

## Iyashikei 161

### Chapter 161:

Xin Lu old city was particularly noisy that night, people even appeared to have more smiles on their faces. Passing through the crowds, Han Fei took a cab to arrive at the destination given by Director Jiang, it was a rather upscale restaurant. He rode the elevator to the 16th floor. Once the door opened, he saw the floor manager standing at the corridor in his best suit. He happily led Han Fei to the biggest booth on the 16th floor. Before he entered the room, Han Fei could already hear the laughter coming from inside the room.

Han Fei had a smile on his face as he pushed the door open. He greeted everyone politely and found a quiet corner to sit down. He did not like the spotlight and was not used to being the centre of attention. In contrast, Zhan Yueyue was like fish in the water. He helped maintain a lively atmosphere by making people smile, it was little wonder that he was so popular on variety shows. The casts of Twin Flower were easy to work with. Han Fei did not put up airs, Zhan Yueyue and Mian Nian were easy going people too. They mixed well with the crew. At 7.50 pm, when it was 10 minutes away from the premiere, the waiters pushed the serving carts into the room. The alcohol and drinks were served. The trailers for Twin Flowers were already playing on the large projector screen. But so far Director Jiang's VIP guest was still a no-show, his seat was conspicuously empty.

"Director, how about we start on our own first?" The floor manager walked to Director Jiang's side.

"Wait a minute, I'll make another call." Just as Director Jiang took out his phone, noisy footsteps came from outside the booth. Soon the door opened and a middle-aged man who looked about Director Jiang's age walked in with a handsome male actor. The middle-aged man was short and rotund, he was impeccably dressed but for some reason, there was something sleazy about him.

"Jiang Yi, I'm so sorry for being late." The middle-aged man shook Jiang Yi's hand. "I've been quite busy later. A few of my films have been nominated so I've been requested to show up at many different award ceremonies, it's quite annoying."

"Qian Cheng, I've seen your new film, it's not bad." The director was called Qian Cheng, he was currently one of the most famous actors in the thriller genre. Even though he did not have any representative titles, he won with quantity over quality. Every one of his projects earned money and thus many companies were fighting to work with him.

“Attending those ceremonies was just something I have to do. The limit of thrillers is right there, there’s nothing we can do about it.” The man’s voice was laced with pride. When the entire market for thriller movies was less than optimistic, his projects were always able to turn a profit, that was how good he was. “Right, this right here is an actor who just came from a ceremony with me, Wu Li. We’ve cooperated on many different films. He’s also the only actor to be nominated for best new actor with a thriller.”

“Please, have a seat.” Director Jiang did not expect the man would bring an actor with him. Looks like this was the way the director intended to reject Jiang Yi’s suggestion. He already had an actor he used to work with, he did not need any other recommendation. The middle-aged director chatted happily with everyone at the table, he was too socially experienced to let the awkwardness settle. However, the male actor beside him clearly was bored by this whole event. Many big films would book an entire floor to celebrate and the premiere would have a professional host but Twin Flowers not only did not have a host, the crew’s treasurer hesitated for a long time before he cleared the budget to book this booth.

After everyone was seated, the projector screen started to show the data provided by the online cinema platform. In that month, there were 47 new dramas and movies being released. The platform had limited resources. Most of the films were like pebbles dropped into the ocean after they were released. They created little ripple and nothing more. That was often the case for many thriller-type horror films. There were only a few which could garner the viewers’ attention but that was only because they were bombarded by negative reviews. Such was the environment for horror-type movies. On the ranking for horror movies, the top 10 was still dominated by the classics released years ago.

The competition on the platform was normally within love story, fantasy adventure, family drama but a black horse had cut its way up the most anticipated movie of the month. Its genre of thriller was so markedly different from everything else on the ranking. Without any promotion and with a budget much lower than other projects, Twin Flowers was placed number 2 on the most anticipated ranking, it was just slightly behind Wu Wu Entertainment’s Secret Urban Romance.

“Jiang Yi, your film has an impressive lead, you’ll probably break my film’s premiere release record.” Qian Cheng praised but internally he did not think this was that impressive. The man assumed Jiang Yi had thrown money to get on the ranking, everyone could have done that. Even a pile of shit could get on the most anticipatory ranking with money thrown behind it. The VIP viewership was the real yardstick to decide whether it was a lucrative film or not.

“I remember during the premiere of your Female Hostel No. 4, the VIP viewership for the first day was 230000.” Jiang Yi raised his glass.

“Female Hostel No. 4 was the peak of my career, I was unable to break that record until now.” Qian Cheng sighed. “Thriller and horror are after all unpopular subjects, the ceiling is only so high. But your film has such great promotion, I believe you’ll break 30000 VIP viewership easily.”

“Then I hope that you’re right.” Director Jiang glanced at Wu Li who sat beside Qian Cheng. He planned to say a few things about Han Fei, “Ol’ Qian, the main character for our project is very good. His acting skill is perfect. He’s one of the reasons why Twin Flowers got so many people talking.”

“I’ve heard about him, a young man with great potential. But I hear that he’s in a legal problem with Wu Wu Entertainment? The latter claims that they are going to investigate his breach of contract or something like that?”

“Rumors, those are definitely rumors!” Director Jiang was about to call Han Fei over but when he heard what Qian Cheng said, his face dropped, “Ol’ Qian, how long you’ve been in this business already? Couldn’t you tell what’s real and what’s fake?”

“Of course, of course. Come, let’s drink!” Qian Cheng quickly changed the subject. By then 8 o’clock arrived. Han Fei’s first movie, Twin Flowers was premiering on all online cinema platforms!

On the large projector screen, the left side was showing the movie while the right side showed the backstage data for Twin Flowers from all online viewing platforms. In just the few seconds it took for Qian Cheng to pick up the wine glass from the table and put it to his lips, the VIP Viewership for Twin Flowers had passed 10000!

Many internet users were waiting for this moment. The viewership continued to climb. With ease, it left the other 47 films released in the same period in the dust!

With his eyes twitching and his fatty cheeks trembling, Qian Cheng placed the wine glass down. His throat burned! His eyes watered! His heart flamed! “Tsh...” Tonight’s alcohol was rather strong!

The whole booth was silent, everyone was staring at the viewership which was still rocketing. It broke 30000 in a minute, 100000 in 6 minutes. When it was at the 19th minute mark, the overall online viewership was already over 230000!

Qian Cheng looked at the projected data dumbly. He could not believe it. His presumed ceiling was just the starting point for Twin Flowers!

Picking up the napkin, Qian Cheng wiped away his sweat as he looked around to locate Han Fei. As a professional commercial flick director, he sniffed the smell of money.

Half an hour after its premiere, Twin Flowers' overall online viewership had broken through the 300000 mark, Secret Urban Romance which was placed second only had 200000. Furthermore, the viewership for all the other films were already slowing down but the one for Twin Flowers was still growing. Initially they were focusing on the ranking for thriller and horror movies but now Twin Flowers had appeared on the overall ranking. In just a short hour, Twin Flowers' viewership had surpassed 500000.

Han Fei who played both roles also appeared on the popular searches. The last time he managed that was through his actions with the police but this time, it was because of his acting. The man had perfectly characterized the dual-character of Meng Changan and Meng Changxi. Even the smallest details exuded the contrasting characters' personality. The viewers were shocked that a comedy actor could have such a wide acting range. His characters were complicated, maddening but absolutely charming.

On the popularity ranking, both Han Fei and Twin Flowers continued to climb. Inside the booth, Director Jiang's phone suddenly rang. It was a very famous experienced director within the country. Director Jiang answered the phone in front of Qian Cheng. The old director very politely congratulated Director Jiang and then asked about Han Fei's scheduling information. The director's latest film had to do with criminal psychology and he had a character that he believed was suitable for Han Fei.

While Jiang Yi searched for Han Fei, both Mian Nian and the floor manager's phones rang. The previously quiet booth became so rowdy.

"Mian Nian! Pass your phone to Han Fei now! Ask for his intention to join us You Long Culture, we are open for all kinds of negotiations!"

"Hi, we are from Qian Ding Entertainment. We would like to talk to Han Fei, he hasn't signed to any other company, right?"

"Yueyue, is your film's male main character there? I hear he hasn't joined any agency."

“Brother Liu, you’re the floor manager for Twin Flowers, right? Give your phone to Director Jiang! His line has been busy!”

The booth was chaotic, everyone was searching for Han Fei but Han Fei was not around.

The wind ruffled his hair. Han Fei had long left the booth. He walked down the corridor and stood beside the open window. He could hear the phone ringing from inside the booth and his name being mentioned repeatedly. “Now I should have the qualification to tell everyone I’m an actor, yes?”

