

The Gods 741

Chapter 741: Is Time Fear Faction? No — He Doesn't Have Time to Fear

'How is that even comparable?'

'If I want to ask something, I can go directly to Destiny's audience. But if I want to ask Time — does He even acknowledge me?'

'Not only doesn't He acknowledge me — You've been pulling stunts left and right in here, and He hasn't come to bother You either!'

'But seriously — why doesn't Time have time?'

The question was simply too bizarre. Cheng Shi couldn't figure it out, so he asked Deceit outright.

The Fun God paused. For once, His tone turned solemn: "Probably because... His efficiency is quite low?"

"..."

Cheng Shi gave up. He felt his questioning was only making him look more like a clown. But if he didn't ask, these answers would never come from anyone else. So he had no choice but to sift for truth amid the mockery and ridicule — searching for the essence hidden behind the facade.

Because he always remembered what the Fun God had said: the path of Deceit was to conceal the essence.

So — what essence was his Benefactor concealing?

Cheng Shi furrowed his brow. Realizing more questions would lead nowhere, he decided to switch tactics — play the emotional card.

"My Lord — ever since I learned of Your fear, my resolve on the path of Deceit has only deepened. But I don't want to be a clueless pawn.

You planted the seeds of facade across the universe, but what those facades grow into depends entirely on each seed's own nourishment.

I don't aim to grow the most 'authentic,' the most deceptive. I only wish that along the way, I can use this facade to shade just a little of the fear in my own heart. And if I'm fortunate enough to shade even a fraction of the fear You've concealed... then this lifetime will have been worthy of the word 'lie.'"

The clown's words were profoundly sincere. Though the final "worthy of" wasn't directed at the Fun God, hearing this, Deceit's gaze froze for an instant.

The star-specks in those eyes began flickering erratically. The spirals started spinning forward and backward simultaneously. His eye-corners arched high — the gaze of someone admiring the universe's most perfect work of art.

"If I didn't wield Deceit's authority, you'd have almost fooled Me.

Good. This is the collection piece I chose.

Remember — what I say next isn't because your little lie moved Me. It's a reward for having the courage to deceive a god.

The truth is far simpler than you imagine. I fear Him, so naturally I must find a way to distance Myself from Him.

But before He descends, how do I know whether My methods work?

I see you've guessed it. Correct — whether Destiny or Time, certain authorities of Theirs relate to the future. Only They have surveyed all possible futures. That's why your obsessed Benefactor keeps telling you you're 'fixed.'

Because She's already seen your ending.

And I, too, want to see My ending.

From there, things are simple. I needed to pick an ally between Destiny and Time. Since Destiny proved unreliable, that left only Time.

Of course — where there are followers, there's a Benefactor. The clown is steady; the clown's Benefactor is a steady god.

Inspired by your inexhaustible greed, I thought: if I must find revelation in either Destiny or Time, why not have Them both give Me revelation together?"

The instant He finished, Cheng Shi pointed at himself in shock: "So You set Your sights on me? I'm supposed to be that revelation?"

"You? Tch—

I must commend your talent for being hilariously absurd.

Don't overestimate yourself. You're merely a fragile mortal life. You can't even perceive the future or the past — how could you possibly qualify as revelation?

I simply borrowed Her favoritism toward you, giving Destiny and Time a point of intersection.

As for the rest — I'll have to slowly extract it from those two over time. Destiny probably won't talk, but Time is easy to fool. He'll tell Me whatever answers Destiny has given."

'Time is easy to fool...'

Cheng Shi's pupils shrank. Alert now, he asked directly: "Is Time also 'Fear Faction'?"

"No. He can't really be called fearful. Hmm — probably because He doesn't have time to be afraid."

Cheng Shi twitched at the mouth. He was increasingly convinced that this "Time has no time" line was one of Deceit's lies.

So — the same question again: why didn't He have time?

When speculating about what a deity might be busy with, most players could only think of faith competition. In most people's eyes, the struggle for faith was the only thing that could occupy a god's attention.

But Cheng Shi thought differently. Time had already agreed to fuse with Destiny. Regardless of why — such a reversal couldn't happen in an instant. That meant He'd agreed to fuse with an opposing faith only after prolonged, deep deliberation. So whatever He was busy with had to transcend faith competition — at least not competition with the opposing faith.

Connecting this to what had happened during the trial, Cheng Shi's brow furrowed. An unthinkable idea surfaced.

'What's consuming Time's time... might not be Destiny, but... other Times?'

'Or rather — other slices of the "true Time"!?'

Don't forget: in Qin Xin's "hard to pass the torch" world, it was Decay who'd fallen. That implied each such parallel world might have its own sixteen deities. And to make different timelines intersect within a single trial — wouldn't this world's Time need to constantly interact with other worlds' Times?

Did the Fun God know about this?

Cheng Shi started to ask — but Deceit's eyes turned playful first.

"Your imagination is certainly vivid. But you're wrong. Those aren't parallel timelines.

Of course, parallel timelines do exist, and as you guessed, the gods sit high above, overseeing countless universes. But what you've heard about Decay's so-called fall...

Hah. That's nothing but one of Time's extrapolation tricks.

That world doesn't exist. Decay never fell. As for who actually fell — to avoid accusations of digging up corpses, I'll decline to say.

Remember: facades don't exist only within the Void. Existence has them too. I believe you should understand this quite deeply by now.

Don't waste your attention on these illusions. Focus on the present — that's what you should be doing."

'Facades?'

'Time's extrapolation tricks?'

'So the struggling-to-pass-the-torch Qin Xin, the wrong-prophecy An Mingyu, the stagnant Wang Weijin, the Destined One Li Wufang — all fake? All phantoms from an extrapolation?'

'But that doesn't add up...'

'If they're all phantoms, then what was Jiang Chi's "overwrite" about?'

Cheng Shi sank into deep thought, brow knotting tight.

And the very instant he looked down — a flicker of indescribable cold passed through those starlit eyes.

Chapter 742: Double Punishment for Two Crimes

Was the Fun God telling the truth, or was He lying?

If it was all a facade — then what was the point of Time showing it to him?

Could it be a test? A final test for the clown before the fusion?

Not impossible. But something still felt off.

Mainly because that Qin Xin from the "hard to pass the torch" world had felt far too real. His steadfast passion, the frustration vented under crushing pressure — all of it so "lifelike" that it was hard to imagine an Existence facade could achieve such realism.

There was no way Cheng Shi could solve this puzzle under Deceit's gaze. So he decisively shelved the speculation, filed it away, and moved to his next question:

"My Lord — I have another question. How did You convince Destiny and Time to agree to this?"

"What — I need to report My actions to you now?"

"..."

Cheng Shi's expression froze. He scratched his head awkwardly, thinking: 'Well, it's not like that would be terrible.'

Those eyes scoffed, as if reading the clown's mind. But after a moment's mockery, the eye-corners curved, and He offered a brief explanation:

"Simple. When someone doesn't agree to cooperate, you fight them.

Beat Them into submission, and They'll agree whether They want to or not."

"!!??"

'No — You actually BEAT THEM into it?'

'Huh?'

'The Fun God beat Destiny into surrendering?'

'Is He that fierce?'

'And what about Time — beaten too?'

'But does He have time to get beaten?'

Cheng Shi blinked in bewilderment. Something clicked — and he said with doubt: "My Lord, excessive self-aggrand— no no NO, don't hit me! Enhancement! Not bragging — enhancement!"

Before he could finish, two blasts of wind hurled him skyward, then slammed him back down.

The clown was terrified. On landing, he rolled to bleed off the impact, then looked back at his smirking Benefactor with lingering dread:

"What I meant was — since You're this good at fighting, why not beat Them ALL into submission?"

"Tch — how do you know I haven't?"

"?" Cheng Shi froze: "Are You serious?"

"Heh. Why else do you think the Convention was signed? They're all just losers who've lost to Me."

'...! If I believe a single word of His, I'm the dumb one — specifically the dumb one sandwiched between dumb A and dumb C.

Cheng Shi could tell this topic was a dead end for today. The Fun God freely admitted to pushing the Destiny-Time fusion, but when it came to how — He would never budge.

