

The Gods 871

Chapter 871: Trouble

The Void. Fishbone Hall.

The colossal skull atop the Bone Throne gazed down at the small skull standing silently at its feet. Inside the giant's cavernous eye sockets, violent green flames roared.

"My, faith—when, did it, become, Deceit's, place, to meddle?"

"Does He, truly, believe, that by, stealing, My, follower, He can, steal, Death's, divine name, as well?"

"Absurd!"

"Time, and again, He uses, this, faith, nonsense, to deceive, Me. Does He, truly, think, I fear, Void?!"

"..."

The small skull didn't dare make a sound. Its oversized eye sockets seemed to want to narrow, but no amount of squeezing could change the shape of two hollow holes. All it could manage was to slightly wrinkle the edges of those cavities. After a moment of silence, it cautiously corrected the great Lord's statement.

"My Lord, forgive my presumption, but I must remind You—this is merely a message from Deceit. It seems to have... nothing to do with the other one on the Void path."

"How, could it, possibly, have nothing, to do, with Him?"

"You, are too, naive. You have, no idea, how complex, the Void, path, truly is!"

"The moment, something, involves, Cheng, Shi, Void, becomes, two-in-one, a single, unified will."

"This, is Their, era. Void, must not, be underestimated."

"But my Lord," the small skull raised its head in confusion, "didn't You just say You weren't afraid of Them?"

The words weren't even fully out before the small skull realized its mistake. It clamped its mouth shut at once.

'Bad. My nerves, always wound so tight in this Lord's presence, slipped for just a moment. Started talking without thinking. How could I say something like that?!'

'It must be Deceit's influence!'

The small skull shuddered, its gaze dropping to the floor. 'My, what a lovely shade of white this bone floor is.'

The colossal skull paused as well, then regarded the small skull with a few additional threads of scrutiny in its gaze.

"Your, words, have grown, many.

"Indeed, any, life, that draws near, Him, cannot escape, Deceit's, contamination."

"That does seem to be the case!" The small skull nodded hastily, then added with careful diplomacy, "However, my Lord, based on my understanding of Deceit, if You don't agree to His... request, the subsequent harassment will likely only..."

"He wouldn't dare!"

"My Lord, with all due respect, He may not dare to face Your divine might directly, but He is very likely to harass the others, stirring and goading Them into bothering You indirectly..."

At these words, the green flames in the colossal skull's eyes flickered.

He knew His follower spoke the truth. Deceit was absolutely capable of pulling something like that.

The small skull continued:

"So rather than endure even greater harassment later, wouldn't it be better to... lend Deceit a hand with His request now? Help Him temporarily, and that way, You can enjoy Your peace."

"..."

Did the colossal skull not understand such simple logic? Of course He did. He understood all too well—and that was precisely why He couldn't swallow this indignity.

A mere sliver of His fear had slipped out, and Deceit had seized upon it, leveraging it again and again, pushing further and further, doing as He pleased. And now He was meddling in faith fusions under Death's domain!

At this rate, who knew—one day Deceit might truly claim Death's divine name for Himself!

It had to be guarded against. It absolutely had to.

But then...

The colossal skull suddenly broke off its train of thought and turned a brooding gaze upon His follower. That look contained so many tangled emotions that the small skull on the receiving end—Zhang Jizu—found himself growing uneasy.

Indeed, the small skull was none other than Zhang Jizu. He had come to give his Benefactor a heads-up in advance, to prevent the Lord from being blindsided by one of Deceit's schemes.

But now it seemed his Benefactor was... displeased with him?

"You, have changed, greatly.

"Stay away, from, Cheng, Shi, in the future.

"You reek, of far, too much, Deceit.

"Today, you sound, more like, His, lobbyist!

"Do not, forget—you, are first, and foremost, My, follower. A Gravekeeper. Only, secondarily, are you, His..."

At this point, the colossal skull's tone turned bitter. He seemed reluctant to mention the episode of His follower being deceived and stolen away.

"...Never mind. You, are right.

"I shall, help Him, once more—consider it, repayment, for His, not having, mistreated, you, in matters, of faith.

"But there, will not, be, a next time!

"Absolutely, not!"

"...Praise be to the great God of Death."

Though his Benefactor's words were resolute, Zhang Jizu had a feeling there would absolutely be a next time. After all, whether or not a "next time" happened probably wasn't up to this Lord—it was up to his other Benefactor.

But his Benefactor's grace was profound. All he could do was give advance notice, just as he was doing now.

That said, based on the recent intelligence gleaned from Cheng Shi about the gods and his own observations of both Benefactors, Zhang Jizu couldn't shake the feeling that the Lord upon the Bone Throne didn't truly reject the Fun God. His behavior looked more like an unwillingness to publicly support the Fun God in the open.

So... had They been allied all along?

Otherwise it was hard to explain how he'd been so smoothly swindled into Deceit. What had happened to him could only mean one of two things:

Either these two gods had a hidden partnership, or the Fun God's power far exceeded his Lord's—only then could He have stolen a follower right under Death's nose.

At this thought, Zhang Jizu furrowed his brow. Seizing a moment when the green flames in his Lord's eyes had dimmed slightly, he ventured a question:

"My Lord, do You know of a Servant God of Void called... Yu Xi?"

Zhang Jizu had not forgotten Yu Xi. Excessive forgetting would scramble his memories. Even though Existence would logically fill in the gaps, the cautious Mi Laozhang had chosen not to entrust his memories to Existence—after all, he was half a Void follower himself.

So what he'd erased in that trial wasn't Yu Xi at all. It was the matter of Cheng Shi's dual personality.

All of his anxiety about Yu Xi had stemmed from Cheng Shi's dual personality. As he'd told Cheng Shi, he feared that Cheng Shi's Deceit personality was actually a sign of Yu Xi's self-resurrection. But having already established a deep alliance with Cheng Shi, he didn't want to spend every future collaboration on tenterhooks—or worse, abandon the alliance out of caution. So Zhang Jizu had taken a bold, risky decision:

He chose to trust that Cheng Shi could manage the relationship between the Clown and Yu Xi, and then decisively erased the knowledge of Cheng Shi's dual personality.

It was a minor adjustment to his memory. After the Remembrance Needle took effect, what had been "Yu Xi's personality lurking within" was rewritten as "Cheng Shi tracing Yu Xi's footsteps." This way, the ever-steady Zhang could maintain his composure through continued collaboration without wasting mental energy guarding against Yu Xi.

Now that a rare opportunity presented itself, he naturally posed the question to his Benefactor.

The Lord upon the Bone Throne paused for a moment, then shook His head, His voice a deep rumble:

"Void, has never, had, a Servant God.

"Just as, Existence, has never, had one, either."

"Existence doesn't have a Servant God either?" Zhang Jizu was also taken aback. "But I recently heard that Time has a Servant God called Shi Zhen—apparently the first hour hand that Time personally shaped upon His descent... Could that be false?"

The green flames reignited in the colossal skull's eyes. He pondered for a moment, then shook His head once more.

"Perhaps, not false, but certainly, not true.

"Since, the Void, Era, began, Time, has grown, ever more, mysterious. No one, knows, what He, is doing.

"I, have never, heard, of Him, creating, any, hour hand.

"Rather, what you, mentioned—Yu Xi...

"I have heard, that Deceit, once showed, extraordinary, favor, toward, a certain, follower. But that, follower, appears to have, perished, in the very, first, God War, of the, Void Era."

"A God War?!" The small skull tried once more to narrow its eye sockets.

"Indeed. Shortly, after Void's, descent, the new, era's, masters, challenged, the old.

"Void, and Existence, clashed, in a great, battle, drawing, all, the gods, to watch.

"Though, era transitions, are common, and such things, happen often, never before, had any, power, acted, as blatantly, as Void.

"That is why, I say, Void, is forever, united. Even if, Deceit, stabbed, Fate, in the back...

"No one, knows, whether that, was merely, a bitter, ploy, staged by, Void, itself.

"So even, upon seeing, cracks, between Them, no one, dares provoke, Them, in this, era."

"..."

Today's revelations were so explosive that Mi Laozhang's brain suffered a brief crash. He carefully committed every word his Benefactor had spoken to memory, feeling that it wasn't just him whose tongue had loosened—this Lord was also unusually talkative.

'Could it really be like the Fun God said—that when gods grow old they need companionship?'

"..."

'Zhang Jizu, what are you thinking? Where did your logic go? Are you really turning into a Deceit-brain?'

Zhang Jizu shook his head hard, flinging the stray thoughts out, and hurriedly asked another question:

"If Void splits apart, what happens to the followers who've undergone faith fusion?"

"That, is not, your, concern.

"Withdraw. I have, heard, what you've, said.

"Continue, on your, path. That, is all."

With that, the entire Hall of White Bones surged into a torrent that crashed into the small skull, sweeping it into the Void and out of sight.

Chapter 872: Still Trouble

Reality. A luxury penthouse in some unknown province.

The trial was over. Ai Si lay in her bathtub and slowly opened her eyes. This was her way of unwinding, but this time she felt anything but relaxed.

Her mind kept replaying the message from Lord Yu Xi that Cheng Shi had delivered. If she truly was accepted by Death, then as a Gravekeeper she might finally have hope of preserving her own life.

