

Collapse 331

Chapter 331 Sad Gu Mian_1

As he watched 'Dong'er' leave, Gu Mian fell into deep thought.

He had sensed something amiss since the outset of the instance.

The production team had separated the guests into their respective rooms, only to interrupt halfway through explaining the rules to move everyone to the main hall—an approach completely unheard of.

It was as if the production team was deliberately extending the time each person stayed in their rooms, making it convenient for certain individuals to accomplish specific tasks.

Therefore, when Gu Mian arrived at the main hall, he had made sure to observe his surroundings closely.

He was well aware that only three people followed 'Dong'er'.

Combining this with 'Dong'er's' intentional avoidance of their line of sight, Gu Mian began to understand.

It's every man for himself.

Although she had committed murder and stolen an identity, Gu Mian wasn't so righteous as to immediately expose her and have her apprehended.

As long as she didn't go out of her way to cause him trouble, Gu Mian wouldn't say a word to her.

Besides, this 'Dong'er' was quite astute. Throughout the entire instance, she hadn't uttered a single word to him nor actively caused trouble for the other guests. She just quietly pretended to be a harmless little rabbit, apparently intending to wait out the three days peacefully.

Unfortunately, this little rabbit's cover was blown today by the Fortune-teller.

Gu Mian hadn't hidden under the bed just to make a dramatic entrance or show off at the end.

He had actually come to this room to examine the real Dong'er's corpse.

Unexpectedly, just as he squatted down beside the bed to examine the corpse, the Fortune-teller pushed open the door and entered.

Engaged in a covert act, Gu Mian instinctively dove under the bed without a second thought.

Yuwen Hao, who had accompanied him, reflexively followed suit and crawled under too.

Fortunately, they had initially crouched by the window, so the Fortune-teller didn't see them when she entered from the doorway.

The stabbed Fortune-teller finally had a chance to speak. Her eyes widened slightly as she looked at the two who had just crawled out from under the bed. "What are you doing here?"

She had initially thought she was the only one sneaking around. Who would have thought she'd discover two others who had infiltrated the room even earlier?

This was suffocating.

Yuwen Hao's expression was grim. "I was tricked into coming here."

Gu Mian had said he was coming back to catch someone, so Yuwen Hao had eagerly tagged along. Unexpectedly, things hadn't developed in that direction at all.

Only after entering the room with Gu Mian and discovering the corpse under the bed did Yuwen Hao realize something was amiss. By then, however, it was too late to flee.

The Fortune-teller turned to Gu Mian again, apparently waiting for him to speak.

Gu Mian could only pat his white coat and say, "Actually, I came to analyze the corpse under the bed."

The Fortune-teller gave Gu Mian a quick once-over. He certainly fit the description; this was indeed a doctor.

But what kind of doctor he was remained to be seen.

She leaned towards thinking Gu Mian was a psychiatrist, as she'd heard psychiatrists were more prone to mental illness themselves.

But seeing his interest in corpses...

"Are you a forensic doctor?" the Fortune-teller asked tentatively.

"No," Gu Mian denied. "I don't have any particular fondness for corpses. But look..."

He had already lifted the bedsheet, revealing the full view of the corpse underneath to the Fortune-teller.

It was a woman, thoroughly dead.

Her top had been stripped off, leaving her upper body bare, though her bra was still on.

At the beginning of the instance, the Fortune-teller had also been afraid of dead bodies, so much so that she couldn't bear to look at them for long.

However, over time, this fear had gradually numbed. Now, seeing a corpse merely made her feel uncomfortable.

The Fortune-teller stared at the corpse under the bed, which was emitting a faint odor of decay. The smell was nauseating.

"Is there anything unusual about it?" She stared for a while longer but couldn't spot anything out of the ordinary.

Left with no choice, Gu Mian began to explain, "Look, this female corpse is about 1.63 meters tall and weighs around 50 kilograms. Her build is very similar to the impostor's. This was deliberately arranged by the instance."

That's why, even after the impostor stripped the real person and put on her clothes, no one noticed anything amiss.

Yuwen Hao chimed in, "Right, that's probably why the Fortune-teller was muttering to herself earlier about 'a hidden player killing a guest being a normal part of this instance's design' or something like that... The instance intentionally made the guest and the hidden player have similar body types, so murder and impersonation would be harder to detect... What did I just say?"

The Fortune-teller was stunned for a moment before replying, "You said the instance intentionally chose two players with similar physiques to be on opposing sides..."

This would make it easier for hidden players to kill and replace their targets.

This was indeed a bias the instance showed towards the hidden players...

But this was also their greatest weakness.

Once this rule was known to the guests, the identities of these hidden players would be instantly exposed!

Unfortunately, this rule was now known to all the guests—including the one lying on the floor, stripped of her clothes.

So that's how you identify the targets!

"But... but..." the Fortune-teller began to recall her four potential targets. "They're all men. Wouldn't it be strange for them to wear my clothes?"

Yuwen Hao looked at the Fortune-teller. "Why don't you take a look at what you're wearing?"

The Fortune-teller finally understood.

Before this instance began, she was an amateur fortune-teller and was fascinated by the attire of medieval witches.

Of course, she couldn't dress up like an actual witch, but wearing a cool black trench coat was acceptable.

Whenever the wind blew, she would often pop the collar of her trench coat, cultivating an aloof and mysterious aura...

So this outfit was directly brought with her into the instance.

"A black trench coat. It doesn't look specifically like a woman's design. It would fit quite well on a smaller man," Gu Mian said, glancing at the Fortune-teller's coat.

As for Gu Mian's own coat, it was a white doctor's coat. Because it was a special item, he knew it would automatically adjust to the most suitable size for whoever wore it.

The instance must have considered this, so it hadn't matched him with any potential targets of similar build. The only male among his options was half a head shorter than him.

Yuwen Hao perked up at this. "I remember! Among my potential targets, there was a woman of similar height to me."

The Fortune-teller also focused her thoughts on the shortest man among her potential targets.

With this clue, they should be able to leave this place soon.

"But I remember your remaining two potential targets don't have a similar build to yours." The Fortune-teller looked at Gu Mian curiously, unaware that his coat was a special item.

"That's right," Gu Mian nodded, putting on a sorrowful expression. "So, even after you two leave, I'll still have to stay in this godforsaken place to identify my target."

The Fortune-teller gave him a sympathetic look.

Yuwen Hao, however, snorted. You probably just want us to leave early so we don't interfere with your plans, right? he thought with disdain.

Chapter 332 Gu-gu Never Breaks

Gu Mian also wished for the other players to leave as soon as possible.

Because once the players were gone, the remaining ghosts would be his alone, completely at his disposal.

Yet, a third of the instance time had passed, and these guests had yet to find their way.

With no other option, Gu Mian had to personally drag out Dong'er's corpse and make an example of it.

He had now put the bedsheet back, covering the small, pitiful, and helpless body.

"So, can you fill in your cards now?" Gu Mian asked tentatively.

The Fortune-teller felt somewhat strange. Just moments ago, she had sympathized with this Doctor, who couldn't leave the instance. But when she saw his current expression, she felt she might have been too sentimental.

How to describe his current expression...

It was like a bank robber hidden in the dark, eagerly awaiting the departure of the security guard.

Is it just me? The Fortune-teller stood up from the ground.

The wound on her shoulder was still bleeding profusely. At this rate, she would eventually die of excessive blood loss.

Luckily, she and Yuwen Hao didn't have much time left in the instance.

"But I think I need to observe a little more before choosing my 'heartthrob'..." the Fortune-teller wavered as she held her wounded shoulder.

This choice concerned the instance's ending. It was best to be cautious.

The Fortune-teller planned to carefully observe the potential choice whose body type was similar to hers.

But as she hesitated, she caught sight of Yuwen Hao in her peripheral vision.

To her surprise, that fellow had already taken out his card and was searching the room for a pen.

The Fortune-teller was taken aback. "What are you doing!"

