

## The Gods 921

Chapter 921: Cheng Shi, I Know You

Sun Miao's expression was... odd.

Ever since Cheng Shi had grabbed her and charged down from the highlands, she'd been studying this con artist who'd practically tattooed "caution" on his forehead for the past two days.

In her understanding, if a Chosen-level player like Lin Xi launched a surprise attack, Cheng Shi's personality dictated he'd first bury himself underground for three days of observation before deciding whether to continue the trial or flee. As for going head-to-head against a Chosen...

If he were the type to fight head-on, the trailblazer slot wouldn't have been hers this entire journey!

Even that one time he'd threatened her — it was only once, wasn't it? Sizing up situations and being obsessively cautious weren't antonyms. They complemented each other.

Yet what Sun Miao never expected was that right now, she could see rock-solid fighting intent radiating from Cheng Shi.

This Fate Weaver didn't just want to fight — he wanted to fight to his heart's content!

Why?

Did they have a grudge?

If so, he wouldn't have ignored Chun and Lin Xi's clash at the start and chosen only to flee. But if there was no grudge...

How would a simple probe provoke this kind of fury?

Sun Miao couldn't figure it out, and asking yielded nothing — because she had no concept of what it meant to fear a true god.

'I can't beat You? Then can't I at least beat Your followers?!'

That was Cheng Shi's thought process.

He remembered Oblivion's ambush on him perfectly well. Since both sides had long since passed the point of no return, then don't blame him for taking it out on Oblivion's followers.

'What — you say he's only a second-faith follower?'

'How convenient: his first faith, Decay, happens to be Fading. So as a Decay follower, shouldn't he obediently surrender — and wouldn't that count as a form of devotion?'

'But if you refuse to yield and insist on pushing forward...'

Cheng Shi smiled. The river valley was straight ahead. The aura of Oblivion still pursued from behind. He smiled wide.

'Then I'll just have to stand in for your Benefactor, take back His gift, and turn you into a pure, single-colored Oblivion follower. And once your faith stands opposed to mine...'

'Sorry — I'll have to whittle you Rotten Wood lot down on Big Cat's behalf.'

Cheng Shi sprinted at full speed. In no time, he'd plunged into the river valley. Though both of them still had Silence's protection, the pursuer tracked their position like a seasoned hunter, following them down.

Seizing the moment as they burst into the treeline, Sun Miao pulled out her electronic beeper and typed:

"You should know how much a Mime Master influences small-scale combat.

I can help. All you need to do is share more stories about Order."

Cheng Shi chuckled, planted one foot forward, and skidded to a halt. Brow raised, he turned to Sun Miao with an amused look.

"I can tell you about Him. But the condition is...

Stand still. And don't ruin my fun."

A snap of fingers — and Cheng Shi vanished from the spot.

"!!!"

By the time Sun Miao's shrinking pupils caught his silhouette again, this Fate Weaver — his presence radically transformed — had appeared on the path they'd come from, and punched the shadow-disguised pursuer clean off their feet.

Then she watched Cheng Shi vanish again, instantly materializing in the trajectory of the airborne figure. The same scene played out a second time — he launched the shadow-wrapped assailant flying once more.

The sight left Sun Miao stunned.

A peak warrior matching Cheng Shi's speed and power wouldn't be unusual. The difficult part was the timing — striking precisely at the moment when the opponent's chained dashes left a gap, decisively breaking their teleport and simultaneously connecting, thereby seizing momentum.

Sun Miao could tell: Cheng Shi's ability to exploit timing was on par with a Pointer Knight's. And he wasn't even a warrior.

Who could've guessed that the player who'd sent Lin Xi flying was merely a priest fused with Deceit and Fate?

So who was the real Clown here?

Which Clown wielded this kind of terrifying power?

What heaven-defying combat items did this Fate Weaver have?

While her mind raced, Cheng Shi had already stopped attacking.

Not because he didn't want to press the advantage — but because after landing two punches, he'd suddenly realized he might have... hit the wrong person.

Cheng Shi stood at the treeline, expression blank with disbelief. He stopped cold, brow furrowed, and addressed the shadow-wrapped figure in a frigid voice.

"Give me an explanation. Tell me why your pursuit target isn't Lin Xi — but me.

If I recall correctly, we've never crossed paths."

"!?"

Who?

Chun?

Sun Miao was startled too. She'd clearly felt the pure, unmistakable aura of Oblivion from the pursuer. So why was Cheng Shi calling her Chun?

Had she fused Oblivion too?

That was Cheng Shi's thought as well. He'd originally considered this assassin — who opposed Lin Xi — as a potential ally. But now, the situation was far from clear.

As both of them hung in uncertainty, the shadow shattered under the moonlight, revealing the figure hiding within. It was indeed the former top of the Prosperity Ladder — "Only Carving Rotten Wood." Chun.

The moment Chun appeared, the bloody blotches on her scalp made Cheng Shi frown deeply. But this time — perhaps because she'd just been in combat — he could clearly see countless withered thorns shedding from her head. Given her status as a Decay oathbreaker and her Crown of Thorns class...

It clicked. So that was Decay's curse on her.

He'd made it so that a Crown of Thorns could never again sustain Prosperity's glorious crown. While other assassins wore their thorny crowns to amplify every stat, Chun's thorns could only last until a combat pause.

The curse turned the assassin's already-pronounced weakness — lack of sustained combat — into a crippling flaw. This Crown of Thorns had probably lost the ability to fight prolonged battles forever.

And re-forming a Crown of Thorns drained enormous mental energy. During the reformation, an assassin stripped of Prosperity's protection became even more fragile. All told, she essentially bore a double curse.

But Chun seemed long past caring about externals. She stared straight at Cheng Shi, wiped blood from the corner of her mouth, and spoke with blunt directness.

"Cheng Shi. I know you."

'Know me?'

'Of course you know me. You wouldn't be chasing me this hard otherwise.'

Cheng Shi blinked, then laughed in exasperation.

It seemed this Prosperity follower hadn't come to attack him at all. She was more like...

"Bold — using that kind of approach to probe my stance. Aren't you afraid I'd team up with someone else and kill you?"

"You wouldn't. Because you know Hong Lin."

"?" Cheng Shi paused. "What does knowing her have to do with you?"

"She said you're a good person."

"If you know I'm a good person, what's there to probe?" Cheng Shi waved his hand irritably. "And besides — leaving aside whether or not I'm actually a good person — Hong Lin never told me you're a good person. Weren't you worried I'd misjudge you?"

Chun pressed her lips together. Silence. After a few seconds:

"I had to confirm you were you."

"...?"

'Girl, if you're going to talk like this, I physically cannot file you under "adult" when critiquing you.'

'Listen to what you're saying!'

Cheng Shi was so exasperated he couldn't even laugh anymore. He pursed his lips. "So — have you confirmed?"

"Confirmed. You have a grudge against Lin Xi. You're a great person."

"..."

'Brilliant. Just brilliant!'

Cheng Shi found himself involuntarily applauding. He felt his brain shriveling. He also felt fairly certain that inside this female player — who stood as tall as he did — was not an adult but a child. A teenager at most.

No, teenager was generous. Seven or eight sounded about right.

'Who would've thought — Decay didn't just rot your talent. He rotted your age...'

'Judging someone's character based on their relationship with Lin Xi — the last time Cheng Shi had played that game, he'd been trash-talking Rong Mama with kids at the orphanage. And that was when he was... seven? Eight?'

...

Chapter 922: Was It Worth It?

Of course, Chun wasn't actually a child.

She was simply blunt in every situation that didn't involve Lin Xi. Perhaps because the pursuit of Lin Xi consumed every ounce of her mental energy, she refused to waste any on anything else.

But some things still had to be done. Like right now:

Finding allies — and, while she was at it, smearing Lin Xi's name.

When matched with Lin Xi, she united every available force against him. When not matched with him, she impersonated him to make enemies everywhere. This was what Chun had been doing all along.

Cheng Shi had evidently guessed her intentions. Recalling what Sun Miao had told him about the couple's past, he sighed with a complicated expression.

"So that was your probe?"

First you impersonate Lin Xi and attack someone. If they fight back in fury, they become your ally. If they rush to explain themselves, they're your enemy.

The method is crude, but effective.

However, Crown of Thorns — what happens when your probe lands on someone reasonable? That works out. But what about someone unreasonable, someone who insists on settling the score?

Stubbornness pushes them into Lin Xi's camp. The enemies you make become your own bitter fruit.

Have you considered — swallow too much bitter fruit, and it kills you."

Chun paused for a moment. A flicker of gratitude crossed her eyes. She understood: this player she'd just probed was kindly warning her to be more careful with her methods. Sure enough — Hong Lin was right. He was a good person.

But since she dared to do this, she naturally had a way to deal with the fallout.

And so, in the next instant, Cheng Shi — still frowning — and Sun Miao — hurrying over — witnessed a sight that left them dumbstruck. Chun ripped open her shirt, revealing a waist and abdomen bristling with daggers.

