

The Gods 421

Chapter 421: Who Knows if You're a Deceit Follower?

Brilliant!

Hearing those cutting words, Cheng Shi nearly jumped up and applauded The Prisoner.

This Silence Chosen One was terrifyingly sharp. The moment he opened his mouth, he'd struck at the Mediocre Person Society's fundamental essence. Others challenged to get answers. He went straight for demolition!

And he wasn't tearing down the scaffolding President Gong hadn't even built yet — he was attacking the foundation that could let the Society grow taller and taller!

Interest!

That was the inescapable core of any organization's ability to win hearts.

Every player who'd survived this long was no fool. They might have low scores, but most certainly possessed a self-consistent survival logic, and at its heart lay the calculus of self-interest.

If the Mediocre Person Society was just like every other organization — requiring the masses to prop up a select few beneficiaries — then even mediocre people wouldn't agree to be the workhorses they'd refused to be even before the apocalypse.

President Gong visibly stiffened at the incisive question, but quickly recovered. Smiling, he looked toward The Prisoner's artistic arrangement beneath Hu Wei's foot:

"The Mediocre Person Society hasn't even been established yet. With my mediocre vision, I can't see that far ahead. But I can promise this: if, borrowing our friend's auspicious words, the Society truly reaches such heights someday...

I, as president, will absolutely not steal everyone's efforts to elevate myself.

I will... be the first to step aside and remain a mediocre person!

Because all I want is to live!

Living is enough."

"Bravo! Well said!"

President Gong's words were indeed stirring enough to sway hearts. The audience responded with scattered approval. At least a handful of "mediocre people" in the hall were beginning to waver.

But most weren't so easily persuaded. Joining a no-name, no-history, no-guarantee organization on the first meeting? Everyone had their concerns.

For instance, from the middle section, a burly man crossed his arms and bellowed at the stage with undisguised disdain:

"Promises?

What good are promises these days? Haven't we been tricked enough by Deceit followers? How do we know you're not one of them?

Are there any high-level tricksters among us?

I'm sure there are.

If they're not in on this kind of entertainment, I'll rip my own head off and let everyone kick it around.

So, brothers in deception — it's your chance to rehabilitate your reputation. Anyone brave enough to step up and tell us whether this 'President Gong' who won't even reveal his faith is a fraud or not?"

Before Cheng Shi could even laugh, someone in the crowd volunteered.

"I'll do it!"

Everyone followed the voice and found a thin, bespectacled man seated in the middle section, hand raised with a smile.

One look at that smile told Cheng Shi this was absolutely a genuine Deceit follower.

That grin wasn't the helpful sort — it was the gleeful, chaos-loving kind.

The bespectacled Deceit follower laughed loudly and called out to the stage:

"President Gong, right? Not bad — at least so far, not a single lie has left your mouth.

Don't look at me like that, everyone. My Master of Deception talent told me so.

I'll admit it — I've been above 2000 before, but I couldn't keep up with the big shots and fell back down.

An S-rank talent doesn't vanish when your score drops, so it's kept me scraping by below 2000.

By President Gong's logic, below 2000 we're all equal. So I'm the purest mediocre person here.

Anyway, enough chitchat. President Gong, don't blame us Deceit folks for being blunt. Your words are wonderful, and the Mediocre Person Society sounds great — but I'm worried you might be one of us.

How about this: tell us a lie. If you can pull it off, I, Song Liang, will be the first to follow you. Deal?"

"Whoaaah—"

The Deceit follower's declaration set off a storm. People looked from stage to audience, weighing whether the bespectacled Deceit follower's Master of Deception was trustworthy and what faith President Gong actually held.

All eyes darted about. Even the Grand Marshal and his distinguished companion in the first row glanced back. Cheng Shi meanwhile was practically itching to pull out snot water and Finger Bread to snack on while watching the show.

President Gong, hearing these challenges, straightened once more. His temperament seemed genuinely good — no anger at such pointed questioning. Instead, he replied with an easy smile:

"Simple enough — it's just one little lie. I'm not a Deceit follower, and I don't have the Master of Deception talent, so naturally I've no fear of lying.

But even if I do lie, what happens if our Deceit friend here insists that I didn't? How do we settle that?"

The instant President Gong finished, Cheng Shi's eyebrow rose again.

'Interesting — this man truly didn't lie. At least, Master of Deception tells me so.'

'So, could he be a Deceit follower masquerading as president?'

But setting that aside, President Gong's concern wasn't unreasonable. Deceit followers never played by the rules. Nobody could predict whether they'd lie, or at which point.

Just as the standoff threatened to stall, the original mystery voice — the one whose body had never been found — spoke again. This time, from right beside the bespectacled Deceit follower.

"What a coincidence — I have Master of Deception too.

Mr. Gong, go ahead and say it. I may not think much of you, but that bull-brother earlier had a point. I can't let one rat's dropping ruin our Deceit squad's reputation.

I need everyone to know that even among us liars, there are good people."

This got laughs from much of the crowd.

'Hilarious — Deceit has a "reputation"?''

'Calling someone a rat's dropping... isn't the entire Deceit roster a pile of rat droppings?'

'Every last one of them lies through their teeth. Who's cleaner than whom?'

The audience clearly didn't trust this voice. But regardless of credibility, at least someone had offered a verification method. If the president kept refusing, it would look genuinely suspicious.

So, even knowing it might devolve into farce, President Gong had to respond.

With reluctant resignation, he shook his head and chuckled wryly:

"Fine. Apparently, if I don't tell a lie tonight, I won't earn the trust of any mediocre person here.

In that case, here's my lie:

The underwear I'm wearing today... is red."

"..."

"..."

"..."

Silence again. But soon, stifled laughter rippled through the crowd.

Every eye turned to the bespectacled Deceit follower, hoping his reaction would reveal President Gong's true identity.

The self-professed liar blinked, then somewhat startled, nodded:

"President Gong does have something. Master of Deception told me he lied. So it looks like... he really might not be one of ours!"

Hearing this, reactions varied. The clever ones drew their own conclusions, but a noticeable number of people in the hall looked at the stage with newfound trust.

Remember — this was the "mediocre people's" stage.

On top of that, the still-faceless voice chimed in again:

"Heh — so he really isn't one of ours. Boring. Truly boring!"

This further softened attitudes toward President Gong. After all, the voice's response also implicitly confirmed the lie.

But hearing all this, Cheng Shi's smile froze — then widened to its absolute maximum.

'Interesting. So incredibly interesting.'

'This is no gathering of mediocre people!'

'This is a feast of liars!'

Because Cheng Shi's Master of Deception told him that all three of them had been telling the truth!

Therefore!

This was clearly three liars performing on the same stage!

And the show they were performing was a grand swindle called Deceit!

...

Chapter 422: Breaking News — Decay Has Fallen!?

Well, well, well!

No wonder Deceit had a bad reputation. With tactics like these, how could it be anything else?

One person takes the stage, and two more planted in the audience act as shells?

Wait...

Those two might not have been planted by President Gong at all.

After all, Deceit followers excelled at creating entertainment. When they spotted the man on stage had a "problem," instead of exposing it they'd maintain the fraud — and wasn't that entertainment in its own right?

Not just entertainment — it was an offering to Him!

Just like Cheng Shi himself: he'd clearly heard that all three were lying, yet hadn't said a word.

By that logic — how many people in this enormous hall were fellow "insiders" sitting back and enjoying the show like him?

From that perspective, this truly was a feast of Deceit!

'Lord Benefactor... are You watching too?'

With the two skills' endorsement, President Gong stood even straighter on stage.

But the rhythm was bizarre. He'd clearly told a "lie," yet acted as proud in this moment as if he'd spoken a universal truth.

As the challenge died down, President Gong resumed his impassioned pitch, but strip away the packaging and the core was simple: have all the mediocre people present pool their resources, then redistribute them so the right items reached the right people — thereby boosting everyone's survival odds and growth potential.

But mediocre people were already struggling just to stay alive. Where would they find resources to share?

Just then, the fired-up President Gong dropped yet another depth charge — "boom" — reigniting the hall that had barely calmed down.

"I know you all have doubts about me and reservations about the Mediocre Person Society's purpose. But no matter — I'll win over every 'mediocre person' who wants to walk together, through sincerity.

Today, I will freely share one extremely classified piece of intelligence with limitless implications. Once you hear it, go back and keep your eyes open. Before long, you'll be able to verify whether it's true.

