

The Gods 891

Chapter 891: Wait, Sis, You Actually Studied Dance?

The first step was "slander and abuse." The second step was "fury and brawling."

Neither of these steps fazed Zhen Xin in the slightest. She merely furrowed her brow in mild curiosity before stepping onto the third.

When "war and slaughter" appeared before her eyes, this clever Magician seemed to grasp something. The Chaos staircase was clearly using a progressive approach to manifest His will. So what would the fourth step hold?

Zhen Xin steadied herself and climbed. What she witnessed was "madness and muteness."

Yet her expression remained unchanged. It was as though she had long since grown familiar with this suffocating madness, long since desensitized to this struggling despair. A flicker of distaste for the past crossed her features before she clenched both fists and endured it all.

Watching this, Cheng Shi fell silent.

Because the memory surfacing in his mind was that very same unbearable past from Zhen Xin's childhood.

She had endured countless nights just like this — fists clenched, pushing through.

As expected, someone who had lived through inner chaos had long since been baptized by Chaos.

Cheng Shi had assumed that at this stage, at least Zhen Yi would emerge to "protect" her sister. But it was clear now that Zhen Xin's inner strength was far greater than he'd imagined.

She was formidable — admirably so.

But admiration aside — Miss Magician, your unflappable composure is making me look really bad here...

Cheng Shi pursed his lips, shoved aside the tangled thoughts, and continued observing.

Zhen Xin moved again — but only after a long pause before taking the next step.

It turned out that once old scars of the heart were torn open, they could indeed scab over quickly. But the pain that accompanied the process still needed time to heal.

Her complexion grew calmer the longer she stood still. Then, practically biting down on her teeth and dragging legs heavy as lead, she heaved herself onto the fifth step.

And when this determined Magician found her footing on the fifth step... the performance began.

Cheng Shi had been watching with keen interest, waiting for her to embarrass herself, expecting Zhen Yi to take over and deliver a spectacularly humiliating reaction. After all, as he understood it, the fifth step represented the abandonment of self-identity — and under this kind of pressure, a dual personality was bound to trigger the second persona's resurgence.

But he was wrong again.

Not only did Zhen Xin not let Zhen Yi out — she began to fully release herself on this staircase of Chaos.

Her expression was a blend of bewilderment and confusion, yet her movements were anything but stiff. Just like Cheng Shi and Hu Wei before her, she danced to the disorder of her own heart — except her dance was leagues beyond the Clown's flailing and her "alien blood compatriot's" tap-dancing.

The Magician's arms flowed like water, her waist swayed like a willow. Her long legs, taut inside her trousers, moved to a soundless beat — lotus steps, light as air, like a celestial being exiled from heaven.

She began with the grace of classical dance, pivoted into the diversity of folk, transitioned into the wildness of Latin, and landed on the tips of ballet. She was like a dancer who had completely cut loose, pouring every style she'd ever learned into one uninhibited performance — a lavish annotation to her own definition of Chaos.

As the beauty within this disordered dance revealed itself, the smile on Cheng Shi's face slowly froze.

'Wait, sis — you actually studied dance?'

'How did the show I was so looking forward to turn into this?'

'When I climbed the staircase, I was the clown. When Zhen Xin climbs the staircase — I'm still the clown?!'

'So I'm the clown no matter what?'

Cheng Shi couldn't laugh anymore. His eye twitching furiously, he turned away from Zhen Xin on the staircase and glared, face dark, at Kataro in the yellow mist.

The perceptive Kataro knew exactly what his lord was thinking. Having once played his role, he understood Cheng Shi's mindset perfectly — which was why he'd already averted his gaze, terrified that seeing Lord Cheng Shi's rigid expression would make him burst out laughing.

With no one watching Zhen Xin's dance, Cheng Shi finally "reclaimed a win."

'So what if you dance beautifully? There's no audience here!'

'And even if you dance well, you can't just keep dancing on the divine staircase forever! You think this is your Deceit stage?'

'This is the Chaos Temple!'

'Even the Fun God has to be called Chaos here!'

'This is NOT the place for you to "strut your stuff."'

After fuming for a moment, Cheng Shi decided to wake up this overly eye-catching Magician. But just as he raised his hand to pull Zhen Xin down from the staircase, something unexpected happened.

The dancing Zhen Xin alternated between calm and wildness. When calm, she could pirouette in place; but when wildness took over, her movements grew increasingly frenzied, one jaw-dropping technique after another — until mid-dance...

She stepped onto the sixth step!

But the instant her toes touched the sixth step, she crumpled like a swan struck from the sky, eyes shut, collapsing onto the staircase!

"Damn!"

Cheng Shi panicked. Kataro panicked too. They could feel Zhen Xin's vitality dissipating. Both rushed forward to pull her down.

Cheng Shi even produced the Lush Horn Crown, a healing spell already formed in his hand, ready at any moment to yank the Magician back from the Fishbone Hall of a certain deity.

But at that very instant, a beam of murky light descended from the Chaos Temple above them, enveloping Zhen Xin's body and teleporting this follower of Deceit directly into the temple.

Staring at this completely unexpected turn of events, Cheng Shi blinked in bewilderment.

He turned his stiff neck toward Kataro and asked, disbelief written across his face:

"He... was there all along?"

Kataro was equally stupefied. He had been instructed by the Benefactor to have Lord Cheng Shi handle this matter and had personally watched the Benefactor leave. But who could have fathomed that their Benefactor would deceive even His own people?

Seeing Kataro's reaction, Cheng Shi knew Kataro had genuinely been in the dark.

Fair enough — a true god had no obligation to report His whereabouts to His servants and followers.

Still... 'Benefactor, please don't tell me You came here just to watch the show.'

Yes, there had been a clown's circus here. But as for which clown was the star...

'Who cares. As long as I delivered enough laughs, I'm a devout follower of fun!'

Cheng Shi made peace with it. He straightened up, tucked his hands behind his back, and stood waiting for the Benefactor's summons. He knew that Chaos — no, Deceit — would definitely call him. Otherwise, when that beam of yellow light descended, he would have been slapped back to reality by the hand of chaos.

But he waited and waited, and the temple gave no response. Eventually even Kataro couldn't figure out what was happening up there. After a moment's thought, he leaned in close and whispered:

"Sir, shall I go up and inquire?"

Cheng Shi was about to nod, but his gaze swept across the staircase — and he froze. Then, with dawning comprehension, his face darkened.

"No need. Someone's waiting for me to walk up there..."

Fine, fine — Your first collectible made it to the sixth step, so Your second collectible has to match. Is that it?

Sure. One performance or two — it's all performing. I'm the Clown anyway. Since when is a Clown afraid of looking ridiculous?"

With that, Cheng Shi took one long stride, bypassing the still-active first two steps, and planted himself on the third.

But instead of pressing forward immediately, the Clown gazed up at the temple above and called out:

"Benefactor! If I make it to the sixth step, is there a reward?"

"..."

The temple offered no reply. Cheng Shi nodded.

"Silence means consent. That's good enough. Even a clown's performance earns an entrance ticket — I'm a last-minute guest star here, so the least I can do is earn my appearance fee!"

With that, Cheng Shi took another step forward...

...

Chapter 892: Wait, Who Did You Say Is Imprisoned Here?!

...and instantly pulled his foot back.

From the fourth step onward, the influence of Chaos's power on mortals was impossible to ignore. If he just repeated his previous approach, Cheng Shi genuinely didn't see how he could get past the fifth step and reach the sixth.

After all, he didn't know ballet, and wriggling in place wasn't going to land him on the sixth step.

So to complete the Benefactor's "assignment," he'd have to get creative.

Cheng Shi knew his own limitations. He pondered for a moment and quickly came up with a painless method to climb the staircase:

Switch to Fate and cheat with the dice.

Da Yi had actually used this trick before. That reckless Gap Light Iron Thorn had teleported straight to the tenth step — and then instantly disintegrated into symbols that fluttered down like confetti. It had scared Cheng Shi half to death at the time.

But just because Da Yi had turned into symbols didn't mean Cheng Shi would too. His target was only the sixth step, not the tenth. Zhen Xin had already proven with her own body that the worst a mortal faced on the sixth step was death — at least you wouldn't die into symbols.

Besides, leaving aside whether the Fun God sitting in the temple above would really let him die, the master of the Fishbone Hall would hardly pretend not to recognize his diligent and efficient employee upon reunion, would He?

Impossible. He would absolutely save this devout and productive worker.

Thinking it through this way, the path from life to death seemed to have already been paved. Every "authority holder" he'd encountered was practically an ally. A little flirtation with death was probably harmless.

So Cheng Shi made the switch. On the Chaos staircase, right in front of Kataro, he switched to Fate. And then a massive hand formed from yellow mist backhanded him into the air.

"..."

Kataro watched wide-eyed as Lord Cheng Shi was swatted away — and then scooped up by that same chaotic hand and deposited in the temple. He didn't dare utter a word, merely bowed his head and prayed that his lord's blasphemous stunt wouldn't bring the Benefactor's wrath down on him.

Cheng Shi had no idea how he'd blacked out. All he knew was that when he came to, he was lying inside the great hall, and Zhen Xin was sprawled on the floor not far away, her body still radiating an unstabilized breath of Chaos.

She'd fused?

That fast?

Then where was the Fun God?

Cheng Shi shot upright and scanned the surroundings. No sign of the Fun God anywhere — but he did spot a reverent-faced Kataro trotting over on quick, mincing steps upon seeing him awake.

Utterly confused, Cheng Shi asked: "What just happened?"

"..." Kataro was speechless.

