

The Gods 22

Chapter 22: Circus? Yes, Circus!

When Cheng Shi opened his eyes again, he found himself seated high up in a circular amphitheater. Below, a sea of heads filled the audience, and at the center, a stage teemed with the noise of cheers and laughter.

Onstage, seven or eight extravagantly dressed “giants” were performing acrobatics.

“This is...”

His teammates began waking up one by one, and upon seeing the scene, they exclaimed:

“A circus?”

“Ugh... it smells bad.”

“Whoa, they’re huge.”

“Belus Circus, mentioned by one of the big shots in the Bard’s channel. He once shared that the thing that left the greatest impression on him was the ‘Giant Acrobats’ because those giants aren’t actually giants—they’re clusters of dwarves cleverly pieced together to form ‘fakes.’”

Once again, Fang Shiqing showcased the vast knowledge of a [Truth] follower, fully living up to the title of “Scholar.”

“Dwarves under the clothes?”

Ah Ming had arrived late. Hearing only part of the explanation, his jaw dropped as he stared at the stage, trying to detect any flaws.

Unfortunately for him, the giants were flawless. There was no visible hesitation in their movements, no sign of disjointedness.

“That’s pretty impressive!”

“Anyone else smell something weird? Maybe we should move somewhere else to talk?”

“Dwarves, huh? I mean... I wouldn’t mind.”

The group was still basking in the joy of having cleared the first memory layer, unaware of the problem looming ahead. Only Cheng Shi and Fang Shiqing had more somber expressions.

It was too big.

This circus stage was enormous. The number of people here was easily several times that of the previous tavern scene. With so many potential targets, finding the “errors” would be a monumental task.

Cheng Shi glanced down at his pocket watch. It read 9:56; two hours had already passed.

“I’ve got good news and bad news. Which one do you want first?”

Everyone looked at Cheng Shi in confusion. Fang Shiqing frowned slightly and said softly:

“Start with the bad news so we can prepare.”

Cheng Shi nodded. “The bad news is, we’ve just passed the hour mark, and the doctor here forgot to log your statuses. So if anyone gets sick, I’ll have to use ‘Accelerated Metabolism’ for treatment.”

[Time] grants two blessings for priest-class skills: one is a “Time Rewind” that returns the body’s condition to the last logged hour.

The other is “Accelerated Metabolism,” the skill that Fang Shiqing had previously warned him not to use on NPCs. This skill rapidly accelerates the target’s metabolism to heal injuries or cure negative effects in the body over time.

As the saying goes: time heals all wounds.

But in truth, Accelerated Metabolism doesn’t heal in the conventional sense—it merely speeds up the process of forgetting. It doesn’t actually cure anyone; it just lets them bypass the pain faster.

“And the good news?”

“The good news is that the ‘Giant Acrobatics’ show has just begun. We’ll get to watch the whole performance,” Cheng Shi said cheerfully.

“???”

How is that good news?!

Aren’t we short on time?!

Xu Lu’s face fell as she pinched her nose and tried to stand up to leave, but when she saw Fang Shiqing not moving, she hesitated, sitting back down despite raising her rear several times.

Fang Shiqing chuckled softly and then began giving out assignments.

Because of his social anxiety, Cheng Shi was stationed at the center of the stage. His task was to investigate the entire circus troupe.

“Wow, you have a lot of faith in me,” Cheng Shi muttered sarcastically.

Fang Shiqing simply shrugged and walked off with Xu Lu.

Ah Ming, torn between wanting to comfort Cheng Shi and rushing off to complete his own investigation, spent a few seconds in awkward indecision before finally telling Cheng Shi to “hang in there” and quickly scurrying away.

Only Bai Ling remained seated, her feet unmoved.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi smiled and said:

“Looks like you have good taste. Wanna watch the show together?”

Bai Ling pressed her hands on her lower belly, biting her lips seductively as she purred:

“Forget the circus. I’d rather ride something else... care to join me?”

“?”

Cheng Shi’s face froze in shock. He hastily turned around and walked off.

You’d better be talking about an actual circus!

As a follower of [Corruption], Bai Ling was struggling to suppress her primal instincts. It was only a matter of time before she found another “lucky” player to join her in the embrace of [Corruption].

Since one of their teammates hadn’t yet entered the second memory, the “Memory Gate” had not disappeared. As Cheng Shi passed by it, he made a mental note of its location. Logically, this was where the waiter from the tavern had been seated.

Something in this scene must be reminding the waiter of his time at the tavern. If he could recall the tavern here, there must be something within his field of view that he recognized.

