

## **Collapse 501**

Chapter 501 You are really a good person\_1

There were five of them in total, three men and two women.

Gu Mian recognized one of them.

It was Xie Bi'an, still dressed as he usually was, enshrouded entirely in his black robe, even his eyes hidden from sight.

Gu Mian always wondered how he managed to see where he was going.

The other four unwittingly surrounded Xie Bi'an, with one of the male players pointing to the inn sign as if asking Xie Bi'an about it.

The murmuring from the people below was too faint for Gu Mian to hear, but he saw Xie Bi'an nodding in response to the male player.

Then, with a dazed air about them, the group walked into the Passing Inn.

"It seems they formed a team after the event ended," Chu Changge said, appearing behind Gu Mian out of nowhere and looking down through the window. "They're not familiar with each other and all seem immersed in grief. It's likely their former teammates died, and the remaining scattered survivors then gathered together."

"You know..." Gu Mian turned to look at Chu Changge. "You've told me such bizarre things, like coming from a Low-Dimensional World. Why not also describe what Xie Bi'an looks like? Wrapped up so tightly, could he possibly look like me?"

Chu Changge definitely knew Xie Bi'an from the past.

However, Chu Changge had always believed Xie Bi'an was dead.

After a moment of silence, Chu Changge said, "I know what he used to look like. He was completely different from you."

From Gu Mian's many years of watching TV dramas, characters wrapped this tightly usually reveal their faces at the climax, leading to a plot twist.

Gu Mian could even make up a plot on the spot. A masked villain commits evil deeds from the first episode to the last. Only when the hero kills him and unmasks him is it revealed that this man was the father he had been desperately searching for.

With a few minor refinements—add a beautiful female confidante who dies on the eve of the grand finale, a few kind elders murdered by the protagonist's father, and a best friend who ends up in a vegetative state—it would be a complete melodrama.

He had even assigned the roles.

He himself would be the sorrowful protagonist. Xiao Hong would be the beautiful female confidante. Fatty, who looked perpetually anxious, and his brother could together play the kind master or elder figure who was very good to the protagonist but was cruelly murdered. And finally, Chu Changge would end up in a vegetative state.

This role allocation was truly perfect.

Hold on, could this Xie Bi'an actually be his own father? Gu Mian had this horrifying thought.

But he quickly shook his head, banishing the bizarre idea from his mind.

Chu Changge, unaware that he had just been mentally cast into a vegetative state, continued, "I know I'm not the only one who came from a Low-Dimensional World. There are other 'adapters' from various worlds who have found their way here through certain means."

Gu Mian already knew this.

If his guess was right, Liu Ruyan and Xiao Qiao were also from a Low-Dimensional World. However, he didn't know if those two came from the same world.

Fatty's father also seemed highly suspicious, but since he was dead now, there was no way to ask.

"I can't directly identify others who, like me, come from a Low-Dimensional World," Chu Changge continued. "I can only slowly deduce it from their behavior and actions. But Xiao Qiao can directly identify people from a Low-Dimensional World with just a single glance."

At this moment, Fatty came over holding a bowl, and the aroma of meat soup wafted to Gu Mian's nostrils.

"No wonder she could immediately identify the imposter Brother Chu during the dragon boat event," Fatty said, slurping some soup. "By that logic, Miss Xiao Qiao seems a tad more capable than Brother Chu, doesn't she?"

Ignoring Fatty, who was still holding his soup bowl, Chu Changge continued, "And he also belongs to the Low-Dimensional World."

Gu Mian knew "he" referred to Xie Bi'an.

The five players had already entered the building. Looking out the window now, one could only see the stone-paved ground reflecting the sunlight.

"However, many years ago, he had an accident. We all thought he had long since died."

Although Fatty was somewhat confused, he still asked curiously, "What accident?"

Chu Changge's expression didn't change. "We're not sure about the specifics, only that he died unexpectedly. His body was cremated and his ashes put into an urn. He had a death certificate, ashes, and a grave; by all official accounts, he was a dead man."

But now he stood before them, alive and well.

Fatty shivered. "It truly is a wide world full of bizarre things. When I worked at the crematorium, I saw cases of 'reanimation,' but I never imagined someone could even fake their own ashes."

Hearing this, Gu Mian picked up the photo that had his own face on it. "I need to confirm something. Is everyone's mission the same? For instance, some people's mission is to ensure this person \*doesn't\* die, while others' mission is to ensure he \*must\* die."

Although Gu Mian was well aware that the person in the photo wasn't him, they looked absolutely identical.

An assassination attempt could easily lead to accidental injury.

"It's the same," Chu Changge said, looking at the photo in Gu Mian's hand. "But it doesn't rule out the possibility that some individuals might have their own ideas. Xie Bi'an is definitely uncontrollable."

Upon hearing this, Gu Mian felt uneasy.

This Xie Bi'an, a man who was both dead and alive, kept mysteriously appearing right under his nose. Yet, he showed no intention of stepping forward to shield him in a crisis, nor did he seem to have any other particular intentions.

"Let me ask another question," Fatty raised his chubby hand, "did he always go by the name Xie Bi'an?"

Chapter 502 You are really a good person\_2

Chu Changge shook his head. "Jiang Yang. He used to be named Jiang Yang."

"No matter what he's called, we can't allow these folks to live with us. The Doctor's distinctive features are far too obvious. It would be easy for people to discover his identity. Additionally, Xie Bi'an likely knows the Doctor's identity. If he tells others, some people are bound to get ideas," Fatty began to express his opinion.

These players all participated in the college entrance exam event.

There's a good chance they saw Gu Mian use a Spirit Car to ram the exam invigilators. That move was so unusual, it's understandable they'd remember the person who did it.

However, Fatty might be an even bigger target than Gu Mian, as his larger size makes him more conspicuous.

"Speaking of the Doctor's distinctive features, Doctor, if you took off your white coat, I bet 80 percent of people wouldn't recognize you. After all, that coat seems to be your true form," Fatty said, seemingly having completely forgotten about using Gu Mian's 'true form' to wipe his snot last night.

Right then, he was meticulously planning, "Hmm, Doctor, first, take off your white coat and change into that new black shirt, just in case. As for those other players... how about tonight we go scare them so badly they flee in terror and never dare to return?"

There's no need to go that far...

Gu Mian recalled his previous neighbors. They all voluntarily left after experiencing a series of bizarre events.

Gu Mian remembered a small-time boss who had rented a house here specifically to pursue Liu Ruyan. He'd use the excuse of 'checking on my rental property' to sneak peeks at her. His rental was right next to Gu Mian's place.

Gu Mian recalled that the water heater in the house next door later short-circuited, electrocuting the small-time boss so badly he nearly had an epileptic fit.

When the electricity leaked in the neighboring house, Gu Mian was taking a shower in his bathroom. The circuit breaker tripped the moment he stepped out of the bathroom.

After that, nobody lived next door.

At this moment, Fatty was looking eagerly at Xiao Hong, who was hanging from the chandelier. "Xiao Hong, tonight, when it's dead silent, how about you sneak over to their window and give them a good scare?"

Xiao Hong excitedly hopped down.

Gu Mian: "..."

"Look what I've found. New tenants."

Xingluo Buzhichu and the others were walking down the fourth-floor corridor, looking for a door they could open. Before they could find one that would open, they heard a voice from ahead.

They looked up and saw a woman leaning against the entrance to the stairwell, twirling a ring of keys on her finger.

Xingluo Buzhichu, who was at the front, hesitated for a moment before asking, "Excuse me, are you the landlady here?"

Liu Ruyan looked at the man with some surprise.

Since the global game began, most people had become quite casual about staying in hotels. Not only did they not pay, but even if they encountered a landlord, they wouldn't show any courtesy.

They were complete freeloaders.

In this environment, it was rare to encounter such polite tenants, who even used honorifics.

The few people behind him also seemed quite polite.

One man and one woman appeared to be a couple, with the nicknames 'Accompany me next year' and 'Know my thoughts'. The remaining girl, nicknamed 'Su Xiaocha', seemed not to know them.

Of course, the most eye-catching one among them was Xie Bi'an.

Liu Ruyan stared at Xie Bi'an for a moment before smiling and replying, "Yes, I'm the landlady here. Are you looking to stay?"

Xingluo hesitated.

Before the global game began, he had been a prison guard and had seen his fair share of psychopaths and murderers.

For some reason, he sensed an aura of madness emanating from this woman.

She's dangerous.

Just as he was about to refuse, he suddenly heard a pleasant, gentle voice from behind him, "Yes, we intend to stay here."

