

Collapse 581

Chapter 581 I Just Lived Briefly_1

So, the Fortune-teller didn't blindly change the ingredient she represented.

She was looking for a way out while also tracking the pattern of the tasks issued by the food factory.

The structure of the food factory was incredibly complex. Each floor had a locked iron door at the stairway. When the Fortune-teller and her team of players entered the instance, they started on the top floor. To escape, they needed to unlock all the iron doors below.

Jumping off the building wasn't an option. All the windows were equipped with anti-theft grates that only allowed a single finger to pass through.

Breaking the door locks was also not feasible, as they discovered they couldn't damage the doors at all.

The only way to leave was to find the keys. For the Fortune-teller, finding things was a piece of cake.

The tricky part was finding the keys while also avoiding being sent onto the production line.

If I could become an ingredient that wouldn't be used for a few hours, I could focus on searching for the keys to each floor's door and escape in one go.

Just as the Fortune-teller was studying some worker's notes left beside a shelf, a rustling sound suddenly came from nearby.

This instance was somewhat special; it wasn't the type where you'd turn around to find a ghost right behind you. She thought it was just another player nearby, so she turned to look in the direction of the sound.

As soon as she turned her head, she saw that the locked door had been opened at some point, and a head was slowly poking in from outside.

The sight of this head made the Fortune-teller freeze, her expression as if she had been struck by lightning.

Her first thought wasn't how the door had opened; she was more astonished that this person was here.

"Gu Mian?" The Fortune-teller's voice rose in disbelief, her eyes wide as she stared at the person who had suddenly appeared. "What are you doing here? Don't tell me you're a ghost!"

There were ten players who entered the instance this time, and Gu Mian was definitely not one of them!

She felt a bit frantic, completely puzzled.

She didn't understand why Gu Mian would appear midway through this instance.

"Fortune-teller?" Seeing her, Gu Mian was also somewhat surprised.

He hadn't expected to run into her here.

Upon seeing the Fortune-teller, Gu Mian walked out from behind the door, dragging a toy bear with him. "So this really is an instance."

The Fortune-teller's mind went blank; her brain felt incapable of thinking.

She shook her head vigorously to find her voice. "What do you mean, you didn't know this was an instance before you entered? Weren't you matched into this instance through the ticket booth? And... what the hell is that sad-looking doll you're holding?"

Despite her barrage of questions, Gu Mian didn't answer any of them, instead asking one of his own, "You were matched into an instance, right?"

The Fortune-teller stiffly nodded.

"What's the name of this instance?"

"Wondrous Adventure in the Food Factory..."

"And the task?"

"Escape from the Food Factory before you die..."

As she answered, something dawned on the Fortune-teller. "How did you get up here?"

According to the building's map, each floor had a large door that couldn't be forcibly broken open.

Noticing the Fortune-teller's confusion, Gu Mian replied, "Technically, I could have sawed through the door with a saw. But when I first got in, I ran into an old friend who had the keys to all the doors in this food factory, so I just took them."

As he spoke, he raised his hand. Indeed, a shiny set of keys hung from his finger.

"So... you've opened all the doors on the lower floors?" the Fortune-teller stammered, still in shock.

Gu Mian nodded. "Yes, they're all open."

Great!

The Fortune-teller temporarily pushed aside her shock at encountering Gu Mian. The doors on the lower floors were all open—she could escape directly!

Then Gu Mian heard the Fortune-teller in front of him exclaim with sincere praise, "You're a really good person! Thank you!"

With that, she darted towards the doorway, apparently intending to sprint right out of the building.

But as the Fortune-teller passed Gu Mian, he grabbed her arm.

Gu Mian wasn't dwelling on the "good person" card the Fortune-teller had given him. Instead, he held her arm and pondered for a moment before asking, "How long have you been in this instance?"

The Fortune-teller, momentarily flustered by Gu Mian's sudden grasp, replied, a little disconcerted, "Just over an hour. Why?"

"Are you familiar with the layout?"

"To escape, I did carefully survey the terrain. I remember most of it."

Hearing this, Gu Mian smiled. "You're a great person!"

With that, he forcefully dragged the Fortune-teller, to whom he had now also issued a "good person" card, back into the building.

"Wait a minute!" The Fortune-teller watched the stairs recede as she was dragged away. She began to struggle. "Where are you taking me?"

Since there's a food factory, Gu Mian thought, there must be an NPC operating behind the scenes, like a factory manager. Coach Che had seemed to be arguing with someone earlier. However, by the time I approached, the other person was nowhere to be seen, as if they had suddenly vanished. That person might be the core NPC of this food factory. The Toy Goose Factory has branches all over the Second World and is a supplier to supermarkets in the real world. This company undoubtedly holds a high position in the Second World. The NPCs inside this factory must know a lot. I need to find that core NPC and ask about the instance and the game.

And Coach Che? He's just a truck driver, and a temporary one at that. Obviously, he wouldn't know anything.

When Gu Mian had entered this building, Coach Che was still trailing behind him, looking mournful. Gu Mian, finding him annoying, simply closed the main door and locked him out.

He's probably wailing at the door right now.

After Gu Mian entered, he could hear Coach Che wailing outside the door, saying things like, "Oh, the injustice!" and "I've never seen such a shameless person!" The air inside and outside the main door was filled with a strangely cheerful atmosphere.

Gu Mian, pulling the struggling Fortune-teller, walked past row after row of shelves. "Have you seen an office or anything like that around here?"

The Fortune-teller, still struggling, replied, "This hellhole is full of shelves! Where would there be an office?"

That didn't seem right.

Gu Mian looked at the keychain in his hand.

This food processing factory had many buildings, and Coach Che had many sets of keys.

However, only the keychain for this building had a unique key, engraved with "Office Key."

Theoretically, the office should be in this building.

"Can your divination find things?" Gu Mian asked the Fortune-teller.

The Fortune-teller glared at Gu Mian and snapped, "Find what?"

"Find where the office is."

「Meanwhile」

Bai Wu had long since shaken off the ghost tailing her and was currently hiding in the fitting room of a clothing store.

She didn't understand why the ghost had stopped following her after she passed a snack street.

Once she realized the ghost was no longer behind her, Bai Wu immediately hid in a clothing store. Wandering around on the street was too conspicuous.

This clothing store looked like it was on the verge of bankruptcy. There were hardly any people inside, only a few children, likely belonging to the sales staff, running wildly around the store, chattering loudly. Their sporadic screams scared Bai Wu half to death in the fitting room.

Chapter 582 Oh no, Alzheimer's Disease_1

I wonder how the others are doing now... Bai Wu pondered while hiding in a fitting room.

The clothing city was somewhat dim; by now, all the lights overhead had been switched on.

She had successfully survived most of the day; only a few hours remained until she could leave.

She had checked the news earlier and confirmed her suspicions about Yu Ji's death.

They had known each other for a long time, and knowing that Yu Ji was truly dead, Bai Wu couldn't help but feel sorrowful.

But ultimately, her own life was what mattered most. After a brief moment of sadness, she focused her attention on studying this instance.

"This instance is really weird," Bai Wu said, crouching in the corner of the fitting room. "The game of hide-and-seek usually only needs one person and one ghost to complete. It could easily be a single-player instance."

But the instance had summoned so many players and sent out six ghosts to catch people separately.

Pure overkill.

Just then, the chatter of children grew closer.

Through a very narrow gap on the side of the fitting room door, Bai Wu peered outward. She saw children playing hide-and-seek—not the same kind she was playing, of course.

She heard one child, playing the ghost, counting down, while the others scattered to hide.

This should have been a joyful day. But right when the child finished counting and was ready to catch people, Bai Wu heard a woman's loud yell from outside, "What are you playing at? Still trying to catch people? Go do your homework!"

Suddenly, a woman appeared beside the "ghost," grabbed him by the collar, and dragged him away.

Looks like she was taking him to do his homework.

Seeing this, Bai Wu chuckled softly, reminded of her own childhood when she would receive the same treatment.

But then, her laughter froze on her face as a sudden thought struck her.

"Wait, hide-and-seek for one... I understand why there are so many players in the instance now!"

Realization dawned on her, and she quickly pulled out her phone to call the others.

