

Collapse 411

Chapter 411 I, Gu Bingbing, Have Always Won People Over with Virtue_1

Fatty saw that emaciated woman at his door again.

This was the fourth time.

The woman stood at the door, holding out a book. "Hello, I'm here to return a book."

Then she stood motionless.

Strangely enough, ever since Fatty found out that this character was controlled by Gu Mian, he started to find this skeletal woman oddly affable.

Now he was leaning against the door. If it weren't for that transparent barrier, Fatty might have pressed his entire body against the woman.

"Doctor," he edged closer, "Doctor, is that you? Doctor, it's me, Fatty! We've turned into save points, can you hear me? If you can, blink..."

But the slender woman in front of him made no movement.

Her sunken eyes were huge and particularly striking. She stood rooted to the spot, holding the book, not blinking or showing any other sign of life.

After some time, Fatty, his voice hoarse and tinged with disappointment, stopped. "So you really can't hear me?"

Mumbling to himself, he raised his hand to take the book from the woman.

Yet at that moment, Fatty saw the skeletal woman withdraw her hand.

"This is very likely Fatty," Gu Mian said, canceling the save and looking at the screen. The save point was pitch black. "The obedient one is Chu Changge, the insubordinate one is 007."

My God.

Gu Mian mused, tilting his head back, "So it's really become Gu Mian and his three useless save points, huh?"

The save points must not be destroyed, so there could only be fifteen saves in total for the game.

He'd already used ten saves, despite it being early in the game. If all his saves were consumed this early, and a character died later on, wouldn't he be sent back several hours?

But that was hardly the most important thing; the real issue was, destroying a save point would result in a player dying.

"This instance is so wicked," Gu Mian said, standing before the save point. "Indeed, it's a special high-difficulty instance. The slightest mistake by a player in front of the computer could lead to the character in the game dying unknowingly."

So wicked!

Even Gu Mian couldn't help but exclaim about the wickedness of this instance.

After all, not all players would be interested in analyzing the different personalities of each save point. They would just blame the game for lagging when saving.

"The previous instances at least had ghosts killing people. Now, it actually has players do it themselves? And unknowingly, at that... Too wicked."

As he spoke, Gu Mian pulled out a lighter.

Fatty, seeing the woman in front of him pulling out a lighter, stumbled back in a trembling panic.

Then, he watched as the lighter in her hand was flicked on, then off, on again, off again...

This repeated several times before she finally turned around and left, as if she had just been teasing him.

Watching the woman slowly leaving, a dumbfounded Fatty paused for a moment before immediately picking up the phone to call Chu Changge. "I have a feeling that the Doctor has figured something out."

"You think Gu Mian knows something?" Soon, 007 also received a call from Fatty.

Holding the phone, she thought for a moment before saying, "So, if Gu Mian knows that we've turned into save points, he won't destroy us, will he?"

"Well, that's not certain," Fatty began, looking out at the dark street. "Our Doctor is fond of setting traps. If you do anything that rubs him the wrong way, who knows when he might just light a fire and throw it into your house."

Hearing this, 007 swallowed nervously. "What do you think of me? Am I agreeable to him?"

Fatty: "..."

Meanwhile, Gu Mian began to wander around the dilapidated village again.

As he roamed, he was calculating. If destroying a save point meant losing one of his companions, then the entire game only allowed for fifteen saves.

The game rules he'd seen were surprisingly brief. They didn't mention that a save point had to be destroyed and cleared after five uses before another save could be made.

Nor did the game explain the objective for clearing it. He was just left to wander aimlessly and hadn't run into that monster from before.

It was already completely dark. The village was huge, parts of it densely packed with buildings while other areas were quite sparse.

At that moment, Gu Mian was wandering around the outskirts of the village. The buildings here were rather sparse, and a small mountain was nearby.

Gu Mian had tried to climb up earlier but stopped, considering the possibility that he might accidentally fall and get badly injured. Therefore, he decided to give up.

If I really can't find any clues, it wouldn't be too late to climb this thing.

Surrounded by mountains on all sides, the village appeared to be situated in a ravine. If there were heavy rains, it would surely be flooded.

A huge, round moon hung in the night sky, its bright light illuminating the entire ravine and somewhat improving visibility.

Just then, he noticed a house ahead with its lights on.

This building was one of the few that hadn't collapsed. It was a two-story wooden house with a tightly closed wooden door. Next to the door, a square hole had been cut out for a window. However, the window was so dirty he could only see that a light was on inside, but couldn't make out any specific details. A wire mesh covered the exterior of the window, seemingly to deter theft.

Next to it, there was a thatched shed that probably housed some animals, and beside the shed was a handcart.

Gu Mian took a step forward.

Weren't the lights in this house off the last time I passed by?

With this thought, he moved a few steps closer to the window, intending to listen to what was going on inside.

The game didn't include an option to crouch or lie down, so Gu Mian could only walk over brazenly.

However, just as he had his game character brazenly approach the window, the tightly closed door next to him suddenly swung open...

Gu Mian turned his head.

He saw a figure standing upright in the doorway, staring straight ahead. Then, its neck twisted, and its entire face turned towards Gu Mian's screen.

Gu Mian watched as its body remained motionless, only its neck twisting ninety degrees to meet his gaze.

It looked rather eerie.

For a moment, Gu Mian was torn between whether to flee immediately or try to communicate.

However, he noticed that the figure opened its mouth, and a line of text with punctuation appeared at the bottom of the screen:

"Come in"

Since the game was silent, Gu Mian had to rely on the text at the bottom of the screen to figure out what others were saying.

After speaking, the figure turned around and walked back into the house. The door was not closed but was left swinging in the wind, an orange light shining out from the opening.

Gu Mian was left alone, thinking in front of the screen.

This eerie person, and these eerie words.

If someone sees a person secretly creeping around their window in the middle of the night, their first reaction wouldn't be to invite them in, right?

Besides, this person doesn't look like a real human.

After a few seconds of consideration, Gu Mian made up his mind.

He approached the door.

He reached out and closed the door.

He pushed the handcart to the door, then took out his lighter.

Chapter 412 The Gentle Madonna_1

Before long, a fervent blaze ignited in this dilapidated gully, as spectacular as a burst of fireworks.

Gu Mian had thrown the lighter, so while gaining this splendid pyrotechnic display, he lost his source of illumination.

The small cart he had pushed to the doorway proved useless; the people inside didn't even run out before becoming roasted sweet potatoes in the fire.

Of course, Gu Mian had no idea if this mysterious two-story building possessed any secret tunnels or other means of escape.

In any case, no one within his line of sight ran out.

Watching the fire before him grow ever larger, Gu Mian turned and headed in another direction.

Just then, he suddenly saw the silhouette of another person appear on the screen.

The figure ran over from a distance, and in a few seconds, was right in front of Gu Mian's screen.

Given the screen between them, Gu Mian couldn't quite feel immersed. He didn't really understand why he had to control the character from a computer. Wouldn't it be better to put him directly into the game?

The newcomer was a woman.

She had dark brown, naturally curly hair. Probably due to a lack of care, this hair was piled messily on her head, casually tied up with a strip of gray-blue cloth. If a bird flew by, it might even consider laying an egg in there. That's why Gu Mian decided to call her Xiao Niao.

The face beneath her unruly hair was just as unkempt. The girl wasn't what you'd call pretty to begin with, and her face was covered in sooty marks, like a wall blackened by years of chimney smoke, making her even further removed from "beautiful."

Her rather plain face had just appeared on Gu Mian's screen when a line of text materialized below:

"Did you see that fire? It looks like there are still people in the house."

Since the computer had no speakers, Gu Mian mentally supplied her with a voice; it sounded about right.

Did the people in this village already know the character he was controlling, or were they just naturally too familiar? Everyone he met seemed to just start talking at him.

Immediately after, Gu Mian saw two options appear before him, apparently responses to Xiao Niao's previous words.

[I saw it. Such a pity, I'm heartbroken.]

[Of course, I saw it. I started the fire.]

Gu Mian contemplated the two options for a moment.

Only a ghost would choose the second one, right? Are they asking to be trussed up and dumped in the river?

Since this game is called Angel Redemption... Gu Mian muttered to himself, "This fire is such a tragedy. I wonder which heartless monster started it."

As he spoke, he reached out and selected the first option.

