

Collapse 271

Chapter 271 The Little Fatty who Picks Up Trash _1

"Mother, the Prince in the castle is hosting a ball. We need more money to buy decent clothes, and yes, a carriage."

"Don't worry, my darling daughter. As long as we chop up and sell the two people you tricked, we'll soon have enough money. That Fatty has a lot of meat on him."

"That's not enough. It would be great if that old hag in the forest would lend us the money. It's such a headache. Maybe we should think of other ways to get her money."

Fatty leaned against the door, his face ashen as he listened to the conversation outside.

Chopped up?! he thought. I've never heard of such things in fairy tales!

"Sh-she-she... It's bad enough she trafficks people, but she kills them before selling them?" The supermodel was also pressed against the door, stammering as he spoke.

Because night had fallen so quickly, the two hadn't had a chance to light any lamps. In the dim room, Fatty and the supermodel pressed themselves tightly against the door, straining to hear, daring not to make even the slightest sound.

"And... and those hunched-backs she mentioned... do they eat people?" the supermodel continued to stutter.

If Fatty hadn't heard him speak normally before, he would have thought the supermodel actually had a stutter.

Fatty quickly covered his mouth. "Shush!"

He was afraid the supermodel, lacking self-control, might make a noise and alert the two people downstairs.

Fatty couldn't recall any fairy tales featuring chopped-up human remains. However, since this instance was named "Broken Fairy Tale City," it had to be a corrupted fairy tale world. This is just too corrupted...

Just then, the sound of something blunt scraping across the floor came from downstairs.

Fatty's face paled as he listened intently for a few seconds. It sounded like someone dragging an axe on the ground.

There's no doubt that sound is heading for us, he thought.

The mission is to escape this broken fairy tale world, but we don't have a single clue right now! And we need to stay alive to escape this damned place! We're about to be chopped into mincemeat by Elizabeth!

Fatty hadn't experienced many instances, but definitely a fair few. This was the first time he'd encountered an instance that threatened to turn him into mincemeat right from the start.

Panicked, Fatty scanned the room, his gaze finally landing on the only window.

Seeing the window, he suddenly seemed to remember something and pulled a blue-covered book from his bag.

[Protagonist's Cliff-Jumping Immortality Law]

[Function: When the holder falls from a high place with this book in hand, there's a 60% chance they won't sustain any injuries.]

This book was a special item Gu Mian had obtained during the "Bizarre Great Train Escape" instance.

Forget 60%; even with a 99% chance of not getting hurt, Gu Mian would always be in the remaining 1%. So, this artifact was useless to him.

Therefore, Gu Mian had simply tossed it to Fatty, figuring Fatty had better luck.

Fatty clutched the [Protagonist's Cliff-Jumping Immortality Law]. Even if I'm unlucky enough to fall into that forty percent... the Doctor also gave me another piece of junk!

[Dilapidated Winch]

Its function was to hoist people, but it was highly likely to snap mid-air.

Using both items together, I can first attach the winch. Even if the winch snaps midway, I'll still have the [Protagonist's Cliff-Jumping Immortality Law] in hand. Both items can't fail at the same time, right?

Beside him, the supermodel, flamboyant as ever, was still nervously listening to the sounds outside. That axe sounds like it's coming upstairs!

Fatty had already dashed to the window.

Strangely, although night had just fallen, the moon was already quite high.

Fatty had no time to ponder this. He anxiously pushed open the window and peered down, trying to estimate the height.

But the moment he stuck his head out to look at the ground, his blood seemed to freeze solid.

An icy gust of wind hit his face, making it hard for Fatty to breathe.

The second-floor window wasn't too far from the ground, and below was soft grass; even if he jumped, he likely wouldn't get seriously injured.

The problem lay elsewhere.

The sisters were below.

The two sisters stood directly below the window, their faces devoid of expression as they stared blankly upwards. He had no idea how long they had been there.

Jumping now would be suicide.

Fatty had no choice but to retreat. He hadn't expected them to be waiting right under the window. If he jumped now, he'd land right in their embrace!

Normally, I'd be thrilled to jump into the arms of two beautiful women, but today is different. These two beauties downstairs are clearly up to no good!

Thinking this, Fatty furtively took out another item.

It was also something Gu Mian had given him.

[Penguin Brand Cough Syrup]

Taking out this item would attract a great deal of aggro, but throwing it could stop whatever was chasing him for half a minute. Whether it was a human, ghost, cat, or dog, even police chasing a suspect would be forced to stop.

Fatty suddenly realized all his special items were things the Doctor hadn't wanted. In that instant, he suddenly felt like a little boy rummaging through trash, overcome by a profound sense of life's hardships.

But now is not the time for such feelings.

He clutched the [Penguin Brand Cough Syrup] tightly, planning to throw it the moment Elizabeth came after them with the axe.

The harsh SCREECHING grew closer.

The two inside heard the axe finally being dragged up the stairs and stopping right outside their door.

Any moment now... she'll be in.

Their backs pressed tightly against the wall opposite the door, they swallowed hard.

Fatty had been clutching the cough syrup for so long that his palm was slick with sweat, yet there was still no sound from outside.

Just as they were beginning to think the person with the axe outside had left, the door suddenly opened a crack with a CREAK.

The room was very dark, but the corridor outside was lit by candlesticks.

Blinding light streamed in through the opening. A face appeared in the gap, staring intently at the two inside.

Illuminated by the candlelight from the hallway, the face was pale and incredibly sinister, a stark contrast to Elizabeth's gentle and lovely appearance during the day.

But it was unmistakably the same face.

Fatty nervously gripped the [Penguin Brand Cough Syrup], ready to throw it at any moment.

But then, the mouth below the nose on that face suddenly moved. "You're in luck. I need your help with something."

「The sky was pitch black.」

For some reason, though the place had been warm during the day, it became extremely cold when night fell.

Moreover, the night seemed to last a very long time, at least much longer than the brief day.

The Little Dwarfs' home was a small wooden cabin. It was more than spacious enough for five Little Dwarfs, but with the addition of Princess Heitang and Gu Mian, who carried a large guitar, it felt a bit cramped.

The furniture was all miniature; even the chairs were like small stools. Gu Mian didn't dare sit too heavily on his, afraid he might break something and have to pay for it.

Gu Mian, currently oblivious to how much he was crowding their home, sat at the dining table, looking at a small bowl in front of him.

The small bowl contained a simmering meat broth with chunks of meat floating on top. The rich aroma filled his nostrils, tantalizing his taste buds.

The Little Dwarfs' dining table was long, accommodating all five of them and one large princess.

Gu Mian sat beside the princess's designated seat.

Princess Heitang was in the kitchen dishing out soup, while several Little Dwarfs chattered animatedly, telling Gu Mian about the forest.

"Guest, you probably don't know much about our forest, do you?" said the Little Dwarf holding a shovel, sitting opposite Gu Mian.

For some reason, these Little Dwarfs didn't even put down their tools while eating. Gu Mian suspected they might even sleep clutching them.

A Little Dwarf carrying a pitchfork sat next to Gu Mian. Gu Mian didn't plan on asking their names one by one. Since each Little Dwarf had a different tool, he decided to mentally nickname them accordingly:

Shovel, Axe, Hammer, Pitchfork, and Saw.

Pitchfork spoke up, "Not far from here lives Little Green Hat's family. It's just her and her grandfather. Her grandfather is very wealthy; they say he owns enough assets to buy half a castle!"