But before I share it, let me make one thing clear.

What I hope for is not people coming here to freeload off others' resources, but genuine sharing and coexistence.

Only through mutual aid can we keep pace with the geniuses. Think about it, friends.

The next gathering is in fourteen days. I hope to see willing friends who want to join us then."

"Enough stalling — just tell us the intel!"

"Exactly! Until the intel's been verified, who knows what you're really after?"

"Run-of-the-mill intel is useless anyway. Plenty of big shots in the Mage channel volunteer info. Some geniuses aren't unwilling to give us a hand — so let me check the quality of your goods first."

"..."

Clearly the crowd was heating up under his provocation. The moment his intel dropped, the hall would reach tonight's climax.

Cheng Shi was curious what kind of earth-shattering revelation President Gong would produce. Judging from the front row, the Grand Marshal and his companion were clearly interested too. Even The Prisoner under Hu Wei's boot had raised his head, watching the stage with a grin.

President Gong gestured for silence, then spoke, unhurried — delivering a message that genuinely shook Cheng Shi to his core.

"Decay... has fallen."

"!!!"

"???"

"What?!"

Cheng Shi was stunned. He shot upright in his seat.

'How could Decay have fallen?'

'Wasn't He only "faking death"?''

'Did something happen after I left?'

'Wait — if He's truly fallen, even if my Benefactor didn't tell me, surely Big Cat would've been informed as the proxy wielding divine authority?'

'Since Big Cat hasn't notified me, does that mean this intel... isn't real?'

'He's still lying?'

'But to use what's essentially blasphemy as a con — what's he after?'

'Isn't he afraid Decay will settle the score?'

Cheng Shi fell silent. He couldn't figure it out, so he decided to keep watching.

Such shocking news naturally didn't rattle only Cheng Shi. Probably no one in the hall wasn't stunned. Even the three in the front row visibly sobered upon hearing it.

Their faces might not have shown shock, but micro-changes in their eyes and posture betrayed inner turbulence.

Setting aside the mediocre fools who'd been played by three charlatans — even the clever ones who'd never believed President Gong had good intentions found themselves, amid his mysterious and assured tone, entertaining a sliver of doubt about this unimaginable claim.

'Could it be true?'

They cautiously observed other smart people around them, searching for any trace that might corroborate the news.

But here's the thing about human nature: the more someone knows, the quieter they tend to be, lest they attract attention.

And those who know nothing? Their reactions were the biggest — even overly so.

For instance...

The Decay followers.

Think about it. You're fighting to survive in a faith-based game. Then someone tells you that your protector, the source of your power, the destination of your devotion... is gone. What would you think?

Others were hard to read. But in that moment, the Decay followers had unconsciously begun inching toward Folly!

"Utter nonsense!"

"How could a deity fall?!"

"Trials are still running normally! I was just matched into my Lord's trial — rewards and scores same as always. You're nothing but a fear-monger!"

"Exactly — pure bullshit! Rancid bullshit!"

"My Decay power is intact. How could my Benefactor have a problem?"

"All beings should rot, all things shall decay! Great Lord, send down Your divine punishment! Let this blasphemer who runs his mouth rot before all!"

Decay shall be eternally great!

Heh — when your body rots away, you'll learn how our Lord treats blasphemers."

Seeing someone even start invoking Decay's curse, President Gong laughed heartily on stage.

He seemed not the least bit nervous. He showed zero fear of offending these Decay followers and explained, laughing:

"I only said He has fallen. When did I ever say His authority was lost?"

Decay friends, you can still enter trials, use abilities, and receive blessings because the Gods long ago divided His authority among themselves and exercise it on His behalf.

Hey — don't get violent. Since your livelihoods aren't affected, why not hear me out about how your Benefactor fell?"

Was this even appropriate to say?

But there was no denying it was effective.

President Gong was undoubtedly a master reader of people. He'd instantly seized the key issue of the chaos the Decay followers had stirred up — assuring them that Decay's fall didn't affect their survival. He dismantled their fear at its root and bought himself the time to explain.

Sure enough, the agitated Decay followers gradually calmed after hearing this. They watched the stage — some suspiciously, some darkly — awaiting President Gong's explanation.

President Gong casually dispersed the Decay energy clinging to him, then dropped yet another bombshell!

"I have a reliable source. Not long ago, the Gods...

went to war with each other — a 'God War'!"

...

Chapter 423: Deductions About the God War

"A God War!!?"

"Not long ago?"

"For real?"

Exclamations erupted below. Under the repeated bombardment of blockbuster revelations, the assembled mediocre people could no longer contain themselves. The shock they'd been suppressing since the beginning all burst out at once.

Doubts and speculation ran rampant. Accusations and arguments nearly drowned the entire hall.

Cheng Shi keenly noticed that his big brother Hu Wei's expression had turned startled too. Clearly, he hadn't expected the man on stage to say such a thing.

President Gong gestured for quiet and continued with a smile:

"That's right — a 'God War.'

Don't question the reliability of my intel, because a certain friend of mine — who wishes to remain anonymous — witnessed it firsthand.

Of course, God Wars aren't visible to mortals. He merely deduced it from the clues found within a trial. But I believe his deduction is entirely sound."

The hall erupted into discussion again. The Folly followers sneered with contempt. The Decay followers unleashed another torrent of abuse. But the loudest voice belonged to the mystery Deceit follower whose body was never found.

That location-shifting voice mocked with a laugh:

"Oh, Mr. Gong, this 'anonymous friend' who doesn't want to be named — that's not just you talking about yourself, is it?

Are you literally inventing a friend out of thin air?"

President Gong shook his head with a wry smile and immediately countered:

"If it really were me, I'd have said it with way more conviction. Unfortunately, it genuinely isn't me.

After all, some people have their reasons for not wanting to step into the spotlight. Isn't that right?

Rather like... a certain someone who keeps hiding in the shadows."

"..."

That struck a nerve. The bodyless voice hesitated and didn't respond.

Some in the audience even cheered the rebuttal.

Cheng Shi watched the farce with great interest, thinking: President Gong's Mediocre Person Society... was basically a done deal.

Because a fair number of "mediocre people" had already been won over by his charisma.

The question was whether this Society really served the mediocre, or whether it was a wolf in mutual-aid sheep's clothing coming to fleece them!

Once the taunting voice fell silent, President Gong continued:

"To put your doubts to rest, I'll lay out everything I know.

What's certain is that a massive, unexpected event occurred during my friend's trial. He never learned what that event was, but he witnessed its aftermath:

The Gods — all of Them — descended simultaneously into that single trial!"

"Whoaaah—"

Faces changed throughout the room.

President Gong was masterful at "storytelling." Even behind his mask, the audience couldn't see his face, yet his bearing and tone carried a hypnotic quality that made every word feel like something you wanted to believe.

But for Cheng Shi, this wasn't just stunning — it was jarring!

Piercingly jarring!

Because this scene of all gods descending together sounded all too familiar.

'Could President Gong's "friend"... be one of my former teammates?'

'And that trial was the Prosperity trial, Dying Embers?'

'No — too little information. I can't confirm that.'

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted. Without a flicker of change on his face, he kept listening.

"You heard right — They descended into a single trial, all at once.

And in that history-worthy trial, two beings fought.

I don't mean Existence's Time and Memory had a civil war. I mean Life's Prosperity and Descent's Decay — two gods of opposing faiths — erupted into a full-scale battle!

Think about it, friends. Under the watchful eyes of all the assembled Gods, two deities came to blows over faith conflict and authority disputes. If that's not a 'God War,' then what is?"

The moment President Gong finished, the Folly followers started another wave of contempt:

"Drivel. If two gods fighting qualifies as a 'God War,' then I can only say the Mediocre Person Society is nothing but a laughable organization playing word games. And you, President Gong, are merely a clown on this absurd stage, making fools laugh."

'?'

Keyword triggered!

Cheng Shi — who'd been frowning hard, trying to figure out which teammate from his trial was President Gong's friend — found himself slightly losing composure at that remark.

'What's wrong with being a clown?'

'Why drag clowns into your insults?'

'And talking about "drivel" — it's Folly followers who are the real drivelers!'

'Clowns are smarter than all of you!'

The real point of President Gong's speech obviously wasn't "two gods fought." It was "all the Gods assembled!"

That was the key!

If nothing catastrophic had happened, why would They all descend into a single trial?

Heh — things were getting interesting again. Cheng Shi's gaze turned grave.

