

The Gods 971

Chapter 971: Nothing Is Impossible

Cheng Shi was, of course, alive.

Or rather, the authority "Vitality" had its pride. Even if its defenses were breached, there was no way it would fall at the hands of a mere mortal.

Of course, as always, before the fight began, Cheng Shi had no idea what trump cards Xiao Qi was hiding. So he hadn't dared bet everything on "Vitality" alone. Steady as ever, he'd already prepared his "immortality" contingency while running for his life.

Don't forget: he was currently a Clown — a [Deceit] priest with Lie Like Yesterday!

And as luck would have it, in the previous trial, he'd deceived a certain squinty-eyed teammate. And so...

"Lie like yesterday, mock today.

Yesterday I deceived a [Death] believer, so today...

I am a [Death] believer."

An off-the-books top sales agent, temporarily promoted to full-time!

When the universe's cemetery became his home — what, you actually want to send me home!?

Well, I refuse! Because a rebellious clown never takes his final bow easily.

The Gravekeeper gave Cheng Shi his ultimate safety net, allowing him to execute his plan the moment Xiao Qi fired that decisive arrow. And that plan had a name...

Kill the Heart!

As in "killing the person, destroying their heart" — the heart being the spirit, the will, the conviction.

So that arrow wasn't something Cheng Shi couldn't dodge. Well, no, let's stop lying — he genuinely couldn't dodge it...

But evasion was never the point. Because when that arrow left Xiao Qi's bow, Cheng Shi had never intended to dodge. He charged straight into it!

From deliberately dropping the container to feigning trap-laying, from dispatching the Envoy to faking the wise man's imprisonment — everything up to this moment had been preparation, all for the purpose of taking this one arrow at the perfect time.

Cheng Shi had never known what Xiao Qi's killing blow would be. He only knew that when Xiao Qi used it, his response wouldn't be evasion but a headlong collision!

So Cheng Shi didn't dodge. Instead, he straightened his chest and met it head-on, letting the arrow — infused with past betrayal, present obsession, and imagined future — pierce clean through his heart.

In that instant, a heart that hadn't so much as ached at childhood betrayal genuinely spasmed with pain for a single beat.

Then Cheng Shi lay flat and took it.

The dense arrow fire had been no joke. In a game watched by gods, some arrows carried effects ordinary ones didn't. A single hit could kill outright, let alone hundreds or thousands.

But no matter how different they were, under "Vitality"'s contempt, all were equal.

In truth, he had Xiao Qi's own caution to thank. If not for that half-hour of low-frequency "corpse whipping," Cheng Shi's "Vitality" might not have restored him so quickly.

And the moment Cheng Shi reopened his eyes, the tide of battle shifted entirely. Toward something far more brutal.

Don't misunderstand. "Brutal" here didn't mean Cheng Shi had launched a fiercer counterattack. Rather, he'd been subjected to even more inhumane "abuse."

When Du Qiyu saw that Xiao Shi could survive even this, he didn't pull back for self-preservation. Instead, he raced against the clock to press his advantage, continuing to hammer Cheng Shi's immobile body with everything he had.

He knew that if he missed this moment, he'd never get another chance to hunt this unkillable cockroach of a friend.

So the dense arrow rain fell once more, pinning Cheng Shi — who'd barely managed to lift his head — back to the ground.

Countless arrows shattered the shafts already embedded in his flesh and burrowed in anew. But no matter how many arrows accumulated, Cheng Shi's eyes remained open, and the smile on his face never faded.

"No, this is impossible!"

'He's just a Clown who merged with a Fate Weaver. What gives him the right to survive like an unkillable Gravekeeper!?'

'This is impossible!'

Not until Du Qiyu's mental energy was so depleted that he was forced to cease fire did Cheng Shi — for the umpteenth time — pluck the arrows from around his mouth. He stretched that inhuman, ruined grin and clicked his tongue:

"Tsk. Your archery's decent. But compared to Qin Xin, it's a step behind.

Your valor passes muster. But next to Hu Wei, you're short on bandit swagger.

As for your deception, heh, now that's the interesting part. Those crude lies could fool the oblivious at best. And for this, He pulled you into [Void]'s camp?

Can you give me an answer, Beast Tamer?

Oh right, you have a name. What was it again.

Du... Qi-yu? 'Cheated-jade?'

You certainly did deceive an uncut jade. Come to think of it, I should thank you when I picked up that promising prospect. Your 'inspiration' put Cheng Shi on the path of [Deceit]. In that sense, you actually deserve some credit.

Hmm. Looked at that way, Him giving you a head start is perfectly fair."

Cheng Shi monologued to himself while yanking arrows from his body by the handful. Blood gushed non-stop, soaking the earth beneath him a deep crimson, yet his movements suffered no impairment — growing more fluid by the second.

This scene, seen through Du Qiyu's eyes, was as though Cheng Shi had a secret blood reserve of infinite capacity stashed inside his body. He'd never heard of any tool or talent that could withstand such devastating injuries while regenerating this fast.

But that wasn't the main thing. The main thing was: what the hell did those words mean?

Judging by the tone, the person before him didn't sound like Xiao Shi at all!

Though his mental energy was running low, the [Corruption] container kept Du Qiyu's mind online. His first instinct was that Cheng Shi was bluffing to deceive him. But when he saw what Cheng Shi produced next, that assumption immediately disintegrated.

Cheng Shi was a master of timing. Especially the timing of a lie.

Deceit was never a performance accomplished by silver tongue alone. In specific contexts, yes, words could be powerfully persuasive. But most of the time, words were hollow. What truly fooled people wasn't the liar's mouth — it was the victim's eyes.

You had to let the target see what he was willing to believe. Only then could you brazenly declare: the truth before your eyes is a lie you'll never see through.

What Cheng Shi produced was nothing other than a container.

A [Prosperity] container!

The instant this gnarled-wood hourglass appeared in Cheng Shi's hand, the terrifying [Prosperity] aura it emitted jolted Du Qiyu so hard he froze, his mind snapping to the emotion-absorbing tool in his own hand.

He was no fool. In that moment, pieces were clicking into place.

But Cheng Shi didn't let Xiao Qi's train of thought wander freely. This was the most critical moment for steering the other's mind. He had to use the most heart-shaking method possible to redefine this battle between two players, telling this ignorant Beast Tamer:

The one who'd been playing opposite him was never a player. It was a god. A supreme Servant God!

So at this crucial juncture, Cheng Shi produced yet another container. The [Time] container!

And as the two containers floated and orbited around his left and right hands, he shook his head with deep disappointment:

"I chose from among several containers and selected the [Corruption] one — the one best suited to you — just to see the ceiling of your potential and the depth of your faith. But now it seems...

You fall far, far short.

Beast Tamer, you've lost your chance. Return the container. I have my next candidate to test."

By now, Du Qiyu's brain had completely seized up. Though he felt no fear, confusion saturated his exhausted mind.

Looking at the two dazzlingly brilliant containers in Cheng Shi's hands, then at the one in his own, Du Qiyu didn't even ask who Cheng Shi was first. Instead, he blurted with desperate urgency:

"What is... a container?"

And the moment Cheng Shi heard the man ask about the container instead of his identity, he knew: the mirage had dazzled the eyes. This game...

Was won!

...

Chapter 972: You... Are the [Deceit] Envoy!?

"What do you think the Faith Game is?"

Cheng Shi didn't answer Xiao Qi's question. Instead, he posed a new one.

Xiao Qi maintained his caution. His true body didn't appear. Instead, he conversed with this mysterious "Xiao Shi" through his stunned tamed beast, observing "Xiao Shi" closely. The more he observed, the less the person resembled Xiao Shi.

Because ever since the "resurrection," the other party's attention clearly wasn't on him anymore. It was as though, just as he'd said, Xiao Qi had lost some sort of qualification...

'What qualification have I lost? And why? Could this qualification be connected to the entire game?'

Du Qiyu's brain spun furiously, but the sheer shock left him unable to reach any conclusion. Under the container's influence, however, he suddenly recalled the phrase the [Decay] Envoy had uttered. Connecting the dots, his suspicion only grew stronger.

'Could the "Him" in Yu Go's mouth... actually be Xiao Shi!?'

'No. Could it be a Servant God... wearing Xiao Shi's skin!?'

'Impossible!'

'He was clearly helpless against Yu Go's cage. He clearly couldn't even beat me. He...'

'But could he really not beat me?'

'I gave it everything I had and still couldn't kill him. He didn't even counterattack. Even at this most opportune moment for a counterattack, he hadn't lifted a finger. He just kept talking about containers, the game, tests...'

'What are containers? What do tests mean? What did I miss? And who is he?'

In that moment, Du Qiyu was lost.

And right then, Cheng Shi continued weaving his web of lies.

He hadn't expected Xiao Qi to respond. If the man had responded, Cheng Shi would have needed to improvise. For now, he only needed to recite the pre-written script.

"Eras march forward, and [Void]'s curtain will eventually fall. How to harvest enough faith during one era to 'nurture' an attendant who can remain at a true god's side unaffected by the era's end — that is the purpose of this game.

Why else would it be called the Faith Game?

Of course, such a follower has another name: what you call an Envoy. What mortals can only dream of — a Servant God.

And the container in your hand is the key to becoming one.

Mortals fantasize about ascending to godhood, never knowing that gods were never created. They are selected by us. That term you players toss around — 'Chosen One' — is rather fitting right about now.

But sorry. A high ranking on the Ladder of Ascent doesn't make you the Chosen One. Being chosen by us does... that's what makes you... Chosen!"

