

The Gods 300

Chapter 300: What a Breathtaking Close-Up Magic Trick, What a Brilliantly Executed Double Act

Cheng Shi was puzzled—utterly bewildered.

The biggest problem he faced now was this: if he used that [Fate] trial as the dividing line in his memories, he was still missing one crucial "link" that could connect "certain memories" from before to the "shadow" from after. Only by bridging that logic could he figure out what exactly Zhen Yi had sent the Puppet Master to do!

So he began casting his thoughts wide.

First, one thing was certain—Zhen Yi had long since learned from others that "she herself" had eaten the fruit.

And while others might not have seen through his identity during that episode, Zhen Yi herself would know for sure. After all, the only person bold enough to impersonate her and casually namedrop a "Clown" she'd just met couldn't possibly be anyone other than the Clown himself.

So the first confirmed clue was: Zhen Yi knew he'd eaten the fruit.

And that bitter fruit of [Fate] had been "grown" by the Conjugate Whisper. The Conjugate Whisper dealt in the interplay of real and illusory—reflected in a person as their body and their shadow. For a fellow swindler under [Void], leaping from the fruit to the shadow might not be such a stretch.

But how did she know the shadow held a secret?

Logically, even he had assumed—before the shadow went mechanical—that it was nothing more than a faith converter!

But now it clearly held some other significance. What was it?

Surely his Benefactor hadn't just told her directly?

Hmm... he couldn't rule that out. The Fun God was absolutely capable of pulling something like that.

But setting aside that logic-defying prankster, was it possible—thinking purely from a player's perspective and logic—to connect the two sets of memories?

"Sun and moon alternate, above the real and unreal—the future has arrived..."

The first two lines clearly indicated a location, while the last line was the actual prophecy. But what could a prophecy have to do with the fruit of the Conjugate Whisper?

'No!'

'Wait!'

'There actually is a connection!!!'

Cheng Shi suddenly thought of a possibility—a possibility so absurd that his scalp went numb, his entire body convulsed as if electrocuted, his spine went rigid, and every hair stood on end!

His heartbeat accelerated. His hands began to tremble. His pupils shrank to pinpoints, teeth clenching tight.

He didn't dare imagine it was true, but after turning it over and over, this was the only possibility left. Because he'd found the one and only link between the prophecy and the fruit—and that link was:

The future!

Never mind what the prophecy's "future" specifically referred to, or who it pointed to. The Conjugate Whisper's fruit could absolutely be connected to the future!

Because the Conjugate Whisper tree had been force-ripened using [Prosperity] Divinity from "the future"!

That exhausted Divinity had been brought back from the future by Su Yida!!!

Granted, the fruit hadn't actually been plucked from the tree—he'd conjured it through "Sacrifice to Nihilism." But when he'd done so, he'd been standing on the Conjugate Whisper tree, trying to fool the Torchbearers!

If that [Prosperity] Divinity contained some hidden trick, then that single moment was the only opportunity for whatever failsafe lurked within to make contact with the fruit!

So this was still part of that scheme from the future?!

Had Zhen Yi gotten herself involved in that deadly game from the future?

'No, that still didn't add up. The Puppet Master bore me no malice. She seemed interested only in the shadow. So where's the flaw in my reasoning?'

'Future, future—what future? Whose future? Where is the future?'

As he thought, Cheng Shi suddenly froze. Dazed, the words tumbled from his lips: "There's a future inside the shadow?"

'The prophecy is fulfilled... in my shadow?'

Cheng Shi, who had been lost in thought with his head bowed, suddenly looked up. A keen light blazed in his eyes as he embarked on a bold flight of imagination.

He was thinking—Zhen Yi knew everything he'd experienced. So she could arrive at every deduction he'd just made, meaning she'd long since connected Su Yida's Divinity to the Conjugate Whisper's fruit. No—

for her, the connection was even simpler, because nobody else knew the fruit hadn't actually grown from the Conjugate Whisper!

Everyone believed it was a fruit from the Conjugate Whisper tree. That was exactly why she'd linked the fruit to the future.

But even so, she wouldn't have needed to take such an interest in the shadow of a Clown she'd once toyed with and who'd taken the fall for her—unless that shadow was still connected to the prophecy!

'This is bad!'

Cheng Shi suddenly realized there was a gap in his understanding. He'd been too confident, which had led him to miscalculate one critical thing—nobody had told him the prophecy was over!

He'd merely inferred that conclusion from the Chosen Ones climbing back up the rankings. But...

Zhen Yi was a swindler!

Regardless of whether she shared an ID with her sister, "True Heart, True Intentions" had never actually returned to its peak. She was still in the process of climbing.

And her score was still very close to his!

If she could trick all the Chosen Ones into dropping their scores, why couldn't she trick them into climbing back?

And the reason for that reverse-trick—had he himself unwittingly provided it?

"Heh!" Cheng Shi laughed—an angry laugh at his own belated realization, and at that so-called "future."

So the Puppet Master's intense interest was because Zhen Yi had told her everything?

And she still had designs on a shadow linked to a prophecy about the future?

'Wait!'

'If the shadow contains the future, then...'

The thought hit him like a bolt of lightning. Cheng Shi's brow furrowed deeply and he shouted toward the battle behind him:

"Baldy! When I shut the door to deal with the Old Patriarch today, what happened inside the room?"

I need every detail. Every step of what occurred. This is critical—you must tell me everything without leaving anything out!"

The giant bear had been happily brawling. The question caught her off guard—and in that moment of distraction, Eposka slammed her to the ground.

She twitched, eyes narrowed, grinding her teeth: "It has to be right now?!"

Cheng Shi nodded gravely: "Yes. Right now."

"..."

The giant bear roared, hurling the tree spirit off her back, then continued pummeling it while snarling:

"Nothing happened!"

That damn historian puppet vanished for a moment. I thought the Puppet Master had hidden him in the shadows to set up an ambush, so I faced off with her briefly. But then the historian puppet reappeared, she came clean on her own, and we didn't end up fighting!"

Cheng Shi frowned sharply: "After vanishing, he reappeared—at the doorway?!"

The giant bear bellowed, locking in a contest of strength with the tree spirit.

"Yes! Right where he'd disappeared!"

!!!

A flash of realization lit up Cheng Shi's eyes. Everything clicked.

'I understand now.'

'I was tricked.'

That hadn't been Shadow Shuttle at all. The historian had used the opportunity to enter the Void!

He'd exploited the Mushroom-Footed People's panicked visit and the opening of the door—which revealed Cheng Shi's failsafe—to create a split-second timing gap. He'd forced Cheng Shi to stay locked outside the room, stripped of his ability to assess the situation within, and used that window to pin Hong Lin down for a brief moment.

And in those few seconds, perhaps he'd already found what he was looking for in the Void.

Could the Puppet Master's control threads operate a puppet in the Void from reality?

That seemed unlikely...

Which meant the historian—the one Cheng Shi had assumed was the Puppet Master's puppet—wasn't actually a puppet at all!

He'd used the position of Cheng Shi's shadow to access the Void, and then searched for the "future" the prophecy spoke of!

Such precise timing. Such masterful misdirection. Could this really be the work of a 2,300-point historian?!

Impossible!

He had to be a con artist—and a brilliant one at that!

Right under Cheng Shi's nose, he'd still managed to pull one over on him!

What a breathtaking close-up magic trick. What a brilliantly executed double act!

If all this was true—if the Void corresponding to his shadow really did contain some kind of "future"—then had he...

Found it?