

Iyashikei 111

Chapter 111:

“Notification for player 0000! You have activated Resurrection and sent the wandering soul back to his body. You’ve obtained 1 Malice Point reduction.” When the notification came, Han Fei could finally sigh in relief. He turned to his character profile, his malice point was now negative 1. For now, he had no idea what the purpose of this value was, but based on his understanding of the game, a negative attribute value might not necessarily be a bad thing. After all, this was a hellish world, not every normal rule applied.

“Han Fei, who was that man? His words quite touched me, but what does his story have to do with the bathroom?” Meng Si was confused.

“I have no idea but it felt like he was trying to find a way to leave.” Han Fei scratched his chin, “But it does come as a surprise that he’d take Xu Qin as his mother. Perhaps he was in too much shock to make sense of anything at the moment.” Han Fei felt responsible to find Huang Yin to check on him after he logged out from the game. This was his fault after all.

“Then what are these things he left on the table?” Meng Si picked up the stuff on the table. Before Huang Yin left, he retrieved everything valuable from his inventory and left them for Meng Si to thank her for her porridge. The man was an honest and loving person. Han Fei picked up the item one by one and allowed the system to identify them. As he said, Huang Yin was a casual player so most of the stuff were items of luxury, like handmade cookies, toys, flower seeds... Han Fei searched through everything and only found 2 things that were rather useful, one was a book, entitled Introduction to Physician’s Basic Skills and a set of simple surgical tools.

Unlike other games, one could not pick up a new skill by just a few clicks. For example, if Han Fei wanted to learn medicine, he would have to put in real work to study the literature, complete the application and only then would the skill appear in his skill tab. That sounded tedious but now at least Han Fei had the book necessary to initiate his mastery of medicine skill. Without the necessary skill book, he wouldn’t even be able to start. Then to level up the skill, one needed to apply Skill Points. Of course, one could continue to repeat the exercise and master the skill through experience but the time needed would be astronomical.

‘Currently, I only have 3 main skills, Advanced Acting, Beginner Cooking and Beginner Soul-Depth Touch. I noticed skill books are extremely rare in the cryptic world. In the future, perhaps I can get similar literature through this method.’ Han Fei placed the book and the surgical tools into his inventory. Then

he grabbed some toys, and a few flower seeds before he left Meng Si's home. 'I wonder if flowers from the surface world will grow here or not.'

Han Fei went to the door opposite to visit Weep. Han Fei dropped off the toys for Weep. The boy no longer hated Han Fei that much.

Han Fei returned to Room 1044. He did not disturb his roommates, instead he sat on the living room couch to study his character profile. 'Resurrection and Spirit Farer are two incredible skills. I cannot help but wonder if it is because I possess the black box that they are given me...' While he sat there, Han Fei noticed his mission for the hidden profession had been completed, the system appeared to have credited him with Xu Qin's kills of the non-locals as well. Han Fei originally did not think the hidden profession would surpass his two talents but when he saw the profession description, he found it difficult to calm down.

"Notification for Player 0000! You have completed the prerequisite mission for the hidden profession, Midnight Butcher! When you've reached level 10, you can proceed to Cattle Alley to obtain the profession.

"Midnight Butcher (Hidden Profession): Profession Ability not yet unlocked.

"Profession Property: Resistance to Blade-Type Cursed Objects increase by 30 points!"

Some time ago, Han Fei obtained the Mirror God's blessing that gave him resistance to mirror-type cursed objects, at the time, he groused that he would have preferred resistance to blade-type cursed objects.

'Has the system been listening in?!' Using cursed objects would harm the user but most importantly, they could injure ghosts and monsters!

'When I tried to pick up Xu Qin's table knife, the curse immediately took over, but after I became the midnight butcher, they would not cause such a lasting impact on me anymore.' However, it was not a solution to steal Xu Qin's weapon, he narrowed his eyes. Han Fei decided to keep his eyes open for his own blade.

Then, Han Fei turned to the inventory to pick out the Introduction to Physician's Basic Skills. As he did so, he noticed one of his existing items had changed.

When he completed the showering mission, he obtained a landlord's diary. At the time, he thought it was just an ordinary notebook because it contained no entry. But now he noticed the previously black cover had turned red. 'The diary has changed after I became the new manager?'

Han Fei took out the diary. Just as he turned the first page, a thick sense of blood overwhelmed him. The diary was seriously damaged, many pages were missing. The few remaining pages didn't have their dates marked out either. The entries were also incomplete. In any case, the entries were mostly comments on the neighbourhood tenants. To Han Fei's surprise, it not only contained information on tenants at Apartment 1 but also at Apartment 2 as well.

"Possible Candidate for Apartment 2's Manager: Qu Yun.

"The half of a loving couple. The husband and wife from Room 2044 are by all means an enviable match, at least in front of others. When the door closes, screams would come out from Room 2044 at night. They say human beings are no different from beasts, I say no, because humans are more cunning than beasts. They know how to disguise themselves before others and put on clothes made from morality and civility. This kind of clothing is called humanity.

"That early morning, the normally well-dressed wife stumbled out from Room 2044 covered in wounds. She cried for help as she ran down the stairs as if running away from someone. She tripped on the stairs and was later dragged home. She was never seen ever since.

"Possible Candidate for Apartment 2's Manager: Spectral Dog

"This wild canine that can hide in the shadow possesses an intelligence that is not lower than humans. It appears to be the few earliest tenants to settle at Happiness Neighbourhood.

"It carries a curse that I have not seen before, I wonder how it got that curse."

The entries and the handwriting were hard to read. There were many places where Han Fei had to fill in the blanks.

“There was indeed a wounded woman staying in Room 2044. It was she who dragged the butterfly-tattooed spirit into her room. She is probably Qu Yun. According to the previous manager, she is a possible candidate to manage Apartment 2, looks like there is a need for me to reach out to her.”

As the current building manager, Han Fei believed he should have a good conversation with the tenants from Apartment 2 so that together, they could bring true happiness to this neighbourhood.

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Han Fei had completed the prerequisite mission for Midnight Butcher, stayed in the game for more than 3 hours but he did not hurry to log off but instead waited until 4 am. When Chatroom 444 lit up, he immediately entered it.

Anonymous User: ‘Is anyone there?’

Huang Yin (Tester Account Player 0999): ‘Brother, we meet meet meet again. But today I’m not feeling so well, I’m going to log off soon.’

Anonymous User: ‘Oh no, I hope you’re not sick.’

Huang Yin (Tester Account Player 0999): ‘It’s not that, I’ve been through a bit much earlier, so now I feel quite tired.’

Anonymous User: ‘What do you mean?’

Huang Yin (Tester Account Player 0999): ‘You probably won’t believe me, but there is a hidden map connected to my home’s bathroom.’

Anonymous User: ‘?’

Huang Yin (Tester Account Player 0999): 'I knew you wouldn't believe me, hell, if I didn't experience it myself, I wouldn't have believed it either, but it's real! My bathroom is the key to open the map. Based on my observation, there's a slim chance for me to enter that map whenever I open my bathroom door.'

Anonymous User: 'What is so special about the map? What's so exciting about it?'

Huang Yin (Tester Account Player 0999): 'The map appears to manifest your innermost fear into actual ghosts and demons, so that you are forced to face your darkest memory head on.'

Anonymous User: 'Brother Huang, are you pulling my leg?'

Huang Yin (Tester Account Player 0999): 'You still don't believe me?! No matter, when you come to visit me in the future, I'll bring you along to experience it with me!'

Anonymous User: 'For real?'

Huang Yin (Tester Account Player 0999): 'Yes. It's an indescribable experience. At the beginning, everything is horrifying but at the end of the darkness, you'll encounter that hope hidden deep inside your heart, the memory that keeps you holding on in the darkest moment. When you wake up from the nightmare, when you've experienced the darkest moment, you'll realize even the simplest bowl of porridge, a normal conversation with others can be such inspiration of bliss! In fact, perhaps that is the real Iyashikei game in Perfect Life...'

Anonymous User: 'You really think it's that magical?'

Huang Yin (Tester Account Player 0999): 'It's very hard for me to explain. Brother, you'll see for yourself when I bring you along next time. I'm getting too tired already. I'll chat with you tomorrow. Good night.'

After leaving the chatroom, Han Fei glanced around Room 1044. He then scratched his chin. 'The man really appears to have been healed from that experience. Is he not normal or am I not normal...'

He quitted the game. Blood covered his world. He removed the gaming helmet and climbed into bed. 'After I finish with the shoot tomorrow, I should go and check up on Huang Yin in person.' He stretched lazily and pulled out his phone to call Jin Jun, "Have you called the police?"

"Big Brother Han, I'm now at the police station. I've told the officer everything. You saved my life and detained the culprit." Jin Jun was very clever. After a while, he suddenly whispered, "I only called them at 12.15 am, I followed your instructions to the tee."

"You're older than I am, it's weird to hear you call me big brother. Listen, cooperate well with the police and we might work together again in the future." Han Fei turned to look at his crime wall. "I have many exclusives that will skyrocket your career. But you'll have to follow my instructions on what to publish and how to publish them."

