

Collapse 421

Chapter 421 I am Really the Great Devil King_2

This grandeur, however, was something only Gu Mian himself felt, along with a certain unexpected delight, of course.

Judging from the wide-open eyes of the two men in front of him, Gu Mian's surprise hadn't been very successful.

Just moments ago, they had been eagerly awaiting the Holy Daughter's capture. But when she appeared before them, they reacted with terror, leaving Gu Mian puzzled.

Gu Mian maneuvered his character swiftly forward, then raised the shovel in his hand. Success or no success, I don't care anymore. Let's just get away for now.

Cries for help arose from the men on the screen:

"Help!"

"She's still here!"

They no longer had the luxury of discussing what they might eat tomorrow, nor would they get the opportunity.

Clearly, these two gaunt men were no match for the spirited Gu Mian and his shovel. After a few strikes, their heads began to deform. They lay on the ground motionless, while Gu Mian, unsatisfied, gave them a few more whacks with his shovel.

Does hitting people feel easier this time than before? Gu Mian paused for a moment, then controlled his character to approach the swing door and firmly clicked the rusty lock shut.

If those people who had just entered were to suddenly return, he wouldn't be able to beat them. So, it's better to lock this door first.

Gu Mian had already decided to eliminate these two, followed by the two others at the well. Then, he would escape directly by climbing up from the well. This way, he could avoid encountering Curly Hair's squad as much as possible.

However, the screams of the two men in the room should have alerted the people at the well. They might be heading this way or fleeing to get reinforcements.

In either case... escape is essential.

Gu Mian looked into the dark passage and quickly walked out.

"Did you hear that noise just now?" In the darkness, two men were running one after the other toward the village chief's house.

"No. We just reached the well when you claimed you heard something, insisting we come back to check. But I didn't hear a thing, and I haven't even had a chance to rest tonight. I was quite pleased when I saw the Holy Daughter arrive, but then this unlucky business happened. Next time we catch her, we need to bind her securely and kill her immediately," the man in the back said, spitting in disgust.

The fork in the path was now in sight.

To the right was the Holy Daughter's morgue, with the butcher's body lying across the passage. To the left was the village chief's room.

The two of them veered slightly and headed down the left path.

"I wonder if they can catch her. Never mind, even if we can't catch her immediately, there's other food. We've gotten a lot more to eat directly this time."

"But it's still the Holy Daughter who's a continuous source..."

The voice behind him was suddenly cut off. At the same time, the man in front heard an indescribable sound from behind him—like a sharp blade cutting into flesh, like the cracking of a skull, or like a ghost slowly approaching.

He abruptly halted, twisting his somewhat stiff neck to look back.

But before his head could even turn halfway, it stopped forever.

A sixth body had now appeared underground.

Gu Mian emerged from the darkness. He had hidden in the right fork of the path earlier, intending to ambush these two men from behind. Fortunately, his wait had paid off.

Now I can finally escape with peace of mind, Gu Mian said, raising the bloody weapon in his hand and looking at the corpses on the ground. This time also seemed to go exceptionally smoothly.

Without wasting time, after dealing with these two, Gu Mian immediately ran towards the well.

While fleeing, he managed to take out the Village Chief's Journal from his inventory and flip through it. The entries were written in inks of varying shades, suggesting they were recorded at different times.

[The Crusaders killed the Holy Daughter's parents. The Holy Daughter was hiding in the closet and witnessed everything. Oh, what a poor girl. Did they act so crazily because she is the reincarnation of the goddess?

A lesson from the past: the Holy Daughter must not harbor hatred. We can only advise her to let go of her sorrow.]

The ink on the next paragraph was darker. Gu Mian advanced while reading downwards.

[Today, the brother who had accompanied the Holy Daughter for many years was found in the well. When we found him, he was already emitting a foul stench. A large stone, pushed by who-knows-whom,

was blocking the well entrance. Although the Holy Daughter's expression was very calm, I know that stone had nothing to do with her; she doesn't possess such strength.

The bottom of the well also bore the mark of the Crusaders. It seems they still haven't stopped their retaliation against the goddess.

But the Holy Daughter must not harbor hatred. We can only advise her to let go of her sorrow.]

The next passage was written in a slightly different shade of ink.

[The wicked ones finally met their retribution. Most of them perished in a baffling fire, and the remaining few who fled here were captured by us. They prostrated themselves before us, begging for mercy.

The kind villagers forgave their evil deeds towards others, and naturally, the Holy Daughter did not pursue the matter. She magnanimously forgave these errant children.

They were settled in the easternmost area, near the cliff, and made their homes there.]

[Today, someone actually tried to take the Holy Daughter away from here! It was the orphan living next door to the Holy Daughter. This land, so bountiful due to the Holy Daughter's protection, would be ruined. Of course, we captured them and brought them back.

The Holy Daughter was merely led astray; that's why she tried to leave. We burned the orphan girl who misguided the Holy Daughter on the gallows in the east, hoping it would serve as a warning to others.

But something about the Holy Daughter seemed... different.]

A large blank space followed this.

Just as Gu Mian thought this record would end there, the last line appeared before his eyes.

It was a line of hasty scrawl, as if the ink had been about to run out—

[The legend is true: those who harbor hatred will eventually become demons.]

At this point, the exit was in sight.

Gu Mian stared at the final line in the Village Chief's Journal and muttered, This can't be called harboring hatred, can it? This is a blood feud!

If my parents were killed in front of me... Gu Mian mused for a moment before suddenly remembering, Wait, I don't have parents.

Putting aside the question of where his parents had gone, Gu Mian seriously contemplated the Village Chief's Journal.

The last line, "those who harbor hatred will eventually become demons," likely meant that the Holy Daughter started acting abnormally after experiencing the three aforementioned events, doing things only a demon would do.

Perhaps that was why this village became deserted, and its people were forced to live underground.

Thinking about this, Gu Mian recalled the scene he had witnessed in the closet earlier. That was probably a memory fragment of the Holy Daughter. Because his character was the Holy Daughter, he saw those past images when hiding in the closet.

Speaking of which... Gu Mian had reached the well's edge by now. He had even clicked the 'climb up' button, and his character's hands were already on the ladder fixed to the well wall.

The Village Chief's Journal says the Holy Daughter became a demon, so why am I still the Holy Daughter now? Compared to being a vulnerable girl, Gu Mian preferred being a demon.

And after seeing the memory fragment of my parents' death, my fighting seemed to get a lot smoother. Did that have something to do with what I saw in the closet? According to the Village Chief's Journal, the Holy Daughter's hatred erupted after the deaths of her parents, brother, and friend, turning her into a demon. Does this mean that every time I see a memory fragment, my hatred value will increase, and I'll become somewhat stronger?

Once I'm stronger, I won't have to fear a direct encounter with Curly Hair's group.

He had already seen the death of his parents in the closet.

And his brother's death... that happened in the well.

Gu Mian was standing in the well, but he hadn't triggered any memory fragments.

He looked down and saw reddish-brown scratch marks at the bottom of the well wall. Only half of these marks were visible; the rest were buried under the earth.

Gu Mian maneuvered his character down from the ladder and then took out the long shovel from his inventory.

After taking out the shovel, he was pleasantly surprised to see a 'Dig' option appear on the ground beneath his feet.

Without wasting time, Gu Mian immediately brandished the shovel and began his diligent labor.

The brother wasn't buried very deep. After digging for only a short while, Gu Mian pried up something white and gleaming. It had five holes. A closer look revealed it was a skull.

Although it's unclear why his brother's body is still here, now isn't the time to investigate that.

Gu Mian quickly resumed digging downwards, and soon, the entire skeleton appeared on the screen.

