

## The Gods 611

Chapter 611: You... Defeated Order?

"Was what?"

Those upturned eyes refused to let the Clown off the hook, pursuing the question with gleeful relish.

Cheng Shi sighed, wearing the expression of someone being forced to perform: "It was truth-and-lies, Benefactor. I said truth-and-lies."

"Truth-and-lies?"

I've heard of truth. I've heard of lies. But I've never heard of this 'truth-and-lies.' What on earth is that?"

Cheng Shi collected himself, straightened his posture, and spoke with absolute solemnity:

"Truth-and-lies means:

When you question my praise as a lie, it becomes the truth.

And when you question it as truth and attempt to use that truth to define my words as blasphemy, it becomes a lie.

So truth and falsehood don't lie with me—they lie with you!

After all, you are the one who blurs truth and falsehood across this entire universe. Calling truth a lie, or denouncing a lie as truth—it all hinges on a single thought of yours."

The instant those words fell, every wind in the Void softened.

The spirals in those eyes twirled with a rhythmic pulse, and even the brilliant star-points blinked in and out in sync.

Deceit laughed—satisfied, unreserved.

"Very good. I shouldn't have let it leave. I should have kept it here to hear what you just said—so it would understand that every oathbreaking has its reasons."

Cheng Shi's spine went cold. His eyes widened in alarm.

'Who? Fate?'

He blinked dryly, a flash of panic crossing his gaze: "The Benefactor truly left? It's not standing behind me again, is it?"

He even spun around for a quick check.

Nobody. Good.

But his words and his manner made the eyes before him curl into a half-amused smirk: "Oh? The Clown is bold enough to shoo away his Benefactor right at the start of an audience?"

"..." 'No—that Benefactor is not this Benefactor! Benefactor!'

'Juggling two Benefactors is way too stressful.'

Cheng Shi's expression crumbled. He shook his head frantically: "Not you—of course not you."

"Ahh, I see. Since it's not me, then naturally, it must be Fate.

So you don't want to see it.

Mmm, noted. Next time I see it, I'll be sure to pass along your annoyance."

"..."

'Is this really happening? Is there no end?'

'So Clowns deserve to be bullied?'

'A Clown's life isn't a life?!'

'Benefactor, if you're going to keep scaring me like this, just stab me and get it over with!'

Cheng Shi was numb. He wanted to curse but didn't dare—didn't even dare let the thought form. So, left with nothing but bitter silence and resignation, he lay flat under the mockery. It wasn't until the eyes, finding no more resistance from the listless Clown, sighed with visible boredom:

"As I thought—once a Clown loses its spark, it becomes boring.

Say what you came to say. I'm on a schedule."

"?"

'What do you mean "say what I came to say"? Benefactor, you dragged me here! I—'

'Wait!'

'It's giving me a chance to ask questions?!'

Cheng Shi froze, then his eyes lit up. Eagerly lifting his head, his very first question went straight to what mattered most—faith fusion.

"Benefactor, haven't I already fused with Fate? How could I also fuse with Chaos?"

Was this all your doing?"

"No. Next."

"..."

'That's way too brief! No to what—no, it wasn't your doing?'

'Heh—as if I'd believe that.'

'Wait... not believing... Deceit... Is it speaking in reverse?'

Cheng Shi paused with sudden insight. He studied those eyes—upturned with mischief, yet radiating impatience—thought hard for a second, then immediately nodded and asked:

"Why Chaos specifically?"

"It copied me by concealing the essence. Been annoyed at it for ages. Next."

'Concealing the essence? Annoyed?'

'Wait—aren't you and Chaos on the same side?'

'I need to hear this one in reverse too, right?!'

Cheng Shi's eyebrow twitched. Before he could think too deeply, he fired off another question: "Then... will the Fate within me also fuse with yet another faith?"

"You care a lot about Fate, do you?" Those playful eyes suddenly went cold, their gaze dripping with derision.

"Next, next!" Cheng Shi panicked, rushing to steal Deceit's line before it could say more. "Benefactor, I barely survived playing Order's subordinate inside Chaos. I almost didn't make it back to see you. Do you know about that?"

"What—are you blaming me for not rescuing you?"

"Uh... would it kill you to consider it?" Cheng Shi muttered under his breath, then immediately looked up and shook his head wildly. "Of course not! I was just wondering—Chaos... what happened to it?"

"It went chaotic. Isn't that obvious?"

Can the Clown ask questions with some substance? Next!"

'?'

'If I had substance, would I still be a Clown?'

'You'd be the Clown instead!'

The thought had barely flickered through his mind when Deceit's gaze turned playful. The inscrutable gleam in those eyes seemed to say: 'Go ahead. Try it.'

"..."

'Nope. Scared. Very scared.'

Cheng Shi bowed his head again. After a few seconds' deliberation, he asked what he considered a genuinely high-caliber question.

"You helped Chaos trap Order, didn't you?"

This question made Deceit's eyes brighten. It was finally interested.

"Interesting. Why do you ask that?"

The reaction confirmed there was a story here. Cheng Shi's expression sharpened and he immediately explained:

"Because you're the one who pushed me toward Chaos!

I was once summoned by Chaos. At first, it wasn't chaotic at all—it was perfectly communicative, even seemed to favor me... Wait, please don't strike—I harbor no disloyalty toward Void, Benefactor! I'm simply describing the situation accurately.

But now it's completely abandoned itself and is single-mindedly playing the role of Order.

I know the gods can transcend all temporal dimensions, so I'm not fixated on when it started the performance. What puzzles me is: why would a perfectly functional deity suddenly become like this?

Just because it's Chaos?

No—I don't think so.

I've walked those Chaos Steps. I know the chaos that constitutes it far exceeds what mortal minds can achieve. So there must have been some external force influencing it, pushing it toward that decision.

Before faith fusion, I couldn't guess who. But once I fused...

Benefactor, only when there's profit to be had does someone become the mastermind... the driving force behind the scenes!

So I reasoned: even if you weren't the 'ringleader,' you'd have to be at least an 'accomplice.' To advance faith fusion, you got involved.

But there's still one question: why would Chaos give me benefits?

Naturally, it was for your sake. Even if it was for the sake of the Ultraman identity, that's still your face. But a one-sided olive branch doesn't build a sturdy 'friendship,' so I'm inclined to believe you also contributed to this 'grand performance.'

Which brings me to my earlier question. So—you really did get involved, didn't you?

You... defeated Order?"

Chapter 612: Benefactor, Which Path Should I Walk?

Cheng Shi's final question was pure concept-swapping flattery.

Because even if he'd guessed right about everything, Chaos and Deceit had jointly defeated Order—and moreover, the truth was they'd only beaten a fragment of Order.

Indeed, Cheng Shi had guessed correctly. He'd nailed the motive, the process, and the outcome. But...

He'd only gotten those six words right. Everything else... was wrong.

Deceit had indeed, for certain purposes, joined forces with Chaos to eliminate Obsession (Order), then goaded Chaos into ascending Order's Divine Throne to play the role of Order. And naturally, the empty throne left behind by Chaos's departure... Deceit had conveniently claimed.

Originally, it had only been warming the vacant seat. But as Chaos progressively shed its past and stripped away its identity, Deceit gradually picked up the authority that rightfully belonged to that throne.

Until just now—until Cheng Shi had, by sheer coincidence, gained Chaos's acknowledgment and absorbed its final remnant of authority. With that, Deceit had collected the last puzzle piece of Chaos's full authority through Cheng Shi.

So in this drama where everyone was playing a role, the biggest winner wasn't the self-proclaimed-Order Chaos, nor the faith-fusing Cheng Shi—it was the authority-acquiring Deceit!

What it hadn't anticipated was that the faith fusion—which was supposed to be bestowed by Deceit after reclaiming all the authority—had been snatched early by Cheng Shi through his wild improvisation, directly from the true Chaos.

In that standoff between man and god, the single best decision Cheng Shi had made was getting Chaos—the one playing Order—to acknowledge him as a follower of Chaos.

Because until the complete severance, acting was still just acting. Chaos had always been Chaos. With its acknowledgment, the fusion was stripped of any Deceit coloring—rendered seamless.

Cheng Shi stared expectantly, waiting for an answer. But his Benefactor didn't bite on the flattery. Those eyes gave a lazy roll and grinned:

"Don't go running your mouth, or I'll sue you for slander.

I have always been law-abiding. I respect the Convention and I respect Order. How could I possibly do such universally condemned things?

I think you've been spending too much time near that exhausted Benefactor of yours. You caught its disease—always trying to pin labels on people. Crooked labels, no less.

But given your ignorance, I'll pardon you this time.

Now—express your gratitude."

'Gratitude? Gratitude my a—!'

'That was the biggest non-answer in history. You clearly did the deed, pocketed the gains, and now you're wiping your mouth and denying everything!'

'Lying to strangers is one thing, but lying to your own loyal, hardworking follower? Do you have no conscience?'

"..." A flash of exasperation crossed Cheng Shi's eyes. He sighed, sensing he wouldn't be getting real answers today.

Deceit also seemed to feel the audience had run long enough. It chuckled, about to wrap things up—when Cheng Shi spoke again:

"Benefactor, what should I do?"

This wasn't the first time he'd asked. He'd posed the same question during their icebreaker session, only to be thoroughly mocked for it.

But Cheng Shi still wanted to know what he could do for this Benefactor who shared his fear. Everything today clearly had a mastermind, and that mastermind was one hundred percent the entity before him. So since it had a plan, why not share a hint? Let the worker find his direction and boost efficiency.