"Of course, of course!" After hanging up, Han Fei slept soundly. After he woke up, he rushed to the set. Once he arrived at the Northern Street, Han Fei noticed something was wrong. Not only did the number of reporters increase, even the crew members kept tossing strange gazes at him. Theoretically speaking, a topic's popularity would fade as the time went by but it was the complete opposite for Han Fei. "Is there something on my face? Why are you all staring at me like that?"

"Han Fei, have you seen the morning news?" The floor manager jogged over and said, "You're on the news again!" Han Fei quickly pulled out his phone. The police had just announced the news that the killer of the toy plushie case had been captured. It was attached with a video message of Jin Jun thanking his savior. The paparazzi painted a very powerful image of Han Fei, of how he arrived like a superhero to save his life and apprehend the criminal.

"Normally, the paparazzi share a sketchy relationship with celebrities. You're the first celebrity to make a paparazzi to go on public record to express his undying appreciation to you." The floor manager sighed, "Jin Jun is quite famous in our circle. He has a nose for news, he is behind several big scoops. He's a senior paparazzi, loved by his editors but hated by most celebrities."

"I just happened to be there when he was attacked." Han Fei scrolled through the news. There were already articles with headlines like 'actor sacrificing himself to save a paparazzi' and so on, "We better focus on our job. That is more important." When Han Fei first got on the latest news, he found it quite interesting, but now it felt quite normal.

“I am ultimately an actor. I should remind people of that fact.” Han Fei opened his social media account and submitted his first status. It was the poster of his upcoming movie, Twin Flowers. Meng Changan and Meng Changxi stood back to back, once the poster was released, his social media exploded again!

“What the! You’re really an actor?! I thought you’re an undercover cop sent into the entertainment industry!”

“You look much better here than the ones on the news site!”

“Brother, what kind of case do you plan to solve next? No, I mean what kind of project you’ll participate in next?”

Han Fei couldn’t help but laugh when he read the comments. ‘The cryptic world of Perfect Life is so lifeless because there is no global chatbox. Perhaps I should bring a few more players with me to liven up the place when I have the chance.’ Turning off the phone, Han Fei turned to his job. He was the main character and had the most scenes but he was, as always, the first to finish. Around noon, everyone gathered together for lunch. Like usual, Han Fei found a secluded spot away from others to have his meal alone. He took out his phone and started to search online for information on Qu Yun while shoving food into his mouth.

The landlord’s diary provided certain information on specific tenants. Han Fei planned to use this information to get to know these tenants better.

“I still remember the previous building manager telling me to speed up my exploration speed, that suggests that I’m on a time crunch, perhaps something sinister is coming after me. I need to gather more friends and neighbours as well as level up as fast as possible before they can get me.”

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With his previous experience, Han Fei had an easier time unearthing news about Qu Yun. Instead of spreading a wide net, he looked into articles on past criminal cases. Soon, he found the thing he needed. About 10 years ago, a murder happened near Xin Lu countryside. A wife was murdered by her husband. The husband often beat up his wife and one day, he hit a bit too hard and killed his wife. The murderer was caught and given the death penalty. The point of interest was that they had a son together. The father killed the mother and the father was executed. The boy was the murderer’s family but also the

victim's family. He tried to commit suicide after the tragedy but was rescued by the police. To provide a sense of belonging to the child, the police decided to leave the boy with his uncle.

There were a few follow up articles about the boy. He did not do anything wrong but for some reasons, the people disliked being around him. His schoolmates ostracized him and he did not really find a happy home with his uncle. His uncle would be reminded of his dead younger sister whenever he saw the boy, so the uncle did not care for him much. He would give him some monthly allowance, just enough that he would not be punished by the law.

"Qu Yun's son is still alive, his name is Qu Wenhou." Han Fei decided to seek out the boy after he finished shooting. If possible, he wanted to get to know the boy better. The progress in the afternoon slowed conspicuously because there were a lot of couple and group scenes. The other actors in the same frame as Han Fei were under a lot of pressure. This was especially true for the new actor, Mian Nian, she was even frightened a few times by Han Fei who was too into character. Han Fei still managed to wrap up his own scenes by 6 pm. He skipped dinner and hurried towards the boy's uncle's address. The address he got was from 10 years ago, he hoped they had not moved. He bought a bottle of yogurt and a fruit basket at a convenience store before entering the dilapidated neighbourhood. The environment here was horrible, there was not even a gate at the neighbourhood entrance. He eventually located the address.

"I'm sorry but does Qu Wenhou's family live here?" He knocked for a long time before the door was answered by a miserly man. "Who are you?"

"Hi, I'm looking for Qu Wenhou's family."

"Are you his friend? He's at the store, go look for him there."

"The boy is only supposed to be 17 years old now, shouldn't he be at school?"

"He doesn't want to go to school so what can I do?" The man huffed and gave Han Fei the store's address with great impatience. He took the presents from Han Fei but instead of inviting Han Fei in, he slammed the door. The man detested anyone who had anything to do with Qu Wenhou. Following the GPS on his phone, Han Fei arrived at a convenience store not far away from the neighbourhood. The store was located at a secluded spot. There was no customer and surprisingly no person manned the shop either. "Where is the child?" Han Fei was strolling through the shop when he heard sounds of argument coming from the back alley. He hurried towards it.

Five ruffians surrounded a soft-looking young man wearing the convenience store's uniform. One of the five wore the uniform from the nearby high school, his left arm was bandaged.

"Do you think this is over if you don't come to school?"

"There's still teachers to help you at school but who is going to protect you now? Tell on us some more, why don't you?"

"Do you really think no one will know about your history by changing schools? Do you think people will befriend you now? How naïve!" The ruffians mocked relentlessly until the surrounded boy finally exploded, "I've never done anything to any of you, why do you insist on targeting me?"

"Who is targeting you? We were merely telling everyone the truth, so that they can see what you really are. How that affects other people treats you, that we cannot control." The student with the bandaged arm took out a box of cigarettes from his pocket. "Furthermore, don't you forget who put this bandage on me. See, we were not wrong. You have indeed inherited your father's DNA. You're his biological son. Your mother was murdered probably because she was a slut and was caught in bed with another man."

"Don't you dare talk about my mother like that!" The young man suddenly lashed out like a beast. He jumped at the student with the bandaged arm. The other 4 were too slow to stop him. The two rolled to the ground, fighting each other. The gentle-looking boy was a surprisingly ferocious fighter. But he was outnumbered and was soon pinned to the ground. His face was grinded against the tarmac. The boy's pretty eyes filled with venom. He struggled vehemently but no one was there to help him. The ruffians were right, at least at school, the boy could go to the teachers but outside of school, he was alone.

"What are you people doing? Stop that!" Han Fei pulled two of the students up by the back of their collars and tossed them to the side. Then he picked up the boy in the convenience store uniform up from the ground and guarded him behind him.

"Uncle, what does this have to do with you? He was the one who started it. He was the one who broke my arm, do you know how painful the injury is?" The 5 ruffians obviously were not going to let this go.

"He might have done that but can you really blame him? From the way your mouth runs, I'm surprised you have not been beaten up sooner." Han Fei countered as he looked around. He realized there was a

surveillance camera at the front of the alley. With determined steps, he backed the boy deeper into the alley.

The ruffians took this as a sign of weakness. "What did you say? Uncle, do you know there is a price to pay for minding other people's business?" The ruffians cornered them inside the alley.

"Kids like you want to talk prices with me?" When Han Fei made sure the five had followed him deep into the alley, a smile appeared on his face. "Since none of you stay in school like you're supposed to, then I shall help your teachers to impart a quick lesson on you. This is for your own good."

Han Fei had the boy move back a bit. When the five ruffians charged at him, Han Fei unleashed his full power!

Han Fei was still not as good as a professional fighter, but with the training from the game, his reaction speed was very fast. He was outnumbered so he knew he had to strike fast and strike hard. Han Fei aimed a kick right at a student's chest. He then evaded a punch and raised a right hook at the second student's chin. Han Fei was a much better fighter than the students. The attacks that they landed on Han Fei did not do any damage but one hit from Han Fei and they found themselves having difficulty standing back up.

In less than half a minute, the fight was over. 4 of the ruffians were on the ground groaning. Han Fei dragged the student with the bandaged arm over. "So, how did you like your impromptu lesson so far?"

"I, I'm so sorry!"

"Do you know why I didn't start punching directly but wait for all of you to follow me into the alley before I start the lesson?" Han Fei stared coldly at the student.

"I don't know." The student blanched. Whenever he wanted, Han Fei could be very terrifying.

"In that case, you better go back to school, the streets aren't a good place for you." Han Fei tossed the student to the side. Then he turned to the gentle-looking kid, "He's all yours."

“Really?” The boy’s fists tightened.

“Sure, I merely stepped in to help even out the playing field. This is your fight to begin with. Go all out.”

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“Can you teach me how to fight?” The young man placed the cup noodle before Han Fei, he even served an extra bottle of drink and a hotdog. “This meal is on me.”

“Well, this is a first. I’ve never been treated by a high-schooler before.” Since Han Fei skipped dinner, he was indeed quite hungry.

“Thank you for helping me out earlier.” The kid sat beside Han Fei and they looked out at the street through the convenience store window.

