

Iyashikei 121

Chapter 121:

The 3 cigarettes left behind by the landlord were unique blood red items. According to the item description, the 3 cigarettes were placed before the manager's memorial plaque by his 3 children after his death. After some closer examination, Han Fei noticed all 3 cigarettes were curled with Yin energy. He had no idea what would happen if he lit one up. It might cause the Yin energy to infiltrate into his body, it might trigger an event related to the manager or even summon the landlord's 3 kids.

"When I was at the orphanage, the volunteer told me that if I run into supernatural threats, black dog's blood, pee of a virgin or a cigarette can neutralize it, I wonder if it's true or not..." Han Fei only had 3 cigarettes. Holding the bowl with one hand, and the unlit cigarettes in the other, cowering in the night and cold, Han Fei resembled a strange version of the Little Match Girl. He dangled one cigarette in his lips and took out the lighter he sought from Room 1044's kitchen. He started a countdown in his mind. There was no one around him. The street and the stores were quiet. He waited for a full 8 minutes and there was still no sign of Xu Qin. Even the blood stain on the wall had already disappeared.

Finally, the landlord's ring started to chill. Han Fei looked around with alertness. When his head turned downwards, he noticed there was a pool of blood on the ground. 'It moved?' The blood stain was like a mobile person crawling on the ground. Whenever Han Fei turned away and went back to it, it appeared closer to Han Fei. When it reached the 9th minute mark, the blood stain was already resting before Han Fei's feet. 'Theoretically speaking I have all the reasons to fear it but that won't change anything for me. It won't let me go because of it.'

A lick of flame appeared in the night. Han Fei lit the cigarette. A trail of Yin energy appeared as the cigarette burned. Han Fei felt a sense of déjà vu. The talisman given to him by Meng Si contained other people's Yin energy too. 'Each cigarette is as powerful as a talisman? No, wait, the Yin energy contained within the cigarette is much more powerful than the one inside Meng Si's talisman. They're not even on the same level.' The cigarette smoke distorted the scene around Han Fei. The Yin energy was still pooling! 'The landlord's kids are so powerful? Just a cigarette can relay such intense Yin energy?'

Han Fei believed the Yin energy would dissipate once the cigarette stopped burning so he needed to move fast. The smoke unspooled around Han Fei. While the cigarette was still burning, Han Fei was protected from outer threats. The cigarette smoke was meant for Han Fei's protection but the man had his own way of using it. He studied the blood stain which had stopped moving and the edge of his lips curled. "Why did you stop?"

The sound of the burning cigarette calmed Han Fei. With the cigarette dangled on his lips, Han Fei stepped on the 'head' of the blood stain. A cold draft blew but it did nothing to lighten the cigarette smoke around Han Fei. Han Fei stared at the blood under his feet and growled, "You wanted to reach me, didn't you? Well, here I am!"

Han Fei blew a smoke ring at the stain. The human-shaped stain did not anticipate this. Even though he was exposed to such great humiliation, he did not dare to make any drastic move. The cigarette had already burned halfway. Han Fei knew the protection would disappear once the cigarette finished burning but the enemy did not know that. "You better show yourself before this cigarette stops burning..." The threat was real.

Oppressed by the overwhelming Yin energy, the blood stain started to hesitate. Before it could make its move, Han Fei already did. 2 seconds after he made his threat, Han Fei placed the cigarette between his left fingers and extended his left hand to the ground. The power level between them was so terrifyingly at odds that the blood stain did not even try to resist. Through the usage of Soul-Depth Touch, as Han Fei's hand came into contact with the blood stain, the pool rippled. Then Han Fei found himself holding a broken human head. Resentment, pain, madness but also anxiety and fear, Han Fei sensed many emotions from the blood stain. It was in fear.

Putting the cigarette back into his mouth, Han Fei gripped the human head by its hair and yanked it out from the pool. The human head was disfigured from a car accident. Its facial feature was mangled beyond recognition. However, holding the bizarre thing, Han Fei's eyes glowed with excitement and joy. "You like to make people lose their way home but you're the one who is really lost." Licking at his lips, Han Fei's expression was chilling, "It's about time someone leads you home so why don't you come with me? We shall be family from now on." At the beginning, the blood stain was confused by what Han Fei said but when it heard Han Fei wanted to be its family, it knew something was wrong. "Our home is somewhere without pain and despair, it's for family only."

The cigarette had almost reached its end and the Yin energy was at its thickest. "Don't be afraid, it'll be over soon. We'll soon be family." A deep cruelty hid behind Han Fei's smile. His finger tickled the head's smashed chin. His eyes softened with kindness. Han Fei turned towards his menu and used Resurrection on the blood stain!

The night was torn apart as the gates of hell opened. The menu leaked with blood before it shattered. The sea of human faces gushed forward. An endless sea of blood appeared behind Han Fei. The human stain appeared to have sensed something. When it looked behind Han Fei, its deformed face almost cracked from sheer fear. It fractured the chin which Han Fei was holding and slipped away. At the same time, the environment around Han Fei changed. The cigarette dropped to the ground and the robotic system echoed in his mind. "Failure to locate any wandering soul! Resurrection failed!"

Ignoring the system notification, Han Fei turned back to look. The way back had returned. Xu Qin stood in the shadows of the Happiness Neighbourhood.

'It feels like 10 minutes have passed but perhaps in reality, it was much shorter. The blood stain has sensory deprivation ability, it'll be a strong ally. I should be on the lookout for it.' The human-shaped pool had disappeared but Han Fei noticed his hands were still stained somewhat. 'The thing appeared to have abandoned half of its face just to escape.'

The blood on his hands was soon consumed by the ghost tattoo. Han Fei did not waste anymore time and continued with his mission. The human-shaped stain was the strongest ghost at the junction, but now that it had disappeared, other entities turned their focus onto Han Fei. When the cat is gone, the mice come out to play. 'Just crossing the street can get so dangerous, it's really not easy to survive in this city.'

Clearing his mind, Han Fei focused on his mission. He avoided several wandering ghosts and side-stepped some rudimentary traps before he reached the other side of the street.

"Notification for Player 0000! You've completed Grade G Main Mission—4-way Junction! Obtained 1 Free Skill Points! Obtained item reward—The Groom's Boutonniere.

"The Groom's Boutonniere (Grade G Blood Red Item): It was supposed to be the happiest day of his life but when he passed this junction, his car was crashed into by a speeding van. Since that day, he wandered around the junction, waiting for his missing bride. Unable to enjoy his own bliss, he envied it on others."

Chapter 122:

Han Fei sighed in relief after he completed the mission but the expression on his face was still as unapproachable as ever. He radiated tension and danger. The ghost of a smile hung on his face. His bloodshot eyes filled with non-human emotions. It was as if he was daring the ghosts to come attack him. One could easily imagine he was thinking about how to perfectly dismember a body, how to make a ghost toy and how to torment the wandering souls. In reality though, none of these thoughts were close to what was really in Han Fei's mind. His heart pounded heavily. As he adjusted the micro-expression on his face, he planned his escape route. He missed the sense of security he had around Xu

Qin. He wished desperately to return back to the Happiness Neighbourhood. After this, he'd log off, order a supper, and a six pack to celebrate his survival through another day.

After using Resurrection, Han Fei was incredibly drained. He dragged his tired body to the opposite end of the street while making it look like he was moving slowly on purpose. The blood stain on the wall lightened. The ghost who could use sensory deprivation had gone into hiding. It was worth noting that there were some stores located at this side of the street. Their interior was dark. Han Fei did not notice how 'good' their businesses were earlier because the 'customers' had blended in perfectly into the darkness. The 'customers' now peered greedily at Han Fei. Knowing how the human-stained blood's interaction with Han Fei ended, they controlled themselves and did not pounce on Han Fei. Han Fei's perfect acting had worked in warding them off as well.

'It's time to leave.' Han Fei could log off now but he felt like it would be much safer to do that back inside the Happiness Neighbourhood. He turned around and saw Xu Qin gesture wildly at him. She seemed to tell him to go hide. In less than 1 second, a sense of abandonment and loneliness descended upon Han Fei. The ghosts who were peering at him earlier had all disappeared. 'The 10 minutes are up, something dangerous is probably coming!'

A strange song came from one end of the street. There was no other person on the road and it was too late for Han Fei to run back to the Happiness Neighbourhood. He did not want to attract the unknown threat into the neighbourhood. Without any hesitation, Han Fei ran into the closest store. After Han Fei made his move, Xu Qin also fluttered away. The street became so quiet that the song was made that much more pronounced. Han Fei had no idea what the song meant. He only knew that just as the song rang out, all the ghosts disappeared and the place became deserted.

Hiding under a display window, Han Fei did not dare to move. He closed his hand over his mouth to silence his breathing. The song slowly approached. Han Fei could not tell what the thing was singing. He did not move a muscle, he merely prayed that the thing would leave soon. When the song moved past his hiding spot, Han Fei held his breath. He looked up through the window. The song had wandered off to the 4 way junction. It was probably attracted there by Han Fei's cigarette because the song had stopped around the junction. The song echoed down the 4 roads. The song was laced with the sound of laughing and sobbing. It started to move again and it came closer to the store where Han Fei was hiding. Han Fei swore the singer was coming towards him!

The landlord's ring radiated an intense chill. As the song neared, an unprecedented frost crawled from his finger and then coursed through his body. The singer was much scarier than anything Han Fei had encountered so far!