As for the price of keeping graves... Heh. Killing a few people, nothing more. For a follower of War, that was hardly difficult.

She was finally going to escape the bitter sea of War. At this thought, Ai Si rose from the tub, draped a towel around herself, and stood before the floor-to-ceiling window gazing out at the silent city, her heart brimming with emotion.

Truth be told, on the day the Faith Game descended, her first choice hadn't been Civilization's War. She'd been more inclined toward Truth, which shared the same path. But as always, Ai Si was a shrewd woman. She understood that only by combining offense and defense could one go far in times of

upheaval. So for the sake of compatibility with the Priest class—which could keep her alive—she'd reluctantly made what she believed was the optimal choice at the time: become a Priest of War. A player who could fight and heal.

Beautiful in theory, harsh in reality. Although War did offer a variety of explosive offensive talents, for a Priest those talents were fundamentally limited by the class's base stats. No matter how strong the output, it could only go so far.

And so, frustrated, Ai Si had spent her time climbing the ranks while constantly searching for a way to overcome this handicap—until she found a contract on a battlefield. A contract that sold one's life to War.

The contract granted her combat power rivaling an ordinary Warrior's. Combined with War's talents, she truly achieved the balance of offense and defense she'd been seeking. But...

Every gift came with a price. And the contract's price was... her life.

While other players were enduring the grind, waiting for a future, Ai Si was burning through hers. She was borrowing against her own lifespan in exchange for present-day strength. In an era of increasingly brutal trials, this choice wasn't necessarily wrong—it just made her future ever more uncertain.

But Ai Si had no alternative. She could only shoulder the consequences of her choice and carve her way out, kill by kill, to stay alive.

Whether her lifespan would last until the Faith Game was cleared—that was a colossal question mark hanging over her head.

That was why she hoarded every life-saving item she could find. The hollow ache of having no future drove her nearly mad. For a long time, Ai Si had all but given up on the concept of "tomorrow."

After all, in this game, the majority of people had no future at all.

But the world wasn't always hopeless. One day, she'd stumbled upon the concept of a second faith—learned that the game allowed one to fuse an additional faith. Her sights immediately locked onto Death, the one faith that could prolong her life, and she began sprinting headlong toward faith fusion.

Indeed—Ai Si's original reason for going to San Dales had been to find a chance to fuse with Death. And now, she had that chance.

Even if her Road to Ascension score was zero. Even if her Ladder of Ascent had actually been docked points. None of it mattered—a god had already shown her a clear path!

All she had to do was recite Death's prayer, and perhaps the War Supervisor's future would begin today!

Without an instant's hesitation, Ai Si knelt on the floor and prayed with absolute devotion:

"Souls find rest, life—"

Before she could finish, a terrifying ripple from the Void tore her entire being from reality.

A snow-white bathrobe fluttered to the ground where she'd been. And then a bewildered little skull was swept into the endless Void.

...

The Void. Fishbone Hall—again.

This was Ai Si's first audience with a god. Though she'd imagined Their appearance countless times, the first sight of that colossal skull genuinely shook her to the core.

She didn't dare move a muscle, yet her entire body trembled where she stood.

The pitiful little skull rattled like it had a motor inside it, clattering relentlessly against the bone-white floor of the Fishbone Hall.

Of course, the fear didn't come from the visible enormity of the being before her—it came from the crushing divine pressure. The moment she registered that she stood before the true god who wielded dominion over every death in the universe, Ai Si's mind went blank, her consciousness buzzing, unable to form words.

While the small skull shivered, the colossal skull was studying her.

This was undeniably an utterly ordinary player. So ordinary that even though she harbored a devotion toward Death faith tinged with desire, she would never have drawn that Lord's attention in a crowd.

But the colossal skull had done a great deal of thinking after Zhang Jizu's departure. He'd sensed Deceit's intentions in a vague way, yet remained uncertain whether the other god had planted some hidden trick in this player. So He sat upon the Bone Throne, projecting absolute majesty, and asked His question:

"What, is, Death?"

The sudden question startled Ai Si witless. Only then did she realize she'd forgotten all decorum—she hadn't even greeted Death Himself, one of the sixteen true gods. Forcing down her terror, she managed in a trembling voice:

"Praise be—"

"What, is, Death?" The colossal skull's eyes didn't even kindle their green flames. He simply watched the mortal before Him with those hollow, bottomless sockets, repeating His question.

Ai Si panicked further. Being pressed by a god was not a good state to be in. Her mind was a churning mess—all her usual shrewdness and composure had vanished, and she had absolutely no idea what to say. But she wasn't stupid, so in a flash of inspiration she disassembled the Lord's own prayer and offered it back to Him.

"Great God, Death is the resting place of souls, the final chapter of life."

The colossal skull fell silent for a moment, offering no comment. Then He asked again:

"What, is, War?"

War?

As the situation stabilized, Ai Si's thoughts gradually cleared. Seeing that the Lord had raised no objection to her first answer, she played it safe and deconstructed War's prayer as well.

In the War Supervisor's mind right now, so long as she made no mistakes and committed no breach of etiquette, everything else could wait.

"Great God, War is the hymn woven of blood and flame—the sole path by which Civilization endures."

After her answer, the small skull raised its head anxiously toward the Lord upon the Bone Throne. But He...

"..."

'Too ordinary...'

A gleaming question mark seemed to hover in the colossal skull's empty eye sockets. This player was so ordinary it was almost impossible to believe she'd been planted with any hidden gambit.

So Deceit had sent her here just to prod Him into testing War?

What was He scheming now?

Was He still fixated on that battle when Order had led War into the Sea of Desire?

Did He think Order was the problem, or War?

Regardless of who had the problem, Death now understood one thing: it definitely had nothing to do with the ordinary player standing before Him. She was merely a verbal message delivered by Deceit—ordinary and inconsequential.

And so the colossal skull nodded and rumbled:

"Withdraw."

In the next instant, the entire Hall of White Bones surged into two separate torrents. One swept the dumbfounded Ai Si into the Void. The other, carrying an endless aura of Death, rolled toward the unknown depths of the Void.

He was going to inspect War personally. Even if it was just for show—a cursory greeting—it would serve as a response to Deceit.

But what He hadn't anticipated was that this path to War seemed to genuinely lead toward war.

Soon, in the fathomless silence of the deep Void, two voices rang out in succession.

"You're, looking, for, death?!"

"Seeking Death is itself a kind of looking for death but what a pity today the one who dies may be you are you prepared to welcome your own annihilation O great Lord of Death?"

...

Meanwhile, elsewhere.

Cheng Shi opened his eyes and found that he hadn't returned to the rest area. Instead, he'd appeared in a dimly lit space.

From the look of things, he was... still in San Dales?

And still inside the Joy Theater—on the stage itself, right behind the blood-red curtain!

Cheng Shi was stunned. He furrowed his brow and cautiously surveyed his surroundings. When he heard the clamor of a crowd beyond the curtain, his heart dropped. 'Where did this "audience" come from in a theater that fell into ruin ages ago?'

He stood still and listened for a while. Apart from the demands and shouts of anticipation from beyond the curtain, there was no other sound. After weighing his options at length, the Clown decided to investigate. He crept toward the curtain.

Only when he was at its very edge—ear pressed against the blood-red fabric, confirming once more that all the noise came from below the stage and there was nothing else up here—did a strange thought burst into his mind:

'These "audience members" are waiting for the clown to take the stage?'

"..."

Yes, he was indeed a clown—but who wrote this script, and why hadn't he gotten the memo?

Facing an unknown "audience," how was he supposed to just waltz out there?

So the ever-steady Cheng played it safe one more time. Instead of pulling back the curtain, he nervously pried open a tiny gap between the two halves and peeked through—

—and met countless pairs of expectant eyes!

The audience packed the Joy Theater to bursting. Even the aisles were jammed. Everyone was waiting for the show to begin. And the instant they noticed the curtain stir, the entire theater fell silent.

The audience held their breath, gazing at the stage—at the single, slightly embarrassed eye peeking out from between the curtains. They waited, anticipating what spectacular entrance was about to unfold. And in the next second, the clown behind the curtain yanked the drapes open, revealed himself in full, and stood there doubled over with laughter:

"Hee~

"You don't actually think there's a real show, do you?"

...

April 1st. Overcast sky, sunny heart.

Today was really, truly fun.

— Excerpt from "Who Knew Zhen Yi Keeps a Diary"

Chapter 873: Death vs Oblivion

No one could have predicted that at this particular juncture, Oblivion would appear here and block that Lord's path.

Opposition between faiths certainly existed, but after several eras, the gods had long ceased escalating their rivalries into overt confrontation—especially in this era, where the Convention safeguarded divine authority. No one saw the point in wasted effort.

Yet Oblivion had come anyway.

The instant He manifested, the entire Void began to peel, collapse, and then dissolve.

But the Void was already nothingness—so how could it dissolve?

What was happening looked more like someone had given form to nothingness, only to obliterate those tangible fragments of pitch-black existence into absolute annihilation.

The torrent of white bone was halted in this space. It spiraled twice before rapidly converging and crashing downward, and the Fishbone Hall materialized on the spot.

The colossal skull sat upon the Bone Throne, not even bothering to ignite its spectral flames. It merely surveyed the collapsing Void around it with cold indifference and let out a contemptuous snort:

"All, flash, no substance.

