

Iyashikei 131

Chapter 131:

The white candle had worked at the convenience store for a long time, thus he had met many different kinds of ghosts and monsters but none of them could even hold a candle against Han Fei (pun intended). Seeing the smile that bloomed on Han Fei's face then, fear coursed through his body. He could not begin to fathom what the man was thinking. He did not sense any joy from that smile but a kind of indescribable, perverted amusement. The man before him was like a devil dancing around the graves of its captives, waving around a bloody knife. Humanity's complication was evident in the man. He showed fear and anxiety but he was also getting used to and mastering them with astonishing speed. The candle slowly moved his eyes away.

Han Fei noticed the candle had suddenly gone so quiet. He did not think much of it. Perhaps the candle grew more fearful of Han Fei after he found out Han Fei was capable of killing the previous boss. Looking out the window, Han Fei thought back to the map left behind by the previous manager. 'The Happiness Neighborhood is located at quite a reclusive location, all of the dangerous nearby buildings have been pointed out by the manager. Compared to other parts of the city, the block that we're at is relatively safe. I need to be appreciative of that. From how I see it, there are currently 2 ways that can help me get to the 'exit'.

'One is to improve myself and then cut my way forcibly through the city. With a simple goal, there's less chance of attracting attention.

'Two is to expand my influence towards the exit. Clear out all the buildings along the way and claim them as my own!

'Each of the method has its own pros and cons but there is nothing preventing me from applying both methods at the same time either.' Han Fei stood behind the window and focused his gaze at Yi Ming Private Academy. 'Every soul in this world possesses their own reason for being here. They are often only concerned about their own desire, that is the weakness I can take advantage of. If I gather more friends along the way, I can win with the number's advantage.' Han Fei drew out a straight line on the window. 'Happiness Neighbourhood, Yi Ming Convenience Store, Yi Ming Private Academy, after these three places are connected, it'll form a safe travel path. The forces within these three places can enhance and support each other, allowing me to expand my exploration further.'

Perfect Life was supposed to be an Iyashikei game but Han Fei appeared to have devised his own unique way of playing it. He stood quietly beside the window. At around 4 am, he finally saw the person he was

waiting for. The wounded single-eyed worker carried a tattered paper doll as he shuffled back into the convenience store. 'Where's the bride? Did she perish in the fight or is she trapped at the Ziggurat?'

He stuffed the white candle into his pocket and Han Fei ran out from Apartment 1. While no one was around, the man who was still in the store uniform made a beeline towards Yi Ming Convenience Store. The bell above the door rang. The single-eyed worker was still carrying the paper doll as he stood numbly inside the store. The racks were toppled over and the merchandise were scattered all over the floor. Even the store's glass door was shattered. Hearing Han Fei's footsteps, the single-eyed worker slowly turned around. His remaining eye filled with confusion. "Were we robbed?"

"Not only that, our boss has been killed." What Han Fei said stunned the young man to his core. Eventually spirit slowly returned to the single eye and he rushed into the warehouse. The shelf was shoved to the side and paper dolls with a lack of expression tumbled to the ground. The young man stepped over the dolls and when he saw the gap behind the last shelf, he was dumbfounded. "Where's the boss' coffin?"

"It was ruined when the boss died." Han Fei signaled for the single-eyed young man to follow him. They exited the backdoor and came into the dark alley. "Dear seniors, the boss who has been maltreating you is now dead. Its curse on you should be neutralized already, you can try to exit the wall now."

The souls did not dare to leave just on Han Fei's words. In their weakened state, if the curse was triggered, they'd die for real. The alley became silent. Eventually, an old lady tried to walk out from the wall. She emerged unscathed. Several seconds later, the back alley came 'alive'. Even though they were just Animated Regrets, there were so many of them and once gathered, they would emit a surprising amount of resentment.

"From today onwards, no one will hinder your freedom anymore." Han Fei gave the former employees their freedom but most of them stayed. They were too weak to protect themselves, if they left, they'd be consumed by nearby ghosts immediately. Considering that, Han Fei added, "We met thanks to this convenience store, if you really have nowhere else to go, you can continue to stay here and help me run this shop. No one will bully you and everyone will be treated equally. The shop will be a home for us unfortunate employees who were tricked by the paper doll."

Opening his arms, Han Fei told the gathered souls, "You can leave any moment you wish, no one will stop you. But should you feel tired from all the wandering, you can come back anytime. As long as I am still here, the store will always be open for you. Every single one of you has helped build the shop up after all."

The Animated Regrets who lost their power had nowhere to go, the cryptical world was filled with pain and despair, staying with Han Fei at least brought them some warmth.

Han Fei gave his speech and turned back into the store. The Animated Regrets chose to follow him without much hesitation. The paper doll used curse and torment to control his workers but Han Fei chose to place his faith in them. Then again, without the paper doll's harsh treatment, Han Fei's kindness would not have been so amplified in contrast. The combination of all these Animated Regrets was not a force to be trifled with. They were also experienced workers who could help Han Fei with business management.

Han Fei turned to the single-eyed worker. "To be honest, I'm not doing all these for my own sake. I ran into a very cute boy, he asked that I help him find his older brother."

The mention of the word older brother caused complicated emotion to cross the young man's murky eye. "His name was Firefly Ying, he and his mother live just right next door." Han Fei used Soul-Depth Touch to tap the young man on his shoulder. "They're still waiting for you, don't let them worry too much. Also, I hope that you'll return to help me manage this place."

From the young man, Han Fei sensed excitement, pain and love for his family. "This used to be a literal shop that devours, it is filled with gore and filth. But I aim to turn this place around, to provide actual warmth and guidance for our customers."

The single-eyed young man stared at Han Fei for a long time before he nodded. "I will stay." When he said that, the robotic voice echoed in Han Fei's mind. "Notification for Player 0000! Your friendliness level with Drake Ying increases by 10 points! He has also decided to become your employee.

"Drake Ying (Lingering Spirit at the convenience store): He was once a customer, a merchandise, and a worker. He bears much pain and torment."

Han Fei knew the young man was powerful but he did not expect him to be a lingering spirit. This went to highlight the scalding pain the young man must have gone through. 'Lingering Spirits range from weak to strong also, Drake should be on the weaker side but no matter, after he has enough 'food', he'll get stronger.'

Han Fei then had a business meeting with all of his employees on how to proceed with the business. The bride was scammed by the paper doll boss so she might come back to seek revenge. For the sake of safety, Han Fei decided to close for a few days. He reminded the workers that should the bride appear, they shouldn't hesitate to escape to Happiness Neighbourhood. After the meeting ended, Han Fei rushed back to Apartment 1. He found Wei Youfu in Room 1044 and updated him about his latest acquisition as well as the status with the bride before he logged off the game.

Blood draped over the world. His mind wavered.

"That was one hell of a long night..."

Chapter 132:

Han Fei collapsed on his bed. In just one night, he was promoted from employee to boss. Honestly, the man himself did not expect that. He worked the kinks out from his joints and Han Fei realized his fingers were trembling. He gripped them into fists. He had managed to survive another night and took over the convenience store. The result was positive but thinking back, there were so many places where it could go wrong and he'd die. He was risking his life and managed to squeeze out a tiny victory.

'I'm still too weak. I'm only level 7, based on Perfect Life's official website, the players can only unlock their first profession at level 10 which will bring them a brand new experience. The rules for the cryptic world and surface world should be the same. My available profession for now is Midnight Butcher...' Han Fei could not find anything on that profession on the official forum. He had no idea what the profession might entail and what was its future career planning... if it even had anything. In a normal Perfect Life, levelling up was easy in the beginning, in fact, it was possible to rush to level 10 in one day. The first 10 levels were for the players to familiarize themselves with the controls of the game. The real charm of the game began after level 10 where one would gain one's dream career and kickstart one's dream life. That was the true meaning of perfect life. But for Han Fei, he did not dare to even wish for a dreamed life, he just wanted to survive to see the sun rise another day.

'It's pointless to fret about it now, I should focus on levelling up.' Closing his eyes, Han Fei emptied his mind and soon fell asleep.

Han Fei woke up at 8 am by his alarm. He finished his morning routine and headed to the set. 'I've signed a percentage-based contract with the crew. If the movie becomes a blockbuster, I'll gain a windfall. Things will get a lot more convenient for me then.' Han Fei hurried to the apartment. Before he entered the set, he saw Li Xue and another officer standing there.

“You’re not here to look for me, are you?”

“It’s not convenient for us to speak here, can you come with us?” Li Xue grabbed Han Fei by his arm. Her expression was serious. The three of them walked to a police car. Before Han Fei got into the car, the other officer took out a device to scan Han Fei. After ensuring Han Fei did not carry any dangerous object, he very politely ‘borrowed’ Han Fei’s phone. He placed it inside a special bag that seemed to be able to block electrical signals.

