

## Iyashikei 171

### Chapter 171:

The normal version of Perfect Life had already removed the map where the Ziggurat was but the building still existed in the cryptic world and it was Han Fei's impression that it was one of the most dangerous buildings around. The tester from Immortal Pharma found out about Fu Sheng and the cryptic world's existence at the Ziggurat. He went insane and murdered all of its residents. From his various actions, Han Fei suspected there was a channel that might connect the two worlds of Perfect Life at the Ziggurat.

This was an important find for Han Fei. If he could locate that channel, Han Fei could travel between the two worlds freely, that would open up even more options. Han Fei's attention was fully on the Ziggurat but Huang Yin and Feng Ziyu's focus was on Fu Sheng. They believed Fu Sheng was related to the tester's spiral into madness. In fact, Fu Sheng might directly cause the tester's mind to break.

"I have no idea Immortal Pharma's CEO had an older brother. There is no such news at all about him."

"The company CEO is already shrouded in mystery but his elder brother even so." Feng Ziyu flipped through his phone. "I worked as one of the internet security experts at Immortal Pharma. Ever since Brother Zhang's incident, I have been collecting information on the side. But even now, I've only gained one new piece of information. Fu Sheng has been through psychological treatment. Other than that, there is nothing else that I can find on him, not even his picture. He's more like a ghost. Probably other than the CEO, no one really knows who he is."

"Is it possible that Fu Sheng is only an existence in the game? In terms of technology, as more breakthroughs are achieved by computer science, virtual immortality is no longer a dream." Huang Yin took a sip of his coffee.

"That's impossible, in fact, I suspect the cryptic world is where they store the data of the dead." Feng Ziyu turned to Han Fei and Huang Yi. "The reason Brother Zhang lost his mind was because his consciousness was taken over by different personas. I could not explain these personas' origin, the only logical explanation is that there is a hidden world inside this game." Compared to the other players, these three individuals at Corner Coffee had their own reasons to believe in the existence of the cryptic world. Feng Ziyu witnessed how his colleague went insane and came to that conclusion. Huang Yin accidentally found his way into the cryptic world and had personally experienced its horror. As the owner of the black box, Han Fei was the one who understood the cryptic world the most. It was quite a coincidence that the 3 of them managed to meet together.

“Perfect Life will enter OB in another half a month, I plan to attempt to enter that hidden map again tonight.” Huang Yin tapped on his phone. “But the main problem is I still have no idea what is the condition to trigger that hidden map. I’ve not succeeded in entering it again since that last time.”

“I know all the available conditions necessary to trigger any in-game missions, we can go through them one by one for these next few days.”

“Okay.” Huang Yin then took out 3 Id cards from his pocket. “In the future, we should meet up in this coffeehouse. Take these cards, they’ll grant you access to the 2nd floor. After the OB starts, the 3 of us should start a group that focuses on exploration of the cryptic world.”

“Maybe the team can be called Corner Coffee. We shouldn’t discuss anything related to the cryptic world with anyone else, everything should be contained to this coffeehouse.” Feng Ziyu looked at Huang Yin and Han Fei before he shared another gaming secret, “Even though Perfect Game promotes itself as an Iyashikei game, the game has a fighting system that mirrors the one in real life. So when you choose your profession, do not pick those that lack fighting capability.” Then he turned to Han Fei and elaborated. “Out of the 3 of us, you should be the best fighter so I’d suggest you to go for the profession of a private investigator. The profession can be built in any way you wish and the profession talent will improve your observation, analytical and tracking skills. At the same time, it will buff your fighting-related skills. It is a perfect fit for you. The prerequisite mission for Private Investigator is to participate in some investigations before you reach level 10. Later, I will give you the plot details of those investigations. I know some of them but not all.”

“What about me?” Huang Yin wanted to hear Feng Ziyu’s opinion.

“The profession of a doctor will be hard to master and it does not provide any fighting ability but a healer is instrumental in any team.” After some thoughts, Feng Ziyu added, “Actually I have heard of a unique hidden profession. It’ll help greatly in our exploration of the hidden world but it’ll be hard to unlock that hidden profession.”

“What profession is it?”

“A blood doctor.” Feng Ziyu added carefully.

“Blood doctor? I’m a medical practitioner, I’ve not heard of that in my life.”

“The blood doctor is actually a profession based on an in-game character. This NPC was originally a forensic doctor but he was fired from his job due to unknown reasons. After that, he opened his own dentistry clinic. Due to his skills and friendliness, both the business and the man were well-loved by his neighbours. But in reality, the man was crazy. He made his hobby out of hunting his customers. After his evil deeds were exposed, he became a fugitive. Despite the police’s effort, he managed to stay underground and was a notorious criminal in the virtual world.” Feng Ziyu shared the plot. “To become a blood doctor, you’ll have to enter his shop before level 10 and save all of his victims. Finally, you’ll have to personally apprehend that NPC.”

“And then?”

“At the very end of the questline, you’ll be given a choice, to hand the blood doctor to the police or to kill the blood doctor. After you murder the blood doctor, he will curse you with his death.” Feng Ziyu tapped against the table. “Normally, the mission would have ended here but I know of a well-hidden easter egg. If you dismember the blood doctor’s carcass, you’ll be put under his curse and take his place as the new blood doctor, and assume the man’s destiny.”

“Are you for real? It sounds so dangerous.” Huang Yin said worriedly, “Blood Doctor, Huang Yin, it sounds weird just saying it.”

“After you become the blood doctor, both your intelligence and stamina will increase. The blood doctor has many professional talents. In any case, the profession has great potential.”

“There is no free meal in this world. What is the price to pay for so many perks?”

“The price is you’ll have to be careful when you wander around the city during the day. The police have their eyes on you because since you’ve desecrated the body of the previous blood doctor, you’re now their prime suspect. You’ll be seen as the mastermind who has been manipulating the previous doctor.” Feng Ziyu shared the mission details with Huang Yin and then many other in-game secrets with both Huang Yin and Han Fei.

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The trio exchanged a lot of information. Han Fei benefited a lot from it. He realized there were many rules in the game that he could use to his own advantages. Han Fei left the second floor of Corner Coffee around 2 pm. Once he did, his phone started to vibrate. 'The second floor even screens phone signals?' Han Fei turned to glance up the stairs before he swiveled his attention back to his phone. Most of the messages were from Director Jiang. You Long Culture was very interested in the series of docu-movies. They wanted to draft an official collaboration contract with Han Fei. With the popularity from Twin Flower, You Long Culture now had full confidence in Han Fei's vision.

'Flower of Sin almost got cut due to budget issues but now before the new script is even ready, we already got the sponsor.' After making the replies, Han Fei asked about the payment cut from Twin Flower. He was eager to make the purchase of the high-class gaming hub. Walking down the street, perhaps because Perfect Life was going to enter OB soon, its advertisements could be seen all over the intelligent city. Due to its iyashikei nature, players of all age groups were excitedly discussing the upcoming gaming phenomenon. This game would be a cultural reset.

"Hopefully nothing happens after the OB."

Han Fei was in no place to worry about others. The moment he mentioned anything related to the black box, his brain would explode. The only thing he could do now was to get strong and survive in that horrid world. Han Fei reached home around 4 pm. He sat down to study and then committed a series of martial arts practice. Han Fei lived a monk-like lifestyle. He abandoned all bad habits and focused on strengthening his body and will.

When it was around midnight, Han Fei stood beside the wall of crimes and picked up the gaming helmet from the table. 'I need to clear Yi Ming Private Academy's map as soon as possible. I worry about my neighbours after being separated from them for so long. I hope everyone is fine.' Putting on the gaming helmet, his world was dyed red. "Welcome to Perfect Life!"

Opening his eyes, Han Fei was inside a dark corridor. There was no sound, no light. He reached forward to push at the door before him. Han Fei barely applied any force and he frowned. 'The door's not locked?'

Han Fei lowered his head and noticed the lock of Room 104 was broken. The handle was sticky with dark red residue. Han Fei strode into the room and Zhang Guanxing was missing. 'There is no sign of struggle. Looks like he has left before the threat arrived.' Han Fei took out the red uniform from his inventory and walked around the small bedroom. He visited all the corners but Xu Qin's pet did not come out. 'Did it leave with Zhang Guanxing?' The shadow was a master at concealing itself, if even it had slipped away, it meant that something incredibly scary had been to this place. Putting away the red uniform, Han Fei

closed the door. Honestly, he was slightly panicking. When he was around Zhang Guanxing and the shadow, at least they could watch each other's back but now he was all alone inside the bedroom. 'The building is incredibly quiet, it's like it has been deserted.'