Cheng Shi wasn't sure how much Xiao Qi knew about Them, so he mentioned everything he could. This saturation-level information barrage completely crashed Du Qiyu's already taxed brain.

"I've tested countless candidates. Apart from a few who caught my eye, most were as dull as you.

So don't feel bad. Failure doesn't mean you're not excellent. There are simply too few excellent people. You've only lost your first evaluation opportunity.

I'm not the sole examiner. If another examiner takes interest in you, they'll bring you a new test. And should you pass theirs by some stroke of luck, perhaps we'll meet again.

Do you understand now? Return the container, and continue your trial.

I'll make you forget all of this. It won't unduly affect your understanding of the game. This is a necessary step. Otherwise, the Convention would classify it as cheating.

As for the consequences of cheating... I think you can imagine."

Du Qiyu stared at the container in his hand, brow furrowed, thinking he should have realized this was no ordinary tool. So this was the essential item for becoming an Envoy!?

But once something landed in his hands, how could he possibly give it back?

Even if the other party was an Envoy...

Yes. Under the weight of so much evidence, Du Qiyu's reason told him the person wearing Xiao Shi's face could no longer possibly be a player. Let alone the real Xiao Shi.

And the most crucial point: if the other party weren't an Envoy, there was absolutely no way he could have known about Du Qiyu's former [Corruption] affiliation — and chosen a [Corruption] container specifically to test him!

Put differently: if Xiao Shi truly possessed this many unthinkable tools, there'd be no reason to play games. He'd just attack.

Of course, even if the evidence seemed overwhelming, he had to consider one possibility. A slim one. That the other party had refrained from attacking due to some constraint... and after racking his brain, the only conceivable reason was that the other party hadn't yet located his true body's position.

At this thought, caution made Du Qiyu quietly shift positions once more.

He still didn't return the container. Instead, he feigned uncertainty and continued probing.

"Then who... who are you?"

"Heh. Can't bear to part with what's in your hand?"

On account of your being His believer, I can allow you a few more moments with it.

Want to see anything else? Cherish this window while it lasts."

With that, Cheng Shi casually tossed the [Prosperity] container to the tamed beast before him. The instant tamed-beast Xiao Qi received the second container and felt its incomparable mystical allure, his heart instinctively clenched, and he involuntarily — across the vast distance — stole a glance at his true body.

And that one glance was captured by Cheng Shi's peripheral vision, seemingly casual but razor-sharp. He immediately pinpointed his old friend's location.

'Found you at last!'

'Now's my chance!'

But Cheng Shi still didn't move. He simply continued pacing, letting his body heal, smiling at the corner of his mouth:

"You may call me Yu Xi. I, like you, am a [Deceit] believer."

"You... are the [Deceit] Envoy!?"

"You could say that. But right now, I'd prefer you address me as the Faith Inspection Officer.

The authority granted by the Convention supersedes faith itself. This involves Their secrets. Even though you'll forget all of this, I can't say too much."

As he spoke, Cheng Shi deliberately activated the aura from the [Order] Inquisitor's ring, letting the most pristine ancient [Order] energy suffuse his surroundings.

No problem there. After all, the word "Convention" naturally carried an [Order] flavor.

But he wasn't done. In front of Xiao Qi, he recalled his [Time] container, then produced a [Decay] container and dropped it into Xiao Qi's hands.

"On account of our shared bond as servants of the Fun God, this is your fun time — a brief break from the game.

Anything else you want to know? Ask quickly. My time is short. The next candidate is already waiting."

Then he pulled out the [Deceit] container, but this time didn't throw it. Instead, he paused: "You're currently a [Deceit] believer, so you can't touch a [Deceit] container. This one won't do. Let me swap."

Cheng Shi shook his head with a laugh, stowed the container, secretly dyed it, and brought out the [Chaos] container. But this time he didn't even need to toss it. The tamed-beast Xiao Qi, staring dumbly at the two containers in his hands, no longer harbored any doubt.

'This can't possibly be a player!!'

'This is basically a game GM!'

'Otherwise, you're telling me Xiao Shi has this many key-to-godhood items in his hands?'

'Heh. Do you think I'd believe that?'

Even if the container story had come from the man's own mouth and could be a lie, the aura of faith and the power emanating from the gods themselves couldn't be faked.

These weren't ordinary tools that a player could fabricate. These were clearly things only They could possess.

Same bottom line as before: if Xiao Shi truly wielded power at this level, this whole "hunt" would have been a joke. The fact that Du Qiyu was still alive was the best proof that the other party simply didn't care about him.

With so many logical anchor points in place, Du Qiyu finally grew formal. Even though this Envoy Yu Xi wearing Xiao Shi's skin was repulsive, he had no choice but to show respect.

Whether out of honor from sharing [Deceit]'s allegiance, or out of hunger for power, he had every reason to demonstrate his devotion here.

And so the tamed-beast Xiao Qi obediently handed back the two containers. But his true body still hadn't moved — holding onto his last trump card, stretching out the remaining time that the [Corruption] container was "his."

Seeing this, Cheng Shi snorted a laugh and, right before Xiao Qi's eyes, shifted into his Yu Xi form.

And the moment Xiao Qi saw the true body of this tall, gaunt, masked Envoy, the last shred of his guard dissolved entirely.

...

Chapter 973: Happy? I Was Lying

"Lord Yu Xi, why... did you insist on disguising yourself as Xiao Shi for my test?"

Du Qiyu seemed deeply bothered by this question, which once again made Cheng Shi marvel at the depth of the man's obsession.

Fortunately, he was well prepared. His mental script could handle virtually any question.

"All tests must begin from the familiar, because faith always sprouts from the smallest things.

Everyone being tested must confront their own heart. So you should understand better than I do why I chose to impersonate Cheng Shi.

On that score, his performance was far better than yours."

This was the second time Cheng Shi had praised himself. On the surface, it seemed like self-promotion, but it was actually one of his psychological tactics.

Daring to repeatedly mention someone Xiao Qi despised while in his presence was, in fact, a way of distancing himself from that identity. The more you emphasize a sensitive subject at a sensitive moment, the more outsiders subconsciously conclude that the speaker doesn't care about the sensitivity at all.

Xiao Qi thought exactly that. He didn't believe the real Cheng Shi would repeatedly get in his face at a time like this. It was probably just Lord Yu Xi's "objective" assessment.

An assessment he disagreed with.

But more importantly, Xiao Qi had already decided that Cheng Shi was Yu Xi before any of this. So Cheng Shi's performance was merely redundant backup, providing minimal reinforcement.

After hearing Xiao Shi's name twice, Du Qiyu grew curious.

"So Cheng Shi... passed your test?"

"You could say that. His devotion to his faith is far purer than you scheming humans. He can thank his good father for that."

"..."

Hearing this, even with the [Corruption] container's influence, Du Qiyu clenched his fist in bitter resentment. He seemed to deeply despise any mention of Xiao Shi's father.

But he didn't truly lose his temper, nor did he argue or follow up. Instead, he silently commanded his tamed beast to walk in the opposite direction, deeper into the forest, while respectfully saying:

"My apologies, Lord Yu Xi. For my own safety, I cannot hand over the container in person. I hope you'll understand my position."

CLAP, CLAP, CLAP—

Cheng Shi suddenly applauded. With an amused smile, he looked directly toward Du Qiyu's true body's location and nodded appreciatively:

"Good. It's precisely this caution of yours that makes me think somewhat well of you.

But thinking you can hide from me is rather overestimating yourself."

Seeing Yu Xi instantly pinpoint his location, Du Qiyu didn't feel a shred of fear. Instead, there was a sense of 'of course' relief.

'Naturally. How could I hope to fool an Envoy? Especially a [Deceit] Envoy. Using deception and concealment against Him was like showing off with an axe before the master carpenter.'

'Wait!'

'[Deceit]...'

For some reason, Du Qiyu suddenly frowned and slightly slowed the tamed beast's pace toward him in the forest.

At that exact moment, Cheng Shi gave a light snort and averted his gaze:

"Don't play petty tricks. And don't let my appreciation fall flat.

I look forward to the day you pass the next test and stand before me again. But today, this is as far as we go. My time is limited."

The sudden warning smoothed out Du Qiyu's furrowed brow. He realized he'd been overthinking.

If even the subtlest movement couldn't escape the Envoy's notice, how could someone with such ability possibly be a fraud?

Little did he know that Cheng Shi had no idea what Du Qiyu had done in the forest. He'd simply predicted that the man wouldn't be completely well-behaved, so he tossed out an intentionally vague warning.

And yet that single ambiguous remark all but sealed Xiao Qi's fate.

Du Qiyu respectfully returned the container, placing this life-saving enhancement tool — one that could push his strength to its peak — into the tamed beast's hands.

Under the container's influence, calm had led him to make the most rational decision. But the instant the container left his vicinity, the furious, anxious, desire-consumed Du Qiyu came roaring back. He stared darkly at Yu Xi in the forest clearing, equal parts terror and restraint, and bellowed with all his frustration:

"My lord, if you think so well of me, can't you at least give me a second chance?"

Why should that dog Xiao Shi be better than me!?

I should have performed brilliantly in this trial. Your test is what made me like this!

As compensation, shouldn't you give me another shot!?

Believe me, my lord, I can do better than Xiao Shi!"

Despite the volume, it was useless.

Driven by fear, Du Qiyu started shifting positions. The tamed beast's expression fluctuated wildly, its steps toward Yu Xi halting and restarting, even turning back several times.