"You, are still, as fixated, as ever, on claiming, ownership, of the void. Utterly, laughable.

"If, even Oblivion, can no longer, bring about, oblivion, then you...

"What, reason, do you, have, to exist?"

With that, the Fishbone Hall stirred to life once more. From the countless bone pools flanking the spike-lined stairway beneath the Bone Throne, an endless swarm of chattering little skulls erupted, shrieking their Benefactor's divine name as they converged into raging streams. They shot outward in every direction, their bone-white bodies continuously patching the collapsing Void around them.

Oblivion, lurking beneath the Void's surface, offered no rebuttal. He simply kept devouring the ground beneath the Fishbone Hall, attempting to strangle His opposite through a siege of annihilation—snuffing out His rival here and now.

And so, the third god of Life and the third god of Descent collided head-on. The entire Void became their battlefield as they launched into a clash that could shake the very universe!

The scene was horrifyingly grand. The violent aftershocks alone—born from the collision and dispersal of masterless divinity as both sides strained against each other—were enough to annihilate every living thing in the space, withering them to ash.

Fortunately, no one was watching this battle. Even if someone had been, they would never have been dragged into the inescapable maelstrom of a God War.

Indeed—this qualified as a God War. A "war" between two diametrically opposed deities!

The colossal skull on the Bone Throne sat immovable as a mountain, seemingly unsurprised by this moment's arrival.

Ever since Cheng Shi had intercepted all those sacrifices meant for Oblivion on His behalf, the Lord had anticipated that Oblivion would not let the matter rest.

After all, faith was the foundation of a god's existence. Losing so many offerings at once would put anyone in a foul mood.

Of course, a minor embarrassment alone wouldn't have been enough to fully enrage a true god. But during the Void civil war, Oblivion had tried to fish in troubled waters—only to be counter-attacked by both masters of Void and then blocked at the "door" by Death's own scythe. That had been the moment Oblivion truly couldn't stomach.

Before the Void Era's descent, Oblivion had always regarded everything pertaining to "nothingness" as an extension of His own authority. After all, "annihilation" meant vanishing into formlessness.

But after Void descended, Oblivion realized that the territory He'd claimed as His own looked positively clownish in the face of Void.

This left Him both terrified and disoriented.

He'd believed His will had moved far beyond the Origin, yet in Void He saw a shadow of His own past convictions. So He could no longer be certain which will could truly bring Him closer to the Origin.

Indeed—Oblivion had originally been a pure member of the Approach Faction. But since Void's descent, He had changed.

Not only had He shifted His will from absolute annihilation to the creation of new life, He'd also exhausted every method to merge into Void—to reclaim His authority and influence.

Unfortunately, the two rulers of Void had no interest whatsoever in a "rigid and obsessive" "ancient god." When Oblivion came seeking cooperation, Fate met Him with cold eyes, and Deceit spent the entire time dripping with sarcasm.

And so Oblivion and Void—wills that should have drawn close—went their separate ways entirely. That was why, the moment He spotted the Void civil war, He'd charged in without hesitation.

Fishing in troubled waters didn't mean helping one side destroy the other. Under the Convention's protection, no god could fall at another's hand. The "fishing" was simply Oblivion's attempt to seize Void's authority during the chaos.

Unfortunately, He'd underestimated the bond between those two rulers of Void—and became the sole "underdog" of that melee.

Now, having found His opening, the final god of Descent—the terminal deity meant to drag the universe into annihilation—at last bared His fangs at His so-called opposite.

Every one of the sixteen true gods sat high upon their Divine Thrones and surveyed the cosmos. Perhaps not all of Them were as omniscient as Folly, nor possessed of Truth's supreme intellect, but with Their accumulated authority and divinity, They certainly weren't stupid. Could never be stupid.

Oblivion had long since noticed that His opposite was drawing ever closer to Void. He feared this was Void's alternative after having rejected Him. He feared that the era's masters planned to join forces with Death before the era's curtain fell, orchestrating something earth-shattering.

No one could read Deceit's mind. No one could decipher Fate. Oblivion couldn't determine whether this cataclysmic move was aimed at Him, so His only option was to strike first—divide and conquer.

And with Void seemingly fractured, now was one of the best possible moments.

He had the self-awareness to know that fighting two-on-one was impossible. Whether Void had truly split was unverifiable. But one-on-one... even if He couldn't annihilate His opposite entirely, making that old pile of bones feel pain would be enough.

Because He had already issued a simultaneous edict to all His followers: "Annihilate every follower of Death." All He needed to do now was pin down the old bones, keeping Him too occupied to protect His own flock. That would give Oblivion the decisive timing advantage in this quietly launched "war of faith," allowing Him to achieve both revenge for the countless lost sacrifices and a harvest of Death's believers.

If He could also gain the upper hand in this direct confrontation, then this deliberately provoked God War would end in Oblivion's absolute victory.

Oblivion needed this victory. Or rather, Descent as a whole needed it.

Corruption never showed His face. Decay wallowed in self-pity. This meant that Descent—which should have held the advantage after Prosperity's fall—had instead stagnated. Combined with Oblivion's own humiliating retreat before all the gods at Void's hands...

All of it was causing Descent's reputation to crumble among the pantheon.

So Descent needed an inspiring victory—and Oblivion needed a war to prove Himself!

The colossal skull felt the pressure from the perimeter intensifying rapidly. Pale green fire gradually kindled in those hollow eye sockets.

He halted the bone torrent's assault and addressed the opponent who never showed His true form:

"I, gave you, a chance, but you, did not, cherish it.

"Now, it seems, the Convention, must first, take custody, of your, authority.

"Oblivion!

"You had, best, annihilate, your own, authority, before, embracing death—otherwise..."

"You will, be utterly, defeated!"

With those words, a colossal scythe—forged from the fusion of countless divinities—materialized above the skull. And in that very instant, the perpetually invisible Oblivion tore Himself free from a world on the brink of annihilation and descended.

He did not come alone. Alongside Him plummeted countless worlds in the throes of disintegration.

Across the pitch-black Void, the ash of crumbling worlds scattered like dust in the wind while the embers of dying worlds cascaded like waterfalls. In that moment, the breath of annihilation erupted like a volcano, swallowing the entire space whole. Even the bone-white Fishbone Hall began to crack and dissolve under that apocalyptic aura...

But none of this was where the battle raged most fiercely. The truly terrifying, viscous essence of Oblivion had already latched onto that fearsome divine scythe. The annihilation-force of countless perishing worlds was attempting to strip away the scythe's divinity, piece by piece, and obliterate it on the spot!

His target had never been Death Himself—it was the most precious treasure in Death's possession!

"I sense your fear. So even the great Lord of Death knows fear? But tell me—whom is this fear directed at?"

"Whoever, it may be—it, is not, you."

The moment the words left His mouth, the Fishbone Hall detonated. In that instant, it was as though the gates of the abyss could no longer contain the infernal flames within. A torrent of searing green fire erupted from beneath the Bone Throne, raging outward, and in mere moments had incinerated every scrap of Void in sight.

Death brought true death to the Void.

Chapter 874: I'd Love to See If You Two Can Tear My Void Apart Today

The sudden clash was vast in scale, rivaling the earlier eruption during the Void civil war.

Yet even though these two had caused such an enormous disturbance in the Void, every other deity in the cosmos acted as though nothing had happened. Not a single one cast so much as a glance in this direction.

That was decidedly abnormal.

And when the two combatants realized this, the Void's disintegration suddenly froze. They ceased hostilities in perfect unison and cautiously surveyed their surroundings.

It was at precisely that moment that a supremely mocking snort echoed through the space. Then came that familiar, dripping sarcasm, reverberating across the entire Void:

"Oh my, keep going! Why'd you stop?"

"I'd love to see if you two can actually tear my Void apart today."

"..."

"..."

Anyone who heard those words knew exactly who had arrived.

Indeed—Deceit was here. Or rather, He had been here all along.

His creation, Mockery and Jeering, threaded through the Void like capillaries, allowing this god—who was constantly on the hunt for entertainment—to be first on the scene whenever fresh drama unfolded. This time was no exception.

Only this time He'd gone further. Not only had He secured front-row seats to the spectacle, He'd immediately shielded every ripple in this area, cutting off any possibility that others might catch wind of the fun.

It seemed He wasn't just here to watch—He intended to watch alone.

Of course, monopolizing entertainment wasn't truly His purpose. Since He'd appeared here as the Void's "host" and deliberately dampened every spatial fluctuation, well—in a corner unwatched by Order, who could say what disorderly things might occur?

The instant Deceit spoke, Oblivion—sensing a trap—immediately annihilated His own presence and attempted to flee.

But... He failed.

Because in that same instant, Deceit had scrambled perceptions, deceiving Himself into believing that He was Oblivion and the fleeing Oblivion was actually Deceit!

So in the moment Oblivion tried to erase His own traces, those still-closed stellar eyes flickered like a meteor crashing across the horizon—while the real Oblivion, stalled by the trick for one critical instant, lost the optimal window to escape.

Simultaneously, Death smelled opportunity. Brilliant light blazed in His eye sockets as green flames roared to life, coalescing into two enormous arms of tangible fire. They seized the hovering scythe and swung it at the trapped Oblivion.