'Sir, you personally committed the blasphemy. And you've already forgotten?'

'Was that on purpose or by accident?'

Regardless of what Cheng Shi might be thinking, a servant should do what a servant does — avoid speculating about his superiors' motives. So Kataro stood at attention beside Cheng Shi and faithfully relayed the Benefactor's instructions.

"Sir, the Benefactor wishes me to take you to see a prisoner."

"Who?" Cheng Shi went blank. He blinked, the bewilderment plain on his face. "Are you saying the prisoner... is here? In the Chaos Temple?"

Kataro nodded reverently.

Cheng Shi's brow furrowed in thought. "Something doesn't add up. Your expression is strange, Kataro. Is this prisoner's identity... distinguished?"

Kataro nodded again without hesitation.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi's frown deepened.

Why would there be a prisoner in the Chaos Temple?

Whose prisoner?

Chaos's, or the Fun God's?

If it was Chaos's, that would make sense. After all, Order had imprisoned a Chaos Envoy, so tit-for-tat, Chaos imprisoning an Order Envoy wouldn't be unusual.

An Envoy's status was high enough to justify Kataro's obvious anxiety.

But if it was a prisoner taken after the Fun God's "coup"...

Who had He imprisoned?

Could it be... Oblivion?

Had He already resolved his mortal crisis that quickly?

At this thought, excitement surged through Cheng Shi. But then the fear set in — if it really was Oblivion, there was a chance He'd simply obliterate all restraints and break out to kill him. So before getting up, Cheng Shi played it safe.

"Is this Chaos's prisoner, or His prisoner?"

Kataro's face was the picture of piety. "Both."

"Both?" Cheng Shi was baffled again. That ruled out Oblivion — after all, Oblivion and Chaos had no quarrel between them.

He mulled it over briefly and decided that since the Benefactor had said it was fine to visit, there shouldn't be a problem. So he took Kataro's offered hand, stood up, and nodded. "Lead the way."

Kataro turned and set off. But just as the two of them stepped around the prone Zhen Xin and were about to ascend the divine throne's platform, the Magician on the floor suddenly woke. She opened her eyes woozily.

Zhen Xin was equally disoriented. She'd lost consciousness on the fifth step. Waking now, she'd only vaguely heard a familiar voice and assumed she was back in reality.

But finding herself inside the Chaos Temple sharpened her brow into a tight knot.

That voice... was definitely Cheng Shi's. But why would Cheng Shi's voice be here?

She didn't sit up. Instead, she cautiously shifted her eyes around the hall. When she spotted the mysterious Lord Ultraman in front, and behind him a partially obscured but familiar figure, Zhen Xin let out a startled whisper:

"Cheng Shi? You're really here?"

The shout nearly gave Cheng Shi a heart attack.

He shot a quick glance at his own disguise, thinking — the instant he'd sensed her regaining consciousness, he'd already activated Chaos Acting to assume Ultraman's appearance. How had she seen through it?

Was this a new talent of hers?

That couldn't be right — was the Fun God specifically targeting His own people?

But in the next instant, Cheng Shi caught the direction of Zhen Xin's suspicious gaze and realized the truth. She hadn't unmasked his disguise — she'd mistaken Kataro behind him for Cheng Shi!

No wonder she'd mixed them up. In a sense, Kataro was his shadow — a shadow from history.

Kataro was stunned too. In the presence of the real deal, he'd never dare usurp the identity. He moved to pull back his hood and explain — after all, this "collectible" was also a player the Benefactor had His eye on, and in terms of rank, she might even be above him. No matter how loyal he was to Lord Cheng Shi, there was no need to stir up trouble here.

But just as Kataro was about to remove his hood, Cheng Shi subtly stopped him. Then, wearing a mysterious smile, Cheng Shi addressed Zhen Xin.

"You woke at just the right time. A moment later, and this secret would have been Cheng Shi's alone.

What a pity, Clown — you lost the bet. Your greed came up empty."

"?"

'Sir, are you mocking yourself now?'

Kataro was remarkably sharp. He immediately grasped Cheng Shi's intent, though he hadn't expected his lord would sacrifice his own reputation just to separate the identities of Ultraman and Cheng Shi.

But if the lord himself didn't mind, who was Kataro to object?

So the moment Cheng Shi took the lead in the charade, Kataro seized the cover of the blocked sightline and, right under Zhen Xin's nose, shifted his appearance into "Cheng Shi." With a guilty face, he poked his head out from behind Lord Ultraman and flashed Zhen Xin an awkward grin.

"Fancy meeting you here, what a coincidence!

I saw you sleeping so soundly, I didn't have the heart to wake you. Secrets and all that are secondary — your health comes first.

Without a healthy body, how can you make it to the top of this game? Right, Zhen Xin?"

"..."

"..."

Both people present were rendered speechless.

Cheng Shi was speechless because it was his first time witnessing his own lip from a third-person perspective. But he decided the blame lay entirely with Kataro's over-the-top acting causing character drift — that wasn't the real him at all.

Zhen Xin was speechless because with one glance, she'd read the situation and this Clown ally's true intentions.

There was a secret hidden in this temple, and this so-called partner who'd sworn to share intelligence was planning to cut her out and hoard the secret for himself!

'He's probably trying to use this secret to trade for more intelligence from me, isn't he?'

'No — a secret from a divine temple is definitely no small matter. One piece of intel probably won't cover it!'

'Fine, fine, fine. So this is where the Joker's intelligence comes from. Turns out that besides the great Lord Yu Xi, this Clown also has connections to the Chaos Envoy!'

Zhen Xin got to her feet with a rare scowl. She felt the Chaos energy within her body and asked, perplexed:

"Haven't you already fused Fate? Are you going to fuse Chaos too?"

Has a third faith slot opened up?"

Cheng Shi tensed inside but showed no concern on the surface.

"Sometimes, His gaze is worth far more than any fusion.

Cheng Shi is a guest I invited. It merely happened to coincide with your visit."

'A guest...'

'So Cheng Shi's relationship with Lord Ultraman isn't bad either. How does this Clown always end up on good terms with Envoys?'

'What on earth does he do to win over these Envoys that ordinary people haven't even seen?'

Zhen Xin knew this wasn't the time for deep investigation. She shelved her swirling doubts, bowed slightly to Lord Ultraman, and asked:

"Sir, now that I have received the Benefactor's gaze and become part of Chaos, may I ask — do I have the qualifications to learn the secret within this temple?"

Cheng Shi said nothing. He merely smiled and looked at Kataro.

This wasn't to ask for Kataro's opinion, of course — it was to ask whether the secret was significant enough to require Zhen Xin to step out.

From Cheng Shi's perspective, Zhen Xin was a solid ally. Since he'd already shared Order's secret with her, there was no need to be constantly on guard. Today's theatrics had all been about establishing Ultraman's image and separating it from Cheng Shi's identity. Now that the desired effect had been achieved, there was no point in being cagey about other things.

But he wasn't sure what the Fun God intended by this arrangement, which was why he let Kataro clarify.

Kataro considered for a moment, then smiled at Cheng Shi and replied in "Cheng Shi's" voice:

"Your generosity puts me to shame, sir.

A small wager for entertainment — since I've lost, I'll naturally defer to your arrangement."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi knew the temple's secret didn't need to be hidden. He relaxed and waved Zhen Xin over.

"Your luck isn't bad. Come — let me take you both to meet Him."

Zhen Xin's eyes widened in surprise as she hurried to keep up, walking shoulder to shoulder with "Cheng Shi" behind the lord. She glanced sideways at "Cheng Shi" and whispered:

"Meet who? The master of the temple?"

"Cheng Shi" shook his head, eyes forward, and murmured back: "Not Chaos. It's... Order."

'Wait — hold on — WHO?!'

In that instant, Lord Ultraman, who'd been leading the way with ears pricked, froze mid-step.

...

That was one hell of a bombshell!

...

Chapter 893: Order?!

"Sir?"

"Cheng Shi" and Zhen Xin had also stopped, both looking up at Lord Ultraman who had suddenly halted in his tracks.

With his back to the two of them, Cheng Shi's eyelids were twitching wildly. It took him a good while to force the shock back down.

It really was Order!!

He'd assumed that Order's presence here involved some kind of chess game between gods. But now it was clear... to hell with chess — the Fun God and Chaos had straight-up kidnapped Order!

No wonder They'd dared to so brazenly replace Order. With the only legitimate holder already captured, what was there to fear?

But still...

'Isn't this a bit reckless? How could you leave a loose end like this lying around?'

Hsss—

'Wait — is the Fun God expecting me to help Them deal with this loose end?'

"..."

Cheng Shi blinked and sank into thought.

'Me — a con artist — deal with a true god?'

'Am I even qualified for that?'

For a moment, the Clown was frightened by his own conjecture. But he quickly collected himself.

Maybe he was overthinking it. Even if he was, the current lineup — one fake Envoy plus two diluted Chaos followers — had absolutely no business visiting a true god in prison.

What if the other party saw through his identity and forced a full-exposure showdown, ripping off every last disguise?

At this thought, Cheng Shi started to panic.

He didn't want his spur-of-the-moment performance to once again devolve into a clown show. But with Zhen Xin watching, he had no choice but to keep the act going. Reluctantly, he continued toward the elevated platform, guided by "Cheng Shi's" cues, and finally came to a stop before the divine throne.

Seeing that Lord Ultraman had at last halted, "Cheng Shi" — who'd been theatrically examining the surroundings and gasping in admiration — fell quiet. He looked left and right with apparent wonder, then pointed at the divine throne and ventured cautiously:

"Sir, are you saying the prisoner... is tied up behind this throne?"

