

The Gods 361

Chapter 361: Midnight Terror — Attack from the Scavenger

They didn't end up going through the window. Turadin procured a set of core church personnel robes from somewhere, and after Cheng Shi changed into them, the two strolled brazenly out of the tower.

The library sat at the deepest end of the church's outer compound. On the way through the corridors, they encountered Scorpio and Gao Ya in a rear courtyard, and the four merged into one group heading toward the library.

Turadin didn't bat an eye at Zhang Jizu's absence. He understood that an organization like this had many irons in the fire—one or two fewer members was no big deal.

But the other two teammates were curious. After a long hesitation, Gao Ya finally frowned and whispered:

"Where's the Gravekeeper?"

Cheng Shi answered without hiding a thing: "Bathroom. Constipation. Won't be back for a while. No need to wait."

"..." Gao Ya's expression after hearing this was indistinguishable from actual constipation.

Scorpio, meanwhile, seemed to be growing accustomed to Cheng Shi's rhythm. He only smiled without commenting.

The church grounds were sizable—the library wasn't nearby. En route, Cheng Shi gradually leaked bits of his plan. There were no absolute idiots in this tier; upon hearing his wildly ambitious approach, both teammates froze.

Scorpio asked in a dazed whisper: "What if there actually is a life in this trial that shouldn't be born?"

Cheng Shi rubbed his chin: "Then it shouldn't be born."

"..."

"Bro, I don't even think this counts as cheating—you've basically given yourself a whole new problem set. Can this really work?"

"We still have six days. No reason to rush."

"Why not rush? The whole point of a speedrun is speed."

"Never mind whether my answer's right—just tell me: is it fast?"

"..." Scorpio had no rebuttal. He could only nod.

'It's pretty fast, yeah...'

Gao Ya listened to their exchange with a scoff, trailing behind in silence.

Not because she didn't want to join the discussion—she simply didn't want to be the one getting mocked. In her assessment, Cheng Shi's approach wasn't crude at all—it was actually quite elegant.

She'd seen this kind of "edge-case" problem-solving in other trials. But it was exclusively the domain of top players. Ordinary players couldn't replicate it—partly because nobodies lacked the ability to rally an entire team behind their schemes, and partly because normal human brains simply didn't produce ideas like this.

Since she could ride along for a speedrun, she'd naturally prefer an early finish. After all, there was still a Scavenger out there watching and waiting. His hunting game probably wasn't over yet, and being marked as prey was deeply uncomfortable.

At this thought, Gao Ya frowned again and asked quietly:

"The cake Mo Shu made earlier—any left?"

Cheng Shi paused mid-step and looked back at Gao Ya in surprise: "What—hungry?"

Gao Ya's expression was conflicted. After a long silence, she reluctantly nodded.

Watching her refuse to lower her head, Cheng Shi nearly lost his composure. Without thinking, he jabbed: "Not worried about it being tampered with anymore?"

"..." A meaningful glint passed through Gao Ya's eyes. She replied: "I'm worried it isn't."

Cheng Shi seemed to understand. He smiled:

"If you want to eat—sure. Trade for it."

"If you don't want to trade, out of humanitarian aid I can also offer you something else to eat. Bug juice or something. Plenty of it. If you're not picky, it'll fill you up. Want some?"

"?"

When Cheng Shi actually produced two bottles of Mucus Water, the expressions on both Scorpio and Gao Ya's faces shifted dramatically.

'What kind of respectable 2,000+ player eats that?'

'No—what living person with any self-respect still eats that stuff?'

Gao Ya shot Cheng Shi a venomous sideways glare. After a moment's hesitation, she decided to "submit." She pulled a scale from her spatial storage.

"B-grade item. Scale of Evil Bearing. Stick it on an enemy to increase damage they take by thirty percent. Half a cake."

The little assassin gawked at the faintly blue-glowing scale. 'Are you serious? Half a cake for a B-grade item?'

But Cheng Shi pursed his lips dismissively: "Trash. If I could get close enough to stick this on someone, I'd have already twisted their head off. I don't need this. The enemy doesn't have 1.3 heads for me to twist."

"..." Gao Ya was momentarily choked. She glared at him, teeth grinding: "A Wood Elf can twist heads off?"

"Didn't you say I'm not a Wood Elf? Maybe I'm a Druid."

"..." Gao Ya was furious. She was about to fire back—but when Cheng Shi suddenly retracted his bottles of Mucus Water, she bit her tongue. Then she pulled from her spatial storage a pair of gossamer-thin gloves.

The gloves appeared to be woven from translucent, crystalline threads. Worn, they were nearly invisible on the hand. When folded, faintly reflective contours emerged.

"A-grade item. Puppet Grip. Derived from the Civilization Lonely Tower's research on [Silence] assassin Puppet Masters during the late Chaos Era. Wearing them lets you create illusory puppet strings to freeze opponents mid-air. This is one of my escape tools. Worth at least half a cake!"

Seeing these gloves, the little assassin Scorpio's eyes sharpened.

'A-grade? What kind of cake warrants an A-grade item?'

When something consistently defied logic, the anomaly wasn't the thing—it was the person who couldn't see through it!

He immediately suspected the cake was the key. He started replaying everything about the cake in his mind—but before he could connect all the threads, Cheng Shi had already smiled and nodded.

"You're really going all-in. These are genuinely good. Half a cake isn't enough for these—take a whole one."

He produced an entire cake. But just as he held it out—a spark of intuition flashed through his mind and he said casually:

"Come on out. I know you're there."

The instant those words dropped, Scorpio and Gao Ya tensed, scanning their surroundings. Even the quick-striding Turadin froze and stopped.

Turadin frowned and looked around, unable to believe anyone in the church would dare openly confront him. But guilty conscience won out—he cautiously retreated a step, backing up to Cheng Shi's side, whispering: "What's going on?"

Cheng Shi was about to laugh it off as a joke—when the cake in his hand vanished into thin air with a whisper of sound.

!!!

His pupils contracted violently. He tackled Turadin to the ground, then in the same motion slashed to his side with everything a clown had—a strike both fast and precise. But as the blade-tip passed through space, everyone clearly saw half the scalpel simply... vanish into thin air!

[Oblivion]'s power!

The Scavenger was here—and right beside them!

Scorpio, as an assassin, should have had the sharpest instincts for danger and killing intent. But the attacker specifically possessed the ability to annihilate all killing intent—reducing him to a "normal player" on par with Cheng Shi. All he could do was watch.

But this only solidified his conviction: anyone who could detect an enemy approaching through this utterly normal-feeling environment was no amateur. This [Prosperity] follower absolutely had to be Bald Uses Rejoice!

Yet even with the [Prosperity] Chosen One as a teammate, surviving the [Oblivion] Chosen One wasn't guaranteed. So the instant Cheng Shi's scalpel vanished, Scorpio summoned his Arc of Time Restoration and slashed a circle through the air around himself.

He intended to lay a swamp-trap of [Time]'s delaying power as a defense—forcing the attacker to reveal themselves within [Time]'s grasp.

As a singer, Gao Ya was even weaker in direct combat. But nobody reaching this score tier was truly helpless. Everyone had at least some contingencies.

She swiftly pulled on the Puppet Grip and clenched toward the spot where Cheng Shi's scalpel had vanished.

The grip yielded results—puppet strings fired from the gloves and went taut, apparently latching onto an invisible target. But a heartbeat later, every last thread snapped. Gao Ya was yanked backward by the recoil, and the gloves ripped right off her hands.

She'd underestimated a warrior's raw strength—and the agility of [Oblivion]'s power.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi frowned. He shoved Turadin away from the corridor, barking a low "Go"—then ducked and combat-rolled, immediately snatching the fallen gloves into his spatial storage.

Gao Ya watched her equipment get taken without a crumb of cake in return. Her expression was complicated, but she said nothing—just scrambled upright and moved toward Cheng Shi's position.

She was smart enough to see that this self-proclaimed Wood Elf was the only teammate capable of holding the line against the hunter.

As for the little assassin? Heh. Forget it. His back was drenched in cold sweat.

Fear was an emotional burden for Scorpio—but for Cheng Shi, it was a godsend. Between all three teammates' contributions, his [Death] Fun Ring had finally charged to full capacity.

Which meant the previously helpless clown suddenly had a sliver of bargaining power against the opponent.

As the three drew together in the corridor, the cagey Scavenger finally revealed himself with a smile—stepping into view in the courtyard outside. Three startled cries erupted simultaneously:

"The Scavenger!"

"Mo Shu!"

"I knew it was you!"

The Scavenger, who'd been hunting all afternoon, still wore that sheepish expression—completely at odds with his black trench coat. It looked as if the person who'd just ambushed them wasn't him at all, but someone else entirely.

Seeing that demeanor, Cheng Shi's heart dropped.

'Great. We've got a psychopath on our hands.'

Chapter 362: Standoff — The [Oblivion] Chosen One!

Before the Scavenger revealed himself, Cheng Shi had already vaguely deduced why he'd attacked the other teammates.

When the [Oblivion] warrior chose to attack the two people inside the walls instead of him and squinty-eyes, Cheng Shi had been mulling it over. It wasn't until they ran into the [Folly] follower at the gate—and her inadvertent remark—that it clicked. This hunt was truly connected to the cakes Mo Shu had offered at the beginning.

'What an interesting person.'

He was hunting the three who hadn't eaten the cake!

He clearly knew everyone would be on guard against unfamiliar teammates at the start—especially suspicious of unfamiliar food from unfamiliar people. Yet he'd still chosen to hide the "key to safety" inside his handmade pastries.

So why?

Some twisted hobby?

A trust test between strangers?

