

## The Gods 561

Chapter 561: Time Gives an Answer Again

"How did you get here? That's new!"

Cheng Shi was amused. He didn't mind that Zhang Jizu had found his rest area — one glance at the skull's appearance told him the visit was probably arranged by that lord.

Since there was divine authorization behind this, there was little risk. Besides, the visitor was Squinty Old Zhang — a fellow priest, also working two jobs under that lord and the Fun God alike!

He trotted over to the little skull, squatted down, and examined his former teammate with brimming delight.

"Nice new skin! Wearing the work uniform really makes you look sharp!"

It took Zhang Jizu a moment to realize "work uniform" referred to his current skull form. He sighed helplessly:

"That lord granted me a small gadget. It can locate you. So here I am."

'Knew it was Him!'

'But... a small gadget?'

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow as something sprang to mind. His tone instantly turned teasing:

"That doesn't add up, Old Zhang. Did you hear me talking about getting gadgets from that lord, and then go whine to Him for your own reward out of jealousy?"

"..."

The question shut Zhang Jizu right up.

Honestly, he really hadn't asked. Nobody knew why that lord had suddenly bestowed upon him a key leading to Cheng Shi's rest area. And it so happened that Zhang Jizu's cemetery was filled with endless corpses — some already rotted to bone. And Death loved bones.

So he came. And then... he got mocked.

Worst of all, there was no good way to counter it. Explain — and it looks like you're making excuses. Stay silent — and it's taken as admission.

So the curious squinty-eyed arrival could only accept the loss and squeeze his eyes even tighter.

But since he was in skull form, the squinting didn't register on the bone surface. To Cheng Shi, the complete lack of rebuttal equaled confirmation.

So his grin grew wider still.

"Tsk — Old Zhang, that competitive streak of yours is a bit much, huh."

"..."

Zhang Jizu could no longer laugh. He was seriously questioning why he'd even come.

Cheng Shi roared with laughter at the little skull's dazed look, but he also knew when to stop. Before long, he cut the laughter and patted the squinty skull on the cranium:

"Alright, alright, I'll stop laughing. So what brings you here, little bone?"

"..."

Zhang Jizu narrowed his eyes with a wordless stare at Cheng Shi. He had to talk himself down for a good while before restraining the urge to curse. He sighed once more and began: "I—"

"Hey, hold on!"

Cheng Shi suddenly cut him off, as if recalling something extremely urgent. He leapt to his feet and darted into the rest area warehouse.

After a bout of rummaging, he returned carrying a battered old wooden chair, which he set down right in front of the Death Chosen.

"Sit — it's more comfortable."

Zhang Jizu blinked, then a flash of surprise crossed his mind.

'Since when was this guy so considerate?'

'He probably doesn't want to talk down to me from above. So he wants to put me on this chair?'

'But the way I am now, how am I supposed to hop up there?'

'He'll have to help me, I suppose?'

So Zhang Jizu slowly turned his gaze toward Cheng Shi, waiting expectantly.

What he absolutely never expected was that just as he waited for Cheng Shi's next move, this absurd clown suddenly flashed a wicked grin — and walked right past him to sit down himself.

Yes. Cheng Shi sat down himself!

Right in front of Zhang Jizu!

As Cheng Shi sat on the chair, looking down at the little skull on the ground from an even loftier position, sounds of amused wonder escaped his lips.

"Tsk — so this is what it feels like when that lord looks down at me."

"?????"

Zhang Jizu was dumbstruck.

'What is this person doing?'

'He's imitating the lord on the Bone Throne right in front of me?'

'Dude...!'

'What kind of brain circuit does a person need to do something like this?'

'Even the Prisoner wouldn't stoop this low, right?'

'Well, maybe Zhen Yi... forget it, that jinx probably could.'

'Fine, fine, fine. You Deceit people really are something...!'

This thought was barely formed when he caught himself — because he suddenly remembered that he was now a Deceit follower too.

"..."

Zhang Jizu's heart seized. His lip corner twitched, eyelid spasming wildly. Though the skull couldn't display his expression, there was no question: the Death Chosen had reached peak speechlessness.

At this moment, Squinty wanted nothing more than to headbutt Cheng Shi off his feet, drag him back to the cemetery, and bury him — let this unreliable liar keep Mo Shu's fake grave company.

Though the little skull was expressionless, Cheng Shi sensed the atmosphere crumbling around him. He quickly tucked away his sly grin, cleared his throat casually, and pivoted:

"Ahem... let's talk business. Business."

Zhang Jizu slanted a sidelong look at him and said nothing.

Cheng Shi's face stiffened with embarrassment. He got off the chair and squatted back down on the ground.

Squinty continued his silence.

Cheng Shi twitched his lips, sighed, and obediently lifted Zhang Jizu onto the chair.

Only when those pitch-black eye sockets were level with Cheng Shi's gaze did Zhang Jizu finally speak in a slow, measured tone:

"I ran into Poison."

"?"

Just the opening line nearly sent Cheng Shi reeling. He blinked rapidly at Zhang Jizu, frowned in thought, then brightened:

"What — you two butted heads?"

The little skull shook: "No. She helped me. Though I don't remember exactly who she shielded me from after the trial ended, I'm certain she did help me.

And it was on your account."

Cheng Shi's eyebrow rose. He was even more pleased.

Repaying kindness was a good thing. But as for Poison... 'Forget it. Once the trade is done, let's mind our own businesses.'

He didn't respond aloud, because Zhang Jizu was still going.

"She's already found her own second faith."

"?" Cheng Shi froze. He wasn't surprised per se, but he was taken aback by how quick Poison moved. "That fast?"

'That fast?'

A gleam flashed in Zhang Jizu's eyes. Understanding dawned: "So it is connected to you."

Cheng Shi gave an awkward laugh: "Not exactly connected. I had a tiny bit of influence, maybe. So — which faith did she embrace? Don't tell me it's actually Birth?"

At the word "Birth," Cheng Shi involuntarily shuddered.

He was genuinely terrified.

"Birth? No — not Birth. Not even Life.

I'm curious, Cheng Shi. You clearly have a Fate sub-personality. So why did you push Poison toward your own opposite?

Was that calculated, or was it a mistake?"

"???"

Cheng Shi's brain short-circuited.

"What opposite?"

Huh?

Old Zhang — what do you mean? Are you saying she... merged with Time?"

Zhang Jizu automatically filtered out the irrelevant words. With a grave expression, he nodded:

"Yes. The Wicked Sin concurrently serves as an Another Day Assassin. The current Poison has become... very powerful."

"..."

6.

6 out of 6.

'Aph Ros, how exactly did you guide her?'

'You steered your own Benefactor's follower straight to your warden?'

'What is this — offering a beauty to the jailer in hopes of getting your sentence reduced?'

'Hm?'

'Does that even work?'

'And Time — everyone else runs from Corruption, but You don't seem to care at all.'

'Could You possibly be tougher than the Corruption that took down Order?'

'Why does this Existence feel so... narcissistically powerful? Am I imagining things?'

'And Poison — your heart is truly made of steel. Harder than mine by a wide margin. I mean, I did owe her a favor, so I have no right to criticize her choices. But you just waltzed right over to the enemy team?'

'Absolutely incredible. Existence just came by to play me, and the idle chess piece they left behind inexplicably wound up in the opposing team's box.'

'Spectacular. But what can I do about it?'

'All I can say is — praise fking Fate.'

"#\$%&...#"

...

## Chapter 562: How a Second Faith Exists

"You don't remember what happened in the last trial?"

Once the initial shock had passed, Cheng Shi gradually recovered. He looked at the little skull on the chair before him and asked with a frown.

Zhang Jizu nodded:

"Correct. There must have been a violent conflict, because one of my life-saving measures was expended.

Yet my memory is severely blurred. That's clearly the work of someone using Memory's methods.

There aren't many people capable of doing this to me. I've narrowed it down to a few, but I still can't confirm."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's interest was piqued.

"Got quite a few enemies, huh? Tell me — which ones?"

"They just don't get along with me, that's all. There's no use in you knowing."

"How is there no use? What if I run into them? Maybe I could help you deal with the trouble?"

"..." Zhang Jizu blinked, slightly uncertain: "I feel like I've heard that line somewhere before."

"?"

Before Cheng Shi could follow up, Squinty narrowed his eyes and continued: "Help me deal with a blasphemer first. This one's easier to handle — especially for you."

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow in surprise. After a moment's thought, he nodded:

"So there really is one, huh? Not impossible, I suppose — but let's be clear on the price. Even brothers settle accounts fairly.

Go ahead — name, profession, tier?"

"Score unknown. Surname Cheng, given name Shi. Profession... fate weaver."

"???"

Cheng Shi was stupefied. What shocked him wasn't that Squinty Old Zhang was messing with him — but that these words coming from Squinty's mouth were... true!

The Master of Deception told Cheng Shi: it was true!

Which meant Squinty genuinely wanted Cheng Shi to take out... himself.

'How is this possible?!'

'Something's off. Way off!'

