

## The Gods 461

### Chapter 461: Long Jing's Repayment

"Fate Weaver, I'm not targeting you specifically. It's just that I genuinely think Zhen Yi is completely unreliable. She clearly—

"Ugh, forget it. No matter how I phrase it, it comes back to you. You're... fine. At least you're completely separated from Zhen Yi now.

"Still, I'm curious about how [Prosperity] actually fell, and what exactly the Convention is. Normally I'd get answers from you, Brother Cheng, but now that your memories have been taken, we're all in the dark.

"But you saved my life, Brother Cheng. I, Long Jing, have that engraved in my heart. So today, in front of everyone, let me be a bit uncouth and repay that debt first.

"I never like to leave things outstanding."

To outsiders, every word seemed to be making excuses for Cheng Shi. But only the two of them knew: Long Jing was mimicking the Grand Marshal's style— every sentence was actually probing Cheng Shi.

As he spoke, Long Jing pulled a contract from his storage space and slapped it on the ground.

Everyone's expressions turned peculiar. Da Yi, who hadn't participated in the "escape," was still among them. This clearly wasn't the moment for "repaying debts," yet Long Jing's "gratitude" seemed suspiciously eager.

Cheng Shi's eyes flickered with amusement. He roughly guessed the other's intent but didn't expose it. Instead, he feigned surprise and raised an eyebrow at the contract, which was covered top to bottom in dense text. At the very end was a signature in Chinese characters: "Long Jing."

Beside the signature was a charcoal-drawn smiley face. Though drawn with just three curves, its crooked, twisted shape unmistakably seemed to be mocking something.

Seeing everyone's odd expressions, Long Jing explained:

"I obtained a very special [Deceit] item during a trial— the Tongue of Eating Lies that Zhen Yi used to shatter her own illusion at the Mediocre Person gathering.

"Don't be fooled by its S-grade rating. It's extremely useful for dispelling falsehoods.

"This is the contract I wrote with Zhen Yi. I lent her the Tongue of Eating Lies for six months. When the contract expires, she returns it, and additionally lends me her Void Memory Pocket for one month.

"Since you saved us, Brother Cheng, you essentially dismantled Zhen Yi's scheme. That means she'll probably add another grudge on your account. I don't need to tell you how troublesome that pest is. So, to give you at least some means to expose her lies...

"I'm transferring this contract for the Tongue of Eating Lies to you!"

"..."

Everyone's expressions were a sight to behold. Cheng Shi's face was especially complicated.

'This is... Brother Tongue's lending contract?'

The other party may have been a con artist with a Master of Deception talent, but this contract didn't appear to be fake.

'So once I take this contract, Brother Tongue is definitively mine?'

'Doesn't that mean Zhen Xin lent MY OWN property... back to me?'

'Outrageous!'

'Well then. I won't even need to return it.'

Of course, Cheng Shi knew the Tongue of Eating Lies was already in his possession, but nobody else did. They'd been discussing trials when Long Jing suddenly produced a repayment, drawing puzzled looks. After the explanation, Hu Wei actually laughed in anger.

He looked at Long Jing, displeasure tinging his eyes:

"My brother risked his life pulling you out of Go Lis's lair, and this is how you repay him?"

"A scrap of paper?"

"Long Jing, have you forgotten? That tongue thing is still in Zhen Yi's hands!"

"..."

Outwardly, Cheng Shi smiled. Inwardly, he was elated. 'As expected of my good brother— even standing up for me. Honestly, this is the most sincere "brother" I've ever called anyone.'

Long Jing looked sheepish but soon stiffened his neck and argued:

"After comprehensive consideration, this is the most useful thing I can offer Brother Fate Weaver. The tongue is still with Zhen Yi, but Grand Marshal, don't underestimate this contract. It's—"

"A Law Contract that passed the Grand Tribunal's highest judicial ruling!" Mo Li cut in, brows raised in surprise. "President Gong, impressive work. Where did you steal this from?"

Cheng Shi blinked— he hadn't expected Mo Li to verify the contract's authenticity. He turned with genuine surprise: "What exactly is it?"

Mo Li smiled and explained patiently:

"Think of it as a page blessed by the Iron Law of [Order]. It was originally meant for the Grand Tribunal's pending legislation. But somehow, two con artists managed to write an absurd contract on it!

"Long Jing, do you have any idea what something like this could fetch in [Order]'s circles?

"Even I had only heard rumors of blank Law Contracts being lost. I never imagined you two would actually... heh, you're certainly generous.

"Cheng Shi, I can tell you with full confidence: everything written on this contract will take effect under [Order]'s watch. Meaning: when the lending period ends, you will definitely reclaim that [Deceit] artifact and also gain one month's use of Zhen Yi's Void Memory Pocket.

"But I must warn you: though that [Memory] artifact in Zhen Yi's possession is useful, taking it will only make your relationship with her even more... irreconcilable.

"As for the consequences, I trust you understand better than I do."

"..."

Clearly, Long Jing had mixed some agenda into his repayment. But the gesture itself wasn't entirely hollow— because regardless of who Long Jing believed Cheng Shi truly was, Cheng Shi had genuinely saved him.

So surrendering the Tongue of Eating Lies was a generous repayment. At the same time, this acrobat probably also wanted to shed a burden.

Mo Li's analysis had noticeably diluted the impact of Long Jing's "gratitude." Long Jing gave a dry laugh and looked at Cheng Shi, awaiting his reaction. From Cheng Shi's perspective, this wasn't purely a repayment— it was another "cooperation" agreement.

As for the terms of cooperation, beyond mutual non-exposure, what Long Jing probably craved most was the "un-forgotten memories" Cheng Shi had mentioned.

'Long Jing wants to know what happened during that trial!'

'Good. Very good. Partnerships between fellow con artists are always this shady.'

Cheng Shi pondered briefly, confirmed his approach was airtight, then reached down with a smile and collected the contract.

'Well then. Brother Tongue finally has a permanent address.'

As for that "broken pocket" mentioned in the contract? Why refuse something offered for free?

Even if it was only for a month. After all, the Tongue of Eating Lies was technically a loaner too. And look how that worked out— borrowed and borrowed until it became his own.

What if the Void Memory Pocket...

Well. A person needed something to look forward to.

'Mm. This isn't greed. It's aspiration!'

Chapter 462: Hu Wei, You Really Can't Forget That Priest

After neatly folding and pocketing the contract, Cheng Shi smiled broadly.

He adjusted his expression, looked at the group, and spoke slowly:

"You've probably all noticed that I'm not as generous as my Hu Wei. Quite the opposite— I'm very selfish.

"Honestly, I didn't save everyone out of kindness. I did it because... I couldn't find a second way to escape.

"I'm a pragmatic person. All I want is to survive. Saving you all might buy me a bit more time alive. That's it."

He turned to Hu Wei with an awkward expression: "Sorry, Hu Wei, I—"

SLAP!

Hu Wei's palm came down hard on Cheng Shi's shoulder, cutting him off. Then he laughed thunderously:

"Brother, you did nothing wrong.

"It's every man for himself. Wanting to live isn't a crime.

"But I, Hu Wei, don't care about the process— only the result. And today's result is that you pulled me out. So I'm alive right now.

"Cheng Shi. Good brother. I owe you one."

"That's too much, Hu Wei." Cheng Shi hastily waved it off.

Everyone knew that each person still had unused contingencies— at minimum, some means of resurrection. So saying Cheng Shi saved everyone's lives was perhaps an overstatement. Strictly speaking, he'd saved each person one life.

But regardless, in a game where death came as easily as drinking water, every single life mattered. So everyone appreciated the gesture.

Moreover, because of Cheng Shi's display of "sincerity," the others' impression of him actually improved.

Even though sincerity often masked hidden falsehoods, in this game there were simply too many people who wouldn't even bother with false sincerity. A drop of it was enough to "move" others.

Only Long Jing. His gaze at this "colleague" grew more enigmatic.

'This con artist— who is he, really?'

Hu Wei's laughter grew louder.

"Not at all. A life-saving debt can never be overstated. Though I don't have anything on hand that suits you, perhaps this one..."

He glanced at Hu Xuan, gave a slight nod, and produced from his storage space a large burlap sack.

Everyone blinked. And when Cheng Shi saw Hu Wei open the sack to reveal the densely packed Genesis Seeds inside, his mind went blank.

???

'Bro, please tell me you didn't kill every Genesis Hunter you encountered?'

'How many [Birth] hunters did you loot to amass this many seeds?'

Hu Xuan was equally astonished. She looked at Hu Wei with a meaningful smile:

"Should I thank the Grand Marshal for his generosity, or mourn my fellow believers?"

Hu Wei waved dismissively, laughing:

"Dead is dead. Wasteful to let them rot. I'm no executioner— I just can't stand seeing things go to waste.

"I can roughly guess the path you're walking, so these [Birth] trinkets might speed up your progress.

"I once heard someone say that [Birth] isn't purely about proliferation. As for what He truly wants, I can't say. Take those words as a bit of inspiration."

