

The Gods 851

Chapter 851: Too Many Lice to Feel the Itch?

Back to the present.

When Cheng Shi punctured Zhen Xin's disguise with that peculiar tone, "Cheng Shi" blinked. Features gradually receded, revealing a young woman in a purple scarf and casual blazer...

Zhen Xin!

The Deceit Chosen One finally appeared before Cheng Shi in her true form for the first time.

Her expression was serene, even indifferent. No frustration at being outmaneuvered. She didn't seem to think she'd lost.

She shook her head with a light smile. "Not at all. I was simply studying a colleague's craft. And now... well, it's been quite rewarding."

But the instant her words faded, Cheng Shi's mouth moved on its own.

"Yes — I lied..."

???

Both of them froze.

'Brother Mouth, you...'

'Wait — no! Brother Mouth isn't speaking for me. He's... speaking for the ear?'

'Huh?'

'So this is what "all spoils go to me" meant?'

'But how did the ear link up with Brother Mouth from inside spatial storage? Will every secret I hear from now on be filtered through the Lips?'

'Can that still be called a secret?'

'That's just a riddle game.'

Setting that aside...

Cheng Shi ignored Zhen Xin's stunned expression. His brow sank. His face darkened.

If the altered play had ended and Brother Mouth and the others were still on his body... then everything he and Mi Laozhang had quietly schemed...

Was for nothing?

So nothing changed. Their reunion wasn't so easy after all.

Cheng Shi clicked his tongue and gazed toward where Zhang Jizu was hiding.

What kind of unexpected event could even Mi Laozhang fail to prevent?

Had the interference come from Them?

Was it Deceit? Or... Memory?

Zhen Xin's expression was equally strange. She tilted her head slightly, studying the clown she'd observed countless times through memory, and asked with curiosity:

"You didn't use the Tongue of Eating Lies to verify my words, yet you were certain I lied.

Hmm — so you've already acquired it.

The Secret Peeping Ear is already in your hands, isn't it?

And the way you phrased it was strange — very unlike your usual self. It reminds me of when you exposed Zhen Yi. I've always wondered how someone with zero top-tier experience at the time could identify and unmask her, especially when you'd nearly believed her.

Now I understand. Cheng Shi — you must have another tool similar to the Secret Peeping Ear, one that can eavesdrop on people's inner secrets. That's how you saw through Zhen Yi."

"..."

That deduction sent a jolt through Cheng Shi. The sharpest liar was indeed perceptive. But he kept his composure, changing the subject.

"Keep guessing if you like. I need to go — I've got things to do. No time for riddles with you."

He brushed dust off himself and headed offstage.

In truth, exposing Zhen Xin hadn't served any special purpose. He'd simply identified her and wanted a "win" to rebalance their unequal history.

Zhen Yi had fooled Cheng Shi once. Even though he'd eventually caught on, being duped was being duped.

Between liars, competition was about craft. If you were fooled, you were outclassed. Only by leveling the score here could Cheng Shi hold his head high in future meetings with the Zhen family.

Moreover, he'd already established a link with Zhen Xin through the Blind One. So regardless of the calculus, he wouldn't burn bridges over a disguise — especially one where he'd come out the winner.

Cheng Shi walked away. Zhen Xin didn't stop him. She quietly followed, continuing her reasoning.

"Your non-answer confirms my guess.

The History School spent a long time gathering intelligence before confirming the Secret Peeping Ear's existence. And with only a tongue in hand, it's hard to believe you'd go looking for another similar artifact on a hunch. So...

That tool I mentioned probably isn't a tool at all. It's most likely another facial feature on par with the tongue and ears, isn't it?

You already have three similar Deceit creations?"

"..."

Cheng Shi laughed in exasperation — marveling at her acuity and annoyed by her chattiness.

He'd assumed the former Deceit Chosen would have a steadier temperament than her pest of a sister. Steadier? Sure. But in the annoyance department, she gave Zhen Yi a run for her money.

'I thought Mi Laozhang was the reincarnation of the nagging monk. Turns out you're the same age.'

Cheng Shi snorted, turning to Zhen Xin. "You think you're clever?"

"Not at all," Zhen Xin shook her head with a gentle smile, unfazed by his sarcasm. "Logic and deduction are simply my tools for understanding the world. Nothing more."

Cheng Shi stopped. A thought struck him — he was suddenly in no hurry to find Mi Laozhang. Since the outcome was settled, why not use this chance to learn more about the former Deceit Chosen?

Zhen Xin's purpose here wasn't hard to guess. She'd never been his "enemy." She'd probably come because of that casual "show me something real" he'd said on the phone.

So her bond with the Blind One was truly deep — willing to risk everything over a throwaway remark, coming here to find something as precious as the Secret Peeping Ear as payment.

That heavy "gratitude" carried genuine thanks, but what Cheng Shi saw even more was the depth of their friendship.

Too bad she'd picked the wrong "gift." Good thing he'd gotten to it first — otherwise he'd have lost twice over.

Cheng Shi smiled, studying Zhen Xin's curious eyes. His tone turned playful.

"So — what kind of world have you come to know?"

Or do you think you've already seen the world clearly?"

The subtext was obvious. Zhen Xin wasn't stupid — she caught his meaning, raised an eyebrow, and with a casual wave conjured two figures in the empty theater.

One was the resurrected Crown. The other...

Was her sister, Zhen Yi!

The phantom Zhen Yi stuffed Crown into a small bag, then dashed out of the theater laughing, vanishing — leaving behind countless "visible" traces.

After this played out, Zhen Xin produced a slender stylus and drew in the air. Moments later, those traces materialized throughout the theater for real.

Now anyone who entered would see the evidence and conclude they'd been played by Zhen Yi — she'd already taken Crown. Any secrets in this theater had been claimed by that number-one pest.

Watching this, Cheng Shi blinked in surprise.

He understood: this was Zhen Xin's show of sincerity. This cleanup had been his job, but now she'd saved him all the work of fabricating cover stories. He could pin everything on Zhen Yi.

But... wasn't Zhen Yi her sister?

No — wasn't Zhen Yi her?!

'Girl, are you so covered in lice you've stopped feeling the bites? Or do you just not care about bringing trouble on yourself?'

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Chapter 852: No! It's: Arsonist Sister Zhen Yi, Sincere and Steady Sister Zhen Xin

Cheng Shi's eyelid twitched. "Is this how you normally throw your sister under the bus?"

Zhen Xin smiled carelessly. "She's caused me so much trouble. Why can't I cause her a little?"

Cheng Shi blinked. 'Fair point!'

But given the current picture... were those troubles really caused by Zhen Yi herself?

You borrow her talent, wear her identity, accomplish your goals — then erase her memory. After that, who besides you would know whether any of it was really Zhen Yi's doing?

With Zhen Yi's personality, when attacked she'd probably double down on the chaos rather than immediately shed the blame. So over time, the black marks above her head would only pile higher.

And as her sister — the steady player constantly cleaning up after the younger sibling — Zhen Xin naturally earned more and more... "recognition." After all, from a certain angle, she too was a victim.

But was she really a victim?

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted.

'Wait—'

'So this is the advantage of dual personality?'

'Arsonist sister Zhen Yi. Sincere and steady sister Zhen Xin!'

'Beautiful. Your solo two-man show is a masterpiece!'

Fear crept in. Steadiness reasserted itself. He eyed the "harmless" Zhen Xin suspiciously and stepped back half a pace.

"Zhen Xin — you wouldn't be planning to frame me, would you? Announcing in Zhen Yi's name that she gave the ears she obtained to me?"

Zhen Xin snorted, tilted her head in thought, then nodded with a smile. "Hmm, that's a good idea. I'll consider it."