Cheng Shi's reflexes were quick. He only froze for a second before realizing the crux of the issue: Squinty had apparently also acquired the Master of Deception!

'The gravekeeper has abandoned his graveyard and started playing mind games with his brother!'

He stared at the little skull in shock, blinking with disbelief: "The talent He granted you — is it the Master of Deception?!"

Zhang Jizu saw Cheng Shi's deflated look and shook his head with a smile: "No."

'Another true statement!'

'It IS the damn Master of Deception!'

'Fine, fine, fine — the clown was me all along!'

'Who'd have thought that a liar's promise would actually turn the other person into a liar too!' But all joking aside — how exactly did Squinty's second faith exist?

It wasn't just about Zhang Jizu. Cheng Shi was curious about the faith-state of every player who had a second faith.

Because he'd always felt his own ability to switch faiths was different from everyone else's.

Initially, influenced by Hu Wei's ability to directly wield Chaos power, he'd assumed a second faith simply meant gaining a new class blessing and another faith talent.

But after learning that Hu Wei was a purebred Chaos follower, he realized he was wrong. The Grand Marshal's War power all came from his greatsword — his true faith was Chaos.

He'd always been single-faith!

Same for Da Yi.

Among the remaining dual-faith players: Big Cat's side he'd never asked about, since the Destined Ones needed to maintain mystique; Poison had just gotten her second faith and he hadn't encountered her since; Qu Yan could be asked freely, but a Herald asking a regular player about these things was too unreasonable and beneath his dignity. So...

Among everyone he knew, only Zhang Jizu — who'd stepped onto the Deceit path — was someone he could ask.

And today, Zhang Jizu had walked right up to his doorstep. This was a heaven-sent opportunity.

Then again — Cheng Shi now guessed why Squinty had come looking for him. This dual Death-Deceit believer probably wanted to compare notes on how the second faith manifested in others versus his own dual-personality situation.

Having figured out the other's purpose, Cheng Shi nodded. After exchanging a look with Zhang Jizu, he spoke first:

"My faiths haven't merged. I just coincidentally obtained another personality. I can switch personalities to change my faith, but... the two faiths' talents can't be shared.

So I can only be a clown, or a fate weaver."

Cheng Shi's tone was sincere and entirely unhidden. Zhang Jizu blinked in mild surprise.

He studied Cheng Shi through narrowed eyes for a moment, then said with some amazement: "You seem different. More trusting of others than before."

"Well, that depends on who it is!

As Void's wanderer and that lord's employee, I naturally trust a fellow employee from a brother company under the same corporate umbrella more than I'd trust an outsider.

Right, Old Zhang?"

Zhang Jizu was silent for a moment, noncommittal about the framing. But soon enough, he reciprocated with equal sincerity:

"I received the Clown's blessing, along with three additional Deceit faith talents. I don't need to switch — in my Gravekeeper state, I have... nine talents."

???

'How many?'

'Nine talents?'

'Squinty at 2400+ score would have six innate talents. So faith fusion gave him three new ones?'

'What? Three?'

'Seriously...'

'Who exactly is Void's darling here?!'

Cheng Shi was green with envy. He smacked his lips, scrutinizing Zhang Jizu up and down — practically oozing acid from his eyes.

He stared for a long time before speaking, barely willing to believe it: "Old Zhang, you're not lying to me, are you?"

Seeing Cheng Shi's reaction, Zhang Jizu let out a satisfied huff: "Yes, you guessed right. I'm lying."

'The Master of Deception activated again!'

But even setting aside the talent — even with zero expression possible on that skull — Cheng Shi could tell that Squinty was telling the truth.

This made him even more envious.

So faith fusion really was a stacking of talents. But how was the number of second-faith talents calculated? What were the rules?

If each fusion gave three faith talents, then...

'Damn — turns out I spent the entire last trial showing off, only to become the clown. That chameleon Bianse Long was the real winner!'

'Three Decay talents. Absolutely cleaned up...'

But another question arose: why did everyone else's faith fusion result in a true merger, while his own "fusion" didn't actually merge at all — it was just switching between Void faiths?

Was it because Deceit and Fate had opposing views?

No — that didn't seem quite right. There had to be deeper reasons. Next time he had an audience with Them, he absolutely needed to find out.

Cheng Shi pondered silently for a while, then looked back at Zhang Jizu on the chair and pouted:

"Squinty Old Zhang, you didn't just come here to rub it in, did you?"

How long does this little skull form last?

One-way?

Does that lord's gadget have another one? Can it also..."

Before he could finish, Zhang Jizu snorted softly and spat something out of his hollow mouth — a key forged from bone.

Cheng Shi blinked. 'There actually is one?'

He quickly snatched up the key, only to discover it was no longer than a finger. One side bore two delicately carved characters: Cheng Shi.

'Hiss—'

'What is this — an employee badge?'

"A communication tool. A tool for me to pray to Him.

Unlike certain people with their competitive streaks, I'm pragmatic. Mutual information exchange between allies is a necessity."

'Allies?'

'That's a fresh term.'

Cheng Shi pocketed the key and laughed heartily: "So I can go hang out in your cemetery now? Perfect — my neighbor's gone, and I keep running out of corpses. Looks like you're here to make deliveries, then.

But Old Zhang — what do we call this... alliance of ours?"

"?" Zhang Jizu froze, blinking.

'Allies are allies. Why does it need a name?'

'Do friends who help each other really need a fancy title?'

He looked at Cheng Shi yet again with exasperation and sighed:

"Visits don't have unlimited time. Breaking through the Convention's constraints to reach this place cost that lord considerable effort. So say what you need to say — time's almost up."

Cheng Shi hadn't actually planned to establish any formal alliance. But the conversation had reminded him of the Destined Ones he'd formed with Big Cat, and he figured — since they were cooperating anyway — he might as well create some kind of organization with Squinty too.

Thinking it over: they were both Deceit followers, both clowns. So why not call this "alliance"...

"Joker.

We're both this world's Jokers — standing on Deceit's stage, performing our absurd acts to tell the gods the story of Void.

Praise Deceit. What do you think, Old Zhang?"

There was no response from the rooftop. The little skull on the chair had vanished before he'd even finished his second sentence.

"..."

Staring at the empty rooftop, Cheng Shi clicked his tongue with an awkward expression.

'Ha. Me — the clown. The Joker among Jokers.'

...

Chapter 563: Prosperity's Heir — Frazor

Zhang Jizu's departure was perfectly timed. Not long after he vanished, the prayer hour that Cheng Shi and Big Cat had agreed upon arrived.

In the final minute before the prayer, Cheng Shi called Big Cat again. The two synchronized their timing with precision, speaking identical incantations in perfect unison.

This time...

[Prayer Trial (No Prosperity Judgment Required) has been initiated]

[Matching teammates (1/6)]

[Trial Objective: In a city proclaiming Order, make order flourish (Time limit: 1 day)]

No complications. Seeing the Prosperity trial notification appear in his vision, Cheng Shi exhaled with immense relief. 'Finally, something normal.'

[Match successful (6/6). Entering trial]

His vision went dark as he entered the trial. When he opened his eyes again, he found himself sitting in the gallery of a grand tribunal — and beside him sat the very Hong Lin who'd prayed with him.

She still wore that fiery beast-skin outfit, her sleek black hair cascading over the seat, nearly touching the floor.

'Matched!'

'They actually matched!'

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted slightly, but he quickly broke into a smile.

Rather than focusing on Big Cat's status, he rapidly scanned his surroundings. His gaze swept across the stern-faced inquisitors at the tribunal bench, the banners bearing the Grand Tribunal's heraldic engravings hanging high above, and he nodded thoughtfully with raised eyebrows.

Beside him, Hong Lin was clearly just as startled. She first lit up with delight and was about to say hello — but then her expression shifted subtly, and her gaze toward Cheng Shi sharpened.

"Who are you?"

She'd gotten more cautious. Identity verification first.

'Good — she's learning.'

Cheng Shi had also meant to confirm her identity first, but seeing Big Cat so on guard, an uncontrollable dirty thought popped into his brain.

'Hmm? If I hit her with a "hee~" right now, would she die of fright?'

The thought made him grin — then shudder. He abandoned the idea immediately.

His "hee~" probably wouldn't scare her to death. But it might get him punched to death by her instead.

'Too terrifying. A druid plus a Hero of Today — nobody in this entire game can withstand Big Cat's fists anymore...'

'Better not court death.'

So Cheng Shi skipped the banter. He casually surveyed the area, quickly scanning the faces of their teammates. Finding no acquaintances or enemies, he pointed to himself, then to Big Cat, and murmured:

"Relax. It's me. Let's go."

With that, he unhesitatingly activated Sinner Redemption, yanking both himself and Big Cat into the resentment of Go Lis.

'Aph Ros — sorry to bother you again!'

The instant both were swallowed by the inky void, furious warning shouts erupted from knights across the courtroom.

The inquisitors' faces turned severe. Knights swarmed into the hall. Citizens in the gallery went pale with fright, scrambling to flee. Only four bewildered players remained, looking at each other — every face plastered with shock and incomprehension.