Without raising his head, Yuwen Hao responded, "What am I doing? I'm looking for a pen to fill my card and leave this godforsaken place quickly."

"Aren't you going to observe more?" The Fortune-teller paused, slightly stunned.

Observe my ass.

Yuwen Hao had teamed up with Gu Mian before.

He knew very well that Dr. Gu was cursed by the world's malice; any safe place Gu Mian entered would instantly transform into a living hell.

He still remembered the shattered Evil God Statue. That statue, which had maintained the safety barrier, was easily broken by Gu Mian. This caused all of them to be teleported from the safe zone into a terrifying warehouse engulfed in flames, where they had to directly confront a female ghost.

Yuwen Hao had no doubt that if Gu Mian hadn't swiftly decapitated the female ghost—triggering a data crash and the instance's collapse—they would all have perished in the fire.

As long as Gu Mian was present, the instance would use any means necessary to cause accidents. Who knew what this instance would ultimately become?

Whether it meant dying in a fire or the instance being destroyed along with everyone in it, it had nothing to do with Yuwen Hao anymore.

As the saying goes, "When the city gate catches fire, the fish in the moat suffer." Yuwen Hao had no intention of becoming collateral damage, some roasted dried fish; it was best to leave this place as soon as possible.

Although the compensation for surviving an instance collapse was tempting, he strongly suspected he wouldn't last until the end.

Having found a pen, he took off the cap and said, "You'll definitely regret staying here."

Yuwen Hao urged earnestly, but he could see it.

This Fortune-teller had a look of stubborn defiance; it seemed she was determined to tough it out.

"Alright then..." Yuwen Hao quickly recalled the serial numbers of his potential choices, selected the only one with a similar build to his own, and hastily filled in the card.

Gu Mian saw that the instant Yuwen Hao filled in the number, his entire figure flickered like TV static and then vanished.

His last words echoed in the room—

"Good luck."

Gu Mian didn't think those words were meant for him.

The Fortune-teller mulled over Yuwen Hao's last words. For some reason, a chill ran down her spine. She didn't know if Yuwen Hao had chosen correctly or not...

Just as her hair was standing on end, she saw the Doctor approaching.

"You..." the Fortune-teller began to speak.

But Gu Mian immediately interrupted her, "You're injured."

The Fortune-teller watched the Doctor walk past her, casually patting her injured shoulder.

As he raised his hand, she saw a dark-gold bracelet, engraved with what appeared to be ancient patterns, emerge from beneath his white sleeve.

Good taste.

"Yes," the Fortune-teller's hand tightened on her wound. "I need to treat my wound. Doctor, have you seen any bandages or similar items around here?"

Gu Mian didn't say a word, just walked past her towards the door.

And right then, the Fortune-teller suddenly noticed that the stab wound on her shoulder no longer hurt as much.

She curiously loosened her grip and turned her head to look at the wound.

Her blood-soaked clothing completely covered the skin, making it impossible to see the wound at a glance.

But the Fortune-teller discovered that after she let go, no more fresh blood seeped out.

She paused for a moment, then, as if realizing something, reached under her torn clothes to touch the wound.

It was gone... Absolutely gone...

The wound had healed; she couldn't feel it at all anymore. If not for the conspicuous bloodstains on her clothes, she might have thought being stabbed was just an illusion.

The Fortune-teller stood there, stunned.

Of course, she wasn't fanciful enough to believe she had suddenly awakened some self-healing ability.

The only explanation was that the Doctor had touched her just now.

One touch, and her wound was healed?

At this point, the Fortune-teller suddenly recalled the Doctor's self-introduction: his stated profession was the same as hers.

If that's the case, he's very likely a player with a Profession too!

The Fortune-teller grew excited at this thought.

Players with Professions were extremely rare. Encountering another one in an instance was like meeting an old friend in a foreign land.

The Fortune-teller muttered to herself, "Since his Profession is Doctor, the guitar case he's always carrying might not actually contain a guitar, right? Its contents should be similar to my Crystal Ball—probably special medical supplies capable of saving someone on the brink of death at a critical moment."

Although this Doctor's behavior was very strange, merely possessing a Profession made him worth befriending.

While the Fortune-teller was still in the room letting her imagination run wild, Gu Mian had already pushed open the door and left.

Now that Yuwen Hao had left the instance, his three pitiful and helpless "available choices" were still here. Gu Mian was going to round them up.

"Thankfully, I tied up Yuwen Hao's available choices earlier, otherwise they might have all escaped by now..." Gu Mian mumbled to himself as he went upstairs, heading for his room.

That was right. To interrogate the ghosts in the instance more effectively, Gu Mian had trussed up Yuwen Hao's four available choices tightly before entering Dong'er's room and had thrown them into his own room.

Although he didn't know if ropes were effective against ghosts, tying them up was better than not.

Gu Mian was eager to see the ghosts he had trussed up like zongzi.

He had now reached his room. Surprisingly, the door was slightly ajar, as if blown open by the wind.

Gu Mian found this somewhat strange. He touched his chin. I remember closing the door quite securely when I left.

How could it have opened a crack on its own?

Did something happen? As these thoughts crossed his mind, he pushed the door open.

The scene behind the door came into full view.

Chapter 333 Gugu Never Stops Updating_1

"Mr. Gu, I can't say I've ever seen a guest on a matchmaking show tie up their potential date." As soon as the door was pushed open, a highly sarcastic remark reached Gu Mian's ears.

He looked up.

To his surprise, Teacher Sweet was in his room, standing right in the center and watching him with a look of displeasure.

It seemed the host had come to deliver her suffering employees.

At her feet, several tightly bound employees were still writhing like clumsy caterpillars.

Gu Mian made a mental note: It seems ropes can indeed bind ghosts.

Thinking this, he managed an awkward yet polite smile. "Well, you're seeing it now, aren't you?"

Gu Mian couldn't resist adding, "You might have never seen anyone tie people up with ropes, but I've also never seen a matchmaking show that allows ghosts to participate, heh heh heh."

His final laughter was clearly perfunctory, sounding almost sarcastic.

Teacher Sweet's eyebrows twitched, looking somewhat exasperated.

Not only was Teacher Sweet in Gu Mian's room, but there were also several cameramen carrying video cameras.

These pale-faced cameramen were omnipresent, capable of squeezing into the tiniest crevice.

Just as Gu Mian was speaking, one cameraman scurried over to give him a close-up.

This instance really has a strong reality show vibe...

Teacher Sweet knew Gu Mian was a thorn in her side.

For this reason, the instance NPCs had even held a special meeting to discuss him. The conclusion was unoriginal: get him out as soon as possible; otherwise, who knew what might happen later.

Of course, some had proposed bold ideas, like a 'righteous backstab,' but such audacious suggestions were unanimously rejected.

Teacher Sweet deeply empathized. With Coach Che and Mr. Green as prior victims, she truly couldn't afford to be complacent.

Moreover, she'd heard that a statue of an Evil God in some forgotten corner was constantly being destroyed—a truly innocent victim.

To avoid becoming the third victim, Teacher Sweet had always wanted to find an opportunity to kick Gu Mian out of the instance.

Unfortunately, she lacked the authority.

Teacher Sweet felt a headache coming on. She looked at Gu Mian and asked, "You already know the most important clue in this instance, don't you? Did you tell the other guests this clue to get them to leave, just so you could stay here alone and operate more conveniently?"

She understood Gu Mian's intentions.

Last night, Gu Mian had maniacally dragged No. 4 into an all-night discussion about life. The next morning, Teacher Sweet learned about their conversation from her miserable employee.

"It seems you realized early on that this instance was unusual. Well, it's not surprising that you'd notice..."

Teacher Sweet muttered to herself, "However, if you're trying to understand your relationship with this game, I'm afraid you've come to the wrong place. Because even I don't know the answer."

"Even if you're an advanced NPC in this special instance?" Gu Mian countered.

By now, the bound ghosts had stopped struggling. They quieted down, appearing to listen to the conversation between the two.

