

Collapse 311

Chapter 311 Cunning Spirit_1

Bai Qiong's brows twitched. "Has someone already caught the ghost?"

Gu Mian replied, "Of course. By the way, how were you able to call my phone?"

Bai Qiong knew this wasn't the time to waste, so he briefly recounted how he had obtained the Key and reached the underground warehouse.

Then he urgently said, "The ghost has become a true ghost now! I'll inform the others first. Goodbye."

"Wait," Gu Mian interjected. "When you tell them, add that this ghost can teleport and even knows everyone's location."

Bai Qiong paused for a moment. He didn't ask how Gu Mian knew this but simply agreed, "Okay."

The call ended as soon as he finished speaking.

Soon, all remaining players would learn the truth of this instance, and panic would spread among all living players.

And it was currently only 10:40. There was still an hour and twenty minutes before this horrifying instance would end.

And this hour and twenty minutes would be a nightmare for all remaining players. What was originally an instance full of thrills but no real danger would now turn into a true nightmare. All they could do was run for their lives.

In the quiet night, Bai Qiong's voice wasn't particularly soft, so Fatty, who was right beside Gu Mian, heard everything clearly.

Fatty said hesitantly, "Doctor, if Bai Qiong is right, then this instance provided us with clues from the very beginning. It was designed for players to find clues and discover that the ghost could switch identities with them."

There was even a phone left in the final underground warehouse that could call everyone's cell phone, ensuring that once the truth was discovered, everyone could be notified immediately.

"That's right. The standard procedure would be to first find clues and then discover the truth," Gu Mian nodded.

Fatty pursed his lips and asked timidly, "But, Doctor... I don't think I saw you find any clues..."

One could even say he deduced the truth of this instance completely empty-handed.

He's truly incredible, Fatty thought to himself.

Gu Mian had no idea Fatty was silently praising him; he was still deep in thought.

In this instance, the ghost, as a survivor, was at an absolute disadvantage.

But it still managed to turn the tables.

"The Doctor and the ghost are truly incredible..." Fatty's voice came from beside him again. "But Doctor, don't you think the teammates we were matched with this time are also quite smart?"

They were indeed quite smart.

The normal way to clear this instance was originally: "Find clues → Discover the truth → Devise a countermeasure."

But in this instance, someone, with no clues at all, relied on their own deductions to discover that the ghost was constrained by the Hunter—though that deduction ultimately went astray...

The players they were matched with this time were noticeably more intelligent than those from previous matches.

However, smart people may outsmart themselves.

If all the players who entered this instance had been the type with negative IQ who only screamed upon encountering the ghost, the situation wouldn't have developed like this.

By this time, the two of them had gone up another floor.

Gu Mian was pushing open a door in front of him.

As soon as the door was pushed open a crack, a cold wind gusted out, as if a window in the room was open.

When the door was fully open, Gu Mian saw that the window in the room was indeed broken—shards of glass littered the floor, and there was a large, jagged hole in the windowpane.

The whistling wind surged into the dilapidated room.

Thankfully, a figure stood before the shattered window, blocking some of the cold wind for them.

Dim light filtered in from outside, outlining the person's silhouette with a faint glow. Even the glasses perched on his nose reflected the faint light from the window.

"Brother Chu!" Fatty exclaimed, recognizing the person, and walked forward.

But after only a few steps, he felt a familiar sensation underfoot.

When Fatty was a child, he had once accidentally stepped on a dead mouse in a dark room. The sensation under his foot now was disturbingly similar to that of the dead mouse back then.

As Fatty stopped, Gu Mian also looked down at the ground.

It was Ji Bie Li, strangled.

Due to asphyxiation, her entire face was cyanotic, a purplish-blue. Her long tongue lolled out limply, and the whites of her eyes were shockingly prominent in the darkness.

She was looking right at him.

Fatty's expression changed drastically. He stumbled back several steps before steadying himself.

The area where Ji Bie Li lay was so dark that when they first entered, they had only seen Chu Changge by the window and hadn't noticed Ji Bie Li at their feet.

Gu Mian squatted down and saw what was wrapped around her neck: a pair of earphones.

Fatty had now lifted his head and was looking at Chu Changge with a questioning gaze, apparently baffled as to why Chu Changge would be in the same room as a corpse.

Chu Changge walked a couple of steps closer to the corpse. "This office building is in the city center, and it's quite tall. I originally planned to observe the city from up here, but it seems someone else had the same idea. She was already dead when I arrived in this room. It doesn't look like she was killed by the ghost."

Gu Mian nodded knowingly. "The ghost probably wouldn't use earphones to strangle someone unless it was incredibly bored. Besides, didn't Manjusaka, who was killed by the ghost, have no external injuries? This doesn't seem like the ghost's M.O."

Chu Changge's glasses glinted. "After observing for some time, I've deduced that the ghost belongs to the Survivor Camp and is focused on deceiving players to become a Hunter. I trust you two know this as well."

Gu Mian nodded.

Chu Changge continued, "It seems the ghost has now gotten what it wanted. As you know, because the instance initially placed severe restrictions on the ghost, the abilities it was given were absurdly powerful. It would have been manageable if the ghost had remained unable to kill, but now... I'm afraid this instance is about to become a living hell."

Being able to teleport and knowing every player's exact location—these two abilities alone are enough for it to unilaterally slaughter all survivors in the instance.

Survivors have probably already started dying.

Moreover, the roles of survivor and Hunter aren't fixed. Bai Qiong should have informed all living players of the current situation by now. This will lead to survivors frantically hunting down Hunters, attempting to switch identities.

Now, even walking down the street, one might be pounced upon by an oncoming survivor.

Not long ago, survivors were trembling in fear of Hunters...

Gu Mian patted his jacket. "So, we need to hurry."

As he spoke, he stood up, walked around Ji Bie Li, and headed out.

Fatty quickly stood up and followed. "Doctor, are you going to look for the murderer?"

"I'm looking for the ghost," Gu Mian glanced at him. "Why would I look for the murderer? It's not like I'm Conan..."

The murderer obviously had a motive.

This murderer might kill again, but as long as they weren't coming to assassinate him, it had nothing to do with him.

Gu Mian was well aware that this was no time to play "detective."

Now was the perfect time to catch the ghost!

As he walked on, he said to Fatty beside him, "Weren't we supposed to investigate the reason for my anomalous data? I reckon even if we caught the murderer, they couldn't explain it clearly, right? It's more practical to catch the ghost in this instance. It looks pretty smart to me."

Fatty watched, wide-eyed, as Gu Mian adopted an expression that clearly said, 'Strike while the iron is hot!' Cold sweat trickled down Fatty's forehead.

You're incredible, a real piece of work! Everyone else is scrambling to escape, and here you are, wanting to go straight up and wring the ghost's neck!

Meanwhile, Nine Lives, after receiving Bai Qiong's call, was already hiding fearfully among the shelves in the supermarket warehouse.

He had been searching the supermarket for a long time, following the clues on the receipt, but had found absolutely nothing. Then, just when he was at a complete loss, he received Bai Qiong's call.

After the call, Nine Lives was cursing between the shelves, "Damn it, what a treacherous ghost! And it can teleport and knows every player's location? It's not just bluffing, is it?"

Chapter 312 What is this thing_1

This was a large supermarket.

At the moment, Nine Lives was in a warehouse on the second floor. There were plenty of snacks on the surrounding shelves, but he didn't have an appetite right now.

If what Bai Qiong said is true, that the ghost can detect the location of all players and teleport... then wouldn't hiding here be pointless? Furthermore, if the ghost can only attack escapees, hiding so well becomes even more pointless.

With this in mind, Nine Lives felt a little more courageous.

He touched his ponytail. "I have nothing to fear from ghosts, as long as I don't run into anyone else before midnight..."

Just a while ago, the group of escapees was terrified of the Hunter, hiding out of sight. Who would have thought that the roles would be reversed so quickly? Now, it was the Hunter's turn to be chased by the escapees.

Indeed, fortunes shift, and no one escapes fate.

So even if there's no need to hide from ghosts now, I must hide from the escapees.