No matter where this woman had appeared from, or whether she recognized him or not, he absolutely had to act like a paragon of virtue.

Xiao Niao took a step back, and new text appeared on the screen: "You truly are as you've always been, so kind."

What in the world? This is so bizarre. Gu Mian frowned at the message below.

Fortunately, no new options appeared this time, so he didn't have to make any choice.

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Meanwhile, Fatty had found a strange character profile among a messy pile of character settings.

He immediately picked up the phone and dialed a number. "Brother Chu? I found a character profile in this book of settings that seems a lot like the one the Doctor is controlling."

"Really? I don't think the character setting book I have here mentions this character."

Holding the book in one hand and the phone in the other, Fatty began to read seriously.

"The Holy Daughter"

"Bestowed the title of Holy Daughter before birth, she has no true name. Legend says she is the reincarnation of the Doctrine Goddess."

"Kind-hearted and innocent by nature."

"Her parents died in a fire when she was nine."

Her only brother disappeared when she was thirteen; his body was found a year later in a dry well.

At sixteen, she was kidnapped by her best friend but returned safely."

"Despite experiencing so much misfortune, she remains as kind and innocent as she was at birth, protecting this sanctuary of peace."

"There's a picture beside it. It looks a bit like the character the Doctor is controlling, just not as thin..."

Fatty's voice came from the receiver.

Chu Changge listened while looking through the book in his hands.

He had already gone through all the game-related books on his shelf once, but there was no mention of the character Fatty described.

Fatty's voice continued, "Speaking of which, this Holy Daughter, quite the character, has certainly had some rotten luck, hasn't she? Parents dead at nine, brother dead at thirteen, kidnapped at sixteen... That's on par with the Doctor's luck. No wonder they want the Doctor to control this character. But why did she get so thin later on?"

Chu Changge listened silently to Fatty's voice, who was still saying, "The character profile is quite similar to the Doctor too. One is an incredibly unlucky Holy Daughter who still protects her people, and the other is an incredibly unlucky Doctor who still dedicates himself to saving lives."

After a good while, Chu Changge finally spoke, "I'm afraid this character isn't as simple as she appears on the surface. I can't find any useful information on my end. Keep searching your bookshelf."

Fatty acknowledged and hung up.

Chu Changge also put down the receiver.

The very next second after he hung up, the phone on Chu Changge's desk rang again.

He reached out and picked up the receiver again.

The voice of 007 came through: "I found a strange diary... well, let's call it a diary."

"I'm in the wardrobe. People waving flags with an evil symbol burst into the room. I watch through a crack as they tear my father apart, and my mother is turned into a hanging picture on the wall."

"They shout, 'Kill the Holy Daughter!' They yell, asking where the Holy Daughter is."

"I'm in the wardrobe."

"My brother disappeared. I looked for him for a long time. Finally, I saw him in a well. He hadn't decayed yet, but his fingers were clawed raw. The walls of the well were covered in desperate scratch marks; he had been trying to climb out."

"I saw that evil symbol again at the bottom of the well—the symbol of those who turned my mother into a hanging picture."

"I found a huge stone to cover the mouth of the well, to let my brother rest in peace there. But a year later, someone still disturbed him."

"Later, the villagers caught those evil people. They knelt on the ground, weeping, kowtowing, and begging for mercy."

"The kind villagers looked at me."

"'The Holy Daughter will forgive everything.' 'No matter what, the kind Holy Daughter won't mind'—I heard them say."

"After that, I remained the kind Holy Daughter."

"'Let me take you away from here,' the girl next door always liked to say to me. When she spoke, her eyes would twinkle like stars in the sky."

"I nodded in agreement."

"Later, the villagers caught us. They said the kind Holy Daughter would not abandon the people she protected, that the kind Holy Daughter was lying for a kidnapper."

"I watched as she was placed on a barbecue grill, her once bright eyes turning black."

Chapter 413 You Haven't Seen It in a Year_1

"This is where it ends," 007's voice came through the phone. "I don't know what happened next..."

"No dates are recorded on it, nor anything else. Because this part is completely handwritten, I believe it's a diary. I've skimmed through all the books; this is the only one with handwritten content... But I'm not sure who wrote this diary."

With one hand flipping through the book's pages and the other holding the phone, Chu Changge said, "Fatty just told me that the character Gu Mian is controlling is the Holy Daughter—the one mentioned in your diary."

A few seconds of silence followed on 007's end. "So, does our discovery of these things hold any meaning for Gu Mian?"

"If we knew what happened after this diary was written, it might help him play the game. Have you ever played a horror game like this?"

007 paused, her voice tinged with hesitation. "...A long time ago, but I don't remember it very well."

"These types of games don't usually assign specific tasks. Players must explore within the game, gradually uncovering the game's world view and background until they reach an ending. There are usually different endings, too. I imagine once he's figured out what we already know, the game will conclude."

"Of course, players can also die in the game. That's when save files come into play."

Chu Changge glanced at the book in his hand. "By the way, let me ask you something."

"What is it?" 007 asked, sounding curious.

"When was the last time Gu Mian saved his game at your place?"

007 seemed to ponder for a moment before replying two seconds later, "After I found out that the woman was the character he was controlling. He's saved at my place three times now. Why, is there a problem?"

"No," Chu Changge said. "Just keep looking for clues in your rooms."

007's puzzled voice came through the phone, "You didn't find anything on your end?"

Chu Changge snapped his book shut. "Nothing."

Meanwhile, Gu Mian was still at the site of the fire. Though Xiao Niao had come specifically to watch the explosive "firework," she seemed indifferent to the person being roasted like a sweet potato inside the house.

Gu Mian saw her offer a token expression of regret before she spoke, "You can stay at my place tonight."

Of course, she was talking to the character he was controlling. Gu Mian had to imagine her voice, as the computer lacked sound equipment.

After speaking, Xiao Niao turned and walked away. It seemed the game character Gu Mian controlled knew people in the village.

But how could this dilapidated village still be inhabited?

As Gu Mian followed, pondering, he recalled that the man who had invited his character in had now turned into a grilled sausage. Since he didn't have a second lighter, he couldn't create another "grilled sausage" for the time being.

His plan was to first sneak into Xiao Niao's place to see if there was anything worth stealing before deciding his next move.

After all, the game had no sleep option, and Gu Mian didn't believe closing his character's eyes would allow him to see the next day's sun.

Xiao Niao led the way quickly. Gu Mian's character soon passed by what appeared to be Fatty's save point.

As they did, Gu Mian noticed Xiao Niao stop and turn her head left and right. Then, a line of text appeared at the bottom of the screen, representing her words, "I think I heard something."

She seemed to be talking to herself, however, and didn't give Gu Mian's character a chance to respond before continuing ahead.

Soon, Gu Mian's character was led to a collapsed house.

He had passed this place not long ago, even standing on top of it to survey the area, but had found no signs of habitation. Who could live in a collapsed house?

Yet Xiao Niao stopped right there, with an air that clearly said, "I live here."

Immediately, Gu Mian saw her bend down and, using both hands, push a large stone aside. The stone rolled away with a RUMBLE.

Then Xiao Niao cleared away the smaller stones from beneath where the large one had been, dusting off the surrounding dirt with her hands.

On the dark ground, Gu Mian saw a hatch.

She lifted the square hatch embedded in the ground. Then she turned around, her eyes glowing with an eerie light as she said, "Go in. Everyone is waiting for you."

No wonder there are people living in this broken-down village. They're all living underground?

However, the peculiar glow in her eyes alone made Gu Mian instinctively hesitant to enter so readily.

Just then, he saw the strange creature with leg shackles appear again in the distance, heading towards them.

The clanking of the iron chain on its foot was clearly audible; at least, Xiao Niao, who was in front of him, turned her head towards the sound. This meant Gu Mian no longer had to face her strangely glowing eyes.

The words "Hurry up!" followed by an exclamation mark appeared at the bottom of the screen.

It was apparently Xiao Niao's voice. Then, she suddenly leaped down.

Deciding that discretion was the better part of valor, Gu Mian quickly stepped forward and followed her down.

The jump was intense. Gu Mian saw his health bar, which had only been slightly grazed by the monster before, instantly drop by nearly half.

He instinctively looked up to see a round patch of sky above; he realized his character had jumped from a height of five or six meters.

It seemed they were in a well, and a new-looking ladder was set up against its wall.