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'Oh no — the great Cheng Steady has just supplied the enemy with ammunition!'

"Relax and stop being paranoid. I did all this to save time on explanations.

So — can we talk now, Cheng Shi? What kind of world are you referring to?"

Indeed — Zhen Xin and the Blind One were kindred spirits in their hunger for mysteries. The moment the topic arose, they could discard everything else — even the fact that she'd lost the treasure race.

But the Blind One had surely told Zhen Xin already. What more did she want?

"Didn't the Fate Chosen already explain it to you?"

"Yes, but not in detail. I'd like a supplementary perspective. It'll help complete my understanding of the world."

"What do you want to know?"

"Whether she came from a parallel timeline... or from an entirely different world."

Cheng Shi silently marveled at her sharpness, but played dumb. "Isn't that the same thing?"

Zhen Xin laughed and shook her head.

"Of course not.

But I understand — that's extra, isn't it?"

'?'

'The girl's polished. No wonder she runs the game's biggest intel organization.'

Cheng Shi smiled. He looked relaxed, but his mind was carefully weighing options.

Should he exchange this colossal secret with her? It was priceless — almost impossible to match with equivalent intel. Sharing it meant adding Zhen Xin to his "ally" circle. Only then could he freely engage this intelligence queen in a deep analysis of the game, the situation, and Them.

He wanted to. But Zhen Yi's existence made this "ally" slightly unstable.

His entire impression of Zhen Xin had been built from others' accounts. His sole direct encounter was one long con. But through this trial, he'd learned a bit more.

And now, with the Secret Peeping Ear's help, he might have a better chance to truly understand her.

After a moment's deliberation, he decided, and smiled.

"Talking with a clever colleague is entertaining. I'll skip the pleasantries.

By the rules of equivalent exchange of secrets: for me to share mine, you share yours first.

So, Zhen Xin — dare you have a completely honest, heart-to-heart exchange with me?

Or to put it differently: can I trust you?"

Zhen Xin blinked in mild surprise. The sincerity felt genuine. But she hadn't planned to build this deep a connection — she'd been considering how to recruit this intel-rich con artist...

Into the History School.

After reviewing his memories and watching him save Ming Yu, Zhen Xin believed she'd gotten a read on Cheng Shi. A "good person" redeemed by paternal love. She didn't mind such people — even admired them.

Add his mysterious yet repeatedly validated divine intel, and she figured a vice-president seat would suffice.

After all, if the president was a liar — adding another liar as VP seemed... reasonable.

But apparently he wanted far more than that.

Zhen Xin deliberated briefly, then mused:

"So it's the latter. The world's parallelism isn't a product of Time's projection — there's another secret.

Cheng Shi, I don't entirely buy your 'heart-to-heart' talk. But... considering you probably need a partner..."

"Hmm?"

Cheng Shi laughed in disbelief.

'Sister — listen to yourself. Where's your self-awareness? You—'

Zhen Xin raised a hand and interrupted his inner rant with total confidence.

"Settle down. I've been fooling myself for so long that I can tell when others are fooling themselves too.

No need to hide it. You do need this kind of partner — someone you can trust with your back, like Hong Lin. But different from Hong Lin. Because we both know she'd give you everything she has — even her life. But she can never give you... intellectual support or strategic feedback."

"..."

Cheng Shi didn't want Big Cat subjected to such a "put-down." But this time, he truly couldn't argue. Not one bit.

"I see it's true." Zhen Xin chuckled. "Sorry — I'll find a chance to apologize to Hong Lin. But my point is: to a degree, I really can help you.

I'm growing more curious about the secrets you carry. And to set your mind at ease about sharing them...

Come. Let's exchange.

I know what you need."

She produced a card — a gold-edged poker card. On its face: two hands, each clutching a beating heart.

"Silence's S-rank talent — Unspoken Understanding.

Hold this card. No voice needed, no questions asked. You'll see the inner secrets I choose to share. No loopholes. No faking.

Well? Is this sincerity enough?"

"..."

Cheng Shi stared. Neither Brother Mouth nor Brother Ear objected, which meant Zhen Xin was almost certainly telling the truth. He'd heard of this Silence talent, but it had always been used to extract from others. Rarely did anyone use it in reverse.

He studied Zhen Xin for a long moment, uncertain.

"You're serious?"

"Absolutely." Zhen Xin's smile was open.

"Because of the Fate Chosen?"

Zhen Xin nodded firmly. "Yes. The moment you saved Ming Yu, you earned my unconditional trust."

"But I didn't save—"

"Every Ming Yu is Ming Yu." Zhen Xin's smile was warm. "Come — with a true heart... meet Zhen Xin."

She extended the poker card before Cheng Shi's eyes.

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Chapter 853: Zhen Xin's Past...

Cheng Shi suddenly smiled.

He wasn't sure whether it was the depth of their friendship that moved him, or the realization that he'd been underestimating this Deceit Chosen's magnanimity. Either way, his smile was brilliant as he reached out and grasped the card without hesitation.

Of course — ever the cautious one — he'd hidden Brother Tongue in his sleeve. When both touched the poker card simultaneously and he felt no warning from the tongue, his heart settled.

As the clown gripped the magician's card, a building of aching familiar style materialized in his consciousness:

An orphanage.

Zhen Xin hadn't lied. She'd genuinely laid her deepest secret before Cheng Shi. But the calculus behind this was layered.

She'd known this player for a long time — through her sister's memories. And once she'd accessed Cheng Shi's own memories, she understood why her sister Zhen Yi cared so much about this previously unknown clown.

Because his past and hers were "strikingly similar" yet "completely opposite."

Cheng Shi was a "born" liar — yet paternal love had raised him into a good person.

She was a good person raised in warmth — forced by circumstance to become a liar.

Their shared backgrounds formed the strongest resonance. But it wasn't the full reason she dared trust him.

It always came back to the same thing: Cheng Shi had saved An Mingyu. That kept Zhen Xin's emotional anchor alive. That was why she'd bare her deepest secrets so openly.

And the trigger for this decision was the Time trial — one she'd never participated in but heard about from Ming Yu's own lips!

The world was nothing like she'd imagined. Countless Zhen Xins struggled across different worlds. Which meant countless An Mingyus weren't all alive and well.

If Ming Yu could cross into another world to save another-her, why couldn't Zhen Xin act? Why not find a way to help Ming Yu — or, if she dared be greedy...

'I want to save every Ming Yu. And every me.'

To do that, she needed to understand the world anew.

And the first step was earning the trust of a "pioneer" who understood the world far better than she did — confirming whether this pioneer shared her thinking. Only then could she make this liar-who-trusted-nobody believe in her, and share the secrets outsiders couldn't access.

This conviction drove Zhen Xin's decision — and showed the clown what kind of magician she truly was. What kind of Deceit "collection."

Zhen Xin's past played through his consciousness. But barely past the opening, Cheng Shi raised his head and eyed the magician strangely.

"If I weren't sure I was receiving your memories, I'd think I was looking in a mirror.

What a coincidence — you're an orphan too."

"Quite the coincidence. But not all orphans are the same."

'?'

'That "not the same" better not be you elevating yourself at my expense.'

His eye twitched. He wanted to tease her — but when the next stretch of memory unfolded, he opened his mouth, couldn't make a sound for a long time, and finally let out a deep sigh.

"So... that's when Zhen Yi was born. Right?"

A lunatic who wanted to fight everything on your behalf whenever you were afraid.

Of course — Zhen Yi is His collection.

And you, Zhen Xin... you have a good sister. She saved you.

Before the apocalypse. And in this game."

