

## The Gods 231

Chapter 231: History's Protagonist Was Never the Players...

No one could have predicted that a prison disaster would be resolved this way. Cheng Shi—a deathmatch convict—had been escorted out of the very headquarters that manufactured deathmatch convicts by an official Grand Tribunal knight.

If Cheng Shi hadn't lived through the absurdity himself, he'd have slapped a clown hat on whoever told this story and given them a round of applause: "Nice fiction!"

But this was reality—far more absurd than any script.

Beyond the laboratory's main door ran a long tunnel that terminated at the underground shaft and storage area of an abandoned quarry.

Melina escorted Cheng Shi there, then directed him to leave via the mine elevator.

After he'd gone, she returned to the laboratory alone and unlocked a sealed iron door, releasing the helpless Iron Law Knights trapped inside.

"Melina, you violated the Secret Experiment Protocol! You had no authority to bar our entry!"

"Right. I had no authority. But I did it."

"You... Melina, Lord Keinlaur specifically said Lady Galusha is no longer permitted to come here—"

"I'm just a bodyguard. I can't control her decisions. Why don't you tell Lady Galusha in person?"

"..." The lead knight ground his teeth. "I was locked out by you!"

"That wasn't intentional. It was an accident. I'm not assigned to this facility, so my unfamiliarity with the laboratory's systems is understandable."

"If you don't believe me, feel free to report me to the Knight Trust Society and the Fair Arbitration Tribunal. If I have time, I'll attend the hearing."

"You..."

"Mark my words! I will!"

"And I will report truthfully to Lord Keinlaur that you obstructed the Iron Law Knights' response, delayed the laboratory's emergency protocol, and disregarded the Secret Experiment Protocol—"

"Do as you please." Melina cut the guard off for the second time, then took up her cold, expressionless post by the main entrance, quietly waiting for that lady to emerge.

Meanwhile, the exasperated guards raced to prove their diligence, rushing into the experiment workshop to investigate everything that had transpired.

What followed was their exchange with Galusha.

And just as the guards poured single-mindedly into the experiment site, the main door cracked open again. A figure slipped through and hid behind Melina.

Melina frowned slightly and said in a frigid tone:

"Why didn't you notify me before initiating the plan? If I hadn't noticed the explosion in the Colosseum and brought Galusha here, we might have missed our window."

"We don't get many chances to try again, Grind!"

The hidden figure was none other than Grind—the vice-captain of the Iron Law Knights' Seventeenth Squad, the very one who had taken an interest in Cheng Shi in the Colosseum and extended an invitation.

Hearing this, his body stiffened. His face was dark enough to drip water.

"I didn't initiate the plan!"

"I'd only just found a suitable triggerman when the explosives I'd planted three months ago were detonated by someone else! I was dug out of the rubble myself. The moment I got free, I rushed here."

"What do you mean the plan was initiated?"

"?"

Melina's eyes widened in shock. Abandoning all pretense, she whirled to face Grind, her expression grim:

"A deathmatch convict called out your name. I assumed you'd started the plan ahead of schedule!"

Grind's face turned black as a cauldron bottom:

"You let him go? You released Selius!?"

"Melina, how could you! Have you been in the Grand Tribunal so long you've forgotten where you come from!?"

"The Grand Scholars are all waiting for our report!"

"Shut up, you fool. This is your failure in planning! How does a Master of Traps let someone else trigger his explosive trap?"

"And they knew your name! Who was this person you found? Was he wearing red prison garb?"

Grind froze.

'It's him. Red Number Four! How is this possible? How could it be this coincidental?'

'How did a mere prisoner find his way here?'

'The Tower of Logic spent years investigating before finally pinpointing Selius's location. He's just a convict—how did he walk straight in? And right after I made contact with him...'

'What kind of script is this?'

A torrent of thoughts crashed through Grind's mind. He asked in a low voice:

"And Selius? Is he dead?"

"Yes."

"You did it? If you completed the mission, why are you questioning me?"

"I didn't do it! When that convict left, I checked him with my lance—there was no parasitic soul on his body!"

"I don't know if it was him who killed Selius, but Selius is definitely dead, and that prisoner definitely walked out of the workshop where Selius was confined!"

Grind's mind went blank again.

"You're certain?"

"Unless one of Them is providing cover—yes, I'm certain."

"Ironic. The very person you recruited, and you know nothing about him!"

"He wasn't like this before. Today it's like he became a completely different person."

"What do you mean?"

"Forget it. It doesn't matter. As long as you can confirm the real Selius is dead, our mission is complete. I'm sick of these rules. Damn [Order]—so rigid it drives people insane."

"Watch your tongue. This is His domain. If you want to curse, do it when we're home."