What a generous Grand Marshal!

To Hu Xuan's ears, that single sentence was worth far more than the entire sack of seeds.

Peak players continuously sought their own path while drawing closer to the gods. Many had formed vague understandings of the road beneath their feet, but Hu Xuan's relatively brief tenure meant she was still exploring.

Where she held an advantage, though, was that she'd nearly identified the destination's coordinates. She simply needed to finesse the route that led there.

Any interpretation of Him could potentially smooth her way. So this time, Hu Xuan gained an entirely new appreciation for the Grand Marshal's generosity.

Seeing the other two make their offerings, Mo Li couldn't exactly play the bystander. After a moment's consideration, he produced two palm-sized glass spheres from his storage.

One was crystalline-clear with miniature waves churning inside. The other glowed with holy light, faint arcane inscriptions flickering across its surface.

He rolled one to Cheng Shi and the other to Hu Xuan, then explained with a smile:

"A Learned Poet transcribes talents onto pages. A Backstage Director records scenes onto curtains.

"Unfortunately, singers lean toward support. Their pages can only record a single talent, unlike mages—whose very existence is meant to demonstrate the gods' spectacular might!

"These are two S-grade Curtain Call Balls. One records the Grand Tribunal's Elemental Judges flooding a city in a siege battle. The other records a blessing ceremony from the Nature Alliance's Southwest Rainforest tribe.

"Fate Weavers lack offensive options, so this 'Water Ball' is more suited to you. Mages never lack firepower, so perhaps take this 'Medicine Ball.' But I must add: when the recorded drama replays, the power inside won't distinguish friend from foe.

"So use them wisely."

Curtain Call Balls!

Cheng Shi had encountered these in previous trials. They were standard tools for [Folly]'s Backstage Directors. But at lower ranks, they were considered among the most useless talents, since weaker players lacked the ability to capture a grand spectacle. Most ended up using them as alternative storage spaces.

For example, record a cooking scene, replay it later, and enjoy a hot meal in the wilderness.

Don't ask why he'd reference this specific example. He'd eaten one. And it hadn't even tasted as good as Finger Bread.

Cheng Shi picked up the "Water Ball" by his leg. Outwardly composed with a measured smile, inwardly... ecstatic beyond words.

'Now this is what you call a total jackpot!'

'A three-person improv script had yielded this much "tip money"!'!

'Thank you, top-ranking big brothers, for your patronage. I will absolutely double down, polish even better scripts, and strive to scam— I mean, stage another blockbuster for everyone!'

But everyone else had made their contribution. Was his good big brother really offering only a verbal promise?

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, casually glanced at Hu Wei, then turned his attention to studying the "Water Ball" without a word.

The message was practically identical to pointing at Hu Wei's face and asking, 'So, how do you like Mo Li's gift?'

Hu Wei didn't react— hard to tell if he'd missed the hint or was lost in thought. Either way, silence settled.

Seeing the gratitude segment conclude, the long-patient Da Yi licked his lips and spoke with unmistakable envy:

"Hot damn, brother, stop analyzing that lousy ball. Put it away. I've got green-eyed disease— can't stand watching other people get rich."

"..."

Cheng Shi laughed and quickly stowed everything, slipping in: "A poor man's windfall. Apologies for the unseemly display."

"Hot damn, if you're poor, I must be destitute!

"Enough, Lao Hu. Get to business. Much longer and the moon's going down."

Moon?

The word triggered something in Hu Xuan's mind. Her brow arched as she glanced at Cheng Shi.

Cheng Shi pre-emptively shifted his gaze, waiting for Hu Wei to lay out the plan.

Seeing the timing was right, Hu Wei addressed the group with grave solemnity:

"I won't beat around the bush. I have a trial, and I'm inviting all of you to join.

"Previously, I assumed [Decay] had fallen, which made the risk manageable. But now, with news that it was [Prosperity] that fell, I'm worried about surprises along the way.

"After all, He's still alive. And what we're doing is going to scavenge what He dropped during the God War.

"To put it bluntly, this is a blasphemous operation.

"A scheme to blaspheme a recently defeated god. That kind of behavior could very well enrage [Descent]'s second deity. So I need to ask everyone first: does anyone...

"Want to back out?"

"Um..." Cheng Shi raised his hand wearily. "Hu Wei, I wasn't lying— I really do have rice cooking back at the Rest Area. How about I—"

Hu Wei's big hand swept through the air, cutting him off again.

"Brother, you can't leave. My compensation for you is part of this trial.

"Besides, you can see— you're our only priest. We genuinely need a priest this time!"

"..."

'So the truth comes out. All that warmth earlier was an act!'

'You big jerk!'

Cheng Shi froze mid-sentence, let out a theatrical sigh, projecting the image of someone dragged onto the wagon against his will.

But where no one could see, he smiled quietly. His heart settled with certainty.

'Thread every plot point together. Keep the persona consistent. Dump every blame, claim every credit.'

'Then cap it off with a classic catch-and-release!'

'And just like that— he was in.'

'Tsk. Let's see what exactly this so-called "remnant of [Decay]" actually is!'

Chapter 463: The Lost [Decay] Shell?

"Very good. It seems everyone's interested. Since that's the case, I won't hide it any longer.

"What we're looking for tonight... is a [Decay] shell!"

A [Decay] shell?

Everyone froze at this. Only Da Yi remained unfazed— he'd clearly known Hu Wei's plan for tonight.

Mo Li frowned: "[Decay] hasn't fallen. Where would we find a shell?"

Hu Wei shook his head with a smile:

"It's not His shell, Mo Li. Rein in that ambition of yours. A deity's remains could never be something players like us would have a chance to covet.

"However... in a certain sense, it can also be considered divine remains.

"A Servant God's remains!"

"A Servant God's remains!?"

Everyone was astonished. Cheng Shi's eyes narrowed slightly. He seemed to have guessed something, but his knowledge told him that entity shouldn't have been left behind. So he kept quiet and continued listening.

"He was once a child of [Prosperity], later became [Decay]'s Envoy. But his ambitions grew too large and were discovered by [Decay]. So his Benefactor sentenced him to spiritual-physical separation!"

At these words, Cheng Shi's eyes widened. He'd figured it out— the Servant God in Hu Wei's mouth was clearly the Barren Walker, Eposka!

And before his oathbreaking, this had been the second son whom [Prosperity] granted the Divine Name "Shadowless Crown"— Dizel!

'It's him!'

'But how could it be him?'

'Didn't [Truth] fuse with Eposka's body and thereby inherit [Prosperity]'s Convention voting rights?'

'How could it have also become [Decay]'s lost shell?'

'Is my big brother's intel... fake?'

But judging by Hu Wei's absolute certainty, he didn't look like someone who'd been deceived.

So who had told him this? What source could make a Chosen One believe so firmly? It couldn't be... Them?

Had the gods undergone yet another change!?

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted sharply. Fortunately, everyone was equally shocked, so his reaction didn't stand out.

Mo Li clearly knew of Eposka's existence. He spoke up with matching astonishment:

"Your target is Eposka?"

"Did this Barren Walker get caught in the crossfire of the God War?"

"Crossfire? No— it was at the battlefield's very center. I don't know what it went through, but..."

Hu Wei glanced at Cheng Shi with a hint of regret, seemingly lamenting that his brother's memories hadn't been taken away.

"But I can confirm it's dead. Eposka lost the last shred of living consciousness in its body and became a completely lifeless corpse!

"Moreover, thanks to my intelligence channels, I know exactly where its body was left!

"And that... is our destination tonight!"

The instant Hu Wei finished, Mo Li's brow furrowed first. He gave the Grand Marshal a thoughtful glance, as if forming some guess about Hu Wei's true objective.

Da Yi looked breezy as ever. As a member of this campsite's circle, he'd probably discussed this with Hu Wei more than once and already knew everything.

Long Jing frowned — all an act. He hadn't caught any issues, so he could only covertly observe Cheng Shi's reaction.

Cheng Shi hadn't fully grasped it either, but he'd already cataloged everyone's reactions. So he put on a knowing expression and nodded along.

Hu Xuan wore her smile throughout. She neither offered intelligence nor shared opinions — like an unreachable sun, beautiful in solitude and entirely aloof.

Yet to the others, her demeanor looked like someone who'd seen through everything. So Long Jing, who'd been studying every face, was even more confused.

'Great. A con artist had become the person in the room who understood the least.'

'This wasn't being an acrobat anymore— he'd become the clown.'

To be fair, Hu Wei hadn't said everything. But certain things could only be hinted at. Since this trial contained something the Grand Marshal wanted, he naturally wouldn't lay all his cards on the table. Otherwise, with no binding agreements in this ad-hoc team, no one could guarantee others wouldn't compete for it.

So Hu Wei's true purpose in assembling this group was never about splitting treasure equally. It was about finding allies with aligned interests — ensuring he had as much muscle around him as possible.

And what he'd hidden was naturally something far more important than a mere "Servant God's remains."

The atmosphere turned peculiar. Everyone was lost in thought, but their gazes constantly drifted sideways to study one another.