Xingluo turned to look and saw that Xie Bi'an had, at some point, stepped forward.

Truth be told, as a prison guard who had encountered many deviants, he was very wary of people like this, cloaked in black and with their faces hidden. Completely concealing oneself was often what criminals did before committing a crime.

But, surprisingly, Xie Bi'an always exuded a sense of reassurance. If you spoke with him quietly for a few moments, you would feel that he was definitely not a bad person.

He was a gentle person who harbored goodwill towards the world.

"Don't worry," Xie Bi'an said with a chuckle, seeming to have read Xingluo's mind. "I know this landlady. She's not a bad person."

"Of course I'm not a bad person," Liu Ruyan said, stepping back slightly. "I presume you all participated in the college entrance exam event? I didn't join that one. I heard not many players made it out alive. Could you roughly tell me what happened in there?"

If Gu Mian were here, he would surely marvel at Liu Ruyan's ability to lie so blatantly.

Xingluo lowered his head slightly. "Not long after that event started, my teammates were killed off one by one. It was baffling; we had no idea what taboo we'd broken. We could only watch helplessly as the people around us died.

"Later, a man played a broadcast. I still remember the content clearly... 'Anyone who participates in another's exam question will undoubtedly die.' The moment I heard that broadcast, I believed him.

"Fortunately... I hadn't yet participated in anyone else's exam questions at that point because, at the start, everyone was working on my questions...

"After hearing the broadcast, I and another survivor wanted to leave the school. But then we ran into an exam invigilator. We got separated while fleeing. I searched for him for a long time, right until a horde of ghosts suddenly swarmed out. I turned and ran. A few seconds later, the ground began to shake... Then the entire school collapsed. Chased, I could only run for my life, without even submitting my exam paper.

"While running, I thought I was going to die there. I didn't know if I could leave the school gates without submitting my paper, but I had to take the gamble, because there were life-threatening ghosts chasing me.

"Luckily, miracles still happen in this world. When I reached the school gate, I found it had cracked open. I think the tremors must have broken it, so I managed to escape."

At this point, Xingluo fell silent for a good half-minute. "But I still wanted to wait for someone, so I waited at the school gate for a very, very long time. I waited until it was almost dawn, but the person I was waiting for never appeared."

Liu Ruyan took out a key. "That was truly an instance with heavy casualties... Second room on the left. It's a large room; you can all stay there."

As she spoke, she tossed the key to Xingluo.

Xingluo caught the key, looking stunned for a moment before quickly thanking her, "Thank you..."

Just as Liu Ruyan was about to offer a polite "You're welcome" or something similar, the group on the fourth floor suddenly heard a loud noise from upstairs.

It sounded like some unruly kid was energetically jumping around upstairs.

The players stared blankly up at the ceiling.

"Oh," Liu Ruyan chuckled. "I forgot to mention, besides you, there are other tenants here. They live upstairs. By the way, those tenants aren't very nice people. You'd best not go up there."

Not very nice people...

The players silently mulled over this description, a sense of dread creeping in.

「Night quickly fell.」

Fatty, on the sixth floor, had already made his preparations.

Gu Mian didn't have any cosmetics at home, so Fatty used flour to paint Xiao Hong's face a ghastly white, then dabbed on some strawberry jam.

However, after the flour covered her most terrifying features, Xiao Hong didn't look quite so scary anymore.

This was clearly a failed attempt at makeup.

The overhead light was on. Gu Mian, wearing the new black shirt Fatty had bought, was curled up on the sofa, scooping strawberry jam from a can with a spoon.

Meanwhile, Fatty was by the window, giving Xiao Hong a pep talk. Gu Mian heard him muttering, "Just climb onto the sill of that lit window and scare them. If no one sees you, knock on the window, then press your face against the glass. Yes, just like that..."

Then, Gu Mian saw a white smudge appear on their own window.

Chapter 503 Old World\_1

"Considering her previous record of climbing out windows, I think she's in for a nasty fall this time too..."

Before Gu Mian could finish his sentence, Xiao Hong, who Fatty had half-pushed out, lost her footing.

Immediately after, Gu Mian heard a LOUD BANG, like someone had jumped from a building and slammed onto the ground. Indeed, someone had slammed onto the ground.

After a two-second silence, Gu Mian stood up and walked over to Fatty, who was leaning on the windowsill, looking down with an indescribable expression. Gu Mian interpreted his expression to mean, You can't carve rotten wood.

Xingluo, who was brooding on the living room sofa on the fourth floor, was startled by the loud thud. After his experience in the College Entrance Exam instance, the slightest noise put him on high alert.

"What happened?" The two girls also ran out of their dimly lit rooms.

This was a two-bedroom apartment. Since having the couple (two of the players there) share a room would make assigning the other difficult, the rooms had been allocated by gender.

"It sounds like something fell... It sounded like a person..."

Xingluo felt uneasy and instinctively glanced at the wall clock. But the clock had long stopped ticking, its battery dead.

"Don't we have tenants upstairs too?" Accompany Me Next Year quickly walked to the window. "Could they have dropped something?" As she spoke, she leaned out to look down.

The street, devoid of streetlights, was pitch black. Looking down from the window, one could only see dense darkness.

The thudding sound made the already subdued group even more agitated, and a sense of panic began to set in. What kind of people lived upstairs?

Before Gu Mian and the others could go find Xiao Hong, who had accidentally fallen, there was a knock on the door.

Had Xiao Hong climbed back up herself? Fatty trotted to the door, looked through the peephole, and saw Liu Ruyan standing outside.

"Miss Liu..." Fatty opened the door. "What brings you here so late?"

"I just wanted to ask if this was dropped by you lot." Liu Ruyan spoke as she reached out and pulled Xiao Hong, who was lurking to the side, into view. "She took quite a tumble. It's strange, every time I run into her at an inn, she falls from an upper floor."

Pausing as if recalling something, Liu Ruyan added, "She landed face-first last time too."

Gu Mian suddenly understood why Xiao Hong looked so unattractive.

The last time Xiao Hong had fallen from a building was during the Lantern Festival. She had been climbing through windows looking for Gu Mian but had mistaken Liu Ruyan's room for his. According to Liu Ruyan, Xiao Hong's Mind Amplifier had been shouting, "Wrong room! Wrong room!" right before she plummeted with a SMACK.

Gu Mian didn't bother checking Xiao Hong's face to see if it had become even flatter. Instead, he turned to Liu Ruyan in front of him. "Actually, there's something I wanted to ask you."

His question concerned the Low-Dimensional World Chu Changge had spoken of.

Chu Changge hailed from the Second World. According to his description, the Second World had a background similar to Earth, except that, for some unknown reason, it was inhabited solely by Asians. Liu Ruyan and Chu Changge were not from the same place, so Gu Mian was curious about Liu Ruyan's world.

Liu Ruyan seemed to sense something and crossed her arms. "What is it?"

"About where you come from," Gu Mian said, staring at her.

Gu Mian had once used the Prophecy Book to see all of Liu Ruyan's identities throughout her life, and he was still very curious about her past labels of "fugitive" and "murderer."

Originally, Gu Mian had wondered how Liu Ruyan had evaded the eyes of the law, but if she were from another world, it would explain everything. Even if one committed countless evils in this world, one could simply jump to another world and become a respectable, law-abiding citizen.

But Gu Mian remembered Liu Ruyan was only twenty-two this year. Although she looked older than her years, she was indeed young. It was surprising that someone of twenty-two could have such vast experience. He subconsciously felt that Liu Ruyan's world couldn't be simple; at the very least, it was unlikely to be a society governed by the rule of law.

Truthfully, it would be hard to find someone Liu Ruyan's age with more life experience.

Just then, Fatty, who was nearby, leaned over to wipe strawberry jam Xiao Hong had smeared on the door.

Wait a minute, there's someone here with even more life experience than Liu Ruyan.

However, now wasn't the time to compare life experiences. Gu Mian continued to gaze at Liu Ruyan.

She seemed to have anticipated his question, as her expression didn't change much. "I see. Chu Changge must have told you."

Gu Mian stroked his chin. "Can you tell me about your world?"

"My world..." Liu Ruyan spoke in a resigned, almost defiant tone. "Since Chu Changge has already told you about such things, I'll be frank. The development level of my world was similar to the real world several decades ago. People were very warm; neighbors visited each other frequently, and strangers meeting on the street would greet each other kindly. Furthermore, the world was inhabited only by Asians. But I must say, it was an extremely pathological world, almost indescribable...