Her smooth abdominal muscles were riddled with wounds. Every scar had a dagger with a broken handle lodged into it. Dozens of shattered blades had all but torn her midsection apart. Any onlooker would wince — yet this woman hadn't so much as furrowed her brow. She'd been running through trials in this agonizing state, all for the sake of killing a former lover.

'Sss—'

'She really is ruthless with herself.'

Cheng Shi's pupils shrank. He sucked in a sharp breath, his own abdomen twinging in sympathetic pain.

Sun Miao stared blankly for a moment, then picked up her electronic beeper: "You're still making offerings to Decay?"

Chun shook her head.

"No. Decay and I are done.

This isn't an offering to Him. And it's not atonement either. It's compensation for the probing.

My life still serves a purpose. That filthy rat doesn't die, I don't die.

So I can't repay you with a life. But I can let you vent the anger of being probed."

As she spoke, Chun drew a dagger, held it blade-out in her grip, and walked toward Cheng Shi with a steely expression. The message was clear: if Cheng Shi was angry, he could plunge this dagger into her. Let bone-deep pain substitute for death as her punishment.

"..."

'Sure enough — peak players are insane. Has there ever been a single normal person among those who've topped the rankings?'

"Doesn't it hurt?" Cheng Shi's eyelid twitched.

Chun's ashen face twisted into a cold, hate-filled smile.

"How can flesh wounds compare to heartbreak?"

Cheng Shi, I'm asking you for help."

Cheng Shi went quiet. He knew exactly what the favor was. But he didn't rush to agree. Brow furrowed, he sank into thought. A long while passed before he nodded.

"All right. But one dagger..." He glanced at the dagger in Chun's hand and shook his head. "...isn't enough."

Chun smiled. It was her first genuine smile in this trial. She didn't resent that Cheng Shi wanted more. She simply felt, once again, that Hong Lin was right — he really was a good person.

She never feared paying a price. She only feared getting nothing in return.

So she drew a second dagger.

Bearing two shares of pain. Representing double her sincerity.

"..."

"..."

Dead silence.

Even Sun Miao, the Silence follower, was struggling to keep a straight face.

'Call her a child, and she has a resilience that would make the toughest warrior feel ashamed. Call her an adult, and... is this a transaction that a mentally sound grown person would come up with?'

'Girl — do I need your dagger? Or do I need an opportunity to stab you a second time?'

'I'm asking for a win-win. But you...'

'You haven't embraced some suffering-desire, have you?'

Cheng Shi's gaze toward Chun suddenly carried a note of scrutiny.

Corruption was no joke. Even mere observation shouldn't be done at this close a range.

Fortunately, he confirmed she harbored no leanings toward Corruption. But her obsessive killing intent toward Lin Xi was undeniably walking the path of embracing one's own desire.

Seeing Chun hesitate over whether to pull out a third dagger, Cheng Shi had enough. He decided to be blunt and stop wasting time.

"I'm curious about how you faked the Oblivion aura. That was genuine Oblivion.

Did you... fuse Oblivion, like Lin Xi?"

Chun blinked, seeming to finally grasp what Cheng Shi actually wanted. She shook her head. After careful deliberation, she pulled a palm-sized banner from inside her clothes.

"This. An SS-class divine artifact of Oblivion: the World-Destroyer's Banner.

After that filthy rat fused Oblivion, I wanted to fuse it too. I knew that only by knowing my enemy could I kill him. But...

Oblivion rejected me. No matter how I prayed, no matter how I offered — He never gave me a single chance."

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow.

'Oblivion didn't want to fuse with Prosperity?'

He didn't know what Oblivion was thinking, but he suspected that Prosperity having "obliterated" Oblivion had created some... resentment.

Who knew what authority Prosperity had left with Oblivion? It probably disgusted Him.

"So to understand Oblivion, I targeted His servants."

Cheng Shi's gaze sharpened. He was about to speak when the electronic beeper beside him cut in:  
"Herobos!"

Chun's face shifted, as though recalling something unforgettably painful.

"Yes. I found Herobos. And I took this banner from the World-Destroyer."

"?"

Impressive.

Only Carving Rotten Wood's strength was beyond question. But Cheng Shi still couldn't believe she'd single-handedly held her own against a World-Destroyer, let alone seized a divine-class artifact from an Envoy.

That was borderline unthinkable.

"So — the price?"

Chun said nothing. After a moment, she tore the already-shredded remains of her top completely off — revealing a ribcage stripped of flesh, and a heart wrapped in ashen Oblivion aura.

The heart, barely retaining a faint pinkish hue, was still beating. But with each pulse, it pumped a small amount of Oblivion essence into her limbs and body.

"!!??"

"I'm dying. As the price for wielding Oblivion's power, I've shouldered another curse that was never part of my own faith.

That's why I can't put any more daggers in my right chest. As you can see — ribs can't hold a dagger in place...

I'll give up anything. But I have one demand:

I will land the final blow myself!"

"You..." For the first time, a trace of emotion cracked Sun Miao's perpetually blank face. Her fingers typed stiffly: "Was it worth it?"

"No."

A shadow dimmed Chun's eyes. But in the next instant, they blazed with unwavering resolve.

"But I hate him."

Hearing all this, Cheng Shi nodded. He asked nothing more.

"I've heard about what happened to you. But that's not the reason I'd cooperate with you.

Everyone has their own misfortune. Misfortunes can't be quantified by severity — outsiders can empathize, but they've never lived it. Those who haven't been through it have no right to judge.

At most, I can offer you my sympathy. But Crown of Thorns — you should count yourself lucky that this time, Fate stood on your side. No — it's more like Oblivion pushed the opportunity your way.

I do, in fact, have a bone to pick with Him.

So yes, I agree. Whether it's out of support for the Prosperity camp or disdain for the Oblivion camp — I see no reason to refuse.

But let me be clear: I won't follow your lead. I'll act only when I deem it necessary. Rest assured, though — when it comes to threats, I'm always more 'fearful' than anyone.

If he truly poses a threat, I'll do my best to 'obliterate' that threat within this trial. But if he has some means of resurrection..."

"He doesn't. I'm certain." Chun's tone was absolute. Her hatred surged.

'So you've both cut off each other's escape routes.'

"Good. Then for now, let's return to the trial. I doubt you'd want to tag along and dig into Order's stories with us.

In that case, go handle your own affairs.

Relax. The moment will come soon. Every last drop of hatred will find its resolution. Of that... I'm quite confident."

Chapter 923: This Decay Curse — I Want It

Hearing Cheng Shi's words, Chun nodded solemnly and turned to leave.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi blinked. "Wait — you're just leaving?"

Chun paused mid-step, turned back with a slightly puzzled look. "Didn't you tell me to go handle my own affairs?"

"..."

'Great. The moment the revenge talk ends, she's seven years old again.'

Cheng Shi rolled his eyes and pointed irritably toward the chaotic Grand Tribunal central camp up on Boro Highlands.

"You threw the whole situation into chaos, forced us down from the highland, wasted a ton of my mental energy — and now you're just walking away?

So you get all the benefits for free."

"I followed you down here. You chose the direction."

"I—" Cheng Shi's voice hitched. Fighting the urge to abandon the alliance on the spot, he exhaled heavily. "Don't make me trash-talk my own ally. Compensation. Hand over the compensation first. Show me your sincerity."

The instant the words left his mouth, he added: "Not daggers. Put those scrap-metal daggers away!"

Chun obediently put back the dagger she'd just drawn, then said with a troubled expression:

"Besides the items I use for tracking and assassinating that rat, I don't have anything left."

"Yes, you do." Cheng Shi jabbed a finger at Chun's head. "I've taken an interest in this Decay curse.

Honestly, I've been studying the nature of oathbreaking curses lately — treating them as another form of divine blessing.

Deconstructing these blessings gives me inspiration about the nature of faith-based power. As for how I deconstruct them — that's a secret. I won't be sharing it.

Oathbreaking curses are rare. I can only collect them slowly.

Today I've run into one. You have no choice, Chun. Hand over the curse — consider it the sincerity price for our alliance.

Otherwise... no deal."

The words didn't just stun Chun. Even the History School's Vice President Sun was floored.

Sun Miao stared at Cheng Shi in disbelief, her normally blank face filled — for the first time — with uncontainable shock. Her fingers flew across the keys: "Curses cannot be deconstructed."

The certainty in her voice made Cheng Shi's gaze sharpen with amusement.

"You're only a Silence follower. No matter how close to Folly you get, you can't speak for Folly.

How would you know curses can't be deconstructed?"

"I—" Sun Miao typed a few characters, then quietly withdrew her hands.

She went silent.

But Chun ignited. The Crown of Thorns's expression twisted further. She rushed to Cheng Shi, gripped his shoulders, wanted to say something but couldn't find the words — just kept nodding, red-eyed, nodding again and again.

Decay's curse had wasted too many of her opportunities. Without that oathbreaking leash, her hunt for Lin Xi would have gone far more smoothly.