"I wonder how many escapees are left alive now." Nine Lives anxiously fiddled with his ponytail, his gaze fixed on the warehouse door.

Suddenly, footsteps sounded from beyond the door.

After only a few seconds, the faint sound disappeared.

Like a drop of water melting into a lake, it vanished into the silent night.

Nine Lives tensed his body, watching the warehouse door intently, even though he couldn't see a thing in the darkness outside.

He harbored a strange wish: he didn't want the figure outside to be a ghost, but nor did he want it to be a human.

After a long while, the disappeared footsteps didn't resurface, but Nine Lives still couldn't relax.

Just then, his sharp ears caught a faint noise.

It wasn't from the spooky warehouse door, but from...above his head.

He looked up slowly.

A pale face was hanging above him, unnoticed until now.

Run!

Nine Lives' extensive experience had instilled an immediate reaction: to run at the sight of a ghost.

His mind went blank. He bolted from the shelves and ran to the door without thinking.

His heart pounded like a drum. Holding his breath, he dashed forward, not even daring to glance back to see if the pale face was following.

As his heart throbbed wildly, the door was already close at hand. Nine Lives took a deep breath and rushed even faster toward it.

But just then, a blurred figure suddenly appeared before him.

The figure appeared from behind the door, standing just two meters away.

Seeing the figure, Nine Lives was stunned. The ghost *can* teleport!

But he was going too fast to stop. In the blink of an eye, he crashed into the figure, managing only to reach out and brace for impact.

The collision was so strong that Nine Lives and the figure rolled out of the warehouse together.

Amid the chaos, Nine Lives thought he heard a groan of pain.

What? Can ghosts feel pain when knocked down? Nine Lives groaned as he tumbled, every part of his body aching and his mind blurring.

Just then, he saw the figure jump up.

Nine Lives hurriedly backed away.

But that figure ignored him, turned, and fled in the opposite direction.

What's going on? Nine Lives' confusion grew as he watched the rapidly retreating figure.

Just then, a robotic voice sounded in his ear—"You have successfully captured an escapee. This player will replace you and become the new Hunter."

Nine Lives felt his head explode.

In other words, that figure was an escapee! I accidentally caught them during the tumble, and now our identities have reversed! I'm no longer the dominant Hunter in this instance! And now...

Nine Lives stiffly twisted his neck towards the warehouse door. In the pitch-black warehouse, a pair of pale feet appeared in his line of sight.

Scrambling to his feet, Nine Lives started running again, cursing as he ran, "Damn it!"

He sprinted, weaving through weak patches of light scattered throughout the supermarket and knocking over objects in his path.

Amidst the clatter, footsteps behind him sounded, THUD, THUD.

Like a wooden stick thumping the ground.

Nine Lives ran for his life, horrified to realize that he wasn't gaining any distance.

If anything, the sounds are getting closer! Run, run, run!

Nine Lives screamed inwardly, though whimpering sounds escaped his lips.

Yet, despite his pleas, he didn't seem to be moving any faster. Suddenly, he winced as a sharp pain shot through his thigh—apparently a pulled muscle from the intense running.

As time passed, the initially dull pain grew sharper, until eventually, each step brought excruciating agony.

He knew that continuing this way wasn't a solution. But the ghost behind him was getting closer and closer...

In the dimness, he saw what seemed to be a glimmer of light ahead.

A window!

Nine Lives was overjoyed. Supermarkets rarely had windows, at least not large ones, but now one was directly in front of him.

This is the second floor. Even if I jump out of the window, it won't be life-threatening.

Hearing the approaching sounds from behind, Nine Lives sprinted to the window and hurled himself out.

The ground below was concrete, offering no cushioning for his fall from the second floor.

During his descent, Nine Lives started to feel a flicker of fear, but before it could fully register, he crashed onto the ground. Intense pain shot through his body, so severe he couldn't tell which part hurt the most.

He gritted his teeth against the pain and, without hesitation, scrambled up and started to run.

This was a small alley behind the supermarket. Nine Lives bolted through it, only daring to glance back when he was about to emerge.

The pale face hovered in the dark window, staring in his direction—like a colorless, black-and-white photograph.

Nine Lives immediately jerked his head back around and sprinted away.

"Since this ghost can teleport and knows all the players' positions, it will catch me no matter where I run! So, I can't run to an open space. I have to go somewhere I can cleverly shake off the ghost quickly..."

With this in mind, he dashed towards an amusement park not far away.

The amusement park at night was eerily quiet. Nine Lives looked around, trembling, his attention soon caught by an unusual building.

Infinite Mirror House...

The so-called Infinite Mirror House was a labyrinth. Unlike ordinary labyrinths, its walls were made of mirrors.

These mirrors cleverly used angles to reflect their surroundings, causing visual disorientation. If not careful, people would smash right into them.

After a moment's thought, Nine Lives sneaked inside. He groped his way in and found a hidden, tricky corner where the mirrors could hardly reflect, then squatted down.

"Even if the ghost finds this house, it won't find my exact hiding place right away. I can also use the terrain to escape!"

As Nine Lives thought this, he glanced at his phone.

It was exactly 10:40.

One hour and twenty minutes left. Then this disastrous game of hide-and-seek will be over, and I'll get a decent score.

Thinking of this, he chuckled. After risking my life to catch an escapee, the final score definitely won't be low. I have to hold out for this hour and a bit for the final evaluation.

With this in mind, he lifted his head and stared intently at the mirror in front of him.

The mirrors here are the best messengers. If the ghost appears, it will definitely be reflected in the multitude of mirrors. Then I'll run away immediately!

Time flew by.

In the quiet night, the rustling of grass in the wind occasionally sounded near the entrance. Nine Lives' nerves were stretched taut, making him exceptionally sensitive.

After being startled numerous times, he shifted slightly, pulled out his phone, and checked the time.

It was 11:40!

Nine Lives was ecstatic.

Only twenty minutes left to end this damned game!

Thinking this, he raised his head.

A distorted face had somehow appeared around the corner.

Nine Lives shivered violently and immediately wanted to flee.

But he quickly realized—it's a reflection! It's the mirror! That face is reflected; the ghost itself isn't in that position!

As he pondered this, he began to move his body, intending to creep quietly in the direction away from the face.

But just then, the face around the corner suddenly twitched violently. Then, to Nine Lives' shock, all the mirrors around him instantly reflected the ghost face.

It teleported near me!

He saw the face turn slightly, its gaze seemingly searching for something. Nine Lives shrunk back, not daring to breathe.

But finally, that gaze landed on him.

It found me through the reflection in the mirrors...

The distorted face gave him an eerie smile.

Nine Lives shivered violently. It's over...

But at that moment, a sudden THUD, accompanied by a curse—"What the hell?!"—echoed in the room, and to his astonishment, the ghost face vanished!

Gu Mian was rubbing his nose, looking at the mirror he had knocked over. "This damn place. You hit the mirrors if you're not careful..."

Then, as if noticing something, he bent down, grabbed some hair sticking out from under the mirror, and lifted up what had been pinned beneath it. "What on earth is this?"

Chapter 313 Madness_1

Nine Lives watched wide-eyed as the ghost was suddenly crushed under the falling mirror. Immediately after, the Doctor, the suspected culprit, appeared.

Nine Lives opened his mouth, about to reveal himself and urge the Doctor to run. But what happened next made him snap his mouth shut again.

He watched in disbelief as the Doctor nonchalantly grabbed the hair of the ghost on the ground, yanking it out from under the mirror!

In a daze, Nine Lives even thought he heard something like, "What the hell is this thing?"...

That's a ghost!

He was dumbfounded, his eyes wide, staring fixedly at the Doctor who had suddenly appeared.

What was even more terrifying was that the ghost, its hair being pulled, allowed itself to be lifted like a dead pig, motionless, as if the mirror that had suddenly smashed onto it had killed it outright.

Nine Lives felt like he was going insane. He had never seen such a horrifying scene since the game began. A player was lifting a ghost by its hair... and this player clearly had no intention of being gentle!

Gu Mian, still clutching its hair, closely observed the face before him. Its eyes were tightly shut, and he leaned in so close it was as if he were about to press his own eyes against its face.