"If I had to describe it... people in that world lived for only two things: eating and surveillance.

"Our world had a supposedly perfect Law Code. Everyone memorized its contents by heart and acted strictly according to it. The slightest transgression meant you were finished—and I mean truly finished.

"Everyone was constantly monitoring everyone else. If someone's actions deviated even slightly from the rules of the Law Code, they would be reported and publicly denounced by those around them, including their friends and family. In that world, obeying orders was far more important than familial ties.

"I often saw people stripped naked by their own relatives, bound, and thrown into the street to be flogged, a sign reading 'SHAME' hung around their necks. Large crowds would gather to watch, cheering around the bound individual. Anyone could spit on them, pull their hair, or pelt them with stones. I still remember the expressions on those people's faces."

Liu Ruyan chuckled at this point. "They were excited and frenzied... You would never guess what that person had done."

She paused, looking at Gu Mian. "He lied to his parents about his salary, saving a little money to buy bread for a starving child on the street."

"In our world, deceiving one's elders was a grave offense. Anyone who broke this rule would meet such a tragic end. No one could resist." Liu Ruyan seemed to greatly dislike recalling these things; an unnatural look came over her face.

Gu Mian, however, remarked thoughtfully, "Oh. Good thing I'm an orphan, then."

It was as if he didn't find her world particularly tragic.

Liu Ruyan silently glanced at Gu Mian. "Sometimes I wonder what would happen if you appeared in our world."

Fatty, having finished wiping the jam, leaned over. "It would definitely be spectacular! He'd be punching parents and kicking the masses, probably even tear up their Law Code!"

Fatty figured that, never mind stripping him, those people wouldn't even be able to pluck a single hair from Gu Mian.

"Yes..." Liu Ruyan leaned against the wall, her expression suddenly melancholic. "Perhaps everything would have been different if Gu Mian had appeared in our world back then... In our world, the most terrifying thing wasn't the inescapable Law Code, but the human heart."

"No one thought it was pathological; instead, they took pride in it."

"So, does that mean you were considered normal in your own world?" Fatty asked Liu Ruyan curiously.

Liu Ruyan gave a small laugh. "If I had lived in this world from the beginning, I'd probably be considered normal now."

"But, Doctor, we've never entered an instance like Miss Liu Ruyan's world, have we?" Fatty racked his brains. "I can't recall any instance with a worldview that matches."

Speaking of worldviews, the worldview of the Slaughter Game was somewhat similar to that of Liu Ruyan's world.

The worldview of the Slaughter Game was also quite pathological, but it was different from Liu Ruyan's world. Liu Ruyan's world appeared peaceful on the surface; everyone seemed united, kind, and lovely. At first glance, it appeared to be a perfect world of peace and prosperity. Only by delving deeper could one uncover its underlying madness.

The worldview of The Slaughter Game, however, was different. Gu Mian had seen the pathological class antagonism in that world as soon as he entered the instance. The elite looked down on the lower classes as if they were beasts in a fighting pit—perhaps even worse than beasts.

At least frenzied beasts could provide them with extreme entertainment, whereas in that world, very few of the lower-class people dared to become frenzied—almost none.

They didn't know how to resist. This aspect was somewhat similar to Liu Ruyan's world; perhaps the two worlds were closely related.

By this count, there were at least three worlds.

Chu Changge's Second World, the unnamed world of the Slaughter Game, and Liu Ruyan's world...

As Gu Mian pondered this, he looked at Liu Ruyan and asked, "Every world has a name, right? What's the name of your world?"

Liu Ruyan clenched her fist and tapped it lightly against the wall. After hesitating for two seconds, she said, "Old World."

Chapter 504 Give me 30 million, or else.....\_1

The Old World...

Gu Mian stroked his chin. Not a bad name. If time were rolled back a hundred years or so, to the warlord era of Republican China, it would have been a fittingly atmospheric name for a brothel.

Liu Ruyan had no idea her world had just been likened to an atmospherically named brothel.

She shoved her hands into her pockets. "I was an outcast in my own world. It wasn't until I came here that I realized this world suits me better. If I hadn't been born in my original world, I'd probably be a normal person, developing like anyone else."

She wouldn't have been branded a fugitive or a murderer.

"But when did you kill someone?" Gu Mian asked, stepping back a few paces and picking up a jar of strawberry jam from the table.

Liu Ruyan gave him a peculiar look. "You even know about that? I never told anyone else."

Liu Ruyan was unaware that Gu Mian had used the Prophecy Book to learn about her.

Seemingly uninterested in how Gu Mian knew, she paused before continuing, "I remember... I think I was fourteen."

"Fourteen?" Fatty looked surprised. "You were just a little girl then."

He had instinctively wanted to use "young maiden" for a fourteen-year-old, but looking at Liu Ruyan, it seemed she'd never had such a phase.

"People who are asleep are, of course, exceptionally easy to kill. All you have to do is grab something and smash it hard against their head. Even if it doesn't kill them, they can't move. Someone hit hard on the head will just writhe unconsciously; they can't resist whatever you do to them."

Hearing this, Fatty thought Liu Ruyan sounded like the kind of deviant who stalks people and attacks them when they least expect it.

"It must have been hard to find someone who slept that soundly..." Fatty murmured.

Liu Ruyan laughed. "There were two of them. Later, I burned the house down with them inside."

Two? Fatty looked puzzled at first. Then, as a horrifying thought struck him, his eyes widened. "You don't mean..."

"That's right," Liu Ruyan said, her smile unfaltering. "I broke the rules. If I hadn't acted first, they would have dragged me out onto the streets, paraded me around with a sign hung around my neck. I didn't want people spitting on me."

Fatty was terrified for a moment, but then understanding seemed to dawn on him. "You have a point. In your world, all relationships are pretty much the same. Parents and friends are hardly different from strangers... Still, I'm surprised you could kill so decisively."

"Because they were wrong, don't you think? A wrong world, wrong concepts—all wrongs should be thoroughly eradicated," Liu Ruyan said, still smiling.

Fatty felt a chill as he listened to Liu Ruyan's laugh; it sounded somewhat eerie.

"I don't think you were an outcast in your world," Gu Mian suddenly said from the side.

Fatty turned to see Gu Mian holding the jar of strawberry jam, looking at Liu Ruyan. "You're not an outcast. They abide by the Law Code; you abide by rules you set yourself. It's just a difference in ideology that led to conflict. If people followed your rules instead of the Law Code, I imagine you'd feel perfectly in sync with that world."

In essence, Liu Ruyan and the Old World were almost identical. She was practically made for this world: fanatical about rules, ruthless in eliminating violators, and utterly devoid of compassion. Not that compassion is needed in that world anyway.

"You're the first person to say that about me," Liu Ruyan said, her smile fading. "After I was caught, I managed to escape. It was successful, but as you can imagine, a little girl can't get very far. Within a week, I was recaptured. Everyone called me an outcast. Soon after, I was chosen to participate in a game."

"A game?" Fatty asked curiously. "Like this global game we're playing now?"

Liu Ruyan shook her head. "Of course not. Our world never suffered such a devastating blow... though I rather wish it had."

Sensing she had digressed, she continued, "It was a game like a battle royale, with all participants being children around my age. As I told you, the Old World wasn't very technologically advanced. There was no cloning or anything like Artificial Men.

"If someone wanted a high-quality child but couldn't produce one themselves, they had to choose from a large group of children. It was like breeding poisonous insects, and I was just one of them."

"And you succeeded," Gu Mian stated, recalling the "champion" title associated with Liu Ruyan.

"I succeeded, and I received my reward," Liu Ruyan said, a smile returning to her face. "The reward was being successfully brought to this world. I was the only one..."

"...And successfully sneaking into my room to turn the valve dozens of times," Gu Mian added.

Liu Ruyan fell silent.

A few seconds later, she spoke again, "Right, I came here the same year I committed those murders. So much happened that year... Oh, and the year I arrived here, I met a good friend. He liked murder and arson as much as I did..."

Fatty instinctively took a step back, suddenly feeling like the inn was at high risk of catching fire.

What a peculiar friendship...

"But he died later... or at least, I suppose he's dead..." Liu Ruyan seemed lost in her thoughts, standing motionless at the door.

"But seriously," Liu Ruyan paused for a long moment before speaking again, "if you ever get matched into an instance of the Old World, could you say hello for me? You know what I mean by 'say hello,' right?"

It seemed Liu Ruyan thoroughly detested her own world.

Gu Mian slammed the door shut with a SNAP, leaving Liu Ruyan outside.

