

The Gods 1361

Chapter 1361: That Brilliant Bloom of [Prosperity]

The Spacetime Dolphin Bridge.

The weaving figures of the Void-Whiskered Swallowing Dolphins grew distant and faint. Pure white streams of light had almost driven away the darkness before them. The bridge was about to disappear.

In the last moments before it did, three silhouettes reappeared on its surface.

Zhang Jizu watched with sharp, guarded eyes. Cheng Shi's expression was grave. Hong Lin still stood far away from Cheng Shi at the other end — gripping her spear tightly in both hands, her gaze fixed on something beyond the horizon. Her will was certain. Her resolve was absolute.

"Don't say anything. Don't ask anything. This is my own choice. When you get back... don't mention me to anyone."

She pointed at the divine aura surrounding her and glanced at Cheng Shi. "You should understand what I mean. A contaminated will cannot be allowed to affect your world. You might not fully understand now — but based on the rate you're going, it won't be long. I don't know whether the answer we found is the final answer. But I believe in him."

With that, Hong Lin smiled — and that smile was blazing and sincere. Her hair streamed behind her like a flag in the wind. She turned partway, glanced back at Cheng Shi, and broke into the most open, wholehearted smile imaginable:

"I know you won't leave easily. So watch closely before the bridge disappears. Fate Weaver — don't let my blood go to waste."

And with that, Hong Lin leaped forward without hesitation, ignoring the hands that reached toward her, and vanished directly beneath the bridge.

The next instant — the Real Universe lit up.

A single stream of seven-colored light rocketed upward against all expectation, shooting into the depths of the endless starry sky. That brilliant radiance trailed like a rainbow's wake, bathing the sky ahead in dazzling brilliance. But that single stream was only the beginning. One. Ten. A hundred. A thousand. Ten thousand — from every direction, countless streams of light erupted skyward in unison, their wills resonating, entwining and rising, mirroring one another in splendor.

The seven-colored streams of light wove together — like new shoots pressing against each other, or like ancient vines entangling into one — twisting and binding, spreading to their farthest edges. For a moment they looked like an enormous, boundless canopy drawn in light across the starry sky.

The prosperity of the universe that [Prosperity] held in its heart had finally, in this instant, blazed into full bloom in the Real Universe itself.

Yet the seven-colored streams crisscrossing the sky, like [Prosperity]'s very will, were brief and brilliant. Quickly, in the midst of their endless convergence, the light began to dim — no longer so vivid. But they kept flowing forward, refusing to stop, as though each stream understood the will of every other, affirming one another, affirming themselves — and in their ever-accelerating fusion, they slowly took shape.

Countless streams poured inward without returning. Almost indistinguishable now from a white hole too bright to look at directly — and in only a few breaths, it cradled into being, with its own hands, a blazing white sun of such intensity that all voices fell silent throughout the Real Universe, and all colors in the cosmos faded before it.

"!!!!"

Ten thousand rays of light utterly failed to capture the spectacle before them. That blinding white radiance seemed to strip the sight from every living being that dared to look at it.

In that moment, the faces of both men on the bridge changed dramatically. Their bodies went rigid. Cheng Shi felt his scalp go numb — he felt as though the scene of [War] surging upward for its charge was being replayed before his eyes. But this time, the scale was unmistakably greater than anything that had come before.

[War]'s fire and blood perhaps couldn't burn through the Creator's experiment. But the Creator's own power — what of that? The aggregate of countless [Origin]-powers — could it blast open the experiment ground that had held countless billions of sliced universes in its grip?

The answer was... no.

Because the great sun had barely risen when it fell.

"Crack."

A crisp sound — of uncertain direction. You couldn't even be sure it had been a sound at all. Just something that suddenly rang out — formless, traceless, elusive, as though some concept of sound had exploded simultaneously in the consciousness of every living being present. Yet searching for it closely, one could find no evidence it had ever existed.

And after that impossibly strange crack — that blazing great sun shattered midway through its ascent. It never even reached the height where [War] had once bled itself dry. Far short of that Creator's divine throne high above, it exploded with a thunderous boom — and instantly became countless scattered threads of white light, tearing through the sky, spreading like a spider's web, like a great canopy's leaves bursting into sudden growth — and vanishing in a flash.

Gone.

Everything returned to stillness. Everything sank beneath the darkness.

No hum. No tremor. No shockwave.

As brilliant as its rise had been — that was how quiet its fall was.

The scene was so overwhelming that Cheng Shi nearly lost the ability to think. He instinctively grabbed the equally stunned and motionless Zhang Jizu beside him — tried to call out "let's go" — and found he couldn't make a sound.

Fortunately, the silent detonation had only been a massive impact on the soul. Not a hair on either of them had been harmed. Zhang Jizu came back to himself from the shock of the sun's fall sooner, gave a sharp start, seized Cheng Shi, and pulled them both off the bridge below.

In that last instant before consciousness fell into darkness, both men's minds flashed with the same single thought:

[Origin]... can never be defeated.

...

Meanwhile. Elsewhere.

In the void, before a world about to be annihilated.

The brilliant firework display of the Real Universe was not something every living being in every world could witness — but even without experiencing that shock firsthand, certain beings had shocks of their own.

Herobos looked at the "visitor" before him, his expression complicated.

Before the [Void] epoch, this visitor and he could never have met in circumstances such as these. And yet here they were now — two beings who had once clashed at full force, looking at each other at close range.

Everyone knew [Oblivion] had declined. But out of respect for [Void]'s situation, no divine being had come to make trouble for Herobos.

Was today the day that trouble arrived?

No, Herobos didn't think so. In the current state of the universe, anyone might come to make trouble for him — except for the one standing here. This rat in the gutter would never take a single unnecessary

risk. As long as this one couldn't inherit its patron's divine throne, couldn't become an invincible true divine being, it would never come to him for "revenge." So there had to be another reason for this visit.

Herobos regarded the visitor — and said, quietly: "State your purpose, Yu Go. Otherwise, you will be annihilated here alongside the world at my back."

"..."

Yes. The one standing before Herobos was [Decay]'s sole surviving Envoy — the Last King of Decay Vultures — Yu Go.

As a servant god who reacted to even the faintest wind and was known for extreme caution, Yu Go never took risks. Once upon a time, it would never have done something as self-incriminating as walking into a trap. But this world had become more and more incomprehensible to it lately.

A single mortal could be protected to the death by multiple divine beings — and even dared to demand a divine throne from right under Justice (Order)'s nose. And the most maddening part: it worked.

Was this still the universe where the gods ruled and faith overrode everything?

Even if both the era and the epoch had entered [Void] simultaneously — it couldn't have become this void, could it?

Yu Go was afraid. Genuinely afraid. Its patron was decaying to its final end — and when that throne opened up, would that insatiable mortal truly not come looking for it?

No — it absolutely would.

And when the time came, could it escape?

It could not.

Yu Go knew itself very well.

Chapter 1362: Arrivals and Departures — This Is Continuance

And so it began to look for a way out — a way to safely weather this disaster in an age that had grown abstract and absurd.

The first solution it thought of was to find the [Oblivion] Envoy who had once destroyed its kingdom, and have Herobos take it somewhere far away — to flee.

Herobos was a pitiable divine being in its own right. It had been boxed in from all sides by that mortal — lost the Container and unable to claim the throne. In a sense, the two of them were "fellow sufferers sharing the same misfortune." This world had clearly stopped having room for either of them. Better to run than to wait and slowly perish.

Yu Go knew there were other worlds beyond this one. Yes — in an era when even true gods hadn't seen the full picture, this self-styled Runaway Emperor somehow knew everything. Not because it had eavesdropped on some true god. Because it had found a "reminder" in its most secret hiding place.

Yu Go was supremely confident in its ability to conceal itself. It believed almost no one short of a true divine being could find it. So on that day — finding that message in its own hiding place — its sky collapsed.

Only a true divine being could bypass every concealment measure and locate it. And yet Yu Go had never had contact with any true divine being. Why would they bypass its patron to deliver a divine revelation directly to it?

Yu Go didn't want to read the message — but also didn't dare not to. And when it finally saw what was written there... it discovered something far more terrifying than any divine revelation. An intruder whose handwriting was identical to its own had left it a message: the world was on the brink of destruction; to survive, it had to abandon its identity and power, and leave this world behind.

Yu Go was stunned.

The writer had specifically emphasized that the worlds were not [Time]'s projections, but independent starry skies — where gods different from those currently in this universe existed. Only by leaving and finding a new world could it hope to escape the [Void] ending of the era's curtain call.

Yu Go wasn't stupid. On the contrary, it was extremely sharp. It quickly determined that this was another-world-version of itself leaving a warning for it. It was deeply grateful. But — it knew perfectly well that its divine power was the only thing it still had left. It couldn't abandon it.

Besides, it had never been to the world outside and had no idea what it was like there. If it really abandoned everything and the dangers outside turned out to be everywhere, how would it handle that?

And it kept its guard up toward the warning itself — even though the other-world self had also left a dimension-crossing tool. Still, cowardly Yu Go couldn't make up its mind.

Until it watched Cheng Shi — right in front of all the gods — toy with them and personally take the [Chaos] throne from Justice (Order)'s hands and hand it to another mortal.

In that moment, Yu Go was afraid. Genuinely afraid. The absurdity of the [Void] era had exceeded everything it could imagine. So it steeled itself to leave this world — to escape from the absurd and twisted [Void] ending.

But the world outside was too "dangerous" — it couldn't go alone. It needed an "escape partner." And thinking about it over and over, the only viable divine candidate seemed to be... Herobos.

