

Collapse 651

Chapter 651 Why Xiao Qiao's Head Appears on the Bed in the Middle of the Night _1

Lin Xiaowei, who corresponded to the Fifth World, and Song Yu, who corresponded to the Sixth World, were both dead. This left them unable to determine which of those the Escape World was.

Fatty leaned over, looking at the page in Gu Mian's hand. "At least we know the names of six worlds, though it's unclear if one of them belongs to the Fifth or the Sixth World."

"Only Miss Xiao Qiao's world doesn't have instances, but the Fifth and Sixth do," Fatty said. "So we might have entered instances from the Fifth or Sixth World before."

To figure out the names of these two worlds, they needed to enter instances again and ask the advanced NPCs from those worlds.

Thinking of advanced NPCs, Gu Mian turned his gaze back to Mr. Green.

Mr. Green, feeling the stare, shrank back and muttered, "What... what are you looking at me for?"

Gu Mian asked directly, "Do you know the names of the Fifth and Sixth Worlds?"

Mr. Green shook his head vigorously. "Of course I don't know that! They're miles away from me! The Old World and Paradise are between us; I have no idea what the names of the Fifth and Sixth Worlds are!"

"What about their advanced NPCs?" Gu Mian asked, still holding Mr. Green. "Do you know which instances their advanced NPCs are in?"

Mr. Green, as if possessed by a rattling drum toy, kept shaking his head and shouting, "I really don't know!" His expression looked genuine.

He felt he was the unluckiest NPC. He'd been living happily in his own instance, but then Gu Mian had to drag him into this mess. Not only was he plucked out, but he was also exploited daily.

Is there any NPC in this world more miserable than me? Mr. Green wanted to howl at the sky.

「At that moment, Coach Che, who was working part-time in some courtroom, suddenly sneezed.」

"Is someone thinking about me?" he wondered, stopping his work to rub his nose. "Could it be my spirit cars missing me? I need to work hard, earn money to fix them, and reopen the instance!"

Coach Che clenched his fists. Dreams made life more fulfilling. He worked with even more enthusiasm.

"This is a problem," Gu Mian thought, letting go of Mr. Green. "It seems we'll have to randomly enter instances. Who knows how many we'll have to go through to find the Fifth or Sixth World."

He then looked at Dwarf Xiao Lv, who had just regained his footing on the ground. "Do you know which instances the advanced NPCs of other worlds are in?"

If they couldn't get matched with the Fifth or Sixth World, matching with an instance containing advanced NPCs from other worlds would also be acceptable.

Mr. Green wanted to pretend he hadn't heard the question. But before he could feign ignorance for long, the sound of Gu Mian unzipping his guitar case reached his ears.

He quickly raised his head. "I know, I know!"

Gu Mian stopped his movements and looked at him.

Mr. Green hesitated before speaking. "If you're asking about advanced NPCs, Coach Che is one. He's the only NPC in his special professional instance, and he definitely has connections with other advanced NPCs!"

Coach Che had indeed told Gu Mian about the advanced NPC in the Circus Instance. But from Mr. Green's tone, it seemed Coach Che also knew of several other instances with advanced NPCs, and quite a few at that.

"If you ask him about matters concerning the Global Game, he might be able to answer some. I guess... and this is just my guess, mind you... he probably knows some inside information about the game." Mr. Green was doing his best to sell out his teammate in front of Gu Mian.

"Ever since his Spirit Car Instance was damaged, though, he's been drifting between different instances, taking odd jobs. He doesn't have a fixed location now, so he's hard to find. If you guys ever run into him in an instance, make sure to grab him and ask him more questions!" Mr. Green desperately wanted others to experience his unfortunate plight.

「Coach Che, who was organizing case files, sneezed again.」

"Strange," he muttered, wiping saliva off the file cover. "Are that many people thinking of me today?"

Hearing Mr. Green's words, Gu Mian fell into deep thought.

If only I could bring Coach Che to Earth too, Gu Mian mused. Drag him through one of those portals and get him here.

However, since the Crazy Guessing Words instance, Gu Mian hadn't seen that kind of portal—the type that could trap NPCs—again.

Gu Mian voiced his confusion. "Speaking of which, I only saw that portal in your instance. I haven't seen one since. Are they exclusive to your instance?"

Upon hearing this, Mr. Green forced out a stiff smile. "Of course not. When Global Game first started, almost all variety instances were equipped with these portals. They were mostly for aesthetic reasons, so your departure from an instance wouldn't seem too abrupt.

"But then, unfortunately, you dragged me here through one of those doors. After that incident, the game discovered the security risk these doors posed. To protect everyone's safety, all the doors were removed. In the end, I was the only unlucky one."

"Such misfortune, such misfortune," Gu Mian said with a sorrowful expression, kicking Mr. Green. "Continue."

Mr. Green suppressed his grievances and raised his voice. "Then there's the Train Instance—the bizarre Great Train Escape you wrecked! It's an instance that doesn't belong to any world. That train can travel between worlds, and there's a conductor on it.

"He's a very advanced NPC. If you catch him, he can tell you the names of all the worlds! He might even write you a 'Chronicles of the Seven Worlds'."

That was bad.

Gu Mian recalled the details of that instance.

He remembered meeting that conductor. At the time, he'd swiftly drawn a door on the metal plating outside the cockpit and barged in. The conductor had been cowering in a corner, shivering.

He hadn't been swayed by any allure at all; his only focus had been smashing the control panel to bits.

Of course, Gu Mian had interacted with this conductor before—he'd hijacked the poor fellow and disdainfully thrown him onto the station platform.

They hadn't exchanged a single word from start to finish. Thinking back now, it was a huge loss.

After Gu Mian's rampage, the instance had 'sadly' shut down and hadn't reopened to this day.

Recalling the conductor's appearance, Gu Mian kicked Mr. Green again. "Tell me about some instances that aren't completely defunct."

Mr. Green clutched his backside. "Besides those two, I only know one more: Death Operator! An instance called Death Operator. I heard an advanced NPC sometimes goes there to impersonate an operator when they're bored.

"I don't know which NPC it is, or which world's instance it is. Other than the instance's name, I really know nothing else!"

It was clear he had squeezed himself dry; his face practically screamed, I really don't know anything else!

Gu Mian finally let Mr. Green go. Upon gaining his freedom, Mr. Green didn't dare stay in the room any longer; he bolted out the door like the wind, disappearing into who-knows-which room.

Gu Mian still had one Dungeon Entry Ticket.

But this ticket was for threatening NPCs. If he used it, he wouldn't get to see those priceless, shit-eating expressions on their faces when threatened.

"Let's just enter an instance randomly for now," he sighed. "Maybe we'll get matched with one that has an advanced NPC."

Advanced NPCs did indeed know a lot.

Lu Yi, for instance, had told Gu Mian a lot and even helped him blow up a location. Hopefully, the next NPC they encountered would be just as reasonable.

"Speaking of which, Doctor, Miss 007 just sent a message saying she got the Beast Tamer class. Didn't you get that class, Doctor?" Fatty leaned in curiously. "Could it be that each player can only have one class and can't have multiple?"

"No," Gu Mian puffed out his chest. "The NPC in that instance said the Beast Tamer class was too low-tier and unworthy of me."

Fatty's expression immediately turned skeptical. He hesitated for a moment before saying, "Oh, I see."

「The sky had long since darkened.」

Gu Mian and Chu Changge discussed when to enter an instance next, and Gu Mian also dragged Fatty to the Fortune-teller for a reading.

"I'm completely drained! Not a drop left!" the Fortune-teller wailed as Gu Mian forcibly dragged him up to perform a divination.

The final divination concluded that Fatty was a bit 'heated' lately and should eat more fruit.

What kind of garbage divination is this? Gu Mian, contemptuous of the Fortune-teller's abilities, left with Fatty.

「When Gu Mian returned with Fatty, Xiao Qiao was still sitting in the living room.」

It was way past dinnertime, and the dishes had been cleared. Xiao Qiao, having finished her scrounged meal, was craning her neck to look in a particular direction.

Gu Mian followed her gaze to his bed, where Xiao Hong was wriggling under his covers, occasionally poking her head out to look their way, as if inviting Gu Mian to bed.

Before Gu Mian could react, Xiao Qiao darted to the edge of the bed and burrowed into the covers. "I want to sleep too!"

Gu Mian: "..."

The female ghost on the bed, thoroughly displeased, tried to kick Xiao Qiao off as she clambered on.

The girl and the ghost began to tussle on Gu Mian's bed.

Fatty, watching from the side, smiled with satisfaction. "Those two women have finally realized they're love rivals!"

Gu Mian: "..."

In the end, Gu Mian threw Xiao Hong downstairs.

Gu Mian then personally carried Xiao Qiao back to Liu Ruyan's room; the two girls shared a dorm.

"Keep an eye on her. Don't let her run off," Gu Mian instructed as he set Xiao Qiao down.

Xiao Qiao squatted on the sofa, watching forlornly as Gu Mian closed the door and left.

After Gu Mian left, Liu Ruyan leaned against the door and looked at Xiao Qiao on the sofa. "Did he take you to the Fortune-teller today?"

The girl on the sofa nodded.

"What did the Fortune-teller say?"

"She said I have the same fate as Chu Changge."

Liu Ruyan was silent for a few seconds before asking softly, "Is there anything you want to do now?"

Xiao Qiao nodded emphatically.

"Then go ahead." Liu Ruyan stepped back a few paces, clearing the way to the door behind her.

「So, when Gu Mian woke up in the middle of the night, he found Xiao Qiao's head nestled in his arms.」

Chapter 652 When everyone thinks I've slacked off, I've updated three times. This is also a kind of slacking off_1

Gu Mian felt that these people from the low-dimensional world were all seriously messed up in the head. Some loved to wear short skirts, some came to fiddle with his gas cylinder every day, some spent the whole day cosplaying under a cloak, and some even crawled into his bed in the middle of the night to rest their heads on his chest. It was utterly absurd.

Gu Mian reached out to pull Xiao Qiao out from under the quilt, but she seemed so fond of it that she thrashed about, trying to get back in. Having no other choice, he found a rope, tied Xiao Qiao up securely, and placed her by the bedside.

「The next morning」

Fatty, having just woken up, saw Xiao Qiao trussed up tightly under Gu Mian's bed and fell into deep thought.

Does the Doctor have such a strange fetish? He took out a small notebook and jotted it down. He also grabbed a few lengths of rope and gestured with them on his own body.

Nearby, Chu Changge glanced at Fatty, who was fiddling with the ropes, then continued to read the list of worlds Gu Mian had compiled the day before.

Fatty sensed something was amiss. He approached Chu Changge. "Brother Chu, I've noticed you've been very quiet since the Doctor came out of the Circus Dungeon. You haven't been possessed by a ghost, have you?"

Chu Changge looked up at him.

Fatty, sensing Chu Changge's gaze, smiled sheepishly and retreated two steps. "Just kidding, only kidding..."

Just then, Liu Ruyan's voice came from the doorway, "You're all here."

Fatty looked up and saw their landlady, who had appeared at the doorway at some point, smiling at them.

From Liu Ruyan's vantage point, she could see Xiao Qiao tied up in the room. However, she made no comment about her roommate's predicament, feigning ignorance.