Staring out at the beautiful city outside the window, Han Fei’s eyes eventually fell on the glass. He looked at himself inside the mirror and was reminded of his past. He’d spent a decade honing his craft, finally it had come into fruition!

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For most internet users, the name Han Fei was very unfamiliar. His fans followed him on social media not because of his acting but because of his act of heroism. But as Twin Flowers premiered, everything changed. The explosive result shocked everyone in the industry. When was the last time a horror flick surpassed the films in the other genre in viewership?

The talent scouts and managers kept contacting the crew. The audience who was swept off their feet by Han Fei’s acting skill searched for the actor’s information online. Helping the police close a cold case from a decade ago; saving a reporter and managing to apprehend a fugitive; ability to not lose his cool during the less-than-stellar online reception at his movie press conference. Any of these things would have been turned into great publicity fodder by other celebrities, but Han Fei did not once try to make a topic out of himself. The more they found out about this man, the greater the public curiosity. There appeared to be endless secrets on Han Fei. There were practically no details on Han Fei’s personal life. There was no gossip on Han Fei. This newcomer who was not affiliated to any agency practically dropped out from the sky.

Some of the bigger entertainment youtubers and bloggers were approached to be interviewed on Han Fei, but they too were stumped. These people knew that Han Fei had once assisted the police but they had no idea he had such good acting skills too! There was no one in his age range that had his acting capability. The actor carried a unique presence about him, a presence that no one else could have simulated!

Only he could play the characters, or rather, only Han Fei could bring these characters to life. Beyond the normal internet users, many paparazzi were set loose into the waters. They wanted to grab the first big scoop on Han Fei. Facing the wave of private messages and bribery to purchase Han Fei's dirt, finally a senior entertainment reporter released a public statement on his public platform, "Please do not come to ask me about this actor's information anymore!"

"This actor is really something else! Since he started the shoot, I've spent a whole week trailing him but the man spends most of his time either at work or at home gaming!"

"The man has no social activity so where are we going to get any scoop?!"

"On the day of their wrap-up party, I thought he would finally loosen himself but reality proved that I was too naïve.

"That day, I stayed under his building until 3 am. I couldn't stand it anymore so I went to the nearby convenience store to grab a can of coffee. I noticed someone was also watching Han Fei's building, I assumed it was one of us so I went to greet them. The first thing I was asked was whether I knew a Butterfly or not. I thought this Butterfly was a new celebrity, it'd be so shameful to admit that I wasn't following on the latest news as an entertainment reporter so I grumbled a yes, but 30 seconds later, I kid you not, 2 police cruisers came rolling down the streets!

"I still shiver thinking about it! That was my first-time riding in the back of the police cruiser and it was because I bragged to the plainclothes police that I knew someone whom I did not!"

These testimonials only got the public even more interested in Han Fei. To have a paparazzi post a public statement to shield his reputation, this Han Fei was one of his kinds.

The popularity of Han Fei and Twin Flowers continued to climb. It was worth-noting that this was only the first day of the premiere, less than 12 hours had passed. Han Fei's own social media account had surpassed 10000 followers. The growth was unimaginable. Han Fei considered opening a membership option. Reading the comments left on his wall, the praises and compliments he just received in the past 1 hour was more than the compliments he had gotten in the past 25 years. Many comments warmed his heart and his inner shield started to lower imperceptibly.

Han Fei was honestly nervous about how people would react to Twin Flowers, but seeing the positive reviews and comments, Han Fei felt joy. He tried but failed to form a sincere smile but at least he knew he was experiencing happiness. It was at that moment that the black box in Han Fei's mind started to change. Only those embraced by misfortune could carry the black box and their life would worsen after gaining the black box but Han Fei appeared to be an exception.

"Big brother, why are you standing out here alone?! So many people are looking for you!" Director Jiang and the floor manager ran out from the booth holding their phones. They searched the whole booth but failed to find Han Fei. They were the first to think about searching for the man outside.

"It was rather noisy in there so I came out here to take a breather." Han Fei answered with the usual placid smile on his face.

"There's a big director on the phone for you! He wants you to be a part of his new film! Quick! He's been waiting for a long time already!" Director Jiang hurriedly passed the phone to Han Fei. Behind Director Jiang, there was a long line of people looking at Han Fei with phones in their hands. Since Han Fei was spotted outside the booth, most had come out to find him. Therefore, the corridor became quite crowded and the booth rather deserted. Staring at the viewership that was still growing, the young actor, Wu Li coughed drily before reaching out to nudge Qian Cheng. "Director, did you bring me here so that it wouldn't be so awkward after you've made such an embarrassment of yourself?"

"I... What do you mean? Have I said anything wrong?" Qian Cheng put down the glass and glanced at Wu Li beside him. With a sorry smile, Wu Li answered honestly, "Basically everything that you have said was not right. Earlier Jiang Yi just got a call from Director Zhang, the great director has personally named Han Fei to join his cast."

"Wait, the Director Zhang who sat in the front row at the award ceremony that we attended this afternoon?"

"Yes, the Director Zhang whom you tried to take a photo with but was halted by his security."

The more Qian Cheng thought about it, the more uncomfortable he felt. He dragged Wu Li and sneaked to the exit. At that moment, he heard Han Fei reject Director Jiang's offer on the phone. "Director Zhang, thank you so much for your kindness but I have to stay at Xin Lu City because I need to cooperate with the law enforcement. Before the real culprit is captured, I need to stay at Xin Lu City within their protection." Han Fei was telling the truth and his reason was very objective. Director Zhang gave his

understanding but hoped that they would have a chance to cooperate in the future. When the people in the corridor heard Han Fei reject Director Zhang, they could not believe their ears.

“Han Fei, are you sure about this?” Jiang Yi was thinking of Han Fei’s future.

“Safety first. I will only take projects shot within Xin Lu for now.” Without even knowing it, Han Fei had morphed from someone who was picked to someone who could pick. His attitude changed. “We should go back. We shan’t block the corridor, it’ll disturb the patrons in the other booths.” Han Fei led everyone back into the booth. Everyone followed him and they ran into Qian Cheng and Wu Li who were leaving.

Being stared at by so many eyes, Qian Cheng’s lips twitched awkwardly. He teetered between leaving and staying behind before he walked over to Han Fei, “Congratulations! Your movie’s viewership today will form a new record and it’ll be hard for other horror films to surpass it! That’s incredible!”

“Well, records are just data. Furthermore, aren’t records meant to be broken?” Han Fei walked past Qian Cheng and started to discuss a new movie with Jiang Yi. To return justice to the souls in the cryptic world and to gain their friendliness, Han Fei planned to start a series of movies inspired by real life cases. He wanted to bring light to cases related to the cryptic world. Then he’d find people to help him bring the movies into Perfect Life’s surface world. Using Spirit Farer, Han Fei would have these players transport the movie into the cryptic world. This was a long and time-consuming process but to bring a little hope to the souls in the cryptic world, it was all worth it.

For many people, they had to try very hard not to be changed by the world. But Han Fei had chosen a path even harder. He tumbled into the cryptic world like a moth flying into a flame. In the place forever claimed by darkness, he would raise a touch, to show those in the dark, there was still light in this world.

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Taking in Han Fei who stood before him, Jiang Yi’s heart filled with emotions. For most actors, when they reached a certain level of fame, they would try their best to turn that into money, by taking sponsorship, advertisement. They’d actively go searching for a director with better resources, to join a bigger crew. However Jiang Yi did not feel such an intention from Han Fei. After a project was completed, no matter how famous it got, the man’s first concern was to work on the next project.



“Director Jiang, perhaps we can turn more similar cases into a series. Human jigsaw puzzle case will be our first, we can consider working on a story inspired by Yi Ming Private Academy’s ghost stories next. All the films will be connected by the Butterfly. We’ll work on it part by part.” Han Fei shared his own plan. “With the experience from adapting the human jigsaw case into Twin Flowers, the succeeding adaptations will be a lot easier. Furthermore, with the result from Twin Flowers, I believe Sister Long will be willing to support us, after all, I don’t think anyone will purposely go against money.”

“Han Fei, you didn’t just reject Director Zhang because you wish to adapt these cases, did you?” Jiang Yi admired Han Fei but the director wished for the man to have a bigger stage to shine.

“No, I was not lying when I said that I could not leave Xin Lu.” Han Fei did not continue this topic but instead he pulled the balding scriptwriter over, “Guys, I hope we can familiarize ourselves with old cases that happened at Yi Ming Private Academy. We should start on them as early as we can.” The balding writer initially had many issues with Han Fei but the latter’s deeds convinced him that Han Fei only had professional concerns, so he had no problems with the actor now.

Since they did not get to gather in a relaxed environment often, the crew chatted and enjoyed themselves. Han Fei did not rain on their parade by rambling on about work. He too joined in their celebration and stayed until 11 pm.