"..."

'So you just strapped Order to the back of the throne?'

'Fine, fine, fine!'

Cheng Shi turned around and shot "Cheng Shi" a half-amused look, practically on the verge of applauding his own shadow.

'Kataro, oh Kataro — you really held that in. You've been coming to this temple for ages, and it never occurred to you that there was a secret behind the throne!'

Zhen Xin's eyebrows shot up in surprise as well. Having an audience with Order inside the Chaos Temple was already mind-boggling enough, but when she heard the word "prisoner" from "Cheng Shi's" mouth, even this brilliant Magician froze.

She suddenly realized that this opportunity to face Order was not an audience — it was a prison visit. Chaos had actually imprisoned His rival here!

Was this how Chaos had managed to become Order?

A personal gambit — switching heaven and earth?

Zhen Xin held her breath. The confusion and alarm of moments ago gave way to exhilaration. She knew she was close to finding her answer.

Meanwhile, the mysterious Lord Ultraman had no idea how to open the throne's restraining mechanism. So he turned once more to face Cheng Shi and Zhen Xin, "generously" offering both players the chance to approach Order first.

But this was no kind "opportunity." It was more like a loyalty test — a statement of allegiance before the Chaos Envoy himself.

If the person leading the prison visit was Lord Ultraman, then these two mortals were merely witnesses to Order's disgrace — hardly accomplices to Chaos's actions.

But if one of them personally exposed Order's cage for all to see, that act would be tantamount to blasphemy.

No one wanted to take that risk, because as mortals, they had no way of knowing whether Order might one day break free — and then, in Order's name, come knocking to judge them for their blasphemy.

Of course, that was a concern for the real Cheng Shi. The problem right now was that if the "Cheng Shi" played by Kataro didn't step up, no one else on scene could open the cage.

The standoff froze.

Lord Ultraman remained breezy and unhurried, seemingly unbothered by the wasted time.

Zhen Xin and "Cheng Shi" exchanged several glances but couldn't bring themselves to act. Zhen Xin's thoughts were straightforward — she was simply weighing the cost-benefit of committing blasphemy. Kataro's mind, however, was a whirlwind.

This act was exhausting. He had to keep Cheng Shi's persona consistent while avoiding character drift, couldn't defy Cheng Shi's nature by taking the initiative, had to guard against the Magician's scrutiny at every turn, and needed to maintain the right distance from Lord Ultraman. His brain was like an engine revving at maximum RPM, on the verge of overheating.

Thankfully, it was Zhen Xin who made the first move. Seeing the cautious "Cheng Shi" refuse to budge no matter what, she reluctantly stepped forward, resolving to trade one act of blasphemy for one monumental secret.

But the throne's mechanism wasn't something just anyone could undo. Without temple authority, even a Chaos follower couldn't rotate the throne to reveal what lay behind it.

So just as Zhen Xin was about to take a step forward, "Cheng Shi" grabbed her arm. Seeing the slight surprise and questioning crease on her brow, he offered a soft laugh, full of meaning.

"I'll do it. I'll handle this.

You may be a Chaos follower now, but I'm the one who dragged you into this. It wouldn't be right to make you shoulder more risk.

Besides, I have a bit of experience when it comes to blasphem— ahem, this sort of thing. So leave it to me.

But considering I'm taking the bullet for you, Zhen Xin... you'll compensate me a little, won't you?"

At these words, both Zhen Xin's and Ultraman's expressions shifted.

Zhen Xin thought she'd underestimated the Clown's greed — even committing blasphemy, he wanted to squeeze intelligence out of her. But then again, without this "skill-makes-the-bold" brand of greed, the Clown would never have accrued so many intelligence sources.

So with a peculiar look on her face, she studied "Cheng Shi" for a moment and quietly agreed to the trade.

Watching "himself" score yet another windfall, Lord Ultraman nearly lost his composure trying to keep a straight face.

'Not bad, not bad — only now do I feel like Kataro truly gets me.'

"Cheng Shi" probably guessed what the real Cheng Shi was thinking. He pursed his lips with resignation, walked up to the throne like a duck being pushed onto a perch, fumbled around theatrically for a bit, and then — with great "effort" — rotated the throne around.

The moment the chaos chains and mockery spikes pinning down the codex came into view, Cheng Shi and Zhen Xin's expressions hardened. Their pupils contracted.

Order!!!

It really was Order imprisoned here.

Except this Order felt nothing like the fair and just Order one would expect. Instead, there was a strange, lofty arrogance about Him.

As the three stood examining the codex, He didn't even spare a glance at the mortals around Him. He simply spoke, as if to Himself:

"Bring Him to see me."

Order's divine voice reverberated through the temple. Two mortals certainly weren't about to respond carelessly. Their expressions varied — thoughtful, cautious — while only Lord Ultraman maintained an easy smile, as if this scene was old hat.

In truth, it was all an act. Cheng Shi's thoughts were racing. After lengthy deliberation, he decided to adopt an "old friend" posture and replied with a smile:

"Whom would You like to see?"

"I said — bring Him to see me."

The shackled Order didn't even look at Cheng Shi.

Cheng Shi didn't mind the snub. He chuckled. "He may not have the time. After all, the justice and order of this universe require His watchful eye."

The codex fell abruptly silent. Then its pages began flipping in a frenzy, the Order symbols between them blazing with holy light, thundering like a storm — as if, any second now, He would shatter His cage and descend upon the world bearing the universe's supreme laws.

But instead of loosened restraints, the chains only tightened further!

Every wisp of Order's escaping power was swallowed whole by the laughing mouths carved into the mockery spikes. Before long, the codex that had been thrashing violently went rigid once more, slumping back against the throne like a departing soul.

Yet even so — even drained and weakened — His tone remained unbending.

"In this world, no one but me is fit to speak of Order!"

Listening to this arrogant declaration, Cheng Shi slowly began to understand.

This didn't sound like the Iron Law of Order. Could it be another fragment of Order?

So he looked at Kataro and gave him a questioning glance. When he received an emphatically affirmative wink in return, he threw his head back with a grand laugh and introduced the prisoner to the two players before him.

"Behold — this is Pride of Order. The former Order...

or rather, one of them."

...

Chapter 894: Order, Do You Plead Guilty?

"One of them?"

Before Zhen Xin could even process that, "Cheng Shi" had already slipped smoothly into the role of straight man. Like a clueless newcomer, Kataro boldly threw out questions during this bizarre prison visit.

"Sir, why do You say 'one of' the Orders? Are you implying there are many Orders in this world?"

"..."

'Great question!'

'That one struck right at the heart!'

'I want to know too!'

Cheng Shi, however, wasn't stumped. Drawing on his limited intelligence, he began introducing the hidden divine history to the two of them.

"It's a long story."

He first offered a nod to the bound Order — a mild apology for ripping open old wounds to His face — then preemptively patched any holes in his narrative.

"I once went through a period of dormancy and missed that remarkable past. So my understanding of these events comes only from various secondhand accounts.

It is said that during a certain god war, Order, for the sake of universal peace, stepped into the Sea of Desire — attempting to quell the world's greatest aggregation of desire: Corruption."

"Order once entered the Sea of Desire?!" Kataro cried out in disbelief. "The Sea of Desire still exists, yet Order is imprisoned — does that mean Order lost, sir?"

"..."

'Okay, that was a bit over the top, buddy.'

Cheng Shi's eyelid twitched, but he had no choice except to nod along.

"Correct. He failed.

Torn apart by desire, the Order of that time ceased to exist, shattering into different fragments.

Justice of Order upholds the Convention for the gods. Fear of Order became the will of Order in the game you participate in. The Iron Law of Order took His original divine throne, becoming the guide for billions of Order followers. As for this one — Pride of Order...

I only recently learned He was confined here.

It seems my Benefactor's approach toward Void wasn't merely riding the tides of the era. They must have begun cooperating long ago — and the object of that cooperation was the hunt of another true god.

Isn't that right, great Order?"

Cheng Shi even took the time, mid-performance, to verify with the deity in question. He could tell that Pride of Order didn't deign to expose the charade before Him — because He was arrogant enough not to bother.

The codex wilted, drooping against the back of the throne. Even drained of all presence, His pages still trembled with disdain.

"And who are you, to presume to discuss Order?"

"Naturally, I'm not worthy. Which is why I can only stand here and admire the 'heroic figure' of Your imprisonment."

Cheng Shi snorted a laugh, not forgetting to stay in character as Ultraman.

In his design, the Chaos Envoy Ultraman was a devoted follower who didn't know that Chaos had already replaced Order. Only with this setup could he, wearing an Envoy's mantle, assign Zhen Xin — one of the few who knew the truth — to carry out tasks related to Chaos's approach to Void, without needing to dodge suspicion or over-explain.

Everything was in service of intelligence gathering. And the disguise was the collector.

"I believe that very soon, my Benefactor and Deceit—" he cast a meaningful glance at Zhen Xin, "— which is to say, your two Benefactors, will join forces to do something about Order. I've been waiting for this day for a long time. Years of planning, all to return the universe to disorder — eternal chaos."

Hearing this, Zhen Xin's pupils contracted. She seemed to grasp the key issue.

At the same time, Kataro, reading Cheng Shi's intent, seamlessly lowered his head and exchanged a quiet glance with the Magician beside him. His sharp eyes clearly communicated:

'Lord Ultraman doesn't know the secret about Deceit and Chaos.'

Zhen Xin understood immediately. She swallowed the question that had been on the tip of her tongue.

