

The Gods 321

Chapter 321: [Decay]'s Fall?!

The perspective returns to inside the Septic Final Tomb.

[Decay] bore Cheng Shi no grudge—for reasons Cheng Shi couldn't fathom. On the contrary, He'd even bestowed a reward upon him.

Not verbal praise—a genuine divine gift!

The withered giant pulled off His own fingernail, dropped it at Cheng Shi's feet, and then feebly closed His eyes without another sound.

Watching this unfold, Cheng Shi's brain went BOOM—and exploded.

His mind blanked. His awareness blurred. He couldn't even control his own body as he staggered two steps backward.

[Decay]'s aura was dissipating...

'He couldn't have... kicked the bucket, right?'

'What?'

'WHAT?!'

'I didn't do anything!!'

'Heavens as my witness—I don't even know how I got in here!'

'The moment I arrived, He was already on His way out!'

'Besides, I'm just a player—a mortal! There's no way I could kill a god, right?!'

'You'll all believe me... RIGHT?!'

Cheng Shi went ashen, drenched in cold sweat, heart hammering, feet tripping.

He could barely believe he'd just witnessed the passing of one of Them.

'Wait—They weren't fighting just now, were They? How did He just... die?'

But the next instant he figured it out: well obviously, a clash between gods wouldn't be something players could see.

Yet understanding this only made him more lost.

So what was [Decay]'s intent?

He'd died on the battlefield of the Gods, then used a humanoid vessel inside what seemed to be a tomb of His own making to summon Cheng Shi and... leave His last words?

What were those last words again?

'Stay far from [Prosperity]?'

'Huh?'

'Bro, I feel like You're trying to screw me over.'

'I was literally the "inside man" who helped [Prosperity] take You down, and somehow I'm the one who should stay away from [Prosperity]?'

'You're not playing mind games to drag me down with You before You go, are You?'

'That doesn't track either—at the rate You're going, a single sneeze from You would have me reporting to that Gentleman's Bone Throne. Why bother with something this convoluted...'

Cheng Shi's mind was in total chaos. So confused he couldn't even tell what he was thinking anymore.

He stared at the "gift" at his feet, then at the now-silent giant, his heart in absolute turmoil.

Honestly, given Cheng Shi's personality, he desperately wanted this "God's fingernail" that looked like a rotting twig. But he also feared it carried the massive karma of a Fallen Deity. So he was torn.

He wondered: if he took this thing, could his two Benefactors wipe the karma for him?

Yes—not once had he considered leaving it. The only question was how to dodge the karma.

But while he hesitated, the giant at the center of the tomb opened His eyes once more, slowly turned His head toward Cheng Shi, and spoke in exhausted weakness:

"The gift has been given. What else do you want?"

"..."

"..."

"..."

Cheng Shi went completely blank. For one delirious instant, he thought [Decay] had come back from the dead.

But realization hit him like a freight train, and he slapped himself hard across the face, internally screaming:

'I'm an IDIOT! I'm an IDIOT! I'm a goddamn COLOSSAL IDIOT!'

How could one of Them possibly fall right in front of a mere player?!

'Cheng Shi, you've lost your damn mind!'

The moment he realized [Decay]'s demise had been nothing but his own delusion, he picked up the fingernail without another word.

'He's not even dead. Why the hell would I leave it?!'

But the shock-addled Cheng Shi had overlooked one thing:

This was a gift from a Deity. A gift from one of Them who wielded countless Authorities of [Decay].

So the instant he grasped that fingernail, his entire right arm along with his chest began to rapidly rot and decay.

Cheng Shi jolted in horror. Without a second thought, he grabbed several bottles of Prosperity of Yesteryear with his other hand and began frantically chugging them, his expression deadly grave.

And so, the day's most blasphemous scene was born.

The second God of the [Descent] Path—[Decay]—sitting right there in His own Temple, inside the mausoleum He'd built with His own hands, watched helplessly as the player He'd just praised guzzled bottle after bottle of [Prosperity]-infused Potion, trying to counteract His divine gift.

The absurdity of the image was such that the giant's barely-open eyes widened... and widened further... until they glowed with an angry crimson light.

And when [Decay] grew furious, the tide of septic blood erupted.

Countless streams of black blood gushed from His eye sockets, drowning the entire tomb in the blink of an eye. Before Cheng Shi could even cry out, he was reduced to a handful of rotten flesh and bleached bone, thoroughly dissolved into the sea of blood.

The cataclysmic disturbance was violent enough to draw the attention of "every living person" in the Sighing Forest.

The Historian and the Puppet Master, standing at the edge of the dried-up Blood Lake and trying to regroup with their [Decay]-betraying teammate, watched as the Septic Final Tomb—now wrapped in countless verdant branches—suddenly erupted with horrifying crimson light. Then a Sighing Sorrow Tide several times more concentrated than anything before exploded without warning from atop the tomb!

This tide of [Decay] skipped the Blood Lake entirely, carrying untouchable black blood in every direction!

"Holy shit! RUN!"

Zuo Qiu went pale. Without a word, he hurled every defensive measure he had behind him. An Jing's gaze hardened—she abandoned her Ranger puppet, converting it into a silk-thread barrier, scooped up little Cai Wei, and sprinted for her life.

Zhen's position was worse—he was practically still at the lakeside.

Seeing the most concentrated Sighing Sorrow Tide he'd ever witnessed crashing down on him, his heart clenched. He could only pray that his new Benefactor—who'd overwhelmingly dominated this clash—would show him some merciful shelter.

So he spread his arms wide and raised his voice:

"All things grow, flourish and prosper!"

But to his horror, the instant his prayer echoed out, an even more devastating [Decay] tide erupted from the Septic Final Tomb!

The plummeting fog was solid as ice, frozen and corporeal. Zhen stood dumbly at the lake's edge, watching this thing—too substantial to be called fog—plunge straight down onto his head.

BOOM—the ruins were leveled flat.

Nearly half the forest was engulfed by [Decay] once more. Trees in the rainforest withered and died, all green vanished, and the entire ground was flattened by the "weight" of the fog to the same level as the Blood Lake's bed.

Hong Lin sensed the terrifying tremor and peered toward the distance, frowning. 'What happened over there?'

And at the same time, those pairs of divine eyes above the canopy turned in unison toward the Septic Final Tomb.

"Foolish. Why provoke Him at a time like this?"

"I smell [Death]'s aura. He certainly is impatient."

"Letting [Fate] and [Prosperity] fight forever is a waste of time. [Truth]—when do you intend to make your move?"

"Oh?"

Relax. There won't be a part for you in this play. Supporting roles belong in the audience. Only the leads should take the stage. Isn't that right, [Truth]?

Your Experiment may have failed, but superior material is laid out right before you. What are you still hesitating for?"

A pair of eyes radiating the light of knowledge and infinite laws gazed toward the space above the canopy. After a brief silence, they vanished.

Immediately after, the spatial disturbances above the canopy grew even more violent.

Another pair of pitch-black eyes—eerily similar to [Void]'s—tried to follow. But a pair of pale, disdain-filled eyes swiftly blocked their path.

"I told you—you're just a supporting role. You don't deserve to go up there."

"So He sent you to block me."

"Block you? Heh. You think too highly of yourself."

"Sigh..."

As the sigh faded, a new battlefield opened beneath the canopy.

Chapter 322: Tonight's Commentator Is... [Death]

Cheng Shi didn't die.

Though his mortal shell had been reduced to rotten flesh and bleached bone, he hadn't actually perished.

But what saved him wasn't the still-active Gravekeeper's [Death] talent. It was the real... [Death]!

When [Decay]'s furious tide swallowed Cheng Shi and prepared to convert him into a [Decay] creature, [Death] had gently moved a finger, adding a lethal ingredient to that boundless rage—the ingredient of death itself.

So Cheng Shi died.

But in His hands, death was merely the beginning of new life.

So Cheng Shi lived again—reborn beside that great Gentleman's Bone Throne, in the form of a skull.

Staring at the familiar colossal cranium before him, Cheng Shi's two hollow eye sockets stung, and he nearly wept aloud.

'Finally!'

'A God I actually know!'

'I'm home! No wait—I'm at the office!'

'But from this moment on, the office IS my home!'

'I love work! I love [Death]! Praise [Death]!!'

The massive skull atop the Bone Throne observed the little skull at its feet, watching the light in its sockets flicker and flash. After a moment's silence, it flicked the small skull away—down the white-bone stairs—tumbling it into the heap of endlessly bouncing skulls.

For some reason, ever since seeing Cheng Shi, He'd felt an Inexplicable noisiness around Him. Even though Cheng Shi hadn't spoken a word, there was an irritating buzz reminiscent of having [Deceit] nearby.

Cheng Shi was bewildered by the rough toss. He looked up at the Gentleman, wondering if his silence had been taken as insolence. So he scrambled out from the pile of little skulls, hooked his chin over the white-bone stairs, and began clacking his jaw against the ground in a show of deepest piety, offering his most heartfelt thanks and praise:

"Please allow me—your most loyal employee, Cheng Shi—to convey my most devout greetings to the great God of [Death], supreme sovereign of the Hall of White Bones.

It has been too long. I have missed you dearly.

Esteemed Gentleman, might you spare one minute to hear me report on the, uh, stor—performance... of your devoted bone servant Le Le'er, who has been toiling tirelessly on your behalf?"

Le Le'er's name visibly gave the massive skull pause. A flicker of strange green light passed through its eye sockets, but it didn't take the bait. Instead, it spoke offhandedly:

"That, bitch's, mother, the [Prosperity Mother], has, also, run into, problems.

She, will become, just as, Misfortunate, as, Le Le'er."

'Huh?'

The moment he heard "bitch," Cheng Shi tossed every last shred of fear and confusion out the window. He shot to his feet, eyes blazing with the excitement of divine gossip!

'It's tea time! Nobody's stopping me!'

But when [Prosperity]'s name followed, that gossip fire quietly extinguished. Composure and calm returned to his mind.

Cheng Shi's heart clenched. He thought of Cheng Dashi's machinations, and after a moment's hesitation, probed cautiously:

"What exactly... happened between [Prosperity] and [Decay]..."

The colossal skull glanced down at Cheng Shi and grunted:

"The conflict, was started, by you.

You, don't, know?"

"What? I genuinely have no clue—I wasn't even thinking about any of this. I just wanted to clear the trial." Cheng Shi denied it without hesitation.

The massive skull watched him play dumb, the green flames in its sockets flickering twice. It said nothing more.

But moments later, as though struck by some thought, it sighed. From those abyss-deep eye sockets, two beams of pale green light shot out. The light of [Death] swirled above the Fishbone Hall, instantly forming a green luminous screen that projected everything happening in the Canopy Sea above the Sighing Forest.

'!!!'

'Is this... a projection?!'

'What?'

'I'm actually watching a projection hand-cast by [Death] Himself!'

'Got to admit—making a projector look like a skull head is a fresh angle for marketing. I wonder if—oh right, the world's already gone. What's the point of selling anything.'

After a jumble of stray thoughts, Cheng Shi quickly looked up at the green screen. There, he spotted a familiar figure.

[Chaos]!

That ever-shifting, ever-morphing silhouette of entropy was now hovering at the far end of the Canopy Sea, facing off against a... codex?

'What?'

He was confronting a codex!

Cheng Shi's eyes went wide with shocked suspicion, because he recognized the codex's design. Its cover bore the most common—and yet most uncommon—emblem of the Grand Tribunal!

