

## The Gods 941

### Chapter 941: Walking the Void

In this trial, there were mages, assassins, and warriors, but none of these classes could match a hunter's agility when it came to raw speed, especially over long distances.

And so, in order to reverse the looming disadvantage as quickly as possible and seize that giant bow before anyone else, Du Qiyu moved at full tilt. Before even his tamed hawk and other beasts reached the left flank, his true body had already arrived at the encampment ahead of everyone else, locating Keinlaur in the midst of commanding the battle.

The Keinlaur standing here now bore no resemblance to the slightly aged, white-haired old man from the central army tent the day before. He stood atop a small hill in the heart of the camp, surveying the spreading fires across the lowlands below. Messenger after messenger rushed in to report the battlefield situation, and with each one he issued precise, methodical orders that struck directly at the heart of the enemy's assault plan.

Command after command flowed down the hill. Before long, the once-raging [War] battle line below began to cool, and it was clear that only scattered embers would remain soon enough.

Perhaps when the [War] soldiers charging wave after wave saw that Keinlaur himself was stationed here rather than at the central camp, they must have felt true despair.

The War Legion's night raid had unquestionably failed. Their well-timed charge had served only as a wake-up call for the entire encirclement line.

Judging solely from the few minutes Du Qiyu had observed, Keinlaur's military acumen was so extraordinary that it was nearly impossible to imagine how the historical version of this man had misjudged the broader situation and sent this two-nation encirclement to its doom.

But none of that concerned Du Qiyu. He was here for one thing only: that bow. And so, during a brief lull between commands, Du Qiyu seized the moment to reassert control over one of Keinlaur's personal escort knights. Then, as the battle wound down and Keinlaur turned to head back to his tent, the Supreme Inquisitor was once again brought before him.

Of course, the cautious Du Qiyu didn't meet the legion commander in person. Instead, he used the controlled escort knight to deliver his "ultimatum" directly.

One escort knight pressed a dagger to Keinlaur's throat while the other clapped slowly in front of the Inquisitor, sneering:

"Well done. No wonder you weren't afraid of me. You had a backup plan ready all along.

So does that mean our deal is void?

Keinlaur, you don't actually believe you can win this epoch-defining war on your own, do you?"

Keinlaur said nothing, just as silent as he had been in the central army tent before. He merely raised those hawk-like, seasoned eyes to study the familiar yet strange escort knight before him, tinged with a note of sorrow:

"You've killed yet another brave knight of the Grand Tribunal. Your atrocities are pushing you into an abyss of disorder.

[Order] above, turn back. Judgment has never been about harsh punishment. It grants you a chance to repent."

Hearing this, Du Qiyu laughed mockingly:

"What, you want [Order] to judge me?

Let me tell you, I don't have the time to play your little trial games.

Even if you're not afraid to die, even if you have plenty of body doubles, nobody can out-fox me when it comes to having multiple bolt-holes.

I will find your true body, Keinlaur. And before I do, you'd better have what I need ready. Otherwise, you won't have a single bargaining chip left to buy your own life."

The escort knight slapped Keinlaur hard across the cheek, the insolence of a subordinate striking a superior radiating with brazen arrogance.

"And one more thing. You're going to have quite a few visitors soon. When 'unfamiliar faces' show up, no matter who they are, I want you to kill them all.

I know your people can't eliminate these freaks without forbidden arts. Then use the forbidden arts. Even if it means destroying the entire eastern and western flanks, as long as I'm here, I can guarantee your victory.

Keinlaur, if fate truly favors you and you manage to pull it off, then even without the thing I want, I'll spare your life.

Remember my words. You're running out of time."

With that, the escort knight behind the Inquisitor moved to slit Keinlaur's throat. Du Qiyu knew that when someone possessed body doubles, what they displayed to the world would never be their true self. So he didn't fear a false kill, and he used it to reinforce his intimidation.

But what he hadn't anticipated was that the very instant the knight's blade was about to slice across Keinlaur's throat, smoke exploded across the scene and Keinlaur vanished in a flash.

'Not good. Something's wrong!'

Du Qiyu's expression shifted instantly. He reacted decisively, severing the connection between himself and both knights inside the smoke. Cautious as ever, he feared the smoke might contain some means of tracing back to his true body's location.

But the worst had already happened. He realized that only one of his controlled knights remained. The other had lost its connection to him the instant the smoke detonated.

This sudden turn of events darkened Du Qiyu's face to a thunderous shade. Only belatedly did he realize that he, a [Deceit] believer, had been played.

And the one who'd played him was most likely another [Deceit] believer: Xiao Shi!

But he had watched Keinlaur for so long specifically to verify the man's authenticity. Even if Xiao Shi had wanted to impersonate Keinlaur to turn the tables, setting aside how he could have beaten Du Qiyu to the left flank, the calm and measured command against the War Legion's assault, the precise and efficient troop deployment—surely that couldn't have been an act?

'How did he do it?'

'He even learned how to command a grand army?!'

'Impossible!'

'How could he? Did his trash-picking father teach him that along with his trash-picking skills?!'

'No, it's all fake. It's all an illusion. From the very beginning, the changes at the left flank were fake!'

Du Qiyu was equal parts shocked and furious. He kept grasping at reasons to excuse his blunder, but after rationalizing for a while, he was forced to acknowledge that if everything he'd just witnessed was indeed an illusion, it meant the Xiao Shi he'd once looked down upon now possessed abilities on par with the legendary Zhen Yi, capable of deceiving players at will.

That thought sent an involuntary shiver of fear through his heart. But before that fear could even settle, the young hawk, which had nearly reached the left flank, spotted Lin Xi below the high ground. The Plague Cardinal was already standing there, having arrived who knew how long ago, calmly observing everything.

The Plague Cardinal had arrived too!

And even earlier than his racing tamed beasts!

Lin Xi glanced back at the young hawk flapping its slightly awkward wings behind him, let out a cold snort, and then shook his head with a mocking laugh.

"Heh, seems I misjudged you too. Looks like you've already taken a beating.

Beast Tamer, let me give you a piece of advice. When you claim to be 1,600 points, people just think you're being cautious and hiding your strength.

But when you claim to be 2,600 points, you'd better pray you actually are.

I don't know if traveling by land is some kind of Beast Tamer principle, but when it comes to saving time, we generally prefer to walk the Void."

"..."

Those three words—"walk the Void"—felt like the universe's most devastating mockery. Du Qiyu's expression darkened until it seemed water might drip from his face.

He hid inside the hollow of an enormous tree, breathing heavily, fists clenched white. Then, with a snarl of pure hatred, he slammed his fist into the cavity wall, sending the entire tree resonating with a deep hum.

"You. All. Deserve. To. Die!!"

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Chapter 942: Keinlaur, the Brilliant War Commander

That's right. The Keinlaur from moments ago had indeed been Cheng Shi.

He and Sun Miao had arrived at the left-flank camp a step ahead of everyone by walking the Void. Of course, neither Cheng Shi nor Sun Miao had torn open the Void themselves. That had been Chun.

The moment Cheng Shi learned Keinlaur's location, he sensed the opportunity to set a trap and immediately contacted Chun.

He hadn't left behind any method of reaching Chun, but he wasn't worried about losing touch with her. He knew that as long as Sun Miao remained curious about that "deconstruction curse," she would never let a subject under observation slip out of her sight.

Sure enough, the instant Sun Miao heard Cheng Shi's request, she called Chun back.

The former [Prosperity] Chosen was practically at Cheng Shi's beck and call by now, and when she learned the trap was aimed at Lin Xi, she didn't hesitate for a second. She tore open the Void and ferried both of them directly to the left flank, compressing what would have been an overnight march into just a few hours.

Upon arrival, Cheng Shi's group quickly located Keinlaur. His timing was much like Du Qiyu's, both seizing a lull between commands to spirit away the real body. The difference was that Cheng Shi's approach was far more aggressive: he switched straight back to [Deceit] and transformed himself into Keinlaur, entering the game in person to see just what those two teammates who'd been absent all day were plotting.

But entering the game in person didn't mean throwing himself into danger. Before the disguise even went on, Cheng Shi had already calculated every possible outcome.

Chun was lurking near the camp. If Lin Xi approached, no warning would be needed. She'd catch the stench of rot on him instantly and throw herself into a fight.

And if Xiao Qi approached? Even less cause for worry. Even if Xiao Qi arrived first, it would never be in his true body. This wasn't an overestimation of Xiao Qi's caution. It was simply that no Beast Tamer would expose themselves when a tamed beast could do the job.

So when he thought it through, the worst-case scenario for this deception was encountering one of Xiao Qi's tamed beasts. And if that was all there was to fear, then what was there to be afraid of?

If a certain someone couldn't even handle a Beast Tamer's thrall, forget being mocked by the Fun God, Cheng Shi could find a block of tofu and bash his own head in.

And so, without hesitation, Cheng Shi stepped into Keinlaur's place and became the commander of the Grand Tribunal's left flank.

That said, none of those brilliant tactical maneuvers had actually been his own work. For someone who was still cramming the history of the Land of Hope like a slacker student, asking him to command a large-scale military operation he'd never experienced was a bit much.

Everything he'd demonstrated in the camp had been Keinlaur's own words, relayed verbatim.

Indeed, Keinlaur truly was an exceptional war commander. On this point, Cheng Shi and Xiao Qi found themselves in remarkably rare agreement.

Because it was Cheng Shi who had "persuaded" Keinlaur to help him carry out this disguise, ostensibly to keep outsiders from further disrupting the Grand Tribunal's arrangements. And Keinlaur, without even hearing or seeing how the battle would unfold, had drafted a series of military orders based purely on his own judgment, instructing Cheng Shi to simply read them aloud.

