

The Gods 751

Chapter 751: Change Never Stops, What Is Fated Remains Fated

When An Mingyu arrived at the Fire Passing Hall, only Qin Xin was there.

Looking at the heavy armor reflecting cold light, the Blind One's heart swirled with a thousand conflicting emotions.

Only then did she realize what Qin Xin's words at the end of the last trial — "Welcome home" — truly meant. This founder who steadfastly upheld goodness had personally sent another version of himself, one who equally upheld goodness, to a different world, and then greeted her arrival with that single phrase.

He was still him, yet he was no longer him.

"You're here, Mingyu."

Qin Xin smiled and waved the Blind One over, though a trace of lingering sorrow lurked within that smile.

The Blind One sensed that sorrow and assumed he was mourning the Blind One who had originally belonged to this world.

"You... certainly had no qualms letting her go off alone."

Qin Xin blinked in surprise, then smiled and shook his head. "There's nothing to worry about. I know that in that world, there's another me who will look after her."

The Blind One understood what Qin Xin meant, but she couldn't bring herself to smile.

Because given all the despair she had endured today, this founder of the Torchbearers could hardly be said to have "looked after" her. Rather, it was the Fate Weaver who had arrived "just in time" to stitch her shattered destiny back together and pull her from the brink.

Of course, the Blind One wasn't complaining. She was simply reflecting on Fate — especially her own.

Seeing that the Blind One had come but remained silent, Qin Xin quickly guessed what she was thinking. He sighed and said:

"Perhaps the original intent of the Torchbearers never accounted for a situation like this, but Mingyu, you must believe — we have never meant any harm."

The Blind One sighed as well. "I know. Relax, Qin Xin. I'm not a fragile person..."

By the second half of that sentence, even her own tone lacked conviction. But Qin Xin knew the Blind One was a resilient player, so he smiled and moved past the heavy topic.

"Any news to share? Or would you rather rest for a while?"

"I came to—"

"If you want to 'take a leave of absence,' I can extend your time off a bit. But if you're thinking of resigning — sorry, Mingyu, I'm a ruthless boss. I won't approve it.

You can walk further alongside the Torchbearers. We will never be a burden to you, just as we won't be a burden to the Fate Weaver either."

"..." If he hadn't brought that up it would have been fine, but mentioning it only made the Blind One's expression grow stranger.

Lao Deng had slipped through both their grasps and nearly caused Cheng Shi catastrophic trouble — and it was Cheng Shi himself who resolved the mess. Given that, where exactly did this so-called "not being a burden" apply?

But the Blind One also knew it had been an "accident" — an unavoidable one caused by the gods' interference that couldn't be blamed on the Torchbearers. So she told Qin Xin that Cheng Shi had already dealt with Lao Deng.

Qin Xin was stunned by the news. His first thought wasn't about why Cheng Shi had the opportunity or the strength to eliminate Lao Deng immediately, but rather whether the Flame of Hope's nonchalant attitude meant He had already foreseen the outcome of this entire affair.

Born in the Void and connected to a certain "future" — this identity made Qin Xin wonder about His relationship with Fate.

And just how many of Their wills had been woven into this "accident"?

"In that case, the danger is completely resolved. It's time to forget the Fate Weaver." As he spoke, Qin Xin once again produced two vials of Remembrance Needle.

The Blind One looked at the Remembrance Needles on the table and shook her head, placing her own vial alongside them. She said softly, "I can't forget him just yet. I'm sorry."

"..." Qin Xin froze, then furrowed his brow and pondered for a moment. "Does the Fate Weaver know?"

The Blind One nodded, her expression complicated.

Qin Xin understood. He asked nothing more, simply picked up one of the Remembrance Needles with resolve:

"Alright. In that case, I'll just forget this along with everything else.

But Mingyu, since you've chosen to keep your memories, remember to remind me about the Prisoner after I've forgotten everything related to the Fate Weaver.

I'm afraid his memory might get swept away along with the rest."

"The Prisoner?" The Blind One frowned. "Still no word from him?"

"None. After the special trial ended, he never appeared again. And it's not just him — I've received confirmed reports that quite a few players vanished after that trial. They seem to have found something during the trial, and the instant they were transported out, a mysterious force spirited them away."

"Alright. I'll remind you."

With the Blind One's assurance, Qin Xin smiled and used the three vials of Remembrance Needle. He used one extra, though the Blind One didn't know what additional memory he had erased.

Shortly after, Qin Xin opened his eyes again. The two Torchbearers exchanged a few words, and then he frowned as he pulled a letter from within his armor.

He couldn't remember who had written it, but after reading it, he turned to the Blind One with a peculiar question:

"Mingyu, if possible, could you ask Zhen Xin for me — what changes have occurred recently on Memory's Ladder of Ascent?"

The Blind One found the question baffling, but she silently noted it and asked nothing further.

"Sure."

...

Meanwhile, in the Void.

A pair of star-filled eyes suddenly opened amid the infinite darkness — irises etched with constellations and spirals that coldly swept across the surrounding emptiness. After a moment, a frigid voice spoke:

"How much longer do you intend to hide?"

The Void offered no response. It seemed as though He had been mistaken, but those eyes did not withdraw. Instead, they grew colder still:

"The Authority you traded with me led me straight to you. I took that as an invitation. Now that I've arrived, you refuse to show yourself.

What — afraid after the beating you took?"

"Me? Afraid?"

A derisive snort echoed before those eyes, and then an identical pair snapped open directly opposite.

Deceit — the Manifestation of Void — couldn't endure His sibling god's mockery and immediately leapt to retort:

"Who's afraid of whom? That's far from settled!"

Normally, Fate would have fired back with something even sharper upon hearing this — especially today, right after their internal war, when tensions between them should have been at their peak. His counterattack should have been fiercer than ever. Yet upon hearing the taunt, He fell unexpectedly silent.

When He went quiet, the Fun God across from Him fell silent too. The Void suddenly became still — not a single sound left in existence.

After a long while, a flicker of complexity passed through Fate's eyes. He looked at Deceit and asked an inexplicable question.

"Who am I?"

The playful gleam at the corner of Deceit's eyes stuttered, but He quickly let out another scoff. "Heh — got hit so hard you forgot? Who else could you be?"

"Then who are you?"

"Heh~

Now that's an interesting question. Who should I be?

Or rather — who do you want me to be?"

Fate fell silent again for a long moment, then said: "I don't know who you are. But all I want is to be myself."

With that, He departed — left without anger, as if He would pursue the matter of the lost Authority no further.

Deceit raised an eyebrow, watching the direction of Fate's departure. A cunning light flickered through His eyes.

"Figured it out? Or just scared?"

No matter. Change never stops, yet what is fated remains fated."

...

Chapter 752: Who's the Clown?

Finally back!

The moment Cheng Shi's feet touched the rooftop of the rest area, he collapsed onto the ground without a shred of dignity.

Completely drained.

Whether it was the observation and deduction during the trial or the maneuvering and fast-talking before the audience with the gods, all of it had left him utterly exhausted in body and mind.

Right now, all he wanted was to lie here and think about nothing — empty his mind, let that taut bowstring of tension slacken just a little, and catch his breath.

A nice thought, but relaxation was impossible. Although Cheng Shi lay on the ground doing nothing, the questions in his head never stopped.

He was "interrogating" Brother Mouth, demanding to know its true identity.

Whether before Time or before Folly, Brother Mouth's behavior had been... alarming. But that very fact proved Brother Mouth's identity was extraordinary — profoundly extraordinary.

If it were truly nothing more than a sentient creation of Deceit, as the Dragon King claimed, then why would two gods pay such "serious attention" to a mere servant-god-level creation?

When They conversed — or traded barbs — with Brother Mouth, it didn't look like They were gazing down at something beneath Them. It looked more like They were regarding an equal.

So Cheng Shi grew ever more curious. From the moment he left the Void, he had been relentlessly bombarding the Fool's Lips, trying to pry out some clue. Yet Brother Mouth, who had been so fierce just moments ago, had now gone cold — no matter how Cheng Shi pressed, it refused to speak.

Left with no choice, Cheng Shi tossed Brother Tongue out to stretch its legs and tried some roundabout probing.

Watching the tongue lounge on the ground, idly spinning left and right without a care in the world, Cheng Shi's eyes glinted with mischief. He stirred up trouble:

"Brother Tongue, think about it logically. You eat lies, and Brother Mouth tells lies. By that math, it produces and you consume — you're its customer. The customer is king! Your status should be higher than its, so why does it look like you're its lackey?"

The Tongue of Eating Lies flipped over on the ground and smacked its tip boredly. "You want to know?"

Cheng Shi blinked. He was about to nod when instinct kicked in and he raised his guard. "What's the catch?"

"Hungry. Feed me."

"..."

'Bro, how is that any different from just slapping me across the face?'

'So I take the hit and then have to play along too?'

Cheng Shi was about to decline, but his curiosity was too strong. He ventured one more question: "You're serious?"

"I can't tell lies — a lie would make me eat myself. So if you want an answer, cook up a meal first."

"..." What a way to put it — "cook up a meal"!

Cheng Shi took two deep breaths, poked his head over to check the neighboring rooftop, and confirmed that Xie Yang still hadn't appeared. Only then, after much hesitation, did he utter a lie: "I don't want to know the Fool's Lips' identity."

The words had barely left his mouth when — smack — a vivid crimson "rouge mark" bloomed across Cheng Shi's left cheek.