Teacher Sweet spread her hands. "Even though this is a special instance, and even if I'm a somewhat advanced NPC, if I don't know, I don't know... But judging by your words, did someone tell you that you can get more information out of host-type NPCs?"

She guessed correctly, indeed.

But Gu Mian didn't waste words with her. "If I believed everything you said, wouldn't that be rather undignified for me?"

Of course, Gu Mian wouldn't be easily persuaded by her.

An NPC's words are as trustworthy as a ghost's promise.

Besides, with so many reasonable ghosts in this instance, not making good use of them would be a colossal waste.

Seeing Gu Mian's opportunistic look, Teacher Sweet opened her mouth to speak, but then, as if noticing something, she closed it and looked behind him.

Gu Mian also turned to look and saw the Fortune-teller's head peeking furtively around the doorframe.

The Fortune-teller had come upstairs originally wanting to discuss class matters with Gu Mian, and perhaps to recruit him.

Unexpectedly, just as she reached the top of the stairs, she heard what sounded like people talking inside.

When she reached the door, she realized the person talking to the Doctor was Teacher Sweet.

"What are you two..." The Fortune-teller stared at the two people in the room, her expression puzzled.

It was the same last time.

Those two seemed to have had a conversation in the hall as well.

But the Fortune-teller hadn't paid much attention back then.

An NPC and a player—what could they possibly have to talk about?

And now, the Fortune-teller had stumbled upon them talking again.

But after witnessing Gu Mian's distinctiveness, the Fortune-teller couldn't help but become suspicious.

Actually, before Gu Mian, she had seen players who dared to attack ghosts in an instance—quite a few, in fact.

That was when the game had just begun. Some players didn't believe in the supernatural, claiming that instances were just data and ghosts couldn't harm them. The Fortune-teller vividly remembered one such player who, when a ghost appeared, mustered their courage and attacked it with whatever they held...

The aftermath was too gruesome to describe; even a brief recollection made her feel sick.

Other players considered themselves the chosen ones, thinking that since death wasn't real, there was nothing to fear. Yet, upon entering an instance and encountering a ghost, they'd flee faster than anyone, and their screams when caught were utterly bloodcurdling—nothing like the people who had once claimed 'we won't really die.'

Reality was far more terrifying than imagination.

The Fortune-teller had never seen a player who could withstand such terror, until now...

She saw not only Teacher Sweet standing in the middle of the room, hesitating to speak, but also the figures on the floor, trussed up like rice dumplings and wriggling clumsily.

The Fortune-teller's mouth fell slightly agape.

It didn't take a genius to know this was the Doctor's handiwork.

To date, he was the only player the Fortune-teller had seen who could truly take action against ghosts.

And when he struck, he struck to kill.

She saw the Doctor turning back to look at her. The instant his gaze met hers, the Fortune-teller shuddered violently.

She had always considered this Doctor a comedic character. Every time she saw him, he would do something highly dramatic, capable of making people laugh even in the most terrifying environments.

For instance, giving the impotently furious driver a resounding slap; or suddenly emerging from under a bed at the most perilous moment, causing everyone to scatter in fright.

But this moment was different.

That fleeting glance, one he hadn't managed to conceal in time, carried an aura of wanting to kill and silence, so oppressive it was suffocating.

Terrifying.

"You two chat... I'll be going..."

Realizing something was amiss, the Fortune-teller immediately decided to turn back. Under the gaze of the two people in the room, she walked with mechanical steps, quickly heading towards the stairs.

For some reason, she had an ominous premonition, as if staying in this instance a moment longer could prove fatal.

"Yuwen Hao was right..." The Fortune-teller had reached the top of the stairs. She looked back at the open doorway, a lingering fear in her eyes. "I should have left this place sooner..."

Just then, she heard Teacher Sweet's voice come from the room again.

Chapter 334 The Grand Prize for Confusing Behaviour: Kidnapping the Host During a Blind Date_1

"I can't believe that I, a distinguished host of a special instance, could fall this low..."

The Fortune-teller's scalp tingled. What was she saying! What did she mean by 'I, a distinguished host of a special instance'? Teacher Sweet was indeed the host of a special instance, but those words absolutely shouldn't have come from her own mouth.

The Fortune-teller had always believed that all instances would reset. Once a group of players completed an instance, it would revert to its original state before accepting the next group. The NPCs within these instances were merely tools generated by the game, their memories wiped clean with each reset. But now, it seemed that wasn't the case at all! She had always been cautious when entering instances, never mentioning words like "instance" or "game" in front of NPCs. Yet, these NPCs in the instance actually knew their own identities? A character in a game knew they were an NPC? That was utterly ludicrous!

The Fortune-teller swayed, feeling a little faint. A chill crept up from the soles of her feet to her heart. These instances weren't just data... they were alive...

At this moment, Gu Mian, who was in the room, had already turned to look at Teacher Sweet. He knew the Fortune-teller hadn't gone far. For Teacher Sweet to say such a thing at this juncture, she was clearly making sure the Fortune-teller outside could hear her. Moreover, her tone carried a distinct hint of threat, as if she might expose his identity to the other players at any moment.

Being exposed wouldn't be a huge deal, but Gu Mian was rather concerned that people who knew his identity might have loose lips. They might tell everyone they met things like, "That Gu Mian is easy to recognize, handsome, dashing, and suave," making his appearance common knowledge. This was

especially true for players with occupations. Players with occupations usually had many friends—except for himself, of course.

Seeing that Gu Mian didn't speak up, Teacher Sweet raised an eyebrow and continued, "I can make an exception and tell you which of the remaining No. 2 and No. 3 is a player. You can then immediately fill in your crush and leave this instance..."

Heavens! The Fortune-teller, standing at the top of the stairs, instinctively took a step back, trying to hear more clearly, her heart pounding in her chest. What was going on with this instance? How could an NPC proactively offer players such information?

Teacher Sweet's voice continued to drift from the room, and this time, even the Fortune-teller could detect the threat in it. "Besides you, there are four other players left in this instance. None of them are easy to deal with."

Although the Fortune-teller outside didn't immediately grasp what Teacher Sweet was threatening, Gu Mian understood perfectly. If he remained in this instance, the other four players could discover his identity at any moment, perhaps even learning that his nickname was concealed. Coincidentally, none of those four were to be trifled with. They would not only covet what he had but were also highly likely to share his information with others. Without the protection of his hidden identity, Gu Mian would have to constantly watch his back for attacks, both in the real world and in the game.

This was a blatant threat. If a precedent was set here today, then any NPC he met in the future could use the same tactic against him. Teacher Sweet could truly be called a pioneering, new-era NPC.

At this moment, Gu Mian found himself missing the Evil Ghosts from other instances. As ferocious as they were, they had never threatened him so openly. Teacher Sweet, despite her human appearance, posed a far greater danger than those Evil Ghosts.

Gu Mian resolved that if he ever encountered the ghosts he had previously beaten, he would offer them a sincere apology.

Teacher Sweet smiled at Gu Mian. "Of course, don't even think about trying anything on me. I can, at any moment..."

But before she could finish, Gu Mian cut her off, "What was that you just said?"

Teacher Sweet frowned slightly, unsure of Gu Mian's move. After a moment's hesitation, she repeated, "I said, don't think about trying anything on me..."

"No, the line before that."

"I can tell you..."

"Not that one. Further back. The one where you were sighing about your ill fortune and difficult fate."

Teacher Sweet thought for a moment, then frowned and said, "To think that I, a distinguished host of a special instance, could be reduced to such a state?"

Gu Mian chuckled. "Don't say you've been reduced to such a state. There were several before you who were far worse off. Your current situation isn't so bad, really. The worst is always yet to come."

Teacher Sweet's mind raced. Her smile instantly froze on her lips. "What do you mean by that?"

Outside, the Fortune-teller didn't dare move a muscle, silently listening to the conversation between the two in the room. She knew they were both tacitly allowing her to eavesdrop, but even with their permission, she didn't dare make the slightest sound.

