

The Gods 301

Chapter 301: An Invitation From the Void

Meanwhile, on the other side.

After being let go by Cheng Shi, the Puppet Master walked "alone" through the Sighing Forest.

But this "one person" actually outnumbered the three on the other side.

The Ranger puppet led the way. The historian puppet walked shoulder to shoulder with the mature woman puppet. And the Puppet Master's true body was, as always, cradled in the mature woman puppet's arms—a pair of bright, lively eyes blinking as they gazed at the historian beside her.

Before long, she arrived at the edge of a Sighing Sorrow Tide. Staring into the dense, impenetrable fog deep within the forest, the Ranger puppet at the front spoke flatly:

"We're here. We've walked far enough. No one's around. It's safe now."

No sooner had the words left its lips than Zuo Qiu beside it smiled and nodded. He turned to look at the Puppet Master—but his gaze wasn't directed at the little girl in the puppet's arms. It was aimed at the mature woman puppet walking alongside him.

"Thank you for the performance, Aunt Jing."

The mature woman puppet's somewhat stiff face suddenly came "alive." Her expression grew vivid and lifelike, virtually indistinguishable from a real person's. She wore a warm smile, like that of a loving mother.

"Did you find what you were looking for?"

Zuo Qiu furrowed his brow slightly and shook his head.

"No. I was tricked."

"Hmm?" The mature woman puppet blinked. "Tricked? Didn't you say Yiyi told you where it was? How could she possibly trick you?"

Zuo Qiu shook his head again.

"It wasn't Zhen Yi who tricked me. It was the 'person' I was trying to find—he tricked me.

He set a trap for Zhen Yi, deceived her, and then I took Zhen Yi's memories. So I was tricked too.

He..."

As he spoke, Zuo Qiu gazed into the distance, toward Cheng Shi and Hong Lin's direction, and pressed his lips together.

"He's probably already figured it out."

Watching him like this, the mature woman puppet chuckled softly and stroked his hair. And with that single touch, the bespectacled, outdoor-jacket-wearing historian transformed into a long-haired girl with bright, perceptive eyes!

She wore a cropped black casual blazer over a pair of white straight-leg pants. A snow-white dress shirt and double-breasted vest were accented by a purple cravat. Her outfit was mature and composed yet radiated an irrepressible youthful energy—utterly out of place in this rotting, decaying Sighing Forest.

The mature woman puppet ran her fingers through the girl's long hair with a wistful sigh:

"Xin Xin, you must be exhausted?"

Indeed—this girl whose eyes glittered with cunning and calculation was none other than [Deceit]'s first Collection, Zhen Xin!

"Exhausted?" She shook her head. "Not exhausted. Just a little deflated about being used as someone's messenger.

This world never runs out of people who are really, really good at deception."

"And you're one of them?"

"Mm. I am." Zhen Xin made no attempt to deny it.

"And him?"

"Him... perhaps not right now. But in the future—without a doubt."

Zhen Xin shook her head with a bitter smile, her thoughts drifting back to the moment she'd stepped into the Void!

...

Rewind to just before the standoff in the Main House.

Zhen Xin, in her historian disguise, had been wandering the Tribe. She'd already discovered numerous objects connected to the Tower of Logic. Though most had been disassembled and repurposed into everyday necessities, their materials and craftsmanship still betrayed their origins in some Tower of Logic laboratory.

Combined with her knowledge of certain Grand Scholars from the Tower of Logic, Zhen Xin quickly deduced which scholar had been driving this experiment—and what its purpose was.

But she hadn't shared any of this with her teammates, because her goal wasn't the experiment itself. It was the prophecy that had come from the Blind One's lips!

The prophecy had indeed never been fulfilled. The Blind One's public statement was something Zhen Xin had asked her to say. Under the [Deceit] Chosen One's direction, the [Fate] Chosen One had lied to the world, and together they'd tricked all the other Chosen Ones into climbing back up the rankings.

And just as Cheng Shi had guessed—when Zhen Xin learned he'd impersonated Zhen Yi and eaten a Conjugate Whisper Fruit, and heard from Xiao Bai that he'd even recited a fake prophecy, she'd sensed that something unknowable must have happened to him.

Because the Blind One had told her that the "future" she'd seen in this prophecy was a blur of black. Considering the Conjugate Whisper's nature of interweaving real and illusory, Zhen Xin had quickly zeroed in on Cheng Shi's shadow.

From that point on, Zhen Xin—with her score deceptively climbing back—began waiting for the right opportunity. She knew the odds of being matched with Cheng Shi were slim, so she leveraged her connections.

Thus, when her Aunt Jing was matched with Cheng Shi in this trial, the Puppet Master pulled Zhen Xin straight out of another trial, swapping her in to replace the real historian who'd cared only about studying Underground transitions!

So Cheng Shi's instinct was correct—after the group assembled, the historian's identity had been switched. But the replacement wasn't a puppet—it was Zhen Xin!

Everything that followed need not be repeated. Until that morning, when the wandering Zhen Xin noticed the Desolate Lamp hadn't been reset. She devised an impromptu plan that would both conceal her identity and probe Cheng Shi's secrets: she would use his shadow's position to perform what would appear to be a "Shadow Shuttle" but was actually a Void entry!

She then exploited the Desolate Lamp incident to send the Old Patriarch into a panicked rush toward the Main House. Before the Mushroom-Footed People arrived, she opened the Main House door a step ahead of time. And her Aunt Jing, right on cue, had refined the Dream Peeping Ranger—who was doomed to die—into her puppet.

Yes—Zhen Xin had seen from the start that the Ranger wouldn't survive the second night. She didn't believe Cheng Shi had failed to notice the anomaly in his dream. When she'd tried to pass him a hint and he'd clumsily changed the subject, she knew he intended to do something inside the dream.

A liar like him would never let anyone learn about his past. That was exactly the kind of person he was in Zhen Yi's memories. So Zhen Xin was certain the Ranger would die, and she'd arranged with the Puppet Master in advance to use the Ranger's death as a diversionary focal point for their bait-and-switch.

The goal was to hide her true identity so thoroughly that even if Cheng Shi racked his brain, he'd only be able to trace things back to Aunt Jing's puppet.

But what she never expected was that the so-called prophecy from the Blind One's mouth was nothing more than a trap set by that "future"!

She'd been tricked too!

When she used Cheng Shi's shadow to silently enter the Void, she found nothing.

The pitch-black Void was silent as ever. Not a single figure existed within it.

Zhen Xin stood in the Void, brow tightly knit, scanning her surroundings. After a moment, she spoke softly, as if to herself:

"I'm here. I've come as invited. Show yourself."

But the Void offered no response.

She frowned again, murmuring:

"Is this... a test?"

Fine. Since you want to hear it, I'll say my piece."

Chapter 302: Everyone Has Their Own Path

"I believe this invitation from the 'future' wasn't something you relayed through the Blind One. Her prophecy doesn't have a perfect score, so the 'future' didn't necessarily have to come.

But in Zhen Yi's memories, I discovered that she seemed to have sensed someone's presence above the Void, yet—just like me now—she couldn't find them.

She had zero patience and gave up. But I believe any 'future' capable of catching her attention must have done so deliberately.

You... are probably a Cheng Shi from the future?

I don't know which [Time] you've come from, nor which specific [Existence] you belong to. But based on what I know of Cheng Shi—well, what I know from Zhen Yi's memories—his future probably won't be anything simple.

So if you truly wanted to hide yourself back then, my scatterbrained little sister would never have noticed a thing.

Therefore, Zhen Yi's suspicion was your invitation. You deliberately showed a single flaw without letting her find you—all to invite me here, correct?

It seems we'll cross paths in the future. And you know my unreliable little sister can't be counted on, right?

Hmm, I've said enough. My time is limited. If you still won't appear, I'll consider this meeting forfeit, and the invitation void."

Though Zhen Xin's reasoning was sound and well-argued, the Void offered no response. It remained unnerving in its silence.

Zhen Xin's brow furrowed deeply. Her heart lurched as she suddenly realized she might have been deceived—deceived by a "future."

"His" target wasn't her at all. She might be nothing more than a component of his invitation. He'd used her curiosity to lure her here, but only to complete "his" other invitation—and the intended recipient of that invitation was easy enough to guess.

Among the four people who'd been in the room during the incident, three could be directly eliminated: herself, Aunt Jing, and Hong Lin. So...

This "future" that was presumably Cheng Shi was extending an invitation to the present-day Cheng Shi!

He'd cast out bait and waited for a bite. And she was the idiot fish who'd snapped at it, becoming part of the invitation itself!!

'Fine! Fine! Fine!'

'As expected—a swindler through and through!'

Zhen Xin laughed. Unwilling to accept being fooled so easily, she prepared to do something in the Void that would utterly derail this covert invitation scheme—

Attract [Deceit]'s attention!

She chuckled softly and began chanting a prayer:

"True and false, beyond discerning!"

But even after she finished the incantation, the Void remained perfectly still. Not a ripple of response!

Zhen Xin's smile froze on her face, and her heart sank.

What did a lack of response from the Void mean?

It meant that Cheng Shi's "future"—or "future Cheng Shi"—already possessed the ability to shield against [Deceit] within the Void!

He really wasn't simple!

And it also proved he was right here. The person he was waiting for was definitely not her!

Now, being unwilling was pointless.

For a fish on the chopping block, not getting sliced up was already the best possible outcome...

Thinking this, Zhen Xin bit her lip in frustration and dissolved into mist, exiting the Void.

And the moment she left, a faint, barely perceptible chuckle echoed through the Void—as if someone were stifling laughter in the dark. But listened to more carefully, it could also have been Zhen Xin's own laughter reverberating back from the depths.

