

Iyashikei 351

Chapter 351

352 Crowded Elevator

The anticipation within Zhuang Ren couldn't be hidden once he knew he had a chance of meeting his family. He was like a husband pacing outside the maternity ward, every second was a torment.

"Before I bring you to meet your family, I need to stress a few things. One, you are not allowed to reject my orders; two, you have to be mentally ready for the fact that I might abandon you at any moment." Han Fei said with a severe expression, an aura of death radiated off him naturally, "The actions that we do tonight will affect many innocent lives. If you do something without my permission, do not blame me for eliminating you as a possible threat."

"I promise you that I will listen to your orders." Han Fei's requirement was strict but Zhuang Ren felt comforted by his strictness. It suited the severity of the situation. His heart was pumping with excitement.

"You need to calm down, I can sense your excitement from here. Even though your family is still present, they are no longer like you, you have to be prepared for them to turn into monsters."

"Even if they become monsters, they are still my family."

"But what if they are monsters who want to kill you? Think about that. You'll have to stay alive to be able to save them." Han Fei reminded him kindly before he turned back to the game. He had memorized every step of the earlier maps. He could solve them with impossible speed without even looking at the screen.

Yesterday night, before Han Fei left the cryptic world, he had triggered a Grade F Mission. He had no idea what he would face after he got online. To increase his survivability, he needed to be as prepared as possible. Seeing how 'immersed' Han Fei was in the game, Zhuang Ren said hesitantly, "The main reason I play this game is to look for my family, since you're bringing me to meet them tonight, I have no use for this game anymore. If you want, I can give you the game."

"Hmm."

“...” Zhuang Ren had changed into a new set of clothes to meet his family. He forced a smile. “That’s all?”

“Thank you.”

Han Fei’s focus was 100 percent on the game. He controlled his character and evaded endless traps. He carved out a way of survival among the ghosts and monsters. He entered Building 4, escaped from Room 4144 and came to the elevator on the 14th floor. In the cryptic world, Han Fei had not taken the elevator, he was very curious about it. ‘To see the Soul Chaser in the game, I’ll have to trigger its mission first.’

The character stopped beside the elevator and the number on the panel started to change. The elevator booth was like a hungry beast, rapidly charging at Han Fei. ‘The Soul Chaser in the cryptic world also took the elevator.’ The death of his character in the Ziggurat game wasn’t permanent so Han Fei didn’t avoid the threat but stood right at the elevator door. The red number on the panel soon turned to 14. Han Fei narrowed his eyes at the screen.

The silvery door slowly opened. There was no blood or monster inside the booth. In fact, the elevator looked perfectly normal. The only strange thing was the woman who stood at the corner facing the wall. She stood turning away from the door of the elevator. She wore bright red clothes and was barefooted. Around her ankle was a chain decorated with many small red flowers. Zhuang Ren kept his mouth shut seeing such a strange development, he didn’t urge Han Fei.

‘That’s all?’ Han Fei looked disappointed. He frowned as he controlled his character to move between the elevator and the corridor. ‘Where is the Soul Chaser? What am I supposed to do to trigger its mission?’ He moved in and out of the elevator, trying various ways to trigger the Soul Chaser mission.

“Are you testing out some bug?” Zhuang Ren already had no idea what Han Fei was doing. It looked like his actions were random and yet strangely purposeful. Han Fei ignored Zhuang Ren. He stared at the woman inside the elevator and remembered every detail about her. ‘On her ankle chain, other than the decorative red flowers, there is a key and number tag. Is that the key to her room? Or the key to her morgue freezer? Normally, a person wouldn’t wear such a thing around their ankle.’

Han Fei stood up and walked towards the screen. He adjusted the camera but no matter what, he couldn’t see the number on the tag clearly.

Zhuang Ren coughed twice and said casually, "The game is authentic but it is just a game. Han Fei, would you like to bring the game home to research it later? Shall we go find my family first?" Then Han Fei did something even more surprising. If Zhuang Ren was the player, he would have run the moment he saw such a creepy woman inside the elevator. But Han Fei not only didn't leave, he moved into the elevator and circled around the woman, as if trying to take a good look at her face.

Zhuang Ren had no idea what to say to Han Fei anymore. He had interacted with Han Fei for only a few days but he had witnessed how Han Fei evolved from a completely new player into this strange player who would openly challenge the ghost in the game.

'Why can't I trigger the Soul Chaser mission?' Zhuang Ren couldn't understand Han Fei's desperation. If he couldn't see the Soul Chaser's face, then he'd die the moment he logged into the game. Even if he was lucky to survive the Soul Chaser, the headless door guardian at Room 4044 would decapitate him. Han Fei's ability to log off the game was an OP skill because his enemy rarely stayed at one spot to wait for him to return. But yesterday night, he logged out before the door guardian and he would log back in front of the door. What was a door guardian? As its name suggested, it was a guardian of the door, so as long as the door was there, the guardian wouldn't have moved. Han Fei now found himself in a death trap. The fact that he could still keep his mind calm as he attempted to find ways to resolve the problem was already very impressive.

'What am I missing? Or is this woman the Soul Chaser? But the Soul Chaser should be male, and is related to the tester who butchered the whole neighbourhood many years ago!' Staring at the woman, while Han Fei contemplated, the elevator door closed. To Han Fei's surprise, his character didn't die the moment the door closed. Instead he stood inside the elevator booth peacefully with the woman. 'Well, this is just strange, why hasn't she killed me yet?'

The doors were closed. Han Fei tried to press the buttons on the control panel but none of it registered. The woman who stood at the corner slowly turned around but to Han Fei's consternation, after she did, somehow she was still facing away from Han Fei. 'I wouldn't be able to see her face no matter what? Is she really the Soul Chaser?' Han Fei controlled his character to get closer to her. He wanted to pull back her hair to look at the face underneath but the game refused to let him do that. He pressed the interact button many times but there was no reaction from the woman. 'She won't kill me and I can't interact with her? What is up with this woman in red?'

No one touched the buttons on the panel but the elevator suddenly started to descend. Something that looked like lichen appeared at the corner of the booth. The silvery walls started to darken and the woman's bone structure was creaking noisily.

'Is she truly faceless?' Han Fei circled around the woman. His actions had gone from curiosity to open taunting. He wanted to make the woman kill him so he could have a chance to look at her face but the woman was impervious to his actions. Soon the elevator stopped at the 13th floor.

The doors slowly opened. A boy wearing pajamas with a little bear print appeared at the door. He stood facing away from the elevator and had his head lowered. The cute pajama he wore was already dyed red with blood. Similarly, the boy hid his face away from Han Fei. He also had a chain around his ankle and the chain had a number tag as well.

The elevator door closed. The boy stood near the door while the woman occupied the corner. Han Fei was sandwiched in the middle.

The elevator at Ziggurat kept moving downwards. It would stop on each floor and a person whose face Han Fei couldn't see would enter the elevator on each floor. Eventually, Han Fei was packed inside the elevator with these 'people'.

The elevator soon reached the 4th floor. The elevator door slowly opened but this time there was no tenant waiting to get in. There was nothing outside the elevator. However, the elevator door remained open, and the atmosphere inside the booth became increasingly tense. About 10 seconds later, everyone in red slowly lifted their heads. They moved their bodies around, but kept their heads fixed, as if turning to stare at Han Fei with their bodies in unison.

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Chapter 353

353 The Final Warning

Smell of blood thickened inside the moldy elevator booth. The people in red surrounded Han Fei in the middle. 'What will happen if I just stay put?'

The elevator didn't move from the 4th floor. As time progressed, the bodies of the red-clothes people appeared to be injected with blood. Their skin started to stretch as their bodies expanded. Death awaited him if he stayed so Han Fei controlled his character to leave the crowd.

The moment he left the booth, the door slowly closed. Through the closing gap, he could see a group of red people standing facing away from him. Soon the door closed fully and the number on the panel shifted quickly. Han Fei thought the number would stop at 1 but it continued to descend into the negative. It only stopped at the -18th floor. 'The elevator is connected to the underground too?'

Since Han Fei was already on the 4th floor, he was not going to waste this opportunity. He ran towards Room 4044. Room 4044 in the Ziggurat game was different from the one in the cryptic world. The door guardian was not headless. 'Well, now's my chance to see what it really looks like.'

Han Fei slunk to Room 4044. As he stared at the screen with bated breath, the door guardian in the game suddenly winked. Its head appeared to move but also not. It was a strange feeling Han Fei couldn't describe but he did feel a chill run down his spine.