Just after Teacher Sweet spoke, the Doctor's voice followed, "What I mean is—this isn't your worst predicament yet."

Teacher Sweet started to say, "What—"

But before she could finish, a piercing scream cut her off.

Hearing the scream, the Fortune-teller instinctively turned her head and took a step in that direction, only to freeze again. She didn't dare go any closer.

Then, a sound like a motorcycle engine revving roared from the room. After a long moment, Teacher Sweet's incredulous voice followed, "Are you insane?"

Before the Fortune-teller could process where the motorcycle sound had come from, she heard the Doctor's voice again. "If I back down to you today, every NPC I meet from now on will be able to threaten me like this. Choosing the lesser of two evils, I'd say being threatened by players is slightly more tolerable than by NPCs... Besides, I find you particularly grating today."

How could the Fortune-teller not understand after hearing that? That Doctor must have kidnapped Teacher Sweet! But weren't players unable to harm NPCs? And how did he manage to kidnap her? With a motorcycle?

Unable to contain her curiosity any longer, the Fortune-teller quickly tiptoed towards the source of the sounds. After just a few steps, the scene inside the room came into view.

That guitar case didn't hold life-saving medical supplies for critical moments; it clearly contained a gleaming, menacing, and deadly weapon!

Chapter 335 Cuckoo Flies First_1

Teacher Sweet lay on the floor, just like the other bound individuals.

She had been tackled, and the perpetrator was still pinning her down.

Gu Mian supported himself with his left hand on the floor, while his right hand held the chainsaw, its handle pressed across Teacher Sweet's neck.

The chainsaw was already running. Its blade tip, unsupported, rested on the tiled floor, where the teeth had ground a deep, long groove into the tile.

Tile debris flew from the groove as the blade moved, like earth churned by a plow.

If Gu Mian loosened his grip, the chainsaw would fall instantly, and Teacher Sweet's head would be severed from her neck.

The Fortune-teller's mouth fell slightly open.

Years of habit made her instinctively step forward to mediate violent disputes.

"Wait..." The Fortune-teller trembled, taking a small step forward. "Let's talk this out!"

Oh my God.

What on earth is this surreal scene?

I've never witnessed anything like this in my entire life!

The Fortune-teller desperately suppressed the torrent of sarcastic remarks flooding her mind, inspired by the insanity unfolding before her. For now, she only wanted to restore peace.

However, neither party paid her any attention.

Pinned beneath Gu Mian, Teacher Sweet stared directly at him, her voice frantic, "Gu Mian! If you stop now, she'll be the only one in this instance who knows your identity!"

The Fortune-teller was baffled.

Does "she" refer to me?

And this Doctor is... Gu Mian!

Of course, I know the name Gu Mian! That name has a bounty of 30,000 Game Coins on his head!

The Fortune-teller was dumbfounded.

"You see," Gu Mian said, showing no intention of stopping, "a moment ago, when you were unharmed, you could threaten me with revealing my identity to make me leave this instance. But now that you're about to die, you can only use that same threat to beg me to spare your life. This shows that the more decisive a person is, the greater their advantage."

As he spoke, he demonstrated his point about 'decisiveness.' His grip on the saw loosened slightly, and the chilling blade slid an inch lower, poised to slice into Teacher Sweet's delicate neck.

"Besides, if I cared about my identity being exposed, I wouldn't have disregarded your threats and done this to you. I care about something else. You understand that, right?"

Teacher Sweet was practically exploding with rage.

She hadn't expected Gu Mian to be so nonchalant about his identity being exposed.

Moreover, she couldn't afford to act recklessly and immediately inform all players in the instance of Gu Mian's identity. This was her only bargaining chip; if she used it, it would be gone, and she'd have nothing left to threaten Gu Mian with.

At that moment, the saw in Gu Mian's hand lowered another inch.

The sharp teeth whizzed past Teacher Sweet's neck. Her skin seemed to react to the sound of the chainsaw; her pores rapidly dilated, as if emitting terrified screams.

Death would arrive in the next second.

In that split second, the Fortune-teller heard Teacher Sweet's urgent cry, "I'll tell you! What do you want to know?"

Her words were clearly effective. Gu Mian stilled his hand, the saw now hovering about two centimeters above Teacher Sweet's neck.

Gu Mian's eyebrows twitched; this was exactly what he wanted to hear.

The somewhat oblivious Fortune-teller was still watching from the side, but Gu Mian didn't care.

"I'm asking you," Gu Mian said, staring intently at Teacher Sweet's face, "what's the significance of the number seven...?"

'Seven' was the word the abnormally powerful ghost from the previous instance had blurted out before dying. Unfortunately, it had only managed that single word before it perished completely.

Hearing this, Teacher Sweet first furrowed her brow in confusion, but it quickly smoothed out. "Who told you this?!"

The Fortune-teller nearby was completely bewildered. She had no idea what cryptic game these two were playing and could only watch helplessly.

"Less nonsense," Gu Mian said, remembering how forcing a confession last time had led to the instance's destruction. "Speak up."

If Teacher Sweet starts talking now, she probably won't get many words out before the instance is shut down. We have to hurry.

Teacher Sweet seemed caught in a dilemma. She frowned and hesitated for several seconds before finally speaking, clearly compelled by the threat to her life, "It's not merely a simple number..."

Meanwhile, Anzhi Tianlan stood far from the villa, gazing at the building where all the players had gathered at the start.

A few cameramen were sticking close to her, filming her from every conceivable angle.

Anzhi Tianlan glanced at the cameramen beside her. "That's right. My other opponent died long ago, so you can only film me now."

The pale-faced cameramen remained silent, continuing their work.

They seemed particularly fascinated by Anzhi Tianlan's long, dark hair, often zooming in for close-ups of her tresses.

Anzhi Tianlan's gaze returned to the distant villa, her earlier gentle expression gone.

Early on, she had found the hidden way to clear this instance: kill Dong'er, hide the body, and take her place.

This way, no one could hold her accountable, as long as other players didn't meddle unnecessarily.

Moreover, she was confident in her acting skills and believed she could deceive the other players.

But the appearance of that Doctor had thrown her into a panic.

In truth, the Doctor hadn't actively sought trouble with her, nor even given her an unnecessary glance.

But Anzhi Tianlan had encountered many people in her life; some, she knew were trouble just by looking at them.

The Doctor was such a person.

Therefore, Anzhi Tianlan tried even harder to conceal her identity, but unexpectedly, she was still exposed—in front of all the guests, including the Dong'er who had been under the bed for some time.

Since my role-play was a massive failure, my only option is to flee.

As long as I make it past the third day, I'll naturally leave the instance...

As Anzhi Tianlan thought this, she retracted her gaze and was about to turn and leave.

But just then, she suddenly sensed the distant building quiver slightly.

She stopped abruptly, frowning. "Am I imagining things?"

Almost immediately, a stronger tremor came from beneath her feet.

This special instance seemed to be experiencing an earthquake.

What's going on?!

How can there be an earthquake in an instance?!

But she quickly realized this was no earthquake; it was a malfunction of the instance itself.

Chapter 336 Susceptible Zone_1

[Warning!]

[The instance is currently experiencing an unknown attack!]

[To ensure personal safety, all players will be ejected from the instance within ten seconds. Please prepare.]

[10, 9, 8...]

What? Anzhi Tianlan's eyes widened in disbelief as she looked at the game panel that had suddenly appeared before her. She had been prepared to stay in this instance for three full days but hadn't expected something like this to happen midway. This does save me a lot of trouble...

But this instance was fine before. Why would it suddenly turn out like this?

The ground beneath her feet trembled continuously. The tremors from distant buildings were particularly violent, as if they could collapse at any moment. Anzhi Tianlan quickly composed herself amidst the chaos, her gaze fixed on the trembling world as countless thoughts raced through her mind.

An instance wouldn't collapse for no reason. Something abnormal must have gotten mixed in, causing it to suffer an unknown attack. And this abnormal thing... No matter how I look at it, the most out-of-place thing in this instance is that strange Doctor.