This had always nagged at Cheng Shi. And facing the question again, Deceit finally didn't mock him—though its response remained characteristically dismissive:

"The legs are on your body. The road is yours to walk. Why do you keep running to me? I don't know."

"Fine—even if you don't know, you must have a general direction. How to escape the fear, how to achieve our goals. Even without a concrete plan, you've surely had a passing thought.

Share that thought with your most devout follower, and he might be able to do... quite a lot for you.

Take faith fusion, for example. Since Void's dual faith can be fused separately through me, who is your next fusion target?

Do you need me to make early contact?"

This was what Cheng Shi truly wanted to ask. He'd long been calculating that after the second faith, there might be a third—and he'd even cataloged every god that might bestow it. If the Fun God confirmed it now, Cheng Shi could not only play a version ahead of everyone else but lead by a step in two versions at once!

And this was one of his real objectives!

He wasn't just working hard for his "esteemed" Benefactor. He was also seizing advantages for himself while conveniently expressing devotion.

This kind of wordplay might fool others, but Cheng Shi stood before Deceit—the god in the universe who understood lies and appearances better than any other. It saw through Cheng Shi's thoughts instantly but chose not to expose them. Grinning as always, it said:

"Recklessly rushing ahead is inadvisable. That's wisdom your humans have passed down through ten thousand years of history.

I've told you—the legs are yours. How you walk is your business."

"But your guidance would let me walk faster and more accurately."

"Guidance is useful. But once guided, 'drawing near' ceases to be genuine closeness—it becomes 'approaching with intent.'

As a con artist, you should understand: when your purpose is too obvious, your trajectory too directed, your emotions too charged, and your eagerness too palpable... you can't fool anyone.

And if you can't even fool people—how will you fool... the gods?"

Deceit's words detonated like thunder beside Cheng Shi's ears, shaking him to the core.

He suddenly understood what "the road is yours to walk" truly meant. It wasn't that the god refused to guide him—it was that with Deceit's guidance, any "closeness" on his part would carry visible intent, letting the gods he approached smell Deceit on him!

In other words, Deceit could only operate backstage. The one standing onstage would forever be the Clown!

'So that's how it is. But...'

Then Cheng Shi's expression froze. 'But Benefactor, doesn't this performance feel like a Deceit Clown performing from Fate's script?'

'The road ahead is uncertain. The process is mysterious. Even the destination is unknown. Only when the final curtain falls will the Clown and the audience simultaneously learn the ending...'

'If that's not Fate, what is?!'

'Wait—are you on the wrong channel?'

Those eyes seemed to read Cheng Shi's bewilderment. They smirked:

"Feels familiar, doesn't it? Good—it should.

Why else would I have signed that Void Agreement with it? Simply to let the Clown's journey go a little smoother.

Using Deceit's identity to walk Fate's road—that is the true Void.

While you don't need to think about such lofty things, just focus on what's beneath your feet. Aiming too high while standing too low is a good way to twist an ankle.

If you want to see further, you'd need..."

Those eyes made a full revolution, their corners tilting even higher.

"You'd need the fear in your heart to exceed mine.

Right—today's audience has been most unpleasant. Mmm, now get lost."

Without waiting for Cheng Shi's reaction, the eyes blinked once and blew a gust of Void-wind that sent him tumbling out of the Void.

When a thoroughly dazed Cheng Shi opened his eyes again, he found himself back in the trial. Beside him stood the Dragon King with furrowed brows and Big Cat with darting eyes.

"I'm back?" He blinked, patted his arm, and only relaxed upon feeling solid, real sensation.

'Looks like I'm back.'

The Dragon King and Hong Lin both turned to him. Hong Lin, unable to contain her curiosity, asked outright: "Li—the Dragon King says Fate summoned you again. Is that true?"

Cheng Shi's eyebrow rose at her words. He looked at Li Jingming, who met his gaze with a quiet smile.

'How chivalrous of the Dragon King. He's even covering for me in front of Big Cat—not a word about Deceit. Seems this Joker already feels some loyalty!'

'And Big Cat's gotten savvier too—she knows not to say "Benefactor" to conceal her own faith fusion.'

'Everyone's growing. Only—none of you are growing as fast as me.'

Cheng Shi smiled faintly. He nodded first, then shook his head:

"It's complicated, but it's unrelated to this trial. Remember—whatever you've recalled, don't speculate until you've synced memories with me. And don't spread anything.

Order... has had a minor issue. But nothing catastrophic."

"?" Hong Lin was perplexed. The Dragon King looked contemplative.

Just as Cheng Shi was about to elaborate, Chernosly—who'd been dreaming—and the unconscious La Quis both woke simultaneously.

They'd heard his last remark. Slowly, they turned to face this blasphemer of Order.

Chernosly, still reeling from Chaos's influence, protested weakly: "The great Order would never have any problems. It must be the Grand Tribunal that has the problem."

His mentor La Quis, however, wore an expression of defeat: "Just as I suspected. It is no longer itself... Then who... are you?"

"Us?" Cheng Shi smiled. He snapped his fingers at Chernosly. "We're the people who came to help you find Order again."

Chapter 613: Memory Self-Consistent, Time Closed Loop, Destiny Predetermined...

Cheng Shi's original plan was to clear Chernosly's head first. After all, trial time was running low—they couldn't keep wasting it on cross-channel conversations.

But what he hadn't anticipated was that when he snapped his fingers and activated the Order Horn, not only did Chernosly regain clarity, but even the Order chains binding him dissolved at the sound.

The suddenly liberated First-Class Inquisitor froze in disbelief. He raised his hands and stared at his unshackled limbs, his mind buzzing with static.

Memories from his period of chaos flooded in like a tidal wave, swallowing him whole. His freshly recovered awareness wavered under the assault of jumbled recollections—but he soon regained composure, recalled everything that had happened in the Supreme Court, and understood that the supreme deity who had always protected this nation had, just as his teacher said, truly gone wrong.

"Teacher... I..." Chernosly's eyes reddened instantly—whether mourning the disappearance of his faith or fearing the uncertain road ahead. He crawled on his knees to his teacher's side, clutching the weakened La Quis, and wept bitterly: "Teacher, we've lost Order. We've lost justice..."

The scene stunned everyone present.

Big Cat was stunned that Cheng Shi's single finger snap had unlocked the Order shackles that she herself hadn't been able to smash. She stared hard at his right hand, a spark of fire in her gaze. She was wondering whether her fellow Destined One had powered up again—and if so, whether they could finally find a good opportunity to spar.

The Dragon King's gaze went sharp. He'd just parted ways with Cheng Shi, their Void conversation still echoing in his head. Now, watching Cheng Shi return from the Void and suddenly display Order-like power he hadn't shown before...

Not that Li Jingming could be blamed for the assumption. Though he hadn't sensed any surge of Order's force, the only thing that should be able to break Order's shackles was Order's own power.

So he was thinking: had this Joker who sang praises to Void somehow, during the chaos he himself had no memory of, acquired some Order-related benefit?

Considering Cheng Shi's claim that Order hadn't suffered any major problem—and coupling it with the earlier chaos—could it be that Order had offered Deceit some hush money to cover up the truth?

But he was technically half a Deceit follower too. How come none of the benefits had trickled down?

The Dragon King frowned, recalling the moment Cheng Shi had been pulled away before they left the Void. He guessed that was when Order's payoff had flowed through to Cheng Shi via the god!

But what exactly was this payoff? Li Jingming couldn't figure it out.

Cheng Shi was far more shocked than either of them—because he was the only one who knew what kind of faith talent this so-called "Order Horn" actually was.

'Bro—how is it that a Chaos talent can break Order shackles? So when you imprisoned these "blasphemers," the Order chains binding them were all simulated with Chaos power?!

'Pulling this stunt in the place where Order's authority should be most absolute—you really weren't afraid of getting caught!'

'Or did Chaos actually need its own power continually eroding these prisoners, keeping them permanently mired in mental chaos, ensuring they stayed obedient little blasphemy convicts?'

Cheng Shi couldn't guess what Chaos had been thinking. He only knew that destiny seemed to be closing its loop.

A prisoner who was never meant to be released had been brought out of Prologue Holy Mountain by Big Cat—and now had his bonds undone by Cheng Shi on the spot.

He looked at the wailing Inquisitor with a complicated expression. And as he kept watching, it got even more complicated.

Because Chernosly had literally wailed his teacher La Quis into unconsciousness.

Someone whose shackles hadn't been removed would trigger "Order's" punishment upon outside interference. So the instant Chernosly had embraced his teacher, the elderly Grand Justice's eyes rolled back and he passed out.

"..."

'What even is happening.'

Cheng Shi shook his head with a sigh and snapped his fingers twice more, freeing the other two prisoners.

Seeing him shatter Order's bindings so effortlessly, Li Jingming could no longer contain his curiosity: "What exactly happened to Order?"

"Long story. Trial's almost out of time—let's talk on the phone later.

But Dragon King, this is one spectacular memory. If you want to hear it, you'd better have your trade goods ready."

At this, Li Jingming's face darkened: "You and I—"

"Hey, hey, hey—hold it. Even blood brothers settle accounts clearly. This stuff involves the gods—it's no small matter. Even if we're close, we're not close enough for freebies."

As he spoke, Cheng Shi gave the Dragon King a pointed look, then gave Big Cat one too.

Li Jingming's eyebrow rose. His peripheral vision caught Big Cat, and he suddenly realized the Prosperity Chosen didn't know about the Jokers organization. Cheng Shi was being deliberately vague to keep things separate.

