

Collapse 481

Chapter 481 Family Members Not Allowed In_1

Gu Mian was well aware of Chu Changge's propensity for deception.

He used to think that he was the greatest deceiver, but compared to Chu Changge, Gu Mian still had some shortfalls.

Chu Changge was sneaky. He cunningly deceived others, and by the time they realized what had happened, it was too late. Alternatively, he would charm someone into willingly falling into his trap and still make them feel that it was worthwhile. He had the potential to be a suitor everyone loved to hate.

However, Gu Mian never imagined Chu Changge and Xiao Qiao would conspire to commit murder. Of course, this conspiracy was merely Gu Mian's intuition until it was confirmed by Chu Changge's admission.

"You two aren't actually planning on killing someone together, are you?" Gu Mian sidled up to the pair.

Since the start of this global game, he, Chu Changge, and Fatty had mostly stuck together. It seemed unlikely that Chu Changge would find the time to rendezvous with Xiao Qiao to commit murder.

Could it be that they executed their plan before the game started?

Had Chu Changge already lost his mind before the game began?

Xiao Qiao closed her mouth and fell silent. Silence usually indicated guilt, but Gu Mian couldn't read any hint of guilt on her beautiful face.

"When we first met him at the Lantern Festival, the last time we saw him was on the dragon boat," Gu Mian pondered. "Chu Changge, how could you not have recognized him if you have killed him before?"

However, on second thought, even if Chu Changge did know Xie Bi'an from before, it made sense that he might not have recognized him later.

Xie Bi'an was wrapped like a mummy from an Egyptian pharaoh's tomb. It was likely that not even his own parents would have recognized him if they had been present.

Maybe he was wrapped so securely because he feared being recognized by Chu Changge and consequently murdered?

After a few seconds, Gu Mian finally heard Chu Changge's voice, "I didn't kill him."

Nearby, Xiao Qiao also silently raised her hand, "I didn't either."

But clearly, they recognized each other.

And judging by the glance Xie Bi'an cast in their direction, he obviously recognized someone familiar, making Gu Mian feel deceived, as if he were the only one in the world who didn't know Xie Bi'an.

Fatty, who was sitting nearby, leaned over to join the conversation, "Doctor, don't be disheartened. I might recognize him too when he takes off his mask."

Gu Mian shoved Fatty away dismissively.

Fatty, now by the window, continued, "But his voice sounds so enticing. If I knew him, I would have definitely recognized him... such a soothing voice means he must be quite good-looking. It would be even better if he were a girl."

Gu Mian ignored Fatty—who had the strange fixation of looking at men but wishing they were women—and turned to Xiao Qiao. "Tell me, what's your relationship with that cloaked man."

Xiao Qiao paused for three seconds before replying, "He's an orphan."

It sounded as if she was stating a fact, not using the opportunity to insult someone.

Then she continued, "I am an orphan, and so is Chu Changge."

Gu Mian was silent for a moment. Oh great, was this an orphan gathering? Surely this vehicle was named 'Orphan's House'.

"We knew him before, but he had an accident. We all thought he was dead," Xiao Qiao succinctly stated before falling silent again.

Gu Mian broke the silence, "Could you tell more about it?"

"No."

Although Gu Mian suspected there was more to the story, right now he was more curious about why Xie Bi'an wrapped himself so tightly. "What does he look like?"

Xiao Qiao pondered for a moment. "Quite good-looking, I think."

So, his reason for wrapping himself so tightly wasn't the same as Xiao Hong's.

Did he possess some sort of superpower? Like a special item tattooed onto his skin that could kill anyone who saw it...

While Gu Mian was envisioning the tattoo, Chu Changge suddenly spoke up, "He's very dangerous."

He indeed looked dangerous. If he had dressed that way before the game started and went to a train station, he would surely have been arrested by the on-duty policemen.

Then Chu Changge suddenly turned his head to look at Gu Mian. "You need to be careful."

"Why?" Gu Mian asked.

Chu Changge fell silent again.

Gu Mian was frustrated with their vague and evasive responses. If it were ghosts, he would have tortured them until they confessed.

But these were Chu Changge, who probably wouldn't even blink if his head were chopped off, and Xiao Qiao, who could probably be dead for several minutes before it registered.

"Ah." Gu Mian leaned back in his chair and exhaled a sigh. He wanted to beat someone up.

However, causing a scene by assaulting his own brother would surely draw too much attention. Gu Mian quickly discarded the idea.

The school bus continued its rapid journey from dusk till dawn.

As the sun slowly began to set again, only about twenty people had boarded the bus during the better part of the day. Fortunately, there was plenty of space on this large bus, and the seats were spaced generously apart, so the players didn't have to squeeze together.

It was confirmed that this bus was meant to transport the top-ranking players from the Dragon Boat event. After spending half a day on the road, the players in the bus had started to strike up conversations.

However, no one tried to chat with the six people sitting in the back row, but they couldn't help glancing back from time to time.

Among the six, two were wrapped up tightly, looking quite eerie; along with a beautiful but obviously malicious mature woman, an emotionless man with glasses, a stern Doctor, and in the far corner sat the most terrifying figure of all: a large, menacingly ferocious-looking man.

"Your name was revealed during the Dragon Boat event," Liu Ruyan said, looking towards the conversing players in front. She spoke in a voice so low that no one else could hear. "Everyone knows Gu Mian came in first, and they know that the first-place winner is on this bus. It's likely they've already figured out we are the winners."

"It doesn't matter," Gu Mian touched the school emblem on his chest. "Everyone knows Meiren Chu and Gu Mian are two different people. Right now, I am Meiren Chu."

All five of them could open their player panels normally, but the most suspicious one was Xiao Hong, who couldn't open her player panel.

If any player did have the intention to kill, they would target Xiao Hong. Whether through firearms or melee weapons, all attacks would be directed towards Xiao Hong.

He was a man, and Xiao Hong was a woman, but who really knew Gu Mian's gender in the eyes of others?

Thinking of this, Gu Mian reached out and gently patted Xiao Hong's hair with a smile. "Xiao Hong, you're truly kind-hearted."

Feeling puzzled, Xiao Hong looked up at Gu Mian, cheerfully brushing against his hand.

For now, no one dared to make a move. Gu Mian suspected that it was due to the "Fighting Prohibited" sign placed at the front of the bus. Long-term gaming experience taught the players to obey the rules or face dire consequences, so they naturally treated the sign as a rule of the bus that had to be obeyed.

But none of them knew that the sign was put up by the driver after seeing Gu Mian get on the bus.

"We should be picking up the final group next," Chu Changge commented, watching the setting sun. "It's already past four in the afternoon, and the event begins at seven. The bus still needs time to get us to our destination."

By dusk at five o'clock, the bus stopped and started to play the recording of "A One-Way Journey," which Gu Mian had heard many times.

Shortly after, three hurried girls got on the bus; among them was a familiar face to Gu Mian.

"Mingyue?" Fatty blinked in surprise. "Doctor, do you remember her from the Death Aspect instance?"

Gu Mian quirked an eyebrow. "My memory isn't as poor as you believe."

It was impossible for him to forget the players from the last instance.

Mingyue, aside from them, was the last player to survive the previous game. According to Fatty, she was rather untrustworthy and was finally killed by a falling clothes rack—poetic justice.

Perhaps it was just Gu Mian's imagination, but he noticed that as soon as Mingyue got on the bus and took a glance at the interior, her entire body seemed to shudder when her gaze fell on their side. She immediately looked down and rushed to a seat in the front row.

"What's with her?" Gu Mian was a bit confused; he didn't think he looked like the clothes rack that killed her.

Xiao Qiao replied with righteous certainty, "I don't know."

As expected, after that stop, the school bus drove on without stopping again until six in the evening. At that point, a familiar scene appeared outside—the entrance to Lianhua University.

"Exit the bus in order!" The driver stood up and started shouting at them, as if afraid someone would refuse to leave.

Starting with the quiet man in the front row, they started to disembark. Being at the very back, Gu Mian and his group were the last to get off. However, he noticed many of the players sneaking glances at them as they got off, as if they were plotting something.

The questionable Mingyue, however, disembarked rather quickly, almost jumping off the bus as if a ghost were chasing her.

Several other school buses were also parked in front of Lianhua University, with their own set of players dismounting.

Gu Mian stood at the school entrance, watching the players trickling out from the school buses. These were not all the exam candidates. Most of them were probably still on their way, and some perhaps already in the examination room.

Several NPC-looking figures stood outside the massive main gates of Lianhua University, holding what seemed like Metal Detectors. The players were lining up, awaiting their turn to be inspected by these NPCs.

"Come over for forbidden object detection with your admission ticket!" an NPC shouted towards the players.

Players from different locations trickled towards the school's entrance and stood in line for the inspection. Gu Mian thought that the irregular line resembled the trajectory of the eighteen flower pots that had almost hit him.

"Let's go." Gu Mian walked briskly up, taking his position at the end of the line.

For some time, no new buses arrived with candidates, leaving no one behind Gu Mian and his group.

