

The Gods 1301

Chapter 1301: Darkness and Fire

The view returned to another stretch of starry sky.

This was perhaps the least-attended Assembly of Gods Convention in history. Even though Justice had relaxed the restrictions and extended invitations to every true god eligible to attend as well as every servant god permitted to observe, not a single deity affiliated with the Fear Faction had shown up. Only a scant handful of true gods were present.

This undoubtedly made the atmosphere even more eerie.

The servant gods had voluntarily huddled in a corner the moment they arrived, standing at attention like punished children, terrified of being dragged into the horrifying standoff unfolding before them.

Hong Lin had come as well. As the Proxy of Prosperity, this was not her first time appearing at the Assembly of Gods Convention, but it was the first time she attended with her eyes open. She looked toward the figure at the center of the starry sky — head lowered, expression unreadable — and fought the urge to rush forward and rescue him immediately.

The galactic river flowed in measured orbits, stars flickering in orderly rhythm. The Flowing Light Scales gleamed brilliantly, and before them, the Holy Light Law Code — radiating the aura of Order from every page — turned gracefully, pronouncing judgment upon the cold-eyed Stellar Gaze:

"Deceit, your ambition is plain for all to see. Your crimes are too many to record. You have defied the order of this world. If you still refuse to see the truth..."

"And what?"

The Outer God Fate cut short the Iron Law's droning pronouncement with a cold snort. "Deceit has already paid for His foolishness. If a judge cannot even identify the suspect he has convicted, then what right does Order have to speak of order?"

You don't actually think you are Order, do you — Chaos?"

The moment the words fell, a swirl of chaotic yellow mist rose behind the Outer God. Before the stunned gazes of every god and mortal present, the churning hand of Chaos quietly shed its aura of disorder and transformed into a Stellar Gaze identical to Fate's.

The stars within that gaze were dim and lightless, yet the spirals still whirled ceaselessly.

Two spirals, synchronized in frequency and rhythm, mirrored each other. Before long, amid gasps of shock, they merged into one.

Chaos had been a disguise worn by the Outer God Deceit all along?!

Then where was the real Chaos?

Every gaze — mortal and divine — involuntarily drifted toward the Iron Law of Order that the Outer God had called out by name. The Holy Light Law Code of Order faltered mid-turn, its pages hesitating for a heartbeat, before it hummed:

"No one believes your lies anymore!"

"No one believes the lies of Deceit — but do you refuse to believe even the truth spoken by Fate?"

If you recognized that I am Fate, why didn't you dare acknowledge it?

Is it because you're afraid I'll tell you that even though this world possesses Fixed Destiny, you still cannot provide the Origin with an answer that satisfies Him?

Fate is dead. Even if I placed the answer in your hands, would you... even know how to use it?

Only I have any chance of saving this world!

To this day, even mortals know more than you. The so-called Order is nothing but a laughingstock."

"..."

Silence blanketed the assembly. Even though Silence had not come in person, His will still permeated this place.

The Outer God Fate surveyed the surroundings, His tone growing ever more frigid and contemptuous.

"The Spacetime Storm has not yet arrived. I still have time to watch a universe-wide farce of self-deception.

I'm curious to see what agenda this Assembly of Gods Convention can possibly pass today, with so many gods absent."

With that, a howling gale of Void surged toward Cheng Shi, who stood before the assembled gods. Even though the Assembly no longer posed any threat to His plan, the Outer God still refused to let Fixed Destiny out of His sight.

Yet the instant that gale was about to reach the Clown, a resonant bell toll suddenly rang out, accompanied by the clash of weapons and the thunder of warhorses, exploding in everyone's ears.

The Iron Law of Order erupted into a frenzy of flipping pages, sheaves of parchment scattering through the air. Boundless power of Order cascaded from the Law Code like a waterfall of holy light — like a dam bursting and unleashing a flood of divine law — drowning the entire starry sky, swallowing the Void's howling gale, and dragging Cheng Shi along with it into this endless tide of order.

The Clown, who had thought salvation had arrived, never imagined that before he could even celebrate for a single second, he would once again become Order's "honored guest" — only this time, the seat was not one of safety, but the defendant's chair!

Indeed, boundless power of Order coalesced into chains that bound Cheng Shi to a Judgment Chair to await trial. In the eyes of the Iron Law of Order, Cheng Shi's past actions clearly qualified him as an accomplice of the Outer God — a fate of judgment he could not escape.

However, given the suspect's exceptionally sensitive status at the moment, the Iron Law of Order did not begin the trial immediately. Instead, it poured its full strength into battling the Outer God Fate.

Interestingly, whenever the Assembly of Gods Convention was in session, any combat occurring within this stretch of starry sky should have been halted by Justice, who would strip the offenders of their corresponding voting rights. Yet this time, Justice said nothing. Not a single word of objection.

Seeing this, the Outer God Fate let out a scornful laugh.

"When Justice is no longer just, what right does Order have to speak of order?"

I once thought this world could still be saved, but now it seems only a precious few are worth saving.

Chaos — you refuse to reveal your true identity, and yet you dare try to stop me with Order's power, power that has lost all claim to order?

Who gave you that courage?"

As He spoke, every star in the sky was draped in shadow.

The Void encroached!

Though the Outer God could not defy the Pact of Gods, could not nullify the results of the Assembly, Fate — whose power surpassed all the gods — could still influence the proceedings through other means.

Even if His voting rights were revoked, it would make no difference. Every true god present could vote in favor and still fail to reach a majority. This Assembly of Gods Convention was less a lifeline for the Clown and more a final cry — a last desperate struggle — by the gods who had been kept in the dark all along, those "gods of foolish acts," fighting for their divine authority and their dignity.

They refused to fade silently alongside a dying world.

Folly was among them. He sensed the power that did not belong to this world seeping into the starry sky, then gazed at those ice-cold Stellar Eyes. He froze for a moment, then suddenly let out a derisive snort.

"So there was never an answer to foolish acts after all."

With that, He left — departing gracefully before the darkness could engulf this place.

He looked like a sage who had seen through everything, and also like a coward fleeing from the battlefield.

And just as the endless Void continued pouring into the starry sky, as the encroaching blackness slowly devoured the sight of every mortal and god present, a spark of light suddenly blazed before their eyes.

Fire!

A crimson tongue of flame licked forth, and then an inferno roared skyward!

The howling fire erupted from behind the fading Law Code, its sparks carrying War's zealous will, spreading through the darkness like a plague.

It was as if a single ember had fallen into a sea of oil — in an instant, the lost horizon was painted a searing white!

War had returned!

No one had expected War — absent from the Assembly for so long — to appear at this moment, much less that He had been hiding behind the Iron Law of Order all along.

No wonder the typically stammering Iron Law had suddenly found its nerve. This was not a trial of Order — it was a renaissance of Civilization!

Then what about Truth?

Where was Truth?

The gods searched in every direction, but alas, Truth was nowhere to be found.

Perhaps the universe had never possessed Truth. Perhaps all that existed was the endless cycle of Order and War.

Yet just as everyone believed War's arrival would turn the tide, the Outer God Fate let out another cold snort:

"Has the universe truly run out of gods, that a mere servant god must now speak on their behalf?"

Follower of War — I sent you to the Real Universe so you could learn, not so you could come back and challenge me!"

Only then did the assembled gods realize that the towering battle aura — equal to War itself — did not emanate from the true god of War, but from a... human, standing in the roaring sea of flame, drawing a giant bow.

Qin Xin's hair and beard were ablaze, his left eye rolling like magma, his right eye fierce and dripping blood. He fixed a solemn gaze on the Outer God and spoke in a deep voice:

"Borrowing greatness from the gods has always been the will of the Torchbearers.

Using the gods' own power to grind away the gods' oppression is the indomitable spirit of the Torchbearers.

Whether you are Deceit or Fate, so long as you do not belong to this world, you are our enemy.

Against enemies — take up the arrow!

To dispel darkness — pass the torch!

How do we survive? With blood — and fire!"

Before his words had faded, those hands — skin splitting, flesh tearing, blood spraying wild — released the bowstring and loosed an arrow carrying every ounce of the Torchbearers' will, an arrow sworn to protect humanity and defend the world, aimed straight at...

The Judgment Chair beneath Cheng Shi!

Chapter 1302: Rescue!

That's right — what Qin Xin shattered was not the Outer God's conspiracy, but the Iron Law of Order's shackles on Cheng Shi!

Of course he knew that every mortal and god present should be united against their common enemy, tackling the greatest threat first. But he also knew that submitting Cheng Shi to the Iron Law's judgment would push "the world's answer" away from this world entirely!

The Fate Weaver might have appeared to compromise at every turn, but anyone who truly knew him understood he was no pushover. Like a true Torchbearer, he had been fighting against every form of oppression forced upon him all along.

At this most critical juncture, Qin Xin could not allow the Iron Law's so-called "order" to become the foolish act that buried every last hope for the world.

And so his arrow was fired without an instant's hesitation.

The flames roared in answer — wild, surging without wind — and in a flash they engulfed Cheng Shi along with the Judgment Chair.

At the sight of this, the Iron Law of Order's fluttering pages froze in unison. It turned on Qin Xin in absolute fury, its voice thundering:

"Proxy of War!

It was you who invited me here, claiming you would defend the universe's order with your very life!

I persuaded Justice to convene the Assembly of Gods Convention at great cost, breaking the Outer God's lock on the Void — and yet you turn your weapon against me?!

Your enemy is the Outer God, not me! Why attack your only ally?!

Has the fall of Civilization taught you nothing?!"

Qin Xin shook his head and nocked another arrow:

"I know who my enemy is — but I don't know who my ally is!

You never once told me you weren't Order!

Chaos?

What a fine Chaos you are!

If you are Chaos, how can I possibly trust what you'll do with the world's answer? How can I believe you truly fight for the universe's order?