Zhen Xin was noncommittal. Silent. Cheng Shi clicked his tongue and kept watching. The deeper he went, the quieter he became. The theater fell into total stillness. His gaze toward Zhen Xin grew increasingly complex.

Her past was anything but warm.

Zhen Xin's parents were long unidentifiable. In her memories, she'd grown up in a place called "Sunshine Orphanage."

Much smaller than Cheng Shi's — barely a dozen children and two or three teachers.

But among those teachers was someone Cheng Shi actually recognized. The face was plainer in life than in the game, but unmistakable: the Puppet Master he'd met in the Sighing Forest — An Jing!

An Mingyu's aunt.

An Mingyu was also an orphan — her parents killed in a car crash. But she was luckier: she had a devoted aunt. She didn't need to live in the orphanage.

Didn't need to and didn't were two different things. Since Aunt Jing worked there daily, Ming Yu practically lived there too.

That was how two parentless girls became each other's best friend.

This orphanage was far warmer than Cheng Shi's. The director was an elderly woman whose parents had perished in a family tragedy during her youth, and whose husband and children were taken by a natural disaster in middle age. In her twilight years, while she could still move, she'd founded this haven for children like herself.

The teachers were genuinely kind — Zhen Xin's memories made that clear. They truly loved the children and wanted them to thrive. The orphanage was a happy place. And in that warmth, Zhen Xin and An Mingyu slowly grew up.

But things weren't always smooth. To the orphanage, the next development seemed like good news: a wealthy couple known for their philanthropy visited Sunshine Orphanage to discuss adopting a child.

These benefactors were actually friends of the director. The old woman had been watching the children's development closely. Noticing Zhen Xin's sharp mind and steady temperament, she felt it was a shame to keep such a bright girl cooped up here. So she reached out to the couple — childless friends — and asked if they wanted to adopt an exceptional child.

They agreed. They came. They met Zhen Xin and were delighted. Adoption proceedings moved quickly.

But adoption at Sunshine Orphanage wasn't like at Cheng Shi's — no money-and-go. The director insisted on asking little Zhen Xin herself.

Aunt Jing also wanted better for Zhen Xin. So, without telling Ming Yu, she found Zhen Xin one day and relayed the director's suggestion.

Zhen Xin listened. She studied Aunt Jing's face and read the orphanage's guilt and hope. So she didn't refuse. She didn't want to disappoint the people who cared about her.

Everything went smoothly. Zhen Xin left the orphanage with An Mingyu's reluctant farewell.

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Chapter 854: ...And Redemption

Everyone assumed this would be a harmonious win-win. No one realized that from the moment she left the orphanage, Zhen Xin was stepping into a lifelong nightmare.

Because the philanthropic wealthy couple were nothing but... liars!

They were pure con artists who survived on reading people and sweet-talking their way through upper society — endlessly manufacturing personas while producing absolutely nothing real.

Adopting Zhen Xin wasn't about building a family or honoring a promise to a small-town orphanage director. They'd recently spotted a target — a fat sheep, a tycoon big enough to let them retire in gold — and that tycoon's daughter also happened to be adopted.

So to create a conversational bridge between the two families, they adopted Zhen Xin, intending to turn her into their social calling card for high society.

Little Zhen Xin was clever. But no clever child could outmaneuver two swindlers who'd kept their house of cards standing for decades.

All her wit and sharpness became useless in that household. Her "parents" drilled her relentlessly — learn this, learn that. But being too cheap to hire real teachers, they never let Zhen Xin actually master anything. Every skill was tasted, never savored — just enough to script convincing lies around.

So rather than learning social skills, she was learning the art of deception.

But the fraud wasn't the worst of it. How could such a couple possibly love a child?

They didn't know how to love. They only knew how to make a child hurt.

To forge flawless poise and rhetoric, Zhen Xin endured inhuman cruelty in her supposed home.

By day: the adorable daughter of a noble philanthropy family. By night: the sobbing girl standing at the door, denied dinner.

This half-waking, half-dreaming split existence shattered a little girl raised in warmth.

One evening, she finally "awakened" to the same art of deception she'd absorbed from her parents.

And her first use of this art came shortly after — when the director called.

The old woman asked: Are you happy in your new home?

Zhen Xin laughed and answered:

"Of course! Everything's wonderful. Mom and Dad love me so much. I'm so happy here.

Hee~

Grandma Director, when will you come visit? I'll take you to the park to sit in the sun — there are lots of grandpas and grandmas there. You'd love them."

Hearing those words, the director passed peacefully. Just days after hanging up, she departed — finally reuniting with her family.

And hearing those words, Zhen Xin's "parents" finally showed something called "satisfaction" in their eyes.

They never believed they'd raised a child. In their minds, the great duo had sculpted a masterwork born of lies.

Even more absurd: when Zhen Xin "inherited" their craft, they finally began treating the clever girl as a real member of the "family."

What they never knew was: the obedient, adorable daytime girl was Zhen Xin. The shrewd, deception-capable nighttime girl was... Zhen Yi.

Zhen Xin had found a way to fit into this "family." And she'd given her "parents" a new member.

The memory cut off abruptly. Cheng Shi's expression was a cocktail of emotions.

So similar to his own experience — yet completely reversed.

He'd been pulled from the abyss by Old Jia. Zhen Xin had been pushed into the abyss by the people who loved her most.

Though Deceit had orchestrated everything — couldn't Fate also be blamed?

No wonder she was Deceit's first collection. No wonder He gave Zhen Yi the chance to choose Fate. Because the Void-unity He sought found its perfect embodiment in Zhen Xin.

More importantly: the narrative of going from evil to good was far less dramatic than going from good to evil.

She was the true darling of Deceit.

Cheng Shi sighed. "So that's why you can fool yourself... Forgive me for asking, but — at that time, what did you tell yourself?"

Revisiting the past was no pleasant affair. Layered with Cheng Shi's own experiences, Zhen Xin's face darkened. She pressed her lips white, managing a smile that was more grimace than grin.

"I told myself it was all an illusion. Just nightmares that came with the dark. They were good people. The family was fine. The world was fine. Everything was fine."

"And now?" Cheng Shi studied her eyes — eyes hiding countless lies — with a pang of empathy.

"Also fine." Zhen Xin's answer was unwavering.

But the instant those words landed, Cheng Shi's mouth moved involuntarily.

"This world... lost its hope a long time ago..."

For a moment, Cheng Shi understood why this world's An Mingyu had gone to help another world's Zhen Xin.

If even the current, relatively "normal" game rhythm could breed such hopelessness in Zhen Xin's heart, then it wasn't hard to guess what the Zhen Xin in that crumbling world must be feeling.

So the Blind One truly understood her — every version of her. And everything Zhen Xin had done today was entirely because Cheng Shi had saved the Blind One.

No matter how many times he recalibrated his understanding of their bond, every new story added another layer of emotion.

She was indeed of the Fear Faction — and far more fearful than he was. A fear-holder who refused to accept her own fear.

"Your bond is remarkable. Having a friend like that — you're lucky."

The moment those words left his mouth, his expression froze.

Her past was anything but "lucky."

'Ah, fate... truly interesting.'

Zhen Xin's face finally warmed at those words. She laughed self-deprecatingly.

"I know you're wondering how we kept such a deep bond despite being separated for so long.

Since we've already come this far, I'll answer:

We were never truly apart.

If Ming Yu hadn't dragged Aunt Jing across provinces every single month to visit me — if she hadn't brought a sliver of light into my darkest days — I'm not even sure I'd have lasted until Zhen Yi emerged. Whether I could have survived that nightmare I never want to revisit.

She's not just my best friend, my sister, my family...

She's my redemption.

She can't live without me. And I... even more so."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's expression softened with deep emotion. Everything clicked.

