

The Gods 731

Chapter 731: Divine Audience Frenzy

The plummeting clown felt those terrifying aftershocks. Fear—born from the violent clash within the Void—surged through his heart.

This situation had clearly spiraled far beyond his expectations. He didn't know what had transpired between his two Benefactors, but as the only Void walker holding dual faiths, he could distinctly feel his two faiths going at each other.

And not the playful pinching kind. This was the life-or-death, stabbing kind!

'They're actually serious?'

Connecting this to the Fun God's arrangement regarding Destiny's faith fusion, Cheng Shi couldn't help but wonder: had their differing attitudes toward faith fusion caused the two Void gods to permanently break?

'Surely it hasn't come to that — after all, my fusion is still intact. That means Void is still... voiding.'

But what exactly was the Fun God trying to do? He couldn't be trying to beat the other Benefactor into submission and force Destiny to accept Time's fusion, right?

'That would be too void.'

Even Cheng Shi startled himself with that thought.

This kind of absurd plot would already be outrageous among humans. If it happened among the gods...

'Impossible. Definitely impossible.'

Even though Cheng Shi's core faith was Deceit, he'd always felt that Destiny's power was no less than the Fun God's — perhaps even greater.

After all, the moment you compared "essence" to "facade," it was obvious who stood higher.

But he'd never dare openly critique such things. Private thoughts only.

Setting aside Destiny's attitude — would Time even agree to a 100% fusion with Void?

Judging by Existence's demeanor, They weren't fond of Void's chaos-sowing ways.

'Unless... there's another rebel in the ranks?'

Cheng Shi was speechless. The relationships among the gods were a tangled mess. Chaos would probably emerge the biggest winner from all this. But in reality, something bothered him even more than divine politics...

The clown still hadn't returned to his rest area. He was still falling through the Void.

Today's journey through the Void had dragged on far too long. After staring at endless nothingness, the warm feeling of "going home" had long since evaporated, replaced by the sensation of being shoved into the office — getting dragged from one meeting to the next by a parade of bosses both familiar and strange, each one as tedious as an old woman's foot-wrapping cloth.

'Who's next?'

During the fall, the bored clown even started making bets with himself.

'Truth, the puppet master behind Tower of Logic?'

'Order, usurped by Chaos yet still upholding justice?'

'Memory, who War believers use to disguise their identities?'

'Or the other star of this faith fusion drama — the one who'd revealed the universe's truth to him... Time?'

The instant this last thought crossed his mind, his destination arrived.

His vision blazed with light. He found himself plummeting from the Void into a radiant, shimmering sea of stars.

A "starry sky" — and yet, not much of one. There weren't many actual celestial bodies here. Instead, countless bizarre beams of light twisted and spiraled independently, crisscrossing one another, bending their trajectories into structures that resembled stars. One glance, and your sight was pulled in like a foot stepping into quicksand — trapped in eternity.

Cheng Shi never expected his very gaze could be captured by these "existences." One second, he seemed to have witnessed centuries of time. The next, he snapped awake, realizing that entire stretch of extended consciousness had lasted mere milliseconds.

Terrified, he wrenched his gaze back and shut his eyes — afraid of stumbling into another trap with no way out. And in this state, he slowly descended onto a platform.

Feeling solid ground beneath his feet, Cheng Shi carefully cracked his eyes open. He looked down and found himself standing on an enormous jade disc. Whether it was truly jade or some jade-like substance was unclear, but although it was a surface, it was a three-dimensional plane — warped through space, tilting in every direction, extending infinitely outward.

On the disc: countless concentric rings of varying sizes, interlocking and fitted together. At the center of each ring sat a point of absolute black — like a tiny black hole. The light radiating from each black point resembled time itself, trapped in some deformed elongated tube, cycling endlessly, never ceasing.

These dizzying components formed individual clock faces, each radiating resplendent streams of light. And these clock faces merged into one another, combining into an even larger face — a twisted, circular disc that hung like draped jade fabric.

A hand — covered in countless rings — swept silently over Cheng Shi's head, casting a vast shadow beneath him. "Click." As if tolling the hour for the entire universe, announcing that the cosmos had entered its next whole hour.

Staring at this spectacle, Cheng Shi stood rooted in place. He swallowed dryly.

Time!

It really was Him!

Only in His domain could such a universe-shaking clock exist.

So this colossal clock — composed of infinitely cycling flows of time — was it anchoring the universe's current time?

Cheng Shi was genuinely awestruck. But his thoughts weren't entirely on the present — they drifted to... the past.

He was wondering: if he mentally recited the "Little Book of Phlegm Eating" in his head, would He — like Destiny — be magnanimous enough to forgive his earlier blasphemy?

'Help me — I had NO IDEA Destiny could fuse with Time when I was disrespecting You!!!'

Cheng Shi was terrified. He stood frozen, not daring to move, listening to the clicks of countless clock hands ticking around him, letting time pass — like a prisoner awaiting sentencing, growing more anxious by the second.

But as the fear persisted, he suddenly realized: no deity seemed to be present on this colossal clock face.

In other words — though the clown had landed in Time's domain, Time hadn't appeared to grant him an audience.

This realization made Cheng Shi blink. Then the Fun God's words echoed in his mind:

"Time doesn't have time."

'He doesn't have time to see me?'

'Then who threw me here?'

Cheng Shi sank into thought. Gradually, his courage grew. He began cautiously exploring the warped clock face, carefully feeling the jade-like ground beneath his feet. After a moment's examination, he made a startling discovery: what he was standing on wasn't stone. It wasn't any "material." It was... Existence itself.

The fine grain of time pressed ring upon ring against itself, tight as tree rings — dizzying to behold. He ran his fingertips over a few rings, and everything felt like he'd lived through the turning of an entire era — waves of vast, surging time crashing toward him, rushing through his body.

This sensation only reinforced his certainty. What lay beneath his feet was nothing else — it was infinitely folded... time!

Chapter 732: Destiny Fuses with ???

Originally, Cheng Shi held no affection for Time.

First, Time and Destiny were opposites — Existence was the Void's natural enemy. You didn't show enemies a friendly face. Second, the lurking shadow of Time's sudden appearance outside Aph Ros's door still hung over his heart. He knew almost nothing about Time and instinctively feared dealing with the unknown.

But now, his mindset had shifted.

The moment he learned the Fun God wanted him to fuse with Time, his rejection transformed into curiosity. He burned to know what role Time played in the Fun God's scheme — and whether He would agree to this fusion with Void.

Deceit had once said: any approach tainted by His will was no longer "approaching" — it was "getting close." So the road beneath Cheng Shi's feet had always been walked by himself. Even though every inch was littered with so-called Destiny's guidance, at least he could tell any given deity with a straight face: the Fun God's shadow isn't behind this meeting.

But this time was different. The Fun God had handed him a performance on a platter — one staged on the "enemy's" platform, with a billboard out front bearing Destiny's name.

Cheng Shi felt like a bewildered actor holding a script with a title but no content. He wanted to perform it as well as possible, but had no idea how.

The most critical question: did Time have a role in this script?

'My Lord, oh my Lord — did You actually arrange this with Time, or is this just a probe?'

If the former, he could just coast. If the latter — could the warring Void actually protect him from Time? Cheng Shi was lost.

But that couldn't stump an adaptable clown for long. After a brief moment of confusion, he furrowed his brow and made his decision.

'Since there's no script... I'll improvise!'

He sprang into action. First, he mentally grilled Brother Mouth. Getting no response, he felt slightly reassured. He pulled out the Tongue of Eating Lies and started tossing it toward the platform's outer edge.

He feared Time might harbor illusions like Memory, or phantoms of Existence might pervade His domain. So he used Brother Tongue to scout the path — much to Brother Tongue's fury, since this overtime came with zero compensation.

Finding no traps, Cheng Shi's courage grew slightly.

He... pulled out a pickaxe.

Yes. A pickaxe!

Don't ask why a clown's spatial inventory contained a pickaxe. The answer: mining.

But there was clearly no ore here. So what was Cheng Shi going to do with it?

