

Collapse 551

Chapter 551 See How Big And Round This Moon Is_1

"Indeed. That's just like me."

Gu Mian had already seen the few people rushing out of the residential community and had also noticed Cang Yue striding over.

He also happened to catch, in his peripheral vision, the enigmatic expression on her face as she spoke: a mixture of relief from just escaping danger and an anger akin to discovering a cheating husband.

Though such a description might not be perfectly accurate, it was definitely anger.

On the other end, the customer service representative seemed desperate to stop dealing with this lunatic. Fortunately, Gu Mian ended the call at the right moment.

"I don't have any other questions."

"Then, sir, do you need us to call a taxi for you?" the person on the other end asked, maintaining her professional composure to the very last.

"Yes, a large one, please."

Upon receiving an affirmative answer, she replied with a quick "Alright" and swiftly hung up. It was clear she'd been wanting to do that for a long time.

"So, what exactly are you doing?" Cang Yue stood outside the phone booth, panting heavily, and glared at Gu Mian with all her might.

Although these players had all enhanced their bodies using Attribute Points, the instances yielded too few points. Moreover, players had allocated these meager resources haphazardly, so most hadn't significantly improved their physical stamina.

Gu Mian hung up and turned to look at Cang Yue outside the glass door.

A turn of his head revealed the community's main gate, which offered little security. The other players were congregated there, bent over, clutching their knees, and gasping for air; they clearly had just experienced a frantic escape.

Zhao Shuang, who had no experience fleeing, looked ready to collapse. Keke was supporting her to keep her upright, her face flushed red.

Fortunately, this residential community was quite remote with few residents. The gatekeeper was also perpetually slacking off somewhere, so no one witnessed their terrified state.

Observing the scene before him, Gu Mian concluded, "You were chased by ghosts?"

Cang Yue's brow twitched. She couldn't comprehend why this person described "you were chased by ghosts" so casually and matter-of-factly, as if he were remarking, 'Look how big and round the moon is.'

"Indeed, we were almost chased by ghosts," Cang Yue exhaled deeply. "Luckily, they didn't actually do anything... You still haven't answered my question. What are you doing here?"

Gu Mian pushed open the drafty glass door and stepped out, the wind causing his coat to rustle.

"It's not like I sent the ghosts after you. Why are you glaring at me like that?" He took a few steps toward the community entrance. "You can't just dump all your anger on me because you were scared by ghosts and I wasn't, can you?"

That was indeed true, and Cang Yue understood it.

But they had just endured a perilous escape. Turning around only to see Gu Mian nonchalantly making a phone call in the booth naturally stirred feelings of imbalance and, consequently, anger.

"But you still haven't answered my question." Cang Yue calmed herself; her breathing was no longer as ragged. "Who were you calling?"

Gu Mian's status was already peculiar. For him to be calling someone immediately upon entering the instance had naturally caught Cang Yue's attention.

Logically, players just entering an instance should be completely clueless about it and shouldn't be conversing so familiarly with someone outside the player group. Cang Yue couldn't shake the feeling that there was some conspiracy surrounding this person.

"Taxi customer service. I just called for a taxi." Gu Mian pointed to the landline phone in the booth.

Following his gesture, Cang Yue saw a "Call Taxi" button on the lower left corner of the phone, different from phone booths in the real world.

Next to the landline phone lay a newspaper that looked recently browsed. The bold headline "Fenshan Mountain Vehicle Accident" was printed on it, along with headshots of those who had vanished without a trace—neither seen alive nor their bodies found. Gu Mian must have read this newspaper during his time in the booth.

Gu Mian glanced at Zhao Shuang, who was being supported by Keke. "Since you brought her out, you must have planned your next move. You need to call for a ride; you're not planning to spend the night at the gate, are you?"

He spoke with such conviction and righteousness that Cang Yue felt too embarrassed to say much more.

She had indeed considered actively seeking a way out of this instance. The way out of this instance was so obvious it made her itch to stab Zhao Shuang to death right then and there.

Not long ago, the person she had wanted to stab was Gu Mian.

Xia Jianren, having regained his composure, walked over. He glanced at Cang Yue, then at Gu Mian. "You haven't been fiddling with this phone by yourself ever since you left the house, have you?"

This question was directed at Gu Mian.

Gu Mian nodded honestly. "Yes, I've been here the whole time."

"Aren't you scared?" Xia Jianren's expression was somewhat cryptic. Before the death protection mechanism was deactivated, he had indeed seen some daring players, but their courage usually manifested only after danger had struck.

He had never before encountered a player so audacious as to actively seek out danger.

Fiddling with a phone booth alone in the dead of night, in an instance where real death could occur, was practically a death wish!

Gu Mian looked at Xia Jianren, whose face was still slightly flushed, fiddled with the strap of his guitar case, and said without a hint of sincerity, "Scared me to death."

Xia Jianren's eyebrow twitched. This person didn't look "scared to death" in the slightest.

"So, you've decided to explore the mysteries of the instance with Zhao Shuang?" Gu Mian asked them.

Xia Jianren looked at Cang Yue in bewilderment. "When did we decide that?"

Cang Yue wiped her forehead. "Well, I think this instance might be rather simple. Instead of hiding and leaving our lives in the instance's hands, why not start from an easier angle..."

"But your theory could be completely wrong!" Xia Jianren lowered his voice as he spoke, as if afraid Zhao Shuang in the distance might overhear. "What if stabbing Zhao Shuang isn't the way out but a path to death? What if the ghosts not only have no feud with Zhao Shuang but actually get along well with her? If you stab her, wouldn't we be done for?"

Of course, ghosts and humans getting along well was highly unlikely; Xia Jianren was merely providing a hypothetical example.

"That's why I didn't stab her on the spot!" As Cang Yue spoke, she shifted, allowing Gu Mian to see the fruit knife hidden in her pocket. He silently took a few steps back, wary that the person before him might suddenly snap.

Looking at the fruit knife in Cang Yue's pocket, Gu Mian couldn't help but remark, "You really are something."

Cang Yue found those words somewhat familiar, as if she had said them herself not long ago.

But now wasn't the time to dwell on such things. She pressed down on the fruit knife in her pocket. "I also considered that such an obvious way out might be a trap set by the instance, so I didn't act immediately. Actually, it's quite simple to find out if this is the way out: we just need to help Zhao Shuang recover her memories from that day..."

Wang Chuan had, at some point, also joined them. Gu Mian had already retreated several steps, distancing himself from this group of players, just in case someone got any bright ideas about doing something to him.

Fortunately, no one had acted rashly yet.

Wang Chuan, who had just arrived, strongly agreed with Cang Yue's statement. "Yes, I think since this is the first instance players have participated in that involves real death, the instance's difficulty might have decreased. There has to be a grace period for players. Killing Zhao Shuang is very likely the way out of the instance. But we still need to be cautious. As long as we help Zhao Shuang regain her memory of that day, we'll know if this way out is real or fake."

The instance's name was Amnesia; it was clear this instance was intricately linked to what Zhao Shuang had forgotten from the day of the incident.

Whether her colleagues' deaths were due to Zhao Shuang could be determined if she remembered what actually happened that day, which would confirm the way out of the instance.

Xia Jianren stared wide-eyed at Cang Yue. "That's not what you said when we were in the room earlier! What happened to not courting death?"

"This might not necessarily be courting death." Cang Yue kept her hand on the fruit knife in her pocket and looked towards Zhao Shuang, who was being supported by Keke in the distance. "If she really is the way out, isn't killing her simpler than struggling in the instance for thirty-six hours?"

Everyone present had struggled through numerous horror instances; naturally, they wouldn't feel compassion for an NPC or hesitate to kill one.

"Alright, if you all want to find the way out, I'll go with you." Xia Jianren then looked at Gu Mian. "Do you also agree with Cang Yue's plan to help Zhao Shuang recover her memory?"

Gu Mian nodded slightly. "I was originally planning to stick by Zhao Shuang anyway. If it's on your way, you can come along."

Earlier, he had asked the operator about locations and variety shows in other instances and had gotten a clue about a Sweet Manor in the neighboring city. If it wasn't just a coincidence of names, then it meant this instance was interconnected with certain other instances. Perhaps he could pry more clues from the NPCs; he had been targeting Zhao Shuang from the start.

"Recovering her memory shouldn't be too difficult. If we stimulate her with things from the past, she might suddenly remember," Wang Chuan said. "Also, I remember the news report said there were thirty-eight people on the bus on October 1st, but only thirty bodies were found. Besides Zhao Shuang, seven others are unaccounted for. I guess they're most likely still alive. If we can find these seven, we might make a significant breakthrough. Even if Zhao Shuang really can't remember, these seven might know what happened that day."

"You're not thinking of taking Zhao Shuang to Fenshan Mountain right now to recall her past, are you?" Xia Jianren pursed his lips. "I think going there in the middle of the night is a bit too dangerous."

Cang Yue shook her head. "No rush. We can go to their company first. These people spent more time at the company than in the employee dormitories when they were alive. We might find some important clues there, and the company isn't far from here..."

Just as Cang Yue was speaking, a van approached from the distance and screeched to a halt in front of them.

The window rolled down slowly, revealing the driver's face. "You called for a cab?"

Gu Mian nodded.

There were six of them, so Gu Mian had specifically requested a larger vehicle when he called.

And just like that, a van had arrived.

They all climbed into the van and sat down. In the back row, Xia Jianren was speaking quietly with Wang Chuan, "Are we going to the company?"

The three young women sat in the second row, with Zhao Shuang sandwiched between Cang Yue and Keke, still visibly shaken and fearful.

Gu Mian, cradling his guitar, sat in the front passenger seat. The driver turned the steering wheel and asked, "Where to?"

Before anyone else could speak, Gu Mian, clearly prepared, quickly answered, "Can we go to Sweet Manor?"

Chapter 552 Truly a Healthy - _1

"What?" This was the second time Cang Yue had heard Gu Mian mention Sweet Manor after they entered the instance. "Do you have a grudge against that place? You think about it all the time."

She didn't know where Sweet Manor was, nor did she understand why Gu Mian would ask about this place in the instance.

All she knew was that now was clearly not the time to discuss whether the place was sweet or not.

Gu Mian symbolically cleared his throat and changed the subject before anyone else could speak. "I'm sorry, we're going to Yaxin Media on Licang Road."

He hadn't originally planned to enter Sweet Manor directly from this Amnesia instance. He was just in the car and took the opportunity to ask the driver.

Yaxin Media was the company where the players worked. It sounded grand, but it was just a small company occupying only half a floor. It was located on the thirteenth floor of an office building on Licang Road. The other half of the thirteenth floor was occupied by a design company that often discarded large rolls of blueprints.