At the center of the emblem were a crossed lance and great shield, surrounded by two bands of judicial text forming an X.

It was common because nearly every Grand Tribunal asset bore this symbol. But it was uncommon because when this emblem appeared on a codex's cover, it could only mean one thing: this was the one and only Iron Law, the tome said to have been bestowed by [Order] Himself!

[Order]!

That was [Order]?!

Cheng Shi had always assumed that Gods like [Order] and [Truth]—who ruled the surface world—would look more like humanity's conception of the divine: mysterious and majestic. He never imagined [Order] would be a book.

'If He's a book... then what's [Truth]?'

'Also a book?'

'Well, that would explain why the surface [Civilization] was destroyed by the Underworld's [Chaos]. They had too many books.'

"..."

After another barrage of random thoughts, Cheng Shi watched the two sides remain locked in a stalemate without moving. Finally, curiosity got the better of him:

"Is that... [Order]?"

"He, is not, [Order]. He is, the [Iron Law]."

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted violently. He repeated instinctively:

"The [Iron Law]? Isn't that the constitution [Order] gave to the Grand Tribunal?"

How..."

"Ancient, history. You need not, know.

You, only need, to understand, that He, is not, the real, [Order]."

"Then where's the real [Order]?"

The massive skull fell silent at that. Only after a pause did it speak again: "I, also, am not sure, of His, condition."

'Something happened to [Order]!'

'His own law replaced Him?'

'What? That's front-page news!'

"Then the [Order] avatar in the trials... is that also the [Iron Law]?"

"Your, questions, are, too many.

That, is, [Fear (Order)]."

'Fear?'

'Whose fear?'

'[Order]'s fear?'

Cheng Shi was stunned—but instantly everything clicked. No wonder that chair had been so terrified of him breaking order. So it was [Order]'s fear?

That meant [Order] really was in trouble. Had He lost a God War and been shattered?

Cheng Shi's mind immediately leapt to the current situation. He ventured another quiet question:

"Esteemed Gentleman, does this... count as a new God War beginning?"

"Yes."

!!!

That single syllable set Cheng Shi's alarm and excitement ablaze. So Cheng Dashi had orchestrated a God War!

But who was his target?! Or rather—what outcome was he trying to achieve through a God War?

Torn between tension and bewilderment, Cheng Shi's expression shifted constantly. The Gentleman on the Bone Throne watched the play of emotions across his face, pondered for a moment, and then disclosed some divine history that no player should ever know.

"The [Prosperity Mother], has always, championed, universal flourishing.

Time and again, She has, tried to convince, Us, to embrace, flourishing, to become one, with Her.

Herazur, Her eldest son, agreed. And so, He, vanished.

Frazor, Her eldest daughter, agreed. And then, She, also, vanished."

"Vanished?"

The great skull was visibly displeased at being interrupted. Cheng Shi flinched and immediately clamped his mouth shut.

But He still offered a brief explanation.

"They, were, Assimilated, by Their own, mother.

Merged, with Her. Became, a part, of the, [Prosperity Mother]."

!!!

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's gaze went razor-sharp.

'Assimilated, Assimilated... She's one of the True Gods—after merging with Her, how could She possibly tolerate other Wills existing within Her?'

'What a nice word—Assimilation. Call it what it really is: devouring!'

Sure enough, every one of his guesses had been correct. She really was plundering others, using Them as fertilizer to nourish Herself!

So those countless branches, veins, and bits of flesh and organs on that colossal tree were all... remnants of those She'd absorbed?

'How many people had She consumed?!'

'Or rather—how many Gods?'

Cheng Shi jolted, terror flooding through him as a bone-deep chill enveloped his entire being.

The great skull sensed his dread, mildly surprised.

"You, seem to, already, know, about, these things?"

Cheng Shi didn't dare hide it: "Yes. I guessed some of it."

"Oh? How, did you, guess?"

"Just now, [Prosperity] summoned me and invited me to become one with Her!"

Hearing this, shock briefly flickered through the great skull's sockets. He nodded, his tone turning strange:

"Interesting. You, are likely, the first, human, that the, [Prosperity Mother], has ever, attempted to, Assimilate."

'What?!'

Before Cheng Shi's jaw could hit the floor, the great skull continued:

"Do not, be so, surprised. Not just, any life, can catch, Her eye, and be, Assimilated.

The [Prosperity Mother], is very, selective. That She, invited you, means, you are, an exceptional, match, for Her Will.

A walker, of [Void], matching, [Prosperity]'s, Will.

Do your, two, Benefactors, know?"

'Huh?!'

Chapter 323: The Gods' Game of Chess—Cheng Dashi's True Objective!

Cheng Shi suddenly grew restless.

"You... knew?"

"Hmph. Why do you, think, I, intervened, to save you?"

"Huh? Wasn't it because I'm your hardest-working, highest-performing employee?"

"..."

The massive skull fell silent. Green flames smoldered in its eye sockets—a gaze that seemed to be looking at some shameless [Deceit].

Though it said nothing, Cheng Shi could swear he heard the faint sound of teeth grinding.

'Uh oh. The boss doesn't acknowledge his top seller's performance?'

He quickly plastered on a grin and looked up at the Bone Throne. The great skull remained silent for a long time before speaking again in its hollow tone:

"[Fate].

It was your... other, Benefactor, [Fate].

He, saw, your crisis. So He, made a deal, with me.

To save, you."

[Fate]!

Again, [Fate]!

'Praise the goddamn [Fate]!'

'From this moment forward, I am [Fate]'s die-hard loyalist! Anyone who dares blaspheme my Lord answers to me!'

'I, Hero of Today Cheng Shi, vow to defend [Fate]'s glory unto dea—scratch that, can't die yet. Unto the last weapon in my hand!'

Loyalty pledges aside, Cheng Shi was still curious: when exactly had his Benefactor foreseen his peril?

He posed the question, and [Death] didn't withhold:

"When I, took, the nascent, [Corruption] Authority, from your, body."

'Nascent [Corruption] Authority?'

'What's that?'

'Wait...'

'Germinating Divinity born from fear?'

'So it really was [Death] who took that Germinating Divinity!'

Still, as long as it hadn't gone to Le Le'er, ending up in [Death]'s hands was... acceptable.

But Cheng Shi probed anyway: "That Divinity..."

"Do not, entertain, Wishful Thinking."

"..."

'Great. So the trade between [Fate] and [Death] was swapping the Divinity for my life...'

'Well, when you think about it, not a bad deal. What good is Divinity if you're dead?'

But something nagged at him. If his Benefactor had foreseen the crisis that early, didn't that mean everything was written in His script from the start?

Since He'd already known everything, did He know that Cheng Dashi had returned?

Even if He hadn't before—the moment Cheng Shi learned of it, He should have too. After all, Cheng Shi was a character in [Fate]'s script, a character He'd personally penned. Any Change would register with the Screenwriter immediately.

So Cheng Dashi had never hidden anything from [Fate]...

Then had his machinations truly changed fate, or hadn't they?

The question was so profound that even as nothing more than a skull, Cheng Shi furrowed his bony brow in confusion.

[Death] glanced at him and said coldly:

"Do not, attempt, to approach, [Corruption]."

'What?'

Cheng Shi hadn't expected his silence to be misinterpreted. He quickly changed the subject:

"Not thinking about it, not thinking at all. Sir, I was just wondering—did [Prosperity]'s other two children betray Her precisely because they feared Her Assimilation?"

The great skull was apparently still interested in the topic of [Prosperity]. He nodded and resumed His account of [Prosperity]'s disgraceful history.

"Your guess, is correct.

Her second son, Dizel, feared, Her Assimilation, and chose, to betray, His own mother, by throwing Himself, into, [Decay].

However, He embraced, [Decay], solely, to take revenge, on His mother.

This was, incompatible, with, [Decay]'s, Will.

[Decay], discovered, this. But, He still, took Dizel, in.

Yet Dizel, did not believe, that being, a Servant God, was enough, to oppose, [Prosperity].

So, He attempted, to kill [Decay], and usurp, the Divine Throne.

Then, He was, dismantled, by [Decay], and turned, into, the mindless, Barren Walker."

'Holy crap!'

'So Dizel's story was that explosive?'

'Kill His rival and seize the throne—all to get back at His mom?'

'Bold idea, but hasn't it occurred to him that assassinating the host looks a lot more like a spy his mom sent?'

Still—he hadn't expected [Decay] to be so soft-hearted. Taking in someone like that?

Cheng Shi recalled his audience with [Decay] in the Septic Final Tomb. The oddness deepened.

[Decay] had called Himself "pitiable." So... He'd sympathized with the equally pitiable Dizel?

Seriously? The god whose followers spent their days self-mutilating... was a Being who liked to sympathize with others?

'Shouldn't You be sympathizing with Your own followers?'

'Grinding Yourself down to give charity to outsiders, huh?'

'Fine, no wonder You and [Prosperity] are arch-rivals. One plunders, one self-flagellates. A match made in heaven.'

[Death]'s sharing continued. Today, He was unusually talkative:

"After losing, Dize, [Prosperity], reflected, on Herself.

And so, Her youngest daughter, Le Le'er, was born, without, a shred, of fear."

"..."

'So that's Her idea of self-reflection—cutting off the possibility of ever needing to self-reflect again, right at the source...'

"But Le Le'er, was a fool. She, sensed, that all, Her children, could feel, fear.

So She, began to, doubt Herself. Then, behind, Her mother's, back, She came, to me, to ask, what fear, was.

I, miscalculated. The greatest, mistake, was sending, Garuda, to guide Her, toward fear.

Garuda, went with Her, to the [Sea of Desire]. There She, felt, the call, of countless, fears.

And so, ignoring, Garuda's, pleas, She leapt, in.

Garuda, tried to, pull Her back. But it was, already, too late. She had, sunk, into it, intoxicated, by the, beauty, of fear, beyond, rescue.

She became, entirely, the Mother Tree of Fear, absorbing, the universe's, fear.

And my, Envoy, racked with guilt, upon learning, nothing, could be, undone, chose, to take, that bitch's, place, and let, [Prosperity], Assimilate, him.

The [Prosperity Mother], was eager, to seize, my Authority. So, She, did not, refuse. Thus, She, devoured, Garuda!

Garuda, died. Died, inside, [Prosperity]'s, Divine Shade."

"..."

Cheng Shi had never imagined the truth of history could be this absurd.

'An honest boy fell for a rebellious girl, and was even willing to pay her debts with his own body...'

'But bro, let's be real—Le Le'er may truly have been a fool. But to get yourself Assimilated by [Prosperity] for the sake of a fool who chose to fall... Garuda...'

'Ahem. Well. It's all that bitch Le Le'er's fault!'

While Cheng Shi was chewing over this gossip, [Death]'s next words froze him solid where he stood.

"Now, you have, opened, a new path, of Assimilation, for the, [Prosperity Mother].

So, She once again, wants, all of Us, to return, to [Prosperity], to become, one.

[Fate], only believes, in Himself. So He, will not, agree.

[Truth], from the very, beginning, has been, the one, pushing, Faith Fusion!"

"What?"

The one pushing Faith Fusion is [Truth]?

Sir, isn't every god pushing Faith Fusion?"

The great skull paused, then nodded:

"Yes. But the one, who convinced, Us, was Him."

"Then..." Cheng Shi thought it over and decided to muster the courage: "Why fuse faiths at all?"