Clearly, the Beast Tamer was thrashing violently at losing his "essential item." He couldn't deny Yu Xi's identity, yet he couldn't bear to part with the invaluable container. But he also dreaded the punishment for breaking the game's rules. All he could do was rage more violently along that tightrope, hurling obscenities.

Most critically, there were no longer any living creatures in this forest to absorb his emotions.

Cheng Shi had swept the area clean during the preparation phase. Why else had he fled in this direction? It was deliberate. Even the escape route had been scripted.

And so the true clown began his performance. Du Qiyu's rage accumulated relentlessly. With only a single tamed beast to share the emotional burden, he was on the brink of total meltdown. Within seconds, he was railing against everything — cursing the heavens, the earth, the gods — stopping just short of cursing Yu Xi and [Deceit] as well.

The phrase "blaming heaven and hating others" found its finest illustration in this moment. But for Cheng Shi, none of it held any further interest.

Because for the current Cheng Shi, the raging Du Qiyu had long ceased to be a real opponent. The moment the man had willingly surrendered the container and — freed from its influence — felt fear again...

The Death Fun Ring's full charge had already written Xiao Qi's final chapter.

No running. No hiding.

This was the script Cheng Shi had prepared for his childhood friend!

But simply killing Xiao Qi wasn't Cheng Shi's goal. The Kill-the-Heart plan's emphasis was "the heart." So the story was far from over.

Yu Xi made no move. Only his eyes grew colder, his gaze toward the tamed beast increasingly dark.

This shift made the hypersensitive Du Qiyu even more hysterical. But he was helpless. To earn the supposed second chance, to survive before a Servant God, he could only command his tamed beast to hurry and return the [Corruption] container.

Those few short steps became the trial's cruelest torment for the Beast Tamer. Personally handing back the container to godhood was pushing Du Qiyu to the edge of emotional collapse.

"Give me another chance, Yu Xi! You have to give me another chance!"

His mouth was defiant. His temper was foul. His heart was quaking. In this moment, Du Qiyu had lost all human composure.

And his torment was far from over. In truth, it had only just begun.

Because the instant Cheng Shi — stone-faced — took back the [Corruption] container from the tamed-beast Xiao Qi, the corner of his mouth curled into an unmistakably mocking arc. And to the raving Du Qiyu, he spoke seven words:

"Happy?"

I was lying."

...

Chapter 974: You and I Are Nothing but Passersby

"?"

The instant he heard those words, Du Qiyu didn't even question Yu Xi's authenticity. He was simply wondering where this Envoy had just lied to him.

'Surely not the second test opportunity?'

'Did my foul language kill his desire to keep testing me!?'

'No, absolutely not! It was [Deceit]'s enticement that made me this way. As His Envoy, you should answer for it!'

'You can't strip me of my right to be tested!'

Du Qiyu erupted. Rage boiling over, he could no longer contain his fury. He commanded the tamed-beast Xiao Qi to grab Yu Xi by the collar and snarled at the mask, spraying spittle:

"Test! Me! Now! Immediately!"

"?"

'Has this man lost his mind?'

Cheng Shi blinked, his smile growing ever more enigmatic as he nodded.

"Very well. Since you insist, then I shall..."

In one fluid motion, he drew a blade and — with the tamed beast completely off-guard — slit its throat. At the same time, he shed Yu Xi's guise, looked toward the dense forest with naked mockery, and scoffed:

"...have to burst your beautiful dream.

Like I said. I was lying. There is no Yu Xi in this world.

Thanks for returning my container.

Getting something back after losing it feels great. I wonder how 'losing something after getting it' feels, hmm, Xiao Qi?"

"!!!???"

'He's... Xiao Shi!!?'

'No!'

'Impossible!'

'This can't be!'

When Du Qiyu realized his last tamed beast had just been killed, the fury that had nearly peaked suddenly froze for a single second. Then boundless terror detonated inside him, blanking his mind with a piercing ring.

His fingers dug into the dirt. His entire body went rigid. Refusing to believe, unable to believe, he screamed at Cheng Shi in the clearing:

"THIS is the real trick!

Yu Xi, you can't fool me!

There was never any Xiao Shi in this trial! This is your test! Your second test!

I've seen through you! I've passed! You can't fool me! You CAN'T fool me!!!"

Du Qiyu had truly gone mad.

Cheng Shi pouted, annoyed by the volume, and briefly covered his ears. Then he shook his head and sighed:

"The greatest deception in this world is deceiving yourself.

I've always felt you weren't worthy of being His believer. But now I see I underestimated you.

You think all of this is fake?

Why? Because of the containers?"

As he spoke, Cheng Shi produced two more containers and tossed them between his hands like a juggling clown, continuing to taunt:

"You think the containers can't be forged, so my identity can't be fake either?

But...

Who told you the containers were fake?

Of course the containers are real. And I wasn't lying. They really are essential for becoming one of Them. I just happen to have quite a few.

So, do you understand now? The containers are very, very real. It's just that I was deceiving you."

"!!!"

The instant those words landed, Du Qiyu — his dream shattered — shot out of his hiding place like an arrow loosed from a bow, sprinting for the forest's edge. His earlier roaring had partly been an attempt to find an opening, but there was also a genuine sliver of hope that this truly was Lord Yu Xi's second test.

But... with emotions boiling over, he couldn't trust a single word from someone who looked like Xiao Shi. Even if this were the second test, he no longer wanted to continue.

All he wanted now was to survive. Find another opportunity. Pay back every deception and humiliation inflicted today, paid to Xiao Shi's account. Whether Yu Xi existed or not, Xiao Shi should not!

But tragically, Du Qiyu's proudly honed escape skills finally failed him today. Because Cheng Shi didn't need to know where he was.

"Looks like the second test is a failure too."

Cheng Shi scoffed, lazily raised his hand, snapped his fingers, and four bolts of lightning screamed from between his fingers. Like a plasma torrent, they tore through the forest with devastating ease, obliterating the fleeing, cursing Beast Tamer into flying ash.

BOOM— BOOM-BOOM-BOOM—

The violent explosions shook the entire river valley. The last thunderbolt, finding no target, slammed viciously into the surrounding trees.

In an instant, a vast swath of forest was plowed by lightning, leaving nothing but charred remains.

Surveying this hellish corridor, Cheng Shi didn't rush to confirm whether Xiao Qi had truly been reduced to ash. Instead, he strolled at a measured pace to the dead tamed beast's side and casually nudged the corpse with his foot.

He'd never forgotten Sun Miao's words: the Beast Tamer was a cunning hunter who'd disguised many tamed beasts for decoys and ambushes. So who could be certain the one just blasted to oblivion was really Xiao Qi's true body!?

The most dangerous place was the safest. A puppet could also be the real thing. That was experience Wei Mu — the unchallenged number one on the Road to Ascension — had shared. Cheng Shi had taken it to heart.

So he wouldn't overlook any potential threat.

But what had enabled him to react so quickly — to notice the body at his feet the instant Xiao Qi's fleeing form disintegrated — wasn't merely prudence. It was the Death Fun Ring, still hard at work.

Because the ring, which he'd deliberately kept one charge in reserve, had suddenly been fully recharged.

With only himself and a corpse present, the question was: where was the fear coming from?

Real brain teaser.

So Cheng Shi looked down at the corpse with undisguised mockery:

"Stop pretending. I know you're alive.

But you should also know: every second you stay alive adds another layer to your fear. Because you can't escape.

These are the rules of this game. While ordinary players like yourselves are still groping for the gods' attention, I've long since sat at the same table as Them. I'm one of the rule-makers."

At this, the corpse's hand twitched slightly.

Cheng Shi regarded his stubborn old friend with a half-smile, pulled out his container, and tossed it back and forth like a juggling clown, then continued hammering at the other's mental defenses:

"Perhaps you're curious how I've accomplished all this. I'll tell you. It's because I was never human to begin with."

"!!!"

The tamed beast snapped its eyes open, staring in disbelief and horror at this familiar stranger before it, and at the container being tossed and caught in his hand.

"Decided to wake up?"

Heh."

Cheng Shi spared Xiao Qi a glance, then — just as Yu Xi had — stopped caring about Xiao Qi's life or death altogether and began pacing leisurely.

"We're living through era after era. Mortal lives repeat their own destruction with each era without knowing it. Only we can transcend everything, standing at the crest of the era's tide, admiring a view that belongs exclusively to the gods.

So you should understand now. Your best chance to kill me was in the era when I had not yet become a god. And now, sorry, I lied to you again.

I'm indeed not Yu Xi. But only for now. Because soon I'll become Him again, and when the era crumbles, I'll watch with my own eyes as this world marches toward true void.

You'll never have the chance to make me pay for your obsession. Painful, isn't it, Xiao Qi.

I felt that same despair in the era when I had not yet ascended, and you were the one who created it. That was the era when you came closest to godhood. But in the end, the one who succeeded was me.

Originally, the gap between man and god meant I'd grown weary of this endlessly repeating drama and had no desire to bother with you. But every time, your death-seeking eagerness compels me to oblige my old friend's wish.

So farewell, old friend. See you next era.

And sincere advice: though we'll inevitably meet again, abandon your delusions. Don't pin your hopes on the next era. I will never allow you to become one of us."

When he finished, Cheng Shi didn't forget to add a cold laugh as a parting jab.

But the instant his words fell, a muffled groan of bone-deep agony came from behind him.

Cheng Shi seemed to have anticipated what happened. He turned slowly, unsurprised, and saw a bone knife driven straight into Xiao Qi's own heart. The expression on his face was one of utter resolve.