The driver didn't respond but silently pressed the accelerator.

Gu Mian looked ahead through the windshield. There weren't many people around, and only a few cars were on the road, significantly reducing the risk of an accident.

Just then, Cang Yue, who was sitting directly behind him, suddenly leaned forward and asked, "What is Sweet Manor?"

It was the name of a location from a peculiar instance.

Of course, Gu Mian didn't answer her directly. He wasn't familiar with Cang Yue and saw no need to tell her this, especially with two NPCs in the car.

Cang Yue had clearly been curious about this place for a long time. Seeing Gu Mian didn't answer, she turned to Keke. "Have you ever heard of the variety shows 'Crazy Guessing Words' and 'Sweet Lovers'?"

Cang Yue had heard these names when Gu Mian was on the phone. She had no impression of them herself.

Keke shook her head, looking puzzled. "No."

But Xia Jianren in the backmost seat seemed to recall something and began, "Crazy Guessing Words! Isn't that..."

His voice trailed off halfway, and he hesitated, staring at the back of Zhao Shuang's head in front of him.

Cang Yue looked back at him. Seeing his guilty expression, she understood. "Could it be..."

"It's an instance." Xia Jianren mouthed the words, not making a sound, afraid the NPCs would hear.

Only after mouthing the word 'instance' did he speak aloud. "This... variety show, I remember it had a little green old man as the host. He was always using idioms incorrectly and was incredibly stingy..."

Gu Mian sat in the passenger seat, listening silently.

Based on the description, it was undoubtedly Mr. Green.

However, Xia Jianren didn't know that this incredibly stingy host had actually been generous for once at the end. Not only did he give his treasured Archive Device to Gu Mian, but Mr. Green himself also left the instance with Gu Mian. Even the staff from the instance ended up in Gu Mian's hands.

The entire "Crazy Guessing Words" instance had come to tour Earth thanks to Gu Mian. As for when they could return, that was unclear.

Xia Jianren continued, "Speaking of which, in there, there was also a wo—woman who was so terrifying! Ugly and scary!"

He shuddered as he spoke. It looked like he had been killed by the woman he was describing.

It could be concluded that the woman he was talking about was Xiao Hong.

Luckily, Xiao Hong wasn't here now; otherwise, Xia Jianren might have already been rushed to the emergency room.

Cang Yue took a deep breath and then looked at Gu Mian. She didn't understand why Gu Mian would call an NPC in one instance to ask about another instance. Could one get clues about another instance from a different one?

Could it... be possible? For one instance to provide information about another? Did that mean instances were connected? They might even exist in the same world! Was it really like that?

Cang Yue opened her mouth slightly, desperate to ask Gu Mian what answer he had received. But, considering the two NPCs in the car, she sensibly kept her mouth shut.

As Cang Yue pondered this, she glanced at Zhao Shuang beside her. She noticed Zhao Shuang wasn't listening to the others at all. Instead, her eyes were fixed, staring blankly at the rearview mirror.

This reaction was very strange. Cang Yue frowned and leaned slightly, moving closer to Zhao Shuang to look at the rearview mirror.

From this angle, one could only see the lower half of the driver's face. There was nothing unusual about it.

Still wary, Cang Yue quietly asked, "Zhao Shuang, what's wrong?"

Zhao Shuang replied in a daze, "Him, the driver... he looks a bit familiar? I feel like I've seen him somewhere."

Cang Yue's heart sank. She realized something was very wrong.

Fortunately, Zhao Shuang's voice was low, and the driver in the front seemed not to have heard. Gu Mian in the passenger seat also showed no reaction.

Only Keke beside her turned pale, clearly having heard.

"I... I think I saw him on the day of the team-building trip," Zhao Shuang struggled to recall. "He... he seems to be the driver of the bus from that day!"

There were thirty-nine people on the team-building trip on October 1st: one driver and thirty-eight passengers.

Besides Zhao Shuang who had been found and the thirty corpses, eight people were still missing, one of whom was the bus driver. Yet Zhao Shuang was saying the man before them was that very bus driver.

The news hadn't reported the bus driver being found. The person in front of them was clearly not human.

Cang Yue reached for the door handle. She recalled that the driver had seemed expressionless from the start. The lower half of his face, which she had seen in the rearview mirror just now, was also stiff and wooden.

A chilling premonition gripped her heart. We have to run! If we stay in this car, we'll all die!

She gripped the door handle tightly, intending to jump out of the car and escape immediately.

Just then, she instinctively glanced at the rearview mirror again and saw a pair of eyes staring intently at her from it.

"Run!" This time, she couldn't hold back any longer. With a shout, she yanked open the car door, pulled Zhao Shuang, and leaped out.

Keke scrambled out from the other side simultaneously, tumbling to the ground. The two men in the back, no matter how slow-witted, knew something was wrong. They reacted immediately, opening their respective doors and rushing out.

Just as they jumped, the two of them seemed to hear Gu Mian, still sitting in the passenger seat, say something.

Due to the immense inertia, Cang Yue rolled several times on the asphalt road after jumping out before coming to a stop, her hands and face scraped.

After stopping, she ignored her throbbing ankle and didn't even look at Zhao Shuang, whom she had pulled down. She just sprinted headlong in the opposite direction to the van's advance, only stopping to look back when the sound of the vehicle vanished from her ears.

Far behind her were the other players.

Keke seemed to have injured her leg. She was trying hard to get up but failed several times.

Further back, the two men were already stumbling to their feet, supporting each other and walking unsteadily.

Zhao Shuang, whom Cang Yue had pulled from the car, was still lying on the ground, apparently not having moved since jumping.

Looking even further, she could still see the receding silhouette of the van. Its taillights were on as it sped far into the dark night, eventually disappearing.

The driver hadn't stopped. Someone was still in the car.

"Gu Mian didn't get out?" Cang Yue looked around, repeatedly confirming there were only five of them here.

She took a few steps in the direction the van had left; there was no longer any sign of it.

Keke also propped herself up and looked in that direction. "Yes, he doesn't seem to have gotten out."

"It's not 'doesn't seem to,' he just didn't get out," Xia Jianren raised his voice, trying to make sure Cang Yue could hear him from a distance. "When we two jumped, he was still sitting happily up there. He seemed to say something. Wang Chuan, did you hear? I didn't hear clearly."

Wang Chuan also raised his voice somewhat. "I heard it. It sounded like..."

Cang Yue was already limping towards the two. "Sounded like what?"

Wang Chuan frowned. "I didn't quite understand it either. The exact words seemed to be, 'Isn't it a matter of course for six out of seven Sunshine Taxi drivers to be ghosts?'"

Is that a matter of course?

Xia Jianren twisted his foot, and every step was painful. He grimaced and said, "Listening to that, it sounds like he knew the driver was a ghost all along!"

Hearing this, Cang Yue suddenly remembered something.

She remembered there was a newspaper in the phone booth Gu Mian had been in. It had photos of the eight missing people, including the bus driver! At the time, she had only glanced at it briefly and just knew there were photos.

But Gu Mian, who had been in the phone booth for a long time, must have read the newspaper carefully. This meant he had recognized the driver from the very beginning!

Cang Yue said with utmost certainty, "Yes, he knew the driver was a ghost all along! He had just seen the bus driver's photo in the newspaper not long before."

"Huh?" Xia Jianren had only suspected it. Hearing Cang Yue say this, he was somewhat incredulous.

He knew the driver was a ghost and still dared to get in his car? He didn't even warn them, and he dragged all of them into this.

Knowing the driver was a ghost and still sitting so happily in the passenger seat... Xia Jianren's and Wang Chuan's minds went a bit blank. They didn't know if it was because they had hit their heads when jumping from the car or because Gu Mian's actions were too stunning.

Wang Chuan rubbed his forehead. "I suddenly kind of get why he's on the wanted list."

This guy was a complete lunatic; being alive was a danger to everyone.

Who knows when he might explode and kill everything living nearby, taking the instance down with him.

Keke had managed to struggle to her feet and was now helping up Zhao Shuang, who was still lying on the ground. While helping, she asked, feigning concern, "So, that Gu Mian... he won't be in any danger, will he?"

Xia Jianren massaged his lower back. "Danger? He ran off with a ghost! He's probably lost his life by now, never mind danger..."

Wang Chuan voiced his doubt, "But I always feel he's not a reckless person. He wouldn't do something he's not confident about. Like when he left the group to find the phone booth at the start. We all thought something would happen to him, but didn't he turn out fine in the end?"

Xia Jianren didn't agree with Wang Chuan. "Confidence? How can a living person be confident against a ghost? If a person dies, they might have a chance to become a ghost and fight the ghost that killed them on the spot. Living people can forget it.

"Although... although players have special items they can use, they're all for escaping. Have you ever seen anyone pull out a gun and blast a hole in a ghost's head? Gu Mian has gone with the ghost now. I guess he's either dead or trying to find a way to escape."

Chapter 553 Urban Ghost Story Gu Bong Bong_1

"Gu Mian himself called the car. We were staying close enough to the company to walk," Xia Jianren said, sucking in several sharp breaths, perhaps because wincing tugged at his injuries.

"Yes," Cang Yue nodded, looking out onto the deserted highway. Street lamps cast their dim glow on the road, a few moths orbiting them. "He had the car ready when we escaped."

When they fled from the perilous employee dormitory, they had hastily jumped into a taxi without much thought.

Could it be that he already anticipated that the driver was a ghost when he called the car! A preposterous notion suddenly popped into Wang Chuan's head.

"That's likely the case," Cang Yue let out a long sigh, feeling utterly exhausted.

Of the eight missing people, the driver's death had been confirmed, and the remaining seven were likely in dire straits, which made it hard to find a path to survival through them.

But if all eight were dead, then why hadn't their bodies been found?

Keke, who was supporting Zhao Shuang, asked, "Do we continue towards the company?"

Cang Yue snapped out of her thoughts and looked at Zhao Shuang. This NPC must have suffered quite a fall from the car and was unable to walk independently. Luckily, her head wasn't injured, and she looked quite lucid, though her face was etched with fear.

"We must. The company should be close by. We'll walk there," replied Cang Yue, patting her pocket, which contained a fruit knife. Luckily, the knife hadn't shifted when she jumped from the car, or she would have stabbed herself.

Wang Chuan and Xia Jianren were already hobbling forward. Wang Chuan turned and called back to them, "Let's go quickly. In our current state, every second we spend here is dangerous."

By "here," he meant this instance.

Ordinarily, uninjured and agile players faced a slim chance of survival in instances, let alone a group like theirs, with injured legs and feet, unable to run quickly.

Cang Yue tried to ignore the pain in her foot and quickened her pace to join the two men, putting distance between them and Zhao Shuang, who was being supported by Keke further behind.

