

The Gods 226

Chapter 226: The Divinity Germination Experiment

The Nature Sect!

The instant Cheng Shi heard the experiment's name, that was his first thought: the Nature Sect!

A player organization that believed divinity was born from humanity itself!

And Hu Xuan—the "offspring" acknowledged by [Birth]—was one of its members.

The Land of Hope's history contained no such organization, but virtually every player organization traced its roots to some major power on the continent.

Just as the Reason Association corresponded to the Tower of Logic, and the Order Alliance corresponded to the Grand Tribunal, the Nature Sect's counterpart wasn't the Nature Alliance—it was the Church of Life, a deity-worshipping organization founded by followers of [Life] under [Civilization]'s rule.

Since every nation in the Civilization era maintained some degree of political cooperation and cultural exchange with the Nature Alliance, they didn't resist the emergence of such cross-path theological organizations within their borders. Thus the Church of Life flourished under Civilization's watch—especially within the territory of the Tower of Logic.

The reason was the same one already stated: the Church of Life also believed that divinity should be born from humanity, and they pursued that conviction tirelessly. As it happened, no one studied divinity better than the Tower of Logic.

So... Selius wasn't merely a scholar from the Tower of Logic. He was also a devotee of the Church of Life.

"Divinity... Germination... Experiment."

Each word sounded ordinary enough on its own. But strung together, they were nothing short of staggering.

"How can divinity germinate? And how could it possibly germinate inside a human?" Li Yi was stunned. He stared blankly at the wooden cross-sections in Selius's hands and asked in disbelief, "So the Deathmatch Final is meant to germinate divinity? What divinity? [Chaos]? Does [Chaos] even exist at this point in time?"

Gao San was equally dazed, murmuring to himself:

"So are we really ourselves, or are we slices... and whose slices are we?"

He looked at Li Yi, recalling Li Yi's earlier words. By sequential logic, the one numbered first should be the original. Did that mean he and Cheng Shi were both Li Yi's slices?

Li Yi had clearly realized this too, and his expression grew exceedingly complex.

Only Cheng Shi let Selius's words go in one ear and out the other, treating the whole thing as idle entertainment.

Because until the scholar revealed his true intentions, even true statements could be instruments of deception—after all, Cheng Shi himself had just finished playing that exact trick.

So only one question occupied his mind: what was this Selius really calculating? And why hadn't the Selius outside followed them in?

"No, no, no—you've misunderstood. When a slice hasn't yet been cultivated into an individual, you can think of it as just that—a slice, a fragment peeled from the experiment material."

"But once the slice has grown into a complete experiment material, from that moment on, there is no longer any concept of 'slice.' Because every experiment material is himself. At the very least, this was established before the experiment even began, and every material believes it without question."

THUNK!

When Selius finished speaking, Cheng Shi smiled. He felt the scholar was trying to bewitch everyone into buying his thesis—that everyone was merely a slice of a single person.

'But I cannot possibly be someone else's slice.'

So he sent another scalpel whirling into the experiment table, his tone playful:

"Scholar—why don't you spell it out? Who is whose slice?"

"Or more specifically—of the three of us sitting here, who's the slice and who's the original?"

Selius didn't mind the gesture in the slightest. He glanced at the sharp scalpel embedded in the table, then back at Cheng Shi, and smiled:

"Why fixate on who's a slice? I already said—"

THUNK!

A third scalpel slammed into the tabletop, this one pinning one of the innocent wooden cross-sections right through to the surface.

"Keep wasting my time and the next scalpel goes into your skull."

"I don't know what you're waiting for. Your eyes keep drifting to the wooden door behind me—are you waiting for the other Selius, the one who looks exactly like you?"

"Though from what I can tell, he doesn't seem eager for a reunion."

"..."

At this, Selius's expression finally shifted. His gaunt cheeks twitched once, and then he let out a slow sigh:

"The concept of slices depends on the specific experimental objective. The Divinity Germination Experiment is not simple, and if I casually tossed out a number, would you even believe me?"

"So please—hear me out."

"For divinity to burst forth from humanity, it is absolutely impossible through individual consciousness alone—through fantasy or fabrication. This has been the consensus since the ancient epochs."

"Therefore, to 'nurture' divinity within humanity, the Church long ago shifted its focus to the interactions between different life forms. Only the sparks generated through the collision of consciousnesses have any chance of 'mutating' into divinity."