...

The perspective shifted back to the present—back to the Sighing Forest, where Zhen Xin stood shoulder to shoulder with the mature woman puppet.

When Zhen Xin said "Perhaps not right now, but in the future—without a doubt," the mature woman puppet's expression flickered with surprise:

"You seem to know him quite well?"

"Not really. I didn't go through his memories in detail—I only looked at the parts I wanted to know. It was Zhen Yi who helped herself to quite a bit, without any restraint. She should've told you about it, right, Aunt Jing?"

What do you think of him as a person?"

The mature woman puppet reflected for a moment, and a flash of sympathy crossed her eyes.

"Cheng Shi... he's a person who's as lonely as you."

Zhen Xin blinked, then smiled.

"I'm not lonely. I have you, Aunt Jing. And Ming Yu..."

The mature woman puppet shook her head, cutting her off: "We're not by your side very often."

"Then... at least I have Zhen Yi."

"It's precisely because of Yiyi that I think you're as lonely as Cheng Shi.

Sigh. Have you ever considered..."

"No!" Zhen Xin's tone turned firm. "She causes me nothing but trouble, but I think things are fine the way they are."

"Alright. As long as you two are happy with it." An Jing smiled gently and said no more.

"Let's drop this boring topic. Let me ask you something else—I'm curious. Cheng Shi has Master of Deception on him. Just now..."

I was able to fool him because I borrowed Zhen Yi's Master of Deception. But how did you manage to fool him, Aunt Jing?

Little Cai Wei doesn't have Master of Deception too, does she?"

Zhen Xin grinned, winking as she stroked the little girl in the puppet's arms, then looked at Aunt Jing's eyes with curiosity.

"You mean the God Worship Society thing?"

"Mm."

The mature woman puppet smiled candidly: "I didn't lie to him."

"Huh?"

Zhen Xin's expression changed. Her eyes went wide, as though something had clicked.

The mature woman puppet didn't wait for more questions. She came clean on her own.

"I really did join the God Worship Society. And I really do want to see what's deep in this Sighing Forest."

"Aunt Jing, you..."

Zhen Xin's pupils contracted. She pressed her lips tightly together.

She never would have imagined that everything said in the Main House of the Tribe had been true—that her Aunt Jing genuinely wanted to lay eyes on the Septic Final Tomb. No one could say how dangerous that place was. Why would she want to go there...

"Aunt Jing, you lied to me."

The mature woman puppet smiled and ran her fingers through Zhen Xin's hair: "You know I can't lie to you. As you said yourself—you're one of the greatest deceivers in this world. And I'm nothing more than an ordinary [Silence] walker. How could I possibly deceive you?"

"Then why..."

"Shh. Let me finish. Ever since Cai Wei died, apart from you and Ming Yu, I have nothing left to worry about."

As she spoke, the mature woman puppet also stroked the little girl in her arms. The girl had her eyes closed, clearly enjoying the caress. But looking more closely, her expressions were already noticeably less vivid than the mature woman puppet's.

"And now you and Ming Yu have both surpassed me. I truly have nothing to worry about regarding you two.

As for myself...

I've been silent for too long. So long that I've begun to feel myself peeling away from this world, becoming nothing more than a passing visitor in this game. That's not good. It's making me lose my sense of being human. But most importantly—it will make Cai Wei lose her mother.

So it's time I changed something about myself. Otherwise, I'll truly sink into eternal silence... until I die.

I'm not afraid of death. But I'd rather watch you all walk higher and farther—to see whether, in the future, I might have a chance to become the Aunt Jing who can still take care of you."

"..."

Chapter 303: The Master of Deception Card!

Zhen Xin had many things she wanted to say, but she knew this wasn't the time. This was the beginning of someone who'd lost a beloved person trying to break free from a walking-dead existence. She couldn't pour cold water on that hope.

But certain things had to be addressed.

She couldn't watch her Aunt Jing wander down the wrong path—or at the very least, she couldn't let her become some god-worshipping fanatic. So she furrowed her brow, wrestled with herself for a moment, then said with her head lowered:

"The God Worship Society... isn't a good choice."

The mature woman puppet clearly understood what Zhen Xin meant. She smiled warmly, stroking Zhen Xin's hair: "Paths aren't good or bad. As long as they reach the other shore."

"Aunt Jing... you've made up your mind?"

"Mm. You've grown up. You're not the scared little girl at the orphanage who needed me to take care of her anymore.

In fact, lately, it's been you and Ming Yu taking care of me.

You don't need to burden yourself like that."

"I'm happy to." Zhen Xin pressed her lips together, then reached into her blazer pocket and pulled something out, pressing it into An Jing's hand. "This is for you."

"What is...?" The mature woman puppet looked at the gleaming golden poker card in her hand, slightly startled. She noticed the card's face depicted a silent, eyes-closed mask.

"A Master of Deception Card. I just swindled it off Cheng Shi. I've heard there are many devout [Decay] followers near the Septic Final Tomb. Take this with you—don't let them lead you astray."

The mature woman puppet blinked, then smiled and accepted it.

"So these things really do exist. It seems the other little swindler didn't do his homework well enough—his card face appears to be wrong."

"Deception isn't about the card face. The moment you focus on a con artist's card face, you've already been conned.

He's very skilled. At least no worse than Zhen Yi."

"High praise. But you didn't find what you were looking for. How are you going to explain yourself to Yiyi, whose memories you took?"

At the mention of this, Zhen Xin sighed helplessly.

"Ugh, that's exactly what's giving me a headache.

She found two Mediocre Person Society cards during a trial. She told me it's a rehearsal stage built by a group of 'mediocre people' trying to step onto the world stage. She thinks she has the keen eye to judge these self-proclaimed mediocre players—wants to go help vet them. But I think...

The Mediocre Person Society's purpose probably isn't so innocent.

I've been refusing her, and now that this trip turned up nothing, she's going to mock me for a while. And per our sisterly agreement, since I lost this round, I've lost my grounds to stop her from 'causing trouble.'

All I can do now is pray she doesn't go too wild, and hope the mess won't be too hard to clean up..."

The mature woman puppet seemed to recall that little troublemaker. She curled her lips:

"So that's why you used this chance to slip the second Mediocre Person Society card to Cheng Shi?"

You want him to help keep an eye on Yiyi?"

Zhen Xin pressed her lips together and nodded:

"I just hope Zhen Yi puts all her attention on Cheng Shi. That way, maybe she won't cause as much chaos. As for Cheng Shi..."

The two of them will probably have plenty to talk about.

Honestly, I owe you thanks for timing the Ranger's movements just right, Aunt Jing. That's what made Cheng Shi suspicious in the first place, and gave me the window to send the card his way.

But I have to say... what a greedy heart that man has!"

The mature woman puppet couldn't help but laugh: "If you know he's greedy, why keep giving him good things?"

Zhen Xin shook her head:

"That [Prosperity] Divinity was always intended for Baldy. She and I had an agreement to search for each other's needed Divinity fragments in our spare time. I just happened to accumulate faster than her. Using Cheng Shi as the middleman was simply convenient.

As for the Tongue of Eating Lies...

Honestly, even though it's not exactly well-behaved, I never intended to give it away."

"Then why did you?"

"It asked me to!"

"Hmm?" The mature woman puppet blinked. "That tongue... can talk? Yiyi never mentioned this to me."

Zhen Xin's expression grew complicated: "Yes. None of us knew until just now, when it demanded I hand it over to Cheng Shi as compensation. That's when I discovered the Tongue of Eating Lies could actually speak!"

"..." The mature woman puppet was stunned. Even the "little puppet" in her arms started blinking, looking utterly bewildered.

"I'm guessing... Cheng Shi has something it likes. Or maybe—sigh, forget it, it's all speculation. Meaningless.

I made a verbal agreement with it. It'll come back. Probably."

"Aren't you afraid it'll trick you? It is your Benefactor's creation."

"I'm not afraid. It wouldn't dare."

Seeing Zhen Xin so certain, the mature woman puppet smiled.

"Since you didn't find what you wanted, where do you plan to go next?"

Zhen Xin lowered her head and thought for a moment, then said softly:

"I think... I'll wait a little longer. There might still be a turn of events.

Oh—Aunt Jing, since you really do want to go to the Septic Final Tomb, would you mind returning this to that historian who 'dares not claim fame'? Perhaps once he gets his history book back, he could serve as your temporary companion."

As she spoke, Zhen Xin produced from her storage space the very history book that Cheng Shi had found completely flawless!

She did indeed possess the talent "Lie Like Yesterday." However, she had not prepared a history book in advance for her historian disguise.

The reason the book had been flawless was simple—it actually was Zuo Qiu's history book. Zuo Qiu's own book, handed to Zhen Xin by Zuo Qiu himself!

When An Jing had taken control of Zuo Qiu and summoned Zhen Xin, they hadn't killed the historian. Instead, they'd struck a deal with him.

Zhen Xin had shown Zuo Qiu a path to witness the Septic Final Tomb. In return, Zuo Qiu had to lend her his inseparable history book. Of course, in the circumstances, the "lender" hadn't exactly been in a position to refuse.

But Zhen Xin hadn't lied to him. She'd genuinely pointed Zuo Qiu toward a correct path—one leading to the Septic Final Tomb.

"That path should be safe enough. If you want to go, Aunt Jing, just follow the historian's route. But...

Please be careful. Extremely careful.

Ming Yu, Zhen Yi, and I—none of us can afford to lose Aunt Jing."

The mature woman puppet smiled tenderly. She stroked Zhen Xin's hair and nodded gently.

