

Collapse 391

Chapter 391 Exhausting Cunning, Meiren Chu_1

Li Yibai didn't speak. Gu Mian felt he seemed to have something more to say, but the words died on his lips. It seemed he too was now wavering.

There were seven people present, and adding Yue Nu on the floor—who was long past being lively—brought the total to eight. The only ones not present were 007, who had fled earlier, and Zhang Pingfan, who had barely shown himself.

Chu Changge glanced at the clock on the back wall of the classroom. "It's almost time to vote. Have you all decided who you're voting for?"

Gu Mian looked at the others. Pan Yue's expression was resolute, just as determined as when she had decided to vote for Li Wentao the day before. It looked like she was set on voting for 007. Li Yibai, next to her, sat with his head bowed, his expression unreadable. Guo Jimei watched Yuan Qinghua warily, as if Yuan Qinghua were a vicious hound ready to take her life at any moment. Keke, held tightly by Guo Jimei, looked extremely awkward. Chu Changge still wore that deathly-pale expression, like a face ruined by botched plastic surgery, incapable of showing much emotion. As for the actual dead person, Yue Nu... both Yue Nu lay quietly on the ground, offering no opinions. Of course, they couldn't offer any opinions anymore.

The situation remained deadlocked; no one else spoke. Time seemed to pass with excruciating slowness. It was as if by unspoken agreement; though their expressions varied, no one broke the precious silence. Only the occasional rustle of wind-blown leaves scraping against the ground, or the flutter of birds passing overhead, punctuated the stillness of the campus.

After a long silence, the hands of the classroom clock ticked cheerfully on, finally pointing to three. They were once again facing the same event as the previous night.

A mechanical voice suddenly echoed in the darkness, right above their heads. Gu Mian looked up. Because the school corridors were equipped with loudspeakers, the announcement this time was broadcast directly through them—

"The second night has ended. Voting will now commence. Players, please select your voting target within one minute."

The moment the voice faded, Pan Yue spoke first, "I vote for Lin Qi!"

She seemed to shout with all her might, as if she'd been holding her breath. Her voice echoed powerfully through the dark corridor. After shouting her vote, Pan Yue twisted her head to look at Li Yibai. Surprisingly, Li Yibai didn't retaliate this time, which seemed to greatly disappoint Pan Yue, who had been all fired up.

Voting time was only one minute. Yuan Qinghua spoke up shortly after Pan Yue, "Then I'll vote for Lin Qi too..."

Her voice was somewhat shaky; she seemed unsure about voting for Lin Qi.

Keke looked around. It seemed she felt that voting for Lin Qi would damage their camaraderie. After struggling for a moment, she finally said, "I... I abstain!"

Gu Mian glanced at Keke, then said, "I also abstain."

After all, they were comrades; stabbing someone in the back like this wasn't right.

Just then, a spoiler suddenly emerged. An ill-timed voice cut in, "I vote for Yuan Qinghua!"

One didn't even need to look to know those words could only have come from Guo Jimei.

Gu Mian was speechless. He knew Guo Jimei was a ticking time bomb that would detonate as long as Yuan Qinghua was around. But he hadn't expected Guo Jimei to detonate quite so arbitrarily.

Keke also looked at Guo Jimei in shock. It had to be said, Yuan Qinghua hadn't shown the slightest sign of being a ghost so far. But Guo Jimei was stubbornly fixated on her. If one were to go by evidence, the video in Pan Yue's hand clearly pointed to 007 as the ghost. Yet Guo Jimei clung tightly to her suspicion of Yuan Qinghua.

Pan Yue was also astonished. "Have you gone crazy? Why suddenly vote for Yuan Qinghua!"

Gu Mian looked at Pan Yue's surprised face; it didn't seem fake. She obviously didn't know about the history between Guo Jimei and Yuan Qinghua from earlier that day. From her expression, it seemed she was even starting to suspect Guo Jimei of being the ghost's accomplice.

Guo Jimei immediately retorted, "Believe me! Yuan Qinghua is definitely the ghost!"

"I don't believe a damn word you say!" Pan Yue looked furious. "Forget it. Lin Qi already has two votes anyway. Your one vote for Yuan Qinghua won't make a difference." She looked at Li Yibai as she spoke, seemingly thinking he might vote for Yuan Qinghua to protect Lin Qi. "You'd better not get innocent Yuan Qinghua killed just to save Lin Qi!"

Yuan Qinghua looked genuinely scared.

Chu Changge had yet to vote, so Pan Yue seemed somewhat at ease. "Of course, even if you, Li Yibai, vote for Yuan Qinghua, you can't save Lin Qi, because Meiren Chu hasn't voted yet..."

Just then, Gu Mian heard Chu Changge, who was beside him, suddenly say, "I vote for Yuan Qinghua."

Now, 007 and Yuan Qinghua each had two votes. As soon as he finished speaking, the others turned their heads to look at him in shock.

Pan Yue was the most agitated. "Have you all gone crazy? Why are you all voting for Yuan Qinghua? What did she even do today?!"

Gu Mian saw Yuan Qinghua staring at Chu Changge in utter disbelief. Within seconds, tears welled in her eyes. "No... It really wasn't me. I didn't do anything..."

"Believe me!" Guo Jimei reached out to grab Li Yibai. "Vote for Yuan Qinghua; she must be the ghost! If she's not the ghost, then vote me out next round! Besides, if Yuan Qinghua is voted out, Lin Qi won't die either."

Excluding the absent 007 and Zhang Pingfan, Li Yibai was the only one present who hadn't voted. Everyone turned their gaze to him.

And only twenty seconds remained of the one-minute voting time.

Chapter 392 Finally, a Ghost is Out_1

"It's not me!" Yuan Qinghua almost roared through her tears the next second. "Why is everyone voting for me!"

As she roared, she swiftly ran to Chu Changge, grabbed Chu Changge's wrist, and urgently asked, "Why did you vote for me?"

Gu Mian watched Yuan Qinghua firmly holding Chu Changge's wrist and stepped back a few paces.

Lin Qi and Yuan Qinghua now both had two votes. The game hadn't specified what would happen in the event of a tie, but Gu Mian suspected the game would likely choose one of the two tied players to kill.

Pan Yue's emotions were now almost as volatile as Yuan Qinghua's.

But she no longer had time to question Chu Changge. Instead, she immediately turned her gaze to Li Yibai, who had been keeping his head down. "Now, you're the only one who hasn't voted! Lin Qi definitely won't vote for herself! What if... what if she just randomly votes for someone and happens to pick Yuan Qinghua? Then Yuan Qinghua will be the one to die! She's so innocent. Can you bear to watch her die?"

The crucial vote now lay in Li Yibai's hands. He determined the fate of the other two.

"Moreover, look! Yue Nu was killed by Lin Qi!" she said, raising her hand as if she wanted to show Li Yibai the footage of Yue Nu's death again.

However, Guo Jimei, who was beside Pan Yue, suddenly snatched the phone. "You can't force Li Yibai to make a choice! Besides, Yuan Qinghua is a ghost to begin with. It's perfect if she dies."

"Give it back to me!" Pan Yue reached out, trying to grab it.

But Guo Jimei immediately threw the phone out the nearby window. "Li Yibai, don't listen to Pan Yue! Yuan Qinghua is the ghost! If she isn't, I'll twist my own head off!"

Pan Yue was on the verge of erupting with curses.

There was absolutely no time to retrieve the phone now.

Pan Yue immediately turned, grabbed Li Yibai's arm, pulled him into the classroom, and pointed to the corpse on the floor. "Look! Look how Lin Qi stabbed Yue Nu! Her back is completely mangled! Are you still going to protect the ghost? How can you face the deceased Yue Nu?!"

Gu Mian watched them from the periphery.

Guo Jimei looked like she wanted to step forward and interfere, but Keke grabbed her arm. "Forget it..."

At this moment, Yuan Qinghua, who had been clinging to Chu Changge, turned and rushed toward Li Yibai, grabbing his sleeve. "I'm not the ghost! I'm really not! Please, don't let me die... I don't want to end up like the person from last night..."

"Exactly!" Pan Yue shouted at Li Yibai. "If you don't vote today and Yuan Qinghua is eliminated as a result, her death will be entirely your fault! Why don't you think about Wang Pan, killed by the ghost yesterday? Do you want another innocent person to die?!"

"Lin Qi is the ghost! If there were no ghost, this game wouldn't exist, and these people wouldn't be dead! Why are you unwilling to vote out a ghost who will kill us all? Why protect her instead?"