She didn't have much time to think. The countdown on the panel ticked down relentlessly, each number like a strike of doom. Before long, the ticking number transformed into a large, round zero. Anzhi Tianlan stared intently at the "0" on the panel.

Just half a second after this perfectly round zero appeared, a boundless darkness surged forth, blotting out the sky and extinguishing all light.

The same thing happened to Gu Mian. The moment that zero, round as a duck egg, appeared, he was enveloped in darkness. In the instant he was enveloped by darkness, Teacher Sweet, pinned beneath him, was still mouthing words, but no sound could be heard. Gu Mian only saw the Fortune-teller's terrified expression freeze on his face before that seemingly petrified face was consumed by the darkness.

Not long after being surrounded by darkness, light began to re-emerge.

Looks like I'm back in the real world.

A beam of light pierced the darkness ahead, illuminating the immediate surroundings. Just as Gu Mian expected this light to expand and illuminate everything, it remained static. After several seconds, it was still just that single beam.

Gu Mian blinked, taking a moment to confirm he hadn't been transported to some peculiar location; it was simply late night in the real world.

Because it was a special instance, Gu Mian had entered it while in the Spirit Car, so naturally, he returned to his original location upon exiting. Fortunately, Chu Changge and Fatty hadn't driven the Spirit Car away—of course, neither of them could drive, so they couldn't have even if they'd wanted to.

It was now late at night. A flashlight lay on the front seat, the source of the illumination.

Gu Mian instinctively checked the time: 2:35 a.m. It's already so late...

A faint fragrance wafted through the air. I wonder who sprayed perfume while I was gone. The sound of snoring drifted up from his feet. Glancing down, Gu Mian saw Fatty sprawled at his feet, sleeping like a log. His arrival hadn't disturbed Fatty in the slightest.

Not far away, the windshield presented a scene straight out of a midnight horror show: a few strands of hair dangled from the car roof, draped over the glass, looking quite terrifying at first glance. No need to even think about it; it must be Xiao Hong, who, unable to bear the idleness, had gone to the car roof to enjoy the breeze again.

Chu Changge isn't here? Gu Mian searched high and low, almost flipping Fatty's makeshift bed to see if Chu Changge was hiding underneath, but found no trace of him. Vanished into thin air? Quite something.

Just as Gu Mian was debating whether to wake the soundly sleeping Fatty to ask, a figure appeared on the road ahead.

Chu Changge? Gu Mian frowned, looking in the direction of the figure. Because the Spirit Car's headlights weren't on, the figure outside the windshield was extremely blurry. However, it wasn't long before the figure drew closer, and Gu Mian recognized it as Chu Changge.

Strangely, he was wearing a mask in the dead of night. A closer look revealed it to be the Life Type D - Blockage mask Gu Mian had recently purchased from the medical supplies section of a supermarket.

This blocking mask, once opened, had a shelf life of one month and could filter out common viruses. It wasn't cheap for ordinary players.

Gu Mian didn't believe Chu Changge was wearing the mask merely to keep warm.

Seemingly noticing Gu Mian's return to the real world, Chu Changge quickened his pace, swiftly reached the Spirit Car, and pulled open the door to get in. A gust of cold wind swept in. Chu Changge quickly closed the door, shutting out the chill. The strands of hair dangling from the roof swayed slightly, then fell still.

Chu Changge paid no mind to Xiao Hong perched on the roof. He looked at Gu Mian and said, "You're back."

"Hmm," Gu Mian nodded thoughtfully. "What were you doing out in the middle of the night?"

"This," Chu Changge said, taking off his mask with one hand and producing something from his pocket with the other. "A map."

Gu Mian took it and glanced over it. Indeed, it was a map.

He had previously teased Chu Changge for being a map aficionado, but he hadn't realized Chu Changge was so passionate about cartography. Why hadn't he noticed this hobby of his when they were younger?

Chu Changge handed him a hand-drawn, detailed map of their current area, roughly the size of a county. The buildings were marked with great clarity, including pre-existing structures as well as the ticket hall and supermarket that had appeared after the game started. Could Chu Changge really have explored all the places on the map in such a short time?

Gu Mian continued to examine it. The color scheme of the hand-drawn map was rather jarring. It was unclear where Chu Changge had found colored pens, but he had managed to color the small county map so vividly it resembled a rainbow after a storm.

Gu Mian frowned. He knew Chu Changge's aesthetic sense wasn't usually this gaudy; there had to be a reason for coloring it this way.

Thinking this, he pointed to the map in his hand. "We're right here, correct? You've colored this area yellow. Is there any particular significance to that?"

The center of the map depicted their dilapidated Spirit Car. Chu Changge's drawing skills were quite good; Gu Mian recognized their Spirit Car at a glance.

Chu Changge glanced at the area Gu Mian indicated and said calmly, "Yellow signifies a high-risk infection zone."

Just hearing the term 'high-risk infection zone' was enough to know it wasn't good. If this were a global zombie apocalypse instead of a global game, the 'high-risk infection zone' would undoubtedly be an extremely dangerous place.

Gu Mian wasn't an idiot; he understood immediately. "There's a contagious disease here?"

No wonder Chu Changge was wearing a blocking mask. He hadn't expected something like this to happen while he was in the instance.

Chu Changge nodded slightly. "I suspect this virus began spreading a few days ago. Furthermore, I believe this isn't the only area affected."

Gu Mian looked down at the map in his hand again.

Natural disasters are often followed by man-made calamities. It was highly probable that inadequate post-disaster measures had led to decomposing corpses and contaminated water sources, breeding a multitude of viruses.

"From my observations, since the virus hasn't been spreading for long, only initial symptoms are apparent. However, it's clear that the symptoms of this infectious disease are significantly more severe

than those seen before the game began. It could even develop to a terrifying extent in the future..." Chu Changge paused here before adding, "It's highly probable that this is a virus released by the game."

Chapter 337 - The Madness of Gu Mian's Patient_1

This game had indeed carried out quite a lot of unethical practices to exploit human beings. The extreme cold weather not long ago was likely its doing as well. Gu Mian and his group had speculated that there were two organizers behind this game: one beneficial to humans and the other harmful. It seemed the harmful one had almost taken control of the real world.

"That said..." At this moment, Chu Changge raised his head, his eyes adjusting to the slightly glaring flashlight beam, and looked directly at Gu Mian. "Aren't you going to check the content on your panel?"

Gu Mian's panel was always visible, so Chu Changge could see its contents clearly. The first line read: [Instance Evaluator No. 10065 at your service...] This was clearly the evaluation after the instance ended. Previous evaluations were almost always conducted **within** the instance. This time, however, the evaluation only appeared after they were teleported out.

It's probably because the instance was in such a hurry to teleport us out, Gu Mian suspected.

"Don't worry about it; you continue," Gu Mian said, having already glanced over it. Just like the previous times, it's mostly fluff aside from the rewards.

Chu Changge then continued, "This infectious disease is spreading aggressively. For now, I've only identified the initial symptoms: coughing, fever, nausea, vomiting, and one more key point..." He paused. "It seems to be accompanied by mild allergic reactions."

Allergies? Gu Mian stroked his chin. Although the temperature has warmed up a bit, it hasn't gotten **that** much warmer. Most people outside are still wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants, not exposing much skin. And Chu Changge could deduce allergic reactions just from their exposed faces and hands?

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "I've noticed that people have been scratching themselves much more frequently lately. That's why I made that guess."

True. If people on the street were scratching all over like monkeys, it would be hard not to notice. It was remarkable that Chu Changge had managed to visit so many areas in such a short time and observe the behavior of so many people.

Gu Mian looked at the map in his hands again. The map was broadly divided into three colored areas: red, yellow, and green.

Chu Changge explained, "The red areas are heavily infected zones. Entering these regions is extremely dangerous, with a high probability of contracting the virus. Of course, since this disease has just begun to spread, there aren't any heavily infected situations yet. But based on my observations, if this virus develops further, the red areas will definitely become major disaster zones..."