"Don't worry. I won't die for nothing."

And then she added silently to herself: 'Because I still need to protect all of you.'

The two embraced for a moment before parting ways. The Puppet Master walked into the depths of the fog, while Zhen Xin sat down where she was, waiting for her chance.

She didn't know if a chance would come. But she had plenty of time and patience enough to wait.

"Let me see... what message, exactly, did you leave for him..."

Chapter 304: A Message Hidden From the Gods

The battle in the garden raged on. Hong Lin and Eposka clashed furiously, and under the giant bear's relentless assault, Eposka's wounds multiplied. Pale blue luminescent blood had been splattered across nearly every patch of soil in the garden, nourishing the "flowers of rot" planted upside-down like fertilizer.

Beyond the battlefield, Cheng Shi was still deep in thought.

He was thinking about what this so-called "future" actually was, and why it involved him.

Honestly, he'd considered the possibility that the "future" Zhen Yi had been so relentlessly pursuing might be his future self. It was the most obvious and easiest conclusion to reach. But the problem was that merely thinking it wasn't enough—this theory needed evidence.

Cheng Shi needed to find definitive proof that "future Cheng Dashi" was the one the prophecy pointed to. Yet after prolonged deliberation, no clues emerged. So he decided to try a different angle.

Start by assuming Cheng Dashi had already been here.

Though he couldn't determine which future or what kind of future Cheng Dashi hailed from, nor how similar their experiences might be, he could at least adopt his own perspective for the most intuitive guess: If this was a Cheng Dashi whose experiences closely mirrored his own and whose personality hadn't changed, then at least a small part of his current situation could be explained.

At the very least, if he himself traveled back to the past, he wouldn't make it easy for his past self to detect his presence.

Cheng Shi had once mused that if he went back in time, he'd probably just watch his past self's amusing moments and do nothing. But that premise assumed accidentally stumbling upon the chance to travel back!

If he connected this to the Su Yida incident, the truth was likely far from "just watching"!

So if Cheng Dashi had a specific purpose, he would definitely have left a few breadcrumbs for himself after arriving—because in this current [Time], the only person he could trust was himself!

And the most critical point was... he also needed to hide it from the Gods!

If future Cheng Dashi wanted to do something in the past but would be completely exposed under the Gods' watchful eyes anyway, he wouldn't have bothered acting so secretly. That would mean he was using "traveling to the past" as a decoy to deceive others—meaning none of this had anything to do with Cheng Shi at all, and perhaps he was simply playing a game of [Time] against Them.

But since he'd been so covert, it meant he needed to evade the Gods' notice. The question was: what kind of clue could be noticed by a Cheng Shi who couldn't possibly hide anything from the Gods, while simultaneously escaping Their detection?

Cheng Shi sifted through his memories for a long time without results. But as he thought, a question suddenly struck him.

Memories!

Was the very act of combing through memories to unravel all of this, in itself, a clue?

Then why remember? Remember what?

'Remember... wait, wait!'

[Memory]!

Cheng Shi's eyes went wide. He'd just thought of an utterly inconceivable method of passing information—one that "could be noticed by himself while being hidden from the Gods":

Getting Them to unwittingly speak the hint aloud Themselves!

Cheng Shi finally recalled a crucial piece of information he'd overlooked. When [Memory] had summoned him for an audience, He had said:

"However, this farce still hasn't reached its conclusion. That restless Benefactor of yours added another stroke to a Collection that hasn't even been fully repaired yet.

Though that stroke erased itself on its own, this repeated provocation is quite embarrassing for me."

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted. He'd finally found the "answer"!

'That stroke—erased itself on its own!'

'Ha. Hahaha. Hahahahaha!'

'What a "future." What a "self." Truly identical to me—arriving without a sound, departing without a trace!'

'No—he's far more formidable than me. Because he even predicted [Memory]'s temperament. He used [Memory]'s complaint to leave me the perfect hint: My future self had already been here!'

A keen light blazed in Cheng Shi's eyes. So that deadly scheme from the future—that was your doing, Cheng Dashi?

You sent Su Yida back to kill me?

'Fine, fine, fine. So that's how it is. Absolutely certain I wouldn't die, huh? Just had to crank up the difficulty?'

'Great. You're really something!'

At this point, though no concrete evidence supported the theory, having found a logical anchor that explained every surface-level phenomenon, at least all the threads in Cheng Shi's mind were finally untangled.

Future Cheng Dashi hadn't simply slipped back for a quiet visit. He'd orchestrated an elaborate scheme from the future aimed at the present!

His actions matched Cheng Shi's own temperament. His behavioral logic was virtually identical. Thinking about it that way, he probably hadn't come back to sabotage himself.

But the question remained—what was he trying to do?

The same principle applied: if this Cheng Dashi was truly identical to him, he would never make contact with his past self. Just as Cheng Shi himself, in the dreamscape cemetery moments earlier, wouldn't have shown himself to comfort the younger version of himself no matter how hard that boy had sobbed.

Because that was their fate. A lonely fate.

So why had Cheng Dashi broken this principle and come back to set up a scheme?

Cheng Shi couldn't figure it out—he didn't know what specifically had happened in the future. But he could guess, by putting himself in those shoes.

If he were that future Cheng Shi, what circumstances could possibly compel him to secretly return to the past and personally arrange a scheme for his past self?

Given the unknowability of the future, he couldn't fully immerse himself in the perspective. So Cheng Shi began reasoning backward from the present.

If last night's dream hadn't dissipated, under what circumstances would he intervene in the past— influencing the version of himself still in school?

He couldn't think of any. Not even Old Jia's death had made him consider warning young Cheng Shi to prepare in advance. So what could possibly make him change?

Cheng Shi pondered for a moment, then steered his thoughts toward the worst-case scenario.

If someday he was about to forget Old Jia entirely, would he choose to go back and, through some small act, tell young Cheng Shi to prepare—to engrave those memories deeper?

Probably. But Cheng Shi didn't believe he'd ever forget Old Jia. Even if the Gods threw everything They had at him, he was confident he'd remember.

Because the path he walked, the things he did, the person he did them for—all carried Old Jia's will. He was raised by Old Jia's own hand. As long as he was alive, that was the greatest tribute to Old Jia.

But what if... he died?

Then he died. Nothing grand about it. Death was simply another form of reunion.

But what if—at a time when he still had the chance to continue remembering the past, to continue missing Old Jia—he was forced to die because of events beyond his ability to handle? Would he want to give his past self a chance?

Just like now—if external forces were about to shatter the dream, and the dream could never be replayed in the years to come—would he want to give the Cheng Shi inside the dream a chance to keep dreaming, even if it meant a nightmare born of Misfortune?

At this thought, Cheng Shi hesitated.

Chapter 305: The Clue He Left Behind Is...!

Cheng Shi could feel his future self's hesitation too!

Because he genuinely didn't know the answer. He firmly believed that everyone had their own fate. Yet he also couldn't bear the thought of all his memories of Old Jia simply evaporating in another stroke of misfortune.

So...

That was why Cheng Dashi had chosen such an elaborate, covert method to leave a hint—or perhaps, a choice?

Then what was this choice?

Setting aside what the choice might be, the information he'd deduced today alone was staggering enough.

He stood in Eposka's garden, brow deeply furrowed, face tight with gravity.

Because Cheng Dashi seemed to have conveyed something extraordinary and deeply ominous—that this "dream" called reality, in the future, appeared to have shattered...

Another tragedy!

Perhaps in the future, the entire world had become a tragedy—one that even a Cheng Dashi capable of deceiving the Gods couldn't prevent.

'So that's why you came back, future me!'

'You're so much like me that you believe our futures run along similar paths.'

'So it turns out our entire lives consist of stumbling through one tragedy after another, until we suddenly vanish in the final misfortune.'

'Heh. So that's why He favored me?'

'Fixed Destiny. Fixed Destiny.'

'So this is what Fixed Destiny means!'

'Fate...'

'Damn it!'

'Just great.'

Cheng Shi had been standing motionless for far too long—so long that Hong Lin thought something was wrong. The giant bear delivered a thunderous palm strike to Eposka's body, knocking it backward, then charged toward Cheng Shi on all fours.

Once she reached him, she roared, scooped up both Cheng Shi and Amir in her paws, and bolted toward the garden's perimeter.

The jolt snapped Cheng Shi back to reality. He blurted out in confusion:

"Did you lose?"

The giant bear froze mid-stride, then instantly turned ferocious, roaring:

"CHENG! SHI!"

The explosive roar sprayed spittle directly onto Cheng Shi's face. He suddenly realized Hong Lin hadn't lost at all—she'd only retreated because she thought he was in trouble. He froze for a moment, then scratched his head with an embarrassed grin:

"My bad! That one's on me! But retreating works out. I've got some ideas I need to think through carefully. Somewhere quiet. Let's fall back."

Hong Lin had been seething over that "Did you lose?" remark. But seeing Cheng Shi's increasingly serious expression, she assumed he'd figured out something critical. Swallowing her indignation, she ground out: "Where to? The Fog Gate is gone."

Cheng Shi took a deep breath: "The Void. We go to the Void!"

Even though his shadow had lost its responsiveness, and entering the Void now might mean all traces of the "future" were long gone, he still wanted to take a look—to see if any clues remained.

Hong Lin frowned deeply: "Walking through the Void is worse than walking through the Sighing Forest directly. At least here we have landmarks. The Void has no sense of direction at all.

Unless you have a way to navigate?"

"No." Cheng Shi shook his head.