For one person to possess such insight and control over a localized battle was almost unthinkable. It was so impressive that when Cheng Shi first received those orders, he'd actually questioned whether the man's surname was Zhao.

But the well-traveled Vice President Sun of the History School, after glancing over those directives, had said this to Cheng Shi:

"While I'm no expert in military strategy, I can see that if these defensive tactics are executed properly at the front, they may not be enough to repel the enemy, but they would certainly hold the line without issue.

And so, Lord Keinlaur, I'm quite curious. With military insight and command ability this exceptional, how exactly did you lead the Grand Tribunal to its decline?"

Keinlaur, who had been "invited to sit" in a chair, said nothing. After furrowing his brow in thought for a moment, he suddenly spoke:

"What I find more curious is that you strangers always seem to see the future.

I don't know what kind of power this is, nor which heretical god granted it. But I'd like to ask: can you see the Grand Tribunal's future?"

Cheng Shi was about to step out of the tent to play the role of Keinlaur when he heard this. He turned back with a smile. "Are you asking about the Grand Tribunal's future, or... [Order]'s future?"

Keinlaur froze. Those sharp eyes flashed with piercing light, and he answered in a deep voice: "Both."

Cheng Shi chuckled softly, assumed Keinlaur's appearance, and pushed aside the tent flap as he walked out, speaking over his shoulder:

"The Grand Tribunal has no future. As for [Order]'s future... it's probably with me."

His words fell, and his figure vanished.

Keinlaur stared intensely in the direction Cheng Shi had disappeared, carefully mulling over his words.

'[Order]'s future is with him?'

'But he had just taken on my appearance. Does that mean [Order]'s future is with me?'

'If so, then this path... was perhaps not a mistake after all!'

Keinlaur's gaze grew even more resolute.

Noticing this shift, Sun Miao shook her head and typed on her electronic beeper:

"Don't let him bewitch you. Everything that man says has a kind of magic that makes people want to believe him. But the moment you actually do, you've lost, Lord Keinlaur.

Before you know it, you'll end up like me: a 'beggar' who can't stop waiting for him to let some scrap of hidden knowledge slip from his mouth."

Keinlaur raised his head slightly, regarding the woman holding the strange device.

"Then what insight can you offer me, madam?"

Sun Miao paused, then typed rapidly: "The things I know are far too many to list. If you wish to purchase intelligence, please first present your price. Regardless of whether it's high or low, as long as it's fair, I'm open to trade."

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Meanwhile, on the other side.

After scaring off Xiao Qi, Cheng Shi slipped away from the camp and stood alone at the edge of the high ground, gazing into the distance under the moonlight, lost in thought.

He had indeed captured one of Xiao Qi's tamed beasts, using the Molten Coffin that Xie Yang had given him.

Of course, anything shoved into the Molten Coffin was certainly dead by now, and whether it would yield any clues to Xiao Qi's true body remained to be seen. But Cheng Shi wasn't thinking about any of that right now. He was reflecting on his relationship with Xiao Qi.

Admittedly, Xiao Qi had used a lie to deceive him and stolen the "fate" that should have been his.

But...

Honestly, everything Cheng Shi had experienced since, and those irreplaceable memories of warmth he carried, was probably the fate he truly wanted to have.

If he could do it all over again, he would let Xiao Qi deceive him willingly. Because all he wanted was to wait for that old man who pretended to be awkward to come and adopt him one more time.

But life never offered second chances.

And so, Cheng Shi's feelings toward Xiao Qi weren't bone-deep hatred. He wasn't even sure it qualified as hatred at all.

Back when he was a child left behind at the orphanage, watching that Director Du lead Xiao Qi away before his very eyes, Cheng Shi couldn't say he'd felt much hatred then either. At the time, he'd been immersed in his epiphany about "how to use lies," and hadn't felt much of anything else.

Perhaps it was later, the snide remarks from teachers and the indignant protests of his little friends, that planted some seed of regret in Cheng Shi's heart. But at most, it was the disappointment of losing a fun playmate, an irritation at Xiao Qi's betrayal of their friendship. As for the rest, well, this kid had simply never been the type to dwell.

Even if all those vague, conflicting emotions could be called hatred, that hatred had long since evaporated the moment Old Jia hauled that crate of cola back home.

So by now, in this reality where even the gods had become real, Cheng Shi had long since let go of that so-called friendship, that pointless sentimentality.

Friendship was never one-sided. If one party betrayed it, it wasn't really betrayal. It meant the friendship had never existed in the first place.

With that mindset, Cheng Shi looked at Xiao Qi more like a stranger who had happened to walk beside him for a brief stretch. A stranger who'd also tricked him once, who'd "gotten the upper hand." But from his observations of Xiao Qi during this trial, the other man clearly didn't see things the same way.

'His obsession runs deep.'

And that raised an interesting question. If Xiao Qi truly lived the privileged life he'd described, with plenty of food and clothes, studying abroad, graduating from a prestigious school, inheriting the family business, then why was he so hostile toward a childhood companion he'd once toyed with and "defeated," someone who'd been "picked up" by a scrap-collecting old man?

'Wouldn't freedom, money, and time smooth over any scar in the world? And even if there were scars between them, shouldn't they be on my body, not his...?'

So this old friend who once deceived him with lies had probably told another lie about something.

'Tch. He walks the path of [Deceit] with real devotion, I'll give him that.'

'I just wonder, with all that devotion, is he happy?'

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Chapter 943: The Plague Cardinal

"The stinking rat is here."

When Chun found Cheng Shi, the former [Prosperity] Chosen was gnashing her teeth. "He's probably noticed your interest in this trial, so he brought a plague to [Order]'s encampment."

A plague?

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, suddenly realizing that with the [Decay] authority of Faded in his hands, he had almost forgotten to account for threats from [Decay] itself. But those threats remained very real for everyone else.

Lin Xi's primary class was a [Decay] mage: Plague Cardinal. A profession that reigned supreme as the king of area-of-effect damage in the Faith Game.

Choosing this moment to strike the left-flank camp meant Lin Xi was definitely coming after him. As expected, [Oblivion] had no intention of letting him go.

Lin Xi's goal here was no different from kidnapping Keinlaur. It was simply about disrupting the trial's normal progression, forcing Cheng Shi to go "deal with" the source of disruption first, thereby allowing Lin Xi to gain an advantage through pre-arranged preparations for their eventual confrontation.

The Plague Cardinal could spread plague at terrifying speed. If left unchecked, even with the Grand Tribunal's countermeasures, the only outcomes would be countless knights rotting in place or withdrawing from the encirclement zone.

And if a gap appeared in the encirclement line, it was anyone's guess where history would go from there.

Cheng Shi wasn't concerned about the direction of history itself. What he cared about was whether, when history changed course, the particular Gods he was watching would react the same way they had in the historical record.

Everything he'd experienced since the trial began told Cheng Shi that this supposedly observer-perspective trial might actually be a true projection of that ancient faith conflict. So to prevent Lin Xi from erasing any more clues, Cheng Shi really did need to find a way to stop all of this.

Besides, no one knew whether this was Lin Xi's way of weakening their side from a distance. Even if Cheng Shi himself was safe from the plague thanks to his Faded authority, the other two members of his group weren't. If they fell ill during this plague, the balance of combat power might tilt.

The odds of that were slim, but in the name of caution, it couldn't be ignored.

So regardless, the time to act had come. Only by dealing with Lin Xi could this trial continue in peace.

But still...

'Sis, what's with that tone of yours?'

'Why does it sound like you're upset that Lin Xi came looking for me instead of you?'

Cheng Shi gave Chun an odd look. Since she hadn't charged off headlong, it meant she hadn't caught Lin Xi's scent anywhere nearby. In that case, he'd have to gamble on whether Xiao Qi's captured tamed beast had left any useful clues.

It went without saying that Lin Xi wouldn't be foolish enough to face this confrontation without an ally. And the only ally he could find was Xiao Qi.

Those two really were "birds of a feather," drawn together by shared stench.

Cheng Shi retrieved the escort knight whose soul had been obliterated from the Molten Coffin and addressed the slightly puzzled Chun:

"I'm guessing my old friend has teamed up with the rat you loathe so much. Finding him might lead us to Lin Xi.

This is one of his tamed beasts. Can you use it to pick up a trail?

I know Lin Xi issued the challenge, but if we can break free of his rhythm and catch him off guard, our odds improve significantly.

If not, we'll just have to go back and ask the Master."

"Yes!"

Chun's reply was terse and to the point. Although she was an assassin by class, her extended pursuit of Lin Xi had given her an extensive arsenal of tracking methods and tools.

The moment Cheng Shi produced the tamed beast's corpse, Chun was already in motion. She pulled out a palm-sized bone compass and gently placed it on the body. A pointer fashioned from a bone shard began spinning wildly across its surface, and before long, it settled on a direction for them.

Chun's eyes lit up. She snatched the compass back and bolted in that direction.

The sight left Cheng Shi dumbfounded. He immediately used the communication item Sun Miao had given him to summon backup, then hurried after Chun, trailing half a step behind as he ran and asked curiously:

"Is that a [Death] artifact?"

"Correct. An S-rank sacred artifact: the Tragic Death Compass. Despite the word 'tragic' in its name, it doesn't point to the killer, it detects similar death auras. It was a gift from a Scarlet Hunter friend of mine, but she... died at Lin Xi's hands."

"..."

Honestly, Cheng Shi couldn't care less how many additional grudges were tangled up in these two people's vendetta. All he knew was that the name "Tragic Death Compass" could not possibly have been given by that God. It had to be a later corruption of the deity's magnificent naming artistry.