The Tongue of Eating Lies finished its meal, rolled over contentedly, and lounged on the ground. "I chose this willingly."

"?"

Cheng Shi touched his face, dumbstruck.

"Wait — that's it?"

I took a slap to the face just to hear you say you voluntarily became Brother Mouth's lackey?"

"And? That's what you asked. I answered. I didn't lie. What's the problem?"

"Then why voluntarily?"

"Urp — not hungry anymore today. Let's talk about it some other time." The Tongue of Eating Lies rolled over, wriggled twice, and went still.

"I..."

Cheng Shi snapped. He snatched up the Tongue of Eating Lies, squeezed it viciously a couple of times, then flung it toward the edge of the roof in a fit of exasperation.

But just as the tongue was about to sail over the rooftop, he scowled, snapped his fingers to teleport to the ledge, caught it mid-air, and shoved the slap-happy tongue into his personal storage with a scowl.

And right on cue, the expert at twisting the knife chimed in: "Heh — nice acrobatics."

"???"

'Brother Mouth, did you catch Folly's disease?'

'I didn't close the deal with Folly, but you went ahead and sealed it for me, is that it?'

Fine, fine, fine. Cheng Shi was so angry he laughed. He plopped down on the rooftop's edge, pulled out over a dozen cans of slime drink, and sneered:

"Today it's a duel to the death. Either I disgust you to death, or I burst trying. Let's see who breaks first — you talk, or I die."

With that, Cheng Shi chugged two bottles in quick succession.

Now it was the Fool's Lips' turn to be speechless. It could see that if it didn't give up some information today, this clown of a host was genuinely going to make himself vomit all over this rooftop. Of course, given Cheng Shi's cautious nature, he wouldn't actually die — but the thought of all that slime drink passing through itself going down and then passing through itself again coming up...

The Fool's Lips wrestled with itself for a moment, then chose a tactical retreat.

"What do you want to know?"

Cheng Shi jolted so hard he nearly tumbled off the building. He hurriedly swept the drink bottles aside, planted himself firmly on the ledge, and asked with wary suspicion: "What are you, really?"

"The Fool's Lips."

?

Cheng Shi frowned. 'If that's a lie, does it mean Brother Mouth just admitted it has a secret identity?'

"What was your original name?"

"The Fool's Lips."

"...Brother Mouth, if you're going to be like this, I'll have no choice but to continue!"

"...I'm not lying. Since the moment I was born, I've been called the Fool's Lips."

'Born?'

"Are you really a creation of the Fun God? I mean, a creation like the Ritual of Truth or the Mirror of Delusion!"

"No."

"Then you're higher-ranked than those creations?" Cheng Shi was stunned — after all, the attitudes of Time and Folly couldn't be faked.

"Lower."

"Lower? Impossible!" Cheng Shi laughed in disbelief. He was sure Brother Mouth was toying with him again. "Do people chat with ants? Why would the gods bother conversing with an ordinary creation? Brother Mouth, tell me the truth. Don't make me beg."

"You'd really be—"

"Please, I'm begging you, just tell me." Cheng Shi's face was the picture of sincerity — and he casually picked up a can of slime drink for good measure.

"...I can talk, but I don't have Status."

"Ha. Guess whether I believe that." Cheng Shi's eyelid twitched as he tightened his grip on the can. "Let me rephrase: if I found all your brothers and sisters and reassembled the complete set — would the whole of you have Status?"

"No."

Cheng Shi pursed his lips, resigned. "So you're just a bunch of talking facial features with no other purpose, is that it?"

"That's not what I meant."

"Hm?" Cheng Shi perked up. "Then what do you mean?"

"I'm just me. I don't have brothers and sisters."

"..." Cheng Shi's expression froze on his face. But an instant later he flicked out the Tongue of Eating Lies — smack — and jabbed a finger at the tongue on the ground, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "Say that again, Brother Mouth. I dare you."

"I don't have brothers and sisters."

"!!!"

'You actually said it?!'

Cheng Shi was dumbfounded. He looked at Brother Tongue, who couldn't have cared less. "Brother Tongue, you're not mad? Your big bro just disowned you!"

The Tongue of Eating Lies bounced a couple of times, thoroughly unconcerned:

"I call him big bro. He doesn't call me brother. Where's the conflict?"

I call him big bro, he calls me tongue. Isn't that fine?"

'Fine?'

'Right, right, right. I see how it is — you're both just using the clown for entertainment!'

Cheng Shi was so angry he forgot how to breathe. He exhaled heavily several times, then switched tactics and tried the sentimental route.

"Regardless of everything, I've always felt that brothers and sisters belong together — that's what makes a family.

I don't have a 'family' anymore. But Brother Mouth, Brother Tongue — you still do. More importantly, I can help you find those scattered siblings of yours. So as long as you still long for 'family,' still long for reunion, then I'm willing to give everything I have to protect that beautiful thing!"

"Heh — who do you think you are, a Torchbearer?"

Cheng Shi faltered, but quickly recovered and declared solemnly: "For the sake of your reunion, I can be!"

"But I don't want a reunion."

"Neither do I!"

The tongue and the lips spoke in unison, dousing Cheng Shi's enthusiasm like a bucket of ice water. Yet he still detected something off, because those two refusals had sounded genuinely heartfelt — as if they truly didn't want to see the other parts.

'Why?'

'They don't get along?'

'But the tongue and the lips seem to be on decent terms.'

'Don't tell me a single set of facial features has internal cliques?'

Cheng Shi was baffled. He thought for a moment, then ventured a probing question:

"So there's someone you don't want to reunite with? Then surely there's at least one you'd like to see?"

I don't know what the other parts are called or where they are, but I do know there's a Secret Peeping Ear currently in San Dales, in the Tower of Logic.

Would you like to see it?"

At the mention of that name, Brother Tongue seized up and went silent. Brother Mouth clamped shut entirely.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi's eyebrow arched, and he finally smiled.

'Ah-ha — they're on bad terms with the ear!'

'Bad terms are good.'

The "enemy" of his "enemy" was his friend. At this rate, the trip to San Dales needed to be moved up!

Just as Cheng Shi was scheming about how to rally the ear against the mouth-and-tongue alliance, a shrill phone ring suddenly cut through the air.

He paused, dashed into the warehouse, and picked up the phone — only for an entirely unexpected voice to come through from the other end.

"Cheng Shi?"

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted. He nearly dropped the phone.

It was her!

...

Chapter 753: An Unexpected Call

"The number you have dialed is currently unavailable. Please leave a message after the tone..."

"...This is Zhen Xin."

Cheng Shi was about to hang up, but hearing that name made his eye twitch. "Beep."

"..."

The other end paused for a moment, then solemnly left a message:

"Did she... leave any words behind?"

Hearing that, Cheng Shi was ninety percent certain the caller really was Zhen Xin. After all, the bond between her and the Blind One couldn't be faked. But even if there was only a one-percent chance, he had to guard against being made a fool.

Getting played by a mouth and a tongue was humiliating enough. If someone on the other end of a phone line pulled the same trick today, it would become a permanent black mark in the Clown's history.

So Cheng Shi pondered for a moment, then offered a cautious response.

"She did. But I'll need a password."

'A password?'

Zhen Xin frowned on the other end, but after only a few seconds of thought, she realized what the "password" was. The sheer absurdity of it even momentarily diluted her grief, drawing an involuntary laugh. "Fine. Do you want the old password or the new one?"

"Both!" A keen light flashed in Cheng Shi's eyes as he held his breath, terrified of missing a single word.

"There are too many old passwords to go through. Let me hit the ones you'd be most interested in.

I know who you're worried about. No need — things went smoothly. We found Lu Xia.

Hu Xuan turned out to be a decent teammate — reliable, at least when our goals aligned. She wanted to persuade Lu Xia to return to Birth's side, but...

The Birth Holy Voice didn't believe that crowding around a Benefactor's throne in worship was the same as devotion. So He refused Hu Xuan's request and stayed behind in the history of the Land of Hope.

Of course, He has been revived, which means He can leave that history at any time. But I think He seems to be waiting for someone.

Birth has recovered another one of Her children, and as a member who made a modest contribution along the way, I was granted an audience after the trial. As for the content of that audience..."

'An audience with Birth...'

Cheng Shi's lip twitched. He could picture the scene, but he couldn't imagine what Birth had said.

Of the entire Life path, this Prelude of Life was the one he understood least. So he was exceptionally curious about the content of Zhen Xin's audience.

"What did She say? Don't tell me you aligned with Birth?"

Zhen Xin chuckled lightly. "That's not part of the password. If you want to know, trade something you know for it."

"?" Cheng Shi blinked, then smiled. "What a head of the History School you are — not willing to take the slightest loss. Aren't you afraid I'll hang up and you'll never know what the Blind One said?"

"So she really did leave a message."

"...?"

'Damn. Got played into being the clown again.'

Cheng Shi's eyelid jumped violently. He had assumed that given Zhen Xin's intelligence and her bond with the Blind One, she must have been certain the Blind One left something — hence the call. He hadn't expected that she, too, had been probing.

But probing was good. If it had been a probe, that meant Zhen Xin also wasn't entirely sure of the Blind One's attitude — which in turn meant their bond as close friends wasn't quite as unconditional as he had assumed.

The Blind One had been right: they were first and foremost independent individuals, and only then the kind of friends who shared everything.

And given the current situation — with the Blind One having been swapped — that worked in his favor.

