

## Iyashikei 31

### Chapter 31:

“As scientific technology continues to improve, humanity bequeathed machines and AI with more emotions and ability but did you not realize that humanity’s own ability to emote is regressing?” Huang Yin and Han Fei put on VR glasses and they were immediately transported to an alley in the old city.

After some conversations, Han Fei noticed Huang Yin was quite a knowledgeable and philosophical person, or at least that was the impression Han Fei had of the man. “Human beings evolved from animals but our hearts are slowly turning into a machine. This is something very scary. It is why I love Perfect Life, this one-of-a-kind game.”

Treading on the pebbled street, taking in the smell of rain and plants, Huang Yin opened his arms as if to embrace the virtual space around them. “This game is helping us relocate our missing emotions and cure our souls’ wounds. At this place, we can re-experience the wonderful memories that we have forgotten and we are reintroduced to the most earnest expression of our existence.”

“Really?” Thinking back to what he had experienced in the game and how disjointed it was to what Huang Yin was describing, Han Fei’s eyes almost welled with tears.

“Of course.” Huang Yin said confidently.

“The game’s demo is already so impressive, I wonder how groundbreaking it’ll be when it comes to the official version.” Han Fei removed the VR glasses. The old alley and drizzling rain disappeared at once. He was standing inside a booth with Huang Yin.

“The official version will blow your mind. This is a game that can make your wildest dreams come true. The game lives up to its name, it will present you with your perfect life!” Huang Yin said with a satisfied sigh.

“How come it sounds like you have played more than the demo version? Do you have any insider information?” Han Fei said with a mock-surprise gasp.

“Ha ha, you got me. I’m actually a special tester involved in the 6th CB of Perfect Life.”

When he searched on the official website, Han Fei noticed there were four types of CB players in Perfect Life. The first was the internal gaming staff, they would be the first to test out the game during its many variations. The second was the supervisors from the related government departments. As a super immersive next gen game, it combined the latest scientific technology and almost maddening creativity so the government paid specific attention to it as well. The third were special testers like Huang Yin. They were usually the leaders in their specific industry or profession. They would try out the game from their professional perspective and provide suggestions of improvement to the developers to make the game more interesting and real. The fourth was the general player who managed to gain access to CB through certain channels.

Some of these people were casual players who simply wanted to experience this unique game; others were representatives from gaming studios, they joined to gain firsthand information and guides that could be turned into money when the game entered OB.

“You must be someone important to have gained the invitation to be a special tester!” Han Fei could now confirm that this man was indeed the ‘Huang Yin’ whom he chatted with last night. His earlier prediction was correct.

“I wouldn’t say that, I’m just slightly famous in my field.” Huang Yin was very humble, he had no air of self-importance. He patiently led Han Fei through the convention and greatly hyped up the game. He was more professional than the gaming company’s event organizer.

“You said in Perfect Life, any dream can come true. Assuming I am a horror movie buff, is it possible that I can experience the various plots of horror movies in the game myself?” After confirming the man’s identity, Han Fei started to probe.

“Of course, there is a midnight theme park in the game. It is there for the horror games fans. There, you can relive many classic horror movie plot points and take on some of the most heart-pumping rides in your life. In fact, I believe you can choose to work at the theme park and try to trigger the string of missions that would eventually turn you into the owner of the park.” Huang Yin started to help Han Fei plot out his move, “But there is something that you need to be careful about. There is a data called Sanity Value in game, once it goes over 10, the system will automatically disconnect you from the server to protect your mental health.”

“You’ll get forcibly disconnected when this value crosses 10?” Han Fei’s eyes twitched. In his version of the game, his Sanity Value would have to go over 100 before he could escape from the horrors of the game!

“Once you’re disconnected by the system too many times, your in game character might die. Your life is very fragile in Perfect Life and you only have one life. All your data will reset after death and you’ll start from zero again.” Huang Yin said with lamentation, “Death is very painful, the game teaches a lesson to appreciate the transience of life.”

“I’ve personally watched many horror movies and they normally won’t elicit any fear in me but, some urban legends in real life can get my blood pumping.” Han Fei slowly approached the question that he wanted to ask, “Do you think there will be such a themed plot in Perfect Life?”

“There might be traces of them before the 2nd CB. Based on what I heard, at the time, the game didn’t have much limitation. The players won’t be punished from attacking the NPC. There was a tester who murdered an entire neighborhood and he was later apprehended due to emerging mental problems.”

“Things got that ugly?”

“What do you think? After humanity has its shackles removed, human beings would turn into the scariest monster.” Huang Yin appeared to remember some of the rumors from back then. “Due to the incident that happened to that tester, Perfect Life added many limitations and cut off about a third of its plotlines. Now, in its 6th CB, all of the plotlines that could possibly trigger morality problems have been removed. In fact, even the Easter Egg left in the original creator’s will has been removed.”

“Easter Egg in the creator’s will?”

“You don’t know about that? It’s quite famous in the gaming circle.” Huang Yin lowered his voice conspiratorially, “The CEO of Immortal Pharma passed away due to illness after Perfect Life’s first CB. In his will, he mentioned a black box that he hoped his children could find. According to the man, the box is filled with humanity’s deepest regret, desire, hatred, malice and misfortune. He gave 3 hints to its location, the box is supposed to be at the deepest part of the world, the deepest part of the mind and the deepest part of the human heart.”

“Did someone find the box?” Cold sweat slid down Han Fei’s forehead.

“Nope. There were so many different interpretations and eventually they believed the box was an Easter Egg buried in the game. It was the only place where all 3 hints could make sense. At the time, the testers turned over the game like crazy, looking for it but no one saw any trace of it. However, for some reasons, after the 3rd CB, all of the designs the old gentleman was involved in had been removed and we believed now the Easter Egg is permanently lost.” A sigh of regret escaped Huang Yin’s lips. “If possible, I do wish to know what that Easter Egg is supposed to be when I am still alive.”

“Yes, that does sound quite intriguing.” Han Fei touched the back of his head and uttered calmly.

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“Brother Huang, other than the Easter Egg left behind by the passed founder, are there any other strange stories about this game? I’m more interested in those.”

“If you’re really that curious, you should visit the game forum. There are plenty of threads discussing that but most of them are just rumors.” Huang Yin said with derision, “I saw one of the threads claimed that there are many surefire ways to see ghosts in game. The poster listed out a series of guides, like going into the midnight theme park at 00.00 am and push open the door in the centre of the maze and you’d enter another world; going to the Funereal Street during twilight and you’d encounter living paper dolls; entering Chat Room 444 at 4 am, and you’d run into dead players. I have been playing daily and I spent hours lurking in Chat Room 444 and I haven’t seen a single ghost yet!”

“Indeed, some of these do sound like urban legends.” Han Fei said with an innocent look.

“Thankfully most of them sound so ludicrous that you’ll be able to tell their authenticity easily but there some that had successfully fooled others. For example, there are rumors going around that the game has a cryptic world and there is a Dark Version to Perfect Life and so on.”

“Cryptic world?”

“Do you still remember the tester who butchered a whole neighbourhood? After he was apprehended, he claimed he ran into ghosts. The game brought him to a sinister world filled with the dead and the game told him to kill all the NPCs to escape.” Huang Yin said with plain disbelief. “Yes, there are players who imagine their perfect life as an adventurer and the game would send hostile NPCs to help them

level up but to have come up with something as preposterous as that tester, it was never heard of and since. Regardless, many testers believed him and they started to search for this cryptic world.”

“In other words, this cryptic world is supposedly a place filled with malicious ghosts?”