After he sat back down on the couch, Han Fei turned to the screen again, he finally realized what was wrong. The door guardian in the game was looking at him, not the character Han Fei controlled in the game, but Han Fei outside the game. 'What kind of technology is this?' Han Fei had no idea if this was a trap or an easter egg. He tried to push on the door of Room 4044 and then a conversation snippet appeared on screen. "Would you help me bring my head back?" There was no hint, and no warning. There was no NPC around him either.

'Wait, the door guardian is talking to me?' Han Fei clicked on the conversation box and something even more confusing appeared. He was given 3 options but all 3 of them were the same—No.

"Room 4044 is the location which is closest to Room 4444. Bring my head back and I can help you end this endless nightmare. To enter Room 4044, you have to help me do something. No matter what you choose, you'll ultimately end up here." The words in the box kept changing but the options available were always 'no', like this was already predestined and couldn't be changed.

"The evil that you see has to be evil; the kindness that you see has to be kindness? If you have the chance to approach the 'divine', you should look behind them where their humanity is hidden. How brilliant the glow of their divinity, is how dirty their humanity. Help me and I can tell you the secrets of the Unmentionables." Han Fei was greatly piqued by the content of the conversation. Unmentionables represented something unique in the game.

'The headless door guardian wants its head back. I should use this knowledge to my advantage when I log in next time.' After some hesitation, Han Fei didn't pick any of the selection, he didn't like to pick the path designated for him by others. But if he didn't make any choice, the game would be stuck on this page. After many tries, Han Fei memorized the door guardian's face and then chose to exit the game. The moment he did, the gaming screen turned black immediately, instead of returning to the main menu.

"Huh? I've played this game for decades already, but this has never happened. Is there something wrong with the tv?" Zhuang Ren walked towards the television with confusion.

"Stay where you are! I think I've triggered something." Several seconds later, a pair of bleeding eyes appeared on the black screen. The eyes were flickering like they were under great limitation. Cracks of

blood spread from the centre of the eyes. Soon the blood capillaries filled up the screen like it was trying to break through it. This development reminded Han Fei of Spirit Farer. Whenever he used that talent, his system menu would be crawling with blood capillaries and then torn open from the middle, like a door had been forcibly broken through. 'It's too similar, how many secrets is this game still hiding?'

Perfect Life was more than a game due to the presence of the black box. It had many tenuous relationships with real life, it blurred the border between the real and virtual worlds, blending the living and the dead together. No one knew what was the secret hidden inside the black box. All its previous owners' attempts to understand it had failed. There was still a long way to go for Han Fei to open the black box, but the things he had seen so far had fully changed his life. It was like through the game, he was slowly unveiling the truth about the world.

The pair of red eyes stared at Han Fei before they eventually exploded. The blood mist coagulated into a sentence—this is the first warning, 3 warnings later, death will descend. The warning soon disappeared and the screen remained black.

'3 warnings? The black box also gave me 3 warnings should I try to tell others about the black box or the cryptic world. After 3 warnings, the black box will explode inside my head.' Han Fei's eyes narrowed. 'This game was designed by the Director of Immortal Pharma when he was young. The black box in my head was gifted to me by the director's older brother. When I got the black box, the director had been dead for some time already, but is it possible that even though the director is already dead, his memory or consciousness lives on inside the black box? Or has he gone hiding inside a part of the black box?' This was mere speculation, Han Fei had no proof. In any case, a small comedy actor like himself couldn't do anything against a big company like Immortal Pharma anyway.

'Fu Sheng and the director are the previous owners of the black box. Through the building manager's memory, I can confirm that they both do exist, but Zhuang Ren said the director did not have an old brother and the director often talked to himself. What exactly is the relationship between the 2 brothers? 1 was responsible for exploring the cryptic world while the other expanded their influence in the real world?' Staring at the black screen, Han Fei put down the controller, 'Of the 2 brothers, one of them can see the future, but is the future he saw the real future? Would the world really develop the way he had foreseen it?'

Han Fei did not think that was the case, at least he believed that the siblings wouldn't have predicted he would choose to open the black box from both sides. 'In any case, I will walk my own path.'

Unplugging the power switch, Han Fei restarted the Ziggurat game. The game started up like normal, it was as if everything earlier was just an illusion. The character respawned inside Happiness

Neighbourhood. The atmosphere was joyful and peaceful but the game character was now wearing bloody clothes. "The in game character has changed!"

Han Fei didn't control the character and start clearing the map. Instead he leaned back into the chair and stared at the character quietly. He felt like this Ziggurat game was very similar to Manager Mission in the cryptic world. With every death, there would be a rebirth. The victim's memory would slowly disappear until they became nothing more than a husk, a character controlled by others. 'I'll only go far by being controlled by others? Is that the true meaning of this game? The director wanted to tell the player of this game that only being a pawn can one retain their individuality?' Taking in the character's bloody clothes, Han Fei chuckled, 'I've been in the shadows of the spotlight for so many years. Finally I've been given the chance to stand in the centre of the stage. I'm not going to let anyone else control my life. Since the black box has been given to me, I have the right to decide what to do with it.'

"Han Fei... Shall we go meet my family now?" Zhuang Ren was unable to stand the silent treatment anymore. He walked to block Han Fei's sight of the television screen. "Even if I can only look at them from afar, I am willing to give you everything, this house, my assets and so on."

Seeing the determination on Zhuang Ren's face, Han Fei decided it was time to stop playing the game. After all, he had already obtained the things he needed.

"Okay." Han Fei stood up to switch off the game. He then placed the controller inside the black box which already had the tape and the therapy device. "Please help me place the game inside the box later, I'll carry the whole box home with me."

Chapter 354

354 The Song for Soul Summoning

Han Fei lifted up the black box single handedly. Han Fei's strength shocked Zhuang Ren who knew how heavy the box was. "Since when did you get so strong?"

"How can someone be an actor without some special training?" Han Fei noticed the change to himself too. When he first got the black box from the old man, he could barely lift it with both of his arms. But now he only needed one arm to pick up the box. It was a scary transformation. "When we're there, you need to listen to my orders, and be patient. Don't worry, I will not purposely harm you." Han Fei carried the black box and pushed open Zhuang Ren's front door. After a long time, this was the first time

Zhuang Ren exited his room. The sun showered on both of them. They enjoyed the sunlight but unfortunately the sun was soon blocked off by dark clouds.

Han Fei led Zhuang Ren to Jin Jun's neighbourhood. As the top paparazzi, Jin Jun didn't live within the intelligent city not because he couldn't afford to but he didn't want to due to the unique nature of his career. Zhuang Ren's identity was quite sensitive so Han Fei was very cautious on the road. It was not until Jin Jun opened the door and they were all indoors that he could sigh in relief.

"Han Fei, after we left my home, I had the feeling that someone was watching me. That feeling only just disappeared." Zhuang Ren said anxiously, "But I'm a boring old man, who would be watching me?"

"Just stay here for the day and follow my instructions." Han Fei had Jin Jun give Zhuang Ren a new gaming account.

"What is this?"

"It's a game, you can see it as an advanced version of the Ziggurat Game." Han Fei had Zhuang Ren enter the gaming hub. Han Fei personally checked all the wires and then had Zhuang Ren activate his new account. This was the first time Zhuang Ren tried a fully-immersive game. He followed Han Fei's instruction to go through every step but at the last moment, the gaming hub's internal alarm suddenly activated. The gaming hub door opened on its own and Zhuang Ren lying inside frowned with confusion, "What's wrong?"

"Those with serious heart and brain disease wouldn't be able to play Perfect Life. The gaming hub will conduct its screening and when such patients attempt to enter the game, it will block them." Jin Jun came with 3 glasses of juice. Even though he was a paparazzi, he remembered what Han Fei had done for him.

"But I don't have any of those diseases! My heart and brain are perfectly healthy." Zhuang Ren was desperate. He was ready to meet his family but something like this had to happen.

"It shouldn't be a problem with your health then." Han Fei stood beside the gaming hub and frowned. "When you activated the game, did you notice anything out of place?"

“My connection to the game appears to be strangely weak, there are a few wires which cannot detect my consciousness.” Zhuang Ren sighed helplessly, “What should I do now?”

“You’ve worn the director’s therapy device before, that device might have changed something within your mind.” Han Fei had Zhuang Ren try the system a few more times but they all ended in failure. Perfect Life refused to let Zhuang Ren register an account. This interesting discovery ignited Han Fei’s interest in Zhuang Ren, perhaps Zhuang Ren himself didn't even know how unique he was.