Naturally — secure some loot and leave himself an escape route.

As a Destiny follower, as a forever-steady player, whether or not he'd eventually fuse with Time, he needed an exit strategy.

Void fusing with Existence wasn't minor business. The violent clash currently raging in the Void proved his other Benefactor disagreed. Though he didn't know how the Fun God planned to push it through, once it happened — the Fun God could vanish into the Void and never resurface. But Cheng Shi? He couldn't escape his other Benefactor's wrath.

When that time came, how would he — carrying Time's power — explain himself to Destiny?

'Well, Your twin deity made a compelling argument, so I agreed?'

'That would be a death so stupid I wouldn't even know how I died.'

So everything Cheng Shi did now was about building an exit. He raised the pickaxe and slammed it into the ground beneath his feet — hoping to chip off a piece of folded time for research.

Later, if Destiny came in a fury, he could argue he'd never agreed to the fusion — it was all coerced — and he'd already proven his resistance through action!

'Look, my Lord — here's the time I chiseled off Time's domain. I couldn't do more, but I needed to express my position!'

Yet even this carried risk. Even if Destiny was merciful enough to let it slide... how would he handle Time?

Best case: the other deity didn't have time to show up. But if He did?

For that, Cheng Shi had prepared his defense too.

'I'm a Void walker who's fused with Existence itself. Bringing home a few local specialties from my "new place" — is that wrong?'

'No. Not at all!'

Whether or not these excuses would work, greed had successfully talked him into it. He swung harder.

But a mortal's pickaxe could never shatter a deity's creation. The faster and harder he swung, the more the folded time-floor remained immovable — while his pickaxe eroded first.

Not dulling or chipping — corroded by the vastness of time.

Handle and head alike turned brittle. On his final forceful strike, the ground didn't budge, but the pickaxe shattered — exploding into sparkling points of light that arced upward. Like every other stream of light in this space, they instantly plummeted... straight toward Cheng Shi!

"!!!"

He sensed danger. Tried to dodge. But how could life outrun time?

Countless streams of light spiraled around him, coiling into rings of years that reflected in his horror-shrunken pupils.

That ancient, cyclical time — like a chisel from the dawn of existence — etched the patterns of time into Cheng Shi's eyes, stroke by stroke, transforming the briefest instant into unchanging eternity.

And at that very moment, another pair of spiral-and-star-painted eyes opened above Cheng Shi's head. They looked upon him — gaze so complex, laced with grief and resolve that no mortal could comprehend — and silently blinked at Their follower.

With that single blink, a mysterious force of Destiny rose from those starlit eyes, dispersing into star-specks that filled the sky, illuminating this entire space once more.

Simultaneously, Cheng Shi's hand rose of its own accord. Under his increasingly alarmed gaze, it pointed straight at his shadow — for the first time overriding his will to switch his faith.

In that instant, Deceit's power shattered. Destiny's power surged to fullness.

The Destiny power within Cheng Shi began resonating with the sky full of star-specks — rising, intertwining with the Time power that had just been etched as patterns — forming countless interconnected rings of reality and void. For one dazzling moment, they blazed across the starry sky — then poured back into Cheng Shi's eyes.

His vision went black. His entire body felt hurled skyward by a titanic force. Fighting through the violent vertigo, he forced his eyes open — and found himself face-to-face with two black holes vast enough to imprison every timeline in the universe.

Those black-hole eyes released a sigh, then returned the "follower" who'd paid them a visit back to the warped clock face.

This rollercoaster of terror left Cheng Shi's heart pounding like a war drum, every ounce of strength drained. But the instant his feet touched solid ground, he snapped back, immediately looking upward — only to find that both the starlit eyes and the black-hole pupils had vanished.

The entire starry sky held only him. Him, and the endlessly imprisoned time, and the countless ticking Universal Clocks.

Tick... tick... tick...

Time never stopped flowing. The bewilderment in Cheng Shi's heart only grew.

Those familiar eyes that had descended — they didn't feel like his Benefactor Destiny. Yet everything before him forced him to believe it was Destiny — Destiny who'd come specifically to approve the fusion with Time!

Because...

[Cheng Shi, Male, 22 years old]

[Path of Fate: Void]

[Path Talent: Reflection of Nihilism (SSS): ...]

[Current Faith: Destiny (Fused) Time]

Chapter 733: Destiny Fuses with Time — The Fate Weaver Forgotten by Time!

[Current Faith: Destiny (Fused) Time]

[Road to Ascension: 2242, Global Rank: 358,761]

[Ladder of Ascent: 181, Path Rank: 31]

[Faith Talents:

Fate Loom (SS): Destiny faith talent...

Fate Has Divergence (S): Destiny faith talent...

Small Bet Big Thousand Arts (S): Destiny faith talent...

Never Lost Gambling Gear (S): Destiny faith talent...

Fate Clown (S): Deceit oathbreaking talent...

Time Deduction (SS): Time faith talent. Active. Every life yearns for the truth of time, yet truth is often hidden where the living cannot see. Before activating this talent, you must designate a single target. Upon activation, you will gain a brief opportunity to communicate with the target's projection on another timeline. The same effect can only be used once per target.

Time Has Path (S): Time faith talent. Active. Each time you activate Fate Has Divergence, before your fate fully collapses, you may regress through time to the moment before the divergence occurred. Using this regression will place the talent Fate Has Divergence on extended cooldown.

Elusive Chip (S): Time faith talent. Active. Each time you activate Never Lost Gambling Gear, the die's exchangeable position will no longer be limited to its current location — it will include its trajectory across past and future. The temporal range depends on mental power.

...]

Staring at these new Time talents, Cheng Shi froze in place.

This was the first time he'd felt at a loss while receiving a divine gift.

Yes — Cheng Shi was utterly at a loss. He stood there, rigid, devoid of any joy at growing stronger. All he felt was bewilderment at the Void and Existence deities' attitudes, and confusion at the Time talents themselves.

Honestly — if the descriptions hadn't explicitly said "Time faith talent," he'd have sworn these talents belonged to Destiny!

'This isn't fusion.'

'This is supplementation!?!'

'Who says Existence opposes the Void? They're practically family!'

Look at these talents — every single one strengthened Destiny!

Well, that wasn't quite accurate. They didn't strengthen Destiny — they strengthened Her followers.

But consider: Destiny's talents were custom-designed for the Fate Weaver. So what about Time?

'You nearly got me killed in the last trial, and now you hand me a set of custom talents as a peace offering?'

'You're the essence of Existence, the most mysterious Time — and this flip-flopping attitude is really...'

'Wonderful!'

'More please. If this is the compensation, I'll take on the hardest trials.'

""My Lord," please keep tempering me!'

Cheng Shi laughed. In the end, the thrill of gaining power won out, pulling him free from confusion. He began examining his post-fusion self.

He'd never been one to hesitate. Despite how sudden this fusion was — despite knowing nothing about the Void-Existence power play behind it — that didn't stop him from banking Time's benefits and figuring things out as he went.

'Since the Fun God pushed things this far... He wouldn't just abandon me, right?'

'The Fear Faction has exactly one person and one god. He can't be that heartless!'

That said, the Destiny talent system with Time's enhancements had become absurdly powerful.

Take the most unassuming upgrade of this batch — Elusive Chip. The position swap now included past and future trajectories? Fascinating. It practically perfected his Deceit-based combat system. For one fleeting moment, Cheng Shi even wondered whether these "Time talents filling in Destiny's gaps" had been personally designed by Deceit.

To test the effect, he casually pulled out a die and hurled it toward the platform's infinite horizon. While the die was still arcing upward, he snapped his fingers — and appeared at the platform's edge. A light flick of his wrist, and the die was back in his hand.

But that wasn't all. He snapped again — and found himself back at his starting point, die in hand. In mere seconds, he'd traversed the die's future and past.

This firsthand experience of Time's arcane power left the Fate Weaver thunderstruck.

He stared at the die in his hand, grin spreading wider, then wider — until it erupted into unbridled, manic laughter.