One of them was literally trembling.

'Wait — I prayed for the easiest trial possible! How did I end up with two big shots who ripped open the void and bolted within seconds of starting?'

'How is anyone supposed to play this?!'

All four were shell-shocked. Before they could even react, fully armed Iron Law Knights had surround them, indiscriminately sweeping up everyone in the gallery.

"Screen them one by one. In the sacred halls of Order, no lawbreakers shall be tolerated!"

...

Meanwhile, on the other side.

Cheng Shi awoke once more in the assembly hall of Dolgod's church. The moment he opened his eyes, he saw the black-robed Aph Ros standing at the hall's entrance, watching him with blazing intensity — though His gaze kept drifting toward Big Cat beside him.

Yes — both he and Big Cat had already been released.

Aph Ros could sense Cheng Shi's emotions and naturally knew his relationship with this new female visitor was solid. So the moment the two were pulled into Go Lis's resentment, He'd let them out.

Of course, sensing emotions was only one reason. The bigger factor was the unusual aura He detected from this woman — something different from a mortal.

Normally, beings carrying this kind of aura arrived here freely. They came and went as they pleased — no need for such... "indignified" methods. But this time...

'My brother, you've brought me another enormous surprise.'

Aph Ros was profoundly shaken. He wanted to examine Hong Lin more closely, but feared His scrutiny might blaspheme this "Her." So He could only fix His gaze on Cheng Shi and wait quietly for an answer.

Cheng Shi was thoroughly immunized to those kinds of looks from Aph Ros. After opening his eyes, he gave the Herald a smile and turned to check on Big Cat.

Hong Lin was completely dazed.

She'd never imagined Cheng Shi would pull her into a place like this, much less that the "friend" he'd mentioned would be... a rather handsome old-era nobleman.

The aura did bother her, though. Way too much Corruption.

'Who is he?'

'Why is he a Corruption follower?'

Hong Lin frowned, suppressing her distaste. She surveyed the surroundings and asked:

"Cheng Shi, where is this?"

"The Life Era's Land of Hope. A city-state watched over by Birth — Dolgod." Cheng Shi answered with a smile.

"Birth?"

"You're saying this is Birth's territory?"

Hong Lin was taken aback. She shook her head with a wry smile: "Then why does your friend look like a Corruption follower?"

"What — are you two staging a blasphemous performance against Birth here?"

"Not exactly..."

Cheng Shi gave an awkward chuckle. 'Lady, please stop automatically associating me with blasphemy. I'm not desecrating Them every waking moment.'

"Ahem — correction: I meant 'formerly.' Currently, this place has become... a cage.

"As for who it's holding..."

Cheng Shi turned to Aph Ros and grinned without reservation:

"This illustrious blasphemer right here.

Allow me to introduce — this is Aph Ros..."

"The dual Herald of Birth and Corruption!?" Hong Lin's eyes darkened as she cut Cheng Shi off.

Cheng Shi blinked: "Guess no introduction needed. So you've heard of Him."

Hong Lin's expression grew slightly grave. She nodded, looking at Aph Ros. That serious gaze suggested she not only knew of Him, but had some degree of understanding.

Aph Ros had been standing at the doorway watching Cheng Shi's performance. After waiting a good while for an introduction of the lady that never came, He sighed and took the initiative:

"It is my honor to have my name known by such a distinguished lady. Might Aph Ros also have the honor of learning Your name, beautiful madam?"

Aph Ros faced Hong Lin with a gentle smile and a slight bow — elegant manners, impeccable etiquette. Completely different from how He behaved around those "Miss Moons" or even Miss Sun.

Cheng Shi glanced at Him with interest, his smile laden with meaning.

Hong Lin, however, showed no warmth in return. Instead, she slowly dropped her smile and spoke with measured gravity:

"Your only honor is being Cheng Shi's friend. Otherwise, we would have nothing in common.

Frazor. You may call me Frazor."

"!!!"

Now Aph Ros was truly shaken. He snapped His head up, swept a quick look over Hong Lin — disbelief unmistakable in His eyes.

"That can't be right. How could you possibly be the Mother of Prosperity's eldest daughter? She's already..."

"Dead?" Hong Lin snorted. "Apologies — I don't know how long you've been locked up in here, but your information seems rather outdated.

Cheng Shi, you didn't tell Him? The great Frazor has been brought back to life?

I am the Mother of Prosperity's eldest daughter, Frazor — a lucky soul saved by Death.

Of course, if you still don't believe it — if you refuse to acknowledge my identity as Frazor — you may also address me by my other name.

Prosperity..."

...

Chapter 564: Big Cat's Prosperity Will

Hong Lin's words genuinely startled Aph Ros — not because He didn't believe her, but because He didn't dare disbelieve!

After all, this woman truly carried the scent of authority. Faint, yes — but authentic!

Moreover, she was already actively releasing the aura of Prosperity's authority. She was deliberately flaunting her identity!

Aph Ros's pupils contracted sharply as He stared at Hong Lin. His thoughts suddenly became muddled. He couldn't understand why Frazor would be resurrected by Death, much less why she'd dare call herself Prosperity.

Would her mother — that one who sought to assimilate the universe — permit her daughter to steal her divine name?

Impossible!

But if impossible, then why did this woman carry Prosperity's authority?!

Aph Ros stood frozen, unable to untangle the web. And right as He furrowed His brow in deep thought, the outwardly resolute Hong Lin — heart privately quaking — added:

"...s heir."

"..."

That single addendum silenced both people present.

Cheng Shi hadn't expected Big Cat to pull the same dramatic pause as Chaos — leaving "Prosperity" hanging that long before completing the sentence. Aph Ros was simply stunned by the information itself.

'Since when can a true god's heir inherit divine authority early?'

'If they can't, then her words could only mean one thing: Prosperity... something happened!'

Enormous doubt bloomed in Aph Ros's heart. The curiosity was so overwhelming He couldn't contain His desire. Eyes blazing, He looked to Cheng Shi with a mix of bewilderment and anticipation:

"My brother, I like this surprise.

No — I love every surprise. You truly are one of this era's masters. Praise Void — You... understand me well."

"..."

Cheng Shi went numb. 'Fine, Big Cat going off-script and revealing herself as some Prosperity heir is one thing. But you too?'

'Bro, please don't heap praise on me like that. Any more and my disguise is gonna slip!'

Cheng Shi laughed awkwardly, sensed Hong Lin's questioning gaze, and opted to play dumb for now.

Explaining the Yu Xi impersonation was actually quite easy for him, but this clearly wasn't the right moment — especially not in front of the fully convinced Aph Ros.

So silence was his only option.

Aph Ros wasn't finished, though. He turned back to Hong Lin and bowed again, every gesture brimming with respect:

"Praise Prosperity's... heir. Aph Ros, the Gate of Joyous Lust, extends to You the most Prosperous of greetings."

"..."

Hong Lin was slightly thrown by Aph Ros's formality, but soon enough, this bold Prosperity heir gracefully accepted the salute, giving a soft "Mm" in acknowledgment.

Watching this, Cheng Shi's heart churned with mixed emotions.

Because just now, he'd suddenly understood why Big Cat had chosen this place — Aph Ros's home turf of Dolgod — to reveal her identity as "Prosperity's heir."

It wasn't because she feared the Corruption Herald and confessed her identity as a defense. It was because this Prosperity heir was living out her Prosperity will:

In an unknown land, before a dual Herald she barely knew, she demonstrated her divine name to elevate her own standing — and thereby shield her friend!

Shield her friend, Cheng Shi!

Yes — it was a display of power. But it wasn't for herself.

Hong Lin had studied Aph Ros's history. She knew this was a formidable Corruption Herald whose pursuit of desire was frenzied. His personality was bold and flamboyant.

Even though Cheng Shi said he was bringing her to meet a friend, before she could read the full picture, she couldn't be certain whether Cheng Shi's so-called "brotherhood" was actually a twisted, warped delusion born from Corruption's influence.

So she chose to step forward at this moment, show her "strength," and set the tone for the conversation ahead — adding weight to their leverage.

'She's still as dependable as ever.'

Hong Lin's move was an embodiment of her Prosperity will — and it suited Cheng Shi perfectly.

Yes, perfectly. But perhaps... too perfectly. Overdone, even.

Because Cheng Shi had lied.

Bringing Hong Lin here wasn't purely to give her an intel channel familiar with Them, nor just to handle Yu Mu. Beyond all that, he had another purpose.

He wanted Aph Ros to meet Hong Lin. To meet this bearer of Prosperity's authority!

He knew that although his lies and acting had fooled the Herald, with each successive visit, the astute Aph Ros would inevitably notice discrepancies.

Even if Cheng Shi could talk his way past every detail, no one maintained a perfect record forever. Too many stacked lies risked collapsing the foundation.

So lies were far less useful than real "power."

With genuine power on par with Aph Ros's, it wouldn't matter whether the Herald knew, saw through, or exposed his lies. None of it would matter.

The scales of friendship would remain balanced through the equilibrium of "power."