Xiao Qi had killed himself.

Unable to bear the humiliation, he chose to end it.

But Du Qiyu hadn't found release. His eyes were venomous as he glared at Cheng Shi, blood foaming from his lips, and with his last breath bellowed his defiant howl:

"Next... era... I'll... beat you!"

His obsession was still growing.

Clearly, Du Qiyu — unable to make sense of any of this — had believed every word Cheng Shi said. Otherwise, he couldn't explain why Cheng Shi held all the cards yet refused to deliver the killing blow. This disgusting Xiao Shi was obviously using an Envoy's authority to humiliate him!

So better to die. In that so-called "next era," he'd start over!

If everyone had a chance at godhood, then next era, he would repay today's shame a hundredfold, a thousandfold!

But a next era?

Heh. Even the Fun God didn't know if there would be a next era. And you do?

You believed my ghost story?

Then sorry. I lied to you again.

As for the reason for repeatedly lying to you... I was simply testing a theory. If a person loses all motivation to live in the present, they probably won't bother leaving any resurrection contingency behind, right?

Du Qiyu breathed his last. Even in death, he refused to close his eyes.

Cheng Shi gazed down at Xiao Qi's body, his expression complicated. He closed his eyes and let out a long sigh.

'You started my life with a lie. So I end yours with one.'

'There's nothing more to say. After all, you and I are nothing but passersby. You're the road beneath my feet. And I... am the one walking.'

Cheng Shi huffed a cold laugh and stepped over the corpse.

Moments later, several thunderclaps rumbled through the forest.

Because the steady never forget to double-tap.

...

Chapter 975: Xiao Qi's Obsession and Past

When Sun Miao reappeared before Cheng Shi, the wise man was unmistakably furious.

The Fate Weaver's return without a scratch meant he'd already dealt with the Beast Tamer. But the problem was: why didn't you let me vent some frustration too!?

'What happened to the trust between us as fellow History School Vice Presidents? The friendship forged through trading divine intelligence?'

'And how did you handle the Beast Tamer and ensure he won't resurrect?'

Sun Miao was bursting with questions. But seeing Cheng Shi's expression — one that practically screamed "I dug a hole and I'm waiting for you to jump in" — he hesitated, chose not to ask, and settled for a heavy snort.

"Should I also thank you for letting me out?"

Cheng Shi was amused by this quintessentially [Folly]-flavored retort. He nodded repeatedly: "If you'd like to, I wouldn't refuse the courtesy."

"..." Sun Miao's nostrils trembled with rage. But he quickly narrowed his eyes in suspicion at Cheng Shi: "Something's off. If you've already wrapped everything up, this trial should be completely meaningless for us.

Yet you released me without saying goodbye, and without suggesting our next move. What are you scheming?

Because you personally settled an old grudge and now you're feeling sentimental?

Give me a break, Vice President Cheng. In my brief time with you, I can see you're not someone who dwells on the past. Especially when the person being mourned is Du Qiyu.

What do you want me to do?

What, am I wrong? You're standing in front of me but saying nothing. Isn't that just waiting for me to volunteer?

Last time you at least put on a pretense. This time you're not even pretending?

Don't look at me like that. My wisdom has never been for others to exploit. Don't you dare—

Wait. The trial's history holds no interest for you anymore. The only thing I can think of that you'd care about is the Beast Tamer. You want me to search the Beast Tamer's corpse for old memories?"

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, suppressing a grin, and shook his head: "I never thought about any of that. Don't project your ideas onto me to 'slander' me."

"..." Sun Miao regarded Cheng Shi with a peculiar expression. After an internal struggle, he said with a dark face: "Fine, fine, fine. Let's say it was my idea. Where's his body?"

When it came to choosing between pride and intelligence, this History School Vice President chose the latter without hesitation.

Seeing how proactive the wise man had become, Cheng Shi couldn't very well keep stomping on his dignity. So he casually glanced in the direction of the thick forest, and the very next second, Sun Miao vanished with a "whoosh."

By the time he found Cheng Shi again, an entire day and night had passed.

The Boro battlefield's smoke was gradually settling. The Grand Tribunal and Tower of Logic's encirclement had all but collapsed.

Keinlaur — no, Delvo — was undeniably a brilliant commander. He possessed not only terrifying military acumen but also extraordinary personal charisma that somehow made this battered War Legion grow larger as the battle raged.

By now, countless knights and scholars who'd lost their faith's direction, having witnessed the reality of war, had defected to [War]'s banner without reservation.

The trajectory of faith's evolution played out before Cheng Shi's eyes once more.

But every time such reflections struck, Cheng Shi recalled what [Birth] had shown him. A single sentence, a single evaluation, had been enough to birth a true god from faith's evolution. Could that omniscient, omnipotent [Origin]... truly be "defeated"?

If not, what was the Fear Faction's purpose?

Mere survival?

Heh. Look at the present. As far as the eye could see, this battlefield held only the victors' cheers and the defeated's bones. There were no lucky survivors.

Just as he was thinking this, Sun Miao returned.

The History School Vice President's expression was profoundly complex. He approached Cheng Shi from behind in silence, opened his mouth, but couldn't find the words.

Cheng Shi didn't ask. The two simply gazed at the blood-soaked battlefield in the distance, wordless for a long time.

Not until the sun set and the afterglow faded did Sun Miao tell Cheng Shi a story whose protagonist was Xiao Qi.

"You've also said there's no need to rehash ancient history. So I won't play the tiresome narrator.

In short, after Boss Du adopted him, Du Qiyu's life wasn't as rosy as it looked.

He'd gotten a taste of how sweet lies could be from a certain someone. So he began employing deception in every aspect of life to extract more profit, eventually aiming his petty schemes at Boss Du's business dealings.

Boss Du's operation was sizable, and his partners were all shrewd operators. A clever child was no match for these old foxes. So the self-appointed social master never realized he'd become someone else's pawn.

And their prey was, of course, Du Qiyu's father.

So you see, every hunter's growth must involve a real hunt. Or being hunted.

Before long, the rivals' successive attacks left Boss Du floundering in a capital crisis. And Du Qiyu, realizing he'd caused the mess, had no choice but to accept the foxes' terms to keep them quiet, becoming the straw that broke the camel's back.

And so, through this internal and external pincer, Du Qiyu successfully 'ruined' the very businesses he would have inherited.

Boss Du was betrayed and disheartened. He took his private savings and vanished. The glamorous stepmother, deprived of wealth, naturally had no use for a burden. So on the year Du Qiyu came of age, he became an 'orphan' once more.

Well? Are you satisfied with this ending?"

Cheng Shi chuckled softly, offering no comment.

But the story wasn't over.

"From that point on, the Du family boy's psyche began to warp. On one hand, he sustained his image as a rich young master through cons. On the other, he could only survive by picking through garbage.

Interestingly, he was picky even about garbage. He wouldn't touch anything unless it came from a wealthy household. His reasoning? His pampered stomach couldn't handle poor people's scraps.

Hearing this, you probably understand why he hated you so much. Because you and picking through garbage...

Apologies. I don't mean to pry into your privacy. But Du Qiyu was very interested in this subject. He even returned to that orphanage after he 'went independent,' where he happened to run into Zhao Xiaogua — your 'A Gua' — who'd also come back looking for childhood happiness.

A Gua was the real winner. After a certain someone was taken away by a good father, A Gua became the second orphan in the institution to be adopted by a wealthy businessman.

His father kept A Gua's name, giving him only the surname 'Zhao.'

Honest A Gua was nothing like Du Qiyu. He had no schemes and no drama, living the most 'ordinary' life: well-fed and clothed, studied abroad, graduated from a prestigious university, and eventually took over the family business...

This life trajectory — one that should have been his — was inexplicably grafted onto a friend so unremarkable you'd lose him in a crowd. Hearing this broke Du Qiyu completely.

But what broke him even more was that Zhao Xiaogua told him about your situation. He said you had a father who cherished and loved you...

Did you know about this, Fate Weaver?"

...

Chapter 976: So They're Called the Torchbearers

"?"

Cheng Shi furrowed his brow slightly but still didn't respond.

"It seems you didn't know.

After Zhao Xiaogua came of age, he went back to the orphanage once with his pocket money — an amount nearly equivalent to the orphanage's annual expenses — and donated every cent.

That was when A Gua offered to help you, because he'd always remembered you being good to him back at the orphanage.

Your director was an interesting character, too. All smiles when receiving the money, but evasive whenever you were mentioned. I don't know what fascinating story lies behind that. But under A Gua's insistence, the orphanage finally tracked down your... father.

Hmm. It seems you also didn't know that Zhao Xiaogua once donated money to your father."

"???"

'This happened?'

'How come I never saw that money? Did the old man pocket it?'

Cheng Shi blinked, picturing in his mind that father who was "exceptionally good at saving money."

Sun Miao had done it on purpose. He paused for a long time, studying Cheng Shi's reactions. Only after detecting nothing did he reluctantly continue:

"Your father turned him down. He told him:

'A person has hands and feet — they can earn their own food and drink. How much doesn't matter. But they don't need donations, and they don't need charity.

If you have this kind of money, go save a few more children who actually need saving.'

I suspect those words inspired Zhao Xiaogua, which is why he went on to establish his orphan assistance fund."

At this, Cheng Shi's smile suddenly turned radiant. Those words did sound like the old man.

Seeing the "reminiscence" bloom across Cheng Shi's face, Sun Miao nodded to himself. As expected, the one thing this Fate Weaver truly valued was his only family bond.