Once the line had shortened, Gu Mian was finally able to see that the object held in the NPC's hand was a "Contraband Detector."

It was not a Metal Detector, as Gu Mian saw a goth with a nose ring, a player with a walkie-talkie on their chest, and someone on a bicycle all successfully pass through the detector. It was a sight he had never seen before.

"What exactly is that thing supposed to detect?" asked Fatty, who was standing close behind Gu Mian.

Gu Mian genuinely expressed his opinion, "I think it must be broken."

But it was soon proven that the detector wasn't broken when it beeped loudly as Gu Mian passed through, triggering the red warning light.

Gu Mian thought for a moment and silently raised his saw. "But the bike passed through just fine earlier..."

"No," the NPC suddenly spoke. "It's not that."

Then what was it?

Just as Gu Mian was feeling puzzled, the NPC hesitated for a few seconds before saying, "Relatives are not allowed inside."

"I do not have any fami..." As soon as Gu Mian began to respond, he stopped. Then, somewhat uncertain, he pulled out the CD from his pocket. "This?"

Chapter 482 2019 Test Cheating Group_1

As a sunny, kind, honest, and law-abiding player, Gu Mian certainly wouldn't forcibly bring anything strange in.

These strange things included Xiao Hong and her elder brother.

Actually, Gu Mian figured it would be easy to bring them in, but it would be disastrous if he couldn't get them back out.

He could imagine how Xiao Hong and her elder brother, two ghosts, would react upon discovering his disappearance.

Xiao Hong would do nothing more than jump into the water and swim around erratically in a doggy paddle, trying to find him... She had done exactly that during the Dragon Boat event.

As for her elder brother, he would have to resign himself to catching other ghosts and calling them 'sister.'

So, when Gu Mian and the others entered the school gate, these two ghosts squatted at a distance outside the gate, truly resembling two dogs.

After leaving behind these two strange "things," Xiao Hong and her brother, Gu Mian successfully entered the school with his guitar case.

When passing the NPCs, Gu Mian deliberately eyed the contraband detectors in their hands. If he had that gadget, maybe he could find his parents, who had been missing for years and whom he had never met.

The NPCs under Gu Mian's gaze silently shivered and took a step back in unison.

"As expected of an event in a horror game," Fatty said, looking up at the school in front of him. "Even the school is made to be so gloomy. Brother Chu, was your school's atmosphere always this gloomy before?"

The school appeared somewhat gloomy and desolate, perhaps because no one had attended classes there for a long time.

"Not really," Chu Changge replied, walking slowly forward. "It's just that sometimes people would jump off buildings to commit suicide. To prevent similar incidents, the school installed security bars on all windows above the third floor. So, if you encounter ghosts in rooms above the third floor, don't even consider escaping by jumping out of a window."

"And have you noticed," Chu Changge said, glancing back. Behind him were the NPCs standing outside the school gate. "Those NPCs are all outside the school. They didn't come in."

Gu Mian had noticed this too. Moreover, after entering the school, there were no other NPCs, only scattered examinees searching for their respective exam rooms.

"Even the NPCs are unwilling to set foot inside. I'm afraid this event will exceed our expectations. You all need to be careful." Chu Changge withdrew his gaze.

Fatty nodded, firmly committing this to memory.

A few more steps ahead stood a giant statue, about three stories high, engraved with the Lianhua School emblem—a trophy-like object.

Gu Mian stopped in front of this statue. "This event isn't one where we're directly transported in and then directly out. Everyone should gather here after finishing their tests to leave together... Xiao Qiao's group chat should work in here, right?"

As he spoke, he tested it and found that the game panel's built-in chat system was no longer usable. However, Xiao Qiao's ten-person group chat hadn't been disabled, though she had already changed its name to "2019 College Entrance Exam Cheating Group."

Quite a fitting name.

This group chat was indeed a powerful tool for cheating on exams. Plus, they had Chu Changge, who was like a walking encyclopedia. If this college entrance exam truly tested normal knowledge, with Chu Changge on their side, they would be invincible.

Finish copying all the answers within the first ten minutes, then leave with a flourish, leaving only their retreating figures for the other examinees to see. The thought was quite satisfying.

However, this time, everyone's test paper wouldn't necessarily be the same, and it was highly probable the questions wouldn't be normal.

"Anyway, when all of you have finished your tests, you can pick a time to gather here," Gu Mian said, pausing briefly. "...If you feel it's dangerous, I can go to the exam rooms to pick you up."

For a moment, Fatty thought Gu Mian sounded like a parent picking up their child from kindergarten.

Chu Changge spoke up, "Let's play it by ear. If anything happens, we can communicate through the group chat."

"Alright, the event starts at seven. Let's go find our exam rooms now." Gu Mian checked the time. It was already 6:30 in the evening; the sun's radiance had mostly faded, and the school was gradually sinking into darkness.

「Lianhua University, Building 6, Exam Room 208. This was Gu Mian's assigned room.」

He was very familiar with Lianhua University, so it only took him fifteen minutes to find his exam room: the westernmost classroom on the second floor of Building 6.

When Gu Mian entered the exam room, the overhead lights were already on. The room contained twenty-five desks, and there was no one at the podium. It looked like a perfectly normal classroom.

A dozen or so desks were already occupied, and their occupants were currently looking his way curiously.

Gu Mian, using the nickname Meiren Chu, wasn't fazed at all. He walked a few steps into the room and immediately spotted someone he knew: 007.

She was sitting in the second seat of the row by the windows, looking up at him with wide eyes.

The desk in front of her was right where Gu Mian was standing. He glanced down; the seat number on it was 1.

What a coincidence.

It was a shame Xiao Hong wasn't here; otherwise, the human and the ghost could be stuffing each other's mouths with tasty treats right now.

He hadn't expected that he and 007 would end up as deskmates, with him sitting in front of her. Gu Mian also knew she had been looking for her parents two months ago, though according to Fatty, she hadn't found them in the end.

Gu Mian put down the guitar case he was carrying on his back, propping it against his desk. He plopped down onto his seat and then turned to look back at 007. "I heard you didn't find the people you were looking for?"

He had spent a lot of effort getting 007 home, and it turned out to be all for nothing.

"Yes," 007 replied, not surprised for long about them now sitting at adjacent desks. "When I got home, they had already moved. New people were living there."

"Didn't you suspect the family living in your house now?"

Since the global game started, murder and robbery have become common occurrences. Killing people to take their houses is also possible.

"No, the house was rented," 007 said, shaking her head. "Besides, my parents... they often move suddenly like this without telling me. They're afraid I'll worry."

Gu Mian thought for two seconds and somewhat understood. "Hiding from debts?"

007 nodded silently. "Two years ago, my dad's company went bankrupt, and he incurred a lot of debt. For the past two years, debt collectors have been constantly showing up at our door, and our home was frequently splashed with paint. Despite trying our best to repay it, the amount was too large... so I dropped out of school to work and pay off the debt. If I worked locally, those people would definitely cause trouble at my workplace, and I'd lose my job."

Gu Mian remembered the first instance where he met 007. He recalled her saying back then that she didn't go to school because she had no money. At that time, he had wondered just how poor someone had to be to not even afford school fees. It turned out she not only had no money but also had debts to repay.

Due to his innate bad luck, Gu Mian didn't dare to work outside, afraid he'd implicate others and drive them to bankruptcy.

Just as Gu Mian was envying 007 for still being able to work, he suddenly sensed the classroom fall instantly silent.

He was all too familiar with this kind of silence; it usually occurred when the head teacher's face appeared in the window of the classroom's back door.

The exam invigilator is here.

However, the invigilator apparently lacked the head teacher's leisurely inclination to observe from outside; it came straight in through the front door.

Gu Mian turned and saw a pair of empty eye sockets.

Fatty couldn't understand why the exam invigilator was dressed like that. The thing on the podium was hunched over in a bizarre posture, clad in a bulky, filthy hazmat suit—the kind worn by lab technicians in zombie movies—with a damaged face mask on its head.

The entire classroom fell silent. All the examinees shivered, holding their breath as they stared at the terrifying thing on the podium.

It stood in the middle of the podium, its body contorting. Then, Fatty saw blood-red words appear on the blackboard behind it:

[Exam Time: 19:30—24:00]

[Exam Rules]

[1. Open-book exam; answers may be found within the school.]

[2. Test papers must be submitted to the invigilator before the exam ends.]

[3. Patrolling invigilators will be present during the exam. Students outside the exam room, if discovered by patrolling invigilators, will be dealt with as a violation.]

[4. Males are forbidden from entering the female dormitories.]

Fatty was focused on the third rule. "Patrolling invigilators... if caught by a patrolling invigilator outside the exam room, it's treated as a violation..."

What kind of 'violation processing' is that? Does it mean death?

He glanced at the time. It was 7:10 PM; there were still twenty minutes before they could start answering the questions.

Fatty couldn't help but look again at the thing in the hazmat suit on the podium. Let's just call it a 'thing' for now, because it really doesn't look human in any way. If they didn't hand in their test papers to it before midnight, something horrifying would probably happen too.