“Get in the car.” Han Fei obliged obediently. Li Xue and the other officer did not follow him but they guarded outside the car door. “What is happening?” For a moment, Han Fei thought the secret of the black box had been exposed but no matter how anxious he felt, it would not be reflected on his face. That was the basic requirement for an actor.

“Han Fei, the sole survivor of the Bloody Night at Happy Orphanage. Ever since your info appeared in the citizenry database, you’ve been a model citizen. In fact, your hazard rating is rare 0.” Sitting at the backseat, there was a senior police officer looking at his phone with his head lowered.

“Who are you?” Han Fei sat next to the old man and scanned the phone from the corner of his eyes. The senior officer was not logged into the citizenry database, instead the screen showed the picture of a butterfly with a broken wing.

“Over the past 30 years, technology has improved greatly. Things we thought were impossible were now commonplace in households. In fact, human imagination can barely keep up with technology anymore. This changed our lives but also brought with it some problems. Compared to decades ago, today’s criminals are harder to apprehend. They can hide themselves better and commit more dangerous acts.” The senior officer put away his phone. He lifted his head to look at Han Fei. He had a common face, the kind that would disappear into a crowd but his eyes were special, like a calm sea.

“Sir, I’m on a tight schedule. Do you mind cutting to the point?” Han Fei had a good impression of the law enforcement. They had been cooperating with each other. They were even friends on social media.

“I am Li Xue’s teacher. I’ve been hospitalized so I only manage to come thank you in person now.” The officer was seated in a relaxed pose but there was no weakness exposed.

“Is it due to the human puzzle case? There’s no need for thanks, I was merely doing my citizen duty.”

“No.” The old man shook his head and said seriously, “It’s because of the butterfly.” Then the old man said something important in a very casual tone, “The citizenry database delineates criminals into 6 levels based on their hazard rating, A to F. However, there is one beyond these 6 levels, the kind that cannot be identified by the computer system. They are far more dangerous than Grade A criminals. They are cunning and cleverer than a computer. That’s how their hazard rating according to the system is a solid 0.”

“How come it feels like I’m being interrogated?” Han Fei knew his own hazard rating was 0.

“We law enforcement call them Grade S Criminal, some call them super criminals. This Butterfly is a super criminal we’ve been chasing for the past 10 years.”

“You’ve been investigating the Butterfly?”

“The Butterfly is responsible for many brutal murders but they never dirty their own hands. The victims died in accidents, suicides or through unknown strangers’ deeds. Oftentimes, we cannot even tell whether a murder is related to the Butterfly or not.” The senior officer said evenly despite the rage in his eyes. “The methods of death can only be described as creative. Our investigation into the Butterfly has been slow until recently we have a breakthrough in capturing the culprit of the human jigsaw case.”

“You found clues about Butterfly?”

“Meng Changan is the only one we have who has recorded contact with the Butterfly. With science, our interrogation tools have improved as well. We managed to get many information from the man. The more we know about the Butterfly, the crazier they’ll become.” The officer stared long into Han Fei’s eyes. “Other than to come thank you in person, the main reason I’m here is to warn you. The Butterfly will definitely come after you, you better don’t leave Xin Lu, go out alone at night and stay away from schools and hospitals.”

“Why the need to stay away from schools and hospitals?”

“Based on the information we derived from Meng Changan’s subconscious brain mapping, whenever we brought up the Butterfly’s appearance or identity, his brain would provide response towards the careers of teacher and doctor.”

“Is it possible that it is because Meng Changan views the Butterfly as his teacher and doctor?” Han Fei gave his thought.

“Of course but there is other evidence. From Meng Changan, we discovered the Butterfly was connected to another case. The case happened at Yi Ming Private Academy in the countryside. At the time, everyone thought the kid’s death was an accident but when we reopened the case, we realized the student’s death was premeditated.”

“Yi Ming Private Academy?” For all intent and purpose, it looked like Han Fei heard this name for the first time. “What happened there?”

Chapter 133:

“In the span of one short month, 4 deaths occurred at that school. The strange thing was that the deaths were all predicted but the prophecy was taken as a joke.” The senior officer leaned on the seat and thought back to the case.

“Wait, this is about The Case of the Foretold Deaths?”

“Yes, there are 4 victims, the first was the school security, he died in the small river behind the school after a drunken romp at night; the second victim was the head teacher of Primary 1 Class 4, she was found dead inside the hostel toilet. At the time, the law enforcement believed she committed suicide; the third victim was a ruffian that hung around the school. He was in a relationship with one of the school’s female students and fell to his death. They thought it was an accident; The last victim is called Jin Sheng, he was a new student who joined Primary 1 Class 4 in the middle of the term.”

“Is there any connection between the four victims? Is the target totally random or premeditated?”

“The only connection is that their deaths looked like accidents or suicides. They come from different age groups and backgrounds. Although... there is one more thing. The case got its name because the kid

called Jin Sheng managed to prophesize the other victims' deaths before it actually happened." The senior officer told Han Fei. He shared the info with Han Fei even though he did not need to.

"The last victim foretold the other victims' deaths?"

"Indeed." The officer's eyes moved away from Han Fei. "Jin Sheng was a very unique child. He was a naughty kid. His parents worked overseas so he was raised by his grandparents. As with most elderly citizens, his grandparents were extremely superstitious. Therefore, he grew up with exposure to taboos and archaic ghost stories. Perhaps this sparked his creative mind, because he was a very good story teller. He could keep children and adults rapt with his own retelling of ghost stories. But ever since he joined Yi Ming Private Academy, he started to change. He stopped telling ghost stories but instead started warning people of actual haunting at the school."

The senior officer stopped to glance at Han Fei. After noting Han Fei's reaction, or lack of, he continued, "Before the first death, Jin Sheng apparently told this story to his roommate. He said he ran into a man when he went to use the toilet at night. The man stood on tip-toe and had his head hung while he followed behind the security guard. No matter where the guard went, the man followed but the guard did not seem to notice his presence. After Jin Sheng told that story, that same security guard died a few days later.

"When he found out about the guard's death, Jin Sheng was apprehensive and scared. He said the man who followed behind the guard saw him that night and claimed that he'd come for him. His roommate did not believe him and complained about Jin Sheng to his head teacher. The female teacher who was fresh at her job was very responsible. She tried her best to comfort Jin Sheng but for some reasons, the boy refused to even get close to her. Instead he warned her to be cautious at night and not speak to any students who wandered the hall after school.

"The next night after he gave his teacher that warning, she was found dead. That shook Jin Sheng. He started to ramble. The adults believed he was too affected by these deaths and that caused him to have some mental problems. The school permitted him to leave the premises and go home to rest. However days later, Jin Sheng stormed back into school. Like a rabid person, he attacked a girl's face. Apparently it was because she looked like a ghost. The girl's face was ruined and she was sent to the hospital for treatment. Jin Sheng was punished severely, with warning of expulsion.

"Everyone thought that was the end of it but the girl's boyfriend, a ruffian from outside the school was found dead inside the school premise the next day. He apparently sneaked into school at night to meet up with his girlfriend at her hostel. All 3 victims had different backgrounds, their connection was Jin Sheng. Just as we intended to look further into the boy's background, Jin Sheng disappeared.

“In the end, we found Jin Sheng’s body inside his hostel’s cupboard. After that, Yi Ming Private Academy’s reputation got ruined and it went down a spiral. Due to bad management and horrible teaching quality, the school was eventually sealed off and abandoned.” Han Fei noticed that whenever the senior officer mentioned Jin Sheng, his tone would alter slightly with regret.

“How did the police discover this case is related to the Butterfly?” Han Fei still had questions.

“For one, the victims were all posed like victims of accidents or suicides but more importantly, when we questioned Meng Changan about the places where he had met up with the Butterfly, one of them was Yi Ming Private Academy.” The officer’s eyes darkened. “The Butterfly even asked Meng Changan, if he was the Butterfly, how would he make Jin Sheng’s world more despairing?”

“The Butterfly has been to Yi Ming Private Academy? Meng Changan admitted that?”

“We’ve used many new technologies to interrogate Meng Changan.” The senior officer did not elaborate. He turned to stare at Han Fei. “You seem to be quite interested in this case.”

“I’m interested in all cases related to the Butterfly. If possible, I wish to capture the Butterfly.” Han Fei was being honest. That was what he thought.

“Leave the apprehension of the criminals to the police.” A light smile appeared on the old man’s face. “In any case, that was all you needed to know about that case. Oh right, another reason I came today is to personally give you the reward money.” The car door opened and the officer who took Han Fei’s earlier now took it out and returned it to Han Fei. The phone vibrated once it sat in Han Fei’s hands. He looked at the new notification with some confusion and realized there was 60000 RMB added into his account.