But then Cheng Shi frowned again. 'Wise man, you've seen a bit too much. Can History School people now cross the boundaries of individual memory to excavate the past?'

Sun Miao seemed to read the doubt on Cheng Shi's face and shook his head darkly:

"Don't misunderstand. This wasn't about probing your past. The body was blasted to dust, which shattered the memories as well. I had no choice but to use some of my treasured techniques to expand the memory vessel and extract what I could.

But looking at the results, I got absolutely fleeced on this deal. Those techniques are one-use, and all I dug up from Du Qiyu's past were trivialities.

Vice President Cheng, don't you think some compensation is in order?"

"?" Cheng Shi glanced sideways at Sun Miao with a strange grin: "Did I ever tell you to mine Xiao Qi's memories?"

"..."

"Did I ever ask you to tell me Xiao Qi's story?"

"..."

"Since I did neither, why would I compensate you for an uncontrollable urge to share?"

On the contrary, Vice President Sun, you forcibly injected all these impurities into my memory. May I ask you for damages?"

"???"

'Dude, seriously...'

Sun Miao was once again floored by Cheng Shi's audacity. Nostrils flaring, he glared at Cheng Shi, thinking that the last time he'd received such treatment, it had been from Zhen Yi.

'Indeed, there must be a reason those two get along so well.'

Seeing Sun Miao's face turn iron-dark, Cheng Shi shook his head and laughed:

"Come on, Vice President Sun. We're both thousand-year-old foxes. Let's stop pretending to be fresh-faced storytellers.

I'm no gullible organization member of yours. Surely you don't think I'd actually believe you came up empty-handed?

Don't forget — I'm a [Deceit] believer. Lying to my face is pointless."

"..."

An odd glint passed through Sun Miao's eyes. After a moment's silence, he spoke again:

"So... they're called the Torchbearers."

"?"

The instant he heard "Torchbearers," Cheng Shi's pupils contracted sharply for a split second.

He didn't mind Sun Miao knowing about the Torchbearers' existence. The wise man had already sensed it; he simply hadn't known the name. What puzzled Cheng Shi was: why were the Torchbearers in Xiao Qi's memories!?

Surely Xiao Qi wasn't a Torchbearer himself?

Passing what torch? The torch of rage?

Impossible. No Fire Seeker would have chosen Xiao Qi, much less recruited him. So the only explanation was that Xiao Qi had encountered Torchbearers. Or even... killed Torchbearers!

Cheng Shi suddenly recalled the girl "Little Yuan" that Xie Yang had once mentioned — the player who refused to let others bear painful memories. Had she been trying to protect something beautiful?

At this thought, Cheng Shi's expression gradually turned cold.

'Beast Tamer. Good riddance.'

"You really do know them well."

Sun Miao studied Cheng Shi, oblivious that Cheng Shi was secretly studying him right back.

Cheng Shi was thinking: since the wise man now knew about the Torchbearers, he might as well find a way to consolidate his resources.

Given what he knew of the Torchbearers, Sun Miao could never become one. So instead of trying to initiate him, Cheng Shi wanted the wise man to become his informant planted near the Torchbearers!

That's right — an informant!

The same axiom held: when I'm powerless, I protect only myself. But when I can lend a hand, I won't deny that I have a heart that yearns for something good.

Now, with powers and divine connections that far surpassed an ordinary player's understanding, Cheng Shi finally felt he could help the Torchbearers.

'I may never be the torch that carries the flame. But at least I can stand in the shadows beyond the firelight and shield this dying ember from the wind.'

Given Sun Miao's "greed" for intelligence, the wise man would undoubtedly track the Torchbearers through every means available. And Cheng Shi could indirectly monitor their movements through intelligence trades.

Moreover, while Sun Miao had nothing to do with "goodness," he wasn't "evil" either. He guarded against [Corruption] and refused to conspire with the God Worship Society. Accomplishing even one of those, in a world governed by power and paved with desire, already qualified someone as a "good" person.

This was also the only strategy Cheng Shi could devise that didn't entangle him too deeply with the Torchbearers.

If he tried to learn about them directly through the Blind One, Zhen Xin, or the Torchbearers themselves, it would only lock both sides into an awkward binding relationship. That would not only bring the Fear Faction's risk to the Torchbearers but also shackle his own steps, making him too constrained to move.

So joining or cooperating was never Cheng Shi's choice. Silent observation was indisputably the best approach.

Seeing Cheng Shi lost in thought, Sun Miao mulled it over, then continued the earlier topic.

"Since you know them so well, did you know that Zhao Xiaogua was also a member of this organization?"

"!?"

This time, Cheng Shi was genuinely moved. His voice suddenly dropped low.

"You're saying..."

"That's right. He also died at Du Qiyu's hands.

Simply because he'd 'stolen' Du Qiyu's life. So when they met during a trial, he became Du Qiyu's tamed beast.

Zhao Xiaogua was originally Du Qiyu's proudest masterpiece. Unfortunately, not long ago, another player seeking revenge destroyed him. Through a twist of fate, you missed the chance to reunite."

"...Vice President Sun, you don't need to make your sentimentality sound so [Folly]-flavored. It's rather punchable."

"More punchable than you trying to bill me for my sharing impulse?"

"..."

"Forget it. Since you won't talk, let's leave it here. But take this."

Sun Miao held out a blood-stained bone knife. Cheng Shi stared at it in surprise, instantly recognizing it as the weapon Xiao Qi had used to kill himself.

"Your spoils of war. Consider it compensation for my overzealous sharing." The wise man clearly didn't want to acknowledge the latter, but if taking the offer could turn the page, so be it. "The fact that you left it at the scene means you have no idea what this is."

The Flaying Bone Knife. An SS-rank quasi-divine artifact of [Death]. It can nullify any resurrection contingency. Supposedly, it was the personal weapon of the very first bone-scraper, and later became the dream tool of every bone-scraper since."

'The first bone-scraper?'

Cheng Shi blinked. 'Could it be...'

"Garuda?"

Sun Miao stared at Cheng Shi with a peculiar expression for a long while. Only when Cheng Shi snatched the knife from his hand did he snort:

"How fascinating. When it comes to history, you know almost nothing. When it comes to tools, you're half-ignorant at best. But the moment it involves Them..."

You act as if you're omniscient.

Cheng Shi, your identity seems far from simple."

"..."

'Coincidence. Believe it?'

'If not... fill in the blanks yourself.'

Cheng Shi smiled and accepted this gift from [Death]'s boss without responding further to Sun Miao's probing.

Seeing the other man's silence, Sun Miao decisively killed his own speculation.

"A hunt born in a trial, strangled beneath desire. Truly, the only judge of desire is oneself.

The trial is nearly over. If you're in no rush to leave, why not join me to witness Delvo's victory?"

'Well, I'm already here. Might as well see this piece of history.'

Cheng Shi swept the cluttered thoughts from his mind, nodded, and gave Sun Miao a meaningful look.

"Sure you have nothing left to ask?"

Sun Miao lifted his chin slightly and snorted: "Nothing."

"Then let's go."

Cheng Shi had barely taken two steps toward the battlefield when Vice President Sun's voice came from behind.

"Yu Xi... is he real, or fake?"

Hearing Yu Xi's name, Cheng Shi slowly curved a smile.

'At last. You took the bait.'

'If this game couldn't get you — the intelligence kingpin — to spread Yu Xi's name for me, then all that time listening to stories would have been wasted.'

'What kind of past Xiao Qi had, I've never cared. All I care about is what kind of future Yu Xi will have.'

'So, History School... are you ready to record this mysterious Servant God of [Void]?'

...

Chapter 977: Trial's End, War's Blood Apricot

On the way to find Delvo, Cheng Shi intentionally — and seemingly unintentionally — revealed much about Yu Xi.

Of course, he flatly denied being Yu Xi himself. No matter how Sun Miao probed, he insisted he'd merely met the person. Whether Vice President Sun believed it or not was anyone's guess.

Along the way, the battlefield's muddy terrain made travel arduous. Blood too thick to spread had so thoroughly saturated the soil that the valley had become a crimson swamp that had swallowed untold bones.

In this stinking hellscape, the war raged on for three more days. Not until the Grand Tribunal realized that the southern front — deprived of Keinlaur's command — could no longer contain the War Legion's counterattack. Not until the Tower of Logic acknowledged that the heretical scholars had "reasoned" their way to territory of their own. Only then did both nations pull back their lines and accept what could only be called a humiliating defeat.

And the followers of [War] had at last won themselves fertile ground for their faith on this continent through war.

Delvo raised the banner of war high, standing atop the Boro Highlands, gazing toward his "homeland" in the distance. With blazing spirit, he pointed to the crimson swamp behind him and declared:

"The Kingdom of [War] was founded on the sacrifice of countless war's fallen, and shall be reborn in this land of blood and fire.

From this day forth, we shall marshal every available resource to build a city of [War] beneath this valley. I name it Volbelli, to memorialize the devotion of countless sacrificed to our Lord.

Henceforth, all land south of the Abyssal Volcano belongs to our Kingdom of [War]!

But comrades, this is far from the end!

One day, the blood and fire of [War] shall wash across the entire continent. We will make the world know that only [War] can bring new order to this rotting world!

Everything — for the new order!"

"How do we survive? Through blood and fire alone!"

Watching Delvo fervently shout about "new order," Cheng Shi couldn't shake the absurd feeling of sitting at a second marriage and hearing the groom accidentally recite his ex-wife's name during his speech.

'So is it old love hard to forget? Or is it just that every new face reminds you of the old one?'

'Tsk. Hard to say.'