But Xiao Niao hadn't used the ladder either; she had also jumped straight down.

What the hell? Gu Mian stared at Xiao Niao. Wouldn't she lose health jumping down like that?

Xiao Niao's mouth moved. "Why are you staring at me? Let's go."

Gu Mian then saw a passage in the well wall. It was dark and narrow, its destination unclear.

At this moment, Xiao Niao took out a lighter, illuminating their surroundings somewhat.

Just then, Gu Mian suddenly noticed what looked like scratch marks on the lower part of the well wall. He controlled the game's camera to look down and indeed saw deep brown, haphazard scratches there.

However, these scratches were half-obscured by the dirt at their feet; the well seemed to have been partially filled in at some point.

By now, Xiao Niao, holding the lighter, had already walked into the dark passage, and Gu Mian followed.

As he controlled his character, he thought, How can I steal that lighter from her?

Just as he was pondering this, the screen's brightness suddenly increased considerably.

Gu Mian looked up.

Before him was an ant-hill-like structure, with numerous passages branching out in all directions from a fork not far ahead. Along the sides of these passages, several openings had been dug out, barely concealed by curtains or other materials, apparently serving as doorways.

People live in these holes?

Gu Mian saw Xiao Niao's words appear at the bottom of the screen: "Ever since that incident, we hardly ever go to the surface. We only go out at night. All the villagers live underground."

Then, more words from her: "You, come with me. Your place is inside."

Since he was only controlling a game character, Gu Mian couldn't directly ask the questions he wanted to, such as, "What happened here?"

Frustrated, Gu Mian could only follow Xiao Niao forward.

During this time, someone lifted a curtain from one of the openings and looked out. Gu Mian then saw a few more lines of text appear at the bottom of the screen:

"It's the Holy Daughter!"

"The Holy Daughter has come again! You truly still love us!"

Gu Mian never thought he'd get to be a Holy Daughter in his lifetime. But being the Holy Daughter of this slum is truly frustrating. No wonder the character jumped off a cliff at the beginning; she probably died of frustration.

Thinking this, Gu Mian began to look around this godforsaken place.

Actually, there wasn't much to see—just dirt, and more dirt. His gaze shifted to a few of the openings with lifted curtains, and he saw that the holes indeed contained some household furnishings.

But one thing was very strange: there was no food.

No food was visible, neither on the surface they had left nor here underground.

These people look like they've lived here for many years. If there's no food, how have they survived?

Chapter 414 Full_1

"You should understand they are not the same."

"I know, but I..."

"Who's there!"

The sudden voice in her dream startled 007, making it a bit difficult for her to open her eyes.

She saw a chandelier lightly swaying from the ceiling. The ceiling, not originally white, was now dotted with different-sized spots of mold due to the dampness.

She stared blankly at the green mold spots for a while before remembering that she was still within an instance.

Days and nights without sleep in the real world had pushed her consciousness to the brink of collapse, and then she had entered a special instance.

"Damn it, I actually fell asleep. It looks like I still don't have enough Attribute Points..." 007 muttered, supporting herself on the ground as she struggled to get up.

The phone on the wooden counter beside her kept ringing incessantly. It seemed the ringing was also to thank for her waking up.

007 immediately reached for the phone on the counter and glanced at the clock opposite her.

It was already eight-fifty.

She had probably slept for about thirty minutes.

Now holding the phone, Fatty's anxious voice came through, "Why didn't you answer? I thought something had happened to you."

This instance had specifically turned off their protective mechanism. In here, death meant actual death.

007 never expected that she would fall asleep in such an environment. Pinching her brows, she hoarsely replied, "Sorry, I accidentally fell asleep. Did anything happen?"

Fatty seemed surprised for a moment, but then he sighed in relief. "That makes sense. You looked like you were about to fall asleep in the car... But let's not talk about that. I called precisely because nothing seemed to be happening. The last time the Doctor came here, it was slightly past eight, but now it's

eight-fifty, and I haven't seen a trace of the Doctor. I originally wanted to ask if you'd seen the Doctor, but I didn't expect you'd fallen asleep."

Listening to Fatty's anxious voice, 007 apologized, "I don't know because I was asleep. I'm sorry..."

At this point, she suddenly recalled her dream, hesitated for a moment, then asked, "Have you asked Chu Changge?"

"Brother Chu also said the Doctor hasn't been to his place for a while either. By the way..." Fatty's voice took a peculiar turn. "Did Brother Chu ask you when the Doctor last saved his progress at your place?"

007 paused. She didn't quite understand why Fatty would suddenly ask such a question. Her brain, having just woken up, was a bit sluggish, but she still recalled quickly. "Yes, before I fell asleep. Did he ask you too?"

Fatty on the other end confirmed, "Yes, he did, about half an hour ago..."

While listening, 007 looked at the clock in front of her again, watching the second hand ticking away.

It was also about half an hour ago when Chu Changge asked her about this.

Fatty's voice continued from the receiver, "The Doctor came to my place four times but only saved his progress three times. The last time, he just brandished his lighter to spook me."

Hearing this, 007 instinctively asked, "So when did he last save his progress at your place?"

"Before I realized the Doctor was that woman."

007 asked again, "Then what about the last time he saved his progress at Chu Changge's place?"

Fatty seemed to recall for a moment. "The Doctor has saved his progress at Brother Chu's five times. The last time, if I remember correctly, was when I was on the phone with Brother Chu. Right, it was when I figured out that woman was a character controlled by the Doctor."

"What's wrong?" Fatty's voice came through the phone.

007 gave a wry smile. "It's nothing. Thanks for telling me this."

With that, she hung up.

007 turned her gaze toward the door.

The night sky looked like paper splashed with thick ink; the entire sky was permeated by darkness, a boundless expanse of black as far as the eye could see.

Data or clues about the game could be found in both her bookstore and Fatty's. Only Chu Changge hadn't revealed a single word; he claimed he found nothing. Considering Chu Changge's performance in the previous instance, 007 didn't quite believe him. Moreover, Chu Changge had asked both of them about the last time Gu Mian saved his progress. According to Fatty, Gu Mian last saved his progress at her place.

007 thought while looking at the pitch-black night sky. What did it mean that he last saved his progress here...?

Gu Mian hadn't directly transmigrated into the game, so there were many inconveniences. Even if he noticed something amiss, he couldn't ask questions directly and had to wait for options to appear before he could make a choice.

Currently, he was following Xiao Niao deep into this ant-nest-like structure.

Actually, even though there are no options on the screen, I still have choices.

He was controlling his game character and could make two decisions right now:

One, turn around and run, leaving this very spooky place.

Two, follow Xiao Niao to what she called the "room prepared for you."

Gu Mian considered option one and even briefly tried it out. But he had barely begun to act on it when option one died in the womb. The moment he turned his head, he saw that the curtains covering the cave entrances he had passed were all slightly lifted. Emaciated faces, so thin they were almost deformed, squeezed into the gaps, holding lamps and staring blankly at him. These people seemed to be anticipating something. Gu Mian was sure that if he tried to run back, those people would stop him at all costs.

Stroking his chin and staring at the somewhat dim screen, Gu Mian murmured, "Feels like I've entered a wolf's den..."

While muttering to himself, he also glanced down at the chainsaw lying quietly at his feet. If he himself had entered this game, he wouldn't be afraid of those people who were practically skin and bones. But now, he was just a player controlling a game character. He couldn't wield a chainsaw to cut off anyone's head, nor could he stir up any real trouble in this game. If he encountered an irresistible force, he could only quietly accept death. Although there are saves even if I die... But I always feel that saves are an uncontrollable element; it's better to use them sparingly... So, it's best not to die.

"We're here. This is where you'll rest. Holy Daughter, please go to bed early."

Gu Mian saw new text appear at the bottom of the screen.

Xiao Niao skillfully led him into a relatively more ornate mud den. She seemed very practiced. This was the only such den around; it seemed she also felt it wasn't appropriate for the Holy Daughter to stay with a group of civilians starved to skin and bones.

Although this cave was much tidier than where the others lived, it couldn't change the fact that it was still a mud den.

The mud den in front of him was roughly hollowed out into a squarish shape. A table was placed against the wall, and on it, a kerosene lamp barely illuminated the space. Beside the lamp was a chipped porcelain bowl, about two-thirds full of water.