Even though the Hand of Purifying Weevil had once annihilated its kingdom — there was no time to dwell on that now. They were both servant gods of [Descent], which counted as a kind of "kinship." And so came the scene unfolding today.

Yu Go stood before Herobos, laying out its escape plan one step at a time with extreme caution, watching Herobos's reactions closely. If anything seemed off, or if Herobos looked about to "report" it, it planned to activate the tool immediately and flee.

Herobos was... dumbstruck.

It had been busy thinking about how to leverage [Void] to reclaim [Oblivion]'s throne that belonged to it — and now Yu Go was telling it the world wasn't the only one out there, that there were many [Oblivion] thrones in other worlds available for the taking.

The question was... had those other worlds' [Oblivion] also annihilated itself?

"..."

Herobos thought for a long while. Looking at the badly-startled-bird state of Yu Go, it managed a strained smile, shook its head, and declined the escape plan.

"I underestimated you, Yu Go. I have to say — daring to stand before me already proves your courage. Daring to flee this world... even more so. But I cannot go."

"You still have designs on that throne?" Seeing the escape partner squad about to fall apart before it even formed, Yu Go panicked. "Wake up! That's going to be that kid's sooner or later! [Void] is playing you — can't you see that?"

Herobos smiled grimly. "Of course I can see it. But regardless of whether [Void] obtains [Oblivion]'s throne or not — they can't deny my 'contribution' in all of this. Given that, I can become the non-[Void] servant god closest to [Void] in this era. They have no reason to reject a 'free enforcer.' Through that, I can receive [Void]'s protection. If [Void] will decide whether the era ends or not — why should I, protected by them, leave?"

"?"

The explanation tangled Yu Go up entirely. It stood there for a moment thinking — and felt that what Herobos was saying seemed... actually to make sense.

But it still wasn't ready to give up. It didn't want to become a "world-crossing rat" alone. So it offered a pessimistic prediction:

"What good is protection? If the world is destroyed — [Void] would be destroyed alongside it. When that happens, will they fight desperately to keep you alive?"

Herobos said quietly: "With [Origin] watching over all, even a destroyed world will be reborn. When the next era arrives — who says I, with my close ties to [Void], won't have an opportunity?"

"You fool — there won't be a next era!" Yu Go said it — and immediately regretted it. It took a few steps back, eyes fixed on Herobos's movements, ready to flee at any second.

Herobos wasn't angry. On the contrary, it smiled.

"You're wrong. There will absolutely be a next era. Otherwise, why would [Origin] create so many worlds? I can't see through the future — that doesn't mean [Void] can't. They've gone to such lengths cultivating Cheng Shi. Perhaps only the world he exists in is the future. Alas — never mind. You go. I know you won't believe me. You were born timid — reaching this point is already impressive. I respect that. I won't mention you to any divine being. But don't waste any more effort on me here."

With that, Herobos — along with the world at its back that was about to be annihilated — vanished from Yu Go's sight.

Yu Go's eyelid twitched frantically. It held the dimension-crossing tool in its hand and hesitated all over again.

Outside was unknown danger. Here was certain destruction. It didn't want either path.

But it couldn't choose neither.

After agonizing for a long while, Yu Go finally bit down, closed its eyes, and crushed the tool in its grip.

"I'd rather trust another-me than stay here waiting to die!"

As the words left its mouth, a dense surge of [Time]-force exploded beside it, forming a black void that sucked Yu Go in entirely. Yu Go lost consciousness before it even had time to panic — and was then expelled, tumbling through spacetime turbulence, into the Real Universe.

At precisely that moment, the great detonation from deep in the starry sky arrived — making the entire spacetime barrier of the world shudder.

The black-hole eyes that had opened in the cracks of [Existence] watched the flash of blazing white disappear in the distance — and watched Yu Go drift into the Real Universe. A long silence. Then a quiet sigh.

"Arrivals and departures... this is continuance.

The compressed detonation of [Origin]-force is enough to shake the spacetime barrier and cause a faint pause in the experiment's time. It seems my research is about to yield results."

And with those words, those black-hole eyes dissolved silently into the darkness.

Chapter 1363: It Left Itself No Time at All

He was back.

When Cheng Shi opened his eyes and saw the brilliant starry sky overhead, the shock inside him had still not settled. That blazing white crown of [Prosperity] had burned itself into his vision like a brand — leaving behind the silhouettes of countless Big Cats, impossible to erase or shake away.

He could barely imagine what sequence of world-line events could lead so many Hong Lins to carry [Origin]-force toward that Creator's throne — a throne that could never be shaken. He couldn't imagine how many worlds' Hong Lins had gathered in one place, each carrying the same mission.

When they saw each other there — what did they feel? Anguished sighing? Grief? Or was it high-spirited defiance, thousands united in a single will?

Probably the latter. Because that was Big Cat. A Druid who would throw everything away for her friends. If she got to meet ten million versions of herself, all charging forward without hesitation just like her — she would probably have been very happy.

Cheng Shi had thought that after witnessing [War]'s charge, the drying of its blood and the dying of its fire, and the Blood-Red Mockery — he could no longer be shaken to this degree. But he had still underestimated the living beings of this universe.

Knowing the path ahead led nowhere — and still pressing forward with all their strength.

Life's defiance had never stopped since the moment of birth. It reached its very peak in the instant before death.

Whether they succeeded or not, Cheng Shi had no way of knowing. But he was certain — they had not stagnated and rotted in the corner of failure.

He was deeply moved by that.

Fortunately — he, like them, was also resisting. Unfortunately — his ending would most likely be just like theirs: he could only hope to live without regret, and die in brilliance...

No. He couldn't think that way. The path ahead was still undetermined. Everything was still possible.

Cheng Shi's gaze snapped to focus. He sprang to his feet, immediately grabbed his phone and called Zhang Jizu to confirm that Old Zhang, not present in front of him, had also returned safely.

The call connected quickly. The moment Zhang Jizu's voice came through, Cheng Shi finally released a long breath — he could report back to Death's boss now.

But before that breath was even half out, the very next second — his whole body shuddered. He froze where he stood.

Because the voice from the other end of the call said:

"Cheng Shi — the Assembly of Gods Convention has begun."

The brutal truth caught Cheng Shi completely off guard — though in truth, he didn't need Zhang Jizu to tell him. Because when he turned his head, he had already seen it: a void gate, split open right on the rooftop of the rest area.

A swirling gate of void had descended in silence. Hanging from its outer frame were countless mask wind chimes — laughing, raging, weeping, wailing — and an endless aura of [Deceit] poured out from behind the door, like a light wind brushing past each mask, playing for the stunned Cheng Shi standing before it a [Deceit]-song of "mockery from all directions."

So this was the Audience Gate — the gate leading to the Assembly of Gods Convention?

Listening to the lively tune, Cheng Shi couldn't shake the feeling that those chiming wind chimes were laughing at him — laughing because he'd come back late. No — more accurately, come back at exactly the right time.

Look. The moment he returned, the Convention began.

Could this be a coincidence?

Absolutely not.

Again. This again. Every time he returned from the Real Universe, this reclusive Fun God distorted time, compressed the clown's preparation time, and forced him to take the stage immediately. It never asked his opinion. Never gave him any advance notice. Just slammed a stage in his face like this — crude and direct — waiting for the clown to perform.

Couldn't the clown at least prepare a little? Did the clown have no right to any advance information?! And even if the clown had no right to information — surely the clown had the right to choose?

If you want me to go in — I refuse.

In that moment, every ounce of the clown's inner "defiance" was ignited. His eyelid twitched violently. He spat toward the void with full feeling, stared daggers at that gate, and took two deliberate steps backward — making his refusal clear through action.

Those two steps, however, nearly sent him walking directly into another gate.

Another gate. There was a second void gate descending to the rest area's rooftop. A gate identical in form opened right behind him — but this dark gate bore no floating mask wind chimes. Instead, it was strung with countless dice, row upon row, like curtain beads.

The back of Cheng Shi's head grazed the dice curtain and triggered ripple after ripple of barely-audible murmuring. Countless dice rubbed against each other in a creaking babble of noise — the chaotic sound was maddening. Cheng Shi instinctively wanted to rip all the dice down — but when he reached out, he suddenly realized his hand had already passed through a void gate, and what he was grabbing wasn't the annoying dice curtain at all — it was the mocking mask wind chimes.

He had nearly been deceived by an illusion and stepped through [Deceit]'s door.

"F—!"

Cheng Shi swore and yanked his hand back, jumped clear, and stood firm again — looking at the two bizarre void gates before him with an expression that defied description.

After that near-miss, he couldn't even be sure whether the tokens on each door were actually correct. What if the gate hung with masks led to [Fate]'s Assembly, and the dice-covered one was the stage [Deceit] had prepared for him?

Had the Fun God seen through the clown completely, and was now playing a reverse psychology game?

Cheng Shi's expression darkened.

Seemingly two choices — but actually no choice at all. The clown had wanted to choose neither — but both gates were expanding like anchors of void invading reality, growing and spreading, until before long they had swallowed the entire rooftop rest area's reality, turning it into two different patches of void, pushing toward the last strip of solid ground beneath Cheng Shi's feet.

If he didn't choose soon, the void gates would swallow him — and at that point, which door he ended up in would seem to be entirely up to [Void]'s will. But he didn't need to think hard about that. [Void]'s will would definitely send him through the Fun God's door — because [Fate] was still being held somewhere by the Fun God, and no one knew where.