He had no idea what presence was responsible for that, he could not even be sure if the thing was still inside the building or not. Han Fei's heart raced thinking about the perils that he might need to face on his own. 'Should I stay here or try to leave?'

While he teetered between the two choices, Han Fei busied himself by searching the bedroom. When he opened the cupboard, he found the rice-cooker sitting inside it. Weep's urn was still kept safely inside and there was a paper note edged underneath it. A message was hastily scrawled—2nd floor Bathroom at the Cafeteria.

'Did Zhang Guanxing leave this note? But why has he gone to the cafeteria?' Han Fei had to be careful. He had to consider the possibility that the note was faked. Studying the note further, Han Fei suddenly realized the handwriting look strangely familiar. As he placed them, chill tingled up his spine. 'I've seen this handwriting before!' Han Fei's powerful memory lined up the handwriting on the message with the appreciation notes he had previously found inside the hostel manager's office. One of the appreciation notes was written in this exact handwriting. 'This note is left behind by the ghosts. They want to harm me.' Wiping away his cold sweat, Han Fei was thankful that he remembered those details. He really could not be too careful in this world, one wrong step and he'd be dead. 'The real note probably has been swapped out for this fake one. This means that Room 104 is no longer safe anymore. Someone has been in here.' Han Fei looked around as if anticipating a ghost to jump out from the shadows. It was pointless to wait inside the bedroom now, he might as well leave while he still can.

All the windows on the first floor were sealed up behind anti-theft nets. The only exit was the front door or the window that Zhang Guanxing used on the 2nd floor. Placing Weep's urn back in its place, Han Fei sneaked out from Room 104. The corridor was eerily silent. Han Fei felt extremely unsettled. Even though he experienced no chill from the landlord's ring, there was no telling when something might suddenly decide to show up from the dark.

'The blood stain on the front door has darkened. The talismans and papers have basically glued onto the door. It hasn't been in use for a long time already.' Leaning against the wall, Han Fei slipped into the stairwell. He climbed the steps and felt something slipping under his feet. Curious as he was, Han Fei knew he did not have time to stop for a close examination. He just wanted to leave. The atmosphere at the hostel was too creepy, it was as if he was the only one alive still remaining at the building.

Invisible creatures appeared to crawl in the thick darkness. The oppressive tension pressed down on Han Fei. Holding his breath, Han Fei arrived at the 2nd floor. He carefully made his way to Room 201. When he reached out to open the door, Han Fei's hand touched something wet on the door handle. It was blood!

Han Fei's every nerve tensed from this discovery. The blood was still very much liquid. It meant that someone had used their bloody hand to open this door less than a minute ago. It meant that they were still around!

His heart palpitated heavily. Han Fei did not dare to enter Room 201, afraid that the thing was waiting for him inside it. Outside the door, Han Fei slowed his breathing. Using the lightest step, he moved to the door of Room 202 without making any noise. The door handle of Room 202 was also stained with blood but the stains had almost dried.

Han Fei moved down the corridor before finally stopping before Room 204.

The corridor beyond that was so dipped in darkness that Han Fei was convinced that the darkness would claim him if he moved any further. The door handle of Room 204 was relatively clean but the lock had already been broken. Han Fei held the handle and eased it open very slowly to limit his sound production as much as possible. When he was halfway through the motion of opening the door, a piercing chill came from his ring finger!

There was no warning, the frost almost froze his finger off. He whipped his head around and realized the door to Room 201 had been silently opened and something was coming out from it.

'I need to run!' With no time to hesitate, Han Fei bolted into Room 204. With adrenaline pumping through his veins, Han Fei leaped over the balcony of the second floor and landed among the bushes. The fall scraped Han Fei's arm but that did not stop the man. He picked himself up from the ground and continued to run.

After he believed he had put enough distance from the hostel, Han Fei only then dared to turn back to look. There was a man standing inside Room 204. He radiated malice. His face was painted in blood and a sadistic smile hung on his face. Due to the distance, Han Fei could not get a good look but the man's body size and frame reminded Han Fei of Ma Manjiang.

'Is it really him?'

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'Is that really Ma Manjiang?' When Han Fei tried to focus harder on Room 204, the shadowy figure had disappeared. 'Ma Manjiang has escaped from real life into the cryptic world? Does this mean that the man is dead?' An indescribable malice followed that man. After Han Fei made sure he was not being followed, he slowly calmed down. 'The enemy this time is very cunning. If I was a second slower, I'd be dead now.' Han Fei could not leave the game yet so if he was captured, death would be inevitable. 'He was waiting for me inside Room 201 but why would he choose that particular room? Why would he know that I'd go there?'

Ma Manjiang was different from any ghost Han Fei had encountered in the past. 'He had his own children leave the note in Room 104 to lure me into a trap. This is not something a normal Lingering Spirit could plan. What has happened to Ma Manjiang? Or is he the Butterfly?' Li Xue's teacher once predicted that the Butterfly was related to doctors and teachers. Coincidentally Ma Manjiang was a teacher at Yi Ming Private Academy.

In any case, Han Fei did not have enough clues to come to any conclusion. Instead what he needed to do now was to get as far away from the hostel as possible. He turned to look at the school gate. Yi Ming Private Academy's walls and gates were decorated with symbols drawn out in blood. Whenever Han Fei got closer, the landlord's ring would chill as if something bad would happen if he ventured too close.

Since he was unable to leave, Han Fei could only face the trial as best as he could. 'Ma Manjiang is the source of all the pain at Yi Ming Private Academy, in other words, he is the scariest presence here. Now that he is at the hostel, it means that the other buildings are temporarily safe.' Han Fei planned to make use of this opportunity to get to the education block to find Jin Sheng. Normally, a person would lean towards escaping or hiding after experiencing great trauma but Han Fei was different because he knew such actions were futile in the cryptic world.

'Jin Sheng should be Jing Sheng, he is the key to the missions at this school.' Despite Yi Ming Private Academy's reputation, its campus was quite large. Many parents were fooled by its appearance and sent their children here. Making his way through the bush, Han Fei kept his body as small as possible. However, he soon realized the bushes were not safe either. Han Fei did not need to go far when he noticed he had company. Not far away from him, there was something moving inside the bush. It was incredibly thin, it looked like a monkey or a disfigured gnome. The thing radiated misfortune and curse. Han Fei stayed a distance away to observe it. It was tearing at something for a long time before it slipped away.

Han Fei slowly approached the spot it vacated. When he arrived, there was only a tattered school uniform and a wrinkled student id left on the ground. 'That thing earlier is a student here? But why does he look that way? What has happened at this school?'

The school appeared particularly uninviting in the night. The place was incredibly quiet. Han Fei eventually walked out from the bushes, crossed a cement path and reached the education block. Yi Ming Private Academy's education block was in an L shape, it was attached to the office building. Perhaps due to the imperfect management at the school, the school security office was located at the deepest part of the education block's 1st floor corridor. It made dealing with student bullies much easier. Normally the security guards would take their shifts at the gate but during breaks or when they needed to check the security tapes, they would visit the security office at the education block.

Han Fei entered the education block from the backdoor so the first room he encountered was the security office.

'Su Mengting's diary has once mentioned an uncle guard. He is one of the victims in the Case of Foretold Death. From the diary, he sounds like a nice person.' Han Fei's plan initially did not involve a trip to the security office, he wanted to get to the 4th floor as soon as possible but he only entered the education block when the chill came from the ring. He did not hear any strange voice nor see anything out of place but the ring would never lie to him. The chill intensified, something was approaching!

For the sake of security, Han Fei did not use the stairs, it would make himself too conspicuous. He took several steps back, opened the door to the security office and temporarily hid inside it.

"Notification for Player 0000! You're in possession of the victim's tape, you've successfully triggered Grade G Hidden Mission—Surveillance Tape.

"Mission Requirement: Stay inside the security office and watch the tape for a whole half an hour. This is a time-limited mission."

The chill on the ring did not go away, if anything, it was increasing. Han Fei hid behind the door and his face was unholly white with the light casted from the screens. Surprisingly, the surveillance equipment inside the room was still working. An old computer and a small tv with a tape player were placed on a table. The television screen was cracked like someone had smashed into it. The computer though could still be used. Its monitor showed 10 segments of surveillance videos.