No—it shouldn't be anything that absurd. As a high-ranking [Oblivion] follower, he shouldn't be that frivolous.

Cheng Shi couldn't figure it out, nor did he want to overthink it. The man himself was standing right there. Instead of guessing, just ask.

Mouths existed for asking questions. The more questions asked, the fewer misunderstandings.

So Cheng Shi studied his suddenly-arrived "teammate" and raised an eyebrow:

"Complete Deletion?"

Mo Shu turned toward Cheng Shi. With a meaningful curl of his lips, he said:

"Cheng Shi. Not bad."

"I've never been matched against you, yet you recognized me. So the skeleton cockroach told you?"

'Skeleton cockroach...'

'As expected—the cruelest nicknames always come from rivals.'

Cheng Shi's lips twitched. He fought desperately to suppress his grin in front of squinty-eyes' rival, pressing his mouth shut. The harder he tried, the more his lips wanted to betray him. This would be terribly disrespectful to his friendship with squinty-eyes.

But from that one sentence alone, he could deduce that the Scavenger hadn't been tailing them continuously. At least during his conversations with squinty-eyes and Scorpio, the man hadn't been listening.

Oddly enough, maybe because he was accustomed to facing peak players, seeing a Chosen One standing before him didn't particularly faze him. It was Scorpio and Gao Ya behind him who stiffened upon hearing the man so readily confirm his identity, their gazes turning grave.

Cheng Shi found it funny—a priest getting pushed to the front line by his teammates. It was like karmic payback for all the times he'd shoved teammates ahead of himself. Shaking his head with a wry smile, he addressed the restless Scavenger with genuine curiosity:

"Why kill people?"

Mo Shu wasn't like the other high-score players Cheng Shi had encountered—unfathomably deep. He was remarkably candid. Since Cheng Shi asked, he answered without reservation:

"They didn't align with my Lord's Benefactor. They had to die."

He even added a casual smile, as if annihilating teammates was utterly trivial.

"..." Scorpio trembled, not daring to make a sound. Gao Ya frowned hard, wanting to fire off some caustic remarks—but after sizing up the situation, she chose silence.

Mo Shu's gaze swept across everyone. He snorted softly and added:

"But more than that, I'm curious how you detected me."

'How did I detect you?'

'Guess whether I actually did.'

Cheng Shi smiled enigmatically, deliberately dodging the question. But verbally, he continued along the previous thread:

"So you used a few cakes to test whether people align with [Oblivion]'s will?"

"Isn't that a bit reckless?"

Mo Shu didn't press further when Cheng Shi didn't answer—every expert had their own tricks. Nothing worth investigating.

"Reckless? Maybe. But it works for me."

"Works?" Cheng Shi frowned, unable to figure out why.

"Mm. It works."

"I've always believed there are too many things in this world that shouldn't exist. Too many people who shouldn't be alive."

"If [Life] continues, how can the universe reach [Oblivion]?"

"So everyone should die."

"But I'm just an ordinary [Oblivion] follower. I can't annihilate everyone—that'd be way too much work."

"So I devised a method."

"At first, I stole a Die of Fate from a [Fate] follower. At the start of each trial, whatever number I rolled, that's how many I'd kill. But after a few rounds, I felt like I was harvesting on [Fate]'s behalf."

"So I had to switch methods. The little cakes were the second method I came up with."

"Before They descended, I really was a pastry chef. Loved baking. People loved my cakes. But after the game started, I became a follower of [Oblivion]. How could His follower be permitted to keep creating?"

"So I came up with another idea: let my teammates annihilate my creations for me. That way, I wouldn't feel guilty about creating."

"But some people refused to offer their trust. Entrenched behind walls of prejudice, unable to free themselves. Since they wouldn't help me, I might as well help them."

"Those without [Oblivion] in their hearts will be [Oblivioned] by others. Perfectly reasonable, right?"

"But as I kept killing, I suddenly realized: when only [Oblivion]'s followers and those who carry [Oblivion] in their hearts remain—wouldn't universal [Oblivion] be right around the corner?"

"And so I became even more exci—... even more convinced that this path is correct."

"So, Fate Weaver—that's the path I walk. Do you think my philosophy is right?"

"..."

"..."

"..."

'Buddy, I understand every individual word you said, but strung together, it's way too abstract. I really can't cosign this.'

'Also—oblivion or not aside—you're definitely catching some [Prosperity] vibes!'

Cheng Shi was numb. He deeply believed that every peak player was fundamentally insane—from Hu Xuan to Zhen Xin to Mo Shu. Without exception.

But this one was especially unhinged!

Because he actually used whether people ate his cake as the selection criteria for hunting teammates!

This was beyond absurd.

Cheng Shi had assumed the cake contained some deeper meaning he couldn't fathom. But the facts proved he'd overthought it.

The opponent simply felt killing everyone was too exhausting, so he'd fabricated an excuse to trick himself into sparing a few lucky souls.

This childish reasoning was simultaneously laughable and heartbreaking.

The tears were for the unlucky ones who didn't eat the cake. The laughter was for the desperately hungry ones who did.

'In that case, I suppose I should thank you for not killing me...'

Cheng Shi wanted to laugh but couldn't. His expression was frozen stiff. He suddenly felt this Scavenger wasn't really an [Oblivion] follower at all—more like a [Corruption] believer who happened to wield [Oblivion]'s power.

He was clearly unleashing his killing desire without the slightest restraint.

Scorpio thought the same—which made him even more terrified, to the point of completely ignoring who the "Fate Weaver" in Mo Shu's words actually was.

He hid behind Cheng Shi, compulsively checking the time, desperate to survive the day so he could escape via future-projection.

The [Folly] follower's thoughts ran deeper. She was noncommittal about Mo Shu's [Oblivion] path, but very interested in Cheng Shi's identity. When Mo Shu called him "Fate Weaver," she murmured:

"So you really are that Cheng Shi!"

"..."

'Is this really the time for that?'

Cheng Shi's thumb had been resting lightly on his ring. He feigned nonchalance, clapped his hands, and responded:

"Profound understanding. But I have a question."

"Since your path of [Oblivion] is so pure, why did you choose to embrace [Memory]?"

Mo Shu raised an eyebrow, shaking his head with a wry smile:

"I knew I couldn't hide it from that cockroach."

"You're right—I did seek audience with Him. And He did grant me some power."

"After all, the opening-cake routine is way too obvious. If I didn't make everyone forget I existed, by the day after any given trial, every player would know to eat a cake at the start."

"But you and he both guessed wrong. I haven't decided whether to embrace [Memory]."

"[Memory] belongs to [Existence]. And [Oblivion] doesn't want [Existence] to exist."

"So rather than embracing [Memory], I'm leaning toward... [Deceit]."

"?"

Cheng Shi's brow creased deeply. He'd caught it: Mo Shu's words weren't a casual jab at [Existence]—he genuinely had the option to choose [Deceit]!

'What's going on?'

'The Fun God summoned him?'

'Is this one of His chosen players? An ally?'

'Something doesn't feel right.'

He studied the man opposite him and asked uncertainly: "What does [Deceit] have to do with this?"

"Everything."

"He summoned me too. I never found where He was during the entire audience, but He bestowed some fun toys upon me."

As he spoke, Mo Shu drew from his spatial storage a clown doll—grinning wide with a bright red nose.

"Clown Substitute. But this clown isn't that kind of clown." He rubbed the clown's red nose, smiling eerily. "This is a circus clown. It lets me enjoy one extra player identity. So when slaughtering in the peak tier isn't satisfying enough, I can switch to a 2,100-point fish pond and hack down a few more fish."

!!!!

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted violently. It all clicked.

The Scavenger hadn't lied. He truly was the [Oblivion] Chosen One—but with a second, 2,100-point player identity!

'But this Clown Substitute... isn't the implication a bit too obvious?'

'He really gave this?'

'Did He give it to you... or to me?'

Cheng Shi blinked thoughtfully and quickly lowered his gaze.

'Interesting. So the Fun God's purpose in sending me into this trial might be to retrieve this so-called Clown Substitute?'

'Did He have a falling out with [Oblivion]? So He wants me to reclaim what He bestowed on an [Oblivion] follower?'

'What god is this petty?'

'But if it's the Fun God...'

'Hiss—actually, you know what? That tracks perfectly.'

At this thought, he raised his head with a smile. But when he again saw Mo Shu still rubbing the clown doll's red nose, he suddenly felt deeply uncomfortable.

'Bro, could you please stop rubbing the clown's nose? My nose is starting to itch...'

"ACHOO—"

Chapter 363: Did You Just Insult Me?

"Did you just insult me?"

After finishing his sneeze, Cheng Shi opened with an accusation so baffling it stunned even Mo Shu. The Scavenger blinked in astonishment, then burst out laughing.

"I never stoop to petty tricks. If something offends me, I annihilate it on the spot. No point bottling up frustration."

"Besides—you carry [Oblivion] in your heart. I'm not here for you. I'm here for those two."

"Stop hiding. Even cowering behind someone else won't save you from annihilation."

The Scavenger's words were breezy, but every syllable sent cold sweat streaming down Scorpio and Gao Ya's backs.

Gao Ya pulled her hood lower, retreated half a step, and quietly began singing various support melodies behind Cheng Shi. Between measures, she didn't forget to hiss:

"You took my gloves. Where's my cake?"

A cake suddenly materialized in Cheng Shi's hand behind his back—but instead of giving it to Gao Ya, he pressed it directly into Scorpio's palm. Simultaneously, he looked dead-serious at Mo Shu:

"Impossible. My senses are extremely sharp. Whenever someone insults me, I sneeze. So you definitely just insulted me."

Mo Shu blanked again. He didn't know why Cheng Shi was hung up on this, but he had time to spare—so he decided to play along.