"Ha ha ha — HA HA HA — I don't know why, but I feel like THIS is the real Destiny!"

But the instant those words left his mouth, his smile froze. He suddenly realized he was no longer a pure Destiny follower. The master of this starry domain — Time — was also his Benefactor now.

'Oh no. Got carried away.'

He hastily corrected himself, cupping his hands toward the sky overhead. He was about to offer praise when the words stuck in his throat.

Brow furrowed, he paused: 'Wait — Destiny's my Benefactor too, and that doesn't stop me from occasionally... So why should Time be immune to a little disrespect?'

'Besides, after the fusion, Destiny and Time are one. Saying I carry the "true Destiny" isn't technically wrong.'

Just like that, Cheng Shi straightened his back again.

Not because he'd stopped fearing Time — but because Time was genuinely busy. Apart from that one-second appearance to approve the fusion, He'd never once shown Himself in this starry domain.

'Strange. If He isn't summoning me, and the faith fusion is already complete, then why am I still on this Universal Clock platform instead of returning to reality?'

'Could the Void conflict still be unresolved — those two Benefactors still locked in battle?'

'But if there's no winner yet, how did Destiny manage to come here and approve the fusion?'

Cheng Shi couldn't figure it out. And right as he was frowning and scanning his surroundings — mutation struck!

A twisted corridor of time suddenly tore open in the starry sky above. Streams of light burst from its mouth like fireworks, instantly shattering the silence.

A blurry shape fought its way out of the corridor, tumbling through the Void before gradually resolving into the form of a young human.

'Someone's here!'

'Who?'

'His follower?'

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted. He realized a new visitor was arriving in Time's starry domain. But Time clearly wasn't here — so who had drawn this player to this place?

'Hm?'

'Wait!'

'Who says He's not here?'

He was standing right here. Right on this Universal Clock platform!

At that realization, Cheng Shi turned on his heel. He touched his shadow, and one second later — the Fate Weaver forgotten by Time vanished. In his place stood a clock hand — blending perfectly, harmoniously into this starry domain!

'Impersonating the real god might be going too far. But impersonating a divine envoy...'

'Now that's my specialty.'

Chapter 734: A Void Civil... War Rivaling a God War

Rewind time a moment — back to the climax of the Void civil war.

Deceit and Destiny were fighting in deadly earnest. Chaos, ever the master provocateur, stirred things up with relish. Under the combined "efforts" of three deities, the Void collapsed entirely.

This mirror-image of reality was frozen, shattered, and sent plummeting — collapsing toward infinite nothingness. If this continued, the entire universe would crumble from the imbalance between reality and the Void, with the real world collapsing toward pure Existence just as the Void now did.

When that happened, aside from the lofty Them far above, the universe would be swept clean — leaving only two "colors": black and white.

That was an outcome none of Them wanted.

The commotion had grown truly staggering — rivaling an actual God War. The spectating deities hadn't expected the Void to actually fight for real. Now, no one could sit still.

One by one, They descended around the battlefield, pouring divine power into holding back the Void's disintegration.

But not every deity was working to salvage things. At least one of Them seized the chaos to dive into the fray — attempting to accelerate the universe's "Oblivion"!

Yet what this interloper didn't anticipate was that the two Void deities — who'd been tearing each other apart moments ago — both pulled their punches the instant He entered. In perfect unison, They turned on Him!

Before two masters of the era, this deity didn't dare linger. He paid the price and fled.

To prevent Him from stirring more trouble, Death sighed and drew His scythe — that blade forged from countless shards of divinity — and stood guard at the outermost perimeter.

At that moment, a pair of eyes swirling with chaotic white miasma looked toward the three deities at the storm's center, and scoffed:

"The Void plays a fine game of chess. But isn't your method of rejecting Oblivion's approach a bit underhanded?"

If all divine communication were conducted like this, what peace would this universe ever know?"

The battle at the Void's center didn't pause for even a heartbeat in response to that scoff. If anything, the fluctuations intensified. Both Void deities were giving everything — though one of them still had the leisure to answer the mockery from outside.

Naturally, His response was also mockery.

"Hee~

How entertaining. You want peace with that foul mouth of yours? Just sew it shut and the whole universe will be at peace.

Not just peaceful — blissfully quiet."

"..." Folly's eye twitched. Then He laughed scornfully: "Give it up. You can't provoke My anger. And I won't follow Oblivion's example of annihilating My own brain. I will not join your battle — and don't think you can use this to test Me."

"Ha — you really think the Void wants to target you?"

The laughing voice emerged from the battlefield again, followed almost instantly by a frigid one:

"As if you're worthy.

When the Void wants to strike you, it needs no reason."

With that, a terrifying blast of Destiny power actually split from the raging Void collision — streaking toward the spectating Folly!

Destiny!

She'd suddenly broken from the melee and charged at the deity who'd displeased Her.

As for why She was displeased — no one knew. But this attack forced Folly to take things seriously.

He recognized it wasn't a probe. He instantly deconstructed the incoming divine power and returned fire with equal force. Two Destiny-caliber strikes collided head-on, detonating with enough force to nearly blow this fragile, god-maintained Void to pieces.

Seeing Folly deconstruct Her power, Destiny's expression grew colder. Seeing Destiny refuse to stop, Folly furrowed His brow:

"Foolish. Manic. Purposeless.

You want the era to walk toward the fixed — yet your rage is incinerating that very fixed path.

Don't let the divine name 'Destiny' become a joke. There are enough fools in this world already."

"..."

An indiscriminate AOE attack, without question. But in the current situation, no one was about to argue.

All the gods knew: you couldn't out-argue Folly, just as you couldn't reason with Deceit.

Yet these words clearly ignited an even greater fury in Destiny. She abandoned Her offensive against Her twin deity and redirected all attention to this second deity of Chaos.

It seemed the Void was about to declare war on Chaos. And at this critical juncture, Deceit appeared — materializing behind Destiny, pointing at Folly and chattering away:

"Who's the foolish one here?"

You don't actually think Chaos has three gods and therefore three times the fighting power, do you?"

As He spoke, His gaze swept past Chaos — His recent co-combatant — then drifted to Silence, who had stayed far, far away and hadn't uttered a single word throughout.

The mockery in those eyes was unmistakable: the Void has two. You only have one. Where do you get the nerve?

Folly fell uncharacteristically silent. Indeed — if the Void stopped its infighting, then in the current power dynamics, He'd inexplicably become the prey.

He frowned, sensing something was off. But what He didn't expect was that things would only get worse.

"The Void doesn't need two shares of fighting power. You and I aren't finished!"

Destiny didn't appreciate the assist. She scoffed and charged straight at Folly. Deceit, unwilling to leave Her unsupported, helpfully followed.

Folly braced Himself, not daring to let His guard down. Just as He tried to deconstruct the incoming twin assault — the entire Void offensive suddenly collapsed on its own!

"!!!"

"BOOM—"

Every deity's expression transformed. Because they'd all seen it clearly: at the very moment Deceit had joined Destiny's attack, this Void facade had once again used a "deceit" to fool everyone — including His own twin — and struck Destiny down mid-charge with a devastating blast of Deceit power!

Deceit had succeeded!

And in that instant, Destiny's eyes flew wide. She felt Her authority leaving Her. Felt someone invading Her divine core. Though the process was brief—

In that fleeting heartbeat, three streams of Destiny light shot from the melee toward the heavens, then streaked like meteors in three different directions!

The gods sensed what that power was. One by one, Their expressions turned grave as They watched the battle's center, each internally raising Deceit's threat level again... and again!

When... had He acquired such terrifying authority-stealing capabilities?

Those three blasts of Destiny power involving faith determination were clearly the result of Deceit openly stealing Destiny's authority with a single strike. But this unprecedented, never-before-seen ability — why hadn't it been written into the Convention when the Convention was established?

This Void facade had actually hidden this trick from all the gods?

Hidden it until only now?

Was that possible?

Not likely!

But if the one in question was Deceit...

Then anything was possible!