Axe suddenly interjected, "But Little Red Riding Hood said they've been threatened by werewolves recently. She mentioned often seeing werewolves lurking near her home. Speaking of which, I don't know why, but there seem to be a lot more werewolves around lately..."

Gu Mian recalled seeing Little Green Hat earlier that day; she had seemed to be frantically searching for something.

"Far from us, there's a villa where a lady lives with her three daughters. I heard the youngest daughter isn't biologically hers, but they seem to have a good relationship."

Sounds a bit like Cinderella, but not quite.

Since this instance is a counterfeit, the creators must have plagiarized many stories and then added their own twists and adaptations.

Saw asked curiously, "By the way, guest, the Prince in the castle is hosting a ball soon. Are you also going to attend?"

This is definitely the Cinderella plot. So, this instance has mashed many fairy tales into one world? It's a bit of a clumsy mash-up.

Gu Mian touched his chin. You wouldn't believe me if I said I was thrown in here completely bewildered.

After a moment's thought, he nodded. "That's right, I'm here for the ball."

Maybe I can even try on Cinderella's lost glass slipper, assuming the plot develops as I imagine.

Setting those thoughts aside for now, after the Little Dwarfs had eagerly finished telling Gu Mian about the forest, they seemed to get hungry and quickly gulped down all their meat broth.

After the Little Dwarfs had finished their broth and were wiping their mouths, they noticed that Gu Mian's bowl remained untouched.

"Drink... drink up—"

The Little Dwarfs raised their hands in a synchronized gesture, their eyes fixed on Gu Mian, seemingly desperate for him to drink the broth.

This scene is quite eerie.

Gu Mian looked at the seven figures staring intently at him and didn't move.

Just then, Princess Heitang emerged from the kitchen carrying a bowl of soup.

She placed the bowl at her seat and then looked at Gu Mian. "Guest, I'd like to discuss something with you. Could you come with me privately?"

With that, she walked a few steps toward the door of an adjacent room, then glanced back at Gu Mian, as if signaling him to follow.

Gu Mian glanced at Princess Heitang, then at the Little Dwarfs who were still seated, their eyes fixed on him.

These Little Dwarfs are a bit odd, Gu Mian thought. Sometimes they're like soulless puppets; even the range of their movements is identical. Strange...

Mulling this over, Gu Mian stood up and walked towards Princess Heitang's room.

Chapter 272 The Little Princess Eating an Apple_1

Princess Heitang's room was almost as large as the living room outside. Due to her larger physique, her room contained the largest bed in the house. Also, in this room, designed to accommodate her size, the furniture seemed more comfortably proportioned compared to the outside, where the chairs were as small as stools!

Upon entering, Gu Mian took a look around. The furnishings in the room were rather old and seemed to have seen better days, appearing more worn than everything else outside. He paused momentarily, finding this peculiar...

Just after he entered, Princess Heitang hastily closed the door, as if afraid that others might overhear the conversation they were about to have.

"Don't trust them!"—this was the first thing Princess Heitang said to Gu Mian after she had shut the door.

At this point, Gu Mian was completely at a loss as to how the plot would unfold. Whether he had an opportunity to wear Elizabeth's glass slipper remained a mystery. However, this wasn't Gu Mian's main concern.

He glanced again at the old furniture in the room, "Why do you say that?"

"Everyone outside is a man-eating demon," Princess Heitang responded, seemingly oblivious to where Gu Mian's gaze had rested. "They lure people lost in the forest back here, drug them unconscious, and then devour them... The meat soup is..."

She lowered her voice when she came to this point, "Actually, I'm Princess Heitang, the princess of this kingdom. I am now trapped here, and even if I tried to escape, I can't make it out of this forest on my

own..." Her voice grew softer. "Perhaps we should try to escape together tomorrow. Once we're back at the castle, I'll tell my father that you are a foreign Prince who rescued me..."

This plot was completely self-contained. A kindhearted princess, deceived by five cunning individuals, reduced to a housewife. If this were to be published in a weekly magazine, it would probably be a tear-jerking story. However, if the plot were to unfold this way, his next step would be to marry the princess. Gu Mian recalled that his mission in this instance wasn't to marry a princess, but to escape from Fairy Tale City. Marrying a beautiful princess along the way wouldn't be a loss for him, but it wouldn't be particularly useful either.

"Wait a moment," Gu Mian suddenly interrupted Princess Heitang. "Can I ask you a question?"

Princess Heitang paused before asking, "What's your question?"

"When you first came to this forest, those five Little Dwarfs were already here, weren't they?"

The princess in front of him nodded, "Yes, they were already here when I arrived."

"Your room must have been furnished after you arrived. Those Little Dwarfs wouldn't use such large furniture," Gu Mian continued.

Princess Heitang continued to nod, seemingly unaware of why Gu Mian would say so.

Gu Mian continued his line of questioning, "I saw a piece of furniture outside that seemed strange. Did the Little Dwarfs suddenly replace any furniture or anything like that?"

Princess Heitang shook her head, "No, they've never replaced anything in the house..."

By this point, Gu Mian had figured some things out.

He cut off Princess Heitang mid-sentence, "Alright, I will escape with you tomorrow..."

Surprised by how easily Gu Mian was persuaded, Princess Heitang felt a momentary surge of joy. But then, she saw him magically produce a shiny red apple and ask, "Do you eat apples?"

The cold wind whipped against their faces, stinging Fatty and the supermodel. But this was nothing compared to the harsh cold of the real world. At this moment, the two of them were draped in furs, passing through the forest.

Elizabeth had not minced them into meat. Instead, she had entrusted them with a dreadful task.

"Murder Little Green Hat's grandfather who lives at the other end of the forest, loot all valuable items from his house, and then pretend to be the grandfather to murder the troublesome Little Green Hat. If you dare to run away, I can kill you at any moment"—this was the direct quote from Elizabeth as she dragged a heavy axe.

For some reason, the terms 'Little Green Hat' and 'grandfather' felt familiar to Fatty, but the terrifying situation left them with no time to think. As she spoke, Elizabeth's face was deathly pale, like an Evil Ghost that had just crawled out of hell. Fatty and the supermodel, not doubting her words, ran off without a second thought.

This certainly wasn't Cinderella's story. Fatty resolved to never again associate the kind, cute, brave, and smart Cinderella with the terrifying Elizabeth!

To prevent their identities from being revealed, Elizabeth had even brought out wolf skins she had prepared in advance for them to wear, to falsely attribute the deeds to a werewolf.

In the chilling wind, the historically most flirtatious supermodel said with chattering teeth, "How about we just run away? We're already quite far from the house..."

Fatty shivered and nodded, "Yes...I don't really want to kill anyone's grandfather..."

At this point, the two of them stopped and looked at each other, seemingly wanting to discuss something. However, at this moment, the supermodel's face turned ashen. His neck stiffened sharply, his gaze fixed desperately on the direction behind Fatty's head, as if his eyes were about to pop out.

A shiver ran down Fatty's spine.

A gust of wind swept by, causing the leaves overhead to rustle and fall. A green leaf danced in the wind and landed on Fatty's shoulder. He slightly twisted his stiff neck and reached out, seeming to want to brush it off. As he turned his head, Fatty stole a glance in the direction of the supermodel's gaze.

