

The Gods 661

Chapter 661: The Future "Discrepancy" — Shi Lolin

Cheng Shi returned with his people soon enough, though this time he'd resorted to violent means after all.

Qin Xin and the Blind One heard a muffled crack of thunder from the distance, and before long, a skeleton came hurtling toward them carrying Cheng Shi and a trembling Shanty Area contact man.

The Blind One didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Qin Xin's jaw nearly dropped. He studied Cheng Shi with great interest and asked with a smile:

"Are you looking to fuse with Death?"

"?" Cheng Shi blinked and hopped off the Screaming Servant. "Why are you always worrying about that? Does controlling a skeleton necessarily require fusing faiths? Can't a man just have a thing for bones?"

"...I suppose there's nothing wrong with that." Qin Xin's expression stiffened briefly, then he smiled and let it go.

Cheng Shi wasted no time. With the two Torchbearers as witnesses, he resurrected the one-armed Shi Lolin, then set up a friendly confrontation platform for all three parties.

Shi Lolin, Mo Rabic and Allendor, and the Shanty Area contact — all sat facing each other, utterly bewildered.

But what none of them expected was that when Shi Lolin awoke from death and opened her eyes, the first to speak wasn't the shrewd Extreme Desire Brotherhood boss herself — it was the panic-stricken contact man.

"Lady Shi Lolin! Save me!"

The brawny man lunged toward the still-disoriented Shi Lolin, but he'd barely left the ground before Qin Xin pressed him back down with one hand. The Mirror Person applied only minimal force, yet the big man — who was every bit as tall as Qin Xin — broke into a cold sweat, unable to budge.

Cheng Shi noticed and raised an eyebrow.

Strength, speed — both extraordinary. This Mirror Person seemed to be deliberately — or perhaps casually — displaying his capabilities.

Was he trying to intimidate the two Folly wise men?

But what was the point? They clearly weren't fighters.

Meanwhile, Shi Lolin had emerged from her foggy consciousness. Seeing so many people surrounding her, alarm flickered through her eyes in rapid succession. But her powerful composure quickly steadied her, and with lingering apprehension, she looked at Cheng Shi:

"I'm... alive again?"

"You were alive the whole time, Shi Lolin. That was just a simple trick — a little joke we played." Cheng Shi smiled.

"A joke? I certainly hope so." Shi Lolin gave a bitter, self-deprecating laugh. Her gaze swept across her subordinate and over to the two bewildered wise men nearby. She frowned, seemed to recall something, and understanding suddenly dawned: "So you came here for the Divinity? You've set your sights on Mr. Mo Rabic's experiment?"

At those words, sharp glints simultaneously flashed through all three players' eyes. Mo Rabic himself, however, was genuinely confused. He pondered for a moment, then shook his head with utmost gravity:

"Lady Shi Lolin, while we have indeed heard your name and do intend to make contact with you, I must emphasize — we only just set foot in the Shanty Area. We haven't had time to find you yet. So how do you know my name?"

"?" Shi Lolin's brow darkened with displeasure. "We spent three days negotiating the terms of the deal. It was only after you showed me that thing that I agreed to the trade. Have you forgotten?"

No — you don't look like you've forgotten. Has someone tampered with your memories?"

Shi Lolin was alarmed. She looked to Cheng Shi, assuming the only person capable of meddling with these people's minds was the Fate Weaver who'd killed her.

Cheng Shi shrugged, indicating he hadn't touched them, and then asked with a grin: "What exactly did these two Folly followers show you?"

Shi Lolin frowned, increasingly lost. She exchanged another uncertain glance with Mo Rabic, then muttered to herself in deep confusion:

"Folly... what is that, exactly?"

"?"

This remark immediately ruffled the two wise men. Their faces stiffened and they moved to correct her, but Cheng Shi raised a hand to silence them, his curiosity piqued as he asked Shi Lolin again:

"You don't know the name Folly?"

"Why... should I?"

Sounds like the name of some wild god. Besides, they never mentioned anything called 'Folly' when we spoke. I always assumed they were followers of some minor wild god. And now that I hear it... yeah, sounds about right."

"..."

Cheng Shi's expression became a masterpiece of contradictions.

'Lady, you've got nerves. To casually disdain the god of Folly Himself rather than just His followers — you're the first person I've seen do that.'

'Truly worthy of the Extreme Desire Brotherhood. When desire runs wild, it runs wild.'

Still, something was odd. Even the Shanty Area grunts knew Folly's divine name. How could the person in charge not know?

Even just from aggregating intelligence, she should have heard it mentioned at least once.

Cheng Shi's questioning gaze drifted to the surviving contact man, who sensed the attention and promptly volunteered: "We — oh no, I also only heard about it from outside. It does sound like a wild god..."

He even shot a loyalty-affirming glance at Shi Lolin after saying it.

Good grief — the man had guts!

Cheng Shi grinned. He didn't dwell on these minor episodes and instead had Shi Lolin recount her negotiations with Mo Rabic while having the two wise men retrace their movements for the day.

Both sides' recollections were reasonably clear. Within the scope of their own experiences, neither lied. But the moment the topic touched on the negotiations, the two sides gave completely contradictory accounts.

Shi Lolin was adamant she'd met them. The wise men insisted they'd never set foot inside the shanties. And the contact man's account — claiming the orders he'd received were muddled, saying he'd never even seen these two — sealed the picture. After this round of confrontation, the three players understood.

Something was wrong with Shi Lolin's cognition.

But to be safe, the trio decided to go one step further: Qin Xin tracked down every witness Shi Lolin claimed had been present at the negotiations and sought testimony. Yet every last one of these supposed witnesses insisted they'd never attended any negotiation.

At this point, all three were nearly certain: Shi Lolin was one of the trial's anomalies, and most likely the future "discrepancy" — because what she described plainly hadn't happened yet.

Mo Rabic and Allendor had only just arrived at the shanties, hadn't made contact with her, yet she'd issued the order to have her people stand by for the rendezvous three days ago. If that wasn't "the future," it was hard to imagine what kind of "discrepancy" could qualify.

And so the trail that began with Alo Manni's identity ultimately pointed to the Extreme Desire Brotherhood's boss — Shi Lolin.

This shrewd Corruption follower, without even realizing it, had crossed the boundary of Time from another timeline into this one, becoming the players' first key to solving the puzzle.

Chapter 662: The Core Experimental Material Brought Down from the Tower of Logic!

Finding the trial's answer was certainly cause for celebration, yet all three players' expressions turned strange at the same moment.

Because, based on past experience with Time trials, future anomalies were usually the last ones discovered. Finding the answer this smoothly — on the very first day — was exceedingly rare.

Was this truly Destiny's guidance?

The Blind One looked thoughtfully at Cheng Shi. Qin Xin studied the pair of them with keen interest. Cheng Shi... played it safe and didn't dare declare this the real answer.

You had to be kidding. If the opposing god's trial were this simple — even allowing a rival deity's influence to help all along — then why bother with faith rivalries at all? Just declare Existence and Void one big happy family.

Even if Time wouldn't make things as difficult as Memory would, He'd certainly stir up something in His own trial. Otherwise, there'd be no explanation for why He'd suddenly appeared before Aph Ros's gate to summon him.

Though that summons had seemed like a greeting aimed at Brother Mouth, the ring — Time of Eternal Imprisonment — had very much landed on his own head!

What His purpose was, Cheng Shi couldn't begin to fathom. But he knew Time never acted on a whim. It was just that whatever He was trying to express was beyond Cheng Shi's current comprehension.

So — was the answer he could understand right now actually the real answer?

What was He trying to say through this trial?

As Cheng Shi mulled it over, the quiet Blind One spoke up again. She wasn't particularly curious about Shi Lolin as the answer — she was far more interested in the two Folly followers' experiment.

She steered the conversation back to the experiment, but her target wasn't Mo Rabic or Allendor. It was the person who also knew about the experiment — Shi Lolin.