So that's why their bond ran so deep. So that's why they were inseparable. The Blind One had saved adopted Zhen Xin.

Cheng Shi's own adoption had been "decent enough." But he could imagine what unspeakable cruelties Zhen Xin would have endured without An Mingyu showing up at her door every month.

Of course, young Ming Yu might have simply been driven by a child's friendship — unwilling to lose her playmate. But as an adult, Aunt Jing tirelessly taking her niece on monthly cross-province trips to visit a child with zero blood relation carried an unmistakable undercurrent of "reminder and warning" to the new family that everyone saw but no one spoke aloud.

So Zhen Xin had always been surrounded by good people.

An Jing was one. An Mingyu was one. And Zhen Yi...

At least before the Faith Game descended — was one too.

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Chapter 855: Who? Poison?

Seeing Cheng Shi sink into silence again, Zhen Xin smiled calmly. "What else do you want to know?"

"Too much — but none of it relates to your past. I'm more interested in the intel your History School has. But now isn't the time for that.

The secret you want — I'll tell you after the trial ends. My word is good; you can relax.

Time to get to business. You've stalled them long enough, but the longer this drags, the more those two will catch on.

Dragon King is easy — his reason for being here is similar to yours.

Long Jing is different. His obsession with a certain existence runs deeper. But I can handle him — provided I find out what happened on Mi Laozhang's end first."

When Cheng Shi mentioned "a certain existence," he watched Zhen Xin carefully. She didn't hide anything — just smiled casually, signaling she already knew.

Cheng Shi's brow shot up. So Zhen Xin hadn't come just for the Secret Peeping Ear — she'd also wanted to investigate "Yu Xi"!

"So does He truly exist?" Zhen Xin didn't voice the question — she mouthed it silently.

"Of course He exists." Cheng Shi was equally silent, pointing at the stage with absolute sincerity. "I thought I could change history. But I was wrong. History didn't change. He may have existed once — but now... He's dead."

One thing at a time. Heart-to-heart was heart-to-heart. Trial was trial. Outside the trial, he accepted her as an ally. But before settlement, he'd keep his mouth sealed.

That said, Cheng Shi turned decisively and headed toward Mi Laozhang's position.

He didn't hide his path from Zhen Xin, nor did he use dice to vanish. The message was clear: if you're interested, follow me.

Zhen Xin wasn't about to pass up this chance. Because she was certain the clown who'd just bared his heart... had lied again.

Yu Xi wasn't dead. He was definitely still alive!

And "He's still alive" was very likely the answer to this entire trial!

'Hear it to doubt; see it to believe.' But was Crown's death, witnessed firsthand, necessarily real?

No — what died was Cheng Shi. Not the truth!

So was this really a Silence trial? Based on its style, it seemed more like a trial from her own Benefactor — the Fun God...

'Interesting. An Envoy of Deceit that she'd never heard of even after multiple audiences with the Fun God — and he seemed to have a decent rapport with Cheng Shi?'

'How did he find Him?'

'The Tongue of Eating Lies? No — that tongue hadn't breathed a word when it was with her.'

'So was it the thing the clown already had on him?'

Zhen Xin shelved her questions and followed Cheng Shi toward the place that might hold answers.

Cheng Shi wasn't idle while leading the way. He kept trying to figure out who'd told Zhen Xin about "Yu Xi." The name's spread had been deliberate, but it was still limited to a few peak players. She'd most likely heard it from someone, not through the History School.

He thought and thought without an answer. Then Zhen Xin, noticing his perpetual frown, laughed gently from behind.

"I know what you're thinking. How about a quick-fire round? I'll trade another secret — an ordinary one. Deal?"

Cheng Shi didn't even turn. "What am I thinking?"

"Poison." Zhen Xin's answer was instant — as certain as if she lived inside his stomach.

"???"

Cheng Shi froze. Even his stride stuttered.

"Impossible." The word escaped before he could stop it. Then he frowned hard. He knew Poison well. Her path of "flattery" might change course, and the idea of her "selling him out" — after he'd personally introduced her to Aph Ros for her second faith — was patently absurd.

In her eyes, he wasn't just Cheng Shi. He was Yu Xi himself. As long as Poison wasn't stupid, she'd never—

'Wait.'

She would never tell an outsider. But what if the person in front of her... was "him"?

"..."

"Exactly as you suspected. Zhen Yi ran into Poison. And coincidentally, in that trial, she was performing as you. See — Fate is a funny thing sometimes."

Cheng Shi's eyelid went haywire. "The one who bumped into Poison — it was really Zhen Yi?"

Zhen Xin smiled and deftly changed the subject.

"That's a second question.

I know you're not Him. I don't want to speculate on why you played Yu Xi in front of Aph Ros. I only want to know: how did you find Him?"

A spark ignited behind Cheng Shi's eyes.

'Done!'

All his groundwork had finally cemented the "Yu Xi" identity.

Even though Zhen Xin had called out his lie, she didn't realize that the hundred-foot foundation beneath that lie was also lies. "Yu Xi" was a name he'd improvised during his push-and-pull with Brother Mouth. He had no idea what the real creation was actually called.

Maybe it had always been Crown. Or maybe Crown's mask?

It certainly wasn't "Yu Xi." And it definitely wasn't "Hee-hee Weirdo."

The real secret might already be in front of Mi Laozhang. But all Cheng Shi could tell Zhen Xin right now was:

"I didn't find Him.

Understand this: if He didn't want to be found, only the Fun God would know His location. So He found me.

In a previous trial, He appeared suddenly and guided me toward the true nature of Void.

You should know what that means — because this was originally your opportunity, Zhen Xin.

You know my past too, so I won't hide it: I suspect it was Zhen Yi's refusal combined with my future self crossing back that drew Yu Xi's gaze here."

"Your future self..." Zhen Xin frowned, seeming to accept it but still full of questions. "Was that really the future?"

"You could call it that. Or you could say he came from another world — one similar to the place the Fate Chosen wants to go, but absolutely not a parallel world under the gods' watch.

Past and future were always just labels that Time stuck on different evolutions. The difference is: now, the one sticking those labels...

Might be far more than one entity.

We've arrived. Let's finish the matter at hand first, and then I'll tell you some stories about Them.

Of course — beyond the one secret I promised you, every extra story costs extra.

But since you're a fellow sufferer, I'll give you half off."

"..."

...

Chapter 856: Mi Laozhang's Composition

When the two circled behind the theater's backstage and up to a rafter near the ceiling on the second floor, they finally found Zhang Jizu — hidden here.

Mi Laozhang had been dozing with his eyes closed, apparently waiting for Cheng Shi a long time.

He heard the noise and opened his eyes. When he saw Zhen Xin following Cheng Shi, those just-opened eyes immediately squinted shut again.

"So it's you, Zhen Xin."

Zhen Xin studied Zhang Jizu thoughtfully, nodding with mild surprise.

"So that's where my flaw was."

Interesting — your relationship is clearly much closer than I imagined. Outdated intelligence does lead to blind spots. But I'll note it for next time."

"?" Cheng Shi stopped in his tracks, forgetting to ask Mi Laozhang for an explanation. He spun around and shot Zhen Xin a look. "Next time?"

Zhen Xin laughed lightly. "Relax — not impersonating you. It's about refining and cautioning my own disguise methods."

"You'd better mean that..."

Eye twitching, Cheng Shi turned back to Zhang Jizu. The two Jokers didn't say a word — just locked eyes for an instant, as though a thousand words had already passed between them.

Zhang Jizu read the question in Cheng Shi's gaze: "What happened here? Where's Crown?" And Cheng Shi caught a flash of helplessness and powerlessness in Mi Laozhang's eyes.