"If Yuan Qinghua dies today, and if she turns out not to be a ghost, how could you live with yourself? How could you face any of us? Your 'protection' got one person killed! And it will lead to a second death, and a third!"

"Think about Li Wentao from yesterday! When you think of him now, don't you feel utterly ashamed?"

Although Keke restrained Guo Jimei, Guo Jimei still shouted from where she stood, "Don't believe her!"

Gu Mian stroked his chin from the sidelines, observing the almost incendiary atmosphere. What a drama.

There was no denying Pan Yue was a rare talent. Her verbal barrage left people reeling. She was clearly the key figure who led everyone to vote for Li Wentao yesterday, yet now she had completely absolved herself of any responsibility. She projected such an air of righteousness, like a crusading heroine willing to cast aside her own image and rail against injustice for the sake of the downtrodden.

It's a shame someone like her isn't in sales.

Meanwhile, Li Yibai kept his head down the entire time, only faltering for a moment when he heard the name "Li Wentao."

At this moment, Yuan Qinghua was still begging desperately, "I don't want to end up like Li Wentao... Please, vote! Just don't vote for me..."

Li Yibai's expression was dazed. In that instant, countless images flashed through his mind, the last one settling on the look on Li Wentao's face just before his death the previous night.

Li Wentao had been staring intently at him then.

Sadness, unwillingness, pleading.

Endless pleas had streamed from his eyes with his tears, until he finally collapsed, helpless.

And now, Yuan Qinghua's face before him began to subtly superimpose itself onto the image of Li Wentao in his mind.

"Enough!" Li Yibai shook his head violently, finally shouting in a shattered voice, "I vote for Lin Qi!"

Hearing this, Pan Yue's expression froze in momentary disbelief.

From the other side, Guo Jimei stared at him in shock. "Are you fucking insane?! You're actually voting for Lin Qi? Have you lost your mind?"

I recognized that look, Gu Mian thought. It was like the expression of someone witnessing their own mother murder their father. I'd had the misfortune of seeing such a look before—the kind one wore upon seeing two people they believed to be the closest of companions suddenly try to kill each other. It seemed Guo Jimei absolutely couldn't believe Li Yibai would vote for Lin Qi.

Gu Mian was an outsider who had joined midway; he wasn't aware of the bond between them.

But Pan Yue and Guo Jimei, who had been there all along, knew.

Presumably, even though Pan Yue had been trying to manipulate Li Yibai just now, she hadn't held out much hope that he would actually vote for Lin Qi.

A mere moment after Guo Jimei's voice faded, the icy voice from above abruptly resumed.

"The second round of voting has ended. In this round, 6 players voted, and 3 players abstained. The player with the most votes in the second round is—"

"Lin Qi, 4 votes."

Following this, a prolonged silence filled the area.

Everyone fell silent, looking at one another as they quietly awaited the game's verdict.

Only an unsuppressible whimpering escaped Li Yibai, soft and choked, like a kicked puppy.

I remember yesterday at this time, Gu Mian recalled, the voice announcing the rules also paused for a while. Because at that moment... Li Wentao was being executed. I still remember the sound of bones shattering and the tears Li Wentao couldn't hold back before he died. And now, somewhere unknown, Lin Qi must be undergoing the same fate. The only small mercy was that this time, we didn't have to witness such a gruesome scene, especially Li Yibai.

After many long seconds, the voice finally returned to announce the results.

Everyone's eyes were wide, as if praying this sacrifice had been worth it.

"The second round of the game is over. One player has been killed, and one player has been voted out. The third round of the game now begins. There are 8 players remaining in this round: 6 civilians and 2 ghosts."

Chapter 393 The On-The-Brink of Extinction NPC and The Successive Instances_1

Remaining players, 8.

Civilians, 6.

Ghosts, 2.

The ghosts had been reduced from three to two—a qualitative breakthrough.

However, no one present seemed happy about this development.

Li Yibai squatted down, his head buried in the bend of his arm, faint sobs emanating from him.

Guo Jimei bowed her head, her face obscured by darkness, her expression unreadable, but Gu Mian sensed a mournful atmosphere surrounding her.

Yuan Qinghua's tears had yet to dry, and her face still bore a trace of lingering terror.

Keke seemed quite embarrassed; she was completely out of sync with the somber mood, making her stand out.

Chu Changge glanced at Yuan Qinghua, then withdrew his gaze.

After a while, Pan Yue, who was still beside Li Yibai, mumbled hesitantly, "I told you... I told you Lin Qi was definitely a ghost..."

"Enough!" Guo Jimei abruptly shouted, seemingly in no mood to discuss this any longer.

Gu Mian understood perfectly.

They had all known each other for a long time. For someone they had shared a dormitory with for several years to suddenly be revealed as a murderer was unthinkable.

For Li Yibai, it was even worse. His friend of over a decade had suddenly turned into a ghost, and he had just been responsible for killing her.

Gu Mian tried to empathize with Li Yibai's feelings.

But then he realized that most of his own friends from a decade ago were either dead or had fled. The only one still around was Chu Changge.

If Chu Changge is a ghost now... Gu Mian scratched his chin and looked at Chu Changge. No, forget 'if' — he's very likely a ghost as things stand. Especially after he unaccountably voted for Yuan Qinghua just now.

It's never too late to settle scores; wasn't that reflected in the Chinese proverb about "settling scores after the autumn harvest"?

At this moment, Guo Jimei looked up, staring directly at Chu Changge. "Why did you vote for Yuan Qinghua just now!"

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "Well, well, weren't you the one just crying and yelling for people to vote for Yuan Qinghua? How come you're turning on her now?"

Yuan Qinghua turned her swollen eyes towards Chu Changge, her expression full of bewilderment.

"That was... that was because the timing of Meiren Chu's vote was too coincidental!" Guo Jimei argued hastily. "Don't you all think it was too much of a coincidence? At that time, I was the only one who had voted for Yuan Qinghua..."

"Pan Yue and Yuan Qinghua had voted for Lin Qi, so Lin Qi had two votes. Keke and Gu Mian, you both abstained. At that point, only Li Yibai and Meiren Chu hadn't voted.

"No matter how I voted, Lin Qi was bound to be eliminated. But then, Meiren Chu suddenly and inexplicably cast his vote for Yuan Qinghua, causing a tie between them. It was because of Meiren Chu's sudden vote that the final decision fell to Li Yibai!

"It was as if he intentionally voted for someone else at a critical moment, forcing Li Yibai to make the choice!"

Keke glanced at Guo Jimei beside her and then at Chu Changge on the other side. "Listening to Guo Jimei... it does seem like that's what happened."

Hearing this, Pan Yue also looked at Chu Changge with a puzzled expression. "But what good would that do him?"

As she spoke, Pan Yue lowered her gaze to Li Yibai beside her. Was it just to watch Li Yibai cry? Surely no one could be that depraved.

Gu Mian dropped the hand that had been stroking his chin and glanced at Li Yibai, who was still squatting on the ground. "Even if that's what you all think, I believe Li Yibai's vote was actually useless."

"Useless? How could it be useless?" Pan Yue looked at Gu Mian, somewhat puzzled.

Finally, Chu Changge spoke. "Firstly, I voted for Yuan Qinghua because I genuinely believed she was suspicious. What you think about it is none of my concern. Secondly, Li Yibai's vote was indeed useless."

"Yes," Gu Mian nodded. "Didn't you hear the earlier broadcast?"

Pan Yue looked baffled. When the announcement was made, everyone had been focused on whether Lin Qi was a ghost, so they hadn't paid attention to other details. "Was there something wrong with the broadcast?"

Gu Mian nodded. "Since you didn't hear it, I'll repeat it for you. It said, 'The second round of voting has ended. In this round, 6 players voted, and 3 players abstained. The player with the most votes in the second round is—Lin Qi, 4 votes.'"

This time, there wasn't an incident like in the first round where an extra vote popped up, but...

Guo Jimei frowned. "What's so... Wait! That's not right! How could Lin Qi have four votes!"

Gu Mian looked at Guo Jimei. "You just summarized it: you and Meiren Chu cast two votes for Yuan Qinghua; Pan Yue, Li Yibai, and Yuan Qinghua herself cast three votes for Lin Qi. This means that besides those of us present, another person also voted for Lin Qi.

"Currently, only Lin Qi and Zhang Pingfan aren't here. So, if we do the math, one of them voted for Lin Qi, and the other abstained.

"Let's not get hung up on how those two voted for now. Lin Qi ended up with four votes, and Yuan Qinghua only had two. Even if Li Yibai hadn't cast his vote, it wouldn't have made any difference."