"Then—?" Hong Lin's eye twitched. She wanted nothing more than to crush this infuriating Fate Weaver in her paw. But almost immediately, she realized Cheng Shi only wanted to get out of Eposka's sight—he had no intention of returning to the Mushroom-Footed People's Tribe. She wrinkled her nose and growled: "You'd better have found something!"

With that, she extended her bear paw and slammed it down on empty air. A shockwave powerful enough to tear reality rippled outward, and through brute force alone, she ripped open a Void rift right in front of Cheng Shi.

Cheng Shi gaped at the spectacle. Before he could even react, the giant bear unceremoniously hurled him in.

Hong Lin leaped in after him, then sealed the rift behind her. Eposka was in hot pursuit not far behind, and when it saw the scent of [Prosperity] vanish before its eyes, it let out a frenzied roar, growing even more volatile.

But it was nothing more than impotent rage. Utterly useless.

...

The Void.

The Void once again.

If a trial didn't include at least one trip to the Void, it simply wasn't a complete trial for Cheng Shi.

'Home again. This time, really home.'

This was his first return to the Void since becoming a child of [Void], but staring into the endless darkness before him, Cheng Shi felt no more relaxed than before.

Because from the instant he'd stepped into the Void, he'd begun searching for Cheng Dashi's traces. But after scanning in every direction, he found nothing but infinite blackness. His brow furrowed once more.

Seeing Cheng Shi's grave expression, Hong Lin—having reverted to human form—frowned slightly, let out a cold snort, casually kicked the unconscious Amir aside, and said with visible displeasure:

"Talk. What did you find?"

"..."

'A slave driver through and through. Not a moment's rest, not even for acupuncture!'

'But... have I truly missed my chance at that prophecy?'

Cheng Shi sighed inwardly, but on the surface, he shook his head with a rueful smile: "Relax. I'm almost there. Just a bit more and I'll have it."

He sat down cross-legged, eyes closed, and continued thinking.

Hong Lin saw this and frowned but said nothing more.

Cheng Shi was certain that if he wanted to send a message back to the past, he would always have a contingency. Perhaps the once-responsive shadow hadn't been meant as his clue at all—rather, it was the shadow becoming unresponsive that served as the actual alert.

Pursuing this line of thought, he continued expanding and branching his reasoning, searching for whatever hint Cheng Dashi had left behind.

First, one thing had to be established: if "he" was the one setting the game, no piece of information would be wasted. So the clues had been planted from the moment Su Yida entered the picture.

But Cheng Shi was genuinely curious—had that Su Yida, who died simultaneously in the past and the future, been "tricked" into coming back by his future self? Or had it all been... an act?

Probably not an act... what kind of actor gets himself killed performing?

Besides, the desire to kill him that had burned in Su Yida's eyes had been all too intense. He'd only held back because of his own plan.

Was it possible, then, that his future self had deceived Su Yida first?

"..."

'Can't think about it that way. The future is the future. I am me. You can say we're alike, but you can't simply draw an equals sign.'

Since he'd thought of Su Yida, he naturally had to consider the [Prosperity] Divinity the man had carried!

That Divinity had been meant for Old Cui, but by a strange twist of fate, Old Cui had stuffed it back into Cheng Shi's body. So—was this also within Cheng Dashi's calculations?

[Prosperity] had catalyzed the fruitless Conjugate Whisper. And the failsafe Cheng Dashi had hidden within it had quietly crept into the fruit Cheng Shi had fabricated, nesting inside his shadow, even fooling the Gods.

But had it truly fooled Them?

If Cheng Dashi possessed such power, why not be more direct? Even if direct contact with himself was off limits, the clues could at least be more straightforward. The very fact that he'd been so secretive meant he couldn't yet deceive Them outright—he'd merely exploited Them...

And Them—especially the four of [Existence] and [Void]—didn't operate solely within the space-time dimensions inhabited by mortals. So perhaps, in the future, Cheng Dashi was also locked in a game against Them. He'd simply managed to steal one round this time, getting his message through.

If that was the case, then he must have found a way to Change the tragedy. And the hint of that method was hidden somewhere within the scheme he'd set up.

So what was it...

In truth, Cheng Shi had already arrived at the answer.

It was [Prosperity]!

From beginning to end, throughout this "killing game" from the future—or this twist of [Fate]—the shadow of [Prosperity] had appeared at every critical juncture.

And this trial, as it happened, was also a game of [Prosperity].

When coincidences piled up until they wove through the entire story, they could no longer be called coincidences.

If Cheng Dashi had chosen this specific trial to unveil the hint and let himself know he'd once been here, then the clue he was pointing to was painfully obvious.

It was [Prosperity]!

The turning point for that future tragedy—the shattering of reality—might lie right within this trial!

Chapter 306: Come On—Let Me See How You Plan to Trick Me Today!

Cheng Shi's eyes snapped open, sharp light flickering within them. He had an even bolder idea—the so-called turning point probably wasn't the trial itself. Could it be the one who sat on high? Him?

Or rather, could it be [Prosperity] Himself?

Since the Gods had brought down the Faith Game, and the game's conclusion was a tragedy, did breaking out of it require starting with the game itself?

More bluntly—did it require starting with the game's creators, the Gods?

So... Cheng Dashi had set his sights on [Prosperity]?!

Did he believe [Prosperity] was the breakthrough?!

Cheng Shi was thunderstruck. This "future self" of his was actually plotting against a God who stood above all!

It was insane. It was dangerous. It was terrifying!

But it was also incredibly fascinating!

Cheng Shi suddenly smiled. Throughout his speculation, he'd been debating whether to involve himself. The indecision gnawed at him—until he recalled Old Jia standing beside the barbecue stand, gazing at that top scholar's father.

The undisguised envy in the old man's eyes had been unmistakable.

'A top scholar...'

'The old man wanted to be a top scholar's father too.'

Seeing Cheng Shi open his eyes, Hong Lin frowned and sat down across from him.

"Figured it out?"

Cheng Shi looked at the [Prosperity] Chosen One before him and suddenly asked:

"Baldy, what's it like being a Chosen One?"

Hong Lin blinked, then something odd flickered in her gaze.

"Boring. Dull. Nerve-wracking. Everyone's got their eye on you.

But...

There are perks. It saves you a lot of unnecessary trouble, thanks to the Chosen One's reputation."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi was taken aback. He asked:

"You're actually afraid of people targeting you?"

"Mm." Hong Lin nodded, expression deadly serious. "What I fear are Those who aren't 'people'— Them—paying attention to me."

"You seem to... not like [Prosperity]?"

"It's not about like or dislike. I like power. He gives me power. I wouldn't call it gratitude, but I'm thankful.

But what I do and what He wills are worlds apart. You've probably noticed.

What He champions is the flourishing of all life in the universe. But me—I'm a selfish person. I can't be bothered with whether others prosper or not. All I want is for me and my friends to prosper. All I care about is me and my friends prospering.

As grand as His vision is, that's how narrow my selfishness is.

And yet, despite all this, I still receive His attention, earn His approval, and keep climbing the Ladder of Ascent...

That feeling is unsettling. Deeply unsettling.

No matter how I think about it, it reeks of conspiracy.

So whenever someone calls me Chosen One, I can't help but read into it—wondering if these so-called Gods really are choosing something. As for what, no one probably knows. No one dares to know.

You've heard the talk, right? A lot of people think the Faith Game was never designed to be won or cleared. I'm not a pessimist, but I think... they're probably not wrong."

Cheng Shi listened in silence until the end, then looked at Hong Lin with surprise—this "friend" was starting to feel like a real friend. She was actually confiding in him?

Still, there was something undeniably strange about the relationship between Hong Lin's actions and [Prosperity]'s response.

This wasn't worship of [Prosperity]—it looked more like plundering!

She accepted [Prosperity]'s blessings, used the power to gain more advantages, then erected walls of caution and suspicion against the faith itself. In essence, how was that different from a shameless bandit?

So what exactly did [Prosperity] see in Hong Lin?

But setting that aside, another question nagged at Cheng Shi—today's speculation seemed to confirm the notion that the Faith Game was very likely a game without victory or completion.

The only question was how long this game could continue.

And from which [Time] in the future had the Cheng Dashi who'd left him this choice actually come?

Cheng Shi's thoughts churned, his eyes clouded with uncertainty. Seeing the flash of bewilderment in his gaze, Hong Lin smirked:

"Don't overthink it. I just felt like you'd understand.

I haven't shared my thoughts with anyone in a long time. The people around my score range all have their own agendas—hard to trust. And the so-called Chosen Ones are all walking their self-proclaimed righteous paths to godhood with unwavering conviction.

Players like me, who want the benefits yet resist the implications—there aren't many of us.

Tao Yi is my closest friend, but she's too... weak.

The little fox can figure out a lot of things, but a fox is still a fox—she can't withstand a tiger's swipe. So she shouldn't know too much.

If you want to bare your heart to a tiger, first, you need to be a fox who can eat one.

And you—you look like one to me."

"..."

'I'll take that as a compliment...'

Hong Lin snickered at his expression: "Why the sudden interest in being a Chosen One?"

"No reason. Just curious. Hey Baldy—would you say a Chosen One... counts as a top scholar?"

That question genuinely stumped Hong Lin. She spent a moment with an indescribable look on her face, then nodded uncertainly.

"If you really had to... sure. But it's more like a martial top scholar... hmm, the kind with a bit of brains."

'With a bit of brains...'

That qualifier was perhaps a touch too pointed—and not strictly necessary either.

"A martial top scholar..." Cheng Shi smacked his lips. "A martial top scholar is still a top scholar."

"Are you having a breakdown?"

What's with all this random nonsense? I asked if you've figured things out, and you start talking about Chosen Ones and top scholars. What's that supposed to mean?"