"Oh? Even when I've annihilated my own presence, you can still sense being insulted?"

Cheng Shi nodded solemnly.

Mo Shu laughed. He laughed uproariously.

"You can't! Just now while saying that sentence, I insulted you—and you didn't sneeze. You lied, Fate Weaver."

But Cheng Shi showed zero embarrassment. Instead, wearing the triumphant expression of a trap sprung, he exclaimed:

"And you said you didn't insult me!"

"?"

After all that time hunting teammates, Mo Shu once again experienced a feeling of utter helplessness. He realized he'd walked right into a trap—yet the trap had been one he'd entered of his own volition.

He stared at Cheng Shi in speechless disbelief, thinking this Fate Weaver was like the slipperiest eel—no matter how you tried to grab him, he'd wriggle free and spit in your face for good measure.

'The last time I felt this way was when I ran into his rumored girlfriend, Zhen Yi.'

'As expected—birds of a feather flock together.'

But just as he'd given up on talking, Cheng Shi pushed his luck even further:

"What I hate most is people talking behind my back. Since you insulted me, don't blame me for being ruthless."

The instant the words left his mouth, Cheng Shi disregarded the two trembling teammates behind him and charged straight at the Scavenger with dual scalpels.

His charge was so fierce that both Scorpio and Gao Ya froze in shock.

Gao Ya's eyes went wide. 'A priest is at best slightly tougher than a singer—how does he dare play like a warrior?'

Scorpio's thinking was simpler. In his mind, Cheng Shi was still Bald Uses Rejoice, the [Prosperity] Chosen One. A head-on Chosen One clash seemed perfectly fine—especially since Cheng Shi had claimed to be a Druid, which made it even more logical.

[Prosperity]'s warriors never feared injury.

The only odd thing was that his charging form was riddled with openings—nothing like a seasoned warrior. More like an attention-seeking clown.

But given the title of Chosen One overhead, Scorpio figured those glaring holes were deliberate—bait to draw the Scavenger's attention, a trap waiting to be sprung!

Mo Shu thought the same—but one layer deeper.

He knew full well that any player widely discussed among peak players had to be formidable. So from start to finish, he'd never underestimated Cheng Shi just because he was a Fate Weaver. The instant Cheng Shi's feet left the ground, he reacted.

The Scavenger vanished from his position and reappeared atop a distant corridor roof, casually waving his hand to send both scalpels spiraling into the world of impending [Oblivion].

The attacker's weapons were gone before the two sides even met. Scorpio and Gao Ya watched with hearts in their throats.

But Cheng Shi himself wasn't surprised. He'd never expected his scalpels to hurt the man. The charge was only meant to get close enough. And at sufficient range—

BOOM—

He fired a "Thundering Judgment" from his mouth.

A fake one. He'd never intended to fight Mo Shu head-on. All these theatrics were to probe the enemy's reality—because if a Chosen One who'd been granted an audience with the Fun God had some bizarre trick up his sleeve, and three of them got duped by a mere illusion... that'd be humiliating.

So Cheng Shi had gambled by charging in. When he saw Mo Shu retreat cautiously, he knew this was no phantom. It was the genuine [Oblivion] Chosen One.

'Interesting. Both [Death] and [Oblivion]—two of the most aggressive faiths—have cautious-type Chosen Ones. People really have figured out how to play faith correctly.'

Seeing Mo Shu still frowning, scanning for environmental changes triggered by his "boom," Cheng Shi quickly darted back. While retreating, he clicked his tongue:

"As expected of a Chosen One—dodging even my Fraud Judgment. Impressive."

"I acknowledge you. In light of your skills, I'll let the earlier insult slide. I am, after all, a generous man."

"..."

"..."

"..."

This "I'm so generous" act left the dumbfounded Gao Ya stunned all over again.

She replayed the last few moments, confirming she definitely hadn't been singing any Soloist melodies to influence Cheng Shi. The songs she'd played were purely ordinary buffs.

So... was this Fate Weaver always this brave?

Mo Shu's expression finally shed its "shyness." Even if he were dumber, he could tell the charge was merely a probe—and he'd been tricked by two scalpels into retreating this far. How utterly...

Interesting.

Blending truth with bluff, toying with the heart. What a worthy reputation this Fate Weaver had—truly formidable!

He regarded Cheng Shi again, his eyes openly glinting with interest.

"Done playing?"

Cheng Shi pursed his lips: "Yeah. I still want to speedrun the trial. Next time we meet."

"Fine. Very fine. Cheng Shi—as you said, I acknowledge you too. So you may leave. Go speedrun your trial."

"But the two behind you stay. They... don't have my acknowledgment."

"The main issue is they didn't eat my handmade cake."

"That said, I do understand reciprocity. Next time we meet, I'll remember to put away your cake first."

"Then we'll continue today's game."

Mo Shu's words were clearly a warning that their next encounter would be very unpleasant. But Cheng Shi extracted a different meaning entirely—this man followed rules.

At least, he followed the rules he'd set for himself.

Simply because Cheng Shi had eaten that one piece of cake, this Scavenger wasn't planning to make a move on him this trial.

'This path of his really has shown him hope at the end of the road to faith.'

'Though—operating like this makes you look like an [Order] follower.'

Cheng Shi clicked his tongue and said meaningfully:

"You haven't also had an audience with [Order], have you?"

Mo Shu recognized the jab, but just smiled without responding.

And a smiling tiger was the most terrifying kind—it meant he had absolutely no intention of abandoning his kill plan.

Out of options, Cheng Shi turned and gestured for Scorpio to eat the cake immediately.

Scorpio had been wanting to eat it all along, but feared the timing would trigger a direct attack from the Scavenger. At Cheng Shi's signal, he instantly understood and crammed the entire cake into his mouth.

Watching the cream-smearred Scorpio, Cheng Shi smiled and looked at Mo Shu:

"Now what?"

Chapter 364: A Wood Elf Isn't Omnipotent

Mo Shu chuckled lightly: "You want to protect him?"

"Nope."

"???" Scorpio stared at Cheng Shi, nearly choking on his cake.

Cheng Shi ignored the gaze boring into his back: "He just looked hungry, so I shared some food."

"Interesting. You're more interesting than those cold-blooded peak players."

"Fine. Out of respect for you, I won't kill him. But you've only got half a cake left. By my rules, half a cake can't protect a whole person—especially when you still have two more teammates in this trial..."

At those words, Cheng Shi's eyebrow shot up. So Gou Feng really wasn't dead!

He'd actually used the Uma Sinners' Umbilical Shackles to escape!

As long as this [Birth] follower was alive, the Artificial Holy Infant plan would be much simpler. He could only hope squinty-eyes brought him back safely.

Speaking of squinty-eyes...

"Zhang Jizu only ate half a cake too. Why didn't you go after him?"

"Him? He didn't even eat half. Ha—I can't kill him, so obviously I'm not going to waste the effort." Mo Shu smiled, showing no shame whatsoever.

"..."

'You two are unexpectedly pragmatic...'

Seeing Cheng Shi at a loss for words, Mo Shu smiled with rare delight:

"Cheng Shi, you really are interesting."

"Since it's such a hard choice, I'll make an exception and give you one more chance:"

"Before noon tomorrow, make your decision. Let one lucky soul eat the remaining half-cake. That way I'll spare one more."

"But remember—only one can survive."

"Oh, and—to keep you from clearing the trial tonight and teleporting out, I've taken that church worker with me. After I kill the unlucky one tomorrow, I'll return him."

With that, Mo Shu vanished without even giving them time to react.

Cheng Shi's face darkened. He dropped the other two and sprinted in the direction Turadin had left—but it wasn't long before he found the man was simply gone from the outer compound. Nothing remained but two shoes flung at opposite ends of the corridor—a public announcement that he'd been kidnapped.

He stared at the scene, expression cooling by the degree.

'Killing people—fine. But repeatedly obstructing my speedrun? Now that's annoying.'

The other two jogged over. Seeing the key to the Artificial Holy Infant plan had vanished, their expressions changed as well. Gao Ya frowned deeply. Watching church workers drawn by the commotion closing in, she said in a low voice:

"Turadin isn't the only one who can create buzz. We can do it ourselves. As long as we spread the word about a [Corruption] Holy Infant and make them believe in it, that's enough. It shouldn't be hard for us, should it?"

Cheng Shi nodded, then shook his head:

"Doing it isn't hard. The hard part is making the Theocracy of Growth and the local citizens believe it."

"This isn't reality. We can't be certain how a rumor will ripple outward once released. If they buy it—great. But if the rumor fails and the populace raises its guard, convincing them later that some evil being is about to be born becomes much harder."

"That's not hard either. Just kill. You said it yourself—the Holy Infant's birth comes with omens. Kill enough people, and collective fear might genuinely birth a real one."

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow at this. 'Your mind goes dark fast, nostrils-girl.'

But he shook his head again:

"Brute force works in the Civilization Era. That doesn't mean it works in the Life Era."

"Since you studied the Three Wu Tribes, you should know how fanatical this era's people are about faith. I'm afraid that before the real Holy Infant descends, the overstimulated Theocracy of Growth will summon some greater horror—and our trial will fail at the final hurdle."

"The reason I've been leading you around isn't because this trial has only one solution. It's about playing it safe."

"There are many ways to win. I simply chose the safest one within the rules."

"Can't do this, can't do that—what exactly do you want?" Gao Ya was growing frantic. After watching Scorpio eat "her" cake, she'd lost all composure. "You took my gloves and gave my cake to this Another Day Assassin! So now—shouldn't the last half-cake be mine?!"

Cheng Shi glanced at her with a scoff.