But what in a circus could possibly remind him of a tavern?

Pondering this, Cheng Shi walked until he reached the backstage area.

The circus's backstage was located directly beneath the VIP seating on the western side. Outsiders weren't allowed to enter, and it was just as lively as the main stage.

All sorts of creatures—humans, beasts, elementals—were backstage preparing, their chatter as loud as a busy marketplace.

Cheng Shi only needed a glance to realize that the target of this trial wasn't part of the circus troupe, but rather one of the spectators. More specifically, a less affluent spectator.

Why? Because the floor of the VIP seating and the ceiling of the backstage...

...were overlapping.

The entire backstage ceiling was transparent, revealing the bottoms of the VIPs' shoes... and their rear ends.

This was a glaring memory error, one that only occurred when the memory's owner was unfamiliar with a particular space or had never seen it in detail.

Of course, one could never rule out the possibility of magic in a world filled with all kinds of strange abilities.

But after wandering around inside and seeing that no one was paying attention to the VIPs' "backsides," Cheng Shi concluded that the memory's owner was genuinely unfamiliar with both the backstage and the VIP area.

This was getting interesting. Time to investigate these VIPs... well, their butts, at least.

Cheng Shi interviewed a few friendly-looking performers, chatting casually with them. Before long, he was able to match each “butt” to its respective VIP.

The most prestigious guest, undeniably, was Lady Dillar, wife of Duke Brookes, one of the town’s rulers.

Apparently, she was a huge fan of dwarf acrobatics and had been attending circus performances frequently as of late.

Seated next to her were the wives of various noble families.

Obviously, this was a “ladies’ night out.”

Further back were the bodyguards and servants of the nobles, followed by the town’s middle class, made up mostly of factory owners.

Cheng Shi noticed something interesting.

The bodyguards clearly looked down on the factory owners sitting behind them, while the factory owners sneered at the lackeys in front of them.

Both groups despised each other, yet silently envied one another’s status.

“Even in the Land of Hope, human relationships are just as complicated as in reality...”

But then, Cheng Shi saw something that left him both shocked and amused:

“Wait... it’s even more complicated.”

One of the bodyguards behind Lady Dillar was secretly reaching his hand toward her backside.

Given the “pressing need” for time, Cheng Shi only watched for three minutes before reluctantly dragging himself away.

Now that he had narrowed down the range for the memory’s owner, it was time to regroup with his teammates and adjust their search.

He checked his watch—another half hour had passed. Turning toward the audience, he noticed that the “Memory Gate” was still standing, unchanged.

“Strange, why is that old man Huang still stuck in the first scene?”

You couldn’t apply logic to a follower of [Chaos]. Not wasting any more time thinking about it, Cheng Shi headed for the far side of the audience, away from the VIP section.

As he passed by the stage, he saw a group of dwarves changing costumes behind a massive curtain.

Well, “changing costumes” wasn’t quite accurate—they were actually “changing skins.”

Five dwarves were stacked on top of one another. The one on top carried a massive skull, two formed the arms and chest, and two more made up the torso and legs. They then draped an orc skin over themselves.

Cheng Shi watched them for a moment and realized that the skin wasn’t just any orc—it was a female orc.

The skin was so pristine, the texture so vivid, it was clear that a master executioner had flayed it from its original owner.

The dwarves finished donning the skin and walked out from behind the curtain. The female orc, now fully formed, was wearing a rather conservative fur skirt.

When she saw Cheng Shi standing there, the “female orc” instantly adopted a coy demeanor.

The orc skin fit so seamlessly over the skull that there were no visible gaps. Her expressions were so lifelike that it was impossible to tell she wasn't real.

If Cheng Shi hadn't seen them getting dressed, he would've easily believed she was an actual orc woman.

Even her voice was convincing.

"Oh my, a new guest. What brings you here in such a hurry? This isn't your place. Go back to your seat—I promise I'll come to you before the show ends."

She winked at Cheng Shi playfully.

"..."

The more Cheng Shi looked, the weirder it seemed—it was like watching a strange form of lion dancing. He forced a smile and asked, pretending to be curious:

"What other services do you offer?"

The female orc eyed him suspiciously, then lifted her fur skirt, revealing an exaggeratedly rounded backside.

Cheng Shi squinted.

That area...

...looked like the bottoms of two dwarves' heads?

“Hiss—”

Yeah, this definitely wasn't a legitimate service.

His face darkened, and without another word, he quickly walked away, as if suffering from sudden constipation.

What was this?

Orc acrobatics?

Bai Ling was right after all—there really was “horse riding” involved in this circus.