“So I can’t see my family after all?” When Zhuang Ren found out he could see his family, he was so happy, he even joked with Han Fei, but now with this problem in the way, his face collapsed and he aged in mere minutes.

“I have a back-up plan. Wait right here.” Han Fei took out his phone to call Li Xue. He wanted to borrow the latest psychological treatment device from the police. A few weeks ago, Han Fei managed to summon Mingmei to the cryptic world when she was using the psychological treatment device designed by Deep Space Tech. Due punishment was delivered to Ying Yue’s killer. Now he wanted to replicate the same experience, perhaps it might work. After all, the device didn’t need to check the wearer’s personal info before it could be used.

“Sister Li, I have a favor to ask.”

“Haven’t we just talked on the phone this morning? Did you find something new?” Li Xue sounded surprised.

“No, it’s not that. Can you help me secure one of Deep Space Tech’s latest psychological treatment devices? The device that I saw the police used on the psychologically impaired inmates at the detention centre.”

“Why would you need one of those? Are you facing some psychological problem?” Li Xue was concerned but after a few exchanges, she still helped Han Fei make the request. Han Fei was the key person to help them capture Butterfly, nothing could happen to him.

“Li Xue, I have a desperate use for it, do you think I can get it before nightfall?”

“Our leader has personally gone to get one for you, so it should be fine.”

“There’s one more thing that I wish to ask.” Han Fei took out the music box from the black box. “Do the police have personnel with the technical skill to recover the lyrics in this song? I want to know what it is trying to say.” Han Fei switched on the music box and a strange song echoed inside Jin Jun’s house. “This is a song from a music box.”

“I can’t promise anything. The recording sounds too blurry, the computer might not be able to analyze it. How about you bring it to the station in person and we’ll see what we can do?” Han Fei glanced at the time. He had Zhuang Ren stay with Jin Jun while he rushed to the police station. Ever since he woke up from the game that morning, he hadn’t had a moment of rest. When he arrived, Li Xue led Han Fei to the tech department. They uploaded the song from the music box into the system and compared it to the database but to everyone’s surprise, there was no information about this song at all on the internet. “This is impossible, as long as it has been on the internet, there would be a trace of it.” Li Xue and her colleagues were about to attempt something else when the door of the tech department suddenly burst open. Li Xue’s mentor and the officer who was his bodyguard returned to the station with a new treatment device.

“I practically needed to beg to get this. If there’s something wrong with him psychologically... Han Fei? When did you get here?” Li Xue’s mentor put the thing aside. He came to greet Han Fei when he heard the strange song from the music box. A woman and a child sang along to the strange melody. Their voices were mixed together and they were hard to separate.

“Where did you find this?” Li Xue’s mentor listened to it and his face slowly changed.

“I found the song inside a music box, have you heard of it before?” Han Fei silently moved the music box closer to him.

“This is not a song. Please close all the devices in the room now.” The senior said seriously, he seemed to know something. All the devices were closed and in the end, only the creepy song from the music box remained.

“The song was pre recorded and it would play whenever the music box was opened. This is exactly the same as the music box from 14 years ago.” The old man’s presence was completely different from before. He could be quite scary when he was serious.

“14 years ago?”

“On April 4th 14 years ago, a case happened at Xin Lu. One of the residential apartments caught on fire, a music teacher and her child were trapped. When they were rescued, their vitals were almost gone, but something miraculous happened. After some emergency rescue, the heavily injured child woke up from his coma but his mother unfortunately died from the fire.”

“But what does that have to do with a music box?”

“After the boy woke up, he couldn’t stop crying. Initially the doctors thought it was the pain from the burns but after some counseling, they realized it was because of a dream the boy had when he was in the coma. In the dream, his gentle mother morphed into something else, she kept hitting him, scolding him, she even chased him out of the house. In the end, when he was forced to leave his home by his mother who wielded a knife, he woke up from the coma.” The senior officer shared the details from the old case.

“It felt like the mother was trying her best to save her child, the room might represent death. After all, he woke up the minute he left the room.” Han Fei found the story to be quite touching.

“Perhaps.” The man was an atheist, he believed it was the subconscious which was behind everything. “The boy suffered from heavy burns all over his body and he was turned into a monster. He spent a lot of time in the ICU. He kept saying how much he missed his mother, it was quite a sad story.”

“The poor child.” Li Xue sighed but Han Fei noticed something else. At the start, the senior officer called this a case and not an accident.

“Don’t be fooled by what you see.” The senior officer said with an even voice, “After we investigated it further, we found the source of fire. This was not an accident but arson. And the arsonist was the boy. No one knew why he did it, the only one who knew the truth might be his mother but she was already dead.”

“The boy set off the fire? But why would he do that?”

“We found the boy’s father, he was not at all happy to find out his child was still alive. He told us the child was a monster, a harbinger of misfortune. He knew that the boy would grow up to be a killer, but he didn’t expect him to kill so early in his life.” Li Xue’s mentor’s words were quite shocking. “The boy was young but he was very mature. We didn’t spook him but went along with his lies and the world that he had built for himself. But as we interacted further with him, we discovered more and more strange things.” As he listened to the strange music, the senior officer sighed, “The boy said he missed his mother and wanted to find something that she owned. He requested the medical staff to go back to his home to find a music box, he said it was something his mother loved dearly.

“We did find the music box at his home but according to the father, the music box didn’t belong to the mother. She didn’t have anything like that. The medical staff handed the music box to the boy and he hugged it daily, and conversed with the woman’s voice inside the song like his real mother was trapped inside the music box.

“Then something even stranger happened, the young boy completely lost his mind. He would use the most innocent voice to say the creepiest thing, he scared quite a few staff. After the boy got the music box, his wounds suddenly deteriorated and he passed away one night.

“In the succeeding investigation, we compiled all the information and in the end, we could only confirm 2 things.

“While the boy mumbled to himself, one name kept getting featured—Fu Sheng. He wanted to kill Fu Sheng, claiming everything was Fu Sheng’s fault, so why did he have to bear the sin on its behalf? But from what we know, there was no one named Fu Sheng in the boy’s life.

“The other thing is we have tried to analyze every single word in the lyrics from the music box and we believed it was some kind of spell to summon the dead’s soul.”

The senior officer’s words shook Han Fei. He was surprised to hear Fu Sheng’s name mentioned here and he didn’t expect the Unmentionable’s song was also meant for soul-summoning.

‘It feels like others have to go through a lot and suffer great side effects to conduct soul-summoning, is this talent that powerful?’ Han Fei reassessed his talent of Spirit Farer but other than that, he also felt like there was a need to also examine his starting personal talent—Resurrection.

Chapter 355

355 Prelude

The music box found at Immortal Pharma's director's former home appeared 14 years ago. Li Xue's mentor confirmed that they were the same music box. After knowing the music box's past, the blessing written under the music box became quite ironic. The song inside the music box didn't bring anyone happiness or bliss, instead it had turned itself into a monster spreading misfortune.

No one knew what happened to the Singer, everything was a mystery. Everyone related to the music box was dead, and so the case remained unsolved. Li Xue's mentor remembered this case clearly because he had memorized all the murders that had happened over the past 20 years at Xin Lu to close the net around Butterfly. The senior officer himself was quite a unique character, there was no information about him at all on the internet, but even the leader of the Xin Lu heavy crime unit had to bow deferentially to him whenever he was around. The senior officer didn't have an official post and not many people knew of his past. Han Fei was only sure of one thing, this senior officer had spent his whole life attempting to catch the Butterfly, even if he had to die, he would drag the Butterfly down into hell with him.

After acquiring all the things he needed, Han Fei didn't stay for long. He deflected some questions by the police and left with the treatment device. It was the Night of Resurrection so he had to make use of every second he had.

He returned to Jin Jun's place and walked into Jin Jun discussing entertainment gossip with Zhuang Ren. When Jin Jun found out about Zhuang Ren's real identity, his jaw fell to the ground. He didn't expect he would have the king of bad movies as his guest in his lifetime. Jin Jun wanted to dig up some gossip about entertainment business seniors from Zhuang Ren; and Zhuang Ren needed Jin Jun to enter the game so he gave Jin Jun some crumbs. However, the crumbs were enough to shock Jin Jun's system. His eyes that looked at Zhuang Ren were glowing like a hunting hound who had found its prey.

"Looks like you two are having quite a good chat."

"Brother Han, you are my lucky star. You've helped me a lot this time." Jin Jun was supposed to help Han Fei but Han Fei had presented him with an even bigger surprise. It only confirmed his belief to side with Han Fei.