With the chill from his finger, Han Fei knew the unknown monster was still wandering outside the door. Han Fei locked the door and turned his attention to the surveillance videos on the computer screen. The 10 videos corresponded to the 10 cameras around the campus. 'Are the cameras broken? How come the videos are all so blurry?'

Since the mission had been triggered, Han Fei would stay to try to complete it. After he did, he could leave the game after 3 hours, that would be a great lifeline to have while he explored the rest of the building. Taking out the surveillance tape, Han Fei slid it into the obsolete player. He tried to switch on the television and to his surprise, the cracked monitor came on. 'It's still usable?!'

Han Fei looked at the screen quietly. The tape played a night time surveillance of the campus. The black and white video was rather grainy but Han Fei got used to it after a while. The mission had already started, everything was normal during the first five minutes. No one made an appearance inside the tape. Regardless, Han Fei did not put his guard down and kept his eyes glued to the screen. At around the 7th minute mark, something was caught on the tape. But due to the quality of the video, Han Fei could not tell what it was. Han Fei wanted to rewind to take a closer look but the button on the player was not working.

At the 10th minute mark, something flashed across the screen again. This time Han Fei got a closer look. 'Was that a woman's hair?' Han Fei focused closely afraid that he might miss something. At the 14th minute mark, Han Fei finally got a good look, it was a woman with her head lowered. Her body was covered in blood. She looked taller than Han Fei and walked past the camera with her head hung low.

Moving subconsciously back from the screen, Han Fei continued to watch. The woman reappeared at the 17th minute. As if sensing that someone was looking at her, the woman purposely stopped before the camera. Han Fei's heart strung tight. The woman lifted her ruined face to reveal a horrible smile. Then the next second, she disappeared from the screen!

'There's a ghost inside the tape? No, wait, this tape belongs to a ghost.' Han Fei's face paled, 'She wouldn't come searching for this tape, would she?'

Han Fei's eyes swept the computer screen which was placed adjacent to the television and his body chilled. By then, the video was at its 20th minute mark, the woman did not show up on the television screen but instead she appeared in the live surveillance videos on the computer monitor!

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The woman flashed across the camera at the 4th floor of the office building. She appeared to be heading somewhere else. The light from the computer screen lit up Han Fei's face, making it look paler than usual. 'The woman first appeared at the 4 floor of the office building and the surveillance tape was from the camera at the 4th floor office as well. That can't be a coincidence. Why is she wandering there? Is she a former staff member here? Or she's a student looking for a teacher?' Many questions floated up in his mind as Han Fei stared at the screens.

The black and white surveillance screen appeared to capture a different world, framing the horror inside the school at night. About 10 seconds later, the woman once again appeared on the computer screen. This time, she was on the 3rd floor!

Drenched in blood, she shuffled past the camera. She seemed to float on air. 'The woman's body is covered in blood but I see no visible wounds. However, her hair is heavily matted, perhaps that has hidden the fatal wound. She is quite maturely dressed, she should be one of the teachers here.' Han Fei tried his best to place that ruined face. It was not a pretty picture but Han Fei went over the smallest detail in his mind. 'Her face was too dirty and scarred to tell who she is. But one thing's for sure, she must have been through hell before she died.'

Han Fei turned back to the 'death' tape in the hope of gaining more information. Furthermore, the mission required that he kept his eyes constantly on the video. 'The banister at the staircase is about 1.2 metres tall. In comparison to the height of the banister, she should be about 2 metres tall...' While Han Fei made these observations, the woman flashed down the corridor and moved from the office building to the education block. There was a camera that sat at the corridor which connected the two buildings. When the woman strode past, she stopped to look right at the camera. Her head slightly tilted and through the curtain of hair, a pair of red eyes leered out.

'She knows I'm looking at her!' Inside the small security office, chill crawled up Han Fei's spine. The woman was coming towards him!

Via her movements through the surveillance screens, Han Fei knew she was getting closer and closer. The feeling of impending doom grasped at the man's heart. 'She has already entered the education block, it won't take long for her to get here in person.'

The chill from the landlord's ring had not abated. There was still something else loitering outside the security room. 'If I leave this room, I'll fail the mission and I might need to face 2 threats at once. In that case, I might as well stay in here and get the hidden mission over and done with first.'

Han Fei was like a man dancing on the tip of the knife. He knew escape was not an option so he might as well take a bet and stay. Taking a deep breath, Han Fei returned his attention to the surveillance screen. Time appeared to have slowed down. This was a veritable torment for Han Fei. Forcing his eyes to stay on the screen, at the 25th minute, Han Fei finally saw the woman appear on the 1st floor of the education block!

She walked out from the stairwell and with her head lowered, made her way towards the security room which was at the end of the corridor. Her matted hair swung behind her. Dark red footprints surfaced in her wake. Her reflection was conspicuously missing from the windows. Han Fei's eyes were fully drawn to the computer screen, he knew that there was less than 10 metres between himself and the woman. When the woman disappeared from the screen, there came an immediate knock on the security room door!

There was no lapse in time at all. The sudden knocking caused Han Fei's whole body to tense. He did not dare to make any noise as he kept his eyes on the tape. The mission was about to be over soon!

A very strange smell permeated the air. It was not particularly smelly but inhaling it caused Han Fei's stomach to twist. It was like the smell of stale meat. 'Where did the smell come from?'

With cold sweat pouring down his forehead, Han Fei held on with sheer willpower. He did not allow himself to be distracted and continued to fixate his eyes on the playing tape. The smell thickened but the knocking stopped. Just as Han Fei was about to sigh in relief, something worse happened. The sound of a key being pushed into the lock came. Han Fei heard the spring click and the locked security door was opened!

The old axle creaked creepily like an old man groaning for help. The stench filtered into the room. The chill from the ring was immense. Han Fei gritted his teeth and hid his hands behind him. He silently opened the inventory and readied to take out the red paper doll.

"Who are you? Why are you here? And why did you lock the door?!" An old gentleman's voice began. The person did not go on the aggressive immediately, this was good news for Han Fei. His brain started to spin at full speed, the information fell into place in less than a second. Since this newcomer had the key to the security room, then most likely he was one of the security guards. The man's voice was aged,

Han Fei put him around 60 years old. There was only one person who fitted these descriptions in this school's horror story, the first victim—Ol' Lee.

The security guard once made an appearance in Su Mengting's diary, he was one of the few who was willing to help her. It was unclear what happened to him after death, but at least he was a good guy when he was alive. Just from one simple sentence, Han Fei had analyzed many things. That was the fruit of his labor from his survival in the game.

"Hey, I'm talking to you! I haven't seen you around the school before, who are you?" The stench became unbearable after the guard entered the room. Han Fei almost suffocated but he kept his eyes on the running video. "I'm a new teacher here, this is my work id." Without turning his eyes around, Han Fei took out the educator's id and dropped it on the table.

A pale arm reached into his line of sight. The person picked up the id and studied it for a while before adding, "You're right. In any case, why are you here? Is there something wrong?"

Staring at the television screen, Han Fei assumed easily into his character. He asked in a normal tone, "Do you still remember the name Su Mengting?"

"Who? I've not heard of that name before."

"No?" Han Fei thought to get more secrets about the girl from the guard but the old man could not even remember her name.

"So why exactly are you here? Are you really a staff member here?" The voice dipped with suspicion. As he approached, the smell seeped into Han Fei's body and the temperature inside the room dropped to freezing point.

"Something bad has happened around the school recently, I'm trying to be a lookout for my students." Han Fei split his attention into 3 parts. While he replied to the guard, he stared at the tape and paid attention to the mission interface in his mind. The countdown was near its end. The ghost from the surveillance tape did not show up after all. 'Could the biggest challenge of this mission be facing the unknown fear the woman had roused within my heart? The woman is actually not real? I was merely scaring myself?'

Han Fei soon got the notification that the mission was over. Compared to other Grade G Hidden Missions, this one was surprisingly easy.

“Hey, don’t just leave things hanging! What do you mean by something bad has happened around the school?” The guard demanded as he moved to stand beside Han Fei. Since the mission was already over, Han Fei moved his gaze and turned towards the guard. When he did, chilblains broke out on the back of his neck. The guard was indeed Ol’ Lee, Han Fei had seen the man’s picture when he did his investigation on Yi Ming Private Academy.

Ol’ Lee looked precisely like himself in real life but the problem was the man was draped in many unholy objects and creatures! But beyond that, there was a woman following behind him. It was the woman with the hung head and ruined face!