A clink came from Han Fei's hand. He widened his eyes as he turned to his ring finger. There was a crack on the landlord's ring. 'This is bad!' The singing stopped and then the glass window shattered. A blood-curdling wail erupted above Han Fei. Blood leaked out from his ears. The shriek dulled his brain and his Life Point almost plummeted to zero. With the last remaining shred of consciousness, Han Fei pulled up the menu and chose to exit. The curtain of blood fell and the world was dyed red. When everything froze and Han Fei's consciousness started to waver, something absolutely horrifying happened!

From the city frozen in red, a pair of arms reached out to grab at Han Fei!

His eyes burst open and Han Fei quickly yanked the gaming helmet off! He gasped hungrily for air as his heart raced! "What the hell was that? It could still attack me while I was exiting the game?"

Han Fei could not imagine what would have happened if he was grabbed by the hands. Perhaps his mind would be trapped in some twilight zone, treated as a collection by the singer. His back was soaked. Han Fei gripped the back of his chair tightly, "I was too careless. The ease from the past few days had lowered my guard. I should have known that Happiness Neighbourhood was just the beginning. It was technically the first stage, surviving it was nothing to be proud of."

All this time, Han Fei treated his ability to log off the game as his trump card but he was just given a harsh lesson that it was not the case. "The things in the cryptic world have gotten so strong that they can violate the game rules?" Han Fei thought back to the choice the previous manager told him to make, "Cryptic world is not only filled with despair and pain but also pure madness."

Just a shout from the singer dropped Han Fei's Life Points down to almost zero. He had no idea how he was going to deal with this threat. "The darkest and most malevolent things in humanity have been percolating in the cryptic world, I shouldn't be surprised to find such powerful sin there." Han Fei turned to study the gaming helmet that landed on the table. Then he took out his phone to examine that strange picture. "At the time, I was the only one at home. Until now, I have no idea who is behind this. But if tonight is any indication, can this be the doing of something from inside the cryptic world? Something that has crawled out through the helmet into the real world?"

Han Fei's fingers cracked noisily. The gaming helmet sitting on the table took on the appearance of a human head, a head which was looking at him with gentle eyes. His body was extremely tired but sleep refused to come. The next time he went online, he'd return to that store. There was no way of telling whether the singer would have left by then or not. "O well, there's no reason to worry about things I can't control. I should count my lucky stars that I manage to survive until now." Han Fei told himself but even so sleep was elusive. Whenever he closed his eyes, he'd feel his eardrums trembling from the phantom wail.

Sunlight filtered into the room. Han Fei who slept not for a whit crawled up from bed and entered the bathroom. He looked at himself in the mirror and put on a smile. The smile spoke of joy and kindness but Han Fei knew the truth. Because no matter how good his acting got, the only person he'd never fool was himself. After a quick shower, Han Fei hurried to set and threw himself into work. He personally enjoyed being in front of the camera because in the movie, he could shed his skin and be someone else. Those were the moments where he could clear his mind of his own problems.

The shooting was reaching its end. The earlier part of the script was mostly left unchanged. The biggest change was having Ah Cheng's part cut out. The latter half was mainly Han Fei's solo show. While the topic was still on Han Fei, the company began its promotion. Seeing the reaction from the public, there was literally no chance for this movie to fail. While most online movie platforms' rankings were filled with romance and comedy, the horror-themed movie, Twin Flower sneakily found its way up to the list for the public's most anticipated movie.

Han Fei packed up and left when the shot was over. He decided to go for a feast because it might be his last. Then he returned home. If he came online and the singer was still there, Han Fei'd be dead. He could only pray that the thing had already left. Han Fei set the alarm and tried to take a quick forty wink. When midnight came, he put on the helmet after a brief hesitation. The world before his eyes turned red. He felt bathed by a shower of blood, it soaked into every inch of his skin.

"Welcome to Perfect Life!" Han Fei waited for 2 seconds before he opened his eyes after the system gave its welcome notification. The display window was gone. Glass shards littered the ground and the street before him was empty.

'It's gone? I'm safe?' His heart dropped back to its place. Han Fei crumbled to the floor. Opening the menu, Han Fei noted he only had 3 Life Points left and he felt incredibly sluggish. 'The thing really left? But how come it feels like things have not returned to normal?' Han Fei's hands touched the ground and he instantly pulled them back because he felt not the solidness of the ground but something else. He turned to look and his eyes narrowed. The singer had eviscerated 3 stores worth of 'individuals' because it failed to find Han Fei. Instead of killing the ghosts inside the stores, the singer grounded up their bodies, mixed it with a curse and spread it on the ground. On a cursory look, the store seemed to be layered with mould and dust but the layer was actually a mixture of blood and flesh. The ghosts were stripped of a chance at final peace but instead they were sealed into the ground, living out an eternal pain and despair.

'That thing sure is cruel.'

Han Fei took out Xu Qin's knife. Wrapping the doily around the hilt, he stabbed the ghosts inside the stores. He did this out of kindness. An eternity of torment was too much even for the greatest sinner, plus they were in this unenviable state technically thanks to Han Fei. However, to Han Fei's pleasant surprise, after he killed the few ghosts, his EXP increased by quite a bit.

'I've used the knife to kill several non-locals in the past but I did not get any EXP. Only killing ghosts can bring me EXP? Or is it because I've helped them seek release?' After dealing with all the cursed ghosts, Han Fei exited the store. He wanted to return to the Happiness Neighbourhood but on the other side of the street, the old man glared at him viciously through the brazier.

'With the state I'm in, he'd kill me easily.' There were two methods to recover Life Points, to rest or to eat. After giving it some thoughts, Han Fei turned his head towards the convenience store down the junction. The whole street was dark but a dim light emitted from the easily-overlooked convenience store.

'The convenience store is not far from where I am but the singer spared it from its wrath, was it due to pure luck or the convenience store had its own secrets?' Han Fei couldn't be too careless since he only had 3 Life Points left. He decided to stay inside the cursed store for now. He'd recover his stamina first before he figured out what to do.

Chapter 123:

Everyone on the street knew what the song represented so no one dared to come close to the shop destroyed by it. This worked in Han Fei's favor because temporarily he did not need to worry about being ambushed. Hiding under the window counter, Han Fei glanced towards Happiness Neighbourhood. The rusted iron gates were shut and silence dominated the neighbourhood like it had been deserted. The black cloth draped over the altar by the gates was missing a large chunk. The bowl that Han Fei grabbed earlier had been replaced to its original spot. 'The altar appears to be protecting the neighbourhood. Weifu mentioned that Little Eight cannot leave the Happiness Neighbourhood. Is it because of the altar and its protective property? Perhaps the altar can eclipse Little Eight's presence from whoever that's looking for her.'

The broken altar looked unassuming and did not give off any Yin energy but Han Fei felt comforted by its presence. 'The singer might return, I shan't stay to find out. I need to return home as soon as possible.' Han Fei still could not leave the game so he needed to be cautious. If he was captured and killed, then he'd be trapped inside the game forever. When his Life Points raised up to 10 points, Han Fei climbed up from the ground. Just as he did, he saw a human face staring at him from outside the broken window. 'It's the old man!' The wrinkled face reached through the broken window. The venom was clear in his

eyes. "Find another place to hide. This place is very dangerous. You just killed its prisoners, it will come for you soon."

The old man made it sound like he cared about Han Fei but the latter knew the old man was not doing that out of kindness. He ignored the old man and thought about how to extricate himself from this situation. "You should come with me. You can hide at my place, my home is just nearby. It's not a long walk." The old man offered kindly. His wrinkles trembled as he reached his hands through the window frame. "It's coming, I can feel it. You have to follow me now. I'll give you a sanctuary." Han Fei knew he would not shake the old man loose that easily. He reached his hand into his pocket and curled his fingers around Xu Qin's knife. 'My current level is still too low. The only way I can escape is through the element of surprise.'

His eyes followed the movement of the old man's hands. As the twig-like hands were about to reach Han Fei, the latter jumped to the side and kicked down the store's front door. He raced outwards. His initial plan was to race past the old man and cross the street back to the Happiness Neighbourhood. But once he exited the store, Han Fei saw two children sitting on the roadside. When they heard Han Fei's footsteps, they turned to look at him. The expected innocence was not on their faces, instead there was a pair of creepy smiles.

Bang!

Han Fei halted from shock. In that moment, a flower pot filled with soil and dead worms crashed before Han Fei. If he did not stop earlier, the pot would have fallen right on his head. He glanced upwards and saw a rotund woman hugging an armload of flower pots at the third floor of the store building. She was smiling eerily down at him. She loosened her embrace and another pot came flying down at Han Fei. Han Fei moved to evade it. At the same time, the old man and the pair of siblings pounced at Han Fei. Han Fei had no choice but to run away from them and thus away from the Happiness Neighbourhood.

Without the human-shaped stain in the way, the children revealed their true nature. Their bodies started to bleed, as they morphed back to their state of death. "Big brother, big brother..." Bloody tiny footsteps surfaced closer and closer to Han Fei. Han Fei knew he'd be caught up by them if he did not do something so with a grit of his teeth, he turned into the convenience store next to him and pulled the door closed. It was too dangerous for him to hesitate.

After the siblings and the old man saw Han Fei enter the convenience store, their expressions took on a strange hue. It was as if their chicken had flown the coop and they could not have it back anymore. Han Fei who was a master of micro-expression naturally noticed it. It unsettled him somewhat.