Big Cat likewise raised an eyebrow. Her peripheral vision caught the Dragon King—she too realized Cheng Shi hadn't yet brought the Dragon King into their inner circle. After all, intelligence sharing among Destined Ones had no price tag.

Their sideways glances collided briefly before both looked away, saying nothing more. But inwardly, a thought was forming simultaneously:

'Bringing Dragon King Li (Hong Lin) into the fold... doesn't seem unacceptable.'

Cheng Shi had no idea what sparks were firing between the two Chosen's brains. The trial was about to end, and he urgently needed to confirm one thing: whether everything they'd experienced in this trial would become new history—and whose hand was behind Memory's self-consistency and Time's closed loop.

As things stood, the only one capable of this was the Chosen of Memory: the Dragon King, Li Jingming.

But the problem was, after spending time with Li Jingming, Cheng Shi had noted the man's approach to memory clearly favored exploration over alteration. The Dragon King himself didn't seem to have any particular stake in rewriting this memory into new history.

So he wondered if he was overthinking it. Perhaps this trial wasn't as mystical as he'd feared.

But out of caution, he probed anyway.

"Dragon King, you haven't tampered with our current memories, right?"

The question made Li Jingming frown in surprise: "Why?"

"!!!"

That single "why" sent Cheng Shi's heart slamming against his ribs. He immediately realized the problem was indeed the Dragon King—the man had actually altered history!

His initial reaction was alarm, which quickly morphed into the realization that panicking was pointless. He'd known from the start this would be an Existence drama. He just hadn't expected that despite his precautions, he'd failed to protect against the person right beside him.

The irony of his hindsight made him laugh bitterly. He glared at the Dragon King and lectured:

"History was sitting there perfectly fine. Why change it for no reason?"

You don't strike me as the type who mucks around with historical records. What's the point of altering your Benefactor's collection?

You're a memory traveler, not a historian. There's absolutely no reason to write yourself into history. I can't think of a single motive—unless your Benefactor gave you some cryptic divine decree?

Li Jingming, I consider you a brother. Don't screw me over."

"?" Li Jingming looked baffled. His expression turned peculiar as he fired back: "Don't overestimate your own importance. Yes, my change to history involves you, but it has nothing to do with any of that."

Cheng Shi froze: "What do you mean?"

"What do I mean?"

How about you first explain why you vanished the instant the trial started?

I'm passionate about collecting memories, and I already recognized you before I even committed you to memory. I'd seen plenty of sketches of you, Cheng Shi.

When I noticed you and Hong Lin disappeared right after the descent, of course I wanted to know if there was any chance of running into you again—to ask where you'd gone.

Otherwise, did you think it was pure luck that the moment you finished your business and came back, you just happened to bump into me?"

"..." 'Luck? How was anything about this lucky?'

Cheng Shi's face was a forest of black lines. The Dragon King continued:

"No—you're wrong.

Changing history was never my intent. It was merely a method to locate you.

Return of the Past. I used Return of the Past.

I searched through layer upon layer of folded memories for traces of you and Big Cat, until finally, in one particular re-manifestation, I found you coming back.

So..."

Li Jingming glanced at his watch and sighed: "Before the trial ends, the Return of the Past will shatter first. That's when history truly gets rewritten. Though I suspect history was always predetermined—our changes are ultimately inconsequential."

The moment he finished, everyone heard a crash—the true past broke apart. The overwritten present was inscribed into new history at that very instant, becoming the familiar past everyone would know.

And so Cheng Shi watched, slack-jawed, as he became the "hero" in the Land of Hope's historical record who rescued the "blasphemer" Chernosly from the Howling Iron Prison.

'So Li Jingming hadn't deliberately tampered with history. He'd received no divine decree. It was simply his hunger for memory that drove him to use Return of the Past again and again before encountering them—and eventually, in one iteration, history shifted and he found them.'

'Damn...'

'There's no escaping it. Absolutely no escaping it!'

Cheng Shi trembled from head to toe, scalp prickling, goosebumps scattering across the floor.

He stood in awe of Existence's mystique and marveled at Void's enigma. He didn't know how many gods were contending behind the scenes of this Chaos-history drama, but he understood one thing clearly:

Time would always close its loop—just as Fate would always arrive at its destiny.

Chapter 614: Trial Complete—Big Cat's Gift

The trial was about to end. In its final moments, Cheng Shi surveyed the scene and suddenly understood what this trial's title meant.

No Judgment Required!

'What an apt name!'

Indeed—in this absurd chapter of history, no one had actually committed a crime. Naturally, no judgment was needed.

The Grand Justice had rightly questioned his own faith. The Grand Investigator had "voluntarily confessed" and uncovered the truth. Chernosly hadn't blasphemed the real Order. Even Moxius hadn't betrayed his senior as the historical records claimed.

No one was guilty—yet everyone bore the stigma of guilt.

Katouting, the city most brilliantly illuminated by Order, had produced the most chaotic and twisted events imaginable. How absurd!

And yet it all made perfect sense. Because Order had never been Order—it was the unspeakable Chaos. What shone upon Katouting had never been the radiance of Order, but the murky glow of Chaos.

But... was Chaos wrong?

No. Also no!

It had pleased itself with the most extreme chaos while doing its best to preserve Order's domain. Though those in power all knew the truth, the common people basking in Order's light—how could they know of such filthy, sordid things?

As long as the laws remained, as long as justice endured—could dirt unseen truly be called dirt?

'Look—in this city that sings praises to Order, order is flourishing.'

Big Cat and the Dragon King had clearly reached the same conclusion. Both churned with silent thoughts, expressions shifting.

Cheng Shi smiled suddenly. He lifted his gaze to the horizon, watching the dawn break through the mist and rise above the skyline, piercing through layers of haze to illuminate the three-tiered Prologue Holy Mountain behind them. A cold smirk touched his lips.

'Today will be another day of Order.'

'What more is there to say? Praise be to Order.'

He withdrew his gaze and looked at Chernosly one last time—but this time, he had no intention of offering further guidance. He'd guessed that no matter what he did, Fate would steer this First-Class Inquisitor toward Chaos.

But the irony was: the one actually trying to get close to Chaos was Deceit.

'Void... is truly absurd.'

He shook his head with a wry smile. Hidden from the others, he quietly touched the shadow beneath his feet. Time slowly froze in that moment. The dawn's glow draped perfectly over the entire Prologue Holy Mountain.

And the trial finally reached its last second. Every player's vision gradually faded to black.

[Wish Trial (No Judgment Required — Prosperity) Challenge Successful]

[Evaluating performance and calculating rewards...]

[Player: Cheng Shi — Performance Rating: S]

[Item obtained: Nature Homecoming Contract (A) x1]

[Item obtained: Tree Spirit Prayer Contract (A) x1]

[Item obtained: Mini Gavel Toy (C) x1]

[Item obtained: Thorn Weeping Rite (SS) x1]

[Road to Ascension: +20]

[Ladder of Ascent: +3]

[Current Road to Ascension score: 2,224 — Global Rank: 370,224]

[Current Ladder of Ascent score: 178 — Path Rank: 33]

[Trial complete. Exiting...]

...

When all three players vanished from Chernosly's sight, he stood dazed, staring at where they'd been—at the morning light draping the Prologue Holy Mountain. His mind was a whirlpool of confusion.

Just then, the Grand Investigator who'd never woken finally regained consciousness after being freed from her Order shackles. The instant her eyes opened, she cried out in anguish: "La Quis, no!"

Chernosly jumped. He spun around—and saw that his teacher, who'd been lying motionless in his arms moments ago, had somehow picked up a sharp stone shard and was driving it straight at his own throat.

His expression was one of absolute resolve. But his eyes—they were so dim, so despairing.

Chernosly was stunned. Perhaps the chaos still rattling his brain, perhaps the dreamlike quality of everything around him—in the first instant of witnessing this, he didn't rush to save his teacher. Instead, he furrowed his brow, as if trying to process what he was seeing.

And that single moment of distraction—a spray of hot blood spurted with a hiss, splattering across his face.

Vivid, stinging red trickled down, framing his already crimson eyes. In the amber glow of dawn, the droplets transformed this Order's Son into something resembling a demon from hell.

He snapped awake. He grabbed his teacher's hand, tried to speak, but his lips moved soundlessly—only choked sobs escaped. His entire body shook. Terror crashed over his soul like a tsunami. In his eyes, what had died in his arms wasn't an old man—it was the very thing the Grand Tribunal would never possess again:

Justice.

La Quis died just like that. He hadn't wanted to leave a single word.

Lid Yara was likewise shaken by his decisiveness. But as the Grand Investigator, she was far steadier than Chernosly. She opened her mouth as if to comfort him, then reconsidered.

She turned to follow the morning light toward Katouting—that scale-like city suspended between three mountains—and sighed:

"Chernosly. Leave. Leave this place. You no longer belong here... and here no longer belongs to you."

Chernosly collapsed over his teacher's body, weeping silently. In that moment, the bewildered terror deepened with her words.

"Grief and mourning can trap a person. Faith and devotion can trap a person. Since everything is a siege, since the world is full of snares... then cast them away.

Cast away the sorrow. Abandon the devotion. Become someone new.

Chernosly—your teacher would be proud of your rebirth."

He sat up, choking on tears. His eyes were hollow as he looked at the former Grand Investigator—once one of the supreme six—and whispered: "Then... what about you... Lady Lid Yara... will you..."