Cheng Shi's demand wasn't a taking — it was a gift.

He was gifting her liberation.

Chun wasn't stupid. She wasn't actually seven. She could feel Cheng Shi's goodwill, and she knew it didn't stem from sympathy — it came from Hong Lin, a fellow member of the Prosperity camp.

It was because of Hong Lin that Cheng Shi gave her this chance.

She was overjoyed — and yet quietly heartbroken.

Because she knew she owed too much, and could no longer bring anything to Prosperity.

But she might still bring something to this "generous" Fate Weaver. With that thought, Chun withdrew her hands and clenched the banner hidden behind her back.

In truth, the chip Cheng Shi wanted wasn't about the present. If Lin Xi truly intended to do something under Oblivion's orders, Chun would be the most reliable ally — bar none.

So even just to stabilize this trial-bound alliance, he had to extend goodwill first. After all, this could be a fight to the death.

Under the other two's watchful eyes, Cheng Shi once again activated the power of Decay's Faded authority. With a light swipe over Chun's head, he stripped away every last trace of the curse that had tormented her for countless days and nights.

"!!!"

Surprise. Shock. Awe.

Chun had never imagined she could one day shed her former "employer's" "gift." This dream-like scene made her momentarily anxious — was it real?

It seemed so! Because the instant Decay left her body, the Prosperity power she held — no longer suppressed — surged forward like a tidal wave. In the blink of an eye, the bald "man" standing before them regrew a full head of lustrous black hair. Looking at her now, there was something almost—

Never mind. She still looked masculine. Like a man with long hair.

Chun had rugged features. That was why losing her hair alone was enough for people to mistake her for male. But her appearance needed no apologies — just like her experiences, it was not for outsiders to judge.

She was simply persisting in what she believed mattered. Like millions of lost players in this game, she'd found a psychological anchor to survive — and an excuse to convince herself.

Even witnessing it firsthand, Sun Miao could barely believe it. Her blazing eyes locked onto Cheng Shi's arm. Sensing the purest essence of Decay, she typed with undisguised desire:

"Is this the result of your curse research?

Deconstructing curse power into personal strength?

This taste of Decay is so rich — how many Decay curses have you deconstructed?

Does it work on other curses?

Truth? Folly? ...Or Silence?"

While listing the gods, Sun Miao paused noticeably. Then she resumed typing smoothly:

"I'm very interested in this deconstruction method. I'll trade any history or intelligence you want. Any amount. What do you say, Cheng Shi?"

"Not interested." Cheng Shi snorted and flatly refused the trade. "What I want, you don't have. And what you want... I don't have either."

Sun Miao assumed Cheng Shi was brushing her off. She didn't realize those words were his one piece of genuine truth.

"Deconstructing curses" was complete nonsense. All he'd used was the authority Decay had granted him. As for other gods' curses...

Don't even dream about it. Unless They Themselves were willing, who would dare risk provoking a deity to shoulder someone else's divine wrath?

But from Chun and Sun Miao's perspective, Cheng Shi had just shouldered Decay's fury on the Crown of Thorns's behalf. How he'd converted that fury into protection — that was the question Sun Miao cared about most.

"Chun still bears another curse. Why not take that one too?"

"..."

'Can I? Do you think I'm some kind of magic gourd that sucks up anything I call by name?'

Fortunately, Cheng Shi had already prepared his defense. He scoffed and refused: "I told you — this method only works on oathbreaking curses. The Oblivion curse was planted by someone else; it's not from Chun's oathbreaking. Useless to me.

Don't ask again. This kind of secret will never be shared."

Sun Miao clearly hadn't given up, but she knew not to push right now. She decisively went quiet and started scheming other approaches.

Chun gazed gratefully at Cheng Shi. Feeling Prosperity's power circulate through her without obstruction, she barely resisted the urge to find Lin Xi for another fight to the death right this second.

Naturally, Cheng Shi wasn't going to manage her schedule. He reiterated that he'd only act when the time was right. What Chun did before that point — what she was doing, whether she lived or died — was none of his concern.

Chun understood. She expressed her thanks once more, gritted her teeth, left behind the few Prosperity healing potions she still carried, and departed.

Looking at those all-too-familiar potions — so many he couldn't even store them — Cheng Shi shook his head with a smile.

'So Big Cat made the same call. She's been secretly helping Chun too.'

Watching Chun disappear in a blaze of energy, Sun Miao typed thoughtfully:

"She hasn't got long. The banner gave her power but also obliterated her vitality.

She didn't have to go this far. But she was too impatient.

Though I understand her impatience. In this era where Favored Ones open their arms to embrace faith fusion, earning a second god's gaze is extraordinarily difficult..."

The Mime Master sighed at length. But Cheng Shi's expression went peculiar.

'Difficult...'

'Mm. True. Deliberately suppressing my own power to avoid exposing a third and fourth faith is indeed quite difficult. Even more so than obtaining a second faith.'

But these thoughts stayed safely in Cheng Shi's head. He didn't dare voice them. Instead, he pointed at Boro Highlands once more and said with a straight face:

"Now that Chun showed up here, it means Lin Xi has bought himself time too.

The central camp was thrown into total chaos. He can't not know — yet he still hasn't appeared. So tell me, Vice President Sun — what exactly is this Chosen with, shall we say, questionable hair quality up to?"

'Questionable hair quality...'

'You just restored Chun's hair and now you're immediately throwing shade at a Decay follower?'

Sun Miao gave Cheng Shi an expressionless glance, said nothing, and silently added a note to her mental file: Master of Passive Aggression!

'This man is exceptionally skilled at throwing shade. Rivals The Prisoner himself.'

...

Chapter 924: Enemy or Friend — the Choice Is Yours

"So you believe Chun's story, then?" Sun Miao looked at Cheng Shi and continued beeping away.

"Believe it or not — doesn't matter. Sympathy has never been a foundation for cooperation. The History School should understand that better than I do."

Indeed. Whether you walk the same road depends not on truth or lies but on mutual benefit. Sun Miao nodded in agreement.

But seeing Sun Miao nod, Cheng Shi knew they weren't really the same kind of person. Still — at least for now, they were walking the same road of mutual interest.

At the moment, Boro Highlands thundered with shouts. Iron Law Knights were combing every corner of the camp. No matter how effective Silence's concealment talents were, right now was not a good time to head back up.

Investigation should never happen when the target is on highest alert. Impatience never yields good results. So Cheng Shi and Sun Miao decided to stay in the river valley for a while — at least until the storm above subsided.

And so the two wandered aimlessly through the valley. Each held a trove of secrets no outsider could access, so every exchange was laced with hidden edges, every probe wrapped in riddles.

Like this, two people with entirely different motives talked from the surface world to the underground, from reality to the Void. On the surface, they said plenty. But looking back...

Neither had gained any new information.

Sun Miao was clearly fed up with Cheng Shi's deflections. She dropped all pretense, her steering becoming more and more overt. But just as Cheng Shi expected her to probe about Order again, the Silence follower quietly steered the conversation toward...

Birth.

'Strange! Way too strange!'

In the middle of nowhere, a man and a woman discussing Birth.

The scene was surreal — not out of embarrassment, but because nearly every line from her was a probe for intelligence, giving Cheng Shi a genuine headache.

"I've heard you have a good relationship with 'Eternal Sun' Hu Xuan. Do you think her success can be replicated?"

At first glance, the question was about Hu Xuan. But in reality, she was almost certainly fishing for the whereabouts of Zangier — the man whom Cheng Shi had dragged into Go Lis's grudge.

After all, even a "replication" would only count as "authentic" if Zangier himself oversaw the experiment.

But what could Cheng Shi say? He couldn't exactly tell her: 'Forget it — old Zan is currently working for me. Well, for my brother. You want him to switch jobs? Not happening. But if you want to come work for me and my brother just like he does — we can talk.'

Regardless, Cheng Shi would never leak a single word about Zangier's location. So he responded with a teasing deflection:

"Of course it can be replicated. But you should know — her success wasn't a product of the Stars Dagger.

The Tower of Logic's experiment failed. In fact, they never succeeded. Hu Xuan's success was earned step by step — she gestated it herself.

So if you have the courage to ask a god for offspring, perhaps you could succeed too.

But the question is — do you?"

"..." Sun Miao didn't answer. She immediately pivoted to another angle. "Birth's divinity and temperament are both remarkably stable. Does that mean She has already grasped everything and holds no more expectations for the past or future?"

"Ha — Master, have you looked at who you're asking?

I'm just a clueless Fate Weaver. Where would I get all this Birth knowledge?

If you want to understand Birth, go find Her directly. Failing that, go find Hu Xuan. Even if she won't answer you, her child might give you something — kinship has its perks.

Besides, knowledge costs money these days. If you don't show some sincerity first, I can't even be bothered to lie... to give you a one-sided account."

"..."

Sun Miao fell silent again. After a long pause, she picked up the beeper once more:

"Fine. Then I'll trade one of the History School's absolute secrets for your 'one-sided' understanding of Birth. Deal?"

