actually a clown, everyone else was the clown!'

'Now that's truly clownish.'

But the revelation's impact on Hu Wei was overwhelming.

The Grand Marshal's whole body shuddered. He stared at Wei Mu in disbelief, questioning the puppet's authority for the first time.

"You're saying Brother Cheng is... Yu Xi!?"

His voice had warped, but it still couldn't shake Wei Mu's certainty about the identity.

"Exactly. I'm very sure of it. I don't know whether he's retracing a past path or achieved ascension within this game, but there's no mistake about the Yu Xi identity.

This game was always about creating gods. Doesn't the name 'Road to Ascension' make that clear enough?

Many have already touched that threshold—Eternal Sun, the Prosperity followers, for instance..."

Hu Wei still couldn't accept it. He'd thought that in this trial, he'd finally crossed paths with his Brother Cheng. He'd been planning to hitch a ride with a Deceit follower, meet Yu Xi after the trial ended, and receive his second faith.

'But now you're telling me I've been riding along this whole time, and the person I was going to see was the driver—Brother Cheng himself!?'

'Wait—I'm still running around chasing a second faith, while my brother has already become a god!?'

"But doesn't he also carry Fate?"

How can he simultaneously be Deceit's envoy?"

The question cut to the heart of the matter. Wei Mu, naturally, wasn't truly omniscient. He simply excelled at extracting the most useful threads from known conditions and daring to speculate. When too many unknowns were involved, he too lacked answers.

The puppet shook his head: "That's where my confusion lies as well. But since the magician has come all the way here, she should be able to enlighten me.

In this Void-stage Curtain Call performance, who is the true lead—Fate, or Deceit?"

Zhen Xin fell silent for a moment, then softly uttered a name:

"It's Cheng Shi."

Wei Mu went quiet. In a rare departure, he offered no opinion of his own and listened in silence as Zhen Xin laid out everything.

Before long, she'd recounted the full story of Morning Joy versus Sunset within this trial, and closed with:

"Now you should understand why I began by telling you there are other worlds beyond ours..."

Wei Mu lowered his head in thought for a long while, then broke into sudden realization:

"You mean that the clown in Deceit's world died by accident, and that's why He set His sights on our world's Fate Weaver?"

"!!!"

Hu Wei's pupils contracted violently. His whole body trembled, thinking he'd misheard.

"Hold on—what are you two saying?"

What do you mean, 'the world Deceit belongs to'..."

"We're talking about the story's allegory." Wei Mu smiled faintly. "Fate—who has always believed in Lake's skill—clearly represents the Fate god who trusts the predetermined path. And Madame Freud—who used lies to lure Lake to Morning Joy—naturally represents Deceit, who commands all falsehood in the world.

I once visited Canlival and studied its history. Morning Joy never existed. The only circus recorded in history is the Sunset.

Therefore, everything you've experienced today isn't a historical omission. It's a confession—one concerning lies and truth.

Morning Joy never existed in history, which means it never existed in our world. But just because it never appeared in this starry sky doesn't mean it hasn't appeared in other worlds!

History's perspective is always partial—just as our view of the Real Universe is partial.

Deceit is telling us that He doesn't belong to this world. In His world, the clown died, so He wants to 'deceive' this world's clown into completing a performance that was never finished.

I suspect this is the reason Yu Xi was made a god.

Deceit intends to use an envoy's title to steal Fate's answer."

"!!!" Shocked to his core, Hu Wei's voice distorted again. "You're saying the Deceit who gave us this trial doesn't belong to our world!?"

He's an outsider!?"

Wei Mu glanced at Zhen Xin, whose expression had turned complicated, and gave a quiet hum of affirmation.

"Most likely.

When Jie Shu rose to become second on the Road to Ascension out of nowhere, I wondered whether he'd learned something from our benefactor's lips.

Now it seems his intelligence didn't come from our incompetent Folly at all—it came from another world.

He is an outsider.