“That’s what friends do.” Han Fei took out the psychological treatment device and signaled for Zhuang Ren to come over. He connected all the wires following the instructions and then had Zhuang Ren put it on. “Do not feel too much pressure. In a minute, you will appear inside a room, the room will change according to your mood. Relax and do not resist it.” Han Fei stared at Zhuang Ren because he was worried the device would not work on Zhuang Ren.

The power light came on and the device operated like normal. But what happened next was different from what described inside the manual. Before Han Fei conducted any verbal therapy, Zhuang Ren already sunk into deep sleep, it was like his consciousness and the world created by the photon computer were incredibly compatible with each other. ‘What has the director done to Zhuang Ren’s brain?’ Han Fei looked at the burnt therapy device inside the black box and pondered. Zhuang Ren’s consciousness was different from normal, it appeared to have been marked and this kind of marking method was beyond Han Fei’s comprehension. To be fair, Han Fei, who lived in the old city, never had the chance to interact with the latest technology. He’d only occasionally hear about them from advertisements.

“When will Zhuang Ren wake up?” Jin Jun asked nervously. He still had many questions for Zhuang Ren, after all, gossip and celebrity news were going to sell in all kinds of era.

“I can’t tell either.” Han Fei could only hope that no accident would happen to Zhuang Ren. After having dinner at Jin Jun’s place, Han Fei decided not to waste time and took out the Ziggurat game from the black box and started to play. Jin Jun looked at the two ‘strange’ men inside his living room and didn’t dare to say anything more. He stood quietly to the side like he was the guest.

Han Fei returned to the Ziggurat’s Building 4 and instantly made his way to the door guardian and triggered the conversation. To his surprise, the door guardian appeared to be a unique NPC because he remembered Han Fei had been there before. The conditions he gave Han Fei were different every time. He tried his best to persuade Han Fei to help him. Han Fei did want to help him but the game didn’t provide him with the option to do so. After he forcibly exited the game, Han Fei triggered the warning for the second time, he wanted to see what would happen after the third warning.

After the second warning, Han Fei’s character was entirely drenched in blood, and when he came to the door guardian again, the door guardian had been spliced into pieces and his head was missing. Han Fei tried to converse with him but once he got close, his character was killed by the door guardian. The Ziggurat game finally aligned with the cryptic world. The game wasn’t going to give Han Fei the opportunity to trigger the third warning.

'It feels like there is also a pair of invisible hands inside the Ziggurat game, it keeps the game running, playing a similar role as the manager in the cryptic world. The pair of bloodshot eyes that I saw should belong to it.' Han Fei had memorized that pair of bloodshot eyes, so that he would recognize it when he saw them again.

Unable to talk to the door guardian, Han Fei started to explore Building 4, hoping to find more clues. After a few hours, Han Fei found a few clues that might be useful to him.

Different from the other buildings, Building 4 had a basement and the stairs that led to it were locked behind a steel door.

The 'strange tenants' in red clothes were unique to Building 4, normal tenants were unable to see them, and one needed to go through some kind of special ritual to interact with them. Han Fei remembered that one of the red clothed tenants was a boy wearing a bear print pyjama, he should be the child of the woman from the dresser. Han Fei didn't forget his promise to the woman. If possible, he too wanted to reunite the mother with her son.

After dying multiple times in the Ziggurat game, Han Fei noticed that with each death, the Death Curse inside the Ziggurat would increase, which was quite strange. It meant that the game would be harder with each death, this was something Han Fei didn't expect. 'It feels like the game is completing itself through the character's deaths by collecting more Death Curses. Is it a reflection of the Ziggurat in the cryptic world? That it would get scarier as it collects more deaths?'

Time flew by when one was having fun. The sky outside the window darkened. At 7 pm, when Han Fei and Jin Jun were considering unplugging the power source of the treatment device, Zhuang Ren finally woke up. Through the clear mask, Han Fei saw Zhuang Ren's heavily wrinkled face. "What did you see? Why did it take you so long to wake up?"

"I was trapped inside the room, the room appeared to be constructed based on my subconscious, all my memories were manifested into reality in some ways." Zhuang Ren took down the device but the fear froze on his face, "I saw my eldest daughter turn into a brave adventure, second daughter into a clingy kitten and my wife used her bones to construct the main frame of the house."

"That sounds lovely." Han Fei knew the basic functions of the treatment device, one of them was to read the user's subconscious and to build a room from it.

“But the problem was... the whole room was red, there was blood everywhere and the room kept expanding like it had no horizon. I had no control over it at all. Gradually, things that didn’t belong in my memory appeared among the blood!” Zhuang Ren shivered as he described those things. “There appears to be another person’s consciousness hidden among my memories!”

“Wait, you’ve spent the past few hours just building your room of subconscious?” Based on the manual, the room would take at most only 5 minutes to build.

“Yes.” Zhuang Ren nodded. He had taken almost 5 hours.

“Then what else did you see inside that bloody room?” Han Fei tried to use a calming tone. Zhuang Ren was in a very agitated state, he was very nervous and afraid.

“People, dying people and dead people. Their body parts littered everywhere, they stuffed up my room and they were still expanding.” Zhuang Ren held his head with both hands, just the thought of what he saw scarred him deeply, “I felt like I wasn’t inside a room anymore but standing at the source of an endless sea of blood.”

“The source of an endless sea of blood?” When Han Fei used his Spirit Farer talent, he had to cross a blood sea as well. He was unsure if the two were related or not. “Then did you try conversing with the people who were still alive? Ask about their names or addresses? You should be curious about whose memory was implanted into your mind, right?”

“I did but they would only croak out these two words repeatedly—Fu Sheng (resurrection) and Yong Sheng (immortality).” Zhuang Ren slumped down the couch, losing all his strength, “I don’t think I’ve done anything in my life to deserve something like this. This has to do with the therapy device the director had given me, but why would he do this to me?”

“Don’t panic, this might not be a bad thing.”

“Han Fei, you weren’t there, you have no idea how shocking and scary it was. My subconscious room was filled with people that I don’t know who are dying or dead. They are all hidden inside my brain!” Zhuang Ren’s hands shook harder as he pulled on his hair. “Immortal Pharma’s goal is immortality, currently there are two branches of research into immortality, the first is physical immortality, which is impossible; but the second is consciousness immortality. Every soul has their unique consciousness, the

people that I saw appear to be the consciousness of the failed experiments! Yes, that's it. I heard someone mention that to me before, but I can't remember whom."

"Consciousness immortality?" For someone like Han Fei, this was a farfetched concept. Even if such a technique did exist, he wouldn't be selected to use it.

"I have heard of this before. In the past Immortal Pharma's goal was to extend human longevity and explore all the secrets of the brain. When they were approached by Deep Space Tech, the two giants started to cooperate on research into consciousness immortality." Jin Jun heard similar news before, "In their eyes, human souls can be objectified." Zhuang Ren and Jin Jun's words affected Han Fei deeply, if they were right, then the director might have hidden his own consciousness in Zhuang Ren's subconscious and might even one day take over Zhuang Ren's consciousness fully.

Han Fei shivered suddenly. He was reminded of a quote— It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.

'Butterfly has been trying to bring Zhuang Ren into Ziggurat, the goal should be to find the memory hidden in Zhuang Ren's subconscious.' Many things were falling into place. Zhuang Ren's family was trapped inside Room 4144. They used the figurines with Fu Sheng's memory fragments to conduct the ritual of summoning Zhuang Ren to Room 4144, the family was used to anchor Zhuang Ren and the figurines to anchor the memories that did not belong to Zhuang Ren but did exist in his mind. To get what it wanted, Butterfly had done a lot.

'Looks like I'll have to be careful how I summon Zhuang Ren into the cryptic world.' Glancing at the clock, Han Fei walked to Zhuang Ren's side. "After midnight, put on the device. Stay inside the room and face the memories head on."

"I'll see my family that way?" Zhuang Ren's expression dropped. "Don't tell me they have been made into those things too? They're buried inside the 'piles of bodies'?"

Shaking his head, Han Fei wanted to say something when there was a boom from outside the window. It sounded like an explosion. Even though it was far from them, they could hear it clearly. The 3 of them rushed to the window and saw pillars of flame coming from the intelligent city.

“Something has happened in the intelligent city?” Xin Lu intelligent city was a landmark of modern city living. It was monitored fully by a photon computer, normally there would not be something like a car accident but today an explosion happened there. The fire lit up the night sky. Even the virtual screen that hung in the sky was affected. The giant 3 rippled in the fire.

