

Iyashikei 291

Chapter 291:

The chain stuck with animal fur dropped into the hole, strangely enough, when the chain touched the flowers, the red flowers started to wilt and the petals supposedly wailed in pain. The flowers grew on bodies, absorbed the nutrients of the soul and blossomed representing the beauty of humanity. The beauty of humanity was also incredibly fragile. Once it was contaminated with animality, the flowers stopped being pure and they began to wilt.

Han Fei had made the last preparations. He picked a location where Eight-Crown had used to scale up the wall. Han Fei would hang himself from the side of the hole, basically standing right in the middle of the monster's retreat path. If Eight-Crown wanted to escape back into the hole, there was a high chance it would have to retrace its step through here. Seeing Han Fei strap the blade into his back, Bai Sinian decided he still needed to warn this man. In a way, he was a kind person. "I worry that you might not be able to stop it alone. You're too weak compared to that giant."

"Don't worry, I have a helper with me." Han Fei would not voluntarily put himself in danger. He held up a little girl's hand. The girl looked like she was at most 6 years old. She kept her head lowered and felt incredibly shy. The stronger the spirit, the larger they'd be, Bai Sinian still knew that. "She's your helper? Why don't I come with you instead?" Bai Sinian didn't question Han Fei or the girl, he instead used actual action to prove that he was worried about Han Fei.

"Then, you better be careful. Don't push yourself." Han Fei said gently. For some reason, Bai Sinian felt like Han Fei had taken the words out of his mouth. Seeing Han Fei slowly and carefully rappel himself down into the hole, the whole thing felt surreal to Bai Sinian. A living person armed with a bladeless knife was leading a little girl to stop the retreat of a Large Linger Spirit? Had these people lost their mind?!

From size alone, Eight-Crown could have easily swiped Han Fei away. The negative energy poison from the snake tail would immediately shatter Han Fei's soul and mind. Bai Sinian had no confidence Han Fei could stand a blow from Eight-Crown, much less kill the thing.

In the basement, the battle between Eight-Crown and the neighbours had reached the climax. After another head with the character, Body, exploded, its body expanded twice its size and its wounds started to heal. If any of the neighbours had to face this monster alone, it would be impossible. The monster's 8 special powers covered all the bases, offensive, defensive, crowd control, regenerative, supportive. It was very well-rounded but that itself was its weakness. Compared to other Large Linger

Spirit, Eight-Crown's powers were too average, it had no specific ability that could bring it specific leverage in battle. For example, the brothers Lee Zai and Lee Huo trained their bodies through disaster and they specialized in close quarter combat; Weep was a master manipulator of despair from a distance. If he was given enough time, he could weave cages out of despair and turn the enemies' despair into knives. If they encountered Eight-Crown alone, they had no choice but to run but when they cooperated, they were more than capable of holding back Eight-Crown.

However, Eight-Crown was ultimately a Large Lingering Spirit, if there were just Weep and Lee Huo, Eight-Crown could still take them down easily. But Eight-Crown was unlucky because the whole Happiness Neighbourhood was on the move thanks to the Singer's interruption. The tenants had never been on such a large excursion before. Eight-Crown basically had to take on the monsters and ghosts from 2 Grade F locales on its own. As the blood leaked out from its body, the pattern on its tail started to fade. To prevent others from entering the sea of flowers, it had already exploded a few of its heads but its effort was futile. There were too many enemies!

Without realizing it, the cage of despair closed. Weep stared at Eight-Crown's heart and pulled! Eight-Crown's remaining heads screamed. Weep pulled on the knife that formed from Eight-Crown's internal despair, the damage came from within it. Using the enemy's despair as a weapon, Weep's power was very terrifying. The despair and black hair slowly constricted its space. Eight-Crown finally thought about retreating. But just as it was about to turn around, a 2 metres tall woman wearing a red necklace appeared behind it. Two stick-like arms reached out from the red dress. Jin Sheng's class teacher hugged Eight-Crown's body tightly. The pale face suddenly turned unhinged. The female teacher's body started to corrode along the spot where she had touched. Her twisted love morphed into penetrating hatred!

The scariest thing was the female teacher was slowly melting into Eight-Crown's body!

"What kind of power is this?" Not only Bai Sinian, Han Fei was frightened by what he saw. Jin Sheng's class teacher was Ma Manjiang's wife, she was fooled and then killed by Ma Manjiang. Her resentment was deep and Han Fei had never seen her fight before. "Are all of my colleagues that powerful?"

Even Eight-Crown had not encountered this strange power before, the woman appeared to have the intention of melting herself into its body, to become one with it. It couldn't tell whether this was a curse or something else, it was already too weak. The children's heads started to cry. After yet another head exploded, Eight-Crown abandoned the lower body which was infiltrated by the female teacher while its upper body flew back towards the deep hole. After it was detached from control of the children's heads, the snake body dissolved into smaller Lingering Spirits. The body of Eight-Crown was made up from the souls of numerous children's souls. It was a monster that specifically fed on children, but it was in a less than positive state at the moment.

It once again felt the danger of society. Cryptic world was dangerous but the cruelty was on the surface. But ever since Han Fei arrived, the word danger had to be given a new definition.

The few spirits stared at the slithering Eight-Crown, they didn't chase after it. Since Eight-Crown had placed all of its focus on the enemies behind it, it didn't notice a little girl who had appeared beside the rim of the hole. She stood in the middle of Eight-Crown's path and slowly raised her head.

The dark eye appeared to contain another world. When she opened her 'eyes', the pupils on the walls opened as well. Eight-Crown's consciousness was pulled away from its body and it could feel its control over its body weakening!

Then it heard footsteps. When Eight-Crown turned its head around, its world turned upside down. The blade sang and humanity's light shone in the dark. Han Fei severed Eight-Crown's head swiftly and efficiently. It was as if everything had been rehearsed multiple times. Eight-Crown widened its eyes and looked at the figure who stood before it and then it heard the last word of its life. "Pet training!"

"Pet training failed! Notification for Player 0000! You cannot train Lingered Spirits as pets!"

The system spelt out Eight-Crown's fate. At the last moment, it saw a light that blinded everything. It shot through its heart and punctured its body.

"Notification for Player 0000, you've successfully killed Large Lingered Spirit—Eight-Crown! First kill for a creature of this calibre unlocked additional Exp, as well as Midnight Butcher's Hunting Entry!

"Midnight Butcher's Hunting Entry: Killing can improve the butcher's ability but it will also influence the butcher's mind. After you take down a prey powerful than or equal to a Large Lingered Spirit, you will gain additional reward. When you take down specific prey, you have a chance to obtain a special reward.

"Disclaimer! This is not a behavior rewarding hunting and killing, it is a training for the Midnight Butcher to understand the wild prey of the cryptic world."

Chapter 292:

The Large Linger Spirit, Eight-Crown was killed by the tenants of Happiness Neighbourhood, its consciousness was absorbed into Ying Yue's eyes, the resentment it accrued for years was absorbed by Jin Sheng's class teacher, while its large amount of Yin energy was shared by all. Other than for the Eight-Crown, this was a happy ending for all. The monster's giant body disappeared just like that. Bai Sinian stood there stumped, unable to believe his eyes. When he saw Han Fei who scaled back up the edge of the hole, he was even more shocked. The man who looked so weak and even bookish, was covered in ghastly tattoo when he faced off against the Large Linger Spirit and his butchering skill was the most expert and cruellest Bai Sinian had ever seen.

"One really shouldn't judge a book by its cover." Bai Sinian walked to stand behind Han Fei and asked cautiously, "What should we do next?"

"We should investigate the sea of flowers further." Even after the Large Linger Spirit was killed, the Grade F Hidden Mission was not completed. It meant that there were still secrets at the company.

"Some security guards had wandered into the sea of flowers before. The moment they did, they would be controlled and lose their minds. This place is very dangerous, I'd advise you to proceed with extreme caution." Bai Sinian said that out of kindness but when he saw Big Sin who was crawling through the sea of flowers with extreme joy, his eyes started to twitch again. What group of monsters was this?

Actually, Han Fei was also observing Big Sin. Without Eight-Crown in the way, Big Sin jumped into the blood pool in the middle of the hill and started to bathe in it. Before the security guards were sent to Ziggurat, they were only required to take one drop of this blood, this liquid was very dangerous. However, as Big Sin soaked itself in the pool, the water level started to decrease and a blood red pattern started to show on the bug's exoskeleton. As if in direct contrast to the Butterfly, while the butterfly's victims had beautiful and captivating patterns, Big Sin's pattern was ghastly, grotesque and barbaric, the style was completely opposite. "What will happen after Big Sin has absorbed all the blood in this hill?"

