

## **48 Hours 321**

### **Chapter 321 Apollo Training Camp (End)**

On a silent moon, the entrance platform slowly opened, and a camera was turned on as well. Armstrong walked out of the hatch and climbed down slowly along with the landing gear. He first checked the four load-bearing legs to make sure they were good order so the Lunar Module could use the entire descent stage as a launchpad when they lifted off. They would just need to fire up the ascent stage's engines to return to lunar orbit and dock with the Command and Service Module.

A voice from Mission Control came over the communications channel.

"The camera is good. We can tell you, Neil, you are looking good."

"Thank you, Houston."

Armstrong looked up to Zhang Heng in the lunar module. He then nodded at him.

"A textbook landing."

After that, Armstrong continued to climb down the ladder.

(The following were the original words of Armstrong when he landed on the moon) "...I'm at the foot of the ladder. The LM footpads are only depressed in the surface about 1 or 2 inches, although the surface appears to be very, very fine-grained, as you get close to it. It's almost like a powder. Down there, it's very fine."

After he was done talking, Armstrong turned around.

"I'm going to step off the LM now."

Millions of people had been sitting in front of their TV's biting their nails and holding their breaths until Armstrong's left foot moved from the ladder to the surface.

"... That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." Armstrong said.

However, due to a transmission problem with the sound equipment, and distance from the Earth, the sentence became intermittent when transmitted to the television. Coupled with Neil Armstrong's strong Ohio accent, many people did not hear what he said.

Then, the audiences in front of the TV began whispers of, "Wait, what did Armstrong say when he landed on the moon?"

"Well, it seems like he said, this is a small step for man, but also a big step for mankind?"

"It all sounds very philosophical, but is this a small step or a big step for mankind?"

## **1111**

It wasn't deliberate, though. In fact, nobody who watched the broadcast, NASA's own mission control in Houston included, heard the letter 'a' in the middle. At the same time, the press had already begun writing their articles. Every journalist was now in the race to be the first to report the big scoop. It wasn't until Armstrong returned to Earth that he re-explained what he said on the moon.

All those things would only happen way after Armstrong returned to Earth. Zhang Heng followed Armstrong down the ladder and took his first steps on the moon's surface. What attracted him the most was an equally desolate but magnificent scene. This was a monochrome world of gray, undulating with craters and jagged surfaces. There was nothing but rocks and dust around him. No sound or life existed there as well. Eternal silence was the only thing one could find. That said, it was all undeniably a breathtakingly beautiful sight to behold. It was no wonder Armstrong later said, 'I have been to the moon, so, where else on Earth can attract me?'

Beauty and scenic value aside, however, things didn't look so good for the human body. Without the protection of the ozone layer, the temperature on the moon's surface could reach a scorching 160 degrees during the day, and at night, it would drop to an ungodly minus 180 degrees. Coupled with the ubiquitous radiation and lack of oxygen, astronauts needed to be in their spacesuits at all times.

Zhang Heng couldn't look at his watch, but mission control told him the time on Earth over the radio. He only had apparently less than thirty minutes left before the end of this quest. In other words, the journey was about to come to an end.

"Neil, I'm going to stroll around," Zhang Heng told Armstrong, who stood not far away from him.

"Affirmative, David. Be careful."

"It's nice to have met you, Neil."

Those were Zhang Heng's last words to Neil Armstrong. After that, he hopped to a distant crater like a rabbit.

After jumping around for about a hundred meters, Zhang Heng turned off the radio. Now, all he heard was his own breathing and the buzz of the life support system. It was pitch black, as the vast blanket of space hung above his head. At this moment, he was alone on an empty lava plain. It was as if he was standing in a palace of the ancient gods. And like the soundless alien world, his heart had also gone exceptionally quiet. Zhang Heng did not know where he should be going. So, he walked into the darkness in front of him without hesitation.

(The quest has reached its deadline. Quest is completed...)

[Apollo Training Camp quest is cleared. Your fifth round of the game is over. Returning to the real world...]

Zhang Heng opened his eyes. This time, the quest didn't last too long. Combined with the transitional quest, its entire duration was less than a year. However, as the time-flow rate was slower this time, six hours had already passed in the real world. The bar downstairs was probably closed at this hour.

Fortunately, nothing changed in the lounge. It was at the beginning of the month, and it was rare to see guests around. Besides, Zhang Heng should be last to finish the game. Only he and the bartender were left in the lounge. She hid behind the bar and was reading Akira Toriyama's "Dragon Ball." She took a glance at Zhang Heng as he got up from the couch. "You were away for a long while this time." "I traveled to a land far away from here."

The bartender made a lame joke.

“How far? Did you go to the moon?”

“Almost,” replied Zhang Heng as he threw down five game items over the bar counter.

“Great yield. Psst. Psst.”

The bartender put down the comic in her hand and put the game items in a wooden Tulewood box.

“Did you get to meet other players?” Zhang Heng nodded, picked up the tablet on the side, and entered his player number. He then clicked the confirm button and paid 20 game points for the identification fee.

“You didn’t tell me how you could meet other players in a single-player game...” “I can’t reveal too much. In fact, I have told you almost everything I’m allowed to tell you. On the bright side, you managed to get your hands on another five items.” “By the way, do you provide storage services at this checkpoint?” Zhang Heng asked as he moved along quickly.

He didn’t want to dwell on the topic anymore, knowing that once the matter here was dealt with, Zhang Heng could finally return to his hometown and celebrate Chinese New Year. He did not plan on bringing along those game items with him. He knew that it was the time where he would cross paths with many people. It was a recipe for potential problems.

“Yes. Three game points per item, per day.”

“Huh?”

Zhang Heng raised his eyebrows, and he thought he heard it wrong.

“The checkpoint is the safest place to store all your game items. Even if the three most powerful guilds invade this place, it’s still impossible for them to take your game items. It will only cost you three points per item. Value for money proposition, don’t you think?”

Zhang Heng quickly noticed a loophole. “What if the three major guilds capture the owners and force them to withdraw all their items?” he asked. The bartender only laughed, implying that she was only responsible for keeping the game items safe, and had nothing to do with the lives of their owners.

“Forget it. I’ll take care of my game items myself,” Zhang Heng replied.

He then wrote the address of his grandfather’s house on a sticky note.

“Please send them to this address.”

### **Chapter 322 The Journey Back Home**

There was no one outside the bar in the early morning. Only a few cleaners were cleaning the mess on the floor.

After returning to the earth, Zhang Heng needed some time to get used to gravity again. Fortunately, unlike a real astronaut, his physical body remained in the same state as before he entered the quest. His bone mass and blood volume were still the same, and he did not feel thirsty. He also suffered no vision problems (usually hyperopia). Hence it was more of a psychological adjustment for him.

After all, all he did was wander in space for four days. Even with the moon having only a sixth of earth's gravity, these minor problems could be resolved in a matter of an hour or two, unlike the Black Sail quest.

Zhang Heng walked to a small housing estate. Upon seeing a roadside stall that served breakfast, he ordered a bowl of hot soy milk, with two Youtiao and a boiled tea egg. When he was done eating, the road was already lively again, and white-collar workers who lived nearby could be seen leaving their houses. Commuting in big cities had always been a serious problem. Most of the workforce lived so far away from their workplaces that it was worse than the distance between the Cowherd and Weaver Girl. Left with no other options, they had to get up very early in the morning and to fill their stomachs as fast as they could before joining the mad rush to work. Many even developed the skill of eating while walking.