The scene was fascinating: a true god was present, yet held the lowest status. An Envoy was running the show, yet was ignorant of the secret. And two mortal followers stood at the bottom of the ladder — yet were the most informed people in the room.

Zhen Xin didn't know why Chaos would keep His own Envoy in the dark about this grand affair. But once she factored in her own Benefactor — Deceit — well... the Fun God was surely scheming something beyond Order, something aimed at Chaos as well. That would explain the current situation.

So the Magician, confident she'd read the room, seamlessly switched into intelligence-gathering mode and began cataloging everything she witnessed.

She was curious why Lord Ultraman had brought Cheng Shi and her to visit Order in prison. But before she could ask, the ever-"thoughtful" Clown had already raised the question for her.

No — he didn't just ask. He even volunteered his own guess.

"Cheng Shi" furrowed his brow with feigned puzzlement and addressed Ultraman.

"Sir, are You bringing us here because... You want us to search through the historical records and piece together what happened during the god war between Order and Corruption?"

As he spoke, his expression turned troubled.

"But, sir — divine secrets aren't something two lowly players can touch. The history of the Land of Hope may not even contain a similar faith-conflict projection. I'm afraid this task... might be rather difficult."

The information density of those words was staggering. For a moment, not only Zhen Xin, but even Ultraman himself was floored.

So that was what the Fun God meant?

He wanted them to sift through relevant history — to peer through so-called "faith conflict projections" and uncover the truth behind that era?

What truth?

The truth of Order's fracture, or the truth of Corruption's Sea of Desire?

Setting those questions aside — if Kataro was right, did that mean every divine conflict over faith had a corresponding parallel in the history of the Land of Hope?

At this thought, it dawned on Cheng Shi.

Of course — the gods were themselves crystallizations of faith, each a commentary by that primordial Origin on a past era. So rather than saying that mortal faith conflicts were projections of divine will, it was more accurate to say the gods themselves were the aggregate of mortal faith conflicts.

But if that were true... then the History School's approach — deriving the grand from the small — had actually been on the right track?

Lost in thought, Lord Ultraman couldn't help glancing at Zhen Xin.

"Cheng Shi" followed suit and looked at Zhen Xin. And Zhen Xin... was stunned.

Studying the gods through the Land of Hope's history was one of the founding principles of the History School. They had accumulated mountains of historical data, yet their understanding of the divine had remained frustratingly limited and one-dimensional.

Now, hearing this novel theory of "faith conflict projections," she suddenly felt that her years of persistence had finally glimpsed a dawn.

But was it real?

If Lord Ultraman had said it, she'd believe it without question. But if it came from Cheng Shi... she'd need to watch Ultraman's reaction first.

And besides — this Clown's nerve was something else. What did he mean, "this task might be difficult"?

Was he bargaining with an Envoy?

Openly bargaining?

It seemed the Clown's network — no, his divine network — ran far deeper than she'd imagined.

And furthermore — why would an Envoy seek secrets through mortal players instead of obtaining them from other gods or even Servant Gods?

Had He realized He was being sidelined by His Benefactor, and was now carving out an alternative path? Or was Chaos's position not as favorable as it appeared?

Zhen Xin's head was brimming with questions. She looked at "Cheng Shi," then at Ultraman who was watching her, and after a moment's thought, spoke first:

"If Your Excellency has need, I am willing to dedicate whatever time remains beyond my pious duties to search the world for the information You seek."

'Got her!'

Lord Ultraman smiled knowingly, thinking — 'That's exactly what I was waiting to hear.'

"I can feel the sincerity from both of you. Very good. You may withdraw. I have other matters to attend to."

With that, Cheng Shi waved the two away. Kataro promptly summoned the yellow mist and escorted himself and Zhen Xin out.

After seeing Zhen Xin off, this devoted servant of Void immediately returned to the great hall — and was met with a sight he would never forget.

The Lord Ultraman who had been perfectly "orderly" moments ago now had one foot planted on the divine throne, legs spread in a wide stance, looming over the codex in a posture of absolute dominance. And he was delivering a spirited speech:

"Chaos usurped Your name. Order can no longer sustain itself. Your pride betrayed Your faith and cost the universe its true Order.

Justice of Order is rigid and outdated. Fear of Order merely rides on threats. Not only have they failed to discipline the gods — they've let the gods roam freely through Order's loopholes.

Is this what you meant when you said only Order is fit to speak of order?

If so, then this Order is laughable.

Ha — ha ha ha ha ha!

Today, I speak on behalf of the billions of bewildered Order followers across history and reality — and the countless ordinary lives who lived carefully, followed every rule, colored inside every line — to judge You, and to ask their beloved Order:

Do You... plead guilty?"

...

Chapter 895: Order, Split into X?

In the past, the ever-prudent Cheng Shi would never have dared to blaspheme a god this brazenly to His face.

It wasn't because firing Thundering Judgment at Oblivion had sent him into a nihilistic "shattered-pot" mentality. Rather, he reasoned that since the Fun God was willing to expose the imprisoned Order to him, it meant he was absolutely safe at this moment.

At the very least, even if the prisoner rioted, the warden had to be nearby.

So Cheng Shi pushed his luck.

He wasn't just fulfilling a "promise" he'd once made to Order during a trial. Drawing from his own experiences and feelings, he genuinely wanted to confront Order with some hard questions.

He often wondered: if Order had never faltered from the very beginning, would reality look different from what it was now?

It was a question with virtually no answer. Cheng Shi knew that. But he still wanted to ask — because that was the instinctive longing buried deep in every human heart for peace and goodness.

Muddled thoughts silenced him for a moment. Seeing that Pride of Order had also fallen silent under his judgment, he let out a snicker and pressed on with another taunt.

"Though they have their faults, at least they are still Order.

Justice of Order uses the Convention to restrain the gods and discipline their conduct.

Fear of Order may be extreme, but at least, driven by fear, it constantly reinforces order.

The Iron Law of Order may have fallen prematurely, but within its limited 'lifespan,' it ensured a stable transition of historical order.

So let me ask — what about You, Pride of Order?

What have You contributed to the order of this universe?

Being tied up here to please Chaos, begging Him not to add more chaos to the world?"

"..."

"..."

What Pride of Order was thinking, Kataro had no idea. All he knew was that his own eyelid was twitching violently.

This Order truly couldn't escape the cage. But what if...

'Lord Cheng Shi was always so steady — why has he suddenly gone into this crazed mockery mode? I'd like to ask You, sir — where did Your prudence go?'

It had to be said: while Cheng Shi's strength was negligible before a god, his biting sarcasm — learned to a good fifty percent from Deceit — packed staggering destructive power. Pride of Order had absorbed every word, which was precisely why He couldn't refute them.

But His inherent arrogance wouldn't let Him bow His head. So His pages still fluttered — the holy light dim — and in a tone of lofty detachment, He denied it all.

"I acknowledge that Justice of Order is Order's essence. Fear of Order is Order's worry. And I am Order's transcendence over all.

But...

What is this 'Iron Law of Order'?

It is merely a creation of Order. How dare you equate it with the likes of us?

I created it for the sole purpose of providing guidance from Him to the foolish, self-unaware mortal lives. By that logic, everything it accomplished was merely the manifestation of my will. Its merits are, by rights, my merits.

The fact that it collapsed midway through propagating Order's will — without a contingency plan — constitutes a betrayal of my expectations and an act of blasphemy!

It... is not worthy of speaking of Order."

"..."

That outburst actually left Cheng Shi speechless.

'Buddy, I thought I was shameless — but you're on another level.'

'Is this a divine talent? Even in shamelessness, you can transcend the mortal plane and ascend a whole dimension?'

'If you had the slightest shred of self-awareness, how could you spout such brain-dead nonsense?'

Cheng Shi nearly laughed in anger. He was about to fire back when Kataro behind him muttered in a strange tone:

"That doesn't add up..."

Cheng Shi paused and turned to look at Kataro. Kataro was nervously glancing left and right, as if searching for someone's presence. But in this temple devoid of Chaos, who would a servant of Void be looking for?

Cheng Shi read Kataro's mind instantly. He raised an eyebrow.

"Looking is pointless. If He wants to know what you said, He'll know regardless of where He is. So just say what's on your mind, Kataro. It's not like there's anything new that I don't already know."

Kataro clenched his fists nervously. He wasn't sure whether he could share this. But since Lord Cheng Shi had asked, he had no choice but to confess, anxiously and honestly.

"Sir, the Order that Chaos replaced — the Iron Law of Order — was not a pure creation of Order. It was Obsession of Order, who fused with the Iron Law to turn the creation into a true deity!

So He should also be one of the fractured Orders.

Order split into four — this is common knowledge among the gods regarding the Sea of Desire shattering."

"?"

Hearing this, Cheng Shi froze.

Granted, for a true god to fuse a fragment with a creation wasn't particularly unusual. But given Kataro's alarmed tone and Pride of Order's definition of the Iron Law, was there more to this story?

He turned back to the codex beneath his feet, only to hear it scoff:

"I erred in stepping into the Sea of Desire. I was torn apart by desire. I split into three — where does this fourth come from?"

It seems that a universe stripped of Order can't even keep its basic facts straight.

How pitiful."

"..."

Cheng Shi couldn't hold back. He pressed one finger onto the codex's cover, pinning down the feebly fluttering pages, and sneered with maximum derision.

"Who's the pitiful one here?"

You don't even understand your own death. You wear Order's divine name on your head, yet at the moment of your shattering, you couldn't even let the world clearly perceive the order of your fracture — leaving outsiders to guess how many pieces you split into!

Pathetic!

