

The Gods 51

Chapter 51: The Trial's Difficulty Continues to Increase

Was this the semi-divine dagger that killed without a trace?

The scene before Cheng Shi left little room for doubt.

The dagger was clenched tightly in the ascetic monk's hands, but he clearly couldn't control the artifact. His entire body trembled, as if the dagger itself was shaking him.

Seeing the monk's bloodshot eyes and the veins bulging in his temples, Cheng Shi feared the monk might soon collapse.

"Judge Moxius and the Grand Tribunal are right downstairs. They'll figure this out any second. Drop the field, and I'll help you!"

Cheng Shi's words of concern were met with the monk's familiar silence.

Even as his strength waned, the ascetic monk refused to deactivate the Field of Silence.

Cheng Shi was left speechless.

"You've found the key clue to the trial, haven't you?"

"....."

"Your condition is deteriorating! You'll die if you don't let go!"

"....."

Fine, Cheng Shi thought, you want to be a lone wolf?

“Okay, okay. Then die if you want!”

Unable to communicate, Cheng Shi turned and prepared to leave.

The noise they were making was bound to draw the attention of the Grand Tribunal. They weren't fools. It wouldn't take long for them to figure out which room was the bard's and come running.

If they found Cheng Shi here, there would be no way to explain his presence at the killer's door.

How could a “normal guest” be so interested in a murderer that he'd come running to the killer's room while everyone else was trying to escape?

There's a time to search for clues, and a time to save yourself.

Cheng Shi couldn't deal with this stubborn monk, so he decided to find another way out.

But just as he was about to leave, a terrifying bolt of violet lightning flashed past his cheek, striking the ascetic monk squarely in the chest.

Thunderstrike!

Cheng Shi was shaken to his core, his pupils shrinking in shock.

The searing heat and paralyzing numbness left him unable to feel one side of his face.

He glanced forward and saw, standing at the stairwell on the second floor, a cold-eyed man glaring at him.

Moxius!

The judge had arrived even faster than Cheng Shi had anticipated.

Behind him were several enforcers, some curious onlookers, and among the crowd, Fang Jue and Du Xiguang, both watching with furrowed brows.

It was clear they had already dealt with the bard downstairs.

So quickly?

Cheng Shi's instincts told him something must have gone wrong downstairs.

He glanced toward Fang Jue, then hesitated and looked at Du Xiguang instead.

As expected, Fang Jue was stone-faced, saying nothing, while Du Xiguang's expression was conflicted, and in the end, he gave a slight shake of his head.

Something had happened to the bard!

That's why they had rushed upstairs!

Fang Jue, the faithful follower of [Order], was still caught up in worrying about the conflict between their faiths at a time like this.

Honestly... Cheng Shi thought, it's hard to blame him. [Chaos] isn't exactly a faith anyone likes.

But now wasn't the time to dwell on that. He had to figure out how to distance himself from the fact that he had been caught at the killer's door.

Cheng Shi's mind raced as he quickly feigned shock, stumbling to the side and collapsing to the floor, all while sneaking a glance at the ascetic monk.

That massive lightning strike had merely grazed Cheng Shi with a few stray sparks, and yet half of his face had gone numb.

How could anyone survive a direct hit like that?

And yet, the monk did.

Though his body was scorched and mangled, the ascetic monk had survived, his charred form flung across the room.

At the same time, the eerie red dagger slipped from his grip and landed at Cheng Shi's feet.

Moxius, too, seemed momentarily surprised that his thunderous judgment hadn't killed the monk.

But he quickly composed himself, his voice as cold as an abyss:

"Impressive. You're the first to survive my lightning punishment.

Such a resilient body, even I must begrudgingly admire it.

The southern front is in need of strong men like you.

Surrender, hand over 'it,' and I will grant you a chance to serve as a 'war prisoner!'"

Criminals sentenced to death could sometimes earn a slim chance at survival by serving on the battlefield. Such individuals were known as war prisoners.

Of course, no matter how many enemies they killed, they could only avoid execution. Upon returning, they would still face imprisonment.

[Order] had to be maintained, and punishment could not be evaded.

Once a sinner, always a sinner. That was the will of the Grand Tribunal.

It was also the reason Fang Jue had hesitated to join the Tribunal.

Fang Jue frowned at Moxius's offer.

The crackling storm of lightning still raged at the tip of Moxius's scepter as he stared down the monk with cold, unfriendly eyes. It was clear that if the monk dared to refuse, the furious thunder would consume him without hesitation.

Cheng Shi, hiding off to the side like a bystander, was already thinking about how the follower of [Silence] could escape this.

But to everyone's surprise...

The monk didn't seem to want to escape at all!

When the ascetic monk struggled to his feet, he didn't flee. Instead, he charged straight toward Cheng Shi!

No!

Toward the dagger at Cheng Shi's feet!

Cheng Shi's eyes went wide in disbelief as he frantically scrambled backward.

Dude, do you really have to be this stubborn?

Is your skull so thick you can't survive without being reckless?

Do you think the judge's lightning is some kind of therapy?

That'll get you killed!

Cheng Shi's quick retreat saved his life, because at the same moment the monk made his move, Moxius sent another bolt of lightning roaring toward him!

Boom!

There was no escaping this time!

The monk was hit by the full force of the strike, instantly reduced to a pile of charred ash.

This bolt of lightning carried far more wrath than the one before.

Judge Moxius was furious.

And the criminal...

Was dead.

Dust scattered, and the thunder faded.

Throughout the entire process of his death, the ascetic monk hadn't spoken a single word.

Even in his final moments, he had followed the Divine Will of [Silence], demonstrating his devotion to his god.

“Bzzzz—”

The lingering thunder left Cheng Shi’s ears ringing.

His skull felt like it was splitting, and his mind was trembling.

Since the monk had been charging toward him, Cheng Shi had caught a clear view of the look in his eyes.

In that brief moment before the lightning struck, Cheng Shi saw the determination in the monk’s gaze disappear.

The monk hadn’t been killed by the lightning.

He had died from fear.

Yes, it was the cursed dagger that had killed him—the semi-divine artifact When Fear Descends.

The monk had died, not from the judge’s punishment, but from the fear brought on by the very artifact he had tried to seize!

Cheng Shi couldn’t believe it. He quickly turned to scan the crowd.

If the bard downstairs had already been dealt with, then when had the ascetic monk been marked by the dagger?

Could it be that the real killer was still among them?

Even under the gaze of the Grand Tribunal, were they still killing?

There were six players yesterday. Now, only three remained.

And it was only the second day of the trial!

Cold sweat ran down Cheng Shi's back as he stayed silent.

He hugged his arms tightly, doing his best to play the part of a frightened, injured guest, hoping to blend in.

Moxius, of course, had seen through it all. He knew Cheng Shi wasn't innocent, and he knew what the priest had been trying to do—take the dagger for himself.

But the one thing Cheng Shi had going for him was that, though he had been in the wrong place, he hadn't actually done anything wrong.

And for someone like Moxius, someone who followed [Order], that was all that mattered.

He couldn't declare someone guilty without cause.

To do so would be to violate the very principles of [Order].

[Order] had granted the judges their authority, but it had also set boundaries on their power.

With a cold expression, Moxius walked over to Cheng Shi, ignoring the "injured guest" and bending down to pick up the sinister red dagger.

It had nearly claimed the monk's life, yet in Moxius's hands, the semi-divine artifact didn't resist. It lay as still as any ordinary piece of iron.

But the moment When Fear Descends fell into Moxius's hands, the remaining three players' faces turned ashen.

The difficulty of the trial had just escalated once again.