Zhang Heng had visited a number of cities when he was still a kid, where he would follow his parents to attend academic conferences or his grandfather to meet friends who came from elsewhere. It was at that time when he got into the habit of labeling every city he visited in his mind. For this particular city, he had studying here for a year and a half, but still found it hard to find the right words to summarize and describe it. It was like a bowl of thick soup thrown in with all sorts of ingredients, its strange and weird flavors brutally clashing and mixing with each other.

No matter how picky the diners were, you could always find the parts that you liked. At the same time, you had to endure the parts you didn't like. Perhaps then, complexity was its label.

After finishing up the last sip of soy milk, Zhang Heng wasn't about to join in with the crowded mess of white that boarded the city's various public transports. Instead, he unlocked a shared bicycle by the roadside using a QR code. He then rode all the way back to school. As he approached a few stores, he stopped his bicycle to buy some local produce. It would be used to deal with the little brats that frequented his house every Chinese New Year. As for the robot vacuum cleaner that he wanted to buy for his grandfather, an order had already been placed on Xiaomi's official website.

Nothing else happened in the next two days. Zhang Heng put his Paris Arrow into the locker of the archery hall and took with him for the other game items that had no problems passing security checks. After that, he bid Ma Wei goodbye before embarking on the journey back to his birthplace to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

Whenever Chinese New Year was near, millions of people would rush to board the trains. Zhang Heng had to squeeze through the gargantuan crowd just to get to the ticketing counter. After rummaging through the entire human mess, he managed to board the train. He put down his carry-on luggage and started to look for his seat according to the number printed on the ticket. There was already someone at his designated seat, and it looked like a young couple occupied it. Seeing that the original passenger had arrived, the boy got up with a smile and told Zhang Heng that they couldn't get double seats and asked if he was willing to change seats with him. At the same time, he showed his ticket to Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng took a look at it. Fortunately, the seat wasn't too far away, located at the end of the carriage. So, Zhang Heng agreed to change seats. The boy's face instantly lit up with joy, and he repeatedly thanked Zhang Heng. There was a high chance there was no extra space over there, so Zhang

Heng did not take down his small suitcase that had found a spot on the luggage rack. He could only carry his backpack, which had a drinking cup and other valuables such as a camera and the game items.

Zhang Heng's new seat was close to the aisle. Seated next to him was a middle-aged man in a jacket. He had not stopped talking on his mobile phone since he got on the train, appearing as if he was explaining some work issues or discussing after-sales problems with his customers. He sounded like some kind of sales director of a particular manufacturer.

Opposite Zhang Heng was a girl who should be a student like him. She held a book called – "TOEFL Vocabulary, Root + Associative Memory" in her hand. She wasn't the most attractive, having tiny slits for eyes and a flat nose, and a scrawny body as well. At least she was still young and seemed to have a lot of potential till maturity.

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Sitting next to her was a slightly older woman. She had a pair of headphones on and was watching a drama on a tablet. All three looked ordinary, and Zhang Heng did not know if this was a sequel for completing the single-player game with competitive mode. He could not help but subconsciously observe the people around him. There were still other players in the real world, and there were a lot of them. Hence, it was perfectly reasonable that he kept looking over his shoulder.

Speaking of the battle with Jia Lai in the Apollo Training Camp, it was his first time single-handedly killing other players. Zhang Heng thought he would feel bad about it, but that didn't turn out to be the case. Maybe it was because he had endured too many battles and his hands were soaked with blood anyway. The people he killed were from the quest or monsters in the real world. That said, he was surprised his heart remained the same even after killing other players. When he stuffed Jia Lai's mouth with sand and watched him suffocate to death, he was calm and unmoved throughout the whole process. Perhaps he was a little too calm. Jia Lai was the first real person he killed. For a moment, even Zhang Heng could not recognize him.

He wasn't sure if his current situation could be considered normal since he had such a bountiful experience. Hence, it was hard for anyone to tell him what he should do right now.

When the girl with the TOEFL book noticed somebody coming towards her, she quickly emptied the seat opposite her by removing a bag of potato chips and an apple. Zhang Heng thanked her as he sat down. As soon as he put his backpack down, his phone vibrated.

A small '1' appeared on the cute version of Aqua's avatar in his WeChat contact list. It meant he just received a new message. Zhang Heng tapped on it. [I'm sitting opposite you. Did you see me?] Zhang Heng frowned and looked up at the TOEFL girl. She had her head lowered and was memorizing words from the book. She could feel Zhang Heng looking at her face and observing her thoroughly. At that time, she was in a panic. Instead of looking up, she only lowered her head further. Her ears were slowly turning red as well. Zhang Heng replied. (I will block you if you keep on doing this to me.)

[Hehe... I'm bored. What are you doing? Do you want to go to the haunted house with me? I heard the alley is very, very, haunted. Let's catch some ghosts tonight. (-W-)]

(I'm on a train back to my hometown for Chinese New Year. You can go there yourself.)

(Huh. Does that mean you'll come to the haunted house with me if you are still here?]

(No.)

### **Chapter 323 Deep Sleep Aboard the Train**

After dealing with the prankster's harassment, Zhang Heng took out a 'Finnish Grammar' book from his bag and continued from where he stopped. Surprise flashed in the eyes of the TOEFL girl sitting opposite of Zhang Heng

Finnish was a very niche language, where only one university in China, namely the Beijing Foreign Studies University, offered any related major. The enrollment each year was tiny as well. In fact, less than 100 people managed to master Finnish in the whole country. Besides, Zhang Heng's poise was very much that of a student's. The TOEFL girl hesitated and whispered, "Classmate?"

"Hmm?"

"Aren't you from Beijing Foreign Studies University?"

"Oh, I am not," said Zhang Heng. Realizing what had caused the misunderstanding, he waved the book and explained, "Just for my own pleasure." The TOEFL girl's face turned red. "I'm sorry..." she muttered.

Zhang Heng smiled. "Don't worry about it. I like Finland very much, and I hope to go there someday."

"May your dreams be granted soon."

After that, the TOEFL girl quickly buried her head in the red book again. The train continued to move forward, and the carriage was alight with sounds. Some chatted and ate sunflower seeds. Children were crying and playing music, and the middle-aged man beside Zhang Heng was still talking on the phone. Suddenly, Zhang Heng missed the moon's eternal silence.

The man had got up from his seat, and when he came back, he finally put away his phone as he muttered a few words. Then, he leaned his head on the curtains and fell asleep after that. Zhang Heng continued to flip through the 'Finnish Grammar' in his hand until an attendant who was pushing a cart reminded the passengers to keep their legs off the aisle.

The TOEFL girl took out an apple from her bag. After a few moments, she took out another one, and in a soft voice, she asked Zhang Heng, "Hey there, do you want an apple? It's washed."

"Thank you."

Zhang Heng did not refuse her kindness to avoid embarrassing her. The TOEFL girl breathed a sigh of relief. The gesture had eased the previous awkward introduction, and she seemed to have forgotten about it. She appeared less bashful and started to talk while taking a bite off the apple.

After chatting for a while, the TOEFL girl winked at Zhang Heng, whispering, "Look at the uncle next to you. He's drooling."

Zhang Heng looked at him and frowned. Many people drooled while sleeping, but it was rare seeing a middle-aged man drooling so much that the curtain was wet. In fact, he seemed completely unable to control his salivary glands. Immediately, Zhang Heng tried to pat the middle-aged man on the shoulder,

but there wasn't any response. So, he tried harder, nudging the man this time. Still, the middle-aged man did not wake up.

The TOEFL girl, too, noticed that something wasn't right.

"What's wrong with him, is he sick?"

"I don't know. Let's call the attendants first," Zhang Heng replied in a low voice.

