

## The Gods 881

### Chapter 881: The Gods Who Watched

The chase through the void continued.

Amusingly, Oblivion could have easily retreated into His own world to escape Fate's pursuit in the present reality — but He didn't. Instead, He kept expanding the conflict's impact across the void, dragging nearly its entirety into the battlefield.

One by one, the gods descended, once again cleaning up the mess left by this eruption in the void. They couldn't allow the universe to collapse, so they had no choice but to join forces and contain the battle's fury.

Meanwhile, the instigator of it all — Oblivion — wove through the void beneath all their gazes, fending off Fate while simultaneously gauging the attitudes of the others.

He was not a pure Approach Faction member. After the authority related to Void had been claimed by Void's own, His desire to approach Origin had cooled.

But neither was He a member of the Fear Faction. He knew everything He had come from Origin — a fundamental truth He could neither refuse nor change. So He had become a self-entertainer who practiced the will of Oblivion, pleasing Himself and incidentally fulfilling Origin's expectations for Oblivion.

Of course, He also harbored a grand ambition similar to the Prosperity Mother's: He hoped the universe at the end of the era would march toward total oblivion — that the curtain would fall upon Oblivion and not upon the Void that no longer belonged to Him.

Challenging the era's dominant ruler was dangerous, so He needed suitable allies. At first, Descent had been His support and Existence His target. But as time wore on, Descent fractured and crumbled into true descent, while Existence itself ceased to exist, drawing ever closer to Void. This shift had nearly "obliterated" all of His hopes.

He often wondered who was directing this script that so clearly favored Void. Fate and Deceit, one openly and one from the shadows, had threaded events together to push the situation to this point.

Would Void's authority expand in the next era after this one ended? Would His own authority be nibbled away once more?

Oblivion couldn't help but think this way, because that was exactly how His authority had been acquired — and exactly how it had been divided.

Origin's appearance was always a summation of the previous era. If the coloring of Void grew too heavy this time around, then when the next era dawned, no one could predict what kind of result His commentary on this era might produce.

Oblivion didn't want to stand still and become an old god wallowing in a bygone era. He felt He had to make a move in this one — and obliterating the "sacrifice" that Void had been crafting was undeniably the best way to both please Himself and offer something to Origin.

After all, Void's offering was an offering, and Oblivion's offering was equally an offering.

So He waited — waited for the day He could confirm who the true "sacrifice" of Void really was.

Until... a player named Cheng Shi obtained the container that Deceit had hidden during a trial. That was the moment Oblivion decided the time had come.

So He struck. And then He failed — and the "sacrifice" had even blasted Him point-blank with a little firework.

Of course, the failed operation had nothing to do with that "sacrifice" and everything to do with the hot-tempered Fate chasing behind Him. What He truly couldn't understand was this: the player called Cheng Shi was doing everything in his power to defy destiny. Why, then, did he still receive Fate's gaze and favor?

It was precisely for this reason that He began searching among the spectating gods for others who couldn't comprehend this behavior either. He hadn't hurried off because He wanted to identify potential "allies" among the remaining Them.

And so, both participants and spectators were observing.

The first to descend at the battlefield's periphery was a pair of eyes smeared with the white miasma of Chaos. He merely glanced at the fight, left behind a contemptuous remark — "Pointless foolishness, a waste of time" — and departed.

Then Birth, Truth, War, and Chaos descended in succession. Even Silence, who had just been scared off by Deceit, returned once more, locking His gaze onto Fate.

He seemed very interested in this Fate.

Yet no matter how enormous the commotion the two combatants caused, none of the others intervened. They simply maintained the void in silence, propping up the space that was on the verge of shattering, preventing the universe from collapsing.

During the standoff, Truth turned His blazing gaze upon Birth and asked a question that bewildered the others.

"Birth, is your devotion still devout?"

What kind of question was that?

Was there anyone in this universe who would question Birth's devotion?

As long as even a single species continued to exist, it could be counted as proof of Birth's piety. After all, He was the prelude to life, the origin of all things, the first true god acknowledged by Origin, and the universally recognized, unquestioned member of the Approach Faction.

Yet Birth's Divine Pillar offered no answer to Truth's question. He merely silently radiated the aura of Birth, which was enough to make Truth furrow His brow and edge away slightly.

Truth pondered for a moment, then turned to Silence. Although He knew the other wouldn't say a word, He asked anyway:

"What agreement did you reach with Deceit?"

Silence was, as always, silent. He watched Fate intently, unwilling to spare even a sliver of attention for the questioner.

But Truth didn't care about the response. His purpose had never been Silence itself — He wanted to observe the reactions of the other gods to this question. He was like a diligent scholar, head down, tirelessly working to unravel the mysteries of the universe, searching for the thread that Void had hidden.

He was now certain that Void was concealing some secret from the rest of the gods. As for where this suspicion came from...

It was from that earlier transaction with Memory.

He didn't know the contents of the deal between Fate and Memory, but through subtle probing, He had learned one crucial detail from Memory: Memory had voluntarily erased a segment of His own recollections to ensure the fairness of His transaction with Fate.

For an Existence deity, this was practically a self-blasphemous act that betrayed their very will. From that moment on, the seed of suspicion had taken root in Truth's mind.

Beyond advancing Faith Fusion, He had begun quietly investigating the matter. Thanks to His own authority, He quickly discovered that the affair might involve several of Them.

Void, Existence, Silence... and even His own opposite — Folly.

If it were merely a transaction between a few true gods, it might not be a major issue. But the moment Folly was involved... Truth knew His counterpart well. If Folly didn't wish to be drawn into something voluntarily, then no amount of temptation could move this god who looked down on everything.

So whatever this was about, it had to be enormous — enormous enough to pull even Folly into its depths.

And in this entire universe, what could possibly be greater than... Origin?

Had They discovered another source of power that rivaled Origin? Or had They seen through the lie called "Origin"?

Beyond these two possibilities, Truth believed nothing else could compel Folly to enter the game personally.

The "truth" He had tirelessly pursued seemed to be growing more fascinating and more alluring by the day, and that filled Truth with renewed vigor.

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Chapter 882: Death's Probing

The situation on the field shifted quickly. Fate grew weary of this cat-and-mouse game and stood His ground, divine power surging wildly, once more driving the universe toward misfortune.

The assembled gods were exasperated with this volatile Void ruler. Although the collapse of the universe aligned perfectly with Void's will, it contradicted the will of every other Path of Fate. The gods wouldn't let Fate unleash His full power unchecked — and their method of stopping Him was an interesting one.

Rather than simply reasoning with Him or joining forces to counterattack, they decided to give Him a hand — by driving Oblivion out first.

This wasn't exactly standard procedure. Before Void's era, any individual who dared resist the majority of gods would be besieged. But ever since the Void era had begun — or more precisely, ever since Deceit had "sold" the Convention to everyone — no one was willing to provoke Void anymore.

One madman was headache enough. Add a noisy "flea" on top of that...

Yes, the Convention protected divine authority from being lost, but the Convention also protected the "flea's" annoying attributes.

All the gods knew that Void was of one mind. Even if They appeared to be split right now, who would wager that this wasn't just another Void illusion?

If they antagonized Fate to stop this war, then as long as Void still stood, no one could withstand the retaliation from either of Them.

Compared to Void, however, Descent was far easier to bully.

Corruption never showed Himself. Decay had nothing left to give. If they dealt with the sole remaining Oblivion, one could almost say Descent had already lost any chance of competing with other Paths for the future.

None of the gods present were fools — Truth least of all. The moment He saw the situation trending in the direction He'd envisioned, He immediately bestowed the guidance of Truth upon His followers, ordering every "scholar" to scour the trials for traces of Oblivion's Envoy — the Hand of Purifying Weevil, Herobos.

And then He personally joined the "hunt."

The score suddenly became two against one.

The fire of war began to spread, and yet the true god who bore the divine name of War merely stood in a corner of the void, silently watching it all unfold, never once making a move.

Seeing this, Silence spared Him a rare glance — but by sheer coincidence, at the very moment Silence's gaze shifted, a Fishbone Hall crashed into existence behind those eyes of blood and fire, and a massive skull slowly drifted forth from the Bone Throne.

Death had arrived.

The instant He descended, Silence vanished without a trace.

War calmly regarded the Death behind Him and rumbled: "You should be on the battlefield, not here."

"?"

The green flames in the massive skull's eye sockets flickered. He felt this remark should be directed at anyone but Himself, so He tossed it right back — with a little extra.

"The one, who should, stand here, is Order. You, are so, orderly — do you, want to, inherit, Order's, divine throne, or steal, His authority?"

War fell silent. After a moment, He rumbled: "The Convention expressly forbids initiating a God War."

"And yet, a God War, has already, begun," the massive skull replied, looking toward the battlefield with curiosity. "If you, truly cared, about the Convention, you should, use your authority, to stop, the war, that has already, broken out.

Yet you, still haven't. Don't you, want to, explain, yourself?"

