

POOR AS HELL

窮死人的冥府經濟學

After a lifetime of being broke, Chang Chih-Cheng never imagined that another economic crisis would be waiting for him in the afterlife! While waiting for his next rebirth, Chang Chih-Cheng must survive in the Netherworld, where denizens are taxed so heavily that the ritual offerings meant to sustain them are reduced to a mere pittance. Armed with his knowledge of economics, he formulates a rags-to-riches plan, figuring the afterlife may be his best shot at the good life!

After dying of overwork at age thirty-seven, Chang Chih-Cheng arrives in the afterlife. His virtuous character saves him from going to Hell, so he is assigned to wait in the Netherworld until it is time for rebirth. His surviving family members have been busy offering spirit money and replica sports cars in his name, and he has every reason to look forward to a comfortable afterlife. So why is his post-mortem bank account hovering just above zero?

As it turns out, the ritual offerings intended for the departed are heavily taxed in the Netherworld, and no one seems to know exactly why. Using the knowledge conferred by his economics degree, Chang Chih-Cheng runs some numbers and discovers that the Netherworld's finances are a mess, causing intense inflation. To improve his lot, he hatches a plan with his still-living younger brother to launder spirit money. Before long he is a playboy of the Netherworld, drinking and partying all night, enjoying a lifestyle he could only dream of while still living.

Despite his newfound wealth, Chang Chih-Cheng finds no peace of mind. First, there's that annoying resident of the Netherworld slums who pops out of nowhere to remind him: "money can't buy happiness". What kind of joke is that? After lifetime of struggle why shouldn't Chang Chih-Cheng finally live a little? Then there's his Netherworld driver Ping An, who is suddenly hauled off to Hell for punishment. And finally, he can't ignore the fact that his brother is spending all of his earnings



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on himself, while neglecting their elderly parents. Slowly, Chang Chih-Cheng learns he can no longer turn a blind eye to the suffering around him.

With its innovative premise and tight pacing, *Poor as Hell* takes a hard look at the relationship between money and happiness, incorporating topical issues like wealth inequality and overwork. At the end of this entertaining journey through the afterlife, readers will be left wondering if ghosts, demons, and even Hell itself pale in comparison to the real horrors of poverty and human greed.

Kagero 陽炎

The first novel of Kagero's series *The Struggles of the Dragon-Witch Shimmy* received a silver medal at the sixth annual Sharp Point Media Awards. He is the author of the *When a Pop Idol Decides to Become a Real Man* series, and has contributed to the innovative public messaging / novel / video game franchise *Let's Go! K.R.T. Girls*.