Fatty walked a few steps towards the door. "Miss Landlord," he began, lowering his voice because Gu Mian was still asleep in the room, "do you need something?"

Liu Ruyan rarely came to find them, so if she did, it was bound to be for something important.

"I have something to discuss with Chu Changge," Liu Ruyan said, her gaze sweeping across Gu Mian's room before settling on Chu Changge. "Do you have a moment?"

Chu Changge rose and walked towards the door without a word.

Just then, another slightly husky voice came from behind Liu Ruyan, "What a coincidence, I also have something to discuss with Mr. Chu."

Even without seeing the person, Fatty recognized the pleasant voice as Xie Bi'an's.

Surprised, Liu Ruyan turned around and was met by the sight of a dark cloak. Indeed, it was him.

What's going on? Fatty was puzzled. "Is this some grand assembly of surviving Guardians? If so, they should have brought Miss Xiao Qiao along!"

Xiao Qiao was currently sleeping soundly under Gu Mian's bed. No one thought of her, so the three left with a tacit understanding.

Gu Mian was awakened by a fragrant aroma.

When he opened his eyes, he subconsciously sniffed for the source of the aroma; it was Fatty's breakfast. Roast duck soup dumplings, to be precise.

A glance revealed Xiao Qiao by the bedside, already awake for some time. Her eyes sparkled as she stared intently at his chin, as if he were more captivating than the soup dumplings on the table.

It was now ten-thirty in the morning. Xiao Qiao had been quite a handful the previous night, causing Gu Mian to wake up late.

Noticing the person under the bed still staring at his chin, Gu Mian touched the area. "Is there something on me?"

Seeing Gu Mian awake, Fatty came to the bedside. He carefully examined Gu Mian's chin for a moment. "Nope, nothing there."

Why was Xiao Qiao so interested in that spot then? She looked as if she wanted to detach his chin and run away with it.

"Perhaps she finds the Doctor's jawline exceptionally attractive," Fatty conjectured, deeming it a plausible explanation.

Being stared at like that, Gu Mian found it impossible to eat. He decided to send Xiao Qiao away first and then return for breakfast.

As Gu Mian carried Xiao Qiao out, he glanced around the room. "Where's Chu Changge?"

"He was called away by Miss Landlord and Cloak Guy," Fatty said, scratching his head. "Looks like they're planning some secret meeting."

Miss Landlord and Cloak Guy... Fatty really had a knack for names.

Muttering to himself, Gu Mian carried Xiao Qiao out the door.

It was rather odd. Every time he left the apartment with a girl, he would run into Accompany me next year. And upon seeing him, a peculiar expression would invariably appear on her face. It was as if she were looking at some heinous archvillain.

This time was no exception. Gu Mian had barely taken a few steps up the stairs, carrying Xiao Qiao, when he encountered Accompany me next year in the corridor.

She stopped in her tracks upon seeing him, her gaze fixed on the tied-up Xiao Qiao. Then, Gu Mian saw her expression become quite animated. Sadness, anger, fear—Gu Mian could roughly discern these emotions.

What's wrong with this person? Gu Mian paid her no mind, intending to continue downstairs.

But then, Accompany me next year suddenly opened her mouth, "P-p-p-put her down!"

He recalled that she didn't stutter before. Combined with her righteous, knight-in-shining-armor tone, Gu Mian realized she must have misunderstood something.

Xiao Qiao cooperatively squirmed, perfectly resembling a virtuous lady being abducted.

The situation became exceedingly awkward for a moment.

At that moment, Liu Ruyan's voice suddenly interjected from nearby, "It seems we've arrived at an inopportune moment."

Gu Mian turned to look. Liu Ruyan was standing on the landing below, flanked by Chu Changge, with his fondness for skirts, and Xie Bi'an, the avid cosplay enthusiast.

"On the contrary, your timing is perfect," Gu Mian said, placing Xiao Qiao in front of Liu Ruyan. "Quick, take her back."

Liu Ruyan smiled, untied the ropes binding Xiao Qiao, and said, "Then we'll be on our way." With that, she took Xiao Qiao by the hand and departed.

Xie Bi'an's hood stirred. He turned towards Gu Mian, his voice emerging from beneath the pitch-black cloak, "Well then, you two, I shall take my leave as well."

Neither Gu Mian nor Accompany me next year showed much reaction, not that he minded. He strode off alone.

Watching Xie Bi'an's retreating figure, Gu Mian found himself genuinely curious about what lay beneath the cloak. Too bad the man wouldn't show him.

With that thought, he turned back to Chu Changge. "What were you three doing?"

Chu Changge pushed up his glasses. "Xie Bi'an said he wants to join us for the next instance."

What's gotten into Xie Bi'an? He was actively avoiding them not long ago.

His stomach rumbled; Gu Mian recalled he still hadn't eaten breakfast. Ascending the stairs, he asked Chu Changge, "You said before that he died once. Did you sense his death?"

"Yes," Chu Changge replied, following Gu Mian.

"So now that he's standing in front of you, is there still any connection between you two?"

"In my perception, he is already dead. I can no longer sense his presence, though he might still be able to sense mine."

"Are you sure he is Number Four?"

"Certain."

This was peculiar. Xie Bi'an had died and then revived. Post-resurrection, he kept himself completely concealed, not revealing even a sliver of skin, as if to hide something. Now, he was volunteering to enter an instance with them. Could he have an ulterior motive?

Lost in thought as they walked, the two soon arrived back at their door.

Fatty was sitting on the sofa, chin in hand, waiting for them.

Xiao Hong was sprawled under the bed, looking utterly dejected. She had been out all night, her face a mask of grievance.

Her brother remained inside the disc, uncharacteristically silent instead of calling out for his sister.

What a warm morning indeed.

Gu Mian planned to enter the next instance on August 20th. The intervening ten-odd days passed pleasantly enough, aside from Xiao Qiao occasionally emerging from under the bed late at night to stare fervently at his chin. He had no idea where she'd gotten a key.

「August 20th arrived quickly.」

Gu Mian turned down the enthusiastic Fatty, insisting he stay home, then departed with Chu Changge.

Xie Bi'an shadowed them like a persistent ghost, and Keke, surprisingly, also joined their party.

Gu Mian listened to her reasons for entering the instance, but only three words registered: short on cash.

The ticket seller still wore that same look of utter despair. By the time Gu Mian emerged from the instance, the ticket seller's expression would likely be one of near-death.

While the ticket seller was rolling his eyes in utter despair, Gu Mian's group began the instance matching process.

[Instance matching in progress, please wait]

[Instance match successful, teammate matching in progress...]

[Teammates successfully matched]

[Instance: The Screaming Courtroom]

A courtroom? Gu Mian pondered for a moment. He vaguely recalled someone mentioning a "Courtroom instance" to him before, but he couldn't remember who.

Isn't this instance a career-specific one, like for the Judge profession?

[Content: Players will become partners of justice within the instance. Each group will consist of four players: one Judge and three Assistants. All players must gather evidence and adjudicate the cases assigned to them.]

[Number of players: 12]

So, it's a team-based instance. That means the four of them should be in the same group, Gu Mian mused as he continued to read. Twelve players in total, so besides their group, there are two others.

[Task: Render a correct judgment on the assigned cases within three days. Players will exit the instance after delivering their verdict and adjourning court.]

As he finished reading the last line, Gu Mian's vision suddenly brightened. He looked up to find himself in an unfamiliar grand hall. A survey of his surroundings revealed it to be a sizable courtroom, similar to those depicted in television dramas.

Just as Gu Mian was about to examine the details more closely, he sensed a gaze fixed on his back.

He turned and was met by a familiar face—and a familiar look of terror.

Seeing the familiar white coat, Coach Che's jaw dropped, and the case files in his hand scattered to the floor in his astonishment.

Can anyone tell me why he's in my instance again?! This has to be a nightmare!

Chapter 653 Isn't It Beautiful to Have a Three-Month Manuscript Stored_1

Gu Mian hadn't expected to see Coach Che again so soon. Mr. Green must have a blessed tongue; whatever he said came true instantly.

Gu Mian was delighted to meet an old friend in the instance and flashed a friendly smile at Coach Che, who was behind him. Coach Che, however, did not share this delight; his expression was like he'd just eaten shit.

He stared at Gu Mian's face in astonishment, subconsciously taking a few steps back. Realizing he wasn't dreaming, Coach Che immediately turned and walked away. After a short distance, he seemed to remember something, turned back, quickly snatched up the file that had fallen on the ground, and then ran off.

Keke, who was closest to Gu Mian, saw his friendly smile and followed his gaze, only to see a hurriedly departing figure.

Keke had never seen Coach Che, but she realized that Gu Mian seemed to know this NPC.

After Coach Che left, Gu Mian turned back to examine his surroundings in the courtroom.

The light overhead shone brightly, illuminating every corner of the hall.

This was a courtroom of about two hundred square meters. Half of it was a spectator gallery, currently empty. The other half was designated for the judge and the prisoner.

There were two doors. The larger one, for spectators to enter and exit, was opposite Gu Mian, behind the spectator gallery. This door was wide open, with a circular clock hanging above it. Gu Mian saw the time was now 12:03; they should have entered the instance at 12:00.

The other, smaller door was located diagonally behind the judge's bench, used by the judge, assistants, and staff. Mr. Green had just run out through this door.

Gu Mian was sitting at the judge's bench, a long table, with the others seated on either side of him.

A few meters in front of the judge's bench was a separate small table. A young man sat there, his wrists and ankles locked to the chair beneath him.

The young man sat silently with his head lowered. Gu Mian's gaze shifted from his face to the small copper plaque on the table in front of him, which stated the young man's identity: "Prisoner."

In front of the several players were also copper plaques indicating their identities. Gu Mian reached out and picked up the plaque in front of him.

It read, "Judge." Gu Mian looked at the small plaque in his hand. The instance mentioned that each team would have only one judge, and the remaining three would be assistants.

With this in mind, he turned to look at the plaques of the others. Keke was seated to his left. Her plaque read, "Assistant Keke."

Did they add names too?

He then looked to Xie Bi'an on his other side. Xie Bi'an was next to him on the right, and his plaque read, "Assistant Xie Bi'an."

Gu Mian looked past Xie Bi'an, intending to see Chu Changge's plaque to the right, but instead saw that the plaque of the person to Xie Bi'an's right read "Assistant Bai Lu."

What's going on? Did Chu Changge change his name?

Confused, he looked up at the person seated to Xie Bi'an's right. It wasn't Chu Changge, but a woman in a white shirt.

Did Chu Changge change gender?

Still skeptical, he opened the player's panel and confirmed that this was indeed not Chu Changge, but a female player named Bai Lu.

Other than the "Prisoner" not far away, they were the only four in the courtroom. Apparently, they were one group.

Keke also noticed Chu Changge's absence. She glanced around. "Mr. Chu might have been split into another group."

The female player named Bai Lu also looked surprised; she clearly hadn't expected to be grouped with three strangers. Judging from her expression, Gu Mian guessed she had also entered the instance with teammates.

Interesting. Gu Mian rubbed his chin. "By putting players who entered the instance together into different groups, is it intending to pit players against each other, just like in the 'Close Your Eyes' instance..."