An explanation was absolutely not forthcoming. War lapsed into silence again.

The massive skull glanced at Him, then suddenly let out a laugh that set teeth on edge.

"I wonder — are you, still, War?"

Could you, perhaps, be a puppet, double for Silence, or maybe, half of Order, who was, split apart, in the Sea, of Desire?

Only that, would explain, why you've, become... like this."

As the two conversed, the God War below grew fiercer by the minute.

Oblivion could barely hold off Fate's pursuit, and adding a Truth with ulterior motives to the equation left Him with virtually no chance of winning — especially after He spotted His own counterpart descending.

So at a certain moment, after shaking off the pincer attack of Fate and Truth, He plunged directly into His own world, obliterated every trace, and vanished from before the gods.

Meanwhile, Death — right beside where Oblivion disappeared — hadn't lifted a finger. The flames in those eyes of blood and fire erupted for an instant, and He rumbled once more:

"You are not Death. You are—"

Before the words could finish, a pale Fishbone Hall descended upon... the first Fishbone Hall.

And when the massive skull within the second Fishbone Hall looked down and saw another version of Himself beneath, He finally understood what someone's so-called "probing" had been all about.

It turned out He wasn't needed to do the probing at all — He'd just been used as a disguise!

Yes — the newcomer was the real Death. As for the first one...

"Deceit! I, demand, an explanation!"

Hearing this thunderous roar, the "massive skull" beside War let out a snicker, winked at War with those hollow eye sockets, and said:

"See? Old Bones just loves demanding explanations. Seems I didn't play the part too badly after all.

Hmm, and neither did you."

With that, the "massive skull" looked up at the "other self" overhead and argued — shamelessly, stubbornly, brazenly:

"Old Bones, you were the one who got trapped. I went through all that trouble, personally stepping up to fulfill the promise you made me, and you won't even thank me? What are you getting angry for?"

Hee~

Menopause truly is terrifying."

With that, the first Fishbone Hall and its "massive skull" instantly collapsed into a flood of Void and vanished, leaving only a grim-faced Death and a grave-faced War staring at each other, with nothing left to say.

An absurd farce concluded with an even more absurd ending. The spectating gods had begun to withdraw the moment Deceit appeared, and now that Oblivion had fled, they naturally had no intention of staying around to bear the brunt of Fate's fury.

In an instant, only two remained in the void — the frigid Fate and... the smiling Truth.

Truth had never left. Or rather, His decision to enter the fray hadn't been merely about coveting Oblivion's authority. Let us not forget — it was He who had witnessed the transaction between Fate and Memory, which had sparked His investigation into Void's secrets.

So at this moment, having lent Fate a hand, He naturally wasn't about to leave. He wanted to glean some information from Fate.

He looked at this Void ruler, whose anger still smoldered, and said with a light smile:

"If you wish to see Descent fall into true descent, I might offer myself as an ally. I know you have no interest in Oblivion's authority, but I happen to be quite interested. So — shall we cooperate, Fate?"

A partnership that sees through both truth and destiny."

Those star-filled eyes, crusted with frost, glanced at Truth and let out a cold laugh:

"I know you want more than just Oblivion's authority, but you've come to the wrong person.

I need no allies. I can still send Him to meet true oblivion on my own.

He will understand — the end of oblivion is not Himself, but Void."

Hearing the refusal, Truth showed no annoyance. He simply smiled on:

"Practice is the only path to verifying truth. We've worked together before, and it was a rather pleasant experience. So why not try once more?

Whether it's your twin deity Deceit, who never speaks a word of truth, or your busy and enigmatic counterpart Time — compared to Them, I'm far more like a trustworthy partner. Wouldn't you agree?"

"Your cooperation is merely a pretext to learn about my transaction with Memory. But as you yourself once said, one must respect Memory's authority. Since the transaction is complete, I cannot remember what I've forgotten.

But I can tell you what I have not forgotten:

I am the essence of Void, wielding the authority of Fate. I perceive the changes of the present and witness the Fixed Destiny of the future.

Regrettably, no matter how trustworthy you may be, your figure appears in neither the change nor the Fixed Destiny of this era.

You've taken a wrong turn, Truth. Take care of yourself."

With that, Fate vanished from the void, leaving Truth gazing at the spot where He had disappeared, shaking His head with an amused smile:

"If every path were the right one, I would already be Truth itself — wouldn't I?"

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Chapter 883: Fear Faction's One-on-One

When Cheng Shi opened his eyes and found himself still in the void, his cold sweat instantly renewed itself.

'What did I just do?'

'Fired Thundering Judgment at Oblivion?!'

'Wait — Cheng Steady, you've been steady your whole life. How did you trip in the biggest pit of them all?'

'Can this even be called blasphemy? Isn't this attempted deicide?!'

'How did you dare?'

Cheng Shi was dazed. He kept questioning himself but still couldn't find an answer.

His nerves were strung taut. While reflecting, he was also scanning the void — first he needed to confirm Oblivion wasn't nearby, and only then could he think about which being had intercepted him this time.

Fortunately, everything around him was safe. The void had returned to its familiar calm, which finally let Cheng Shi catch his breath and begin assembling a "defense" for his act of deicide.

He looked at the Death Fun Ring on his finger and thought — this was a tool crafted for him by that Benefactor. So was it possible that in that moment, it wasn't him who'd wanted to raise his hand and fire that bolt of thunder, but rather that Benefactor "borrowing" his hand to strike His own opposing deity?

Hiss—

There might be something to that.

But this excuse... whether or not that Benefactor acknowledged it, would Oblivion just pinch His nose and accept it?

Oblivion's arrival hadn't looked like an accident at all. The gaze He'd fixed on Cheng Shi had been brimming with the desire for annihilation — He'd clearly come for him specifically.

So why would a Descent deity want to obliterate him without any warning?

Hadn't He been drawing closer to Void all this time?

Then why wasn't the look He cast his way one of favor, but murderous intent?

'So your idea of "getting close" is this kind, huh? Having Void embrace Oblivion?'

Cheng Shi furrowed his brow, sensing that he was forgetting something related to Oblivion. Just as he was rummaging through the corners of his memory for the lost past, a pair of cold, starlit eyes opened before him once again.

The moment He appeared, the void whipped up an endless, frigid wind. He gazed down at Cheng Shi and spoke, cold and deliberate, word by word:

"Your audacity grows ever greater — you dare commit such an act of deicide. Have you grown so spoiled by Void's protection that you've developed delusions of invincibility?!"

"..."

The words, paired with that glacial tone, were terrifying enough to count as a sentencing of Cheng Shi.

But strangely, the very same Cheng Shi who'd just been quaking with fear suddenly felt unafraid. He stared at his Benefactor, utterly unimpressed, one eyelid twitching.

"Benefactor, please drop the act.

If the corners of Your eyes weren't turned up so obviously, You might have actually had me fooled.

Just laugh already — You don't have to hold it in.

Why put on airs for Your own follower? Isn't the Clown's whole purpose to be laughed at..."

The instant the words left his mouth, those previously cold eyes erupted into dazzling, kaleidoscopic brilliance. Stars flickered wildly, spirals spun in reverse like currents, and He gazed at His slightly fidgety follower with undisguised glee, thoroughly delighted.

"What? Where did your courage go — the courage you showed when you attacked Oblivion?

You've caused me this much trouble, and even I'm not nervous. What are you nervous about?"

Trouble? What trouble?

And besides, apart from Origin, what could possibly make You nervous?

Cheng Shi's brain was a tangled mess. He knew nothing about the history between Oblivion and Void, nor what had transpired in that stretch of void after he'd left. All he could gather from the Fun God's tone was that He was probably lying to him again.

Once the boss started piling pressure on the employee, it meant He was about to demand overtime.

Cheng Shi didn't mind working, but he didn't want to work blindly. So he decided to ask clearly.

But instead of opening his mouth right away, a sudden idea struck him — he wanted to use the Secret Peeping Ear in his possession to eavesdrop on what was actually going on inside his Benefactor's mind.

Since obtaining the Secret Peeping Ear, it had changed completely from how it worked in San Dales. It could no longer spy on secrets through eavesdropping. Instead, only when the other party lied could it — through the Fool's Lips — speak aloud the truth hidden behind those lies.

This effect had been verified on Long Jing, but the problem was that anything involving Brother Mouth made it hard for Cheng Shi to trust every word it said.

Still, true or false, hearing an alternative take was valuable in its own right. He could sort out what was real and what wasn't on his own.

So Cheng Shi's eyes shifted slightly, and he posed a question back to those eyes:

"Benefactor, You were just trying to scare me again, weren't You?"

In the void, the corners of those eyes curled upward once more. He looked at Cheng Shi with a grin brimming with amusement and nodded.

"Yes."

"...?" Cheng Shi blanked. 'Hold on — since when do You tell the truth?'

'He's already seen through my plan?'

'Yeah, He must have. In this void, nothing can be hidden from Him. But since He didn't call me out, that means my scheme doesn't count as blasphemy, so... keep going!'