It revealed a stark white face, concealed among the layers of leaves, one eye staring fixedly at them through a small opening.

They both recognized the face—it was Elizabeth's...

Chapter 273 No Time to Think of a Title _1

A gust of wind swept across the ground, carrying dust and withered leaves into their faces and making their eyes itch.

The World's Strongest Supermodel hurriedly averted his gaze, pretending he hadn't seen anything. He awkwardly raised a hand to rub his eyes. His voice, raspy from his wind-dried throat, sounded somewhat grating, "Little Green Hat's home is on the other side of the forest. Let's hurry over there..."

Fatty stiffly turned his neck back and nodded in agreement.

The two of them raised their feet in unison and continued forward.

The crescent moon hung high overhead, seemingly motionless for a long time. Its curved arc resembled a gaping mouth, mockingly laughing at the people below.

The wind whistled through the forest, and the rustling leaves overhead in the darkness sounded like applause, as if cheering for someone.

It was as if a farcical stage play was being performed here.

Someone was laughing broadly, someone was applauding.

Only the characters involved could truly feel the bone-chilling malice.

At this moment, there were only three characters here: a delicate fatty; a delicate supermodel, who might not actually be a genuine supermodel; and Elizabeth, who was hiding amidst the dense leaves, one eye visible, staring intently at the two of them.

Fatty and the supermodel wrapped their wolf pelts tightly around themselves, almost completely enveloped. It was as if this could shield them from the malicious gaze that clung to them.

It looks like we have to find Little Green Hat and her grandmother first... Fatty thought as he strode briskly through the forest. Little Green Hat's home was still a considerable distance away.

Was there no other way out? Could they only be under Elizabeth's surveillance, acting on her instructions?

The cold night wind cleared Fatty's head. His mind raced as he walked, but he couldn't come up with any other solutions.

We can only take it one step at a time...

Speaking of which, the mission is to escape Fairy Tale City. Although we don't have any clues right now, maybe we can find some on the way to Little Green Hat's house? Perhaps there's a way out of Fairy Tale City in this forest?

Although, they still didn't know the actual size of Fairy Tale City.

At this moment, despite it being late at night, Wangcheng City's main street was bustling with people.

The shop lights along the street were all on, making the transparent glass display windows shimmer brilliantly. Inside, freshly baked pastries showed tempting colors; a dollop of strawberry jam even seemed to have oozed out. Although their aroma couldn't be smelled through the window, just looking at the crisp pastries made one imagine the scent of warm food.

A little girl was pressed against the display window, her eyes fixed on the freshly baked pastries inside.

The little girl carried a basket on her left arm. It seemed she couldn't even afford a cloth to cover it, so the goods inside were exposed.

Inside were only three lighters: a gold one, a silver one, and one that looked no different from an ordinary lighter. It appeared she hadn't sold any.

A piece of cloth lined the bottom of the basket, apparently to prevent her only wares from falling through the gaps.

She was dressed in rags; there was even a patch worn thin on her knee. She was grimy, and whenever the wind blew, the tatters of her clothes would flutter.

The little girl shivered violently with each gust of wind, but her eyes never left the display window, as if the fragrant pastries behind the cold glass could offer her warmth.

People bustled past her.

A haughty noblewoman, cradling a dog, entered a nearby cake shop and soon emerged, her chin still held high.

A man with shiny, almost reflective, leather shoes arrived at the entrance of a restaurant.

Two doormen eagerly bowed and opened the door, repeating the exact same actions they had performed for the previous customer. Their movements were identical, as if they were merely robots designed to open doors.

It seemed no one noticed the little girl in her tattered clothes.

Just then, a figure who seemed entirely out of place amidst the street's crowd suddenly appeared.

She wore a plaid skirt that was impractical for movement, her hair hung loosely down her back, and her flat leather shoes made a CREAK-CKEAK sound on the bluestone pavers.

Her attire was quite distinctive, very different from the others on the street, because she was a player.

A few people glanced at her curiously, but only a few. Most didn't pay much attention to the strangely dressed woman who had appeared on the street; they remained focused on their own affairs.

007, seeing the steady stream of people on the street, released a sigh of relief.

Just as night fell, she was still wandering in the forest.

She had been dropped into the forest as soon as she entered the instance and couldn't find her way out, no matter what she did. Players could freeze to death in an instance; her friends had tested this.

Tonight's temperature was far from ideal; wandering outside in a skirt, she would definitely freeze to death.

However, not long after it became completely dark, she spotted a small wooden cabin in the distance—a cabin in the forest.

A warm light shone from the cabin's windows. Although she was wary, her priority was to avoid freezing to death.

She had no choice but to slowly approach the cabin in the forest.

Chapter 274 No Time to Think of a Title _2

007 was extremely cautious. Instead of directly calling out to ask if anyone was inside, she cleverly pressed her ear against the door panel, trying to hear any movements within.

Indeed, she heard terrifying sounds.

A woman's bloodcurdling scream, the rising and falling shrieks of men, and... the sound of a chainsaw?

007 made an instant decision; before her legs could turn to jelly, she bolted in the opposite direction.

Fortunately, her luck was decent enough that she managed to sprint all the way into a town.

However, it was a bit strange. At the border between the forest and the village, she had seen a group of people. A group of people wasn't strange in itself, but this group all wore identical clothes. 007 didn't get a close look and ran straight here.

And before her was...

The Little Match Girl? No, that was wrong. She was selling lighters.

"Big Sister," the little girl by the shop window seemed to notice 007 beside her. She turned her head to look carefully at 007.

007 remembered that their mission was to escape Fairy Tale City. But as for how to escape or what they should do, she was utterly clueless.

Perhaps they were supposed to assist the game NPCs to get clues?

The little girl in front of me must be an important NPC, right?

Thinking this, 007 bent down slightly, offering a smile. "Do you need any help, Little Sister?"

The child barely reached 007's waist and looked to be only seven or eight years old. 007 seemed to quite like children; she even took the opportunity to reach out and gently ruffle the little girl's hair twice while speaking.

The little girl clearly hadn't expected her head to receive such treatment. She flushed red and then said softly, "Big Sister, would you like to buy a box of lighters? Perhaps in the light of the lighters, you'll see what you desire."

As she spoke, she diligently lifted the basket in her hands, apparently wanting her customer to see its contents clearly.

See what you desire... isn't that how one completes an instance mission?

Unfortunately, although 007 really wanted to complete this task, she was dirt poor—flat broke. Never mind the currency of this instance; she barely had any Game Coins. Her death rate in instances wasn't high, so she hadn't lost many items. However, Game Coins were just never enough; at least, she couldn't save them up in the short term.

Seemingly sensing her thoughts, the little girl tiptoed slightly and then whispered, "Big Sister, there's a forest nearby. You can go there to pick some deadwood to sell. If you're lucky, you might find other things..."

This must be a task assigned by an NPC, right?

007 straightened up. Even though there might be something terrifying in that forest, she still had to go. She couldn't abandon the mission just because something frightening was there.

She rubbed her temples, a slight headache forming, then turned to look back in the direction she had run from. She remembered seeing some deadwood at the border between the forest and the village.

Having to go gather deadwood to sell just to buy lighters... what a raw deal...

007 turned back and smiled at the little girl. "Wait here for a bit. I'll come back as soon as I've exchanged them for money."

Just then, the little girl suddenly took a step forward and tugged at the corner of 007's clothes. "Please wait."