So Cheng Shi didn't dwell on being outmaneuvered. Instead, he agreed openly.

"She did. And only I know what she said.

Relax — unlike certain people, I don't enjoy lying. I may not know you two well, but I deeply admire the genuine bond between you. As long as your password checks out, I'll tell you what the Fate Chosen left behind.

Honestly, even if you hadn't called, I would have told you the next time we met. But since you're eager to know now, 'early access' comes at a premium — that's a universal truth.

So keep going. Tell me the new password."

"..." The other end fell silent again. Muffled muttering drifted through — Cheng Shi could only make out snippets like "this guy," "Zhen Yi," and "so similar" — and then, through this unexpected phone call, he received a bombshell he wouldn't have dared imagine.

"Internal intelligence the School hasn't yet decrypted: the Stars Dagger experiment was interrupted. Zangier... escaped."

"!!!???"

Cheng Shi froze. Each of those words sounded familiar on its own, yet strung together they felt utterly alien.

"What do you mean, escaped?" Cheng Shi stared, his brain grinding to a halt.

"Vanished. He had already stolen enough pseudo-god divinity a long time ago. No one knows how he managed to 'hoard' that much divinity right under the Erudition Presidium's nose, but he did.

Combine that with the body of the Hanged Man of the End — tempered through countless ages of resisting divinity — and he may have already become... Him.

A pseudo-god. No — more accurately, a wild god cobbled together from fragments of stolen divinity.

So during one of the Stars Dagger's routine 'consumable' replacements, He seized the opportunity and fled. Every experimenter performing the replacement died on the spot — including one member of the Erudition Presidium.

I'm not telling you this as mere history anymore. I'm warning you. Back then, Hu Xuan was likely His first escape plan, but thanks to certain interference, He failed.

So be careful. Never underestimate the ambition and vindictiveness of a Grand Scholar."

"..."

Although Zhen Xin was perfectly capable of lying without batting an eye, Cheng Shi still believed this so-called "new password." It fit his understanding of Zangier too perfectly. He — no, He — had always been that kind of madman.

With that in mind, Cheng Shi pulled Zangier's Severed Finger from his personal storage.

Indeed — the key tool of the divinity-tempering experiment had fallen into his hands. Originally, he hadn't wanted the thing after the experiment ended. He knew it was valuable, but its karmic entanglements were too massive... He was afraid of getting dragged into yet another inexplicable incident.

Conveniently, the Torchbearers needed divinity, so he had planned to leave it with them. But at the time, Qin Xin was lying on the ground, and the Blind One hadn't accepted it either. She had merely copied a set of the Doctor's experiment manuscripts, then handed all the divinity and the finger over to Cheng Shi.

Cheng Shi had felt... rather embarrassed. After much deliberation, he accepted the finger, and in return, he bundled up every scrap of Decay divinity stripped from the Folly believers and gave it all to the Torchbearers.

He knew Decay no longer cared about such things, so this essentially "free" divinity was the best aid he could offer the Torchbearers.

Now, hearing this news, Cheng Shi's expression turned grim. He shouldn't have taken it...

The thing hadn't even warmed in his hands before trouble started brewing.

That said, Zangier's jailbreak wasn't too big a problem for him personally. After all, everything back then had been played within the rules of the game. Besides, He couldn't pin the blame for His first failed escape or His severed finger on Cheng Shi.

But Hu Xuan — the warrior who had demanded a child from the Eternal Sun right in front of Him — was probably in for trouble.

Then again, given her current status, Birth probably wouldn't let a pseudo-god snatch away one of Her children... right?

Cheng Shi sank deep into thought. The other end of the line didn't press him either, and it wasn't until he shifted position, producing a faint rustle, that Zhen Xin finally spoke again.

"I've given you the password. Where's my answer?"

This time Cheng Shi held nothing back. The other party's sincerity was evident — or rather, during this call, he finally appreciated the fairness of Big Cat's old assessment of Zhen Xin.

"She's someone who's very good at cooperating."

Indeed. Setting aside her sister, Zhen Xin herself seemed more approachable than most liars. Within limits, of course — she was still a liar at heart.

Recalling the covert sparring at the Mediocre Person Society, Cheng Shi shook his head and smiled wryly.

'Stop overthinking. Just treat her as an intelligence mine.'

And he was the tireless miner with a pickaxe — oh wait, the pickaxe was broken. He'd need to get a spare.

After a few seconds of idle musing, Cheng Shi relayed what the Blind One had left behind. It was only a few words — short enough that the "password" he'd received in exchange seemed like an unfair trade.

But Zhen Xin didn't see it that way. Her voice changed audibly — even trembling slightly with barely suppressed emotion.

The voice on the other end disappeared for a time. When it returned, it carried a single word:

"Thank you."

The gratitude was so genuine that Cheng Shi, unaccustomed to sincerity from a liar over the phone, paused for a beat.

He wasn't used to trading real emotions with a deceiver through a phone line, so he smiled and steered the mood.

"How about something more practical?"

"Sure."

"?"

Cheng Shi blinked again, about to say something more, but the line had already gone dead.

'Wait — she just hung up?'

'So is the "something practical" coming or not?'

...

Chapter 754: Earth-Shattering Intel from the Dragon King

Exactly one second after Zhen Xin hung up, the phone rang again. Cheng Shi immediately realized it hadn't been intentional — she'd probably hit the button by accident — so he snatched it up, and his first words were:

"You're serious?"

The other end went quiet. Before long, a familiar voice chuckled:

"Sounds like another interesting memory you've just made. Who were you on the phone with, Cheng Shi?"

'The Dragon King?'

Cheng Shi froze, blinked, then shook his head with a wry smile. "Nobody. But your timing is impeccable — I was just about to look for you, and here you are calling me first."

Li Jingming wasn't surprised that Cheng Shi wanted to reach him. He knew the Clown was planning to find the Secret Peeping Ear and use it to get closer to the so-called Lord Yu Xi.

And since that intel had come from the Dragon King himself, the reason for the call was obvious — Cheng Shi simply wanted to verify its accuracy one more time.

But that wasn't why the Dragon King was calling today. He had something far more interesting in mind.

"I'm not sure whether Hong Lin ever mentioned it, but I once obtained a small fragment of memory related to 0221. Not from the man himself, of course, but from one of his Slices.

He's been subtly probing his Slices after every trial, extracting details about their trial experiences through casual conversation. One particular Slice apparently caught on and quietly documented everything.

I happened to stumble upon that Slice's memory, and it opened a 'door into the world of Truth' for me."

The Dragon King's "opening a door into the world of Truth" was surely hyperbole, but the claim of finding a Slice's memory was probably genuine.

Of course, Cheng Shi could only be certain that "finding the memory" was real. Whether the memory itself was authentic... that was another matter entirely.

After all, Cheng Shi himself had constructed self-hypnosis traps to counter Memory followers. Who was to say the far more brilliant Truth followers didn't have a fake memory of their own?

A Slice's memory was, after all, nothing more than whatever its creator had sculpted.

But Cheng Shi didn't warn the Dragon King. With his level of insight, a reminder would be unnecessary.

What intrigued Cheng Shi more was the Dragon King's motive for sharing this.

'Intelligence exchange within the Joker alliance?'

'Impossible.'

There was still an entry fee standing between the Dragon King and full membership. Even if Cheng Shi forgot everything else, he'd never forget the price the other man had pledged.

'So what's the Dragon King after?'

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, held his curiosity in check, and listened quietly.

"0221 is fascinating. He's a pure Truth follower..."

The Dragon King had barely gotten that far when Cheng Shi blurted out: "A lunatic?"

"Exactly — but purer than any lunatic. He's studied every experiment in the Tower of Logic's history and formed his own unique insights on each one.

Interestingly enough, the reason this particular Slice figured out his own identity as a Slice was because he was awed by the staggering breadth of knowledge displayed by the Truth neighbor he'd been chatting with.

It was that feeling — of a firefly gazing at the brilliant moon — that first planted the seed of doubt: could his conversation partner actually be the Chosen One of Truth? And once that suspicion took root, every subsequent detail became a thread to unravel.

Of course, I'm not saying all this because I'm interested in 0221 as a person. I am interested in him, yes — but what interests me even more are the experiments he controls."

Cheng Shi stiffened. 'Did the Dragon King already hear something right after the trial? He can't possibly know I have experiment manuscripts, can he?'

"So you want to go after 0221's experiment manuscripts?"

"Manuscripts?"

No. I don't need knowledge. What I need is memory.

What interests me is the memory embedded in those experiments — the people and events of the Tower of Logic lost to history. The manuscripts themselves don't hold that much appeal."

"..."

It clicked. 'You say you're not interested, yet you keep bringing them up. So who do you think would be interested?'

'Dragon King, oh Dragon King — you're dangling those manuscripts to bait me.'

'You want to drag me along to rob 0221.'

'And then you take the memories while the manuscripts become my payment.'

'Hmm...'

'Not the worst idea, but...'

"Got a plan?"

Hearing that, the Dragon King laughed.

"Sharp as ever — wouldn't expect any less.

No plan yet. I just have a feeling an opportunity will present itself soon, so consider this a down payment. When you spot that opportunity, remember there's a Joker waiting for you to return the favor."

"Heh. Pay your entry fee first before you start throwing around 'Joker.' But Dragon King — why do you think an opportunity is coming soon?"

"Because according to my sources, the recent mass disappearances of players seem to be connected to 0221."

"!!!"