Sun Miao was equally stirred. Having witnessed history again and again, he recalled this particular chapter and sighed deeply:

"Pity they don't know. What war brought wasn't new order, but new chaos.

The Underworld's counterattack was imminent. Surface order would ultimately be destroyed by the Afterglow Church and the Extreme Desire Brotherhood. Everything... is but an unremarkable ripple in the river of history."

"The Extreme Desire Brotherhood?" Cheng Shi blinked. "That... desire-peddling organization also played a role in the Underworld's counterattack?"

"A role?"

Heh. Their contribution was far more than 'a role.' If they hadn't poured everything into spreading the Underworld faith everywhere, where would all those [Descent]-assimilated heretics have come from?

You could even say the Extreme Desire Brotherhood paved the road for the Afterglow Church to destroy everything.

I still remember what the Brotherhood's Head Chief said during the Tower of Logic's destruction:

'If [Truth] won't serve my purpose, then She isn't [Truth].'

What an unforgettable scene that must have been. Pity I never had the chance to witness it myself."

"?"

Cheng Shi paused again. If he remembered correctly, wasn't it the [Folly] believer Galusha who'd destroyed the Tower of Logic? How had it become the Extreme Desire Brotherhood's Head Chief? Had Galusha cooperated with the Brotherhood?

But the Extreme Desire Brotherhood were [Corruption] devotees. Was [Folly] interested in [Corruption]?

Cheng Shi's confusion caught Sun Miao's attention. Seeing that Cheng Shi apparently didn't know who the Brotherhood's Head Chief was, the wise man ventured: "Intelligence exchange?"

Cheng Shi pouted and casually dropped a minor piece of information:

"The shattering of the Mirror of Delusion was connected to [Corruption]."

"!!??"

This single sentence crashed Sun Miao's brain.

'I was just trying to trade casual tidbits, and you go and escalate the stakes to this level?'

"So that's the truth behind how That Dream My Nightmare can reflect the darkness in people's hearts?"

A creation of [Memory] really was tainted by [Corruption]!

Everyone's suspected it, but Vice President Cheng, where did you get this information?"

'Where?'

'From Herobos's own mouth, naturally.'

'But I can't tell you that. I'd blow my cover.'

So Cheng Shi shrugged: "Forgot. Probably dreamed it. So, about the Extreme Desire Brotherhood, Vice President Sun?"

Sun Miao collected himself. He felt like he'd gotten the better end of this trade, but knowing Cheng Shi's nature... was such a bargain really free?

The wise man studied Cheng Shi repeatedly, his earlier suspicion intensifying. He was now certain that during their earlier conversation, Cheng Shi had definitely lied.

'That Yu Xi... forget it. I'll ask Zhen Xin later. Maybe she'd be interested in Yu Xi too.'

"The Extreme Desire Brotherhood's Head Chief was Galusha.

It seems you know Galusha. Indeed, most who've studied history know her name. But few know she was the Brotherhood's Head Chief.

The connection is deeply secretive, recorded only in certain believers' memoirs from the [Folly] epoch.

For unknown reasons, Galusha harbored a near-obsessive hatred of [Truth]. So in order to topple the Tower of Logic, after Keinlaur's death, she ventured into the Underworld alone in search of new allies.

How she joined the Extreme Desire Brotherhood, no outsider knows. But according to limited records, she vastly expanded the Brotherhood's sphere of influence and gradually rose to become its de facto leader behind the scenes.

The memoir's author noted that he was profoundly influenced by Galusha's will and voluntarily followed her into [Folly]. But his ancestors had been pure Brotherhood members who'd unflinchingly worshipped [Corruption].

I also found traces of his ancestor — reportedly an extraordinarily ambitious Head Chief under whose leadership the Brotherhood's influence reached its peak. It was this very person who passed the Head Chief title to Galusha.

And this charismatic woman's name was... Shi Lolin."

"..."

'The hallmarks of fate are still chasing me.'

Cheng Shi was speechless. The instant he heard Shi Lolin's name, he knew: in that trial where he hadn't yet merged with [Time], [Fate] had still been at work.

He just didn't know why the script seemed to have a slight error. He'd only encountered Shi Lolin, never the [Folly] Galusha.

'Close call. Good thing I didn't. Otherwise, this "fixed destiny" would be too terrifying.'

As the two talked, Delvo — surrounded by his followers on the battlefield — had also finished his founding declaration. In front of everyone, he drew a small bloodstained branch from his robes and planted it in the soil already mixed with countless flesh and bone.

"I plant this withered wood — embodying [War]'s warrior spirit — here at this very spot. Around it, we shall build a royal court of [War]. When this dead wood drinks enough blood to be reborn, that shall be the day [War]'s will spreads across the world!

How do we survive?"

The soldiers roared: "Through blood — and fire!"

Watching this scene, the only two players present exchanged a glance, their expressions rich and varied.

Because even though Delvo had dyed it, they both recognized it: that was unmistakably a branch of the Mother Tree of Fear — the same one Keinlaur had once shown Lid Yara. It was Lid Yara's birth gift.

So the blood apricot of [War]'s royal court... was actually a graft-reborn branch of the Mother Tree of Fear?

Did Le Le'er know about this?

As a [War] believer, what did Keinlaur's gesture mean?

Did this mean [War]'s followers lived in fear, or that this war's instigator had started the war because of fear?

Under the two stunned gazes, cheers erupted across the Boro Highlands. Though the shouts shook the heavens, this moment brought a long-absent peace to the battered land — a tranquility whose name was An Ning.

In that moment, the setting sun's afterglow was torn to shreds by the upraised lances, stubbornly casting its fading glory across the scorched earth.

Keinlaur's desires converged and poured into the sea. This former Supreme Inquisitor used a fresh devotion to absolve himself of all his sins.

【Wish Trial (Free Conviction [Corruption]) Challenge Successful】

【Evaluating performance and calculating rewards...】

【Player: Cheng Shi, Performance Rating: S】

【Item Obtained: Knowledge-Seeking Mask (S) ×1】

【Road to Ascension +20】

【Ladder of Ascent +3】

【Current Road to Ascension Score: 2,281 | Global Rank: 318,147】

【Current Ladder of Ascent Score: 187 | Path Rank: 30】

【Trial Cleared. Exiting...】

...

Chapter 978: The History Correction Meeting

Reality. A museum in some unknown province and city.

That's right — the museum you're thinking of. The director's conference room here was where the History School's senior leadership held their History Correction Meetings.

Despite the School's leader repeatedly insisting that this was her rest area and no one was allowed to dirty the conference room, nobody believed her. They tossed books everywhere, cluttering the place with paper and screens until it was a complete mess.

Here, the History School's executives compiled historical records into volumes and proofread page after page into polished chapters. This was arguably the largest player-organized intelligence hub in the game. Every attendee present held the rank of Vice President.

At this moment, Sun Miao sat at the first seat on the left side of the long table, scribbling furiously. The other six seats — aside from the President's center position at the head — were equally busy.

No one would have guessed this was how the most serious History School meetings were conducted. They seized every second to record history, only pausing to consult others when discussion was needed.

After the room had been silent for a long while, Sun Miao set down his pen, raised his nostrils, and looked toward Zhen Xin:

"I've recently catalogued a new piece of intelligence regarding Them. I recommend a 4S classification. Sharing at this meeting requires the President's approval. So, esteemed Madam President, do you approve of my seeking further details on this intelligence?"

Zhen Xin leaned back in her chair, fingers tapping the table, regarding Sun Miao with an amused smile:

"Mister Wise Man, organizational procedures aren't meant to be shortened like this. I haven't even received the latest report. How am I supposed to judge whether your so-called 4S intelligence is fit for sharing?"

But since you're so eager, go ahead. I'm sure the others would like to hear it too."

The moment she finished, everyone stopped what they were doing and looked up at that pair of conspicuous nostrils.

Sun Miao paid no mind to Zhen Xin's teasing. At his usual measured pace, he shared his discovery.

"I've received word of a new Servant God. He belongs to [Void], calls himself Yu Xi, and is—"

"[Deceit]'s Envoy." Before Sun Miao could finish, an old man at the far end coughed twice and completed his sentence. He tossed a notebook onto the center of the long table. "I've also been hearing a great deal about Him lately. I was hoping to verify with everyone."

"I've heard too."

"Same here."

"Count me in."

"+1."

In an instant, five booklets landed in a pile. The six Vice Presidents exchanged meaningful glances, then simultaneously turned to look at the President at the head of the table. Seeing Zhen Xin's delighted smile, they suspected she'd known about this for quite some time.

Zhen Xin didn't hide it. She selectively shared some of what she knew, then tapped the table and outlined her plan:

"Yu Xi's existence may become one of our windows into [Void]. As you all know, the gods descended in a certain order. From [Life] to [Chaos], traces of the four paths' faiths are scattered all across the Land of Hope.

But starting from [Existence], those traces diminish significantly — though they still exist.

[Void], however... even as a [Void] walker myself, I know precious little about Their faith history. But given the ongoing Faith Game, I'm inclined to believe [Void] is currently creating history.

As for what kind of history They intend to create, gods probably don't bother explaining to mortals. So we can only search for clues through Yu Xi.

I've learned through reliable channels that Yu Xi is undergoing a 'rebirth.' He's searching for His mask. This is critical information. If we can find information about the mask — or even collect fragments of it — we may be able to obtain truths about [Void] from this Servant God through the principle of exchange.

So I propose that our next priority target be [Void]. Thoughts?"

"None to spare."

"I disagree."