"These areas are densely populated, and there are likely many corpses hidden within them. Several residential complexes are located here, mostly adjacent north-to-south. Some complexes are separated by only a very narrow road. A northerly wind is currently blowing. If the virus is resilient and capable of airborne transmission, then as long as the wind blows, these areas will quickly fall."

"The yellow areas are susceptible to infection. The population isn't as dense, so there won't be too many sources of infection. However, since they're located on main roads, people often pass through them during transit, so there's still a risk of getting infected..."

In that case, even without Chu Changge saying so, the green areas must be safe zones, Gu Mian understood.

"The green areas are relatively safe, but not absolutely safe," Chu Changge said. "The green areas are sparsely populated, but we need to be concerned about animals like rats, flies, and cockroaches carrying and spreading the virus."

"Right now, people don't seem to have realized the severity of the situation. They appear to be treating this virus like a common flu."

Gu Mian nodded slightly. After all, with the recent severe cold, catching the flu wouldn't be surprising. Some people might even choose not to take medication. Currently, all hospitals and pharmacies are closed, and medicine in supermarkets is frighteningly expensive. More people want to save the medicine

they've stocked up for critical moments, though it's debatable whether it would even work then. It probably won't be long before those who don't take this seriously start to panic.

He noticed Chu Changge had marked the Spirit Car they were in with green. The green vehicle looked completely out of place against the surrounding yellow main color.

Chu Changge explained, "The moment I realized an infectious disease might be spreading, I went to the supermarket's medical supply section and bought this. Masks can indeed block some viruses, but I was afraid Fatty might suffocate in his sleep if he wore one..."

Gu Mian was speechless. "..."

Fatty's snores seemed to be getting louder.

As he spoke, Chu Changge reached out and picked up an item from the dashboard near the windshield. It was something similar to a solid air freshener. With Chu Changge's movement, Gu Mian caught a faint, pleasant scent. It's the same scent I smelled when I first got back.

[Life-Type-C Virus Air Freshener]

[This scent can disperse some types of airborne viruses. The smaller the space of use, the more pronounced the dispersal effect.]

This means if this air freshener were thrown outside, its effective area would be the entire Earth, rendering it basically useless. But if placed in this small car, its effect would be significant. As for when it would become ineffective, it's just like a solid air freshener: it stops working once it completely evaporates.

Gu Mian recalled that the supermarket's medical supplies were divided into four categories—A, B, C, and D—with prices decreasing accordingly. Category C medical supplies cost a few hundred Game Coins, which is a bit pricey. But it was worth it to prevent Fatty from suffocating in his sleep.

"I haven't found any high-level ticket booths nearby," Chu Changge said, still remembering their goal of finding one to enter high-level instances. "What's your plan?"

By this time, Gu Mian had already closed his settlement panel. Unsurprisingly, it was still an S-rank evaluation. However, I do have some reservations about the comment 'holding key personnel from the variety show hostage and threatening them.' The rewards were 999 Game Coins, 9 Attribute Points, and one special item. It seems the instance wants to give people a chance to survive, so everyone's recent special item rewards are probably related to medicine.

[Toy Goose Pharmaceutical Flu Medicine]

[Introduction: A drug produced by the Toy Goose Pharmaceutical Factory, one of the first batches of medicine manufactured by the company. Due to unrefined techniques, taking it may result in some strange side effects.]

[Function: Cures illnesses]

Well, the function is certainly concise and easy to understand. But this Toy Goose Company... Gu Mian frowned. Isn't this company putting out products a bit too frequently? The previous [Dimension-Breaking Phone] was from this company. And then [A Vial of Failed Experimental Reagent] also mentioned this company. Gu Mian vaguely recalled complaining about the Toy Goose Company when he read the description for [A Vial of Failed Experimental Reagent].

Seeing Gu Mian remain silent, Chu Changge repeated, "What's your plan?"

Gu Mian finally snapped back to reality. "For now, let's stay somewhere a bit safer." Only an idiot would run around in heavily infected areas.

Chu Changge was silent for a moment before speaking, "Have you realized? You're the only Doctor in the world. A world ravaged by a virus is actually very advantageous for you... You could have queues of patients hundreds of meters long lining up at your door, waiting for your treatment. Even if your identity is exposed, desperate patients wouldn't let anyone harm their only Doctor. They would overturn everything just to survive."

Chapter 338 - Gu Mian Driving_1

Gu Mian sat silently in the dark for a few seconds before speaking, "Could I even establish something like an organization with me as the leader?"

Such an organization would have been unthinkable before the game began.

However, times had changed. All survivors were now banding together for warmth, and organizations like the one Gu Mian had mentioned were scattered all over the world.

Chu Changge nodded. "You could use your status as a doctor to help others. Of course, I mean only help those who would be useful to you, thereby gaining their gratitude..."

"And even when saving people, it would be best not to reveal your identity as Gu Mian. So, he should avoid being seen by others as much as possible."

Chu Changge was referring to Fatty. The trio Gu Mian belonged to were frequent names on the public announcements, and of the three, only Fatty lacked a real name for cover.

If people saw his game username, it could potentially arouse suspicion.

Gu Mian stared at the sleeping Fatty. "It's probably not too late to kick him out of the car right now."

Fatty, snoring blissfully, had no idea what Gu Mian was contemplating and continued to snore contentedly.

Listening to Fatty's snores, Gu Mian let out a rare sigh. "There probably aren't many people left in the world who can sleep so peacefully now."

Food, medicine, and electricity were scarce. They had recently endured the threat of extreme cold, and just as the severe cold had passed, a massive epidemic was breaking out.

The scariest part was that, at that time, the majority of people were unaware of the impending disaster.

Only Fatty remained happy-go-lucky, well-fed and warm, and had avoided infection by the plague.

To put it another way, even if Fatty did get sick, Gu Mian, being a doctor, wasn't just for show. The illness would most likely be nipped in the bud by Gu Mian before it could worsen.

Chu Changge spoke quietly, "If you kicked him out of the car now and drove off, he'd never be able to sleep so peacefully again."

Of course, Gu Mian would never actually kick Fatty out of the vehicle.

Thus, when Fatty, who had been sound asleep, opened his eyes the next day, he saw Gu Mian in the driver's seat.

"Doctor?" Fatty rubbed his eyes as he sat up. "You're back?"

Not only was he back, but he had also driven them to the relatively safe area marked on the map.

Even with the 'virus freshener' they'd bought from the supermarket in the vehicle, they still had to be cautious.

Gu Mian was currently driving the Spirit Car along the main road in this green zone. It was clear this area had been sparsely populated even before the game began, so the road wasn't congested.

After the severe cold, the population in the cities had gradually begun to increase.

But since few people lived in this particular area, Gu Mian only encountered a handful of individuals.

The Spirit Car truly lived up to its name; its head-turning rate was easily 200 percent.

Almost everyone who saw the Spirit Car stopped, their eyes glued to the white vehicle until it disappeared from view.

This was because drivable cars were now exceedingly rare.

Due to the conditions on Earth, nearly all vehicle fuel had evaporated out of nowhere. For a time, there were still a fair number of cars on the streets because a small portion of fuel remained in the hands of players.

Recently, however, drivable cars had become an almost nonexistent sight on the streets.

People could now only travel by foot or bicycle, but neither mode of transport allowed for long-distance travel, making things highly inconvenient.

The Spirit Car didn't consume fuel; it could even pull off eighteen drifts on a mountain road right now.

Basking in the envious gazes of passersby, Fatty remarked, "Professo Che certainly wasn't kidding; the Spirit Car Driving License is truly a great asset."

Hearing this, Gu Mian couldn't help but think of Coach Che, the driving instructor he had tricked before.

Teacher Sweet had mentioned he'd even worked as a cameraman in the 'Sweet Lovers' instance for a while, hadn't he?

Speaking of 'Sweet Lovers'... Gu Mian stroked his chin. "That special instance I entered recently was indeed very special..."

Fatty's voice came from the side, "Was it a matchmaking show?"

