

Collapse 211

Chapter 211 Gradual Transmutation of Thoughts_1

"A few people have ordered before, but everything they ordered was in the warehouse, so it wasn't much of a problem..."

While speaking, Han Shan's brow furrowed even more. "But just now, a passenger came to the counter to order in person."

He paused when he reached this point.

Gu Mian curiously waited for him to continue.

After a few more seconds, Han Shan resumed speaking, "A man. He ordered two pounds of raw meat."

Gu Mian, influenced by Han Shan, also frowned.

Ordinarily, if a passenger on the train made such an absurd request, the conductor would likely ignore it or even call the police. But not now.

"You agreed?"

"Of course."

Gu Mian could even imagine Han Shan, brow furrowed and looking troubled, agreeing to the passenger's unreasonable request.

This lieutenant must have been attending a dinner party when he entered the game. He was dressed quite formally, though not in his blinding military uniform.

Gu Mian watched Han Shan frown. He took a small notebook from his suit pocket, followed by a pen, apparently to take notes.

Holding the pen, Han Shan wrote in the notebook, "Actually, if it's just two pounds of raw meat..."

"Just?" Gu Mian touched his chainsaw. "Do you have two pounds of raw meat? Of course, if you want to sacrifice yourself to satisfy the passenger's request, I can lend you my saw to cut your flesh."

Han Shan had seen this Doctor's chainsaw before; he definitely didn't want such a terrifying instrument turned on him.

Seeing Han Shan remain silent, Gu Mian continued, "If you really give them flesh this time, what about the next, and the time after that? How can you guarantee passengers won't make even more outrageous requests? Like wanting someone's manhood, or something of the sort..."

Han Shan's brow furrowed, and he winced as if feeling a phantom pain.

He looked up at Gu Mian, trying to detect any other emotion on the Doctor's face, but failed.

Then, Han Shan coughed lightly and said, "Actually, that's exactly what I'm worried about—the kind of situation you just described."

As he spoke, his pen started moving again. "I just did a quick calculation. This train will pass through a total of nine stations, but we haven't even reached the third one yet, and already a passenger is requesting two pounds of raw meat..."

"It's still deceptively calm right now, but I have no doubt this peace will soon be shattered. I guess..." Han Shan's pen kept moving. "The closer we get to the terminal, the more outrageous the passengers' requests will become. This is only the beginning."

"I predict that the most terrifying demands will emerge as we approach the final station." Han Shan pursed his lips slightly at this point. "But that's assuming we can survive that long."

Han Shan's brow furrowed deeper. "And if I'm not mistaken, these kinds of requests are probably appearing in all carriages by now. This is the first wave designed to filter us out."

Gu Mian glanced at him.

Han Shan also looked at Gu Mian. "If I may be so bold, if a passenger made such a request to you—something like wanting someone's manhood—what would you do?"

Han Shan even stopped his pen as he spoke. He seemed exceptionally serious about this question, with no hint of jest.

Gu Mian wasn't exactly a serious person and rarely gave serious answers to serious questions.

The lieutenant, pen in hand, watched the Doctor across the invisible line separating them. The Doctor seemed to ponder for a moment before replying earnestly, "The wool comes from the sheep."

Han Shan: "..."

"Of course," Gu Mian continued. "In a situation where a few living people are serving as attendants on a train with ghosts, and a ghost wants, say, an arm to gnaw on, the optimal solution is naturally to chop up another living person to fulfill the ghost's order. After all, players are unlikely to dare attack a passenger who might be a ghost."

"However, there's a strict rule: two players cannot be in the same carriage. So, even if you wanted to attack another player, you couldn't." Gu Mian paused here, then looked out the adjacent window. "But..."

Generally, when a conversation reaches the word "but," experienced people know things are about to take a turn for the worse.

At that, Han Shan's heart skipped a beat. He followed Gu Mian's gaze out the window.

Outside, the sky was rather dark, and dilapidated houses sped by. Not long ago, looking out from here, they could still see a station platform with vendors selling their wares.

At this thought, realization seemed to dawn on Han Shan. His expression turned grim. "Players can't be in the same carriage simultaneously, but they *can* be on the same platform when the train is stopped at a station!"

Just then, an announcement suddenly blared through the carriage—

"Attention, passengers. We are about to enter a tunnel. The train's power supply will be temporarily cut. Please prepare yourselves."

Han Shan asked, a hint of confusion in his voice, "Cut the power?"

Not long after his question, Gu Mian suddenly felt the ambient light dim, as if he had been struck blind.

The surroundings instantly plunged into an eerie silence, broken only by the roar of the train.

But just then, Gu Mian suddenly heard another faint sound, like the roar of a different train.

The sound came from behind, quickly passed them, and then sped off ahead.

Meanwhile, Gu Mian felt as if the train he was on had slowed.

Only when they emerged from the dark tunnel did the carriage lights flicker back on, and the train gradually began to pick up speed.

Han Shan, opposite him, was frowning deeply. "Did you... hear anything just now?"

Gu Mian nodded slightly. "It sounded like another train passed us? And it overtook us quickly?"

Just then, a voice crackled over both their intercoms simultaneously. It was Guigu. "Say, Lieutenant, did you happen to receive any strange orders just now?"

This guy practically treats the public intercom as a private line to Han Shan, always addressing the lieutenant so directly, oblivious to anyone else.

Angel Slaughter's voice followed, "A young woman came to my counter just now... asking for two pounds of raw meat. But the warehouse doesn't stock anything like that..."

This seemed to strike a chord with Guigu. "Same here! Someone came right up to my counter to ask for it, though in my case, it was a bald man."

Then, other voices chimed in one after another, all essentially saying the same thing—"Me too."

Since Gu Mian hadn't spoken, Guigu's puzzled voice came over the intercom, "Doctor, you didn't get this strange order?"

Gu Mian glanced at Han Shan opposite him, then looked back towards the counter, which was some distance away. "Your orders... did the passengers deliver them to you in person at the counter?"

The others were momentarily taken aback, then realized that, yes, that seemed to be the case.

Gu Mian stroked his chin and averted his gaze. "I haven't been back to my counter for a while."

Chapter 212

"Attention all passengers, we will shortly be arriving at Rongcheng City, the third station. The train will stop for one minute. Passengers planning to disembark here, please prepare in advance."

This stop, potentially teeming with protagonists, had also arrived.

Gu Mian shifted his gaze to the passenger area. Still, no one seemed ready to get off at this station.

Angel Slaughter's voice came through the intercom: "Um, Doctor, there's someone who's been standing near your counter for quite a while now."

Since Angel Slaughter was in Carriage Five, which was adjacent to Gu Mian's, she could see the situation around his counter.

"I think that passenger probably wants some raw meat as well... Doctor, are you planning to come back?" Angel Slaughter's voice sounded slightly hesitant.

Everyone except Gu Mian had received raw meat orders, but they had no such thing in their storage.

The passengers who had placed orders had now returned to their seats to wait. If they were kept waiting too long, something terrifying might happen.

So, staying away from the counter seemed like a good choice for now, but no one knew what might happen if they left their counters unattended for an extended period.

Suo Qingqiu's hesitant voice came through: "Speaking of which, wouldn't it be bad if we don't return to our counters?"

"Indeed, it wouldn't." Gu Mian rubbed his chin, then turned off his intercom to prevent passengers from overhearing anything inappropriate as he crossed the passenger area.

Han Shan gripped his pen. "Are you going back?"

Han Shan's intercom was still on, and Gu Mian heard Guigu's voice coming from it.

His voice was urgent. "Lieutenant, I can't get any raw meat! Am I supposed to cut it from myself?"

Han Shan picked up his intercom. "Don't worry. We'll get off at the next station and take a look."

Guigu sounded perplexed. "Get off? Can we even get off?"

Guigu then seemed to be flipping through something. After several seconds, his voice came again: "That's right! There's no rule stating crew members can't disembark. I finally get what that vendor at the last stop was for—to let us restock the dining car's supplies! As long as we get back on the train before it departs, we're good!"

Guigu's words gave the others an idea.

Several of them began to consider the feasibility of this idea.