Chapter 422 Gugu's Trick_1

"My brother's skull is quite round, smooth, and rather nice to look at," Gu Mian examined the beautiful skull that had been dislodged from the ground. "He must have been good-looking when he was alive. It's a pity he ended up as bones."

He then noticed that the character on the screen began to move on its own.

The screen kept zooming in on the skull. The beautiful skull continued to magnify until it filled his entire field of vision.

Next, Gu Mian saw a pair of emaciated hands appear on the screen. The character extended her hands and carefully cradled the somewhat dirty skull, gently holding it close.

The screen shifted, the view changing directly from the bottom of the well to a room—the same room Gu Mian had seen from inside the closet. The floor had been replaced with a new one. There were traces of repainting on the wall where the woman had been hung, but the mark of the hook nailed to the wall could not be completely erased; it had merely been sloppily painted over with a layer of white paint.

The skull that had previously occupied almost the entire screen had turned into a real head.

It was a young man with gray hair and brown eyes, slightly thin. He wore a ragged coat, bent over, and offered a gentle smile towards the screen, likely even patting the character's head.

Gu Mian gazed at the face that occupied half of the screen. "That must be her brother," he muttered.

The brother's mouth moved, his voice presumably quite gentle. "Stay at home obediently. I'm going out to work and will be back before nightfall."

Then he straightened up, and his tall figure walked out and closed the door, leaving his younger sister alone in this room, thick with an undercurrent of horror.

The camera angle shifted again; sure enough, the sister, unwilling to be left alone, followed him.

As the scenes unfolded, it became clear that the group's terror attacks on the Holy Daughter were far from over. In just a few frames, Gu Mian saw various forms of attempted assassinations, such as an 'oil fire attack,' a 'homemade bomb attack,' and a 'wolf-feigning-sleep-to-lure-enemy' style attack, which left Gu Mian utterly astounded.

Despite having been targeted by assassination attempts since childhood, Gu Mian was still dazzled by the sheer variety and ingenuity of these methods.

But compared to Gu Mian, the Holy Daughter was fortunate, for she had a perfect brother.

He saw the terrifying flames ultimately engulf the would-be arsonist. The brother, having removed his coat, watched silently from the side until the person before him turned to charcoal.

A deafening explosion resounded in the abandoned house. By the time others arrived, all they saw were human remains blown to pieces.

He could even win a fight against two opponents, though the process was brutal, leaving him with several bleeding wounds.

The sun was setting, and evening was approaching. The perspective followed the brother to a riverside. She watched as her brother cleaned his bleeding wounds and roughly bandaged them with a few strips of cloth. Finally, he put on his ragged coat to hide his injuries.

"I'm back." When the brother's figure reappeared at the door, the last ray of sunlight had completely disappeared below the horizon. Looking out the door from the game's perspective, Gu Mian saw only endless darkness.

Then the screen showed the brother's pale face. This was a memory from the bottom of the well; he hadn't yet turned into a skeleton. The chaotic scratch marks on the well wall were still clearly visible, and the strange symbol smeared beside them seemed to hint at something. The tips of his fingers, not yet decayed, were worn almost to the bone—evidence of his desperate attempts to climb out.

At this moment, Gu Mian suddenly saw the ghastly pale skull on the ground stiffly twist. Its face, in the dark and damp bottom of the well, abruptly turned ninety degrees to the right to face the screen, its mouth gaping wide.

"What's happening?" Gu Mian frowned. "He should be dead by now. Was this part of the memory?"

This corpse, which should have been resting peacefully, seemed to be howling something, but the subtitles disappeared again. Gu Mian couldn't make out what it was shouting.

The screen suddenly shattered like impacted glass, and Gu Mian finally deciphered the last two words the corpse was shouting—

"Run!"

The next moment, the screen returned to normal, showing the gloomy and dark well bottom and the skull cradled in the character's arms.

But something seems off...

This strange feeling seems to be coming from... above?

Gu Mian, sensing something, controlled the view to look up. Half a face had stealthily peeked into the well opening, staring fixedly at the character he was controlling.

It was Xiao Niao.

Unfortunately, Xiao Niao and the two men who had gone to carry out the corpse had returned.

"Gu Mian can't hear our voices. It's very likely a game mechanic to prevent him from discovering that we are the save points. However, Gu Mian is highly intuitive; he sensed this almost from the start."

Fatty nodded as he listened to Chu Changge. "So, the Doctor can't hear our voices because the game wants to mislead him into killing us?"

"Yes," Chu Changge's voice continued from the microphone, "but..."

At this, Chu Changge suddenly stopped. Fatty scratched his head impatiently while waiting for a few seconds. Seeing that Chu Changge didn't continue, he anxiously asked, "But what?"

Only then did Chu Changge speak again. "But if Gu Mian can't hear any sounds at all, not just our voices, then things might not be that simple. Judging by the state of the character he's controlling, it seems she can't hear any sounds at all either."

"Like I said before, if Gu Mian were to hear any sound, some secret could be revealed. I suspect this secret is related to him personally. However, as long as the save points aren't all used up, he should be out of danger. But if all save points are exhausted and the character Gu Mian is controlling dies again... In any case, don't destroy the save points."

Chapter 423 Gugu's Trick_2

Fatty quickly responded and ended the call. He sat by the table, deep in thought.

Sound and secrets... Fatty furrowed his brows, struggling to find a connection between the two.

He had turned the room upside down, flipping every book and almost dismantling the bookshelf. After finding a lighter in the chandelier, he even checked every clock on the wall, wondering if something was hidden behind them, but found nothing.

Fatty sank despondently onto the floor, staring out at the pitch-black street. It seems like only the Doctor can solve this problem, but I don't know if he realizes something is off with the game's audio.

Just as Fatty was about to ransack the room a second time, considering whether to pry open the floorboards, the telephone on the table behind him suddenly rang.

Is it Brother Chu? Has he found something new?

Fatty picked up the phone, muttering to himself. The moment he placed the receiver against his ear, his scalp tingled intensely.

CLICK.

It was the sound of a lighter being ignited.

Next, 007's calm voice came from the receiver:

"I just found a lighter."

Moonlight cast over the abandoned village nestled in the gully.

Gu Mian stood on the ground next to three corpses, with only one-quarter of his health bar remaining.

These people seemed mentally prepared but had never expected the Holy Daughter to be so ruthless. Consequently, they all ended up collapsing in fright.

Gu Mian shifted his gaze. "Finally, they've stopped staring at me like I'm a piece of meat. Being stared at like that gives me the creeps."

If he had been fighting two men and a woman on flat ground, he wouldn't have suffered so much damage. Unfortunately, Gu Mian had to climb upwards while fending off attacks. Otherwise, the people above would have blocked the well until their backup arrived and trapped him like a turtle in a jar.

"Speaking of which..." Gu Mian shifted his view towards the well again. The round skull was still at the bottom, lying on its back, seemingly staring at him. Moonlight shone on the skull, making it appear as if it were trying to articulate something, yet Gu Mian couldn't hear anything, and there were no subtitles.

Could the 'run' that brother mentioned in the memory fragment have been directed at me? Gu Mian rubbed his chin. Perhaps he saw Xiao Niao and the others coming back and warned me?

If so, he indeed is a warm and kind brother. Too bad I'm not his real sister.

The mission of this instance is to clear the game. Regardless of becoming stronger, viewing these memory fragments should also be beneficial to the plot. Gu Mian was now controlling the character to walk swiftly. The last memory fragment should be at the gallows, but I haven't discovered any gallows while I was exploring.

Gu Mian recalled the content written in the village chief's diary. The gallows was described as being at the "easternmost point," where the group that killed the Holy Daughter's parents and brother had finally settled.

...Could I possibly encounter them if luck serves?

I remember when I first entered this game, I was almost at the village's easternmost point, but there was virtually nothing there—just a cliff and a large empty field.