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow.

"Interesting. I thought you were here purely to investigate Order. Turns out you've got your eye on Birth?"

Go ahead. Tell me your secret first. I'll decide whether to complete the trade.

Don't worry — it's not an unfair deal. It's just that you need to demonstrate your sincerity first."

Sun Miao's expression turned odd. But she didn't refuse. After a long pause — a flash of astonishment in her eyes — she resumed typing:

"The History School has made contact with many organizations over the years. Quite a few harbor hostility toward the gods' descent. And among them, the largest has already grown to a scale that cannot be ignored.

But here's the interesting part: the gods seem completely unaware of them.

So who's been concealing their intent to overthrow the gods? Who's been quietly supporting their blasphemy?"

Your eyes changed. It seems you know of them?"

You wouldn't happen to be one of them, would you?"

Relax — I have no intention of opposing any faction. I'm merely curious why an organization this large was only detected recently.

Honestly, the History School is far larger than you'd imagine. Our entry bar may be strict, but beyond official members, our pool of external contacts is equally vast.

Yet even with so many tentacles, we only learned of their existence after they'd grown to that scale. Their operational security is impressive, I must say.

Of course, I still don't know their name. This intelligence is confined to discussions among the History School's upper echelon. But judging from Zhen Xin's indifference... she probably already knew.

Did you tell her, or did you recruit her? Is she one of them too?

Hmm, I see — this trade shouldn't be structured this way. Let's try a different format, Fate Weaver.

You answer my questions. I keep your secrets. How about it?"

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow and snorted.

"Nobody keeps secrets better than a dead person, Master. You don't honestly think I need a teammate, do you?"

"True, you don't need a teammate. But you need a back door into the History School."

"Isn't Zhen Xin's front door enough?"

Sun Miao paused. Her expression turned strange as she typed: "Not enough. She has reservations. I don't. I'm a shrewd businesswoman — as long as the price is right, anything is on the table."

Cheng Shi stared at Sun Miao with furrowed brows. After a moment, he asked a question that seemed to come from nowhere.

"Is she... trustworthy?"

Sun Miao typed two characters instantly: "Trustworthy."

Then she paused. And typed two more: "Trustworthy."

...

Meanwhile — on the other side.

In another grove, across the river, a hooded figure halted silently before a dead tree that stood rotting but unbroken.

He reached out and gently ran his fingers along the bark — nearly crumbling to dust at the touch. Then he gazed up at the slightly overcast moonlight above and spoke in a voice sharp yet rasping:

"Enemy or friend — the choice is yours.

Don't wait for me to choose. Because I rarely choose friends."

...

Chapter 925: What I Cannot Accept Most Is Betrayal

The words had barely faded when a juvenile hawk alighted on a dead branch.

The hawk pecked at the brittle bark beneath its talons, showering the scene in a rain of wood chips — a tribute to Decay.

"Lin Xi. I've long heard of you.

I have no intention of disturbing your path or making an enemy of you. I'm merely guarding myself against unknown threats approaching. You're welcome to ignore me.

Of course, if you're interested in learning any information during this trial, I could be a rather useful pair of eyes.

Care to consider?"

Lin Xi let out two sinister chuckles, then casually wiped the entire dead tree from existence. The startled hawk took flight, screeching twice as it circled high. Its tone was displeased.

"So friendship is off the table?

Don't say I didn't offer."

The hawk flew straight toward the highlands. But before it left Lin Xi's line of sight, the Decay Chosen snorted coldly.

"You know Cheng Shi?"

The hawk's momentum stalled instantly. It executed a clean V-shaped reversal and shot back like a bullet, its talons slamming into a solitary trunk near Lin Xi's feet, embedding themselves deep. Its eyes were razor-sharp.

"Who did you say?"

"Interesting — I saw you greet him on the cart. So you actually don't know him?"

The hawk... no, Du Qiyu froze.

'Cheng Shi?'

'The Cheng Shi who single-handedly wrecked 0221's experiment ground and dragged the pseudo-god Zangier into the Void?!'

'He's in this trial too?'

'Who is Cheng Shi? Who did I greet... wait — Xiao Shi!?!?'

'No. No no no. NONONO!'

'Absolutely impossible!'

The hawk beat its wings frantically, shrieking: "His name is Sun Lin! Not some Cheng Shi!"

"Hmph." Lin Xi didn't even bother acknowledging the suddenly unraveling Beast Tamer. He merely snorted, then sat down cross-legged to rest on the spot.

Now the hawk's movements grew even more frenzied — or rather, more unhinged.

Lin Xi's reaction clearly said: I don't make mistakes like that. And if Xiao Shi was actually the infamous Fate Weaver Cheng Shi, then... everything before — the 2,201 score, the Pen of Finality class — was fake?! All lies?!

'But why didn't Master of Deception flag them as lies?!'

'He has a Master of Deception Card!?!'

Not only that — even that 2,400-point Mime Master had been lying. Well, she hadn't spoken aloud, but her tacit complicity and refusal to expose the truth was the greatest insult and malice toward him!

'Those two actually played me for a fool!'

Uncontrollable fury instantly ignited Du Qiyu's reason. In his hiding spot, his true body slammed a furious fist into the ground. But the moment that fist fell, the surge of rage evaporated — replaced by a terror beyond description.

'If that man could deal with a pseudo-god, why couldn't he deal with me?'

'Then why hadn't he dealt with me this whole time?'

'Just to toy with me? Payback for that old deception?'

'No! Wrong! He's not holding back — he's confirming whether I have any cards left to play! He wants to erase me from this world permanently!'

In that moment, Du Qiyu suddenly recalled what Cheng Shi had said: "Yeah. It's all in the past now."

Those simple words now echoed like whispers from an abyss, sending chills down his spine. So that was what he'd meant by calling himself a hunter. Xiao Shi's prey... was him!

'On what grounds!?!'

Under the twin assault of fear and rage, Du Qiyu's face darkened to its extreme. He made the hawk screech desperately at Lin Xi:

"You have a grudge against him, don't you!? You do, right!?"

I knew it — nobody could like that self-righteous good-for-nothing! Lin Xi, we can team up! We can kill your enemy!

Only then can we walk this road in peace! He's a threat! A massive threat!!!"

Honestly, Lin Xi hadn't expected the Beast Tamer to suddenly have a meltdown. But he didn't care about the cause — knowing the result was enough.

The man was indeed a viable teammate. But in his current state, an alliance like this had no future.

So Lin Xi sneered, raised a hand, and casually obliterated the squawking hawk. The sudden death of his tamed beast shocked Du Qiyu back to his senses. Fear, given time to settle, solidified into something manageable.

He began to reassess his situation. After long deliberation, he realized he had no other options — because the one who'd crushed his choices wasn't Lin Xi, who'd offered the ultimatum, but that Xiao Shi who'd been playing dumb the whole time!

At this thought, Du Qiyu's fury intensified. His expression shifted through several shades before he finally guided his remaining hawk back to Lin Xi's side.

"I've never heard of any grudge between you and Xiao... Sun... Cheng Shi. Lin Xi, what exactly do you want?"

"Ah — calm again. Good." Lin Xi raised his head slightly toward the sky. Watching the moon's glow slowly shroud itself behind clouds, he prayed with deep reverence:

"Born from nothing, extinguished in silence.

My Benefactor issued a divine decree — naming Cheng Shi specifically, commanding us followers to offer him up. My station is humble. I don't comprehend my Benefactor's foresight. I only know He saved me from fire and flood, gracing me with power and glory. And so I came.

What I didn't expect was that a prayer with hidden motives would collide with her. It seems Fate has brought us both here for a reckoning.

Knowing Chun as I do, she'll certainly seek Cheng Shi's help. So upon seeing you, I asked first:

Enemy or friend?"

Du Qiyu had regained his shrewdness. He parsed every word for meaning, then replied:

"Would you dare swear on your own devotion?"

Lin Xi gave the hawk a sidelong glance and sneered. "Dare? Certainly. But do you deserve it?"

"..."

Even from this distance, Du Qiyu instinctively shrank back.

He sensed the killing intent — and his mind amplified it severalfold, birthing a fear that made him cower.

But the exchange also showed him something: this seemingly disastrous trial still had a turning point. That Xiao Shi — who'd finally learned how to lie — wasn't necessarily going to have the last laugh.

'Strong as you are, can you overpower a Chosen who's fused two faiths?'

'Among the sixteen Chosen, there's never been one named Cheng Shi!'

'Fine. FINE. Being Lin Xi's friend is entirely YOUR doing, Xiao Shi!'

"How should I cooperate with you?"

"So it's 'friend.' Good — you've made the right choice.

Cheng Shi is formidable. Every source of intelligence confirms it. I don't fear him, but I can't claim confidence either.

Dealing with Fate isn't hard. What's hard is dealing with Deceit.