She stood on tip toe and her chin was practically laying on Ol’ Lee’s shoulder but the latter did not seem to notice it at all. Even for Han Fei, his expression stalled for a moment. He took an involuntary step away from Ol’ Lee.

“Well? Why aren’t you saying anything? What has happened at this school?” Ol’ Lee repeated concernedly. The senior guard took his job seriously. He cared about the students here.

“It’s nothing really...” Han Fei’s mouth fell open. He bumped his back into the wall and the words tumbled out, “Sir, don’t you feel like you’ve been carrying a lot lately?”

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“What do you mean, I feel just fine!” Ol’ Lee answered.

“Don’t you feel a bit uncomfortable?” Han Fei was shocked. He looked at Ol’ Lee who was basically a moving mountain of ghosts.

“No, if anything, I notice that you are looking incredibly pale. I know you care about the students, but you have to take care of yourself too.” Draped in dirty stuff, Ol’ Lee who was tailed by a Lingering Spirit started to show concern for Han Fei. It was surreal to say the least.

“Well, as long as you feel fine.” Han Fei tried to adjust his breathing. As a professional actor, this would be a great challenge. He needed to ignore the smell that drifted off Ol’ Lee and the monsters as well as ghosts that latched onto Ol’ Lee. He needed to present himself as a ‘normal person’ like Ol’ Lee.

“You still haven’t explained why you are here. What exactly has happened at this school that got you worried?” Ol’ Lee pressed. He did not trust Han Fei fully simply because of the working Id. Han Fei’s original intention was to show Ol’ Lee Su Mengting’s diary, specifically the entries that were related to the guard. Based on Han Fei’s observation, every mission at Yi Ming Private Academy was interconnected. The diary might help Ol’ Lee recover his memory. His idea was good but just as Han Fei attempted to take out Su Mengting’s diary, the things on Ol’ Lee started to go berserk. They did not seem like they’d want Ol’ Lee to recover his memory. If Han Fei insisted on taking the diary out, there was no telling what the ghosts might do.

“A ruffian has sneaked into the campus at night. He used to be a student here.” Han Fei did not bring up anything related to ghosts and placed the diary back into his inventory. Only then the things around Ol’ Lee started to calm down.

“Why would he come back to school at night? To steal stuff or to commit vandalism?” Ol’ Lee took a seat on the single bed. The resentment of the dirty things that surrounded him was strong enough to cover the entire room. Han Fei who could not stand the smell, politely shuffled away from Ol’ Lee. “The boy’s name is Zhang Guanxing. He comes from a poor family. His father is a drunk and would beat him for no reason.”

“Zhang Guanxing?” Ol’ Lee repeated the name like it was familiar to him.

“Have you seen him before?”

“No, I patrol the grounds every night and you’re the first person I’ve ever met.” Ol’ Lee scratched his head. The ghosts around his head allowed Ol’ Lee’s hand to phase through their bodies.

“You’ve not seen anyone other than myself on your patrols?” Han Fei took another step back. This whole thing smelled fishy. Ol’ Lee appeared to see a different world from what Han Fei was experiencing. He was a very unique presence. “When do you go out for your patrol normally?”

“I have no place to call my own at my old age, so the school allows me to stay here. In return, I will help them look around the grounds at night. Each night, I’ll make 3 patrols on average.” Ol’ Lee answered honestly.

“3 patrols every night?” Han Fei was surprised. To do that and survive until now, Ol’ Lee must have been incredibly lucky or powerful. “Sir, sorry if I appear to be intruding but can your body handle such taxation?” Looking at the dirty things crawling all over the old man and the Lingering Spirit who still refused to leave, Han Fei’s question had a different meaning to it.

“It’s just 3 patrols. It’s nothing. Furthermore, the headmaster came from the same village as I do, so he is particularly kind towards me. He is willing to trust an old man like myself so I shan’t disappoint him.” Ol’ Lee clearly misunderstood Han Fei. “Anyway, I believe I remember this Zhang Guanxing. Come, I’ll help you look for him together.”

Ol’ Lee’s situation was very complicated. He not only had lost his key memories, he had even awakened some ‘unique’ powers. The monsters that crawled over him were the manifestation of that power. Technically, Ol’ Lee was being possessed by these things and his vision was distorted by the ghosts that made his body their host. However, different from normal possession, the ghosts who surrounded Ol’ Lee did not mean to harm him. If anything, they shielded him from the truth because they wanted him to live a simple and uncomplicated life.

Ol’ Lee was a good man so Han Fei believed it would be good for him to follow the old man for now. “Then, I shall thank you in advance.”

Watching the surveillance tape was the simplest hidden mission Han Fei had ever completed and the biggest reason for that was Ol’ Lee. Due to his encounter with the guard, Han Fei could feel his luck changing. Ever since he entered Yi Ming Private Academy, his luck was horrible. Today, he even got separated from the shadow and Zhang Guanxing. For a moment, he even wondered if the system was doing this on purpose because of his negative 9 luck.

Han Fei stood up and pushed open the security room door, he did not want to stay in there even for a second longer. After he left, Han Fei glanced at the mission interface. “Notification for Player 0000! You’ve completed Grade G Hidden Mission—Surveillance Video Tape. Obtained 1 free skill point, friendliness level with Lee Jingye increases by 10.

“Since the mission completion rate is lower than 50 percent, there is no extra reward.

“You’ve challenged 4 tales of horrors. Grade F Hidden Mission, Jin Sheng’s Tales of Horror completion rate: 4/7.”

The main mission was already halfway through. Han Fei planned to head towards the 4th floor of the education block to find Jing Sheng directly. The monster that resembled Ma Manjiang was also around the campus, Han Fei got to meet Jing Sheng before he reunited with that monster to understand what had really happened at this school.

“Ol’ Lee, aren’t you afraid to patrol such a large school alone at night?”

“Well, of course, there is fear but that won’t stop me from doing my job.” The things that latched onto Ol’ Lee formed a cocoon around the old man as he walked down the corridor with Han Fei.

“Furthermore, I personally do not believe in ghosts.”

“You know what, me too.” Han Fei very casually glanced behind the old man. The woman who was 2 metres tall, was still following behind Ol’ Lee on her tip toe. Her ruined face was practically breathing down Ol’ Lee’s back. The man would see her the moment he turned around. All the ghosts were doing their part to ‘protect’ Ol’ Lee. Han Fei wondered what would happen if he tried to expose Ol’ Lee to the truth, would the ghosts make him disappear instead?

Ol’ Lee was a ghost who could not see ghosts. In Ol’ Lee’s world, Han Fei was the only person he could meet. With the protection provided by the ‘mobile ghost lair’, Han Fei felt perfectly safe. The only downside was the horrible smell. Without any accident, they arrived at the 4th floor of the education block. The 1st to 3rd floor consisted of normal classrooms, the 4th floor had the labs and extra-curricular rooms.

“The student you mentioned is hiding here?” Ol’ Lee leaned on the window to look into one of the rooms. The ghosts around him did the same. Han Fei did not know whether to laugh or cry. If Zhang Guanxing was really hiding here, he’d be scarred for life seeing Ol’ Lee.

‘What exactly is this guard’s special power?’ Han Fei had never encountered a ghost like Ol’ Lee before. He shook his head to clear the question out of his mind. Without more clues, it was pointless to fixate on that problem. Instead, he turned and walked towards the room at the end of the corridor.



## Chapter 176:

Jin Sheng was the key person at Yi Ming Private Academy, all the ghost stories were related to him in some ways. For example, he was the one who foretold the deaths in real life and embellished them as ghost tales to warn the victims. Even though the tragedies were ultimately not avoided, at least the boy had tried. Han Fei went down the corridor and opened the door of every single room he passed. The monster who resembled Ma Manjiang might return at any moment, hesitation would be no different from wasting away his own life.

Since he had no key, Han Fei relied on brute force. He knocked down the doors. Courtesy was no longer that important when a person's life was on the line. Han Fei eventually reached the last room. This lab had a huge lectern. There was a cupboard slid underneath the lectern. It looked like it was used to store lab equipment. "Jing Sheng?" Han Fei called out softly but there was no response from inside the cupboard. Han Fei reached over to open the cupboard and once he did, balls of rolled up papers tumbled out. Han Fei bent over to look into the cupboard. Jing Sheng was not there, there was only a pile of waste paper.

'I've checked all the rooms on the 4th floor, where could he be?' Picking up some random balls of paper, Han Fei spread them open to take a look but once he did, he could not move his eyes away. Strings of sentences were written on the back of these papers. When arranged properly, they made up one after another ghost stories.