"Miss Soloist—you seem to have forgotten: if I hadn't stood in front of you two just now, you might already be dead."

"So tell me—was your Puppet Grip the price for saving your life, or for filling your stomach?"

"..."

Being smart, Gao Ya knew Cheng Shi was right. He'd saved her once already. Even if it only bought half a day, time often meant opportunity.

At this thought, she glanced at Scorpio, thinking: 'Lucky little assassin. Just called someone "bro" and gets protected for free.'

Seeing her expression shifting, Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow and silently pulled out the transparent gloves.

At the sight, Gao Ya looked away, conflicted. Clearly, her survival still depended on Cheng Shi's help.

Cheng Shi pursed his lips with disdain: "You're a [Folly] follower, yet your hysteria is driving you away from your Benefactor."

"..."

When your life hung in the balance, who could guarantee perfect calm?

But Gao Ya didn't argue. Instead, she quietly sang herself a calming melody.

"We still have a chance. Besides, even if we fail to speedrun, can the Scavenger actually kill everyone he wants to?"

Gao Ya laughed coldly: "He may not be able to kill you. But he can definitely kill me."

"..." 'Smart people sure have a knack for self-awareness.'

Seeing Cheng Shi's odd expression, Gao Ya gritted her teeth and said firmly:

"Fine. I'll cooperate. The gloves are still yours. But you need to guarantee that before noon tomorrow, you'll give me the last half-cake."

Cheng Shi was somewhat surprised by her sudden change in attitude. After a moment's thought, he nodded:

"It'll be yours. Just not now."

"But you're right—we can't count solely on Turadin to build momentum. Right now is perfect. We can start leaking hints, and these church workers crowding around are the best megaphones."

"I have another matter to handle. I'll step away briefly. You two quietly blend into the crowd and spread the word: Turadin discovered something alarming in a prophecy tome and was heading to the library to verify it when unknown forces abducted him."

"Remember—that's it. Don't add anything extra."

"Letting a vague rumor ferment into their own worst fears is exactly the outcome we want. Gilding the lily only hurts us."

Hearing this, the [Folly] follower narrowed her eyes.

'What underhanded tactics!'

Scorpio panicked when he heard Cheng Shi was leaving: "Bro—where are you going? Let me help!"

After a moment's hesitation, Gao Ya added quietly: "Strength in numbers."

'Heh. NOW you realize there's strength in numbers?'

'I still prefer the version of you who strutted off alone at the start with your nose in the air.'

"Split up for efficiency. We grouped up before because we didn't know where the 'hunter' was. Now that the 'hunter' has given us an opening, we should make the most of the time."

"A Wood Elf isn't omnipotent. I can't be in two places at once. So don't drag your feet—everyone needs to pitch in."

"..."

"..."

Both Scorpio and Gao Ya were rendered speechless. At this point, exactly who the "Wood Elf" identity was meant to fool was anyone's guess.

"That's all. Get moving. I'll step out briefly and be right back."

With that, Cheng Shi took two steps back, reached out through the corridor's dim lamplight to touch his own shadow—snapped his fingers and vanished on the spot.

Both people watching his disappearance had their pupils contract, expressions wildly different.

"Do Druids have this kind of teleportation ability?"

At this pitifully naive question, Gao Ya couldn't help rolling her eyes.

She was furious—Cheng Shi had taken her goods but not held up his end, giving her cake to Scorpio instead. But she couldn't exactly reach into Scorpio's stomach and retrieve it. So she could only compromise and follow Cheng Shi's rhythm. After all, the one calling the shots was this Fate Weaver.

Gritting her teeth, she stood up, pulled her hood low, and plunged into the crowd to start spreading rumors.

Scorpio watched with sharpened eyes.

He wasn't stupid. Though the current situation seemed favorable—the Scavenger's attention had shifted from hunting three to targeting two—he knew his survival didn't hinge on whether he'd eaten cake. It hinged on the Scavenger's whim.

The Scavenger might not be able to kill Cheng Shi or Zhang Jizu—but he could easily kill him.

So even having eaten the cake, Scorpio felt unsafe.

The safest plan remained: clear the trial as fast as possible and teleport out. Only after returning to the Rest Area would he truly be safe—truly removed from this lethal clash of titans.

So he began thinking.

No player above 2,000 points was a true yes-man. Even when grouped together for mutual benefit and shared objectives, everyone had their own problem-solving approach. When the group's path hit a wall, the individual's path became crucial.

And so Scorpio started planning his own.

It was nearly midnight. When the day ended, his projection chance would reset—and with that, a [Time] assassin could create far more possibilities for the current situation.

As for what those possibilities were... the little assassin was already forming a plan.

Chapter 365: The Fire That Blazed Through the Night

Meanwhile.

Rewinding slightly—to the moment Zhang Jizu parted ways with Cheng Shi.

The pragmatic [Death] Chosen One wasted no time. The moment he left the church, he retraced the daytime route back to the Evil Infant Inquisition.

Why not take a shortcut? Naturally—because... steady does it.

He'd walked this road twice now. He knew the terrain and the surroundings. Familiar paths at night were the only paths that offered peace of mind.

Of course, the sole danger in nocturnal Dolgod would shortly be facing off against Cheng Shi's group. So his journey was uneventful.

He quickly reached the Inquisition, leaped over the wall into its courtyard, and gazed at the pitch-black interior hall.

Cheng Shi had asked him to find Gou Feng. Per their shared deduction, the Chieftain had most likely hung himself from the second-floor ceiling to escape pursuit.

Zhang Jizu frowned slightly, putting himself in the man's shoes. To hide from a Scavenger whose presence you couldn't detect at all—you'd never emerge until you were absolutely certain the coast was clear.

But how do you confirm the absence of an enemy you literally cannot sense?

The answer: you can't. And since you can't, the safest approach is to extend your hiding time—potentially staying concealed among the dead infants until the trial ends.

So Zhang Jizu estimated the Chieftain was still up there on the second floor. Hanging among those rows of inverted dead infants.

The question was: which one was he?

The arrangement looked deliberate and symbolic—and symbolic meant risky. Zhang Jizu was confident he wouldn't die in the trial, but he wasn't arrogant enough to take pointless risks.

Case in point: he stood in the moonlit courtyard with zero intention of entering the dark interior.

He even did his thinking in a spot with open sightlines and multiple escape routes.

After a moment's reflection, Zhang Jizu hit upon a method—one that was, without question, one hundred percent prudent.

Set it on fire.

He was going to burn the Evil Infant Inquisition to the ground.

When this near-abandoned building was reduced to rubble, when all those "dried jerky" corpses were burned to cinders, he could leisurely search through the ruins for the Chieftain's remains and attempt to...

Resurrect him.

This approach eliminated any possibility of conflict with the Uma Sinners, incinerated every trap and conspiracy potentially hiding on the second floor, and carried virtually zero risk.

And resurrection? For a top-tier priest of the [Death] faith, that was hardly difficult. The plan's only real challenge was sifting Gou Feng's remains from the post-fire debris.

But for Zhang Jizu, even that wasn't hard. He was observant. Given enough time, he could piece a person back together.

Moreover, the most important factor in his decision was this: when they'd parted, he'd vaguely guessed Cheng Shi's strategy—that the man's next moves would revolve around the Holy Infant.

If he guessed right, then burning the Evil Infant Inquisition was also a way to create momentum for Cheng Shi's side. So all things considered—this method was rock-solid.

Time to execute!

The Gravekeeper surveyed his surroundings, then set to work—gathering every weed and dead branch in the courtyard and hurling them inside. Only when the dry tinder was piled all the way up to the second-floor windows did he pull from his storage... two cans of gasoline.

Gasoline is flammable. Perfectly logical.

Everything was ready. All that remained was a spark.

Zhang Jizu casually produced a match, struck it against his boot heel—and before the flicker could even illuminate his steady, unwavering eyes, he tossed it into the kindling.

What followed—

BOOM—

Flames erupted violently. This building that had stood for centuries was engulfed in a blazing inferno without the slightest warning.

At that precise moment, back at the church, the standoff had already concluded. Gao Ya was skulking through the church crowd, spreading rumors of Turadin's disappearance. The workers had been half-skeptical at first—but when news of the Evil Infant Inquisition's "heaven-sent blaze" arrived, every wakeful staffer in the church erupted into chaos.

Panic and unease instantly spiraled through the crowd.

Gao Ya detached from the throng and hid in a changing room, watching the distant fire at the Inquisition through the window. She sighed with admiration.

'His reputation is well-earned. This Fate Weaver is truly formidable.'

'Every idea of his cuts such an unconventional path, yet always seizes the situation's jugular—delivering maximum impact at the precise moment. Even when disruptions occur, he immediately pivots to the

next stratagem. The dazzling problem-solving makes it impossible to imagine where those wildly creative ideas even come from.'

'Honestly, more than a priest who mends fate, he's like a screenwriter who crafts details and orchestrates coincidences!'

'He really is a Fate Weaver, as the rumors say?'

...

Elsewhere.

Cheng Shi had swapped positions with his die. But he hadn't gone to Zhang Jizu at the burning Inquisition—he'd appeared right before Mo Shu!

Yes—he'd chased after the [Oblivion] Chosen One!

And the die that brought him to Mo Shu's side hadn't been planted on Mo Shu during their earlier skirmish. He'd slipped it into Turadin's pocket while covering Turadin's escape.

So the situation was: Cheng Shi used the die on Turadin's person to teleport himself right back to Mo Shu!

As for why...

Rescuing Turadin was secondary. The real reason: this greedy clown had his eye on the [Deceit]-bestowed Clown Substitute in Mo Shu's possession. Whether or not this was the Fun God's purpose for sending him into this trial, the item simply suited him. So he'd pursued without a moment's delay, intent on trading with the Scavenger for it!