So it was a force no mortal could resist that had shattered his plan. None of the Players present could have left the Death Chosen this deflated.

Seeing Cheng Shi's confusion, Mi Laozhang sighed and pulled from his left pocket a... sprawling thousand-word report!

The thorough Steady-ite had anticipated this scene the moment he failed to protect Crown. To avoid triggering the trial's settlement by speaking too much, he'd written down everything.

And the story on that paper delivered yet another shock to the two newcomers.

...

Rewind slightly. Shift to Zhang Jizu's perspective.

When the Cheng-Shi-played Crown was dismembered on stage, Deceit's descent silenced the theater like winter cicadas.

But He didn't leave after that sneer. He appeared on the rafters, dragged the unprepared Mi Laozhang and the trussed-up Crown into the Void together — granting these two mortals the supreme honor of a divine audience.

Of course, the true guest was Crown. The moment Zhang Jizu was pulled into the Void, he was "muted." He couldn't voice a single praise or greeting. He stood there like a frozen witness — mortified and stunned.

As for Crown... he was even more shocked than the Player. This was the first time since his birth — since San Dales' "creation" — that anyone had touched transcendent power. And he was face-to-face with a supreme Him. So the instant the Fun God untied his bonds, Crown's legs buckled and he collapsed before those eyes.

Those star-flecked, spiraling irises studied the "follower" with interest and chuckled:

"You wish to follow me?"

Crown prostrated immediately, voice trembling with excitement: "Yes — I want to follow You — no, praise You — I mean, I don't not want to follow You — it's that I feel I should praise You before answering — I..."

"Save it. If I enjoyed formalities, I wouldn't be here today.

For you, clown, I have only one question:

Will you follow me?"

Crown nodded frantically. But mid-nod, he gradually stopped. Conflict crossed his face. After a moment's courage, he gritted his teeth and asked:

"Great God of Joy — forgive my boldness — but is San Dales saved?"

Those eyes sneered. "No."

No!?

How could it be no!?

You descended because of their devotion — how could it be no?

Crown's mind went blank. Trembling, he straightened and looked up at those eyes — eyes that seemed to embody the universe's mirth — in disbelief.

"Wh... why?"

Another sneer.

"No why. They're not funny. So they don't deserve salvation."

Crown's face froze. Fear was written across every feature. The deity wasn't what he'd imagined.

They sat high above and truly didn't need to care about mortals. But Crown was different. He was born here, raised here. His sole wish was to be useful — useful to San Dales.

That's why he'd rejoiced when faith first flickered. Not purely out of newborn piety, but because he'd finally seen a chance to fulfill his wish — to matter to San Dales.

Remember: this land had never known faith. Nobody could expect someone grown in such soil to develop devotion overnight. Not even Crown, who was closer to piety than anyone.

But the clown hadn't given up. He sensed divine goodwill. If his "Benefactor" truly didn't care about this place, there'd be no audience. So he saw another chance — one to prove his devotion and maybe save San Dales.

He raised his head once more, trembling, and pleaded:

"I'm funny!

Great God of Joy — I'm funnier than any of them."

"And?"

"I wish to ask You to take my mouth, my tongue, my ears... everything I am — and give them to the people. That way, they'll become as funny as me.

I'll spread Your faith with my flesh and blood. And You'll gain a host of funny followers. A win-win!

My Benefactor..."

Crown's voice quaked on "my Benefactor." He wasn't sure his "insolence" would be forgiven. But whatever Deceit's response, when Mi Laozhang — standing beside them — heard those words, he sighed internally.

The plan was dead.

Cheng Shi's scheme had crumbled.

Memory hadn't been overwritten. And the one correcting this memory was none other than the Fun God Himself.

Why was He here correcting history? Why not save His own follower?

Had the Fun God yielded to Memory?

No — impossible. He'd probably struck a new deal with His opposite number. But what deal required this person who looked like a Seedling Follower — or even like Yu Xi — as a bargaining chip!?

The Secret Peeping Ear clearly originated from Crown. But was he truly Cheng Shi's "Envoy Yu Xi"?

Zhang Jizu's head filled with question marks, but he couldn't ask. He could only watch in silence.

Those stellar eyes gazed down, amused, studying Crown.

"You're making demands of me?"

"No — begging."

"You think you're devout?"

"No... Great God of Joy, I intend to prove my devotion through action."

"Even at the cost of your life?"

"...Yes." Crown pressed his forehead to the ground, trembling head to toe.

"Tch—

You really are quite funny."

...

Chapter 857: Crown's Ending and Mi Laozhang's "Backstab"

Despite the Fun God's mocking tone, He granted Crown's plea.

Those eyes blinked gently. Crown exploded into nothingness within the Void — then the shapeless ripples became five streams of light, shooting toward three different locations.

In the nearest direction, three streams twisted together, clearly landing in the same spot.

Zhang Jizu squinted and witnessed everything. He expected to be returned to the trial once Crown's audience ended. But Deceit didn't release him. Instead, He posed a loaded question:

"Do you think the clown's devotion was real... or fake?"

"..."

Cold sweat erupted down Zhang Jizu's spine.

A death-sentence question!

Before a true god who governed the universe's falsehood — how do you judge whether His follower's piety is real or not?

Say real? That desecrates His authority.

Say fake? That desecrates His honor.

Zhang Jizu's mind kicked into overdrive, pouring every ounce of lifetime wisdom into this single moment.

His approach wasn't brute-force trial-and-error — he borrowed another clown's answer sheet, constantly asking himself: "What would Cheng Shi say here?"

And that line of thinking actually yielded an answer.

A few breaths later, Zhang Jizu took a deep breath and replied with utmost solemnity:

"My Benefactor — are you doubting Cheng Shi's devotion?"

Understood. I will keep a close eye on his movements and report everything about him to You."

Hearing this, those eyes blazed with a brilliant eruption of Void-colored light. He studied Zhang Jizu with clear satisfaction and nodded.

"Indeed — clowns are funnier than the rest."

Whether the "clown" in His mouth meant Crown, Cheng Shi, or Zhang Jizu himself — Mi Laozhang didn't dare guess.

He simply squinted, lowered his head, feigned ignorance, and stayed silent. When Deceit neither left nor spoke further, Zhang Jizu suddenly realized — his audience had begun!

He snapped his gaze up, eyes slitted tight, and asked his Benefactor the question burning in his mind:

"My Benefactor — when everything belonging to Crown is pieced back together... will Lord Yu Xi... return to this world?"

At the words "Yu Xi," the corners of Deceit's eyes soared. The stars in His pupils flickered wildly, spirals reversing like rivers.

He chuckled, gaze drifting toward somewhere beyond the Void.

"He has never appeared, nor has He ever vanished.

When you know of Him, you do not truly know Him.

When you understand Him, you do not truly understand Him.

Only He knows and understands Himself. And once an outsider truly knows Him, truly understands Him — then He...

Is no longer Him."

With that, Deceit left — carrying a surge of joy that made the Void itself seethe.

The invisible bonds holding Zhang Jizu released simultaneously. He let his body fall through the Void, brow knotted the entire way, parsing the riddle-like divine guidance.

What did He mean?

Was Crown really Yu Xi?

If yes — He'd appeared right before Cheng Shi. How could He "never have appeared"?

If no — then who was Yu Xi?

Given Deceit's reaction, the Envoy's existence seemed beyond doubt. But His words made the Envoy feel ephemeral — a phantom without a trace.

Was this what Void meant?

Mi Laozhang sighed with a headache and thought of his other Benefactor.

'The one on the Bone Throne is so much easier to deal with. At least conversation doesn't make your brain hurt.'

'And come to think of it, Death's slow speech is actually an advantage — at least you can relax your neurons between words.'

"..."