"Doctor, I'm suddenly finding Miss Liu Ruyan quite terrifying," Fatty said, rubbing his arm where goosebumps had erupted.

Still rubbing his arm, Fatty asked timidly, "Doctor, can I sleep with you tonight?"

Gu Mian replied thoughtfully, "If you want to be hung from the ceiling, then sure."

Fatty shut his mouth.

"From what Liu Ruyan said, her situation is similar to Chu Changge's. They both come from Low-Dimensional Worlds, and only one person came here from each of those worlds," Gu Mian mused, rubbing his chin.

In that case, Xiao Qiao must be from another unknown world. Xie Bi'an too. Adding Fatty's highly suspicious father, that makes at least five Low-Dimensional Worlds. They each selected one person from

their respective worlds to come to the real world, all to prevent the death of that person who looks identical to Gu Mian.

Of course, Gu Mian thought, that person could very well be him.

He thought about the game's two organizers, the assassination attempts he'd faced over the years, and the game compensations from the instances that were never paid out...

It could be concluded that all the assassination attempts over the past twenty years were orchestrated by Earth, while those Low-Dimensional Worlds are trying their best to keep me alive. It's the same with luck. Earth curses me with bad luck so I can't draw anything good, and the Low-Dimensional Worlds compensate me when an instance collapses? It looks like my being alive is beneficial to those worlds.

It appeared the lottery and the compensations were controlled by two different organizers.

Since the Low-Dimensional Worlds don't want him to die...

Lost in thought, Gu Mian grabbed a fruit knife from the coffee table, held it above his head, and yelled, "If I don't get thirty million, I'll kill myself!"

Chu Changge, sitting on the sofa, glanced up at Gu Mian brandishing the knife, then lowered his head and continued reading.

Fatty scurried over to Gu Mian, looking anxious. "That's too little! Ask for fifty million!"

Gu Mian was speechless.

Just then, there was another knock on the door. Fatty hurried to the door, peeked through the peephole, and saw it was Liu Ruyan again.

He opened the door curiously. "Miss Liu, is there something else?"

Liu Ruyan stood outside. "Not really. I just wanted to tell you to stop that female ghost in the red dress from playing her little tricks."

Gu Mian glanced at Xiao Hong, who was already halfway under the bed. Little tricks? She *\*is\** a ghost.

"She can't find the windows of the residents downstairs," Liu Ruyan said, glancing at the brightly lit living room, then at the two bedrooms with their lights on. "They're not like you; they have no money. An electricity card is a luxury item for them, so those people never turn on their lights. They save what money they have for necessities; even then, it might not be enough for food."

As she said this, Liu Ruyan looked at Gu Mian. "Perhaps they'll freeze to death this winter."

Gu Mian recalled the game's initial premise—for the evolution of humanity.

But six months had passed, and not only had humanity failed to evolve, but large numbers had died. When Earth initiated this game, it didn't tell humanity that this was a contest.

Earth on one side, the Low-Dimensional Worlds on the other. Earth might have had most of the control over the game initially, but it has gradually lost its advantage over the past six months. The instances began to show mutations. More and more people died, but there was still no sign of any human evolution. If things continue like this, the outcome will probably be decided in about another six months.

"May I ask something?" Gu Mian looked at Liu Ruyan. "Is there some kind of conflict between Earth and your worlds?"

It feels like they're locked in a life-or-death struggle.

Liu Ruyan chuckled as she explained, "It's quite simple, actually. Low-Dimensional Worlds are afraid of high-dimensional worlds because high-dimensional ones possess the absolute power to destroy them.

"Take a Second World, for example. It's like a book. If someone in the Human World destroys that book, the world and everyone in it would instantly turn to ash and smoke. That's why Low-Dimensional Worlds are afraid of high-dimensional ones."

At this point, Liu Ruyan's voice grew somber. "But let me offer another analogy. You live in a peaceful, stable world, but Second Worlds are overrun by ghosts. Second Worlds are born from imagination; they contain fears and an uncanniness that don't exist in reality.

"Do creators fear their own creations? It's like when you write a ghost story. You know ghosts don't exist in this world, yet after writing it, you can't sleep at night.

"Then one day, you see a hand reach out from under your bed. You're horrified to realize that the fear and uncanniness you created are encroaching upon reality.

"Therefore, high-dimensional worlds are also afraid of us."

#### Chapter 505 The Collapse of Miracle\_1

Just as Fatty's scalp tingled and a chill ran down his spine, Gu Mian suddenly touched his chin and said, "Let me give you an analogy. Say I write a novel; the idea of the protagonist suddenly jumping out and killing me is impossible. Similarly, the gap between low-dimensional and high-dimensional worlds is vast. Theoretically, a low-dimensional world eroding a high-dimensional one is absolutely impossible. The probability of such an event is about the same as my protagonist killing me."

"If you're in an absolute high dimension, then your statement would hold true. But we don't know whether the so-called 'real world' is also a low-dimensional world," Liu Ruyan tilted her head slightly. "If we're not in an absolute high dimension, then anything is possible."

"Absolute high dimension," Fatty mused with sudden understanding. "That's... like a god, then."

"By the way," Liu Ruyan continued, "Earth fears us because it can't find the exact hiding place of our world. It's like the Second World is a book, but Earth doesn't know where this book is located."

As she spoke, she glanced at Chu Changge on the couch, who reached out and put down his world.

"Honestly," Liu Ruyan looked at the tattered leaf Chu Changge had placed on the coffee table, "if my world were in my hands, it would have turned to ash by now."

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "It seems you bear a deep grudge against your world."

Fatty also nodded and said, "That's like Earthlings saying they want to blow up Earth. That's blasphemy..."

At this point, Fatty suddenly remembered Gu Mian had made a similar statement about "blowing up Earth" and quickly shut his mouth. After a long pause, he coughed a few times and said to Liu Ruyan, "For saying that, you could be dragged off to participate in 'Metamorphosis'!"

[Trigger Special Instance 'Metamorphosis']

"What the hell!" Fatty's eyes widened.

Gu Mian silently put down the strawberry jam in his hand. "What else could it be? A special instance, of course. Giving you a chance to participate in 'Metamorphosis.' By the way, your expression is pretty much the same as when you first encountered a special instance."

"Oh," Fatty grimaced. "Do I have to go to some godforsaken place and reclaim barren land? I've seen people like me on that reality show get sent to the mountains to be reformed..."

[Trigger condition: Mentioning 'Metamorphosis' has a chance of matching you to this instance]

This trigger condition is a bit of a trap...

[Instance Player Number: All players within a certain range]

[Successfully calculated the number of players. Current count: 9 players]

Looks like all nine people on this floor are included.

Gu Mian quickly slapped his brother into a CD, stuffed it into his pocket, and snatched up the guitar bag beside him.

The front half of Xiao Hong was still under the bed, seemingly unaware of what was happening outside.

[Introduction: Players will participate in the reality show 'Metamorphosis' and can leave the instance once filming is completed]

[Instance Task: Complete 'Metamorphosis' filming]

As the panel displayed the last line of text, Gu Mian slammed the door shut with a BANG, the door panel nearly hitting Liu Ruyan's nose as she stood outside.

"Remember to close the door when you go out," Gu Mian said. "Otherwise, what if Xiao Hong gets snatched away by some villain?"

Fatty shrank his neck, "I think she looks quite like a villain..."

Hearing the noise, Xiao Hong scrambled out from under the bed, only to find the room empty.

Her villain-like face looked somewhat dumbfounded.

"At night, he is an elf of nightclubs."

"During the day, he is a demon feared by his parents..."

In the blink of an eye, Gu Mian heard these two sentences ring in his ears. When he saw the words "Metamorphosis," he was already mentally prepared. He just hadn't expected that even the lines were copied verbatim from the show; they didn't even pay copyright fees for the crossover.

He turned his head and found himself in an office-sized room. The air conditioning was set to 23 degrees, making it a bit cold.

Gu Mian looked out the window beside him and saw only a tree, its yellowed leaves falling incessantly as the wind blew through it.

There were no other players here besides me.

At that moment, a group of people was gathered at the doorway. It was a middle-aged man with a duckbill cap and glasses on his nose who had just uttered those lines about the "nightclub elf."

"Sad parents, rebellious son..."

"..."

"...After all this, will he be able to repent and be reborn?"

"Did you hear that? The promotional copy for this episode will follow this script..." Gu Mian heard the middle-aged man continue.

It was only then I realized this copy was about me.

But that "nightclub elf" term is a bit too flashy, isn't it?

Still, carrying a guitar bag, I really do look like a "nightclub elf."

