

The Gods 253

Chapter 253: This Honor — It Doesn't Belong to You Yet

"Whew—"

Too hard. This was an agonizing choice.

Because Cheng Shi had never once considered betraying [Void]!

Even now, as [Fate]'s favored child, he still considered himself a trickster.

Just one with slightly better luck.

So for him, there was no choice to make.

But the one presenting the choice was a God — one of Those seated upon the Divine Thrones!

He could humble Himself and "graciously" offer Cheng Shi the opportunity to choose, but Cheng Shi absolutely could not refuse [Chaos] as bluntly as he'd refused [Memory]!

After all, His goodwill was genuine.

And Cheng Shi was not someone who failed to appreciate kindness.

So he devised a workaround. His expression shifted several times as he carefully chose his words and asked:

"Would I be betraying [Fate]?"

It was a pointless question — and yet it wasn't.

Because accepting the envoyship would necessarily mean betraying [Fate]. So by voicing this question, Cheng Shi had already, in the instant the words left his lips, given his refusal.

Nothing in the hall's disorder changed in response to his answer. This meant [Chaos] had not grown angry at the rejection. He merely let out a sigh of profound disappointment upon hearing it.

Yes — He was disappointed. The disappointment of disorder toward order. The disappointment of a deity toward a subordinate.

"Step down. This honor does not yet belong to you."

With that, the entire hall warped. Cheng Shi was a grain of sand in this deforming space, slipping through a gap in the disorder.

His vision went black. Then he lost consciousness.

After Cheng Shi vanished, the hall returned to its original form. Spaces became regular. Pillars became symmetrical. Inscriptions became complementary.

Kataro resumed his place in the position that should rightfully have belonged to Ultraman.

He stood with his head bowed, eyes fixed on the center of the empty hall, and asked with a trace of puzzlement:

"My patron, forgive my presumption — You could have simply bestowed [Chaos]'s Authority and Divinity upon Lord Ultraman directly. Why did You insist on having him personally experience that extrapolation, to try to ignite his own New Authority Divinity?"

The air was still for a moment. Then [Chaos]'s resonant voice sounded:

"A passing fancy, nothing more. If Chaos's new authority had truly germinated within his consciousness, it would have proven he was born to be [Chaos]'s darling.

A pity — the trial did produce a new authority, but it belongs neither to him nor to Me. It belongs to [Corruption]..."

From his patron's words, Kataro had gleaned fragments of the Gods' history, so he understood that [Corruption]'s new authority would not be easy to claim.

The so-called New Authority Divinity was a type of divinity, but fundamentally different from ordinary divinity. Its state wasn't that of scattered shards or disassembled puzzle pieces — it was an entirely new "component."

And this was precisely why Selius's Divinity Germination Experiment had earned the Tower of Logic's attention. Other experiments studying divinity invariably used known, existing divinity. But Selius was researching a method to produce divinity!

In other words, the Germinating Divinity born from his experiment was, in fact, brand-new divinity manufactured by mortals!

The method may have referenced the "Faith Blueprint" of a known deity — [Corruption] — given the similar data and directional overlap. But ultimately, it was born from a different kind of faith: the self-affirmation of "I am who I am"!

The reason the Gods referred to Selius's Germinating Divinity as New Authority Divinity was simple: if a stable method of "manufacturing" and accumulating this type of divinity could be found, it would bypass the Convention's restrictions entirely — and create a New God!

Of course, the New Authority Divinity produced in Selius's experiment was extremely weak, because the foundational faith behind it wasn't strong.

So even though it was a New Authority, it ultimately couldn't resist [Corruption]'s seizure and became a wisp of new [Corruption] Divinity.

"Even knowing Lord Ultraman would refuse You, why did You still..."

"Fate changes constantly. I was gambling on that possibility. But I lost the bet."

Kataro's gaze sharpened. He didn't dare continue the line of questioning. After a moment of silence, he bowed his head once more:

"[Fate]'s interference allowed Galusha to see Lord Ultraman. This Wise Man — who betrayed [Chaos] — holds grudges for even the smallest slight. Could this affect Your arrangements..."

"No matter. Her actions were anticipated. [Fate] is not one of the players on the board."

"Then what should I do next?"

"Play His role in history. Don't disgrace [Chaos]'s envoy. And then — wait. Wait to see if the day comes when he changes his mind."

Kataro bowed even lower, answering with ever-deeper reverence: "Yes."

[Chaos]'s resonant voice sounded once more: "Is there anything else?"

"I... I have repeatedly felt the true Will of [Chaos] calling to me. So I wished to ask — has He... encountered some problem?"

The moment his words fell, a pair of eyes opened within the hall — eyes of Chaos suffused with the essence of [Chaos]. They gazed upon the head-bowed, eyes-lowered Kataro, the corners lifting slightly, then turned toward the direction in the Void corresponding to the Grand Tribunal's position across each temporal period.

"Which era do you mean?"

"The dimension You occupy — not the one we occupy."

"He is well. He has even forgotten that He was once [Chaos]. But the order He shelters... it seems to be in some trouble.

As for further details, you should know who to ask. That will be all for today. Someone has come knocking, and I need to deal with it.

You are dismissed."

With that, the eyes vanished from the hall.

'Come knocking?'

'Who would dare challenge His authority at the gates of the [Chaos] temple?'

Kataro stood in thought for a moment, then chose not to leave. Instead, in an act of supreme "presumption," he ascended to the high platform where the Divine Throne sat, and turned the great seat — one that had never been occupied yet bore immeasurable weight — around to face him.

As the throne rotated, a codex nailed to its backrest gradually came into view.

Chain after chain of solidified amber chaos-mist bound the tattered codex in place. Long nails — each topped with a mocking, chin-stretched grinning face — pierced the book's four corners, pinning it motionless.

Kataro reverently lowered his head. Before he could speak, the grand voice of [Order] resonated from the codex:

"Send Him to see me."

"You're still as arrogant as ever."

"I said — send Him to see me."

"My Master is not here."

"Hmph. Your master. Your master. Is your patron [Chaos], or [Deceit]?"

"That depends entirely on how You choose to see it, great [Order]."