After that, he placed his fingers under the middle-aged man's nostrils. Seeing that the man was still breathing, he proceeded to open his eyelids and saw that his pupils were not dilated, and they responded instantly when exposed to light. Apart from the abnormal amount of saliva, his current state wasn't medically abnormal. He was in a deep sleep, but it was strange that he couldn't be awakened by any means.

After a while, the TOEFL girl came back with a train attendant. Zhang Heng did not move the middle-aged man, placing him flat on the seat instead to stop him from choking on his own saliva.

Nonetheless, there was only so much the train attendant could do. They had received a good amount of first aid training, but they certainly did not possess any professional medical knowledge. Unable to make a better diagnosis, the only thing the train attendant could do was to keep shaking him, hoping he would come to.

"Sir, wake up. Please wake up!"

After confirming that the middle-aged man was breathing properly and his heartbeat was also normal, the attendant began to suspect that the man was actually pretending to be asleep. Just then, a rough part of the track caused the whole car to shake, and the man's body fell towards the table, his head hitting the corner hard. Although he wasn't bleeding, the loud, sickening thud from skull colliding with metal couldn't be faked.

Even so, the middle-aged man still didn't wake up.

It was then that the attendant started to panic a little. Soon, an emergency broadcast came over the intercom. They were looking for any doctors on board. After a few tense moments, a doctor showed up, but he could only make simple diagnoses since he had no medical equipment with him. Unfortunately, he, too, failed to find the root cause.

The middle-aged man had been traveling alone, and his phone was locked. Hence, train attendants couldn't contact his family to enquire about his medical history. In the end, they could only reach the hospital at the nearest station. When they arrived at the next stop, medical staff quickly rushed into the train and carried the man into the ambulance.

Finally, the unexpected incident had come to an end.

As the crowd slowly returned to their seats, the TOEFL girl and Zhang Heng returned to their respective places as well. She still seemed a little shocked and gasped a little when she saw the drool on the curtains. "What happened just now?" she asked.

"I don't know."

Zhang Heng lied. After seeing the condition of the middle-aged man, he came up with a few guesses. When the train attendants and the kind doctor were busy ‘rescuing’ the middle-aged man, he turned on his mobile phone. He then opened up WeChat and touched Why Do You Always Look Unhappy with Aqua’s profile picture (#’O’).

(Hey, I want to ask a question.) (What’s up? Finally decided to visit the haunted house with me? Looking forward to...)

(Stop talking about the haunted house first. I told you I’m on the train.)

Zhang Heng typed, paused, then typed again.

[Dreamland of Death. Who’s holding it now?]

[??? Play stupid.jpg]

(Will a person targeted by Dreamland of Death never wake up? And all that drooling is abnormal as well, right?) This time she kept quiet for a long time, struggling to answer Zhang Heng. It took her half a minute before she replied.

[Did you see it happening to someone?] [Yes. It happened just now, right in front of me. The person has been carried off the train, but I suspect the user is still here.]

[...big brother, I really don’t know who has it right now. I know the Dreamland of Death’s previous owner, but as far as I know, she sold it right away after she got her hands on it. It hasn’t been used at all. Besides, the Dreamland of Death doesn’t require its user to be in the vicinity.)

### **Chapter 324 Spring Cleaning**

The incident of the unconscious man on the train was no more but a small episode that quickly passed. After discussing the matter for a while, the passengers quickly shifted their attention back to what they were doing. Before contacting Why Do You Always Look Unhappy (#’O’), Zhang Heng checked out the train, using the excuse of filling up water. However, he saw nobody behaving abnormally. The person who had attacked the middle-aged man was most likely not on the train.

After returning to her seat, the TOEFL girl still chatted enthusiastically with Zhang Heng. Zhang Heng’s thoughts, however, were still on what happened earlier. Obviously, the matter wasn’t so simple. This wasn’t the end, since the three major guilds had been offering handsome rewards to capture the mysterious woman that appeared suddenly at that night’s auction.

Everyone present at the auction got played by her, and the three major guilds wanted her to pay for what she did to them. More important for them was to retrieve the Grade B-game item, Dreamland of Death from her. Since they still couldn’t locate this weapon of mass destruction, nobody from the guilds felt safe. After all, nobody knew if they would end up like Silver Wing’s former guild leader.

Zhang Heng had been playing solo for some time, and when he participated in his only single-player-with-competitive-mode quest, no one else ended up alive. Thus, he should be relatively safe for now. Under normal circumstances, he shouldn’t be a prime target. It was simply a coincidence that the killer chose the man next to him since he changed seats with the boy earlier.

Nothing extraordinary happened until the train arrived at the next station.



The TOEFL girl wanted to get Zhang Heng's contact, but she was too shy to ask. As she watched him disappear into the crowd with a backpack and suitcase, she could not help but feel a sense of loss. She knew that they would never see each other again.

Zhang Heng did not bother his granddad to pick him up from the train station. However, his grandpa came anyway with his old Volkswagen. As they met, he hugged his grandfather outside the exit before placing his luggage in the trunk before entering the passenger's side. This reminded him of another incident. He was an apprentice of Takeda in the Tokyo Drift quest, managing to learn some rather impressive drifting techniques from him. And he even won a death race. Yet, he still couldn't drive in the real world.

It was because he did not have a driver's license yet. Perhaps it was time to get his licence once and for all.

"How is school life?" Grandpa asked while driving

"It's not bad. Same old."

Even without warnings from the weird man in the Tang costume, Zhang Heng couldn't possibly tell his granddad about what happened to him recently. Let alone making anybody understand and accept such things, there was nothing the old man could do but worry if he knew about it.

However, after the Zavilcha incident, Zhang Heng wondered if he should remind his grandpa to look over his shoulders for any threats. After contemplating for a while, though, he knew how difficult a normal person would react even if they knew about in advance. And as a part of the older generation of intellectuals, grandpa held a firm belief in Marxism. He wasn't one to get involved in such matters.

"You seem to have matured a lot recently," smiled grandpa as he looked at Zhang Heng through the rearview mirror. "Very well, don't be as frivolous like your father. A man should look like a man. Speak less, and do more."

"Why then, did you let him marry my mother in the first place?" Zhang Heng asked while opening a box of CDs. He took one out called "Qi Li Xiang", an album about the same age as this car, and inserted it into the player.

After a while, the catchy tunes of Jay Chou started to play over the stereo.

Grandpa harrumphed, "Your mother's always had a bad taste since she was a child. Inherited it from your grandma..."

Zhang Heng smiled and said nothing.

Half an hour later, the car arrived at his grandpa's residence. This area was made up of old apartments, and due to the fact that it was built decades ago, underground parking wasn't on the minds of the builders at that time. Later, the government added more parking spaces on the roadsides.

After grandpa parked his car, Zhang Heng got off and took his suitcase with him. While walking toward the apartment unit, he ran into a few residents of the same building. A long time ago, everyone worked the same job. Hence, Zhang Heng's granddad was very close to them. Besides, he used to run around the courtyard when he was a little kid and had visited most of the units.

At a time like this, Zhang Heng was obligated to chat with them for a while. When they finally returned home, grandpa warmed up a pre-prepared meal for him. As they ate, the conversation moved to Zhang Heng's parents. During Christmas, Zhang Heng received a call from them, saying that they would be back this year for Chinese New Year. They did not tell him the specific date back then and he got to know that they hadn't bought their flight tickets until a few days ago.