Before Zhen Xin had even finished, voices of opposition arose.

The History School had grown to this scale not because of Zhen Xin's absolute authority, but because of her skill in forming alliances. As stated before, she was exceptional at cooperation. She'd gathered a group of history-obsessed experts under one roof. They shared the same intellectual goals, but that didn't make the School a monolith. Each Vice President at this table had their own particular area of interest.

A sharp-voiced Vice President snorted with a laugh and shook his head:

"I suggest the esteemed President drop those [Deceit] parlor tricks. Not everyone is interested in [Void].

How can I be sure you're not using 'researching [Void]' as a cover to curry favor with this so-called 'Yu Xi'?

Yes, I admit the discovery of a new Servant God is enticing. But He isn't a Servant God of my [Existence]. Compared to chasing meaningless [Void], I believe pursuing more [Existence] knowledge would benefit the History School far more.

After all, history is the History School's foundation. Divine authority... is merely a byproduct of studying history."

The tone was unfriendly, but Zhen Xin seemed accustomed to it. She smiled at the [Existence] believer and tilted her head: "Terms?"

"Ha! Don't assume everyone's so transactional. Surely those of us who sit here must have a genuine love for history?"

At this, snickers rippled through the room. They'd known each other long enough to see through everyone's nature. This Vice President's lengthy speech was simply adding bargaining chips.

Zhen Xin's smile faded as she nodded, weighing what to offer in exchange for his support. But while she deliberated, Sun Miao suddenly raised his nostrils and snorted:

"I have new information about That Dream My Nightmare."

"?"

The room froze.

The normally first-ranked Vice President never spoke in support of their beloved President. In fact, he was the person at this table who contradicted the President the most.

Of course, the wise man wasn't targeting Zhen Xin specifically. He targeted everyone.

The sharp-voiced Vice President straightened immediately at Sun Miao's words, eyes gleaming: "How novel. When did the great wise man start running with [Void]? Fine, you've got my vote. I hope your intelligence lives up to it."

He smiled, rapped the table, and scrawled his signature on a blank sheet, then slid it to Zhen Xin. This meant that in the upcoming vote, he would unconditionally support the President's allocation of resources to investigate Yu Xi.

With Sun Miao's vote added, the proposal needed just one more to pass.

But the moment the other three — who hadn't previously opposed the measure — saw this, they collectively reversed course, proclaiming the matter required more careful consideration.

As for how much more careful, well, that depended on how much leverage the President and the wise man were willing to put on the table.

Zhen Xin tapped the table, her gaze sweeping across everyone present, finally resting on the silent, eyes-closed Sun Miao. After a moment's thought, she smiled:

"Could it be that the wise man recently met our Vice President candidate?"

If so, may I take this to mean your preliminary review of him went smoothly?"

"?"

At the previous meeting, Zhen Xin had raised a motion to add a seat to this table. The preposterously out-of-protocol proposal had been voted down 1:6. But now it seemed... there might be a chance?

All eyes turned to Sun Miao, who merely snorted: "No objections."

"Oh—!"

He'd been the fiercest opponent last time. How had he come around now?

The sharp-voiced Vice President's expression cooled immediately. He snatched his signed paper back.

"Lopsided exchanges are always disappointing. Wise man, did that Fate Weaver get some leverage over you?"

Tell us. Perhaps we can help."

Sun Miao didn't so much as twitch an eyelid. He simply raised his nostrils slightly and uttered: "He killed Lin Xi."

"???"

The room erupted in shock.

Zhen Xin raised an eyebrow, amused: "You saw it with your own eyes?"

'With my own eyes?'

'Of course not.'

'But does something not happening just because I didn't personally witness it?'

'Killing Lin Xi. Killing Xiao Qi. Even driving off an Envoy, Yu Go... if I revealed all of that, wouldn't you all think I folded out of cowardice?'

So Sun Miao said nothing more, simply adding in a quiet murmur: "I've already mentioned all of your names to him."

The instant those words fell, the signed paper found its way back to Zhen Xin.

A certain Vice President's shrill voice seemed to have softened considerably.

"This table is long enough that someone ought to fill it. Staring at the same sour faces gets tiresome. We could use some fresh blood. I hear Li Jingming didn't oathbreak but rather merged, so [Existence] and [Void] aren't necessarily enemies.

What do you all think, esteemed Vice Presidents?"

"..."

...

Chapter 979: Revisiting Old Ground

Sweltering heat. A stench that assaulted the nostrils.

Cheng Shi's vision gradually brightened. When he opened his eyes, he realized he hadn't been teleported out of the trial at all. Before him lay the same scorched, blood-soaked battlefield. The only difference was that the legions of [War] soldiers that had blanketed the hills were gone, replaced by a pair of...

Divine eyes!

The left eye blazed like fire, dripping molten lava that rolled and surged. The right eye was as still as a lake, yet rippled with blood-red waves. These heterochromatic eyes hung in the sky like the sun and

moon coexisting above the battlefield, gazing straight down at the fortunate mortal summoned before Them.

Cheng Shi... went numb.

Being summoned by [War] might not have been terrifying in itself. What frightened him was knowing that [Order], which had splintered beside the Sea of Desire, very likely had an inseparable connection to [War]. This made him harbor a thread of dread toward this so-called god of endurance.

'The dog that bites doesn't bark.' That old saying was painfully apt.

'Wait!'

'This isn't me being blasphemous — [Truth] said it first. I'm just borrowing the expression.'

Who wouldn't fear someone of immeasurable depth and patience?

But fear was useless, because [War] could also resonate with fear. The sight of Keinlaur planting Le'er's "remains" in the soil of the Kingdom of [War] had yet to fade from his mind...

Cheng Shi could only hope [War]'s fear was the Fear Faction's kind of fear, and not some other variety. Otherwise, he was in for a very bad time.

He shook his head and cut short his wild speculation, returning obediently to the role of a devout supplicant.

No matter what, praise first couldn't go wrong.

And so he bowed respectfully and called out in a clear voice:

"Praise to the great God of [War]! You illuminated the universe with fire and forged civilization with blood!

Under Your protection, mortals may speak their minds. Civilization grows ever more brilliant, and ideas contend freely.

It is my honor to be summoned by You.

A devout [Void] walker, faithful [Time] believer, a dauber of [Chaos] upon history, a diligent employee before [Death]'s court, a proxy wielding [Prosperity] and [Decay]'s divine authority, a witness to [Birth]'s descent into history, a bystander in [Folly]'s wager against foolishness, a candidate for [Silence]'s assimilation puppet — Cheng Shi, greets You.

May You... be in good health."

"..."

You could never have imagined that those eyes — eternally flowing with blood and fire — would actually freeze for a split second the moment Cheng Shi finished speaking.

Not even [Deceit]'s probing had provoked a reaction. Yet this shameless player's introduction had rendered [War] speechless.

For a moment, even [War] wasn't sure whether this was praise or a provocation.

Declarations of battle were commonplace. But issuing a challenge by "silencing" [War]? That was a first.

Even [Silence] wouldn't dare that, so where had this one come from?

Cheng Shi was, of course, coming from a place of cowardice.

He'd brought up [Silence] not to anger [War] but to remind Him:

'[Silence] is hostile toward me and wants to assimilate me. So I'm on Your side!'

But this laundry list of titles — as long and stinky as an old woman's foot wrappings — didn't move [War]. He simply gazed silently at Cheng Shi. After a long pause, He uttered a single line:

"Your survival instinct... is as strong as ever..."

Cheng Shi felt no shame — only pride. He even reflexively added a dose of flattery: "And Your magnificent bearing remains as... composed as always. Yes, composed."

'Close call. Almost stepped on a landmine.'

Cheng Shi's expression flickered. He hastily snuck a glance upward. Seeing that the third god of [Civilization] showed no further reaction, he breathed a small sigh of relief.

'Seems like He's not here to cause trouble.'

But the instant that thought formed, the eyes of blood and fire spoke again:

"You recited so many of Their names... hoping They would protect you from me?"

"!!??"

Cold sweat poured down Cheng Shi's back. He scrambled to justify his fear:

"Not at all!

I simply feel that as a mortal beholding a true god's glory, I cannot bear to gaze directly upon Your radiance. Only by chanting the names of the gods can I muster the courage to receive Your divine word. It is also the only way someone of no particular merit can barely be worthy of Your summons."

'What a "no particular merit"!'

[War] scoffed coldly: "So you're saying... all of Them combined... are less than me?"

"?"

Cheng Shi froze. 'Dude, are You really [War]?'

'That shamelessness is straight out of the Fun God's playbook. Is He messing with me again?'

'Uncertain. Better observe.'

He swallowed hard. Not daring to respond immediately, he stole a glance upward. Seeing the expression wasn't stern, he mumbled:

"It's not that I think so. Rather, Your spirit is worthy of the name [War]..."

"What a silver tongue that fools the world!" The eyes erupted in a hearty laugh, then suddenly dropped to a grave tone: "But you've gotten too close to Him... Beware [Deceit]."

"!!!"

'Oh no. This really isn't the unreliable Benefactor.'

'The Fear Faction standoff is over. He has no reason to play another heart-to-heart with me.'

'But what is [War] after?'

'Is He also in the Approach Faction, aligned with [Fate]?'

'Otherwise, from what position is He warning me about the Fun God?'

'How interesting. A suspect in [Order]'s sabotage telling me to watch out for my own Benefactor?'

'Heh. Has the world gone mad? He's not here to cause trouble — He brought the trouble with Him!'

'You, [War], You're not trying to drive a wedge in [Void], are You!?'