As the water level in the blood pool decreased, the red flowers over the hill started to wilt. The death of the red flowers revealed intertwining black vessels and beneath those were layers of 'humans'. The flowers' vines grew out from their brain, their humanity and memory becoming the fertilizer for the flowers. The stronger the memory, the brighter the flower. After the red flowers died, it was followed by the wilting of the black roots. The net that entrapped the 'people' started to loosen.

Mumblings emitted from the deep hole, it sounded like the dead bodies were sleep-talking. Initially there were only one or two but gradually more and more people awakened. They started to regain their

memories. Various expressions colored their previously dull faces, most of them had to do with pain and despair.

“Captain? Senior? Senior!” After the sea of flowers faded away, Bai Sinian’s eyes suddenly zoomed in on a spot. He was startled before he ran towards the edge of the hole.

“Wait! Don’t go there!” Han Fei wanted to stop him but this cowardly man had already slid down Han Fei’s chain into the hole. His body was submerged in the black roots, his legs sinking into the swamp of dead bodies. However, he didn’t give up or sink, instead he tried his best to swim towards the centre of the swamp. After sensing the presence of a living spirit, the black roots appeared to come back alive. They instinctively latched onto Bai Sinian’s body, wanting to drag him into the depths of the hole.

Shredding the nearby roots, the seemingly cowardly spirit showcased enormous strength, nothing was able to stop him in this state. As more roots grew on his body, Bai Sinian should have been dragged down into the swamp by now but somehow he managed to reach the centre of the hole.

“Senior?” Ignoring the layering of roots on his body, he tore off the roots that twined around another body and tried to yank him out from the mountain of dead bodies. Flowers bloomed in the gap between souls. The body no longer had any presence with it, only its past habits and a weak presence. After Bai Sinian grabbed his hand, the dead man tried his best to point towards the blood pool. Pain and sadness covered his face. After drinking the blood, they would become toys and puppets of the Ziggurat; if they refused to drink the blood, they wouldn’t be able to leave the deep hole. The blood inside the pool contained human cocoons and the roots hated cocoons. It was through this delicate balance that Ziggurat managed to create this mountain under the security company.

Normally those who were forced into the hole had no other choice but to drink the blood in the pool. If they refused, they would have to stay forever but now that Han Fei was here, a new rule had appeared. The old should be abolished.

“Grab hold of this!” Drake swung the chain to Bai Sinian’s side. The man in the hole saw the group standing at the edge. Different from Butterfly who could only bring pain and death, these people would always bring hope. Holding his senior’s body in one hand, he grabbed the chain with another. Bai Sinian was thus dragged by Drake and Lee Huo out from the hole. Seeing Bai Sinian being dragged away, Big Sin even chased after him, as if mocking him or perhaps it was trying to stake its territory claim.

When Bai Sinian was rescued out from the hole, a new notification appeared in Han Fei’s mind.

“Notification for Player 0000! Friendliness level with Bai Sinian increases by 10, you’ve gained Bai Sinian’s initial trust, you are now colleagues.

“Bai Sinian (The Cowardly Ghost): A very unique spirit, he is the most cowardly one at the security company and mocked by most. But he is also the last survivor at the security company! Do not underestimate him, when the coward is no longer cowardly, he’ll become extraordinarily scary!”

The system notification was quite surprising. Then again, when Han Fei thought about it, he realized the system was right. Bai Sinian did manage to survive until the end, the boss didn’t kill him but instead trapped him in a hellish loop. There had to be a reason why his boss had done that.

Even though he only lingered in the hole for a limited time, there were already a lot of black roots that had drilled into Bai Sinian’s body but he didn’t have any regret. He kept thanking the people around him, this young man couldn’t be more polite even if he tried.

The change inside the hole was still continuing. It was little wonder that Big Sin was the manifestation of tragedy, its small body had caused the large mountain to topple and turn. After draining all the blood inside the pool, it killed the human cocoons which were being nurtured inside the pool, tore off all the flowers and sliced through all the roots. Since how happy and free Big Sin was, Han Fei was honestly quite envious.

After a whole half an hour, after all the flowers wilted, Big Sin dipped into the deepest part of the mountain. At the bottom of the bottom pool, Big Sin bit and brought out a piece of human skin that contained a butterfly pattern. This thing appeared to be the core of the dead mountain. When the root binding the human skin to the mountain was severed, all the dead bodies inside the hole started to groan but the voice didn’t come from their mouths but it was an echo of their souls. Without the binding of the black roots, the numb souls finally regained their true feeling.

The mountain collapsed. The bodies’ craniums were cracked, traces of butterflies were left in their minds. Seeing this, Han Fei thought about many things. Butterfly appeared to be born from the depths of humanity. Did Butterfly take control of its first victim or did that person turn into the Butterfly?

The Butterfly did so many things, crazy on all levels in both cryptic and real worlds, other than to find the black box, it appeared to have another goal, which was to create another Butterfly. But it never succeeded. The last time it tried, it created the Spider and now it created Big Sin.

After ensuring all the roots were destroyed, with Drake's protection, Han Fei jumped into the hole. Seeing the dead bodies hidden under the mountain, he had no idea why the previous manager would paste the Iyashikei label on this gaming helmet. Noting Han Fei, Big Sin ran towards him carrying the human skin the size of a palm. If Big Sin had a furry body and was not carrying a human skin, it would be quite cute.

"Is this for me?" Han Fei discovered that after absorbing all the blood in the pool, Big Sin became cleverer. As he reached out to grab the human skin, several system notifications rang in his mind.

"Notification for player 0000! You've been infected by Soul Poison, please seek medical attention immediately!"

"You've obtained Skin of Hatred. The skin contains the presence of Pure Hatred and possesses the curse of the same origin! Please take care of it carefully. Taking this out willy-nilly and you might attract the Pure Hatred's attention!"

"Your pet, Big Sin has absorbed enough blood from its natural nemesis to break through to the second larvae stage! Loyalty increases by 10! All basic ability increases in power and all attributes double. It also obtained a new larvae talent—Harbinger of Tragedy."

"Big Sin (Grade F Cursed Insect): Tragedy is brewing but you do not notice it at all. The faster it grows, the heavier the scent of death is on you. No one has been able to keep an adult Big Sin as a pet because no one has been able to live until that stage."

Chapter 293:

Whenever he saw a system update about Big Sin, Han Fei would be assaulted by complicated feelings. It was a good thing that Big Sin had levelled up to Grade F but the higher its level, the heavier the stamp of death on its owner. In other words, the happier Big Sin, the closer Han Fei was to death. It would take a really special kind of person to keep Big Sin as a pet.

"The skin of a Pure Hatred? This skin feels just like a normal human skin, I didn't expect it to belong to a Pure Hatred." Han Fei had never seen a Pure Hatred before. "The appearance of this skin confirms that there is a Pure Hatred at Ziggurat and they are related to the Butterfly." Studying the skin with the

butterfly pattern, Han Fei was contemplating how to make use of the human skin to its maximum potential. Seeing how satisfied Han Fei was with the human skin, Big Sin circled around Han Fei happily. It tried to brush against Han Fei but that almost caused Han Fei to die from soul poisoning. Han Fei only kept Big Sin for 3 days but his poison resistance had improved to an impossible level.

“Well done.” Han Fei with darkening lips turned to encourage Big Sin. After that, he started to ponder another question. Both the sea of flowers and Eight-Crown had been eliminated, so why hadn’t the Grade F Mission been completed yet? The security company wasn’t a unique locale so the Grade F Mission shouldn’t be that difficult. Standing in the hole, Han Fei noticed that without the suppression of the human skin, the weak Animated Regrets inside the dead bodies started to awaken. The Butterfly had taken everything away from them, leaving them with only pain. Hearing the incoherent mumbling from the dead bodies, Han Fei’s heart weighed with sadness. He took out Rest in Peace. “If one day I fall into the hands of the Butterfly, I will become like you, unable to live and unable to die.”

There were things scarier than death in the cryptic world. For these spirits trapped here, death was the final present Han Fei could give them. “I’ll give you closure, hopefully now you can rest in peace.” Endless hands gripped the hilt and a warm blade materialized. The blade dissolved the pain and consoled despair. It gave the souls which had been punctured by the roots the final farewell. Most of the spirits dissipated, but a small part which managed to retain their humanity until the end joined the Rest in Peace.

Most butcher’s knives would dull after multiple uses but Rest in Peace was the complete opposite. Its blade would only get sharper and brighter, the presence causing fear among normal spirits. This kind of blade shouldn’t exist in the cryptic world and it was only usable by Han Fei. After helping all the spirits seek release, the mountain of dead collapsed. Each guard uniform represented a human life, Butterfly’s sin was deep and unforgivable. Crawling out from the deep hole, Han Fei turned to the last lingering spirit—Bai Sinian’s senior, the guard responsible to teach new guards. He had taken Bai Sinian’s spot to die. He didn’t choose to drink the blood but stopped beside the pool. The flower had sucked out all the memory and humanity from him, Bai Sinian’s senior couldn’t remember anything anymore. He only had basic instinct left in him.