"You, do not, need to, know this."

"..." Right. Not important enough. Cheng Shi nodded sheepishly. "Please... continue?"

"[Truth], does not want, to be, Assimilated by, [Prosperity]. Yet He, covets, [Prosperity]'s, Authority of Assimilation.

But He, has long, lacked, an opportunity. Until today, when [Prosperity], openly, broke, the Convention, by Assimilating, [Decay]'s, faith.

[Truth], finally found, His moment, to strike.

He wants, to devour, [Prosperity]'s, Authority. His justification, is upholding, the Convention, and purging, [Prosperity]'s, ambition!

The [Iron Law], believed, [Truth]'s, aggression, also, violated, the Convention. So He, tried to, stop Him.

But [Chaos], blocked, the [Iron Law], on [Truth]'s, behalf.

[Oblivion], wanted, to Muddy the waters—to annihilate, [Prosperity]'s, Authority, for His own, pleasure—but [Folly], kept Him, outside."

Hearing all this, Cheng Shi was thoroughly bewildered.

Honestly, he'd always felt his Benefactor [Fate] didn't want to side with [Truth]. Yet in this so-called God War, the two happened to be fighting on the same side.

Even stranger, [Folly] was supposed to be [Truth]'s natural enemy—yet here He was helping [Truth], even blocking [Oblivion] for Him.

'What's going on?'

'Is [Prosperity] really that universally despised?'

Bewildered, he looked up at the skull on the throne. The skull sensed his confusion and paused before speaking:

"[Folly]... no one, can understand, Him."

"..." Cheng Shi didn't dare wonder why [Death] couldn't understand [Folly]. He pivoted to a different curiosity: "And my other Benefactor?"

Something this... entertaining—I mean, significant—and He's not involved?"

The great skull scoffed, disdain dripping:

"Your, annoying, Benefactor.

To prevent, escalation, [Existence], has probably, already, imprisoned, Him."

"..."

This was the first time Cheng Shi had ever heard [Death] say so much. And the first time he'd gained a complete, clear picture of the Gods' machinations.

All of it originated from so-called Faith Fusion. And the God driving Faith Fusion was the one behind the Tower of Logic he encountered in every trial: [Truth]!

So this was Cheng Dashi's goal?

He'd maneuvered Cheng Shi into luring [Prosperity] down, then let [Truth]—who coveted [Prosperity]'s Authority—kill [Prosperity], thereby shattering the so-called Convention?

Cheng Shi felt he'd finally untangled the logic. Digesting the avalanche of information, he looked up at the flickering green screen, watching invisible shockwaves erupt above the canopy. At last, one thing became crystal clear: Cheng Dashi's target had always been [Prosperity]!

Even though [Decay] had been weakened to the extreme by having His faith Assimilated by [Prosperity], none of Them could tolerate [Prosperity] using Faith Grafting to Assimilate Them!

Indeed—when titans clashed, the weak didn't necessarily die first, but the strongest was always the Public Target!

And so every divine blade now pointed at [Prosperity]!

Chapter 324: Honestly? I Want a Seat at the Feast of Divine Authority!

Cheng Shi couldn't make heads or tails of the clash between the Gods, and he didn't pretend to try. Because right now, one thought consumed him entirely:

If this many Gods were ganging up on [Prosperity], why wasn't the Gentleman before him the least bit tempted?

Didn't He have a grudge against [Prosperity]? Why not jump in?

Cheng Shi bounced back around on his jawbone, looking up at [Death] on the Bone Throne, engrossed in the battlefield. When he saw those hollow eye sockets, something suddenly clicked.

It was something He'd said during their very first audience.

He'd said [Thundering] was dead, killed by [Order]. But half of [Thundering]'s Divinity was in this Gentleman's hands.

Given that His Divine Name was [Death]... was there a chance that when a Deity truly died, that Deity would shed half—at least part—of their Divinity... and it would automatically end up in His possession?

After all, the death of a god was, in a sense, an offering to Him!

A True God-level offering!

The thought staggered Cheng Shi. If this was true, then the Gentleman wasn't abstaining from participation—He was simply waiting for an outcome. An outcome where He could sit and Reap the Fisherman's Profit!

So He believed the Gods would win?!

But if [Fate], [Truth], [Folly], and [Chaos] truly succeeded, would [Prosperity] actually die?

And if She died, what would happen to Her followers? What about Hong Lin?

He'd spent all that time hoodwinking Big Cat, promising to broker a [Prosperity]-[Fate] fusion. But the next moment, her Benefactor would be gone. How was he supposed to explain that?

'Tell her his future self came back in time and got her Benefactor killed?'

'Big Cat would lose her mind!'

'Wait!'

If things truly unfolded this way, then the token his Benefactor had bestowed...

Cheng Shi froze. The die was ostensibly a Die of Fate for establishing a second faith. But when a player's first faith ceased to exist, wouldn't the second faith... become the first?

'What?'

'So my Benefactor wasn't recruiting—He was straight-up plundering, just like [Prosperity]!'

'He wanted to directly convert Hong Lin into a [Fate] Warrior?'

'He'd already foreseen [Prosperity]'s fall?'

'Does that mean [Prosperity] is definitely going to die?'

'So what He stands to gain from this God War is... Hong Lin?'

'Then what about [Folly]? What does He get?'

Cheng Shi couldn't figure it out—and never would. A mortal simply cannot know what chips the Gods were playing with. But the curiosity was unbearable. He wanted nothing more than to throw himself into this war and grab some scraps.

So the more he thought, the more his brain narrowed down to a single question:

'What can I get out of this God War?'

That question was more important than everything else—more important than whether his Benefactor trapped by [Existence] could even make it back.

So, driven by immense greed, Cheng Shi deliberated at length and decided to ask one more question.

This time, it wasn't for gossip. It was for profit—profit that might slip through the Gods' fingers!

Everyone knew: where there was risk, there was reward. Faced with the greatest upheaval since the Faith Game's descent, if he couldn't leverage his status as a Favored One to claim a share of this chaos, then Cheng Shi felt he'd truly become a spider on a Spider Web:

'A failed man.'

He wanted to advance. Ever since that dream, he'd desperately wanted to advance.

So after careful deliberation, he looked up at the Gentleman on the Bone Throne and spoke once more.

This time, his probe was completely direct.

"Esteemed Gentleman, forgive my presumption. There is one question that has been plaguing me, and I wish to ask it of you once more."

The great skull withdrew its gaze from the green screen and looked down at the small skull below the throne. He nodded.

"Speak."

Cheng Shi perked up immediately and rushed out the words:

"If [Prosperity] falls, what happens to all the [Prosperity] players in the Faith Game?"

And if [Truth] truly seizes [Prosperity]'s Authority, will [Truth]'s followers receive new blessings derived from those Authorities?"

The great skull seemed to have anticipated the question. He snorted:

"The [Prosperity Mother], will not, fall.

You do not, know, the Convention. So you, do not know, its power.

Under the Convention's, protection, no God, can kill, another God.

Because, the Convention, was signed, precisely, to prevent, any more, wars, that result, in divine, death."

"She won't fall?" Cheng Shi was stunned. If [Prosperity] wouldn't die, then what were all these Gods fighting so hard for?

The great skull was in an unusually chatty mood today. He glanced at Cheng Shi and "helpfully" enlightened him.

"Not dying, does not mean, She can, keep, Her Authority.

[Truth], has long been, researching, how to effectively, Exploit Loopholes, in the Convention, to fuse, Our Authorities.

He has, already, seen results. Today, He should, use them, on [Prosperity].

But Authority, only transfers. It does not, vanish.

So when, [Prosperity], is imprisoned, aside from, being unable, to have, an audience, with Her, for you all, nothing, changes."

'What?'

Today's information overload was frying both halves of Cheng Shi's brain. But he didn't waste time processing—he immediately pressed further:

"Does it affect You, Gentleman? [Prosperity] is, after all, a Deity of the [Life] Path. If one of Them in the Path is no longer free, what impact does that have on the other two?"

The great skull was quiet for a moment, then turned to look at Cheng Shi.

"You, have become, very bold.

What, do you want, to say?"

'What do I want to say?'

'I want a share of the spoils!'

But could he say that? Absolutely not!

So Cheng Shi, trembling with audacity, uttered the boldest sentence of the day:

"I want... to help You!"

Light blazed feverishly in his eye sockets. He tried to squeeze an expression of wild devotion onto a bare skull, then once again perfectly demonstrated his greed to [Death]!

"Gentleman, if you have any expectations in this shifting God War, your loyal employee, Cheng Shi, is willing to do whatever is within his power.

And all you need to do is point your employee in the right direction, so he might claim one small spoonful of broth from this divine banquet!

What... do you think?"

"You, a mortal, also wish, to seize, Her Authority?"

The great skull thundered with bewilderment so immense that the entire torrent of bones in the Hall of White Bones surged and boiled in sympathetic confusion.

Countless chattering skulls spiraled through the air, and the bone-forged waterfalls churned and roared.

Cheng Shi was blasted backward by the [Death]-saturated shockwave, rolling down the stairs. But he clenched his jaw, wedging himself into a gap between steps, and screamed up at the Gentleman on the Bone Throne like a man with nothing left to lose:

"Esteemed Gentleman, I'm not trying to seize Her Authority! I just want to pocket a few perks from this 'accident'!"

"Delusion.

Mortals, cannot, partake, of Her Authority.

The Convention, protects, all divine, power, from being, lost."

"But you said [Truth] found a way to Exploit Loopholes and seize [Prosperity]'s Authority! That means the Convention isn't omnipotent!

Since it's not omnipotent, why can't we do the same?

Gentleman, the [Life] Path is about to lose one True God! Why shouldn't we think about [Life]'s interests and retain some benefits?"

Green flames roared in the great skull's eye sockets. He gazed at Cheng Shi, His expression unreadable.

"Excessive, greed, is the, path to, death.

You are, nothing like, [Fate].

You are, very much, like [Deceit]."

"..."

But after a moment of silence, the Gentleman on the Bone Throne sighed—and revealed something that a player should never have been told.

"[Truth], has taken, control, of Dizel's, body.

He, has tampered, with the, bloodline fusion, and will, use, Dizel's identity, as a, child of, [Prosperity], to inherit, [Prosperity]'s, Authority.

You, have no, right of, inheritance.

Le Le'er, is rooted, in the [Sea of Desire]. You also, have no, reason, to throw, your life away, for an, unrealistic, fantasy."

"Right of inheritance?" Cheng Shi bounced twice, his heart suddenly seizing. He blurted: "What do you mean, right of inheritance? What kind of identity qualifies for inheritance?"

"A Servant God, or an Envoy. When a, True God, is imprisoned, and loses, their freedom, per the, Convention, their Envoy, holds the, right, of Proxy Action, over their, Authority."

Cheng Shi swallowed hard and asked with extreme nervousness: "Then does She have... an envoy?"

"An envoy?"

If you mean, messengers, like the, bone servants, those are, merely, Favored Ones. Naturally, they, do not, qualify."

"No, no, no—I mean the kind of envoy who delivers divine Edicts to Her people!"

"Delusion, nothing more.

Do not, lose yourself, in fantasy. That is, [Corruption]'s, specialty—corrupting, the human heart.

The [Prosperity Mother], has never, had, a Favored One, who carries, Her Edict.

Those who, relay, Her commands, have always, been, Her children, alone.p

You..."

"I know Her second daughter—Frazor!"