“50000 RMB was the reward money, the 10000 RMB was a personal extra, it’s a thank you for helping me complete one of my wishes.” The officer did not take any more of Han Fei’s time. Han Fei left and the officer watched as the former walked away. After Han Fei disappeared from their sight, the other officer spoke, “Sir, do you think it is possible that he’s the Butterfly?”

“The timeline does not match. The Butterfly was most active about 10 years ago, at the time, this Han Fei was just a kid.” The smile faded from the old man’s face. “Keep a close eye on him though. There’s something special about this kid that is sure to attract the Butterfly.”

“Something special?”

“He has the disposition of someone who has struggled in the deepest abyss, I’ve felt it once on another Grade S criminal.” The officer took out his phone. After keying in a long code, the phone projected out Han Fei’s personality model. Then he added his own confidential code onto the model. After his identity was confirmed, the hidden info on Han Fei’s personality model was unlocked.

“When the tragedy, Case of the Bloody Night at Happiness Orphanage happened, Han Fei was the sole survivor, he was only 10 then. He was diagnosed with acute mental stress disorders. He showed signs of conceptual misappropriation of time and space. Sounds, smells, images or even too close of a body contact would trigger the trauma from that night. His attending psychiatrist said that it got so severe that once the patient closed his eyes, his world would be soaked in a bloody redness.

“After initial treatment, the patient showed remarkable recovery. Other than his inability to smile, he could live like a normal person.

“Based on the psychiatrist’s assessment, the patient possesses a textbook self-healing personality and has immensely strong self-adjustability and adaptability.”

Chapter 134:

Double-checking the amount in his account, when Han Fei ordered his lunch, he decided to splurge and added 2 more eggs. ‘I shouldn’t be too hard on myself. I deserve some reward. I can’t bring the money with me after death anyway.’

After lunch, Han Fei returned to Northern Street. Today they were going to do another on location scene so Han Fei hopped onto the bus with the rest of the crew. If everything went well, all of his parts would be completed that day. After he got on the vehicle, Han Fei found a quiet corner and sat down. He still preferred his own solitude. He pulled back the curtain and prepared to nap when Director Jiang plopped down beside him. “Han Fei, there’s a big event tomorrow. Will you be interested in joining?”

“What kind of event?”

“It’s a variety show invitation. You’ll play some games with other celebrities and the exposure can help promote the movie.” Director Jiang hoped Han Fei would agree. “You do not have any agency so I believe you should grab these chances to appear before the camera. The show’s crew also hoped that you’d agree, they couldn’t wait to meet you.”

“I don’t think so. I do not have any work to show at the moment. Many people know me from my connection to law enforcement. If I appear before the camera now, I’m afraid it’ll distract from the actual promotion of the movie.” Han Fei leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes.

“You are one unique actor. Normal celebrities would jump on this chance but you still put the movie first.” Director Jiang admired Han Fei. “After this movie is released, great popularity awaits you. I hope that we’ll have the chance to collaborate again in the future.”

“Of course.”

When they arrived at the location, the busy day began. Due to the editing to the script, most of the previous shots couldn’t be used anymore. To catch up to the schedule, everyone was working overtime to produce the product. Han Fei’s last scene ended at 8 pm. Zhan Yueyue and Mian Nian were still working. With Han Fei’s aid and stimulant, these two young actors had improved greatly. However, to quote Director Jiang, they had to act like their lives depended on it to be on Han Fei’s level.

‘Without even realizing it, I’ve obtained the life that I’ve been yearning for in the past but how come I feel so disinterested about it?’ Without participating in the wrap party, Han Fei left early on his own like usual. He took public transport to return to the old city. He just got down from the bus when he heard the sound of rushing wind. Without even raising his head, Han Fei’s body took an instinctual step back.

Bang! A potted succulent landed squarely at the spot he just vacated. The shattered porcelain cut his skin. The loud crash also attracted the attention of all the nearby pedestrians. The training Han Fei got from Perfect Life just saved him. His face darkened as he looked up the apartment building. There was a pair of couples arguing on the 3rd floor and underlying the argument was the sound of a child crying.

‘Is this a coincidence?’ Han Fei took out his phone to call Li Xue. “I’m not sure if this is an accident or not but I almost died. Perhaps the Butterfly is behind this.”

“What?! Be careful and I need you to get into the cover of a crowd immediately!” After Li Xue asked for Han Fei’s location, she hurried over. After hanging up, Han Fei used his phone to capture the pictures as evidence. Meng Changxi’s words echoed in his mind. The Butterfly knew how to use unrelated things and people to commit murders. ‘My rental is heavily guarded so the Butterfly will have a harder time coming for me there so they’ll have to make use of the opportunity when I’m away from home. But how would they know where to set up the trap?’

‘They must have studied my habits closely. My life is extremely regular. Other than going to work, I stay mostly at home. And to travel between these two places, the one place that I’ll have to pass is the bus station.’ Han Fei’s eyes chilled while he stared at the arguing husband and wife. ‘The potted plant fell from the 3rd floor. The pot was heavy enough to claim a person’s life if it hit.’

The police arrived 10 minutes later. They went up to the 3rd floor with Han Fei trailing behind them. Hearing the knocking, the arguing couple stopped. They initially refused to open the door but when they heard it was the police, they chose to cooperate. “We are investigating a murder case, we hope that you’ll cooperate with us...”

The police checked the premise for half an hour and found nothing. The potted plant fell when the fight got slightly physical between the couple. They had many potted succulents on the balcony because this species required plenty of sunlight.

That day, the husband was out on the balcony smoking when the wife returned from work early. They got worked up over some small issues and it grew into a fight. The whole process was not complicated. If Han Fei did die, it would look just like an accident. While the police interviewed the two adults, Han Fei walked around the house. In the end, he stopped to look at the cowering child. With tear stains on his face, he seemed the most innocent party.

‘The Butterfly appears to be inordinately interested in children. From Little Eight to Jin Sheng at Yi Ming Private Academy, they were both deeply tied to the Butterfly.’ Han Fei sauntered over to Li Xue. He whispered something into her ear, reminding her to not overlook the child. After that, Han Fei left. ‘Now that the Butterfly is coming after me, I need to capture them as soon as possible!’

The problem was Han Fei was in the open while the Butterfly was still in the dark. ‘There should be more clues about the Butterfly in Perfect Life, after all both Happiness Neighbourhood and Yi Ming Private Academy are related to the Butterfly.’

Back in his rental, Han Fei went online and bought another crop of ebooks, *The Study of Success*, *the Management of Talent*, *How to become the Students' Best Teacher*, *The Power of Education*... Han Fei put on the earphone to listen to them while he searched online for information about Yi Ming Private Academy. Unlike the human jigsaw case, most information about this school had been deleted. Han Fei could only find scattered clues and pictures. One of the pictures grabbed Han Fei's attention. In the pictures, Jin Sheng's grandparents went to the school gates with flower rings and paper money but they were chased away by the school teachers.

'Why is there so little information? It feels like many things have been purposely deleted.' Then again, the Case of the Foretold Deaths occurred much earlier than the Human Jigsaw Case, so the lack of information was understandable. 'In real life, not many people remember that school, and the evidence would have disappeared with time. But that does not mean the same is true in the cryptic world. There has to be a reason why the previous manager has circled out this school.'

Han Fei remembered blurrily the previous manager's last words. He told Han Fei to expand his exploration as soon as possible because danger was imminent. Han Fei initially had his reservation about this but his encounter with the singer changed his mind. The singer's power was beyond his expectation. With such a presence loitering around the neighbourhood, Han Fei needed to get stronger as fast as possible. 'What have I done to deserve this? Why is it that in both real world and gaming world, people want to kill me?!'

After doing his research, Han Fei practiced another round of fighting skill before he hugged the gaming helmet and sat on his bed. Han Fei connected all the wires and put the helmet on. When the game started, Han Fei's world dyed red. "Welcome to perfect Life!"

His eyes opened and Han Fei first added his 2 recent Skill Points into Acting and Soul-depth Touch. Then he entered the innermost bedroom to find Wei Youfu.

"Weifu, do you mind following me to Apartment 2, I wish to summon all of the current tenants."

"Hmm, why?" Wei Youfu leaned against the wall. He looked very fragile. "Some of the tenants will lose part of their power after they leave their room, it'll be hard to gather all of them before we get their trust. Do you have something important to announce?"

"I have the working id for Yi Ming Private Academy with me. And I have a plan. If I succeed, we will be able to take down Yi Ming Private Academy."

“Take down Yi Ming Private Academy?” Wei Youfu’s eyes widened, “Haven’t we just dealt with the former boss of the convenience store yesterday night? Aren’t you taking things a bit too fast? You need to rest too, you know.”

“We do not have much time left, every night is incredibly precious to us.” Han Fei looked at Wei Youfu seriously. “The students there are being tortured by horrible ghosts. I have to go save them.”

“You’re serious about this?” Wei Youfu asked again, “Indeed the teacher id can allow you to enter and leave the school freely but have you been a teacher before? How can you tell that your disguise will work?”