I don't know where the real Order has gone, but from this moment forward — I, Qin Xin, Envoy of War, Servant God of Civilization, am willing to stand in for Order and become the new order!"

These words were the ultimate provocation against Order — and let us not forget, there was more than one Order present!

Even Fear, the Order-aligned god, was curled up in a corner, staring at the Judgment Chair consumed by flames, imagining himself in that seat, growing ever more terrified.

Justice still said nothing. As the Outer God had pointed out, the moment He sheltered the Iron Law of Order and chose not to intervene in its disruption of the Assembly, His impartiality had already taken a side.

He had chosen to side with this world.

But the Iron Law of Order, having heard all of this, was visibly enraged. Its pages whipped into a frenzy, power of Order spilling in every direction.

"Absurd! How dare you trust the words of an Outer God?"

I am Order — the one and only Order of this universe!

I represent the Origin's greatest hope for this starry sky! I am the anchor of Civilization, the sum total of all that is ordered!

Everything I have done is worthy of my divine name. The Clown's disruption of the universe is an undeniable fact. No matter what, he must be judged, and then use his own Fixed Destiny to atone for his crimes!

This is his path — and this is the universe's order!"

"Bullshit!"

Before Qin Xin could even respond, Hong Lin could hold back no longer. She hurled curses straight at the Iron Law of Order.

No — not just the Iron Law. In what might be the final Assembly of Gods Convention, the sleeping Big Cat had at last become a "tiger with open eyes," unleashing a torrent of fury at every god present.

"Obsessive to the point of madness! Rigid to the point of revulsion!

It's because of gods like you — caring only about your own faith, concerned only with your own will, never willing to bow your heads, forever indifferent to life — that the Outer God has been playing all of you like fools!

The Fate Weaver is someone who remembers every kindness! His father adopted him, and he carried that gratitude for a lifetime. Deceit sheltered him, and even when he couldn't be sure where Deceit's goodwill came from — even when fear of the Fear Faction crept into his heart — he was still willing to follow Deceit!

Such simple, honest goodwill was all it took to 'win over' a Fate Weaver. Why didn't any of you try?

Is it because gods can't lie?

No!

It's because you have no goodwill to offer!

I see it clearly now — gods are just gods. You have no emotions. You see only faith. You possess only will!

But we are different. Humanity's faith is built on emotion and friendship!

If death is inevitable — ha! Release my friend and let me go first!"

Before her words had faded, a figure swift as the wind howled into the maelstrom of intertwined War and Order power — that violent, raging inferno!

In the blink of an eye, Big Cat emerged from the flames, her body charred, carrying a soot-blackened Cheng Shi on her back. Her resolute face was etched with the determination to save her friend, all trace of the fear she once felt under the collective gaze of the gods now gone.

But Fixed Destiny was not so easily rescued. The Outer God Fate saw this, let out a heavy snort, and an invisible Void storm materialized from thin air, sweeping toward Big Cat.

He knew Cheng Shi was unharmed. This follower of His had too many schemes in mind — playing dead for now, no doubt plotting something behind the scenes again.

But no matter what he planned, Fixed Destiny was Fixed Destiny. There was no escaping it, no erasing it.

"Before the Spacetime Storm arrives, I have no objection to watching one more circus act from the Clown. Consider it this world's curtain call. No matter how you resist, struggle, or fight — in the end, you'll realize that I was right all along.

The only one who can save this world is me.

But unfortunately, before the true answer is revealed, there are always a few who think themselves clever — and they neither deserve nor can endure long enough to see that moment.

Of the gods I can save, there are few. Of those present here — not a single one."

Fate's tone grew ever colder. He gazed at Cheng Shi once more and spoke in a low, haunting voice:

"You have one last chance. Even if not for this world, then for the sake of your so-called friends — I will forgive your blasphemy, take pity on your confusion, and grant you one opportunity to return to the proper path of Fate. Do not persist in your delusion..."

Cheng Shi, draped across Big Cat's back, did not move a muscle. He simply raised a single middle finger toward those merciless eyes.

"Screw you!"

Then he burst into laughter and patted Big Cat on the back:

"Hong Lin, this time we might actually die."

Big Cat's gaze hardened. A flicker of sorrow passed through her eyes, instantly replaced by ironclad resolve:

"If there's no way to avoid it, if the road ahead is cut off — then let me die first. Use my body as a stepping stone. Maybe then you can still find a path to the other shore..."

If that road truly exists — live. And if there's any chance at all, take Xiao Yi with you. Live together."

Cheng Shi's hand tightened on Big Cat's back. He was about to say something, but she spoke first, her voice firm:

"Cheng Shi, this is my last wish in life. Don't let me leave you all carrying regrets."

"..."

Just as the despair and sorrow threatened to consume them, the flames of War erupted across the starry sky once more.

Qin Xin mustered every ounce of divine power, igniting every facet of his Authority of War, and once again showed the world War's indomitable will.

Crimson fire scattered in every direction, searing heaven and earth.

He drew his giant bow to the fullest and stood among the inferno, raising his head in a thunderous cry:

"It's far too early to be writing last wills!

The Outer God is still a god — and as long as it's a god, it can fall! Haven't we seen enough proof of that?!

Pull yourselves together! Submission has never been resistance — war is!

And the rest of you — Birth, Decay, Order, Memory — and all those servant gods and envoys sitting around waiting to die — do you honestly believe that watching from the sidelines will spare you when the era meets its end?!

Fools!

Those gods who still believe the Outer God can save the world — do you truly think an Outer God's methods can preserve our world?!

He already failed once! What makes you think the second time will be any different?!

He has dragged this world into the abyss of darkness, not toward a bright future!

The road to the future is one we carve for ourselves! Even I, a mere mortal, understand that — and you...

Pfft—"

Before Qin Xin could finish his impassioned speech, a frigid gale of Void struck him squarely and sent him flying.

Under the protection of War's Authority, the blood gushing from his mouth only made the surrounding flames burn fiercer. After tumbling across the ground, he did not hesitate for a single instant before drawing his bow once more.

This Successor of War was truly unyielding. His every move screamed defiance against Fate to the bitter end. He was living proof of his own convictions — yet the only one who seemed to share them was himself.

Despite his rallying cry, the surrounding gods remained unmoved.

They appeared to have fallen for the Outer God's seduction — every one of them indecisive, their gazes upon Qin Xin and Cheng Shi a tangled web of conflicting emotions.

"Ha... hahaha..."

Cheng Shi finally sat up straight. He knew pretense was useless now, so he dropped the act entirely and pointed at the gods filling the sky, speaking freely:

"Everyone keeps telling me that becoming a god is the only answer.

But now you're telling me that gods... are this lot?

Then why the hell would I want to become a god? Why would I want that answer?!

Whoever wants this Fixed Destiny can have it. I — am done playing along!"

As he spoke, Cheng Shi suddenly produced the Container of Deceit from within his grasp, raised it high above his head, and bellowed toward the Flowing Light Scales suspended in the firmament:

"I — Walker of the Void, Envoy of Deceit, Yu Xi — demand, under the witness of Justice, to inherit the Authority of the fallen god Deceit!"

His voice was wild, manic. Every god present was stunned.

Fate's gaze grew colder still. Justice offered no response — Yu Xi's identity had not been bestowed by this world's Deceit, so naturally it could not elicit an answer from Justice.

With the Outer God's invasion at their doorstep, He might have been willing to bend the rules for order's sake — but rules were rules. He could not break them, and would not.

And so the situation ground to a stalemate.

But just as every mortal and god was captivated by Cheng Shi's proclamation, a terrifying torrent of divine power suddenly descended, and countless bones rained from the sky.

The usually chattering little skulls were silent now, tumbling and stacking before the assembled gods, forming a bone-white throne to welcome the arrival of the one called Death.

The colossal skull arrived. And His first words upon descending were a challenge to the Outer God Fate:

"Can — you — guarantee — this world's — safety?"

Chapter 1303: Time to Wake Up

When the boss of Death arrived, Cheng Shi's heart clenched tight.

He hoped this was the third path that the Flame of Hope had found for him — but that hope had barely begun to rise before it shattered.

Anyone who heard Death's question would realize that this true god, who rarely left the Fishbone Hall, had known about the Outer God Fate's plan all along. He had come to confirm — not to truly challenge.

That meant all the protection Death had given him before was very likely part of a performance staged in coordination with the Outer God!

Together, they had used flawless acting to deceive him straight into the Fear Faction's camp!

Cheng Shi raged. Cheng Shi grew weary. Cheng Shi laughed.

When he saw that his only hope was, in truth, despair — he knew there was nothing left in this world for him to rely on.

Everything was a delusion. Even the desire to survive was a luxury.

Time to wake up from the dream...

The Outer God Fate showed no reaction to Death's arrival. He regarded the colossal skull with the same cold indifference He showed every other god present, His voice devoid of joy or sorrow:

"I believe I explained all of this to you long ago. If you didn't believe me then, why come to question me only now?"

I cannot guarantee it — but I am confident.

Fixed Destiny has indeed failed once before. But it was precisely because of that failure that I was able to see through the Origin's will.

A single world's answer cannot satisfy His expectations for a 'sacrifice.' True Fixed Destiny has always come from the Real Universe.

I already have a plan. Once I take Fixed Destiny away and complete the 'sacrifice,' should the Origin approve, then this experiment may end right here — and countless worlds will be redeemed!

I have said it before: I am saving the world. Just not our world — the greater world.

I sheltered the Torchbearers and bound Fixed Destiny to them precisely so they would understand that true success was never confined to a single corner.

Unfortunately, Fixed Destiny refused to see reason, and the Torchbearers went astray."

This was perhaps the most candid the Outer God Fate had ever been. It was clear He truly harbored a desire to "save the world." His starting point was never about tormenting a Clown — He merely wished to sacrifice the Clown to fulfill the "task" that the Origin had assigned to Fate, thereby gaining an audience with that omniscient, omnipotent Creator and persuading Him to end this experiment and save every world.