But at that moment, Bai Wu noticed something near a shelf not too far away... a giant, hollow-eyed teddy bear.

It's here!

It moved slowly down the aisle. The people nearby passed by as if they couldn't see it.

Bai Wu clutched her phone, a cold sweat breaking out. She watched the human-height plush toy walk into the clothing store opposite, search carefully, then stop right at a fitting room door and pull it open.

Bai Wu shivered as she watched the door of the fitting room across from hers being pulled open.

Run, I need to run!

But the teddy bear is just outside! Running out now would be like walking straight into the line of fire!

Luckily, it didn't come to Bai Wu's side right away.

It walked down the aisle, checking store after store, its figure gradually disappearing. But it'll be back in a moment! Bai Wu knew.

She tightly held her phone, and the moment the teddy bear's figure completely disappeared from her sight, she pushed the door open and ran in the opposite direction.

The nearby children were startled, glancing curiously at Bai Wu's retreating figure.

"Who's she?" the children whispered among themselves.

"Dunno. She was hiding in there. She must have been playing hide-and-seek too."

"With who?"

"No idea."

"Then I'm gonna tell the one who's 'it' that she ran that way!" one of the boys exclaimed, getting excited. They jumped up and down, pointing in the direction Bai Wu had just gone.

At that moment, the lights overhead flickered a few times, and a teddy bear's face popped up in the darkness before disappearing again, but no one noticed.

"Hello?" Bai Wu panted, dialing Liu Yiji's number as she sprinted.

She had worried he might hang up, but he actually answered immediately.

Liu Yiji was at that moment searching online for a map of his surroundings to facilitate an easier escape should he be found by the ghost.

He hadn't expected Bai Wu to call him out of the blue, but after a moment's thought, he answered.

No sooner had he answered than Bai Wu threw a question at him, "How much is Gu Mian worth now?"

Liu Yiji was taken aback, completely stumped by the question.

He instinctively asked back, "What did you say?"

Bai Wu, her voice hurried and breathless, repeated, "How much is Gu Mian worth now!"

Only then did Liu Yiji realize he hadn't misheard. He hesitated for a moment before answering, "A hundred thousand?"

Bai Wu breathed a sigh of relief. "Good. That confirms you're a real player."

"What on earth are you doing?" Liu Yiji frowned, not understanding why Bai Wu would ask such a question.

"Listen!" Bai Wu's voice was urgent, punctuated with heavy pants. "I think I've figured out the survival path in this instance. If we're going to trigger it, I need your help. Where are you now?"

Upon hearing her ask for his location, Liu Yiji immediately grew wary.

Though Bai Wu had initially asked about Gu Mian—something only real players would know—it didn't completely dismiss the suspicion that she could be a ghost.

What if a ghost heard about this from another player and is using it to deceive me?

So, he threw back his own question, "Which instance was the first to crash in Global Game?"

If Gu Mian had been there to hear their exchange, he'd definitely be thinking, Really, you two...

Bai Wu didn't hesitate, immediately answering, "Revengeful High School!"

"And the second one?"

"Spirit Car Driver Test Center."

Only after hearing Bai Wu's correct answers did Liu Yiji lower his guard a little. "Why are you asking for my location?"

"To trigger the survival path, at least two players need to be together... Hurry, where are you?"

Liu Yiji scratched his head, which was itching from apprehension.

Still wary, he said, "I'm in Times Square."

As he spoke, he looked out the window at the empty square below.

He was actually in the clock tower next to the square, where he had a bird's-eye view of the surroundings and could escape immediately if something seemed off.

If Bai Wu came to the square, he would be able to observe her from here and see if anything was amiss.

"Great!" Bai Wu's voice was full of joy. "I'm not far away. I'll be there in a few minutes!"

"Okay."

Bai Wu was on the run and naturally couldn't stay on the phone for long.

After confirming Liu Yiji's location, she hung up and sprinted towards Times Square.

During the past few hours, she had also carefully studied the local map, so she knew which direction Times Square was in.

After Liu Yiji hung up, he was still puzzled. From the sound of Bai Wu's voice, it seemed like she was running hard.

Then a thought struck him: She's not being chased by a ghost, is she?!

If she's being chased by a ghost and she's coming to find me, isn't she leading it right to me? That's asking for my life!

Liu Yiji's expression tensed, and his head itched even more.

Strange, why is it still so itchy...

He reached out again to scratch his head.

But as soon as his hand reached the back of his head, he touched something fluffy. He could feel it...
That thing is right behind my head...

Chapter 583 A Day Without Gu Mian_1

Run!

Without looking back, Liu Yiji started dashing down the nearby staircase. The thing behind him followed closely. He heard something coming after him!

Liu Yiji, who had rested for several hours, was full of energy. He sprinted down the stairs, taking two or three steps at a time, almost flying down.

Yet, the distance between him and the thing behind him didn't widen.

He heard the rustling sound right behind him. His skin prickled, and the hair on his back stood on end.

The bell tower had seven floors, and he was originally on the top floor.

Realizing he had been spotted by the ghost, he had already fled down three or four floors, but he couldn't shake it off.

The sound behind him grew closer. Liu Yiji even felt the stuffed animal's hand touch his back, the spot it touched tingling and itching.

It's about to catch me...

Feeling the touch from behind, Liu Yiji's eyes widened.

No! If I'm caught, it's over!

At that moment, he noticed an open window around the corner of the staircase ahead.

Spotting the window, he charged towards it without a second thought, heedless of the fact that a fall from this height could leave him half dead.

Before the stuffed animal could react, he propped his hands on the windowsill and vaulted out of the open window.

THUD!

Liu Yiji landed heavily on the ground.

There was no one around the plaza, so his fall didn't cause any panic.

Having jumped from buildings in previous instances, Liu Yiji was already adept at positioning himself for landing, so he hadn't sustained any major injuries despite jumping from the third floor.

After the heavy landing, he frantically reached out to brace himself on the ground, but his right hand was useless, completely unresponsive.

He quickly used his left hand to push himself up, thankful it was still functional.

His right arm hung limply from his shoulder, swaying with his movements and sending jolts of excruciating pain.

He knew his right arm was broken.

It's not a severe injury.

Ignoring his arm, he stood up and bolted.

But then he heard the sound of something else landing behind him.

The teddy bear had jumped down too!

Liu Yiji didn't look back; he just forced himself to run forward. However, his leg was also slightly injured, throbbing with unbearable pain and causing him to limp.

A ghost's speed was far beyond what a player could match, especially a limping Liu Yiji.

Almost immediately, he felt something reach for his neck from behind.

Then, a weight settled on him, as if something was pressing him down.

He was now near the entrance of an underground parking lot. Without turning his head, he could see his reflection in the glass panels beside him.

He tilted his head slightly.

In the reflection, he saw two hands gripping his neck tightly, and the human-sized teddy bear had clambered entirely onto his back...

There's no way out now.

Desperate, Liu Yiji closed his eyes.

But just then, he heard someone rushing over from the side.

Before he could open his eyes, he felt something collide with him. Then the weight on him lightened, and the sensation on his neck vanished.

Liu Yiji immediately turned to see Bai Wu.

She had forcefully pinned the teddy bear to the ground. Holding a knife high, she stabbed it into the bear's abdomen.

The spot had been cut open before and stitched up with crooked red thread. Bai Wu's stab severed all the red threads. Glutinous rice, mixed with a few fingernails, streamed out from the teddy bear's belly.

Once its contents spilled out, the previously animated teddy bear lay motionless on the ground.

Liu Yiji held his breath, staring at the stuffed animal on the ground for several minutes. Only after confirming it truly wasn't moving did he finally exhale, turning to stare in shock at the suddenly appeared Bai Wu. "This is..."

Bai Wu, presumably out of breath from running, took a moment to compose herself before saying, "This is the way out. Aside from not getting caught, there's another way out.

"The instance name is 'One Man's Hide and Seek.' It's not about one ghost catching many people; as long as there's one person and one ghost, the game can proceed. But the instance brought in six players and then dispatched six ghosts to hunt each of them individually. That's illogical.