"What did they show you?"

At this, Mo Rabic also turned with deep suspicion. Shi Lolin had spoken about their experiment with impressive authority, as if she'd truly been briefed on it. But Mo Rabic didn't believe Allendor would have leaked experimental secrets without his knowledge. He wanted to confirm whether she actually knew something.

Shi Lolin paused, quickly combing through her memory, and said with a frown: "A finger segment. A severed finger."

"!!!"

She really did know!

Mo Rabic was stunned. He whipped around to glare at Allendor, only to find Allendor already glaring back at him with fury. The two scrutinized each other without yielding an inch, each clearly suspecting the other of leaking the artifact's existence.

"You've truly disappointed me, Mo Rabic."

"Fool, use your brain. I've been with you this entire time — when would I have had the chance to spill these secrets?"

"Then why are you looking at me like that?"

"..."

"And how do you explain her knowing your name?"

"..."

Mo Rabic had no answer. His expression stiff and grave, he turned to Shi Lolín — only to see her adding fuel to the fire with evident relish:

"I don't just know Mr. Mo Rabic's name — I know yours too, Mr. Allendor. I also know that while Mo Rabic is the finger's custodian, the actual operator is you.

You replicated a small portion of the experiment right in front of me."

"Absolutely impossible! Without the Abyss Colorful Crystal, how could anything be replicated?"

!!!

Unless... you're a prophet?!"

In that moment, both Folly followers had finally achieved true folly.

The scene erupted into chaos. Only Shi Lolín had a vague inkling of what was happening, but she didn't dare voice it — because she wasn't sure if doing so would cost her the leadership of the Shanty Area, her position as the Extreme Desire Brotherhood's representative in Falling Gate.

Desire wasn't only about indulgence — it was also about fear. She was afraid. And because she was afraid, Cheng Shi was amused.

Because the Fun Ring had finished charging.

Cheng Shi smiled, interrupting everyone's free-form debate. Naturally, the players weren't about to explain Time "discrepancies" to NPCs. They only wanted to know what that finger was. So he cut straight to the point:

"Let's hear it, wise men. Only when you've explained this experiment can we begin cooperating and help you find some Abyss Colorful Crystal.

At the end of the day, that's what you came here for. So whoever can supply the Crystal counts as a perfect partner — isn't that right?

As for you, Lady Shi Lolín — for certain reasons, you may need to surrender your freedom for a while.

But don't be afraid. We won't do anything to you. Finding Abyss Colorful Crystal is outside our expertise, and we'll need your help. I trust you'll assist us?"

Shi Lolín's face was pale. Though genuinely shaken, she seized the moment and said through gritted teeth: "I can also cooperate with you."

"?" Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, even more amused. "Between us and the Shanty Area — and the Extreme Desire Brotherhood — I see no basis for cooperation."

"No — this has nothing to do with the Shanty Area. It's me — Shi Lolin — personally. I want to cooperate with you."

"You think you're in a position to negotiate?" Cheng Shi smiled, flicking out a scalpel.

"No, I'm not. But I know that my willing compliance will be more useful to you than coercion. I know this place. I know Falling Gate. I know the mine. I know the Proxy Hand. And I know my brother, A Rad, better than anyone.

I can tell you don't want to kill me, and your real objective extends far beyond just me. So I'm begging for a chance to cooperate. And the biggest chip I can offer is...

Myself.

I will submit to any arrangement and assist you in achieving every one of your goals within Falling Gate. Even if my ultimate fate is death, I accept it willingly."

"..."

Cheng Shi nearly applauded her for that speech. Even Qin Xin and the Blind One's expressions shifted after hearing it.

The Blind One was silent for a moment, then asked: "What do you want?"

Shi Lolin's head snapped up, eyes brimming with desperate hope as she looked at the Blind One and said, word by deliberate word: "I want A Rad dead. And I want you to spare the Extreme Desire Brotherhood. Beyond that, I ask for nothing."

"You want A Rad dead? Isn't he your brother?" Cheng Shi blinked in confusion.

"Yes. My full-blooded brother, born of the same mother."

"And you still want him dead? Well, that's not necessarily off the table, but... it'll cost extra." Cheng Shi rubbed his chin.

???

'Wait — he's my brother. Why would you charge extra to kill him?'

The line caught Shi Lolin completely off guard. She stared at Cheng Shi vacantly, unable to recover, until Cheng Shi cleared his throat to snap her out of it. She clenched her teeth and made another promise:

"A Rad's death can be hidden from the Proxy Hand for at least seven days. During that time, all mining proceeds will belong to you. The Extreme Desire Brotherhood won't compete — and wouldn't dare.

I know they've recently excavated several pieces of Abyss Colorful Crystal. Those would all be yours."

Chapter 663: Whose Finger Did You Say?

"Those were already ours to begin with." Cheng Shi sighed and was about to say "Fine, let's leave it at that" — but Qin Xin beat him to it:

"Deal! A pleasure doing business!"

The moment this Torchbearer founder heard Shi Lolin's wish to protect the Shanty Area, his heart had already been swayed. Seeing that Cheng Shi still wouldn't relent, he stepped in and accepted the partnership first.

Cheng Shi blinked, not particularly surprised. He hadn't expected the one who'd been playing bad cop to suddenly switch to good cop — while he, the good cop, got "whitewashed" in comparison.

Well, whatever. It's not like he had a reputation worth protecting.

Cheng Shi smiled, then looked at Qin Xin with a teasing grin:

"What — 'guarding beauty' triggered your keyword?"

The remark was intended as a harmless jab, but for some reason, Qin Xin's expression froze the instant he heard it. A flash of barely perceptible shock crossed his eyes — but he lowered his gaze and concealed it before anyone noticed. Then he looked up again, smiling as he nodded:

"Life isn't easy for anyone. It's rare to meet someone who thinks of others before themselves. A moment of soft-heartedness — forgive me."

Cheng Shi didn't actually believe Shi Lolin was thinking of the "people" in the Shanty Area. Whether viewed through the Extreme Desire Brotherhood's doctrine or Corruption's theology of desire, her actions looked far more like she was preserving her own faith and practicing her own devotion.

So rather than saying Shi Lolin was "guarding beauty," it was more accurate to call her simply devout.

But arguing the point served no purpose. The Torchbearers already walked a hard enough road. They deserved to find comfort where they could — especially on the Land of Hope, where the moral climate had only grown more degraded. Acts of "self-sacrifice" were vanishingly rare.

Cheng Shi understood their hardship well, so he didn't press the topic further.

He smiled casually and turned to Mo Rabic. With Shi Lolin's situation settled, it was time to ask these two wise men what this so-called finger actually was.

By now, Mo Rabic had sorted out his thoughts. He could see that from today onward — no, perhaps forever — he and Allendor would never again be masters of their own fate. They could only dance to others' tunes. Yet the dream of faith in his heart wouldn't let him abandon his experiment. So, inspired by Shi Lolin's example, this Folly wise man made the wisest decision since they'd been discovered:

Cooperate! Proactively cooperate!

And the first step of that cooperation was showing sincerity to the three people who now held power over their lives.

Mo Rabic reached into his shirt and produced a small metal box. Under the shocked and furious gaze of Allendor, he pushed aside his partner's obstructing arm, withdrew the finger — barely two and a half segments long — and said with utmost gravity:

"This is it. This is the most critical instrument in the Divinity extraction experiment — its most essential component. Only with this can the muddled, unidentified Divinity be refined from the Abyss Colorful Crystal. And only this can classify and separate the distorted Divinity.

When our fathers were first exiled, they did manage to bring down a fair number of Crystal fragments. Thanks to those, we've been able to continuously improve the experiment over the years. But... materials run out eventually. After exhausting the last Crystal shard, we had no choice but to venture out and find a new source."

"Mo Rabic, you're a traitor!" Allendor erupted, pointing at his companion and roaring: "We swore an oath — we would never reveal the core of this experiment! You can show them, you can demonstrate for them, but you absolutely must not tell them everything!