Thinking of this, Cheng Shi laughed — exasperated.

Fine. You love tormenting the clown, do you? Love forcing the clown to perform without notice, do you? Then don't blame the clown for improvising wildly on your stage.

The Assembly of Gods Convention was just an audience with divine beings. But what's interesting about meeting a divine being? [Deceit] was known by everyone — meeting it wouldn't be anything special. Better to do something fresh — an audience with Yu Xi instead.

Did everyone know Yu Xi? That [Void] servant god who had never shown its face to the world — [Deceit]'s Envoy. Didn't know? That was fine. One meeting, and all would be familiar.

Thinking of what was about to happen, Cheng Shi let out an amused snort. His expression became extraordinarily playful.

You want to play? Then I'll play along.

Yu Xi took up his mask. Adjusted his attire. Then, with easy, unhurried steps, walked forward into the spreading void gate.

But he still hadn't chosen [Deceit]'s door. Because right now, Yu Xi was just as defiant as [Deceit] itself. Once, at the very starting point of a path of fate, he had chosen "both." And this time—

He was choosing [Fate].

He would take his fate into his own hands — not because he believed in destiny, but because his shadow had chosen [Deceit].

When the Greed Lord stands before you, what choice is there to even make? He was choosing both, of course. Only this time — he would use [Deceit] to deceive [Fate], and use [Fate] to gamble against [Deceit].

Yes. He was [Void]'s sacrifice. But he also wanted to become [Void]'s "master" — and write the conclusion of the era's ending with his own hands.

Chapter 1364: The Assembly of Gods Convention — Begins

No one knew what the Assembly of Gods Convention actually looked like — what its proceedings were, what spectacle awaited those who attended. Players only knew that those ranked in the top ten on the Ladder of Ascent within their specific faith had a chance to be summoned by their god, and to see a true divine face in person on the first anniversary of the Faith Game's descent.

So the closer the date drew, the more frequently players initiated Wish Trials. Those of middling or lower scores knew they stood no chance and didn't bother wasting energy this late — but those peak players who were just one step away from making the cut refused to give up any chance to stand before a god face to face.

They pushed harder — and grew more disappointed. Because even the highest-ranked were fighting among themselves for those slots.

Even those top-ten players who had already had a divine audience before weren't willing to sit it out. The Ladder of Ascent was one of the two most important rankings in the Faith Game. No one believed the Convention tied to it would be "ordinary" — just another routine audience.

And so in the three days Cheng Shi had been absent, the Faith Game had been genuinely lively.

Though none of that liveliness had anything to do with the clown. To everyone else, it was excitement; to him, just noise.

Cheng Shi had desperately wanted to give himself a little time — to quietly sort through everything he'd experienced, do a mental review, and lay a solid foundation before taking that next unknown step into the future.

But certain divine beings left him no such opportunity. He could only be pushed forward with the current, step through the door, and arrive at the Assembly of Gods Convention's...

Hm?

This didn't look like the venue for the Convention. It looked more like behind the stage — backstage.

Swept here by void-force, Cheng Shi's gaze sharpened and he paused his steps. What lay before him was not a hall-like space. It was boundless void — with a semi-transparent curtain drifting before it, one that appeared not to exist at all but could actually be touched.

And beyond that invisible, strange curtain was the real venue.

The venue was vast beyond measure. "Venue" was perhaps misleading — there was no floor, no ground. Countless thread-like refractions of light pierced through the void from top to bottom, and in the endless black, they suspended countless enormous masks — too many to count. Each thread held a single mask at a different angle — and those threads were packed so densely they had nearly woven across the entire void.

The sight was nearly identical to the mask wind chimes Cheng Shi had seen before stepping through the gate — except the chimes here were absurdly enormous.

Each mask was its own independent platform to stand on. At this moment, six figures were stationed on different masks, eyeing each other and surveying the surroundings — apprehensive and guarded.

The six were positioned at descending heights — mirroring their order on the Ladder of Ascent. The ten mask platforms were arranged like a spiraling staircase around the venue's center. The top three and the bottom one were all empty.

Cheng Shi watched the scene in quiet silence. His eyelid twitched sharply.

He had guessed wrong, as expected.

That was the Fun God for you. Even forcing your way through [Fate]'s door still brought you straight to [Deceit]'s Audience Ground. And it wasn't just him — Shadow Cheng Shi, who had stepped through [Deceit]'s door, had ended up here too.

Cheng Shi had never expected to so deeply understand "different routes, same destination" at this particular moment. That endlessly scheming patron of his hadn't given him a second choice at all. The two gates it opened on the rooftop had been a performance all along.

"Ha. Clown."

But he was used to it by now. Cheng Shi smiled at his own expense.

Fortunately, tricks were usually followed by a good outcome. At least he hadn't materialized in the main venue like the others — and what this curtain meant... was he being left backstage to watch a good show?

Thinking along those lines, Cheng Shi gradually drifted closer to the curtain and waited silently for the "performance" to begin.

For the players inside the venue, however, the performance had already started long ago.

Long Jing had been the first [Deceit] believer to arrive. He knew his rank on the Ladder of Ascent couldn't surpass Long Wang or Zhen Xin now — so he'd tried to get a head start in terms of arrival speed. The moment the Audience Gate opened, he charged through without hesitation.

And it worked. He was the first to arrive.

But that wasn't enough. It wasn't sufficient demonstration of devotion. Personal piety was thin on its own — if he could mix in a little entertainment for the god alongside that devotion, he might earn more

of the Fun God's attention. And more of the Fun God's attention naturally meant being closer to it, which would translate into greater contribution to the various clown plans.

He was certain that with his demonstrated devotion, he could extract at least one useful thing from the Fun God's mouth.

Having reasoned this far, Long Jing suppressed his quiet satisfaction and hid himself. He tucked beneath the highest mask platform, waiting for Zhen Xin to arrive — ready to surprise her and pay back his embarrassment at the first Joker Society meeting.

He hadn't expected the wait to stretch on this long.

Zhen Xin, Long Wang — neither had come. Cheng Shi hadn't come either. Instead, six fraudsters had gradually trickled in one by one.

Among the top-ranked fraudsters, they all knew each other — even those who weren't close had crossed paths in various trials. So there were no pleasantries or warmth between them. Only mutual wariness. They understood their peers too well — and understood the Fun God too well. No one wanted to become the entertainment in an occasion this important.

On an ordinary day, getting swindled by a fellow con person was grounds to swear a bit and move on. But getting conned at the [Deceit] Assembly of Gods Convention...

Believe it — these fellow fraudsters would never let it go. The moment the Convention ended, you would become the world's — or at least this present era's — biggest entertainment spectacle.

To avoid becoming that spectacle, every fraudster was on full alert, minimizing their own presence, avoiding drawing fire. This naturally meant that what should have been the liveliest [Deceit] Convention gathering had nearly become an awkward silence. Six pairs of eyes darted around like they had tics. Six mouths, though, were sealed shut as if they'd pledged allegiance to [Silence]. No one dared speak.

Long Jing had been waiting so long his thoughts had turned to nothing. Still no Zhen Xin. He even started wondering whether the top-ranked player got different treatment, having already been called for a one-on-one audience long ago.

And Long Wang — why hadn't he shown up either? Oh, right. Long Wang's name was [Deceit] but his faith was [Memory]. Maybe he was attending [Memory]'s Convention?

Not impossible.

Then Cheng Shi — why wasn't he here?

Of the ten top fraudsters, four of them were Jokers. And now three of the four, except Long Jing himself, were nowhere to be found. Was that right?

And he was the first one to arrive, no less. Was that right?!

It was not. Not remotely right.

You can't keep treating me as the clown — I am an Acrobat. What is going on that you're all keeping from me again?!

In truth, the other Jokers hadn't hidden anything particular from Long Jing about this Convention. They just hadn't told him what was going on beyond the Convention itself.

Cheng Shi's departure to the Real Universe was something only a minimum number of people could know about. Zhen Xin naturally said nothing extra — and to avoid arousing suspicion, she hadn't even met with the other Jokers since. So Long Jing naturally didn't know that the Magician had now inherited [Chaos]'s divine throne and had gone to another Assembly to serve as a "judge." As for Li Jingming — Long Jing had guessed correctly. He'd gone to [Memory]'s Assembly.

Of those three, Cheng Shi was the only one who had actually arrived at [Deceit]'s Convention grounds — but he was behind the curtain, not on the stage. This meant the Acrobat on stage had been lurking beneath his mask platform for ages without a single Joker showing up.

When the only clown on stage is left alone — he must truly be the punchline.

Long Jing was exhausted. In that moment, he considered abandoning his entertainment schemes entirely. He was afraid that if he waited any longer, he'd become the entertainment himself.

And it was at precisely that moment that the other attendees began to grow suspicious of the four absent top-ranked fraudsters who had failed to appear.

"I don't buy that the Zhen girl would skip the Convention. Watch yourselves, everyone — she might already be hiding under someone's mask platform, waiting to make you the entertainment."

"Ha. Zhen Xin might not pull that — but Zhen Yi? Who knows."

The moment those words settled, from the various mask platforms at different heights — came a sudden chorus of...

"Heh~"

"..."

"..."

"..."

The brief exchange died back into silence once more.

Chapter 1365: The Assembly of Gods Convention — The Circus

"I heard the Chosen One gets different treatment from the rest of the top ten — a private divine audience. Zhen Xin is probably already in a one-on-one with the Fun God as we speak. Want to impersonate Zhen Yi and stir up chaos? I'd advise a certain someone to be careful not to turn themselves into the entertainment while trying to create it."