“Let him go, don’t let him suffer anymore.” Han Fei stopped before Bai Sinian. The latter hugged his senior’s body and had a complicated expression. He wasn’t ready for all these. After a long time, Bai Sinian slowly placed his senior on the ground and he knelt quietly beside him.

“Your senior has helped many people, you are just one of them. But in the end, he chose to die for you, have you really considered why?” Holding Rest in Peace, Han Fei didn’t console Bai Sinian but told him the truth. “Perhaps your senior saw some kind of hope in you, he believed that you could bring hope and continue his legacy of saving people.”

“Me?” No one had told Bai Sinian things like that before.

“I won’t know you better than your senior so you can choose to ignore me but I hope you’ll try to believe in your senior’s judgement.” With that, Han Fei eased the warm blade into Bai Sinian’s senior’s chest but he met with resistance. Undoing the man’s uniform, Han Fei realized there was a thick attendance registry around the man’s chest. It contained all the dead’s names and pictures, as well as everything they had done. The security company’s boss wasn’t lying. The Ziggurat treated the locals at Yi Ming Street as prey. If the company didn’t send suitable vessels to Ziggurat at regular intervals, the people from Ziggurat would come out themselves to hunt and it would cause a higher fatality. In a way, they indeed had protected Yi Ming Street but they were far from being able to call themselves the street’s guardian spirits. The thick attendance registry was soaked in blood. It was light but the things it contained were heavy.

Han Fei had no idea where Bai Sinian’s senior got this thing, perhaps he just didn’t want these people to be forgotten.

“I believe this is for you.” Han Fei handed the registry to Bai Sinian. After accepting it, Bai Sinian placed it inside his uniform and kept it well. This cowardly ghost appeared to have come to a decision and the change had begun.

Rest in Peace pierced again and this time it met no resistance. Bai Sinian’s senior’s soul entered the blade and the blade shone brighter. There was now another person joining Han Fei. “Rest in Peace has approved of your senior, and your senior has approved of me.” Han Fei pulled back the blade and he received the system notification.

“Notification for Player 0000! You’ve completed Grade F Hidden Mission—Yi Ming Street’s Guardian Spirit! Obtained 3 free skill points!

“Completion rate is more than 90 percent, obtained additional Grade F Title—Yi Ming Street’s Guardian Spirit!

“Yi Ming Street’s Guardian Spirit (Grade F Title): From today onwards, you’ll be the new guardian spirit of Yi Ming Spirit!

“With this title, you’ve gained the qualification to open all the altars on Yi Ming Street! Friendliness level with all spirits at Yi Ming Street increases by 3, all the Animated Regrets and Lingering Spirits will be less hostile against you. Pure Hatreds are not affected.

“Notification for Player 0000! You’ve reached level 12, obtained 1 free attribute point!”

After getting the notifications, Han Fei realized the goal of this Grade F Mission was not to kill Eight-Crown but to provide salvations to all the spirits in the hole and become the real guardian spirit that they approved of.

Chapter 294:

“Killing Eight-Crown didn’t complete the mission but helping Bai Sinian’s senior did. The real guardian spirit of Yi Ming Street was someone absolutely normal and unimposing.” The security company boss allied himself with Ziggurat, he only thought about himself. In contrast, Bai Sinian’s senior was weak and could be crushed easily by Ziggurat but through his own method, he tried to protect this street. “The qualification of a guardian spirit has nothing to do with his strength but what he has done. This is quite like the style of Perfect Life.”

Just as Han Fei lamented that, he received the final notification from the system.

“Notification for Player 0000! Your professional resume has been updated—The night you sought employment at the security company, you killed the boss, trespassed into the core of the company and massacred the whole employee roster! Of the company’s 171 employees, only 1 remained!

“Notification for Player 0000! Your Business Killer Title will upgrade soon!”

The notification almost stopped Han Fei’s heart, why did the system make it sound like it was his fault that the security company’s employees had died?! Turning back to look into the deep hole and then Rest in Peace in his hand, Han Fei’s eyes twitched. Technically the system was not wrong. Opening the menu, and taking in his colorful professional resume, Han Fei didn’t know what to think. With this kind of resume, he could kiss any normal job goodbye. This was fine in the cryptic world, but if one day he returned to the surface world, his resume would frighten anyone that came across him.

The attribute point that he got from leveling to level 12 was added to Stamina, raising it to 17. For stamina, every 10 points would be a new threshold. Soon Han Fei would make one of his earlier dreams a reality—run faster than a ghost. “The hidden profession, Midnight Butcher, is quite a cheat. The additional buff to Stamina is ridiculous, no player at my level will be a match for me.” Currently Han Fei was the only player in the cryptic world but who knew what would happen after the game entered OB. People might stumble into the cryptic world like that game tester who went insane. No one could predict the future and Han Fei was not going to lose his mind over it. He was satisfied if he could survive to see the sun rise another day.

After cleaning up the security company, Han Fei’s original plan was to make his way towards Ziggurat but due to his new title, he changed his mind. Han Fei had been wondering about the identity of the altar in front of Happiness Neighbourhood, he never got the chance to open it before. After gaining the title of Yi Ming Street’s Guardian Spirit, the system stated that he was now qualified to open the altar so he decided to return to satisfy his curiosity.

After sending all his neighbours back into the urn, Han Fei left Yi Ming Security Company. Perhaps it was his new title being in effect, it no longer felt that oppressive walking down Yi Ming Street. If anything, everything looked very familiar like he grew up here. Half an hour later, Han Fei materialized from the shadows and returned to Happiness Neighbourhood’s front gate. “The first time I left Happiness Neighbourhood, I held the altar’s bowl and headed across the street. It was because of the altar’s protection that I wasn’t killed directly by the ghosts. Even though I had not seen the thing inside the altar before, it felt like it had been watching over me.”

The small altar sat at an unassuming corner, people would miss it easily. After Han Fei was all prepared, he reached out to pull away the black cloth covering the altar. ‘When I was small, the adults at the orphanage told me not to disturb any cloth placed over an altar, to not disturb the divinity inside. They also warned that altars found beside the street might be home to things which are not divine.’ Han Fei looked into the altar. The inner walls were covered in blood but other than that, there was nothing.

‘It’s empty? It’s just a shell?’ Just as Han Fei prepared to lower the black cloth back down, the interior of the altar started to change. Like gaining consciousness, pairs of eyes opened among the blood stains. The landlord’s ring pinged noisily. When Han Fei met those eyes, his Life Points, mental power and spirit drained rapidly until he didn’t even have the strength to hold the black cloth anymore.

Han Fei slumped to the ground and he looked at the altar in shock. Before he knew it, the black cloth was back in its original place.

'Eyes? There were eyes inside the altar? They were sucking out my life and soul!' Crawling back, Han Fei looked at the altar with alertness, he almost died in front of his house. Compared to before, the altar seemed to come a bit more alive.

"Notification for Player 0000! Lighting of the altar has failed!

"Different 'Gods' are served inside each altar, some altars will provide you great boons while others will claim your life should you open them.

"The lowest level requirement to light an altar is level 30 but since you've obtained the title Yi Ming Street's Guardian Spirit, you've gained the right to do so in advance.

"Lighting the Altar: After successfully lighting the altar, your name will be remembered by Unmentionables, you might get their blessing or curse.

"Warning! Each altar is home to an Unmentionable's past. Remember, unless you are totally confident, do not pry into their secrets."

Han Fei heard the notifications and touched the landlord's ring. It now had 2 extra cracks on it.

'You'd have to be at least level 30 to interact with these altars, no wonder I almost died just now.' Han Fei was only level 12, if he didn't pour all his attribute points into stamina, he'd be dead already. 'The Midnight Butcher will grant double stamina, and with the other attribute buff, I should be able to light the altar before I'm level 20 but Butterfly won't give me that chance.'

Climbing up from the ground, Han Fei's head was still spinning. He was about to put the landlord's ring away when something scarier happened. The song drifted down from the end of the street. The eulogy singing voice was rapidly approaching. The goal was clear, it was Happiness Neighborhood.

'Was it attracted by the altar?' Without any hesitation, Han Fei grabbed the urn and ran. Normally the Song would only echo around Happiness Neighbourhood but this time its goal had changed. The harrowing vocals entered Han Fei's ears and they punctured his consciousness and mind like small chains, latching onto his memories.

'Why is it on me this time?' The urn started to crack. Drake slipped out from the urn, carried up the weak Han Fei and started to flee.