“Do you think such a place would exist in this game? Perfect Life is an lyashikei game. Unless the developers themselves do not know about this cryptic world, why would they leave such a dangerous element in their game to ruin their own reputation?” Huang Yin shook his head. “As Perfect Life’s CB progresses, less and less people believe in this cryptic world.”

“So it was all the tester’s own imaginations?”

“No one really knows, perhaps his mind just snapped that day. Even though he did not murder any actual people, due to his actions in game, he was determined by the citizenry system to be Moderately Dangerous. He is currently staying at Xin Lu Asylum’s Critical Case Zone for rehabilitation treatment.”

‘Xin Lu Asylum...’ After memorizing this location, Han Fei changed the topic. “Brother Huang, thank you for showing me around today. I still have other things to do so I’ll have to leave for now.”

“Brother, even though we’ve just met, I feel like I’ve known you forever. I haven’t had such a satisfactory chat in a long time already.” Huang Yin was a chatterbox but clearly not everyone in his life could stand his nags... well, at least not until Han Fei’s appearance that is. To gain more information, Han Fei dissected Huang Yin’s every word carefully before he responded. He was the perfect listener.

“Perhaps it’s because we have the same hobby. After Perfect Life enters OB, I’ll see you in game.” Han Fei took out his phone to add Huang Yin’s contact. Due to the pressure brought on by Perfect Life, Han Fei’s social ability had improved tremendously.

“Sure, once you party up with me, I’ll show you how to trigger some extremely rare missions with excellent rewards. You’ll be glad to have befriended a CB player.” Huang Yin leaned close to Han Fei and continued when he was sure no one was around, “In fact, during the test, I have discovered a hidden mission that only has a 1 percent chance of triggering. We can attempt it together during OB.”

“Are hidden missions... that rare?” Han Fei asked with blinking innocent eyes.

“Of course! Hidden missions are stuff of legends, to have triggered one is like winning the lottery. So don't you go around telling people I've found one!”

“Okay, thank you, Brother Huang.”

After leaving the convention centre, Han Fei hurried to Xin Lu Asylum. From his perspective, the tester probably did arrive at a world filled with malicious ghosts. When he reached the asylum, Han Fei used many methods but he failed to glean any information about the tester. He eventually was chased out by the nurse. From the nurse's tone, he was not the first person to hear about this urban legend and come to seek attendance with this mysterious tester. Most of them were probably players of Perfect Life. Like Han Fei, they wished to find out more about the cryptic world through this tester but they were all chased away by the hospital staff. Facing the wrathful gaze of the nurse, Han Fei had no choice but to return home.

On the way back, he stopped at a shop for dinner. After having his body cured by delicious food, Han Fei was ready to go home to have his soul 'cured'.

Even though only several days had passed since his first gaming instance, he no longer had the initial fear and anxiety. Han Fei himself was surprised by the speed with which he had adapted.

He read some books, analyzed some cases, memorized details about the victims and did some physical training. Han Fei connected all the wires, put on the gaming helmet and laid in bed at midnight.

“Welcome to Perfect Life where you are free to choose your own perfect life!”

The blood receded. Han Fei opened his eyes to darkness. He was sitting at the corner of his in-game home. “The wall clock shows that it's midnight. The time in game is perfectly in line with the time outside in real life.”

Han Fei took a deep breath. As he was about to crawl up from the ground, the robotic voice suddenly came. “Notification for Player 0000! Your New Player Period of Protection is over! New Player Missions, Take a Shower and Sleeping (incomplete) will be substituted! Are you going to give up the New Player Missions? Be mindful of your choice because they will not return after being substituted!”

“There’s a New Player Period of Protection?” Hearing the announcement, Han Fei was dumbfounded, “I’ve almost lost my life so many times and you’re telling me I was actually still in the New Player Period of Protection? Then just how much more dangerous things will get from now on?”

Before Han Fei decided what to do, he heard a loud bang. He got up hastily and looked through the wooden gaps on the window. Looks like a human body was dumped from upstairs.

‘Jesus, the welcoming ceremony is getting more and more creative with each new instance.’

Han Fei had no idea what happened upstairs but he was sure it was nothing good.

“Notification for Player 0000! Your New Player Missions will be substituted! Will you give them up permanently?” The voice pressured Han Fei to choose but in reality, there was not really much choice. At least the New Player Missions would occur inside this room, but who’d know what kind of objective would be required of Han Fei for the new missions? In any case, Han Fei believed the new missions would be indefinitely harder.

Seeing as the New Mission Players slowly grayed out, Han Fei gritted his teeth and accepted both missions at once.

“Player 0000 has accepted the Grade G New Player Mission—Sleeping!

“Warning: After failing New Player Mission, the mission will not disappear but each failure will increase the mission’s difficulty slightly!

“Mission Requirement: Please close all the lights in the room and get into bed within the next 5 minutes. No matter what happens, you must not leave the bed in the subsequent 3 hours.

“Player 0000 has accepted a Grade G New Player Mission—Take a Shower!

“Take a Shower (New Player Mission): Whenever you shower at night, you always have this feeling that there’s someone else in the house.

“Mission Requirement: Before 4 am arrives, use in-game items to clean your face, head and body. Your combined hygienic activities have to last longer than 20 minutes.”

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‘The sleeping mission will start in the next 5 minutes while I have until 4 am to complete the shower mission, technically I should have more than enough time to complete both of them.’

Now that the New Player Period of Protection was over, who knew what had changed beyond the door of his in-game house. Instead of risking a new mission, it was much safer attempting the New Player Missions. After all, he had memorized more than 100 pages of case files just to survive in this house. Time ticked by. Han Fei bustled inside the room. He switched off all the light. He found the cleaver under the pillow and detached the wooden beam from the mop. The latter was his choice of weapon. The cleaver was more like a psychological comfort. Should a neighbour come to visit during the mission, he wouldn’t use the cleaver. Only when the neighbour refused to come in that he’d use the wooden beam to taunt them or politely invite them in. To prevent the anti-theft door from doing its job, Han Fei purposely left it slightly ajar.

‘If the monster inside the house went insane, I’ll run towards the exit; if a special neighbour comes to visit, and I can’t defeat them, I’ll run towards the innermost bedroom.’ Han Fei had set up his escape route. After everything was done, Han Fei entered the bedroom closest to the living room. He did the sleeping mission in this room last time. ‘I’ve failed last time because I was too nervous, I was so close to succeeding but I was too cowardly. This time, no matter what, I’ll have to stick around for the full 3 hours. Only by completing this sleeping mission that I’d have more wiggle room for the showering mission.’

Han Fei stared at the wall clock as if trying to hypnotize himself. When the clock reached 0.05 am, he laid down in bed and covered himself under the quilt. He left a gap near his eyes to observe his surroundings. ‘During the previous sleeping mission, the ghost in the bathroom appeared around 2.44 am. Today I started the mission at 0.05 am. Assuming if the ghost returns again at 2.44 am, I only need to stay for another 21 minutes after its appearance and my mission will be completed. It’s difficult but not impossible. Compared to last time, I even have a new passive skill this time. Hide and seek will help lower my presence. Hopefully the ghost will fail to notice me.’

Han Fei was quite confident when the mission started. ‘The beginning hours of the mission are quite relaxing, the key moment to this mission occurs at the last half an hour. However, I shouldn’t let my



guard down. According to the system, the mission difficulty will increase with each failure, so I have to be ready to deal with sudden changes.'

Hiding under the quilt, Han Fei gripped the cleaver with one hand and the wooden beam with another. His muscles tensed. Like a beast in prowling mode, his expression was stern and his eyes sharp. Who would have thought that several days ago, this was the same man who had locked himself up in his rental house and surrendered himself to gaming addiction?