Cheng Shi froze. He turned to stare at the neighboring rooftop, thinking of the neighbor who had been missing for so long. 'Could Xie Yang have been taken by 0221?'

'Why would he take people — for experiments?'

"Experiments?"

The word slipped out uncertainly, and the Dragon King's reply was nothing short of earth-shattering.

"Yes. Experiments."

Based on the breadcrumbs I've pieced together from the various memories I've collected recently, 0221 has developed a keen interest in a certain failed experiment. One you should have heard of — the Stars Dagger, led by the greatest scholar of the Creation Alchemy Department: Zangier."

"The Stars Dagger?!" Cheng Shi was stunned. 'What a coincidence?'

"I see you already know about it."

The missing players were all snatched away by a mysterious force the instant their trials ended. They didn't return, yet the corresponding spatial merge prayers didn't activate either — meaning they're not dead.

But gradually, a fair number of them have started dying off. At first I assumed something new had changed in the trials. But after tracking and investigating for a while, I discovered that all of it seems connected to 0221."

At that, a wild notion flared in Cheng Shi's mind. He blinked, scarcely believing his own words:

"Are you saying 0221 is using players as test subjects for the Stars Dagger experiment?!"

In reality?!

Replicating the experiment that stole the gods' Authority?!"

"Precisely." The Dragon King's tone turned grave. "You and I both know what Truth is capable of. It's far from impossible."

"But that's insane..." Cheng Shi murmured.

"The road to Truth has always been insane."

Cheng Shi fell silent. But soon another thought struck him: 'Damn — Xie Yang really was taken as experimental material!'

'The missing players are almost certainly consumables!'

'But even so, where would 0221 get that much divinity?'

The Stars Dagger had only been feasible because the Tower of Logic poured an entire nation's resources into creating two pseudo-gods, then made Zangier himself enter the game as the thief who stole the gods' Authority.

On top of that, the Erudition Presidium had even deployed the Ritual of Truth to carve out a pocket of space within the Void, specifically to house Far Dusk Town — the experiment's base of operations.

'Wait...'

'Far Dusk Town?'

Cheng Shi's eyes widened. Suddenly he realized where that inexplicable sense of familiarity at Falling Gate had come from. Although the architectural styles weren't the same, the stowaways who didn't belong and the speculators chasing profit — weren't they just like the carefree travelers in Far Dusk Town who asked no questions and lived only for pleasure?

And he remembered Zhen Yi had mentioned that the Stars Dagger's experimental town had been found near the Abyssal Volcano. So... Far Dusk Town's prototype might have been an underground settlement like Falling Gate?

It wasn't impossible. A Rad had also mentioned that the Tower of Logic possessed the means to destroy underground towns — the cost was simply enormous. And now it seemed that what he'd called "destruction" might have been the original "uprooting" when Far Dusk Town was selected.

A price that, set against the Tower of Logic's divinity-theft experiment, was simply deemed acceptable.

But more alarming than Far Dusk Town's origins was another coincidence: at this exact juncture, Zangier had escaped.

'Is that really a coincidence?'

'Or was 0221's experiment prepared precisely for the escaped Zangier?'

'This historical madman meets a present-day kindred spirit, and the two of them hit it off perfectly — transplanting the Stars Dagger out of the Land of Hope entirely?!'

Cheng Shi was frightened by his own wild speculation. He gripped the phone tightly, brow furrowed.

'The followers of Truth have truly lost their minds!'

...

Chapter 755: Big Cat: Tao Yi Is Missing

Cheng Shi furrowed his brow tightly, weighing whether to tell the Dragon King about Zangier's escape.

This was first-hand intelligence from the History School — the Dragon King certainly didn't know about it, or today's conjecture wouldn't have been so straightforward.

The coincidence also solidified Cheng Shi's conviction of how vital it was to control two top-tier intelligence channels. The feeling of being the only person who could "see the truth" while everyone else was misled by illusions was exhilarating — not because of the thrill of discovery itself, but because such an information gap was exactly what a liar needed to work his craft. And that was what Cheng Shi cared about most.

Of course, deception had its principles — when to deceive, and whom. At the very least, with the Dragon King having shared intelligence first, Cheng Shi had no reason to cheat a future Joker.

So after careful deliberation, he decided to share the news.

First, he needed to maintain parity in their cooperative relationship going forward. Second, he needed to build up enough mystique around the Joker — this ramshackle "organization" of his.

Only then could he make the Dragon King even more curious, and therefore more eager to join.

Sure enough, upon hearing of Zangier's escape, Li Jingming was stunned. He fell silent for a long while before asking:

"Is this the Joker's intelligence network?"

Cheng Shi answered without hesitation: "That's right — this is the Joker!"

After saying it, he smacked his lips guiltily — but quickly straightened his spine, thinking: 'I didn't lie. Yes, the intel came from the History School, but I obtained it from the History School, and I'm a Joker, so by extension the Joker obtained it. Perfectly logical!'

'Makes complete sense!'

Li Jingming fell silent again. When he spoke, something wistful had crept into his tone:

"I underestimated you all. Good. This memory exchange has far exceeded my expectations. Cheng Shi, arrange a meeting with the Jokers as soon as possible. I'll bring the entry fee you want."

"..."

Cheng Shi's eyelid twitched violently.

'You want to meet Mi Laozhang that badly?'

'Have you considered whether Mi Laozhang wants to meet you?'

'I have a feeling the "Cemetery manager's" desire to see your corpse far outweighs any desire to see you alive.'

But... it really was time to think about how to bring the Jokers together.

Cheng Shi had originally seen the organization as nothing more than a tool for extracting intel and keeping in touch with allies. But ever since being inspired by the Destined Ones from another timeline — and watching the local Destined Ones "grow and strengthen" — the Clown had realized that having such a group at his back was genuinely necessary.

At the very least, it would be useful for fending off external crises and future risks.

And so Cheng Shi began mulling over how to turn these two nebulous organizations into something real.

But the current phone call was obviously not the time for such considerations. After a moment of silent reflection, he asked:

"0221 probably has many Slices. Knowing their names might help track him down later. What was the name of the Slice you mentioned?"

"Wang Weijin. A Truth Assassination Doctor."

'Wait — who?!'

'Wang Weijin?'

Cheng Shi's mind went blank. He hurriedly pressed: "When was this?"

"About a month ago. His appearance was what allowed me to make a significant leap in my search for 0221.

Unfortunately, when I ran into him again a week ago, he had become a new Slice who didn't remember me at all. Even his memory logs were completely lost."

"..."

Cheng Shi never imagined he'd hear that deceitful scholar's name again so soon!

'His predecessor turned out to be the Dragon King's breakthrough for investigating 0221?'

'Interesting — the world really is getting smaller.'

But even if they crossed paths again, the Dragon King's research might become completely useless, because the current Doctor was now a Wang Mou from another world — perhaps even a Wang Mou who had crossed the boundaries of the Slice Universe.

Given that fraudulent scholar's motivations, if he had willingly smuggled himself over from another world, it had to be to escape the predicament of his original one. And for a Slice, the worst possible scenario was having the original body discover something was wrong.

So he had most likely already figured out his own identity and seized an opportunity to swap over here.

The more Cheng Shi thought about it, the more impressive the Doctor seemed. In that case, would the bold and meticulous Wang Mou truly have no designs on his own original body?

He was a pure Truth follower, which meant he craved Truth intensely — and 0221 happened to be the person closest to Truth...

Of course, Wei Mu didn't count. Who knew which world the Doctor who worshipped Wei Mu had been swapped to.

So, post-swap, could Wang Mou once again become an outsider's avenue to 0221?

Cheng Shi pondered for a moment, then told the Dragon King:

"Next time you run into this Slice, try chatting with him about these things again. Maybe he'll remember something.

But be careful — he's a doctor who's very good at lying.

If he won't tell you the truth, try dropping my name. It might help."

"?"

Li Jingming froze again. After thinking for quite a while, he laughed:

"Some new change has happened with Wang Weijin?"

And why would dropping your name help?

Fascinating. I'm growing more and more curious about the Joker's intelligence sources. This is going to be an unforgettable memory. I can hardly wait to meet the Jokers."

"..."

'Let's hope you still feel that way after coming face-to-face with Mi Laozhang.'

'Though, to be fair, that scene would be hilarious.'

The two chatted idly for a bit longer before hanging up. Cheng Shi rubbed his forehead, feeling the world growing more chaotic by the day. He had no idea where his own path would ultimately lead.

But overthinking was pointless. Better to take things as they came.

Just as he stepped out, ready to rest, the phone he'd just set down rang again. Cheng Shi's heart lurched. He stared at the buzzing receiver, speechless.

'Seriously — when did phone calls start coming as frequently as audiences with the gods?'

'Can a man not have a moment's peace?'

Cheng Shi was numb, but remembering that only Big Cat's friends had this number, he couldn't not answer. So he picked up once more — only to find that this time it wasn't one of Big Cat's friends, but Big Cat herself!

The moment she spoke, it was bad news.

"Cheng Shi, Tao Yi is missing."

"?"

Cheng Shi froze, but an instant later his brow furrowed tightly.

'No way it's that much of a coincidence.'

'Did the Wood Elf become an experimental consumable too?'

...

Chapter 756: Wait — Another "Audience Call"?

"When?"

"After last night, before tonight."

She answered the previous call. This last one — nothing.