The two would take a flight to meet Zhang Heng in four days, after a stopover in Shanghai. Although Grandpa was still dissatisfied with their reluctance in returning to China, he still valued the family reunion a lot. Weeks ago, he had started preparing a variety of ingredients, even bringing out his precious Maotai which he kept away for a long time.

It always felt good to be home, especially for Zhang Heng. For the past six months, he had endured a complicated and arduous journey. After taking a shower, he took his backpack and walked into his bedroom. The switch on the wall was flicked, and the lights immediately came on. After glancing around, Zhang Heng realized that nothing much had changed since he left.

Except for the new bedsheets and quilt, everything else remained the same as before. Above the shelf beside his bed, two superhero figures of Hulk and Spiderman he bought while in junior high were in their Bruce Lee and Altland poses. The PSP stuffed at the bottom of the drawer was now an antique. He even found several posters of S.H.E and Jay Chou in his drawer.

Zhang Heng threw his backpack in front of the desk and collapsed on the bed.

Finally, at a time like this, there was no need to think about the previous quest. He did not need to guess the thoughts of those around him as well. This was probably the true meaning of returning home.

Zhang Heng got up at ten, had breakfast, and started helping his grandfather clean up the house before the Chinese New Year. They started decluttering the study room, taking out the trinkets and boxes that were stuffed all over the place. After wiping them clean, they were sorted out.

As the cleaning proceeded, Zhang Heng found an unopened pager under the bookcase and was thinking about how he should deal with it when he saw Grandpa standing on the other side. It appeared the elderly man was deep in thought as he held a photo album in his hands.

Zhang Heng put down the pager and walked over to him.

The album must be quite old, seeing how yellowed the photos were. However, one could still make out the faces of the people on them. It was a girl with a sweet smile and a young guy with a serious look.

"She looks beautiful," Zhang Heng said.

"Yeah, which is why I always said she had bad taste. Back then, many young men pursued her, but she chose me instead." Grandpa wiped his glasses and continued, "I was a very ordinary boy back in school. It's safe to say that I'm a nerd that doesn't understand what love is. I can still remember how I got so nervous while taking the picture. The people in the photo studio asked me to relax, but I just couldn't smile anyway. Hence, my face on the picture. After that, she always said I looked arrogant in this picture." As grandpa spoke, a photo slipped out of the album.

## **Chapter 325 Old Photo**

Zhang Heng bent and picked the photo from the floor. Unlike the other pictures which were fixed in their slots, this one was clipped instead, hence the reason it fell out. Thus, it should be a more recent addition to the album. There were more than 20 people in the picture, and they looked to be from the same organization. Everyone was in winterproof clothes, hats, and snow boots. At that time, they were standing on a glacier with a dozen sled dogs beside them.

In a single glance, Zhang Heng instantly spotted his parents in the crowd. They looked to be very young at that time. Standing on the left of the first row, his father had made a V gesture at the camera. His mom, on the other hand, was busy stuffing snow into his collar. They were both smiling and seemed really happy.

However, Zhang Heng's gaze stopped at the rightmost person in the second row. His pupils contracted instantly the moment he saw the Tang costumed man who had given him the extra 24 hours. Zhang Heng quickly noticed that his appearance almost hadn't changed at all. In the photo, he wasn't in that Tang suit but had on ordinary clothes that every westerner wore. It appeared he was attempting to look as inconspicuous as possible, seeing how he was behind the others. He wasn't that tall too, which was why half of his face was blocked. In the photo, his eyes were trained on the others while he smiled.

Zhang Heng looked to the timestamp printed at the bottom right of the photo. It was taken 17 years ago. At that time, he should be more than a year old.

"Oh," grandpa replied as he put on his reading glasses. "This was taken on the last research project they participated in before returning home. It was in Greenland. They said the temperature could get down to minus 70 degrees. Someone apparently found some ancient ruins, and a large part of it related to ancient myths. When your parents were invited, they didn't waste a second."

"What were the results?" Zhang Heng asked.

"I don't know. I have never cared for these sorts of nonsense. In fact, I disagreed with your mother when she chose this course as her major. She'd always been interested in weird stories and legends since young. At that time, your grandma took her side. Convincing two women were way more difficult than convincing one. Fortunately, they took you back to China after the project ended. I thought they'd finally settle down here, but they left after two years. When you become a parent one day, you'll know how eager your kids can be when it comes to venturing the world."

"Can I take this photo with me?" Zhang Heng asked.

"Of course, but remember to inform your parents when they are back. Anyway, I have lots of other photos of them."

Grandpa glanced at the sweet-smiling woman in the photo before finally closing the album in his hand.

"Let's put these memories aside and finish the work at hand. There are too many places to clean. Thank goodness you got home early. I knew I couldn't count on your parents."

"Okay."

Zhang Heng put away the photo and pointed at the pager, asking, "Do you still want this thing?" "Hmm, this was given to me by your grandmother. I have a special box for the things she gave me. I'll look for it later."

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The two cleaned the house from morning to night. Now, the study, master bedroom, and bathroom were finally done. There were two more bedrooms, and then, it was the kitchen, the most troublesome spot in the house.

The next morning, Zhang Heng turned over a small plot of land in the backyard, intending to grow some produce when the weather became warmer. Grandpa seemed a little surprised as he saw how Zhang Heng turned over the ground.

“The educated youth from the universities are taught to work like this?”.

Grandpa passed him a cup of warm water. Zhang Heng simply shrugged and took a sip from it.

As he looked at the land he plowed, he remembered how it previously took at least an hour and a half to dig through a small area. Now, it was only half an hour, not to mention workmanship was definitely better than before. Zhang Heng was no expert, nor did he deliberately venture into agriculture. It was just one of his hobbies. That said, sustenance had always been the eternal pursuit of mankind, no matter time or place. Out of the need to survive, he gained farming experience on the deserted island and later, in the Black Sail quest. Although the skills were probably at LV 0, it was good enough for him.

“We are progressing a lot faster than I thought. If this is the case, we should finish cleaning everything by tomorrow morning.”

Suddenly, the doorbell rang.

Zhang Heng was wearing his old clothes when he dug the ground, and his shoes were all muddy, so grandpa went for the door. A young woman was standing outside. She was the resident of the unit opposite theirs, and there was a worried look across her face. After listening to her, grandpa became serious as well. He then nodded.

The young woman thanked grandpa profusely. After a while, she brought a little girl over.

“Old Chen hurt his leg while shopping for vegetables. No one else is in the house except for his daughter-in-law and his granddaughter. The daughter-in-law requested us to watch over her daughter for half a day. She needs to go to the hospital to look after Old Chen. Chen. Still remember Tian Tian? She kept following you around during your summer holidays.”

Grandpa started with a brief introduction.

“Tian Tian, do you remember brother Zhang Heng?”

The little girl seemed a bit shy, instantly hiding behind her mother after hearing what grandpa said.

“Anyway, I’ll leave her in your good hands. Please take care of her,” the young woman said gratefully. “Don’t worry. I watched her grow all the way up. She can make herself at home. By the way, is Old Chen okay?”

“It wasn’t a bad fall, but he’s been suffering from osteoporosis, and they estimate it’ll take a while before he recovers. Anyway, the hospital has been calling us, and I’ve to rush there now. Tian Tian has brought her homework with her. She’ll be preoccupied with it.”

“Okay.”

Grandpa nodded and said nothing after that. After he sent the young woman off, he led Tian Tian to a coffee table and moved her to a small stool to do her homework. At the same time, Zhang Heng didn't leave the backyard, deworming the laurel tree instead. When he put the canister down, he received a message from Ding Si.