Fatty, who had rushed over upon hearing the commotion, arrived to witness this jarring scene.

Gu Mian watched Fatty huff and puff his way over, bumping into numerous mirrors. Clutching his chest with one meaty hand, Fatty looked at the ghost in Gu Mian's grasp and said, "Doctor, hold it tight! This ghost is very cunning; it'll run away the moment you loosen your grip!"

Nine Lives, hiding in the corner, shivered violently again. What did he mean by 'if you loosen your grip, it will run away'?

At this point, he was beginning to question his entire existence. Other Hunters can just openly catch ghosts like this? Is there something wrong with me? Is there actually a proper way to catch ghosts in this instance?

No, that can't be right!

Catching ghosts is supposed to be a trap!

It's entirely because some idiotic Hunters caught ghosts before, leading to an identity swap, that ghosts can now run rampant and slaughter in the instance!

So, catching ghosts is definitely not the way to clear this instance and survive!

Doing so would only lead to self-destruction!

But what on earth is happening right now...

Gu Mian noticed Chu Changge had also entered.

Chu Changge navigated with ease; his keen eyesight allowed him to distinguish the only clear path even in a room full of mirrors.

Seemingly reading Gu Mian's mind, Chu Changge said, "Increasing your spiritual power allows for heightened concentration, enabling you to observe things ordinary people can't. Your eyesight also improves."

As he spoke, he turned his head in a certain direction. "For example, I've noticed someone hiding over there."

Gu Mian turned to look. Sure enough, a figure was squatting there, seemingly trembling.

He recognized him: Nine Lives.

The long-haired young man met his gaze and trembled even more violently, a stark contrast to his previously cocky attitude.

This made Gu Mian wonder if there was something wrong with his own appearance.

Fatty chimed in opportunely, "He's probably scared of the ghost in your hand, Doctor?"

Exactly! Gu Mian nodded in complete agreement. No one would be afraid of a kind and amiable Doctor.

The kind and amiable Doctor showed no intention of comforting the young man. Gu Mian glanced at the time. "It's 11:47. We need to hurry."

We need to ask this ghost the important questions quickly, but definitely not here.

After all, someone else is still watching.

Without wasting any more time, Gu Mian left, holding his spoils.

Only after confirming the three had completely left did Nine Lives, still shaken, scramble to his feet.

"Damn it!" he cursed again. "If anyone ever tells me again that the Doctor is soft, I'll flip out on them!"

Soft? My ass!

By now, Gu Mian had found an ideal dark room for interrogation. This was a good place for an interrogation. Even if this ghost didn't know what he wanted to ask, as the saying goes, "Better to mistakenly kill a thousand than to let one escape."

But the prize in his hand kept its eyes tightly shut, as if it were already dead.

Everyone knew that ghosts don't usually die unless their heads fall off.

So, Gu Mian quickly brandished his Saw.

Half a second later, the ghost, which had its eyes tightly shut, immediately snapped them open.

Fatty, standing to the side, clucked in amazement.

Gu Mian had mentally rehearsed this interrogation countless times. He wanted to ask just one thing: why did he feel so out of place in this world, and why was he the only one who could truly die when they all played the game?

Of course, asking so directly would yield no results.

And Gu Mian couldn't ask something as glaringly suspicious as, "Why is my gender listed as a question mark in my data column?"

So, after a moment's thought, he asked, "Where are you from?"

To understand the true nature of this game, one had to start from its origins.

Gu Mian had realized long ago, especially after the Fairy Tale City instance, that this global game was more than just data.

So the question remained: what was the origin of this game, and how was it connected to him?

The ghost in his hand stared with wide, terrifyingly pale eyes that seemed to glow eerily in the darkness. It just gaped, its sockets looking as if they were about to disgorge its eyeballs.

Heaven knows, Gu Mian hadn't choked it or anything.

Seeing it remain silent, Gu Mian switched on the Saw again as a threat. The roar of the chainsaw echoed in the small room.

Fatty, at the side, saw the ghost's eyes bulge even further.

Chu Changge glanced at his phone. "It's 11:50. There are still ten minutes before this instance ends normally. Plenty of time."

Gu Mian brought the gleaming Saw closer to the ghost's neck, not actually touching it, but making a clear gesture.

The intimidation worked. The previously silent ghost suddenly opened its mouth, emitting a RASPING sound. It sounded like a critically ill old man trying to speak but being choked by thick phlegm.

Gu Mian didn't stop.

As the Saw drew nearer, the ghost's rasping grew more urgent.

"RASP... RASP... RASP... Sev..."

What?

Gu Mian paused. "Seven what?"

Chapter 314 You Better Get Lost_1

"I'm telling you! Do you know why the ghost hasn't appeared? Because it was caught by a Doctor just now!"

In the last few minutes, by a strange quirk of fate, Nine Lives bumped into "Safe Life 658," the very escapee he'd been up against.

This middle-aged man had actually managed to survive until the very end as an escapee. Nine Lives was impressed by his skill at staying hidden.

The man even spoke in a hushed voice, as if afraid of startling the rats in the garbage pile.

Safe Life 658 hunched his shoulders beside Nine Lives. "Keep your voice down; don't attract the ghost."

Nine Lives anxiously gestured with his hands. "Didn't I just tell you? The ghost was caught by a player—grabbed by the hair!"

He was afraid the other man wouldn't believe him. This story indeed sounded unbelievable. Nine Lives could guarantee that if he had not witnessed it himself, he would not have believed it either.

"Shh," Safe Life 658 hurriedly said, "Don't be so loud. I got it, I got it; the ghost was caught by a player."

His dismissive attitude was obvious.

Nine Lives was growing frantic. He desperately wanted to share the incredible things he had witnessed, as much as someone might want to share seeing a line of sows queuing up to jump into water. And what I saw, he thought, is even more incredible than sows diving into water!

"It's true!" Nine Lives felt like his mouth was about to blister from frustration. Witnessing something impossible and then having no one believe you when you tell them... it's absolutely maddening!

Safe Life 658 seemed somewhat annoyed.

He finally turned his head to look at the earnestly gesturing Nine Lives. "You must be hallucinating from the stress of this hide-and-seek game. We'll be out of this instance in five minutes. Can you stop imagining things and just stay put quietly?"

As Safe Life 658 spoke, he pointed at the screen. Nine Lives saw it was already 11:55 PM; indeed, the game instance would end in five minutes.

"I think what you described must have been a hallucination—all that stuff about grabbing hair and not being gentle at all," Safe Life 658 continued, trying to placate Nine Lives. "That's impossible. If a player could actually beat up a ghost, wouldn't the instance lose all face?"

Safe Life 658 murmured, "If something like that really happened, the game would have to shut down this instance early just to save face. Weren't there announcements about instances shutting down prematurely before...?"

As he was talking to himself, he suddenly realized something was wrong.

The reason was simple: right in the middle of Safe Life 658's monologue, a game panel suddenly popped up in front of both him and Nine Lives.

That's not right, Safe Life 658 thought. I just checked the time. There are still five minutes before the instance ends.

He thought this as he stared at the panel in surprise.

[Warning!]

[A data loophole has been detected in the 'Heartbeat Hide and Seek' instance. To ensure information security, this instance will self-destruct immediately!]

Safe Life 658 was stunned. "What the hell?"

He had just been talking about the instance ending early, and his prediction had come true!

No, this is even more drastic than ending early—it's self-destructing?

Nine Lives, beside him, was also stunned. Then he spoke very quickly, "It must be because that Doctor caught the ghost!"

Only then did Safe Life 658 begin to feel a flicker of doubt.

[Player instance evaluations will be conducted ahead of schedule. After evaluations are complete, players therein will be forcibly expelled from the instance...]

Meanwhile, Gu Mian was experiencing the same thing.

Just as he understood the first word the ghost managed to utter, it froze solid.

It truly froze, as if flash-frozen in an instant; not even a strand of its hair moved.

The game panel appeared immediately.

[Instance Evaluator 10065 at your service. Firstly, I sincerely wish *me* a pleasant life...]