The house was quiet except for the ticking of the wall clock. Han Fei counted along with it internally as his eyes fixed on the bathroom door. His entire focus was on the bathroom. But at 0.14 am, a creaking sound came from outside the quiet bedroom. 'The bathroom door hasn't moved, the sound came from somewhere else!'

Inside the tomb-like house, any sound would be greatly amplified. Han Fei perked his ears up to locate the source. His eyes slowly moved away from the bathroom door. 'That sounded like a door opening... I have left the front door open so the chance of the sound coming from that is low... That means the door of the innermost bedroom has been opened!'

Han Fei's slow-moving gaze finally settled on the bedroom door. He saw half of a child's face outside the door. The child's facial feature was blurry as he slowly poked his head into the bedroom. Han Fei held his breath and froze his body. The child looked around for a while before he dragged his broken body and slunk past Han Fei's bedroom.

'Jesus, it's only 0.14 am. I refuse to believe this is just a 'slight' increase in difficulty!' From the bed, Han Fei could only see the living room and bathroom. He was unable to see the innermost bedroom. It was the sound of the door axle moving that he realized his roommates had decided to come out to play. 'The innermost bedroom is the most dangerous place in this house. The sleeping mission has changed. The ghost has appeared much earlier than expected but the good news is they do not seem to be that interested in me.'

The child wandered around the living room before he sat on the couch. Han Fei could see the back of the child's head from his vantage point. He worried the child's head might suddenly turn around for 180 degrees to make eye contact with him. The air was thick with uncertainty. Han Fei hid under the quilt and was too afraid to even poke his finger out. 'It's alright. The plan is still the same. I just need to stay here for another 2 hours and several minutes.'

The child stayed unmoved on the couch. It was not until 0.44 am that a woman with long hair shuffled past Han Fei's bedroom door without warning. She too headed towards the living room.

'Another one?' The woman's figure was equally blurry. She picked up the television remote and silently sat down beside the child. The two ghosts sat facing away from him. Han Fei's hair stood on end. Even when they were not staring at him, his heart was quivering. His heart would probably explode if they suddenly decided to turn their gazes on him. Time seemed to slow down, every second moved glacially. Ever since the two ghosts appeared in the living room, Han Fei's body had frozen solid. He did not even dare to breathe too loudly.

Tik tok, tik tok... There was an undercurrent of a different sound mixed into the ticking of the clock... it sounded like dripping water. At 1.04 am, the kitchen door was pushed open. A woman with short hair stood at the door with her head lowered and a fruit knife in her grasp. She seemed to be searching for something.

At 1.14 am, the sound of high heels clicking came from the innermost bedroom. At 2. 44 am, the bathroom door trembled slightly, and soon the door opened a gap. From that gap, an eyeball glanced into the bedroom where Han Fei resided. A pale arm reached out from inside the bathroom. Wet hair stuck to the face. The person crawled out from the bathroom and the next moment, it disappeared from Han Fei's field of vision. The temperature in the bedroom dropped. Han Fei gritted his teeth tightly. He heard something brushing against the mattress. Han Fei's eyes stretched as far as it could without moving his head and he believed he saw someone kneeling by the foot of the bed. With their head lowered, it looked like the person was ready to crawl into bed with Han Fei.

Han Fei swallowed a scream as he kept a close tab on the kneeling figure. It was now 2.45 am. The mission time was almost over. Chill crept into his heart. Han Fei's face was purple from the gargantuan effort needed to still his heart and body. Just as his heart was about to give out, the television set in the living room switched on. The cold light filtered into the bedroom and the chill inside the room dissipated.

Han Fei relaxed his closed fists. When he looked towards the living room again, there was a new figure sitting on the couch.

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At 2.45 am, the television screen lit up on its own. The eerie light illuminated the dark living room. Several faces could be seen reflected on the flickering snowy static screen.

The hellish mission was almost over. To be honest, Han Fei had no idea how he managed to survive for so long, but he finally saw a bit of hope at the end of the tunnel.

Five figures sat facing away from the bedroom door on the living room couch. They stared transfixed at the old television screen, as if there was something immeasurably interesting among the static.

Tik tok, tik tok... The ticking of the clock aligned with Han Fei's heartbeat. He tried his best to calm himself. He must not let himself commit any mistake now that he was at the last leg of the mission. His eyes scanned the 'people' in the living room. Eventually his gaze settled on the television screen. Underneath the fuzzy static, there was a male voice. It was barely discernible, it sounded like a madman mumbling to himself. Han Fei focused his attention. He picked out terms like dissection, metamorphosis, break free, beauty and so on.

'Room 1044 is haunted by the victims of the human jigsaw case. I've personally encountered Wei Youfu and Ah Mei's ghosts here. However, based on the tone of the man from the tv, it doesn't sound like he's a fellow victim. If anything, he sounds more like the killer.' The victims of the human jigsaw case were all ordinary people. Han Fei had seen their photos at their time of death. Every single one of them was filled with despair and pain. They did not sound like people who would repeat these meaningless mumbo-jumbos after death. To get to the bottom of this, Han Fei tried to grasp every single detail from what the man was saying.

'Based on the crime scenes, the murders were highly ritualistic.' Han Fei thought back to the information he had read on the case. The law enforcement paid special import to this case. Even a decade later, the case was still open. Xin Lu Police was still investigating and collecting evidence. They even offered rewards for any possible clues. Through the official released statements, Han Fei understood some of the insider details.

According to the common classifications, there are four types of serial killers, visionary, mission, hedonistic and control. Xin Lu Police classified the human jigsaw killer as an extremely violent person with a mission who was looking for control. Most of the victims of the case were children and females. The police profilers thus believed the murderer was someone who had no control in real life and thus went after targets who were weaker than him. He wished to gain something from these victims to satisfy his twisted heart.

Of course, Han Fei only had limited information from the police's official statement. The other information he instead gathered from the internet. They might not be accurate but at least they had

provided him with a direction of investigation. Until now, he agreed with the profiler's assessment but as he continued to piece together what the man on the tv was saying, he realized the killer had a much deeper purpose than that. There might be a deeper meaning to this string of murders.

'Metamorphosis? Butterfly?' Han Fei had gained a clue from Perfect Life which was not to the police's knowledge, the suspect from the frozen body case, Meng Changan had predicted the human jigsaw case. Meng Changan himself was not a normal person. After his first murder, he revealed to his family that there was someone guiding him. He did what he did to catch a clearer glimpse of the butterfly in his brain. 'The frozen body case and human jigsaw case appear to be related to the butterfly, what does this butterfly symbolize?'

Meng Changan claimed the butterfly ignited the murderous urge within him. Now listening to the man on the tv, the murderer from the human jigsaw case was somehow induced by the butterfly as well.

'From the murder scenes alone, one would think the murderer is a mission type serial killer but now as I listen to this voice on the tv, there are plenty of flagrant symbolism and visions. His motive is extremely complex.'

Han Fei was not a professional detective, a few days ago, his homework was coming up with punchlines to make people laugh. In terms of deduction and analysis, he was just a beginner. Turning to the figures on the couch, Han Fei studied the five blurry shadows and images of the victims floated up in his mind.

'The order by which the victims were murdered didn't seem to say much, but their age...' The child who appeared inside the house at 0.14 am was very similar to the youngest victim of the human jigsaw case. 'Chui Tianchi, 12, he was once a children's outfit model. He died between 11 pm to 1 am.'