Cheng Shi suddenly tipped himself upright on his chin. His gaze burned as he stared at the great skull on the Bone Throne, speaking with manic intensity:

"Gentleman, if [Prosperity]'s eldest daughter Frazor is still alive—does She... have the right of inheritance?!"

"?"

Chapter 325: Frazor Isn't Dead—You Saved Her!

"Frazor, is, already, dead."

The great skull spoke with certainty. Clearly, He knew everything about [Prosperity].

But Cheng Shi was fiercely insistent. He bounced up one more stair and declared solemnly:

"What if She didn't die? Or to put it another way—what if You saved Frazor?"

Green flames ignited in the eyes of the skull atop the Bone Throne. He studied Cheng Shi for a moment and realized this wasn't greed corroding his mind—the boy genuinely had an idea. So He decided to hear what this follower of [Deceit] was really after.

"I, will give you, one chance.

Speak."

Cheng Shi surged with excitement. He immediately laid out everything that had happened in the trial—holding nothing back.

He told [Death] that during the trial, he'd saved an entire Tribe of [Prosperity]'s children and crafted a convincing Divine Envoy of [Prosperity] persona before them.

Most importantly, after several ordeals, when [Prosperity] descended, these Mushroom-Footed People had received genuine salvation.

Never mind that the five promised trials had somehow compressed to four before they were accepted—the right of final interpretation belonged to [Prosperity] anyway.

But once [Truth] subdued [Prosperity], She would lose Her right to interpret anything. And so that final authority would default back to the fabricated [Prosperity] Divine Envoy!

Originally, Cheng Shi hadn't thought this identity would serve any purpose. He'd even considered the karmic entanglement with history more of a burden than a benefit—so he'd sneakily given them Hong Lin's ID instead.

But he never expected the Convention to contain rules about inheriting Authority.

With this, Hong Lin's false Divine Envoy identity suddenly became Cheng Shi's ladle for scooping broth from the Gods' table—a genuine chance to claim a share!

Because the Gentleman had said: the only ones who ever relayed [Prosperity]'s Edicts were Her children!

His eyes blazing, Cheng Shi faced [Death] and spoke with manic clarity:

"Gentleman, forgive my boldness, but I must ask—did You personally witness [Prosperity] Assimilate Her eldest daughter, Frazor?"

The great skull considered this a moment, then shook his head.

"Indeed, I did not, personally, witness it."

Cheng Shi's grin deepened by three degrees: "Then did any of the Gods personally witness [Prosperity] Assimilating Her eldest daughter, Frazor?"

The great skull fell silent. He understood what Cheng Shi was driving at.

As long as no one had actually witnessed [Prosperity] Assimilating Her children, there was a Loophole to exploit!

Indeed—devouring others was the sort of thing one did in private. Once others were frightened, like Her child Dizel, the so-called universal flourishing would be impossible to preach.

Cheng Shi knew all too well that unsavory deeds could only be hidden in shadow. That was precisely why he'd asked the question.

And from the Gentleman's reaction, he knew his plan was already more than halfway home!

But in [Death]'s eyes, this scheme was still a rootless drifting weed—barely begun.

"You should, know, that trials, are merely, [Memory]'s, reproductions.

When you, finish, this trial, those, [Prosperity] children, will sink, back to the, Bottom of Memory Sea, vanishing, into time.

No one, will remember them. And no one, will remember, the so-called, Divine Envoy, you speak of."

Just as the great skull finished speaking, Cheng Shi—carrying a Ring in his teeth—hopped right up to Him.

The green flames in [Death]'s sockets wavered. He extended divine power and lifted the Ring.

"This is, [Memory]'s, power."

Cheng Shi nodded frantically:

"Yes! Gentleman, this is a gift from [Memory]. He granted me three chances to alter history. And now there's still one final use left.

You only need to send me back to the trial, and I only need to snap my fingers inside it. Then everything about the [Prosperity] Divine Envoy will be written into history!

With that, wouldn't we have the right to inherit [Prosperity]'s Authority?"

The great skull froze. It felt less like He was receiving a player and more like He was plotting strategy with [Deceit].

"...You, cannot, explain, why Frazor, did not, die."

"She didn't die because You saved Her!"

"Why, would I, save Her?"

Cheng Shi gritted his teeth and summoned the nerve to throw out a justification:

"Then why did the [Prosperity Mother] Assimilate the great Garuda for no apparent reason?"

The petty, vindictive [Prosperity Mother] was taking revenge—revenge against You for disrupting Her Assimilation of Frazor!"

The words left his mouth, and every nerve in his body pulled taut.

This was an enormously risky move. He was dragging Garuda's death into a scheme woven entirely from lies.

If this offended [Death], he'd never get another chance to join the divine feast.

Worse—he might literally become a skull. Not the kind that served by the throne, but the mindless kind howling amid the bone-white rapids.

But against all expectation, [Death] heard this reasoning—and began to nod. He regarded Cheng Shi with satisfaction, as though these were the most pleasing words He'd heard all day.

"Indeed. It was I, who saved, Frazor.

The [Prosperity Mother], humiliated, and furious, seized, an opportunity, to devour, Garuda."

The instant those words dropped, Cheng Shi knew his gamble had paid off.

[Death] wasn't validating this for His own ego. He was restoring the dignity of the Envoy He'd valued—Garuda!

So He'd always known Garuda's self-sacrifice was foolish...

Yet all these years, He'd stubbornly branded Le Le'er a "bitch" without ever once mentioning Garuda's choice...

'Pity the heart of a divine parent.'

Le Le'er was indeed a bitch, of course.

But today, the fool—ahem—Garuda seemed poised to stand tall again.

He'd been transformed from a blind Servant God who threw himself away for love into a Victim of [Prosperity]'s revenge.

A complete shift of perspective. A victim doesn't get scorned—only sympathy.

Cheng Shi was numb—and thrilled. He'd never imagined that the key to persuading [Death] wasn't some airtight con. It was an emotional gambit dating back to the dawn of time.

"..."

'Well—as long as there's broth, that's all that matters!'

With that thought, fire blazed in Cheng Shi's eyes.

"So, Gentleman! You need to send me back to the trial before it fully ends. The moment I snap that history-inscribing finger, we'll have our chance!

A chance at a share!"

After hearing Cheng Shi's full plan, the green flames in the great skull's eyes roared to a blaze.

No one could tell what He was thinking. All Cheng Shi knew was that when [Death] deliberated, the entire Fishbone Hall went silent. The chattering little skulls fell uncharacteristically mute. Even the thundering bone-white torrent ground to a halt.

Countless skulls turned as one toward the Bone Throne, as though awaiting His command.

A very long time passed. So long that Cheng Shi worried the God War above the Canopy Sea had already concluded. If he'd schemed and schemed only for everyone to have already gone home, that would be peak Clown behavior.

Unable to endure the wait, Cheng Shi nervously crawled half a step forward, intending to use his scraping to remind the Gentleman.

But in that precise moment, the great skull moved. He turned toward Cheng Shi, the fire in His sockets boiling even higher.

"You, are, very, greedy.

But you, are also, very, clever.

If, [Memory], does not, correct, history's, falsehoods. If, [Deceit], can make, her identity, even more, believable.

It is, indeed, feasible.

However, you, are better, suited, to this position, than your, friend.

An Envoy, who wields, [Prosperity]'s, Authority, through Proxy Action.

Do you, not, want it?"

Chapter 326: Praise the Great Benefactor!

Cheng Shi was momentarily stunned, thinking to himself, 'If it were a Servant God of [Void], I'd definitely want it, but [Life]...'

'Forget it. After all, I didn't accept [Chaos]'s recruitment either.'

'But honestly speaking, I have another friend who's also a Servant God of [Life]—well, to be precise, at least the top candidate for [Birth] Envoy.'

'If Hong Lin also becomes the Daughter of [Prosperity] who inherits the Authority of [Prosperity], plus me as an employee of [Death]—when I think about it that way, I really do have a deep connection with [Life].'

Cheng Shi lowered his head and pondered for a moment. He neither rushed to refuse nor readily accepted. He simply stalled until the right moment, then raised his head and spoke earnestly:

"I am sheltered by two Benefactors and walk the path of [Void]. Naturally, I must carry out the will of [Void]."

"[Life] is brilliant and radiant, but it is ultimately not [Void]."

"Throughout history, in the long river of time, I am a spectator, a passerby, a bubble that bursts at the slightest touch—but never a character who writes [Existence]. Therefore, my friend is far more suited to that position than I am."

After hearing Cheng Shi's words, the green flames in the colossal skull's eye sockets burned even brighter. It let out laughter that made the universe tremble, and the gaze directed at Cheng Shi was filled with admiration.

"Cheng. Shi. Very good."

"Have you ever, considered, coming—"

Before the words were finished, from within that severed torrent of white bones, an unremarkable skull suddenly shot up into the high skies of Fishbone Hall. Its teeth clattered up and down, grinding noisily, and with an exasperated demeanor, it berated the master of this hall—the owner of all these skulls—with brazen audacity.

"Hey, old bones, you're poaching people right in front of me. Don't you think that's a little too shameless?"

"You stripped every last bit of skin off your own face just for this?"

???

The colossal skull's gaze turned ice-cold in an instant. It glared at the "bone servant" hovering above, gnashing its teeth in fury.

Cheng Shi was stunned for a moment as well, but he quickly realized who had arrived. He whirled around in wild elation—and then watched as the small skull soaring through the sky was suddenly incinerated by terrifying green flames that erupted from the void.

But the ashes did not fall. Instead, they slowly traced out a pair of eyes in midair—eyes whose corners curved upward so dramatically they seemed to touch the heavens.

The spiraling swirls and flickering starpoints within those eyes were so magnificent that the instant Cheng Shi saw them, he wanted to shout his praises:

"Praise—"

But before he could finish, a bone whip formed from Fishbone Hall itself lashed out and sent him flying, hurling him into the void alongside his insufferable Benefactor.

Even after his consciousness returned, he could still hear a single word reverberating endlessly through the void: "Scram."

"..."

'What kind of situation is this? I was halfway through my report and the boss literally whipped me out of the company.'

'Can I file a complaint with the labor bureau for workplace abuse?'

'But setting that aside...'

'My Benefactor caught me at my moonlighting job, reporting to another boss. He won't be angry, will he?'

'When did He arrive?'

'Don't tell me He heard everything?'

'Hah? Then the one sitting on the Bone Throne really lost face too—letting my Benefactor hide there for so long without noticing?'

'Hilarious. Truly, where three walk together, at least two are clowns.'

Still in the form of a skull, Cheng Shi floated in the familiar void, gazing at those impossibly familiar eyes before him. At last, he completed the praise he'd left unfinished:

"Praise the great God of [Deceit]. Under Your gaze, may the world be blanketed in falsehood, and may the universe never again know a truthful word."

Those laughing eyes stared at the tiny skull before them, snorted once, and spoke with dripping sarcasm:

"Nice work uniform. You seem to be having a grand time under old bones' command."

"..."

'Great, here comes the passive-aggression.'

Cheng Shi wanted to wipe the sweat from his brow, but he had no hands. So he could only bow his head in contrition first.

"About that... I was just earning a little extra on the side. You heard everything, great Benefactor—my heart is totally devoted to [Void]!"

"I didn't hear anything. When all's said and done, I'm just a pair of eyes. I don't have ears. How could I possibly hear what someone says?"