He was thinking: among the teammates who'd gone their separate ways after that trial, which one had made this deduction — one that was only half correct? The suspects numbered only four.

First, he could eliminate the Decay Rank 4, Zhen.

If the Rot Chanter whom Big Cat had duped into going to the Septic Final Tomb was still alive, he surely wouldn't blaspheme his own Benefactor by making such an unfavorable guess.

The remaining three could really be counted as two, since An Jing was Zhen Xin's person. So she and Zhen Xin could be treated as one unit.

As for Zuo Qiu, whom Zhen Xin had replaced...

Though Cheng Shi had left that trial as a Fate follower — making it impossible to use masks to determine if Zuo Qiu was alive — based on his assessment of Zhen Xin, the historian most likely survived.

Because even her unpleasant sister apparently didn't kill indiscriminately. So the more "orderly" elder sister was probably the same.

Even if Zuo Qiu's faith was diametrically opposed to hers, at Zhen Xin's level, ideological opposition probably ranked below pragmatic interest.

So President Gong's friend was either Zuo Qiu or Zhen Xin.

And then there was a third possibility: his friend was Zhen Yi — or rather, President Gong himself... might be Zhen Yi!

Because these words sounded exactly like something a professional liar would say. Half truth, half fiction.

Others might not know, but President Gong couldn't fool Cheng Shi.

Cheng Shi had personally witnessed that God War and participated in the Assembly of Gods Convention — a gathering no player was supposed to attend!

He knew President Gong was half right. A God War had indeed erupted. But it wasn't Decay who'd fallen — it was Prosperity!

And Prosperity hadn't died from battle. He'd died from... self-destruction!

Drawing such a conclusion from the limited perspective available in that trial wasn't wrong per se — but it meant his "friend" was extraordinarily bold!

Because no sane person would dare speculate about the life and death of a deity!

Looking at it that way, the "friend" seemed more like Zhen Xin.

But was what he was saying true?

If that friend really was Zhen Xin, then how had she dared guess it was Decay who fell?

More importantly — did that friend really exist?

'President Gong, is your real surname Gong... or Zhen?'

...

Chapter 424: Prosperity's Prosperity Became Evidence of Decay's Fall

Cheng Shi still didn't move.

He sat obediently in his seat, not even giving the stage excessive attention.

Right now he acted like a true mediocre person — glancing around, opening his mouth then closing it, as if wanting to say something but afraid to invite argument.

There were many people like him. Plenty had opinions but wanted to hear others' takes first.

But Cheng Shi wasn't imitating them just to avoid attention. He was using the act to carefully survey his surroundings.

'If President Gong is Zhen Yi — or Zhen Xin — then I have every reason to suspect that all of this is another "Dream from Nothing"!'

The thought was terrifying. Cheng Shi had already fallen into that trap once. Remembering the back door he'd pushed open in the Void Church of Far Dusk Town — it bore an uncanny resemblance to the Mediocre Person Society door he'd just pushed open!

The only difference: this time there'd been no memory flashback, and an empty corridor had been added.

But who could guarantee this wasn't the Master of Trickery upgrading her prey's trap?

Cheng Shi was scared. Genuinely scared.

But scared or not, he could only feign calm and hold position.

The hall's players had been thrown into turmoil by President Gong's bombshell, but things remained manageable overall.

Folly's eye-rolls, Decay's tirades, Deceit's jeers, and assorted hotheads' profanity wove themselves into a net that crashed over President Gong's head. Yet the man who'd dropped this explosive news seemed unfazed. He continued sharing his "friend's" deductions.

"I know such unthinkable news is hard for everyone to accept. But someone will believe me — because I also know that this hall is full of clever people who 'happened to find' the invitation cards I personally issued.

I won't probe how you 'found' those cards, and I won't question your motives for sneaking in. But these people probably already know: I'm right.

See, mediocre ones? Clever people can unravel the truth about Them from mere traces. But us? If we lose sharing and mutual aid, we'll be abandoned by the era entirely — lost in the sea of memory.

I'm not being melodramatic. After everything we've been through, you know my words ring true.

Enough talk — let's get back on topic. Let me continue about Decay's fall."

President Gong clasped his hands behind his back and began pacing the stage. After a moment, he posed a question with theatrical mystery.

"I know most of you have probably never had an audience with a deity. I certainly haven't. Everything I know about Them comes secondhand.

So let me ask: based on everyone's connections and intel — can we first confirm one simple thing?

Starting a few days ago... Prosperity followers' scores seem to have been rising across the board. Is that correct?"

"!!!"

Honestly, true mediocre people were too consumed with survival to track leaderboard shifts. Below 2000 points, there wasn't much to watch anyway.

But President Gong was right — this hall didn't contain only mediocre people. Plenty of sharp minds had infiltrated, and they were now chewing over what President Gong meant.

An older player who'd apparently noticed the same thing spoke up to confirm:

"That's right — I noticed it too. At my point range, the Prosperity followers around me on the Ladder of Ascent have all been climbing lately.

You might wonder how I could notice others rising or falling in a range where a single point separates tens of thousands of ranks. I'll tell you.

Not long ago, I got lucky in a trial and scored big, pulling far ahead of several Prosperity IDs I'd been tracking. But recently, they've caught back up.

Furthermore, I have a... ahem... a friend who told me that Prosperity followers in their Mutual Aid Society have been receiving large quantities of trial rewards lately.

Not all of those rewards are useful, but the volume has undeniably increased.

I'm no shill for President Gong. You can see what I am — a Decay follower. So I too am very curious about what's happening to the Prosperity crowd.

There must be Prosperity people here. Anyone brave enough to stand up and enlighten us?"

The old player's words ignited another wave of heated discussion. Several Decay followers stepped forward to corroborate, but not a single Prosperity follower dared speak up.

Obviously — anyone with half a brain knew this wasn't the time to "flaunt wealth."

Watching this, Cheng Shi shook his head with a wry smile. He suddenly appreciated how difficult it was for Big Cat to play den mother to that whole crowd.

By this point, he'd basically figured out President Gong's angle.

Clearly, the uninformed President Gong — or rather, his wildly speculative friend — had taken the recent phenomenon of Prosperity followers' surging scores and used it as evidence of Decay's fall.

Indeed, if Prosperity had won the so-called God War, showcasing that victory through overwhelming dominance on the Ladder of Ascent wouldn't be unreasonable.

But the one pumping up Prosperity followers' scores wasn't their Benefactor, Prosperity — it was Big Cat!

Who could have guessed that their recent windfall wasn't because their Benefactor won a God War, but because He'd died?

President Gong and his friend had been deceived. Well, not exactly "deceived" — with the Gods keeping silent, probably no one could guess the full picture.

It was like a multiple-choice question with only A, B, C, and D. They'd had the guts to reject all four options and pick a nonexistent E — and that alone deserved a "bravo for the audacity."

But reality was even more absurd than imagination. Because the actual answer was an even more outlandish, nonexistent F.

The deity grading Prosperity trials and distributing rewards had been swapped from a real god to a fake, "selfish," friend-sheltering, rule-bending Envoy!

If you hadn't lived through it, who would believe it?

"Tsk — this is really... hard to evaluate."

Cheng Shi smacked his lips. Then it occurred to him: since President Gong had gotten the answer wrong because of this misread, didn't that lower the probability he was Zhen Xin or Zhen Yi?

Objectively — perhaps because he had a bias toward his own Deceit Chosen One — Cheng Shi couldn't picture Zhen Xin as someone who'd get the answer wrong.

So he circled back to suspecting the true historian who'd vanished from the start: Zuo Qiu.

And right then, President Gong spoke again.

"Thank you to the old gentleman for the corroboration. But the evidence I have goes far beyond this single point.

From that same friend, I also learned that Decay followers appear to have been unable to...

have an Audience with their God for some time now."

"What?!"

"How is that possible?!"

...

Chapter 425: A Flawless Deduction

"What's so impossible about it?"

President Gong smiled. He paced the stage, speaking with great confidence:

"Prosperity and Decay share one leaderboard. So friends from both faiths should know: Decay's Chosen One goes by the ID 'Xiu Mu.' Ranks two through four are 'Yu Mu,' 'Bu Ziqi,' and 'Zhen Du.'

I have confirmed intel: since that 'God War,' none of those four have had an audience with Him."

"Oh, very funny. Unless you're one of them, how would you possibly know they haven't secretly had an audience?"

And even if you were one of them, you'd only know your own situation. Just because someone tells you something, does that make it true?"

