

The Gods 254

Chapter 254: [Void] — A Few Anecdotes (One)

In the Void outside the [Chaos] temple, within the endlessly churning breath of primordial chaos, a pair of eyes brimming with [Chaos]'s will gazed toward the place where Cheng Shi had departed.

Those eyes first betrayed a flicker of divine appreciation for a subordinate — then shifted into the disappointment of a schemer gazing upon one who refused to yield.

So complex were His emotions that the surrounding currents of chaos grew even more turbulent beneath the force of His will.

And right then, violent perturbations rocked the Void. Those eyes narrowed, their corners lifting, before vanishing in an instant. In their place, a colossal hand materialized from the amber chaos mist, breaking through the surging torrent of primordial chaos.

Moments later, a pair of eyes painted with constellations and spirals opened above the Void. They gazed down coldly at the chaotic hand before them, a voice like the howling gale of an abyssal chasm.

"[Chaos]!"

The hand remained motionless. [Chaos]'s resonant voice answered:

"[Fate]..."

"Why have you come?"

"You know full well why I've come." Those eyes — their gaze piercing all things — saw through the endless chaos breath, as though every twist of fate had already been laid bare. "Whatever agreement you've struck with Him, its terms should not extend to the followers under my protection.

Fate has shifted course. I am here to remind you: it's time to draft a new agreement with Him."

The hand was noncommittal. It swept away the amber fog between itself and the eyes, then rumbled:

"Who is 'Him'?"

The eyes grew colder still: "[Chaos] is not [Void]. There's no need to dissolve the meaning of self. You know exactly who I mean!"

"I do not."

"..." The eyes swept over the hand without a shred of emotion. A cold snort. "That is all I have to say. There will not be a next time."

As the eyes prepared to dissipate, the hand spoke again:

"Are you [Deceit]?"

The eyes froze. Then turned frigid: "Are you looking for a fight?"

"Oh — so you're not [Deceit]. If you're not Him, why are you meddling in matters between Him and Me?"

"I see. So you really are looking for a fight.

Come, then. Let Me show you why My follower refused to join your dreary [Chaos]."

An all-out war erupted in the Void.

The battle came without warning, without prelude. So fierce was the clash that the entire Void trembled and hummed.

"You keep tampering with My envoy's fate — making the divinity that should have germinated in him vanish into nothing. So tell Me...

Was it he who refused? Or was it you?"

"Absurd. Without Divinity, on what grounds would you call him an envoy?"

He is a wanderer of [Void]. When has he ever submitted to [Chaos]?

The words of [Chaos] — nothing more than this."

"Hmph. [Fate] is merely a waggle of tongues as well."

"..."

"BOOM—"

The tremors across the Void grew ever more violent.

...

Cheng Shi woke up — back on his rooftop again.

But he kept his eyes shut, face-down on the ground, replaying [Chaos]'s words in his mind:

"This honor does not yet belong to you."

He'd keenly latched onto the critical words: "yet" and "not... yet"!

'Wait — what does that mean?'

'It means that if I change my mind later, I still have a chance?'

"?"

Cheng Shi patted his own head in disbelief, terrified that this whole audience had been another extrapolation-fantasy — after all, he knew [Chaos] had stolen [Time]'s Deduction Authority.

But if it wasn't a fantasy, then why would this Being — hailed as the most insane in the entire cosmos — look upon him with such favor?

By what right?

'Just because my reputation among the Gods is terrible?'

'Just because a certain God is always calling me greedy?'

'Huh? Being greedy gets you perks?'

'The world's full of insatiably greedy people, and I haven't heard of a second Ultraman...'

This time, Cheng Shi was genuinely stumped.

He pondered for ages, came up empty, and decided to "seek guidance" from a God.

Logically, since [Deceit] was the one who'd turned him into [Chaos]'s envoy, the obvious move was to ask [Deceit].

But Cheng Shi was now [Fate]'s follower. He had no idea whether chanting his former patron's name at a die would prompt his current patron to "transfer the call"...

'Probably not, right?'

'After all, what person... what God could have that kind of patience?'

Then again, even if [Fate] knew everything, asking Him about [Chaos]'s business was a stretch too far. And that side was also hoping he'd break his oath.

'I'm screwed.'

Cheng Shi suddenly found himself caught between a rock and a hard place. After agonizing for what felt like forever — practically scratching himself bald — he finally concocted a sneaky little workaround.

He would recite [Fate]'s prayer while holding one of his masks. That way, if [Deceit] summoned him, he'd have achieved his goal. And if [Fate] intercepted the call instead, he could play dumb and claim he'd grabbed the wrong item.

'I really am a clever little rascal!'

'No time like the present!'

So Cheng Shi produced a golden mask and, trembling with nerves, muttered softly toward it:

"Fate like myriad stars — within sight, yet out of reach..."