Keke paused for a moment before speaking. "Lin Qi definitely wouldn't have voted for herself, so that vote must have been cast by Zhang Pingfan."

Guo Jimei, however, frowned and offered a different idea. "If Zhang Pingfan cast it, how could he have so accurately voted for Lin Qi? I don't think that's very likely."

At this, Pan Yue chimed in, "But none of us knew Lin Qi would end up with two more votes than Yuan Qinghua. So Meiren Chu really did seem like he was forcing Li Yibai... though I personally think it was pointless."

As she spoke, she looked at Chu Changge. "Did you do it on purpose?"

Seeing this, Guo Jimei had a strange expression. "Even if he did it intentionally, he wouldn't admit it..."

Chu Changge remained silent.

Gu Mian stepped forward. "Alright, we currently have six civilians and two ghosts. There are seven of us here, so at least one ghost is among us. We should focus on figuring out how to root out the ghost among us."

"Fine, I don't want to dwell on this either. If Meiren Chu really is a ghost, doing something like that wouldn't benefit him. All I hope, Meiren Chu, is that you'll tell us why you thought Yuan Qinghua was a ghost." As Pan Yue said this, she walked quickly into the hallway and peered down through a window.

After taking a look, she turned back. "My phone was tossed down there by Guo Jimei. Let's all go down and find it now."

"You still care about your phone at a time like this?" Guo Jimei couldn't help but ask.

"Are you stupid?" Pan Yue glared fiercely at Guo Jimei. "It had the video Yue Nu gave me on it, and I hadn't even finished watching it! There might have been important clues in the part I hadn't seen, and you just threw it away! I really want to vote you out right now."

Though the phone might have already been broken from the fall.

Splitting up had proven to be a bad idea.

So, this time, everyone decided to go downstairs together to find the phone. Only Li Yibai remained squatting where he was, seemingly unwilling to move.

Gu Mian decided to stay there and wait for them to retrieve the phone and return.

Keke looked very wary. "You'll be alone with Li Yibai here, so be careful."

Gu Mian nodded. "Although it's not daylight yet, it's also not within the ghosts' active hours."

As long as Li Yibai, who's right next to me, doesn't suddenly get the inexplicable urge to take me down with him.

"Then we'll go down first." Pan Yue was the first to set off.

Yuan Qinghua promptly followed.

Guo Jimei clearly still didn't want to be with Yuan Qinghua, so she deliberately pulled Keke along with her, putting some distance between themselves and Yuan Qinghua.

Chu Changge walked between the two groups of women, keeping a neutral distance.

Just then, Keke seemed to remember something and ran back, calling out, "Guo Jimei, wait for me!"

Gu Mian saw Keke call out and then run back, looking as if she wanted to tell him something.

Just as Gu Mian saw Keke run up to him, panting, Guo Jimei, who was a short distance ahead, seemed to spot something on the ground. She quickly bent down, picked it up, and immediately hid it in her pocket.

Gu Mian had sharp eyes. Even in the dim corridor, he saw what Guo Jimei picked up.

He watched as she bent over, got a clear look at the object, then immediately hid it in her pocket before swiftly glancing around to see if anyone had noticed.

Gu Mian lowered his head, pretending he hadn't seen anything.

But Guo Jimei's actions told him that something was seriously wrong with this instance.

Chapter 394 The Fatty's Boxed Meal is Really Fragrant_1

Gu Mian had just seen it clearly.

The item Guo Jimei had picked up was a movie ticket, which, coincidentally, was identical to one of the special items Chu Changge owned.

Chu Changge had many special items, but since he rarely used them, Gu Mian had forgotten how many he actually possessed.

Still, if one were presented before him, Gu Mian would recognize it. That ticket belonged to Chu Changge, and he had purposefully let Guo Jimei find it.

From Guo Jimei's expression, it appeared she knew it was a special item.

Theoretically, apart from high-ranking NPCs like Mr. Green, most NPCs couldn't recognize special items and would discard them as trash.

So, there were only two possibilities in this situation.

First, Guo Jimei was a high-ranking NPC. That seemed improbable.

Second, regardless of whether Guo Jimei was human or ghost, she had begun to playerize, though she seemed oblivious to it.

The so-called playerization meant gradually developing towards becoming a player, possibly even detaching from her original instance self to enter the real world.

This possibility wasn't small; Fairy Tale City had previously provided an example for Gu Mian, aptly demonstrating that "you players could also be trapped inside an instance, unable to leave."

And this instance might be capable of sending NPCs out of the instance world.

What a headache.

Just then, Gu Mian remembered Xu Xingcheng, the NPC who had mysteriously appeared from another instance; his behavior had also been peculiar.

This indicated that there were connections between instances, but Gu Mian couldn't figure them out.

What exactly was the relationship between different instances, between instances and the overall game, between instances and NPCs, and between instances and himself?

Gu Mian fell into deep thought.

Just then, Keke, who had already run over, spoke up. She leaned close to Gu Mian's ear, seemingly afraid of being overheard by Li Yibai nearby, "I have something I hope you can help me with... You're a doctor, right?"

Gu Mian looked down at her. "Do you want my help with an injection? Or an amputation?"

Keke stared blankly for a moment before she shook her head urgently, "No... Let's talk about it another time..."

With that, she promptly turned and ran back toward Guo Jimei.

Gu Mian was quite confused; this teammate he had been matched with twice was acting very strangely.

They found the phone very quickly.

Gu Mian had been watching by the window for less than five minutes when Pan Yue and the others found the phone and returned to the academic building.

During this time, Chu Changge and Yuan Qinghua exchanged a few words in the back.

They climbed the stairs quickly, and soon after, Gu Mian heard Pan Yue's voice.

"We found the phone, but it's broken. I took out the memory card, though; it should still be usable." When Pan Yue and the others returned, Li Yibai was still huddled on the floor, looking utterly despondent.

Pan Yue glanced at the unmoving Li Yibai. "It's already past three o'clock. Do you guys need to rest?"

Gu Mian could endure, and the other players probably could too, but the NPCs likely couldn't.

Having not slept for two days, Li Yibai was immersed in sorrow and probably not in the mood to sleep. Guo Jimei and Yuan Qinghua, on the other hand, were exhausted.

Keke also yawned softly. "I haven't slept in two days. I'm afraid I won't have any strength tomorrow."

The girls went to sleep. Guo Jimei deliberately pulled Keke to sleep as far away from Yuan Qinghua as possible.

Pan Yue had probably slept during the day, so she wasn't sleeping now; instead, she leaned against the door, lost in thought.

Li Yibai still sat with his head buried, unmoving.

Chu Changge was next to Gu Mian. Gu Mian glanced at him and asked quietly, "You threw something away today?"

"Mm," Chu Changge nodded silently. "This instance isn't normal. I suspect it's somewhat similar to the Fairy Tale City instance. Fortunately..."

Fortunately what?

"Fortunately, Fatty knew the identities of all the ghosts before he died."

Gu Mian wasn't surprised.

Before Fatty died, he had gone to the restroom once. His purpose wasn't to relieve himself but because he had misspoken.

Gu Mian remembered the words Fatty almost blurted out—"Right, I have that little..."

Fatty had a special item he had snatched from Gu Mian.

It was called the [Small Notebook].

[Function: Fill in a time period and a person, and the notebook will automatically generate that person's actions during that period.]

It could be used once a week. The larger the time range entered, the more concise the generated actions would be; conversely, a smaller range would yield more detailed actions.

Moreover, it could only record actions that had already occurred.

When Fatty was in the restroom, Gu Mian guessed he had already used this notebook, together with Chu Changge.

Although only one person could be entered at a time, the notebook could show who was around the specified person.

For example, if "Gu Mian" was entered as the person, and the time was set to the short period when they had just encountered 007 in this instance, the content displayed on the notebook might be something like this—

[Gu Mian encountered Lin Qi (Identity: Ghost)]

[Lin Qi took out a piece of paper with twelve signatures on it.]

[Gu Mian (Identity: *), Meiren Chu (Identity: *), Wang Pan (Identity: *)... Li Yibai (Identity: *)]

Of course, the "*" was Gu Mian's speculation, as the identities of certain individuals were still uncertain at present.

"You've thought of it too, haven't you? Fatty learned everyone's identity through that notebook. He could have announced it immediately," Chu Changge continued, "but he didn't inform the others."

Fatty's role was civilian.

The reason he concealed the ghosts' identities was solely to help cover for them.

And in this instance, the only ones who could make Fatty go to such lengths to shield those ghosts' identities were those two.