“I never intended to become a teacher to begin with, my goal is to become the headmaster.” Han Fei took out the teacher’s working id from his inventory and then shared with Wei Youfu his plan.

Chapter 135:

“Yi Ming Private Academy and Happiness Neighbourhood are one block apart but the convenience store offers a shortcut. The people from the school have already sent their feelers into our neighbourhood, if we do not want to get cornered, we need to come up with a plan to fight back.” Han Fei placed the teacher’s id on the bed and grabbed some paper and pen. “The danger of the school is not to be underestimated so I plan to overtake it in stages.”

“What do you mean?”

“First, we need to gather all the tenants who are willing to leave the neighbourhood to help clean up the buildings along this street. While we expand our safe zone, we can consume those spirits that cannot be saved anymore. That will increase our overall power.”

“How can we tell if someone is still saveable or not?”

“If they are willing to join us, then they can be saved; if not, they’re food.” Han Fei said firmly.

“But there are so many buildings down this street. Even if we manage to clear away the existing ghosts, new ghosts will come to take their place.” Wei Youfu had no fighting ability, he relied fully on Little Eight but Little Eight could not leave Happiness Neighbourhood. The victims could not help Han Fei outside of the neighbourhood so Wei Youfu was concerned on Han Fei’s behalf.

“As long as we have the power, the newcomers will also end up as food. We’re not the one who should be making the choices but them.” Han Fei wrote down a name on the paper. “There are indeed many inscrutable and inexplicable presences at this city. What we need to do is strengthen ourselves while making sure we do not attract their attention.”

“But I still think it’s too dangerous.” Wei Youfu looked into Han Fei’s eyes, he saw ambition and fire in them. The natives of cryptic worlds were corrupted by despair and pain, their eyes were filled with nothing but cruelty and madness. No one would even fathom the concept of future planning like Han Fei would. Wei Youfu slowly discovered the thing that was different about Han Fei. The man’s eyes glowed with a light that was impossible to find on any ghost, he carried the most precious thing in the cryptic world—hope.

With envy in his heart, Wei Youfu wished he could be more like Han Fei but the memory of death was like a steel needle pierced in his heart. The thought of it injured his soul.

“The precious manager has marked out the dangerous locales so we only need to avoid them.” Han Fei’s plan was clear. With Happiness Neighbourhood and Yi Ming Convenience Store as bases, he planned to expand his influence throughout the cryptic world. “After we clean up this street, everyone should be much stronger. Then I’ll figure out a way to sneak into the school.” Han Fei planned to make an excursion with the tenants of Happiness Neighbourhood. He wished the tenants would provide him protection as well as missions.

Han Fei’s current level was too low. If he did not add all of his acquired attribute points into stamina, he wouldn’t be able to carry the paper doll’s coffin. He was still at the beginning stage of the game. He did not consider improving his intelligence. He needed to be strong enough so that he wouldn’t have to choose flight in every situation first.

“I’ll mix into the school to scout it out and try to seek out more staff and student ids. Then I’ll place those ids at the convenience store. When the time is right, we can enter the school together.” Han Fei explained his plan. He needed his neighbours’ help to take down Yi Ming Private Academy because his level was too low. To be honest, Han Fei had considered other possibilities like going to the school only after obtaining his secret profession but he needed to go to Livestock Alley to gain that profession. The alley wouldn’t be less dangerous than the school and the place was far from the neighbourhood. Han Fei

would be isolated from his friends if he decided to go there. Therefore, the best target at this moment for Han Fei was none other than Yi Ming Private Academy.

“The whole plan will be split into 3 stages, the first is to ensure the safety of this street and improve ourselves; for the second stage, I’ll infiltrate into the school to gather information and more access cards; then for the third stage, we’ll work in tandem both inside and outside of the school to bring it down.” Han Fei did not rush ahead but he did not halt due to fear either. He decided to start his work of taking down Yi Ming Private Academy that night. He needed to find clues about the Butterfly in the cryptic world and help the police capture them. Then he wouldn’t need to worry about his safety anymore in real life.

After Han Fei shared all of his plan, even though Wei Youfu still thought it was too risky, he would support Han Fei. They left Room 1044 and started to approach the other tenants. Ying Yue refused to leave her parents. If she left the aquarium for too long, the pain in her would turn her insane. Xu Qin was not home but as if expecting Han Fei would come get her, she left a bloody note on the door—I’ve sniffed something delicious, I’ll be back soon. The bloody message was horrifying but Han Fei had gotten used to her bloody ways.

Of the entire Apartment 1, only one tenant agreed to come with Han Fei and that was Weep who came hugging a ceremonial urn. It was unclear whether this was the effect of the Pied Piper, or the boy wanted to have more meals like the paper doll. In any case, Han Fei managed to convince him with a few words. With Weep and Wei Youfu, Han Fei ran to Apartment 2. After some asking around, only the tall ghost was willing to help.

“Your plan is good but it’ll be hard to put it into action.” Wei Youfu could not allow Little Eight to leave the neighbourhood. Watching the trio of Han Fei, Weep and the tall ghost, he shook his head. “Maybe we should wait for that woman from the 5th floor to come back.”

“The two of them are enough. Most of the tenants from Apartment 2 refuse to come because they only see the danger. When they realize the benefits involved, they’ll be more willing to help.” Han Fei turned to the tall ghost. “Consuming ghosts will provide lots of Yin energy, it can help increase your power and calm the pain in your heart. The tenants here will eventually learn that helping me is helping themselves.”

“I was lucky enough to be at home and saw you come back carrying the coffin. I knew you were different from others and that is why I’m willing to help.” The tall ghost’s voice was low and hoarse, he sounded mature. “Let me reintroduce myself. My real name is Lee Zai, I live in Room 2021. My younger brother is called Lee Huo. He is now living inside me, we can swap consciousness whenever we wish.”

“What special power do you have?”

“We can pollute and steal other people’s luck. By the way...” Lee Huo suddenly remembered something, “There was a wandering soul that sneaked into Apartment 2 earlier. He was a patron of Lady Luck like me and my brother. We have stolen the last good luck he had and planned to ask him to become our sworn brother. But you rescued him before we could get him. Is he still around? We wish to meet him.”

“He has already departed from this world.” Han Fei ended this sad conversation and the three of them left the neighbourhood. The street was covered in darkness. They did not dare to stay outside for too long. They hurried across the street and entered Yi Ming Convenience Store. The bell rang. Han Fei looked around. The store had been cleaned but the single-eyed worker was missing. “Where’s Drake? He’s my only living employee!”

Han Fei entered the warehouse and pulled one out. “Stop playing dead, where’s Drake?”

A confused face appeared on the normal looking candle, “Who are you?”

“Huh, so you even know how to change your voice and face... That’s useful.” Han Fei identified the man through the system. Han Fei took out a lighter. “I had you look over the shop for me but you couldn’t even do that. Maybe some fire will help clear your mind.”

“How did you find me among so many candles?” The candle face panicked. “I even changed my hiding spot...”

“Stop wasting time, where’s Drake?”

“He went to the hostel next door a few hours ago and he hasn’t returned.”

“The hostel?”

“I’m not lying! A child’s crying came from the hostel earlier and I believe the child was crying for his mother. When Drake heard that, he left the shop immediately...”

“A child’s crying? Looks like something has happened to Firefly and his mother.” Han Fei stuffed the candle into his pocket. He led Weep and Lee Zai to the back alley. Han Fei greeted a few broken souls and then he slipped to the alley entrance.

Beside the convenience store, there was a small, old hostel that did not even have a sign.

“The woman who dropped the pot on me stays here as well. It’s time to make things even.”

Chapter 136:

“Honey, let me hear our son’s voice again.”

“I know it still doesn’t know how to speak, I just miss it too much.”

“It can’t make any sound anymore? How long ago was this?”

“Honey, don’t cry! I’m not saying this is your fault. It’ll be fine, I’ll get us a new son in a few days.”

“Come, give me a hug. Of course, I wouldn’t leave you all alone in this creepy place. I’ll find you company.”

“Hush, hush! Don’t worry, this son is definitely yours, I know you’ve hidden it inside the hostel.” At the front desk of the lobby, a man in a raincoat half-squatted beside the phone. He kept mumbling things into the phone. His voice was gentle, the person on the other end of the line appeared to be his wife. The hood of the raincoat shielded most of his face. The man’s voice was filled with love. He gushed at his wife, they were very much in love. The clock pointed at 1 in the morning but the man was still talking on the phone. He kept comforting his crying wife. At that moment, footsteps came from the hostel entrance.

A well-built young man, carrying a ceremonial urn walked into the lobby. Wiping away the blood stains from his palms casually, the man in the raincoat ended the call unwillingly. He turned to the young man and asked, “Are you here for a room?”

“You’re the boss?”