The moment President Gong finished, a barrage of challenges erupted. Naturally, publicly exposing four peak players' personal affairs would raise suspicion. But this time, President Gong hadn't lied.

Because after that challenge, the distinguished man in the first row spoke up.

And the instant he opened his mouth, he confirmed President Gong's words.

"I can verify that President Gong's claim is accurate. The peak Decay players have indeed been unable to have an audience with their god recently. However...

I should also note that this unsummoned status has persisted for some time — it's not something that only started recently.

Furthermore, I can add some supplementary intel: Prosperity audiences appear to have stopped as well.

'Tu Tou' and 'Zhidio Xiumu' haven't shown any activity either."

At this, everyone was stunned.

Every eye in the hall turned to this confident, elegant man, trying to guess his identity.

Cheng Shi only grew more certain of his suspicion: this person had to be one of the Chosen Ones he hadn't yet met.

President Gong clapped his hands in delight at the first-row man's contribution. With impeccable grace, he bowed toward the man and said:

"Many thanks, Chief Grand Secretary, for your support. But I must remind you — no matter how selflessly you share this information, the Mediocre Person Society can hardly accommodate a figure of your stature.

You are one of those 'geniuses' I spoke of. You've even transcended the need for mediocre people to prop you up. So...

What brings you here?"

'Chief Grand Secretary?'

'What kind of ridiculous nickname is that?'

Cheng Shi blinked, confused for a second. Then a name clicked — a person once hailed across every channel as the "Faith Game's number one support": the Arbiter, Mo Li!

"..."

'He's Mo Li?'

'So "Chief Grand Secretary" means "chief support." Is that it?'

'Fine, fine, fine! Chief Grand Secretary it is!'

By now, others had also recognized Mo Li's identity. Gasps echoed through the hall.

"It's him — the Chosen One of Order! The Arbiter who understands human nature best — Mo Li!"

"Who? A Chosen One? A Chosen One is mediocre too?"

"...Whether a Chosen One is mediocre, I don't know. But buddy, you definitely are."

"Yeah, I know — why else would I be here?"

"..."

Amid the commotion, Mo Li in the front row didn't deny his identity. He simply smiled at the stage and spoke at an unhurried pace:

"The difference between a genius and a mediocre person is merely the angle from which they view the world. I wouldn't dare call myself a genius. But those present here may not be mediocre either.

A masterwork's audience is always thin — yet a masterwork isn't always pleasing to the ear.

I only know that the majority defines the mainstream. Just as my Lord's radiance never changes for the differences between living beings, shining equally upon all things in the universe.

So I'm no genius, nor am I the enemy of mediocre people. I bear the Mediocre Person Society absolutely no ill will.

I simply happened to find a card. Curiosity brought me in for a look. And of course — what matters more is confirming whether this place falls under my Lord Order's illumination."

These words filled nearly everyone present with goodwill toward this modest Chosen One. Even Cheng Shi thought this peak Arbiter was utterly impeccable.

"Clap! Clap! Clap!"

President Gong applauded rhythmically from the stage, exclaiming:

"Truly worthy of His follower — still so reassuring.

I should be thankful for everyone's restraint, sparing us the Chief Grand Secretary's judgment.

Now that even the Chief has corroborated this, surely there are no more doubts?"

Mo Li smiled and added:

"I did say the audience cessation isn't something that began only recently. So President Gong, your evidence is rather conveniently selected."

"Even the strongest evidence, placed before someone who refuses to believe, won't convince them.

I'm merely the Mediocre Person Society's convener — not the mediocre people's teacher. My vision is to benefit those who are willing to trust each other and join the Society, not to convert stubborn lone wolves.

And what I'd like to say is: when people witness something, they shouldn't only look at its surface. They should pierce through those fragmented, deceptive appearances to seek the essence of the matter!

And the essence behind these appearances is: Decay has fallen. Prosperity achieved total victory!"

"..."

President Gong's logic wasn't the most airtight. As he admitted, he was openly persuading people who already wanted to believe. And yes, some in the hall were willing — though mostly because of Mo Li's endorsement.

But these words landed very differently in Cheng Shi's ears.

'Surface versus essence — my Benefactor was just lecturing me about this exact thing!' So the Deceit follower on stage was... pretty high-level.

He was no mediocre person — he might very well be one of those "geniuses" he kept talking about!

A genius walking the path of Deceit!

'Heh — how interesting. A genius convenes countless mediocre people below 2000 points, aiming to build an organization that can keep pace with the geniuses.'

'So what's his angle?'

'If it's just for entertainment, isn't this level of manipulation a bit... low-grade?'

The hall quieted once more. Strangely, the moment that should have produced the fiercest debate and most heated discussion simply fizzled. Players glanced at one another and chose silence.

Perhaps in many eyes, Decay's fall was now a "settled" matter.

"I know this is hard for our Decay friends to accept. But everyone should understand: though the gods shelter their followers, They are also the very reason we're in this mess!

Without Their descent, we wouldn't be suffering like this.

So wake up — don't let the abilities They bestowed blind you.

Humans and gods were never on the same side!"

The hall erupted in thunderous cheers.

Cheng Shi's eyebrow rose with mild surprise. He even sensed the shift in Cui Qishi's aura behind him.

'Huh — the Mediocre Person Society is starting to sound like a variant of the Torchbearers.'

He stayed silent, didn't turn around, and watched the stage with burning eyes, waiting for President Gong's next act.

"Everyone, please stay calm.

The Mediocre Person Society is a stage for the mediocre — not a stage for fools.

I won't lead anyone to challenge gods we can't possibly defeat. I said it before: I only want everyone to help each other, brave the blizzard together, march in step, and strive to survive.

Those grandiose notions — until the mediocre have transformed, we cannot and need not consider them.

I understand, Decay friends — you're worried about your situation. But don't forget: you can still abjure your oaths.

And even without abjuring — who says the fall of a deity is necessarily...

not an opportunity?"

At this point, President Gong's voice began rising toward mania.

"Everyone!

At the end of Decay's path, that Divine Throne sits empty!

Don't you want to give it a try?"

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's lips curled. He'd basically figured out President Gong's game.

'He wants to be a second "me" — he wants a slice of the pie from this so-called god-fall event!'

And founding the Mediocre Person Society might just be one of his tools for carving that slice.

Who exactly would benefit from the Society remained unclear. But the leaked God War had almost certainly become the perfect catalyst for the Society's establishment.

Without it, this President Gong probably wouldn't have had such perfect "material" to share with the assembled mediocre people.

His impassioned speech continued.

"I've said it before: the geniuses are gifted, and they run fast. But if we work together, moving as one, we may yet follow in their footsteps and pick up the scraps!

And today's intel is my sincerity. I'm sharing this information precisely so that all of you can grab a piece of the pie in this monumental upheaval!

It doesn't matter which one of us gets that piece — whoever does can give the Mediocre Person Society the capital to sit at the same table as other organizations, and negotiate as equals.

With more and more sharing, we will grow faster than those rigid, hierarchical, old-guard institutions!

And when the mediocre people of the Society shed their mediocrity through unity — we will very likely be the ones who survive to the very end of this game the Gods have bestowed upon us!

Friends, think carefully. Opportunities...

don't come along every day."

...

Chapter 426: The So-Called Opportunity

Opportunity.

President Gong had said "opportunity" — and this opportunity was the crux of the entire intel.

Even if Decay had truly fallen, the ones who'd divvy up His authority first would undoubtedly be the gods.

In Cheng Shi's view, under the Convention's intervention, whether Decay was dead or alive might not even matter. Just like with Prosperity: even after He died, the Faith Game kept running as normal.

So from Cheng Shi's perspective, a deity's fall wouldn't benefit players at all — unless you were like Big Cat, backed by a god and having already "latched onto" an Envoy title in advance. Only then could you inherit the authority.

But these mediocre people probably didn't even know the Convention existed. How could they find opportunity in a god's demise?

Everyone's curiosity was piqued. President Gong was undeniably masterful at controlling a presentation's rhythm. Perhaps all his earlier buildup had been for this very moment — to lay the "opportunity" bare.

He paced around the stage, speaking with mounting fervor:

"Let your imaginations run free, friends. Think about the chain reaction that follows a deity's fall.

First, we must agree on one thing: the gods are openly plundering each other's authority. So one thing is easy to guess — Decay's authority has surely been stripped clean, with Prosperity claiming the lion's share.