Gu Mian had taken a few glimpses there when he was exploring the village earlier, but all he saw was an empty field, with no gallows or Crusaders to be seen.

Let's go and check that place again. Even though I might encounter that monster with the leg chain at any time, I still don't understand where this monster comes from, or why the village chief would dare to go out of the secret tunnel late at night. Is he not afraid of encountering the monster?

As Gu Mian headed east, he made sure to pass by his three teammates. He took a good look at each of them. Other than smoke emerging from the save point where 007 was, there didn't seem to be any other anomalies.

As the frail woman (Gu Mian's character) passed Fatty's save point, Fatty was on the phone with Chu Changge. "Brother Chu, 007 found a lighter too... No, she wanted to check if there was anything under the wooden floors, so she used a book from the bookshelf as kindling to burn the wooden floor... Yes, she found something hard and shiny under there, probably some sort of stone foundation? Also, she said she almost got smoked like roast ribs in the bookstore..."

Just then, Fatty noticed a silhouette in his peripheral vision.

He glanced over and saw the slender woman. It might have been an illusion, but Fatty felt she looked more menacing than before—probably because her clean white clothes were now stained with blood.

"The Doctor! The Doctor is back!" Fatty immediately abandoned the receiver in his hand and rushed to the door. He stuck his head out to thoroughly inspect the woman from head to toe, sighing with relief only after ensuring the blood wasn't from *his* character.

He then remembered Chu Changge, whom he had been ignoring, and quickly picked up the receiver hanging from the table. "The Doctor is back; he came to my location."

Soon after, Chu Changge witnessed Gu Mian reappear with his own eyes.

The tall, thin woman Gu Mian controlled, wearing a blood-stained white dress, stood by the door for a moment before turning and heading east.

Standing at the door, Chu Changge watched the woman leave. From his perspective, her destination lay towards a cliff.

Gu Mian quickly arrived at his respawn point: a steep cliff edge overrun by wild grass tall enough to submerge a person. Besides the grass and the cliff, there was only open space, with no signs of ruins. Gu Mian couldn't help but wonder whether the people mentioned in the village chief's notes had made their homes underground.

Looking up into the night sky, the towering cliff face, well over ten meters high, blended into the darkness.

Just as he was thinking of walking along the steep cliff edge to see if he could find any clues, a huge shadow suddenly appeared in his line of sight.

He saw the chain-bound monster walk out from the darkness. Gu Mian instantly hid his conspicuous shovel and carefully retreated a few steps, ducking into the tall grass behind him before he could be noticed.

The massive beast didn't see him. From the grass, Gu Mian watched the creature pace forward, seemingly on patrol. Not long after, it turned, stood for five or six seconds in front of a rock wall, and then walked away.

Is there something there?

Once the creature had completely left, Gu Mian immediately controlled his character to step out.

The wilted grass underfoot RUSTLED as he walked.

Suddenly, Gu Mian stopped.

He heard a sound.

Until now, the only sounds in the room had been those he made. But just then, the distinct CRUNCH of dry grass underfoot reached his ears.

He tried controlling his character to take a few more steps, and the surrounding area filled with the sound of dry grass being CRUNCHED underfoot.

What's happening? This game suddenly has sound effects?

As he thought this, Gu Mian controlled his character to take a few steps forward. However, he only heard footsteps for the first two; the subsequent steps were almost silent.

This sound doesn't seem to be coming from the computer, but from... above.

Musing on this, Gu Mian looked up, only to see the gray, unremarkable ceiling overhead.

After pondering for a few seconds, he quickly controlled his character to return to the patch of grass, shifting the camera angle to look at the ground. The original ground was already covered by a messy tangle of wild grass. Gu Mian pulled out his shovel, and a "Dig" option appeared on the ground. He immediately started digging. Simultaneously, he heard a digging sound from above, as if someone were operating an excavator right over his head. Gu Mian felt as if the ceiling could be breached at any moment.

Could it be that I'm also in this game, and the character I'm controlling can help me escape this place?

But soon, Gu Mian, who was intently watching the screen, dismissed this naive thought.

After just a few digs with the shovel, a black book cover appeared in view.

The moment he saw the book cover, Gu Mian abruptly stopped his actions.

He understood.

I can't escape from here.

It turns out I'm also a save point... the initial save point...

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No wonder I couldn't hear any game audio. It was to prevent characters passing by from hearing inappropriate sounds—for instance, sounds coming from me, sitting in front of the computer.

I am the original save point, the tool for the Holy Daughter to respawn when the game restarts.

Gu Mian never thought he would end up being a tool himself.

He had played countless games like this growing up, and the ways to save in them varied wildly. Some games had a blackboard as a save point, where you'd stick a photo on it to save. Others had a shrine as a save point, where you'd have to pray to save.

This game's save points were a few rundown huts; to save, one would hand a book into a pitch-dark room.

Having saved the game more than a dozen times, Gu Mian obviously recognized the book his character had just dug out on the screen.

Moonlight shone down from above the back of the character's head, casting the Holy Daughter's elongated, deformed shadow onto the haystack in front of her on the screen. The corner of the book protruding from the soil was completely enveloped by the eerie shadow. Even Gu Mian, sitting at his computer, felt an intense gaze from above his own head.

I was wondering where the hell I was... So it turns out I'm just a save point...

He sighed. If the 'Holy Daughter' dies after all three other save points have been used up, the game will end immediately. It will only restart when a new group of players enters the instance.

He himself was the very reason the game could restart.

Before the next group of players entered the instance, the Holy Daughter would use him to revive, and the new players would become save points in turn, continuing the endless cycle.

This is nuts.

Gu Mian felt he should change his thinking. It wasn't Gu Mian and his three useless save points; it was the Holy Daughter and *her* four useless save points.

None of the four save points could be used, because using one meant real death for someone. Plus, the game's difficulty was absurdly high; this instance seemed designed with the express purpose of killing all players.

Thinking of this, Gu Mian remembered the book 'Second World' he had been holding before entering the instance.

This instance, which had come so suddenly and involved real death, seemed designed to stop... something. That must be why they were dragged into it.

Could it be that they had touched upon some truth, causing this special instance to suddenly appear and intervene? Although Gu Mian knew he was always unlucky, the timing of this instance was indeed too coincidental.

But if that's the case, does it mean everyone who came into contact with the book 'Second World' was dragged into this instance? Gu Mian furrowed his brows, thinking about the more than one hundred and fifty players who had been eaten by the villagers.

However, this wasn't the time to think about those previous players. Zoning out in an instance was not a good habit.

Gu Mian moved his character, intending to rebury the exposed book cover. He couldn't pick up the book, so he could only try to hide it more thoroughly.

Just then, he suddenly heard another set of footsteps, coming from directly above the room he was in.

His fingers paused on the keyboard. He then shifted the game's camera view to look behind his character. As the view switched, a face practically filled the entire screen.

It was Curly Hair! And the seven people he'd brought with him—the eight-man squad hunting the Holy Daughter!

At that moment, Curly Hair was right behind his character, his knife raised high, reflecting a chilling glint in the moonlight.

Gu Mian cursed inwardly and slammed his keyboard, maneuvering his character to dodge to the side, narrowly avoiding the deadly strike.

Even though he reacted quickly, his character was still grazed by the knife in Curly Hair's hand. Gu Mian watched as his character's health, which had been at a quarter, dropped to one-sixth. He was practically on his last sliver of health now!

Gu Mian clearly remembered his last save was at 007's location.

If his character took another hit, 007 would be the first to Go to the West!

Thinking rapidly, he frantically mashed the attack key. His character smacked the shovel hard against Curly Hair, who was still caught off guard. But after only a few hits, his character pulled back the shovel and turned to flee.