Chapter 395 Clever, isn't it?_1

"SIGH..." Just then, Gu Mian heard Guo Jimei make a sound behind him.

Guo Jimei had a strange expression as she reached out to touch the ground beside her hip, as if something had poked her.

"What's wrong?" Keke, whose eyes had been closed, opened them to look at her.

But Guo Jimei's expression quickly returned to normal. "Nothing, I just twisted myself a bit awkwardly."

"Oh." Keke nodded doubtfully, then leaned against the wall and closed her eyes again.

At that moment, Pan Yue, who was by the door, seemed drawn by Guo Jimei's voice and turned her head in their direction. Then, as if suddenly remembering something, she walked over.

Gu Mian had no choice but to pause his conversation with Chu Changge.

"Right," Pan Yue reached them in a few steps and looked at Chu Changge. "Meiren Chu, you still haven't explained why you voted for Yuan Qinghua earlier."

Chu Changge was direct. He took out a yellowed photograph and handed it to Pan Yue.

Gu Mian recognized it as the photo Chu Changge had found in the school's basement: twelve people, six men and six women.

Chu Changge began calmly, "Look at this photo. Both the gender ratio and the number of people are very similar to our group, and there's a woman without a face mixed in."

Pan Yue took the photograph. Old, moldy things always evoke a certain inexplicable sense of horror.

It was like a cupboard that had been stored in a basement for years; whenever one got close, the dust-covered glass doors seemed to reflect another person's figure.

Just seeing the aged tones of this old photograph made Pan Yue feel a bit apprehensive.

Upon closer inspection, she saw six men and six women, all strangers.

One girl didn't even have a face, as if she had melted into the darkness.

"What is this?" Pan Yue asked, her expression strange.

Chu Changge replied, "It's the photo we found tonight. As I said earlier, both the number of people and the gender ratio are very similar to our current situation. The woman without a face is the most suspicious."

At this point, Chu Changge paused. "If you look closely at this faceless person, her build is completely different from Lin Qi's, but it's somewhat similar to Yuan Qinghua's."

Hearing this, Gu Mian looked over at Yuan Qinghua, who was sitting on the ground nearby.

She had her eyes closed, seemingly unaware that she had become the target of their suspicions.

"Moreover, Gu Mian mentioned earlier that the ghost is either Yuan Qinghua or Guo Jimei, and this can be seen from their voting slips..."

"That's correct," Gu Mian nodded slightly. "Yuan Qinghua and Guo Jimei are in the same dormitory. According to their account, during the first round of voting, they both saw a ballot paper appear beside them, but neither of them voted."

"But Guo Jimei's ballot paper mysteriously disappeared. It was nowhere to be found, without a trace, as if it had never existed."

"So I suspect that, in Guo Jimei's case, her ballot paper never actually existed. Remember how Li Wentao got an extra vote in the first round? I theorize that one of those two is the ghost. That ghost was with us during the voting and cast a verbal vote for Li Wentao. The other person was sleeping in the dormitory, and only she actually received a ballot paper."

Hearing this, Pan Yue frowned. "Are you implying..."

As she said this, she glanced nervously towards Guo Jimei and lowered her voice, "...that Guo Jimei is the ghost?"

After all, it was an undeniable fact that Guo Jimei couldn't produce her ballot paper earlier today.

"Not necessarily," Gu Mian shook his head. "Only one true paper was issued between them—to the one who was actually in the dorm. That paper could have been stolen. That's why I'm saying the ghost is one of those two."

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "Besides, Pan Yue, yesterday you also saw Li Wentao, whom you suspected of being the ghost. But it was proven that Li Wentao isn't the ghost. Therefore, I don't think the video footage you provided concerning Lin Qi is reliable."

"By the way," he raised his head to look at Pan Yue, "aside from the last segment, did you watch any other parts of the video?"

Hearing this, Pan Yue felt a chill down her spine.

She had. She'd even seen the face that flashed past the classroom door after Yue Nu had put down her phone.

That face was right in front of her now.

"N-no," Pan Yue stammered, backing away a few steps while still facing him. "I skipped straight to the end and saw Yue Nu being killed... then I rushed over here. Now that Guo Jimei smashed the phone, we can't watch the earlier parts anymore."

"It's alright." A voice suddenly interjected.

Gu Mian turned his head and saw Keke, who had come up beside them. "As long as the memory card is intact, it'll be fine," Keke said. "Tomorrow, we can leave the school together and go to Mobile Phone Street to see if we can get the phone repaired. If not, we can try to read the memory card directly."

"Yes... right," Pan Yue nodded hastily. "Tomorrow, we'll leave the school and check... We can also look for clues related to this photo. This faceless girl doesn't look like Lin Qi. Maybe we can find some clues from the twelve people in this picture."

Because if they didn't start with this photo, they wouldn't have any other worthwhile leads to pursue.

Gu Mian took the photo, flipped it over, and showed the back to Pan Yue. "There's a date: June 12th, 2013. It's a six-year-old photo. I think it'll be quite difficult to find clues from it."

Just then, Yuan Qinghua, who had been sitting to one side with her eyes closed, suddenly seemed to sense something and leaned in. "Let me see..."

As she spoke, she craned her neck to look at the photo, then let out a surprised sound, "HUH?"

"Do you recognize them?" Gu Mian looked at Yuan Qinghua.

Yuan Qinghua quickly shook her head. "I don't recognize them, but I think I've seen this picture in the homeroom teacher's office... He has an album full of group photos of former senior students, and I believe there's an identical copy of this photo in it."

Hearing this, Pan Yue's eyes widened. "Then do you know who any of the people in it are?"

Yuan Qinghua shook her head, looking troubled. "I don't know... But since they were students taught by the homeroom teacher in 2013, his office might have records. Why don't we go take a look now?"

"Can you even get in? The office will be locked at night," Pan Yue frowned.

"I'm our class president, you know," Yuan Qinghua said matter-of-factly. "I have keys."

As expected of the class president.

She was leading the entire group down a path of stealthy mischief.

If Yuan Qinghua's homeroom teacher knew she'd do something like this in the middle of the night, he probably would have swallowed the keys rather than give them to her.

And this class president wasn't just good at sneaking around; she was also impressively bold when it came to tearing up official records.

Her approach was like that of a primary school student who, after years of compulsory education, finally graduated and then ferociously tore up all their textbooks.

It didn't take long for Gu Mian and the others to find the 2013 class records and sneak them back to the classroom. The class president then took the thick file, expertly tore off its spine, and divided the contents into three piles.

Regarding tearing up the homeroom teacher's records, she reasoned quite convincingly, "We have less than twenty-four hours before we have to vote. There's definitely not enough time to investigate all these people together. It's better if we split up."

The others agreed.

Pan Yue nodded. "Tomorrow, we'll use these students' addresses to investigate. Anyway, the ghost can't kill anyone before 8 PM..."

They had voted out one ghost today, and now they had new targets for tomorrow.

The atmosphere in the room finally lightened a bit, though Li Yibai remained squatting in the same spot, motionless.

Actually, Gu Mian quite admired Li Yibai.

Li Yibai maintained that posture until sunlight streamed into the classroom the next morning.

Even Gu Mian had slept for a few hours. When he opened his eyes, he still saw Li Yibai squatting there, completely still.

I definitely couldn't manage that, Gu Mian thought. My lumbar discs would probably herniate.

Since they were splitting up to investigate, they naturally had to form groups. However, today's groupings were rather strange...

Keke volunteered to team up with Li Yibai.

Chu Changge, for reasons he himself didn't quite understand, ended up in a group with Yuan Qinghua.

The remaining two, Guo Jimei and Pan Yue, naturally formed a group together.

This left Gu Mian alone.

Gu Mian: "..."

Seeing this, Pan Yue said, "Just pick a group and join them."

So, Gu Mian chose to go solo.

Chapter 396 Is the Guitar More Important than Life?_1

Considering Gu Mian was acting alone and his capabilities were limited, the others thought for a moment, then tore off several files and handed them to him.

Pan Yue shoved several files into Gu Mian's hands. "I think there are a few in this class who live near the school, and one whose family lives directly on school grounds. Let's give you these simple ones."

After everyone's tasks were allocated, they agreed to meet again in the classroom at six in the evening, as they had no other place to spend the night.

The seven of them quickly dispersed. Gu Mian watched them leave, then decided to first visit the student whose address was listed as being within the school.

As is commonly known, student information files include a home address, and this particular student's name was Xiang Xingye. It sounds like an insignificant name.