Based on that God's typical style, it should obviously be called the "Bone Fragment Trail-Seeker's Compass."

Cheng Shi pursed his lips, shook the jumbled thoughts from his head, then furrowed his brow slightly.

"Things are going a little too smoothly. I smell a trap."

My old friend is a Beast Tamer. Since he knows I captured one of his beasts, there's no way he wouldn't have scrubbed his own traces.

That bone fragment... Tragic Death Compass of yours, is it reliable?"

"It's not necessarily precise.

It might lock onto another victim's corpse, or one of his other tamed beasts. But we can use it repeatedly as a lead, narrowing the search area to zero in on the target.

Trust me, I've done this at least a hundred times."

At this moment, Chun was brimming with fighting spirit, her earlier seven-year-old demeanor nowhere to be seen. If anything, she bore a passing resemblance to Big Cat.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi was momentarily lost in thought. 'Did Big Cat really help this [Prosperity] colleague purely out of factional interest and personal goodwill?'

'She didn't just think she'd finally found a kindred spirit who shared her belief that "fighting is exhilarating," did she?'

'Tch. Hard to say.'

The two of them quickly arrived at a dense thicket beneath the Boro Highlands, where they found a dead spotted leopard as expected. But it had been dead for a long time, at least a full day.

Cheng Shi frowned at the tamed beast's corpse but said nothing. He watched in silence as Chun pulled out the compass again, and it pointed them toward a new direction.

They wove through the dense forest for quite a while, and only after linking up with Sun Miao and discovering several more tamed beast corpses of different types did they finally stop before the last one: a dead young hawk.

The Tragic Death Compass had gone still. That meant there were no more matching death auras in the vicinity.

When the compass fell silent, Chun showed no impatience. Instead, she produced a whole array of other tracking tools: artifacts of [Decay], [Oblivion], [Truth], [Silence], [Memory], and even [Fate]...

More than a Crown of Thorns assassin, at this moment Chun resembled a [Prosperity] hunter. A gourmand.

She was genuinely skilled at tracking, but after multiple attempts she had to concede that Xiao Qi was equally expert at covering his tracks. Beyond the existing traces, no additional clues could be found no matter what.

And upon learning this, Cheng Shi's brow furrowed tightly.

Controllable traces meant either they had walked into a trap designed by Xiao Qi, or Xiao Qi was using this method to toy with them.

Cheng Shi had checked and double-checked: there was no danger in this forest. So was this yet another deception?

'He's toying with the hunters pursuing him?'

'No, that's not right.'

Cheng Shi shook his head. Something told him this might not be so simple. And just as Chun had hit a dead end and Cheng Shi was sinking into deep thought, Sun Miao, who had been silent the entire way, suddenly lifted her electronic beeper and typed:

"Lin Xi is in the battlefield ravine in front of the Boro Highlands battle line."

"?"

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#### Chapter 944: The Betrayer

The other two present froze, turning to Sun Miao with startled expressions.

Chun was utterly baffled, though her eyes already blazed with fierce battle lust. Cheng Shi, on the other hand, reacted quickly. He briefly recalled the locations and route of their pursuit, then suddenly laughed.

"As expected of a [Folly] wise man. Quick on the uptake.

But I'm curious, which organization's cipher are those symbols made from corpse positions?"

"[Folly]?" Chun looked at Sun Miao, confused. "Isn't she a [Silence] believer?"

Then she looked down at the tamed beast's corpse at her feet, frowning in thought. "Cipher? What cipher?"

Cheng Shi chuckled lightly and said nothing more. Sun Miao didn't address Chun's confusion either, merely facing Cheng Shi with her ever-expressionless face as she typed:

"Your mind isn't slow either, but I must correct you, Cheng Shi. The lines connecting the corpse positions don't spell out some cipher. They spell... Grand Tribunal script.

The Beast Tamer wrote the characters for 'mountain ravine' in the river valley forest, pointing away from the actual ravine. This means he's deliberately avoiding Lin Xi's line of sight to pass us information.

I don't know what your old friend is thinking. All I know is I've gained another piece of trivia:

Apparently, certain famous Fate Weavers... are illiterate.

That's quite rare among peak players. You really ought to work harder at fitting in, Vice President Cheng."

"..."

Cheng Shi stood dumbstruck for a moment, then burst out laughing.

'See? This is what [Folly] believers are like. They always find some bizarre angle to hit you with disdain.'

'But so what if I can't read?'

"Vice President Sun, you seem to have overlooked something. Fitting in isn't determined by literacy. It's determined by numbers.

Of the three people present, who do you think there are more of: the literate, or the illiterate?"

The moment those words fell, the two History School Vice Presidents, suddenly locked in a bout of one-upmanship, both turned to look at Chun. Chun blinked, somewhat bewildered.

"I can read. I recognize the characters for 'mountain ravine.' I just didn't realize the corpse positions formed writing..."

But before she could finish, a look of sudden realization crossed Chun's face. She pressed her lips together and looked at Cheng Shi. "Should I... have pretended I couldn't read?"

"???"

'Wait, sis???'

'You can actually read?!'

Cheng Shi was floored. Of all the things he'd calculated, he never imagined the Crown of Thorns, whose behavior so closely mirrored Big Cat's, would actually know Grand Tribunal script.

'Is that also the power of hatred?'

'Great. So I'm the only illiterate one here?!'

'Heh.'

'This is like the clown's mother opening the door for the clown. The clown has finally come home.'

Even Sun Miao, expressionless as she was, could barely keep her composure. She fought down the urge to look down her nose at him and, instead of pressing her advantage, "helpfully" pointed toward the ravine.

"On our way here, I surveyed the area. There are three ravines ahead of the left flank. Two have gentle terrain and simple topography, poor for concealment. The third has complex features, dense vegetation, and lies in the direction we came from. It doesn't resemble a decayed zone, but there's a high probability that's where Lin Xi is.

However, if we want to deal with him before the full battle erupts, we'll need to drive him out first.

His current position is at the heart of the battlefield. Even if we successfully eliminate the Plague Cardinal, the plague sources he leaves behind upon death will become a nightmare for the entire battlefield and will certainly alter the left flank's outcome.

That's not good for faithfully recreating history, and it's an even greater obstacle to the truth you're trying to uncover, as it would obscure and overwrite the real facts.

So, have you figured out what to do, Vice President Cheng?"

Sometimes things worked out this way: people with different amounts of information reached entirely different conclusions about the same situation. Cheng Shi wasn't the least bit worried about Lin Xi leaving behind plague sources after death, because he could guarantee that Lin Xi would no longer be a Plague Cardinal before he died.

His only two concerns right now were, first, whether the "tip-off" from Xiao Qi concealed goodwill or malice, and second, when Lin Xi unleashed the power of [Oblivion], would the [Oblivion] deity hiding in some disintegrating world come swooping in again for another undignified ambush?

What Cheng Shi feared was never power on his own level. It was the higher-dimensional force he couldn't hope to resist.

After a moment of thought, he looked up with a smile. "How about a deal, Vice President Sun?"

Sun Miao paused, then nodded. "It seems the value of a Mime Master is finally being acknowledged."

"Not exactly." Cheng Shi waved his hand with a smile. "I don't need you to fight Lin Xi with me. I just need you to watch the perimeter. Keep an eye on that Beast Tamer who could show up at any moment.

Based on my understanding of Xiao Qi's personality, he's probably not extending an olive branch to smooth things over. In all likelihood, he's setting the tiger against the wolf, watching from the sidelines, waiting for my battle with Lin Xi to produce a result before swooping in as the oriole behind the mantis, the fisherman who profits.

I don't want this straightforward faith conflict contaminated by too many outside agendas. So all I need from you is to pin down the Beast Tamer, make sure he contributes nothing in this trial. Even chasing him off to find that giant bow he's after would be fine. Just keep him away from me."

"Xiao Qi. Is that his real name?"

He's that Du Qiyu he was talking about, correct?"

The wise man was sharp indeed, but Cheng Shi had no desire to explain, and even less intention of satisfying Sun Miao's curiosity.

"Never mind who he is. Are you taking this deal or not, Vice President Sun?"

"Taking it. Of course I'm taking it." Sun Miao's fingers flew across her beeper, resembling nothing so much as a shrewd merchant who never turned down business. "But if it's just surveillance, I feel the deal is too limited. How about... I take him out for you? That might earn me something more interesting in return. What do you say?"

Hearing this proposal, Cheng Shi smiled.

Taking out Xiao Qi wasn't necessarily a gain for Cheng Shi, but leaking intelligence to others was definitely a loss. So someone as calculating as Cheng the penny-pincher would never agree to such terms.

But he didn't refuse, either.

"If you feel like going for it, by all means. But the intelligence cap stays where it is. Anything beyond that is volunteer work on your part.

Past, present, or future: overtime never comes with overtime pay."

Cheng Shi chuckled softly and beckoned Chun to follow, darting off toward Lin Xi's location. Seeing his attitude, Sun Miao nodded thoughtfully.

'So this Fate Weaver doesn't want to discuss his past. But the lead is already in hand. Perhaps someone else will find this more interesting than I do.'

'I wonder, when Zhen Xin learns about Cheng Shi's past, will she be willing to trade more secrets for it? And if she's not interested, then...'

'What about Zhen Yi?'

With that thought, the Mime Master vanished from the spot as well.

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Meanwhile, on the other side.

Although Du Qiyu and Lin Xi were allies, aside from the initial meeting at the start of the trial where everyone had seen his true body, he had operated exclusively through tamed beasts.

He had volunteered to be Lin Xi's eyes, keeping meticulous watch for the [Decay] Chosen, who was singularly focused on luring Cheng Shi into his trap.