But where did everyone else go...

"Director, the other guests have been contacted. The ones in the mountains have booked flights and can arrive this afternoon. Shouldn't we hurry up on our end?"

Gu Mian's sharp eyes spotted a list on the opposite table. He reached out, took the A4 sheet of paper, and quickly scanned it.

It read—

"Gu Mian: At night, he's an elf of the nightclubs; by day, he is... Can he turn over a new leaf and be reborn?"

"Wang Longxiang: Having no parents, he has never experienced the warmth of a family. A dilapidated thatched house, a remote mountain gully... After all this, can he let go of his resentment, regain his confidence, and become positive and proactive?"

"Meiren Chu: He's the problem student who gives teachers headaches at school—tardy, cutting classes, early romances, incorrigible... After participating in this transformation, will he understand his teachers' painstaking efforts?"

"Xie Bi'an: In public, he's the gentle and kind class idol; behind the scenes, he's a meticulously calculating and insidious person... Can he mend his ways and start anew?"

"Liu Ruyan: She..."

Listing out the rest would just seem like padding the word count, so Gu Mian just skimmed them, noticing that only his own description was plagiarized.

Because Fatty carried Wang Longxiang's school badge, they directly called him Wang Longxiang.

It's worth mentioning that Gu Mian was carrying Liu Xuan's school badge, but it was utterly useless.

There were nine people on this list—exactly the nine players.

Based on the character descriptions, I, Chu Changge, Lai Nian, and Xie Bi'an are the city participants heading to the remote mountains to experience life. Meanwhile, Fatty, Su Xiaocha, Xingluo, You Si, and Liu Ruyan are the participants from the remote mountains heading to the city to experience life.

I haven't spotted any danger yet.

The instance introduction doesn't say where ghosts might appear, nor if any are hidden among the film crew. Gu Mian pondered this as he observed the film crew gathered at the door.

After some thought, I figure that in this kind of show, beating up the director and cameramen should be pretty standard procedure... right?

As Gu Mian was thinking this, he clenched his fist.

Just then, he noticed a new message in the College Entrance Exam Cheating Group. He couldn't chat with friends within the instance, but this group chat was still usable.

Fatty was currently wailing in the chat.

[Pan]: Doctor, where are you? I'm in a mountain gully, and a group of people is about to take me away...

[Pan]: I'm so scared. Will there be any ghosts among these people?

Gu Mian thought for a moment, then sent a message: "I'll teach you a method. Try hitting them. If they don't cry out in pain, they're not human."

Chapter 506 Xū\_1

Fatty would have to be crazy to do as Gu Mian said.

Of course, he didn't dare reach out, slap someone, and spout lines like, "Fuck your ancestors' graves!"

By this time, Gu Mian had more or less figured out the nature of this variety show-themed instance.

Unlike the "Crazy Guessing Words" and "Sweet Lovers" instances, this one, though also a variety show, featured people who seemed completely unaware they were NPCs. They didn't realize they were in a Low-Dimensional World.

This is quite similar to the "Slaughter Game" instance, Gu Mian thought.

Speaking of which, which world is this...?

Gu Mian sat in his chair, mulling it over. The environment here seemed similar to Earth. He recalled Chu Change mentioning that the Second World greatly resembled Earth.

Could this possibly be the Second World?

A wall-mounted TV outside the door caught Gu Mian's attention. Tilting his head, he looked at the distant television, his superior vision allowing him to clearly see the images on the screen.

Content was playing on the television, apparently a live broadcast.

On the screen, a host was holding a microphone and introducing something. Gu Mian glanced down at the subtitles.

"All eyes are on 'Metamorphosis'; we are already prepared for filming. This installment will also be broadcast live. Everyone must be greatly looking forward to the performances of our nine guests..."

Gu Mian shifted his gaze slightly upward and saw the TV channel's logo in the upper-left corner: "World Channel."

The host on the screen was still speaking.

"I know what everyone is most eagerly anticipating: information about our four violators. As always, these four violators were chosen by public vote. The violators with the most public support—those at

the top of the polls—will be pardoned if their performance in this episode earns public approval. Next, our reporter will go interview these four guests and ask them how they're feeling..."

Violators? Pardon?

Gu Mian latched onto these two rather strange words.

He suddenly recalled what Liu Ruyan had recently told them about the "Old World." Those who violated the "Law Code" were reviled and ostracized by everyone. In Liu Ruyan's time, when she was fourteen—eight years ago—anyone who broke the "Law Code" rules would be relegated to the lowest rung of society, at the mercy of the frenzied populace's scorn.

Could this be...?

Gu Mian continued to watch the television outside the door.

The camera angle shifted slightly, revealing a dense, fervently animated crowd behind the host. Their eyes were wide, mouths agape, collectively shouting something in unison. Gu Mian carefully discerned that the word these frenzied people were chanting was "punishment."

Punishment...

It seems Liu Ruyan really has returned to her old home, Gu Mian thought, observing the nearly fanatical onlookers. They were passionate about punishment; they yearned for it.

In that case, there probably aren't any ghosts in this instance...

However, in the intervening eight years, this world had made some progress.

It was no longer an immediate death sentence; instead, there was a chance to "turn over a new leaf" through this program.

And the violators participating in the show were the top four chosen by public vote. Gu Mian figured the voting was akin to: "I have many death-row inmates here. Everyone, vote for who you want to see perform. I will select the top four to put on a show, and if anyone manages to gain everyone's approval, I will pardon them."

Gu Mian felt that if he were participating in this vote, he definitely wouldn't pick uninteresting, dull criminals. He'd choose the most insane, most depraved, preferably those utterly devoid of humanity.

Four such individuals together would surely be interesting.

And this world had clearly voted along the same lines. The transgressions committed by these four must have been exceptionally severe.

The host continued, "Next, we're going to interview the guest who ranked fourth in votes, Accompany me next year, who is also the only female among the four violators. I'm sure everyone is very much looking forward to it, right?"

They certainly look excited, Gu Mian observed. Quite a few people had gathered in front of the TV outside, their expressions eager, as if they couldn't wait for the live broadcast to begin.

At this moment, the host had reached a door. Without knocking or announcing her presence, she pushed it open and walked right in, the camera following closely behind.

Behind the door was a lounge. A girl with clear, pretty features was sitting on the sofa—it was Accompany me next year.

She was unaware of this world's insane worldview, completely oblivious to everything.

Accompany me next year didn't detect anything amiss. When the door was pushed open, she immediately stood up, dutifully playing the role of a good guest.

"Hello." Accompany me next year bowed slightly towards the screen.

"Oh, my," reading the subtitles, Gu Mian could almost hear the host's strangely sarcastic tone. "It seems this young lady has already started trying to curry favor. You weren't like this before you came on the show..."

The host was seen uttering a string of sarcastic remarks, while Accompany me next year looked somewhat bewildered but still tried hard to maintain her smile. It was clear she was making a real effort.

It wasn't long before the host emerged from Accompany me next year's room, disappointment visible on her face. "This young lady is so uninteresting. Who would have thought the fourth most popular guest would be this boring? Next, let's move on to see the third-ranked guest, Meiren Chu."

Gu Mian realized that the show claimed to want guests to reform, but that wasn't true. Its core purpose wasn't that; it was to satisfy the desires of others.

Most people enjoy plots where a powerful villain is ultimately beaten until they're wailing.

Just as a novel without conflict won't attract many readers.

Similarly, a TV drama that proceeds too smoothly often won't achieve high viewership. One must always create some conflict, introduce a few villains for the protagonist to defeat, to stimulate people's desire to watch.

It aimed to satisfy the audience's desires, so it selected the four individuals the audience considered most "interesting."

And Accompany me next year's performance had clearly disappointed them.

Gu Mian knew they didn't want to see a well-behaved girl being well-behaved from beginning to end. Instead, they wanted to see a defiant guest who initially cursed and refused to compromise, only to eventually be forced to bow their head and become a fawning, tail-wagging dog.

That kind of reversal is more satisfying, Gu Mian mused. Actually, I enjoy watching that sort of thing too.

But today, it's my turn to be the dog.

By now, the host had entered Chu Changge's room.

"This is the lounge of our third most popular guest, Meiren Chu. Speaking of whom, this guest seems rather cold, as if very unwilling to cooperate with us... Guest Meiren Chu, may I ask your thoughts on being chosen for this program?"

"..." Chu Changge said nothing.

"Then, may I ask if you regret what you've done before?"

"..." Still no words.