After a moment's thought, Cheng Shi decided that rather than fixating on how the Fun God had achieved His goal, he should ask about Destiny's attitude.

So far, his new Benefactor Time still hadn't appeared. That meant He'd tacitly accepted everything — even Deceit impersonating Him and "causing chaos" here.

Which also meant Deceit had truly and completely settled things with Time.

So...

'Back at Aph Ros's doorstep — Time wasn't there to reminisce with Brother Mouth at all. He was waiting for me!'

'Perhaps by that point, He and the Fun God had already reached an agreement.'

'And that "Time of Eternal Imprisonment" ring was probably part of His show of goodwill.'

'Though that name... why is it so unsettling?'

Cheng Shi touched the Time of Eternal Imprisonment on his finger, brow slightly furrowed. Seeing this line of questioning going nowhere, he switched to a different one.

'It's rare to catch the Benefactor in a talkative mood. Today, I'm getting every question answered.'

"My Lord — regardless of how You made this happen, I want to ask: Your twin deity, is She..."

"What — worried about whether I beat Her to death?"

"..." Cheng Shi laughed nervously, not daring to follow up.

"Good. You really are someone else's pet. Two Void gods fight, and you only check on one of them?"

"..." 'What's there to check? You're standing right here, tormenting Your clown. Do You look like something's wrong?'

Perhaps reading Cheng Shi's thoughts, those eyes snorted coldly:

"I still need to extract answers about the future from Her mouth. Why would I commit fratricide?"

But just because I won't doesn't mean She won't.

If She discovers that Her follower has betrayed the Void and embraced Existence — tell Me, do you think that 'bitch' you keep calling Her would commit fratricide?"

"???"

'Wait — HUH!?!'

'How did this loop back to me AGAIN!?!'

Cheng Shi was numb. He looked at those eyes and murmured:

"With everything that happened between You two, there's no way this blame can land on me, my Lord. The other Bene— Destiny must know what happened.

Since She hasn't come for me yet, that means..."

Wait!

Mid-sentence, Cheng Shi stopped dead. He'd realized something deeply strange.

If Destiny hadn't initially wanted to fuse with Time, and today's events were entirely Deceit's backstab — then why hadn't She come after the Fun God?

And why was She letting the Fun God keep him held here to be toyed with, without demanding answers from either of them?

Too strange. Completely unlike Her.

Connecting this to the fact that the Fun God had forged Time's temple right in front of him — impersonating Time Himself — a possibility suddenly clicked:

'It's not that Destiny hasn't come looking. It's that She CAN'T FIND anyone!'

'Deceit used a disguise to hide His trail — that's why He has enough time to toy with the clown here!'

'He's not just disguising. He's... on the run!'

The moment this realization hit, Cheng Shi snapped his head up to meet those slightly surprised eyes. A flash of insight blazed in his gaze:

"So it was You who brought Little Deng here — wasn't it, my Lord?"

The Torchbearers failing to kill Deng Sui — that was also Your doing, wasn't it?

What are You planning?

Afraid I'd lean toward Time's will during the fusion, so You took precautions — made me personally behold this Time Chosen to burn my bridges, thereby correcting my path within the Void?

Or did You want the Torchbearers to owe more favors, creating more entanglements between me and them?

My Lord — this clown works diligently! You can't keep setting me up like this!"

Hearing all this, those eyes lit up with delight:

"Not bad — your perceptiveness has improved. However—"

Before He could finish, countless gusts of Void wind erupted from every direction, converging on the clown.

Cheng Shi's face changed. Trembling — yet he still heard the Fun God's scoff:

"Speculating on your Benefactor's intentions with infinite malice constitutes blasphemy. Today — double punishment for two crimes. Time to teach you a lasting lesson."

The moment He finished, the Void's tempest winds wove together and mercilessly swallowed Cheng Shi. The panic-stricken clown tumbled like he'd been tossed into a washing machine — spun dizzy and nauseated.

The vertigo lasted an eternity — long enough that Cheng Shi had nothing left in his stomach to vomit before it abruptly stopped, dumping the half-unconscious clown back onto the ground.

Cheng Shi's face was ghostly white. He struggled to raise one hand from the ground and waved it weakly — the message clear: 'I confess. Everything. Please stop...'

Seeing this, those eyes laughed with pure delight.

Chapter 743: In Every Good Show, the Clown Never Misses His Cue

It took Cheng Shi a good while to recover from the dizziness and weakness. Only then did he finally have enough strength to cast a healing spell and a spirit spell on himself. Once his power began reviving, he hauled himself upright and spoke with the resignation of a man accepting his fate:

"That's done then. Now that I've been punished, my Lord — can we continue?"

"Why do you have so many questions today?"

Cheng Shi pursed his lips, thinking: 'Because You have so much time today.'

'I finally get it — so THAT'S why Time has no time. It's all been swindled away by You.'

"Zealous pursuit of knowledge!" Cheng Shi stretched his body and pressed on relentlessly: "My Lord — this faith fusion aside, I more or less understand my Benefactors' thinking now. But for my own survival, I have to ask one more thing. How does Folly feel about all this?"

Destiny wants to approach Folly — I can sense that. And Folly even summoned me. Did You know about that?"

"Oh? So you're actually..."

"Folly's pet, yes. So now You know."

"...How dull." Those eyes blinked. Stars and spirals both wound down.

A clown who answered before the joke landed had robbed Him of His fun.

"Don't worry about Him. A sore loser who refuses to concede, nothing more. Apart from that foul mouth, He has nothing."

"..."

Cheng Shi smacked his lips. Right now, it felt like the Fun God Himself was Folly.

'See what I said? Fuse You two together — guaranteed entertainment.'

But for self-preservation, Cheng Shi immediately killed that thought. He furrowed his brow: "But I clearly saw a towering spire in His temple. The abyss-like depths at its base — one glance and it filled me with terror. And those white-eye wind chimes, radiating Folly's divine power everywhere. Does He truly have nothing?"

"You just said you 'saw' it. You also 'saw' Time's temple today. Does seeing something make it real?" Deceit scoffed.

"What do you mean?" Cheng Shi was stunned. "That was a facade too? He stole Your authority?"

"He wouldn't dare!

That's His own authority. He's different from Truth — Truth emphasizes action, while Folly excels at knowing.

He can perceive your every thought, then use His methods to reconstruct what you expect to see, wielding that cognitive projection to intimidate you.

Simply put: what you saw was nothing but your own imagination. You believed He'd look like that, so He became that.

Seeing is knowing. That foul mouth was once the wisest being in this universe, but unfortunately..."

'Unfortunately!?'

Cheng Shi jolted. He remembered what Brother Mouth had told him — that Folly had squandered His own authority!

'Am I about to learn the truth today?' Excitement surging, he stared at Deceit with expectant eyes — practically spelling out in capital letters: "Unfortunately what?"

"Unfortunately... the Void descended, and your Benefactor — Me — became the wisest god in this universe. That foul mouth dropped to second."

"..."

The spark of hope in Cheng Shi's eyes — extinguished.

'My Lord, never mind whether Folly is second in wisdom — His talent for being insufferable is definitely second. As for who's first...'

'I dare not say.'

Those eyes seemed to read Cheng Shi's thoughts. They studied him with that not-quite-smiling gaze and needled:

"I suggest certain clowns mind their words and deeds. Blasphemy carries heavy penalties, and I'm not always this lenient."

'Lenient!?'

'My brain's been shaken into a smoothie and YOU call that lenient!?'

Of course, retort he must. Cheng Shi pursed his lips and recalled another matter:

"My Lord — since You're protecting the Torchbearers, and I'm Your follower, I feel obligated to give You a tip. Purely out of devotion, nothing more.

I've learned that Little Deng spread rumors about the Torchbearers during the last trial. This could put them in an impossible position. If You already know, forget I said anything. But if You don't — is there still time to contain this?"

Those eyes swirled meaningfully, and He smiled:

"What — are you a Torchbearer now?"

Cheng Shi straightened up, expression dead serious:

"Yes!

I carry the flame of Deceit — so calling me a Torchbearer isn't wrong."

"Tch—

I gave you talent abilities to deceive others, not yourself.

A clown is a clown indeed, but you needn't constantly remind Me.