Lin Xi could guess that Du Qiyu harbored his own petty schemes, but he didn't care. That was the nature of this game. There could never be true, sincere friends. Aligned interests brought allies together; conflicting interests tore so-called friends apart through betrayal.

Lin Xi had never had friends. From the moment he lost the person he loved, he knew there was no such thing as love or goodwill in this world.

Faith and survival. Those were everything.

Right now, he was pondering how to handle a [Void] practitioner and his troublesome "ex-wife." And if it came to it, possibly a Mime Master on top of that.

The Beast Tamer was useless. Based on his impression, the man was a paper tiger, the kind you couldn't prop up even if you tried.

His only option now was to overwhelm the Beast Tamer with sheer intimidation, ensuring that at least he wouldn't become an additional asset for the other side. As for whether he served as Lin Xi's own asset, it didn't matter. He didn't need that sliver of combat power.

Of course, what gave Lin Xi such confidence wasn't the talent bestowed upon him by [Oblivion]. No matter how good a talent from faith fusion might be, it couldn't let him single-handedly fight three opponents in a peak-level match, especially when one of them was a Fate Weaver who had once slain a Pseudo God.

But the thing was, a Pseudo God was still a Pseudo God. Even if Cheng Shi's track record was impressive, could he really handle a true god?

Lin Xi was very much looking forward to finding the answer to that question in this trial.

And just as he was contemplating his layouts and designs, a bird circling overhead dove toward him, calling out with a note of urgency:

"They're coming. Northeast."

Lin Xi's brow darkened. While he didn't mind accelerating the timeline for battle, the problem was they were approaching far too quickly. He hadn't had time to set most of his traps.

"How many?"

"Two. Xiao... Cheng Shi and that long-haired man."

Long-haired man? Who? Chun?!

Her hair grew back?!

'That's impossible!'

...

Chapter 945: Traps? Just Walk Through Them

At the same time Lin Xi received his intelligence, a tamed beast appeared in Cheng Shi and Chun's line of sight: a forest tree rabbit.

Perhaps thinking a familiar species from their earlier encounter would be easier to approach, Du Qiyu had once again sent a rabbit to wait along their path.

The moment the rabbit appeared, it knew it had drawn the attention of these two experts. What it hadn't expected was that Cheng Shi, after a single glance, simply changed direction, ran a half-circle, and led Chun around it entirely.

This left Du Qiyu, who had been poised to deliver his report, frozen in place. His expression darkened as he slammed a fist into the ground. Then, with no other choice, he drove another bird-type tamed beast after Cheng Shi, because this was his only chance to gain any leverage in this conflict: a chance to escape from the [Decay] Chosen.

Lin Xi had done something to him!

Lin Xi hadn't told him this. He'd figured it out on his own.

When he saw Lin Xi's utterly unperturbed demeanor, showing no fear whatsoever of betrayal, he knew Lin Xi must have placed some invisible [Decay] technique on him. Otherwise, in a game where you couldn't even trust friends, why would Lin Xi have no fear of treachery?

After all, his true body had never once gone near Lin Xi. And yet, it was precisely this fact that made Du Qiyu too terrified to simply vanish from this conflict. He feared that some unknown method had already been used on him without his knowledge.

Only a leash around the neck could make someone obedient, and if there was one thing Du Qiyu understood intimately, it was this.

A "partnership" born from a chance encounter had become shackles he couldn't remove. That was why he'd panicked and begun secretly tipping off Cheng Shi, placing his hopes on Xiao Shi and Chun being able to kill the [Decay] Chosen.

Of course, if both sides could wound each other grievously, that would be even better. If not, he was "willing" to temporarily side with Xiao Shi.

Xiao Shi was no pushover these days either, but compared to the cold-blooded, vicious Lin Xi, at least Du Qiyu and Xiao Shi didn't share any mortal grudge.

True, his deception had cost Xiao Shi the chance to "walk the path to success." But didn't Xiao Shi also meet a great father because of it?

Xiao Shi had said so himself! If you thought about it, wasn't there some credit due to Du Qiyu in that?!

Besides, during their confrontation on the highlands, neither had seen the other's true face. As long as Du Qiyu stuck firmly to his Zhao Xiaogua identity, maybe he could still muddle through?

Being a "friend" to the repulsive Xiao Shi had to be better than being a "tamed beast" for the life-threatening Lin Xi, right?

What if Xiao Shi truly hadn't recognized him?

Du Qiyu's mindset had completely reversed from the start of this trial. He no longer resented Cheng Shi for not recognizing him. Now he prayed the man absolutely wouldn't.

And so, caught in that paradox of anxiety, a bird circling high in the sky dove sharply toward the running pair, chirping out directions for an attack approach:

"Lin Xi is under a rotting tree in the forest on the west-side shade of the hill. If you keep going straight, you'll hit the plague trap he laid dead ahead.

Detour! Detour now!

Descend from the other side of the high ground. He hasn't had time to set anything up there."

Listening to the chattering bird, Cheng Shi snickered internally but put on a face of pleasant surprise. "A Gua? What are you doing here? Have you come to help us?"

"..."

The grotesquely fake enthusiasm made Du Qiyu feel physically ill, and a tingle of fear along with it. Because if Xiao Shi didn't intend to target him, he would never put on such a nauseating performance right now.

Such transparently false warmth could only mean one thing: Xiao Shi had already classified him as one of the enemies.

'But I'm willing to be your friend again! Why are you still performing for me?!'

Du Qiyu was furious. His temper was quick to flare, but circumstances demanded rapid adaptation. And so, when forced to choose between dignity and survival, he gritted his teeth and chose the latter. He steered the bird closer to Cheng Shi, letting out a "mournful" cry:

"Xiao Shi, you recognized me, didn't you?"

The smile on Cheng Shi's face grew even brighter: "Of course I recognized you, A Gua!"

"Fuck!" Du Qiyu's true body slammed a fist into the ground, hatred nearly spilling from his eyes. But the bird following Cheng Shi maintained its "sorrowful" act.

"I... I know you recognized me, Xiao Shi. That's right, I'm Xiao Qi. I used A Gua's identity precisely because I was too ashamed to face you.

I didn't know about what happened back then. It was Rong Mama who lied and misled me. You know how it was. We were the best of friends! Of course I wanted you to be adopted by Dad... by Director Du."

Hearing this, the expression on Cheng Shi's face gradually turned cold. He scoffed: "I don't care."

"..."

A single "I don't care" left Du Qiyu with nothing to say.

Chun, running ahead of Cheng Shi, had caught the gist of the relationship between these two. Her gaze sharpened, and a thread of killing intent surfaced as she looked at the bird.

She was like Lin Xi in that regard: she despised all betrayers.

"Want me to deal with him?" Chun asked suddenly.

The question didn't earn a response from Cheng Shi, but it terrified Du Qiyu. The bird beat its wings and shot skyward for a moment before swooping back down, dripping with pathos.

"Xiao Shi... I know you hate me..."

"I don't."

"..."

"Fuck! Fuck! FUCK!" Du Qiyu's true body, hidden far away, had a face the color of liver. His eyes blazed with fury, and the fists he'd been smashing into the ground were now raw and bloody. His groveling had earned him not forgiveness but icy mockery. For someone as prideful as him, this was worse than death.

But being alive meant having everything. So Lin Xi had to die.

"I'm glad you don't hate me. I... didn't come specifically seeking your forgiveness. I am, after all, a [Deceit] believer. In this era of [Void] solidarity, I must obey the Benefactor's edict and annihilate every enemy of [Oblivion]."

I deliberately got close to Lin Xi to be your eyes. Remember what I said? I would serve as your hidden eyes, watching over you.

Believe me, only the northern high ground is free of Lin Xi's traps. Only by going that way can you catch him off guard. He doesn't know you're coming yet, but the closer you get, the more alert he'll become. Change course, Xiao Shi! This window is closing!"

Cheng Shi frowned, considering Du Qiyu's true motive.

By Cheng Shi's reckoning, there was absolutely no reason for the man to suddenly help him.

The divine edict was just an excuse. Completing a god's edict did come with rewards, true, but failing to complete it carried no punishment. So if Xiao Qi's starting point was devotion...

That was simply laughable.

A [Deceit] believer's devotion lay only in offering lies. Which meant his arrival had to be yet another deception.

From the coded messages in the forest to the advance warning just now, what was this old friend, who appeared to have allied with Lin Xi, actually doing? Switching sides, or putting on a show?

Cheng Shi leaned toward a combination of both. He understood these liars all too well. They would never do anything without benefit. But given Xiao Qi's performance this trial, could this half-baked Beast Tamer truly play the fisherman who profits after the snipe and the clam exhaust each other?

'Has he been hiding his true strength all along?'

Cheng Shi wasn't sure anymore. The one thing he was certain of was that he would never follow an outsider's directions heading into a confrontation. So he held his course, maintaining speed, and called ahead to Chun:

"Lin Xi's traps. Can you handle them?"

Without turning around, Chun nodded: "Simple. Just walk through them."

"...?"

"[Decay]'s plague is strong in breadth, not intensity. It won't kill quickly. With my [Prosperity] talent as a foundation, I can hold out until I've obliterated all the plague from my body.

So just stay behind me the entire way.

The [Oblivion] traps, though, those are the real concern. We need to watch for being hurled into a world on the brink of annihilation.

Fortunately, [Oblivion] is only his secondary faith, so his trap options are limited. As long as I'm careful enough, my command banner can tell me where [Oblivion]'s aura lurks.

Cheng Shi, right now you don't need to do anything. Just wait until he and I are locked in combat, then hit him with maximum disruption. That's all I need to drive this dagger back into his heart myself!"