"Me?" She shook her head with a bitter smile, then her expression shifted from shadow to steel. She fixed her gaze on Katouting, on those rooftops and walls gleaming under "Order's" light, and spoke with precise, resolute weight:

"I'm different from your teacher. I'm more stubborn than him. So before I die—I must see the Order I believe in with my own eyes!"

"Order... but it's already gone..."

"It doesn't matter. I need it to live on in certain people's hearts..."

...

The Void. Infinite darkness above the Grand Tribunal.

This was the Grand Tribunal's other notorious prison—apart from the Howling Iron Prison. Only its fame was unknown to mortals. The gods, however, were all quite familiar with it.

Held here was no ordinary blasphemer, but an entity that had been probing the edges of Civilization—swimming naked through the depths of Chaos.

The Wrath of Abomination!

This Chaos Envoy, imprisoned here by Order and forced to serve the Grand Tribunal's Elemental Judges on command, had long since lost count of the directionless years that had passed.

And today would be the most bewildering day in all its comings and goings.

Because a pair of cold eyes had silently opened before it at some unknown point, watching it with an expression of supreme indifference—joyless, sorrowless—posing a question it couldn't begin to comprehend:

"Blazing Sun—why did you seduce my follower into impersonating you? Were you hoping to manipulate outside perceptions and escape Order's cage?"

"?"

The Wrath of Abomination was utterly lost. But under the influence of Chaos, its confusion still manifested as fury. So it blazed up within its prison, expressing its bewilderment.

But the next second, when it recognized who stood before it—under the gaze of this era's sovereign—it chose to extinguish itself.

"Speak."

"ROAR (I)..."

"Chaos is unruly, with scarcely any Order. An audience with a true god, and you dare show fury and disrespect? On behalf of Order, I sentence you once more for the crime of blasphemy!"

"???"

BOOM—

A... well, one couldn't really call it a battle. An interrogation. An interrogation erupted in the Void.

That day, meteor fire rain fell across every trial. Players panicked, thinking the apocalypse had come—only to discover the fiery rain was merely an illusion. No heat, no damage.

It didn't resemble the legendary fury of the Wrath of Abomination at all. It looked more like its...

Hmm—indelicate question, but: can gods cry?

Chapter 615: The Prosperity Contracts and the Thorn Weeping Rite

Bright moon high overhead, stars turning in the sky.

Cheng Shi was back. After an intensely compressed trial, he'd returned to his rooftop.

Though the Prosperity trial had lasted only a single day, that day had felt as long as several combined. He'd shuttled between the Void, reality, history, and dreams—navigating among Void, Existence, Civilization, and Chaos. He'd met countless people, spoken countless words, and even had audiences with several gods!

Who would have imagined all of that fitting into twenty-four hours?

Cheng Shi hadn't slept for an entire day and night. The instant the trial ended, crushing exhaustion slammed into him. His legs buckled and he collapsed flat on the ground.

If he hadn't remembered his original purpose in the trial's final moments—frantically switching his faith to claim Big Cat's gift—he'd have forgotten this was supposed to be the "simplest" trial they'd both prayed for together.

'So where exactly was the "simple" part?'

The simplest moment of the entire trial was probably when Big Cat transformed into a bear and punched open the Howling Iron Prison's gate. Indeed—brute force was always the most efficient problem-solving method.

Unfortunately, even as Today's Hero, he still didn't have Big Cat's ability to practically steamroll a trial. And as his contact with the gods deepened, raw power alone was becoming less and less sufficient under their watchful gazes.

Still, having more firepower was always better. At least it could eliminate the small hassles.

With that thought, Cheng Shi smiled and pulled from his inventory the trial's biggest prize—the Prosperity item Big Cat had promised him to boost his mental energy.

The Thorn Weeping Rite. SS-rank quasi-divine artifact. A thorned whip covered in barbs...

When he realized he was gripping a whip whose handle was also covered in barbs, blood already seeping from his palm, the smile froze on his face.

'Excuse me—you call this a buff item?'

'A buff for what? Bloodletting to improve circulation?'

Cheng Shi's lip twitched as he began studying it in detail.

Thorn Weeping Rite (SS): Quasi-divine artifact. A whip-punishment used by rainforest tribes faithful to Prosperity to prove their devotion. The target suffers both physical and mental damage.

Special Effect — Wailing Is Worship: If the target sings a hymn of Prosperity while being whipped, the strike inflicts no mental damage.

Special Effect — Prosperity Brings Rebirth: When a lash causes only physical damage, a small amount of the target's mental energy is restored.

"..."

Reading the effects, Cheng Shi's jaw dropped. His entire composure unraveled.

He even began questioning whether this had truly come from a rainforest tribe. This looked far more like a Decay creation!

Harm yourself, praise your Benefactor, gain power... How was this not one hundred percent Decay?

'Prosperity is dead, and it's still pulling plot twists?'

So if it worked as described, the usage would be: when his mental energy was depleted, he'd pull out the whip, flog himself, while simultaneously singing praises to Prosperity, then gradually recover mental energy through the bloody mess—and finally use the recovered energy to heal the injuries he'd just self-inflicted?

'Self-sufficient. A free beating for nothing, basically.'

'This doesn't even look like a Decay creation anymore. This is a pure Clown prop!'

'How does this deserve an SS rating?'

'Big Cat, oh Big Cat—you may not know I'm the Clown, but you've certainly got the Clown role down pat for me!'

Cheng Shi was speechless. He looked at the whip, then gripped it tighter—letting the barbs dig deeper into his palm. When the blood was flowing freely, he suddenly let out a holler:

"PRAISE PROSPERITY!"

When this decidedly undevout praise landed, he felt a subtle shift in his fully charged mental energy!

It was like a brimming reservoir suddenly gaining a few extra cubic meters of water. But the surplus didn't overflow the dam—it stacked above the surface in some miraculous state, becoming an additional reserve.

"!!!"

In that single instant, Cheng Shi understood why this thing was an SS-rank quasi-divine artifact.

The upper limit!

Its lashes could increase the maximum capacity of mental energy. And it wasn't limited to self-use—it worked on others too. Meaning that with good timing, it could be the ultimate pre-battle team buff!

Cheng Shi shot upright, eyes blazing, and spent nearly the entire night experimenting with the Thorn Weeping Rite's mechanics. After exhaustive testing, he finally mapped out every one of its effects.

The whip didn't actually raise the reservoir's permanent capacity. It was more like excavating a temporary spillway beside the reservoir.

He could keep flogging himself to accumulate mental energy bonuses, but after half an hour at most, any unconsumed surplus would dissipate entirely.

In other words, the buff stacked for a maximum of thirty minutes. Factoring in the wind-up and cooldown of spellcasting plus other time losses, this could roughly double his mental energy capacity under ideal preparation.

What did double mean? It essentially gave a player an entire extra round of output before a fight ended. Peak-level battles never dragged on too long—a few minutes was typically enough to determine victory.

So Big Cat's eye for gear really was exceptional. Whether used for pre-battle preparation or clutch comebacks from a deficit, this item was remarkable.

The only downside: the flogging genuinely hurt.

Besides the Thorn Weeping Rite, Cheng Shi had also received two contracts.

Though both were only A-rank, their utility was fascinating.

The Nature Homecoming Contract let the user temporarily transform into a plant—returning to nature. The plant couldn't move but provided an omnidirectional field of vision within a certain radius.

The Tree Spirit Prayer Contract let the user bond with a tree and share part of its vision.

In simple terms: two recon tools, designed to give players a more covert intelligence advantage in small-scale or sustained engagements.

They seemed a bit niche, but for an information-warfare specialist like Cheng Shi, they were practically dream items.

'Big Cat really gets me. She knows I lack large-scale recon capability, so she hand-delivered these right to my door.'

'If she treats me this sincerely, I should reciprocate. Next time we meet, I might as well tell her my other identity. That way she won't hear it from someone else and come back to interrogate me.'

'Though... what excuse should I use?'

'Right—I'll say I found an opportunity through Lord Yu Xi and then got tricked into the Fun God's service.'

'As fellow Void walkers, I naturally couldn't refuse. And there was no way I could see through Deceit's tricks. So I had no choice but to eat the loss in silence.'

'Hmm. Reasonable. Very reasonable.'

Cheng Shi smiled—genuinely happy.

As for the other trial reward, some Mini Gavel Toy from the Grand Tribunal... he pulled it out, took one look at its squishy texture that couldn't even crack a walnut, and tossed it straight into the warehouse.

"Just a toy. Not even B-rank. Worse than the wood-bird clock the Dragon King gave me."

Speaking of the wood-bird, Cheng Shi remembered Big Cat asking him for a gift.

"..."

'Whatever—I'll save it for Big Cat. Call it a Destined Ones membership gift.'

'Come to think of it, I still haven't collected the Dragon King's entry fee. Wonder if he...'

Right as that thought formed, his phone rang.

He picked up with a peculiar expression. Sure enough—the caller was the very Dragon King he'd just been thinking about.

Li Jingming didn't waste time on pleasantries. He opened with the question that had been burning in him for ages:

"Cheng Shi—what happened inside Chernosly's dream? What went wrong with Order?"

Chapter 616: The Ladder of Ascent for Order and Chaos

Hearing the surprise in the Dragon King's tone, Cheng Shi paused. It seemed Li Jingming had heard other rumblings about Order. So rather than answering immediately, he countered:

"What happened?"

This time, Li Jingming didn't bother with any memory-exchange formalities. He spoke without concealment: "Mo Li. It's Mo Li—he didn't approach War to fuse. He..."