Of course, if the other party refused a trade—conning it away was also acceptable.

And if even conning failed... then buddy, don't blame me for—

Rescuing the hostage first, heading back to strategize with Zhang "Steady" Jizu, and figuring out a Plan B!

Just kidding. The guy was a Chosen One. Cheng Shi was confident, but not delusional enough to think he could take down a Chosen One directly—especially when he was currently just a Fate Weaver. An ordinary Fate Weaver.

Before coming, his greatest fear was that Mo Shu had banished Turadin to some world on the verge of [Oblivion], which would have made his die-teleportation fail. But he'd gambled anyway.

And clearly—he'd won again.

Mo Shu hadn't done that. He hadn't even gone far. He'd simply knocked Turadin unconscious and taken him to a civilian house not far from the church.

The house was utterly bare—not a single piece of furniture. From outside it looked like an ordinary building, but stepping through the door revealed nothing but gray-white walls and empty space.

Cheng Shi's sudden materialization beside him genuinely startled Mo Shu—but the Scavenger didn't panic. He didn't even retreat. Instead, he exploded off the ground and drove a straight punch toward the nearby Turadin.

Mid-charge, he caught the fervent gleam in Cheng Shi's eyes. His heart lurched—he'd underestimated this Fate Weaver's character. Though not among the official peak players, his recklessness was indistinguishable from theirs.

Because this Fate Weaver had actually sidestepped half a body-width to shield an NPC—Turadin—with his own body.

The punch, brimming with boundless [Oblivion] force, slammed directly into Cheng Shi's shoulder socket—blasting him and the unconscious Turadin clean through the air together.

WHAM—

Chapter 366: The Mutual-Destruction Thunder

"Pfft—"

The force packed into that punch was terrifying—nearly enough to kill Scorpio on the spot earlier. Upon impact, Cheng Shi immediately coughed up a mouthful of blood, his body hurtling backward until he crashed against the wall with Turadin beneath him. Pale-faced, he crouched up.

He'd blocked most of the attack, but the splash of [Oblivion] still caught Turadin. Flesh began rotting and vanishing instantly, leaving him disfigured.

Combined with the violent crash, the unconscious Head of Church's son jolted awake—and his first sensation was agonized screaming.

"AHHH—"

Cheng Shi couldn't tend to him now. He hacked twice, raised his head, and wiped the blood from his lips. Defiant determination flashed through his eyes—only to be immediately followed by another spray of blood, even more vivid than the first.

The dynamic had reversed in an instant. The attacker who hadn't even launched his offensive was suddenly on the back foot—a lamb under [Oblivion]'s brutal assault.

"Cough cough—impressive..."

Cheng Shi clutched his shoulder, body trembling.

Seeing this, Mo Shu merely smiled—and instead of closing in, actually retreated several steps.

"Nice acting. But the blood's a bit off. Your blood pack seems to be expired."

"Huh?"

Cheng Shi glanced at the floor and noticed the second mouthful was indeed somewhat too dark. His lips twitched as he stood up, face full of embarrassment.

He was completely fine. Under Endless Life's protection, he didn't even need to heal himself!

It was all an act. He'd been trying to blindside the opponent—but a detail glitch had blown his cover.

So he could only shrug and sigh: "Ah well, secondhand goods are unreliable. Who still uses expired blood packs? What a waste of emotion..."

Mo Shu's eye twitched. He looked at Cheng Shi with faint amusement:

"So our agreement is void?"

Cheng Shi blinked blankly: "What agreement?"

"...Very well. Then they're all mine." Mo Shu snorted a laugh and turned to leave.

But Cheng Shi made no move to stop him. Quite the opposite—he turned his back entirely, exposing himself completely.

He hauled up the wailing Turadin, fired a quick healing spell to keep him alive, slapped tape over his mouth, then shoved him out the window.

Only after all that did he turn around and say casually:

"Go ahead. Two people dying—so what? They've got nothing to do with me. People die every day these days. As long as I'm alive, who gives a damn."

But it was precisely this baffling behavior that made Mo Shu's brow furrow. He didn't leave immediately.

He was a cautious man—every bit as cautious as Zhang Jizu.

He was thinking: a [Fate] follower, someone widely discussed among peak players, even Zhen Yi's rumored boyfriend—such a man with such a complex identity, risking it all to teleport over here... just to save a dispensable NPC? Was that normal?

No. Extremely not normal.

Mystics were always the most enigmatic bunch. Their simplest actions often concealed the most labyrinthine schemes. Even against a priest, Mo Shu couldn't afford carelessness.

He suspected Cheng Shi had already set traps around the perimeter before arriving—a net waiting for him to leave to kill. That's why the Fate Weaver seemed so relaxed about not blocking. Which meant [Fate] traps lurked nearby.

Priest or not—at their tier, class wasn't a limitation anymore. Everyone carried a few tricks up their sleeve.

Just like himself—didn't he have [Deceit]'s gift?

So until he understood Cheng Shi's true objective, Mo Shu wouldn't act rashly.

But Mo Shu's immobility didn't mean Cheng Shi was idle too.

As soon as Cheng Shi finished speaking, a handful of dice materialized in his palm. With a light chuckle, he tossed them high, scattering them to every corner of the room.

Mo Shu watched with sharpened eyes, smiling:

"Never Lost Gambling Gear. A priest choosing a talent like this—truly interesting."

He spoke while his hands stayed busy. Now that he knew how Cheng Shi had teleported to him, he naturally wouldn't let the same trick work twice. He waved his hand, sending every object in the room as an offering to his Benefactor, [Oblivion].

"The interesting part comes later."

Cheng Shi didn't stop. He scattered another handful of dice. Mo Shu frowned and annihilated those too.

One threw, the other destroyed. After two such rounds, Mo Shu laughed:

"Stalling for time?"

"What—you think this small window is enough for that NPC to escape my vision?"

Cheng Shi laughed too. But he didn't respond—instead, amid the rain of dice, he slipped in a mask.

Mo Shu had been casually annihilating everything in the room—but the moment he spotted an unfamiliar mask among the dice, he froze. He pulled back his [Oblivion] power instantly.

Furthermore, his gaze locked onto Cheng Shi's eyes, trying to glean what this mask signified.

But Cheng Shi ignored him and kept scattering. Before long, the dice rain contained increasingly bizarre objects.

A magician's hat. An acrobat's costume. A beast-tamer's whip... and a bizarre, fleshy little figurine.

As the pile of items he didn't dare annihilate grew, Mo Shu's expression darkened steadily.

Instinct told him that compared to whatever [Fate] traps might lurk outside, the objects inside this room were potentially far more dangerous.

He decided he was done playing with this Fate Weaver. Brow furrowed, he resolved to tear open the Void and flee to continue his hunt.

Every prior agreement was hereby null and void.

But just as Mo Shu opened his mouth to bid Cheng Shi farewell—Cheng Shi moved again!

He raised his hand once more, delivering from his mouth another Thundering Judgment.

BOOM—

Mo Shu's gaze sharpened as he dodged slightly. Seeing it was another blank, his expression turned dark:

"The boy who cried wolf doesn't work on me. No matter how many times you do it, I'll dodge."

"[Void] isn't understood this way. You're supposed to make the world void—not do baffling, pointless things."

"Time's up. I'm done playing. Farewell, Fate Weaver."

The very instant Mo Shu prepared to rend the Void with [Oblivion]'s power, Cheng Shi raised his hand again and fired at the space before him—

No. Five Thundering Judgments!

That's right. Five consecutive shots!

He truly hadn't come just to rescue Turadin—nor solely for the Clown Substitute on Mo Shu's person. Before arriving, he'd already planned to test the potency of his Vitality authority through mutual destruction!

Yes—mutual destruction!

So these five thunderbolts weren't aimed at Mo Shu at all. They simply flooded the entire space with lightning.

Mo Shu, true to his own creed of caution, had dodged the instant Cheng Shi raised his hand. But he never expected: this time, the thunder was real—and inescapable!

In this cramped space, rampaging thunder threatened to tear apart spacetime itself. But even at this level of devastation, the Scavenger might have found a gap to escape before full detonation.

However, Cheng Shi's assault didn't stop there. Simultaneously with the five Thundering Judgments, he activated his [Fate] talent: Fate Has Divergence!

Before misfortune strikes, greater misfortune has already been brewing.

Under [Fate]'s manipulation, the hyper-dense lightning plasma folded back on itself, converging at a serendipitous instant to trigger resonance in [Thundering]'s divine power. As the Authority of Thunder cascaded freely, even the Void itself froze for a heartbeat—and in that heartbeat, Mo Shu, who'd just torn open the Void, watched his expression contort violently. He couldn't escape in time!

BOOM-BOOM-BOOM-BOOM-BOOM—

The building exploded.

Wild thunder poured from the sky. The entire structure was instantly reduced to ash, and everything within hundreds of meters was leveled by the overflowing devastation!

Yet even amidst the ruins, residual lightning still flickered across the horrifying scorched earth, accompanied by ceaseless rumbling.

In this moment, it was as if [Thundering] Himself had descended—dead yet resurrected!

Under this intensity of annihilating lightning, nobody could survive—except...

Someone who also wielded a true god's authority.

Cheng Shi—the clown who bore a fragment of the Vitality Authority—knelt naked on that thunder-plowed earth. Skin dangling, body charred black, burns reaching bone, face horrifying.

But at least he wasn't dead. Even the resonance of five Thundering Judgments hadn't fully extinguished his vitality!

As for his opponent—his target—the [Oblivion] Chosen One, Mo Shu...

Also not dead!

Not only alive, but in better shape than Cheng Shi—not a single wound on his body. His condition looked more like he'd been restored to peak form.

