

Collapse 103

Chapter 103: Counterflow Clock [First Order Requested]_1

Not only Gu Mian, but others also detected something amiss at a glance.

A human-height clock was propped against the wall facing the door. The furnishings in the room were all very antique, and the clock face bore no modern numbers.

However, what Gu Mian cared about was not whether the clock had numbers, but the ticking hand on its dial.

"A clock running backward?" Gu Mian frowned slightly.

Such a sight was unheard of and unseen before.

The young man also glanced at the clock leaning against the nearby wall. "Ah, that clock... I don't know why, but it suddenly broke. It was like this when I arrived. I have no idea how to fix it..."

As he spoke, he moved to the sofa. "Please, have a seat."

Brother Mobile averted his gaze from the weird clock, hesitating to sit down.

Gu Mian, however, calmly sat down.

The young man began to pour water into a few cups. "My name is Zhao Lei. My father, Zhao Guanhai, has always lived in this house. I came up the mountain a few days ago looking for him, but it seems he has disappeared..."

"I can't reach him by phone at all. I waited here for a few days, and then a heavy snowstorm blocked the mountain roads, so I couldn't get down either."

While speaking, Zhao Lei looked at Gu Mian and the others. "By the way, you all came mountain climbing. Did you happen to see my father up there?"

As he spoke, he gestured to his neck. "About this tall, in his fifties, his hair at the temples has all turned white, and he looks pretty fierce..."

Forget people; Gu Mian and the others hadn't seen a single soul, not even a ghost, on their way here.

They all shook their heads, looking at each other, while Gu Mian gave an ambiguous answer, "It seems we didn't see him."

Zhao Lei didn't seem too disappointed. "Oh, okay. My dad must have gone down the mountain and can't get back up for now..."

He then looked at Gu Mian and the others, holding his cup. "I haven't asked how you ended up stranded on the mountain. I remember there was a forecast for a blizzard a few days ago. Did you still decide to climb?"

This question left them speechless.

They couldn't just blurt out, "We don't know a damn thing! This place is actually an instance, and the game just threw us into the mountains," could they?

Even if they wanted to say that, the game system wouldn't allow it. At that moment, Gu Mian noticed something suddenly display on the game panel:

[Side Quest: Play the role of a mountaineer well and do not arouse the suspicion of the plot characters.]

[Zhao Lei's Suspicion Level: 0]

[Reward: Financial Management Handbook]

[Friendly Reminder: If the suspicion level reaches 60 or more, you will not receive the side quest reward.]

Gu Mian stared at the panel for a few seconds. The Financial Management Handbook... that sounds like it's related to money. I'm quite poor right now, so this could be useful.

The others had obviously seen the side quest too. For a moment, there was silence. After Zhao Lei finished his question, no one spoke.

A look of confusion crossed Zhao Lei's face.

Fortunately, Gu Mian was adept at lying; he'd told countless lies growing up. He immediately reacted, saying, "We aren't weather experts. We heard there would be snow, but we didn't expect it to be this heavy, completely trapping us."

Upon hearing this, Zhao Lei didn't express any doubt, instead nodding in agreement. "This snowfall was indeed heavy. It seems like the heaviest I've seen since I was born. It's the first time I've seen the mountain sealed by such heavy snow."

He paused, looking dazed for a moment, then turned back to Gu Mian and the others. "By the way, I haven't asked for your names yet."

Coming up with names was easy enough; even if they couldn't fabricate a convincing backstory, they could surely invent a couple of aliases.

Soon, each of them introduced themselves. Zhao Lei listened attentively, nodding.

After everyone had introduced themselves, he set down his cup. "The six of you, please don't worry. There have been others like you, trapped on the mountain by heavy snow for many days, but they all eventually left safely."

When Zhao Lei said this, Gu Mian suddenly remembered something. He glanced at Chu Changge, who was sitting opposite him, with a strange expression. Chu Changge also seemed to recall something.

Brother Mobile, beside them, also appeared deep in thought.

The three men wore looks that said, "I seem to have realized something, but I'm not telling."

Only Fatty and the couple were still listening to Zhao Lei with foolishly oblivious smiles.

"There are many rooms here, so you can stay for now. Once the road is cleared, you can leave." Zhao Lei stood up as he spoke. "On the first floor, there are three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a restroom. I'm staying on the first floor.

"On the second floor, there are four bedrooms and a restroom. However, my father converted one bedroom into a study, so only three rooms are usable. That means there are only five usable rooms in total, but there are six of you..." Zhao Lei hesitated.

Just then, Mingliang suddenly spoke up, "It's okay, my girlfriend and I can share a room."

This instance was highly realistic, delivering a first-rate experience. Whether it was injury or death, the pain felt one hundred percent real. Of course, the same applied to other sensations.

This wasn't the kind of game that could pass censorship. Here, players were free to do anything they wanted without restriction—even procreate, if any player actually had the bizarre inclination to do so in a horror instance.

Zhao Lei nodded in understanding, then turned to the others. "The rooms are fully equipped; you can rest once you go in. But..."

But what? Everyone stared intently at him.

Zhao Lei furrowed his brows slightly. "These past few days, I've felt that something isn't quite right..."

Something being off was exactly right. Gu Mian and the others had sensed it too when they entered the building. Something was very wrong here.

It was worth mentioning that Fatty, upon entering, had immediately dashed back out and then in again, apparently testing if one could end the instance that way. It proved unfeasible.

The mission was to escape the mountain villa, not simply to enter and exit. That would be too easy and wouldn't match the difficulty of a four-star instance.

It was likely that someone would have to start hunting the players, and only then could they escape in a way that would logically complete the mission.

Meanwhile, Zhao Lei was still speaking, "Ever since I came back, I've felt something is very off here. I can't pinpoint exactly what it is, but if I had to describe it, this place feels... unfamiliar.

"Even though everything is the same as before—the furniture, the decorations, nothing has changed—I just feel like something is different..."

Zhao Lei relaxed his brow slightly and looked at them. "You should all be careful."

Chu Changge nodded slightly. "We will."

Zhao Lei then nodded back. "Okay, go choose your rooms."

Assigning rooms wasn't particularly contentious. Two of the usable bedrooms on the first floor were taken by Brother Mobile and Chu Changge, with Brother Mobile's room situated between Zhao Lei's and Chu Changge's.

Gu Mian, Fatty, and the couple ended up on the second floor.

Fatty's room and the couple's room were not far apart, their doors facing two different staircases. Gu Mian occupied the bedroom next to Fatty's.

They had considered having several people share a room, but a group of grown men rooming together might arouse suspicion, so Gu Mian had dismissed the idea.

At this moment, Gu Mian, Chu Changge, and Brother Mobile were gathered in Fatty's room, discussing something.

"Did you notice something just now?" Chu Changge asked, pushing up his glasses.