Zhang Jizu returned to reality. The instant he was back on the rafter, he wrote down everything and now presented it to Cheng Shi.

Everything — except the riddle about "Yu Xi."

And when Cheng Shi read Mi Laozhang's unedited audience response, his face went pitch black.

He shot Zhang Jizu a withering side-eye. The resentment was unmistakable: 'So you threw me under the bus.'

'Fine — you dare gossip about me to My Benefactor's face. Don't blame me for doing it right back.'

"Oh — so that's who had such quick wits. A faithful witness, I see.

Mi Laozhang, when did you start cozying up to Memory?

Dragon King's disguise was truly a masterpiece. With your level of devotion to Memory, another Dragon King must be rising in Void's embrace!"

"..."

Zhang Jizu completely ignored him.

From the moment he'd used Cheng Shi's name as his escape card, he'd expected this sarcastic roasting. But he had to share his response — because he feared Cheng Shi hearing about it from the Fun God later would result in even worse "verbal violence."

Rip the bandage off now. No time like the present. Today's pain ends today. And if there's more tomorrow, then I'll start sniping back.

So Zhang Jizu slowly closed his eyes. Pretended he couldn't hear.

Zhen Xin, watching from the side, had been pondering the relationship between Crown and Yu Xi. When she caught "Dragon King" from Cheng Shi's mouth, her expression shifted.

"So Li Jingming really did fuse.

His fusion doesn't surprise me. But this one..."

She studied Zhang Jizu thoughtfully.

"He fused with Death — that I didn't expect.

What is the Fun God after?"

That last question was clearly directed at Cheng Shi. He could hardly tell Zhen Xin that Mi Laozhang — this lovable oaf — had been first conned by Cheng Shi himself and then tricked by the Fun God into Deceit's camp. Bros were bros. Even after the backstab, given how much Zhang Jizu had contributed in this trial... show the man some face.

As for what the Fun God wanted from Death, Cheng Shi wasn't sure either. So he deflected with a casual excuse, then suddenly turned to Mi Laozhang.

"Old Zhang — do you think she... would work?"

Zhen Xin raised an eyebrow. She immediately realized the "she" was herself. These two were openly discussing her right in front of her?

And whatever they were about to say seemed related to what Li Jingming had left unsaid earlier. Did these three share the same secret?

Zhen Xin was too sharp. From fragments and reactions alone, she deduced it was likely some kind of alliance. But she said nothing, asked nothing — just smiled and waited for Zhang Jizu's answer.

Mi Laozhang opened his eyes, studied Zhen Xin for a moment, then looked at Cheng Shi.

"When you asked that question, you already had your answer.

Instead of asking me, you'd be better off asking her directly."

Cheng Shi was indeed wavering. He'd genuinely considered pulling Zhen Xin into the Jokers.

Before, he'd reached into the History School through the Blind One. But now, through the Blind One, he'd gone deeper and gotten to know the head of the History School — Zhen Xin herself.

If he could bind Zhen Xin to the Jokers' chariot, he could cut out the middleman...

Well — the Blind One wasn't exactly a middleman. But this arrangement would spare her the awkwardness and guilt of feeling like she was betraying her best friend. After all, regardless of which universe's Zhen Xin and An Mingyu, they'd always be sisters.

And it wasn't just that. Having witnessed Zhen Xin's "stability" in this trial — especially after baring her past through the carte blanche exchange — Cheng Shi felt that this equally "absurd" liar who honored verbal promises was rare. That's what planted the idea.

But he couldn't share the details with Mi Laozhang. Regardless of motive, he had to respect Zhen Xin's privacy. So after long deliberation, he made his decision.

He turned to Zhen Xin, dead serious.

"Are you certain you can control Zhen Yi one hundred percent?"

Zhen Xin blinked, then smiled. "Cheng Shi, you needn't be so guarded against her. You said it yourself — I owe her for getting this far. She's not pure liability. At least to some extent, Zhen Yi is also my weapon."

"..."

This was so sincere that even the Fool's Lips + Secret Peeping Ear combo couldn't produce a "no." And Cheng Shi recalled what the Blind One had once told him: if you understand Zhen Yi — make her actions predictable — she could become a weapon.

'True. When the "Hee-weapon" is in someone else's hands, I'm on tenterhooks.'

'But if I hold the "Hee-weapon" myself...'

'Hee~'

'Then don't blame me for "killing" you all!'

It clicked. Cheng Shi curved his lips and extended his hand to Zhen Xin.

"Since we've all bared our hearts to this degree, I won't hide anymore. Today I formally invite you to join us.

What do you say, Zhen Xin? Interested?"

Zhen Xin's lips curved to match.

"So you really are an organization. Interesting — an organization composed entirely of His followers?"

Who's in it?

From what I know: you, him, and Li Jingming?

Because of Zhen Yi, I'm not fond of Li Jingming. But this organization does intrigue me.

So what do you call yourselves?"

"Jokers." Cheng Shi's smile was enigmatic. "We are a troupe of jesters who perform absurdist art on the universe's stage, hymning the melody of Void."

...

Chapter 858: The Fun God's Message

"Jokers..."

Zhen Xin savored the name, then looked at the two clowns before her. Something nagged at her:

'This feels like an organization born from two clowns cracking jokes at each other. Is this... actually a real organization?'

She pressed her lips together. Instead of agreeing immediately, she asked again:

"Everyone in the Jokers... knows the secret of that world?"

"Of course!" Cheng Shi's tone was absolute. "Everything you want to know about Them can be answered within the Jokers."

We hold far more divine secrets than ordinary players — even peak players. And those secrets are something the History School could never collect.

Because the Land of Hope carries only Their will — not Their secrets.

Moreover, Dragon King is also a Joker. Even with his understanding of Memory, he still needs the Jokers to find answers about Them. That tells you how close we are."

Hearing this, Zhen Xin fell into thought. Mi Laozhang's eyelid leaped.

'Loads of divine secrets in the Jokers?'

'Since when?'

'I'm a so-called founding member — how come I don't know any of this?'

Apart from "Yu Xi," he couldn't recall hearing much. And Li Jingming's actual enrollment was still debatable. Could he really be counted?

"..."

'This lying clown — did he recruit Li Jingming the same way?'

'Playing both sides?'

'Where does that leave me? Accomplice?'

Zhang Jizu stayed silent. When he felt Zhen Xin's suspicious gaze, he returned a mysterious smile and said nothing more.

That enigmatic smile served as tacit confirmation of Cheng Shi's claims. Zhen Xin was sold.

Or rather — she'd been sold from the start. Judging by the two people present, the Jokers' intel came mainly from Cheng Shi. This clown who'd fused all of Void carried an absurd number of secrets. But more than the secrets themselves, what fascinated her was where they came from.

Being the second window to information would never match controlling the primary source. As the History School's operator, Zhen Xin understood this intimately. She wanted to use the Jokers to get closer to the source — and this had been one of her reasons for the memory exchange.

Add the fact that his "orphan" past mirrored her own. Shared roads erode bias and caution.

One drenched soul had no reason to mock another in the same rain — especially when this particular wretch had once held an umbrella for her best friend.

But sentiment aside, Zhen Xin never dropped her shrewdness.

After careful deliberation, she reasoned: an organization containing two Chosen Ones plus a liar who'd fooled her suggested the others couldn't be lightweights either.

Decision made. She extended her hand and clasped the clown's firmly.

"I'm a magician, but I believe I can play a stage-singing jester convincingly enough.

So — pleasure working with you, Jokers."

"Pleasure's ours, Ms. Magician. But I must warn you — keep that pes— that trickster sister from finding out. We're a low-key outfit. Can't handle the chaos."

"Relax. She never accesses my memories."