"It didn't make sense until I saw a group of kids playing hide-and-seek in the clothing mall earlier. 'One Man's Hide and Seek' means the rules only apply between that one person and their one ghost. The person hides, their corresponding ghost chases, and that ghost won't go after anyone else.

"Each ghost corresponds to a specific player and won't target others. This means you can interfere with the ghost chasing me! And I realized something else...

"My doll was in perfect condition when I left that room. But when I saw it again, I found its eyes had been gouged out.

"The Doctor said earlier that he'd experimented with his own teddy bear and found it indestructible. But when I saw my corresponding teddy bear again, its eyes were gone. Of course, it couldn't have gouged out its own eyes!

"So, I had an idea: what if players are only unable to destroy their *own* corresponding dolls? I suspect another player gouged out my doll's eyes. Someone must have done it after I left!"

"In short," Liu Yiji frowned, summarizing, "destroying each other's dolls is the way out, right?"

He glanced at the doll on the ground, which showed no signs of stirring.

Bai Wu nodded. "Yes. So, separating at the beginning was a mistake. But when I came looking for you, I didn't expect you to be chased by a ghost. It seems I arrived just in time."

Liu Yiji winced, moving his injured arm slightly. "Indeed. I think it targeted me when I was on the phone. So, this doll... did you kill it?"

Bai Wu shook her head. "How can ghosts be killed by players? You must have been through quite a few instances. Have you ever seen a ghost killed by a player? It's just that the doll's contents spilled out, so it lost its target."

As she spoke, she glanced at the puddle of glutinous rice on the ground, mixed with several fingernails.

The ghost relies on the fingernails or hair inside its body to identify its target.

Now that these things had fallen out, the ghost naturally lost its target.

Bai Wu handed the knife to Liu Yiji. "We shouldn't separate now. I just saw the ghost that was looking for me. If it comes, you..."

Just as she was halfway through her sentence, a stuffed animal's arm suddenly shot out from the nearby underground parking garage, grabbed Bai Wu, and dragged her into the darkness.

"AH—" Bai Wu screamed, but her voice was quickly swallowed by the dark garage.

Having just taken the knife, Liu Yiji immediately tried to give chase, but his limping leg couldn't keep up with Bai Wu.

Using his phone for light, he frantically searched the dark garage for several minutes but found no trace of Bai Wu.

"Bai Wu?" Liu Yiji scanned the surrounding cars, shouting.

Only his own echoes reverberated in the underground garage.

Panting heavily, he quickly opened his phone's contact list and dialed Bai Wu's number.

Half a second later, a faint ringtone echoed from a dark corner.

Liu Yiji hesitated for a moment before following the sound.

The light from his phone pushed back the darkness. After walking for half a minute, he finally reached the source of the sound.

He looked closely and found the sound was coming from a red sedan.

Liu Yiji aimed his phone's light through the car's windshield.

A headless corpse sat in the driver's seat.

His hand trembled.

Then, something tumbled and rolled to his feet.

He looked down and saw Bai Wu's severed head, her eyes bulging.

Chapter 584 A Pigeon Gu Mian_1

When Huai Xin Zhen Yue received the call from Liu Yiji, it was already four in the afternoon.

Luckily, the ghost had not found him yet, allowing him to go unscathed for most of the day.

During his idle time, Huai Xin Zhen Yue even began to question the difficulty of this instance.

Liu Yiji's call came in just when he was bored, and he casually answered it.

After the call was connected, there was no sound from the other end.

For a moment, Huai Xin Zhen Yue suspected that Liu Yiji had been killed, and he suspected that it was the ghost who was currently calling him.

Just as he was wondering whether to hang up, a voice finally came from the other end, "Zhen Yue, are you still alive?"

Hearing Liu Yiji's voice, Huai Xin Zhen Yue responded, "I'm alive. You're also alive, aren't you?"

Although this was indeed Liu Yiji's voice, he couldn't confirm whether this was the ghost imitating him.

He heard no background noise from Liu Yiji's end, suggesting there was no one around him.

"I'm alive," Liu Yiji said. "Bai Wu just died."

Huai Xin Zhen Yue had not seen any new death announcements, so he asked in doubt, "How do you know?"

"She found the way to survive. She rushed over and saved me just now, but then she was caught by the ghost, and I couldn't catch up."

"The ghost ran off with her, and you chased after the ghost?" Huai Xin Zhen Yue felt a buzzing in his head, thinking there was something wrong with the other party's mind.

"That's the path to survival. One-on-one hide-and-seek is only viable between one person and one ghost. The ghost assigned to you can only catch you, but I can interfere with the ghost trying to catch you. You can come to me. I'm in Times Square. If you're found by the ghost, I can help distract it."

Upon hearing him reveal his location just like that, Huai Xin Zhen Yue asked in confusion, "You just gave me your address without confirming my identity? What if I'm actually a ghost?"

"My ghost will no longer come after me. I'm not afraid."

Of course, Huai Xin Zhen Yue did not believe him.

In his eyes, this was clearly a ghost using Liu Yiji's phone trying to lure him over.

So he asked a series of questions, including "What's the name of your high school head teacher?", "How many subjects did you fail in the first semester of your freshman year?", and "What color is your girlfriend's underwear?"

The other party answered all the questions fluently.

Only then did Huai Xin Zhen Yue partly believe him.

He hesitated for a moment. If he went to find Liu Yiji as suggested, there was a risk of being discovered by the ghost on the way. He had been hiding well here; going out and being caught by the ghost would be a net loss, wouldn't it? But if he told Liu Yiji his location, he wasn't sure either. Although the other party answered all the questions correctly, Huai Xin Zhen Yue still had doubts. Even if the other party was really Liu Yiji, it didn't guarantee there were no ghosts nearby. If he revealed his location and it was overheard by a ghost near Liu Yiji, it would still be a net loss.

Huai Xin Zhen Yue thought deeply for a moment and finally made up his mind. "My hiding spot is very concealed; the ghost hasn't found me. There's no need to take an unnecessary risk."

Liu Yiji sounded very worried. "Being found by a ghost can happen in an instant. Just now, I'd been hiding well for several hours when the ghost suddenly appeared behind me."

Huai Xin Zhen Yue pursed his lips. "You're too far from me. I would take a big risk if I were to go there. If I tell you my location, you also can't guarantee that there are no ghosts eavesdropping around you, right?"

That's true. Liu Yiji fell silent.

Huai Xin Zhen Yue continued, "Don't worry, the ghost hasn't found me. I'm hiding in a very concealed place... Actually, I have some doubts about the difficulty of this instance. Is it because this is our first time entering an instance after the death protection mechanism was turned off, so the difficulty has been reduced?"

It was too easy.

Huai Xin Zhen Yue had been safe for most of the day, which made him feel that this instance was simpler than the previous ones.

But Liu Yiji, who had already witnessed the ghost's power, didn't think so. He sighed. "Then hide well. Don't let the ghost catch you. The ghost in this instance is really dangerous."

Huai Xin Zhen Yue agreed.

What the two of them didn't know was that in the room where they had stayed together, a tightly bound toy bear was hanging outside the window.

The bear's face was facing the window of the neighbor downstairs.

The neighbor was startled when he looked out of his window.

"Who hung this here..." The man downstairs stared at the toy bear for a long time, then opened his window and muttered to himself, "Could it have fallen when someone upstairs was airing out dolls?"

He reached out to untie the knot on the toy bear's body, wanting to pull it into the room.

But he fumbled the grab, and the huge doll fell.

He immediately leaned over and looked down, but the toy bear that had just fallen was nowhere to be seen.

"That's strange..." he muttered.

On the other side, Gu Mian was pulling the Fortune-teller at a brisk pace, moving between the shelves.

His other hand was also dragging that toy bear, which had a deathly expression on its face.

"Hurry," Gu Mian urged, glancing at the nearby window as he walked. "The sun is already setting, and it won't be long before it goes down. Once the sun sets, I have to leave the instance."

The Fortune-teller was still very puzzled by Gu Mian's appearance. "How on earth did you get in here?!"

She had no idea that Gu Mian was still in another instance. She just thought he had exploited some bug and ended up making a cameo appearance here.

"Alright, just start divining," Gu Mian said, ignoring her question and instead pointing to the small wooden stick in her hand.

