

Collapse 671

Chapter 671 Damn, I Almost Stood Someone Up_2

Actually, there was no need to look for the phone anymore. They all knew the answer in their hearts. They didn't want to pay with their lives for an instance. Right now, they were just delaying, delaying the arrival of the final judgment.

"Actually, this instance doesn't have an absolute death mechanism," Ye Qianqian mumbled to herself. "If we find Liu Ben innocent, the ghost will come to kill us immediately... But what if we manage to survive until the court adjourns? As long as we leave the court alive, we can leave the instance immediately..."

Ye Weiwei's voice came through, "But we can't hold on."

Ye Qianqian fell silent, searching the bookshelves. Suddenly, an old cell phone caught her eye. A picture of a boy was stuck to its back.

She shifted her gaze to the name next to the picture: Liu Ben.

"Sis," Ye Qianqian instantly picked up the phone from the shelf, "I found it."

Found it? Ye Weiwei stopped searching and walked over.

It was a very old gray cell phone. The edges of the casing were chipped and scratched, evidence that it had been dropped countless times. Due to long-term use, the phone screen was slightly separating from the body. A few cracks spread from a shattered corner to the entire screen, and on that shattered corner was a small piece of transparent tape. The tape looked quite old, and some dust had accumulated beside it.

Ye Qianqian quickly pressed the home button.

The phone lit up; it still had battery.

Liu Ben's phone wasn't locked; she saw the apps page with a slight swipe of her finger.

There were no unnecessary apps on the home screen, and she quickly spotted the photo album.

"I guess Liu Ben might have discovered something in the school. He either took photos or recorded it. Let's look at his album first," Ye Qianqian said as she tapped on the photo album app.

The phone had been used for so long it lagged when she tapped the screen. It took three seconds for the phone to respond to Ye Qianqian's tap and slowly open the album.

The first item at the top of the album was a video.

Judging by the video thumbnail, it looked like a corridor in a student dormitory. Furthermore, it looked like a recording of a computer's surveillance screen.

The two exchanged a hesitant glance, then clicked on the video.

The phone lagged for a few seconds again before it slowly started to play the video.

As the two watched the video playing on the phone, their expressions grew increasingly grave. The light from the screen cast their faces in deeper shadow, making them look even more somber.

As the video played, Ye Qianqian bit her lip tighter and tighter until the video ended. Only then did she open her mouth, her eyes red.

She looked at the screen in her hand, seemingly wanting to speak, but no words came out. Finally, her slightly open mouth uttered a single, hoarse word, "Sis..."

"Hmm," Ye Weiwei exhaled in response.

Ye Qianqian tightly held the phone in her hand. "Do we really have to..."

But before she could finish her sentence, she suddenly felt a chill behind her head.

Ye Qianqian's sense of danger had always been sharp. She knew something was behind her.

She shoved Ye Weiwei hard, sending her stumbling away, then turned to flee.

But it was too late.

She felt a pair of icy hands wrap around her neck, and a tremendous force pulled her from behind.

Ye Qianqian fell to the ground, dragged backward by the hands on her neck. Her vision blurred; all she could see was the ceiling with its light fixture and the toppled bookshelf amidst the chaos.

Breathing instantly became difficult.

"Sister!" Vaguely, she heard Ye Weiwei's cry.

Following the sound, she lifted her hand with the last of her strength and threw the phone fiercely away from her.

"Sister!" Ye Weiwei chased after Ye Qianqian, who was being dragged by the ghostly hands, but she couldn't stop it.

She watched as Ye Qianqian was dragged behind the door by the ghostly hands and disappeared.

She knew Ye Qianqian was dead.

Only the phone that Ye Qianqian had thrown with her last strength remained on the ground.

Hearing the commotion, Wang Youcai came rushing over. All he saw was the mess on the floor and Ye Weiwei, phone in hand, tears streaming down her face.

"Ye Qianqian..." Wang Youcai began, taking a step forward. But as he did, he abruptly saw a ghostly hand resting on Ye Weiwei's shoulder.

"Run!" Wang Youcai's voice was strained with urgency.

But it was too late.

He watched in horror as the ghostly hand pulled Ye Weiwei into the collapsed bookshelf behind her.

Ye Weiwei's last action before her demise was to hurl her cell phone, seemingly afraid it would be dragged with her.

CLATTER.

The thrown phone bounced a few times on the ground before landing at Wang Youcai's feet.

He looked down at the cracked phone, cold sweat trickling down his forehead.

By now, he was beginning to understand. The deaths of the two female players were almost certainly connected to this phone. They had found important clues in the phone, and that's why they were killed by the ghost.

They were both protecting this phone with their last breath. Were they trying to pass the evidence to me, the judge? he wondered.

Wang Youcai stared intently at the phone.

If I pick it up, I might die too, he thought.

The room fell into an eerie silence. The only survivor stood silently, his eyes fixed on the phone at his feet.

Finally, he made a choice.

Wang Youcai bent down, picked up the phone from the ground, and swiftly fled the room.

Once he was out of the room, he didn't stop running. Only after about thirty seconds of frantic sprinting did he finally halt, gasping for breath. He slumped down in a corner to examine the phone.

As soon as he turned on the screen, a video was already playing: surveillance footage from a dormitory hallway.

At one end of the corridor were several sinks with a water heater – a place for students to fetch hot water. The camera was positioned in the middle of the hallway, so the other end wasn't visible; it only recorded one section of the corridor.

But that was enough.

Within a few seconds of the video's start, he recognized a familiar figure.

It was Liu Baoma, the same boy whose picture was on the back of the phone.

Liu Baoma was seen carrying several thermoses out of a dorm room. After taking a few steps, someone from the dorm seemed to call him back, and another thermos was thrust into his hands.

Liu Baoma nodded slightly, as if agreeing to something.

From the dorm, another boy emerged, rudely slapped Liu Baoma on the back of the head, and then sauntered back inside.

The slight boy, burdened with five or six thermoses, awkwardly made his way to the water heater, filling each one. He couldn't carry too many full thermoses at once, so it took him several trips to bring all five or six back to the dorm.

Because the recording was playing at high speed, this segment of the video passed quickly.

Liu Baoma had barely settled back in his dorm when he was pushed out the door again, a pile of clothes shoved into his arms. He was pushed to the doorway, and when he shook his head, apparently refusing, he received a kick to the stomach.

The frail boy stumbled a few steps from the kick, then silently gathered the clothes and headed to the sinks to wash them by hand.

During this time, several other boys came out of that dorm and tossed more clothes into Liu Baoma's basin. One even threw clothes directly onto the boy's head before walking away, laughing loudly.

Liu Baoma silently scrubbed the clothes in the basin for quite a while.

Then, the group from the dorm, apparently having thought of another prank, tiptoed out of their room. They crept up behind Liu Baoma, who was bent over washing clothes. Suddenly, a tall roommate jumped up and sat squarely on the back of Liu Baoma's head.

Liu Baoma's entire head was forced into the sudsy basin. He flailed his hands, struggling desperately, perhaps even screaming in terror, but the person sitting on his head remained unmoved, laughing wildly, which prompted the other roommates to laugh as well.

The other students in the corridor seemed to be infected by the laughter, clutching their stomachs as they mocked the boy whose head was pressed into the washbasin.

Wang Youcai saw everyone's mouth agape. He could almost hear the frenzied laughter pouring from those hollow openings. The laughter filled the entire corridor, threatening to spill out of the screen.

When he'd had enough fun, the roommate finally jumped off Liu Baoma's head.

The boy at the sink remained motionless. A few seconds later, amidst the jeers, he slowly straightened up and turned to look at the laughing crowd.

He looked at the corridor full of smiling faces, his mouth opened, but no words came out.

After a long moment, Wang Youcai saw a smile appear on the boy's soaking-wet face. It was a forced, despairing smile, one that desperately tried to hide his true feelings.

Chapter 672

The video frame froze on the boy's vacant smile.

Wang Youcai quietly stared at the smartphone screen, his gaze lingering on this face of despair.

Before he realized it, an intense chill had enveloped him. The sensation of looming danger made Wang Youcai's hair stand on end.

He looked up to spot a hand reaching out from the corner of the wall, the ghostly figure standing behind him reflected on the glass window. A drop of blood fell from above. He looked up to see a ghost face, hanging down from the ceiling, grinning at him.

Go now!

Hurry up!

He seemed to hear their urging voices.

They demanded the judge's verdict.

They sought revenge.

Surrounded by their heavy resentment, Wang Youcai trudged towards his courtroom.

He needed to make the final verdict.

Quickly, he arrived at the court's entrance, pushing the door open under the malicious stares of the three ghosts.

He stepped forward, approaching the judge's seat.

Liu Ben was sitting motionless behind the small table in the middle of the court, his gaze still lowered.

Wang Youcai observed the man behind the table.

Barely in his forties, Liu Ben's hair was streaked with far too many grays. His hands were dark and rough, clearly hands that had seen much hard labor. His right index finger was slightly crooked, as if it had once been smashed by machinery...