But while his body survived, his mind had nearly died from shock.

His pin-point pupils and split-cornered expression laid bare just how violently his composure had shattered!

Mo Shu had never imagined the Fate Weaver came not to kill him—but to take him down together.

Stranger still: he distinctly felt himself die for an instant, yet was somehow revived by unknown means.

That wasn't his own failsafe. He'd just confirmed his backup was still intact, untriggered.

Bizarre.

Feeling the lingering world-shattering power, staring at the kneeling-yet-alive Cheng Shi, his assessment of this lunatic soared to infinity—and dread crept in.

'What IS this person trying to do?'

Peak players' madness was rarely pure madness—they always profited from it. But this Fate Weaver?

What was his profit?

'Wait—something's wrong!'

Mo Shu moved. He decided not to overthink—just kill this maniac who'd dragged him into mutual destruction first.

But simultaneously, Cheng Shi also moved.

With a hoarse, ghastly laugh, he crawled forward like a zombie, snatched up a charred, palm-sized something from the rubble—then snapped his fingers and instantly vanished.

Mo Shu's form froze at the exact spot Cheng Shi had disappeared. He'd come within a hair's breadth of keeping that damned Fate Weaver under his fist.

Staring at the afterimage of Cheng Shi's vanishing figure, his eyes glinted with cold fury:

"Brilliant!"

"But... what the hell kind of trick was that?!"

Chapter 367: The Dirty Trick's First Victim

The Inquisition's fire hadn't fully died. But the weakening flames and scattered embers could no longer stop a Chosen One.

As crowds of frightened citizens gathered outside the Inquisition, Zhang Jizu decided he couldn't wait. He had to enter the ruins and find Gou Feng's remains before professional church staff arrived.

But just then—from the direction of the church—came one ear-splitting explosion after another!

Purple lightning flashed, briefly illuminating the entirety of Dolgod.

Tonight was destined to be eventful. Zhang Jizu halted and looked toward the lightning, wondering if something had happened to Cheng Shi.

He badly wanted to go back—but couldn't abandon his "mission." So he could only quicken his pace, hoping to finish early and return before Cheng Shi ran into trouble.

But right then—just as he was about to step into the Inquisition's ruins—a charred, blood-soaked figure dropped from the sky directly in front of him.

Zhang Jizu's eyes sharpened. He instinctively slashed upward with his scalpel—but as his narrowed eyes swept across the unrecognizable face, he realized the blackened features looked somewhat...

Familiar.

'Cheng Shi?!'

The "Wood Elf" that [Deceit] had personally designated for protection had appeared before him like this!

He deduced the method: Cheng Shi had used Never Lost Gambling Gear. For safety's sake, Zhang Jizu had hung the die Cheng Shi gave him on the only tree he hadn't chopped down—and Cheng Shi's descent point was exactly at that tree's crown.

'Interesting. Like Zhen Xin, he can borrow his alternate personality's power?'

'No—this isn't the time. What happened to him? Why is he charred like this?'

A thousand thoughts flashed through Zhang Jizu's mind, but none slowed his reflexes.

He yanked back his scalpel, slid his other hand under Cheng Shi's back, and fired off a thick healing spell.

Holy light erupted, enveloping Cheng Shi's entire body in soothing warmth.

But it was pointless.

Cheng Shi only looked terrible. Endless Life had already locked his vitality ceiling. Aside from some numbness where the lightning had fried his skin and nerves, he was perfectly fine.

Not just fine—his spirits were exceptionally high. He'd even waved hello to squinty-eyes while falling.

"Yo, squi—... Old Zhang. We meet again."

Hearing that robust, fully-powered voice, Zhang Jizu's eye twitched. He withdrew his hand and let Cheng Shi slam into the ground.

THUD—

"F—..."

'That bastard is definitely taking revenge!'

Cheng Shi hit the ground hard. Charred scabs cracked and flaked off across his body.

Zhang Jizu studied him with a slight frown, then glanced toward the distant lightning and asked:

"That commotion—your doing?"

Cheng Shi didn't answer. He just clutched whatever was in his arms and laughed. Maniacally.

Zhang Jizu's suspicion deepened. He studied the contents of Cheng Shi's embrace, trying to determine what treasure this unreliable Wood Elf had stolen. But after careful examination, his expression suddenly darkened, his gaze turning deep and foreboding.

"You used the Substitute Death Doll?"

"Who killed you—Mo Shu?"

His voice was heavy with gravity. His hands moved swiftly, producing a match and a can of gasoline—his steady expression clearly indicating he intended to burn this liability in Cheng Shi's arms.

But just as he bent to extract the thing, Cheng Shi's smile froze. He scrambled backward, shaking his head frantically while half-laughing, half-crying:

"Wait—let's talk! The doll didn't die for me! Don't burn it!"

"Not for you?" Zhang Jizu blanked. Then, as if something clicked, his perpetually narrowed eyes snapped wide open, filled with shock:

"You mean it was—..."

Cheng Shi's retreat halted. He threw his head back and laughed—brilliant and unhinged.

"HAHA! That's right! It's Mo Shu's!"

It's Mo Shu's!!!

Those four words detonated like thunder beside Zhang Jizu's ears. This habitually steady [Death] Chosen One stared blankly for three full seconds before processing what Cheng Shi meant!

"You killed him, then used the Substitute Death Doll to revive him?"

He was utterly stupefied. Disbelief saturated his voice. He wanted to ask why—but the very next second, understanding flashed through his eyes. Without hesitation, he cast [Death]'s resurrection spell on the doll remnants in Cheng Shi's arms—nothing but shredded skin and rotting flesh.

He was going to resurrect this Substitute Death Doll!

This time, Cheng Shi didn't dodge. He didn't just not dodge—he cooperated seamlessly by placing the doll's remains on the ground, then cautiously retreated two steps with a fresh scalpel gripped in hand.

The silvery blade reflected pure moonlight, forming a stark contrast against his body's charred, blood-caked black—like the colors of life and death. But who could have guessed that beneath the char lay new life forged in thunder, while the snow-white blade brought only death.

Cheng Shi focused intently, watching the resurrected Substitute Death Doll without blinking.

The instant the sickly-green resurrection spell struck the charred remains, the shattered figurine twitched its limbs and slowly came alive. As flesh churned and reformed, its ugly face gradually transformed into... Mo Shu's likeness!

A miniature, palm-sized version of the Scavenger materialized between them.

!!!

Zhang Jizu's pupils contracted violently. 'It really is him!'

Indeed—Cheng Shi had used the Substitute Death Doll, but not to save himself. He'd had it take the lethal strike for Mo Shu—absorbing the rampant thunder under Fate Has Divergence!

And why? Because Zhang Jizu had told him: when the Substitute Death Doll is resurrected, it steals its replacement target's identity.

'If I've already been killed once, how do I guarantee I'm safe after resurrection?'

Cheng Shi knew he wasn't Zhang Jizu. He wasn't the [Death] Chosen One who literally couldn't die. He couldn't guarantee that after resurrection he'd be in any position to calmly destroy the doll that had died in his place. Even less could he accept this eerie puppet accidentally reviving and stealing his identity.

'Since nothing can be guaranteed, why use it to save my own life?'

'Better yet—why not throw all that "unguaranteed" risk onto the enemy? Why not convert this death-proxy puppet into a weapon that steals the enemy's identity?'

'Can I? Of course I can!'

So from the moment Cheng Shi had received the Substitute Death Doll, he'd never seen this [Folly] creation as a lifesaving device. Instead, on a wild impulse, he'd studied how to weaponize this dirty trick—and hidden it away!

And Mo Shu was the dirty trick's first victim!

...

Chapter 368: Mo Shu's "Death"!

When Cheng Shi had thrown the Substitute Death Doll, he'd calculated the distance with precision. Squinty-eyes had told him the doll only bonded to the nearest life form—so he'd positioned it a few crucial centimeters closer to Mo Shu.

During a standoff, those few centimeters might seem insignificant. But that tiny margin was enough for the doll to designate Mo Shu as its replacement target—absorbing the fatal blow on Mo Shu's behalf!

And after the thunder subsided, Cheng Shi's first move was to grab the not-yet-disintegrated doll remains and flee.

He didn't know how to steal someone's identity—so he had to find Zhang Jizu for help immediately.

As for whether squinty-eyes would cooperate... From his Lord's perspective, from a friend's perspective, or from the perspective of screwing over his rival—he had absolutely no reason to refuse!

That's why Cheng Shi appeared before Zhang Jizu at this moment.

It was a massive gamble. Betting that Mo Shu didn't recognize the Substitute Death Doll. Betting that Fate Has Divergence could truly catalyze the Thundering Judgment. Betting that his Vitality authority could withstand five bolts of thunderous force.

But it wasn't purely a gamble—because Cheng Shi had also stacked the deck. Though his cheating couldn't change the outcome directly, it gave him far greater confidence.

Squinty-eyes had told Cheng Shi the Substitute Death Doll was extremely rare, with very few people knowing its function. This became his first chip.

He'd experienced Fate Has Divergence's effects. He believed the talent's essence was to invoke the Misfortune authority in [Fate]'s hands—driving all affected lives toward misfortune. And the greatest misfortune was the erasure of life itself. This was his second chip.

The Vitality authority belonged to the true god [Prosperity]. Even partially wielded, its Status shouldn't be inferior to [Thundering]—a god killed by [Order]. So Vitality should be able to overcome Thunder. This speculation became his third chip.

But the third chip was unstable. Cheng Shi couldn't stake his life on a guess—so he kept a trump card. At least one that could preserve his life.

The Lush Horn Crown!

