

## The Gods 32

### Chapter 32

“What?”

Bai Ling, startled, jumped slightly at Cheng Shi’s sudden outburst.

Cheng Shi, his excitement rising, explained quickly:

“Bai Ling, he mentioned a broker!

So, isn’t it possible that the guard didn’t know who the dwarves were? Maybe he only recognized the ring?”

Bai Ling wasn’t slow on the uptake and quickly understood Cheng Shi’s point.

If the guard had hired the dwarves through a broker, then he wouldn’t necessarily know who they were or what they looked like, at least not in detail.

The dwarves in the servant’s quarters hadn’t shown any logical inconsistencies. They even knew to kill the invading players to cover their tracks.

Bai Ling’s eyes widened in disbelief. “But... but we already found the answer! The trial’s solution is right there!”

Fang Shiqing chimed in, agreeing with Bai Ling’s confusion:

“Cheng Shi, the memory labyrinth has never had a second answer.”

Heh, Cheng Shi thought to himself. Forbidden techniques never showed up in the [War] trials either, but we encountered one last time, didn’t we?

“I remember the prophet girl’s Divine Will roll was... a 5, right?” Cheng Shi asked pointedly.

Xu Lu’s face flushed with anger when Cheng Shi referred to her as “prophet girl,” but she didn’t dare speak up.

Fang Shiqing, deep in thought, nodded. “Yes.”

“So, isn’t there a possibility that this prophecy is telling us that we still have another 50% choice to make?”

Cheng Shi locked eyes with Xu Lu and spoke slowly and deliberately:

“She’s at 1600 points. Her dice has 10 sides. Rolling a 5... that’s exactly half.”

“!!!”

Everyone was stunned, but no one could argue with Cheng Shi’s logic. His explanation made sense.

And with [Fate]’s prophecies, no one could say for sure what they meant until the very end.

“But we don’t have any other clues or evidence to find a second answer,” Fang Shiqing said with a frown. “Cheng Shi, the manor is full of people—too many. And too many have died. We’re in a very passive position.”

“But we at least have time, don’t we?” Cheng Shi flashed a grin and started walking.

“I can think of someone who might be one of the answers.”

“Who?” Bai Ling quickly followed him, while Fang Shiqing hesitated for a moment but eventually dragged along a reluctant Xu Lu.

Xu Lu clearly didn't want to go, but Fang Shiqing held her tightly, preventing her from running off.

It was obvious that Fang Shiqing still believed in Cheng Shi and didn't want Xu Lu running off to her death.

But that wasn't how Xu Lu saw things. She glared at Fang Shiqing with a mix of anger and mockery.

In her mind, the once-reliable "big sister" had lost her reason.

The [Time] follower was corrupting her!

Cheng Shi led the group away from the second floor, quickly navigating the manor as they searched for their answer.

The guests at the banquet hadn't left; they were still chatting and laughing as if the duke's lateness was a common occurrence.

Cheng Shi ignored the clueless nobles and led his group away from the main hall, back toward the servant's quarters where everything had started.

Just as everyone was starting to wonder why they had returned, Cheng Shi smiled, staring down at the ground by the doorway.

Fang Shiqing followed his gaze, noticing a faint layer of sandy soil at the threshold, with a shallow footprint pressed into it.

"What is this?"

Cheng Shi pointed at the ground and chuckled:

“See the dirt from the courtyard?”

I figured that whoever hired the dwarves, for whatever reason, would come to check on them when they didn’t show up at the right place and time. So, I scattered some fine sand by the door.

And now, as you can see, there’s the footprint of a noblewoman’s high-heeled shoe.”

Bai Ling, finally catching on, asked—perhaps playing dumb on purpose—“So, what does this mean? Uh, that the duchess was here? That she’s connected to the broker?”

Cheng Shi gave her a look as if she were an idiot, but before he could respond, Fang Shiqing spoke up, her face thoughtful:

“It means the duchess isn’t as simple as we thought.

Cheng Shi mentioned that her reaction to the duke’s death was extreme, but if the dwarves were hired to assassinate the duke, she shouldn’t have been here.

The only explanation is that she knew the dwarves were coming.”

“Exactly!” Cheng Shi nodded. “As the duchess, she’s recently taken an unusual interest in the dwarven circus. That says it all.”

“What does it say?”

“I have a theory, but I won’t make any definite claims until we find the duchess.”

Fang Shiqing nodded sharply. “Let’s split up and search!”

She hurriedly dragged a resentful Xu Lu along with her, while Bai Ling sidled over to Cheng Shi, whispering:

“Big shot, you’re not hiding anything this time?”

Cheng Shi clicked his tongue and scoffed. “Can’t hide things anymore—if I rely on you, we’re doomed!”

Bai Ling giggled awkwardly. “Sorry, big shot. I’m too weak.”

That phrase... it sounded familiar.

Cheng Shi froze for a moment, looking at Bai Ling’s slightly apologetic face. His gaze softened.

“It’s fine. A big shot can carry you to victory.”

With that, he strode out of the room, searching for the duchess.

Bai Ling hurried after him, lifting the hem of her dress.

It took them about half an hour, but eventually, they found the duchess “on her way out” along a narrow path in the back of the manor’s gardens.

Seeing her about to leave in a hurry, the players quickly dealt with the guards around her, stopping her escape.

The duchess, glaring at the group of strangers, angrily demanded:

“Who are you? What do you want?”