The scythe—forged from countless fused divinities—screamed through the fractured Void, trailing horrifying ripples of warped space-time!

This strike carried the full weight of Death's will. A direct hit wouldn't kill the target, but it would shatter His authority, reducing Oblivion to a crippled state like Decay—powerless and broken, unable to pose a threat for a long time to come.

But just as the scythe descended upon Oblivion's head, Oblivion let out a derisive huff, neither dodging nor flinching. He charged straight into the blade!

"!!??"

'When things are this strange, there must be a hidden cause!'

A God War was never a simple contest of raw power. Behind every move the gods made lay depths that mortals could scarcely fathom.

If Oblivion dared to ambush them here, and then—under Deceit's interception—rushed headlong into death, it could only mean He had come fully prepared to "fall."

His earlier display of caution and his attempted escape had been nothing but a ruse. Their sole purpose may have been to bait out this exact moment!

A chance to die!

"This is bad—it's a trap!"

"Ha! Well played, Descent!"

Death—unable to pull back His strike—and the re-materialized Deceit cried out simultaneously. They watched as the colossal scythe blade cleaved through the center of those twin eyes—eyes churning with the ash of dying universes, endlessly collapsing inward.

Yet those eyes showed no frustration of defeat. They gleamed with the triumphant spark of a scheme fulfilled.

Because at the very instant Death's scythe split those eyes apart, a force of Decay potent enough to rot the entire universe detonated outward. Countless withered vines and putrid flesh erupted, spreading in

every direction, sealing the entire space into a prison of Decay—trapping both the skull upon the Bone Throne and a pair of stellar eyes that were no longer laughing.

One star within those celestial eyes dimmed and faded. Braving the raging tide of Decay, Deceit looked toward the epicenter of the explosion, the corner of His eye curling with contempt:

"Trading your own authority for Oblivion's authority—you wretched beggar. You don't actually think this brings you closer to the Origin, do you?"

"Now I see why Oblivion agreed to fuse with you. So it was for this."

"He wanted an extra life, and you happened to have a worthless one to spare..."

"Ha. A match made in heaven."

Decay couldn't respond to Deceit's mockery, because what had taken the hit here wasn't His true body—it was the surplus divinity He'd accumulated over who knew how many years.

He'd given this stockpiled divinity to Oblivion to craft a perfect replica of Himself. Then Oblivion had annihilated the stray traces of Decay's aura and used the double to launch a surprise attack on Death.

Decay had always intended to rot Himself. So regardless of the outcome, once Oblivion's enemies realized they'd gravely wounded Decay, they would never strike at Decay again—because any reduction of Decay's power only accelerated His approach toward the Origin.

Without certainty about what the Origin truly "favored," no god was willing to push another closer to It—especially not the members of the Fear Faction.

So Death and Deceit stayed Their hands. They didn't attack Decay's false body. Instead, They let this prison hold Them in place, watching helplessly as Oblivion escaped.

Of course, the "Oblivion" who'd fought here hadn't been the real one either. He'd merely used Decay's false body for a flawless disguise—not only probing the relationship between Void and Death, but also seizing the chance to trap both Death and Deceit.

And the real Oblivion, the moment He sensed opportunity had arrived, opened His eyes at last. He stepped out from countless worlds on the verge of annihilation, chuckled softly, tore through the Void, and descended before a certain unsuspecting target.

The colossal skull, foreseeing this outcome, watched His spectral flames flicker. He retrieved His scythe, gathered the scattered divinity, and stared at those stellar eyes with a complicated expression, sighing:

"Your answer, is him... Oblivion, guessed it too.

"Ever since He, lost His, grip, on, 'nothingness,' He, has been, endlessly, performing, acts of, annihilation, to satisfy, Himself.

"Now, He seizes, Void's, discord, to go, annihilate, the answer, you have, chosen.

"Fate, upon learning, that he, has drawn, close to, you, may not, shelter, him, as before.

"Cheng, Shi, is in, danger..."

The spirals within those stellar eyes reversed for a moment, casting off their gravity. Then they suddenly crinkled with an impish grin:

"Old Bones, what are you rattling on about? Answers, schmanswers—I don't understand a word you're saying.

"Could you maybe string together one complete sentence for once?"

"...Have you, already, set the, board in, motion, or do, you truly, not care?"

"Care about what?"

"Ha. One little follower—what's there to care about? I've got countless more just like him."

"Not one, of those, countless, followers, has ever, been graced, with a, Container."

"You... are, roasting him, over an, open flame."

"Tch—"

"Old Bones, whose follower is he, exactly? How come you care about him more than I do?"

"Don't tell me he's your Envoy too?"

"..."

The colossal skull's expression froze. The green flames in His eyes extinguished once more.

'Void... why hasn't it become void yet?'

Chapter 875: Fixed Destiny? Whose Fixed Destiny?

The scene fell silent. All that remained was the sound of withered branches and rotting flesh slowly decaying.

Before long—perhaps because staring at Old Bones in mutual speechlessness was too boring—those stellar eyes spoke with fading interest:

"Relax. My answer isn't him. I'm merely waiting for my Envoy to resurrect."

The colossal skull's gaze sharpened, and He immediately shook His head: "Void, has never, had, a Servant God, and you, have no, Envoy."

"Tch—

"Oh? Your opposite used to fancy himself master of nothingness, and now you're the Void's sovereign too?

"You think you understand Void better than I do?

"Old Bones, I think you're putting on airs in the wrong place."

The colossal skull ignored the Fun God's taunting. His gaze was grave: "I, bear, Death's, divine name, and wield, Death's, authority.

"Whenever a, god falls, half, of its, divinity, returns, to Me. Yet I, have never, received, even a, trace, of Deceit's, divinity. You, can never, deceive Me, on that, point.

"Therefore, this talk, of an Envoy, is pure, nonsense.

"I, may not, know, the details, of your, war, with Existence, but I, can state, with certainty, that in, that conflict—before, the Convention, was signed...

"No god, fell!"

"..."

Though Death's reasoning was airtight, the Fun God stubbornly retorted:

"Oh? Is that so?

"Even if I can't fool you, can't you fool yourself?"

"Deny my Envoy, then devour my authority. Old Bones, oh Old Bones—I thought we were allies, yet here you are plotting to stab me in the back?"

"Seems like you're not fearful enough."

The moment He heard the word "fearful," the Lord's gaze froze. By now, His dread of that particular word far exceeded His fear of that existence—especially when the word came from Deceit's mouth, which made it infinitely more terrifying.

The colossal skull offered no reply. Seeing the lack of response, Deceit let out a bored huff of amusement.

"I think you and that mute have a real connection. Why not just fuse with each other right here and now?"

"..."

Respond and get mocked. Stay silent and get ridiculed. As long as you were in His presence, sarcasm was guaranteed.

This was precisely why the gods despised the Fun God.

The colossal skull sighed inwardly. He stared at those stellar eyes for a long while, watching the corners crinkle higher and higher, the next jab clearly on its way. He was forced to speak first, steering the conversation with painfully stiff abruptness.

"Why, did you, have Me, probe, War?"

"Good question." Those eyes blinked twice, then playfully countered, "Then let me ask you—why wouldn't you probe War?"

"?"

'Is that even a coherent question?'

'Why would I probe Him for no reason?'

'I'm not even curious. And even if I were, I could restrain myself. Unlike certain people—'

The colossal skull's gaze froze, then turned solemn. "You're, still, scheming, against, Corruption!"

The Fun God grinned:

"How is this scheming against Corruption?"

"It's simply that the incident occurred in the Sea of Desire, so no matter how I investigate, there's no way around Him.

"Besides, He's not worth my attention anyway.

"What is worth paying attention to is what exactly happened when Order led War into the Sea of Desire.

"One of Them split into four. The other became meek as a lamb. Honestly, Old Bones—aren't you the least bit curious about what unspeakable things They got up to in that sea?"

At this, a glimmer flashed in the colossal skull's eyes.

The words were coarse, but the logic wasn't. Saying He wasn't curious would be a lie. Apart from the two gods directly involved, no one could not be curious about this.

But curiosity was one thing; sticking your nose in uninvited was another. Over the years, it wasn't as if no one had asked War about it, but War had never elaborated. He only ever repeated the same

refrain— "Dwelling on the past is pointless. Better to observe the order of the present." That curiously evasive attitude had even led several gods to suspect War had fractured like Order—splitting off a version that leaned toward His opposite, Silence: an "Autistic War."

But since no one had witnessed the incident firsthand, it all remained speculation.

Deceit had always believed there was entertainment buried in that incident, and He had never given up investigating. But His interest had never been as intense as it was now—so the colossal skull was also curious: what had He recently discovered?

"Probing, War, is fine, but you, must not, be so, reckless, as to, probe, Corruption.

"Though, My words, may seem, to bolster, Descent's, prestige, I must, warn you, nonetheless.

"Conduct, yourself, accordingly.

"Without, your, protection, he, cannot, guard, anything, you have, bestowed."

At these words, the spirals in those stellar eyes began to whirl rapidly.

"Ha. I thought my ally was concerned about me, but in the end, you're still fretting over my follower.

"Mm. Good thing I pulled the little bone pile into my ranks early on. Otherwise, when certain clowns defect, I'd really be in trouble, wouldn't I?"