"Even if someone were to chant some novel little 'the coming path and going road, all are destined' at the artifact I bestowed, I wouldn't have heard that either."

"..."

'Great Benefactor, why don't we drop the name [Deceit] and just rename You [Passive-Aggression]...'

But now was clearly not the time to go toe-to-toe with his Benefactor. He was anxious about whether Hong Lin could inherit the Authority of [Prosperity], so Cheng Shi hurriedly changed the subject and asked the pair of eyes:

"Great Benefactor, the succession plan I just proposed to... uh... is it feasible?"

The eyes blinked. Said nothing.

Silence descended without warning.

After a long while, Cheng Shi was so anxious he could barely stand still. Seeing that his Benefactor still showed no reaction whatsoever, his mind raced desperately until he came up with a terrible idea.

He spat the Die of Fate out from his empty, contentless mouth, then murmured under his breath:

"Lies of yesterday..."

Hearing this, the spirals in those eyes reversed a single rotation. The gaze brightened by three degrees—but still remained silent.

Cheng Shi had no choice. He added the remaining words: "...mock the present day."

Now the spirals began to whirl rapidly, and even the starpoints within the pupils started twinkling with delight.

"..."

Cheng Shi was numb.

'Fine, fine, fine. I really am just a cog in your mutual blasphemy game.'

Watching His follower make such a clown of himself, those eyes finally looked pleased.

"Hee~"

"Since you're being so devout, I'll agree."

?

Huh?

Agreed?

What did He mean, agreed?

Cheng Shi was shocked. Judging by his Benefactor's demeanor, this didn't seem like teasing—so the word "agreed" looked like He was going to handle everything personally.

'Hold on—I spent all that time negotiating with [Death] and couldn't even get a straight answer, and You just give me an "agreed" right off the bat?'

'That's it?'

He asked in disbelief: "You mean... it can be done?"

"Mhm~"

"Why couldn't it? If [Truth] could use Dizel's body to seize the Authority of [Prosperity] through trickery, then why can't I?"

"You're right—Frazor merely disappeared. Even if They know full well that [Prosperity] devoured Her own firstborn, as long as They didn't witness [Prosperity] assimilating Her eldest daughter with their own eyes, they cannot deny that your little cat friend isn't Frazor."

"Though your ambitions aren't small, are they? You want to become [Chaos]'s Envoy and seize control of [Prosperity]'s oracle at the same time."

"Greed, sometimes, can be fatal."

"..."

'That's absolutely unbearable—this is a trumped-up charge!'

"The [Chaos] Envoy position wasn't my idea—You forced it on me! And [Prosperity]'s oracle isn't real either; I'm just relaying it on Baldy's behalf!"

"I told those Mushroom-Footed People that my current form is merely a borrowed shell, so it doesn't affect Frazor's true appearance..."

"A little clever, but not much."

"You should be grateful you added that one extra line, otherwise no amount of excuses would have saved you."

"Heh. [Memory] doesn't want me rewriting history again, but who could have guessed that the history about to be altered this time actually comes from His own creation?"

"As for you—be careful when you meet Him in the future. If He kills you in a rage of humiliation, I won't be able to save you."

"..."

Cheng Shi's heart lurched, and he thought, 'This is bad.'

'I hadn't even thought about it until You brought it up. If I've used up all three of [Memory]'s blessings, and He comes demanding I break my oath and swear to [Memory], I wouldn't even know what to do...'

Since his Benefactor was right here, he hastily asked:

"Great Benefactor, if [Memory] summons me again playing dirty, and demands I break my oath to join [Memory], what should I do?"

The eyes in the void rolled twice, overflowing with amusement:

"Hee~"

"There's something that amusing?"

"Break it! Why wouldn't you? I can already picture the look on [Fate]'s face. Mm, I'll send you to see [Memory] right now."

!!!

Wait just a moment!!!

Cheng Shi scrambled backward in terror—but since he was just a bone head, he started rolling as he retreated.

The eyes watched this entertaining spectacle and burst into laughter.

Cheng Shi was drenched in skull-sweat. Realizing his Benefactor was only teasing him, he hopped back with an exasperated huff.

But then something occurred to him. His expression froze, and he asked urgently:

"Great Benefactor, [Death] said that [Existence] trapped You to prevent the situation from escalating. So—does this mean You've broken free?"

"Does that mean the God War is already over?"

The laughing eyes fell silent instantly. They regarded Cheng Shi with an inscrutable half-smile and spoke coldly:

"What are you trying to say?"

'Bad—He's about to get angry!'

Cheng Shi quickly corrected course: "I just wanted to ask, when are You sending me back to discuss things with Baldy? Time waits for no one."

The eyes in the void paused, then nodded thoughtfully.

"[Time] indeed waits for no one."

"But I must remind you once more—a mortal ascending to heaven in a single step, wielding the Authority of a god as proxy—opportunities like this don't come around often."

"Are you truly not tempted?"

Cheng Shi pursed his lips: "There's no need for head games, Benefactor. You can see into my heart and know I have no desire to become a god. But I can only guarantee what I want—I don't know what Baldy wants."

"This truly is a once-in-an-eternity opportunity. When You said 'wielding the Authority of a god as proxy,' even though I'm nothing but a skull right now, I could feel my heart pounding wildly, almost suffocating."

"I desperately want my friend to take that position, but I'm not Baldy. I can't make that decision for her."

"I merely found an opportunity. If she doesn't agree..."

"Then you'll give up?"

"Give up a chance to rise to Envoy—or even approach a Divine Throne?"

"..."

'A Divine Throne...'

Cheng Shi was deeply conflicted. He truly did not want to miss this opportunity—whether from a friend's perspective or his own!

Yes—from his own perspective!

Cheng Shi was not without desires. He had his own selfish motives and his own goals.

Perhaps pushing Hu Xuan toward that position had initially been a matter of seizing the moment, but now—right here, right now—he wasn't simply giving away an Envoy's seat out of pure goodwill.

He was making his move!

When he learned that Cheng Dashi was scheming against [Prosperity], when he decided to join this madness, he knew he could no longer afford to remain passive.

A rabbit might indeed smash itself dead against a tree stump, but the wait was far too long. After catching the first one, it would be nearly impossible to wait for a second.

So in order to catch more, Cheng Shi decided to put wheels on that rabbit-killing stump.

He would push it toward the rabbits and let them smash into this high-speed mobile stump.

Thus he began laying his own plans.

And pushing Hong Lin toward that position was the first move on his board. This was no act of saintly charity. First, nobody knew what kind of risks that position entailed—not even [Death] and [Deceit] had spelled them out. Second, compared to [Life], he was clearly more suited to [Void], so for the sake of going further and faster in the future, he couldn't switch his Path of Fate just yet.

At the very least, he shouldn't switch paths for an Envoy position that only might inherit the Authority—and possibly only half of it at that.

That was why Cheng Shi wanted Hong Lin to step up. He wanted to push her closer to Them, wanted this trustworthy friend to become his "eyes"—to use her new identity to sense the shifts among the Gods, so he could better understand Them.

But this move was fraught with unknown—even lethal—risks, so he couldn't make the decision for Hong Lin, even though he felt she wouldn't refuse.

And so Cheng Shi clenched his jaws tight, his gaze flickering. After an eternity of deliberation, he finally forced out a few words: "Then I'll give up."

"Tch—"

"Foolish."

It was clearly a rebuke, yet there was no displeasure whatsoever in the tone of those eyes.

They departed. As they left, a gale erupted from the void and sent Cheng Shi tumbling down.

His vision went black, and he lost consciousness.

In the last second before awareness faded, he heard his Benefactor's final piece of advice:

"Next time you have an audience, don't be so... exposed. As your kind would put it—it's indecent."

???

Cheng Shi was dumbfounded.

When he woke, he immediately looked around. Discovering that he was back in the Sighing Forest—now transformed into a rainforest—he finally let out a breath of relief. Reflecting on the audience he'd just had, his face was full of bewilderment.

'How was I exposed?'

But in the next instant, he recalled his skull-form appearance that hadn't changed since [Death] had rescued him, and his brain let out a buzz as everything clicked.

'Right, right, right. So that's the kind of "exposed" He meant. In that case, I really was too damn exposed just now.'

His expression turned indescribably strange. Hong Lin, standing beside him, was startled by his sudden reappearance. After the initial shock, she asked with immense curiosity and gossip-hunger:

"Who summoned you?"

"[Prosperity]..."

?

Hong Lin was skeptical. She couldn't believe that her own god would summon a follower of [Fate] while his own Chosen One stood right here. She furrowed her brows and pressed further:

"Summoned you for what?"

But Cheng Shi wasn't answering her question at all. He thought for a moment, then suddenly raised his head and looked at Hong Lin with absolute solemnity:

"Baldy, do you want to become a god?"

"?"

"Never mind, I'll just say it directly—do you want to become the Envoy of [Prosperity]?"

"?????????"

...

Chapter 327: Because My Luck Is Too Good

Hong Lin's first thought was:

'This world has gone insane.'

A Fate Weaver who had just tried to recruit her into the Destined Ones was now, after an audience with her own Benefactor, asking her: do you want to become the Envoy of [Prosperity]?

What kind of deliriously prosperous mental state did it take to even ask that question?

'Are all you Destined Ones this unhinged?'

Honestly, upon hearing Cheng Shi's words, Hong Lin wasn't all that shocked. She simply felt his brain might be a little scrambled.

But after watching him carefully for a long time and finding that his expression showed no sign of deception, her heart suddenly skipped a beat.

"You're serious?"

Cheng Shi nodded with absolute gravity:

"Yes. I'm serious. I'm asking you—do you want to become a god? Do you want to wield [Prosperity]'s Authority as proxy in His stead?"

"..." Hong Lin felt like she was the one going crazy. Unable to contain herself, she shifted into Big Cat form right on the spot, vigorously scrubbed her face with those thick paws, then transformed back into human shape and repeated what she'd just said.

"You're serious?"

Cheng Shi had absolutely no idea what the point of the Druid's little routine was, but he nodded solemnly all the same:

"Dead serious!"

"And just because I want it, it can happen?"

Cheng Shi chose his words carefully: "With Their support, probably."

Hong Lin's pupils contracted sharply. She seized Cheng Shi's shoulders in a vise grip, her expression a tangle of emotions:

"Whose support?"

Cheng Shi paused for a moment, then told the truth: "[Death], [Deceit], and perhaps [Fate] as well."

When she heard those three Divine Names, Hong Lin's pupils contracted yet again. Her heartbeat accelerated wildly, threatening to burst from her chest.

Staring at Cheng Shi's solemn, opinion-seeking expression, a torrent of thoughts raced through Hong Lin's mind. She froze suddenly, then blurted out in disbelief:

"The Divine Envoy?"

Cheng Shi grinned: "Smart! Exactly—that Divine Envoy. So, do you want it?"

This time Hong Lin didn't hesitate. Suppressing the monumental shock roiling inside her, she gritted her teeth and nodded:

"Yes!"

?

Even Cheng Shi hadn't expected Hong Lin to agree so readily. Before, when he'd tried to win her over, she'd always been full of reservations and considerations. Yet now the stakes were infinitely higher, far more insane—and she just agreed?

Hong Lin caught Cheng Shi's surprise and smiled as well, though tension still leaked through the edges of her grin.

"Your question is too terrifying. So terrifying I nearly lost the ability to think—it felt like being thrown back to the moment the Faith Game descended, when everything bizarre and uncanny appeared right before my eyes."