As she spoke, she pulled out the cloth from under her basket.

Only then did 007 see clearly that it wasn't just a piece of cloth, but a tattered shirt.

"The villagers over there don't like outsiders picking things up on their land, and they all wear the same clothes. Big Sister, if you wear this, they won't recognize you as an outsider."

The little girl looked up at 007, smiling, her smile incredibly bright.

007 hesitated for a moment, then took the clothes and put them on. When she came from the forest, she had indeed seen many people wearing this type of clothing.

The little girl was right.

After putting on the clothes, 007 nodded at the girl with the basket, then headed off in the direction she had come from.

The little girl remained standing in the same spot, her bright smile fixed on her face, unchanging, until 007's back disappeared into the darkness.

「Not far away, in the cake shop.」

Chu Changge, dressed in a store uniform, was watching 007's retreating figure intently through the glass window.

The wall sconces cast a soft glow, illuminating the nostrils of the lady at the counter. The lady currently held her chin high, her mouth opening and closing as she spoke to Chu Changge, "Give me a donut."

This was the lady's third visit to the shop tonight.

Behind the counter were several people in identical uniforms; they were all employees of this cake shop. They were all bustling about, their hands never idle. Thanks to them, the cakes in the display case were all fully stocked.

Chu Changge glanced at the people around him but didn't move.

The lady before him was still looking down her nose at him. "Give me a donut."

Thanks to the wall sconces, the hairs in the lady's nostrils were clearly visible, a somewhat nauseating sight. Chu Changge paid no mind to these things.

He adjusted his glasses and, standing behind the counter, took off his uniform.

The few people nearby had no reaction.

Chu Changge paused again, then pushed open the counter gate and stepped out.

Still no reaction.

Only the nostril-flaring lady, head still high, repeated woodenly, "Give me a donut."

The lights in the cake shop were very bright, yet they inexplicably cast a chill.

Chu Changge didn't linger. He strode towards the entrance, pushed open the door, and walked further and further down the main street until he completely merged with the night, his figure disappearing from view.

Meanwhile, the customer inside the shop kept repeating her previous sentence.

「By this time, 007 had reached the border between the forest and the village.」

Although there was deadwood here, there wasn't much. She searched for a considerable time before gathering even a small amount.

"It's a bit cold..."

After gathering for a while, 007 rested in a nearby shelter. For some reason, this area had many shelters of various sizes. Some were very old, while others looked recently built. Though not as warm as a house, they could at least offer some protection from the biting wind.

Just as she had been resting in a shelter for a short while, she suddenly saw a white figure dart out from the woods and head in a specific direction.

Midnight, a white figure, the woods. These elements combined screamed horror movie. Since this was a horror instance, such things weren't surprising.

However, 007 soon realized this white figure wasn't some terrifying element, but a person. Someone who looked like a Doctor. His white coat fluttered slightly in the wind, and he carried a large guitar on his back. Like a Doctor unwilling to give up his hobby.

It had to be said, a Doctor in a white coat appearing in such a place in the middle of the night was genuinely creepy. However, 007 wasn't thinking about how creepy it was.

Such a strange outfit... could it be another player?

At the start of the instance, it was said there were eight players. But she hadn't encountered any yet. Naturally, she couldn't let this person, who was very likely another player, get away.

Thinking this, 007 quickly scrambled out of the shelter and stood up, intending to give chase.

Unfortunately, the white figure vanished too quickly, gone in an instant. If she hadn't gotten a clear look, she really would have thought a ghost had just drifted past her.

007 plopped back down on the spot she had warmed with her body. Forget it... He runs really fast...

「Meanwhile, a Doctor appeared on the bustling streets of Wangcheng City.」

Gu Mian adjusted the chainsaw on his back and surveyed the bustling street. Both sides of the street were lined with a dazzling array of shops: clothing stores, cake shops, drink shops, pastry shops, and restaurants.

Bright lights streamed from the glass shopfronts, illuminating the street teeming with people, making it as bright as day.

Of course, most numerous were the peddlers wandering the main street. Many peddlers had set up stalls on both sides of the sidewalk, but they all looked listless, not even bothering to look up when people passed by.

Gu Mian glanced at the items they were selling. Strange. Why is almost everyone selling the same things?

Chapter 275 Gugu tragically encounters a river crab_1

There was a maroon fruit, somewhat akin to a cherry tomato, its peel already shriveled. I didn't know whether it was naturally like this or had dried up later on. If it had dried up later, selling such a product to customers would be rather immoral. Almost all the vendors were selling this type of fruit. Gu Mian even walked forward, picked up a few to examine them. There was nothing special. No characteristics that would make them poisonous upon contact...

The wind never ceased, making the corners of the vendors' stall cloths flutter. A few fruits rolled into the middle of the road, carried by the wind. A vendor, head down, stretched out his hand, woodenly smoothed the tattered cloth of his stall, and continued to stare fixedly at the ground. The few lone fruits remained lying in the middle of the street, ignored by everyone.

People came and went on the street. Occasionally, a lady with her head held high or a neatly dressed man would pass by the vendors. All of them looked straight ahead, seemingly disdainful of the stalls lining both sides of the street. A lady in white leather shoes, head held high, stepped on one of the small fruits in the middle of the road as she walked. The maroon fruit instantly burst, its bright red juice splashing everywhere. Some of it even landed on the lady's white shoes, and a few drops splattered

onto the shoes of nearby people. But the lady didn't care, and neither did anyone else. Still with her head held high, she walked down the brightly lit street, her chin lifted, seemingly showcasing her noble identity with every step. Gu Mian glanced at the white shoes, then averted his gaze.

The most conspicuous person on this street wasn't the lady who had stepped on the fruit, but a little girl standing not far away, her eyes glued to the pastries in a shop window. Children her age were rare on this street, and she was dressed in particularly eye-catching rags—indeed, the tattered little girl was more conspicuous than others. Moreover, she was carrying a basket disproportionately large for her small frame. It looked rather comical, as if she were a naughty child who had sneaked out with her parents' grocery basket to play.

Gu Mian naturally walked towards her. As he drew closer, the light from the display case allowed him to clearly see the items in the little girl's basket: three lighters. A gold one, a silver one, and an ordinary one. The bottom seemed to be lined with a layer of tattered cloth.

Just as Gu Mian suddenly remembered something, the little girl in front of the window evidently noticed him too. She tilted her head, looking over at him and meeting his gaze. Then, Gu Mian saw her lips part, and a sweet voice emerged, "Sir, would you like to buy a lighter?"

Look, what a familiar plot this is. If the lighters in the basket were replaced with some primitive matches, this would be the classic 'The Little Match Girl' story. Times are always progressing, and even NPCs in instances aren't willing to be left behind. This one before him clearly had a strong enterprising spirit. The 'Little Match Girl' had abandoned outdated matches and switched to selling lighters...

While Gu Mian was still marveling at the progress of the times in his heart, the little girl in front of him spoke again. This time, however, her tone changed, as if she was growing impatient, or perhaps she thought Gu Mian wouldn't buy her lighters. A somewhat cold voice came through, tinged with a sinister air, "Sir, are you buying or not?"

This tone was like that of a domineering street vendor using high-pressure sales tactics, the kind who would be very displeased if you bought too little. Gu Mian looked down at the little girl selling lighters in front of him. She was looking up at him, her face already showing some displeasure.