Angel Slaughter's voice came through: "Since there's no rule against crew disembarking, we should be able to get off and restock at the station. But will there even be vendors at the next stop? And selling raw meat, of all things..."

Guigu replied, "Since he was there, he must have been there for a reason. We'll know once we get off the train and see."

Then Angel Slaughter added, "Even if there are vendors at every station, and even if they sell raw meat, would they have enough to supply passengers in all seven of our carriages?"

Han Shan remained silent for a few seconds. "Probably not."

This was likely an opportunity for the players to slaughter each other.

Supplies were scarce. If they wanted to ensure their own carriage was adequately stocked, they would probably have to fight other players for resources.

Eventually, it might even escalate to other players becoming resources themselves.

This malice was all too obvious. Han Shan gripped his pen. He really didn't want to follow the malicious scenario set up by this instance.

But now, he had no choice.

A passenger had already ordered two jin of raw meat. If they didn't disembark to restock after reaching the station, they would probably die even sooner...

Thinking of this, he looked up at Gu Mian.

He saw the chainsaw-wielding doctor turn around, apparently intending to return to his counter.

But then, Han Shan saw him stop abruptly and turn back.

"What's wrong?" Han Shan squeezed the pen in his hand.

Gu Mian glanced at the pen in Han Shan's hand. "I heard something strange in the passenger area earlier. I was about to mention it, but I got interrupted..."

Han Shan frowned. "What is it?"

Gu Mian glanced at Han Shan's pen again. "You seem to really like holding that pen when you talk."

Han Shan loosened his grip slightly. "Is that what you discovered?"

"No," Gu Mian shook his head, getting to the point. "Earlier, I heard a girl say that when she was boarding the train, she thought she saw someone who looked exactly like her."

Someone identical?

Han Shan's frown deepened.

Gu Mian stared at him, really wishing he could catch a fly and place it right between Han Shan's furrowed brows.

But alas, there were no flies to be found here. Gu Mian tightened the strap of the guitar on his back and started walking towards his counter.

He quickly entered the passenger area.

The passengers still appeared to be behaving normally; nothing seemed out of place.

A passenger who had been reading a newspaper seemed tired. He placed the paper on the small table in front of him, then rested his head on it and fell asleep.

Gu Mian glanced at the newspaper as he passed by.

The headline on the paper was large and eye-catching: *ANCIENT BUILDING FROM 50 YEARS AGO SUDDENLY APPEARS IN RONGCHENG CITY; REPORTEDLY, THIS BUILDING WAS DEMOLISHED LAST YEAR*

The newspaper seemed to be one provided on the train, as many passengers were holding identical copies.

Gu Mian didn't linger. He looked up and continued towards the counter.

About halfway there, he saw the figure standing in front of his counter.

It was a middle-aged woman. Gu Mian had noticed her earlier; when he was delivering orange soda, this woman had gotten up and walked towards the rear of the carriage.

Now it seemed she hadn't been going to the restroom, but rather had intended to place an order.

Gu Mian took a few more steps, and now he could see Angel Slaughter in Carriage Five.

Angel Slaughter was standing at the very front of Carriage Five, apparently tidying something, but Gu Mian noticed her gaze kept flicking towards his carriage, clearly keeping an eye on his area.

When Gu Mian walked past, he saw Angel Slaughter give him a somewhat surprised look, but the expression quickly vanished. She concealed it and resumed surreptitiously observing Carriage Four.

She clearly hadn't expected Gu Mian to return to his counter so decisively.

By this time, Gu Mian had reached his counter. The woman seemed to have been waiting there for a very long time.

The woman's complexion was rather pale, and fine beads of sweat continuously trickled down her forehead.

Gu Mian couldn't tell what season it was in this instance, but the air conditioning on the train maintained a comfortable temperature. Considering this, the woman in front of him seemed unusually hot.

"Hello," Gu Mian said, approaching her. "How can I help you?"

The woman turned her head with some difficulty to look at Gu Mian.

Her face was now even more clearly visible to Gu Mian.

Deathly pale, or rather, a ghastly white. Her eyes were bloodshot, her lips seemed drained of all color, and her bangs were soaked with sweat, clinging to her forehead.

A few strands of hair stuck to her damp forehead, looking rather eerie.

She struggled to speak, her voice strained: "Meat... two jin. Two jin of meat. Raw."

Not far away, Angel Slaughter tensed up.

She remembered that when the passenger in her carriage had ordered two jin of raw meat, their expression hadn't been this terrifying.

Why did this passenger, ordering from this doctor, look so...

Angel Slaughter furrowed her brow. Could it be because the woman had been waiting for too long?

Gu Mian was now behind the counter. He glanced at the attendant's rules.

****Attendants should strive to fulfill passenger orders and must not refuse them.***

He then glanced at the passenger manifest on the counter.

'Time Escape' Train Journey – Carriage Four Passenger Overview

Passengers: 31

And yet, in his carriage, there were 32 humanoid figures seated in the passenger area.

Chapter 213 Startled From Near-Death to Sit Up, A Short and Powerless Addition_1

"I'm sorry," Gu Mian said from behind the counter, looking at the pale woman before him. "What did you say you wanted? I didn't hear clearly." His expression genuinely suggested he hadn't heard clearly.

Angel Slaughter paused. She was standing so far away yet had heard it clearly. How could this Doctor not have?

The woman in front of the counter opened her mouth again. She seemed extremely tired; even opening her mouth appeared to be a great effort. Gu Mian saw large beads of sweat gathering on her forehead,

tracing past her wide-open eyes, and then trickling down her pallid cheeks. Her face now looked exceptionally terrifying.

The woman weakly opened her mouth, "I want two jin of meat..."

Just then, the announcement in the train carriage sounded again: "We have now arrived at the third stop, Rongcheng City. The train will stop for one minute. Passengers wishing to alight, please do so promptly."

The mechanical broadcast drowned out the woman's voice. This time, because of the announcement, Angel Slaughter truly couldn't hear what the woman at the counter had said.

She paused, then looked towards Gu Mian. The stop was only for one minute. If they wanted to get off and resupply, they had to do it within that minute. Time was tight; it was best to get off now. Although she wanted to stay and watch the drama unfold, circumstances didn't permit.

Angel Slaughter turned slightly and glanced again at the woman at the counter. The woman's complexion was even more terrifying now, almost like that of a corpse dead for several days. This was definitely not the complexion of a living person.

Seeing this horrifying face, Angel Slaughter's hand trembled slightly. She began to withdraw her gaze, murmuring as she did so, "Now I can only accept the order." Who could refuse a ghost's request?

She didn't plan to stay here and watch the Doctor accept the order. Time was tight; she had to get off the train immediately. As Angel Slaughter thought this, she was about to turn and walk towards the carriage door.

But just as she was about to turn, she witnessed an astonishing scene.

She saw the Doctor push the train manifest on the counter towards the woman, and then, inexplicably, he began to smile. Then, Angel Slaughter saw the Doctor extend his hand. His hand stretched out very far, right up to the terrifyingly pale woman's face, almost touching it.

What is he trying to do? Her scalp tingled slightly.

Up until now, she had experienced quite a few instances. She had seen many cases of ghosts stretching their pale hands towards players, but a player stretching their hand so far, almost touching a ghost's face, was a first. She swore this was the first time she had encountered such a situation.

And just then, she heard the Doctor say something even more shocking.

His hand remained outstretched, his face beaming with a friendly smile, as he uttered two words: "Tickets, please."

Angel Slaughter stopped in her tracks.

Checking a ghost's ticket, this was truly—

Wait a moment?

At that instant, she suddenly realized something and looked at Gu Mian in shock.

The terrifying-looking woman's eyes widened even further, but she made no sound. Half a second later, Angel Slaughter saw her lips tremble; she took several large steps back, then turned and rushed into the restroom behind her.

So that's how it is...

「At this time, Han Shan and the others had already reached the platform.」

Guigu seemed afraid the train would depart as soon as he alighted. He hesitated for a moment, then quickly ran over after spotting Han Shan on the platform.