I suspect something went wrong after the special trial, but I'm certain she isn't dead. That particular special trial happened to be a Prosperity trial — I personally gave her the evaluation and rewards!"

Big Cat's voice was thick with barely suppressed fury. Tao Yi meant too much to her. The sudden disappearance had turned the Prosperity Agent into a powder keg.

Right now, she probably just wanted to tear something apart — she simply hadn't found the right place to do it yet.

Judging by her tone, she was also aware of the mass disappearances. So this call wasn't to discuss strategy — it was to ask for intel.

With Big Cat's strength, rescuing Tao Yi probably wouldn't require backup. But figuring out where to even look for Tao Yi... even three Big Cats might not crack that puzzle.

"..."

'So it really is that much of a coincidence?'

'Did Fate smile on me, or on Big Cat?'

Today's three phone calls — had even one come in a different order, Cheng Shi probably wouldn't have been able to piece any of this together. Yet here he was, somehow one of the best-informed people about this entire incident. After a moment's thought, he said:

"Don't panic yet. I think I know what happened to Tao Yi, but—"

"Where is she?!"

Cheng Shi, give me a location. You know I'm not joking."

"..." 'I literally just said don't panic.'

Cheng Shi rubbed his head, gathered everything he knew, and laid it all out for Big Cat — every deduction, every guess — clearly and without omission. He explained what was entangled in this affair, what it would mean if this experiment was truly being replicated in reality, and every danger involved.

Hong Lin listened in silence all the way through. When he finished, she said a single low word: "Thank you."

Cheng Shi shook his head with a bitter smile:

"I know what you're planning to do next. But hold steady — this isn't something one or two people can solve. We need thorough investigation to understand the risks before we can move with any assurance.

Everything I've told you comes from first-hand, privileged sources. Even so, we have to prepare for the possibility that it's all still some kind of bait.

Hong Lin, Tao Yi's life matters — but so does yours. Don't let anger cloud your judgment."

"..." Hong Lin was quiet for a long time. Finally, she exhaled heavily. "I can afford to wait. But I'm afraid Tao Yi can't..."

So, Cheng Shi — will you help me?"

Cheng Shi frowned and thought for a moment.

"I have an idea.

Use your channels to spread the news about 0221 as widely as possible. Important: don't mention anything about Zangier. Even if some people figure it out on their own, that's fine — our job is just to push the information out and attract those who are curious about 0221 or have a stake in investigating this.

One or two people, no matter how efficient, can never work faster than a crowd.

And remember — keep it vague. Don't give too many details. Make them believe this is something you accidentally let slip, not some conspiracy.

As for who 'they' are — I'm sure you already have a list in mind.

Meanwhile, I'll be spreading disinformation across every channel, exaggerating 0221's experiment to ridiculous proportions. When the skeptical average players cross-reference with the peak players who received real intel, someone is bound to notice the pattern.

Those people will be the key to cracking open 0221's experiment site.

We don't need to control their actions. We just need to keep our ears to the ground and follow developments.

Hong Lin, no matter how urgent it feels, investigation needs time to mature.

And Time will eventually give us the answer."

"Thank you... Cheng Shi..."

"Don't thank me. Thank Fate. The Destined Ones won't fall before the final act — this is nothing but a minor setback."

Cheng Shi was smiling, but in truth he felt anything but confident. All he could do was use this strategy to pressure 0221, hoping the man would reveal a flaw under the scrutiny. But this wasn't the real key to solving the problem.

To find out where this experiment was being conducted and what was happening inside, he'd need those top-tier intelligence contacts he knew to work even harder.

Yet this position of having to simply wait wasn't one Cheng Shi enjoyed.

'Think... who else could help?'

Big Cat soon hung up and they went their separate ways.

The chat channels were already ablaze over the mass disappearances. Add one scheming liar fanning the flames, and before long, channels for warriors and assassins were overflowing with inflammatory declarations like "Punish Truth!" and "Assassinate 0221!"

The mage channel, true to form, was the most level-headed. Though many veteran mages didn't have the highest scores, their analytical prowess was genuinely impressive. Some even guessed 0221's intentions outright, noting that so many disappearances likely meant people were being used to replicate a large-scale, multi-person experiment. A spirited discussion ensued, and various past experiments from the Tower of Logic — some described in detail, others in broad strokes — flooded the chat. Among them was the Stars Dagger.

Several participants even knew the experiment in remarkable detail, summarizing its key points in just a couple of lines buried in the torrent of messages.

Cheng Shi marveled at the hidden experts out there while frantically absorbing knowledge from the chat logs. But most of it remained surface-level speculation and discussion — real intelligence never showed up in chat channels.

Still, it was enough. At the very least, it had seeded suspicion in a huge number of players. 0221 was going to have a rough time in the near future.

Nothing noteworthy came from the other channels. The Deceit channel was, predictably, a circus of ever-escalating tall tales. In the mouths of those liars, 0221 had practically become Truth incarnate — and if someone hadn't jumped in to "clarify" that he was Truth Himself, this Truth Chosen might have gone down in history as the Faith Game's first mortal to achieve godhood.

Just as Cheng Shi sat brooding with furrowed brows, a sudden "call notification" shattered his train of thought.

But this time it wasn't the buzz and ring of a telephone. It was a summons from... the starry sky!

A brilliant phantom star plummeted before Cheng Shi's eyes and, as the Clown stood slack-jawed, burst into a swirling yellow mist.

The mist churned and rose, and moments later, a staircase materialized before him.

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted sharply — because the staircase's design was unmistakably the Chaos Steps that had once led to the Temple of Chaos!

'Wait — another audience?'

Cheng Shi was bewildered. Just as he was weighing whether to enter, a familiar voice called from the far end of the staircase.

It was Kataro.

"My lord, someone wishes to seek an audience. Would you... like to receive them?"

"?"

'Is that even my call to make?'

Cheng Shi's expression stalled — then broke into a grin.

'Receive them! Why wouldn't I?'

'All hail Chaos — your lowly Envoy Ultraman is clocking in for another shift.'

With that thought, the Clown curled his lips into a smile and stepped onto the staircase without a moment's hesitation.

...

Chapter 757: The Petitioner Is Hu Wei!

The same familiar platform, drenched in swirling yellow chaos-mist.

When Cheng Shi opened his eyes, he found himself draped once again in a murky yellow ceremonial robe. Beyond that, a passage had opened within the chaos-mist at the platform's edge, and from within the Mockery and Jeering on the opposite side, a familiar figure emerged.

A large, round face propped against a golden apricot tree, lumbering forward with labored steps.

Hu Wei!

His good "big bro" was back — but this time, alone.

At the sight, Cheng Shi didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He'd always found the idea of Chaos followers seeking an audience through the Mockery and Jeering absurd, yet the moment he remembered that his current self was Deceit fused with Chaos, the arrangement suddenly made perfect sense.

Apparently, the Fun God's collaboration with Chaos went back much further than he'd imagined. And this privilege of walking through the Void was likely the sweetener the Fun God had offered to Chaos's followers.

But now that Chaos had fully become Order, this temple was clearly vacant. The one in charge appeared to be Kataro — or perhaps himself...

'Given the situation, doesn't the Fun God have designs on this temple?'

'That doesn't sound like Him at all...'

With that thought, Cheng Shi glanced nervously toward the far end of the Chaos Steps, wondering whether Chaos had left any contingencies inside the temple and whether a minor figure like Kataro could actually fend off the Fun God's covetous eyes.

As he mulled it over, Hu Wei arrived. The moment he appeared, he launched into a torrent of praise for Cheng Shi, though the tone carried an undercurrent of heaviness. After a beat, he got straight to the point.

"My lord, Da Yi has gone missing."

"?"

Cheng Shi was lost for words.

'What is going on today?'

'Have I become the missing-persons bureau?'

'Why does everyone come to me with the exact same line?'

'And besides — someone at Da Yi's level can still go missing? Has he become a consumable too?'

After a moment of stunned silence, Cheng Shi nodded. "I'm aware of this matter."

Hu Wei wasn't surprised by the Envoy's nonchalance — after all, Lord Ultraman was a divine Envoy, lofty and presumably omniscient. What worried him was that the four-man squad originally assigned by the lord had now dwindled to him alone. That meant he'd have no one he could trust for executing the lord's secret mission, and his efficiency would drop significantly.

He wasn't worried about lacking the ability to complete the task. He was worried that the delay would lower the lord's opinion of him.

So Hu Wei hadn't come to ask for help finding people — he'd come to request new personnel. Just like last time, he desperately needed teammates he could trust at this level.

Cheng Shi had understood his "big bro's" intentions the moment he heard of Da Yi's disappearance. A mere missing-player case wouldn't warrant being reported to an Envoy. But he genuinely didn't know any Chaos followers, and he certainly couldn't summon players on the god's behalf.

'How should I respond?'

After a moment's thought, a flash of inspiration struck.

If Chaos was still willing to let him play the role of Ultraman, and if Kataro even sought his approval for audiences — then perhaps his authority here extended far beyond what he'd assumed. Maybe even personnel assignments were within his purview?

After all, he was half a Chaos follower himself. Even if he couldn't recruit others, recruiting himself should be fine... right?

So he arched an eyebrow and, as Hu Wei bowed in waiting, delivered a response that visibly stunned the man.

"Our Lord has recently granted an audience to a new player. If you find yourself lacking support on your travels, feel free to contact him for assistance."

'A new player?'