The water was somewhat murky, with steam rising from the rim of the bowl; it looked like freshly prepared hot water.

A chair was placed in front of the table; one of its legs was already a bit loose.

Next to the table was a bed—a makeshift bed made of old clothes and sofa cushions, with a blue bedsheet spread on top. It looked a bit dirty but was relatively tidy.

It was clear this room had been carefully prepared; it was countless times better than the mud dens the others lived in.

Xiao Niao looked somewhat sheepishly at the bowl of water on the table, then turned her head towards the screen, swallowing hard, and said, "I'm sorry, Holy Daughter, we don't have any food today. Please bear with it and have some water. We'll be able to eat tomorrow."

Gu Mian saw Xiao Niao's Adam's apple, prominent due to her emaciation, bobbing up and down relentlessly, as if she were gulping down saliva.

She had an expression that looked like she wanted to eat someone. Even if someone else were sitting in front of the computer, they would have noticed something was off about her.

At this moment, options finally appeared on the screen again:

[Where do you get your food?]

[Can I take a walk around?]

[How many exits does this place have?]

[I'm scared. Will you sleep with me tonight?]

The fourth option was quite in the style of certain adult-themed games. But even if an absolute lecher were sitting at the computer now, they wouldn't dare choose this option when facing a woman with glittering eyes who was staring at them and constantly swallowing. Besides, Xiao Niao's appearance was rather unfortunate. Gu Mian, of course, was a man of noble character. Although choosing any other option would yield more information than the last one, Gu Mian, with mock solemnity, chose the fourth option— "Sleep with me."

Xiao Niao froze. "Holy Daughter, you seem a bit different this time... No, it's nothing. I need to report some things to the village leader first. I'll come and accompany you when I return. Please wait here and don't wander off."

With that, she turned, lifted the curtain, and left.

Of course, Gu Mian wasn't going to just wait there.

After Xiao Niao left, he immediately began to rummage through the room. He found a lighter in a drawer, successfully detached a loose chair leg, and finally, even blew out the kerosene lamp on the table.

The room instantly plunged into darkness.

Gu Mian had long suffered from the lack of an inventory. Now that he finally had an inventory in this game, he stuffed everything he could fit into it—including the loose chair leg and the extinguished kerosene lamp.

Confirming there was nothing else to take, Gu Mian immediately left this mud den and entered the corridor outside.

The corridor was very dim. Of course, Gu Mian wouldn't go back the way he came; a dozen or so hungry ghosts with glittering eyes were waiting for him there.

He noticed that Xiao Niao had headed deeper into the structure when she left.

So, he controlled his character to grope his way deeper into the darkness.

Before long, he came to a fork in the path: one way led right, the other left.

Without hesitation, Gu Mian headed left.

He didn't use the lighter. He hadn't walked in the darkness for too long before he saw a light ahead.

It seemed to be light seeping out from behind a curtain that wasn't tightly closed.

Gu Mian immediately crept forward stealthily.

Ahead was another mud den. Due to the curtain, Gu Mian couldn't see inside, but he could "hear"... Actually, it wasn't that he could hear the sound, but rather the dialogue of the people inside was displayed at the bottom of the screen.

"Village leader, there's one more thing. When the Holy Daughter arrived, the hut Bai Sha and the others were in caught fire... This has never happened before. I keep feeling something is off with the Holy Daughter this time."

Gu Mian guessed this was Xiao Niao speaking. So, the one he burned alive was named Bai Sha?

Then, the next line appeared at the bottom of the screen.

"No need to worry. The Holy Daughter has been here many times. This time was just an accident... Later, take some people to carry their corpses out. Adding the Holy Daughter, we can have our fill..."

Although it ended with an ellipsis, Gu Mian still figured out the meaning. Just as I thought, they're planning to make a move on me... 'Have our fill,' my ass!

Chapter 415 Butcher Assassin_1

From the conversation inside, it seemed this so-called "Holy Daughter" had been to this game countless times already.

Gu Mian felt that this game didn't operate like typical games, where you finished a playthrough and had to start over.

He speculated that the world within the game was continuously progressing, and the players controlling the characters were the ones who brought a continuous supply of these "Holy Daughters" to these people.

What a peculiar worldview.

Furthermore, from what the people inside were saying, it seemed no player had ever escaped the fate of ending up in their stomachs.

What kind of game were they playing?

Being a maverick player, Gu Mian, of course, intended to rebel. In an instant, numerous malicious ideas flashed through his mind.

New text kept appearing at the bottom of the screen.

"Although an accident occurred, weren't the previous Holy Daughters obedient? This time will be no different. Besides, we have so many people here. You go find a few people to bring Bai Sha and the others back, then we'll butcher and divide them..."

Upon reading this, Gu Mian snuck away again.

Instead of checking the forked path on the right, he returned to the dirt den Xiao Niao had arranged for her.

Back here, Gu Mian took out a kerosene lamp from his inventory and lit it with a lighter, while also casually reattaching the chair leg he had managed to remove with some effort earlier.

It's worth mentioning that these two items were designed very rationally: one hand could hold the kerosene lamp for light while the other brandished the chair leg as a weapon.

Sure enough, Xiao Niao returned not long after.

Gu Mian heard her hurried footsteps approach the entrance before she lifted the curtain to peer in, her rather plain face appearing on his screen.

"The village chief sent me to do something. Holy Daughter, please wait a little longer, and I'll be back to accompany you. Oh, and please, whatever you do, don't wander off..."

Gu Mian certainly intended to wander off and execute some malicious plans.

He watched the person before him repeatedly swallow, like someone starved for three days staring at a large platter of glistening roast meat—its rich aroma filling the air, yet untouchable.

With that, she turned and left the dirt den, heading in the direction they had arrived from.

Gu Mian guessed she was going to the well to call people to help carry the 'roast meat'.

Perhaps because the characters controlled by all previous players had ended up as food in their stomachs, these people were exceptionally unwary of her.

Therefore, Gu Mian once more removed the loose chair leg and stashed it in his inventory, and also took the kerosene lamp, plunging the room into darkness.

Gu Mian continued deeper, towards the right fork he hadn't had time to explore yet.

It wasn't that Gu Mian particularly enjoyed exploring, but Xiao Niao had gone to call people to move the corpses, so not all of them would be there. If Gu Mian tried to run out the way he came, he would definitely be caught.

The left fork only led to the village chief's room, whereas the right fork could potentially lead to other exits.

Even if there were no other exits, there might be some 'vicious' tools.

As Gu Mian pondered, his character arrived before the right fork.

He immediately entered the right fork, 'tiptoeing' in his mind.

Gu Mian's 'tiptoeing' was purely psychological; in reality, the game didn't have a 'tiptoe' option. His game character was simply moving at a normal pace.

This tunnel was surprisingly long; midway, there wasn't even a sliver of light.

Gu Mian had no choice but to control his character to fumble forward. After advancing in the darkness for about three minutes, a small spot of light appeared in the center of the screen.

It seemed there was a source of light ahead.

Seeing this spot of light, Gu Mian continued to 'tiptoe' forward.

As Gu Mian advanced, the spot of light on the screen grew larger. When it covered roughly one-eighth of the screen's area, Gu Mian realized it was an opening ahead.

Beyond the opening seemed to be a large room piled high with something white.

It looked as if someone had lit a fire in the room; an orange glow flickered, dancing on the earthen walls and seeming to cast the shadow of a person.

Gu Mian continued to move slowly forward. When the bright opening was approximately four or five meters away, new text appeared at the bottom of his screen.

"THUMP. THUMP. THUMP."

...

The moment he saw this word, Gu Mian thought someone with a cane was approaching from behind him. But he quickly realized the frequency of this word's appearance matched the swaying of the human shadow in the room ahead.

"THUMP."

The shadow on the ground swayed slightly.

"THUMP."

The shadow's swaying became more frequent.

Although Gu Mian was an orphan from a young age, he had eaten dumplings before, back in the orphanage.

He remembered when the orphanage director minced dumpling fillings, it was with this kind of motion and rhythm... the sound also seemed quite similar.

"THUMP."

"THUMP."

"THUMP."

That strange and eerie mincing sound continued to appear as text at the bottom of the screen.

Gu Mian looked at the chair leg and the worn-out kerosene lamp in his character's inventory, then glanced at the chainsaw by his own feet. He calmed himself and decided to leave this place first.