By now, four players had gathered on the platform: Han Shan from Carriage No. 3, Guigu from Carriage No. 1, Suo Qingqiu from Carriage No. 6, and the middle-aged man Xiao Tiantian from Carriage No. 2.

As expected, there was also a peddler on this station's platform. A figure squatted in the distance, with colorful goods spread out before him.

At this moment, the balding Xiao Tiantian was looking left and right. "By the way, aren't the other three planning to come down?"

Han Shan was holding a pen. He paused for a moment before saying, "The Doctor might have just received an order for raw meat; time isn't tight for him yet."

Suo Qingqiu raised her hand. "Mr. Fang Xiang injured his leg and can't get off the train, so he entrusted me to bring something back for him."

The four of them had now walked up to the peddler.

It was late at night, and the platform was pitch black; they could only see by the light of a few streetlamps. Suo Qingqiu had initially feared this peddler might be something terrifying. Now, looking closer, she saw the peddler appeared normal, though his eyes seemed to constantly gleam with a sharp light. Eyes gleaming with a sharp light were much better than eyes gleaming with green light. Seeing the normal-looking peddler, the others breathed a sigh of relief.

Actually, they weren't quite sure how to buy things from this peddler, as this instance hadn't provided them with any money.

"Hello," the peddler, still squatting, looked up at them and smiled. "What do you need? We have everything here."

At that moment, Suo Qingqiu was holding a walkie-talkie, seemingly talking to Fang Xiang. "Mr. Fang Xiang, they have orange juice, soda, and the like here. What would you like me to bring back for you? Preferably not too much; I can't carry a lot if it's too much..."

But the walkie-talkie was silent. Not only was Fang Xiang's voice absent, but there were no other sounds either, as if the signal was gone. Confused, Suo Qingqiu called out again, "Mr. Fang Xiang? Mr. Fang Xiang?"

Han Shan glanced at Suo Qingqiu behind him, then turned to the peddler and asked, "What about the prices?"

The peddler seemed startled for a moment, then waved his hand. "Prices? I'm just someone specially sent here by the train company to supply goods. Why would I need money? Just take whatever you want."

"However..." At this point, he suddenly changed his tune. "My items here are limited. Once they're taken, there won't be any more. You'll have to distribute them well."

Is that how it is? Han Shan clenched the pen in his hand. Provide resources that are in short supply, then let the players fight over them.

The peddler on the ground continued, "But you don't need to worry. You can pre-order. If you reserve what you need at this station, I can have the people at the next station prepare everything. When you get to the next stop, you'll have everything you need."

As he spoke, he pulled out something like a tablet. "See this menu? It's just like ordering food in a hotel. However, you must specify which carriage number it's for at the end, otherwise, it'll be hard to sort out later... Speaking of which, did you not pre-order at the last station?"

It wasn't just that they didn't pre-order; they hadn't even gotten off the train.

Han Shan didn't answer the question, instead looking down at him. "No matter how much we pre-order, it will all be ready at the next station?"

"Of course," the peddler patted his chest.

Han Shan frowned again. This is somewhat strange. Resources are very plentiful... Could it be that this instance wasn't designed to make players compete with each other?

Guigu spoke up, "Is raw meat also available?"

The peddler smiled. "Of course. I have several bags here right now." As he spoke, he opened a nearby black plastic bag to show Han Shan and the others. An experienced person could recognize the meat inside as pork hock.

"If you want them, I'll give these to you first." The peddler handed the tablet forward. "Time is almost up. Use this to pre-order first. Let me remind you, it's best to order a bit more at once when you pre-order. What you order at this station, you can only get at the next. It's possible that goods might run out in between."

Han Shan was still frowning deeply. He always felt something was off, but he couldn't quite say what.

Xiao Tiantian immediately took the tablet and began tapping away furiously. Guigu glanced his way and saw that he had actually pre-ordered twenty jin of meat, plus other things. Finally, at the end, he selected Carriage No. 2 and then submitted the order.

After pre-ordering, he picked up a black plastic bag, rolled up some other items, and ran towards the train. He probably feared the train might leave at any moment and felt it was safer on board.

At this moment, an announcement came from the train: "The train will depart again in half a minute. Passengers who need to get off, please alight quickly."

Guigu was startled by the announcement, thinking the train was about to leave immediately. There was still half a minute.

At this time, Suo Qingqiu took the tablet, seemingly wanting to help Fang Xiang pre-order.

The peddler glanced at her. "You must pre-order in person."

Chapter 214 Everyone, Look! _1

"It seems like one of you is injured and can't move around freely? I got this impression from the tone of your voice," the vendor speculated, scrutinizing the walkie-talkie in Suo Qingqiu's hand.

At this moment, there was still no sound coming from her walkie-talkie.

Suo Qingqiu put away her walkie-talkie and nodded. "A gentleman has injured his leg."

The vendor said, "Oh," and then began, "Even though I also want to help that gentleman, we have rules here. Attendants must personally come to reserve the resources needed for their own carriages... However, although he can't make the reservation in person, there is an alternative."

He paused for a moment. "You can reserve it under your name. Once the goods are in hand, you can distribute them as you see fit. You can then give them to him when you get the supplies at the next station."

Suo Qingqiu asked, puzzled, "Is that really allowed? If that's the case... what's the point of the rule that reservations must be made in person?"

After all, even if you ask someone else to reserve in their name, you can still get the resources... This rule requiring personal reservations is really strange, she mused.

The vendor chuckled. "Of course, there's a reason, but it's a long story. Anyway, this train is leaving in less than half a minute. You'd better hurry."

Feeling a bit uneasy, Suo Qingqiu quickly ordered a bunch of supplies.

Standing close by, Guigu glanced at her screen and saw that she had also ordered twenty pounds of raw meat, presumably to share with Fang Xiang. Then, at the bottom, she had marked 'Carriage No. 6'.

Even as Guigu was still peering at the screen, Suo Qingqiu had finished her reservation. She took a few items from the vendor's stall—two bags of meat—and, clutching them, hurried toward the train.

These players were all strangers to begin with, and even more so after being isolated in separate carriages on the train; there was no deep sense of camaraderie. So, waiting for others was out of the question.

Just as Suo Qingqiu was rushing back, a figure suddenly darted out from Carriage No. 5.

Suo Qingqiu was just passing Carriage No. 5, and the sudden appearance of this figure startled her.

She initially thought it was a passenger getting off, but upon seeing clearly, she discovered that the hurried figure was Angel Slaughter.

As soon as Angel Slaughter dashed out of the carriage, her gaze lingered on the two black plastic bags in Suo Qingqiu's hand. They seemed heavy—one could guess what was inside.

"Meat?" Angel Slaughter quickly sputtered out, her expression somewhat strange.

Suo Qingqiu seemed frightened by her expression. Without answering, she quickly moved towards her own compartment.

It looked like Angel Slaughter wanted to say something more to Suo Qingqiu, but when she saw Han Shan and Guigu still standing before the vendor, she gritted her teeth and headed hastily toward the vendor.

As she walked, she shouted loudly, "Wait a moment! Don't buy anything!"

Guigu, who was still fiddling with the tablet, turned around in confusion when he heard her shout.

Suo Qingqiu, who had already swiftly reached the door of her compartment, also turned around, looking puzzled at Angel Slaughter's retreating figure. She had originally thought Angel Slaughter was rushing out to replenish some dining car resources.

Who would have expected her to start shouting as soon as she left the carriage, telling everyone not to buy anything? It was really strange.

Thinking of this, Suo Qingqiu couldn't help glancing a few more times at Angel Slaughter's retreating figure, but she didn't linger. She turned and looked towards the end of the compartment... The passenger who had reserved the meat had already arrived at the counter, looking somewhat impatient.

Give him the meat quickly...

Suo Qingqiu swallowed, then swiftly moved towards the counter at the end of the carriage with her bags.

Gu Mian was standing at the open door of the carriage, watching the scene outside.

He saw Angel Slaughter rush anxiously toward Han Shan and Guigu, the only two people left at the stall, saying something to them.

Angel Slaughter's mouth was moving rapidly. Guigu, who was holding the tablet, appeared stunned after hearing her, seemingly very shocked.