And if outsiders exist even among the players... then gods...

why not?"

...

Chapter 1278: Just How Important Is Yu Xi?

It was certainly possible—but it was also utterly mind-boggling.

Hu Wei stood frozen. Zhen Xin pressed on:

"Actually, I met another world's Cheng Shi quite some time ago. The name 'Origin' was something I first learned from his lips.

At the time, he—much like the Fun God who bestowed this trial—harbored certain hopes for our world's Cheng Shi. Coupled with the attention Fate had cast upon him...

It isn't hard to imagine that Cheng Shi is the answer that Void wants in this era—or in this game.

The Creator stands high above, having constructed a universe-slicing experiment that mortals can't comprehend. This experiment must have a purpose, yet no one can know what that purpose is. But if we analyze the behavior of Void's two gods, isn't it possible that the experimental outcome Origin seeks... is connected to Cheng Shi?

I don't necessarily mean Cheng Shi the individual—only that our world's Cheng Shi happened to catch Void's gaze and became that person."

After receiving this flood of information, ordinary people would struggle to shift perspectives immediately—elevating their vantage point all the way to the Real Universe and the Creator. Even Hu Wei fell silent for a moment, needing to process the meaning of their world's existence.

But Wei Mu was different. He seemed to have guessed long ago—every guess just lacking a piece of evidence. And today, that evidence had arrived.

Or perhaps "evidence" was too strong a word. It was more that one person's partial perspective had been supplemented by other partial perspectives, firming up conjectures that had been floating like rootless duckweed.

The puppet nodded, connecting everything he knew. Before long, he delivered a calm analysis:

"My Lord lost His authority. I've always wondered why He surrendered His own authority. Now it seems highly likely that He glimpsed where Deceit came from, and through that discovered the truth of the Real Universe—whereupon Deceit set a trap and swindled away His authority.

An outsider Deceit would necessarily surpass a 'homegrown' Folly in understanding the Real Universe. So my Lord was deceived.

But He wasn't the only one. Every god who could have obstructed Deceit's plan was deceived!

Folly, Time, Memory...

Deceit shattered the barriers between worlds, forcing Time to be 'trapped' in the Real Universe's 'time' just to preserve Existence.

Memory, to prevent the universe's memories from falling into chaos—to keep everything that Exists intact—deliberately forgot this period, or perhaps made certain gods forget it together.

And the key to unlocking that memory is very likely sealed inside Yu Xi's mask!

He should have a mask, shouldn't he?

Just like the Tongue of Eating Lies that Zhen Yi once held, and that terrifying legend of the Secret Peeping Ear in San Dales... they should all be parts of that mask?"

"..."

After hearing all this, Zhen Xin couldn't help but fall silent.

Everything Wei Mu described was as though he'd personally eavesdropped on the Joker's assembly, laying bare secrets the members had never shared with outsiders.

'Surely this doesn't count as me "leaking" information, right?'

'But then again, leaked or not—what difference does it make?'

The puppet continued: "So the gods, faced with the outsider Deceit's 'invasion,' were passively split into two camps. One: the 'foolish-act gods' kept in the dark, utterly unaware of what happened. Two: the 'foolish-act gods' who once knew everything, then quietly forgot, trying to clean up the chaos and keep the world running normally...

And perhaps a third: Deceit Himself.

He wove an entire sky of lies, integrating Himself into this world, all for the ultimate goal of taking Yu Xi away.

So everything I'd thought before was wrong. Void's will isn't contradictory at all—Deceit created all of this merely to sever Yu Xi from the original world!

It turns out the world's answer wasn't given by Deceit. It was given by Fate. Deceit has His eye on Fate's answer!

Does this mean He already knows the purpose of the Creator's experiment?

Perhaps His original world was just one step away from the final success, but because Cheng Shi fell at the threshold of victory, He was left with no choice but to make this decision.

But what exactly is the Creator after?"