"What, you thought I wouldn't want this?"

"No, I just didn't expect you to agree so quickly. Didn't you have misgivings about [Prosperity]?"

Hong Lin shook her head and let out a heavy breath.

"What I resisted was the helplessness—being unable to fight back. What I feared was being played by Him."

"But if you're asking whether I want to become an Envoy with greater power to protect myself, then of course I do."

"Otherwise, why would I still be struggling in this game? Isn't it all to become stronger?"

"Becoming one of Them—oppressing others, outmaneuvering others—wouldn't that feel a hell of a lot better than just enduring the pressure myself?"

"..."

'Well, that's certainly... a refreshing perspective.'

Cheng Shi laughed. He should have known Hong Lin was never the indecisive type. She was a warrior—a warrior who fought with everything she had.

Seeing that Cheng Shi's expression had finally relaxed, Hong Lin dropped down beside him with a thud, gasping for breath:

"Quick—tell me what happened. While my sanity is still intact, tell me everything."

Cheng Shi was amused. It was rare to see Hong Lin lacking confidence. He held nothing back and laid out every detail of the plan.

Moments later, Hong Lin's expression had grown incomparably complex.

Cheng Shi watched his friend furrow her brows in deep thought. Just as they had the last time they'd stepped out of the void together, he asked that question once more:

"Now—do you still want to?"

Hong Lin didn't answer. Instead, she asked:

"Is there still enough time?"

Cheng Shi blinked. Although his Benefactor had said time waits for no one, He hadn't pressed or come to hurry them—which naturally meant there was time.

Perhaps the gods were still brawling atop the Canopy Sea, and it would likely take a while before their battle concluded.

So Cheng Shi nodded, signaling Hong Lin to speak her mind.

Hong Lin exhaled another turbid breath. She looked at the Fate Weaver friend she'd only recently made, and a serene smile spread across her face.

"Cheng Shi, do you know why I believe in destiny?"

"Why?"

"Because... my luck is too good."

"?"

'Come on now, friend—opening with a critical hit right to my face?'

Hong Lin seemed less tense now. She flopped back onto the grass and gazed up at the lush canopy towering high overhead, then began to tell her story.

"When I say my luck is good, I actually mean it literally."

"Originally, my fate wasn't good at all. At least not in childhood—it was downright abysmal."

"From the moment I was born, I had an irreversible form of atypical progeria. Can you imagine? By the time I was twelve, I had more wrinkles on my face than my eighty-two-year-old great-grandmother, yet my hair was even thinner than hers."

"Every doctor declared I wouldn't survive past fifteen. But on the day I turned fourteen, a biology professor moved in next door."

"At first, we had no idea he wasn't a real professor, but a black-market dealer conducting illegal biological experiments in secret. Still, his unthinkable bio-experiments managed to keep me alive—even though I was reduced to a husk lying in a culture tank, plugged full of tubes, stripped of all dignity. But I lived. I made it past fifteen."

"Fortunately, my family was fairly well off. My parents earned enough to sustain the experiments, so I wouldn't die in that tank."

"When I was sixteen, Tao Yi moved in and became my neighbor."

"She was two years younger than me. Pretty, with a lovely voice—lively, cheerful, and clever. Most importantly, she was healthy. Incredibly healthy."

"My mother always felt I needed a friend my own age, so with her deliberate encouragement and invitations, Tao Yi started visiting regularly. She wasn't the least bit afraid of the tank that imprisoned me like a cage."

"Having a companion my age made me happy, even though I looked more like her grandmother—or even her great-grandmother."

"But I was often jealous of her too. Jealous of how beautiful she was. Jealous of her carefree health."

"Those tangled emotions lasted for years. My body deteriorated further and further, until even the experiments could no longer hold things together."

"And just when our entire family had lost hope, that black-market dealer with his miraculous connections—Professor Chen—procured a new drug. He said it could keep me alive, but it was even more expensive than the experiments."

"That same year, our family business collapsed. It looked like we wouldn't be able to afford the life-sustaining treatments anymore. But then one night, my father hit the lottery. Six million dollars."

"Unbelievable, right? Those six million let the family business recover, and kept me clinging to life."

"But later I found out that ticket wasn't his. It was Tao Yi's. She was still in college, spending her living expenses on lottery tickets every single day—all so she could win enough money to pay for my treatment. Who would have thought a naive college student could actually win the lottery? And that she'd hit it at the exact moment my family was on the verge of collapse."

"This girl who had absolutely no obligation to me—and that sum wasn't small change for her family either—she could have simply walked away. But she didn't."

"She never told her family. She secretly slipped the winning ticket into my father's pocket. He had no idea where it came from, but seeing that the money could save a life, he took it with a guilty conscience."

"And so I lived again. Lived for many more years. Our family business thrived, and we even had the resources to support Tao Yi in chasing her dream of singing."

"But she was... honestly, not that great a singer. So my mother suggested she try a different track. And wouldn't you know it—she landed a minor role as a servant girl in a drama, and she blew up."

"The very first paycheck she earned, she spent it on the newest medication for me—even though by then my family could afford it ourselves. Honestly..."

"Later, the disease finally became impossible to hold off. Even my mother—who'd always been the most confident about my recovery—gave up. They cried as they prepared my funeral arrangements, and then..."

"The Faith Game descended."

"..."

"So now you can guess why I chose [Prosperity], and why I'm grateful to Him—because He let me stand on my own two feet again."

"At the Path Starting Point, there were three artifacts: [Prosperity]'s green branch, [Decay]'s dagger, and [Fate]'s die."

"The moment I learned that the green branch could restore me completely, I didn't even spare a second glance at the other two."

Hong Lin gave a self-deprecating laugh, then turned to look at Cheng Shi beside her:

"Now do you understand why I believe in destiny? The first half of my life is living proof of good fortune."

"That's why I told you I'm not afraid of dying—because every time I've walked to the gates of hell, a hand has always pushed me back."

"First it was Professor Chen, then it was Tao Yi, and now it's you, Cheng Shi."

Cheng Shi's mind churned with emotion, deeply moved. He thought that perhaps this was the real reason [Fate] had bestowed that die—because the god had already set His eyes on this pitiable soul favored by fortune, all the way back at the Path Starting Point.

'So people truly blessed by [Fate] do exist. And Hong Lin wasn't just blindly charmed by my persuasion—she genuinely believes in destiny.'

'If anything, I'm the one profiting off her good luck.'

"I wasn't crazy before, because I felt I owed it to them to stay alive. But now that I've met you, seen the Destined Ones, I realize I was wrong."

"My good fortune shouldn't be my safety net—it should be my weapon."

"So if there's a chance, why not? At the very least, standing at that height would let me better protect my friends."

"Wielding the Authority of [Prosperity] as proxy—wouldn't that let my friends flourish forever?"

Cheng Shi smiled. He smiled with genuine joy, and even clapped his hands. And as he applauded, he activated the Floating Dream of the Memory Sea, inscribing the tale of the Mushroom-Footed People and the Divine Envoy into the history of the Land of Hope.

Watching Cheng Shi work, Hong Lin suddenly asked:

"Are we going to die?"

The question landed heavy, because this time it wasn't something an [Order] remnant page could solve. This gamble demanded they go all-in—absolutely, irrevocably all-in.

This time, Cheng Shi genuinely couldn't be sure. But at the very least, under his Benefactor's protection, even if they died, it shouldn't be too gruesome.

So he nodded with "conviction": "No. Absolutely not."

...

Chapter 328: When Divine Matters Are Uncertain, Consult [Order]

Beneath the Prosperity Divine Shade, the alliance was sealed. Above the Canopy Sea, the God War reached its conclusion.

[Prosperity] lost. She was disrupted by [Chaos], bound by [Fate], slandered by [Folly], and finally imprisoned by [Truth].

In this divine battle invisible to mortals, She grew weaker with every exchange, yet no ally ever appeared. And so, isolated and without recourse, [Prosperity] surrendered at the war's end, resigning Herself to being sealed within Her own domain by [Truth].

Redundant cosmic laws and intricate universal truths were forged into chains that cleansed divinity, each one piercing through [Prosperity]'s God Body, binding Her to the tower of essence that [Truth] had constructed for this purpose.

From this moment on, She was no longer the crescendo of [Life] nor the abundance of the spirit—She was [Civilization]'s prisoner, a withered slave.

According to the Pact of Gods, when one of the signatory deities is trapped and deprived of freedom, Their Envoy holds the right to inherit the true god's Authority.

Thus, when [Truth] achieved the anticipated victory, He stood atop the Canopy Sea before all the gods and used [Truth]'s methods to extract the bloodline from the utterly defenseless Barren Walker, Eposka, and graft it into His own body.

Life, biology, heredity, grafting—every one of these was His specialty. And so Eposka died. No—it should be said that Dizek died. All that remained of Him was the soul sealed within the Gift of Sores, while His body—or rather, His identity—had been stolen by [Truth].

A "Dizek" still existed in the world, but He was no longer [Prosperity]'s second child, because a different god now occupied that role.

A pair of white chaotic eyes hovering high above, brimming with contempt and disdain, let out a derisive snort. The tone dripped with sarcasm.

"Brilliant. Truly brilliant. Willing to become [Prosperity]'s son for the sake of merging faiths—how very [Truth] of you. After all, truth is about achieving the most complex goals through the simplest means."

"I'm starting to admire you."

A pair of eyes painted with spirals and starpoints opened beside the white ones, and their tone was icy:

"[Truth] has already taken the first step down His path. And you? When does your grand plan begin?"

"Stay away from me, [Fate]. Don't let your [Misfortune] rub off on me."

"You want a fight?"

"Crude. Irritable. Utterly devoid of logic."

"I was merely expressing my feelings. If you want a fight, go find [War]. I see He's been lurking in the back watching for quite some time now. Perhaps He's already itching to join in."

A pair of heterochromatic eyes swirling with blood and fire fell silent upon hearing this. After a moment, a low, hollow voice rumbled:

"...The Pact... must not... be violated..."

"Tch—I'd truly love to know where that courage went—the courage you had when you and [Order] were purging the universe and marching into the Sea of Desire."

"Don't tell me you ended up the same as [Order]—defeated in the Sea of Desire, torn to shreds by endless wants?"

"Hm? Are you [Fear (War)] or [Shut-In (War)]?"

"..."

No god responded to that. No one could endure [Folly]'s relentless mockery. The gods despised Him, and few bothered engaging.

But just then, another pair of eyes painted with spirals and starpoints opened before the heterochromatic eyes of blood and fire. The moment they appeared, they grinned at the war god:

"If you have reservations, why not follow behind me? I'll lead the charge, and we'll take down that foul mouth together. What say you?"

The instant those words landed, even the white eyes radiating endless derision clamped shut.

In any place where [Deceit] was present, no god was willing to engage with Him either.

Before long, more and more eyes opened above the Canopy Sea.

[Life] sent two, but neither offered any comment on [Prosperity]'s defeat.

[Descent] had only one representative, who was still lamenting not having been able to get a piece of the action during the battle.

[Truth] was still mid-fusion. [War] was meek and mousy. [Chaos] had shown up in full force, but had now fallen entirely silent.

From [Existence], only [Memory] was present—[Time] seemingly never appeared at these kinds of affairs.

And the great [Void]? One watched coldly from the sidelines. The other only knew how to giggle.