Cheng Shi suddenly guessed the rest. His voice was thick with disbelief: "Broke his oath? He oathbroke?"

Li Jingming's voice hitched. Then his eyes gleamed and his tone heated up: "You guessed it? Then Order really has had a major incident!"

'Indeed—Order had a huge problem. But the bigger question is: can I tell you?'

Regardless of whether he considered Chaos's situation, Deceit's plans absolutely had to be protected. If a Memory follower learned about Deceit's scheme—even if that follower was also technically under Deceit—there would be risks.

'Better not to let the Dragon King know the full truth. But as a fellow Joker—a pre-qualified insider—having him understand some intelligence would undeniably help the Jokers analyze information and assess the situation. So I can't say nothing either.'

'And the Dragon King gave me the lead on the Secret Peeping Ear. I might need his help finding it later. So how much to say, and what to say, requires careful thought.'

After a moment's deliberation, Cheng Shi decided to let a little slip. As for exactly how much—that depended on how much his Benefactor was willing to let him share.

So he organized his words and revealed why Order had been radiating Chaos energy—though he altered certain key details. He changed "Chaos impersonating Order" to "Chaos attempted to seize Order's authority but failed, while Order also overreached in absorbing Chaos's authority and fell into disorder—hence the earlier eruption of Chaos power."

"Order wasn't stable for a while. It would still occasionally display Chaos-like traits. But after relinquishing the last shred of Chaos authority, it... returned to normal."

Nearly everything Cheng Shi said was factually accurate—except the subject was different. Everything else was one hundred percent true.

But Li Jingming still had doubts. He felt Cheng Shi was holding back, because the explanation had completely skipped over Cheng Shi's acquisition of Order's gift.

'That gift probably came from the Fun God. Yet he never mentioned the Fun God at all. So what role did Deceit play in this clash between Order and Chaos?'

Li Jingming didn't keep this suspicion to himself—he asked directly. When Cheng Shi heard the question, he smiled inwardly. 'Finally—time to test the Benefactor's limits. Now, what can I say without getting my mouth sealed by a Void gale like last time?'

After a moment, he tested the waters: "Since you asked, and as a fellow Joker, I'll tell you. But Dragon King, this involves the Fun God. Once you know, keep it to yourself—don't tell a soul."

Li Jingming heard the gravity in Cheng Shi's voice. Rather than feeling excited, his heart clenched—immediately calculating what this information was going to cost him.

But to his surprise, Cheng Shi demanded nothing this time. He simply said:

"I told you—Order discarded the authority it had seized from Chaos. Once authority seized between two opposing faiths is abandoned, anyone else can claim it.

You've heard about the Tower of Logic's Stars Dagger experiment, right? Zangier used exactly this method to steal the gods' authority.

This time, the Fun God did the same.

That's right—our Benefactor took that sliver of Chaos authority. Chaos conceals the essence, which is somewhat similar to Deceit—the surface of Void. So it absorbed the authority with ease.

And the timing was perfect. The seizure actually looked like it helped Order.

So Order, under duress... ahem, you can probably guess how our Benefactor negotiates payment... Order had to 'thank' it by offering certain additional benefits.

That finger snap you saw? Part of its gift. Not a talent—a tool. So I used Order's gift to unlock Order's shackles...

And speaking of which—I'm annoyed, Dragon King! You wrote me into history, and you don't think you owe me compensation?"

Li Jingming mulled over each word and found the story held together—especially the part about Deceit maneuvering between the two and profiting from it. That was so authentic it couldn't be more real.

But regarding Cheng Shi's demand for compensation, Li Jingming laughed and declined:

"Who says I wrote you into history? Can anyone identify you, Cheng Shi, as the one who freed that First-Class Inquisitor?"

"?" Cheng Shi froze. His face darkened. "You don't know? Does Hong—does Hong Lin know?"

"Even if we know, we're friends—we won't go running our mouths. But the rest of the world? History only records that a mysterious figure freed Chernosly. Nobody knows who.

Even if Hong Lin and I told people, they'd just smile and move on. These are inconsequential historical details. No one's going to investigate."

"..." Cheng Shi pursed his lips at this.

'You're not digging deeper because you don't know I'm Ultraman. This time loop doesn't feel significant to you—but for me, the implications are massive.'

'Whatever. Dwelling on what's already happened is pointless.' He sighed and shook his head: "Some people have gotten too clever. Guess I should stop giving away all my secrets in the future. Better to leave some suspense and wait until the price is right."

On the other end, Li Jingming burst into laughter.

"Don't worry—I won't take a memory from you for free. Thank you for filling in the blanks from the last trial, Cheng Shi. You're far more interesting than the rumors suggest.

The Jokers—not bad at all. I'm actually looking forward to this organization. I hope you'll invite me to a gathering soon. I'd love to meet more friends who perform Void's opera onstage.

I'll remember the entry fee. Rest assured, it'll satisfy you.

Anyway, I have a trial to run. Let's leave it here—call anytime."

And with that, the Dragon King hung up. But his dangling mention of the "entry fee" left Cheng Shi's curiosity hanging mid-air. He was about to ask what it was when the line went dead.

Cheng Shi glared at his phone with visible irritation—half-tempted to call right back. But before he could, Big Cat's call came through.

"..."

No choice. He repeated to Big Cat roughly the same version he'd told Li Jingming. Not because he didn't trust Big Cat, but because he didn't want her dragged into unnecessary mires until she possessed the power to contend with the gods.

The Fun God was clearly scheming. The covert power struggles among the gods weren't solely about authority—they involved a certain unseeable, unthinkable entity. So Cheng Shi wasn't comfortable bringing Big Cat into this higher-level game just yet.

After some small talk, Cheng Shi heard from Big Cat about Mo Li's oathbreaking. After hanging up, he kept pondering why the Chosen of Order had so decisively abandoned his faith and gone to War.

'But if he's gone to War, then the Grand Marshal...'

'Wait—Hu Wei is Chaos too! He's not truly War. So now that I've genuinely fused Chaos, can I see Hu Wei's position on the Ladder?'

At this thought, Cheng Shi immediately switched faiths and opened the Ladder of Ascent. First to appear was the Deceit leaderboard—Li Jingming sitting at number one, though the gap to second place had narrowed considerably.

Second wasn't a Memory follower—it was Zhen Xin. This former Deceit Chosen who'd disappeared alongside Hu Xuan had actually climbed a few more points.

'Have they finished their operation? Did they find that Birth Envoy, Lu Xia?'

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, silently adding "call Hu Xuan" to his agenda.

Nothing else on the list had changed. He knew this chart of con artists too well—nothing worth lingering on. So he began investigating whether he could view the Ladder of his second faith.

It didn't take long to discover he could. Though he didn't have an ID on it—he was merely a spectator.

[Ladder of Ascent (Civilization — Order) / (Chaos — Chaos)]

1. Penny (Chaos) — 214
2. No Law No Way (Order) — 208
3. Chaos Rising (Order) — 204
4. Fang Yuan (Order) — 202
5. Shortest Inquisitor (Order) — 201
6. Stalled Thoughts (Chaos) — 200

"..."

'Holy—the needle-threading competition here is just as fierce as Deceit versus Memory.'

Chapter 617: New Intelligence from the Chat Channel

Busy days are fulfilling and fleeting. Before long, it was time for the next special trial.

Only a day had passed since the Grand Tribunal, but Cheng Shi had accomplished quite a bit.

First, he'd called Hu Xuan—but she hadn't answered. Considering she was probably off giving birth to something in another trial, Cheng Shi obediently abandoned any plans to ring the silent baby bell.

'No need. There's no urgency. We'll connect when she's free. Compared to other players, this sister's survival abilities don't require much worrying. Same for her reproductive abilities.'

Then he'd combed through the chat channels he'd missed over the past few days. Faith fusions were clearly accelerating—especially recently, almost erupting. He needed to understand how each faith faction's front-runners were doing.

This wasn't merely to gather intelligence on other players. More importantly, he needed to find clues within these fusions—to analyze which factions the gods had aligned themselves with.

As far as Cheng Shi could tell, there were still only three factions: the Fear Faction, the Neutral Faction, and the Approach Faction. All divisions related to the gods' attitudes toward Origin.

The Approach Faction needed little elaboration. Until someone was confirmed neutral, any god could provisionally be categorized as Approach—especially Prosperity and Decay, who were surely the faction's backbone.

'Shame the backbone has literally become "bones" now. One's body is gone entirely; the other's fixated on rotting.'

Cheng Shi's Benefactor Fate was undeniably Approach as well. Though the reason for wanting to draw near Origin remained unclear, Fate's behavior—particularly disagreeing with the Fun God—confirmed its inclination.

By that logic, Folly and Truth were also likely Approach. At minimum, Folly was—Fate wanted a relationship with it, and Folly lay on Fate's fusion path as Chaos's second god.

Truth's obsession with becoming a "god" was common knowledge among the divine. Whether that ambition stemmed from genuine devotion or something else was uncertain. But Truth's actions were undeniably trending toward that distant entity.

As for the Neutral Faction... honestly, Cheng Shi didn't know much. He'd only heard the term from a certain being upon the Bone Throne.

In purely semantic terms, the only god he could think of was that very entity.

Death sat atop its Divine Throne, entangled with the Fun God yet deliberately keeping distance—a push-pull dynamic that qualified as neutral.

'Other neutrals must exist. That entity had said "the neutral ones," plural—so there were probably quite a few.'