This matter requires no salvaging. Next time — don't meddle in business that isn't yours."

"No salvaging needed?" Cheng Shi didn't grasp the Benefactor's meaning: "Could he have been lying to me? But it didn't seem like it."

"He wasn't lying. This Time follower did indeed broadcast the clown troupe's secrets far and wide. It's just that... the mortals who heard it are all dead."

"Dead!?" Cheng Shi startled, blurting out: "Did You personally—"

"Of course not. It's simply that the last trial was too difficult. Apart from that Time follower, none of them made it to the end."

'Wait — that's not right!'

'The Fun God's tone... sounds like...'

Cheng Shi's expression turned fascinating. He blinked at Deceit and asked tentatively: "It wasn't... 'coincidentally'... Your trial?"

Those eyes completed a full rotation. Said nothing. But the smile? Utterly radiant.

Now Cheng Shi understood.

'Well played, my Lord. Watertight indeed. Though if this is how You keep "protecting" them, the Torchbearers might actually manage to pass the flame.'

'The question is — in the end, will it be the flame of hope... or the flame of Deceit?'

His worry was clearly unnecessary. This news needed to reach Qin Xin's team as quickly as possible. He'd call the Blind One the moment he got back.

Cheng Shi made several rapid decisions. He looked up to ask about something else — only to find those perpetually laughing eyes were no longer watching him. They stared motionless into the depths of the Void, fixed on some distant point.

Cheng Shi followed the Fun God's line of sight: "My Lord, what's happening?"

"A good show is about to begin." Deceit was beside Himself with glee.

"Good show? What good show?" Cheng Shi peered again but saw nothing.

"You want to know?"

"!" The words triggered every alarm. "No — I don't."

"Hmm, you do." Those eyes smiled. He blinked — and a hurricane erupted in the Void, flinging the clown away.

Cheng Shi was numb. He had no idea what kind of production awaited him next. But he knew all he needed to do was play the clown well.

After all — in every good show, the clown never misses his cue.

[End of Volume Two: Void Walker]

Chapter 744: The First Audience

Everyone wears a mask, but that is not you.

You are merely performing it. Remember — do not lose yourself.

And above all, never let it become you!

...

The Void. Fishbone Hall.

A massive skull sat upon the Bone Throne, silently watching the bewildered smaller skull at its feet. It seemed on the verge of saying something, but after a moment's hesitation, chose silence.

Right now, It wanted nothing to do with any being connected to the Void.

The small skull before the hall was silent too, but the complex expressions flickering across its face betrayed inner turmoil — thoughts boiling furiously.

It thought for a long time. About many things. Only when the great one on the Bone Throne released a sigh did it look up at its Benefactor with sincerity:

"My Lord... I'm sorry. The recent changes have come one after another — I can barely keep up. But regardless, thank you for your recognition and your gift. I..."

"Unnecessary.

The one, who recognized you, was not, I.

I, merely, made, a deal, with Him.

The deal, is concluded, so, you may, withdraw."

The small skull froze. Then slowly nodded.

Its eye sockets narrowed tight, as if trying to connect every clue it possessed. But for an outsider, this was impossibly difficult — she couldn't even confirm whether the "deal" the great one mentioned had occurred during the trial she'd experienced, or at some point before she arrived in this world.

Indeed — this bewildered Death follower was none other than the Destiny Chosen from another timeline: An Mingyu.

Not long ago, the Blind One had cried herself to sleep at her desk. But soon, in her sleep, she sensed a faint, ethereal summons.

She jolted awake to find her rest area invaded by a crowd of bouncing little skulls. The moment she opened her eyes, they grew even more animated, chattering:

"Hurry up! Come on, move it! Don't keep Him waiting!"

As they spoke, they began disassembling themselves. Countless white bones scattered and reassembled, forming a pallid Bone Gate before the Blind One.

She recognized it immediately: a summons from Death.

Such an unannounced divine summons should have been terrifying — especially from the deity bearing the divine name Death. Yet somehow, the Blind One felt no fear whatsoever. Instead, a strange anticipation rose within her.

After all, in the trial, it was Death who'd saved her. Even though Death's initial stance had been refusal, the outcome was still good.

Most importantly, what happened in the trial felt far more intimate than anything she'd experienced in this world. Only when there were connections to the trial did she stop feeling like an An Mingyu who'd arrived in a foreign world all alone.

So the Blind One didn't hesitate. She lifted her skirts and stepped through the gate. In a blink, she stood before the Bone Throne — transformed into a small skull with "open eyes."

Honestly, it was her first time clearly perceiving Death's form. She was awed by the massive skull's divine might and surprised by its attitude toward her. She desperately wanted to ask whether she could ever find her way home — but before she could, Death spoke directly and bestowed a new faith:

"Will, you, become, My follower?"

To toll, Death's, funeral bell, for, all beings, of the universe?"

The Blind One was dumbfounded. Truthfully, she'd been mulling over her faith fusion for a while. Her list of candidates was long — Order, Truth, Folly, even War, and yes, even Deceit!

But Death... genuinely hadn't been in her plans.

Of course, mortal plans meant nothing. Faith fusion was ultimately subject to the gods' will. With opportunity at her doorstep, she had no reason to refuse — no right to refuse. And this was a deity who'd once saved her life, even if it was done for the Fate Weaver's "sake."

Come to think of it, Cheng Shi had plenty of Death-aligned abilities too. Could Destiny fusing with Death actually be what She had intended all along?

The Blind One was confused, but she quickly accepted.

Yet her acceptance didn't immediately bring a new faith. The two skulls — one large, one small — stared at each other in silence for a long time. Only when a stream of Destiny light sliced through the Void and descended did the Blind One feel Destiny's true guidance. In that moment, a surging torrent of Death power rose from the river of bones beyond the hall and gradually enveloped her.

Moments later, a new Bell Ringer was born beneath the great one's Bone Throne.

Feeling the two intertwined divine forces coursing through her, the Blind One's thoughts grew even more chaotic — and then came the scene from the beginning.

After hearing her new Benefactor's dismissal, the small skull nodded firmly and prepared to leave. But the very instant she was about to leap through the Bone Gate — the unexpected struck first.

A pair of eyes painted with stars and spirals wrenched open above the Fishbone Hall. No sooner had they appeared than they whipped up Void gales without a word of warning, blasting down toward the hall below.

The massive skull's eye sockets contracted violently at the sight. Without even a greeting, It abandoned An Mingyu and dissolved into a river of white bones, fleeing the premises.

It was exhausted.

Dealing with one Void deity had already drained every last ounce of Its spirit. After all that, It simply lacked the energy to face another Void deity.

Besides — all this trouble stemmed from agreeing to Deceit's deal. It couldn't explain anything to Destiny. That burden of explanation didn't belong to It — it belonged to that insufferable Deceit!

So It left. Swiftly, cleanly.

But when It left, the Bone Gate naturally crumbled. And so the Blind One — freshly fused with Death — was left like an orphan abandoned by her Benefactor, suddenly face-to-face with her other Benefactor: Destiny!

This was her first time standing before Destiny. But the timing couldn't have been worse.

Though her Void-sight showed her nothing, she knew the being before her was her Benefactor Destiny. And she could feel an endless fury radiating from Her.

Most terrifying of all — a sliver of that fury seemed directed at her.

The Blind One... was afraid.

She clenched her teeth so hard they almost cracked, refusing to let her fear ruin her first audience.

But she didn't really have an image to protect — she was still a skull, after all.

How ironic. Destiny's Chosen, meeting her Benefactor for the first time... wearing Death's clothes.

No wonder the Fun God, far away in another corner of the Void, had said a good show was about to begin.

"Praise my Benefactor. Praise Destiny. May..."

"You are not part of the fixed path. You... should not be here."

Chapter 745: An Mingyu, Shattered

"!!!"

The instant she heard those words, a strong and warm An Mingyu — shattered.

She stared at her Benefactor in disbelief, certain she'd misheard.

'What is She saying — that I'm not part of the fixed path?'

'So... in the finale of that script the Fate Weaver mentioned, there's no place for me?'

'Yes — of course! As the author of the world's script, Destiny Herself has spoken. How could it be false?'

In that moment, An Mingyu's heart shattered completely.