This tragic man had endured decades of hardship and had now lost his child.

Wang Youcai slowly reached for the small gavel on the table, then gripped it firmly.

Then he felt a chill on his shoulder.

He knew it was a threat from the ghosts.

To survive, to avoid being killed by these vengeful spirits, he had to sentence this pitiful man to death...

Wang Youcai lifted the gavel, his voice trembling as he began, "I pronounce—"

The oppressive feeling from the surroundings intensified, making it almost impossible to breathe.

In this suffocating atmosphere, he suddenly recalled Ye Weiwei's expression right before her death.

As she faced death, her face bore an out-of-place expression of hope and anticipation. What was she thinking then? How did she feel when she turned over the evidence to him?

Ye Weiwei and Ye Qianqian had used their last breath to deliver the evidence to him. What had they chosen?

Thinking about Ye Weiwei's actions before the ghost dragged her away, Wang Youcai already had his answer.

Another hand, icy and making him shudder, gripped his shoulder.

He felt a horrifying sensation creeping up his neck.

Wang Youcai closed his eyes.

Survive like this? Were the sacrifices of three individuals just for him to scrape by?

He thought of the wide-open mouths in the video, of Ye Weiwei's hopeful eyes before her death, of the boy's despairing smile at the end. He remembered seeing the same expression on another boy, just before the Global Game began.

The pressure on his body suddenly increased, seeming to compel him to make a decision.

"No!" he suddenly refused loudly.

"I refuse!"

I refuse to extinguish my conscience!

I refuse to let other players pay with their lives in vain!

I refuse to issue a verdict against my will under this disgusting coercion!

I refuse this court without conscience!

I refuse... this path to survival."

Will anyone know?

Will anyone remember?

Will anyone remember a group of players who naively sacrificed their lives to uphold their conscience?

Will anyone know that there was a group of people who resolutely walked towards death, even when they knew the path to survival?

But none of that mattered anymore.

No need for anyone to know or remember.

As long as their own consciences were clear, that was enough. It was enough if, as their lives neared their end, they could look back with satisfaction, having wronged neither the world nor any person.

He lifted the small gavel in his hand and slammed it down hard on the table. "I declare him not guilty!"

As soon as his words fell, an overwhelming sense of oppression began to envelop him from all sides.

His vision dimmed, and a chilling cold seeped into his body.

He knew he was about to die.

Feeling the rolling anger around him, he suddenly burst into loud, relieved laughter.

"HAHAHA, it's good to die, good to die..."

The laughing man was instantly swallowed up. There was no more sound in the courtroom.

Gu Mian, who had just arrived downstairs at the courthouse, sensed something and looked up.

"What's wrong?" Bai Lu asked anxiously.

"Nothing," Gu Mian said, retracting his gaze and continuing to drag the person he held. "It seemed like I heard someone laughing."

A wild laugh.

Bai Lu paid no mind to the laugh Gu Mian mentioned; her attention was entirely focused on the man Gu Mian was dragging. It was Li Shu.

He had been punched in the face by Gu Mian in the hospital and then dragged here.

His expression was still shocked, as if he didn't understand why his two roommates hadn't appeared.

"Cao Deren? Zhang Shengli?" Li Shu was still flailing, continuously calling his two roommates' names.

But no one answered him.

Sensing the situation was turning bad, Coach Che had already slipped into the courthouse like a wisp of smoke.

Bai Lu heard him mumbling as he ran, "Who ever heard of a judge dragging the victim into court? I can't let him get away with this."

It looked like he was going to get reinforcements.

"My two roommates must already be waiting for you in the courtroom. I can't wait to see your faces when you see them!" Li Shu continued to roar loudly.

Gu Mian ignored him and dragged the man straight through the main entrance.

Unexpectedly, as they boarded the elevator, Li Shu, still in Gu Mian's grip, became even more frantic, "HAHAHA! You only dared to punch me to vent your anger. Even if you want to declare Yuan Haotian innocent, will the others agree?"

He gazed maliciously at Bai Lu and the others as he spoke, "If your judge declares someone innocent out of selfish desire, you'll all have to die with him! My two friends will kill all of you!

"You will lose your lives because you have a saintly judge! Look at this man; he's willing to sacrifice himself to declare Yuan Haotian not guilty, but he didn't consider any of you!

"He wants to uphold his grand sense of righteousness, but he's dragging you all down with him! Are you willing? Are you willing to die for this man's erroneous judgment?!

"Kill him! Kill him and become the judge yourself! Then only he will die!"

Overwhelmed by emotion, Bai Lu's chest heaved.

At this moment, Gu Mian turned to look at her. "What's your choice? Do you want to choose the path to survival, or the other one?"

Bai Lu was startled; she hadn't expected Gu Mian to suddenly ask her this question.

But she hesitated for only half a second before speaking firmly, "I don't want to take this path to survival. Even if the mission fails, even if I might die here, I don't want to take this path given by the instance..."

"I had loved ones too, but they died in an instance long ago. Some died trying to save me; some died trying to distract the ghosts.

"I know they were like Yuan Haotian, willing to do anything for me. So, I'm not afraid of death anymore!"

At this, she glared hard at Li Shu, "I just want... him to die."

Just then, the elevator stopped.

They had arrived.

The elevator door slowly opened. Outside stood a middle-aged man with grizzled hair, holding a sharp knife.

He was a stranger. Keke, wary, took a few steps back, then she seemed to realize something. "Is this a prisoner from another group?"

Bai Lu was also stunned.

She hadn't expected that a judge from another group had already declared a prisoner not guilty.

Didn't this mean...

One group had already been wiped out.

Chapter 673 Finish Writing a Copy in a Week with Intermittent Resurrection_1

The man outside the door seemed unprepared to encounter other people.

He looked at Gu Mian and the others emerging from the elevator, then at the person Gu Mian was carrying, who was radiating malevolence.

Understanding something, he put away the knife in his hand, took several steps back, and bowed deeply to Gu Mian and his group.

The man said nothing.

He remained bowed for several seconds, then silently straightened up and walked into the elevator.

Bai Lu watched as the elevator doors slowly closed, until the figure inside was no longer visible.

"He was expressing his gratitude to us. Since he couldn't thank the judge who presided over his case in person, he thanked us, fellow adjudicators, instead," Bai Lu mused. "Was he holding a knife because he intended to kill someone?"

She didn't know this man's story, but she knew it was a story for which a group of people would willingly dedicate themselves and make sacrifices.

He must have been a pitiful man, Bai Lu thought, looking at the tightly shut elevator doors.

But before she could reflect further, a wave of icy air swept over her, drawing her attention.

Why is it suddenly so cold?

She turned her head slightly and discovered the reason for the sudden drop in temperature.

At some point, the corridor ahead had filled with ghosts.

They had pale, ashen faces, wore school uniforms, and stood in a line in the middle of the corridor, their bulging eyeballs glaring fixedly at Gu Mian and the others.

Behind these ghosts were two familiar figures.

Cao Deren and Zhang Shengli were behind these ghosts. Emboldened by their numbers, these two ghosts were now grinning savagely at Gu Mian.

"Wait..." Keke tugged at Gu Mian's sleeve. "Those students up ahead aren't the ghosts from our case, are they?"

Gu Mian rubbed his chin. "They probably followed that man from earlier. But now, they seem to harbor a great deal of malice towards us too."

"It must be because they saw that man expressing gratitude to us," Bai Lu said, her teeth beginning to chatter. She had never encountered so many ghosts at once. In a normal instance, facing so many ghosts would likely mean immediate death. "These ghosts are taking their anger out on us!"

Indeed. The ghosts in the corridor were now approaching them, their malice palpable.

Li Shu, whom Gu Mian was carrying, let out a loud laugh. "I told you they were waiting for you! HAHAA, this will be interesting to watch. Even other ghosts hate you meddling busybodies..."

Before he could finish speaking, the lead student ghost stretched out its twisted arm towards Gu Mian.

Its face was filled with endless malice, as if repeatedly mouthing, "Die! Die! Die!"

But before it could grab Gu Mian, another pale hand suddenly appeared and seized the twisted arm.

Li Shu's laughter died in his throat.

His mouth fell open as he watched, wide-eyed, as a pale hand emerged from the pocket of the judge's white coat.

Then, a lifeless face poked out, followed by a torso, and then legs.

He watched as a ghost crawled out of this person's pocket!

With this ghost's appearance, the surrounding chill intensified, making them shiver uncontrollably.

This ghost... What's going on with it? Li Shu saw the newly appeared ghost give a light tug, and the student ghost's arm was ripped clean off.

The wails of ghosts instantly filled the entire corridor.

Bai Lu was fortunate enough to once again witness the sight of Evil Ghosts fleeing.

This time, it was a ghost chasing other ghosts.

Li Shu's mouth hung open, as if he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

But the reality was undeniable. The scene in the corridor was brutal, with severed limbs flying everywhere. The astonishingly powerful older brother had ended the battle with little effort.