"You—"

"Enough, Old Bones. Worry about yourself instead. At your age, things can't be easy. I hope you enjoy your chat with War.

"Oh, right—take your time with it. After all, helping Him rediscover the bloodlust of War benefits you too. At least when He goes on His old god-slaying rampages, you can follow behind and pick up scraps for another scythe.

"Win-win, isn't it?"

Seeing the colossal skull sink into exasperated silence, those stellar eyes erupted in laughter.

"Old age really is dreadfully boring. You're terrible at conversation. Whatever—I'm leaving.

"Just remember: don't badmouth my follower behind my back. Otherwise I'll come back and gossip about you."

With that, Deceit—who moments ago couldn't break out of this prison—simply vanished before Death's eyes.

Death's gaze sharpened. 'Deceit could have left at any time yet chose to stay. He clearly isn't afraid of Oblivion targeting a certain someone. Which means Void has probably reunited as one once more.'

'But if He opposes the Origin's will so blatantly, how can He possibly stand alongside Fate—that steadfast champion of the Origin?'

'Is the bond of shared path really that profound?'

Surely not. A shared path was nothing more than a label for an era. If it could truly bind a god's allegiance, then the Mother of Prosperity would never have died by her own hand...

The colossal skull couldn't figure it out. He brooded in silence for a long while, then raised His scythe once more and brought it down on a particular corner of the Decay prison. Though the cage continued to ooze the stench of rot, the blow failed to break it open—and instead only caused Decay's divinity within it to dim further.

Seeing this, Death withdrew His scythe and let out a long sigh.

"So, Zhen's, poison, works, swiftly. He truly, has, benefited, from, that power.

"However..."

The colossal skull raised His scythe and studied it at length. The fused divinities flowing across its blade shimmered like a rainbow—yet not a single thread of Deceit's divinity could be found among them.

This meant Yu Xi could not possibly have perished. Which in turn meant that the so-called Envoy Deceit spoke of had, in fact, never existed.

So was that employee of His... the future path Deceit intended to walk?

Fixed destiny... fixed destiny...

Was this the clown's fixed destiny, or Fate's fixed destiny?

Or was it Deceit's fixed destiny?

The colossal skull gazed toward a certain point in the Void, His eyes as fathomless as oblivion itself.

Chapter 876: Who Gave You the Nerve to Assimilate My Follower?

Meanwhile, elsewhere.

Time needed to rewind a bit—back to the moment right after the last trial ended.

Cheng Shi opened his eyes and found that he hadn't returned to the rest area. Instead, he'd appeared in a dimly lit space.

From the look of things, it seemed like...

The Void?

But why would there be light in the pitch-black Void?

And the faint illumination seemed to be coming from directly behind him.

'The stranger the scenery, the sooner the audience with a god.'

'Who would it be this time?'

Though Cheng Shi was well-practiced in the routine of divine audiences by now, his heart still clenched. His body instinctively moved to turn around and investigate, but the moment his muscles tensed he stopped himself, cautiously extending his senses to probe the surroundings instead.

And yet there was nothing abnormal. Perhaps the only abnormality was that it was far too quiet here—so quiet it felt like plummeting into true nothingness.

'Void?'

Gulp...

Cheng Shi swallowed nervously. 'Don't tell me the one standing behind me is my Benefactor who punished me and then stormed off—Fate?'

'And if He's standing silently behind me, does that mean He's angry again?'

'Angry at whom?'

'I've been on my best behavior lately. He can't still be angry at me...'

'...right?'

'Bad. My legs are going weak.'

Cheng Shi's brain spun at full speed, reviewing his every action again and again, scrutinizing his words, screening his behavior—terrified that he'd somehow committed another act of blasphemy that had provoked this easily-angered Benefactor.

But no matter how hard he thought, nothing came to mind. After a moment's deliberation, he decided to go on the offensive—lead with a "submissive attitude" and angle for a "lenient sentence."

Cheng Shi drew two deep breaths, instantly donned a flawless smile, then whipped around. Before he even saw who was in front of him, he launched into a ringing proclamation of praise:

"May Fate's... radiance... ever... shine... upon... the... world..."

He'd barely gotten a few words out before his throat felt as though a boulder had been pressed against it. Speaking became agonizingly labored—and it wasn't just his throat. His mouth, his nose, his ears all seemed bound by some eerie force, growing dull and unclear. Even his vision began to blur. The distinction between light and dark narrowed, his entire field of view slowly draining of color, fading to black and white—and even the boundary between black and white grew indistinct.

It was during this gradual loss of all five senses that the horrified Cheng Shi realized his body was rapidly stiffening. His muscles turned rigid and mechanical, his frame solidifying into something frozen and lifeless.

He finally understood that the being before him was not a Benefactor of Void at all. It was an enormous puppet he had never seen before—utterly lifeless, dangling in the Void.

He couldn't even perceive what the puppet was made of. He saw only a stiff figure floating lifelessly in the emptiness, staring at him vacantly, as though examining some secret.

Cheng Shi's heart seized. He thought he knew who was before him. But gradually, even the fear in his heart began to blur. Every sensation and emotion was rapidly being stripped from his consciousness.

Each thought felt like life's final note. Each moment of sluggishness was like the last reverberation of awareness.

A vibrant life was bleached into a lifeless thing by this terrifying silence—all vitality extinguished, down to the very last trace.

The laughing clown merged soundlessly into this space, becoming just one of the countless small puppets dangling before the impossibly vast marionette.

And so, Silence descended.

Indeed—this colossal puppet was one of Silence's many incarnations in the mortal world, for Silence was everywhere.

Silence was an exceedingly inscrutable god.

His followers knew only that they must practice His will, yet none truly knew what that will was. He never issued edicts, never offered guidance. He embodied His divine name through action alone, and so His followers emulated this behavior, maintaining silence as much as possible.

Certain chatty followers who silenced everyone else around them notwithstanding.

This was undoubtedly Cheng Shi's first audience with Silence, though calling it an "audience" felt generous, given that his senses were abandoning him. Beyond the faintest impression of the puppet lingering in the deepest recesses of his consciousness, nothing else remained. Nothing could remain.

This world seemed to no longer require expression—and yet this world was filled with expression everywhere.

Just as now. Just at this moment. As the clown was about to be thoroughly transformed into a puppet, a pair of utterly frigid eyes snapped open within the Void!

The instant They appeared, a freezing wind from nothingness shattered every puppet like bone-piercing steel needles, then erupted into piercing detonations.

Sounds rose and fell in cascading bursts, reverberating through the cosmos, filling this once-silent domain with the clamor of a world no longer at peace.

Those eyes glared at the largest puppet in this space with a gaze as cold as the arctic abyss, each word falling like frigid gales from the deepest chasm:

"Silence—who gave you the nerve to assimilate My follower?"

In this moment, the god who had once sheltered His follower with everything He had... seemed to have returned.

At His challenge, the entire Void began to flood with the colors of change—as though an indomitable hand had poured a bucket of kaleidoscopic paint from the sky, drenching every last shade of black and white in psychedelic brilliance.

Seeing this, the gigantic puppet raised its head with stiff, halting movements, gazing blankly at those furious stellar eyes. Then, at an imperceptibly slow pace, it began to retreat.

Clearly, Silence had no desire to oppose Fate. But His reactions were so glacially slow that it was impossible to tell whether He was withdrawing—or gathering strength for a counterattack.

Regardless, Fate had no intention of letting Him off. The enraged master of Void sealed the entire Void in the blink of an eye, then unleashed the same overwhelming force He'd displayed during the Void civil war. He detonated the ever-shifting power of Fate, dragging the entire space into Void's battlefield.

Yet no matter how wild Fate's power raged, every attack that drew near the puppet—each one laden with terrifying divinity—was transformed into harmless, docile wisps that drifted gently outward. The

storm from nothingness seemed to form a blank zone at the very center of the battlefield, creating a relatively safe buffer.

Every attack fell silent before Him.

"..."

Witnessing this, Fate fell silent too.

He knew this was the true nature of Silence. The other god never expressed, was never forced to express. Since the dawn of His existence, He had silently observed everything in the cosmos, unchanged through the turning of eras and the aging of epochs. Consistent from beginning to end.

Like an unyielding stone perched on a mountain peak or nestled in a valley floor—witness to countless upheavals, yet never eroded by any of them.

The world needs no expression. It didn't in the past. It won't in the future. This...

...was His will.

Chapter 877: Where Did All Your Courage Go?

The atmosphere turned peculiar.

The enormous puppet had initially been retreating, yet after weathering Fate's assault, He stopped—and began to slowly study the Fate before Him once more.

Everyone knew that Silence never pressed in close to unleash His power. No—He never pressed in close to observe.

Although He was an observer, He never interfered with His subjects during observation. But today's uncharacteristic pause looked, by every measure, like a wordless taunt issued after confirming the other party posed no threat.

'I'm right here, watching your impotent fury. What are you going to do about it?'

This provocation-like behavior undoubtedly infuriated a certain master of Void. A moment later, the entire Void froze.

Every tangible attack vanished. The Void stopped crumbling. The screaming wind fell silent. Even the kaleidoscopic haze of change faded from the surroundings as the world seemed to revert to black and white.