The system had given him a mission regarding the convenience store so he'd come here sooner or later. With his back to the door, Han Fei looked around. Compared to a chain convenience store like 7-11, the place was more like a mini market. The racks held various snacks, drinks, everyday needs and even some second hand small electrical appliances. Still holding onto the knife in his pocket, Han Fei stood at the door. He decided to stay there as long as he could while he carefully studied the interior of the shop.

The clock on the wall ticked. A person's mumbling could be heard coming from an indeterminate corner. The male voice sounded like it was saying something on repeat, as if chanting a mantra. Han Fei did not venture towards it. He stayed near the door, uttering not a word. After the siblings and the old man left, Han Fei reached for the front door. He wanted to race back to the neighbourhood but he realized with consternation that the previously unlocked door was now locked.

"What... can I get you?" A voice choked with tears sang out behind Han Fei, it caused the young man to jump. He turned and saw a young man in a store uniform standing behind him. The young man was incredibly thin, his lips were cracked and one of his eyes was blinded. "What can I get you?"

"What do you have on sale?" Since Han Fei could not leave, he decided to converse with the store worker to see if he could get any valuable information from him.

"What can I get you?" The worker repeated as his remaining eye bulged out from its socket. That seemed to be the only thing he knew how to say.

Han Fei turned to the racks. There were many things on sale but there was no price tag. In other words, the shopper had no idea what kind of price they'd pay for the items they wanted to get.

'Looks like I shouldn't expect any normal sale transaction here.' When Han Fei turned his face back from the racks, the store worker's face was practically leaning towards his.

"What can I get you?" The question echoed out from the young man's stick-like figure. If he took another step, he'd walk right into Han Fei.

"I'm not here to buy anything." Han Fei could feel the negative energy coming from the young man. He took an involuntary step back. "I'm here to look for a job. Do you have any vacancy?"

Pulling up the mission interface, Han Fei accepted the other main mission.

“Notification for Player 0000! You’ve accepted Grade G Main Mission: Convenience Store Worker!

“Mission Requirement: There is a secret hidden at this convenience store. As a temp worker working the graveyard shift at Yi Ming Convenience Store, survive through the night!”

Chapter 124:

“The job can give more meaning to my life, and provide an outlet for my creative energy. It will also allow me to come into contact with more people and events, giving me more societal experience. Overall, it will be a valuable investment in myself.” At midnight, in the corner of the dark city, Han Fei stood inside the dim convenience store and attended a job interview with an impossibly lanky young man. “Please give me the job.”

The two looked at each other for more than a minute. As if someone had snapped his consciousness into being, the young man’s only eye rejuvenated with spirit. The murky iris moved in his head. Instead of repeating the same question like before, he uttered the following in unusual coherence, “I do not own this place. If you wish to work here, you need to earn its approval.”

“It?”

“Follow me.” The single-eyed worker walked down the racks and led Han Fei deeper into the store. He opened a door and signaled for Han Fei to enter it. The room was gloomy. Han Fei forced himself to go into it despite his unwillingness. The room turned out to be the store’s warehouse. It was stocked with many things. The only light source was a burning candle. Han Fei noticed that the worker was more like a marionette. Most of the time, he had no volition of his own. He walked in a very disjointed manner like his body was held up by invisible strings. “It is inside there, if you can find it, it means that you can stay.” The single eye pulsed inside the man’s head, it looked quite scary. “The candle won’t burn forever, you better hurry.” Then he turned and left Han Fei alone inside the warehouse.

‘He left just like that? He’s not even going to stay to watch over me?’ The warehouse was filled with items. Han Fei did not even know what he was supposed to look for. ‘The real boss of this place did not appear to be a ‘person’ but an object. Based on the worker’s hint, I’m supposed to find it before the

candle burns out.’ For the natives of the cryptic world, finding something, especially without a clue would be impossible. However, it was different for Han Fei, he was a player, he could use the system to identify useful objects. Han Fei first reached for the candlestick.

“A white candle used in memorial of past loved ones.” The system introduction was direct. The candle contained Yin energy, it was a unique object but not what Han Fei was looking for. Han Fei proceeded to touch everything in the room. As time passed, the light dimmed as the candle slowly died out. The landlord’s ring also grew colder. Han Fei felt unsettled. After some rummaging, Han Fei realized the convenience store offered ‘convenience’ merely to the dead. The stock inside the warehouse was mostly paper objects normally burned for the dead. The situation was horrifying but considering the nature of Perfect Life, Han Fei eventually found things to be quite typical.

Holding the candle, Han Fei came to the last row of the warehouse. The shelf was lined with paper dolls. Standing before the shelf, Han Fei felt many eyes on him. He swallowed and reached out to touch the paper dolls. As his fingers brushed past the dolls, Han Fei frowned. They did not appear to be normal dolls. Each of the dolls had its own different ‘body’ temperatures as if they carried different souls. The candle flickered in the dark. Just as the light was about to be extinguished, Han Fei’s fingertip came across something that he had not felt before. Han Fei stopped moving and turned to see what he had touched. The moment he raised his eyes, the candlelight went out. ‘This whole shelf should be lined with paper dolls but this particular one did not have that papery touch like the others, if anything, it had the suppleness and warmth of human skin.’

A jolt of pain came from his wrist. Before Han Fei could react, the light returned. A new white candle rematerialized on the candlestick. This time Han Fei managed to see the candle in its entirety. The candle body was carved with a pained ghost face. The candle was made from wandering souls. Suddenly the warehouse door opened. The single-eyed worker stood teetering at the frame. He shuffled towards Han Fei, “It has agreed for you to stay.”

Han Fei felt the young man was more like a messenger. He had no mind of its own. “Come, I’ll show you around the shop.” The worker’s voice was devoid of emotion. He led Han Fei around the warehouse and showed Han Fei where each item was stocked. “You need to remember where these stocks are placed. If the merchandise outside is sold out, you need to restock them. If there’s a stock delivery, you’ll need to accept them and arrange them here.”

“Stock delivery? We’ll get stock delivery here?”

“Everyone that walks into the shop is our customer and our product.” The worker paused for a long time before he added, “Most of the time, they are customers.”

“Understood.” Han Fei nodded.

“You’ll have to handle the cleanliness inside the shop as well. Most of our customers are messy shoppers, so you need to ensure that the shop is spick and span... at least on the surface so that the customers would be more willing to buy.” The worker pointed at the label on the warehouse shelves. “None of our products are priced but they have their own hidden pricing.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Simply put, our customers can be separated into 7 different kinds. Our most common customers are the Animated Regrets, their body parts are not that valuable no matter how deep the regret in their hearts is. They range from Animated Slight Regret, Animated Deep Regret, Animated Extreme Regret.” The worker was explaining to Han Fei the basic business knowledge but in Han Fei’s ears, he was basically delineating the strength of the ghosts in this world. “A more valuable customer is the Lingering Spirit. These Lingering Spirits normally appear no different from Animated Regret, they retain a human appearance. But when they run into danger, they’ll reveal their true form and turn into various monsters. The value of Lingering Spirit is related to their size. We order them accordingly as Small Lingering Spirit, Medium Lingering Spirit and Large Lingering Spirit.”

What the worker said reminded Han Fei of Little Eight. Normally Little Eight appeared like a harmless little girl but when she pieced together with the other victims, she’d morph into a large red spectre. “Lingering Spirits are very dangerous but also extremely rare. If you run into small and medium lingering spirits, you can try negotiating with them. If you run into a large lingering spirit, do everything you can to lure it into the warehouse.”

“Senior, didn’t you say there are 7 types of customers? So far, you’ve only mentioned 6 types.”

“Extremely small number of Lingering Spirits may evolve into Pure Hatred. If you run into those, and somehow manage to survive, you need to go into the warehouse to find it, it will tell you what to do.”

The pricing of the items at this shop was very strange. All the items were priced according to the customer’s body parts. For example, the candy near the door, one of them equaled one eyeball of an Animated Regret; while each of the paper dolls deep inside the warehouse would cost the head of a Small Lingering Spirit. With such gory pricing, it was little wonder that they were not listed out at the store front. After introducing the pricing and the items on sale, the worker did an impromptu test with

Han Fei. To his surprise, Han Fei answered it perfectly. With just a glance, Han Fei had memorized the pricing and the location of all the merchandise.

“Senior, I believe I heard someone singing yesterday night, was that a Pure Hatred...” Han Fei began but before he could finish, he was glared by the young man. This was the first time Han Fei detected emotion from him. “We do not serve any customer beyond Pure Hatred. If you do not wish to die, then you’d never raise that issue ever again.” The worker then reverted to his insipid self as he continued to teach Han Fei how to use the tools available at the shop. Then he led Han Fei into the staff breakroom. “This is where we change shifts. The pictures on the wall belong to our former colleagues.”

Han Fei lifted his head to look and he saw portraits of individuals which had been drawn out with red markers filling up the wall.

“Look over here.” When Han Fei turned around, the worker already raised a camera to snap a picture of Han Fei. A picture soon rolled out from the digital camera. “Your picture will be placed up there too. Hmm?”

Holding Han Fei’s picture, the worker’s face colored with a rare expression.

“What’s wrong?”

“How come you don’t show on the picture?” The worker handed the picture to Han Fei, the picture was empty. Han Fei was confused too. ‘Is it because the camera can only capture ghosts?’ He glanced at the camera, an eyeball was screwed at the spot where the camera lens should be.