Never mind how many fragments you truly became. Your stubborn dead-duck posturing right now — what good does it do for the last shred of order left in this universe?

Making the world see how wretched the former Order has become, so they'll toss you some humanitarian sympathy?

Sorry — you can't even manage that.

Only two people have seen you this pathetic. Only one has heard you this stubborn. No one pities your predicament — just as no one even noticed the fall of Order.

Now I understand how Chaos managed to replace Order. Hah — if even Order can't face itself, then a Chaos that's equally blind to its own nature is no different from you.

Order's codex, the Grand Tribunal — nothing more than a clueless troupe of amateurs, if you ask me."

After that, Cheng Shi even spat on the ground. Then he stepped off the throne, brow deeply furrowed, and walked over to Kataro. He laid a hand on his shoulder and, with the utmost gravity, asked:

"Who told you about the existence of Obsession of Order?"

Kataro's expression shifted. Something clicked for him, and he didn't dare hide it. "The Benefactor. But sir, this is common knowledge among the gods."

The gods?

Cheng Shi seemed to grasp something. He snickered, waving a hand dismissively.

"Good. Of course I know the gods all know this. But does your 'all the gods' include the Order right in front of us?"

In this world, who understands Order better than Order Himself?

He says He split into three. That doesn't seem to include your so-called Obsession of Order.

So here's the second question:

If the gods all know about this — who told them?"

"..." Kataro was a sharp man. The answer came to him instantly. But he didn't dare say it.

Cheng Shi didn't press him. He just shook his head with a wry smile and began counting on his fingers.

"That's a tough one to guess. So let's use the process of elimination.

First, eliminate Order. Second...

Eliminate every god except Deceit."

"..."

Kataro's eyelid twitched. 'Sir, your process of elimination is certainly... unique.'

But Cheng Shi paid no attention to Kataro's odd expression. He stroked his chin, deep in thought.

"Interesting. So during Order's fracture, the Fun God was already plotting for Order's divine throne?"

No — wait. He wasn't scheming for Order's throne. He was scheming for Chaos's throne!

Getting Chaos to replace Order was all about vacating this temple for Himself.

He'd been eyeing a fusion with Chaos all along!

And this covetous intent may have begun even before Order stepped into the Sea of Desire!"

The further Cheng Shi's thoughts ran, the more alarmed he became. He kept feeling that Deceit — who concealed everything — hadn't sought to fuse with the all-obscuring Chaos for any simple reason. It was to better hide some secret.

But what exactly was He hiding?

...

Chapter 896: War Has a Part in This Too?

Cheng Shi pondered for a long time, then looked up at Kataro again.

"Do you know what actually happened before and after Order stepped into the Sea of Desire?"

Kataro glanced at the now-silent Pride of Order and bowed his head with reverent deference.

"I've heard snippets.

At the time, Void had just descended. It was the dawn of the era. Everything in the universe was developing in an orderly fashion — after all, previous epochs had gone through the same cycle several times. Aside from the massive influx of divine wills, the tide of history was no different from the past.

But the problems seemed to originate from within that very deluge of divine wills.

I believe you already know of His existence...

This humble Kataro dares not speak that name. I can only say that all of the gods' wills are connected to Him. They seemed to be vying for something. And this chaotic situation, under the... ahem, 'push of the era'... finally drew Order's displeasure."

"..."

Cheng Shi shot Kataro a sideways look, thinking — 'That's a nice euphemism.'

'What "push of the era"? Just say the Fun God was stirring the pot.'

So that was it. Aph Ros had once said the gods had coexisted peacefully in every previous era, which had left him puzzled as to why a god war erupted in the Void era. Now it was clear — the Fun God had contributed significantly to igniting that war.

"And then?"

Order went solo against the entire world?"

As he spoke, Cheng Shi glanced back at the codex that embodied "Order's transcendent standing."

"Yes."

"???"

Cheng Shi was stunned.

'Hold on — I was joking. You're telling me it actually happened?'

Kataro's expression was somber, as if awed by the memory of Order's former might.

"Order sought to restore order and purge the universe. First, He exterminated the various lesser gods who harbored too many schemes. Then He joined forces with War to deal with the subordinates of both Civilization and Chaos. The fires of war at one point engulfed the entire universe — until several other supreme true gods intervened, each shielding their own Envoys. Only then did this all-consuming crusade of order come to an end.

But Order understood: gods, too, have desires. As long as the Sea of Desire existed, divine wills tainted by desire would never build an absolutely ordered world.

And so Order resolutely stepped into the Sea of Desire, intending to judge Corruption — a fellow member of the sixteen true gods.

War loved war. Naturally, He followed right behind."

"Wait!" Cheng Shi raised his hand in astonishment, cutting Kataro off. "War 'loved war'? That's a pretty niche description.

War has a part in this story too?"

"Yes." Kataro nodded. "According to the Benefactor, the old War was the most belligerent and battle-hardened god in all the universe. He fanned the flames of war everywhere, all to make the universe acknowledge His will.

During Order's purging war, War was originally one of Order's targets too. But War was ultimately a sibling deity of the Civilization Path, so Order ordered Him to use war to end war — to pay for His sins.

War never refused a war. So He agreed. And then He threw Himself into the most exhilarating battle since His descent: a god war!"

"..."

'This War is way too unfamiliar.'

If "war" didn't inherently connote violence and cruelty, Cheng Shi might as well have labeled it with "silence."

Then again, His followers did carry quite a bit of His old "heritage."

Kataro paused at the right moment, giving Lord Cheng Shi time to sort his thoughts before continuing.

"After that came the moment Order, with War in tow, stepped into the Sea of Desire.

What happened inside was unknown to any outsider. All the gods knew was that Order had shattered — split into four. And War, from that day forward, strayed far from His original will."

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow.

"Here's the question: how did the gods know Order split into four?

I'm guessing...

Among the gods stationed at the edge of the Sea of Desire, eagerly awaiting the outcome — the most enthusiastic one bore the divine name Deceit.

And perhaps alongside Him was Chaos!

The Fun God was probably already scheming all of this by then. He struck a deal with Chaos — maybe not because He foresaw what would happen in the Sea of Desire, but simply to team up like fishermen waiting to profit while the snipe and the clam fought.

Except Order didn't manage to destroy Corruption. Instead, Order Himself shattered.

And so!

What was originally a three-way split happened right under Deceit's watchful eyes — and became four. The fourth piece was the Chaos who agreed to impersonate Order!

So what Chaos replaced wasn't truly Order — He was merely displacing the so-called Iron Law of Order.

That's right — if Order could purge the entire universe, how could His fragments so easily fall to His opposite number? The Fun God used precisely this 'logic' to deceive every god and successfully infiltrated Chaos into Order's Tribunal!"

Cheng Shi guessed aloud as he spoke, his eyes burning brighter with each word. He suddenly pointed at the codex on the throne and nodded.

"Not only that — He even left a failsafe. What if someone discovered Order only split into three? For example, War — the one who'd entered the Sea of Desire with Him.

So to patch that hole, He and Chaos kidnapped this disgraceful Pride of Order and locked Him in the temple.

With that, everything falls into place.

From start to finish — from the god war to the impersonation — He was pulling the strings all along.

The current state of affairs may not have been His original plan, but the facts prove that the situation remains heavily in His favor — even more so than the original scheme.

Am I right, Kataro?"

Kataro was sweating. He absolutely didn't dare speculate about the Benefactor's plans. All he could do was laugh nervously, offer a couple of vague affirmative sounds, then wipe the cold sweat from his brow and stammer:

"Reporting to my lord — Kataro was not informed of this."

"Of course you weren't. Otherwise, how could you serve as His messenger?"

But when He told you all this, didn't you at least make some guesses? You're not a fool.

And judging by your reaction, you only learned all this recently, didn't you?"

Though Cheng Shi was questioning Kataro, he was really asking himself:

'What does the Benefactor want me to do?'

'Could the Fun God want me to probe War?'

'Is that why He used the War Supervisor to test War?'

'He thinks something's off about War?'

True enough — if Order, the god who'd purged the entire universe, had shattered, why did War come out unscathed?

Merely becoming timid and orderly didn't look like someone who'd suffered a "devastating blow."

But the real question wasn't that. The question was why the Fun God wanted to probe War at all.

Everything He'd done was to uproot Order. War had nothing to do with that. Even as sibling deities on the same Path, there was no need to overly affect War's interests.

Besides, who said deities of the same Path were like family? The Fun God and Fate weren't exactly getting along either.

"..."

'Forget it — my daily blasphemy quota is already way over the limit. Better cool it.'

Cheng Shi couldn't figure it out. Kataro didn't look like he'd offer anything useful either. So Cheng Shi turned back to the codex behind him, hoping to squeeze a few more words out of the captive.

As the saying went — a tiger on the plains gets bullied by dogs...

'Wait — that's not a great saying. I'm not a dog.'

Cheng Shi smacked his lips, walked back over to the codex, crouched down to eye level, and dropped his earlier mocking tone entirely. In a sudden shift to sincere gravity, he began to "negotiate."

"Pride of Order — transcendent above all. Allow me to speak plainly. Your predicament is not entirely without a solution.

Though the true Order is but a fading afterglow, Your followers don't know that, do they?

So as long as the faith endures, as long as conviction remains — why can't the universe march toward a different kind of order?

All that's missing is someone to guide them.

Do You... take my meaning?"

"..."

Whether Pride of Order understood or not remained to be seen. But Kataro understood. He understood instantly.

'So that's it — that's what this is!'

'I was wondering why Lord Cheng Shi had abandoned his trademark prudence today. Every taunt and attack was laying the groundwork for this one line.'