"Hm? It doesn't mean anything. I've figured it out."

"What is it?!" Hong Lin's eyes lit up, suddenly energized.

"I'm going to take the exam—no, wait, that's not—"

Cheng Shi nearly blurted out what was really on his mind. He hastily swallowed the rest, then looked at this somewhat reliable new friend who didn't particularly like [Prosperity], and suddenly broke into a radiant smile.

"What are you grinning at? Spit it out."

Cheng Shi nodded, wiped the smile off his face, and with utter solemnity, took Hong Lin's hand in his. He spoke with grave earnestness:

"Can I trust you?"

Hong Lin raised an eyebrow and glanced at her captured hand. She didn't pull away. Instead, she leaned back with an amused, teasing smirk:

"The heart-to-heart, bare-all kind?"

"..."

That single sentence obliterated every shred of atmosphere Cheng Shi had painstakingly built.

His toes curled so hard they nearly cramped. His face went rigid, cycling through shades of green and white. After an agonizing stretch of embarrassment, he finally remembered to release Hong Lin's hand, wearing the expression of someone who'd lost all will to live:

"So you and Tao Yi really are close, huh... ha... haha... ha..."

Hong Lin snickered.

"She told me that whenever you say those words, it means you're about to start lying.

Come on—let me see how you plan to trick me today!"

"..."

Cheng Shi went numb.

'Damn it! This world really is one giant mouth!'

Chapter 307: Do You Believe in Fate?

Cheng Shi knew there was a limit to what he could do right now. Even if Cheng Dashi intended to scheme against [Prosperity] in this trial, the only thing he could actually contribute was attracting [Prosperity]'s gaze. Nothing more.

But the question was—how?

There was actually one remarkably simple method: backstab his own teammate. Screw Hong Lin over!

If he tricked [Prosperity]'s favored Chosen One into Oathbreaking—into becoming a follower of another god, say... [Deceit] or [Fate]—would [Prosperity] show up?

Most likely, yes!

But the life-cherishing Cheng Shi feared [Prosperity] would "deal with" him afterward. So his habitually Steady self had to think of something else.

Since backstabbing was off the table, he'd just "join" instead!

When his "offerings" to [Prosperity] were satisfactory enough, He would naturally cast His gaze upon him.

So Cheng Shi pondered for a moment, then launched today's con.

A con that Hong Lin already knew was coming and had braced herself for.

He took two deep breaths, shed the earlier embarrassment, and fixed Hong Lin with a perfectly serious, blazing stare. His opening line was earth-shattering:

"I want to make a big gamble."

'Gamble?'

Hong Lin frowned, confused. What did gambling have to do with the current situation?

Was the tangle between Eposka and the Mushroom-Footed People supposed to be solved with a bet?

Bet on what?

Bet that killing Eposka wouldn't kill the Mushroom-Footed People?

Or bet that the [Prosperity] Divinity they held could truly awaken the soul within Eposka that rightfully belonged to [Prosperity]?

Hong Lin was momentarily taken aback. She suddenly recalled something Cheng Shi had once said:

'There are only two kinds of gambles worth placing bets on: when there's no way out, or when the fix is in.'

The current situation didn't look like a dead end. Worst case, they'd lose the trial and drop a few points. So... had this Fate Weaver found a way to stack the deck?

Hong Lin's interest was suddenly piqued. She raised an eyebrow:

"How big?"

"Big enough to make Them come down in person!"

"..."

It was almost laughable—it sounded like something a clueless player with delusions of grandeur would say as a joke. And yet, when she heard those words, her heart involuntarily tightened. A flicker of alarm crossed her eyes.

'Oh no. This Fate Weaver seems to be serious.'

'Is this the con?'

'What's he trying to deceive me into?'

'Or is he trying to whip me into helping him with something?'

A Druid who'd never hesitated even when facing the massed ranks of ten thousand enemies actually felt a twinge of nervousness.

But then she laughed at her own tension.

How could a con artist's words be this persuasive!

No wonder he'd once tricked Zhen Yi!

But this only proved his intentions weren't pure. What the hell was this Fate Weaver planning?!

Hong Lin's scrutinizing gaze swept Cheng Shi from head to toe. She pressed down her tumultuous emotions, curled her lip dismissively:

"That's your trick?

Using Them to rattle me?

Mediocre."

Cheng Shi shook his head solemnly, his gaze unwavering:

"I'm not lying. I'm inviting you—to take a big gamble with me."

"..."

Looking into eyes that didn't seem to be faking it, Hong Lin went rigid. She suddenly realized that fighting was actually the least nerve-wracking thing in the world.

"Why gamble that big? How does making Them come down help this trial?"

Or more importantly—how does it help you?"

Hong Lin appeared to field Cheng Shi's words with casual ease, but in truth, the alarm in her eyes had already been noted.

'Surprise and curiosity. Good. As long as it's not resistance or disgust, the partnership still has a chance.'

So Cheng Shi smiled and explained:

"It's not about what's good for me—it's about what's good for us."

At the end of the day, even winning a trial only adds a dozen or so points. At our level, nobody cares about those numbers..."

At this, Cheng Shi paused with an odd expression before continuing:

"What we should care about is how to walk the road ahead!"

Hearing this, Hong Lin's expression finally turned serious.

It echoed what she'd just confided in him. The fox really was ready to bare its heart to the tiger—but oddly enough, she felt no resistance toward this possibly fraudulent exchange of sincerity. Because she truly lacked someone to discuss the road ahead with.

Same answer as always: Tao Yi would be perfect, but she was too weak.

There was no shortage of strong players in the game, of course, but they all had their own agendas—good for competition, impossible for genuine connection.

But Cheng Shi... was different. Everything he'd done suggested he wasn't a bad person. At least no worse than she was.

More importantly, he'd saved Tao Yi. And Tao Yi trusted him. Someone who could earn her shrewd little fox bestie's trust even after being conned was, to some degree, trustworthy. So Hong Lin decided to let Cheng Shi continue.

But Cheng Shi stopped talking. Having whetted her appetite to the limit, he asked another question:

"Baldy, you need to first tell me—do you dare to gamble? After that, I'll decide whether to lay everything on the table!"

Hong Lin's expression shifted. She snickered:

"Tch. Cheng Shi, you haven't told me what the bet is, what the stakes are, or what happens if we lose—not a single word. And you're asking me if I dare?"

How is that different from guessing blindly?

Or is this a test—are you evaluating my courage?"

"Yes. It's both a test and an invitation.

I need to be sure my partner has the same do-or-die nerve that I do. Otherwise, when I go all-in at the table, I'm afraid my teammate might get scared and run off with all my chips.

I'm not without a plan. But first, I need to find someone worth sharing it with... someone who's the same kind of gambler as me!"

Hong Lin fell silent.

Never before had she felt such turmoil inside. She didn't think Cheng Shi was lying. He wanted to go mad—absolutely, utterly mad. But the problem was, she had no idea how insane this "madness show" would actually get.

Honestly, she didn't need the points. She didn't have firm faith either. Even though this was her Benefactor's trial, winning or losing meant the same to her. From start to finish, all she cared about was one thing: honoring her friendship with Tao Yi. That was why she'd given Cheng Shi "special treatment."

But after two days of teaming up, that courtesy—originally borrowed from Tao Yi's perspective—had become genuinely her own.

So she felt this decision went beyond "gamble or not." It also contained an invitation about friendship.

This Fate Weaver was clearly asking her: did she want a friend? The same kind of friend as Tao Yi.

Before meeting Cheng Shi, Hong Lin had always considered herself a "Steady" warrior. But right now, something inside her was stirring—those wild, restless, uneasy genes screaming at her to accept the Fate Weaver's invitation. To join this so-called gamble to drag Them down from Their thrones.

Cheng Shi was sharp. He could see Hong Lin's indecision. Though she hadn't agreed, not refusing was already a kind of answer.

So the deviously cunning part of him dropped a second weight onto those wobbling Scales.

"Do you believe in fate?"

Hong Lin froze, then flushed with a mix of embarrassment and irritation: "Did Tao Yi tell you?"

"Huh?"

Cheng Shi was baffled. What did this have to do with Tao Yi?

Seeing his genuine confusion, Hong Lin instantly realized she'd jumped to conclusions. She frowned, spent a moment wrestling with some complex emotion, then nodded softly.

"Yes. I believe!"

"..."

'Wait—sis, I had a hundred-thousand-word speech prepared in my head. You just went and believed? Just like that?'

'But hey, works for me. Saves me from having to patch up my own lies.'

Surprise flickered through Cheng Shi's eyes again, but soon his smile grew even brighter.

"Do you think... your luck is good?"

Hong Lin's expression went strange. She nodded, her answer oddly stiff: "Yes!"

"Excellent. I believe too. My gambling luck is exceptional. And I'm also a Fate Knower."

"I know you're a Fate Weaver."

"No—you don't understand. The 'Knower' I'm talking about uses the character for 'knowing,' as in 'foreknowing.' Not 'weaving,' as in 'mending!'"

Hong Lin frowned: "What do you mean?"

"Fate is a fascinating thing.

Every person has their own destiny script. When the destinies of all living beings weave together, they form an even grander world script. This is what ordinary people call 'the script theory of destiny.'

Of course, for Chosen Ones like you, this might be old hat.

So let me put it differently:

If [Fate] has already written your name in the finale of the world script, then no matter how you rewrite your own story, you can never be absent from the final act He penned Himself."

At this, Hong Lin's eyes went wide. She suddenly realized what this "Fate Knower" was getting at.