When he reached home, Han Fei splashed himself on his face with cold water to clear his mind. “The money from the movie should come soon, I’ll use the money to buy an actual gaming hub. That should enable me to stay in the game longer without hurting my posture.” The gaming hub designed by Deep Space Tech and Immortal Pharma had many functions, it was good for health as well. However, it also came with a preposterous price tag.

Han Fei sat on his bed at around 11.30 pm. He connected all the wires. When he was ready to enter the game, his phone suddenly vibrated. “Jin Jun? How can I help you?”

“Congratulations on the premiere! Brother, you’ve blasted right through the stratosphere,” Jin Jun sounded very excited. Even as a senior paparazzi, Han Fei’s career trajectory was something he had not encountered before.

“Thank you, is there anything else?” Han Fei was about to hop into the game.

“My people just got another call. Wu Wu Entertainment is doubling their offer just to get some dirt on you. They’ve approached other paparazzi as well.” Jin Jun chuckled bitterly, “As I’ve said, they’ll be kicking themselves if your movie gets famous. But now, from what I hear, your former agency is not only kicking themselves, they’re crazily mad. The movie, Secret Urban Romance, that they’ve invested in has 13 times your budget just on promotions and advertisements alone. But even so, their result is so much worse than yours. I doubt any of them will be able to sleep tonight with the ball of rage burning inside them.”

“Let them rage.” Han Fei said calmly. “Just keep them dangling for now. After a while, I will leak some ‘news’ to you, I won’t make life hard for your people.” Han Fei managed to survive for so long in the cryptic world because he had a quick mind. He already had a plan forming. He’d leak false news and allow Wu Wu Entertainment to make a big deal out of it. After they helped him get people talking, he’d come out with a counter-attack.

“Wu Wu Entertainment is considered a rather famous company within the industry but you are still alone. For the sake of security, I think you should join a company.” Jin Jun really cared about Han Fei to say these things.

“That’s not within my plan for now. Alright, if there’s nothing else, I’m going to hang up now, okay?”

“You have to be careful, Wu Wu Entertainment has poured a lot of investment into Secret Urban Romance but everything that they should have gotten was taken away by Twin Flowers. They will do everything within their power to knock you down! To be perfect honestly, this industry is much dirtier than it appears. No one other than the paparazzi knows better.” Jin Jun reminded Han Fei again.

“I’ll be careful.”

After Han Fei hung up, he just sat back down when his phone vibrated again. This time, the caller was Huang Yin. “Brother Huang? How can I help you?”

“I just watched your new movie! It’s so good! Is the story inside it real? You were helping the police with the human jigsaw case, weren’t you?!” Huang Yin was as excited as ever.

“Yes, the plot is adapted from the actual case.”

“To have helped the police with such a dangerous case, brother, I knew I was right to place my trust in you!” Huang Yin guffawed heartily, “I never believed in destiny, but now I realized everything happens for a reason.”

“What reason?”

“Do you still remember the cryptic world that I told you about in Perfect Life? The hidden map that I’ve found?” Huang Yin lowered his voice like they were discussing something highly confidential.

“I do.”

“Brother, I’ve decided to share my biggest secret with you.” Huang Yin took a deep breath. “The passage that goes to the hidden map is right at my house’s toilet. If you’re free tonight, we can go explore it together.”

“Tonight?”

“Yes! That hidden map is a nightmare, it is filled with ghosts, monsters and murderers. I really don’t have the guts to return there on my own so I wish for you to join my group!” Huang Yin said seriously.

“Brother Huang, I am so sorry but tonight is my crew’s celebratory party, so I won’t be in game. But if there’s a chance in the future, I’ll definitely party up with you.” Han Fei was already trapped inside a hidden map, he couldn’t leave it even if he wanted too. But he could summon Huang Yin into Yi Ming Private Academy so they could have a reunion there.

“Understood, you deserve the break. Enjoy yourself, we’ll schedule this another time.”

“Thank you, Brother Huang.”

“By the way, I heard that in another half a month, Perfect Life will end its 6th CB, we’ll have to try to enter the hidden map again before the OB begins.” Huang Yin dropped another news for Han Fei.

“The game will enter OB in another half a month?” Han Fei’s eyes slowly narrowed. After the photon computer took over the management, the era of Han Fei would truly begin. If he survived, he’d live to welcome a new world. After finishing the chat with Huang Yin, Han Fei glanced at the time and put on the gaming helmet. Blood soaked everything. When the familiar chill curled around his heart, Han Fei opened his eyes.

In the darkened corridor, there was still a light echo of strange footsteps. This was the 3rd floor hostel corridor. Sneaking into the bathroom, Han Fei took out the red uniform from his inventory and called Xu Qin’s name. Hearing Han Fei’s voice, Xu Qin’s black shadow poked its head out from the corner. While Han Fei was offline, it must have consumed something else because it had grown bigger. It was now a large anaconda.

“Don’t just eat. I don’t see you charging ahead in battles.” Han Fei chided the shadow as he rubbed its head. He sighed, “You’re best at eating, there’s no doubt about that.” The giant snake snuggled up to Han Fei and it was lazy to move. It allowed Han Fei to mold its head into different shapes. After having the shadow trail around him, Han Fei led it downstairs.

“I wonder what has happened to Zhang Guanxing, I hope he’s fine.” Han Fei did not need to walk so far down the stairs to smell the blood in the air. He looked around and realized there were more blood stains on the walls and steps.

“When I first arrived here, the interior at least still looks rather normal. The hostel manager and Ma Manjiang’s sons still possess the appearance of normal humans. There were also lights in the corridors.

“On the second day, the lights in the corridors went out. The hostel manager and the kids have all gone missing, all that remains were only ghosts and Zhang Guanxing who accidentally stumbled his way into this place.

“Now, on the 3rd day, something has changed in the hostel again. It feels even more dangerous than before.”

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Blood slid down the gaps in the wall, the smell lingered in the air and the corridors were eerily quiet. Han Fei did not know what happened at the hostel after he got offline but things felt extremely

ominous. Afraid of staying at a place for too long, Han Fei found his way down the stairs carefully. When he reached the landing between the 2nd and 3rd floor, an indiscernible sound came from the 4th floor. It sounded like flesh splatting against the floor. The sticky and wet sound repeated uncomfortably down the steps.

The smell of blood in the air thickened. Han Fei closed his mouth and nose. He moved faster but when he reached the second floor and glanced down the steps, his body froze. There was someone standing in the landing between the 1st and 2nd floor.

He stood right there in the staircase, facing away from Han Fei. His body was strangely contorted. 'Something doesn't feel right.' Walking alone inside a creepy building was already scary enough but the scarier thing was to run into a stranger during your exploration. Instead of approaching the man, Han Fei silently retreated.

'There are staircases on both sides of the corridors, there is no reason for me to accost him. My most immediate concern is Zhang Guanxing's safety.' That was Han Fei's plan but when he turned his face to look down the 2nd floor corridor, there was also a person standing in the middle of it.

Similarly, this man stood facing away from Han Fei and did not budge. 'The fuck?!' Focusing his eyes on the man's back, Han Fei slowly noticed a problem. Even though the man had not conspicuously moved, somehow he had gotten closer to Han Fei!

'Is this the same man as the one inside the staircase? He's very different from the other ghosts I've met in this hostel.' Han Fei was a peaceful person, he'd rarely go on the offensive especially when his own safety could not be guaranteed. Han Fei moved his eyes slowly back towards the staircase.

The man who previously occupied the space in the staircase had disappeared. But when Han Fei turned his head back, the man inside the 2nd floor corridor had moved closer.

Han Fei was reminded of a game he once played at the orphanage, it was called the traffic light game. Basically one person was to act as the red traffic light, whenever he turned to face the other players, they would have to stop. The game was over when one of the players managed to touch the traffic light without being caught, or all the other players were caught moving during the red light.

With his eyes fixed on the man, Han Fei walked backwards down the stairs with his hands on the wall.

Due to the extra blood and dirty stains, the walls of the staircase were slippery. The strange sound from the 4th floor was still there. The smell of blood became more pungent. Under such circumstances, Han Fei kept a safe distance from the other man. He slowly nudged his feet until he reached the 1st floor corridor.

When he arrived, he noticed that the smell of blood was thickest at the 1st floor. The entrance of the hostel was posted with many things, including unfinished exam papers, stained clothes and unknown talismans.

The hostel manager's office which was closest to the front door was not spared. The windows were all shattered. The previously clean and well-made bed was covered in bloody handprints. The notes of 'appreciations' were torn into pieces, trampled fruits scattered on the ground.

