

## **Collapse 471**

### Chapter 471 Class System of Copies in the Slave Society\_1

"No need." Fatty eyed the direction where the female ghost had disappeared.

Between Xiao Qiao and Liu Ruyan, Gu Mian chose the former without hesitation. Given Liu Ruyan's penchant for making waves, Gu Mian suspected she might drill a few holes in the dragon boat.

The activity started at seven in the morning, and it was one in the afternoon by the time they finished the third round.

So when Xiao Qiao appeared, the warm sun was hanging high above their heads.

The moment Xiao Qiao got on the boat, she was drawn to Chu Changge. She stared at Chu Changge's face for a few seconds before spitting out two words, "Fake."

"What?" Fatty also looked at Chu Changge in confusion. "Brother Chu is fake?"

Fatty repeatedly checked Chu Changge's player panel. "It's real. The name on it clearly says Chu Changge."

As everyone knew, ghosts didn't have player panels.

Xiao Qiao stared at Chu Changge's face again and repeated, "Fake."

Fatty patted Chu Changge on the shoulder. "Brother Chu, say something."

That's when he noticed the man in front of him had been eerily silent. Before Fatty could react, the man's face suddenly withered. It turned as dry and wrinkly as old tree bark, as if all moisture had been sucked out of him.

His body also swiftly slimmed down, becoming skin and bones, looking like a mere skeleton.

Gu Mian heard the skeletal thing make a noise, and then it dove wildly into the water.

When he looked again, it had vanished completely.

Fatty stared at the water, swallowing hard. "Damn, was it really a ghost? Where did Brother Chu go?"

A calm voice came from behind him, "I'm here."

Fatty turned around to see a familiar face right in front of him. Just moments ago, he'd seen this face become all wrinkled from dehydration.

Gu Mian pushed Xiao Qiao towards the newly appeared Chu Changge. "Is this one real?"

Xiao Qiao stared at his face for a while before nodding. "It's real."

Fatty, still shaken, looked at Chu Changge. "What just happened? A ghost impersonating Brother Chu... and I could even open the ghost's player panel. How did you come back, Brother Chu?"

"I'm not sure. I just saw it jump in when I arrived," Chu Changge answered succinctly.

"Ah, then you don't know what happened. Let me explain..." Fatty slapped his thigh.

Chu Changge quietly said, "You've already said that."

Fatty paused, recalling his last sentence. He realized he had indeed already summarized it.

"So what's the situation now?" Gu Mian recalled the appearance of the ghost. "Are we playing Werewolf, where we need to kill the werewolves to find our real teammates? Is it only targeting us, or is it affecting other players too?"

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "If a ghost could impersonate me, it's highly likely others could be impersonated too... What I mean is there might be other ghosts on our boat right now."

"Indeed there are." Gu Mian reached out and pulled up Xiao Hong, who was vigorously rowing the boat. Xiao Hong twisted his neck to look at them, his ugly face filled with confusion.

Then he reached out again and pulled up a soaked brother. "And there are two of them."

The brother Gu Mian had picked up looked up at him and shouted, "Sister!"

Chu Changge averted his gaze from the brother. "This proves that Gu Mian is real."

"Ah," Fatty rubbed his thigh. "So that means only Miss Xiao Qiao and I are suspects now."

Chu Changge looked at Fatty. "She's real too."

Fatty didn't quite understand how Chu Changge could verify identities just by looking. He paused for a few seconds before accepting Chu Changge's judgment. "Then how do I prove myself?"

Gu Mian glanced at the two who had vouched for each other, then looked at Fatty. "Let's do this: I'll ask you a question. If you answer it correctly, it means you're real."

"Alright, ask away." Fatty was already prepared to answer what color his underwear was today.

Gu Mian posed the question, "In third grade, you fell, ripped your pants during a long-distance race, and cried your eyes out. What place did you get in that race?"

"Third," Fatty answered reflexively, then he realized. "How did you know?"

Gu Mian gave him a meaningful look. "You talked in your sleep."

Fatty's expression was one of revelation. "I talk about this in my sleep?"

Having confirmed Fatty's identity, Gu Mian and the others continued at a steady pace.

Xiao Qiao was squatting next to Fatty. "I can't believe you ripped your pants, cried while running, and still got third place!"

Just as Fatty scratched his head, preparing to brag, Gu Mian's voice came through, "Because there were only four participants. Right, and the person in fourth place didn't even show up that day because they had diarrhea."

Fatty's neck stiffened. "Did I also say this in my sleep?"

Gu Mian didn't reply, so Fatty crawled over to Chu Changge. "Brother Chu, do I talk in my sleep?"

Chu Changge looked at the paper in his hand and shook his head. "I don't know."

Chu Changge had pulled out a pen and paper from somewhere and kept scribbling. Fatty didn't hear what he wanted to; instead, he heard Chu Changge intently analyzing, "Now there are two possibilities. One is that only we encountered a ghost switch. The second is that all players have encountered this, although they may not have discovered it yet.

"If it's the first possibility, the situation isn't that serious. But if it's the second, it means the game can now give many ghosts 'player' identities. Future instances will be even more dangerous.

"And if it's the second possibility, I guess this is a test. The game organizers are testing whether they can muddy the waters and sneak ghosts disguised with 'player' identities into the real world."

Gu Mian remembered Mr. Green, whom he had carried out of the instance. "It seems NPCs aren't too keen on entering the real world either."

Chu Changge capped his pen. "Mr. Green is considered a high-level NPC in the instance. He possesses independent thought and awareness of the existence of the instance world and the real world. But these ghosts are different. Class systems have existed since ancient times. To give an analogy, if Mr. Green is equivalent to a landlord in a slave society, then these ghosts are essentially slaves.

"High-level NPCs wouldn't undertake such arduous and dangerous tasks themselves; instead, they dispatch underlings to test the waters."

Gu Mian suddenly felt Chu Changge was like a scholar researching \*The Class System of Instances within a Slave Society\*.

"Brother Chu, you really know a lot," Fatty leaned in.

Chu Changge continued, "Of course, this test might not succeed. There are at least two game organizers, and one of them absolutely doesn't want to see such a situation happen. If many players are swapped, I suspect there might be a turning point in the next round. We're down to the last round now, right?"

Indeed, only Liu Ruyan was not on the boat now.

Chapter 472 Sexy Gu Mian Slacking off Online \_1

The last checkpoint appeared at three in the afternoon.

During this time, Gu Mian and his team rode their dragon boat through wind and waves. Chu Changge suggested letting the players in front test the waters, so their boat never rushed to the front.

Fatty had bought a pocket watch at some point, which he wore around his neck. The watch case was made of copper and looked quite antiquated.

He occasionally opened his pocket watch with a CLICK to check the time. At precisely three o'clock, Gu Mian saw the dragon boats on the screen ahead all stop moving.

The dragon boats were scattered across the river surface. Not many players participated in this activity with its high death rate, and after several rounds of selection, the remaining dragon boats were sparsely dispersed.

At this point, Gu Mian's boat also came to a halt. Fatty curiously peered at the water and saw Xiao Hong poke her head out, a puzzled expression on her rather plain face, as if she couldn't push the boat any further.

An option then appeared before Gu Mian and the others—

[Do you accept the last teammate?]

This crude choice alerted Fatty. "Why is there no formality this time? They're directly asking if we want someone... Could it be a trap?"

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses, "The event shouldn't set such a pointless trap."

While Chu Changge was still speaking, Gu Mian had already chosen "Yes."

Immediately, Liu Ruyan appeared on the boat.

After appearing, she first looked around and then lazily sat down, remarkably calm.

Fatty was already anxiously observing Liu Ruyan to see if she was an imposter.

The boat still wasn't moving. Xiao Hong could be seen pushing hard at the stern a few times, but the dragon boat didn't budge an inch.

Then, something else appeared before them.

[Fourth Checkpoint: Give and Take]

What the heck? Gu Mian stared quizzically at this bizarre fourth checkpoint. First, they were given a teammate, and then the checkpoint appeared—it was mind-boggling.