At this moment, the young female player spoke, her greeting hesitant, "Um... well, hello."

She had entered this instance with her friends. She hadn't expected to open her eyes and find them gone, replaced by three strangers. It seemed the instance had shuffled and regrouped everyone. Being matched with unfamiliar players was one thing, but the more she looked, the more abnormal these players seemed. The player closest to her was shrouded entirely in a black robe, completely covered from head to toe. This person hadn't made a sound since the instance began, and Bai Lu couldn't even tell if they were male or female. Their Player Panel showed a red "Anonymous," which felt ominous. Fortunately, the copper plaque in front of this person had a name: "Xie Bi'an." Hmm, Bai Wuchang's name. Bai Lu felt even more uneasy. To the left of this player named "Xie Bi'an" was a handsome... doctor? At least, his nickname suggested so; the green word "Doctor" floated above his head. Bai Lu wondered if she'd eaten some poisonous mushrooms; why else would she be seeing players' nicknames in different colors? Besides the bright green "Doctor" nickname, the player's white coat also indicated his profession. However, she'd never seen a doctor so passionate about music; he carried a huge guitar case on his back, looking like he was ready for an impromptu performance at any moment. Furthermore, this doctor seemed to have a habit of stroking his chin and muttering to himself. His chin was indeed handsome, but did he really need to keep touching it? The player farthest from her was also female. Compared to the other two, this one seemed much more normal, with a normal-colored nickname and standard attire. She looked like a regular player, very young, probably only seventeen or eighteen. This normal-looking player was chatting familiarly with the Doctor, indicating they had entered the instance together.

Just then, the female player named Keke noticed her gaze and looked over. Bai Lu immediately offered a friendly smile.

However, the female player blinked, a frightened expression spreading across her face before she shrank behind the Doctor.

Then, Bai Lu heard Keke saying in a pitiful voice, "Doctor, I'm scared."

That expression, that tone... Well, she seems to be a Lv Cha!

Bai Lu's mouth twitched. It seemed she was the only normal person in this group!

Gu Mian silently watched Keke shrink back beside him. He'd forgotten Keke's established persona in instances was that of a Chu Chu pitiful Xiao Bai flower, fond of playing the innocent to ambush others, using perceived weakness to her advantage. Having gotten used to her normal demeanor, hearing her speak in such a tone now was surprisingly hard to bear.

"AHEM, hello," Gu Mian coughed a couple of times, returning the unfamiliar player's greeting.

Keke also leaned her head out from behind him, replying to Bai Lu in a soft voice, "Hello."

Xie Bi'an also turned his hooded face towards Bai Lu and greeted her in a gentle voice, "Hello."

Hearing Xie Bi'an's voice, Bai Lu paused for a moment. His voice is really nice, she thought.

After only a moment of appreciation, she refocused and looked at the three in front of her. "Did you also enter this instance with friends?"

Gu Mian put down the plaque in his hand. "The three of us came together."

Bai Lu nearly choked. The three weirdos are together...

"Birds of a feather flock together, huh?" she muttered.

Gu Mian didn't catch what she was mumbling. "What did you say?"

"Nothing, nothing," Bai Lu quickly waved her hand. "I also entered with a friend, but it seems we were separated."

As she spoke, she glanced around again, discerning no sign of other players.

"There must be more than one courtroom here." Gu Mian looked at the open door on the opposite side, which led to a wide corridor. Tilting his head slightly, he could see windows along the corridor. Outside, large clouds drifted across a pale blue sky, pushed gently by the wind.

He retracted his gaze. "I guess there are at least three courtrooms. You should be able to find your teammate after we leave here."

There were twelve players, four to a group, so there had to be at least three courtrooms.

Bai Lu nodded. Even though her teammate wasn't here, the instance had to continue. She glanced at the prisoner in the room and said softly, "The task is to make a correct judgment within three days. I presume that means judging him, right?"

The courtroom in this instance wasn't exactly like one in real life. Although Bai Lu had never worked in a court, she'd seen trials in TV dramas.

Gu Mian also looked at the prisoner in front of him. "There's no plaintiff, no defendant, no lawyer, and no audience..."

Keke added from the side, "Not even a case file."

Gu Mian suddenly realized something and looked back at the small door behind him.

"Yeah," Bai Lu said, looking at the empty table before her, perplexed. "If we're to make a judgment, they have to tell us what happened, right? But there's no background information here."

The case background was probably taken by Coach Che when he fled. Gu Mian suspected Coach Che was supposed to be the Guiding NPC in this instance, meant to brief them on the case. But upon seeing Gu Mian, Coach Che had been overjoyed—so overjoyed he'd ecstatically run away. He guessed the players in the other two courtrooms had already started getting briefed on their cases by NPCs, while the four of them were left here, clueless.

Xie Bi'an's voice suddenly came from beneath his cloak, "The task is to make a judgment within three days, so we're not rushed. I remember the instance also mentioned we need to find evidence, right? Find evidence, then make the judgment, and we can leave the instance."

"And after making a judgment, we must adjourn the court before we can leave," Gu Mian added.

"So we don't have to stay here," Keke said, looking at the young man in the middle of the courtroom. "We can find clues and evidence outside first, then come back to judge him."

Bai Lu nodded. "Right, we first need to know what case we're judging. This instance seems hard. I thought we just had to deliver a verdict, but I didn't expect we'd have to investigate the case ourselves."

Actually, they probably just needed to judge, but the Guiding NPC had run off with the case file.

As he thought this, he picked up the small gavel in front of him. It was on the judge's desk; the other players didn't have one.

Gu Mian had seen judges preside in court on TV. They would bang a small gavel on the desk to announce the verdict.

He was eager to try the gavel. A bold idea popped into his mind. "I have a great idea to get us all out of here right now."

Upon hearing his words, everyone turned to look at him.

Gu Mian raised the gavel. "I'll just find him guilty right now, adjourn the court, and we can exit the instance. Wouldn't that be splendid?"

Bai Lu's eyes widened; she was at a loss, unable to determine whether he was joking or serious.

"Wait, wait," Keke quickly grabbed his arm. "Doctor, please calm down."

Chapter 654 Bring it on, you_1

When Chu Changge arrived at the entrance of Gu Mian's courtroom, he was met with a chaotic scene.

Gu Mian was holding aloft the small mallet unique to a judge, looking as if he was about to deliver a verdict.

Keke clung tightly to his arm, trying to prevent him from getting too agitated.

Xie Bi'an sat to one side, looking up at Gu Mian, a mocking smile seemingly hidden beneath his black robe.

Another unfamiliar female player stood with her hands braced on the table, apparently considering whether to grab Gu Mian around the waist.

The judge's bench was in turmoil, yet the prisoner sat quietly behind a table, seemingly indifferent to their judgment.

Just as Gu Mian raised the mallet to nudge Keke aside, he heard Chu Changge's voice from behind him. "What are you all doing?"

He turned to look and saw Chu Changge, who had somehow appeared by the small door next to the judge's bench, silently observing them.

Behind Chu Changge stood three other people—two men and a woman—apparently players from his group.

These individuals were currently staring at Gu Mian and Keke with peculiar expressions, as if suspecting this instance had matched them with a pair of lunatics.

Before Gu Mian could speak, Bai Lu from his side was the first to call out to the newcomers at the entrance, "Chu Chu!"

Good grief, was she calling Chu Changge? Gu Mian wondered.

Then, he saw Bai Lu run over to a woman standing behind Chu Changge. "Chu Chu, I knew you'd be nearby too!"

So, she wasn't calling Chu Changge, Gu Mian realized.

He glanced at the female player's nickname: "Qiao Chuchu Wind Snow Mountain Temple."

That name... A fan of Xiao Qiao?

He also noted the nicknames of the other two male players: "Yan Shuang Fei" and "Li Yuan."

Looking at the chaos at Gu Mian's judge's stand, Chu Changge pushed up his glasses, a sudden realization dawning on him. "Don't you have a Guiding NPC?"

"A Guiding NPC?" Bai Lu looked at Chu Changge incredulously. Such a thing exists?

Chu Changge glanced at her. "It's the NPC who explains the case details and gives you the case file. It seems you haven't met him."

Hearing this, Bai Lu turned to Chu Chu with a surprised expression. "Does your group have one?"

Chu Chu also looked somewhat troubled. "Don't you?"

We did have one, Gu Mian quietly put down the mallet. But he bolted.

Fortunately, Chu Changge hadn't suffered the same misfortune. He took out a small notebook and handed it to Gu Mian. "After I realized we weren't in the same group, I anticipated you might run into this, so I jotted down a few points the NPC mentioned. However, you'll still need to find your own case file."

What a great teammate, Gu Mian thought.

He took the pink, cutesy cartoon notebook from Chu Changge. This aesthetic must be Fatty's handiwork, he guessed.

He opened the cover, which was printed with small white flowers, revealing pages filled with neat handwriting.

Gu Mian read it softly:

"Within three days, the judge must pass judgment on the prisoner, declaring them guilty or not guilty. Once the judge has delivered the verdict and adjourned the court, their group of players will be considered to have completed the task and will leave the instance;

"Players may go out to find evidence of the prisoner's guilt or innocence. The judge can make a judgment based on the evidence, and only the judge can make a judgment;

"The judge can ignore evidence when making a judgment. If the judge declares someone guilty, they are guilty; if declared innocent, they are innocent;

"Throughout the duration of the instance, players can enter or leave the courtroom at any time and can return to the courtroom to make a judgment at any time."

That's quite a lot of information, Gu Mian mused, fiddling with the pink, floral-printed notebook. "Only the judge can make a judgment, and after the judgment, you can leave the instance. Does this mean the judge is guaranteed to survive until the end?"

He didn't think the instance would be so kind to him.

Yet there was another possibility.

"Or perhaps the 'Judge' role itself is a trap designed to push players into a dead end. If the ghost kills the 'Judge,' then that Judge's group immediately hits a dead end. With no one left to make a judgment, once time is up, everyone in that group fails the task and dies," Chu Changge suggested.

Bai Lu felt a chill run down her spine upon hearing this. If that's the case, the ghost would only need to kill one judge, and the remaining three people in that group wouldn't survive either.

As she processed this, she looked at the Doctor with the vibrant green hair. We have to protect him, no matter what, she resolved.

"Of course, this is just speculation. We've only just entered the instance and don't have many clues," Chu Changge said, pushing up his glasses slightly.

Bai Lu sensed a familiar tone in their exchange. She looked at Gu Mian, then at Chu Changge. "Did you two know each other before?"

Gu Mian nodded slightly. "Yes, the four of us entered this instance together."

He lowered his head again to look at the notebook. "The rule says, 'If the judge declares someone guilty, they are guilty; if declared innocent, they are innocent.' And 'The judge can pass judgment on the prisoner at any time.' This means as soon as a judge enters the instance, they can make a decision. Guess right, and we all continue to suffer; guess wrong, and we all die with smiles on our faces."

Hearing Gu Mian's words, Keke flinched. It's true, most people alive right now are indeed suffering, she thought.

Chu Changge hummed in agreement but didn't comment on Gu Mian's two idioms. "It seems so for now. Players need to make the correct judgment. A wrong judgment will most likely result in the entire group dying."