"I see the school guard patrolling at night, he is the only night time guard. I reminded him to stay away from the canteen and hostel but he refused to heed my advice. Now his physical condition is getting worse as more ghosts climb onto his body.

"I see the three children trailing behind Ma Bo. They are his dead elder brothers. The doctor said he suffers from schizophrenia but I know that he is not crazy, he is wiser and more cunning than most of us.

"I see the wild hound outside the school trying to grasp the attention of the spring blossom. Unfortunately, spring will eventually pass and the hated wild dog might not survive the harsh winter.

"I see a ghost roaming the girl hostel. He will only appear after the hostel manager is gone. Like the snake, he is there to trick Eves to take a taste of the forbidden fruit.

“I see Teacher Ma walking around with two faces, one looking like a human, the other like a ghost.”

There were many similar stories. All of them started with ‘I see’, written in the first person view. ‘These are probably left behind by Jing Sheng. All of his ghost stories have been brought to life at this school. Or rather, the tragedies that occurred in real life have been recorded by Jing Sheng as ghost stories.’ Reading through the stories, most would assume these were a child’s harmless nightmare. But for Han Fei who knew the horrible truth about Yi Ming Private Academy, Jing Sheng’s ghost stories were already the family-friendly version of what really happened.

Jing Sheng used a child’s perspective to describe everything, all the gore and cruelty were given a disguise of a horror tale. Han Fei unfolded all of the paper balls and used his impressive memory to memorize down all the stories. He wished to find a solution among them. When he reached his upper body into the cupboard to haul out the deeper pile of paper, the system suddenly announced in his mind, “Notification for Player 0000! You’ve found a Broken Grade G Cursed Object—Jing Sheng’s Exercise Book.”

Han Fei turned to the tip of his fingers and realized there was an exercise buried underneath the mountain of paper. The book was heavily torn and only a few pages were left. ‘Jing Sheng hid inside the cupboard and wrote down the ghost stories in this particular book? Since he has torn out most of the pages, why didn’t he go all the through? What’s so important that they are left on the last few pages?’

Han Fei’s curiosity easily trumped everything. He opened the book and what he saw made his stomach turn. The last few pages contained a message of self-reflection.

“Dear Teacher Ma, I wrote this self-reflection with deep regret and shame. I should not have come up with those stories and definitely should not have lied. This is a deep lesson that I have learned. I will not tell ghost stories to scare the other students again. I will not claim that the stories are real to gain attention. I hope that all the teachers and students will forgive me. I also pray that no one will make the same mistake I did. I was wrong. I am sorry, I apologize to everyone again.”

All the ghost stories were torn away and rolled into balls. Only this self-reflection remained.

‘The person he apologized to was really Teacher Ma. Looks like the man noticed that Jin Sheng has found out about his secret, but instead of using corporeal punishment, he uses his power of authority to torture and humiliate Jin Sheng.’ What Ma Manjiang did to Jin Sheng reminded Han Fei of what the Butterfly did to the kind homeless drifter. ‘Just what is the connection between the Butterfly and Ma Manjiang?’

Jin Sheng was not inside the cupboard and Han Fei had no idea where he went. His only clue was the exercise book. Han Fei flipped through the pages of enforced apology and his heart burned. Just as he thought there was nothing worth reading from the book, he found something else at the very last page. It was written at the corner of the last page and the handwriting was even and firm. The writer must have put a lot of thought before he decided to write this down.

“It is dark all around me, I can’t see anything. There is no light here, but there are the occasional pills which dropped around me. I could see myself falling asleep but soon all those people appeared inside the cupboard.

“They demanded an explanation from me. Since I could see them, why didn’t I reach out for them? I didn’t know what to answer. Were my stories real? I don’t even know anymore.”

After reading the last sentence, Han Fei’s emotion was complicated. ‘In the end, Jin Sheng himself became one of the school’s ghost stories.’ He sighed but the search for the boy had to continue. From what he wrote, Han Fei picked up a keyword—cupboard.

‘According to Jin Sheng, he was inside a dark space and the characters in his stories appeared around him. That means that he is probably still hiding inside some kind of cupboard. There is no light but there are pills? Could he be at the infirmary?’ Han Fei now had an irrational fear of opening cupboards, he was afraid that he’d open one and find a dead body inside.

“Ol’ Lee, where is the school’s infirmary?”

“It’s on the 2nd floor at the office building.” Ol’ Lee took in the pile of rubbish. “Is this one of that student’s pranks?”

“We’ll go to check out the infirmary first.” Han Fei flattened the papers and stuffed them inside Jing Sheng’s exercise book for that would be easier to carry than lugging around balls of paper. But to his surprise, the system added, “Notification for Player 0000! You’ve repaired the Grade G Cursed Object—Jing Sheng’s Exercise Book.”

Jing Sheng's Exercise Book was the gentlest and kindest cursed object Han Fei had ever encountered. It radiated no malice or resentment. But one's heart would brim with inexplicable sadness when holding it.

Chapter 177:

Han Fei tried to place Jing Sheng's Exercise Book in his inventory and he succeeded easily. 'This kid's cursed object is quite unique.' Han Fei spent quite a bit of time reading all the stories written by Jin Sheng so he needed to pick up the slack. Han Fei called after Ol' Lee and prepared to head towards the office building. Han Fei hurried out from the lab but he soon stopped when he reached the corridor. From the window, Han Fei could see clearly that the hostel's front door had been opened and a man with a horrifying presence was making his way towards the education block. 'Ma Manjiang?'

Han Fei knew he did not have much time left. He waved at Ol' Lee, lowered his body and scurried towards the office building. 'In real life, Jin Sheng's body was found inside his hostel bedroom's cupboard. Is that why Ma Manjiang has been patrolling around the hostel?'

Han Fei would never underestimate his opponent, it was why he managed to survive until now. "Ol' Lee, keep your head down! Don't look out the window!"

"What's wrong? Has someone dangerous infiltrated into the school?" In spite of his age, Ol' Lee was physically agile. He quickly followed Han Fei's example and squatted beside the window. However, the woman who trailed behind him still stood at the corridor, she showed no sign of hiding herself.

"Never mind, I need you to stay here! Do not let anyone get into the last room." Ol' Lee was too big of a target. Concealment was not his strong suit. Han Fei had no choice but to abandon him and head to the office building alone. Han Fei stayed to the wall and crawled towards the office. 'Ma Manjiang has been keeping the hostel on lockdown but now he has exited with his kids. This means that he probably has scoured all the corners of the hostel or he has realized Jin Sheng is hiding somewhere else.' With this thought in his mind, Han Fei got increasingly nervous. 'I've already completed a mission and stayed longer than 3 hours. I can quit the game anytime I want. At least I'll have that option in case I run into him.'

Ma Manjiang was moving with surprising speed. When Han Fei looked out the window again, the shade had already entered the education block. Yi Ming Private Academy's education block was connected to the office building. Han Fei made his way to the office building and hid in the corridor to prevent direct confrontation with the thing. The corridor was dim and was a perfect hiding place for other creatures of

the dark, but facing such a big threat in Ma Manjiang, Han Fei had no time to hesitate. He focused his attention on the landlord's ring. When he sensed even the smallest chill, he'd run off and take the other path. Through his masterful hiding and scouting, Han Fei managed to get to the 2nd floor of the office building. It was then that the sound of glass breaking came from the 4th floor of the education block.

'Is that Ma Manjiang?' Han Fei was worried about Ol' Lee but he had something more important at hand. The infirmary was beside the corridor connecting the two buildings, in just a few steps, Han Fei would reach his destination. There were growls from the 4th floor. The ghosts around Ol' Lee appeared to be caught in a fight. Han Fei used this opportunity to run towards the infirmary. His eyes were locked onto the door, his 10 points in stamina burst with their full potential.

10 metres! 5 metres! Suddenly there was a howling wind and the air dirtied with the smell of blood. 3 metres!

When he was 2 metres away from the door, a bloody face appeared at the corner of the corridor. It carried a giant body behind him. "Ma Manjiang!" Han Fei's eyes were red. He was running on such high speed that he could not stop within 2 metres. From the size of Ma Manjiang's body, he was probably the same level as Little Eight in her complete form. That meant that even if Han Fei wanted to escape, it was not possible. At that moment, many thoughts crossed Han Fei's mind. Instead of slowing down, he accelerated further.