Han Shan, however, was frowning and looking into the darkness behind the vendor. He had been maintaining this posture for quite a while now.

The platform was quite large, but only a few streetlights were lit near their train. The rest was shrouded in darkness.

But Gu Mian could still vaguely see that there seemed to be something in the darkness behind the vendor. Han Shan was probably also looking at that suspicious spot.

Time was running out.

The three people left on the platform were clearly aware of this.

Angel Slaughter had barely said a few words when Han Shan averted his gaze and quickly ran towards the train, leaving her staring dumbfoundedly after him.

Seeing this, Guigu also ditched the tablet he was holding and started to run back with Han Shan.

Suo Qingqiu, who had finally given the meat to the customer, wiped her sweat and glanced towards the restroom. Finally, this order is complete, she thought.

When she had approached with the meat, the customer had already grown very impatient. His face was turning a purplish-blue, and his eyes were bulging, fixed on her as if he wanted to devour her alive.

As Suo Qingqiu fearfully handed over the meat, he snatched it and quickly ducked into the restroom opposite the counter.

That was really terrifying... What's he doing in the restroom? Suo Qingqiu didn't dare to look towards the restroom for long. She took a few glances and then turned her gaze towards the outside of the train, trying to see what had happened to the three people out there.

What she saw surprised her.

They were all running back quickly, empty-handed.

What... what's happening?

Suo Qingqiu was shocked. Then suddenly, she remembered what Angel Slaughter had shouted after rushing out of the carriage: "Wait a moment! Don't buy anything!"

They really didn't buy anything...

Did they discover something?

Moreover, that Doctor didn't get off the train at all. He should have accepted an order by now, right? Why didn't he get off to replenish resources?

Suo Qingqiu felt as if her head was stuffed with a tangled mess, making her feel flustered and panicky.

At that moment, a voice brought her back to reality. "Suo Qingqiu?"

She looked to the side and saw Fang Xiang from the next carriage. He seemed to have broken his leg when he boarded the train, an accident that left one leg dangling and swaying, making it impossible for him to walk properly.

Walking from the end of the carriage to its head was already his limit.

That was why she had to help him bring back supplies.

As she pondered, Suo Qingqiu walked out from behind the counter, packed a portion of the supplies into one of the black plastic bags meant for meat, and tossed it to Fang Xiang.

The rules didn't permit two players to be in the same carriage, so they naturally didn't dare to hand things to each other directly. They had to throw items instead.

By then, the people who had been running frantically on the platform had returned to their respective carriages.

Gu Mian stood at the door watching them.

After the three left, the vendor's face on the platform darkened, almost blending into the surrounding blackness.

Angel Slaughter, who was running last, looked back just before boarding the train and caught sight of something strange.

From that angle, it looked like there was something in the vendor's pocket. A corner of it was poking out.

But she didn't have time to look closer. The moment she glanced at the vendor, the train roared, signaling its imminent departure, which scared Angel Slaughter so much that she quickly turned back and stepped into her own carriage.

Just as her foot landed inside the carriage, the door behind her slammed shut.

Angel Slaughter looked apprehensively at the abruptly closed door. Being caught by that would definitely have been nasty.

At this moment, after a long silence, the walkie-talkie finally crackled to life. It was Han Shan's voice:

"Angel Slaughter.

"Could you repeat what you told us just now?"

Chapter 215

"It's a trap."

Angel Slaughter took a deep breath and then said, "When I was on the platform, I spoke very briefly, pressed for time. Basically, 'The Doctor said if you take the stuff from here, you'll fall into a trap.'"

Angel Slaughter hadn't expected her words to convince Han Shan and Gu Mian so quickly. When Han Shan turned and walked back immediately after listening, Angel Slaughter, who had been prepared for a lengthy persuasion, was stunned.

The three of them were back on the train now and had time to discuss things in detail.

Just then, the mechanical voice sounded from above again— "Next stop, Sweet Manor. Passengers who wish to disembark, please prepare in advance."

Angel Slaughter, unaffected by the announcement, was about to continue speaking.

But when she opened her mouth, she found her mind a bit muddled. Although she generally understood the trap, she couldn't articulate it clearly, so she passed the problem directly to Gu Mian.

"I'm quite flustered right now, and my mind isn't clear. You should ask the Doctor in the fourth car directly. Anyway, he was the one who speculated about the trap and told me."

Gu Mian, suddenly saddled with this question, felt a bit of a headache.

However, he then spoke, not about the 'trap,' but asked, "What was the tablet the hawker gave you for?"

Gu Mian had seen the tablet on the train. Although he had his suspicions, he still needed to ask a few questions to confirm.

Han Shan answered succinctly, "To pre-order goods. Any amount can be pre-ordered. The people at this station will notify the hawker at the next station to prepare them for us in advance."

At this point, everyone else was clutching their walkie-talkies tightly, waiting for the Doctor's response. From the moment they heard the word "trap," they had a vague sense that something bad was about to happen.

After a few seconds, the Doctor's voice came through the walkie-talkie. "How many of you pre-ordered raw meat?"

The voices of Xiao Tiantian, Suo Qingqiu, and Guigu sounded one after another.

Angel Slaughter had gone out a bit late; by then, Guigu had already pre-ordered the resources needed for the next station.

Gu Mian's voice then followed, "You should have realized some things from my question. The trap is related to this raw meat."

"From the moment we boarded, we saw the passenger list on the counter showing the number of passengers in our respective cars. However, each of us discovered an extra person in our own car."

"And the attendant's rules state we cannot refuse a 'passenger's' order. We need to understand that the official passenger count is clearly written on the list, meaning the extra person isn't considered a 'passenger'..."

Han Shan's brow smoothed. "So, we can absolutely refuse the requests of that extra person."

The meaning of this instance was very clear: they were meant to refuse.

Xiao Tiantian hesitated before asking, "Are you saying the one who ordered raw meat from us is 'the extra one'? How can you be sure?"

Gu Mian stated confidently, "Because I checked the tickets!"

Xiao Tiantian was speechless.

COUGH COUGH. Gu Mian coughed twice and began to explain, "Actually, I noticed earlier that everyone who ordered raw meat went to the counter to do so personally. They could have placed their orders when an attendant passed by, but they didn't."

"The woman in my car who ordered raw meat, for instance. When she wanted to place her order, I was right beside her, but she didn't ask me directly. Instead, she walked to the counter and waited for a long time."

"This shows that those placing the orders didn't want the surrounding passengers to know what they ordered. They knew they were different and were afraid of attracting attention, so they deliberately went to the counter."

"Afraid?" Guigu's sarcastic voice interjected. "Can we not describe ghosts as being so weak?"

Gu Mian continued, "In fact, the ghosts placing orders are probably indeed very weak. They likely just want to eat meat. I even suspect that if you punched one, it wouldn't dare to fight back and might even whimper..."

Han Shan cut off Gu Mian's 'whimpering' promptly. "Alright, stop the nonsense and get to the point."

Gu Mian immediately stopped his vocal imitation. "Initially, I thought this was a misdirection from the instance, intended to mislead us into fighting amongst ourselves for the limited supply of raw meat."

"That's why I had Angel Slaughter go down to stop you. I originally said not to buy raw meat, but other things were fine. However, I don't know why the three of you took nothing and came back on the train empty-handed."

Angel Slaughter faltered. "Time was too short; I misspoke."

But that wasn't a major issue, as their supplies of ordinary goods were still ample.

Gu Mian twisted open a bottle of orange-flavored soda and continued, "I just said I suspected the instance was trying to misdirect us. But Han Shan, after you came up and described the situation, I suddenly felt that wasn't it."

He took a sip. "As long as items are pre-ordered, resources become plentiful. With abundant resources, even if players are misled, the likelihood of them resorting to killing each other is quite low."

Guigu muttered, "Why do I seem to hear someone opening a soda bottle?"

Angel Slaughter replied, "I saw him drink it with my own eyes."

So, if the chance of players killing each other is low even when misled, then the danger in this instance must come from somewhere else.

Where exactly...

Han Shan frowned in confusion.