Han Fei's original plan was to enter the office to find the key but with the man on his tail, he could not afford to let himself be distracted. With his eyes on the man's back, Han Fei moved backwards down the 1st floor corridor. He maintained a constant safe distance with the man.

Silently counting the number of the rooms he had passed, when Han Fei reached the door of Room 104, he knocked on it lightly, "Zhang Guanxing? Are you in there?" There was no reply.

'Something wouldn't have happened to him, would it?' It was dangerous to stand there in the corridor. Fixing his eyes on the man following him, Han Fei whispered again, "Guanxing, it's really me. I've once said that I would not give up on any of my students, no matter whether they are males or females."

After Han Fei said that, footsteps came from inside the room and a gap eased open. "Sir, it really is you!" Zhang Guanxing hid behind the door. The expression on his face changed from anxiety to excitement, it was like he had just reunited with his long lost family.

"Caution is a virtue, you have done well." Han Fei entered Room 104 with the snake. After the door closed, he sighed slightly in relief.

"Sir, I really didn't think I would ever see you again!" Zhang Guanxing was happy to see Han Fei, his joy was undisguised.

“What exactly happened here when I was gone?” Han Fei leaned against the door and perked his ears to pay attention to the sounds outside the room.

“Everyone at this hostel has gone insane.” Fear entered the man’s eyes. “Screams echoed down the corridors and inexplicable things emerged from darkness. Some of the bedroom doors were forced open and none of the students managed to escape.”

“How did you manage to survive if it was so dangerous yesterday night?” Han Fei was quite impressed.

“I’ve hidden myself inside this room. Yesterday, people came to knock on my door, they pretended to be students asking for help. I almost fell for their tricks but I managed to keep still and didn’t move.”

“They?”

“I recognized three distinct voices. They were boys, arguing and fighting with each other. They were cunning and cruel.”

‘That has to be Ma Manjiang’s 3 sons.’ Han Fei was not too worried about those 3. He was more concerned about Ma Manjiang himself. According to the police, Ma Manjiang had gone missing, Han Fei had no idea whether he’d run into the man in the game or not.

“The 3 kids appear to purposely go after Yi Ming Private Academy’s students. They have some way of telling their locations. I was spared probably because I was already expelled and wasn’t considered a student here anymore.” Zhang Guanxing was very careful and clever. He had a bright future, he merely took the wrong path.

“When did the chaos stop?”

“About a few hours ago,” Zhang Guanxing thought about it and added, “Before it settled down, the front door was opened and something entered the hostel.”

“We have some new arrivals with us?” Han Fei thought about the man he encountered in the stairwell. “Guanxing, have you heard any story about a man with his face always turned away? I encountered such a man when I was coming down the stairs earlier, he has been following me since.”

“You know what, I think I heard something like that from a first year student before but I always thought it was just a story!”

“A story told by a first year student?” Han Fei believed that first year student was Jin Sheng, “Do you mind telling me more about it?”

“There was a senior who had a crush on a girl at school. The girl reciprocated his feelings so they got together quickly. The male senior came from a bad family, his parents were divorced and his father had serious violent tendencies. For the senior, his only family was not his father but his girlfriend.

“He shared his pain and humiliation with the girl and promised to give her happiness. But after the school found out about their relationship, it became a big deal. In the end, the senior voluntarily dropped out from school to protect his girlfriend. He took on all the blame.

“After the senior dropped out, he maintained contact with the girl. They promised that they would work hard and get married after they both had stable careers. It was a sweet and innocent promise but they both really put their hearts into it.

“However, the couple’s happiness was broken again. One day, the senior was unable to contact his girlfriend. He sneaked back into school to ask for an explanation. If the girl had moved on, he would take it in stride. He didn’t want to hold the girl back either.

“Nonetheless, the senior was unable to find his girlfriend. People whom he asked refused to talk to him. Eventually, one of the girl’s friends passed him a note. It said that he should go to the rooftop of the education block that night.

“The senior did not think much of it, he just wanted to see his girlfriend. No one knew what happened up there but the next morning, there was a body discovered inside the school the next morning.



“The senior fell down from the roof. His spine snapped and his neck was twisted 180 degrees as his eyes stared transfixed at the rooftop of the education block.

“From that day onwards, some of the students claimed they would run into a person standing facing away from them in the corridor.”

Han Fei was confused after he heard Zhang Guanxing’s story. He studied Zhang Guanxing and realized with a shock that the tattoo on the young man’s arm had disappeared.

Chapter 165:

“Guanxing, what happened to the tattoo on your arm?” Han Fei took a silent step back.

“I don’t know.” Zhang Guanxing was confused, “After I got separated from you, the tattoo became lighter and lighter. When the hostel front door opened, the tattoo faded away fully.”

“When the hostel front door opened?” Han Fei used Soul-Depth Touch to examine Zhang Guanxing’s arm. The young man before him was indeed Zhang Guanxing, the emotions that Han Fei read from him were similar to before. “Guanxing, that ghost which you mentioned, has it ever appeared inside this hostel building before?”

“Never, since the senior died at the education block, the students only saw him at that block. Apparently, he was still roaming the education block, looking for his girlfriend.”

“In other words, the senior probably got into this building when the hostel front door opened yesterday night. And after he did that, the tattoo on your arm fully disappeared?”

“Yes, I guess you can say that.” Zhang Guanxing had no idea what Han Fei was trying to imply.

“Why did you get that tattoo in the first place?” Han Fei lowered his voice and sat on the bed with Zhang Guanxing, “Our age difference is not that big, so I hope you won’t see me as a person of authority, please treat me more like a friend. I promise I will not reveal your secrets to others.”

After a long hesitation, Zhang Guanxing answered, "It's because of my mother. She abandoned me and my father, and left me to fend for myself against my father. My father only knew how to turn to drink and then vent his anger on me. My former friends turned against me when they found out about my family situation, they mocked me, calling me names." Zhang Guanxing's fists tightened. "I hate all of them and I hate this world, why should I bear all the misfortunes? I do not wish for anything too impossible, I just want to be like a normal kid, but it won't even give me that. The world will only bully me again and again! I see no hope at all."

Reaching out to pat Zhang Guanxing on his back, Han Fei gave a few words of consolation and then added, "You said you hate everything about this world, but I'm sure there are exceptions... What about your girlfriend, Chuxia?"

When the name Chuxia was mentioned, Zhang Guanxing's expression softened. "I don't hate her, she is the only one who is willing to believe in me. Of course, sir, I don't hate you either." Zhang Guanxing had completely blanked out on his own death, he only remembered the good memory he shared with Chuxia. Narrowing his eyes, Han Fei noticed the similarity between Zhang Guanxing and Meng Si. They had both forgotten about their deaths, their most despairing memory to retain their humanity. Han Fei suspected the previous manager had done something to Zhang Guanxing as well. If that was the case, he might be able to find the clues about the previous manager from Zhang Guanxing.

When Han Fei heard the story told by Zhang Guanxing, he already noticed something was wrong. Zhang Guanxing was telling his own story. The monster that faced away from people was probably the manifestation of his own resentment and hatred.

"When the thing who faces away from people appeared, the tattoo on your arm disappeared, could there be a connection between the two of you?" Han Fei prompted.

"A connection?" Zhang Guanxing slowly moved his eyes to his arm like he could not remember having a tattoo there in the first place. He was about to shake his head when something slammed into the door of Room 104. It was not a soft knocking, it sounded more like someone had slammed their entire body into the door!

"Notification for Player 0000! You've triggered Grade G Hidden Mission—The Face Facing Away from You.

“The Face Facing Away from You: I exposed my back to you but you pushed me down the abyss. You were so afraid when you saw my neck move but to tell the truth, I merely did that because I wanted to take one last look at you.

“Mission Requirement: Do not let it stick to your back in the next half an hour.

“This is a time-limited mission.”

When the system rang out, Han Fei instantly became highly alert. ‘Do not let it stick to my back? That sounds horrifying.’

“Sir, what’s wrong?”

“Be careful! The thing is just outside the door!” Han Fei dragged Zhang Guanxing deeper into the room.

Bang! Another heavy slam into the door. The door shivered like it could fall down at any moment. “The door won’t hold on much longer.” Han Fei moved the bed, table and other furniture to block behind the door. While he was doing that, he noticed blood leaking through the door. To make things scarier, the sound of bones snapping came from outside the door, the monster seemed to possess the ability to freely transmute its body. The smell of blood was the thickest it had ever been. The blood and crushed bones squeezed through the gap. They dripped onto the ground and dyed Room 104 red. Han Fei and Guanxing retreated until they were up against the balcony, the heavily rusted anti-theft net trapped them inside the room.

“Sir, what should we do now?”