"Benefactor, so then — the trouble from Oblivion wasn't brought by me; the trouble found me on its own. Is that right?"

Those eyes blinked gently, feeling a trace of satisfaction at His follower's sharpness. Then He replied with perfect solemnity:

"Yes."

'Yes...'

Neither the Ear nor Brother Mouth reacted, so Cheng Shi tentatively took the Fun God's word at face value. But if it was "yes," did that mean Oblivion's closeness to Void was a thing of the past? Had Oblivion already had a falling out with Void?

Why the falling out?

What had been happening among the gods recently?

And what was this "nervousness" the Fun God mentioned? How could a Descent deity make the ruler of the current era feel nervous?

Cheng Shi couldn't figure it out. He thought the only explanation was that the conflict between the two had become irreconcilable and war was imminent — and that the Fun God had already been scheming against Oblivion. Perhaps only then, when plotting against a god still protected by the Convention, would He feel nervous.

And it would be the nervousness of excitement, not fear.

So — the Fun God wanted to devour Oblivion?

At this thought, Cheng Shi jerked his head up, looking at his Benefactor with uncertainty. But before he could even open his mouth, the Fun God let out a derisive laugh and denied it:

"No."

The instant the word landed, Cheng Shi's lips were "loaded and ready to fire" — but those eyes in the void narrowed sharply, their corners dropping, and the someone's mouth that had been about to move obediently snapped shut again.

Cheng Shi hadn't even felt his lips move. Had he guessed wrong?

Or was Brother Mouth simply too afraid to defy the Fun God — too afraid to join him in this "blasphemous act"?

The Clown wasn't sure anymore, so he silently asked in his mind:

'Brother Mouth, was the Fun God telling the truth? You didn't misfire, did you?'

The Fool's Lips heard this utterly upside-down questioning and fell into a long silence. At last, it spoke in a hollow voice:

"What on earth gave you the illusion that I can judge Him?"

Was it the ridiculous brain rattling around inside that stupid clown skin of yours?"

"..."

'Alright. That was very aggressive — which means the Fun God was lying just now. Otherwise Brother Mouth wouldn't have lashed out like that.'

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow and silently shut his mouth, saying no more. He had already begun connecting every clue he possessed, trying to understand why the Fun God had squared off against Oblivion.

Deceit, who perceived every thought swirling in Cheng Shi's mind, only smiled more brilliantly. He didn't interrupt the brainstorming — just watched in silence.

But a mortal's perspective was ultimately limited. After thinking long and hard with no result, Cheng Shi decided to stop wasting time and ask about something more immediately important.

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Chapter 884: Not Even Pretending Anymore

"Benefactor, Crown is Yu Xi, isn't he?" Cheng Shi asked the question without hesitation.

He'd asked before, but never this directly. Previously, he'd asked whether his Benefactor had an Envoy, and was told yes — and that it was him.

That had clearly been a joke. But this time, after obtaining the container tainted with Deceit's colors, Cheng Shi felt more certain than ever that Brother Mouth and its companions must have a past they'd never revealed — not the tragic history of San Dales, but a past belonging to "Yu Xi."

After all, every experience during that "Return of the Past" had been his own revision of history. The true secrets buried beneath San Dales' blizzards were likely far more profound.

In the version of history without another Clown, no one knew what the Joy Theater had gone through. Yet the Clown was certain that beneath those painted-over memories lay Yu Xi's greatest secret.

That was what Cheng Shi thought, but the Fun God's answer fell far short of his expectations.

"No one is Yu Xi..." Those eyes let out a derisive snort.

"But—"

"...except you." The Fun God's tone shifted, and He burst into hearty laughter.

"..."

The predictable response left Cheng Shi speechless. But the Fun God wasn't finished — still greatly amused, He shot back with a question:

"Since my little skeleton friend already told you what he thinks, why don't you believe him?"

Cheng Shi paused, then pursed his lips.

"Following Your logic — if Yu Xi really is me, then why would I still fear Yu Xi's recovery?"

That's what You mean, isn't it? You're worried I'm channeling my fear elsewhere?

Rest easy, Benefactor. Clowns are common, but fear is rare. I trust the Fool's... the Fool's Lips bear me no ill will. After all, they're Your creations.

However... Benefactor, I've been curious for quite some time. Since I've already witnessed Crown's past, may I ask — why is it that during an audience with You, those companions of mine who are usually so lively become more silent than the next?

Could it be that they, too, are afraid — afraid of You?"

As he spoke, Cheng Shi, for the first time in Deceit's presence, produced the Tongue of Eating Lies and the Secret Peeping Ear. He cradled the two "organ brothers" in his palms and raised his arms as high as he could toward those eyes.

In the process, Brother Tongue — who normally loved to laze around and roll about — stopped rolling entirely. Brother Ear — who normally delighted in piercing others' secrets — went completely mute. They curled into tight balls and trembled, looking for all the world like schoolchildren about to face a teacher's furious tirade.

Those eyes observed the scene with keen interest and chuckled.

"What are you trying to say?"

A sharp glint flashed in Cheng Shi's eyes. His heart hammering, he tested the waters.

"I want to know if they are... fragments of Your authority?"

"Oh?" Those eyes perked up. He glanced at the creations in Cheng Shi's hands and said with amusement, "You think I granted you authority through these?"

"I... don't think so."

No matter what the Fun God said, Cheng Shi always felt there was a trap in His words. He'd learned his lesson by now and developed a counterstrategy: deny the Fun God's premise first, then restate his own point clearly — avoiding getting dragged into the pit.

"I merely sense that their abilities resemble Your authority, so I'm respectfully seeking Your confirmation."

"Then why didn't you ask before?"

"Because before, I hadn't received the container of Deceit. Now I've been fortunate enough to receive this honor."

As he spoke, Cheng Shi brought forth the container tainted with Deceit's colors from within his consciousness.

Truthfully, he had no idea how to display the container, but before his Benefactor, he didn't need to fuss over the method — he simply thought about displaying it, confident that the Fun God would perceive it.

And sure enough, when those eyes noticed the container Cheng Shi's consciousness wanted to show, His smile turned playful once more.

Seeing that smile, Cheng Shi's expression froze. He knew he'd probably gotten something wrong again.

It had practically become the signature of being toyed with.

"Not bad — I did grant a certain Clown a container. But... who told you this was a container of Deceit?"

"!!!?"

'Wait — what?'

While Cheng Shi stood there in stunned confusion, those eyes blinked gently and extracted the container from his consciousness. It was hard to describe what it looked like when the formless became form, but from the Clown's perspective, the container before him — dazzling like a diamond, reflecting kaleidoscopic radiance — truly resembled a bizarre, twisted... hourglass.

The hourglass had no bottom and no top, its edges spreading infinitely. The gathered faith transformed into grains of sand shaped like masks, and the dripping divinity emitted grotesque, giggly sounds. It floated before those eyes, and its reflection on the stardust pupils aligned so harmoniously with the starlight and the spirals that Cheng Shi felt this thing must inherently belong to Deceit.

But the next second, he knew he was wrong.

Because those eyes moved. The stars within them extinguished, returning to primordial ruins and transforming into surging yellow mist. The spirals disassembled and shattered, flowing into boiling chaos. Then a concentration of Chaos so thick it was terrifying erupted from every direction of the void's floor, engulfing both Cheng Shi and the container entirely. And then...

The previously clicking and laughing container of Deceit began to slowly fade, bleaching into pure, burning white — before gradually dyeing itself again in the hues of disordered distortion.

The container had been recolored — into the colors of Chaos.

From that moment on, "dripping" was no longer dripping, but erupting. Faith no longer crystallized into "grains of sand" but fused into the hourglass's outer walls.

Everything began operating according to the "rules" of Chaos. What had moments ago looked like a work of Deceit art was now, right before Cheng Shi's eyes, transformed into a piece of "junk" tainted with the breath of Chaos.

"..."

Cheng Shi was stunned. Thunderbolts detonated inside his skull, and his heart quaked with shock.

It wasn't just because the container had changed its faith color — it was because the Benefactor standing before him...

'Hold on — why are You wearing Chaos's clothes?'

'Good lord, Benefactor — You're not even pretending anymore, are You?!'

'Just as I thought — everything about Chaos has been in Your grasp all along!'

Cheng Shi suppressed his shock with every fiber of his being. He stared, eyes blazing, at those eyes now flowing with chaotic yellow mist. Though he had never seen this form before — though Chaos typically manifested as a hand of swirling chaos — he was certain. This was Chaos. Pure Chaos. As pure as Order is pure.

Because the power of Chaos within him had already begun resonating with the churning yellow mist, growing fevered and boiling!

"Benefactor, should I address You as Deceit, or Chaos?"

Those turbid eyes of chaos curved upward at the corners, and He tossed the question right back, laden with meaning.

"That depends on whether you're really Ultraman, or Yu Xi..."

"..."