Yet His candor only deepened the terror felt by mortals and gods alike.

The colossal skull said nothing. The gods exchanged uneasy glances. Qin Xin continued to draw his bow. Only Big Cat, having cast aside all fear and thrown caution entirely to the wind, pointed at Fate's eyes and roared:

"What a joke!

You just admitted this is nothing more than your own idea! In the Origin's eyes, you're just another variable in the experiment — so what does your confidence even count for?

How are you any different from the Truth you murdered? Aren't both of you just using the world as a testing ground for experiments that please yourselves?!

You're satisfying your own 'devotion' while trampling on the lives of an entire world!"

The Outer God Fate's gaze drifted toward Hong Lin, but His eyes slid past Big Cat and settled on His follower.

His apathy remained unchanged:

"So what if it's an experiment?"

Countless Deceits, countless Fates, countless Fixed Destinies — they all wagered their lives, gambling everything on the Origin's answer...

Why is it acceptable for them to die, but not for you and me?

How can you find the answer without trying? How can you win the future without gambling?

My follower, you should be honored. When the Origin turns His gaze upon my offering, your name may echo across countless universes simultaneously. All of creation will remember the sacrifice you made for the greater world. You..."

"Go to hell!"

Cheng Shi cut the Outer God's cold rhetoric short, his voice dripping with manic derision:

"Over and over, it's nothing but coercion dressed as purpose. Too bad for you — my will is the same as the true Deceit's. Always rebellious.

The more you want me to be Fixed Destiny, the more I'll tear myself free from it!

The way I see it, what you care about is no different from what we care about for ourselves. Sounds noble — for the greater world, you say?

Bullshit!

If I told you right now that I understand the Origin better than you — that I have a better chance of saving countless worlds — would you believe me? Would you walk away and abandon your plan?!

You wouldn't!"

"I would."

A flash of starlight glimmered in the Outer God Fate's eyes — but an instant later, they turned cold and merciless again. "But you can't.

No one can save the world except me."

"..."

Cheng Shi laughed bitterly. He realized this argument was utterly pointless. The only reason they were still alive was that the Outer God was waiting for some Spacetime Storm to arrive.

Once that storm — powerful enough to let someone traverse time and space — descended, no amount of debate would matter.

Cheng Shi saw it clearly now. Trying to make the Outer God Fate understand Fixed Destiny's position was nothing but wishful thinking.

"Deceit was right — some people are born to tear down the thrones from under the gods!

Maybe Deceit was never truly the face of Void. Maybe He was the one who saw through to the essence all along.

As for you, Fate — hahaha — in my eyes, you're nothing but a..."

He paused, giving "someone else" a chance to vent.

"Bitch."

Enunciated to perfection, straight from the heart!

The Fool's Lips had spoken up. Brother Mouth could not accept the reality that his Benefactor had long since perished, nor could he bear the humiliation of being kept in the dark by the Outer God like a fool. He had wanted to lash out for ages, but held back to keep Cheng Shi from being dragged into an even worse position. He had endured until now — until Cheng Shi reached his own breaking point and gave him the opening.

The Outer God Fate could tolerate Fixed Destiny's emotional outbursts and mockery — but that did not mean just anyone could mouth off at Him. Those cold eyes flicked toward the Fool's Lips, and with a single merciless blink, Cheng Shi heard a sound of shattering beside his ear.

"Crack."

The sound was faint — so faint that Cheng Shi thought he was hearing things.

And yet it was deafening — because in the instant he realized what had happened, it felt as though an invisible gravity had crushed every last molecule of air from his lungs. He could not breathe.

Trembling, as if struck mute, he reached for his mouth — but could no longer feel the Fool's Lips responding.

"Brother Mouth!!"

Cheng Shi's entire body convulsed. He screamed inside his mind, calling out desperately — but the voice within... never came again.

'You're leaving me too?'

The man who had been cursing at the top of his lungs a moment ago suddenly deflated, slumping lifelessly onto the leopard's back.

"Cheng Shi! What happened?!"

Hong Lin was frantic. Qin Xin whipped his head around in shock. The Cheng Shi sitting atop Big Cat seemed to have lost every ounce of fighting spirit in a single heartbeat, falling utterly silent.

Seeing this, Fate murmured in a low, spectral voice:

"It was the first — but it will not be the last.

I told you: there are always lives unworthy of surviving until Void's curtain falls. The longer you struggle, the fewer will remain. This is the farewell performance of the Void Era.

Whether you dye this curtain crimson with blood or bid this stage farewell with laughter and joy — it all depends on your choice.

Fixed Destiny cannot be defied. And I believe that at this very moment, you understand that better than any of them."

"..."

Those were words that struck at the very heart!

Hong Lin's face twisted. She bucked Cheng Shi off her back, reverted to human form, seized his arm, and shook her head violently:

"Cheng Shi, don't listen to Him! Since the dawn of time, submission has always led to bloodshed — only resistance offers a way out!

You said it yourself — everyone has their own choices. Don't make ours for us! Our choice is to struggle, to stand, to fight — to fall on the road to the light even if it kills us!

All you need to do is lead us in breaking the shackles of Fate, in shattering its chains, and fight for a future without Fate — no, without gods at all! Not to listen to an Outer God's words, twist yourself, and wallow in humiliation and hesitation!

We don't need you to save us. We are saving ourselves!"

She set Cheng Shi gently on the ground, whirled around, and glared at the Outer God. She unleashed the full power of her Authority of Prosperity. Her hair danced like sprouting tendrils, and in an instant, wild-growing branches wove a crown of Prosperity atop her head.

But it did not stop there. Countless roots extended from the green crown, plunging into the surrounding starry sky, drawing upon its power, making Hong Lin's body swell with ever-greater strength. Her arm transformed into a spear, leveled at the Outer God, fury blazing in her eyes:

"So what if we dye the curtain in blood? Dye it vivid enough, and it'll make a fine shroud for your coffin!"

The moment the word "coffin" left her lips, a real coffin suddenly squeezed through a Void rift torn open by a branch of Prosperity!

Its lid slid open three inches, and a slender hand reached out. Without a single word, it seized the soul-shattered Cheng Shi and yanked him inside.

The lid flipped. Figures switched.

The person from within the coffin appeared before the assembled gods, while the coffin — now hiding a person — was instantly pushed back into the Void rift.

The newcomer dusted off their hands when it was done, ignored the Outer God Fate's icy stare, and squinted at the colossal skull sitting atop the Bone Throne. Their voice dipped low:

"My lord, my devotion ends here."

Chapter 1304: Stop It, Fate — I'll Go with You

The newcomer was, of course, Zhang Jizu.

Even before the Assembly of Gods Convention had begun, Zhang Jizu had already sought out Hong Lin.

The world-saving plan might not have needed a Long Jing — but it absolutely required a "god's" help. And Hong Lin, in a sense, was a god. More importantly, she was one who could be trusted and easily persuaded.

Zhang Jizu naturally knew that a true god's assistance would be more effective, but where in the world could he find a god willing to shelter the Clown now?

So what seemed like the best option was in fact the only option left.

As it happened, the smaller meeting in that other stretch of starry sky had just adjourned, and Hong Lin was still frantically searching for Cheng Shi's whereabouts when the Death Chosen cornered her in the Void.

Zhang Jizu told her he had a way to save Cheng Shi's life — though it might require a certain price.

Hong Lin did not even ask what the price was. She only confirmed, again and again: "You're not lying to me? You can really save Cheng Shi? Rescue him from an Outer God as cunning as Deceit?!"

Zhang Jizu nodded solemnly. Hong Lin did not hesitate for a single heartbeat, her voice equally resolute:

"Tell me what to do. I'll do it."

Zhang Jizu narrowed his eyes, a barely perceptible glimmer flickering within them. Then he suddenly smiled: "For friendship?"

Hong Lin's face was dead serious: "For friendship."

"Even if the price is death?"

Hong Lin blinked — then her smile only grew brighter: "I told you — for friendship!"

Zhang Jizu said nothing more. He seemed to have expected exactly this answer. He produced a palm-sized green crown and handed it to her, explaining:

"The Crown of Prosperity. I happened upon it within lost memories — something perfectly suited to you.

Activate it with your Authority, and it will help you draw upon the power of Prosperity from across the universe. It's a feedback loop born of faith — as long as the faith in Prosperity endures, you can borrow its followers' strength without limit.

Of course, even with the faith's power augmenting you, you still cannot match a true god. Our goal is not to fight — it's to rescue!

Use the crown's roots to pierce through space. I'll follow those roots to your location. Then I'll use the same method to send Cheng Shi away — to buy him even a single second of breathing room.

But the Void is the domain of the Void path... whether he'll actually have a chance to escape..."

Zhang Jizu sighed. Clearly, he had little confidence in his own plan.

Hong Lin raised an eyebrow and looked at the miniature green crown in her hand, puzzled: "This thing... I've never seen it even in Prosperity's treasury. Where did you get it?"

"A secret." Zhang Jizu squinted. "When to activate it is up to you.

I'll be standing by to receive him at any time. But remember — it's best not to do it when he's in full resistance mode, or I'm afraid he'll reject the plan outright and break free on the way out."

Hong Lin took Zhang Jizu's instructions to heart, which was why she activated the crown at Cheng Shi's most shattered and spiritless moment, guiding the Death Chosen here.

And as a mere mortal, that was all Zhang Jizu could do.

He watched the coffin vanish before his eyes. One second he was smiling in relief at the plan's success — the next, he stood frozen in place, watching with his own eyes as the coffin was squeezed back out of the Void and dropped right before those cold Stellar Eyes!