'He wasn't showing off his sarcasm — he was showing off his greed!'

'Facing the last remnant of Order in all the universe... he was still greedy!'

...

Chapter 897: Face Reality — You Have No Choice

The codex turned its pages slowly, radiating haughty disdain.

While Cheng Shi's words might have held some logic, Order — however far He'd fallen — would never entrust His last hope to a follower of Chaos. Letting Chaos's lackey preach order to the universe? The very notion was as laughable as a Deceit follower opening their heart to somebody.

Cheng Shi clearly sensed the withering gaze and knew exactly what the other was thinking. But he felt neither shame nor dismay. Instead, he sat cross-legged on the floor with perfect composure and began haggling with Pride of Order.

In Kataro's eyes, the scene looked remarkably like something from his student days at the Tower of Logic — certain data-falsifying scholars grinning ear to ear while pitching their advisors for research funding.

He had to admit: those teachers, in their pursuit of Truth's infinite possibilities, had been genuinely lenient. Well — other people's teachers had been lenient, anyway. They'd approved all sorts of funding.

But now...

No matter how well Kataro understood Cheng Shi, he couldn't fathom how a follower of Chaos — the nominal Envoy, no less — could con "research funding" out of actual Order.

Cheng Shi was indeed "pitching for investment." He'd never imagined he'd have any dealings with the genuine Order. Before today, he'd assumed Order in this world had self-destructed, leaving only the rigid Justice of Order within the Convention and the harsh Fear of Order — neither of which he liked.

But now, opportunity had knocked.

After all, gilding the lily could never compare to sending charcoal in a snowstorm. No matter how much those watching eyes appreciated him, his meager offerings were merely a slightly higher wave in the boundless ocean of faith.

But Order was different — because He had no choice.

Perhaps He didn't want the "charcoal" Cheng Shi was offering. But sometimes, the fun in business lay precisely in the hard sell — especially when you held all the leverage.

"Great Order, with Your permission — actually, You don't really look like proper Order right now, so let's simplify things. Change the titles.

I'll call You 'Lord Codex.' And You needn't think of me as a follower of Chaos. I know You can see where my roots truly lie. So please, just call me...

Clown."

Cheng Shi was a master of building rapport. His rhetoric was packed with technique.

Even though the current dynamic was the strong pressuring the weak, the other party was still a true god, and Cheng Shi's leverage was borrowed from Deceit.

If Deceit Himself were here, He could strong-arm the deal without a care. But when the negotiator was merely Deceit's follower, that leverage was automatically discounted. Bulldozing relentlessly would only break the deal — especially when the other party was this "arrogant." Strategic concessions to widen the negotiation space were essential.

Take the current moment: "clown" was universally synonymous with ridicule and absurdity. By calling himself a Clown, Cheng Shi could, to some degree, satisfy Pride's need for superiority.

These were all tricks Cheng Shi used to handle players. He wasn't sure they'd work on a true god, but not trying guaranteed failure.

Fortunately, Pride of Order did respond to this approach. Though the codex's scrutiny of Cheng Shi grew even more contemptuous, the adversarial will within it noticeably softened.

Who would lower themselves to spar with a Clown?

Sensing the shift, Cheng Shi allowed himself a small smile and continued with sincerity.

"Lord Codex, before we speak candidly, I'd like to ask for Your forgiveness in advance. To earn Your approval, I must confront You with some harsh realities. These truths will undoubtedly feel like an affront to someone in Your position.

Of course, whether or not You agree is irrelevant.

That, too, is part of the current reality."

"..." The codex's pages flipped more rapidly — clearly angered. But He said nothing, only listening with imperious detachment.

"You may still be trapped in Order's most glorious past, believing that it was Order who brought peace to the universe.

But in fact, You should know by now — Chaos replaced Your position long ago. Your other fragments have become nothing more than 'props' the gods use to manage relations among themselves.

Order has long since lost its true meaning.

Tsk — please, don't rush, and don't get angry. Everything I'm saying is fact.

The Convention does restrict the gods' 'freedom' to a certain extent. But You should know Them. Even setting aside my Benefactor, Deceit — among the remaining gods, which one do You think would honestly obey the Convention?"

"..." The codex might have confidence in His own will of Order. But as for the other gods — clearly, He did not believe these beings would submit to His will.

"The answer is obvious. None of them. Not a single one.

This isn't solely the consequence of Your fracture. Divinity is inherently complex. To put it bluntly, the gods are simply another form of 'mortal life' with authority in hand.

A truly omniscient, omnipotent god exists elsewhere.

On this point... do You agree?"

"Insolent!

You dare speak recklessly of Origin! I shall sentence you to the highest crime — destruction of body and soul!"

The codex flipped in a frenzy. But Cheng Shi didn't flinch. He simply spread his hands and smiled. "Then by all means, sentence me. After You're done, we'll continue."

"..."

A single line sent the lofty Order crashing to earth. Pride of Order raged impotently for a moment before the mockery spikes drained another burst of Order's essence, leaving Him even more depleted.

Cheng Shi studied the spike — its jaw stretching ever wider — with keen interest, thinking: 'This thing is definitely a good item. Wonder if the Fun God has any spares.'

"Finished with the sentencing? Then let's move on.

Lord Codex, have You ever considered what brought You to this predicament?"

"Deceit!" The codex was drained, but when He spoke that divine name, His teeth still gnashed.

"No. Wrong. This has nothing to do with the Fun God. It was You — You yourself created everything that's happened."

"The crime of slander!"

"Want to sentence me again?"

"..."

"Then let's skip the sentencing and move on." Cheng Shi pressed down a smile and continued. "Gods harbor complex thoughts and shifting wills. Burdened by suspicion, calculation, and caution, They're reluctant to act directly — hence the Envoys who serve as proxies. Am I right so far, Lord Codex?"

Whether it was because He'd been rendered speechless or because He simply refused to engage with the Clown any further, the codex fell silent and said no more.

"Silence means agreement.

Good. If I'm right, then here's the question.

Those who truly seek to change the present always have devoted followers to spread their faith and carry out their will. So let me ask — where have all Your followers gone?

The Grand Tribunal counts, I suppose. But they're equally trapped in history — mired in the past just like You, refusing to move forward.

What I mean is — aside from the followers stuck in the past, where did Your other subordinates go?"

Cheng Shi didn't even give Order a chance to respond before answering his own question.

"Oh, right — You and War cleaned them all out.

That was excellent. It satisfied War's appetite and reduced the risk of corruption in Your subordinates' ranks. But...

Did it ever occur to You to wonder why the other gods' Envoys were allowed to survive, while Your followers were purged entirely?

Granted, You were fair and impartial — willing to start with Your own people. But was it also You who single-handedly pushed the situation to where it is today?

What if the others did it deliberately, precisely to weaken Your influence?

And while we're on the subject, let me verify something. Why does Order possess the power to purge the entire universe, while the gods of the first two Paths lack Your transcendent standing?

My humble mind tells me this seems related to Him. So might generous Order grant this confused Clown an answer?"

The codex went mute again. After a long silence, His pages finally turned with a feeble whisper of Order.

"Smooth-tongued scoundrels are invariably those who desecrate the law.

No matter how silver your tongue, I will never trust you."

Cheng Shi wasn't offended. He just nodded with a smile. "Very well. Then You must surely have someone else You can trust?"

"..."

After delivering another emotional gut-punch, Cheng Shi pivoted away from his previous "flattering" tone. His voice sharpened again.

"Face reality — You have no choice!

You should be grateful it's me standing here today. If it were any true believer loyal to Chaos, You would have absolutely no chance whatsoever—"

...

Chapter 898: The Past of Order

"...Before a being who is willing to make an effort to carry on Order's legacy, if You still refuse to invest Your last shred of hope — then I will have no choice but to assume the worst about the one who once brought order to the universe. Perhaps You've already gone the way of my Benefactor, Deceit — become a Fear Faction member who deliberately distances himself from Him!

It was You — deliberately — who made the universe lose its order!

But if You are of the Fear Faction, then You should trust me even more, shouldn't You?"

"..."

The words fell, and silence consumed the hall.

Kataro's brain looped through the logic several times and still couldn't figure out how the situation had turned into a Chaos Envoy making a watertight argument in front of Order — win or lose, heads or tails.

'Is this the sophistry inherited from the Benefactor?'

'Lord Cheng Shi has truly mastered this "authority"!'!

Kataro was endlessly impressed by Cheng Shi's rhetorical prowess, but Pride of Order offered no such praise.

A god was not a person.

Even imprisoned in a cage, He still possessed wisdom and vision far above mortal life.

No matter how arrogant He was, Pride of Order was no fool. He regarded the silver-tongued Clown before Him for a moment of silence, then spoke for the first time in a calm, even tone.

"Your tactics of cognitive confusion don't resemble Chaos at all — they're a spitting image of your Benefactor, Deceit.

Ultimately, a Clown blinded by greed simply wants divine blessings from me. But why should I grant you anything?

It was your two Benefactors who bound me here. I have no reason whatsoever to oblige a Clown whose mouth contains not a single word of truth — a jumping jester who would invert black and white and disorder all order."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi felt no shame or anger. Instead, he was delighted.

Because buried in that changed tone, he detected a "willing to talk about it" attitude. So he cut straight to the point.

"Because I can spread order on Your behalf."

"A servant of Deceit is the least trustworthy of all!

How do I know you won't use my power to continue tarnishing Order's name on behalf of your Benefactor, Chaos?!"

'Hiss—'

'There really is a chance?'

