

The Gods 255

Chapter 255: [Void] — A Few Anecdotes (Two)

"Any more questions?"

If not, I'll be going. I do have a fight— matters to attend to."

"Yes! Oh, do I EVER!!!"

Cheng Shi glared at the eyes before him through gritted teeth. He desperately wanted to point and shout, but he didn't dare. So he settled for panting heavily and asking:

"[Chaos] just summoned me. He wanted me to become His envoy. You'd know about this, right?"

"Mm~ I do."

"Why do You want me to become His envoy?"

Is it the same reason You made me break my oath and become [Fate]'s follower?"

I've heard other players mention Faith Fusion. You're pushing that agenda too, aren't you?"

And I — I'm Your test subject, am I right?"

Cheng Shi's thoughts had finally crystallized. He fired off every suspicion and guess in one breath, then fixed his gaze on those eyes, awaiting a response.

He wasn't sure [Deceit] would answer, but He didn't seem averse to the questions.

"You have too many questions. I don't have that kind of time. I can answer one. Pick."

Cheng Shi's gaze hardened. He answered immediately:

"Fine. My question is:

Were all the guesses I just laid out — correct?"

"..."

The eyes turned to Cheng Shi with a look of surprise — and a glimmer of admiration.

"Not bad. You've learned to use your brain."

"Learned from You. So — Your answer?"

"Hee~

I've already answered. That will be all. Running short on time.

Mm, this audience... hee, wasn't particularly pleasant.

Next time — don't pray to Him while holding a mask.

Also, I'll relay your devotion to Him. You may go."

With that, the eyes blinked once and vanished. Cheng Shi, having lost his foothold, plummeted straight into the infinite Void.

'Wait — hold on!'

'What are You planning to relay!?'

'Is this "relay" the same kind of "relay" I'm thinking of!?'

'The kind that lets the Gods know about my greed? The kind that makes [Fate] remind me that "mortals and gods cannot share [Birth]'s Authority"? THAT kind of relay!?'

'My Lord, please — I'm begging You — find a different sheep to shear! This clown is about to be plucked bald!!!'

'How about You go harass Your very first Collection instead!?'

Chaotic thoughts followed Cheng Shi back to reality. He woke up on his rooftop once more, staring at the not-yet-set sun, sinking into contemplation.

'The answer?'

"I've already answered."

'So what had He answered?'

"Not bad"!?

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted. He sat bolt upright.

His answer was "not bad"!

So his guesses had been correct!

[Deceit] was indeed pushing Faith Fusion. But while fusing [Void]'s two faiths was somewhat understandable, throwing [Chaos] into the mix — what was that about?

'Chaos... confusion... deceit... lies...'

'Could it be that His original plan was to fuse [Deceit] and [Chaos], but [Fate] intercepted?'

Not impossible!

That would explain why, during that [Chaos] extrapolation trial, [Fate] had manipulated events — ensuring Cheng Shi encountered one "self" after another with implausible speed and coincidence, then killed them all before their slice-personalities could fully form.

[Fate] was preventing him from germinating [Chaos] divinity. He seemed to have rejected the fusion of [Deceit] and [Chaos].

So... it could only be [Deceit] and [Chaos], or [Deceit] and [Fate]?

Would [Fate] agree to fuse with [Deceit]?

As his reasoning progressed, Cheng Shi gripped the mask in his hand tighter. He recalled the problem he'd discovered after the oathbreaking:

The masks he'd accumulated under [Deceit]'s protection were starting to feel... insufficient for the present. Or for the foreseeable future.

But as a follower of [Fate], he had no channel to acquire new masks. And the only method was a talent from his [Deceit]-era faith — Aspect of Sentient Beings!

So...

Had [Fate] agreed to this all along?

Cheng Shi was stunned by his own audacious theory. He fished out the Die of Fate from his pocket and placed it side by side with the golden mask, then furrowed his brow.

'Faith Fusion... how does it actually work?'

'After fusing, am I [Fate] or [Deceit]?'

The moment this mildly "blasphemous" thought formed, his vision went dark again.

'Oh, come on — not again!'

...

This was the third time today that Cheng Shi had ascended into the pitch-black, infinite Void.

Before him again — those eyes painted with spirals and constellations. Only this time, there was a faint chill at their corners. The gaze radiated cold detachment.

The instant he opened his eyes, he recognized the Being before him!

[Fate]!

His true patron had arrived.

His heart sank. 'Surely the Lord hasn't come to settle scores after [Deceit] "relayed" something outrageous?'

But just in case — better to strike first and strike at the God!