"Someone's coming. I'm leaving. I hope the next time we meet, it's at the academic symposium in Tusnat."

"Peer into essence. Walk toward truth. Until we meet again."

Grind vanished—as silently and formlessly as he'd arrived.

Melina sensed his departure. Her lips moved in a silent prayer: "Peer into essence. Walk toward truth. Until we meet again."

When she turned back and lifted her gaze, the little girl flanked by two knight escorts had already drawn near.

"Aunt Melina, who were you talking to?"

Before Galusha, Melina shed her coldness. She cracked a warm smile:

"No one. I was rehearsing my defense statement, in case someone reports me to the Knight Trust Society and the Fair Arbitration Tribunal."

She cast a sidelong glance at the two knights behind Galusha.

Both young knights broke into a cold sweat.

"They won't. Everything you did today was under my orders. I'll ask Lord Keinlaur to pardon your offense of ignorance."

"Let's go. Grandpa Selius has been killed. I have no reason to come here anymore."

The guards trailing behind hesitated, then one whispered a reminder:

"Lady Galusha, Mr. Selius is still tidying up his documents. If you wish to consult him, you may still—"

"Forget it. I don't want to speak with a counterfeit. You know what I mean by counterfeit. Let's go, Aunt Melina."

The girl took Melina's hand and walked quietly toward the exit.

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Montelani Fair Arbitration Tribunal.

At its highest level was a suite that could only be described as lavish. This had once been a place for worshipping [Order], but ever since the Deathmatch Sentence was enacted, it had become the lodging of choice whenever a Supreme Inquisitor visited Montelani.

It was now evening. Seven or eight hours had passed since the morning's explosion. The setting sun clung stubbornly to the horizon, unwilling to depart, draping all of Montelani in a warm amber filter.

Supreme Inquisitor Keinlaur stood on the suite's balcony, gazing toward the collapsed Colosseum, his expression grave.

Before long, a knock echoed through the room, followed by a little girl pushing the door open.

He didn't turn around, yet he already knew who it was. Even so, his face showed not a flicker of change—his expression remained stern as ever:

"Little Galusha is back. What did you learn today?"

The girl walked obediently behind Keinlaur and spoke softly:

"I learned that useless people should be discarded. If someone must be killed, don't hesitate."

"Very good. Who taught you that?"

"You, honorable Supreme Inquisitor. My dear grandfather, Lord Keinlaur."

"[Order] above, law below. Even killing must follow rules. One must not act on whim. I don't believe I taught you any such thing."

"But your every word and action taught me exactly that."

"Good. Little Galusha has grown up." Keinlaur's words sounded approving, but his expression never softened—still just as severe and cold. "Selius was not a good teacher. He shouldn't have filled your head with the noise of [Truth] this early."

"I asked him to."

"You wish to pursue [Truth]?"

"No. I simply feel that none of the three lords truly like [Order]. So I wanted to seek answers from another deity."

"[Truth] peers into essence. Perhaps it can tell me why."

"Childish prattle. As [Order]'s Favored One, I both believe in Him and revere Him. How could I not like Him?"

"The lords live surrounded by lies. How tiring that must be."

"However, Lord Keinlaur, I still want to ask one question."

"Go ahead."

"If one day [Order] is no longer orderly—what do we do then?"

Keinlaur watched the sunset slowly sink below the horizon, its afterglow fading into nothing. Without joy or sorrow, he said:

"The knowledge you learned today has already written your answer."

"Go now. I have matters to attend to."

"Yes." Galusha lowered her head obediently and left.

After she'd gone, another figure appeared on the windowsill—a knight cloaked in shadow, kneeling respectfully on one knee. He reported in a low voice:

"The Master of Traps, Grind, has left Montelani. The Learned Poet, Melina, has made no move—she remains at Lady Galusha's side."

"My lord, are we truly letting them go?"

"Why shouldn't we?"

"Regardless of who orchestrated this chaos, someone must bear the crime. Wouldn't you agree?"

"The Tower of Logic is already in turmoil. I doubt those old men on the Erudition Presidium would mind a little more chaos."

"Go. Find an opportunity to tell Galusha about Melina's true identity."

"My lord, Lady Galusha still believes she helped Selius escape. In that case..."

"She's so young..."

"It doesn't matter. She can endure it—and she must."

"Otherwise, after I'm gone, how will [Order]'s radiance reach beyond the Grand Tribunal?"

"Civilization's fire endures. [Order] persists eternal." The shadow-cloaked knight struck his left shoulder in salute and withdrew into the dark.

"Yes... [Order] persists eternal. I too wish He could persist forever. But I have already seen His decline and decay."

"So how, then, do we survive?"