This experiment belongs to us! It's the only experiment that can attract His attention and summon Him! You've broken your oath — you've betrayed Him!"

"I have not!" Mo Rabic replied calmly. "This is my final effort toward earning His audience. Allendor, I'm not afraid of death. I'm only afraid of dying before I have the chance to witness this come to fruition. And now, I believe that with their help, we can accomplish it all — complete the experiment that not even our fathers managed to.

We need a massive quantity of Abyss Colorful Crystal to succeed. And right now, they're the only ones who can provide that volume."

"The Abyss Colorful Crystal is still in the Proxy Hand's possession!"

"Excuse me — if I may interject: it's temporarily. Temporarily in the Proxy Hand's possession.

They're called the Proxy Hand, after all. The meaning shouldn't be hard to grasp — they're temporarily proxying as our warehouse manager.

When we go to collect, the goods naturally become ours."

With that, Cheng Shi offered a friendly smile and gestured for them to continue.

But the interrupted pair could no longer muster the emotional momentum from before. Allendor seemed to have come to terms with Mo Rabic's decision. He faltered, his eyes dimming, and said nothing more.

With no one blocking him, Mo Rabic continued sharing.

"Since the Tower of Logic first began observing the Abyssal Volcano, its eruption frequency has been generally stable — though the intervals are immensely long, often measured in centuries.

Because the Underworld contains vast quantities of resources that don't exist on the surface, the Erudition Presidium never gave up researching the Abyssal Volcano. Their vision was to transform this continuously erupting volcano into a spatial corridor that ordinary people could use to travel underground, allowing them to deploy massive labor forces to extract Underworld resources.

However, the Void Energetics Department repeatedly failed in their spatial research. No scholar could stabilize the Abyssal Volcano's spatial structure. Instead, it was the Creation Alchemy Department that, during peripheral research on the Abyssal Volcano's byproducts, discovered the Abyss Colorful Crystal containing distorted Divinity — and through it, found a door waiting to be pushed open toward refining Divinity.

But the door was too heavy. Up until the day our fathers were exiled, every scholar involved had failed to find any method to open it...

Yet now, after years of underground experimentation and refinement, that door has been opened — no, not by us alone, but by all the Creation Alchemy scholars across the generations — forced open the tiniest crack!

We've found the method to gather the distorted Divinity. And that method is..."

Mo Rabic raised the box once more and declared, word by solemn word:

"This finger! A finger taken from the great leader of the Creation Alchemy Department — Zangier!"

"?????"

Who?

Did he just say who?

Cheng Shi was thunderstruck. His pupils contracted as his mind reeled.

Both Torchbearers had clearly heard this name before as well. The Blind One's brow furrowed: "The Zangier who presided over the Stars Dagger?"

"The very same!

Only a genius of his caliber could have conceived such a fantastical experiment to steal Divinity from the gods. And we merely followed his lead — learned his method of slicing open the gods' pockets — and cut a slit in the Stars Dagger itself, stealing a small segment of the finger that the greatest thief of all used to cut those divine pockets!"

"..."

"..."

"..."

Cheng Shi's mind shook like an earthquake. He was utterly floored.

'What is this — the one who steals shall have stolen from him in return?'

'Well, well, well — so this is what Truth was really like all along.'

'Oh, right. Now... they go by Folly.'

Chapter 664: Faith Marrow and Mo Rabic's Experimental Demonstration

The clown was struck speechless for a long while.

On one hand, he was awed by Zangier's reach. Even though this Divinity extraction experiment hadn't been conceived by the man himself, the core material still traced back to him, and the experimenters were disciples of the Creation Alchemy Department's lineage. Zangier's influence within that department was truly terrifying.

On the other hand, he didn't dare say too much for fear of revealing how he knew about this experiment. At the same time, he was watching the Blind One, wondering whether Zhen Xin had told her about everything she'd witnessed inside Zhen Yi's memories.

After a lengthy observation, Cheng Shi concluded that the Blind One appeared unaware of the trial that had taken place within the Stars Dagger. That gave him some relief — no need to fabricate lies to patch past loose ends.

As for whether this would blow up later...

Future problems were for future Cheng Shi to worry about. What did present Cheng Shi care?

Just like that, Cheng Shi "peacefully" continued listening, because the discussion about the Tower of Logic and Zangier was far from over.

"Why can Zangier's finger gather Divinity? And what exactly is the Abyss Colorful Crystal — what kind of existence can harbor Divinity?"

If something like this exists and has such a connection to the Tower of Logic, we shouldn't be completely ignorant of it."

The question came from Qin Xin. If even a Memory follower couldn't dig up the relevant memories, Cheng Shi knew even less. In this "symposium," aside from playing the role of "bad-cop enforcer," he couldn't contribute a word.

"I keep feeling that this thing called Abyss Colorful Crystal resembles a certain item I know of. It can also extract Divinity — only the Divinity inside it isn't chaotically distorted."

The moment the Blind One finished speaking, Qin Xin raised an eyebrow: "Faith Marrow."

"Exactly! Faith Marrow."

This time, Cheng Shi had heard of it. Faith Marrow did indeed resemble ore, but it was a smooth, rounded jade stone of varying sizes. The Divinity contained within was said to be the devout faith that mortals had offered to the gods, only to be discarded — buried in history and compressed by spacetime into stone marrow.

It sounded impressive, but honestly... it was mediocre.

Any discussion of value that ignores quantity was misguided. Faith Marrow did contain Divinity, but the amount was minuscule — so minuscule that even a truckload might not yield the bare minimum experimental quantity. And the extraction method wasn't something just anyone could master.

So this S-grade item — yes, it was actually S-grade — was extremely underwhelming.

In the eyes of most Truth or Folly followers who needed Divinity for experiments, it was valuable because the Divinity within, though scant, was stable and easy to study. But in the eyes of the vast majority of players, it was simply a "gold mine" for fleecing experiment-obsessed truth seekers.

Yes, the current consensus among most players was that the "S" in this S-grade item stood for the ability to sell it at an exorbitant price to experimental fanatics in exchange for real resources.

"Faith Marrow is born from spacetime folding and compression. Abyss Colorful Crystal is obviously also a type of ore, clearly also born from compression. So could these two things possibly be one and the same?"

With that, the Blind One produced a jade stone tablet from her personal space — a playing card that appeared to be carved from jade!

"What's this?" Cheng Shi sidled over quietly.

"A little gift from Xin Xin." The Blind One smiled.

"?" Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow in surprise. "Carved from Faith Marrow?"

"Correct. This is Faith Marrow. So, gentlemen — and Lady Shi Lolin — would you please produce the Abyss Colorful Crystal in your possession? Let's compare and see what differences there are between these two materials."

Both Folly wise men stared hungrily at the jade in the Blind One's hand but dared not speak. They'd long since exhausted every last fragment of their Abyss Colorful Crystal. Shi Lolin, however, clearly had some — she'd mentioned the wise men performing a demonstration for her. Even if that had happened in another timeline, it still proved the Extreme Desire Brotherhood possessed resources.

Shi Lolin's expression tightened. She nodded and named a location.

The three players exchanged a glance. Qin Xin understood instantly and vanished. Before long, he returned with two large chunks of utterly unremarkable gray ore.

The ore was an extremely dull color, irregular in shape. Set on the ground, it would blend perfectly into a heap of rubble with no distinguishing features whatsoever. It couldn't have been more different from

its name. Cheng Shi even suspected Qin Xin had found the wrong stash — but the two wise men's eyes erupted with blazing fervor the moment they spotted such sizable chunks of Abyss Colorful Crystal.

"That's it! That's it! Mo Rabic — how long has it been since we've seen Abyss Colorful Crystal of this magnitude?"

Mo Rabic didn't answer. He stared unblinkingly at the ore, already murmuring fervent prayers under his breath.