No, perhaps it couldn't be called a battle. This was a one-sided massacre.

Bai Lu looked at Gu Mian in shock. She never thought a player could actually possess an Evil Ghost.

This was the first time she had seen a ghost protect a player.

Gu Mian's image in her mind instantly grew towering, right until the ghost that had crawled out of his pocket returned, nuzzled against their judge, and called out, "Sister."

Hearing this "Sister," Bai Lu felt the judge's towering image crumble once more.

A passing Guiding NPC, clutching a stack of papers, was just exiting a room. He turned his head and saw the bloody scene filling the corridor, nearly fainting on the spot.

Meanwhile, Li Shu, still in Gu Mian's grasp, watched his two roommates get "brutally killed" again and was momentarily stunned.

As he stared blankly at Cao Deren's severed arm on the ground, Gu Mian's ghostly voice whispered in his ear, "Oh, I'm so scared. Since I'm not doing what you want, you wouldn't call your two good friends to beat me up, would you?"

Li Shu tore his gaze from Cao Deren's arm and looked up at Gu Mian, only to be met with a sneering, malicious face.

Looking at this face, he shivered violently.

Coach Che arrived with his men just in time to see Gu Mian wearing the expression of a deranged villain.

"Quick!" Coach Che instantly sensed something was terribly wrong. "Quick, before he does anything, notify the higher-ups to shut down this instance!"

Hearing this, an NPC hurried away.

Coach Che continued to shout orders, "Also, protect the case files! Some cases haven't even been judged yet!"

He knew Gu Mian wouldn't just obediently judge the cases and leave. Their only hope now was for the higher-ups to quickly shut down this instance.

Seeing Coach Che suddenly appear, Gu Mian wasted no more time.

He looked down at Li Shu with a kind gaze, reaching out to pat his head. "Why aren't you laughing? Where's that bravado from before? Wasn't it you who shouted 'You don't dare' in the hospital? In a moment, I'll let you experience what 'not daring' truly means."

Chapter 674 Writing a copy intermittently in a week_2

Seeing Gu Mian's seemingly affectionate expression, Li Shu trembled all over like a sieve.

He didn't understand how the judge, who had just been radiating a halo of saintliness, could suddenly turn into a psychopath. It shouldn't be like this. It really shouldn't!

At this moment, Gu Mian was instructing Keke to bring Yuan Haotian out of the courtroom.

Keke nodded, navigating the scattered limbs as she hurried into the courtroom.

Not long after, she came out, leading Yuan Haotian who was bound in handcuffs and shackles.

Because of the shackles, it was hard for Yuan Haotian to move freely. He clumsily stumbled along the corridor. Confused, he looked at the chaotic mess on the ground, not quite sure what had happened.

Seeing Yuan Haotian being brought out, Li Shu suddenly realized something and looked at Gu Mian in horror. "You wouldn't... You wouldn't dare..."

"Absolutely," Gu Mian bent down, laughing and showing his pearly white teeth. "Didn't you despise him, hate him, and wish for his immediate death? Didn't you enjoy seeing the desperate and helpless expressions on his face? Don't you just love seeing the impotent rage of those you loathe?"

"Tell me, if you were to struggle and die right in front of the person you hate most, if you were to show a desperate and helpless expression before them as you died, wouldn't that thought alone make you want to vomit from disgust?"

"How pitiful. You thought you had everything under control, gleefully awaiting the death sentence of the weakling you despise, yet the outcome was the complete opposite of what you imagined."

"Are you angry? Furious? But what can you do about it?"

Gu Mian laughed, holding up Li Shu's gradually distorting face. "You can't do anything, can you? Oh, to see this look of impotent rage, it's truly delightful."

Shit.

Bai Lu muttered another curse word. This time, she moved a bit further away from Gu Mian.

"Then let us all bear witness to student Li Shu's final brilliance together," Gu Mian said, dragging the man in his grasp towards a specific direction.

Li Shu's face contorted as he struggled. He wanted to plead for mercy, but closed his mouth as soon as he saw Yuan Haotian nearby.

He was a psychopath who had murdered an entire family and reveled in this person's suffering. He had even brazenly told this person, "I am the murderer, but there's nothing you can do about it."

This arrogant psychopath always saw himself as superior to his victims and would never allow himself to show any weakness in front of them.

But his constantly trembling body betrayed Li Shu.

Anyone could see he was now terrified beyond belief.

Yuan Haotian saw it too. He looked at Li Shu's shaking body, his lips curling into a mocking smile.

This was the victim trampling on the murderer's psyche.

This was the desperate counterattack of the weak against the strong.

This was an absolute reversal of their statuses.

Seeing that smile, Li Shu went completely mad.

By now, Gu Mian had stopped at a room's doorway.

Coach Che saw where Gu Mian had stopped and gasped in alarm, "Who told him the records room was there!"

His only answer was a LOUD BANG. Gu Mian had already kicked the door open.

The room was small, barely twenty square meters, but it was packed full.

Piles of old files were stacked on the floor, reaching nearly two meters high. On a desk not far from the entrance lay several fresh stacks of A4 paper covered in writing—likely case files for pending cases.

"Got a light?" Li Shu heard Gu Mian's voice from above him.

Keke promptly handed over a lighter.

Bai Lu silently moved a few more steps away from them.

Gu Mian took the lighter, ignited it, and then tossed it into the records room.

The fire spread rapidly through the flammable paper, and within seconds, the entire room was a roaring inferno.

Thick smoke billowed out from the doorway.

Coach Che, who wasn't far away, rolled his eyes and fainted again.

"You want to burn me alive! You want to roast me alive!" Li Shu struggled madly.

Most people who die in fires are first suffocated by the dense smoke before their bodies are burned, so their deaths are often relatively painless.

But this room was nothing but fire.

The moment one stepped inside, they would feel the flames licking at their skin; they might even smell their own flesh roasting before they died.

"That's right," Gu Mian nodded honestly. "Not only that, but we'll be outside listening. All the people you hate will be outside, listening to your struggles, your desperate screams, your agonizing howls, your cries of impotent rage. Fun, isn't it? Aren't you the one who loves to see people in a state of impotent rage the most?"

Hearing this, Li Shu lunged, attempting to grab Gu Mian. "If that's the case, I'll drag someone down with me!"

But he couldn't reach Gu Mian. A pale hand had already seized him, lifted him entirely, and then flung him into the inferno-like room.

And the pale hand thoughtfully closed the door.

Violent wails of agony erupted from behind the door, mingled with curses like, "I won't let you go even if I become a ghost!"

The person inside repeatedly slammed against the door, trying to break out.

But it was futile. Brother was blocking the doorway; no one could break out.

As time passed, the sounds from inside grew fainter, and the pounding on the door gradually ceased.

During this time, Coach Che woke up once. After learning from other NPCs that the instance had malfunctioned and couldn't be shut down temporarily, he fainted again.

The sounds from the room had completely vanished. Brother moved away from the door and came back to Gu Mian's side.

Gu Mian feigned a moment of sorrow. "He was perfectly fine just a moment ago, how could he be gone already... Well, since things are settled here, I'll return to the courtroom for the trial."

He said this as he started walking back towards the courtroom.

Just then, an ill-timed CREAK echoed through the hallway.

Not far away, Bai Lu's scalp tingled. She stiffly turned her head to look at the door of the room behind Gu Mian.

The door was pushed open a crack from the inside. A charred arm stretched out, filled with endless resentment, and grabbed Gu Mian's ankle.

Li Shu... he's turned into a ghost!

Gu Mian followed the charred arm with his gaze and saw a twisted, gleeful face peering out from the crack in the door.

Its charred lips opened and closed, emitting a harsh sound: "I told you... even as a ghost... I won't let you go."

Gu Mian looked at the hideous face and silently reached for his guitar case.

That day, Bai Lu once again witnessed the dazzling gleam of the chainsaw.

That day, she learned another use for the chainsaw, besides picking locks.

She saw poor Li Shu, just reborn from the flames, scream once more as his life was extinguished under that 'sacred' glow.

He must have been exceptionally regretful at the moment of his second death. Because when the charred head rolled to Bai Lu's feet, she read intense remorse on its blackened face.

Chapter 675 Tomorrow is Qixi (Chinese Valentine's Day)! _1

Gu Mian finally saw the alert panel indicating the collapse of the instance.

A countdown appeared, marking the last ten seconds of the instance.

NPCs in the distance were in disarray, scrambling around in search of fire extinguishers, only to sadly discover that the instance's designer had not left them such items.

Who would have thought a player could set the instance on fire?

Bai Lu, who was trembling slightly next to the human heads, also realized something after seeing the instance collapse alert.

This doctor with the gleaming green head might just be Gu Shiwan.

Heaven bear witness, she harbored no inappropriate thoughts towards this walking pile of 100,000 Game Coins.

Who could foster inappropriate thoughts for a freak who could conjure ghosts from his pockets?

Bai Lu merely wanted the countdown to end quickly so she could escape from this instance filled with freaks.