The Fortune-teller reluctantly raised the wooden stick in her hand and tossed it to the ground.

"That way," she said, pointing in the direction the stick indicated.

This was the Fortune-teller's peculiar ability: she could divine the direction of certain items or locations.

Gu Mian was using this ability to find the NPC's office.

During this time, the Fortune-teller had tossed the stick many times, but the office was proving extremely hard to find, and they had gone around in circles.

This was the third time the two of them had passed this spot.

It appeared they had just made another perfect loop.

Having used her divination ability multiple times, the Fortune-teller was exhausted. She felt as if her energy had been completely drained. "Anyway, it's definitely on this floor, but I really can't find out exactly where."

Her face was pale; she was clearly overexerted.

Meanwhile, Gu Mian was staring at the small wooden stick on the ground, deep in thought.

They had circled this area three times already. There were no walls nearby, so naturally, there was no door to an office.

Gu Mian turned around on the spot and looked up at the ceiling.

The entire ceiling was a vast expanse of white, without a single crack or seam.

Then he looked down at the ground.

There were quite a few shelves nearby, obscuring parts of the ground.

Without hesitation, Gu Mian quickly walked over to a nearby shelf and, before the astonished Fortune-teller's eyes, kicked it over.

Like dominoes, one falling shelf knocked over another, and a whole row of shelves collapsed thunderously in front of them. The Fortune-teller, watching from the side, blurted out, "WTF!"

The bases of the shelves, which had previously obscured the ground, were now tilted upwards, with only their bottom edges touching the floor.

Gu Mian crouched down and looked at the previously concealed patch of ground. "Finally found it."

At that moment, Coach Che, who had been anxiously scratching his head downstairs, finally kicked the door open. As soon as he entered, he heard a violent crash from the third floor.

Hearing this sound, Coach Che cried out, "Oh no, we're doomed!" and then bolted up the staircase.

His expression and movements were identical to those of a player being chased by a ghost.

Chapter 585 Gu Mian Detector_1

"No wonder he's been hovering around this place. His office entrance is right here." Gu Mian reached out to touch the door panel visible on the floor.

It was a square hatch embedded in the ground. A sign hung on it, haphazardly inscribed with the word "Office." Beside the sign was a tiny keyhole.

Gu Mian took out the large jumble of keys he had obtained from Coach Che and found the one for the office. He gently inserted it into the keyhole and twisted.

CLICK.

The door opened, revealing a ladder leading downwards.

The Fortune-teller stared, her eyes wide with disbelief.

All day, she had been in a fog. She'd cluelessly met Gu Mian, then, seemingly out of nowhere, he had dragged her off to find this office. Surprisingly, there actually **was** an office in this food factory.

"Alright," Gu Mian looked up at the Fortune-teller. "There's nothing left for you to do here. You can go now."

His tone carried an air of someone callously casting aside a used tool.

The Fortune-teller glanced at the hatch on the ground. While Gu Mian had been dragging her around looking for the office, the food factory hadn't issued any food production tasks.

She speculated that the factory operations had been temporarily paused due to Gu Mian's presence.

But if he entered this blasted office and left her alone out here, the factory might immediately issue a "Scrambled Eggs with Tomatoes" task. Then, she and the eggs would be sent along the food processing conveyor belt together!

At this thought, the Fortune-teller put on a display of selfless bravery. "It seems dangerous down there. I'll go with you!"

She took a few steps forward and crouched near the hatch.

Without a word, Gu Mian threw the gloomy-faced teddy bear down and then jumped into the hatch himself.

The Fortune-teller quickly followed.

When Coach Che arrived, he saw scattered empty shelves and an open hatch in the floor.

The wide-open hatch was eerily quiet, like the calm before a storm.

Below the hatch was a surprisingly normal room, about a hundred square meters, enclosed on all four sides with no windows.

The overhead lights were extremely bright, preventing the windowless room from feeling gloomy.

As soon as Gu Mian landed, he saw shelves lining all four walls. These weren't for goods, however; they were bookshelves.

The most striking was a row of bright red books titled, "Top Most Popular Products with NPCs."

The Fortune-teller picked up a book and opened it. She read:

"The best-selling product among NPCs is the 'Gu Mian and Dogs Not Allowed' sign. However, some buyers have reported its effect is negligible, and recent sales have declined.

"Our company is currently striving to develop a new product, tentatively named the 'Gu Mian Detector.' When worn, if Gu Mian approaches, a red warning will appear around the wearer, enabling early detection of danger. However, this product is still in the experimental phase, and its effectiveness is not yet stable..."

As she read this, she suddenly noticed a cluster of translucent red letters appearing around a nearby desk, somewhat resembling a player's game interface.

"Warning! Warning!" "Danger Approaching!" "Harmful Substance Detected! Evacuate Immediately!"...

Hmm... just like the book described.

The Fortune-teller closed the book and looked at the large executive chair behind the desk, which had its back to her.

There was someone there; the translucent letters were revolving around that chair.

Gu Mian had already taken a few steps forward and was now turning the executive chair around.

The Fortune-teller fixed her gaze on the person in the chair.

He was short, under 1.5 meters, and very thin. Curled up in the chair, he seemed even smaller. From the back, you couldn't even tell someone was hidden there.

Her player interface wouldn't open.

It was an NPC.

The Fortune-teller was rather surprised; she hadn't expected to find an NPC in this instance.

The NPC looked pale, as if he'd suffered a terrible shock, and was surrounded by red letters urging him to flee.

He seemed to be clutching something.

Gu Mian snatched it away. It was a small object resembling a lighter, but it definitely wasn't one. An inscription on its side read: "Gu Mian Detector."

Gu Mian: "..."

What in the world is this?

Just then, while Gu Mian was momentarily distracted, the man in the chair tried to jump down and escape. But a hand shot out from above and grabbed him.

Then, Gu Mian's menacing voice sounded from above his head, "Are you the manager here?"

When Coach Che burst in, this was the scene that greeted him.

The small manager was being held aloft by Gu Mian, his face deathly pale, looking as if he might pass out at any moment.

In a corner, the teddy bear that had come with Gu Mian was stealthily trying to scuttle away.

Coach Che clutched his walkie-talkie, eyeing Gu Mian nervously. "Don't do anything rash!"

「Meanwhile」

Huai Xin Zhen Yue, still unaware that the ghost chasing him had been freed from its restraints, was crouching behind a tombstone, mulling over Liu Yiji's words.

"If what he said was true, then splitting up right from the start was a mistake..."

"But I don't know if this is really the way to survive. Sigh, if only there was a forum where players could exchange instance strategies."

While Huai Xin Zhen Yue was deep in thought, he suddenly noticed something odd about the shadow at his feet.

The sun, sinking in the west, cast long shadows of each tombstone across the ground.

He then noticed that, besides the tombstone's shadow, another distorted shadow lay at his feet.

This shadow stretched out from behind him. At first glance, it looked like a standing person, but it was bulkier, with a large head from which two ears protruded.

Huai Xin Zhen Yue's scalp tingled. He slowly turned his head to look.

That terrifying teddy bear was now standing right behind him.

Huai Xin Zhen Yue leaped up and bolted, accidentally kicking a loose tombstone, sending dust flying.

「On the other hand」

Coach Che was sweating profusely as he stared at Gu Mian.

By now, Gu Mian had already pulled out his Saw and was holding it before the diminutive manager.
"Were you the one arguing with this hearse driver downstairs earlier?"

When Gu Mian first arrived at the factory gate, he'd heard Coach Che cursing someone out. Presumably, it was this manager.

Hearing this, the manager glared fiercely at Coach Che. "Was it you who told him my office was here? You mutt!"

Coach Che cried out his innocence, "How the hell would I know your office was in such a hidden place?! Besides, he's the one who caught you, why are you yelling at me?"

"Enough bickering, you two," Gu Mian lifted the manager a little higher, the Saw resting on the man's shoulder. "Toy Goose Company has branches worldwide and supplies the game supermarket. It must be a very important company. As the manager, you surely know a lot, right?"

The manager, now dripping with cold sweat, stuttered, "W-what... what do you want to know?"

Clutching the book, the Fortune-teller nervously glanced from one to the other.

