

The Gods 242

Chapter 242: Faith Game — Starting with an Inherited Laboratory

Misplaced. Every last ounce of expectation — misplaced.

This cold-blooded Fool's Lips was incapable of giving anyone a useful hint. All it knew was deception.

And ever since he'd converted to [Fate], this mouth was increasingly starting to sound like a riddler. Sigh — ungrateful lips that couldn't be kept in line.

Who knew what [Deceit] would think.

After multiple fruitless attempts to coax Fool's Lips into speaking again, Cheng Shi resigned himself, gathered his emotions, and prepared to leave the laboratory.

But when he reached the main entrance, a thought suddenly struck him:

'Why am I leaving?'

'When the laboratory was dangerous, I wanted out for safety.'

'But now everything dangerous in here is dead. So why would I leave?'

The realization hit Cheng Shi like a bolt. He turned toward the sealed laboratory door with a grin.

'Why shouldn't I, Cheng Shi, become the director of this laboratory — even if only for four short days?'

'In all of Montrani, where could possibly be safer than this hidden underground lab?'

'Besides, by the laws of historical extrapolation, the one who overthrows the "tyrant" is supposed to "inherit the throne"!'

'So I should rightly be this laboratory's director!'

'Perfectly reasonable!'

'I'm staying!'

Enlightened, Cheng Shi turned on his heel. As he passed through the experiment ground's mountains and seas of corpses, he was already planning the cleanup.

'Hmm, can't leave them in the main hall. The smell I can tolerate, but the eyesore is the real problem — it's bad for the Honest Laboratory's reputation.

Might as well sweep them all into the workshop.

On a related note, I should use my free time to study the slice experiment. The lab has so many rooms, so many tools, and my teammates still haven't woken up. If I can master the entire procedure within a couple of days, I could give them a wonderful surprise when they wake up!

Yes, yes, yes!

Not bad at all — I really am a little genius!'

No sooner said than done. Cheng Shi rolled up his sleeves and began his first contribution to his temporarily inherited laboratory.

Well, not technically the first — overthrowing the old regime counted too.

And so, in the middle of a [Chaos] trial, Cheng Shi found himself playing a neat, orderly laboratory simulation game.

Just as he'd predicted, nothing unexpected occurred during the following three days. Not a single visitor came knocking at the laboratory door.

Meanwhile, he shuttled between two tasks: cleaning the experiment ground's corpses and learning to operate the slice experiment.

Normally, a player from outside the [Truth]/[Folly] paths would have struggled immensely with the complex and arcane experimental procedures. But Cheng Shi was different — he had Brother Mouth.

Although Fool's Lips rarely told the truth, as long as it spoke at all, Cheng Shi could simply reverse its instructions and then calibrate through observing experimental feedback, gradually mastering the process.

So the hardest part wasn't the experiment itself — it was getting Brother Mouth to talk.

And so, in pursuit of progress, Cheng Shi began talking to himself — bombarding Brother Mouth with an unrelenting stream of monologue.

After a full day and night of relentless verbal siege, even the [Silence]-converted Fool's Lips couldn't take it anymore and grudgingly offered a pointer or two.

Cheng Shi instantly and enthusiastically reversed the instructions — and then, predictably...

Blew up a few experiment materials.

Good news: the destroyed subjects were Land of Hope locals. Definitely not teammates.

Bad news: Brother Mouth had started using the truth to deceive him...

'Heh. Me — the clown.'

The pleasant days flew by. Cheng Shi had never found experimentation this entertaining. By the final day, he was actually praying for the trial to be extended, because the slice experiment he'd overseen from start to finish was on the verge of success. It looked like it was going to work — just needed a bit more time.

What Cheng Shi never could have anticipated, however, was that on the trial's last day, the script's finale dropped a bombshell on him.

A teammate woke up.

The first teammate, under Cheng Shi's careful maintenance, survived the slice experiment — four days and sixteen hours in total.

In the slice experiment, if a subject successfully had their personality sliced, the separated personalities didn't leave the body. They remained within the subject's consciousness, awaiting the next step: memory slicing.

Cheng Shi couldn't alter the experiment's course or intervene in procedures already underway. All he could do was meticulously maintain the experiment's operation, ensuring that the probable-teammate subjects didn't die from neglect.