The checkpoint didn't elaborate on its contents. Gu Mian only saw the boat's hull transform from a dragon boat into a rickety vessel, and an old man suddenly materialized at the bow.

This old man had appeared out of thin air like a ghost. Standing at the bow, he swept his gaze over them before coldly announcing, "I am the boatman of this vessel. You will need to ride it for the next stage. Your current boat is overloaded. There must be give and take, loss and gain. You must abandon one person before I can ferry you."

Fatty's mouth fell slightly open, and he whispered, "Is this the turning point Brother Chu mentioned? Having to abandon one person... this must be to make players find the ghost hidden among their teammates, right? But why don't they just point out who the ghost is?"

"There might be some restriction," Chu Changge replied.

"But the ghost hidden among us already ran off," Fatty said, looking troubled. "And there's no one for us to abandon. Otherwise, should we try to explain it to this old man?"

Chu Changge continued, "But if he's determined to make things difficult for us, then nothing we say will work."

And indeed, the old man seemed intent on giving them a hard time.

No matter how Fatty tried to argue, he wouldn't listen, insisting they had to throw someone off.

Just as Fatty, agitated, was about to stand up, Gu Mian reached out and pressed him down. "That's right. You have to give something up to gain something; lose something to obtain something."

Fatty looked at Gu Mian in confusion. Gu Mian paused in thought for a moment, then kicked the boatman off the boat.

"Alright," Gu Mian said cheerfully. "Now we can move forward."

Fatty: "..."

Indeed, the boat began to move forward slowly again, though the two ghosts pushing it from the stern seemed to be struggling, and its speed had decreased considerably.

Gu Mian gazed contemplatively at the water's surface. "The speed has dropped so much. That old man really was useful. If he had been rowing, we would have been much faster."

Fatty nodded in agreement. "We should've tried to reason with him, appeal to his better nature, and persuade him to stay and help us..."

Gu Mian was still muttering to himself, "If I'd known earlier, I would've just tied a rope around him and thrown him into the water to push the boat."

Fatty choked on his words.

Despite not having a boatman, Xiao Hong and her brother—the two ghosts—weren't particularly slow. Their boat continued to move forward steadily, overtaking many other players.

But as their boat advanced, the waterway became increasingly narrower.

With the narrowing waters, boats had to steer towards the center, causing the players to become more densely packed. From his boat, Gu Mian could even spot other players in the distance.

"The Doctor's Gorgeous Fan Club" boat had previously garnered a lot of attention. However, everyone had since changed boats, and now none of them bore any names.

Consequently, Gu Mian and his companions didn't attract other players' notice.

But as the river grew narrower and the distance between players decreased, people began to notice something unusual.

Gu Mian noticed it too.

Every other boat had an old man standing at the bow, rowing. Only Gu Mian's boat moved as if on its own, gliding swiftly forward—it was extraordinarily strange.

If one looked carefully, they could see something under the stern, apparently pushing the boat. However, people didn't dare crane their necks too far, as they knew many ghosts were lurking in the water, waiting for an opportunity.

However, not too far away, one man had his neck craned out so far, staring in their direction, that he looked like he wished he could stretch it into a giraffe's. Gu Mian also noticed this particularly conspicuous player.

He glanced over and saw a somewhat familiar face.

For a moment, though, I can't recall who it is. Gu Mian thought.

Fatty had also spotted the man who looked like he wished he could turn into a giraffe and whispered to Gu Mian, "Doctor, an acquaintance."

Who was that again? Gu Mian silently tried to recall.

Fatty helpfully prompted, "I remember his username seems to be 'I Desire to Rule the World'."

Ah, the name sounds familiar too, but I forgot which instance we met this player in. Gu Mian thought.

Fatty continued, "The Mr. Green instance. He used a special item to trick you, Doctor, and you tore off his prompt card and pocketed it. Remember now?"

## Chapter 473 Plotting for Wealth and Killing Gu Bengbeng\_1

Gu Mian had gone all out with his disguise today. He was certain that even his own parents wouldn't recognize him, were they to come back from the dead.

But seeing how 'I Desire to Rule the World' was craning his neck as if trying to become a giraffe, Gu Mian knew he had likely been recognized. It seemed the affection this young fellow—whom he had previously tricked—held for him surpassed even that of his own parents.

Of course, Qi Tian might have noticed him only after recognizing Fatty and Chu Changge. But now was not the time to quibble over who was noticed first. Fatty quietly edged closer to Gu Mian. "Doctor, I think his gaze is up to no good. He looks like he's scheming something."

"I think so too," Gu Mian said, adjusting his dark-framed glasses. "After all, I tricked him pretty badly last time."

Fatty promptly chimed in, "Well, he was the one who harbored malicious intentions first."

Gu Mian looked towards Qi Tian's boat again. Besides an old man rowing, there were only three people on it. It appeared they had failed to clear two stages.

Qi Tian was about three or four hundred meters away. When he saw Gu Mian looking directly at him so brazenly, his gaze flickered, and he quickly averted his eyes.

Fatty noticed Qi Tian's expression too. He whispered, "He probably thought you, Doctor, would be too worried about being recognized to dare look at him. He certainly didn't anticipate you brazenly staring back. Look, it scared him into looking away."

"I wasn't glaring at him," Gu Mian corrected.

Although Qi Tian had looked away, he kept sneaking furtive glances in their direction, whispering to his companions. Soon, his companions were also casting sneaky looks over.

Gu Mian was actually quite worried Qi Tian might suddenly stand up, raise his arm, and shout, "Gu Mian is over there!"

The last time they met, it was in an instance. At that time, other players didn't know Gu Mian could truly die if killed within an instance, so they wouldn't have attacked him even if they encountered him. Back then, Qi Tian had only been trying to find out Gu Mian's real-world location. What a coincidence to run into him now. He's probably ecstatic right now, already scheming how to get his hands on those tens of thousands of Game Coins.

Fatty also sensed Gu Mian's unease. Just as he was tensing up, wondering how they should respond, he suddenly saw Gu Mian, who appeared deep in thought, lean over the water and say, "Xiao Hong, go and capsize that boat."

Fatty's throat tightened; the countless schemes and strategies in his mind were instantly rendered useless.

Xiao Hong, having received her orders, poked her head above the water. She wore an unwilling expression, as if Gu Mian were a procuress forcing an innocent girl into a life of vice, while she herself was a virtuous lady from a good family, pure and unstained despite being cast into the mire.

If this were a xianxia film, and some powerful monk came to capture evil spirits, Xiao Hong might even exclaim, "My beloved and I are truly in love; I never harm anyone!"

As for who this 'beloved' of hers actually was, that was a thought for another time.

While Gu Mian's imagination ran wild, the noble Xiao Hong, under Gu Mian's duress, reluctantly swam towards the other boat.

And just as Gu Mian had guessed, Qi Tian was indeed ecstatic. He was quietly describing Gu Mian's appearance to his two teammates.

His two teammates were named "Super Hunterman" and "Devil Incarnate Yang Lekai."

"Look over there, at the boat without a boatman..." Qi Tian lowered his head slightly, glancing in Gu Mian's direction. He saw Gu Mian lean over and say something to the water at the stern of his boat. Ripples spread from the stern, then quickly subsided.

Qi Tian paid it no mind. He continued in a low voice to his two teammates, "The one with the black-framed glasses and the scarf is Gu Mian."

Super Hunterman and Yang Lekai also took several quick glances in that direction. Yang Lekai spoke first, "The one on the wanted list?"

Qi Tian nodded. "He tricked me badly in an instance last time, so I remember him well. That Fat Kid Surnamed Wang and Chu Changge, who often team up with him, are right next to him. If you don't believe me, we can get a closer look later."

Super Hunterman sneaked another few glances in their direction. "Killing him is worth tens of thousands of Game Coins. Dying in an instance isn't true death, but now that we're in an event, isn't this a perfect opportunity?"