“Yes.” The man took out a key from underneath the desk, “Please give me your name. All of our guests need to register.”

“Meng Changan.”

“Changan? That’s a good name.” The man handed the key to the young man. “Room 202, please check out at this very hour tomorrow night.”

“That’s all? But I haven’t even paid.”

“Someone has already paid on your behalf. Go and rest. Sweet dreams.”

“Thank you, good night to you too.” The young man said politely. But he did not leave immediately instead he turned to study the lobby wall. There was a bulletin board there which was covered with various ads and notices. There were lost and found notifications and missing person ads. The young man studied it for a long time and he noticed there was a wanted ad for a family tutor.

“Boss, I’m sorry but do you know who left this ad behind? Will the teacher be tutoring a child from the nearby Yi Ming Private Academy?”

“Yes, the child dropped out from school for some reason. His mother has been figuring a way to help him to go back to the school. To ensure that he does not lag behind from his peers, she left the ad to find a family tutor.” The boss explained kindly.

“Does the pair of mother and son live here as well?”

“They stay in Room 301, if you wish to answer her ad, I can help you make a call to inform the mother.”

“Then I shall thank you in advance.” The young man headed towards the staircase. Walking down the moldy corridor, when he reached the first step, he turned back to look. The man in the raincoat was still standing behind the front desk, staring at him. “Good night.”

Stepping on the creaking wooden steps, the young man came to the 2nd floor. He heard the man’s voice coming from the 1st floor again. He appeared to have continued his call with his wife. ‘Are they actual husband and wife? This hostel is different from what I have imagined.’ The young man who carried the urn was Han Fei. His original plan was to ambush the boss and then murder his way to Drake and his family. But when he saw the actual boss, Han Fei noticed something was off. The boss appeared to be under some kind of spell. He reminded Han Fei greatly of Drake when he was still working under the paper doll. Seeing this, Han Fei knew brute force was not going to work. He did not expose Weep and Lee Zai who resided inside the urn and instead decided to take on the disguise of a guest.

Using the key, he opened the door to Room 202. Han Fei shook his head at the urn and then he looked around. The furniture was old. There was a tea pot next to the small tv. Han Fei opened the lid and several damp paper monies were stuffed inside. “You’ll never know what you’ll get here.” Han Fei inspected the room closely. He noticed the room was relatively ‘clean’. The only strange item he found was shredded paper money at the corners of the room and inside the closet. “It feels like this room is prepared for the dead, then again, considering where I am, that is no surprise.”

Han Fei sat on the bed and analysed the situation in his mind. ‘There are 3 levels to this hostel. Each level has 4 rooms and one of the rooms on the first floor, Room 101 specifically, has the word, manager on it.’ Han Fei perked up his ears to listen. The walls were extremely thin. He could hear the sound of grinding teeth from the adjacent Room 201. ‘The hostel is not that big. Firefly should be in one of these rooms.’ Closing his eyes, Han Fei tried to remember, ‘The person who dropped the pots on me stays on the 3rd floor. If the layout for the rooms are all the same, then she should be staying in Room 302, right above me.’ Standing up, Han Fei could hear the sound of snoring coming from above. ‘She sure is a sound sleeper.’

Ring Ring! The phone by the bed suddenly rang. Han Fei frowned, he thought the phone was just a decoration. ‘Will it keep on ringing if I don’t answer it?’

Han Fei stared at the phone and he noticed something interesting. While the phone rang, the sound of teeth grinding and snoring had all disappeared. Han Fei eventually picked up the phone but did not say anything. After a short silence, a woman’s voice came out from the phone, “Please just stop torturing me, just kill me. Please just kill me...” The woman said between sobs, she sounded very fragile.

“Tell me where you are.” Han Fei whispered urgently.

“Don’t torment me anymore. Kill me, kill me please...” The woman repeated. At that moment, the sound of chains falling came from the other line. Then the door opened. Finally, the boss’ voice came, “Honey, who are you talking to?”

The call was abruptly ended. Han Fei’s eyes darted around as he placed the phone back. Then he slunk over to sneak out from Room 202. He had no idea where the boss hid the woman but he knew that the boss was not at the 1st floor front desk at this moment. Using his fastest speed, Han Fei hurried to the first floor. As he expected, the first floor was empty. Without wasting any time, Han Fei jumped into the front desk and grabbed all the available keys. Then he searched through the desk and swiped the registration book the boss left on the table. After making sure he did not miss anything, Han Fei raced back up the stairs.

His gait was light. When he passed each room, he’d stop to listen to the sounds from inside them. He reached Room 202 successfully. Han Fei checked and he got 6 numbered keys with him. He memorized all the numbers and opened the registration book. Meng Changan’s name was the latest entry. He turned a page forward and found Drake’s name.

“Drake Ying is in Room 304?” Han Fei compared that with the keys he ‘borrowed’. There was no key for Room 304. “That means Drake hasn’t checked out yet...”

While Han Fei flipped through the book, footsteps came from the corridor. At the same time, the robotic voice announced. “Notification for Player 0000! You’ve successfully triggered Grade G Normal Mission—Find the Missing Employee!

“Find the Missing Employee: Your only employee is missing! Finding him will greatly increase his friendliness level with you!

“Notification for Player 0000! You’ve successfully triggered Grade G Hidden Mission—Midnight Hostel!

“Midnight Hostel: The boss of this hostel once used fresh blood to write this on the business sign—No entry to the living! But after the boss disappeared, many strange things started to happen at the hostel.”

Chapter 137:

The footsteps on the corridor appeared so abruptly that Han Fei wasn't sure the owner was coming for him or not. But for the sake of security, he stuffed all the keys and the registration book into the urn. Closing the cracked lid, Han Fei carefully moved to the door.

Dong, dong, dong! The person knocked on his door, stopping before Room 202. The door did not have a peephole so Han Fei had to lean on the crack in the frame to look out. There was a woman in an old, blue dress standing outside the room. Her face was ashen, and her eyes bloodshot. There was a large birthmark around her neck. Her hair was matted with clumps of soil. 'The landlord's ring gives no reaction at all, does this mean she carries me no harm?' Han Fei slowly eased the door open. "How can I help you?"

"Are you Mr. Meng Changan? I just got the call from the boss, he said you have answered my ad for a family tutor." The woman's voice was dull and flat. It suggested an exhausted frame of mind.

"Indeed, I am Meng Changan." Han Fei pulled the door open. "Why don't you come in? I'm sure you have questions for me." The woman hesitated before entering Room 202. Han Fei poured a glass of water for the woman and then asked, "I understand that your child is a former student at Yi Ming Private Academy?"

"Yes, my child is very clever and he used to be very good with his studies. But recently, his results plummeted and his behavior turned strange. He would cry and throw stuff for no reason."

"I bet it's because he was under great pressure from school. It's my advice that you give him some time to breathe. After all, all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

"If I do that, he will definitely hate me in the future! Furthermore, it's not like he doesn't want to study but more like he is prevented from focusing on his studies." The woman thought about it. "I swear it's that kid that my child shares a room with. He often tells very scary stories to my child, I suspect he's the one behind my child's problem."

"Very scary stories?" Han Fei's eyes narrowed. "Do you know the name of that child?"

"His name is Jing Sheng."

'Jing Sheng? Jin Sheng?' Han Fei did not expect to hear that name at the hostel. It gave him all the more reason to make the woman stay. "Sometimes, we as parents have limited understanding of our children because we lack a proper channel of communication. Do you mind telling me everything that has happened to your child at school? I'll help you analyze why your child has fallen behind in his studies." Han Fei exuded such a professional presence of a teacher that he gained the woman's trust quite easily.

"Yi Ming Private Academy is a boarding school, I can only see my child once every 6 months. He was perfectly fine when he started at the school but the last time I went to see him, which was 6 months ago, he told me that he had been suffering from a terrible headache. I also noticed there were inexplicable small wounds on his body that refused to heal."

"What did you do then?"

"I asked him whether there was someone bullying him at school. He denied it. He merely begged me to bring him away from the school." The woman gripped her dress. "We came from a poor family, I used all of my savings to send my child to this prestigious school so that he could have a better life than I did but who would have thought this would happen to him."

"In other words, until now you have no idea why he has dropped off from school? Forgive me but that is quite irresponsible." Han Fei took out his teacher's work id. "I am a professional educator with years of experience. If you're willing to place your trust in me, why don't you bring me to meet that child now?"

"Teacher Meng, I can't thank you enough for this." The woman placed her hands inside her pocket and then added in an embarrassed whisper, "But I do not have that much money on me..."

"We can discuss that later. The child's situation is more important. If we do not handle these problems now, it might affect the rest of his life." Han Fei picked up the urn from the bed. "Education is not only meant for the children to master skills and knowledge, it is also to help them understand the meaning and value of life." The woman was even more impressed by Han Fei now.