Halfway through his deductions, Wei Mu heaved a sigh.

"Not enough.

Too little information to make useful inferences. A frog at the bottom of a well may, by luck, catch a glimpse of the bright moon—but it can never embrace the truly vast sky.

Standing here is already our limit. What the Real Universe actually looks like—only someone who's been there would know.

If we want to understand why Yu Xi is the answer, and what the Creator's true purpose is, we can only ask Yu Xi himself.

Magician, it's your performance time again. How to extract Yu Xi's Real Universe experiences without raising suspicion may well determine which direction this performance goes.

Of course, if we set aside the Creator's will and look only at the facts before us, the Void-wills of different worlds have already told us:

Yu Xi is the world's answer, the game's answer, and in all likelihood, the answer to this grand experiment by the Creator!

If we want to 'win' among the many slice universes, if we want to survive this immense experiment, there's only one path: protect Yu Xi.

We cannot let Deceit take Him away!

The good news: Yu Xi is already wary of Deceit.

The bad news: we can never predict Deceit's schemes. He let us discover all of this, which means He isn't afraid of our efforts."

"It seems this Curtain Call is a battle over the clown. Morning Joy versus the Sunset..."

The puppet paused, his tone turning strange, and suddenly tossed out a suggestion that stunned both listeners.

"Must we necessarily choose the Sunset?"

"???"

At those words, the look Zhen Xin directed at Wei Mu instantly changed.

Even Hu Wei instinctively tightened his grip on his greatsword, his brow low and eyes fixed on the puppet.

Sensing the pressure from both, the puppet broke into a brilliant smile.

"A joke.

The atmosphere was too heavy—bad for thinking.

I'm rational, but that doesn't mean I have no attachment to this world.

Relax. I won't be a traitor."

"..." Hu Wei's cheek twitched twice. He couldn't laugh.

Zhen Xin just rolled her eyes, muttering darkly:

"You can't fool him.

The Fun God bestowed the title of Yu Xi precisely because He recognized Cheng Shi's talent on the path of Deceit.

The moment Cheng Shi realizes we haven't brought Madame Freud back promptly, given how well he knows me and the Grand Marshal... he's probably already guessed something.

We can return to the trial, but we must bring a solution with us. Otherwise, the moment we meet him again could be the moment the world falls.

Cheng Shi is sentimental. He'll definitely choose the Sunset. What I fear most is that the 'Sunset' I understand isn't really the Sunset at all—but Morning Joy dressed in the Sunset's skin.

As you said, the Fun God isn't afraid of letting us know this. He isn't afraid of us causing trouble.

But precisely because of that, we must disrupt the ending He's written for Yu Xi. This isn't just protecting Yu Xi—it's protecting ourselves."

Zhen Xin's gaze was unwavering. Wei Mu regarded her with a hint of respect: "You care deeply about this world."

"Because this world has people I care about."

Zhen Xin told herself: whether it was the her standing here now, or the her who'd gone to another world—both felt the same.

...

Chapter 1279: Why Aren't They Back Yet?

Gods loved self-destruction?

That was the simplest lesson Cheng Shi had distilled from his past experiences.

Of course, there was a deeper one: extreme devotion is always blasphemy!

Why else would Sin of Desirelessness have committed such supreme sacrilege against his Lord Corruption before death—going so far as to create a person devoid of desire?

Cheng Shi studied Poison with an expression that ran through every shade of complexity. After a pause, he offered:

"I understand."

This was something he'd learned from the gods themselves. When you can't give a precise answer, just say "I understand" and leave the other person trapped in "I don't understand."

Cheng Shi had undoubtedly mastered the essence, because after hearing this, Poison proved remarkably... accepting.

Perhaps in her eyes, a god was supposed to look exactly like Cheng Shi right now—cold and detached. Before, his player persona had been too disarming, always making her instinctively want to draw closer. Now she'd been "disillusioned" about the Fate Weaver.