Nobody could predict how many difficulties a Chosen One's trial would bring. Pre-trial preparation was essential.

And for peak players, their preparation leaned more toward assessing people than acquiring items.

Hu Wei understood this well and didn't rush anyone. He simply smiled and recited the trial's prayer of invocation.

The Faith Game had never included multiplayer group-matching rules. But that couldn't stop players who were determined to exploit loopholes.

Shortly after the game's descent, many had discovered that if several acquainted players simultaneously prayed for the exact same trial, they had a chance of being matched into the same instance.

This was also why Cheng Shi had previously encountered only three Torchbearers in one trial. They'd actually deployed many members to pray simultaneously, but only Fang Shiqing's group of three had been matched in.

Nobody could guarantee that simultaneous prayers would land everyone in the same instance. That was why Hu Wei gave everyone time to discuss — so each person could prepare for the possibility of being matched with different teammates.

For the Grand Marshal, all he could do was pull in as many semi-trustworthy people as possible. How many actually ended up together was left to fate.

"This trial requires us to pray to [War]. So you should all understand: this will be a hard fight.

"And the prayer goes:

"How does one survive? Only through blood and fire.

"O all-trampling [War], I am but a passerby struggling beyond the battlefield, shaken by the violence and cruelty before me. I humbly pray to You: grant me a trial..."

"A trial to witness... Pe Laya's rebellion at the Tower of Logic during the Civilization Era!"

After finishing, he smiled, nodded at the group, and walked toward Da Yi.

The meaning was clear: the two of them had business to discuss, and everyone else was free to talk amongst themselves.

By all appearances, only Long Jing and Mo Li were in slightly awkward positions, since the other four each had a "trustworthy" partner.

But circumstances were ever-changing. No one could predict which players would end up together in the actual trial.

To everyone's surprise, shortly after the Grand Marshal departed, Long Jing sidled up to Cheng Shi with a brazen grin, speaking at a volume clearly meant for all to hear:

"Um... there are some details about the contract I should go over with you, Brother Cheng."

Cheng Shi raised a brow— 'Finally'— and nodded without refusing. He watched Long Jing deploy what looked like a transparent curtain around the two of them.

The moment it settled, all outside sound vanished. Within the curtain, only two con artists remained, staring each other down!

"So how should I address you... my fellow colleague?"

Long Jing's smile held steady, but his tone was pure grinding teeth.

Cheng Shi chuckled internally. But he had to keep the act going— because while the curtain blocked sound, their images and movements were being "broadcast" to everyone outside. So instead of answering immediately, he first laid out the contract on the ground, pointing at various sections as if discussing terms. Only then did he speak slowly:

"I am Cheng Shi. The genuine, authentic Cheng Shi."

Long Jing's pupils contracted violently. His expression transformed.

Not because his Master of Deception tagged the statement as truth. But because — unbeknownst to Long Jing — Cheng Shi had already hidden the Tongue of Eating Lies beneath the contract. And now the Fate Weaver had pointed at himself, then at Long Jing.

The meaning was crystal clear: the Tongue of Eating Lies game had begun. From this moment, neither of them could lie!

Chapter 464: Who the Hell Is He!!

Cheng Shi's sleight of hand was exquisite.

Under the direct scrutiny of an acrobat, he'd hidden the Tongue of Eating Lies beneath the contract without a single crack in his movements. The fluid motion, the perfect timing of his misdirection — none of it resembled a Fate Weaver. It was more like a seasoned close-up magician.

Add to that the Tongue of Eating Lies— an artifact that shouldn't have been in his possession...

Magician plus the Tongue of Eating Lies. That combination made it very hard not to think of a certain player with the surname Zhen.

And so Long Jing was stunned.

He'd always found Cheng Shi's identity deeply suspicious. The contract just now was his test of this fellow con artist!

The contract was real, yes. The gratitude was real, yes. But the probing was equally real!

Although every aspect of their escape pointed to this Fate Weaver's identity being genuine, Long Jing knew this person was plainly a con artist capable of going head-to-head with Zhen Yi.

So his suspicion and vigilance toward Cheng Shi had never dropped for a single moment.

He was thinking: how could someone who'd been at a disadvantage in a con-versus-con showdown against Zhen Yi — who'd even risked exposing his identity to rope Long Jing in for help — turn around and completely shatter Zhen Yi's [Birth] trap?

Just because that whistle summoned Hu Xuan?

That was indeed a hard point to explain, because Hu Xuan herself hadn't seemed to notice anything wrong with this "Cheng Shi"!

Of course, Long Jing didn't know Hu Xuan well. He couldn't tell whether she truly hadn't detected anything off about Cheng Shi's identity, or whether she'd noticed long ago but simply didn't care.

All he knew was that from his own vantage point, this Cheng Shi absolutely had major issues.

In fact, at one fleeting instant — driven by a con artist's instinct — he'd even wondered whether this "Cheng Shi" had already been swapped out by Zhen Yi.

After all, during the time everyone was imprisoned inside the stillborn infants, no one knew what had happened outside. That brief window of blank time was more than enough for Zhen Yi to complete a near-perfect disguise.

But one thing he couldn't figure out: if this person was Zhen Yi, what was she doing?

Going through all this trouble to rescue everyone, even heaping "glory" onto the Fate Weaver — all just to join a trial assembled by the Grand Marshal?

That didn't match her style...

So Long Jing couldn't pin down Cheng Shi's identity.

Thus he'd used the Tongue of Eating Lies contract as his probe.

Confrontations between con artists always went this way. Unless one side admitted defeat and flipped the table, peak-level [Deceit] followers kept their fiercest battles hidden beneath a placid surface.

This was the unspoken code among cons.

So Long Jing had never planned to expose Cheng Shi in front of everyone. He wanted Cheng Shi to know that he'd seen through him — so Long Jing could operate from a higher vantage point and harvest this game's entertainment.

Exactly the same pattern as when Cheng Shi had dueled Zhen Yi.

And the test's content was whether the other had the guts to accept a deal tied to Zhen Yi!

Mo Li had been spot on: this wasn't just about the ownership of an S-grade Sacred Artifact. It was a prophecy of an inevitable future conflict with Zhen Yi.

From how Cheng Shi accepted the contract, Long Jing was confident he could read plenty.

And when he saw the other hesitate briefly before accepting — a "cooperative" gesture — Long Jing concluded this was probably a peak-level con artist, not Zhen Yi herself.

But what he never anticipated was this: the other had clearly "hidden" his identity successfully, yet deliberately revealed the Tongue of Eating Lies right to his face!

'If she's not Zhen Yi, then who could she be!?!'

Because this was a "divine artifact" capable of shattering countless lies and scams. No con artist would willingly relinquish ownership of it.

Long Jing himself had given it up because it was tangled in too much karma with Zhen Yi. But Zhen Yi? A con artist sitting atop the "bad-luck food chain" — why would she ever surrender such a thing?

So faced with seeing-is-believing evidence, regardless of what he couldn't figure out, Long Jing could only arrive at one conclusion about Cheng Shi's other identity.

'She can only be Zhen Yi. Only then would that statement "I am Cheng Shi" register as truth under Master of Deception!'

And so Long Jing was thunderstruck.

But what shook him wasn't that Zhen Yi would appear here. It was that she'd obviously managed to fool him — yet chose to reveal her "true form" right to his face!

'She was... toying with him again!?'

'Was she addicted!?'

Long Jing was furious. But his rage carried a distinct flavor of "helplessness."

He stared hard at Cheng Shi, his surface smile intact, but his tone grinding through clenched teeth:

"Zhen Yi. You really think I wouldn't dare expose you in front of everyone?"

"Breaking your scheme would be entertainment for me too. Even if word got out, I wouldn't be the only one embarrassed!"

"Don't push me!

"Hah—

"What the hell do you actually want?

"Fine, fine, fine. I, President Gong, bow in defeat. I surrender, alright? Hah—

"We can keep cooperating!

"Just tell me what happened during that trial, and I'll let bygones be bygones. More than that, I'll assist you as much as I can during the Grand Marshal's trial.

"And my only condition: this agreement is voided immediately. Everything found during the trial goes to you. But the Tongue of Eating Lies... stays mine!

"Deal?"

'No deal!'

Cheng Shi was thoroughly amused. He hadn't expected the other to spin such an elaborate story in his own head — even ignoring multiple facts to cement the idea that "he must be Zhen Yi."

But the thing was, Cheng Shi was no longer interested in playing Zhen Yi.

The same trick might work, but the clown performing the act had grown tired of the role.

Besides, impersonating Zhen Yi meant having to explain a mountain of things — like Hu Xuan's attitude toward him, or his true form in Mockery and Jeering... Though he could find justifications for all of it, it was simply too exhausting.

Cheng Shi was someone who avoided hassle. So he decided to settle this once and for all.

A lie's hole might require ten thousand more lies to patch. But that's only because the patching lies aren't big enough.

When a lie is big enough to fill the entire hole, a single one suffices to cover every previous discrepancy.