Hearing this, Gu Mian picked up his little mallet again.

Bai Lu was terrified that this Doctor, shouting the famous catchphrase of a certain Host Lu—"I don't believe!"—would then slam the gavel down.

Luckily, he didn't.

Gu Mian thought of Coach Che, still at large, and put the mallet down again.

"So, what we need to do now is find out the truth of the case, right?" Li Yuan, a male player from Chu Changge's group, stepped forward. "If the prisoner is innocent, we must clear his name. If he's guilty and deserves it, then we sentence him as guilty."

"In theory, yes," Chu Changge summarized. "Find the truth and make the correct judgment to live. Otherwise, you die."

"By the way, are you the judge in your group?" Gu Mian handed the notebook back to Chu Changge.

Chu Changge reached out and took it. "Yes."

"How did you find our courtroom then?"

"After the NPC left, we moved around freely and found many courtrooms on this floor. I guessed you might be in one of them, so we checked them one by one," Chu Changge said, tucking the pink notebook back into his pocket.

Gu Mian watched the corner of the pink cover peeking out from Chu Changge's pocket. "Didn't you run into the other group?"

"We found your group first. There are still many courtrooms we haven't entered," Chu Changge replied, seemingly not intending to look for the other group.

It was the two male players from his group who spoke up.

The player named Yan Shuang Fei stepped forward. "Li Yuan and I entered the instance together. There's another male player with us named... 'Twist Off Your Head.' He should be in the other group, and we want to find him."

Twist Off Your Head... Gu Mian mused. Violent, and very much my style. I like it.

Chu Changge didn't seem too concerned about his group members. He glanced at the two. "Do as you please."

Yan Shuang Fei and Li Yuan exchanged a look, then asked, "Aren't you coming with us?"

People could actually die in this instance.

They didn't dare to go off as just a pair.

What if they split up and immediately ran into a ghost that killed them?

Chu Changge ignored them, turning instead to look at the prisoner in the middle of the courtroom.

The two looked awkward and glanced at the others. Bai Lu and Chu Chu were already huddled together, clearly uninterested in searching for another group's teammate.

Xie Bi'an kept his head covered and rarely spoke.

Keke didn't plan to leave Gu Mian; staying with him would greatly increase her chances of survival.

Gu Mian lowered his voice to ask Chu Changge, "Have you seen Coach Che?"

Chu Changge realized something. "Was he the Guiding NPC for your courtroom?"

Gu Mian nodded slightly.

"No wonder," Chu Changge mused, looking up. "Even if Gu Mian is terrifying, I thought, he wouldn't go so far as to scare an NPC away. But if it was him, then it's understandable. After all, you've tormented him many times."

"Our case file is with him; he took off with it," Gu Mian frowned. "Keke and the others are here. I can't just make a random judgment."

I don't know what the death mechanism in this instance is. If it's ghosts killing people, that's one thing. But if a wrong judgment leads to forced elimination, that would be bad.

"Let's go find Coach Che first. He shouldn't have left this building," Chu Changge said softly.

Indeed, Coach Che hadn't left. He was hiding in a bathroom.

Gu Mian had long since inflicted significant psychological trauma on him. Now, the mere sight of a doctor, anyone surnamed Gu, or even a guitar, would make him reflexively fearful.

Who would have thought this instance would deliver Gu Mian straight to him, causing his composure to shatter completely.

At this moment, he was huddled in a corner, clutching the case file. What will my next job be? he wondered miserably.

Gu Mian was always adept at finding traces of ghosts within instances.

He knew ghosts often lurked in bathrooms. Perhaps Coach Che has similar tendencies, he mused, so he decided to check the bathrooms first.

Surprisingly, he immediately found his target, shivering in the last stall.

When Gu Mian hauled him up from the toilet, Coach Che, still clutching the case file, let out a desperate wail. "Must you torment me so relentlessly!"

Chapter 655 'Take' _1

"Hand it over," Gu Mian snatched the papers from Coach Che's hand. "You run every time you see me. Is it really that amusing?"

Held aloft, Coach Che shut his eyes in resignation.

Holding the dossier in one hand, Gu Mian passed Coach Che to the nearby Chu Changge. "Hold him for me for a second."

Chu Changge expressionlessly took Coach Che from Gu Mian.

Only then did Gu Mian begin to focus on the case file.

At this point, the other players were peering around the restroom door.

They had only seen both judges enter the restroom, followed by the sounds of wails and sobbing.

"What are they doing in there?" Bai Lu asked, a peculiar expression on her face.

The Doctor claimed to be fetching the Guiding NPC, yet he took another team's judge into the restroom and then made strange noises.

If it weren't for the fact that they had entered the men's restroom, Bai Lu would have rushed in to see what was going on.

Li Yuan hesitated for a moment, then asked, "Should I go in and check?"

Their team's judge is in there; it wouldn't be good if something happened.

However, Keke was blocking the men's restroom door, apparently determined not to let anyone in.

Fortunately, the noises from inside didn't last long, and soon they saw the two judges emerge, one after the other.

Gu Mian walked in front, holding a relatively thin case file.

Bai Lu's eyes brightened upon seeing the file in Gu Mian's hand. "Is that the case file? Did you really find it in the restroom?"

Chu Changge followed Gu Mian, his hand clutching a peaceful-looking individual.

When they saw this stranger, the players cautiously stepped back, then tried to pull up his player panel. Unable to do so, Li Yuan hesitantly asked, "NPC?"

Hearing someone call his name, Coach Che briefly glanced at them before lowering his head again.

The players were immediately puzzled; this was the first time they had encountered such a dispirited NPC.

"This is our Guiding NPC," Gu Mian said, pushing Coach Che forward and handing the case file to Keke.

Bai Lu looked Coach Che up and down, then decided to look at the case file Keke was holding.

"On June 3rd, at 10:00 PM, a brutal murder occurred at Ping'an Apartment in Dianxin District, resulting in two deaths and one minor injury."

"The suspect, Yuan Haotian, armed with a kitchen knife, broke into the victims' home, hacking Zhang Shengli and Cao Deren to death. While Yuan Haotian was attacking them, another victim, Li Shu, rushed out of the room shouting for help. This alerted the neighbors, who then worked together to subdue the suspect."

"Suspect Yuan Haotian has been detained in the 'Screaming Court,' awaiting judgment."

"The bodies of Zhang Shengli and Cao Deren have been sent to the morgue at Dianxin Hospital."

"The survivor, Li Shu, has been sent to Dianxin Hospital for treatment."

That was the summary of the case—just a few sentences, not very detailed.

"Looking at this, there are still some questionable points," Bai Lu said, having read the brief account. "Three victims, two died on the spot, and the remaining one only sustained minor injuries. If Yuan Haotian is truly innocent, then this Li Shu is highly suspicious."

"You also need to pay attention to something else," Gu Mian, who had already read the case file, interjected. "Of the three people, two died on the spot. The remaining one might also be dead."

"What?" Bai Lu looked up, baffled. "You mean Li Shu is an imposter?"

"No, he might not know he's dead." Gu Mian recalled the amnesia instance. "I entered an instance before where there was a ghost who had forgotten she was dead. She had no killing power when she had amnesia, but once she remembered she was a ghost..."

"That instance would also trick players, making them believe that helping her regain her memory was the way to survive. In the end, it successfully conned and killed many people."

"Good heavens, that instance was really twisted," Bai Lu shivered.

"Of course, Li Shu's death is just my hypothesis. You can continue reading," Gu Mian said with a shrug.

Keke reached out to flip through the case file in her hand.

The following pages contained personal information about the suspect and the victims.

"Suspect: Yuan Haotian, male, 26 years old. Residential address: Apartment 1302, Unit 2, Building 13, Dayang Garden, Dianxin District."

"Victim: Li Shu, male, 24 years old. Residential address: Apartment 501, Unit 1, Building 5, Ping'an Apartment, Dianxin District."

"Victim: Zhang Shengli, male, 30 years old. Residential address: Apartment 501, Unit 1, Building 5, Ping'an Apartment, Dianxin District."

"Victim: Cao Deren, male, 29 years old. Residential address: Apartment 501, Unit 1, Building 5, Ping'an Apartment, Dianxin District."

There wasn't much written on the few pages, just this information.

Looking at the case file, which she had now flipped to the end, Bai Lu frowned. "To find clues, we should still check the crime scene. I wonder if there are any surveillance cameras in the victims' building corridor. To find the truth, it's best to look at any available footage first."

Gu Mian, however, was stroking his chin. "I want to go to the morgue first... or rather, to Dianxin Hospital to check on the survivor's condition. If you want to look at the crime scene footage first, we can split up."

Are you kidding me? Bai Lu thought. Even back when instances didn't involve real death, I wouldn't have dared to split up. Now that the death protection mechanism is off, I'd be even less inclined to do something so reckless.

"Sure, sure," Bai Lu waved her hand. "Let's go to the hospital first. After that, we can look for the footage."

Gu Mian nodded and looked at Chu Changge. "What case are you handling?"

Light from the window reflected in Chu Changge's eyes. "A young man killed a woman in her sixties. That's the case I'm assigned to."

He really is as concise as ever, Gu Mian thought.

"Where are you planning to go first?" Gu Mian asked.

"To the hospital."

"Dianxin Hospital?"

"Mm-hmm."

Is Chu Changge's case also connected to Dianxin Hospital? Gu Mian wondered, frowning.

Soon, a remark from one of Chu Changge's teammates answered Gu Mian's question.

The player named Yan Shuang Fei suddenly spoke up, "Judge, isn't our case completely unrelated to Dianxin Hospital? Neither the suspect nor the victim went to that hospital. If I recall correctly, the words 'Dianxin Hospital' don't appear anywhere in our case file!"

Chu Changge pushed up his glasses. "That's right."

Yan Shuang Fei continued to ask, puzzled, "Then are you going to that hospital because you found some hidden clues, Judge?"

"No." Chu Changge's denial was blunt.

Hearing this blunt denial, a strange expression appeared on Yan Shuang Fei's face. "Judge, you're not going there just because Gu Mian is, are you?"

This is an instance where we can actually die! Why would any player abandon investigating their own case to just wander around with another group? And he's a judge, no less!

Chu Changge seemed to have run out of patience; he didn't respond to Yan Shuang Fei.

Bai Lu and Chu Chu also had somewhat strange expressions on their faces. Although they had a good relationship, it was unthinkable for them to abandon their own cases to wander around with the other.

Keke, however, wasn't surprised. She knew that as long as she followed Gu Mian, barring any special circumstances, she definitely wouldn't die.

Gu Mian's presence was like a safe zone. But Chu Changge didn't seem like the type to freeload off a safe zone.

Gu Mian also felt Chu Changge was acting a bit strange. Ever since the Circus Dungeon ended, he'd sensed a peculiar incongruity about Chu Changge, though he couldn't quite put his finger on what it was.

It wasn't until just now, when he heard Chu Changge say he wanted to come along, that Gu Mian finally realized what that incongruity was. Clinginess. Chu Changge had been a bit clingy lately. Previously, Chu Changge might not have shown his face even once throughout an entire instance. He was always off in some unknown, dark corner, attending to his own business. But now, he was tagging along so eagerly. Was he possessed by Xiao Hong?