The gods recoiled in shock. Even Folly's brow dropped.

This scene genuinely surpassed Their imaginations. By Their understanding of authority seizure, any deity wishing to use another's authority needed to meticulously study and fully comprehend it — only then could a fraction of that authority's power be wielded.

This meant mastering a new authority demanded enormous amounts of time — potentially lengths beyond human imagination.

Even Folly and Truth — the fastest learners of authority — probably couldn't suddenly deploy the other's authority mid-battle.

Yet now, Deceit had done exactly that.

Who would dare approach Him?

If He launched another war and weaponized others' authorities mid-combat...

The consequences were too terrifying for even the gods to contemplate.

So They fell silent. Withdrew. Distanced themselves from the battle's center. And jointly invoked the Convention — summoning the Justice of Order embedded within it to halt this universe-purging "civil war."

Not because They didn't dare fight. But because They knew: as long as Deceit didn't wish to self-destruct, the Convention's protection meant even a united front couldn't erase Him.

This deity born of the Void had already exploited the universe's greatest loophole in this Void-dominated era!

"You summon Me. For what purpose?"

Order's resonant voice rang across the universe, guiding everything in this fragile Void toward balance and law. But at that very moment, a voice cold enough to freeze the oceans cut directly through Order's pronouncement, enunciating word by word:

"This is none of your concern!

Today — the Void will have only one!"

"BOOM—"

The worst-case scenario materialized. Destiny had lost control to fury.

Every deity's color changed. Only Deceit remained unmoved — even laughing.

"Hee~

You still want to fight?

Too bad. I'm tired today. Let's reschedule."

Chapter 735: How Should This Humble Follower Address You?

The Void was treacherous to traverse today.

Deng Sui's journey had been harrowing. First, terrifying spatial stasis. Then the Void itself shattered, plunging him into the deep nothingness where nothing existed.

He'd already been critically wounded by the enemy. Now, battered again and again by the Void's "abuse," he was barely holding on.

Fortunately, he had one final lifeline: half a God Audience Contract from Time believers on the Land of Hope. Legend had it that after the Memory faithful used a mirror to gain their Benefactor's audience, Time's relatively few followers had gathered devoutly to attempt the same.

They prayed to a contract drawn in blood, hoping to attract their Benefactor's gaze. They'd just begun to sense a deity's descent when — one of their number succumbed to greed and lunged for the contract, wanting to monopolize it.

He seized it and opened a Time gate to the past, hoping to go back and claim the honor of first audience alone. But nearby believers reacted fast, grabbing the contract. In the tug-of-war, they tore it in two.

Half vanished through the Time gate. The other half changed hands countless times before ending up with Deng Sui.

Naturally, anyone who possessed such a thing was no ordinary player. Deng Sui was a Time follower too. His ID in the Faith Game was...

Lao Deng.

Yes — Deng Sui was Lao Deng. After escaping the two Torchbearers, he'd tried to flee through the Void. But today's Void was in tumult and nearly buried him.

Left with no choice, he produced the contract, poured every last drop of his remaining Time power into it — fully prepared to gamble with his life. But instead of his Benefactor's gaze arriving, the contract shattered into a corridor. A corridor to the unknown.

Normally, Deng Sui would have run countless extrapolations before daring to enter. But his current death-trap left no room for choice. So, gritting his teeth, he dragged himself in.

The warped space-time corridor spat him out beneath a sea of breathtaking stars he'd never seen before.

As he descended, his form gradually materialized, drifting down toward a vast jade-white platform beneath the starry sky.

He recognized it immediately. This had to be Time's temple. And that platform wasn't truly a platform — it was a twisted, colossal clock face, constructed from imprisoned temporality and stacked time, embedded with countless dials of every size!

And right now, standing at the center of that clock platform, a single unadorned clock hand turned slowly to track his descent.

Deng Sui's heart lurched — then leapt with joy!

Anyone could see it: the only being that could stand here — in Time's own temple, attending the deity Himself — had to be His Envoy. He could think of no one else.

But did Time have an Envoy?

Apparently not. Even he — a devoted Time chaser — had never heard of one. But "never heard of" didn't mean "definitely didn't exist." Even if this clock hand wasn't the Benefactor's Envoy, it must be something deserving worship.

So the instant Lao Deng's feet touched ground, he wisely and devoutly bowed to the clock hand:

"Time flows through cracks; I drift like the wind.

Praise be to Time. The devoted Time follower Deng Sui pays his respects to all great existences."

Deng Sui was shrewd. Not knowing how to address the entity, he used "all" and "existences" — avoiding any uninformed title that might give offense, while conveying his devotion to the Existence faction.

He thought his greeting was flawless. If not for his critical wounds and disheveled appearance, he'd have given himself a perfect score.

But he didn't need to score himself. Cheng Shi had already given him full marks.

That clock hand was, of course, Cheng Shi — disguised via Chaos Acting. Since this player named Deng Sui had appeared, Cheng Shi had been studying him closely.

He could tell the man was powerful. Grievously hurt. And the profile of "a severely wounded Time believer" instantly brought to mind the person the Blind One had mentioned... Lao Deng.

This wasn't baseless speculation. The timing was simply too convenient.

In the trial, the Blind One had said Lao Deng was about to die — no surprise there. Yet moments after the trial ended, a critically injured top player appeared in Time's temple?

No matter how you looked at it, this had to be Lao Deng — the one who'd defied the Torchbearers.

'He's... Lao Deng?'

'This young?'

'Where's the "old" in Lao Deng? This is more like Little Deng!'

'The Torchbearers botched it?'

Cheng Shi furrowed his brow. He didn't dare confirm the identity immediately — but identity-testing was well within his expertise. He didn't even need to probe; the upcoming "audience" would supply all the information he needed.

But one thing Cheng Shi had to figure out first: why had this person arrived here?

The Blind One — Destiny's Chosen, not one for exaggeration — had declared Lao Deng would die. There should have been no way for him to escape.

So was his appearance here an accident... or a summons from Cheng Shi's new Benefactor?

'He doesn't have time to see me, but He has time to rescue His follower?'

Cheng Shi's guard tightened. He decided to talk first — at least determine who this person was and what had happened to him.

So he spoke. And his opening salvo was pure veteran-charlatan pressure:

"Existence is the entanglement of Memory and Time — not Time alone.

If you don't wish to fuse with Memory, you'd best correct who you're paying respects to.

Young one — remember: devotion split between two is no devotion at all."

This barrage rattled Deng Sui badly. He immediately bowed his head in penitent submission and addressed the largest hand on the clock face, barely able to muster his voice:

"My Benefactor above — please forgive Your ignorant follower.

This is my first time being honored with Your summons, and my excitement has left me somewhat incoherent. All I meant to express was devotion — not to Existence at large, but absolute devotion to You."

With that, Deng Sui rattled off two quick prayers, then looked respectfully toward Cheng Shi:

"How should this humble follower address You?"

'First time?'

'Got it.'

Cheng Shi arched an eyebrow. Delighted. He cleared his throat with a light cough and laughed: "What — do I not resemble the Benefactor you imagined?"

"!!!???"

Hearing this, Lao Deng turned ghastly pale. "THUD" — he dropped to his knees, broken body and all.

Chapter 736: I Am the First Clock Hand He Shaped When He Descended

"Praise our Lord — praise Time!"

"Praise our Lord — praise Time!"

The first was Lao Deng's cry of shock and devotion. The second came from Cheng Shi, confirming his "identity."

No matter how bold the clown was, he'd never dare impersonate Time on Time's own turf. That earlier joke was merely a minor power play.

But from Deng Sui's perspective, it was anything but a joke.

He could tell this wasn't his Benefactor. But an entity that could joke about the Benefactor here — could that be someone simple?

Absolutely not!

His expression grew even more apprehensive. He carefully raised his eyes toward Cheng Shi:

"I always assumed Time was rigorous and Existence was solemn. Meeting you today, I realize my understanding of our Lord's will was far too narrow. So Time also possesses a lighthearted humor.

Thank you for this guidance. A devout follower will walk further because of it."