But did that mean He'd given up His assault?

No. Absolutely not!

Quite the opposite—this was the moment the true war horn was sounded!

Because Fate governed not only change and fixed destiny, but also misfortune and divergence!

So even if Silence could perpetually mute Fate's direct influence upon Him, the instant this master of Void tried to indiscriminately drag the entire universe into divergence...

"..."

Silence fell silent.

You simply couldn't reason with a madman.

As part of this universe, Silence knew He would not be spared when misfortune and change were about to dominate all of existence. So He turned to retreat once more.

Yet even so, His "withdrawal" remained agonizingly slow. He seemed to still be observing.

Then, at that very moment, a certain someone who'd caught the scent of entertainment suddenly descended into this stretch of Void. He opened His eyes atop His sibling god's head—and the instant Silence glimpsed those stellar eyes...

The puppet vanished!

Gone on the spot. Instantly.

His reaction was blindingly fast, His movements razor-sharp—an utterly different creature from the three-steps-and-a-backward-glance figure of moments ago. It was as if "God" had suddenly unmuted a silent video. Silence was ripped from this stretch of Void without leaving a single trace.

Decisive. Bold. Absolute.

The moment Silence's power disappeared, the clown who'd nearly been turned into a puppet snapped his eyes open, threw his head back, opened his mouth wide, and gasped desperately. His chest heaved with nameless terror—but also with the exhilaration of surviving the unsurvivable.

That exhilaration evaporated almost instantly, however, because the clown discovered that his two Benefactors had, at some point, squared off against each other in this Void.

Those two pairs of eyes—one perpetually mischievous, the other cold as frost—glanced sidelong at each other, each apparently deeming the other unworthy of a direct look.

'Hss—'

'My Benefactors rescued me?'

'One after the other, or together?'

'Had They... made up?'

Cheng Shi couldn't be blamed for fixating on this—it was critically important. It determined how to even begin addressing two Benefactors at once.

In a situation like this, one wrong word was all it took. Repeated blasphemy at worst earned him a round of sarcasm, but spilling water when carrying two full cups meant...

...he might as well reroll a new account.

So Cheng Shi watched the standoff anxiously. Seeing that neither was paying the other any attention, he guessed Their relationship hadn't thawed. But if his two Benefactors were at odds, what was he—the unwitting "beneficiary"—supposed to do?

After much deliberation, Cheng Shi decided to ignore the details, deliberately blur the question of allegiance, and open with a barrage of praise across the board.

At the very least, he had to project one clear message: no matter how the two of You don't get along, this follower is devout.

But just as he'd finished composing his speech and was about to showcase his gratitude and devotion, the Fun God spoke first.

Same old dripping sarcasm.

"What—the mute summons you just once, and you're already eager to offer him your devotion?"

"Being an observer is fun, is it?"

"Looks like being a puppet is more appealing than being a clown."

"..."

'Hold on—isn't Your ability to roast people in real time a bit overpowered? Doesn't that need a nerf?'

Cheng Shi's "devout" expression froze on his face. He looked at the Fun God awkwardly, mouth opening to protest, but before the words could leave his throat, the other Benefactor spoke.

"How My follower conducts himself is not for others to judge. His devotion is none of your concern.

"Deceit, you should not be here.

"Void's accord merely proves that change must ultimately converge upon fixed destiny. The gaze you have cast upon him will bear witness to this final act.

"Before My wrath reaches you—leave. Go find your entertainment."

"..."

At these words, the Fun God hadn't even reacted yet before Cheng Shi's mind went blank.

He blinked rapidly at his other Benefactor, sensing that today's Fate felt somehow different from before.

He seemed colder. And more... resolute.

As for what exactly He was resolute about, Cheng Shi hadn't figured out yet.

But just because he couldn't see through it didn't mean Deceit couldn't. Noticing that Fate seemed to have forgotten something, the Fun God's gaze first sharpened, then His eyes crinkled with spreading mockery.

"I really shouldn't be here, but I'm afraid my entertainment is right here.

"Fate truly is the essence of Void—your capacity for self-deception dwarfs even mine.

"Take notes, little clown. I told you your other Benefactor is a better liar than me. See it now?"

Though the Fun God was snarking gleefully, Cheng Shi genuinely couldn't tell where Fate had been self-deceptive. He glanced at those laughing eyes, puzzled, then turned to those cold ones. Truthfully, if the expressions within the two pairs weren't so utterly different, their appearance alone made them impossible to tell apart.

Seeing his Benefactor Fate merely staring at Deceit in icy silence without speaking, curiosity got the better of Cheng Shi. He mustered his courage and ventured a question:

"What did my Benefactor deceive about?"

The question was deliberately vague. Both of Them were his Benefactors, and both were capable of deception, so while the words sounded like he was piggybacking on the Fun God's accusation, if you parsed them carefully, there was wiggle room for interpretation.

Cheng Shi had finally learned his lesson. No matter how curious he was, he didn't dare ask pointed questions in front of two Benefactors whose mood was this strange. All he could do was probe sideways and take the roundabout path.

Yet no one acknowledged his question. The Fun God chuckled softly, eyes filled with nothing but amusement. It was Fate who deigned to glance at Cheng Shi, let out a cold snort, and directly whisked His follower away from the scene. At the same time, He left one parting warning for His sibling god:

"Fixed destiny cannot be defied. Conduct yourself accordingly."

Watching His follower being carried off by Fate, Deceit wasn't the least bit annoyed. Instead, He burst into uproarious laughter right where He stood.

"What a fine 'fixed destiny cannot be defied'..."

"Yes, your fixed destiny cannot be defied—but mine? That's another story.

"Dear little sister, I'll grant you this: you're talented at writing scripts. But have you considered that how the play is performed might not be up to the Screenwriter—but up to the actors?

"Ha. What a coward. You don't even have the courage to face yourself.

"Where did all your courage go?"

With that, those stellar eyes let out a contemptuous snort and glanced toward the distant nothingness, where it seemed another battle had erupted within the Void.

Chapter 878: Farewell, Fate

When Cheng Shi opened his eyes again, he stood awkwardly in the void, not daring to make a sound.

Good news — he'd escaped the Fun God, so at least he didn't have to worry about being double-teamed.

Bad news — his other Benefactor was still here, and those eyes were growing colder by the second. He'd probably be slapped with another pile of blasphemy charges.

Why had He become so frigid? Could it be related to the container Cheng Shi had just obtained — the one tainted with the colors of Deceit?

Cheng Shi lowered his gaze, trembling.

The last trial had undeniably tipped the scales of his Void faith slightly toward Deceit, so until he figured out how to package his covetousness for that container, he didn't dare break the silence first — lest he hand someone ammunition against him.

But standing at attention under the Benefactor's scrutinizing gaze was terrifying in its own right, so Cheng Shi decided to butter Him up first.

Flattery never hurt anyone — surely a simple greeting couldn't go wrong.

"Praise be to You, great—"

"You want to become a god?"

Before Cheng Shi could finish, those cold eyes spoke up and cut him off with that question.

Cheng Shi froze in place, blinking in bewilderment.

"...?"

He had a nagging feeling that the Benefactor's words carried a hidden meaning — it sounded like an open scheme.

If he said yes — he didn't actually want that. The Clown merely wanted enough power to protect himself under the gods' watch. Of course, if he could deceive Them, that kind of power could also be "cashed in" for "special tricks" — like the kind the Fun God had promised him.

But if he said no... 'Benefactor, if I say no, You won't confiscate the container I found, will You?'

Absolutely not!

Cheng Shi tightened his collar, terrified that the Benefactor might reach directly into his coat. He pondered for a moment, eyes darting, and suddenly had an idea.

"Benefactor, I believe You've misunderstood.

I didn't obtain it out of greed, nor to become anything. I simply couldn't bear to see something connected to You — ahem — connected to Void left abandoned out there, suffering in loneliness. That's why I retrieved it and am temporarily holding it in safekeeping.

I know You two are both very busy, so I'm honored to serve in the role of custodian.

Of course, if You also have something similar that's been misplaced somewhere..."

Cheng Shi swallowed hard. Seeing no displeasure in those eyes before him, he carefully continued.

"I will retrieve it for You at the first opportunity and keep it safe.

Rest assured — as long as it's with me, no one will ever take it.

I swear on my devotion to You!"

"..."

Fate's expression turned peculiar at this speech. The ice in His gaze thawed slightly, though beneath it lingered an essential coldness. He studied the follower He had chosen, then asked in a low, measured voice:

"You want the container of Fate as well?"

"May I?" Cheng Shi's eyes went wide, but he immediately shrank back and said, "No, no, no — Benefactor, what I mean is, would I have the honor of recovering Your lost relic for You?"

"Hmph. You reek of Him. Far too strongly." Those eyes let out a cold snort, their tone returning to its emotionless calm. "You need not search for it — you've already found it."

Already found it?

When?

Where?

Cheng Shi was baffled. He combed through every memory, sifting for anything remotely connected to Fate, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't recall a single item that bore even a passing resemblance to a container. He raised his head blankly, confused.

"Benefactor, please forgive my ignorance. After all, I am far removed from Memory and not particularly skilled at recollection. So if I may humbly ask — when exactly did I, Your most devoted follower, find the container of Fate?"