This SS-grade resurrection item had been pulled out the instant the thunder detonated, hidden behind his back. During [Thundering]'s rampage, he'd secretly fired a healing chain toward Mo Shu!

Healing chains bounced between targets. Since Mo Shu couldn't die thanks to the Substitute Death Doll, the healing light would inevitably return from Mo Shu to Cheng Shi.

If his Vitality authority failed to withstand the Thundering Judgment and he died, the healing chain imbued with the Lush Horn Crown's essence would revive him.

But if he survived the Thundering Judgment without dying, the precious resurrection charge wouldn't be wasted.

This was precisely why Cheng Shi considered it a massive gamble!

He was spending a rare resurrection opportunity to bet on killing the [Oblivion] Chosen One in that cramped room!

Did he win?

Obviously—he won!

The moment Zhang Jizu began resurrecting the Substitute Death Doll, Cheng Shi knew he'd won big!

Because he'd never seen such excitement blazing in squinty-eyes' gaze!

When the miniature Mo Shu opened his eyes, he saw two enormous heads looming above him. His mind buzzed for a moment before he identified them.

That charred survivor from the mutual-destruction blast—Cheng Shi. And his rival—Zhang Jizu!

Mo Shu was shocked. For the first time, he failed to contain his terror. His eyes went wide.

'What is this?'

One second he'd been contemplating amid the thunder-scorched ruins. The next—his vision went black and he was here?

'Where is this? What are those two horrifyingly enormous heads?'

But before his confusion and dread could fully form, a scalpel larger than his entire body descended from above—piercing his heart and pinning him to the ground.

It wasn't Cheng Shi's blade. It was Zhang Jizu's.

While Mo Shu was drowning in successive waves of shock and terror, Zhang Jizu struck with lightning speed—killing the resurrected miniature Mo Shu on the spot.

"..." Cheng Shi blinked in blank amazement. "That's it?"

Zhang Jizu nodded solemnly, then suddenly allowed a smile: "That's it."

But it wasn't just "that's it"—because even as he responded, he'd already picked up the unfinished gasoline can and poured it over the dead miniature Mo Shu.

But at that very instant—another mutation!

The blood-and-flesh figurine pinned to the ground suddenly twitched. Its body began inflating like a balloon, skin stretching paper-thin.

Both men's eyes sharpened. They retreated simultaneously, and countless scalpels flew like rain, embedding themselves in the fleshy balloon.

The sudden external force detonated it. They heard a POP—and the thin membrane stuffed with blood and flesh burst open, releasing...

Confetti and streamers!

Colorful ribbons and paper scraps rained down, covering both men head to toe. Faint laughter drifted through the air, as if mocking them for not dodging.

When the confetti finally settled, the spot where the Substitute Death Doll should have been was completely clean of any trace of flesh. In its place sat a clown doll with a red nose and a wide grin—staring at them with an eerie smile.

???

!!!

Cheng "Steady" and Zhang "Steady" were both completely stunned. No amount of imagination could have prepared them for what just transpired.

They exchanged glances. Neither had words.

Silence arrived on cue. But before long, Cheng Shi's expression turned remarkably animated.

Zhang Jizu raised an eyebrow. He noticed Cheng Shi seemed to recognize the thing—unsurprising, given that this clown puppet clearly bore [Deceit]'s hallmarks. Squinting, he asked: "You know what this is. What's the situation?"

Cheng Shi nodded, then shook his head. He walked over, picked up the clown doll from the ground, examined it briefly, and laughed despite himself:

"This is what I was after. But before you killed him—I never imagined the 'identity' that got stolen would be this kind of identity."

Zhang Jizu understood instantly. Though he didn't know the clown puppet's function, the word "identity" triggered an immediate connection—the Substitute Death Doll was always linked to identity theft.

"I knew a single Substitute Death Doll couldn't truly kill him. But what is this thing?"

"You'd better tell me it's worth something. Because that Substitute Death Doll wasn't cheap."

Cheng Shi smiled meaningfully:

"No matter how valuable that Substitute Death Doll was, I can compensate you."

"But you're right—this Clown Substitute in my hand is also very valuable."

"Most importantly, it was bestowed by my Benefactor. It's just that this time... the 'method of bestowal' was a bit... unconventional."

"..."

'Bestowed?'

Zhang Jizu's narrowed eye twitched. He was thinking: 'Wasn't this Mo Shu's property?'

'Hold on—do you [Deceit] people seriously dress up "robbery" this eloquently?'

...

Chapter 369: SS-Grade [Deceit] Item — Clown Substitute

Cheng Shi held nothing back. He openly handed the clown doll to Zhang Jizu, who took one look and instantly understood why Cheng Shi was so desperate for it.

Clown Substitute (SS): A substitute prop crafted by the circus's magician for the clown. Can be activated before entering a trial. Upon use, creates an identical duplicate of you that enters the trial in your place.

Special Effect — Lifelike: The duplicate functions as a special substitute player identity, sharing all your memories, talents, abilities, and items.

Special Effect — Empty Joy: The substitute player cannot earn any score or rewards from clearing trials.

Special Effect — Drum Flower: Upon the substitute player's death, the body reverts to the Clown Substitute form, awaiting the next fated person to pick it up.

It certainly looked like a gimmick item—entirely consistent with his understanding of [Deceit] and [Void]. The only question was how Mo Shu had gotten it.

Cheng Shi read the doubt in squinty-eyes' expression and smiled: "You might not believe it, but the Fun God summoned him."

"Mo Shu?"

"Yes. He said it himself—this was [Deceit]'s gift to him. Also, he apparently hasn't embraced [Memory], though [Memory] did grant him an audience. He probably still has [Memory]'s items, and their function is to erase the memories of everyone in his trial."

"Didn't you just say this was [Deceit]'s gift to you? Now it's his?"

"Temporary custody and permanent ownership aren't the same thing."

"You can pick up a package someone mailed—but you should still thank the courier for the delivery, right?"

"..."

'Specious logic!' But imagining Mo Shu as the courier felt surprisingly satisfying.

Zhang Jizu smiled, entirely unsurprised. At their tier, everyone had special lifesaving measures. The Clown Substitute clearly offered more opportunities for Mo Shu's [Oblivion] path—but for Zhang Jizu himself, the item was rather useless.

He didn't fear death, and he wasn't one for gimmicks.

So he snorted a laugh and pushed the clown back into Cheng Shi's arms.

Cheng Shi had known squinty-eyes wouldn't be interested. But what intrigued him more was: if even Mo Shu had been summoned by two other gods, then who had squinty-eyes had audiences with?

He pocketed his sole spoil of war and casually asked. Zhang Jizu didn't hide it, but his answer genuinely left Cheng Shi dumbfounded.

"[Truth] and [War]."

"?"

Cheng Shi was stunned. [Truth] made sense—squinty-eyes' every move was methodical and orderly, fitting [Truth]'s will. But...

[War]?

'Did He lose His mind?'

"What could you possibly share with [War]? You have absolutely nothing to do with Him."

"I'm baffled too. I never saw Him. I just spent one night on some blood-soaked battlefield, then was sent back."

"..." Cheng Shi pondered briefly. Finding no leads, he dropped it. "We didn't actually kill Mo Shu—only a duplicate. But there's still a payoff. At minimum, his [Oblivion] path just got a lot harder. So I deserve major credit, right?"

Zhang Jizu smiled with narrowed eyes: "Sure. Though I'm curious how you took him down."

Cheng Shi spread his hands: "You saw everything. It was all thanks to the Substitute Death Doll. Come to think of it, you contributed... err... about one-tenth of the credit."

Zhang Jizu snorted: "Mo Shu isn't easy to kill. If a mere Substitute Death Doll were enough, the real necromancers, Scarlet Hunters, and death weavers ranked below me would've killed him hundreds of times already."

"Nobody who reaches the top of the Ladder of Ascent is easy prey."

Cheng Shi studied squinty-eyes with an odd expression, trying to determine if the man was complimenting himself. Then squinty-eyes continued:

"Also—that thunder earlier. Your doing?"

"Don't worry about that. Let's focus on the present. Since I've earned credit—can we maybe knock the Substitute Death Doll's price down by half?"

Zhang Jizu blanked, then his expression turned exasperated.

"You actually want to pay? I was kidding."

"GREAT!" Hearing he didn't owe anything, Cheng Shi beamed instantly. Laughing, he clapped squinty-eyes on the shoulder, praising nonstop: "I knew I chose right! As that Lord's right-hand man, you should have exactly this kind of generous spirit!"

Zhang Jizu was thoroughly speechless. He swatted Cheng Shi's hand away and pointed at the ruins ahead:

"Time's short. Business first. The thunder slowed the church's response, but not for long. People outside will come in to investigate any moment. We need to move before they see us."

"..." Cheng Shi turned to look at the ruins, his expression flat.

'Bro, I asked you to come save someone—and you burned the whole place down?'

Zhang Jizu didn't elaborate. He strode forward into the debris. But Cheng Shi didn't follow. Instead, he left a parting line and snapped his fingers—vanishing on the spot.

"You handle yours, I'll handle mine. No overlap."

"..."

...

Switching to Mo Shu's perspective.

The instant Cheng Shi disappeared, he'd sensed he'd fallen into a trap. But unable to determine its origin or effect, he could only rush to the church to find Cheng Shi. If not the man himself, at least the two teammates he was close with—use their lives as leverage to force Cheng Shi out.

But halfway there, a violent wave of disorientation crashed through his mind. Memories and awareness peeled away like threads being drawn from silk. His eyes shifted from terror to calm, then to hollow stupor.

He stood frozen in place, mechanically surveying his surroundings, suddenly unable to remember what he was doing.

No—not just his purpose. He seemed to have forgotten himself entirely.