Watching the countdown number jump from "1" to "0," she closed her eyes and revealed a pleased smile.

It was noon when Gu Mian and his group emerged from the ticket office.

The midday sun shone on the ground, heating up the glass door of the ticket office, but this blazing sun could not warm the icy countenance of the ticket seller.

This ticket office was nearest to Gu Mian's house, so he always entered instances from here.

Over the days, he had witnessed this ticket seller's transformation—from bright and sunny to gloomy, from optimistic to despondent, until the man looked utterly down in the dumps.

Gu Mian noticed a sign in the ticket seller's hand. It featured two small rows of words, possibly about a new product in the supermarket.

Keke, being sharp-eyed, tiptoed and read the words on the sign, "'Gu Mian & Coach Che are not allowed in.' There's a bracket below it with 'Dogs may enter.'"

Gu Mian: "..."

Coach Che and Mr. Green were truly a pair of miserable NPCs, he thought. Their story could be turned into a textbook lesson. The title could be 'Tall Coach and his Green Dwarf.'

Gu Mian skillfully excluded himself from the "miserable" category.

What he didn't expect was to find Xiao Qiao squatting at the door of the ticket booth, looking as if she was holding something.

"Why are you squatting here?" Gu Mian took a few steps forward and squatted down in front of Xiao Qiao.

Only then did Xiao Qiao realize that Gu Mian and his group had come out.

She looked at Gu Mian squatting in front of her and gently opened her arms to reveal an old radio. "We have this in our world too."

Gu Mian recognized it.

It was the radio that had been with him since his time in the orphanage, the one from which he first heard the name "Guardian."

Gu Mian rarely used this device, so naturally, Xiao Qiao hadn't seen it before.

Gu Mian held up the peculiar-looking radio. "You have this kind of radio in your world too?"

"Exactly the same," Xiao Qiao wrinkled her brow. "Lots of them."

Hearing this, Gu Mian fell silent, staring at the radio in his hand.

Is it from the Seventh World?

Indeed, there was no brand marking on this old gadget, and its style was somewhat different from other radios on Earth.

Gu Mian had long known this device was unique, but he hadn't expected it to actually come from the Seventh World.

So, the Seventh World could already transmit items to Earth?

"You squatted here just to let me see your world's radio the moment I exited the instance?" Gu Mian thought Xiao Qiao's brain was a bit rusty, but surely not *this* rusty.

"No. When you guys entered the instance," Xiao Qiao shook her rusty head, "I was here, and I heard sounds from our world through this."

The Twilight Gods World had always been mysterious.

The game hadn't even opened an instance for this world.

According to Xiao Qiao, she was the only living being in that entire world; besides her, it was overrun with rampant ghosts.

But now, Xiao Qiao was saying she had heard sounds from that Mysterious World through this radio.

「They soon returned to Gu Mian's residence.」

Gu Mian and the others formed a circle, staring at the radio on the coffee table.

Xiao Qiao was trying to adjust the dial on the radio, but despite her twisting it for a long time, Gu Mian hadn't heard the so-called 'voices from the Twilight Gods World.'

The static's HISS filled the living room.

When the global game had first started, they could still pick up a few Earth channels on this broken radio. But now, all they could hear was static; radio stations on Earth had long since ceased operations.

Fatty was initially waiting with rapt attention for that mysterious sound.

However, after fifteen minutes, he couldn't hold back anymore. He grabbed a grill, announcing they would have a barbecue in the backyard tonight.

Xiao Qiao still persisted in adjusting the dial. Looking at her stubborn determination, Gu Mian thought that if she put this much effort into honing her acting skills, she wouldn't have to worry about her fan count.

Speaking of which, in all the many instances Gu Mian had entered, he had only come across one fan: Qiao Chuchu.

Speaking of Qiao Chuchu... Gu Mian turned his head to look at Chu Changge. He remembered that Chu Chu was on Chu Changge's team.

The courthouse instance was a master at manipulating people's emotions.

If players wanted to survive, they had to abandon their compassion and sentence the pitiful defendant to death.

If they didn't want to lose their humanity, they themselves would die.

This was very unforgiving to players who still harbored goodwill towards the world.

But for players like Chu Changge...

If I have no heart, you can't manipulate me. Gu Mian felt that this phrase described Chu Changge best.

Chu Changge didn't care about others' lives, nor would he care how miserable their stories were.

Knowing the path to survival, he would undoubtedly sentence the defendant to death.

Hao Laoshi, who had gone through an instance with them before, had complained to Gu Mian that when they faced a ghost, Chu Changge had thrown him to it without the slightest hesitation.

Chu Changge must have been the only judge among the three groups to find the defendant guilty.

As if sensing Gu Mian's thoughts, Chu Changge suddenly said, "I didn't."

Gu Mian swallowed.

Is the expression on my face that obvious? He reached out and touched his face.

"Because I knew I could leave the instance without having to make a choice, I didn't issue a verdict," Chu Changge said, adjusting his glasses.

Really? Gu Mian never knew Chu Changge was such a kind person. Wasn't his character supposed to be utterly ruthless, devoid of empathy, basically 'I'm going to live, and the rest of you can drop dead for all I care'?

Xiao Qiao was still tirelessly twisting the radio's dial.

Chu Changge's gaze paused on the radio for a moment before he explained, "I thought you wouldn't want to see that outcome, so I refrained from issuing a verdict."

Gu Mian touched his face again. Do I really look like such a good person?

Xie Bi'an suddenly chuckled. "You weren't like this before."

The Bai Wuchang, who loved cloaks, had also followed Gu Mian to his house. For some reason, Chu Changge and Xiao Qiao hadn't driven him away.

Gu Mian sensed deep resentment in Xie Bi'an's tone.

It was as if he'd been deeply hurt by the cold and unfeeling Chu Changge in the past.

Good thing Xie Bi'an isn't a woman, Gu Mian thought, or I'd be suspecting Chu Changge was a scumbag who'd abandoned him.

Xiao Qiao was still stubbornly fiddling with the radio.

Snapping out of his thoughts about "scumbags," Gu Mian found it hard to watch her any longer. "What exactly did you hear from this radio when we were in the instance? Why are you so certain the sound came from your world?"

Xiao Qiao suddenly stopped what she was doing and turned her head. "I'm sure. It was an alarm. I've heard that sound countless times."

An alarm?

Gu Mian was slightly taken aback. He remembered a sound that played when the worlds switched in a certain horror movie.

As if in response to his thoughts, a bizarre, hollow-sounding alarm suddenly blared out.

He looked towards the source of the sound.

It was the radio on the coffee table.

Chapter 676 Happy New Year, Happy New Year_1

The alarm with a strange tune reverberated throughout the room.

Xiao Qiao instantly got excited. "This is the sound! I've heard it countless times."

It's remarkable she can be so excited by such a strange alarm sound.

The sound didn't stop. Gu Mian looked at the radio on the table and asked, "Does this sound often echo in your world?"

Xiao Qiao pondered seriously. "It has a rhythm; it sounds periodically... each time it lasts about three minutes. When the sound plays, the ghosts become especially terrifying and only return to normal after the sound stops..."

Watching her rack her brains, it seemed she had revealed everything she could think of. What Xiao Qiao said was very much like the horror movie named Silent Hill that Gu Mian had watched. Could the Twilight Gods World also be divided into two parallel worlds? Besides, could this radio really broadcast the sounds of the Seventh World live? Was it connected to the Seventh World?

While Gu Mian was contemplating, the alarm sound stopped abruptly.

He frowned slightly. Xiao Qiao said an alarm would last three minutes, but this one clearly stopped in less than two.

Xiao Qiao, equally confused, patted the radio on the table. The already dilapidated old device nearly shattered under her palm.

Hearing the radio emit a fragile sound, Xiao Qiao silently withdrew her hand. "That's not right, it's all wrong... The alarm probably sounds only every few days, but I just heard it this morning..."

Gu Mian guessed she had only just then remembered the alarm's interval. Otherwise, she wouldn't have been so persistent in guarding the radio.

"So, it's not a live broadcast?" Gu Mian leaned over to look at the radio on the table that Xiao Qiao had almost smashed.

Theoretically, the radio from the Seventh World should only sound once every few days. However, it rang in the morning and then again at noon, and this time the sound didn't last for three minutes.

Chu Changge, standing nearby, adjusted his glasses. "I guess this signal from the Seventh World is affected by dimensional differences. Their time isn't the same as ours, similar to the saying 'a day in heaven is a year on earth.' It's also possible that time in the Seventh World is completely chaotic, and what we hear each time is a sound transmitted from a random point in their jumbled timeline."

That was possible.

"Speaking of which," Gu Mian said, thinking about the voice he had heard earlier, "that person who claimed to be the No.1 Guardian, was that also a broadcast originating from the Twilight Gods World?"

But Xiao Qiao clearly said there were no living people in her world. If there were indeed no living people in that world, then was the broadcast sent by a ghost?