Gu Mian was momentarily taken aback before he realized.

That's right, the announcement was already out. Fatty probably saw the name of the 'Sweet Lovers' instance on the instance collapse announcement.

"There was a person named Teacher Sweet inside," Gu Mian continued. "She's a very understanding female host. After a harmonious conversation with her, I obtained a lot of information."

Upon hearing the name 'Teacher Sweet', Xiao Hong at the rear of the car seemed to stir.

"If I may be so bold..." Unaware of Xiao Hong's stirring in the back, Fatty suddenly asked, "If the conversation was so harmonious, how did you manage to crash the instance?"

Gu Mian pursed his lips, opting to ignore Fatty's question. "Just as I was about to leave the instance, she told me something."

Chu Changge also turned his gaze to Gu Mian, apparently waiting for him to continue.

"Do you remember the 'Hide and Seek' instance, where the ghost spat out the number 'seven'? When I asked Teacher Sweet about the meaning of 'seven,' she told me the name of a story..."

"I assume everyone knows this story, right?" Instead of revealing the name directly, Gu Mian looked at Chu Changge and Fatty. "Just from the number 'seven,' can you think of anything?"

A brief silence followed, but it didn't last long before Fatty hesitantly spoke. "You know, Doctor, your question reminds me of something... Doesn't this whole scene feel a bit familiar to you guys?"

Of course, it did. In the 'Crazy Guessing Words' instance, Gu Mian had been responsible for guessing the words, while Chu Changge and Fatty acted them out.

At that time, the three of them had guessed a word related to 'seven.'

Coincidentally, that word related to 'seven' was also the name of a story.

"It's 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,'" Chu Changge said, adjusting his glasses.

Gu Mian nodded slightly. When he had asked Teacher Sweet about the meaning of 'seven' in the instance, she had replied with an understanding expression, "It's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs!"

Gu Mian didn't know why Teacher Sweet's first reaction was this.

When he tried to ask more, the entire instance began to collapse. Although Teacher Sweet, whom he held hostage, was still shouting desperately, not a sound reached Gu Mian's ears.

He could only see Teacher Sweet's mouth opening and closing, and the suddenly shocked expression on the face of the Fortune-teller standing by the door. That Fortune-teller seemed to know something...

While Gu Mian was still pondering, Chu Changge suddenly asked, "Do you remember the last set of words to be guessed in the 'Crazy Guessing Words' instance?"

Of course he did. Gu Mian remembered that a player named Qi Tian, who was near his cage at the time, had suddenly sabotaged things, using the 'Curtain of Darkness' to cover his guessing board so no one could see the words on it.

Only when the instance was about to end did the 'Curtain of Darkness' lose its effect and retract.

However, Gu Mian had looked too late and hadn't clearly seen what was written on it.

And Chu Changge, who had been staring at the guessing board for a while, claimed he hadn't seen it either when asked.

Fatty, on the other hand, claimed to have seen a name.

Chapter 339 - Fake Accident"_1

"So, you're going to confess now that you actually saw it back then, but lied and told me you didn't?" Gu Mian looked at Chu Changge.

Chu Changge indeed looked like he had seen it at the time, but he seemed to have some unspoken difficulty that prevented him from saying it.

"No," Chu Changge shook his head. "I didn't see it."

It seemed he wasn't planning to confess.

After shaking his head, Chu Changge continued, "What I mean is that the hidden word might also be some kind of hint."

He paused for a moment, seeming to organize the clues. "You learned from Teacher Sweet that 'seven' is related to 'Snow White and the Seven Little Dwarfs.' Coincidentally, we encountered the clue about the seven Little Dwarfs much earlier, in the Crazy Guessing Words instance, but we didn't think deeply about it."

"This might not be a coincidence. My idea is that the game was hinting at certain clues from the very beginning. These clues might be hidden in the daily routine of an instance, or they could be displayed in very obvious places, just like 'Snow White and the Seven Little Dwarfs.'"

"Do you remember Mr. Green's expression when the phrase 'Snow White and the Seven Little Dwarfs' appeared?"

Gu Mian remembered. It wasn't that he paid particular attention to Mr. Green, but rather that when this phrase appeared on the word guessing board, the expressions of the others were exceptionally peculiar.

Not knowing what the phrase was, Gu Mian had specifically observed everyone's face. Among them, Mr. Green's was the most spectacular; it could almost be described as breathtakingly turbulent.

However, this breathtaking expression only lasted for a moment before he quickly concealed it.

At the time, Gu Mian thought he was just marveling at how perverse the words were, but thinking about it now, it seems there was more to it.

"Speaking of which, I suddenly remember..." Fatty interjected weakly. "Back then, when the phrase appeared on the blocked-off prompt board, Mr. Green was especially anxious for us to go get the rewards. If we go by what Brother Chu is saying, he must have been afraid of us seeing something."

Gu Mian thought for a moment. "If we consider it like Chu Changge said, then it's highly possible that the instances we experienced before also contained certain hidden pieces of information, but they were all overlooked."

Hearing this, Fatty's face scrunched up slightly, as if he were trying to recall clues from the previous instances.

"I remember the first instance was a story about a girl and her classmates who were burned to death. The second was a terrifying Spirit Car driving test. The third was your own, Doctor, right? I remember Brother Chu and I didn't enter the third instance..."

"Yes," Gu Mian nodded. "The third instance was the story of a headless female ghost."

Fatty's face wrinkled deeply. Why did the topic always seem to become so bizarre when Gu Mian talked about it?

Gu Mian continued, "The fourth was the Crazy Guessing Words instance. The fifth was the Slaughter Game instance, which was my professional instance. Inside, there was a doctor who wanted to save the world by eliminating the divide between Upper Class People and Lower Class People. And yes, he achieved this wish before he died."

"Let's just talk about these first five for now. Did you discover anything in these instances?"

Fatty racked his brain, but it seemed he couldn't think of anything, so he just shook his head.

Chu Changge remained silent, his thoughts unreadable.

Gu Mian, however, began to recall them carefully. Among these five instances, the most significant one should be the Slaughter Game instance.

The absolute restricted zone, the mad doctor, the audience that reveled in suffering—this was the largest-scale instance Gu Mian had ever experienced, and it could also be called the most deranged.

Thinking back on this insane instance, Gu Mian couldn't seem to recall any useful details.

Just then, Chu Changge, who was beside him, suddenly spoke up, "You're thinking about the Slaughter Game instance, aren't you?"

Gu Mian looked up at him and nodded slightly.

It seemed Chu Changge also had a deep impression of the Slaughter Game instance.

Chu Changge paused for a moment, then continued, "I'm thinking, from a broader perspective, the Slaughter Game is also called a game. We are currently in a global game. While the details differ, games always share similarities. If this global game is termed the 'big game,' then a Slaughter Game instance within it can be considered a 'small game.'"

Gu Mian understood immediately. "You mean it's a reflection?"

Gu Mian's grasp of Chinese was quite good; he could immediately think of several idioms to describe it.

Something like 'seeing the larger picture from a small instance,' 'understanding the profound from the minute,' or 'peeking at the sky through a tube.'

A small game can reflect the larger environment of Earth.

This global game is equivalent to the restricted zone in the Slaughter Game instance, where countless players are struggling desperately.

And each instance is like a monster within that restricted zone, bringing danger to the players.

But if this analogy truly holds...

Gu Mian touched his chin. "Then, what on Earth corresponds to those frenzied spectators from the instance?"

Hearing this, a chill suddenly ran down Fatty's spine. "That is to say... there really might be something on Earth corresponding to the reveling spectators in the instance, and we just don't know it? No, no, we have to think on the bright side. What if that Slaughter Game instance has nothing to do with this global game? After all, these might just be our assumptions."

At this moment, Chu Changge suddenly took something out.

Gu Mian, with his sharp eyesight, recognized it as a special item obtained previously.

[Mail From Hell]

For some reason, Chu Changge rarely seemed to use these special items. After obtaining them, he would just store them in his inventory. Gu Mian had almost forgotten this thing's function.