Then Han Fei turned to the second ghost. This was the woman with the long hair who shuffled past the bedroom door at 0.44 am. 'Chui Caiyi, Chui Tianchi's elder sister, 18, she had a pair of pure and gorgeous eyes. She was an eye model, many eye products had her as their ambassador.'

His eyes then moved to the short-haired woman with the fruit knife. An image instantly pulled up in his mind. 'Xiao Qing, 20, a university student and a family tutor. She excelled in both sports and studies. The money she earned she used to support her schooling and a part she used for charity donation. She also took on legs modelling jobs.'

Next to the short-haired woman was a lady with a wiry frame. She wore a pair of high heels and her skin was eerily white. 'Zhang Linfan, 23, a livestreamer with a small following. She had a pair of snow-white hands. She often took on nail art advertisements, she was a hand model. She died around 1 am, about the same time, she appeared earlier.'

'The next victim should be the 25 years old Ah Mei. Other than a housewife, she had a social media presence that was quite popular. She shared her daily life on it and was famed for her plump lips. Many lipstick companies reached out to her.

'The victim closest in age to Ah Mei was Wei Youfu, 26. He died around 3 am. He was the only victim who did not have a particular attractive physical asset. That led the police to believe Wei Youfu was murdered because he arrived at the wrong place at the wrong time. Furthermore, this was the killer's first stint so Wei Youfu was believed to be an unfortunate collateral damage.

'Other than Wei Youfu, there is only one other male victim. He was the oldest of all the victims. Gu Hua, 29, a catalog model. He died between 3 to 4 am.'

There were 8 victims in the human jigsaw case, 7 of them had almost similar time of death and were close in age. Han Fei also noticed that the older they were, the later their time of death. From midnight to 4 am; from the darkest hour to almost dawn.

According to biology, the human body physiology and ability started to peak after 12 and began to deteriorate after 30.

Every victim of the human jigsaw case appeared to be specially selected. This was no random killings, it was a premeditated crime.

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'Eye model, leg model, hand model, lips model... This murderer has gone after the victims' prettiest body parts and used them to piece together the 8th victim. Is this the metamorphosis mentioned by the killer?'

'Information for the first 7 victims can be found online but nothing is available on the 8th victim. Even the law enforcement did not release any information regarding this mysterious 8th victim...' To confuse things even further, when Han Fei did the new player mission of watching the television, he encountered a monster who had the faces of only 7 victims on its body. 'Is the monster the 8th victim?' Han Fei wanted to get to the bottom of the truth. He was roommate with the victims and could empathize with their pain and despair. Whether to avenge the victims or to have a better survivability in the game, Han Fei would try his best to apprehend the killer.

The current situation inside the haunted house was very bizarre. As the only living human, Han Fei was curled under the quilt in the bedroom. Out in the living room, several figures facing away from him were watching a television show with no content. Everyone appeared to be waiting for something to happen. The light from the television screen illuminated the blanched faces. As the time ticked by, the temperature in the house slowly dropped.

'What are they waiting for?' Just as the night reached its thickest moment, the whole gaming world started to become a bit abnormal. The sound of nail scratching came from the walls, the voice-activated lights flickered on and off, the wooden boards on the window cracked and there appeared to be worms wiggling on the outer walls of the dilapidated apartment. However, no matter what happened outside Room 1044, the few figures sat transfixed on the couch.

It was not until 3 am that the image on the screen gradually clarified. In the dark living room, 5 individuals, who died from a horrible death, sat facing the television. They seemed to be searching for something through the television. 'What are they looking for?' Han Fei stole a glance through the gap in the quilt. The static on the tv screen slowly cleared to show the lifeless visage of the 5 victims who sat in the living room. Every single body was desecrated. Blood drained from their faces. Milky white pupils trembled inside their sockets. They were staring at their own reflections on the television.

'What is happening?' Han Fei was extremely unsettled. His eyes turned to the screen. Behind the victims' reflection, the background started to fill in. First came the living room, and then Han Fei saw the half open bedroom door at the corner of the screen, he also saw his own eyes blinking through the gap in the quilt. 'How is it that I'm part of the show?'

The television was like a surveillance camera capturing a live feed from inside the haunted house. The poor victims scanned the screen carefully. They were looking for something or someone inside this house!

'They're not looking for me, are they?' Han Fei had just spotted himself inside the television when the child who sat at the edge of the couch stood up. He sauntered slowly towards the television screen as if

he had noted something. 'Am I cursed by children or something?' It was now 3 am. After another 5 minutes, Han Fei would complete the mission. No matter what, he would endure past this last 5 minutes. To prevent himself from being discovered, Han Fei crawled deeper into the quilt and waited for the system announcement. 'No matter what, I'll have to persevere for the last 5 minutes. If the ghosts lunge into the bedroom, I will be prepared to tussle with them! It's just another 5 minutes, I can do this!'

The temperature continued to drop. Han Fei's heart pounded heavily. He had no idea whether the ghosts entered the bedroom or not. He imagined the ghosts surrounding him on all sides of the bed. Time could not have moved slower for Han Fei. Opening the menu, Han Fei focused on the exit button. Suddenly, he heard the sound of the door opening again. This time, the person appeared to have directly walked into his bedroom.

'If I can walk out of this place alive, I will help you find your killers! After all, we're staying under the same roof. I'll come to accompany all of you at night and I'd burn paper money for you in the day. Please give me a chance, my dear friends and family.' Han Fei was so nervous that his internal mumblings made no sense anymore.

"Notification for Player 0000! New Player Mission, Sleeping has been completed! Obtained 1 Free Skill Point! Obtained the mission reward, the landlord's keys.

"Notification for Player 0000! Due to the slight increase in the New Player Mission, you have also obtained an additional reward, landlord's cigarettes x3

"Landlord's Keys (Grade G Blood Red Item): After the landlord passed away, the building's spare keys disappeared. Perhaps it was stolen by the other tenants or borrowed by ghosts.

"Landlord's Cigarettes x3 (Grade G Blood Red Item): After the landlord passed away, his 3 kids laid 3 cigarettes out before his ceremonial urn in his memory."

Hearing the sound in his mind, Han Fei gave out a long breath. When he saw the exit button lit up, he felt everything was right with the world again. 'Life truly is a journey. I now have Wolverine's nerves of steel, nothing can put me down anymore!' Han Fei glanced towards the inventory and all the newest mission rewards were there.

'All of the New Player Missions reward me with the landlord's items. Is the game trying to model me to become the new landlord? Looks like there is a purpose for me to complete all the new player missions. The landlord's keys will come in very useful. The hint given by the system is not wrong, completing all the new player missions will help me get to know this world better.' Han Fei was thankful that he did not abandon the new player missions. The lucrative rewards of the sleeping mission helped assert his decision to take on the showering mission.

'The 3 new player missions should correspond to 3 rewards related to the landlord. The ring can help me detect the presence of ghosts, the key I can use to open other apartment units. I wonder what kind of reward I'll get from the showering mission.' Humans were compelled by greed. After Han Fei was sure that he could quit the game at any time, he decided to push his luck further. 'I still have one hour to complete the shower mission. I should try my best to complete all the new player missions!'

Slowly peeling off a corner of the quilt, Han Fei was astonished to see Wei Youfu standing at the bedroom door. The latter used his body to block the other ghosts' line of sight into Han Fei's room.

'When the hell did he appear?' Han Fei then realized Wei Youfu was probably the person who came out from the innermost bedroom when he was all curled up under the quilt. Staring at Wei Youfu's back, Han Fei had a feeling that Wei Youfu was different from the other ghosts in this house. The other ghosts were physically impaired, but Wei Youfu's body was fully intact, or at least it was on the surface.