As for the Fear Faction—what more was there to say? Team Fun God—just the one, no question.

Cheng Shi had considered Chaos too. But Order had to be Approach. Aph Ros had said Order was different from other gods—at the dawn of the Civilization era, it had arrived bearing supreme authority. Other gods received their titles at an era's close, but Order was appointed as a true god at the very start.

And Blazing Sun's betrayal stemmed from Order's failure to protect it at the era's end. So Cheng Shi leaned toward this theory:

Order's descent carried Origin's will. Blazing Sun had drawn close to Order to get closer to Origin. But the era's concluding chapter proved Order couldn't change anything—it merely carried that will. So Blazing Sun chose a different way to approach Origin: Chaos.

Viewed this way, Chaos also resembled Approach—because devoting so much effort to impersonating an Approach member didn't seem like something a Fear Faction god would do.

But this was all speculation. As for Chaos's true purpose... perhaps only Chaos itself knew. Well—the Fun God probably knew too.

So far, Cheng Shi's understanding of the gods came entirely from their own mouths. But divine audiences were too rare, too infrequent, and the gods always spoke in half-measures—leaving him still fumbling through the fog.

That was why he wanted to find traces in the real world. Whatever the gods wanted to accomplish would inevitably be reflected in the Faith Game.

But reality proved Cheng Shi had overthought it. Those who didn't know would probably never know. The gods' wills weren't fully understood or propagated at every level.

Though faith fusion was raging among peak players, the sprawling chat channels showed almost nothing about it. Even information like Lin Xi's fusion or Mo Li's oathbreaking was hard to find. The channels were dominated by speculation about the Land of Hope's history and the most publicly known headlines.

So the phrase "common knowledge" was circle-dependent. No matter how hard ordinary players tried, they'd never catch wind of what peak players discussed.

'How similar to the Grand Tribunal in the last trial. Faith and devotion are also flourishing among the players!'

Though he'd found little of personal interest, one piece of information from the Singer chat channel caught his attention.

It was something he'd stumbled upon yesterday afternoon while casually scrolling. A player had randomly asked: their neighbor had been missing for a long time but wasn't dead. Their spatial prayer trials kept failing, and they were worried—did anyone know what was going on?

'Neighbor concern aside—' The word immediately made Cheng Shi think of his own lovestruck War neighbor.

Xie Yang had been missing for ages too. And the symptoms matched exactly—no activity, and their spaces couldn't merge.

'Don't ask how I know they can't merge. I just know.'

Curiosity piqued, Cheng Shi followed the thread closely. Sure enough, the channel always had experts. Before long, another player replied saying the same thing had happened to their neighbor—it had lasted several days, but yesterday the space had suddenly become ownerless and mergeable. So they suggested waiting it out: maybe the neighbor would die in a couple of days.

"..."

'Great advice. But essentially useless.'

What mattered was that the comment drew more people out. Many reported the same phenomenon. Though these few chat messages were still inconspicuous amid the channel's frenzied scroll, the fact that they sparked any discussion at all proved the situation was unusual.

'Xie Yang and many others have all vanished. Could they be trapped in some inescapable trial?'

'No—trials automatically return players upon conclusion. Their situation can't be trial-related. It's more like they're trapped in... reality.'

'Reality... multiple people... trapped... gradually dying...'

'This déjà vu feels an awful lot like attending some gathering and getting snatched for experimentation.'

'Sound familiar, Yu Mu?'

'But if there really were such a large-scale gathering, the heavyweights I've recently met would surely know. Unless... this isn't targeting the high-end bracket—just a low-level gathering?'

'But at this scale, peak players should have caught some wind of it.' After further thought, Cheng Shi decided to ask around.

This time, he didn't make a call. Instead, he pulled out a key—the Death work badge personally delivered by Zhang Jizu!

That's right—he was going to visit Mi Laozhang's cemetery in person. And maybe harvest a few corpses while he was at it, for inventory.

'Sure enough, living next to a War follower long enough is contagious. Always wanting to keep a few corpses at home.'

But this visit wasn't solely for scavenging and intelligence. He also had an important favor to ask of Zhang the Steady. And requesting favors shouldn't be done with a mere phone call—so he'd go in person, to show Mi Laozhang his sincerity.

That evening, he raised the bone-shard key to the empty air and twisted. The key's tip instantly sprouted countless white bones, spreading rapidly until they formed a Bone Gate standing squarely before him.

Chapter 618: Destination—Mi Laozhang's Cemetery

Cheng Shi hesitated. After sensing the exceptionally pure Death aura, he gingerly released the key, then picked up a bamboo pole from beside his feet and prodded the pale-white gate with it, trembling slightly.

It wasn't that he didn't trust Death. Nor was he worried about what lay beyond. He simply feared that Mi Laozhang—his fellow Deceit brother—had rigged the gate to scam him into becoming a real Clown.

And so, Cheng the Steady logged back in.

But as it turned out, being cautious was what made him the real clown. Because there was no trap whatsoever. The instant his bamboo pole touched the Bone Gate—whoosh—his entire body was sucked inside.

When Cheng Shi came to his senses, he discovered he'd been turned into a tiny skull, deposited in the middle of a...

'Hm? Wait—wasn't this supposed to be a cemetery?'

'This isn't a cemetery. This is a mass grave!'

Surveying the desolate landscape around him—like some godforsaken wilderness—Cheng Shi felt a chill. He instinctively tried to hug himself tighter... but couldn't. Skulls don't have arms.

He was stunned. Hopping and bouncing, he jumped up onto a protruding rock—not quite high enough for a proper view—and surveyed the eerie, wind-swept hillside with his jaw clacking open and shut, unable to form words for quite some time.

It was utterly barren. Gravel everywhere, weeds running wild. Under the sickly moonlight, every direction was nothing but wasteland—not a single trace of human construction, let alone the tombstones and cottage Mi Laozhang had mentioned.

After surveying the area, Cheng Shi concluded he was at the very bottom of a long slope. In his current form, if he wanted to hop over the top, it would take all night.

As for going downhill in the other direction...

Not unwilling—unable. His shell was pressed right against an air wall. Death's portal had deposited him in the very corner of Mi Laozhang's property. So there was only one option: scale the summit!

He could already make out faint light beyond the slope. After a moment's thought, he guessed the cemetery lay on the other side—this was probably an abandoned stretch at the cemetery's edge.

'Is this some kind of power move?'

'When you visited my place, I seated you on a chair as grand as a Divine Throne. And when I come to yours, you pull this?!'

'Fine, fine—Mi Laozhang, I'm adding this to my tab!'

The path ahead looked like an extremely grueling journey. But nothing could stop a Hero of Today with dice in hand—oh wait, Today's Hero-Skull.

So he pulled out his Fate dice... then quietly put them back. Instead, he pulled out a megaphone, fiddled with it, and belted into the mic with full lung power:

"Laozhang, Laozhang! Copy if you hear me. Copy if you hear me. Over."

Yes—Today's Hero-Skull had tactically retreated from the field. Why use the jawbone when you could use the brain?

Hopping around was exhausting too. Since he was already at Mi Laozhang's front door, asking the man to come out and meet his guest wasn't unreasonable.

Zhang Jizu's response came much faster than expected. Before the last "over" had even faded, a figure appeared atop the slope.

Squinting through the darkness with eyes that were nearly invisible, he peered cautiously downward. When he spotted a tiny skull bouncing and waving at him, he said with mild surprise:

"Cheng Shi?"

"Look, Laozhang—your front yard is kind of a dump. What is this place? Not a single light. I almost thought I'd come to the wrong address."

Zhang Jizu didn't immediately come down for pickup. Instead, he smiled and nodded from his perch: "You did come to the wrong place. This isn't the cemetery entrance—it's uncleared land set aside for future expansion. I usually use it for entertaining enemies."

'???'

'Enemies?!'

'I treat you like a brother and you treat me like an enemy?!'

'Grudge doubled!'

Cheng Shi was furious. He clattered his jaw and jabbed accusingly: "Then I'd love to know how you entertain friends!"

Zhang Jizu's eyes narrowed with a smile: "Same way. Same place."

"?"

Cheng Shi blinked, not following.

"Until I've confirmed the identity of the intruder, everyone is treated as hostile. Of course, once confirmed as a friend, I'll naturally invite you up. But Cheng Shi, you'll need to wait a bit.

This is a defensive formation I've placed throughout the cemetery. No matter where a space-time fluctuation occurs, it'll be warped and redirected here. It's one of the cemetery's defense mechanisms.

The cemetery is too large. I have to take extra precautions.

But don't worry—give it... let me check, about two more minutes. Once the formation's 'backlash' buff expires, I'll bring you up."

"..."

Cheng Shi was dumbfounded. He'd always thought his rooftop defense strategy was sufficiently cautious—neurotically so, even. But compared to Zhang the Steady, he was hopelessly outclassed.

'With gear like this, he chose to deploy it inside a rest area—a zone already protected by Faith Game rules that blocks outsiders from entering freely.'

'Bro, who exactly are you defending against?! Imaginary enemies?!'

Cheng Shi's expression turned supremely bizarre, his eye sockets nearly warping. He looked at Zhang Jizu irritably: "Let me guess—I'm not the first 'enemy' to be greeted by your formation?"

Zhang Jizu squinted thoughtfully and nodded: "That's correct. Your visit has provided excellent feedback. I think I can refine the setup further."

"..." Cheng Shi swore he only refrained from charging Zhang Jizu a testing fee out of respect for Death itself. "Great. Wonderful. Really something. But Laozhang—what exactly is this 'backlash' buff?"