"..."

Cheng Shi was stunned. The last time he'd met a player this skilled at flattery was when he'd "recruited" Long Jing using his Yu Xi identity.

'But Little Deng, you've got it wrong. Time really is quite serious. The fun one is me — no, the Fun God.'

But Cheng Shi didn't correct him. He needed leverage. So he scoffed and continued his pressure:

"Good. Decent instincts. But I must warn you: excessive cunning will skew your will toward the Void. I can sense your devotion — but inflated devotion is not true devotion.

Time is not Deceit. And time does not need to be embellished."

Deng Sui's heart lurched. He quickly bowed: "I stand corrected."

"Stand. Existence is equal. You and I are both His followers. No need for this — I am merely an ordinary gatekeeper."

'Ordinary?'

Deng Sui twitched the corner of his mouth. 'Someone who guards His temple and calls themselves ordinary? In what universe?'

But who'd kneel when they could stand? He hurried to his feet and began examining the platform with growing excitement:

"Please forgive my presumptuousness once more. How should I address you, sir?"

Cheng Shi's eyes flicked. Without a second thought, he improvised a brand-new identity:

"I have no name. I am merely the first clock hand He shaped when He descended into this world. If you insist on a title, call me Hour Hand."

Deng Sui trembled from head to toe. His mind buzzed. He'd registered nothing else — only one word: "shaped."

Shaped — by hand!!!

This being before him was the Benefactor's first creation upon descending!

Could it be that this entity was, like Memory's Mirror of Delusion, a Servant God-level creation of Time!?

Almost certainly. No — definitely!

Deng Sui's eyes lit up. He felt enlightened.

'No wonder!'

'No wonder Time's followers scoured every trial and never found a single trace of their Benefactor's Servant God-level creation. No wonder all he'd ever managed to find was that half a God Audience Contract with nothing written about Him. It turned out He'd been guarding the Benefactor's temple all along!'

'He'd probably been serving before the divine presence since His creation. If not for using that half-contract in desperation today, who could have ever found Him!?''

'So this truly was Time's gift. So this was Time's miracle!'

Those earlier followers who'd tried to use the contract to become the first to meet Him had failed. Yet untold ages later, today — he'd used that half-contract to truly become the first to find the "Hour Hand"!

'Praise Time! Today wasn't misfortune at all. It was fortune.'

'And here Destiny thought She could interfere with Time followers' fates? Laughable!'

Deng Sui was ecstatic. In this era where faith fusion had clearly accelerated, he'd maintained an aura of mystery toward other players. But in truth, that mystery hid no real secrets — it was more about preserving his prestige, concealing the fact that he'd never once received an audience from his own Benefactor.

But now he didn't need mystery anymore — because he'd seen Him!

At the very least, he'd reached Time's temple. At the very least, he'd met a Servant God-level creation: a self-aware "Hour Hand."

With such a golden opportunity, Deng Sui naturally wanted to extract as much as possible. But Cheng Shi would never let the other lead this "audience." He cut off the questioning and said, in a tone dripping with significance:

"Time is not Destiny. He is always at our side. So as His followers, there's no need to deliberately chase His guidance.

Every second and every minute ticking in this world is a divine oracle He delivers to us.

Feel it carefully. You'll gain something from it."

Hearing this, Deng Sui furrowed his brow slightly and actually fell into contemplation.

Seeing such a devout expression, Cheng Shi nearly broke character. 'Bro — I was completely making that up. And you actually believe it.'

Fighting back a laugh, he pressed his lips together and continued: "As for why you were able to come here today..."

"?" The contemplating Deng Sui snapped back to attention, looking up in bewilderment. "Hour Hand, sir — wasn't it because of the God Audience Contract?"

"?"

Now it was Cheng Shi's turn to be stunned.

'What contract? There's a contract for divine audiences?'

He looked the other up and down, gaze lingering on pockets and inner folds. Finding nothing, he cooled his expression and continued:

"The contract is merely the means, not the timing.

If He wishes to see you, no contract is necessary. If He does not, then even if you paved the river of time with contracts, you would never arrive here.

So — why do you think you came to this temple today?"

'Why?'

Deng Sui's brow knotted tighter. He began solemnly reviewing the day's events, connecting the "timing" from the Hour Hand's words to the Torchbearers' ambush.

Obviously, he'd used the contract only because he was fleeing for his life. So this summons must be connected to today's Torchbearer attack.

And one of those two Torchbearers was Destiny's Chosen. Could this audience actually be about... the war between faiths?

Not impossible. In fact, during the preceding trial, Deng Sui had already been reviewing his clash with the Torchbearers.

He'd noticed that Qin Xin didn't seem like a Memory follower. Aside from item-use moments when Memory power swirled around him, there was never a trace of Memory energy — not even in his most ferocious attacks.

Add to that Qin Xin's abnormally high physical stats and strength, his unusually sharp observational skills — against a top-tier assassin like Deng Sui, the man consistently managed to find him in the Void's shadows.

And Deng Sui had only ever experienced that level of detection from elite hunter-class players. So he'd been speculating whether Qin Xin might actually be a hunter of a different faith.

Especially... the combat-oriented War!

Chapter 737: I Will Be the Blade

In truth, Lao Deng had considered other faiths. But Corruption, Folly, and their ilk obviously didn't match the Torchbearers' ethos. That's why he'd guessed Qin Xin might be a War follower — a Hawk Eye Scout.

He wasn't certain, of course. But that didn't stop him from packaging his speculation as rumor and spreading it.

During the trial that had just ended, he'd told his teammates everything about the Torchbearers and his suspicions about Qin Xin.

Unfortunately, the trial had been too brutal. All his teammates died. He himself barely survived.

He'd thought, exhausted as he was, there'd be no way to dodge the Torchbearers' final strike on the way out. Yet Time's protection let him escape death and arrive here.

With that in mind — being rescued from an impossible situation by either the Benefactor or "Hour Hand" — could this involve a faith struggle?

'Yes! That annoying blind woman is a Destiny follower. The Torchbearers' "flame" is suspiciously vague, and that Fate Weaver Cheng Shi they kept discussing is also a Destiny follower. Perhaps the Torchbearers are an organization that follows and pursues Destiny?'

That would be the only way to explain today's "misfortune."

'Destiny punished a rival faith's follower — while Time saved His own!'

Deng Sui's thoughts crystallized. He jerked his head up, eyes brimming with devotion and gratitude, and locked onto "Hour Hand." He poured out every theory he had — liberally embellishing along the way.

He'd been blindsided by those two Torchbearers today, left with nothing, nearly killed. Now that he had a chance to "plead his case," he wasn't letting them off easy.

By the end, he was openly fabricating claims like "The Torchbearers are a Destiny-protected organization secretly conspiring against Time" without batting an eye.

"Hour Hand, sir — the situation facing us Time followers is dire. Destiny followers are allying with other faiths to systematically crush our living space.

I cannot understand why these people hate our Lord. But I suspect it's because our Lord's tolerance has robbed them of self-awareness.

Especially these so-called Torchbearers. To protect a single ordinary Destiny follower, they tried to kill me — Your Lord's most devoted follower! This is an unforgivable sin!

Of course, whether or not insignificant me lives or dies doesn't matter. What I fear is that our Lord's tolerance will become their excuse to push further!

To carry our Lord's will farther, we must strike back! We must visit misfortune upon every Destiny follower — throw these accursed riddlers into the prison of Time, and let their eternal wailing atone for their blasphemy!

And I — I will be our Lord's swiftest blade, clearing the path for Time's eternity!"

These fabricated accusations left Cheng Shi blinking in astonishment. But amid the mostly nutritionless rant, he'd harvested one useful piece: final confirmation that this was, indeed, the Lao Deng who'd narrowly escaped the Torchbearers!

'Seriously, you Torchbearers — how can you be this bad? A guaranteed win and you still let him flip the board?'

'If I hadn't "coincidentally" run into this Time Chosen here, he'd have your secrets spread wide open!'