You dare attack the duchess of Brookes on Brookes land, near the duke’s manor? Have you lost your minds?”

Cheng Shi strolled up to her with an easy smile and asked in return:

“Are you really the duchess?”

Dillar’s expression faltered, but she quickly masked it with fury as she spat:

“You’ll pay for your foolishness!”

Cheng Shi ignored her anger and continued conversationally:

“Apologies, my lady. I’d like to tell you a story. Once I’m done, you can go freely.

I promise, my companions won’t harm a hair on your head.”

Dillar hesitated. “Really?”

“Really. But in return, you won’t be able to seek retribution for this encounter.”

“You... you came here just to tell me a story?”

“Yes, esteemed lady, shall I begin?”

Dillar, though reluctant, realized she had no choice but to agree. “Then speak.”

Cheng Shi bowed slightly and, in a slow, deliberate tone, said:

“The story I want to tell is about a group of dwarves, corrupted by an underground faith, who tried to seize control of a small town by pretending to be something they weren’t.”

The moment the words left his mouth, Dillar bolted.

Fang Shiqing's eyes widened, immediately pulling out a page from her book and casting it in the duchess's path. Vines sprouted from the ground, tangling around Dillar's legs and sending her crashing to the ground.

Bai Ling, quick on her feet, dashed over to tie her up.

But as she tightened the ropes, she felt them tear through the duchess's waist, ripping her skin.

And beneath the torn skin was... a pair of oversized feet and a bald head.

"???"

"Wha...?"

"A dwarf!?"

Everyone stared at Cheng Shi in disbelief, and he let out a long breath, smiling as he said:

"You see? That's the story I wanted to tell."

Fang Shiqing stood there, still in shock. She asked, her voice trembling slightly:

"When did you figure it out?"

Cheng Shi thought for a moment.

"Probably when I remembered that conversation in the tavern, hearing how they impersonated so many people."

Fang Shiqing couldn't help but feel a pang of regret that Cheng Shi had turned down the Torchbearer invitation.

Cheng Shi was clearly a high-caliber [Player], someone adept at keen observation and reading people.

More importantly, throughout everything, his heartstrings had never turned dark.

Not even when he killed Huang Bo.

"Big sis, why are you staring at me?"

Fang Shiqing sighed. "You know what I'm thinking."

"Come on, I'm not a mind reader," Cheng Shi replied with a grin as he walked over to the "duchess" and pulled out the two dwarves hidden beneath the human skin.

The ugly dwarves, now exposed, covered their faces and wailed:

"It was all Sombos' idea! He made us impersonate the duke and duchess to seize control of the town. We were just following orders! Please don't kill us!"

"I'm not interested in killing you. I just want to know... who's trapped in the memory?"

With that, Cheng Shi cast two quick hypnosis spells on the dwarves.

This time, neither Xu Lu nor Fang Shiqing intervened, leaving Cheng Shi to handle it.

After a brief interrogation, the dwarf who had been playing the duchess's lower half exploded in a burst of light, re-forming into another gate.

The second Final Gate!

“This... there’s really a second one.”

“!?!?”

Fang Shiqing stared at the second gate, her expression a mix of conflicting emotions.

“Cheng Shi... will you really not reconsider what I said?”

Xu Lu and Bai Ling exchanged glances, watching the interaction between the two of them. Cheng Shi simply smiled lightly.

“No, thank you.”

With that, he bowed slightly and, with a hint of amusement, said:

“The show is over. Please exit the performance in an orderly fashion.”

What was meant to be a lighthearted comment to ease the mood fell flat—no one moved.

Seeing the awkward silence, Cheng Shi sighed and prepared to leave.

But that’s when Bai Ling acted.

With a mischievous grin, she hugged Cheng Shi’s arm, leaned in, and planted a kiss on his cheek before darting toward the Final Gate like a swallow returning to its nest.

Just as she was about to step through, Cheng Shi called out:

“Why did you choose Him?”

Bai Ling froze, turning back to flash a seductive grin at Cheng Shi.

“Isn’t it because I like Him?”

With that, she disappeared through the gate.

Her response was phrased as a question, but it was also an affirmation.

Cheng Shi blinked, then broke into a laugh.

He wasn’t laughing at Bai Ling’s brazenness—he was laughing because she had lied.

As a companion he had met by chance and gone through life-and-death battles with, he never pried too much into others’ choices.

But knowing that Bai Ling had lied was already something worth smiling over.

Living in this world was hard enough. There was no reason to judge others.

Besides, she hadn’t harmed anyone.

Watching her disappear through the gate, Cheng Shi’s smile grew brighter.

But Fang Shiqing, standing nearby, wasn’t as pleased. She wanted to invite him once more but knew it would be futile—Cheng Shi’s answer wasn’t going to change.

With a heavy heart, she started walking toward the Final Gate.

Before stepping through, she gently pushed Xu Lu forward—clearly not wanting to leave her alone with Cheng Shi at the end.

But just as Xu Lu was about to step through the gate, something unexpected happened:

She suddenly began to struggle violently, pulling away and running several meters back.

Staring at the stunned Fang Shiqing and the confused Cheng Shi, Xu Lu screamed, her voice filled with hysteria:

“It’s fake! It’s all fake! He’s lying!

Sister Fang, he’s lying!

This whole thing is a trick!

Don’t trust him!

This gate is a trap! We’ll all die if we go through!”

Title: A Story and the Second Final Gate