A buzz of nothingness rang through her skull. Everything went hazy. From the instant the Faith Game had descended, she'd tirelessly chased Destiny's trail — even believed herself to be the first person in this world to gain Destiny's audience. But now, every pursuit, every belief, every conviction, every shred of devotion... popped like soap bubbles under the sun's scorching glare.

Fear was spreading, breeding. A terror far greater than suddenly realizing she'd switched worlds. In a game orchestrated by gods, if she lost her Benefactor's guidance and protection, An Mingyu couldn't begin to imagine where her future would lead.

She might not cling to life. But Xin Xin... whichever Xin Xin — she couldn't let go.

She'd always been a strong and resolute person. But today, after blow upon blow, that strength seemed to have reached its limit.

For one fleeting instant, every thought went dark. She even considered death — but Death... had somehow become her Benefactor.

An Mingyu felt dazed. A belated realization dawned: so that was what Death accepting her meant?

'Preventing a Destiny follower's demise?'

The Blind One was lost. She sank limply to the ground — though as a skull, the motion barely registered. She might as well have entered eternal silence.

Those eyes gazed down from high above, watching everything, entirely unmoved by their follower's despair.

Her gaze was cold. The Void's storm was gathering. From the look of things, those gales would blow the Blind One to wherever she truly belonged.

Whether that was another timeline or some eternal nothingness — no one could say.

The Blind One accepted her fate. No resistance. No ability to resist. As the Void winds drew closer, stripping her skull form bare, flaying her skin, shredding her hem — she was a leaf with nowhere to cling in the storm. In the blink of an eye, riddled with wounds.

But the very instant before she vanished into the Void — another disruption struck. A panicked figure plummeted from above, crashing directly toward the nearly unconscious Destiny Chosen.

That figure was, naturally, Cheng Shi — hurled here by the Fun God. The moment he appeared, the Void's cutting winds ceased instantly.

Though those eyes still churned with endless frost — at least this patch of Void was safe again.

Cheng Shi slammed down before the Blind One with a resounding THUD. He howled in pain, cracked one eye open — and found himself face-to-face with a battered, black-veiled acquaintance.

"?" His expression froze. He scrambled upright. "Chosen One An?"

Without a second's hesitation, he raised his hand and fired off several healing spells in succession.

At this moment — witnessing a Deceit-faith clown openly using healing power to restore the "sinner" She'd just been punishing — those eyes in the Void darkened. The Void's gales howled once more.

"???"

Feeling that unmistakably familiar chill, cold sweat erupted across Cheng Shi's forehead.

Expression frozen, he glanced at the now-recovering An Mingyu, then tried to sneak a backward glance to confirm whether the presence behind him was the Benefactor he feared. The Blind One, wrenched from terror and despair by the healing, sensed it was Cheng Shi before her. The dam finally broke. She clamped her lips shut but couldn't stop helpless tears from falling.

"Cheng Shi... the Benefactor has abandoned me..."

"Nonsense!"

Cheng Shi snapped. He leapt to his feet and jabbed a finger at An Mingyu in a blistering tirade:

"Foolish!

Abandoned!? You're Her Chosen! The one She values most to carry Destiny's will! She'd abandon anyone before She'd abandon you!

Don't equate a setback in fortune with Her averting Her gaze! Remember — Destiny isn't only good luck and fixed paths. It's also full of change and misfortune.

To put it crudely, whether thunder or rain, both are the ruler's grace—

No, that's too crude. That's feudal garbage. Let me rephrase: Her radiance shines equally upon the universe. She won't bestow an extra ray upon you.

An Mingyu — remember this! The reason you caught Her eye was because you believed the path beneath your feet is Destiny's road! It was your own fate-script that you wrote and spliced into the world's grand play!

The coming path, the going road — all are destined!

You and I are both Destined Ones! But we Destined Ones don't rely solely on Her guidance to find the way. It's the roads we walk ourselves that pave the path. It's the directions we choose that align with Destiny's guidance!

If you haven't woken up properly, go sleep some more.

If someone tampered with your dreams and gave you nightmares... that's not a big deal either. I'm an expert at countering Dream Peeping Rangers. I can teach you.

Not... not for free though. There's a fee."

Having lectured the Blind One, Cheng Shi frantically started signaling with his eyes.

The Blind One was stunned — or more precisely, scolded senseless. She stared blankly at Cheng Shi, feeling his desperate determination to drag her back onto Destiny's rails. And behind the Fate Weaver... she also saw those star-studded eyes, their expression gradually softening.

'So... Her eyes can be this beautiful.' But that beauty...

'Stop thinking, An Mingyu! Your self-pity is wasting the Fate Weaver's effort!'

The Blind One snapped to her senses. She immediately closed her mouth. Head bowed, like a criminal awaiting sentencing, she stood perfectly still — waiting for the "inquisitor's" next verdict.

Destiny watched all of this without a word. In Her eyes — a flash of... surprise.

Because She suddenly noticed that the thread of destiny that should have deviated from the fixed path had, after Her follower spoke the words "Destined Ones," actually reconnected.

That change from the unknown had returned to the fixed. A fate from a "parallel world" had genuinely replaced the original providence, becoming the present's "future."

Seeing this, Destiny's expression darkened once more.

Change was Her authority — but She hadn't activated it on An Mingyu. So if Change arose now, it could only mean one thing: during their brief clash, Her twin deity had stolen part of Her authority!

He hadn't merely borrowed it temporarily. He'd actually partitioned the authority of Change — and taken half!

And the reason She was only discovering this now was because He had disguised some Deceit authority as Change and slipped it back to Her!

He'd deceived Her. Used that universe-shaking civil war to execute an authority swap within the Void!

And She hadn't realized until She observed the change in Her own follower!

'Where... did He acquire these unthinkable powers?'

'And what does He intend to do with Her stolen authority of Change?'

Destiny fell silent. Lost in thought. And as She sank into contemplation, the atmosphere in this Void grew increasingly strange. Cheng Shi didn't dare turn around, only sweated. The Blind One was dazed, lost. Soon, only the sound of breathing remained.

Cheng Shi found this unbearable — worse even than his audience with Folly. If this continued, he wouldn't need the Benefactor's judgment. He'd drown in his own sweat.

So he steeled himself, prepared to scold the Blind One again — hoping to interrupt the Benefactor's scrutiny. But before he could open his mouth, Destiny spoke first:

"The matter of Change — I will pursue no further.

But you — Cheng... Shi!

The crime of blasphemy — how do you explain THAT!?"

Hearing this, both Cheng Shi and the Blind One went blank.

Cheng Shi had assumed his fast-talking had fooled his Benefactor. But clearly She remembered everything — each offense tallied separately.

The Blind One was even more baffled — because when she'd been on trial moments ago, she definitely hadn't been given a chance to explain!

But she couldn't dwell on that now. Because the moment Destiny spoke, the surrounding Void winds had already knocked her unconscious.

In this patch of Void — only one mortal and one deity remained, facing each other.

Chapter 746: My Lord, Please Hear My Sophistry

"Gulp..."

Cheng Shi swallowed. Expression frozen stiff.

Cold sweat cascading down his forehead like a waterfall. Only when his lips tasted the faint salt did he finally muster the nerve to speak:

"My Lord — please hear my soph— I mean, my explanation!"

Cheng Shi shuddered. His brain spun at maximum speed, desperately seeking a way to survive Destiny's judgment. He had no desire to end up like the Blind One — shredded by Void winds until riddled with holes.

But no matter how hard he thought, he couldn't construct a single argument that would "clear" him. Because everything today had been driven by forces far beyond his control. Fundamentally, he was a victim too.

So Cheng Shi hit a wall. He stared at those increasingly glacial eyes, paralyzed with anxiety.

'My Lord, oh my Lord — if only You were as easy to talk to as the Fun God, I—'

'Wait!'

'The Fun God!?!'

'Right! The Fun God was right!'

Cheng Shi jolted. He suddenly recalled what the Fun God had told him during their audience: "As a Void walker, you must view everything from the Void's perspective." Those words struck like enlightenment, straightening his spine and filling him with conviction.

He locked eyes with that frigid gaze, cleared his throat, and argued his case:

"My Lord — I believe I need not explain much for You to know that today's events are not my fault.