With that, Chun reached into her chest and gripped the long-since-rotted dagger tightly.

...

Chapter 946: Conflict Erupts — Confronting Lin Xi!

If even a "hunter" who had spent years stalking Lin Xi could withstand the plague traps, then there was no reason someone with the Vitality authority couldn't.

So Cheng Shi relaxed. All he had to do was stay alert for [Oblivion]'s power.

The two of them picked up speed. They both knew the informant Beast Tamer had likely chosen to retreat from this unexpected conflict, which meant even if he'd lied, it was at most a half-truth. Lin Xi certainly hadn't had time to finish all his preparations. This was their best chance to neutralize the trial's most dangerous variable.

Seeing that the two of them had completely stopped acknowledging him, Du Qiyu stopped his bird with a hateful flap of its wings.

He hadn't lied. Lin Xi's traps were directly ahead. His intention had been to spare these two from wasting energy on meaningless obstacles so they could face Lin Xi at full strength.

But since good advice couldn't save the damned, fine. Let them all die in this forest for all he cared!

The moment contact was broken on this end, Xiao Qi immediately relayed their position to Lin Xi. Thanks to the Du family's teachings, playing both sides was second nature to him.

"They're almost here, Lin Xi. The long-haired man isn't afraid of your traps. Pure [Decay] traps can't slow them down. Only [Oblivion] can reduce their speed.

But even that can only slow them. What are you still waiting for? For them to push through the traps, recover, and charge right into your face?!"

Lin Xi was utterly unmoved by Du Qiyu's warning. He sat motionless as a mountain beneath the rotting tree, merely lifting one eyelid to glance at the bird perched in the canopy. A cold smile crossed his lips.

"Since you're in such a hurry, why don't you go test them for me?"

"?"

The bird froze. Moments later, it spread its wings and soared away, shrieking from a safe distance: "I'll be a pair of eyes, but only eyes!"

Lin Xi snorted and closed his eyes again.

"A tree only realizes it's not a pillar when it's about to die. The same applies to people.

Until you're on the edge between life and death, who really sees themselves clearly?"

Those words cut even deeper than Cheng Shi's feigned obliviousness. Du Qiyu, in his hiding place, pounded the ground in a frenzy. His eyes were bloodshot, veins forming a web of red, wishing he could kill every last person who mocked and sneered at him.

And it was right then, while these two exchanged words, that a thunderous crash of collapsing earth echoed from the front of the ravine. This war between players had finally erupted ahead of the historical battle.

Chun might have been an assassin by class, but her charging posture on this approach was virtually indistinguishable from a warrior's.

Her wildly dancing hair of thorns detonated every [Decay] trap in her path. The stench of plague thickened through the hills, but for the moment, it still couldn't touch two players shielded by [Prosperity].

Cheng Shi followed cautiously behind Chun, deliberately keeping his distance. If they stumbled upon an undetected [Oblivion] trap, this formation would prevent both of them from being swallowed at once.

Yet Chun's efficiency far exceeded Cheng Shi's expectations. This Crown of Thorns knew her "ex-husband" far too well. Sometimes she didn't even need to produce that [Oblivion] command banner. Instinct and experience alone were enough to expose Lin Xi's planted tricks, so practiced that it looked as though she'd laid them herself.

Watching this somewhat surreal scene, Cheng Shi felt no surprise, only a sigh.

'The more you understand, the more it hurts. Not all hatred was once called love, but the depth of Chun's hatred right now implies...'

'Forget it. Focus on the present.'

Cheng Shi shook off the stray thoughts and got to work.

The starring roles in this battleground might belong to Chun and Lin Xi, but Cheng Shi would never entrust his own safety and the outcome of this fight to a teammate blinded by hatred.

He needed to consider why a [Decay] believer had chosen a densely forested ravine as his battlefield. In a place like this, a [Prosperity] believer would thrive, while Lin Xi gained no advantage at all.

The only explanation was that this area had far more vegetation than any other ravine or valley, and annihilating a greater volume of "existence" was itself a form of offering, not to [Decay], but to [Oblivion]!

So Cheng Shi's intuition told him that Lin Xi's confidence in picking this fight stemmed entirely from [Oblivion]'s power backing him up. What he couldn't gauge was just how thick that backing was.

'What if that deity truly fights dirty...'

Erring on the side of caution, Cheng Shi scattered dice along his path and, seizing the cover of the oncoming plague, decayed his own arm. He rotted every plant he passed into dust and nothing.

He intended to offer those "props" to [Decay] before Lin Xi could offer them to the other deity. This would not only interrupt Lin Xi's casting but leave him in an impossible bind.

'If you object to me, you're being impious.'

'And the moment you're impious, I get to punish you on [Decay]'s behalf!'

And so the most absurd scene of this conflict unfolded: the [Decay] believer hid in a flourishing forest, waiting by the stump for his rabbit, while the [Prosperity] hunters pursuing him rotted the entire forest as they came.

When Chun saw the power Cheng Shi had gained from deconstructing her curse, her confidence surged. She didn't care whether her teammate's methods drew on [Prosperity] or [Decay]. After all, she too had once been a [Decay] believer.

Chun's speed through the forest climbed higher still. Within just a few breaths, she located the enemy's position.

Lin Xi had finally come. And he had never intended to hide.

"Watch out! The stinking rat's here!"

The instant the words left her lips—BOOM. Every plant Cheng Shi had rotted along the way exploded into flying ash. Plague-laden debris kicked up a wall of dust that engulfed the entire ravine. In the blink of an eye, even the soil of the hillside turned loose and dry, stripped of all life.

It had all decayed...

This was the might of the number-one [Decay] mage on the rankings.

"Cheng Shi."

Lin Xi emerged gradually from the swirling plague-dust, regarding the two figures ahead who showed no reaction to his "greeting." A frigid smile spread across his face.

"Becoming a sacrifice to [Oblivion] is the highest honor you could receive.

Surrender, and I'll ensure your name lives on, passed from mouth to mouth among [Oblivion]'s believers. That way, at least you'll survive in history. How does that sound?"

Before he even finished, Cheng Shi was already swinging that rotting arm, dispersing the surrounding dust cloud as he stepped forward. He found Lin Xi's confidence a tad excessive.

'Buddy, what kind of courage lets you play the monologuing villain after I've already marked you?'

'But alright, fine. At least when you arrive in Dolgod, Zangier won't be lonely anymore. He'll have gained a chatty cellmate.'

But Cheng Shi didn't rush to activate Sinner Redemption. He wanted to use this brief exchange to understand the behavioral logic of [Oblivion]'s believers, and more importantly, to learn what kind of edict [Oblivion] had issued them.

So he addressed the loquacious villain before him with a smile: "If you love [Oblivion] so much, why bother staying a [Decay] believer?"

Lin Xi's expression instantly turned reverent, a flicker of respect passing through his eyes.

"Supreme [Decay] gave me a second life. Great [Oblivion] granted me a second existence.

They are both my Benefactors. I won't tolerate your blasphemy."

"Tch—

Bad as I am at history, even I know that the extinction of [Decay]'s kingdom came precisely because the World Destroyers kept pushing them to the brink. So these two clearly don't get along. Why force them together?"

"Bold of you!"

Lin Xi snorted coldly and raised his hand, erasing everything in front of him. As a faith-fusion Extinguisher, his mastery of [Oblivion]'s power already rivaled that of many high-ranked [Oblivion] players.

But Cheng Shi had anticipated this. With a snap of his fingers, he swapped positions to a spot outside the forest, then circled back in, calling out to Lin Xi, who was already locked in combat with Chun:

"Tsk, touchy.

Interesting. You can tell a lot about what someone treasures from their reflexive reactions. Your opening move was [Oblivion]'s power. So where's this 'devotion' to [Decay] you speak of?

Since the devotion is already gone, why not just embrace [Oblivion] outright?

Wouldn't you agree, Lin Xi?"

With that, Cheng Shi curled his lips and raised that rotten-wood arm toward Lin Xi.

Lin Xi hadn't even grasped the meaning behind Cheng Shi's words. In his mind, no matter how powerful a player was, could they really rival a god?

They actually "could."

Well, perhaps not rival one outright, but at the very least, they could wield a portion of a god's authority as a proxy. In certain circumstances, especially certain specific situations, a proxy could indeed unleash divine power.

Such as... right now.

Cheng Shi merely shaped his arm into a firing gesture and made a "bang" sound with his mouth. The next second, Lin Xi, who habitually used [Decay]'s power to drive dust shields against his opponents' attacks, discovered that a dagger had somehow found its way into his chest, right where it had never managed to strike before.

A familiar, rust-eaten dagger!

And the hand gripping it belonged to Chun.

This moment was a mirror of that moment. The only difference was that back then, the two of them had lain spent and broken beside the Blood Lake, while now, in the forest of the mountain ravine, Lin Xi's pupils quaked with shock, and Chun's eyes... blazed with pure hatred.

...

Chapter 947: Herobos and...

Lin Xi was naturally not going to be killed by a single dagger.

The instant Chun drove the blade into Lin Xi's body, this Plague Cardinal—no, he was no longer a Plague Cardinal—this Extinguisher annihilated every inch of the blade embedded in his flesh, stripping it of all lethality.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi finally understood why Chun insisted on using a rust-eaten dagger for her revenge. The rust wasn't by choice. Every time the dagger was plunged into Lin Xi's body, he would decay it further.

Over time, the dagger that had witnessed the curtain fall on their love had itself "fallen," until this very moment when it exited the stage of vengeance for good, no longer fit for use.

"How does fear taste, you stinking rat?!"