But Cheng Shi was only playing a role. He was destined never to demonstrate the "power" needed to conquer Aph Ros. However, just because he didn't have it didn't mean his friend didn't.

Hong Lin — acknowledged by the Convention, championed by Death, supported by Deceit, and favored by Fate — as Prosperity's heir, the authority in her hands alone was enough to obliterate every doubt Aph Ros might harbor. Any suspicions He'd developed about Cheng Shi could be swallowed whole.

Because true divine authority was simply too precious. Throughout the Land of Hope's history and in the servant gods' eyes, these things had only ever been treasures held in Their hands. No outsider could covet them.

Possessing them meant a life that had utterly transcended everything — merged into Their ranks. At the very least, it reached the threshold of Their divine thrones!

So merely letting Aph Ros sense the authority on Hong Lin — even without extensive introductions — would deepen His conviction about Yu Xi's identity. He'd automatically filter out inconsistencies and dismiss inconsequential lies.

After all, in Their view, a mortal couldn't possibly be friends with a being who wielded authority. And Hong Lin's mystique would become a trump card for her "friendly" dealings with Aph Ros.

This was Cheng Shi's original three-birds-one-stone plan. His true purpose.

But he genuinely hadn't expected Big Cat to open this hand of "landlord" by slamming down a pair of jokers. Though her move did sweep away every risk for Cheng Shi regarding Aph Ros, the current power dynamics would also make the Herald more... wary.

Yes — wary.

Two "Heralds" exchanging information as equals might at worst involve some mutual deception. But if one side suddenly showed up with a friend wielding a true god's authority — and not the Benefactor's authority, but another god's — it would inevitably make the startled party far more cautious.

Nobody wanted to become ash in the gods' contest for authority. Aph Ros felt the same, and His expression grew ever more solemn.

Cheng Shi, on the other hand... smiled happily.

'This is Big Cat. Always devoted to protecting her friends.'

Sometimes Cheng Shi couldn't help but reflect: if there were an award for "most blessed thing in the world," being Big Cat's friend would surely be on the list.

She was too dependable.

But also too fierce...

Big Cat's reaction had caused a slight deviation in Cheng Shi's plan. Fortunately, the clown's adaptability was strong.

He laughed heartily and addressed Aph Ros:

"The best respect isn't spoken — it's shown.

Aph Ros, we can't keep chatting here, can we?"

Hong Lin's brow still carried caution. Aph Ros didn't dare slight an honored guest. Regardless of how this noble lady obtained her authority, the proper attitude was paramount if He wished to learn anything.

Fortunately — Corruption excelled at grand hospitality.

He chuckled softly and extended a hand: "Indeed, this is no place for conversation. Allow me to welcome our most distinguished guest somewhere more fitting."

The moment He finished, the scene inverted. The dim assembly hall dissolved. A terrace with a long table materialized, and the glow of dusk settled quietly upon the horizon.

...

Chapter 565: The Familiar Long-Table Talk

The seating arrangement at the terrace's long table had changed.

Aph Ros didn't place a chair at the head of the table where He should have sat. Instead, He pulled a chair to the side opposite Cheng Shi.

The two sat facing each other along the table's length, leaving the head seat for Hong Lin, who was still surveying her surroundings.

Hong Lin raised an eyebrow and, without ceremony, sat down at the head. She took in the surrounding scenery, watching devout servants file in with food and wine. Then, with a hint of amusement, she looked at Cheng Shi and said in a peculiar tone:

"You call this a cage?"

That single line told Cheng Shi that even if Hong Lin knew something about Aph Ros, her knowledge was limited. Perhaps she'd merely heard of this person, knew some of His history, but not what had actually happened to Him.

So he smiled and explained the situation in Dolgod. Then, with practiced finesse, he wove Aph Ros's story in, drawing the two closer.

"So you see, this prisoner of Existence is actually a friend of ours in Void. Wouldn't you say, Frazor — the enemy of our enemy is our friend."

Reasonable as it sounded, Hong Lin still couldn't let her guard down around Corruption. She knew all too well what these people were like — They'd stop at nothing for desire.

Aph Ros noticed Hong Lin's wariness but felt no resistance. Nobody knew Corruption's reputation among the gods better than His own Herald.

He couldn't ask a "true god's heir" to change her view of Him. If Go Lis's consciousness weren't so obsessively frenzied, He would've much preferred to face this fellow Life guest in that other form.

So He was quite satisfied with Cheng Shi's introduction. After Cheng Shi finished, Aph Ros applauded with a smile.

"I know my status as a sinner may not qualify me for Void's friendship. But I will certainly never be Void's enemy.

I love this era. I love everything about it. However, I do have one curiosity.

My brother — why would you and this distinguished Lady Frazor both... claim Void?"

"..."

'Crap. Slipped up. Forgot about that.'

Cheng Shi's expression stiffened. Hong Lin froze, then her face darkened. In their mutual understanding, this detail should have been concealed as long as possible — buying time to quietly build an information barrier and gain more leverage in future interactions and confrontations.

But now, in trying to bridge their relationship, the Void hook had been exposed.

This was nothing a performing clown couldn't handle, though.

Cheng Shi's expression shifted rapidly — an awkward laugh, then a much graver look.

He fixed his blazing gaze on Aph Ros and, in a solemnity the Herald had never seen, spoke word by measured word:

"Aph Ros, I'm not sure whether your Corruption is tugging at my desires right now, making me lower my guard..."

Truth be told, as a Corruption Herald, Aph Ros's aura constantly pulled at surrounding emotions. But this faint tug could be fully countered by the door key in Cheng Shi's hand alone — zero impact.

He was purely deflecting blame, while simultaneously applying pressure. He was deliberately manufacturing tension and mystique. The purpose, naturally, was deception.

Every trick a liar played was in service of deception.

"...enough to carelessly let slip some little Void secrets.

But I'd suggest that until you've decided to fully trust me and align with Void, it would be best to forget what you just heard."

'Sure enough — all of this, exactly as I suspected, involves Void's contest for Their authority!'

'But... forget?'

Aph Ros smiled, a grin blooming with desire.

'Forget? Easier said than done.' He was a devotee of desire — asking a Corruption follower to abandon the craving in their heart was no different from asking them to break their oath.

Absolutely impossible.

But Aph Ros was no fool. He grasped Cheng Shi's meaning perfectly: if you want to learn more about Void's story, you must draw closer to Void.

So He grew cautious too.

He had to consider the fact that this was a Deceit Herald. Cheng Shi's words just now might not have been a slip at all — they could've been deliberate. Designed to push Him one step further, nudging Him slowly toward... the abyss of Deceit.

Though in the Void era, drawing closer to Void wasn't necessarily wrong. But Deceit was too false, and Fate too arcane. Everything He knew about Void so far came from a single Void wanderer's mouth. He couldn't be certain whether this Deceit Herald was lying to Him, and He feared a rash decision might bring irreversible consequences.

Aph Ros might be trapped in Time's cage, but His endless cycles of rebirth, year after year of waiting, surely weren't self-punishment. It was for the day He could resume His grand ambitions.

He was weighing whether drawing closer to Void would fulfill that wish — or sink Him into nothingness, never to exist again.

Before, dealing with Cheng Shi alone, He hadn't needed to overthink this. This "brother Yu Xi" wasn't all that powerful — at least not until He recovered His mask.

So Aph Ros had believed there would be ample time to study this era before Void's dominance demanded a choice.

But now, time seemed to be running out. Especially after seeing a... Frazor who wielded Prosperity's authority.

This Frazor's identity was surely false. Aph Ros had met the real Frazor. The Mother of Prosperity's eldest daughter hadn't possessed such a beautiful, healthy face and physique.

She'd been gaunt. Under her mother's divine oppression, her growth had been anything but flourishing.

Moreover, she was long dead — she'd died in her mother's arms.

So this fake Frazor was probably another Void wanderer like Yu Xi? Or a Herald?

'Has Void already begun brazenly seizing the gods' authority?'

'Even if this kind of thing is a dirty secret all gods know about, how did Void wrest authority from Prosperity's grasp?'

In Aph Ros's understanding, Prosperity would never share Her authority with Her children — let alone a Void wanderer.

'What happened to the second god of Life?'

Unable to trace the cause and effect, Aph Ros suddenly fell into turmoil. He should have followed His heart and obeyed His desires, but now even desire had forked. Both the conservative and aggressive paths looked promising — leaving the bewildered seeker standing at fate's crossroads, hesitant and lost.

This inner conflict manifested externally: Aph Ros's aura began to fluctuate, growing chaotic. The surrounding Corruption pull strengthened gradually.

He looked at Cheng Shi with a complex expression and said quietly:

"My good brother. Deceit's Herald. Lord Yu Xi...

Are you... lying to me again?"

Before Cheng Shi could react, Big Cat moved first.

Her pupils contracted sharply as she looked at Cheng Shi. Those eyes, sharp as a leopard's, overflowed with confusion. The expression clearly asked:

"Since when are you Deceit's Herald?"

"..."

Cheng Shi went numb. He could only simultaneously respond to both sides with an awkward laugh, while screaming internally:

'Bring it on — let the lies come faster and harder!'

