

The Gods 249

Chapter 249: It's Him!!!

Cheng Shi lay sprawled on the rooftop, staring at the sky — boneless, motionless — from the first rosy streaks of dawn until the sun sat high at its zenith.

He was reviewing. Replaying every detail of the trial. Trying to figure out how a trial with six tricksters had possibly reached its conclusion.

Here's the thing — when a trial has only one trickster, it'll probably produce some quiet, behind-the-scenes entertainment;

When there are two tricksters, the entertainment becomes a synchronized comedy of minds;

Three tricksters, and the trial is bursting with cheerful laughter;

Four — the fun doubles instantly;

Five — anyone could end up as the punchline.

But when there are six? Trust me — that's no comedy. It's a tragedy.

Cheng Shi's trial results spoke for themselves.

He didn't dwell too long on how six tricksters had outmaneuvered one another. Instead, he pondered the five "selves" from the fantasy trial extrapolated by [Chaos] — what exactly did they represent?

Li, Ji, Gao, Zhao, and Su undoubtedly stood for five distinct personalities. But for Cheng Shi, they were different from ordinary personality slices.

Because beyond that identity, they also seemed to overlap faintly with certain figures from his memories.

Just as Selius had noted, his self-identification was extraordinarily high — so high that every single slice believed itself to be the true self. Between them, there wasn't even the "Common Recognition" of "I am Cheng Shi." There was only the shared obsession: "I truly exist."

And when that obsession reacted chemically with fragmented memories, vivid "other people" materialized within Cheng Shi's self-created fantasy.

Why?

Cheng Shi had asked himself more than once but arrived at no answer.

Perhaps it was because he observed others too keenly. Perhaps because he could always see through to the hearts of those around him. Perhaps because he habitually reasoned using other people's logic. In any case, the deeper he immersed himself, the less he resembled himself.

Yet he stubbornly held on to who he was. He firmly believed he was not someone else. He was only Cheng Shi — and could only be Cheng Shi.

It was probably this most "obstinate" conviction that won him the fantasy trial.

Of course, [Fate] must have bestowed its blessing. This script, woven entirely from coincidence, bore its handiwork on virtually every page.

It seemed [Fate] didn't want him to become someone else.

Why not?

Cheng Shi still couldn't guess the answer. But the answer was actually very simple — because in the script he couldn't see, [Fate] had already left ample hints.

The one surnamed Li chose to abandon Divinity when he embraced it;

The one surnamed Ji was combative as always, yet was once again defeated by fate;

The one surnamed Gao deceived everyone and overheard things he shouldn't have;

The one surnamed Zhao, at the crossroads of life and death, unhesitatingly preserved himself;

The one surnamed Su believed he'd set a brilliant trap, yet couldn't escape a stifling death.

Each of them was a reflection of Cheng Shi's thinking, a distortion of his memories, a slave to obsession... In this [Chaos] scenario, none ultimately escaped the [Fate] of "the self."

This was what it meant: Fixed Destiny!

A Fixed Destiny that, even while constantly changing, had never truly changed!

Perhaps the missing perspectives prevented Cheng Shi from figuring out the reason, but it didn't matter. He was already walking the Fixed path in practice.

And that was precisely why a certain someone could become [Fate]'s favored child.

But the man himself was blissfully unaware. He continued staring at the sky, his complicated gaze alive with vivid stories, until he sighed endlessly and mused:

"Maybe I'll just have some snot soup for lunch?"

I don't seem all that hungry."

Right — [Fate]'s favored child's mind had long since wandered. He'd never been the sentimental type.

"By the way, Brother Mouth — I've noticed you never refuse when I drink snot soup. Does that mean... you like it too?"

"...?"

His lips parted — then clamped shut without producing a single syllable.

Sensing Brother Mouth's exasperation, Cheng Shi laughed so hard he rolled across the rooftop.

"I've noticed that ever since I came back to [Fate], Brother Mouth, you've gotten dumber.

Yep, no doubt about it. The mouth has gotten dumber."

The thought had barely formed when his vision plunged into blackness.

"Brother Mouth!!??"

Cheng Shi jolted upright, instantly realizing this wasn't Brother Mouth's doing — it was one of Them. A God had dragged him into the Void.

"Thump-thump... thump-thump..."

His heart hammered violently.

Who was it?

Who this time?

'Please don't let it be [Memory]. I've already broken my oath once — no, twice. Being a three-time defector is hard enough...'

'Preferably not [Order] either, because I'm still on bad terms with that chair...'

'Any [Void] god would be fine, but it's definitely not one — the blackout is lasting far too long this time.'

He seemed to be soaring through the Void, toward the very edge of the cosmos.

Just when Cheng Shi was wondering whether some underhanded God had personally descended to squash him, light finally returned.

A beam of dim, amber light pierced the darkness and seeped into his vision. Cheng Shi slowly opened his eyes and checked his body.

'Good — flesh and blood. That rules out [Death].'

Then he looked ahead. But this time, there was nothing before him.

All he saw was an infinite tide of primordial chaos churning and flowing. Violent currents surged in every direction. Dense yellow fog clung together, thick as paste.

"This is..."

He froze for a beat. Thunder roared inside his skull.

"Bzzzz—"

He seemed to already know who it was.

'No way. Bro. You're serious?'

And right then, a colossal hand made of swirling amber mist seized Cheng Shi and hurled him upward to a platform at an unfathomable height.

It was a genuine platform — a massive, unbroken stone slab inscribed with innumerable words, though every last character had been violently slashed away by blade-marks and spear-scars.

At the platform's edge stood a book so impossibly enormous that words failed to describe it. Cheng Shi craned his neck skyward but still couldn't see the edges of the tome hidden within the dense amber fog.

All he could see was this "giant's book" in a state of having been torn apart — as if ripped open by invisible, titanic hands. The debris had scattered into stars, and between the peeled-apart pages gaped terrifying black holes.

The front and back covers, now separated, looked like a pair of flung-open gates — waiting for the lucky soul being summoned to step through.

Cheng Shi stood in stunned silence. He could hardly imagine where else such a blasphemy against [Order] could possibly exist.

Yes — blasphemy against [Order]. Not [Truth].

Because the style of that colossal book was nothing like a tome of knowledge belonging to [Truth]. It was a codex of laws — inscribed with countless commands of [Order].

It was Him!!!

[Chaos]!

Without question, on the other side of this shredded Gate of [Order] waited the first god of the Chaos Path — [Chaos].

Why was He here?

What did He want?

'Didn't the last trial already award me bonus points? What more could He be unsatisfied with?'

'And if He's satisfied, can't He just stay home? Socializing is exhausting!'

'Huh!?!'

Cheng Shi was panicking — because he realized the hand that had delivered him was already gone, the way behind him had long vanished, and the choice now rested squarely in his own hands.

Gazing at this "still somewhat orderly" gate, he broke into a cold sweat that soaked through his back.

'The man himself has arrived...'

'Do I go in or not?'

'Or, more importantly — can I not go in?'

'If I do go in, should I be His envoy, "Ultraman"?''

Cheng Shi desperately wanted to ask whether the mess [Deceit] had caused could please not be pinned on him. But every time he opened his mouth, he couldn't bring himself to say it.

He was terrified that [Deceit] and [Chaos] had united on the front of messing with [Existence]. If that were the case, the question above could very well become his death sentence.

'So... should I or shouldn't I?'

'My Lord... you've handed me one hell of a conundrum...'

'This pot is too big — I can't carry it!!!'

'Help... help me!'