This event seemed more bizarre and sinister than the previous Dragon Boat event. Not only Fatty thought so; the other players felt the same way.

The moment the invigilator entered the classroom, they were enveloped by a strange feeling. It's odd. The players here have all been through many instances, and at least one event where death was real. Logically, they shouldn't be this terrified.

But when these people saw the bizarre, contorted invigilator, an extremely terrifying sensation surged through them. Horror and despair welled up from within, suffocating them—it was the fear of confronting death head-on.

At this point, Fatty suddenly recalled what Chu Changge had said after they entered the school: "I'm afraid this event will exceed our expectations."

A bizarre thought suddenly popped into his mind: How many players will make it out of this event alive?

Just then, he saw a test paper materialize on his desk.

「...」

It was now 7:20 PM, still ten minutes before they could start answering. Everyone stared nervously at the test papers in front of them, no one daring to pick up a pen.

Gu Mian was also looking at the test paper in front of him. He'd forgotten to bring a pen. But that wasn't a major problem.

Gu Mian examined the content on his paper. By now, the sky outside had turned completely dark. The classroom lights cast a hazy glow out through the windows, faintly illuminating the building opposite.

Gu Mian leaned by the window, looking at his test paper.

The test paper was very strange; it only had two questions.

One multiple-choice, one fill-in-the-blank. However, below these two questions was a large blank space, as if new questions would appear there later.

He first looked at the multiple-choice question above:

[The third floor of the school cafeteria is in the () section.]

[A. East] [B. West]

Sure enough, these weren't questions you'd find on a normal exam, and they seemed completely baffling. The format of the questions was similar to the 'Classroom Staff Exam' instance they had experienced before... But were the two truly the same?

Setting that question aside for the moment, he then looked at the fill-in-the-blank question below.

[In the fish tank on the windowsill of Room 4244 in the girls' dormitory, there are a total of 104 dead fish.]

This question was even more baffling; it was completely unclear where one was supposed to fill in a blank.

Seeing "girls' dormitory," Gu Mian looked up again at the last exam rule on the blackboard:

[Males are forbidden from entering the female dormitories.]

He subconsciously glanced out the window. Next to their building was Female Dormitory Building 4. And he suddenly saw a face in a window of the building opposite.

A horrifying, completely rotten human face, held together by just two strands of sinew.

But the face vanished in an instant, as if what he had just seen was merely Gu Mian's hallucination.

It was now just past 7:30 PM. The examinees in the classroom all took out the pens they had prepared beforehand. No one noticed the anomaly in the female dormitory building opposite.

Gu Mian heard another player's voice from behind him: "Why isn't it writing?"

He turned his head and saw the person with the pen trying to write on their test paper, but not a single mark appeared.

Gu Mian looked again in the direction where he had seen the face. "I'm afraid these are 'choices' and 'fill-in-the-blanks' in the truest sense."

These were choices and blanks that required them to use practical, hands-on experience to complete.

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Gu Mian's dream of copying his exam paper in ten minutes and leaving coolly was shattered.

Meanwhile, Fatty was frantically typing in the "Cheating Group." It was the first time Gu Mian realized how insanely fast Fatty could type.

[Pan] "Do your exam proctors also dress up like they're cosplaying?"

[Pan] "I don't know why, but it feels weird. Do you guys know what my questions are? I only have two. Here's my fill-in-the-blank question: 'The key to the No.9501 Classroom is in the third-floor office.' What kind of fill-in-the-blank question is this?"

Gu Mian cringed a little at the nickname "Pan" Fatty had given himself.

On the other hand, Chu Changge always used his real name, never hiding or altering it.

[Chu Changge] "This question is telling you to insert the key into the lock of the No.9501 Classroom."

That made sense.

Gu Mian also looked at his own fill-in-the-blank question. So, this question of mine, 'The fish tank in Dormitory 4244 has 104 dead fish in it,' means I have to put 104 dead fish into the fish tank.

What an insane question.

Now he was left with the headache of where to find dead fish.

At this point, some of the other examinees had figured out the purpose of the exam.

"They want us to personally carry out the tasks in the questions, right? We go to the location specified in the questions and make a choice... The fill-in-the-blank questions are asking us to fill in something that belongs to a certain place."

"We still have lots of time, so let's go to the places in the questions together."

For now, no one left the classroom. Everyone was whispering anxiously to each other.

The being referred to as the proctor remained standing on the podium, occasionally slowly turning its head under the light. Whenever it twisted its neck, the examinees' already hushed voices would drop to near silence.

At that moment, Gu Mian heard 007 calling him from behind. Turning around, he saw that 007 had already put away her test paper.

"If you need any help, I can assist you. For example, if you need to enter the girls' dormitory." Clearly, 007 had noticed the words "girls' dormitory" on Gu Mian's test paper.

Gu Mian shook his head slightly. That wouldn't be necessary. Although he was indeed male, his gender was still marked as a question mark in the system. Theoretically, this should allow him to enter.

He couldn't help wondering if the programmer who had set his gender had had a chunk of their brain scooped out.

"But there's something I'd like to ask you," Gu Mian spoke as he stood up.

As soon as he stood, all eyes in the room focused on him. The students were all somewhat scared of the thing on the podium, and they were still considering whether to team up for this eerie activity. Consequently, no one had risen to leave yet.

All the students watched Gu Mian closely, some keeping an eye on the reaction of the proctor on the stage.

When they saw the man with the guitar safely leave the classroom, they collectively sighed in relief. Although the rules stated they could search for answers anywhere in the school, with a ghost standing right there, no one dared to make a rash move.

007 quickly followed him out.

The hallway lights were off. They could only see by the light filtering out of the classrooms.

A few lone students emerged from other classrooms and dashed for the staircase, likely to meet teammates in other exam rooms.

After all, no one wanted to act alone in this ghostly place.

Gu Mian stopped by a corridor window. "I wanted to ask about your teammate in the black robe. You know his name, right?"

"Xie Bi'an. But his nickname is Red," 007 replied, nodding. "I only met him a few days before the dragon boat event, when I was searching for my parents, and then I ran into him..."

"He knew I was looking for someone and told me there might be special items that could help me find my parents. He said that if I entered more instances and participated in more activities, I might get the special items I wanted. I thought about it carefully and realized it was true, so that's why I came to participate in these activities."

It was true that there might be special items to help find people. Fatty used to have a 'Mini Notebook'. If a nickname and time were written in it, it could provide specific information about a person's situation during that timeframe, and possibly even their location.

But that item had dropped inside the 'Close Your Eyes' instance.

Gu Mian also had a special item, the 'Dimension-Breaking Cell Phone'. If used outside an instance, it could call the player with the strongest affinity to the caller, but only if that player had a phone or cell phone nearby...

But that cell phone wasn't with him at the moment. Since Gu Mian had no inventory, his special items were all kept by Fatty and Chu Changge. He wondered who had the phone now.

Fatty also had a 'Strange Camera', a special item that could take one photo of an invisible ghost per day. After obtaining the Everbright Lantern, Fatty no longer needed the camera, so it was now in Gu Mian's pocket.

Putting these issues aside for the moment, Gu Mian said, "I have a special item in the shape of a cell phone. If you use it to make a call, you might be able to contact your parents. But I don't have it with me right now. You can wait at the school gate when the activity ends. I need to find out who has it first."

007's expression became thoughtful. "Thank you. I really envy the relationship you guys have. You can trust each other with special items, even forgetting about them if you don't need them... You know, special items are hard for normal players to obtain, especially if they're useful in instances. Players usually won't easily hand special items to others."

Difficult to obtain? Gu Mian recalled Fatty using that very phone to crack walnuts just a few days ago.

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He did a quick tally of the special items they had obtained since the game began and found there were too many to count.

However, it seemed he hadn't summoned 007 just to count his special items. Gu Mian recalled the actual reason. "That Xie Bi'an, what kind of person is he?"

007 thought for a moment. "He's very gentle. He never takes off his hood; I've never even seen him rest. Sometimes he'll sit for an entire day. Every time I went to his room to find him, he would immediately open the door... As for his past, other teammates have asked him, but he never says a word."

Xie Bi'an was always patient. He never lost his temper or got into conflicts with others. Otherwise, 007 wouldn't have been his teammate; after all, his appearance in that all-black cloak was somewhat intimidating.

Gu Mian rubbed his chin. What a strange person.

He asked another question, "Do you think Xie Bi'an is a good person?"

007 looked at Gu Mian, somewhat puzzled. "I suppose... he is."

Gu Mian recalled what Chu Changge had said and leaned in towards 007. "Actually, he's not a good person."

Before 007 could react, Gu Mian darted away, leaving only his retreating figure and a "bye-bye."

「Restaurant, fourth floor.」

Mingyue and Li Xueqi were lingering at the top of the stairs, shining their flashlights on the floor beneath their feet. The sign for the fourth floor was on the adjacent wall above them.

The entire restaurant was unlit. It was pitch-black inside, and only their flashlights could penetrate the darkness.