"So... what's colorful about it?" Cheng Shi was even more confused.

"May I... please?" Mo Rabic extended a trembling hand toward Qin Xin. His calloused fingers quivered, and though he hadn't yet touched the ore, he already looked as if he were cradling something far too heavy for him to bear.

Qin Xin nodded and handed over the smaller piece. Mo Rabic was beside himself with excitement. He clutched the ore tightly, raised the finger, and seemed about to use the legendary Creation Alchemist Zangier's finger to slice open the ore's "pocket" and extract Divinity right then and there.

But a split second before he could move, Cheng Shi pressed a scalpel against his throat in one swift motion.

"Mr. Mo Rabic, we've already shown you ample leniency. I trust this will be a demonstration only — and not an attempt to deliver a 'surprise' that no one here wishes to see."

Mo Rabic's excited expression froze. He nodded with utmost seriousness: "I know what I'm supposed to do, sir. I don't want to die — not before my Lord descends, at least."

With that, he lifted Zangier's finger and gently pressed it against the ore's surface. That rough digit — its skin hardened almost to the point of calcification — truly did slice into the ore's soul like a keen dagger. Yes, its "soul."

Because the instant the finger touched the ore, Cheng Shi clearly saw the ugly, unremarkable stone erupt with dazzling radiance. As if spirit were separating from flesh, a cloud of seven-colored mist slowly emerged from within, and within that mist, threads of faith power — visible to the naked eye — twisted and coiled like mindless little serpents, chasing each other in endlessly winding spirals.

Chapter 665: Silence — Silence Again!

Everyone present was dumbstruck.

The scene was so unthinkable that they couldn't help but admire the Tower of Logic's myriad bizarre and ingenious methods for studying deities and Divinity.

"These gossamer threads — that's... Divinity?"

Honestly, this was the first time Cheng Shi had ever seen Divinity in a state beyond pure radiance. Mo Rabic nodded, lifted the Abyss Colorful Crystal slightly higher, and signaled to his companion with his eyes — it was Allendor's turn to operate.

The experiment's true mastermind clearly wasn't Mo Rabic, who had opened the ore's pocket, but the quieter Allendor standing off to the side. His expression was complicated, yet after surveying the scene, he shuffled over with a look of resigned acceptance.

As Mo Rabic said — they had no choice.

With deep gravity, Allendor took Zangier's finger and began channeling the power within it, transforming it into a filament far thinner than the threads of Divinity themselves. He carefully guided it down into the mist to sense, separate, and coax apart the intertwined strands of Divinity.

Allendor's expression was rigidly focused during the operation — not a single word. Mo Rabic, however, seemed more like a Truth scholar than a Folly wise man. Serving as the "experimental stand," he patiently and thoroughly narrated for the audience:

"When the Creation Alchemy Department first discovered the existence of Abyss Colorful Crystal, they attempted every conceivable method to access the Divinity within. But Divinity is holy — it tolerates not the slightest contamination by mortal impurities. The moment any ordinary force entered the mist, the Divinity would shatter instantly, dissipating into mundane dust.

So don't be fooled by how effortlessly Allendor is inserting the 'Divinity separation tool' — that single step alone took the Tower of Logic over a century to figure out.

Until the day a scholar learned that Zangier had completed the Stars Dagger experiment and was actively stealing the gods' Authority. That's when a bold idea took root among the team members. They set their sights on Zangier himself. After waiting many years — until the moment Zangier suffered the backlash and transformed into the Doomsday Hanged Man — our fathers made their move.

By then, Zangier was far beyond mortal. Under the tempering and refinement of divine Authority, he had drawn infinitely close to Them. Though the experiment ultimately ended in disaster, what was a catastrophe for the Stars Dagger was a one-in-ten-thousand opportunity for our fathers.

So they circumvented the Erudition Presidium's oversight, opened the Stars Dagger's gate, and sacrificed nearly an entire team's worth of lives to sever a small section of Zangier's finger.

But no one could have imagined — their original plan wasn't for just a small finger segment. They'd wanted Zangier's entire arm..."

Mo Rabic's reminiscence was tinged with wistfulness. He snorted, as if mocking his forefathers' overestimation of their own strength — yet also perhaps mocking himself, for never having the chance to accomplish anything as magnificent.

"They miscalculated. No matter how weakened the Doomsday Hanged Man was, he remained an existence that had transcended mortality. Without any assistance or the Erudition Presidium's support, they couldn't have done much to Zangier. So they grabbed the finger and retreated.

But operating a finger to do what a whole arm was meant to do was immensely difficult. They spent ages learning to harness the finger's power.

During that time, they were exiled to the Underworld with nowhere to go. But the experiment continued — until we took over and repeated it for decades before finally seeing hope.

Allendor may be an imbecile when it comes to interpersonal relations..."

The scalpel in Cheng Shi's hand twitched before Mo Rabi could finish his sentence — he was afraid this badly-timed disdain would disturb the experiment. But Allendor's hands were rock-steady, his state utterly stable. He seemed to have shut out all external noise, his entire being submerged in the work of separating Divinity.

"But when it comes to Divinity research and hands-on experimentation, he's a genius — one no less talented than our fathers!

He successfully devised the method for extracting Divinity, connected every stage of the experiment, and from the last piece of Abyss Colorful Crystal in our possession, separated out a small portion of Divinity. Unfortunately, we had no means of storing it at the time, and that infinitely precious Divinity simply... dissipated into the wind.

Now, we've designed the experimental equipment for storing Divinity. I believe that with your... esteemed support, we'll have sufficient resources and conditions to refine Divinity in large quantities!"

The moment his words ended, Allendor suddenly reacted. His entire body shuddered violently, and then, his face dark as ink, he sighed:

"I failed."

"???" Cheng Shi's mind went blank. 'Wait — your buddy just spent all that time hyping up how incredible you are, and the second he finishes, you fail?'

'Are you deliberately trying to slap him in the face?'

'But wouldn't the slap hurt your own face even more?'

Yet before the explanation came, Cheng Shi already spotted the reason. These two wise men were simply too exhausted. After their long journey and the fright they'd endured, their energy was clearly depleted.

This was his own oversight. Cheng Shi pursed his lips and casually fired a Spirit Spell at both of them.

Allendor's spirit surged. A keen light flashed in his eyes again, and he looked ready to make another attempt — but this time, Cheng Shi refused.

"Forget it. There's no need to waste time right now. Once we deal with A Rad and seize control of the mine, we'll have plenty of time to process the Abyss Colorful Crystal.

What do you say, gentlemen?"

Of course, Cheng Shi's question wasn't directed at the two wise men but at the two Torchbearers present. Qin Xin and the Blind One also felt it was enough for now — they only needed to confirm the extraction was viable. Before more resources were "secured," there was no rush to obtain the first batch of Divinity here and now.

The Blind One nodded, then looked at Allendor's hand.

Though the wise man had failed, that failure wasn't entirely fruitless. He'd clearly extracted a small portion of Divinity — and this Divinity seemed somehow... familiar.

"It's miscellaneous, useless wild god Divinity. I can sense it contains Death, Decay, and Order Divinity — but I was too exhausted to separate them. I only managed to extract this small fragment of wild god Divinity.

But believe me — right now, I'm fully capable of extracting those individual types. I wouldn't need long — just one night."

"..."

"..."

"..."

All three players fell silent once more. Not because they thought the timeframe was too long — but because the so-called "wild god Divinity" he'd described...

It wasn't from any wild god at all!

It was clearly the Divinity of Silence!

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted sharply, his expression transforming. How strange — how, in the middle of the Civilization Era, when even Folly existed only through a handful of Seedling Followers, was Silence's Divinity already... compressed into ore?

What in the world was going on?

Chapter 666: So Why Did He Change?

Cheng Shi looked toward Qin Xin and the Blind One, only to find the same shock mirrored on their faces.