Chapter 295:

As they say, misery loves company. Han Fei was in a weakened state since he failed to light the altar. His Life Point was so low that a bump could kill him. Under such extreme conditions, the Song suddenly made an appearance. Once it locked onto Han Fei, like a shark, it couldn't be shaken off.

'This is probably the side effect from failing to light the altar, the system did mention these altars contain the presence of specific Unmentionable. That's probably why the Singer is chasing after me.' Han Fei shivered as he thought about the pairs of scary eyes inside the altar. 'This rubbish game, why would it allow a level 12 player to trigger a level 30 object?'

Yi Ming Street started to frost over like winter had arrived all of a sudden. Paper money fluttered from god knows where and since the Song appeared, the comfort and familiarity Han Fei felt with the street disappeared. Being carried by Drake, Han Fei summoned his courage to look behind him. If he had to die, at least he wanted to know the identity of his killer. The street behind him was like a land of death, other than the song, there was no other sound. The song came closer and closer but the scary thing was it was invisible. Because it was invisible, that made it even more frightening. This was no longer an issue of mental constitution, but fear and escape were how the body reacted when one was around the Singer.

"Its target is me, Drake. If you stay with me, everyone will be destroyed." Han Fei said seriously. "We've cleaned up the security company and made known the relationship between it and Ziggurat. When Ziggurat found out about the security company's destruction, they would hate us even more. But if we led the Singer to the security company, the Ziggurat might think it was the Singer who was behind the destruction, it was the Singer who destroyed their production chain and took out the butterfly patterned human skin." Even at that moment, Han Fei tried to keep calm. Since he was going to die, then he was going to bring everyone down with him. The Singer posed extreme danger but within danger, there was always chance. Han Fei very acutely captured that. "After all, if I'm dead, Ziggurat won't know what really happened there. The Singer would bear this blame for me." When Han Fei said that, his tone was sharp. Even though he was the one being chased, it didn't stop him from trying to entrap the Singer.

Drake obediently carried Han Fei towards the security company. His hands gripped Han Fei tightly as if worried that the man had other plans that he was not sharing. With blood flowing out from his single eye, Drake was already running at full speed but it was not enough to shake the Singer off. He felt very

powerless. Before an Unmentionable, even escaping was a luxury. When the Singer felt like it was right behind them, Drake finally arrived at the security company. He had no idea what he should do next so he continued to run.

Although by then, he understood that the Singer had fixated on Han Fei's presence, the chance of them escaping was zero. If Singer was operating on its full power, they wouldn't have been able to escape this far.

"Drake, carry the urn and bring everyone away from this building. Come back here to look for me at midnight tomorrow!" Due to the extreme circumstances, Han Fei didn't elaborate. He grabbed Drake by his shoulder and said, "Trust me."

Perhaps because he failed to light the altar, the Singer fixed its sight on Han Fei. If they stayed together, they would all die. So the best solution was to abandon Han Fei so that the others could live. At the moment of life and death, not many would be able to make the decision to surrender their own lives to protect others but Han Fei was an exception. His firm tone and unshakeable gaze said one thing—compared to his own life, he hoped that his neighbours and colleagues could live.

Drake and the spirits inside the urn knew about these things but because they had been injured so deeply by despair that they stopped believing in anything, but now Han Fei was using his action to help them regain the 'thing' that they had lost. Everyone inside the urn witnessed and heard what Han Fei was doing. Throughout this process, Han Fei had no hesitation and conflict, he was sincere. The Song was approaching and Han Fei signalled for Drake to let go. After multiple tries, Drake finally put Han Fei down. "Remember to come back tomorrow at midnight! If I am still alive, you'll find me here!" By then, the Singer had floated into the security company.

After Drake and Lee Zai shattered the company's back window and planned to escape, the urn suddenly opened and a ghastly bug crawled out. It was not that clever, it didn't understand why everyone was running. When everyone made their escape, it toddled innocently towards Han Fei. Han Fei knew it was pointless to explain the plan to a bug but to be honest, when he saw Big Sin run towards him, he was quite touched. 'No wonder people like to keep pets, it's quite healing.'

To buy more time for his neighbours to escape, Han Fei grabbed Big Sin and got into the elevator. He pressed the button for the second floor. He had no idea whether he would make it or not but there was no other path inside the company. The elevator door closed too slowly for Han Fei's comfort. When it closed fully, a human silhouette appeared at the company front door. As the number on the panel rose, Han Fei's heart raced. Now only he and Big Sin remained. When the number on the elevator turned 2, the song inside the booth suddenly amplified, it felt like something had hooked onto the bottom of the

elevator. The red number on the panel flickered until it morphed into a human face. The elevator grinded to a halt. Without giving it much thought, Han Fei peeled the doors open and ran out with Big Sin. The Song followed like a shadow. Han Fei's face was twisted from the effort of running. With blackening lips, he stared at Big Sin. "Find a good place to hide, don't be discovered! Stop following me!" Then he tossed Big Sin down the window on the 2nd floor and he ran down the other director.

The song had already started to reverberate in his mind. Until now Han Fei had not seen the Singer in person but the Song had already occupied his mind. He raced down the corridor until the dead end. Han Fei, who was covered in cold sweat leaned on a closed door beside the wall. There was nowhere else to run!

The elevator that he took creaked strangely. The elevator doors opened and closed on their own and blood started to flow. After the blink of an eye, a figure suddenly appeared down the corridor. Han Fei knew that the Singer could delay him from quitting the game so before the thing arrived, Han Fei chose to leave the game lest he was trapped. Blood covered the world and the whole city froze but something was still moving on the corridor before Han Fei!

Chapter 296

296 Huang Yin and the Butterfly

Time appeared to slow down indefinitely. Han Fei could see clearly his mind was being pulled away from his body but at the same time, he saw a hand reach out to grab his leg. The fingernail scratched him and his soul froze. Han Fei's eyes involuntarily swung downwards but he saw nothing. Opening his eyes, Han Fei removed the gaming helmet and opened the gaming hub. His pupils were still shaking and he found it hard to calm down. 'Exiting the game wouldn't stop that thing, I almost got trapped in the game.'

The gaming hub was constantly monitoring Han Fei's physical condition. He didn't feel uncomfortable physically and he didn't feel as exhausted as he would have been if he only had the gaming helmet. But as he tried to climb out from the hub, he staggered and fell to the ground. Han Fei looked at his left calf in disbelief, he couldn't move the lower half of his left calf anymore! 'That was the place where the Unmentionable scratched me!'

He stared at the left calf and then decided to lay down and rest. After a long time, senses returned to his left calf but with it came quite a scare. 'Just a small touch and I couldn't feel my left calf anymore. Using this as a speculation, if I die in game, I might not actually die in real life but there's a high chance I might lose full consciousness and become comatose.' The joy of reaching level 12 was dampened immediately. The Singer had given Han Fei a good lesson, it reminded Han Fei who had gotten rather contented with

his current situation in the cryptic world a lesson on its dangers. 'The water of the cryptic world is too deep. Even someone as strong as Little Eight had to hide at Happiness Neighbourhood, so I need to be more careful in the future.'

Han Fei's plan was to train his level as fast as possible but the Singer had decided to put a stop to that. Han Fei finally understood the biggest difference between Perfect Life and the other games on the market. For most games, it was the player playing the game, but in Perfect Life, it was the NPC playing the player. Only by maintaining a constant humility and caution that one had a higher chance of survival.

Sitting down in bed, Han Fei found himself fully awake. Deep Space Tech's gaming hub was indeed effective. When he was submerged in the game, his body received absolute relaxation and recovery. 'Gaming equals sleeping, now I have more time to use in my day.' Time was the thing Han Fei lacked the most. He looked out at the dark sky and opened the computer to search all the murder cases related to Ziggurat and the Singer. Even when the sun rose, Han Fei didn't find anything. There were many articles about Ziggurat but they were mostly mythological in nature.

'It's like looking for a needle in a haystack, I would have a better chance talking to someone involved.' Han Fei called Huang Yin, hoping that his friend could help him contact Feng Ziyu. Feng Ziyu was the mad tester's colleague, and he had witnessed the massacre from back then. He had been searching for info related to Ziggurat as well. The phone only rang once before it was picked up, Huang Yin appeared to have set a special reminder for Han Fei's calls.

"Brother Huang, did you experience any more nightmares yesterday night?" Han Fei was concerned about Huang Yin. After he asked the question, Huang Yin was silent for a long time. "It was still that dream..." Huang Yin was in a strange state. Normally when a person was targeted by the Butterfly, they would be mentally affected, like the Chef persona of the Spider. Even if they managed to survive the mental onslaught, they would become paranoid until they pushed themselves mad. However, Huang Yin sounded calm and collected, there was no fear and panic, if anything, it sounded like there was even some taste of remembrance.