Li Xueqi was Mingyue's teammate and also her classmate. They had been together during the dragon boat rowing, and this time, they were both assigned to the exam site on the 3rd floor of Building 12, so they decided to team up.

Building 12 was closest to the restaurant, directly opposite the school cafeteria. Consequently, they arrived early, before many other examinees.

"Mingyue, do we really have to go in now? Why don't we wait until there are more people..." Li Xueqi stared apprehensively at the pitch-black fourth floor. "Besides, I'm a little scared of running into the patrolling examiners."

Mingyue clutched her exam paper; she had a multiple-choice question to answer.

[Your task is to eat from the fourth-floor restaurant's specialty rice bowls: ()]

[A. Salt and Pepper Rice Bowl]

[B. Tomato Rice Bowl]

She had to choose one of them.

Li Xueqi's question was different from hers. They agreed to do Mingyue's question first, then Li Xueqi's.

"...Okay." Mingyue stood rigidly at the top of the stairs.

Truthfully, she hadn't wanted to come directly to the fourth floor of the restaurant. However, as soon as she exited Building 12, she saw Fatty... and another person. This person was heavily bundled up, but Mingyue recognized them with a single glance!

That was the one who had killed her!

In the death image instance, Mingyue had stared at that expressionless face for a long time before her death. It affected her so much that for several days after exiting the instance, every time she closed her eyes, she would see that person's face and the clothes hanger that had pierced her body.

How insane and twisted must one be to kill someone with such indifference, as if it were the most natural thing to do?

Mingyue was certain that if Xiao Qiao were to run into her again, Xiao Qiao would kill her without hesitation, just like before.

She had loathed Xiao Qiao intensely before. After that incident, her revulsion deepened into abhorrence. But when she saw that face again, the deep-seated hatred was unconsciously replaced by profound fear, causing her to instinctively flee into the nearby restaurant.

If only there's a chance to kill her... if only there's a chance to kill her... that would be great.

"Let's go down first," she said, her voice trembling slightly as she turned and headed down the stairs.

That person must be gone by now.

Li Xueqi looked at Mingyue cautiously. "What's wrong with you?"

Mingyue clenched her fist, realizing her palm was already damp with a thin layer of sweat. "It's nothing. Let's go..."

The two girls descended the stairs gingerly, their flashlights casting the only illumination on the staircase.

Soon, they realized something was wrong.

They couldn't go down. They simply couldn't go down!

"Mingyue, I remember we were on the fourth floor just now. How come we've been walking for so long and still haven't gone down?" Li Xueqi stared at the endless steps beneath them, a shiver running down her spine.

Ten minutes! They had walked for a full ten minutes and still hadn't descended the stairs!

"What's going on?" Mingyue looked at the endlessly repeating staircase. Suddenly, a thought struck her, and she quickly shone her flashlight upwards on the adjacent wall.

The flashlight illuminated the sign for the fourth floor above them. Both girls stared wide-eyed. They had never left the fourth floor; they had been there all along.

Li Xueqi swallowed, looking at the pitch-black entrance to the fourth floor. "We've been here the whole time... And why haven't any other players arrived after all this time?"

Other players should have exam questions located in the cafeteria too.

But at this moment, the staircase was utterly silent. They couldn't hear any other sounds, as if they were the only two people in the entire cafeteria.

Just the two of them.

"What should we do?" Li Xueqi looked at the staircase stretching down into darkness, her scalp tingling.

They carefully tried to go down again, but no matter how many times they descended and rounded the bend, they were always met with the sign for the fourth floor.

"We have no choice now." Mingyue stood on the stairs, looking at the pitch-black entrance to the fourth floor. The huge doorway was a gaping maw of darkness, as if ready to swallow everyone whole. "We can only go in. Maybe... maybe if we complete the question, we can leave this place..."

Li Xueqi swallowed hard and nodded. Although she already regretted entering this terrifying restaurant, they now had no other choice but to enter the fourth floor.

Chapter 485 Human Head Covered Rice

The two of them held their flashlights, tiptoeing into the main entrance of the restaurant on the fourth floor.

Just then, they suddenly heard footsteps coming from the staircase behind them!

Run! Both of them, jolted with fear, rushed forward without a second thought.

At that moment, Li Xueqi tripped over something and fell heavily to the ground, her flashlight clattering away to one side.

By the time she struggled to push herself up, the footsteps had stopped. Then, in the faint beam of her distant flashlight, she saw a pair of worn-out shoes appear right in front of her.

...

Meanwhile, Gu Mian had already reached the third floor of the restaurant. Just as he was using his flashlight, trying to figure out which way to go, he suddenly heard something crash onto the floor above.

The sound seemed to be coming from the fourth floor.

He looked up at the ceiling. What in the world is going on up there?

However, he didn't have time to worry about what was happening upstairs. Gu Mian looked at the contents of his test paper, seriously considering which way to go.

I remember the left side has a revolving hot pot, chicken pot, rice noodles, malatang, dumplings, and wontons, while the right side has beef soup, mutton soup, curry rice, fried chicken and beer, and pork rib soup.

...

"Are you okay?"

A voice came from above her. Li Xueqi immediately looked up. A normal face met her eyes. She quickly tried to open the player status panel of the person in front of her. Seeing a player nickname, she finally relaxed.

The young man standing before her was named Liu Xuan.

Behind Liu Xuan were two other boys: one named Feng Zitao, and the other, Wang Longxiang.

"We came for the covered rice," Liu Xuan said, helping Li Xueqi up from the floor. "Flavored Covered Rice. You too?"

"Yes," Mingyue replied, having returned from the front. "We were trapped on the stairs for a long time. We got so scared when we suddenly heard a noise, so we just ran."

"It's alright." Liu Xuan took a couple of steps forward. "Let's stick together."

The restaurant looked as if it had been abandoned for years. The beams of their flashlights revealed a thick layer of dust covering the tables.

The stall's signboard was so dilapidated it looked like it was about to fall off. Behind the food-serving window, the stall was dark and oppressive; their flashlights faintly illuminated haphazardly stacked bowls and overturned pots.

After walking for less than a minute, they saw the sign reading "Flavored Covered Rice."

They heard a gurgling sound and were assailed by a repulsive, nauseating odor.

Mingyue peered towards the source of the sound. Behind the cafeteria window, she saw a humanoid figure moving beside a large pot filled with some unknown substance.

This was her multiple-choice question.

Choosing between Salt and Pepper Covered Rice or Tomato Covered Rice... after seeing the unknown contents of that pot... am I really supposed to eat it?

The group hesitated for a moment. Finally, Liu Xuan and his friends stepped forward and spoke to the figure behind the window, "We want Salt and Pepper Covered Rice."

Seeing them make their choice, Mingyue also stepped closer. As she did, the strange, sickening stench assaulted her nostrils. The blurry figure behind the glass moved towards her, its face almost touching hers.

"I want Salt and Pepper Covered Rice!" she blurted out almost immediately.

A plate of stinking, black mush was placed before her. Mingyue, suppressing her revulsion, carried the plate to a table and sat down beside Liu Xuan. Li Xueqi sat opposite Mingyue. This wasn't her multiple-choice question, so she obviously wasn't going to voluntarily order the covered rice.

At this moment, Liu Xuan and his two friends were also staring at their plates, looking troubled.

Mingyue clutched her test paper. I only have to eat it, right? Not necessarily finish it? As long as my choice registers on the test paper, I'll stop immediately. Thinking this, she gingerly picked up a bit of the substance from her plate with her fingers and brought it to her lips.

BLECH— No, it's too disgusting!

I regret joining this event, she thought. Not only did I run into the person who murdered me, but now I have to eat this revolting food.

Still, at least there are others eating it with me. That thought offered a sliver of comfort.

As she was thinking, she glanced at Liu Xuan, who was eating beside her.

Huh? He...

She saw Liu Xuan, who at some point had lifted his plate and was now frantically stuffing food into his mouth with one hand. He chewed constantly, making loud, smacking sounds, and viscous black ooze covered almost the entire lower half of his face.

A chill ran down Mingyue's spine, and her fingers began to tremble.

The other two guys were doing the same thing!

They were all ravenously devouring the contents of their plates!

Li Xueqi seemed to have noticed something was amiss much earlier. She stared at the three of them, her body rigid, not daring to move her head in the slightest.

Just then, Liu Xuan abruptly stopped.

He turned his head, his eyes wide, and stared at Mingyue. "Why aren't you eating?"

The other two also stopped and turned their heads. "Why aren't you eating?"

Fear instantly coursed through her entire body.

Run!

Li Xueqi grabbed Mingyue's hand, and they bolted desperately towards the stairs.

Mingyue, regaining her composure, sprinted forward, overtaking Li Xueqi. Hand in hand, one pulling the other, they sprinted frantically across the fourth floor.

A shuffling sound came from behind. Mingyue glanced back. In the darkness, the three figures were closely following them, their movements unnervingly bizarre.

But before she could run much farther, the sounds from behind vanished. Mingyue looked back, mystified. The three figures had disappeared.

So had Li Xueqi, who had been right behind her.

She looked down at her hand; she was only clutching a severed hand.