After all, back then, when the director was mincing fillings, she was holding a large, sharp cleaver.

Thinking this, he began to 'quietly' retreat.

But as stated before, Gu Mian's 'quiet retreat' was only in his mind; he knew perfectly well that when his game character moved, it was still normal movement.

Sure enough, just as he took his second step backward, the mincing sound from below the screen abruptly stopped.

Along with it, the huge shadow projected onto the ground also froze.

If not for the firelight still flickering in the room, he would have truly thought the game had frozen.

Seeing the massive form on the ground suddenly stop swaying, Gu Mian cried out in his heart, 'I'm screwed!'

After that cry, he immediately turned and fled, simultaneously pulling the chair leg from his inventory.

As he ran, he didn't forget to switch his perspective to check the situation behind him. The moment he looked back, a terrifying man with a fleshy, fierce-looking face charged into his line of sight.

His curly hair, almost reaching his neck, was filthy and matted, with what looked like bits of flesh clinging to it. A battered grey hat, so greasy it almost shone, was perched on his head.

He wore an apron, stained almost completely red, the kind a butcher would wear. In his hand, he gripped a kitchen cleaver, black with filth and incredibly sharp.

He wore a pair of leather boots, their soles caked with some red, fat-like substance that squeaked as he ran.

Although now wasn't the time to be observing someone's attire, Gu Mian couldn't help but imagine the sound of those boots running on the dirt road.

In this game, Gu Mian was just a weak young woman.

He was quickly overtaken by the furiously charging butcher and tackled to the ground.

The butcher raised his cleaver and swung it down towards the screen.

Gu Mian still had the chair leg in his hand and instinctively used it to block the sharp cleaver.

Seeing his attack fail, the butcher gripped the cleaver with both hands and, using his entire body weight, pressed down hard.

The cleaver was indeed sharp. Pressed by the butcher, it bit into the chair leg Gu Mian held, nearly chopping it in two!

At that critical moment, Gu Mian suddenly reached out with his other hand, pulled the kerosene lamp from his inventory, and smashed it hard onto the butcher's head.

Of course, that did nothing!

The glass chimney of the kerosene lamp shattered like a beer bottle, sending shards tinkling to the ground, its broken surface jagged and uneven.

And right then, Gu Mian, gripping the remaining part of the shattered glass chimney, plunged it fiercely into the butcher's neck.

Chapter 416 Gugu's Dream_1

"Doesn't it seem a bit ignoble to stab the butcher in the neck in this escape game?"

"Am I the first player to kill the butcher...?"

Gu Mian was now controlling his character to stand up shakily. He figured he should hear the sound of his panting by now, but unfortunately, the game did not have sound effects.

The health bar in the top left corner had been scraped down a bit more by the butcher, leaving Gu Mian's health at less than half.

If someone were to attack him again, he might just Go to the West... No, he still had a save file.

After his character died, the game would automatically load the most recent save file, so he wasn't going to the West just yet.

As he stood, he looked down at the massive body on the ground. No, it wasn't a corpse yet, but it was close.

Flickering light from a hole in the distance illuminated the scene. The behemoth of a body twitched uncontrollably. His dirty hand, fingernails caked with grime, clutched the wound on his neck, his wide-open eyes reflecting the firelight from the hole. Shards from a broken kerosene lamp lay scattered around the butcher, stained with a considerable amount of blood.

His wide, angry eyes didn't last long before dimming. He became a true corpse, lying still on the ground.

Gu Mian quickly squatted down, attempting to find anything useful on the butcher's body.

Indeed, he pulled several useful items from the corpse.

A worn-out golden key. He had no idea what it opened.

An old lighter. This item, used to destroy save points, could truly be found everywhere.

And a palm-sized diary.

Gu Mian never knew anyone could have such terrible handwriting. Time was short. He quickly scanned the few written pages of the diary in his hand by the firelight from the distance, roughly filtering out two lines of useful content:

[Our food supplies are dwindling. We can only find grass roots to satisfy our hunger. Fortunately, four Holy Daughters arrived again today. I'm in charge this time. This is the 158th time.]

[When the Holy Daughters come, on their later visits each time, they always bring some new trinkets, and sometimes even food.]

This...

Gu Mian furrowed his brows.

The first passage indicated that at least 158 player-controlled characters had perished, and he himself was the 159th. However, he didn't quite understand the phrase "four Holy Daughters arrived again today."

As for the second passage...

What did "on their later visits each time" mean?

Gu Mian frowned and pondered for a moment. He felt the meaning of this sentence might be similar to "My mom comes to cover me with a blanket several times every night."

Did it mean the Holy Daughters would appear multiple times within a short period?

If he combined these two passages, did the diary mean that the Holy Daughters visited multiple times a day?

And they would also bring many novel trinkets...

At this thought, Gu Mian's frown deepened slightly, and he looked again at the butcher who had collapsed and wasn't getting up.

A faint light shone on the butcher's filthy apron, coating it with a radiance like holy light. Gu Mian's gaze shifted downwards, settling on the sharp cleaver the butcher had brandished.

It was indeed a cleaver. It was still stuck in the chair leg, with some uncleaned scraps of meat clinging to it, seemingly from the same source as whatever was matted in his disheveled hair.

He reached out and picked up the black cleaver from the ground. The cleaver was indeed incredibly sharp; just a slight movement made it reflect a bone-chilling glint. He held the cleaver in one hand, thought for a moment while standing there, then put the chair leg that had been struck by a blade and the shattered kerosene lamp back into his inventory.

They might come in handy sometime.

After taking everything he could, Gu Mian rotated his character's view and looked towards the cave entrance on the other side, from which the glow of a fire emanated.

Now he finally understood why flickering firelight was coming from the cave entrance ahead. There was probably a stove inside, likely with a strong fire burning beneath it. There might be a large pot or a

steamer on top, and perhaps an aroma would be wafting out from it. Gu Mian didn't have time to imagine how captivating that aroma might be.

He immediately maneuvered his character towards the cave entrance.

The time in the top right corner read 9:15. Gu Mian reached the cave entrance in less than a minute, and by then, he could also see the scene beyond the entrance clearly.

Against the left wall, there was indeed a stove set up. On it was a very worn-looking cutting board, on which some minced meat was piled. A blazing fire burned under the stove, and a large pot, already blackened by smoke, was set upon it. It seemed to be boiling something inside, emitting clouds of steam. A lid made of pieced-together wooden planks covered the pot, now thoroughly soaked by the steam.

The orange glow from the fire filled the entire cave. Gu Mian shifted his gaze towards the edge of the wall directly facing him. He finally saw clearly what those white, glistening things were—they were white bones. Piled-up white bones, densely packed, as if there were no gaps between them at all. From a distance, it looked like a vast expanse of white.

And in the corner beside these bones, some clothes were piled up. Gu Mian maneuvered his character towards the corner and looked down. They were all identical white, bloodstained clothes, too numerous to count.

It seemed these were the "players" they had previously consumed. Gu Mian did not want to become one of them, and various ideas were constantly forming in his mind.

And just then, he noticed some things of other colors seemed to be mixed in among these clothes.

Gu Mian zoomed in his view to look carefully.

The first thing that caught his eye was a mirror mixed in with these tattered clothes.

A small, palm-sized round mirror, it shone in the light of the fire, though its surface was already covered with a layer of dust. Gu Mian tried to maneuver his character to pick up the mirror, and unexpectedly, he actually managed to pick it up.

However, immediately after, a panel appeared on the screen.

[Queen's Little Magic Mirror]

[Description: "Magic mirror, magic mirror, who in this world is the person I most want to see?"]

[Function: Recite the spell to the magic mirror to view the situation of a random player in the instance. Can only be used once a day, for two minutes each time.]

A special item?

He hadn't expected to find special items even in this video game. But even if he found them, he couldn't take them out, right?

As Gu Mian thought this, he turned his gaze back to the pile of clothes.

It seemed there was still something underneath.

He frowned and fumbled around for a while, and indeed, he found quite a few more things.

There was a distorted humanoid figurine, a wallet whose buttons could never be fastened, a card with a drawing of a man seated on a stone chair...

There were many, many more, all searched out from under these messy clothes.

It was worth noting that they were all special items!

Having suddenly obtained so many special items, Gu Mian felt no excitement. On the contrary, as he looked at the several rows of special items in his inventory, a tremendous sense of uncanniness rose in his heart.