...

Chapter 566: Even Desire Has Its Restraint

Cheng Shi began to operate.

He knew that even if Big Cat had a mountain of questions, she wouldn't blow his cover here. At the very least, she'd shelve her doubts and wait for his explanation later. So the priority was handling Aph Ros.

He shot Big Cat a "hold steady" look, then swiftly turned to Aph Ros with a meaningful smile.

He didn't deny anything. Under the mantle of Yu Xi, there was no need to deny.

"Lies are one of the ways I approach Corruption.

As I've told you before, Aph Ros — I can't guarantee which of my words contain lies. Everything is for you to judge.

The Void era is rife with opportunity. But not everyone can find opportunity in its tide.

I walk for my Master — discovering and sharing opportunities. Whether one can seize them depends not on luck, but on alignment with Void!

So I can't give you the answer. Because Void itself has no answer."

These words sounded utterly meaningless — at least to Hong Lin, Cheng Shi seemed to have wasted a lot of breath saying nothing.

But to Aph Ros, the implications were entirely different. He read Cheng Shi's true meaning: the lies were a two-way filter.

Those who wished to approach Void needed to find truth within his lies. Those who couldn't would only lose themselves deeper in deception, drifting ever further from truth.

Aph Ros didn't want to be lost. Nor did He want to lose the truth. So after a moment, He reverted to His Corruption nature, fully yielded to His own desire, and chose to...

Step back.

It was as if He'd stood at Void's door and knocked. Hearing only endless echoing from an empty room beyond, He decisively retreated one step — preventing Himself from stumbling into Void's abyss.

Clearly, compared to Aph Ros's personal obsession, catching the Void era's train held too little allure.

He firmly believed that after the Void era ended, another would follow — an infinite succession of eras. There was no need to rush into another gamble now.

He'd learned from the Existence era's lesson: going all-in only turned you into a prisoner. So He wisely declined the wager that Yu Xi had laid out for Him.

But declining to approach Void didn't mean He couldn't continue cooperating with Cheng Shi. Their "trade" could clearly go on. He could still learn about this era's "truth" through Cheng Shi's mouth, and Cheng Shi could still uncover the history-buried past through Him.

Only the depth of content exchanged would probably never again touch either side's core interests.

So Aph Ros sat up elegantly. First, He nodded respectfully to Hong Lin:

"My apologies — rather than the uncertain title of heir, I'd prefer to address you as Lady Frazor.

Please forgive my presumption. As a member of Life myself, I cannot desecrate Her before Prosperity's status is confirmed."

Then He turned to Cheng Shi with a radiant smile:

"When I'm not the one speaking in riddles, I despise all riddlers.

So tell me, my brother — what brings you and the distinguished Lady Frazor here today?"

Hearing this, Cheng Shi knew Aph Ros had pulled back. He wanted to keep the cooperative relationship at the level of "trust between brothers" — no deeper faith alignment. But that was fine. At least transactions could proceed with clear consciences.

So he smiled just as brightly and replied:

"You respect Them more than I expected. But there's no need for such caution. Prosperity is already in the past.

As you can see, this Frazor — saved by Death — successfully reclaimed some things that should have belonged to Her. However, She was absent for too long. So long that Prosperity's assimilation cost Her many memories, and She's forgotten much about past eras.

So — you know how it goes — another intelligence exchange. Or rather, an exchange of past and present. This is something we'd both welcome, isn't it?"

Aph Ros furrowed His brow at Hong Lin. Meeting her scrutinizing gaze, He asked in puzzlement:

"I'm curious. When you say 'Prosperity is in the past'... does that mean what I think it means?"

She fell?

A true god... fell?

Enough for... this Lady Frazor to inherit Her divine name?

No — I don't think 'inherit' is quite right either, but I can't articulate what it actually is.

Could you elaborate, my brother?

I'm thinking — if this is real, something this monumental probably can't stay hidden from the universe for long."

Cheng Shi shook his head with a wry smile:

"It's real, and I can elaborate. But there's one thing you got wrong.

I've told you about the players. In the Void era, the Convention uses a game to restrict all players, making it nearly impossible to break through the rules and access information about Them — unless some deity decides to tell them personally.

So Prosperity's fall could theoretically stay hidden for a long time.

Yes — Prosperity did fall.

You needn't probe further, Aph Ros.

Even if I keep bringing you living players from the present, you'd have a hard time learning about Prosperity's fall from them.

Because they don't have the clearance or the channels to know such things.

However, I can tell you everything. And this won't count as part of our intelligence exchange.

This is my — a Void liar's — greatest show of sincerity toward a friend stranded in the past."

The moment Cheng Shi finished, Aph Ros couldn't contain Himself. He spun around — chair and all — and right there, under Hong Lin's watchful gaze, transformed from a decent-looking noble gentleman into a stunningly beautiful noblewoman.

Her eyes toward Cheng Shi burned with ever-greater intensity. Under Hong Lin's gaze, the fire was somewhat restrained — yet the admiration radiating from her was simply impossible to conceal.

"..."

Hong Lin raised an eyebrow, casting a teasing look at Cheng Shi.

Cheng Shi shrank his neck in embarrassment, not daring to meet Big Cat's eyes at all.

He cleared his throat and, with utmost seriousness, recounted Prosperity's self-destruction. Of course, the reasons were omitted, the outcome unknown — he simply spent ample time and lavish prose describing the awe-inspiring spectacle of Prosperity's final moment of death.

Yet even so, from this vivid, detailed description, Aph Ros felt the sheer shock of a true god's fall.

"She found Her will."

Aph Ros's voice took on a wistful edge. After all, no matter what, He too was a member of Life.

He sighed and continued:

"So the distinguished Lady Frazor ascended because of... Void's support?"

Indeed — Your Benefactor has the ability to distort reality. Fabricating an identity isn't strange.

The question is: would Life's other two gods agree?

Facing the hostility of Descent's three, would They really agree to elevate a Herald who isn't all that powerful to that divine throne?

But all of that is beside the point. This is the Void era, after all. I've already witnessed the era's rulers freely rewriting the past once.

What I'm more curious about, my brother, is this Convention you just mentioned...

What is it?"

...

Chapter 567: The Last King of Decay Vultures — Yu Go

"!!??"

Aph Ros didn't know about the Convention?

Cheng Shi was dumbstruck. But in a flash, he realized: the Convention's signing had also occurred during the Void era!

So prior to that — after all those eras and epochs — the gods had never thought to establish a Convention protecting divine authority?

Weren't They afraid of losing Their authority?

Or had the gods simply never considered this possibility before Void descended?

No — at the very least, Truth and Folly were smart enough. They could surely have anticipated what Void anticipated.

But from Cheng Shi's understanding, the Convention wasn't designed as a downward defense — it was an upward one. In other words, before the Void era, didn't They fear \*Him?

'What?'

'So it was Void that brought the fear?'

'Could the Fun God have been the one who shattered the gods' unspoken silence and single-handedly pushed the Convention into existence?'

'That's absurd.'

'Can a Convention truly be a contract led by a liar?'

'It can. It absolutely can — as long as the Fun God packaged the contract well enough, He could definitely sell it!'

'And the gods currently despising the Fun God? Could that be precisely because He screwed Them over with the Convention?'

Cheng Shi's brain was smoking from the strain. He'd thought of a chaotic mess of things, and his emotions became impossibly complex.

'Great — I haven't even figured things out on my own end, and now I'm dealing with a Herald who's never heard of the Convention.'

'Feels like I came here today to patch holes. My mouth's going dry from all the lying.'

'How am I supposed to explain this?'

Cheng Shi frowned slightly, his mind racing. In the blink of an eye, he'd composed a script.

"The Convention concerns the gods. I can't say too much. I can only tell you that its purpose is to protect all divine authority from being lost."

He finished with a meaningful smile.

Aph Ros was exceedingly sharp. The moment He heard this, He immediately grasped the crucial implication. His expression shifted violently — pupils contracting, entire body tensing.

He could never have imagined the gods had become wary of Him. In His view, They should all want to approach Him.

Aph Ros drew a sharp breath. Staring at Cheng Shi in disbelief, He asked gravely:

"Birth and Decay... are they also under the Convention's protection?"

Cheng Shi didn't hide it. He nodded.

He remembered Aph Ros once saying that Birth's will was similar to Decay's. At the time, he hadn't understood. Now it was clear: Birth was also among the "Approach Faction." What Aph Ros had meant by "similar will" was probably the will to draw closer to \*Him!

So the entire Life path was indeed, just as the Fun God said, deeply reverent toward the Origin. But then — why did the lord on the Bone Throne stay so close to the Fun God?

No — the real question was: why did the Fun God keep gravitating toward that lord?

Was He trying to recruit Death into the "Fear Faction"?

Not impossible.

At this thought, Cheng Shi furrowed his brow again.

Interestingly, as the conversation deepened, all three people at the table furrowed their brows simultaneously.

Cheng Shi was mulling things over. Aph Ros was clearly recalibrating His worldview. And Hong Lin... was growing impatient. She felt the conversation was dragging on too long.