Qi Tian nodded. "But let's keep quiet about this. Not many people recognize Gu Mian. If word gets out, someone else might kill him first, and we wouldn't get anything... However, he already noticed me."

"He noticed you?" Super Hunterman frowned. "Then it'll be hard for us to make a move. He might even try to silence us first."

"No need to worry. With so many people here, he definitely wouldn't dare expose his identity. If he tries to make a move on us, I'll immediately shout out his identity. He'll know I'd do that, so he won't dare to act rashly," Qi Tian said, his brow smoothing. "As long as I have this leverage, I can keep him in check."

Even if they failed to kill Gu Mian in the end, Qi Tian could still expose Gu Mian's identity and let other players do the job.

Having been outwitted by Gu Mian in an instance before, Qi Tian relished the thought of causing him trouble, even if there was no reward in it for him.

Just as the three of them were overjoyed, discussing how to use this leverage to threaten Gu Mian, they suddenly heard a THUD, as if something had struck their boat.

They all turned to look and saw a fair-skinned, slender hand emerge from the water, firmly gripping the gunwale.

It was unmistakably the hand of a beautiful woman. If it hadn't emerged from the water, the three of them might have been more pleased.

Before they could react, the slender hand seemed to exert force. Their boat abruptly lost balance and was tipped to one side by that single hand.

The three on board immediately tumbled to one side. Amidst the chaos, Qi Tian thought he vaguely saw Gu Mian on the distant boat, a crafty grin on his face. He even seemed to hear a faint "HEE HEE HEE" sound.

Before Qi Tian could figure out what was happening, the entire boat capsized, trapping everyone underneath the water.

Fatty stared at the capsized boat in the distance and swallowed hard. "Doctor, theoretically, villains don't die that easily. For the sake of the plot, they need to pop up a few times to get their faces slapped. If they're killed off in one go, sure, it's satisfying at the moment, but then the thrill is gone for good..."

"Speak plainly," Gu Mian interrupted.

Fatty swallowed again. "I don't think he'll die that easily."

Sure enough, Qi Tian struggled and flailed to the surface; it seemed he could swim.

At this moment, he seemed to have figured out what had happened. Struggling, he turned to look in their direction, his mouth agape in fury as if to shout Gu Mian's name: "Gu..."

But before he could utter the first syllable, a hand shot out from the water and clamped over his mouth.

Then, Qi Tian was violently dragged underwater, until not even a bubble rose to the surface.

Gu Mian watched the scene intently. Yep, completely dead.

Chapter 474 We are all Meiren Chu\_1

Fatty stared speechlessly at the spot where Qi Tian's boat had sunk. "That was a bit of an unceremonious death..."

Gu Mian adopted a sorrowful expression and said, "This isn't a television drama. The fact is, anyone can die arbitrarily. Take Qi Tian, for example. Of course, I could be next."

Fatty curled his lip. "Doctor, you're really good at cursing yourself... Can you stop feigning such sadness? Do you see any other players acting like you?"

The sight of Qi Tian's capsized boat had drawn the attention of the surrounding players, but they didn't keep their eyes on his boat for long. They merely saw a struggling figure in the water manage a desperate 'GLUG!' before sinking out of sight.

Of course, no one would suspect Gu Mian, who stood at a distance, eyes brimming with tears, wearing an expression of profound sorrow and compassion for Qi Tian.

Having grown accustomed to deaths during the event, the players showed little sympathy for the capsized boat. Their attention was mainly still on Gu Mian's boat.

This boat was particularly strange; it lacked a boatman but moved forward on its own, a true oddity slowly emerging on the river's surface.

The river was getting narrower now. Chu Changge suddenly said, "The Liannu River shouldn't have such narrow waters. The event must have altered the terrain here. The final stage of the game will likely require many players to gather together."

Fatty, also gazing at the increasingly tightening banks ahead, said, "Right, if we continue like this, we'll certainly run into other players. At that point, we'll be able to see each other's game nicknames. Although Doctor's nickname is disguised, people will still find mine and Brother Chu's familiar..."

Gu Mian wiped away the deceitful tears from the corners of his eyes, took off the [Blood-Stained School Badge], and returned it to Chu Changge. "My nickname, 'Doctor', is green. Chu Changge's nickname can also be concealed by this special item. Now we just need to solve the issue with your nickname, Fatty."

A chill ran down Fatty's spine. "How do we solve it?"

Fatty's heart screamed in protest as Gu Mian plopped down on him.

Gu Mian actually wanted Fatty to lie down and hide, attempting to prevent other players from seeing him in the boat. However, Fatty's build was so large that even if he sucked in his stomach, other players could spot the distinct bulge on their boat even from a great distance.

In the end, Fatty wore the school badge, and his nickname changed to Meiren Chu, while Chu Changge lay down in the boat.

Chu Changge was considerably smaller than Fatty. Gu Mian even deliberately used his guitar to cover Chu Changge, making it hard to spot the hidden person on their boat without looking very closely.

However, while Gu Mian was doing all this, many players were still watching from a distance. They saw Chu Changge lie down in the boat but had no idea what he was doing.

Fatty looked around. "Besides Qi Tian just now, there are no familiar faces here. As long as Brother Chu doesn't expose his nickname, there should be no problems."

"There may not be anyone you know," Gu Mian's voice came eerily from the side, "but that doesn't mean there isn't anyone I know."

Fatty's brain froze. He rigidly turned his head. "You have an acquaintance? A former colleague? Schoolmate? I remember you entered some instances alone."

Fatty was right; Gu Mian had joined some instances alone.

The person Gu Mian was looking at now was someone only he had met; neither Fatty nor Chu Changge had seen this individual.

Actually, Gu Mian only recognized her face; he didn't know her name. Their encounter had occurred in an instance where player nicknames weren't displayed.

It was that love matchmaking show hosted by Teacher Sweet. Gu Mian remembered it was called 'Sweet Lovers'.

The person Gu Mian was now looking at was one of the female players from that show. Upon entering that instance, she had killed another player and taken their place, all unbeknownst to everyone else. It was in that same instance that Gu Mian had met the Fortune-teller. After the Fortune-teller exposed her identity, the female player had even tried to kill them to silence them. However, Gu Mian had suddenly crawled out from under a bed, scaring her away.

This female player was still quite far from Gu Mian and his group. He saw her glance their way a few times, seemingly unintentionally, before turning her head away as if she hadn't recognized him.

Fatty, quick-eyed, had already pinpointed the "acquaintance" Gu Mian was looking at. He also stared in that direction for several seconds.

Then, Gu Mian saw Fatty ponder for a moment before speaking, "That stage where we borrowed a beauty to pass... do you think we could borrow this one too?"

Gu Mian's eyebrow twitched. "All you know is to look at beauties. If you like them so much, why don't you transform into one?"

Fatty chuckled unabashedly.

Anzhi Tianlan didn't expect to encounter this player again during the event. Ever since their encounter in the 'Sweet Lovers' instance, she had realized this player was not to be trifled with, so she had done her best to hide her identity during that instance. But this time, she had run right into him.

She had long noticed that peculiar, boatman-less boat and the player on it who was so thoroughly wrapped up it was hard to make out their features. Though the disguise was strange, her keen senses still picked up on something.

Anzhi Tianlan, observing intently, had witnessed Qi Tian's boat capsize, the sound Qi Tian made as he went under, and the strange smile on the black-framed glasses-wearing man's face right after—a smile instantly replaced by a hypocritical, sorrowful expression.

Anzhi Tianlan was certain that man was involved in the capsizing. She carefully considered the sound that sinking person had desperately made in their last moments.

Gu?

"Tianlan," a female player next to her called her name, "What's up with you? You seem to be daydreaming."

Anzhi Tianlan quickly responded, "Nothing, I was just spacing out."

After saying this, she threw another deep glance in Gu Mian's direction.

"Doctor, it seems she didn't recognize you," Fatty glanced in her direction before turning back. "But it's also possible that she recognizes you but is pretending not to."