[Deceit] believers would not necessarily resort to violence — but they would absolutely resort to sarcasm.

After a few scattered "heh"s landed, the silent stage felt like someone had yanked away a curtain, and things suddenly came alive.

"Ha. You think I'm Long Jing?"

The scoffing voice came from the male [Deceit] believer standing at the highest occupied position. He was completely unclothed — with only a mask positioned below him, covering critical areas, preserving the story's tonal integrity.

With the top three absent, he was the highest-scoring person on stage. Though this fraudster had often aligned his Ladder of Ascent remarks with President Gong's stated positions, he clearly wasn't very satisfied with Long Jing being ranked above him.

He let out a snort of contempt toward those below him, leaped nimbly, and landed on the platform that belonged to Long Jing — looking around briefly, then frowning and muttering:

"Really not here? Strange. Long Wang and the Zhen girl — fine, they're Chosen Ones, their absence is their business. But him, the eternally second-place guy — where did he run off to join the excitement?"

"?"

Long Jing, who had already been feeling that people were talking about him, had been on the verge of stepping out and reasserting his presence — to give these crowd a little taste of his bearing. But upon hearing those words, President Gong's eyes swiveled — and he quietly retracted the hand he'd been using to grip the mask's edge, slipping back to the shadowed side of the mask where no one could see him.

In the darkness, a pair of wickedly amused eyes gleamed with quiet light — the look of a predator waiting for prey to expose a weakness.

Let's see just how you end up embarrassing yourself.

The gathered fraudsters below watched as the unclothed fourth-place player jumped to the third-place mask platform without any visible "rule punishment," everyone's expressions making a show of their own — and then the jibes started flying.

"You really are something. Can't beat President Gong on the Ladder of Ascent, but at the Convention you just jump up and take his spot. I'd say you look less like an Acrobat and more like a clown.

Strange world we live in — the Acrobat acts like a clown, the Victim acts like an Acrobat. So who's left to act like a Victim?"

Before the voice had even finished, an arrow screamed through the air and exploded that mocking-smiled skull. The arrow was swift beyond measure — but drew no blood, since it had only punctured an illusion. The real Master of Trickery had already taken cover elsewhere.

The crowd saw this coming. Not a flicker of surprise — just a collective chorus of "what a pity."

The archer on the ninth mask platform raised their bow in a display of dominance, scoffing: "Sorry — I thought you were angling to be the Victim."

A cold voice came from the shadows of the eighth mask platform.

"Gutsy, Du Qiyu. You dare throw punches at the Convention? Keeping that sharp a mind means you've done plenty of beast-taming. If you didn't bring all your beasts in with you, watch yourself — don't end up dying here."

The bandaged man touched his bow, unbothered, and scoffed again.

"I just shot an arrow at the air. By what definition is that 'throwing punches'? Are you hurt? Are you dead? No? Well then, ha — what exactly are you barking about? Even if you know I'm a Beast Tamer and you're trying to act like a good dog to earn my favor, there's no need to be so desperate."

"Your mom's dead."

That wasn't an insult. It was a statement.

No one who made it this far was a simple character. No one here would lose composure over a war of words — but before deciding to actually act, talking cost nothing.

The Master of Trickery hiding in the shadow of a mask spoke with deep disdain. "How did a freak like you end up in a fraudster's crowd?"

"Me, a freak? I can't possibly be more of a freak than the one who came here without any clothes."

"?" The unclothed man on the third platform took issue with that. He clarified with great seriousness: "I am being strategically preemptive. I stripped off my underwear in advance, so there's nothing left for anyone to trick away."

"Who wants your underwear?"

"None of your business."

"..."

"...You two are both equally ridiculous. But the one at the top is a real fraudster — what are you, exactly? You really think you're a Beast Tamer? Pah — go back to your Sea of Desire."

At those words, the smile on the bandaged man's face slowly froze. His voice went cold. "You've investigated me? Where did you get that from?"

"From your mom's mouth," the Master of Trickery continued cheerfully. "Satisfied? She also asked me to pass you a message: she found you a stepdad down below, and gave birth to a little brother for you. Happy?"

The bandaged man's entire body trembled — then seized his bow and fired three arrows in rapid succession into the shadows of the platform above, while bursting into unhinged laughter.

"Satisfied, absolutely satisfied — thank you for helping me find my biological parents. Now if you'd be so kind as to pass them a message in return — tell them I met a very fine dog today, nice coat, and I'm sending it down to keep them company."

"Whoosh whoosh whoosh —"

Three arrows followed by three more — the bandaged man moved with terrifying speed. Before anyone could react, the mask platform above had been turned into a porcupine. He kept firing and snarled: "Don't worry. I'll personally send you down there."

"That's all right. I have no interest in replacing your father."

The Master of Trickery scoffed and struck back without hesitation. At this point, any residual concern about the Convention's rules had evaporated — there was something far more important than rules happening here. Specifically: these fraudsters could not be allowed to go around saying he'd lost his nerve.

And so — the fight broke out at the Assembly of Gods Convention.

By any measure, this was an absolutely detonating development. Other believers had waited an entire year, desperately hoping for the chance to stand before their god — while this gang of fraudsters started throwing down before the audience even began, right in full "view" of their god.

But among the fraudsters, no one found this particularly problematic. If anything, they felt it wasn't abstract enough yet.

Because the more abstract thing was happening above them. The [Deceit] believers on the fifth and sixth platforms put their heads together — and right there on the spot, opened a betting pool.

The seventh-place player wanted to get in on it, opted to bet on the Master of Trickery winning — then jumped over, looked at the odds, and immediately jumped back.

Because the bet had nothing to do with who won or lost the fight. These two were betting on whether the fourth-place player had underwear under his mask, and if he did — what color it was.

Solid color: 1 for 5. Pattern: 1 for 17. None at all: 1 for 10,001.

Any sane person would pick option three for the house to lose money — but someone on that stage who was very much not sane picked option one.

The fifth-place bookmaker was curious. He asked: "What makes you dare pick one?" The sixth-place player gave a cryptic smile. "I've seen him wearing them."

"..."

The scene went instantly quiet.

Even the two fighters stopped. Five pairs of eyes turned simultaneously toward the third mask platform — to find the unclothed mask-wearer standing with complete solemn dignity at the edge of the mask, addressing the crowd below:

"I'm betting on none."

He then lifted the mask from beneath him in front of everyone.

He won.

The bookmaker folded the pool and prepared to skip payment. The sixth-place player raised a middle finger and swore freely.

The only quiet one was seventh, sitting on his own mask platform, face expressionless, unsurprised by any of it.

This was a [Deceit] believer's Assembly of Gods Convention. This was the abstract circus these fraudsters offered their patron.

Cheng Shi, who had witnessed the whole spectacle from behind the transparent curtain, stood with his mouth open — and let out an impressed exclamation inside. He had never imagined that even his understanding of [Void] was still too orthodox. These people — they were the true reflection of this era.

Though that aside — that Xiao Qi... what was going on with him?

His gaze settled on the bandaged man at the ninth platform who had stopped fighting, and his brow furrowed slightly. The bandaged man's wrapping was indeed at the same spot where Xiao Qi had once been injured on his face. But why was he still alive?

Had the Flaying Bone Knife failed to take effect?

It shouldn't have. Unless someone had impersonated Xiao Qi's identity — but who would that be?

Cheng Shi didn't make a move yet. He decided to keep watching for a while longer.

Chapter 1366: The Assembly of Gods Convention — Long Jing

Very quickly, the scene shifted again.

Perhaps the wait had grown too long — long enough for Zhen Xin to have already completed a divine audience and returned. Yes — Zhen Xin was back.

The moment she appeared, she looked down from the highest mask platform at the gathered fraudsters. Her gaze swept across each person in turn, lingering on the last mask platform for a moment before she raised an eyebrow and said:

"Having fun, I see. Though your eagerness to please the Fun God through this is a bit too obvious, wouldn't you say? If last-minute flattery worked, the Acrobat would already be standing where I am. Everyone — put your skills away. It has no time to watch your circus. Right now, it's busy summoning the thing it likes most."

With that, she pointedly dipped her chin toward the very bottom mask platform.

At Zhen Xin's appearance, the scene went quiet again. Rank one on the Ladder of Ascent, with an authority long established — she silenced the floor the moment she appeared. It was also possible that these fraudsters were giving Zhen Yi a little face, since no one wanted to cross that unpleasant thing in a place like this.

Hearing her words, someone frowned and peered downward, skeptical: "You're saying the Fun God is summoning the lowest-ranked one among us?"

"That's right. He has a name — you know him, don't you? He's called Cheng Shi. He's a... Fate Weaver." Zhen Xin smiled.

"Ha. A Fate Weaver should be at [Fate]'s Convention. What business does he have here? Look at Long Wang — now THAT'S knowing your place."

Before the words had finished, someone scoffed:

"And you believe anything a Zhen says? The Fate Weaver is probably just at [Fate]'s Convention, which is why he's not here. She's feeding us nonsense. Watch yourselves — don't fall for her tricks and end up missing the entire audience with your patron."

"The Fun God is nothing but a pair of eyes. Do you need to wait for the Convention to see it? — My friend, it hasn't summoned you even once before, has it?"

"?"

"Wait — is there actually someone here who's never been summoned? Oh my, then let me give you my slot. I'd feel bad otherwise."

"Your mom's dead."

"Is she taking up a spot in your family's ancestral plot?"

"..."