Cheng Shi blinked, his gaze guileless, thinking — 'That's an easy one.'

'I'm Ultra-Xi.'

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Chapter 885: The Dyed Container

The Fun God had seized Chaos's authority and was impersonating Chaos — just as Chaos had been impersonating Order!

That explained why Kataro in the Chaos Temple had been so hesitant when speaking to him.

Anyone with a Benefactor like the Fun God would have trouble gauging where exactly they stood.

But had Kataro been saved by Chaos, or by the Fun God?

There was a crucial difference between "captured prisoner" and "embedded spy" — and it determined how Cheng Shi should view this delicate relationship. Still, the matter wasn't urgent. He'd know the answer when they next met.

And Cheng Shi had a feeling that "next time" wasn't far off.

What deserved far more attention than Kataro's identity was the Fun God's purpose. Upon learning that Chaos was Deceit, Cheng Shi suddenly recalled his earlier theory about the Fun God helping Chaos. Looking at it now, he realized he'd probably gotten the whole thing wrong.

The Fun God wasn't that generous. If He had already successfully usurped everything belonging to Chaos, then at the time, He couldn't possibly have been merely a cooperater trailing behind Chaos collecting scraps of authority. He was very likely the instigator who had goaded Chaos into impersonating Order in the first place!

It was He who had set Chaos on this path of no return!

He was absolutely capable of something like that!

With this realization, Cheng Shi looked up, eyes blazing, at his Benefactor and asked without the slightest reservation:

"Benefactor, why did Chaos agree to Your instiga— 'suggestion'?"

Those eyes blinked twice and chuckled. "Your Benefactor is Chaos, so who is this other Benefactor you keep referring to?"

"..." 'Fine, playing that game, are we?' Cheng Shi rolled his eyes and immediately rephrased. "Then allow me to ask, Benefactor — why did You agree to Deceit's instigation and attempt to steal the divine throne of Order? That's Your opposing faith — a will directly contrary to Chaos."

The moment the words fell, the void erupted. Yellow mist churned, and all traces of Chaos receded completely. Those turbid eyes of chaos transformed back into brilliant eyes of stardust, studying Cheng Shi with a half-smile.

"What a fine 'instigation.' The Clown's audacity just keeps growing. Attacking Oblivion was one thing, but now you dare blaspheme me to my face.

Do you plead guilty?"

"I—"

Cheng Shi felt numb. The confident bluster he'd had a second ago drained away in an instant. His entire posture crumpled. He rubbed his nose red and shook his head with a bitter smile. "Guilty as charged. Terrified as charged."

Seeing His follower surrender immediately, those eyes sighed with boredom.

"Boring.

Chaos back then was just as boring as you. I foresaw that such disorderly tedium would amount to nothing if allowed to develop further, so I offered slight... guidance for His future path.

And look — He found His way.

When the followers of Order across the universe discover that the Benefactor they worship and revere is in essence Chaos — wouldn't that be the greatest Chaos in all the world?"

Before the Fun God could even finish, Cheng Shi's spirits soared. He raised his head and picked up where the god left off:

"...And wouldn't that also be the greatest Order in all the world?"

What an unthinkable win-win!

No one in this universe but You, Benefactor, could contribute so much to the harmonious coexistence of those two.

The curtain falls on the conflict between Civilization and Chaos — all thanks to You."

Cheng Shi was stunned by the Fun God's methods, and seamlessly slipped in a bit of flattery. Unfortunately, that flattery missed its mark.

Because the Fun God had done none of this for the sake of harmony between Order and Chaos — He'd done it for Himself. But He naturally wouldn't tell Cheng Shi any of that, merely regarding the Clown with a half-smile.

"Don't think a little flattery will get me to pardon your blasphemy. I'm not your other Benefactor — I have no idea what 'tolerance' means."

"..."

'Way to bring up the one sore subject.'

Cheng Shi gave an awkward laugh and quickly looked away.

His mind was brimming with questions, but he'd never known how to bring up Fate's transformation in front of Deceit. Now that his Benefactor had inadvertently provided a segue, Cheng Shi deliberately sidestepped the blasphemy topic and asked cautiously:

"Benefactor... speaking of the other Benefactor—" Seeing the void suddenly whip up a gale, Cheng Shi shuddered and immediately corrected himself. "Speaking of Fate... I've noticed He's changed."

"Tch—

How novel. Change has always been Fate's authority. Shifting back and forth is His very nature. If He didn't change, that would be the real problem."

"But He has become more resolute, Benefactor.

I don't know how You used His hand to push the fusion of Fate and Time, but under Your intervention — no, Your mediation of faiths — He used to warn me not to stray onto the wrong path. But just now...

He's now certain that even the changes You've engineered are themselves Fixed Destiny.

And He asked me to choose one of two within Void. The implication being..."

At this point, Cheng Shi recalled Fate's attitude from moments ago. Unease crept back into his heart, and a thin layer of cold sweat seeped across his back. But he couldn't continue.

Because he'd just witnessed the container being dyed.

He was wondering — was it only because the container belonged to Deceit that it could be re-colored with His authority? Or could any god who obtained this essentially faithless container dye it?

If it was the latter, then Fate's threatening ultimatum had been nothing more than intimidation — exploiting his ignorance about the container.

The container was mutable. There was no life-or-death dilemma forcing him to pick one over the other.

So — could the container be dyed other "colors" too?

Cheng Shi snapped his head up toward the Fun God, and the moment he saw a hint of amusement in those eyes, he knew he'd guessed right!

This wasn't a fixed container. This was a container the Fun God had seized from Truth — one that could be dyed with any faith's colors!

So from the very start, the Fun God had been explaining Fate's behavior to him!

Every move He made carried deeper meaning!

Seeing that Cheng Shi had figured it out, those eyes smiled with unmistakable significance. He gazed toward the depths of the void, His tone laced with amusement.

"Figured it out?"

Relax — He won't do anything to you.

Compared to the fear in your heart, it may be He who is truly afraid right now.

He doesn't know what He's forgotten. Naturally, He must ensure that the Fixed Destiny He champions walks its predetermined path."

'Wait!'

'Who's afraid?!'

'Fate is afraid?!'

Cheng Shi's eyes went wide, his jaw nearly hitting the floor. "Benefactor, what exactly happened? Does Fate know about Your discovery?"

Those eyes flickered twice and began playing dumb.

"What could I possibly discover? Even Truth hasn't spoken of any discovery. What would a Void deity discover?"

Don't get so jumpy, seeing ghosts everywhere.

Nothing has happened. Nothing has changed. Everything is normal. Everything is the same. Dead and lifeless...

That is this era. And every era."

...

Chapter 886: Since I'm Already Here

"..."

'If truly nothing is going to happen, as You say, then You wouldn't be feeling fear in this era.'

Cheng Shi knew his Benefactor was hiding many things from him, but he also possessed enough self-awareness: a mortal had no business meddling in the struggles between gods. Moreover, the Fun God's current target no longer seemed to be the gods within this sliced universe, but rather a higher existence beyond it.

So was this container a symbol of His accelerating plan?

And was Oblivion's arrival connected to His schemes? Had the Fun God lured Oblivion here, or had Oblivion sensed something and come to interfere?

Those eyes saw through Cheng Shi's thoughts and let out a derisive snort.

"As if He's worthy?

Just a confused fool searching for the meaning of his own existence.

He's not even as 'devout' as Decay of the same Path. At least that stinking beggar found a true will that suits himself. Whether or not it aligns with His expectations for Decay, the beggar has at least set foot on the road to proving his own self.

But that fool — hah, nothing more than a clown amusing himself."

"???"

'Hold on — was I asking about that?'

'The word clown is practically a trash bin at this point — any piece of garbage gets sorted into it.'

'Benefactor, You'd better not be shooting arrows at me through someone else's target. If You're really trash-talking this clown right here, then don't blame me for gossiping—'

'Actually, I don't dare gossip. I'll just endure it.'

'Wait till the Fun God leaves, then I'll gossip. Otherwise the blasphemy charges will just keep stacking.'

"So Void and Oblivion have no grudge — He came to obliterate me just to amuse Himself?"

Benefactor, that doesn't sound like Oblivion to me. That sounds more like Your style.

Please don't tell me in a few days that Oblivion was also one of Your alter egos?"

Cheng Shi was spooked. His own abundance of disguises had clearly been "inherited" from above.

Right — a crooked roof leads to a crooked foundation.

Those eyes chuckled through their nose and glanced at Cheng Shi.

"If fantasies can soothe your anxiety, then by all means, dream bigger.

Maybe Origin is me too, while we're at it?

I know your other Fear Faction Benefactor will do everything possible to keep you alive, but let me warn you, Clown — Oblivion is not so easy to deal with.

Be careful. If you die by His hand, you won't get to visit your skull boss afterward. And at that point, forget Old Bones — even I probably won't be able to find you."

"!!!"

Cheng Shi had just managed to walk out of his decide-induced terror, and the Fun God's words nearly shoved him right back in.