“If you really want to thank me, then get back to school. Education might not guarantee a bright future but it can at least provide you with more opportunities and choices.” Han Fei said in a warm voice, “You are still young, your future is bright open. If you do not like this city, you can consider applying to a university far away, but to get into a good university, you have to have a good grade, which is why you need to go back to school.”

“I know but university requires tuition. I need to work because I don’t want to trouble people around me, my uncle’s family already hates me as it is...” The kid pouted as he turned to the empty street.

“Your situation qualifies you to apply for scholarships, if you work hard enough, I’m sure help will come.”

“My situation?” The kid was confused. Han Fei did not elaborate. After he finished his noodles, he went to the counter to swipe his id card to pay for the meal. “My contact number is on there. If they ever dare to come back, call me.” Han Fei then departed. As he was about to step out, Han Fei turned around to ask, “Qu Wenhong, if you can see your mother again, is there anything that you want to tell her?”

Hearing Han Fei, the kid was stunned for a long time before his head slowly lowered, "If I can see her again, I will definitely apologize to her and then give her the promise that from now on I will protect her always, so that she will never be bullied again." When he raised his head, Han Fei had already disappeared. Dusk arrived and it was still quiet out on the streets.

The setting sun elongated Han Fei's shadow. He stood on the opposite side of the road and studied the kid inside the store. Then with his hands in his pocket, he disappeared into the night. When he reached home, Han Fei called Huang Yin. When he met Huang Yin at the gaming con, they exchanged contact numbers. Huang Yin was glad to receive the call from Han Fei. He said that when he saw Han Fei on the news, he was so shocked. He went around the hospital, telling everyone that Han Fei was his friend. From his tone, Huang Yin sounded normal but to be safe, Han Fei made a date with the man so that they could meet up in person.

After hanging up, Han Fei practiced Li Xue's moves again. He realized how useful they are. "I've already mastered the basic fighting skills, I should find Li Xue tomorrow to learn something new." Han Fei took a shower and then settled by the table to read. He put on the gaming helmet when it was midnight. Blood covered everything and his consciousness submitted.

His eyes opened to the familiar living room. "I've basically completed all the missions at Apartment 1, I need to gain contact with the tenants from Apartment 2 as soon as possible." He was about to sit up when he heard sounds coming from the kitchen.

'Hmm? At this time, my roommates should still be inside the bedroom.' Picking up the knife, Han Fei slithered his way to the kitchen. Wei Youfu with an almost transparent body stood at the stove next to Little Eight. The former appeared to be teaching the latter how to cook. Seeing Han Fei, Wei Youfu turned around to smile at him, "I'm teaching Little Eight some basic life skills."

"Oh." Han Fei was flummoxed before he gasped in shock. "Wait, you can converse normally now?"

"Yes, I've found my humanity, all thanks to you." Wei Youfu coughed. "The 8 of us can combine our bodies together, the memory and pain from death can bring us power but it will also overwhelm us with despair. I gave my part of the power to others, and that is how I manage to maintain my rationality."

"That's impressive." Han Fei looked at Wei Youfu before he walked over to give Wei Youfu a hug using Soul-Depth Touch. "Brother, I've avenged your death. Your killers have already been captured. Now I'm figuring out a way to bring all of you out of this cage, so that you can witness the criminals being punished in person!"

“You’ve already done so many things for us, we’ve already treated you like family. No matter how this concludes, we will follow you to the end.” Wei Youfu ruffled Little Eight’s hair. “All these years, none of the tenants dare to come close to 1044, but you’re the only exception. We’ve given you the chance to escape at the start but you came back again and again, that gave us hope.” Wei Youfu was in a very unique state. He looked very fragile, like a man who could collapse at any moment. Probably even Meng Si the old lady could win him in a physical fight. However, after giving up his power, he retained his humanity. He became the only person among the 8 victims who could communicate with Han Fei.

“Youfu, is there any mission on any of you?” Han Fei asked.

“Mission?”

“Things that you would want me to do for you.”

“There’s nothing else. We’ve already found our lost pieces. Now we only need to control the pain and despair, and we’ll all return to our true selves.”

“Then is there any long goal that you have?”

“We’ve never really considered that. But if you really need one...” Wei Youfu looked at Little Eight, “All 7 of us hope that this girl can appreciate the beauty of the human world. She was raised by a murderer. She was doomed the moment she was born. You’ve seen the cartoon on the tv right, that was everything Little Eight can remember of her life.”

“Perhaps I can bring her back to the real world in the future, to let her see the beauty of it.” Han Fei turned to Little Eight, but she quickly hid behind Wei Youfu, she was still afraid of Han Fei.

“What about you? What do you plan to do next?”

“I have become the new building manager of this apartment, I’m preparing to head over to Apartment 2. I plan to help them deal with all the non-locals and then I hope I can sit down to have a peaceful talk with them.” Han Fei did not hide anything from Wei Youfu because Wei Youfu really did feel like his family.

“Apartment 2 is very dangerous. I should go with you.” Wei Youfu then coughed a few more times. A breeze and he’d probably lift off.

“I don’t think so, I fear that you’ll be in more danger than I do.” Han Fei denied his offer. Wei Youfu though smiled, “You misunderstood me. The 8 of us can combine together into 1, when all of our hatred and resentment is gathered on Little Eight, she’ll be the scariest presence in this neighbourhood.”

“Her?” Han Fei knew Little Eight was very unique but he couldn’t see how scary she could be. So far, she had acted more like a frightened bunny around Han Fei.

“When all the despair is gathered on a single person, they will become very scary but of course, it’ll negatively impact Little Eight as well. It’s not good for her but you’ve helped us so much, it’s our turn to help you.”

When Wei Youfu said that, the innermost bedroom opened and the victims came out one after another.

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When all pain and despair was gathered on a single person, that person’s power level would have a drastic increase but the process would seriously harm said person as well. The human puzzle case victims knew this would impact them negatively but they still insisted on helping Han Fei. Taking in their expressionless faces, and their eyes dominated by pain and despair, Han Fei was quite touched.

“We’re going to Apartment 2 today for a peaceful talk, we should avoid using force if possible.” Han Fei watched as the victims disappeared after they walked behind Wei Youfu, they appeared to dissolve into his body but nothing about Wei Youfu appeared to have changed. “We can’t leave this place that easily so when you plan to leave, just notify me.”

“Okay.” To prevent further accidents, Han Fei decided to visit each of his neighbours and wait for 3 hours to be over before he made his move to the opposite building. He first dropped by to check on Xu Qin. The latter was not home, she was probably out grocery shopping again. “Xu Qin’s curse can only be controlled via endless consumption but the more she consumes, the stronger the curse on her body. How can I help her?” Xu Qin accompanied Han Fei to Apartment 2 yesterday night. Xu Qin had to ingest

all her stores of food before she could calm down again. As the curse continued to deepen, Han Fei could not guarantee if Xu Qin could still return from the edge the next time she went berserk.

“The previous building manager appeared to have done something on Meng Si and Xu Qin’s memory but that does not solve the problem. Avoidance merely delays the problem, it does not solve it.” Han Fei continued to move up the floors. Han Fei found Ying Yue, the poor girl still won’t communicate with Han Fei. She just guarded the aquarium. After making sure that there was no mission available inside the building, Han Fei returned to Room 1044. After he waited for 3 hours, he left with Wei Youfu.

“Youfu, careful not to stress yourself. If you can’t handle it, just leave me and save yourself first.” Han Fei could log off after he completed one mission, so he meant what he said. Wei Youfu chuckled self-deprecatingly. “I am very weak but Little Eight is very strong, don’t worry.” Han Fei tried a lot of the landlord’s keys before he found the correct one. He looked out. Half a human head peeked from the top of the outer walls around the neighbourhood. Two pupil-less eyes stared at him.

“A ghost from outside the neighbourhood? I wonder what kind of ghost that is.” The ghost outside the wall did not make any move, it merely stared quietly at Han Fei. The milky white eyes seemed to follow the man.

“We shan’t stay outside for too long. Hurry.” Xu Qin said something similar yesterday. These old tenants seemed to understand that it was dangerous to stay too long outside in the world. The duo hurried to Apartment 2. Once he entered the corridor, Han Fei was greeted by a stinging smell of death and blood. “After Xu Qin and I left yesterday, the tenants appeared to have gotten into a fight with the rest of the non-locals.”

Stepping through the dried pools of blood, Han Fei just arrived at the 2nd floor when he encountered a girl. She wandered among the stairs with her arms behind her. There was a strangulation mark covered under her collar. Her skin was incredibly pale. The girl did not react to Han Fei’s arrival.

“Hello, is there anything I can help you with?” Han Fei actively tried to communicate with the girl. He noticed the arms behind the girl were bleeding. “Are you injured? Did those non-locals hurt you?” Using Soul-Depth Touch, Han Fei studied the girl’s broken arm under the girl’s surprised gaze. “Your wound is fresh, who did this? Perhaps I can help you.”

“You can help me find my hands?” The girl’s eyes wandered between her stumps and Han Fei. “Don’t toy with me. I know people here hate me. Yesterday, someone said he’d help me too but I realized he was just saying that. All of you hate me, I know it...”