Why did every encounter with Gu Mian involve him threatening NPCs with a Saw?!

Chapter 586 If you are reading a novel on Christmas, you definitely don't have a partner_1

The Fortune-teller, standing nearby, was trembling with fear.

The food factory manager Gu Mian held captive wasn't faring much better. Sweat drenched his clothes as he stared at the saw blade mere centimeters from his body.

Gu Mian looked at the man in his grasp.

He wore a formal suit with a meticulously tied striped tie. However, his small stature made him look like a child who had stolen his parents' clothes. Fortunately, his mature-looking face clearly marked him as an adult.

The only identifying item on him was a metal work badge pinned to his left chest.

The copper-colored work badge looked somewhat old, with a line of words carved into it.

"Manager No. 845 of the Toy Goose Food Processing Factory?" Gu Mian read aloud. "Your company certainly has a lot of managers."

Manager No. 845 swallowed. "We have many branches and employees, so we use numbers to differentiate them. If you'd like to know more, I can explain in detail..."

Gu Mian had no interest in a deep discussion about the relationship between numbers and employees.

He tightened his grip on Manager No. 845's collar. "Since the food from here is transported to the real world, you must know the entrance to the real world, right?"

The Fortune-teller, listening nearby, was confused.

She remembered the last time Gu Mian held the saw to Teacher Sweet's neck. He had been asking all sorts of strange questions she couldn't understand.

This time, she could understand his questions, but their implications still baffled her.

Food from this factory could be transported to the real world? An instance could connect directly to the real world?

Moreover, the "Toy Goose Food Processing Factory" Gu Mian had just mentioned sounded familiar.

"This processing plant is called the Toy Goose Food Processing Factory?" The Fortune-teller looked around, somewhat surprised.

She remembered when Gu Mian used her as bait in the death-face instance, he had given her a special item: "A Vial of Failed Experimental Reagent," produced by the Toy Goose Company.

At the time, she had merely thought the game had fabricated the manufacturing location; she never expected such a place actually existed.

Manager No. 845, under duress from Gu Mian, immediately sold out Coach Che. "I'm just the food factory manager, responsible only for dispatching goods! I don't know where they're delivered; he's the one who delivers them! Ask him!"

As he spoke, he pointed at Coach Che.

Gu Mian looked at the wide-eyed Coach Che opposite him. He had just seen this coach climb onto the delivery truck.

The three of them stared at each other, their expressions odd. The atmosphere was quite awkward.

The Fortune-teller took a few steps back and, seeing an opportunity, stomped on a teddy bear trying to sneak away.

This special item Gu Mian brought can actually move, and it looks like it wants to escape. Is it a special item that can run away? Also, why does its face look so depressed?

The Fortune-teller realized she couldn't see this special item's information. It's no surprise it's something Gu Mian brought; it's even encrypted, she mused.

It wasn't her fault she didn't recognize it as a ghost.

The teddy bear had been so badly damaged by Gu Mian earlier that it hardly resembled a bear. Half of its body was scorched black, and its face wore an expression of "I have depression." It truly didn't look like a ghost.

Gu Mian moved the saw closer to Manager No. 845's neck and threatened Coach Che, who stood opposite him. "Tell me how you deliver the goods, or I'll saw your boss in half!"

Manager No. 845 nearly fainted. "Don't saw me! Saw him! Saw him!"

Of course, Coach Che couldn't let Gu Mian saw Manager No. 845.

It wasn't because he had any deep affection for Manager No. 845; in fact, the two often bickered.

But ever since his instance, the "Hearse Driver's Examination Center," collapsed, he had wandered between other instances, trying to earn extra money to repair his Spirit Cars as soon as possible.

However, Gu Mian was like a persistent shadow, always managing to encounter him.

Coach Che had previously worked as a cameraman in the Sweet Lovers instance for a few days but left because the salary wasn't ideal.

However, just a few days after he left, Gu Mian entered the Sweet Lovers instance and single-handedly caused the entire instance to collapse.

Although this had nothing to do with Coach Che, other NPCs began to look at him suspiciously. This was because his Hearse Driver's Examination Center instance had been previously wrecked by Gu Mian, and the Sweet Lovers instance where he had worked also got destroyed.

Later, Coach Che found a new job.

He served as a logistics teacher in the Close Your Eyes instance. Unexpectedly, Gu Mian also entered that instance! The two even met there.

The moment Coach Che saw Gu Mian in the instance, he knew he was in trouble.

As expected, after a series of chaotic events, the Close Your Eyes instance was shut down.

Coach Che lost his job again.

Other NPCs looked at him with even greater suspicion, as if he were a harbinger of plague.

It had taken Coach Che a great deal of effort to get his current job.

But Gu Mian came again.

And now he had even captured Manager No. 845.

If he really let Gu Mian saw the manager...

Then, Coach Che would never find a job for the rest of his life.

"Don't get agitated!" Coach Che clutched the walkie-talkie, his body swaying slightly. "Our factory doesn't supply the real world. The food here is transported to local supermarkets! Only food processing plants numbered 1 to 10 supply the real world!"

Meanwhile, Gu Mian had already freed a hand to flip through the goods transaction records on the table.

"Two thousand cans of milk powder, 500 bags of baby rice crackers, 1,000 bags of fruit gummy candies... transported to Cradle Home..."

"One hundred cans of luncheon meat, 20 dried chickens, 50 boxes of self-heating hot pots... transported to the Museum Of Death..."

"Five hundred boxes of pickled vegetable beef noodles transported to the Instance Court..."

"One hundred cans of herring, 50 bags of dried durian, 60 packages of stinky tofu... sent to... the Anti-Gu Mian Association?"

"Haha," Manager No. 845 chuckled awkwardly. "That's just an organization founded by some kids with too much time on their hands. No ill intent, really, no ill intent."

Indeed, the ledger showed no transaction records with the real world.

They were all instance names and some strange association names.

Gu Mian closed the ledger. "So, are all the locations on this list within the Second World?"

Manager No. 845 was still chuckling nervously. "Yes, yes... Wait!"

His eyes bulged, but he didn't dare look at Gu Mian. Instead, he glared at Coach Che while speaking to Gu Mian, "You know everything?"

The Fortune-teller was puzzled by Manager No. 845's reaction and didn't understand what Gu Mian meant by the "Second World."

Looking around, she decided it had nothing to do with her anyway, so she comfortably watched the commotion from the side, still stepping on the teddy bear.

So this is indeed the Second World...

Gu Mian narrowed his eyes at Coach Che. "So, the Hearse Driver's Examination Center, Sweet Lovers, and Close Your Eyes—are they all instances within this world?"

Coach Che had wandered through these three instances, so they should logically all be in the same world.

Unexpectedly, Coach Che shook his head and replied, "No."

Chapter 587 Ooo_1

"So you must know how you travel between these two worlds, right?" Gu Mian asked Coach Che, all the while gripping Manager 845.

"Of course." Coach Che wasn't surprised that Gu Mian knew about multiple worlds. He twitched his eyebrows slightly. "There's a train that can travel between different worlds, but I've only ridden it once. Shortly after that, the train was scrapped..."

The scrapping of this train was one reason Coach Che struggled to find work.

Not many NPCs traveled between worlds; most diligently guarded their own instances in their own worlds.

Only a few unlucky ones, whose instances were gone, had to find work in other instances.

Coach Che had embarked on a journey away from his hometown, shuttling through other worlds.

Unfortunately, just as the train delivered him to his destination, it turned around and picked up Gu Mian.

Later, as expected, it was gone and is still in the repair station undergoing refurbishment to this day.

The poor train conductor suffered a huge shock and has been in a psychiatric clinic for several months, only recently showing some improvement.

Everyone else believed the train was wrecked by Gu Mian because it had been jinxed by Coach Che's bad luck.

Gu Mian suddenly thought of something. He pondered for a moment. "Is that train called 'Time Escape'?"

Coach Che nodded, his face contorting. The thought of not being able to return to his own world twisted his expression even further.

So it really is the train from the 'Freaky Great Escape Train' instance, Gu Mian thought.

He spoke with disdain, "Such an important place, and you didn't protect it properly. Instead, you turned it into an instance for players to enter. Now it's gone, right? Are you all brain-dead?"