The two had met at the auction and exchanged contacts. Although Zhang Heng rarely interacted with other players, he wasn't against keeping good ties with commerce chambers like Fulou. They could prove handy with exchanging game points and selling game items. With their help, he wouldn't need to wait until the auction to sell his game items. Moreover, Fulou had often sold him useful game items and provided valuable information.

### **Chapter 326 Simple Drawings**

Ding Si's text this time was partly an advertisement. It was about a newly established forum led by the three major guilds. They had rented overseas servers to facilitate and promote communication between players, and each player could register for an account for free.

Zhang Heng briefly glanced at the picture Ding Si attached. The name of the website was Immersive Simulations Fan Forum.

There were also rules and regulations written in fine-print below, done in a way that if a regular person accidentally clicked it by mistake, they would think that it was just another gaming fan forum.

Currently, three main sections of the website were open- a message board, a trading section, and a teammate recruitment section. Some other functions were still under construction. The website's developers claimed they would do their utmost to protect members' privacy, encrypt their identities, and would not require users to be bound by email or mobile phone registrations. In fact, a comment could even be left as an unregistered user. But of course, registration with an ID was still encouraged.

In principle, website administrators were not responsible for the authenticity of the information posted on the forum, and new members were reminded to stay vigilant at all times and to never disclose their personal information.

The idea of such a site was actually conceived a long time ago. Reportedly, it started off with a group of players who created QQ groups and invited their friends to actively share their experiences. However, after a series of vicious incidents, the QQ groups were dissolved. The current website was considered to be an upgraded version of the QQ group. The initial intention of the forum was to reunite the players, hoping to solve the problem of poor communication and to eliminate the 'every man for himself' mentality. Of course, that didn't mean the three major guilds didn't have their own selfish intentions. Through the forum, they hoped to establish a position of leadership gradually. For now, the creation of the webpage was obviously a huge advantage, especially for single players like Zhang Heng. It provided him with a platform to understand the outside world.

However, Zhang Heng did not sign up immediately. Although the three major guilds claimed that the site was safe and that they would not disclose their members' IDs, Zhang Heng didn't log in using his mobile phone or computer. Instead, he planned on visiting an Internet cafe when he was free.

After tidying the yard, Zhang Heng got out of his muddy shoes and entered the house. He was about to take a shower but stopped as he walked past Tian Tian.

The girl was sprawled over the coffee table, pencil in her hand. At first, Zhang Heng thought she was doing her homework, but when he came closer, he realized that she was actually scribbling on the back of the workbook.

She had drawn a picture of a woman sitting on a bed, where an old man lay there with a leg in an elevated position. There was a frightened look on his face because the light from the ceiling was falling down on him.

It was a simple child's drawing, but within the innocent brushstrokes lay an ominous and frightening image.

"Can I have a look?" Zhang Heng asked warmly, reaching out.

Tian Tian was startled, so focused on her drawing that she did not see him coming. Despite the scare, she handed the workbook to Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng flipped through the book and saw a few other drawings, including one of an old man who had fallen off his bicycle, a little puppy falling into a pond, and another of a woman cutting her finger amid a meal preparation.

Zhang Heng's eyes widened as he thought about the band-aid on that woman's index fingers. He looked down at the girl and saw her looking up at him, her eyes trembling in fear.

They had last met about a year and a half ago, and back then, Tian Tian was a cheerful and bubbly young girl. Now, she seemed a lot quieter than before.

"That's pretty good," Zhang Heng smiled as he handed the book back to her. He noticed how relieved she looked when the book was in her hands. Admittedly, it was difficult for children this age to hide their true feelings.

Zhang Heng abandoned the idea of a shower and changed into fresh clothes instead. Then he went to his grandfather and asked, "Which hospital is Uncle Chen in?"

"Why? Feel like visiting him? That's good. When you were a little kid, you were always at his place, eating a fair share of meat. He's in The Second People's Hospital. I was planning to see him, but since you're going, then you can go in my place. Do you have money?" Zhang Heng waved his wallet. "I'm going." Once he was outside, Zhang Heng dropped by a local fruit shop to purchase a fruit basket. Then, instead of taking the bus, he hired a DiDi\* and arrived a lot faster at Shenzhen's Second People's Hospital more than three kilometers away.

No matter what time it was, the place was always crowded. Patients, visiting families, relatives, and friends... it was so packed that human scents and odors overpowered the corridor. There were sounds of people coughing, and a pungent scent of disinfectant lingered in the air.

It was nothing but a depressing scene.

Instead of approaching customer service to get the patient's information, he remembered the bed number on Tian Tian's drawing and found the ward without trouble. Through the viewing window, he then saw Grandpa Chen and the young woman inside.

Zhang Heng knocked on the door twice before entering the ward. The woman was surprised, but immediately stood up and greeted him. She accepted the basket of fruits, and she asked about his university life.

Grandpa Chen looked pretty good. Even though he had just fallen and injured his leg, he was still in high spirits. He even laughed aloud when he saw Zhang Heng, noting how they hadn't seen each other for a while and that Zhang Heng looked even better than before.

Zhang Heng peeled an apple for the old man using a fruit knife that happened to be on the bedside table. The setup of the ward was pretty decent, considering it was a three-patient ward. The other two beds were occupied, and Grandpa Chen was in the middle. Above his head hung an old-fashioned double-ended fluorescent lamp.

It was a scene that was eerily similar to the drawing.

Zhang Heng didn't leave immediately even after the apple was peeled. He stayed by Grandpa Chen's bed and chatted with him, something the woman thought was rather odd. Grandpa Chen reminisced about the old times, relating how Zhang Heng would never tell anyone if he had peed his pants when he was still a kid, and how he tried to hide the embarrassment by standing in front of the heater to dry himself off. The memory was so funny to Grandpa Chen that he seemed to have forgotten the pain in his leg.

Suddenly, without warning, the fluorescent lamp on the ceiling detached from its housing and took a dive toward the old man! Just as the tube was about to hit Grandpa Chen's head, a hand reached out and caught it. Zhang Heng could even block a falling butcher knife – a lightbulb was nothing to him. Also, he had been secretly keeping an eye out for any movement from above. Still, he was somewhat flabbergasted that the light actually fell. Predicting the future? But all the simple sketches only seemed to portray bad things. It was more like some kind of a curse.

The woman gasped, and although clearly in shock, she thanked Zhang Heng profusely. The nurse tending to the patient next to them stared at Zhang Heng with curious eyes. She had frozen in place and seemed startled as well. Unfortunately, Zhang Heng decided not to stay in the hospital any longer. Now that his suspicions were confirmed, he needed to figure out a way to solve the problem.

Footnote:

Didi: A ride-sharing platform

### **Chapter 327 Recurring Slaughter**

Even though the old man in the Tang suit had already alluded it all, Zhang Heng did not expect to encounter another supernatural event so quickly after the train incident. Those things had been operating in the dark in the real world even before the game existed.

But one thing was for sure. Even if supernatural events did happen then, they weren't as frequent as now. Also, since the players were taking out a large number of game items, more "unexpected"

situations would take place. Zhang Heng frowned. This was not the first game, so it was implausible that the organizing committee were oblivious about the consequences of doing so, or perhaps it was what they intended?

Zhang Heng stopped himself from overthinking. There was no point as of now, seeing how he couldn't confirm anything anyway. So, he decided to focus on the matter at hand.

Old Chen and Zhang Heng's grandfather shared a pretty amicable friendship. They were both colleagues, then neighbors for many years after their retirement. During the school holidays, Tian Tian used to follow Old Chen around like a puppy. Had Zhang Heng not known her, he would have just disregarded it, but since he knew her, it was very difficult not to care.