He was already seriously considering the potential consequences of this deal. If He had absolutely no interest in the trade, He would have continued the endless "void sentencing" from before, rather than probing in this tone.

So Cheng Shi pondered for a moment and produced what he considered a satisfying answer.

"Very well. Since we've brought up 'tarnishing'...

Lord Codex, let's consider this from another angle. First — Order in the present world is dead. Do You acknowledge that?"

"..."

No matter how much Pride of Order refused to admit it, this was an irrefutable fact. That Order who had once commanded and enlightened billions of followers had long since shattered and been dragged from His own divine throne.

"Good — silence means agreement again.

In that case, You should also acknowledge that the Order of this world is currently being impersonated by my Lord, Chaos. So let me ask You: even if I used Your divine blessings to commit some dirty deed and tarnish the current 'Order'...

would I be tarnishing Order, or tarnishing Chaos?

For You, it should be the latter, shouldn't it?

And if what I'm tarnishing is the Chaos that has usurped Your position, then doesn't that mean I'm desecrating my own faith as the price for endorsing Your will of Order?

So why wouldn't You trust me?"

"..."

Silence fell once more.

The codex turned its pages without a sound. Kataro's jaw was on the floor.

This level of sophistry was something Kataro could never learn in a lifetime — not because he couldn't think of it, but because even if he could, he'd never have the audacity to argue it so shamelessly before a true god.

Lord Cheng Shi's selection by the Benefactor was absolutely, undeniably a matter of natural-born talent.

In that moment, Kataro bowed to Cheng Shi's talent with every fiber of his being.

This time, Pride of Order remained silent for a very long while — so long that Cheng Shi nearly thought his sophistry had overshot and backfired. Just as he was about to speak up and reel the situation back in, the captive codex actually responded — with an answer to his earlier question.

The codex's pages began flipping rapidly, and from between different law-text pages, several characters devoid of any Order essence were flung out. These gray-white characters arranged and rearranged themselves before the codex, assembling, separating, and fusing — and before long, they opened a "gate" to the past for Cheng Shi and Kataro.

Both held their breath and watched. In the next instant, Cheng Shi realized this was a bargaining chip Pride of Order was laying down for the negotiation. And the contents of that chip were...

Why Order transcended all!

The vision, suppressed by the dual restraints of Chaos and Deceit, was not grand in scale, but it was enough for Cheng Shi to discern its contents.

He saw the curtain fall on an era. He saw the universe terminated once more. He saw a new era dawn. He saw... Origin cast a beam of holy light upon this newborn age.

He spoke:

"Order is the prelude to Civilization. When life sheds its chaotic overgrowth, when descent is freed from endless desire — Civilization shall awaken and walk the righteous path."

This sudden voice of Origin sent Cheng Shi's face sheet-white with shock. Kataro was so terrified he collapsed prostrate on the ground.

Fortunately, this was merely Pride of Order's recreation of His own descent — not like Birth, who had yanked people's consciousness bodily into the past. So despite the terror, Cheng Shi held firm.

What he saw next was this: at the dawn of that era — at a historical starting point where, by his understanding, no new god should have been sanctioned — Order had descended into the universe ahead of the other two true gods of Civilization.

He carried Origin's expectations for Order and brought a new order to the universe. In that moment, Civilization sprouted — and began the longest journey in all of existence.

The vision slowly faded. The temple returned to stillness. Cheng Shi's heart roiled with aftershocks that took a long time to settle.

He blinked, looked at the codex, and asked with a mix of dawning understanding and lingering bewilderment:

"So in the world of the gods, 'premature births' are stronger than 'full-term deliveries.'

I'm not wrong about that, am I?"

"..."

"..."

The codex's flipping pages froze stiff. Still prostrate on the floor, Kataro's expression locked up — before he reverently raised two thumbs toward Lord Cheng Shi.

'No wonder the Benefactor adores you. Let's hope this particular description doesn't earn the wrath of that supreme existence and bring down some blasphemy charge — or everything Kataro has worked for will be destroyed by that mouth of yours!'

'Lord Cheng Shi — please, rein it in!'

...

Chapter 899: The "Future" of Order

Life and Descent were both summaries of a past era, but Order was the true beginning of Civilization.

What set Him apart from the preceding six true gods was that He had genuinely descended bearing Origin's expectations for Civilization. That was why His power was so formidable — enough to sweep the entire universe single-handedly.

Of course, War's help had been instrumental, though the extent of War's contribution to that god war remained unknown.

Cheng Shi understood now. Nodding, he looked at the codex and spoke again.

"I see. As I suspected, it was His expectations that granted You such tremendous power.

But Lord Codex, don't You feel that this moment mirrors that one? That supreme being bestowed upon You the power of Order so You could realize His vision of a universe in order. So why not follow His example — bestow upon me the power of Order and let me deliver a vision of Order back to You?

When that time comes, I will be like You once were — carrying expectations from above, singing the song of order across the universe.

And wouldn't that be the best way for You to draw closer to Him?"

The codex slowly closed all its pages. His aura grew solemn — clearly entering the final stage of deliberation.

He was tempted. So He asked:

"What do you want from me?"

Cheng Shi didn't even think. The word flew out: "Authority!"

The instant the word left his mouth, the aura around the codex snapped taut, then contracted — like a fed-up investor flipping the negotiation table and storming out of the nauseating meeting room.

Seeing things going south, Cheng Shi's face changed and he hastily amended:

"...That would obviously be inappropriate.

Deals should proceed step by step. If You were to generously grant authority right off the bat, then I would actually hesitate under the weight of such overwhelming expectations."

He paused to check whether his flattery had landed. Unfortunately, it had zero effect. The codex showed no intention of continuing negotiations.

Cheng Shi sighed inwardly, recalibrated, lowered his mental asking price slightly, and held out both hands to display every ring he'd received from the gods — regardless of whether they still worked — in front of Pride of Order. Then he pressed on.

"Your special creations or semi-divine artifacts of that caliber would work. Anything lower would be useless. If I'm to walk the world on Your behalf, I need to win the trust of our own Order followers and intimidate the lawless rabble who won't listen to reason.

And what You see here is proof that I have the ability to spread order for You."

The codex let out a cold laugh, dripping with contempt. "It seems you carry quite a few divine mandates."

Cheng Shi straightened his back without a shred of deference. "Many hands make light work."

"..."

'Many hands make light work, he says!'

For a brief moment, the codex's cover seemed to distort. It was unclear what this Order — one who had witnessed untold ages of the universe — truly thought of the shameless Clown before Him. After a pause, He made one more remark:

"So you are His answer."

"?" Cheng Shi's expression froze. The smile died.

Before learning that the "answer" meant "sacrifice," he might have harbored some vague aspiration about bearing that title — or at least felt no complete terror about it. But now...

'No thanks. Whoever wants this lousy title can have it. I'm done.'

'Best if Wei Mu takes it. He's smart — maybe he could actually be useful to Them.'

While Cheng Shi's face cycled through expressions and his mind ran wild, the codex's aura stabilized once more. He rejected Cheng Shi's request and spoke with lofty pride:

"Were it not for Chaos and Deceit's restraints, I could grant you any creation you desire. Life is too crude, Existence all style and no substance — neither possesses Civilization's refinement.

But now — hmph — thanks to your two Benefactors, whatever you deserve has already been returned to Void."

"..."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's expression grew even stranger.

'Fine, fine — stubborn as a mule. Just admit you can't grant anything. Why do you have to throw shade at everyone in the process? Who do you think you are — Folly?'

'Actually, come to think of it — Folly can't grant authority, and neither can You. From that perspective, you two really are alike.'

Cheng Shi was numb. The bargaining chip he'd been banking on had slipped through his fingers, leaving him with the deflating feeling that all his verbal effort today might have been for nothing.

But they'd come this far. The duck was practically cooked — no way was he giving up now. So the Clown regrouped and switched tactics.

"Very well — You're the 'investor,' Your word goes.

Then Lord Codex, what exactly can You grant me right now?

Even ordinary followers receive their Benefactor's gaze as motivation. You can't expect me to work for free, can you?

Cab fare alone costs money. I can't be paying out of my own pocket to spread order across the universe..."

Cheng Shi's tone was "utterly pitiful," making it sound as if Pride of Order were a heartless boss withholding wages. The scene left Kataro dumbstruck all over again.

The codex's cover creased even tighter.

He felt that the mortal's words weren't a plea for sympathy at all — they were a ruthless mockery of His inability to offer anything.

This Clown was jeering at the fact that He had nothing to give.

What infuriated Him most was that the Clown was right.

The codex fell silent. He suppressed the indignation and arrogance within, and after a long deliberation, calmly offered the largest chip He could currently pledge.

"I can grant you a seat on the tribunal that serves supreme Order. A position analogous to your standing in the Chaos Temple — to become a member of Order's Tribunal, a piece in the puzzle that safeguards Order's universe."

"An Envoy?!"

"No. I have never had Envoys. The subordinate role is merely a title. Should you prove unfit for the position, I shall strip you of your judicial authority."

"..."

Cheng Shi understood. In that instant, he recalled the history of Order that Aph Ros had once told him — the tale of Blazing Sun and Thundering, two wild gods who had both served as Order's subordinates...

'After all that effort, I've become an Order-appointed civil servant just like Thundering?'

Cheng Shi looked down at the rings on his fingers with a peculiar expression, his heart full of emotion.

'Thundering, oh Thundering — who would've thought? You got killed by Order, and you still end up working for Order.'

'And it's unpaid work at that — nothing but empty promises!'

'The kind where even the promises can be revoked at any time!'

'Is this right? Is this fair?!'