"Do you need me to go be with you in person? Have you considered just moving into a hotel near the police station for these few days?" Han Fei really didn't wish for anything bad to happen to Huang Yin.

"I didn't know how to describe it to you. In the dream, I was given a chance to live a different life. In the dream, my mother didn't leave me, she stayed by my side..." At this point, Huang Yin suddenly stopped.

"And then?" Han Fei knew Butterfly wouldn't be so kind for no reason.

“And then she continuously tried to kill me in various ways.” Hearing that, Han Fei sucked in a cold breath. Butterfly took on the image of the person Huang Yin loved and respected the most and used this method to ruin the man. Han Fei was worried, so he changed into a video call. On the screen, Huang Yin was still wearing his pyjamas, he smiled like a big boy. Han Fei was confused, he couldn’t see any mental breakdown symptoms on Huang Yin.

“There’s no need to worry, I’m fine.” Other than the bushy beard, Huang Yin looked normal.

“But didn’t you feel anything? Being killed by your beloved mother. Didn’t you feel despair having your most precious memory twisted? Brother Huang, you have to tell me the truth so that the police and I can help you.” Han Fei uttered sincerely.

“The truth?” Huang Yin thought about it. “Actually, the thing that happened in my childhood has always been my nightmare, the thing that I refused to face. My biggest hope is for my mother to survive and not sacrifice herself to save me, she was the kindest person in the world.” Huang Yin had been through death with Han Fei and they were each other’s only friend so Huang Yin didn’t hide anything from him. “My father hated me for quite a long time after that, he sent me overseas to study because he couldn’t stand being near me. Honestly, I’m now in my 30s but I still haven’t forgotten about that part of my memory, I merely have learned not to let others see my sadness.

“I’ve already felt guilt towards my mother. It was because of me that she had to die, I wanted to make up to her but I had no way of doing that... until I started these nightmares.

“When I saw my mother standing by the lakeside and not jump down to save me, the first feeling I had was not fear but great relief, I was worried that she might die in the dream as well. Then when she wanted to murder me in my dream, that was scary but for some reason, it felt like I was also paying penance. When each death, my heart felt lighter, the pain suffocating me was being slowly released. My guilt, my self-blame, my pain, they were going away with each death.

“At the later part of the nightmare, I started to voluntarily approach her even though I knew she wanted to kill me. But I wouldn’t run away from her anymore, just like how she didn’t hesitate to jump into the icy lake to save me.” Huang Yin on the screen took a deep breath and he broke into a smile, “I know what the Butterfly is trying to do but I don’t care.” Huang Yin appeared to have awakened some strange worldview, Han Fei had no idea if it was good or not, Butterfly was probably equally confused. “Is there anything else?”

“Since Butterfly was unable to make any progress with you, it’s already the best news for me.” Han Fei started to explain the reason for him calling. He wanted to know more about Ziggurat. Huang Yin agreed easily and helped Han Fei contact Feng Ziyu. Soon Han Fei received a document. After entering the password, he realized the content of the document was all related to the Ziggurat.

“The Ziggurat is not a specific building or a neighbourhood, it is a gathering of many different haunted houses and boarded off locations.”

Just the first line of the document had attracted Han Fei’s attention deeply. He ended the video call and started to study the document seriously.

Chapter 297

297 Ziggurat?

In the past several years, Feng Ziyu had investigated several places before he came up with this document about Ziggurat. The content was so preposterous and unbelievable that if Han Fei had not been to the cryptic world himself, he wouldn’t believe such locations exist at Xin Lu. In the 1st edition of Perfect Life, to increase authenticity, part of the gaming set was inspired by real life, and that included the Ziggurat personally designed by Immortal Pharma’s past director. No one knew what Ziggurat’s real name was, Ziggurat was just a codename but the locale had been closely related to death ever since its creation. Following the deaths of the director and the tester who went insane, Feng Ziyu was the living person who knew Ziggurat the best. He had personally tested all the missions available at Ziggurat and had been to most of the rooms at Ziggurat.

“Since the beginning, I noticed the connection between Ziggurat and real life. On the surface, Ziggurat claims to be a virtual location created by Immortal Pharma’s director, but once you were inside it, you would notice its tenuous relationship to reality. As a tester, I had checked the missions at Ziggurat multiple times, they all looked normal on the surface but they had such sinister details.

“Take for example, there is a deliveryman outside Building 1 of Ziggurat, he came to Ziggurat for his job, taking a temporary post from his colleague. According to the game’s design, the deliveryman’s attitude was completely different from a normal NPC, he was extremely cunning and crazy. He would inject the water from the toilet into the bottled water using a syringe and hid his cut nails inside the food. When the deliveryman made his 3rd delivery, he was encountered by one of the tenants, a father. The man discovered his crazy actions and got into an argument with him. Just as it was about to escalate to a fight, the player would be dragged into it. Based on different choices, the ending of the deliveryman would be different.

“The best result was when the deliveryman was arrested by the police, he would be given therapy but I realized things were not that simple. The first problem was the deliveryman supposedly took over from his colleague and entered the Ziggurat but what exactly happened to his colleague, the game didn’t explain. This was very unlike the photon computer, there was only one explanation, that part of the history had been purposely wiped away. I tried to look into similar events in real life and realized with shock that something similar really did happen at Xin Lu many years ago.

“It was a double murder case. Two deliverymen were tricked to a neighbourhood called Qiu Yun Residence, it was a high-end apartment. The two deliverymen were killed and stuffed inside their own respective delivery boxes. The case had been solved, the culprit was a father, he lived in Room 0314. If you think this was an isolated case, then you couldn’t be more wrong.

“Inside the small Ziggurat, there were more than 10 such storylines, almost every single NPC had their own story to tell. I’ve looked through most of them and discovered something shocking. Almost 50 percent of the NPC were modelled after actual people, their gory and bloody murders were written into the seemingly mundane everyday life stories at Ziggurat!

“In Perfect Life, with the players’ help, their stories would soon be tied up perfectly, the complete opposite of what happened in real life. These accidents and cases were gathered together, I really couldn’t understand why the dead director would design a place like this.

“As I investigated further, I noticed something even weirder. The NPC connected to murder cases were all living in Room with the number 4. In fact, the greater the number of 4 in their room number, the more terrifying their stories were. Based on that, I started to get curious about the people and things inside Room 4444. I tried my best to recall and flipped through the company’s internal records but then I noticed something, there was no info related to Room 4444 at the company. The only person who had been into Room 4444 was that colleague of mine, the tester who went insane. Room 4444 must have something important hidden inside it, the reason why my colleague went crazy. I used various excuses to access the company’s inner data and waded through the sea of data but the truth had fully been hidden away.

“Then again, I didn’t really come away with nothing. When I was testing Ziggurat, I accidentally entered a hidden room—Room 4944, I remembered its layout very clearly. In my investigation, I found out the room was modelled after Immortal Pharma’s Director’s childhood room.” There was a picture under that line and when he saw that picture, Han Fei’s eyes widened with shock. The decoration of Room 4944 was similar to the room of the previous building manager at Happiness Neighbourhood!

“Based on my earlier speculation, the greater the number of 4 on the room number, the more harrowing its inhabitants’ tales. It would then seem like the director didn’t have an enjoyable childhood.” Feng Ziyu investigated all the rooms he had been in and came to a scary conclusion. Almost half the NPC at Ziggurat were tied to murder cases, it was hard to imagine such a locale would exist in an Iyashikei game.

Taking in all the details, Han Fei memorized the cases and their corresponding room number. While he did that, his spine chilled. Compared to Ziggurat, the Happiness Neighbourhood was really ‘happy’.

“Qiu Yun Residence, Pear Blossom Neighbourhood, Blue Sky High-End Apartment, Happiness Street Temporary Homes...” Ziggurat consisted of a lot of different places but there was one place that Feng Ziyu specially marked out where he hoped Han Fei could go in person to investigate.

“Pear Blossom Neighbourhood?” The neighbourhood had a very common name and it was an old neighbourhood but it was also where the dead Immortal Pharma director spent his childhood. ‘9 NPCs at Ziggurat are tied to this place. Looks like it is worth checking out.’

The address of Pear Blossom Neighbourhood was marked out on the map. Feng Ziyu was a very detail-orientated person. He reminded Han Fei that if he did go to Pear Blossom Neighbourhood, he should go and find a person. The person was a once-famous horror film director but he lost his mind after his family got caught in an accident. Feng Ziyu paid him special attention because he had seen a few NPCs inside Room 4144 and they appeared to be the director’s family. Coincidentally enough, there was a black and white picture inside Room 4144 that looked 70 percent like that director.