To solve the problem, he would need to first get to its roots, and the best place to start was obviously Tian Tian. Zhang Heng had to find a way to understand what he was really dealing with before he could decide what to do next.

Before that, though, Zhang Heng made a detour and stopped at an internet café. He visited the new website using the URL Ding Si had provided. Zhang Heng was surprised to find that the forum had many visitors, though most of the traffic was on the message board. This was only the launching day of the forum, yet many were already flaunting their prowess, tirelessly posting tawdry comments like 'bump, sofa, floor, ceiling' under every post

Some even took the opportunity to post long but pointless comments. In one post, a person yelled, "I'm about to ascend to heaven, and I would like to ask all my fellow comrades to lend me a helping hand!"

Some people had queued under a certain post with a tacit understanding, playing the role of a broken record – repeating and regurgitating everything that others said.

There was also an infinite idiom solitaire post.

Birds of the same feather flocked together, apparently, and it was human nature to naturally bond with those who had the same aspirations.

The total number of players wasn't small, but in comparison to the throngs of ordinary folk, they were the minority. Those who were outside the player circle would probably find it difficult to understand the harsh challenges they had to face each day. Players had to keep finding ways to employ their talents, abilities, game items, and skills to complete one quest after another. On the one hand, these players got to enjoy the rich experiences that nobody else could get. On the other, they constantly faced all kinds of danger, some even life-threatening.

Whatever the players witnessed and experienced couldn't be shared with non-players as well, and therefore, in one way or another, they were actually very lonely. Those who had a team had it better. If a single player like Zhang Heng were to be psychologically unstable, he would have lost his mind a long time ago in the quests. But come what may, it was always good to have a place that served as a reminder that they were not alone.

Other than the mess of useless posts, Zhang Heng did find some useful things on the website. One of the top posts was an announcement by the three major guilds, stating that they were looking for information relating to 'Dreamland of Death' and the mysterious woman who appeared at the auction.



The article also mentioned the incident on the train. In fact, Zhang Heng would later find similar reports in the newspapers. After the petrified middle-aged sales executive was sent to the hospital for a thorough examination, he was found to be perfectly healthy. An hour later, however, his blood pressure suddenly soared, causing the capillaries in the brain to rupture. It increased pressure on his brain tissue, which eventually caused cerebral edema to develop. The hospital performed an emergency surgery but alas, they were unable to save his life.

For this reason, the newspapers interviewed several medical experts to discuss the matter and investigate the cause. This was one of the most searched topics on the internet, and experts appealed for the public to be vigilant of the risk of a cerebral hemorrhage, which could also be the result of overworking. However, Zhang Heng was alarmed, discovering that this wasn't the only incident that had taken place within the same period.

In fact, just last week, a similar thing had happened to six or seven people. When it took place, the victims all asleep in bed, and families only found out about their deaths the next morning. The circumstance in which the incidents occurred wasn't too compelling and were treated as sudden death due to cerebral hemorrhage.

As a matter of fact, the episode on the train should be an exception. The perpetrator obviously did not want to attract public attention. Zhang Heng was now certain that that one of the conditions of triggering Dreamland of Death was that the target had to be sleeping. From the sales rep's phone conversation, Zhang Heng could deduce that the man's trip on the train was unplanned. It was apparently due to a work issue that he had to speak to the customer in person. Much to his annoyance, however, the customer canceled the order and didn't show up.

The middle-aged man was devastated at that time, and after hanging up the call, he had nothing to do and fell asleep on the train. In other words, him boarding the train and falling asleep were probably unanticipated. Under normal circumstances, he should have returned home before falling asleep. That way, he would have been like the other seven, dying on his own bed, quietly and peacefully before being diagnosed with cerebral hemorrhage. Now, instead, the incident had ended up all over the news.

It was obvious that the three major guilds took this matter extremely seriously. This was about two months since the reappearance of Dreamland of Death, and unlike before, the erratic killing pattern began as soon as it appeared.

Because the person in possession of the Dreamland of Death had already gone through a round of killings before, most players believed that although it was a Grade-B item, it probably had only a few uses left in it. But now, it seemed that wasn't the case. This time around, the pool of victims was rather peculiar.

All seven victims were from all over China, from Yunnan to Shanghai, and there was even a case where two people who were more than a thousand miles apart died the same way on the same day. The comments that followed the posts were discussions about the phenomenal trajectory of the new owner of the game item.

What was it? A killing expedition?

This time, however, because there were no prominent victims like Silver Wing's guild leader, the panic wasn't as widespread or as intense. Even so, the three major guilds, all up against a common enemy, had already dispatched personnel to investigate the connection between the victims.

At the same time, they also urged the players to actively provide information, should they have any, and promised a reward of game points based on the value of the intelligence they received

### **Chapter 328 Elimination Process**

Zhang Heng browsed several other hot posts and registered an ID called Saturn 5. He then shut down the computer, and left the Internet cafe. The whole process only took him less than twenty minutes, and when he returned home, Tian Tian was alone jumping on a rope in the backyard. Grandpa was leaning against the courtyard door, looking at her. He looked a little worried.

Sensing unrest, Zhang Heng put on his slippers and walked to his grandfather.

"Do you remember taking Tian Tian with you last summer holidays?" Zhang Heng nodded.

"At that time, she was very lively, running around the house behind you. In fact, when I saw her a month ago, she was still very normal, jumping up and down all the time. But after that, she somehow became terrified of communicating with other people."

"What happened in between?" Zhang Heng asked.

"No one knows. A child her age usually has a regular life. She spends most of her time in school every day, and on Saturdays and Sundays, she's either with her parents or attending classes. Her parents suspected that it was the school's problem at first. After all, she spends most of her time there. You know, sometimes, children in school get bullied..."

"What happened after that?"

"As a result, her parents went to talk to her class teacher. They even sought her substitute teacher and the rest of the kids in the class, hoping to find out a little more about their daughter's peculiar behavior. They all told her the same thing. Tian Tian is good at learning, beautiful, well-behaved, and she's the class monitor. She is very popular among teachers and classmates. A kid like her is unlikely to become the target of bullies. Later, her parents brought her to a psychologist. Since then, the situation has improved to some extent, but..."

"But?"

"But the good times didn't last long, and soon, her condition began to deteriorate again. Now, she seems to have social anxiety, not knowing how to communicate with others. Her mother will apply for a school leave in two days. After that, she will bring her to the city to meet a specialist for treatment. In fact, if it weren't for Old Chen's injuries, they would have already contacted the hospital over there." Grandpa shook his head. "I hope everything ends well this time."

Zhang Heng was left in silence.

The current situation showed that there should be two possibilities for what happened to Tian Tian. Either she had come into contact with monsters like Moresby and Zavlcha, or she had unintentionally

obtained some game items. The psychiatrist, though an experienced expert, wasn't equipped to deal with supernatural phenomena like this, so Zhang Heng decided to investigate the matter himself.

He intended to start with the latter possibility, where many game items were circulating among players at the moment. It wouldn't be too surprising if one of them lost an item or someone accidentally took it. That was why Zhang Heng initially intended to deposit his game items at the game checkpoint.

Right now, Zhang Heng needed to focus on locating the game item.

Although the environment in the quests was more dangerous than reality, it had its own advantages. For example, when the players laid their hands on a game item, they would hear a notification from the system. This method could also be used to quickly identify whether the item the player was holding was a game item or not. So far, the system had been very accurate except for extreme cases like an auction.

On the other hand, Zhang Heng couldn't rely on the game's system in the real world. There was also no character panel for him to review the items as well, making things a lot harder.