Faced with such aggressive sales tactics, Gu Mian would naturally rise to resist. He adjusted the guitar on his back, then stared intently at the little girl before him and slowly said, "I'll... take... them... all."

The night passed very slowly. 007 had managed to gather a few bundles of dry branches with great difficulty. By the second half of the night, she couldn't bear the cold and hunger any longer and planned to take a short nap in the lean-to. She hadn't expected to sleep so soundly; when she opened her eyes, the sky was already bright. 007 scrambled to her feet, patting the dry grass off herself. What happened? How did I sleep for so long?

To enhance her constitution, she entered an instance almost every day. Although one's body wouldn't be harmed in an instance, mental damage was unavoidable. Continuously entering instances without a break would affect one's spirit. However, to strengthen herself, 007 didn't stop entering instances. She had invested all her Attribute Points into spiritual power, which was how she barely managed to cope. Her stats panel was slightly stronger than others—just slightly. This was because dying in an instance would cause a loss of Attribute Points, Game Coins, or items. She had nearly lost everything a few times but had managed to build it all back up by continuously entering instances. Theoretically, her spiritual power should have been enough to allow her to go two nights without sleep without feeling too tired. Yet, in this instance, she couldn't even last the first night and fell asleep.

007 propped herself up against the grass shelter. Her prominent spiritual power meant other deficiencies; her stamina wasn't very good. Now, hungry and cold, she felt a bit unsteady as she suddenly stood up. As soon as she got up, she scanned her surroundings. There were no threats, and 007 breathed a sigh of relief. I'm really lucky. She had slept at the edge of the forest and woken up without a scratch. And this is supposed to be a Mysterious Dungeon.

The daytime temperature here was quite considerable. The sun in the sky dispelled the cold, making one feel warm and comfortable. 007 supported herself for only a short while before heading towards the town. Could it be because it was too cold last night, and I was too hungry, so my stamina didn't hold up and I slept through? It seems I'll have to strengthen my stamina attribute in the future...

As she pondered this, she weighed the few bundles of dry branches in her hand. She had only managed to gather this much in half a night. Theoretically, the edge of the forest shouldn't lack dry branches. 007 didn't know how much these dry branches would sell for—perhaps not enough to buy a lighter. However, she could go to town first to check the prices and see what customers needed, what sold well, and what was most profitable. She needed to investigate all of this. If the dry branches were truly worthless, she could find something else to sell. Yesterday, she really hadn't expected dry branches to be so scarce, which was why she had come here to gather them without hesitation. The dry grass underfoot made a CRUNCH CRUNCH sound as she stepped on it. 007 stomped a few more times before continuing towards the town.

The main street was as bustling during the day as it was at night. However, because the sun hung high, the nearby shops didn't need to turn on their lights. Without the lights, the street seemed to be missing

something at first glance. 007 quickly found the spot where the tattered little girl had been yesterday. Sure enough, she was still standing there in the distance. 007 quickened her pace in that direction for a few steps, but then she suddenly realized something wasn't quite right. From afar, she couldn't see the little girl clearly. It was only after running a few steps forward that 007 noticed the peculiarity.

She seems... fatter? And a little shorter? 007 stopped, frowning as she observed the figure of the 'little girl' not far away. The figure had its back to her, and the basket that had been slung over 'her' arm yesterday was now on the ground beside 'her'. People were coming and going, but no one seemed to notice anything unusual about this 'little girl,' nor did anyone spare more than a glance at her basket.

007, suspicious, took a few more steps forward and began to observe carefully. Soon, she discovered some extraordinary things. Her eyes widened, and her mouth fell slightly agape. This, this, this... Then, right before her eyes, the 'tattered little girl,' seemingly a bit impatient, stood up, still with 'her' back to 007.

That's right, the 'little girl' was squatting just now. Wait, that's not a little girl!

007 couldn't understand why, after just one night's sleep, the little girl selling lighters had turned into a young man selling lighters. Moreover, this young man seemed to have inherited the little girl's clothes, wearing them like a cape. He was seen sorrowfully brushing the tattered fabric of the clothes, as if wanting to cover up the holes. Fortunately, he was wearing a white coat underneath, so he wasn't so deranged as to appear in public wearing only that tiny garment.

Just then, 007 again saw the guitar case lying in front of the man, with only a corner visible. Seeing this guitar case, she suddenly understood something. Isn't this... the Forest Ghost from last night? The one who, despite being a Doctor, wouldn't sacrifice his passion for music for his career—of course, this was just 007's assumption.

In that instant, 007 wasn't sure if she should leave or go up and greet him... She wasn't at all sure if this person was a player. Besides, the sudden appearance of this white figure in the forest last night had given her a real fright. Speaking of which, 007 admitted to herself that she had only been truly frightened twice during this current instance. One time was in the forest, in front of the wooden cabin, when she heard tragic screams coming from inside, like a scene from hell. At that moment, she felt she was only a hair's breadth from death. The second time was being startled by this white figure, though the impact was much less than the first.

At this moment, 007 recalled her previous few disastrous deaths in instances. Each death had been incredibly gruesome, but what was even more miserable was taking stock of the few possessions she had left after exiting the instance. Thinking of this, she took a slight step back. Of the Thirty-Six Stratagems, fleeing is best... However, seeing Gu Mian's white coat, she hesitated again. Characters in an instance wouldn't usually dress like this...

And just as 007 hesitated, she suddenly noticed that the guitar case in front of the man wasn't properly zipped, and something inside was glinting. 007 took a step forward, wanting to see more clearly. Why would a guitar reflect light? Could it be that it's not a guitar inside? But very quickly, she saw clearly what was inside. Upon seeing the object inside, her previous hesitation instantly turned into decisiveness.

007 didn't delay for a moment. She turned and bolted, running even faster than she had in the forest.

Players all have inventory slots! Why would anyone carry such a heavy chainsaw around?

Players can't even attack ghosts in an instance! So, even if he is a player, that chainsaw must be for killing other players!

Chapter 276 Scratching the Head and Posing, Looking at Beng Beng_1

Gu Mian squatted here, wearing the little girl's clothes, purely for the off-chance he might run into other players.

The odds of encountering other players on a bustling street were, after all, higher than in a desolate forest.

However, he had been squatting here for the better part of a day without any success.

He must be a psychopathic killer!

By this time, 007 had already sprinted far away.

The psychopathic killer Gu Mian, oblivious to the player rapidly distancing herself from him, watched the passersby with little interest. Feeling bored, he tugged at the rags he wore, then, thinking better of it,

lifted them slightly. This gesture of suggestively adjusting his clothes was strikingly similar to how a bare-shouldered prostitute might solicit customers outside a brothel. However, in broad daylight, no one paused to observe Gu Mian's preening.

Not that Gu Mian had any intention of actually attracting customers.

After noticing something amiss with Princes Heitang and the Little Dwarf, he had formed a bold theory, but it still needed to be confirmed.

After a moment's hesitation, Gu Mian stepped onto the main street, basket in hand.

The street was crowded, but no one seemed to pay him any mind.

Gu Mian tried to stop a passing man. "Sir, buy a lighter?"

The man looked annoyed, yanked his sleeve free from Gu Mian's grasp, and promptly walked off in the opposite direction.

Gu Mian stared thoughtfully at the man's retreating back.