"Then what do I do if He comes for me again?"

Benefactor, based on past experience, You and Fate can't possibly watch over me all the time. Chaos is also You, which means I've lost one Benefactor's eyes. And Time has no time to watch at all..."

The more he thought, the more his face fell.

'Great — my four Benefactors are basically the same as having no Benefactors.'

'All that faith fusion for nothing.'

Those eyes observed this and chuckled lightly.

"Since you can't dodge it anyway, why not change your thinking?"

If He can come find you — why can't you go find Him?"

"???" Cheng Shi was flabbergasted.

'Me? Go find Him?'

'What kind of logic is that? What would I go find Him for? To die?'

'That wouldn't even be called seeking death — because dying at His hands wouldn't leave so much as a skull behind!'

"Rather than sitting around waiting to die, you might as well strike first.

You've offended Him before, haven't you? The fact that a mortal's disrespect can send a confused god into a rage proves there's a crack in His mentality. The more cracks there are, the more openings..."

At this, Cheng Shi's eyes snapped wide open. He finally understood the Fun God's meaning.

He was scheming against Oblivion!

He even wanted to use Cheng Shi himself as bait to lure Oblivion in!

This confirmed that Oblivion was not Deceit — at least not in the past or present. As for the future... that depended on whatever the Fun God was planning.

Having grasped the picture, Cheng Shi lowered his head and conceded. "What would You have me do, Benefactor?"

"Just keep 'taunting' Him the way you did before. You may not even need to do anything deliberate — His zealous followers will come looking for you on their own under the banner of piety.

After all, there's no more perfect ending than making a player vanish silently during a trial. So the threat you need to watch for was never Him — it's the God Upholders who serve Him.

Alright, I've said far too much today. It's gotten boring.

That's enough. I have other things to attend to."

With that, those eyes moved to blow Cheng Shi out of the void.

But Cheng Shi had far too many questions. He hurriedly raised his hand to stop the Benefactor's "dismissal" and craned his neck.

"One last question, Benefactor — just one last question!"

"Today's clown is so noisy it's becoming annoying. Hurry up and ask."

Cheng Shi pretended he hadn't heard the jab and blurted out:

"Benefactor, I want to ask about Your relationship with Time...

Normally I wouldn't dare think this way, but since even Chaos turned out to be You — why couldn't Time be You as well?"

Those eyes paused, then regarded Cheng Shi with a half-smile.

"I see that someone isn't really wondering about my relationship with Time, but rather has an ulterior motive. Am I right?"

"..." Cheng Shi scratched his head sheepishly. "Since I can't hide it, I'll come clean. Benefactor, here's the thing — aside from Ultraman and Yu Xi, I previously 'fabricated' a third identity as Shi Zhen. So, if You could consider..."

"Tch—"

Deceit knew exactly what kind of person His follower was. Hearing this, He smiled meaningfully.

"So the Clown has been eyeing the position of Existence Servant God."

"I wouldn't call it 'eyeing' exactly..."

"Since you're not eyeing it, then forget it."

"I am! I am!! I'm totally eyeing it!!!" Cheng Shi panicked. He immediately straightened his back, his eyes gleaming. The greedy expression couldn't have been more different from his cautious demeanor moments ago.

Could it be — there was actually a chance?!

Had Time really let go of the reins?

Those eyes studied Cheng Shi's posture and said with biting sarcasm:

"Finally willing to tell the truth.

Good — I underestimated you.

Shi Zhen... becoming Time's Envoy might be a bit difficult for you right now. But becoming Corruption's Envoy would be easy enough. Wouldn't you agree, Greed Lord?"

With that, those eyes gave Cheng Shi no chance to defend himself and hurled him out of the void.

Watching the Clown's figure vanish, He shook his head with a string of derisive laughs.

"Doesn't know when he has it good. But I must say, you've played the role of the Clown rather vividly.

It seems all clowns, no matter what world they're from, are the same. No wonder He sees you as Fixed Destiny.

I'm starting to wonder whether choosing you in the first place was truly Fate's doing.

What do you think, Fate?"

No one answered in the void. Those eyes gave a casual laugh, turned, and disappeared into the depths of Void — into the river called Mockery and Jeering.

Before leaving, He surveyed the entire universe through His creations, the corners of His eyes high with glee, smiling happily.

"Since I'm already here — wouldn't it be rude not to leave a little gift?"

With that, He bestowed an edict upon every Deceit follower in the universe — an edict identical to the one Fate had issued.

When it was done, those eyes vanished instantly.

The void and the emptiness sank back into silence. It looked as though everything had returned to peace.

But things were far from over. At some moment after Deceit departed, two pairs of eyes suddenly opened beside the river of Mockery and Jeering.

One bore the weight of the universe's entire past and present. The other captured the ceaseless rush and ebb of time.

Existence!

The twin deities had descended here, in the deepest reaches of Void, beside this creation of Void.

The eyes of Memory made no move to file this place's memories into the Collection Hall. Instead, they asked the other calmly: "Where does this absurd tide lead?"

The eyes of Time were silent for a moment, then shook their head with a sigh. "I don't know."

Memory chuckled.

"From what I can tell, you've fused less with Fate and more with Deceit — you've learned how to lie."

With that, Memory left — neither probing further nor reminiscing.

Time gazed in the direction the Mockery and Jeering flowed, sighed softly once more, and departed as well.

He still had things to do — and no time to linger.

...

Chapter 887: A Brief Rest, a Rare Peace

He was back. Finally back.

Lying on the rooftop floor, gazing up at a cloudless sky, letting the blazing sun paint every inch of his skin. Only when the heat verged on scorching did it manage to chase away some of the chill inside him.

Trouble had arrived.

Cheng Shi had never been one to shy away from trouble — but that was contingent on the trouble not coming from a Him whose power far exceeded his ability to handle.

It was just like those first months when Fate had been watching him. When you knew a deity with ill intentions was peering at you from the shadows, you simply couldn't face a trial with ease. The only option was to tighten every nerve and tread carefully.

This feeling had been absent for a while. Ever since fusing all of Void's faiths, he hadn't felt pressure like this.

The "covetous gaze" of a deity...

To cope with his frustration, Cheng Shi even tried consoling himself: looked at from another angle, if he were a Descent Faction member or a God Worship Society zealot, wouldn't this be the highlight of his entire life?

But fantasy could never truly soothe anxiety. After wallowing for a moment, Cheng Shi sat up, grave-faced, and began thinking about how to deal with this — from his perspective — utterly inexplicable Oblivion crisis.

First, his strength had undeniably improved vastly since the days when Fate had been watching him. He carried four faiths, possessed countless tools, and with the Destined Ones and the Joker alliance, he'd amassed formidable divine resources and most of the intelligence network in this game.

This should have been enough for the Clown to handle any crisis. Except this time, the crisis came from... above. From the very source of certain players' power.

The gap in Status rendered all those preparations meaningless.

But not entirely meaningless. At least... there was the container.

With that thought, Cheng Shi brought out the container he'd just received. Ever since the Fun God had dyed it, Cheng Shi could switch the container's state by channeling different powers of faith — toggling between Deceit and Chaos.

But only those two. Fate and Time still wouldn't activate.

So Cheng Shi concluded that "having a god dye the container first" was likely a prerequisite. Mortal faith could switch between colors but couldn't activate new ones.

In its current state, switching to Fate or Time was pointless anyway.

After all, the container's function was to drip divinity, and the raw material for that divinity was faith — faith directed at the container's holder.

Taking the current container as a reference: when switched to the Chaos state, divinity dripped far faster than in the Deceit state. That forced Cheng Shi to ponder what caused the difference.

After much deliberation, there was only one answer:

The renown of Chaos Envoy Ultraman had spread vastly farther than that of Deceit Envoy Yu Xi. Ultraman was a figure written into history — one who had, in a sense, guided the underground Chaos forces in their counterattack against the surface.

Yu Xi, on the other hand, was just a name recognized by a handful of players.

Combining this with his previous conversations with Hu Xuan, Wei Mu, Aph Ros, and others, Cheng Shi arrived at an exceedingly simple conclusion:

The more people who believed, the faster divinity dripped. It wasn't just about purity, as previously understood — it was about speed.

So the fact that his container had begun dripping divinity from the very moment he received it came down to one fundamental reason: he'd been walking the right path from the very start.

Unlike Hu Xuan — the Eternal Sun was ultimately a star hoisted into the sky by an experiment. Aside from the residents of Far Dusk Town within that experiment, no one worshipped her.

But Cheng Shi was different. The Ultraman identity had given him enormous advantages. At this rate, he would soon obtain his first shard of Chaos divinity.

Of course, this "right path" hadn't been one he'd paved himself — the Fun God had laid the groundwork long ago.

Cheng Shi often reflected that given a deity's foresight — their ability to perceive past and future and lay plans far in advance — it was, for an ignorant mortal, effectively just another form of Fixed Destiny.