Howling Void winds lifted the coffin, forming invisible hands that tore it apart inch by inch. Only when the figure inside tumbled out did everyone realize the person pulled into the coffin had not been the Fixed Destiny Clown at all — but the second Death Chosen!

Zhang Jizu!

The one who fell out of the coffin was another Zhang Jizu!

Even Hong Lin was stunned by this. She whipped around to stare at the Zhang Jizu behind her, still trying to figure out who he actually was, when the Outer God Fate mercilessly exposed the ruse:

"A very creative substitution trick. The most impressive act in this farewell performance, I'll grant you that — but you can't fool me.

As Fate, I see through all truths. Did you think a blind-spot trick would save you?

My follower, you seem to have forgotten — every ability you possess was bestowed by me."

The Zhang Jizu behind Hong Lin grimaced, let out a self-deprecating laugh, and shed his disguise, reverting to Cheng Shi's true appearance.

Indeed — it was Cheng Shi!

Only now did Hong Lin realize that the earlier flip of the coffin lid had been nothing more than sleight of hand. The two figures had never actually switched positions. Instead, the coffin prop had merely facilitated a rapid exchange and identity swap!

Cheng Shi had taken on Zhang Jizu's appearance and stayed behind, while Zhang Jizu — disguised as Cheng Shi — was sent into the Void along the crown's roots.

Had the plan worked, Zhang Jizu would have done exactly as he promised — trading one "price" in exchange for a moment's reprieve for Cheng Shi.

What Hong Lin had not expected was that the so-called price was never her — it was Zhang Jizu himself.

But alas, their opponent was the Outer God Fate — a being who could not only see through the essence of the universe but also wielded the current Authority of Deceit. A true master of the Void.

The plan had failed... without lasting even a single second.

Fate let out a cold snort. Countless howling Void winds surged toward the Zhang Jizu who had fallen from the coffin. He was making good on His word — every struggle by Fixed Destiny would splash blood onto the curtain.

But just as those winds were about to grind Zhang Jizu to dust, a torrent of white bone erupted skyward, scattering the gale and sweeping the unconscious Death Chosen back to the foot of the Bone Throne.

The colossal skull shielded its follower and spoke to the Outer God in a low rumble:

"Enough — is — enough.

Take — your Fixed Destiny — and then — tell — us — the true — answer."

At these words, Fate's cold gaze drifted to the Zhang Jizu sheltered beneath the colossal skull. His spiraling eyes whirled for a moment before settling on Cheng Shi, who stood in the distance with a grim expression. The Outer God's voice was frigid and pitiless:

"Do you want to keep going?"

"Of course we do!"

The answer came not from Cheng Shi, but from Qin Xin — who had been charging his power for some time — and Hong Lin, who roared as she launched herself forward. In this arena where true gods merely watched from the sidelines, the two beings least like gods among them all charged the Outer God one final time.

The power of Prosperity wove itself into a crown; War's fire spread in its wake. The terrifying display came close to rivaling a true God War in the eyes of the assembled deities — but the problem was, it only looked that way to the gods.

In the eyes of the Outer God Fate, all He saw were two streaks of blood about to stain the era's curtain — a turning point that would inevitably drive Fixed Destiny back to Him.

Humans are not made of stone; none can be truly without feeling.

Even Hong Lin had said it — Cheng Shi was someone who remembered every kindness. So when he watched his friends throw themselves into danger again and again for his sake, each time coming closer to death — how could he possibly remain unmoved?

But what could he do?

Right now, the two humans most akin to gods were fighting the Outer God together, and they did not appear to have even a sliver of hope for victory.

The winds tore through their flesh. The Void devoured their spirit. Battered and broken, they charged the Outer God again and again.

Was he truly going to wait until Qin Xin and Hong Lin died before his eyes?

And it was not just them — there were others...

Where was Zhen Xin, the magician of this farewell performance?

And who had summoned Death — who had known the truth all along — to make one final, utterly hollow "show of support"?

Qin Xin's very arrival proved the Torchbearers had known for some time. Yet even now, Change had not appeared. Did that mean even the Flame of Hope could not see where hope lay?

Then what was he still holding on for?

What meaning did his resistance even have?

Cheng Shi lifted his head abruptly, stared into those merciless eyes of Fate, and let out a wretched smile. He finally surrendered.

"I'll... go with you..." he said, his voice drained of all strength.

Big Cat's entire body shuddered, her scream hysterical: "Absolutely not!"

Qin Xin's flames flickered on the verge of dying out. He whipped around in fury:

"Cheng Shi, you don't need to carry the whole world on your shoulders, and you don't have to sacrifice yourself for a world without hope—"

Before Qin Xin or Hong Lin could finish, Cheng Shi shook his head and smiled gently at the two blood-soaked figures:

"The world has nothing to do with me, and I don't owe it anything.

I'm not doing this for the world. I'm doing it for my friends.

Old Jia taught me something very simple: my friends help me, and I help my friends.

So now — my friends are saving me, and I'm saving my friends.

Stop it, Hong Lin. Qin Xin.

Fate...

"I'll go with you."

Chapter 1305: Leave? Not a Chance!

When Cheng Shi uttered those words, he had already taken his first step of surrender toward Fate.

Fixed Destiny had finally, at the last possible moment, become "true Fixed Destiny."

"No!!!"

Qin Xin and Big Cat pulled back in anguished fury and charged toward Cheng Shi simultaneously, trying to drag him back. But endless howling winds surged from the Void, threaded with the prismatic light of the Origin, forming a towering wall that blocked them both.

War's blood-fire roared. Prosperity shrieked with bitter hatred. But it was all too late.

At this moment, Fate resembled that mad Truth — the one who had obsessively pursued the Origin's experiments. Back on the Land of Hope, Truth had used this very method to shut Deceit out behind a wall of absolute knowledge.

As Cheng Shi drew closer to Fate step by step, as the world's hope drifted further from the world, a god finally could no longer sit still.

A Divine Pillar suddenly tore through the Void winds and planted itself before Cheng Shi. It halted his advance, lashing irritably at everything around it, and demanded of the Outer God Fate, who stood high above:

"His departure — will it bring the universe's destruction — the end of all Life?"

Fate's cold gaze swept over the Divine Pillar. His voice was ice:

"Birth, I know you care only about drawing close to the Origin and creating life. You have never concerned yourself with the affairs of this universe. Blocking Fixed Destiny's path now is nothing more than wanting to know whether the will of Birth can continue.

But regardless of the outcome, you cannot stop me — nor can you hold back Fixed Destiny."

Upon hearing this, the Divine Pillar grew even more agitated. Yet the surrounding Void winds pressed in, step by step, locking the fearsome Pillar in place.

Birth, immobilized and silenced by the restraints, could only listen as Fate continued in a voice devoid of joy or sorrow:

"I explain this much only because you never once hindered Fixed Destiny, and also to prove that I have no need to deceive you.

Fixed Destiny is the sole chance for this universe — for countless universes. Only by fulfilling the Origin's will can you ever hope to live as true gods.

And right now, with the experiment unsolved, you and I are nothing more than variables."

The staggering impact of this worldview still had not been digested by the assembled gods. They fell into silence once more. Meanwhile, Cheng Shi let out a bitter laugh, stepped around the motionless Divine Pillar, and continued walking toward Fate.

As he walked, he gradually raised his head and began surveying his surroundings, gazing at every mortal and god present.

The atmosphere turned surreal. The Clown was supposed to be the "star" on this "red carpet," yet he walked like a passing bystander, carefully studying the expression of every "audience member" in the stands.

His gaze was layered with complexity. He instinctively skipped over Big Cat — whose eyes were splitting with rage — and Qin Xin — whose eyes wept blood. He glanced past Death, whose green orbital flames had gone dim. He swept over the Iron Law of Order, whose pages trembled and hummed in frozen stillness...

Decay decayed in silence. Memory memorized in silence. The Wrath of Abomination, Herobos — beings who before mortals were normally either volatile or loftily enigmatic — now cowered in a corner, not daring to make a sound.

Before the Origin's aura billowing through the space, they were simply too small.

Though many gods were absent, with that single glance, Cheng Shi felt as if he had seen through the entire universe.

This was simply what the world was. Every person, every god, pursued their own will, warring endlessly, never stopping.

Only when they discovered that all their conflicts were futile — that the final answer rested upon a single mortal — did they realize that gods were not truly gods.

They could not accept this reality. Their only thought was: if Fixed Destiny truly was the answer, then let this experiment that had ground the gods' dignity to dust be turned and forgotten as quickly as possible.

But was that page really so easy to turn?

Cheng Shi was not sure. His steps were heavy, as though dragging invisible shackles. He staggered forward until at last he stood before Fate. He lifted his head and stared into those Stellar Eyes that had given him shelter countless times before, and his vision blurred.

He hallucinated his Benefactor, Deceit, possessing those same mesmerizing spirals and stars that should have been brilliant. But now, like these extinguished constellations, He would never shine again...

A lump rose in Cheng Shi's throat, but he made no sound.

He clenched his fists. He gritted his teeth. He forced the despair back down his throat. He looked the Outer God Fate in the eye and asked a question the old Cheng Shi would never have asked.

"If sacrificing me alone will end everything — will it?"

In that moment, the spirals in the Outer God's eyes froze.

He gazed down at His follower, and for the first time, His expression was not as certain as when He had addressed the gods.

Cheng Shi sensed the Outer God Fate's uncertainty as well. But he did not step back, nor did he run. Instead, he planted himself before Fate, baring his neck to the blade:

"If the Clown taking the stage is the final act of this farewell performance, then let the Void depart alongside Fixed Destiny... and let the curtain fall.

We are too tired. It's time to close our eyes and rest."

Fixed Destiny seemed to have fully accepted his fate — and even Fate Himself was moved by this.

But not everyone surrendered simply because Cheng Shi had. Sparks may die — but the torch burns on!