Not because her mindset had changed—but because her desire had been stripped away.

Just as Poison herself had said, she was merely performing the role of herself now. Performing the assassin who wanted to be near the Fate Weaver.

Seeing Poison's confusion, Cheng Shi gave a light chuckle:

"Perhaps this is for the best. Only by setting down the weight of desire can you see the truth hiding behind countless illusions in a world warped by desire.

Your information is very important to me. Corruption is indeed one of the universe's mysteries. When I have time later, I'll investigate thoroughly.

But right now, I need to focus on Deceit's trial.

I need to figure out whether He's an ally I can win over, or an enemy I need to fight..."

Cheng Shi's voice trailed off, as if dissolving into self-murmuring. But then he looked up with a smile. "Also—don't overestimate your own importance. I guided you to see Aph Ros only because Aph Ros was bored and needed entertainment, and you happened to have the desire for faith fusion.

A win-win arrangement—nothing to do with what you've witnessed today.

Since there's no desire left in your heart, don't be too hard on yourself. Enjoy the gentle breeze of the present.

This is a rare moment of peace for you."

With that, Cheng Shi turned and headed straight for the hill where Long Jing and Old Zhang were hiding.

Both Joker members paled slightly at the sight.

'Oh no—they hadn't heard a thing, and now the man himself was coming over?'

Long Jing's eyelids twitched frantically. Without a word, he burrowed straight into the ground and vanished. Zhang Jizu, on the other hand, refused to leave in such an undignified manner. With a quiet sigh, he stood where he was, waiting to be caught red-handed.

Cheng Shi had been heading for them specifically, and he already knew neither had overheard anything significant—so naturally he wouldn't make an issue of it. His thoughts were still a mess; he was still trying to parse Drasilco's behavior. When he rounded the hill to find Old Zhang standing ramrod straight, he blinked, glanced at the adjacent mound, and said with a peculiar expression:

"What's this?

Your security guard instincts kicked in?

Old Zhang, you really don't need to be this dedicated. You see a dirt mound and think you're back in the cemetery. You're standing guard for nobody.

Unless you want me to praise you?"

He clapped theatrically, murmuring, "Oh my, what excellent posture..."

Zhang Jizu's face went black. His eyes nearly disappeared into the shadows of his brow.

But for once, he didn't fire back.

He was wrestling with his own complicated feelings—because he'd sensed the Death energy permeating the area around Cheng Shi and Poison.

He'd rung that Bone Bell again.

The Joker didn't know, but Zhang Jizu was keenly aware: the being behind that Bone Bell wasn't the benefactor on the Fishbone Hall's white bone throne. It was the very god who had bestowed this trial—Deceit!

Having learned some of this trial's backstory, Zhang Jizu had been mulling over what Deceit was really alluding to. Back then, he'd believed Deceit's claim of saving the world and had cooperated to deceive all the Joker members. Now, sensing Cheng Shi's strikingly ambiguous attitude toward this trial, he was starting to wonder if he too had been duped.

But he had no proof. Terrified that his "foolish act" might ruin things, he was caught in indecision.

He was debating whether to come clean with Cheng Shi—but that internal struggle, when viewed through Cheng Shi's eyes, simply looked like the old man was emotionally compromised.

Cheng Shi quit while he was ahead and stopped teasing. After a moment's thought, he tossed Zhang Jizu the question Poison had raised:

"What do you think desire really is?"

Zhang Jizu blinked, then turned to peer around the hill at Poison standing motionless in the distance. He shook his head.

"People's hearts all differ. Hard to generalize.

What happened to Poison?"

Cheng Shi sneered at such evasive diplomacy. He waved a hand dismissively:

"She lost 100 S-rank artifacts to me in a game of rock-paper-scissors. Couldn't accept the defeat, so she's standing there playing freeze-frame to soothe her wounded ego.

Tsk—debt collection is getting harder every day. That puts me at 200 unreturned articles now. Old Zhang, do you think I'll ever collect in this lifetime?"