Less than two exchanges in — they were fighting again.

The fraudsters' thoughts were entirely disparate, each harboring their own schemes. Two people's sparring quickly escalated into a multi-person melee. Strangely though, while the fighting was loud — the actual destruction was negligible. Smoke and haze billowed everywhere instead, until before long the whole space was blanketed in a fog — and then—

Ambushes erupted from all directions.

Everyone was attacking — but nobody could have predicted that their targets would be so uniformly consistent. Not whoever they'd been trading insults with, not whoever they found irritating — but the person on the first platform above, looking down at them all with that playful curl of the lips: Zhen Xin.

Yes. Under the borrowed cover of the fog, every technique was flung at Zhen Xin.

They all felt something was wrong with this Zhen Xin. As con artists who had crossed paths with Zhen Xin before, they all knew her personality. Zhen Xin, even at her most cutting, would never openly antagonize an entire room the way Zhen Yi would. She excelled at cooperation and at calculation — when facing a crowd of fraudsters, she would only divide the group's power and strengthen her own camp. She would never open with a mass roast that left herself isolated.

So the person standing up there — definitely not Zhen Xin. But it couldn't be Zhen Yi either. Because Zhen Yi was not this well-behaved. If that rotten thing could act — it would, and without announcing itself beforehand or waiting for someone to suffer first.

Which made the identity of this "Zhen Xin" obvious: someone was impersonating her. And whoever dared pull this off in this setting — either they were using it as an offering of entertainment for the Fun God, or they had some hidden ulterior motive. Every fraudster in the room was sharp. They all figured this out at the same moment, reached a silent understanding, and all charged toward Zhen Xin in unison — they wanted to know what this Zhen Xin impersonator had discovered on the first platform.

Zhen Xin seemed to have anticipated this. She didn't fight back — just let out a scoffing laugh and slipped through every ambush with fluid footwork.

Seeing this, the unclothed mask-wearer paused his step. He looked at the ghost-like figure and frowned.

"Long Jing?"

The gathered fraudsters blinked — then looked at the vacant third platform below, and the penny dropped. That made sense. No wonder Long Jing hadn't appeared — he'd been hiding here impersonating Zhen Xin.

So where did the real Zhen Xin actually go?

With his cover blown, Long Jing dropped the pretense entirely. He laughed out loud, slipped free of the fog, and hopped onto a separate hanging mask away from the spiral platforms — watching the crowd scrambling above and below with boundless satisfaction:

"No wonder a monkey act is indispensable in any circus. The effect really was something — bravo, bravo, bravo—"

"..."

"..."

"..."

Every fraudster in the room directed a look of absolute loathing at "Long Jing" — and among those looks was the real Long Jing's.

Yes. That was not Long Jing.

The very instant "Zhen Xin" had appeared, the Long Jing hiding below the first mask platform knew she was a fake — because the pressure he felt from her was far too weak. Nothing like the suppressive authority that one of the Jokers would carry.

In other words, this "Zhen Xin" had the appearance but not the soul.

Long Jing hadn't considered resuming his own scheme at all. He'd spent the whole time wondering who had manufactured this fake — and he had a rough idea of the purpose. The Convention had gathered everyone here, but showed no sign of any god appearing. Everyone was probing for whether the chance to see their patron was hidden somewhere in this venue. This was most likely a test of sorts — though how the test-initiator intended to run it, he couldn't fully work out.

Then the fog rose, and Long Jing smiled.

He could see that this crowd of fraudsters wanted to use the chaos to rush the first platform and see what was hidden there. And as the second-ranked [Deceit] player, there was no way this group would catch him. So he used the fog to swap positions as well, slipping secretly into the shadow of the lowest mask platform.

He'd intended to keep hiding and observe — but then someone had thrown an entire pot of blame directly onto his head. Could he endure that? Absolutely not.

Long Jing's expression darkened, and he moved decisively — hiding himself even more thoroughly. Before he'd found the real test-initiator, he wasn't going to become some random mid-plot entertainment act.

The fraudsters were sharp too. Even after the fake Long Jing had outed itself, no one here trusted anyone else. They just accepted it as "Long Jing" on the surface and used the fading chaos to search the first platform thoroughly — and only when they genuinely found no mechanisms or hidden teleport doors did they reluctantly accept that Zhen Xin had very likely already been summoned.

"Looks like we're taking turns for a divine audience. Hopefully it won't take too long."

"Don't worry — when I see the Fun God, I'll let it know you voluntarily gave up your turn."

"Whoosh whoosh whoosh—"

"If you can't close your mouth, I don't mind helping you sew it shut."

"Is that what you did to your mom, since she can't speak?"

"..."

The Beast Tamer said nothing — and just kept firing arrows.

Cheng Shi, having watched the whole farce unfold below, shook his head and chuckled. But as he watched the eighth-ranked Master of Trickery — the one dodging Xiao Qi's attacks with a mouth full of people's mothers — a faint flicker of something crossed his eyes.

It was this eighth-ranked Master of Trickery who had impersonated Zhen Xin and pinned the blame on "Long Jing." Standing above and looking down through the smoke, Cheng Shi saw it clearly: while the Master had appeared to join the others charging toward the first platform, that too was an illusion. The real Master of Trickery had never left his own platform from beginning to end.

He seemed to have used one deception to draw everyone else away from their own platforms. He had probably been guessing that the divine audience was somehow tied to holding one's platform — and when he saw the others leave their platforms and his own audience still hadn't begun, the Master of Trickery hidden in the shadows let out a helpless exhale, realizing he'd overthought it.

Now that was a Master of Trickery. His illusion acting wasn't a step behind Zhen Yi's — which showed that ranking in this sense, at least among [Deceit] believers, didn't fully represent power.

What Cheng Shi confirmed was that this Master of Trickery wasn't anyone he knew — and couldn't possibly be the "Su" with whom he'd once crossed paths. Which meant the truth was drawing closer to his original guess: that "Su" Master of Trickery he had once encountered might, from the very beginning, have never been a real Master of Trickery at all.

Cheng Shi shifted his gaze toward Long Jing hiding below the tenth platform. His expression grew more and more complex.

Is that really you, President Gong?

Chapter 1367: The Assembly of Gods Convention — Yu Xi

Long Jing had never been someone who accepted losses quietly.

No matter how many times he'd been forced to play the clown within the Jokers, out in the broader world he was always the top-tier fraudster ranked just one below Zhen Xin.

When that full pot of blame came flying down onto his head, he had already prepared a counter in tricks — he was just waiting for the right opportunity.

As luck would have it, that opportunity arrived not long after.

While the Beast Tamer and the Master of Trickery continued their exchange, someone in the group suddenly spoke up in confusion:

"Do you think the real Assembly of Gods Convention has already started?"

"What makes you say that?" the unclothed man at the top — mask back on — asked with great interest.

"You all know what the Fun God is like. Given its love of trickery, I think — maybe it's been watching everything happening here from backstage all along. Not the kind of watching where a god observes the entire world and knows all things — I mean it's literally here, somewhere we can't see, 'appreciating' this improvised performance. And the odds are very good that when it saw everyone's embarrassing moments, its eyes were already curling up past the tops of its ears in amusement."

At those words, several fraudsters immediately looked up and began glancing around.

Watching a few lines of sight sweep across the invisible curtain, Cheng Shi — lurking behind it — instantly flattened the corners of his eyes and stopped grinning.

Sharp instincts. Pity they'd guessed wrong. The Fun God wasn't here. The person hiding behind the curtain watching the show was Yu Xi — someone they would never think to guess.

Cheng Shi shook his head, chuckling — then the next second, his smile froze on his face.

Because he suddenly saw Yu Xi appear — not behind the curtain, but on the actual Convention floor.

Yes: Yu Xi. The tall and bamboo-thin [Deceit] Envoy made a bright entrance, standing on Cheng Shi's assigned mask platform, gazing up at the six fraudsters above, and clapping with leisurely rhythm.

"Clap clap clap—"

"Marvelous. Your instincts are sharp — it just took a little longer than it should have to get there. Still, you got there eventually. Unfortunately, the direction was wrong.

The Assembly of Gods Convention was never a gathering to meet a true god. The gods sit high on their divine thrones — they would not summon a group of mortals on account of the rules of a small game. They can summon their believers any time they wish. So what you see before you today is not an audience — it's an Assessment Meeting, to examine each of your understanding and devotion to your faith.

And the examiner for this Assessment Meeting is myself.

Don't look so surprised. Many of you already know of my existence. And even those who haven't heard of me — it doesn't matter. After today, his believers will carry my divine name forward.

My name is Yu Xi — servant god of [Void], Envoy of [Deceit], the final step you must climb to get closer to him.

The Assembly of Gods Convention — officially begins."

With that, Lord Yu Xi flicked his fingers lazily — and leaped from the lowest platform in a single bound, landing directly on the mask platform that had belonged to Zhen Xin. With one foot, he kicked the unclothed mask-wearer standing at the platform's edge clean off it, turned his back to everyone, and bowed with a smile toward the empty void:

"Praise to my patron. Your followers have arrived to take your burdens."

This scene was absolutely stunning — whether for the fraudsters standing before it or for Cheng Shi hiding behind the invisible curtain. Because by some extraordinary coincidence, this "Yu Xi" was bowing in precisely the direction Cheng Shi stood — not off by a single degree. This left Cheng Shi with no choice but to wonder whether Long Jing had somehow guessed something, or seen through something.