Those eyes gazed coldly down at Cheng Shi, unmoved by his honeyed words, and offered no direct answer. Instead, He posed a new question.

A lethal question.

"You so often proclaim your devotion. Very well — prove it to me.

Cheng. Shi. Would you keep the container of Deceit, or possess the container of Fate?"

"???"

Cheng Shi blurted out without thinking: "Can't I just have bo—"

But he quickly swallowed the rest of the sentence, then pivoted mid-thought.

"Benefactor, what I mean is — I feel I'm capable of safeguarding two containers. So please, rest easy. Besides, we're all family under Void. As a walker of Void, it's only right that I contribute what I can."

The words came out with absolute conviction — even Cheng Shi himself had never felt so devout.

But his sophistry earned him not Fate's approval, only an endless, frosty stare.

"Greed has never belonged to Void."

"It does now, Benefactor. It does now." Cheng Shi dropped the hint with everything he had. "Corruption never refuses anything, so in the era of Void, greed can belong to Void."

"..."

The remark silenced Fate entirely — a silence more profound than even Silence itself could impose.

Within those eyes, the unmistakable iridescence of Void had already bloomed, impossible to conceal. Yet He still replied with cold detachment:

"Even if greed does belong to Void, it is not for you to decide.

You... never mind."

He let out a soft sigh, and His gaze finally softened.

"A mortal cannot hold different containers. I know your mind, but you may choose only one.

Fixed Destiny, or Change? Cheng. Shi. Answer with your devotion."

With that, those eyes fixed on Cheng Shi and spoke no more.

Under that gaze, heavy as a mountain, the Clown felt the pressure crash over him.

'It's over — this really is a death question.'

Cold sweat poured from Cheng Shi. Under the Benefactor's stare, his mind spun frantically. He knew that right now, he absolutely could not choose from the options given — because "blaspheming" either of Them would be a grave sin.

But there were only two choices. Even if he refused to pick, what then?

The answer was simple: stall.

Whether by playing dumb, feigning ignorance, or deflecting with tangents — as long as he could grind this fatal loyalty question down into a mere attitude problem, he'd have a shot at weathering the current crisis.

Cheng Shi didn't know what had happened to his Benefactor, but he could sense that Fate had changed — become different from before.

What had triggered his transformation? The civil war within Void? Or had He already parted ways with the Fun God entirely over the question of Origin?

Cheng Shi might not be able to play dumb before a deity who perceived the very essence of the universe, but he could still ask questions. He had so many doubts swirling in his mind — surely it was reasonable to clear them up before making such a pivotal choice?

As long as he could stall past this window, he refused to believe that the leader of the Fear Faction would ignore the plight of its sole remaining member.

So after a brief brainstorm, Cheng Shi forcibly set aside Fate's question, steeled his courage, and looked up.

"Benefactor, before I choose, I have a few questions..."

"Speak."

Cheng Shi's heart clenched. He kept reassuring Brother Mouth — yes, reassuring Brother Mouth — because his next question was directly related to Brother Mouth. No, more precisely, it was related to Yu Xi.

'Brother Mouth, buddy... I'm at death's door here. As my brother, you don't mind taking a hit for me, right?'

In any case, the Fool's Lips couldn't openly contradict Cheng Shi here. So when Cheng Shi saw its silent acquiescence, he tested the waters.

"Benefactor, do You... know about Yu Xi?"

...

Chapter 879: Void Has No Servant Gods, and Neither He Nor I Have Ever Had Envoys

Those cold eyes suddenly deepened for a moment, and then the specks of starlight within them flickered slowly, spiraling as He spoke:

"If that is what you wish to ask, I can grant you an answer.

Void has no Servant Gods. Neither He nor I have ever had Envoys."

"Never had Envoys..." A sharp glint flashed through Cheng Shi's eyes. He felt he was about to grasp something crucial, but being the cautious person he was, he pressed further. "Are You certain?"

"Are you questioning the nature of Void, or are you questioning the authority of Fate?"

A bone-chilling wind suddenly seeped through the void. Cheng Shi shivered in fright and hurriedly shook his head.

"No, no, no — Benefactor, I misspoke. What I mean is, could it be possible that Deceit... does have an Envoy, only He used His authority to conceal it from You?"

"Impossible!" Fate's denial was absolute and resolute.

Honestly, regardless of Cheng Shi's intentions, his questioning already bordered on open blasphemy — he was blaspheming a ruler of this era to His face.

But fortunately, this ruler showed him extraordinary tolerance. He not only forgave His follower's blasphemy but also, in that emotionless manner, explained the difference between the appearance and essence of Void.

"Appearances can deceive everyone, but they can never blind the truth of essence.

I know Him, and I know Void even better. Even if Void truly had a Servant God, even if He had a follower who possessed Status, that person would absolutely not be the Yu Xi you speak of..."

At this point, those eyes glanced at Cheng Shi without joy or sorrow, then coldly shifted away.

"He was indeed His first follower, but he made the wrong choice. When he could have earned His recognition, he strayed onto the wrong path and missed the glory he should have had.

I have perceived them gathering toward you. They've probably realized the problem and found their way back to the right path — but it is too late. And this so-called 'right path' is merely another illusion He crafted for the universe."

"Then what is it that You wish to create?" Cheng Shi asked, brow furrowed as he struggled to digest these incomprehensible riddles. All the while, he quietly reassured Brother Mouth, praying it wouldn't blurt out any fatal rebuttals at this critical moment — and then he suddenly fired off the question.

"?" Those cold eyes paused briefly. Looking at this admirably bold follower, He let out a cold snort. "Your questions today are very daring."

Cheng Shi quickly lowered his head and said with utmost piety:

"It is Your tolerance that emboldens my courage.

Benefactor, I have already learned much about Him, and I know that Your concept of Fixed Destiny is connected to that Him. A doubt has been buried deep in my heart for a long time, one I shouldn't be voicing now...

But I believe the choice You've given me is extremely important. So to ensure my decision is sufficiently careful, I must gain a deeper understanding of this doubt — to guarantee that Fixed Destiny under Fate's gaze has not been contaminated by the randomness of Deceit.

I wish to trade my devotion for an answer..."

The moment Cheng Shi's words fell, the entire void could no longer contain its seething, hallucinatory splendor, billowing forth the appreciative will of a certain Void deity.

The first half of his speech had undeniably earned Fate's extreme approval. Fixed Destiny marching steadily along its destined path made those eyes quite pleased. The chill in His gaze receded, and He spoke again, succinct as ever:

"Speak."

"Then please forgive my boldness, Benefactor.

From my humble mortal perspective, the Faith Game is a pasture of devotion bestowed upon humanity by the gods, where the piety of the masses flourishes unchecked.

And the Ladder of Ascent is the pilgrim's stairway leading the faithful toward the divine thrones. So the Road to Ascension... may I understand it as the ultimate goal of this game — the final 'sacrifice' that the gods are crafting for Him?"

This time, Cheng Shi truly laid his cards on the table. For the first time, he spoke openly about Him before his own Benefactor — even bringing up the gods' "conspiracy."

It wasn't that having the container gave him confidence. Rather, he'd suddenly sensed that Fate — having undergone some kind of transformation — had become even more unshakably certain of so-called Fixed Destiny, exuding an almost careless conviction that transcended details.

This shift gave Cheng Shi an opening to pry into the secrets of the gods and the Convention, so he asked — forcing those last two words out from between clenched teeth.

Fate, who had moments ago shown hints of appreciation, turned cold once more upon hearing those final two words. He stared straight at Cheng Shi, His voice like a frigid wind from the deepest abyss.

"That is what you think?"

"It's not up to me, Benefactor. It's up to You... and the gods."

Before Cheng Shi could hear the Benefactor's reply, Brother Mouth responded first — inside his mind.

"Sigh... I really don't want you to die, but you're seriously trying to get me killed here..."

Hearing that, Cheng Shi's heart lurched, and he instantly realized he had crossed the line entirely.

But fortunately, those eyes before him merely studied Cheng Shi coldly for a moment without taking action. Then He looked away, gazing toward the distant emptiness of the void with unfathomable depth.

"Faith has nothing to do with sacrifice. Offering is itself devotion.

To approach Him is to approach the essence of the universe. This is not a wrong path — it is a blessing."

"..."

Cheng Shi was stunned.

Although Fate's words dripped with piety, Cheng Shi still caught the absurd truth buried within that terrifying devotion.

His guess had been entirely correct — the gods were using this game to craft something that would please Him — a "sacrifice" for Origin!

The good news was that Wei Mu held the top rank on the Road to Ascension. If a "sacrifice" was needed, that Behind-the-Scenes Puppeteer would be first in line. Cheng Shi's own score was light-years from the so-called summit.

But the bad news was that these two Void ancestors seemed to hold very different views on the "sacrifice," and their method of selecting it probably had nothing to do with some score.

As for which lucky soul They had Their eyes on...

Tsk. What a real brain-teaser.

Cheng Shi's face drained of color. He could only hope that this so-called "sacrifice" wasn't the kind of sacrifice he was imagining. Even if it was...

Deceit was manageable — as the leader of the Fear Faction, His stance toward Origin was more about sabotaging this laughable "ritual." Whether the "sacrifice" would survive once the farce ended depended on whether He was in the mood to leave a contingency plan.