Li Xueqi...? Where is Li Xueqi? Mingyue stared blankly at the severed hand.

Just then, a faint, soft sound reached her ears. Following the sound, she looked through the food-serving window and saw a familiar human head.

...

Gu Mian's choice was the eastern side of the third floor, where the revolving hot pot was located.

He missed the school's food, but this cafeteria seemed completely different from before. There were none of the familiar signs Gu Mian remembered, only rusted iron frames about to fall off and dilapidated windows.

Just as Gu Mian stepped into the eastern area, the answer was automatically filled in on his test paper.

Throughout this time, a loud CLANGING AND BANGING came from upstairs, as if a world war was being fought.

For some reason, it seemed he was the only person on this floor. Gu Mian walked east along the windows for a minute and finally saw something moving: a figure that looked charred and was oozing pus.

It was behind a window. The sign above its head read, "Mixed-Meat Soup."

Gu Mian walked quickly to the window, almost pressing his face against the glass. "Do you have anything to eat?"

Chapter 486 Thank You_1

Gu Mian looked at the sticky soup that had been pushed in front of him.

The yellow, sour-smelling, viscous liquid in the bowl, which had two chips, contained no meat and looked like the product of someone with a bad stomach who had consumed too much fruit.

Not convinced, Gu Mian took a sniff. Yes, even the smell is similar to that stuff.

"It doesn't look very appetizing," Gu Mian said, pushing the bowl back in disgust. "This is false advertising."

Then he quickly realized his test paper might have some kind of twisted sense of humor.

Because he saw a new option appearing in the blank space under the multiple-choice question:

[Mixed Meat Soup on the third floor of the restaurant ()]

[A. Delicious] [B. Not Delicious]

Anyone could tell A wasn't the right choice for this thing.

Gu Mian felt conflicted.

Logically, since both options existed, it meant there was a possibility—however small—that the mixed meat soup could actually taste good.

But he really didn't want to eat this shit-like substance.

Looking at the human figure behind the window, Gu Mian had a clever idea. "You..."

Just as he uttered a word, he suddenly heard a voice from behind him.

"You're here for the mixed meat soup too?"

Gu Mian turned, shining his flashlight behind him, and saw three young men standing there. The one in the lead, who looked quite refined, had the nickname "Liu Xuan."

The two following Liu Xuan were named Feng Zitao and Wang Longxiang, respectively.

The trio stared at Gu Mian together in the dim light.

Just as Liu Xuan was about to say something more, Gu Mian suddenly exclaimed excitedly, "Great! Why don't we do this together?"

The third floor fell silent for a few seconds.

Then Gu Mian saw Liu Xuan give a strange smile. "Alright."

Immediately, the four of them each picked up a bowl and sat down together on the dark third floor.

"GULP. GULP." Liu Xuan excitedly grabbed his bowl, brought it to his mouth, and began to devour its contents frantically.

The viscous yellow slurry scrambled to pour into his widely stretched-open mouth. He barely chewed as it slid down his throat.

The other two were the same; all three wore crazed expressions as they swallowed the contents of their bowls, making strange gurgling sounds in the darkness, as if oblivious to the foul stench.

Yellow liquid trickled down Liu Xuan's chin. The contents of his bowl were nearly gone, about to be entirely gulped down his throat.

Just then, he suddenly heard an eerie voice by his ear, "Is it tasty?"

He turned his head and saw a face pressed close to his, its unblinking eyes fixed on him. "Is it tasty?"

Liu Xuan's mouth hung open, unable to utter a word.

The face before him drew even closer and, with an urgent, eerie, and bizarre expression, repeated, "Is it tasty?!"

Why am I not dead? Why am I not dead? Why do those ghosts have nicknames? Mingyue kept repeating these questions to herself as she fled the fourth floor.

But there were no answers, only the image of Li Xueqi's head swirling in her mind.

She never got an answer to her questions, but thankfully, the looping staircase had finally stopped. Standing in the dim stairwell, Mingyue looked at the "Third Floor" sign before her. "I made it down, I finally made it down..."

Just then, she thought she heard voices coming from the third floor.

Players?

She instinctively glanced through the doorway of the third floor. A single look was enough to scare her out of her wits—the three ghosts from before were here too!

But...

She saw the ghost that had ruthlessly killed Li Xueqi now being held by the neck, forcefully pressed against a table by someone, and relentlessly interrogated, "Is it tasty?" "Is it tasty?" "Quick, say it!"

"My heavens!" Mingyue instantly recognized the person in the white coat. Her breath hitched for a moment, then she immediately turned and fled.

Perverts! They're all perverts!

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Meanwhile, Fatty and Xiao Qiao were observing the restaurant from a dark grove.

Gu Mian had said in the cheating group that he had arrived at the restaurant. Since the two of them were not far away, they decided to wait for him outside.

The small grove was pitch black at night, with only a faint light visible from the streetlamp at the restaurant's entrance. Players whose test location wasn't here would definitely not come to this place seeking trouble.

Fatty actually didn't want to wait for Gu Mian here either; after all, dark groves at night were notorious hotspots for supernatural occurrences.

But considering his nickname often appeared alongside "Gu Mian," he worried that if they loitered in crowded places, others might spot them and use them to track down Gu Mian. So, Fatty, shivering, hid in the dark grove.

"Luckily, it's early June, so there aren't many mosquitoes yet," Fatty said, simultaneously counting the players he had seen enter the restaurant. "But we've been staking this place out for over ten minutes, and in that time, I've counted more than thirty players going in..."

But not a single one had come out.

Not one.

The massive restaurant was like a giant beast crouching in the darkness; everyone who went in never returned.

They didn't even know what Gu Mian was up to, as he hadn't sent them any messages.

"If we don't hear from the Doctor in another ten minutes," Fatty glanced at the time—it was 7:55 PM, "then let's go in and take a look?"

"Okay." Although Xiao Qiao rarely voiced her opinions, she was generally responsive to requests.

Fatty remembered how a few days ago, he couldn't crack a walnut and asked Xiao Qiao for help. Without a word, she had taken the walnut from his hand and crushed it to bits.

Of course, it ended up inedible...

"But Brother Chu and Liu Ruyan haven't sent any messages either," Fatty said, checking the cheating group again.

Chu Changge had only said one thing, and Liu Ruyan hadn't made a peep.

Chapter 487 Thank You_2

Fatty started to worry slightly. "Where did they go..."

After all, the possibility of being caught by an invigilator right after exiting the exam hall wasn't zero.

Just as Fatty was worrying about Chu Changge and his companion's safety, he suddenly heard a slight rustling sound from behind him.

He immediately looked back, but it was pitch black, and he couldn't see anything.

He was about to speak when Xiao Qiao, beside him, suddenly said, "Run."

What?

Fatty instinctively thought Xiao Qiao's words were related to the sound from behind. However, he then noticed that she wasn't paying attention to what was behind them; instead, she was staring intently ahead.

That was the direction of the canteen building.

At the same time, Fatty suddenly heard a strange, nauseating sound from the distance ahead—GURGLE GURGLE—as if something was approaching.

"Run quickly, split up!" Xiao Qiao's voice became more urgent. She forcefully pushed Fatty back but didn't move herself.

Seeing this, Fatty understood something. He took out the Everbright Lantern and bolted, running out of the dark forest in one go.

He heard something, as if it had followed him out of the forest. Fatty risked a glance back and saw three normal human silhouettes behind him; Xiao Qiao wasn't among them.

From the moment Xiao Qiao uttered "Run" for the second time, Fatty understood. The nauseating GURGLE GURGLE from ahead was likely the invigilators wandering the school. And the shadows now following him...

"Did that Fatty spot us?" Invincible Braver was close on Fatty's heels.

Next to him were his two teammates from the dragon boat activity: one named Luo Shao, the other Liu Qing Yu.

They were players who had taken the school bus with Gu Mian and knew he was one of the last six people in the back row. So, they had discreetly noted their appearances fairly well.

This time, they followed Fatty, hoping to track down Gu Mian, whom they hadn't seen during the activity.

Who would have thought this Fatty would suddenly bolt, and then the masked woman would also flee in another direction? They chose to chase the slower Fatty.

"He must have spotted us; otherwise, he wouldn't have suddenly run off," Liu Qing Yu said while running. "It's better to just grab him and ask. He definitely knows which exam hall Gu Mian is in."

"Right..." Hearing this, Invincible Braver increased his speed.

Death in this activity was real; this was a rare opportunity.

At this moment, he suddenly heard a strange sound from behind. Invincible Braver turned to look and was so frightened he almost stumbled.

A dense mass of white, humanoid figures surged from the forest behind them, advancing with eerie, intermittent GURGLES emanating from their throats—a sound like that of a dying old man choking on thick phlegm.

"Damn it, now I know why that Fatty was running!"

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When Gu Mian left the canteen, he had three more school badges in hand. They were special items named "Liu Xuan," "Feng Zitao," and "Wang Longxiang."

This was his reward for treating three fellow students to "mixed meat soup" and engaging in a "friendly exchange" with them.