He tried this with several other people, but without exception, they all left impatiently, ignoring him completely.

Gu Mian figured that even if he resorted to a public striptease, people would still walk past without a second glance.

Truly a crowd unmoved by physical charms.

After trying to engage a few more people, he completely abandoned the idea of getting any information from these passersby. They might hold important clues, but he clearly couldn't coax anything out of them.

"I still need to find the other players... Finding Chu Changge and Fatty is the priority right now," Gu Mian muttered to himself.

Lost in thought, he habitually lifted the little girl's tattered clothes draped over him again. He didn't actually want to run around in these ill-fitting garments, but if his suspicions were correct, he'd be done for without them.

Gu Mian resumed his wandering through the crowded streets.

No one paid any heed to this strangely dressed Doctor, who looked as if he had robbed a little girl of her only belongings.

Everyone was absorbed in their own tasks—which seemed to consist only of walking, staring straight ahead.

Since he wasn't getting anywhere here, Gu Mian decided not to linger.

Looks like to find the other players, I'll have to go back to last night's forest. Or maybe visiting Little Red Riding Hood's house will yield some clues?

The damned thing was, Gu Mian had no idea where Little Red Riding Hood's house was, and grabbing a random person on the street wouldn't get him an answer.

Got to hurry...

Gu Mian glanced up at the sun, high in the sky.

The daytime in this instance was very short, while the nights were comparatively long.

Although Fatty had forcibly stuffed a flashlight into his guitar case, allowing him to see at night, finding people was still best done during the day.

Meanwhile, 007 had reached the edge of the forest.

She paused for a moment, slowly recalling what had just transpired.

That person just now... their clothes didn't look like an NPC's. More like a player's.

But a player carrying a chainsaw... and one hidden in a guitar case at that? Anyone would instinctively keep their distance, right?

Just then, 007 suddenly heard voices conversing somewhere in the nearby forest.

The voices weren't too loud, nor too soft, just audible enough to reach her ears.

After a brief moment of consideration, 007 decided to head in the direction of the voices.

Before the instance evaluation system was revised, she had always prioritized survival. After all, just surviving until the end, even by doing nothing, would still grant rewards. Being too proactive, on the other hand, greatly increased the risk of death and losing items.

But things were different now.

If she wasn't proactive now, she might not even be able to afford food later on.

The path to the little girl selling lighters was now blocked by that bizarre, chainsaw-wielding Doctor. She had no choice but to take on quests from other NPCs.

With this in mind, she quickened her pace. Completing tasks for other NPCs should also provide clues on how to leave Fairy Tale City...

Soon, she reached the source of the voices.

Two people were talking a short distance ahead.

Catching sight of them from a distance, 007 frowned slightly and darted behind a nearby tree. She peeked out, revealing only half her face, as she carefully observed the pair.

The reason was simple: one of the two figures looked decidedly odd.

Having experienced countless instances, she had long since mastered the skill of instantly finding cover at the slightest hint of anything unusual.

It was a hunched woman, completely enveloped in a cloak. She sat on the dry grass with her head bowed low, her face obscured by shadows. Only a sharp nose poked out from under her hood, giving her an uncanny resemblance to a wicked witch.

Although it was broad daylight with the sun high overhead, the area around the woman seemed strangely dim. 007 couldn't tell if it was an illusion or simply the shade from the trees...

Chapter 277 Scratching the Head and Posing, Looking at Beng Beng_2

007 hid behind a tree, watching the other side intently. The two people there seemed unaware of her presence.

In the dim forest, a woman resembling a witch extended a withered hand, her fingers almost as thin as the thinnest dry twig 007 might hold. They looked dry and stiff, as if they would SNAP if bent even slightly. At this moment, this skeletal hand was tightly gripping a soft, tender one, its fingertips still tinged with pink. The contrast made the witch's hand look even more emaciated. The other tender hand belonged to the woman standing opposite the witch.

Since the woman's profile was turned to her, 007 couldn't get a clear look, only a vague outline.

With just one look, 007 was filled with admiration.

Is she a princess from a fairy tale? She's so beautiful! Even a glimpse is enough to perceive her striking beauty.

007 knew that "striking" wasn't the best adjective to describe beauty, but she couldn't think of a better one for the moment.

However, she looks somewhat familiar? And judging by her outfit, she doesn't look like an NPC. She seems more like a player. Her clothes are a mess; she clearly has no clue how to match outfits. A green vest over a pink sweater, and black sweatpants... The pants are ordinary enough, I guess. There isn't much one can mess up with a pair of pants...

Usually, beautiful people also have pleasant voices.

007 listened intently to their conversation.

"Beautiful girl," the witch said, gripping the lovely woman's hand tightly, "I am an old woman passing through this forest. I've been forced to rest here due to an injury. Could you do me a favor?"

Indeed, this witch seemed incapable of significant movement. Even the act of reaching out and grasping the other's hand appeared to exhaust her.

007 knitted her brows.

For some reason, these words sound oddly familiar. Come to think of it, the little girl selling lighters said something similar to me. Although the words were different on the surface, the meaning was pretty much the same. They were all asking for help.

Is this how all the NPCs in this instance give out tasks?

As these thoughts crossed 007's mind, she shifted her feet slightly to change her position. Just then, she felt her foot kick something. Luckily, the two over there didn't seem to notice.

She looked down and saw a shovel lying there. It looked as if it had been there for a very long time; it was almost completely rusted through.

The conversation between the two figures ahead continued, and this time, it was the beautiful woman who spoke.

"If there's anything I can assist you with, I'll do my best to help."

The beauty's voice is indeed pleasant, gentle, and kind. Even though this NPC looks so sinister, clearly not a good sort, that woman still agreed to help without hesitation.

007 squatted, examining the shovel at her feet while stealthily eavesdropping on their conversation. Half of the shovel was buried in the earth. She carefully dug it out, only to discover something else underneath.

"Actually, it's not a difficult task," came the elderly voice. "Help me dig up ten medicinal herbs. You might not have seen this herb before; it grows underground. It's red, slender, and long, with many roots around it, like a centipede."

At that moment, 007 had just picked up what the shovel had unearthed. But before she had a chance to inspect it closely, the elderly voice spoke again, "Here, take this, it'll make your task easier..."

007 paused, then suddenly looked up.

Sure enough, a shovel—neither too big nor too small—had appeared in the witch's hand. She was now passing it to the woman opposite her.

007's pupils constricted sharply.

A shovel...

There's an identical one under my foot! Although it's rusty, its size and style are still clear. They're practically identical.

This means someone else, with an identical shovel, dug something in this spot before... But given how rusty this shovel is, it must have been a long time ago.

A long time ago... Could a player who entered this instance much earlier have left it after doing this task?

So, this instance's data doesn't reset? How can items left by previous players still be here?!

007 was somewhat bewildered.

Then, she discovered something even more terrifying—the item in her hand had triggered some changes. It was a small, pendant-like object. But whether because it had been buried for too long or for some other reason, it was as corroded as the shovel, its original appearance almost unrecognizable.

Not long after 007 picked it up, her panel appeared.

[Item Name: Sunny Day Charm (Corrupted)]

[System Message: Data analysis failed. Data structure abnormal.]

[Analysis: Failed.]

Is this... a special item? The panel only shows up to give a description when you acquire a special item in an instance. But what do these garbled characters mean...? Is the special item's data corrupted? Melted?