She glanced back at Zhao Shuang, who was struggling to advance, then whispered to the two men, "Now that we all have mobility issues, passively clearing this instance is impossible. If we encounter a ghost, we can't outrun it in our current state."

Wang Chuan nodded. "So you mean..."

"We can't run. Every second we spend in this dangerous environment could be our last. What we need to do now is make this instance no longer dangerous," Cang Yue's voice was so soft it was almost inaudible.

She cast another glance at Zhao Shuang. "Meaning, we have to find a path to survival as soon as possible. My guess may not be entirely accurate, but we can be sure that the path to survival in this instance is definitely related to the memory Zhao Shuang lost. As long as she can recall what actually happened on October 1st, we can deduce the path to survival from it."

Why did the bus overturn and fall down the mountain, and what did it have to do with Zhao Shuang? As long as she could remember, everything would be resolved.

They had already investigated the employee dormitory and obtained some clues.

The chat history on Xia Jianren's cellphone showed that Zhao Shuang had a dispute with him before she lost her memory. Her current attitude, however, indicated that she might have forgotten about it.

Cang Yue hobbled forward. "At any rate, let's head to the company and do our utmost to find any clues that could stimulate her memory..."

Wang Chuan nodded in agreement.

Xia Jianren looked at the dimly lit road and remembered the taxi. "I wonder how Gu Mian is doing."

"Right," remembering the taxi prompted Xia Jianren to recall another incident. He turned to Cang Yue. "Why did you ask about 'Crazy Guessing Words' in the taxi? Have you been in that instance too?"

Hearing Xia Jianren's question, Cang Yue frowned. "No, I didn't know it was an instance before this. I heard the name from Gu Mian. Do you remember when we just escaped from the residential area and saw Gu Mian making a call in the phone booth?"

Both men nodded.

"I was close enough to hear him ask the person on the phone if they knew about a place called Sweet Manor and if they had watched the two variety shows, 'Crazy Guessing Words' and 'Sweet Lovers'."

Xia Jianren's jaw dropped. "There are only five players in this instance... He must have been talking to an NPC. Does this mean he was asking an NPC in this instance about another instance?"

It was truly mind-boggling.

Cang Yue continued, "I don't know what answer he got. But where there's smoke, there's fire. Maybe there is some connection between these game instances?"

Compared to Cang Yue and Xia Jianren, Wang Chuan was more concerned about the matter at hand. "This is not the time to discuss these things. If you really want to know the answer, ask Gu Mian the next time we see him."

Xia Jianren pursed his lips, seemingly not very hopeful about meeting Gu Mian again. "We may not see him again. He went with the ghost driver. I fear the worst for him... Wait, what's that up ahead?"

Upon hearing his words, everyone followed Xia Jianren's gaze and saw two beams of light on the empty road ahead—evidently, they were car headlights.

A car was slowly approaching from ahead with its headlights on. The crucial thing was, this car looked incredibly familiar. They had just jumped off that car not too long ago!

"That ghost is back!" Xia Jianren nearly jumped up at the sight of the familiar car.

Cang Yue reacted quickly. The moment she saw the front of the car, she turned and ran, shouting to the others, "Split up and run!"

One ghost, five people. Splitting up was undoubtedly the best strategy to buy time and the safest option.

They scattered in an instant and ran as hard as they could.

However, the road they were on was straight with no forks for them to split up, so they could only flee together in one direction initially.

But how could people with impaired mobility outrun a four-wheeled car? Xia Jianren, who was lagging at the very back and almost out of breath, was the first to be overtaken.

In just a few seconds, the car caught up to him and moved forward parallel to him.

Xia Jianren didn't dare, nor did he have the energy, to turn his head to look at the car running side by side with him. He just kept running forward, his legs throbbing with excruciating pain, desperately trying to escape the car's vicinity.

He thought he was likely to die, to die in this horrifying and cold instance. After his death, he would lie sprawled on the road, wondering if his corpse could even return to the real world.

Gu Mian pressed the gas pedal, unhurriedly rolled down the window, and looked out at Xia Jianren, whose profile was perfectly visible from this angle.

He could see Xia Jianren's face was pale and bluish, his eye sockets and the tip of his nose red, tears almost pouring out.

Gu Mian estimated that if he let him run for a few more minutes, he would collapse and die on the spot.

"Are you guys racing?" Xia Jianren, who was trying desperately to escape, suddenly heard this sentence from beside him.

The voice didn't sound like a ghost's, and it was quite familiar.

He instinctively slowed down and glanced at the car by his side. He saw that the car window had been rolled down at some point, revealing Gu Mian's face.

Upon seeing this familiar face, Xia Jianren's foot slipped, and he plopped onto the ground, twisting his previously uninjured leg in the process.

Following that, what erupted in Gu Mian's ears was an outburst of loud sobbing.

After plopping onto the ground, the man, his eyes already red, finally couldn't hold back any longer. He began to sob loudly.

Gu Mian looked through the car window at Xia Jianren sitting on the ground, not quite understanding why he was crying.

The sound of sobbing also reached the others who were fleeing up ahead. Cang Yue had been expecting to hear screams, the final sounds a person makes before dying, but instead, she heard crying, unending sobs. The crying wasn't cut short by death; the ghost in the car seemed very patient, as if waiting for the person to finish crying before making a move.

She glanced back curiously and saw that the car had stopped. The car door was open, and the driver's seat was empty. Shifting her gaze slightly to the side, she saw Gu Mian squatting beside Xia Jianren, who was wailing, while Gu Mian offered him a tissue.

Xia Jianren snatched the tissue and fiercely wiped his nose, while Gu Mian, who was squatting beside him, pulled out another tissue and handed it over.

Cang Yue, too, stopped running.

The others apparently had also realized things weren't as they'd imagined, and they all stopped to watch Gu Mian hand tissues to Xia Jianren.

The scene was heartwarming, but also somewhat bizarre.

"So, you're saying it wasn't the ghost driver who drove the car back, but you, Gu Mian? You drove the car back to pick us up?" Once they had calmed down, the group quickly gathered and boarded the car. Cang Yue was asking Gu Mian about what had just happened.

Only Xia Jianren, in the front passenger seat, was still whimpering, not yet fully recovered.

"Indeed, that's the case," Gu Mian said, turning the steering wheel. "As it happened, I saw you guys racing when I came back."

The racing part wasn't important. Cang Yue twitched her eyebrows and asked, "Wasn't the driver a ghost? How did you manage to come back safely? And you even brought the ghost's car back."

Who could have imagined that what was the ghost's car a moment ago had become Gu Mian's in the next?

"I saw you all fall off, so I told the driver that some people were left behind and asked him to go back and pick you up."

"Well, you're quite something!" Xia Jianren said, fiercely wiping his nose again.

Gu Mian continued his account. "But he was silent, ignoring me. I thought, What an unprofessional driver. I've met such unprofessional drivers before, but I always managed to persuade them by appealing to their reason and emotions."

"So, I told the driver it was unethical of him not to go back and pick you all up. He ignored me at first. But after I talked to him at length, he was moved. He cried profusely, admitting his fault, and said he was too ashamed... he couldn't bear to face you all. So, he gave me the car and told me to come back and find you."

What the hell? Cang Yue thought inwardly upon hearing Gu Mian's account.

Looking at the expressions of the others, it was clear they were thinking something similar to Cang Yue. However, with tacit understanding, none of them voiced their thoughts; they just nodded awkwardly in feigned agreement.

They increasingly felt this man was abnormal, and none of them dared to refute him, fearing that Gu Mian might go crazy.

Just as everyone was trying to figure out how the car ended up in Gu Mian's hands, Xia Jianren in the front passenger seat suddenly said, "Look on the right."

Everyone in the car looked out the right window. On the right side of the road, something lay curled up and motionless, as if it had been beaten to death and dragged there. A closer look revealed it was a person, still wearing clothes. Most importantly, the clothes were distinctly familiar!

They were the ghost driver's clothes!

But Gu Mian's car was moving fast, and it was gone from sight in a flash as they sped past.

The moment they saw that thing on the roadside, Keke thought she could hear the chattering of teeth from the others in the car.

Chapter 554 Max Level Priest Gu Bongbong_1

Gu Mian also heard the strange sounds coming from the car. "What's wrong with you all?"

Cang Yue nonchalantly shifted her gaze away from the car window. "Nothing."

As she spoke, her eyes kept sweeping over her own body. If Gu Mian's player panel hadn't been accessible, she would have almost suspected Gu Mian himself was a ghost in disguise.

In the dead of night, why did passengers leap from the car to flee? Why did the taxi driver die horrifically in the street? Is this a distortion of human nature or a collapse of morality...

This refrain began to play automatically in Cang Yue's mind. She felt like she might be going crazy.

After seeing the thing by the roadside—which appeared to be the former driver—the car quieted down significantly. Even Xia Jianren, who had been sobbing earlier, clamped his mouth shut. His face, however, seemed even more ghastly than before.

Zhao Shuang, who was a bit slow on the uptake, hadn't seen the driver's corpse on the road. She sat in a daze between Keke and Cang Yue, unable to understand why the dead would return harboring such malice towards them.

Wang Chuan's mental state wasn't much better than the others. He seemed to want to muster the courage to ask Gu Mian why the driver had died so horrifically on the street, but his courage failed him every time his gaze fell upon Gu Mian.

The van drove on alone down the silent road, stopping before an office building not long after.

Gu Mian stepped on the brake and looked at the adjacent building. "We're here."

After the recent events, it was now eleven o'clock. The towering office building stood starkly in the night, empty and deathly still, its main entrance locked. There wasn't a living soul inside.

Gu Mian opened the car door and stepped out. The others, each preoccupied with their own thoughts, also disembarked. The six of them gathered, looking up at the towering office building. An occasional cold wind gusted past, making their hearts tremble.

"I hope we can find some clues here," Cang Yue said, standing by the car, maintaining a careful distance from Gu Mian—not too far, yet not too close.

Zhao Shuang didn't quite understand why they had to come to the company. She looked quizzically at the people beside her, but no one offered an explanation.

Before anyone could answer, she finally voiced her confusion, "Why did we have to come here?"

Wang Chuan replied, "Don't you want to know what exactly happened on October 1st?"

Zhao Shuang hesitated for a moment, then nodded. "I want to remember too."

For the players, Zhao Shuang's lost memories were critically linked to the path to survival in this instance. Thus, everyone wanted her to quickly recall what had happened that day.

Zhao Shuang herself also desperately hoped to remember the events of that day.

Taking a step forward, Cang Yue said, "Going to the place where you usually work might stimulate your memory."