Under normal circumstances, Chun would never have stopped after a single strike. But Cheng Shi's sudden stripping of Lin Xi's faith had genuinely shocked her, too. This was no simple curse deconstruction. The [Decay] power on Lin Xi's body wasn't a curse; it was a blessing.

'So why could he erase even a god's blessing?'

'Shouldn't only another god be able to affect a god's power?!'

It was the sheer impact of this reality that caused Chun to hesitate for one second, and that one second was all Lin Xi needed to find his opening for retreat. His expression twisted as he activated his talent, trying to use the swirling [Decay] dust to distance himself. But reality slapped him awake the very next instant, cruelly informing him that he was no longer a [Decay] believer.

Now, at last, fear materialized on Lin Xi's face. His skin twitched; his pupils shrank to pinpoints.

But he was still a battle-hardened peak player. After an instant of extreme panic, Lin Xi decisively abandoned all dignity and scrambled backward on all fours. Simultaneously, he swept his hand out and banished everything before him into a world on the brink of annihilation.

The two, already on high alert, were never going to fall for that. They'd long since vacated the area and, after Lin Xi's slightly stiff maneuver, circled behind him.

Chun could see Lin Xi trembling. For the first time, she had a visceral sense that the end was near for her nemesis, and it was all because of Cheng Shi, this terrifying... player, who could strip others of their faith and curses.

'Let's just call him a player for now.'

She refused to waste even a single second and let his efforts go to waste. Transforming into the Queen of Thorns, she used the omnipresent shadows to flash directly in front of Lin Xi. In his slack-jawed disbelief, she whipped a mane of dense thorn-hair toward his eyes, throat, and heart.

She was certain this strike would end all her suffering. And yet—

"Watch out!"

Cheng Shi's expression twisted as he shouted the warning.

He had already sensed something was off about Lin Xi. If this man could adapt quickly after losing his faith, then there was no way he'd stand there trembling once the immediate crisis had passed. That kind of pointless behavior would squander the survival window he'd fought so hard to earn, compressing his own chances of living.

The stupor and trembling were both feints. Baiting the enemy into rushing in was the real goal!

Lin Xi was a formidable opponent indeed, daring to gamble on his adversaries' impatience even at a moment like this!

Even stripped of his faith, where did he find such confidence? What was the source of his trump card?

In that instant, Cheng Shi's heart leapt into his throat. But the Chosen assassin was simply too fast. His thoughts couldn't keep up with Chun's movements. She'd already closed in and unleashed her ultimate attack on Lin Xi.

The moment he realized the danger, Cheng Shi raised his hand and fired Sinner Redemption without hesitation. No more playing dangerous games. He had to snuff out every threat in its infancy.

But when you realize danger is upon you... it's usually already too late.

As Go Lis's Grudge unfurled from the Void, tentacles raining down toward Lin Xi like a storm, a pale, gaunt hand suddenly tore through the fabric of space above Lin Xi's head. With a casual swipe—

Go Lis's Grudge vanished.

Chun vanished.

Everything within dozens of meters vanished. All that remained was that hand and Lin Xi, and in its grip was a familiar command banner, fluttering without wind, radiating a dread-inspiring pressure.

Cheng Shi's pupils contracted violently. Every hair on his body stood on end.

Lin Xi's trump card really was a God!

Herobos!!!

The only entity that could banish Go Lis's Grudge into annihilation, erase everything in the vicinity, and reclaim that command banner from Chun's hands was the Envoy of [Oblivion]: Herobos!

Cheng Shi recognized the presence before him in a single second and, before the next second even began, threw every last card he had.

It wasn't that he didn't want to win through cunning. Under [Oblivion]'s overwhelming pressure, he had no confidence in haggling with an Envoy of [Oblivion]. He knew he had nothing of value to offer this leader of World Destroyers, while the other's devotion was more than enough to erase him from existence.

So [Oblivion] had indeed fought dirty, though the big one hadn't come in person. It had sent the smaller one instead.

But even the smaller one was more than he could handle.

In that instant, Cheng Shi fired five bolts of thunder toward Herobos's hand, identical to the ones used to blaspheme [Oblivion]. He knew the thunder might be useless against an Envoy, but he needed time. Even a single breath of thinking time. Otherwise, he was certain he would die here.

'Wait. Die?'

'[Death]!'

'I've got it!'

A flash of inspiration struck Cheng Shi's mind. The next second, he pulled the escort knight's corpse back out of the Molten Coffin, jammed the Door Key into its eye socket, and watched the bones scatter upward and stack themselves into a doorframe. He shoved open the gate to the Abyss of Desire.

He was practically working with both hands. The instant the Door Key's effect activated on one side, his other hand was already re-marking Herobos's hand, firing a second round of Sinner Redemption.

And he didn't forget to activate Chaos Acting, transforming himself into...

Aph Ros!

That's right. Cheng Shi hadn't chosen to run, because he wasn't sure he could outrun Herobos's [Oblivion] power.

This was the leader of the World Destroyers, a being who had dragged an entire city into annihilation. Even if Cheng Shi used [Time] to flee as far as he could, could he truly escape the reach of that power?

Cheng Shi didn't dare gamble on it. So he chose to trust [Deceit]!

"Aph Ros" took a single stride and planted himself at the threshold of the Abyss gate. In his hand, he toyed with a [Corruption] container as if bouncing a ball, fixing the soon-to-descend Herobos with a playful, knowing smile.

Herobos had indeed broken through the trial's shackles and descended into reality. But as it tore through the barrier of the mortal world, it suddenly sensed a wisp of [Corruption]'s aura. That faintest hint of desire emanating from the [Corruption] container caused a momentary hitch in both its actions and its perception, just long enough for Cheng Shi to seize the window and complete his disguise.

No deity wanted to be anywhere near [Corruption]. After all, it was a collection of desires that not even [Order] had managed to conquer.

So when Herobos manifested and found Aph Ros standing directly before it, its grave gaze swept the surroundings. It frowned slightly.

"Aph Ros?"

You cannot possibly be here."

Herobos was suspicious, but the [Corruption] container couldn't be faked. Hence the contradictory statement.

And it was precisely this [Corruption] container that absorbed Cheng Shi's emotions and fear, granting him the clarity of mind to face an Envoy of [Oblivion] who could annihilate him at any moment. He opened his mouth, speaking in Aph Ros's tone:

"Herobos, who gave you the courage to snatch someone in front of me?"

The icy challenge had barely landed before Go Lis's Grudge tore through the Void once more, descending upon this place.

In an instant, two forms of dual-Envoy power coexisted in the world. In this trial of [Corruption], they now stood face to face with another Servant God of [Descent]: Herobos!

...

Chapter 948: ...Aph Ros

This was arguably the crowning achievement of Cheng Shi's career as an Envoy impersonator, and the most audacious disguise in recorded history.

The gate radiating the new authority of [Corruption], the container absorbing desire from every direction, the form shielded by Chaos Acting, and Go Lis's Grudge writhing between Void and reality, on standby at all times...

No one could pierce this disguise. Even if Aph Ros arrived in person, the sight before him would make him think he'd found a mirror.

It was that real...

If even this could be called fake, then no true Aph Ros existed in this world.

So from the moment of descent, Herobos never doubted. He simply assumed he'd been a step too slow, and Aph Ros had already dragged the clown who had angered his Benefactor into one of [Time]'s cages.

'That clown certainly lives up to his reputation. The gods all seem to have their eyes on him.'

'But why would a prisoner sentenced by [Time] appear here to "protect" him?'

Herobos leapt out of the Void. He coldly surveyed the surroundings, tossed the thunder-stunned Lin Xi aside like an afterthought, and addressed Cheng Shi in a deep voice:

"You escaped?"

"Escaped?" Cheng Shi let out a scornful laugh, channeling Aph Ros's debauchery and twisted nature with uncanny perfection. "Why would I escape? Can't I just come out for a stroll?"

Herobos frowned and snorted. "If you could get out freely, you wouldn't have waited this long to show yourself in this era. Have you finished all those mad ideas of yours?"

"So what if I haven't? Herobos, the eras are changing. If everything is allowed to change, why can't I?"

"That's not for you to decide. As long as [Time] doesn't relent, it doesn't matter what you become. You will never be forgiven.

With the shattering of the Mirror of Delusion as a precedent, He will never allow you to corrupt any [Existence] believer again."

"!?!?"

'What?!'

'I knew it. The best gossip always comes straight from the gods' mouths. What's Herobos implying? The Delusion Mirror's shattering is connected to Aph Ros?'

'Huh?'

'Don't tell me my dear brother smashed that [Memory] mirror.'

'Then why wasn't he imprisoned by [Memory] instead of [Time]?!'

Cheng Shi was stunned, but he masked his shock masterfully, twisting his expression of astonishment into a snarl of rage.

"Watch your words, Herobos. I, Aph Ros, have never needed forgiveness!"

The line was delivered with ironclad defiance, but it wasn't aimed at Herobos standing before him. It was meant for the real Aph Ros listening from behind the gate.

Cheng Shi knew this was a dangerous gambit. Impersonating Aph Ros right on his doorstep, even dragging out Go Lis's Grudge as backup—without a plausible excuse, even resolving the current crisis would only breed a new one.

So to save himself future explanations, Cheng Shi decided to take a page from Poison's book and play to Aph Ros's twisted desires.

In plain language: butter him up first.

He was firmly convinced this wasn't [Corruption] contamination at work, but rather the most rational and clear-headed decision he could make after having his desires and emotions drained by the container.

Herobos heard these words and laughed coldly.

"Forgiveness isn't yours to claim, either. You should be grateful you're a prisoner. Otherwise, what you did today would earn you true annihilation."