So it wasn't only Fate who awaited Fixed Destiny. Deceit had been paving that Fixed Destiny well before it arrived.

Yet possessing divinity didn't mean Cheng Shi had the strength to fight Oblivion. So far, he was still like a rich man sitting on a fortune he didn't know how to spend — unable to effectively convert divinity into combat power.

Logically, Envoy = one complete set of divinity + the authority of a Proxy Action.

And right now, Cheng Shi equaled: one set of mixed divinity, plus one promising future set of complete divinity, plus two Proxy Action authorities. Numerically, he was worth two Envoys. But in essence... he wasn't much different from an ordinary player.

Aside from a few intimidating titles, he was still a mortal.

This made Cheng Shi anxious. Before, when he'd been matching wits with other players, these impressive facades had been his bread and butter. But the moment his enemy became one of Them, those same things became the Clown's comedic props — good for laughs and nothing else.

So to maximize the resources at his disposal, Cheng Shi humbly consulted an expert — well, not a person. A mouth.

He took out the Tongue of Eating Lies and the Secret Peeping Ear, placed them on the ground, and then set down a bottle of tentacle slime drink to represent the Fool's Lips. And there, on this sun-scorched rooftop, he convened a small meeting on "Yu Xi" and "divinity."

Seeing the tongue and ear both lacking enthusiasm, Cheng Shi had no choice but to ask Brother Mouth first.

"Brother Mouth, since you were once an Envoy, how about sharing how an Envoy's divinity should actually be used?"

The Fool's Lips detected the probing nature of the question but stayed silent — no comment.

Out of options, Cheng Shi gulped down a bottle of slime drink with several hearty swigs, placed a fresh bottle in the same spot, and asked again.

"..."

The spectacle made the newcomer ear marvel at the novelty.

"Is this how you two normally communicate?" the Secret Peeping Ear asked curiously.

"This has nothing to do with communication. I was just thirsty."

The moment the words left Cheng Shi's mouth, the ear before him let out a soft hum and began "relaying" the truth hidden behind the lie:

"I don't know if it actually works, but grossing out Brother Mouth at least helps me blow off steam."

"..."

Cheng Shi froze. He stared at the ear in disbelief. "Didn't you and Brother Mouth... merge?"

The Secret Peeping Ear rotated elegantly left and right and shook its head. "We didn't. Brother Mouth normally doesn't let me talk. But right now, there's a seat for me at this table, so I've naturally reverted to being myself."

Cheng Shi's spirits surged. Eyes blazing, he locked onto the ear and probed: "So Brother Mouth is your leader — isn't that right? Maybe it isn't about which organ you are at all. Maybe the being you once combined into was called Yu Xi, and only Brother Mouth kept His name?"

It was a plausible suspicion. But this time, it wasn't the ear that answered — it was his own mouth.

The Fool's Lips spoke: "Yes. I won't hide it from you any longer..."

But before it could finish, the ear on the ground squirmed and "contradicted":

"If I'd known the name 'Fool's Lips' would cause this much trouble, I would've called myself the Giggling Lips instead. Surely no idiot would go around calling themselves 'Giggle.'"

The entire rooftop fell silent.

Cheng Shi's eyelid twitched violently. He looked at the ear, then at the slime drink, his expression a masterpiece of conflicting emotions.

'Oh no — there really isn't anyone named Yu Xi?'

...

Chapter 888: What Yu Xi Truly Means

"Then Crown..." Cheng Shi hesitated.

Objectively, Crown's story was tragic. Bringing him up was tantamount to ripping open the scars on Brother Mouth and the others. Cheng Shi had no desire to hurt anyone — but unless he unraveled the Yu Xi question, he couldn't see the road ahead, let alone resolve the crisis at hand.

When the Fool's Lips heard Cheng Shi mention that name yet again, it sighed.

"He isn't the Him you think he is."

Cheng Shi blinked, his gaze instantly darting to the ear. Seeing the Secret Peeping Ear remain still, he said with some surprise:

"You're willing to talk now? When I asked about your identity, you completely ignored me. But the moment I mention Crown, you open up?"

Brother Mouth — isn't Crown... your past?"

"Not exactly. He is he, and I am I.

Crown from San Dales was, at most, one of the Benefactor's Seedling Followers — a confused do-gooder, a clown who stumbled into good fortune, but ultimately a mortal.

We, on the other hand, are His creations — the manifestation of Deceit's power. And also...

Never mind. I'm not even sure my guess is right, so I won't lead you astray.

You can think of us as Crown — but a failed Crown.

He missed the best opportunity to follow the Benefactor. By the time he realized... it was too late."

Too late?

Hearing that word, Cheng Shi couldn't help but recall everything he and Time had said during their standoff at Aph Ros's doorway. So Crown's failure had ultimately been pinned on Brother Mouth and the others?

And from the look of it, Brother Mouth seemed to have already made peace with the past and accepted its failure?

Crown may have missed his chance to follow the Fun God directly, but his "fragments" had unexpectedly become the Fun God's creations. Wasn't that, in its own way, another form of following?

"Then, Brother Mouth — what do you and Brother Ear mean by 'finding the right path'?"

Is it me?

No — it's the act of me playing Yu Xi! Isn't it?"

As Cheng Shi spoke, a sudden flash of insight blazed through his mind. Something clicked. He bolted upright, studying the ear and tongue before him, brilliance flickering repeatedly in his eyes.

"I understand — I think I understand now. So that's what Yu Xi really is.

Brother Ear, you can hear my thoughts — am I right?"

The ear fell silent. In its place, the mouth answered.

"Right. Absolutely right. You're so incredibly clever."

"..."

The elation on Cheng Shi's face crumbled the instant he heard this "affirmation."

'That stupid mouth — did it do that on purpose?'

Using an ambiguously affirming statement to deceive him, thereby driving him to doubt himself?

Cheng Shi went quiet too. He silently sifted through his logic, replaying everything Mi Laozhang had relayed of Deceit's words. His conviction grew stronger that he'd touched Yu Xi's threshold — he just didn't know how to translate this undefined intuition into reality.

He raised the container again, thinking that perhaps to become the true Yu Xi, he first needed to expand Yu Xi's influence.

Just as the thought formed, Cheng Shi noticed something: the Deceit container's drip rate of divinity was slightly faster than moments ago.

The difference was minuscule — easy to miss under normal circumstances — but with his mind so focused, he caught it. He didn't overthink it, simply assuming that someone, somewhere, had spread Yu Xi's name further. After this latest incident, "Yu Xi" had probably become a bargaining chip among high-level players exchanging intelligence.

That worked in his favor. At least the groundwork he'd laid was paying off — the past had built a stairway to the future.

Seeing Cheng Shi lost in thought, the Fool's Lips hesitated for a moment, then offered some guidance.

Real guidance.

"Remember — fear is never an obstacle. It's fuel."

The tone was uncannily similar to the Clown of San Dales. It startled Cheng Shi, and suddenly, without knowing why, the image of Crown discovering the world was a lie in that underground passage flashed before him.

It was precisely that fear which had birthed the Clown's survival instinct and led him to the opportunity to approach Deceit. So Brother Mouth was right — fear was never an obstacle. It was fuel.

The words jolted Cheng Shi awake, wrenching him free from his recoiling paralysis. Reflecting on everything he'd woven from lies, his gaze grew ever brighter.

His fear wasn't entirely born from Oblivion's approach. Part of it came from his other Benefactor — Fate. Though Deceit had repeatedly reassured him that Fate bore no malice, Cheng Shi trusted only his own instincts. He felt that the current Fate no longer saw a follower in him — only Fixed Destiny.

But Fixed Destiny had never been a grave. It was a weapon!

In this moment, Cheng Shi suddenly fed himself the very cake he'd once dangled before Big Cat. Why did the Destined Ones exist? Precisely because of so-called "Fixed Destiny."

So as long as this era hadn't reached its final act — as long as the universe's curtain call hadn't been performed — then under Fixed Destiny's script, Fate would never allow him to be obliterated by Oblivion!

No matter how Fate viewed him, no matter how Fate viewed Fixed Destiny — Cheng Shi needn't concern himself with what Fate obsessed over. All he needed was to leverage the fact that "he was Fixed Destiny."

Perhaps that was exactly what Deceit had meant by "relax"?

Having thought it through, Cheng Shi's face filled with emotion. He sighed deeply.

In this moment, the Destined Ones had finally become truly destined — and Deceit's lie had finally solidified Fate's Fixed Destiny.

Cheng Shi quietly put away the ear and tongue, then asked with a complicated look: "If... if one day I truly become Yu Xi, and the world knows only Yu Xi and not me — will I still be me, Brother Mouth?"

The Fool's Lips pondered for a moment, then delivered the most earnest response it had ever given since fusing with Cheng Shi.

"Everyone wears a mask, but that mask is not you.

You are only playing it. Remember that — never lose yourself in the role.

And never let it become you!"