“Perhaps it was warming up earlier, how about you give it another try?” Han Fei activated his ghost tattoo and had the poor soul from the 8th floor landing spread all over his body. The worker snapped the picture again and this time a shadow did appear on the picture. However, the face was still blurred and the body size did not match Han Fei either.

“This’ll do.” The worker pulled out a paper doll the size of a palm out from the drawer. Then he pinned the doll along with ‘Han Fei’s’ picture on the wall. “If there’s any loss in the shop while you’re on duty, you’re responsible to pay for it. Other than that, there are no rules.”

“I’m planning to do this as a temp. How can I leave should I decide to quit?” Han Fei summoned the courage to ask.

“Quit?” The single eye pulsed dangerously. Black threads snaked out from the worker’s body, they pierced into his bloodstream and heart. His face grimaced with pain. He doubled over and started to vomit. Shredded paper coughed out from his throat. After a long time, the worker finally returned to normal. His mind was dazed. His single eye looked around blurrily. “What did you ask me earlier?”

“Nothing, I just said I will work hard so that our boss can reach financial freedom as soon as possible.”

Chapter 125:

The single-eyed worker did not respond to Han Fei’s latest statement. Han Fei’s image was reflected in his eye, for some reason, the young man felt things were going to get a lot less peaceful around here. “Once your picture is on the wall, you’re an official worker here. Now I will bring you to a place exclusive to the workers.” With a few more coughs, the worker led Han Fei into a room next to the warehouse. There were two doors inside this room. One of them was connected to the warehouse and the other reeked horribly. “We’re in the garbage disposal room, the door on the left leads to the warehouse and the right leads to the back alley.” The worker strode towards the door with the horrible smell and pushed it open with some force. It opened to a dark alley about 10 metres long. There were 3 large trash cans placed adjacent to each other in the alley, the stench emitted from the cans.

“You have to clear up the racks every day and toss the expired merchandise into the trash cans.”

“What if the cans are full?” Han Fei glanced outside. One of the cans was filled with the convenience store’s uniforms. Most of the uniforms were shredded and bloody. It was not hard to imagine their owners had had a horrifying death.

“That is not something you should worry about.” The worker signaled for Han Fei to come out into the alley with him. “We also need to maintain the cleanliness of the back alley. There are many rats out here, so be careful when you clean up.”

“Understood.” Han Fei glanced down the dark alley, when he saw the building at the end, he startled slightly. The end of the alley was connected to the main road and opposite the road was a dilapidated school. The sign for the school had faded away and Han Fei barely made out the name Yi Ming Private

Academy. 'Huh, so the convenience store provides a shortcut to the school.' According to the previous manager's map, Han Fei would have to take many turns on the main street to go from Happiness Neighbourhood to Yi Ming Private Academy. There was no telling what kind of danger one might run into. Thus it came as a pleasant surprise to Han Fei to have found out this shortcut. 'The Happiness Neighbourhood, Yi Ming Convenience Store and Yi Ming Private Academy are closely connected to each other. If in the future, I am to become the headmaster or the convenience store owner....'

Han Fei was dreaming ahead when the bell at the store front rang. The single-eyed young man immediately led Han Fei back into the store. There was no one inside the empty store. But the temperature appeared to have dropped.

"There's a new set of uniforms in the breakroom. Go and change. I'll serve this customer." The worker said plainly.

"There's a customer?" Han Fei glanced around the deserted store front. In any case, he hurried into the breakroom to change so that he would not miss out on this opportunity to learn from his senior. However, when Han Fei came out, the temperature had already returned to normal and the single-eyed young man was kneeling on the ground, wiping away a puddle of black blood.

"Has the customer left?"

"No." After cleaning up the puddle, the worker entered the trash disposal room. Han Fei walked to the spot his senior just deserted and noticed there was a new white candle on the rack. 'This is not a shop but a trap! Only by ensuring customer satisfaction that they'd return. Who'd come if you go after your customers like this? No wonder the business here is so horrible.' Han Fei was an actor. After he put on the uniform, he looked even more like a worker than the single-eyed young man. 'The cans in the back alley are stuffed with the store's uniforms and dead pictures of former workers are pasted on the wall. Looks like this is a high risk career.' Han Fei sauntered over to the front door. 'The current boss is not business-minded at all. I don't see a bright future with him, if anything, I might lose my life if I continue to work for him. I need to find myself a way out before the whole ship sinks and carries me down with it.'

Han Fei's hand landed on the front door. After he was an official employee, the door gave with a slight push. However, the ghost tattoo on his body started to tremble and struggle like it was scalded. 'I do not feel anything but the ghost inside the tattoo is clearly in plenty of pain. Looks like the working contract has been signed with the ghost tattoo and not me.' Several plans immediately appeared in Han Fei's mind. 'When a ghost enters the store, the bell will ring. But when I opened the door earlier, it did not. Everything inside this convenience store appears to serve the dead. Then again, that's perfectly normal

considering we're in a world of the dead. No one would have expected a living person to come work at a ghost convenience store anyway.'

Han Fei took a step back. Once he moved away from the door, the struggle of the ghost tattoo stopped. 'The contract is signed with the ghost tattoo, so no matter what I do, it'll be the tattoo who will pay the price.' His eyes scanned the store greedily. A brave plan popped up in his mind. 'Should I make use of this opportunity to take all the valuable merchandise with me? A ghost tattoo to trade for a whole lot of items, no matter how you look at it, it'll be a positive outcome for me!' Thankfully the ghost inside the tattoo was unable to read Han Fei's mind or else it might have torn itself right out of Han Fei's skin.

'But if I do that, it'll sever any good relationship I might have with the current boss. Even though I have not met the boss, we might end up as business partners in the future. It's easier to make enemies than friends. My plan is to make a systemized community out of the apartments, stores, and the school. The convenience boss store might be a great ally for it has heft over the other store owners. From the fact that it was spared from the singer's destruction, it was clearly the strongest among all the store owners.' With that in mind, Han Fei decided to work obediently at the store at least until he completed the main mission, 'One must always take the future into consideration.'

Han Fei stood near the door and noticed the old man with the paper money wandering outside the shop. He seemed to be still hung up on Han Fei but he was too afraid to come in. 'This old man is going to be a hindrance, I'll have to deal with him as soon as possible.' Han Fei turned to glance behind him. The single-eyed worker had not returned. Han Fei sought his way to the door and pretended like he was going to make his escape. Han Fei manifested the hesitation, fear, and struggle clearly on his face. Falling for Han Fei's performance, the old man quietly slunk over. As if worried of attracting other people's attention to Han Fei, he whispered, "This convenience store is very dangerous, it's still not too soon for you to come with me!" The old man hissed concernedly. "I'm risking the anger of the store owner to come warn you. Believe me. Step out of the shop and you'll be safe."

Conflict was evident in Han Fei's eyes. His teeth grinded together, as he teetered at the edge of the front door.

"You still have the choice now. In a while longer, you won't be able to escape anymore! Follow me and I'll bring you somewhere safe!" The old man persuaded. He could see Han Fei being convinced by his words. With his hand on the door, veins bulged on the back of his hand. Han Fei's teeth gritted so hard together, his gum almost bled. His eyes focused on the opposite street and his jaw set with a decision. He pulled the front door open. Just as Han Fei was about to step out, the ghost tattoo pleaded with mercy. The ghost trapped inside the tattoo had no idea what was happening, he assumed Han Fei was torturing him on purpose.

"I can't leave, my skin is being torn off!" Han Fei shouted harrowingly, almost as real as the ones issued by the ghost tattoo.

"Grab my hand!" The old man actively reached out for Han Fei. A sinister smile lit up his face. His wrinkled face looked anticipatorily at Han Fei. But to his minor concern, despite the shrill shouts, Han Fei's face carried a sinister smile as well.

Han Fei activated Soul-Depth Touch. With 10 points in stamina, the old man lurched forward from a massive pulling force. Han Fei yanked him into the shop before the old man could even react.

The bell above the door tingled. The single-eyed man materialized beside Han Fei. Han Fei and the young man sandwiched the old man between them. The two drawn faces lit up with a brilliant smile as they uttered in unison. "What can I get you?"

Chapter 126:

"Erm..." Regret, there was nothing but regret in the old man's heart. He had to admit he had greatly underestimated Han Fei, the complexity and repugnance made possible by human nature. "I'm not here to shop." The old man astutely did not resist. He took a step back but Han Fei held onto his arm like a vise. As if rehearsed, the two workers had their faces darkened and repeated once more, "What can I get you?"

"I just want to go home." Now both of the old man's arms were held by the workers, one on each side. He was pulled into the shop.

"What can I get you?" Even though the employees still repeated the same questions, the murderous intent in their words thickened. The old man looked at Han Fei and the single-eyed young man pleadingly. Eventually he was ushered to the counter. "I'll just get one candy." The old man's voice trembled. He lived right outside on the street so he was very familiar with the working of this shop.

"We're doing a promotion now, buy 3 candies and you can get one extra for free." Han Fei said with a professional smile, he was truly the perfect worker. "I'd suggest you go for the promotion."

“But...” The old man blanched as he gripped the single candy tightly. “I do not have that many eyes.” The old man was familiar with the hidden pricing of the convenience store, he was already prepared to sacrifice an eye. “Just ring up the merchandise.”