Hu Wei froze. His first thought went to the names just below his on the rankings — wondering who had caught Lord Ultraman's eye, and whether they might threaten his own position. But after chewing on the lord's phrasing, a look of surprise crossed his face:

"My lord, from what you're saying... this person doesn't seem to be one of our Lord's followers?"

Cheng Shi nodded without hesitation:

"Correct. Our Lord intended to offer him a fusion with Chaos.

However, his original Benefactor is... not one to be trifled with. So the matter was shelved. But cooperating with you on a task or two should pose no problem.

Besides, you're familiar with this follower. He is a Fate Weaver from the Void path."

'Void?'

'And a Fate Weaver?'

'Wait — huh?'

"Cheng Shi?!" Hu Wei blurted, somehow arriving at his buddy's name as his very first guess. "Our Lord granted an audience to Cheng Shi?"

Seeing his big bro's face turn green, Cheng Shi nearly broke character. Suppressing a laugh, he nodded. "Correct. Just recently, He granted Cheng Shi an audience."

"..."

At those words, Hu Wei's expression soured into visible envy.

He had been running himself ragged for Chaos. Maybe he hadn't executed every single mission flawlessly, but he'd always delivered results. He'd even manufactured spectacular "chaos" in the affair of stealing the War Chosen's position — surely enough to earn his Benefactor's appreciation and a personal audience. Yet here he was, having encountered a god or two from other faiths but never once receiving a word from his own Benefactor.

Sure, an audience with Lord Ultraman was technically equivalent to an audience with a god. But with that extra layer in between, it just didn't feel as good as a direct audience in the temple above!

Hu Wei didn't dare look up at the temple, lest it displease the lord before him. So he swallowed his "grievances" and consoled himself: maybe he was just unlucky. After all, his brother Cheng Shi had been granted audiences with Fate, and Fate hadn't even summoned His own Chosen One, An Mingyu.

That thought made him feel slightly better.

'Yeah. Just a bit short on luck, that's all.'

Cheng Shi naturally saw through Hu Wei's feelings, but he was playing Ultraman, not Chaos. Granting divine audiences was beyond his authority.

Besides, the current Chaos wasn't chaotic anymore. He couldn't very well bring his "big bro" to the Grand Tribunal for an audience with the Iron Law of Order, could he?

Still, Cheng Shi knew that if you wanted your "underling" to work hard, you had to dangle some incentive. So after establishing the groundwork about his own identity, he thought for a moment and offered reassurance:

"This audience was merely our Lord extending a gesture of goodwill to the Void. That Fate Weaver has already fused with Deceit, becoming a true walker of the Void path. That's why our Lord was interested enough to summon him for a look.

However, very few know of this. Now that you're privy to it, feel free to use it to get closer to him and observe the movements of the Void."

"Cheng Shi fused with Deceit?"

Hu Wei was shocked again — though it also made a certain sense. In his estimation, Cheng Shi had always been a slippery character!

But Fate fusing with Deceit — wasn't that a perfect match for the Void path?

If even his own Benefactor wanted to draw closer to the Void, then didn't that mean his good brother had already stolen a march and become the "meta answer"?

Hu Wei furrowed his brow slightly, already scheming about how to reconnect with this "unfamiliar" brother of his.

Cheng Shi had no idea what Hu Wei was thinking. To give Hu Wei some extra motivation, he added with a smile:

"Indeed. Fusion can no longer be stopped — the tide of faith will eventually sweep everyone up.

Previously, our Lord observed and planned before acting, making no promises. Now the time has come to offer you some guidance.

Hu Wei — is there a faith you wish to fuse with?"

"!!!"

The moment those words registered, Hu Wei's brain detonated.

An eruption of ecstasy surging up from the depths of his soul seized every last scrap of his rationality, and the "Grand Marshal's" composure crumbled entirely.

"Any faith at all, my lord?"

"..." Cheng Shi's eyes darted. 'He's not going to pick Origin like I did, is he? Besides, this is just a pie in the sky — whether it's even what He intends is another matter entirely. I'm only testing Hu Wei's attitude. As for whether it actually works out...'

'Even if it doesn't, that would be because Chaos abandoned us and defected to the Order camp. What does that have to do with Ultraman?'

"Chaos knows no constraints. Speak freely."

"I want to... fuse with Deceit!"

"?"

...

Chapter 758: Chaos's Followers Aren't Chaotic

'No, you don't!'

Cheng Shi's brain went numb. He'd just stolen Hu Wei's house, and now the man wanted to come steal his!

'Being brothers just means taking turns raiding each other's homes, is that it?!'

'You're a proper, upstanding Grand Marshal — why on earth would you want to fuse with Deceit?'

'Did you catch the Fun God's disease too?'

Cheng Shi grumbled internally, but on the surface he put on an expression of serene foresight and shook his head with a chuckle:

"Though we approach the Void under our Benefactor's mandate, there is no need for you to seek a Deceit fusion simply because of that. Faith fusion should be a path you forge for yourself — your own heartfelt interpretation of the Faith Game.

Piety tainted with ulterior motives is no piety at all. Though I must say, your impulse does carry a certain flavor of Deceit."

Cheng Shi's words were genuinely sincere. Whether Hu Wei fused with Deceit or not had nothing to do with him — he couldn't influence it anyway. That depended not only on Chaos (which was currently masquerading as Order) but also on the Fun God.

What he was really trying to tell his "big bro" was: there was no need to show such devotion for the sake of some faction. His piety could be invested somewhere far more important — like figuring out how to walk the path of Chaos and, under Chaos's protection, survive until the end.

If Chaos was still Chaos, that is...

Qin Xin, like his Benefactor, had always been patient. So the Torchbearer's leader would likely refrain from exposing Hu Wei's identity until the very last moment. Wearing the Grand Marshal's mask, Hu Wei could accomplish a great deal — after all, however impulsive War might be, the reputation of His followers was worlds better than Chaos's.

Out of appreciation for a "big bro" who still thought of him, Cheng Shi offered this gentle nudge, hoping to steer the admittedly "honorable" Grand Marshal away from a wrong turn taken just to please higher-ups.

But that was as far as he would go. Everyone made their own choices. The thought was what counted — enough to honor this brotherhood built on mutual scheming.

Hu Wei heard the counsel beneath Lord Ultraman's words. For an instant he was genuinely moved. But he didn't back down — he still chose Deceit.

"Oh? Interesting. Tell me — what's your take on the Void?" Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, smiling.

"My lord, you and our Benefactor see things from heights we can only dream of. You said to approach the Void, and we naturally obey.

But, if I may be frank, I personally hold no particular views on the Void. On the contrary, I believe everything in this world Exists, and that its existence must have meaning.

Just as our Benefactor and the other gods descended and brought us a game — perhaps I cannot yet comprehend its purpose, but I don't see it as a catastrophe in the slightest. Forgive my blunt wording — you know many people think otherwise.

Meaning is already there. Not having found it doesn't mean it doesn't exist. The same goes for living, and for fusion. My desire to fuse with Deceit serves a dual purpose: on one hand, to fulfill the divine oracle by drawing closer to the Void; on the other, to borrow the Void's power to continue my disguise and sustain this chaos that the world knows nothing of.

Compared to that mysterious 'unknown,' I prefer my current identity — the one people call Grand Marshal.

Of course, all these identities are but fireflies beneath the moon, sand beside a mountain, in your presence."

"..."

Cheng Shi was baffled. 'If you're this fond of Existence, why not fuse with Existence?'

'And what does the Grand Marshal identity even give you?'

'Besides a "modest reputation" and "flexible camaraderie," not much else, is there?'

'So what exactly is Hu Wei living for?'

'Searching for meaning, pursuing gain, and enjoying himself along the way?'

'That sounds... incredibly normal.'

'Bro, you're the Chaos Chosen. In a world where every single Chosen One is abnormal, you're somehow the most normal?'

'What?'

'Are you kidding me?'

'How are you supposed to walk the path of Chaos like this? This isn't piety — this is daily blasphemy!'

'Wait — actually, if you think about it, a Chaos follower not being chaotic... is itself pretty chaotic.'

'Living in the moment, seeking meaning, working hard, being generous, having decent social skills, enjoying attention...'

'What kind of ultimate extrovert is this?!'

Momentarily lost for words, Cheng Shi couldn't make any promises. He simply nodded to indicate he understood, and offered an "appreciative" look.

"Very well. I will convey your devotion to our Benefactor. As for Da Yi's situation...

This is a thorny matter. It involves the machinations among the gods — especially Truth."

"Truth?!" Hu Wei's eyes went wide as he listened intently.

"Indeed. In His obsession with chasing the unknown, He lost control of certain test subjects, allowing His followers to create a pseudo-god. Now that pseudo-god has broken free from the shackles of history and descended into reality, causing no small number of ripples.

Of course, we have no love for Civilization, and this chaos is precisely what our Lord wishes to see. But what calculations Truth has in letting all of this unfold unchecked — that, no one knows.

Since you're concerned about Da Yi, go and investigate. Follow this thread and find out what Truth's followers are really up to."

"Yes — Hu Wei receives the oracle." Hu Wei clasped his fists, then frowned. "My lord, might you offer a clearer direction? With only myself remaining, the investigation may prove... difficult."

"One must work methodically, but not be too attached to method. You are our Lord's follower — in the midst of chaos, you should form your own conclusions.

Zangier.

That is all I can give you. Any more would defeat the purpose of tempering.

Now then, I have other matters to attend to. You may withdraw."

'Tempering!'