However, the host didn't get angry. Instead, she chuckled, "What an interesting guest. I hope he can maintain this toughness once filming begins."

Sure enough, the audience likes this type.

Gu Mian stroked his chin, thinking, and silently resolved, I'm going to be the type the audience loves most!

That said, I wonder what rank I am?

Chapter 507 Zu An's Collapse\_1

Gu Mian was thinking about this when the host on the screen looked excited and continued speaking.

"The guests are gradually getting more interesting."

"Now, we will be visiting our guest, Xie Bi'an, who is currently ranked second in popularity. This guest is somewhat different from the usual guests. He is good at disguising himself, and if it weren't for an accident that exposed his true self, he might still be an exemplary young man in everyone's hearts."

"I wonder if he's still in the mood to keep up his act?"

Gu Mian watched the host speaking while opening a door.

It looks like I'm the one with the highest popularity.

As he thought this, Gu Mian straightened himself up, trying to look more impressive to live up to the number one title.

Just then, the host had started questioning Xie Bi'an. "Is your insistence on staying concealed a way of rebelling against the outside world..."

At that moment, Gu Mian suddenly saw a message Chu Changge had sent in the cheat group. He realized that Chu Changge hadn't been moving because he was busy typing this message.

[Chu Changge]: You guys must have noticed too; this instance probably belongs to the Old World.

[Pan]: What are you talking about? I haven't noticed anything. People here are warm and hospitable to me, and it doesn't seem like there are any traps...

Gu Mian silently read the message Fatty sent. He remembered how this guy was panicking just a few minutes ago.

He didn't expect him to switch sides just a few minutes later, praising their warmth and hospitality.

Just then, Liu Ruyan also appeared in the chat group.

[Liu Ruyan]: Who would have thought we'd end up back in this world? It's so nauseating to think about, especially since we're back as weaklings, heh.

Gu Mian felt the final 'heh' was quite expressive; he could almost see a certain expression. Based on the guest characterization, Liu Ruyan was indeed a weakling. Fatty, Liu Ruyan, and their other three teammates were designed to be poor, weak, miserable, and lacking self-confidence. They were weaklings who hadn't broken the rules, supposedly sent to a good place to experience life.

[Liu Ruyan]: Although weaklings will also be punished for breaking the rules, people generally don't pay much attention to them. Even if you were tied up with a sign and thrown onto the street, nobody would bother to look. Out of jealousy, people prefer to see those usually in high places in a miserable state. If a rich or good-looking person were thrown onto the street, they would be mobbed by onlookers.

[Liu Ruyan]: Rather than saying this world is rule-based, I would say it's full of jealousy. Sometimes, the higher-ups will give the masses some benefits to maintain control. You four have been selected by the masses to amuse them.

The four people Liu Ruyan mentioned were Gu Mian and his team. Although Gu Mian hadn't participated in such shows before, he knew that the main attractions in these shows were usually people like them. People always like to see conflict and plot twists, and their characters were suitable for these.

Fatty seemed somewhat worried.

[Pan]: Oh no, isn't the Doctor in danger then... So, there might not be any ghosts in this instance, right? Like it was with the taxi instance where the final boss was a human.

[Pan]: Thinking about it, this might be the first instance we've experienced that doesn't involve a ghost, right?

Gu Mian thought about it, not sure if the previous Fairy Tale City instance counted as one with a ghost.

[Pan]: Ah, forget it, we need to get going. Since I'm closer to the filming location, I don't need to take a plane. To be honest, I've gotten so used to being around the Doctor that I'm actually a bit scared to fly now...

Gu Mian considered Liu Ruyan's words thoughtfully. Were they just here to entertain?

As he thought, he looked back up at the screen. The host was still interviewing Xie Bi'an. Seeing the host's strangely mocking expression, as if enjoying the drama, Gu Mian made up his mind and clenched his fist. "I'm going to be an entertaining guest!"

It's time for my performance.

Fatty, oblivious to Gu Mian's thoughts, boarded the bus with the filming crew and found a secluded corner to sit. Initially, he wasn't that afraid after meeting the seemingly friendly natives of the instance. However, after hearing Chu Changge's explanation, Fatty's heart began to race again. He now found their smiles rather creepy.

Just then, he suddenly heard a pleasant voice from overhead. Looking up curiously, he saw a small screen installed above his head. He blinked and focused on the content.

The screen showed a female host questioning a man in a black cloak. Fatty would recognize Xie Bi'an's cloak anywhere.

His instincts told him this man wasn't friendly, but Xie Bi'an always appeared gentle and kind. Even now, on screen, he looked very gentle. Fatty felt his kindness practically penetrated the airtight cloak, even overflowing from the screen.

Despite the host's relentless questioning, Xie Bi'an wasn't annoyed. Instead, he patiently answered all the questions.

A few minutes later, the host turned back to the camera. "Our guest is still as fond of disguising himself as ever. Will he be able to keep it up during the rest of the recording?"

Then, Fatty saw the host take a few steps and leave the room.

"Alright, now let's interview the most popular player of this program, our guest, Gu Mian."

Fatty looked up slightly. As expected, they're using the Doctor's real name in this instance. The school ID tag the Doctor was made to wear was completely useless.

"But first, let's give a detailed introduction of our most popular guest. We had to go through a lot of trouble to capture him... He has violated quite a number of regulations during his time as a wanted fugitive. If it weren't for his high popularity, he would have been executed by now."

Upon hearing this, Fatty was already imagining a group of people trying to catch Gu Mian, and found it quite amusing.

"Now, let's go meet our guest. Ah, the door to the dressing room is open."

Fatty stared at the TV screen intently. At this point, he was unaware of Gu Mian's intention to "create some fun."

The host, holding the microphone, took two quick steps towards the door. "Presumably, for being granted this chance at redemption, Mr. Gu Mian must be grate—"

Before she could finish, something flew out from the open door and smashed straight into her smiling face.

The impact made the host sway and fall out of view of the screen.

HISS. Fatty sucked in a sharp breath. He saw that the item thrown out of the room was a flowerpot. As for the plant originally inside... it had probably been pulled out by the Doctor.

The bus suddenly fell silent. Fatty, stunned, turned his stiff neck to look around, only to see everyone staring straight at the TV screen, their eyes wide with horror.

The camera moved forward a bit, as if the cameraman intended to help the person on the ground.

But then, the camera suddenly panned to Gu Mian. Now, everyone watching the screen witnessed the performance he had meticulously prepared.

There, on the screen, Gu Mian held a freshly plucked weed and opened his mouth towards the camera.

Suddenly, Fatty heard Gu Mian's crude words transmitting from the screen—the kind that would definitely be replaced with asterisks in a novel.

Dizzy and disoriented, Fatty could only pick out some of the slightly more "civilized" phrases, like, "Film Your Daddy again, and Your Daddy will personally plant a loquat tree for you tonight!"

Feeling scared, he quietly turned to observe his surroundings, worried they would become angry from embarrassment.

Unexpectedly, Fatty saw someone laugh. Someone was actually laughing at the person who had just been threatened with having a loquat tree planted for them?

Fatty hunched his shoulders in fear. "Miss Liu was right... everyone here is a psycho..."

Chapter 508 I Split\_1

Gu Mian remembered that the guest invited to that particular variety show was much like him now.

However, when that program was broadcast on TV, it had already been edited, and all the swear words were bleeped out and replaced with asterisks. But now, it was a live broadcast, and his choice of words was quite civilized, so everyone could hear what he was saying.

Fatty was secretly watching the people around him, who were all intently staring at the screen on the vehicle's ceiling. He lowered his head, abashed, as if ashamed of having such a foul-mouthed teammate.

"But where on earth does the Doctor learn this kind of nonsense?" Fatty wondered. "He usually seems so serious; I never expected him to talk like this."

Now, Fatty wouldn't even be surprised if Gu Mian suddenly spouted a couple of dirty jokes.

As he thought about this, he looked up and glanced at the people nearby again.

They were still staring intently at the screen; a few even had intriguing smiles on their faces.

Fatty's gaze went past those smiling faces and out the vehicle window to the distant sky.

Grayish-brown clouds roiled in the sky, looking as if they were about to press down on the earth. From within the heavy clouds, occasional deep rumbles sounded—muted thunder.

Fatty took a deep breath; his nostrils filled with the scent of an impending downpour.

The weather was about to turn.

He suddenly felt a little lost.

By the time the host got up from the floor, Gu Mian, having finished his performance, had already casually shut the door behind him. All she had time to hear was a SLAM!

When she looked up again, all she saw was the tightly closed door.