“The world is so big, there is bound to be people who hate you but also people who love you. I know talk is cheap. After I chase away all these non-locals, I’ll help you locate your hands, then you’ll believe me.” Han Fei detected only a weak resentment from the girl.

“You really wish to help me?” The girl’s voice was thick with distrust probably because she had been disappointed too many times.

“Of course.” After giving his guarantee, Han Fei finally heard the system notification.

“Notification for Player 0000! You have triggered Grade G Mission—Find the Missing Hands.

“Find the missing Hands (Grade G Normal Mission): No time limit. Find the cursed hands inside Apartment 2.”

‘A cursed pair of hands?’ Han Fei was about to ask the girl why her hands were cursed when the sound of door opening came from the corridor. The doors on the 3rd floor opened and a pair of ghosts shuffled down. One was tall and the other was short. They carried a mouldy haze around them. They were misfortune and tragedy personified. After these two, another set of footsteps echoed in the corridor. Following a heady smell of blood, a man with a knife stuck in his chest walked down the stairs.

Then, the door on the 4th floor clicked open. The woman covered in bruises and wounds sauntered down carrying a human head in her embrace.

“Be careful.” Wei Youfu warned. Han Fei also did not expect the ghost tenants at Apartment 2 to appear all at once. He initially intended to talk to them one by one.

“We came from Apartment 1, we want to help you deal with the non-locals.” Han Fei said with a kind smile. His expression changed very fast. As a professional actor, he could input 10 different emotions behind a similar smile.

“There’s no need for that. We’ve already killed all the non-locals here ourselves.” The tall ghost said. His voice was gravelly and dipped with an intense loathing.

“But they will return. You might have killed this batch now, but the next batch will come to take their places and they’ll only be stronger.” Han Fei was not lying. Based on the previous manager’s final words, Han Fei was certain that something scary would be coming for him.

“And your point is?”

“We’re the only occupants of this neighbourhood so I believe we should help each other to protect and improve our home.” Han Fei said with sincerity, “If you run into any difficulty, we’ll come to help; and I hope you’ll do the same for us.”

“You alone wish to represent the entire Apartment 1?” The man with the knife in his chest said chillingly. He looked more like a moving carcass. “That aside, I couldn’t care less what happened to the rest of you.”

He turned to the other ghosts in his building. “I personally do not believe in solidarity and cooperation, in this place, only by killing each other that we can survive.”

“How about this, we’ll vote it out. The majority wins.” Han Fei raised his hand. “Every tenant in Happiness Neighbourhood will have a power of vote. If you agree to the alliance, raise your hand.” Wei Youfu raised his hand soon after. The tall ghost wanted to as well but when he realized none of his neighbours did, he put down his hand again.

“If voting can solve problems, then this city would not be drowned in despair.” The man with the knife in his chest scoffed. “You’ve helped us yesterday night so we’ll let you go this time. Leave while you still can.”

“Who said voting can’t solve problems?” Han Fei still maintained the kind smile on his face but he moved several steps away from Wei Youfu. While the rest looked on with confusion, a pair of arms reached out from Wei Youfu’s back. The Yin energy spread like waves. Then more pairs of hands grew and multiplied. Ghastly human faces carved on the hands howled in pain.

The despair of the several victims weaved together. The resentment gathered and bound with each other to form a giant red spectre!

Chapter 116:

8 arms pulsing with hatred locked up the entrance. Compared to the red spectre, the tenants of Apartment 2 appeared so insignificant. The resentment materialized into corporeality, forcing the weaker wandering souls inside Apartment 2 to go into hiding. A barking came from the top floor. Blood trickled and an evil beast crawled out from the shadow on the 3rd floor. Its pure black fur stood on end, it sensed a great threat from the spectre. Even Han Fei did not expect the amalgamation of the 8 victims to be so scary. Their despair and pain empowered each other, their energy bounced off one another before collecting on Little Eight. The girl in this state was far more powerful than any ghost Han Fei had met so far. However, every single moment in this state would cause irreparable damage to Little Eight. Han Fei could feel the victims' pain so he did not want to waste anymore time. He walked to stand between the spectre and the tenants.

"There are 8 of them in that one body and counting me, that's 9 of us, voting yes." Han Fei addressed the tenants. "I know you might not trust me now but I hope you can give me a chance, time will prove that you've made the right choice."

"Most of our tenants here are picked off by the non-locals because we don't have a building manager, the rest of us are forced to work together to stay alive. Yesterday night, you and that woman have helped us greatly and we appreciate that." The tall ghost stared at the red spectre and slowly raised his hand. His voice was still dry and hoarse. "I believe an alliance will only help but not harm." Then the girl with her hands chopped off joined in.

"My goal is to protect every single tenant, we can form a neighbourhood committee. It will be open to all tenants, everything will be decided fairly, openly and evenly." Han Fei then pointed to the building behind him. "You've met the lady from yesterday night, there are 3 more tenants as powerful as her in Apartment 1. Combine that with my family, how long do you still think Apartment 2 can hold on if we push forth with this plan using brute force?" Han Fei played both the bad and good cop. "Before Apartment 1's previous manager disappeared, he left me with a warning. We are going to face a terrifying threat. If we do not work together, we'll all perish horribly." Finally, Han Fei appealed to their emotions. He turned to the woman with the bruised and wounded body. "By the way, I've just met your son. He changed his surname to follow yours, his name is now Qu Wenhou."

Hearing that, the quiet woman walked out from her pool of hair. She stalked like a spider to rest above Han Fei's head. The bloody hair dangled before Han Fei. The latter felt no fear. He looked evenly at her face. "Your boy wants me to tell you this, he said, if he has the chance to see you again, he will apologize and then promise that he'd protect you from now on so that you will never be bullied again."

The woman's eyes pooled with blood. The boy appeared to have told her something similar when he was young. She stared at Han Fei as if trying to read his mind. "I'm telling the truth, I would never lie or harm any of you." Han Fei promised sincerely. After boring her eyes into Han Fei, the woman crept back to her spot among her neighbours.

"Don't be fooled by him, honesty is the rarest thing in this world." The man with a knife in his chest turned to the dog in the shadow, as if asking for its opinion.

"You're wrong, hope is the rarest thing in this world and the thing that I'm offering you is exactly that." Han Fei's eyes swept all the tenants from Apartment 2. Without the protection of a building manager, there weren't many original tenants left. The rest of them were forced to cooperate to survive against the non-locals' onslaught. "There is nothing for you to lose, just trust me this one time."

Han Fei stood there facing the tenants until the dog in the shadows barked several times, and then disappeared.

"Even the Spectral Dog senses no malice on you?" The man with the knife studied Han Fei with disbelief. "Either you're the most cunning demon or you really meant what you said..."

He did not think Han Fei was a saint, especially not in this world, but the man did not see Han Fei as a particularly malicious person either. After a long hesitation, he raised his arm, "Fine, I'll play along for now." At the same time, the robotic voice rang in Han Fei's mind.

"Notification for Player 0000! You have activated Grade F Hidden Mission—Happiness at Happiness Neighbourhood!

"Happiness at Happiness Neighbourhood (Grade F Hidden Mission): No time limit, raise your friendliness level with all the tenants in Happiness Neighbourhood to Amicable!

"Warning! This mission is the last hidden mission at Happiness Neighbourhood, completing it will cause great influence to your Perfect Life!"

Han Fei clicked on the mission interface and saw the list of all the tenants under the description of this latest Hidden Mission. His current relationship level with each of the tenants was labelled out. The one who shared the highest friendliness level with Han Fei was Wei Youfu, followed by Xu Qin.

‘When did Wei Youfu’s friendliness level get so high? Is it because he has found his humanity and thus is privier to everything I’ve done for everyone?’ Both sides had agreed to the alliance so Han Fei hurried to have the victims return to normal. The combination seemed to affect Wei Youfu the most, his rationality that he recovered was shattering again.

‘Currently only Wei Youfu has found his rationality, after all 8 of them have reached the same level as he has, they should be able to carry on in that state much longer.’ Guarding before Wei Youfu, Han Fei had a discussion with the tenants from Apartment 2. With full agreement, they decided to set up the Happiness Neighbourhood Tenancy Committee. As the only person who could communicate with most of the tenants from both apartments, Han Fei was selected as the temporary leader.

“Thank you for your trust in me, I promise to lead everyone to turn Happiness Neighbourhood into a safe, comfortable and beautiful home. While protecting everyone’s benefits, we’ll open our doors to outside individuals seeking tenancy. If they promise to abide by our rules, we’ll extend a welcoming arm. If they refuse to, then we will strip them of what they’re worth to improve the overall strength of the existing tenants!

“We shan’t be complacent! We need to improve ourselves as fast as possible. Abandon that false sense of security. We shall try our best to face the imminent danger. I believe that with unity from everyone, all the tenants at this neighbourhood will eventually achieve true happiness!”

Chapter 117:

Han Fei was once an introverted person with social anxiety but after he started Perfect Life, he even got the courage to give speeches before a crowd of horrifying spectres. His sincere gaze, moving words possessed hope towards a beautiful future. Many tenants had not encountered such a building manager before, hell, they had not come across such a person before. After he shared his thoughts, intermittent claps echoed in the corridor and Han Fei officially became the temporary leader of the Happiness Neighbourhood Tenancy Committee. With that out of the way, Han Fei still did not leave. Using the excuse of getting to know the tenants better, he patrolled around Apartment 2.