Cheng Shi had found that "big enough" lie. He'd long since devised the perfect method — one that would spare him from ever needing excuses for his behavior again!

And pulling out the Tongue of Eating Lies to plunge Long Jing into cognitive chaos was merely the first step.

Gazing at the acrobat whose eyes churned with confusion and shock, the clown chuckled internally and took the stage.

He looked at Long Jing with a playful smile, answering none of his questions. Instead, he said with theatrical mystery:

"The rules of the game: one question each. You've already asked yours. So now... it's my turn.

"And my question is..."

Under Long Jing's slightly flustered gaze, Cheng Shi suddenly paused. His smirk curved even more strangely:

"After personally witnessing the accidental deaths of your parents... why did you still choose to become..."

"An acrobat?"

"!?!?"

If Cheng Shi's earlier suspected identity as Zhen Yi could be called "shocking," then these words detonated a nuclear bomb inside Long Jing's mind — and not a small one.

BOOM—

The sky collapsed!

Earth-shattering terror!

Long Jing had never shared his story with anyone. Like Cheng Shi, he'd racked his brains devising countless techniques to counter [Memory]. And with his score and abilities, he was confident he'd never leaked his past.

Even when Li Jingming had offered generous incentives, Long Jing hadn't contributed a single memory to that man's [Memory] path!

So how did this Cheng Shi in front of him know about this!?

And also— could she still be Zhen Yi? Could he still be Cheng Shi?

To think even more terrifyingly... was it...

Was it truly a player like himself?

Chapter 465: A Once-and-For-All Identity

Cheng Shi had achieved the desired effect.

Seeing the barely concealed terror in Long Jing's eyes, his smile grew even more enigmatic.

'Yes, I'm a clown. My talent is mediocre. I can't lie. My falsehoods get devoured by the Tongue of Eating Lies. But...'

'I have an out— Brother Mouth!'

This was Cheng Shi's greatest trump card and the source of his newfound confidence.

Because he'd called upon Brother Mouth once more, and the haughty Fool's Lips had made the rare decision to cooperate!

As for the nature of that cooperation — it required rewinding the clock to explain properly.

Back to the moment inside Go Lis's Grudge, right after Cheng Shi rescued Long Jing!

Before pulling all the peak players into Go Lis's Grudge, Cheng Shi had indeed considered leaving the departed Long Jing as a casually shelved "contingency."

After all, the man knew he wasn't the real Cheng Shi. So once everything was over, whenever Long Jing brought him up in front of others, Cheng Shi could deflect every chain reaction from the Mediocre Person gathering onto a nonexistent con artist — cleanly closing the logical loop and keeping himself uninvolved.

But no one expected that every single person who'd announced their departure... hadn't actually left.

The moment he rescued Long Jing, Cheng Shi's face darkened enough to curse.

From that point on, he began searching for a new explanation for his identity.

The Zhen Yi disguise wasn't bad per se — only that he'd worn it so many times it had lost its novelty.

More importantly, like every other peak player, he'd been psychologically wrecked by that Master of Trickery. The instant that name crossed his mind, only two words surfaced instinctively: "bad luck" — never "entertainment."

Playing her any longer was genuinely starting to disgust him. So he shifted approach and began brainstorming how to perform an entirely fresh role.

But he only knew two con artists at the peak level: Zhen Yi, and the newly met Long Jing. He could hardly impersonate Long Jing right in front of the real Long Jing — that was too absurd, too farcical.

Not knowing any peak cons didn't mean he couldn't fabricate one, though. But high-scoring [Deceit] followers probably all knew each other, making that approach unreliable.

But this was no obstacle for the clown, because he quickly hit upon a bolder idea: why limit his thinking to peak players?

Put another way: why limit the role he played to the identity of a "player"?

Were there no peak-level con artists among those who weren't players?

Yes. Of course there were. For example...

The Fun God's Envoy!

If [Deceit] had an Envoy, He would undoubtedly be a "peak" con artist!

Playing an Envoy might be difficult for others, but for Cheng Shi — no, for Lord Ultraman — it was just right.

Moreover, once clothed in that identity, no matter how bizarre, dramatic, contradictory, or unreasonable Cheng Shi's behavior became, anyone "in the know" would probably mentally rationalize it all.

After all, on the path of [Deceit], the illogical was logical — especially for an Envoy, the existence closest to Him!

So Cheng Shi's nerve swelled for a moment. He hatched the idea of playing [Deceit]'s Envoy. But a performance at that level was impossible on his own, so he went to beg a certain "someone."

The Fool's Lips!

He'd first asked Brother Mouth a question:

"Brother Mouth, how come I've never heard of our Benefactor's Envoy? Does He even have one?"

The Fool's Lips maintained its usual aloofness and ignored him. But Cheng Shi was never one to give up. Throughout the escape, he'd pestered Brother Mouth relentlessly.

"Brother Mouth, if I impersonate an Envoy of our Benefactor, He wouldn't get mad, would He~"

"Brother Mouth, would you be willing to play a new role with me?"

"Your silence counts as consent."

"Then it's settled. Help me check with Brother Tongue — can it pitch in too? When the time comes, you two pull off an epic double act and crush this acrobat. How about it?"

"This is prime entertainment. I'm already about to crack up. How come you're not reacting?"

"Great, you didn't refuse. Then I'll continue. Mm... let me think. Since this performance will be led by you, Brother Mouth — yes, you're the lead. I'm just writing the script. As everyone knows, the lead actor is the most important part of any show because they get paid the most.

"And the more you get paid, the more responsibility you should bear.

"Don't misunderstand, Brother Mouth. I'm absolutely not passing the buck. If our Benefactor comes looking for trouble, of course I'll shoulder part of the blame.

"Err... what I mean is, we'd both share some responsibility, right?

"Great, you've consented again.

"Now then, the question of identity. Fabricating an Envoy identity is kinda scary, not gonna lie. But based on my understanding of the Fun — I mean, our Benefactor — if He had an Envoy, that Envoy's name would probably...

"Not be very serious?

"In that case, how about we call it...

"Giggle Freak?"

"..."

The Fool's Lips gave zero reaction. But Cheng Shi could swear the Tongue of Eating Lies in his storage twitched at the name.

Then again, it might have been his imagination.

"Too goofy? Servant Gods' names should have a certain gravitas. Let me think... How about 'Deceit's Cold Eye'?

"Or 'Eternity of Lies'?

"Can't very well call it 'The Smiling Clown'?"

"No. Absolutely not!"

Cheng Shi fell into deep contemplation. Without even getting a response from the Fool's Lips, he'd immersed himself in the role, fretting over his new name the entire way. But nothing clicked until the moment everyone cleaved through the Void and plunged into Mockery and Jeering. That's when the perfect name hit him.

"I feel like our Benefactor's Envoy doesn't need to follow naming conventions of other Envoys. [Deceit] should have its own flair.

"Since you're the lead, Brother Mouth, let's just call it... 'Yu Xi.' Simple, clean. What do you think?"

"Once again, you say nothing. Then I'll assume you—"

"Good."

The Fool's Lips responded. Suddenly responded.

Though only a single word, it was the most resounding reply Cheng Shi had ever heard from Brother Mouth.

That one "Good" stunned him senseless. So much so that upon dropping into Mockery and Jeering, he froze for a beat — but then his expression transformed to sheer, overjoyed disbelief.

"Brother Mouth, you agree?"

"I don't need a script. But the lines and timing of my appearances are decided by me. That's a lead actor's prerogative."

"?"

'Something was off. A hundred percent off.'

Based on everything Cheng Shi knew about Brother Mouth, it had never been this proactive. The only times it showed initiative were when it was setting him up.

So was it possible that Brother Mouth had spotted the entertainment value and wanted to use this as a pretext to screw him over big time?

At this thought, Cheng Shi suddenly chicken-outed.

"Uh, Brother Mouth, how about we discuss this more? No rush. I can probably come up with another approach."

"You're backing out?"

"Yes!" Cheng Shi's answer was equally thunderous!

"Fine. You can back out of your part. I'll play mine. Each to his own. No interference."

"..." 'This is bad. I just fell into a pit, didn't I?'

Cheng Shi's heart lurched. But suspicion immediately took over.

His con artist's instinct told him: this matter had just gotten a lot more complicated.

"Brother Mouth... the Fun God doesn't actually have an Envoy called [Yu Xi], does He?"

"Don't tell me you were that Envoy all along!?"

"Yes."

"???"

Cheng Shi shuddered in fright. He was about to press further when the Fool's Lips spoke again:

"However, only when we merge as one are we the true Envoy."

"Merge with whom!?" Cheng Shi's pupils contracted.

"With you."

"With ME!!??" Cheng Shi went pale with shock!

"Correct. With you. That's exactly what the script you just made up says."

"..." Cheng Shi's piercing gaze instantly glazed over.

'Is that what I meant?'

'Is conning a clown really that fun?'

'Let this world full of clowns burn!'

Chapter 466: You're Saying You're... Whose Envoy!!?