The single-eyed worker nodded. He took out a very small paper doll from his pocket and had the old man swallow it. A few seconds after the old man did, his body doubled over. He grabbed his neck in pain. He opened his mouth wide and tried to shove his hand into his throat to hook out the paper doll but the doll had gone further down into his body. There was a barely discernible laughter coming from his stomach. In that impossible pose, the Yin energy around the old man disintegrated until what was left of him was a puddle of smelly black blood. The single-eyed worker knelt to pick out the paper doll from the puddle. The doll was holding a new candy and the smile on its face became more realistic.

“Senior, isn’t the price of a single candy equal to his one eyeball?” Han Fei only wanted to incapacitate the old man, he didn’t expect his colleague to go for the kill.

“The pricing only comes into play when the other party is able to negotiate.” The single-eyed worker carefully placed the paper doll back into his pocket, then he grabbed the tools from the trash disposal room and started to clean up. As he studied his colleague, Han Fei realized his senior was a rather reliable person. ‘The old man did not resist at all before him, could it be that the single-eyed worker is a very powerful ghost?’ Han Fei’s interest in the young man was piqued. He went over and volunteered to help. He focused on the cleaning. ‘With him around, the mission shouldn’t be too hard tonight.’

Before they could even finish cleaning, a strange noise came from the back alley, it sounded like something was rummaging through the trash cans. When the sound came, the single-eyed worker grimaced from a headache again. His remaining eye pulsed like it could drop out at any moment. He mumbled incoherent things. He knelt to the ground and covered his ears.

“Are you alright?”

“The rats, the rats are here again. Eventually I’ll kill them all. Yes kill them all...” Regardless, the young man did not move. He remained on the ground and chanted madly. When the single-eyed man was conscious, he acted like a normal person but when he was agitated, he’d turn intense and mad. Han Fei did not dare to venture too close to him either. Instead he picked up the cleaning tools and turned to head towards the garbage disposal room. ‘When I mentioned the possibility of quitting, the man already experienced one episode. The word appeared to have triggered the curse the boss placed on him; now when he heard the noises from the back alley, he was triggered again. Why is that? What could be out there that might trigger him?’

The curse was placed on the employees to make them stay in line. Since the sound from the back alley triggered the single-eyed young man, there was a high possibility that there was something back there that could shake the man's loyalty to the boss. Han Fei put away the tools and pulled the backdoor open. Han Fei looked into the alley. Everything was normal except a rubber ball that slowly rolled towards him. 'A rubber ball? It's too small to hide anything. It should be a normal ball.'

He slowly bent over to reach for the ball. His hand touched it but the system did not react. Only then he picked up the ball. "My colleague said there are rats out here but would rats play with rubber balls?" He held the ball and exited the door. The ghost tattoo screamed again. But to further his investigation, Han Fei had no choice but to let the ghost suffer a while longer. 'The trash bins have indeed been rummaged through but there are no clear claw or bite marks...' When Han Fei reached the space between the first and second trash cans, he stopped. There was a boy about 5 cowering there. When he saw Han Fei in the convenience store uniform, his small face paled. His eyes watered but he did not dare to make any sound. He bit on his small hands as tears flowed down his cheeks. He huddled deeper into the shadow.

Honestly, Han Fei felt afraid as well. After all, he still could not leave the game. If this was a trap, he'd be dead. After some hesitation, Han Fei was the first to make contact. He placed the rubber ball on the ground and rolled it over to the boy. "Is this yours?"

The boy hugged the ball and eventually nodded. He bit on his lips as if he'd cry the moment his mouth opened.

"Do you live around here? Where are your parents?" Han Fei asked but he got no answer. Eventually he sighed and stood up. "I'll just pretend that I haven't seen you. Hurry back home. Don't come here again, it's very dangerous here." Han Fei turned to walk back to the convenience store. Seeing that, the boy hugged the rubber ball and crawled out from his hiding spot. Realizing Han Fei really meant him no harm, the boy bowed deeply at Han Fei. When he did so, the rubber ball slipped from his grasp. The boy did not realize that as he turned to run out of the alley.

"Little boy, you forgot your ball." Han Fei shook his head. 'The boy is quite cute, if only everyone here is like him.'

Hearing Han Fei's reminder, the boy shuffled back into the alley. He picked up his ball.

"Little fella, what's your name? Maybe we can be friends."

This time, the boy did not run away. He pinched his face for a long time before he said innocently, "But my mother said everyone from the store is very scary."

"Since you know that, why would you come to this alley to play?" Han Fei continued to chat with the boy. There were not many innocent residents like the boy in the cryptic world.

"I'm here to look for my big brother. He's here, he's inside the wall."

"Inside the wall?" After the boy said that, Han Fei turned to look at the wall in alarm. The back alley was dark. Only upon close inspection that one could tell there were human-shaped shadows imprinted on the alley wall.

"My brother is in the wall. He wanted to save me and my mother so he entered the store. But I have not seen him since. Based on what the previous old lady who worked there told me, eventually everyone who entered the shop would appear on the wall so I've been waiting here for him." The boy stuttered through his explanation. Han Fei picked up a few key points.

"A previous old lady who worked here?" Han Fei ran through the pictures of his former colleagues he saw in the breakroom. Next to his own picture, there was a portrait of an old lady which had been drawn out.

"Does your big brother have a small face, long hair..." Han Fei described the single-eyed young man. He was only halfway through when the boy toddled towards him. "You've seen my big brother?"

Before Han Fei could reply, the robotic voice announced, "Notification for Player 0000! You've successfully triggered Grade G Hidden Mission—The Missing Big Brother.

"The Missing Big Brother: Help the child find his big brother, this can be your good deed for the day.

"Warning! This hidden mission will influence the progress of the other missions so please approach it carefully."

If the system did not append the last sentence, Han Fei would have dragged the boy to meet his colleague immediately. 'Of course the hidden mission wouldn't be that simple. If I bring the boy to meet my colleague now, the single-eyed young man might perish from the boss' curse and the boss would come out to eliminate both me and the boy...' This reunion required careful planning. To complete the mission, Han Fei knew he had to start by cleansing the young man of the curse. He stared at the boy before him and the frame of a plan appeared. 'Perhaps I can use this boy to earn his brother's trust. When the time is right, perhaps us two employees can work together to usurp the current boss.' Even though this was Han Fei's first day on the job, he was already planning to replace the boss.

'Curses are hard to remove. For now, I only know 2 ways. One is to wait for the cursed individuals to digest it slowly and two is to kill the person who dealt the curse. We are too weak compared to the boss. For now, I better focus on my job. Haste is not going to solve any problem. As long as I am still alive, there is a chance to succeed.' A bright flash crossed his eyes. Han Fei then arranged his expression, "I've met your big brother but I can't bring you to see him now. However I promise that one day you'll reunite with him."

"Really?"

"Of course." Using soul-depth touch, Han Fei ruffled the boy's hair. The boy's intention was pure, he only had the concern and memory of his family in his mind.

Chapter 127:

There were good and bad people in the world; it was the same in the cryptic world. Some ghosts were a worse version of themselves when they were alive; but some ghosts managed to retain kindness despite their circumstances. "What is your name? When the opportunity arises, I'll bring you to meet your big brother."

"Firefly Ying. My mom said it's a kind of worm that glows in the dark but I've not seen it personally before."

'There are plenty of parents who'd wish their children to become dragons and phoenixes, but this is the first time I've met a parent who named their son after an insect.' Han Fei had the child hurry away, "Don't come back here to play again. Give me your home address, when the time is right, I'll go find you."

“My mother and I live in the hostel next to the convenience store. My mother is reluctant to move away because she has been waiting for my big brother to return.” It seemed to take a toll on the boy to hold such a long conversation. After he told Han Fei his address, he grabbed his rubber ball and toddled away.

“The kid is quite interesting...” Han Fei turned to stare at the wall in the back alley. Apparently everyone who worked at the convenience store would eventually end up trapped on the back alley wall. The wall was filled with faded human shapes, each of them representing a former worker. ‘This is probably not the first time Firefly has come here to play but the ghosts on the wall did not harm him or take over his body. In fact, they even played with him. When I opened the door earlier, the shadows crowded around Firefly’s hiding spot. That was the shadows trying to help him.’ The broken souls on the wall wanted to protect Firefly. Just that fact alone made Han Fei believe that he could be good friends with all these broken souls. ‘Looks like all my seniors are good people!’

His eyes scanning the wall, Han Fei took a slight bow. “This is my first day on the job, please take care of me, dear seniors.”

There was no response from the wall. Eventually Han Fei walked back into the store. But just as he was about to close the door, he believed he saw the human shadows on the wall moving, they seemed to gather to discuss something. ‘All the former employees have been sealed into the wall, why didn’t the boss just kill them? Does the boss still have a need for them?’

These shadows were weak Animated Regrets. But their power might be overwhelming if they gathered together.

The bell above the door tingled again. As Han Fei walked towards the store front, the landlord’s ring chilled. Heeding the warning, Han Fei hid inside the trash disposal room. He creaked the door open a gap and looked out. The single-eyed young man stood at the counter. Across from him was a woman about 2.5 metres tall. The woman had on a red veil and a lavish red wedding dress. However, there was a white flower pinned on her chest. Almost at the same time the woman appeared, the temperature in the store dropped to subzero. The single-eyed young man was so polite, he served the woman seriously. Most of the time though it was the young man talking, the woman merely nodded occasionally. Han Fei could not catch their conversation clearly, but he did overhear terms like Soul, Ziggurat, and 144. Several minutes later, the young man walked out from behind the counter and signaled for the woman to follow him into the warehouse.