"Within five minutes of the teleport triggering, this corner of the cemetery locks down. If anyone uses faith power, opposing-faith energy will spontaneously generate and attack the intruder. It's a technique from the Tower of Logic's Master of Traps. Effective—but pricey.

So best not to waste it. Anyway, time's up."

With that, Zhang Jizu strode swiftly down the slope—but halted just before reaching Cheng Shi, keeping his distance.

The sudden stop made Cheng Shi raise a nonexistent eyebrow: "Another mechanism?"

Zhang Jizu's eyes crinkled with a smile: "No more mechanics. I was just guarding against you attacking me out of annoyance. But you didn't.

That's not like you. Hmm—so you came here today because you need a favor?"

"..."

Cheng Shi was numb. He stared at the man before him with dead eyes, feeling for a split second like he was looking at a complete stranger.

'Your Benefactor shouldn't be called Death. It should be called Steady!'

"Stop looking at me like that. If you've got business, say it. You should know the special trial is right around the corner. Unless you want to enter the trial from my place?"

Seeing Cheng Shi frozen in exasperated silence, Zhang Jizu chuckled softly, picked up the little skull, placed it on his shoulder, and began walking toward the cemetery.

Riding on his shoulder, Cheng Shi bounced twice: "I have a feeling you've gotten livelier. Am I imagining things?"

"Have I? I don't feel any different."

"Definitely. The Fun God is already getting to you. I—"

Before he could finish, Cheng Shi cut himself off in stunned silence. Because Zhang Jizu had just crested the slope—and what now filled his vision was row after row of stone-carved tombstones, densely packed and stretching into the distance.

This cemetery was nothing like the minimalist graveyard from Cheng Shi's dream sequence. The style here was flamboyant, especially in the front section—nearly every grave was decorated with miniature courtyard-like ornamentation. Clearly, whoever had commissioned these markers had spent lavishly on the décor.

Beyond that, candles flickered before every tombstone. Their tiny flames swayed in the cold wind but refused to die. Hundreds upon hundreds of candles crisscrossed the grounds, sketching a spectacular vista—the dwelling place of Death's followers.

Gazing at the staggering number of tombstones—far exceeding his estimates—Cheng Shi blurted in astonishment:

"How many people have you planted in this cemetery?!"

'Planted people?'

Zhang Jizu blinked at the novel phrasing, then realized Cheng Shi meant buried. He shook his head with a rueful smile:

"The ones actually buried might be only half—or fewer. The rest are memorial markers I carved for teammates who died in trials."

"You're commemorating their deaths?"

Mi Laozhang! You've finally given me leverage! You've already set foot on Deceit's path, and here you are secretly committing blasphemy in the rest area? Next time I see the Fun God, I'm absolutely filing a complaint."

"..."

Zhang Jizu fell silent. His perpetually squinting eyes betrayed no emotion, but a faint trace of embarrassment crossed his face.

Having finally scored a win, Cheng Shi surveyed the grounds with a swagger. Before long, his gaze snagged on something, and he tapped Squinty's shoulder with a bony foot. Staring at the nearest tombstone, his tone went peculiar once more:

"Wait—Laozhang, you're a serial blasphemer too?"

If I'm reading this right, the word 'Order' carved on this tombstone... refers to the one on the Divine Throne?

Tsk—bold, very bold. Secretly carving tombstones for the gods?

Are you trying to... kill them?"

"..."

"That's pretty interesting, actually. Say—is there one for the Fun God?"

"...?"

## Chapter 619: Mi Laozhang, Don't Make Me Roast You When I'm in Such a Good Mood

There really was one!

When Zhang Jizu brought him to a tombstone engraved with the word "Deceit," Cheng Shi went completely catatonic.

"Laozhang... you can't just assume you're safe because Death protects you. They could still sentence you for blasphemy.

You've got your priorities completely backwards!

Painstakingly cautious in the small things—and straight-up suicidal when it comes to the big picture?

Your talent for trash-talking behind people's backs far outstrips certain others who commit blasphemy to their faces."

Zhang Jizu smiled without dwelling on who this notorious face-to-face blasphemer might be. He continued toward the cemetery's security station, explaining as he walked:

"This is something I recently came to understand."

"?" Cheng Shi looked at him quizzically. "Understand what?"

"The logic of Deceit. Sometimes, telling only half the truth can also be a lie.

Take those sixteen tombstones carved with divine names—they aren't for the gods. They're for their Chosen Ones.

I simply haven't finished carving. So you saw half-completed works.

But you still misunderstood. And I think—that is Deceit."

"..."

'Oh no. The honest man isn't honest anymore.'

Cheng Shi gazed at Zhang Jizu with a complicated expression. He mulled it over for a long time before managing a single sentence: "I still think the honest, squinty-eyed version of you was easier on the eyes."

Zhang Jizu grinned happily, eyes squeezed into slits: "Don't forget—you're the one who led me down this path. I'm simply making the best use of what I've been given, keeping the faith from gathering dust. While you, my friend—you're the real con artist."

"Sigh. My friends are all developing brains. It doesn't feel great. But I like what you said—I'll take it as a compliment."

"...Did you really make this trip just to hear that compliment? Or are you generously helping me test my formation?"

"Can you go back to being the old squinty-eyes?"

"I can put you back where I found you."

"..."

By the time they finished their exchange, they'd arrived at Zhang Jizu's quarters. Compared to the grand cemetery, the living space was rather spartan—though anything was better than a windblown, sun-scorched rooftop.

Zhang Jizu didn't bother opening the door. Instead, he leaped straight onto the roof, set Cheng Shi on the ridge, and spoke again: "So—what do you need help with?"

"You're that certain I'm here to ask a favor?"

"Yes. Otherwise I can't think of a reason you'd come in person instead of just calling.

Besides, you've been unusually well-behaved all evening. I know a skull body can't actually stop your mischief—so the fact that you haven't been pranking me means you need something.

Out with it. If the risk isn't too high, I'll consider it."

Cheng Shi bounced twice on the rooftop and said meaningfully: "And if the risk is high?"

Zhang Jizu's brow twitched at that. His eyes narrowed to a slit: "Related to... the gods?"

'Listen to that!'

'For Mi Laozhang, the only things that qualify as "high risk" involve the gods!'

'As for ordinary trials? Heh—just a question bank for the Chosen of Steady to grind more Steady Points.'

Cheng Shi smiled. No beating around the bush—he went straight to the point: "Not exactly the gods. Just one god. It involves a single deity."

"Which one?" Zhang Jizu's eyes cracked open a fraction wider—clearly intrigued.

"Yu Xi. Deceit's Envoy. A Servant God of Void."

'Yu Xi?'

Zhang Jizu searched his memory and found nothing about this Deceit Envoy. He looked at Cheng Shi with mild surprise: "Deceit has an Envoy?"

"What's that tone? You have a bias against the Fun God?"

"..." Zhang Jizu had no comeback.

"Of course it has an Envoy. And quite an interesting one at that. It was Yu Xi who inspired me—who gave rise to my alternate persona."

"!!!" Zhang Jizu's eyes flew open, their gaze burning into Cheng Shi. His shock was palpable: "You've seen it."

"Obviously. I haven't just seen it—I was tricked by it."

Cheng Shi then recited the same cover story to Squinty. With this, his identity concealment plan was fully closed-loop. Every person who knew about his dual faith had now been corralled into the same information fence. If anyone leaked his faith details later, the insiders would simply smile knowingly—and silently reassure themselves with the "truth" they already believed.

Of course, one other person knew his identity but wasn't part of Cheng Shi's calculations: Zhen Xin.

But based on his current read on Zhen Xin, she was a steady, cooperation-oriented con artist who generally didn't run her mouth. Her sister, on the other hand...

'Even if she talks, who believes a liar?'

With the identity issue squared away, Cheng Shi relayed everything Li Jingming had told him and expressed his hope that Mi Laozhang would accompany him to San Dales. In return, he'd offer equivalent assistance.

Zhang Jizu listened with eyes narrowed to hairline-thin slits, pondering for quite some time. Then he suddenly asked: "You're saying Li Jingming agreed to join the Jokers?"

"?"

Cheng Shi froze. 'Laozhang, you don't care about San Dales or Yu Xi—but the Jokers and Li Jingming?'

"Yes. The Dragon King's intelligence value is immeasurable. Bringing him in was the right call. And I'm a good judge of character—after spending time with him, I can tell he's far more reliable than the rumors suggest.

But we should stay cautious. After all, he's like you—a follower of Deceit. These con artists are never honest!

You're one of the Jokers' founding members, so naturally I'm informing you."

"Founding member... So hearing an organization's name in passing and waiting two days automatically makes someone a 'founding member'?"

Cheng Shi's face darkened: "...Mi Laozhang, don't make me roast you when I'm in such a good mood."

Zhang Jizu shook his head with a chuckle:

"I'm fine with it. But Cheng Shi, I have to ask—what's the actual purpose of this so-called Joker organization?"

You're not planning to drag me into a scam and make me take the fall, are you?"

'?'

Cheng Shi's face crumbled.

'How could you think that about me?!'

'Even if I did briefly consider it, you still shouldn't think that about me!'

'What about friendship? Friends who can't even take the fall for each other—what kind of friendship is that?!'

He bounced on the rooftop twice, fixing empty eye sockets squarely on Squinty:

"Laozhang, let's have a real talk. You live so steadily—but what for?"

"To tend graves."