That number, 10065, looks very familiar, Gu Mian thought. I've seen it at least three times already. Previously, the evaluation always started with a sincere wish for the *player's* pleasant life, but this time seems a bit different?

[Detecting your game nickname... Your game nickname is... Unable to detect game nickname.]

[Detected your game ID as '1'... Detected you are currently in the 'Heartbeat Hide and Seek' instance.]

[Your performance in the instance will now be evaluated. Please wait...]

[Player: ???]

Participated in uncovering the truth of the Hide-and-Seek Game and successfully solved it. Clue Collection Rate: 12%. Decryption Progress: 100%. Instance Evaluation: +159 points.]

Fatty, looking at Gu Mian's panel from the side, remarked, "So you only found 12% of the clues. The 100% decryption progress must be entirely thanks to your later... situational guessing... I mean, deduction."

[Escapees Caught: 0. Instance Evaluation: +0 points.]

Violently... discovered a game glitch in the instance. Extra Instance Evaluation: +60 points.]

Discovered a game glitch in the instance? Gu Mian frowned, puzzled. So, they're talking about the ghost I caught? The 'data loophole' mentioned in the earlier warning must also refer to this ghost. However, 'discovering a loophole' isn't quite accurate. 'Poking out the loophole' is closer to the truth.

But this time, the instance adopted a conciliatory policy. Not only did it not penalize me, but it also gave me extra points. This is truly unheard of.

[Player ??? Total Instance Evaluation Score: 219 points]

[Instance Evaluation Grade: S]

[At this evaluation grade, the player will receive: Game Coins x999, Attribute Points x9, and the rare special item drop 'Angel Halo'.]

[Obtained Title: 'Troublemaker'. Equipping this title significantly increases the probability of unexpected incidents occurring.]

Gu Mian was speechless. Is this title mocking me? Last time, I got the 'Train Master's Killer' title, which increased the train accident rate by 50%. And now this one... Still, this rare special item sounds pretty powerful.

Gu Mian took a moment to glance at Fatty's panel beside him.

Good grief, 25 points, he thought. How much did Fatty have to slack off to only get 25? I clearly didn't do much of anything and still got over two hundred...

He then glanced at Chu Changge's panel: 101 points.

It feels like Chu Changge didn't do anything either and still got over a hundred points. Fatty's twenty-five is just incredible.

Fatty was overcome with shame, wishing he could find a hole to crawl into. But there were no mouse holes nearby, so he could only stand there, being scrutinized by Gu Mian's incredulous gaze.

Fortunately, this instance began ejecting players quickly. Fatty wasn't subjected to the scrutiny for long before being forcibly kicked out.

Gu Mian, of course, received the same treatment. If this instance could talk, he mused, it'd probably yell something like, 'Hurry up and scram!' while kicking me out...

After exiting the instance this time, the ticket-seller's expression was exceptionally grim.

Previous instances had merely been sent back for repairs.

This one had self-destructed. The trouble I stirred up this time must have been a bit bigger... Gu Mian thought.

Chapter 315: From Fan to Enemy _1

Gu Mian and his companions did not have a fixed residence.

The weather had grown more severe since they exited the Heartbeat Hide-and-Seek instance.

The persistent snowfall had ceased, but there was no sign of the temperature rising any time soon.

The snow from the past few days had blanketed everything in sight—with snow piles on the ground, tree branches, and rooftops.

The windows of the car had been frozen solid, making it difficult to see the outside.

These harsh weather conditions did not allow them to stay in the Spirit Car any longer unless they wished to die within the old vehicle.

So Gu Mian found a rundown house.

It would be more appropriate to say that they had forcefully broken into the house.

This place was an old residential community located in a remote area, with only a few remaining residents.

Gu Mian casually chose a building that appeared deserted and brought Fatty, who was a professional at picking locks, to get them inside.

Spider webs had formed on the stairway railings, showing they hadn't been cleaned in a long time.

Wrapped in a cotton-padded jacket and shivering, Fatty asked while fiddling with the door lock, "Doctor, aren't we breaking the law doing this?"

Gu Mian nodded. "If we don't do this, you'll freeze to death outside."

Fatty shivered. "Thank goodness, I used to be a locksmith..."

Gu Mian asked with curiosity, "You were a thief?"

"Pah!" Fatty hastily denied it. "I was a locksmith, not a thief!"

Remarkably, Fatty had dabbled in various trades.

In a short while, Fatty had opened the door lock.

This rundown building had only five floors, and Fatty chose the third one, saying that living on a middle floor wouldn't be too cold.

Just then, Chu Changge, along with Xiao Hong, came up from downstairs. They were earlier tidying up below and had now brought a bunch of items.

Chu Changge was empty-handed, having piled all the bedding and miscellaneous items on Xiao Hong. He just stood by and watched.

Gu Mian was worried that Xiao Hong would be crushed under the weight.

Fatty had already entered the room.

Since the room had been vacant for a long time, materials prone to mold like quilts, mattresses, and sofa cushions had been removed, but the furniture was still present. There was even an old, broken air conditioner on the wall, though it had yellowed over time.

There was a slot in the wall on the right side of the entrance. It was brand new.

"This seems to be a slot for an electrical card specifically designed for the game," Gu Mian commented, pulling out a card from his pocket. "Every house should have this slot now."

He slotted the card in as he spoke.

Currently, there was a global power outage, and the only way to acquire electricity was by purchasing and plugging electrical cards into the slot.

The electrical cards sold in the supermarket were not cheap at all. You would be given a card, and the salesperson would then load it with the amount of electricity you purchased.

The price for one unit of electricity was three Game Coins.

Given the current environment, it was necessary to use the air conditioner, but one unit of electricity could only support an hour of air conditioner use.

In such freezing conditions, even if you only used the air conditioner for twelve hours a day and didn't use any other appliances, you would still have to cough up thirty-six Game Coins each day.

Gu Mian calculated this while looking over at Fatty. "If I remember correctly, you only received twenty Game Coins for completing the last instance, right?"

Ashamed, Fatty dropped his head again.

That was correct.

With an instance grade of twenty-five, he had only received twenty Game Coins and nothing else.

All because he had spent most of his time hiding in the instance.

Speaking of which, Gu Mian turned to Chu Changge. "In the last instance, how did you know I would pass the place where Fatty was hiding?"

He had indeed passed there later, which allowed him to rendezvous with Fatty.

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "As you know, there was a set of clues in the Hide-and-Seek instance. Following those clues, you would ultimately uncover the ghost's plot."

"To explain it better, let's say the clues are arranged in a sequence, like a chain. For instance, you find the first clue at Spot A, which leads you to Spot B where you find the second clue. The second clue directs you to the final Spot C, where the answer is hidden."

"I placed Fatty at a strategic location on the way from B to C. To be sure, I had him hide near the last clue, so even if you took a detour, as long as you reached the end, Fatty would see you."

So Chu Changge had discovered the entire chain of clues in the Hide-and-Seek instance from the start.

Gu Mian queried, "Since you knew that C was the endpoint, that implies that you must have visited Spot C; otherwise, you wouldn't know whether C was just part of the sequence or the endpoint."

Chu Changge confirmed it with a nod.

So that means Chu Changge had unraveled the ghost's plot from the very beginning, but he didn't inform the players via the phone that could be used to communicate with all players.

This ignorance among the Hunters made them want to tear the Evil Ghost apart with their bare hands. Once the ghost assumed the identity of a Hunter, it could roam unchallenged in the instance, resulting in countless player deaths.

Indeed, the ghost was quite rampant at first, but its dominance ended once it encountered Gu Mian.

Chu Changge continued, "Because if all the players knew about the ghost's scheme, then no players would actively hunt the ghost, and thus the ghost would not become a Hunter."

Fatty voiced his confusion, "Wouldn't it be better if the ghost remained a survivor in the Hide-and-Seek instance? It would be safer for everyone."

"No, we needed to get close to the ghost to collect instance information," Chu Changge shook his head. "If the ghost remained a survivor, there would be no way for Gu Mian to approach it. We all know that the first Hunter to catch the ghost would swap identities with it. If Gu Mian, with the identity of a Hunter, approached the ghost, there would be no guarantee of his safety."

Fatty gradually understood.