As the woman turned to follow the young man, she stopped when she faced the trash disposal door. Her veil lifted from the wind and Han Fei saw a torn mouth. ‘Did she discover me?’ The woman did not

expose Han Fei. Her unusually large hands were carrying a bloody package. She shuffled into the warehouse. There was no other sound after that even though the light from the warehouse did dim.

Then the coughs echoed. The young man came out from the warehouse carrying a paper doll that was the size of a normal human. The doll had a smile on its face and its hands closed over the young man's eye. The bride walked out later. But her bloody package had disappeared. The bell rang and the young man carried the paper doll out from the store with the bride trailing behind them.

'That paper doll did not look like a normal doll, its expression is practically alive. Could that be the boss?' The temperature around him slowly returned to normal. Han Fei sidled to the warehouse door. The white candle inside was extinguished, the room was shrouded in darkness. 'Even if the paper doll isn't the boss, it should contain part of the boss' spirit. After all, it was too alive to be a normal object. It even knew to cover my colleague's eye, as if worried about what the young man might see.' Han Fei did not believe a normal paper doll would be that astute, the boss should be controlling it one way or another. 'The woman in the wedding dress is very strong, she gave off a presence even scarier than Xu Qin. She came here to seek the boss' help, the package should contain the payment for the boss.'

Following the blood trail, Han Fei came to the last row of the shelf. It did not feel good being stared at by the rows of paper dolls but when Han Fei was there, he noticed something different too. When he was there the first time, the paper dolls looked at him like they were alive. They seemed to contain individual emotions but this time, the paper dolls' eyes were dull like their souls were gone.

'The blood trail stops here.' Han Fei stared at the space before him. There was a paper doll in the way and Han Fei took it down. Behind the doll and the wall was an extended space. Han Fei reached his head into it to investigate. He realized there was a coffin sitting inside it. 'Well, this is quite a secret.' Han Fei memorized the arrangement of all the paper dolls before he took them all down to clear a space big enough for him to crawl behind the shelf and into the hidden space. When his hands touched the coffin lid, the ghost tattoo wailed. The pain was unbearable but Han Fei wasn't the one bearing it. 'Brother, it'll just take a little longer.'

Han Fei noticed the package at the corner. It had been opened. The bloody cloth was left to the side. With enough strength, Han Fei eventually got the lid open. Various body parts were placed inside the coffin and right in the middle of the amalgamated creature was a blood red paper doll the size of Han Fei's palm. The doll's eyes were close as if asleep. Han Fei looked closer and he noticed there were various screaming faces on the doll's body. Han Fei recognized many of them from the staff breakroom. 'The paper doll is trying to build itself an actual body?'

While Han Fei was studying this new discovery, a voice came from the corner of the room. "Save me, save me..." Han Fei was so startled that he almost fell into the coffin. He widened his eyes to look around and realized the voice came from one of the white candles. He went to the white candle and stared at the carved face. The man did not look like a kind individual.

"You're the new worker right? The boss' curse on you is still weak, bring me with you and get out of this place, I will repay you massively!" The face tried his best to speak. "The paper doll has left, it rarely leaves the shop, this is a rare opportunity."

"A candle wishes to convince me to betray my loyalty to the boss?" Han Fei countered vehemently.

"You removed the boss' coffin lid on your first day of work, I don't really see much loyalty in you."

"I just wanted to get to know my favorite boss better."

"You're a clever person, let's not waste time." The face argued. "Do you know why the candles here can burn through the night? Do you know why the candles here are precious merchandise for the other ghosts?"

"Why?"

"All the white candles are made from grave wax, literally parts of monster bodies and the previous worker's lingering spirit. It likes to hear their wails from being burnt." The face turned twisted. "if you do not leave now, you'd be turned into a candle eventually! I know the way to undo the boss' curse, if you take me away with you, I'll help you remove your curse!"

"You seem to know the boss quite well..."

"Because I used to work here. The boss is the blood red paper doll inside the coffin. It is a cursed object but it has come alive from absorbing too many resentments. Everyone who enters the shop will become its target, either they become its merchandise or become its employees. Neither has a good ending! All the employees will eventually die! And it will be a horrible death. Our remaining humanity will be sucked away by the paper doll, becoming a part of it." The candle face said chokingly.

“All the former workers’ humanity has been absorbed by the boss?”

“Yes.” The face turned to face the coffin. “The more it absorbs humanity and their resentment, the more alive it becomes. Normally, it will hide its presence inside one of the many dolls while its real body is kept nourished by flesh and blood. In other words, all the paper dolls in the shop are a part of it...”

“Doesn’t that mean we’ve already been exposed?”

“But tonight it’s different! The bride just dropped off the precious human heart and head for the boss. As compensation, she needs the boss’ help to kill someone.” The candle face knew a lot. He must have overheard many secrets just sitting there on the shelf. “The person lives at the Ziggurat. They’re very dangerous, so dangerous that the boss has to gather all of its power to have a chance to kill it. Once it kills the target though, it’ll gain more energy and increase its growth. Then it’s basically impossible for us to escape.”

“So tonight is our only chance to escape?”

“Yes! This chance won’t come ever again!” The candle face persuaded. “The boss’ curse will prevent you from leaving the shop and touching its real body, once you do, you’ll be placed under great pain. However, today, the boss will enter a big battle, there is no way for it to get away without being heavily injured. When it’s weakened, its curse will be weaker than usual. That means we’ll be in less pain even if we trigger the curse. Therefore, we have to leave now. This is our chance to escape, after we leave, I will tell you how to undo the curse.”

“Wait a minute, if the boss is going to be heavily injured, why are we escaping?”

“You’re powerless before it if you’re under its curse! It doesn’t matter how weak it is! Please just listen to me! Take me and run away from this place!”

“Let’s not rush it. I have a better idea.” Han Fei stared at the coffin behind the shelf. “After all, if I cause the shop to close on my first day of work, it’ll look so bad on my resume.”

Han Fei glanced at the mission interface. He now understood why the mission required him to survive for one night because after tonight, the convenience store might not exist anymore.

Chapter 128:

A crazy plan formulated in Han Fei's mind. If he succeeded, he'd take over the convenience store but if he failed, death would be the best ending he could hope for. "With no risk comes no glory. You're right, this is a rare opportunity that we mustn't let slip." Han Fei's eyes slowly narrowed, hiding the dangerous glint in his irises.

"How come I have a feeling what you're thinking is different from what I'm saying!" The candle face moaned. It just wanted to escape from the store. "The boss is very dangerous. The only thing we need to do is to escape while its attention is otherwise occupied! Please don't attempt anything more than that!"

"I'm just a temp worker on his first day on the job, what really can I do?" Han Fei stared at the white candle. "You've stayed here for so long, you should know about that woman's history, right? What is the Ziggurat that she's bringing our boss to tonight?"

"The Ziggurat is the most dangerous building in this area. It is next to a hospital two blocks away. The woman in the wedding dress came from the Ziggurat, it was its former tenant." The candle face placed all of its hope on Han Fei so he answered as honestly as he could. "The body parts that she got for the boss probably came from the Ziggurat as well."

"The hospital 2 blocks away?" Han Fei pulled up the map in his mind. There was only one hospital nearby called Yi Ming Hospital. The previous manager drew a red cross over it on the map.

"You don't think the distance will stop the boss, do you?" The candle face sighed. "If the boss' real body senses a threat or it has been moved or touched, its consciousness will return to its body through some kind of unique method. It is very cautious and will not let any harm come to its body."

"Then is there a way to stop its consciousness from returning?"

"That depends on the strength of its enemy. If the enemy is powerful enough to demand the full attention of the boss, then it'll be more unlikely to spare his mind to events at the shop. The other method is to confuse and befuddle its mind, when it's in that state, its consciousness won't be able to sense the presence of its real body that clearly." The candle felt a thread of danger conversing with Han

Fei. "In any case, now is not the time to worry about that, we better leave now! I promise that I can help alleviate the pain of the curse from you!"

"The boss is not always this strong, right?" Han Fei continued his questioning.

"The boss started out as a cursed item. It only became stronger through accumulation of resentment."

"There are many regrets of the former employees sealed up on the back-alley wall, why didn't the boss just eliminate them completely?"

"The resentment inside the Animated Regrets can enhance its power. The lingering humanity within them also helps make it more like a human." The candle could not tell whether Han Fei was going to help him or not, for now all he could do was to answer Han Fei's questions, "In other words, the boss' consciousness contains the spirits and humanity of the former employees. They do not belong to the doll, they are merely conscripted under its control through forced labor contract. The first thing you were asked to do once you gain employment here is to take a picture. That is the first step of the curse! Once the curse is completed, the doll can deprive you of your humanity at any moment it likes." The candle explained patiently. "While the curse is still light on you, we need to leave now! The further we are from the cursed object, the weaker the curse will be, it is why the boss bans his workers from leaving the shop!"

"Looks like I was right. The boss' consciousness combines the humanity of all of the previous workers here. If I can convince all of the workers to form a riot, then it'll negatively impact the boss. Normally, this might not do much against the boss but when that happens in the middle of a hard battle, it might cause the boss to commit a fatal mistake." Han Fei's plan was to stop the boss' consciousness from returning to the blood red doll. He needed to buy more time.