These things... they seem like items left behind by players who previously entered this instance.

But players sitting in front of computers controlling their characters could absolutely not drop special items into the game.

The only people who could leave special items here were players who originally existed within the computer game... only those in the save points.

It's just that the people in the save points couldn't move easily. Judging from the diary, these special items were clearly brought by the previous "Holy Daughters." But how could the "Holy Daughters" have the special items of the players in the save points?

Countless strange conjectures churned in Gu Mian's mind, finally coalescing into the two sentences recorded in the diary.

[Fortunately, four Holy Daughters arrived again today.]

[When the Holy Daughters come, on their later visits each time, they always bring some new trinkets.]

As he silently recited these two sentences over and over, Gu Mian finally narrowed his eyes.

I understand now!

As he thought, he shifted his gaze to the already very low health bar in the top-left corner. When the health bar reached zero, it meant death.

After a "Holy Daughter" dies, she will immediately load the most recent save and revive at the save point.

But I'm afraid she revives *inside* the save point.

And judging from the special items before him... as long as she revives in the save point, she will immediately kill the player in that save point!

As long as the character he controls dies once, someone will truly die!

Chapter 417 Exile World_1

Being able to save the game only fifteen times already made it extremely difficult. But now Gu Mian faced an even more significant predicament in this challenging game...

He halted his actions, staring at the health bar in the upper left corner—now less than half full. I can't die... I can't die, he muttered to himself.

If the character died even once, a player at a save point would inevitably die. This meant the three save points would become completely useless, and he would have to complete the game in one life.

The raging furnace fire behind him cast the silhouette of the Holy Daughter on the cracked, ancient walls. The dark shadow swayed with the flickering firelight, resembling a demon rising from hell.

Worse still, the demon Gu Mian controlled couldn't use these special items.

[Doctrine Goddess Information (Incomplete Version)]

[The goddess never truly perishes;

New souls will emerge from the burning black books;

The flesh and blood of the living will provide the goddess a new body.

(Note: Some say the means by which the goddess rejuvenates is demonic, but angels and demons are often just a thought apart.)]

Chu Changge's fingers traced these lines, then with a SNAP, he shut the book he was holding. Embossed on the brown hardcover in gold were the words— "Exile World Character Anthology."

He glanced up at the pendulum clock opposite him. It was nine twenty-five, and Gu Mian still hadn't appeared.

A strange-sounding wind scraped past the doorframe, making a whistling sound. Collapsed buildings were piled up in the dark night, and the roadside weeds were flattened by the wind. It was an incredibly strange scene: in the bizarre, grotesque, abandoned village surrounded by mountains, three intact buildings still stood, as if waiting for something, anticipating something.

The haggard, emaciated woman Chu Changge was waiting for didn't arrive. Instead, the ringing of a telephone interrupted his wait.

"Hello, Brother Chu?" Fatty's anxious voice came over the handset. "It's been an hour, and I still haven't seen the Doctor. And 007 hasn't seen anything either... Where do you think the Doctor could be now?"

Chu Changge was silent for a moment after hearing his voice, then finally spoke, "When was the last time you saw him?"

"It was when I called you before to say the Doctor discovered..."

"The last time," Chu Changge cut him off before he could finish.

Then, there was silence on the other end of the phone.

For a time, only the whistling wind could be heard from outside and through the handset. After a while, Fatty finally spoke, his voice somewhat sheepish, "You knew?"

"Gu Mian hasn't appeared since he saw 007 and then you. He didn't come to my location afterward. Perhaps he turned back. If Gu Mian mysteriously disappeared at one location, you'd have the highest probability of witnessing it. Your tone just now gave you away."

Fatty on the other end of the line fell silent for a few seconds. "That's right, I did see the Doctor again later. He left with a woman, a woman with hair like a bird's nest... I saw that woman pass by with a few men earlier, so I wanted to tell you about this."

Chu Changge spoke in a solemn tone, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Brother Chu, I've noticed... are you planning to do something to 007?"

"Before I saw the Doctor for the last time, you said you hadn't found any clues on your end. After I saw him for the last time, you called to ask when the Doctor last saved at my place. Later, I learned that you also asked 007 when Gu Mian last saved at her place."

"Perhaps the more clues you know, the sooner death will come. And I think the Doctor is currently working hard to keep all of us alive."

Chu Changge didn't speak, listening as Fatty continued through the handset.

"I still don't understand how we're supposed to escape this instance, but Brother Chu, I have a strong feeling you're planning to set her up. Besides, setting her up won't help with this instance at all. This is an instance where you can actually die. I wouldn't say anything if this were some other instance, but this one specifically... My father once told me that everyone has the right to live."

Having said this, Fatty fell silent. No more sound came from him over the handset.

The silence lasted for a long time before Fatty's voice finally came through again, "Could I perhaps ask your reason for doing this?"

"Your father probably also told you that the more you know, the faster you die."

Fatty on the other end choked for a moment, then finally managed to speak, "We, as save points, can't contact the Doctor. I know that even telling you the Doctor left with that woman wouldn't help, but the instance surely wouldn't put all the agency in the Doctor's hands alone.

"The three of us definitely have some power... Perhaps it's to escape this instance by killing the Doctor before he destroys us. To save ourselves, we must first kill the person who might kill us. This is a contest between two sides. There have been instances of this type before."

Chu Changge fell silent.

After a good while, he finally spoke, "We all know that when playing a game, if a character dies, you can load a save. But what if a player controls a character into the mid-to-late game, and upon dying, finds that all their saves have suddenly disappeared?"

Fatty hesitated before speaking, "Then it's game over, and you have to start from the beginning... But can this game really be started over? And how could the saves just suddenly disappear?"

Fatty looked at the three black-covered books stacked on his desk—those were Gu Mian's three saves. "Actually, I've also thought about this possibility," he said. "But there's nothing in the room that can destroy the saves. If it's just brute force..."

Fatty had once tried to forcibly open the hard-covered, black book, but he couldn't even leave a mark on it.

Just then, Chu Changge's voice came from the phone on the floor beside him, "Stand on the table and look straight ahead, in the direction of the pendulum clock."

Fatty frowned.

He glanced at the table beside him, then at the pendulum clock directly opposite it.

Without hesitation, he immediately climbed onto the table.

Fatty wasn't short to begin with, and now standing on the table, he was even closer to the ceiling. As he straightened up, breathing the higher air and looking towards the pendulum clock, he was shocked to find that the chandelier hanging from the ceiling was almost level with his head. And on that chandelier, which was often swayed by the wind, sat a metal-cased lighter, placed perfectly upright.

Fatty's mouth fell open in astonishment.

He heard Chu Changge's voice slowly emerge from the phone at his feet once more, "And the danger we face probably isn't just limited to being destroyed."

How could one clear the game without dying even once?

It was almost impossible.

By this time, Gu Mian had already left the cave illuminated by the furnace fire, carrying several unusable special items.

He wasted no time, immediately turning left at the fork in the road.

That way was the village chief's room. Since everyone's room was just covered by a tattered curtain, the key found on the butcher wasn't for opening room doors. This key should be useful for other locks. Xiao Niao doesn't seem to be back yet. And the village chief's room is far from the people at the well; it should only have a few people, or perhaps just one, inside.

The Holy Daughter, carrying a blood-stained cleaver, had already arrived at the village chief's doorway. No one would have imagined the frail Holy Daughter acting in such a manner.

This, of course, startled the person who suddenly lifted the curtain and stepped out.

And the person who suddenly lifted the curtain also startled Gu Mian, who was in the middle of steeling his nerves.

Chapter 418 Rookie Novice Gu Bong Bong_1

This was a young man.

After the initial shock, he finally directed his gaze towards her. The Adam's apple in his emaciated neck bobbed incessantly, as if he had laid eyes on delectable food. In the dim hole, only his slightly protruding eyes reflected light—a light that had burst forth only after seeing the 'Holy Daughter'.

Gu Mian watched the man roll his protruding Adam's apple a few more times before he finally opened his mouth to ask a question. A line of text appeared at the bottom of the screen.

"Holy Daughter... how did you end up here?"

He hadn't noticed the dark kitchen knife in the Holy Daughter's hand, a knife originally intended for preparing the next day's breakfast.