Gu Mian heard Xie Bi'an, who was off to the side, let out a chuckle. His voice was somewhat cold as he said, "No need to worry about me. I won't do anything."

What is he suddenly talking about? The other players thought, turning to look at him in confusion.

Xie Bi'an lightly leaned against the wall and fell silent.

Is Chu Changge worried Xie Bi'an will do something? Gu Mian mused.

Just then, Chu Changge, who was in front of him, suddenly stepped back and said, "You guys go ahead."

He seemed to have changed his mind about coming along.

Gu Mian nodded, then swiftly grabbed Coach Che, who was attempting to sneak away. "Keep in touch through the group chat."

With that, he led the pale-faced Coach Che away.

After bidding Chu Chu farewell, Bai Lu trotted after Gu Mian's group. "Will our Guiding NPC stay with us the whole time? I notice Keke's team doesn't seem to have one."

Gu Mian concocted a reason that played up Coach Che's supposed handsomeness and kind heart. "To make up for disappearing at the beginning, he has decided to stay with us for this entire instance."

The truth, of course, was different; he had forcibly detained Coach Che.

"Oh, I see," Bai Lu nodded hesitantly. "I didn't expect NPCs in these instances to be so... considerate."

The 'considerate' Coach Che managed a stiff smile.

Gu Mian's first stop was Dianxin Hospital. Since it wasn't nearby, they hailed two cabs.

Bai Lu was reluctant to take separate cabs. Danger could pop up anywhere in an instance, especially if they split up.

However, five people and a guitar couldn't fit into one taxi. Since they couldn't find a tractor or a large truck that could carry passengers, they had no choice but to split into two groups.

Gu Mian, Coach Che, Keke, and the guitar were in one car.

Xie Bi'an and Bai Lu were in the other.

Before getting in, Bai Lu carefully scrutinized their driver. Only after confirming there was nothing abnormal did she dare to enter the car, much to the driver's confusion.

In the other car, Gu Mian had already begun his interrogation of Coach Che.

Keke sat in the front passenger seat, while Gu Mian and Coach Che were in the back, making the questioning more convenient.

Gu Mian didn't waste time on pleasantries and got straight to the point. "Besides the Circus Dungeon, what other instances do you know of that have high-level NPCs?"

At these words, Coach Che's eyes rolled back in his head as he began to pray for his fellow NPCs.

Chapter 656 Kill the Donkey after Removing its Grinding Plate, Gu Bong Bong_1

"Human Coffin"

"No.7 Psychological Counseling Center"

"Evil Ghost Puzzle"

"Heart-throbbing Moment with 100 Corpses"

"Devil"

"Bus 444"

"Grudge Returns"

These were the instance names blurted out by Coach Che under Gu Mian's coercion.

"That's all I know—I swear I don't know any more. Please, don't come looking for me again!" Coach Che buried his head in his hands and shrank into the corner of the vehicle, clearly desperate to jump out and escape.

The driver at the steering wheel occasionally glanced back at the two passengers in the rearview mirror.

The things they were discussing—something about coffins, evil ghosts, and corpses—were sending chills down his spine.

Noticing the driver's confusion, Keke explained, "They're supernatural authors discussing their plots."

"Oh, is that so," the driver said, nodding. He then pressed down harder on the accelerator.

"Supernatural authors are certainly an odd bunch. Last year, I drove three of them. They wanted to go to a haunted house in the middle of the night, said they were 'gathering material' or something."

Keke, curious about what happened next, asked, "Did they make it back safely?"

"No idea," the driver said, shaking his head. "I only drove them there. I didn't drive them back."

Gu Mian wasn't listening to the driver's story about the three supernatural authors. His focus was on the list of instances Coach Che had rattled off. The name "Bus 444" sounded familiar—it was that special instance he'd "killed" on New Year's Eve.

Had I unknowingly brushed shoulders with so many high-level NPCs...?

Aside from asking about instances with high-level NPCs, Gu Mian had other questions. He grabbed the trembling Coach Che and lowered his voice, "Mr. Green told me you know the secrets of this game. Spit it out, and I promise I won't bother you again."

Damn it! Coach Che's eyes widened in fury. So it was that little brat Xiao Lv who led Gu Mian here? Pah! That damn traitor!

"Stop playing dumb," Gu Mian said, patting Coach Che's head affectionately. "Out with it."

Coach Che flinched, wanting to retreat, but Gu Mian had a firm grip on his collar. He could only maintain a ridiculous pose, hands braced behind him, body leaning back.

Hearing that Mr. Green had sold him out, much of Coach Che's defiant spirit evaporated. He stole a glance at Gu Mian and, in an extremely low voice, began, "I do know some things... As you know, we are all people from a Low-Dimensional World. We are intelligent and powerful, dedicated to consuming higher dimensions..."

His tone, as he said this, actually became proud.

Noticing Gu Mian's smile growing increasingly unsettling, Coach Che quickly switched back to a serious tone. "We are dedicated to consuming higher dimensions. Before the global game began, we had almost succeeded."

So, the global game was Earth's attempt to save itself?

Gu Mian pondered the connection between high-dimensional and Low-Dimensional Worlds. "Logically, a Low-Dimensional World shouldn't be able to threaten a high-dimensional one. How did you almost succeed?"

Coach Che didn't seem very clear on the details himself. He frowned in thought. "It's said that someone discovered the secret of dimension exchange..."

Dimension exchange? To swap Earth into a lower dimension and the instance worlds into a higher one?

Is such a thing even possible?

"But dimensional exchange seems to only average the two dimensions. It makes Earth descend slightly and us ascend slightly, until we become the same dimension. Later, they used that secret to erode the higher dimension, allowing our Low-Dimensional World to nearly land on Earth," Coach Che finished, looking at Gu Mian sincerely. "That's all I know."

Gu Mian had no intention of letting him off so easily. He posed a tricky question: "Do you know why my luck is so bad?"

At first, Coach Che was taken aback. For a moment, he thought Gu Mian was asking a rhetorical question. Seeing Gu Mian's serious face, he realized it was a genuine inquiry.

"This, this..." Coach Che was in a bind. He originally wanted to say, It's definitely because you've killed too many! But the words died on his lips. A few drops of sweat beaded on his forehead, and in the end, he could only purse his lips and shake his head.

"Alright." Seeing that Coach Che genuinely seemed clueless, Gu Mian changed the question. "Why is the quality of your instances so poor? They fall apart at the slightest touch."

What kind of question is that?

Is that what you call 'falling apart at the slightest touch'?

You're the one who goes on a rampage inside, has your wild fun, and then, once you're satisfied, you tear down the instance like killing the donkey after it's done its grinding!

Coach Che considered himself to have met many scumbags, but absolutely none could compare to Gu Mian—freeloading and then complaining about the quality!

Pulling up his pants and pretending not to know anyone—Gu Mian was the master of that!

Gu Mian didn't know that in Coach Che's mind, he had already become a scumbag who'd hit it and quit it. He only saw Coach Che's face alternating between red and white, as if he had suffered a great injustice.

"What's with that expression? It's as if I did something to you," Gu Mian said, leaning slightly closer to Coach Che, who was still tilted backward.

Coach Che shuddered violently and quickly answered Gu Mian's previous question: "Our instances aren't poor quality! The quality is top-notch! As for why they collapse... you should be asking yourself that! What kind of person are you, collapsing so many of our instances? You're not some kind of bioweapon created by Earth, are you?!"

Gu Mian never imagined that just by entering an instance, he'd become a bioweapon.

And Keke, in the front, also turned her head to look at Gu Mian, seemingly in full agreement with Coach Che's bioweapon theory.

The driver laughed awkwardly. "You supernatural authors really know how to get into character, hahaha..."

How are these supernatural authors all like lunatics?

Dianxin Hospital was fast approaching. The driver stepped on the gas again; he wanted to get these people to their destination as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, Gu Mian was still taking advantage of the time to play a question-and-answer game with Coach Che.

"Can the global game prevent the low-dimension invasion?"

"It probably couldn't have originally," Coach Che said, shrinking his neck and glaring at Gu Mian. "But throwing you in might just do the trick."

Gu Mian: "..."

"What's the current situation?"

"What?" Coach Che didn't quite understand Gu Mian's meaning.

"Earth and your Low-Dimensional World are fighting, aren't they? What's the war situation?" Gu Mian explained.

Coach Che shrank his neck even further. "This... I really don't know..."

As he was shrinking his neck, he saw Gu Mian take out a ticket. Coach Che looked closely and saw five large characters written on it—"Dungeon Entry Ticket."

Seeing this cursed Dungeon Entry Ticket, Coach Che quickly changed his tune. "Our Low-Dimensional World is probably gaining the upper hand. Not long ago, I heard someone say that 'landing' isn't far off. Quick, put that ticket away and go find another high-level NPC! Don't waste it on me!"

"After the Low-Dimensional World 'lands,' what will happen to Earth?" Gu Mian actually wouldn't mind if Earth exploded, but it wouldn't be good if he accidentally got killed in the blast.

Coach Che thought for a moment. "A part of it will collapse, right? Because a part of it needs to accommodate us from the Low-Dimensional World, so a part will collapse."

Gu Mian showed a regretful expression.

Coach Che shivered. What's with that look of regret that Earth didn't explode! What on earth are you thinking?!

At this moment, the taxi stopped at a red light.

Their destination was just past this intersection. Gu Mian could already see the hospital, sprawling on the ground ahead, through the car window.

"One last question." He looked at Coach Che, a cheerful expression on his face. "Which instance are you planning to find your next job in?"

Coach Che: "???"

"Are you even human?!" he finally burst out.

Chapter 657 Wandering Car_1

Of course, Gu Mian was only trying to scare Coach Che.

Once his value in this instance is squeezed dry, who would care where he goes in the next instance?

Seeing the panic on Coach Che's face, Gu Mian leaned back against his seat in good humor.

Seeing the smile on Gu Mian's face, Coach Che realized he had been tricked.

But so what if he tricked me? Can I actually hit him with my already clenched fists? No, Coach Che didn't dare.

He could only clench his fists tightly and cower in the corner of the backseat, already planning his next clandestine job.

As he thought about it, Coach Che suddenly felt a wave of sadness.

I probably won't be able to find another job, he worried.

My three adorable little Spirit Cars are still at the auto repair shop, crying out for attention...

Just then, Gu Mian's voice suddenly sounded from the side, "Oh, right, I forgot to tell you something."

What? Coach Che looked at Gu Mian cautiously, hesitating for a moment before asking, "Good news or bad news?"

Gu Mian raised an eyebrow. "One good, one bad."

Coach Che hesitated, wondering whether to hear the good news or the bad news first.

But Gu Mian didn't give him a choice, announcing directly, "The good news is you don't have to keep working to repair your cars."

Hearing this, Coach Che looked up, stunned. Could it be that the instance had taken pity on him and repaired his cars? Could he go back to being an NPC in his special instance?

At this thought, he grew excited, a blissful expression spreading across his face.

Then, Gu Mian announced the bad news: "Because they've all been sent to the junkyard. You can continue to wander."

Coach Che's eyes rolled back, and he fainted.

Keke, sitting in the front passenger seat, felt a little guilty. So the ambulance she scavenged in the junkyard belonged to this poor NPC...