Just then, a frightened voice came through the walkie-talkie. It was Xiao Tiantian. "Wait! I just realized... in my car..."

However, just as he was mid-sentence, an announcement blared from overhead—"Next stop, Sweet Manor. Passengers preparing to disembark, please get ready."

The announcement was too loud, completely drowning out Xiao Tiantian's voice.

Immediately after this announcement, another followed—"Attention passengers, we are about to enter a tunnel area. The train's power will be temporarily cut. Please prepare yourselves."

A tunnel area again!

Another power outage!

How could this be!

As the tunnel announcement was halfway through, darkness suddenly enveloped everyone.

The two announcements had completely drowned out Xiao Tiantian's voice.

Guigu grew anxious. In the darkness, he strained his ears, pressing the walkie-talkie almost to his head, but only managed to catch two fragmented words.

"Count... less..."

The moment the word "less" came through, Xiao Tiantian's voice cut off abruptly.

It was as if someone had suddenly cut off his walkie-talkie; the other end went silent.

At the same time, the overhead announcements also ceased. The dark train plunged into an eerie silence. No one spoke.

After a long moment, Suo Qingqiu's trembling voice broke the silence from the darkness, "He... what happened to him? What did he say at the end?"

"Less." Gu Mian stated, sensing the train slowing down. "The number... has decreased."

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Han Shan gripped his radio. "The numbers...have decreased?"

He, too, felt the train slowing down. It was just like the last time they passed through a tunnel, with the train inexplicably slowing down.

He held his radio, listening carefully to the sounds outside.

As expected, the same noise as before could be heard, as if another train was speeding past them.

Not long after that train sped by, they could see light again. The lamps overhead lit up, illuminating the scenery outside, though there wasn't much to see.

The train had left the tunnel, and the power supply was restored.

But Xiao Tiantian's voice was still absent; his end of the line was completely silent. It seemed he was no longer capable of speaking. Those present could guess what had happened to him.

Gu Mian could hear the sound of teeth chattering from the radio; someone was unable to suppress their fear.

Han Shan glanced at the passenger area of his carriage, then furrowed his brows. "Guigu, you're in carriage No. 1, right? Could you see Xiao Tiantian in carriage No. 2 while he was speaking?"

Guigu's voice came through, "I could. I was just about to look that way when the power cut out. When the lights in the carriage came back on... he seemed to have vanished into thin air. I can't see him anywhere."

Han Shan was in carriage No. 3, adjacent to carriage No. 2. However, just moments before, he had been standing at the rear of his carriage; though he was very close to Gu Mian, he couldn't see into the front of carriage No. 2 from there.

Therefore, no one could precisely determine what Xiao Tiantian had seen; they could only speculate based on the words he spoke before his presumed death.

Han Shan pondered Xiao Tiantian's words again: "Has the number decreased?"

Speaking of numbers... from the very beginning, they had noticed something was off about a certain count. Could it be the number of passengers?

As Han Shan thought to himself, he quickly scanned the passenger area of his own carriage, then lowered his voice and spoke into his radio, "Everyone should check if the number of passengers in their carriage has changed."

Right after he finished speaking, people in other carriages began nervously counting their passengers.

At this moment, Gu Mian had also made his way through the passenger area, coming to the front of carriage No. 4. He counted the passengers in his carriage: thirty-one, exactly the number on the passenger list.

Including the woman hiding in the restroom, that made thirty-two—the same number he had counted when he boarded.

Now Han Shan was standing not far ahead of Gu Mian in carriage No. 3. He seemed to have finished counting the passengers in his carriage; from his expression, it appeared there were no extra passengers, nor were any missing.

However, Gu Mian saw a pale-faced passenger walking toward Han Shan's counter—most likely the one who had ordered raw meat earlier.

He saw Han Shan frown and utter a few words. The pale-faced passenger immediately backed up several steps, his face becoming even more pallid.

Then, this pale-faced person turned and ducked into the restroom behind him.

Gu Mian adjusted the guitar on his back. "These ghosts really seem to love hiding in restrooms..."

Han Shan had evidently also seen Gu Mian standing nearby, watching the commotion.

He walked out from behind the counter, apparently wanting to say something, but before he could speak, Guigu's voice simultaneously came through both of their radios, "This is bad! My carriage is really short one passenger! I counted 32 when I boarded, and now there are only 31!"

Suo Qingqiu's voice trembled as she added, "My carriage... is missing three!"

Three were missing?

Gu Mian furrowed his brow in imitation of Han Shan. "One missing in one carriage, three in another. The numbers don't match."

Who knows how many are missing from Xiao Tiantian's carriage.

Meanwhile, Angel Slaughter and Fang Xiang both reported that no one was missing from their carriages; the passenger count was unchanged.

Angel Slaughter's voice came through, sounding a little perplexed, "It's very strange. Xiao Tiantian, Suo Qingqiu, Guigu—the attendants in the carriages where passengers went missing had all placed orders with that vendor... And Guigu, what did you order?"

Guigu replied, "Because I thought that vendor was suspicious, I didn't order much—just a few drinks and two pounds of meat."

Two pounds of meat?

Upon hearing this, Gu Mian asked, "Suo Qingqiu, how many pounds did you order?"

Suo Qingqiu swallowed. "Twenty pounds."

It seemed the number of missing passengers in a carriage was proportional to the amount of raw meat ordered. Moreover, once passengers started disappearing, the attendant of that carriage was in grave danger.

Xiao Tiantian had fallen silent right after discovering passengers were missing.

Why would the number of passengers decrease after placing orders with the vendor?

Gu Mian stroked his chin thoughtfully.

Just then, Angel Slaughter spoke again, "When I looked back just now, I thought I saw something flat and square in the vendor's pocket."

Han Shan queried urgently, "What did it look like?"

Angel Slaughter pondered for a moment. "It looked like...the corner of a photograph?"

The corner of a photograph?

At this moment, a mechanical announcement rang out overhead— "The fourth station, Sweet Manor, has been reached. The train will stop at the platform for one minute. Passengers wishing to alight, please do so promptly."

The train pulled into the station and stopped.

At the same moment, Suo Qingqiu saw the restroom door diagonally opposite the counter open, and a somewhat pale face appeared in her line of sight. It was the extra one...

The passenger who had ordered raw meat wiped his mouth, then looked towards the counter, seemingly wanting something more.

Startled, Suo Qingqiu immediately backed up several steps and bolted towards the carriage door. She ran quickly, reaching the platform in seconds.

A breeze from the distance helped calm her slightly. Suo Qingqiu looked back at the carriage, sighed in relief, and then turned her gaze to the middle of the platform.

Sure enough, this station also had a vendor, but this time it was a middle-aged woman.

She was currently smiling and waving at Suo Qingqiu.

Suo Qingqiu glanced around fearfully and suddenly noticed that, besides herself, only two other people had disembarked this time: Han Shan from carriage No. 3 and the doctor from carriage No. 4.

They seemed to have gotten off to investigate something.

The doctor, still carrying his guitar, dusted off his clothes and muttered to Han Shan, "You'd better watch the time. I suspect the train won't give a warning at the half-minute mark this time; it'll just leave directly after one minute."

Gu Mian knew his luck was consistently bad. It wouldn't be surprising if the train's announcement system malfunctioned this time, and it silently sped off after exactly one minute, leaving him and Han Shan stranded on the platform.

Han Shan nodded with a solemn expression, clearly not optimistic about Gu Mian's luck.

Then, Suo Qingqiu saw the two of them walk towards the vendor in the middle of the platform...

Chapter 217 The Pigeon Spirit is Really Diligent!_1

Gu Mian glanced at Han Shan beside him.

Han Shan was still gripping the pen tightly.

Gu Mian shot him a curious look but said nothing.

Seeing the two of them heading towards the peddler, Suo Qingqiu hurriedly followed.

The night wind blew across the platform, making it very cold. Gu Mian wrapped his white coat tighter around himself.

Without wasting any time, they reached the center of the platform in just a few strides.

The center of the platform was pitch-black, the peddler's face somewhat indistinct, but her features could be discerned with a careful look.

She was a middle-aged woman who seemed to have endured much toil in her youth; deep wrinkles were etched onto her face.