Since you're also His follower, all you need to do is strip away Cheng Shi's lies. Peel off his fabricated illusions. Then I can strike at the essence and obliterate all his fate.

Simple, isn't it?"

"?"

'Wait — hold on.'

"He fused faiths? Fate fused with Deceit?" Du Qiyu's voice cracked.

"What — you didn't know?"

Well, faith fusion only happens to the select few. He hid it well, but secrets can't be kept from everyone."

"..."

In that instant, Du Qiyu half-regretted the alliance.

Right now, all he wanted was to run.

The person he'd wanted to bully was Sun Lin — not some Fate Weaver named Cheng Shi who'd fused Deceit.

He did enjoy the dark thrill of turning humans into beasts. But the prerequisite was that the beast... couldn't be too strong.

A beast that could devour its master was one he couldn't tame.

So for Du Qiyu, staying alive mattered far more than indulging himself.

And so Little Seven — who'd just resolved to strike back — plunged right back into indecision. Seeing through this, Lin Xi fixed the hawk with a cold smile.

"What I cannot accept most is betrayal.

I hope you take that to heart."

...

#### Chapter 926: Transport Records and Invitation Letters

The Grand Tribunal's southern front had been on edge for the entire night because of the central camp incident. Only when the dawn's first light illuminated the river valley did the number of patrolling Iron Law Knights atop the highlands gradually return to normal.

Having been pulled through a high-intensity tug-of-war for the first half of the night and barely managing to rest in the second half, Cheng Shi finally saw his window. He had Sun Miao bring him back to the central army tent once more.

Honestly, judging by how the central camp had responded to the "raid," Cheng Shi couldn't fathom how a force this disciplined, this organized, and this combat-ready could possibly lose to the War legions.

Never mind the battered War legions — even a complete formation, with their Benefactor having just cast His gaze but not yet descended, how were they supposed to beat the Grand Tribunal and the Tower of Logic, who'd ruled this continent for nearly a thousand years?

With these questions in mind, Cheng Shi prepared to have a proper talk with Keinlaur. But...

Best-laid plans — Keinlaur was gone.

"..."

Nobody had expected the army's supreme commander to vanish from his command center at a time like this. Even the personal guard knights surrounding the camp didn't know where he'd gone.

Granted, after surviving the "decapitation attempt," Keinlaur had every reason to hide. But war was imminent. Hiding without telling your subordinates — how were orders supposed to be relayed?

'He didn't seriously leave the entire Grand Tribunal battle line to improvise, did he?'

'Bad sign — is the Pot of Defeat about to be forged?'

Cheng Shi stood dumbfounded. After knocking out the personal guards, war supervisors, couriers, and even a subordinate legion commander — none of whom knew where Keinlaur had gone — he exchanged a look of total bewilderment with Sun Miao in the middle of the central camp.

"Your History School knows history best. Tell me — what's this episode about?"

Sun Miao raised her thumb, then lowered it. She clearly thought it was absurd too. But after a moment's reflection, she offered a remarkably precise analysis.

"Either he fled, or he was taken. I don't see a third option.

However, reviewing the historical records of this battle, Keinlaur already paid for his defeat. He died on the battlefield — at the hands of Commander Rista, the War legion's supreme commander. So fleeing seems unlikely.

As for being captured... in this trial, if someone were to abduct Keinlaur to leverage him for some purpose, I'd say the Decay Chosen who hasn't shown himself yet is the only candidate."

Sun Miao paused, then continued typing:

"I've heard that followers of Void have recently been hunting Oblivion's followers under divine decree. As an Oblivion believer — even as a second faith — would Lin Xi retaliate against what amounts to a faith-extinction war?

Even if he wouldn't, the moment he deduced that Chun might recruit you as an ally, wouldn't he hide the NPC you're interested in to split your attention and try to broker a deal — thereby eliminating one potential enemy?

I believe these are all valid reasons for him to act this way.

As for the Beast Tamer who has issues with you...

Frankly, he's probably the one who most wants Keinlaur to be safe. The item he's looking for in this battle is like a needle in a haystack. He's entirely dependent on Keinlaur replaying history to find any leads.

So the answer is clear. Lin Xi has interfered with this trial — and he's here for you."

Cheng Shi listened quietly and agreed the analysis was spot-on. Lin Xi was quite possibly targeting him. But without confronting the man directly, he couldn't confirm whether it truly was Oblivion's will driving this.

Regardless — bearing the faith of Oblivion made Lin Xi fundamentally incompatible. So after brief deliberation, Cheng Shi decided to... pull back first.

Knowingly walking into a trap wasn't courage. It was stupidity.

Cheng Shi never did the "march right up to the tiger's mountain" thing. What he preferred was to set a trap behind him and wait for the tiger to come down and step in it.

So he decisively abandoned the plan to hunt for Keinlaur and returned to the central army tent, hoping to find some clues inside the Supreme Inquisitor's quarters.

And sure enough — he found plenty.

First: a batch of munitions transfer records. These documents were decades old. Logically, files this ancient had no business being in a current military camp.

Even the most incompetent archivist wouldn't bring decades-old files on a deployment, right?

The fact that these records were here already said something. But the real point was their contents: every item logged was war materiel — weapons and combat consumables.

And the delivery destinations weren't the Grand Tribunal's borders or domestic rebellion zones. They were... the Tower of Logic!

Sun Miao flipped through the documents rapidly, then typed furiously:

"As I suspected. The History School always had doubts about whether the Tower of Logic's civil war was truly a simple academic dispute. After all, scholars abandoning reason for fists was inherently absurd.

But because records from that period were perpetually missing, everyone eventually took it at face value.

Now it seems the Shared Law Faction played a considerable role in igniting it."

Indeed. These records weren't all personally approved by Keinlaur. A significant portion bore authorization from previous Shared Law Faction leaders — documented evidence of "supplying the enemy." This proved the Shared Law Faction had been doing real work toward its vision of universal shared law.

No wonder Keinlaur carried these files even on a military campaign. If the Supreme Court ever discovered them, the Shared Law Faction would find itself moved from the judge's bench to the defendant's chair by the next day — forced to test every law they'd ever written on themselves.

Perhaps they'd never imagined their vision of universal shared law would, rather than bringing Order to the Land of Hope, instead ignite the fire of War and drag the entire continent into a quagmire.

So... fate indeed.

The tent held not only the Shared Law Faction's "aid-to-enemy" records but also countless invitation letters.

Every addressee was a named scholar from the Tower of Logic. Clearly, the Shared Law Faction's strategy to undermine Truth wasn't limited to fanning flames — they were also removing the firewood from under the pot. Of course, they'd ended up using that firewood themselves.

Cheng Shi looked at the invitation letters in his hands and thought of the Divinity Germination Experiment beneath Montelani's Colosseum. Selius had received exactly such a letter from the Grand Tribunal — saving him from despair and allowing his mad experiment to continue.

Judging by the sheer volume, the Shared Law Faction's talent-poaching efforts were nothing short of relentless. Yet the vast majority of letters were crossed out. Very few had received replies.

Still — Selius was one of them.

When Sun Miao dug Selius's reply out of the mountain of correspondence, she typed rapidly:

"Found it. So he really did leave the Tower of Logic."

Cheng Shi glanced at the unrecognizable scribble on the envelope and raised an eyebrow. "Who?"

"Selius. The initiator of the Slice Experiment. A Grand Scholar of the Life Extension Department.

In the Tower of Logic's records, his experiment was incomplete. I'd been tracing the true nature of his work, and across countless experiment logs, I'd sensed that he might have long since been replaced by a slice. I just never figured out where the real him went — or whether he was already dead.

Now it's clear. The Shared Law Faction intervened and spirited him away from the Tower of Logic.

Hmm, my next investigation should focus on the Grand Tribunal. Looks like it's time for a Shared-Law-themed prayer when I get back.

Hopefully I'll find new leads soon."

"..."

'You could just ask me.'

Seeing her throw herself into the analysis with such dedication, Cheng Shi thought it over and generously tossed Sun Miao a lead.

You can't expect the horse to run without letting it eat. That was something capitalists did — not him. ...Unless the horse volunteered.

"I suggest you focus your investigation on Montelani. The Montelani with the gladiatorial shows. As for why — don't ask. Just do it."

"?"

Sun Miao froze. After a moment, she looked at Cheng Shi with a complicated expression and typed involuntarily:

"Is there anything in this game that you don't know?"

"Plenty. For instance, where the old inquisitor who used to sit here went — I have no idea."

Cheng Shi spread his hands and grinned.

...

Chapter 927: The Fates of Those in Power

The investigation continued. The commander's tent appeared to hold quite a few secrets.

This was undoubtedly a moment of euphoria for any History Scholar. Sun Miao's enthusiasm far outpaced Cheng Shi's.

She combed every corner at breakneck speed, overturning every searchable nook. Before long she had a new find — a journal pulled from the sand-table drawer. No, not a journal... more like an observer's ledger. It didn't chronicle Keinlaur's own daily life but rather the routines of the other two Supreme Inquisitors: Lo Yat and Esa Res.