Of course, I bear some blame. My greatest error was mistakenly believing You wished to approach Folly — pushing for a Destiny-Folly fusion.

I see now that I was wrong. Utterly, disastrously wrong. Only now do I understand Your true intent — what You always wanted to fuse with was Existence. Was Time.

You used the pretense of approaching Chaos to fool everyone in the universe, making Them think the Void was searching for something. But the Void is void — it needs nothing, accepts nothing, because the Void is without meaning.

Yet not everything under this universe is meaningless. At least Existence still insists this cosmos has purpose. So Your choice of Existence — Your agreement to fuse with Time — was it not a reminder to me:

That Existence is already slowly walking toward the Void?

If even the Void's opposite has set foot on the Void's path, then wouldn't this universe's Void golden age be exactly as You desire?"

With that, Cheng Shi bowed his head devoutly and shouted: "All shall return to the Void!"

"..."

This was no longer mere sophistry. The clown was using words to stage a coup — splashing dirty water on his Benefactor and crowning Her with a tall hat. He twisted everything the Fun God had orchestrated into Destiny's original will, demeaning Existence while elevating the Void.

The move was filthy. So filthy that if his other Benefactor were anyone but Time, that deity might have personally shown up to sentence him for blasphemy.

But conveniently, Time didn't have time. So the clown could fearlessly stabilize Destiny first.

He didn't know whether his sophistry worked. But judging by the surrounding Void winds... it seemed to have... some effect?

The Void gales did die down. Yet the cold in those eyes didn't diminish one fraction. She watched Cheng Shi for a long time before finally speaking, voice flat and cold:

"There should be no Existence within the Void. Nor does the Void need Existence's approach as proof of anything.

You carry too much of His scent. But at least one thing you said was correct.

All shall ultimately return to the Void.

Cheng... Shi...

You walk toward the fixed. But the changes within that fixed grow ever more frequent. If one day you lose yourself amid those changes... will you still find the fixed path?"

Without a heartbeat's hesitation, Cheng Shi blurted: "My Lord — I will never lose myself."

"Heh. Arrogant words.

I cannot yet declare who will prevail in My contest with Time, yet you're certain change won't affect you. I'd say His influence runs too deep."

"..." Cheng Shi bristled. He looked up: "My Lord — since both Change and the Fixed are Your authorities, why must I walk only the fixed path and not the path of Change?"

Destiny paused — seemingly not expecting this question. She glanced at Her follower dismissively, still cold:

"Change concerns Me. The Fixed concerns Him.

I have never spoken to you of the Origin. But I know you already know of His existence.

His... intent is unknowable to all. Perhaps even He Himself does not understand what He's doing. His influence on you runs deep, breeding misunderstanding of the Origin. I will not correct those perceptions — because as long as you walk the fixed path, you will gradually understand Him, worship Him, draw near to Him.

For that... is the true Void!"

"..."

Honestly, hearing the name "Origin" from Destiny's own lips should have thrilled Cheng Shi. But his Benefactor's attitude frightened him.

According to the Fun God, that was an unknowable, unknown existence. So why did Destiny harbor such fervent worship and reverence for Him?

Just because He'd bestowed divine names and authorities?

Then how was Her stance any different from the God Worship Society and the Descent Faction in the mortal world?

Cheng Shi was stunned. Cheng Shi was terrified. He dared not speak carelessly on this subject, fearing his words would shatter the current "quiet" and plunge him into an inescapable quagmire of faith.

So he fell silent — but didn't forget to put on a "repentant" face.

Seeing this, the ice in those eyes thawed a fraction. She sighed:

"The fixed shall ultimately be fixed. The era will prove He was wrong.

As for the fusion with Existence...

So be it. Whatever agreement Time made with Him — They will both witness the arrival of the fixed through you.

Time's power can also help you fend off some hostility from the extrapolations.

I've noticed Time is changing too. He's probably no longer the Existence I once imagined. As for what's influenced Him... I will find out.

As for you..."

Something complex flickered through those eyes. Then the gaze turned cutting once more.

"The crime of blasphemy cannot be forgiven. A minor punishment today — consider it a reminder."

With that, several blasts of Void wind slammed into Cheng Shi without warning, hurling the clown skyward — replaying the exact same nightmare from Deceit's hands.

Cheng Shi was about to vomit. But while he spun dizzy and nauseous, those eyes narrowed slightly and muttered in a voice no mortal could hear:

"Time's cyclical power easily draws Destiny's power into entanglement — generating misfortune on its own — unless the Time power is shaken loose and made to align with Destiny segment by segment... Otherwise, a fusion will never be a true fusion.

He certainly thought ahead. He'd even taken this step in advance.

But... how does He understand Destiny and Time this thoroughly?"

The words ended. Those eyes vanished. The Void gales died. The clown tumbled to the ground.

Cheng Shi vomited. Stomach acid and all. He didn't stop until this patch of Void fell completely silent, at which point he realized his Benefactor had seemingly accepted the faith fusion just like that.

'Wait — it's over?'

'She... came around?'

'Hiss—'

'That doesn't seem like Her.'

Cheng Shi blinked, unable to figure it out. But that didn't stop him from squeezing out one last bit of flattery:

"Praise Destiny! Praise clemency! Praise the Void!"

When the Void offered no response, Cheng Shi relaxed slightly. First, he hit himself with a healing spell. Then a clarity spell to revive the unconscious Blind One.

Looking at this truly pitiable Destiny Chosen, Cheng Shi was about to ask what had happened — when the Blind One seemed to make some kind of resolution. She lifted her head, seized his hand, and "looked" at him:

"Cheng Shi — can I trust you?"

"???"

Cheng Shi was dumbfounded. 'Sis, since when are you the one asking the questions here?'

Chapter 747: What Did You Say — You're Not An Mingyu!?

"No, you can't!"

Cheng Shi's answer was razor-sharp — utterly unlike the man who'd just "saved" her.

He didn't know what the Blind One wanted to say, but from that single question he'd already guessed she hadn't used the Remembrance Needle. That made sense — before confirming whether Lao Deng was dead or alive, neither Torchbearer could afford to erase those particular memories.

But Lao Deng was dead now. Cheng Shi felt it was time to create some distance from the Torchbearers.

The same principle as always: Cheng Shi had never claimed to be a good person. He harbored no grand ambitions of sheltering the world or saving humanity. His sole wish was to survive.

But he undeniably admired those who fought for goodness and conviction. So he helped them often — on the condition that it didn't endanger himself.

And from the Blind One's tone, she was clearly about to endanger him. So in this moment, Cheng Shi chose retreat.

After all, the new member he'd invited to the Destined Ones wasn't Torchbearer An Mingyu — it was Destiny's Chosen An Mingyu. A Blind One who still retained those memories wasn't the person Cheng Shi wanted to recruit.

A her with intact memories had too complicated a position. She didn't belong in the Destined Ones either.

Add to that the Fun God's machinations with the faith fusion — Cheng Shi kept feeling as though He was pushing him toward becoming a Torchbearer. But he didn't want to be one. A "narrow" clown couldn't carry a "broad" flame.

Since the Fun God played the rebel among the gods, then "a crooked roof leads to a crooked foundation" — His follower being a bit rebellious among devout swindlers should be perfectly fine, right?

So Cheng Shi decisively shut down the Blind One's opening, rendering her speechless.

The Blind One was indeed silenced. Her confused, dazed face flickered with conflict and complexity. After a prolonged "stare" at Cheng Shi, her mind finally cleared — and she realized her identity probably made it inappropriate to bother him too much. But...

This had nothing to do with the Torchbearers. What she wanted to say wasn't about Lao Deng. It was about herself.

She was ready to come clean. She wanted to reveal everything. But Cheng Shi had chosen to shut the door at the exact moment she needed someone to trust the most.

'Typical of him.'

The Blind One laughed bitterly at herself. But she had to lay bare the truth regardless. This concerned not only her own path forward, but also the identity under which she'd continue walking alongside Cheng Shi.

A Fate Weaver who'd stitched her shattered destiny back together right before Destiny's eyes — perhaps he was the only person in this world she could trust. So she had to push past Cheng Shi's "defense" and keep talking. Only this time, she changed her straightforward confession into a hook to reel him back in.