Qin Xin, the founder of the Torchbearers, had devoted everything to preserving a sliver of hope for the world. Now that hope was gone and the road ahead was dark — he no longer needed to think for the world. It was time to think for his friend.

Cheng Shi did not want to leave this place — because the people he cared about were here!

If that was so — if death awaited no matter where they went — then why not die together beneath this starry sky, buried in the world they held dear?

And so Qin Xin moved!

The Void winds blocked his approach, but they could not erase his voice. In the heartbeat before that boundless power of Fate consumed Cheng Shi, Qin Xin roared:

"I, Qin Xin — the sole Proxy of War in this era — petition the Pact of Gods to inherit the Divine Name of War!"

When a true god had fallen or was imprisoned beyond freedom, its Envoy had the right to inherit that god's Authority. Qin Xin had already received the recognition of War's Authority. All he was missing from the Divine Throne was the "legitimization."

In that moment, every mortal and divine gaze was drawn to the Torchbearer once more. Even those silent Scales began to gleam again, starlight streaming across their surface. The Pact of Gods took effect according to law. Justice Himself nodded and approved the petition for War's succession.

Witnessing a new god's coronation at such a delicate juncture, every mortal and deity felt a storm of emotions.

None suffered more than Herobos...

After the fall of Oblivion, He too could have succeeded to the Divine Throne through this very method. But before the succession could proceed, a pending agenda item at the Assembly of Gods Convention regarding His right to inherit the Authority had been indefinitely postponed.

Justice's rigidity would not allow the rules to bypass any unresolved matter. And so Herobos was stuck in limbo — neither ascending nor descending.

With the pending item in place, He could not ascend to the throne; but without that item, Oblivion would never have fallen in the first place...

It was a deadlock with no resolution, trapping Herobos in perpetual torment.

But Qin Xin had no such obstacles. Justice likely guessed what Qin Xin intended to do, and so He streamlined every procedure, placing the vacant Divine Name directly upon Qin Xin's head.

And the instant Qin Xin ascended as a god, his heterochromatic eyes — one blazing fire, one weeping blood — snapped wide open. He fixed them on Cheng Shi, now nearly engulfed by Fate, and howled:

"By the name of War, I appoint the mortal Cheng Shi as my Envoy!

By the Pact above — let all gods bear witness!"

Chapter 1306: He Is Cheng Shi?!

"Whoosh—"

This was no longer resistance — it was a naked provocation.

Even the slowest gods among them could see, from Fate's past actions combined with today's events, that the Outer God Fate wanted a faithless Fixed Destiny.

And War's act had undeniably cut off Fixed Destiny's path forward — polluting him with faith so he could no longer serve as a sacrifice untouched by it.

A true god's throne may have required the Pact's approval, but an Envoy had always been elevated by the true god alone, needing no other proof. When a living being held a Faith Container, received a true god's recognition, and acted as proxy for a true god's Authority — they naturally became an Envoy.

And as luck would have it, Cheng Shi already carried both War's Container and War's Authority!

He was a natural candidate for Envoy — separated from the real thing by nothing more than a single word of divine promise.

Today, that promise had come.

And so Fate was furious.

The darkness that the flames had driven back came roaring back in an instant. The thick, fathomless blackness — impossibly deep yet awash in terrifying iridescence — pressed down like a physical force, mercilessly eroding the inferno blazing around War.

Inch by inch, the fire shrank. Drop by drop, the blood multiplied.

Even though War was the god most skilled in combat in the entire universe, against this sliver of the Origin's power, He had no strength to resist.

This moment echoed that other moment — the scene before them reminded both Cheng Shi and Hong Lin of those countless Wars in the Real Universe, charging upstream against the current, only to be wiped out in a single stroke.

The two sights were uncannily similar, save that War's destruction was far slower this time.

This was the Outer God's wrath — and Qin Xin's torment.

Just as the Outer God had said, no one could prevent Fixed Destiny from being taken. The only reason He still lingered here, sparring with the gods, was that the Spacetime Storm He awaited had not yet arrived.

Cheng Shi's expression shifted. Before he could intervene, the flames imploded into darkness, and the flowing blood dissolved into the Void, becoming part of the hollow backdrop beneath the starry sky — gone without a trace.

War had vanished — just like that!

No. He hadn't vanished.

Qin Xin had vanished.

The instant Qin Xin disappeared, a pair of brand-new War eyes — one blazing fire, one weeping blood — opened before the assembled gods. Within those eyes, spirals of the Void swirled without concealment. They settled on Cheng Shi, who had spun around in alarm, and spoke in a spectral murmur:

"Someone stole my identity in a futile struggle, attempting to pollute Fixed Destiny. Fate saw through it.

His timely intervention freed my true self. I am deeply grateful.

All prior commitments were made by the imposter and hold no validity.

Fixed Destiny... has never resisted. He never once resonated with my will. He does not deserve the title of my Envoy..."

"..."

"..."

"..."

He was not even trying to pretend anymore.

The Outer God no longer cared what the gods thought, nor whether truth held meaning within this universe. In the end, even without this charade, He could simply reset time, roll it back, kill Qin Xin first, and then deal with everything else.

But He had not done that. Instead, He performed this pantomime before the assembled gods — not merely as a dismissal, but as a declaration to the universe: Fixed Destiny could never be defied.

"Ha."

Cheng Shi laughed. He stared at those eyes of War and laughed like a madman.

"Fate, oh Fate — I think you're the biggest clown on this stage.

Your performance is truly hilarious. Ha — hahahaha!"

The universe fell deathly silent, leaving only Cheng Shi's laughter echoing through the void.

Those frigid Stellar Eyes slowly stilled their spirals. Fate gazed at His follower for a long, silent moment — and then, at last, commanded the power of Fate to engulf him. Together with Fixed Destiny, He vanished from the gods' sight.

The dust had settled.

The Outer God departed. The Origin's power dissipated. The crushing pressure lifted in an instant, and the stars smothered by darkness regained their color.

But a furious roar immediately tore through the starry sky. Hong Lin, still falling, transformed into a leopard mid-descent and bolted toward the depths of the Void.

She did not know where the Outer God had taken Cheng Shi. But she knew with absolute certainty — wherever it was, that was where she would be buried.

'I will never abandon a single friend. Never!'

Prosperity chased after them through tears. Those who remained sighed in sorrow. The gods exchanged glances and quietly dispersed.

The farce seemed to be over. Perhaps when Fixed Destiny was sacrificed to the Origin, the world... could go on living?

No one dared say for certain. Not even the gods.

The colossal skull atop the Bone Throne sighed as it gazed at the spot where the Outer God had vanished. Then the green flames in its eyes flickered, and the Fishbone Hall disassembled into a torrent of white bone that carried its follower away from the devastated starry sky.

When the hall found a tranquil stretch of Void and reconstituted itself, a stream of pure Death power quietly seeped from the colossal skull, restoring a small skull beneath the throne to human form and rousing the follower who lay unconscious before it.

An Mingyu stumbled forward and nearly collapsed on the steps before the Bone Throne. She "looked" toward the distant figure of Zhang Jizu as he groggily came to, and her heart clenched:

"Where is Cheng Shi? Is he..."

Zhang Jizu's whole body convulsed. He stared at his own hands, and something seemed to click. Then, in a voice hoarse, choking, and full of despair, he slammed his fist into the ground and howled:

"No!!!"

And when the colossal skull and An Mingyu heard that single "No" —

"BOOM—"

Both god and mortal's minds erupted in chaos.

Countless torrents of bone surged skyward from either side of the staircase. The entire Void began to fill with the aura of Death. That seething Death power writhed as erratically as the shock within the colossal skull. Its green flames blazed sky-high as it stared at its follower before the throne, utterly unable to comprehend.

He bore Zhang Jizu's aura through and through — so why was his voice...

An Mingyu was overjoyed beyond all expectation. She thought her prayers had finally been answered. Lifting the hem of her skirt, she dashed to Zhang Jizu's side, seized his hand, and wept with joy:

"Cheng Shi... you're alive!"

That's right!

The voice emanating from beneath Zhang Jizu's skin was Cheng Shi's!

He was not Zhang Jizu — he was Cheng Shi!

The essence of substitution magic lay in deception — in misdirection. As long as you could fool everyone's eyes and ears, the stand-in would naturally be accepted as the genuine article.

Zhang Jizu had used precisely this method to deceive every god present — including the Outer God — allowing himself to become the "Fixed Destiny" that had to be sacrificed!

But this world's Deceit had long since perished. Even His Authority was being wielded by the Outer God Fate. So how had Zhang Jizu impersonated Cheng Shi well enough to fool an Outer God who could see through all truth in the universe?

Because...

The Zhang Jizu who had been taken was never Zhang Jizu at all. He truly was Cheng Shi!

Only — a Cheng Shi from another world!

Remember the attempt to seek knowledge from the outside, just before Cheng Shi entered Mockery and Jeering? At that time, Cheng Shi had encountered another world's Mi Laozhang, who had inherited the Authority of Death. And at the very same moment, Zhang Jizu had encountered another world's Cheng Shi — one who had inherited the Authority of Deceit!

That Cheng Shi — spirals filling his eyes — took one look at the stunned and bewildered Zhang Jizu and said:

"Good. It seems my chance to atone has finally come."

He extended his hand toward Zhang Jizu, grinning with extraordinary joy.

Chapter 1307: "Atonement"

The truth was now obvious.

Zhang Jizu — consumed by guilt toward the Joker and craving atonement — had encountered another Cheng Shi who also yearned to atone.

He knew that on his own, he could never save Cheng Shi. But the other Cheng Shi might have a way. So the two locked eyes in mutual, wordless understanding, instantly in sync, and used the Time Deduction method to perform a cross-world exchange.

Zhang Jizu grasped the outstretched hand and traveled to that other world — already counting down to its collapse — while that world's Cheng Shi broke through the barrier using the legacy of Time and arrived in this world, flawlessly taking Zhang Jizu's place!