"This radio has always been with you," Chu Changge looked at Gu Mian. "Haven't you heard strange sounds from it before?"

"I often listened to it before the Global Game started," Gu Mian replied. "Back then, the radio could pick up many channels, so it was hard to notice a specific one. Thinking about it carefully, I don't believe I heard any strange channels before the game began. The first time was shortly after the game started, when you all were around."

That was when he heard the "No.1 Guardian."

"Everyone is dead," Xiao Qiao, squatting beside the table, suddenly spoke up. "My world has been on the brink of destruction for a long time; there are no living people."

No.1 Guardian, living people, the alarm sound... These things clearly didn't belong to the same world. Could this radio be connected to other worlds as well? Gu Mian was somewhat perplexed.

Just then, a STATICKY sound suddenly emanated from the radio, followed by a person's voice—

"Goodbye..."

It was a woman's voice. She sounded as if she were on the brink of death, yet she had managed to bid them farewell with her last breath. Her voice was low and hoarse, like the creak of an old, neglected wooden door swinging open, grating on the ears.

Yet, Gu Mian felt this voice was somewhat familiar. This voice, its tone altered and its original timbre lost, he seemed to have heard it somewhere before.

Before the woman's words fully faded, the harsh alarm sounded again. This time, however, it lasted only ten seconds before stopping abruptly. Only rustling STATIC could be heard from the radio again.

Xiao Qiao suddenly stood up, her expression somewhat puzzled.

The alarm just now confirmed the other side was the Twilight Gods World, but who was that woman? Were there really any survivors in that world on the brink of destruction? Who was that "goodbye" addressed to? Did she know someone could hear her farewell through the radio?

"Quick," Gu Mian suddenly stretched out his hand and pulled Xiao Qiao. "Quickly say 'goodbye' for me."

Xiao Qiao looked at Gu Mian with dull eyes, as if hypnotized, and robotically repeated, "Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye..."

"Alright, I know it's not you now." Gu Mian dismissively pushed her aside. Xiao Qiao wouldn't say goodbye in such an intelligent-sounding tone.

Pushed aside, Xiao Qiao looked a bit aggrieved. She stood up, thought for a moment, then plopped down on the sofa, inching her way towards Gu Mian.

Chu Changge's voice came from the side, "I remember the one who called herself the No.1 Guardian—she's a woman too, right?"

That's right, Gu Mian recalled. A standard female voice. Not the same one who just said goodbye. Are there still that many people alive in the Seventh World?

An atmosphere of suspense and mystery pervaded their side, while Fatty's area presented a completely different scene.

He was humming a song as he took a bag of chicken wings from the fridge and skewered them with metal skewers he had prepared earlier, his joy unmistakable.

If Gu Mian's side was a mystery thriller channel, Fatty's was a cheerful urban life channel. Gu Mian silently turned his head. If he didn't know Fatty so well, he'd suspect he was a character who'd crossed over from a different genre.

Noticing everyone looking at him, Fatty assumed they were anticipating dinner.

He raised his head proudly, waving the skewer in his hand, and announced, "I bought lamb, beef, chicken wings, enoki mushrooms, pork trotters, pork hearts, crab sticks, green peppers, crayfish..."

Listening to Fatty list the ingredients, Gu Mian actually felt a bit hungry.

While Fatty joyfully prepared ingredients all afternoon, Gu Mian and the others had been staring at the radio.

Who knew this thing would behave like an intermittently reanimating corpse? It made a sound once and then went completely silent, as if dead again.

It remained silent until evening, when Fatty set up the grill in the backyard for a barbecue.

The tempting aroma of barbecue wafted into Gu Mian's nostrils.

He went to the window and looked down.

He saw Fatty in the yard, grilling some beef tendons. Fatty picked up some cumin powder from the side and sprinkled a layer on top, instantly making the aroma even richer.

Barbecues, of course, are best with more people to liven things up.

At this moment, Keke, Liu Ruyan, and the others were already seated at the table Fatty had prepared. Even Xiao Hong and the Green Dwarf had been drafted by Fatty as the "atmosphere squad." That hopeless Xiao Qiao, upon smelling the aroma, instantly forgot about her tragic hometown and looked ready to jump from the upper floor into the yard.

Just then, Fatty looked up and saw Gu Mian and Xiao Qiao at the window.

He waved the skewered meat in his hand, calling out, "Doctor, come on down! I'm almost done with the first batch."

Xiao Qiao, at the window, looked eager to leap. Afraid she might actually jump, Gu Mian had to turn, pick up the radio from the table, and say to Chu Changge and the other person present, "Let's go down first."

In the end, Gu Mian carried the radio down to the yard.

He found a seat and sat down, placing the radio in front of him.

Fatty just then brought over a large basin of spicy crayfish. He looked contentedly at the cheerful crowd around the table, feeling proud of his massive contribution to the harmony of the Doctor's "harem."

Just as Fatty was basking in his self-satisfaction, the radio in front of Gu Mian suddenly crackled to life again.

The voice this time sounded normal. The speaker's voice was clear, and full of emotion. Gu Mian immediately recognized it as the same person who had said "goodbye" earlier.

"Is anyone there?"

He heard these three words from the radio.

At the same time, everyone at the table froze.

They all recognized this voice.

It was 007.

Chapter 677 History Always Astonishingly Repeats Itself_1

"Dear Miss 007, I wonder if you've been having a good time lately. I heard you recently entered the Circus Dungeon with the Doctor. I imagine you two must have had a very pleasant chat...

"I'm not sure if you're currently in an instance, but something strange happened here today. If you're not, we were hoping you could come over."

History is often surprisingly similar.

Fatty was sending a message to 007. Of course, if she was in an instance, she wouldn't receive this message; she'd have to leave the instance to see it.

"The Seventh World has open instances?" Gu Mian stared at the radio on the table.

This device wasn't exactly a communication tool, so Gu Mian couldn't use it to talk to 007, who had sent the signal. Moreover, its signal was very unstable; it fell silent after broadcasting that sentence.

007's voice had come from the radio twice today.

The first time, her voice was weak, like a final goodbye before death.

The second time, her voice was full of energy, sounding like she was in good condition.

From deathly still to full of life.

It couldn't be a final burst of energy before death, could it?

Just as Gu Mian was seriously contemplating this possibility, Fatty's voice came from the side, "Miss 007 just replied! Her reply was very quick. She said she's not in an instance..."

"Not in an instance?" Gu Mian frowned. "Hasn't she entered any instance today?"

"Miss 007 said that after leaving the Circus Dungeon, she hasn't entered any other instances."

Well, that was truly strange.

007 was on Earth, yet her voice from the Seventh World was being broadcast on the radio.

"Why would this happen? Could it be that the broadcasts from noon and just now weren't actually from Miss 007?" Fatty, too, found it odd.

Gu Mian had a theory. "Time in the Seventh World is chaotic; you could even say time doesn't exist there. Combined with dimensional interference, what we're hearing isn't a live broadcast from the Seventh World. I believe the voices could be from the past, or perhaps the future."

He elaborated, "For example, let's say you, Fatty, accidentally fall into a room where time doesn't exist. Inside, there's only you and a cellphone. At that point, your time is out of sync with the outside world. If time in the outside world is a line, then your time is a point outside that line."

Fatty, holding his kebab, had a 'Why me?' look on his face.

"Then," Gu Mian continued, "you try to use that phone to call me. But because your time is non-existent, completely unrelated to our time, your call might reach me when I'm three years old, or it might reach me when I'm eighty."

Fatty chimed in aptly, "Doctor, with your luck, I doubt you'll live to see eighty."

Gu Mian ignored Fatty's curse. "So, these two broadcasts from 007 are from the past, or the future."

Most likely the future, Gu Mian thought.

Fatty had the same idea. "So... instances will open in the Twilight Gods World? And Miss 007 went into one?"

Not only that.

Fatty recalled the goodbye he'd heard at noon.

If that voice truly was from the future...

It would mean 007 died there.

Everyone seated at the table fell silent.

The Fortune-teller didn't know what Gu Mian and the others had heard at noon, but judging by the atmosphere, she could guess. "At noon today, you heard 007's last words?"

They were like last words, yes.

As if to confirm the Fortune-teller's mention of "last words," the radio, after a long silence, crackled to life again. It was someone else's last words—

"Damn it! I don't want to die!"

That was the only sentence. After that, only the hiss of static came from the radio.

Judging by the words alone, you'd never imagine a girl said them. But everyone present could tell it was a woman's voice, and a familiar one at that.

Several people slowly turned their heads, their gazes fixing on the person in question.

The Fortune-teller, now the center of attention, widened her eyes. "What's with that voice? How did I get dragged into this?!"

Today was destined to be an unpleasant day.

Last words from 007 and the Fortune-teller had arrived one after another. After hearing both, Gu Mian crouched by the radio, hoping to hear a third or fourth set, but the device, after its burst of activity, fell completely silent.

The radio remained silent.