Once [Truth] completed His fusion on the divine level, He began to seek inheritance rights to [Prosperity]'s Authority under the Pact.

And at that very moment—just when the gods assumed the matter was settled—[Deceit] spoke up. He appeared beside [Truth] with a playful grin, His voice dripping with "sincerest apology":

"Sorry, bookworm, but you're not the only one who can inherit [Prosperity]'s Authority. I've got a claim too."

At these words, the eyes of every god darkened.

No one wanted [Deceit] to grow stronger. Other gods might exercise caution and restraint due to this concern or that, but not Him. He only ever pleased Himself.

For the sake of entertainment, there was nothing He wouldn't do.

So when [Deceit] uttered those words, every god except [Fate] furrowed their brows.

[Truth] seemed to have anticipated interference, and so He stepped aside, gesturing for [Deceit] to go first.

Seeking an inheritance of Authority under the Pact was not a matter of mere words. All rulings pertaining to the Pact required Justice—[Order]—to appear in person and exercise judgment according to the rules.

[Truth]'s meaning was clear: He was certain [Deceit] could not convince Justice, because He bore not a single thread of connection to [Prosperity]. Without a connection, there was no grounds to inherit [Prosperity]'s Authority.

And just as the gods were cautiously watching [Deceit], waiting to see what sort of entertainment He was engineering this time, He did something unexpected—He summoned Justice before anyone else could.

A set of Scales, sketched from starlight and luminous streams, materialized before the gods. The instant it appeared, the universe resounded with a rigid, booming voice woven from countless intertwined rules.

All of spacetime began to boil. The Canopy Sea sank infinitely, the blazing great sun rocketed upward, reality stretched and thinned until it was gossamer-frail—and then every god present was wrenched into a brilliant starry sky.

Here, light and dark held perfect order. The galactic river flowed along precise tracks. Every star that freely twinkled and orbited did so in such sublime harmony that it seemed some pattern—invisible to mortals and gods alike—was constraining them, rendering every corner of the universe absolutely [Ordered]!

Even the gods had been forcibly arranged in symmetrical positions, becoming part of this harmonious cosmos.

"You have summoned Us. For what purpose?"

Spirals reversed, starpoints flickered softly. Those eyes with their upturned corners glanced at [Fate] beside them, then at [Memory] across the way, and giggled:

"Don't play dumb, you old relic. You heard me. I'm claiming inheritance of the Mother of Prosperity's Authority. Oh, and [Truth] wants it too, so let's split it between us."

The stars within the Scales rose and fell for a moment, as if evaluating the qualifications of the two petitioners. Before long, the powerful voice of [Order] rang out again:

"The Mother of [Prosperity]—by what cause was She imprisoned?"

"How would I know? You'll have to ask [Truth]."

Before [Truth] could speak, [Folly]—positioned opposite [Truth]—beat Him to it.

"The Pact does not inquire into cause and effect. Since when have you become a gossip?"

"Could it be that [Fear (Order)] has already merged with you?"

"..."

[Deceit] let out a derisive snort, then turned to [Folly] with a mocking grin:

"Well, this is rare. You're actually siding with [Truth]? What—has the great [Folly] already bowed before the even greater [Truth]?"

"..."

And with that, everyone shut up again.

On the pan of the Scales, a pair of eyes inscribed with the axioms of order opened. They fixed upon [Deceit] and issued an icy denial:

"[Deceit], you do not possess the right of inheritance."

"Old relic, please spare us the obvious. I'm not about to fight over who gets to be the Mother of [Prosperity]'s son like some gods do—so of course I don't have the right."

"Then you summoned Us and convened the Assembly of Gods Convention—for what purpose?"

"Hee~"

"Naturally, to open the door ahead of time for someone who does have the right of inheritance—saving you the trouble of dragging your ancient limbs all the way here."

With that, those grinning eyes blinked once—and two figures instantly appeared before the gods. Two thoroughly bewildered human figures.

"Behold—the eldest daughter of [Prosperity], Frazor. She has arrived."

The moment those words fell, the gaze of every deity present converged on the two humans who had no business being here.

Feeling a pressure like a mountain crashing down upon him, Cheng Shi's entire body shuddered. He forced out a pallid smile.

Hong Lin beside him was even more terrified, but she at least managed to hold her composure—and then simply shut her eyes. Out of sight, out of mind.

'As long as I can't see the gods, their gazes aren't on me.'

This warrior of [Prosperity] had finally learned a new skill from Cheng Shi: self-deception.

"A meaningless act of folly."

Just as [Folly] voiced His mockery, the previously silent [Memory] suddenly spoke. He gazed at Cheng Shi with keen interest, and within His eyes flashed the entire history of the Mushroom-Footed People.

"Cunning never changes. You truly are the spitting image of your Benefactor."

Cheng Shi didn't dare make a sound, but [Deceit] had no such reservations.

He let out the same derisive snort and fired back three words: "Want a fight?"

[Memory] withdrew the history from His eyes and returned to silence.

At that moment, [Truth] turned His gaze toward Hong Lin, His eyes reflecting the unraveling of cosmic laws, layer by layer, thread by thread.

He merely reviewed everything that had transpired today—and from that alone, He discerned every cause, effect, and twist. Then, with neither joy nor sorrow, He spoke:

"Since when have [Deceit] and [Memory] stood on the same side?"

[Memory] gave a soft hum and offered no reply. He never explained memories to anyone, for all of history was His collection—and what lay within that collection was for Him alone to decide.

Seeing [Memory] close His eyes, [Folly] spoke up again from the distance.

"If rewritten history can still be called history, then why can't grafted faith be considered true faith?"

"By that logic, did [Prosperity] even violate the Pact at all? Was everything I just witnessed nothing more than a joke?"

"If so, why don't we all just embrace [Prosperity] and merge with Her?"

"It appears She saw through the universe's truth a step ahead of the rest of us. Heh. How laughable."

?

'That passive-aggressive thing has to be [Folly], right?'

Cheng Shi listened in stunned silence. He carefully stole a sideways glance at those white eyes, then grumbled internally:

'No wonder Your followers are all like that. Hm, suit Yourself.'

'But seriously—who says rewritten history can't be called history? And why does Your "let's all merge with Her" have to drag me into it?'

Cheng Shi panicked. He glanced back at his Benefactor, and seeing no intention to stop him, raised his hand: "I object!"

That juvenile voice drew every deity's attention. [Folly] let out a contemptuous snort, and the Scales resonated with a solemn declaration that swept across the cosmos:

"The Assembly of Gods Convention—humans hold no right to participate."

"..." Cheng Shi had no choice but to sheepishly lower his hand. But in that same instant, two other voices rang out across the stage.

One cold as an abyssal abyss. One light and giggling.

"I object."

"I agree."

...

Chapter 329: Who Killed [Prosperity]!??

When [Void] was divided, whose voice should be heeded next?

The answer was [Deceit].

Because [Fate] was supremely indifferent and rarely spoke.

And because He could never outpace [Deceit] in conversation.

The moment He finished saying "I object," [Deceit]—holding the opposing view—had already launched into His mockery.

"Great idea. I've been wanting to merge with the Mother of [Prosperity] for ages. I've always felt Her eyes weren't captivating enough—why not swap them for mine?"

"But the Pact probably wouldn't appreciate me doing that, so how about you give me a demonstration first?"

"Oh, and we'll need the most esteemed [Truth] to release the Mother of [Prosperity] from that dusty pile of books first. Then we can discuss who gets to assimilate with Her."

With that, He turned His gaze toward [Folly].

Those eyes smeared with chaotic white opacity let out a contemptuous snort, muttered "a meaningless farce," and vanished.

He was gone—as if He'd already foreseen the coming disagreements and their futile end.

Seeing [Folly] depart, [Deceit] turned to [Truth] with a playful grin.

"Your hard-won ally just walked out. So tell me, interested party—how do you feel?"

"History may not be truth, but it is still worth remembering. The Pact recognizes [Memory]'s Divine Name and safeguards His Authority—and so it should likewise acknowledge the changes brought about by the exercise of that Authority."

"Therefore, I have no objections."

At those words, [Memory] opened His eyes and gazed at Him with a faint smile.

Hearing this, Cheng Shi could only marvel at how formidable [Truth] truly was. He seemed to have gained yet another ally—if not in the present, then perhaps in the future, or even in the past.

[Truth]'s infinitely rational gaze swept over the bodies of Cheng Shi and Hong Lin, and then He stated His position with measured composure:

"All of you know my will. I have no desire to hoard divine power indiscriminately."

"So the Pact need only confirm my identity, granting me [Prosperity]'s Authority of Assimilation. As for the remaining Authorities, I am perfectly willing to relinquish them—to share them with this long-absent Servant God, Frazor."

Upon hearing this, the tightly wound, terror-stricken Cheng Shi and Hong Lin both brightened—while [Deceit], on the other hand, furrowed His brow.

[Truth] was not [Prosperity]. He was the aggregate of all cosmic laws, the sum total of the universe's essence. If He obtained the Authority of Assimilation, it would likely be only a matter of time before everyone was subsumed within Him, becoming part of this world's truth.

And that was precisely why [Deceit] had agreed to let Cheng Shi run wild—because no one wanted to be assimilated, whether by [Prosperity] or [Truth].

The no-longer-grinning [Deceit] prepared to voice His opposition, but before He could open His mouth, a cataclysmic roar erupted from the void without the slightest warning!

BOOM—BOOM!!!

An explosion that seemed to shake the entire universe tore through the cosmos. Before Cheng Shi and Hong Lin could even react, an indescribable torrent of overwhelming vitality erupted from rifts in the void on all sides, instantly flooding the entire starry sky with emerald green.

The two humans couldn't process what was happening. Their vision went black and consciousness fled. When they opened their eyes again, they discovered they had both become bleached-white skulls.

"?"

"Huh?"

Two small skulls appeared beneath that great one's Bone Throne, utterly dumbstruck. [Death] had at some point reassumed the form of a colossal skull, and Fishbone Hall had materialized in this stretch of void without anyone expecting it.

He sat high upon the Bone Throne, green flames blazing wildly in His eye sockets, His gaze heavy as He stared downward.

Cheng Shi and Hong Lin exchanged an uneasy glance, hearts pounding, and followed His line of sight downward. Below, in the void that still bore the shadow of the Canopy Sea, there was no longer any trace of green. The apocalyptic force unleashed by that horrific explosion seemed to have destroyed reality and void alike, crumpling everything into a single mass.

Throughout this space riddled with tears in the void, terrifying fluctuations still surged and overflowed—yet all that met the eye was the ravaged aftermath of vitality turned to ruin.

Cheng Shi's heart lurched, and a deeply unsettling thought suddenly surfaced in his mind.

But the thought was so absurd, so terrifying, that the instant it formed, he shoved it away.

Hong Lin felt the same—but she knew slightly more than Cheng Shi, because her keen [Prosperity] senses told her that this space had just experienced a single instant of [Prosperity] aura so dense and overwhelming it defied comprehension. And now, this place held...

No more [Prosperity].

She gaped in disbelief, her teeth clacking against each other, struck mute by the utterly unfathomable thought forming in her mind.

"This is..." Cheng Shi tilted his chin upward, his head buzzing, the question escaping him involuntarily.

"The Final Oracle..."

The colossal skull atop the Bone Throne let out a mournful sigh and slowly uttered the words. His tone was so complex, so inscrutable—tinged even with a thread of ineffable sorrow.