He clearly had no room for reconciliation with the Torchbearers. The hatred had reached "one of us dies" territory.

Of course, this wasn't about right or wrong. Everyone acted in their own interests. But...

'Little Deng, you shouldn't have painted all Destiny followers with one brush. That makes me feel targeted too.'

'Even if I have some ties to the Torchbearers, I never provoked you. You even eavesdropped on my secrets. And now you're playing victim first? That skill of yours...'

'Tsk. Well-aimed, but badly timed.'

'And your perspective is too narrow. The Torchbearers don't resist only Time — they resist all gods. Even the Deceit currently sheltering them is someone they want to rebel against.'

'You might not believe it, but Qin Xin is a rebel commander, after all...'

'More importantly — the Destiny you want to oppose has already fused with your Benefactor Time. If I told you that, would you still want to be the blade?'

'A blade that devours its master? Or a blade for self-execution?'

Cheng Shi wanted to laugh. But the gravity of the situation made laughter impossible. He had to consider how to deal with this Time Chosen.

Honestly, killing Lao Deng would be simple. He didn't even need to switch back to Destiny to change professions. In his current state, one flick of his wrist and the Fun Ring would erase everything.

And he was certain the other had no cards left — otherwise he wouldn't have staked his life on a fragment of contract.

So what Cheng Shi agonized over wasn't the method of killing — it was the justification for getting away with it!

Yes. Getting away with it.

He didn't need motivation to eliminate a player who wanted both him and the Torchbearers dead. What he needed was a way to avoid "prosecution" after the deed.

Because he had to consider Time's attitude.

Even though this perpetually busy Existence deity hadn't appeared or issued any oracle or guidance, Lao Deng was His Chosen — the one He'd rated highest among all His followers.

Cheng Shi had enough self-awareness to know: even though he was technically a Time follower now, that status had been "scammed" by the Fun God. As a new hire with no standing who was currently impersonating a board member — how could he compete with the company's existing top salesman?

Furthermore, even if Time had agreed to the fusion, His attitude toward Destiny remained unclear. So Cheng Shi couldn't gamble on what killing Lao Deng might cost him. Even with Void's backing, he needed at least a defensible excuse.

And that excuse came to him quickly.

He looked at Deng Sui and smiled:

"Your courage is as impressive as your devotion. But I must remind you — the Void isn't only Destiny.

Until the facade is seen through, the essence will never be discovered."

The words were deliberately vague, but Deng Sui understood immediately.

'Hour Hand's praise affirms my approach of faith confrontation. And His next hint directly points out the next course of action.'

'So... our Lord intends to move against Deceit first?'

'Hiss—'

'That's... not impossible. But can I skip the disgusting one and start from the bottom up?'

'Hmm, feasible!'

Deng Sui's heart soared. Energy surged back. He knew this was his moment to take a stand. So he bowed his head devoutly and declared with the utmost solemnity:

"Hour Hand, sir — I will be faith's blade, and strip away every last facade of the Void!"

Chapter 738: Lao Deng's Death: This World Was Never Meant to Have That Many Answers

Hooked!

Cheng Shi arched an eyebrow. 'That's exactly what I was waiting for.' But the declaration still wasn't explicit enough.

"Good. Then how do you plan to do it?"

'How?' Was this a test?

Deng Sui furrowed his brow. After a moment's deliberation, he answered earnestly:

"The swindlers are difficult to deal with, but lies always have their day of reckoning.

I've tangled with the top players on Deceit's Ladder of Ascent. Apart from Zhen... Yi and Long Jing, who are harder to handle, I'm confident I can eliminate the rest.

As for the lower-ranked small-time tricksters — I shouldn't deny other followers the chance to earn merit, and they should contribute to spreading our Lord's will.

Of course, as the opposing faith to Deceit, Memory players likely wouldn't refuse to join the hunt. I know a few high-ranking Memory players. They've loathed Deceit for a long time — they could become my allies."

Cheng Shi blinked. Surprised.

'Well, that's an unexpected bonus.'

"Oh? Not bad. Clear thinking. But Memory is not Time. Even within Existence, wills are not unified. Bear that in mind."

"!!!"

Deng Sui startled at this. From Hour Hand's tone... was Time on guard against His own Path's twin deity?

'Oh no — did I say the wrong thing?'

His heart clenched. He hastily clarified:

"Sir, I believe only in Time. But Memory can occasionally be of use to us.

I share no friendship with those Memory players — only transactional interest. Take 'This Sentiment Awaits,' for example. He and I are both assassins. We've cooperated on a few kills. Given his eagerness to impress his Benefactor, I can probably leverage him for one joint operation — knock off a few annoying Deceit followers at minimum.

And then there's 'Last Year Today.' She and the former Deceit Chosen Zhen Xin are mortal enemies. If I can borrow her hand — even if she can't kill Zhen Xin, at least she'd drain some of Zhen Xin's strength.

Of course, with our meager power alone, we probably can't match the efficiency you hope for, Hour Hand sir. So if you could generously grant us some guidance or... material assistance, I believe I can bring you good news very soon."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi grinned.

'This Little Deng is truly sharp.' Not only was he using the "mission" as a pretext to request support, he was already angling for his next audience. 'Well, well — if you can actually kill Zhen Yi, I'll personally pry you out from under that great one's Bone Throne and give you a lavish burial in Mi Laozhang's Cemetery.'

'Having Death's Chosen guard your grave — now that's dignified.'

'But this alone... isn't enough.'

So Cheng Shi curled his lips and continued baiting:

"Worthy of our Lord's favored child. You are impressive.

Perhaps you are confused about Time's true will at this moment. But what I must tell you is this — the relationships among the gods are far more complex than the cooperation and opposition you see. The desires and filth flowing beneath their authorities are equally horrifying.

You need not understand too much. Just know that to be granted eternity, you need only carry out His will."

"Eternity?" Deng Sui was awestruck. Voice trembling, he asked: "Hour Hand, sir — is it the kind of eternity I'm imagining?"

"Indeed. That very eternity. Even mortals can obtain it. But divine gifts are never bestowed on the meritless.

Killing a few Deceit followers won't earn you the eternity you seek."

"!!!"

Deng Sui understood. He understood again.

Eyes blazing with excitement, spine straight, piety maxed out:

"I shall walk the path of Time and never retreat — until the day comes when I can trample the Void beneath my feet!"

'Good spirit!'

Cheng Shi smiled. Beamed, actually.

"So then... if the opportunity arose, would you be willing to plunge a blade into the Void's heart?"

"?"

'Into whose heart?'

'The Void's?'

'Do gods even have hearts?'

'Even if they do — who's doing the plunging? Me? Me!? Can I even!?'

'Obviously not!'

A spike of fear shot through Deng Sui — but brief terror was swiftly overtaken by uncontrollable excitement.

'The atmosphere's been built to this point. How could I say no?'

'This is clearly Hour Hand testing my resolve. And anyway — blaspheming an opposing Path's god in your own "backyard"? What's the worst They could do, reach into Time's temple to punish me?'

So Deng Sui agreed. He nodded firmly, though still measured:

"If given the opportunity and honor — I would shatter all falsehood for our Lord, and restore truth to Existence!"

"Excellent!" 'That one sentence is all I needed!'

Cheng Shi nodded enthusiastically, practically applauding.

"Admirable courage. I am very pleased with today's audience. Join me in saluting Him, then you are dismissed."

The clock hand slowly turned to face the Universal Clock's center. Deng Sui felt the Hour Hand's summons, tamped down his excitement, and stepped forward, positioning himself behind.

"I told you — Existence is equal. Come forward. Stand beside me."

Deng Sui froze. The delight in his eyes nearly overflowed.

He was at that age where rebellion felt thrilling and prestige meant everything. Hearing a "Servant God" invite him to stand side by side felt like downing two shots of bootleg liquor — the world went floaty, and he nearly forgot how to walk.

But he remained deeply respectful, terrified of violating divine protocol. He shuffled forward in small steps, wisely positioning himself a half-step behind Cheng Shi.

'When the boss says "side by side," you never actually stand side by side.'