Although Gu Mian appeared almost invincible against creatures in instances, the Hide-and-Seek instance had separate camps for survivors and Hunters. If Gu Mian swapped identities with the ghost, the Hunters' absolute dominance over survivors could lead to unexpected outcomes.

"The best scenario would be for Gu Mian and the ghost to be on the same side. I considered it, and it seemed safer if they were both in the Hunter's Faction. Hence, I did not notify the other players about this."

So Chu Changge had intentionally concealed crucial clues to facilitate the ghost's transformation from a survivor to a Hunter.

As a Hunter, the ghost wasn't able to harm Gu Mian at all. Instead, it provided a clue—the word "seven." Although this clue was destroyed the moment it was spoken, it also signified the clue's importance.

Fatty awkwardly smiled. "Who would've thought, Brother Chu appeared so innocent, but below the surface, he's all shady..."

Gu Mian rubbed his chin. "So, does that mean similar situations will occur in future instances? I'll need to screw over other players to get the clues I want."

Chu Changge nodded. "Not all instances will present such situations, but there is a probability they might occur. Also, understand that the instances you enter are one-off. Once you give up on a clue, there will be no further chances to return to that instance."

Chapter 316 I'm Not Being Human Anymore_1

Hearing this, Gu Mian glanced at the bracelet on his wrist.

The dark-gold bracelet was engraved with ancient, mysterious patterns and made a dull sound when struck.

This was the rare special item, "Angel Halo," obtained from the Hide-and-Seek instance.

The "rare" designation implied it wasn't easily acquired.

At the very least, despite having gone through so many instances, this was the first time Gu Mian had encountered a special item designated as "rare."

[Angel Halo (Rare)]

[Description: A mysterious halo of unknown age, rumored to be a creation of some creator god. Although called a halo, it is actually a bracelet-like item. Absolutely do not wear it on your head!]

[Function: A special item exclusive to the Doctor profession. It can absorb a large quantity of medicine; within a certain range, the medicine stored inside can directly affect a patient under the halo's effect.]

Initially, Gu Mian hadn't fully understood this thing's function. He only discovered its use after he made a cut on Fatty with a knife.

As long as Fatty was within a two-meter radius, the medicine in the bracelet could directly affect Fatty's wound, much like a Priest's healing in a game.

"Well, I am a Doctor, after all. It's not really right to screw over other players like this," Gu Mian said, stroking his chin. "But, better you than me. I'll try my best not to let my 'friend' die."

"Speaking of which..." Gu Mian continued, still stroking his chin, "you heard it too in that Hide-and-Seek instance, right? The word the ghost uttered before it died."

Fatty corrected, "Before it was *destroyed*."

To be fair, this was the most pitiful ghost Fatty had seen since the game began. Although most other ghosts he'd encountered had also perished, their deaths weren't unjust; they were all killed after losing duels with the Doctor.

But the ghost from the Hide-and-Seek instance was different. It was directly destroyed by the instance itself. Even Dou E, were she here, wouldn't dare claim her grievance was greater than its.

Thinking of this, Fatty actually started to sympathize with the ghost, tears even welling up in the corners of his eyes.

At this moment, Chu Changge, who was beside them, suddenly spoke. "The destruction occurred because that ghost revealed an absolutely forbidden secret. It uttered just one word, and the instance

immediately self-destructed. That was a heavy price. This indicates that the word it spoke before its demise was already enough to pose a threat to the instance, and perhaps even the entire game world."

A threat to perhaps even the entire game world...

Fatty kept repeating Chu Changge's last sentence in his mind. Could it really be that significant?

Gu Mian lowered his hand. "I remember my question was, 'Where are you from?'"

And the ghost's answer was only a single word: "Seven."

It wasn't that it didn't want to say more; it was just immediately destroyed by the instance.

Gu Mian couldn't, for the life of him, connect the word "seven" to any specific location.

Fatty piped up strangely, "Was it trying to say 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs'?"

Gu Mian glanced at him. "Your intelligence level is only fit for watching cartoons."

Fatty was speechless.

The air conditioner had been turned on. The dilapidated unit seemed very reluctant to work, emitting a HUMMING noise, as if accusing Gu Mian of exploiting elderly labor.

Amidst the noisy HUM, Gu Mian turned to Chu Changge beside him. "Do you know any place names that include 'seven'?"

Chu Changge pushed up his glasses again. "Place names I know that contain numbers include Sanming, Sanmenxia, Siping, Liu'an, Liupanshui, Jiujiang, Shiyan..."

Fatty listened, somewhat bewildered. "Are you a reincarnated map?"

Chu Changge continued, "As for place names starting with 'seven,' I only recall two: Qi Xing Tai and Qi Tai River."

Gu Mian felt a sudden headache. Although he'd asked, he didn't actually believe the ghost came from the real world.

If real-world ghosts were pulled into instances to act as NPCs, this game would be too unreliable. The King of Hell would probably revolt against the organizers...

Though, it's not certain if the King of Hell even exists in this world. Even if he does, he might have been eradicated by the holy light of core socialist values.

"But if the 'seven' that ghost mentioned isn't a place name, then what could it be?" Gu Mian pondered, unable to figure it out.

Chu Changge's voice came from the side. "At the very least, from the Hide-and-Seek instance, we've gained one clue: some ghosts within instances might know certain things. Of course, this excludes the weak underlings. Only very powerful and intelligent ghosts or monsters are likely to have access to such clues."

Fatty stood under the air conditioner, warming his hands. "That ghost from Hide-and-Seek was indeed formidable. It's the smartest and most formidable ghost I've seen since the game started."

Its abilities to sense player locations and teleport alone were enough to instantly kill many players.

As Fatty spoke, he glanced at Xiao Hong, who was standing stiffly nearby.

Xiao Hong remained silent as usual.

Fatty averted his gaze, thinking, Xiao Hong looks like a minion at first glance. Even under severe torture, nothing useful would be extracted from him.

Gu Mian was still discussing with Chu Changge. "So, in future instances, my task is to capture powerful ghosts, beat them up, and demand clues?"

Chu Changge paused for a moment, then seemed to agree with his perspective. "It's best if other players don't see you."

Indeed, other players mustn't see. Otherwise, they might be scared enough to bite their own tongues off and commit suicide.

Fatty was already imagining a scene in the next instance where all his teammates bit their tongues off to commit suicide. And while they're doing that, the Doctor with the halo would be there stopping their bleeding?

Chu Changge continued, "Also..."

At this, Fatty also leaned in, listening intently to what Chu Changge would say next.

"I think beating up NPCs might be more effective than ghosts, especially NPCs like Mr. Green, who appear in those variety show-like instances."

Gu Mian silently took note and decided to give Mr. Green a good beating the next time he saw him.

Gu Mian still hadn't figured out the specific meaning of the word "seven."

However, since they had a starting point, they could follow the trail of clues in other instances.

Everything from the Spirit Car had been moved inside. Gu Mian decided to stay in this house for a while and resume their journey once the temperature warmed up.

Their next objective had also been set by Chu Changge.

It was to find a high-level ticket booth. Allegedly, the probability of being matched into a high-level instance at a high-level ticket booth was slightly higher.

Furthermore, the likelihood of finding the clues Gu Mian desired in a high-level instance was also slightly greater. He hoped to find a high-level ticket booth and then fleece it daily.

Heavy snow a few days prior had practically blanketed the entire city.

But just a few days after Gu Mian and his group had settled in, the sun finally made its long-awaited appearance.

Once the sun appeared, it seemed to stay. Brilliant sunlight illuminated the entire city, and the air finally carried a hint of spring.

The temperature also began to rise with the sun's appearance, as if someone had suddenly lit a massive bonfire beneath the earth. Over the past few days, Fatty had personally watched the thermometer climb rapidly, and the accumulated snow on the roads began to melt.

The severe cold had passed, but the situation was far from optimistic.

As the snow melted, Gu Mian discovered that there were more things hidden beneath it, and these things were now becoming visible.

They were utterly horrifying.

Chapter 317 Emphasizing_1

The bluish-purple corpses began to emerge from the melting snow.