「Three days later.」

007 pulled up in her kiddy ride car outside the building with the "Bengbeng Imperial Harem" sign.

Fatty was the first to spot 007, who was staring blankly at the inn's sign. He greeted her enthusiastically, extending a warm welcome.

"Why the rush to get me here?" 007 looked somewhat haggard, likely exhausted from the journey.

Fatty hadn't told her about the last words. He felt such matters were best discussed in person. But looking at 007 now, he found it difficult to broach the subject. He couldn't just blurt out, "Your future self died and left her last words," could he?

With this in mind, he decided to start with something else to ease into it. "Let's not talk about that for now. By the way, Miss 007, have you found your family yet?"

The saga of 007 searching for her mother had been ongoing for a long time. If you considered it an instance, it would be the longest one in the entire game.

At his words, 007's already somber expression darkened further.

Seeing her expression, Fatty mentally cursed. Looks like I really put my foot in it this time.

After a moment's thought, he decided to pass the hot potato to Gu Mian. "Miss 007, it's been a few days! The Doctor said he missed you very much. He even said something like, 'A day without seeing you feels like three autumns.' Quick, I'll take you to him. Let's give him a surprise."

007: "..."

She knew Gu Mian would never say anything like 'a day without seeing you feels like three autumns.' The person before her was most likely spouting nonsense.

Fatty, pleased with himself, led 007 into the room and then made his exit.

Thus, when Gu Mian opened his eyes the next morning, he saw 007 standing awkwardly beside him.

"You're awake." 007 looked at the quilt, which Gu Mian had kicked to the edge of the bed in his sleep.

The poor quilt was already half dangling onto the floor. Who would have thought Gu Mian had such a habit? Kicking off the covers... that really didn't fit his persona at all.

Gu Mian silently pulled his quilt back. "I'm awake."

The atmosphere instantly became awkward.

007 coughed, pretending she hadn't seen anything. "Did you need me for something? You sounded so urgent calling me over."

Once Fatty found out those last words were 007's, he'd bombarded her with calls, urging her to come to Lianhua City. However, 007, despite being rushed, had no idea what had happened.

Gu Mian, who lacked Fatty's subtlety and wasn't good at reading people or situations, stated the facts directly, "Your future self transmitted her last words to us. You died in this game."

At this, Gu Mian added, "And judging by the sound of it, your death wasn't peaceful."

Fatty, who had just re-entered the room, caught the words "death wasn't peaceful." The hand holding the broom trembled. He really didn't need to say that last part, he thought.

007 was stunned.

She never imagined she'd be informed of her own death while still alive.

As if to comfort her, Gu Mian spoke again, "Another unlucky soul died with you... or at least, around the same time. It was the Fortune-teller; you've met her."

Meanwhile, the unlucky Fortune-teller was lying in bed with dark circles under her eyes. She hadn't slept well since receiving her own last words. She had even performed divination for herself several times, but the results were chaotic and different each time.

Is this future already set in stone? she stared at the ceiling. If we try hard to change things now, can we alter this fatal outcome...?

"That's it!" The Fortune-teller abruptly sat up in bed. "007 was with me then! Can't we just avoid entering the same instance together in the future?"

As long as we don't enter instances together and stagger our entry times, there's no way we'd be matched into the same one. However, our voices weren't broadcast at the same time. It's possible we entered that time-distorted instance separately and broadcast our messages at different points...

Thinking of this, the Fortune-teller became deeply troubled. In that case... unless we stop entering instances altogether, it'll be hard to avoid that deadly fate. And even if I don't go to the ticket office, special instances will appear automatically anyway.

Chapter 678 I Kidnapped a Keyboard to Type for Me Day and Night_1

"According to reliable intelligence, you entered a world called the Twilight Gods World. There are no living people there, only Evil Ghosts everywhere, and there is no concept of time," Gu Mian described the Seventh World to the person before him.

007 lowered her head slightly. She knew Gu Mian was somewhat different; therefore, when Gu Mian announced her death, she readily believed it without much doubt.

"If there are Evil Ghosts everywhere... Indeed, it would be very difficult to survive," 007 made a fair judgment. "In ordinary instances, one or a few ghosts chase players. But if you enter that world, it's a few players facing an entire world of ghosts."

Evil Ghosts were even more terrifying than the zombies in post-apocalyptic movies.

They would appear silently behind a slightly open door, in a cracked mirror, outside a dark window, or... behind you.

Evil Ghosts were everywhere and unstoppable.

Additionally, there was no concept of time in that world. Is there neither day nor night?

"An alarm will sound in that world periodically. While the alarm is active, those ghosts will become even more terrifying," Gu Mian explained honestly.

007 frowned, clearly considering how to survive in such an instance. "From my past experience, no matter how terrifying the instance, there's always a way for players to survive. But in the world you mentioned... I don't see any possibility of survival."

"So, that world isn't an open instance. Obviously, Earth doesn't want its people to enter unsolvable instances," Gu Mian said, crossing his hands. "I don't know how you all got in there. It might be the Low-Dimensional World causing trouble, or possibly... the will of Earth."

Earth loved the humans born upon it. But it did not love Gu Mian. Nor did it love the people around him. It was always trying to kill Gu Mian and his friends.

In the future, 007 and the Fortune-teller would step into this realm of absolute death together. The targeting was too obvious.

007 knew full well that Gu Mian was not favored by this world. She pondered, "I remember when this global game started, its purpose was to strengthen humanity."

But now, forget strengthening humanity.

The continuous winter and plagues had caused massive human casualties, and the death protection mechanism in instances had been turned off. The extreme difficulty of the instances made it hard for players to get rewards. Over the past half-year, not only had humanity not been significantly strengthened, but a large portion had died. The surviving players hadn't significantly improved their physical fitness. Attribute Points had become the rarest reward in instances, and most people had only gained a handful so far.

Fatty had once worried about fantastical scenes like "battle-qi manifesting as a horse" appearing in the later stages of the game, fearing that antagonist players would use a move like the "Eighteen Dragon-Subduing Palms" to crush Gu Mian, who couldn't gain Attribute Points. It seemed he wouldn't be able to witness such a fantastical scene now.

"Strengthening humanity was Earth's goal," Gu Mian said, rubbing his fingers. "Apparently, its goal was hindered by the Low-Dimensional World. Humans have become casualties in this contest, but most haven't realized it yet."

Earth was already on the losing end. Why has it started targeting the people around Gu Mian? 007 wondered.

"Do you have any guesses about your identity?" 007 asked. "Earth targets you, and even those around you, surely because your identity is special."

"I'm trying to figure it out," Gu Mian shrugged. "Many NPCs in instances are clueless, and it's pretty awkward to grab someone and ask, 'Hey, do you know my life story?'..."

"I think if Earth wanted to eliminate those around you, it wouldn't just pull me and the Fortune-teller into that world," 007 analyzed. "There should be others... It's also strange. The Fortune-teller and I only recently got closer to you. Earth wouldn't be so deranged as to eliminate us for that, would it?"

"True," Gu Mian nodded. "I don't quite understand why it would be you two. If it wanted to eliminate anyone, it should start with Fatty. If Fatty's gone, wouldn't I naturally starve to death?"

Fatty, in the living room, shed tears of gratitude. "That's the Doctor's acknowledgment of my importance! I must be the most important person in his heart."

Hearing this, 007 fell silent for a moment. She glanced at Fatty, who was weeping openly outside, then asked, "Can you predict when the Fortune-teller and I entered the Twilight Gods World?"

"It's difficult," Gu Mian admitted. "You two said less than twenty words in total. I really can't analyze much from that."

"So, you mean it's impossible to know how far we are from death." 007 gazed out the window.

Gu Mian sensed something was off with her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, I'm just a bit tired." 007 withdrew her gaze and revealed a smile. "After all, I rode a child's kiddy ride for three days straight. I'm quite sleepy now."

This woman rarely slept. Gu Mian remembered that before they entered the save point instance, 007 hadn't slept for several days either.

Gu Mian suddenly recalled Lu Yi's "Beast Tamer Theory." Beast Tamers are all villains! That was roughly what Lu Yi had said.

Thinking of this, he advised earnestly, "You should be a good person."

This time, 007 didn't give him a look as if he were insane. She nodded and promised solemnly.

Gu Mian was taken aback. He had been prepared to guide the rebellious young woman back to the right path, but he hadn't expected 007 to agree so readily.

After thinking for a moment, he added, "In the future, don't casually team up with the Fortune-teller for instances. Try to avoid contact with her as much as possible, lest you both get targeted by a special instance."

007 nodded.

Gu Mian thought for another moment. "Regarding the Twilight Gods World, you can ask Xiao Qiao. She's more familiar with that place."

"Mm." Apparently truly tired, 007 wasn't very talkative.

Gu Mian propped his chin on his hand. "Seems like there's nothing else to say. You can go. Head to the first floor and have Liu Ruyan find you a room. Try to get one far from the Fortune-teller's. Xiao Qiao lives with Liu Ruyan, but she's probably at the supermarket now. She came here begging for food this morning but didn't get any, so she said she'd go buy some herself."