An extended period of fighting meant that Apartment 2 was covered in gore. Many of the rooms were heavily damaged and most valuables had already been plundered. Han Fei eventually found the girl’s

hands inside a larvarium made from flesh on the 8th floor. After handing in the mission, he added the rewarded skill point into acting. 'Advanced acting is already quite impressive. I wonder what kind of effect masterful acting will have. A master actor at early 20s? That would not have been possible without the game.'

Supporting Wei Youfu, the duo exited Apartment 2. Even though there was only 10 metres between the two buildings, Han Fei was still very careful. Even so, accidents happened. When Han Fei was halfway through the journey, he heard someone call his name. Naturally, Han Fei did not respond to it, he pretended not to have heard it. The voice became clearer, but Han Fei still refused to respond. He entered Apartment 1 and closed the door, but to his consternation, the voice was still following him!

'It comes from behind me?' Han Fei glanced at Wei Youfu from the corner of his eyes. Youfu was trying his best to resist against the despair that infiltrated into his body. He was at the edge of madness and unfortunately was of no help to Han Fei. "Youfu, you better go home and rest first." After dropping Youfu back at Room 1044, the voice became louder. The person appeared to be directly lying on Han Fei's back, whispering into his ears. Acting like he was deaf, Han Fei hurried up to the 5th floor. He knocked on Xu Qin's door. "Big Sister, I've some groceries for you." The voice behind him called even fiercer, it appeared to have bought Han Fei's acting of deafness. Poor thing had no idea the trouble it was going to be in.

The smell of rotten blood leaked out from Room 1054. Suddenly, the door opened. A harrowing voice trickled out from the inner recess of the room. "I just came back from grocery shopping, I'm a bit dirty. Give me some time to clean up."

"Okay, I have brought an appetizer for you." Han Fei entered Room 1054. Out of kindness, he locked the door close behind him. Calls of Han Fei's name were still continuing. The sound only stopped when the beautiful Xu Qin appeared in the living room holding the table knife. "This is the appetizer?" Xu Qin wiped away the blood drops on her face. A smile lingered there. "But she's just a child."

"The young have the supplest flesh." Hearing the conversation between the two, the thing behind Han Fei sucked in a cold breath. Xu Qin enjoyed Han Fei's company. She strode languorously to Han Fei's side. She leaned close to Han Fei and spoke to the space behind the man, "Do you want to get down on your own, or do you prefer I cut your hands off?"

The strange calls turned into a whimper. Han Fei felt the weight being removed from his back. The ghost who had been calling his name had descended. Turning around, Han Fei noticed a female student standing behind him. She was normal-looking and wore a dirtied school uniform. The uniform had the

logo of Yi Ming on it. Being scrutinized by Han Fei and Xu Qin, the girl cried. It was already too late when she realized she had walked into a trap.

“When I came back from Apartment 2, someone suddenly called my name. I didn’t answer but the voice came closer and closer.” Han Fei explained to Xu Qin what happened. “Noticing my lack of response, she pushed her luck further until she eventually climbed onto my back.”

The woman’s icy gaze shot at the girl and the latter’s frame started to waver. Her eyes lingering on Xu Qin’s knife, the shivering girl uttered between sobs. “I didn’t want to do that, someone forced me to.”

“Someone forced you to?” Actually when Han Fei saw the girl’s school uniform logo, he no longer planned to serve her as dinner to Xu Qin. He merely kept up this charade to get the girl to be more honest, “Is it another student from your school?”

“No.” The girl hesitated before she said, “It’s a ghost hiding among the students...” The moment she said that, a trail of blood crawled out from her chest and punctured her skull. The speed was so fast that even Xu Qin did not expect it. When Xu Qin snipped the thread with the table knife, the girl student had already collapsed. Her body started to decompose and strange characters surfaced under her skin.

“She was cursed. The curse will be triggered if she did certain things. With her current ability, I don’t think she’ll survive this.” Due to her nature, Xu Qin was very familiar with curses. With a glance, she understood the gist.

“Someone cursed the students and forced them to infiltrate into our neighborhood?” Han Fei’s brain moved fast. “The child is wearing the uniform from Yi Ming Private Academy. Something horrible probably has happened at that school.”

“She mentioned there was a ghost hiding among students and then the curse was triggered. Looks like the ghost is behind this.” Xu Qin stood next to the girl. “Its manipulation of curses is masterful. In fact, it wields them better than I do. You need to be careful, I fear it has already targeted you.”

“Yi Ming Private Academy, I’ve been meaning to visit the place.” Han Fei took out the previous manager’s work id. “The manager’s memory might be hidden there.”

Han Fei was caught in a conundrum. He knew he needed to speed up his exploration but too much haste might cause his death. 'I believe the previous manager said something about my level before he perished. I wonder what he was doing when he was at my current level...'

Han Fei had not been to the school but the school had already started its infiltration into the Happiness Neighbourhood. This concerned Han Fei. He suspected the enemy might have cracked the previous manager's memory and knew the black box was hidden at Happiness Neighbourhood. Of course, he had to admit the chance of that was low but Han Fei had to prepare for the worst, he realized he could not sit idle anymore.

"The students of that school are in deep danger, I need to go and rescue them." Through the map left by the previous manager, Han Fei knew where Yi Ming Private Academy was located. He moved to the window and looked out. Somewhere in the darkness, something appeared to be staring back at him. 'Only by mastering the black box can I leave this despairing world and bring salvation to all my families and neighbours.' Han Fei's eyes chilled. 'No matter what, I shan't be forced off my path.'

Inside the dark room, a soul-captivating smile lingered on the pair of red lips as Xu Qin studied Han Fei's back. Then she turned to the girl and placed her hands on the girl's chest. The blood red curse crawled up Xu Qin's finger. When the thread of blood was fully curled around Xu Qin's finger, another flickering shadow materialized in her eyes. She sucked on her slender finger. She then gnawed on it until blood painted her lips and dribbled down her chin. "The best curses are those which have been soaked in despair."

The student appeared to fare better. Xu Qin did not kill her but she did proceed to undress her.

"What are you doing?" Han Fei turned back to see Xu Qin modelling the school uniform before her.

"I've been meaning to visit that school myself but I haven't got the chance."

"Sis, you're not... thinking about going there dressed as a student, right?" That was so out of place, Han Fei did not know what to think.

"Every building manager has their own rules. The school's manager forbids outsiders from entering the school compound. So if you do not want to be discovered immediately, this is the perfect disguise."

“We shan’t take this too fast. We better plan this further!” Han Fei quickly persuaded Xu Qin to cancel her plan before he returned to Room 1044. He checked on Wei Youfu and his other roommates.

Since everyone’s souls had been restored, the combination this time created a monster that was far more powerful in both despair and ability than any iteration they had formed in the past. That was beyond Wei Youfu’s expectation. After a long time taken for digestion, he finally regained his rationality.

“Youfu, are you alright?”

“I believe I’ve found the key. As long as we cancel the combination within 10 seconds, the impact won’t be so heavy on everyone.” Wei Youfu kept coughing. To keep his humanity, he really kept no power for himself. “That way, we’ll be more useful to you in the future.”

“You’re my family, not a tool. Please don’t push yourselves too much.” Compared to the horrifying red spectre, Han Fei rather had the rational Wei Youfu stay with him. After confirming his roommates’ status, Han Fei exited the game. Removing the gaming helmet, Han Fei tossed and turned in bed but couldn’t fall asleep. These thoughts bounced in his mind. ‘There are good and bad ghosts like there are good and bad people. If anything, the nature of a ghost is easier to spot than human beings. While there are still missions available in the neighbourhood, I need to ration them while I explore the nearby areas.’

Han Fei could only quit the game after he had completed a mission so it was wise to not complete all the available missions at Happiness Neighbourhood at one go, because then he’d be forced to take up missions outside of the neighbourhood just to quit the game. That was far more dangerous than the alternative which was to complete one mission inside the neighbourhood and then start exploring the world beyond it, essentially saving one neighbourhood mission for each gaming instance.

Chapter 118:

Han Fei woke up punctually at 8 am. He had a very important scene to shoot that day, the set was not at Northern Street but at Xin Lu Tv Station at the city centre. Today, Han Fei was going to bring back to life the final duel between Meng Changan and Meng Changxi. It was his job to manifest the pain and despair that was suppressed within Meng Changxi before the camera for the past decade. After meeting up with the crew, they took a van together to the intelligent city centre. After going through multiple security scans, Director Jiang communicated their purpose with the tv station’s workers before they started their shoot.

“Han Fei, we need to wrap up this shoot before noon, the station only gives us one morning to use their place.”

“That is more than enough.” Han Fei stood at the roof and allowed the breeze to caress his face as he looked out into the city. The faces of all the victims crossed his mind, so did the clues that Meng Changxi had pieced together using 10 years. Standing at the edge of the roof, Han Fei pulled his shirt off. His lean body was covered in words and scars, his eyes gradually took on the spirit of Meng Changxi. If you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you... Han Fei never really understood the meaning of that quote until he had faced absolute darkness. When one gazed long into the abyss, one’s body would involuntarily lean towards it. Without sufficient courage and determination, one would be swiftly consumed by the abyss, becoming a part of it. He had experienced exactly that which was why he could personalize the desolation Meng Changxi must have felt as he edged along the abyss for the past 10 years.