Yes — the real Yu Xi was hiding backstage. The Yu Xi on stage was inevitably someone else's performance. And that performer was Long Jing. This wasn't the first time he had played Lord Yu Xi — but this time, he had far more room to give it his full expression.

Among the fraudsters present, it was unlikely anyone didn't know the name "Yu Xi." In the first half of the Faith Game, Yu Xi's name had genuinely been obscure — but in the second half, especially in the past few months, any player with aspirations of growing closer to [Deceit] could hardly have overlooked this sole Envoy of [Deceit]. Exactly where the name had spread from was no longer important. What mattered was that countless members of the History School were vouching for Yu Xi's authenticity, and the very top-ranked fraudsters all seemed to have crossed paths with this servant god at least once.

Though none of the fraudsters currently present had actually laid eyes on Yu Xi in person — this figure in front of them: tall, with long slender limbs, a pure-white mask, an overall aura that was slightly uncanny yet thoroughly saturated in [Deceit]-flavor — perfectly matched every image they'd conjured for Yu Xi.

But a fraudster was a fraudster. Standing here was the smallest slice of the most fraudulently gifted people in this game. Would one convincing appearance make them believe this was Yu Xi?

No. Absolutely not.

The previous "Zhen Xin" who'd been suspected had already been hammered into a "Long Jing."

In the fraudsters' eyes, a mere appearance alone would never make you Yu Xi.

But this was precisely where Long Jing's performance was most brilliant. His appearance wasn't a one-off introduction with a single act — en route to introducing himself, he had casually demonstrated his power, kicking that unclothed mask-wearer clean off the first platform.

The one who was kicked off was no passerby. He was the fourth-ranked fraudster — an extraordinarily agile Victim — a peak assassin who had reached mastery in both trickery and physical combat. With his skill set, even if he chose not to dodge, even the third-ranked Acrobat couldn't necessarily kick him off in a single move.

And Yu Xi had done it. One casual kick, handled with ease — as if lifting nothing at all.

This was what a divine being looked like.

Everyone there only needed to see the unclothed mask-wearer's grave expression to know that this "Yu Xi" was quite possibly real. The scene, which had been lively to an extreme just moments ago, went suddenly quiet again.

The fraudsters' eyes darted everywhere, peripheral vision scanning everyone else furiously — until finally, in the gradually cooling atmosphere, someone "flattering" led the charge, and a unified chorus rang out:

"Praise to our patron. Praise to Lord Yu Xi."

Yu Xi turned back around, waved a dismissive hand, and gave an amused snort.

"Spare me. Whether a fraudster's devotion counts as real devotion remains to be examined. Just like you're wondering in your hearts whether I'm truly Yu Xi — no one can say for certain. Put away that act. Those little thoughts of yours — I walked that same road thousands of years ago.

Still, you did one thing right. Whatever the situation: remember — always keep your suspicion. Those who deceive others will always be deceived themselves. Even the Fun God itself may not have gone undeceived. Only by maintaining your suspicion can you walk far enough down the road of [Deceit]."

With that, Yu Xi's sharp gaze swept across everyone below, then lingered on the several empty platforms with some apparent regret.

"It's a bit of a pity. The ones who most needed to hear these words aren't here. And the one who is here—"

Yu Xi gave an amused snort and casually flicked a mask dart, shattering the "Long Jing" illusion from before. "—is also a fake."

The fraudsters had suspected Long Jing might be a fake — but hadn't expected him to have been an illusion all along. They turned furious glares toward the eighth platform — only to find the Master of Trickery's illusion smiling awkwardly, but eyes on Yu Xi, gleaming with sharp interest.

Whatever the crowd's reaction, what Yu Xi had just said was undeniably barbed. It was basically implying that however hard the fraudsters in front of him worked on the road of [Deceit], they still wouldn't get very far.

Of course the fraudsters refused to accept that. It wasn't long before someone's eyes darted, and the question came:

"Lord Yu Xi — since the Assembly of Gods Convention isn't actually a meeting with a true god, can you tell us where the Magician, the Acrobat, and that last Fate Weaver... all went?"

Chapter 1368: The Assembly of Gods Convention — The Performance

"The three of them have tasks to attend to — ones you aren't yet cleared to know about. But since you had the nerve to ask, I'll let slip a tiny secret about our patron."

Yu Xi gave an amused snort, raised a gloved hand, and made a peace sign — then pointed at each finger in turn.

"This is our world. And this... is an entirely different world, completely unlike ours."

Before he'd even finished, someone jumped in: "Parallel timelines?"

Yu Xi shook his head. "Pretending to know what you don't is the greatest deception you can inflict on yourself. It's not the kind of [Time] projection you're imagining — not some parallel world operating beneath the gods' gaze. That's a completely independent starry sky — so independent that within it, there is also a version of our patron. A [Deceit] that is identical to our patron yet is not a split-form."

"???"

"!!!"

For fraudsters who didn't know the universe's real nature — this news was nothing short of explosive. Their pupils contracted sharply, and the gazes they turned toward Yu Xi were full of disbelief.

When something matches your expectations, it might be a lie. When something doesn't quite fit your expectations, it's very likely a lie. But when something is so far beyond your expectations that it sounds like drunken raving — it starts to feel like the truth.

"How is that possible — how can there be another Fun God? Doesn't that mean every divine being has an identical... copy in that world?"

Yu Xi smiled and shook his head. "Wrong. These two worlds are not copies of each other. They're similar, yes — but their internal development is not the same. If you insist on bringing up copying — you could say they were identical at the very moment of their birth. But only in that instant. After that, they're like two carriages, galloping off in entirely different directions."

"Then why is the Fun God sending Zhen Xin and the others to that other world?"

The fraudsters were burning with curiosity — but at this moment, Yu Xi pulled the curtain shut on the topic. He retracted his hand and snorted:

"As I said — those tasks aren't something you have clearance for yet. All you need to know is that devotion will lead you further, and allow you to access a broader world. This world is not as simple as you imagine, and neither is the Faith Game. All right — enough of that. It's time for the first item of the Assembly of Gods Convention.

Flattery — ah, I mean, devotion. You'll be demonstrating your devotion. Our patron may not concern himself with such details, but as his most loyal follower, I take some care with flatt— devotion. And you, as those who trail behind me — you too must understand 'devotion.'

I'll give you a short amount of time. In 5 minutes, move me with your most impactful memory. Note: move me with a 'memory.' Everyone has memories — we can't use them alone to judge a [Deceit] believer's devotion. But one's attitude toward one's memories is crucial.

Take the Memory Traveler who should be standing on this platform beneath me — now absent. When our patron considered inviting him into [Deceit]'s camp, I stated my strong opposition at the time. This mortal's devotion to [Memory] cannot be converted into momentum to walk the road of [Deceit]. He will never believe in [Deceit]. And events proved me correct. Even for the Convention, he went to the opposing faith's side. But that's our patron for you — the more you advise against something, the more defiantly he does it."

Yu Xi smiled reluctantly, that faintly bitter smile seeming to say: yes, this really happened.

"Finding devotion within blasphemy is a required course for every fraudster. All right — I may have gone on a bit. So: the countdown starts now. You have..."

He produced a pocket watch, glanced at it, and curled the corner of his mouth. "3 minutes and 50 seconds."

"???"

The sudden reduction in time threw everyone off for a moment. Did the time spent talking just now count against those five minutes?

How could a presiding officer waste the players' own time?

At this, every fraudster's mind shifted into gear. They began racking their brains for what kind of "memory" could move this so-called Assessment Officer.

"Move me" was an almost impossibly hard thing to pin down. It seemed to demand emotional resonance — yet it also felt like a baited trap, designed to lure them into over-reading every word.

But [Deceit] was always like this. Its divine revelations were perpetually riddled with ambiguity and traps. So for Yu Xi — as its Envoy — to speak this way was very consistent with the fraudsters' expectations. This actually worked in Long Jing's favor: as the players' emotions rose and fell in waves, being "baited, lured, then caught" over and over, they gradually shed their suspicions about Yu Xi's identity and fell deeper into the rhythm Long Jing was setting.

Watching the fraudsters' expressions grow serious and concentrated — the "Yu Xi" on stage was delighted. Both versions of him were.

The "Yu Xi" on stage was naturally savoring his personal moment of glory. And Cheng Shi, watching with great interest from behind the curtain, was studying Long Jing — still puzzling over exactly how he had kicked that unclothed mask-wearer clean off the platform in a single blow.

Long Jing was not the real Yu Xi. An Acrobat might have great strength, but his agility didn't necessarily surpass a Victim — and yet Long Jing had done it. That single act of intimidation was what had made everyone briefly believe in his identity. Cheng Shi couldn't help but connect this to Long Jing's second faith — [Time]. He hadn't forgotten that Long Jing had merged with [Time]. Hadn't forgotten, either, that Long Jing had obtained a sword capable of rewinding timing.

But was President Gong's hand speed really that sharp — locating in that single instant the moment the Victim couldn't dodge, and kicking him down from that window?

Or — was there any possibility the unclothed mask-wearer had actually been playing along with Long Jing?

It didn't seem that way. The gravity on the other man's face right now appeared too genuine to be an act.

Cheng Shi was puzzled and could only keep observing. But what he didn't know was that it truly had been a joint act — a silent coordination between the third and fourth-ranked [Deceit] players.

In fact, Long Jing and the unclothed mask-wearer had excellent mutual understanding. You could glimpse the hint of it from their IDs alone. From the very beginning of Long Jing's scheme, he had never intended to hide it from this person. The moment he appeared impersonating Yu Xi, he had already made the other man part of his performance plan.