Judging by Tian Tian's current state, it would be difficult to communicate with her.

Zhang Heng pondered for a while, went out of the house, and went to a nearby mall where there was a large Disney stationery counter. He bought a series of stationery, including notebooks, a pencil case, a pencil sharpener, and a school bag. These were all popular items among school kids, and he hoped to do an exchange with Tian Tian.

Tian Tian was moved after seeing the Frozen backpack, but when Zhang Heng told her that the exchange included the workbook in her hands, she seemed a little hesitant. In the end, though, she still failed to resist the temptation of a Disney stationery set. She handed everything over to Zhang Heng, except the textbook.

Zhang Heng patted the girl's head and took her old backpack along with its contents back to his room.

He then contacted the bartender lady and asked her for the address of the game's checkpoint in his current city. He was, however, not in a hurry to get there as a hefty amount of game points would be needed for item identification. Besides, his membership card was invalid at other checkpoints, which meant he had to pay the full price for the service.

That night, Tian Tian's mother returned from the hospital and thanked them for the trouble. She also specifically thanked Zhang Heng for his assistance with Old Chen. Soon after, she collected Tian Tian, now sitting quietly in a corner, back home.

At dinner, Zhang Heng had mentioned that he wanted to retire early tonight. He went back to his room right after that. Once he had his privacy, he proceeded to go through Tian Tian's old backpack. For now, the two most suspicious items were the pencil and the workbook, especially true for the workbook. Being part of a generation influenced by "Death Note", it was difficult not to notice such an obvious target.

After rechecking it, though, the workbook seemed to be like any other. The date that was on her previous work was a month ago. Tian Tian still behaved normally at that time. There was, of course, the possibility that she had not found the conditions to trigger the item at that time. As for the pencil...

Zhang Heng picked it up, placing it under the light of a lamp. Just as he was about to take a closer look, there was a knock on his door. He was greeted by grandpa's serious face when he opened it.

"Something untoward happened to Old Chen again. The drip stand next to his bed fell, and it happened to hit his head. His forehead now has two stitches. I am going out to visit him now. Thought I'd inform you about it."

Retribution for the interrupted curse?

Zhang Heng was surprised. When he went to the hospital, he chatted with Tian Tian's mother about the recent happenings in his family and found that the accidents seemed to run on a schedule, where one would take place every three days. This was the ninth time, and each time it happened, it wasn't a fatal accident. According to the pattern, the next accident should be three days since he had interrupted this one. Now that Old Chen got into another accident again, it appeared that this was the replacement for the accident that Zhang Heng stopped. Zhang Heng frowned, extremely curious if this time, Tian Tian had drawn any stick figures in advance. However, he couldn't just knock on her door right now. Fortunately, the young woman sent her to grandpa's house again the very next day. It was then that Zhang Heng saw a stick figure of a falling drip stand scribbled in the new Disney workbook.

He had personally purchased the pens and notebooks. In other words, the possibility of game items being hidden in the pile of stationery could almost be ruled out.

Could it be the work of a monster? Zhang Heng was lost in thought as he stared at Tian Tian lying on the coffee table.

### **Chapter 329 Communication and Doubt**

While cleaning the house, Zhang Heng took some time off to check on the curse. He went on Baidu, researching the meaning of the simple strokes and foreseeing the future. However, he might have inputted the wrong keywords might because the search results mainly returned with horror and science fiction movies. Advertisements for art training classes popped up on the internet browser too.

As he logged out of Baidu, he realized he had to start with Tian Tian if he wanted to find a breakthrough in this matter.

Although Tian Tian was reluctant to speak now, the Disney stationery set that Zhang Heng gave her indicated that there was some form of communication between her and the outside world. And like any other child her age, she was still tempted by these things. Earlier, Zhang Heng failed to communicate with her effectively, but he wasn't about to give up on trying. He decided to use other methods to talk to her.

After that, Zhang Heng told his grandfather that he wanted to bring Tian Tian out.

Grandpa hesitated a little.

"It's good to help her relax, but make sure you look after her."

Zhang Heng nodded, "nothing will happen when she's with me."

Of course, he was more than qualified to say something like this. Squatting down, he asked Tian Tian, "Would you like to have McDonald's?"

Although the child was a little scared, children her age showed almost no resistance to when it came to McDonald's. She finally nodded.

"Okay, we'll go to McDonald's then."

They both boarded a cab and headed to a large shopping mall, going straight to the McDonald's outlet on the second floor. Zhang Heng ordered Tian Tian a kid's meal that came with a toy. As for himself, he ordered a glass of Coke.

After getting the order, the two found a place to sit down. Zhang Heng then pushed the set meal to Tian Tian. She glanced at him, seeing that he had no intention to stop her. So she reached out and grabbed a nugget.

He waited patiently for her to finish her chicken McNuggets and the cheeseburger. The abundant food finally allowed the girl to relax a little.

"I know that you understand what people around you say. I also know that many have told you the same thing. They said that they could help solve your problems, but in the end, they all failed to live up to your expectations. I can guarantee you this time; it's different."

Zhang Heng paused. "Whether you believe it or not, I actually understand what you're going through right now. They are the closest people to you in this world, and you don't want to hurt them, right? I can see in your eyes. Guilt and self-blame... you just don't know how to stop, stop all of this. I can help you, but only if you tell me what happened first."

Zhang Heng looked into Tian Tian's eyes, "Did you meet any strange person... or a strange thing before this?"

Tian Tian suddenly stopped and looked at Zhang Heng. After a long while, she shook her head. Zhang Heng frowned and decided to change the method he asked questions.

"Who's asking you to draw on your workbook?"

This time, Tian Tian lowered her head after she heard Zhang Heng's question. She obviously did not want to answer any more questions like this. So she silently gnawed on the cheeseburger in her hand.

The communication between them was basically over. Zhang Heng's knuckles tapping the table, clearly displeased by the outcome. He could feel that their conversation must have affected her in a certain way. Tian Tian's eyes were hopeful, and with her shaking her head, it was the best proof that she finally responded to external stimuli.

However, when Zhang Heng moved the topic to the drawings in the book, Tian Tian's guard immediately came up. His hope was dimmed, as her defensive mechanism effectively cut off all communications that had been established.

Why did that happen?

If something was working in the dark and caused one accident after another at home, everyone close to her must have sustained some sort of injury. Why would she cover-up for that thing? Zhang Heng knew he was missing something important. The second half of the meal was finished in silence. Zhang Heng

knew that he could no longer make Tian Tian talk to him, and he didn't push her any further. The two returned home after that.

That afternoon, Tian Tian was completing her homework, and Zhang Heng continued helping his grandfather with spring cleaning. Progress was slow because of the previous delay, but in the end, he finally managed to finish all the cleaning up before sunset.

The house now looked spanking clean and brand new, which put grandpa in a good mood,

"Not bad at all. You are much better than your mother. When she was a little girl, she wouldn't even clean up a small area of the house during the Chinese New Year. However, when it came to collecting the New Year's money, she ran faster than anyone."

Zhang Heng washed the last piece of rag in his hand and put it back in place.

"I'm glad that you are satisfied."

"All we need to do tomorrow is to stick the Spring Festival couplets on the wall. After that, we can celebrate the New Year with your parents once they come back."

"Isn't it too early to post the Spring Festival couplets? I thought we had to do it at the right time? Aren't we supposed to stick them on the 28th or 29th of the lunar calendar?"

Zhang Heng wiped the water off his hands.