This basic social grace — no, divine grace — he understood perfectly well.

Seeing Little Deng so deferential, Cheng Shi pursed his lips. But this distance was close enough. So he nodded:

"Lower your eyes. Compose your expression. Bow. Pray.

Then repeat after me:

Praise the great..."

Deng Sui obeyed. Head bowed, body low, piety absolute: "Praise the great..."

"...God of Deceit! I will repent for my blasphemy under Your gaze — and atone with my life!"

"...God of Dec— ???"

Despite Cheng Shi's rapid-fire delivery, Deng Sui realized something was wrong.

He froze. Then his face twisted in horror. He jerked his head up — and found the Hour Hand that had been standing before him was gone. In its place stood a familiar figure — lips curled in a cold smile.

'Who is he!?'

'Oh — now I remember. He's that Fate Weaver the Torchbearers wanted to protect!'

'No! The audience was a lie! The oath was a trap!'

Terror erupted from Deng Sui's core and detonated in his skull. His first instinct was to flee — but his body was no longer capable of obeying his will.

And the other man didn't even seem interested in attacking. This Fate Weaver was actually moving farther away.

'Hm?'

'What's he doing?'

'He's... stepping back?'

'No — he seems to be cleaning bloodstains off the floor. Tidying up my body.'

'But wait—'

'Why is my body in his hands?'

'And... where's my head?'

Deng Sui couldn't comprehend it. The last image this world left him before death was a sinister smile.

He never understood why there were illusions in Time's temple. Never understood how a Destiny follower could kill him under His gaze!

'On what grounds!?'

'Where was His protection!? The protection He promised!?'

'I was this devout — WHY WOULDN'T YOU PROTECT ME!? WHY!?'

"Tsk. Confused?"

I have plenty of confusion too. But this world was never meant to have that many answers."

The clown wiped the last drop of blood from his scalpel. He lifted the head from the ground and bowed elegantly toward the Universal Clock.

"Thank you for your patronage. I hope my actions served to cull the parasites from Your flock."

This was equal parts self-deprecation and mockery. The clown had been pleased at how smoothly things had gone — but when he straightened up, every trace of his smile petrified on his face.

Because there, at the center of the massive clock face, a pair of black-hole eyes had opened. When, he couldn't say.

"Cheng... Shi."

Chapter 739: I, Cheng Shi, Clown

Whatever terror Lao Deng had felt moments ago — Cheng Shi now felt something eerily similar.

Executing a deity's Chosen before that deity's very eyes was already blasphemy. Worse — the charge the clown had pinned on Lao Deng was blaspheming Deceit!

Think about it: a Time follower, executed for blaspheming the Void, on Existence's own turf!

In the entire history of the Grand Tribunal — no, of the entire Land of Hope — you'd be hard-pressed to find a trial more absurd than this.

Cheng Shi knew his actions constituted "framing." But the other party had run his mouth first. Little Deng had slandered him and the Torchbearers without provocation. So Cheng Shi figured his actions qualified as self-defense at best.

Even if the defense was excessive — you still had to admit it was defense, right?

Besides, fabricating a charge of "blaspheming Deceit" wasn't random — it was calculated.

Given today's faith-fusion dynamics, his Benefactor Deceit had clearly communicated with Time beforehand. Otherwise, He wouldn't have only impersonated Destiny to "guide" Cheng Shi — He might also have impersonated Time to bolster his confidence.

Though Cheng Shi didn't know how the Fun God had won Time over, he knew that in this fusion gambit, Deceit's bargaining power far exceeded Time's. Deceit had to be the one who'd greased every wheel, enabling this cross-factional fusion to proceed.

Most crucially — although Deceit belonged to the Void, He wasn't directly opposed to Time. This gave Cheng Shi a lifeline in the tangled web of faith relations: if he'd eliminated a blasphemer for his Benefactor Deceit, then even if his new Benefactor Time wanted to cause trouble, He'd have to consider Deceit's position — the senior partner in this "collaboration."

And furthermore — having offered such prime entertainment, how could the Fun God not protect him?

This was Cheng Shi's reasoning. This was why he'd specifically steered Lao Deng toward blaspheming Deceit.

He'd considered framing Lao Deng for blaspheming Destiny instead, but his current read on Destiny's attitude was a total blank. Judging by Her expression during the fusion, She seemed to be harboring something unspeakable.

So Cheng Shi didn't gamble. He chose steady.

Of course, this "steady" was anything but. From the moment he'd decided to kill Lao Deng, there was nothing steady about any of it.

But no matter. The clown still had his silver tongue.

So the moment he saw Time open His eyes, Cheng Shi bent at the waist, head bowed, immediately donning an expression of sincere repentance. He "confessed":

"Praise the great God of Time — I..."

But before he could get past the preamble, something struck him as wrong.

'Too many coincidences. Everything today has been too convenient.'

'Not just convenient — rushed!'

Deceit disguised as Destiny had summoned him. Told him to fuse with Time. He'd barely arrived at Time's domain before the fusion completed. Even Time Himself appeared for barely a second. Then Lao Deng materialized in Time's temple.

And don't forget — Lao Deng had escaped from the Torchbearers. Sure, the Torchbearers were a grand organization resisting the gods. But their patron was Deceit!

'See the pattern? From beginning to end, the Fun God's shadow runs through everything!'

Now — this was Time's temple. He supposedly still had time to summon followers. So why hadn't He descended during the fusion with an opposing faith? Why hadn't He exposed Cheng Shi impersonating His creation? Why hadn't He appeared when Cheng Shi was cutting off Little Deng's head? Why had He only opened His eyes to "investigate" after the dust settled?

Was that... reasonable?

Obviously not!

Cheng Shi refused to believe that over a span of time even mortals wouldn't consider long, a deity who governed Time just happened to not have time for these few minutes.

A bolt of inspiration struck. A bold hypothesis surged up.

'These eyes... are they really Time?'

After all, if even "Destiny" might not be Destiny — who could vouch that "Time" was truly Time?

So in that blink of an instant, the clown made a decision: he would test a deity!

Cheng Shi's eyes flashed with cunning. Lips curling, he abruptly changed course:

"I can explain everything, my Lord!

Though Deng Sui spoke earnestly, his devotion wasn't true devotion — it was self-interest. He wrapped desire in faith, hoping to deceive You into noticing him. I've seen this trick countless times in Deceit's camp — it's unmistakable.

So, my Lord, I killed Deng Sui not for any personal reason — only because I feared he was drifting toward Deceit!

But I am different!

Though I am also a Deceit follower, I've always believed Destiny is the future and Time is the fixed path!

Especially when opposing faiths set aside their prejudice and became one — I nearly saw the universe's road ahead:

The unification of Void and Existence. The harmony of Destiny and Time.

To prove my words are no lie, my Lord — bestow Your guidance. And I, too, will be faith's blade — shattering every last facade of the Void for You!"

Cheng Shi delivered it with iron resolve, shamelessly borrowing Lao Deng's words without blushing. His posture would have earned a "devout" from anyone watching. The only flaw was that he was saying it as a clown — a Deceit-fused-with-Chaos "deranged clown."

And a deranged clown spouting this kind of chaotic speech wasn't all that strange.

But Cheng Shi didn't really care about the content. The instant he finished, he raised his head to watch those black-hole eyes, waiting for a response.

Sure enough — those eyes, so stern a moment ago, twitched at the corners after hearing the clown's speech. A gust of Void wind rushed onto Time's platform, staggering Cheng Shi!

Simultaneously, a bizarre echo rang through the starry sky:

"I KNEW it was the Fun God!

Damn — I knew it...

Good, good, great. Playing me again, my Lord? You're... wait, AGAIN!?

A true deity using these tricks to toy with Your own follower — is that really fun?

I'm not the same person I used to be. My current devotion is terrifying. All my Lord's getting out of this is hearing how devout my innermost thoughts are. Pointless.

He's... not saying anything?

Oh no — is He actually angry?

But I offered a bunch of lies as tribute — why would He be mad? I've been getting scammed nonstop! I haven't even complained!