"I can't believe this is your first day at work. It sure is unlucky that the boss has recruited you into our ranks." The candle showed fear around Han Fei.

"I'm only doing this for everyone's sake." Picking up the candle, he walked back to the hidden space with the coffin. "Is there a way for me to tell the boss' current status through the red paper doll?"

“When the boss is unleashing its full power, the paper doll will suck the blood out from its neighbouring body parts, and black symbols will surface on its body.” The candle had given up the fight, he decided to follow along Han Fei to the end. Then again, he did not really have another choice.

“Then, I’ll leave you here to watch over the doll for me.” Han Fei placed the candle on top of the coffin lid. He raced to the staff breakroom. “Hey, don’t leave me here!”

“Aren’t you a ghost? Why are you afraid of a coffin?” Han Fei grumbled. He then tore down all the pictures from the breakroom wall. He took the pictures and headed to the back alley. Facing the moving shadows on the wall, he explained the current situation inside the convenience store to his seniors. When these trapped souls heard that the boss was not in the shop and might be heavily injured, some of them started to fidget.

“Dear seniors, these pictures are the contracts that you’ve once signed. If the current boss really has your best interest in its heart, I wouldn’t have stepped in but as you all know, it does not care about us at all. It has cursed our body, stole our humanity and even trapped us inside the wall! It has exhausted us for everything we are worth but even then, it refuses to let us go! Give an inch and it demands a mile. Do you really wish to live your life on the wall? Do you really want to stay here forever? Do you not want freedom?” Han Fei’s emotion grew firmer, his voice gathering. His words were strong and powerful. “We can’t allow this to continue any further. Tonight we are presented with a rare opportunity, it is time for us to make it pay!” Han Fei gripped one fist in emphasis while his other touched the wall gingerly, “My own power is limited but if we combine our effort, we should have more than a fighting chance. Stay forever inside the wall or attempt an escape, the choice is yours. I won’t force you into making any choices. But I will lead the way. Even if I am the only one, I will rise against the boss’ unlawful treatment of its employees tonight!”

Several seconds later, Han Fei felt an extra weight on his shoulders. He turned around and saw many semi-translucent hands reaching out from the wall. In their current state, that was the most they could do to show solidarity. Han Fei was shocked by the amount of support, he did not anticipate the boss to have wronged so many ghosts. “I will not disappoint you.” Standing in the back-alley, Han Fei shared his plan. He communicated patiently with all the employees’ broken souls. With an order, these incomplete souls would gather their power to resist the paper doll. When all was said and done, Han Fei returned to the warehouse. He stuffed the candle into his pocket and moved some shelves towards the wall, to clear a clean path for himself.

“What are you doing?”

“Is the coffin heavy?” Han Fei cracked his knuckles.

“Brother, why would you ask that? What are you planning?!”

“The stronger the cursed object, the more powerful its curse. Direct contact will probably harm me.” Han Fei took a deep breath and exited the warehouse. He moved the racks to the side. When everything was done, Han Fei stood next to the coffin and stared right at the red paper doll. Time ticked by slowly. Han Fei sweated in nervousness. When it was 3 am, the paper doll inside the coffin started to crack and blood inside the coffin flowed towards it! As blood was injected into the doll, black names surfaced on its paper body!

“Now is the time!” Han Fei kicked open the door to the back alley and shouted loudly. The broken souls howled with all their might, their shouts echoing down the streets!

The paper doll inside the coffin suddenly went berserk. Cracks became more numerous. The paper smile disappeared and its expression turned ghastly.

“Now it’s my turn!” Han Fei closed the lid and moved to place the coffin on his back. His spine creaked from the sudden weight. Han Fei grimaced with effort and rushed out of the convenience store carrying the coffin with the red paper doll!

“Get out of my way!” He rammed through the store’s glass door. The bell tingled incessantly. Han Fei did not stop to even take a breath. With so many ghosts watching in shock, Han Fei hauled the coffin and raced across the street. No one dared to stop this madman!

Bang!

The rusted gates to Happiness Neighbourhood was kicked open. Lugging the coffin, Han Fei headed straight for Apartment 1!

Chapter 129:

After stuffing the soil from the garden into the bowl, Little Eight ran back into Apartment 1 with the bowl. She took out the flower seeds and gently buried them into the bowl. Her innocent eyes stared at the bowl as if her laser focus could persuade the flower to grow and bloom from the rotting soil. “Little

Eight..." Wei Youfu stood guardedly beside the girl. When he saw the girl plant the flower seeds, pain crossed his eyes and sudden tiredness overwhelmed him. He turned to look out at the city covered in darkness. Leaning against the wall, Wei Youfu thought back to his recent memories.

Light finally shone through his life dipped in his darkness. That man was like the flower seed buried in the rotten soil, it was able to bloom despite its circumstance. No one thought it was possible but he was able to surpass everyone's expectation and brought them hope. "Perhaps he'll never return again." Wei Youfu studied the world outside the lobby and the darkness that stretched down the horizon. His heart chilled. "I thought I would never experience the loss of family again now that I'm here but..."

Bang! A loud crash shattered the silence. Wei Youfu turned to the source and his eyes widened in shock! Han Fei was back! The man who had gone missing for a whole day had returned carrying a coffin!

"What the fuck?!" Wei Youfu couldn't believe his eyes. The figure was so familiar. Even carrying a leaking coffin, he ran as fast as ever!

"Youfu! Open the door! Quick!" A shout tore out from Han Fei's lips. Hearing the familiar voice, Wei Youfu immediately moved to oblige.

Han Fei rushed into the lobby and dropped the coffin to the ground. "Go and help me get everyone! I've invited the convenience store's boss to join us!"

"The convenience store's boss?" Wei Youfu was baffled. Moments earlier, he was lamenting the loss of his family, naturally he needed time to adjust himself. Seeing Wei Youfu standing there frozen, Han Fei hurried up the stairs despite the open wounds on his shoulders and back. "Never mind, help me guard over the coffin! Be careful around it!"

He raced all the way up the stairs. He knocked on all the important doors and Han Fei's voice echoed throughout the building. "Xu Qin!" "Ying Yue!"

One after another dangerous presence awakened. A wave of Yin energy rushed downstairs.

The coffin which was dropped at the lobby was still leaking blood. A sound emitted from inside the coffin. Wei Youfu and Little Eight took a step back, they could sense an immense anger from inside the coffin.

“What has our building manager done to it?” Blood seeped out from the cracks to cover the entire coffin. The coffin started to shatter and an enormous curse as well as resentment blasted against the wall. When it reached the climax, the coffin on the ground exploded!

A blood red paper doll stood amidst the pile of body parts. It was heavily wounded but its eyes carried such heavy resentment. At the last moment of its intense battle at the Ziggurat, its consciousness suddenly wavered. It let its guard down and the paper doll was heavily injured by its tenants. It knew something wrong must have happened at the convenience store. It wanted to return but it couldn't let itself be too distracted lest it was consumed by the tenants at the Ziggurat. However, as the bad omen within its mind grew, the doll decided to abandon its body at the Ziggurat and returned to its real body. For that, it had paid heavily.

However, when it opened its eyes, something even more shocking awaited it. It was not inside the convenience store! Its coffin had been moved to some place completely unfamiliar! The convenience store was laid with curses. Any outsider entering the warehouse would be torn apart by the paper dolls. Its employees had all been cursed. Technically they wouldn't be able to leave the convenience store without its permission unless they wished for a long and painful death. This should not have happened! Its coffin should still be inside the convenience store!

This was the first time the convenience store boss had been exposed to such a dire situation. With a splitting headache, it glared fiendishly at Little Eight and Wei Youfu, it still had no idea what went wrong. Well, the answer arrived 10 seconds later when Han Fei returned back to the lobby. Blood coursed through the doll's body and its eyes were practically spitting fire. “It's you!”

The ghost tattoo on Han Fei's body pleaded heavily for mercy. “If you've awakened one minute earlier, then it'll be over for me. Such a shame...”

“Nothing has changed! You'll still die!” Ever since the convenience store boss gained sentience, it had never been so enraged. Han Fei was the employee it personally recruited several hours ago. It could sense a wealth of humanity on Han Fei. Its plan was to consume Han Fei but it had underestimated the cunningness of human nature. Only a few hours had passed since Han Fei's recruitment but the doll already found itself in the biggest danger it had ever been in! “Die!” Han Fei retreated from the raging boss. “Sis, I've used a lot of effort to bring this thing for you.”

The sharp table knife sheared through the red curse. A fresh wound appeared on the paper doll. The boss leaped away from Han Fei. It sensed the same presence as itself on Xu Qin, they were both curses manifest!

“Die, you’ll all die!” The lingering body parts gathered onto the boss’ body. Its body grew in size. Faces started to appear on the paper body. When its body grew about 2 metres tall, it charged madly at Han Fei. The boss lost its cool from anger. Even if it was to die, it’d bring Han Fei down with it. The paper was shredded by the table knife but it did not slow the boss down. Since it was made of paper, it could fold its body any ways it wanted. As long as its core was not injured, it was invincible.

‘Even when it’s heavily injured, it can still put up such a fight?’ The boss’ arm charged at Han Fei. The arm was sliced through by the knife. But the stump immediately refolded out a new arm. The broken arm that fell to the ground did not disappear either, instead it unfolded and refolded itself into smaller paper dolls and leaped at Han Fei. The knife cut through the boss’ body. Paper fluttered like snow but the paper snippets did not die. They morphed into small paper dolls and glared venomously at Han Fei.