She remembered seeing a note on the windshields of those vehicles: "I've temporarily left these cars at this repair shop. I'll come back to fix them once I have the money. Please don't tow them away. —Coach Che"

But in the end, all three vehicles had ended up in the junkyard.

Just looking at those few lines, one could tell it was a tragic story.

The taxi passed through the traffic lights and slowly pulled over to the side of the road.

"Dianxin Hospital, we're here," the driver said, turning to look at the unconscious Coach Che. "Um... you've arrived. You can wake him up now."

In the end, Coach Che was dragged out of the car by Gu Mian.

When the hospital doctors saw Gu Mian, dressed in a white coat, carrying a person into the hospital, they assumed this doctor had picked up a patient who had suffered sudden cardiac death on the street.

With Keke and Bai Lu's help, Gu Mian and the others quickly found Li Shu's hospital room.

His room was at the far west end of the ninth floor, opposite the stairwell.

It was clear that the people in this city were quite healthy; there weren't many people in the hospital, and Li Shu occupied an entire room by himself.

Probably for ventilation, most of the ward doors were open.

When Gu Mian reached the doorway, he saw a young man quietly leaning against the bed in the middle of the room, head lowered as he read a book in his hands. The midday sun was intense and bright, practically engulfing the entire ward. Sunlight poured onto the book in the young man's hands, making the pages glaringly white. The young man, slightly uncomfortable, shifted his gaze from the book and then noticed the group standing at the door.

"Who are you?" The young man stroked the pages of his book, his gaze sweeping over Gu Mian's white coat. This person doesn't look like a hospital doctor, he thought. His eyes then landed on the unconscious Coach Che.

Seeing Coach Che, Li Shu seemed to understand. "From the court? A judge?"

It seemed Li Shu had been to court after the incident and had met Coach Che.

Gu Mian nodded. "Indeed, that is I."

This world sure is interesting, Gu Mian thought.

From Li Shu's reaction, it seemed it wasn't unusual for a judge to visit a victim privately.

On Earth, judges and victims rarely have private contact.

Li Shu offered them a polite smile. "The court informed me that someone might come to investigate. I will cooperate with you."

As he spoke, he closed the book in his hands and placed it on the beige bedside table. Gu Mian glanced at the cover. The title was **The Disappearing Murderer**.

The others also noticed the book's title.

Bai Lu quietly approached Gu Mian and lowered her voice, "Although I haven't read this book, it looks like a guide on how to help a murderer get away with their crime. He couldn't really be the actual culprit, could he?"

Bai Lu had previously hypothesized that Li Shu might be the actual culprit.

Now that they had come and found him reading something called **The Disappearing Murderer**, it was highly suspicious. But if he really were the murderer, would he be so blatant as to leave the book out in front of a judge?

Noticing Bai Lu's scrutinizing gaze, Li Shu pushed the book slightly in their direction. "It's just quite boring here, so I found a book to read."

His expression was so frank that Bai Lu became unsure of her suspicions.

Gu Mian glanced at the book Li Shu had pushed towards them, then looked away. He then casually tossed the unconscious Coach Che onto the vacant bed nearby.

Because it was a casual toss, Coach Che let out an unconscious groan when he hit the bed.

Li Shu looked curiously at the man in the suit lying on the adjacent bed. "What's wrong with him?"

"Motion sickness." Gu Mian didn't want to explain, so he simply made up a concise excuse.

But this excuse was far from convincing. Even Bai Lu, standing to the side, had an expression of disbelief. This was the first time she'd ever seen someone pass out from motion sickness.

Gu Mian had no intention of discussing Coach Che further. He plopped down on Li Shu's bed and began to introduce himself.

"Hello, I'm the top-performing judge in our court. I've presided over at least eighty, if not a hundred, miscarriages of justice. If your case is in my hands, you can rest assured..."

Xie Bi'an, standing to the side, let out a soft chuckle. Li Shu, on the bed, subconsciously glanced at this person who was completely covered up.

Bai Lu stiffly turned her neck. She was terrified this doctor would blurt out, 'You just wash your neck and wait for prison!'

Fortunately, Gu Mian stopped himself in time and didn't say what Bai Lu feared.

These three people—no, these four—are definitely not normal, Bai Lu thought, lumping Chu Changge in with Gu Mian's group.

Investigating a case with such a group, she felt like she wouldn't live much longer.

Li Shu's expression also grew somewhat stiff.

He shifted back slightly, trying to put some distance between himself and this judge who looked like a doctor. Once he felt the distance was safe, he looked at the others, his eyes full of questions, seemingly starting to doubt the authenticity of Gu Mian's identity.

Bai Lu quickly coughed a few times to cover for him, "He really is the most brilliant judge in our court, a genius. Haha, geniuses are always a bit... unconventional. Yes, unconventional..."

As she said this, her smile was extremely stiff, almost failing to hold.

Li Shu hesitated, then nodded, appearing to tentatively accept Bai Lu's explanation. "So that's how it is."

After introducing himself, Gu Mian, still sitting on the bed, conscientiously began his investigation. He remembered he was here to find the truth.

"I came to ask you a few questions," Gu Mian said, recalling the contents of the case file. "I've read the case report. Yuan Haotian rushed into your home and killed your two roommates. What was your relationship with Yuan Haotian? Was there any animosity between you? Why did he kill your two roommates but not you, allowing you the chance to escape and call for help?"

Li Shu lowered his head slightly.

Gu Mian's questioning is a bit insensitive, Bai Lu thought. It's cruel to directly pick at someone's wounds like that. But there's no helping it; they're just players whose lives could end at any moment. They don't have the time or inclination to offer psychological counseling to victims.

"Us and Yuan Haotian..." Li Shu answered softly, his head still lowered. "We'd met several times. A friend of mine worked in the same office as him. We first met him at a dinner party hosted by that friend. The impression Yuan Haotian gave... um, he was very reticent..."

He spoke slowly, as if searching his memories for his few encounters with Yuan Haotian. "He didn't talk much, mostly remaining silent, as if he'd suffered some kind of blow. Later, that friend told us he had recently lost his parents and younger sister in a fire."

As Li Shu said this, Xie Bi'an's black hood twitched, as if he had turned his head.

"At that time, all his relatives had died, leaving him all alone. Our friend told us that his temper had worsened since losing his family, and advised us not to provoke him."

"Of course, we wouldn't go out of our way to provoke him. But things in the world are often coincidental. Later, during the Qingming Festival, that friend's company organized a trip. It was a very affordable price for an out-of-province tour. Some people in their company didn't want to go, so they sold their spots. The three of us happened to be bored during the holiday, so we bought three spots from his colleagues."

"You can guess what happened next. We met Yuan Haotian again. That trip was to climb Wei Mountain, but for some reason, Yuan Haotian and Cao Deren started arguing during the climb..."

Cao Deren is one of the victims in this case, and the other is named Zhang Shengli, Gu Mian noted mentally.

"To this day, I still don't know what they were arguing about back then, but it was just a minor disagreement. Because Yuan Haotian's mental state wasn't quite right at the time, my friend quickly tried to smooth things over and wanted Cao Deren to apologize. But Cao Deren was stubborn too and refused to apologize, so the matter ended inconclusively."

"But I don't know if it was because of that argument, but Yuan Haotian seemed to start fixating on us. After we returned from Wei Mountain, we often ran into him."

"Sometimes, on the way to work, if we suddenly turned around at a certain moment, we'd see him following closely behind."

"Sometimes, when we ordered takeout, upon opening the door to get our food, we'd see a figure flash past in the hallway. It looked a bit like him."

"The most outrageous time was when we were using the toilet. The apartment we lived in was a mid-unit, so the toilet shared a wall with the outside corridor. For ventilation, there was a window installed on the toilet wall, more than two meters high. It could only be opened a crack about two fingers wide. Once, when Zhang Shengli was using the toilet and looked up, he saw Yuan Haotian on the other side of that two-finger gap, eyes wide, staring at him."

Hearing this, Bai Lu shivered.

Keke, very fittingly, shrank closer to Gu Mian.

Chapter 658 - Sing a Song for You, Please Listen Carefully_1

"I realized then that something was off. How could you coincidentally find someone in your own bathroom?

"I told a friend about this, one of Yuan Haotian's co-workers. After hearing the situation, he became scared too and advised us to be more cautious. He even suggested reporting it to the police.

"We wanted to avoid causing unnecessary trouble, so we thought we could wait a bit longer. If Yuan Haotian kept this behavior up after some time, we would then consider reporting it to the police.

"But before we knew it, he had burst into our home holding a knife, and killed Zhang Shengli and Cao Deren," Li Shu said, his expression sorrowful. "As for how I managed to escape, it's because I had just returned home from a night shift when the incident happened. The moment I walked through the door, I saw blood everywhere.

"Both of my friends were lying in pools of blood, and Yuan Haotian was standing near them with a knife in his hand.

"Seeing the corpses inside, my legs turned to jelly—I couldn't even muster the strength to run. So I had to crawl to the hallway and screamed for help.

"Fortunately, my neighbors hadn't gone to bed yet. As soon as they heard my voice, they came running and managed to subdue Yuan Haotian."

Despite listening to all of this, Gu Mian still couldn't figure out Yuan Haotian's motive. Keke, who was nearby, also wore an expression of deep thought, apparently trying to analyze Yuan Haotian's motivation.

The only suspicious detail was the conflict during their Wei Mountain outing, but since Li Shu didn't know why Yuan Haotian and Cao Deren had fought, this puzzle remained unsolved.

However, Gu Mian found another clue amid this conversation.

"What's the name of your friend?" Gu Mian stroked his chin. "The one who facilitated your earlier meetings with Yuan Haotian."

Upon hearing this question, Li Shu looked up at Gu Mian and, after a few seconds of silence, said, "Chen Yao."

"Where does he live? Where does he work?"

"I only know that he lives in Lvcheng Community, but I don't know his exact apartment number. He works at Fengqi Business Company, which is also where Yuan Haotian works," Li Shu replied.

"What's your relationship with Zhang Shengli and Cao Deren, and why were you living together?"

"We were roommates who met while renting the apartment."

I see, Gu Mian nodded, not pursuing this line of questioning any further. Instead, he turned the conversation towards the footage from the crime scene. "There's a camera in your hallway, right?"

Keke was close to Gu Mian, and even closer to Li Shu. She noticed that when Gu Mian mentioned the word "camera," Li Shu's expression stiffened.

"Yes," he nodded.

As if he hadn't noticed Li Shu's stiff expression, Gu Mian continued asking, "Is it broken? Can we still watch the footage?"

Li Shu slightly lowered his head, taking a while before he answered, "Yes."

It seemed as if he was somewhat resistant to them viewing the footage.

Even Bai Lu found this peculiar. Is he afraid we'll see the footage? Bai Lu frowned at Li Shu, suspecting that he might have lied in his account of the crime.

At that moment, Gu Mian suddenly stood up. "Alright, I don't have any other questions. Do any of you?"

As he spoke, he looked at the others.

Both Bai Lu and Keke shook their heads. Xie Bi'an made no move, but Gu Mian had grown accustomed to his silence and ignored him.

"Let's go back to the crime scene then." After saying this, Gu Mian turned and walked a few steps towards the door.