"...?" Cheng Shi was so annoyed he laughed. "Drop the fake piety act. Death isn't watching this place. I'm baring my heart here—can't you be honest for once?"

Zhang Jizu's lips twitched. His narrowed eyes nodded: "Fine. I'll be honest."

"So what for?"

"To tend graves."

"..."

"Don't rush—I'm serious."

I don't think every person is born with a purpose. I've never known what the meaning of life is. I simply don't want to die.

This world is extraordinary. There's still so much I haven't seen. Once you're dead, you never get to see it."

Cheng Shi felt something off about the phrasing. He studied Squinty with faint suspicion:

"But you don't seem like those people who fanatically pray for trials to explore the unknown.

Exploration and caution have always been antonyms.

Isn't that a contradiction?"

"Not at all. See what you can, when you can. The outside world is risky. Compared to seeing more—staying alive comes first.

As long as you live long enough, the sights will come naturally."

"..."

'Well—can't argue with that...'

Now Cheng Shi truly understood. Mi Laozhang was a simple man at heart. His purpose for living was... to keep living.

'Tsk—how fascinating, though. A person who purely wants to stay alive... has become the Chosen of Death.'

'This kind of absurdity could probably only happen in an era governed by Void.'

Chapter 620: Special Trial (Discrepancy — Time) Activated

"When are you planning to go to San Dales?"

"After the special trial. These specials keep getting harder. I just came out of one—I can't jump straight into another while this exhausted.

I need to be in peak condition to take the special trial's beating. Besides, the end of the world is here—no need to keep grinding nonstop."

Zhang Jizu nodded with a smile: "That's all?"

"?" Cheng Shi bounced. He threw Squinty a peculiar look: "That's not enough? My mouth is practically dry from all the talking!"

"Human salivary glands are roughly distributed across the sublingual area, the oral mucosa, and the lips—in other words, they're entirely embedded in flesh. And you're just a skull. You don't have those organs..."

"Is your third faith going to be Truth?"

"..." Zhang Jizu was genuinely stunned. His brow twitched. "There's going to be a third faith?"

"Obviously!" Cheng Shi worked his eye sockets emphatically. "Why else do you think the gods are driving fusion? Fusing just two faiths is pointless. What they actually want goes far beyond complementary pairs—they want to deconstruct the very essence of faith itself, to draw closer to—"

He cut himself off mid-sentence. He glanced at Zhang Jizu, then adopted a mysterious air:

"Forget it. Saying more is useless. You haven't reached the right level yet—you wouldn't understand even if I told you."

"..."

Zhang Jizu squeezed his eyes tighter. After careful deliberation, he concluded this didn't sound like a con—more like Cheng Shi dangling higher-tier intelligence to whet his appetite.

He was genuinely curious but didn't press. After all, as he'd said: live long enough and everything reveals itself.

So he fell silent. After a while, when the expected barrage of eager questions never came, Cheng Shi's jaw clacked against the rooftop twice in exasperation. He gave up the struggle.

'Great—people are getting harder and harder to fool.'

But he couldn't waste this precious pre-trial time on dead air. So, without a trace of embarrassment, he pivoted to another topic and asked about Mi Laozhang's situation.

"As a fellow Joker, don't you have anything to... report—er... share with the organization?"

'Report?'

'Now there's a distant word. The last time I filed a report was back when the cemetery was still operational. As for that reporting supervisor in the duty room... he's gone from staff to permanent resident now.'

Zhang Jizu recalled the amusing past and chuckled softly:

"I haven't participated in any trials these past couple days, but I have picked up some gossip. Care to hear?"

Cheng Shi brightened, hopping forward twice: "How gossipy?"

"Unverified. Rumor only." He watched Cheng Shi's eager expression and concluded the man wasn't actually after critical intelligence—he was fishing for juicy gossip.

"First off, I don't have gossip.

Second, building intelligence channels is an essential part of staying safe. The more you know, the steadier your path. So before I'd even reached the top of the Ladder, I'd already joined numerous small organizations—just like the Jokers."

"???" Hearing this, Cheng Shi's face instantly soured. "You're comparing those bootleg clubs to our Jokers?"

"True—they are different. They had more members."

"..."

"Here's today's tidbit. It comes from one of those Death-faith organizations called the Undead Salvation Society.

I rarely attend their gatherings, but I get occasional updates. Recently, one member reported that after their Folly neighbor died, they acquired the deceased's experimental notebook.

The meticulous notebook was filled with experimental conclusions. Among them, one inference—highlighted in bold red—relates to the faith fusion you just mentioned.

It reads: Silence may be unable to fuse with other faiths.

I haven't seen the original notebook, so I don't know how this conclusion was derived. But based on my understanding of Silence followers, they do seem to show no fusion trends.

Even the Prisoner hasn't been summoned by a single deity to this day.

So I'm wondering if this rumor might be true—whether Silence... has no interest in driving faith fusion."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's expression became extremely animated.

Not just because the rumor was thin—but because he'd heard of this Undead Salvation Society. Not just heard of it—he knew its founder!

Ji Yue. This Truth follower mad enough to try researching War had left a deep impression.

And come to think of it, this Erudite Scholar was technically the first person to receive his organizational invitation. The name of the organization he'd created was identical to the Torchbearers—born in the river of "Mockery and Jeering."

"You're not surprised. You already know about this—that Silence can't fuse?"

"No," Cheng Shi said, dropping his usual playfulness. He furrowed his brow thoughtfully. "I know Silence can fuse. That inference is probably wrong."

Zhang Jizu blinked, eyes narrowing to razor-thin slits: "Interesting. So even though the Prisoner hasn't fused, you're saying you've actually seen a Silence follower successfully fuse with another faith?"

"Yes. And that's exactly what puzzles me.

Folly's people are annoying, I'll grant you that. But under their Benefactor's protection, they're genuinely brilliant.

I saw a Silence follower fuse with my own eyes. That means Silence doesn't reject fusion. But Folly followers' experiments are typically precise—especially when they don't know when they'll die, there's zero reason to fabricate data to deceive themselves before the apocalypse. So...

It really is a thin rumor. What level was the player who made this inference? Was there information loss or distortion in the chain of transmission?"

Cheng Shi didn't bother asking whether Mi Laozhang could be getting conned. He knew the man's caution rivaled that of a Master of Deception—he'd never blindly trust unreliable intel.

The fact that he'd shared this unverified rumor today clearly meant he wanted to discuss the gods' faith fusion plans.

Zhang Jizu shook his head: "The score wasn't low. But I'll look into exactly how much was lost along the way."

"Do that. Laozhang, let me speak from the heart—faith fusion isn't just about the gods. It's a manifestation of the Convention. And how critical the Convention is... I don't need to spell out.

For you, whether you want to see more or simply want to survive, this intelligence matters far more than anything else.

Our competitors may never have been players. And our allies aren't just players either.

Take the Yu Xi I mentioned. Honestly, a big part of why I founded the Jokers was to use it to please that entity.

It doesn't seem as cold as other Servant Gods, yet I can't quite gauge the right boundaries. That's why I want you to come again to San Dales with me—hoping for a chance encounter, or at the very least, to let more people learn about it.

When a god is no longer so mysterious, our understanding of it deepens. Don't you think?"

Cheng Shi's words were remarkably sincere—so much so that Zhang Jizu found them the most genuine things Cheng Shi had ever said since they'd met. He nodded thoughtfully, silently committing "Yu Xi" to memory.

Seeing the evening's mission accomplished, Cheng Shi prepared to leave. Overdoing things was counterproductive—saying too much risked mistakes. Better to leave room for others to fill in the blanks.

So the two said their clean goodbyes. Cheng Shi opened the Bone Gate once more and teleported back to his rest area.

Shortly after Cheng Shi left, Zhang Jizu took up his carving knife and returned to the cemetery. He strolled past those sixteen tombstones carved with divine names, studying the unfinished inscriptions, his expression growing increasingly strange.

He stopped and crouched before Order's marker. His hand gently traced the carved letters. Eyes squeezed shut, he murmured as if asking himself:

"His eyes were strange... So what happened to Order?"

Without any intelligence to work with, the Chosen of Death couldn't possibly guess that Order had been compromised. After a fruitless bout of contemplation, he stood, picked up his knife, and walked back the way he'd come.

Zhang Jizu had suddenly changed his mind. He didn't want to keep carving.

'Leave them blank. They might prove useful someday. After all, who says the gods... will necessarily outlive their own Chosen?'

'Besides, this isn't blasphemy. I simply haven't finished the engraving work.'

'There's no rule saying tombstone inscriptions must be completed within a specific timeframe, is there?'

'Mm. Reasonable. If any god asks... I'll say Cheng Shi told me to do it.'

'He loves blasphemy. At this point, one more flea won't make the itch worse.'

Naturally, Cheng Shi knew nothing of Squinty's actions or thoughts. He only knew that shortly after returning—the very moment dawn cracked the horizon—the special trial notification blazed into his vision.

[Special Trial (Discrepancy — Time) Activated]

[Matching teammates (1/6)]

[Trial Objective: Across past, present, and future, time has never been aligned (7-day time limit)]

'Time!!!'

The instant Cheng Shi saw this trial's faith affiliation, he froze completely.

'Memory just left and Time shows up?! You Existence gods are dead set on making my life miserable!'

Still, in fairness, a Time trial was genuinely tricky.

'Hopefully...'

'Actually—no. No jinxing it.'

'Maybe, without the hopes, the trial will be simpler.'

Cheng Shi took a deep breath, relaxed his mind, and let his vision fade to black.

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