The home address column was filled out as: "Songwen Academy, Teaching Building No.6, office on the far eastern end of the ground floor."

Songwen Academy was the school Gu Mian attended in this instance. He knew that many schools hired older individuals as custodians, providing them with a few rooms inside a teaching building to live in, and they sometimes doubled as security guards, though these elderly people couldn't really perform as effectively as regular security guards...

Gu Mian didn't step out until past eight o'clock, by which time there were hardly any people around. The floor he was on consisted entirely of storage rooms. Before leaving, he closed the door, hoping Yue Nu's body inside would remain undisturbed and undiscovered.

Teaching Building No.6 was easy to find. Students had already started class by this time, so no one noticed Gu Mian as he slipped past the entrance.

Gu Mian reached the easternmost room without any obstruction. There was a long glass panel on the door, through which he could see the room was empty.

It appeared to be a regular office, not modified for residential use. Strange... I should be in the right place. Gu Mian frowned, standing there for a moment before deciding to go inside and take a look.

Unfortunately, the door was locked. This forced Gu Mian, who wanted to investigate, to abandon his plan. Although the lock looked quite flimsy, causing a commotion by breaking it in the school wasn't a good idea.

He had no choice but to first check the addresses around the school. Pan Yue had given him information on three students; besides Xiang Xingye, there were two others with seemingly ordinary names.

Gu Mian was nimble, especially when it came to hopping fences. In no time at all, he vaulted over the school fence and began looking for the homes of the other two students, using the street signs for directions.

He didn't have to look too hard. Both students lived in a residential complex just behind the school. Gu Mian quickly found the complex; now, he just needed to find their specific addresses within it.

"Liu Qiang, Building 32, Unit 2, 7th floor, west apartment..." Gu Mian muttered, twisting the paper in his hand. With the help of a helpful passerby, he quickly found Building 32.

He rushed into Unit 2 and took the elevator up to the 7th floor. The residential complex looked a few years old; its facilities weren't new, but it was very clean and tidy.

The area in front of Liu Qiang's apartment was also very tidy. A white shoe cabinet stood neatly by the door with no shoes outside. It was so neat that Gu Mian suspected a shoe thief had recently paid a visit.

Gu Mian adjusted his clothes and then began to knock on the door. After a good ten seconds of knocking, there was still no response.

Gu Mian patiently knocked for another two minutes, but still, no one answered; there wasn't a single sound from inside. The office was empty earlier, and this place is too? he thought, crouching down to examine the lock, which looked quite fragile.

Just then, a CREAK reached his ears. It wasn't from the door in front of him, but from one nearby.

It seemed his continuous knocking for two minutes had disturbed the neighbors. Indeed, a normal person wouldn't knock on a door like that.

The neighbor first opened their door a crack, revealing half of a white-haired head, seemingly trying to see who was there. Seeing it was just a student, she breathed a sigh of relief.

The neighbor was an elderly woman, appearing to be nearly seventy. "Young man," she said, "didn't you know the family in this apartment just held a funeral a few days ago?"

A funeral? Gu Mian raised his eyebrows; that would explain why the shoe cabinet by the door looked as if it had been looted. But theoretically, this Liu Qiang should be in the prime of his life. "How did he die?" he asked.

The old woman looked puzzled. "The old man was almost eighty. It's not strange for him to pass on. What are you here for?"

Gu Mian was also puzzled. "I'm looking for my classmate. Do you know Liu Qiang?"

"Liu Qiang? What Liu Qiang? That old man lived here alone for decades. There's never been anyone named Liu Qiang living here. No one in this entire building knows anyone by that name."

Strange.

Gu Mian furrowed his brow. The address on the student file seemed inconsistent with reality. Still doubtful, he then went to the home of another student, Zhang Liu.

The situation was the same: no one recognized the name Zhang Liu. In fact, no one in the entire building went by that name. This is so weird, Gu Mian thought, gazing at the papers in his hand. He decided to return to the office at the school for another look.

「Meanwhile, the others were encountering similar situations.」

Pan Yue and Guo Jimei were shocked to find that none of the addresses matched any actual residents. Even the phone numbers were completely wrong.

"Are these damn files fake?" Pan Yue exclaimed, sitting by a flowerbed and angrily tossing aside the papers in her hand.

Guo Jimei was equally anxious. "Impossible! How could files stolen from the office be fake? Unless everyone filled them out falsely back then, but if they did, they would've been caught. Could someone have secretly swapped the files?"

However, judging from the condition of the papers, they clearly weren't recent forgeries.

"Wait..." Pan Yue suddenly turned to Guo Jimei. "If someone really did swap the files, I think it might be Meiren Chu. I agreed to split up this time precisely because I wanted to get away from him. And there's something else I need to tell you..." As she spoke, she took out her shattered phone. "Actually, I watched a bit more of the video yesterday. I noticed... when Yue Nu put her phone down, Meiren Chu was right behind her, watching!"

Guo Jimei's eyes widened. "So Meiren Chu knew Yue Nu would go back for her phone? Could he be the one who killed her?"

Pan Yue nodded. "It's highly likely. Besides, I've always felt that he and Gu Mian are strange. Neither of them seems scared at all. And Gu Mian keeps carrying that guitar around. Do you really think a guitar is more important than his life right now?"

Guo Jimei nodded vigorously in agreement.

Pan Yue hesitated before continuing, "I don't know why, but I have a bad feeling about all this. Ever since that first night, when we found out Li Wentao wasn't a ghost, something has felt off...

"We were misled into voting out a civilian. When the ghost kills, it never mistakenly targets an accomplice. It's as if the ghost knew everyone's identity from the very beginning.

"And then there's Lin Qi. She was voted out. Regardless of whether Li Yibai cast that vote, Lin Qi was doomed to be eliminated... It's as if someone had predetermined her death long ago!"

"I'm really uneasy," Pan Yue said, shivering. "It feels like we've walked into some kind of trap, and the net is slowly closing in. With the way things are going... I feel like we're all going to be caught very soon!"

Chapter 397 Zhang San's Head, Like a Football

Upon hearing this, Guo Jimei also shivered. She hesitated for a moment before saying, "Actually..."

But just as these two words left her mouth, she spotted a familiar figure not too far away.

"Keke?" Guo Jimei looked, somewhat surprised, at Keke in the distance.

It wasn't that she was surprised to see her here, as their search areas already overlapped. What Guo Jimei found strange was that Keke was alone; Li Yibai was nowhere to be found.

Just then, Keke also noticed Guo Jimei and Pan Yue. With a panicked look on her face, she wove through the crowd and hurried towards them.

"What happened?" Pan Yue, also noticing Keke, stood up and walked towards her.

In just a few steps, they gathered.

The first words Keke blurted out were, "I got separated from Li Yibai!"

"Separated?" Pan Yue was taken aback. "That's right, considering Li Yibai's barely alive state... But where did you get separated? Nearby?"

Keke shook her head. "No, I was walking ahead looking for the address. When I turned my head, he was gone. I haven't found him since. Can you help me look for him?"

"Alright," Guo Jimei nodded. "Anyway, most of the addresses we found were wrong, so there's no need to continue with that. We'll help you find Li Yibai."

Upon hearing this, Keke looked shocked. "Your addresses were incorrect too? Ours were as well, even the telephone numbers were wrong. What's going on?"

Guo Jimei shook her head. "We don't know either."

Keke wanted to say something else but was interrupted by Pan Yue.

"We can walk and talk," Pan Yue said, pulling Keke. "Where did you get separated from Li Yibai?"

Keke started walking in one direction. "Near the school, not far from here."

At this point, Guo Jimei also quickly followed. "Now, it's just the three of us girls. I trust you, so I'll tell you something as we walk..."

The other two turned their gaze towards her.

Guo Jimei took a deep breath and started, "Actually, I've noticed that some items in this game can be used."

"Items?" Pan Yue looked very confused.

Guo Jimei immediately pulled out two items. "These I found in the classroom on the day we were assigned our identities. This notebook is called the 'Prophecy Book' and can be used twice. It can predict all the identities a person has had throughout their life. I've already used it once. This other item I got last night while I was sleeping is called 'Decision Right,' and it can directly determine the voting result. Remember when I screamed? It was because I saw this... Actually, I found one more thing, but it's not useful for us."

Pan Yue looked somewhat puzzled.

Keke stared at these two items in shock. Of course, she recognized them; they were special items! Only instance players can use special items. Why could Guo Jimei use them?

Keke stared closely at the items in Guo Jimei's hands and asked, "Can I touch them?"

Guo Jimei nodded.