If they could just confirm that Zhao Shuang was responsible for the deaths of those dozens of people, they could figure out the path to survival in this instance. As this thought crossed her mind, Cang Yue touched her pocket.

"Although coming to a place like this in the dead of night is indeed unsettling," Wang Chuan said, also taking a few steps forward, "it's better than doing nothing and just waiting to die."

As he spoke, he strode to the front of the office building. The main entrance was locked, but as employees, they had keys.

Cang Yue deftly fished a set of keys from Zhao Shuang's pocket. She remembered Zhao Shuang had brought her keys and identification card when she left the employee dormitory.

Xia Jianren didn't dare to get too close to Gu Mian, so he jogged over to the main entrance of the office building to watch Wang Chuan and Cang Yue try the keys.

Seeing the others gathered at the office building's entrance, Keke took a couple of steps to Gu Mian's side. "Why did you come and meet up with us?"

This was the first opportunity the two of them had to speak privately since entering the instance.

Keke was always puzzled about why Gu Mian would join the other players, especially when his name was still on the bounty list and he was someone many players dreamt of killing.

Gu Mian, guitar on his back, watched the group fiddling with the keys at the door. "I think I might need to experience the plot."

Keke didn't understand. "What?"

"I need to understand the instance's content," Gu Mian said, turning his head to look at the scrape on Keke's face as he began to search his pockets. "Because I've discovered that some instances are interconnected; in other words, some instances might exist within the same world..."

He took out a stack of adhesive bandages, tore one open, and thoughtfully stuck it on Keke's face. "For example, the world where this current instance is located might also contain other instances."

"For instance, Sweet Manor?" Keke retorted.

Gu Mian tore open another adhesive bandage and stuck it on her face, perfectly aligned with the previous one. "Your mind certainly works fast."

However, Sweet Manor might not be an instance. That name was a station Gu Mian had heard mentioned in the 'Bizarre Great Train Escape' instance.

"If I'm not mistaken," Keke continued, "the incredibly stingy Host Green from the 'Crazy Guessing Words' game Xia Jianren mentioned—that's the little green dwarf who was with you before, right?"

Little green dwarf? Gu Mian's hand paused. If Mr. Green heard Keke describe him like that, he'd surely scratch her face raw on the spot.

Keke, not particularly concerned about her face, went on, "And that so-called ugly and terrifying employee, that was Xiao Hong?"

Keke had stayed at Liu Ruyan's motel for some time, so of course, she saw those two every day. Although she hadn't asked many questions, she had her own speculations about their identities.

After hearing Xia Jianren's words, she became even more certain. She just hadn't expected Gu Mian to actually keep a ghost by his side all day long.

What was even more preposterous was that an NPC from an instance could enter the real world.

Gu Mian continued, "Only by understanding the content of every instance can we gather more clues and perhaps even touch upon the truth of this global game..."

Why was this game initiated? Where did the instances originate? And what was the reason for his own luck, so potent it could startle heaven and earth and make ghosts weep?

Keke stared at the group in front of the door. "It's all well and good, but for someone like me, even if I realize something's wrong with this game, I don't have the energy to investigate. Just surviving is hard enough."

Gu Mian hadn't initially wanted to delve too deeply into instances either. After all, aside from destroying Earth, he'd never really had any other ambitions. But he always had a nagging feeling that Chu Change and the others were hiding something.

These individuals, originally from the worlds within the instances, had been tasked with protecting Gu Mian, yet they themselves didn't know why.

They had secrets, and if asked, they wouldn't reveal them. Gu Mian felt that if he allowed this situation to persist, a major disaster would erupt sooner or later.

By this time, Cang Yue had successfully opened the office building's door. As she turned to call the others over, she saw Keke's face neatly plastered with three adhesive bandages, covering a good portion of it.

Meanwhile, Gu Mian was stuffing the remaining "tools of the crime" into his pocket.

Seeing this, a twinge of pain shot through Cang Yue's foot, reminding her that she had just sprained her ankle.

"The door's open, let's go in." Wang Chuan also turned back to look at the two.

Gu Mian nodded and started walking forward. Xia Jianren squatted by the doorway, peering inside, but it was pitch-black, and he couldn't make out a thing.

The light switch was easy to find, but when they flipped it, the overhead lights remained off. The security guard had probably shut off the main power when leaving.

They didn't know where the electrical panel was, so they had to rely on flashlights for illumination.

The ground floor was a spacious lobby with four elevators, two on each side. However, all the elevators were without power, forcing the group to take the stairs.

The company offices were on the thirteenth floor. As Xia Jianren climbed, he panted, "This pitch-black corridor, these cramped stairs... this is prime haunting territory!"

Clearly, they were all terrified that a ghost would suddenly materialize and kill them. The group huddled together, inching slowly up the stairs. They didn't even dare to raise their flashlights too high, terrified of being discovered by something.

Gu Mian silently watched from the rear as the group ahead of him shuffled along like a caterpillar. He wasn't selflessly bringing up the rear to protect them; rather, he was afraid that if he walked at the front, someone might suddenly stab him in the back. He hadn't expected them to move even slower than snails.

By the time the main group had shuffled to the third floor, he couldn't stand it any longer. "You guys take your time. I'm going ahead to check things out."

Before anyone could react, he raised his flashlight and sprinted up the stairs, vanishing from sight in an instant.

The people behind were dumbstruck, staring in the direction where he had disappeared.

It had been unnerving enough when Gu Mian was with them; now that he was gone, it was even more terrifying.

Chapter 555 Startling Sitting up from the Bed of Death, Another Short and Feeble - _1

"How can he run so fast!" Xia Jianren gaped, looking in the direction Gu Mian had disappeared.

In this cold, horrifying instance, everyone trod carefully, fear in each step. Only Gu Mian would spontaneously decide to abandon the group with words like, "I have to go ahead for a bit; you guys take your time," only to reappear unscathed when the others, who had expended all their mental energy, encountered him again.

"Is he really human?" Xia Jianren couldn't help but voice the thoughts he had harbored for a long time.

Cang Yue also had an expression as if she'd seen a ghost. "Honestly, he doesn't seem to be."

Wang Chuan looked upwards. "So, do we continue up?"

Cang Yue nodded. "Since Gu Mian went up, it's like he cleared some danger for us. Following him should be safe."

Xia Jianren, however, had other worries. "But what if the danger wasn't triggered by him and targets us instead?"

This frightening idea was so strong, he almost felt it was bound to happen.

"We've already come this far; there's no point going back," Cang Yue also looked up the staircase. "Let's continue up."

Being near Gu Mian felt safer—a conclusion she had reached after several hours in the instance.

So, the group continued upwards, their pace slightly faster than before. Fortunately, though the stairwell was dark, no strange entities jumped out at them.

They quickly groped their way up several more floors. As he climbed, Xia Jianren thought of Gu Mian. "I still don't understand how he ran off with a ghost and came back alive... By the way, when we were in the car, you all saw that thing on the roadside, right? That human-looking thing, the clothes on it looked very familiar!"

Silence filled the stairwell for two seconds before Wang Chuan spoke, his expression strange. "I saw it. That looked like the driver who drove Gu Mian away..."

There was no doubt that the driver was a ghost.

"Was that really a ghost?" Xia Jianren shivered as he lifted his foot to the next step. "Can a ghost end up looking like that?"

Lying motionless on the street like a recent robbery victim, anyone who saw it would sigh at how pitiful it looked.

If someone with a poetic inclination happened by, they might even look at the ghost's corpse and recite something like, "Wine and meat rot behind vermillion gates, while bones of the frozen litter the roads."

"What we know now is that the driver was a ghost. He drove off with a person, and in the end, the ghost was gone, but the person returned." Cang Yue quickened her pace slightly, silently marveling at how absurd the situation was.

Thinking of the driver sprawled by the roadside, Xia Jianren's teeth chattered. "That couldn't really be Gu Mian's doing, could it?"

He would rather believe the driver had been driving too fast, was thrown from the vehicle, and died from the fall, than believe Gu Mian had done something to him.

Wang Chuan was quite accepting of strange occurrences. "It's a vast world, full of wonders. Perhaps Gu Mian has a special item that can suppress ghosts. I think that Saw in his bag is likely a precious special item, capable of subduing ghosts."

"I think so too," Cang Yue nodded. "If it were just an ordinary Saw, he wouldn't carry it on his back all the time; he could simply put it in his item slot."

Gu Mian, who lacked an item slot, was unaware the other players were speculating on how rare his Saw was. He moved quickly, reaching the thirteenth floor while the others were still trudging slowly up the stairs.

This building had a staircase on the east and west sides, with four elevators in the middle, facing each other in pairs.

Zhao Shuang's company was on the eastern side of the thirteenth floor. Gu Mian had just come up the eastern staircase. Directly opposite him was a locked office, and to his left, at the easternmost end of the floor, was a restroom.

Restrooms were classic haunted hotspots in horror films and novels, after all. Gu Mian unhesitatingly walked to his left. Just inside the restroom entrance was a large mirror, reflecting Gu Mian's figure as he held his flashlight.

Further inside were two small doors.

The left door depicted a pink figure in a skirt; the right, a black stick figure.

Gu Mian stood before the ominous entrance to the women's restroom, lost in thought.

Although his gender was marked with a "?", and even the girls' dormitory in the college entrance exam event had allowed him entry, however, a person should still adhere to some moral principles, he thought.

He stood at the gloomy doorway for a long time, waiting.

However, five minutes passed, and still, nothing had happened.

"That's not right," Gu Mian said, swinging the flashlight in his hand. "According to horror novel tropes, shouldn't this be the part where 'a pitch-black hand suddenly shoves his back, catching him off guard and pushing him into the women's restroom; when he frantically turns around, he finds the restroom door has been shut, and he can't get out no matter what'? Isn't that how the plot should go?"

Unfortunately, no dark hand came to push Gu Mian, who was trying to uphold his moral bottom line, which meant he still hadn't entered the women's restroom.

Gu Mian pondered for a few seconds, seemed to understand something, then turned off his flashlight beam and continued to stand at the doorway, waiting for the dark hand.

A few minutes later, still, nothing happened.

Only the sound of the wind brushing against the windowpanes could be heard, as if mocking Gu Mian for standing there alone in the dark, as if being punished.

"Alright then..." He resignedly turned on his flashlight and took a large stride inside. "I wasn't very moral to begin with, anyway."

The women's restroom was very clean; it was clear the cleaning staff here loved their job. Gu Mian meticulously checked every stall, one by one, finding nothing.

No little girl crying in a stall, no female ghost constantly washing her hair, no school principals skilled at climbing over stall partitions.

Finding nothing in the women's restroom, Gu Mian, not giving up, explored the men's restroom as well, but again, found nothing.