Gu Mian had initially wanted his character to just run. But unfortunately, his real body was right under these people's feet. If he didn't draw their aggro onto the Holy Daughter, they might discover his physical body hidden below.

His character ran in the direction where the monster had previously paused.

There was nothing in this area but cliffs and precipices. On flat ground, a "weak girl" like the Holy Daughter obviously couldn't outrun eight grown men. With no other choice, Gu Mian could only direct his character toward a direction that might offer a sliver of hope.

The commotion from earlier seemed to have been quite loud. He saw the huge, black shadow at the edge of the screen freeze, then turn around and slowly begin moving towards his character's position in the pitch-dark night.

Gu Mian never imagined a day would come when his character would be chased in circles by eight men and a monster.

He rapidly typed on the keyboard, making his character dash forward. Behind them, Curly Hair, who had been smacked a few times with the shovel, seemed enraged by the humiliation.

Gu Mian saw the shadows of the men behind his character also projected onto the ground; even the glint of their knives was reflected by the moonlight. They were rapidly closing in on the 'Holy Daughter'.

Meanwhile, the towering monster at the edge of the screen was slowly striding in their direction. If their paths happened to intersect, his character might lead the pursuing eight-man squad right into this creature. However, if they did meet, his character would be the first to bear the brunt.

So, Gu Mian adjusted his character's escape angle. Under the cover of night, his character desperately ran towards the spot where the monster had paused earlier. He hadn't run far before he spotted what looked like a narrow crevice by the cliff, barely wide enough for one person to pass through and almost invisible unless one looked closely.

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The pursuers were closing in from behind, and the distant creature had also moved closer, barely visible in the darkness of night. Seeing the crevasse ahead and the creature slowly advancing towards this side, a daring thought emerged in Gu Mian's mind.

"Stop!" These two words appeared at the bottom of the screen, a call from one of the men behind.

But of course, Gu Mian wasn't going to stop. The Holy Daughter, left with only a sliver of health, was on the verge of death. It wasn't a big deal if the Holy Daughter died, but Gu Mian didn't want his teammate to die on the spot.

Looking back at his dogged pursuers through his character's shadow, he muttered, "You're in for some serious trouble!"

Of course, no one could hear him. His pursuers were relentless. Pressing down on the keyboard, he rushed towards his destination. Just as he'd thought, he could squeeze into the crevasse. Without a second thought, he dove in. The slender Holy Daughter slipped easily into the narrow crevice, and the men closely pursuing her seemed to want to follow her in.

A few strands of moonlight barely penetrated the darkness of the crevice. Under this dim light, the Holy Daughter suddenly turned, wielding a long-handled shovel.

Gu Mian swung at Curly Hair, who was halfway into the crevice. The already injured man's face now bore another bright red gash. Due to the confined space, Gu Mian couldn't wield the weapon effectively; its power was greatly reduced, but he managed to keep his pursuers at a distance.

"Back, back!" The leading man anxiously retreated, but he was blocked by the people rushing in behind him. He took several hits from Gu Mian before finally making his way out of the damp and gloomy crevice.

The man who had just rushed out of the crevice shot a gloomy look over. Gu Mian saw him talking, and then a line of text appeared on the screen: "You can't hide for long. We'll catch you soon."

However, the few strands of moonlight that had originally penetrated the crevice suddenly disappeared as if something had blocked them.

Gu Mian glanced upwards along the crevice before him. A huge shadow had unknowingly appeared behind them.

The people standing in front of the crevice seemed to have noticed it. They turned around to look.

That was their last glance backward; after a few screams, their bodies lay lifelessly on the icy ground, seemingly in disbelief at the tragic fate brought about by this 'Holy Daughter'.

Gu Mian took advantage of their deaths and retreated further into the crevice. It was pitch-black, and he could hardly see anything.

The crevice seemed to lead somewhere. This was the easternmost side of the village. Gu Mian remembered this place as the final settlement of the Crusaders—those evil people who had killed his older brother and the Holy Daughter's family. He wondered what expressions they would wear if they met her now. The final memory fragment should also be here; the execution rack used to burn his friend was likely hidden in this place. The stone walls scraped against the Holy Daughter's clothes. Gu Mian lit his lighter, illuminating the path, and walked deeper into the crevice.

"As long as I can touch the execution rack, I'll turn into a demon," Gu Mian thought, navigating the dark crevice while glancing at the health bar in the top-left corner of the screen. "Though I'm barely alive, as soon as I touch the execution rack, I'll be unstoppable."

If I'm a bit more daring, the Holy Daughter who touches the third memory fragment will directly turn into a demon. The village will suffer the same fate as before, and in the end, the game will display an ending like ["Repeat the Old Path"].

By this time, Gu Mian had already visualized the scene on the screen upon reaching such an ending.

Perhaps there were also endings like ["Delicious Dish on the Table"] and ["Monster Cannon Fodder"], but achieving these wouldn't mean clearing the instance, just that some companions would die in it. Fortunately, I've essentially avoided these two endings now.

At this moment, Gu Mian finally saw light coming from ahead.

A faint firelight streamed in from the crevice ahead. Gu Mian snuffed out his lighter and continued forward. He was about to leave this place and go find the execution rack.

But he hadn't been walking long before text appeared again at the bottom of the screen. This would only appear when the speaker was quite close to him.

"I'll return to the village first. I suppose the first Holy Daughter of the day has been thoroughly dealt with. When all the Holy Daughters are done, we will give you some food."

Looking at these words, Gu Mian inexplicably thought of the village chief.

Another line of text then appeared on the screen below, seemingly from another person: "You are indeed a kind village chief. Despite our past wrongdoings, you still graciously share meat with us."

"As all of our villagers are kind-hearted, they, of course, couldn't bear to see anyone going hungry. Today's Holy Daughter does not seem to be very smart, so I think we will be able to eliminate all the Holy Daughters very soon. Perhaps we'll be able to bring you food by tonight."

"I am truly thankful for that."

Seeing the words on the bottom of the screen, Gu Mian stepped back a few paces. It seems the village chief's late-night outing was to bring comfort to the Crusaders, sacrificing his own food to fill the stomachs of these murderers. What a truly qualified and benevolent village chief, Gu Mian thought sarcastically.

At this point, the cordial conversation outside had come to a halt.

"I shall take my leave now and go check on the Holy Daughter."

"Alright."

Following that, a figure appeared ahead, seeming to squeeze inside. It was the village chief, Gu Mian realized.

Gu Mian took a few more steps back in the narrow crevice, pressing himself tightly against the wall and switching to the kitchen knife he'd taken from the butcher. He made sure he was concealed in the darkness, undetected by the approaching person.

He decided then to give the village chief a big surprise, letting him know the Holy Daughter's situation right here and now.

The area was very dark. Unless the village chief had a light, he wouldn't notice the Holy Daughter lying in wait until he came very close.

Luckily, the village chief didn't bring a source of light. He seemed quite familiar with this crevice and could navigate freely even by touch in the dark. However, tonight was different. After groping his way forward a short distance, he noticed something peculiar: a white figure appeared before him.

Immediately following that, he heard a CLICK.

It was the sound of a lighter being ignited.

An orange-yellow light burst from the fingernail-sized flame, spreading all around. The chief, his head bent down, slowly looked up from the worn shoes in front of him to the blood-soaked clothing, which emanated a menacing and ominous aura. Further up, he encountered a familiar, gaunt face.

She was smiling.

Of course, Gu Mian didn't give him the chance to scream. He frantically mashed the attack key until the figure before him turned a vivid red. Under the soft glow, the village chief's mouth was slightly agape, his eyes wide in terror. The expression of fear solidified on his face, as if he had come face-to-face with the most terrifying demon in the world.