"It seems this guest is still as audacious as ever," the host mused. "I wonder if he'll learn his lesson after this program and genuinely repent..."

Fatty saw the host on the screen give a strange, chilling smile.

"According to Miss Liu, eight years ago in this world, anyone who violated the Law Code would be tied up in the street and subjected to public condemnation. To think that only eight years later, they've come up with something like this again... The people chosen for the program won't be directly sentenced. Is this considered dodging a bullet?"

Fatty couldn't tell if this was societal progress or regression.

Eight years later, the Old World, through the Metamorphosis program, gave people a chance to avoid punishment. Logically, forgiveness and tolerance should signify progress in human nature...

But Fatty felt somewhat perplexed.

Is this really progress...?

As he pondered, he turned to look at the program crew sharing the vehicle. Seeing the smiles on their faces again, Fatty suddenly had a chilling realization.

The people of this world never followed the Law Code for the sake of rules. They were envious, selfish, and took pleasure in others' suffering. These people didn't live to obey the Law Code; on the contrary, the Law Code existed because of people like them.

The Law Code created countless violators, and these violators, without exception, all became tools for the amusement of the masses.

And now, this situation was becoming even more severe.

From the very beginning, this was never a so-called world of rules.

This was a Paradise of envy and madness, a Human World for countless twisted individuals.

Fatty's hair stood on end. He looked up at the closed door on the screen. Gu Mian had now become a plaything for everyone; countless eyes were fixed on him, eager to see him end up sobbing, begging for mercy, and repenting.

This would bring them immense satisfaction.

It dawned on Fatty; he suddenly had an idea of how previous players had managed to clear this instance.

As long as the audience was sufficiently satisfied, and one simply went along with the will of the masses, the filming could be completed smoothly.

But he knew Gu Mian would never appease them. He might even do as he'd said before: punch the common folk, kick the 'parental' authorities, and in the end, tear up the Law Code itself.

Thinking of this, Fatty broke out in a cold sweat. "Will the Doctor's misdeeds implicate innocent bystanders like me? No, I have to pretend I don't know him..."

Meanwhile, Gu Mian had already boarded the vehicle.

The original mode of transportation was supposed to be a plane. However, Liu Ruyan had mentioned that this world's technology level wasn't great. Considering his own luck, Gu Mian suspected that taking a plane in this instance would lead to a crash. So, after throwing a tantrum, he boarded a train with his beloved guitar.

He heard that the four guests were heading to the same destination, but the other three had taken different modes of transport.

Meanwhile, the program's popularity was skyrocketing.

Just as Yang Yongxin didn't like to 'treat' well-behaved children, this world's audience also had little interest in overly compliant guests. Everyone's focus was on the group of four, primarily Gu Mian.

Due to his choice of transportation, Gu Mian arrived at the destination much later than the other three, who had already been waiting for a long time.

The show was being broadcast live, so while waiting for Gu Mian, the other three hadn't just been sitting idly by; they were tidying up the house.

It was a dilapidated-looking mud hut with a thatched roof. After inspecting it, Gu Mian suspected it would leak if it rained.

Their filming location was a small village nestled in a mountain ravine. They had driven along a winding mountain road for quite some time before finally spotting it. The village was mostly populated by the elderly, women, and children; young people were scarce.

In this world with its low level of development, the economy was naturally also poor.

All the houses in this village looked somewhat precarious. There were hardly any properly constructed buildings; most were mud-brick houses.

In the center of the village stood a slightly larger structure, supposedly where the village children attended classes, though it could hardly be called a school.

The roads were all dirt tracks, so uneven that one could easily sprain an ankle walking on them. A few resilient weeds poked through the soil.

Dusk had fallen. The sun was half-hidden beyond the horizon, leaving only a faint, indistinct arc of light.

When Gu Mian arrived at the hut, he saw Chu Changge, expressionless, carrying a leaking bucket. Chu Changge then proceeded to pour all the water from it onto the cement floor.

Gu Mian: "...What are you doing?"

"Mopping the floor," Chu Changge replied, setting down the bucket and pushing up his glasses.

A cameraman was filming nearby.

Gu Mian could imagine the audience in front of their screens bursting into HAHA laughter at this.

Facing the camera, the sole female guest, Accompany Me Next Year, gave an awkward laugh, then quickly snatched the bucket from the floor, saying, "Here, let me do it..."

The show hadn't officially begun. According to procedure, the director would assign them tasks when it formally started. These tasks were decided by the audience, much like the variety shows they'd seen on TV. They might be tasked with earning a certain amount of money or collecting several buckets of manure.

The current live broadcast was just a warm-up; the official proceedings wouldn't begin until tomorrow.

However, the audience willingly spent their time glued to their television sets, eager to see how the guests would endure their first night of hunger and cold.

The place where Gu Mian and the others were staying couldn't even be called a house. It was merely four walls with a thatched roof on top. Naturally, the four guests couldn't each have their own room.

There weren't even any beds.

Gu Mian spotted a pile of rags heaped in a corner of the room. Stroking his chin, he asked Chu Changge, "What's that stuff?"

Chu Changge glanced casually at the dim corner. "Beds."

Gu Mian: "..."

A dedicated cameraman stood in the corner of the room, shouldering his camera. Several lenses were trained on them, capturing their every move and word, broadcasting it all live to television screens.

In the studio, the host was laughing cheerfully. "Alright, all four guests are now in position! Next up is everyone's favorite segment: the tasks! While watching tonight's live broadcast, you can send suggestions to the production team for tasks you'd like to see specific guests undertake. We will select the most popular requests and assign them to our guests!"

Chapter 509 Murmurs and Gasps\_1

Truth be told, Gu Mian had never lived in such a shabby house in his entire life.

Even though he had grown up as an orphan, the orphanage director had managed to swindle a fair bit of money by taking him out to bluff and deceive people.

Even though their place leaked rain in summer and let in drafts in winter, the director's tireless scheming had secured enough funds to patch up the holes.

In short, even the orphanage was several tiers better than this hovel.

Of course, as one of the world's "sinners," Gu Mian knew he wouldn't be sleeping in a decent house.

After all, they were put here to be made a spectacle of.

The sky had already grown completely dark. Being in a small mountain valley, night fell particularly quickly here.

Through the crooked door frame, Gu Mian watched the gradually darkening sky. The weather wasn't good; low rumbles of thunder echoed from the horizon intermittently.

The air was stuffy.

Naturally, there was no clock in this slum-like hovel. Gu Mian estimated it was around six in the evening.

How to sleep was a major problem. Looking at the pile of rags in the corner, Gu Mian fell deep into thought.

The film crew from the program was gathered at the entrance, cameras ready, determined not to miss a single detail. Gu Mian had no idea what they could possibly film in this pitch-black room.

By this hour, most people had finished work. In a world with few entertainment facilities, television was the primary means for most people to pass the time.

The show \*Metamorphosis\* was already very popular. Thanks to Gu Mian's recent troublemaking, its ratings had soared even higher.

Viewers in front of their televisions either sneered sarcastically or excitedly brainstormed tasks to propose.

They stared with malevolent glee at the individuals on screen.

Cameras had long been installed in this dilapidated house. Once the sky was completely dark, the cameramen departed one by one, but the cameras inside continued to record.

Just then, Accompany me next year was lighting a candle with a match. Keeping her voice low and away from the cameras, she said, "I always feel that these people's attitude towards us is somewhat strange... I don't quite understand the point of this show. An instance could have ghosts hunt us in countless ways, so why a variety show format?"

This female guest was still unaware of the old world's worldview.

She was still preoccupied with when the ghosts would appear, oblivious to the fact that she might soon face something far more terrifying.

At that moment, Chu Changge, sitting on the pile of rags, adjusted his glasses and said, "The mission given by the instance is to complete the filming of the show. I suspect various incidents might occur during the program; it wouldn't even be surprising if we discovered the entire production team consisted of ghosts..."

Nearby, Gu Mian touched his guitar case. Looks like Chu Changge is spouting nonsense again, he thought.

Gu Mian hadn't realized it before, but since this global game began, he'd discovered Chu Changge's peculiar talent.

Perhaps because he was usually expressionless, his face never reddened when he lied. Gu Mian had genuinely never seen him blush.

"So, it's best for you all to be cautious. If you notice anything amiss, you can flee immediately."

Accompany me next year, who was lighting the candle, nodded as if she understood, then fell into deep thought.

"Hey," Gu Mian suddenly lowered his voice and asked, "Are you trying to set her up?"

Chu Changge replied with a calm expression, "This instance is somewhat special..."