“I need you to stand behind me. Do not move from my back no matter what happens, leave the rest to me.” Han Fei still could not leave the game so if he failed this mission, it would be game over. He was more nervous than he had ever been. His heart pounded and his hands were slick with sweat. The monster’s flesh and blood squeezed through the gap. The rotten flesh wiggled within its pool of blood, the sight of it numbed Han Fei’s skull. The heady smell of blood dulled their mind. The broken flesh and bones slowly meshed back together. A twisted figure appeared inside Room 104. It stood facing away from Han Fei. Its back was slanted to one side as if its spine was bent.

The small bedroom was oppressively silent. The monster slowly sucked up the blood on the ground and its body became more complete. Being in such close proximity to the monster, Han Fei realized the monster was indeed similar to Zhang Guanxing but the monster wore a Yi Ming Private Academy uniform. Han Fei's eyes slowly moved to the monster's arm. Underneath the tattered clothes, Han Fei managed to make out the tattoo of the word, Hatred. The tattoo was carved out by fingernail. The wounds did not heal and it oozed out black blood. 'Why would it have the same tattoo on its arm as Zhang Guanxing?'

Han Fei was about to move back further when he felt his back bump into Zhang Guanxing. Han Fei heard Zhang Guanxing turn around.

Unbeknownst to Han Fei, the young man was staring transfixed at the monster inside the bedroom. The light in his eyes rapidly faded and in its place was confusion and pain.

"I have not seen this person's back before so how come he feels so familiar to me? I can see his despair and pain. Every single bone in his body is broken, he cannot control his own movement. Listening to the wind howling in his ears, even if his neck would break, he needs to turn his head around." Zhang Guanxing's voice darkened. He gripped his arm and his nails dug into his skin. "I remember him, I know him..."

The bones creaked, Zhang Guanxing's body was twisting into the abnormal shape of the monster. Han Fei stood between the two of them and his face was pale. However, he chose to trust Zhang Guanxing, in spite of the strange behavior of the young man, he did not turn around but kept his eyes on the monster before him. "Guanxing, there are people who are willing to place their belief in you. There is someone who is willing to offer up their life to save you, you are not alone anymore." Han Fei's voice echoed inside the bedroom. When Zhang Guanxing heard that, he grimaced with pain. The monster also reacted to Han Fei's proclamation. His neck made this awful cracking noise.

While keeping his body facing away from Han Fei, the monster slowly turned his head around. Eventually Han Fei saw the monster's face, it was similar to Zhang Guanxing but the face was covered in scars and blood leaked out from every orifice.

Chapter 166:

Resentment and pain were like chains piercing through flesh and skin, trapping the monster's soul. There was nothing but hatred left in his eyes. The tattoo on his arm bled as rancor ran through his veins. As his body slowly pieced together, the monster lifted his head to look at Han Fei. His arm creaked

noisily as he raised it up. The next moment, he disappeared. The bleeding visage then materialized before Han Fei, their noses almost touching. Han Fei was not expecting this lightning speed.

Han Fei needed to focus on Zhang Guanxing behind him, Han Fei needed to persuade the young man to calm down, to help him win over the resentment in his heart, to retain his humanity. The monster appeared to have read Han Fei's thought. Instead of playing the cat and mouse game, he decided to end the problem now. Han Fei could feel murderous intent from the monster. His every nerve shivered from the threat!

Fear and death were literally right before his eyes. Han Fei's throat trembled. His fractured mind quickly calculated how he was going to survive against the onslaught in relation to the remaining mission time. Zhang Guanxing was not yet complete. The humane part claimed the spot behind Han Fei... while the inhumane part stood before him. However, even if the monster was only operating on pure hatred, he was as powerful as a normal Lingering Spirit. Han Fei could not think of any other idea than to rely on the blood red doll to stop the man.

Staring down the face, Han Fei could read unresolvable resentment within the man's bleeding eyes. The eyes contained nothing that could be called human. It was a monster standing before Han Fei, a monster who had been stripped of his humanity. The horrible smell crawled into his nostrils. The cracked skull echoed hollowly as black blood trickled down the bridge of the nose.

The monster swung his raised arm at Han Fei's head. In the middle of the arc, the bone within the arm snapped to form a sharpened bone pike which lanced at Han Fei's forehead!

Han Fei did not flinch despite his fear. Using an efficient self-defence technique, he raised his arms to block the incoming blow.

The moment Han Fei's arms knocked away the monster's attack, the bones cracked noisily. Han Fei staggered back a few steps until he bumped into Zhang Guanxing. His left arm dangled weakly, a wide bruise surfaced on the skin. Pain jolted through him. Han Fei did not even have the chance to inspect the extent of the damage as the monster's arms flew and bound around Han Fei like ropes!

The black blood slathered Han Fei's skin. The hands twined around Han Fei's body before they met around the man's neck. The monster was going to crush Han Fei's air pipes. The monster could change his body at will, his bones and flesh could be reshaped depending on their purpose. But more than that, the monster's black blood and flesh also carried its own kind of poison.

Han Fei's skin which had come into contact with the monster's black blood started to darken. Yin energy seeped into Han Fei's body, Zhang Guanxing's resentment was changing and influencing Han Fei.

Pain came from all parts of his body. Han Fei could feel his mind wavering as oxygen was cut off from his brain. They were not on the same power level. Han Fei would be injured the moment he touched the monster and on top of that, the monster could manipulate his body at will. This was a landslide victory for the monster. Han Fei felt the pressure around his neck. He knew he could not hold on much longer. He opened the inventory and tried to summon the red paper doll when he heard a wail come from behind him!

Zhang Guanxing's arm was clawed until it dribbled with blood. The wound formed the Chinese character for Hatred. Zhang Guanxing behind Han Fei dug his five fingers into his flesh, his eyes were turning a murky red!

Pain, despair and endless hatred squeezed out the rationality in his eyes. His precious humanity was being consumed. His face kept twitching as he stared at the other version of himself inside the room. The tattoo was replaced by a ghastly wound. When the monster saw the change to Zhang Guanxing, he tossed Han Fei easily away and strode to stand before the other young man.

Zhang Guanxing appeared to see himself in a mirror of death as he stared at the bloody and ruined face. He saw his fated ending. The forgotten memory rushed back like waves. He reached out to grab the monster, to grab his 'own' back. There was not one bone that was not splintered. Yes, he remembered it now. Someone pushed against his back down the side of the building. His head was turned to look at his aggressor. As his body met the ground, he saw the face of the person at the rooftop.

He died because no one was there to look over his back. His nightmare was now reconstructed in a different way. The monster's head which was turned 180 degree cackled shrilly. As a manifestation of pure despair and hatred, he strode forward. The backs met and the monster's flesh and blood began to combine with Zhang Guanxing. The light in the young man's eyes dimmed. No matter how loud Han Fei called at him, he did not respond.

"No one trusted you in the past but I do now! I've always shown my back to you! Even when I thought I was going to be killed, I didn't turn my back away from you." Everything connected for Han Fei then. The mission description referred to the sad reality of Zhang Guanxing being betrayed by someone he trusted, someone whom he'd show his back to. Han Fei used the same method hopefully to show that he had complete trust in Zhang Guanxing and he was literally not going to turn his back from the young

man. Han Fei hoped to use that shared experience to stabilize Zhang Guanxing's humanity but he underestimated the young man's depth of hatred. His words and actions had no effect on the merging of the two Zhang Guanxing's. As they mixed, the resentment deepened.

'I have to stop this! After they join together, the Zhang Guanxing that I know will disappear forever.' Han Fei forced himself up with his right hand. He had to complete the mission not only to save himself but also for the sake of the poor boy. The blackened skin prickled like needles. The bruises contained the lingering poison of the monster's flesh and blood, they tormented Han Fei nonstop. The pain shot through his heart but Han Fei was surprisingly calm. He studied his body and noticed the skin covered by the ghost tattoo was unharmed. He tried to summon the ghost tattoo and a light hue of Yin energy surrounded his body. It helped lessen the pain somewhat.

'This is not enough.' Reaching towards the dark corner, Han Fei pressed Xu Qin's pet shadow onto his ghost tattoo. "Since you're not going to fight, mind lending me some of your power?" The shadow seemed to understand Han Fei's intention. After all, they were in the same boat. If Han Fei died, it would not survive on its own. The giant anaconda slithered out from the shadow, it slid along the ghost tattoo. A piercing chill shocked Han Fei's system. His own heartbeat was the only sense left in Han Fei's world. The beating was loud as drums. He tore off his shirt and it revealed a black anaconda gliding on his body.

Chapter 167:

Han Fei listened to his slowing heartbeat. His blood froze and black fog lingered around his eyes. Misfortune and curse danced around the man who was standing at the brink of insanity! The monster turned to look at Han Fei, he was close to merging with Zhang Guanxing.