But for Them, authority might be all They want. Yet how can a deity possess only authority?

When He fell, were all the other things on Him automatically claimed by the gods?

I think not!

This isn't my speculation — it's what my friend witnessed firsthand!

He told me that during the God War, he couldn't see the real battlefield or sense the gods' power. But he was certain of one thing: before Decay fell, something brimming with infinite Decay power tumbled out of the Septic Final Tomb!"

'Something... fell out of the Septic Final Tomb?'

Cheng Shi froze mid-thought. 'Is this real or fake?'

'If true, when? Could it have been during the Decay surge deep in the Sighing Forest?'

'So when Decay clashed with Prosperity... did He actually drop loot?'

'Hiss — it's not impossible. After all, thanks to my offering, Prosperity invaded Decay's home turf and plundered His faith.'

'When gods fight, even the splashing divine power would look like a spectacular display to players.'

While puzzling over this, Cheng Shi glanced down at Hu Wei and Mo Li in the front row. On Hu Wei's face, he clearly caught a trace of gravity and seriousness.

'Huh?'

'His big bro seems to know about this too?'

'Could it actually be real?'

'But... what kind of twist is this?'

'Seeing the surface, guessing the essence wrong, yet the conclusion ends up right?'

'Huh?'

So President Gong's true objective was to mobilize the Mediocre Person Society to find whatever had fallen from the Septic Final Tomb!

That made everything click.

Cheng Shi's eyes flashed. He quietly lowered his head.

'Once you know the liar's true goal, you can sit back and enjoy the rest of the show.'

Questions poured in from below. President Gong didn't keep them waiting and promptly "freely" shared tonight's most critical intel.

"No need to guess — I'll give you the answer.

What fell is most likely... His God Body!"

"God Body?!?"

"Bullshit — absolute bullshit! Do you even know what you're saying? Even if Prosperity, with the gods' help, killed Decay, how could They possibly let Decay's body just drop — and right in front of a player, no less?!"

"Exactly — President Gong, that 'friend' of yours seems to be playing you."

"..."

President Gong heard these challenges and laughed heartily, continuing without faltering:

"The 'god body' I speak of is not Decay's actual body.

The gods are not mortal beings. No one knows if They are aggregations of will or higher-dimensional entities.

I've always believed They're visible to us because They've found vessels in reality that can house a deity's will.

So the 'god body' I refer to is the divine vessel that we humans can perceive.

And Decay... did have such a vessel.

His vessel was an impossibly ancient, rotting giant. I believe the Chief Grand Secretary should have heard of this as well."

Cheng Shi couldn't see Mo Li's expression, but he saw Mo Li nod — confirming President Gong's claim.

Another wave of exclamations rolled through the hall.

"President Gong, you're saying we might actually find this divine body?"

"A god's body — could it hold the secret to becoming a god?"

"Becoming... a god?"

President Gong laughed and shook his head:

"Everyone, let's not get ahead of ourselves.

If there were such a golden opportunity, the geniuses would have devoured it already.

Remember — we're mediocre. As the road grows harder, we can't afford to aim for the sky. True, what dropped might well be His mortal vessel. But a vessel capable of housing divine will is far beyond what we can covet.

What we need isn't the whole intact corpse, but the fragments that shattered off during the God War's fierce exchange!

Friends — eat one bite at a time, walk one step at a time.

If the Mediocre Person Society can pick up even a small shard of that body, the opportunities contained within would be enough to sustain us for a very long time.

And let me remind you: the more precious the prize you pray for, the harder the trial becomes. So with our abilities, how could we possibly seize an entire deity's remains?

Impossible.

So our goal is the debris that crumbled from that divine corpse — the fallen treasures imbued with Decay's power!

This is precisely why I've gathered you all here."

President Gong paused abruptly. With a casual wave, countless doors split open between every row. Then, amid the audience's shock and confusion, he smiled and said:

"What follows will be the Mediocre Person Society's internal sharing session.

I do know where and when the god body fell. With precise coordinates of space and time, I believe tonight's gathering will not be in vain.

But I also know that not everyone believes me. I won't force anyone.

I've said my piece. The intel I've shared tonight should at least be worthy of the brave 'admission ticket' you all paid.

As for what comes next — friends who wish to join the Mediocre Person Society may stay. We'll discuss the god-hunting plan together.

And those who don't believe me — you may leave in peace."

Watching the corridors open for the audience to exit freely, Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow with genuine surprise.

'President Gong has real guts.'

Even if eighty percent of tonight's intel was fake, the genuine bits about gods and Chosen Ones woven into the lies were worth at least the "courage" ticket price the mediocre people had paid.

But unfortunately, he had no interest in an organization built by a con artist.

So Cheng Shi prepared to leave.

But just as he and Cui Qiushi behind him stood simultaneously, his feet suddenly stopped.

'Wait... would a premeditated, calculating liar really let his entertainment walk away so easily?'

Cheng Shi's gaze sharpened. He stared gravely at the gilded door not far ahead.

...

Chapter 427: The Stage Collapsed!

He was thinking.

Cheng Shi kept asking himself: if a con was truly premeditated, when would be the optimal moment for the swindlers to strike?

For others, this might take some pondering. But for a fellow con artist like Cheng Shi, it was a giveaway question.

The answer: at the con's climax — when everyone's attention has been pulled in every direction. For instance...

Right now!

President Gong hadn't just shared explosive news. In an extraordinarily short window, he'd hurled an agonizing choice at everyone present.

Never mind whether anyone truly believed him — anyone with even a shred of curiosity about the intel would want to know exactly where and when that Decay God Body had fallen.

But to keep listening, you'd have to join the so-called Mediocre Person Society.

Clever people only wanted the benefits without the baggage. So they hesitated — and in that hesitation, they'd easily overlook any new little tricks the swindler had slipped in.

Such as...

A bait-and-switch.

Yes — the doors everyone entered through were safe. And these new doors looked identical to the originals. If he hadn't already seen through President Gong as a fraud, Cheng Shi might not have thought twice either.

But the question was: did these doors actually lead home?

The memory of falling into Zhen Yi's Void Memory Pocket was still raw.

Moreover, President Gong's so-called "friend" was very likely Zhen Xin or Zhen Yi — or President Gong himself might even be her!

So Cheng Shi stopped. He needed to observe. He'd wait for others to walk through the doors before deciding whether it was safe to leave.

But not everyone could think this far.

In many eyes, President Gong had already built a charismatic, selfless image. The useful intel he'd shared was genuine treasure for people who knew nothing about peak players.

So a number of level-headed types and freeloaders who wanted zero risk prepared to leave.

Among them: the Torchbearers, who would never join another organization.

Cui Qiushi stood but didn't immediately enter a door. After studying Cheng Shi for a moment, he carefully moved to a nearby aisle and, in a covertly defensive posture, rendezvoused with another player.

The two exchanged a brief look, nodded in unison, and prepared to leave.

But at that instant, Cheng Shi moved. Without confirming the doors' safety, he couldn't watch Old Cui's son walk into danger.

His gaze hardened. The look he shot at Cui Qiushi turned razor-sharp. Without hesitation, three scalpels slid from his sleeve, and he flung them at the back of Cui Qiushi's head!

He knew Cui Qiushi had been guarding against him. He knew scalpels at this speed wouldn't hit an alert Order Knight. But Cheng Shi's real target wasn't Cui Qiushi — it was the player Cui Qiushi was trying to shield!

The unknown Torchbearer!

In the same motion, Cheng Shi snatched something from his storage and hurled it at the stranger with blinding speed.

The unknown Torchbearer — already wary of Cheng Shi thanks to Cui Qiushi's warning — saw him attack two targets at once. His expression darkened, and he dodged sideways.

He couldn't not dodge.

Cui Qiushi faced three clearly identifiable scalpels and could simply tank them with his small shield. But the stranger faced a bizarre, wriggling tongue!

'What kind of person opens a fight by throwing a tongue?!'

Nobody knew what the tongue could do. Better safe than sorry — stay far away and don't let it touch you.

But by dodging, he moved clear of the exit door. And because he dodged in time, the tongue Cheng Shi had thrown slapped — without obstacle — right onto that gilded, jade-paneled door!

The stranger exhaled in relief. Then he pulled a staff from his person — clearly a mage. But just as he prepared to counterattack the man who'd suddenly gone hostile, the exit door beside him let out a tremendous "crack" and...

Shattered!