Back to the present.

When Long Jing heard the question Cheng Shi posed, he felt an icy current shoot up his spine straight to his crown. His scalp tingled, and a soul-deep tremor erupted from his brain, flooding outward to every limb.

'How could he know things that only I know!?'

Long Jing nearly lost control of his facial composure. But as a peak player, he managed to maintain a semblance of calm.

Of course, that calm was for external consumption. To Cheng Shi's eyes, the terror was virtually impossible to conceal.

The acrobat stared at Cheng Shi in disbelief. His mouth opened several times before he "dared" to ask:

"How... did you know? Who the hell are you!?"

Cheng Shi gave a faint smile. Again, he didn't answer. Instead, he continued speaking as if to himself:

"Long Yu and Jing Bai were truly a match made in heaven in this profession. Their child inherited every ounce of their talent and was expected from birth to become the next era's pillar of the acrobatic world.

"But after that accident, the child mysteriously vanished...

"People always said the child couldn't overcome the terror of witnessing his parents' deaths and chose to retreat.

"But who could have imagined that today, in this game-descended world, that child still hadn't abandoned his parents' dream — and had already become the world's finest acrobat?"

"Though this kind of acrobat is quite different from that kind, when it comes to entertaining an audience... different paths, same destination. Don't you agree?"

"Am I right... Long Jing?"

"..."

Long Jing was genuinely rattled. With every word Cheng Shi spoke, the trembling in his body intensified.

This had gone far beyond a question of what someone did or didn't know. The other person simply knew too much. This near-surgical tearing open of old wounds dragged Long Jing back to that childhood moment — watching from beneath the stage as his parents' fatal slip played out before his eyes.

That terror hadn't faded with time. Instead, it had slowly accumulated in his heart over the years.

All these years he'd never revisited those memories. After the Faith Game descended, he'd thrown himself into deception and climbing rankings, nearly convinced he'd moved on.

But now, with this bloody scar ripped open again, he realized: his fear had never dissolved. It had been there all along.

His face grew paler, his expression more taut. When he looked at Cheng Shi, the sharp edge from their earlier covert sparring was gone — replaced entirely by alarm and unease.

Watching this, Cheng Shi inwardly marveled at Brother Mouth's words but sensed something was off about Long Jing's state.

He could empathize with this kind of deep-rooted familial grief. But empathy aside, based on what he knew of peak players, these people had already weathered emotional turbulence far more intense than this. Even an ordinary [Corruption] talent could induce feelings more searing than one's deepest emotions. So if Long Jing was merely recalling the past... why was his reaction so "exaggerated"?

'Where there's smoke, there's fire!'

Although the Fool's Lips was currently leading the show, Cheng Shi chose the prudent route and guarded himself.

Of course, certain protective measures weren't about assuming a defensive stance — they were more about striking first.

So Cheng Shi pressed the hand wearing the Death Fun Ring against Long Jing's wrist, letting the ring press flush against his skin so the other could feel its presence.

At the same time, he flashed Long Jing a mysterious smile and spoke meaningfully:

"If I were you, I wouldn't choose to act impulsively. The unknown is frightening, yes — but an unknown that speaks brings more than just fear."

Sure enough, when Long Jing felt the foreign object on his wrist, he swiftly scanned the ring on Cheng Shi's finger. The panic and dread in his eyes slowly dissipated, replaced by a deepening gravity.

He'd genuinely been startled, yes. But the over-the-top display of fear? An act. He'd wanted to test this person's mettle — to see how they'd react to his "panic." If a flaw appeared, he could simply strike and settle things with force. But once again, the probe had been deflected.

Second time now. Every probe had sunk like a stone into this person's ocean.

This was an expert. But whether they were a top "player"...

Long Jing shot a sidelong glance at Cheng Shi and twisted free of his grip with a subtle flex. He shifted back into his sharp, combative con-artist state.

The fear still lingered, but at least the surface couldn't show cracks anymore.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi felt a chill himself.

'The acrobat had been probing after all. Lucky he'd gotten the drop on him — otherwise, that warrior might have punched him clean out of the curtain!'

'Brother Mouth, you're ruthless. You just run your mouth nonstop. The consequences of what you say? Not your problem at all!'

'Apparently I'm the one cleaning up your messes?'

'That's some real Zhen Xin behavior!'

Cheng Shi was numb. He instinctively wanted to twitch his mouth, but the Fool's Lips denied him — because the performance wasn't over. This was still the lead actor's moment.

Seeing his second probe blocked, Long Jing's heart sank. But his surface demeanor recovered to that shrewd, measured state. He said with affected gravity:

"If you've chosen cooperation, then speak plainly. Who exactly are you?"

"Don't use the Tongue of Eating Lies as an excuse to dodge. Until I know who you are, I refuse all cooperation.

"You may know my past, but in the eyes of [Deceit] followers, [Memory]... is cheap."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi silently applauded.

Long Jing was undeniably sharp. He was already looking for an escape route.

The man had probably been constructing an identity for Cheng Shi in his head. And just how high that imagined identity went could be guessed from what he was saying.

An acrobat who'd never once mentioned his Benefactor at the Mediocre Person gathering was now, within this two-person sound barrier, loudly broaching the topic of faith rivalries.

He was clearly trying to court [Deceit]'s favor — to earn his Benefactor's attention and protection.

Though he hadn't shown it, that single sentence told Cheng Shi everything: Long Jing was scared. He was afraid the person before him wasn't some ordinary player, but an existence he couldn't handle.

'So this is what it feels like to make someone face fear.' Cheng Shi chuckled internally, recalling his own feelings when he'd faced entities he couldn't overcome.

And that's when Brother Mouth struck again.

"Interesting. You're trying to attract His gaze?"

"But..."

"Who told you that when His gaze descends upon this place, it would necessarily... protect you?"

The Fool's Lips deliberately stressed the final word "you," causing Long Jing's pupils to contract sharply.

He seemed to realize something, and his expression grew even more guarded as he stared at Cheng Shi:

"You're... one of His?"

"His? His 'person?'"

"Not bad. I like this species. It seems my performance as one has been quite successful."

"!!!" Long Jing's expression warped with horror. To keep his reaction hidden from those outside, he could only force down his shock and bow his head: "What does that mean? You're not human?"

"..."

'Nice insult!'

Cheng Shi was caught between laughter and anger. Setting comradeship aside, these believers had certainly picked up the Fun God's passive-aggressive habits.

'I'm not taking the fall for that remark. But you're right — Brother Mouth really isn't human.'

The Fool's Lips couldn't care less about such trivial matters. It gave a light chuckle and continued:

"In the dimension of flesh and blood — yes, I am. But from the heights of faith — no, I am not."

"You... !?"

"Typically, in the mouths of you so-called 'players,' an existence like me would be called...

"A Servant God.

"Hmm. Rather than 'Envoy,' I do prefer that title."

"!!!" Long Jing was stupefied. His hand pressed against the ground tightened. Suppressing his extreme shock, he spoke with forced composure: "You think reciting a piece of my past is enough to make me believe you're His Envoy?"

"Ha— deceit upon deceit. How would I know you're not impersonating His Envoy?"

"Cheng Shi, you've certainly given me plenty of shocks. But I don't believe you.

"You can't fool—"

Before he could finish, Cheng Shi's lips curled into a smile once more:

"Whether you believe is your business. Whether I speak is mine. I respect the rules above all else. The stupid-tongue's game is still on. Since you don't want to answer the previous question, here's a new one:

"The [Deceit] mask you lost — have you found it yet?"

"!!!"

Long Jing froze solid. His pupils quaked. Every muscle locked rigid.

'Could this person... truly be an Envoy!?'

Chapter 467: Wait, Bro, Why Are You Playing the Mirror!?

Indeed, Long Jing's mask was lost.

During a trial long ago, he'd hidden his mask to conceal his identity — only for the trial to terminate unexpectedly. He was ejected before he could retrieve it.

From that day on, Long Jing became a [Deceit] follower without a [Deceit] token.

Fortunately, he still possessed the ability to perform Oracle Acts, because he discovered that even an ordinary mask could serve as a vessel in his hands.

After learning this, he gradually abandoned the idea of recovering his mask. Not because he didn't want to, but because no matter how many times he prayed, he could never get matched into the relevant history of that trial again.

Now, this most guarded secret had been spoken aloud by Cheng Shi. After shock upon shock upon shock, Long Jing finally cracked.

"Who... are you, really?"

Cheng Shi smiled enigmatically: "You believe me now?"

"I..."

Conflict flashed through Long Jing's eyes, but in the next second he believed. Completely believed. Because Brother Mouth added one more line:

"It seems you've already forgotten me."

"Forgotten?" Long Jing froze, then shuddered violently. His pupils shrank to pinpricks, and his voice cracked: "It's you!!??"

Cheng Shi was utterly baffled listening to this. But that didn't stop Brother Mouth from continuing the performance.

He gave a casual smile, then introduced himself:

"Let's get reacquainted. I'm Yu Xi — Servant God of [Void], Envoy of [Deceit].