'Youfu doesn't seem like he's hostile towards me. This differentiates him from the other ghosts. Is it possible that he still retains part of his humanity and memory?'

Chapter 36:

Of all the victims in the human jigsaw case, Wei Youfu was the most unique one. The murderer killed in the name of beauty, but Wei Youfu was much too normal, the man was not particularly attractive. It was rude to say that, yes, but that was the truth.

As sound as the argument was, there was no supporting evidence. Han Fei originally sided with the police but after he interacted with Wei Youfu in the game, his perspective started to change. With a glance at Wei Youfu's life, it appeared normal and even banal. He never did anything out of line or unexpected. He loved his wife, cherished his father, he worked with honesty and without complaint. The man seemed to always hold the world in the light of hope. There was something beautiful about that. The man had a beautiful soul.



Han Fei believed that was the thing of beauty the killer wanted from Wei Youfu, alas he had no evidence to prove it.

Han Fei tried to think back to everything he remembered about Wei Youfu and something he saw at the man's home when he first visited the place stuck out at him. He noticed many lego toys and jigsaw puzzles on display inside the cupboard at Wei Youfu's living room. Lego was a toy manufactured decades ago. They were building blocks with more than 1300 shapes and equally as many variances in colors. They could be mixed and matched to create different constructions. In China, they were also known as Magic Plastic Building Blocks.

As technology progressed, Lego was also washed away by the tides of time but some adults still purchased them as items of collection. 'Could that be the connection between the two? Both Wei Youfu and the killer were Lego enthusiasts? But Wei Youfu worked with building blocks but the killer with human body parts. Does this mean Wei Youfu knew his killer?' There was even a moment where Han Fei thought, 'Or Wei Youfu is the killer?!'

The killer could have easily found his other targets from the internet but to know whether someone had a pure soul, they had to interact with them in person for an extended period of time. The killer must be someone who knew Wei Youfu very well.

While Han Fei was parsing this information, footsteps erupted from the innermost bedroom. The 7th victim appeared at 3.14 am. This catalog model by the name of Gu Hwa was once very famous in the modelling industry. He had what the designers called a golden ratio body proportion but unfortunately, he got into a car accident at the peak of his career. His life was spared but his face was heavily injured. After a facial reconstruction surgery, his star shone less bright than before.

Of the seven victims, Gu Hwa was the oldest. His appearance also appeared to symbolize the passing of the night and change was about to happen. When Gu Hwa walked past the bedroom door, Wei Youfu followed after him. All 7 victims sat on the couch. They sat facing away from Han Fei and stared at the television screen quietly. The television screen reflected the situation in real life and Han Fei noticed something.

When he did the mission to watch a television show, he had tuned into a hellish cartoon with a very abstract and grotesque style. It was like a child's nightmare. At the time, the monster made from the 7 victims appeared to join him in the living room. When they were patched together, the victims were violent, crazy, desperate and murderous.

However, the situation tonight was very different. The victims appeared individually. When they were separated from each other, each of them seemed to retain a certain level of humanity, at least they didn't come after him with malicious wrath.

The temperature in the house continued to drop to freezing point before the image in the screen finally changed. Wei Youfu was still seated on the couch in the living room but on the television, he moved to pick up the picture frame from the table. He took a cloth and polished it gently. He gestured at the people inside the frame as he sidled up to Ah Mei. Ah Mei inside the screen tried to push him away shily but she gave up after a few times. She seemed to be lecturing Wei Youfu but her eyes were filled with bliss.

The other victims inside the screen also stood up to attend to their own business. According to Han Fei's research, Xiao Qing was a foodie and currently she was in the kitchen cooking away. The siblings, Tianchi and Tianyi were arguing. The younger brother, Tianchi, puffed up his cheeks in mock anger and spat out his tongue at his sister because he couldn't win at verbal arguments.

The livestreamer, Zhang Linfan turned to a compact mirror and worked on her makeup. The oldest Gu Hwa took out cans of beer from the fridge. He put on an ear mic for music and tossed the cans back.

The television screen was showing the last bit of each victim's beautiful memory. However, this last slice of heaven shown on the television was slowly being blurred out by the static. As if trying to hold onto this small shard of happiness, they gathered before the television to watch reruns of it every night. They too once had happiness and bliss in their hands.

'With the monster's appearance, the television will broadcast the hellish cartoon but when the victims are separated, the television will show their individual happy memory.' The world outside the house was turning more dire and dangerous by the minutes but an air of peace and tranquillity permeated the house. Han Fei hid under the quilt and observed everything. The longer he watched, the more melancholic he felt. As an actor, he was very good at reading expressions. He needed great empathy to get into character. At that moment, he could empathize greatly with the victims' feelings.

'No one wants to become a monster.' Han Fei glanced at the wall clock. It was now 3.30 am. The showering mission would perish at 4 am so he did not have much time left. At 3.35 am, Han Fei made a very brave decision. He slowly pulled the quilt back.

If you woke up to 7 ghosts watching television outside your bedroom at midnight, what would you do? Most would move to call the police, run out from the house or continue to hide in bed. However, Han Fei chose a path different from all of the above. He chose to walk out from the bedroom to join the 7 ghosts.

The patched-up monster could not be communicated with so to get to know the victims, Han Fei had to interact with them individually. Han Fei tried to even out his breathing as he walked out from the bedroom. The 7 victims were so glued to the television that none of them paid Han Fei any attention.

He slunk over and squeezed himself into the end of the couch. If one looked from the back, Han Fei fitted in perfectly. Han Fei had social anxiety and was an orphan. He never had to deal with familial communication problems because he did not have a family before.

Leaning into the couch, Han Fei did not disturb the other victims. He merely sat beside them and watched the television quietly.

“I joined Meng Si and Chen Chen on January 1st for dumplings. I wonder if I’ll join the seven of them to watch the new year special on the eve of Lunar New Year...”

#### Chapter 37:

Staying alone at his rental, the first thing Han Fei did after coming home was to switch on the television. He was not really interested in the program, he just wanted a background sound so it would not appear too lonesome by himself.

The old-fashioned television set broadcasted the reruns of the victims’ memory. Han Fei imprinted as many details as he could into his mind. However, time was ticking. If he did not attempt the shower mission soon, it would be automatically substituted by the system.

Glancing at the clock, when it was 3.50 am, he stood up quietly and walked alone to the bathroom. ‘Aiz, I’ll have to give it a try after all. I know collecting all the new player missions’ rewards will be of great help to me in the future.’ Perfect Life was essentially a life simulator so after Han Fei gave it some thought, assigning ‘shower’ as one of the missions was quite acceptable. However Han Fei also knew the mission would entail more than just a simple shower. After checking around, Han Fei realized the bathroom door’s lock was already ruined.

'It can't be locked?' Han Fei's brows furrowed together. Thankfully the man was good at finding the silver lining, 'At least the mission didn't require me to be naked.' While fully clothed, Han Fei switched on the shower and stood under it. He was still holding the cleaver. The water plastered his clothes to his skin. It restricted his movement. It did not feel good. 'The game really did simulate even the smallest detail.'

After standing under the shower for half a minute, Han Fei noticed the completion rate for the mission was still 0. With his whole body soaked, Han Fei turned towards the wash basin. A bottle of hair shampoo, body cream and face scrub sat on top of it.

'It feels weird showering at 4 am inside a haunted house. No matter how high I adjust the water temperature, it's still so freezing.' He squeezed out some body cream and slathered it on his body. Finally the completion rate of the mission was climbing. 'So this is how it feels like to shower with clothes on. Indeed, in this game, you can attempt many things that you wouldn't do in real life.'