Three days to master a personality slice experiment was already Cheng Shi's absolute limit. So for the experiment materials in this laboratory, retaining their personality slices was the best possible outcome.

But even that outcome wasn't great — because in the extrapolated fantasy, the more "players" that survived, the more personality slices remained lodged in their consciousness.

So when the first teammate woke up, he took one look at the stark-white laboratory and the operating table, and bolted upright.

"Where is this?"

"Who are you?"

"And who are you?"

"A laboratory? Why am I in a laboratory? And you two — who are you?"

This wasn't Cheng Shi talking to his newly awakened teammate. It was the teammate... talking to himself.

Yes — he'd split. In his personal fantasy, three personalities had reached a stalemate, and so he'd fractured.

Cheng Shi stared at the scene, then silently set the Concentric Dagger down on the experiment table.

'For the record... I know absolutely nothing about this.'

"And who are you!?" The awakened teammate was a burly man. He rubbed his temples with a deep frown, glaring at Cheng Shi with undisguised suspicion.

And the instant those eyes fell on him, Cheng Shi snapped into character.

"Where is this?"

"Who are you?"

"And who are you?"

"Why are you inside my body?"

He babbled bizarre things to himself, one hand permanently glued to his nose, the other clutching his own throat while his face reddened with fury:

"Get out of my body!"

"You get out!"

"..."

The performance left the burly teammate utterly stupefied.

Connecting it to everything that had happened before, he seemed to grasp the picture. So that chaotic brawl in the Colosseum had been nothing but a personality slice experiment?

And what lay before his eyes right now — this was real?

This idiot with dissociative identity disorder might actually be his real teammate?

Tss — headache!

His own condition was terrible. That was dangerous. But at least his only conscious teammate appeared to be in even worse shape and didn't seem to pose a threat.

Compared to each other, he gradually calmed down. But it was only the primary personality that settled — the others didn't. The arguing erupted again, and this time the physical thrashing was far more violent than before.

The different personalities replayed the gladiatorial combat from the imagined trial within the battlefield of their shared consciousness. The war for control of the body had begun.

"Crash—"

The big man crumpled to the floor, his face twisted in agony. One hand mimicked Cheng Shi's pose, throttling his own throat, while the other fought to pry the first hand loose. His entire body contorted into a knot as he battled himself.

And right then, the second teammate woke up.

An identical situation. Nearly identical words. After taking one look at Cheng Shi and the first teammate's state, he unhesitatingly joined the fight-yourself club.

Insane. They'd all gone insane.

Cheng Shi lay on the ground, rolling back and forth, occasionally slapping himself. But his wildly darting eyes were secretly studying his teammates the entire time.

Both clearly had three personalities crammed into their heads — two arms weren't really enough to go around.

At least they were all men. Legs could be allocated too...

Cheng Shi's mind raced through a jumble of nonsense. He was about to wait for the two of them to tire out and then make contact, but that was when the third and fourth teammates woke up in quick succession.

These two were even more outrageous. They each had only one mouth, yet the racket they produced sounded like a fish market. Even their speech patterns had devolved into brawling.

Clearly, neither had managed to eliminate a single personality. They'd entered the game at practically full capacity.

"..."

Beyond the players, other experiment materials began waking up one by one. Apparently this batch of slice experiments had reached its conclusion. The small laboratory instantly became a cradle of chaos — pandemonium beyond description.

Cheng Shi continued lying on the floor, smacking himself, though he was slowly inching toward the exit. He knew he couldn't stay much longer. At this rate, he'd end up in a brawl before he even had a chance to identify his teammates.

Imagine it — a room full of people with dissociative identity disorder. Who could handle that?

But right as he was about to crawl out of the laboratory, the last teammate slowly opened his eyes. A sharp gaze swept across the room before the man furrowed his brow and spoke:

"A slice experiment... I never imagined that trial was actually a slice experiment. Interesting. Where's Selius? Why isn't he here?"

"Who are you!? How come you haven't split!?"

The last teammate glanced at the one who'd spoken, then smiled with bitter self-awareness.

"Me? Split?"

Sorry — I only just realized that I was already a slice to begin with.

But don't panic. Let me look for the Concentric Dagger. Maybe I can still save you."

No sooner had he finished than a nimble hand thrust the Concentric Dagger right in front of his face.

"?"