The director was the only one alive but his picture was treated as the portrait of the deceased in the cryptic world. The boundary between the living and dead appeared to have been inverted.

Chapter 298

298 The Horror Movie Actor and Director

When Feng Ziyu paid a visit to Pear Blossom Neighbourhood, he did encounter the guy but after a brief conversation, Feng Ziyu had a feeling the man was not crazy but had to act crazy due to certain pressure. He believed the horror movie director should know something, the fact that he continued to stay at Pear Blossom Neighbourhood was suspicious too. After memorizing all the data, Han Fei destroyed the document. He called Li Xue, reported his schedule and then left his house with the nunchucks. Pear Blossom Neighbourhood was at Xin Lu Old City as well, but it was situated at a very

secluded place. Furthermore, the name of the place had changed so many times that even with the GPS, Han Fei needed a long time before he found it.

Taking in the dilapidated neighbourhood gate and the banners that hung on the wall, Han Fei felt transported to several decades ago. The technological advance didn't bring much change to the bottom layer of the society.

'The director has accumulated quite a bit of wealth from his movies, so why is he still living in a place like this?' Han Fei pulled out his phone to key in the man's name, Zhuang Ren. It returned him a lot of results. About 10 years ago, that was the time when this horror film director's fame was at its height. Each of his movies was worse than the one before, and the critic lampooned them greatly but somehow he had the box office and none of his projects lost money. Many people went to the cinema not to be terrified but to see how low the standard his works could get.

At the social media account of the director which hadn't been updated for years, there were his 'fans' who were still active. They called him the titan of the comedy world, revering this horror film director as the godfather of unconventional comedies. Han Fei felt a sense of familiarity when he saw the director's comment section, his own comment section was the same way. He was an actor but many netizens mistook him as a bounty hunter. In a way, he could empathize with Zhuang Ren.

The neighbourhood's guardhouse door was locked and the notice for the city cutting off water supply to this place hung on the wall. The trash cans in front of the gates hadn't been cleaned for a long time. This neighbourhood was once quite a nice living space but as time moved forward, it was slowly forgotten like the people who still lived here. Walking down the roads with many holes, Han Fei glanced at the sign placed above the roadblock. He noticed the construction on the road should have been finished half a year ago, it probably wouldn't finish in his lifetime.

Pear Blossom neighbourhood wasn't that big, there were 4 buildings in total and none of them that tall. Building 4 had been fully sealed off. Based on research, Immortal Pharma had bought this building a long time ago. Shaking the iron door which was welded shut, Han Fei couldn't help but sigh. Such was the privilege of the rich. The director of Immortal Pharma once stayed here but Han Fei couldn't enter the building, or at least he didn't dare to trespass in broad daylight. Passing Building 4, Han Fei came to Building 1 where Zhuang Ren stayed. He walked up to the 4th floor and encountered no one along the way. The place appeared haunted even during the day.

"Is anyone home?" He knocked lightly on the door. There was no answer, the place appeared abandoned. Leaning his upper body forward, Han Fei placed his ear against the door, he could hear the sound of the news. "I'm sorry but is this Zhuang Ren's home?" Han Fei stood for a full 3 minutes at the

door before he heard footsteps coming from inside the house. The anti-theft door eased open a gap. A bloodshot eye looked out. The owner said nothing and only stared at Han Fei.

“My name is Han Fei, I’m here because I have some questions for you.” Hearing Han Fei was there to ask questions, the owner immediately closed the door but Han Fei was prepared. He squeezed his fingers into the gap and held the door. “I’m not a bad guy, if you’re worried, I can call the police and have them come with me.” Han Fei’s tone was gentle but his words were incongruent with the gentleness. This was just an issue of talking, why would he involve the police?

Han Fei pulled harder and forced the door to stay open. To leave a good impression, he stood politely at the door and didn’t force his way in further. “I’ve seen your info online and I know about your past, I just need you to hear me out first.” Han Fei stared at the face behind the door and lowered his voice to a whisper. “I know you’re not crazy because I’ve encountered the same thing as you do. My family is not dead, they’re trapped somewhere, or rather they’re still surviving in a different state.” The bloodshot eye moved slightly as if taking in the hidden meaning in Han Fei’s words. “I know where they are but I can’t save them, I need to get some information from you first.” Han Fei said many things before a low and hoarse voice finally replied from behind the door. “Where do you think they are now?”

“Have you heard of Ziggurat?” Han Fei answered the question with his own question. But to his surprise, once he said that, the door slowly opened. An unkempt man with white in his hair and beard appeared. His actual age was around 60 but this man looked like he was about to die soon. “Come in, if you’re heard saying these things outside, they’ll think you’re crazy.” The man then turned into the room, he didn’t even close the door. Han Fei confirmed the location of his nunchucks and entered the room. Avoiding the trash on the ground, he took a quick look at the room. There were medicine bottles everywhere. It was morning, but since all the curtains were closed, the living room was extremely dim. Han Fei closed the door. When he lifted his head again, the man walked out from an inner room, holding a fruit knife. He stared right at Han Fei, his bloodshot eyes practically bulging. After a long time, seeing a lack of reason from Han Fei, he asked, “Would you like some apples? They’re given by the community service people yesterday.”

“Thank you but I’m not here for fruits.” Han Fei sat on the couch and looked at the television which was playing a recording and notes that scattered across the table. “You don’t seem to fancy modern electronics, do you?”

“I’m used to these old things and can’t bring myself to change.” The man sat down on the other end of the couch and watched the television with Han Fei. The screen was playing the news from years ago. A car was carried away from a bridge by a deluge and washed into the lake with rising water level.

“Were your family in this car?” When Han Fei asked that, the news showed the names of the victims. Among them were Zhuang Ren’s family but he shook his head. “They are not dead, they’re just trapped at Ziggurat, I’m sure of that.” Zhuang Ren tied up his messy hair. “Everyone else thinks I’m mad but my mind is clearer than most.”

Han Fei didn’t answer immediately. After a long pause, he asked, “Have you been to the Ziggurat?”

“I’ve been meaning to but I can’t find the path.” The man glared with his bloodshot eyes. To Han Fei’s confusion, he switched on the gaming console under the television and handed Han Fei a gaming controller.

“What is this?”

Zhuang Ren didn’t answer. As he held the controller, his condition became even more unstable. His pupils kept shaking but his attention was fully on the screen. After connecting all the wires, the screen started to play a game with horrible graphics and the game’s title was... Ziggurat. It had a black background and red font. It was simple but it gave Han Fei the chills. “My family is in there! They’re waiting for me to go rescue them! I can do that by clearing the game!” Zhuang Ren’s words became more unhinged, no one seeing him now would believe he was sane.

“The Ziggurat you referenced is this game?” Han Fei was quite disappointed. He was about to put down the controller and stand up when he saw something that caught his attention. In this game, the first map was called Happiness Neighbourhood!

Even more coincidentally, the goal of the first map was to find puzzle pieces, but instead of finding human body pieces, the main character had to help a boy find normal puzzle pieces. The player had to locate 8 puzzle pieces on the large map by asking the various NPCs. Based on the familiar way he controlled the character, Zhuang Ren had played this game many times already. As he triggered the missions and searched for the puzzle, he got to know the neighbours and their troubles. He helped them solve their conundrums. This first map looked unfinished but it had a lot of content. By then Han Fei no longer thought Zhuang Ren was a crazy person, he sat back down and watched quietly.

Zhuang Ren used 15 minutes to find all the puzzle pieces. The finished puzzle was a picture of a child reaching for a butterfly. After finishing the first map, Zhuang Ren entered another map. The second map was called Qiu Yun Residence. Here, Zhuang Ren had to help the deliveryman deliver the packages through the complicated building pathways. While delivering the goods, Zhuang Ren would interact with different people and hear their stories of humanity. From the 2 current maps, Han Fei saw that the

game creator encouraged a message of hope and hard work, in essence, they were trying to create an lyashikei game.

After 10 minutes, Zhuang Ren finished all the mission and he entered the 3rd map, Happiness Street Temporary Homes. The temporary homes had quality and safety problems and the mission required Zhuang Ren to persuade all of its current citizens to move out. The game design was very interesting but Zhuang Ren hit on the button mechanically because he already played this who knew how many times already. He used the quickest path to finish all the missions. 3rd map, 4th map....

When it was around noon, Zhuang Ren reached the 8th map and the map's name was Pear Blossom Neighbourhood. When he reached this map, Zhuang Ren's speed conspicuously slowed down. It was like he was watching his life from another angle. Half an hour later, he cleared the 8th map. The game was hard but not impossible. Just as Han Fei thought they were going to proceed to the 9th map, the game restarted and the title Ziggurat reappeared on screen.

"That's all?"