Zhang Jizu narrowed his already-narrow eyes and said coolly: "Collecting after death is always an option."

"..."

'You'd actually accept a grave as collateral?'

Cheng Shi couldn't laugh anymore.

He checked the time, his brow furrowing: "Why aren't Zhen Xin and they back yet? Two people shouldn't have this much trouble finding a single NPC."

Zhang Jizu didn't take the bait. After a moment's reflection, he decided to test Cheng Shi's attitude toward Deceit, hoping to confirm the suspicion in his heart.

"Aren't we going to talk about Yu Xi?"

"?" Cheng Shi's expression froze. A second later, he played dumb: "What about Yu Xi?"

"Poison told me. I know everything."

Cheng Shi stared at Old Zhang's narrow eyes for a long time, suspicion written all over his face. Then he snorted:

"Tsk—trying to bluff me?"

Old Zhang, just because you've fused with Deceit doesn't mean you can out-trick me. For all you know, you're the one being deceived.

Believing anyone and everyone without question—what, you've never been played?

People need independent judgment. Otherwise, they'll get led straight into a ditch."

He'd spoken casually, but the listener took it to heart. Zhang Jizu instantly thought of Deceit's "saving the world" rhetoric. His heart sank.

Meanwhile, Cheng Shi's expression grew steadily more serious.

"Something's wrong.

This spot is far from the Imperial City, sure, but for those two it shouldn't take this long. Could they have run into trouble at the palace?

And Long Jing?

Where did he go?

One by one, they all vanish on me. Are these people plotting something behind my back?"

"..." Zhang Jizu looked away and kept silent.

Cheng Shi's unease grew. He frowned and peered toward the Kurd Imperial City—just as a figure appeared in the distance from that direction.

Long Jing!

The acrobat had returned, sprinting back at full speed. When he saw only Cheng Shi and Zhang Jizu nearby—with Poison standing alone in the distance—his expression turned visibly bewildered.

Meeting Cheng Shi's questioning gaze, he exclaimed:

"The Zhen woman isn't back?"

Cheng Shi's eyes sharpened: "You went to the Imperial City. You didn't see them?"

Long Jing had clearly sensed something off as well. He dropped all pretense about the eavesdropping and nodded:

"When I saw you heading over, I figured I'd get a head start and see what the Zhen woman had found. But I couldn't find anyone at the palace.

News of the Morning Joy ringmaster's disappearance has already spread within the Imperial City. Luckily, it hasn't leaked out; the Canlival royal family has sealed off the information and is searching the entire palace.

I thought I'd just missed them on the way, so I rushed back.

They're really not here?"

Long Jing's suspicion deepened. He looked at the two in front of him, his tone uncertain:

"You two couldn't actually be the Zhen woman and the Grand Marshal in disguise, putting on another show for me, could you?"

Still trying to make me the clown!?"

"..."

"..."

Cheng Shi stared at the acrobat, thinking PTSD had become a full-blown epidemic.

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Chapter 1280: That's Right, I Am Yu Xi

The disappearance of two players was clearly a problem.

Madame Freud's vanishing proved they'd found their target. But after finding her, they hadn't returned—instead, they'd taken the key NPC and disappeared along with her. The implications were deeply thought-provoking.

Nobody would question Zhen Xin's intelligence. Nobody would assume Zhen Yi had surfaced to sabotage things by absconding with the target—not with the Grand Marshal standing right beside her. The

absence of any large-scale battle traces inside the Imperial City confirmed that the Zhen player had taken Madame Freud under her elder sister's identity.

But why would they hide the NPC?

What secret was Madame Freud carrying?

Cheng Shi's brow furrowed deeply as he began to think.

Reviewing the entire story of Morning Joy versus the Sunset, it wasn't hard to see that Madame Freud could only have done one of two things: hidden Masford and used his fake death to scam the rival clown in an elaborate scheme, or killed Masford and framed the opponent to win the final showdown.