Gu Mian noticed that her expression at that moment seemed uneasy, even a little guilty.

How odd...

Seeing them approach, the woman first gave Gu Mian a suspicious glance, then put on a friendly smile. "Are you here to collect the goods reserved at the previous station? That's right, only three attendants from the previous station made reservations."

As she spoke, she lifted a huge black plastic bag, the size of a travel bag. "Let me see... this one was reserved by the attendant from Carriage 2."

The peddler looked up as she spoke.

She had carefully sorted the resources reserved by attendants from different carriages. The peddler looked up, surveying the group before her. "Which of you is the attendant for Carriage 2? Is it you? Or you?"

Gu Mian observed the peddler's gaze sweep over Suo Qingqiu and Han Shan before casually glancing at him.

The peddler seemed certain that he was not the attendant for Carriage 2.

Xiao Tiantian from Carriage 2 could no longer come to pick up the goods. Suo Qingqiu opened her mouth as if to say something, but then swallowed her words.

Gu Mian spoke up first, "It's me. Give it to me."

As he spoke, he reached out.

Immediately, Gu Mian noticed the peddler's expression stiffen. She looked as if she wanted to say something but didn't. Instead, she put on a warm smile. "Alright, here you go."

Just as she was handing over the bag, Gu Mian abruptly withdrew his hand. "Sorry, I was lying just now."

The peddler's hand froze in mid-air, then she gave a stiff laugh.

At this moment, Han Shan was holding the pen, a small notebook resting beneath it.

He seemed to hesitate for a moment, tightening his grip on the pen before finally speaking to the peddler, "They decided not to take the reserved goods. They asked us to tell you. You don't mind, do you?"

The peddler paused for a moment, then said with a smile, "It's not a big deal, it's fine..."

Just then, a voice echoed from the train behind them: "Thirty seconds until the train departs again. Passengers needing to disembark, please do so quickly."

Gu Mian noticed that Han Shan's pen hadn't stopped writing since earlier, continuously scrawling something in the notebook at a speed no ordinary person could possess.

At this point, the peddler pulled out her pre-order tablet and said with a smile, "So, you're here to reserve goods...?"

It was clearly meant to be a question, but before the peddler could finish, Han Shan interrupted her, speaking rapidly, "How do you peddlers communicate?"

The woman at the stall was slightly taken aback, apparently not expecting Han Shan to ask such a thing.

Meanwhile, Gu Mian had already fixed his gaze on Han Shan's small notebook. Noticing Gu Mian's attention, Han Shan didn't try to hide it, allowing Gu Mian to clearly read the contents.

All the while, the pen in Han Shan's hand was swiftly recording in the notebook, which already had several lines of writing on it.

[Time: 11:56 PM]

[Han Shan spoke: "They no longer want the reserved goods. They've asked us to tell you. You don't mind, do you?"]

[The woman squatting on the ground laughed, then said, "It's no big deal, it's fine..."]

[Announcement from 'Time Escape' train: "Thirty seconds until the train departs again. Passengers needing to disembark, please do so quickly."]

[Attention! The doctor next to me glanced at me! He noticed me! Keep it away from me!]

[The squatting woman then opened her mouth, "So, you're here to reserve goods..."]

[Han Shan asked, "How do you peddlers communicate?"]

[The woman on the ground was stunned.]

[That doctor is watching me again! It's coming closer! Han Shan didn't dodge! It read all the words I wrote!]

What the hell?!

Gu Mian choked for a moment.

This was definitely not something Han Shan, that grump, would write. It seemed like... The pen in his hand wrote this? Could it be a unique item capable of recording real-time events? Well, this special item is quite sentient... but what about this 'it' that's used to describe me throughout the document? Could it be because my gender attribute is "???" that even this unique item uses the gender-neutral 'it' to refer to me?

Just then, Gu Mian noticed the pen had started to update again.

[The 'Time Escape' train thundered.]

Simultaneously, he also heard the thundering noise described by the pen, but it didn't seem to be coming from behind him.

Han Shan had clearly also noticed this unusual sound and took a large stride in the direction behind the peddler on the ground. Gu Mian noticed that Han Shan's pen was still recording everything in real-time.

The peddler quickly stood up and grabbed him. "Wait, what are you doing?!"

Just then, Gu Mian heard another thundering noise, this time definitely from the train behind him.

This was a signal that the train was about to depart! I can't believe a minute passed so quickly!

Hearing the sound, Gu Mian grabbed Han Shan, who was still intending to walk in the opposite direction, and ran desperately towards the train.

Han Shan seemed to understand that the train was about to start, so he stopped heading in the other direction and followed Gu Mian.

The train's roar grew louder, and almost in the exact instant the doors closed, the two of them stepped into their respective carriages.

Suo Qingqiu, having heard the sound, had already run towards the train; she had boarded even before Gu Mian and Han Shan.

A few seconds after everyone had boarded, a familiar announcement echoed overhead: "Next station, Crazy Game City. Passengers who need to disembark, please prepare in advance."

The next stop is the fifth station...

Gu Mian was still frowning, replaying the events on the platform in his mind, when Han Shan from Carriage 3 walked over with a stern look, his small notebook still in hand.

He must have some bad news for me, Gu Mian thought.

Sure enough, Han Shan paused for a moment, then tossed the notebook onto the floor of Gu Mian's carriage. "Take a look at what's written after that."

Gu Mian curiously picked up the notebook, continuing to read from where he had left off.

[The 'Time Escape' train thundered.]

[Han Shan took a big step forward.]

[Time: 9:25 PM]

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[Time: 9:25 PM]

[She suddenly stood up and grabbed Han Shan: "Wait, what are you doing!"]

[The 'Time Escape' train let out a sound—

The text ended abruptly, not even deigning to grant a period.

Make no mistake, it truly wasn't finished.

This pen didn't finish writing the latter content, but the information given previously was already quite sufficient.

Gu Mian held the notebook, stroked his chin, and said, "I know the key lies in this notebook's content, but I'm still curious... What pen is that in your hand?"

Han Shan didn't say much; he took the pen from his pocket and tossed it to Gu Mian.

Gu Mian, with quick reflexes, caught it, preventing this remarkably clever little thing from hitting the ground.

As soon as he caught this remarkably clever little thing, its description panel appeared.

[Pen-shaped Real-time Repeater]

[Description: The essence of humanity is repetition... No, this thing doesn't seem to be human, does it?]

[Function: Repeats, in written form. Press the button on the pen's body, and it will record surrounding events in real-time. The level of detail in the recording depends on luck.]

[Usage Frequency: Usable three times a week. Each use lasts about half a minute (duration primarily depends on luck).]

It seemed the content had ended abruptly because the pen's usage time was up.

Han Shan looked at Gu Mian. "This thing is unstable..."

He paused for half a second before continuing, "For instance, if this pen were to record a scene like this, and if your luck is bad, the record might be very rudimentary."

"With no record of time, location, actions, or expressions, it might simply state something like, 'A man spoke, another man listened.'"

Not necessarily both men, Gu Mian thought to himself.

Han Shan didn't know what Gu Mian was thinking and continued, "But if your luck is good, it will record things in great detail, including the time, place, and people involved. Sometimes, it might even include more elaborate descriptions."

Gu Mian nodded. It seemed what the pen had just recorded wasn't particularly detailed, nor was it too simplistic. There was no location, the character introductions were somewhat brief, and only the time was reasonably detailed...

As he was thinking, he looked at the first line—[Time: 11:56 PM]

After reading this line, he glanced at the third line from the bottom of the notebook—[Time: 9:25 PM]

According to the time in this instance, the 11:56 PM in the first line should be correct.

But right after [The 'Time Escape' train let out a sound—], when Han Shan took a large step behind the vendor, the time mysteriously changed to 9:25 PM.

Han Shan frowned. Did our time change at that moment?

Could this be an instance related to time?

As he pondered, Han Shan's frown deepened. "After the train made a sound, the time changed... Is the change in time related to the train's sound?"

Gu Mian tossed the pen back to Han Shan and glanced at the notebook again. "Earlier, when we were on the platform, you heard the train make a sound twice, right?"