What a hospitable school. I'll definitely visit again next time. Gu Mian put the three school badges in his pocket and looked towards the small grove.

Fatty and Xiao Qiao had said they would wait for him in the small grove.

But Gu Mian searched the entire grove and found no trace of them. He pondered for a moment, then looked back. The main road beside the canteen was devoid of any figures.

There are many players participating in the exam. Considering the number of participants, there should have been people on this road. Unless more than half are already dead, or... had the invigilators just passed through?

Gu Mian glanced at the time: 8:15.

He sent a message to ask, but no one replied.

Meanwhile, Fatty had already rounded a corner and was running towards Teaching Building No. 9 ahead. His exam hall was in Building 11, but the invigilators were in that direction. He couldn't turn back and walk into his death, so his only option was to dash into this building and hide.

As long as I'm not found! Just hide!

It's worth noting that not all academic buildings housed exam halls. Teaching Building No. 9, for instance, was an empty building used to provide space for examinees to answer their questions.

Fatty gathered his courage and burst through the main entrance. It was pitch-dark inside, but he had the Everbright Lantern for illumination.

As soon as he rushed through the main entrance, Fatty was dumbstruck. The corridor was bare, without so much as a large potted plant. There was absolutely nowhere to hide!

Even the classroom doors were locked. There was no sanctuary!

The three pursuers also burst in. Less than ten meters behind them were the densely packed figures in biohazard suits—the invigilators!

There was no path of retreat.

"Shit!" Fatty instantly sprinted up to the second floor, desperate to find some cover.

Seeing Fatty sprint towards the second floor, Invincible Braver immediately charged after him. "Follow him!"

What if there's a place to hide?

They followed Fatty onto the second-floor corridor, just as the invigilators began to ascend the stairs.

Once those things reached the second floor, no one would be able to escape.

The eerie GURGLING grew louder and louder. By now, Fatty had dashed to the middle of the corridor. Invincible Braver and his two companions were also running for their lives, glancing back sporadically.

The last time Invincible Braver looked back, a terrifying biohazard mask filled his vision.

It's over. They've seen me...

Now, no matter how I hide, I'll be found.

Despite this, he continued to sprint forward with all his might. "We can still use another staircase to get to a different floor and hide!"

But before they had even covered half the distance, the invigilators were practically on top of them.

Liu Qing Yu, running at the very rear, felt an icy malice at his back. Then, a cold hand slipped under his arm and seized his waist. He was caught.

"You violated the rules"—this was the last sentence Liu Qing Yu heard.

Instantly, he saw a thin line of blood appear across his waist. He... had been severed in two.

Agonizing screams instantly filled the air, assaulting everyone's ears.

This was real death!

Seeing Liu Qing Yu bisected at the waist, Invincible Braver's eyes turned bloodshot. He held his breath and ran forward with every ounce of strength he had. Moments later, Luo Shao, who was behind him, was also engulfed by the white figures.

By then, an invigilator was right behind him.

It's over. Invincible Braver felt something press against his back.

Just then, he saw Fatty abruptly stop running and crouch down in a window-side corner, still clutching that faintly blue lantern.

Seeing Fatty suddenly stop, a flicker of hope ignited in Invincible Braver, and he surged past the crouching figure.

Killing takes time! His death, at least, can buy me a few seconds to escape!

As this thought crossed his mind, he was stunned to realize that the invigilators behind seemed to have completely ignored Fatty, rushing past him and straight towards Invincible Braver himself.

Why?! Why?! That guy is holding a lantern too!

How could they not see him?!

Then, he felt a sudden coldness on his neck. His head... tumbled off.

Fatty, trembling, squatted by the window. His hands tightly clutched the Ghost Card Gu Mian had given him, which was tucked into his pocket. He watched as the tide of invigilators receded from the corridor.

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At 8:20, Gu Mian saw a new message from Pan in the cheating group.

[Pan]: Thanks, Doctor!

Gu Mian: "?"

Chapter 488 Gu Mian and His Beloved Doll_1

Gu Mian already had the answer to his second multiple-choice question.

While he was having a 'friendly exchange' with those three students, the exam paper had filled itself in. Apparently, they had found the mixed meat soup quite tasty.

But after the answer to the second multiple-choice question appeared, no further choices presented themselves. Currently, Gu Mian was heading to the location for the fill-in-the-blank question—female dormitory building No.4.

Based on his gender, he should be able to enter.

And Fatty was still babbling on.

[Pan]: I just ran into a group of patrolling examiners. They looked almost identical to the exam proctor. I, Fatty, cleverly resolved the danger and, by the way, eliminated three players who had malicious designs on you, Doctor.

Gu Mian highly doubted Fatty's claim. He thought it was more likely that those three players had accidentally run into a wall and died than been 'eliminated' by Fatty.

[Pan]: But I've hit a ghost wall and can't find this building's main entrance... Is it because my fill-in-the-blank question is in Building No.9? I probably can only leave this place after finishing that question.

[Gu Mian]: Do you want me to come and get you?

[Pan]: No, don't worry about it. It's strange, though. There are so many players, but I'm the only one in this building. I guess the instance is playing tricks. Even if you come to Building No.9, you might not be able to find me, Doctor.

[Pan]: Oh, right, Miss Xiao Qiao and I got separated near the cafeteria, and I can't contact her now. Doctor, if it's convenient, could you look for her while you're doing your questions?

Gu Mian acknowledged and closed the chat, continuing towards female dormitory building No.4.

Female dormitory building No.4 was just opposite his exam hall, so Gu Mian was very familiar with the route.

On his way to female dormitory building No.4, he occasionally encountered a few panicked-looking players. They hid in the shadows like frightened stray cats, tensing up and nearly jumping out of their skins at the slightest disturbance.

So scared? Gu Mian found it odd. They all came from the Dragon Boat event; they shouldn't be this terrified.

The streetlights overhead were dim. Though they cast light over the main road, hardly any players walked beneath them. Almost everyone he saw was hugging the walls as they moved.

Consequently, he was the only one whose head was bathed in the streetlight's glow.

However, Gu Mian had no interest in probing into the reasons for their terror. He took out the three school emblems from his white coat.

These three school emblems, which he had forcibly acquired, were special items. They were similar to Meiren Chu's item, but these three could only change one's in-game nickname.

And those three ghosts possessed nicknames precisely because they wore these emblems.

Logically speaking, special items capable of changing nicknames were extremely rare. The chance of a player obtaining three at once was virtually zero.

Furthermore, these school emblems were clearly not rewards intended for players by the event, as they were on the ghosts. Under normal circumstances, it would be impossible for a person to rip these things off a ghost. Doing so would be a death sentence.

But Gu Mian had ripped them off. Of course, 'death' had not been avoided either.

Gu Mian had previously used the Mind Amplifier on Xiao Hong and knew that ghosts could use special items, though only certain ones.

He had also tested Meiren Chu's school ID on Xiao Hong, but it had no effect when she wore it.

Yet, in this event, the ghosts could use these school emblems to acquire nicknames. This reminded Gu Mian of the ghosts from yesterday's Dragon Boat event who could impersonate players. It seemed that

starting from the Dragon Boat event, or perhaps even earlier, the ghosts in the game had undergone some kind of transformation.

Although the game was explicitly stated at its launch to be for human evolution, humans had yet to evolve anything noteworthy. In contrast, the ghosts in the game could already impersonate players. Truly a 'great' evolution.

It was basically certain that the game had two sponsors. It now appeared that the sponsor wanting human evolution was being thoroughly thrashed by the sponsor wanting instance evolution.

Who was thrashing whom was of no concern to Gu Mian. What he was currently focused on was the school name on the emblem: 'Songcheng College.' Not Lianhua University.

Those three ghosts in the cafeteria had been students of 'Songcheng College.'

This event seemed to have brought all the ghosts from an entire school within an instance into the event grounds, which was quite different from the previous two events.

The ghosts in the previous two events were drawn from various instances. But this time, not only were the exam proctors identical, but even the patrolling examiners were all the same. It wasn't a hodgepodge.

Clutching his exam paper, Gu Mian navigated the school. At exactly 8:30 PM, he reached the base of female dormitory building No.4. He first needed to check out the fish tank in dormitory room 4244.

Strange, why does it feel like there are so few people in the school? Luo Tianqing mused, wandering down the fourth-floor corridor of the No.1 Female Dormitory Building, flashlight in hand. She had just completed a multiple-choice question here and was preparing to leave.

She and 007 were teammates in the Dragon Boat event, and they had come here together this time. Besides her and 007, their remaining teammates were Xie Bi'an, Shiba, and Xue Ning.

When they had participated in the college entrance examination event together, Luo Tianqing, Shiba, and Xue Ning had decided to tackle the questions as a group, while Xie Bi'an and 007 had wanted to act independently.

The three women had agreed to rendezvous at the statue in the school's center if they could move about freely. It turned out that examinees could indeed move freely within the school, but Luo Tianqing hadn't managed to meet them because she had encountered a patrolling examiner en route.

When she reached the agreed meeting point, there was nobody there.