Before the words were even finished, his vision went black. He passed out.

When he opened his eyes again, a pair of eyes painted with constellations opened right before him!

[Deceit]!

Those whimsically swirling spirals and gleefully twinkling star-dots — that was unmistakably his former patron, [Deceit]!

The moment He opened His eyes, the entire Void began radiating sarcasm.

"How fitting for someone else's favored child. Under [Fate]'s protection, you even dare use another's prayer to blaspheme Me."

That single sentence drenched Cheng Shi in cold sweat from head to toe.

'I've really been sweating too much today. At this rate, I'll be dehydrated.'

'But this isn't entirely my fault, my Lord! That redo-your-Path-Beginning room didn't have a single mask in it!'

'Where were You at that moment?'

'If You'd spent the energy You're using to mock me right now on THAT moment instead, would I have broken my oath? Huh!?''

At this thought, Cheng Shi's eyes suddenly lit up.

'Right — how is the oathbreaking MY fault!?''

'I couldn't resist! You're clearly the one who sold me out! I haven't even demanded an explanation yet!'

And so, brimming with righteous indignation, Cheng Shi raised his head, ready to properly debate his former patron — but those eyes seemed to read his mind. The instant he lifted his head, the topic was seamlessly redirected:

"Ask whatever you want to ask. Do it quickly. I was merely passing through and can't linger."

"..."

"Mm... why did You make me break my oath?" Cheng Shi abandoned his original grievance and blurted out the question instead.

The eyes flickered twice, then sneered:

"You picked up His dice yourself — and you still dare bring this up in front of Me?"

Who gave you the courage to blaspheme Me?

Was it that new patron of yours — the one you used to call a 'bitch' with every other breath?"

"..."

'What a magnificent tongue-lashing!'

'Look — can we stick to the topic? Stop with the blasphemy-this, blasphemy-that!'

'Who have I blasphemed?'

'I don't even blaspheme myself anymore!'

Cheng Shi's jaw set stubbornly, defiant: "My Lord — let's stick to the facts. When I returned to the Path Starting Point, there were only dice inside. No masks! Am I right!?"

"What did you just call Me?"

"..." Busted. Old habits die hard — he kept forgetting to change his form of address.

But the eyes in the Void didn't seem to care. Not only that — the entire Void began to liven up, its psychedelic colors quietly effervescing.

The desperately anxious Cheng Shi, however, noticed none of this. After a moment's hesitation, he corrected himself in a small voice:

"F-Former Lord."

The effervescent Void froze solid in an instant!

Wave after wave of indescribable pressure rose from every direction. At this moment, had Cheng Shi not been able to see [Deceit] before him, he would have sworn he'd been transported back to that instant at the Path Starting Point — reaching out to touch the mask!

And this oppressive force was far stronger than that time!

The eyes swept over Cheng Shi — devoid of joy, devoid of sorrow. The voice was cold as an icy wind howling through an abyssal chasm.

"How do you know there were no masks inside?"

Cheng Shi stuck his neck out stubbornly: "I reached out three times! [Fate] nearly killed me — and I didn't touch a single mask!"

The eyes shifted, turning playful: "Why must a mask be in its original position?"

'Wha—?'

'Huh?'

'Huh!?'

'HUUUH!?'

'The mask could have been somewhere else!?'

Cheng Shi's mind went blank.

'Hold on — at THAT point, You could still put the mask in a DIFFERENT spot!?'

'My Lord, please — use Your head! How is that any different from not putting out a mask at all!?'

'No — wait, there IS a difference!'

'The difference is that it made me realize I'm a clown. A clown who lost his own mask!'

"So... You did place a mask at the Path's Starting Point. I just didn't find it — is that right?"

By this point, Cheng Shi was utterly crushed. He even began to doubt himself:

'Why didn't I search longer at the Path Starting Point?'

'Why did I keep poking at [Fate], wasting my selection time?'

'Do I really not belong to [Deceit] but to [Fate]?'

'Am I truly not a born trickster? Otherwise, why couldn't I find — why couldn't I even sense — the mask that should have been mine?'

He was frozen. Felt like nothing more than a clown with no leg to stand on, comically interrogating a God who stood far above.

If this wasn't blasphemy, what was?

He tried several times to ask where the mask had been placed, but each time, the shame clamped his mouth shut.

And then — the spirals within the eyes suddenly spun faster. He laughed. Laughed with genuine delight.

"Hee~

I actually didn't put one there at all."

"..."

Cheng Shi's brain whited out for an instant, as if struck by five simultaneous lightning bolts. He stared in disbelief at those rapidly twinkling eyes and finally confirmed, once again, a singular truth:

Cheng Shi the Clown!

He was right — Cheng Shi was indeed a clown!

But...

'What a coincidence — because my name HAPPENS to be Cheng Shi!!!'