'Workers of the world shall never be slaves!'

Cheng Shi was furious. He felt Order showed zero sincerity. So he protested indignantly:

"Lord Codex, forgive my bluntness, but if it's just a title, then even without our cooperation, my dual faiths in Chaos and Deceit would allow me to slap an Order title onto myself by brute force.

So why should I bear the sin of desecrating my own faith for some ethereal title?

Don't forget — I am never a good person. I am a lawful villain. And this is merely a transaction."

The codex resumed its lofty bearing, scrutinizing the Clown before Him with a disdainful sneer.

"Any false identity you fabricate on your own would not survive even the most basic verification under Order's protocols. My bestowal, however, would legitimize you."

'Hah — legitimize?'

'Who do You think You are — Origin?!'

Cheng Shi scoffed with equal disdain. Then his expression shifted entirely — he bowed his head, lowered his body, and spoke with utmost devotion:

"Well then, Lord Codex — when do I start work?"

"...?"

...

Chapter 900: Even in a Cage, There Is a Game

The Clown had a flexible bottom line.

That line could hang high enough to execute sinners who trampled order, or dip low enough to amuse the gods watching from above. The Clown had earned the audience's enduring applause by jumping rope on that ceaselessly fluctuating line of his.

Like right now — grab the benefits first, think later. If he simply never came back to visit, what could a captive possibly do to revoke his tribunal seat?

At this thought, Cheng Shi smiled happily.

Seeing Cheng Shi accept so readily, Pride of Order experienced a fleeting moment of doubt about His own decision.

He scrutinized the Deceit follower before Him several times over. Only after confirming He hadn't misjudged the man did He let out a soft sigh and separate a strand of holy light from His pages.

Normally, any power bearing Order's essence would immediately trigger the Chaos chains to tighten and the Deceit spikes to devour it. But this time, both restraining forces silently parted ways for this wisp of Order's breath, allowing it to drift toward Cheng Shi bit by bit.

Then Cheng Shi watched as that strand of holy light descended before him, coiling around his finger and solidifying into a ring — a lance and shield crossed into a circle.

A ring representing the identity of an Order Inquisitor!

This Inquisitor was nothing like the ones in the Grand Tribunal. In fact, even the Grand Tribunal's supreme inquisitor would have to bow in respect upon seeing this ring's bearer, because this status symbolized infinite proximity to Order Himself. And in the eyes of other Paths, this title was equivalent to... a Servant God.

Sometimes, it was meaningless for Order to deny the existence of Envoys, because in mortal eyes, He had always been followed by countless subordinate deities.

And so the Clown obtained a ring that carried prestige but no practical power. Yet sometimes, identity itself was power — especially for a certain con artist who loved collecting disguises.

Looking at the Order ring on his finger, Cheng Shi's eyes brightened. Then he let out a thoroughly ungrateful remark:

"The texture isn't as good as Time's. The craftsmanship doesn't match Memory's. The design can't hold a candle to Death's. Tsk — mediocre, I suppose."

"?"

The instant the words left his mouth, the codex's pages flipped of their own accord, whipping furiously. Rage erupted — it looked as if He was about to reclaim the title He'd just bestowed. But in the next instant, the Chaos chains and Deceit spikes — dormant until now — sprang to life, instantly cinching Pride of Order tight and forcing Him to swallow His remaining power whole.

"..."

Seeing this, Cheng Shi knew his Benefactor was definitely somewhere inside the temple. He'd probably been watching the show for quite some time.

He exchanged a glance with Kataro, who had just risen to his feet, then signaled Kataro to hurry and rotate the cage back into place. At the same time, he tossed a reassuring promise to the darkly brooding Pride of Order, then addressed the empty space above the hall with devout reverence:

"Thank you for the Benefactor's protection..."

He'd learned his lesson. To prevent the absurd scenario where saying "Deceit" prompted the other to play "Chaos," he replaced all titles with the generic "Benefactor."

"However, Benefactor — what were You thinking, having me approach Order?"

Actually, what I'd like to say is: since Chaos has already usurped the throne and You've seized Chaos's authority, then this Order... why keep Him around?

It's a disaster waiting to happen, Benefactor!"

"What a 'disaster waiting to happen'!"

The moment the words left his mouth, a pair of starlit eyes opened at the vault of the temple. Those orbs, swirling with stellar points and spirals, had dropped the act entirely — not even bothering to adopt the appearance befitting Chaos in Chaos's own temple.

Those eyes regarded His follower with a half-smile, then let out a scoff.

"You just took His gift, and in the very next breath, you've sold Him out. Your bridge-burning skills are something else, Clown-Inquisitor."

"..."

'Clown-Inquisitor? That sounds awful.'

Cheng Shi's eyelid twitched violently. With utmost piety, he bowed his head and explained:

"I never forget that I am a Void walker. Void is my root. Deceit is my path.

My perspective has always been that of Void. So my deception of Order is merely a Void transaction offered in devotion to You.

Now the offering is complete, Benefactor...

Are You satisfied?"

The spirals in those eyes spun faster than ever, the star-points flickering without pause. The radiance of Void even threatened to devour the entire Chaos Temple. Yet He still held down His upturned eye corners and sneered with sardonic bite:

"It seems I misjudged you. You're no Clown-Inquisitor — you're probably still eyeing that Greed Lord title I mentioned earlier, aren't you?"

Tch—

"You've got some nerve, trying to probe your own Benefactor?"

Cheng Shi hastily ducked his head and denied all charges. "Accusation without evidence is slander, Benefactor — this is defamation!"

"Whether it's defamation or not, you know perfectly well.

And this isn't just probing, is it? You're forcing yourself into a performance of fake piety so you can demand a reward for the show. Your next line was going to be asking for payment, wasn't it?"

"..."

Having a mind-reading Benefactor did make things rather inconvenient when you wanted to run your mouth.

But this was Cheng Shi. He was only embarrassed for a heartbeat before he peeked up shamelessly. "So... is there a reward?"

"Heh. There is. Of course there is."

With that, those eyes retrieved the Order ring from the Clown's finger — then bestowed the very same ring right back to him, unchanged.

Cheng Shi froze. He stared at the ring in his hand — still identical — and his face went completely dark.

"That's it?"

"What — not satisfied?" Deceit's tone dripped with amusement.

"But, Benefactor!" Cheng Shi was indignant. "This was already mine!"

"Tch—

Sophistry doesn't work on me.

What you should say is: from this very moment, this ring belongs to you. Before this moment, even though it was in your hand, it did not belong to you.

Don't forget — Order is my prisoner. Only when I bestow this ring — which represents Order's subordinate status — unto you, do you truly possess it.

Now — any more questions?"

"..."

'YES!!!'

'So many questions!!!'

'Who's really doing the sophistry here?!'

'You took the ring, passed it through Your hands, and suddenly it counts as my reward?'

'I don't think that was a reward — that was a slap! Smacked me right on the nose. My nose is still red!'

Cheng Shi rubbed his nose, utterly helpless, and admitted complete defeat.

"You accept the benefit and still play coy. Visiting my prisoner without my permission, betraying your own faith, daring to act as another god's proxy — every one of these is a grievous sin. The fact that I haven't sentenced you for blasphemy is the greatest reward you could ask for."

"Wait!" Cheng Shi panicked again. He pointed at Kataro and argued his case. "It was Kataro who brought me to see Order. How does that not count as Your permission?"

The moment Kataro heard this, he snapped to attention, kept his head down, and said nothing — the very picture of "I didn't hear anything."

'No kidding — when the Benefactor isn't here, of course I listen to you, sir. But that was when the Benefactor 'wasn't here.'

'When the Benefactor is present, who to obey? I, the loyal Kataro, can still sort my priorities.'

'So forgive me, Lord Cheng Shi — your "lord" isn't lord enough.'

"..."

Seeing Kataro abandon all support for his defense, Cheng Shi still refused to give up. He wanted to keep "arguing his case," but those eyes gave him no further opportunity, scoffing:

"Excessive favor has made the Clown lose himself.

You should take a good look in the mirror and figure out who you really are.

Now — this matter is concluded. Get out.

The stench of Order on you is giving me a headache."

With that — never mind Cheng Shi's questions about "how will You deal with Order?" or "what are Your plans for Zhen Xin?" or the endless other queries — He flung the Clown straight out of the temple.

The instant Cheng Shi vanished, Kataro took it upon himself to stride out and close the temple doors behind him for the Benefactor within.

He had a feeling that what came next was beyond a lowly servant's involvement.

And when the Chaos Temple returned to silence, Deceit rotated the divine throne once more and gazed upon the imprisoned codex with a teasing grin.

"How has Order fallen so far that You'd believe even my follower's words?

You don't actually think he'll carry out Your will and protect the order of this universe, do you?"

Pride of Order recovered His arrogance. With equal derision, He regarded this long-absent "warden" and let out a cold snort.

"Deceit — you seem to have forgotten who I am.

Even as a mere fragment, I am still Order.

I know full well who in this universe has been drawing close to Order.

Rather than mocking me, you'd do better to ask that favored follower of yours — ask him why, beneath all those filthy disguises, his pure heart still harbors a genuine sense of order.

When you have the answer, do come back and tell me. I'm curious too."

"..."

Hearing this, those starlit eyes stopped smiling. Even the upturned corners drooped.

He seemed to have had His defenses broken.

Seeing this, Pride of Order twisted the knife:

"I look forward to the day he rebuilds order for this universe."

"You're dreaming!"

"Yes — I've been dreaming for a long time. From the moment I stepped into the Sea of Desire, the dream began."

...