Coach Che hadn't expected Gu Mian to have the audacity to say such a thing. His gaunt face trembled, full of disbelief. "The train is gone because of you! How dare you call us brain-dead?"

Ignoring Coach Che's indignant question, Gu Mian continued, "So, can that train reach the real world?"

Coach Che shook his head immediately. "No."

"What benefits does this game's appearance bring to your Low-Dimensional World?"

"I don't know."

Seeing that he wasn't getting anywhere with him, Gu Mian quickly patted down Manager 845's pockets, trying to find some information.

But there was nothing in his pockets except a set of keys.

Manager 845, still dangling from Gu Mian's grip, was sweating profusely, his legs kicking out sporadically. Just as he was flailing, he heard Gu Mian, from above him, ask another terrifying question.

"I can't get any answers out of you two. But high-ranking figures from your Low-Dimensional World must be involved in this global game. I'm sure they know the details," Gu Mian said, looking down at the top of Manager 845's head. "You're an executive in a big company, after all. Surely you know where the higher-ups in your world are, or in which instance they might be found."

Manager 845's lips trembled, and he even forgot to kick his legs. He stared, transfixed, at the saw blade in front of him. "I don't know! I don't know anything! I'm just the manager of a small branch office. How would I know where those bigwigs are?"

As he spoke, he glanced at Coach Che opposite him and yelled, "You must know! Before your instance collapsed, it was a very high-level instance! You definitely have connections with the higher-ups in your world!"

Coach Che clamped his mouth shut, refusing to say a word, looking as if he were ready to be crushed to pieces rather than betray his principles, determined to maintain his innocence in the Human World.

The Fortune-teller at the side grew anxious. Gu Mian had told her he would leave the instance after sunset.

Time was almost up. If this stalemate continued, once Gu Mian left, she would be all alone here.

I have to finish this quickly!

I have to make these two NPCs talk!

She hurriedly rummaged through her item bar and finally pulled out something hefty.

Then, Manager 845, Coach Che, and the teddy bear heard the woman shout a chilling sentence: "I have a bomb! It can bring down all the buildings here!"

Gu Mian turned his head and saw the Fortune-teller holding a special item.

[Condemned Building Demolition Bomb]

[Description: An extremely rare special item, said to have been created by a certain developer for rapid site clearance. However, due to high costs and rare materials, this is the only one of its kind.]

[Function: Ten minutes after pulling the safety pin, it will rapidly detonate all buildings in the area. It cleverly avoids living organisms; even if you are inside a building when using this item, you will remain unharmed by the blast itself.]

[Friendly Tip: Although this bomb avoids living organisms, if you are inside a building during the detonation, you will still be buried by the collapsing structure. While you won't be injured by the explosion, there is a risk of being crushed to death.]

This was a special item the Fortune-teller had obtained from a construction site instance.

This item had been hidden very well. If not for her special class, she really wouldn't have found this thing.

But although it was well-hidden, it wasn't very useful, so the Fortune-teller had always kept it tucked away at the bottom of her inventory.

Unexpectedly, it was proving useful now.

Sure enough, both Manager 845's and Coach Che's faces went deathly pale.

"Not bad at all," Gu Mian remarked with admiration.

Even though Coach Che had looked ready to die for his principles, the bomb still made his expression change drastically. He practically swore, "Which damn idiot invented this kind of special item!"

Manager 845 couldn't hold back either. "It must be those morons from Escape World!"

Coach Che suspected that if the food factory blew up this time, he'd be sent to an instance tribunal and sentenced to two life terms.

The charges would probably be things like "spreading ill fortune" or "leading the wolf into the house."

Gu Mian moved quickly. He immediately led the Fortune-teller up the ladder and out of the office.

Then he had the Fortune-teller pull the safety pin and toss the bomb down.

Below, Manager 845 and Coach Che were like ants on a hot griddle. They stared at the falling bomb, almost jumping out of their skins.

The device wouldn't explode for another ten minutes, so the two of them above weren't in a rush to leave.

The Fortune-teller lay by the hinged door, looking down at the teddy bear below. "Huh? Don't you want your special item?"

For a moment, Gu Mian couldn't figure out what special item the Fortune-teller was referring to.

He looked at the two men below. "Can you tell me the location of the important NPCs now? Manager 845, you don't want to end up like Coach Che, doing odd jobs everywhere, do you? Look how pitiful he is now. Once this food factory blows up, you'll be just as pitiful."

Coach Che's face was ashen. He could already picture himself being thrown into prison after the food factory exploded.

Two seconds later, he spoke decisively, "I know of an instance called the 'Circus of Love and Justice.' There are high-level leaders from the instances there. You might find something if you go to that instance. That's all I know! Quick, take the bomb back!"

The Fortune-teller said, "It can't be taken back. We have to throw it somewhere else so this place doesn't explode."

As she spoke, she looked at Gu Mian. "We need to run!"

Gu Mian nodded in agreement and fled with the Fortune-teller, leaving Coach Che and Manager 845 swearing loudly below.

Coach Che hesitated for a moment but still picked up the bomb from the floor, planning to run out and throw it somewhere else.

But just as he was climbing the ladder, the hinged door above seemed to be caught by a draft and SLAMMED shut right in front of him.

Seeing this, Manager 845 anxiously asked, "Where's your key?"

"Gu Mian swiped it. What about yours?"

"He took mine too..."

Chapter 588 Ghost Language Level 4-6_1

Coach Che was stuck on the ladder, unable to move up or down. He stared blankly and muttered, "So who designed this damn door that can't be opened from the inside without a key!"

845 was almost in tears. "Never mind who designed it! We need to get this thing out of here! I don't want to end up like you!"

The bomb was surprisingly user-friendly, featuring a small screen counting down: 463 seconds until detonation.

Less than eight minutes until detonation, and they were locked inside. Even if they weren't locked in, they might not be able to get the bomb out of the food processing plant in those eight minutes.

Coach Che was already imagining himself being sanctioned by the court and sent to prison for reform. He shivered at the thought.

No way! He clenched his teeth, made up his mind, and finally reached for the walkie-talkie strapped to his waist.

He held the walkie-talkie to his mouth, pressed the talk button, and roared, "Anything that can hear my voice, stop chasing the players! Hurry to the food processing plant and open the door for us! If you don't come soon, this place will be blown to smithereens! Come immediately! Right now!"

Huai Xin Zhen Yue had already been killed. His corpse lay on the ground, blood gushing out.

Suddenly, a blood-stained hand burst out from his stomach, followed by an arm, a head, a torso... Finally, Huai Xin Zhen Yue climbed out of his own corpse—a truly bizarre scene.

He wiped the blood from his face, glanced at his own disemboweled corpse, and spat.

He glanced around and relaxed when he saw the toy bear was gone. "Thank goodness for my Golden Cicada Shelling. Otherwise, I would've definitely died this time."

Huai Xin Zhen Yue coughed a few times. Using this special item consumed a lot of energy, equivalent to losing half his life; he even struggled to stand afterward.

He lay on the ground, lamenting, "It's a pity it can only be used once. Still, it saved my life, so it was worth it..."

But he quickly realized he might have spoken too soon. Beside him, a pair of furry legs suddenly appeared. Looking up, he saw a huge body and a creepy bear face. It... hadn't left.

Huai Xin Zhen Yue stared at it, his mouth agape. Then, the furry hand slowly rose and reached for him...

Huai Xin Zhen Yue frantically tried to move his body, desperate to escape, but he couldn't get up.

Just as the hand was about to touch him, the toy bear suddenly stopped. Before Huai Xin Zhen Yue could register his surprise, it vanished, leaving only one person and one corpse in the area.

Huai Xin Zhen Yue kept looking up, still not having processed what had just happened. After a while, he finally confirmed that the toy bear had indeed left.

"What... just happened?" he muttered, lying on the ground, utterly perplexed.

Although he didn't know why it had suddenly disappeared, Huai Xin Zhen Yue was still happy. Happy that he had escaped death.

He lay on the ground, struggling to look up at the sun. More than half of it had already dipped below the horizon, its last light about to vanish.

He watched with bated breath as the edge of the sun vanished bit by bit, until it was completely gone. "Great, I can go back now..."