"No, the gate to Ziggurat is just opening." Zhuang Ren clicked on the start game button but this time, he was sent into the 9th map. Just like how he had once helped piece the 8 puzzle pieces together at Happiness Neighbourhood to unlock that picture, the player had to finish the 8 maps once before they could access the 9th map.

The 9th map revolved around a very strange building. Whenever Zhuang Ren's character tried to approach the building, they would die for no reason. He attempted entry from different directions but it was to no avail, he couldn't find the entrance. The blood vessels in his eyes thickened and Zhuang Ren handled the controller rougher and rougher. Eventually he slammed the controller on the table and shouted angrily as he swiped everything to the ground. Shouting, screaming, lashing out, Zhuang Ren only calmed down after a long time. His hands were injured by broken glass but Zhuang Ren didn't seem to feel the pain. Picking up the controller, he exited the game and restarted everything.

"I must have missed something or I need some kind of item that will grant me access to the Ziggurat." Zhuang Ren's hands were bleeding but his eyes were transfixed on the screen. Seeing Zhuang Ren who was lost in the game, Han Fei touched the controller and suddenly said, "Where did you find this game? And who told you your family is trapped at Ziggurat?" It might be grief but grief wouldn't push someone to such extremes, Han Fei believed something else had happened to Zhuang Ren.

“You will not believe me, you’ll think I’m crazy.” Zhuang Ren worked the controller and said, “The game was given to me by Immortal Pharma’s director when we were young, it was about 40 years ago, at the time, he lived in this neighbourhood.”

“Immortal Pharma’s director?” Han Fei’s eyes shone with disbelief.

“I know, you’re thinking I’m creating stories. After all, the man’s already dead. To be honest, I don’t get it myself either. Why would the man who people claimed closest to God give me such a game? It was a mystery until I lost my family about 10 years ago...” Zhuang Ren looked at Han Fei. The latter’s eyes widened. “Yes, you saw the map for Pear Blossom Neighbourhood yourself. The game was given to me before the tragedy befell my family. The game had predicted my family’s death.” Zhuang Ren put down the controller. “Everyone says I’m crazy. Perhaps, I am really crazy or the world is crazy.” No one spoke and the room was eerily quiet. After a long time, Han Fei broke the silence, “Did Immortal Pharma’s Director say anything else?”

“It was so long ago, I could only remember one blurry scene. That night, I saw him talking to himself alone at the corner of the neighbourhood like he was possessed. He kept mumbling about his older brother.” Walking down memory lane, his body leaned into the sofa. “At the time, I was still young. Out of kindness, I wanted to help him but he turned to ask me a question that I couldn’t understand until now.”

“What question?”

“He asked me whether there are ghosts in this world or not.”

“How did you answer?”

“I told him there wasn’t and then he gave me this game.” Zhuang Ren stared at the screen and the wrinkles on his face seemed to deepen. “He even told me, if I ever lost something important, I could look for it inside here. Perhaps they haven’t left, they are just trapped inside a black building and unable to leave.”

Everything matched but what Zhuang Ren didn’t get was the Ziggurat mentioned by the Director was a Ziggurat inside another game.

299 The Real Iyashikei Game

The black box's previous owner was Fu Sheng, or the Immortal Pharma's Director's older brother. Han Fei believed that was the case but after interacting with Zhuang Ren, Han Fei realized the director who stayed at Pear Blossom Neighbourhood didn't have an older brother, or at least he had never seen that brother before. Not only Zhuang Ren, even the director's family as well as the group of lawyers he hired before his death didn't make any mention of an older brother. His brows creased, Han Fei came here for answers but he found himself with another mystery.

'As the previous owner of the black box, his younger brother became the man closest to God and changed the whole world. The man himself, though, couldn't even live a normal life, why was that? Why was Fu Sheng killed in the end and had his memories shattered?' Questions surged into his mind. Han Fei wanted to hurry back into the game, to find the previous manager's memory fragments. He needed to know the truth. 'My current area is still considered the starting map. The real world will open after I clear Ziggurat.' While Han Fei was contemplating these questions, Zhuang Ren started the game again. He controlled the character and once again died at the Ziggurat map.

As the afternoon rolled by, Han Fei had watched Zhuang Ren play the game so many times that he could already memorize the procedure himself. After getting Zhuang Ren's permission, he decided to give it a try himself. There were many hints inside this game, the kid who caught the butterfly at the Happiness Neighbourhood, the older brother who was unnamed at Pear Blossom Neighbourhood and the Ziggurat which would always bring death with it. The game only had 8 maps but the stories in each of the maps had endless ways of reading them. Zhuang Ren had sought out the most expedient way to clear all the maps but he still couldn't finish the game.

Han Fei decided to approach the game differently from Zhuang Ren. Clearing the game was not his goal, instead he wanted to find out the message which was inherent in this game left behind by the director. He had personally participated in the human jigsaw case, lived under the same room with the 8 victims, and became the building manager of Happiness Neighbourhood Building 1. He was the person who understood Happiness Neighbourhood the best in this world. When he controlled the main character to interact with the neighbours, Han Fei couldn't stop frowning. The game's message and image were warm and peaceful. Even if there was conflict between the neighbours, in the end, they would be resolved peacefully. This was a fully fleshed-out Iyashikei game.

'This feels like an extremely early version of Perfect Life. It has a pretty and warm appearance but underneath that appearance is a demon who survives on people's despair and negative emotions.' That was how Han Fei felt because he had been to the cryptic world himself. 'This game was made more than

decades ago and 8 puzzle pieces were hidden inside the Happiness Neighbourhood map. That coincides perfectly with the details of the human jigsaw case but the human jigsaw case only happened 10 years ago. The director prophesied the human jigsaw case? Or someone started to commit the series of cases based on the game detail left behind by the Director? Could Butterfly have known about the existence of this game? Or Zhuang Ren is the Butterfly? Or... Butterfly is the Immortal Pharma's Director? This game is not a prophecy but a calling card?' With that in mind, Han Fei's heart chilled. But soon, he calmed down again. The chance of the Butterfly being the Director was small but they should know each other. To verify his suspicion, Han Fei planned to reconstruct the human jigsaw case inside the Ziggurat game. To do that, one had to know the killer's modus operandi, and the location where the human pieces were hidden. Only Han Fei and the police involved in the case would know about these details.

He followed Zhuang Ren's direction and finished all the side missions. Han Fei bonded with all the neighbours, and the place was radiating with happiness and warmth. When everyone was submerged in this haze of happiness, Han Fei accepted a mission to skin an apple at the kitchen on the 5th floor. After accepting the mission, he didn't grab the apple but instead went to the first floor to initiate his plan. Zhuang Ren saw through Han Fei's plan. His bloodshot eyes blinked. He said, "It's pointless, I've tried killing all the NPCs on all the maps, it will only make you fail. The first 8 maps of this game require you to create healing memories, so that it'll form a great contrast with the upcoming Ziggurat."

Han Fei ignored Zhuang Ren, he remembered the death of each victim and to his surprise, the game provided him with all the tools to perfectly duplicate the human jigsaw case. The Ziggurat game had a day and night cycle, Zhuang Ren used 10 minutes to clear the first map, in comparison, Han Fei used 20 minutes just to prepare for his first kill. When he murdered all the victims and placed their body parts where they should be, the game really did change. Zhuang Ren, who had played the game to its ends so many times, didn't expect this new unexplored development. His eyes were round and his face was colored in shock. On the screen, Han Fei used the 7 victims' body parts to piece out the last victim— Little Eight.

After the appearance of the dead girl, the cute and warm atmosphere turned immediately. Just as Han Fei placed Little Eight's body inside Room 1044, the screen turned blood red. Little Eight was like a key that opened the other side of this map!

'Little Eight is the key!' Han Fei had heard that repeated many times by different people but he didn't really understand why. Today, he finally saw it in action. 'But why is she so unique? What secret is hidden on her?' Han Fei was muddled by these questions but he didn't have time to think. The map had changed, the previously friendly neighbourhood was now teeming with monsters and murderers. They would immediately kill when they saw the main character, they had lost their rationality and humanity.

“Why don’t you... hand it back to me?” Seeing the new change, Zhuang Ren worried that Han Fei might be overwhelmed by the monsters but a few seconds later, he realized he was worried for no reason. Using the various items inside the neighbourhood, Han Fei’s character carved a way out for himself. He was so familiar with the game that it felt like he had personally experienced this event before!