Gu Mian rubbed his chin. "The instance we traversed didn't display nicknames."

Fatty also mimicked Gu Mian, pinching his own fleshy chin. "That's even better! Doctor, your name was already hidden, so this person doesn't even know your fake name, let alone your real identity."

But it seems she recognizes me, this 'acquaintance', yet she's pretending not to... Maybe she's guessed something, Gu Mian thought.

Just then, the final stage of the dragon boat racing event suddenly began.

Chapter 475 No Dogs Allowed\_1

Perhaps because the event had altered the terrain, the Liannu River's surface was now much narrower, drawing a large number of players together.

Gu Mian noticed grid-like patterns appearing on the water surface ahead, resembling a chessboard. Following that, an introduction for this stage appeared before him.

[Minefield Waterway]

[The water route ahead has been divided into a grid. The grid is split into safe zones and bomb zones. The first row contains no bomb zones. Bomb zones explode every minute. Players within a bomb zone when it explodes will have their boats immediately overturned. Upon entering a grid square, it will display a number. This number indicates the total count of bomb zones within that square and its adjacent squares. Please navigate through the safe grid squares to reach the destination.]

Gu Mian saw a sixty-second countdown in the sky ahead. Every time the countdown reached "0," boats in the bomb zones would be overturned.

This was quite similar to the "Minesweeper" game they usually played on the computer. Gu Mian and his companions' boat was not at the very front. He saw that many of the boats ahead that had entered the grid zone were already overturned.

Of course, not everyone knew how to play Minesweeper. Gu Mian, for instance, had only played casually when bored, randomly clicking around without any real strategy.

Gu Mian had always been unlucky and often triggered a mine right at the start. But that didn't matter much, as he wouldn't actually get blown up by hitting a mine in the computer game. Things were different now, though. Triggering a mine here meant he could actually get blown up.

Quite a few people at the front had already died.

Real-life Minesweeper was different from the computer version. On the computer, you could click any grid square. But here, their boats couldn't fly; they had to enter from an edge, cross the center, and then exit the area.

Their boat had now reached the first row of the grid.

Gu Mian quickly scanned the area, noting that the grid here had seven rows and seven columns. Each grid square was quite large, making it somewhat different from the computer game Minesweeper.

As expected, the first row had no mines. The boats that had capsized all started doing so from the second row onwards.

Currently, the leading boat was in the third row. Gu Mian saw a few players on it craning their necks to observe the surrounding water grids. Other players had followed this boat's route, but unfortunately, their boats got blown up, suggesting the mine locations differed for each boat.

Fairly confident, Gu Mian directed his older brother and Xiao Hong into the rightmost grid square of the first row. Soon after, the number "1" appeared above their boat.

"I get it," Fatty said, looking up at the number above their boat. "This means one of the adjacent grids has a bomb."

Technically, there was a simple way to clear this stage: dash through the grid zone within sixty seconds.

But that was highly improbable.

Every boat was now equipped with a boatman who rowed at a leisurely pace. Gu Mian had observed earlier that the boats could move a maximum of three grid squares per minute, roughly the distance from the first to the third row.

Even if they charged forward at full speed, it would still take them over two minutes to cross the entire area. Those who tried to rush straight through usually had their boats overturned halfway.

The boat that had been in the lead also capsized for entering the wrong grid square, causing other players to halt.

Fatty sounded troubled. "They just give us one number and expect us to navigate blindly? This is all down to luck! There are three squares around us; who knows which one has the bomb?"

Meanwhile, Chu Changge, whose head had popped up at some point, was quietly observing the boats ahead.

"The first row has no bombs. The bombs can only be in the two grid squares in front of us. Let's move horizontally first and see," Gu Mian directed Xiao Hong to move the boat one square to the left. A new number, "2," rose above their boat.

This indicated two bombs among the five surrounding grid squares. However, since the first row contained no bombs, the two bombs had to be in the three squares directly ahead.

This still didn't reveal much, so the group moved one more square to the left. The third grid square from the right in the first row still showed the number "2."

Fatty ruffled his hair. "So, two of the three squares ahead have bombs. That means the far-right square in the second row must be safe, and the one to our front-left is also safe."

As Gu Mian's group was moving, a minute passed. By now, other players had reached the third row.

Just as Gu Mian was about to head for the grid square to their front-left, Chu Changge, still only showing his head, suddenly spoke up, "The second, fourth, and sixth squares in the third row, counting from right to left, are safe. No players in those squares have capsized.

"Meanwhile, all the odd-numbered squares in the third row, counting from right to left, will explode. I observed earlier that the boatmen row at a speed of three grid squares per minute. I guess this is a hint from the event."

Fatty looked around, completely baffled by Chu Changge's words.

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "The event must be trying to prevent players from rushing through a single column. Players can only move three squares per minute. Even if you charge forward recklessly, you can only reach the third row before the explosion. If it's as Chu Changge said—that in the third row, even-numbered squares are safe and odd-numbered ones are bombs—then in the sixth row, the even-numbered squares must be unsafe. Furthermore, the odd-numbered ones in the sixth row won't necessarily be safe either."

After changing boats, his older brother and Xiao Hong were noticeably slower, hardly faster than the boatmen. So Gu Mian couldn't just rush through.

Chu Changge continued, "The maximum speed for an average player is three squares per minute. I've noticed that starting from a safe square, there's always another safe square within the next three squares. The event organizers wouldn't put players in a no-win situation."

Gu Mian looked ahead, frowning. "Based on the third row's pattern—odds explode, evens are safe—and the sixth row having deadly evens, plus a safe square within every three... Xiao Hong, on my command."

Fatty also frowned, an ominous premonition creeping over him. Here we go, he thought, as Gu Mian, that unlucky fellow, began to issue commands, "We're currently in the third square from the right in the first row. Move one square left, then two squares forward..."

That would take them to the fourth square in the third row, a completely safe spot.

The fourth square in the second row (which they had passed) displayed the number "4."

Their boat now showed the number "6," indicating six bomb zones around them.

Just as the two ghosts managed to strenuously push the boat into this square, the bomb zones detonated, capsizing boats in the squares on either side of them.

Before the surrounding players could process this new development, they saw the man in the black-rimmed glasses unhesitatingly give more instructions, "Two more squares forward."

The boat, which had no boatman, began to glide forward as if possessed.

At this point, however, no one cared if the boat was possessed. They swallowed hard, watching it move further and further away. "So reckless! Aren't they afraid of getting blown up?"

Chapter 476 Grand Dragon Boat Event\_1

Chu Changge poked out half of his head, his eyes surreptitiously observing the surroundings. He did not offer any comments on Gu Mian's actions but was thoughtfully staring at the ripples beneath the boat.

By now, one of the men and Xiao Hong had already pushed the boat into the first square ahead, displaying the number "5." Before Fatty could analyze this number, the boat continued to move forward, crossing the square marked with "5" and entering the fifth row ahead. The square they were now in displayed the number "4," indicating that there were four bomb zones among the nine squares comprising their current position and its immediate surroundings.

The boat stopped, halting in the fifth row.

Fatty was somewhat anxious; he didn't know whether the square he was in was a bomb zone or not. Sixty seconds were not up yet, but they were quickly approaching.

After a slight contemplation, Gu Mian spoke quickly, "Based on previous deductions, the square directly in front of us must be a bomb zone. Furthermore, based on the numbers from the squares we've just passed, we can infer that within this nine-square grid, the row behind us has two bomb zones, the row in front has at least one, and the remaining bomb zone could be in our current row or the row ahead."

Fatty was a bit puzzled, "Doctor, how did you figure that out..."

Before Gu Mian could answer, Chu Changge's soft voice came, "Just draw a picture and you will know."

Gu Mian continued, "So our square, plus the two adjacent ones, make a combination of three squares. Within these three squares, there is either one bomb zone or none. Hence, our current position is the safest."

Fatty vaguely understood some of it, "Doctor, you're gambling, huh? What makes you so confident about your luck? Have you forgotten what you've drawn each time you play a lottery?"