007 agreed and turned to leave.

As she reached the door, Gu Mian suddenly remembered something. "Have you found your parents?"

007 stopped, her back to Gu Mian. She stood there for a long moment before replying in a somewhat subdued voice, "I have."

With that, she stepped out the door and left.

Gu Mian watched the doorway, sensing that 007 had reached a sorrowful conclusion to her search.

The Fortune-teller also thought of Xiao Qiao. Hearing that Xiao Qiao was quite familiar with the Twilight Gods World, she decided to pay her a visit and ask some questions.

But it was Liu Ruyan who opened the door. Liu Ruyan told her that Xiao Qiao had gone to the supermarket a little while ago, saying she wanted to buy something called 'Xiao Qiao Stewed Mushrooms.'

The Fortune-teller hurried towards the supermarket. The nearest supermarket was only a few hundred meters away. After running for three or four minutes, the Fortune-teller saw the supermarket building, which was open for business. At the entrance, a beautiful woman was talking incessantly with a salesperson.

It was Xiao Qiao.

"Miss Xiao Qiao!" the Fortune-teller called out from a distance.

But Xiao Qiao didn't seem to hear, still relentlessly trying to communicate with the salesperson.

Finding this odd, the Fortune-teller walked closer and overheard the following exchange:

"I want Xiao Qiao Stewed Mushrooms."

"What stewed mushrooms?"

"Xiao Qiao! Xiao Qiao Stewed Mushrooms!"

"We don't... we don't carry that item."

"Really? I don't believe you."

"..."

Slightly exasperated, the Fortune-teller approached Xiao Qiao. "You might be looking for Chicken Stewed with Mushrooms."

Only then did Xiao Qiao notice the Fortune-teller. "Are you also here to buy something?"

The Fortune-teller wiped the sweat from her forehead, a result of her run. "Actually, I came to ask you about the Twilight Gods World. I'll likely end up there in the future, so I was hoping to learn a bit about it beforehand..."

As she was speaking, she suddenly caught sight of a familiar figure in her peripheral vision. Damn it, that's the last person I want to see right now!

007 was also stunned. She hadn't expected the Fortune-teller to be here too, also looking for Xiao Qiao.

Seeing the Fortune-teller at the supermarket entrance, 007 stopped dead in her tracks.

A strange premonition surfaced in her mind. They already knew what the future held, so they wouldn't enter instances together anymore. The only thing that could bring them together again was a special instance. And special instances selected players by designating one or more small areas, pulling all players within those zones into the instance. In other words, only if she and the Fortune-teller were in the same small area could a special instance pull them both in simultaneously. The two of them should have been avoiding each other, yet they had run into one another by a strange twist of fate. The catalyst is Xiao Qiao! Because they both needed to find Xiao Qiao, they had ended up in the same place.

At that moment, a chill ran down 007's spine. I finally understand! The catalyst for the Fortune-teller and me entering that place of certain death... it's probably Xiao Qiao too! Earth is targeting Xiao Qiao and her group! When a special instance descends, it pulls in all players in the designated area. The Fortune-teller and I are just innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire! But it's too late. It's all too late!

In a surge of panic, she stumbled back a step, opening her mouth to shout.

But then she saw two male players and one female player exiting the supermarket, and not far behind them—Chu Changge!

Chu Changge froze for a second upon seeing the three of them, then immediately spun around and headed back into the supermarket. He's trying to get away from us!

Watching Chu Changge instantly turn and retreat, 007 knew her suspicions were correct. Chu Changge probably knew long ago that he would be pulled into that world. He knew he was a catalyst too!

007 gasped, her lungs burning, and managed to shout three words, "Quickly—separate!"

But it was still too late.

Her voice had barely faded when a fierce wind suddenly swept through the street.

When the wind died down, the supermarket entrance was empty, leaving only a dumbfounded salesperson staring at the vacant space.

Chapter 679 The intermittent play-dead never sends lunchboxes_1

"Can someone please tell me what the hell is going on!"

In front of a dark, dense forest, a male player named Song Tang was looking around in sheer disbelief.

Just seconds after he and his two friends stepped out of the supermarket, they found themselves in this eerie place.

It seemed that night had recently fallen, and the surroundings were dimly lit.

Behind them was a pitch-black forest, and in front of them was a winding path. Looking further down this path, they could faintly make out buildings concealed in the darkness.

It appeared to be a small town in the distance.

But at the moment, Song Tang had no energy to focus on the town. Instead, he asked with wide eyes, "Where are we? How did we suddenly appear here? Did any of you see a prompt on your game panel?"

As Song Tang spoke, he turned to look at the others. Unsure who to ask, he scanned their faces one by one.

"No," a female player with the nickname "A String of Thoughtful Years" said, her face grim. "We were inexplicably pulled here. No alerts, no notifications..."

As she spoke, her eyes were fixed on the void in front of her, as if trying to see the panel that would issue missions.

"Me too. No instance prompt, no mission alert. I don't even... know how to leave this place," the male player next to A String of Thoughtful Years finally said.

His expression was also grim, but he remained relatively calm. He looked at his two friends, then shifted his gaze to the four people opposite them. "Did you all not receive any alerts either?"

He noticed a popular female star among the four people opposite them, but in the current situation, no one had the mind to care; they just wanted to figure out what was going on.

Miss 007 looked at the man nicknamed "August Fifteenth", then turned to survey her three companions, silently questioning them with her gaze.

The Fortune-teller was pale. "I didn't get any panel notification either."

She hadn't expected to enter this deathtrap so quickly, and with Xiao Qiao and the others at that.

Chu Changge shook his head lightly, his meaning clear.

Xiao Qiao was staring blankly at her surroundings, as if not expecting to return to this world. Only when she met 007's questioning gaze did she snap back to reality, answering curtly, "Didn't see a panel."

007 frowned. "It seems none of us received any alerts."

"Could this be a special instance?" A String of Thoughtful Years suddenly asked, her voice laced with urgency. "It's a special instance, right? But why didn't we receive any instance prompt? Without any missions issued, how do we leave?"

007 knew this wasn't an instance.

It was a deathtrap Earth had chosen for them.

Earth didn't want them to leave, so naturally, it wouldn't issue any missions.

The Fortune-teller knew this too. Her face white, she looked at Chu Changge. "We're trapped here, aren't we? Without a mission, we'll never be able to leave."

As she spoke, her eyes kept scanning the surroundings, trying to spot Gu Mian's figure.

Unfortunately, the surroundings were clear; he was nowhere to be seen.

On this silent land, there were only the seven of them, and no one else.

Are we... going to die here?

Trapped forever in this vast, lonely world, with no escape even in death.

Overwhelmed, Song Tang burst out, "How could that be! How is that possible!"

"Calm down first," August said, patting Song Tang's shoulder. "The game wouldn't slaughter players senselessly like this. My guess is we've indeed entered a special instance, but maybe the game system malfunctioned and hasn't issued us missions yet."

007 knew this wasn't the truth, but she didn't say it out loud; the truth would cause these three to have an emotional breakdown.

But this explanation calmed Song Tang somewhat. He looked up blankly. "You mean the game has a bug?"

"Exactly," August nodded. "We can wait a bit; maybe the panel will appear later... If it still doesn't show up, then we'll try to explore this instance. It's possible the mission for this instance only appears when we trigger it."

A String of Thoughtful Years and Song Tang both accepted this explanation.

"That's right. This might be a rather unique special instance, one where we have to find the mission ourselves," A String of Thoughtful Years nodded.

Just as A String of Thoughtful Years opened her mouth to continue discussing their next steps, the sharp-eared Fortune-teller suddenly heard a CRACK from behind them.

It was the sound of footsteps on fallen leaves.

She whirled around to look, only to see a deep, dark forest.

In the dim night, the forest was pitch-black, with extremely low visibility, making it impossible to see anything inside.

The others had also heard the sound and turned to look.

"Could there be other players?" August stared warily at the menacing forest. This instance was eerie through and through; he didn't even dare to breathe too loudly.

Normally, when players heard unknown footsteps, they would turn and run without a second thought.

However, August wasn't certain how many players had entered this place. He clung to the hope that the footsteps belonged to another player; after all, in these strange circumstances, one more person meant more strength.

The Fortune-teller held the same hope.

She hoped Gu Mian would emerge from the forest.

She hoped to see Gu Mian walk out, brushing leaves from his shoulder while cursing what a stupid place this was.

007 also cherished this hope.

If it were Gu Mian, there might be a chance to change their fate.

The footsteps sounded again, closer this time.

Song Tang and A String of Thoughtful Years had unconsciously retreated a few steps, frightened by the sound.

But the others stood their ground, watching the forest as if awaiting something.

The Fortune-teller watched the dense forest, a mix of hope and fear in her heart.

Could it be?

Could it be him?

Would this sound bring hope?

Just then, Chu Changge suddenly noticed something under a tree in front of him.