He's stating the obvious, Gu Mian thought. It's already called a special instance; how could it not be special?

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses again and continued, "The difficulty of player missions in this instance can vary."

Gu Mian understood this point.

Although they had entered the instance together and shared the same mission, it would be incredibly difficult for the four "sinners," including Gu Mian, to continue filming successfully. The other five merely needed to act miserable enough to make everyone lose interest in them.

Of course, only those who understood the old world's worldview would know to feign misery on the show. For those ignorant of this worldview, a single misstep could be fatal.

Imagine, for instance, sympathizing with a beggar who pleaded on the streets, rain or shine. Every time you passed by, pity would compel you to give him something. Then, one day, you suddenly discover this 'beggar' is actually a wealthy man owning ten properties.

Begging was merely his hobby, and he couldn't care less about your alms.

Such a revelation would inevitably transform one's feelings from sympathy to something else entirely...

Anger, envy, perhaps even madness.

Gu Mian didn't know if ordinary people would be driven to madness by such an encounter, but the people of this world most certainly would.

The other five players were currently like those wealthy beggars asking for alms on the street. If they were smart enough to discover the rules of this world early on, they could survive safely until the end.

As for Fatty, Gu Mian wasn't worried about him at all.

Fatty both understood this world's rules and had experience from many instances—even if he'd mostly coasted to victory.

But Fatty's ability to feign misery should be quite convincing, Gu Mian mused.

Although a misstep by the other five people could doom them, their difficulty level was indeed much lower than that of Gu Mian's group.

If one were to say the other five were strolling near an abyss or treading on thin ice within the instance, then Gu Mian and his companions had started at the very bottom of the cliff, trapped in a hole in the ice.

They would have to find a way, any way, to climb out...

However, Gu Mian noticed that the guest, Accompany me next year, seemed oblivious to this. She was staring at the pea-sized flame in the darkness, apparently still wondering when the ghosts would make their appearance.

As the only female guest, she showed no concern about where she would sleep that night, seemingly unbothered by the presence of three young men around her.

Chu Changge's voice suddenly came from beside him. "This is a special instance. Since the beginning of the global game, it's been stated that special instances are highly difficult and possess unique characteristics. The difficulty scaling in this instance is quite pronounced; our side's difficulty is very high."

So, the players who entered this instance were also assigned difficulties based on their abilities? Gu Mian understood Chu Changge's implication.

He stroked his chin. If the caliber of players on our side is higher than the other...

Does that mean Accompany me next year is also not to be trifled with?

Gu Mian thought of Liu Ruyan, who was on the other team. Liu Ruyan was already a formidable individual, yet surprisingly, in this instance, she had been assigned to the 'weaker' camp.

Does this mean Accompany me next year is stronger than Liu Ruyan?

Lost in thought, Gu Mian glanced at Accompany me next year in the dim light. She sat quietly beside the candle. While she clearly wasn't a naive ditz, she didn't appear to be the scheming or cunning type either.

As if reading Gu Mian's mind, Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "Not all high-caliber players are devious and cunning."

"Oh," Gu Mian nodded. "Not all players are like you."

Chu Changge fell silent.

Chapter 510 I, Hu Hansan, am back again\_1

Accompany me next year, who was not sinister or cunning, was very aware.

Probably because she hadn't quite figured out the nature of this instance, she decisively stated, "If we're to sleep, let's sleep together."

If a girl with a boyfriend had said this to Gu Mian before the global game started, he would have surely thought that she intended to cheat on her boyfriend.

But after the global game started, saying this kind of thing was perfectly normal.

On the other hand, Know my thoughts was also quite enlightened.

Fatty and his four companions lived separately in the original homes of Gu Mian's group.

But since there were five people on this side, Fatty paired with Know my thoughts and, by sheer coincidence, moved into Gu Mian's original house.

In this instance, Gu Mian was not an orphan. He had two parents who were keen to observe him.

But now these parents belonged to Fatty.

At that moment, Fatty and Know my thoughts were exchanging ideas in a room. The audience didn't pay much attention to them, so there were no cameras installed in the room.

"I say... I think in this variety show, those who are sent to the remote countryside all sleep together. Then your girlfriend..." Fatty was quite worried that this boyfriend would fly into a rage, jump up, and accuse Gu Mian's group of cuckolding him.

You Si turned his head, his face bitter. "Don't worry," he said, "my girlfriend absolutely won't do anything to them."

Fatty choked on his saliva, which blocked his throat.

Know my thoughts wasn't paying attention to his girlfriend. He looked at Fatty with slight worry and said, "To tell you the truth, this game has been going on for half a year, and it's the first time I've entered a special instance. I don't know what's special about these special instances..."

First time entering a special instance in half a year?

Fatty raised his eyebrows in surprise.

He carefully counted the special instances he had entered with Gu Mian this past half year and realized there were actually quite a few.

He originally thought his frequency of entering special instances was normal, but it didn't seem to be the case when compared with others...

Know my thoughts continued rambling, "By the way, Brother Fatty, have you ever entered a special instance before?"

It was the first time Fatty had ever been called "Brother Fatty," even though the speaker was not a beautiful young girl.

He was not particularly swayed by being called "brother."

Fatty thought for a bit. "I've entered a few... indeed, they were much harder than the regular instances..."

Of course, the end of these instances was all the same.

Well, pretty much the same.

"Ah," You Si sighed slightly. "If I die in this instance, I won't have much left on me. I originally joined the college entrance exam activity thinking I could get some special items, but I didn't expect it to turn out this way in the end."

Speaking of which, because Gu Mian had destroyed the college entrance exam activity before the test ended, the players who participated didn't get any rewards.

No one knew what kind of reward the college entrance exam activity would have given.

Fatty opened his mouth to say something, but then he heard a rustling noise from behind.

He looked up reflexively, only to see that the window across from him was pitch black, the glass reflecting the light of the lamp.

At that moment, the reflective glass showed the image of a head peeking out from behind the door.

Fatty shivered and turned his head to look.

He saw that the door had somehow been opened, and a middle-aged man was staring at him from behind it.

You Si was obviously startled by the sudden appearance of the head. He opened and closed his mouth, looking frightened but not daring to cry out.

This face belonged to the man of the house.

In other words, this was Gu Mian's father in this instance. Now that Fatty and You Si were temporarily exchanging identities with Gu Mian, this man was currently their "father."

Fatty swallowed hard and looked at the man who had suddenly appeared.

Seeing both of them looking at him, the man's face overflowed with a kind smile. "It's getting late," he said. "Time to go back to your rooms and sleep."

Currently, You Si was in Fatty's room; they both had separate rooms.

You Si had a strange expression on his face. He sensed that something was off about this man, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it.

He hesitated. It wasn't good practice to split up in a Mysterious Dungeon. And of course, no one would want to be separated at night; who knew what might pop out from under the bed?

You Si hesitated for a moment before finally asking, "Can I..."

But before he could finish his sentence, Fatty, who was beside him, grabbed his shoulder. You Si looked at Fatty in confusion.

Fatty winked at him. "Go back to your room and sleep."

You Si was somewhat baffled but still listened to Fatty and got up to go to his own room. All he could think about was whether a ghost would pop out from under his bed in the middle of the night.

Fatty was completely certain that a ghost wouldn't pop out from under the bed in this instance.

The threat in this instance was the people observing them.

So he was quite at ease with them splitting up and sleeping separately at night.

According to Liu Ruyan, it was better to obey the "parents"; otherwise, they might change from pitiful weaklings into beasts that everyone would want to hunt down.

Thinking of this, Fatty cowered timidly, looking as pitiful as a young girl who had just been bullied.

"Father" seemed quite pleased with Fatty's performance.

He smiled kindly, then helped Fatty close the door.

Gu Mian had no idea that Fatty was playing innocent and pitiful. All he knew was that he was sleeping in a room that leaked when it rained, and it wasn't pleasant.

There wasn't a single star visible in the sky; it looked like it could pour with rain at any moment.

The pitch-dark room was illuminated only by a half-burned candle. The camera above their heads was constantly monitoring their every move.

No doubt many viewers in front of their TVs were currently watching this comical live broadcast.

And at that moment, people were frantically voting, deciding on the tasks for the four of them.

Of course, as a variety show with the superficial theme of "turning over a new leaf," tasks like eating excrement wouldn't be included in the vote.

But there were still many other votes with high entertainment value.

In a few hours, the tasks for the four of them would be essentially confirmed.

As the least noticeable guest among the four, the task assigned to Accompany me next year had the lowest entertainment value of them all.