Hearing this, images of the phrase "Thank You for Your Patronage" in different fonts flashed through Gu Mian's mind. After being confronted with those characters for some time, Gu Mian had even forgotten how to write "Thank You".

He shrugged off those four words swirling in his mind and patted Fatty's shoulder, "Don't worry, those who capsized their boats weren't blown to death."

Upon hearing this, Fatty looked around keenly, just in time to witness a boat overturn in the distance behind them. Fatty watched with wide eyes as the people from the capsized boat fell into the water, struggling. But they were immediately dragged under the water by the hungry Evil Ghosts lurking beneath.

The ghosts lurked around each boat like fish waiting to feast, latching on at the sight of flesh.

Gu Mian put his hand on Fatty's shoulder again, "Look under our boat again."

Fatty did as instructed. The water of the Liannu River wasn't clear, but you could still see about a meter or two underwater.

To his surprise, there was nothing under their boat, not even a single ghost. It was a stark contrast to the scene under the other players' boats, as if their boat was emitting a foul smell that deterred the countless Evil Ghosts from approaching.

Only Xiao Hong casually swam around the boat, her red dress fluttering flirtatiously as if she were trying to entice someone. Of course, Xiao Hong had successfully attracted someone. Xiao Qiao kept reaching into the water to tug at her red dress, much to Xiao Hong's annoyance as she flailed about.

Gu Mian patted the dust off Fatty's clothes, "See? The ghosts are so considerate. They're avoiding you so as not to scare you. So even if the boat capsizes, we'll be fine."

Feeling Gu Mian's hand on his shoulder, Fatty shivered, "Doctor, are you sure they moved away to avoid scaring me?"

Just as Fatty was contemplating who was scaring whom, the sixty seconds were up.

Fatty instinctively ducked, bracing for the boat to sink. However, their square surprisingly did not explode.

On the contrary, some boats in the third row behind them, which were carelessly trying to surge forward, capsized.

"See, my luck isn't always terrible," Gu Mian straightened up and began to direct, "There are only two rows ahead. We can dash straight through them in sixty seconds. Xiao Hong, stop squirming and push the boat."

With that, Xiao Hong, who was reluctantly swaying in the water, began to push the boat again.

By this time, Gu Mian's group at the very front had already attracted the attention of the players trailing behind them.

The players who hadn't been able to cross the fourth row helplessly watched as a boat charged straight ahead, successfully clearing the last row in one go.

The players who were wracking their brains to analyze the numbers gaped in astonishment.

"What the hell?"

"It seems like that boat just kept moving forward in a straight line without really stopping. Did they recklessly charge onwards, not caring about their lives, and luckily made it through in the end?"

"I've been quite curious all this while about where the boatman on that boat vanished."

At this moment, Fatty was perched at the stern of their boat, looking back at the other boats with lingering fear, "Although it might sound like I'm gloating after getting off easy, I feel this event is relatively simple..."

By now, Chu Changge had already sat up. He gazed at the players still stuck in the mine-sweeping zone, "The players who fell into the water certainly wouldn't agree with you."

Fatty thought carefully for a moment, "You're right."

There were only two stages to the dragon boat race event. After the minesweeper segment, one could sprint straight to the finish.

It was well-known that there would be a distinct marker at the finish line, and at this moment, Gu Mian spotted a red line stretched across the river surface in the far distance.

Victory was within sight, and provided there were no unexpected bumps along the way, Gu Mian and his crew would be the first to finish the event.

The sun was now leaning towards the west, about to set. Fatty sat at the stern of their boat under the setting sun, gazing behind them, "Going by my years of experience reading novels, the protagonist often encounters a setback just when he's about to succeed. For instance, the boat might suddenly split apart or another team might suddenly appear out of nowhere to snatch first place."

"We'd then become adversaries with that team and find out that all the players on that boat are proud sons of heaven, geniuses. We wouldn't be able to defeat them, and they'd mock us. We would then roar something like, 'What goes around comes around. We'll fight again in ten years' and embark on a journey of leveling up, overcoming monsters, and humiliating opponents," Gu Mian's voice suddenly interrupted Fatty's daydream.

Fatty stared at Gu Mian in surprise, "Doctor, how are you so clear on this?"

Gu Mian flashed a small smile, "It's a standard fantasy novel trope. I could even write one."

Fatty was left speechless.

Reality is often much more drab, lacking the twists and turns of fantasy.

The dark horse that Fatty had imagined didn't appear. Under the setting sun, they moved forward quietly and crossed the finish line just as peacefully.

However, the situation after crossing the finish line was anything but quiet.

[Congratulations to the players who came first in the 'Dragon Boat Race' event: Gu Mian, Meiren Chu, Chu Changge, Xiao Qiao, Liu Ruyan]

[Players will be teleported out of the event once they have selected their rewards]

These were the words that appeared in the sky the second after they crossed the finish line.

As Fatty was still wearing Meiren Chu's badge, his nickname was still Meiren Chu.

Gu Mian silently looked up at the large characters "Gu Mian" in the sky, "Well, now everyone knows that Gu Mian was on the boat that charged ahead."

Chapter 477 "This won't work, make changes!"\_1

Luckily, they could leave right after picking their items.

Gu Mian now understood what "distributing rewards based on rankings" meant. It involved presenting a pile of rewards for people to choose from, with higher-ranked individuals picking first. Naturally, those at the front wouldn't leave anything good for those behind.

At that moment, huge screens appeared before Gu Mian and the others.

Fatty first glanced at the line at the top of the screen that read, "Choose One Special Item," then shifted his gaze to the dazzling array of special items displayed.

As the first-place winner, he naturally had to choose the most precious special item. It was clear at a glance which of these items were more valuable, as the few in the top row were all marked "Rare." Fatty's eyes roamed over these particular items.

[God's Map], [Everbright Lantern], [Mr. Gu's Artwork], [Paranormal Editor Simulator], [Ten-Person Group Chat], [Ghost-Emitting Closet]...

Just as Fatty was avidly eyeing these special items, he suddenly noticed Gu Mian's gaze drifting.

He turned his head and saw Gu Mian, who was wearing black-framed glasses, looking from one side to the other, observing the screens in front of the others.

"What's wrong, Doctor?" Fatty asked, looking at Gu Mian with some confusion.

Gu Mian stopped turning his head and pushed up his glasses. "Nothing, I just wanted to confirm if the items on your screens are the same as mine."

Hearing this, Fatty asked in surprise, "They're not the same?"

As he spoke, he looked up at the screen in front of Gu Mian.

The screen in front of Gu Mian was just as large as theirs, only... "Just one item?" Fatty's eyes widened slightly as he looked at Gu Mian's screen.

There was nothing flashy on Gu Mian's screen; only one special item was available for selection. It was an antique-looking key, the style of which Fatty had seen in many period dramas—they looked just like the keys used to open prison cell doors.

Moreover, this key had no description or instructions for use. It just sat there forlornly in the middle of the screen.

Gu Mian even suspected for a moment, Has my screen frozen?

"Doctor, it seems you have no other choice," Fatty said, blinking as he looked at Gu Mian's screen. "On the bright side, protagonists in novels always get something unique. Maybe this is it?"

"Let's hope so." Having no other choice, Gu Mian had to select this seemingly ordinary key.

After he made his selection, the slightly rusty key immediately materialized in Gu Mian's hand. Holding the palm-length key, he examined it from every angle but couldn't discern anything special about it.

Gu Mian frowned. Perhaps it's used to open some kind of door? There are no instructions or description... Could it be used to open something indescribable?

At this thought, Gu Mian had a fleeting urge. Should I try poking my own skull with it?

Just as Gu Mian was itching to try it out, Fatty had already selected his item.

[Everbright Lantern]

[Description: A lantern emitting a soft, blue light. Fragile, please handle with care.]

[Function: Perpetually emits a blue glow, illuminating a twenty-meter radius. Ghosts cannot perceive this lamp's light. Invisible ghosts entering the illuminated area will immediately become visible.]