From his talk with Huang Yin, Han Fei noticed something. A normal Perfect Life game had many restrictions on its player but his version of Perfect Life seemed to do away with them. No GM was there to restrict his actions. As long as he was alive, he could do anything he wanted. This place was a veritable test of human nature. It could be hell or heaven depending on his choice. The water temperature gradually rose and the bathroom misted. Han Fei's attention sharpened with alertness. After he put down the body cream and reached for the hair shampoo, the previously closed bathroom door opened on its own.

'Who is it?' Han Fei glanced towards the living room. The television was still playing the 7 victims' memory but the victims themselves had gone missing. The temperature of the shower continued to rise but Han Fei felt much chillier in person. The air in the cramped bathroom seemed to solidify. The suffocating Han Fei turned to the misted mirror. Inside the mirror, other than Han Fei, there were 7 other faces. Han Fei fixed his neck in place and stared right into the mirror. Give him a million and he would not turn around.

Wei Youfu in the mirror slowly walked towards Han Fei. He reached his finger forward to write something on the mirror. Words started to appear on the surface of the misted mirror—the child is coming soon, help her.

This was Han Fei's first time communicating with his roommate. Seeing the words on the mirror and Wei Youfu standing behind him, a strange feeling rose within him. Outside the game, he was arranged to

play Wei Youfu's character and at that moment, he was only a mirror away from the actual person his character was modelled after. His heart still quivered from fear but beyond that, there arose a different emotion. It was not pity or charity. Looking into the eyes of the 7 victims, Han Fei appeared to see his former self.

Raising his arm, Han Fei's fingertip landed on the mirror surface. Chill surged through his finger into his mind. He nodded slowly but with determination. "I promise you, I will help her."

With that, Wei Youfu gave a simple smile. Then blood leaked out from his skull and neck. Ghastly lashes materialized on his body. Standing next to Han Fei, his body was being brutally dismembered, like a jigsaw puzzle being forcibly pulled apart.

Blood splattered on the white bathroom wall. Han Fei had not experienced something as horrifying as this. Liquid splashed onto his body but he could not even tell whether it was water or blood. To his consternation, Wei Youfu was merely the first. After Wei Youfu's body was completely dismembered, the similar cruel fate descended upon Ah Mei, Chui Tianchi, Chui Caiyi...

Fresh blood flowers bloomed in the narrow bathroom. The world in the mirror was blood red. Outside the mirror, Han Fei's body felt like it had been dropped in ice. His body shook uncontrollably. Water slid down his face, blood slithered down the mirror.

Against his better instinct, Han Fei kept his eyes open. The horror and gore were beyond any horror flicks. The reality of it slit at his heart. This was how these seven poor souls died.

After all the 7 victims were in pieces, their flesh and blood in the mirror appeared to gain its own life. Despair, hatred and pain formed black threads that started to string the broken pieces together. After the killer harvested the organs he needed from the victims, he had done the very same thing. Han Fei was placed back at the crime scene. The flesh were puzzle pieces glued back together with hatred-filled wires. An ugly, scary, crazy monster reborn from the dead meat of the victims.

Its size grew. The twisted faces of the 7 victims slowly surfaced. They had all lost their rationality. They groaned and yelled in madness. Their broken, unused limbs littered the room. The scene was too gory but Han Fei forced himself to look. He had promised Wei Youfu, he would lend that child help. 'Who is this child? There has to be a reason why the 7 victims have done this. They disintegrated and reformed before my eyes for a reason! They wanted me to see something!'

The veins bulged as the flesh melted together. The monster rose to the ceiling but its size was still growing. Blood poured like rain. Finally Han Fei spotted something at the location where the monster's heart should be.

Inside the monster's body, he saw a girl's face which he had not seen before. It was a face which had not appeared in any of the case files. The police had not released any information about this person either.

'She is the 8th victim? She's the last piece of the puzzle?'

Chapter 38:

It was a blood red world on the other side of the mirror. Broken flesh, blood, and the Frankenstein monster filled up the small bathroom. Even though the gore was not reflected outside the mirror, the monster might as well be there behind Han Fei from the horror and pressure that the man felt. The smell of blood thickened. Warm water splashed on his skin but it felt like he was being showered with icy cold blood.

Inside the television at the living room, the victims' warm memories disappeared, they were replaced by the child's nightmare. Small characters scurried through an eerie jungle before they were hauled back into the dark wooden house by a pair of invisible hands. The monster in the mirror grew larger and larger. The human face at the monster's heart became clearer. It was the face of a girl, she looked quite young. The face was devoid of any expression, it was as unreadable as a white piece of paper.

'She is the 8th victim? The one without any official records?' Han Fei branded the girl's face into his mind. This would be crucial to solve the case. The mist in the bathroom turned sticky as the monster in the mirror solidified. When it pieced itself back together, it would probably appear in real life just like how it did when Han Fei attempted the tv mission. After witnessing the victims' individual dismemberment and their reconstruction into a monster, Han Fei's SAN Value skyrocketed. His body shook uncontrollably but even at that moment, he still had not forgotten his promise to Wei Youfu.

Standing alone inside the mirror, the monster was gaining corporeality. It materialized out from the water mist. 'How am I supposed to help her?'

The 8th victim was like a princess sleeping inside the monster's body. She would only appear during these few moments alongside the monster when it attempted to reconstruct itself. Looking from

another perspective, this innocent girl could be the scariest of them all for she seemed to be an integral part of the monster, its heart to be precise.

Wei Youfu only hoped that Han Fei could help the girl but he did not give Han Fei any pointer on how to do that. As the monster gradually formed, the girl's face was layered behind flesh and blood. She was about to be engulfed by the other victims' bodies. As the girl slowly disappeared and the monster gradually manifested itself, Han Fei knew he would have to do something soon. Turning around, Han Fei glanced through the mist at the Frankenstein monster that easily took up the entire bathroom. He made a crazy decision.

Reaching into the gap between the flesh, and resisting the sense of disgust that came from his arms, Han Fei pried away the flesh and guts that were about to consume the girl's face. He was going to tear the girl out from the monster's body! His hands were covered in blood, his and 8 other people's blood. The sharp bone chips scratched at his skin. Fear and pain tormented his nerves, but Han Fei refused to surrender. More globs of flesh swamped towards the girl's face. Han Fei gritted his teeth and pulled and pushed at the moving flesh. He was trying to save the girl!

Han Fei had not seen so much blood in his life and this was definitely the scariest thing he had ever experienced. He cleansed his mind and allowed a single purpose to take over his body because if he stopped for even a second to think about what he was doing, fear would overwhelm him. Flabs of meat were peeled away. Han Fei's body was soaked in water and blood. However, his movement became more agile and proficient. Inch by inch, Han Fei nudged the girl's head and shoulders out from the monster's central cavity.

Strands of capillaries snapped loose. Han Fei's mind was blank. He repeated the same action mechanically until the wall clock in the living room buzzed with noise. It was 4 am, dawn had arrived. Even though it was still dark outside the window, the speed by which the flesh recovered conspicuously slowed. The sleeping beauty's eyelashes fluttered as if waking up.

Han Fei took this as a sign of encouragement. He stepped on the fallen flesh. He dug in his heels and slowly pulled out the girl's arm. The water mist dyed with blood. As Han Fei tightened his grip on the girl's hand and tried to pull her out from the ugly monster, the sleeping girl suddenly opened her eyes. Han Fei had never seen such a gaze before. There was no soul behind the girl's eyes. She appeared to have no emotion or memory. The clear pupils were like those of a newborn baby.