But Fate...

Cheng Shi saw it clearly now. The meaning of Fixed Destiny was this: when he was finally bound to that sacrificial pillar, the one who would personally light the fire would undoubtedly be this "cold" Benefactor standing before him.

His protection had perhaps never been about anything else — it was all to ensure the completion of that predetermined "offering" to Origin!

Of course, He wouldn't see Himself as cold. He would see it as guiding His follower closer to the universe's most magnificent Origin.

This follower should even be... grateful.

A nameless terror suddenly surged from the depths of Cheng Shi's heart. He no longer dared to look at the eyes before him, and instead began wondering why the Fear Faction's Benefactor hadn't come to rescue him yet.

But even though he refused to look at Fate, Fate never stopped watching him. He perceived the essence of the universe and naturally knew what Cheng Shi was thinking. He gazed at Cheng Shi and spoke without joy or sorrow:

"I understand His rebellion. But the essence of that rebellion is not an expression of His own will — it is merely Him seasoning the monotony of past eras.

All things begin with Origin, and all things end with Void. Even though He split the authority of Change from my grasp, Fixed Destiny remains in my hands. Nothing will change.

Cheng. Shi. Before Him, you should feel not fear, but greed.

For it will be this universe's closest opportunity to approach Him."

'Sure enough, I should be grateful.'

'Hah. Grateful my a—'

In that moment, the Fool's Lips used every ounce of its strength to stop Cheng Shi's suicidal outburst. But while it could restrain his mouth, it couldn't restrain his heart.

'Now I see it clearly — Void was never united. Fate, You really are a piece of—!'

'From beginning to end, never once changed!'

...

Chapter 880: The God Who Came to Save Him

"So... why me?"

After a long silence between mortal and deity, Cheng Shi raised his head and asked the question, his expression complicated.

He had asked this question of Memory, and of Deceit. Memory had told him it was because the ruler of the Void era chose him, which made all the gods take an interest. Deceit had told him He didn't choose Cheng Shi — He chose Himself.

Now the question fell upon Fate. The spirals within those eyes paused for a moment. He gazed at Cheng Shi with something slightly less than cold detachment, and after a long silence, spoke slowly:

"Because of Fixed Destiny. I did not choose you — Fixed Destiny resides within you."

"But Benefactor, isn't Fixed Destiny Your authority?!" Cheng Shi didn't understand. He stared wide-eyed, demanding an explanation — and then it hit him what Fate's words truly meant.

Fixed Destiny was indeed Fate's authority, but that authority had been... bestowed by Origin!

So the true source lay with Origin?!

He was the one who chose me??

At this thought, a terror far greater than before surged and boiled within Cheng Shi's heart. In that moment, he finally experienced the true horror of facing Origin, and never before had he felt so close to the Fun God.

The Fear Faction existed for a reason. No one enjoyed being targeted for no apparent cause.

Cheng Shi's face went deathly pale, drenched in cold sweat. He didn't dare think about anything related to Him, terrified that his wandering thoughts might draw an unknown gaze upon him. All he could do was silently pray for the Fun God to come and take him away — away from this Benefactor who was becoming an ever more fervent member of the Approach Faction: Fate.

Yet the other member of the Fear Faction offered no response, and Cheng Shi's heart slowly sank.

But things took a turn.

Perhaps because Fate had always been protecting His follower, or perhaps because the road to Fixed Destiny was inherently riddled with change — just as Cheng Shi was frantically wishing to escape this suffocating void, his savior truly arrived!

But it wasn't Deceit. It was...

Oblivion!

Oblivion, who had been waiting for an opportunity, materialized in the void without hesitation, dragging along His countless collapsing worlds as He appeared before Cheng Shi.

But before He could obliterate this favored child of Void and please Himself, He was imprisoned by an endless torrent of frigid Void wind, frozen in the space barely an arm's length from Cheng Shi.

In that instant, Fate's gaze turned to ice. He looked at Oblivion, who had suddenly appeared, and issued the most cold and contemptuous disdain in all the universe:

"Who gave you the courage, Oblivion?"

Oblivion?!

Cheng Shi, his thoughts in chaos, hadn't even noticed the change in the void. Only when he heard his Benefactor's voice did he jerk his head up — and came face to face with a pair of eyes barely inches away, churning with the ashes of the cosmos, collapsing infinitely inward.

This was Oblivion?

Was He here to save him?

The thought had barely formed before Cheng Shi caught the mockery gleaming in those deep eyes. No — something was wrong!

He wasn't here to save anyone. He was here to... kill!

'Shit — Oblivion wants to kill me?!'

Why?

Cheng Shi was stunned. The pressure of a deity at arm's reach was too overwhelming. In that instant, the peak of terror completely shattered the Clown's reason, and his body moved on pure instinct.

His left hand shot forward, unleashing a bolt of Lightning Punishment fueled by his own fear straight at Oblivion. Simultaneously, his right hand snapped, activating the entangled power of Fate and Time, teleporting himself back to the space where Silence had nearly turned him into a puppet.

The sequence was seamless and fluid. Had it played out in a trial, anyone watching would have had no choice but to applaud.

But unfortunately, Cheng Shi wasn't facing a player, let alone an NPC — he was facing a true god.

His tricks, in the eyes of a true god, were as absurd as a clown's slapstick. That tiny flash of lightning was nothing more than a spotlight illuminating the Clown's exit. This mantis-trying-to-stop-a-chariot resistance served no purpose beyond entertaining the audience.

The problem was, neither of the two present found any of it funny.

Fate had been cold since time immemorial, rarely smiling at anything beyond Fixed Destiny. His lack of laughter was perfectly normal.

As for Oblivion...

He couldn't laugh.

Or rather, no one in His position could have. Because what had just happened was unmistakable — a mortal had just "declared war" on a true god with some laughable attack!

This pathetic clown had the audacity, in the presence of a true god, to challenge another true god's authority!

What manner of blasphemy was this?!

In the untold millennia of eras past, no mortal being had ever dared do anything as insane as what Cheng Shi had just done.

A mortal had fired a bolt of thunder at a true god — and that thunder even carried the essence of Death, an opposing faith!

How dare he?

Oblivion was so enraged it was almost comical. For a brief moment, He suddenly understood why Deceit had chosen this particular player. The man probably suited Deceit's taste perfectly — his behavior even had a certain flair reminiscent of the god Himself.

But a mortal having the nerve to provoke Him like this undeniably inflamed Oblivion's already hostile feelings toward Void. He shattered Fate's shackles and attempted to obliterate the Clown once and for all in the emptiness of the void.

However, Fate would never allow anyone to break His Fixed Destiny. And so, a new war erupted in the void.

This time, the scale dwarfed even the Void civil war.

Swaths of infinite blackness peeled away. The interior of Void was revealed and then buried again. The power of Fate flowed thick as stellar plasma, threatening to solidify the entire space into eternity, while the breath of Oblivion raged in all directions, disintegrating everything solid into ash.

The two divine forces entwined and annihilated each other. Stray, masterless divinity exploded and buzzed. What had begun as sparks of conflict caught fire in an instant, erupting into an apocalyptic blaze that nearly dragged the entire universe down with it.

In that moment, the gaze of every single one of Them turned toward this place.

The standoff ground on. Oblivion's strategy had always been speed. He knew Decay's prison wouldn't hold those two for long, so the moment He realized He couldn't obliterate Void's favorite under Fate's watch, His expression darkened rapidly.

"Void is full of madmen! You and Deceit have clearly already split — why are you still protecting His follower? He wants to distance himself from Origin, yet you tirelessly draw closer to Him! I'm doing you a favor, and now you're stopping me? Fate, have you lost your mind?"

Fate let out a cold snort, said nothing, and simply intensified the pressure.

"..."

Oblivion fell silent.

You simply couldn't reason with a madman.

Deceit had never gone this far for His follower, but Fate... it was as though someone had stepped on a dragon's reverse scale. He looked like He was prepared to keep Oblivion here no matter the cost.

Under the Convention's protection, Oblivion wasn't afraid of tangling with Fate. The problem was — due to the inheritable nature of the Convention's authority restrictions — He had to be wary. If other gods caught a whiff of opportunity and descended on this place, would they fish in muddied waters the way He himself had just done? Or would they, like Truth, use a "perfectly justified" imprisonment to carve away at His authority?

After all, Oblivion still had an Envoy out there to worry about.

So when He sensed the spatial fluctuations around them growing ever more violent, with someone already attempting to descend, Oblivion had no choice but to swallow his defeat through gritted teeth — a failed "assassination" of a mere mortal — and turn to leave.

But Fate had no intention of letting Him go. He had been enraged by this "dishonorable" intruder who dared to break Fixed Destiny. He set aside everything, chased after Oblivion, and in the heat of pursuit, issued a divine edict to all of Fate's followers:

Sever Oblivion's destiny!

For Fate's players, this was an inconceivable edict. How could a mortal sever the destiny of a true god?

But if the edict existed, then the problem wasn't with the Benefactor's command — it was with their own understanding.

And so, in an instant, the zealous followers eager to fulfill the edict turned their eyes toward every Oblivion follower in the trials — just as Oblivion's followers were, at that very moment, secretly plotting against Death's faithful.

A war of faith suddenly erupted within the game, in the strangest way imaginable.