Gu Mian looked at the corpse displayed on the screen and muttered to himself, "Letting an old man pass by here and see all these bodies scattered about wouldn't be good. It could give him a heart attack. So, you'll just have to die here first."

With the village chief gone, Gu Mian had his character step over the body and continue forward. He would soon leave this crevice, and those waiting for food on the other side probably hadn't expected the Holy Daughter to arrive so quickly.

When he reached the exit, Gu Mian paused to check if any subtitles appeared at the bottom of the screen.

After about half a minute, no new subtitles had appeared. It seemed there was no one around the exit, Gu Mian concluded.

Only then did he boldly walk out.

Moonlight once again shone on the Holy Daughter. This was a slightly wider canyon. Looking up, Gu Mian could see a sliver of night sky squeezed between the rock walls. On the ground, houses were built close against the stone. At this late hour, everyone was presumably asleep; even the Crusaders whom the chief had just left had likely gone back inside.

"So this is the Crusaders' den? The group that killed the Holy Daughter's parents and older brother," Gu Mian mused.

Gu Mian's gaze traveled past the rows of houses built against the stone walls, focusing on a large, dark, rack-like structure in the far distance.

Chapter 426 A Simple Gu Mian_1

So that's the gallows, hidden pretty well.

Just by navigating this narrow alley and passing the dilapidated thatched-roof houses on either side, I can reach the destination.

That's the third memory point.

At that point, Gu Mian will be able to transform, and his health bar, which is almost depleted to a sliver, will also be restored. He remembered that when he was a child, the TV station often broadcast animations about magical girls. Whenever the scene of a girl transforming played, the little girls in the orphanage would gasp in amazement one after another.

Back then, Gu Mian had sneered at it, but he never expected to be so excited when it was his turn to transform today.

The little companions will be saved!

Gu Mian quickly maneuvered the character forward. However, just as he took a few steps, the screen suddenly began to shake, as if the cameraman filming a video had Parkinson's disease. Simultaneously, words started popping up one by one at the bottom of the screen—

"THUD"

"THUD"

"THUD"

The moment Gu Mian saw these words, he understood. It was most likely that monster on the other side of the crevice causing trouble!

He quickly switched his perspective to look behind him. Sure enough, the cliff face behind him was starting to shake. Small pebbles tumbled down from above, and tiny cracks spread along both sides of the crevice, as if some colossal creature were attempting to force its way through this pitifully narrow gap. The stone wall behind him could collapse at any moment!

Fuck! Gu Mian cursed inwardly and immediately turned, sprinting madly towards the gallows.

Besides the "THUD" continuously popping up at the bottom of the screen, other words appeared. This path was already narrow; if Gu Mian spread his arms while running down the middle, he could even touch the houses on either side. The newly appearing words were the conversations of the people inside the houses, startled by the commotion.

"What's going on?"

"It must be the monster. Is it chiseling through the wall?"

Gu Mian had no time to consider how close the monster behind him was. He put away his shovel, trying to increase his speed, and mashed the keyboard, sprinting towards the gallows ahead. But the awakened people had already begun to move. Some even pushed open their doors, wanting to see what was happening outside. Simply opening a door wouldn't have been a major issue, but this alley, flanked by houses on both sides, was extremely narrow. If someone in front opened their door, it would block nearly half the path. If, at that moment, someone on the opposite side also opened their door, Gu Mian would have no choice but to attempt a hurdle.

Though he wasn't sure he could clear it.

Fortunately, the Holy Daughter's luck was decent; there was no instance of two opposite doors opening simultaneously. But even if only one person opened their door, they could still see the Holy Daughter sprinting down the alley.

Sure enough, someone saw her and screamed, "It's her!"

The people in the houses were quickly and fully awakened. Candlelight flickered to life within the rooms. Gu Mian watched as doors ahead were pushed open one by one, revealing heads so emaciated they were almost skeletal. Soon, the eyes set in those withered heads lit up. Gu Mian recognized that look—it was the gaze of a starving wolf spotting food.

And mixed within it was excitement and madness.

"Don't let her escape!"

"The Holy Daughter! We've seen a living Holy Daughter again! All these years, we've never managed to kill her with our own hands... Is our wish finally going to be fulfilled today?"

They spoke while leaning out, intending to come out and block Gu Mian.

Of course, I can't let you achieve that! Gu Mian sprinted rapidly towards the gallows ahead. At this point, he was less than twenty meters from the gallows, which was already charred black.

Just then, he took out the shovel from his inventory. While running desperately forward, he swung it at the people sticking their heads out from either side. The remnants of the Crusaders were already few and far between; only about a dozen heads poked out from the two rows of houses. Gu Mian roughly estimated the population density and, while still running, took out his only remaining lighter and threw it towards the side where more heads were protruding.

Perhaps because this was a game, the fire spread incredibly fast. Leaping, enormous flames immediately engulfed the entire row of houses. The emaciated heads in the houses were instantly obscured by the blaze. Gu Mian casually swung his shovel, striking a person beside him who was attempting to flee outwards, knocking him, his face etched with shock, back into the burning building.

The flames also swept over the Holy Daughter. Gu Mian saw one side of the screen glowing with firelight, and her health, already down to one-sixth, began to slowly decrease again.

More and more people burst out from the houses ahead. They chased closely behind Gu Mian, shouting, "Catch her!"

The persistent "THUD, THUD" at the bottom of the screen indicated that the monster behind him had not given up its advance.

Bright flames leaped in the dark canyon. A clamorous crowd pursued the Holy Daughter through a sea of fire. A huge monster squeezed through the narrow crevice, entering this area. The charred gallows stood silently amidst the chaotic environment, seemingly observing everything.

The scene was, for a moment, utter chaos.

Gu Mian mashed the keyboard frantically, bursting out of the sea of fire as his health bar rapidly approached zero, a mob of crazed people following closely behind him.

Faster! Faster!

He kept running forward, finally touching the charred gallows just as his health bar was nearly depleted.

For an instant, time seemed to freeze; even the arrogant flames paused their consumption.

A new scene flashed across the screen.

"Run, get out of here." A girl's face appeared on the screen. The background was a forest at night, but the girl's eyes were exceptionally bright, like stars in the sky. She was leaning against a thick tree, her foot caught in a large animal trap; it seemed she had stepped into a snare.

In the distance, many faint lights flickered; Gu Mian recognized them as the glow of torches.

During the memory flashback, Gu Mian couldn't control the character.

He could only sit in front of the computer and watch.

"Go! Don't worry about me." The girl gave 'him' a push... No, she must have been pushing the Holy Daughter at that time.

"If you don't like it here, then don't stay. Kindness is not your responsibility. You should go to a new place, give yourself a real name, one that you like. Someone like you deserves to live happily."

The screen's perspective remained unchanged.

The flames in the background seemed to be drawing nearer, almost upon them.

The Holy Daughter still showed no reaction. Perhaps she remained silent, or maybe Gu Mian couldn't see what she was saying. But the camera angle never left this girl with the sparkling eyes; the Holy Daughter hadn't abandoned her to escape alone.

But an agitated expression appeared on the girl's face. She forcefully pushed the Holy Daughter down, and Gu Mian saw the screen image lurch.

"Go! I told you to go!"

In the end, neither of them managed to leave, because the torches from the darkness were already right before them, and countless faces surrounded them.

They were captured and taken back. After that, the Holy Daughter's perspective never left the girl.

Gu Mian saw the girl tied up. On a pitch-black night, she was placed on the gallows, which resembled a roasting rack. Fierce flames rose from beneath her feet, and the dry, thin kindling instantly burned black. Before long, the struggling person on the gallows gradually turned the color of the charred wood beneath her, along with the terrifying gallows itself.