‘The paper doll is a master at curses, I mustn’t be too careless.’ Han Fei activated the ghost tattoo to cover his body in Yin energy. He even took out a cigarette from his inventory and prepared to light it if necessary. There were so many paper dolls, Xu Qin could not hold all of them back on her own. Just as the paper dolls jumped at Han Fei, a sad sob came from the stairs and a thin boy walked out. He looked frail and weak but he possessed a unique power. Every paper doll that came into his proximity would slump lazily to the ground. Their resentment would disappear, leaving behind a sad face. The boy had the ability to infuse his own overwhelming sadness into cursed objects and other ghosts, causing emotional damage.

Not far away from the boy, a giant eye suddenly opened on the mottled wall. A different world was reflected inside the dark gaze. Every doll that dared to approach Han Fei was sucked into the black prison inside the empty gaze.

“A Curse Amalgamation and 2 Lingered Spirits?” The boss was stunned, but there was no way out now. The hatred in its eyes was palpable. The doll knew this night was probably its last. It glared viciously at the tenants of Apartment 1. “You’ll all pay before you can kill me! Other than this curse, I’ll not leave anything for you!”

The boss' body suddenly expanded as it sucked every last bit of energy from the bodies inside the coffin. Black names surfaced on its body. Using its own blood, it painted the faces of everyone present on its paper body.

"Someone stops it! It is trying to curse us with its death! It's the ultimate skill for any cursed object!" Xu Qin shouted loudly. Her knives flew but they did not hit the paper doll's core. While she panicked, a presence that dwarfed everything else slowly appeared.

8 large arms slammed against the ground. The 3 story tall red spectre squashed the paper doll. It used the most primitive method to stop the boss. With one after another heavy punches, it shattered the doll's consciousness! It was brutal, straight-forward and most importantly, effective!

Despair coalesced, the spectre's every punch carried 8 different kinds of pain. The whole apartment shook. In just 5 seconds, the paper dolls were pounded into dust and only the initial palm-sized blood red doll remained. Impressive amount of Yin energy and resentment oozed out from the doll's cracked body. It was absorbed by the neighbouring tenants. The Yin energy that the boss had gathered since it gained sentience was shared by the tenants of Apartment 1, everyone smiled satisfactorily.

When no energy could be sensed from the doll anymore, they surrounded the convenience store's former boss. The boss' consciousness had been shattered, now the doll had reverted to a normal cursed object.

Chapter 130:

"It was Han Fei who brought this paper doll here. We have consumed its energy and that is already more than our fair share. I suggest we leave the doll itself for Han Fei." After the combination was undone, Wei Youfu sat on the stairs weakly. Rationality and despair wrestled in his eyes.

"I agree but it's dangerous for Han Fei to touch cursed objects directly." Xu Qin picked up the cracked blood red paper doll. "I've seen this doll before, it hides deep inside the convenience store, controlling its many paper doll creations. It's impossible to deal with, who would have thought it'd one day die in our neighbourhood."

"Sis, do you know about its history?" Han Fei was quite interested in the paper doll. He wanted to know more about it.

“There is nothing too special about this doll. The reason it became the way it was, was due to the uniqueness of its curse.” Xu Qin placed the doll before Han Fei. “It was created as a Substitute Paper Doll.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s something you use when you are the target of a malicious curse. The paper doll will become the substitute to bear the curse on your behalf, hence the name,” Xu Qin explained patiently, “I’m not familiar with the curse on it but I can make sure that it won’t harm you again.” With that, Xu Qin used the knife to cut open her wrist. Her blood dripped onto the doll. “I might not be always there for you in person, but my blood will accompany you always.”

When Xu Qin’s blood soaked the whole doll, she placed the doll under her left palm and then she used the knife in her right hand to pierce right through her palm into the paper doll. Shadows of lunacy flashed in her red eyes. Xu Qin mumbled something on her lips before she pulled out the knife. Then she handed the doll which had completely changed to Han Fei. “Now it’ll not only not harm you, it’ll help you when you’re in danger.”

Han Fei accepted the transformed doll with both hands. The doll now took on Xu Qin’s likeness with red eyes and crimson lips.

“Notification for Player 0000! You have obtained a Grade F Cursed Item—Paper Doll!

“Paper Doll (Status – Ruined): This is the first cursed object you own. When you need her, she’ll appear to share in your despair and pain.

“Warning! The doll is in a ruined status, it can only unleash 50 percent of its full power. Please repair it as soon as possible.

“Notification for Player 0000! You’ve completed Grade G Main Mission—Convenience Store Worker! Obtained 1 skill point!

“Notification for Player 0000! You’ve completed 500 percent of the mission requirement! You’ve obtained additional reward—Title: Store Manager

“Store Manager (Ungradable Title): You’ve become the new manager of Yi Ming Convenience Store!

“The responsibility of the manager is to modulate the worker’s daily schedule, assess their performance, come up with a good branding, and build a peaceful relationship with your employees, and customers. Follow these guidelines and you’ll soon become a respected store manager!”

After reading all the system notifications, Han Fei reached out to touch the paper doll. He did not feel any negative impact, the negative emotions were all sealed off behind a thin layer of blood.

“Sis, are you feeling okay?” Xu Qin seemed to feel sorry for ‘losing’ Han Fei the previous time so this time she purposely used her own blood to create a unique cursed item, wishing to use it to protect Han Fei. “You’ve taken such a great risk to bring the paper doll here, and we’ve consumed its Yin energy, so this is the least you should get from it.” Xu Qin said with a soul-crushing smile.

“Thank you, oh by the way, this is yours.” Han Fei returned to Xu Qin her knife. Xu Qin’s knife came in a set, losing one would weaken her.

After chatting for a while longer with the group, the ‘satisfied’ neighbours returned to their room. Han Fei also supported Wei Youfu as they returned to Room 1044. “Han Fei, you shouldn’t do such dangerous things anymore.” Wei Youfu nagged like a concerned brother.

“I’ll be more careful next time.” Han Fei had Wei Youfu and Little Eight go to their room to rest. Han Fei stood next to the window and studied the convenience store across the street. “Now I have my own asset but it’ll be hard to run and keep it.” The paper doll boss’ death was still a kept secret but the nearby ghosts would soon find out the truth.

“Of all my neighbours, only Xu Qin has the habit of leaving the neighbourhood, I can’t expect her to help me look after the shop forever...” Rubbing his temple, Han Fei felt like his next move should be to find some reliable workers. “Hopefully the single-eyed young man and my other seniors in the back-alley survive the ordeal.”

“Brother, can you hear me?” A voice came out from Han Fei’s pocket. The white candle poked out its wick. “Is this all part of a plan? You guys have been plotting to get rid of the boss? Can I join you?”

“Right, I almost forgot about you.” Han Fei did not plan to harm the white candle. Since he decided to keep the convenience store running, then he needed an experienced former worker around, the white candle fitted the description. The candle felt fear being scrutinized by Han Fei. Then again, there was nothing he could do. Could he grow legs and run? No.

“In the future, I need you to help me look over the store. As long as I’m around, no one will hurt you.”

“You really plan to keep the store in business?” The candle face smiled bitterly, “The store is situated right in front of a ‘crowded’ junction. One careless mistake and we’ll all be dead. To survive in this world, one has to keep a low profile...”

“The convenience store is just a stepping stone, my real target is Yi Ming Private Academy from across the street.” Han Fei looked at the dark silhouettes of buildings out the window. “The convenience store’s backdoor offers a shortcut to the school. Owning the store will allow easy travel between Yi Ming Private Academy and Happiness Neighbourhood.”

“The school? That’s a very dangerous place, it has its own manager...” The candle immediately shut up when he realized he had said too much but it was already too late.

“You also know things about the school?” Han Fei’s interest was piqued.

“I only know the rumours. They say you can enter but never leave the school. It is owned by a scary headmaster. But recently, something happened inside that school and many students were seen escaping from its premises.” The candle warned, “Something strange is going on over there. I’d advise you to stay away from it!”

“It’s a bit too late for that.” Han Fei still remembered how a few days ago, a female student was forced to infiltrate into the Happiness Neighbourhood. ‘I’ll need to build up the business at the convenience store first before I expand my exploration into the school.’ Han Fei knew the dangers at the school, but the school was also specifically circled out by the previous manager. The school might have the manager’s memory fragment, Han Fei had to go retrieve it.

When Han Fei sought out the red paper doll from his pocket, the white candle fussed and moaned. With a frown, Han Fei tried to store the white candle into his inventory but he failed. He tried the same thing with the red paper doll but this time he succeeded. "Wait, since when can I store cursed objects inside my inventory? I failed to do so when I experimented with Xu Qin's knife! Is it because I claim ownership over the paper doll already?"

After multiple tries, Han Fei came to this conclusion, to store a cursed object inside his inventory, he had to fulfil 2 requirements. First, the cursed object must not be sentient; secondly, Han Fei himself must have the cursed object's approval, in other words, the objects must not be hostile against him.

'I can make use of this. This is perfect for a sneak attack. I'll appear weak to others since they can't sense the cursed objects inside my inventory. When they've put their guard down, it'll already be too late for them." Han Fei held the red paper doll and a sneaky smile appeared on his face. The white candle sat on the table next to Han Fei and any traitorous thoughts that he might have were vanquished fully.777