A shiver ran through Cheng Shi's entire body, his expression deeply moved. The belief that "Brother Mouth would never set me up" suddenly began growing uncontrollably in his mind. He'd never thought a mouth full of nothing but lies could feel so reliable — because this statement simply didn't sound fake.

And yet...

The very next second, the Fool's Lips reminded him exactly why it was called the Fool's Lips.

"Why are you getting so worked up? I was just reciting the performer's code of conduct from the Joy Theater. What were you even thinking?"

"..."

Cheng Shi froze. Moments later, his eyes went vacant as he pulled out a dozen cans of slime drink and began punishing himself in a suicidal binge.

Glug, glug, glug—

"..."

'That's what you get for running your mouth. That's what you get for lying. Give me back my feelings!'

The blazing sun still hung high, its heat still scorching. But the ice that had quietly melted from the Clown's heart had nothing to do with the temperature outside.

Who says lies can't heal others? If they couldn't, then why would the priest of Deceit be called a "Clown"?

In the end, it was because His first follower had used a sincere lie to save the people of an entire "world." That was why the Clown became synonymous with Deceit's priest — an unsung savior.

...

Chapter 889: An Utterly Predictable Invitation

Regardless of whether the tidal wave of tentacle slime had managed to disgust Brother Mouth, it had undeniably disgusted Cheng Shi — disgusted him so thoroughly that he couldn't eat for the rest of the day.

Of course, the slime drink's surprisingly filling nature might have contributed, but the bottom line was that the Clown had endured a decidedly un-merry afternoon.

It wasn't until sunset gave way to moonrise and night drew near that he finally clawed his way out of that nauseating state.

What pulled him out, however, wasn't his iron stomach — it was a call. A summons from the stars!

Kataro's signal had come again. This time, the voice emanating from that star trailing chaotic yellow mist sounded slightly anxious:

"Sir, another visitor has come seeking an audience. But the situation is somewhat complicated this time. Would you... have time to handle it?"

Cheng Shi blinked. Last time, Kataro had asked whether the visitor should be received. This time, he'd jumped straight to assuming it was Cheng Shi's job.

Had the Fun God briefed Kataro?

So the current arrangement was... the crown prince governing on behalf of the king?

Cheng Shi grinned. He could even guess who the visitor was. The number of players significant enough for Kataro to personally summon him could be counted on one hand. Hu Wei and Da Yi would never dare make a scene in the Chaos Temple, so whoever was causing Kataro "trouble" had to be — no question — Zhen Xin.

What had she done this time?

Curious, Cheng Shi hooked a smile and stepped onto the stairway winding through the yellow mist, vanishing from reality in an instant.

At the other end of the stairway lay the familiar platform rolling with infinite chaotic yellow mist. Before Cheng Shi even fully emerged from the dense fog, he heard the bell-like laughter ringing across the platform.

"Hee~

It was I who begged the Benefactor to bring me here, so the audience afterward is naturally mine to claim!"

"Zhen Yi! I didn't want an audience—" This voice was grinding its teeth, but out of respect, it ultimately swallowed the final word "Him."

"You don't want one, but I do! How about this — today I'll be the big sister, I'll attend the audience, and you go take a nap?"

"No! Absolutely not!

Running wild in the void is one thing, but before this deity's temple — how dare you act out?!"

"Why can't I? Chaos is Chaos. Maybe the more chaotic I am, the more He'll like me!

What if He takes a shine to me...

Hee~

I, Zhen Xin, will have a second faith!"

"You. Are. Zhen. Yi!"

"La la la, I can't hear you. You're Zhen Yi, and I'm Zhen Xin."

"..."

"..."

"..."

Not just Zhen Xin — even Kataro hiding in the mist and Cheng Shi on the verge of stepping out were rendered speechless by Zhen Yi's antics.

Who could possibly handle this lunatic?

Other people went crazy just to go crazy. But when she went crazy... the infuriating thing was that she actually made sense.

Chaos did champion chaos. Zhen Yi's behavior was, theoretically, entirely correct. Whether her "chaos" was genuine or fake, though — that was another matter.

If Cheng Shi hadn't known Zhen Xin's past, hadn't known the Zhen sisters' story, he might have been fooled by this scene too.

But having witnessed just how formidable Zhen Xin could be, looking at this situation now, he was certain: Zhen Xin had dug a pit for Zhen Yi and then tricked her into leaping headfirst into it.

Remember — Cheng Shi's original plan had been to use Zhen Xin to probe the Fun God's authority within the Chaos Temple. Yet now Zhen Xin was putting on a show of reluctance to cooperate with Chaos. This was obviously a ploy to bait her own sister.

'So it's like that, huh? Fine — deceiving yourself is one thing, but deceiving another version of yourself too?'

'Look at you — you've practically hooked your sister like a bass fish, and you're still reeling her in.'

'Do you have no conscience? No familial love? No video evidence?'

No.

Da Yi wasn't here. There really was no recording this time.

But the probing had already gotten its answer. Cheng Shi hadn't expected the Fun God to hand him the answer directly before Zhen Xin even launched her investigation. So was the reason He'd dumped Zhen Xin here again just to mock how clumsy Cheng Shi's probing methods were?

'I foresaw my follower's little scheme, so I spoiled the answer in advance and then laughed at him...'

Yeah, that sounded exactly like something the Fun God would do.

Cheng Shi's eye twitched as he began pondering how to handle the two sisters.

Meeting Zhen Xin alone wouldn't be a problem. Her personality was stable and she always considered the bigger picture. In the Chaos Temple's atmosphere, as long as his performance was convincing and his words were well-chosen, he'd never blow his cover.

Meeting Zhen Yi alone would also be manageable. No matter how many tricks she had, whipping out the container would be enough to silence all suspicion.

But if these two sisters showed up together in their split-personality mode...

Cheng Shi wasn't actually afraid of Zhen Yi. He was afraid of Zhen Xin — that master schemer whose depths were bottomless — using Zhen Yi's madness as cover to relentlessly probe the Chaos Envoy Ultraman's reactions.

After all, she'd come here with the express purpose of probing. Cheng Shi had absolutely no doubt that Deceit's darling would be willing to create a spectacular fall-guy scenario for her own sister — one big enough to trap an Envoy.

And so, seeing the two of them argue with mounting fervor, Cheng Shi decided not to reveal himself just yet. Instead, he had Kataro push the mist inward. He blended into its form and slowly drew closer, observing them, thinking about how to shut down their split-personality act.

But the Zhen sisters' vigilance was extraordinarily sharp. The moment they sensed the yellow mist beginning to roll toward the platform's center, Zhen Yi abruptly halted her argument with her sister. Her eyes darted suspiciously.

"Strange — how come no one's shown up yet?"

Sis, did you offend Chaos at some point? Is that why they're snubbing you?"

"Ha — since when am I the sister? I'm Zhen Yi now. You're the big sister."

"Really? Wonderful!" Zhen Yi's grin stretched wide, and without warning, she shouted toward the space beyond the platform: "Hey, Chaos, are You there?"

If You're not, does that mean You're dead?

If You're dead, can I have this stairway and the temple up there? My name is Zhen Xin, and I—"

"ZHEN YI!!!"

Zhen Xin clapped a hand over her own mouth — but that was all she could do, because she couldn't stifle her own snickering.

Watching this unfold, Kataro, hidden in the yellow mist, was left deeply shaken.

Standing behind Cheng Shi, he was so stunned he started stammering.

"This... is what the Benefactor called... His 'collection'...?"

"Yes. That's His first collectible." Cheng Shi was equally at a loss for words.

'I mean, I did send you here to probe, but your guts are something else. You really think having Zhen Yi as a scapegoat gives you free rein to run your mouth?'

'How certain are you that the Fun God will protect your sister, to dare play it this way?'

Kataro nodded, face full of genuine admiration. "Truly worthy of someone the Benefactor has His eye on."

"?" Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, nearly choking on a laugh.

'She's getting praise now? Kataro, whose side are you on?'

Standing behind Cheng Shi, Kataro regretted the words the instant they left his mouth. He quickly noticed the shift in Cheng Shi's expression, his face stiffening. He hurriedly added:

"With merely three-tenths of your grace, sir, she could comfortably claim the top spot on the audience rankings. Clearly, this player has her own merits."

"..."

Cheng Shi blinked and glanced back at Kataro, thinking — 'You've got your own merits too, kid.'

Catching the appraising look, Kataro hastily lowered his head and asked: "Sir, how would you like to receive these... two?

If it's inconvenient, I could... expel them on your behalf."

'They can be kicked out?'

Cheng Shi paused, then shook his head.

"Not yet. Let me figure out how to disarm Zhen Xin first."

He thought in silence for a moment. Then his brow quirked, and he snapped his fingers toward the Zhen sisters beyond the mist, activating a Chaos talent — Order Horn.

He wasn't even sure whether their current state counted as "disorder," since Zhen Xin was probably doing it deliberately. So he hadn't held out much hope.