The ledger recorded in meticulous detail the "audience with god" schedules of these two supreme wielders of power — specifically, their pattern of reporting to Iron Law.

Sun Miao had barely flipped through a few pages before she spoke up:

"As I thought — something is wrong with Order. Even His own followers have begun avoiding Him.

I know about the Grand Tribunal's rotation system for Supreme Inquisitors, and I know that reporting everything to Iron Law is the most devout display of faith. But according to this record, Lo Yat reported constantly, Esa Res reported occasionally, and between the two of them, there was no window left for Keinlaur to report at all.

So... Keinlaur likely discovered long ago that his Benefactor had a problem — and deliberately avoided contact with Order?

But what kind of change would make the follower closest to Order unwilling to approach Him?

The Shared Law Faction's consistent vision was never to distance itself from Order. If anything, they're the believers who most wanted Order to permeate every corner of the world. So if even the Shared Law Faction's leader began distancing himself from Order, I can only conclude that in his eyes, Order may have already ceased being Order.

This is the crux of Order's problem — isn't it, Cheng Shi?"

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted faintly. He'd underestimated this teammate. She was formidable indeed.

And observing his micro-reaction, Sun Miao nodded expressionlessly, essentially confirming her hypothesis.

"This is a worthy research topic. No wonder Zhen Xin takes it so seriously. It seems your investigation has shifted from history to... Them.

Interesting. If I may have the honor, I'd very much like to assist you. As you've seen, I consider myself somewhat talented at deconstructing history."

"Oh?" Cheng Shi smiled meaningfully. "Is deconstruction really the only thing you're talented at?"

Sun Miao froze mid-stride, then stiffly retreated into silence.

Seeing her unwillingness to be candid, Cheng Shi didn't press. He turned back to searching. Soon, inside the armrest drawer of the Supreme Judgment seat, he fished out an arrowhead — forged from steel and inscribed with the Grand Tribunal's sigil.

He studied it carefully. It looked familiar somehow.

Sun Miao came over to look. She pointed at the scratchy signature on the arrowhead.

"Esa Res. Strange — why would Esa Res's name be on this arrowhead?"

As far as I know, that Supreme Inquisitor was an Elemental Mage. But this arrowhead is clearly an investigator's weapon component. He..."

'Wait!'

'Esa Res!?'

In that instant, Cheng Shi knew exactly why the arrowhead felt familiar. He'd seen one on Grand Investigator Lid Yara — and Lid Yara was Esa Res's adopted daughter!

So this was almost certainly one of Lid Yara's arrowheads.

Cheng Shi's thoughts drifted to the three wrongfully imprisoned souls from that trial. He frowned and asked quietly: "How much do you know about Lid Yara?"

Sun Miao blinked. She glanced at the inscription, paused, then answered:

"The Grand Investigator?"

She apparently wasn't originally from the Grand Tribunal. There were rumors she was Esa Res's illegitimate daughter with someone from a Nature Alliance tribe. So... the rumors were true?"

"?"

Cheng Shi was thrown off too. 'Wasn't it adoptive father? How did "illegitimate" get into the picture?'

"Seems you're not sure either. Well — that's the charm of gossip. It always tempts people to dig deeper.

In my assessment, she was an extremely devout Order follower but only a middling investigator. Public records show she once investigated a case about Tower of Logic scholars conducting secret experiments within the Grand Tribunal. But now it seems...

She may not have been investigating the Tower of Logic, but the Shared Law Faction.

The Grand Tribunal was already rotting from its roots. The factions' wills were mutually incompatible. Add in Order's own problems, and the decline was irreversible.

If this is true, her death raises many questions — historical records say she was ambushed and killed by Truth followers within Grand Tribunal territory. Whether those 'Truth followers' actually followed Truth...

Hard to say. After all, even Tower of Logic scholars occasionally dabble in War, don't they?"

Cheng Shi didn't respond. He only nodded thoughtfully.

Given what he knew of the Grand Investigator's temperament from that trial — combined with the replacement of Order, Keinlaur's preemptive distancing from the power center, and Esa Res's silent pretense of ignorance — Lid Yara had likely conducted a new, unauthorized "investigation" of the "blasphemers" within the Supreme Court after her escape.

Only this time, there was no official mandate. It was more like a "blasphemer" committing a second desecration of the existing Order.

And her investigation most likely stopped here — at Keinlaur.

'The so-called Truth ambush...!' He sighed inwardly. 'I hope this devout Order follower didn't die at the hands of her own people.'

Cheng Shi gripped the arrowhead. "Do you know the final fates of Supreme Inquisitor Esa Res and Grand Executioner Artair?"

"I do."

Sun Miao's answer was concise. She was a living history book — every bit worthy of her title as History School Vice President.

"Esa Res, leader of the Traditionalist faction, lost two favored successors in quick succession. Devastated, he died of resentment at home.

Though alternative accounts claim that on the day he died, all of Katouting was hunting an escaped prisoner — and that prisoner, in desperation, broke into the Supreme Inquisitor's residence and killed him.

But I think that version is too wild. Never mind whether the elderly Esa Res still had formidable power — any prisoner strong enough to kill him would have been locked in the Howling Iron Prison at minimum. And once inside the Howling Iron Prison, who could escape?

The Grand Tribunal's history is full of escaped prisoners, but not a single one ever broke out of the Howling Iron Prison.

Honestly, they might as well have stuck with 'Truth followers killed Esa Res.' At least that would give Truth followers an intellectual thrill."

"..." Cheng Shi rolled his eyes. He sensed she was slipping in her own bias — she clearly had a bone to pick with Truth followers.

"Compared to Esa Res, Artair's later years were far more dramatic.

As the Grand Tribunal's strongest combat force among its six supreme figures, and as a champion of the Strict Law faction, Artair became the sole surviving supreme authority after Keinlaur died on the southern battlefield. Before new Supreme Inquisitors could be appointed, he single-handedly steered this crumbling empire for quite some time.

With defeat's fallout and constant harassment from the Kingdom of War, the Grand Tribunal was rife with grievances and conflict. He seized the opportunity to impose his will — escalating punishments, tightening laws, and temporarily stabilizing the situation.

But these measures only slowed the nation's decline. They solved nothing.

After all — when the god Himself had a problem, what could even the most devout mortals do?

So the answer to all dilemmas is ascend to godhood. Only by becoming one of Them can one achieve what one truly desires."

"?" Cheng Shi frowned. "You actually think that way? Don't tell me you moonlight at the God Worship Society too."

Sun Miao paused. She typed with noticeable stiffness:

"Correct. I also serve as vice president of the God Worship Society. But my fanaticism is an act.

I aspire to become one of Them — but only through a viable path. Mindless zealotry only accelerates one's own destruction; it does nothing for apotheosis.

I didn't join the God Worship Society because I share their vision. I treat them as intelligence-gathering tentacles.

I told you — the History School's scale far exceeds your imagination. In a sense, even the God Worship Society could be considered a subordinate organ of the History School. Because their president...

seems to have long forgotten he's a president at all."

"...?"

...

Chapter 928: Let's Go Back and Take a Look

"Who is the God Worship Society's president?"

Cheng Shi had been interested in this question for quite a while. Or rather, not just him — most players who knew of these organizations were keenly curious about their upper echelons.

Many players probably couldn't even get past the entry threshold, but that didn't stop them from using it as conversation fodder to brag during trials.

"Meng Youfang. A mystical bard.

The name might not ring a bell, but if I tell you his ID... Gods Forsake Me. Does that ring anything?"

'Him!?'

Ring a bell? It absolutely rang a bell.

Cheng Shi recalled the most recent Time/Fate Ladder of Ascent. He realized this man was the new Time Chosen after Lao Deng's death — though his score now sat below the Blind One's.

After the two faiths' merger, a Fate follower had finally and decisively claimed the top spot.

To think the God Worship Society's president was a Time follower — and a bard at that.

Bards were famous for summoning past heroes from the river of time. By that logic... was this president trying to summon the echoes of past gods as reflections?

Sun Miao seemed to read his mind. She paused before typing:

"You guessed right — that's exactly what this lunatic intends. But he's crazier than you think.

You think his ID was randomly chosen?

No. He's always believed he himself is another god, forgotten by the pantheon — and that this game was designed by the gods specifically to help him reclaim his identity.

He's convinced he'll one day reclaim his divine throne.

Throughout this process, everyone laughed at him. Until... the God Worship Society he founded grew to its current scale, and he himself claimed the top of Time's rankings.

After that, nobody laughed anymore. At the very least, people started seriously considering whether what he said might actually be possible."

"..."

'Why does every peak player keep raising the bar for insanity?'

'You can't make it without being mad?'

'What kind of protagonist script is this?'

'If you weren't a Time follower, I'd almost believe it.'

'Unfortunately, Time's only servant-god slot has already been claimed. Don't tell me you're trying to reclaim Time's divine throne itself.'

'Now that really would be Void.'