This item was like a high-powered flashlight from a horror game, but ghosts couldn't see the light it produced. Even if you pressed the lantern to a ghost's face, it wouldn't react.

This way, he wouldn't have to worry about the light revealing his position at night.

Actually, Fatty had another reason for choosing this.

During the 'Close Your Eyes' instance, Gu Mian had obtained a "Ghost Card." The holder's presence would drastically decrease between 8:00 PM and 3:00 AM. Gu Mian gave this card to Fatty. Although his presence was greatly reduced during this period, he could still be discovered by a ghost if he did something conspicuous. Therefore, Fatty specifically chose the [Everbright Lantern]. It would allow him to detect any ghost that came within twenty meters, so he could prepare in advance.

"Of course, if I'm always with you, Doctor, I wouldn't need to prepare for anything. But who knows when an instance might separate us... or an event might," Fatty said, caressing the lantern in his hand. "With this lantern and the Ghost Card you gave me, Mom won't have to worry about me being caught by a ghost at night anymore!"

Actually, Fatty had initially considered choosing [Mr. Gu's Artwork].

Because "Mr. Gu" somehow reminded him of Gu Mian, giving it a sense of familiarity.

But he didn't choose it, thinking, It's a bit perverse to feel such familiarity with a special item.

Chu Changge chose the [Paranormal Editor Simulator LV.1], a pen-shaped special item.

[Description: "This won't do, change it!"]

[Function: Can alter reality within its capabilities. For example, writing 'disappear' on a bed to make the bed vanish, or writing 'open' on a door to open a jammed door. Can only be used once per day.]

[Note: This item is an upgradable special item; its level is related to the number of uses. It can only alter non-living objects and is ineffective against living organisms. Please use this item within its capacity. Attempting modifications beyond its capability will result in a backlash.]

For example, if he wrote "Earth explode" on the ground, Chu Changge himself would probably be the one to explode.

Xiao Qiao chose the [Ten-Person Group Chat]. This item had no physical form; it was simply a group chat.

[Description: There are always people in the world who have nothing better to do than chat in groups. This is a ten-person group chat. You can send messages anytime, anywhere.]

[Function: Group members can open the group chat to communicate at any time, regardless of whether they are in an instance or in the real world.]

While Gu Mian was fiddling with the key in his hand, a panel appeared in front of him.

[Player Xiao Qiao invites you to join 'Ten-Person Group Chat.' Do you accept?]

Gu Mian's finger twitched as he clicked "Accept." After joining, he found that Chu Changge and Fatty were already there; even Liu Ruyan was in the group.

"This is great stuff!" Fatty exclaimed happily. "Now we won't have to worry about being scattered in instances and unable to communicate anymore."

Liu Ruyan chose the [Ghost-Emitting Closet].

Gu Mian thought, I really want that. After placing the closet, the next ghost to appear will definitely emerge from it. It can only be used three times.

Gu Mian thought, That's a great tool for lying in wait. Too bad I could only choose this plain-looking key.

Besides these special items, all five of them also received their examination admission tickets.

Gu Mian was currently holding his examination admission ticket.

[Name: Gu Mian]

[Admission Ticket Number: 000001]

[Examination Site: Lianhua University, Building 6, Room 208]

[Seat Number: 01]

[Examination Time: June 8th, 19:00–24:00]

Gu Mian gazed at the words "Lianhua University" and fell into deep thought.

"Doctor," Fatty leaned over. "I remember we met in Lianhua City. That's your hometown, isn't it?"

Chapter 478 He's Just a Child!\_1

Gu Mian glanced at Fatty. "It seems you still remember almost running me over the first time we met."

Fatty swallowed nervously. "You didn't die in the end, did you..."

After selecting their special items and receiving their admission tickets, they were teleported out of the activity area and back to the dilapidated apartment building where they were temporarily staying. By now, the sun had already set, leaving only a faint afterglow to illuminate the earth.

The dragon boat racing event would continue until midnight, and it wasn't even seven o'clock yet.

Gu Mian didn't dwell on the life-or-death issue. He said, "Chu Changge is very familiar with Lianhua University; he's a student there."

Fatty looked at Chu Changge, scratching his chin in puzzlement. "Doctor, you two don't attend the same school?"

"We did, before university," Gu Mian raised his eyebrows.

At this, Chu Changge returned to his room and came back with paper and a pen. "That's right, I'm a student at that school, so I'm very familiar with it."

As he spoke, he began sketching something on the paper with a black pen. Gu Mian glanced over; it was a map of the school.

While Chu Changge was drawing the map, Fatty started complaining about the next day's event. "They call it a College Entrance Exam event, but who holds college entrance exams from 7:00 p.m. to midnight... By the way, Doctor, what do you think the exam will cover?"

Gu Mian walked to the window, looking at the evening sky. "I doubt it'll cover things like complex analysis or calculus. It'll probably be something similar to the Spirit Car instance."

After all this time, Gu Mian still remembered the "Dancing with Shadows" option he had seen in the Spirit Car instance.

Fatty had already looked at everyone's admission tickets. He noticed that while all their exam locations were at Lianhua University, their admission ticket numbers, exam halls, and seat numbers were all different.

Gu Mian was in Building No. 6, Room 208, Seat No. 01.

Chu Changge was in Building No. 3, Room 602, Seat No. 24.

Liu Ruyan was in the same exam hall as Chu Changge, her seat number 25. They should be seated next to each other.

As for Fatty himself, he and Xiao Qiao were both in Building No. 11.

However, Xiao Qiao was in Room 701, while Fatty was in Room 503.

Chu Changge drew the map quickly. By the time the hour hand of the wall clock pointed to 7:00, he had roughly sketched out the map of Lianhua University.

He was currently pointing at the map on the table as he spoke, "Lianhua University has two main gates, the South Gate and the North Gate; a total of twelve academic buildings, numbered 1 through 12; and eight dormitory buildings, also numbered. Dormitories 1 through 4 are for female students, and the rest are for male students."

As he spoke, he used his pen to tap a building in the top-left corner of the map. "This is your exam building, Gu Mian, Academic Building No. 6. It's in the far northwest corner, the closest academic building to the girls' dormitories. If you try hard enough, you can even see into the girls' dorms."

Fatty was slightly startled. "Brother Chu, you sure know your way around."

Chu Changge's hand moved to the right, his pen tapping a building in the top row, sandwiched between two others. "This is Academic Building No. 11, Fatty and Xiao Qiao's exam location. It's very close to the North Gate."

Then, his pen moved again, pointing to a building in the lower-left area, closest to the South Gate. "This is Liu Ruyan's and my exam hall, Building No. 3, the one nearest to the South Gate."

"It's so convenient having Brother Chu around," Fatty said, looking at the map in Chu Changge's hand. "We won't have to worry about going to the wrong exam hall."

Gu Mian, who had been listening quietly, interjected, "You seem to be missing the main point."

Fatty paused, stunned. He stared at the map for a good while before finally asking, "Have we been split up?"

"Glad you finally noticed."

And quite far apart, too.

The content and rules for tomorrow's College Entrance Exam event hadn't been announced. Gu Mian was sure teachers would be there on-site to explain everything.

Perhaps there will even be proctors...

But will those teachers be real teachers?

Gu Mian didn't need to memorize it. He had grown up in Lianhua City. In elementary school, his teachers often took the class to visit Lianhua University. Of course, they originally had better places for field trips, but given that their class trips were always plagued by minor accidents, the teachers specifically chose the seemingly benign and harmless campus. Since he lived close to the university, Gu Mian, who rarely set foot in a kitchen, often went to the Lianhua University cafeteria to scrounge food and drinks. For some unknown reason, every time he visited that cafeteria, some small mishap would occur.

Fatty's Everbright Lantern was very useful at night. The sun had set long ago, and the room was gradually darkening. With the lantern placed there, they didn't even need to turn on the electric lights.