Melted!

At this thought, 007 froze.

Melted! Connecting this to what I've seen and heard before, and that Doctor disguised as a little girl... I think I suddenly understand something!

007 quickly raised her head to look at the two people ahead again. The woman opposite the witch had already agreed to her request.

"Rest assured, I will definitely help you find those herbs."

Chapter 278 Scratching the Head and Posing, Looking at Beng Beng_3

The person opposite her gave her assurance, then turned to the witch sitting on the ground with great concern to confirm. As she left, for some reason, her expression of concern seemed a bit too forced, like that of an inept actor in front of the camera.

But 007 didn't dwell on it. Her mind was currently fixed on only one thing—

No, I must not let her go!

But that person was heading in the opposite direction from her. 007 didn't dare to pass directly in front of the old witch. She could only take a wide detour before running in the direction the person had gone.

As she ran swiftly through the forest, she used her sleeve to wipe the sweat beading on her forehead.

For someone like her, who hadn't invested points in stamina, such a frantic sprint was truly demanding. Usually, 007 wouldn't meddle in other people's business within an instance, since dying there didn't mean true death.

But if her guess was correct, this current instance... was probably different.

Why? Why would such a change occur?

From now on, even instances that were considered relatively safe might not be safe anymore!

True hunts often begin silently, snaring unsuspecting prey all at once.

007 ran desperately through the woods. The kicked-up dust filled her mouth and nostrils, making her want to sneeze, but this was no time to stop for that.

I have to find that person first.

Theoretically, that person should be moving intermittently, as she needs to dig for herbs.

But 007 had sprinted for a long way without seeing any sign of her, almost making her suspect she had taken the wrong path. However, it turned out she was indeed going the right way.

Just as 007 was about to run out of breath, she finally spotted that familiar figure.

"COUGH, COUGH... How... how is she so fast...?"

007 leaned against a tree, coughing a few times, puzzled. I sprinted at full speed, yet she's still strolling leisurely ahead!

She didn't remain puzzled for long and lifted her foot, intending to walk over.

But just then, 007 saw the person in front suddenly turn sideways, revealing half her face.

It was the same half-face she had seen earlier, but the expression on it was completely different.

The earnest "I'll do this task properly" expression she wore earlier had vanished. Instead, she expressionlessly tossed the shovel aside. Her movements were remarkably practiced, as if she had deceived countless NPCs about their tasks before.

007 could tell her expressionless face wasn't due to anger or anything else. It seemed more like she found making expressions too tiring and couldn't be bothered to fake it anymore.

007 was still catching her breath. She looked at the person in front with some astonishment. What's going on? Could it be she already knows about that matter?

Only then did 007 realize the sky had already darkened, making it almost impossible to see things in the distance.

She quickened her pace, wanting to catch up to the person ahead and ask, but the person moved very fast and disappeared from sight in a moment.

Leaving a bewildered 007 standing in place. She even called out to the person ahead. Did she not hear me?

Surrounded by trees, truth be told, she had no idea where she was now.

But that doesn't matter.

007 leaned against a nearby tree and sat down, thinking, If things are really as I imagine, then it shouldn't matter where I am... as long as I don't accept tasks from NPCs...

Thinking of this, she felt fortunate that she hadn't stubbornly insisted on doing the task given to her by the little girl with the lighter.

As the sky grew progressively darker, a north wind began to blow through the forest, making one feel intensely cold.

007 subconsciously wrapped her clothes tighter around herself.

But just then, her eyes suddenly widened as she looked down at her clothes.

"How could... this be..."

Chapter 279 The Humble 007 [Thanks to the Alliance Leader of the Wild Wolf in Frenzy]_1

They had grown together.

In the dim light, 007 stared intently at the coat clinging to her body.

She and this coat... they had grown together.

Because it had been too cold the previous night, 007 had no intention of taking off her coat. She shivered through the night, wearing it while collecting dry twigs.

Upon waking, she had too much to do, causing her to completely forget about the coat the little girl had given her.

She had never imagined that merely wearing clothes from the instance could lead to a slow fusion with it.

Yes, fusion...

Their mission was to escape from Fairy Tale City.

And this so-called Fairy Tale City **is** the instance!

All players who enter this instance will slowly fuse with it, until their identity as "players" becomes completely blurred, eventually becoming a part of this instance!

Not long ago, 007 discovered this truth.

She had seen the mechanical people wandering the streets and had been suspicious, but observing them alone yielded no conclusions.

Until, just a short while ago, she found a shovel.

A shovel with a special item attached to it, seemingly used by a group of players long ago who had then left their special item behind.

By the time 007 found that special item, it was no longer functional. Even its description was garbled, as if its data had been corrupted by the instance...

The instance destroying special items—this was unheard of!

It was then that 007 realized that a witch-like character was assigning tasks to players, tasks remarkably similar to those given by the little girl selling lighters. The NPCs in this instance, it seemed, all enjoyed assigning tasks that consumed vast amounts of players' time, making it easier for them to merge with this world.

Furthermore, the witch handed that player a shovel identical to the one 007 now possessed.

This implied that, long ago, the witch had given similar tasks to previous groups of players. However, those players who had accepted the tasks seemed to have vanished, not only abandoning their shovels but also their special items, which were now found with corrupted data.

Connecting this with the mechanical people she had seen earlier on the streets, 007 finally understood.

All players who failed their tasks were assimilated by the instance!

Those mechanical people she had seen were all assimilated players!

007 recalled a rule of this global game: an instance cannot host two groups of players simultaneously. For a new group to enter, the previous one must have exited completely, every single one of them.

If those mechanical people truly were players from previous groups, then theoretically, her current group shouldn't have been able to enter. But there was another explanation—

Those people... they no longer counted as players.

They had been completely assimilated into this instance as NPCs, no longer classifiable as "players."

Therefore, in this instance, the only true "players" were indeed her current group...

They call this place "Fairy Tale City," but its real name ought to be "Assimilation City."

Now, 007 thought she understood how to complete the mission "Escape Fairy Tale City."

Don't accept any tasks from NPCs right from the start.

Stay away from everyone here from the very beginning.

Don't touch anything here from the outset.

If you act completely out of sync with this Fairy Tale City, you won't be assimilated. Someone like that would probably be ejected from the instance before long. But those who are unfortunately assimilated...

007 shivered violently.

If a player dies in an instance, they simply wake up in reality. But this instance doesn't cause death. It gradually assimilates players, making them part of itself. This means...

The sky had completely darkened.

The moon was absent from tonight's sky, making the forest seem even more sinister than the night before.

007 tugged hard at the fabric of her sleeve again. It hurt. The coat had completely fused with her skin.

This meant she was already starting to be assimilated by the instance.

Yesterday, she was still worried about being suddenly hunted by an Evil Ghost. But now she understood. In this instance, there are no such gory dangers as I had imagined.

That previous despair when facing an Evil Ghost, the heart-wrenching screams and struggles, the pores on her back dilating abruptly on the brink of life and death—none of those terrifying, horrifying scenes will occur here.

There is only a calm, lonely panic, gradually intensifying and spreading throughout my body.

It's like an elderly person at the end of their days, watching death slowly draw near—filled with reluctance, yet utterly powerless.

I will watch myself die in this bizarre way.

A true death.

Even if my body remains, moving meaninglessly, I myself will be truly dead. That moving body will be nothing more than a pre-programmed walking corpse.