Left with no alternative, she could only explore the school grounds on her own.

As Luo Tianqing walked through the dark corridor, she glanced at the walkie-talkie hanging on her chest—a reward she had received from the Dragon Boat event.

Chapter 489 Gu Mian and his beloved doll_2

[A walkie-talkie (master) that can only be used once a day]

[Introduction: A pair of tattered-looking black walkie-talkies, which seem to be running out of battery]

[Function: The master walkie-talkie can call the subordinate walkie-talkie for a conversation once a day, each conversation lasting up to thirty minutes]

There were two walkie-talkies in total; the other, subordinate one, was in Xue Ning's hands.

Previously, when Luo Tianqing had failed to rendezvous with Xue Ning and Shiba, she had considered using the walkie-talkie. However, on careful thought, she deemed it a waste.

Acting together wouldn't yield as many clues as splitting up. Luo Tianqing wanted to explore the school for a while first before regrouping.

This wasn't their first time entering an instance; they weren't at the point where they wouldn't dare act alone.

"It's already half past eight," Luo Tianqing checked the time. "The examination has been underway for an hour. Xue Ning should have found some useful clues by now. It's time to call her."

As Luo Tianqing was thinking this, she pressed the call button on the walkie-talkie. "Xue Ning, are you there?"

A disadvantage of walkie-talkies is that when you call someone, they might be hiding from pursuers. Your voice could potentially reveal their hiding place, especially in a horror instance.

She was also a bit worried this might happen. Fortunately, not long after she pressed the call button, a reply came through.

"I'm here. I'm with Shiba, near the Performance Hall by the north gate."

The Performance Hall, as its name suggested, was a place for singing and dancing, where events like freshman welcoming parties were usually held.

"The Performance Hall?" Luo Tianqing instinctively looked at her fill-in-the-blank question.

[A human-sized doll is seated in seat number 4, in the 6th row of section F in the Performance Hall]

She hesitated, then asked, "Can you do me a favor?"

A voice crackling with static came from the other end, "What?"

"Could you check if there's a human-sized doll near you or in the Performance Hall, and then place it in seat number 4, in the 6th row of section F..."

Luo Tianqing felt a little guilty as she spoke. She knew it was very inconsiderate to ask someone else to do such a dangerous thing during the activity. It was a thankless task; to put it bluntly, only an idiot would help her with her question.

But she had looked at the school map. Her current location, Building No. 1, was diagonally opposite the Performance Hall. It would take about twenty minutes to run there, not to mention she might encounter terrifying invigilators along the way.

Besides, she didn't know if it would count as her answering the question if someone else 'filled in' the doll for her. But what if it did? It was worth a try.

The other side fell silent, as expected.

Just as Luo Tianqing, embarrassed, was about to retract her words, Xue Ning's voice came through the walkie-talkie, "No problem. But if I do it, it might not count as your answer."

Luo Tianqing hurriedly responded, "That's alright. Give it a try, and if it doesn't work, I'll go myself."

The voice continued from the walkie-talkie, "By the way, where are you right now?"

"Building No. 1..."

Before Luo Tianqing could finish, Xue Ning's voice came again from the walkie-talkie, "Building No. 1? What a coincidence!"

Coincidence? Luo Tianqing paused.

Xue Ning continued, "My fill-in-the-blank question is in Building No. 1."

"What is it? Let me see if I can do it for you. That could save some time."

"The question is 'The curtains in Room 1433 are closed.' I think it means I have to draw the curtains in that dorm room..."

Luo Tianqing was currently on the fourth floor of Building No. 1. Even though each floor of the dormitory building was huge, she quickly found Room 1433.

The doors to the dorm rooms were all open. Luo Tianqing stood at the entrance for a moment, then mustered her courage and stepped into the dark room before her.

It went quite smoothly. No ghosts jumped out, nor did any invigilators suddenly appear behind her.

Luo Tianqing successfully drew the curtains in Room 1433. Then, she saw that the fill-in-the-blank question on her exam paper now had an answer.

You really can answer fill-in-the-blanks for others!

Xue Ning's voice came from the walkie-talkie, "I see my fill-in-the-blank question has an answer now. We also just placed your doll. Do you have an answer on your side?"

"Yes," Luo Tianqing replied excitedly. "Let's meet up soon. I'm heading downstairs. Keep in touch."

"Okay."

Luo Tianqing quickly left the dorm room, flashlight in hand, and headed towards the stairs.

She found this activity easier than she had imagined. Although answering the questions was a bit scary, it had been frightening but not truly dangerous. Plus, you could even help others with their fill-in-the-blanks!

Lost in thought, she walked forward, her flashlight beam cutting through the corridor flanked by dormitories.

As she passed an open dormitory door, she casually glanced inside.

"What's that?" Luo Tianqing stopped abruptly. She had glimpsed an uncurtained window, and through it, she saw the building opposite.

Opposite was Dormitory No. 4.

In Dormitory No. 4, she saw a window directly facing hers. It seemed like someone was behind it, their face turned towards her.

It was too dark outside for Luo Tianqing to see clearly, only a vague human silhouette. Though blurry, it was definitely a human shape... seemingly watching her through the window.

Seeing this figure, she shivered and quickened her pace.

Better get out of here quickly...

Luo Tianqing hurried away from that dormitory door and ran towards the stairs. She ran for a good half-minute before glancing into an adjacent dormitory. One look scared her out of her wits. Through that dorm's window, the thing in the opposite building was **still** directly facing her!

It was following her!

Luo Tianqing desperately ran forward again. After covering a considerable distance, she couldn't resist looking out a window once more.

That thing was gone... The human figure had vanished, as if it had just been her imagination. Luo Tianqing stared at the opposite window for a long while before finally sighing in relief. But the sigh hadn't fully escaped her lips before it was choked back.

She saw someone in a white lab coat suddenly appear out of nowhere behind the opposite window. They were holding a flashlight and rummaging around the windowsill, as if looking for something.

Although their sudden appearance startled her, their actions clearly indicated they were a player. Luo Tianqing patted her chest, relieved. "As long as it's not that thing from before... But why did it suddenly disappear?"

At that moment, Gu Mian, who was on the fourth floor searching room by room for a dead fish, suddenly felt like someone was watching him. He looked up.

Across, in the opposite dormitory building, a cute girl holding a flashlight was looking at him. Perhaps because he'd seen Xiao Hong so much, Gu Mian now found every girl quite cute. He waved at her, "Hello there."

The cute girl was clearly surprised by his ability to find amusement in adversity, but she eventually waved back out of respect.

Gu Mian had searched almost the entire floor but hadn't found any dead fish, though he'd found plenty of little dresses. This was no help at all for his fill-in-the-blank question.

He turned around with his flashlight. "I sincerely hope the fifth floor isn't just full of little dresses..."

Luo Tianqing watched the person in the opposite building leave with their flashlight, thoughtfully closing the dormitory door behind them.

And then she suddenly realized a horrifying fact—it hadn't left.

Just as that person turned to leave, Luo Tianqing saw the terrifying human figure that had been obscured by them.

It was still following her!

Run!

That seemed to be the only thought left in Luo Tianqing's mind. She ran with all her might, but no matter how fast she ran, she couldn't reach the end of the corridor.

No stairs! No exit! Only open dormitory doors.

Whenever she glanced out a window, she could see that figure standing behind a window in the opposite building...staring fixedly at her.

After running for who knows how long, she glanced at a nearby room number and saw a familiar one—'1433'.

The curtains she had closed were still drawn tight. Luo Tianqing suddenly remembered that all the strange occurrences had started after she closed the curtains in this very room.

Trembling, she moved through the darkness into the dormitory, step by step, towards the closed curtains.

"If... if this is the cause... then I'll open it again..."

Muttering to herself, her hands trembling, she pulled the curtain before her open a crack. Through the gap, she saw a pair of eyes staring intently back at her.

"Past the statue, turn left... Mmm, see Dormitory No. 3? Go along Dormitory No. 3, past the pavilion..."

Xue Ning clutched the walkie-talkie in one hand while pulling Shiba along with the other. "We were supposed to meet at the statue. Tianqing seems to have run into some trouble, so now we have to go to Dormitory No. 1 to meet her."

Shiba followed closely behind Xue Ning. "It's okay."

"After passing the pavilion, look to your left..."

"We're here!" Xue Ning said, looking to her left.

One glance was enough to make her scalp prickle. Standing to the left of the pavilion was the doll, holding a walkie-talkie and grinning eerily at them.

Chapter 490 Conscience Awakening, Prodigal Son Returns, The Radiance of the Holy Mother Illuminates the Earth_1

"Rules.

"Long-standing rules that are indelibly imprinted in our minds often don't need to be stated specifically. When you go to a supermarket, for example, there will be a sign at the entrance that says 'No Pets Allowed,' but there won't be one that says 'No Killing.'

"Because 'no killing' is deeply embedded in our minds, just like you can't rob a bank, just like you can't hold a rave in school..."

Gu Mian believed Chu Changge was right. He had never seen a sign saying "Robbery Prohibited" in any bank, nor a school rule that banned raves on campus.