"Don't look at me like that. I imagine you've guessed why I've come to find you.

"Since you had the nerve to take my tongue, you should've expected this day. Shouldn't you?"

"!!??"

This time, it wasn't just Long Jing who was stunned. Even Cheng Shi — who was riding the tiger — was dumbstruck.

'What's going on?'

'What is Brother Mouth even saying?'

'What does he mean "took his tongue"?''

'Did Brother Tongue get... picked up by Long Jing?'

'He picks things up too!? Where did he even find it?'

Cheng Shi was dazed. Long Jing was even more dazed, because he suddenly realized everything was falling into place.

Previously, he could never pin down Cheng Shi's identity because he'd always assumed Cheng Shi was a player — a player with an agenda. But now, who could have imagined the person before him was an Envoy?

'He had to be the Benefactor's Envoy, because everything He knew was information Long Jing had never shared with anyone!'

'Especially the origin of the Tongue of Eating Lies!'

'Aside from Them, Long Jing couldn't imagine who else would know all this.'

'Even if some [Memory] follower happened to "replay" that particular scene, they couldn't have also "replayed" all his other memories.'

'Furthermore, the Tongue of Eating Lies hadn't activated a single time during this game — the ultimate proof that the other party could control the tongue. Given this, who could he be if not the tongue's owner?'

'Ha. If merely separating one tongue already produced an S-grade Sacred Artifact, then as the tongue's possessor, how could he possibly not be divine?'

And so, Long Jing believed.

'So [Deceit] did have an Envoy. No — [Deceit] was always supposed to have an Envoy. It was just that no one had ever discovered who it was.'

'But today! Right now!'

'He'd actually encountered a living [Deceit] Envoy, and He'd even introduced Himself. He was called... Yu Xi!'

'No wonder!'

'No wonder He'd sparred with Zhen Yi. No wonder He'd come looking for him. It had all been about this tongue!'

'His tongue!'

A wave of retrospective dread washed over Long Jing's heart.

'Thank heavens for his quick thinking in testing the other with that contract. Looking at it now, when the other accepted the contract — which represented ownership of the Tongue of Eating Lies — did that mean He'd already "forgiven" the crime of tongue-theft?'

At this thought, Long Jing's expression gradually transformed.

The terror vanished. Learning that the person before him was neither Zhen Yi nor the real Cheng Shi, but his own Benefactor's Envoy, he shed his panic and trembling entirely. His eyes suddenly burned with eagerness.

He seemed to have forgotten that mere moments ago he'd been desperately fleeing from an Envoy. But now, facing a different Envoy, he was actually smiling. Genuinely smiling.

'Someone else's Envoy and your own Envoy — how could they possibly be the same!'

'Besides, this wasn't just any Envoy. This was a treasure trove, a massive intelligence source, a guiding light on the [Deceit] path, a shortcut to understanding the Benefactor's will, and a golden opportunity to chase — even surpass — the Chosen Ones!'

'In short, this wasn't an enemy. This was a patron saint.'

'A living sugar daddy!'

Long Jing had his epiphany. As if he'd heard nothing of Brother Mouth's earlier mockery, he took half a step closer on his own initiative, his face cracking into an unabashed, fawning grin.

The speed of this transformation truly lived up to the acrobat's name.

"Lord Yu Xi, as you can see, I merely borrowed this... er, your tongue temporarily. But I've already returned the contract to you, haven't I?"

"This was all a misunderstanding!"

"I always wondered why this tongue was shining so brilliantly during that trial, guiding me to find it. Turns out it was yours — no, I should say it was our Lord's radiance."

"Even your tongue carries [Deceit]'s radiance, to say nothing of you yourself."

"My lord, please believe me — all those suspicions earlier weren't suspicion at all. I was simply drawn by your radiance without even knowing it!!"

"Also, Lord Yu Xi, while you walk among mortals... might you need a local guide?"

"Though my fraudulent arts surely pale before yours, I've at least got some strength. Would I have the honor of running a few errands for you — things you might find beneath you?"

"..."

Looking at Long Jing's beaming, sycophantic face, Cheng Shi felt a sudden moment of disorientation.

'Was this the same sharp-tongued, deeply calculating number-two of [Deceit]?'

'Was this the same acrobat whose pupils had contracted, whose body had trembled?'

'Why did this shameless look resemble... himself at certain moments?'

'Why was Long Jing performing him now?'

'Great. He'd been performing with Long Jing this whole time, and Long Jing had turned himself into a mirror.'

'Long Jing, oh Long Jing, tone it down. I preferred the defiant version of you.'

Cheng Shi was numb. But he didn't speak, because he figured Brother Mouth's performance might not be over yet.

What he didn't expect was that Brother Mouth had genuinely gone silent.

The instant Long Jing accepted Cheng Shi's "Yu Xi" identity, the Fool's Lips went back to playing dead. And so the conversation lapsed into inexplicable silence.

Fortunately, the smile hadn't left Cheng Shi's face. This "read-but-not-replied-and-still-smiling" expression made Long Jing briefly question himself. After a quick self-reflection, he rapidly adjusted his demeanor and switched to a different phrasing:

"Ahem, forgive my presumptuousness, Lord Yu Xi. Everything earlier was simply an expression of excessive excitement — an occupational hazard of being an acrobat. But no matter. I've recovered my composure.

"Please believe that I am an extremely reliable [Deceit] follower.

"So what I mean to say is: I am devout and entirely at your command."

"..."

'Ha. Today was truly educational. Never imagined the clown's occupational hazard could be stolen too.'

'This number-two of [Deceit] is quite the thief. No wonder he even managed to steal the Tongue of Eating Lies. But... where exactly did he steal it from?'

Cheng Shi desperately wanted to ask. But he was afraid Brother Mouth and Brother Tongue would get the wrong idea. He truly just wanted to gossip — not scout for spare body parts... no wait, available artifacts to pick up...

But he knew he couldn't ask that. So he took over from Brother Mouth and stepped into the role of Envoy "Yu Xi's" stand-in.

"You think... I need a helper?"

Long Jing shook his head with absolute sincerity: "No. The great Lord Yu Xi needs no assistance. But your radiance draws me to you involuntarily. I simply want to lay one more brick on the road of [Deceit]'s grand enterprise. So this is entirely my own desire to help — no, to assist you. Please, I beg you, give me this chance."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's mouth twitched.

'Great. The mirror just got shinier.'

Chapter 468: A [Deceit] Follower Swallows [Void]'s Empty Promise!

Cheng Shi had only ever witnessed two [Deceit] followers in their "audience with god" state.

One was himself. The other was Long Jing.

And these two forms appeared to overlap almost perfectly — a concordance rate of roughly 99.99%.

This made Cheng Shi wonder whether every con artist looked like this when meeting the divine.

If so, it meant it wasn't that he had no backbone during his audiences — it was that the entire [Deceit] roster had no backbone. And that blame could be placed squarely on the Benefactor.

After all, poor team culture was always leadership's fault. Nothing to do with the foot soldiers.

Cheng Shi smiled. He wasted no more words with Long Jing and moved on to business. And the business was, naturally, profiting from Hu Wei's operation!

Let's not forget — this was the fundamental reason Cheng Shi had conned Long Jing!

Cheng Shi hadn't crafted a [Deceit] Envoy identity for laughs. He'd done it to stop Long Jing from unmasking him so he could join the Grand Marshal's trial and profit. His objective had never changed from the very start:

Greed without limit!

This was also the core reason he'd schemed against Zhen Yi.

So after Long Jing had helpfully rationalized every inconsistency in his own head, Cheng Shi cut straight to the point. His goal was simple: get Long Jing to help him find treasure.

Of course, he couldn't put it that bluntly. Even selling products required packaging — cons required even more elegant wrapping.

And so, speaking as the Envoy "Yu Xi," Cheng Shi said:

"If flattery isn't a con, then it's meaningless.

"Put away that greasy look, President Gong. I prefer the version of you that deceived the masses on the Mediocre Person stage."

Hearing this, Long Jing's heart steadied further. He felt no embarrassment at all — instead, it confirmed that this Envoy was indeed the same person from the Mediocre Person gathering, not some "third party" who'd snuck in midway.

'So He really did come for the tongue.'

'Does Zhen Yi know? Probably not — otherwise, how would she dare confront an Envoy?'

'And how did the Envoy reclaim the tongue from her hands?'

'Oh, right — it was His own tongue. Taking back what's yours must be infinitely simpler than relying on contracts.'

Long Jing remained respectfully silent, head bowed. He sensed the other hadn't finished speaking, so he assumed a posture of devout listening, waiting for his "opportunity."

Cheng Shi indeed wasn't done:

"I am indeed searching for certain things. As for what exactly..."

He picked up the Tongue of Eating Lies beside him, flashed it briefly, and returned it to his storage. Then he regarded Long Jing with a half-smile:

"You've seen it. Things like these."

Long Jing's pupils contracted once more.

He seemed to understand the Envoy's meaning: tongues! No — more precisely, things similar to the tongue?