The ghost tattoo glowed as Han Fei raised his arm. Just as he rammed into Ma Manjiang, the hand connected with the latter's bloody face. Endless malice yawned like a black maw. Despair, greed, luck infiltrated Han Fei's mind like a mist and in the centre of that mist, Han Fei saw a fluttering deep blue butterfly.

No one had dared to attack Ma Manjiang like this before. His body started to split open and the seams moved to consume Han Fei.

Han Fei had no other choice, he glanced at the infirmary door from the corner of his eyes and chose to quit the game!

Blood froze the world and Han Fei's consciousness detached. Holding his pounding heart, he had a hard time calming down. 'There is a blue butterfly deep inside Ma Manjiang's soul! It looks like some kind of brand!' Guzzling down several bottles of cold water, Han Fei collapsed onto his bed. 'What should I do when I log in next? With Ma Manjiang's cunningness, he'd stay guard around the infirmary. The room is on my left and it was only about 1 metre away. The next time I log in, I'll have to unleash the paper doll,

kick down the door and shuffle into the infirmary. After I find Jing Sheng, we'll both jump out from the window inside the infirmary.'

Han Fei kept replaying the reconstructed scenario in his mind. Even if there was no accident, Han Fei put his survival opportunity at 30 percent. 'This Ma Manjiang is going to be a huge threat.'

In spite of the weighing tiredness, Han Fei crawled towards the computer and recorded all of Jin Sheng's ghost stories. He could not guarantee he would be alive after his next gaming instance. Normally, a person would use this time to write down their will but Han Fei was not a normal person. Instead of a will, he put down all the information he had found on Yi Ming Private Academy as well as Jin Sheng's ghost stories and sent them to Li Xue. Han Fei never claimed to be a good person but in the face of death, his 'will' was meant to help the police. Making sure that he had not left anything behind, after he was done, it was already dawn. The man could not continue anymore, he slumped on the table and slept.

Even though death was a veritable threat at night, Han Fei managed to sleep like a baby. His mental constitution was impossibly strong, it was the result of his training with the Iyashikei game. He slept until 3 pm. The first thing Han Fei did was to answer all the questions Li Xue had about his email. Then Han Fei turned to the other unread messages. Director Jiang was used to having his calls to Han Fei unanswered so instead he fired several video messages to Han Fei. After he clicked on them, Director Jiang's excited voice echoed inside Han Fei's room. "Han Fei! I have with me a rare opportunity! Earlier you rejected Director Zhang because you aren't able to leave Xin Lu so the senior director has decided to come to Xin Lu for his movie! He plans to shoot the side character's parts while he is here!

"This morning, Director Zhang called me to ask about you, please do not say no to the man again! This is the first time Director Zhang is attempting a thriller, he is very careful with his production and casting! He is serious about using you, please return this call when you have the time. I've helped you read through the script, it is about a thriller surrounding a character with 9 different personas! You'll be playing the most complicated persona, it's perfect for you! I've already given Director Zhang a yes on your behalf! You'll be reading for the role at Xin Lu's Ya Zhi Theatre tonight at 8 pm!

"Brother, why haven't you answered your calls yet? You're not going to stand Director Zhang up, are you? I've put my reputation on the line for you here!"

Director Jiang looked so anxious in the videos, he would reach out through it to grab at Han Fei if he could.

“9 kinds of personas? A thriller movie?” It was indeed a waste to not take up such an opportunity which would be a dream for most actors. After having his late lunch, Han Fei took up the books to read since there was still time to the meeting. “What is education? A low-level teacher will show the students the truth, while a good teacher will help guide their students to find their own truth...”

At 7.50 pm, Han Fei arrived at Ya Zhi Theatre, this was his first time visiting a place like this. Once he got down from the car, he was identified by the worker and was led to the backstage.

“Mr. Han, please wait here for a moment. I’ll give you part of the script at 8pm.”

“Part of the script?”

“Director Zhang wants to see which actors will assume the character best so we will provide random parts of the character’s script and have you all play different segments of the movies.” The worker explained patiently.

“There’s other actors coming for this reading?” Han Fei’s brows raised, “I’m sorry but I have other engagements at night so I won’t be able to stay here for long.”

“Many companies sent over their actors when they heard Director Zhang has come to Xin Lu to cast a character for his film, it is rude for us to reject them, but personally I think you suit the character the best.” The worker was a smooth talker. He opened the door to the waiting room and had Han Fei go in to prepare. Since he was already there, Han Fei couldn’t really complain about it. After he entered the room, the previously rowdy room instantly became silent. Han Fei was the last to arrive, there were already several young actors waiting inside the room and Han Fei knew 3 of them. Ah Cheng who quit Flower of Sin, Wu Li who was nominated for the best new actor and the main character for Urban Secret Romance, Lee Tianlan. The three of them were friends so they formed a group and were happily chatting until Han Fei walked in.

After they saw Han Fei, their expression dropped. Silence blanketed the room. Han Fei was used to this, he walked silently to the corner and sat down.

“Why is he here?”

“A new actor with only one movie and he wants to try out for Director Zhang’s script? Who does he think he is?”

“Ah Cheng voluntarily gave up the main character role for Twin Flower or else he wouldn’t even have the right to be here.”

“I heard that Director Zhang personally came to Xin Lu for casting because Director Zhang was impressed with Ah Cheng’s acting. Ah Cheng agreed to the invitation and it was why he surrendered the character in Twin Flower.”

“Now everything makes sense. No wonder he gave up on that project, he has a better one waiting for him.”

“This is how the industry works. Certain people are lucky enough to earn the scraps and survive.”

The actors whispered among themselves but Han Fei ignored them. At 8 pm, the worker returned to the room with different scripts. “Guys, thank you for your patience! This is the script Director Zhang has prepared for you. Please familiarize yourself with it and we’ll start the reading soon.”

After he got the script, Han Fei poured his soul into it. He flipped through it quickly and the words were stamped into his mind. After 2 readings, Han Fei put the script down, closed his eyes and slowly got into the character. The other actors were just halfway through the script, when they saw this, they couldn’t help commenting.

“Such a show off.”

“Nah, I believe he has already given up. He’s not even studying the script anymore.”

A few minutes later, Han Fei opened his eyes and there was a suppressed madness and an inexplicable loneliness in them. Standing up, Han Fei walked out the door without taking the script.

“You’re going already? Do you really feel that superior compared to the rest of us?” Ah Cheng hated Han Fei a lot, his eyes dripped with disgust.



“We haven’t even decided on our performance order yet, and you’re already cutting into the queue, isn’t that a bit rude?” The main character from Secret Urban Romance chided. “We’re all in the same profession, at least have some professional respect.”

“I believe there is some misunderstanding here.” Han Fei scanned the rest of the room and shook his head. “I respect each and every one of you. I merely am short on time.”

#### Chapter 178:

Han Fei was telling the truth, he needed to return home to play the game at night, his life literally depended on it. He came only to give face to the two directors. However, for the other actors, to be able to be a part of Director Zhang’s movie, even if just for a small part, it was an honour and recognition. It would help greatly in their future career. Therefore, they could not understand Han Fei at all. In their ears, Han Fei’s words sounded like mockery. They felt insulted. In their minds, Han Fei emitted arrogance and harbored a great ego. Even a normal person would be offended when affronted like such, much less these young actors who were well-loved by their fans.

They were young and handsome. Be it at their companies or at events, they were the centre of attention. All they ever heard were praises, they had never been so humiliated in their lives. Granted everyone had their online detractors but no one had dared to say anything unbecoming towards them in real life. The room dropped into a freezing silence. No one said anything to counter Han Fei but everyone was burning with fury inside. Some turned back to study their scripts, while others scoffed with derision. They were waiting to see Han Fei make a fool of himself.

Of everyone present, only Wu Li lowered his head in awkwardness. He was there at Twin Flower’s celebratory dinner with Director Qian, he knew the real actor that Director Zhang had his sights on was Han Fei. So when he heard Ah Cheng boasted that he had voluntarily surrendered the main character role in Twin Flowers because he had already been handpicked by Director Zhang, Wu Li was already feeling embarrassed on the man’s behalf. However, he did not expose Ah Cheng. He merely chuckled along.

When he saw Han Fei leave the room to try for the role without even taking the script with him, his supposition was further confirmed. The character was tailored for Han Fei, most of the people in this room were there just to provide a background. Honestly, Wu Li did feel rather defeated internally. He was nominated for the best new actor that year but it was merely a nomination, he didn’t even get the chance to show his face on stage. Now, the feelings of being an extra returned to him.