She said only four words: "Abyss Rainbow Orchid."

Cheng Shi's face transformed.

With his usual caution, after rejecting someone he wouldn't have listened to another word. But the Blind One had pinpointed his curiosity exactly — dangling a lead from the Time trial he'd never been able to let go of.

Because he still remembered: on the final return, the path back to the original world had somehow reverted on its own.

Li Wufang's death-and-resurrection had turned the originally orange globe flowers red!

The trial only cared about results. Players in the moment wouldn't waste time dwelling on it. But for her to mention Abyss Rainbow Orchid now, after the trial—

Cheng Shi was hooked. He couldn't control his curiosity. He released her hand, took two steady steps back, and countered: "What do you mean?"

The Blind One pressed her lips together. Something resolute flashed in her eyes. Without a moment's hesitation, she laid it bare:

"I... am not this world's An Mingyu."

"!!!???"

Cheng Shi reeled — his brain detonated. He stared at the Blind One in disbelief. His first thought was that An Mingyu had somehow gotten matched into another round after the trial ended — another Time trial, no less — and gotten herself swapped out.

But this absurd notion evaporated the instant he saw the Blind One's expression. Cheng Shi's face turned deadly serious. Word by word:

"Can I trust you, An Mingyu?"

The Blind One laughed — bitter, practiced:

"You can trust me. At least in this 'trial,' you can trust me completely.

But after this trial, Cheng Shi...

You can still trust me. You can also trust others. But I... in this place, it seems like I can only trust you."

"..."

'Oh no — she IS that An Mingyu. The one I brought out of the trial and back to reality!'

'So I brought back the wrong Blind One!?'

Cheng Shi's mind went blank. He immediately began replaying everything from the trial. And right then, the Blind One smiled ruefully and delivered the crucial clue: "My vision... is different from yours."

"Hiss—"

Cheng Shi's scalp went numb. Eyes widening in shock: "You mean... the very first hour-mark!?"

"Yes... that exact hour-mark. Before you and I even met, the Doctor and I had both already been swapped."

"The Doctor was fake too!? But I clearly... with him..."

Mid-sentence, Cheng Shi fell silent.

Because he suddenly realized: every detail the Doctor had shared with him revolved around what they'd initially observed — the red Abyss Rainbow Orchid. In other words, when the Doctor described reality,

he'd never used phrases like "his original world" or "his world." They'd been discussing the initial red color — and Cheng Shi had simply assumed the Doctor's original world matched his own.

And when the Doctor said "the Blind One at that time wasn't the one he'd first met" — that wasn't wrong either. Because whether in his perception or in his plain narration, this Blind One genuinely was the one he'd seen as "the original Blind One" from the beginning!

'I fell for Truth's trick!'

'A lifelong hawk-hunter pecked in the eye by a hawk! This Truth follower was actually a master of twisting truth!'

'Worthy of Truth, indeed. Perhaps the moment he identified the Abyss Rainbow Orchid, he'd already solved the trial.'

Having figured this out, Cheng Shi felt zero satisfaction from solving the puzzle. Only boundless terror and dread!

He was thinking: if the discrepancy had already occurred at the very first hour-mark, then how could they be certain that the red orchid they'd designated as the "original marker" was actually correct?

Of course, based on today's experiences, he could confirm he'd returned to the right world. But within that trial, the method of using orchid color to find the way home was clearly flawed!

If the discrepancy at the first hour-mark had already altered the world, then the players — still inside the inn at the time — had never had a chance to verify the original world's orchid color in the first place!

That was the true greatest crisis they should have faced in the trial!

Chapter 748: Review — The Pattern of Orchid Color Changes

But since the orchid color hadn't actually changed, another hypothesis formed in Cheng Shi's mind. He rapidly combed through every detail of the trial and discovered that the changes between discrepancies weren't entirely random after all.

At least within certain windows, the discrepancies appeared in a specific order!

Yes — order.

The most obvious sequence: the "hard to pass the torch" Qin Xin had been rescued after the battle, then at the next hour-mark became the "wrong prophecy" Qin Xin. The "hard to pass the torch" Blind One had transformed after Cheng Shi's smoke trick into the "wrong prophecy" Blind One. And the "Destined One" Li Wufang had experienced an hour-mark in the mine's holding room and become the "wrong prophecy" Li Wufang.

All of which proved: the discrepancy after "future" was "past."

And after "past"? Simple — it was "original"!

Because the "wrong prophecy" Qin Xin and Li Wufang had both reverted to their original selves after the smoke trick. And the Blind One had also returned to her original self at the hour-mark when she killed Qin Xin after their conversation!

He'd reached this conclusion because that bizarrely staged "Torchbearer" exchange had left a deep impression. He'd never understood why Qin Xin had been so eager to die at the Blind One's hand. Now every mystery was solved!

'The An Mingyu who killed Qin Xin was the original An Mingyu!'

'Qin Xin's judgment hadn't been wrong at all! He'd already found the original world's An Mingyu! It was Cheng Shi himself who'd been fooled by the facade and misjudged the situation — compounded by the Doctor's "confirmation" — which led him to deny that An Mingyu's identity!'

'No wonder back at the inn at the trial's start, Qin Xin had scrutinized the Blind One so carefully — because by then, she'd already changed, while Qin Xin was still the original!'

'This was the most critical detail — and he'd let the chaos of mixed memories blind him to it!'

But none of that mattered now. What mattered was: the original An Mingyu clearly knew where she belonged — yet she'd refused to return!!!

It all clicked. Those two Torchbearers had played it beautifully. Qin Xin had actually agreed to let An Mingyu leave for another world!

'She must have gone voluntarily — otherwise Qin Xin wouldn't have staged that "suicide" performance, and the Blind One from his own world wouldn't have said those words.'

Cheng Shi had always thought that inexplicable "greeting" was the other world's Blind One expressing curiosity about this world's Zhen Xin. But now he saw it was nothing of the sort.

It was a farewell!

She was using his mouth to say goodbye to Zhen Xin!

'What a touching friendship between best friends!'

'But did you ever consider this An Mingyu's feelings!?'

Cheng Shi could tell: the Blind One before him had clearly been kept in the dark too. The only two people who'd understood everything in that whole trial were probably the Doctor and Qin Xin — the Torchbearer founder who'd sanctioned An Mingyu's "emigration."

'Bold indeed!'

'Just like that — sending his own Fire Seeker to another world. How could he be so certain that the Blind One arriving in his world would be the same as the one leaving?'

"..."

'He could be certain — because the Blind One before him was exactly that "present discrepancy." Aside from minor differences in personality and attitude, original and present were identical...'

And with that, Cheng Shi finally understood the complete logic of the timeline switches.

'The Abyss Rainbow Orchid's colors hadn't changed randomly with each discrepancy. There was a clear pattern — and that pattern...'

'...was also connected to Existence!'

'Good one, Existence. Good one, Time! If he weren't now a Time follower himself, he'd have cursed them both out just to vent!'

Watching Cheng Shi's expression shift like a kaleidoscope, the Blind One murmured: "You've figured it out?"

"Yes — I've figured it out!"

The logic of timeline switching wasn't actually that complex. The scattered investigation had just caused players to lose too much information. But once all the pieces were reassembled, the review made the switching mechanism clear.

First — establish the order of discrepancies. Following the logic above, the current evolution order was: Original → Present Discrepancy → Future Discrepancy → Past Discrepancy.

"Future → Past" and "Past → Original" had been proven. "Original → Present" could be inferred from the Blind One's final transformation.

That left only "Present → Future" — but that too had evidence.

During the period after Cheng Shi's battle with Qin Xin, the Blind One had gone from the warm An Mingyu to the "hard to pass the torch" An Mingyu. The shanty-area Qin Xin had likewise changed from the version harmoniously coexisting with the warm An Mingyu into the "hard to pass the torch" Qin Xin.

So: after Present came Future!

With that, the full order of discrepancies was established.

Now, reviewing the first hour-mark through this lens: the Blind One and Doctor had already changed, yet the orchid remained red — meaning the world itself hadn't changed. At that point, players existed in two states: four belonging to the original world, and two from the present discrepancy.