One lick from that bizarre tongue, and the door that had looked solid as jade — sturdy and imposing — splintered like a hammer-struck mirror!

At the same time, the tongue slid off the door and flopped to the ground. Under both men's grave stares, it wriggled lazily, then let out a satisfied burp:

"Burrp~ Stuffed again!"

"!!!"

The stranger and Cui Qiushi both stiffened, pupils contracting!

A talking tongue!!

'Creepy as hell!'

But the weirdest thing wasn't the tongue — it was the shattered door!

Because after the first door broke, every door in the hall triggered a chain reaction — shattering one after another like dominoes before the crowd's eyes.

Several players who'd just stepped through froze mid-stride, then were ejected by an unknown force from an unknown space, flung onto the ground.

Now everyone was stunned.

Terror etched itself across every face. Seeing this scene, who could still not understand? These doors weren't "go home" doors. They weren't "leave the venue" doors. They were "get killed" doors!

Someone had planted traps behind them, teleporting every player who entered into an unknown space!

The doors were fake!!

Witnessing this, Cui Qiushi felt an icy chill shoot from his tailbone to his crown. If not for the strange man in front of him who'd suddenly intervened, he and his companion would already be imprisoned.

'He's not an enemy?!'

Cui Qiushi turned, staring at Cheng Shi with grave intensity, his brow locked tight.

'Who is he?'

Meanwhile, the stranger approached. He was far more pragmatic than Cui Qiushi. Having realized Cheng Shi's attack was rescue rather than assault, he nodded gratefully:

"A life-saving grace — I'm deeply grateful.

I'm Zhang Hao. May I ask—"

But before he could finish, Cheng Shi dove down, scooped up the Tongue of Eating Lies from the floor, and vanished into thin air before their eyes.

He'd bolted.

Having reluctantly blown President Gong's cover, he couldn't afford to remain in everyone's sights. So he used a die he'd casually tossed elsewhere upon entry and teleported to a safe, empty spot.

The instant he vanished, chaos erupted in the hall.

Some lucky ones had indeed escaped thanks to Cheng Shi's move. But what about the players who'd already walked through?

Were they dead? Captured?

No one knew — except whoever had set the traps.

And so the terrified, furious players rounded on the stage, screaming profanities. Some had already drawn weapons, faces dark with rage. Countless blasts of light and projectiles rained down upon the central stage.

Under that barrage, the stage collapsed with a tremendous "boom," instantly raising a towering cloud of dust!

Cheng Shi's gaze sharpened as he watched from his hiding spot. He let out a cold laugh.

'Would that be enough? Probably not.'

'If a calculating organizer could be killed by this level of retaliatory fury, tonight's gathering truly would have earned its name as a "Mediocre Person Society.'"

But credit where it was due — how ironic. The cautious clever ones who'd chosen to leave rather than get involved had fallen into the trap before the "mediocre people" who'd stayed to hunt for opportunity. Didn't that prove that everyone here was...

Mediocre after all?

In Cheng Shi's view, simple foolishness alone didn't make someone mediocre. But failing to know yourself certainly put you on the path.

So the self-proclaimed clever ones — who were actually mediocre — erupted in fury. And the result of their rage was that the stage's sky...

Collapsed!

...

Chapter 428: Oh, Brother-in-Law Is Here Too!

Watching the dust-wreathed center stage, Cheng Shi's brow darkened.

The crisis wasn't over. President Gong certainly wasn't dead. So the priority now was guarding against hidden threats.

Cheng Shi inched back half a step, silently found a position equidistant from everyone around him, and began his vigilant watch.

As the central stage collapsed, the front-row players moved.

Mo Li sat utterly still. Seeing dust billow everywhere, he simply remarked:

"No dust permitted here."

The instant he spoke, every swirling particle in the venue froze mid-air, then plummeted to the ground and never rose again.

Grand Marshal Hu Wei's expression was grim. From the shattering doors, he seemed to have guessed who was present.

The Prisoner under his boot was intensely curious too, craning his neck to scan the surroundings — clearly searching for someone.

Before long, his roving gaze met Cheng Shi's wandering eyes dead-on.

"..."

Cheng Shi wanted to casually avert his gaze, but to his disbelief, The Prisoner seemed to recognize him. One eyebrow rose, and he struggled under the Grand Marshal's foot to shout:

"Brother-in-law? Oh, brother-in-law is here too!"

"???"

'Brother-in-law?'

'Me?'

'Hold on — your sister wouldn't happen to be...'

"..."

'Who the hell is your brother-in-law?!'

Cheng Shi's face darkened. His first reaction wasn't anger — it was a sudden pang of sympathy for his big brother.

'Poor guy. Keeping this number-two most cursed individual pinned down for so long — how did he even endure?'

The Prisoner's shout naturally drew every eye to Cheng Shi, including Mo Li and Hu Wei.

Realizing he could no longer hide, Cheng Shi cursed internally. Outwardly, he could only smile and wave at his big bro.

"Brother Hu! So it really is you. Long time no see."

Hu Wei hadn't witnessed Cheng Shi's door-breaking trick. He couldn't yet drop his guard. But that didn't stop him from putting on a friendly facade.

So he laughed heartily and called back:

"Hahaha, Cheng Shi!

Finally meeting you in the flesh!"

'Nice emphasis on "in the flesh"!'

'Actually, last time was also me in person.'

But obviously he couldn't say that, so Cheng Shi just smiled demurely.

Yet inwardly he was thinking: if he hit his big bro with a "hee~" right now, would the man explode on the spot?

'Tsk. Tempting, but not worth the risk...'

Cheng Shi let the thought pass. His gaze drifted past Hu Wei and briefly crossed with Mo Li's.

He wanted to study this legendary peak Arbiter more closely but feared that prolonged scrutiny would attract attention. So he settled for a fleeting glance.

This legendary Arbiter had eyes that seemed to pierce human nature itself. He studied Cheng Shi with interest for a moment, then greeted him with a smile:

"So you're that Fate Weaver. I've heard much about you."

"..."

'What a loaded "heard much"!'

'I feel like every single one of you is being passive-aggressive, but I can't prove it!'

Cheng Shi couldn't exactly respond to that, so he managed an awkward laugh.

Just then, the scene shifted again.

On the dust-free stage ruins, spotlights blazed to life once more. The figure in the black tuxedo — lit up in their glare — crawled out from the wreckage in an unthinkably contorted posture, gasping for breath.

He was drenched in blood. His limbs looked twisted like pretzels. Yet despite everything, he somehow "squeezed" through the gaps in the debris and emerged.

But the space was too tight. His mask was crushed off. Under the spotlights' harsh glare, the face of an acrobat greeted the audience.

Most people probably couldn't imagine what an "acrobat's face" looked like. Even Cheng Shi had never conceived that a profession could have such a literal face.

He stared at the face speechlessly, ninety percent certain this so-called President Gong was a Deceit warrior — an Acrobat!

Because tattooed across his forehead in four bold characters were the words:

ACROBAT!

"..."

Cheng Shi was lost for words. He felt he'd been speechless more times tonight than in the past several months combined.

'Is Silence really starting to watch me?'

'And... he's not Zhen Xin?'

'Then who is he?'

Anyone bold enough to mount a stage and pull off this kind of show was no nobody. Cheng Shi looked to Hu Wei and Mo Li, hoping their expressions would reveal a clue. Just then, Hu Wei let out a cold snort:

"Long Jing. Of course it's you."

'Long Jing?'

Cheng Shi started. So that was why he'd had everyone call him "President Gong" — "龍 (Long) + 井 (Jing)" combine into "龔 (Gong)."

'So, another peak player of Deceit. Just don't know his ranking.'

Every eye in the hall was fixed on the unmasked President Gong.

Everyone's except The Prisoner's. He'd been studying Cheng Shi the entire time. Seeing Cheng Shi's slightly tense expression, he rolled his eyes and called out again:

"Don't worry, brother-in-law! The way I see it, my dear little sister is at most just collaborating with Old Gong. She definitely hasn't fallen for someone else!"

"..."

'Good god!'

'Listen to yourself! In any other setting, that one sentence would keep the neighborhood gossips fed for three months!'

'Dammit, my fists are tightening.'

Cheng Shi truly didn't want to engage, but his curiosity got the better of him. He couldn't resist asking:

"Zhen Yi is your sister?"