But given the emotions Madame Freud had expressed toward Masford in her diary, Cheng Shi didn't believe this was a ringmaster who could place Morning Joy's victory above her feelings entirely. Even if she'd resorted to dirty tactics, she would never have killed Masford.

So the truth was obvious: Madame Freud must have used some ploy to hide Masford, deceiving Fate in the process.

But Masford wasn't a clown who'd cower from competition. He resonated with Lake on a soul level—both of them wanted to defeat the other fair and square on stage. Would such a clown agree to Madame Freud's plan to shelve himself and exploit Lake's "righteous heart" for victory?

Almost certainly not!

Which meant the scheme had been launched without his consent. He'd had no voice in it—perhaps not even the right to refuse!

But that was stranger still. The clown was more than just a stage performer—he was the ringmaster's heir, essentially the circus's vice-leader. How could someone of such stature have zero say in a plan that staked Morning Joy's entire reputation?

That defied logic—and it defied the relationship between Masford and Madame Freud. Unless...

He had permanently lost his voice!

He was actually dead!?

Cheng Shi shuddered from head to toe. The realization hit him like a thunderbolt!

The final furious stroke in Madame Freud's diary was clearly a reaction to some shocking news. But what could make a seasoned, storm-weathered ringmaster lose her composure so severely?

Could it have been... the clown's death?

So the clown very likely was dead—not at Ringmaster Fate's hands, but from some other currently unguessable "accident."

It could have been overzealous Sunset fans, or a thief taking advantage along the way, or even a Morning Joy fan driven by love-turned-hatred...

Regardless of the cause, Madame Freud could not accept this defeat without a fight. So she'd weaponized the clown's death, crafting an ingenious deception that forced the Sunset to shoulder the consequences of Masford's absence from the final showdown.

Once he'd untangled all of this, someone as sharp as Cheng Shi immediately grasped why Zhen Xin had taken Madame Freud and left.

It wasn't hard to guess. From the moment Cheng Shi had heard that the clown was key to the final circus showdown, he'd been projecting himself into the role. And the rivalry between Morning Joy and the Sunset was eerily similar to the struggle between the Fear Faction and the Fixed Destiny of Fate...

That was precisely why Cheng Shi had been so guarded about this trial from the start.

Now he'd simply thought everything through, finally connecting the trial's narrative to his own experience.

If Morning Joy had never existed, did that mean Deceit... had also never existed here?

He was an outsider!?

Cheng Shi's eyes flew wide. A flash of barely perceptible terror and shock crossed them. He finally realized that the so-called "Fear Faction" was very likely a con—designed solely to trick the Sunset's Lake into joining Morning Joy's camp!

But why?

Even if Deceit was that Outer God, with designs on him—what about the other gods?

Death, Time, Silence... they couldn't all be Outer Gods!

If they weren't, why would they cooperate with an Outer God to push him out of this world?

Could it be that their wills truly ran counter to Fate's?

In this game, Fate's choice was unquestionably himself. If these gods who'd been protecting him had all actually been aiding the Outer God Deceit, then every show of goodwill toward him had been misdirection!

Had they always believed Fate was wrong!?

Or had they learned the truth of the universe from the Outer God Deceit and concluded that Fate's offering was meaningless—thus rejecting This Void sovereign's choice!?

What a mess!

If Fate's choice was meaningless, what was the Outer God Deceit fighting for!?

Didn't He also want an answer capable of satisfying the Creator's question!?

And that answer... now there was no more denying it. It was him!

In the instant this thought crystallized, Cheng Shi's scalp went numb. Thunder exploded in his mind. Cold sweat poured from every pore.

Deceit was about to show His hand!

If He dared use a trial to lay everything bare at this point, He had undoubtedly seized control of the board and was fully confident in victory.

How laughable—he'd been obediently following Deceit's will all this time. Looking back now, hadn't he essentially been helping a kidnapper sell himself!?