She led Han Fei to the 3rd floor. Pushing the door open to Room 301, a horrible smell leaked out and the scene that revealed before Han Fei was quite horrifying. The windows were covered with thick black blinds and the dim light casted shadows on papers that littered the ground. A wet sheet was hung across the middle of the room to split the small space into two partitions. Through the sheet, Han Fei could glimpse a giant head.

Han Fei pulled back a corner of the sheet and spotted a boy leaning on the study table. His head was disproportionately large compared to his thin body, in fact, Han Fei could not imagine the boy standing up. His neck would snap from the weight of his head. The horrible smell came from the disfigured boy. He held a pen in his hand and he kept writing the same thing on the papers.

“Why is he still studying at 2 in the morning? He should be in bed already. There should be a balance between study and leisure.” Chill came from the ring. Han Fei hugged the urn and walked through the sheet. He was assaulted by a thicker smelly fog. Upon closer inspection, Han Fei realized the boy’s appearance was even more harrowing than he thought. Giant blood red veins popped on his giant head and they appeared like worms crawling under the skin. Han Fei could hear a voice coming from inside the boy’s head as if calling him to return to Yi Ming Private Academy.

“Child, what is your name?” The smell crawled into his nostrils but Han Fei’s expression did not change like he was born without olfactory cells.

The large head slowly turned around. A large vein pulsed above his eyelid. His eyes were so red like the ocular pressure would push them out at any moment. The bulging eyeballs stared at Han Fei. They were filled with malice. The boy’s hand tightened around the pen as if he wanted to stab Han Fei with it.

“Why don’t you take a break for now?” Han Fei turned to study the exercise book before the boy. The page was filled with different names written down with red pen. “Are these the names of your friends?” The veins on the boy’s head pounded and his expression turned vicious.

“Maybe he’s too shy to share his problems with his family around.” Han Fei turned to smile at the woman at the door. “Do you mind if I speak alone with your boy for a moment?”

The woman hesitated before she turned away.

“Boy, your mother has left, do you know what that means?” Han Fei smiled at the boy. The boy sensed danger from Han Fei’s smile and he said the first word since Han Fei entered the room. “Why don’t you try and put a finger on me?”

“You sure have a temper. In any case, I’m a teacher, there is no way I will use corporal punishment on my students.” Han Fei took out the cursed homework from his inventory and placed it before the boy.

He had tried the book on Weep before, he noticed the cursed book could slowly influence the reader's mind. "Since you refuse to rest, then how about you try some of the questions on this exercise book? We can start with simple math." Han Fei used Soul-Depth Touch to fix the boy's gaze on the exercise book. "We have to work if we want a better future. We reap what we sow, right?"

On the previously empty page, lines after lines of question appeared. They pulled at the boy's soul like an invisible whirlpool.

If $x^2 + (2m+4)x + m^2 + 5m = 0$ has no real root. 1. Find m ; 2. If the quadratic equation $mx^2 + (n-2)x + m - 3 = 0$ has real roots, find the roots; 3. If the roots in question 2 are α, β , $\alpha:\beta=1:2$ and n is an integral number, find m 's smallest integral....

Chapter 138:

Some used holy water to cleanse spirit, others used ancient artifacts but Han Fei was probably the first to use math to expel evil. This truly brought a new meaning to the axiom, knowledge is power. The boy's attention was pulled towards the exercise book. The veins on his head subsided and the boy stopped resisting that hard. Under the dim light, a child was working hard to solve a math equation, if not for the horrible stench of decay wafting out from him, this would be a scene perfect from an Iyashikei game. Han Fei sat down beside the boy. When the boy's consciousness was completely submerged into the book, he tried to ask again. "What's your name?"

"Big Head, my friends all call me Big Head." The boy mumbled as if to himself. His eyes never left the book.

"Did you share a room with Jing Sheng? What is your impression of that boy? Did he ever bully you?"

"I don't like him. He always tells these scary stories. Even when he sleeps, his mouth would continue to move and the stories never end."

"Sleep-taking? Do you remember what exactly did he say?" Han Fei was curious.

“He said we are all dead and the school is filled with ghosts. He also said that there was a butterfly who flew into one of the student’s brains. It was that student who has been torturing our afterlife and for us to seek freedom, we need to find that student as soon as possible.”

“Do you believe him?”

“Initially I didn’t, but I started to see ghosts at the school. The place is very haunted!” Han Fei’s question triggered the trauma within the boy. He almost struggled loose from the curse. ‘Looks like Jing Sheng and Jin Sheng are the same person. He hasn’t changed at all and still likes to tell ghost stories but at this place his stories are all real.’ Han Fei came to the hostel to find Drake, the info about Jin Sheng was a pleasant surprise. Han Fei left Big Head alone with his exercise. Both the boy and his mother were victims of the school. Han Fei planned to invite them to join him at Happiness Neighbourhood after he was done researching the hostel. Han Fei looked around and noticed there was a picture frame on his study table. The frame carried a family photo of 3. Inside the picture, the boy’s head wasn’t that big. “Is this man your father?”

“Yes, my father works somewhere far away but he loves me and my mother. He’ll call us on the phone every night.”

‘Another incident with the phone?’ Han Fei walked towards the phone that sat on the dresser. But before he could do anything, the door to Room 301 opened. Big Head’s mother hurried in. “Teacher Meng, what do you think? Is my son still savable?”

“I’m sure you overheard what the boy and I have talked about behind the door, so why ask the unnecessary question?” Han Fei noted with a faded smile. “The student named Jing Sheng has a lot to do with why your son is in the state he’s in. I will help you investigate Jing Sheng further.”

“Thank you, Teacher Meng!”

“If you really care about your son, I’d advise you to move out from this hostel. This is not a place to raise a child. Why not settle somewhere more permanent? There’s a vacancy at the Happiness Neighbourhood across the street. There are more kids his age there. It’ll help him open up to other people.”

“I will consider it.” Just as the woman said that, the phone rang. Hearing the tingle, the woman who had been frowning all night suddenly burst into a brilliant smile. She rushed anticipatorily to the phone and picked it up. “Honey, you’ve not called for the whole night. I was so worried about you.”

“The police are on my tail, I don’t dare to make any call and put you in danger. You better stay at the hostel and don’t go anywhere. I’ll be back to come get you soon.”

“Okay, you have to be careful too.”

“How is our son? Is his headache healing?”

“No, in fact, it has gotten more serious but I have found a very nice tutor, he is willing to help our son.”

“Don’t trust any stranger, have you forgotten how I was framed as the murderer? I have to hang up now, take care of yourself.” The man appeared to sense something and quickly ended the call.

“Was that the boy’s father?” Han Fei asked casually.

“Yes... He’s busy with business and is often not home.”

“No matter how busy he is, as parents, we should make some time for our children.” Han Fei kept bringing up the importance of family and education. The woman nodded in agreement. “It’s getting late, I should be returning to my room.”

“Thank you again, Teacher Meng.” The woman walked Han Fei to the door. After he exited Room 301, Han Fei replayed everything that he saw and heard in his mind, ‘The woman is lying, her husband is a fugitive on the run from the police. But the question is why would her husband know this hostel’s number? Is her husband hiding at this very same hostel? The moment I suggested the woman move away with Big Head, the husband called to stop her. That can’t be a coincidence.’ Han Fei looked quietly around. He felt someone’s eyes on him. ‘Was it really her husband on the phone? Or was it someone else?’ Now that he thought about it, Han Fei realized how sinister the presence of phones was at this hostel. Once he entered the door, he encountered the boss talking to his wife on the phone; after he entered his room, he heard a phone call from a woman asking for help; now he noted the woman in Room 301 maintained communication with her husband through the phone as well.

‘If every guest here is put under some kind of spell, then the phone must play a huge role in it. Is it the same ghost on the other end of the phone hypnotizing all of them?’ Han Fei was determined to find out what was wrong with the hostel. Staring down the corridor that led down the third floor, Han Fei slowly made his move. Drake registered into Room 304 and he had not been seen since. Something must be hidden in that room. Smell of mould lingered in the air. Just as Han Fei passed Room 302, the door suddenly opened. A fatty arm shot out from inside the door. The person had been lying in wait. The fleshy arm grabbed Han Fei tightly. ‘It’s the fat woman who dropped the pots on me!’ Even with 10 points in Stamina, Han Fei was putty in the woman’s arms. He was slowly dragged into her room. ‘I’m still too weak.’

The door opened wider to reveal a woman’s heavily made up face. She was munching on a piece of bone. She salivated hungrily. “You’ll die sooner or later now that you’re here. In that case, why don’t you die in my arms instead?” The folds of fat on her face jiggled from excitement. The woman was much more powerful than Han Fei. She yanked with extra force as Han Fei neared her door. Han Fei did not expect the woman still had reservation of strength. He tripped and stumbled into Room 302. The reinforced door slowly closed and the last shred of light disappeared from Han Fei’s eyes.

