

The Gods 55

Chapter 55: The Mastermind!

The blue [Memory] energy tugged at the ascetic monk's deepest memories, slicing through his consciousness like a surgeon's scalpel, slowly rewriting his awareness.

In the blink of an eye, he forgot why he was there and even who Du Xiguang and Fang Jue were. His eyes grew vacant as he stood motionless.

"You've got 15 seconds! Hurry!" Du Xiguang's urgent shout snapped Fang Jue out of his daze. He immediately reached for *When Fear Descends*.

He could feel the semi-divine artifact struggling in his grasp, though it wasn't as violent as one might expect from something capable of throwing a person across the room. Still, to be safe, Fang Jue issued another command:

"No resistance is allowed here!"

In theory, the power of [Order] that players wielded was far too weak to affect a semi-divine artifact, especially one with dual divinities like *When Fear Descends*. It shouldn't have been impacted at all.

But to everyone's surprise, the artifact quieted down under Fang Jue's decree.

The tension in the room was so thick that no one really registered this oddity.

Fang Jue, feeling a surge of relief, quickly picked up the dagger and tossed it to Du Xiguang.

He wasn't undermining his own abilities; he simply believed that since they were in a memory, the person who controlled the memory would have more means to deal with it than he did.

Du Xiguang leaped to his feet, catching the semi-divine artifact with a sigh of relief.

Finally!

After all their efforts, they had secured it. The clue to the trial might finally be within reach...

“Boom!”

Before Du Xiguang could even take a closer look at it, a terrifying bolt of lightning struck him directly.

“Pfft—!”

Du Xiguang was blasted across the room, his body charred as he slammed into the hallway wall.

But even then, he held on tightly to the dagger.

“Impressive. You’re the first sinner to survive my lightning.”

“Such resilience, even I must admire it.”

“The southern front is in dire need of soldiers.”

“Surrender, hand it over, and I’ll give you a chance to serve as a ‘war prisoner.’”

The same words echoed in everyone’s ears—only this time, they were directed at a new target.

Fang Jue stared at his wristwatch in disbelief. Moxius had arrived six minutes earlier than he had in the memory!

Was the noise from the ascetic monk’s forced entry what changed the timing?

He looked up and noticed that neither he nor Du Xiguang were present in the crowd behind Moxius.

Instead, Cheng Shi was standing in the spot where they should have been, positioned where they had stood before.

Fang Jue gazed at the scene in a daze, realizing that this journey through memory was likely to end in failure.

But just then, something unexpected happened again!

Du Xiguang, still clutching *When Fear Descends*, seemed to realize something. His face paled as he looked at Fang Jue with horror.

It looked like he wanted to say something, but before he could open his mouth, the light in his eyes abruptly vanished.

Fang Jue's body froze, and the scene in front of him shattered like a broken mirror, dissolving into fragments. In the blink of an eye, he was pulled out of the sea of memories.

Everything went dark once more.

When his consciousness returned to his body, Fang Jue realized he was no longer in the inn.

He opened his eyes and saw shackles around his wrists and chains binding his ankles. For a moment, he was too stunned to speak.

Sitting in front of him was one of the enforcers from the Grand Tribunal, the same one who had arrested people in the inn earlier that morning.

"Alright, enough with the boring tricks. If you remember anything, you'd better confess now.

It'll be better for both of us."

...

Meanwhile.

Cheng Shi opened his eyes and found himself no longer in the inn.

He was in a dimly lit cave, with stalactites hanging from the ceiling, arranged in patterns that resembled symbols. The sight reminded him of a place he had visited before:

The underground!

During a previous trial in the underground, he had seen similar symbol-like stalactites. It was said that these formations were the result of cave sprites expressing their devotion to the [Gods].

How did I end up here?

Could the mastermind behind all this really be a follower of [Corruption] from the underground?

As Cheng Shi cautiously observed his surroundings, a familiar figure appeared before him, smiling warmly.

Cheng Shi was utterly shocked, his mouth falling open.

“It’s really you?”

The figure smiled and nodded.

“Indeed, you’ve already started to suspect me. But I’m curious—my disguise was nearly flawless. How did you figure it out?”

Cheng Shi didn't sense any malice coming from the person in front of him. In fact, he felt a trace of kindness. After a moment of thought, he answered earnestly:

"To be honest, I wasn't entirely sure. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have been able to make a definitive judgment.

As for why I suspected you... it's similar to why I suspected the bard puppet you controlled.

When someone wants to kill through fear, simply spreading rumors to cause panic isn't very efficient.

If I were that person, I'd first make everyone feel absolutely safe, then create terror in the place they feel safest.

That psychological shock alone would be enough to break the average person's defenses, turning their fear into a weapon for me.

Maybe that's why you kept encouraging new guests to take a look at 'Blooming in Waiting of Withering,' right?"

Standing before Cheng Shi was none other than the innkeeper of The Burgeoning Light of Life.

The innkeeper laughed heartily and clapped his hands.

"Smart, very smart. You're indeed a good fit."

"Fit?" Cheng Shi's brow furrowed.

"Yes, a perfect fit. Since you were able to guess it was me, why don't you try guessing why I'm here?"

Cheng Shi thought for a moment before answering:

“You deliberately delivered the murder dagger to the Grand Tribunal’s hands. Your target is probably one of the judges.

Or maybe it’s Moxius himself!

I’m not entirely familiar with the Grand Tribunal’s history, but I know some things about this era.

The followers of [Truth] from the Tower of Logic have discovered so many natural laws that they’ve become convinced of their own omnipotence. Their confidence in unraveling the ultimate mysteries of divinity is at an all-time high.

But since each scholar has their own system of understanding, communication among them has become a mess. Instead of sharing ideas, they mostly criticize each other’s theories. This has led to increasing chaos in the scholarly world, where everyone holds onto their own beliefs.

Now, they scorn [Order] for its stagnation and tire of their peers’ relentless pursuit of knowledge. Add to that the influence of the underground faith, and it won’t take long before they begin a war in pursuit of a singular ‘truth.’

Once the war starts, it will be unstoppable. The flames of war will spread to the southern borders of the Grand Tribunal.

And you, since you’ve already made it to the heart of the Grand Tribunal and seem intent on killing Moxius, are likely here to disrupt the Tribunal’s rear defenses, making it harder for them to maintain their front lines.

In other words, you want to drag the Grand Tribunal into the chaos of war, pulling the judges into the conflict as well.

With the Grand Tribunal distracted, the underground faith would have the opportunity to consume more surface factions, spreading its influence in the ensuing chaos. That would align perfectly with your interests.

In that case, killing a first-class judge—especially one known as the ‘Son of [Order]’—would make for a perfect starting point.

Am I right?”

The innkeeper listened in silence, his face showing genuine admiration as he clapped his hands again.

“Impressive! Truly impressive!

You’ve practically nailed it.

Your thinking is sharp—so sharp that it’s hard for me to believe you don’t belong to us.

Even with so much missing information, you’ve managed to piece together this many conclusions from just a few days of observation. Remarkable.”

“Us?” Cheng Shi caught on to the innkeeper’s choice of words, surprised.

“You’re not alone?”

“Of course not. Who do you think could operate so flawlessly under Moxius’s nose without leaving the slightest trace?”

I admit, I couldn’t do it.

So yes, you guessed right—and also wrong.

ArDOS really was a puppet, but he wasn't mine.

He was his own!"