Then what about Fate?

Had He simply watched as Deceit succeeded!?

In this moment, Cheng Shi felt like a clown.

He'd blasphemed against Fate at every turn, only to discover—when the mask of Deceit was finally torn away—that it seemed only Fate could save him.

Of course, the "save" here meant that Fate, following His own will, would intercept Cheng Shi from Deceit's hands and keep the clown in this world.

But one mustn't forget: Fate had His own agenda. The sacrifice He'd selected was still Cheng Shi!

In other words, the two paths remaining before Cheng Shi were very likely both dead ends!

Either be taken by the Outer God Deceit and become a sacrifice for another world, or stay in his own world and become Fate's sacrifice.

No other choice existed!

"Ha—"

Cheng Shi, brow tightly knitted, suddenly burst out laughing. His exaggerated expression startled both people present.

"At last, I've confirmed one thing.

So that unlucky bastard... really was me all along.

Can't lie to myself anymore. And no more chance to, either."

Cheng Shi drew a deep breath and looked at the two stunned Joker members before him, speaking word by deliberate word:

"It's a matter of life and death now. I can't keep this from you any longer.

That's right—I really am Yu Xi. A clown who was tricked into godhood. A pathetic wretch who grew more afraid the closer he got to fear.

It's a long story. If you two want to hear it, you'll need to answer me one question first.

Can I... trust you?"

'You're Yu Xi!?'

'How can you possibly be Yu Xi!?'

Long Jing's mind short-circuited.

It wasn't as if he'd never suspected it. After all, in his understanding, Yu Xi had once impersonated Cheng Shi. But he'd already convinced himself that Yu Xi was someone else entirely—and now you're telling me you are Yu Xi!?

'Then what were my thoughts worth?'

'Proof I have a brain? No—this was proof I had no brain!'

The acrobat was furious. He couldn't tell if Cheng Shi was lying yet again. All he wanted to say was: even if you're going to deceive people, could you at least not target the same person over and over?

But seeing Cheng Shi's gravely serious expression, Long Jing swallowed the complaints in his heart.

He rarely saw Cheng Shi this earnest. The last time had been at the Joker Society, when he'd revealed the universe's truth to them.

So what secret would this true clown unveil for them this time?

'Don't tell me that by the end, we'll all have an epiphany and realize I was the real clown all along!?'

'I'm supposed to be the dazzling acrobat who radiates charisma on stage—not the red-nosed buffoon who has the audience howling with laughter!!'

Long Jing's feelings were complicated. He said nothing.

Beside him, Zhang Jizu narrowed his already-narrow eyes and stared at Cheng Shi with an equally grave expression:

"How should we trust you? Lay everything bare?"

Cheng Shi nodded solemnly. Just as he was about to ring the Bone Bell once more, Old Zhang's heavy voice cut in:

"You can't.

Because I've been deceiving you.

The Bone Bell isn't a gift from that Lord. It's Deceit's lie.

He said He would save the world. And so I believed Him."

"!!!?"

Cheng Shi was floored.

He stared at the one "hope" in his hand. The sky was falling.

'Deceit was already playing three roles at once, and now He's impersonating that Lord on top of it all!?'

'Old Zhang—how could you believe Him!?'

'Hah—save the world?'

'Sure, He's saving a world—but whose!?'

'The Outer God's world and ours—were those the same thing!'

Cheng Shi gripped the Bone Bell in his hand, then let his arm drop lifelessly to his side.

"I—" Zhang Jizu looked apologetic, as if wanting to say more.

Cheng Shi waved him off.

"It doesn't matter anymore.

Since He's laid everything out in the open, it means every single one of us has fallen into a trap woven from His lies.

You're not the only one who was deceived. So was I. If His scheme could be seen through, He wouldn't be called Deceit...

I was wrong—wrong to trust Him.

But if we course-correct now, perhaps there's still time!"

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