[Description: A letter mailed by a bored Evil Ghost. There are ten such letters in total, and this is one of them. It contains some idle words:

'This is a place of exile.'

'We are all monsters in a cage.']

Its function is that burning the letter prevents the user from being discovered by ghosts for ten minutes, as long as they don't shove themselves right into a ghost's face.

It's worth mentioning that when Gu Mian first read this letter, he thought the tone was ridiculously over-the-top, but now it seemed that this over-the-top tone was full of hints.

"This is a place of exile; we are all monsters in a cage," Gu Mian repeated. "Looking at these two lines alone, they do bear some resemblance to the Slaughter Game instance."

Chu Changge nodded slightly. "But this isn't a special item from the Slaughter Game instance; it was obtained much later."

This item isn't related to the Slaughter Game, yet it's remarkably similar.

Could these two sentences actually be hinting at this world?

Fatty was struck dumb. It seemed he was once again trying hard to recall the previous instances, his expression looking constipated. "I need to think carefully about the previous instances..."

Just as Fatty put on his constipated expression and was wracking his brain to recall past events, a soft "THUD" suddenly came from the left side of the car.

It sounded like something—or someone—had bumped into the car.

To make it easier to talk, Gu Mian had already parked the car on the roadside.

Hearing the sound, Gu Mian tilted his head slightly, looking in the direction it came from. "What's going on? An insurance scam?"

Chapter 340 Diligent Cooing_1

If we're talking about running a scam, scamming a Spirit Car is certainly a novelty.

By now, Gu Mian had come to the window and looked out.

Indeed, someone had collapsed by the car, appearing as if they had fainted. Even Gu Mian, who had seen his fair share of strange sights, couldn't help exclaiming, "This person... they're terrifying to behold!"

Fatty also craned his neck to get a look. After a few glances, he felt something was off. "Tell me, Doctor," he said, "why do I get the feeling this person isn't a scammer?"

Gu Mian patted Fatty on the shoulder. "You can't just assume she's not a scammer because she's good-looking. If you run into someone faking death to rob you, that kind of thinking will get you killed."

Fatty felt wronged. "I didn't even notice what she looked like until you said she was good-looking!"

It was indeed quite unethical for a group of grown men in the car to be gawking at a fainted, weak woman outside.

After confirming the person on the ground wasn't faking, Gu Mian, out of humanitarian concern, picked up the frail woman and moved her to a nearby green belt for observation.

Xiao Hong was in the Spirit Car. Gu Mian figured that if he moved the woman into the vehicle, she might suffer further trauma upon waking and seeing Xiao Hong's face, so he decided against it.

Fortunately, the area was eerie and deserted, so no one witnessed Gu Mian and his companions' strange behavior.

Even though she was unconscious, Gu Mian and the others could still see her player information.

The girl's game name was "Liu Ying." Quite a poetic name, actually, Gu Mian thought.

He reached out and roughly shook Liu Ying's shoulder, trying to jolt her awake.

Fatty winced from the side.

"Honestly, Doctor, your methods of saving people are so violent..." Perhaps influenced by Gu Mian, Fatty felt a pang of guilt; it seemed less like they were rescuing someone and more like they were robbing them.

While Fatty was still wrestling with his conscience, Chu Changge, who was beside them, suddenly reached out and lifted Liu Ying's top.

"What are you doing?! What do you think you're doing?!" Fatty exclaimed, quickly swatting at Chu Changge's hand. "Put that down! Cover her up!"

Chu Changge, however, ignored Fatty's outburst. Staring at Liu Ying's exposed midriff, he said, "She's infected. This is the most severe case I've ever seen. She likely fainted from extreme exhaustion caused by the virus."

Hearing this, Fatty immediately stopped and also looked at Liu Ying's exposed midriff.

Gu Mian had already been observing her closely.

Previously, Chu Changge had mentioned that those infected with this virus would exhibit allergic reactions. At the time, I'd assumed it would be a mild allergy, Gu Mian recalled, just some small red bumps. At worst, maybe the bumps would cover her whole body, possibly life-threatening. But it's clear now I underestimated how serious this is.

Indeed, the skin on Liu Ying's midriff was a sheet of crimson, covered in bulging, toad-skin-like bumps crowded together. The small bumps had pointed, slightly whitish tips.

Although the sight was gruesome, that wasn't the most terrifying part.

The most terrifying aspect was that among the continuous spread of toad-skin bumps, several enormous protrusions stood out conspicuously.

These were towering pustules, generally yellowish and formed from small, connected patches. Compared to them, the surrounding smaller bumps seemed insignificant.

"My god..." Fatty choked out, his voice trembling. "This disease... it's so disgusting."

Chu Changge looked at Liu Ying lying on the green belt. "Her symptoms are the most severe I've seen to date," he said, "but I suspect her illness hasn't even reached its peak yet."

Fatty's jaw dropped. "So you're saying that at its worst, the symptoms are even more terrifying than this?"

Chu Changge nodded slightly. "Yes."

As he spoke, he took out barrier masks he had prepared earlier. "Put these on," he instructed. "We don't yet know how this virus spreads, so we need to take precautions."

Fatty put on the mask Chu Changge gave him, looking visibly apprehensive.

Gu Mian lifted Liu Ying's top a little higher. The skin above her waist was still relatively clear; the horrifying bumps hadn't spread there yet.

As he was observing the characteristics of Liu Ying's skin, he caught sight of a syringe being handed to him out of the corner of his eye.

"Try this." Chu Changge offered the syringe, which contained a clear liquid. "It's a drug I bought at the supermarket. You can use it to test the strength of your career skill. If we had another person with the same condition right now, we could use them as a control."

Fatty understood Chu Changge's implication. If they had two patients with identical conditions, Gu Mian could inject one, and either he or Chu Changge could inject the other. By observing how their conditions progressed, they could calculate the strength of Gu Mian's career skill.

But that would be incredibly inhumane...

By then, Gu Mian had already taken the item from Chu Changge.

[Civilian D-Cleaner]

[Post-injection: Minor cleansing of early-stage virus. Ineffective against severe illness.]

To be honest, Gu Mian thought, this medicine isn't cheap, but this woman's condition looks serious. Using it on her now would just be a waste.

A D-class medicine, even at only one hundred game points, is something most people would have to think long and hard about buying.

Fortunately, I have my career skill. Using medicine with it can amplify its effects several times over.

Chu Changge was still speaking from the side. "This drug probably won't do much for her on its own, but it'll be different if you're the one administering it."

Fatty noticed that as Chu Changge was speaking, Liu Ying, who lay on the green belt, seemed to twitch slightly.

Immediately after, he saw the woman's eyes flutter open a fraction, then, with great difficulty, widen into a narrow slit.

It seemed Chu Changge's voice had been loud enough to wake her, Fatty mused.

Her eyes first opened into a slight slit, then gradually widened until Gu Mian and the others could see their clear black and white.

Her gaze shifted, unfocused at first, as if she were confused about how she'd gotten from the road to the green belt.

Only after a moment did she seem to fully register her surroundings, her eyes slowly coming into focus.

The girl was certainly sharp. The moment she regained consciousness, she spotted the syringe in Gu Mian's hand. A doctor, standing beside me while I was unconscious, holding a syringe... I've seen that medicine in the supermarket, the kind I couldn't bring myself to buy... Liu Ying seemed to understand.

This is exactly what I need most, she thought.

Gu Mian, still holding the syringe, watched as the woman, now gradually regaining her senses, slowly opened her mouth.

I initially thought she'd say something grateful, Gu Mian mused. But to his surprise, the woman blurted out, "You mustn't!"

Perhaps it was due to her weakness; although Liu Ying had uttered an imperative, her voice was incredibly gentle, as if she were afraid of startling the three large men before her.

Fatty, standing nearby, was stunned.

Gu Mian's hand, which had been eager to administer the injection, froze. He paused, considering whether to comply with this unreasonable demand.