Every so often, gruesomely twisted human figures lay by the roadside, their wide-open mouths seemingly showcasing their misfortune.

By this time, Gu Mian and the others had begun their journey as the temperatures warmed.

Chu Changge was at the window, watching the bodies that occasionally surfaced. "Those are all people who froze to death. They were immediately buried by heavy snow after death and remained hidden until the snow began to melt."

Fatty stole a quick glance at the corpses on the ground before looking away again.

These are real corpses, not like the fake data in the instances. For some reason, Fatty found these corpses more bone-chilling than the terrifying ghosts in the instances.

Their contorted limbs and features testified to their desperate struggles before death. But it was all in vain; they had sunk beneath the snow. Some passersby might not even have known they were stepping over a corpse.

Chu Changge continued, "A few days ago, the lowest temperature was negative twenty-three degrees Celsius. Actually, such a temperature shouldn't have caused so many to freeze to death. Before the game started, some areas often experienced temperatures like this."

Hearing this, Fatty glanced at Chu Changge.

"But things are different now," Chu Changge adjusted his spectacles. "Without electricity, with heating also cut off, and in the context of this apocalyptic game, few people can get enough to eat. Naturally, their bodies can't generate enough heat to resist the cold."

In the past, when temperatures plummeted, people were well-fed, warmly dressed, and stayed in rooms with air conditioning or heating. For long journeys, vehicles offered some protection from the cold. Even if it was cold, it was bearable.

But now, things were different.

Gu Mian was driving. Hearing Fatty and Chu Changge discussing food and warmth from the back, he turned and asked, "Are you guys hungry?"

Now that Gu Mian mentioned it, Fatty did indeed feel a bit hungry.

He rubbed his stomach. "Back in the winter, I used to often get a big pot of pork stew with glass noodles from a stall near my place."

"No matter how cold the day, as soon as the owner lifted the lid, the steaming aroma would waft down the entire street, making mouths water."

"The soup, ladled straight from the pot, would still be bubbling. So savory! A single sip was heavenly..."

Gu Mian stepped on the brake. "Stop talking..."

Fatty's words made him crave pork stew with glass noodles too.

Fatty then turned to Gu Mian. "Actually, I know how to make it. When we find a suitable place someday, I'll stew a pot for you guys."

But just as he turned his head, he was shocked to find the person in the driver's seat gone.

Fatty's face turned pale. "The Doctor? Where did our Doctor go?! He was a whole person, how could he just disappear!"

He was just here!

Chu Changge's somber voice came from the side, "He entered a special instance. Just now."

"Entered a special instance?" Fatty was stunned. "What? But weren't we all together? How could only the Doctor enter?"

Chu Changge looked towards the driver's seat. "Who knows."

Gu Mian was, in fact, quite bewildered. His surroundings had plunged into darkness.

He had just been listening to Fatty's description of pork stew with glass noodles when the interface panel suddenly appeared.

The crucial thing was, even after the panel appeared, Fatty continued his mouth-watering description, seemingly oblivious to it.

As it turned out, Fatty really hadn't seen any panel.

Nor had Chu Changge.

The only one who entered the special instance this time... was him, all alone!

And this special instance is truly special; its name alone is enough to outshine all others.

[Special Instance 'Sweet Lovers' Activated]

The name 'Sweet Lovers' for an instance, it's truly...

Gu Mian continued to read.

[Instance Participants: 8]

[Content: 'Sweet Lovers' is an incredibly popular and unconventional matchmaking show, offering guests entirely new choices. Please look forward to it!]

[Main Task: Participate in the 'Sweet Lovers' variety show activity]

A variety show instance? Just like 'Crazy Word Guess' before. I guess this instance should also have an NPC host.

As he was speculating, his surroundings suddenly brightened.

It was a room of about thirty square meters. Gu Mian scanned his surroundings. Besides himself, there were four other people in the room. Noticing his gaze, all four turned and smiled at him.

Gu Mian smiled and nodded back.

Including me, that makes five. Where are the other three players?

There were loudspeakers in the room. Just as Gu Mian was about to try the doorknob to see if he could get out, a cheerful female voice sounded from them.

"Welcome, everyone, to the 'Sweet Lovers' variety show activity! Allow me to introduce myself. I am Teacher Sweet, the host of this show."

I have to say, the instance hosts all have pretty distinctive names.

First, there was Mr. Green, and now Teacher Sweet.

If I remember correctly, there was also a coach called Coach Che before.

The cheerful voice continued.

"All our players have been assigned to their respective rooms. Now, allow me, Teacher Sweet, to explain the rules of this variety show."

"First of all, I must announce—in each room, there are actually only two real players!"

Two players?

Gu Mian surveyed the room again. Yes, there were definitely five people here.

So, that means the remaining three...

"The remaining 'people' are actually Evil Ghosts planted by the production team, you see."

Could you please not describe this with such a matter-of-fact tone?

"In this variety show, the eight players are divided into two groups of four. One group will act as program guests. These guests must choose their 'heart's desire' from the people before them within three days. Generally speaking, choosing an Evil Ghost means certain death."

"The other four players have been placed among the selectable 'choices' in four different rooms. Among the selectable choices in each room, there is only one real player."

Gu Mian looked at the people in front of him, lost in thought.

The most awkward part was that among these four people, there was actually a man.

Recommending a book: 'Movie Alliance of Various Heavens'.

It blends thriller movies with the game King of Glory—a highly creative concept that breaks from the traditional 'infinite flow' genre. It uses the latest movies as instances, allowing you to experience being a jungler carry while also staying updated on the newest film releases.

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Gu Mian tilted his head to look at the wall next to him, where a screen the size of a small blackboard was hanging.

It displayed a single line of text: "The selected guest player in this room is the 'Doctor'."

That was referring to himself. It seemed like he would have to select his potential partner from three ghosts and one human in this variety show.

Gu Mian thought about this while looking at the four people in front of him. Among these four, there were three ghosts and one player. If he selected a ghost, the game would be over for him. Although the rules were laid out, he couldn't help but suspect that the program team might have been devious enough to make all the selectable characters ghosts.

Setting that aside for now, since they had divided the players into two groups, this was somewhat like a team battle, with winners and losers. If choosing the only player could be considered winning, then what would be the winning condition for the player hidden among the ghosts?

Sure enough, just as he expected, Teacher Sweet's voice rang out again.

"And for the players hidden among the ghosts, you must conceal your player identity as much as possible. If the guest chooses you as the partner, the score for the instance will be reset to zero!"

"In this instance, all player information cannot be accessed, so you won't be able to identify the hidden player by checking player information."

They had thought of everything...

"Okay," Teacher Sweet's voice came from the loudspeaker again, "Now everyone in the room can come out. Please gather in the lobby on the first floor. I will be waiting for you there."

"By the way, when I say everyone, I mean the little ghosts that our production team has dispatched into each room."

Her way of addressing the "little ghosts" was genuinely creepy.

Nobody else in the room moved; it seemed they were waiting for the guest to open the door.

Gu Mian walked a few steps to the door and turned the doorknob.

The door creaked open.

As the door opened, Gu Mian thought he heard someone in the room next door opening their door. It must be the guest in the neighboring room.

He quickly took a few steps into the corridor and turned his head towards the direction of the sound.

A familiar face caught Gu Mian's eye.

The owner of the familiar face seemed to have been attracted by the sound he made and was looking over at him.

When their eyes met, the person's expression went from confusion to shock, then to delight, and finally, to sheer horror.

"You...you...you..." Yuwen Hao stretched out a shaking finger towards Gu Mian. "Gu...Gugu..."

In the Death Curse instance, Yuwen Hao had once teamed up with Gu Mian.

Naturally, he had witnessed the destructive power of this Doctor, who wore a white lab coat and carried a large guitar.

That was an immense destructive power capable of sawing off the heads of little ghosts!

Later, in the Death Cab instance, he had personally seen a cab driver, who was likely a ghost, shouting Gu Mian's name as his neck snapped, blood spraying three meters away!

In short, any instance associated with this Gu Mian could never be a peaceful and harmonious place!

Seeing Yuwen Hao, overwhelmed with excitement, about to call out his name,

Gu Mian slung his guitar bag over his shoulder. "It seems you don't value your life very much."