"There are really no ghosts in the restroom?" Gu Mian muttered to himself as he left.

Soon, he turned his attention to the office across from the restroom.

Their company had three offices, each about one hundred square meters. Additionally, next to the restroom and opposite the offices, there was a small storage room for unused desks, chairs, and miscellaneous items.

Although Gu Mian hadn't brought the office keys, these small doors wouldn't stop him.

Soon, Cang Yue and the others, who had reached the eleventh floor, heard a deafening sound from upstairs, as if someone had brought a motorcycle up and was starting it.

The group climbing the stairs was startled by this sound; Xia Jianren, in particular, slipped and nearly tumbled down.

"What's that sound!" He stared wide-eyed at the ceiling, his heart beginning to race.

Cang Yue and Wang Chuan were also startled but quickly composed themselves.

Keke looked up, then at the others beside her, and hesitated before speaking, "That sounds like a Saw, doesn't it? Is someone using a Saw to cut something?"

Hearing this, the others immediately understood.

"Gu Mian?" Cang Yue felt a headache coming on. "Making such a loud sound, he really isn't afraid of dying... But what is he cutting with the Saw?"

Wang Chuan guessed, "I bet he didn't bring the keys."

"That's just like him!" Xia Jianren quickly climbed a few more steps amidst the sound of the Saw. "Even if the ghosts didn't know where we were, they do now! Making this sound, aren't we just painting a target on our backs?"

"Let's hurry," Cang Yue also quickened her pace. "We need to tell him to tone it down."

Amidst the noisy sound of the Saw, the group felt a bit bolder, and their speed climbing the stairs increased considerably.

When they reached the thirteenth floor, they happened to run into Gu Mian, who had just finished his work.

"You're here?" Gu Mian had just sawed open the small lock on the storage room when he saw the group standing at the top of the stairs, their expressions varied. He waved an arm towards the offices opposite. "Look, I've opened them all."

Wang Chuan's eyebrow twitched. "But we have the keys."

"It doesn't matter. The result is the same anyway," Gu Mian said, opening the storage room door. "Let's see what goodies are in here."

Chapter 556

"Let's play a game we could only play when the Doctor's not around!"

Outside of the instance, in Liu Ruyan's inn, Fatty was excitedly going through Gu Mian's childhood photos.

When Gu Mian was present, Fatty wouldn't dare to be so bold as to touch Gu Mian's photo album.

Big Brother was squatting next to him, his eyes glued to the photo album as it was turned page by page.

Xiao Hong was listlessly leaning against the window, gazing outside. From her face, which resembled a car crash scene, one could even discern a hint of depression.

Not far away, on the couch, Chu Changge was adjusting his glasses, observing the coffee table full of lychee sodas.

About half an hour ago, Xiao Hong took advantage of Gu Mian's absence and went on a rampage in the supermarket. When she came back, she was dragging two hemp bags full of lychee sodas, with a devastated cashier chasing after her, crying for payment.

Amid the cashier's wails, which sounded like mourning cries, Accompany me next year and her companions all came out to watch the spectacle. It was their first time seeing someone rob a supermarket and also their first time witnessing an NPC wail as if at a funeral.

This even gave Accompany me next year and her companions the idea of robbing a supermarket themselves.

In the end, Chu Changge paid and sent the wailing cashier away. Of course, the two sacks of lychee sodas Xiao Hong had set her heart on didn't end up with her; Chu Changge confiscated them all.

The lychee soda cans in the supermarket had just gotten new packaging; they were all pink. The can featured an image of a peeled, white lychee with two eyes, a mouth, and four matchsticks for arms and legs. It seemed the designer's aesthetic sense wasn't particularly refined.

"I wonder what instance the Doctor entered this time," Fatty's gaze lingered on a photo of a manhole cover exploding at Gu Mian's feet. "From now on, if you die in an instance, you'll really be done for."

Speaking of this, he shuddered, apparently remembering his own miserable death in a previous instance.

Chu Changge reached out and straightened a soda can on the corner of the table, "Let's wait for the announcement."

At this moment, the players inside the instance had already started exploring the thirteenth floor. Their company had three offices. Since each office was quite spacious, their doors weren't very close to each other.

To save time, they divided into three groups, each heading to one of the three offices to search for clues that might jog Zhao Shuang's memory. After all, these rooms were all on the same corridor; if anything happened, a shout would be enough for everyone to hear.

Cang Yue and Wang Chuan went to the office at the end of the hall, while Xia Jianren and Zhao Shuang went to the middle one. Gu Mian and Keke were supposed to go to the remaining office to look for clues, but Gu Mian decided to rummage through the utility room first. Keke wouldn't be scared on her own anyway.

He stood at the door of the utility room, looking inside. It was thick with dust, and unused files were piled up on all sides. The paper of the bottommost files had already yellowed. Additionally, several unused or broken chairs were stacked together, almost reaching the ceiling.

There were also rarely used toilet plungers, a few plant pots containing only soil, a broken wall clock, and, in the far corner, a small cabinet. It resembled a nightstand with a few drawers and had probably been used for storage beside an office desk.

He crouched in front of the cabinet, took out a tissue, wiped the drawer handle, and then opened it.

Unexpectedly, upon pulling it open, he saw something rather scandalous. Inside the drawer, two Barbie-pink envelopes lay quietly. They were clearly love letters.

The envelopes were sealed with heart-shaped stickers that showed signs of having been torn open. Three small characters were written on them: "To Zhao Shuang."

How thrilling, reading someone's love letters in a horror instance.

Gu Mian, with no moral compunction whatsoever, tore open an envelope and began to read it with relish.

Meanwhile, Cang Yue and Wang Chuan had also found something: a photograph of Zhao Shuang with another man, discovered on Zhao Shuang's desk. Their company only had three offices, and this man in the photo with Zhao Shuang was from the office next door. His name was Sun Zihao, and he had died on October 1st.

"Are they a couple?" Wang Chuan looked at the photo. After entering the instance, they had received basic information about it, but many details hadn't been provided, such as the possible romantic relationship between Zhao Shuang and Sun Zihao.

Looking at the photo, Cang Yue broke out in a cold sweat. "If that's true, it's a good thing we didn't kill Zhao Shuang immediately."

If the two were indeed a couple, and if Sun Zihao still had feelings for Zhao Shuang, killing her could anger Sun Zihao and trigger a death pathway.

"This instance is indeed very cunning," Wang Chuan also stared at the photo. "The earlier hints about Zhao Shuang not getting along with her colleagues were meant to lead us to our deaths."

Cang Yue frowned and put the photo in his pocket. "If killing Zhao Shuang triggers a death pathway, then what is the true life pathway?"

This instance is becoming more and more convoluted, and our previous theories are beginning to crumble, Cang Yue thought. The truth can only be found if Zhao Shuang recovers her memory of that day. Only then can we deduce the life pathway. He continued searching. "Let's hurry and find more clues. Maybe if we show this photo to Zhao Shuang, she'll remember something."

Keke had been searching the office by herself, but before she could search for long, Gu Mian emerged from the utility room and casually tossed two love letters to her.

Keke caught the love letters, glanced at the seals, and tore them open. "These are..."

These were the love letters Sun Zihao wrote to Zhao Shuang.

But Sun Zihao was already long dead. Keke remembered that Sun Zihao's name wasn't among the eight people who had gone missing.

"These two were lovers," Keke said. It feels a bit inappropriate to say 'were lovers' since one of them is still alive, but now isn't the time to fuss over wording. "Sun Zihao is dead, and they were lovers... Perhaps Sun Zihao is the life pathway for this instance?"

If Sun Zihao loved Zhao Shuang deeply, he might continue to protect her even as a ghost. In that case, staying by Zhao Shuang's side would be the life pathway for this instance.

"But I don't know whether the accident on October 1st was a coincidence or something else. I always feel like the accident is related to Zhao Shuang, but I can't find a clue... Maybe things are not as simple as we think..."

As she spoke, she looked at Gu Mian, but he seemed to have little interest in what she was saying.

Keke fell silent. Fair enough. To Gu Mian, life pathways and death pathways were all the same; he never bothered to look for such things.

"What do you plan to do next?" she asked Gu Mian.

Gu Mian casually flipped through an account book on the desk, which belonged to someone in the company's finance department. "Explore the mysteries of the world and strive to save humanity."

Right, that's as good as no answer at all. Keke twisted her neck, no longer intending to speak with Gu Mian.

"The bus they used for the team-building trip was rented," Gu Mian, still flipping through the account book, suddenly said. "There's an entry for the vehicle rental here."

Chapter 557 That year, I also experienced ten thousand days_1

"Indeed," Keke also saw the contents of the ledger. "Do you have any insights?"

"If you just want Zhao Shuang to regain her memory, I do have a good idea," Gu Mian said, looking at the vehicle rental bill in the ledger. "Go to their rental company, rent an identical bus, invite thirty-something people, and I'll drive us all up Fenshan Mountain. We'll go to the spot on the mountainside where the police found Zhao Shuang, and I'll kick her out, recreating the entire scenario..."

Keke was silent for a while. "Are you planning to drive the bus off the cliff in a barrel roll next, taking us all down with you?"

"It's not out of the question," Gu Mian considered seriously. "Depending on the direction and landing spot of the bus's barrel roll, maybe we can find a few more of the missing people."

"Whether or not we find the missing people is another matter, but I guess we'll make the news that day." Keke no longer wanted to talk to Gu Mian.

She had miscalculated. She thought she was accustomed to Gu Mian's eccentricities, but she hadn't expected him to be even more abnormal at a critical moment...

Keke took a few deep breaths. "Fine, do whatever you want."

As long as he doesn't attract all the ghosts to this area...

"Then I'll go look elsewhere first," Gu Mian said, pushing two love letters toward Keke. "Show these two letters to the others later."

Having said this, he headed for the exit. The office had a wall of floor-to-ceiling glass by the door, allowing a clear view from the outside. Thus, Keke could see which direction Gu Mian went after he left. He exited the office and headed toward the stairs on the other side, presumably to go downstairs. Keke didn't know if he was really going to get a bus. But after a while, she saw Gu Mian return.

"What happened?" Keke asked, looking at Gu Mian, who had reappeared at the doorway.

Gu Mian shrugged. "The door to the stairwell over there is locked due to disrepair. They're worried it's not sturdy and might collapse on someone if opened."

As he spoke, he walked toward the stairs he had come from, apparently going downstairs that way.

By the time the players had finished their search, Gu Mian was long gone.

The only useful clue Cang Yue and Wang Chuan found was a group photo. Zhao Shuang and Xia Jianren found nothing. Apart from the two love letters, Keke also came up empty-handed.

When they gathered at the stairwell landing, everyone else realized Gu Mian had disappeared again.