"I'm here to save you." In that hell, Han Fei looked straight into the girl's eye as he held onto her arm. He couldn't tell if the girl understood him or not. For now he just wanted to drag the girl out from the monster.

The girl looked at Han Fei and her surroundings with open confusion. She did not fathom anything. A self was missing behind her eyes, they were like mirrors that reflected the world that she saw. The reconstruction of the monster lagged behind. However, after Han Fei dug out the girl's other arm, he stopped. The rest of the girl's body was pierced through by black threads. They weaved her together with the rest of the monster. Brute force was not going to separate the two.

"Do you know what are the black threads inside your body? Do you know how can I get rid of them?" Just as Han Fei touched the threads, his brain dazed. Malice and despair surged into his mind. The girl did not seem like she understood Han Fei. He had to try again to grasp as much information as he could from her. "What is your name? Do you remember who did this to you?" Han Fei did not know the method to get rid of the black lines so he hoped to find out more about the girl instead. Perhaps she would lead him directly to the killer. Apprehending him would help avenge all the victims.

The girl inside the monster still did not reply. Her eyes danced around before they landed on the television in the living room. The eloping characters were dragged back into the wooden house. They wailed silently. The whole forest echoed with their soundless cries.

A dark image, a dark night, a dark house. Seeing the cartoon, the girl seemed to remember something. She stammered. It sounded like a song.

"Daddy cradled mommy's head, he said he'd use her hair to make me a new raiment.

"To the canteen, the naughty kids go; but the good kids stay for reward and compliment.

"You should smile, you should cry; but above all, you should always heed father's advice.

"Big brothers, big sisters sent far away; little brothers, little sisters, their ranks wasting away.

"After I put on daddy's new clothing, he said I'm still missing a pair of wings."

After the girl finished, the strange cartoon on the television changed. Millions of fireflies flew out from the dark forest, bringing with them pinpricks of light. The monster in the bathroom started to collapse.



The girl's body was yanked by the black threads into the viscous pool of blood. Han Fei tried to stop it but he was unable to do anything.

'The 8th victim died at 4 am, right at the moment of dawn.' Han Fei memorized the girl's song as he turned to the tv. "Forest, black house, brothers and sisters, new raiment, wings..." There was an influx of new information, these were fresh clues that the police did not have.

"Notification for Player 0000! New Player Mission—Take a Shower completed! Obtained 1 Free Skill Point and the mission reward—the landlord's diary!" The robotic voice cut through Han Fei's thought. When he came to again, the oppressive feeling in the bathroom had dissipated by quite a lot.

### Chapter 39:

After some time, both the girl and the monster disappeared into the mist. The bathroom returned to normal. The shower continued to splash on Han Fei. The man, whose energy was drained, collapsed to the ground. His clothes were soaked. Staring at his hands, the whole experience felt very surreal. "I... have just dug into people's flesh."

Even though his intention was pure, the scary scene still left a huge impact on Han Fei. He was transported to the crime scene and saw everything that happened to the victims. His brain buzzed. Han Fei cleaned his hands under the shower as if they were still dirty with invisible blood. "And this is just a New Player Mission."

After some time, Han Fei crawled up from the ground. He switched off the shower and stood dumbly before the bathroom door. The sprays of blood that erupted in the bathroom was striking. Thinking back, his body still shook. "Wei Youfu wanted me to help the girl. None of the other victims interrupted me either. From their perspective, the girl in the monster desperately needs aid."

Standing a distance away from the mirror, Han Fei quietly arranged the clues in his mind. 'The girl looked like she was around 15 but she did not seem like she knew anything. It was like she was raised isolated from society. In her world, there was only daddy, mommy and her siblings. Probably because she was not properly educated that she was able to relay so many horrifying details in such an even tone. They appear normal in her mind.'

His clothes stuck to his body, and Han Fei's brain was pounding. His mind and body had reached their limits. 'My stamina both mentally and physically is still too weak. I can barely think after just 2 missions. Looks like I'll have to attempt to level up to gain more attribute points as fast as possible.' Han Fei leaned against the wall to steady his swaying body. He opened the character profile and added the 2 skill points he gained from the new player missions into acting.

"Notification for player 0000: Your acting skill has reached intermediate 5! Congratulations for crossing the threshold, now you can proudly say that you're a good actor!" Since he started the game, Han Fei put all his skill points in acting but he had been too focused on his survival to notice any difference. But now that the system mentioned it, he did realize his acting skill had gained tremendous improvement. His control of facial muscle was much more masterful, allowing him to assume different micro-expression at his whim. Other than these technical improvements, his adaptability and psychological endurance had a leaping enhancement as well. His acting skill had reached a level where a conventional actor would need years of experience to achieve.

Han Fei then retrieved the landlord's diary from his inventory. It looked like a normal black notebook. It was unused, every page was empty.

'It's probably because I've not found the correct way to use it.' Han Fei was too tired to investigate it now. He replaced the diary back into the inventory. He dragged his tired body out from the bathroom and closed the door behind him. 'It's kinda sad that no neighbours came to visit me today.'

After taking a breather, Han Fei quitted the game. Blood tangled over his world. Han Fei had gotten used to this loading screen.

Removing the gaming helmet, Han Fei laid in bed and refused to move. Night never left in the game but in reality, the sun had already risen. Lying in bed quietly, Han Fei's mind was filled with clues about the case. Whenever he closed his eyes, he found himself back into that horrid bathroom. Tossing and turning, he eventually drifted off.

The afternoon sun slanted through the gap in the curtains. Han Fei was awakened by the phone ringing. The stuff he ordered from the internet had arrived. He went downstairs to retrieve the package. Han Fei opened the box and read through the manuals for items like the tasers and nunchucks. At least for now, he wasn't completely vulnerable. After having a casual lunch, Han Fei switched on the computer to organize his clues. 'The 8th victim is a girl around age 13 to 16. Considering the fact that she's not in the citizenry database, then she might be an abandoned baby. Since orphanages are connected to the government, registered orphans would be in the system too. So this girl was probably taken in by a private party and raised in isolation from the world. With the aid of the 6th generation photon

computer, electronic footprint was inevitable once one used the internet. In other words, this girl had not used the internet before. Abandoned baby, forest, and strange parents.'

Han Fei added this remark next to the blank photo that represented the 8th victim—she lived far away from the city and technology, probably deep inside a jungle.

'The killer murdered in the name of beauty. The 8th victim was the last. She died before dawn, the moment the killer's mangled project was completed. Through the girl's little ditty, I have reasons to believe the killer is the girl's father.' As the scope of the suspect narrowed down, Han Fei remembered another clue. 'Assuming the killer really did come after Wei Youfu for his beautiful soul, then the killer would have to be familiar with Wei Youfu.'

Han Fei went online to look into Wei Youfu's social contact and he eventually found something. There was a puzzle hobbyist shop that Wei Youfu frequented. He looked into the boss and employees' information but none of them seemed like the suspect. 'The workload is too heavy and this is just the investigation on Wei Youfu. I won't be able to do all these alone.' Han Fei now understood the hardship of law enforcement. After giving it some thought, he decided to reach out to the police.

Hiding away the gaming helmet, Han Fei took out his phone to call Li Xue. To solve a cold case from a decade ago, it was too difficult for a former comedy actor. Han Fei needed help but he also wanted to make a deal with Li Xue.

"Li Xue, are you free now?" Han Fei's phone filled with curses, begging but there was not a whisper from Li Xue. "Are you in the middle of a mission?"

"A drug bust."