The night wind blew through the forest.

The leaves overhead rustled again, as if applauding and mocking the foolish humans.

007 closed her eyes and clenched her teeth. Or perhaps, if I had discovered the truth sooner and stayed away from everything in this instance, there might have been a chance of salvation...

No, it's not too late! She suddenly opened her eyes, as if a thought had struck her.

I absolutely cannot die in this place!

With this thought, she gritted her teeth and pulled a boning knife from her inventory.

If I die before being completely assimilated by the instance, will I be saved?

All I have to do is kill myself first!

But after drawing the knife, she hesitated.

No, that's not safe... Part of my body has already been assimilated. What if, upon death, I'm instantly and completely assimilated?

I must... find a safer way. I have to sever all my connections to this instance first...

At this thought, 007 hesitated for a moment. Then, under the cover of darkness, she raised the knife in her right hand.

Just then, the moon, which had been hidden by dark clouds, peeked out. Moonlight glinted off the sharp knife in her hand, the blade flashing with a fierce, cold light.

The gleaming tip of the knife approached the cuff of her left sleeve and then, without hesitation, descended, slicing into it as if through tofu.

The sharp edge pierced the skin of her arm. She didn't pause. Bolstered by what courage she had left, she quickly and decisively gripped the knife tighter and slashed upwards forcefully, dragging the tip all the way to her elbow.

Only then did the searing pain finally register in her mind.

Chapter 280 Gu Bapi_1

The nerves at the wound site pulsed incessantly. Her entire arm began to heat up, then throb with unbearable pain. All five fingers stiffened sharply; the slightest movement sent waves of agony through her.

Tears streamed from 007's eyes instantly, with no warning.

The pain was so intense her tears flowed uncontrollably; she lacked the energy to wipe them away.

Her nose felt stuffy, and she could hardly breathe. 007 sniffed hard.

I've lost too much blood... I absolutely can't die before it's all peeled off!

Agonizing pain flooded her mind, leaving no room for thought. She subconsciously fumbled for a small plastic medicine bottle, wrenched off the cap, and poured all the pills into her mouth. Then, she quickly shoved the empty bottle back into her mouth, biting down hard.

Anyone familiar with the medical supplies section of a supermarket would have recognized it as a rather expensive medicine.

After consuming an entire bottle of pills, the amount of fresh blood gushing out seemed to decrease slightly. The medication was not very effective at this point, but it could still buy her some time.

Fortunately, the garment had only fused with her two arms and a part of her shoulders; most of it hadn't yet integrated with her body.

Just making an incision on her arm wouldn't completely peel off the cloth that had grown on her body. 007 was well aware of this.

This was not the moment of greatest pain.

She bore the pain, then tremblingly held the knife in her right hand, placing the blade against her elbow.

Then, she slashed fiercely, making a short, horizontal cut that formed a 'T' shape with the previous incision reaching her elbow.

Trembling, 007 pressed the tip of the knife into the intersection of the two cuts. Then, as if peeling fruit, she dug the blade in and sliced forward forcefully.

The quiet night air was broken by the sound of a plastic medicine bottle being crunched and her own heavy breathing.

A small flap of skin was peeled back, looking utterly horrifying under the dim moonlight.

Excruciating pain shot from her elbow to her brain.

No...this isn't enough...

007 let go of the boning knife in her hand.

"AHHHH!"

The small plastic bottle was completely bitten in half and fell from her mouth. The entire forest echoed with her chilling screams.

Blood smeared her face and body.

A long strip of skin, still attached to the clothing, tore away from her blood-drenched arm and fell to the ground.

At this moment, 007 felt as if her arm had exploded.

The excruciating pain spread from her arm throughout her body. Even her inner ears seemed to clench violently, as if stabbed by a needle.

Before she fainted, 007 had a moment of clarity. She had overestimated herself. Even if she had poured all her Attribute Points into spiritual power, she still couldn't withstand the agony of being flayed alive.

This is the end. I'm still going to die here...

A girl in a plaid skirt collapsed into the darkness of the forest.

Her horrific, mangled arm lay exposed, oozing blood relentlessly.

A short while later, a foot emerged from the forest's darkness.

Two feet drew nearer, about to tread on the grievously injured arm.

Fortunately, Gu Mian had sharp eyes and recoiled his foot just as he was about to step on her.

He peered at the suspicious, rod-like object protruding from behind a nearby tree. "What the hell is that?"

Gu Mian looked behind the tree. A girl lay there, apparently sleeping soundly—if one ignored the blood splattered on her face and body, the blood-soaked boning knife on the ground, and the nearby detached piece of skin, she did indeed seem to be sleeping peacefully.

"007?" Gu Mian noticed her player nickname.

Then, he noticed what looked like a broken pill bottle beside 007's head. He gently shifted her head and picked it up.

[Life Type C - Hematopoiesis Pills]

[After consumption, the body's blood volume will double in twenty minutes. If there are wounds, it will slightly suppress the bleeding.]

[Note: Do not use without a significant loss of blood!]

A C-grade pill?

Gu Mian had only ever bought D-grade pills; he hadn't encountered C-grade ones before.

But this medicine is life-type...

Life-type medicine could certainly work in instances, though its effectiveness would be greatly reduced. Gu Mian didn't know by exactly how much, as he'd never experimented with it.

Gu Mian squatted down and hoisted 007 into his arms to gauge her weight; she was quite light.

"Looks like she realized how dangerous this instance is. That's why she used medicine meant for life-or-death situations in reality here in the instance," he mumbled, tugging at the jacket 007 wore.

Although it was quite dark in the forest, Gu Mian could still see clearly. As expected. She fused with the instance because of this clothing.

One had to admit, she was quite the heroine to even think of skinning herself, even if she ultimately failed...

But it's fine. A professional doctor is here now.

The sanitary conditions here are atrocious, and there are no sterile scalpels. But there's no time to worry about that. If I delay, 007 on the ground will die.

It's a good thing she fainted. Otherwise, I'd find it really hard to begin. It's like operating on a patient without anesthesia; it's impossible not to feel a heavy weight on my conscience.

I only hope she doesn't suddenly open her eyes while I'm performing the surgery...

Lost in thought, Gu Mian laid 007 on the ground, switched on the flashlight Fatty had stuffed into his hand before they entered the instance, and began to operate.

「On the other side」

Fatty, who had given Gu Mian the flashlight, was also being forcefully pressed to the ground.

Chu Changge's voice came from above him. "There's no anesthetic here. Don't move."

Pressed to the ground, Fatty was on the verge of tears.

A short while ago, he and the strongest supermodel were still searching for Little Green Hat's home. But soon, they both realized something was wrong.

When day broke, the terrifying face that had appeared from nowhere vanished, and both of them sighed in relief.

However, the daytime temperature was quite high. They wanted to remove the wolf pelts and carry them, but were horrified to discover parts of the pelts had already fused with their bodies.

It was as if this layer of pelt had grown directly from their own skin.

The supermodel panicked. He tried to forcibly rip the wolf pelt off, but after a brief attempt, he realized it was impossible.

It was too painful.

If he wanted to rip it off, he would have to tear off a chunk of his own flesh as well.

At this point, they ran into Little Green Hat.

"You've both been tricked by Elizabeth," the little girl in the green hat said, looking at them. "I can help you remove this layer of pelt, but... you have to do something for me first."