While Fatty was yawning and memorizing the map by the lantern's eerie blue glow, Gu Mian lifted his blanket and discovered a soundly sleeping baby in his bed.

A green baby, about the length of a laptop, and quite horrifying to look at.

The moment he saw the baby, Gu Mian's first thought was, Xiao Hong secretly had a baby behind my back!

Meanwhile, Xiao Hong, blissfully unaware that she had "given birth," was happily taking selfies with her phone.

Just as Xiao Hong snapped a selfie, Gu Mian had another thought. He remembered something—That IOU!

He had drawn that IOU when selecting a special item, which resulted in him owing the Nine-headed Baby ten thousand Game Coins.

However, due to various unforeseen incidents, the ten thousand Game Coin debt had not yet been successfully repaid.

Fatty's Everbright Lantern could reveal invisible ghosts, which was why Gu Mian could now see the Nine-headed Baby that had been stealthily lurking beside him.

When it came to debts, Gu Mian figured, There's an excellent way to handle this.

He cheerfully unzipped his guitar case. "Since we can't resolve the debt, we'll just have to resolve the person who got me into debt."

Just then, Fatty happened to turn his head and saw Gu Mian raising a cleaver towards a little green demon. Fatty blanched and wanted to yell the classic line, "He's just a child!" But then, remembering the Nine-headed Baby and the ten thousand Game Coins, his expression shifted. Gu Mian read the new look on his face as, Go on, go on.

Chapter 479 Oligo\_1

Facts proved that children are creatures easily woken once they fall asleep.

Gu Mian had barely moved the saw to the Nine-headed baby's neck when the green, ghostly little creature suddenly opened its eyes. It was awake.

Gu Mian wasn't sure how a normal baby would react to seeing a saw above its head upon waking, but this child, upon seeing the chainsaw overhead, immediately jumped off the bed and ran.

Its speed was so fast it seemed as if it had anticipated its fate today; judging by its practiced maneuvers, it must have rehearsed this several times.

Gu Mian watched as the green creature sprang from his bed, darted towards the window, burst through the closed curtains, and then shattered the glass window.

Gu Mian first heard the sound of shattering glass, followed by the thud of a heavy object hitting the ground.

Then, there seemed to be a faint cry from downstairs.

By the time he reached the window, the green child was nowhere to be seen.

Gu Mian peered down from the window, his gaze fixed. "The debtor has run off."

Fatty had joined Gu Mian. "That's the first time I've ever seen a creditor run faster than the debtor... Speaking of which, Doctor, did you hear any other sounds just now?"

Gu Mian nodded. "Yes, someone shouted from downstairs."

But now, there wasn't a soul in sight below.

Throwing objects from a height wasn't exactly legal, so scaring passersby was understandable.

However, their location was quite remote, and players didn't usually linger in desolate places at night. Gu Mian figured the sound might have been directed at them.

Perhaps someone secretly spying on them had been scared half to death by the Nine-headed baby bursting out the window.

Although the Nine-headed baby was a child, it was still a ghost. The person downstairs probably hadn't expected someone to throw a ghost out of a window.

Fatty also realized something was amiss. "Even if we're not sure how we attracted their attention, shouldn't we do something? It'll be troublesome if they charge in here in the middle of the night to rob us."

Gu Mian glanced at Fatty. "Would you rob someone who throws ghosts out of a window in the middle of the night?"

Fatty seriously considered Gu Mian's question, then silently shook his head.

Besides, they still had two ghosts in their room, helpful for guarding the house.

Why did these two ghosts ignore the Nine-headed baby? Gu Mian wondered. Could it be because it was green and therefore looked harmless and non-toxic?

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "We can't stay here too long. At the latest, we can leave after the college entrance exam event finishes tomorrow. Let's stay one more night."

However, the hole smashed by the Nine-headed baby was quite large, and a draft was whistling in.

Gu Mian considered for a moment, then moved Xiao Hong, who was fiddling with her phone, to sit on the windowsill, perfectly blocking the hole.

"Xiao Hong is so kind," Gu Mian praised, pulling the blanket over himself and drifting off to sleep.

He hadn't slept long, however, before several loud car horns woke him. These days, few people could afford cars, so horn blasts were rare.

In his drowsy state, Gu Mian initially thought it was the horn of their Spirit Car, but he soon realized something was off.

This horn sounded different from their Spirit Car.

Gu Mian threw off the covers and got out of bed. Xiao Hong was still sitting on the windowsill nearby, looking at him expectantly.

He went to the window and looked down. Below, he saw a bright, orange-yellow... bus?

Gu Mian quickly recognized it.

Is that a school bus? He rubbed his eyes and stared down again. Indeed, it was a school bus.

Immediately, a loudspeaker on the school bus's roof blared out an announcement: "Players with examination permits, please board immediately. The school bus will transport players to the examination site. Please note: this school bus is one-way only. Please make your preparations in advance..."

So, it's a one-way trip, no return journey, Gu Mian thought. Surprisingly, we're not being teleported directly into the event this time.

The group didn't have much to prepare. Within minutes, they boarded the bright orange-yellow school bus. During this time, Fatty went to store their Spirit Car.

Residents in the surrounding area seemed unable to hear the school bus's loudspeaker. The announcement had been blaring for a long time, yet not a single person peeked out to see what the commotion was about.

Notably, the bus was empty; it seemed they were the first passengers.

The driver looked like an ordinary NPC. He glanced at Gu Mian's group as they boarded. Did he just stiffen when he saw me? Gu Mian had the distinct impression the driver flinched slightly upon seeing him.

Gu Mian and his companions quickly settled into seats in the rearmost corner. The driver eyed them silently for a few moments, then suddenly produced a sign—"NO FIGHTING"—and placed it at the front of the bus.

Gu Mian touched his face. "Do I look like I enjoy fighting?"

Fatty leaned over. "Doctor, I think he means to prohibit the unilateral assault of the driver."

Gu Mian: "..."

Xiao Hong had also slipped aboard with them. The driver hadn't given the plain-looking female ghost any trouble.

As for Big Brother, who was originally a CD, Gu Mian had already flattened him and tucked him into his pocket.

The school bus moved swiftly, effortlessly phasing through various obstacles while maintaining a perfectly straight course.

Fatty sat by the window, but he couldn't see even a shadow of the scenery outside. He could only feel the bus constantly speeding forward, with no idea how it was bypassing obstacles.

To avoid scaring other passengers, Gu Mian had disguised Xiao Hong before they boarded. He put the black eyeglass frames he'd worn during the Dragon Boat event on her and used a surgical mask to cover the lower half of her face.

With her face partially concealed, she looked passable, but Xiao Hong didn't have a player interface.

If other players later tried to open the player interface of this somewhat plain-looking woman, they would be surprised to discover she didn't have one.

"I guess the school bus is picking up people according to rank," Chu Changge, beside him, pushed up his glasses. "That's why we're the first to board. This bus looks like it can only hold about thirty-odd people. There should be quite a few other school buses."

So this bus is for the top thirty players, Gu Mian mused.

As they spoke, the bus stopped. Gu Mian looked out the window. The scenery had completely changed; they were now parked in front of an apartment building easily twenty stories high.

The bus's rooftop loudspeaker began repeating the message Gu Mian had heard earlier, something about a "one-way trip" with "no return."

That idiom is definitely not a good omen, Gu Mian thought. It sounds so unlucky. But after a moment's reflection, he relaxed. After all, my life has never been filled with good omens anyway.

This time, only one player boarded: a taciturn young man. As soon as he got on, he glanced towards Gu Mian's group in the back corner, then immediately looked away and sat in the front row, as far from them as possible.

"That's the second-ranked player," Fatty murmured. "Only one person?"

"Perhaps his teammates gave up on the college entrance exam event," Gu Mian stroked his chin. "Participating in two consecutive events with a real risk of death would naturally be daunting for anyone."

Chapter 480 Behind-the-Scenes Assassin Qiao Mou Chu\_1

Or perhaps all their teammates had died in the previous event.