When Long Jing leaped toward the first platform, his back was to all the other fraudsters — his face was toward only the unclothed fourth-place player. And in the exact moment he landed on the platform, he pulled a face at him.

Being the fourth-ranked [Deceit] player, there was no way he didn't know what that expression meant. The missing Fate Weaver — he didn't know well. Zhen Xin would never do something like baring her teeth like that, and Zhen Yi even less so. Long Wang — come on, rule him out too. So the only one who could have pulled that face was Long Jing — and in that moment, he understood: this Acrobat standing above him had never left the Convention at all. He had arrived early, biding his time for this exact moment — ready to pull off something massive right in front of every fraudster.

He was insane! How dare he impersonate an Envoy here?!

The unclothed mask-wearer was genuinely shocked — then felt a thoroughly irrepressible itch to join in. The madness in a fraudster's blood had been ignited. If Long Jing dared to do it, then at worst he was an accessory. What was there to fear?

Before he had known what was happening and was being led around like a monkey — he'd only curse Long Jing as a clown. But when he was the one leading the monkeys? Ha. You had to hand it to President Gong's eye for a teammate — it was excellent.

And so with one silent exchange, he let Long Jing kick him off — and the third and fourth-ranked fraudsters pulled the wool over everyone present, including even Cheng Shi behind the curtain.

Where Long Jing had slightly miscalculated, though, was this: the intel he'd gathered through the Jokers far exceeded what any ordinary player could currently know. Combined with his unusually thorough

understanding of Yu Xi's identity — he had slipped into the role a little too convincingly. This left the unclothed fourth-place man with a strange uncertainty forming in his mind. He was beginning to wonder: was it Long Jing playing Yu Xi to fool everyone else — or was it Yu Xi playing Long Jing who'd fooled him?

The fourth-place player looked up at "Long Jing" with complicated eyes — and heard Lord Yu Xi snap his fingers and say, quietly:

"Time's up. Who goes first?"

Chapter 1369: The Assembly of Gods Convention — Belief

Long Jing's intentions were simple and pure — he wanted to pull off the performance of Yu Xi and extract something interesting from these fraudsters. Think about it: when you've tricked every fraudster in the room into making a fool of themselves at the Convention, President Gong's moment of glory would arrive naturally, and his notoriety would eclipse Zhen Yi's — making him the most dazzling "star" of the whole game.

So his gaze at the crowd grew more and more eager — though he hid that eagerness expertly, making it look to outside observers like sharp, penetrating scrutiny.

The assembled fraudsters said nothing, all simultaneously looking toward the unclothed mask-wearer at the highest position.

The fourth-place player frowned slightly. After a moment of silence, he suddenly raised his head and looked steadily at Yu Xi.

"I'll go first. I've heard that you enjoy playing as a player, and have personally participated in trials and given some guidance to other players within those trials. So I want to ask you a question."

"?"

Yu Xi raised an eyebrow and smiled. "This is an Assessment Meeting, not a Q&A session. Are you sure you want to violate the assessment rules?"

The fourth-place player gave an amused snort, his tone odd:

"I don't believe I've violated the assessment rules at all. You said to move you with a memory — and what I just described is my memory. As for the method to move you — that is my question. My understanding of 'moved' relates to emotional change. I believe this question will absolutely cause a change in your emotions. Would you... like to hear it?"

"..."

Long Jing's eyelid twitched slightly. Was the fourth-place player retiring from the performance?

But he couldn't just step off the stage at this moment — or the clown would be himself again. He had to improvise, and clapped in recognition of the other's cunning argument:

"Very good. Cunning sophistry is itself an aspect of my lord's authority. I can feel your devotion. Ask your question. Your devotion deserves a response."

"!"

Hearing this, the others suddenly understood — so the assessment worked like this. The "rules" Yu Xi had stated weren't the complete rules — and one's response didn't have to be a rigid response either. The assembled fraudsters perked up immediately, revising their mental scripts while pricking their ears to hear the fourth-place player's question.

The unclothed mask-wearer studied Yu Xi carefully for a moment, then asked tentatively:

"Since performance is a subject that can never be avoided on the road of [Deceit] — I'd like to ask you, Lord: when you were playing the role of a player, did any player ever play the role of you?"

"!!!?"

At those words, the entire scene was stunned.

The fourth-place player's words were crystal clear — essentially guessing out loud, in front of everyone, that the Yu Xi standing before them might be someone else's performance. Yet paradoxically, this very attitude of suspicion made the other fraudsters more convinced. It wasn't that they hadn't considered that these two might be in on an act together — the problem was that right now, the fourth-place player's expression didn't look like an act at all. It was rare to see such gravity in his eyes.

This could only mean he himself was uncertain about Yu Xi's identity. If even the fraudster most familiar with the Acrobat didn't think this person was the Acrobat — could Yu Xi's identity still be fake?

Long Jing was also taken aback. For a moment he felt vaguely disoriented himself. Come to think of it, the fourth-place player's question was an enormous assist to the construction of Yu Xi's identity — Long Jing should have been pleased. But the problem was he could see the gravity in the fourth-place player's eyes, and when he factored in the man's expression and really savored the question—

No way. Come on. You actually started believing?

I made a face at you, and you can still see me as Yu Xi?

You must be thinking the real Yu Xi is out there impersonating me, Long Jing!

In that moment, Long Jing showed nothing on the surface — but inside, he was laughing his heart out. He had never imagined things would develop this way. But he had to admit the current situation was enormously favorable to his performance. And so this peak fraudster, with his deep understanding of human nature, did the opposite of what was expected — and with a smile, gave everyone an answer they couldn't have predicted.

"Of course there have been. Whether she, he, or him — all of them have borrowed my identity at some point."

Long Jing gestured toward Zhen Xin's, his own, and Cheng Shi's platforms, then said with a smile: "To impersonate a divine being while mortal is a great act of blasphemy — yet to use the arts of [Deceit] to deceive the world is enormous devotion to our patron. I recognized their devotion, but I would not pardon their transgression on account of it. And so between reward and correction — I chose a path for them. A path of redeemed reward: a journey to explore another world. If they gain something from it,

that is the reward. If they encounter misfortune — that is the punishment. This is also why you haven't seen the three of them here. And you... not bad. Your performance puts you very close to them."

"..."

Looking at the strange smile Yu Xi turned on him, for one instant the unclothed fourth-place player felt with absolute certainty that the person in front of him was Yu Xi — could not possibly be Long Jing. The real Long Jing could never have acting this refined. Even if Long Jing's technique could reach this, it could never produce an aura this close to a divine being's.

Yes — the aura. An identity could be performed. After all, your mouth could say anything — but aura could never be faked. And right now, behind Yu Xi's back, an abstract and distorted [Deceit]-aura was rising — exactly the kind of scene one expected when a divine being manifested. It had appeared a little late, yes — but who could say for certain that wasn't Yu Xi deliberately toying with them?

If even the divine being would toy with itself — how could it not toy with fraudsters who thought themselves clever? If any fraudster dared question its identity and was then proven wrong — could that fraudster ever show their face in the fraudster community again? Even if they weren't laughed to death by their peers — they'd probably lose the god's attention forever.

For this reason too, the fourth-place player, even internally uncertain, no longer dared to test the person's identity further. He could only accept "the one standing before him who looks exactly like Yu Xi" as Yu Xi — even if it was Long Jing, being "tricked by Long Jing" was far more tolerable than "failing to recognize Yu Xi."

And Yu Xi's reverse-confessional answer — along with the aura rising behind the figure — finally made the other fraudsters drop their guard. This had to be an Envoy. Where else would this power come from?

Yes — where from exactly?

Cheng Shi was also curious. No — that was the wrong word. He was stunned. He too had noticed the [Deceit]-aura rising behind Long Jing. He had considered lending Long Jing a hand earlier — after all, who wouldn't want to get some free information out of other fraudsters? But he had held back, also

uncertain whether the [Deceit] Container he was holding could pass through the invisible curtain before him.

But now it seemed there was no need to pass anything through. The aura had already risen on its own — and it was a [Deceit]-aura distinctly different from pure [Deceit] energy. Faint — but unmistakably there.

Cheng Shi was thoroughly confused. He even started wondering whether the Fun God had long since created something like a "divine throne" specific to Yu Xi — one that anyone could sit in, not just himself?

But then he immediately rejected that idea, because he thought of another reason:

Faith.

[Time] had once said: as long as they believe — the force of faith will burst forth.

Whether it was Selius's Divinity Germination Experiment, or the Yu Xi circus Long Jing was performing right now — both involved belief. Even the sacrifice dedicated to [Void] had been telling him all along that believing seemed to be something critically important.

So the fraudsters here had already come to believe that Long Jing was Yu Xi?

Then himself — who exactly was he?

Cheng Shi froze. His thoughts plunged into momentary confusion — and then, down below, another change occurred.

After various rounds of brainstorming, the fraudsters studying Yu Xi and the fourth-place player seemed to grow increasingly certain of Yu Xi's identity. And so, eager to "distinguish themselves," they began to compete in trying to move Yu Xi.

The first to speak was the bandaged man on the eighth platform — Du Qiyu.

"I won't do what certain someone did and break the rules by asking a question. I'll demonstrate my devotion to the maximum within the rules as stated. [Memory] — if it isn't used for entertainment, then its conflict with our patron holds no meaning whatsoever. So my understanding of 'moving' you is: making you laugh. And as it happens, I know of something rather amusing."