But after two steps, he suddenly stopped and turned. "Li Shu, could you lend us the keys to your place?"

They didn't necessarily need the keys. Gu Mian had originally intended to saw the lock off.

But that might not go over well.

Li Shu nodded, took a set of keys from the drawer in his bedside table, and gave them to Gu Mian. "You know where my place is, right?"

"Yes." Gu Mian took the keys, turned, and walked towards the door.

When he reached the doorway, he stopped and turned towards the hospital bed. "Alright, stop faking it."

Li Shu subconsciously looked at Gu Mian, only to hear a rustling sound from the bed beside him.

He turned to look and saw that the man in the suit had somehow woken up. He was grudgingly getting out of bed, mumbling something like, "What rotten luck."

After leaving the hospital room, Bai Lu finally lowered her voice and said, "This man seems really opposed to us seeing the footage from when the crime occurred."

Why, though?

What exactly was he hiding?

Was Yuan Haotian really the murderer?

Bai Lu pondered.

Gu Mian jingled the keys in his hand as they entered the elevator. "First, let's go to his house. We should be able to view the footage from that night at the property management office. Once we see the footage, we'll know what he's hiding from us."

Bai Lu nodded and followed the others into the elevator.

But, just as she was stepping into the elevator, she suddenly felt a chill at the back of her head. When she looked back, there was nothing there.

She bit her lip slightly and looked at the others in the elevator. Nearby, Keke also wore a slightly odd expression.

"Did you feel that too?" Bai Lu asked in a hushed voice.

Keke, her face pale, nodded. "It felt like there was something behind me just now."

There's a ghost here, Bai Lu was almost immediately certain.

Of course, Gu Mian didn't feel anything. He was just hoping that the elevator wouldn't suddenly get stuck.

Fortunately, his luck held. The elevator descended to the first floor without stopping.

When it reached the first floor, the elevator doors slowly opened. Gu Mian saw a few people standing outside.

Noticing the elevator opening, a slightly heavysset man wearing glasses waved to a few others not far behind him. "This elevator's down. Quick, over here!"

The others, hearing his voice, gathered around.

Bai Lu darted out as soon as the elevator door opened, seemingly wary of the chill from earlier.

Gu Mian also stepped out.

At that point, the heavysset man quickly walked over to the elevator door, using his hand to stop it from closing.

Just as Gu Mian was passing this man, Keke, who was nearby, suddenly spoke up, "Wait a moment."

As she spoke, she looked at the few people on the first floor waiting for the elevator. "Are you guys... also players?"

Could it be?

Gu Mian didn't have the habit of trying to open other people's status panels upon meeting them.

But Keke seemed to.

Upon hearing Keke's words, the people waiting also stopped and looked at Gu Mian's group. Their gazes all flickered towards their heads; Gu Mian knew they were marveling at his and Xie Bi'an's premium-looking usernames.

These four waiting for the elevator were the other group of players they had not yet met.

Two men and two women.

One was a middle-aged man in grey long-sleeves, with the username "Wang Youcai," a very ordinary name.

The other one was the heavysset man with glasses who had held the elevator door, his username was "Twist off your head," a friend of Yan Shuang Fei and Li Yuan. Gu Mian had even praised this username before.

The usernames of the two girls were "Grass Aguirre" and "Grass Vivi"; it was impressive how they had racked their brains to come up with these matching names when the global game descended.

After observing Gu Mian and his group thoroughly, these four players all had strange expressions.

They wore such expressions, firstly, because of the premium-looking font colors of Gu Mian's and Xie Bi'an's usernames.

Secondly, it was because Xie Bi'an was dressed so eccentrically.

Let alone fellow players, even NPCs in this instance couldn't help but steal a few extra glances at the black cloak.

The middle-aged man, Wang Youcai, wore an expression of wanting to say something but holding back. "You guys... uh, you're another group of players, right? Someone in your case is also hospitalized here."

It was clear he wanted to ask about their colorful usernames, but he restrained himself.

Keke, leaning close to Gu Mian, responded, "We have a surviving victim hospitalized here. You too?"

Wang Youcai nodded. "A few high school students from our case are staying here."

High school students? Keke looked at Wang Youcai in surprise.

"The murderer in our case is a man who... well, he'd divorced his wife and was in a terrible mood. He went out drinking late at night, ran into those high school students, and they got into an argument that turned into a fight," Wang Youcai explained. "Then he smashed a bottle and stabbed several students to death on the spot. The ones who managed to run away faster got injured and were admitted here."

Bai Lu listened to Wang Youcai, her mind racing. "So that's how it is. When we ran into you all here, I thought our cases might be connected somehow."

"Your case is..." Wang Youcai looked to Bai Lu.

Bai Lu then succinctly summed up their case for him.

After confirming that there really was no connection between the two cases, Wang Youcai bid farewell to Gu Mian and his group, leading his three team members onto the elevator.

Bai Lu watched them step into the elevator, looking like she wanted to say something but ultimately remained silent.

There was a ghost in the elevator.

She wasn't sure if the ghost had followed them out.

What was the trigger for the ghost to kill in this instance? Why did they suddenly feel its presence in the elevator?

Could it be that the elevator in this instance had some special property, allowing players to sense the ghost's presence?

While Bai Lu was thinking, the elevator door in front of her had already fully closed.

Until the final moment when the elevator door closed, no one inside showed any odd expressions.

Did they not sense the ghost? Or did it follow us out?

Gu Mian had no idea about the slew of thoughts racing through Bai Lu's mind. He was setting the next goal. "Let's go to the crime scene first, Li Shu's home. We'll watch the video from the night of the incident and also search his house for any clues."

The chill in the elevator had scared Bai Lu. This time, she didn't want to take separate vehicles, no matter what.

With no other choice, Gu Mian shamelessly flagged down a minivan on the street, and they all headed towards Ping'an Apartment.

It didn't take long before the five of them arrived at their destination.

Perhaps due to the instance's influence, Li Shu's home hadn't been sealed off by the police.

Gu Mian directly used the key to open the door to his home.

The room was a mess, clearly indicating a fierce struggle had taken place.

The walls were stained with relatively fresh bloodstains, and the spots where the two victims died were marked with chalk outlines of human figures.

Bai Lu saw Gu Mian, her group's 'judge,' take a particular interest in the two chalk outlines on the ground. He circled them a few times, then PLOP! He lay down right on one of them.

Chapter 659 - This Won't Get 404'd, Right? _1

Under Bai Lu's startled gaze, Gu Mian stood up. "I'm just getting a feel for it, that's all."

As he spoke, he brushed off the white coat he was wearing.

"So, did you feel anything?" Bai Lu watched Gu Mian silently.

"I felt that the floor is cold," Gu Mian responded truthfully.

Bai Lu: "..."

Coach Che had also been forcibly brought to the crime scene by Gu Mian. Currently, he was sprawled out on the couch in the living room, staring blankly at the ceiling like a soulless doll.

Sitting next to him was Xie Bi'an, who sat motionless on the couch. To an unknowing observer, he might have seemed like a mannequin someone had placed there.

Looking at her teammates, each more eccentric than the last, Bai Lu felt pessimistic about their future. As darkness began to fall, the lights had to be switched on to see clearly in the room. She didn't want to spend the night in such a place and redoubled her efforts to find clues.

Among them, only Keke was somewhat serious. She was standing outside the door, intently staring at the wall directly opposite it.

After a while, Gu Mian heard Keke's voice from outside, "Doctor, come and have a look."

Upon hearing this, Gu Mian walked out.

When he reached Keke's side, he found her observing a protruding, semi-circular black object on the wall.

"Is this... a surveillance camera?"

It doesn't look like it was installed by property management, but rather by the homeowner himself, Gu Mian thought.

The camera looked new and was aimed directly at Li Shu's front door. If the door was left open, the camera could capture the entire living room.

"Strange," Gu Mian frowned, looking at the camera installed at a height of about one and a half meters. "Normally, even if people install a camera, they put it above the door or on the hallway ceiling. This one is in such an odd place."

It seemed as if it was specifically installed to film the living room when the door was open.

"This looks like a camera Li Shu and the others who lived here installed. We should be able to find the footage from this camera in their home, right?" Keke bent slightly to examine the semi-circular camera.

"If we have the footage from this camera, we won't need to check the hallway surveillance at the property management office. This camera's footage would be much clearer than the hallway one; it can even show the inside of the house," Gu Mian said. Turning, he headed back into the house. "Let's go to the bedroom and check their computer."

Keke quickly followed Gu Mian.

She didn't dare to stay alone in the hallway for long.

What if the door suddenly SLAMMED shut? Then she'd be left alone in the hallway, she worried.

Bai Lu was already rummaging through cabinets and drawers in the room, hoping to find some useful clues.

Meanwhile, Xie Bi'an and Coach Che remained quietly on the couch like two corpses. Gu Mian really didn't understand why Xie Bi'an had come with him on this instance.

Of the three rooms, only Li Shu's had a computer.

Gu Mian pressed the computer's power button. While waiting for it to boot up, he casually picked up a photograph from the desk and examined it.

In the photo, Li Shu was smiling shyly at the camera, a grey residential building in the background.

Quiet and studious, Gu Mian thought. That was his first impression of Li Shu.

His name also played a part; it was so refined that just hearing it evoked the image of a neat, scholarly young man.

The computer finished starting up.

Li Shu hadn't set a password for his computer, so Gu Mian easily found the surveillance recordings in the files.

He moved the mouse cursor over the recording dated June 3rd and clicked to open it.

At this point, Bai Lu also stopped her search and gathered around the computer to watch the surveillance footage. She even dragged the "playing dead" Coach Che and Xie Bi'an into the room, saying they should help analyze it.

But the two of them, once in the room, merely sat on the bed in a daze, showing no signs of activity.

Seeing this, Bai Lu ignored them. She clutched something pink in her hand and stared intently at the computer. "Li Shu didn't want us to see this recording. He must be hiding something. Perhaps we can find the answer here."

She had an outlandish theory: the murderer wasn't Yuan Haotian, but the sole survivor, Li Shu.

As for why she guessed this... she didn't know.

It was just her sixth sense telling her that the prisoner in the courtroom was not the real culprit.

Because the camera was directly opposite the front door, the footage was very clear.

Gu Mian dragged the timeline slider to ten o'clock at night, the time of the incident.

The three of them huddled around the computer, their eyes fixed on the screen.

Since they didn't know the exact time Yuan Haotian had broken in, Gu Mian increased the video playback speed and sat in a chair, waiting for someone to appear.

Before long, at 10:13 p.m., a figure appeared in the footage.

The person, dressed in a black tracksuit and carrying a gleaming kitchen knife, walked to the door. Then, using their other hand, they fumbled in a pocket and, after a moment, pulled out a key and inserted it into the lock.

Bai Lu's eyes widened as she watched the person on the screen.

It's undoubtedly Yuan Haotian, she thought.

He hadn't even bothered to disguise himself—no mask, no hat—simply arriving at Li Shu's front door wielding a knife.

"Where did he get the key from?" Keke asked curiously.

Bai Lu shook her head, indicating she didn't know.

Gu Mian remained silent, continuing to watch the footage.