“I wish to tell everyone a story, a story about love and death...” The words echoed from Han Fei’s lips. From the back, it was easy to mistake him for the actual Meng Changxi. The man was taking a leap of faith because the land around him had all fallen away. He was not a good person but he was not a bad person either. He had blood on his hands. He merely wished to tell the truth at the final moment of his life. A monologue that lasted for 3 minutes and 36 seconds, a shoot that was completed without a single cut.

Everyone present was drawn into Han Fei’s acting, it was as if they were transported back in time to that fateful day. No one shouted for the scene to end. After Han Fei finished his lines, Director Jiang stood up and he looked at Han Fei with shock and surprise. To capture this climactic scene for the movie, he requested from the tv station’s manager to borrow the place for a whole morning but Han Fei only used 3 minutes and 36 seconds to hand him the perfect cut.

“This is more than just his acting skill, there is an indescribable empathy and understanding that he radiates. It’s like he has been through the same thing as Meng Changxi did.”

“Director, do you mind if we share this actor’s information with our station’s superiors?” Not only the people from the crew, even the station workers who came to watch were mightily impressed.

“His name is Han Fei, a person that is bound for the stars.” Director Jiang answered before he grabbed the script and walked towards Han Fei. They prepared for the next scene. In just 2 hours, Han Fei completed Meng Changxi’s last scene. His demand for perfection was even greater than Director Jiang. Sometimes, Han Fei requested for a reshoot even though Director Jiang thought it was already good enough. Han Fei believed he could do better.

To be honest, Han Fei had his own agenda. He was going to use this climactic scene to help the audience understand the danger of the Butterfly. As long as the movie existed, Meng Changxi's warning would be spread through the media. More people would be cautious of the Butterfly. Han Fei was making more than a movie. Kinship not necessarily built empathy but a good movie could help the audience get into characters, to invoke their sense of affinity. Han Fei worked so hard because he wanted people to look through the smoke and mirrors and really understand what Meng Changxi was trying to say.

'The Butterfly will eventually come for me. It is a master manipulator, I can't put it past the Butterfly to frame me for past crimes. It is cunning and dangerous, I have to expose it before everyone's eyes.' After Han Fei was done with the shoot, Director Jiang worked the rest of the morning with Zhan Yueyue and Mian Nian. Being in the same movie as Han Fei, these two new actors had great improvement but they were still not as efficient as Han Fei. Han Fei who had nothing else to do decided to call Huang Yin. Since he was already at the city centre, he decided to meet the man.

They decided to meet at a coffee shop near the tv station. Han Fei was the first to arrive. He found a corner booth and sat down. Han Fei was not a coffee drinker. The thought that this was going to be a social interaction with no specific purpose still triggered his anxiety somewhat. 'It feels easier to hang out with ghosts. Either I'll eat you or you'll eat me. There's no need for all the other social commonalities.'

After some time, Huang Yin arrived in his car. He took the coffee from the robot waiter and waved happily at Han Fei.

"Brother, you truly surprised me that day! How come you didn't tell me you are an actor when we were at the con? I have to find that out from the television myself, it was a crime news channel if I was not wrong."

"Didn't you question why a crime news channel would report on an actor?" After seeing Huang Yin in person, Han Fei sighed in relief. Huang Yin was still his usual happy go lucky self.

"Never mind that. You got to give me an autograph and then I have something important to discuss with you." Huang Yin took out his phone with a mysterious wink.

"I don't think you really want my autograph. What is it that you wish to discuss with me?"

“Do you still remember the game, Perfect Life? It will enter OB soon. It will be the first global game to be fully managed by a photon computer admin!” Huang Yin revealed the big news to Han Fei.

“A photon computer admin? How is that possible?” Han Fei gasped in disbelief.

“Humans might make the rules but compared to the rule-makers, computers are better rule-followers and administrators.” Huang Yin leaned over to Han Fei to whisper. “The photon computer used at Xin Lu’s core is the 7th generation computer. According to rumors, Perfect Life’s admin would be the 8th generation photon computer. Just imagine, a 7th generation photon computer is already powerful enough to manage an entire city, the 8th generation will be even more powerful! Furthermore, according to my insider information, one of the biggest reasons Perfect Life was made possible was due to existence of this 8th generation photon computer.”

“But what does that have to do with us?”

“Well...” Huang Yin pressed a button by his seat and a black curtain instantly draped around the booth, to form a private space. “Do you still remember the possibility of a cryptic world existing inside Perfect Life that I told you about?”

“Of course, didn’t you say it was just a rumor?”

“That was then. My mind’s changed now. Something happened to me not too long ago.” Huang Yin took a deep breath and continued in his lowest whisper. “I have accidentally entered a hidden map. I met an old lady who cooked a bowl of porridge for me.”

“That sounds like a normal game experience to me.”

“But that’s not all. The key is before that, I had a dream inside the game! I dreamt that I was in a world crowded with ghosts and monsters!” Huang Yin’s voice trembled from perhaps fear or excitement. His finger tapped against the table. “After I logged off, I skipped work for a day. I spent the whole day searching online for information on the existing 6 Perfect Life’s versions. I compared all of them and found nothing remotely related to that world. Then I slowly realized the problem. The hidden map that I encountered, perhaps that was a channel that can lead us to the cryptic world!”

“So you’re telling me the cryptic world is real?!”

“During Deep Space’s tests, there was no mention of any hidden maps. I believe there are indeed channels that connect the surface and cryptic world, but they are concealed inside these extremely rare hidden maps!” Huang Yin said seriously. His eyes were bloodshot, it was clear that the man had spent many sleepless nights investigating this. “For now, there are still human admins but when the OB arrives, the game will be monitored by the photon computer. By then we should have the chance to enter that world to investigate!”

“We?” Han Fei repeated with a frown. “What does all these have to do with me?”

“Brother, let’s be honest here, you’ve shown such plain interest in the game. When I first met you, I noticed how unique you are from the rest. Other players play the game to relax, but you appear to approach it due to your own unique reason.” Huang Yin studied Han Fei seriously, “I’ll say this. The cryptic world is not what you’d imagine. I’ve been there myself. The horror is unspeakable! Only those with the strongest heart can survive there!” He then opened his phone. The main page contained all the news articles on Han Fei. “You are the person with the strongest heart I know. Furthermore, you’ve shown obvious interest in the game and its cryptic world, so you are the best teammate I can find to go on this adventure with me!”

“You want me to be your teammate?” Even as a professional actor, Han Fei did not know what to say.

“I really can’t bear going back there alone ever again. Therefore, I need a friend to cover my back.” Huang Yin extended his hand, “I’ve used my smurf account to join the core of the cryptic world exploration unit. I will make use of their experience and analysis to draft the safest route for us to undertake.”

“As you’ve said, the cryptic world is horrifying, why would you want to return there? Is it to find the Easter Egg left behind by the founder?”

Huang Yin shook his head. “I have my own reasons. No matter how long it takes, how much money I spend, I need to return to that world.”

“But why?”

“There’s one thing that I need to confirm.” Huang Yin’s voice took on a rare severity.

“Okay.” Han Fei stood up and studied Huang Yin again, “Can I trust you?”

“My mother died when I was really young, I can honestly say that I was traumatized by her death. I did not grow up with any friends. But as I grew up, I learned how to smile but that is merely a disguise. I keep a distance from everyone, but you, when I first saw you, it was like I was seeing my former self, all flustered and panicked in the crowd. It was why I actively accosted you for conversation.” Huang Yin extended his hand once more to Han Fei. “This is my first time reaching out to another person, I really hope you can be my teammate.”

“I pray that you won’t regret this.” Han Fei raised his own arm to shake Huang Yin’s hand.

One of them managed to work his way to become the building manager of an apartment filled with ghosts with his intellect and bravery. The other was pulled through the gates of hell through pure luck. He landed inside the most dangerous room, offended several ghosts in one night, had his life targeted by several murderers but somehow managed to survive.

It had to be said that these two would be good partners.

Chapter 119:

Huang Yin provided Han Fei with a lot of information about Perfect Life. They chatted for a long time and then decided to meet up in game after the OB started. Deep Space Tech had not officially announced the date for the OB yet but based on Huang Yin’s insider information, Perfect Life would enter global OB within the month. At that time, Perfect Life would become many players’ second life.

Humanity had great hope for the future. As technology advanced, people would reach closer to Godhood. Humans would finally do things that were previously limited to the domain of the divine, but they would not stop there, they’d eventually attempt things that even God would have not fathomed. Everyone appeared to be anticipating the arrival of that day, only Han Fei who had been living in the cryptic world was not that optimistic. He knew that once the bulwark between the surface and cryptic world shattered, Perfect Life would become the point of intersection between the living world and the after world.