The sun set completely, but the surroundings remained quiet; nothing happened. When the instance settlement didn't appear, Huai Xin Zhen Yue's eyes widened.

"What's going on?" he wondered. The sun has set, and I've completed the instance mission. Why haven't I left the instance yet?!

Liu Yiji was also anxiously awaiting the sunset. He sat in the empty plaza, staring west, surprised that the instance hadn't reacted.

He rubbed his eyes hard, staring at the western horizon. The sun had indeed fully set. "Why... why..."

Gu Mian also noticed something was amiss. He and the Fortune-teller had just reached the main gate of the food processing plant. As long as the Fortune-teller stepped out of this gate, she would have completed her mission.

But she didn't leave immediately. Instead, she started talking to Gu Mian. "I heard your conversation with those two NPCs just now," the Fortune-teller said hesitantly. "From your words, this game is composed of different worlds, and instances are different locations within those worlds?"

While she was speaking, she noticed Gu Mian looking in a particular direction. She followed his gaze and saw the western horizon, still glowing faintly with the afterglow. The sun had set.

The Fortune-teller remembered Gu Mian was supposed to leave the instance at sunset, but he was still standing before her. "How can you..." As the Fortune-teller started to ask, she suddenly sensed something rushing towards them from outside the plant's main gate.

Looking closely, she saw it was a charred human figure! Its entire body was scorched black, its eyelids burned away, and its two white eyeballs rolled frantically.

Even though its face was blacker than a burnt sweet potato, one could still make out the anxious expression on it.

The Fortune-teller was startled and about to step back when she saw the figure brake sharply at the gate, make a wide turn, leap over the adjacent railing into the food processing plant, and then sprint towards the main building.

A horde of miscellaneous monstrosities followed it, clearly nothing good—like the Night Parade of a Hundred Ghosts.

The Fortune-teller stared wide-eyed as these entities bypassed them. "What are these...?"

Gu Mian watched the direction they were heading. "It seems they're looking for Coach Che. Speaking of which, I should have left the instance by now."

But he soon figured out why he hadn't left the instance: several Instance Evaluators had also rushed to this location. These NPCs, appearing as normal humans, stood out starkly amidst this horde of monsters and demons. The large characters "Instance Evaluator" above their heads were also very eye-catching.

It must be that all the support personnel have rushed here, leaving no one to terminate the instance process.

Soon, one of the Instance Evaluators also realized this. He hastily turned and ran back, vanishing in an instant.

Half a minute later, a message about the instance ending prematurely finally appeared before Gu Mian and the Fortune-teller.

At the same time, Fatty, who was waiting anxiously outside, finally received the announcement. However, this announcement stunned him.

[Announcement (July 25, 15:24)]

[Due to missing NPC data, the special instance 'Solitary Hide and Seek' and standard instances 'Fatty's BBQ,' 'The Wondrous Adventure in the Food Processing Plant,' and 'Ghost Language Level 4 & 6' have been terminated prematurely. We sincerely apologize for the inconvenience caused to all players. The game will provide corresponding compensation...]

Below was the compensation list.

Fatty stared at this new announcement for a while, only snapping out of it when someone stood before him.

He looked up and saw Gu Mian, who had just exited the special instance.

The moment Gu Mian exited the special instance, he saw Fatty squatting there in a daze, like a dog just short of barking a couple of times.

Fatty, unaware that he had become a peculiar creature in Gu Mian's eyes, stood up excitedly and circled Gu Mian twice. "Doctor, you're out!"

Chapter 589 Are You Even Proud to Post Something This Short?_1

As Fatty spoke, he glanced at Chu Changge, who stood behind Gu Mian. Chu Changge was adjusting his glasses.

Fatty looked at the two before him in confusion. "Miss Xiao Qiao informed me that Bai Wuchang also entered the instance with you. Did he not come out?"

Did he die? Fatty wondered.

Chu Changge shook his head slightly. "He's out," he said, glancing back.

Fatty followed Chu Changge's gaze. He finally saw Xie Bi'an, who had already run to the hotel's front gate. From afar, Xie Bi'an was waving at them as if to greet them.

"Why did he run so far the moment he got out? Is he afraid someone might eat him?" Fatty grumbled.

Xie Bi'an, seemingly afraid of being eaten, waved and walked off into the distance until he was out of sight.

Fatty stood there for so long that his feet began to tingle. When he tried to move, he limped, which looked rather comical.

Only when the three of them returned to their room did Fatty's gait return to normal.

He plopped down onto the sofa, ready to ask Gu Mian about what happened in the instance.

But before he could speak, a rapid series of loud knocks came from the living room door, like firecrackers going off.

"Who is it?" Fatty stood up again. "It doesn't sound like Miss Xiao Qiao and her group."

As he spoke, he leaned closer to the door's peephole to look out. There was no one outside.

Strange. Are there ghosts in broad daylight?

Fatty, still confused, looked closer and finally spotted the source of the noise—a green hat.

Looking further down, he could see a very familiar forehead. The peephole's field of vision was limited, so he couldn't see anything below that.

But based on the green hat, Fatty had a good idea who it was.

He opened the door. Sure enough, Mr. Green, whom they hadn't seen in over a month, was standing outside.

His face was flushed with exasperation, looking like he was here to demand an explanation.

He stormed in. Fatty heard him shout, "I heard you blew up a food processing factory!"

This was clearly directed at Gu Mian.

Gu Mian pondered for a moment, then touched his chin. "It seems Coach Che didn't manage to throw that bomb away."

He and 845 are probably buried under the rubble by now.

I wonder if the group of ghosts that arrived later also got caught in the blast.

Seeing Mr. Green's face change from red to white, then darken to a shade almost matching his hat, Gu Mian quickly clarified, "This has nothing to do with me. It was all the Fortune-teller."

She was the one who took out the bomb.

She was the one who pulled the switch.

It was indeed all done by the Fortune-teller.

Meanwhile, the Fortune-teller was happily clutching her instance compensation, completely unaware that Gu Mian was throwing her under the bus.

Gu Mian defended himself, "I only asked a few minor questions during all that... But speaking of which, why did you come back?"

Mr. Green had left after the Old World instance, saying he was going to find a way back into an instance, but now he had returned.

And he had returned quickly. Gu Mian had barely stepped out of the instance when Mr. Green was already at the door, banging on it. It didn't seem like he had ever left.

"Because halfway here, I heard Gu Mian was acting like a menace again, destroying an instance called 'Amnesia.' The higher-ups insisted I return to keep an eye on you all. I hadn't even reached the door when I heard the food factory exploded!" Mr. Green clutched his chest. "Do you have any idea how I feel right now?"

Gu Mian stared at Mr. Green. "I don't know how you're feeling, but seeing you so heartbroken, one might think these instances belong to your family..."

Mr. Green felt a chill under Gu Mian's piercing gaze and involuntarily took a few steps back.

"You used to be an instance host, so you must have some status and know certain things..." Gu Mian was saying, when he noticed Mr. Green rapidly backing away, looking like he was about to bolt.

But before Mr. Green could turn, Gu Mian pushed Xiao Hong, who was clinging to him, forward. "Catch him!"

Xiao Hong, though not understanding why, obediently pounced on Mr. Green.

Mr. Green, already looking frail, nearly had his back broken when Xiao Hong pounced.

Xiao Hong seemed to have completely forgotten this man was her former boss. After pinning Mr. Green down, she puffed out her chest proudly.

Gu Mian crouched before the pinned Mr. Green. "In the previous instance, I heard Coach Che mention a dungeon called the 'Love and Justice Circus Dungeon.' Have you heard of it?"

Hearing this, a flicker of confusion crossed Mr. Green's contorted face. He hadn't expected Gu Mian to ask such a question. With a pale face, he replied, "I've heard of it. Isn't that the Beast Tamer's professional instance? What, tired of being a Doctor and want to try something new?"

Xiao Hong had now shifted off Mr. Green, and some color returned to his pale face.

"Beast Tamer professional instance?" Gu Mian mused for a moment. "Then do you know what the instance's content is?"

Mr. Green clutched his aching back. "How would I know? I only know it's a professional instance. Judging by the name, it must be related to a circus—probably performances, circus acts, that sort of thing."