Of course, Yuwen Hao knew that Gu Mian's guitar bag didn't contain a guitar. Scared, he abruptly shut his mouth, though his lips were still trembling.

He knew that Gu Mian's name was on the wanted list; revealing his true identity could make him a target for other players.

At this point, the other people in their respective rooms had also come out.

Yuwen Hao looked back at the four people behind him, then at the four people behind Gu Mian.

Among these eight people, two players were hidden. It seems I have to be careful what I say...

Gu Mian had already taken Yuwen Hao by the arm and was dragging him towards the staircase. "Let's go downstairs first."

Their rooms were on the second floor, and upon exiting, they could see the staircase leading down.

Yuwen Hao was nervously being led downstairs by Gu Mian when suddenly, Gu Mian leaned close to his ear and whispered, "It seems I need to find an opportunity to silence a witness."

Yuwen Hao's foot slipped, and he nearly tumbled down the stairs.

Quickly, he raised three fingers in an oath-taking gesture. "I... I will definitely not tell anyone."

Gu Mian ignored him and focused on descending the stairs.

The place indeed looked like a shooting location for a variety show: a two-story villa. The first-floor living room was well-lit, with the south wall entirely replaced by glass.

The furniture also fit the variety show aesthetic: the living room was simple, with only a set of light-colored sofas and a glass coffee table drawing attention.

It was worth mentioning that quite a few people were already in the living room.

Gu Mian took a closer look.

A majority of them were cameramen shouldering cameras? This instance was freaking realistic.

Teacher Sweet was easily recognizable, standing beside the sofa in a pink dress, looking as sweet as her name suggested.

At this moment, Teacher Sweet looked up at Gu Mian and Yuwen Hao, smiling happily. "It looks like our two guests from the second floor have also come down..."

Just as she said this, she suddenly stopped.

Yuwen Hao noticed Teacher Sweet's smile quickly becoming less sweet, most likely because she had seen Gu Mian.

After all, this was a player whose mere presence made instances want to self-destruct.

After a two-second pause, Teacher Sweet finally managed to dryly force out the end of her sentence:
"...they're here."

Seeing Teacher Sweet's reaction, Yuwen Hao couldn't help but feel sympathetic towards the four people who were about to be chosen by Gu Mian.

If he had to identify which three were ghosts... this terrifying Doctor could surely come up with a thousand ways to do it. As for how... probably something like "cutting off their heads to see if they die"? This is beyond terrifying!

Thinking about this, Yuwen Hao couldn't help but shiver.

"Why are you shivering?" By then, Gu Mian had already reached the first floor with Yuwen Hao.

Many cameramen were aiming their cameras at the two of them. Yuwen Hao saw Gu Mian flashing an enthusiastic smile at the cameras...

What a character!

Teacher Sweet seemed to have found her voice again, though her expression was slightly unnatural.
"The two female players living on the first floor have also come out."

Gu Mian looked behind Teacher Sweet and saw that, indeed, two young women were standing there.

One of them looked quite plain, but her long hair was very smooth. She was looking down slightly, appearing somewhat shy, or possibly nervous.

The other one looked more lively, but she also seemed nervous, currently observing the cameramen around her.

Teacher Sweet continued, "So now, please introduce yourselves..."

Surprisingly, the shy-looking, long-haired girl spoke first. "My name is Dong'er. I am the guest living on the first floor."

Chapter 319 Three Unlucky Ghosts_1

That was all she said. She didn't say much.

But there wasn't a need for many words; this instance wasn't really meant for participants to introduce their talents.

Yuwen Hao spoke up next, "My name is Yuwen Hao. I live on the second floor."

It was also a very brief statement.

Gu Mian spoke after Yuwen Hao, "My name is Doctor. You can come to me if your hand or head is severed. Of course, if your head is severed, I can only take responsibility for digging a grave."

Several pairs of eyes were irresistibly drawn to Gu Mian. It seemed they considered anyone who could make a joke under such circumstances a hero.

Teacher Sweet chuckled and said, "What a humorous guest. So, the next one is..."

The last to introduce herself was a bolder-looking girl. She spoke slightly more than the others.

"You can call me the Fortune-teller," the girl said. "Actually, I made my living as a fortune-teller before this global game began. Perhaps I can identify the real players among the ghosts through my divination. You are welcome to ask for a divination."

At that moment, Gu Mian suddenly felt this variety show could be renamed something like "The Blind Date Show of Quacks and Vulgarity."

"Okay," Teacher Sweet's voice came over. "Now that everyone has introduced themselves, let me explain the detailed rules."

"Of course, the players hiding among the ghosts should also listen closely. The time limit for this variety show is three days, meaning you are free to leave the instance at any time within those three days."

Gu Mian saw surprised expressions on the faces of the other three. They all seemed to think they couldn't leave the instance until a full three days had passed.

"Once a guest selects a love interest, whether the choice is right or wrong, the hidden player corresponding to the guest will also end the instance."

"To put it more straightforwardly, there are two possibilities. One: if the guest picks a ghost or does not pick a love interest within three days, the guest is out. The hidden player receives a normal instance settlement, and then both leave the instance."

"The other possibility is that the guest picks a hidden player. The guest then receives a normal instance settlement, the hidden player receives a score reset and item drop penalty, and then both leave the instance."

"After all, in real-world dating shows, you don't see couples who, having successfully hooked up, shamelessly stick around to hog the limelight."

So, it really was a dating show...

"Does anyone have any other questions?" Teacher Sweet asked them.

The somewhat shy Dong'er suddenly spoke up, "How should guests choose their love interest?"

Hearing this question, Gu Mian felt like he really was participating in a variety show. However, looking at the deathly pale faces of the camera crew nearby, the notion was immediately dispelled.

It seemed these cameramen might also be ghosts borrowed from other instances by the production team.

Yuwen Hao, who was next to Gu Mian, seemed very afraid of these cameramen and subtly moved back.

"It's simple," Teacher Sweet replied. "Each of you has a card in your room. Just write the name of the person you want to choose on it."

"You can go back to your room at any time to fill in the card. Of course, you can also carry it with you."

"This is a small island. Besides you, there are no other people. The island has a full range of recreational facilities, including an amusement park, a swimming pool, and various restaurants. You can also engage in other activities such as hiking. For these three days, you are free to do as you please. You can observe and identify your chosen person by taking them to participate in these activities."

"In the evening, it's best for everyone to return here to exchange what they've learned."

"During this period, the camera crew will continuously film each guest's daily life, and it will all be broadcast live to my side... For now, you are completely free to move about. The final deadline is noon, three days from now. Everyone must choose their love interest before then."

As soon as Teacher Sweet finished speaking, the others looked at each other, bewildered.

No one wanted to experience any recreational activities with several ghosts.

Moreover, the cameramen following them didn't look particularly safe either.

Gu Mian wasn't particularly bothered. He remembered what Chu Changge had told him not long ago: in an instance, this kind of host-type NPC was very likely to possess important information. It looks like I'll have to find a chance to rough up this Teacher Sweet a bit.

At this point, everyone else had returned to their rooms to find the card for filling in their "love interest."

Gu Mian was very quick; he went into his room and found the card right away.

Throughout this time, the four people behind Gu Mian kept following him like lingering ghosts. Gu Mian observed them closely and noticed that their clothes had numbers on the back, presumably for easy identification.

The sole male was Number 1, and the three females were Numbers 2, 3, and 4, respectively.

Gu Mian stood in the room and first looked at the man, Number 1. "What's your name?"

Number 1 smiled shyly and said, "You can call me Number 1. I don't have an actual name."

Then, Gu Mian questioned the other three.

The answers he got were essentially the same. They were all named by their numbers, though their personalities differed.

Number 1, the man, was quite shy.

Number 2, a woman, seemed a bit foolish, which suited her number quite well.

Number 3 was a cheerful and sunny girl.

Number 4 was a gloomy, long-haired woman; if she let her hair fall forward, she could perfectly cosplay Sadako.

However, based on just this, it was impossible to distinguish who were ghosts and who were humans.