Cheng Shi noticed her contracting pupils and continued with a smile:

"So—do you understand what I'm saying?"

What I mean is: if you believe in fate, and if you're certain of your own good fortune, then even if you Pierce the Sky and face the Gods head-on, you will survive under His protection until the moment the world script requires you to take the stage!

And that—is Fixed Destiny!

Heaven's decree is fixed!"

The instant those words landed, Hong Lin's mind detonated.

Chapter 308: The Destined Ones

Looking at the stunned Hong Lin, Cheng Shi smiled and produced his die.

He rolled the bone-white Die of Fate between his fingers and said with an air of mystery:

"When I'm in the script, even heaven-shaking catastrophes can be survived;

When I'm not in the script, even treading on thin ice offers no guarantee!

We walk the path of [Fate]—gamblers blessed with [good fortune], lunatics favored by [Fixed Destiny].

We may not be able to determine fate, but we can exploit it to the fullest!"

Yes—exploit fate!

Ever since his [Fate] trial, Cheng Shi had realized that Fixed Destiny was an incredibly profound concept.

So profound it could make a person feel suffocated and hopeless about the impossibility of changing fate.

His own feelings about destiny weren't quite that bleak, but that didn't mean he never felt powerless. Facing an ending that nothing could change, he too experienced a deep sense of defeat.

But Cheng Shi was never one to wallow. He understood that everything had two sides. If something could make you feel powerless, it could make others feel powerless too.

And that powerlessness of others might very well become his weapon!

So rather than drowning in the inescapability of destiny's script, he'd spent a long time thinking—until he'd devised a clever trick to exploit fate and offer it as tribute!

And this little trick boiled down to two lines. The first was:

"Do you believe in fate?"

No matter when, no matter where, no matter to whom, he could toss out this question. Then all he needed was to add "This—is Fixed Destiny!" at the story's conclusion, and there was a very good chance of converting a disbeliever into a believer of fate—or at least pushing them from skepticism to half-belief or startled uncertainty.

And today, above the Void of the Sighing Forest, was his first time putting the theory he'd derived into practice. His test subject was Hong Lin—someone who already believed in fate.

"So, given all of this, as long as you believe in destiny—why not try gambling with me?"

Baldy, you're the only person who knows my true identity. Now, I officially invite you—join us!

Let us write the most spectacular and insane climax in His script together!"

Hong Lin, rocked to her core by this Inverse Causality take on fate, grew serious in a way she rarely did. She fixed Cheng Shi with a solemn stare, articulating every word:

"Who... are 'us'?"

Cheng Shi smiled enigmatically, stopped spinning the die, and turned its one-pip face toward her.

"The Destined Ones!

We are all destined."

With that, he tossed the die into the Void. Watching it tumble slowly through the darkness, he declared with fervent exhilaration:

"When [Fate] inscribes our names in the final chapter, when the script plants enough foreshadowing for our entrance!

We must not disappoint Him. We must not betray the audience's expectations.

We shall herald the current act with the most delirious of battle cries—an unparalleled, incomparable climax!

A climax that makes [Time] pause, and [Memory] engrave it forever!"

And when the Die of Fate wobbled to a stop on one pip, the fervor on Cheng Shi's face reached its apex. Half-deranged, half-devout, he closed his eyes, raised both hands high, and prayed aloud:

"All roads traveled, all paths to come—all are destined!"

That single utterance struck Hong Lin's consciousness like a resounding bell, setting her entire mind ablaze!

She watched the scene unfold before her, utterly shaken, rooted to the spot. Only four words occupied her thoughts:

'Destined Ones!'

But in the next instant those four words became "heart-bewitching manipulation," only to shift back to "Destined Ones" a second later...

The Cheng Shi standing before her no longer resembled a cunning Fate Weaver. He looked more like a zealot—a madman willing to pay any price!

But there was no denying it: this fresh perspective on [Fate] was just that—fresh. And utterly captivating.

Thinking back on everything she'd been through, this novel blade had thrust straight into Hong Lin's heart!

A direct bullseye!

She was wavering.

Cheng Shi maintained his pose, preserving the mystique, but cracked his eyes open just enough to sneak a peek at Hong Lin.

Seeing her utterly thunderstruck expression, he knew this was practically a done deal. But just as he was about to wrap things up—

The unexpected happened!

No one could have predicted that the moment Cheng Shi finished reciting his self-fabricated prayer, the entire Void erupted!

!!!

Hong Lin's eyes snapped into focus, scanning their surroundings in shock. Countless wisps of iridescent black mist surged and coalesced from every direction, streaming toward Cheng Shi, crystallizing atop his Die of Fate into a brand-new Die of Fate!

When Hong Lin laid eyes on this die, her pupils violently contracted. Her scalp went numb!

This didn't feel like one of the dice players carried. It was more like—the token bestowed by Them at the Path Starting Point!

So why did Cheng Shi have one—no, why would this so-called "Destined Ones" organization possess a die from the Path Starting Point?!

Had they actually prayed for a faith-converting token to recruit new members?!

She'd never heard of such a thing. She'd never known the tokens from the Path Starting Point could even function as items.

What was it actually for?

Hong Lin stared in disbelief, whipping her head up to look at Cheng Shi.

And Cheng Shi...

Was internally losing his mind.

On the surface, he maintained his mysterious smile with every fiber of his being, while inside he was cursing his Benefactor six ways to Sunday.

'My Lord, what exactly is this supposed to mean?'

'I'm in the middle of conning someone and You decide to help out?!'

'Fine—even if You wanted to help [Deceit] crack a smile again, did You really need to come down personally?'

'You conjure a die out of thin air and now what am I supposed to say?'

'My hundred-thousand-word revised speech is wasted again!'

'Could You at LEAST give me a heads-up next time You pull something like this?!'

'Even a Clown can't improvise ALL the time!'

'I'm done. Completely, utterly done.'

Seeing Hong Lin's gaze sharpen by the second, Cheng Shi sighed internally with helpless resignation and immediately said:

"See—this is [Fate]'s choice. You truly are... a child of [Fate]!"

He'd been floundering for words, intending to buy time with vague rhetoric. But to his shock, a tossed-off phrase like "child of Fate" somehow convinced Hong Lin entirely.

The combative [Prosperity] Chosen One's expression cycled through a series of changes before she began murmuring to herself:

"So... I really am a child of [Fate]?"

'Sis, you're not turning this around on me, are you?'

'How are you getting into character already?'

Before Cheng Shi could figure out what was happening, Hong Lin looked up and asked:

"You're saying I should Oathbreak to [Fate]?"

Is that the future you've found for me?"

'Don't make trouble, sis—I don't want [Prosperity] coming to get me after the trial!'

Cheng Shi hastily shook his head. He picked up the new die, scanned its properties, then his lips twitched as he smiled: "Not betrayal—fusion!"

"Fusion?!" Hong Lin's pupils contracted, brow furrowing. "A second faith? You want me to choose [Fate] as my second faith?"

Or is choosing [Fate] as a second faith mandatory for joining the Destined Ones?!"

"..."

'Sis, that's way too many questions. I'm a walking disaster. I can't answer a single one.'

Cheng Shi was on the verge of tears. None of this had been part of his plan. But at this point, he had no choice but to improvise—rewriting the script on the fly to match this unexpected turn of events.

As for why [Fate] had suddenly responded, he had no idea. But he knew one thing: this meticulously planned con had just become much simpler.

Because who in their right mind would waste an item that could change someone's faith just to trick a single person?

And yes—this was indeed an item that could alter faith. When a non-[Fate] follower picked it up, [Fate] would become their second faith.

This truly was a gift from [Fate]. Why He had bestowed it here and now, no one knew.

Cheng Shi's original plan had already revolved around [Fate]. His reason for wanting to pull Hong Lin in was his belief that the Mushroom-Footed People's Tribe in the Sighing Forest was most likely an experiment run by scholars from the Tower of Logic!

He couldn't imagine how else a chieftain of the Mushroom-Footed People could have known about this kind of Faith Grafting contract. Such a contract touched upon the very foundations of the Gods. Without one of Them witnessing and protecting the process, without the Erudition Presidium orchestrating and facilitating it, a soulless Eposka and a band of terrified Mushroom-Footed People couldn't possibly have signed a pact to steal [Prosperity]'s faith.

So Cheng Shi estimated that at least three of Them were entangled in this affair: [Prosperity], [Decay], and... [Truth]!

After prolonged deliberation, he'd finally thought of a method with a high probability of drawing [Prosperity]'s direct gaze. But executing it would inevitably destroy this experiment!

Cheng Shi feared that when this experiment was ruined—just as Galusha had destroyed the Stars Dagger—[Truth] might shamelessly intervene in person. So he planned to drag his own Benefactor, [Fate], in front of him as a shield.

He knew [Fate] looked down on [Truth].

During that previous [Chaos] trial, He had linked Cheng Shi with Galusha—the likely [Folly] follower who was the mastermind behind the Tower of Logic's destruction. So Cheng Shi figured that if he could please [Fate], perhaps when [Truth] came down, his Lord would—for the sake of His own "plans"—shield him from [Folly]'s nemesis.

Therefore!

The whole "Destined Ones" pitch wasn't just to hoodwink Hong Lin—it was to please [Fate]!

Cheng Shi's targets had been two all along: Hong Lin, and [Fate].

What he hadn't expected was that his barrage of ranting about "Fixed Destiny" would not only dupe Hong Lin but actually coax [Fate] Himself into making an appearance!

He'd even bestowed a die that could unlock a second faith...

'Seriously—if all it took was picking up a die to get a second faith, why did I have to go through trial after trial, swallow bitter fruit, and endure crushing pressure?!'