Chapter 1370: Audience Meeting - Torchbearer

Du Qiyu's voice overpowered all the frauds. He bowed deeply toward Yu Xi above, swept his gaze over everyone present, and said with a mocking expression:

"What do you all think is the funniest thing in this era, where Gods descended to bestow a Faith Game upon the world?"

The crowd glanced at their feet, but no one responded.

Or rather, it was certain that no one would respond. No one wanted to play the 'straight man' in someone else's narrative, as they were in a competitive relationship after all.

Du Qiyu apparently hadn't expected anyone else to respond. Not long after, he chuckled to himself:

"Let me reveal the answer.

Naturally, it's a bunch of idiots trying to overthrow the gods and rebuild the world!

And I happen to have encountered such idiots.

Hah, although the Wise Men of Folly are arrogant, they are right: ignorance truly is the original sin of humanity.

The descent of the Gods is the guidance of the world. Refusing to follow this guidance is one thing, but to actually think about returning everything to a past without deities—this is not just the delusion of a fool, it is absolute blasphemy against the Gods!

What's even funnier is that they actually sought me out, believing I was a comrade who could protect what is good alongside them.

Listen to this word, comrades?

Hahahahaha, how stupid. I simply hid all my beasts and put on a little disguise, and they believed it, even wanting to pull me into that nonsensical organization.

Do you think I would agree?"

Du Qiyu was highly skilled at controlling the rhythm of his speech. He paused once again, beginning to examine everyone's expressions, as if trying to find any of the "idiots" he mentioned among his peers.

However, the frauds remained expressionless, revealing no flaws, which left Du Qiyu slightly disappointed.

Not entirely disappointed, though. At least Lord Yu Xi was 'moved'. He actually jumped down from the first platform and arrived beside Du Qiyu, his eyes brimming with appreciation.

Yu Xi moved his long, slender legs and paced around the Beast Tamer. As he examined Du Qiyu, he chuckled:

"Interesting. I'd love to know how you handled such blasphemy?"

Du Qiyu smiled faintly, seemingly not thinking there was any problem with his actions. He bowed deeply to Lord Yu Xi once more.

"Of course, I sternly and righteously... accepted it!"

A shrewd glint flashed in Du Qiyu's eyes as he once again began to examine everyone, including Yu Xi.

Yu Xi froze for a moment, the smile on his face growing more eerie.

"Accepted it?"

It seems you also think humanity needs to rebel against the Gods?

Hmm, very well. I have seen your blasphemy. Now, begin elaborating on your devotion. Otherwise, your path of faith might just come to an end."

Yu Xi stared at Du Qiyu with a half-smile, yet there wasn't a hint of nervousness on the Beast Tamer's face. He burst into laughter:

"My Lord, you are mistaken. Everything I just said was not my blasphemy, but my devotion.

I agreed to their invitation not to join them in upholding some bullshit goodness or rebelling against the gods, but to infiltrate them and turn them into the biggest joke of this era.

Rebelling against the Gods might be a severe sin of blasphemy to other deities, but to our Benefactor, shouldn't this be the greatest fun in the entire universe!

Lord Yu Xi, since I am already inside, I can naturally drag more 'frauds' into that organization. And once the essence of rebellion turns into a 'circus,' hah, I believe this farce will be enough to please our Benefactor and likewise move you.

What do you think?"

Du Qiyu's eyes were extremely bright. He stared unblinkingly at Yu Xi, constantly observing his reaction.

And Yu Xi merely curled his lips, slowly circled behind the Beast Tamer, clapped twice, and asked with a smile:

"Not bad, not bad. But you've talked for so long, and yet you haven't mentioned the name of that organization.

Why, are you subconsciously protecting those blasphemers?"

Du Qiyu was taken aback before bursting into laughter, "Of course not, they are called..."

"Shh!"

Yu Xi's slender arm suddenly reached over Du Qiyu's shoulder. He gently placed an index finger over his lips, interrupting the man's words, and looked at the other frauds present, laughing heartily:

"It's a bit too boring when only one person speaks. I'd like to ask, who else knows what this organization is called?"

The frauds furrowed their brows, remaining silent. Clearly, there was no second person here who knew of the blasphemer organization.

Having taken stock of the situation, Yu Xi nodded. Then, pressing down on Du Qiyu's shoulder, the smile on his face vanished instantly. He slowly leaned into the Beast Tamer's back, bent over, sneered into his ear, and whispered:

"Do you think the foolish acts of mortals can be hidden from the Gods?"

Du Qiyu was perplexed: "Of course not."

"Very well. Since they cannot, the Gods should have long known about the existence of these blasphemers. But why haven't They interfered or brought down judgments for blasphemy?"

Du Qiyu was stunned again, but then his eyes widened in shock, his pupils trembling as if realizing something: "Are you saying that a God has sheltered them!? There are rifts among the Gods, and They are using these fools as tools to scheme against each other?"

"Smart!"

Yu Xi patted Du Qiyu firmly twice and chuckled anew: "Take another guess. The God that shelters them... who is it?"

Before this question was asked, it was indeed a question. But once it came out of Yu Xi's mouth, the answer was obvious!

"The Fun God!?"

"Our Benefactor?"

Before Du Qiyu could answer, the other frauds had already cried out in alarm.

And at the exact moment the frauds figured out the answer, those slender hands resting on the Beast Tamer's shoulders gently grasped his neck.

"Smart, you've guessed correctly.

But what a pity, you guessed wrong."

As soon as the words fell, the crowd heard a crisp snap. Du Qiyu's pupils contracted violently and then slowly dilated, instantly losing their luster as he collapsed into Yu Xi's arms without any resistance.

Yu Xi clicked his tongue repeatedly. He casually tossed the Beast Tamer's corpse aside, looked up with a smile at the remaining five frauds, and declared:

"They are called Torchbearers, sheltered by our Benefactor.

You don't need to know their purpose. Just remember, anyone who witnessed what happened today must never extinguish the fire of another.

As for what the fire is..."

Yu Xi's sharp gaze swept around the circle. He curled his lips into a wide grin. "I shouldn't need to elaborate, should I?"

"!!!"

For a moment, the several people present shuddered all over, remaining as silent as cicadas in winter.

Someone had actually died at the Audience Meeting!

Not getting to meet the Gods was one thing, but losing their lives? What was the meaning of this?

Of course, it was also possible that Du Qiyu had gone to meet Death, but at a critical juncture like this, no one was in the mood to make such a joke.

The Master of Trickery, who had previously fought with Du Qiyu, was particularly terrified. He feared that Yu Xi had killed the man not because of some inexplicable Torchbearers, but because their brawl had disrupted the 'Order' of the venue.

He even turned his head away, not daring to look at Lord Yu Xi, plotting how he could escape this terrifying Audience Meeting ground.

The Envoy of Fraud had once again demonstrated his deterrent power at the Audience Meeting.

Seeing that the people present did not dare to make a sound, Yu Xi let out a soft chuckle. He kicked the corpse down into the abyss with a casual stomp, then leaped back onto the first platform. He extended a hand toward the frauds below and prompted:

"The assessment continues. Who's next?"

"..."

This didn't feel like an assessment at all; instead, it felt like successive death warrants.

For a time, the crowd didn't dare to move, standing rigidly in place, letting silence permeate the air.

Cheng Shi, standing behind the invisible curtain, took everything in, a trace of relief appearing in his gaze as he looked at Long Jing.

'Never extinguish the fire of another' was the rule Cheng Shi had set for the Jokers. For Long Jing to execute the Joker's will at this moment undeniably proved the acrobat had thoroughly molded into the shape of a Joker.

But what was up with that Beast Tamer who didn't die?

That's right, Du Qiyu hadn't died at all!

Cheng Shi, hiding behind the scenes, saw it crystal clear. At the very moment Yu Xi, played by Long Jing, rested his arm on Du Qiyu's shoulder, the Beast Tamer had stealthily slipped something to Long Jing behind his back!

And it was because of this object that Long Jing hadn't broken the other man's neck. Instead, borrowing a misaligned angle of view, he snapped his own wrist to produce the cracking sound, intimidating everyone present.

Breaking an arm or a leg couldn't even be called a true "break" for an acrobat. These two had used this completely harmless method to smoothly send a fraud away from the Audience Meeting.

Yes, the Beast Tamer was sent away!

In fact, a little bit of deep thought would reveal the clues. If Yu Xi had really wanted to shock the believers, there was no need to dispose of the Beast Tamer's body. Leaving the corpse on the platform would have been far more impactful to the frauds.

Yet he deliberately chose to kick the corpse into the abyss. This both prevented Du Qiyu's fake death from being exposed due to prolonged observation and served as a rendezvous. If Du Qiyu wasn't stupid, he would definitely be waiting for Yu Xi's arrival at the bottom of the abyss.

The Beast Tamer probably didn't have the ability to differentiate between the real and fake Yu Xi.

Now, this was getting interesting.

Long Jing's intention to protect the Torchbearers was absolutely genuine, yet he had specifically let off Xiao Qi, who had attempted to expose the Torchbearers.

Based on Cheng Shi's understanding of Xiao Qi, a leopard couldn't change its spots. The real Du Qiyu could never have deceived Long Jing with such a petty trick. Therefore, the answer was obvious: Long Jing had recognized the item Du Qiyu handed over and felt the man wasn't an issue.

And this was precisely Xiao Qi's biggest problem!

He was definitely not Du Qiyu!

Who could it be?

Thinking of this, Cheng Shi glanced toward the void deep inside the venue, his brow slightly furrowed.

Whoever it was, going to meet... no, going to trick them a bit would reveal everything.

...