"It's just a formality," grandpa replied. "The most important thing is to stick the Spring Festival couplets together to make it livelier. This is the true meaning of Chinese New Year. It doesn't matter when we stick it on the wall. It makes no difference to me."

Zhang Heng's grandpa used to be a scientist, which why he did not believe in anything mystical or mythical. After that, grandpa proceeded to practice writing with a brush. As Zhang Heng took the trash out, he took a quick glance at Tian Tian's apartment unit. The room facing the area with a lot of green plants was her room, and although the curtains were drawn, he saw light spilling out.

He stood by the trash can for a while. Just when he turned to leave, the curtains were drawn slightly, and a small gap could be seen. A pair of eyes watched Zhang Heng quietly.

...

On the other hand, he had no intention to give up on the investigation. The afternoon's attempt in communication seemed ineffective, prompting him to take a more direct approach. He decided to go over to her house. If the culprit was around, it was most likely in Tian Tian's house now. Clearly, all the accidents had happened to Tian Tian's family members.

Of course, it would be inappropriate to knock on the door right now and ask to enter her room. There was an 80% chance that her parents would send him directly to the police station. Having these things in mind, Zhang Heng waited until the hour hand pointed at twelve. When time came to a standstill, Zhang Heng left his grandpa's house wearing sports attire.

On the first floor, the front door of Tian Tian's house was secured by a Class-B lock cylinder, and the windows were also equipped with anti-theft nets. Evidently, using the public transport card wouldn't unlock the door. It was time for him to use the item called Evil Wall.

(Name: Evil Wall]

(Grade: D]

(Function: Reconstructing a wall particle. Can be switched between solid and liquid. Usage limit: 3]

Zhang Heng approached the wall and took out a toe from his pocket. He thought that this broken toe would rot, but it didn't look much different from when it was just cut off. It felt weird in hand. Zhang Heng then pressed the toe against the wall and wrote a few Slavic letters with the remaining black blood from the toe. A few moments later, the wall began to boil and melt.

Chapter 330 Eye

When the wall in front of him melted away, Zhang Heng stepped across the plants and walked directly into Tian Tian's room. The bubblegum pink wall then started patching up again, gradually returning to its original form. Zhang Heng found the light switch on the right. He flipped it on, and looked around. He was also surprised to see that Tian Tian wasn't in bed.

In fact, there was no one in the whole room. The quilt on the bed remained undone. However, a pair of slippers were by the bed. Zhang Heng frowned. Tian Tian should be sleeping at this hour. It would be impossible for a little girl her age to go out on her own. Surely, her family would disallow it, and there was also no way to climb out of the window since security grills guarded it. After looking around, he decided to check on the bed and wardrobe in the room. These two places were the only possible hiding spots that a little kid could hide in.

Zhang Heng first opened the wardrobe. He found children's clothing, sheets, and quilts in it. The Disney schoolbag he gave Tian Tian yesterday was in there as well. Squatting down, he pinned his cheeks as close as possible to the floor, peeking under the bed. This time he finally found something.

The 'missing' Tian Tian was hiding under the bed. Her body was curled up into a ball at the furthest corner, her expression looking a little frightened. Zhang Heng also noticed that her eyes were wide open, which meant her eyes weren't closed when the hour hand pointed at 12.

What was she afraid of?

Why did she have to hide here?

Was something about to appear in her room tonight?

Zhang Heng had a feeling that he was very close to the answer, so he stood up, checking his surroundings to see if he could spot any suspicious items. He decided to start with the wardrobe. He found two storage boxes, where one contained Tian Tian's kindergarten certificate and a couple of art pieces she had made. The other one mainly stored toys, including Barbie dolls and bears. These objects seemed to be fine, judging by their appearance.

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He moved to the desk after that. On it were some stationery, textbooks, and toys for girls. Zhang Heng then noticed a Winnie the Pooh notebook. After replacing Tian Tian's old workbook, she had begun to doodle in this notebook instead.

Her first piece was about her grandfather getting hit by a drip stand in the hospital. According to the previous pattern, her second painting should appear tomorrow. When Zhang Heng opened the notebook, he saw a new picture that had hadn't seen before. It seemed to have been done recently, where a little girl was hiding under the bed looking very frightened. If he was right, this little girl should be Tian Tian herself, and the thing in front of her seemed to be... an eye?

Could this have been the object that had been wreaking disaster to her family?

Zhang Heng sensed a trace of evil in that eye, or at least in Tian Tian's eyes; this thing was evil. The next step had become much simpler, though. He only needed to locate the eye, and the frequent accidents that had strangely befallen Tian Tian's family could be solved.

The painting did not specify when the next accident would take place, and he could not rule out if the evil creature were already in the room. If that were the case, then he would have to find a way to install a hidden camera, waiting for 24 hours until the true identity of the evil being was revealed.

He seemed to be in luck tonight. It took him less than an hour to locate the object.

It was a peculiar little ornament made out of unusual stone and was about a fifth of the weight of ordinary gems. Other than that, it retained its natural shape, except for a small hole drilled at its end. It could be made into a necklace, bracelet, or keychain. At the face of the stone, a red-colored eye was engraved. The strange thing was that no matter which angle it was looked at, the eye seemed to be staring at its looker.

Zhang Heng found the peculiar object under Tian Tian's pillow, and it perfectly matched the eye that Tian Tian drew on the book. It also seemed to be quite old. So, to be safe, Zhang Heng did not touch the "eye" with his hands, knowing that it might be cursed. Instead, he tore two pieces of paper from the notebook, wrapped it up, and put it in his pocket.

At this point, the matter should have come to an end. As long as the frequent mishaps stopped happening to Tian Tian's family, and she stayed away from the source of the curse, her mental health should gradually improve with the therapy she was getting.

Zhang Heng spent another four hours scanning Tian Tian's entire house. After making sure that there were no more suspicious objects, he left the house through the front door.

The time was 00:45, and 45 minutes had passed since the end of Zhang Heng's extra 24 hours. Instead of going home, he stood by the roadside, wearing a mask and hoodie, staring at the KTV that was opposite him.

This was the address given to him by the bartender. A drunk man in a suit hugged two voluptuous ladies as he walked out from the place, a wide plastered across his face. He then hopped into a rented car and went straight to a hotel. With the four burly guards standing outside the entrance, Zhang Heng could probably guess the nature of this establishment.



That said, after several anti-prostitution operations, KTVs like this had tried to stay out of trouble. The women who worked there were only allowed to accompany their customers to drink. At least no one dared to make any deals here. Once they left, however, they were free to make whatever deals with whoever they wanted to.

Men frequently fancied socializing, and no matter which city, places like this frequently enjoyed good business. Of course, their customers weren't focussing on the singing bit. Just like the Sex and the City bar, places like this were excellent masquerades as game checkpoints.

Zhang Heng kept his mask on as he walked over to the KTV. His appearance immediately attracted the attention of the four bouncers. The muscular man who seemed to be their leader stepped forward. However, instead of stopping Zhang Heng, they quickly retreated after seeing that he had no intention to stop. Zhang Heng entered the KTV, passed the counter in the lobby, and headed to private room 2306. This time, though, the two gorgeous ladies in bunny costumes gestured to stop Zhang Heng from entering the room.

They both had professional smiles and judging by their exposed arms and thighs; it was obvious that they had been trained by the system. This reminded Zhang Heng of the two men with shades guarding the iron ladder on the first floor of Sex and the City. If the security guards outside were hired by the KTV, then these two beauties were obviously related to the gaming committee.

Zhang Heng then showed them his player number on his arm. One of the ladies smiled and moved aside.

"I wish you a pleasant gaming experience tonight," said the lady in a sweet voice.