The word struck Hu Wei like lightning. He withdrew, blazing with renewed determination.

Cheng Shi watched the retreating outline of the big round face, sighing deeply.

'One more hole in the identity web patched up. At this rate, news of Fate fusing with Deceit will spread among the peak players before long.'

'Just as well. Carrying four faiths simultaneously, exposing two is already the limit. A man should stay steady.'

His thoughts drifted. Even if Hu Wei used the clues he'd given to discover why Da Yi vanished, once Da Yi was rescued, Chaos's workforce would still number only two. How could he fill those "useful underling" slots back up, the way they'd been before?

Cheng Shi had no authority to decide that himself. So he looked to the one who might — and called up toward the temple at the far end of the Chaos Steps.

"Kataro, are you there?"

His voice echoed through the churning yellow mist, but no one in the temple answered.

'Nobody?'

Cheng Shi frowned slightly, then tried again with different bait:

"If you don't come out, I'll just have to take my little question over to the Grand Tribunal and ask my beloved Benefactor personally."

The moment those words landed, the surrounding chaos-mist erupted. Countless tendrils of fog wove together and materialized Kataro's figure right beside him.

Cheng Shi eyed the one who'd been playing his role with a half-smile, making the puppet visibly uneasy.

"My lord, why do you look at me that way?"

"Why didn't you answer me?"

"He... told me not to."

"Then why are you answering now?"

"I believe that when our Benefactor is absent, I should obey you."

"!!!"

'Not bad, kid — progressive thinking.' But what truly caught Cheng Shi's interest wasn't the flattery; it was that phrase — "He is absent."

Cheng Shi already knew Chaos wasn't here. What he wanted to know was whether He would ever come back.

And in His absence, who actually had the final say in this temple?

'It can't really be... hmm?'

Kataro read the confusion on Cheng Shi's face. After a conflicted moment, he decided to defy his Benefactor's instructions and share the tiniest sliver of information.

He was intelligent. As Lord Ultraman gradually reclaimed everything that was His, Kataro recognized he was becoming expendable in this temple. He still served as a messenger, sure — but what about the future?

He didn't dare think about it. Didn't want to.

Once a mortal tasted divine authority and power, who'd willingly return to being a fistful of dust in the annals of history?

Kataro certainly didn't. But he wouldn't complain, either — after all, his Benefactor had saved his life.

He was grateful, deeply so. He wanted nothing more than to serve at the god's side for eternity, proving his devotion.

So he desperately needed to extend his "divine servant's lifespan," and the means to do that clearly lay with the favored Lord Ultraman standing before him.

Steeling his resolve, Kataro bowed his head, leaned close, and whispered:

"My lord — you may not have the final say... but then again, you might."

"?"

'What kind of nonsense is that?'

Cheng Shi frowned hard, his sharp eyes boring into Kataro. He sensed hidden meaning, but before he could press further, the chaos-mist beyond the platform surged violently inward, swallowed him whole, and spat him out into the Void.

The instant Cheng Shi vanished, Kataro's entire body seized. Drenched in cold sweat, he dropped to his knees.

He knew — the true Benefactor had returned.

"Think you're clever, do you?" Those star-filled eyes, not even bothering to disguise themselves, gazed down at Kataro with a half-amused smirk.

"I... am guilty." Kataro was terrified beyond measure, prostrate on the ground, trembling.

"Heh—"

Those eyes glanced at him casually, then shifted to the direction Cheng Shi had disappeared. After a moment's thought, the god showed no anger at all. Instead, He blinked and simply left, leaving behind a single trailing sentence:

"It really is time to find a couple of helpers for that big round face. Let the Clown arrange it.

As for you... make amends through merit."

Seeing that his Benefactor hadn't punished him, Kataro collapsed onto the ground in a heap. He swallowed hard, wiped the cold sweat from his face, and exhaled with the sheer relief of a disaster survived:

"All praise to the Benefactor. All praise to Lord Ultraman.

Your humble Kataro... bet correctly."

...

Chapter 759: Madman, or Genius?

Even after returning to the rooftop, Kataro's words kept echoing in Cheng Shi's mind.

What did "but then again, you might" mean?

It sounded as if Kataro was egging him on to "seize" greater power from above. But why did his tone carry the distinct impression that "if you dare ask, He might just agree"?

This wasn't an unfamiliar feeling. Cheng Shi had experienced it before — but usually only during audiences with his two Void Benefactors.

He knew something important must be tethered to him — something that had drawn the gaze of every god in the universe. Because he had never forgotten what Memory had said:

'The gods are interested in you only because, in this era of the Void, the two masters of the Void have set their eyes on you.'

So was Chaos's goodwill a product of the same reason?

Taking the thought further: Chaos had never refused Deceit's cooperation; He'd even recognized an "Ultraman" handpicked by Deceit as a genuine Envoy. Was it possible that Deceit's voice in their partnership carried far more weight than Cheng Shi had imagined?

And what Kataro's words truly pointed to wasn't the entity masquerading as Order inside the temple — but rather Deceit, who could equally "call the shots"?

'Did Chaos hand over the temple's proxy authority to the Fun God before leaving?'

'Not impossible!'

'In fact, the Fun God Himself wouldn't pass up such a golden opportunity to pocket a Chaos temple for free.'

Cheng Shi was probably right. The Fun God didn't just have designs on the temple — He'd already moved in!

That explained everything.

Kataro's coy, half-spoken demeanor today clearly stemmed from fear of something. But an actor playing the role of an Envoy had no reason to fear the Benefactor who assigned him tasks. So the only thing he could be afraid of was an "Outer God" who had "seized" control of the temple!

At this realization, Cheng Shi's eyes lit up.

If the Fun God truly held proxy over the Chaos temple, this was outstanding news. It meant Ultraman's authority could expand almost without limit — approaching that of a real Envoy upon His divine throne.

The temptation was immense.

Cheng Shi quietly filed this away, resolving to test his Benefactor's reaction at the next audience.

At last, the post-trial Clown found a moment to breathe. He lay on his bed, idly scrolling through chat logs across every channel, thinking that as the situation fermented, more and more people would notice 0221's various anomalies and piece together clues about the experiment from the deluge of information.

But Cheng Shi underestimated the players' capacity for action — or perhaps their appetite for drama.

He'd assumed that even with the news out there, extracting useful intelligence from the noisy, redundant torrent would take at least two or three days of brewing. Yet barely a single night passed before someone discovered the method 0221 used to "kidnap" players during a trial — and sold that information at a steep price.

The buyer turned out to be a sucker who then published the intel openly. So when Cheng Shi opened his eyes the next morning, the chat channels were already flooded wall-to-wall with guides on "how to join the Truth Game."

Cheng Shi was gobsmacked. He began combing through the records, trying to piece together cause and effect, when the phone rang again. He picked up without hesitation. It was Big Cat again — and this time, her fury was on the razor's edge of eruption.

"Cheng Shi, help me."

Cheng Shi's gaze sharpened. "You found her?"

"Yes. I know where Tao Yi is. I need manpower — the situation there is extremely complicated."

Cheng Shi had only just seen the news and hadn't yet figured out what this so-called "Truth Game" actually was. But a sudden jolt struck him, and he asked uncertainly: "The sucker who bought the intel... that was you?"

"It was."

"...What did you pay?"

"My survival trump cards. I traded away every emergency lifeline I had from before I became Frazor — and finally got the ticket to this garbage game."

Hearing that, Cheng Shi actually relaxed. For Big Cat as she was now, the dangers she faced had long surpassed trial-level threats. A handful of ordinary survival measures were practically irrelevant.

Still, he was curious. The "admission ticket" was like the Mediocre Person Society's invitation cards — joining should be entirely voluntary. Why would everyone who received one want to go?

Moreover, if this ticket had a physical form, cautious players like himself might not even want to touch it!

Who would willingly interact with something unknown?

And strangest of all — if this ticket truly existed, why was it only coming to light now?

Had not one of the vanished players refused theirs?

Even gold wasn't to everyone's taste, surely?

Cheng Shi furrowed his brow, completely baffled — until Big Cat dispelled his confusion over the phone. And her explanation only deepened his sense of 0221's sheer madness.

"You can't even imagine what this admission ticket is. Before I held it in my hands, I never would have believed anyone could refuse it.

Because it's... a fragment of divinity!

A fragment of Truth's divinity!"

"A what?!"

Cheng Shi leapt to his feet, certain he'd misheard.

0221 was using a piece of divinity as an admission ticket to an experiment?!

Where did he get that much divinity?

Why squander it luring experimental consumables instead of studying Truth?

'Seriously — who cons people using real gold?!

"Shocking, isn't it? No wonder the information never leaked.

Of course not — when someone gets their hands on a piece of divinity, why would they tell anyone?

Not only wouldn't they — they'd do everything in their power to seal it inside their own body. And the moment they do, they've played right into 0221's hands.

I had it analyzed. This divinity isn't 'pure.' Or rather, 0221 has achieved an unthinkable breakthrough in divinity research — he's embedded within this fragment a spliced sequence of other divinity, engineered for directional teleportation.

Do you understand what that means?

It means 0221 can already fuse scattered pieces into a disassembled puzzle!

He's pushed open that door. He's found an entirely new path — one that bypasses existing 'faith blueprints' and achieves preliminary divinity fusion at the 'microscopic' level of faith!

And this single step has no precedent in the entire history of the Land of Hope.