This clearly defied all logic. Civilization was currently at its zenith, War hadn't arrived yet, and Chaos was just beginning to stir — these were the mainstream faith dynamics of this era.

The emergence of Folly Seedling Followers was already shocking enough, but that could at least be rationalized as a handful of Truth followers whose thinking had shifted under setbacks and oppression, thus giving rise to a nascent Folly will. But... Silence?

The god who only had scant records during the Chaos Era — how could His Divinity have already been compressed into Abyss Colorful Crystal by the Abyssal Volcano's spatiotemporal forces?

This went beyond a mere seedling emerging from soil. This meant Silence had long since descended into the world — yet His existence had never been known to the mortals of the Land of Hope.

No — not just the Land of Hope. Even the players had no idea why a true god recorded as descending only during the Chaos Era had been found through a Civilization Era mineral.

What lay before them virtually shattered the players' understanding of the gods' sequential descent and blurred everyone's comprehension of the eras themselves.

Qin Xin and the Blind One sank into deep thought. Ironically, it was Cheng Shi — the most confused at first — whose mind suddenly seized on something. He blinked in disbelief, seemingly wanting to discuss it with the other two. But just as the thought reached the tip of his tongue, he swallowed it back.

Forget it. It was just a guess. And these two Torchbearers probably didn't even know what "eras" meant in the larger sense. Rather than explaining that concept here, it was better to finish the task at hand first. Once the Divinity was secured, he could bring up these baseless speculations.

"If things go smoothly, tonight you two can extract Divinity to your heart's content on the Proxy Hand's turf. But for now, pack up, take these two pieces of Abyss Colorful Crystal, and come help us take over the Proxy Hand's territory."

At that, Shi Lolin's eyes blazed with fervent light. She pressed her still-functional arm against the stump of her severed one: "You're going after A Rad now?"

Seeing no objections from the other two, Cheng Shi smiled and nodded: "That's right. I know where he is, but it'd be best if you led the way — you know this place, and you know him.

Though I must say, Shi Lolin, I am curious — why do you hate your brother so much?

He obviously kept Ad Ric..."

Cheng Shi trailed off mid-sentence, realizing it was somewhat awkward to mention Ad Ric in front of her. But Shi Lolin didn't mind in the slightest. Instead, she answered with utter frankness:

"Locked up?"

Heh — if I hadn't been finding creative ways to 'sponsor' Ad Ric, I might never have noticed something was wrong with my dear brother.

My original plan was to 'buy off' all the miners under him and have them secretly set aside the best finds for me. But during those discreet inquiries, I realized... A Rad's identity seemed off.

He'd become far more shrewd and capable, and he was seeing me less and less.

So..."

Cheng Shi blinked. 'So she's got a brother complex? That controlling? Just because of this, she wants her own flesh-and-blood brother dead?'

But what happened next caught everyone off guard — Shi Lolin's words took yet another unexpected turn.

"I suspect he's betrayed the Extreme Desire Brotherhood, spurned our Benefactor's grace, and secretly joined... the Tower of Logic!"

"?"

What?

Cheng Shi was stunned: "A Rad was also part of the Extreme Desire Brotherhood?"

"He used to be. But not anymore!" Shi Lolin's tone was practically gnashing — clearly, her brother's betrayal had cut to the bone.

"Why would he join the Tower of Logic?"

"Naturally because of the benefits the Tower of Logic promised him. But the filth on the surface is a hundred times more disgusting than anything in our Underworld. He's lost his way, desecrated our Benefactor, and deserves death as atonement."

But Cheng Shi frowned at this, puzzled: "That doesn't add up. He followed his own desire and made the choice most advantageous to himself. That's arguably the greatest offering one can make to Corruption. How exactly does that count as betrayal?"

"???"

Now it was Shi Lolin's turn to be stunned — completely, thoroughly stunned.

She stared at Cheng Shi in horror, pupils contracting violently, brain buzzing, neck stiff as if filled with lead, mouth hanging open for an eternity without managing a single word of rebuttal.

For one fleeting instant, she felt as though her entire path of faith had veered off course.

But the very next second, Cheng Shi pulled the capsizing Siren back to safety.

"Then again, it doesn't really matter. If you want to kill, kill — you don't need a reason. That in itself is also a form of desire. So you're not wrong either."

"..."

Color slowly returned to Shi Lolin's ashen face. The cold sweat that had drenched her head cascaded down in rivulets. She collapsed to the ground as if all strength had left her, muttering ceaselessly: "I wasn't wrong. I'm right. I wasn't wrong. I'm right..."

In that moment, she looked like a drowning person suddenly rescued — trembling uncontrollably, heart filled with nothing but lingering terror, all traces of her earlier shrewdness gone.

Watching this, Qin Xin furrowed his brow slightly. The Blind One grew contemplative.

They hadn't expected that this Fate Weaver's true killing blade wasn't the scalpel in his hand — it was a swift blade called faith!

Everyone knew that in the Land of Hope — this god-worshipping world — most people's entire lives were shackled by faith. Seize the reins of their faith, and you could manipulate these long-dead historical figures' pitiful, tragic lives at will.

But saying it was easy — doing it was another matter entirely.

Faith had a thousand faces. To distill a few brief words into a blade that struck precisely at the weakest point of someone's faith required an extraordinarily deep understanding of that faith on the wielder's part.

Yet most people couldn't even see through the path of faith beneath their own feet. Their devotion was impure. To say nothing of understanding someone else's faith.

So after witnessing this scene, the two Torchbearers gained a new appreciation for Cheng Shi's "ability." At the very least, this Fate Weaver possessed an extremely profound understanding of Corruption.

"Getting close to Corruption isn't exactly a good thing," Qin Xin murmured to himself.

The Blind One caught his words. She tilted her head toward him with an amused smile:

"I recall you once told me that the greatest desire in this world is the commitment to guarding beauty. By that logic, the Torchbearers should actually be considered a different breed of Corruption devotees.

What happened — so solemn today?"

Qin Xin paused, then smiled ruefully: "People... change."

With that, he walked past the Blind One without another word, heading to Cheng Shi's side to help escort the wise men. But in that fleeting moment as they passed each other, every trace of the Blind One's smile vanished, replaced by an expression of utmost gravity.

Because she remembered — Qin Xin had once said that while people may change, Torchbearers never would.

So why... had this founding Torchbearer changed?

Chapter 667: Back to the Mine

The group set out. Their first stop was the earthen cell where A Rad had previously been found.

The plan was to cut off the serpent's head first — deal with the Proxy Hand's leader, fulfill Shi Lolin's request, then proceed straight to the mine and take over all of the Proxy Hand's assets.

The party had exactly doubled in size. Cheng Shi took point, Qin Xin brought up the rear, and the Blind One commanded from the center. The two wise men fell obediently in line behind Cheng Shi, trailing him step for step with not the slightest thought of escape.

Part of that came from their reading of the situation. But more importantly, Cheng Shi had confiscated Zangier's finger, leaving them no choice but to raise their own level of cooperation.

Shi Lolin had been fully healed. Cheng Shi merely produced a bottle of Prosperity of Yesteryear and the one-armed boss was restored to her former allure. Though her charm was now reserved exclusively for Qin Xin and the Blind One — whenever she looked at Cheng Shi, a nameless dread still lingered in her eyes.

The party of six left the Shanty Area and headed swiftly toward the Proxy Hand's territory. As for the Shanty Area lackey who'd participated in the earlier discussion — to prevent information leaks that might jeopardize the players' plans — Qin Xin had found a spot and buried him underground for the time being.

Everything proceeded smoothly. One thing, however, warranted special mention: a cautious player like Cheng Shi would normally never take the lead. But today he had a skeletal bodyguard. "Gongyang Jiao" was patrolling ahead at a suitable distance, sweeping the path for his master. And it was precisely the Screaming Servant's presence that emboldened Cheng Shi to walk ahead of the Torchbearers.

"I keep feeling that Cheng Shi's Death summon moves in a familiar way. I just can't place where I've seen it before. Ming Yu — does it ring any bells?"