He leaned on the wall to stand. "At worst, it's probably jumping through flaming hoops, climbing poles, playing a clown, stuff like that..."

"But you can't enter this instance just because you want to. Don't think you can get in just because you have an instance exchange coupon. This is a professional instance. You need to trigger specific conditions to enter."

Hearing Mr. Green, Gu Mian recalled his own experience entering the Doctor instance.

Someone in a certain area had drawn a very rare special item called "Doctor's Resentment."

Its only purpose was to significantly increase the appearance rate of a certain special instance in the open area. Of course, that "certain special instance" was the Doctor professional instance.

Back then, shortly after arriving in that area, he had been pulled directly into the special instance by this item.

Gu Mian thought for a moment, then asked, "So, what are the conditions for entering the Circus Dungeon?"

Coach Che had mentioned an important NPC in the Circus Dungeon, and Gu Mian planned to investigate.

Mr. Green seemed reluctant to answer, but with Xiao Hong eyeing him menacingly, he had no choice but to speak. "I hear you need a special item to enter that dungeon... If I remember correctly, I think it's a special item called 'Clown'."

Chapter 590 The Clown Turns Out to Be My Own!

"I heard that the NPCs in that instance used to pay a lot of money for the special item 'Clown' and then threw everything they bought into the recycling station. It seems like they don't want players to interfere with their instance."

"Recycling station?" Gu Mian inquired.

Mr. Green scratched his head. "It's basically a huge dump where all the scrapped and unused items are thrown. I heard from the folks working there that it's quite a peculiar place."

Fatty leaned over. "Is the recycling station also an instance?"

Mr. Green nodded slightly. "Yes, it's mentioned as an instance."

Hearing this, Gu Mian's expression grew strange. "You NPCs are really something. According to Coach Che, you guys even use that train that can travel through different worlds as an instance, as well as the food-processing factory. Now you're telling me that even the recycling station is an instance. You guys are truly remarkable."

Mr. Green puffed out his cheeks. "It's not like we have a say in this! Half of the game treaty rules were drafted by you Earthlings. It wasn't our idea to use important spots as instances; it was Earth's."

As he said this, his puffed-up cheeks deflated. "And even if important locations are made into instances, generally nothing bad would happen, unless..."

Mr. Green trailed off, his gaze lingering on Gu Mian for a few moments before he fell silent.

This time, he didn't seem to have any intention of fleeing.

Fatty asked curiously, "Why did you run just now?"

Mr. Green held his head high. "Wasn't I just scared that Gu Mian would ask some earth-shattering, soul-stirring questions? What if he asked me how to blow up dozens of instances at once?"

"You have a way?" Gu Mian asked.

"Of course not," Mr. Green quickly shook his head. "I was just afraid that if I couldn't answer, you'd get angry, tie me up, and hang me outside the window."

Gu Mian's gaze searched for a rope. "Am I that kind of person?"

Fatty continued to ask, "So, Mr. Green, do you know the name of the recycling station instance? Is it just called 'Recycling Station'?"

"Of course not," Mr. Green shook his head. "I heard the instance's name is quite peculiar, but we all just call it the 'Recycling Station.' We never specifically asked what its real name is."

Gu Mian was stumped.

To join in the fun at the Circus of Love and Justice, he first needed to get his hands on the special item "Clown." To acquire this item, his only current option was to visit the "Recycling Station." But no one knew the actual name of the Recycling Station instance.

Seemingly sensing Gu Mian's thoughts, Mr. Green said, "Even if you go to that instance, there's no guarantee you'll find what you're looking for. While the instance might not be dangerous, it's a chaotic mess; it's a dumping ground for several worlds."

"Think about it: you might not find something specific even in one junkyard, let alone one containing trash from several worlds. The circus people threw the special items in there precisely because they didn't want players to get them."

At this moment, Fatty suddenly slapped his thigh. "Doesn't Miss Xiao Qiao have that thing? I used it not too long ago."

Gu Mian looked at Chu Changge. "I remember Xiao Qiao has a special item called 'Big Data Search,' right?"

Chu Changge nodded slightly. Indeed. This item could search for the location of a desired item once its name was input. However, it could only be used once a week.

When Gu Mian entered the Old World, Xiao Qiao had used this item in the real world to find a player who had previously entered the Old World. This provided the clue that none of the "all-time top-ranked players" could leave the Old World.

Of course, Gu Mian hadn't complied with this rule.

Soon, Fatty lured Xiao Qiao into the room with a bowl of yam and pork rib soup.

Mr. Green glared at Xiao Qiao, who was sitting before the coffee table, head down and engrossed in her food, and exclaimed, "This kid is useless for scheming!"

Gu Mian watched as Xiao Qiao used her chopsticks to pick up a pork rib from her bowl.

Her grip wasn't steady, and the meat slipped from her chopsticks back into the bowl, splashing soup all over Gu Mian's face.

Gu Mian: "..."

A rare hint of embarrassment flickered across Xiao Qiao's usually deadpan face.

She grabbed the hem of Xiao Hong's skirt nearby and used it to wipe Gu Mian's face.

Xiao Hong: "?"

Chu Changge was the first to ask, "Xiao Qiao, I remember you have a special item called 'Big Data Search'."

Xiao Qiao nodded honestly.

"Can it be used in instances?"

Xiao Qiao nodded.

"Can it search for special items?"

Xiao Qiao nodded and said, "It can search for anything!"

Fatty had borrowed it from Xiao Qiao not long ago. A few days prior, he had hung his washed clothes out to dry in the courtyard downstairs. When he went to collect them, he discovered that Gu Mian's frequently worn gray shirt was missing.

He always carefully clipped the clothes when hanging them; it was impossible for the wind to have blown it away.

Fatty searched for a long time but found nothing. In the end, he had to borrow Xiao Qiao's special item to locate it.

He eventually found it in the cabinet where Xiao Hong hoarded her lychee soda.

When Fatty pulled the shirt out, he was nearly bitten by a snarling Xiao Hong.

Of course, Fatty had to wash the shirt again. He then anxiously waited for it to dry, not leaving its side for a moment.

Gu Mian was unaware of this incident.

At this moment, he had already taken the "Big Data Search" special item from Xiao Qiao's hand.

It was a special item that looked very much like a cell phone. Xiao Hong eyed it covetously from the side, seemingly desperate to snatch it for a selfie.

Gu Mian held the special item, studying it for a while before handing it to Chu Changge. "You try using it to search for that special item."

Due to Gu Mian's peculiar nature, he couldn't use most special items, so he directly gave it to Chu Changge to perform the search.

Chu Changge took the item, thought for a moment, then keyed in: "The special item needed to enter the Circus of Love and Justice instance."

A small loading circle appeared beneath the input box. After spinning a few times, it displayed several lines of text:

"You may be looking for 'Clown Mask.' Now searching for nearby 'Clown Mask.' Please wait..."

"..."

"..."

"Sorry, cannot locate the item."

"Due to the vast amount of data, this item's search range is limited. It is recommended you search again when within 800 kilometers of the item's potential location."

Seeing these lines, Gu Mian exclaimed in surprise, "So, there's no such thing within 800 kilometers?"

Chu Changge pushed up his glasses. "I'm afraid so." Moreover, the special item required to enter the Circus Dungeon wasn't called 'Clown,' but 'Clown Mask.'

Mr. Green also saw the text on the screen and chuckled nervously. "Ah, my mistake..."

So, to get the Clown Mask, they had to enter the Recycling Station instance. But they still didn't know the actual name of the Recycling Station instance.

Fatty suddenly had an idea. "Which world does the Recycling Station instance belong to? If we knew that, perhaps we could ask NPCs from the same world. They might know the Recycling Station's name."

Xiao Qiao, who was still engrossed in her meal, suddenly looked up. "Don't know. Haven't heard. No idea."

With that said, she immediately resumed her battle with the pork ribs in her bowl.

Liu Ruyan was also called into the room shortly after. After listening to Gu Mian and the others' descriptions, she too shook her head. "To the best of my knowledge, there's no such place in the Old World."

Mr. Green also had no idea which world the Recycling Station belonged to.