Cheng Shi pursed his lips and offered no comment. But his curiosity was piqued, and he started asking about other matters.

It wasn't every day you met an intel chief who was both willing and qualified to talk. Not squeezing out a few more answers would be a waste. And Sun Miao's approach was simple: answer everything. She was

like a diligent player stockpiling "contribution points" — waiting to trade them in for the ultimate reward: "What exactly happened to Order."

So Cheng Shi didn't beat around the bush. He fired off all sorts of odd questions.

"What other organizations do you hold positions in? The Order Alliance? The Reason Association? The Nature Sect?"

And who founded each of them?"

Sun Miao actually knew all of it.

"The Order Alliance is on its way out. After all, 'order' is mostly championed by low-ranked players. Once order fails to bring new benefits to peak players, they'll trample it rather than obey it.

Its founder is Fang Yuan — same as his ID. A rather interesting Elemental Judge.

How to describe him... compared to obeying order, he's actually better at finding loopholes in various systems of order and exploiting them to create new rules for the disadvantaged. On the whole, a decent person.

The 'Grand Lunatic' of the Reason Association is a Truth follower. That nickname wasn't my doing — it was Zhen Yi's.

After 0221 was delisted, he became Truth's Chosen.

You could never imagine: despite this organization walking the path of getting ever closer to the gods by any means necessary, its leader is neither a mage nor a bard, nor even a hunter. He's... a warrior."

"A combat expert? The Reason Association's president is a combat expert?" Cheng Shi blinked in disbelief.

It wasn't that warriors couldn't pursue theological "research" — all Truth followers were explorers on Truth's road. But nine out of ten players willing to dive deep into this field wouldn't pick warrior.

"Exactly. A combat expert.

Which is why I'm not at all surprised that Truth eventually drifted toward War.

The shifts of faith leave their traces in every corner."

"..."

"As for the Nature Sect — their heads change faster than the Prosperity Chosen. You can never wake someone who's determined to get themselves killed in creative ways. Their sect's guiding will has gone wrong; they've practically been consumed by Descent.

But recently things shifted again. Apparently 'Eternal Sun' has taken over as the new head. Perhaps under her leadership, the Nature Sect — which once championed embracing nature and returning to primal instincts — can limp along a little longer.

Though I'm not optimistic. I suspect a hardline Birth leader will overcorrect the organization's culture, turning the Nature Sect into a breeding sect — humanity's backup offspring 'ranch.'

Of course, that's pure speculation on my part. Don't take it as fact. I know you're close to Hu Xuan, so I hope you won't snitch. I'd rather she not strip me of my vice presidency."

"..."

'Girl — you seriously hold a vice presidency in every single organization?'

'Alright, alright — the eternal runner-up.'

Cheng Shi clutched the arrowhead, sinking back into thought about who-knows-what. Seeing him still fixated on the arrowhead, Sun Miao hesitated, then added:

"What are you thinking about now?"

This may sound 'petty' of me, but I have to ask — are you waiting for me to take the bait?"

Hearing this, Cheng Shi smiled.

He had, in fact, been waiting for her to take the bait. If she never asked, he'd feel too embarrassed to bring it up himself.

The moment she finished speaking, Cheng Shi held up the steel arrowhead and grinned with sly delight.

"I'd bet there's an absolutely fascinating story behind this arrowhead. And I suspect you'd be interested too. So, Vice President — do you happen to have any items that can trace the past?"

Let's go back in time and take a look. This time, I'll walk in front and scout the way for you — bringing you closer to the Order you want to understand. How about it?"

"..."

'As if. Only a fool would trust you.'

'Who knows if you'd suddenly end up behind me?'

'There's precedent for that.'

But she had to admit — Cheng Shi's words tempted her.

She was an intelligence addict. Given the breadth of her knowledge, she had absolutely zero resistance to this kind of thing. Otherwise she wouldn't have continued cooperating with him after being coerced.

She suspected there was a story behind the arrowhead too. But using that particular item would be painfully expensive. If the story proved unsatisfying, the loss would be enormous.

The same intel could be sold to multiple buyers, but items were expendable. So she weighed her options.

Sensing her hesitation, Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow and administered one final dose of motivation.

"It feels rude to keep making you cough up intel. Here — if the story behind this arrowhead turns out not to be what you're looking for... I'll tell you the complete story of Order. Deal?"

"Really!?"

"Of course. Because I never lie."

...

Chapter 929: Lid Yara Once More

Sun Miao yielded — to her own thirst for knowledge.

Seeing that Cheng Shi's smile didn't look fake, she hesitated back and forth before producing a single page from a book and carefully taking the arrowhead from his hand, wrapping it within.

"This is...?"

"One page from Memory's Chronicle of Time. Occasionally in Memory's trials, you'll stumble upon its pages, lost within dreams. Extremely rare, and once used, gone forever.

This may be the most extravagant consumable in the game. Cheng Shi, you'd better not be tricking me.

Its function is to trace origins. Think of it as entering a dream like a Dream Peeping Ranger, except that ordinary dreamwalkers and tools require a conscious living being as a vessel. This page doesn't.

All it needs is a related object. Use the page, enter its 'dream,' and revisit the past.

Of course, you can't change history — we'll just be spectators."

Sun Miao typed with one hand and operated with the other, neither slowing the other. Her hands were quick; the moment her typing ended, the other hand finished as well.

Azure light poured from the page and cascaded to the ground. Like a rising tide, it slowly crept over both their ankles.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi frowned and shuffled behind Sun Miao.

"..." Sun Miao gave him an expressionless glance. "Excessive caution only wastes mental energy. Relax — compared to scheming against you, information and history are what actually interest me.

Also, I've set up a formation around the tent. Nobody will notice this place for a while. You can venture into the dream at ease."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi beamed. "Why didn't you say so earlier? If I'd known, I wouldn't have been so careful. Come on, let's go — lead the way!"

"..."

The tide of memory rose higher and higher, soon engulfing them completely.

Cheng Shi felt everything go dark. When he opened his eyes again, he found himself standing atop a building's roof. Below him stretched the unmistakable skyline of Katouting.

Inside the dream, Sun Miao no longer needed her electronic beeper. Her voice resonated directly in Cheng Shi's ears.

"As I suspected — it's her. Lid Yara!"

Cheng Shi turned toward the voice. There stood the Grand Investigator, one hand gripping the spire of a clock-tower-like structure like a helmsman at the prow, gazing intently in a particular direction.

Sun Miao was surprisingly familiar with the city. The moment she noted Lid Yara's line of sight, she nodded.

"Looks like you were right. She's looking toward Esa Res's residence. This Supreme Inquisitor's death is indeed linked to her.

And there are indeed swarms of Iron Law Knights searching below us. The alternative histories were right for once."

No sooner had she spoken than Lid Yara shot forward like a bowstring-released arrow. Cheng Shi and Sun Miao hurried to keep up.

Before long, they arrived at Esa Res's front hall. But the nearly-retired inquisitor was already dead — killed by a small crossbow bolt.

The first thing Cheng Shi saw upon landing was Lid Yara extracting the blood-stained, Esa Res-inscribed arrowhead from the dead man's chest.

Both their pupils shrank.

'Wrong.'

Their assumptions from moments before were entirely wrong. From the time Lid Yara touched down to the time they caught up — no more than two or three seconds. Never mind whether the Grand

Investigator could kill silently; even if she could, this corpse had clearly been dead for well over ten minutes.

Blood flow had stopped. The killer had struck and was long gone.

They exchanged a look. Neither had expected Esa Res's death to contain hidden layers.

Lid Yara held the bloody arrowhead, looking down at her adoptive father sprawled on the floor with eyes still open. A flicker of pity crossed her gaze — but no sympathy.

A man who'd abandoned his principles and dared play both sides under Order's gaze had long ceased being the father she'd revered.

So Lid Yara shed no tears. She only grew more certain: the Grand Tribunal's problems extended far beyond Order alone. Under His influence, Katouting's supreme power structure was fracturing.

More ironically still: shortly after Lid Yara dropped into the courtyard, Iron Law Knights from across the city converged on the location as if guided by some invisible eye. At that point, any fool could guess who was behind this.

Among the six supreme figures: the Chaos-maddened Supreme Inquisitor Lo Yat had died at the hands of Grand Justice La Quis. La Quis, in turn, died by suicide. Now another Supreme Inquisitor, Esa Res, was dead — and the person about to be "crowned" as the culprit was clearly Investigator Lid Yara. But she was obviously not the killer.

So who, at this point in time, could easily kill a Supreme Inquisitor in Katouting — the holy land of Order? Besides her, only two possibilities remained:

The last Supreme Inquisitor, Keinlaur. And Grand Executioner Artair.

But Keinlaur was currently inspecting the border — away on external affairs. That left only Artair in the city. Who else could the killer be?

The answer seemed obvious. But there was the question of motive.

Had the Grand Executioner discovered Esa Res's blasphemous negligence and been moved to kill?