Gu Mian stared at the screen. Dialogue options would undoubtedly appear in the next second, but he had no intention of glossing this over. His strategy was to eliminate them one by one, dealing first with anyone who was isolated. Coincidentally, there was such a person right in front of him.

So, the instant the line of text appeared at the bottom of the screen, Gu Mian began to furiously click the attack button in the bottom-right corner.

Splattered blood stained the gray dirt walls beside them. The incessantly bobbing Adam's apple was instantly covered in fresh blood. The greedy glint in the eyes fixed on his 'delicacy' dimmed. The man clutched his throat and collapsed, gasping. He failed to make a sound, convulsing on the ground, his eyes wide open in death.

Perhaps he couldn't believe that the 'food', which should have quietly accepted its fate, had actually wielded a kitchen knife and become a butcher.

At this moment, Gu Mian, knife in hand, looked towards the cloth curtain covering the cave entrance. It didn't completely block the light. An orange glow seeped from behind it, suggesting more people were inside.

This man is too young to be the village chief. So, is the village chief still inside? Did the noise I just made alert the people inside?

Gu Mian couldn't hear the game's audio, so he couldn't judge how loud the commotion had been.

Peering through the curtain, Gu Mian couldn't discern the movements of anyone behind it. Perhaps, alerted by the noise, people were already lurking on either side of the entrance, ready to ambush and kill him the moment he pulled the curtain aside.

But he couldn't die, not even once.

A heavy atmosphere instantly filled the quiet cave. Anxiety and restlessness hung in the air, creating an incredibly oppressive feeling.

Xiao Niao, who had gone out, could return at any moment. If she discovered the Holy Daughter was missing from the room, she would immediately become suspicious. The worst-case scenario was that she would notify everyone to gather and rush here to capture the Holy Daughter.

And behind the curtain before him, an unknown number of famished men lurked, hiding near the entrance and waiting for a chance to strike.

Suddenly, Gu Mian felt as if he were back on that traumatic afternoon, on a wide overpass amidst the deafening roar of a twenty-eight-car pile-up. He had been caught in the middle, with death threatening from both front and rear.

The current situation felt quite similar.

But Gu Mian knew he couldn't hesitate any longer. He took a step forward into the tense air and retrieved a lighter from his inventory.

He now had two lighters, one of which he held in his hand.

This was an underground location. The earthen room would be difficult to set ablaze. Although sweet potatoes were typically baked buried in the earth, Gu Mian didn't intend to do anything to this earthen dugout. With a CLICK, he flicked the lighter open and quickly extended his arm. The fingertip-sized flame neared the tattered cloth curtain, and Gu Mian saw a choice appear on the screen.

[Do you want to use one lighter to ignite the 'tattered cloth curtain'?]

He had seen this type of option once before, when he burned down the house. Naturally, he selected the same choice as then.

"Yes."

The thumb-sized flame immediately began to consume it, burning a round hole through the center of the tattered cloth curtain. The ring of fire rapidly expanded outward until the entire curtain was reduced to a large, shriveled pile of ash.

Light poured out from the now unobstructed entrance. Gu Mian, who had already withdrawn his hand, could also see the scene inside.

Two crude, brass-colored candlesticks were nailed to the wall, holding two candles of different colors. The floor was covered with a spread apparently sewn from rags, resembling a quilt; even though similar colors had been chosen, the visual effect was still unappealing. A rather expensive-looking desk stood to the left of the entrance. Farther back was an old, brownish wardrobe, taller than a person. Beside it was a bed made of sponge mats. A small section of the carpet beside the bed bulged, as if something was hidden underneath.

This room was arranged with considerable care—if not for the corners of two dirty old garments poking out from behind the entrance.

Someone was hiding behind each side of the entrance.

Apparently realizing the curtain that concealed them had been burned away, the two individuals behind the entrance kept trying to shrink back. Unfortunately, due to the cave's layout, there wasn't much space to hide behind the entrance.

Those two were probably planning to ambush me the moment I neared the entrance. They didn't expect me to burn the curtain with a lighter. With no time to hide elsewhere, they could only desperately shrink back and pray I hadn't discovered their ploy.

Gu Mian had, of course, seen them. Yet, he feigned ignorance and took another step forward, slowly approaching the entrance.

Just then, a shovel suddenly appeared on the screen. This was the fatal blow, launched by one of the men behind the entrance after long preparation.

Gu Mian, long prepared, swiftly retreated, easily dodging the shovel aimed at his forehead. The man who had swung the shovel came into Gu Mian's view due to the exaggerated motion. Seizing the opportunity, Gu Mian immediately charged forward with the kitchen knife, controlling his character to slash fiercely at the man.

Chapter 419 Rookie Novice Gu Bong Bong_2

The result was as he had anticipated.

A third body had appeared in this dim underground; it seemed to belong to someone quite young.

Just then, Gu Mian saw another person, who had been hiding behind the entrance, suddenly rush out. Just as he prepared to confront the rushing figure, he saw the person slide past him, sticking close to the wall, like a rat frantically scurrying along the wall in the darkness.

The short young man was dashing towards the wellhead at great speed along the wall, his mouth agape to an exaggerated degree. Even though Gu Mian couldn't hear him, he knew how loud the man's voice must be—

"Murder! Help me!"

With a voice that loud in an underground tunnel, the group at the wellhead would have certainly heard.

Gu Mian took two steps forward, wanting to give chase. However, the frantically fleeing man had a head start and was using all his strength. If Gu Mian pursued, he would likely be caught by the people approaching from the other direction before he could even catch up. Chasing the man would undoubtedly lead to his capture, but not chasing him and waiting here would also result in being caught. So, what exactly should I do?

Gu Mian frowned, standing in place and thinking for half a second before turning to look into the room, now unobscured by a curtain.

He quickly walked in and lifted the carpet beside the bed, which seemed to be hiding something.

A trapdoor, installed flush with the floor, appeared before him. An old, brass-colored padlock was fastened to its side.

Seeing this lock, Gu Mian immediately took out the Key he had found on the butcher's body.

"CLICK."

Fatty took out the metal-cased lighter in his hand.

The faint flame flickered in the night wind, seeming as if it would be extinguished at any moment.

"If we all destroy the save points left by the Doctor, then the character controlled by the Doctor will have to start over after they die."

Fatty understood the significance of "starting over" very well.

"This means the Doctor will have to restart the game... Brother Chu, what you mentioned about that Exile World..."

"Exile World Character Excerpt," Chu Changge's calm voice came from the receiver.

"Right, that's the one," Fatty nodded repeatedly at the receiver. "Can you repeat the characteristics of that goddess?"

Without pause, Chu Changge's voice came from the receiver, as if he had memorized the text:

"The goddess never truly perished;

New souls will be born from the burning black books;

The flesh and blood of the living will grant the goddess a new body..."

As Fatty listened, he glanced at the three books stacked on the table. "The black books are the save files the Doctor gave us. So, the save files are a scam. If the Doctor's controlled character revives through a save point, the person at that save point will definitely be devoured. The Doctor saved his game at my location three times. His character always revives from the latest save after death. So, what if the Doctor's last two saves were here, and his controlled character unfortunately died? The goddess would resurrect here and eat me. Then, there would be no one left alive at my save point. If the Doctor died a second time and revived here again, what would the goddess eat then?"

"Two possibilities," Chu Changge's voice came from the receiver. "First, she might devour you in parts. But that's unlikely, as it's hard to guarantee you'd stay alive after she eats a third of you."

"Second, she devours you completely in one go. After resurrecting at your location the second time, she would exist as a spirit, only regaining a body when she resurrects at another save point."

Fatty was puzzled. "Can a spirit die?"

"You should have seen Gu Mian kill a ghost."

"...Well, if that's the case," Fatty hesitated before speaking, "did the Doctor's controlled character have a body as soon as he entered this game because it devoured a living person too?"

Could it have devoured a player from the previous time this instance was run?

Chu Changge also fell silent.

Just then, Fatty suddenly spoke. "By the way, you know the Doctor can't hear our voices, right?"

"Mm."

"Didn't I tell you before? The Doctor disappeared only after he left with a woman. When the Doctor and that woman passed by my place, I shouted at him, but he still couldn't hear me... But the woman seemed to."

Chu Changge's voice, with a slight inflection, sounded out, "Are you sure she could hear?"