But to his surprise, the instant the snap rang out, the split-personality Zhen Xin went momentarily blank. She shook her head, and then her entire expression and demeanor settled completely into the poised, steady Magician — Zhen Xin.

Even Zhen Xin herself was startled. This was the first time an external force had managed to push Zhen Yi back. She stared at the yellow mist before her with alarm, sensing someone's presence within.

And in that very moment, Cheng Shi chuckled softly. He shifted his form into a near-perfect likeness of Kataro, donned the ceremonial robe, pulled up the hood, bowed his head with a mysterious smile, and stepped out of the mist.

When Zhen Xin noticed a figure draped in a murky yellow robe emerging into her field of view, Deceit's darling quietly clenched the hands hidden in her sleeves. She bowed with composure and poise, showing respect.

"Praise be to Chaos. Zhen Xin, follower of Deceit, greets Your Excellency."

Seeing her dignified, neither cringing nor arrogant, Cheng Shi was instantly reminded of the Joy Theater in San Dales — when Long Jing had been desperately fawning over Yu Xi, and she had silently mouthed that question: "Is that how you act during an audience too?"

'Huh?'

'Wait, sis — so you really don't act like that?'

...

Chapter 890: The Pressure of Ultraman

Cheng Shi's lips twitched faintly — once again, the Clown was himself.

But he didn't let this "blasphemer who had disrespected him" off the hook. Instead, he put on an act and let out a cold laugh.

"You perform chaos when I am absent, yet rein in your true nature the moment I arrive.

Zhen Xin?

A fine name. A follower of Deceit who dares call herself 'True Heart' — I wonder if your performance today also comes from that true heart of yours?

This is not your Void stage. This is the birthplace of Chaos. To attend an audience before the Lord of Disorder in an orderly manner — follower of Deceit, are you blaspheming me?"

As he spoke, Cheng Shi closed in on Zhen Xin with an overwhelming air of dominance.

He was only slightly taller than her, but the difference in their presences was like heaven and earth. Cheng Shi gazed down at the "blasphemer" from on high, let out three cold laughs, and in a peculiar cadence, pronounced her guilty.

"Aren't you afraid I'll execute you for blasphemy?"

Zhen Xin felt the immense pressure. It was a kind of pressure she had never experienced from any true god.

But she reasoned that was probably because true gods wouldn't deign to lower themselves and argue with mortals, whereas a Servant God was far more "down to earth" — hence the scene before her.

Yes — Zhen Xin was certain that the being standing before her was the one and only Chaos Envoy, a Servant God of Chaos bearing a comical name: Lord Ultraman.

Throughout the long history of the Land of Hope, His traces had surfaced more than once. Although all records related to the Chaos Envoy were deeply hidden, the History School was a colossus, and under the full weight of their investigation, their president had unearthed secrets no ordinary person could know.

After limited research, she had arrived at a conclusion:

This figure was a puppeteer who covertly plucked at history's strings, guiding the tides of the eras. He was exceptionally mysterious and rarely appeared, yet His name lived vividly on the lips of countless Chaos followers, propelling the chaotic landscape of the Land of Hope ever forward.

He was like a low-profile strategist, orchestrating something for His Benefactor and His camp.

But given the current circumstances... He seemed more like a bad-tempered, sinister schemer.

And this schemer apparently didn't like her very much.

Why?

Had He discovered something and was using veiled hostility to protest against her Benefactor, Deceit? Or... had He noticed nothing at all and simply didn't want to walk alongside Void?

Zhen Xin's expression tightened. She couldn't help recalling the earth-shattering secret Cheng Shi had shared with her back in San Dales:

"Order is actually Chaos — so who do you think Chaos might be?"

When she'd first heard those words, the divine name "Deceit" had sprung to mind faster than her shock could catch up.

She didn't know why Order had become Chaos, but in that context, the implication was unmistakable — he was suggesting that Chaos might be their shared Benefactor, Deceit.

So Zhen Xin had always believed this audience was simply about identifying whether Chaos and Deceit were one and the same. After all, certain effects of Their authorities were strikingly similar, and the talents Deceit had been granting players were increasingly tinged with Chaos.

That was also why she'd engineered a way for Zhen Yi to petition the Fun God to bring her here. The Fun God's reaction to that petition was equally important — another piece of the puzzle she needed.

What she hadn't expected was that the one granting her audience was not Chaos Himself, but His Envoy, Ultraman.

Still, Zhen Xin didn't panic. She simply lifted her chin with a calm expression, neither retreating nor showing fear. She met the yellow mist churning beneath that hood dead-on, and with well-reasoned precision, parried Cheng Shi's "intimidation."

"Whatever crime I may have committed, the very concept of 'crime' belongs to Order's vocabulary.

If Your Excellency wishes to judge me by crimes, then Your Excellency is presently acting in accordance with order.

For Zhen Xin to attend an orderly audience before an orderly envoy — that doesn't seem wrong to me.

Of course, I know the order Your Excellency wears is merely disorder in disguise, just as the chaos I performed earlier was nothing but Void's illusion. We each practice our own will and offer devotion to our respective Benefactors. Such piety, I believe, cannot be called 'wrong' anywhere.

Don't you agree, Lord Ultraman?"

"..."

'Are you prepping for the civil service exam or something?'

Cheng Shi was floored. Beneath the yellow mist, his eyes blinked blankly twice. Then he stepped back slightly, forcibly suppressed his twitching eyelid, and burst into "appreciative" laughter.

"Ha ha, ha ha ha ha! You're quite entertaining."

He turned around, waving away the surrounding yellow mist to reveal the long stairway beyond the platform.

"I am aware of your purpose. Since you have interest in Chaos..."

"Your Excellency!" Zhen Xin seized the pause between his breaths to politely cut in. "Please forgive my impertinence, but allow me to explain why I've come.

It was actually my sister — my other personality, Zhen Yi — who petitioned our Benefactor Deceit to find me a second faith. Before I could agree, she brought me here. I—"

"Enough."

Cheng Shi cut her off with a cold snort.

"Save your Deceit theatrics. Don't assume that everyone in this era bows before Void.

Cheap lies only make you look like a clown.

"I'll give you a choice. Either you ascend the divine staircase and attempt to earn my Lord's gaze — or you leave this place. For the sake of the era's rulers, I'll spare your life."

As he spoke, Cheng Shi waved his hand once more, carving a passage through the endless yellow mist. At its end lay the river the Fun God had buried deep within Void:

Mockery and Jeering.

The sight made Zhen Xin's pupils contract, while Cheng Shi laughed inwardly.

In truth, he had zero control over the chaotic yellow mist on this platform. Even with the container in hand, he held not a shred of authority over this temple.

It was Kataro, the gatekeeper, who possessed partial proxy authority over the temple. This "attentive" servant had razor-sharp observational skills, watching Cheng Shi's every gesture from the shadows and coordinating perfectly to help him... show off.

Of course, from Kataro's perspective, this wasn't showing off. He was merely fortunate enough to serve Lord Cheng Shi — to offer his humble loyalty to this favored child of Void who was on the verge of becoming a true Him.

The modest Kataro had already learned that this lord had obtained a container, and his self-chosen loyalty only grew firmer.

Cheng Shi was quite satisfied with that.

But his attention wasn't on his "shadow" Kataro right now — it was fixed on Zhen Xin.

In reality, the Chaos Temple held no appeal for Cheng Shi anymore. His sole purpose in playing pretend here was to get Zhen Xin to climb the Chaos staircase and memorize every moment of what would undoubtedly be a hilarious experience.

Once she'd made a fool of herself and given him leverage, he could consider leaking a few tidbits of information — perhaps even accommodating Zhen Xin's need for a second faith.

Because the fact that the Fun God had sent Zhen Xin here after revealing the truth, and had Kataro summon Cheng Shi to receive her, meant He had already approved of Zhen Xin fusing Chaos the same way Cheng Shi had.

So Cheng Shi was here today purely to enjoy the show and flex — or to put it more practically, to construct a full-bodied image of Ultraman before a player who commanded the History School, so that the Chaos Envoy's legend would spread as premium intelligence, accelerating the drip of Chaos divinity into his container.

Getting Zhen Xin to embarrass herself was just a bonus perk.

And so, under Lord Ultraman's crushing pressure, Zhen Xin pressed her lips together, lowered her gaze in submission, and chose to give it a try.

"Thank you for this opportunity. If I step onto the staircase, will I receive His audience?"

"That depends on how far you can walk.

The last player I considered promising — and who actually received His audience — managed to reach...

six steps."

Cheng Shi offered a faint smile, telling a not-too-outrageous lie.

Six steps?

Zhen Xin gazed at the staircase stretching endlessly above her and silently counted out six steps.

Less than two meters.

Her pupils shrank, her expression a masterpiece of emotion.

That tiny distance was all that separated a mortal from an audience with a true god.

Was this what they meant by "so close, yet so far"?

With that thought, the Magician's jaw clenched behind a complex expression. She steeled herself, and with one decisive stride, stepped upward.