But after the first investigative split, the orchid turned orange-yellow. At that point, aside from Cheng Shi and the Blind One, every other player had experienced a discrepancy — meaning one original player, four present-discrepancy players, and one future-discrepancy player.

'See the pattern? When "present discrepancy" players outnumbered "original" players, the world changed!'

This explained why timelines shifted at the moment of discrepancy eruption — because the number of players from different timelines always changed at those moments, causing the world to keep shifting!

Specifically, it shifted toward the timeline with the most players and the newest changes!

And the most powerful evidence? Li Wufang's resurrection at the trial's end. In that instant, "one original player and two present-discrepancy players" suddenly became "two original players and two present-discrepancy players." The orange-yellow that should have belonged to "present discrepancy" reverted to the original red — and Cheng Shi had "accidentally" found his way home.

So — whether a world "exists" or not is determined by the majority!

When enough people belong to a particular world, the world becomes what they believe it to be!

With everything figured out, Cheng Shi felt a lingering chill.

This trial had been cleared through everyone's combined effort — but the ending owed much to Destiny's guidance. She'd let him find the fixed path even after he'd overlooked this many rules.

In hindsight, his earlier praise of Destiny had been lacking in sincerity.

But now clearly wasn't the time for hymns to Destiny — because the Destiny Chosen standing before him, from another world, seemed to have lost some of her reverence.

Cheng Shi was silent for a long moment. Then he sighed:

"She left voluntarily. You... can probably guess why.

Before she left, she asked me to pass a message to Zhen Xin. She said: 'I'm fine. Really, truly fine...'"

The Blind One froze. Something clicked. She nodded: "She went for Xin Xin. Probably for the Xin Xin in that 'future' — the one who could barely take a step forward."

"So — the 'original' An Mingyu went to the 'future,' and the 'present' you came to the 'original'..."

From what I saw, the An Mingyu originally belonging to the 'future' wasn't someone who gave up easily. You all swapped her to another world. Who can say whether that's a blessing or a curse for that world?"

"So neither she nor I are true Torchbearers..."

"True Torchbearers?"

Tch—

Even the true Torchbearer tacitly approved the original An Mingyu's smuggling operation, didn't he?

Qin Xin didn't stop her at all. He even staged a suicide show for my benefit just to cooperate.

Where was his concern for everyone else's well-being then?"

"He was considering everyone's well-being..." A faint light glimmered in the Blind One's eyes before she lowered her head again. "Because he was supporting that version of me in protecting her own cherished person..."

"..."

Cheng Shi had no retort for that.

Right — the Torchbearers had always been guardians of what they held dear. And as their founder, Qin Xin had even less reason to deny others the right to protect their own treasured bonds.

'Great, great — you're all beautiful. Only I'm the ugly one!'

Cheng Shi laughed bitterly. He wanted to curse, but couldn't bring himself to — not in front of this Blind One.

In this wretched world, who wasn't someone deserving of pity?

Chapter 749: The Fun God's Hint, and a Hypothesis About the Slice Universe

In truth, Cheng Shi didn't care much whether the Blind One before him was the "real" one. He didn't share Zhen Xin's deep friendship with her — his only interaction with the original Blind One had been a single phone call.

And frankly, if the current Blind One turned out to be the universally acknowledged "warm" version from the trial, that was actually better for Cheng Shi.

He never dwelt on the past. Once he learned the Blind One's identity had been swapped, he immediately recognized his opportunity.

And for the clown, this was genuinely a god-tier opening hand.

Remember why Cheng Shi had wanted to recruit the Blind One into the Destined Ones?

For the History School — the one in Zhen Xin's hands!

He'd used the Origin as bait to hook the Blind One, all to "share" first-hand materials from that organization. But given the sisterly bond between the Blind One and Zhen Xin, the logistics of that plan had remained... complicated.

But now — every problem solved itself!

Because An Mingyu was no longer the original An Mingyu. Most importantly, given the deep friendship between the Blind One and Zhen Xin, Zhen Xin would never sever that bond. She'd even make concessions — on multiple levels — to maintain it.

And the Blind One before him was even more perfect: she not only trusted him, she could barely trust anyone else. She was An Mingyu from another world. Until she knew how people in this timeline felt about cross-timeline players, he was her only real ally!

Zhen Xin counted as half. Qin Xin counted as half. But Cheng Shi counted as a full one!

Especially after he'd rescued her right in front of Destiny — this Destined One seemed about to become a truly Destined One after all!

Of course, the "destiny" here might not be Destiny's kind — but the kind where Cheng Shi saved her life!

At this thought, Cheng Shi's eyes blazed with brilliance.

'Praise Destiny — this inexplicable effortless win feels absolutely incredible!'

He smirked at the Blind One. Seeing her still dazed, he knew the day's events had been devastating. She didn't need to think right now. What she needed most was proper rest, then to slowly accept reality — because she almost certainly couldn't go back.

The Fun God had said everything from the last trial was Time's "extrapolation trick." Cheng Shi hadn't fully believed it then, and now, having met An Mingyu from another world, he believed it even less.

Those parallel worlds clearly existed. But perhaps they truly functioned like Time's extrapolations — when no "caster" was actively performing the extrapolation, no one could detect their existence.

So Cheng Shi now leaned toward a different interpretation of the Fun God's words: researching this dimensional "parallelism" was pointless, because the opportunity to cast wasn't in the players' hands. Players only got one shot. Miss it, and it was gone. The parallel worlds people currently theorized about were still the countless universes where Prosperity had fallen — not the one where Decay had.

Connecting this to his earlier speculation that "Time has no time because He's battling other Times," Cheng Shi formulated an even bolder hypothesis:

What they'd experienced in the last trial couldn't simply be called parallel timelines. It was a higher-dimensional state, clearly distinct from ordinary parallel timelines. He coined a name for this possibility:

Slice Universe.

The "hard to pass the torch" Qin Xin's theory was probably right — the gods the players knew were likely slices of the True Gods.

But that Qin Xin's understanding had been wrong. It wasn't that every parallel timeline had slices of the True Gods. Rather, each Slice Universe contained sixteen divine slices — and beneath each Slice Universe lay countless parallel worlds.

Those worlds were what the Fun God meant by "parallel worlds do exist"!

In other words: Cheng Shi believed his current spacetime contained countless timelines, all sharing one commonality — Prosperity had fallen.

Step outside that dimension, and in another Slice Universe, perhaps Prosperity hadn't fallen at all — Decay had instead. So every parallel timeline beneath that Slice Universe would feature Decay's fall.

The last trial had caused specific parallel worlds from four different Slice Universes to converge — producing "identical" players from completely different timelines.

So for the Blind One to return home, it wasn't just a matter of crossing the parallel-timeline barrier. She'd have to leap out of this entire Slice Universe, locate her original one, and only then — under that universe's divine slices' gaze — return to her world.

Nearly impossible. Because Cheng Shi suspected the gods — or more precisely, the gods of this Slice Universe — very likely didn't know other Slice Universes existed.

Which meant only the Fun God and Time had discovered the universe's truth. And the Fun God had discovered it far earlier than Time — which was why He'd become the first Fear Faction member!

Of course, this was still speculation. And the reason he dared make such a bold conjecture was entirely because of Time's attitude shift.

Everything Deceit had done today had received Time's full support. An Existence deity singularly focused on approaching the Origin had become the "sole Fear Faction member's" ally. Without some earth-shattering upheaval or cognitive reversal, Cheng Shi simply couldn't fathom why Time would change this way.

This hypothesis was terrifying. If true, and if any of the other deities found out, it could trigger the next round of divine chaos.

But Cheng Shi doubted the gods would learn of it soon — at least not before Deceit and Time devised a "solution."

Otherwise, Folly — the supreme intelligence — wouldn't have asked about "foolish acts" during his recent audience. He would have directly peered into Cheng Shi's experiences and deduced the universe's truth!

So the Fun God had concealed the facts. He'd deceived every deity — except Time!

And now Time was likely the Fun God's true ally!

If the divine landscape was structured this way... then what about Him?

'No — absolutely not going there!'

Cheng Shi suddenly went cold all over. He forcibly suppressed the thought, refusing to let his mind reach toward that higher existence. After several deep breaths, he redirected his attention to the present.