0221, that madman — he's broken the shackle that only gods could assemble divinity, and he's punched a peephole through the firmament, letting every mortal glimpse the divine thrones!

His kidnapping of Tao Yi makes me furious. But I have to admit — this madman isn't just a madman. He's also a... genius.

A genius who's touched the threshold of mortal truth."

"..."

Cheng Shi's breath seized. His pupils shrank to pinpoints as he struggled to process what he'd just heard.

But realization came quickly. Genius or not, 0221's achievements weren't born from talent and effort alone. He also needed timing!

Yes — timing!

In the ancient eras of the Land of Hope, there had never been faith fusion between the gods!

So the tidal wave of faith fusion had truly arrived. And the first thing to be shattered by that towering deluge was humanity's understanding of divinity itself!

...

Chapter 760: Let's Go Meet This Genius

"Is this analysis accurate? Who did you get to help?"

Honestly, even though faith fusion could explain how 0221 made a breakthrough, it was still almost too incredible to believe. So Cheng Shi had to be cautious. He was afraid Big Cat's urgency and anger had been exploited — that she'd been unknowingly turned into a spearhead for some probing game between peak players.

Fortunately, Big Cat gave an answer that put his mind at ease.

"Wei Mu.

He spent half the night analyzing it before reaching this conclusion. Most of what I just told you were his exact words.

He took the reassembled Truth divinity from my hand, deconstructed it, reverse-engineered the fusion method, and discovered that 0221 hadn't just made progress in divinity fusion — he'd achieved a leaping breakthrough in understanding the Faith Game's regional architecture.

That air walls are impassable is a truth universally known in reality. Whenever we want to meet, we step into the Void and then transfer into another non-real space — nobody has ever questioned that. But now, this mad genius has found a new method.

Divinity!

More precisely — teleportation arrays coded from divinity fragments!

He modified the Tower of Logic's most fundamental teleportation technique, replacing the original materials with partial divinity fragments and embedding them within another piece of divinity. This way, once someone absorbs that divinity, the air walls that mortals cannot cross simply... stop applying to the bearer of this 'anomalous divinity.' In effect, teleportation now works directly in reality!

And that's the method 0221 used to abduct Tao Yi!

Wei Mu has already replicated the technique. The ticket in my hands is a piece of Folly divinity that he reassembled!"

"..." Cheng Shi stood slack-jawed. He'd underestimated the number-one player on the Road to Ascension after all.

These staggering theories were hard enough for ordinary people to wrap their heads around. Yet Wei Mu had not only fully analyzed and deconstructed them in a single night — he'd even produced a replica.

'Can a mortal truly do this?'

"Is this what true Folly looks like?"

"...Yes. This is true Folly. Wei Mu is likewise a genius — he's simply chosen a different direction on the road of fusion."

'A different direction?'

"What do you mean?" Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow.

"He said he's refused every fusion, because he believes no god in this entire universe is worthy of Folly."

"..."

'Folly through and through!'

'This Folly Chosen's temperament is a carbon copy of his Benefactor's...'

The shock ebbed slightly thanks to this quintessentially Folly punchline, but soon Cheng Shi's curiosity returned.

"You're still in contact with Wei Mu?"

"No. Not at all. We've just happened to be matched in the same trial a few times. This time, he found me..."

Hong Lin trailed off, but Cheng Shi already understood.

Big Cat had probably been too hasty spreading the news and left traces — enough for this supremely sharp Folly Chosen to notice and come knocking.

That said, he didn't seem to harbor any ill intent toward Big Cat. What interested him was probably nothing more than his rival Chosen — 0221.

Still, erring on the side of caution, Cheng Shi went back through her entire sequence of actions with Big Cat. After confirming there were no other issues, he nodded.

"What do you want to do?"

"I..." The other end suddenly went silent.

Cheng Shi paused, then quickly guessed what this was about and laughed.

"I see — you're short on tickets.

Good call. You've gotten more prudent. It's actually a solid plan.

Make enough tickets for everyone who's interested, let them all flood in, then blow the experiment wide open and fish in troubled waters.

It's undoubtedly the safest approach, but speed is everything.

You can't give the other parties and factions enough time to scheme and position themselves. You need to pull them all in at once, then kick down the door to 0221's experiment site simultaneously. Only when the situation is chaotic enough will your combat power have room to shine!"

Hong Lin was stunned too — she hadn't said a word and he'd already read her completely. But this wasn't an easy thing to ask for, because these weren't ordinary tickets. The price of admission to the "Truth Game" was divinity — massive quantities of divinity!

So the best she could manage was an awkward, uncertain "Mm." After all, even though Cheng Shi still held some of the divinity she'd once possessed, the amount was nowhere near enough.

Big Cat wasn't a dim player. She simply wasn't as sharp as the monstrous peak players — different from not being sharp at all.

She could do the math. She knew Tao Yi had no real connection to Cheng Shi. Even if there was one, it was purely one-sided. What's more, Cheng Shi had already saved Tao Yi once. If he chose not to help this time, she wouldn't hold it against him — especially since he'd already done so much. Reaching this point would have been impossible on her own.

But her faith in the Destined Ones still inclined her to turn to Cheng Shi. She was looking to borrow divinity, and the first person she thought of was the Fate Weaver who had once taken some of hers.

She was willing to give up everything to protect a friend. But she couldn't demand that her friend give up everything for another friend of hers.

At the end of the day, divinity was one of the most precious things in this game. Nobody could be expected to part with it — especially not in the quantities she needed.

But what Hong Lin didn't expect was that Cheng Shi's next response swept away every last shred of her two days' worth of fury and anxiety, and made her truly realize that she might indeed be one of the Destined Ones — and that the one looking out for her on the road ahead wasn't just Fate, but also a certain Fate Weaver named Cheng Shi.

"Borrowing divinity from everyone, aren't you? No need. I've got plenty.

Hmm... you know, this brings back memories. When I was a kid, I went through something like this. I didn't have money for school, so he went around borrowing it for me.

My neighbor was a very wealthy auntie. He borrowed a lot from her. I never knew how he managed it, but the feeling of someone willing to help — I've carried that with me to this day.

I wanted to repay that auntie, but she never gave me the chance.

Now, though, I think I finally understand what she meant. She probably never expected anything in return."

"Cheng Shi..." The voice on the other end trembled ever so slightly — but the tremor stopped almost as quickly as it began.

"But let me be clear — I'm not her. What you borrow from me? Every last bit, principal plus interest, comes back.

Of course, the portion that was yours to begin with doesn't need returning. I'm not the petty type. It's been in my custody long enough — about time I returned it with interest."

Cheng Shi laughed, genuinely happy. After all, he had never forgotten that it was the Order divinity Big Cat had "deposited" with him that allowed him to survive when the entity pretending to be Order — really Chaos — had judged him.

Every bite and every sip was fated. Big Cat thought it was Cheng Shi leading her toward destiny, never realizing that her own good fortune might also be shielding her Clown friend.

"Deal!" Big Cat's voice suddenly turned resolute. The divinity wasn't even in hand yet, but she declared it with the force of someone swearing to repay double. "But... this time it might take a lot."

"Hey, what a coincidence — I just happen to have a lot."

Cheng Shi smiled. Truthfully, the divinity extracted from the Abyss Colorful Crystals was all top-grade — each piece a disassembled fragment of a larger puzzle. These should have been among the best materials for studying the gods. But now...

If he could use them to witness a mortal-initiated "microscopic" divinity fusion firsthand, it wasn't a bad trade at all.

Of course, the premise of "not a bad trade" was that he got his hands on the fusion method and its future implications!

"Right now, what you need to focus on is convincing Wei Mu to produce that many tickets!"

"He will. Because he said he wants to witness the grandest act of folly under the heavens."

"..."

Cheng Shi pursed his lips, vaguely suspecting that his own actions probably counted as one of the "foolish acts" in Wei Mu's eyes.

"Whatever. If it makes the Folly follower happy.

You have a way for us to meet up? Tell me. I'll come to you.

Also, Hong Lin — let me make one thing clear upfront. I'm lending this divinity to help my friend 'Frazor,' not for some small-time celebrity from a past era...

I'm putting a lot of trust in you here. Don't push me into a pit."

"..." When Cheng Shi agreed, Hong Lin had expected a laundry list of conditions. She never imagined she'd wait and wait only to hear just this one.

For a brief, irrational instant, she actually felt a twinge of pity for Tao Yi. But just as quickly, she decided Tao Yi's taste was world-class — it was just that her dear friend might be slightly unworthy.

'Is it okay to badmouth your own friend like this?'

'Absolutely. I'm already this deep in debt for her. What's a little trash-talk?'

'Tao Yi, you hear me — before I get there, don't you dare die!'

Hong Lin quickly shared a method for meeting. Tracing out the symbols Big Cat described, Cheng Shi's eyes glimmered with curiosity.

"You got this through a prayer to Them?"

"Yes. If you ever need it, you can pray to me too. I have the authority to grant spatial passages. Of course, I only handle the granting — it's the Convention that builds everything else."

Cheng Shi nodded, musing: 'If I'd known it was this simple, I should have set up a meeting space ages ago. Would've saved all that scrounging around when trying to recruit people into the Destined Ones or the Jokers.'

"Got it. Give me a little time to prepare, and then let's go meet this one-in-ten-thousand genius."

With that, Cheng Shi hung up. He turned to gaze at the neighboring rooftop, his expression strange, his eyes narrowing slightly.

'Will we ever meet again, my War neighbor?'

...