"Where did he go?" Cang Yue asked Keke, shining his flashlight.

Keke touched the two love letters in her pocket. "After looking around the storeroom, he suddenly had some peculiar ideas. I guess he might have gone to rent a car now."

They all looked at each other. Wang Chuan was the first to ask, "Rent a car... to do what?"

"He said he wants to take all of us, find about thirty more people, and he'll drive us to Fenshan Mountain to recreate the scene. He says it'll help Zhao Shuang regain her memory." Keke's expression was anything but calm as she said this.

The others also had strange expressions.

"Anyway, it's not the first time he's acted abnormally," Wang Chuan said, regaining his composure. "Let's first discuss the clues we've found."

He first looked at Xia Jianren and Zhao Shuang. "Did you two find any clues?"

Xia Jianren shook his head. "Nothing. The office was full of useless files, otherwise just some tattered magazines. The cactus by the window was quite prickly..."

At this point, Cang Yue suddenly spoke up, "By the way, Zhao Shuang, you still remember your desk, right? It's in the room Wang Chuan and I searched."

Zhao Shuang nodded. "Yes, I remember where my desk is."

Cang Yue continued, "How about I go with you to take a look? Maybe seeing your desk will help you remember something."

Zhao Shuang didn't object. "Okay."

The two of them then walked towards the office at the far end of the hall.

Xia Jianren instinctively wanted to follow but was pulled back by Wang Chuan.

"What's wrong?" Xia Jianren asked, surprised.

Wang Chuan watched the two figures leave and said quietly, "Zhao Shuang, with her amnesia, isn't one of us. We need to discuss some things about her. If she finds out we know nothing about her, wouldn't that be troublesome?"

"Oh," Xia Jianren said, finally understanding. "You're afraid Zhao Shuang will find out we aren't her original colleagues."

Wang Chuan nodded. "Because the clue Cang Yue and I found is about Zhao Shuang." As he spoke, he took out a photo. Keke and Xia Jianren looked at it; it was a photo of Zhao Shuang with a man.

The memories instilled by the instance allowed them to recognize the man. "Sun Zihao?" Keke identified him at once.

Wang Chuan also looked at the photo in his hand. "Yes, that's him. The police confirmed he's dead. I guess they might have been a couple."

"So you're saying Zhao Shuang's boyfriend became a ghost?" Xia Jianren's eyes widened.

"Yes," Wang Chuan replied. "After seeing this photo, Cang Yue and I suspect our previous guess was wrong. Maybe killing Zhao Shuang isn't the 'path to survival,' but the 'path to death.'"

As he said this, he kept glancing back, afraid Zhao Shuang might overhear him. Thankfully, Cang Yue was keeping her occupied over there.

Wang Chuan continued, "The 'path to survival' might lie with this Sun Zihao, or perhaps with those colleagues who are missing, neither seen alive nor confirmed dead."

At this point, Keke also took out the two love letters from her pocket. "Gu Mian found these. I didn't take them out when Zhao Shuang was here. Take a look."

As she spoke, she pulled the papers from the pink envelopes and spread them out. "The content... well, how should I put it... see for yourselves."

Wang Chuan shone his flashlight on the two sheets of paper in Keke's hand.

"'You are like the moon in the sky, anchored in the heart of the water, forever anchored in my heart...' Wait, haven't I seen this line on some website before?"

Wang Chuan nodded. "Indeed, I've seen it too. It's obviously copied."

Keke had no experience searching for love letters online, so she didn't realize the text was from a website; she just found it cheesy. She guessed Gu Mian hadn't searched for such things online either, so he wouldn't know Sun Zihao had copied it.

There were two love letters in total, both quite cheesy. The crucial part was that both Xia Jianren and Wang Chuan found these two love letters very familiar, strongly suggesting they were copied from a website.

It seemed both of them had rich experience copying love letters.

Xia Jianren looked at the love letters in Keke's hand. "This should confirm that Zhao Shuang and Sun Zihao were boyfriend and girlfriend, right?"

"Most likely," Wang Chuan nodded. "So, I'm thinking if we make a move on Zhao Shuang, Sun Zihao might go berserk?"

Xia Jianren asked doubtfully, "He's a ghost now. Can he still have old feelings for Zhao Shuang?"

"Anything's possible. It would be great if Zhao Shuang could recover her memory quickly. When she returns, we should first ask her if she remembers Sun..." Wang Chuan's voice trailed off abruptly.

"What's wrong?" Xia Jianren asked, looking at him curiously.

Wang Chuan's lips froze, half-open. He was facing the stairwell door, and through its open frame, he could see the stairs leading to the twelfth and fourteenth floors. In his peripheral vision, at the landing of the stairs leading to the twelfth floor, half a pale, bluish face peeked out.

Chapter 558 There Really Aren't Many Authors as Diligent as Me_1

"How is it?" Cang Yue looked at the person in front of her. "Did you remember anything?"

The company building's power was out, and the office lights couldn't be turned on. Cang Yue was illuminating the office desk before her with a flashlight, trying to help Zhao Shuang see it clearly. On the

desk were disheveled documents, a few inkless pens, a thermos in the corner with unfinished water, and an opened drawer revealed half a pack of candied fruit, which Cang Yue, of course, dared not eat.

Zhao Shuang examined the desk by the flashlight's beam. She had only forgotten parts of her memory; she naturally still remembered her own desk. But this didn't seem to help her memory much. Zhao Shuang observed the desk for a long time but couldn't recall anything related to that day—October 1st. Helplessly, she shook her head at Cang Yue, indicating that she couldn't remember anything.

Cang Yue's eyes flickered. She realized Zhao Shuang hadn't noticed the missing photo. The photo of Zhao Shuang and Sun Zihao had been in a conspicuous spot, but Cang Yue had taken it and given it to Wang Chuan. Yet, Zhao Shuang hadn't noticed its absence. Had she not noticed it, or had she completely forgotten about it?

Just as Cang Yue furrowed her brow, contemplating whether to ask Zhao Shuang about Sun Zihao, a loud shout suddenly came from outside— "Run!"

The two of them looked towards the door in surprise. The wall with the door was made of glass, and the office door wasn't far from the stairwell door. From their angle, they could see the pitch-dark staircase. The three people who had been at the staircase entrance had all fled. Cang Yue immediately saw what made them run.

A pale, bloodshot face peeked out from the pitch-black staircase, meeting the gazes of Cang Yue and Zhao Shuang.

She shuddered, her mind racing. Now that the ghost had seen them, it was impossible to keep hiding in the room. The moment she realized this, Cang Yue abruptly turned off the flashlight, grabbed Zhao Shuang, and dragged her out of the room.

The ghost was already on the stairs leading to their floor. They couldn't run towards *that* staircase. They had to anxiously run past that stairwell door and head for the staircase on the other side.

At this moment, Wang Chuan was panting as he climbed the stairs behind Keke. When he first spotted the ghost, he had wanted to run to the other side of the corridor. But then he saw Keke dash directly towards the stairs leading to the floor above. The ghost was on the staircase between the twelfth and thirteenth floors. Anyone with any sense wouldn't choose to run towards the stairs, but Keke rushed up

without hesitation. Wang Chuan immediately sensed something, quickly stopped, and followed Keke up. Meanwhile, Xia Jianren had already sprinted to the other end of the corridor; he was too far to call back.

After they had rushed up several flights and were out of breath, they finally stopped, leaning against the wall and gasping for air. Using the faint light from a window, they looked down. They saw nothing and heard no sounds of pursuit; the ghost hadn't followed them.

Wang Chuan finally let out a sigh of relief and turned to Keke. "Why did you run upstairs just now?"

Keke caught her breath. "When we split up to search the offices, Gu Mian tried to go down the other staircase, but that stairwell door was blocked. It wouldn't open."

This office building had two stairwells and four elevators. The elevators were unusable now, so running to the blocked stairwell on the other side was suicide. Hearing this, Wang Chuan felt a chill run down his spine. "Sealed off? Thankfully, Gu Mian checked there first... and thankfully, I followed you up the stairs."

Keke stared downstairs. "The ghost didn't chase us."

It must have gone to the thirteenth floor. On the thirteenth floor, one stairwell door was sealed, and the other staircase was now blocked by the ghost. Anyone trapped inside was like prey in a snare, helpless.

"I saw Xia Jianren run towards the other side. Cang Yue and Zhao Shuang, still in the office, would naturally try to find the safest route. They wouldn't run towards the dangerous staircase but would likely head in the same direction as Xia Jianren," Wang Chuan sighed. "Their chances of survival are slim."

Keke brushed the dust off her clothes and stood up straight. "Let's keep moving and find a way out. The ghost knows we're here; it's very unsafe now."

Wang Chuan nodded in agreement. Given their own precarious situation, there was no point wasting too much thought on others.

「Meanwhile, on the thirteenth floor」

Xia Jianren had already reached the other stairwell door, only to stop, stunned. He stood before the locked door. He pushed it, but it wouldn't budge. Ramming it with force didn't open it either. Just as he was anxiously wondering what to do, Cang Yue and Zhao Shuang ran up.

"Why aren't you going?" Cang Yue, having rushed over, immediately tried to push the stairwell door while questioning Xia Jianren, who was standing to the side. Only then did she realize the door wouldn't open. It was securely locked. At the same time, by the faint light, she spotted an A4 sheet of paper taped to the door: "This door is broken."

"Damn it!" Cang Yue, usually calm, fiercely kicked the door, but it had no effect.

Xia Jianren was frantic. He looked like he was about to jump out of his skin. While anxiously watching the distant corridor, terrified the ghost would appear, he fumbled in his pockets for anything useful. "What do we do now?!"

They had to try anything. Cang Yue made a quick decision. "Let's check the elevators!" What if the elevators suddenly had power? What if they were just unlit but still operational? With this thought, she dashed towards the elevators. Zhao Shuang and Xia Jianren scrambled after her.

The corridor was too dark for Xia Jianren to see if the ghost had already come up from the stairwell. He could only try to convince himself it hadn't reached the thirteenth floor yet.

It took them a few seconds to reach the elevators. They were surprised to see an indicator light on one of the elevator panels lit up. The small, red light was strikingly visible in the darkness.

"There's power! Quick..." Cang Yue, ecstatic, reached to press the call button, but then she saw the red number on the display panel change from "1" to "2." The elevator was ascending, but none of them had pressed a button. Could it be... someone else was using the elevator?

The thought had barely formed in Cang Yue's mind when Zhao Shuang's terrified voice shattered it. "These elevators... all of them are coming up!"

All of them... coming up? Cang Yue stared, aghast, at the other three elevators. She saw the vivid red numbers on their displays simultaneously flick from "2" to "3" in less than half a second. This was definitely not normal elevator speed.