He looked at the gradually recovering Blind One. Something resolute settled in his expression:

"Chosen One An — don't use that Remembrance Needle."

An Mingyu froze. She looked up, face solemn:

"You're afraid I'll forget this debt of gratitude?"

"No — I'm afraid you'll forget where you came from. After all, during that trial, you were practically glued to my side.

I know this isn't easy to say, but I'll say it anyway: home is the only place in this wretched world worth longing for. We've both lost our homes. But now you have one again — at least a destination that looks like 'home.'

I believe you can handle this. Just as I believe in the other Destined Ones."

With that, Cheng Shi curved his lips into the most sincere smile he had.

Hearing "Destined Ones," something complex flickered across the Blind One's face. But she quickly produced the dice Cheng Shi had given her and declared solemnly:

"The coming path, the going road — all are... Destined!"

Destined indeed — the "destiny" of Destiny... and the "life" the Fate Weaver had saved.

Chapter 750: Qin Xin and... Qin Xin

After a brief exchange, Cheng Shi and the Blind One left the Void separately.

Before parting, Cheng Shi informed her of Lao Deng's death and instructed her to watch personally as Qin Xin used the Remembrance Needle.

His final words upon departure:

"Stay in touch at all times. And if you find that you can't face Qin Xin, consider leaving the Torchbearers. The Destined Ones are also a warm... uh, little den."

The Blind One laughed. She'd finally recovered from the terror of being "abandoned" by Destiny, returning to the warm, confident An Mingyu.

"Trust me — I'll handle everything."

Cheng Shi scoffed and left without a backward glance. He'd had more than enough of the Void today. Not one second longer.

The Blind One, after Cheng Shi departed, traced a strange symbol in the void. From a yawning gate of pure darkness, she stepped onto the Path of Fire Passing.

Now — she needed to talk to Qin Xin.

...

Meanwhile.

While the clown and the prophet had been conferring in the Void, the Fire Passer Hall had settled into a rare quiet. Both Fire Seekers had departed, and the place had once again become Qin Xin's "rest area."

Indeed — Qin Xin's rest area was right here. Although the Faith Game had "assigned" him a plot of land in the real world, he'd practically taken up permanent residence here long ago. His bedroom was a small room off the left side of the Fire Passing Hall.

Having wrapped up all Torchbearer business, Qin Xin finally earned some rest time. He downed two healing potions, then dragged his exhausted body toward the little bedroom and pushed open the door.

The room was small and spartan. Apart from a bed, a wardrobe, and a few black-and-white photographs nailed to the wall, there were virtually no signs of decoration.

Only the wardrobe at the foot of the bed stood out — conspicuously massive. It looked large enough to fit two Qin Xins, as if custom-built.

Qin Xin closed the door. His gaze swept over the photos on the wall, and a trace of sorrow surfaced on his face. He stood staring for a moment, then slowly walked forward and hung two fresh black-and-white photos alongside the others.

When that was done, he drifted toward the wardrobe. Time to rest.

Yes — he never slept in the bed. He slept in the wardrobe.

The armor-plated arm pulled the wardrobe open. Inside the enormous wardrobe — no clothes. Only a gaunt young man curled in the corner, dozing.

The youth's face was deathly pale. Not a trace of color on his lips. Skin and bones all over, barely a few scraps of flesh. He looked as though a single tap from Qin Xin would snap him in half and leave him dead inside the wardrobe.

Yet Qin Xin still tapped him. With the gentlest force imaginable.

The frail youth awoke. He lifted heavy eyelids. Seeing Qin Xin return, he forced a smile.

"Back? How was the trial?"

Qin Xin nodded firmly, then shook his head firmly: "Trial went well. But you... not so well. Are you sure you want to swap?"

Hearing this, the frail youth struggled upright from the corner. He patted Qin Xin's armored arm, bloodless face splitting into a radiant grin:

"Swap! Why wouldn't I!"

Your identity still needs to stay hidden, and it's inconvenient for you to go looking for those things. Leave it to me."

Qin Xin's eyes darkened: "But you..."

"Am about to die?" The frail youth trembled as he used Qin Xin's hand to pull himself upright. He was so weak, so pale — yet his eyes blazed with the exact same light as Qin Xin's.

"Everyone dies eventually.

When I set foot on this path, I never planned on living!

As long as you're alive, that's enough. As long as you live — that's me living!

Qin Xin, I just want to use what little time I have left to help you a bit more. Help all of you a bit more. Help myself a bit more.

I'm a warrior. Let me die on the road of fire passing. Don't let me rot in this cabinet."

With that, the frail youth gripped Qin Xin's arm with everything he had. And Qin Xin gently gripped back.

Worry flickered in his eyes — but he smiled and said one word: "Okay."

At that word, the frail youth smiled. His smile was so like Qin Xin's — no, not merely similar. Even the curve of the lips and the shape of the eyes were identical.

Because that wasn't a Torchbearer's warm smile. It was Qin Xin's own smile.

The two figures standing arm in arm — one powerful, one frail — wore exactly the same face!

They were both Qin Xin!

Only one was sharp and full of spirit — and the other... hollow and fading.

"Can you... stand on your own?"

"Qin Xin, you're underestimating a warrior!"

"Fine. I won't. But I must correct you — you're not a warrior. You're a hunter."

The heavy-armored Qin Xin smiled helplessly. He released his grip, letting the frail Qin Xin stand independently. Something complex passed through his eyes. A sigh. Then he stepped into the wardrobe.

The instant the armored battle boots crossed the wardrobe's threshold, a figure vanished from the bedroom — while inside the wardrobe appeared a suit of... heavy armor.

As the armor settled in the wardrobe, the Dreamless Mirror slowly detached from within and floated before the frail Qin Xin.

He reached out with trembling hands and grasped it. A surge of azure Memory power erupted, spinning into silken cocoons that wrapped around him.

Moments later, the Memory power quietly receded. A somewhat more energetic Qin Xin reappeared in the room.

Some of his strength seemed to have returned — but compared to the heavy-armored Qin Xin, he remained small and weak.

That was enough, though. Memory never required martial valor — only flawless rigor and unwavering devotion.

Qin Xin glanced at the armor in the wardrobe. Closed the door. A steady light flashed in his eyes. He strode from the room.

But the moment he stepped into the Fire Passing Hall, the Candle Man — who always liked to sit inverted midair — appeared silently above him.

Qin Xin looked up and smiled warmly: "You're here?"

"Sigh... I know I can't stop you, but after you die — what happens to them?"

"Ha ha ha! What happens is what happens!

No Torchbearer lives forever. They'll die. And so will I.

The deepest truth I've learned from countless memories is that history never stops for one person's sacrifice. After I die, thousands upon thousands of 'me' will rise to continue passing the fire for this world.

All I ask is to pass the torch just a little farther before I die. That way, on the stretch of road where I existed, perhaps a few fewer brothers and sisters will die.

Death isn't frightening. What's truly frightening is letting the world lose its hope."

As Qin Xin spoke, a brilliant light radiated from his entire being. His conviction was so absolute that the glow nearly eclipsed the candle's own flame.

The candle flickered. Noncommittal.

"Where are you headed this time?"

"The Kingdom of War. Boro Battlefield. I've combed through the Land of Hope's war history and found there's a bow — a War giant bow as tall as a man. I think it suits him. And it can forge a soul.

With it... Qin Xin will be even better at protecting them for me."

"Have you ever considered pulling that bow yourself?"

"Me?" Qin Xin laughed bitterly. He held out his hand, studying his shriveled arm and deflated muscles. "I can't. I'm not perfect enough. Passion alone can't accomplish great things. Strategy without courage can't weather storms. So...

I created him.

As long as he lives, he'll carry my dream all the way to the far shore of a new world!

It's a pity... a dream this long — I probably won't live to see the ending."

With that, Qin Xin walked to the long table, sat down, and entered the trial through a silent prayer.

Seeing his resolve and conviction, something unreadable flickered in the Candle Man's eyes. It melted back into darkness, murmuring:

"Like a Dream... what a fitting name — Like a Dream...

That War beast... is the most beautiful dream you've ever dreamed."