She could see Cheng Shi was laying emotional groundwork to manipulate the other party. But this style didn't suit her temperament. Even when it came to manipulation, she preferred getting straight to the point — just like when she'd outright declared herself as the new Prosperity.

So she studied the two for a moment, cleared her throat, interrupted their ruminations, and spoke with a snicker:

"Can't say this, can't ask that. I didn't come here to play riddles. This is too much wasted time, 'friends.'

Let's speed things up. Exchange what can be exchanged."

Both Cheng Shi and Aph Ros were momentarily taken aback by Hong Lin's bluntness. Seeing this thoroughly impatient Frazor accelerate the pace, Aph Ros laughed heartily:

"I can feel desire flowing, Lady Frazor. A pleasant exchange should be exactly like this.

Since my brother has already answered one of my questions, tell me — what do you want to know?"

"Anything goes?" Hong Lin raised an eyebrow.

"Anything."

"Tell me about Yu Go. In my limited memories, his shadow appears briefly. But... Prosperity's assimilation made me forget much.

Now that I've reclaimed my rightful place, I naturally intend to properly cleanse these filthy faiths while He's still weak."

"?"

That statement lit up question marks above both people present.

Cheng Shi was curious about who this Yu Go was that prompted Hong Lin to raise such a question in this setting. Aph Ros was more interested in... what she meant by "while He's still weak."

'Who's weak?'

'Decay?'

'Prosperity just fell. As its opposing faith, shouldn't Decay be reaping the harvest right now? Why would He be weak?'

'But if "He" referred to a different god... that was even more impossible. Yu Go was Decay's Herald — a servant god of Descent — with no connection to any other god.'

"Lady Frazor, I'm curious — the 'He' you're referring to wouldn't happen to be... Decay, would it?"

Hong Lin cast a casual sidelong glance at Aph Ros: "Does that count as the second question?"

'Pfft—'

Cheng Shi nearly burst out laughing. 'Big Cat got sharper!'

No — Big Cat had always been sharp. Especially in face-to-face dealings.

It was just that other people's sharpness came from endless mental calculations, while hers came from confidence. The confidence of her fists.

Aph Ros was also taken aback. He studied Hong Lin with interest, seeming to get a read on this new Prosperity's temperament. Honestly, compared to Cheng Shi's mysteriousness, He found this Frazor's directness far more appealing.

So He laughed heartily, spun back into male form, and bowed with utmost seriousness:

"Of course it counts. But before you answer that question, allow me to help restore some of your memories regarding this Last King of Decay Vultures.

Yu Go was the emperor of a human empire. His past was far from glorious.

When the tide of Decay swept across the land, his ancestors led a host of believers to establish a dynasty devoted to Decay worship. But Decay was merciless in those days. So when Oblivion arrived during that era, he betrayed his Benefactor and chose survival."

"?"

'Isn't this story a little too familiar?'

Cheng Shi blinked, looking at Aph Ros in surprise: "I once asked you about Decay and mentioned encountering a kingdom like this. Don't tell me the king from that empire I encountered was Yu Go?"

Aph Ros smiled:

"Honestly, during the Descent era, countless Decay-worshipping empires had similar problems. So hearing you encountered one wasn't surprising — there were far too many.

As for whether Yu Go is actually the king you met...

Hmm, let me think. I recall his ancestors named their empire... Rosna?

My brother — judging by your expression, it seems you really did run into him?

What — you didn't meet Him?"

'Meet Him my ass — he ran faster than a rabbit! By the time I opened my eyes, he'd taken the entire court with him!'

'And someone like this can become a Herald?'

"..."

But in fairness, if Rosna's emperor truly was a Decay Herald, then the Herald density in that last trial was absurdly high. Three Heralds in a single trial?

No — counting himself, that was four!

Hong Lin clearly hadn't expected the trial Cheng Shi described to have taken place in Yu Go's empire. She recalled his account, harbored some doubt about whether Yu Go's behavior matched Herald caliber, but didn't speak up. She simply raised an eyebrow and waited for what came next.

"The Descent era ended, and He received no notice. The Civilization era began — history merely repeated itself. The Chaos era descended, and He still found no mercy..."

Until the Existence era arrived. He finally earned Decay's favor.

Yes — He and I both took that fateful step during the Existence era.

By then, Decay had gradually grown more merciful. So in that era's Descent epoch, the Decay kingdom at last experienced its golden age. Under a true god's blessing, Yu Go finally found the courage to stand against the followers of Oblivion.

But the tide of eras cannot be resisted. Despite their desperate resistance, His kingdom was ultimately annihilated by Oblivion's faithful.

Yet Decay pitied his devotion — fighting to the last man, refusing to retreat. So He bestowed His mercy.

An emperor whose body had been gnawed by countless decay vultures before death was elevated to become His Herald. And He granted him the divine name: Last King of Decay Vultures.

Thus, the last surviving Decay follower on the Land of Hope — as his faith stood on the verge of extinction — embraced divine greatness and became a servant god of Descent.

Distinguished Lady Frazor, are you satisfied with these recovered memories?

Truthfully, these are things anyone could tell you. You simply happened to ask me first in your search for answers. By that measure, I'm the one who got the bargain."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi chuckled to himself.

'People who think they've come out ahead don't always have. But those who stay quiet? They definitely scored big.'

Who was really profiting remained to be seen. But Hong Lin clearly had plans regarding this Yu Go. She furrowed her brow and asked: "Where is He now?"

"If that's your second question, I'd suggest picking a different one. I'm merely a prisoner. I have a rough grasp of the past, but I know nothing of the present.

Since we've completed one round of exchange, may I continue with my earlier question?"

Aph Ros still wanted to know what had happened to Decay.

Hong Lin chuckled softly, glancing sidelong at Cheng Shi. Seeing that he didn't interject, she curved her lips and answered playfully:

"Naturally. In truth, nothing catastrophic happened to Him. He merely replicated what old Prosperity once did."

"?" Aph Ros's brow furrowed. "What do you mean?"

"He self-destructed. Not His life — but His... faith."

...

Chapter 568: Huh? Thundering Was One of [Order]'s People?

Foolish Game of the Gods

Big Cat's voice was clear and wild. She carefully chose her words as she repeated everything Cheng Shi had shared with her over the phone, laying out every detail of what had happened with [Decay].

When Cheng Shi heard her deliver it all in that imperious, confident manner, he wanted nothing more than to stand up and give her a round of applause.

Who said Big Cat was dumb!?

She was sharp as a tack!

She'd clearly seen through the dynamics at this table and was beginning to fit in with the Destined Ones, learning to play the persuasion game.

She just had a more direct style.

And her goal was to make Aph Ros believe she was a freshly minted [Prosperity] heir — still trying to establish her authority, missing many memories, and conveniently in need of help!

She'd "exposed" her inexperience while simultaneously displaying her "divinity." By anchoring this image in Aph Ros's mind, once she earned Its trust, all her subsequent interactions with the dual Envoy would flow with exceptional harmony.

Because only this way would Aph Ros neither clam up out of reverence for the status that came with a true god's authority, nor look down too much on a clueless deity who'd just inherited power and knew nothing about Them.

What Hong Lin described were Cheng Shi's latest insights into [Decay] — as well as the shift in [Decay]'s will following [Prosperity]'s self-destruction. For Aph Ros, trapped in the past, all of this was refreshingly new!

It undeniably brought the Envoy up to speed on the gods' latest developments and informed It that even in the era of [Void], those seated upon divine thrones — both individually and in their relationships with one another — had been undergoing dramatic change.

After listening, Aph Ros regarded Hong Lin with a new glimmer of genuine respect. In Its view, only someone who'd perceived the will of the gods was truly worthy of sitting at Their level.

For now, this so-called [Prosperity] heir had at least demonstrated satisfactory understanding and observation of her rival path.

Hong Lin had spoken at length. As she reached the end, she picked up the wine glass before her and glanced at Cheng Shi from the corner of her eye, raising it slightly — her expression seemingly saying, 'I'll give you the honor of wrapping things up.'

But Cheng Shi read the truth instantly: Big Cat had... run out of material.

He stifled a laugh, eyes teasing, but maintained a perfectly serious facade as he swiftly picked up the thread:

"So — you can probably see it now. Our current stance toward [Decay] is... contradictory.

Out of reverence for [Prosperity]'s will, we should capitalize on [Decay]'s self-destructive tendencies and spread [Prosperity] across [Descent].

But doing so would actually be fulfilling Its wish.

As for what that wish is — Aph Ros, I believe you already know.

So I'm curious: if [Decay] achieves Its wish, would something significant happen?

My Benefactor refused to comment, so I can only come to you — looking for clues."

Aph Ros's expression turned grave the instant It heard this.

"I am indeed aware of Its will, which is precisely why I'm puzzled that It would sign some sort of defensive Convention. That's deeply contradictory.

Also, my brother — you seem to have forgotten my warning. You would do well to stay away from [It].

I know your real question isn't about [Decay] — it's about [It]. But...