Xia Jianren's teeth chattered. His voice trembling with fear, he stammered, "It's them! They're here!"

Four elevators. Thirty people. The red numbers kept flickering upwards.

Cang Yue was the first to react. She didn't know where to run, but she had to move. "Don't stay here! Run!"

The other two mindlessly followed Cang Yue. They had no idea where else to go but clung to a sliver of hope as they trailed behind her, desperate to find a hiding place. They ended up rushing into the restroom. Each floor of the building had a symmetrical layout, including a restroom. Cang Yue, leading the way, rushed into the farthest stall in the women's restroom. The others stumbled in after her, and they quickly slammed the stall door and bolted it.

Almost simultaneously, they heard the sound of multiple elevator doors opening. Then, heavy footsteps echoed from the corridor: THUD... THUD... THUD... The sound of many feet, advancing with an eerie rigidity. They were coming. From the first footstep, it was clear they were heading straight for the restroom. Soon, the footsteps stopped right outside the restroom door.

Cang Yue imagined dozens of figures standing stiffly outside, peering in. In the darkness, Zhao Shuang was shivering uncontrollably, her tremors making Xia Jianren, pressed beside her, tremble too. Cang Yue pressed herself tightly into the corner of the stall, her eyes fixed on the door's flimsy latch. She knew it wouldn't keep out a ghost.

In the suffocating silence, the footsteps resumed. Something was coming in. They heard it step into the restroom, take a few paces, and stop. Then, the first stall door was violently yanked open. Of course, it was empty.

The footsteps started again...

「Meanwhile, on the twentieth floor」

Keke and Wang Chuan also noticed the elevators were working. All four elevator displays showed the same number: "13."

"What's going on?" Wang Chuan stood before one of the elevators, utterly confused.

Keke stepped back, staring at the glowing numbers. "Something got on the elevators from the first floor and went to the thirteenth. And there are enough of them to require all four elevators."

Wang Chuan shivered. "You don't mean..."

"Thirty people would be just about right for four elevators," Keke said, her gaze fixed on the elevator doors. "They've all arrived."

Wang Chuan's mouth felt dry. Just as he was about to speak, he saw the numbers on one of the elevator displays change again. From "13," it flicked to "12," then "11," descending all the way to "1."

Wang Chuan unconsciously stepped back. "Is something else coming up?"

「Back in the restroom on the thirteenth floor」

There were only five stalls. The footsteps weren't fast, but they were drawing nearer with each passing moment. The three of them, crowded into the last stall, were sweating profusely.

They heard a SLAP! The entity outside had flung open the third stall door. A few more steps, and the door of the stall next to theirs was yanked open. It, too, was empty.

Finally, the footsteps stopped right outside their stall. Cang Yue's gaze was frozen. Peering through the gap beneath the stall door, she saw a pair of bruised, gory ankles.

BANG!

The thing outside was trying to pull the door open!

The latched door didn't give way immediately. The thing outside went quiet. Just as they began to wonder, the door suddenly began to shake violently. The entity outside was yanking and ramming the stall door. Terrified, Cang Yue lunged forward and grabbed the latch, desperately trying to hold it in place. The violent force from the door almost made her retch, but she clung to the latch, not daring to loosen her grip for even a second.

Fortunately, the stall door was surprisingly sturdy. It didn't break under the assault. After a final, violent shudder, the shaking stopped. The restroom fell eerily silent once more. It seemed like the thing outside had left. But none of them dared to make a sound, let alone try to leave. They kept their eyes glued to the door, terrified of any sudden movement.

Several minutes passed in unbroken silence. Cang Yue and Zhao Shuang were still staring intently at the stall door when Xia Jianren's faint, terrified voice reached them:

"Why don't you two... look up?"

Chapter 559 My useless teammate made me so angry that I was typing half the night _1

Cang Yue and Zhao Shuang rigidly lifted their heads.

Half a face had somehow peeked over the partition from the neighboring stall.

Its skin was deathly pale, its wide eyes were bloodshot, and it was maniacally staring at them with a malevolent gaze.

Cang Yue saw it leaning on the partition, reaching a hand towards her...

It's over, she thought. I'm going to die here.

But just as she was trembling, awaiting her death, the hand reaching for her suddenly stopped.

Following that, the deathly pale half-face peering from the neighboring stall also wobbled, as if something were squeezing it.

Looking up in surprise, Cang Yue saw another face emerge next to the terrifying ghost face.

This newcomer first curiously poked its head out to look at them. After observing the three of them, it turned to the ghost face pressed close beside it, even nudging it and causing the ghost face to sway.

At this, the ghost face also turned to look at the newcomer, its expression incredibly bizarre, appearing even more terrifying than before.

The two faces were almost pressed together.

"The weather is quite lovely today," Gu Mian said to the ghost face. The strange sight made Cang Yue feel faint.

The pale ghost face didn't respond, merely glaring menacingly at Gu Mian.

Gu Mian patted the guitar case he already had in hand. "It's the perfect time to play a cheerful tune."

As he muttered to himself, he gently unzipped the case. Despite the lack of light in the restroom, an uncanny glow shone from within, resembling the flash from a video game loot drop.

Gleaming serrated teeth were revealed, brighter than the deathly pale light on the ghost face opposite him. Gu Mian, holding the electric saw, playfully rubbed it against the ghost. Unexpectedly, the ghost let out a shriek and scrambled away, fleeing without even a chance to glare back at Gu Mian.

When Keke and Wang Chuan reached the thirteenth floor, they saw a contorted figure rapidly crawling towards them.

They immediately turned and attempted to flee, but they had barely run a few steps when the shadow caught up.

Unexpectedly, the figure brushed past them and darted straight into the stairwell. Two seconds later, the hallway returned to its peaceful state, as if what had just transpired was nothing more than a figment of their imaginations.

"Just now..." Wang Chuan stared, dumbfounded, in the direction where the shadow had disappeared.

"I saw it." Keke withdrew her gaze and looked ahead.

At the far end of the hallway was a restroom; the shadow had run out from there.

When the pair reached the restroom entrance, they saw Cang Yue, Xia Jianren, and Zhao Shuang helping each other out of the stalls.

Gu Mian was also there, casually wiping a stool he held as if he had just stepped on it.

The three of them, supporting each other, looked terrible, their foreheads damp with sweat.

Nothing that had come to this floor via the elevators was visible in the restroom. However, just from their expressions, it was clear that the preceding moments must have been incredibly perilous.

Gu Mian, holding the stool nearby, wore an unaffected expression, giving off a 'what a lovely day' vibe. It was unclear when exactly he had returned.

Wang Chuan looked at the four people in front of him, recalling the shadow that had brushed past him earlier. "Are you all okay?"

Cang Yue clutched her chest. "We're okay..."

"I saw something run out of here just now," Wang Chuan said, completely perplexed. He didn't understand why the ghost had simply brushed past them. "You must have seen it in here too, right?"

The three of them looked at each other.

Zhao Shuang forced a nod. "We saw it."

Not only did they see it, but they had even made eye contact. That ghost had almost caught them.

"Then why did it... run?" Wang Chuan's face showed his bewilderment; it was clear the ghost had been quite panicked when it fled.

Cang Yue wanted to know that too.

She swallowed hard and looked at Gu Mian.

The three of them had only heard Gu Mian say, "Nice weather we're having," and then saw him seemingly rub the electric saw against the ghost, and it had fled.

If the other party had been human, its reaction would have been understandable—anyone would be terrified by such a monstrous saw.

But it was a ghost! If even ghosts were afraid of electric saws, then players entering an instance would only need to carry an electric saw each to guarantee their safety.

Shaken, Xia Jianren looked at the guitar case, now slung over Gu Mian's shoulder. "Gu Mian scared it off."

What? Wang Chuan felt he must have misheard, his face a mask of bewilderment.

"Gu Mian's saw... it seems to have a special effect on ghosts..." Xia Jianren began, but since Zhao Shuang was still present, he didn't elaborate. However, he was certain in his heart that the electric saw Gu Mian carried was an exceptionally rare item, possibly even unique, capable of inflicting harm on ghosts.

Cang Yue was starting to think so too.

If they knew that this "exceptionally rare item" in their minds was something Gu Mian had casually bought at a supermarket, they would probably cough up blood from sheer exasperation.

Zhao Shuang had always found it strange that her colleague constantly carried a guitar case but had never asked why. Now, seeing him pull a saw out of it, she was even more hesitant to inquire.

She felt that these colleagues were somewhat different from before.

Could it be that the ghost fled in such a hurry really because of Gu Mian? Wang Chuan was still immersed in shock.

Keke, standing next to him, suddenly seemed to recall something and spoke up. "When Wang Chuan and I were on the twentieth floor, we saw all four elevators arrive on this floor. Surely, it wasn't just that one ghost from earlier that came up, right?"

Pale-faced, Cang Yue nodded. "While we were hiding in here, we heard a large group of people coming down the hallway. By the time Gu Mian arrived..."

She paused, looking up at Gu Mian. "It seemed like only that one was left. I don't know why."

Gu Mian, feeling their gazes, nodded confidently. "Indeed, a large group of people came to this floor."

Cang Yue looked at him strangely. "Did you see them after you came up?"

"Well, not exactly," Gu Mian shook his head. "Initially, I wanted to find a bus and about thirty actors to take you all—you, Xia Jianren, and Zhao Shuang—on a return trip to Fenshan Mountain. So, I left this building, planning to first go to the 'October First' car rental company to find a bus."

Hearing this, Cang Yue suddenly had an inkling of what Gu Mian was about to say.

"To my surprise, not long after I went out, I saw a dilapidated bus heading this way. It had about thirty-odd people on board. But their driver was gone, and the wheels were just RUMBLING as they turned..."

Just as I suspected, Cang Yue thought.

Isn't this a ready-made prop and cast? Gu Mian continued his story, 'So, I flagged down the bus and started driving it myself, heading for this building. I originally planned to come up and call you. Who knew this group would be so damn proactive? They didn't even wait for me to park the bus before they all swarmed out, rushed into the building, and occupied all four elevators! I couldn't keep up and had to take the next elevator up. That's when I finally saw you all here..."

So, he was the one who brought this horde of ghosts here?

Wang Chuan's face was incredibly stiff. He turned his neck to look at the others' faces, only to see that their expressions mirrored his own.

For a moment, he couldn't tell if Gu Mian was spinning a yarn or telling the truth.

Any normal player, in an instance like this, seeing a dilapidated bus in the middle of the night, would immediately connect it to the Fenshan Mountain bus crash! They'd never do something like 'flagging down the bus'! Besides, he even noticed there was no driver and the wheels were still RUMBLING as they turned! He definitely should have realized something was wrong with that bus! Even if he were a complete idiot and hadn't noticed anything before, he should at least recognize his own colleagues' faces! The instance practically drilled their appearances into every player!