"Let's hope so..." Cheng Shi's tone was a cocktail of emotions, clearly still scarred.

Watching this seemingly harmonious scene, Zhang Jizu's eyes narrowed to threads.

'Strange. Profoundly strange.'

He'd never imagined sharing an organization with Zhen Yi's... sister.

He'd already found the Jokers' creation absurd. Now it seemed that earlier absurdity was merely the prologue to true absurdity.

And the future absurdity would surely go further still.

'Think about it — a pack of liars running together. What good could possibly come of it?'

Yet the most powerless part was: he was one of them. And as Cheng Shi's "vision" kept expanding, Zhang Jizu found himself gradually accepting the absurdity. Even... looking forward to it.

'If you don't understand more, how can you bury anything? Right?'

The ambition was grand. But Mi Laozhang didn't dare confront the changes in himself head-on. He could only blame Deceit's subtle influence on his psyche — with Cheng Shi fanning the flames throughout.

He sighed. Since Zhen Xin was now "one of them," there was no need to hide anything further. In front of both, he reached into his right pocket and produced another... document.

This one was much shorter. More of an addendum.

"???"

Cheng Shi and Zhen Xin both froze. But within moments, both realized what Mi Laozhang had done.

This Steady zealot had transcribed two versions before they arrived!

With outsiders present, he'd only shared the incomplete — or false — version. Only when the outsider became an insider did he fill in the gaps.

"..." Being so thoroughly guarded, Zhen Xin stiffened — then broke into strange applause. "Every dose of caution I learn from you two reminds me how much my craft still needs work. Truly — anyone who draws close to Him stops being trustworthy.

Mi Laozhang, you've really changed."

When Zhen Xin said "Mi Laozhang" wearing Cheng Shi's face, Zhang Jizu hadn't batted an eye. But hearing the same nickname from her real face and voice, he spent a full minute smoothing down goosebumps.

Something about that "mī" sound from those lips felt like it should be followed by "mī-squinty-eyes."

Zhen Yi PTSD had struck again.

Cheng Shi didn't care about their exchange. Brow furrowed, he took the note and scanned it — just a few simple lines.

The Fun God had actually left Zhang Jizu one more message before departing. And it was something neither Cheng Shi nor Zhen Xin could ever have guessed.

Because He'd said:

"By the way — that little War girl is awfully pitiful. Since she needs lifesaving so badly, next time you see Old Bones, why not introduce her?

Old Bones has nothing better to do anyway. If I don't drum up some entertainment for Him, I just feel... uneasy.

Mm — one must care for the elderly. Enrich their twilight years as much as possible."

...

Chapter 859: Ms. Magician, Have You... Considered a Faith Fusion?

That was the last thing Deceit said before departing.

Zhang Jizu naturally didn't dare disrespect his Benefactor in writing, so he'd replaced every "Old Bones" with "that Lord."

But Cheng Shi knew exactly how venomous the Fun God's tongue was. He auto-replaced the "honorific" immediately — even supplied the tone of voice.

Yet despite how well he "understood" the Fun God, he couldn't fathom why the deity had come all this way without summoning him, only to drop a casual line about Ai Si at the end.

'What's going on?'

'Taken a fancy to the War Supervisor?'

'If so, why not recruit her into Deceit? Why push her toward Death?'

"He's trying to push a Death-War fusion?" A spark gleamed in Zhen Xin's eyes as she voiced her uncertain guess.

Cheng Shi frowned hard. The Fun God's thinking was surely more complex.

He recalled how the Fun God had once used him to probe Birth. So this Death-meets-War play — was it another probe?

But Death's connection to Cheng Shi was deep. Even as a neutral deity, Death leaned toward the Fear Faction. He shouldn't be someone the Fun God could probe with such a blunt maneuver. The only remaining possibility: the Fun God wanted to use Death's hand to probe War!

The realization clicked. Cheng Shi cut straight to the point. "What do you know about War?"

Zhen Xin's eyes lit up at the conversation suddenly reaching the level of Them. After a moment's thought, she shared freely:

"The most orderly deity in the universe — sometimes even more orderly than Order Himself. Despite His trials revolving around brutal combat, His presence among the gods is remarkably low — on par with His opposite, Silence. Far lower than His siblings in Civilization or even Chaos."

Cheng Shi raised an unsurprised eyebrow. "Heard it from the Fun God?"

"Indeed. During an audience, the topic turned to the gods. His assessment of War was eight characters:

'No war, no fight. Boring, dull.'"

"..."

'When it comes to shade, nobody out-shades the Fun God.'

'Wonder what would happen if He said that to War's face. Would War declare war on the Fun God?'

'If War tolerated even that... that would be extremely War of Him.'

"You think the Fun God is probing War?" Zhen Xin raised an eyebrow.

"Yes." Talking with smart people truly was effortless — every question, every exchanged glance became effective communication. Cheng Shi nodded. "Even Order stopped being orderly. Why should War adhere to order?"

Because of the Convention?

I don't think so.

While every god exploits the Convention's loopholes, a true god named War shows zero reaction. Worse — He actively suppresses His own divinity and authority. Very suspicious.

I assumed the Fun God knew something. But it seems even He doesn't know what happened to War..."

Cheng Shi's words were few, but the information density was staggering.

Zhen Xin discussed the gods with her History School's core council, sure — but she'd never spoken this openly about things like the Convention.

She knew about the Convention, yes. But outside the Blind One, nobody had ever discussed it with her so casually.

And look — the other clown showed zero surprise at the topic. Meaning Convention-level divine secrets were just... ordinary conversation among the Jokers.

This Joker organization might be far more mysterious than she'd imagined.

But was that truly the case?

Not at all!

Mi Laozhang was absorbing fresh divine intel too. He just kept a poker face, acting like this was daily fare. Which spared Cheng Shi considerable work explaining and cover-storying.

The Steady faction's synergy continued — in a beautifully misinterpreted way.

Zhen Xin kept puzzling over where Cheng Shi's trove of information came from. Given the evidence, she could only assume the mysterious Yu Xi had told him.

But Yu Xi was clearly still active — so what were those fragments the Fun God had dismantled? Had He lost His... mask? His authority?

Logically, per the History School's understanding, Void shouldn't have Servant Gods. Void's deities shouldn't have Envoys. But mortal comprehension had limits. Before contacting the Torchbearers, Zhen Xin hadn't known the Flame of Hope existed.

Since even Fate had an Envoy, why couldn't Deceit?

So Yu Xi's existence was perfectly reasonable. The Envoy's exact positioning, however, remained unclear.

And in Zhang Jizu's account, the Fun God had been noncommittal about Yu Xi's existence. Was He deliberately erasing Yu Xi's traces? Did that mean Yu Xi was running errands for the Fun God — secretly?

So — were the Jokers a pure player organization, or were they "Yu Xi's" proxy?

Zhen Xin's mind brimmed with curiosity.

But she didn't spiral. Instead, she followed Cheng Shi's thread and asked another question:

"What do you mean Order is no longer orderly?"

The History School has noticed something off about Order. But the investigation is still classified — only the core council has a rough picture. You..."

She trailed off, but the meaning was clear: can you elaborate?

For Cheng Shi, this was ancient news. He'd known about Order's problems back when Order was still only partially Chaos. So he casually gave away what he'd first learned — free of charge.

"Order fractured in a God War. The current occupant of His divine throne is a fragment: the Iron Law of Order."

"?"

Zhen Xin blinked in disbelief.

Half a year into the game, Order's followers had upheld His will with an impeccable reputation. And now you're saying Order split?

These righteous players had been worshipping a fragment of Order all along? An entity the Grand Tribunal called their constitutional canon — the Iron Law?