'Could Lord Yu Xi have other "organs" scattered throughout the world!?'

'Wouldn't this be the perfect chance to prove himself!?'

Long Jing's eyes widened, but he didn't dare interrupt. He simply waited with burning anticipation.

"Correct— you've guessed it. Just some scattered small components. These body parts of mine are terribly restless. Every era they cause me new problems.

"So don't be anxious. Your 'coincidence' in finding this broken tongue may not have been a true coincidence — it may have been the tongue subtly influencing you.

"Anyway, the rest you don't need to know. Just understand this: in the operation organized by the player you call the Grand Marshal, there may be clues to more of my scattered body parts. That's why I want to join your game under this identity.

"Yu Xi, Yu Xi — without participating in a game, how can one make fools of the masses?

"I haggled with Him for quite a while before securing a player slot. And that... is my purpose in coming here.

"President Gong, I think well of you — far better than that 'collection piece' of His. So keep working hard. I hope to see you at an Audience Meeting. Preferably under the title you people call... Chosen One.

"Hmm, Chosen One. Nice ring to it."

After this, Cheng Shi smiled and patted Long Jing's shoulder, exactly like a senior executive painting rosy futures for a new hire.

But this grand [Void] promise? Long Jing swallowed it without a moment's hesitation!

He gobbled it down, terrified of missing a single morsel of this spiritual feast!

His eyes blazed with light — not only because he now knew how to assist his Benefactor's Envoy, but because the Envoy's "casual" revelations contained a treasure trove of intelligence he'd never heard before.

Things like the Envoy's troubles. The concept of "eras." The player identity haggled out of Him. And... His collection!

Of course, if these words were "deliberate," even better — that would mean the Envoy was interested in him. And interest was the first step on the ladder of advancement!

Without the gods' direct attention, gaining an Envoy's notice was already excellent.

At least in Long Jing's understanding, knowing an Envoy was something most peak players could only dream of.

'He might not have a direct line to the gods, but at least he'd taken the first step toward "reaching divinity"!'!

'Worth it. So, so worth it!'

'Praise the Tongue of Eating Lies. Praise Lord Yu Xi. Praise the great Fun God, [Deceit]!'

Watching the swirl of exhilaration in Long Jing's eyes, Cheng Shi smiled happily.

This conversation hadn't just resolved his identity crisis — it had netted him an eager subordinate. But none of that was the most important part. What mattered most was that Cheng Shi had, right in front of someone else, voiced the question gnawing at his mind.

And that question was: did Brother Mouth truly have other "siblings" scattered out there?

From the moment Cheng Shi obtained the Tongue of Eating Lies, he'd been mulling this over. He'd secretly asked Brother Mouth, but Brother Mouth never opened up. Brother Tongue would chat about other things, but the instant this topic arose, it mimicked Brother Mouth and played dead.

This only deepened Cheng Shi's certainty that the two were deliberately hiding something!

This performance had also been a probe of the Fool's Lips and the Tongue of Eating Lies. He wanted to see how they'd react when he voiced his theory and let an outsider hear it.

But just as Cheng Shi expected — zero reaction from either.

Cheng Shi wasn't worried, though. This was only step one. The road to uncovering Brother Mouth's backstory was long.

'The Fool's Lips... Yu Xi...'

'Did He truly exist?'

'If not, then how had Brother Mouth managed to slip past every god?'

'Surely the gods couldn't have detected it and simply not cared?'

Initially, Cheng Shi had assumed it was simply his Benefactor's "surveillance device." But the longer he spent with Brother Mouth, the more he rejected that theory.

'It definitely had a story — perhaps a spectacular one.'

'It seemed it was time to attend to his own business and explore [Void]'s power. He couldn't keep freelancing for everyone else forever, right?'

Based on their previous dynamic, silence should have settled in now.

But once Long Jing learned Cheng Shi's "true identity," he became absurdly chatty. He had too many questions. Seeing that the Envoy wasn't in a hurry to leave, he carefully chose his words and asked them all.

"Lord Yu Xi, forgive my boldness — is this Fate Weaver called Cheng Shi, well... the player identity you haggled for?"

"May I use this identity to contact you?"

Cheng Shi chuckled inwardly. 'This acrobat was greedy. Already climbing the pole, asking for contact info.'

But Cheng Shi had no intention of locking himself into a single alias. He needed multiple identities — the more, the better — to disguise himself as his exposure grew.

So he snorted with amusement and said:

"Until I've found my body fragments, I'd suggest you don't try contacting me casually.

"Besides, you won't be able to.

"What I call an 'identity' is merely a qualification to participate in trials like an ordinary player. As for that ranking list they've compiled — my name won't appear on it.

"Within trials, I have many identities. They tend to be interesting people I've encountered.

"I met that Fate Weaver once. He's a rather... fascinating soul favored by [Fate].

"I sensed the broken tongue's aura on him, and followed the trail to His collection."

'So this is what an Envoy is!'

'Nearly every sentence contained intelligence he'd never heard before!'

Long Jing was in heaven. Full cerebral euphoria.

He desperately wanted to learn more — about the Envoy's story, the body fragments, anything — but Cheng Shi knew when to quit, refusing to spin more tales that might trip him up.

Seeing the Envoy's smile turn ever more cryptic, Long Jing realized he'd pushed his luck.

He hastily swallowed his unspoken questions and sat back down obediently.

"No one is responsible for answering all your questions. Just as no being can resolve mine.

"You know enough. Go back. I hope the next trial brings rewards for us both."

'Even the Envoy has questions?'

'What kind of matter could puzzle an Envoy?'

Long Jing burned with curiosity but knew when to stop. He shot Cheng Shi one more galvanized look, gave a solemn nod, and silently committed to memory: help the Envoy find his body fragments.

And so, an acrobat and a clown reached a fictitious consensus through an absurd con, then shared one last smile before going their separate ways.

The moment Long Jing dropped his sound curtain and stepped back, the other side's conversation also concluded.

Chapter 469: Mo Li's Warning

While the two con artists huddled for their private discussion, the idle Mo Li had also conducted a brief exchange with the cold beauty Hu Xuan.

When Cheng Shi put away the contract and returned to Hu Xuan's side, this [Birth] Envoy candidate asked with mild surprise:

"What did you say to Long Jing? The hostility in his gaze toward me seems to have diminished."

"?" Cheng Shi blinked. "You're a mage. Since when are your senses this sharp?"

Hu Xuan laughed brightly: "My perception is probably a bit different from what you mean. Rather than sensing someone's hostility, it's more like I'm sensing the probability of successfully conceiving an offspring from them."

"..."

Cheng Shi's smile froze on his face. He turned stiffly toward Hu Xuan and swallowed hard.

'Sis, could you please stop startling me at the weirdest possible moments?'

'Isn't [Birth] this terrifying? Aren't you afraid of scaring people into the [Corruption] path!'

To avoid lingering on [Birth]-related topics, Cheng Shi immediately pivoted:

"Just small talk. Never mind that — what did Mo Li say to you?"

Hu Xuan's smile was laden with meaning. She didn't press further and spoke at a volume only the two of them could hear:

"He was being friendly."

"Friendly?"

"Yes. He warned me that Hu Wei's operation might involve certain risks and told me to stay on guard.

"But what trial doesn't have risks?"

"I feel like there was something beneath his words, but I couldn't catch it."

Cheng Shi's brow creased: "What were his exact words?"

"Some casual small talk, and then he said with gravity:

"The Grand Marshal's operation might carry some risk. It's your first time here — be careful."

"That was it verbatim. Did you pick up on anything?"

As she finished, Hu Xuan looked up at Cheng Shi again. Her gaze overflowed with trust and admiration — practically spelling out: 'You'll figure it out and tell me what's hidden in those words.'

"..."

Cheng Shi deftly dodged her gaze and fell into thought.

Given Mo Li's standing as a top-tier support, there was no reason for him to extend such courtesy to a [Birth] Chosen One with less experience. Not that he shouldn't "lower himself" — but the warning was far too... "basic."

It sounded more like polite small talk between strangers at low ranks. Zero nutritional value.

Based on Cheng Shi's impressions, Mo Li was a sharp, wise player — not the type to say something so vapid. There had to be a deeper meaning. But what?

Cheng Shi mentally replayed every interaction with Mo Li but found nothing. Then he reviewed every person's behavior during the entire escape. Still nothing. Until he chewed carefully on the phrase "be careful" — and a flash of inspiration struck. What if Mo Li's "be careful" wasn't warning Hu Xuan about the trial's dangers, but about a specific person?

Who did he want Hu Xuan to watch out for?

Who?

'The Grand Marshal's operation... your first time here...'

Was Mo Li telling Hu Xuan to watch out for Hu Wei?

He considered Hu Wei a risk?

Once the center of gravity shifted, the logic followed. Cheng Shi instantly recalled a point he'd previously overlooked: in the Grand Marshal's prayer, he'd said, "I am but a passerby struggling beyond the battlefield."

At first blush, the phrasing seemed harmless. But upon closer examination, the problem was enormous.