“Many people cross this junction every day but you are different. When I first saw you, I wanted to kill you. The urge is indescribable. I know you will create a more beautiful blood splatter than the rest of them!” The mouth of the woman cracked open to expose yellowed teeth. Han Fei collapsed to the ground. He stayed there as if frozen from fear.

“You are so cute, I can’t wait to kill you! I will kill you little by little, I will make the process last for a whole day! No, that is still too fast, I will take one whole week to kill you.” The woman eased open a drawer and took out a box of razors. She giggled with anticipation. “We’ll start with the legs so that you won’t be able to move anymore.” The fats on the woman jiggled with her every move. The already small razor appeared even tinier in her grasp. “I promise to make sure no flesh is left on the bone.”

The woman rolled up her sleeves and Han Fei saw the trace of a black-red butterfly on her wrist. ‘Why do all the crazy people in this world have the butterfly’s mark?’

Han Fei remained on the ground. His eyes darted about nervously as he watched the woman approach. The woman was much stronger than Han Fei. Seeing how helpless Han Fei was, she giggled even harder, like a girl at the state fair. A shame that she could not see into the players’ inventory. Her grubby hands reached for Han Fei’s calf. As she tried to drag Han Fei into the kitchen, Han Fei finally countered. Using Soul-Depth Touch, he aimed a kick at the woman’s stomach. As the woman groaned painfully from the

unexpected strike, Han Fei took out the paper red doll from his inventory and shoved it down the woman's open throat!

"Weep!" The boy materialized above the woman's head. He used his power to loosen her mind and the paper doll inside her throat came alive. Blood red needles pierced into the woman's body. Then the cracked paper doll disappeared!

The woman collapsed to the ground in pain. She stuck her fingers down her throat but her gag reflex was not working. Soon her body became even bloated than before. She tried to make one last attempt at Han Fei's life but the thin boy riding above her neck kept disrupting her thoughts. The woman was like a beast who lost her mind. She banged against the furniture aimlessly. She panicked. Soon black blood coughed out from her mouth, the blood was mixed with shredded paper. 10 minutes later, the woman's body paled. When the last trace of blood disappeared, she folded over in the middle of the room. There was a strange rustling and then a hand slowly reached out from the woman's heart. The blood red doll slowly emerged from the woman's body. It turned to look at Han Fei and its face brightened with a smile. Then it extricated itself from the woman and toddled over to Han Fei.

'So this is the power of a Grade F Cursed Object?' Just the sight of the doll working its power was horrifying enough, Han Fei was glad that the doll's consciousness had been shattered. He reached out to pick up the doll. He noticed the tears on the doll had lessened. Absorbing negative energy was able to heal the wounds on the doll. 'Cursed objects are more resilient and scarier than I thought.'

Han Fei stared at the woman on the ground. He actually still had some questions for her. 'This is your fault really. You ambushed me first.' Han Fei closed the woman's eyes. When he brushed against her skin, he did not feel any human suppleness, instead her skin felt as dry as a piece of paper.

In this time of need, every small donation is well-appreciated.

Chapter 139:

Han Fei shut the venom-filled eyes of the guest inside Room 302 and her body disintegrated into paper. As her soul faded away, the system suddenly announced, "Notification for Player 0000! Your employee, Drake Ying has been heavily injured! Please find him soon or the mission will fail!"

‘There’s a time limit to this mission?’ Han Fei initially planned to stay to search for clues in the room but after hearing the notification, he did not dawdle. He picked up the box of razors and turned to the door. There was no one in the corridor. The other tenants appeared to have gotten used to hearing strange voices coming out from Room 302. ‘It’s too unusually quiet.’ After the death of the guest in Room 302, something changed at the hostel.

Out of concern for Drake’s safety, Han Fei hustled down the corridor as he reached into the urn to take out the key to Room 304. The key eased into the keyhole and just as the door opened, the phone inside Room 304 rang. The silvery tingle shattered the hostel’s silence. It echoed throughout the whole building. Han Fei slipped into Room 304 and picked up the phone sitting at the bedside table. Weak breathing came down the line. Several seconds later, two words were heard, “Hurry, leave...” Despite the softness of the voice, Han Fei recognized the caller as Drake, “Where are you now?”

“End this call and leave!” Drake seemed to be struggling with the last bit of his strength. When he gave that directive, the sound of wound tearing also came down the line. Through the call, Han Fei understood there was someone else close to Drake. Said person was probably the one who forced Drake to make this call to Han Fei. Han Fei immediately cut off the call. He studied the red phone line that was embedded into the wall. The line looked like a blood capillary.

‘There has to be a reason why Drake told me to end the call. Probably a conversation with the person on the phone will enable them to put some kind of spell on me.’ Han Fei reacted quickly. The moment he stepped into the hostel, he already suspected the phones. Now with the confirmation from Drake, Han Fei confirmed there was a huge problem with the phones at this hostel. Han Fei took out a razor and tried to cut through the phone line but the red thin line was much more resilient than he expected. The razor was unable to slice through it. “Weep, do you think you can bite through it?”

At that moment, the door opened and a ghost with a dark red face stumbled into Room 304. He was holding a bottle of alcohol and could barely walk in a straight line. After he got into the room, he suddenly picked up speed to charge at Han Fei. His red skin cracked with blood. Weep jumped to defend Han Fei. Weep was a Lingering Spirit while the drunkard was just an Animated Regret. It only managed to do little damage on Weep while suffering a lot of damage in return. It was only a matter of time before the drunkard was killed but Han Fei felt this was too easy. The drunkard was in a state similar to Drake when he was under the paper doll’s control. His consciousness was not there. Despite the obvious losing battle, he still attacked Weep relentlessly. Just as the drunkard was about to die, the system rang in Han Fei’s head again, “Notification for Player 0000! Your employee, Drake Ying’s consciousness is about to collapse! Please locate him immediately or you’ll fail the mission!”

Han Fei narrowed his eyes at the dying drunkard. ‘When the notification first came, it was right after the woman in Room 302 was consumed by the paper doll; now this second notification came right about

this drunkard is about to die. This cannot be a coincidence!’ Han Fei’s eyes swept the phone behind him and a thought appeared in his mind. ‘The real owner of this place can transfer damage between their corrupted guests?’

Han Fei immediately had Weep stop his attacks. Han Fei yanked the phone line forcibly out from the wall. The connection port bled and when the line pulled out, Han Fei saw that it was connected to something that looked suspiciously like a human organ. “Just leave the drunkard! We need to get to the 1st floor now!” Han Fei remembered that when he entered the hostel, the boss was also on the phone. The phone line of the phone at the front desk extended right to the ground. ‘If the phone is the cursed object that connects everything at this hostel, then the heart that controls it must be hidden under the building!’

With that in mind, Han Fei carried the urn and escaped from Room 304 with Weep. As they ran down the stairs, all the phones inside the hostel rang at the same time. The previously closed doors slammed open. The guests shuffled out of their rooms like they were sleep-walking.

“Run past them!” The shrill ringing tortured Han Fei’s eardrums. He gritted his teeth and rushed to the 1st floor. When he arrived, the boss in the raincoat was standing there waiting for him with a smile. The wooden stairs creaked. Footfalls came from upstairs.

“Dear guest, I’m sorry but your check out time is not until tomorrow.” The boss took off his hoodie. A large crack split his skull. “If you insist on leaving early, then I’ll have to charge your rental in advance.” The hand that was hidden under the coat slowly pulled out. It was holding a sharp axe. As more guests made their way down the stairs, Han Fei knew he had no other choice. “Lee Zai!”

“Is it time for dinner?” A dark shadow billowed out from the cracked urn. A tall man peeled back his stomach to reveal another face hidden inside it. “Get your younger brother out! Quick! I need him to slam through this floor!” The situation was getting more dangerous. The tall man nodded. “You better stand back.” He bent his body into an impossible degree and extended his head right into the open mouth of the face inside his own stomach!

This horrifying vision startled even some of the guests. Han Fei did not expect this would be the way the two brothers exchange their personas. The mouth clamped over the tall man’s neck. The bone snapped noisily. Rationality was consumed and what remained was madness and despair. The shadow grew twice as big. The large Lee Huo slammed on the floor like crazy. The 3 storeys building trembled. Lee Huo soon smashed out a hole through the hollowed floor. Wooden splinters showered everywhere. A horrible

stench drifted out from the hole. Han Fei held his hand over his mouth as he peered into the hole. What he saw sent a chill down his spine. There was a mass grave under the hostel!

Carcasses were sewn together with red phone lines. Their bodies were entangled together by phone lines. Some of the lines threaded through their skin and buried deep into their bodies.

“Drake?” The single-eyed employee was bitten in place by his surrounding carcasses. He used his body to shield a boy and a woman’s carcass. The woman looked kind and friendly. Her eyes were closed but she had a satisfied smile on her face. Her body though was punctured through by multiple phone lines. Drake was at his limit, his consciousness was fading. His single eye filled with pain.