Keke slowly reached her hand out.

[Prophecy Book]

[Introduction: Produced by the 'Close Your Eyes' instance. Close Your Eyes production, quality guaranteed!]

[Function: Write down a player's name to learn all the identities they have had from birth until now. Can be used twice.]

[Example: Enter 'Zhang San', and you might get: 'Student, Murderer, Fugitive, Gigolo, Freelancer, Convict, Patient, Ghost']

If Gu Mian were here, he would definitely sigh at how rich and tumultuous Zhang San's life had been, and then proceed to take out a saw to cut off Zhang San's head.

And the other one...

[Decision Right (One-time use)]

[Introduction: An essential tool for elections.]

[Function: Use during voting to directly decide the outcome in favor of the chosen candidate.]

Meaning, if someone possessed this item before a certain overseas presidential election, the final winner might end up being a dog. But all of this was unimportant. The important thing was that Guo Jimei could use special items! Why was this happening?!

Keke took a deep breath, her mind in chaos as she retracted her hand.

Pan Yue also touched the items. "There's nothing special about them. How did you know these items had these functions?"

Guo Jimei blinked. "You can't see it?"

She must be referring to the panel that introduces special items.

Keke exhaled, not pressing further. "See what?"

Guo Jimei shook her head. "Nothing really. But with these two things in hand, the ghost will definitely not win! As long as I have this Decision Right, no matter how many votes others cast, I'll be the one to make the final decision on who is eliminated."

"You all know I'm close with Yuan Qinghua, so the day I got the Prophecy Book, I tried it out on Yuan Qinghua's identity, and it said ghost!" Guo Jimei said, flipping open her small notebook as she spoke.

The flimsy little notebook only had two pages. The first page had "Yuan Qinghua" written on it, followed by just three identities:

"Student, Patient, Ghost."

It seemed her life was very short.

"But nothing happened at the time, so I just thought it was a normal game... Then you told me that Li Wentao and Wang Pan were dead. I still didn't believe it, not until the next day during P.E. class when I saw Yuan Qinghua turn into a ghost..."

Keke frowned. No wonder Guo Jimei had been so adamant about Yuan Qinghua from the beginning.

"Although I don't quite understand," Pan Yue interjected, "Guo Jimei, what you're saying sounds like a tall tale. How do we know if it's true or false?"

Upon hearing this, Guo Jimei immediately took out a pen. "Alright, I'll use my second chance now so you can see... I find Meiren Chu and Gu Mian very suspicious. The last ghost must be one of them..."

She considered for half a second. "I'll write Gu Mian's name. You watch."

But just then, Keke suddenly reached out and stopped her. "Wait!"

What's wrong? Guo Jimei looked up in confusion.

Keke said, "Don't write yet. The ghost might kill again tonight. If the person whose name you write dies, wouldn't that be a waste of the chance?"

That's true. Guo Jimei silently nodded, then put away her pen. "Let's go find Li Yibai first."

「Meanwhile」

Gu Mian was also experiencing some bizarre events.

Visiting the homes of those two classmates had taken some time. By the time he returned, it was already the last class period of the morning.

As he reached the office door, he ran into someone coming out.

He actually recognized this person—someone who absolutely should not have been in this instance.

This was terrible. Of course, not terrible for Gu Mian.

The man seemed puzzled as to why a student would be loitering outside. Two seconds after his gaze fell on Gu Mian's face, he exclaimed— "Why the hell are you—"

But before he could finish, Gu Mian swiftly grabbed the man by the collar. "Well, well, if it isn't the dapper-looking but vile-hearted, notoriously treacherous Coach Che? What brings you to this godforsaken corner of the world? Hasn't your driver's license instance been fixed yet, leaving you stranded here?"

He'd always found this instance incredibly bizarre, but he never expected to run into an acquaintance. This was too strange!

Coach Che stared at Gu Mian, his eyes wide with disbelief. "What kind of ridiculous adjectives are those? Don't think I don't understand idioms! Let me go!"

"I can let you go," Gu Mian remarked, "but the look on your face clearly says, 'The moment you release me, I'm bolting.'"

"Isn't that obvious?!" Coach Che retorted. "I swear, if those three cars in my instance could grow legs, they'd take one look at you and run for their lives! They'd be so terrified, they'd crash into a wall and keep going without a second thought!"

Coach Che's words reminded Gu Mian of the three Spirit Cars he had wrecked.

But now was not the time to reminisce.

Gu Mian frowned. "Let me ask you, how did you end up in this instance?"

"I'm not supposed to be in this instance! If I'd known you were here, I'd rather have gone to the crematorium and had my head roasted like a shish kebab than come to this godforsaken place!" Coach Che retorted.

Gu Mian raised an eyebrow. "Are you working here?"

"Duh! Isn't it all because of you? You joined one event and caused about twenty or thirty instances to crash simultaneously! Now the organizers don't dare start the next event. I'm here to fix the instances!"

As Coach Che spoke, he glanced at the file in Gu Mian's hand. "You've read this file, right? It's completely different from the actual facts, isn't it? It's all messed up because of you! We're still in the process of correcting it!"

Gu Mian remembered that, indeed, a large number of instances had crashed after the Lantern Festival riddles event. Later, there was even an exceptionally long list of suspended instances.

One of them was called "Close Your Eyes (Low-Quality Version)".

And the instance they were currently in was called "Close Your Eyes (High-Quality Version)".

They had even joked about it when they first entered.

"But why do you have a guitar now?" Coach Che glanced behind Gu Mian.

Gu Mian kept a straight face. "Because I love music."

"Let me ask you," Gu Mian said, ignoring the banter and tightening his grip on Coach Che's collar, "why can I encounter NPCs from other instances within this instance?"

Coach Che rolled his eyes. "Duh, it's because we're all in the same—"

His voice suddenly trailed off.

Chapter 398 Guardian of Justice Gu BongBong_1

Gu Mian was still grabbing Coach Che's fragile collar.

Coach Che fell silent for a moment before continuing, "Even though you'd find out sooner or later, if I told you now, my head might well end up as lamb skewers in a crematorium."

He seemed to have a strange obsession with crematoria and lamb skewers.

Gu Mian raised his eyebrows and let go of him. "So everything in this instance is normal?"

Coach Che nodded silently. "Although I don't know how you came across these files, in theory, players shouldn't have access to them."

As he said this, he frowned. "How did you manage to get your hands on the student files?"

Gu Mian glanced at him and confidently answered, "I stole them, of course. You should know that one of the NPCs in this instance is the class monitor."

At these words, Coach Che's face twitched slightly before he let out a sigh.

Before he could even fully exhale, Gu Mian's next sentence caught him off guard.

"So the NPCs in this instance using special items is also part of the deal?"

Coach Che's brow furrowed deeply. "What did you say?"

"The NPCs can use special items," Gu Mian looked straight at Coach Che. "Judging by your reaction, this wasn't expected."

Coach Che seemed stunned for a moment, then decisively said, "You have to get out of this instance as soon as possible. Don't ask why... I'm getting out of here."

Gu Mian watched as Professor Che suddenly brought out something and squeezed it hard.

Instantly, the man before him vanished, leaving Gu Mian standing alone with his guitar.

Thankfully, no students were around to witness this, or they might've been deeply traumatized.

Gu Mian gazed at the spot where Coach Che had stood. So, he told me to get out of the instance.

It was well known that there was only one shortcut to leave an instance: get it announced publicly.

But he didn't know where to start with this one.

Moreover, he couldn't understand why Coach Che would say those things and run off so quickly, as if the instance was about to explode.

「Meanwhile」

Keke and the others were unable to find the missing Li Yibai.

After searching for several hours until dusk, they ran into Chu Changge and Yuan Qinghua, who were also wandering near the school.

Yuan Qinghua was the first to spot Keke and the others. She ran up to them, asking, "What are you guys doing here?"

Guo Jimei and Pan Yue instinctively took a step back, since Guo Jimei had previously unveiled Yuan Qinghua's identity.

Only Keke was desperate. "Li Yibai has gone missing. Have you seen him?"

At this, Yuan Qinghua's expression turned odd. After hesitating for a while, she said, "Earlier, we saw a group of people near that unfinished building by the school. They said someone had jumped off the building and committed suicide, so we went to see..."

She paused before continuing, "It was Li Yibai."

"What!" Behind her, Guo Jimei took a large step forward. "Li Yibai committed suicide?"

"Yes," Yuan Qinghua hesitated, then nodded. "The bystanders said there was another female body found on the roof when the police inspected it. She died horribly, and from the description, it sounded like Lin Qi..."