"I know you hate this world, you know what, sometimes I hate too, that is why I won't ask you to put down that hatred, I merely wish that you do not torture yourself because of it. No matter how hard you punish yourself, those who hurt you will not feel a shred of guilt, the world will not shed a tear for you. If that is the case, why don't we try and attempt something else?" Green veins popped on the back of Han Fei's hands as the Yin energy around him grew. As if talking to himself, he walked to the bedroom door and picked up the black can. "I know it's hard to walk away from the past on your own, so let me help you. Allow your teacher a chance to help you overcome your hatred."

Han Fei gripped the rim of the can and darted at the monster. The arms gelled from flesh and blood swiped at Han Fei. The latter bent over to evade it and then pounced high into the air and smacked the can right against the monster's head!

The Grade G Cursed Item crashed into the monster's skull. The collision caused both the can and the monster's skull to echo!

Notes with wishes fluttered down to cover the monster's body. They got soaked by blood and stuck to the monster's flesh. During the process of assimilation, the monster's head was caved in by Han Fei. He screamed shrilly. The head swiftly turned to its target. The monster's arms were twisted into an impossible angle to grab at Han Fei. This time Han Fei did not choose evasion, instead he rushed into the attack and slammed the can into the offending arms!

Today, either the can or the monster would end up broken!

The black blood and flesh splattered on Han Fei's skin. They pierced through Han Fei's skin like needles. Even with the snake's protection, Han Fei could still feel the pain. However, the pain was within his acceptable threshold or rather the pain inadvertently helped pull the man back from the precipice of madness. Han Fei powered his way forward. As the monster's fingers drilled into Han Fei's body, Han Fei reached out to put a vise around the monster's neck. No one would have stood there and allowed his enemy to perform an offensive maneuver dumbly in combat, Han Fei only managed this by trading damage with his own body.

The arm suffused with Yin energy curled around the monster's neck. Han Fei combined Soul-Depth Touch with the negative energy inside the ghost tattoo. He applied his passive skills into practical martial arts. Before the monster could morph to slither out from his chokehold, Han Fei grabbed the monster's head and slammed it against the ground!

Zhang Guanxing was pulled along by the force. At the same time, the monster managed to inflict incredibly deep wounds on Han Fei's body. Without the black snake's protection, he would have died from the infiltration of Yin energy already.

"Zhang Guanxing!"

Han Fei leaned into the attack and the black can flew at the monster's head again, but this time the monster was prepared for it. His arm was contorted into a strange angle to grab at the can. However, Han Fei was already one step ahead of the monster. "Do you think I'll be dumb enough to use the same trick twice?"



As the monster reached for the can, Han Fei let go. Then he snaked his hand as quickly as possible towards the monster's mouth!

Resisting the pain that came from the wounds, Han Fei took out the paper doll from his inventory. He had prepared so long for this moment. Everything before was preparation and distraction, his real goal was to send the paper doll into the monster's body and had it go berserk! The plan worked!

Crimson blood leaked out from the monster's mouth and he struggled like mad. He wanted to dissolve his body but paper scraps appeared in the seams of his broken flesh and refused to budge. "Enjoy this Grade F Curse!"

Han Fei landed relentless punches on the monster's body, not taking any chances. His punches carried negative energy and prevented the monster from recuperating. Screams reverberated inside Room 104, no one would have thought there was someone punching a ghost inside it!

After swallowing the Grade F Cursed Object, strange things happened to the monster. He tried to escape but Han Fei was not giving him any opening. The monster did not expect things to turn out like this. His hatred slowly faded away as the red paper doll feasted on him. Han Fei turned to face Zhang Guanxing. The child had merged with part of the monster. While part of the monster's energy was siphoned away, it also awakened the young man's death memory. His eyes slowly turned red. There was no light, there was only pain.

"Open your eyes, we are already living at the lowest realm of hell. We have nothing more to lose so why allow yourself to sink further?" Pulling on Zhang Guanxing's collar, Han Fei landed a powerful punch on Zhang Guanxing's jaw. The black snake moved on Han Fei's back, the ghost tattoo radiating an extremely cold energy. "If you hate them that much, then go take revenge on them! Let them know your pain! Let them have a taste of despair! Only by letting them know how much pain they've caused you that they would understand the damage they've done! An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, that is only fair!"

The punch lashed out like a snake's jaw. Han Fei did not hold back and sent Zhang Guanxing flying against the wall. Pain finally brought emotions to Zhang Guanxing's face. His murky eyes slowly turned as he looked at Han Fei. The bare-chested man stood inside the bedroom, covered in wounds and blood.

"Sir..."

As the monster representing Zhang Guanxing's hatred was consumed by the paper doll, Zhang Guanxing regained his rationality. However, his eyes lost his previous innocence but had an extra trace of maturity and undisguised pain.

"It's great that you've snapped out of it." Han Fei was already at his limit. He found his way to Zhang Guanxing's side and hugged the young man. "I know you are in great pain, I can't take the pain away from you but I can help you find ways to help alleviate that pain. I need you to know that you can trust me, okay?"

When the death memory returned, it brought with it unimaginable pain and despair. Zhang Guanxing struggled alone in the endless sea but at that drowning moment, Han Fei extended a helping hand at him. This was a simple proclamation but it carried an unusual meaning for Zhang Guanxing. At least when he was alive, no one had told him anything remotely similar.

Chapter 168:

When Zhang Guanxing regained his death memory, he also combined with his past hatred but most importantly he did not lose his sanity. By then, Han Fei had reached his limits. His arms weakened and his body toppled backwards. His fall was cushioned by the snake that slipped out from Han Fei's back. His limbs couldn't stop shaking and his heartbeat was still too slow. Imbibing too much Yin energy caused serious damage on Han Fei. His blood almost froze and his temperature was dangerously low. 'My stamina is still too weak.'

Lying on the hostel bed, Han Fei found it difficult to even move a finger. This was his first time fighting head on with a Lingering Spirit. If not for the red paper doll, he would not have won. 'I can survive for about 100 seconds in Yin-energy enhanced state. During that time, I'll be able to resist some degree of damage and my physique will improve, it is actually more suitable for making an escape than in a fight.' The ghost tattoo faded in and out. The wounded Han Fei laid in bed. His state was bad but his mind was calculating how to apply this skill to make his future endeavor more effective.

The half an hour finally passed and Han Fei received the system notification.

"Notification for Player 0000! You've completed Grade G Hidden Mission—Face Facing Away from You. Obtained 1 free skill point, friendliness level with Zhang Guanxing increases by 20.

“Mission completion rate is 100 percent so you’ve obtained double EXP and hidden mission reward—A Sturdy Back.

“A Sturdy Back (Personal passive skill, cannot be upgraded): Increases posterior defense. Damage received from the back, from both curses and spirits will decrease to a certain degree.

“You’ve successfully challenged 3 tales of horror. Grade F Hidden Mission, Jin Sheng’s Tales of Horror Completion rate: 3/7.”

After all that, he had finally completed a mission. Han Fei’s heart slowly eased back to normal. Now he only needed to hang around for 3 hours and he could quit the game. Zhang Guanxing stayed guarded beside Han Fei’s bed. He didn’t know what to do. Other than appreciation, he also felt guilt towards Han Fei. The culprit who harmed him was still on the loose but he had instead accidentally injured someone who wanted to help him instead.

“Sir, maybe I should get to the school infirmary to look for things like bandage or medicine.”

“No, just stay right here. Now is not the time to go blundering around.” Han Fei forced a smile. “I’m not able to defend myself. This building is extremely dangerous. We better not split up.”

“But sir, your wounds...”

“I’ll be fine. You better go and check on the Can of Wishes.” Han Fei leveled an apologetic gaze at the can.

“There’s quite a few new cracks on it but it shouldn’t break any time soon. After all, this is one of the oldest curses at this school.” After Zhang Guanxing gained his memory, he became a lot more reliable. “Grade G Cursed Objects possess many different individuals’ malice and negative emotions. In other words, they are formed from human malice. So even if they are broken, they can be fixed through absorption of malice.” Zhang Guanxing closed the lid and placed the can beside Han Fei’s bed. “But, I have to be honest, that was the first time I saw someone use a cursed object that way.” Zhang Guanxing was referring to how Han Fei used the can to bash against the monster’s skull. Han Fei was truly someone very unique.

"I didn't have any other weapon at hand. The plan was to break the can and then use its broken pieces as a makeshift knife but the can is sturdier than I thought." Han Fei tried his best to raise his arm to touch the black can. He still could not move the can into his inventory. 'Looks like it still hasn't accepted me as its owner. Well, can't blame me for rough-handling it then.' Zhang Guanxing had no idea why Han Fei was treating the black can so badly, he assumed it was because the black can had once tried to consume Han Fei.