Then, the door opened, and they saw a dark figure flit inside, the door immediately closing afterward.

The three of them could guess what was unfolding inside the house.

Bai Lu watched the timestamp on the progress bar. "According to Li Shu's statement," she murmured, "he returned from his night shift to find Yuan Haotian had killed his two roommates. He should be coming back around this time."

Yet, as minute after minute passed, Li Shu did not return.

Instead, the surveillance footage showed the closed door suddenly opening with a CREAK.

The door was opened from the inside!

"What's going on? Did Yuan Haotian open the door?" Bai Lu stared at the screen where the door had suddenly opened. "Did he leave before Li Shu returned?"

But soon, she was shocked to discover that the person who opened the door wasn't Yuan Haotian—it was Li Shu!

He was walking out of the house!

"He lied to us!" Bai Lu exclaimed, watching Li Shu's figure on the surveillance screen. "He claimed he was working the night shift and wasn't at home at this time!"

Keke wondered, deep in thought, Could Li Shu actually be the killer?

However, Keke soon realized that things weren't as she had assumed.

After opening the door, Li Shu quickly ran out of the camera's view, but he left the door wide open. The three of them could now clearly see the living room.

Inside, they saw three men entangled in a struggle.

A man in a blue shirt was tightly holding onto Yuan Haotian, who was wielding a knife. Another man in a white T-shirt appeared injured; he clutched one of his arms and desperately dodged Yuan Haotian's attacks.

But Yuan Haotian suddenly broke free from the man in blue holding him and lunged with his knife.

The man in the blue shirt fell, clutching his chest.

The man in white T-shirt wasn't lucky enough to escape either. He tried to flee, but Yuan Haotian cut him down before he could reach the door.

After killing the two men, Yuan Haotian, as if not satisfied, continued to hack and stab at their bodies savagely.

Then, many figures appeared on the screen—presumably neighbors Li Shu had called for help.

The neighbors, armed with brooms and mops, rushed into the house and quickly subdued Yuan Haotian.

The video was very clear.

When Li Shu ran out, the two men inside were still alive.

Yuan Haotian was undoubtedly the killer.

Keke pondered, "Li Shu didn't kill anyone. He didn't want us to see the surveillance footage because he didn't want us to find out he abandoned his friends and ran away."

"So that's what it was..." Bai Lu said hesitantly, nodding.

At that moment, Gu Mian dragged the progress bar to the footage after Yuan Haotian had killed the men.

On the screen, Yuan Haotian, his face tilted upwards, was repeatedly stabbing the two dead bodies—a sight to make one's hair stand on end.

Even though the surveillance footage had no sound, Bai Lu felt she could almost hear the sickening squelch of the knife cutting into flesh and blood just from watching.

"I've noticed something," Gu Mian said, staring at the screen. "The surveillance footage doesn't have sound, right?"

"Right, what's wrong with that?" Bai Lu turned her head to look at Gu Mian.

But as soon as she finished speaking, her expression changed as she suddenly realized something.

The surveillance footage has no sound... So where did that CREAK from the door opening earlier come from?

Chapter 660 - A strange chapter has increased by _1

The outside sky had completely darkened.

Bai Lu stared at the computer with a rigid expression, not daring to look back at the bedroom door.

Gu Mian, however, seemed to have thought of something. He directly closed the video from June 3rd and opened today's surveillance footage.

Since the day hadn't completely passed yet, the recording hadn't been generated, so what played on the computer was the scene at this very moment.

They saw that the previously closed bedroom door in the screen was now wide open.

The view of the living room was unmistakable.

And in the empty living room lay two individuals who were not moving... humans?

Bai Lu looked at the surveillance footage and began to tremble uncontrollably.

She had just seen these two people five minutes ago!

They were the two men who were killed by Yuan Haotian in the video from June 3rd!

They had died and were taken to the morgue.

But now they reappeared in the real-time surveillance footage!

Appearing outside... their door.

In the footage, a bloody figure suddenly jerked a few times, and the sound of clothes rubbing against each other came from the living room.

Then, the two people awkwardly got up from the ground and, moving strangely, started to walk in a certain direction.

THUMP.

THUMP.

THUMP.

Bai Lu's scalp tingled. She heard the footsteps from the living room getting closer and closer, finally stopping.

The surveillance camera could not capture the bedroom entrance, but Bai Lu knew they were right behind her.

She felt a malicious scrutiny at her back.

Bai Lu was sweating profusely. I might die here today, she thought. What bad luck.

While thinking, she looked at the others, hoping they would have some lifeline. Yet, she found that the people next to her seemed oblivious, as if there was no ghost behind them.

The music-loving doctor was still staring at the screen, as if he were considering what to eat for dinner.

An eighteen-year-old named Lv Cha was still maintaining her weak expression next to the doctor, not paying any attention to what was happening behind her.

You guys didn't see that horrifying video just now! You have no reaction! Bai Lu thought. She really wanted to shout, but she dared not.

The ghost was right behind her. She dared not make a sound, let alone turn her head. She could only glance at the two people next to her out of the corner of her eye.

Don't you guys really know there is a ghost behind you! Bai Lu screamed silently, almost going mad.

This wasn't a pleasant feeling.

Even though they were all together, they were supposed to cling together for warmth, to be afraid together when plunged into horror.

But in the end, only she was trembling in fright while everyone else was acting as if everything was normal.

A few seconds later, Gu Mian finally seemed to hear Bai Lu's inner screaming and slightly turned his head to look back.

Bai Lu's eyes lit up. Has he finally noticed? Has he finally noticed that there is a ghost behind us?

But she saw that the doctor had no particular reaction after looking toward the entrance.

He just glanced at the doorway and turned his head back again as if nothing had happened.

Bai Lu widened her eyes.

What's going on? Was there no ghost at the entrance? But this spine-chilling feeling of being watched on my back isn't false. Could it be that I'm so scared I imagined this feeling? This doctor's expression really doesn't look like someone who has seen a ghost, and Xie Bi'an and that NPC didn't react either.

Upon thinking this, Bai Lu calmed down a bit.

"Maybe I'm just too nervous," she murmured to herself as she tried to relax and slowly turned around to take a look behind her. "Looking at everyone else's reaction, there really shouldn't be anything behind us..."

But just as she was halfway through her sentence, she saw two festering faces at the entrance.

Eyeballs filled with blood vessels stared at her, full of malice.

She staggered back two steps and plopped down onto the computer desk behind her.

Before she could react, the sound of a zipper being pulled suddenly came from beside her.

At the same time, the gloomy-faced man in a suit, the NPC, seemed to finally realize what was happening and jumped up from the bed.

Then Bai Lu heard his loud scream, "Run! Run!"

Yes! We should run, she thought.

But the two ghosts had completely blocked the entrance. Bai Lu moved her stiff neck to look at the window not far away, considering the possibility of escaping by breaking the window.

But the man in the suit had already reacted first.

Bai Lu watched with wide-open eyes as he ran towards the door, bellowing, "Run!"

"Wait!" she couldn't help but shout in protest. "Don't run there, the ghosts are that way!"

However, he seemed to ignore her, running straight for the bedroom door, approaching the two ghosts.

Bai Lu averted her gaze, unable to bear what she thought would be a gruesome sight.

But the scene she had imagined did not occur. Instead, the man in the suit stopped when he reached the two ghosts. Then, stretching out an arm, he pushed them forcefully and shouted, "Run!"

Bai Lu: "?"

The two ghosts were bewilderingly pushed out of the door.

Then, Coach Che firmly shut the door and spread his arms in front of it, as if afraid that the people inside the house might chase after them.

His expression was like that of a minor character in a post-apocalyptic film, sacrificing himself to let his friends escape.

Looking at Coach Che tightly protecting the door, Bai Lu felt dizzy again.

This defies logic! The script of this Mysterious Dungeon isn't supposed to be like this! What on earth happened? Bai Lu asked herself, but there was no answer.

The room fell into an eerie silence.

After a while, a clear zip sound broke the silence.

Bai Lu turned her attention to the source of the sound.

It was the doctor nearby, zipping up his guitar case. She noticed a fleeting glimmer through the closing seam of the zipper.

"Um..." she hesitated before speaking. "Can someone explain what just happened..."

While speaking, she turned her gaze towards the man in the suit who was blocking the door, her expression full of inquiry.

"As you saw," Gu Mian said, hoisting his guitar case onto his back again, "just now, our brave Coach Che chased off two ghosts, buying us a chance to live."

Coach Che? What an odd name. Why would an NPC in a court instance be named Coach Che? It sounds more like the name of an NPC in a driving school instance, she thought.

Not lingering on the oddity of Coach Che's name for long, Bai Lu spoke again, "Is... is that so..."

That NPC was clearly trying to help the two ghosts get away, not 'courageously chasing them off.' Why would Coach Che let them run? Could there be something in this room more terrifying than ghosts? Bai Lu wondered.

As for Gu Mian's explanation, she wanted to say, "Really? I don't believe it," but the words died on her lips.

She started to understand. These players have secrets, secrets they don't want me to know.

"Anyway, let's keep analyzing the case," Keke said, taking a step forward and awkwardly changing the subject. "Bai Lu, what's that in your hand? I saw you holding it earlier."

Bai Lu was not one to insist on getting to the bottom of things. Upon hearing Keke's words, she was glad to go along with the change in subject. "I found it in Cao Deren's room."

As she spoke, she opened her hand to reveal a pink butterfly hairpin encrusted with pearls that she had been clutching.

"I found it in Cao Deren's room. The room was entirely filled with men's belongings, but there was this pink hairpin. I thought it was unusual, so I picked it up."

Gu Mian examined the item in Bai Lu's hand carefully.

This pink butterfly hairpin looked brand new, as though it was recently purchased.

"I found a receipt," Bai Lu said, rummaging through her pocket. "When I found the hairpin, this receipt was tucked into a book lying next to it."

It must not have been easy for her to find a receipt tucked into someone's book, Gu Mian thought.

Gu Mian took the receipt and began to read it.

[Pumpkin Jewelry Store]

[Product: Butterfly jewelry hairpin x1]

[Price: 18]

[Receipt printing date: May 31]

It was purchased three days before Cao Deren's murder. No wonder it looked so new.

"I don't know why he, a grown man, would buy this," Bai Lu said, playing with the pink bow. "I guess he intended to give it to his girlfriend? But if it was a gift for his girlfriend, there would be no need to keep the receipt, let alone hide it so well in a book..."

Gu Mian mused over the receipt in his hand.

Keke softly interjected from the side, "It's getting late. Should we continue the investigation or rest a bit..."

Sleeping is the best way to rest.

However, to sleep in a Mysterious Dungeon is tantamount to suicide.

But if the players enter an instance of a long duration, like a week or half a month, they would need to sleep.

Gu Mian's current instance was at most three days long. They could power through without sleep if they really tried, but they would still need some rest in between.

Of course, it didn't matter to Gu Mian.

He felt he could go on without any rest. Whether to rest or not depended on what the others thought.

Bai Lu was the first to oppose strongly. "I don't want to rest in such a haunted place!"

She whimpered as she nervously looked towards the door, where not long ago, two ghosts had been standing.

Even though I don't know what powerful being made an NPC help chase away those two ghosts, I still don't feel safe staying here, she thought.