

Horrors 1

Chapter 1: Dying House of Horrors

“This is the first time I’ve visited such an un-scary Haunted House.”

“The props are too fake; I didn’t feel scared. If anything, it all felt like a joke to me.”

“Materialists like ourselves naturally have nothing to be afraid of! Ghosts aren’t real!”

“I hate to say it, but I told you so. We should have stayed at the hostel; I was so close to gaining another level on my online game.”

A group of students grumbled with disappointment in front of Western Jiujiang City’s House of Horrors before they left on their motorbikes. Chen Ge, who held a stack of advertisement flyers for the Haunted House, shook his head despondently when he saw this.

The art of scaring was a skill, but with the introduction of scary movies, many modern-day citizens’ threshold for scares had been increased. A visit to the Haunted House was no different from a stroll in one’s own backyard.

“Boss!”

A clear female voice erupted from behind him. Chen Ge turned around and saw a slender ‘zombie’ in a nurse outfit running out of the Haunted House in a fit of anger.

“What’s wrong, Xiao Wan?” The zombie’s name was Xu Wan; she was one of the temporary actors hired by the Haunted House.

“Those few ruffians earlier, they tried to take advantage of me!” the girl hissed through gritted teeth, her fists gripped tight.

So, it is merely to complain...

“That’s horrible; they wouldn’t even leave a zombie in peace.” As the boss, naturally Chen Ge was on Xiao Wan’s side. “Later, I’ll have the amusement park manager to pull up the surveillance footage.”

“There’s no need for that. When I realized their intentions, my punch went flying straight at the boy’s face.” Xu Wan pointed at the bloodstain at the edge of her outfit and exclaimed rather proudly, “See, this isn’t fake blood.”

“Good, good, a girl should learn how to protect herself.” Chen Ge wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. As he turned to look at the setting sun, he said, “I suppose it’s time to call it a day. We probably won’t have any more visitors, so help me go and tell everyone that we can get off work early today.”

However, he realized the girl in zombie make-up didn’t make an attempt to move away.

“Is there anything else?”

“Boss...” Xu Wan hesitated before pulling two letters out from her pocket slowly. “These are the resignation letters from Tao Ming and Xiao Wei. You’ve been a great boss to them, so they didn’t have to the face to give these to you in person and had me pass them to you.”

“They’re quitting?” Chen Ge asked the obvious question as he accepted the letters, then he added, “Everyone has their own dream to chase, so be it. Xiao Wan, you can leave now if there’s nothing else.”

“Okay, I’ll go remove the make-up first.”

After the cute little zombie left, Chen Ge lit a cigarette silently. Half a year ago, when his parents mysteriously disappeared, the only thing they left him was this Haunted House. To keep their memory alive, Chen Ge had resigned from his day-job to focus on managing this Haunted House.

Alas, times were changing. Despite the niche genre, there was huge competition among Haunted Houses, and there were plenty of limitations as well. A scary scenario would lose its scare factor after the initial experience, but a constant update would require plenty of resources and money.

Starting from a few weeks ago, the Haunted House had been in the red; the income from the daily ticket sales barely covered the electricity and water expenses.

“I wonder how long I can hold on.”

After extinguishing the cigarette, when Chen Ge was prepared to return to the Haunted House, a middle-aged man wearing the uniform for New Century Park walked toward him. When he saw him, Chen Ge increased his pace like a mouse spotting a cat.

“You think you can pretend to have not seen me?” The middle-aged man clamped his hands on Chen Ge’s shoulders. “Today, we definitely need to talk it out. You’ve owed the rent and utilities for two months already. The top brass are breathing down my neck to pursue it, so pay up!”

“Uncle Xu, it’s not that I don’t want to pay you, but I really have nothing to pay you with. Can you please give me another month?”

“That’s what you told me last month!”

“I promise, this is definitely the last time!” Chen Ge patted his chest as he promised with sincerity.

“People have already moved on from Haunted Houses. Listen to me, it’s no use being this stubborn.” When the middle-aged man named Uncle Xu saw the letters in Chen Ge’s hand, the force on Chen Ge’s shoulders gradually lightened. “You’re so young; you can still begin anew with a different career, so why are you doing this to yourself?”

“Uncle Xu, I know you’re just looking out for me, but this Haunted House carries a different meaning for me. I guess I’m still unwilling to let the last memory of my parents go,” Chen Ge uttered in a lowered voice as if he was afraid that other people might hear him.

As the amusement park manager, the middle-aged man knew about the disappearance of Chen Ge’s parents. He didn’t answer immediately. After a few seconds, he sighed and said, “Fine, I can understand how you feel. I’ll try my best to talk to management for you and see if they can give you a few more weeks.”

“Thank you, Uncle Xu!”

“Don’t thank me so soon, you’d better make sure you can increase the ticket sales or the ending will just be the same.”

After sending the amusement park manager off, Chen Ge returned to the Haunted House and started his daily routine of checking the equipment, maintaining the items, and cleaning.

“The fake blood in the maintenance room is almost empty; I have to buy a new batch.

“If this corridor could be made slightly more slanted to the side, it’ll create a better blind spot to scare the visitors.

“Oh no, this puppet is broken already; I’ll have to repair it later.

“F*ck! What happened to the lightbulb I installed here last week? Who has stolen it?”

In the eyes of an outsider, he was the owner of a Haunted House, a young entrepreneur in a way, but only Chen Ge himself could understand the difficulty behind maintaining a Haunted House. Haunted Houses were a kind of entertainment. Caught within a scary environment, one’s physical and mental situation would be maintained at a heightened state, but when the stress was released, it would lead to a sense of relief and satisfaction; it was not unlike a massage in a way.