So when Cheng Shi and the other world's Zhang Jizu had met, the "atonement" Zhang Jizu spoke of was not his own — it was the other world's Cheng Shi who sought atonement!

That Cheng Shi had brought the so-called "answer" back from the Real Universe, only to inadvertently drag his entire world to ruin, leaving its universe without hope.

He knew the weight of his sins. All he could do was try to pass hope to other worlds, seeking to ease the boundless regret and guilt etched into his heart.

As for the crimes themselves... they could never be washed clean. That was not a personal wound — it was the scar of a despairing universe, branded into his soul, impossible to erase.

And so the "good luck" that Cheng Shi had heard from the other world's Zhang Jizu was never meant for Cheng Shi at all — it was a wish for that guilt-ridden Cheng Shi.

Therefore, when the Time Deduction ended and Cheng Shi saw Zhang Jizu again, the real Zhang Jizu had long since departed to the other world, where he looked at another version of himself and sighed deeply:

"As if I'm not also atoning...

I hope he can save him."

The other Zhang Jizu smiled and said: "It's alright. The debts can always be repaid. He can do it. You can do it. I... can too."

...

The perspective shifted beyond the Void.

This was the endless nothingness — the edge of the universe.

Deeper in, the Void grew ever more fathomless and thick, seemingly without end.

But only those in the know understood that from here, one needed only harness the power of Time to breach the barrier beyond the Void, slip through the cracks of Existence, and enter the Real Universe — to behold true vastness and cosmic wonder.

It was here that the Outer God Fate released his restraints, spitting out the Fixed Destiny he had wrapped in Void.

Those cold, merciless eyes opened anew, regarding Cheng Shi with neither joy nor sorrow. Cheng Shi stood up as well, meeting Fate's gaze without yielding an inch.

The silence between mortal and god was deep and heavy, as though it traversed countless worlds, pierced through innumerable universes. They regarded each other without words, yet seemed to have said everything there was to say.

A long time passed. The Spacetime Storm from the Real Universe still had not arrived. The Outer God Fate broke the silence, His voice cold:

"You are not Fixed Destiny."

Cheng Shi blinked, then sneered:

"My lord, you dragged me all the way here, and now you say I'm not Fixed Destiny?"

So the identity of Fixed Destiny is like a set of clothes — you dress me in it when you please and strip it off when you please?

Ha! I thought I was a key — a tool for opening the doors of the Origin's temple. And now you're telling me I'm a... doll?

Keys don't look like this!

Does putting clothes on a doll really fool you?!

Absurd! Preposterous! Ridiculous!

Fixed Destiny is not some creation within this world for you to mold at will — it's the sole conduit linking to the Origin!

The road I've walked — the Predestined Path — has been nothing but twists and detours, always wrong turns and never the right one!

I'm curious: if Fixed Destiny is your will, why have you never once guided me along this path?!"

The Outer God Fate showed no anger at the challenge. His voice remained as cold as ever:

"I gave you countless forms of guidance. But your rebelliousness, the same as Deceit's, meant you never listened."

Cheng Shi froze — then burst into deranged laughter:

"No, no, no — you know that's not the kind of guidance I mean!

I'm talking about true guidance from Fate!"

The spirals in the Outer God Fate's eyes gradually slowed to a halt. Still He showed no anger; if anything, the question made Him grow calmer.

He looked at Cheng Shi. His voice was ice:

"You are not him. I cannot give you the guidance you seek."

Cheng Shi's manic grin froze — and then, inexplicably, two streams of silent tears rolled down his face.

"So that's how it is... so that's how it is..."

It was Him who chose to believe — not Him who...

Good, good, good!"

Cheng Shi erupted in laughter once more, only this time it came mixed with tears. His face showed no expression, yet somehow looked fiercer than before.

He wiped the tears away with the back of his hand and looked up:

"One last question. How did you figure out I wasn't him?"

The Outer God snorted coldly: "The Spacetime Storm has not come. Your... identity doesn't match."

"Spacetime Storm?" Cheng Shi was momentarily startled, then threw his head back in wild laughter. "What a wonderful excuse — 'the Spacetime Storm has not come'!

How can you even utter such a hollow pretext?

The Spacetime Storm is the chaos at the dawn of an era — the darkness before the first light — the blank canvas before Birth gives form. Yes, beings from the Real Universe can use the storm to travel between worlds, but it never forms above a surviving world! It only appears at the beginning of a brand-new Slice Universe experiment!

You came from the Real Universe — you know all of this! And yet you claim you're waiting for it above a living world?

Ha! Fate truly is a better liar than Deceit. Don't tell me you've even managed to fool yourself?

Your goal was never the Spacetime Storm. What are you really doing?!"

At this, a flicker of change finally crossed Fate's eyes. Cheng Shi caught that tremor within the frozen spirals, and his heart lurched. He seemed to grasp something, and gasped in horror:

"You actually intend to—"

"Enough!"

A single thunderous snort from the Outer God Fate sent the surrounding Void into an endless collapse. The dense blackness seized "Fixed Destiny" once more, sealing away his ability to speak.

But even without words, Cheng Shi's eyes still spoke.

Since his identity had been seen through long ago, since this so-called rescue was utterly meaningless — he let his true eyes emerge, irises flooded with spirals, and stared directly into those matching Stellar Eyes. With the barest possible movement of the corners of his eyes, curving upward, he gave the Outer God a smile of release.

He seemed to be saying:

'My scenes are wrapped. This stage will no longer belong to me.

My sins may never be fully atoned for — but this is as far as I can go...'

And then, one step ahead of the Void, he closed his eyes.

"BOOM—"

"Fixed Destiny" died.

Died in the Outer God Fate's embrace of Void.

He had said it: every struggle by Fixed Destiny would splash blood and stain the era's curtain ever more crimson.

And now, that blood-red curtain was ready to fall.

He carelessly tossed the body of the "Fixed Destiny" that did not belong to this world beyond its borders. Then His Stellar Eyes pierced through the Void and found a certain stretch of space thick with the aura of Death. A strange glimmer passed through His gaze, there and gone. The frozen spirals thawed once more and resumed their ceaseless, hypnotic swirl.

The one who had shielded Fixed Destiny was dead. The true Fixed Destiny could no longer hide.

Chapter 1308: Rebellion Carved into the Bone!

Cheng Shi knew he had been saved.

When he was pulled into that coffin, he had seen a pair of eyes identical to his own. The two gazes met for less than a second, yet in that instant he read a lifetime of emotions within them.

Regret, guilt, longing, defiance, struggle, despair, hope — and even a trace of envy and jealousy that he could not quite name...

In that single glance, he seemed to see another version of his own life — to live through another existence, brilliant yet fleeting.

Then he was knocked unconscious. In the last sliver of light before his vision plunged into darkness, he caught sight of four large characters carved neatly on the inside of the coffin lid:

Live well.

Block lettering.

It was Old Jia's hope for him, and it was another Cheng Shi's final wish.

In that moment, his eyes did not even have time to grow wet before consciousness tumbled into endless darkness.

Cheng Shi had been sealed — sealed inside that coffin by another "Outer God Deceit" wearing Zhang Jizu's face.

Anyone who opened the coffin and saw the figure lying within would never realize it was actually this world's Fixed Destiny, because Deceit understood deception best of all — and Cheng Shi... understood Cheng Shi best of all.

He knew how to hide himself, and He knew how to fool the world.

So when Cheng Shi woke and found himself wearing a body that was not his own, he immediately understood what had happened and guessed where the other version of himself had come from.

But this truth was one he could not accept. It meant not only that Mi Laozhang had left this world to save him — it also meant another version of himself was about to die before the Outer God Fate.

Whether or not the other Cheng Shi truly became the sacrifice, death was his unalterable destination — the final act on this world's stage.

Why?

Cheng Shi collapsed on the ground, writhing in agony. The question surged up from within him once more, only this time it was directed not at the Outer God, not at the other Cheng Shi, but at himself:

Why did he have to endure so much misfortune?

Why had "fate" never favored him?

Was this what being Fixed Destiny meant?

But why did suffering have to be bound to Fixed Destiny? What possible meaning could there be in everything the Origin had forced upon him?!

The wise always said that the more you know, the more you suffer. But for Cheng Shi, knowing nothing was worse.

The pain was nearly tangible — one look at it was enough to feel it in your own bones.

Beside him, An Mingyu gripped the hem of her skirt tightly, watching Cheng Shi's trembling form. The great lord upon the Bone Throne fell silent as well, and even the chattering skulls throughout the Fishbone Hall went quiet. In this moment, the entire Void was saturated with the aura of Cheng Shi's unraveling mind.

Though An Mingyu did not know what plans the others had devised, rescuing Cheng Shi was undeniably a "victory." At the very least, this world's hope remained. At the very least, they had not let the Outer God take their friend.

But...

Cheng Shi was not her only friend.

There was a question she had wanted to ask for some time, but Cheng Shi's state had kept her silent.

Only after a long while, when Cheng Shi slowly steadied himself and she saw him rise from the ground with a blank expression, did she finally find the courage to approach. But before she could open her mouth, Cheng Shi — as if reading her mind — said flatly:

"I'm sorry. I didn't see her."

The words struck like a bolt of lightning that obeyed no reason, blanking An Mingyu's consciousness entirely and draining her of every last ounce of strength. She clamped a hand over her mouth and crumpled to the floor, shaking her head frantically, unable to believe what she had heard.

A magician who so closely resembled Deceit could not possibly have missed this spectacular farewell performance — especially since she had already been brought beneath the stage, just one step away from walking on. What reason could she have had to give up her chance and simply vanish?

If there was none — then she had not chosen to stay offstage. She simply no longer had the chance to take it.

At this thought, the An Mingyu who had been painstakingly pieced back together by Cheng Shi and the Destined Ones shattered into fragments once more.