Although Gu Mian and his companions felt otherwise, the death rate for the dragon boat event was quite high.

The school bus was considerably long, so Gu Mian and his companions, speaking softly at the rear, wouldn't be heard by those in the front.

After a brief pause, the school bus started again, and the scenery outside became a blur.

"But Doctor, I just remembered something," Fatty said slowly, glancing out the window. "I recall we came here because the book \*Second World\* mentioned Xile Town. But after arriving, we completely forgot about that and only focused on the dragon boat event."

Gu Mian patted Fatty's shoulder. "Only you forgot about it; I didn't."

As he spoke, he pulled out the book \*Second World\* from beneath him. "I've thoroughly studied the description of Xile Town in the book and compared it to the Xile Town we recently visited. Some architectural details match up. I also observed the previous areas of Yan Chuan and Hou Ming, and they align with some descriptions in the book too."

However, discovering these things wasn't particularly useful. It only suggested that the author of the book might have gathered material from these three cities during their travels.

This cursed practice of sourcing material externally.

Gu Mian strongly suspected that the original version of \*Second World\* was one of the instance worlds. The copy he held was merely a partially plagiarized version, and the original was nowhere to be found.

"Doctor, according to your theory that instances originate from several different worlds, if one of those worlds is the original \*Second World\*, then other worlds might also exist in reality in some form. If we can find these 'form worlds,' we'll be invincible!" Fatty voiced his thoughts, looking as if he were daydreaming.

Gu Mian opened the book in his hand. "First of all, you can't even find the original version of \*this\* book, so stop daydreaming about other worlds."

"Logically speaking," Fatty offered sincerely, "perhaps the NPCs in the instances would know something. Of course, those passerby NPCs who are clearly cannon fodder wouldn't know anything. But someone like Mr. Green..."

Speaking of whom, Gu Mian hadn't seen Mr. Green in a long time. Their last meeting was during the lantern riddle event. Mr. Green had left Xiao Hong in Gu Mian's care and then vanished without a trace.

...Well, it wasn't exactly 'entrusting.'

As he thought about this, Gu Mian glanced at Xiao Hong, who was sitting quietly beside him. Then, he looked past Xiao Hong to Xiao Qiao, who was sitting rigidly beside her.

As a celebrity who could be recognized at any moment, Xiao Qiao had also carefully disguised herself. The two girls, heavily concealed, sat together. Only at times like this would Gu Mian confuse Xiao Hong with Xiao Qiao.

"Speaking of which, didn't you meet Mr. Green?" Gu Mian decided to temporarily ignore how Xiao Qiao knew Mr. Green. "When was the last time you saw him?"

Xiao Qiao adopted a thoughtful expression. After two seconds, she said, "It was on Qingming Festival, in a car repair shop instance. We players were acting as mechanics. We needed to use parts to repair a car and then drive the repaired car to escape. However, some ghosts had transformed into parts. If you were unlucky enough to pick a ghost-transformed part while repairing the car, they would crawl out from all sorts of places to kill you when you tried to escape..."

"I bet if the Doctor was in that instance, he would've definitely scooped up all the parts," Fatty suddenly chimed in.

"Get to the point," Gu Mian said, his eyebrow twitching.

"When I encountered Mr. Green, I was selecting parts. At that moment, he was driving a freshly repaired bus out of the repair shop—Bus Route 444."

As Xiao Qiao spoke, Gu Mian suddenly felt a strange sense of déjà vu, as if he had seen this Bus 444 somewhere before.

Two seconds later, he remembered. "I had a few traffic accidents when I used to drive the Spirit Car..."

"Yeah," Fatty leaned in promptly. "You even crashed into a special instance. That instance was called 'Bus 444'."

Gu Mian recalled crashing into that instance during the New Year, a joyous occasion, only for it to be repaired after Qingming Festival. The game's instance restoration capability was truly unimpressive.

But did repairing an instance require sending it to *\*another\** instance for repairs?

Xiao Qiao's voice continued, "That's where I saw Mr. Green. He told me that the next time I met Gu Mian, I should take him to see the 'Death Phase' instance."

Gu Mian had indeed discovered something in the 'Death Phase' instance.

He had met a ghost who claimed to have seen him at the crematorium and had seen a colorful mosaic in that ghost's eyes.

Although he had found something, that discovery hadn't provided any real clues.

Gu Mian then asked, "Did he say anything else?"

Xiao Qiao paused for a moment. Half a second later, she said, "He told you to get your brakes fixed."

Was he telling him to stop crashing into instances?

While they were speaking in hushed tones, the third wave of passengers boarded the bus.

The silent second-place contestant from the dragon boat race remained quiet, appearing to be someone not skilled in communication.

Now, the third-place contestants from the dragon boat race boarded—three players in total. They glanced at the man at the very front and then at Gu Mian's group at the very back, eventually choosing seats slightly forward of the middle.

Since they didn't come within three meters of Gu Mian, he couldn't see their nicknames.

"There weren't many NPCs in the dragon boat race, but there should be plenty in the college entrance exam event," Fatty said, retracting his gaze from the three new arrivals and starting to muse. "There'll be proctors, security guards, inspectors, and patrolling supervisors, I imagine."

As he spoke, he looked at Gu Mian. "Doctor, this is a prime opportunity for some... aggressive questioning. Don't let it slip by."

Gu Mian touched Fatty's forehead and said sadly, "What on earth made you so deranged?"

Fatty asked, "...Doctor, are you actually going to answer the questions seriously?"

Gu Mian fell silent.

In those few seconds of Gu Mian's silence, Fatty had already pictured Gu Mian beating up their proctor in front of all the other examinees.

Time passed quickly. After they chatted for a while, it was already past one in the morning.

At one twenty-five, the school bus stopped again.

Gu Mian immediately felt that the scenery outside the window looked familiar.

The next group of players boarding the bus also looked familiar.

The first to board was a cloaked man. Gu Mian was sure he had seen that cloak not long ago; it belonged to a man with a very pleasant voice who, nevertheless, always kept himself completely covered from head to toe.

Following the cloaked man was none other than 007, whom Gu Mian had briefly 'borrowed' during the dragon boat event.

That's right, this was 007's hometown. Gu Mian had brought her back here just two months ago.

Chu Changge paused for a moment upon seeing the cloaked man board the bus, then slowly uttered, "Fourth."

This group was the fourth-place team from the dragon boat race.

Three other people—two men and a woman—followed 007 onto the bus.

As soon as 007 got on the bus, she spotted Gu Mian sitting in the back row. She stopped instantly and said to her teammates, "Let's sit at the front."

The cloaked man seemed to glance toward the back row, then smiled. "Alright."

This was the third time Gu Mian had seen this cloaked man.

The first time was during the lantern riddle event; his nickname had been a red 'Anonymous', yet he had claimed to be Xie Bi'an.

The second time was during the recent dragon boat event, where he had been 007's teammate.

And the third time was now.

Gu Mian realized that this Xie Bi'an always seemed to be involved in these events. Since the game began, there had only been three events, and he had encountered this man in all three.

Just then, he noticed Xiao Qiao seemed somewhat restless.

He saw Xiao Qiao staring intently at Xie Bi'an, who had just sat down in the second row. Surprisingly, Gu Mian could read deep confusion in her usually vacant eyes. If she could display this level of acting skill when filming TV series, she wouldn't have been so viciously criticized.

This was the first time Xiao Qiao had seen Xie Bi'an. When Gu Mian encountered Xie Bi'an during the dragon boat event, Xiao Qiao hadn't boarded the boat yet.

Xiao Qiao kept her wide eyes fixed on the back of Xie Bi'an's head for a long moment. Just when Gu Mian thought she was about to rush towards him, she suddenly turned her head, looking at Chu Changge.

Then, to Gu Mian's surprise, he heard Xiao Qiao say something utterly bewildering to Chu Changge, "He's not dead?"

A puzzled Gu Mian turned his head to look at them both. "Are you two plotting a murder?"