When even the sovereign of the [Void] era refuses to mention something, we need to seriously consider whether we should know about it at all.

Not all curiosity leads to answers. If your Benefactor hasn't cautioned you, then I, as your brother, must warn you again...

Do not try to approach, and do not try to understand [It]."

[It]?

Hong Lin furrowed her brow. She could clearly sense that the [It] in Aph Ros's mouth didn't seem to refer to any of the sixteen gods upon the divine thrones.

A boundless curiosity surged within her, and every time the Envoy uttered that word, she felt a faint, primal tremor ripple through the depths of her soul.

It wasn't an instinctive reaction. It felt more like an emotion emanating from her authority.

The Vitality authority seemed to resonate with that "[It]."

Cheng Shi had no real desire to dig deeper into Origin — especially with Big Cat present, someone who'd never even heard of Origin. The reason he'd steered the conversation here was to pivot toward a different topic.

[It] was an excellent hook. At the very least, every one of Them could be connected to [It].

So Cheng Shi spoke with equal solemnity:

"Rest easy. I'm not learning about these things to get closer to [It]. I simply want to understand Their thinking, and then prepare whatever contingencies I can before this era ends.

You said it yourself — when an era ends, [It] will inevitably appear. And what the end of the [Void] era will bring — neither of us has any idea.

Don't be so certain, Aph Ros. Think about the Convention. If They were as certain as you, the Convention wouldn't exist.

So — and forgive the irreverence — I need to make some extra preparations on behalf of [Void]. To guard against..."

Cheng Shi didn't finish the sentence — didn't say who he wanted to guard against. But even the implication startled Aph Ros badly. The Envoy shook Its head with a grave expression:

"I can't tell whether you're deceiving me. The stench of lies on you is overwhelming — it never fades.

I can't push my brother into another abyss. Besides, I truly have limited knowledge of [It]...

I believe that what I know should be no secret to someone of your standing as a fellow Envoy. Once you reclaim the Mask, you'll know everything.

But I still advise you — if you want to live to see the next era, keep your head down and don't do anything foolish."

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow and seized the opening:

"Live to see the next era?"

So I was right. The gods who were obliterated in the past all ceased to exist because they tried to understand [It].

That does line up with what I discovered while searching for memories.

But I'd still like to ask: before I came into existence, how many of Them were there in this universe? Gods like Thundering."

"Thundering?"

Aph Ros froze for a moment, as if remembering something.

"[Order]'s Executioner?"

Why bring It up so suddenly?

Is It dead?"

"?" Cheng Shi was stunned as well — because the sheer volume of information packed into those few words was staggering.

[Death] had once told him that Thundering was killed by [Order]. So why was Aph Ros now linking Thundering to [Order] in a completely different way?

Thundering was one of [Order]'s people?

Hold on — a god... working for another god?

Huh?

'So It was already holding down a job even when It was alive.'

At this thought, Cheng Shi surreptitiously squeezed the Death Fun Ring beneath the table, his expression becoming wonderfully complex.

"Yes. It's dead. Killed by [Order] during the first God War."

"What!?" Aph Ros's pupils contracted. "The first God War? There's been a God War in this era?"

"!!!"

There had been no God War before [Void]!?

Cheng Shi was shocked — far more so than Aph Ros. But he knew too little about the God War to let this thread extend further, so he quickly added:

"That's right. My limited memories hold a vague impression of this God War, but the specifics of what happened — I'm still searching for the truth myself.

I only stumbled upon scattered fragments of Thundering's divinity along the way, which is why I asked.

If so, let's count that as my second question. Tell me about Them, Aph Ros — the gods who never claimed one of the sixteen divine thrones."

...

Chapter 569: Those Who Never Ascended the Divine Thrones...

"Nothing much to say. Just the old tale of victors and vanquished.

You've experienced the era I lived in. You should know something about the heretical god cults that once flourished in Dolgod."

Aph Ros's opening line dragged Cheng Shi's thoughts back to that utterly chaotic Life epoch.

Indeed — Cheng Shi was familiar with heretical gods. He'd even impersonated one of their devotees alongside Zhang Jizu.

"The Land of Hope was never the gods' birthplace. Every single one of Them came from the distant stars.

When enough people on this continent believed in Them, They would turn Their gaze upon it. And when that faith crossed a threshold They found interesting, a god would descend.

That is the reason for Their arrival."

Aph Ros seemed to sink into the complex emotions of reminiscence. He stared vacantly at the center of the long table, eyes unfocused, slowly narrating.

Cheng Shi and Hong Lin both unconsciously tensed. Their hearts were caught between giddy excitement and nervous trepidation as they listened intently, afraid to miss a single word.

"So at first, there was no fixed number of divine thrones. However many descended, that's how many thrones there were.

But not all of Them truly bestowed gifts or offered visible protection to Their followers. Only those whose faith was most concentrated — whose believers were most numerous — would genuinely bless the mortals below. So in pursuit of divine glory, the so-called tides of faith arose.

I've always believed that faith doesn't begin with piety. Rather, the flow of desire is what gives faith its piety.

Precisely because I grasped this truth, I became His follower in the second era."

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow. 'That does align with what's known about epoch development and era succession. Mortals pursuing divine glory was natural — especially in ages of ignorance, where serving at a god's side was probably the lifelong aspiration of every mortal.'

"These gods with massive followings were previously called orthodox gods or true gods.

Those with scarce, unevenly devout believers — who granted almost nothing, or whose divine gifts were practically curses — remained shrouded in mystery and unknown. The fear this generated couldn't sustain missionary work, and They never took the stage of world faith. Such beings were called heretical gods or wild gods by mortals.

But regardless of orthodox or heretical, true or wild — They were all gods. All of Them, exalted beings above.

Except... not all of Them received... \*His validation."

"???"

Cheng Shi's gaze sharpened. 'The Origin again?'

'Right — \*He created everything, so naturally He's connected to all of Them. But what does "validation" mean, exactly?'

He didn't dare ask, fearing he'd break Aph Ros's train of thought. He chose to keep listening in silence.

"In the earliest first era, both true and wild gods coexisted in harmony.

But when the era ended — aside from Life — every other god... vanished.

Fortunately, in the second era, They returned. Only this time, They could no longer wrestle authority from Life.

Yet authority didn't belong solely to Life. Several more of Them reached the pinnacle of faith in the second era. And when that era ended, They... formed Descent."

"!!!"

'What does he mean, "formed" Descent?'

'The three gods of the Descent path were assembled?'

'Aren't They supposed to be the natural product of era evolution? Could there be other combinations for the Descent path beyond natural evolution?'

'Who assembled Them?'

'The Origin!'

'It was the Origin!'

The question had barely surfaced in his mind before Cheng Shi found the answer himself. Everything about Them traced back to Him pulling strings from "behind the scenes." But "assembling" — that didn't sound like behind-the-scenes influence. It sounded like He stepped directly onto the stage!

Linking this to Aph Ros's earlier claim that the Origin appeared at the end of every era...

'\*He appears at the conclusion of each era... and validates the gods that emerged during it?'

'The Fun God's words about "bestowing divine names and delivering all authority" — that's what He meant!'

'What?!'

'So the truth behind the universe's gods is that a bunch of gods are all waiting for their era to end, hoping to compete for a handful of spots from the Origin's hand?'

'What kind of plot development is this — competitive job placement?!'

'So the current sixteen true gods are basically the winners of a divine hiring process, and the Origin is the HR department issuing "permanent positions?'"

'Holy crap — where even am I?'

'The world's ending, players are worshipping gods, and now you're telling me the gods are basically taking civil service exams?!'

'But the Void era hasn't ended yet. How did Deceit and Fate get their positions so early?'

Cheng Shi was stupefied. He blinked in utter bewilderment, brain reduced to mush. He glanced at Hong Lin with a conflicted expression, only to find Big Cat equally shell-shocked. Their eyes met — both registering the same shock and suspicion — before they each tucked away their thoughts, masked their expressions, and said nothing.

"But things changed in the third era.

Order descended. Before His followers had even triggered a tide of faith, He arrived bearing supreme authority.

He decreed oracles, watched over civilization's development, slaughtered countless heretical gods who disrupted order, and... granted the obedient wild gods a 'position' — a position subordinate to Order.

Your Thundering was one of them.

Though I should clarify: the 'slaughter' here doesn't refer to god wars. The heretical gods simply bowed their necks to the blade out of fear.

After that — whether Thundering, or the Blazing Sun, or any of the others — under Order's witness, They became pieces of the cosmic puzzle guarding Order.

Yet even with Order's recognition, They couldn't survive the era's end.

So when Chaos began, Order sought Them out once more. Only by then, some gods no longer trusted Order.

Take the Blazing Sun. He insisted that Order had never fulfilled His promise. So He abandoned His own oath and plunged into Chaos's embrace, becoming His Herald... the Wrath of Abomination.

Then came the era when Existence descended. They arrived bearing authority, just as Order had. By this point, rifts had already formed among the gods. But under the mediating hand of the era's rulers, everyone managed a fragile peace.