"Look, Holy Daughter," the village chief's face suddenly appeared on the screen, making Gu Mian almost want to grab his Saw. "This is the consequence of making a mistake. The great Holy Daughter, of course, never makes mistakes. The fault can only lie with others."

The Holy Daughter's gaze remained fixed on the charred gallows. At the same time, Gu Mian heard whispers by his ear.

"Selfish."

"Hypocritical."

"Greedy."

"Cruel."

These are not the people I should protect.

Gu Mian turned his head to look around; there was no one else in the empty room.

Then, a new change appeared on the screen.

Gu Mian saw his health bar in the top-left corner completely disappear. It wasn't that his health had run out... the entire health bar had simply vanished into thin air.

Simultaneously, the faces on the screen, which had almost closed in on them, suddenly showed expressions of utter panic.

They stumbled backward, their mouths opening and closing. Gu Mian saw the game translate their words at the bottom of the screen—

"The demon has descended!"

Chapter 427 Truly Stingy_1

A gale suddenly whipped up in the dark night.

Fatty, who was frantic in the bookstore, shivered in the gusts. "This eerie wind... Has something gone wrong?" He looked outside, feeling as if terrifying monsters were hidden in the night.

Meanwhile, 007, holding a lighter, was investigating the strange material under the floor. The gale had blown away most of the lingering smoke in the room, making the air around her slightly fresher.

007 raised her head and looked worriedly at the doorway. Not long ago, she had seen Gu Mian, covered in blood, pass by her door. I wonder how Gu Mian is now, she thought. This special instance is so difficult...

The book in Chu Changge's hands rustled in the wind. Its yellowed pages flipped wildly, stopping on a blank sheet.

He carefully turned the pages back to their original place before looking out towards the pitch-black doorway. From the direction Gu Mian had headed, he could see heavy smoke and faintly hear mournful screams piercing through the stone walls.

Is it over? Chu Changge wondered, looking out into the night, which now seemed more silent.

Only Gu Mian, the one directly involved, knew best about the changes in the instance. He was now hot on the heels of a group of gaunt individuals. These people, whose eyes had been gleaming with almost unbearable excitement moments before, now found themselves being chased by Gu Mian—a truly undignified situation.

After Gu Mian successfully transformed, the monster that had barely squeezed through the gap merely glanced in his direction, then turned and fled. It left Gu Mian with a view of its retreating back, as if it had seen something utterly terrifying.

Gu Mian pursued them from behind. He noticed that 'he'—his character on the screen—was moving much faster, and a hazy black mist swirled around the display. This seemed related to the Holy Daughter's transformation.

Am I surrounded by black mist? Gu Mian muttered to himself while quickly advancing. Black mist is indeed an essential element for a character's descent into darkness.

"Run! RUN!"

Everyone screamed in terror, dashing desperately towards the outside. Some had already entered the widened crevice, their figures swallowed by the darkness.

But these were, after all, people who usually didn't have enough to eat. Even running as hard as they could, they were barely faster than weak puppies.

Gu Mian caught up with the last few people without much effort. They struggled wildly, their eyes wide in horror, before whimpering and being swallowed by the black mist. At this moment, Gu Mian suddenly remembered the Holy Daughter's deceased parents, brother, and friends. Their reactions at the time of death must have been similar, he thought.

Thinking of this, Gu Mian sighed. This is just like a classic plot where a genius, abused by their sect, strives to become powerful and ends up destroying their entire sect. It's all very dramatic. Maybe it could even be adapted into a prime-time soap opera?

But Gu Mian wasn't interested in adaptations right now. He easily passed through the now widened gap and continued his pursuit.

There were about a dozen remnant Crusaders. A small portion of them had already been swallowed by the black mist, silenced forever. However, the screams of the living continued, so loud that even Gu Mian, back at the same point, could hear their desperate cries.

After passing through the crevice, the first thing Gu Mian saw were the corpses of Curly Hair and the others, sprawled haphazardly on the ground. Beyond them, a group of people fled in panic. Gu Mian excitedly gave chase.

But then he noticed that the computer seemed somewhat unresponsive. A few seconds later, his in-game character completely slipped from his control, as if an AFK mode had been activated. The Holy Daughter in the game began to fight the monsters on her own.

At the same time, he heard something shatter nearby, a sound akin to an eggshell cracking as a chick hatches.

Gu Mian looked up and saw a crack that had appeared overhead. Through it, he could see the dark night sky.

Several miserable screams echoed from a distance, then dissipated in the biting wind. Gu Mian stood up from a pile of grass and looked down at the black book and guitar case at his feet, now shattered into pieces. He had come out. He had transformed from being at the save point into a person again. He had finally entered the game.

Gu Mian felt the cold wind and hugged his shoulders. This better not be a setup, he thought.

First, the player turns the Holy Daughter back into a devil, and then the game throws the player in to be killed by that devil. If this is really what's happening, then this game is truly unbeatable.

Gu Mian mused as he took a few steps on the rugged dirt road. No matter what's happened, I have to check on my companions first.

Fatty had already received a call from 007. In fact, just a few seconds after he heard the screams, his phone rang—it was 007.

"You heard those screams, right?" 007's slightly apprehensive voice came from the phone.

Hearing her heavy tone, Fatty sighed deeply. "This instance is so strange. Even though no one has died so far... this situation is still worrying. I hope Gu Mian has nothing to do with these screams."

The intermittent screams echoed through the night. Listening to these terrifying sounds, Fatty couldn't just blatantly lie to himself anymore. He tugged anxiously at his hair and finally said with conviction, "We have to trust the Doctor."

Chu Changge was closest to Gu Mian's location. Amidst the fading screams, it didn't take Gu Mian long to reach Chu Changge's save point. However, he couldn't see anything in the pitch-black house, nor could he enter. It was deathly quiet inside. After confirming that this save point was still intact, Gu Mian turned and headed for the next one.

Chapter 428 Truly Stingy_2

At this time, Fatty, who was still trying to comfort 007, caught sight of a white figure in the corner of his eye. The sacred white coat, the magnificent guitar case... If not the Doctor, who could it be?

Just as Gu Mian approached this save point, he heard an excited voice from the dark room—

"Doctor!"

So they can hear voices from inside, huh? Gu Mian was a bit puzzled. What was Chu Changge doing in there when I passed him earlier? Was he just standing still, staring at me?

"Doctor, how did you get in... No, wait, shouldn't you be controlling a character?"

Standing before this dark house, Gu Mian figured Fatty and the others must have deduced a lot. At the very least, they know they're save points, and that the Holy Daughter is a character being controlled.

Gu Mian looked at the house before him and cleared his throat, trying not to sound like a lunatic muttering to himself, "Actually, I don't know why I came in. To be precise... I don't know how I got out either."

The distant screams were steadily decreasing. It looks like the Holy Daughter will finish off all the monsters soon.

"Got out?" Fatty suddenly changed the subject, as if remembering something. "Right, Doctor, what were all those screams about?"

"Oh, the screams in the first half were mostly my doing. But just as everyone was midway through screaming, my character learned to go idle... This should symbolize that a game is nearing its end." As he said this, Gu Mian suddenly understood why he had emerged from the save point. The Holy Daughter is invincible now; she can't die. That means we, the save points, are useless. Naturally, we'd be released. But why was I the only one let out?

At that moment, Fatty's voice, somewhat shaky, emanated from the darkness. It seemed Gu Mian's words had unsettled him.

Gu Mian heard Fatty give a couple of awkward laughs. "HEH HEH. I was worried with 007 earlier that some of the screams were from your character... It seems we were overthinking it."

So 007 is alive too, Gu Mian thought, tightening his coat in the darkness. That was expected, but I was still worried something might have gone wrong.

Just then, a faint voice came from the darkness ahead. It was 007's. Gu Mian listened closely; her voice sounded hollow, as if coming through a microphone.