Herobos wasn't afraid of Aph Ros. Dual-Envoy or dual-faith, at their level it simply meant one more set of tools and authorities. The game between faiths was never decided in straightforward duels. Under his Benefactor's will, Herobos dared to annihilate anyone who stood in his way.

But this one... just happened to be [Time]'s prisoner.

Even beating a dog required considering its owner. Until [Time] had absolved Aph Ros of his sins, Herobos truly didn't dare lay a hand on [Time]'s prisoner.

His Benefactor might be able to survive under [Birth]'s hand. [Corruption] "never left the house," so there was no need to worry there. But [Time] was different...

Loath as he was to admit it, [Oblivion]'s defeat at [Void]'s hands was an indisputable fact. And if [Existence] was on par with [Void], it made for a poor choice of enemy.

Herobos didn't consider this cowardice. He was merely thinking of his Benefactor, of the broader interests of their faith. And so he stayed his hand. Faced with Aph Ros's mockery and interference, he abandoned his mission.

"I will find a time to inform [Time] of everything that's happened today. I hope you'll still be able to laugh like this when that time comes.

And keep your toys in check. I don't believe you'll always have the chance to come out and play."

With that, Herobos turned and departed. But just before leaving, he cast a frowning glance toward the distant Boro Highlands, murmuring under his breath: "Why is He here too?"

Cheng Shi didn't catch that whisper. All he saw was Herobos leaving with crisp, decisive finality, never once sparing so much as a glance at the believer who had summoned him.

Lin Xi lay there like a stray dog abandoned by the roadside. No one paid him any attention, and he still hadn't woken up.

Yet even after Herobos vanished from the trial, Cheng Shi didn't dare let his guard down. He stood motionless, tossing the container in his hand for amusement, looking left and right, terrified the Envoy might double back.

Only after a long while, when even Go Lis's Grudge had begun to dissipate, did Cheng Shi confirm the crisis had truly passed.

But things were far from over.

Because just as Cheng Shi was about to exhale in relief, a familiar voice issued from behind the gate to the Abyss of Desire.

"Stop looking. He's already gone."

"!!!"

Cheng Shi jolted with alarm, his entire body going rigid. He hastily stowed the [Corruption] container, then crept to the doorway with an anxious expression. Bracing one hand against the frame, he peered into the impenetrable darkness beyond and called out tentatively:

"You... heard everything?"

"Ha. Of course. You always manage to bring me new surprises.

That was quite a performance, I'll say. But, my brother, don't you owe me an explanation?"

"An explanation for what?"

"Never mind why Herobos was trying to kill you. I won't pry into why you borrowed my identity to scare him off, either. All I want to know is where you got that container.

I sense a familiar aura. You... made a move on Him?"

'On whom?'

Before the sentence was even finished—SLAM!

Cheng Shi shut the door.

The pale-faced clown watched the bone gate vanish, feigning composure as he stuffed the Door Key back into his pocket. He let out a long, slow breath.

'The one good thing about that God's gift: as long as I don't walk through the door, you can never touch me.'

'As for how to explain all this to Aph Ros in the future...'

'I'll think it over. When I come up with a perfect excuse, that's when I'll go see him.'

'And if I can't come up with one...'

'Why should present-me carry the burden of future-Cheng Shi's headaches?'

Just like that, Cheng Shi talked himself out of worrying about Aph Ros's questioning and refocused on the present, turning his attention back to the trial.

This sudden Servant God standoff had produced one piece of good news and one piece of bad.

The bad news first: Chun was gone. Whether the avenger had been banished or directly annihilated, no one knew. Either way, she hadn't returned to the trial.

But the "good" news was that even if she was dead, her nemesis would soon be joining her. Because the instant Cheng Shi turned around, the stunned Lin Xi stirred awake.

And when he saw Cheng Shi standing there perfectly unharmed, while the Envoy he'd relied on as his trump card had vanished without a trace, Lin Xi's heart dropped. His eyes flooded with boundless terror.

"Lord... Herobos?! Where is he?!" he rasped in disbelief.

Cheng Shi's eyes rolled slyly, and a look of amused contempt spread across his face.

"Dead. You know, I'm a rather famous Fate Weaver. So I grafted the endpoint of the [Oblivion] path he'd walked his entire existence onto [Death]'s hall.

Right now, he's the most prominent skull beneath that great Lord's throne. And now...

It's your turn, Lin Xi!"

"!?!?"

In that single instant, a certain someone's terror shattered all limits.

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Chapter 949: Any Last Words, Lin Xi?

After throwing out every last trump card, Cheng Shi had essentially nothing left in reserve.

All five bolts of thunder had been spent. The [Fate] mask had lost its chance to switch warriors. He didn't even dare reactivate Sinner Redemption under Aph Ros's watchful "anticipation"...

So all he could do was frighten Lin Xi, letting the man's terror recharge his ring once more.

And judging by the results, it had worked splendidly. Lin Xi alone had filled all five charges.

Combined with the physical enhancement from [Decay]'s Faded authority, even in the clown's form, he could hold his own against the Lin Xi before him.

But the moment Lin Xi saw that even the Envoy trump card he'd hidden the entire time had failed to take down Cheng Shi, he lost every last shred of fighting spirit. He'd been reduced, thoroughly and completely, to a "rotten piece of wood."

Whether Chun's death had played any part in that collapse, no outsider could say. All Cheng Shi saw before him was this:

Rotten wood had rotted through.

It was almost laughable. A player who constantly proclaimed his own devoutness had, at this crossroads, finally found his true self, reverting to the confused young man he'd once been.

But neither in appearance nor in spirit did Lin Xi have anything to do with the word "young" anymore.

He no longer clung to his devotion, no longer viewed Cheng Shi as the divine target marked for elimination. He simply lay on the ground, motionless, hollow eyes fixed on the cloudless sky. Whether he was contemplating the meaning of life or reminiscing about a past too painful to revisit, no one could tell.

Honestly, Cheng Shi had never read such complex emotions on a single face before. He didn't even need to get close. A single glance from a distance told him that all Lin Xi wanted now, besides decay, was nothing.

And the irony was that, stripped of his [Decay] faith, Lin Xi couldn't even rot himself away. After a long silence, Lin Xi laboriously turned his head. His death-resigned eyes fixed on Cheng Shi, and his voice came out trembling:

"Why... are we even alive?"

Cheng Shi could feel Lin Xi's emotions pouring out in a torrent at the edge of life, but that didn't mean he would empathize.

And so, hearing this meaningless question born of despair, Cheng Shi scoffed:

"Tch—

Only now you decide to ponder the meaning of life?

Lin Xi, oh Lin Xi. A man shouldn't only have his epiphany and repent when he's the one suffering. Don't make yourself look this pitiful. I much preferred you when you were arrogant and defiant."

"..." The mockery clearly disrupted Lin Xi's daze for a moment, but he no longer had the will to feel anger. He simply repeated the question, blank and hollow as before.

Cheng Shi frowned slightly and tossed him an offhand answer: "To be alive."

"To be alive? Ha. Haha. But what's the point of being alive?" As he spoke, Lin Xi wept. This executioner who had slaughtered countless players and treated life like grass actually shed two murky trails of tears.

Yet Cheng Shi remained utterly unmoved. He could not empathize, and at the man's most lost and desperate moment, he drove a knife straight into his heart.

"Of course your life has no meaning. Because your betrayal was how you stripped your own life of meaning with your own hands.

Lin Xi, don't forget. You didn't earn the life you have."

"I NEVER BETRAYED ANYONE!!!" Lin Xi shot upright, shrieking at Cheng Shi in full hysteria. "The thing I despise most in this life is betrayal! She betrayed me! Chun betrayed me!"

His eyes flickered between flashes of memory and tenderness and surges of rage and loathing. The thinning-haired Plague Cardinal clawed at what remained of his hair like a man gone mad, roaring:

"She abandoned her faith to save her own skin! She betrayed the one who loved her! She defected to [Prosperity]! Did she ever stop to think that one day she'd still end up dying before me?!

She deserved it! She deserved every bit of it!!"

Lin Xi's voice had gone hoarse. Gradually, his volume dropped. "She deserved it..."

He kept repeating those words, as if trying to numb himself into dissolving his hatred.

Cheng Shi's brow furrowed deeply. He could tell Lin Xi's reaction was genuine. So Chun's act of salvation had, in Lin Xi's eyes, become an act of betrayal.

No wonder the two of them had been at each other's throats from then until now, locked in mutual hatred.

Faced with an [Oblivion] believer who'd come to kill him on divine orders, Cheng Shi had no obligation to set the record straight for Lin Xi. He hadn't even explained Garuda's love story to Le Le'er. Why would he bother with a mortal's self-inflicted anguish?

But remembering the trust Chun had placed in him, Cheng Shi sighed and offered one final remark:

"Have you ever considered that she was trying to save you?"

"Save? Haha, save me?" Lin Xi, who moments ago had been vacant and lost, suddenly contorted with emotion. He stared at Cheng Shi, fingers tearing bloody streaks into his own scalp. "Fate Weaver, tell me: is 'saving' someone the same as stabbing a dagger into their heart?!"

Do you know that dagger nearly killed me?!

If not for my Benefactor's mercy, I would have died at her hand! Is that what you call saving?!

Ha. Hahaha. If that's saving, then I'd rather have died in the shadow of the Septic Final Tomb. At least then, in my memories, there would still be someone who loved me..."

As expected, this was a misunderstanding beyond explanation.

Ordinary people couldn't fathom [Decay]'s will, but Cheng Shi, who had faced [Decay] directly, knew the truth. Perhaps it was precisely because Chun had pushed Lin Xi to the brink of death that their Benefactor, a fellow "pitiabile soul," had taken pity on Lin Xi. Just as the deity hoped that the decay of the entire universe might inspire pity from the one above.