The Prisoner's eyes lit up the instant someone took the bait. He flexed out from under the Grand Marshal's boot in a flash and appeared at Cheng Shi's side. Under Cheng Shi's earthquake-grade stare, he introduced himself with a hint of pride:

"I'm a few years older than Zhen Xin, and Zhen Yi is Zhen Xin's younger sister. So by age hierarchy, calling you brother-in-law isn't really wrong..."

'???'

'Dude — so you have zero actual relationship with Zhen Xin either?!'

'Huh?'

'Being older than someone entitles you to claim family ties?'

'Fine — I'll admit your brain and Zhen Yi's brain are equally busted. You really could be family. But when you two play make-believe relatives, could you PLEASE leave me out of it?'

'I'm innocent here!!'

Cheng Shi was numb. He stared rigidly at The Prisoner standing right in front of him, pressed his lips together, wanting to curse — but not daring to.

But once the floodgates opened, The Prisoner couldn't be stopped.

He circled Cheng Shi with great interest, clicking his tongue appraisingly:

"So brother-in-law, you're a Fate Weaver?"

But doing the math, a Fate Weaver and a Master of Trickery are... hmm, not really a match."

"..."

'Definitely not a match. Thanks.'

'And what kind of math are you doing? Are YOU the Fate follower or am I?'

But Cheng Shi realized he couldn't keep engaging. So he gripped a scalpel in one hand, touched his ring with the other, and stayed on guard — completely ignoring The Prisoner.

Yet that fleeting flash of exasperation had been caught. The Prisoner, as if he'd found a new toy, chattered on:

"You don't believe me?"

It's my secret technique — reads careers, love life, future prospects.

I did a reading for 'my sister' back in the day. Predicted a rocky road but a blessed union. Looks like my divination was spot on!"

"..."

"But this union isn't perfect yet. Fate Weavers like to mend and stitch, while Masters of Trickery specialize in breaking things. Your temperaments are complementary but also conflicting.

Let me think...

If you want marital harmony, maybe you should... oh! I've got it!

Maybe you, brother-in-law, should sacrifice a little for the family. Drop Fate's blessing and come walk my path of Silence for a while.

That way, no matter how long my sister stays out playing, there'll be a night watchman waiting at home. Marital bliss achieved! Wouldn't that be wonderful?"

"..."

Cheng Shi had never imagined that Big Cat's description of "even poorer than you" meant this kind of "poor"...

But this wasn't even "poor" anymore — his mouth ran so fast you could weave cloth from his words!

He still didn't respond. People like this were exactly like Zhen Yi — the more you engaged, the more liberties they took.

But to his dismay, The Prisoner could fill silence too.

He was supposedly a Silence follower — yet was the least silent person in the room.

Seeing Cheng Shi refuse to speak, The Prisoner's eyes lit up and he beamed:

"Brilliant! Brother-in-law, your comprehension truly is remarkable!"

"..."

'Heh. Brilliant my ass.'

...

Chapter 429: Deceit Rank 2 — Acrobat, Long Jing

The Prisoner was very interested in Cheng Shi.

The reason was simple: Zhen Yi.

In The Prisoner's eyes, Zhen Yi was a perfect practitioner of Silence's will. She could always pull off unexpected moves that left everyone speechless.

Even his own transformation into who he was today owed a little something to her inspiration.

So he was intensely curious about what made the Fate Weaver — the one Zhen Yi had gone to such elaborate lengths to screw over — so attractive.

So far... the man seemed utterly unremarkable.

"Brother-in-law, why aren't you talking?"

Even if you've decided to follow my Lord, you don't have to make an offering every single second.

Silence is only His outward appearance. We must peel away the surface to reach the essence — that's how we get closer to Him!"

At this, a nearly imperceptible glint flashed through Cheng Shi's eyes.

He glanced at The Prisoner and probed:

"Interesting. So what is the essence of Silence?"

The Prisoner perked up the instant Cheng Shi opened his mouth. He pondered a beat, then his face turned deadly serious:

"Deities cannot be spied upon, cannot be fathomed, cannot be understood. With our mortal wisdom, any attempt to dissect Them is merely one-sided conjecture.

However... if you truly wish to know, brother-in-law, then I'll share insights I've never told anyone in the half year since I gained them.

But you must promise — never breathe a word to anyone!"

'He's actually telling the truth!'

Cheng Shi's mind stuttered. He frowned slightly. Something felt off, but he couldn't pinpoint what. So he decided to stay still, listen first.

He nodded, leaned in close. Then he heard The Prisoner deliberately lower his voice to a conspiratorial whisper:

"I suspect that... Silence... He is... a chatterbox!"

"???"

Cheng Shi's expression froze solid.

He wanted to slap himself for ever believing a word out of this man's mouth.

And yet — to give credit where due — both Master of Deception and every micro-expression Cheng Shi had read from The Prisoner confirmed that this Silence Chosen One had not lied.

He genuinely seemed to think that.

"..."

'He believes his Benefactor, Silence, is a chatterbox who simply chose to be silent.'

Cheng Shi stared at The Prisoner in utter disbelief. His face screamed: you might as well say YOU are Silence.

Seeing Cheng Shi's reaction, The Prisoner got anxious: "You don't believe me?"

'Heh. I'd sooner believe I'm the First Emperor of Qin.'

But Cheng Shi didn't say that. He suddenly realized that with people like The Prisoner, silence only made them more energized. So he had a flash of inspiration and changed tactics.

He swiftly rearranged his expression, then nodded with absolute solemnity:

"I believe you!"

"?" The Prisoner blinked, eyes narrowing with a hint of self-mockery. "No — you don't. I saw the shock on your face. You don't believe me at all."

Cheng Shi shook his head:

"No, no, no — I do believe you. I was shocked because I never imagined someone else would think exactly the same as me!"

I've always felt Silence was a chatterbox. He stays silent precisely to hide the fact that He can't shut up!"

"..."

This was the first time at the Mediocre Person Society that The Prisoner had been struck speechless by someone else. He stared at Cheng Shi in bewilderment, as if trying to see through this Fate Weaver.

But how could Fate be so easily read?

The Prisoner went quiet for a long moment, then his eyes rolled and he was about to speak — but Cheng Shi struck first:

"You don't believe me?"

"..."

"Hmm, you don't believe me. Then I suppose I need to explain my views on Silence.

Silence is the terminus of Chaos, while Folly is the continuation of Chaos. Think about it — given how Folly antagonizes absolutely everyone, there's no way it just goes quietly gentle into that good night.

So I have reason to believe Silence doesn't not want to talk — He's just bottling everything up inside.

And you, Prisoner — the fact that you became His Chosen One is the best proof of my theory!

He is using His attention to prove to the universe that He is not truly silent.

Does that track?"

"..."

After that little speech, Cheng Shi wanted to punch himself. The Prisoner felt likewise.

The bald man rubbed his shiny dome, studied Cheng Shi for a long time, then broke into a laugh and nodded:

"Now I understand why Zhen Yi screwed you over."

"?" Cheng Shi blinked. "Why?"

"Deserved it. You totally deserved it!"

"..."

'Left speechless again...'

'Damn!'

Cheng Shi was fuming. But somehow, after he'd given The Prisoner a taste of his own medicine, the man actually started warming up to him.

The Prisoner suddenly felt that Void path walkers weren't all as repulsive as he'd thought.

Sensing the shift in attitude, Cheng Shi struck while the iron was hot:

"Who's Long Jing?"

The Prisoner smacked his lips and said cheerfully:

"My little brother."

'Sure, sure. Every woman in the world is your sister. Every man in the world is your brother.'

Cheng Shi's face screamed constipation. He felt he'd asked the wrong person. But The Prisoner wasn't finished — and despite his obnoxious delivery, he did actually explain Long Jing's identity.

"Come to think of it, my bro's also one of your Void people. You probably figured it out already — he's not great at lying. Just a slacker acrobat who never does anything proper."

"..." 'Nice "not great at lying" ...'

The Prisoner seemed to have found his groove again and started chattering nonstop:

"It's normal you haven't heard of him. The kid's super mysterious with a ton of identities. But he loves introducing himself to people as 'Old Gong' — that little bad habit always gets him busted among acquaintances."

"..." 'Does he really self-introduce that way...'

"I can't tell you Long Jing's user ID because those Deceit swindlers are even worse than me — they change their IDs every day. Literally every hour."

"..." 'So you know you're talkative...'

"Want an introduction, brother-in-law? I can set you two up. Before Li Jingming abjured, Long Jing was the eternal number two of Deceit. A good match for someone of your status, brother-in-law."