Hearing Qin Xin's puzzlement, the Blind One replied meaningfully: "No. If even a Mirror Person can't recall the movement patterns, then I — a Void walker — am even less likely to have any impression."

Qin Xin caught the tease and laughed ruefully: "Fair enough. It seems I'm not much of a Memory follower either."

The two Torchbearers exchanged a peculiar "glance" and seemed to arrive at some unspoken understanding.

The little episode was quickly forgotten. Before long, the group reached the spot where Cheng Shi and the Blind One had first discovered Ad Ric. But before they even arrived, the Screaming Servant brought back unwelcome news: A Rad was no longer in the cell. There was movement toward the mine — he'd evidently sobered up and headed there.

With their quarry gone, Cheng Shi had no choice but to redirect the group toward the mine. This time, however, they didn't take the main road through town. Under Shi Lolin's guidance, they found a shortcut threading through the residential district.

The group moved quickly. Cheng Shi stayed busy along the way, constantly observing how the local residents and stowaways lived, and how their ecosystem differed from the Shanty Area's.

This wasn't idle curiosity about Falling Gate. He was deepening his understanding of the area. Cheng Shi suspected that Time's answer wasn't as simple as it appeared, meaning any detail might become the key to his analysis. Though the Blind One knew this place like the back of her hand, secondhand knowledge from texts could never rival seeing things firsthand.

He needed to carefully log everything in case the right moment came — so he wouldn't miss the best window for a clue or a crucial timeframe.

As they walked, he actually did notice something in this district that differed from both the city center and the Shanty Area.

The little globeflowers — those decorative clusters planted in front of many houses — looked somewhat different here than the ones he'd seen earlier.

He raised an eyebrow and voiced his curiosity.

"An Shenxuan, do you know why people here like planting these colorful globeflowers at their doorsteps?" Cheng Shi pointed at a patch of green globeflowers in front of someone's home.

The Blind One "looked" over, frowned, and shook her head:

"The History School doesn't record absolutely everything. It's already impressive that anyone managed to unearth Falling Gate's history. They're piecing together the fractured spine of the Land of Hope's history — they're not going to care about how many differently-colored 'calculi' are growing on some stray rib extending from it...

But this flower — I do recall it."

An Mingyu's "recollection" was, of course, the sight of Cheng Shi plucking a globeflower and stuffing it up Ad Ric's nostril. She mentally reviewed all the globeflowers she'd noticed in town today, thought for a moment, and answered:

"My guess is factions? They're using colors to mark territorial boundaries?"

Factions?

Cheng Shi paused. Recalling the red globeflowers in the city district, the orange-yellow ones in the Shanty Area, and the green ones before him now, he blinked — it actually made sense.

Just as the two of them were discussing, the wise man who'd been silently trailing Cheng Shi and watching him the entire way suddenly spoke up. Allendor couldn't hold back his "disdain" any longer and let out a snort — but he quickly realized he was in no position to look down on anyone. He hastily swallowed his contempt and said in a low rumble:

"This is the Abyss Rainbow Orchid. It was created jointly by the Creation Alchemy Department and the Life Extension Department when the Tower of Logic was hunting for Abyss Colorful Crystal.

It's drought-resistant and heat-tolerant. It thrives by absorbing thermal energy in extremely harsh high-temperature environments and changes color to indicate the ambient temperature. Using the rainbow spectrum as a guide: the closer to the high-spectrum wavelengths, the lower the heat. Green indicates the current temperature isn't suitable for finding Abyss Colorful Crystal — those crystals are typically only found when the Orchid turns red.

The seeds here were likely scattered and lost by the Tower of Logic within the Abyssal Volcano, falling into the Underworld. After all, aside from this flower, nothing else grows in a place like Falling Gate."

Cheng Shi listened, stunned, suddenly realizing he'd been ignoring the gradual environmental changes along their entire route. He focused on the current temperature and noticed it was indeed cooler than at the trial's outset. So this was a natural thermometer?

"Mr. Allendor certainly is erudite. But everything you've shared comes from your forefathers' days in the Truth camp. Could you perhaps share something new — some fresh insight your people discovered after converting to Folly?

Otherwise, I can't shake the feeling that Folly seems... inferior to Truth."

"..."

Cheng Shi's barb left both wise men at a loss for words. Allendor was about to fire back, but then remembered the core experimental tool was in this man's hands. He opened his mouth silently, expression stiff, and swallowed his "disdain."

Seeing Folly once again descend into Silence, Cheng Shi burst out laughing.

Qin Xin, however, having observed Cheng Shi the entire way, shook his head with a smile: "This Fate Weaver is... quite different from what I imagined."

"Different how?" The Blind One paused slightly to ask.

"He's far sunnier than he appears." Qin Xin offered that single observation and said nothing more, smiling as he gently pushed the Blind One forward.

Chapter 668: Wang Mou Again

The shortcut was indeed much faster. Before long, the group had left the city and reached the narrow trail leading to the mine.

Previously, Cheng Shi and Qin Xin had encountered Wang Mou on this very path — dragging Alo Manni — and had been "blocked" by a strange coincidence from venturing deeper into the mine. This time...

They were blocked again. Wang Mou had once more appeared before them, standing at the end of the trail with knitted brows, having just collided face-to-face with the scouting Screaming Servant.

Spotting this from a distance, Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow with an amused smirk.

Interesting. This Assassination Doctor's mining exploration always seemed to sync perfectly with their own pace. Every time they reached this point, he'd just wrapped up. Coincidence, or deliberate?

Was he trying to prevent his teammates from entering the mine's perimeter, or was there genuinely nothing worth digging into?

No — wrong. He definitely had designs on the mine. Otherwise, he wouldn't have used that "cross-referencing experiment" excuse to mask his true purpose when the teams split up.

So what was the Doctor actually up to?

Wang Mou had clearly noticed the group's arrival as well. His perception was sharp — his gaze quickly passed over his teammates and locked onto the two Folly followers among them. He sensed a familiar aura from the pair, and his expression shifted to one of surprise and uncertainty:

"Scholars? No — that scent... it's more like wise men. Folly followers?"

In this era... could they be seedlings?"

Truth followers really did have a knack for this — one glance and he'd already formed a hypothesis.

"Doctor, we meet again." Cheng Shi called out his greeting from a distance, eyes darting about as he scanned the surroundings. Only after confirming through the Screaming Servant's feedback that nothing was amiss did he quicken his pace to the front, his tone oddly teasing:

"Looks like you've been making good progress too. Find any leads?"

Where's Ad Ric?

Why are you alone again? Where's the Investigator — you didn't... assassinate him, did you?

And are you here to wait for us?"

"..."

Wang Mou was clearly unaccustomed to Cheng Shi's sarcastic style. His expression stiffened, but he quickly shook his head and answered with solemn precision:

"Some results — but all within expectations.

The Investigator and I systematically examined Ad Ric across four dimensions: geographical cognition, social relationships, professional skills, and personal memory. We found ample evidence here corroborating most of his memories, meaning his past aligns almost entirely with the past as we understand it. The only discrepancy lies in his attitude toward Alo Manni, and his account of Alo Manni's attitude toward him.

Considering that Time's 'present' isn't any single precise point but rather a brief span, we suspect he's very likely the 'present anomaly.' So our Investigator applied some pressure to the miner and confirmed that the shift in his feelings toward Alo Manni only began recently.

We then corroborated this through other miners. Everyone who'd interacted with him was unaware that he'd developed romantic feelings for Alo Manni. Worth noting — we also found many of Alo Manni's regular clients here and gathered testimony about the shanty woman's character. I'd originally planned to verify this with you all when we reconvened, but now it appears..."

Wang Mou scanned the group, and upon not seeing Alo Manni among them, his expression turned resolute:

"She's probably not one of the 'discrepancies.' The true 'discrepancy' is Ad Ric. The night surrounding his decision to take the shanty woman away — that's likely the so-called 'present.'