"I'm still alive, no accidents. I was just scared by the screams you created... There was a little incident in between."

Fatty began to explain, "She used a lighter to burn the floor of her save point and almost suffocated. She also said she discovered reflective stones underneath."

Gu Mian put his hands in his pockets and closely examined the house before him. They have a phone, a lighter, and wooden floors in there. Compared to this, my place is a real slum.

The cries in the night had almost vanished. Gu Mian turned to look into the distance. Steep mountain cliffs stretched endlessly in the darkness, almost completely encircling the village, forming a natural prison.

But I remember it wasn't like this in the game. When my perspective followed my brother, I saw a small creek flowing by the village and a flat road leading into the distance. When I fled with the girl, we passed

through a dense forest filled with brightly colored, dangerous mushrooms. But around this village, there's nothing but endless cliffs, making escape impossible.

Just then, a barely audible, weak cry suddenly reached Gu Mian's ears. He frowned and turned towards the source of the sound.

This sound... it's very close.

Fatty watched the Doctor in his white coat standing outside the door. The wind whipped at the hem of his coat, making the white robe appear somewhat wild. Gu Mian was staring in one direction, though Fatty didn't know what he was looking at. Just as Fatty was about to say something, everything before him suddenly went black.

It wasn't fainting, nor was it a power outage. It was as if someone had abruptly pulled down a black security door. Fatty could no longer see what was happening outside.

He called out twice, refusing to give up, but received no answer from outside. 007's voice then came through the microphone, "What's wrong?"

Fatty quickly ran to the phone and picked it up, "The Doctor was right at my door, but suddenly I can't see outside, and I can't hear anything from outside either!"

007, on the other end, was silent for a moment before replying, "Maybe something is about to happen outside that you're not supposed to know about."

Something I'm not supposed to know? Fatty was bewildered.

The night wind whistled through the narrow alley. A staggering figure ran through it. Though 'running' might be an overstatement, as his speed wasn't much to speak of. Gu Mian saw him stumble out from a short distance ahead; it took him about twenty seconds to reach Gu Mian.

At that moment, he recognized the man. It's the one from my parents' memories, the one who held the Holy Daughter's father's head high like a banner! I didn't expect him to still be alive.

Even though he had long been emaciated by hunger, he had somehow managed to survive... although a dense black fog was hot on his heels, ready to devour him at any moment.

Gu Mian looked at the fog behind the man. That must be the Holy Daughter, successfully transformed under my control.

The fog was now gradually creeping towards him. The man running ahead seemed to be the last survivor. Gu Mian watched him stagger along until he finally tripped and fell right in front of Gu Mian.

Apparently not expecting anyone to be there, the man looked up with a surprised expression.

Gu Mian, in turn, looked down at him, a slight smile revealing a row of white teeth.

"Save... save me!" Although the man didn't know where this person had come from, the brilliant smile clearly rekindled his hope. He desperately grabbed Gu Mian's trouser leg and clung to it. "Save me!"

Gu Mian looked down at him.

The man clearly didn't recognize that the previous Holy Daughter had been controlled by Gu Mian, or that Gu Mian was responsible for half of the widespread screams.

The unsuspecting man, with a look of longing, gazed up at the Doctor before him, whose smile was as radiant as the sun.

At the same time, the black fog behind him suddenly stopped advancing. It churned in the not-so-wide alley, like an agitated, black-furred hamster.

Gu Mian glanced at the black fog that had abruptly halted, then bent down slightly, extended his hand, and said softly, "Alright."

The man seemed bewitched. He stared blankly at Gu Mian for a moment, then placed his somewhat grimy hand in the offered one, letting the Doctor pull him up. However...

"Go to hell!"

The man never imagined someone could change expressions so fast. One second he thought the person before him was a gentle doctor; the next, he felt as if a strongman had kicked him viciously in the stomach, making it convulse.

If it had just been a kick, it might have been tolerable. But the black fog was right behind him. It rapidly swirled around him. The black mist surging from behind filled the man with terror. He watched, horrified, as he was enveloped by the black fog. He opened his mouth wide, looking at the white figure before him, but couldn't make a sound.

The man's contorted face gradually vanished before Gu Mian's eyes. That was the last living person in the entire game.

With the disappearance of the man's figure, the black fog in front of him also stopped surging. It halted about a meter away from Gu Mian and advanced no further.

With the death of the last person, Gu Mian finally sensed the game was about to end.

He heard an emotionless voice echo through the sky, and saw several large lines of text appear out of thin air before him—

[Angel Redemption Game Cleared]

[Achieved 'Stingy' Ending]

Chapter 429 Recognizing Gu as a Sister_1

As miserly as they come, huh...

Gu Mian quietly looked at the ending he had achieved. Could it be because those people didn't manage to eat a single strand of my hair? Is that why I got this ending?

He had actually considered the endings he might achieve; they should have been something like "World Dominator," "Human Flesh Grinder," or "King of Counter-Attacks"... This "As Miserly as They Come" is really a bit much, making me feel like a rooster in a slaughterhouse refusing to be plucked. Even though the name is awful, it's still a proper ending.

Gu Mian massaged his forehead, feeling somewhat drained, as he waited for the Instance Evaluator's final assessment.

However, he never received the assessment page. Instead, the dense fog before him continued to swirl, and time seemed to have frozen. The words "As Miserly as They Come" hung persistently in the air, seemingly mocking Gu Mian.

"What's going on?" Gu Mian looked around, sensing that something was amiss. "I thought the game was supposed to end when I completed the instance?"

A chilly wind suddenly swept down the street, and carried within it was a woman's voice.

"Of course, the instance will end, but I've temporarily delayed it."

As the voice spoke, Gu Mian saw a woman in a white dress slowly emerge from the fog. She had a beautiful face, and her lips curved into a strange, helpless-looking smile. Her plain white clothes, resembling a gunnysack, rustled in the wind. These clothes, capable of making music in the breeze, made Gu Mian question the woman's aesthetic taste.

It was worth noting that the dense fog had been only a meter away from Gu Mian, and now the woman was standing almost directly in front of him.

Gu Mian tugged at his collar and looked at the smiling woman before him. "Don't tell me you're the Holy Daughter."

The truth was already apparent, though. But if the Holy Daughter always had her own consciousness, why let players control the character?

The woman's helpless smile deepened. She straightened her rather plain clothes. "I used to be the Holy Daughter, but long before that, I was a Goddess. Of course, now I've become a Goddess again..."

Truly a Goddess, to be able to forcibly keep a player in an instance that's about to end. But even a Goddess is just an NPC. Can an NPC born within an instance affect its rules?

"I know you must be thinking, 'How could a mere NPC do this?' Actually, this isn't simply an instance. You're in a game now—a game I created."

It seems this one, like Mr. Green, Coach Che, and Teacher Sweet, also knows she's an NPC.

"As the Holy Daughter, I experienced many things. Although I eventually let go of them all, I still harbored doubts about the choices I made back then. So, I created this game to see what choices other people would make."

"Of course, when I created it, it was merely a game."

Does that mean she didn't intend for it to be an instance when she created it?

"I recreated a village I had once destroyed and pulled everyone who survived that disaster into the game. I manufactured an environment of hunger and introduced a monster that would chase humans, all to create a tense atmosphere for the players... I wanted to see what choices other people would make. Unfortunately, most of them reached the same ending. So far, you're the first player to achieve *this* particular ending... much like I did back then."

Gu Mian stroked his chin and looked at the Goddess. "I'm guessing the ending most people got is probably called 'Table Delicacies' or 'A Feast on the Plate'."

The Goddess squinted. "Close enough. I didn't expect your naming style to be so similar to mine."