"Of course, one must eat one bite at a time and walk one step at a time. We never aimed to directly create divinity. Rather, we were observing whether, within the interactions of human nature, there might emerge—even for a single instant—a mutated form of humanity that resembled divinity in its data and configuration."

"We call this mutated humanity 'Germinating Divinity.'"

"But after generations of exploration, we discovered that attempting to nurture Germinating Divinity through the interactions of different life forms was utterly impossible. Their sense of mutual identification was simply too low. They lacked the critical emotion we call 'Common Recognition.'"

"This emotion is believed to be the foundation of all divinity. It has another, more sacred name..."

"Faith."

"However, in experimental contexts, we prefer to call it faith's embryonic form: Common Recognition."

"And so, to heighten the sense of identification between life forms, the Slice Experiment was born."

"We hypothesized a person splitting into countless selves. Each of these selves—carrying fragmented memories and fractured consciousness—simultaneously holds one belief as absolute truth: 'I am myself.' With that, a rudimentary Common Recognition emerges."

"We then selected [Corruption]—the most torpid of all divinities—as our testing direction, solely because it doesn't reject humanity as aggressively as the others."

"We cannot define what form divinity takes when it manifests within consciousness, so the nurturing process has no clear direction. We can only search for patterns in human nature's mutations through endless, unrelenting testing."

"After countless experiments, we finally discovered that the emotion of fear has the highest probability of mutation. While this mutation hasn't yet produced Germinating Divinity, it has at least generated many beneficial forces that help the life forms overcome their fear."

"This is currently the most promising direction we've found. And so, the Grand Tribunal's version of the experiment—the Deathmatch Final—was born."

"By now you should have guessed it. The reason we use this method is to trigger the experiment materials' deepest fears, using their tense, boiling consciousnesses as a cradle to nurture the exceedingly rare Germinating Divinity related to [Corruption] and 'fear.'"

"If fear is the catalyst, why not make all the materials fight in a free-for-all? Wouldn't the terror be even greater?" Gao San frowned.

"We tried that, of course. But in the chaotic tangle of overlapping cognitions and stacked consciousnesses, it produced mutations that contaminated [Corruption] with other variant elements. While the success rate was high, the results were wildly disordered, and we could find no pattern of divinity despite years of analysis."

"So we abandoned that approach in favor of sequential gladiatorial combat."

"Furthermore, during the experiment we had to consider one additional factor: if a Germinating Divinity truly did mutate successfully, how would we collect it?"

"Because the sliver of fear-born Germinating Divinity that erupts within consciousness doesn't belong to true [Corruption]. It is born under the Common Recognition of 'I am myself.' In other words, the experiment material is the true owner of this Germinating Divinity."

"After bearing the Germinating Divinity that belongs to him, he transforms from an ordinary experiment material into one who possesses that first, most primal possibility of becoming... Him."

"And with that, here is the answer you wanted."

"The experiment material's serial number doesn't matter. What matters is which material this batch of experiments intends to make into the final vessel for collecting divinity."

"Since all materials within the same experimental group share the self-recognition trait, when one material dies at another's hands, regardless of which consciousness the Germinating Divinity was born in, the victor absorbs it—making it the victor's 'spoils of war.'"

"Under normal circumstances, without any special objective, the experiment tends to assign the most original material prototype to the final serial number."

"Because the prototype's personality is the most complete, Common Recognition is more inclined to acknowledge him, and therefore his capacity to bear Germinating Divinity is the strongest."

"Moreover, under the rules of the Deathmatch Sentence, only the last contestant has the highest win rate in the Deathmatch Final. This means he is the most likely to collect the mutated Germinating Divinity!"

"!!!"

The instant Selius finished speaking, Gao San launched himself skyward with explosive speed and squeezed into a gap in the ceiling overhead.

Li Yi snapped his fingers, transformed himself into a shower of poker cards, and vanished on the spot.

Two cowards had fled—apparently frightened away.

Cheng Shi didn't pursue. He digested Selius's words and smiled.

'So after all that, the experiment material prototype turns out to be me.'

'Interesting. But...'

'Not that interesting.'

He stared at Selius without moving, sneering:

"So, scholar—which slice number are you?"

Selius laughed at himself.

"I'm not a slice. I'm the experiment material prototype who was discarded."

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