Han Fei did not take another look at the other actors and walked out from the room. Wu Li was slightly envious of the man's presence and nonchalance. Han Fei did not care about making small talk and casual relationships, he put his whole attention into honing his craft.

"Wu Li, should we decide on our order now? We'll go out following the order, it'll be sure to leave a good impression on Director Zhang."

"Sure..."

When he left the waiting room, the worker outside the door was quite surprised, "Mr. Han, you're done reading the script?"

"Yes, let's begin the reading." With the worker leading the way, Han Fei walked out from the backstage and onto the theatre stage. In the large auditorium, only 5 seats in the front row were taken. The thin Zhang Director, in spectacles sat in the middle. He was reticent and gave off a serious aura. However, when he saw Han Fei, a small smile lit up his face.

"This is the first time I've managed to get to know an actor through social news. You have something about you that the rest of them don't. I hope you'll be able to show that to us tonight." Director Zhang was a senior figure in this industry. Even though he had not come up with any new products in recent years, no one could challenge his clout in the business. "You should have read the script, right? Our movie is based on an urban legend who existed about 1 decade ago. This man was a thriller-writer but he never caught his big break, so no one really knew much about his stories.

"Our team has visited plenty of places and people before we managed to piece together some of his background. His brain has been purchased by Immortal Pharma at a very high price from the writer's own adopted son. He was the only schizophrenic patient in human record to have been able to murder all of his other personas.

"The stories that he penned are very symbolic and very hard to understand but once you dig deeper into them, you'll realize the grotesque scenes are actually mirrors of real life.

"For example, in the book, Cattle Alley, the sins in humanity were manifested in forms of livestock. It gave the readers a rare chance to glimpse the world through the author's eyes. In its sister-book, The

House of the Butcher, the author recorded in details how he managed to murder his other 8 personas. The man was a walking mystery, even his pen name, Spider appears to be related to a known supercriminal.”

Director Zhang personally explained the background of the movie and Han Fei listened patiently. Incidentally, there was a Cattle Alley in the cryptic world and Han Fei had to go there to unlock the hidden profession, Midnight Butcher. This thriller-writer, Spider might be related to the cryptic world. Director Zhang was very satisfied with Han Fei’s attitude. He noticed Han Fei not only listened to his description, he took them in and tried to digest them to help his performance.

“The character I need you to play is Spider’s main persona, and the biggest villain. You’ll slowly take out your other 8 personas one by one.” Director Zhang valued Han Fei and assisted as much as he could. “This movie needs 9 very good actors. They will come from different age groups and professions. I’ve already casted the other 8 actors but I have been having trouble finding a suitable actor to play the main persona, I hope you’ll be able to surprise me.”

After that, he nodded for a man to get on stage. “I’ve tailored the script just for you, I didn’t put much limitation in it, I want you to be able to express and show your skills as freely as you can.”

With a nod, Han Fei went through the script again in his mind. Deep inside Cattle Alley, there was an old building, it was called the House of the Butcher. The building was home to 9 different people and the main persona played by Han Fei would eventually murder everyone inside the building. In the script provided by Director Zhang, there were already tenants at the house who had been murdered. Everyone was nervous and suspicious, worried about being the next target.

In that circumstance, one of the side personas started to suspect the main persona. The main persona played by Han Fei did not have much screen time in most earlier parts of the movie, he hid in the background from the audience and from himself. Instead the movies were carried by Spider’s other 2 personas—a male doctor who had years of clinic experience and a female teacher who was loved by children. The doctor kept trying to cure everyone and the teacher was there for emotional support.

From the audience’s perspective, they would be perfect as the main male and female characters. They were the force of justice, doing their best to pursue the criminal but in reality, they were also the biggest hurdle for Spider to return to normalcy.

For Han Fei, this scene was not hard. The reason was simple, he had once lived in an apartment like that. He had experience that no movie could ever replicate. Anxiety, fear and horror, he tried to silence these

emotions that would waylay his survival. When all the lights faded away, Han Fei felt like he had returned to that dark corridor.

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Chapter 179:

Han Fei's understanding of fear was far better than anyone present. He had lived through the deepest despair, his experience was branded inside his mind. In this story, he was the victim and the murderer. He needed to manifest two types of fear. The first was the fear of the killer; and the second of the fear of death, the respect a killer would have towards the enveloping darkness. He was familiar with all the personas, their strengths and weaknesses. He needed to outsmart and out-manoeuvre 8 individuals inside this apartment so that he would be the last one standing.

Cattle Alley was his worldview and the House of the Butcher deep inside the alley was his mind brought to life. All his 9 personas lived there. They had gotten used to one another but one day, the peace was shattered when one of them was murdered.

Opening his eyes, Han Fei turned to the male actor before him. He placed himself back inside the haunted apartment, playing a game that he could not afford to lose. Toeing the line between life and death, he danced at the edge of the abyss. He placed himself fully into the mindset of the main persona, he needed to pick up the blade and murder the 8 different versions of himself. He needed to kill to save himself. Each meticulously-planned death was the swan song for each persona.

Just with 2 readings, Han Fei memorized all the lines. The male actor on the stage with him started to pour with cold sweat. Han Fei's presence overshadowed him. This scene was meant to be one where the main male character started to question the intention of Han Fei's character. Through indirect questioning, he planned to draw information out from Han Fei but gradually he realized his lines appeared so weak and powerless before Han Fei. He involuntarily moved his eyes away. His brain warned him that the man standing before him was going to kill him but the scariest thing was, he had no evidence to prove that!

Originally, the reading was supposed to last only for 5 minutes but no one dared to stop the scene until it was over. The tall male actor's face was rather pale. As an experienced actor, he had not been so nervous in a long time already. Being on the stage with Han Fei, he needed to be 200 percent present to keep up with Han Fei's rhythm.

Once the scene was over, the people in the audience seat whispered among themselves. They were mightily impressed by Han Fei's performance. The more Director Zhang got to know Han Fei, the greater his satisfaction. It was like Han Fei was born to play this role. Director Zhang had a good eye for talent due to his years in the business. He already had his eyes on Han Fei when he watched Twin Flowers. Before he met Han Fei, he felt there was just something missing in the other actors who came to read for this role. It was not that they were not good enough but they simply lacked something that later Director Zhang realized was unique to Han Fei. To ensure his project's perfection, Director Zhang even made this special trip to Xin Lu.

After watching Han Fei's audition, Director Zhang knew that his trip was not wasted. The 9 personas had different personalities, careers and backgrounds. Even though the main persona was ultimately just a side character, he was also the key that kept the whole machine running. Only by having a solid main villain that the other characters would have the chance to shine.

"Han Fei, do you mind sharing with me your perspective on this character?" Director Zhang who was famed for his sternness was smiling all the while he was conversing with Han Fei. "Come, I feel like we have many things to talk about."

Walking down the stage, Han Fei did not hide anything, he shared his own opinions with Director Zhang. They chatted for half an hour and Director Zhang already decided to cast Han Fei for the role. When he found out Han Fei was not attached to any company, he called his personal assistant over to draw up a contract for Han Fei.

"Even though this movie has conventional main male and female actors, every single actor has their own weight to carry. All 9 personas are played by professional actors, I aim to shoot for the Oscars with this film." After watching Han Fei's performance, he felt like he had found the last missing piece for his project.

"Director Zhang, I really cannot leave Xin Lu..."

"If you're concerned about that, I will add this extra clause in the contract where all of your parts will be completed in Xin Lu." Director Zhang showed great understanding. He believed only Han Fei was able to bring his character to life.

"Thank you, Director Zhang." Han Fei read through the contract but he did not sign it instantly.

“Do you have other questions? Is it the pay? We can negotiate that further.”

“No, sir, I’m very satisfied with the pay, it’s just that I won’t be able to participate in the shoot from midnight to 5 am. But I will do my best to complete my job before midnight.” For any actors, shooting overnight was incredibly common.

“No problem.” Director Zhang agreed easily. Seeing how easily the senior director caved, the other male actor was unable to hide his shock. If this was someone else making the demand, Director Zhang would have walked off already. After making sure there was no problem, Han Fei signed his name and then used his id to scan the e-contract.

“It has been a journey to gather all 9 actors. You should go back home to take some rest, we’ll call you to meet the rest of the crew in about 3 days.”

“Okay.” Han Fei was going to be a part of a big movie and it was in cooperation with Director Zhang, he would not even dare to dream of this in the past. Han Fei left after signing the contract. It was by then just past 9 pm. After he left, Director Zhang made to leave as well but he was stopped by his assistant. “Sir, we still have a few other actors here for the reading. Aren’t you going to stay to look through their performance?” The assistant said helplessly. “They are all new actors from powerful companies. It’ll be quite rude to tell them to leave without even giving them the chance to show their skills.”