The way Zhuang Ren looked at Han Fei changed. The man didn’t even realize that it was the same way he had used to look at the Immortal Pharma’s Director when he was young. Han Fei successfully escaped from Happiness Neighbourhood and then he arrived at the second map. After triggering the change with Little Eight, all the subsequent maps had changed as well. This was the gory version Zhuang Ren had not played before. Just looking at it made his heart wince but Han Fei was perfectly at ease. The 2nd map, 3rd map, 4th map... Han Fei got more and more familiar with the control. The sound of the controller was the only sound inside the room. Han Fei poured his whole attention into the game because he believed there was a great chance he might run into these things inside Ziggurat. So on top of playing the game, he memorized the geography, characters and conversations that he encountered!

His pupils trembled and blood vessels crawled on the edge of his eyes. Han Fei stared at the screen and his hands flew like birds. While he controlled the character, his lips moved, memorizing all the content on screen. Zhuang Ren who sat beside him was stumped into silence, he also didn’t dare to disturb Han Fei. Compared to Han Fei, he appeared so normal and banal.

The 5th map, 6th map... There was no conversation and communication. Maintaining the same pose, Han Fei blew through the red hell. Han Fei, who never had a drop of water from noon to dusk, finally cleared the 8th map. By then the main character was already covered in red and the game screen had turned blood red as well. The room was incredibly quiet. Han Fei and Zhuang Ren stared at the screen transfixed. Blood dripped and the 9th map, Ziggurat finally appeared!

But different from before, the Ziggurat inside the map had its door open. The dark entrance was like the demon’s mouth, waiting for the living to walk in. The hands that held the controller were already soaked in sweat. Han Fei paused for a moment before he controlled the character to approach the Ziggurat. Zhuang Ren and Han Fei’s hearts rose. They had never been inside Ziggurat before. With two of them watching, the character in the game walked towards the door and into Ziggurat!

“You did it!” Zhuang Ren was so excited that it was indescribable. He was treated by so many to be crazy but he didn’t mind because he had a goal to achieve and this was the moment he had been working for.

‘To enter the Ziggurat, one has to know the details of the human jigsaw case and one has to be inside the cryptic world to get the crucial information that Little Eight is living in Room 1044. After knowing all these things, they have to clear all 8 maps which had gotten twisted without dying once. Only then

would they have the right to enter Ziggurat.' Han Fei cleared it at first try but he knew how impossible that was for a normal player. A normal person wouldn't be able to do this. Compared to Zhuang Ren, Han Fei was so much calmer. He looked at the crimson screen and pushed open the first door they came across inside Ziggurat.

"Please choose a death curse that is most acceptable to you." After entering the room, this sentence was written on the blood red wall.

Zhuang Ren thought aloud and tried to give it different readings. Han Fei turned to the corner of the room where a colorful butterfly had landed on a dead body. The butterfly was different from any butterfly he had met before. It had 2 scary ghost faces on its wings.

Chapter 300

300 If you Weep, You'll Die

Not all butterflies were beautiful in this world, some of them were ugly and poisonous like the pets of demons. Ignoring the message, Han Fei moved the main character to walk towards the dead body. When he got close, the butterfly on the body suddenly flapped its wings and flew around Han Fei. Interacting with the dead body, Han Fei noticed several yellowed notes around the body. Each of them had a red message on them. "If you're afraid, you'll die!" "If you look back, you'll die!" "If you see your reflection in the mirror, you'll die!" "If you eat inside the room, you'll die!" "If you open your mouth to speak, you'll die!"

The messages were spine-tingling. Han Fei had no idea which of the paper notes the dead body got but his death should be related to one of them.

"In the Ziggurat, you'll only die if you do things which are written on the notes?" Zhuang Ren was already out of touch with the modern gaming world. He took things literally.

"That should be the case." Han Fei's eyes were locked on the butterfly. The butterfly circled Han Fei's character several times, before it flew deeper into the room.

"Should we follow him? Maybe the butterfly is our guide for this map?"

“It is definitely not the guide, you’ll only die horribly if you follow it.” Just as Han Fei said that, the room where the character was in changed. After the butterfly flew out, the door closed on its own and this bloody message appeared behind the door—The death curse you’ve chosen is, if you move, you’ll die!

Han Fei didn’t really make any choice, all he did was to interact with the body and looked at the messages on the paper notes. No matter how good of a player he was, he’d have to stop playing if he ran into this curse. After a long hesitation, Han Fei tried to move the character forward. The moment he did, the character dissolved into a bloody pool and died horribly. The game returned to the starting page and the term Ziggurat reappeared on the screen.

“If we need to clear the Ziggurat, we need to choose a curse that is not so easily triggered.” Han Fei stared at the screen. He looked like he was playing the game but actually he was thinking about the cryptic world. Looking at the time, Han Fei believed he could manage to enter the ‘Ziggurat’ at least one more time. He stood up to work his kinks out from his body. Then he picked up the controller and said, “Zhuang Ren, do you know how to order take-outs? Just grab something easy to eat and we’ll continue with the game.” It felt like Han Fei was the owner and Zhuang Ren was the guest, but the latter complied without complaint. For Zhuang Ren, Han Fei was like his savior so of course, he would do everything within his power to satisfy him.

Each careless death meant that one had to start over from the start. The complicated missions exhausted hours, when Han Fei reached the 9th map again, it was already 8 pm. He wanted to find out how exactly did one choose the death curse. Controlling the character carefully down the corridor, there were 12 rooms on the first floor and Han Fei took the first room on the left in his previous attempt. “Does the choice of room equal the choice of the death curse?” Han Fei was very cautious. But perhaps because he was dragging it out too long, footsteps came from deep down the corridor. Something was approaching. Several seconds later, the deliveryman who first appeared in the 2nd map made his return. His head was smashed in, flesh mutations grew on the ends of his fingers. With a giant delivery bag on his bag, he crawled towards Han Fei.

“You should find a room to hide in!” Zhuang Ren gasped. In a normal horror game, when the monsters appeared, the player only needed to find a place to hide until they went away. Shaking his head, Han Fei controlled the character towards the stairs. After the deliveryman disappeared from sight, he turned down a different direction. Without any fighting ability, just using geographical advantage, Han Fei managed to hide from the deliveryman’s pursuit again and again. “There’s not many things I know but the game of hide-and-seek is something I do know.” Using the stairs on both sides of the Ziggurat, Han Fei successfully shook the deliveryman off. But before he could sigh in relief, the character suddenly melted into gruesome goo and died on the spot.

“Why did you die again? You weren’t attacked by any monsters and you didn’t trigger the curse, so how did you die?” Zhuang Ren was confused. This game couldn’t be understood normally.

“I believe it’s because since you didn’t pick a death curse for too long, the Ziggurat arranged one for you.” Han Fei narrowed his eyes because he was reminded of something. Due to his intervention of Butterfly’s plan, he was cursed by Ziggurat and he would die in some kind of manner within a month. The Death Curse was similar to the curses inside this Ziggurat game. Then if he entered the Ziggurat, and chose another death curse, which curse would trigger first?

Then again, if he pondered this from another perspective, did that mean that he wouldn’t need to pick one when he entered the Ziggurat because he was already cursed? Ziggurat was not a normal game and Han Fei’s way of thinking was not normal either.

After the 2nd failure, Han Fei glanced at the time, he believed he could start a 3rd attempt. He was getting more familiar with the first 8 maps, and used less time to complete them. Soon Han Fei entered the Ziggurat for the 3rd time.

“Do you mind slowing down...” Zhuang Ren wanted to mimic Han Fei, to memorize Han Fei’s controls but he soon gave up. Sometimes he couldn’t even understand certain decisions that Han Fei made. Other times, even if he understood it, his hands wouldn’t keep up with the controls. At this point, Zhuang Ren gained even more respect for Han Fei, because if he needed to clear this Ziggurat alone, he probably wouldn’t finish it in his life. If he wanted to see his family again, he needed to rely on Han Fei.

Zhuang Ren, who was seen as mad by most, became a butler for Han Fei. Without Han Fei even requesting them, Zhuang Ren did things to make things more comfortable for Han Fei.

The previous 2 deaths provided a lot of information for Han Fei. For this third time, Han Fei tried to trigger yet another curse. After avoiding the 1st room, Han Fei examined each room door to see if he could get any clues. Unfortunately, he got nothing, only by entering the rooms that he’d know what was inside.

Calculating the time, Han Fei only entered the 3rd room on the first floor when he knew the deliveryman was coming. “There’s no butterfly and dead body in this room.” Instead the old room had red scratches everywhere. The room was decorated as a bridal suite but all the red was sourced from blood. The wedding decoration did not look celebratory but eerie.

“A bridal room?” Han Fei’s eyes narrowed. He walked through the living room and pushed open the bedroom door. On the top of the red nuptial bed hung a gigantic black and white portrait of the deceased couple. The groom looked normal and the bride was in a Chinese wedding gown and wore a red veil. Beside the portrait, someone had scratched out in blood—If you weep, you’ll die!