At the same time, most Haunted Houses were one-trick ponies. The most effective business method for a Haunted House was to have it be mobile so that it would constantly attract fresh batches of visitors. A Haunted House that was stuck at a certain location like Chen Ge’s had to have immense popularity to lure in the crowds, or else they wouldn’t be able to survive for long. The fact that he had managed to hold on for so long was already, in a way, a miracle.

Dragging the puppet that was ruined, Chen Ge entered the maintenance room. He had studied Toy Design in college, and the machinery and traps used in the Haunted House had been all personally designed and built by him. The maintenance process, which included sewing and repainting, was dry and repetitive.

“Still missing some fake blood. If I remember correctly, there’s still some stock in the attic.” The Haunted House was separated into three floors; the first and second floors were for haunted scenarios while the third was a storeroom.

After pushing open the wooden door, behind the haze of wood chips and dust, there were various kinds of materials and unwanted ingredients left behind by Chen Ge’s parents from when they had managed the Haunted House.

Unwilling to face the past, Chen Ge rarely came up to this place.

“Now that I think about it, it has almost been half a year already.”

Looking at the various equipment, Chen Ge was reminded of his childhood. At the time, his family had managed a mobile Haunted House, so he had gotten the chance to travel the country with his parents. When the two adults were busy, they would leave Chen Ge alone backstage to accompany the various ghosts, so Chen Ge’s unnatural guts had been trained since he was young.

After all, when his friends of the same age were playing with blocks and puzzles, he was running around with a fake human head.

“These are all precious memories.”

Chen Ge wandered aimlessly before finding himself back at the wooden box that kept the few things that remained of his parents. Inside sat a black cell phone and a rough-looking doll. The doll was the first toy Chen Ge made when he was a child, but he had zero recollection of the phone. Both of these items had been found in an abandoned hospital in the countryside, and regarding why Chen Ge’s parents would go there in the middle of the night, even the police couldn’t give him an answer.

“Where are the two of you?” Chen Ge picked up the doll and pinched its chubby face. Then, with a sigh, he told himself, “I’d better go find that fake blood. If I cannot survive this off season, I really will have to bid this Haunted House farewell.”

Chen Ge was talking to himself, but when he said so, the black phone, which had been silent in the box, suddenly lit up with a dim, cold light.

“What’s going on? Dark technology or supernatural phenomenon?” If this happened to someone else, that person probably would have raced out screaming bloody murder already, but in comparison, Chen Ge’s reaction was much calmer. He picked up the phone and inspected it closer.

“This is weird. I’ve tried opening this phone more than a hundred times before, but it wouldn’t work, so why did it open by itself today? This phone was found where my parents disappeared, so could it be that they know I’m in trouble and are contacting me to help?”

Chen Ge swiped the phone open, and on the front page with a black background, there was only one available app. It had the shape of a Haunted House as an icon.

“Wait... This looks so familiar, just like the front entrance of my own Haunted House!”

With a frown, Chen Ge clicked the app open, and a row of letters written in what appeared to be blood appeared on screen—Do you believe there are ghosts in this world?

Objectively speaking, this was a metaphysical philosophical question; for an engineering student like Chen Ge, it was practically unanswerable.

“There should be,” Chen Ge mumbled to himself, and a few seconds later, a new sentence appeared on screen.

“What you believe is the answer. From this moment on, you will officially take over as the new owner of the Haunted House. Of course, this is not something worth celebrating. Before the end of the tutorials, please heed my last advice: suicide is the most cowardice of behavior, and try your best to survive!”

“What and what? But this pompous way of speech does resemble that father of mine.”

Chen Ge clicked on the app again, and a new window appeared.

Western Jiujiang Haunted House

Status: Almost Closing

Good Reputation: Zero

Daily Visitor Number: Four

Monthly Visitor Number: Ten

My Team of Ghosts and Ghouls: None

My Item Storage: None

Unlocked Achievement: None

Current Available Scenarios [Set Pieces]:

– Night of the Living Dead – Horrible prop, untrained actors, the plot has no readable storyline or logic. Scream Factor: 0 Star

– Minghun [Nether World Marriage] – Couple torn apart in the living world, bound together forever in the nether world; sharing the same grave, pursuing happiness in death. Scream Factor: 0.5 Stars

Unlockable Scenarios:

– Murder by Midnight – A dangerous psychotic patient wandered about a fallen apartment. Scissors and mallets as hands, he is just wandering outside of your room. Scream Factor: 1 Star

– The Third Sick Hall – There are unexplainable noises coming out from this abandoned hospital building every night. As a newspaper reporter, you're tasked with getting to the bottom of this dark mystery. Scream Factor: 3 Stars

– The Haunted Hearse – Leaving with the hearse carrying the coffin, if you cannot escape within an hour, you'll stay forever inside the hearse. Scream Factor: 2 Stars

Daily Mission: Complete Daily Missions provided by the Haunted House to unlock more scary scenarios. The rewards correspond to the difficulty of the mission.

Haunted House Expansion Conditions: Monthly Visitor Numbers over 100. Good Reputation over 60 percent. (After 3 expansions, the Haunted House will upgrade to The Shivering Maze.)

Haunted Wheel of Misfortune (Expend Fright Points generated by visitors of the Haunted House to spin the Wheel): The Decree of Life and Death is never the decision of man; fortune and misfortune are only an inch apart. We have both Spirit Fruits to increase your life span as well as hatred-filled Baleful Specters!

Other functions: Yet to be unlocked