"Guanxing, go and close the door and window. I have questions that I need to ask you." Han Fei thought about it before saying, "Have you ever encountered an old man at the school? He has the same teacher id like I do and he was once a staff here."

"An old man?"

"He's very kind and always has a smile on his face."

"You mean Teacher Fu Sheng?" Zhang Guanxing sat down beside the bed. There was a new emotion on his face, it was fear. "Among the school teachers, he is the oldest. He looks about 60 plus. He is kind and fair to every student but unfortunately he has gone missing."

'Fu Sheng? That's homophonous to Revive in Chinese.' Han Fei narrowed his eyes. He finally had a name for the previous manager although he knew this might be a fake name. "Teacher Fu and I are neighbours. The main reason I've applied for a post here is to come look for him."

"You're here to look for Teacher Fu?" Zhang Guanxing shook his head. "I'm sorry but I don't know where he went."

"Can you give me your impression of him? Have you interacted with him?"

Zhang Guanxing's expression shifted and the fear in his eyes deepened. "In a way, Sir, you are very similar to Teacher Sir. When I almost lost my control the first time, he 'kindly' reached out to help me control it."

"Control it? How?"

“He beat me until I almost died, and when I was at my weakest, he stripped all the resentment and despair out of me. The process was immensely painful and the scariest thing is...” Zhang Guanxing continued, “When I woke up, I had forgotten about my death memory. Honestly, it was not until a few moments ago that I remembered he had made a punching bag out of me. I remember meeting him again after the fact, without that part of my memory, I thought he was affectionate and amiable.”

The previous manager chose to destroy the cryptic world so Han Fei could understand his rough teaching method. Fu Sheng’s ideology was simple. After destroying all the despair, only the positive humanity would remain. The way he treated the spirits were similar to how a medieval medical practitioner would treat a problem, by dissecting the infected part and calling it a day; while Han Fei was more like a mix of both surgical and curative treatment, he provided healing both externally and internally.

“Is that all you can remember about that teacher? Has he done anything strange at school?” Han Fei’s work id was left behind by the previous manager. After he stepped into the hidden map, he was directly transported inside the hostel building. The previous manager would not have set that up for no reason. There might be something important for Han Fei here. It was at this place that Han Fei ran into Zhang Guanxing. Yi Ming Private Academy was a large school with a sizable student body but so far, it appeared like the previous manager had only reached out to Zhang Guanxing and done something to him so Han Fei felt like Zhang Guanxing was the key.

Everything was connected. It was a test and an opportunity.

“Teacher Fu’s a peacemaker. He never gets into petty arguments. All the students like and respect him... O wait, there is a student who is deathly afraid of Teacher Fu.”

“Who?”

“A boy from primary 1 class 1. His name is Jing Sheng.”

“Do you know where the boy is now?” The main mission at Yi Ming Private Academy was surfacing.

“After Teacher Fu was done ‘helping’ me, he locked up my death memory inside a cupboard under a lectern on the 4th floor of the education block. I remembered this now after fetching it from the other

me's memory. After some time, Jing Sheng opened the cupboard, he let the other me out and he went inside the cupboard to hide instead." Zhang Guanxing provided Han Fei with a valuable clue.

Now that Han Fei knew Jing Sheng's hiding spot location, he reminded Zhang Guanxing not to reveal that information to anyone else. There were still many 'people' looking for Jing Sheng at this school.

Chapter 169:

With Han Fei's current condition, he could barely walk much less go and find Jin Sheng. So he waited for his health to heal. He'd wait for the 3 hours to pass first. Pulling up the menu, Han Fei added all the skill points into Soul-Depth Touch, making it Beginner Level 4. During the brawl, Han Fei discovered the accidental usage of this skill. It lived up to its potential of a skill provided from completing a Grade F Hidden Mission. Han Fei believed that there was still room for this skill to grow. Perhaps at max level, he could move parts of spirits as easily as pieces of puzzle.

With that favourable hope in his mind, Han Fei inspected his inventory and skills. Eventually he took out Su Mengting's diary from his inventory. According to the item description, if used well, it would greatly increase Han Fei's friendliness level with Su Mengtong.

The diary had a light red cover and the pages seemed soaked in water. The entries were blurred out due to water spots. Han Fei read on as best as he could with a frown. The diary recorded everything from Su Mengting's perspective. After she was ostracized, she felt abandoned like she was inside a maze. There were paths leading away from her but none led to the exit. She was troubled by pain and despair. In that moment of darkness, someone reached out to her. When she entertained the thought of self-harm for the first time, she ran to hide in the mountain behind the school. She wanted time away from the world to cry herself out. It was there that the school security guard found her.

The security guard was an aged gentleman the students called Ol' Lee. It was he who accompanied Su Mengting back to school. Ol' Lee knew that people were bullying Su Mengting and he tried to help the girl by reflecting this issue to the staff. Unfortunately, the staff he approached was Ma Manjiang.

After the man knew about Su Mengting's problems, he promised to help her but in reality though, he only made things worse. Su Mengting got increasingly fearful for her life. Ol' Lee only realized his mistake when it was too late.

'The security guard is the first victim in the case of the Foretold Deaths. Perhaps he'll know more secrets about this school.' Han Fei got to know the guard uncle better through Su Mengting's diary. For one, he found out about the uncle's usual haunts. Han Fei believed this security guard was a 'good person' he could make into an ally. After finish reading Su Mengting's diary, Han Fei turned to Zhang Guanxing.

The previous manager was too singular in his goal, he refused to really accept and understand ghosts. However, Han Fei was different. Ever since the start of the game, Han Fei has tried to befriend every kind of ghost. As he gained help from them, he'd help lessen their pain as well. Han Fei had not gone far enough down his journey to tell whose approach was better. But just from efficiency alone, Han Fei's was markedly better.

Han Fei studied Zhang Guanxing's closely. It was extremely rare for a Lingering Spirit to retain their rationality. After all, Wei Youfu had to give up all of his power and become an Animated Regret just to keep his humanity. The deeper the resentment, the stronger the ghost but the harder it would be for them to grasp onto their humanity. Han Fei would have a hard time conversing with them as well. Therefore, Han Fei came up with another solution. He would cultivate them from when they were still weak.

Both Drake and Zhang Guanxing were Lingering Spirits with great potential. But more importantly, they trusted Han Fei unconditionally. It was hard to find a friend like that in the real world much less the cryptic world. Zhang Guanxing's murky eyes filled with confusion as he noticed Han Fei's scrutiny on him. "Sir, is there a problem?"

"Since I'm your teacher, I feel a responsibility to teach you something." Han Fei said after some thought. "So I hope you'll remember these lessons."

"Okay." Seeing how serious Han Fei had gotten, Zhang Guanxing became solemn as well.

"I'm not going to lecture you on actual subjects, instead what I wish to impart on you are lessons on how to be a better person and how to survive in this world." It had been some time since Han Fei landed in the cryptic world. Different from the natives who were dominated by pain and despair, Han Fei spent every moment thinking about how to survive. When survival was hard, one's potential would be activated. Han Fei shed his old self and grew into a realer version of himself in the cryptic world.

In the next 3 hours, Han Fei helped counsel Zhang Guanxing, and then using his own experiences as examples, Han Fei described in detail how to face danger and how to identify hazards within a situation. In this world filled with ghosts and monsters, blind kindness was no different from suicide. To survive,

one had to arm that kindness with cunningness, logic and ruthlessness. However, these were just armaments. To survive in this world, one needed an unshakeable heart, a heart that contained light and the basic values of humanity. No one had given such lessons to Zhang Guanxing before.

After Zhang Guanxing understood what a man was and how to be a man, Han Fei analyzed for the young man some acting skill and trickery so that he would not fall so easily for them. Zhang Guanxing picked them up quickly. Even though the young man was a drop-out, he was actually incredibly clever. At that moment, Han Fei was like a real teacher. He planned to train Zhang Guanxing to become an independent individual.

As Han Fei's plan included a continued expansion of his influence, he would need reliable and trustworthy partners to help him manage them in the future. Zhang Guanxing learned a lot from Han Fei and the murkiness in his eyes cleared. Even though Zhang Guanxing still did not believe in hope in the cryptic world, at least it was no longer a world of pure darkness. An educator was like a candle burning himself to bring light to others. Perhaps one day, after Han Fei perished in the game, Zhang Guanxing would remember his light and share that light with others he met.

After 3 hours, the Yin energy in Han Fei's body finally dissipated and his Life Points slowly returned to normal.

"In a while, I will have to leave this room. Remember what I've told you. I'll come back to find you tomorrow midnight." Han Fei was ready to go offline. Even though his Life Points were recovering, his mind was too exhausted to continue.