Han Shan nodded.

Gu Mian continued, "Those two sounds came from different directions; they definitely weren't from the same location. But the record indicates both sounds were from the 'Time Escape' train."

The others were discussing something over their walkie-talkies. For some reason, a strange static kept coming through. Gu Mian found it noisy and turned his walkie-talkie off.

Han Shan's walkie-talkie was still on, so he could still hear if anything happened.

"That is indeed strange." Han Shan's glasses reflected the light. "Those two sounds... one came from the direction the vendor had her back to, and the other came from the direction of our train. Two completely different directions."

Han Shan fell into deep thought.

Gu Mian suddenly said, "Also, that vendor on the platform was very odd. She didn't know who the Attendant for Carriage Two was, but she seemed certain I wasn't him. She also found it very strange that I came to collect something reserved for the Attendant for Carriage Two."

Han Shan put the pen back into his pocket. "Perhaps it's because she saw you get off Carriage Four?"

"No," Gu Mian shook his head. "You got off Carriage Three, but she still thought you might be the Attendant for Carriage Two. I suspect she doesn't identify us by which carriage we're from."

Han Shan's frown deepened. "Then how does she tell?"

"Perhaps she saw what the Attendant for Carriage Two looks like?" Gu Mian suddenly laughed.

Han Shan squinted. "But the Attendant for Carriage Two disappeared before we reached that station. There's no way she could have seen him, unless she had seen him before... Wait a minute?"

Seen him before?

The only chance for the vendor to have seen Xiao Tiantian, the Attendant for Carriage Two, was at the third station's platform.

At the third station, Rongcheng City, everyone except Gu Mian and Fang Xiang had disembarked from the train.

The vendor found it strange when Gu Mian went to collect the item reserved for the Attendant for Carriage Two because she hadn't seen Gu Mian at all on the Rongcheng City platform.

But she was clearly the vendor at the fourth station. How could she have been at the third station and even seen Xiao Tiantian?

Just then, Han Shan suddenly remembered the sound of a train rushing past them every time they went through a tunnel.

"Those people..." He frowned.

However, before he could finish, a mechanical announcement broadcast from overhead: "Attention, passengers. We are about to enter a tunnel. The train's power supply will be temporarily cut. Please prepare yourselves."

At the same time, Gu Mian suddenly heard Suo Qingqiu's voice, sounding very rushed, from Han Shan's walkie-talkie: "Wait!"

Before Gu Mian could understand what she was trying to say, the entire carriage plunged into darkness, and Suo Qingqiu's voice cut off abruptly.

A few seconds later, the sound of a train approaching from behind grew louder and closer.

In the darkness, Gu Mian heard Han Shan move in front of him, followed by the scratching of a pen tip.

"Do you have a flashlight?" Gu Mian suddenly asked.

The sound of Han Shan's pen scratching didn't stop. "No."

That leaves no other choice, Gu Mian thought, taking the [Strange Camera] from his pocket. This device was meant for photographing invisible ghosts, but now it would have to serve another purpose.

In the darkness, Han Shan suddenly heard a sound like a camera shutter, followed by a brilliant white flash that erupted before his eyes. It vanished in an instant.

Han Shan asked, "Did you take a picture?"

Gu Mian was looking down at the camera in his hand. "Mm-hm."

The camera screen emitted a faint glow, and Han Shan, not far away, could also see its display.

Gu Mian had aimed the camera out the train window, so naturally, it captured the scene outside.

On the screen, a white train was visible on a nearby track, traveling alongside them.

Han Shan's pupils constricted as he stared at the camera screen. "They aren't!"

Chapter 219 It's Almost Dawn! _1

At this moment, Suo Qingqiu was groping her way through a dark aisle.

When the train plunged into darkness, she tripped over something. She didn't fall, but the walkie-talkie in her hand slipped from her grasp and flew far away.

After boarding the train, she had been standing near the counter. The passenger who had wanted to place an order had inexplicably disappeared, so she had nervously stayed by the counter.

Suo Qingqiu didn't dare venture too close to the passenger area.

But now, she had no choice but to make her way there.

It wasn't just because her walkie-talkie had fallen in that direction, but also because after the carriage plunged into darkness, she heard the toilet door, diagonally across from the counter, CREAK open from the inside. She thought she could even hear footsteps coming from that direction.

Startled by the eerie sound, Suo Qingqiu quickly moved toward the passenger area, away from the toilet. Fortunately, even after the carriage went dark, occasional sounds from the passengers could still be heard, adding a sliver of human presence to the unsettling environment.

She carefully made her way to the passenger area and crouched down, feeling around on the floor.

The occasional exchanges between passengers and the rustle of their clothes brought Suo Qingqiu some comfort.

She quieted her movements and, after searching for a short while, finally found her walkie-talkie. It seemed to have fallen underneath a seat.

Suo Qingqiu gritted her teeth and stretched out her hand for it. But just as she grabbed the walkie-talkie, a sudden rustling noise came from a nearby passenger.

Startled, she was about to stand up and leave when a gentle voice drifted down to her from above. "Are you looking for something? Can I help you?"

Hearing the voice, Suo Qingqiu let out a soft sigh of relief and replied, "N-no, thank you."

However, a hand had already landed on her arm, seemingly intending to help her up.

Suo Qingqiu instinctively tried to push it away but found the arm disconcertingly soft, as if covered by a thick glove. With a light push, this "glove" rolled up and then fell to the ground with a SMACK.

Hearing that sound, a chill ran down Suo Qingqiu's spine.

What... what was that?!

That definitely wasn't the sound of a weightless glove hitting the floor!

Her hand was still frozen in place, her fingers having apparently brushed against something cool and utterly revolting where the person's arm should have been.

What fell to the ground?

And what did I touch?!

She wanted to scream, but something rigid, like a wooden plank, suddenly coiled around her neck from behind and began to tighten, strangling her.

Suo Qingqiu struggled, desperately trying to pry off the thing around her neck, but it was to no avail.

Her eyes were rolling back, her hands still unconsciously clawing at the object on her neck.

Just as Suo Qingqiu was about to lose consciousness, it suddenly occurred to her what the object strangling her might be.

An oxygen-deprived brain isn't usually conducive to thought, but in her final moments, she understood.

So, that's what it was...

"Say, did any of you hear something just now?" a passenger's voice came from Carriage Six.

A dismissive voice replied, "Probably just someone turning in their sleep."

After this brief exchange, the carriage fell silent. The earlier sounds of struggle had ceased, so no one said anything more.

At this moment, Guigu's voice came from Han Shan's walkie-talkie. "Damn, I think a head was just blowing on me from above!"

Gu Mian also turned on his walkie-talkie.

The surroundings were still pitch black. The train that had been approaching from behind had already overtaken them, its sounds gradually fading. Gu Mian guessed it wouldn't be long before they exited the tunnel.

Sure enough, just as Guigu finished speaking, their surroundings abruptly lit up.

The power was restored.

Han Shan's first reaction was to look down at what he had written on his arm using the "Pen-shaped Real-time Repeater."

His notebook was with Gu Mian, so he had been forced to write on his own arm.

It read—

"The 'Time Escape' train caught up with the 'Time Escape' train."

"Gu Mian on the 'Time Escape' train took a photo."

"Meng Shi Tian Ying on the 'Time Escape' train yawned."

"Suo Qingqiu in Carriage Six was heinously attacked."

"The 'Time Escape' train overtook the 'Time Escape' train."

Ignoring Suo Qingqiu's heinous attack, Han Shan frowned. "So, there really are two 'Time Escape' trains!"

Gu Mian, who wasn't far away, could also make out some of the writing. The name "Meng Shi Tian Ying" caught his attention.

"Meng Shi Tian Ying?" He stroked his chin. "That name doesn't belong to anyone on our train, does it?"

This obviously wasn't a name a normal person would have; only players had names like that.

"I see," Han Shan said, staring intently at his arm. "Those vendors aren't vendors at all. They're players, just like us! They're from another 'Time Escape' train."

No wonder the player count for this instance was unknown from the start. It wasn't a system glitch—they were being set up.