"Mm. After taking the Doctor away, the woman brought a group of people past my place again. Just when I jumped down from the table, they passed by me carrying several bodies. I saw that they all seemed to hear the sound of me jumping off the table."

"Theoretically," Chu Changge began, "if other NPCs can hear our voices, Gu Mian should be able to hear them too."

However, various signs indicated that Gu Mian indeed couldn't hear their voices.

At this moment, Chu Changge's steady voice came from the receiver again. "If what you're saying is true, then the problem lies with Gu Mian. He might be unable to hear sounds because if any sound were to reach him—a secret would be revealed."

What kind of secret could it be? Fatty was completely baffled.

"In any case..." Chu Changge furrowed his brows slightly, looking towards the pitch-black doorway, "do not destroy the save files."

The three black books on the table were neatly stacked together.

007 was leaning against the table. The chandelier on the ceiling was always swaying; it was the first thing she noticed when she woke up. The swaying chandelier seemed to whisper, "I have a secret."

Just then, 007 finally retrieved the chandelier's secret: a lighter.

"CLICK."

This poor lighter – its flame was only the size of a bean.

"What happened?" a gaunt, curly-haired man at the front asked as he walked. Beside him was the short man who had scurried away from Gu Mian like a rat.

Behind the two of them followed nearly twenty emaciated individuals, mostly young or middle-aged men.

"The Holy Daughter killed someone! The village chief went out through the secret passage and told us to watch the door. Then, we heard the Holy Daughter coming," the short man gestured wildly. "She... she was holding a knife and killed two people!"

The curly-haired man twisted his neck. "That's impossible. The Holy Daughter has 'awakened' a few times before, but she only ever flailed around with a wooden stick or an oil lamp. She never managed to kill anyone. The most harm she ever did was break someone's skin. Where would she get a knife?"

However, when they had passed the Holy Daughter's room earlier, they had glanced inside; the dark room was indeed empty.

"You'll believe me if you come and see!" The short, thin man was extremely anxious, hiding fearfully within the crowd. "Quick, capture her!"

When they arrived, they only saw two corpses sprawled across the doorway.

A strange atmosphere suddenly filled the air; everyone exchanged uneasy glances.

The curly-haired man leading them widened his eyes. He quickly stepped over the bodies on the ground and looked into the now unobstructed room.

A large section of the carpet in the room had been pulled back, and a trapdoor stood wide open, revealing a pitch-black passage below.

That was the tunnel leading outside.

The short, thin man squeezed out from the crowd. "Look, she ran away!"

The curly-haired man stared at the open trapdoor in disbelief. After several seconds, he seemed to come to his senses and said to a woman beside him, "Go call Man. Tell him the person escaped and to come capture her."

"Okay, okay." The woman hurried out the door.

At this time, whispers began to ripple through the crowd.

"Was it really the Holy Daughter who did it? She wasn't this formidable before..."

"The Holy Daughter couldn't have killed two people at once; she doesn't have that kind of ability."

"With the way she is, she probably couldn't even kill one person, right?"

"..."

Just as everyone was whispering, the woman returned.

With a terrified expression, she collapsed to the ground, then raised her head to look at the others, her face a mask of panic and dismay. "He's dead! He's dead!"

The buzzing whispers instantly escalated into cries of incredulous disbelief.

"What?" "What did you say!" "Who's dead?"

Everyone turned to face the woman on the ground. Their eyes, wide with shock, reflected an eerie light.

"Man... Man is dead! His knife..." As she spoke, the woman's voice grew fainter with fear. "...his knife has also been taken."

"Yes, the Holy Daughter took it!" the short, thin man almost leaped up. "I saw her kill those people with a knife!"

An almost explosive sense of dread surged through everyone. They turned their heads to look at each other, and indeed, they saw the same fear and shock in each other's eyes.

The Holy Daughter killed Man?

So a woman so weak she couldn't even tie up a chicken... killed the butcher?

Chapter 420: I am Really the Great Devil King_1

It was as unbelievable as a cooked duck suddenly flying away... No, it was like the cooked duck leaping up and devouring the chef.

The curly-haired man didn't seem to believe it. He immediately stepped towards the door, apparently wanting to see the murdered butcher for himself. The people behind him made way and then followed. Only three or four people remained to guard the dark underground passage.

The facts, of course, wouldn't change just by taking a few more looks. The curly-haired man quickly returned, his face twisted with rage, and the group behind him also showed horrified expressions:

"Man is indeed dead."

"Was he really killed by the Holy Daughter? This has never happened before."

"What should we do next...?"

The leader immediately issued orders. He pointed to a few stronger-looking men: "The seven of you, come down with me and give chase..."

Then he pointed to the few women present: "You few, go out and bring the village chief back. Also, call back the three who went out to carry Bai Sha's body."

Finally, the curly-haired man turned his attention to the last four who hadn't been assigned a task: "The rest of you, guard the well entrance and this place. Damn, what a day..."

After quickly making arrangements, he strode towards the trapdoor.

A cold wind blew in from the dark opening. The curly-haired man squatted and jumped in. The seven men following him also surged into the dark opening one after another. The three women turned and jogged out of the room, rushing towards the well, desperate to bring back reinforcements quickly.

The last four men left in the room looked at each other apprehensively for a moment before speaking.

"We'll guard the door... We just need to guard this place and the well entrance. Should we lock this trapdoor again? What if that thing comes in from outside? The village chief always makes us lock it when he leaves this way."

"No need to lock it this time, right? We don't have a key. What if they come back and we can't open the door? Man had one, but that woman took his key."

"Alright, then two of us will go guard the well entrance, and you two stay here. I hope nothing like this happens again. Who knows if they can still catch her after all this time."

Gu Mian, through a crack, saw two men leave the room.

He was in the closet.

He hadn't left the room at all. He had merely lifted the carpet and unlocked the trapdoor, creating the illusion that he'd already left.

After all, Gu Mian was new to this place and didn't know where the dark opening led. What if it was just a storeroom below? Wouldn't those chasing him then be able to trap him like a turtle in a jar?

Though Gu Mian would never admit any connection between himself and "turtles."

The candlelight filtered into the closet through the crack, illuminating a small patch of darkness. Gu Mian tightly gripped a one-and-a-half-meter-long spade—a tool he had confiscated from an enemy. Additionally, in the closet, he found the village chief's logbook, similar to a class journal kept by a class monitor back in school.

But this was no place to read a logbook. The men who had left could return at any moment, and he had to find a chance to escape this godforsaken place. Gu Mian glanced outside again. The other two men had been gone for nearly two minutes. It was about time.

I can't beat four of them, but surely I can handle two, right? Gu Mian thought, preparing to control his character to jump out of the closet.

He wanted to give a surprise to the two outside who were discussing 'what to eat tomorrow'.

But just then, the screen flickered and went black for an instant. Gu Mian stared intently at the screen. He realized that in that brief moment, the scene visible through the crack in the closet had changed slightly. The room's layout had transformed into that of a normal house.

Outside, firelight still flickered, but it was no longer candlelight. Countless torches had somehow flooded into the room. Gu Mian saw a crowd of people dressed in black, holding torches. They all bore the same strange symbol tattooed on them, and their mouths opened and closed as if chanting something in unison. Unfortunately, the subtitle team suddenly went on strike, so Gu Mian couldn't know why they were so excited.

He saw a woman impaled on the wall. A meat hook, the kind used for hanging pork, pierced her ribs, suspending her there. Fresh blood trickled down the white wall, forming a small, scarlet pool on the coarse wooden floor. Dismembered body parts were being distributed by the black-clad men. Gu Mian saw a man's head passed from one hand to another, finally impaled on a thick, sharpened stick and hoisted high like a victorious banner.

Everyone began to laugh.

Inexplicably, Gu Mian felt he understood what one of them was saying—

"We killed the Holy Daughter's parents."

The gory vision flashed by. A few seconds later, Gu Mian saw the view through the crack return to normal: the same crude earthen hut, the same two men guarding it.

The two of them were still talking. The subtitles started working again, and Gu Mian saw them appear at the bottom of the screen.

"The Holy Daughter escaped. So, what do we eat tomorrow? Start with Man?"

"We should be able to recapture her..."

Although I have no idea what that vision was about... Gu Mian muttered to himself while controlling his character. Then, he burst out of the closet dramatically. "But a surprise is still in order."