This follower, abandoned by one Benefactor after another, wept without restraint — just like Cheng Shi moments ago, unable to breathe.

Misfortune was contagious, after all. And so was pain.

But the Cheng Shi of this moment could no longer sense An Mingyu's grief. His gaze passed over her, fixed directly on the colossal skull seated upon the Bone Throne at the top of the stairs, and he asked, word by word:

"My lord — are you still sheltering us?"

"..."

"My lord — do you believe the words of an Outer God?"

"..."

"My lord — do you truly believe that a Divine Throne built by the Outer God Fate from Fixed Destiny could move the Origin? Could convince Him to halt the experiment and spare this world?"

"..."

"The Creator personally fashioned tens of thousands of Slice Universes — just so He could find a single 'Divine Throne' offered up by experimental variables?!"

Ha! My lord, don't you find that ridiculous?"

"..."

Cheng Shi's voice rose higher with each question, his tone heavier with each sentence. The green flames inside the colossal skull's eye sockets blazed wild — yet it maintained its silence, offering no answer.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi scoffed, shook his head, and asked once more, his expression perfectly blank:

"My lord — have you ever known fear?"

"..."

"You must have. Otherwise you would not have accepted the answer the Outer God Fate offered.

But you were never afraid enough. Otherwise you would not have accepted the answer the Outer God Fate offered!

I believe it is time I reintroduced you to fear. Not the wariness one feels before the Origin — but the shadow you feel when you stand face-to-face with Him!

Forgive me, my lord. I am grateful for the shelter you once gave me, whether it was real or a lie — it no longer matters.

I need the world to understand why I despise Fixed Destiny. And I need the Outer God to understand why the Fear Faction exists!"

With that, Cheng Shi produced a Dice of Fate. He raised it high and addressed Death in a cold voice:

"Fate has given me much. Now it is time to use Fate's own methods to teach Fate a lesson:

Whether it is a mortal's fate, Fixed Destiny's fate, or Fate's own fate...

So long as it touches destiny, there is never a straight path — only detours!

If He so desperately wants to send me before the Origin, why bother with the extra step of forging some Divine Throne?

And why wait for a Spacetime Storm?

Right here, right now — I too want to see what that merciless Creator actually looks like!

There's no need to send me to Him. I'll make Him come to me!"

With that, Cheng Shi tossed the Dice of Fate into the air and pressed a Singer Mask over his face. That mask was so cold that even tears could not warm it.

And yet it was warm — because it was one of the few "legacies" that this world's Void had left for Cheng Shi.

"Lies of Yesterday... what a fine Lies of Yesterday. A lie so vast it leaves me with nothing but a bitter laugh at what today has become.

Ha.

This is the end.

No matter how dazzling the stage may be from here on out — the Clown... must exit."

Cheng Shi watched the Dice of Fate tumble down the bone steps and land on one.

He raised both arms toward the infinite Void and roared:

"Fate like stars — within sight, out of reach.

Origin — show yourself!"

Chapter 1309: Origin — Show Yourself!

That's right — Cheng Shi had prophesied the Origin!

He was not sure whether this would actually draw the Origin's gaze. After all, during that past Trial of Time, An Shenxuan had done nothing more than die quietly while peeking at the Origin — it had not ended the Trial, nor had it collapsed the world.

But he knew with absolute certainty that he would die — and in a way no god could prevent!

Death beneath the unbearable terror of the Origin. Death within the divine force of the Creator that even the gods dared not name.

To be honest, when Cheng Shi screamed "Origin — show yourself!" — Death truly felt that fear strike at His core.

Cheng Shi was not the same as An Mingyu. He was the linchpin of Fixed Destiny — quite possibly the sacrifice closest to the Origin's will in the entire universe. No one knew how deep his connection to the Creator ran. If the Origin truly turned His gaze here because of Fixed Destiny's prophecy...

The colossal skull did not dare think further. He even considered sweeping up the Fishbone Hall and fleeing this place entirely.

It was not the first time He had considered this. Just moments ago, when An Mingyu had used the same threat, Death had already felt the urge.

Time rewound slightly.

When An Mingyu revealed her resolve to Death, He was both shocked and furious.

Shocked that His own follower valued her life so little. Furious that she dared try to summon the Origin — the very name He never wished to speak — into His Fishbone Hall.

As a god, Death had ten thousand ways to silence An Mingyu on the spot. But He did not. Instead, after a long silence, He spoke in a low murmur:

"The Outer God — wields — the Creator's — power. I — cannot stop it.

But I — can go — and ask — for this world — one more — sliver — of possibility."

But His response came a step too late. The long wait had made An Mingyu increasingly anxious. In her eyes at the time, Zhen Xin had been dragged into the mess and Cheng Shi was on the brink of disaster — the two people who mattered most to her were both facing imminent misfortune. Her only leverage was to use this threat to force Death's hand. So when the silence stretched on without an answer, An Mingyu gritted her teeth and recited the prayer to prophesy the Origin!

Yes — the prophet had already made her prophecy, in the instant before Death responded.

When the colossal skull saw the infinite sorrow and resolve flash through His follower's eyes, He was stunned.

He thought His hall was about to change owners.

But to everyone's surprise, as the Bell Ringer tolled the death knell, the entire hall, top to bottom...

Nothing happened!

An Mingyu had meant to prove her determination with her own death, but the Creator gave no response whatsoever.

Still, her actions had given Death a genuine scare. When He realized that the prophecy of the Origin had not taken effect, something new flickered in His gaze toward His follower — something like... pity?

An Mingyu also collapsed to the ground, murmuring to herself:

"How can this be...

Have I truly been abandoned by the world?"

At this sight, the green flames within the colossal skull's eye sockets roared to life. He looked at His fallen, weeping Bell Ringer, and sighed deeply:

"For — the sake of — this world — I — will still go — and ask.

You — come with me — beneath my throne — and hear — for yourself — the answer — you seek."

With that, the torrent of white bone swept An Mingyu away — and what followed was the scene where Death interrupted the Outer God Fate.

So now, having detected no immediate change in the Void, the colossal skull realized that Fixed Destiny's prophecy had also...

Failed?

The rhythm of the green flames in His eye sockets grew peculiar. When He looked at Cheng Shi, there was something in His gaze that was hard to define.

Cheng Shi froze.

The louder he had screamed "Origin," the more rigid his body became now.

Prophesying the Origin was supposed to be his final means of seeking death. How had it come to this?

Had the Origin stopped watching this world?

Or had the Creator long since abandoned it?

As Cheng Shi stood bewildered, An Mingyu beside him whispered, her spirit shattered: "It's useless, Cheng Shi. We've... already been abandoned."

The scene was painfully familiar, reminding Cheng Shi of the time he had used the Destined Ones as a pretext to rescue the Blind One from beneath Fate's watchful gaze.

Back then, the people were still there. But the god... had already fallen.

Cheng Shi clenched his fists and shook his head violently: "No — I don't believe it! I refuse to believe even dying is this hard!"

He raised the Fun Ring on his hand and swung it at his own jaw — but it was all in vain.

His call had not summoned the Origin. But what was supposed to come had already arrived.

Void winds howled once more. Dark storms not only pinned the old bones to the Bone Throne, but directly swallowed the flicker of lightning, smashing the Clown aside, sending him tumbling through the Void.

The Outer God had arrived!

Fate once again opened those suffocatingly terrifying Stellar Eyes above Fixed Destiny's head.

He gazed down at His follower, who was gritting his teeth and rising to his feet, and spoke in a voice of absolute cold:

"You should feel guilty for his death. He did not need to die — yet your cowardice and your flight cost him his life."

So that Cheng Shi truly was dead...

Cheng Shi froze. Tears streamed from his eyes uncontrollably, yet he still clenched his jaw, lifted his head, and fixed an unyielding stare on those eyes:

"Yes — he didn't need to die.

If you hadn't killed him, how would he have died?!

What's the matter — as Fate, you can't even bear a little blame?

So eager to push every sin onto me — is that because you want me to inherit your filthy Divine Name, soaked in the misfortune of all living things?

Bah!

I don't want it!

I have never believed in fate!"

The words had barely faded when another upheaval struck!

A flicker of firelight suddenly appeared within this sealed stretch of Void. When Cheng Shi saw that glow, his pupils contracted and his heart surged with surprise.

He thought Qin Xin was alive — that War had returned. However weak, however small, at least the man still lived.

But a heartbeat later, his smile vanished entirely.

Because the light did not belong to Qin Xin. It was not War. It was the one who had not appeared once since the farewell performance began — the Flame of Hope. The last legacy that this world's Fate had left for the universe!

Even if that legacy was something He had once discarded.

The Candle Man descended upside-down, landing between Cheng Shi and Fate. He turned to look at Cheng Shi, eyes brimming with theatrical indignation.

"Just because the villain happens to be the Outer God Fate doesn't mean you have to wear your contempt for all things Fate on your face, does it?"

I know you don't believe in fate. But I didn't know I was this unwelcome in your eyes.

Should I not have come?"

"..."

The Flame of Hope's self-deprecating joke did little to lighten Cheng Shi's burden, but he genuinely felt the warmth that the Flame brought with it.

Just as this Envoy of Fate had always said — He represented hope for the fewest of the few, standing before those with the least reason for hope. Even now, when the entire universe had yielded to the Outer God, He still came — and placed Himself between Cheng Shi and Fate.

For this, Cheng Shi felt crushing guilt.

Qin Xin was dead. The only Torchbearer left was the Flame of Hope. If the Flame fell now too...

He dared not think about it. He had no strength left to think.

The Flame of Hope saw through Cheng Shi's thoughts and spoke in a voice forged with conviction:

"Don't lose heart. Since the dawn of time, despair has always been the seedbed of hope.

When despair comes crashing down upon us like a mountain, hope crystallizes from its weight, and resistance grows all the fiercer.