"Who... am I?"

At precisely that moment, Turadin—the one Cheng Shi had thrown out the window—came stumbling over. He still carried the great [Corruption] mission in his heart. Even battered and far from healed, he gritted his teeth and ran toward the church.

He knew Cheng Shi had rescued him so he could help create a [Corruption] Holy Infant. He couldn't let his brother down—and especially couldn't cut off the hope of spreading [Corruption]'s will in Dolgod!

But mid-sprint, he spotted the very person who'd kidnapped him.

He didn't know who this man was, nor did he need to. He simply categorized him as another stubborn traditionalist obstructing [Corruption]'s spread. The instant he noticed him, his spine went rigid and cold sweat poured.

But when he realized the man seemed to have lost his power and intellect—standing there in a daze like an animated corpse—this audacious son of the Head of Church actually bent down, picked up a rock, and crept toward the disoriented Mo Shu.

Then, just as Mo Shu was mumbling something with his head bowed, Turadin smashed the stone into the "kidnapper's" skull!

CRACK!

Mo Shu stiffened from the sudden blow and toppled. Without a moment's hesitation, Turadin straddled him and brought the stone down again and again on the fallen man's head—until blood and flesh had been pounded flat into the dirt. Only then did he stagger to his feet, gasping.

"Huff—huff—"

"You don't look like you're from Dolgod—so you probably didn't know. We people of Dolgod... excel at stoning."

"Ha. Hahaha. HAHAAAAHA!"

"So this is what it means to follow your heart. This is unfettered freedom. This feeling is simply... exquisite."

...

Chapter 370: A Night of Breathtaking Spectacles

By the time Cheng Shi appeared beside Mo Shu's body, Turadin had already left.

For some reason, the man had stripped off his clothes—so when Cheng Shi used the die from his pocket to teleport over, he found not Turadin, but a Scavenger's corpse.

To be precise, he was no longer the Scavenger. Just a heap of identity-stripped flesh.

Mo Shu's duplicate was indeed dead. Killed by Zhang Jizu's scalpel. His flesh vessel died at Turadin's hands.

'All my scheming led to his death, yet somehow... I haven't incurred any karmic debt?'

But not really. Because Mo Shu wouldn't care who ultimately delivered the killing blow. He would only remember who drove in that first, fatal blade.

At this thought, Cheng Shi winced. 'Antagonized a powerhouse over a Clown Substitute. Not the best trade...'

'That Lord was right—greed truly is the path to death...'

'All I can hope for now is that after the trial, my Benefactor will take pity on the hardship of reclaiming His gift and... throw in some extra rewards for my "emotional damages."' "

"Looks like he headed toward the church!"

Cheng Shi checked the footprints, hastily buried "Mo Shu," and sprinted after him.

He had means to teleport directly back to the church—but the reason he steadily followed Turadin's trail was to prevent any mishaps on the way back.

The trial's "biggest threat" was now neutralized. Once he retrieved Turadin, it should be smooth speedrunning from here!

'There shouldn't be any more surprises...'

'Right?'

...

Rewinding slightly further—to the moment Cheng Shi first engaged Mo Shu.

The Theocracy of Growth.

For the church staff, tonight had been a parade of catastrophes. First, the Head of Church's son was kidnapped without cause. Then blasphemous rumors erupted throughout the compound. Then a fire consumed the Evil Infant Inquisition. Then heaven-sent thunder obliterated a civilian house.

This chain of events shattered Dolgod's tranquility, painting the thick night with strokes of panic and unease.

Head of Church Berios stood at the Assembly Hall entrance, gazing toward the lingering thunder, his eyes grave.

He'd already heard the worst from his flock. Outside, many were saying the church's harboring of Uma Sinners was the ultimate blasphemy. The merciful Benefactor had given the Theocracy of Growth many chances, but under certain leaders' guidance, the church had never reflected on its past—and tonight, His wrath had finally arrived.

Otherwise, why would the fire burn at the Evil Infant Inquisition—home of the Uma Sinners? Why would the thunder strike Dolgod precisely now?

Already, voices demanded the Head of Church step down and atone for tonight's deaths. But Berios knew these rumors couldn't have come from ordinary citizens. They had to originate from church leadership, wrapped in manipulated public outrage before echoing back.

Because common citizens had no idea the Inquisition's resident staff were Uma Sinners. Anyone who'd ever shown suspicion had been... quietly dealt with.

So in his eyes, tonight's farce was simply a clumsy power grab by certain factions.

But Berios wasn't worried. In his years heading the church, he'd faced similar crises many times. What concerned him most was: what role had his heaven-loathing, everything-despising son played in this power struggle? What purpose had he served?

Was his disappearance orchestrated by interested parties? Or... was he one of the architects of this chaos?

Behind him, anxious followers looked to their leader, hoping he'd swiftly restore order. Berios felt the distant thunder's power growing ever more terrifying. His expression hardened:

"Sing the prayers together. I shall invoke the God Descent and purge the heresy."

"Praise the Head of Church! Praise the Theocracy! Praise our Lord!"

"Your devoted followers prostrate themselves here, singing the hymn of birth, beseeching Your gaze, imploring Your protection! Under the radiance of Your glory, may Dolgod be troubled by evil no more! May no corruption hide within the church!"

Waves of fanatical worshippers dropped to their knees and prayed aloud. Carried by their harmonious chorus, Berios ascended the church tower step by step until he reached its pinnacle. He raised the heavy Pontiff Staff and touched it to the towering God Statue atop the spire.

The God Statue—cradling its belly—suddenly blazed with light. Its swollen abdomen erupted like a miniature sun, casting rays in every direction.

As searing holy light flooded every corner of the church, the tower's peak split open. From within, an impossibly vast tentacle—covered in countless abyssal black eyes—burst skyward. It stretched and swayed above the clouds, rising high amid the congregation's chanting. Then it transformed into a wind-splitting, thunder-sundering whip—and lashed toward the thunder-scorched ruins the Pontiff Staff had indicated.

BOOM—

The ruins where Cheng Shi and Mo Shu had clashed were driven three meters deeper into the earth.

Even the residual thunder echoing through the rubble was scattered by that horrifying tentacle's strike.

At that moment, Cheng Shi was on his way back to the church. He saw an enormous shadow engulfing the sky behind him—and froze mid-stride. He immediately threw a die, teleported, and stared wide-eyed, his expression turning deadly serious.

'What the HELL was that?!'

'Its Divine Pillar?'

'No—it doesn't feel right. No [Birth] aura.'

'But the shape is way too similar.'

'This is bad. Something's happening at the church that I didn't anticipate. But who triggered it—my teammates, or Turadin?'

'Or... something else entirely?'

At this thought, Cheng Shi abandoned the footprints. With a snap of his fingers, he teleported directly back to the outer compound where he'd split from the other two. The moment he landed, a sacred, solemn voice broadcast from atop the church tower, its waves rippling across the entire complex:

"Everything tonight was the handiwork of heretics, a smokescreen of deception. I have invoked the God Descent. Under our Lord's protection and guidance, we shall pierce the illusion and vanquish all evil."

"Praise [Birth]!"

"PRAISE [BIRTH]!" The Assembly Hall erupted in thunderous acclaim. Cheng Shi fixed his gaze on the silhouette atop the tower, his expression darkening.

He didn't know whether the Head of Church had discovered anything. He didn't know what that tentacle atop the tower—so eerily reminiscent of [Birth]'s Divine Pillar—actually was. He only knew his speedrun

plan seemed to have collapsed yet again. Because the Theocracy of Growth clearly possessed powerful means to eliminate threats.

Under these conditions, even if they spread the word about a [Corruption] Holy Infant, it would almost certainly be whipped to death by that tentacle. And the victim might not be limited to a fabricated infant—it could easily be the unlucky players themselves.

'What happened?!'

Cheng Shi furrowed his brow and began searching for his teammates. Through the frenzied church crowds and the chaotic compound, he searched everywhere—until finally spotting them in a resting hall near the birthing ward. Scorpio and Gao Ya.

Both wore grave expressions, staring at each other. Something had clearly gone very wrong.

Cheng Shi lunged forward and patted Scorpio's shoulder. Seeing him return, Scorpio managed a rigid smile.

Cheng Shi's heart sank. But he still smiled and said:

"I have good news. Hopefully I can trade it for good news from you."

Scorpio's face tightened with embarrassment: "I did have good news. But now... it's complicated."

"?"

Cheng Shi's brow creased. He looked at Gao Ya. Judging by appearances, this [Folly] follower was better positioned to clearly explain what had occurred inside the church while he'd been away killing Mo Shu.

Gao Ya read his intent. She scoffed:

"Our dear assassin teammate didn't want to be dead weight. So he slightly modified the original problem-solving approach—turning what wasn't a terribly complex puzzle into... something somewhat more complex."

"..."

Cheng Shi's smile curdled into a cold sneer: "Speak plainly. Otherwise—the cake goes to the Chieftain."

"!!!"

Gao Ya's expression froze. Swallowing every ounce of indignation, she spat through gritted teeth:

"He went to the future and overwrote its projection onto the present. As for what exactly he overwrote—I hadn't managed to get it out of him before you arrived."

"?"

Cheng Shi turned to Scorpio, eyes sharpening: "Don't tell me the church's fireworks are your doing."

Scorpio shook his head stiffly: "Take it easy... The church's display has nothing to do with me. But what chain reactions come next—that's harder to say. Because from the future... I brought back a person."

'Brought a person back from the future?'

Cheng Shi blanked, then blurted in astonishment: "You have that kind of broken talent? Impressive. But... who did you bring back?"

"...Someone who knows when exactly the life that shouldn't be born... will be born!"

"?"