"[Prosperity]'s... Final Oracle."

"When... a True God... falls... the Pact... bestows on Their behalf... one last... inviolable... oracle."

!!!!!!!!!!

What!!!???

[Prosperity] had fallen?

She was dead?

Huh? No—how was that even possible!?

"How is that possible!? My lord, didn't you say the Pact protects all True Gods, preventing Their fall and ensuring Their Authorities are never lost? How could She die!?"

"Who killed Her?"

"Who could kill Her?"

Of course it was Cheng Shi asking—because Hong Lin's brain was still in a state of complete shutdown.

From the moment she'd appeared under the gaze of the gods, the roaring in her head had never stopped. She'd lost nearly all the composure and awareness essential to a warrior—all she could guarantee was that she wouldn't collapse from fear in the presence of the gods, standing as straight as she possibly could, but nothing more.

She let her ears passively absorb everything, but words like "Pact" and "Final Oracle" meant absolutely nothing to her—she neither knew nor understood them.

It was only after hearing Cheng Shi speak that she realized this Fate Weaver from the Destined Ones knew far, far more than she did. He seemed deeply familiar with the gods—and hadn't shown even a flicker of timidity before this terrifying colossal skull.

'This must be [Death], right?'

'So He's a giant skull...'

'But why does He stutter when He talks?'

'No, no, no—Hong Lin, you can't be thinking about that right now. You need to pull yourself together. Focus! This is serious—because your Benefactor, [Prosperity]... seems to have fallen!'

The colossal skull on the Bone Throne did not answer Cheng Shi. He merely gazed in silence toward the epicenter of the explosion—toward the place where [Prosperity]'s Final Oracle still echoed—and sighed once more.

"[Life]... is... so... fragile."

"Only... He... and I... remain."

Listening to [Death]'s lament, Cheng Shi confirmed one thing: [Prosperity] was truly dead. Dead beyond any doubt!

But the question was—who killed Her?

Was it [Oblivion], who wanted to annihilate Her Authority for His own amusement?

No, that wasn't right. He remembered that the pair of eyes like twin black voids had been present at the scene the entire time. They hadn't left...

Then it was...

No! Wait!!!

Cheng Shi froze. Because he suddenly recalled what [Death] had said before—those words about the Pact's rules. The exact words were:

"Under the Pact's protection, no god can kill another god."

"Because the very purpose of signing it was to prevent any more wars that led to the fall of deities."

No god could kill another god!

So...

Cheng Shi stared at the devastation stretching across nearly the entire starry sky beneath his feet. Dumbstruck, unable to believe it, he shook his head and spoke:

"So it was..."

"[Prosperity] killed [Prosperity]!"

"She..."

"Destroyed Herself."

...

Chapter 330: That Awe-Inspiring, Irrefutable Universal Prosperity

"You said... what?"

Hong Lin seemed to have recovered somewhat. With only [Death] beside them now, she finally returned to being the outspoken Druid she truly was.

She turned to Cheng Shi in disbelief and asked him to confirm once more:

"You said [Prosperity] killed Herself?"

No matter how absurd, how bizarre, how unfathomable this scene was, Cheng Shi had no choice but to nod—because [Prosperity] had indeed fallen.

"Why?"

"It can't be that She couldn't bear captivity and chose death as a statement of principle?"

"That's impossible. They're... They're the omnipotent gods! What was She after?"

What was She after?

Cheng Shi couldn't make sense of it either, but one possibility occurred to him. He spoke with deep admiration:

"Perhaps... that's exactly it. A death to make a statement."

The moment he finished speaking, the colossal skull atop the Bone Throne slowly turned to look at Cheng Shi. The compassionate green flames in His eye sockets gradually dimmed, and He spoke with even more emotion than Cheng Shi:

"No wonder... She... would invite... you, a human... to merge with Her."

"You truly... are well-suited... to Her will."

"Her... Final Oracle... was to divide... all of Her Authority... equally... and leave it... to the gods."

"The Pact... has already... carried out... this oracle."

As He spoke, the skull gently parted its jaws and from the hollow cavity of its mouth produced a perfect, unblemished tender bud.

Sensing the divine might surging from the bud, Cheng Shi's heart shook.

"This is..."

"[Prosperity]'s... 'Unsullied'... Authority."

"She... would spread... this power... throughout... the Divine Shade... and so... Her people... suffered no... disease."

"But..."

"I wield... [Death]'s Divine Name... I have no need... for this Authority."

Realization struck Cheng Shi like lightning. He blinked rapidly, then burst into laughter.

"My lord, forgive my presumption—but even if you don't need it, you surely... wouldn't return an Authority that was delivered to your doorstep?"

The colossal skull showed no anger at Cheng Shi's irreverence. He quietly nodded.

"Correct. This is... the Mother of [Prosperity]'s... final enactment... of Her own will."

"She gave [Birth]... 'Breeding.' She gave me... 'Unsullied.' She gave [Corruption]... 'Assimilation.' She gave [Truth]... 'Abundance'..."

"In short... every god... received a gift... from Her fall."

"But—"

"But none of it matters!" Cheng Shi laughed maniacally, his jaw clacking against the white bone steps with each convulsion.

He felt this divine drama was absolutely spectacular—so magnificent it drew involuntary awe and wonder!

[Death] gave a soft hum and said nothing more, but Hong Lin's eyes were filled with confusion. She looked at Cheng Shi and asked, bewildered:

"Why would She do this? She sacrificed Herself through self-annihilation just to disgust the gods?"

"Disgust? No, no, no!" Cheng Shi laughed—louder than before. "I think She never cared about what the gods thought. What She cared about was always Herself."

"And above all else—Her will of universal prosperity!"

"Think about it. When every god has received Her gift, when every single one of Them has fused with [Prosperity]'s Authority, when every supreme being in the cosmos carries prosperity within them—then the grand vision of universal prosperity..."

"Can it really be far away?"

"..."

The gods' understanding of Authority clearly exceeded Hong Lin's comprehension. That wasn't her fault—she was only human, after all, and she knew far too little about Them.

But Cheng Shi's grasp of divine Authority also surpassed her understanding. Her head was spinning, because she could vaguely sense a hidden meaning behind Cheng Shi's words:

She was dead—but somehow not really dead.

Brow furrowed in deep confusion, Hong Lin asked another question:

"Then... why don't They just refuse?"

But the moment the question left her lips, she fell silent.

Refuse?

Who would refuse?

The gods' current reality was one of exploiting every loophole in the Pact to seize each other's Authority. When an ownerless Authority was delivered right to their mouths, never mind biting deeper in the direction it came from—who would turn it away?

This was [Prosperity]. This was the [Prosperity] who went around preaching "merge with me."

She was willing to die rather than abandon Her will.

It was terrifying. Absolutely horrifying.

Could what drove a lofty god to sacrifice everything truly be just faith and conviction?

What were They—or rather, what was the Pact that bound Them—truly pursuing?

Cheng Shi would never dare ask that question. He knew he was far too insignificant. When he lacked the power to protect himself, some things were better left unknown. After all, divine favor didn't last forever—the more you knew, the faster you might die.

And so silence settled once more.

Cheng Shi silently pondered whether all of this had been orchestrated by Cheng Dashi, scripted by [Fate], or merely a string of accidents from start to finish.

Perhaps all he'd done was toss a pebble into a calm lake at Cheng Dashi's suggestion—never expecting it to become the final straw that broke the camel's back, shattering the fragile lakebed altogether.

Hong Lin, on the other hand, was far more conflicted. While she didn't worship [Prosperity], learning that her only Benefactor had fallen left her mind churning with one question: what would happen to all of [Prosperity]'s players now?

[Death] saw the alarm and doubt in her eyes and spoke quietly:

"Authority... has only transferred... not vanished."

"You will... lose nothing... except the ability... to be summoned by Her. Otherwise... nothing changes."

"Trials and blessings... will be handled... by the Pact as proxy... however..."

"Her power... to reward followers... during trials... is yet to be... assigned."

The moment the colossal skull finished speaking, a pair of eyes painted with spirals and starpoints opened high above Fishbone Hall.

Those supremely cold eyes swept over everything in the hall, then pushed a contract radiating the luminance of [Order] before Hong Lin.

The instant Cheng Shi saw his Benefactor's arrival, he leaped two steps forward and cried out in praise:

"Praise the greatest [Fate] in all the universe!"

Those icy eyes offered no response. They merely blinked with neither joy nor sorrow—and then tossed the sycophantic follower into another stretch of void.

After Cheng Shi vanished, the eyes regarded the stunned Hong Lin, and a cold voice spoke:

"I have sensed your devotion to destiny, and I have seen your confusion about the road ahead. That is why I have come to guide you."

"Hong Lin, will you step into [Void], walk simultaneously upon the Path of [Fate], and become my Favored One?"

Hong Lin froze for only a single second before nodding with conviction:

"I'm willing. But... forgive my boldness—I have some questions."

The icy spirals in those eyes reversed. They gazed at the player about to become His Favored One, the tone still cold as ever.

"Speak."

"Since my Benefac—since [Prosperity] has fallen, will I change from a Druid into a Hero of Today?"

"Though [Prosperity] has fallen, the path of [Prosperity] endures. Only the Divine Throne at its end now sits empty. You may still continue walking Her road, seeking the destination of faith."

"I will bestow upon you your own Die of Fate. When you take it up, you shall walk both the path of [Prosperity] and the Fixed Destiny of [Fate]."

"Justice has recognized your identity. As the eldest daughter of the Mother of [Prosperity]—Frazor—you possess the right to inherit [Prosperity]."

"But [Prosperity] no longer holds any Authority, so you cannot ascend to Her Divine Throne."

"However, for the sake of fairness, Justice has preserved the necessary rights acknowledged by the Pact for Her offspring."

"These rights are split in two. [Truth] took the voting rights at the Assembly of Gods Convention. What remains for you is only..."

"The power to reward [Prosperity]'s followers during trials."

"Sign this contract, and the rights of [Prosperity]'s offspring will be recognized by the Pact. And you shall truly become a Servant God of [Life]—Her Envoy, Her eldest daughter, Frazor."

"An heir of [Prosperity] with neither Authority nor voting rights under the Pact."

"..." Hong Lin's brain exploded all over again. She desperately wanted to gesture and process her thoughts, only to discover she had no hands or feet. She looked imploringly at the colossal skull beside her, hoping this great lord would explain things just as He had before—but the skull said nothing.

With no alternative, she raised her head and looked at those eyes, asking dryly: "Then... will I still be me?"

"Sign the contract, and you will learn in time."

'Oh. Got it. I don't have a choice.'

So Hong Lin gritted her teeth, bounced over to the contract, and was about to ask how a skull with no hands or feet was supposed to sign a divine contract—when she found that her will had already appeared on the contract in a script she couldn't begin to understand.

The moment the contract was sealed, [Order]'s luminance gradually faded. The contract dissolved into countless starpoints that scattered across the universe.

At the same time, a twenty-four-sided Die of Fate quietly appeared beside her.

"The contract is sealed, your identity confirmed. Leave."

With that, the eyes blinked once and sent Hong Lin out of the void.

The colossal skull raised its gaze to those cold eyes, and spoke with complex emotion:

"[Fate]... truly is... always changing."

With that, the entirety of Fishbone Hall collapsed and dispersed, leaving only those swirling eyes staring at the devastation in the void, their gaze growing ever more unfathomable. Perhaps no one would ever know what He was thinking.

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