I never imagined I would face a day like this. Fate has fallen — but perhaps because He discarded me long ago, I never felt His passing.

Yet as the last legacy He left this world — as the Change that Fate never wished to foresee — I will protect this world's final spark."

With that, the Flame of Hope blazed brighter and brighter, its fire expanding wider and wider.

But only Cheng Shi, standing closest, could feel the truth — that the flame was growing more and more hollow, its temperature colder and colder...

The Flame of Hope was not releasing some hidden power. He was creating power — for Cheng Shi!

He looked at Cheng Shi and left behind one last ember of optimism.

"You were never the kindling. You are the flame — the light that illuminates this world.

And I, named Flame of Hope, am in truth the tinder of hope.

Set me alight. Take this radiance. Use this world's last Change to fight for hope — for yourselves, and for the world!"

"No — don't do this..."

Cheng Shi was beside himself. Instinctively, he lunged for the Flame of Hope. He had watched too many people leave him today — he did not want to endure this despair one more time before his own end.

But the instantaneous detonation of the blaze was beyond saving.

"BOOM—"

His hand was only halfway out when that brilliant, frigid light burst into an sky full of fireworks, illuminating the dark Void — and illuminating the sole mark the Servant God once called the Flame of Hope had left upon this world:

An hourglass — hope as its body, change as its walls, dripping with despair and misfortune.

The Container of Fate!

Chapter 1310: Pass the Torch! Pass the Torch!

Who could have imagined that the Flame of Hope would transform into a Container upon death?

No one — except the Flame of Hope himself.

From the moment He learned of His identity as a Servant God, He knew He must hold a Container of Fate within himself. Yet He could never produce it. That was when He guessed — the Container was most likely His own body.

Only when hope was truly extinguished could the Change abandoned by Fate return to destiny's true path, accepted by Fate once more and reborn as the Container of Fate.

And this was the last shred of help He could offer Cheng Shi.

Faced with that impossible dilemma, the Flame of Hope gave His answer. Between Cheng Shi and the world, He chose Cheng Shi.

No — more accurately, He had never chosen a single individual. He chose the spark that had resisted fate from beginning to end, the kindling that had held onto hope through everything!

Just like Himself — discarded by Fate, yet brimming with hope until the very end!

Cheng Shi stared at the Container of Fate floating before him, tears streaming down his face.

He understood what the Candle Man intended. He wanted Cheng Shi to take this Container and, in his capacity as Fixed Destiny, petition the Pact of Gods to inherit the Authority of Fate.

Compared to the counterfeit Deceit, this world's Fate was unquestionably the god who had most believed in Cheng Shi.

But whether that belief could earn the Pact's recognition and become true Authority in Cheng Shi's hands... that remained unknown.

Yet even with the road ahead shrouded in darkness, the Flame of Hope had unhesitatingly placed this final ember of hope into Cheng Shi's hands. It was proof enough that every being connected to Fate loved a gamble — and right now, this was the ultimate roll of the dice, the last desperate throw on which life and death hinged!

From the Flame of Hope's appearance to His dissolution, He never once looked at the Outer God. He ignored the Fate that did not belong to this world. And the Outer God Fate said nothing in return — silently watching everything unfold, neither interfering nor commenting.

His cold eyes showed no change. The spirals continued to swirl. His apathy was the same as always — as though He were certain that everything they did was meaningless.

But even so — even with not a glimmer of hope in sight — Cheng Shi refused to let the Flame of Hope die in vain. He could not keep betraying everyone's goodwill, and above all, he could not keep betraying their lives. His gaze hardened with absolute resolve. He seized the Container of Fate, felt the surging pulse of Fate's power thrumming against his palm — a sensation he had never known — and spoke those words into the Void once more.

Only this time, Deceit was replaced by Fate.

"I — Walker of the Void, Fixed Destiny of Fate — Cheng Shi — request, under the witness of Justice, to inherit the Authority of the fallen god... Fate!"

It was not a scream this time. There was no hysteria. Cheng Shi's voice was flat — as flat as if he had spotted something he had dropped on the roadside and simply bent down to pick it up. Nothing more.

In response, the Outer God Fate's gaze grew colder still.

He knew why Fate had died. He was certain that Fixed Destiny could not inherit the Authority of Fate. Moreover, this world's Fate had also championed Fixed Destiny. Even if He retained lingering will after death, that will should have been to preserve the sacrifice's purity — not to use His own Authority to help Fixed Destiny escape Fixed Destiny!

"Do not struggle in vain. Fate is dead. He can no longer shelter you.

You were never Fate's Envoy. The Flame of Hope may have had a chance to inherit all that Fate left behind — but He chose to give that hope to you...

A pity. His hope is shattered — just like his life.

And you, my follower — accept reality. Walking the path you were meant to walk is the truest way to honor them.

Otherwise, the era's curtain will only grow more vivid, and you will be left to chew on this pain alone upon the Predestined Path."

As He spoke, those icy eyes turned toward An Mingyu at Cheng Shi's side. Clearly, this prophet who had been discarded by Fate time and again was about to meet the prophecy's final chapter.

Cheng Shi's fury blazed. He gripped the Container tight and spoke through clenched teeth: "Justice has not spoken! Whether I can inherit the Authority — you do not get to decide!"

"Perhaps I don't. But does He?"

He personally shattered the rules of the Pact. He used a grandiose excuse to convene a farcical Assembly of Gods Convention. Does He truly think that because He is the framework of the Pact, He can ignore the Pact and tip the scales of justice?

He cannot come. He may not even survive much longer!"

The words had barely faded when the Void shifted!

"!!!"

Before the colossal skull's stunned gaze, before the Outer God's startled eyes, amid Cheng Shi's ecstatic anticipation — a pair of Scales wrought from starlight and flowing radiance materialized before them all.

The voice of Order resounded through the universe once more, and the prismatic light of the stars painted the Void in brilliant splendor.

Justice had come — bearing divine Authority, answering the call!

The spirals in the Outer God Fate's eyes spun wildly. He could not understand why Justice would descend here. Even if Cheng Shi was Fixed Destiny, even if this world's Fate had unreasonably favored Cheng Shi — Cheng Shi was not an Envoy. He had no right to inherit Authority!

The Outer God could only conclude that Justice had come to reclaim the universe's last shred of dignity — to retaliate for His manipulation of Chaos into masquerading as Order — and was willing to defy the Pact's rules in a desperate gamble to force Authority onto Fixed Destiny's head.

This lose-lose scenario of contaminating the sacrifice was something He absolutely could not accept. In an instant, the Void boiled and storms raged.

Frigid winds from the deepest layers of nothingness froze everything in sight. The dimming iridescent light bore down, physically bending the gleaming Scales' crossbar and locking them in the Void's blackness.

Yet even so, Justice still issued the resounding decree that commanded the stars to hold their order:

"I come to deliver the Authority of a true god to the Successor.

This act conforms to the rules and is protected by the Pact. No god may defy it!"

The Void winds intensified. The Outer God Fate spoke coldly:

"Rules?

Which rule ever recognized Fixed Destiny as an Envoy of Fate?

The Iron Law of Order was Chaos in disguise — are you Chaos as well?!

Justice, what are you struggling for?

The moment you defy the Pact and act unilaterally, the Pact will kill you. After that, the Pact will dissolve, and there will be no rule in the universe to restrain me. When that time comes, Fixed Destiny will still be Fixed Destiny — and you...

You probably won't live to see the end of this era.

Do you still insist on crowning Fixed Destiny with an Authority that the Void will devour at any moment?"

The Flowing Light Scales were gradually engulfed by darkness — yet the voice of Order still pierced through the Void, broadcasting across the universe:

"I come to deliver Authority to the Successor — but I never said I bring the Authority of Fate!"

"What?!"

Not just the Outer God Fate — even Cheng Shi froze.

The voice of Order echoed through the Void:

"I bring War's Final Oracle. He bequeathed His entire Authority to... a mortal.

The Pact has never restricted the gifting of Authority. A Final Oracle, above all, cannot be defied. War had only just ascended, yet He left a Final Oracle before His death. I come in accordance with that Oracle — and I break no rules!"

"!!!"

In that instant, the Void shifted colors, and Cheng Shi lost his voice.

Qin Xin!

Even in death, this Torchbearer had left his hope for Cheng Shi!

He knew that bequeathing his Authority to Cheng Shi was effectively sentencing the entire world to death. Without Fixed Destiny, the universe would have no answer. In this grand experiment of the Creator, this world could only march toward annihilation. And yet he did it anyway — using his last drop of blood to defend his conviction of protecting what was good and beautiful.

"Torchbearers will never sacrifice their friends or their ideals to preserve an 'old' world. Not before. Not now. Not ever."

He had said it. And so he had done it.

In that moment, War's flames — long since extinguished — erupted once more before the world!

Pass the torch! Pass the torch!

Who could have imagined that what Qin Xin passed on was the fire of War itself!

Everything had happened too suddenly. Cheng Shi was so deeply shaken that for a single heartbeat, his mind went blank. And in that instant, the Void — saturated with the thick power of Fate — suddenly turned dry.

The friction of the howling winds sparked tiny embers, flashing for an instant before the gale carried them toward Cheng Shi.

Cheng Shi felt his blood answer some invisible call, boiling in a single heartbeat. His hair, his sideburns, his brows and lashes — all caught flame, blazing into windswept wildfire, erupting in the world's last searing white!

How do we survive? With blood — and fire!

In this very moment, under the witness of Justice, in the silence of the Outer God Fate — faith was contaminated at last, and Fixed Destiny was broken as he had wished!

Cheng Shi looked at the crimson inferno engulfing his body, his gaze sharpening to a razor's edge. In the same breath, he smeared the Container of Fate with blood and fire and hurled it straight at those cold, cold eyes.

"Now you can kill me — bitch!"