Pan Yue widened her eyes. "Li Yibai wouldn't have jumped because he saw Lin Qi's body, would he? But why would he go to an unfinished building?"

"I don't believe it!" Guo Jimei glared aggressively at Yuan Qinghua. "Where is it? I want to see for myself."

Yuan Qinghua quietly pointed in a direction. "Over there."

Guo Jimei and the others immediately ran towards it.

The sun was setting. They hadn't run for long before they saw a crowd huddled in the distance.

Sunlight, slanting from the horizon, cast long shadows of the huddled crowd.

"Excuse me, excuse me..." Guo Jimei began to fight her way into the crowd.

Keke and Pan Yue followed closely behind.

Then, a mangled corpse appeared before them. It was Li Yibai.

They froze on the spot.

He lay alone in the middle of the crowd, his brief existence ended.

Sighs reached their ears.

"Such a fine young man. It's a shame he's gone."

"I heard there was also a young girl. Her death was just as tragic."

After some time, Guo Jimei heard Chu Changge's voice from behind her. "Let's go."

Guo Jimei slightly lifted her head. Looking at the distant orange sky, she said, "I finally understand why you voted for Yuan Qinghua last night."

「By this time」

Gu Mian had been sitting listlessly in the classroom for several hours. He watched as the sky turned from light blue to orange, then to blue-black. Outside, students had left class, returned, and even eaten dinner. It was now six-fifty in the evening.

After all this time, the others still hadn't returned.

Only the two corpses of the Yue Nu women accompanied him in the classroom. How considerate of them.

Out of sheer boredom, Gu Mian's gaze rested on one of the corpses' hands. It appeared she had been clutching something at the moment of death.

Gu Mian knew she must have been holding her phone.

After the ghost killed her, someone took her phone and sent that video to Pan Yue, leading to 007 being voted out directly.

The ghost definitely wouldn't do such a thing, so the identity of the video sender was a mystery.

This should have been a baffling situation, but Gu Mian understood.

Just as he was still staring at the Yue Nu woman's hand, the sound of footsteps suddenly came from the corridor. He looked up.

As soon as he lifted his gaze, he saw Guo Jimei entering the room, her expression unreadable.

Behind her were Pan Yue, looking uneasy, and a somewhat fearful Keke.

Lastly, Chu Changge and Yuan Qinghua entered.

Five people.

Gu Mian looked at them. "Where is Li Yibai?"

Keke bit her lip. "He... he committed suicide..."

But before she could finish, Pan Yue cut in, "What suicide! How could Li Yibai just wander into an unfinished building? Someone must have lured him there and pushed him off! It must have been the ghost!"

Keke tried to calm her. "Don't be like that. The ghost can't kill during this time period... Li Yibai couldn't have been killed by someone else."

Just then, Guo Jimei suddenly spoke. "Alright. Today, one less civilian. So, among the seven of us now, there are two ghosts and five civilians."

"Zhang Pingfan is completely unreachable. Even if he's a civilian, someone we can't contact is useless. Effectively, that leaves two ghosts and four **active** civilians."

"If we're lucky and manage to vote out both ghosts in the next two rounds, we still have a chance to survive. However, if we continue to be unable to contact Zhang Pingfan, and we misvote even once, we're in deep trouble. If we misvote twice consecutively, it's game over for us civilians. And there's another path to defeat: if we make one wrong vote, then in the two rounds following that, if we make just one more mistake—even if we correctly vote out a ghost in between—by the time the fifth voting round of the game arrives, it will be down to one ghost versus one civilian. That's a terrible position to be in."

"Let me be blunt, Meiren Chu! I finally understand why you forced Li Yibai to make a choice yesterday! By using Lin Qi to provoke Li Yibai into suicide, the rest of the game falls almost entirely into the ghosts' control!"

"You and Yuan Qinghua are the two remaining ghosts!"

The classroom fell silent. Gu Mian, listening from the side, clicked his tongue. Such meticulous reasoning.

"Gu Mian, Keke, Pan Yue! Tonight, the four of us will vote out Yuan Qinghua first. In the second round, we'll vote out Meiren Chu! That way, three of us can survive. Otherwise, none of us will!"

Gu Mian adopted a righteous expression. "I agree."

Chapter 399 Cornering Person, Gu BongBong_1

Upon hearing Gu Mian's voice, Guo Jimei turned to look at him and hesitated before bringing out a small notebook. "I have this prop called the ****Prophecy Book****, which can verify the identities of two people. I used the first spot on Yuan Qinghua."

She looked at Yuan Qinghua as she spoke. "The facts prove that her identity is ghost!"

"For the second spot, I initially considered using it on either Gu Mian or Meiren Chu... but now it seems the fact that Meiren Chu is a ghost is already established. Do you have anything to say?" Guo Jimei spoke as she looked at Chu Changge.

Gu Mian also looked at him.

Chu Changge simply adjusted his glasses. "Of course I'm not a ghost. Even if you use that prop you mentioned to verify my identity, you won't get any result."

"Alright," Guo Jimei retorted with a defiant smile. "Then I'll fill in your name now..."

As she spoke, she pulled out a pen, seemingly intending to write the name down.

But Keke, standing next to her, suddenly grabbed her hand. "Calm down. Meiren Chu is merely a major suspect without a confirmed identity, and Gu Mian is also highly suspicious. Let's discuss it first, otherwise we'll just waste a spot."

Gu Mian, having been suddenly singled out, straightened his back.

Hearing this, Guo Jimei took a deep breath. "You're right."

She turned to Chu Changge. "Meiren Chu, let me ask you, since you claim not to be a ghost, why were you seen on the video behind Yue Nu when she placed the phone? Later, Yue Nu was killed when she went to get her phone, and only you knew where she put it!"

Keke interjected, "Yeah, at that time, I remember everyone ran after Zhang Pingfan, who suddenly appeared. Meiren Chu, why were you in that classroom?"

Gu Mian listened as Chu Changge provided a very official-sounding explanation: "I was indeed following Yue Nu, but I only suspected her at the time. I just wanted to end this game as soon as possible."

Hearing this, Gu Mian suddenly remembered what Coach Che had told him during the day.

He had also advised him to leave this ****instance**** as soon as possible.

His expression at the time didn't seem false, and Coach Che himself had physically escaped from there, as if staying even one more second could be dangerous.

Was Coach Che's urge to leave this instance somehow related to the change in Guo Jimei?

Gu Mian pondered this as he looked at Guo Jimei.

To take a shortcut out, one only had to seriously mess up the instance. Actually, it was pretty easy to mess things up—just don't leave any of the NPCs alive. But there might be penalties. To be cautious, Gu Mian thought it better to consider other methods, like winning directly. But how could he win directly in this round without dying?

Guo Jimei continued speaking, "Pan Yue also told me today that ever since Li Wentao's death, everything has felt off.

"Pan Yue and Keke saw Li Wentao, who seemed to be a ghost. But he was clearly a civilian. In the first round, Li Wentao's death was entirely orchestrated by someone, and an extra vote mysteriously appeared.

"In the second round, the ghost directly killed Yue Nu, who was very helpful to us. Yue Nu's video led us to Lin Qi. This forced Li Yibai's hand during the final vote, and Lin Qi was directly eliminated because a mysterious person cast four votes for him. The strange thing is, I remember Lin Qi didn't seem surprised at all when he saw us watching the video, as if he already knew what would happen to him.

"Then, Lin Qi's death directly led to Li Yibai's suicide, putting the civilians in a dangerous situation. All in all, one ghost was sacrificed to eliminate four civilians. It's a brilliant setup, with every step connected. I even suspect"—she paused, turning her gaze to Chu Changge—"that your appearance in the video was also part of the plan."

Pan Yue spoke up, somewhat confused, "What do you mean an extra vote mysteriously appeared in the first round?"

Pan Yue had run away after the first round. She hadn't heard Gu Mian and the others' analysis, nor had she delved into the voting, so she didn't know about this. Keke quietly explained it to her.

At this point, Guo Jimei paused for about a minute, seemingly gathering her emotions. She opened her mouth as if to identify someone, but before Gu Mian could hear her voice, his vision went black.

「Eight o'clock struck, and the third night began.」

Similar to the previous two times, it was still pitch black, but Gu Mian could see the moon hanging in the sky.

He took out his flashlight and shone it around.

This time, they were in a construction site. It appeared to be an unfinished residential complex, with many partially constructed buildings standing around and huge cranes parked motionless in an open area.