As for your other questions...

Ad Ric was taken by the Investigator. He's a very 'considerate' person — gave me some private time. Once we confirmed Ad Ric was the anomaly, we went our separate ways.

So no, I didn't assassinate him. He left on his own.

But now his 'consideration' is over, because as of just now, our Investigator has been following me again. I don't know what he's planning, but yes — I came here specifically to wait for you."

"..."

After hearing this thorough analysis, Cheng Shi wanted to applaud — but he also felt a faint headache forming. The man was too deadpan. His delivery made even Mi Laozhang's explanations seem lively by comparison.

But what did it mean that the Investigator had taken Ad Ric?

What was the Investigator planning?

Cheng Shi frowned. Something about the mine felt off again. But he had a more pressing concern — Wang Mou's final statement. This Truth follower had genuinely been waiting for them?

What did he want?

Just as Cheng Shi puzzled over this, Qin Xin at the rear of the group raised a hand and patted Mo Rabic's shoulder, asking with evident interest:

"Mr. Wise Man — you've looked like you've been wanting to say something for a while now. It seems you have an opinion about this Truth follower standing before us?"

Speak freely. After all, truth becomes clearer through debate. We'd also like to know — between Folly and Truth, which one is actually right?"

Qin Xin's words practically reeked of provocation. So much so that Cheng Shi did a startled double-take, half-wondering if the man had been possessed. The Blind One also let out an amused snort, though she seemed entirely unsurprised by his reaction.

Mo Rabic did indeed have something to say. And it wasn't just him — even Allendor beside him had been biting his tongue repeatedly. If Mo Rabic hadn't held him back, he'd probably have spoken up the moment Wang Mou started talking.

Mo Rabic glanced at Wang Mou, then at Cheng Shi at the front. Only upon receiving an affirming look from Cheng Shi did he speak, his tone grave:

"I have no quarrel with Truth. His foolish ways will sooner or later drive both His followers and Himself away from genuine truth.

What I want to say is: this Truth follower knows where the Abyss Colorful Crystal is. He carries the scent of Abyss Colorful Crystal on his body!

There's no mistake — and it's fresh!"

The instant those words dropped, every pair of eyes snapped to Wang Mou. Cheng Shi's brow shot up as he quietly palmed a scalpel inside his sleeve, simultaneously commanding the Screaming Servant into a defensive stance.

Interesting. So this Truth follower really had come for the Abyss Colorful Crystal!

That figured. As a peak-level Truth player, understanding the Abyssal Volcano better than the rest was only to be expected. But what puzzled Cheng Shi was this: if Wang Mou knew the Investigator had deliberately given him private time to hunt for the Crystal, why had he still gone ahead with Li Wufang tailing him?

Wasn't he afraid the Investigator also coveted the Abyss Colorful Crystal?

The Investigator had certainly been tracking him — and had very likely been doing so the entire time, only revealing his position now to let the Doctor know he was there.

Cheng Shi put himself in those shoes. If he knew a teammate was searching the mine for valuables, he too would lurk in the shadows and observe.

Based on his assessment, Li Wufang — that sunny, cheerful Investigator — was exactly the type who'd do something like that.

So Cheng Shi's confusion only deepened. What was this Truth follower after, with behavior this erratic and contradictory?

Chapter 669: Truth Is Not Folly — Knowledge Should Flow Freely

"Doctor, are you searching for Divinity?"

The Blind One broke the silence amid the collective scrutiny. She turned to Wang Mou with a smile, her sealed eyes seeming to emit a mysterious glow, inviting him to address Mo Rabic's claim.

This answer was critical — it might well determine whether Wang Mou could remain a teammate in the trial going forward. Cheng Shi and the Torchbearers had also come for the Abyss Colorful Crystal; if they

simply watched the Divinity that was rightfully theirs get "picked up" by someone else, the Torchbearers might be willing to let it slide — but a certain clown would not.

True, an ownerless thing belonged to whoever found it first. But the problem was: you took the lead I brought to the inn, then beat me to the Crystal I wanted. No matter how you sliced it, that felt like being backstabbed.

Cheng Shi had a headache. He knew the Abyss Colorful Crystal couldn't belong to him alone, but he also couldn't let the Truth follower before him hoard it all. At minimum, half-and-half was basic courtesy. So from the moment he'd heard Mo Rabi's words, he'd been calculating how to secure his share — plus perhaps the two Torchbearers' — from the hands of an assassin.

Qin Xin and the Blind One were also weighing the situation, keen to learn what this Truth teammate truly intended.

And then, to everyone's stunned disbelief, something jaw-dropping happened. Wang Mou apparently had no intention of hoarding the spoils at all. He retrieved eleven pieces of Abyss Colorful Crystal of varying sizes from his personal space, laid them out neatly on the ground, and — under everyone's thunderstruck gazes — said in his characteristically deadpan manner:

"I searched every mine shaft, warehouse, and miner's hidden stash. This is all there was. The current period isn't ideal for Abyss Colorful Crystal collection — these are likely stockpiles they gathered during the Abyssal Volcano's last eruption.

If I'm not mistaken, this wise man of yours is somehow related to La Biao, a Grand Scholar from the Tower of Logic's Creation Alchemy Department. I've studied him, seen his portrait. That's how I first learned about Abyss Colorful Crystal.

I also found some records related to the Divinity tempering experiment during that trial — but most were failed drafts. The vague 'core experimental material' mentioned in them became the biggest obstacle to my replicating the experiment...

So — friends of Folly — you possess the means to refine these Crystals, don't you?

Otherwise, I can't imagine why my teammates would bring a group of unrelated NPCs to the mine in search of leads."

Sharp, rational, intelligent, composed — Cheng Shi saw in Wang Mou every quality a Truth follower should embody. This should have been a perfect opportunity to deepen his understanding of the man, yet Cheng Shi couldn't shake the feeling that something about Wang Mou was fundamentally off.

If Wang Mou had presented this persona from the start, Cheng Shi's impression of him wouldn't have been negative. But the man had opened with lies, then exposed himself, looking every bit like someone with hidden agendas and ulterior motives — only to now "generously" lay out a full day's worth of Abyss Colorful Crystal for everyone to see.

This erratic, contradictory behavior left Cheng Shi's perception of Wang Mou in disarray. The man's image felt like a defective product stitched together from countless fragments rather than a harmonious whole from the outset.

Why?

Could he be... someone's slice?

It wasn't unreasonable for Cheng Shi to think this. Truth followers excelled at exactly this sort of thing. And after witnessing the Divinity Germination Experiment, no anomaly in a slice-person's personality could surprise him anymore.

With this thought, a new layer of scrutiny entered Cheng Shi's gaze. He studied Wang Mou for a long while before smiling:

"What exactly do you mean, Doctor? You intend to... share these Abyss Colorful Crystals with us?"

Wang Mou nodded frankly:

"Correct. I have the materials. You seem to have the methodology. Collaboration between us can effectively advance the experiment's replication.

If these two Folly followers can truly complete the experiment and extract Divinity from the Crystal, I don't need any share of the resulting Divinity. I only want to observe one complete experiment.

That is the entirety of my purpose."

"But that's not why you were waiting for us here, Doctor. Before running into us, you had no idea our party included wise men who understood the experiment." Cheng Shi's retort was as incisive as ever.

"True. Observing the experiment is merely my hope — not my reason for seeking you out.

But Fate Weaver, you needn't be so guarded against me. I harbor no ill intent. I am simply devoted to pursuing Truth.

I came here because I couldn't be certain whether the Investigator behind me would act preemptively and strip me of all the Crystal I'd found.

Fairness has never been a niche topic. When few people are present, no one can guarantee fairness. Only before a crowd does fairness even have a chance of being invoked.

So you could say it was 'fear' that drove me to find you as quickly as possible — though you arrived faster than I expected.