But why wouldn't a champion of harsh law formalize the killing with procedural justice? That way, he could publicly judge a Supreme Inquisitor, demonstrate fairness to the people, and add a milestone achievement for the Strict Law Faction's governance of Katouting. A once-in-a-thousand-years opportunity. If Artair wasn't an idiot, he shouldn't have missed it.

Cheng Shi frowned. Things weren't so simple.

And clearly, Lid Yara had reached the same conclusion. She didn't confront Artair. Instead, she fled Katouting, evading the Iron Law Knights' pursuit, and raced toward Keinlaur's location.

In her eyes, this was undoubtedly a frame job — and the true beneficiary was Supreme Inquisitor Keinlaur.

As for how Keinlaur, who was far away at the border, could kill Esa Res inside Katouting...

Don't forget — Lid Yara had once investigated the Truth scholars' covert experiments within the Grand Tribunal. She knew Keinlaur had mastered certain "illegal" techniques from the Tower of Logic. Techniques like... slicing.

The intervening pursuit was long and grueling. Stripped of her identity, Lid Yara could barely move within Grand Tribunal territory. Fortunately, for Cheng Shi and Sun Miao it was just a dream. They fast-forwarded through the journey, skipping straight to the moment Lid Yara confronted Keinlaur.

By then, the Tower of Logic's civil war had intensified dramatically. Keinlaur had been conscripting soldiers across the country; his current tour involved pressing each county to send warriors to the front lines — to hold back the fire of War spreading from the Tower of Logic.

When Lid Yara dispatched the guards and slipped into Keinlaur's room, the white-haired elder seated behind a long table slowly raised his head.

"You've finally come, Lid Yara."

"Ready to face justice, Keinlaur?"

Keinlaur smiled faintly.

"Well now — is even the Grand Investigator, champion of procedural justice, going to overstep her bounds and conduct an unauthorized trial on behalf of our Benefactor?"

But you forget — I am the judge. In this nation, it has always been I who passes sentence on the guilty."

Lid Yara laughed coldly. She produced a compact crossbow. On its bed sat a bolt — and its arrowhead was unmistakably the one inscribed with Esa Res's name.

"Then, esteemed Supreme Inquisitor — you may now declare my murder conviction in advance."

The words had barely left her mouth when the crossbow's mechanism clicked.

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Chapter 930: Why Did You Betray Order? Betray? No — I Never Betrayed Him

The bolt split the air and struck true, burying itself squarely in Keinlaur's chest.

The Supreme Inquisitor didn't move a muscle. He simply let Lid Yara's hatred and fury pin him to the chair.

He was truly dead. Both Cheng Shi and Sun Miao were certain that the Keinlaur before them had lost every trace of vitality. But...

Since he still lived in the history outside this dream, it meant the scene was far from over.

Sure enough. While the two players studied their surroundings, another Keinlaur materialized silently behind Lid Yara. He gently reached out, took the crossbow from her hand, and began examining it with interest.

Lid Yara had evidently anticipated this. She showed no alarm — in fact, she gave a cold, mocking laugh.

"So this is the confidence and the means by which you killed Lord Esa Res.

What — does our esteemed Supreme Inquisitor intend to fill every seat on Katouting's supreme bench with identical copies of himself?"

Despite the venom in her words, Keinlaur showed no anger. He only smiled as he inspected the crossbow, pacing idly beside her.

"Look — this crossbow is a crystallization of civilization.

From throwing, to bowstrings, to mechanisms — people have refined their craft across countless ages to produce a weapon this lethal.

And yet this culmination of untold years of collective wisdom... is being used to kill the very creators who made it.

What does that tell us?"

"Don't try to change the subject and obscure your crime!" Lid Yara's sharp gaze tracked Keinlaur's every step. Another compact crossbow had already appeared from her sleeve.

"No. I bear no guilt."

Keinlaur smiled, handed the crossbow back to a stunned Lid Yara, then said with grave sincerity:

"Esa Res's killer was not me. It was a frame-up."

Lid Yara's pupils contracted. Of course she knew it was a frame job — she just believed Keinlaur was framing Artair, hoping to pit herself and the Grand Executioner against each other while he achieved his hidden agenda.

But now Keinlaur was denying it?

A man holding all the cards had no reason to deny. And Lid Yara hadn't come here expecting to survive and expose the truth. She'd long been prepared to die. Against Keinlaur, who commanded the entire Iron Law Knight corps, she had no chance. All she wanted was, under Order's final gaze, not to die ignorant of the truth.

"You're lying!

Keinlaur — we've worked together for years. I always looked up to you as a senior, a role model, an exemplar. And you — you won't even give me an answer, a truth, before I die!?"

Lid Yara's voice trembled with bitter fury. She seemed utterly convinced of her righteousness. But Master of Deception told Cheng Shi: Keinlaur was not lying.

'He didn't kill the man.'

Now that was interesting. It meant Grand Executioner Artair — the sole guardian left in Katouting — was no pushover either. At minimum, he'd seen through Keinlaur's intentions and used Lid Yara as the tool to eliminate his "last remaining rival."

His perspective sat a level above the Grand Investigator's.

Keinlaur smiled, circled back behind the table, pushed his other self's corpse off the chair, and sat down again. Elbows on the desk, he shook his head.

"I gave you the answer. You simply don't believe it.

It's a pity the Sword of Judgment wasn't brought along. Otherwise, you could take it up and ask me yourself whether I lied.

Still, you weren't entirely wrong either. Perhaps there truly is no such thing as absolute truth in this world. Right now, I want an answer just as badly as you do.

But who can give me one?"

Lid Yara froze. Keinlaur's sincerity didn't look feigned. Yet she still couldn't believe that the diligent, honest, ever-devoted Lord Artair was some political power-schemer who manipulated hearts.

'Could he really have predicted this confrontation?'

Lid Yara fell silent. After a long while, she stowed her crossbow and spoke in a heavy, conflicted tone:

"Why did you betray Order!"

Keinlaur shook his head once more. "Lid Yara, don't make yourself appear so naive. It's Order who betrayed us — not the other way around."

"But you knew He had a problem, and your first reaction was to run! How is that not blasphemy!?"

Why didn't you help Him?

Why didn't you warn us?

Why let it fester until the point of no return — watching with your own eyes as the Order kingdom that generations of tribunals painstakingly built into teeters on collapse!?"

Supreme Inquisitor — answer me! Give me your defense!"

Keinlaur looked at the red-eyed Lid Yara and sighed.

"I'm sorry, Grand Investigator. I don't believe I need to defend myself. Because I have never betrayed Order.

However glorious the Grand Tribunal's past, however devout you, I, and followers everywhere have been — we must face one fact: all of this was mortal devotion to Order's will in practice.

But now, the one who has ceased to practice Order's will... is Him.

So — an Order that is no longer orderly — by what right does it still call itself Order!?"

"Keinlaur, you—!!??"

This was no longer mere blasphemy. This was dragging Order to the ground and trampling on it.

On the Land of Hope — where fervor for the gods ran rampant — the sheer audacity of this registered on the same scale as Cheng Shi shooting fireworks point-blank into Oblivion's face.

Even Cheng Shi hadn't expected this Supreme Inquisitor to be a kindred spirit. Only — how did he dare?

'Do you also have a Benefactor called Deceit shielding you?'

Obviously not.

Keinlaur had said it himself: his willingness to blaspheme Order wasn't born of abandoning Order but from the conviction that his own devotion had never wavered.

"Since Order is no more, then why don't we — the ones left adrift — unite and create a new... Order?"

"You... have lost your mind..." Lid Yara was shocked speechless by the blasphemous argument. "He is a god. A Benefactor. The foundation of civilization. Do you think He's like that infinitely rotatable Supreme Inquisitor seat you're sitting on!?"

"If the followers who practice Order's will can be replaced — then why can't the vessel of that will itself be replaced?"

"And you still say you're not blaspheming!"

"The one blaspheming faith was never us — it's Him!

Order Himself desecrated the devotion of hundreds of millions. Now, all that devotion flows toward the wrong direction. If we simply correct it, then the entire continent's accumulated faith could just as well birth a new Order.

This is what I'm doing right now.

I have never betrayed Order. I'm simply trying to save faith itself.

On this, my conscience is clear."

"..."

The room hung in wordless silence. Even both spectators were swept up in the tension, holding their peace. After a long time, Lid Yara emerged from her initial shock and suddenly let out a cold, sardonic laugh.

"Why 'create' something new instead of correcting what exists?"

Heh — Keinlaur, don't tell me the 'new Order' you want to build... is yourself."

"..."

Keinlaur went silent. He didn't answer the Grand Investigator's challenge. Instead, he quietly pulled a broken branch from the desk drawer and laid it on the table.

Every gaze in the room locked onto that branch. And when both players saw it, their pupils shrank to pinpoints. They spoke simultaneously:

"The Mother Tree of Fear?"

"Le Le'er..."

Cheng Shi's expression shifted. He discreetly closed his fingers around the Bone Servant Redeemer's Ring.

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