“You’re right.” Director Zhang patted his assistant on his shoulder. “So you and Ol’ Zhang will stay here to observe their performance. If there’s any good talent, take note for me.” Then Director Zhang walked towards the exit. He hummed under his breath, he was in a good mood.

“Ever since Director Zhang lost that big award, he has not been so plainly happy already.” The male actor who was on the stage with Han Fei commented.

“Brother Zhang, I’ll leave the readings of the other actors to you, I need to go and figure out how to reply to their representative companies.” The assistant hurried to chase after Director Zhang and left the male actor at the scene.

“Hey! Don’t do this to me! I have my own schedule too!”

...

Rubbing his hands nervously, Ah Cheng tried his best to memorize his lines. However, he could not stop images of Han Fei from appearing in his mind. 'Just you wait, you're not snatching this role away from me this time!'

Popping a gum into his mouth, he glanced at the clock on the wall. It was almost 9 pm when the worker walked into the waiting room.

"Is it our turn?" The actor from Secret Urban Romance stood up with the script. "We'll take the stage according to our decided order. Guys, like what we said earlier, no matter who gets it, we'll be happy for him."

After the young actors lined up in a row, they looked expectantly at the worker. Ah Cheng who stood at the front already had the image of a defeated Han Fei in his mind. His desire to defeat Han Fei was so pronounced that the script in his grip bent out of shape.

"You've even decided on an order already?" With the pairs of anticipatory eyes on him, the worker found it difficult to force out the words that he was told to deliver. He pursed his lips awkwardly before adding in a whisper. "I'm sorry but the role has already been set. I'm here to tell everyone that you are free to go home now."

Chapter 180:

The role has already been set?! The young actors in the waiting room looked at each other. Even as professional actors, some of them could not summon the professionalism to control their expressions. They had worked hard over the past one hour. Some had thrown back 2 cans of energy drink and now the worker was telling them to go home?

"It's already over?" Ah Cheng who stood at the front of the line stared at the worker dumbly, he almost swallowed the gum he was chewing, "But how can it already be over when we have not even started the readings? None of us has taken the stage yet!" When a person was delivered bad news, they would normally go through stages of disbelief, bargaining and finally acceptance. Ah Cheng was now in the first stage. He staggered a few steps forward which caused the worker to move away from him.

“The selected actor is Han Fei who took the stage earlier. To be honest, the director has already decided on his pick beforehand. Han Fei is the main reason Director Zhang is even in Xin Lu in the first place.” The worker said to console Ah Cheng, hoping that the man would not take offense. But when Ah Cheng heard the words of ‘consolation’, his face burned even redder.

“Didn’t you guys say that you’ll give blessing to whomever that is selected earlier?” Noticing the drawn expressions on the young actors’ faces, the worker quickly changed subject, “In any case... we’re closing down the theatre soon. Please leave if you have no other business here, we need to clean up the place already.”

“That’s impossible! Something must be wrong, why is it him? An unknown actor? One who has no talent at all?” Ah Cheng gripped the script tighter. He did not turn to look at his other colleagues, his face was purple like someone had given him several slaps.

“Ah Cheng, there are still many other opportunities out there...” Wu Li tried to comfort Ah Cheng out of sympathy but before he could say anything, Ah Cheng huffed and stormed out from the room. The other actors stared awkwardly at each other. Staying would not make things better so each of them made their own excuses and left the theatre.

...

Han Fei went on his merry way home. He couldn’t care less about the other actors in the waiting room, he worked hard for what he got. He did not owe anyone anything. ‘The pay for a big movie is definitely something else. After Director Zhang sent me part of the advancements, I should have enough to purchase the gaming hub.’

Being an actor was like gold mining. If you struck the motherlode, then congratulations. But before that? An extra’s salary might be lower than a normal convenience store worker. Furthermore, they had to work harder and be under greater pressure. Also not everyone would be rewarded for their hard work, therefore 90 percent of hopeful actors eventually left the business without making a blip on the scene. However, once your fame arrived, then everything would change, the most obvious being the income.

Han Fei was starting to taste the sweet fruit of success. The moment his name got on the actor’s ranking, his life changed. To be able to be a part of Director Zhang’s movie and play one of the main



characters? Han Fei was practically skipping with joy as he headed home. However, all that joy evaporated the moment he crossed the door into his home.

Han Fei chuckled mirthlessly when his eyes landed on the gaming helmet on the table. "I can already envision tomorrow's headlines. Rising actor found dead in his own home."

As beautiful as his projected future was, he needed to be alive to enjoy it. Han Fei noticed that after he obtained the gaming helmet, his life did change like the game promised. He started to have anticipation towards tomorrow, he'd begun paying attention to live a better life.

'Is it really as they say... You'll never miss something until you have lost it. Many people spent their lives just slaving away through chores, but once that life was being given an expiration date, one would do everything to make every single second that much more meaningful.' Reaching out to touch the sticker on the side of the helmet, Han Fei felt like his life had been intricately bound with this game. 'Is there really a perfect life out there?'

The clock on the wall ticked away. Han Fei adjusted his emotions. He pulled out the layout of Yi Ming Private Academy's infirmary from the internet and remembered every corner of that room. Ma Manjiang might still be there waiting for his return. Therefore, Han Fei planned to enter the infirmary, pull open the cupboard door and leave with Jin Sheng through the window the moment he logged into the game. Han Fei rehearsed the scenario many times in his mind until he could get every single step down to the minute details. Time passed until it was finally midnight.

After connecting all the wires, Han Fei put on the helmet. Blood descended!

The moment the robotic voice rang out to welcome him, Han Fei leaned his body to the right. The stinging smell of decay, the hair-rising presence of malice, the frost that came from his finger, all these stimuli came at once!

Without any hesitation, like he had practiced in his mind, Han Fei kicked the door to the infirmary down. He charged towards the cupboard where they stored the medicines. Since most medicine could not be exposed to direct sunlight, the cupboard was placed in the deepest corner of the room.

Almost the same time as Han Fei darted into the infirmary, several blood red arms slammed into his earlier position, causing thundering tremors. Blood splattered everywhere. Han Fei knew something was

on his heel but he did not have the time to stop to examine his pursuer. For Han Fei, every second was invaluable!

Before the person attempted the second round of onslaught, Han Fei fired off like a bullet towards the cupboard. He gripped the handle and yanked the doors open!

“Jin Sheng!” Han Fei was betting with his life, he had no other choice. Then doors painted black were pulled open and when Han Fei turned to glance inside the cupboard, the system announced in his mind, “Notification for Player 0000! Since you’re in possession of Grade G Cursed Object, Jin Sheng’s Exercise Book, you’ve successfully triggered Grade F Manager Mission—Yi Ming Private Academy’s Patrolling Teacher.

“Yi Ming Private Academy’s Patrolling Teacher (Grade F Manager Mission): At the school, the teachers are the students’ caretakers. Your responsibility is to love and cherish every student while respecting their individuality. Help mold their moral, mind, and physique. While you carry out your duty, you have to murder anyone that aims to harm the students.

“Warning! Since the mission difficulty is too high for the player’s current level, the system will provide the player with additional hints!

“Warning! Each Manager Mission is manufactured and constructed from the previous manager’s memory and past, in other words, during this mission, you will enter the manager’s memory. There is no death penalty here but with each death, you will lose part of your own memory.

“Warning! Completing all the tales of horror at the school will greatly lower the manager mission’s difficulty. Jin Sheng’s tales of horror’s current completion rate: 4/7!”

When the robotic voice came, a wounded arm reached out from inside the cupboard. Han Fei instinctually reached towards it. Han Fei wanted to pull the boy out but to his surprise, the arm was much stronger than he expected. Han Fei was yanked forward and he tripped and fell into the cupboard. Before Han Fei hit the ground, he turned to look behind him.

Dragging endless malice behind him, the mad Ma Manjiang dominated the corridor. Mouths split on his body and they all roared at the cupboard.

It appeared like only those who possessed Jin Sheng's Exercise Book could trigger the secret inside the cupboard. Ma Manjiang's expression darkened as his heart tore open, showering blood everywhere. Just as the cupboard doors were about to close, a blue butterfly wreathed in resentment floated out from Ma Manjiang's chest and fluttered into the cupboard alongside Han Fei.