"..." Cheng Shi was truly exhausted. He had no energy left to retort.

But...

'Eternal number two?'

His mind jolted. A name instantly surfaced.

That person who'd been perched high on the leaderboard, constantly mocking Dragon King Li Jingming from his ID!

'It's him!'

'So he's an acrobat?'

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow. While The Prisoner glanced toward President Gong on the ruined stage, Cheng Shi retreated half a step. In the instant nobody was watching, he silently tapped his finger against a shadow on the seat-back — and stole a peek at the latest Deceit Ladder of Ascent.

Ladder of Ascent (Existence—Memory) / (Void—Deceit)

1. Li Jingming (Deceit) 213
2. True Heart, True Feelings (Deceit) 210
3. Like A Dream (Memory) 209
4. Dragon King's a Dumbass, Deceit Rules (Deceit) 207
5. Feelings Worth Waiting For (Memory) 204
6. Congrats Big Bro on Paternity Leave (Deceit) 201

...

45. I Never Lie (Deceit) 175

...

Chapter 430: Fate Has Diverged

Just as The Prisoner was endlessly "stating" his statements, President Gong rose from the wreckage with a grim face.

Seeing the trap-setter completely unscathed after such a barrage, the smarter players in the hall began pulling back into defensive stances. But some still burned with fury, ready to literally tear through the ceiling of this Mediocre Person Society.

The chaos escalated.

Yet the turmoil made the front-row players all furrow their brows. Clearly, to their eyes, someone was fanning the flames behind all of this.

Just then, President Gong twitched his lips with a dark expression. After scanning the room, he snarled toward an empty spot:

"Zhen Yi! I partnered with you, not so you could screw me over! If you let any more of this crap land on my head, don't blame me for fighting back!"

The instant he spoke, every streak of skill-light vanished before the crowd's eyes. In that moment, it was as if an invisible net had descended over everyone, catching every attack.

Or perhaps the artist had simply erased her own canvas.

Most people had never heard the name "Zhen Yi" and had no idea what President Gong was talking about.

But the front-row crew was different. The moment they heard "Zhen Yi," every face darkened.

Even the ever-running-his-mouth Prisoner went uncharacteristically quiet, lips twitching.

Evidently, the "sister" he'd claimed was a one-sided relationship — not something he could brag about in front of the actual person.

Cheng Shi's expression grew heavy. He'd guessed President Gong was connected to Zhen Yi. He'd even guessed President Gong might be Zhen Yi. What he hadn't guessed was that they were two separate swindlers — and that they'd once been the former Deceit Rank 1 and Rank 2.

'What is this?'

'A Deceit annual convention?'

And the information density in President Gong's outburst was staggering. It sounded like he'd struck some cooperative agreement with Zhen Yi — but the moment Cheng Shi exposed the fake doors, she'd seized the opportunity to backstab her own partner!

'So what exactly did she take from Long Jing?'

Cheng Shi's gaze swept the hall. Then a flash of inspiration struck: if he possessed Dream from Nothing, how would he create maximum entertainment?

The answer was...

Manipulation.

Just plant a few instigators among the crowd — and the entire venue could become a playground of chaos!

With that thought, a scalpel materialized in Cheng Shi's hand. Without mercy, he slashed at The Prisoner beside him!

The Prisoner didn't even dodge. He glanced back, let Cheng Shi's scalpel sink into his waist without complaint — and far from anger, he nodded with sudden understanding. Then he threw his head back and let out a piercing cry:

"Ahhhh~"

"..."

"..."

"..."

That single note — loaded with indescribable overtones — didn't just freeze the tense situation into silence. Its soundwave resonated through every person present in an unthinkable way, making their hearts quake in sync.

Cheng Shi felt his heart seize — as if someone had suddenly squeezed it for an instant — and he nearly coughed blood.

Every attendee was hit simultaneously. But before anyone could cry out, a series of "pop pop pop pop—" detonations sounded, and countless figures throughout the hall burst like popped balloons — dissolving into nothingness.

The remaining real players saw this and their faces drained of color, their minds reeling. Everyone wondered what kind of power this bald man wielded to kill so many in a single instant.

But only those in the front row understood. Their expressions darkened further.

Dream from Nothing!

It was indeed Dream from Nothing!

Cheng Shi's face was black as pitch. He'd suspected Zhen Yi might have planted fake people in the audience. What he hadn't expected was that two-thirds of the entire hall... were all fake!

One seductive cry from The Prisoner, and the real players left standing numbered less than a third of the original crowd!

Cheng Shi's eyes raked across the survivors. Then he realized: all those "players" who'd responded to Long Jing's passionate speeches...

Were gone!

Every. Single. One!

Meaning everything that had "happened" in this hall was nothing more than a two-person show — a self-directed, self-acted double act by two peak Deceit swindlers!

Not one of the surviving real players had spoken a single word!

'Hah!'

'So were these a crowd of cautious clever people, or a crowd of mediocre people played like fiddles by Deceit?'

What's more, Cheng Shi noticed that the ones who'd attacked the stage earlier were also...

Dream-conjured fakes!

In other words, the entire attack had been Zhen Yi using the chaos to pummel Long Jing!

No wonder Long Jing was furious. He'd clearly realized all of it was Zhen Yi's sabotage — she'd turned on her partner mid-collaboration and started beating his ass!

'Classic her!'

And if that was the case, then the players who'd "unhesitatingly" walked through the doors were probably her illusions too!

She'd used them to trick real players into entering. What she hadn't anticipated was that Cheng Shi's appearance had blown up her scheme.

'So — is Zhen Yi targeting me right now?'

Cheng Shi's heart clenched. He instinctively wanted to change position again. But right then — another "Cheng Shi" suddenly appeared across from the crowd. The instant this doppelganger materialized, he gave an awkward little laugh, then turned grave and shouted toward the front row:

"Brother Hu, watch out — she's Zhen Yi!"

"???????"

Cheng Shi was stunned. No — he didn't even have time to be stunned before an arc of blood and fire burst through the hall's ceiling and came roaring down toward him.

The Prisoner in front of him blanched, leaping back over ten meters. Then he turned, staring at Cheng Shi in shock, and blurted:

"You were impersonating my brother-in-law?!"

"..."

Cheng Shi's heart sank. He couldn't waste time trading jabs with The Prisoner anymore, because the situation was dire!

The instant the fake "Cheng Shi" appeared, Long Jing — for reasons unknown — had swiveled every spotlight in the venue toward Cheng Shi's position. Combined with the blazing flames, every shadow and dark corner around him was eliminated.

Which meant he couldn't switch back to Fate in time and use the Never-Lost Gamble to escape the eye of this storm!

'It's over. This is going south!'

But that wasn't even the worst part. The worst was that Mo Li — who'd been sitting quietly all along — had also slipped into the battle. The moment Hu Wei's blood-and-fire greatsword came crashing down, Mo Li proved for the first time exactly why people called him "Chief Grand Secretary."

"Here — illusions are forbidden!"

"Here — teleportation is forbidden!"

"Here — resistance is forbidden!"

"Here — fire may not be extinguished!"

"..."

'Here — YOUR "here" is forbidden!!'

Cheng Shi panicked. In that lightning-fast instant, he realized that what was already a terrifying inferno of blood-flame, boosted by a peak Arbiter, had suddenly become a meteor strike. The scorching blade wreathed in crimson fire had already slammed into the space right in front of his eyes.

And he couldn't even resist!

Cheng Shi's face had never been darker. So dark that not even a thousand spotlights could brighten it.

For one fleeting instant, he wondered whether tonight's entire setup had been aimed at him. After all, the Mediocre Person Society card No. 15 had been handed to him personally by Zhen Xin.

But when he caught — in that split second of crisis — Long Jing's ashen face, The Prisoner's wincing brow, Mo Li's cold fury, and Hu Wei's erupting rage — he knew this night was pure accident.

An accident where he'd wrecked someone's plan and gotten instant karma right back.

And propelled by the fake "Cheng Shi" across the way, things had spiraled far beyond his predictions.

Fate Has Divergence hadn't activated. Yet Cheng Shi felt his fate had thoroughly diverged...

'Fine!'

'You all insist on playing it this way?'

'Then don't blame me for pulling something BIG!'

Cheng Shi's eyes sharpened. He closed them, and calmly accepted this "trial of blood and fire."

"BOOM—!"

Hellfire poured down. Blood sprayed in all directions. The hall...

Fell deathly silent.

...