Half an hour later, many videos appeared on the internet. The fire occurred at the information database centre shared by Deep Space Tech and Immortal Pharma, it stored a lot of information on Perfect Life.

“There’s only 3 days left until OB, why is this happening now?” Jin Jun was an avid fan of Perfect Life. In there he could be totally free, without the need to worry about being recognized by the fans of the celebrities he had reported on. The fire burned for an hour before it was put out. Han Fei watched the roaring flames and was reminded of the night he got the gaming helmet. The entire street where he got the helmet was also engulfed in a giant fire.

‘Tonight is the Night of Resurrection, is this supposed to be the prelude?’

Chapter 356

356 The Director's Will

The fire at Xin Lu intelligent city soon became a hot topic. Many people started to question Deep Space Tech’s photon computer for allowing this to happen. As the core of the intelligent city, the photon computer was a mechanical god in many people’s minds. It had already impressed the world once when it monitored the construction of the intelligent city and there was no accident. However, just as Perfect Life was going to go online, something happened at the intelligent city which was fully controlled by the photon computer and the damage was concentrated at the location where the most important data for Deep Space Tech and Immortal Pharma was stored.

There were already plenty of people who had a negative opinion of Perfect Life, they believed that this game would negatively impact the real world and it carried many questionable morality problems. However, the real reason was because these people hated the parent companies behind Perfect Life. Deep Space Tech and Immortal Pharma brought about technological revolution and biological revolution, a lot of jobs had been replaced by AI. Many people lost their jobs and were forced to adapt to this new era. If they ever slowed down, they would be cruelly abandoned by the cogs of advancement. This explosion at the intelligent city was like a present from heaven for these dissidents.

Many opposing and questioning voices surfaced on the internet. Some even had started a petition to boycott Deep Space Tech and Immortal Pharma.

After the explosion, Han Fei stood beside the window and glanced at his phone. In less than one hour, the related hot topic had garnered national attention. The speed could only be described as scary. But that was not all, while the fire was being put out, someone who claimed to be a former employee of Immortal Pharma started to expose the many strange events that happened during Perfect Life's CB. When Han Fei saw the identity of this employee, he found it difficult to calm down.

The whistleblower was Feng Ziyu. He shared everything he had collected on the Ziggurat, including the video and audio recording of his colleague who had gone insane. Han Fei saw most of the videos for the first time as well. The mad employee said confidently that Immortal Pharma's director's will had been tweaked; he also revealed that the director had hidden a big secret inside the deleted map. The Ziggurat map couldn't be recovered in the surface world but traces of it could still be found in other hidden maps. Han Fei scanned through the videos quickly because he knew they wouldn't be online for long. Of all the videos, there was one that caught Han Fei's attention.

The mad tester stood alone inside an empty office. He addressed the camera under the table. "I know there is something wrong with that neighbourhood, it is not a technical problem, not something that can be eliminated by deleting its files. I can only attempt to eliminate it the most direct way. A game should just be a game, when the game exceeds the definition of a game, it cannot be a good thing. I will be the first to uphold these rules but I will not be the last. If I die in the game tonight, those of you watching this video, please..." At this point, the man's expression suddenly changed. His mouth opened and closed but he made no sound. Then several seconds later, the man suddenly looked at the camera. His lips split open to reveal a creepy smile, "Those before the camera, please try your best to survive." The video ended there, it felt like it had been purposely cut short.

"This video should be taken when the tester first got into the game, it recorded how the man had gone insane." Han Fei thought about it. Feng Ziyu had gone missing so the person who used Feng Ziyu's identity to release this info was probably Butterfly or Butterfly's disciple but why would they do something like this at such a crucial moment?

"Does it want to stop the OB of Perfect Life? But why?" Han Fei thought about it and believed the Butterfly merely wanted to muddle the water to hide its real intention. "Even though Butterfly has not personally murdered anyone, it is always accompanied by death. This is going to be yet another bloody night."

Different from the explosion at intelligent city, Feng Ziyu's expose couldn't get much traction before it was suppressed by an invisible force. The video Han Fei was watching froze as well. "The two companies have made their move?"

Han Fei looked at the information which was being wiped away and a thought bubbled up in his mind, 'Could the Butterfly's real target be Immortal Pharma? It used Feng Ziyu's material to mess up their footing and then take advantage of this opening to come after the company's other employees?' Han Fei immediately took out his phone to call Li Xue, he couldn't tell how many times he had called her that day. He shared all of his worries with Li Xue and reminded her that Butterfly might cause a massacre that night and they had to be careful.

Han Fei hadn't finished talking when Jin Jun shouted from the living room. The man hurried to Han Fei's side, pointing at his phone like he had discovered something crazy. After hanging up, Han Fei turned to Jin Jun's phone. The first hot topic had been replaced by Immortal Pharma's director's will and the second hot topic was the easter egg for Perfect Life's first OB, the third was the news about the fire at the intelligent city, and how there was no injury.

As if to suppress the negative voices, Deep Space Tech pushed forth an activity that they had been preparing for a long time. The content and scale of the activity was so huge that it shocked everyone who saw it.

This was the first time Immortal Pharma released the video recorded by their director before he passed away. He poured his heart and soul into Perfect Life. The old man in the video didn't look ill. His eyes were gentle as he looked at the camera, it was like he was talking to his kids. The old man talked about his anticipation towards Perfect Life. His own life was filled with regrets so he wanted to build a place where all the regrets could be rectified. The whole video was extremely long, the old man only shared his will near the end.

He hoped that the players who entered the Perfect Life could help him search for a black box inside the game, the box contained his lifetime regret. If someone could find the black box and help him fulfill that regret, he was willing to give his share of Immortal Pharma's company stock to that person.

There was no big conspiracy or big secret in the old man's will. This was just an old man reminiscing about his past and talking about his hope for the future.

The video instantly garnered the attention of many people. No amount of advertisement was going to match the allure of company stock. Immortal Pharma's former director had set up his own foundation to

help with charity and medical research, the fund needed to run his foundation was merely a yearly bonus from the director's company stock. If a normal person could inherit the man's stock, then he would be deified immediately!

Even Jin Jun who was already living comfortably had his eyes turned red after watching the video. Not only him, everyone who knew the news would be affected by it. Greed was human nature, a suitable amount of greed could compel hard work but overwhelming greed could only bury someone. Han Fei felt only chill seeing the exploding discussion.

The black box was in his brain. He instantly was reminded of an image where he was detained by mechanical arms and a saw was going to cut open his brain while many people looked on. The people had gotten rabid. Han Fei looked through the director's video again and again, he knew the director was lying. No one knew what was inside the black box. Fu Sheng's siblings hadn't been able to open the innermost layer of the box. Han Fei was the one who knew the truth but he couldn't share his truth because that would only put a target on himself.

'Immortal Pharma would already know about the content of the video but they have been holding it back. In other words, they have attempted to find the black box themselves. They sent in plenty of their own employees during Perfect Life's CB, some of them were probably there just to look for the black box.' Han Fei had no idea why Immortal Pharma would choose to release the director's will at this time. Perhaps they wanted to use this as a way to promote Perfect Life further; or they had run into some incident where they were forced to reveal this secret.

Han Fei couldn't understand the decision making process of a big company, he only knew that he couldn't let a third person find out he had the black box. The fire at intelligent city had been doused but the fire within the player base had just been ignited.

The giant monitor covered the night sky. The giant 3 entered Han Fei's sight and he felt an oppressive feeling that he never felt before. It was like the number was not only counting down the time to Perfect Life's OB but also counting down his life.

'It's time for me to make my move.' Han Fei called Zhuang Ren in the room. To ensure that he wouldn't summon anything else, Han Fei asked for details like Zhuang Ren's date of birth, and other information. After he memorized everything, Han Fei carried the black box and left Jin Jun's home. Walking down the old city street, Han Fei stayed close to the walls and shadows out of habit. Many habits he gained from the cryptic world stayed with him, sometimes, the line between the real world and cryptic world blurred. 'I only wanted to find a mini game for relaxation, how did I end up putting my life on the line?'

When Han Fei was an extra, he wished to win the lottery, perhaps then he would not feel so pained whenever he ordered something expensive to eat. But now that he really had something priceless in his head, he couldn't feel happy but felt even worse than when he was just a small extra.