Most people's perfect lives were built on a foundation of idealism and excellence, there was no regret and malformation. Perfect Life's surface world did not contain any negative emotions because all the dark, despair, pain and sin in humanity had been trapped within the cryptic world. When the two worlds collided, those trapped in sin and despair would have a field day pulling the world down into abyss. In the abyss, they would feast and feed.

After saying goodbye to Huang Yin, Han Fei returned to the set. He followed the crew to hurry to the convention centre, to shoot the scene between Meng Changan and Meng Changxi. Interestingly enough, Deep Space Tech expressed concern about Meng Changan's involvement in Perfect Life as well as its influence on the game's reputation. At the final minute, they turned back on their promise to borrow the film crew the venue. On top of that, the company manager even hoped that Director Jiang would remove Meng Changan's character from the script.

With no other choice, Director Jiang thankfully managed to find a nearby available conventional centre and eventually completed the shoot. Han Fei finished his cut at 7 pm. He did not stay at the city centre but hurried home. He had a simple dinner and began to study. To get into the mind of Meng Changan, Han Fei read all the books the man had read. The literature ranged from neurology to brain anatomy. Some of them were only available in their native language. Han Fei had to painstakingly translate them term by term. The more he studied, the more Han Fei realized how ignorant he was. The most terrifying thing was the knowledge that the Butterfly would have known these things because it was the Butterfly who recommended Meng Changan these books. Time slipped away while he was enraptured by the books. Midnight soon arrived.

Han Fei washed his face with cold water and put on the gaming helmet. "Welcome to Perfect Life!"

Han Fei moved his body and realized Wei Youfu was sitting beside him. The latter appeared to have known Han Fei's secret but he never once brought it up, perhaps that was what they called familial trust. "Are you feeling better?"

"I am feeling more like myself already. Now, I'm helping others with their journeys." Wei Youfu was a good person. Of all the victims, he was the only one who was willing to believe the drifter. "It won't take long for them to regain their rationality and then they can leave the bedroom."

"That's a necessary prerequisite for you to leave the bedroom?" Han Fei did not know that. He glanced into the innermost bedroom. So far only Wei Youfu and Little Eight moved freely around the house, the other victims rarely showed themselves.

“They are afraid of accidentally hurting you, after all, they can still lose control at any moment.”

“You guys are too kind to be ghosts.” Han Fei did not know what to say. He sat on the couch when he heard a clash from the kitchen. “What was that?”

“Don’t mind it. It’s just Little Eight trying to learn how to cook.” Wei Youfu smiled abashedly. He seemed to have gotten used to this.

“She’s cooking?”

“I wish to help her cultivate some hobbies.” Out of concern, Han Fei decided to venture into the kitchen. He saw Little Eight standing amidst a pile of trash, her expression colored with helplessness. “Perhaps cooking is not a suitable hobby for you. How about gardening?” Han Fei suggested as he cleaned up the trash. Then he extricated the bag of seeds Huang Yin left behind from his inventory. “Fill a bowl up with soil, and plant these. Water them daily and one day, they will bloom into beautiful flowers.” Han Fei had no idea whether these flowers would blossom in hell or not, he just wanted to find something else for Little Eight to do before she tore down the house. Little Eight seemed to have gained a little more trust in Han Fei. She reached out her hands to take the seeds and her face lit up with a small smile.

After leaving the kitchen, Han Fei walked to the window and looked out through the wooden gaps. “The situation at Happiness Neighbourhood has mostly stabilized. From now on, we should expand our exploration beyond the neighbourhood.”

“I’ll go with you.” Wei Youfu walked over to volunteer.

“Sure but I still have something else to do for now. You better stay to accompany Little Eight.” Han Fei left Room 1044 and ran up to the 5th floor. “Big sister, are you home? There’s something I wish to ask you.” When Han Fei walked towards Xu Qin’s room, the shadow in the room next door stretched lazily. It did not show any interest in Han Fei at all. Hard to imagine this room once threatened to claim Han Fei’s life.

“What is it?” The door opened to reveal Xu Qin holding a dripping knife. A normal person would be frightened by this but Han Fei thought it was very normal. “There is a mirror on the 7th floor, what do you know about it?”

"I'd advise you to stay far away from it. The mirror and the spectral dog from Apartment 2 are the oldest tenants in this neighbourhood. At least they're already here when I moved in." Xu Qin rarely dispensed rational advice so this also showed how dangerous the mirror was. "Is there anything else you wish to know?"

"Other than the mirror, there appears to be a haunted graffiti on the landing between the 7th and 8th floor. When I first walked past it, it almost stole my soul away..."

"The tenant on the 8th floor has tortured and killed too many ghosts, the Yin energy of those dead spirits accumulated and gathered on that wall. It eventually formed a malicious mural that preys on the weak. You shouldn't face any problem from them now."

"Wait, but isn't there only one tenant on the 8th floor? You're saying that little girl has tortured and killed many ghosts?" Ying Yue appeared in Han Fei's mind.

"Don't be fooled by her appearance. The girl's house is filled with many eyes, each of those eyes represent a ghost that she killed. After she murdered those ghosts, she kept their eyeballs as souvenirs. She's a real crazy person." To hear Xu Qin call another individual a crazy person was quite surreal.

After he got the information he needed, Han Fei came to the 8th floor. His initial plan was to implore Ying Yue to remove the dangerous canvas from the stairwell wall to ensure that there was no longer any security threat inside the building. However, when Ying Yue heard that the haunted mural almost took Han Fei's life, she stomped out of the room. Han Fei hurried after her as she moved towards the landing between 8th and 7th floor. Facing the wall, Ying Yue's closed eyes slowly opened, then a mist of darkness oozed out of Ying Yue's sockets. The mist billowed against the wall. Shadows were yanked out from the mural and consequently dissolved by the black mist. When the last shadow was pulled out, Han Fei suddenly said, "Wait, that's the man who tried to stop me! If he had succeeded, I wouldn't be able to share the secret of the aquarium with you!"

The black mist thickened. The shadow caught in the mist shivered in fear. When he saw Han Fei's face, he almost cried. The ghost did remember Han Fei. When Han Fei walked past the landing, he glared at Han Fei. That was a mistake that he regretted deeply now.

"Ying Yue, do you mind handing him to me? After all, I have unfinished business with him." Han Fei had helped Ying Yue find her most precious treasure. Ying Yue had been figuring out how to repay Han Fei

so when Han Fei said this, the eyeless sockets slowly turned towards the man and Ying Yue nodded. The black mist rolled around Han Fei. When the mist faded, Ying Yue's eyes were already closed. The girl looked pale and exhausted.

"Notification for Player 0000! You have obtained a Grade G Blood Red Item—Ghost Tattoo.

"Ghost Tattoo (Grade G Blood Red Item): A tattoo painted with ghosts' blood, pain and despair. A dead soul is trapped inside the tattoo. Feeding resentment into the tattoo will make it glow brighter. Forsaking the tattoo for too long and it'll eventually fade away."

Han Fei admitted he had taken some creative license when he told the story, but he did not expect Ying Yue would obliterate the guy and used his remains to paint out a tattoo on his body. The light red tattoo extended from Han Fei's back down to his arm. Han Fei could hear a barely discernible wail from inside the tattoo. It felt like he was a walking cage. The tattoo-painting process must have exhausted Ying Yue greatly. After teaching Han Fei how to use the tattoo, she shuffled back to her room.

"Feeding resentment into the tattoo will make it stronger? This thing even has a growth spurt?"

Ying Yue had gone out of the way to help Han Fei. Han Fei's determination to bring the family of three into the game grew stronger. With experience from last time, Han Fei would be more prepared.

Han Fei left the 8th floor and dropped by to visit each of his neighbours to try to trigger a mission. Unfortunately, even after 3 hours and moving back between the 2 apartments, there was not one mission to be found. None of the existing tenants needed Han Fei to do anything for them. The non-locals at Apartment 2 had all been taken care of by the Spectral Dog. In fact, the tenants of Apartment 2 had gone ahead to entrap and consume the monsters and ghosts who dared to lurk around Happiness Neighbourhood. They took the warning given by Han Fei seriously and Happiness Neighbourhood was indeed safer than before. This was something worth celebrating but Han Fei couldn't bring himself to be happy about it. He needed to complete a mission before he could log off or else he'd be trapped forever in the game.

"It's already 3 am. I need to finish a mission soon." He pulled up the mission interface. After he became the building manager, the system stopped giving him missions inside the neighbourhood. Instead all the missions had to be done outside of the neighbourhood. The system was purposely pushing Han Fei out to explore.

“Grade G Main Mission: The 4-Way Junction

“Mission Requirement: Walk past the 4 way junction in front of the neighbourhood entrance.

“Grade G Main Mission: Convenience Store Worker

“Mission Requirement: Apply for a temp job at Yi Ming Convenience Store, survive through the night.

“Grade F Main Mission: Your first Profession!

“Mission Requirement: Seek out your first employment in the city! A perfect profession is an important step towards a perfect life!”

“Grade F Main Mission: Yi Ming Private Academy.

“Mission Requirement: Become a teacher at Yi Ming Private Academy. Provide the correct guidance and encouragement to the students!”

Based on the names alone, this sounded like a normal mission interface of an Iyashikei game but of course things were not that simple.

Han Fei glanced out the neighbourhood entrance. After a brief hesitation, he chose the first main mission.