'What, the brute stopped charging head-on and started playing mind games?'

'You [Civilization] gods are truly foul!'

Internally raging. Externally groveling. Cheng Shi didn't dare voice any objection to [War]'s provocation. He simply hunched further, putting on a look of extreme shock and bewilderment:

"Forgive my ignorance. I do not understand what the True God means."

"If you were truly ignorant... [Deceit] would never have given you a second glance..."

I didn't expect your devotion to Him... would give you the courage to probe me... Very well, [Deceit] has clearly treated you well...

But have you considered... that in this universe..."

The scene felt too familiar. Cheng Shi's brain twitched, and the words spilled out before he could stop them, completing [War]'s question:

"...why would anyone be kind for no reason?"

Those eyes didn't seem to mind the minor sacrilege. They showed no reaction, confirming that this was precisely Their point.

Cheng Shi fell silent. The same question had silenced him again, and this time the asker was a true god, while the answerer had become himself.

But he quickly straightened his back, face deadly serious:

"True God above, forgive my impudence.

From start to finish, You have not made things difficult for me. So I boldly surmise that You are not from the faction that seeks to obstruct my Benefactor.

If that's the case, let me speak frankly.

I do not believe my Benefactor's shelter is necessarily 'good,' nor do I believe this 'goodness' comes without reason."

Cheng Shi had swapped concepts in this statement. The first sentence referred to [Fate]'s patronage — for [Fate] was also his Benefactor. The second was his response to [War].

The Fear Faction's "unity" was never without cause. It was all built upon upward-facing fear.

But Cheng Shi couldn't yet determine which faction [War] belonged to, so he couldn't elaborate on specifics. He was especially wary that this fear wasn't the kind of fear [War] was hoping for.

However, [War] seemed less ignorant than Cheng Shi had assumed. He stared directly at Cheng Shi. After a moment, He shook His head.

"Shared suffering may draw you closer... But have you considered... that His way of curing the illness... may not be your road to salvation?"

"!!!"

'How could I not have considered this? This is my greatest fear right now!'

'Nobody knows what the Fun God wants. Whether I'll survive when the era ends is still a massive question mark!'

'But from [War]'s tone... He wants to protect me?'

'Why?'

'Compared to the Fear Faction's Fun God, isn't [War]'s attitude today the truly unexplained kindness?'

'What is He scheming?'

...

Chapter 980: [War] May Never Cease

"Do You... know what my Benefactor — the Fun... I mean, do You know what my Benefactor is planning?"

Cheng Shi was a smart man. After several rounds of conversation, he could tell [War] wasn't hostile. Whether He was an ally required a few more exchanges. So after a moment's hesitation, he mustered his courage and asked.

The eyes of blood and fire looked ferocious, yet their mood remained steadfastly stable.

"Nobody knows what [Deceit] is doing... including [Fate]."

I only know... the word 'rebellious' doesn't describe even a hundredth of it... His target was never the likes of us... His plans are impossible to fathom...

But without question... you are a critical piece of His plan... On that alone, I should erase you!"

"!!!"

Cheng Shi jolted with primal terror, instinctively trying to step back. Only now did he realize that at some point, he'd been completely immobilized, stripped of all room to maneuver.

Even though mortals had no power to resist before gods, the sudden "imprisonment" made his heart sink in nameless dread.

He felt that if things continued this way, [War]'s scrutiny would expose him completely. After rapidly assessing the situation, he gritted his teeth and secretly drew the [Corruption] container, hiding it in his sleeve.

Instantly, fear receded like the tide and his mind sharpened.

[War] noticed Cheng Shi's little trick but didn't call it out. Instead, He continued:

"But you are fortunate... because you are equally a piece of [Fate]'s plan..."

[Fate] is even more inscrutable than His rebellious sibling god... I cannot guess whether all of this is [Deceit]'s ploy or [Fate]'s deliberate arrangement...

I only know... for [Fate] to win, you are indispensable..."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi's eyes snapped wide. "So You are on [Fate]'s side!" he blurted.

"On [Fate]'s side?"

No, you're wrong... I'm on no one's side."

"?"

Cheng Shi blanked for a moment. But the next instant, a surge of terror that broke through the [Corruption] container's dampening exploded in his mind, compelling him to press:

"Not even on [Origin]'s side?"

At this question, the eyes of blood and fire fell suddenly silent. He gave no response.

But sometimes, no response is the greatest response of all!

[War] wasn't on [Origin]'s side. He wasn't in the Approach Faction!

But He wasn't in the Fear Faction either. Because the Fear Faction would never speak in [Fate]'s favor. So what was His stance?

Considering His extreme patience, connecting it to His desire for [Fate]'s plan to succeed, an unthinkable idea suddenly bloomed in Cheng Shi's mind.

Without question, the details of [Fate]'s plan might be known to no one, but the Benefactor's fundamental intent was absolutely to approach [Origin] — or even summon [Origin].

If [War] tacitly approved [Fate]'s script yet wasn't in the Approach Faction — then what was He going to see [Origin] for?

Cheng Shi racked his brains and arrived at only one answer:

War.

This god who normally appeared docile and law-abiding was perhaps waiting for an opportunity. Waiting for [Origin] to descend or awaken, then launching a war against the undisputed supreme ruler of the universe!!!

Ha.

Cheng Shi laughed aloud.

He raised his hand, pointing at those eyes, about to say "You're insane"... but reason stopped the gesture, reducing his face — which shouldn't have shown anything beyond shock — to a twitching mess.

'He must be insane!'

'How could such a brute exist?'

'You want to charge at [Origin]!?'

'Is that why You silently destroyed [Order]!?'

'That [Order] by the Sea of Desire — was it You who shattered Him? Just because He once represented the universe's strongest, so You beat Him to pieces!?'

Cheng Shi's mind boiled. With fear siphoned away, he carefully catalogued every anomaly about [War], then leveled a single gaze at those eyes — a challenge from his very soul:

'Lord [War], the fear You fished from the Sea of Desire — could it be the fear that one day, there will be no more wars to fight!?'

'And that's why You've set Your sights on the one who gave You Your divine seat and authority — [Origin] Himself!?'

[War] read Cheng Shi's eyes but still offered no response.

The silence continued.

But in Cheng Shi's heart, the answer was already certain.

'What a Fear Faction indeed!'

'I never would have imagined that this tiny Fear Faction could have internal disagreements.'

'We fear [Origin]'s arrival bringing endless void. You fear [Origin] NOT arriving, leaving You with no one left to fight!'

'Is this right?'

'Is this reasonable?'

'Have You done the math?'

'Setting aside whether [Corruption] influenced You — even if You beat [Order] at that time — what made You think You could beat [Origin]?'

'While fishing for fear in the Sea of Desire, You fished out self-delusion too?'

'Do You even know what [Origin] represents?'

'Do You know that this starry sky You inhabit is just one of countless experimental vessels?'

'If You don't, You can't even be sure You'd beat another version of Yourself, let alone wage war against [Origin] — the being who controls the entire universe from on high!'

'So that's it. All His patience was about conserving strength. All His law-abiding was about waiting for Origin's arrival!'

'No wonder Qin Xin endured so much yet still became the War Chosen. This is truly the episode where the Chosen One most resembles his Benefactor!!'

For a moment, even Cheng Shi was stunned. Then a thought struck: perhaps he could negotiate a deal with [War]. Before, he would never have dared speak to a god this way. But now...

His predicament, his intelligence, and the absence of fear made him feel he might have earned a seat at the table.

So he furrowed his brow, straightened up, and got straight to the point:

"Great God of [War], I wish to propose a trade."

"?"

In all the countless eons since the universe's creation, through however many era-changes, never had a mortal dared to talk business in front of [War]. If business were so easy, what would war be for?

He was the very embodiment of plunder and seizure. Why would trade interest Him?

But Cheng Shi knew that his "fortunate" self was a critical key to fulfilling [War]'s long-cherished wish. Even if the negotiation failed, [War] couldn't easily harm him. So he smiled and continued:

"I can't guess what You intend. But I could hear it — You're trying to protect me. Even though the threat this time also comes from You, I'm still immensely grateful."

So in exchange for more protection, and to ensure the plan You champion continues, I'd like to trade a piece of information for Your 'eternal protection.'

What say You?"

"You... a mortal... presume to bring me news that a god does not possess?"

"Yes." Cheng Shi smiled and nodded, neither humble nor arrogant.

[War] fell silent again. He studied Cheng Shi for a long time, then suddenly broke into hearty laughter: "Commendable courage. Speak."

"Then You've agreed to provide eternal protection?"

"Hmph... not all plans proceed as expected... Timely replacements can still see a plan through..."

This world never lacks for clowns."

"..."

'Great. I overstepped and the backfire is immediate.'

Cheng Shi frowned, paused to think, then — as a show of sincerity — revealed his information first.

"Have You... ever considered fighting Yourself?"

"?" The eyes snorted. "Parallel timelines are nothing but [Time]'s tricks... If that's what you mean... perhaps [Void]'s plan really does need a replacement..."

"No, no, no. I'm not talking about parallel timelines. I'm talking about a sliced universe.

Does the True God know that beyond this starry sky lie countless universes identical to ours?

And that means... there are countless versions of [War] just like You..."

The eyes sharpened instantly, pulling Cheng Shi directly before them. Feeling the searing heat of flame and the crimson aura of bloodlust at point-blank range, Cheng Shi's smile froze on his face.

"Is this... the reason for His fear?"

"I don't know. But I believe this could be the cure for Your fear. Because war... may never cease..."

...