'Why does Hong Lin get to skip all the prerequisites?!'

'Or was it that He'd had His eye on the [Prosperity] Chosen One all along, and I just happened to push things to this point?'

With that thought, Cheng Shi looked at Hong Lin—who was deep in contemplation—and spoke again:

"You should know that everyone who's gotten the word is quietly searching for their second faith. They are pushing this forward."

Hong Lin nodded grimly: "I know."

"Oh? So other ones of Them have already summoned you?"

"Yes!"

'I knew it!'

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, privately guessing it was probably [War].

"Did you accept?"

"No."

Cheng Shi understood. Hong Lin hadn't found a second faith she wanted to embrace. And why would she? She didn't even fully believe in [Prosperity]. How could she commit to a second?

Perhaps that was exactly what she'd been struggling with.

While everyone else scrambled for their second faith, this Druid who'd never lost was suddenly in danger of falling behind.

Hong Lin was silent for a long moment before speaking again:

"I know They're pushing the fusion of faiths, but I've never found a second faith that suits me.

[Life] is bland and boring. [Descent] is self-destructive and defeatist.

[Civilization] is filthy and underhanded. [Chaos] is nothing but a joke.

In my view, only [Existence] and [Void] are even worth considering. But I had no specific target in mind, and the timing was never right. I've genuinely been torn.

But... now that I've seen this die, I have to admit—your Destined Ones have piqued my interest.

Go on, Cheng Shi. Let me first hear just how big this gamble of yours that'll shatter the heavens really is!"

Chapter 309: He Can Steal—So Why Can't We?

What does it feel like when you're pretending to be insane to intimidate someone, only to discover your opponent is genuinely insane?

Cheng Shi was starting to get that exact feeling.

'Oh no. I hyped her up too much. I've unleashed the crazy lurking inside Baldy's heart.'

But it didn't matter. This had always been a grand performance. If the actors weren't a little unhinged, they couldn't even take the stage.

So Cheng Shi maintained his enigmatic smile, first tucking away the Fate token, then spoke to Hong Lin, carefully enunciating every word:

"I'll take that as a yes. When we win this gamble, this die is yours."

Hong Lin hadn't been bamboozled into stupidity. She didn't let Cheng Shi keep painting pie in the sky. Curling her lip, she said:

"Cheng Shi, you should know—embracing a second faith isn't something the god who hasn't yet become a Benefactor can decide alone. It requires my Benefactor [Prosperity]'s approval.

Even if I get the Destined Ones' die afterward, [Prosperity] might not agree to let me set foot on [Fate]'s path.

The reason I'm interested in the Destined Ones is because this organization has you—a friend worth having—and you happen to be somewhat interesting. That's all."

"Then shall I start by thanking you for this friendship?"

"Tch. Say something useful." Hong Lin looked faintly disgusted by Cheng Shi's fake smile.

Cheng Shi nodded, his expression turning solemn:

"Are you afraid to die?"

Hong Lin frowned: "What a boring question. Setting aside whether someone buffed by [Prosperity] can even die—if you're asking me to fight Eposka to the death, I can tell you: if the enemy is only that thing, I won't die. So naturally, I'm not afraid."

"No, no, no—you've got it wrong. Our plan has absolutely nothing to do with fighting Eposka. If you're sure you want in, I'll lay it all out!"

A flicker of hesitation crossed Hong Lin's eyes. But once it passed, no trace of indecision remained on her face.

Cheng Shi understood instantly. Without a moment's dawdling, he revealed the entire plan.

"I don't think simply correcting the Mushroom-Footed People's faith qualifies as a prairie fire."

Hong Lin frowned but didn't interrupt.

"A Tribe of a few hundred to a thousand in this vast forest is negligible in both numbers and territory. It can't possibly match the theme of 'prairie fire.'"

And we can't find more Mushroom-Footed People to worship [Prosperity] either—after all, they follow [Prosperity], not [Birth]. You can't breed a batch of new Mushroom-Footed People in a few days.

What's more, the [Prosperity] they're currently worshipping is actually Eposka. The more of that kind of worship there is, the greater the blasphemy against [Prosperity].

So that definitely can't be the answer.

Which led me to another thought: is it possible that your 'hard-hearted' Benefactor doesn't even need these few hundred or thousand followers?

Or to put it another way—maybe the prairie fire He wants isn't a salvation at all, but a...

Retaliation?"

"!!!"

Hong Lin was stunned. She hadn't stopped being shocked since this conversation began. Her eyes went wide as if she'd suddenly guessed Cheng Shi's plan, and she exclaimed in disbelief:

"You mean... a base raid?"

Cheng Shi laughed heartily and gave a thumbs-up:

"Well said! A base raid it is!

Since Eposka used Faith Grafting to steal [Prosperity]'s power, why can't we use the same method to steal [Decay]'s power?

Think about it—in this Sighing Forest, [Decay]'s followers are everywhere! Especially at night, when even the trees and grass come alive as His followers. If we can graft all that faith onto a [Prosperity] follower, wouldn't that ignite a fire of 'retaliation'?!"

The words had barely left his mouth before Hong Lin believed him!

Because she knew [Prosperity] was precisely that kind of god. Whether from in-game evidence or scraps of recorded history, He was almost incapable of tolerating betrayal. Every single Oathbreaker who defected had been struck with His vicious curses and punishments!

But... wait!

The [Prosperity] follower who'd have to bear this Faith Grafting...

Surely he didn't mean her?

Hong Lin's mind went blank for a second. She recalled Cheng Shi's earlier question: 'Are you afraid to die?'

"..."

'I've honestly never been afraid—but you literally want me dead!!!'

Her expression hardened. She fixed Cheng Shi with a heavy stare, suppressing the urge to punch him, and ground through clenched teeth:

"No [Decay] follower is going to worship [Prosperity]. And certainly not one that's already a [Prosperity] follower. I'll admit your analysis has some merit. But this plan is impossible to—"

She stopped mid-sentence.

Because she watched Cheng Shi pull a contract out from behind his back!

The contract between Eposka and the Mushroom-Footed People had somehow been swiped and hidden on his person without anyone noticing!

"You..."

Cheng Shi declared with utmost solemnity:

"What about me?"

Something this valuable was just lying around in Eposka's vegetable garden. What if it got lost?

I'm just holding onto it for safekeeping!

Free of charge, no less. Sigh—I really am a saint."

Hong Lin was so infuriated by this display of Great Righteousness that she actually laughed: "Let me guess—you're also going to help proofread it? Fix a few typos?"

"Bravo!" Cheng Shi clapped enthusiastically. "Baldy, you truly know your stuff! Yes—exactly! We fix the typos!

All I need to do is change 'Mushroom-Footed People' to 'Twisted Night Python' on this contract, and swap out 'Eposka' for your name, Baldy...

Then disguise you as an envoy of [Decay], and voila—Copy Cat, job done!"

At this, Hong Lin's smile froze.

She twitched the corner of her mouth, seemingly struggling against this "destined" arrangement.

"Setting aside whether you can actually modify a mystical contract that involves divine faith—let's talk about the 'faith' part. How do you plan to achieve it?

The Mushroom-Footed People worshipped Eposka because the first patriarch deceived them. But what about us?

How would you trick the countless Twisted Night Pythons in this Sighing Forest?

Acting? Disguise? Advertising?

They're not stupid. They can tell whether my aura belongs to [Prosperity] or [Decay].

So this plan simply won't—"

Once again she stopped mid-sentence.

Because she watched Cheng Shi pull out a stone radiating endless [Decay] power from behind his back!

The dense, oppositional faith aura clinging to the stone almost reminded her of the [Decay] followers' Pilgrimage Site deep within the Sighing Forest!

"What is that?!!"

She jerked her head up to stare at Cheng Shi, who was grinning ear to ear:

"Tomb End Stone. A single piece is enough to corrode away all the [Prosperity] on you and disguise you as 'an envoy who's come from that place'!"

Yes—the Tomb End Stone!

The moment Cheng Shi had heard the name "Septic Final Tomb," he'd connected it to the origin of this stone in his possession. He just hadn't realized the Tower of Logic had already penetrated deep into the Sighing Forest and excavated the stone beneath those tombstones.

But this only reinforced another deduction: the Tower of Logic's understanding of the Sighing Forest was far deeper than he'd previously imagined.

And that, in turn, strongly suggested that the Mushroom-Footed People's existence was almost certainly an experiment backed by [Truth]!

Hong Lin had absorbed more shocks today than in the past month combined. She took two deep breaths and said earnestly:

"You've been in there too? You've seen the Septic Final Tomb?! Or has someone in the Destined Ones been inside?"

Hearing the question, Cheng Shi chuckled to himself.

If Selius counted as one of the Destined Ones, then the Destined Ones might indeed have been inside.

But the scholar wasn't actually a member. Even though his fate had been literally written into history, the Destined Ones... were all living people.

"That question can wait. You'll find out eventually.

So Baldy—I'll ask you one more time. Are you afraid to die?"

Hong Lin frowned, her expression conflicted.

"Are you sure you can alter this contract's contents?"

'Me?'

Cheng Shi shook his head internally. 'I definitely can't. But just because I can't doesn't mean my mouth can't!'

Brother Mouth, as the Land of Hope's resident know-it-all, certainly knew how to modify the contract. So even before he'd started hoodwinking Hong Lin and [Fate]—back when he'd first obtained the contract—Cheng Shi had already asked.

After being pestered beyond endurance, the Fool's Lips had told Cheng Shi a simple method to alter the contract, and that was...

To ask the Tongue of Eating Lies!