Speaking of which — I've been this transparent already. Investigator, are you still not going to come out and join us?"

Wang Mou turned to look behind him. The moment the words left his mouth, Li Wufang emerged from behind a small hill in the distance, a smile playing at his lips. In one hand he held a rope, and at the other end — two men trussed up like packages, forced to hop forward like zombies.

Everyone recognized both "zombies." One was Ad Ric, the man the Doctor had identified as the "present anomaly." The other was none other than the group's target — the Proxy Hand's boss, A Rad!

No one had expected A Rad to end up in Li Wufang's hands. The moment Shi Lolin spotted her brother in the crowd, her face darkened into a murderous glare as she sneered: "A Rad — so your day has come!"

A Rad was still too far away to hear his sister's greeting. Li Wufang, however, had sharp ears. He glanced at Shi Lolin among the group, then back at his captive, the smile at his eyes deepening.

He strolled over with the two in tow, expression casual, seemingly unbothered by the Doctor's veiled accusation. He didn't even acknowledge Wang Mou's stare. His drifting gaze skipped over everyone else entirely and landed squarely on Cheng Shi — and in the brief instant their eyes met, he squeezed Cheng Shi a conspicuous, deliberate wink.

"?"

Cheng Shi's heart skipped a beat. That covert signal was clearly no ordinary greeting between teammates. Why was the Investigator suddenly trying to curry favor with him? What had he discovered?

Or rather — what did he want to say?

Cheng Shi was puzzled but didn't dare show it. He could only respond with his trademark smile, then casually shifted his gaze back to the Abyss Colorful Crystal on the ground, smacking his lips appreciatively — ostensibly addressing Wang Mou, but really deflecting the Investigator's attention.

"I'm not being guarded against you. I'm just surprised that you're so... generous?"

"Generous? Perhaps. When cooperation improves efficiency, I will always choose cooperation.

After all — Truth is not Folly. Knowledge should flow freely."

Chapter 670: The Doctor: Luck Doesn't Matter

Standard Truth will. Devout Truth rhetoric.

Though every word Wang Mou spoke was technically true, Cheng Shi privately shook his head — he didn't believe a single one.

He could tell this Truth follower was far from straightforward. He just couldn't yet determine what the man was hiding beneath his generous sharing. Moreover, something about the mine itself clearly held secrets he hadn't yet uncovered — secrets that seemed to make every teammate who'd explored it come back acting noticeably stranger than before.

Cheng Shi raised his head and gazed toward the mine, his expression both puzzled and deep. While he was still mulling things over, the Blind One had already struck up a conversation with the Investigator nearby.

"Your aura's become a lot more... lively, Investigator. Did something good happen?"

Li Wufang seemed surprised that the Blind One would engage him. He shook his head with a grin:

"No — nothing at all.

All I did was lighten the Doctor's load and keep an eye on Ad Ric. Beyond that, I've accomplished absolutely nothing.

I'm not as lucky as the Doctor, finding all these wonderful things. I've got terrible luck — all I ran into was one not-very-attractive man.

This Proxy Hand leader rushed to the mine with great urgency. Seemed like he was trying to rally his men for something. I didn't bother investigating — didn't want to waste time. I only knew that if he assembled a force, our mine exploration would get a lot harder. So I went ahead and tied him up.

But — it seems you're all quite interested in this 'mine boss.' Does that mean my little contribution to the team counts for something?

When we're distributing rewards from all these wonderful things the Doctor found... would there maybe be a share for me too?"

"..."

The Blind One fell silent. Somehow, she caught a whiff of Cheng Shi's essence in Li Wufang's words.

Strange — why was this sunny, cheerful Investigator suddenly acting so much like Cheng Shi?

And it wasn't just the Blind One. Cheng Shi felt it too. For a split second he was almost disoriented, as if he'd suddenly looked into a mirror.

Had the Mirror Person made a move?

Impossible. A Mirror Person's ability was to make themselves mimic others — it certainly wasn't some "mirror" that made others reflect oneself.

Cheng Shi's frown deepened. His gaze at Wang Mou and Li Wufang grew even more peculiar.

Wang Mou, meanwhile — seeing that no one had responded to Li Wufang — corrected him with his customary seriousness:

"Finding the Abyss Colorful Crystal wasn't luck. Though I'm an assassin, I've devoted considerable time to studying Divinity. Long accumulation leads to eventual breakthroughs. Without prior research, I couldn't have found these so readily.

On the road to pursuing Truth, attitude matters, methodology matters, perseverance matters, capability matters — but luck... that's a variable.

An uncontrollable variable can never be important."

Aside from the two wise men who partially agreed with the Doctor's "theory," everyone else's reactions varied wildly.

Qin Xin's lips curled faintly. The Blind One wore an impassive expression. Li Wufang looked like it went in one ear and out the other. Only Cheng Shi... outwardly he appeared admiring, but inwardly he was grumbling.

'How hypocritical!'

He distinctly remembered how deeply moved the Doctor had been at the inn when Cheng Shi had shared his theory about fate. Back then, Wang Mou had put on a whole "Destiny is important too" act. But now that he'd achieved something himself, he'd thrown Destiny's guidance out the window.

'Tsk — Doctor, Doctor. Let me tell you: Destiny... isn't always so forgiving.'

'You'd better watch yourself.'

When all the trial's players reconvened, they naturally launched into a second round of discussion about the trial's clues. The Shanty Area team and the mine team each shared their findings, cross-examined each other for several rounds, and arrived at a unanimous conclusion: they'd been lucky enough to identify the "present" and "future" discrepancies on the very first day of a seven-day trial. As for where the "past" lay, and whether additional "presents" and "futures" existed — those would likely become the agenda for day two.

Because with the Abyss Colorful Crystal right before them, virtually everyone found the conversation drifting — uncontrollably, inevitably — toward Divinity. With such an auspicious start, why not seize this perfect alignment of timing, terrain, and personnel to grab the Divinity that was practically within reach?

Especially with two eager wise men beside them who could barely contain themselves. So everyone hit it off instantly. They led all the NPCs to the Proxy Hand's only quiet and suitable location within the mine. After "arranging" the trial-related individuals, the players created an absolutely undisturbed experimental space for Mo Rabic and Allendor.

Wang Mou once again laid out the Abyss Colorful Crystal. Cheng Shi, as promised, returned Zangier's finger. Mo Rabic rifled through the Crystal pile, selecting one that felt optimal in both quality and intuition for the "opening act." The irrepressible grin on his face seemed to say: never in the Underworld had these Folly followers fought from such a position of abundance.

Allendor was ready too. As the experiment's primary operator, he'd reached near-peak mental condition with the Fate Weaver's help. Everything was in place. The experiment seemed ready to begin.

But the atmosphere was almost unbearably taut. Never mind the five players all watching each other — even the two experimenters wore gravely solemn expressions. The tension made Cheng Shi feel constrained. Fearing excessive nerves would cause another failure, he decided to warm things up and break the ice by asking a question that had nagged him the entire way.

"Mr. Mo Rabic — the Grand Scholar La Biao that the Doctor mentioned earlier... is he your father?"

As he spoke, Cheng Shi glanced at Wang Mou. Wang Mou's subtle nod confirmed his guess — the portrait of La Biao he'd seen did indeed bear a strong resemblance to Mo Rabic.

Yet, to everyone's surprise, Mo Rabic frowned at the question and shook his head, denying it. And more than that — Allendor, standing to the side, went dark-faced and blurted out an absurd-sounding fact.

"Hmph. Lord La Biao is my father."

"?"

Now it wasn't just Cheng Shi — even Wang Mou was taken aback. He studied Allendor up and down with knitted brows, then shook his head with utmost gravity:

"That doesn't track. The eyes and brow in La Biao's portrait are strikingly similar to Mo Rabic's — no, they're practically a younger copy of him. But you...

I think you more closely resemble another scholar from that experiment — Lun Zol's descendant. Your face shape and hair color are much closer to his."