“Help, help me...” Drake did not expect to see Han Fei. An emotion that he did not recognize appeared in his murky eye. The rare emotion lent him another surge of energy. His only movable arm grabbed the boy in his embrace and threw him out from the mass grave!

Han Fei caught the boy. Lee Huo who lost his mind jumped into the hole. He tore and dragged at the underground bodies. But all the damage appeared to have been transferred onto Drake. ‘The phone lines are the connection, the curse can transfer the damage taken from one of his puppets to another. The only solution now is to bring down the curse maker!’

Lee Huo was uncontrollable and Weep had to stay guard beside Han Fei. Han Fei’s only hope was the paper doll. He reached into his inventory to take out the red paper doll. Blood dripped to the ground. Han Fei needed the doll to crawl into the grave but the paper doll merely smiled gladly at him. The doll’s consciousness had been broken, it was now just a shell.

Thinking back to what Xu Qin had said, the soul-wrenchingly beautiful face appeared in Han Fei’s mind. When the face overlapped with that of the paper doll, a thick scent of blood pooled around Han Fei. “Dig deep into the graves! Find out what the layers of carcasses are trying to protect!”

The bleeding doll seemed to understand Han Fei. It teetered towards the hole and the smile on its face grew more feminine and seductive. This was the first time Han Fei tried to control the red paper doll. His brain felt like it was being pierced through by thousands of needles. The red doll’s own horrific memories surged into Han Fei’s mind, eclipsing the man’s memory. Han Fei finally understood the utility of intelligence. Thankfully, he had a rather high value in intelligence or else he would not be able to control the doll for so long.

Since the appearance of the doll, the atmosphere inside the hostel changed.

The smell of blood overwhelmed the smell of decay. The thing inside the grave could not move. It could only watch helplessly as the paper doll squeezed through the gap between the carcasses and dug its way deeper into the monstrous pile.

Chapter 140:

The carcasses were strung together via the phone lines, they were pieced together to protect the cursed object placed in the middle. Lee Huo who had consumed his elder brother was completely out of control. He could not tell what was before him. Black mist curled around his fists and it appeared to be able to burn through ghosts. He attacked indiscriminately. The carcasses in the grave were pummelled through. The damage caused by the mist was shared among all the guests at the hostel. While Lee Huo attracted the hostel owner's attention, Han Fei closed his eyes to focus on controlling the paper doll.

The memories in his mind were dyed red. The horrors the paper doll had experienced started to affect Han Fei. If he had not died so many times during the Manager Mission, his mind would have collapsed by now. The multiple deaths strengthened his resolve. Han Fei gritted his teeth and ignored the visions before his eyes. He focused on making the doll squeeze deeper into the grave. While Lee Huo made a mess of the grave, the doll infiltrated into it. The biggest weakness of the thing buried deep underground was its immobility. The doll eventually reached the core of the grave. There was an old man residing at the centre of the grave. His body was shrivelled. Blood red phone lines bound around him. His eyes were filled with pain and regret.

‘The real owner of the hostel is this old man?’ Regardless, Han Fei had no time to waste. If he hesitated, Drake would die. Han Fei gave the final order to the paper doll which was to cut through the phone lines that circulated around the old man. The smell of blood dispersed around the room. A scary smile lit up the doll's face as it plunged its paper hands into the old man's chest. The doll did not follow Han Fei's order. It was distracted by something. It laughed soundlessly as its hands gouged out a hole at the old man's chest. As blood coursed through its body, the doll jumped into the old man's chest. At that moment, every ghost inside the hostel stopped.

Seconds later, the doll crawled out from the old man's chest carrying a still-beating heart. All the phone lines originated from this heart, that was the source of everything!

The guests started to slow. The excited paper doll opened its maw to consume the heart. Han Fei used a lot of energy to stop it.

An old lady's cries could be heard coming out from the wounded heart. It appeared to be a cursed object. "Lee Huo, enough! That's an ally! Lee Zai! I need you to stop your little brother!" Han Fei shouted. Lee Huo was a rampaging tank. He was about to slam into the paper doll. Han Fei needed to control the paper doll, stop Lee Huo and be cautious about the other guests. One wrong move and he'd die. Under Han Fei's urging, Lee Huo's body started to change. The mist around his arms dispersed until the tall ghost returned. Han Fei sighed in relief when he saw Lee Zai. Then he could fully focus on controlling the paper doll to bring the heart back. To his consternation, once the paper doll tried to move the heart, all the cursed ghosts inside the hostel would be affected. They were all connected to the heart.

'This is bad. Drake cannot suffer anymore torment.' Han Fei did not want to lose this employee. He held Weep's hand and jumped through the hole and into the grave. 'The way to undo the curse is to destroy the cursed object. But this thing knows how to transfer damage inflicted onto it. If it dies, it will pull the rest of the guests down with it.' Han Fei frowned. At that moment, the heavily shrunken old man turned his neck to look at Han Fei. "Please don't hurt her, this is all my fault. Kill me instead. I will atone her sins." The old man's voice came intermittently. He was barely present.

"What do you mean?"

"I am the boss of this hostel, my wife of 40 plus years lives inside this heart." The old man continued pleadingly, "We used to run a hostel together but I fell sick and she was left with the burden of running it alone."

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know either. One night, I woke up and realized I was no longer at the hospital but on this street. I was so afraid until I stumbled into this hostel." The old man crawled over the bodies to try to reach the heart. "At the time, the hostel was abandoned. I started to turn it into a business. I wanted to keep everything the same so that she'd not feel uncomfortable when she returned. Unfortunately, she never did, that is until one night, I received a phone call from her..."

Han Fei got the gist of the story now. The old man used to run a hostel in his life and he died at the hospital. When he woke up, he was already in the cryptic world. But his situation was unique, because he retained the memories about his wife and the hostel. "I was so excited when I got her call. I was so afraid I wouldn't get the chance to hear her voice again. I told her that I wish to see her but she said that it was not yet time. She told me to be patient." The old man's eyes softened. "As always, I listened to

her. I waited, but I was also weirdly afraid to see her in person... To be honest, a phone call a day was good enough for me.

“We talked about everything, there were inexhaustible topics. I talked to her about our life together while she shared with me the tales of our guests. Her temper was as incaltrant as I remembered. Such a nagger, she was. Sometimes, she would chew my ears off but the next day, I would find myself waiting beside the phone waiting for it to ring. With her voice accompanying me every day, I no longer felt so fearful.

“But as the hostel started to accept more guests, she suddenly told me she felt very afraid. She could feel herself changing, she had been exposed to too many despair, horrors and unimaginable terror. Her voice was pained, I wanted to comfort her in person but she refused to meet me.

“One night not too long after that, she called to tell me she was leaving, she might not be able to call me anymore.

“Can you imagine the pain I was in when I heard that? I could not understand it. I told her I was ready to give up everything just to see her one last time. That day, she finally agreed. She told me to carry the phone with me into the hostel basement. Walking through the basement covered in phone lines, I maintained a conversation with her on the phone. I asked for her location. Suddenly she told me to turn around...”

The old man’s wrinkles folded together. His eyes dimmed.

“I did and realized the phone was not connected to anything. The phone lines had been snipped. The voice never came from the phone to begin with. It was from inside my heart. The phone never rang, it was not connected, it could not have rung! I have been talking to myself. Do you know... when a person’s desire crosses a certain threshold, it will change. My yearning morphed into a curse and manifested on this hostel’s phones. It went out of control. Through the phone lines, it fed on the guests’ despair and regurgitated it back onto me, stripping me of my kindness. Like what I told myself, there was no hope in this world. She never did reach out to me, I was only fooling myself.”

Tears slid down the old man’s face, he started to bawl like a child. Han Fei had no idea how long the old man had been trapped here, perhaps there were many souls in the same state as he was in the cryptic world.

“Sir, honestly, I have no idea whether there is hope in this world or not.” Squatting down, Han Fei studied the old man quietly, “But if there is no hope in this world, then we shall create one on our own!”

He ordered the paper doll to replace the heart back into the old man’s chest. “I will return to you your desire and I hope that you’ll return my friends back to me.”

The old man’s face colored with complicated emotions. The heart that was connected to all the phone lines beat in his heart again. The old man’s hands went to his chest. He pulled back all the phone lines that weaved through the mass grave. Each of the phone lines carried the voice of a despairing soul.

“Big brother!” Firefly rushed to Drake’s side. The weak Drake caressed Firefly’s face. He crawled up with difficulty. His only eye was filled with appreciation as he turned to Han Fei.

“There’s no need to thank me.” Han Fei used Soul-Depth Touch to help Drake up from the ground. “There’s no need for that between families.”

Get up to date on the translation of the latest raw by joining patreon ?