Chapter 120:

“Notification for Player 0000! You have accepted Grade G Main Mission— The 4-Way Junction!

“There are 100 ways to die at the 4 way junction. You have to complete this mission alone. Find the bowl that is placed beside the altar at the neighbourhood entrance. Pick it up and walk across the street. Tap against the bowl with each step. The mission will be successful once you’ve reached the opposite

side of the street.” The mission description alone did not sound that difficult. The street outside the neighbourhood was about 7 metres wide, he could cross it with at most 20 steps. “The Main Mission’s difficulty is between Hidden Mission and Side Mission, I shan’t let my guard down.”

To be honest, Han Fei was averse against leaving the neighbourhood so soon, if possible, he’d rather leave it after he reached level 20. Regardless, the system was not going to let him have his way. No mission popped up inside the neighbourhood. “I should go scout out the place first. If it’s too dangerous, I’ll just abandon the mission.”

Han Fei wandered over to the neighbourhood entrance. He looked out at the streets dipped in darkness. The whole city was dead. There was not even a shadow out on the street, much less cars or pedestrians. There were shops open but their lights were off.

‘The mission requires that I commit to it alone. In other words, I can’t rely on my neighbours. I wonder if the ghost tattoo counts as a ‘neighbour’ or a unique item...’ Han Fei did not want to trouble his neighbour too much either but he had no confidence he could return to the neighbourhood alive once he left it. For the sake of the security, Han Fei went back to Room 1044 to find Wei Youfu.

He wanted Wei Youfu to bring Little Eight across the street and wait for him on the other side. To his disappointment, Youfu told him that Little Eight was unable to leave Happiness Neighbourhood. Once she did, it would immediately attract the attention of something horrid. That was the previous manager’s warning. Since his roommates were unable to help, Han Fei turned towards Xu Qin.

“Big Sister, I need to cross to the other side of the street in front of the neighbourhood. Do you mind being a lookout for me?”

“Do you know what is on the other side of the street?” Xu Qin instead countered with her own question.

“Some kind of danger?”

“Bingo. Then again, there is no place in this city that is not dangerous.” Xu Qin continued after some hesitation, “If you insist on going, I won’t stop you, but here are a few things that you need to take note of. First, do not idle at the same spot for more than 10 minutes. Second, do not talk to anyone. Third, if someone calls your name, come back to the neighbourhood immediately. Fourth, and this is the most

important one. If you find yourself lost, do not trust anything you see. Stay where you are and I will go get you.”

“Okay.”

“Also...” Xu Qin took out the shortest table knife from her kitchen and wrapped it inside a doily. “Keep this inside your pocket. Do not touch it directly. Only use it when necessary.”

“Understood.” The doily was made from human skin. The skin doily isolated the curse inside the knife so it would not hurt Han Fei that much. When he was all prepared, Han Fei left Apartment 1 with Xu Qin and came to the neighbourhood entrance.

“I’ll have to make the rest of the journey myself.”

“Remember what I said. Now, go ahead.” Pushing open the rusted gate, Han Fei turned back to look. The two old apartments stood quite clearly in the dark. “I’ve played so many games and this is the first game that makes me wish that I can stay at the first stage forever.” Han Fei eventually took his first step out of the neighbourhood. Through the rusted bars, Xu Qin waved at him. Her tongue licked at her bright lips, like a chef wondering how to cook this new ingredient. Han Fei rubbed his temples. He knew Xu Qin would never harm him. But ever since he stepped out from the neighbourhood, various negative thoughts implanted themselves in his mind.

‘I need to calm down and finish this mission as fast as possible. I shan’t stay out here for long.’ Han Fei remembered everything Xu Qin said. He planned to use 5 minutes to complete the mission and then rush back into the safety of Happiness Neighbourhood. ‘The first thing I need to do is to find the bowl placed next to the altar...’ Han Fei looked around and spotted an aged altar not far from the gates. The altar was draped over with a black cloth so Han Fei couldn’t tell what kind of deity, if any, that it housed. Han Fei suppressed the urge to pull the cloth back. He spotted a china bowl which was placed before the altar. The bowl was splintered with cracks but somehow managed to stay in one piece. There was rice inside the bowl and each grain appeared to have something carved on them.

‘I need to knock against this bowl with each step, will the bowl shatter from impact?’ Han Fei carefully picked up the bowl. Before he even took his first step, he heard an old man’s voice saying, “Put the bowl back down and return from whence you came.” Turning around, Han Fei saw an old man squatting at the sidewalk in front of Happiness Neighbourhood. He held a brazier and a thick stack of paper money sat inside it. “That junction collects Yin energy, you wouldn’t believe the kind of creatures that it attracts. If you carry a bowl with rice, you’re just asking for the hungry ghosts to come get you!” The old

man explained to Han Fei. His tone was filled with kindness and concern. "Listen to this old man. The junction is like a well where Yin energy flows in from all sides. Heed my advice. Put down the bowl, burn some paper money at the altar, apologize to it and perhaps you'll be forgiven."

Then the old man sneaked out a wrinkled picture from his pocket and placed it inside the brazier.

Han Fei was not going to abandon the mission so easily. He took his first step into the street and knocked against the side of the bowl. Hearing the crisp clink, the old man gasped in fright. He hurried over to Han Fei. "What are you doing? Why are you trying to summon them? Do you not want to live anymore?!"

Han Fei ignored the old man. He had a good impression of the old man until the old man took out the wrinkled picture. In Chinese culture, burning someone's portrait, especially if said person was still alive, was no different from placing a curse on them. Furthermore, Han Fei still remembered the brazier and his own death portrait from the Manager Mission. In this world, destruction of a person's portrait appeared to have the property of draining them of their life energy. Han Fei saw clearly that the picture the old man took out was someone's portrait. The picture was too aged to tell the captured person's identity. If Han Fei heeded the old man's advice, perhaps the picture would take on Han Fei's resemblance and he'd perish in flames.

Without answering the old man, Han Fei took another step and tapped against the bowl again. Laughter came from the other side of the street. A boy in red walked over holding his little sister's hand. "Big brother, big brother, can you walk us home?" The pair of children accosted Han Fei. Han Fei gave them a cold gaze. He grumbled internally, 'I'm too busy to walk you home at the moment, but in the future, I might help send you to your eternal rest.'

Ignoring the interruption, Han Fei took another step. The boy took a similar step back and pleaded. "Big brother, big brother, my sister and I can't find our way home. Can you help us?"

Han Fei turned a deaf ear to the boy's plea. However, he noticed that whenever he took a step forward, the boy and the girl would take a similar step back. Normally, ghosts would be crazily aggressive but this pair of children appeared to need to stay a fixed distance away from Han Fei. Actually, now that Han Fei thought about it, the old man never got too close to stop him either.

'Is it because of the bowl?' The more he thought about it, the more confident he felt that he was correct. 'The bowl appears to provide me protection, in that case, I shan't worry too much.' Han Fei's

most imminent concern was to complete the mission. Now that Han Fei had found a guardian in the bowl, he picked up his speed. He paced rapidly forward and the bowl ringed with each of his steps.

“Big brother, big brother...”

“Don’t go over there, young man! The hungry ghosts are coming!”

Han Fei closed his ears to these disturbances. He proceeded with his steps. But after he took his tenth step, he stopped. ‘How come it feels that I’m no closer to the other side?’

Han Fei looked ahead. There was a splatter of blood on the wall at the opposite side of the street. Han Fei did not move forward but for some reason, the splash of blood enlarged in his eyes as it took on the frame of a human.

“Kid, get back here! This junction is cursed, it’s a traffic accident hotspot. In fact, only a few days ago, two children were knocked over by a van. The van eventually skidded to a stop at the other side of the street.”

“Big brother, big brother, let’s go home!”

“Young man, come back while you still can! If you go over there, you won’t be able to come back anymore!”

The voices crowded his ears. Han Fei resisted the urge to grab the knife and continued his way forward. He was still no closer to reaching his destination, but the sound of the old man and the boy did fade away.

‘The ghosts finally left?’ Han Fei moved his neck slightly. When he looked back from the corner of his eye, his expression changed. Happiness Neighbourhood had disappeared, instead there was a street that he could not recognize at all. ‘There’s really no way back?’

Han Fei stopped to study his surroundings. The blood stain thickened like the person inside the wall was about to crawl out. ‘I can’t idle for more than 10 minutes at a fixed spot, but if I wander aimlessly on my

own, I'd move further away from Xu Qin. I should have noticed that my senses have been inhabited by some unseen force.' Han Fei lifted up his hand. He looked at the landlord's ring but he could feel nothing from it. Not even a pinprick of chill. 'Ever since the old man appeared, the ring has been inactive. Looks like I've walked into a trap.'

Now that Han Fei understood that, he started to scan through his inventory. Unfortunately, he couldn't find anything that would help his current situation.

'Like Xu Qin has told me, if I'm lost, do not trust anything I see or hear. The thing I need to do now is to calm down. I just need to wait until Xu Qin arrives.' With the plan made, Han Fei found his heart easing. He took out one of the landlord's cigarettes. 'There's no point in panicking. Since I have nothing else to do at the moment, why not take a smoke break?'77777