At this moment, Gu Mian was still in the girls' dormitory, which he had entered without any hindrance.

Despite this, Gu Mian did not think his gender might be an issue.

It's just a glitch in the game program, he thought.

Chu Changge, however, was not in the dormitory. His voice was coming from the speakers on the corridor wall. It wasn't intentionally directed at Gu Mian; rather, Gu Mian discovered Chu Changge's voice was resonating throughout the entire school. Everyone could hear it through the school's loudspeakers.

Gu Mian guessed he might be in the broadcasting room, and judging by his tone... it seemed he had accidentally turned on the broadcast switch while talking to someone.

Chu Changge's voice continued: "...just like you can't cheat during exams."

Gu Mian was certain that other players would feel a chill down their spines, tears streaming uncontrollably, upon hearing this.

"Each candidate's test paper is different. This prevents candidates from copying others' papers and greatly reduces the chance of cheating. However, someone came up with a new idea: working on the problems together.

"For example, like during our usual exams, a group of people might gather to work on one problem, or you work on my problem and I work on yours. That is also cheating."

Chu Changge's voice paused at that point.

Gu Mian heard movement from the speaker, as if someone had taken a few steps in the broadcasting room.

Then he heard a noise from outside the window. Gu Mian leaned over to look and saw a group of candidates huddled together below, accidentally knocking over a trash can.

"I just came from the surveillance room next door. According to the footage, any candidates who interfere with another person's exam questions will die. Ghosts cannot arbitrarily kill their own designated examinee, but they can relentlessly hunt down others who interfere with exam questions. As long as you've interfered with someone else's exam questions and are still in this school, you will undoubtedly die."

A long silence ensued after this statement.

After about ten seconds, Gu Mian finally heard Chu Changge's voice continue: "Don't tell the other players about this. The more people who die, the higher our rankings will be."

Xiao Qiao took two steps forward, peering at the control panel behind Chu Changge. "But it seems like you left the broadcast switch on just now."

"Ah," Chu Changge turned his head to look at the control panel and switched off the broadcast. "It's off now."

"Don't tell other players? Yeah, right! I heard everything," Fatty muttered. He had just left Teaching Building No. 9 when he heard Chu Changge's voice echoing throughout the school.

He finally understood that he hadn't been caught by ghosts while solving the questions not because he was brave or cunning, but because he hadn't broken the rules.

There were also players in twos and threes on the path he was on, all gathered together.

These people visibly panicked; they must have been among those who had "worked on the problems together."

But Chu Changge's words didn't stun all the players.

"I think he did it on purpose," Anzhi Tianlan said, looking at her teammates beside her, who were already starting to get scared. They were currently near a green belt on East Campus Road. "How could he coincidentally say such things in the broadcasting room, and then coincidentally leave the switch on for us to hear?"

The Junior Sister frowned. "You mean he..."

"Wants to scare us off," Anzhi Tianlan said, looking towards the distant teaching building. "He deliberately mentioned, 'as long as you are still in this school, you will certainly die.' The exam has been going on for over an hour, and ninety percent of the players have worked together, interfering with others' exam questions. His choosing to say this now is obviously to drive people away."

Candidates could leave the school at any time, provided they handed in their papers first.

"Because if they hand in their papers early and leave, their scores won't be too high, right? That way, the players who stay until the end will get higher scores," the Junior Sister pondered.

"That's correct," Anzhi Tianlan nodded.

She remembered that Doctor again, the one they had met during the instance and the dragon boat event.

When the broadcast voice sounded overhead, she had subconsciously thought it was that Doctor causing trouble.

But listening closely, she could tell their voices were different. This man's voice was calm and steady, unlike that somewhat neurotic Doctor's tone.

"So, should we continue answering the questions?" The Junior Sister was also quite shaken. The man on the broadcast was right; most players did team up, just like she and Anzhi Tianlan had.

The two of them had gone to the question locations together, and now both had filled in an answer for one question each.

「At this moment, Xiao Qiao and Chu Changge were still in the broadcasting room.」

After separating from Fatty, Xiao Qiao had been exploring on her own and happened to run into Chu Changge in the broadcasting room.

Chu Changge, his back to the control panel, pushed up his glasses. "Unpredictable ghosts are what players fear most. More so than ghosts who kill according to rules, players are more afraid of ghosts who lack a pattern and can kill at any time.

"It's like how students are more afraid of the class teacher who might press their face against the back door glass at any moment, than of the discipline teacher who inspects on schedule.

"More than half of the candidates in this school are already dead, and the rest are in a state of panic. They've discovered that the ghosts in this event seem to kill without reason. They can strike at any time, unbound by any rules... Unlike in instances and other events, where simply staying on the boat during

the Dragon Boat event would ensure your survival, or where you could use reasoning to escape pursuit in an instance, it doesn't work here.

"And since I've just explained to them why they are being hunted so erratically, the number of people in the school should decrease further."

Xiao Qiao had a sudden realization. "You want the players to leave the school?"

So, that last sentence he said, "Don't tell other players," was also a lie, she realized.

Chu Changge paused for a moment, then took two steps forward in the darkness, leaving the broadcasting room. "I dislike crowds."

Xiao Qiao turned to look at Chu Changge's retreating figure. "But is what you said true?"

"It is true." Chu Changge took a few more steps, his figure disappearing into the darkness.

Gu Mian, in the girls' dormitory, had heard everything, including Xiao Qiao's "But it seems like you left the broadcast switch on just now."

He immediately understood. So, Chu Changge wants the players who fell into the trap to run? And then he added that bit about not letting others know...

Considering Chu Changge's usual way of doing things, he's probably trying to set someone up, Gu Mian thought.

Then again, maybe not. What if he's had a sudden crisis of conscience, decided to turn over a new leaf, and is now radiating the benevolence of a reformed saint? Gu Mian mused, turning to leave the dormitory. At that moment, his peripheral vision caught something outside the window.

From his position, Gu Mian had a clear view of the school fence not far from the dormitory building. When he saw what was outside, he froze as if struck by lightning.

Ghosts outside... and two of them... Gu Mian registered.

Xiao Hong had somehow climbed onto the fence. She was sitting there happily, reaching out to her brother who was still outside.

Gu Mian's mouth opened in serene shock.

007 was being relentlessly chased by an invigilator.

She had recognized Chu Changge's voice on the broadcast long ago. After hearing his announcement, she had decided to turn in her paper and leave.

Although 007 hadn't interfered with anyone else's exam questions, her intuition told her something was off about this event. So, holding a paper with only three questions answered, she had tried to return to the examination hall to submit it.

Unexpectedly, she ran into an invigilator beneath Building No. 6.

The moment she saw the invigilator, 007 turned and bolted, sprinting towards the No. 4 girls' dormitory directly opposite.

As she turned to flee, she saw several candidates poking their heads out of a window in Building No. 6, apparently watching her predicament for entertainment.

The candidates in the examination hall didn't need to worry about being caught by invigilators, which was why they dared to look.

007 had no time for onlookers. She ran desperately towards the main entrance of the No. 4 dormitory, hoping to rush into the building and hide.

But the invigilator was too fast. Just two seconds after she dashed through the dormitory entrance, the invigilator also reached the gate, less than five meters behind her.

At this distance, she knew she couldn't outrun them.

It seemed more and more people were looking out from the windows above.

But just as the invigilators outside the door were about to enter the girls' dormitory, 007 suddenly heard an extremely loud, furious voice from above her:

"ALL OF YOU, GET OUT!"

The voice was incredibly piercing, its source unclear from which floor, yet it seemed to contain boundless fury. The entire No. 4 dormitory now echoed with this sound.

At that moment, 007 saw the invigilators outside the door stop in unison. Then, they turned around, leaving her with the lonely sight of their retreating backs.

After watching a dozen invigilators depart, she instinctively looked up. Of course, 007 recognized the voice. Even though its owner sounded furious now, she had never seen that person angry before.

007 didn't think Gu Mian's shout was for her, because although it was very loud, she could tell it wasn't coming from nearby.

It sounded like it came from a few floors above... but how did Gu Mian even get into the girls' dormitory? 007 wondered.

The shout was so loud that several buildings around Dormitory No. 4 could hear it. The candidates in the Building No. 6 examination hall had been watching the female player being chased. Unexpectedly, this roar came out of nowhere, startling the unprepared onlookers.

But they soon realized they weren't the only ones startled. The invigilators who had chased the female player to the entrance of the girls' dormitory had actually responded to the call, stopping in unison... and then turned around and left?

"They left?" A player watching the spectacle through binoculars wiped his lenses. "My binoculars aren't broken, are they?"

Xiao Hong was also startled by Gu Mian's deadly roar. She literally jumped on the fence and then tumbled off, falling to the ground outside with a THUD.

Her brother's gaze followed the sound and locked onto Gu Mian. At that moment, he was crouching obediently outside the fence, as if he had never been involved in any wall-climbing attempt.

Seeing Xiao Hong fall outside, Gu Mian finally closed his mouth.

If those two came in, they might never get out again, Gu Mian thought.