To be matched into the same trial, everyone had to simultaneously recite the identical prayer. For Cheng Shi, Mo Li, and the others, the wording posed no issue — they genuinely weren't [War] followers and really were passersby beyond the battlefield.

But there were two genuine [War] followers in this assembled group!

Hu Wei and Da Yi. Could these two bona fide [War] devotees really say such words while praying to their own Benefactor?

Placing oneself outside the battlefield was practically blasphemy!

'You can't just exploit [War]'s patience and blaspheme right to your Benefactor's face the way I do!'

'[Fate] doesn't just tolerate — He also forgives. Does [War]?'

At this, Cheng Shi frowned. What exactly was Mo Li trying to tell Hu Xuan?

He glanced at Hu Xuan first, then casually let his gaze drift toward Mo Li — only to find Mo Li also glancing their way. Their eyes collided in an instant.

That single look confirmed Cheng Shi's guess. Mo Li was indeed warning Hu Xuan to watch the Grand Marshal!

'Interesting. This [Order] follower was telling two "outsiders" to be wary of his same-path "brother"!'!

'What had he noticed?'

'Or did he know something about Pe Laya's rebellion?'

Cheng Shi silently filed this away, then asked Hu Xuan:

"Do you know about Pe Laya? It sounds like she was a Grand Scholar of the Tower of Logic."

Hu Xuan's gaze sharpened as she nodded.

"I've heard of her. She wasn't just a celebrated Grand Scholar — she was a member of the Tower of Logic's Erudition Presidium at the end of the Civilization Era!"

"The Erudition Presidium!?" Cheng Shi was stunned. He hadn't expected such a lofty position.

"Indeed. And she ranked rather high within the Presidium — a Grand Scholar with significant influence. But for reasons unknown, she betrayed the Tower of Logic and defected to..."

"[Folly]?" Cheng Shi frowned, suddenly thinking of Galusha, with whom he'd had several "encounters."

"No, not [Folly]. It was [Chaos]!"

"She defected to [Chaos] and became the banner that led the Death Knell Knights in their assault on Tusnat, the Tower of Logic's capital."

[Chaos]?

So this trial used a [War] prayer to enter a clash between [Truth] and [Chaos] — a recreation of the Tower of Logic's fall?

Cheng Shi raised his brows in surprise, then smiled: "Being an Envoy candidate really does open up intelligence networks."

Hu Xuan smiled back:

"It has nothing to do with being an Envoy candidate. Everything I've shared comes from the mage channel.

"It's a remarkable profession. If you take the time to scroll through the chat logs, you'll harvest far more information than actually attending trials."

"..."

'So it was all thanks to the mage channel. Those old mages were truly something!'

"Anything else? Other intel on Pe Laya?"

"No. I pay little attention to [Truth] — they're far too rational, incompatible with [Birth]'s will.

"As for [Chaos], I rarely inquire either. I'm afraid His will would contaminate me and turn me into a being of chaotic procreation.

"So I'm sorry. That's all I know."

Chapter 470: The Grand Marshal's True Objective!

"There's nothing to apologize for. If anyone should apologize, it's me. Although I do have designs on this trial, I truly don't have more historical intel to share.

"However, there's one thing I've just figured out. If Hu Wei is right and Eposka's body really was abandoned, then it might actually turn up on [Truth]'s territory — because the Barren Walker was killed by [Truth] in the first place."

"!"

Hu Xuan raised her brows with great interest and smiled: "You're finally willing to share the history you witnessed?"

"Did you guess, or did Mo Li tell you?"

"He did. Before making his friendly overture, he probed around one thing and another. He didn't say much outright, but from the fragments I could piece together the general picture.

"So... is it true what they're saying? [Prosperity]... truly fell?"

Cheng Shi glanced at the others, didn't answer directly, but conveyed the result in his own way:

"There's no need to worry. [Life] was not affected."

Hu Xuan's pupils contracted sharply. She first fixed Cheng Shi with a grave stare, then her expression suddenly softened, and even her smile grew relaxed.

'So this was him. A player capable of creating miracles.'

Her gaze toward Cheng Shi was complicated, but within that complexity one could clearly see a trace of unsurprised amazement and a touch of "that's exactly what I'd expect from you."

Who could imagine that a player had witnessed the fall of a deity?

No — who would even dare imagine it?

If Hu Xuan put herself in that position, the mere thought sent a jolt through her. After all, They were gods!

If one of Them fell, what an overwhelming, terrifying, indescribable scene that must have been!

And the Fate Weaver standing before her had just casually admitted to witnessing it!

If anyone else — even another Chosen One — had told her this, Hu Xuan might have questioned its authenticity. But coming from Cheng Shi? No need for elaboration. It was absolutely true.

Because her own identity was the best proof!

This Fate Weaver had used unfathomable methods to mend her fate and graft it onto an Envoy's trajectory. One could say her Envoy candidacy had been... "created" by him.

Since he'd "birthed" a Servant God, why couldn't he also witness the "death" of a true god? Especially when that god was "Prosperity"...

'[Life], it seemed, was equally fragile — high or low made no difference!'

While Hu Xuan's mind wandered in shock, Cheng Shi suddenly frowned, then his eyes lit up. He lifted his head as if struck by revelation, nodding continuously:

"I get it!

"I've figured it out!

"I know what the Grand Marshal is really after.

"No wonder! Mo Li's gesture was a double warning. He wasn't just telling you to watch out for Hu Wei — he genuinely wanted you to know the trial's risk.

"It seems Da Yi knew about this all along. That's why the Grand Marshal said he absolutely had to obtain that thing. And in my view, it really is tremendously appealing!

"Even more valuable than the Barren Walker's shell!"

"?" Hu Xuan's elegant composure finally cracked. In her experience, she'd always felt Cheng Shi wasn't one of [Fate]'s typical riddlers. But today, that assessment changed.

Riddlers were truly annoying.

Fortunately, Hu Xuan was direct. She "solved" the riddle her own way:

"They say the supremely brilliant can understand with a single hint, so they speak little and don't care whether common people can follow.

"I'm probably that common person. However, if possible, I do hope our children inherit your towering intellect."

"..."

Cheng Shi's excitement froze on his face.

He shuddered in fright, immediately realizing he'd been speaking in clouds and fog and had annoyed Xuan. He rubbed his face and hastily explained in a whisper:

"I don't know if you've heard this history. The Grand Marshal mentioned it too. [Prosperity]'s second son Dize was sentenced by [Decay] to spiritual-physical separation. His shell became the Barren Walker, while his soul became the Gift of Sores.

"And the Barren Walker is dead — killed by [Truth]. I don't know for certain whether its shell was truly used and then discarded by [Truth], but what I can confirm is...

"The Gift of Sores is in danger!

"Because it went from being a penitent soul that might someday sway in faith and become an Envoy again... to a Servant God's soul with absolutely no patron!

"He once betrayed [Decay]. Now [Prosperity] has fallen. His own body was seized by [Truth]. He's become a completely abandoned, utterly alone 'orphan'!

"Think about it: if you had the chance to obtain a Servant God's soul, would you share it with anyone?"

A fierce light flashed through Hu Xuan's eyes. This time, she understood:

"So Hu Wei's real target is the Gift of Sores!

"He used Eposka as a smokescreen — a pretext for assembling the team?

"But many people probably already know this. You, for instance. Mo Li, for instance. So he's not actually fooling his teammates. If they can't be fooled, why bother with the charade?"

Cheng Shi gave a low chuckle:

"I wouldn't call it pointless. Only when the prize is big enough can you convince Chosen Ones to take action.

"I'm sure he received extremely reliable intel from a special channel before deciding to gamble. But the search process itself will likely be extraordinarily perilous — it might even cost lives!

"Remember the Yu Mu I mentioned earlier?"

"The [Decay] hunter who wasn't released?"

"Yes. [Decay] players have never been well-liked. I'd been wondering why the Grand Marshal cared about him so much. Now, thinking about it..."

Cheng Shi left the thought unfinished, but Hu Xuan understood. She mused aloud:

"He's far better suited than anyone else to fill the trial's body-count quota..."

Cheng Shi nodded, his gaze darkening slightly:

"I'm afraid so.

"The Grand Marshal is an honorable man. But all that honor only applies when your interests don't overlap with his.

"Right now, the interests are too intertwined and too enormous. So we need to be careful. And that, I think, is part of why Mo Li warned us.

"That Chief Grand Secretary... he does seem like a friend worth having."

Hu Xuan studied everyone for a contemplative moment, then slowly nodded.

After leaving, Long Jing exchanged some words with Mo Li. Before long, the site fell quiet once more.

Seeing that everyone had finished their preparations, Hu Wei strode to the center of the group:

"It's about time. We should head out."

He casually produced a round clock face and stuck it into the ground, gathering everyone before it.

The second hand ticked forward, one beat at a time. Midnight would arrive very soon.

Of course, it was already well past midnight. The clock's time was entirely arbitrary — it was merely an anchor to synchronize their simultaneous prayers.