And that was probably why the Fun God called [Decay] a "stinking beggar": because the deity was begging for [Origin]'s charity, praying for the mercy of that omniscient, omnipotent being.

Which only proved how wondrous fate could be.

Chun's motivation for saving him was good. Her understanding of the deity was wrong. But fortunately, the final outcome was "good"... at least the man had survived.

As for what the man did after being saved...

'Forget it. If you don't know how to judge this either, then why don't we just curse fate together?'

'Fate, appearing before the eyes of mortals in the same beautiful pose as always.'

"Any last words?" Cheng Shi said suddenly.

Lin Xi froze. He seemed to see the gates of [Death]'s hall swinging wide before him. But before he could utter a word, Cheng Shi raised his hand and fired three decisive thunderbolts, blasting the former [Decay] believer into ash.

Shock, confusion, fear, hatred... in that instant, all of it was blown away to nothing.

"Sorry. I had to trick you out of something.

You came here to kill me. I have no obligation to let assassins leave their final words."

Cheng Shi shook his head, feeling neither joy nor sorrow, and turned to leave the ravine forest, now stripped of vast swaths of reality.

He'd once said he would bury the [Decay] maggot in a [Prosperity] forest. But since the maggot was no longer [Decay], perhaps it was forgivable that his burial ground was no longer [Prosperity], either.

He dusted off his hands and stepped back into the trial.

But before he could take a single step, a familiar figure suddenly plummeted back into reality, landing right in front of him.

Cheng Shi's pupils shrank. A flash of delight crossed his eyes, but caution made him retreat half a step.

"Chun? You're alive?"

Indeed. Standing before Cheng Shi was none other than Chun, the one Herobos had flung into a world on the brink of annihilation.

Her expression was extraordinarily complex. Her gaze drifted past Cheng Shi to that pile of "familiar" ash. Her mouth opened and closed several times, her face caught between smiling and weeping, eyes glistening with unshed tears. Lost and helpless, she asked the very same question Lin Xi had asked:

"Why... are we even alive?"

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Chapter 950: [Fate]: I Didn't Come to Save You

Let us rewind time slightly, back to the moment Chun was banished by Herobos.

[Oblivion]'s power wrapped around her and hurled her into the Void, carrying her toward one of the countless worlds on the brink of annihilation. But just then, a pair of starlit eyes opened above her head. A single icy glance was all it took to disperse every trace of [Oblivion]'s power surrounding her.

Chun survived. But she hadn't yet realized what those eyes before her represented. Her mind was still on the battlefield with Lin Xi, reeling in disbelief that he had actually summoned Herobos.

'He must have come for his lost command banner. But the arrival of the [Oblivion] Envoy has turned what should have been a successful hunt into a foregone conclusion. Not only will I die, but Cheng Shi... will die because of me.'

'That's a god. Even if it's only a Servant God, it's far beyond what any true Pseudo God could match.'

And so the instant Chun regained consciousness, the words that burst from her lips were: "Watch out, Cheng Shi!"

But the moment the words left her mouth, she met those eyes, brilliant and resplendent yet radiating not a trace of warmth.

In that instant, something clicked.

She realized the being before her was also a god, and not a Servant God, but one of the true deities seated upon the sixteen Divine Thrones!

Judging from the mysterious aura and the Void's reaction to the presence, this had to be the sovereign of [Void], Cheng Shi's Benefactor: [Fate]!

Chun froze, then broke into panicked reverence. She bowed her head quickly and was about to offer her respects, but before "Praise be to [Fate]" could reach her lips, those frigid eyes seemed to see through her entirely and cut her off in a single sentence:

"You need not praise me."

That line locked Chun in place, cold sweat streaming down her body. Truthfully, what she felt in that moment was some fear, though not much. What dominated her heart was regret over an unfinished vengeance, and uncertainty over whether she could ever end Lin Xi with her own hands.

She knew that once a god intervened in such matters, the choice was no longer hers.

[Fate]'s indifference continued.

"All mortals blame their tragedies on fate. So tell me: what is fate to you?"

Chun's mind went blank. She didn't know how to answer. Her thoughts drifted back to everything with Lin Xi, and then, with unyielding resolution and hatred in her voice, she answered: "To slay the betrayer with my own hands. That is my fate."

Those eyes regarded her without joy or sorrow, seemingly unsurprised by the answer.

"That is why I said you need not praise me. And I did not come here to save you.

I came to punish those who blaspheme against what is fixed. And you... are not among the fixed."

With that, the Void was torn open once more. Herobos, ever the pragmatist, swept his hand through and bored into the reality of the trial.

What the Envoy never expected was that the instant he entered the Void, he would collide with a pair of eyes he never, ever wanted to see.

[Fate]!

Those eyes hung cold and high, looking down upon Herobos, who had committed the sacrilege of blasphemy. A single question was all it took to drain the color from the face of this Servant God who had been so imperious before Cheng Shi.

"An ant's body dares speak of destroying worlds. You presume to call yourself a World Destroyer?"

What world do you even intend to destroy?

Hmph. Herobos, do you acknowledge your crime?"

Herobos was undeniably shrewd. Without a word, he immediately annihilated himself, offering his existence to his Benefactor in hopes of escaping [Fate]'s grasp.

He knew that only his Benefactor could protect him now.

Sure enough, when he found himself safely returned to the world on the verge of annihilation, standing before his Benefactor, he exhaled with profound relief. Though fear still lingered, his posture was nothing but devout as he confessed to the dark "void" before him:

"Benefactor above, I... have failed."

[Oblivion] huddled within a darkness no outsider could perceive, shaking its head with a sigh.

"You underestimated [Void]'s treasure and overestimated your ability against their resolve. Next time, be more careful."

Herobos's posture grew even more reverent.

"Yes, my Benefactor."

On the other side, watching Herobos flee right under his nose, [Fate] showed no irritation, for this had all been deliberate.

He had never intended to execute Herobos here. After all, everyone's path of growth required stepping stones, and the Envoys serving the gods were not exactly numerous. Count them out and barely any suitable ones remained.

So what [Fate] had done was select a target for a certain believer walking the path of the fixed, adding a touch of tempering to this [Void] practitioner's journey.

His so-called "punishment" was merely using Herobos's mouth to warn [Oblivion] against descending in person again. Otherwise, sooner or later, one of [Descent] and [Void] would be the first to sink into oblivion.

[Oblivion] understood [Fate]'s warning. That was why he instructed his Envoy to be more careful, because next time, there would be no Benefactor's protection for either side. It would come down to individual ability alone.

Having accomplished his purpose, those eyes departed the Void without a trace of reluctance. The frigid gust born of his dissipation blew Chun back into the trial, landing her squarely in front of Cheng Shi.

After confirming it was indeed Chun before him, Cheng Shi didn't answer her question. Instead, he told her everything that had happened.

As a party to this tragedy, she had the right to know it all.

Chun's body went visibly rigid. She couldn't even decide whether to laugh or cry after killing the lover who had betrayed her. Her expression shifted violently through a long silence. Finally, in a halting voice, she asked a question that was half verification, half self-directed: "He... is dead?"

Hearing the lifelessness in her voice, Cheng Shi's heart sank. Something felt like it was about to go wrong. He nodded, thought of Big Cat, paused for a moment, and attempted one careful rescue.

He answered her first question.

"Life has many meanings..."

But before he could finish, the dagger, annihilated down to nothing but its hilt by Lin Xi, plunged into Chun's own beating heart.

Two ribs couldn't stop the blade, but a heart could hold it.

That unfinished strike had finally fallen, only the hand that drove it and the body that received it now belonged to the same person...

"You..."

Despite having anticipated this, Cheng Shi's pupils still contracted sharply. He rushed to Chun's side and caught her in his arms. Watching the rusted dagger bob with each heartbeat, watching searing blood spill and spray until it dyed the hollow of her chest crimson, he pulled out the Lush Horn Crown, prepared to fight that great Lord for her life.

But Chun used the last of her strength to grip Cheng Shi's arm. Tears streaming down her face, she shook her head.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi let out a mournful sigh:

"Was it worth it?"

Chun smiled. It was the first time she had ever shown such a genuine smile to anyone other than her lover, Lin Xi.

"Not worth it..."

Before, I still had my hatred. But now... I have nothing left, Cheng Shi. I have nothing left at all.

Don't revive me. I beg you. I was never a strong person. I wanted to give up long ago. Let me go.

Just bury me here. No, bury me far away. I don't want to be near him. I don't want anything to do with him anymore...

I'm sorry. The command banner I promised you was taken... but everything else... I have a lot, and I won't be needing any of it..."

With that, Chun scattered every item from her personal space. A jumbled heap of tools and artifacts piled up before them. Cheng Shi scanned them at a glance and found that aside from hunting and tracking equipment, it was nothing but hunting and tracking equipment.

She hadn't even kept a single life-saving potion in reserve when she'd paid him back with those potions earlier.

Chun was straightforward, and she knew herself well. Just as she said, aside from hatred, she had long since had nothing.

Watching Chun's vitality slowly ebb away, Cheng Shi, the only priest in this trial, fell silent.

He did not go against Chun's wishes by healing her. He quietly put the crown away and let prosperity walk toward death.

"Thank you. Thank you, Cheng Shi. You really are a good person..."

Those were not Chun's last words, but they were the last words she would ever leave in this world.

Chun was dead. Because [Fate] had said he did not come to save her.

Holding Chun's body, Cheng Shi murmured softly, a storm of emotions twisting inside him:

"Why... are we even alive?"

A moment later, he rose sharply to his feet. His eyes were resolute as he strode toward the horizon.

"To be alive!

For the memories of those who once existed."

...