The surroundings were all unfinished dirt roads. Gu Mian walked a few steps, the uneven ground pricking at his feet.

He needed to find the others.

He thought as he walked forward. The construction site was next to a mountain, so it covered a vast area.

After walking for an unknown duration, he suddenly heard human voices up ahead.

Pan Yue, without the flashlight distributed to the main group, had to grope her way along the pitch-black path. "Damn it! If I'd known, I would have brought a flashlight from home!"

And just as she was muttering to herself, she suddenly heard a rustling sound up ahead.

"Who's there!" Pan Yue's eyes widened as she looked forward.

She saw a figure ahead. The figure stiffened for a moment, then a faint voice said, "It's me..."

Pan Yue instantly recognized the voice. "Xu Xingcheng?"

She quickly approached and saw it was indeed Xu Xingcheng. He stood there, looking tense, his eyes darting about, and fine beads of sweat had broken out on his forehead.

Pan Yue frowned. "What are you doing here?"

"You might not believe me..." Xu Xingcheng began hesitantly. "When you were playing the **Close Your Eyes** game, there was a power outage, right? Zhang Pingfan got too scared and ran off. He bumped into me and asked me to play in his place.

"I agreed at the time and was about to go to the classroom to get the identity slip. But when I got there, you had all left. I used the light on my smartwatch to illuminate the table and saw the identity slip Zhang Pingfan had left..."

Pan Yue's eyes widened. "So, Zhang Pingfan didn't play the game at all? It was you all along!"

"Yes... it was me," Xu Xingcheng admitted, looking rather embarrassed. "But I didn't expect things to turn out like this. I heard someone even died? Last night, I was mysteriously transported to a basement... and today, I mysteriously arrived here again."

Hearing this, Pan Yue looked at him more cautiously. "What's your identity?"

"The slip said 'civilian'... I heard from Zhang Pingfan that you're all supposed to destroy your identity slips after seeing them. But I was afraid he might suddenly want to play again, so I tucked the slip into the back cover of my watch... But my watch... I don't know where it went a few days ago..."

Hearing Xu Xingcheng say this, Pan Yue suddenly remembered something. No wonder an extra, mysterious vote appeared in the first round of voting!

Chapter 400 Abandoning Wife and Child for Gu Bingbing

Everyone thought Zhang Pingfan was a player!

During the first round of voting, eight people voted, and three abstained.

Li Wentao himself received seven votes, while he cast his own vote for Pan Yue.

That way, there were exactly eight votes cast.

However, Yue Nu claimed the next day that she had voted for Zhang Pingfan.

But if Yue Nu's vote was counted, there would have been nine votes, yet the game stated there were only eight voters.

They never understood what was happening until Pan Yue met Xu Xingcheng today.

Since Zhang Pingfan wasn't a player, Yue Nu's vote for him was useless and was treated as an abstention!

It turned out there had only been eight actual voters all along!

Although it was a huge misunderstanding, they had finally connected with this civilian who had always been on the outside.

Enthusiastically, Pan Yue grabbed Xu Xingcheng. "It's okay! I'll take you to Guo Jimei and the others. With you, we'll have one more vote, and our chances of survival will be even greater!"

The two of them started to search the massive construction site, but after a long time, they still hadn't found a trace of the others.

After some time had passed, Pan Yue stopped to take a break.

At that moment, Xu Xingcheng suddenly looked behind Pan Yue and asked in surprise, "Hey, Yuan Qinghua, when did you get here?"

Pan Yue's face instantly stiffened. Yuan Qinghua?

She rigidly turned her neck to look behind her.

Yuan Qinghua had appeared behind her at some unknown point. She wasn't holding a flashlight and stood rigidly in the darkness, a smile on her face. "Where are you going?"

Xu Xingcheng started to answer, "We're going to—"

"Wait!" Pan Yue interrupted Xu Xingcheng. She nervously stared at Yuan Qinghua. "Yuan Qinghua, I know you might not be the ghost. Besides, a ghost definitely wouldn't kill when two people are together; that would undoubtedly expose their identity."

Xu Xingcheng looked at Pan Yue, puzzled.

Then, the same voice came again.

"Where are you going?"

Xu Xingcheng looked in surprise at Yuan Qinghua, who still stood motionless, that smile fixed on her face.

"Where are you going?"

"Where are you going?"

"Where are you going?"

What... what's happening...?

Staring at the figure before him, Xu Xingcheng shivered violently as immense fear gripped his entire body.

"Run!" Pan Yue suddenly yelled, then turned and fled.

Xu Xingcheng hastily stumbled after her.

But that demonic voice seemed to be right behind them!

They sprinted down the uneven dirt road in the darkness. Suddenly, Pan Yue tripped over something.

Xu Xingcheng immediately stopped to help her up.

Just as he paused and looked back, he came face-to-face with a deathly pale visage.

"Where are you going?"

CRACK! The sound of breaking bone echoed.

Pan Yue looked up in astonishment. She saw Xu Xingcheng's neck snap to one side before his entire body crumpled to the ground.

Yuan Qinghua stood before him, still upright, her face now an ashen, deathly pale.

Pan Yue's eyes widened, and she struggled to move backward. "You... You really are the ghost... But you can't kill anymore! You've killed one person. If you kill again, you'll die too!"

She scrambled backward, trying to get up and run.

But the pale face before her offered no such chance.

Pan Yue saw the figure slowly bend down, and then she felt a pair of icy hands encircle her neck.

Her breath caught in her throat. Pan Yue opened her mouth to scream, but no sound escaped.

Why? Why?! If you kill me, you'll die too!

But these words remained unvoiced. Within seconds, Pan Yue too became a cold corpse.

Under the moonlight, the ghostly woman slowly collapsed after murdering the second person. A distinct sound emanated from her body—the crunching of breaking bones.

She had killed two people and was now being eliminated by the game's rules.

This was the fate for all those punished by the game's rules.

Just like Li Wentao, who had been voted out earlier, her body and organs shattered. Blood oozed from Yuan Qinghua's contorted form.

At this moment, Gu Mian emerged from a corner, holding a gleaming saw.

He first glanced at the two corpses on the ground, then at the dying Yuan Qinghua. "What a mess."

He had initially been following Yuan Qinghua to observe her, not expecting her to put on such a dramatic show for him.

Gu Mian felt he ought to go over and greet this "colleague" who had so selflessly performed.

Saw in hand, he squatted down beside Yuan Qinghua, about to say something.

But before he could utter a word, Yuan Qinghua's pale hand shot out and grabbed his clothes—just the fabric, nothing more.

Gu Mian frowned, looking at the hand clutching him tightly.

Then, a faint voice escaped her lips: "You promised me..."

Just like in countless melodramatic TV shows, her dying words were cut short, leaving Gu Mian alone beside three corpses to contemplate life.

What did I promise her? he wondered, looking at the corpse before him. He couldn't recall having much interaction with Yuan Qinghua.

Unfortunately, Yuan Qinghua could no longer provide an answer.

Gu Mian even began to wonder if he'd ever done something like abandoning a wife and children in the past, but try as he might, he couldn't recall anything of the sort.

「Elsewhere」

Guo Jimei and Keke had stuck together.

They too were wandering the massive construction site but hadn't encountered anyone else. At least they hadn't been separated like before.

This round, Guo Jimei was more careful; she had bought a watch before leaving school and wore it constantly.

Keke was still leading Guo Jimei around the construction site.

Guo Jimei asked, a little puzzled, "Keke, why do I feel like you're leading me in circles? I think we've been here before."

Keke turned back, a bewildered expression on her face. "Ah, have we? Actually, I'm not very good with directions. Sorry about that."

As she spoke, she glanced at Guo Jimei's wristwatch. "What time is it now?"

Guo Jimei raised her wrist to check. "It's already two-thirty. In half an hour, we can vote. Strange, I thought the ghost would come for me today. Did it kill someone else instead?"

"I don't know," Keke said, then suddenly stopped and pointed to the tallest building in the distance. "Why don't we go check over there? I don't think we've been there yet."

Guo Jimei nodded.

When the two of them reached the foot of this tallest building, three corpses and Gu Mian came into view.

In the dim light, Guo Jimei gasped, staring in shock at Yuan Qinghua's utterly pale form on the ground. "What happened?!"

Gu Mian, standing to one side, shrugged. "Just as you see. Yuan Qinghua killed two people and then got herself penalized by the rules."

Why? Guo Jimei stared at the ground, stunned. Why would Yuan Qinghua do such a thing? Killing two people... meant she would also die instantly. Wouldn't this put the remaining ghost in the worst possible position?