Next to Cang Yue, Xia Jianren, listening to this, clearly couldn't hold back any longer. He tremblingly raised his hand and pointed at Gu Mian. "You... you you..."

"What's wrong?"

Seeing Gu Mian's gaze turn to him, Xia Jianren deflated. "No... nothing."

Chapter 560 I am still the same old pigeon without any changes_1

Seeing Xia Jianren lose his nerve, Wang Chuan turned his gaze to the two female players, hoping they would stand up for justice and chastise Gu Mian.

Unexpectedly, one of them was too flustered to speak, and the other was engrossed in listening to Gu Mian's words. He couldn't rely on them.

If what Gu Mian said is true...

Wang Chuan had certainly encountered rubbish teammates before, those who lured ghosts towards other teammates in an instance. If he had encountered such a person in the past, he would have immediately abandoned them. If someone was so stupid as to endanger the team's survival, Wang Chuan would even consider eliminating such a dead weight.

But Gu Mian was worse than any dead weight he'd ever dealt with before.

Previous teammates, at most, panicked when chased by a ghost and ran towards the hiding places of others, exposing everyone. There were even those who, when hunted by a ghost, intentionally ran towards others to use their teammates as shields. Wang Chuan remembered this type distinctly; he recalled a previous instance where he had a teammate named Mingyue who was exactly like that, and Wang Chuan had suffered greatly because of him.

But let's set that aside for now and focus on the present.

Gu Mian's behavior was far more egregious than that Mingyue's.

Others only ran towards teammates when chased by ghosts. He, on the other hand, had intercepted a busload of ghosts, appointed himself the driver, and brought the ghosts right to his teammates. This was unprecedented, unheard of. It deserved a place in the "Grand Awards for Paranormal Teammates in Games."

His behavior was extremely malicious.

But Wang Chuan didn't dare voice his condemnation.

Thinking of the driver cowering by the roadside and the dark shadow that had brushed past him, he clamped his mouth shut and said no more.

Zhao Shuang glanced at Gu Mian before her, then looked back at the stall where the ghost had just been. Her expression became vacant again.

Probably because Gu Mian exuded a sense of security, the group lingered in the restroom instead of leaving immediately.

Cang Yue didn't press Gu Mian further. Instead, she turned to the absent-minded Zhao Shuang. "You recognized who that ghost was just now, didn't you?"

Zhao Shuang nodded dazedly. "It was Sun Zihao."

Even though his face looked as if it were coated with a layer of flour, they could still recognize him.

Cang Yue recalled the chilling gaze the ghost had directed at them earlier. Perhaps my guess was wrong again, she thought. Even though Zhao Shuang and Sun Zihao are a couple, Sun Zihao might not necessarily protect her.

Judging by Sun Zihao's gaze earlier, if Gu Mian hadn't popped his head out from beside the ghost, the three of them would likely already be corpses.

Zhao Shuang, looking confused, spoke as if she couldn't remember her relationship with Sun Zihao. "Why would our colleague do this...?"

Cang Yue speculated that the ghosts were targeting them, very likely due to what happened on October 1st.

Unfortunately, Zhao Shuang, the only living person among them at this point, had amnesia. They couldn't rely on her to find out what had transpired that day.

However, it seems that stimulating Zhao Shuang's memory to find a way out isn't the only path to survival...

With these thoughts, Cang Yue looked up at Gu Mian.

Several experiences had shown her that being near him meant safety. It was outrageous, but it was a fact.

Thinking this, Cang Yue hesitantly asked, "That chainsaw of yours, is it some kind of special item? A special item that can harm ghosts?"

It was obvious she was asking Gu Mian.

Gu Mian paused, slightly taken aback, then considered it carefully. "I don't think it has the function you're describing."

Cang Yue's facial muscle twitched. She asked again, "Then can you stay with us? Don't leave the group. It's very dangerous to go off on your own in an instance."

She couldn't bring herself to say, "We'll be in great danger when you're not around."

Gu Mian thought for a moment, then said, "Whether I leave the group or not isn't up to me. This is a horror instance; who knows when a ghost will suddenly pull a switcheroo and teleport you away. Surely you've experienced this in instances before, right?"

Indeed, Keke mentally agreed.

It seems the instance itself anticipated Gu Mian's behavior. If he entered an instance alone, he'd be completely uninhibited, doing whatever he pleased, especially in this kind of instance that only specified survival time without concrete objectives. If he were with Chu Changge and Fatty, Gu Mian might exercise some restraint, not completely let himself go.

At this thought, Keke suddenly felt a wave of relief, thankful that Gu Mian had mostly teamed up with those two in past instances, which had kept his apparent psychosis in check.

Cang Yue considered it and felt Gu Mian was right.

Although I don't know why this man is like a BUG, if a BUG appears in the instance, it will surely be patched. If the BUG can't be patched, then the person exploiting the BUG will be dealt with. That wouldn't end well for us. Maybe Gu Mian will be teleported away by some kind of powerful spatial shift at any moment, or perhaps we'll be the ones moved.

"Let's leave here first," Cang Yue sighed, straightening up and taking a few steps. "BUGs might be useful, but we daren't misuse them."

"What?" Zhao Shuang looked at Cang Yue, puzzled.

"It's nothing," Cang Yue shook her head. "Let's go downstairs first. We'll take the stairs."

Even though the elevator was powered and Gu Mian was present, she still didn't dare take it. Her earlier intention to escape via the elevator had only arisen because all other paths were blocked, and she had wanted to try her luck.

Just then, Gu Mian suddenly spoke up. "Wait a second."

What's wrong? Cang Yue thought, turning to look at Gu Mian.

Gu Mian pondered for a moment before saying, "When I drove the bus here, there were over thirty people on it."

The others looked at Gu Mian in bewilderment. So what?

"But now, not a single one is left."

Cang Yue's face stiffened. Does his tone imply he intends to find all those people?

Xia Jianren spoke, his throat tight, "Before you arrived, I definitely heard a large group of people standing outside the restroom door."

Keke also turned to Gu Mian. "After Wang Chuan and I came down the stairs, we only saw one person run out of the restroom."

Wang Chuan's eyebrows twitched. He knew that ghosts were sometimes elusive, appearing and vanishing without a trace, while other times they'd even take an elevator to go upstairs—very Xue Ding'e.

So, it was possible that group of ghosts was still on this floor.

However, Xia Jianren had said the ghosts were at the restroom door just moments ago. He and Keke hadn't descended slowly, yet they hadn't seen any ghosts at the restroom door, nor had they seen anything leave except for that dark shadow.

While Wang Chuan was pondering, Gu Mian, standing to the side, suddenly had a bold idea.

They all watched as he walked into the men's restroom.

As he walked, he muttered, "You said they were at the door just now, but I didn't see them when I arrived. They're not in the women's restroom either. Could they be hiding in here?"

"W-wait a minute!" Wang Chuan raised a trembling arm, trying to stop Gu Mian, but Gu Mian moved too quickly for him to touch.

Gu Mian strode rapidly, reaching the first stall in the men's restroom in seconds and yanking the door open.

Everyone present gasped.

Cang Yue felt the scene was strikingly familiar; she had experienced something similar not long ago, though the roles were slightly different.

They gaped as he moved from the first stall to the last, then stared intently at the innermost stall for several seconds before concluding, "There's nothing here."

If there had been something, they would have truly been in a dire situation!

"Let's go, quickly!" Cang Yue, abandoning all pretense of decorum, rushed into the men's restroom and grabbed Gu Mian, terrified he might do something else bizarre.

Having found nothing, Gu Mian was dragged by the others all the way from the thirteenth floor to the first. His bus was still parked downstairs.

The dilapidated bus looked particularly sinister under the streetlights. Only then did Wang Chuan truly understand what Gu Mian had meant by "dilapidated."

Its windows and windshield were almost completely shattered. The metal bodywork had several large dents, a few tires were blown, and the entire vehicle was so filthy it looked like it had rolled in mud.

This was undoubtedly a Spirit Car; no sane person would flag down such a vehicle in the middle of the night.

"Are you tired? You can go up and rest for a bit," Gu Mian said to the others.

Cang Yue shook her head vigorously. "No, thank you."

Just then, Zhao Shuang suddenly quickened her pace, walked to the front of the vehicle, and began to stare blankly at the dilapidated bus.

She stared at the bus for a long time, then went to the front to look at the license plate.

She scrutinized the license plate for a good while before turning to Gu Mian and the others. "This... This is the bus we took on October 1st."

The police had found the crashed bus on Fenshan Mountain some time ago. To investigate the missing persons, they hadn't immediately disturbed the scene, but they never expected the vehicle to appear here in the middle of the night.

Cang Yue also hurried to the front of the bus to look at the license plate. "Have you remembered anything?"

Zhao Shuang looked up at the shattered windshield, shaking her head slightly. "A little... I remember we were on the bus... and then it seems I had an argument with someone..."

Xia Jianren immediately thought of the chat records on his phone, where Zhao Shuang had questioned if he already knew about "that incident." An argument? Maybe she also argued with someone about "that incident" on the bus?

Cang Yue remained silent, waiting for Zhao Shuang to continue recalling.

Unfortunately, that was the only thing she could remember.

So, did Zhao Shuang stay at the base halfway up the mountain because she got off the bus in a huff after an argument? Cang Yue wondered. If Zhao Shuang disembarked in anger, then why didn't her boyfriend, Sun Zihao, get off with her? Or was it Sun Zihao she argued with?

Cang Yue thought back to the horrifying look in Sun Zihao's eyes in the restroom earlier; she felt that the relationship between Zhao Shuang and Sun Zihao might not be very good.

"See? I told you, to recover memories, you need to revisit the old place." Gu Mian walked to the bus door, patting the rickety old panel. Too bad all the 'actors' have scarpered, he mused.

"Let's not talk about revisiting old places for now," Wang Chuan began, walking forward. "It's already five o'clock, and dawn is breaking soon. Let's rest for a bit and then exchange what we know..."

But then he realized something was wrong.

The people standing beside the bus seemed completely oblivious to him; no one acknowledged him.

Wang Chuan opened his mouth, intending to raise his voice, and lifted a hand to wave and get their attention. But just then, he felt an icy chill on his waist.

He looked down. Two bloody, mangled hands reached out from behind him, gripping his waist.

"Help—!" He opened his mouth wide to scream but was abruptly yanked backward, vanishing from the spot.

The first to notice something was amiss was Keke.

"Wait a minute!" she yelled at Gu Mian and the others. "Someone's missing!"