Han Fei arrived home at around 10 pm. He was about to head up the stairs when an expensive car parked next to his apartment suddenly switched on its headlights. Han Fei's eyes chilled and his muscles tensed. In that few seconds, he already formulated several ways to quite literally dodge from this problem. The air froze but the car didn't charge towards him like Han Fei expected. Instead the car window rolled down and a well manicured hand reached out from inside, holding a cigarette between the fingers. The man's hand had on an expensive watch and there was something tattooed at the back of his arm.

The car door on the other side opened and a handsome young man walked out. "What's wrong? You're kicked out after a few days of working with Director Zhang? I heard that you have been banned from the set? You poor thing. Director Zhang is after all an influential director, I guess he can dump you whenever he feels like it." The young man was handsome but his tone was sharp and annoying.

"Ah Cheng?" Han Fei knew this young man. Twin Flowers' original main character was supposed to be Ah Cheng, Han Fei only took his place after Ah Cheng walked away from the set.

"To be honest, I sympathize with you. A person has died on set, and someone has to take the fall. You're the youngest and most inexperienced of the cast members, so the scapegoat has to be you." Ah Cheng sounded indignant on Han Fei's behalf. "I consider us to be friends. I have an opportunity that I wish to offer you, you really should take it." Ah Cheng looked at Han Fei, he was desperate to see the begging on Han Fei's face because he knew that Han Fei was 'abandoned' by Director Zhang. Many people in the business were talking about how unlucky Han Fei was.

"You think we're friends? You need to go for a mental check up." Han Fei shook his head. Ah Cheng was born with a silver spoon and had not faced any real challenge since he started his job as an actor. Ah Cheng was not a bad person, he just didn't know how to use his brain. To put it simply, Han Fei wouldn't waste time trying to summon Ah Cheng to the cryptic world because he didn't even qualify.

Han Fei picked up the black box and prepared to leave. Ah Cheng looked back with embarrassment. The car door opened again. The middle-aged man at the driver's seat finally spoke. "Han Fei, do you remember me?"

Han Fei did find the voice familiar. He turned around to study the tattoo on the man's arm. After realizing it was not a butterfly, Han Fei turned and continued to walk away.

"When you were at the company, I saw the potential in you. If you're willing to come back, we'll pour all the company resources on you." The middle-aged man pointed at the decrepit neighbourhood, "I'm sure you won't mind moving to a better place, right? You must be yearning to escape from poverty. We can sign the contract now and I will wire you the contract money tomorrow."

Han Fei ignored the man. 'Escape from poverty? You have no idea how much money I'm carrying in my head.'

Han Fei entered the staircase and was about to continue up when he saw two officers in full get-up guarding outside his door. They were experienced officers. They hid in the blind spot and made no sound.

"Gentlemen, what are you doing here?"

"Something doesn't feel right tonight. Before those two arrived, many people have already come here looking for you. Some of them you know, most of them you don't. We suspect Butterfly's people might be hidden among them and they might come after you tonight." Han Fei was a key informant, his house was heavily monitored.

Han Fei was touched knowing that the law enforcement would do so much for him so that he could game in peace.

Chapter 357

357 The Door Guardian's Blade

Han Fei checked all the corners in his home and took out the black box he inherited from Zhuang Ren. He checked every object carefully and then personally wrote down notes that corresponded to each item. Within the black box's limitation, he wrote down as much info about the Butterfly as he could. If he died in the game that night, these things would be discovered by the police. Han Fei wanted to do everything he could to protect the peace of Xin Lu.

As he wrote, Han Fei felt like he was putting down his will. 'Regardless, tonight I'll turn Ziggurat upside down. Butterfly will not respond to anything else but chaos. Killing it directly will be showing it the biggest mercy.'

After finishing his 'will', Han Fei stood quietly beside the window and glanced at the intelligent city. The skyscrapers reached into the sky, the sight of it awed Han Fei every time. 'I've not lived in an intelligent city before, even for once I wish to experience that feeling of sleeping among the clouds.' Han Fei started to appreciate the beauty of humanity after he began playing Perfect Life. The beauty he talked about was nothing expensive or special, they were very common things.

Time ticked by. Before midnight arrived, Han Fei was already inside the gaming hub, making his final preparations. Last time, he logged out before Room 4044, at the time, he was in the middle of the Grade F hidden mission—The Soul Chaser. Before he solved that problem, he came face to face with the headless guardian of Room 4044. Han Fei was stuck between a rock and a hard place, he was forced to quit the game.

Thinking about the layout of the building around him, Han Fei closed his eyes. He decided to run straight down the corridor once he came online. He knew Room 4044 was important because Feng Ziyu might be inside Room 4044 but first and foremost, Han Fei had to be alive to do anything.

The gaming hub door slowly closed. The virtual screen outside the window started to change, the number 3 shifted to 2. Midnight had arrived, Han Fei put on the gaming helmet and his world was immediately dominated by red.

"Welcome to Perfect Life!" When his eyes opened, Han Fei planned to charge ahead but when he saw what was before him, his raised feet froze in the air. The headless door guardian of Room 4044 sat with his legs crossed before him. His body was bleeding but it looked like he was asleep. Before the guardian scattered many human heads. Each head had been brutally mushed to take on a certain shape. These heads were acquired by the door guardian. He wanted to make the heads into the one he remembered but no matter how hard he tried, he always ended up with a bloody, messy ball.

'Is he a door guardian or an executioner?' The heads of the Animated Regrets were crawling with small blood lines. One end of the line came out from the heads themselves, while the other end was connected to the headless guardian. The intersecting blood lines covered the corridor. Once someone entered the space, the door guardian would instantly be notified.

'How am I supposed to make my escape now?' There was no place for Han Fei to run. If he made too big of a gesture, he would brush against the blood lines. Han Fei was pouring in cold sweat. At this crucial moment, Han Fei's luck came in useful again. There was a tingling from the end of the corridor. The Soul Bells jangled and something snapped through the blood lines in the corridor, charging towards Han Fei.

Han Fei scanned his mission interface and realized he was still in the middle of the Soul Chaser mission! He had 3 more minutes until the end of the mission! The professional Soul Chaser didn't forget about Han Fei, and like the door guardian, he had been waiting for him to return!

The blood lines were torn and the decapitated heads opened their eyes. The eyes opened in their smashed-in heads as they stared around with resentment. An oppressive aura was gathering before Room 4044.

'The headless door guardian is waking up!' Han Fei's luck could not have been worse. He saw as the blood flowed out from the guardian's body and into the heads. The heads pounced on Han Fei. Any other person would have been frightened to death by this scene but Han Fei could still retain his composure. He guarded his neck and thought about lighting a cigarette. But his brain calculated that he wouldn't have the time to do that. He had to choose between the Soul Chaser and the headless guardian. Not to choose whose hands to die by but to choose which of them would give him a greater chance of survival.

Han Fei's mind calculated every factor possible. In the end, it was Han Fei's body that reacted first. He charged forward and rammed through the heads. Pain jolted through his body as black teeth marks appeared on his skin. Due to the presence of Big Sin, the venom in the marks didn't spread as fast as they should.

The headless door guardian slowly stood up and dragged out a giant guillotine knife from inside Room 4044. Without wasting any time on words, the guardian raised the blade and aimed it at Han Fei's neck. Han Fei would have trouble avoiding such a quick swing under normal circumstances, much less when he was held back by a cluster of maddened heads.

"I know where your head is hidden!" In that crucial moment, Han Fei shouted out the above. The guillotine knife enlarged in his eyes as it came towards his neck. At the last moment, the blade stopped right above his forehead. It severed a few strands of hair. Han Fei's legs weakened. At that moment, he really thought he was going to die.

“Your head is hidden somewhere very unique, you cannot approach it through conventional methods, you’ll have to go through Room 4444 to get there!” Han Fei was telling the truth. He knew the door guardian couldn’t go to real life so this was the leverage he had. The guardian’s blade stopped but the Soul Chaser didn’t.

Han Fei was so busy persuading the door guardian that he didn’t have time to mind the Soul Chaser. He could feel something rapidly approaching him from behind. The extreme danger pierced through his heart like a dagger.

Just as Han Fei hesitated whether to turn around or not, the guillotine knife above his head suddenly moved and slashed behind him. The door guardian’s blade caught something and Han Fei used this chance to look behind him.

This was his third time turning around. Han Fei saw a person in bloody clothes dragged out a semblance of Han Fei from the back of Han Fei’s head. The person’s bloody clothes were cut through, exposing the skin covered with Death Curses. Its speed slowed down as it dragged an expressionless Han Fei down the corridor and disappeared.