Gu Mian felt a headache coming on.

At that moment, several camera operators at the doorway were aiming their cameras at Gu Mian, capturing every single one of his pained expressions.

Whatever, there are plenty of tools on the island. I'll go try them out first, Gu Mian thought as he walked out.

When he arrived at the main hall on the first floor, only Teacher Sweet was there; no one else was around. He had no idea if the others had already left or just hadn't come out of their rooms yet.

Upon seeing Gu Mian descend, Teacher Sweet broke into a smile. "Our guest, are you preparing to go out?"

Gu Mian nodded. "Yes."

Hearing this, Teacher Sweet glanced at the four people behind Gu Mian. "Could I trouble you to step aside?"

Step aside? Is she going to discuss some important topic with me?

The four people behind him were quite perceptive and all moved towards the main entrance.

Gu Mian knew that the player hiding among the four must be extremely curious but had to go out with the others. That person wouldn't dare to act unusually for fear of revealing their identity.

Only when the four figures had disappeared from sight did Teacher Sweet turn back. "May I be so bold as to ask, are you familiar with Coach Che?"

Coach Che?

Of course, Gu Mian remembered that unlucky ghost of a coach from the driver's license instance. It seemed that instance hadn't been able to reopen since, and he had no idea where that unfortunate coach had gone.

Gu Mian turned around. "You know him?"

An NPC from this instance knows an NPC from another instance? Is this some kind of big data exchange?

Teacher Sweet continued in a somber voice, "I didn't know him before. But a few months ago, he came here to work. He was a cameraman for a month, supposedly to earn money to repair his instance."

Gu Mian: "..."

"I heard his instance was destroyed by a player. He has to work to earn money to repair it and has already drifted through several instances. He's truly an unlucky ghost."

"And I know another NPC who's just as unlucky, a host named Mr. Green. Because we're both hosts, I have some dealings with him."

"I heard Mr. Green is even unluckier. After hosting his last word-guessing game show, he vanished into thin air. No one has seen him since, and his instance has been abandoned to this day."

"Do you know why I am so familiar with Mr. Green? It's because he borrowed my best employee just before disappearing. He said it was a 'short-term' loan, but since his disappearance, I've never seen my employee again."

Gu Mian gave an awkward smile. "Why are you telling me all this? I don't know any of these people, really."

Teacher Sweet continued, "I was thinking, if you happen to meet Mr. Green in the future, could you relay a message for me? Ask him to return my employee to me... Mr. Gu Mian."

Chapter 320 The - Name is Not Bloody at All

Since Teacher Sweet was calling him out by his real name, Gu Mian couldn't very well keep playing dumb.

Just as he opened his mouth, about to say something like, "Not a chance. Eat shit!"

A bedroom door suddenly creaked open, interrupting the disrespectful words he was about to utter.

A head peeked out from behind it. It was the Fortune-teller.

Seeing the situation in the hall, the Fortune-teller was momentarily stunned.

I just found the card in my room to fill in my name, how did I come out to see something like this?

That Doctor and Teacher Sweet are standing in the middle of the hall, looking like they're about to fight at any moment. Since when did players get strong enough to beat up NPCs? Do they have a death wish?

"Ha... ha," she laughed awkwardly. "What are you two discussing?"

Teacher Sweet smiled at the Fortune-teller. "We're discussing my excellent employee who was abducted."

Abducted excellent employee? The Fortune-teller's mind blanked for a moment. She recognized all the words, but strung together, they made no sense to her.

And then, the Doctor uttered another perplexing statement—

"If you're that eager to see him, I can certainly try my best to arrange a reunion for you two."

Teacher Sweet: "...". She pressed her lips together, no longer wanting to speak.

Seeing Teacher Sweet fall silent, Gu Mian happily left the hall.

The Fortune-teller by the door looked in confusion at the suddenly quiet Teacher Sweet, then at Gu Mian's retreating figure, and decided to follow him.

Just as Gu Mian was stepping out the door, the person from behind caught up.

The Fortune-teller ran up to him, panting heavily. "Do you know that Teacher Sweet? You two seem quite familiar, don't you?"

That's impossible. How could a player know an NPC from an instance? she thought. Besides, isn't every instance reset after it's cleared?

Before Gu Mian could answer the Fortune-teller, he heard two male voices arguing about something behind him.

"The amusement park is nearby; I think we should go there to play."

"No, I think we should find a place to eat first."

"Amusement park first."

"Eat first."

The argument continued endlessly. Gu Mian turned to look. It was the two "selectable targets" following the Fortune-teller who were arguing.

Gu Mian looked surprised. "These people following you are quite lively."

So realistic, they can even start a fight?

The Fortune-teller chuckled. "Those two have fought at least three times since this started. It's hard to believe they might be ghosts."

Gu Mian fell into deep thought. Why are the four following me so lifeless? No one's even started a fight or anything...

Seemingly understanding that Gu Mian didn't want to discuss what just happened, the Fortune-teller smiled faintly. "The weather is lovely today..."

The weather in this instance was indeed very good.

After leaving the house, they could see a clear blue sky with large clouds drifting slowly. The sunlight shone down, and even the wind carried a hint of warmth.

"It's a perfect day for fortune-telling," the Fortune-teller said, her smile widening. "How about I read your fortune?"

Gu Mian hesitated.

Do all fortune-tellers have this kind of quirk? Just grabbing random people in an instance to tell their fortunes?

Sensing Gu Mian's thoughts, the Fortune-teller explained, "To tell you the truth, do you know about profession instances? Once you pass the trials of a profession instance, you're granted the corresponding profession. I was fortunate enough to obtain the Fortune-teller profession..."

Gu Mian stroked his chin. Speaking of profession instances, he was actually quite familiar with them.

He even remembered accidentally killing a Doctor in one such instance.

The Fortune-teller continued, "Because I only recently acquired this profession, I can only perform a divination once a day. So, I need to pick someone out of the ordinary to practice on. We can do it right here; it won't take up much time. Just consider it a little interlude in this instance."

"Why don't you do it for yourself?" Gu Mian asked.

The Fortune-teller held out a Crystal Ball about the size of an infant's head. "Profession restriction. I can't divine my own fate. And even when I divine for others, I can't predict specific events, only random outcomes."

So, you mean if I want to know about my luck in love, you might tell me I'm going to be hit by a car tomorrow instead?

Still, it wouldn't hurt to let this Fortune-teller try. Maybe she'll come up with some useful information.

So, Gu Mian agreed.

But not long after the divination began, he realized things weren't that simple...

"Hey..." The Fortune-teller, eyes still closed as she focused on the Crystal Ball before her, heard the Doctor opposite her suddenly call out the word.

She interrupted Gu Mian, "Don't make a sound. It will be over in just a moment."

Unexpectedly, the Doctor opposite her was still speaking, though this time his voice seemed a bit more distant. "It's not..."

The Fortune-teller frowned and emphasized again, "Please, no noise..."

But fate, it seemed, had other plans. Before she could finish speaking, a tremendous sound erupted right in front of them.

It was the sound of a powerful explosion.

The sound was so loud it even startled Teacher Sweet out of the house. She hurried to the doorway and saw a woman standing there, stunned. Shards of glass were scattered at the woman's feet. It seemed some glass object had just exploded.

Gu Mian was standing some distance away, and said with a complete lack of sincerity, "I did tell you to wait a moment. I didn't expect your Crystal Ball to have an explosive feature."

"Impossible!" The Fortune-teller shook her head vehemently, protesting, "The Crystal Ball absolutely does not have such a function!"

Gu Mian spread his hands. "It couldn't have exploded just because it didn't like the look of me, could it?"

After saying this, he showed no intention of lingering at the site of the explosion. "It's getting late. Since your Crystal Ball has exploded, I'll be on my way."

The four people following him were waiting nearby. Their expressions were no different from the Fortune-teller's; it seemed they had all witnessed the explosion. Seeing their faces, Gu Mian quickly walked over to them.

The Fortune-teller remained where she was, watching Gu Mian's figure recede into the distance until he disappeared from view.

"I've performed divinations for many people, but I've never encountered an explosion like this!"

"I must have really seen a ghost today!"