Cheng Shi composed his expression into one of extreme piety and declared his allegiance:

"Praise the great God of [Fate]. You pluck the strings of [Void], playing the symphony of all living things, rendering every change in this world unpredictable, and making past and future alike resound with the echo of what is Fixed.

I am most honored to be granted Your audience once more. Your most humble, most devout follower, Cheng Shi...

Pays his respects."

Saying this, he quickly bowed at 90 degrees, pressing a hand to his chest — using the deep bend to hide the fact that he was touching his nose.

"..."

'Too awkward. The over-the-top performance didn't project devotion at all — it just exposed my true clown identity.'

This kind of cover might fool other players, but before one of Them...

It was tantamount to streaking.

But the eyes showed no anger. They simply watched Cheng Shi in silence, saying nothing.

After hearing nothing for ages, Cheng Shi sneaked a peek — and met that emotionless gaze head-on.

"..."

'Cold-sweat season is back for a limited time.'

'What's with this inexplicable pressure?'

'Why isn't He speaking?'

'Didn't He summon me? Why do I have to talk first?'

'What should I even say? Confess?'

'Come on — this tiny bit of blasphemy shouldn't count as a major offense compared to what I've done before, right?'

Despite all the excuses, after another nervous glance at the still-silent eyes, Cheng Shi decided to play it safe and confess preemptively.

"My Lord, I can... explain!

I simply grabbed the wrong token just now. No disrespect was intended..."

And then, at last, the icy eyes spoke.

"What token?"

"Huh?"

Cheng Shi was dumbfounded.

'Wait — You don't know!?'

'[Deceit] didn't tell You anything!?'

'Seems like He really didn't... so why did You summon me?'

Cheng Shi let out an awkward dry laugh, scratched his nose, and said: "Never mind. Got confused."

The eyes sharpened. A cold voice: "He met with you just now."

"..."

'How to put it... there's this sudden, inexplicable feeling of... guilt.'

Cheng Shi stiffly lowered his hand. He didn't dare speak or respond.

"Hmph. As expected — He still hasn't abandoned His futile fantasies!" The eyes snorted coldly, but when they turned back to Cheng Shi, a trace of approval had crept in. "You didn't abandon the path of [Fate] to embrace [Chaos]. That is good."

"...As it should be. Naturally, as it should be." The unexpected praise left Cheng Shi honored to the point of alarm.

"But [Fate] is still in flux. And fantasy may yet become reality..."

At these words, Cheng Shi noticed with astonishment that the eyes — which had been consistently cold — had grown even more frigid.

He seemed angry.

But the anger certainly wasn't directed at Cheng Shi. As for who...

Cheng Shi hastily lowered his head, pretending not to understand, and heard the eyes continue:

"Though you walk firmly upon the correct path, know this: [Fate] also has its wrong turns."

"..."

Cheng Shi blinked. 'I know. Oh, do I know. I literally walked down the wrong path myself.'

"I bear the Divine Name of [Fate]. I wield the Authority of [Fate]. I see through the nature of the cosmos. I have known all pasts and countless futures.

In those countless futures, He—

[Deceit], without the help of [Fate]'s favored child, stumbles and errs, never to smile again.

As a sibling god who shares [Void], I need not forcibly alter His fate — but I ought to show appropriate mercy."

'Wait — wait...'

'My Lord, what are You saying?'

'What is this rambling? Are You sure You're not [Deceit] in disguise?'

Cheng Shi looked up in shock, staring blankly at the eyes before him — and then he saw it. The spirals within began to rotate in layers, as though a lone, lonely helix had suddenly gained a shadow.

Two spiral layers intertwined and spun. After a brief moment, they radiated outward a force of mysterious, arcane [Void] power.

The instant this power appeared, it rapidly coalesced in the Void — condensing into a blurred, dark silhouette that hurtled toward Cheng Shi's head without warning.

Cheng Shi instinctively tried to retreat, only to find he'd long been locked in place, unable to move a muscle.

"On this day, I issue a new divine decree. The follower of [Fate], Cheng Shi, is to temporarily reclaim the power of [Deceit] and offer measured assistance to that pitiful God whom [Fate] has forsaken.

As reward for this decree, I shall grant you — the power to command [Void]."

"Wait — what!?" Cheng Shi's pupils quaked. This really was the real [Fate]!

"BOOM—"

He felt a force of the soul ram violently into his sea of consciousness. Then his eyes rolled back and he blacked out.

The eyes watched Cheng Shi plummet endlessly through the Void. The mesmerizing spirals slowed to a stop. The gaze remained cold — unchanged as the eternal Void itself. No joy. No sorrow.

"Fixed Destiny..."