‘What did it take away from me? Was that my soul?’ Han Fei touched and patted his body. The fear was hard to describe. Without knowing it, something had been taken away from him but the scariest thing was, he had no idea what it was that he had lost. ‘I still haven’t gotten the chance to take a good look at the Soul Chaser’s face. But at least I can confirm it’s a man and he does have the same body frame as the tester from Immortal Pharma who went insane years ago!’

Han Fei had 2 minutes left to the end of the mission and 2 more times to turn his head around.

The headless guardian was quite angry that he didn’t manage to kill his adversary. His body slowly moved, causing all the Soul Bells in the corridor to ring.

Chapter 358

358 Grade E Main Mission

The tingling of the bells was more intense than before. The bells seemed to represent something, it sounded like they could temporarily affect the headless guardian. As the tingling grew louder, Han Fei sensed the whole corridor changing.

The mouths of the unrecognizable heads mumbled something, it sounded like they were chanting the door guardian's name. Red blood vessels were pulled out from the heads and the guardian turned increasingly corporeal. He didn't look like a guardian who walked out from the door but a ghost trapped inside a door.

The blood vessels crawled around his body. His fingers that grabbed the guillotine knife tightened. He dragged the giant blade and then slowly turned to look behind Han Fei.

"Head, my head..." The voice echoed in Han Fei's ears and he was spooked. Looking from the corner of his eyes, Han Fei saw something terrifying. The blood vessels were climbing into his ears to crawl into his brain.

"Your head is not with me!" Han Fei retreated as the door guardian raised his blade. Without wasting another word, he swung the blade!

The smell of blood crawled into his nostrils. Han Fei forced himself to keep his eyes open to avoid the blade but the blade was too fast. The moment he saw the door guardian move, the blade was already at his back!

A chill came from his back and Han Fei heard something being severed. 'The Soul Chaser is still here?' Han Fei wanted to turn around but the door guardian's blood lines were beside his ears. If he moved too suddenly, the lines would pierce through his brain. There was less than 2 minutes left to the Soul Chaser mission. The Soul Chaser was desperate too. He needed something from Han Fei, Han Fei's soul was an irreparable part of the ritual, he had to get it!

The soul bells shattered and Han Fei's ears bled. He temporarily lost his sense of hearing but he could feel a hand reaching towards his brain!

He had goosebumps. As he turned around, he felt something touch the back of his head. Different from before, this time, Han Fei could feel something pulling at the thing deep inside his mind. All his memories, good and bad, were twisted into a rope. The rope reached deep into Han Fei's mind. As the external force pulled, the memory rope slowly rose. The rope turned red, the deepest memory Han Fei had was bloody red in color!

The dark night was slowly dyed red. As the sole survivor of Happiness Orphanage, the things that Han Fei's childhood psychiatrist helped to suppress were slowly coming up to the surface. Before the memory fully showed itself, Han Fei's mind was already dyed red. Fragmented memory rushed into his heart. Han Fei's pupils narrowed and Rest in Peace suddenly materialized in his hand.

He ignored the door guardian's blood lines as he turned around for the 4th time, he pierced the blade at the thing behind him. The shiny blade reflected a face crying bloody tears. Han Fei saw a hand covered in Death Curse. In the middle of the palm was the word, Soul.

Currently the hand was dragging out another semblance of Han Fei from the back of Han Fei's head. This dragged out Han Fei was different from the previous Han Fei's. His forehead was bleeding and he had an exaggerated smile on his face like he was mocking the whole world.

'Is that really me?'

This was the first time the Soul Chaser encountered something like this as well. He had pursued many souls. His hand covered in Death Curses could easily pierce through the body of the living and memory of the dead. But today he ran into a special soul, the soul was cackling at him!

The Death Curses on his arm boiled. Even though the Soul Chaser was already using all his strength, he could not drag the laughing Han Fei out. The soul appeared to be attached to something else, something buried deep inside that sea of red in the man's mind. Han Fei was equally as shocked as the Soul Chaser. He looked at himself, who seemed to suffer from gelotolepsy. He was reminded of the old lady from Happiness Neighbourhood.

Fu Sheng had done something to Granny Meng's memory. Whenever she was reminded of her death, a scary monster would reach out from the back of her head, turning the normally kind and friendly old lady into a monster. Back then, Han Fei was quite scared. He didn't expect something similar would happen to him today. Compared to the monster that came out from Granny Meng, this soul that was pulled out from his mind was much more terrifying.

The Soul Chaser wanted to give it a second yank. But at that moment, the immeasurably sharp guillotine knife was already coming at him!

The arm that grabbed Han Fei's soul was severed. The arm covered in Death Curses dropped to the ground. Han Fei finally got a good look at the Soul Chaser's face!

Half of the man's face had the word, Soul and Death Curse radiated from it, the other half was the face of the employee from Immortal Pharma!

The butterfly pattern grew from the corner of his eyes to his lips. He had been made into a true monster. He was like a puppet. His face was carved in pain, regret and sadness. He had once massacred the whole neighbourhood and now he had to personally collect these people's souls. The saddest thing was until now, he had no idea if he had done the right thing or not.

When the Soul Chaser's face was seen, the Death Curses on his body exploded. The face covered in Death Curse morphed to take on Han Fei's resemblance. But probably because Han Fei's soul hadn't fully been drawn out, the transformation of the Soul Chaser didn't go all the way through. With Han Fei watching on, half of the Soul Chaser's face was screaming in pain. Eventually, this half of his face tore away from the Soul Chaser and they morphed into 3 different Han Fei's. Engulfed in a cocoon of Death Curse, they were carried by an invisible force up to the top floor!

All three Han Fei's were covered in Death Curses. The Death Curses hooked through their bodies, causing them unimaginable pain.

"Only 3? Butterfly, your Death Curse can't even steal away a living person's complete soul?" The Soul Chaser's lips split open as he attempted a smile. This was the first time he wanted to smile since he was trapped at Ziggurat. The Soul Chaser's mouth opened and Han Fei realized the butterfly tattoo had even grown into the Soul Chaser's mouth. His entire body, both internally and externally, was dominated by butterfly tattoos.

The Soul Chaser was in a very dangerous and unstable state. He used the last lucid moment he had to turn to Han Fei. "The Night of Resurrection has begun. Summon back your lost souls and help me... kill the Butterfly!" Then the Soul Chaser's body was shredded. His soul descended like snow before disappearing completely.

"Notification for Player 0000! You saw the face of the Soul Chaser when you turned around for the 4th time! You've completed the preliminary mission for Grade E Main Mission—Night of Resurrection! You've successfully triggered the Grade E Main Mission—Night of Resurrection!"

Chapter 359

359 A Child of Nightmares

“Night of Resurrection (Grade E Main Mission): Today is the 14th April 4th after the new manager took its post at Ziggurat. It has waited for this night for 14 years, it has finally found a suitable body, it has seen that blurry figure in the future.

“Mission Requirement 1: Currently, you are a living undead, you need to find your 3 missing souls before dawn. Move immediately, they might have been invited into certain rooms at Ziggurat. The moment you lose one soul, you’ll be trapped inside this game forever.

“Mission Requirement 2: Stop the ritual. If its soul is successfully summoned, you’ll be the first to die.

“Mission Requirement 3: On this special night, the border between living and dead is incredibly blurred. You’ll dance at the edge of death to witness death at work. Please find as many living humans as you can inside Ziggurat before dawn.

“Mission Hint: Killing it is very difficult because it lives inside the human heart. As long as humans live on, it will not die.

“Warning! Due to the player attempting the mission at too low a level, additional hints will be provided—Butterfly.

“I know I was born with a special power. Even without closing my eyes, the world is always dark.

“I know I was born with a disfigured body, one that is disgusted and hated by my biological parents. They left red patterns and black scars on my body, claiming they will make my appearance easier on their eyes.

“The painting continues day after day until the black flower blossoms on my protruding forehead. They stand before me, discussing how to deal with my dead body. I tried to endear myself to them, to forget the conversation that night but my effort only garnered me abandonment. Now I know how much they wish to rid me of them.

“The broken body fell down the cliff. I tried my best to open my tattered wings. Bones, blood, flesh splattered about. I turned my head as best as I could. I wanted to show them the wings that I have grown.

“I fell into the abyss of nightmares. The demons and ghosts looked at me without saying a word. They are curious why haven’t I called for help, I am curious why they would have such a question.

“Aren't all children in the world like me? Trapped inside a cocoon since birth until one can break open with wings?”

“Warning! This mission is one of the most important missions at the early stages of the game! The player must pay special attention to it!