'Is that even reasonable?'

Seeing her stunned expression, Cheng Shi smiled.

'Your intel is way behind. You haven't heard the half of it. If I told you Chaos is actually the real Order, you'd all go chaotic on me.'

'Wait — speaking of Chaos...'

He hadn't forgotten Kataro's cryptic remark at the Chaos temple, and he'd long wanted to probe how deep Deceit's fingers reached into Chaos. He'd just lacked the opportunity.

Today, the opportunity had arrived. A bold idea formed.

He turned to Zhen Xin. After a pause, his expression turned peculiar. "Ms. Magician — have you... considered a faith fusion?"

"?" Zhen Xin blinked blankly. "Sounds like you've picked a direction for me?"

"Not exactly. But if you don't have a specific target...

How about Chaos?

After all, your relationship with your sister is pretty chaotic."

"..."

...

Chapter 860: The Ending the Jokers Crafted for the Trial

Truth be told, Zhen Xin had indeed considered Chaos. And her reasoning was quintessentially a liar's.

In this game, the only talent system that rivaled Deceit in "deception and obfuscation" was Chaos. With Chaos talents backing a con artist, the possibilities for trickery became mind-boggling.

Case in point: present-day Cheng Shi. Without Chaos Acting, he still couldn't have fooled Zhen Xin and her double talent set.

An Deceit follower wielding Chaos talents was fundamentally different from a Chaos follower wielding Deceit talents. The former's purpose remained "deception" — Chaos was merely a tool. The latter leaned into "chaos" — like Hu Wei, who'd fused Deceit solely for the cognitive dissonance his Grand Marshal identity created.

Probing the Fun God through Hu Wei was impossible. The Fun God never stingy with granting second faiths. What He controlled was which faith His followers should fuse. So using His own collection to probe His grip on Chaos was actually an excellent method.

Remember: Cheng Shi's Chaos fusion had been ratified by the true Chaos deity. That final twilight of Chaos had shone upon him, making him a Sanity Eroder.

But now Chaos had become Order. So if Zhen Xin could fuse successfully, that would prove the Fun God had deeply infiltrated the Chaos temple — perhaps already wielding all of Chaos's power and authority by proxy.

Verifying this would give Cheng Shi a foundation to boldly deduce the Fun God's grand design and attempt probes he'd never dared before. After all, when every tool of "deception and obfuscation" in

the universe was controlled by the Fear Faction — as a member, Cheng Shi could safely chase truths others feared to glimpse, without worrying those truths might be twisted by other entities.

Zhen Xin's brow furrowed slightly as she began seriously considering it.

She was genuinely brilliant. When Cheng Shi raised Chaos right after discussing Order, she immediately elevated the conversation to figure out his intent.

When deities and faith were involved, one player's thoughts wouldn't change anything. But if a god's will — specifically the Fun God's — was behind it, things got interesting.

She'd assumed her current state already counted as a fusion — Deceit fused with Deceit. But apparently, both she and Zhen Yi could fuse again?

Zhen Yi would have zero interest in faith fusion. But that didn't mean Zhen Xin didn't.

She parsed the relationships between deities, wondering: was the Fun God Order's opposite? Or had He simply allied with Chaos?

'An alliance like mine with Cheng Shi?'

"If Order really shattered, I doubt He'd probe with such 'subtlety.' Given the Fun God's personality, He'd just storm the gates. So I lean toward this being a probe of Chaos...

Is He probing Chaos, or are... you probing Chaos?

Or are you probing the Fun God?

Cheng Shi — be clearer. If you want me as a chess piece, you should know that on matters like this, an informed me outperforms a clueless me by orders of magnitude.

I can play my part in this drama, but I need the full script.

A director may see the big picture, but on details, an actor has far more experience. Don't you agree?"

"..."

Every response from Zhen Xin kept validating Big Cat's assessment: "She's very good at cooperation."
But... she might be too good.

The excess of perfection gave Cheng Shi a nagging feeling that anything handed to her would slip beyond his control.

Zhen Yi giving that feeling was one thing — she was genuinely unhinged. But Zhen Xin was composed and steady. So why did she radiate... a faint hint of madness?

'Her "parents" truly broke her.'

Regardless, Zhen Xin was an excellent card. Using her Chaos fusion to observe further would also determine how deep their cooperation could go. Cheng Shi nodded and, almost hiding from Mi Laozhang, whispered a few words to Zhen Xin.

Hearing that brief message, Zhen Xin's face transformed violently!

Honestly, Zhang Jizu had never seen such dramatic emotion on Zhen Xin's face. In that moment, he wondered what new bombshell had dropped among the gods — and why it was being hidden from him...

Zhen Xin stared at Cheng Shi in disbelief, her expression spectacular. "Who are you, really?"

"?" Cheng Shi laughed.

'Come on — when you got info from Poison's mouth you were certain I was only playing the Yu Xi role. And now you're doubting me again?'

"As you see — Cheng Shi. Seeing-is-believing Cheng Shi."

"But I still can't accept that a player could obtain this information from anywhere. Did He tell you?"

Zhen Xin's "He" didn't mean the Fun God — she meant Yu Xi.

Cheng Shi heard the distinction. He nodded sincerely.

"Yes. He knows much, but is also kept in the dark by Those who know more. Every He rides the waves of the era. Every He has a different purpose.

I just happened to grab a surfboard and hitch a ride on His wave. So I know a little more than you."

"And your purpose? To stand firm on that surfboard — or to kick the original owner... off?" Zhen Xin's eyes burned.

"?" Cheng Shi gave her a look. 'You're just like Big Cat.'

'Haven't learned to walk and already want to run?'

"Same thing. I just want to survive first, then figure out the rest. Though lately I've added a wish — not just surviving, but understanding why I'm surviving."

"Understanding is never that easy. Might be better to live in blissful ignorance."

Zhen Xin murmured this almost to herself, gaze drifting. Before Cheng Shi could react, the quietly invisible Zhang Jizu suddenly smiled.

"Live long enough — and understanding comes naturally."

"..."

Cheng Shi stared at Mi Laozhang. 'That really hit home, didn't it? Great — my con job is so convincing that the marks are spontaneously emoting.'

A delicate silence settled over the three.

Before long, Zhen Xin nodded and accepted the script.

"I'll give it a try, Cheng Shi. In return for today's secrets, I'll trade the results of my faith fusion for those secrets about another world.

Equivalent exchange of secrets. I won't shortchange my allies."

"Generous!" Cheng Shi was liking Zhen Xin more by the minute. At least in decisiveness, she beat the generous-yet-stingy Dragon King by miles.

Speaking of Dragon King... Cheng Shi raised a brow. "Ms. Magician — where did you lure them?"

"The illusion broke ages ago. They've figured out that both Zhen Yi and Crown were fakes. They're heading back to the theater.

Sigh — even without your prompting, I'd need to plan how to clean up Zhen Yi's mess."

"..."

'Girl, that practiced blame-shifting tone tells me this isn't your first or second rodeo. Zhen Yi really is a born scapegoat.'

But this time, Cheng Shi didn't let Zhen Xin handle the aftermath alone. He'd thought of an ending far better than standing aside.

Zhen Xin noticed his eagerness. She tilted her head. "You have a suggestion?"

"Suggestion?"

With the Jokers holding absolute numbers advantage right now, I'd hardly call it a suggestion.

I happen to have some 'guidance' I'd like to 'bestow' upon a certain someone present. Ahem — no specific acrobat implied. So why don't we keep singing this fraudulent opera?

"How?"

Cheng Shi's lips curved. His smile was deeply playful.

"Simple. You play yourselves. I play Yu Xi.

Time to give these lost little followers... a small Yu Xi shock."

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