Until... until you, my brother, told me that in the current era, a god war broke out!

So — why did They start the god war? And what was its outcome?"

Aph Ros's eyes burned like torches, fixed unblinkingly on Cheng Shi, demanding an answer.

Cheng Shi smiled bitterly:

"If I had already recovered my memories by now, you'd absolutely know the answer today — it's not even a secret.

But as things stand, all I can say is: I don't remember why They started the god war. I only know that after it ended, the Convention protected sixteen divine thrones. As for the other Them...

They're probably waiting for the next era's revenge.

If there is one."

...

Chapter 570: Crafting a Puppet

The terrace fell abruptly silent. Even the surrounding servants withdrew quietly, leaving only three people with very different expressions furrowing their brows in thought at the long table.

Cheng Shi was thinking. According to Aph Ros's account, gods like Thundering were the ones who should truly be called servant gods of a given Path. At least They genuinely possessed independent authority and had once served under a true god.

Most importantly, after an era's collapse, They could start over — receiving believers' devotion and descending anew.

By contrast, the current so-called Heralds were more like true gods' dependents. They were protected by true gods, retained their memories, and then resumed carrying out their Benefactors' will when the era began again. It looked a lot like being a high-level worker spreading the true gods' will — like... himself.

'So if you round up, I'm a Herald.'

'Mm. Reasonable.'

"..."

Cheng Shi was suddenly amused by his own thought, and laughed out loud. The other two noticed and both turned to look at him curiously.

"My brother — what crossed your mind now?"

Cheng Shi quickly shook his head: "Nothing. I just felt my answer to you was too rough to count as a proper intelligence exchange. Aph Ros, you can ask one more question."

Aph Ros smiled in surprise. He studied Cheng Shi thoughtfully, then nodded:

"Generosity is a virtue.

As it happens, I have another doubt I'd like you to help me with. I'd originally convinced myself to believe your lie. But when I sensed the same lying aura on Lady Frazor today, I couldn't help my curiosity. Let me ask:

This 'lost memories' you speak of — have you truly lost your memories?"

"!"

That question made Hong Lin tense. She appeared to be watching Aph Ros, but her peripheral vision was already silently screaming for help from Cheng Shi.

Then again, Big Cat had seen her share of grand occasions. Ever since sitting in on the Assembly of Gods Convention with her eyes closed, she'd gained enough confidence to look certain beings beneath the gods squarely in the eye. So she didn't reveal any major cracks.

Cheng Shi was the same. He'd been dancing on the knife's edge of lies for so long that he was thoroughly seasoned. Hearing Aph Ros's question, he briefly read the Herald's expression and attitude, then pulled out a faintly enigmatic smile and said nothing.

Because he could see it: Aph Ros seemed to already have an answer in mind.

Sure enough — because of Cheng Shi's "non-response," Aph Ros suddenly burst into laughter. Though the laugh was laced with teasing, He still managed to maintain His good-brother persona in front of Hong Lin.

"Did I guess correctly?"

Though I don't know how Lady Frazor, who inherited Prosperity's authority, came to be affected — as I suspected, you haven't truly lost your memories.

Especially you, my brother. Lord Yu Xi.

Perhaps your mask really did shatter. But that wasn't the true cause of your memory loss.

I hadn't thought of any of this originally. But after learning more and more about Void's major events through you, it suddenly hit me: Void is influencing the universe in some pattern I can't discern.

And influencing the universe means They are 'eroding' Existence!

So — Memory tampered with your memories, didn't He?

He's using this method to resist Void's invasion. Slowing down the speed at which Void's servant gods spread Void.

Heh — am I right, my brother?"

"..."

"..."

'I thought you were holding a pair of jokers. Turns out you threw a pair of threes.'

'Right! Absolutely right, bro!'

'Can't beat that!'

'As long as you can convince yourself, everything you say is right. Besides, no matter what you say, the fact that everything I say is a lie — that much is definitely true.'

'So I'll keep talking my talk, you'll keep believing your beliefs, and we won't disturb each other. This relationship is absolutely harmonious!'

But seeing Aph Ros so confident, Cheng Shi's performer instinct kicked in.

A flash of embarrassment crossed his eyes — gone in an instant. He parted his lips as if about to respond, then quickly shut his mouth. He pursed his lips, pretended not to hear, and casually averted his gaze — as though trying to hide his flustered state.

These subtle micro-expressions all screamed that he was desperately trying to save face. And the harder he tried, the more Aph Ros felt that this brother of His wasn't as mysterious as He'd imagined. At the very least, he still had emotions, still cared about dignity.

'Gussed it!'

Aph Ros smiled.

But being a good brother, He naturally didn't rub it in further. He simply chuckled softly, turned to Hong Lin, and changed the subject:

"Lady Frazor, forgive my boldness — sensing emotions is like a sixth sense to me. I can't shut it off. So I can roughly guess that you didn't come here purely to search for 'memories.' You seem to have... other business.

Thinking it over, the only thing here that could interest you — before we'd ever met — would be the Decay follower my brother left behind.

I don't know much about Yu Go's affairs. But this Decay believer... is at your disposal.

Of course, if you have any special requirements, I'm sure both Aph Ros and Go Lis have the means to assist when it comes to punishing 'blasphemers.'"

Having harvested considerable era intelligence, Aph Ros finally began extending goodwill. This was an excellent signal for both Cheng Shi and Hong Lin — it meant the objective Cheng Shi had been pushing toward had finally come to fruition.

'Big Cat's intelligence channel — secured!'

Hong Lin raised an eyebrow and accepted openly. She made no secret of her purpose: to eliminate Decay from this world. As for whether her methods might help Decay draw closer to \*Him...

She figured, at least until Prosperity fully overwhelmed Decay, probably not.

"I still lack some followers. Though the ones I have are devout, prosperous people can't do decayed work. So that Decay follower is still useful to me.

You're right — he's indeed part of why I came."

Since Cheng Shi hadn't objected, it meant they'd had their eyes on this unfortunate soul for a while. Aph Ros nodded and casually waved a hand. A team of servants dragged Yu Mu — still bound within Go Lis's resentment — onto the terrace.

Under His influence, Yu Mu's consciousness was far from returned.

Right now, he was like a lamb awaiting slaughter — on the chopping block of three "Them." He didn't have a shred of strength to resist. He didn't even have the thought to resist.

This dusk hunter probably never imagined that the Prisoner's single "Old Bow" at the Mediocre Person Society gathering would become the last sunset song he'd ever hear.

Hong Lin saw the body arrive. A peculiar gleam flashed in her eyes. She immediately produced a sheet of faintly cyan bark from her spatial storage and pressed it onto Yu Mu's body with a smile.

Cheng Shi looked on curiously. He was about to ask what it was when Aph Ros spoke up beside him, watching the show with relish:

"The Firm Tree Contract!"

"What's that?"

"A servant contract that grants its target hardened bark-skin. Its greatest power isn't the permanent defensive ability it bestows — it's that the contract doesn't require the other party's consent!"

It's a parasitic, coercive contract. While it reshapes the target's body, it simultaneously colonizes their soul.

Rather than calling it a contract, it's more like an instrument of punishment.

The parasitized individual loses self-awareness and submits to the contract holder — becoming a mindless tree servant that only follows orders."

The moment Aph Ros finished speaking, the cyan bark had already begun slowly merging into Yu Mu's body. The old man's deeply wrinkled, decay-ravaged skin was suddenly smoothed away by a surge of Prosperity's power. Every crease and flake of dead skin transformed into rough, bark-like hardened hide. His tightly shut eyes slowly opened, and within those unfocused pupils, a flash of emerald light gleamed.

'Hiss—'

Witnessing this, Cheng Shi drew a sharp breath.

"How is this different from a desire puppet?" He turned to Big Cat and asked.

"Tree servants have no desires of their own. They're far more obedient. Most importantly, they can be treated as inanimate objects and stored in... you know where."

Hong Lin, seeing that a few sentences of conversation had genuinely turned the Decay faction's number-two player into her puppet, wore an expression that was equal parts wistful and excited.

"Not a bad haul this time. Not only gained an extra hand, but also seem to have met a... new friend?"

The Prosperity identity isn't suited for too much contact with Descent. But occasionally, I can also be Frazor.

A simple... Void wanderer."

She smiled at Aph Ros — only to see a knowing gleam flash in His eyes, a look that said 'just as I expected.' Then He elegantly raised His wine glass:

"It's my honor to become Lady Frazor's friend.

So, my brother — what are we waiting for? Let us toast... to a new friend?"

"Cheers!"

Hong Lin tilted her head back and drained her cup in one bold gulp.

Cheng Shi, by contrast, merely raised his glass alongside the other two — then set it right back down.

Not only that, after his hand dropped below the table, he even wiped it on his pants a few times.

He didn't mind Aph Ros's exasperated stare or Big Cat's bewildered look in the slightest. He simply smiled brilliantly, lips curved.

'You don't drink things of unknown origin — even if a friend gives it to you. That's a lesson learned from watching others.'

'After all, this world is far too complicated. Better to play it safe.'

...