It told Cheng Shi that the Tongue of Eating Lies could directly consume the names of both contract parties, because the contract itself was also a fraud—well within its edible range!

'Edible range—what a concept!'

So the Tongue of Eating Lies really did eat lies. Meaning that slap it gave people was actually its way of licking off the lies clinging to them?

The moment he heard this, Cheng Shi knew he'd been right about one thing: the Fool's Lips were definitely connected to the Tongue of Eating Lies!

So what exactly was the relationship between Brother Mouth and this newly arrived tongue?

'Surely they weren't...'

'Hmm... just thinking about it isn't a crime, right?'

Chapter 310: Everything's Ready—Just Waiting for Nightfall

"Cat got your tongue? You've laid out the whole plan—don't tell me that at the very end, you can't actually alter this contract?"

Hong Lin's words sounded like mockery, but she was secretly breathing a sigh of relief, as if she was having second thoughts.

But they'd come too far for Cheng Shi to let her back out now. He spoke with absolute confidence:

"I can. But..."

"But what?" A foreboding clench gripped Hong Lin's heart, as if she sensed something unpleasant coming.

Cheng Shi shot her an odd look: "But you'll have to endure a little indignity."

"Huh?"

With that, he pointed at his tongue.

"I just communicated with the Tongue of Eating Lies in my storage space. It says it can eat the signatures off this contract, but only if the unfinished truth-or-dare game from before is completed first!

In other words, Baldy—either you take a slap, or... you answer one of my questions."

The instant those words landed, Hong Lin sprang to her feet in a fury. She grabbed Cheng Shi and pinned him with a death glare:

"You're lying to me?"

That tongue was clearly given to you by the Puppet Master. How could you know its functions so well?

When I was holding it, I didn't discover it could do any of that!

And I definitely didn't discover it could talk!"

"..."

Cheng Shi hadn't expected such an explosive reaction. He chuckled awkwardly:

"I'm not that talented. It told me everything itself. When I picked up the contract, it suddenly spoke up from my storage space and asked if I could feed it the contract. So I chatted with it for a bit..."

"Bullshit. You liar. I don't believe you. Take it out. If it can talk, then I'll believe you!"

This put Cheng Shi in a bind, because everything he'd just said was indeed fabricated. He'd been trying to trick some gossip out of Hong Lin, but the ploy had backfired spectacularly.

Not that it mattered much—he could just admit his mistake and play it off as a joke to ease the tension. But just as he was about to speak up, his mouth beat him to it:

"Sure."

"..."

"..."

Both of them went slack-jawed.

Hearing the voice, Cheng Shi immediately realized Brother Mouth was helping, not sabotaging him. Fighting back laughter, he looked at Hong Lin: "So... shall I take it out?"

Hong Lin's eyelid twitched. Her suspicious gaze swept Cheng Shi up and down for a long moment before she snapped: "Do it! I refuse to believe a tongue can speak!"

Without another word, Cheng Shi tossed the Tongue of Eating Lies out. The moment it hit the ground, it let out a satisfied burp.

"Burp—I'm full."

"..."

'This is way too creepy—a talking tongue!'

Staring at this tongue that had genuinely produced sound, Hong Lin's mind went blank. She was completely out of options. She glared at the disgusting tongue, her expression cycling through several changes, until she finally blurted out:

"Fine—I'll agree to join this gamble. But I have conditions."

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, already guessing what she'd say.

"Have this tongue modify the contract first. When we win the gamble, I'll finish the incomplete truth-or-dare game.

Otherwise—no deal!"

"..."

Who said Baldy was dumb? She knew better than to lose both the battle and the war. If they lost the bet, she didn't want insult added to injury with a slap on top of it.

Cheng Shi genuinely didn't know if the tongue would agree. But the entire plan hinged on the Tongue of Eating Lies' contract-altering ability. So he looked at the tongue with bated breath, and watched it writhe in two lazy circles on the ground before drawing:

"Deal!"

"..."

"..."

Upon hearing this, Cheng Shi grinned and scooped up the tongue. Hong Lin's face, meanwhile, looked like she'd just eaten something foul.

'Indeed—you always end up paying for your own sins. An unchanging truth since antiquity.'

Cheng Shi thought the same thing. He suppressed a laugh and mused: 'Praise [Truth]—actually, no. Better praise [Folly]. We might be picking a fight with [Truth] any moment now.'

His mind racing with a thousand thoughts, he scratched his nose and continued:

"I know you don't strongly believe in [Prosperity]. But as long as you're in this game, you can't survive without Their protection.

This tribute to Him might mean little to you personally, but you need to think about the future.

If you believe in fate, then it means you're destined to be with us. When we join forces and win this gamble, your Benefactor [Prosperity] will stand alongside my Benefactor [Fate]—to confront the [Decay] sheltering the Sighing Forest and the [Truth] watching over the Faith Grafting experiment.

That's all I'll say. Think it over."

With this, Cheng Shi finally dropped the most information-dense sentence in this entire hustle. He hadn't explained everything, but with Hong Lin's experience, just hearing about a divine power struggle should be enough for her to piece things together.

Hong Lin thought it over with furrowed brows, then asked with some uncertainty:

"You're using a gamble to force His hand—to make Him agree to let me walk the path of [Fate]?"

"This isn't forcing His hand. This is...

[Fate]'s choice."

Hong Lin studied Cheng Shi with a complicated expression, thinking this man's scheming was truly formidable. No wonder he'd managed to...

'Forget it. Let's not bring up that Bad Luck thing.'

"You really are a charlatan!"

"Thanks for the compliment. So—have you decided? Shall we begin?"

He raised both hands: one holding the Tomb End Stone, the other gripping a languid tongue.

Hong Lin frowned, as if something had occurred to her. But before long her brow relaxed, and after a flash of resignation, she shot a disgusted sideways glance at the Tongue of Eating Lies and snatched the stone brimming with [Decay].

"How do we do this?"

Let it corrode away all the [Prosperity] in me? If so, I'll be powerless. Cheng Shi, are you sure a Priest like you can protect me?"

Cheng Shi shook his head:

"No—we can't simply let the Tomb End Stone drain your [Prosperity]. I'm thinking you should try using [Prosperity] to catalyze the [Decay] inside this stone—like Eposka's blood. We don't need to convert [Prosperity] into [Decay]. We just need to 'volatilize' the power outward. That way, the disguise effect will be large enough.

We can worry about whether I can protect you after we've completed this step."

"If I had Eposka's blood, I could try. But I don't have—"

Sentence cut short ×3. Hong Lin shut up ×3.

Watched in stunned silence ×3.

Because Cheng Shi produced a small jar of Eposka's fresh blood right before her eyes.

"You..."

"Don't misunderstand. I dismantled the Desolate Lamp."

"..."

Hong Lin went completely silent.

She wordlessly took the bottle of Eposka's blue blood and began experimenting with using [Prosperity] to catalyze a denser concentration of [Decay].

Cheng Shi wasn't idle either. He used the tongue to effortlessly lick away the names of Eposka and the Mushroom-Footed People from the contract. Then he took Hong Lin's hand, dipped it in the blood, and pressed a handprint where Eposka's name had been.

As for the other signature...

Hong Lin looked at Cheng Shi, her eye twitching: "Don't wait for me to ask. Just take it out."

Cheng Shi beamed. Sure enough, from his storage space he produced a branch of a Twisted Night Python.

"..."

"Don't look at me like that. I picked it up when the trial first started. A person should always plan ahead. It's decent wood, too—even if it turned out useless, I could've burned it for warmth. Right?"

"Right, right, right. Sure, sure, sure. Fine, fine, fine. I never imagined the day would come when I'd be lectured by a scrap collector." She laughed in frustration.

Hearing this, Cheng Shi paused for two seconds.

"Me neither."

"Huh?" Hong Lin didn't quite catch his meaning, but she didn't dwell on it. Instead, she continued: "Disguising as [Decay] is fine, but we must not expose any flaws. I have many other types of Divinity sealed within my body. What do we do about those?"

Cheng Shi snapped out of his brief daze, expression turning serious: "If you don't mind... those Divinity fragments could, ahem, be temporarily..."

"Loaned to you?" Hong Lin sneered disdainfully.

"Such harsh words! Temporarily stored. I'll hold onto them for now—it'd be a waste to just let them dissipate."

Hong Lin's scrutinizing gaze swept over Cheng Shi. Without a word, she extracted every sealed fragment of Divinity from her body.

[Prosperity], [Birth], [Order], [War], [Memory]—and even a few wisps of [Deceit]!

Watching these multicolored fragments of Divinity float in the Void, Cheng Shi's mind went blank.

'Huh?'

'So this is the power of a Chosen One?'

'Why does she have [Deceit] Divinity too?'

"What—surprised?"

You guessed one thing right. I do enjoy sealing Divinity. But my usual container is myself—not some weakling teammate who barely escaped my grasp!"

"..."

'Sis... please stop flogging the corpse. It's already beaten to a pulp.'

Cheng Shi laughed awkwardly, then pointed at the Divinity fragments before them:

"I might need your help... sealing these in the body of the weakling teammate standing before you..."

At this, even Hong Lin was dumbfounded.

Her expression darkened: "You don't know how to seal Divinity? Wait—do you not even collect Divinity?"

"..."

'I want to, believe me! But Divinity doesn't run into trees like rabbits...'

So Cheng Shi honestly shook his head.

Hong Lin sized him up for a moment, then began working with a scowl, muttering resentfully as she went:

"If I find out you're playing me—hmph!"

Cheng Shi's expression tightened. He sighed.

'What a mess...'

But at least the plan was finally underway.

Now all they had to do was wait.

'Come on, night—fall already.'