“The Butterfly is a monster cultivated by nightmares, it has a suffocatingly ugly soul. Due to its spiritual and physical disfigurement, it has to paint on the brightest raiment to disguise its ugliness.”

When the system notification echoed in his mind, Han Fei paid attention to it, the more he listened to it, the more shocked he became. The first mission hint was on how to kill the Butterfly and the second mission hint was about the origin of the Butterfly. When Han Fei studied the second mission hint closer, he realized each sentence contained a lot of information. But Han Fei didn’t have the time to slowly process them now because something more important had grasped his attention. “Wait, if I lose one of my souls, I will be trapped here forever?”

If there was something scarier than death, it was to be trapped at Ziggurat forever. One of the biggest reasons Han Fei always had hope was because he could go offline at any time. As long as he didn’t die in the game, he would always have a second chance.

“I can control my own actions, but I can’t control what my souls are doing!” Han Fei didn’t even know what those souls were. Personally he didn’t feel like anything was missing. If the souls were crystalized memories, then what memory did those 3 dragged out souls represent? “Regardless, I have to find them as soon as possible!”

As soon as that thought appeared in his mind, a chill came from the back of his neck. He turned around and the sharp guillotine knife settled before his eyes. If he had taken a step back, the blade would have sliced through his flesh.

The headless door guardian stood beside Han Fei. The decapitated heads on the ground stared at him with bulging eyes. The blood vessels crawled through his ears into his brain without warning!

“Warning! Warning!” The system screamed. Then Han Fei lost the rest of what the system said because his sense of hearing suddenly failed him. He fell to the ground. He closed his hands over his ears and blood oozed out from between his fingers. Resisting the pain, Han Fei stared at the door guardian, his hands holding Rest in Peace. He was afraid, compared to the door guardian, he was weak but he was not going to give up.

Suddenly the door guardian’s body trembled before he took several steps back. He stopped beside the door to Room 4044. It felt like he was reminded of something horrid. The heads around Han Fei slowly backed away. Their expressions were indescribable. They were filled with hesitation and greed, before all their faces turned up with smiles.

The blood vessels leaked out from Han Fei’s ears. The door guardian appeared to have found the things he wanted. The Soul Chaser’s bells had all shattered. As his hearing returned, Han Fei could hear the dirge. Something was coming up from downstairs.

The door guardian stood beside Room 4044. When the last blood vessel returned to his body, the door to Room 4044 opened a gap. All the blood and human heads on the 4th floor corridor rushed into the room, until a single human head remained on the ground. The human head looked very similar to the one Han Fei remembered the door guardian had. The head was pieced together by flesh and smashed into place by brute force, it looked like a macabre piece of art.

After Han Fei stared at it for a few seconds, the door guardian picked up the head and screwed it on its neck. The blood vessels that crawled out from Han Fei’s ears now climbed into the reconnected head. The face slowly took on Han Fei’s resemblance.

Han Fei was flustered by this strange development. He was trying to figure out if this was a chance for him to escape. However, the mere sight of the large guillotine blade told him that was a bad idea. The guillotine knife was more than 3 metres long, so the door guardian could have sliced Han Fei into half before he had the chance to escape.

“Do not be afraid, I just want to confirm that you didn’t lie to me.” The mouth on the broken head suddenly moved. To prove his sincerity, the door guardian put the weapon away.

“You’ve sneaked a look into my memory?”

“I was going to but I sensed a very familiar and scary presence on you. It was that presence which decapitated me in the first place so I believe you aren’t lying.” The door guardian looked at Han Fei through the bloody visage. It was disconcerting.

Chapter 360

360 Living Undead

“I can help you find your head, I know where it is.” Han Fei voiced his promise again. In the Ziggurat game, the door guardian promised to fulfill any wish Han Fei had as long as Han Fei was willing to help him. The head on the door guardian’s shoulders stopped speaking. Instead the eyes peered right at Han Fei, like they were trying to see through him. “I really can help you.”

“Has my head made the same request of you?” The rotten mouth suddenly asked. Han Fei had no idea what the door guardian meant but he nodded.

“I knew it was looking for me.” The incomplete mouth laughed. “Actually I should thank the person who decapitated me, if not for it, I wouldn’t have been born. I wanted to confirm its location with you not because I want it back but I want you to demolish it.”

“What do you mean?”

“This body has gained an independent consciousness, which is me. I am now the Ziggurat’s door guardian. The head is nothing but a vessel for my past memories.” The door guardian slowly melted into the door of Room 4044. “I do not need you to find my head back for me, I only need you to hide my existence while you bring me to find it.”

“Okay, no problem.” Han Fei promised readily.

“See if you can survive past tonight first. You were targeted by the Soul Chaser so you are one of its chosen.” The head on the door guardian’s shoulders leaned forward. He reached his hands to grab the head.

“Its chosen? I’ve just lost 3 souls, I need to...” It was uncommon for Han Fei to find a ‘person’ he could talk to at the Ziggurat so he didn’t want the door guardian to leave.

“I can’t tell you more, the only thing I can tell you is that tonight both the living and the dead will appear inside this building. The living will remember that they are alive and they will hide at home to sleep; but the dead will forget that they’re dead and they’ll go around acting like everything is normal. If you wish to survive the night, stay closer to the living and avoid the dead.” The door guardian’s body was almost flat against the door of Room 4044. The head on his shoulders looked at Han Fei with a fleeting smile. Han Fei had a feeling that the door guardian had discovered something in his brain because the change in his attitude was too drastic. Before this, Han Fei was an ant he could crush but now Han Fei became someone he could use.

“Is that all?”

“You better move. Your souls would have been inflicted by the Death Curses as well. And as time progresses, they will slowly forget that they are only part of your spirit and start to gain consciousness of their own, just like me and my head.” The head revealed a sickening smile, “My head wants to find its body back to regain control of it; while I want to destroy my head so I can remain.”

“They can grow to have their own consciousness?” Han Fei had seriously underestimated this Grade E Mission. The system didn’t warn him of many things!

“Of course, so move swiftly.” The door guardian plucked the head off his shoulders. The long blood vessels were sucked back into its body. “One last tip for you, I believe I saw one of your souls run into Room 4064 seconds ago.”

“4064?” Han Fei turned to look but he saw nothing. “How come I can’t see anything?”

“Soon, you’ll be able to. You’re now a living undead, not living and not dead. Tonight, you’ll see many things that you have never seen in the past like the Soul Chasers. But be warned, seeing is one thing but

if you cross the line, you'll never be able to return." The door guardian's body joined with the door of Room 4044. The human head in his hands was slowly changing.

"Living undead? What kind of status is that? Is it similar to what a person might experience when they're approaching death?" Han Fei stared at the door guardian, he believed the door guardian was still hiding something from him. "Door guardian, you appear to be very interested in humans, why is that?"

"Well, I've always preferred to communicate with the humans."

"What do you mean?"

"Look at the heads on the ground, are there any that are not human?"

"Well, you have a point there." Han Fei's conversation with the door guardian was unique and probably only could be heard at the Ziggurat. "Door guardian, can you tell me what is inside 4044? Perhaps there is something I can use..." Before Han Fei finished, the door guardian squished the broken head. It dissolved into blood and slithered into the room. Everything on the 14th floor corridor returned to normal.

"He has gone?" Han Fei took a deep breath as his heart slowed down. Only then he realized his back was drenched in cold sweat. What was an Iyashikei game? 3 minutes after you log in, you have already had brushes with death for more than 10 times, it was impossible to not appreciate life in this game.

"One of my souls has run into Room 4064?" Han Fei glanced at the menu. He looked at his character status and discovered something worrying—Player is in a unique state and thus can't quit the game at the moment. Resisting the urge to curse, Han Fei immediately made his way to the 6th floor. "Looks like the exit button won't light up until I find all 3 of my souls."

Even though Han Fei knew he was in a time crunch, his brain was still very clear. At least he had gotten a warning from the system, if his memory or 'soul' was stolen in the cryptic world, the incomplete version of himself would not be able to go offline. Han Fei's nerve was tense because he had lost the godlike-skill of logging off anytime he wanted.

After the door guardian returned to the door, the corridor returned to normal except for the paper human heads on the ground, they looked like trampled white paper lanterns.

Han Fei didn't waste any time. He put away Rest in Peace, avoided the Soul Chaser's elevator and entered the stairwell. Before he could do anything though, the shrill dirge came from upstairs. The dirge mixed with the song from outside the building. After they echoed in his ears for some time, Han Fei thought the two singers matched each other quite well.