"Sir, I don't think you should leave in your current state. If you have something that needs done, I can do it for you."

"It's okay. Just promise me to stay inside this bedroom." Han Fei massaged his limbs and slowly sat up from bed. He had the black anaconda hide inside the room while he opened the bedroom door. There were more blood stains out in the corridor. The sound of children's argument and dull footsteps came from upstairs. A stench lingered in the air. Han Fei did not stay for long. He silently closed the door behind him and opted to leave the game.

Chapter 170:



After removing the helmet, Han Fei felt his body thawing. He tried to raise his arm but even that simple action took a toll on him. His skin was startlingly cold. It was not until moments later when his blood circulation returned to normal that the chill faded away. 'My body can't stand this much longer if this state continues. I'll have to purchase that gaming hub as soon as possible.' The gaming hub would be able to help protect the body and relax the mind while the player was in the game. Take for example, Huang Yin. Even though he too played the game deep into the night like Han Fei, in fact his gaming hour was often longer than Han Fei, Huang Yin was able to wake up energized the next morning, that was the benefit of the gaming hub.

'Pouring Yin energy into the ghost tattoo can temporarily increase all of my attributes and decrease the damage I take. After I obtain the Midnight Butcher profession and have my own blade, then survival should be much easier. I hope that the gaming hub will be able to lessen the pressure on my physical body, so that it will not be so taxing after each gaming session.' There was no player like Han Fei who would spend all of his money and put his life on the line just for the sake of a game.

Turning on the heater and curling inside the comforter, Han Fei took out his phone to search for the name Fu Sheng. The biggest reward from his latest gaming session was the acquisition of the previous manager's name, but sadly the search came up with nothing... Han Fei slowly drifted off to sleep as the words danced before his eyes.

At 9 am, Han Fei was woken up by the vibrating phone. He looked at the caller id, it was Huang Yin. 'I keep hearing from this brother recently... Is it because Perfect Life is going to end its 6th CB soon?'

Before Han Fei could speak, Huang Yin's voice blasted out, "Brother, are you free today? I just gained contact with a former employee from Immortal Pharma, there are things we should discuss."

"A former employee at Immortal Pharma?"

"Do you remember that madman whom I told you about? The tester who accidentally got into the cryptic world during testing and ended up butchering a whole neighbourhood."

"I remember him! Has he been released from the mental hospital?" Han Fei jumped up immediately. He wanted to meet that tester more than anyone else.

"No, unfortunately he has died."

“He’s dead?!”

“Yes, the cause of death is still unknown, the police have opened an investigation into it. The employee that I’ll have you meet today is the former colleague of that man, he knows a lot of secrets.”

“I will be there in a few minutes.” After hanging up, Han Fei took a quick bath and hailed a cab to get to the intelligent city. One hour later, Han Fei arrived at an underground alley. After scanning his id, he entered an inconspicuous coffee house, the place was appropriately named Corner Coffee. The smell of coffee permeated the small space. The first floor was empty other than an aged barista manning the counter. “Han Fei?”

“Yes.”

“They’re waiting for you upstairs.”

Han Fei needed to scan his id again. This time he had to use facial recognition before he could enter the 2nd floor. Compared to the first floor, the second floor was more retro-inspired. There was no high-tech device in sight, it was like a time capsule from the past.

“Han Fei, you’re finally here, let me make some introduction.” Huang Yin pulled Han Fei to the table and pointed at the man who sat at the corner. “This is Feng Ziyu, also known as Absurd Mask on the internet. He’s one of the earliest testers from Immortal Pharma to participate in the Perfect Life project.” Then Huang Yin gestured at Han Fei, “This is the man I told you about, Han Fei. He’s an actor.”

“I’ve seen him on the news before, he has helped the police with cases and has even personally apprehended a fugitive.” The man stood up to shake Han Fei’s hands. “Pleasure to meet you.”

“Pleasure. So... why are we here?” Han Fei sat down at the table. He studied Feng Ziyu casually. The man was only 30 but he looked like he was in his 50s. He was in quite bad shape.

“I own this shop so there is no worry that we will be overheard.” After making that declaration, Huang Yin took out his phone and projected the information given by Feng Ziyu onto the wall. “The tester who

died in the asylum was Brother Feng's senior. When the tester slipped into the cryptic world, Brother Feng was beside him and he witnessed everything."

Huang Yin signaled for the man to speak. After some hesitated, Feng Ziyu finally uttered, "I still feel the chills thinking back to what happened that day. At the time, Brother Zhang and I were testing out a mission, everything was fine at the start. But when we entered Funereal Street next to the neighbourhood for a supernatural side mission, an accident happened."

"What kind of accident?" Han Fei memorized the location name, Funereal Street.

"The side mission was called Ghostly Encounter. It was about an old man's memory of his dead wife. On the day when the Gates of Hell opened, he ran to the Fourth building in the neighbourhood and called his wife's name. His wife was killed there by a petty thief. After he got home, he felt a strange weight on his shoulders and he felt weirdly exhausted. He died not so long after that. Based on the mission description, the old man failed to call his wife to return but instead had unwittingly summoned a wandering soul.

"After the old man passed, the ghost took over his house and started to go after the old man's family. The old man's son, daughter-in-law and daughter all felt under the weather. In the end, it was the youngest granddaughter who saw the ghost. She said it was not grandma but something else living with them. The mission required us to use various items and aid from the little girl to dispel the ghost that no one else could see.

"As a Hidden Mission, Ghostly Encounter was understandably hard, scary and exciting. In fact, we did this test mainly because we wanted to see if it would be too traumatizing for the players. Technically speaking, many tests have already been done on the mission and there shouldn't be any accident. But as we followed the mission's trail, we noticed there were small changes here and there. I assumed at the time, it was just the programmer trying to add flavor to the story." The incident still affected Feng Ziyu to this day because other than confusion, there was barely-concealed fear in his voice. "With the granddaughter's help, we finished the mission and the family returned to normal but the completion rate given by the system was very low.

"I did not think much of it, I merely wanted to get off work and go back home. Brother Zhang though, felt something was off. He reset the mission and did everything by the books but the system still gave a low completion rating. I urged Brother Zhang to move onto the next mission but Brother Zhang told me that there might be some bugs with this mission and he would need to fix it.

“It was like something came over him. He kept repeating the mission, on the 14th instance, he murdered the youngest granddaughter at the start of the mission. I could not even describe what I felt back then. But to make things even more shocking, we got the system notification that the mission had been completed after the girl was killed.

“Do you know what this means?”

“The ghost was not following the programmed plot. It had possessed the granddaughter! The ghost had been playing along with us and repeated the mission at least 10 times!

“But that was not all. After the mission was supposed to be over, Brother Zhang’s expression changed. He’d look normal one moment and then started to giggle like a little girl the next. I persuaded him to leave the game but he did not seem to realize there was something wrong. He was still resetting the mission. In the end, I had to force both of us to quit. Back in the real world, Brother Zhang returned to normal. We compiled our reports and planned to send it to our supervisors the next day. Since my home was in the old city, Brother Zhang told me to get off work earlier like usual.

“But when I came to work the next day, I realized Brother Zhang had gone back into the game. A bad feeling surrounded me then. When I entered the game, it was already too late.”

Feng Ziyu took a very long pause. “Brother Zhang has killed all the NPC in that neighbourhood. He was covered in blood and his mental state was highly unstable. He kept talking to himself like there were different personas inside him.”

“That was the last time you saw him? Did he tell you anything else?” Han Fei stared at the man.

“I have never told anyone this secret before. I hope that you will live up to your promise of bringing me with you to the cryptic world after hearing this.” Feng Ziyu pursed his lips before he made the decision to reveal, “At the time, Brother Zhang was already half crazy. It was like he was under some kind of hypnosis. He kept shouting something about the cryptic world. I tried to approach him but when he saw me, he raised the knife and plunged it right through my chest. He screamed into my face—Have to kill Fu Sheng! Have to kill Fu Sheng! Have to kill Fu Sheng!”

“I didn’t even understand what he meant but I realized now Fu Sheng might be a code or a name. I looked online for information. After years of digging, I finally found out Immortal Pharma’s CEO, Fu Tian had an older brother when he was young. The little-known brother’s name was Fu Sheng!”

After hearing that, Han Fei’s heart was raging. During the previous manager’s Manager Mission, Han Fei met the manager’s family. The previous manager had a younger brother who was well-loved by ghosts.

“Brother Feng, do you remember that neighbourhood’s name?”

“It doesn’t really have a name. In the mission, it was called the Ziggurat but the map where the neighbourhood was located has been wiped out from the system. It is impossible to enter the cryptic world through it now.”

“Ziggurat?” The name struck a bell. The red paper doll and the bride were headed to the Ziggurat that one time.