Hearing this, Gu Mian's hand stiffened slightly. "You came up with 'As Miserly as They Come'?"

The Goddess nodded. "It stems from my peculiar sense of humor."

Gu Mian paused. "...It seems you genuinely don't care about the past anymore."

Otherwise, she wouldn't have come up with such a bizarre and strange name.

The Goddess continued, "But unfortunately, this place later became an instance. Because I set the difficulty too high at the time, almost no one has been able to escape it."

'This place later became an instance?' Gu Mian accurately grasped the key point.

He lowered his head slightly to look at the woman before him. "How did this place become an instance?"

At this, the smile on the Goddess's face had almost completely vanished, leaving only helplessness. "This touches upon the core issue. Besides, I am not my true self here, merely a projection into this game, so I'm like a puppet—very weak. And some things cannot be spoken of casually, much like how people are reluctant to say Voldemort's name. You know who Voldemort is, don't you?"

As she spoke, she looked up at Gu Mian. Her facial expression had almost completely disappeared, only a bright light shone from her eyes.

Of course, I know, Gu Mian thought, staring at her eyes and nodding.

Seeing Gu Mian nod, the Goddess paused before continuing, "I didn't come here just to chat with you. I have something to give you."

A gift from an NPC?

Gu Mian remembered Mr. Green had given him a spray can before; "Product of an Evil God" was written on its label. It wasn't actually very effective, though. It wasn't even as good as some medical supplies sold in supermarkets.

Gu Mian decided against complaining directly. He said diplomatically, "Actually, I've received a similar gift before. It was supposedly from a certain Evil God, but its effects seemed watered down."

The Goddess looked slightly taken aback. "Actually, gifts from gods are never significantly watered down. As for the Evil God who gave you something, although I don't know which one it was, I suspect he..."

Chapter 430 Recognizing Gu as a Sister_2

At this point, she suddenly stopped speaking.

What? Gu Mian stared intently at the person before him.

"I guess you haven't used it many times."

"I used half each time, so twice and it was almost gone." Gu Mian remembered he indeed hadn't used it much. Once, he had used it on a boy during an event, and another time on 007 in the Fairy Tale City instance.

Since then, the Evil God spray bottle had been left with barely half its contents, shaking forlornly, never to be favored again.

The Goddess seemed a bit troubled after hearing this. "If you receive strange gifts again, it's better not to use them in the real world. You can try them out a few times in some instances... like this one I'm giving you."

Before Gu Mian could fully grasp the meaning of her words, she raised her hand. "I'm giving you this instance right now."

What?

Gu Mian saw a light as bright as the sun emanate from the Goddess's hand, and a storm suddenly erupted. He could feel the wind rushing in from all directions.

Then he saw cracks appearing in the sky, and it began to collapse. The distant, continuous mountain ranges twisted into bizarre shapes and steadily moved toward them. The surrounding houses, as if drawn by an immense suction force, started to disintegrate into tiny fragments, then rushed toward the Goddess's hand.

All things were moving toward her, as if congregating.

Gu Mian, frowning in the strong wind, spoke up, "Then my friends..."

"They will be fine."

Debris and dust obscured Gu Mian's vision, but he could still hear the person before him speaking, "I have compressed this instance into an object called the 'Human CD'. Whenever and wherever you are in danger, as long as you use it, you can immediately enter the world inside the CD. Anyone in physical contact with you at that moment will also be drawn into this world. In here, you can avoid all dangers... However, if you use it in the real world, it will be destroyed immediately after a single use. If you use it inside an instance, I don't know how many times it can be used. It might be only once, or perhaps a few times..."

She's being rather reckless!

The world was gradually blurring. Huge rifts tore open in the sky and on the ground. Gu Mian thought he could see the library's ceiling and the rows of bookshelves to one side. The compression of this instance was nearly complete!

"But there's just one tiny problem with this thing..." Gu Mian faintly heard the Goddess's sheepish voice.

He tried to listen carefully, but it was already too late.

The tumultuous storm suddenly ceased, and the swirling bricks and rubble vanished completely. Bright light replaced the previous darkness. Gu Mian looked up and saw the library's magnificent chandelier. He had returned.

Nearby stood the clueless Fatty, the silent Chu Changge, and 007, who was coughing. According to Fatty, she had nearly suffocated from burning an entire room's worth of flooring in the instance. This was likely an aftereffect.

It was already broad daylight outside. Gu Mian looked down and saw the book *Second World* still lying intact on the ground. However, there was now a disc on top of it—presumably the Human CD the Goddess had mentioned.

Gu Mian picked up the book and the CD, but the CD didn't trigger a special item prompt.

No wonder the Goddess explained how to use it, he thought, staring at the CD in his hand. Turns out this thing doesn't come with instructions.

"What just happened?" Fatty was the first to come to his senses. He looked around, a bit confused.

Before anyone else could speak, he seemed to recall something and scurried to the library door, pulling the power card from its slot.

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses and looked at Gu Mian. "Just before the instance ended, a strange wind surged up. I saw the sky and the ground collapsing, and we were kicked out of the instance even before the rewards were settled."

Hearing this, Gu Mian sighed and shook his head. This Goddess is really something else. We cleared the instance but got no rewards. It feels like we did all the work and got nothing in return.

Just then, Fatty trotted back, looking sheepish. He glanced at the guitar case next to Gu Mian. "Doctor, was it something you did? Near the end, I suddenly couldn't see you anymore."

Gu Mian raised his hands. "It really wasn't me this time."

But evidently, his claim wasn't very convincing.

Because 007 was looking at the latest game announcement.

[Announcement]

[The special instance 'Angel Redemption' has mysteriously disappeared. Reason unknown. All players will no longer be able to match with this instance in the future.]

"By the way," 007 looked at Fatty, "what was the name of the instance we just entered?"

Fatty was also looking at the announcement on his panel. "I remember it was called Angel Redemption..."

The two of them looked up at Gu Mian.

Gu Mian said, "...I'm kind of hungry. Let's go get something to eat."

Xiao Hong was still dutifully guarding the Spirit Car. If she didn't always press herself against the car window, leaving a sheet of drool, Gu Mian would have liked her more.

Meanwhile, 007, who hadn't slept for days and nights, lay in the Spirit Car covered with a blanket. Gu Mian sat near 007, his back to the windshield, studying the CD in his hands. Chu Changge was prying Xiao Hong off the rear window to prevent a drool deluge, while Fatty squatted beside the Spirit Car, pot in hand, contemplating the menu.

"007, what do you want to eat?" Fatty, peering through the open car door, asked 007 just as she was closing her eyes.

The young woman had no choice but to force open her eyelids, which felt almost glued shut. She mumbled groggily, "I want to sleep..."

Gu Mian was still studying the CD in his hand. Its front was plain white and looked unremarkable—not like the Black Cat Sheriff discs from his childhood, nor like an adult film.

He was still recalling the Goddess's last words:

"But there's just one tiny problem with this thing..."

A small problem?

Unfortunately, before she could finish, Gu Mian had already left the instance, and the Goddess had vanished along with it. What could this 'small problem' be?

Just then, Gu Mian suddenly noticed that Xiao Hong, who had been plastered to the rear window, had stopped drooling. She had turned around at some point and was now staring intently at him with that apologetic face of hers, as if scrutinizing some exotic species.

Beside her, Chu Changge was also looking over with a perplexed expression.

Fatty, outside the car door, looked as if his neck had gone rigid; he too had swiveled his head in their direction, his expression unreadable.

Even 007, nestled in her blanket, had her eyes wide open, craning her neck to stare fixedly at him.

Gu Mian paused, noticing everyone was looking at him...

What happened?

And just then, he felt a pair of hands encircle his shoulders from behind. Next, a voice, soft as a whisper, spoke right beside his ear—

"Sister."