...No, no — can't think anymore!"

Cheng Shi panicked. He clutched his head and shook it furiously, mentally counting sheep, trying to weather the "truth serum" phase. But right then — those black-hole eyes blinked twice, shed their dark disguise, and transformed back into gleefully squinting, star-speckled, spiral eyes.

Deceit! This Void facade had once again opened His eyes in Existence's domain, watching the "manic" follower on the platform with a smirk that was and wasn't a smile.

"Well, well — if it isn't the 'Hour Hand' that Time personally shaped! What happened? Headache? Needle-phobia?"

I'll grant you this — there are entirely too many clock hands here. They're an eyesore."

With that, He blinked. In mere seconds, the entire starry sky froze solid — then every cycling ring of time shattered. All the clock hands and dials dissolved. Existence receded like a tide. Black, boundless Void returned.

It wasn't until Cheng Shi noticed the ground beneath his feet was no longer the jade platform of stacked time that it hit him: not just "Time" was fake — the very Universal Clock platform he'd been standing on was fake!

This had been a fraud from start to finish. A complete illusion. The entire time, the clown had been singing and dancing on Deceit's stage. His panic, tension, fear, and confusion were nothing but an endless stream of jokes — entertaining who-knew-how-many spectators...

And sitting in the VIP front-row seat of that audience — Deceit Himself!

"Heh. I — Cheng Shi — clown.

A real clown."

Cheng Shi tapped his nose, making the tip glow red.

Chapter 740: It Wasn't I Who Turned Him — It Was Destiny

"Alright, no need to keep emphasizing you're a clown. Devotion is shown through action, not words.

Now then — tell Me. How exactly do you plan to 'shatter every facade of the Void' for your new Benefactor?"

"..."

Cheng Shi's lip twitched. He wanted to point at something and curse, but knew he couldn't. So he stifled his frustration and huffed hard:

"I have already shattered the Void's facade. I saw through the false Time and beheld my true Lord — Deceit!"

"?"

Those eyes froze. The spirals within them spun rapidly at Cheng Shi's words. He laughed — seemingly pleased by the clown's quick thinking — yet He still didn't let up:

"Not bad. Clear-headed.

By that logic, should I also reward your devotion for facing 'Time' without flinching?"

Angry as he was, Cheng Shi could still distinguish between sarcasm and genuine praise. Right now, the last thing he wanted was any "reward." He just needed to understand what today's bewildering faith fusion was all about:

"I'll pass on the Void's reward, my Lord. I just..."

"Very well — you've voluntarily forfeited the reward." Those gleeful eyes cut him off. But a heartbeat later, the upturned eye-corners flattened, and a cold storm rose within: "Since you don't want a reward, let's discuss punishment."

"?"

'WHAT!?'

Cheng Shi gaped. He blinked innocently, thinking: 'Sure, I committed plenty of blasphemy today — but against YOU, Deceit? That was pure tribute! What punishment!?''

Those eyes scoffed at their follower and delivered the verdict without mercy:

"Arbitrarily speculating on and distorting a deity's will constitutes blasphemy. Blaspheming your own Benefactor doubles the offense. Inciting an Existence follower to blaspheme his own Benefactor — that is a capital crime beyond redemption.

I was going to offset your merits against your sins, considering your daily devotion, but...

Hee~

You forfeited the reward yourself. Hmm, let Me think... what sentence should I give you?"

"!!!???"

'No — HUH!?'

'You can DO that!?'

Cheng Shi was numb. He stood there vacant-eyed, staring at his Benefactor, thinking: 'Please, my Lord — stop. The world outside is already full of clowns, and they're all named Cheng Shi. Keep it up and the planet's going to be stained red by clown noses...'

Seeing that Cheng Shi had suddenly abandoned all argument and resistance, the Fun God — who'd been laughing until now — sighed and shook His head wistfully:

"As expected — once you've seen enough clowns, they stop being funny.

What a shame. Time to find new entertainment.

Enough. My time is limited. If you have questions, ask them now. If you keep standing there like a mute, I'll start wondering if you're actually Silence's pet."

"!!!"

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's spirit reignited. 'Finally — the main event!' 'My Lord, if You're letting me ask freely, I've got plenty.'

He straightened up. Eyes blazing, he gazed at those orbiting eyes. His first question cut straight to the day's core:

"My Lord — why did You want Destiny to fuse with Time?"

"Hmm. Good question. Next."

"?"

Cheng Shi blinked. "You... haven't answered?"

"I also never said I'd answer. I just told you to hurry up and ask."

"..." Cheng Shi laughed — the angry kind. He nodded rapidly, muttering "good, good, great," then jerked his head up: "Second question — why did You want Destiny to fuse with Time?"

"..." The eyes stopped laughing. The spirals ceased spinning. They stared at their follower.

"My Lord, may I ask my third question? My third question is: why did You want Destiny to fuse with Time?"

This time, Deceit finally reacted. The eyes blinked rapidly; the eye-corners rose again.

"If there were a divine name called 'Persistence' among the gods, I'd almost think..."

"That I'm Persistence's pet? Yes. I am. Now — my fourth question is—"

"Fine. Given that Persistence's pet showed some cleverness today, I'll grant you one answer."

Those swirling eyes chuckled: "Don't you think fusing opposing faiths is fun?"

"..."

'Great, great — of course it's fun. So that's why You bestowed a second faith upon Your Dragon King?'

'To watch the fun?'

'Worthy of You, truly!'

Cheng Shi was speechless. After a moment's thought, he pressed: "But if it's fun — why didn't You have me fuse with Memory instead?"

That way I'd carry both Void and Existence. Wouldn't that double the fun?"

"Bold! Watch your words, clown — do you mean to blaspheme Me to My face?"

I am a god of the Void! How could I fuse with Existence?"

That Memory follower situation was merely a tossed-off favor — a swindled devotee, nothing more. Actively compromising with Existence would be defecting from the Void!"

"???" Cheng Shi's jaw dropped. He pointed vaguely toward some distant patch of sky: "My Lord — isn't Destiny a Void deity? Isn't Time an Existence deity?"

You pushed this fusion! How is that 'defecting from the Void'?"

Deceit pondered for exactly one second, then said gravely: "I understand your point. So you're saying it was Destiny who defected from the Void?"

"..."

'???'

'What exactly do YOU understand!?'

'Who defected from the Void!?'

'WHICH Void deity orchestrated all of today!?'

'You're over here playing Destiny, playing Time — and now that the fusion's done, you want to dump the blame on me!?'

'Has it occurred to You how enormous a divine blame-shift is? Forget me — could even those Envoys and Servant Gods carry that weight?'

'You're literally treating me like a side dish. And since when does a side dish take the blame? Side dishes go INTO the pot...'

'Whoever wants to carry it can carry it. I'm not.'

Cheng Shi had had enough. Eyes twitching violently, he declared with righteous severity: "No, no, no — a certain god defected from the Void. But I don't believe it was Destiny."

"Then who do you think it was?" Those eyes smirked.

"...I don't know. Further investigation required." Cheng Shi craned his neck, stubbornly playing dumb.

"Tch—

No god has defected from the Void. This era is the Void's era. No one would leave the Void.

As a Void walker, you must view everything from the Void's perspective.

Who says Their fusion necessarily means the Void has a problem? What if it's Time who defected from Existence?"

"!!!"

Cheng Shi was shaken. Eyes wide, he silently digested the Fun God's words. 'This perpetually-busy Time who never has time... actually had time to defect?'

'He became a turncoat?'

'Then what does that make me?'

'A turncoat's follower?'

'But... why?'

Cheng Shi was baffled. He looked up at the Fun God again, asking in disbelief: "You... turned Time?"

Deceit shook His head. Tone heavy with implication:

"It wasn't I who turned Him. It was Destiny."

"What does that mean?"

"Exactly what it sounds like. Why — the clown just fused with Time and he's suddenly this interested in Time?"

Strange... I've never once heard you ask about your other Benefactor... Destiny."

"..."