Gu Mian glanced at the notebook in his hand. "Moreover, these two 'Time Escape' trains are probably the same one... I mean, the same train, but at different points in time."

Two timestamps were recorded in Han Shan's notebook.

One was 11:56 PM, and the other was 9:25 PM.

These two times had been twisted into the same spacetime continuum. The vendor's location served as the dividing line: one step forward placed you at 9:25 PM, and one step back, at 11:56 PM.

Gu Mian and his group of six others were likely on the 11:56 PM train.

The vendors, on the other hand, were on the 9:25 PM train.

Their current time was later than the vendors'.

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "And I suspect the passengers on these two trains are actually the same group."

The same group of passengers? Han Shan frowned.

Gu Mian continued, "The instance information at the start said that the 'Time Escape' train only runs once a day, beginning at 11:40 PM. We should be on the correctly timed run. At 9:25 PM, this train should still be stationary. But, as you saw, the 9:25 PM train was moving."

"Let's ignore for a moment why the train was moving at 9:25 PM. From a temporal perspective, the vendors' train is on a timeline before ours. Their actions on that train could affect us here... Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Han Shan nodded. "Go on."

"If the passengers on both trains are indeed the same people, then imagine this: if a passenger dies on the nine o'clock train, that same passenger definitely won't be alive on our eleven o'clock train."

It's like if you died at age three; you couldn't possibly be alive at age twenty.

Chapter 220 I am a Gugu Spirit, I Feed Myself a Bag of Salt_1

"From the beginning, we weren't the only players in this instance. If I'm not mistaken, it's probably structured like a team battle..."

"We're one team, and the vendors are another."

Gu Mian stroked his chin. He had experienced similar team battles before and ended up inadvertently dragging the host out due to a mistake.

The logistics staff from that instance also inexplicably followed... But none of that was important now.

"It's rather unfair how the teams are divided. The other team seems to be fully aware of our existence, while we're blind to theirs, only able to guess their presence based on clues. It's like a battle between a conspicuous team and one hiding in the shadows."

Han Shan interrupted, "The teams must be divided according to strength. The weaker side tends to have more favorable conditions, and it's also very likely that the weaker side may have an impact on the other."

Gu Mian continued, "Alright, let's assume we are the stronger team... To sum up the current situation, both of our teams are on the 'Time Escape' train at two different time points. The instance has twisted these two time points together. Our task is to meet the passengers' demands and refill goods, while they're masquerading as vendors selling goods to us."

"I'm quite curious where they got their goods from, especially the raw meat... However, we discovered earlier that passengers in our carriages have disappeared. After the first time we pre-ordered goods from the vendors, anyone who had pre-ordered had some passengers disappear from their carriage."

Guigu's voice came over the intercom, "Suo Qingqiu seems to have gone silent. Aren't you guys going to pay any attention? And when we were going through the tunnel earlier, it felt like something was blowing cold air on my head."

Han Shan glanced down at the intercom. "Understood."

Guigu fell silent.

Gu Mian continued, "Of those who pre-ordered goods, only Guigu is still alive. By the way, Guigu, can you check how many passengers are left in your carriage?"

After the question, Guigu's voice instantly came through the intercom, "Thirty-two. Only one passenger is missing, and the count hasn't continued to decrease..."

So, Guigu's No. 1 carriage had, up to this point, only lost one person.

Guigu seemed uneasy. "I'm the only one who pre-ordered goods that's still alive. Am I going to be the next one to die?"

Gu Mian answered, "Theoretically, you should be next."

Guigu choked. "I want to understand why pre-ordering goods leads to death. We never went to collect what we pre-ordered anyway..."

From the intercom came Angel Slaughter's voice, "I didn't lose any passengers, but the man who was taking pre-orders for raw meat has come by a few times. I refused him each time."

Fang Xiang also chimed in, "In my carriage, no one has disappeared."

Gu Mian rubbed his chin. "Because no one got off the train to pre-order at the last station, the number of passengers didn't continue to decrease this time?"

Han Shan frowned. "If you pre-order goods, the number of passengers decreases. What is the connection between the goods given by the vendors and our passengers?"

Gu Mian glanced out of the window. "Perhaps because 'goods' equals 'passengers'?"

Hearing this, Guigu felt a chill run down his spine.

No matter how powerful the instance was, it couldn't turn living people into orange soda or the like, but he remembered that 'raw meat' was an option among the pre-ordered goods.

Turning living people into raw meat... most people should be capable of that.

Angel Slaughter took a deep breath. "Are you saying that the raw meat we pre-ordered was all sourced on the spot by them killing passengers to provide it?"

Gu Mian nodded towards the intercom. "In the beginning, each of our carriages should have had only one ghost, one that liked raw meat but wasn't particularly aggressive..."

Suddenly, an announcement rang out on the train.

"Fifth stop, Crazy Game City is approaching. Passengers planning to alight, please prepare in advance."

Gu Mian quickened his speech, "This ghost should be considered a trigger, its purpose being to mislead players into pre-ordering raw meat from the vendors. And once we pre-order raw meat from the vendors, they will kill passengers in the corresponding carriages to obtain the raw meat."

"For example, if Xiao Tiantian in carriage No. 2 pre-ordered ten kilograms of meat, then those ten kilograms of meat would also be taken from carriage No. 2."

"Here, I'll make a bold guess: although they can kill passengers in the carriages, the decision-making power is actually in our hands. They should be constrained by some rule; if we don't pre-order, they can't just kill passengers arbitrarily."

"In other words, as long as we pre-order, passengers on the 9 o'clock train will be killed for their meat. If passengers on the 9 o'clock train die, their counterparts on the 11 o'clock train will naturally die as well... They might even turn into ghosts and then attack us."

"Suo Qingqiu was short three passengers for ten kilograms of meat, so Xiao Tiantian's carriage should also be short three. Adding Guigu's one, there should now be seven ghosts on our train. Therefore, from the moment someone pre-ordered raw meat, we were already in danger."

Guigu listened, somewhat dumbfounded. He hadn't expected this instance to be so insidious, luring them into a trap from the very beginning.

Fang Xiang's voice suddenly came through. "They were the ones who killed the people, so why are the ghosts coming after us?"

Is it because their train has some protective mechanism? If the vendors killed people, and the passengers turned into ghosts seeking revenge on the vendors, then this instance couldn't continue.

Just then, Han Shan thought he heard faint footsteps behind him. He whipped around to look, but the passenger area was quiet. Everyone was sitting lazily in their seats; no one was moving in the aisle. Strange...

Then Angel Slaughter's hesitant voice came over the intercom. "So, is there nothing we can do now? Do those who pre-ordered raw meat just have to wait in their carriages to be killed by ghosts?"

Gu Mian responded, "No."

Hearing Gu Mian's "no," Guigu felt a flicker of excitement; he really didn't want to die a horrible death in this instance. But Gu Mian's next words plunged Guigu into deep self-doubt: "People who didn't pre-order might also be killed by ghosts. Possibly."

This situation is even worse than before!

"Why?" Fang Xiang's volume suddenly increased, sounding extremely agitated.

Gu Mian recalled the instance's cautionary notes. "This instance stipulates that two players cannot be in the same carriage, so you didn't dare to casually run into other people's carriages. But ghosts aren't players. They aren't restricted to a single carriage; they can roam around wherever they please."

At this moment, the faint, slow footsteps were heard again from behind. Han Shan quickly turned around once more.

His gaze passed through his own carriage to Xiao Tiantian's No. 2 carriage. There should have originally been three ghosts in carriage No. 2. Now that the attendant of carriage No. 2, Xiao Tiantian, had been killed by them, they should be killing other people now...

Angel Slaughter clenched her fists. "In that case, from the moment someone pre-ordered raw meat... we were already in a no-win situation, right?"

Just then, the train suddenly decelerated sharply. Simultaneously, an announcement followed.

"Fifth stop, Crazy Game City, has arrived. The train will stop for one minute. Passengers who need to get off the train, please alight as soon as possible."

"Speaking of which," Gu Mian suddenly said, "don't you think this train is stopping a bit too frequently?"