"Can you come over to my place? I think I have found out what the 8th victim of the jigsaw case looks like."

"You've information on the 8th victim?!" Li Xue's tone changed immediately. "Okay, I'll be there in a minute!"

"My address is..."

“I know where you live. Did you forget it was me who dropped you home last time?”

The call ended. 20 minutes later, Li Xue in casual attire appeared at Han Fei’s door.

“Your house is quite clean, unlike what I imagine a bachelor’s pad to be like.” After entering the room, and seeing the wall of crime, Li Xue was stunned. The victims’ pictures were stuck to the wall and various clues were strung neatly together. For a moment, she felt she had entered the heavy crime unit’s office.

“Please, take a seat.” Han Fei poured Li Xue a glass of water.

“Aren’t you supposed to be an actor?” Li Xue’s eyes still lingered on the wall. “Are you moonlighting as a private investigator also?”

“Oh, no. Please don’t get the wrong idea. The current project I’m in is based on the human jigsaw case. It’s called the Flower of Sin. These are the information I’ve done for my role.” After playing Perfect Life, Han Fei’s personality mellowed out. No matter in what situation, the man found himself to be less easily fazed.

“So what you’re trying to say is... You’ve managed to find out crucial information about the 8th victim due to the research you have done for your upcoming movie?” Li Xue was a detective who had been in many big cases but even at that moment, she was stumped.

Chapter 40:

“I am a detective story buff and I play the victim in my current project. After getting to know the character, I really want to return to the victims their much-deserved justice.” Han Fei said evenly. No matter how you looked at it, the man did not appear like he was lying.

‘Is this what they call method acting?’ Li Xue thought as she sat across from Han Fei.

“Before I start the story, I need to ask you one thing first.” Han Fei did not obfuscate the issue and shot right for his mark, “If I help you solve this human jigsaw case, what kind of consequence will it cause?”

“The human jigsaw case is an open case from more than a decade ago. Many officers still have it on their mind. If we can solve it together, then we’ll be heroes.” Li Xue took a sip of the water. “You’re an actor. If we really can solve this case, then your popularity will skyrocket and the media will crowd towards you. Other than the monetary rewards, there are many other side benefits. Of course, it’s even more important for me. If the case is solved, it’ll be my ticket to go back to the heavy crime unit.” That was probably Li Xue’s goal all along. It was why she had been helping Han Fei.

“For now, money and fame don’t mean much to me, I just wish to have a better relationship with law enforcement. We might have more interactions in the future.” Li Xue narrowed her eyes at Han Fei. “I don’t know what you’re getting at but let’s not waste time anymore. What does the 8th victim look like?” Li Xue took out her phone to look for something.

“I do not have her actual picture but I do remember what she looks like.” Han Fei opened a facial reconstruction program on his computer and keyed in all the information. Moments later, a slender girl around 14 appeared on his computer screen. Staring at the picture, Li Xue’s eyes were transfixed for a long time. Eventually, she gave a sigh, “Kid, you’re the real deal after all. Now I fully believe you.”

“You didn’t earlier?”

“Of course not. After all, you’re a comedy actor who came to me out of nowhere with the key information of an old case. Anyone in my place would find that inconceivable.”

“But you have not seen the actual 8th victim before. What if I just come up with a random picture to trick you?”

“Do you really think the police are that dumb?” Li Xue turned her phone around to show Han Fei her screen. The girl on the screen was 90 percent similar to the girl reconstructed by Han Fei’s computer. “The police had used the little bits of the 8th victim to speculate her age and used parts of her bone structure to theorize her physical frame. We also used the computer to simulate her facial appearance, we merely have not released the information to the public.”

'Looks like the police did have more information than I expected but this is a good thing.' Han Fei planned to combine both parties' clues through Li Xue. "What is your opinion regarding this case? Or is there a theory that is floating around among law enforcement?"

"We believe the killer is of medium build, perhaps even on the slither side. The killer has a certain mastery of fighting skill and autopsy skill. They are very thorough and meticulous. Considering the uniqueness of the 8th victim, the killer most likely has adopted an abandoned baby which had not been registered in the system..." Li Xue volunteered a lot and they helped expand Han Fei's perception of the case.

"That is similar to what I thought but the police seem to have missed one detail." Pointing at Wei Youfu's picture, he shared his hypothesis. He believed the killer knew Wei Youfu. They were more than passing acquaintances.

"That might be the case but to tell you the truth, the police have already investigated everyone connected to all the victims." Li Xue used her id to log into the police's internal database. "For the puzzle hobbyist shop you mentioned, we checked everyone, from the owner to the staff, all of them have ironclad alibis."

"Then, can you help me check one more thing?" Han Fei wrote down Meng Changan's name. "I wish to know whether Meng Si's 3 sons knew Wei Youfu or not, especially this Meng Changan."

"You think the human jigsaw case and the frozen body case have the same killer? But their mo is completely different. Furthermore, Meng family's 3 siblings had alibis during the jigsaw killer's murder spree. The police have already considered the things that you do now."

"Even if the two cases do not have the same killer, they are definitely connected." Han Fei could be so sure because he knew that Meng Changan had predicted the human jigsaw case through the game. Looking through the investigation report, Li Xue scanned for a long time before she found a point of intersection between Meng Changan and Wei Youfu's lives.

"According to the records, a few days before the start of the human jigsaw case, Meng Changan and Wei Youfu visited the same puzzle hobbyist shop. But they did not know each other, they were strangers to each other." For the law enforcement, they had to start from ground zero, it was like finding a needle in a haystack; however, it was different for Han Fei. The game provided him with a clear direction. His investigation difficulty was much lower than the police.

“Meng Changan has frequented the same store?” Han Fei said excitedly, “There is something wrong with that shop! We need to expand the scope of investigation. Other than the staff, we need to look into the other customers who might have interacted with Meng Changan or Wei Youfu!”

“Are you sure about this?”

“Yes!” Han Fei nodded confidently and then added, “Other than that, I have an extra clue for you. The 8th victim did not leave behind any trace on the internet because she was kept at a place secluded from society by the killer. She lived inside a black house surrounded by an expansive forest.”

“How did you know these things?” Li Xue asked as she jotted down the notes.

“If I say I heard them from the victims themselves, would you believe me?”

Li Xue thought for a while before saying, “Actually, I would. The coroner’s job is to help the dead find a voice, perhaps you too have your own method. But don’t worry, I’m not interested in that, I just want to solve this case.” Li Xue stood up. “The database doesn’t go back ten years so we don’t have access to the information on the puzzle hobbyist shop’s customers. However, I will go visit my teacher. He was part of the team investigating the case and as you can predict, it is still bothering him.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll inform you at first notice if we have any update.” After putting the phone and information in her bag, Li Xue turned back to glance at the wall of murder victims. “In a way, you’ve gone far and beyond with your homework as an actor.”

“Nah, it’s nothing. These are just basic preparation for my job.”

Han Fei said embarrassedly. After he started playing Perfect Life, a surprising number of people gave him compliments.

After sending Li Xue away, Han Fei prepared to settle down to study criminology when his phone rang. "Director Jiang, I thought we were done with all of my scenes. How can I help you?"

"Han Fei, it's like this. After a discussion, we decided to add more scenes for you. We are going to add more storyline to flesh out Wei Youfu's character. Do you mind coming over to film them?" Director Jiang informed Han Fei. His tone was friendly. The director was wildly impressed by Han Fei's acting skill.

"Okay, I'll be there soon."

Han Fei hurried to Northern Street, when he arrived, the crew was already in place. It was visible that despite the small budget, Director Jiang's team viewed this movie with great importance.