He stared at it for two seconds, then his pupils constricted.

"Run!"

007 heard Chu Changge's voice from beside her.

"Quick, run!"

Then, 007 saw a deathly pale face emerge from the pitch-black forest.

At the same time, Liu Ruyan, inside the inn, suddenly sensed something and turned to look towards the supermarket.

Xie Bi'an, who was upstairs conversing with Accompany Me Next Year, also paused for a moment, then glanced in a certain direction.

"Doctor," Fatty said, sitting on the sofa and propping his head up with his hand, "speaking of which, I haven't seen much of Brother Chu these past few days. Ever since he started listening to the radio, he's been so elusive. I wonder what he's secretly up to."

Gu Mian pondered for a moment. "I really haven't seen him these past few days. He wouldn't have run away from home, would he?"

Fatty was silent for half a second. "Even if Xiao Hong ran away from home, Brother Chu wouldn't."

Xiao Hong, who was sprawling about on Gu Mian's bed, paused upon hearing her name, then resumed her assault on the bedsheets and quilt.

"We need to ask Brother Chu where he's been running off to these days. If he goes missing in the future, when we post a missing person notice, we can at least provide a clue like 'often spotted in XX location.'"

Fatty opened his panel. Then, as if remembering something, he looked at Gu Mian. "Oh, right, Doctor, let's add the Fortune-teller and Miss 007 to the group chat. If they really do end up in that instance, they can ask us for help from outside."

"Let Xiao Qiao add them; she's the group admin," Gu Mian said, reaching out to toss Xiao Hong off the bed. "Anyway, there are still plenty of empty spots in the group."

Fatty then turned to look at his own panel.

His expression turned a little strange, then that strange look faded, replaced by shock and panic.

"Doctor," Gu Mian heard Fatty's trembling voice come from the living room, "the group chat... is gone."

Chapter 680 The Disappearing Bengbeng and the 100 Copies_1

Hearing this, Gu Mian also opened his panel.

The group chat had indeed disappeared.

The group chat was a special item tied to Xiao Qiao. Now that the group chat was gone, didn't that mean...

With this thought in mind, Gu Mian checked his friends list again.

He didn't have many friends on his list, only a few. The moment he opened the friends panel, he noticed something strange.

Chu Changge and Xiao Qiao had disappeared from his friends list.

Gu Mian hadn't added 007 or the Fortune-teller as friends. He turned to look at Fatty, who was sweating on the sofa. "Check your friends list. Are the Fortune-teller and 007 still there?"

Fatty immediately opened his friends panel.

He stared at his panel for a while, then his face turned pale. Looking up at Gu Mian, he said, "They're gone. The Fortune-teller and Miss 007 have disappeared from my list."

This meant death.

Gu Mian had once added a player whose nickname was "Lianhua City East Police Station Captain Feng".

He was a police officer in this city.

Because Gu Mian didn't pay much attention to his friends, he only realized today that this officer had long since disappeared from his friends list.

He had no idea on which day the officer had died.

And now, Chu Changge's and the others' names had also disappeared from the friends list.

Fatty's face continued to turn pale. "Did the four of them... die together? Miss 007 was so lively just a moment ago."

"Something's not right," Gu Mian said, staring at his list. "I think they must have inadvertently gathered together and then gotten pulled into a special instance. But 007 was here just now, which means they couldn't have been pulled into the instance very long ago. Could all four of them have died together in such a short period?"

"Yeah," Fatty's mouth fell open. "Even if it's a terrifying special instance, there's no way four people would die the moment they enter... Wait, if the Fortune-teller and Miss 007 were pulled into an instance together, could that instance be the Seventh World we heard about on the radio?"

"I'm afraid that's the case," Gu Mian nodded. "I didn't expect this to happen so soon."

They had learned about the future deaths of 007 and the Fortune-teller from the radio.

They died in the Seventh World.

But he hadn't expected Chu Changge and Xiao Qiao to be involved as well.

Gu Mian remembered that the Fortune-teller had done a reading for Chu Changge and Xiao Qiao not long ago. The results for both were the same: stuck in a Schrödinger's state of death.

Dead, yet not dead.

"I think they haven't died yet, but they will eventually die there," Gu Mian said, furrowing his brow as he reached into his pocket.

Fatty didn't quite understand, but he was very anxious. "Miss Xiao Qiao said that place is full of Evil Ghosts! It's dangerous for Brother Chu and the others to go in."

Just as Fatty was speaking, the sound of frantic footsteps came from the corridor.

The two of them turned their heads to look at the entrance.

A man came running to the door, panting heavily and leaning on the door frame to catch his breath.

The newcomer was wearing a supermarket uniform; he was a male sales clerk about 1.7 meters tall.

Fatty was confused as to why a supermarket sales clerk would come here.

The man leaning against the door frame caught his breath, hurriedly stood up straight, and, to explain his purpose to the two men in the room, shouted, "It's terrible! Everyone's been taken away!"

So, he had come to deliver a message. Could it be that Brother Chu and the others were taken into the special instance at the supermarket? Fatty was stunned.

Then, he heard another flurry of hurried footsteps.

This time it was Mr. Green. His anxious expression was almost identical to that of the sales clerk still leaning against the door frame. He rushed into the room, almost jumping in agitation, and exclaimed, "I just heard that Earth pulled some of your people into the Seventh World!"

By now, Gu Mian had already walked over to the coffee table. Before he could say anything, they were interrupted by a third unexpected visitor.

Liu Ruyan also appeared at the door, a complex look on her face. "I just lost my sensory connection with Chu Changge, Xiao Qiao, and the others."

This was a sign of a Guardian's death.

Gu Mian understood. Earth was indeed targeting Chu Changge and the others, which was why it hadn't thrown him into the Seventh World along with them.

Perhaps Earth was also afraid that something unexpected would happen if he, too, were thrown into the Seventh World.

Mr. Green was hopping anxiously. "The Seventh World can't afford any mistakes! Gu Mian, you must find a way to get them out quickly. You still have that admission ticket, right? Hurry up and get in there to get them out!

"No, you going in might cause even bigger side effects. And that admission ticket might not necessarily allow you to enter the Seventh World... After all, that place is a bit special.

"Damn, Earth is really ruthless! Gu Mian, your friends being pulled into the Seventh World has nothing to do with us. You can't blame us for this..."

It seemed that both Mr. Green and the sales clerk had come to deliver the message primarily out of concern for the safety of the Seventh World.

Evidently, the Seventh World was a very important world.

Although Gu Mian didn't know why Mr. Green and the others cared so much about the Seventh World, this wasn't the time for inquiries.

Gu Mian had already taken out the instance admission ticket from his pocket.

By writing the name of an instance on it, he could immediately enter that instance.

At this time, Mr. Green had moved to Gu Mian's side. He looked down at the instance admission ticket on the table and said, "The Seventh World isn't open for instances; this might not work."

Gu Mian ignored the short man beside him.

He picked up a pen and carefully wrote "Twilight Gods World" on the admission ticket.

He thought the four people in the Seventh World must also be looking forward to seeing him.

But nothing happened.

Gu Mian didn't enter any instance. He was still sitting on the living room couch, and the hopeful looks on Fatty's and Mr. Green's faces dimmed.

"Can't get in? Is it because I filled in the instance name incorrectly, or because Chu Changge and the others aren't actually in an instance?" Gu Mian wondered, watching as the four characters on the admission ticket gradually vanished, leaving the instance name field blank once more.

He looked at Mr. Green. "Can Earth pull players into worlds that don't allow instances, just on a whim?"

"No," Mr. Green shook his head vigorously. "In theory, instances are the key connection between players and Low-Dimensional Worlds. Without entering an instance, players cannot enter Low-Dimensional Worlds. Some areas in our world don't offer instances either, and players can't be pulled into those unopened areas."

But the Seventh World clearly doesn't allow instances, yet Chu Changge and the others were forcibly pulled into it.

"Does Earth have the authority to create instances? Can it create instances in your Low-Dimensional Worlds?" Gu Mian continued to ask.

"Yes. Some instances are created by our Low-Dimensional World, and those are quite difficult. Others are created by Earth; those instances are relatively simple, making it easier for players to acquire resources."

At this point, something seemed to occur to Mr. Green. He slapped his thigh. "Earth must have created a new instance in the Seventh World! The treaty states that Earth cannot create instances in the Seventh World. It has violated our agreement! It will face tremendous punishment!"

Did Earth really risk such a great punishment just to create an instance and pull Chu Changge and the others into the Seventh World?

Gu Mian frowned. "I guess Earth must have given that newly created instance a very tricky name, like 'Hjrjkleklk'."

Earth didn't want him to enter the Seventh World, so naturally, it would give the instance a very tricky name.

"Can you find out the name of that instance?" Gu Mian asked.

Mr. Green shook his head in distress. "We have a record of all instances created normally, but we don't know the names of those created abnormally."

This was getting difficult.

Gu Mian couldn't just wildly guess on the admission ticket; if he accidentally guessed another instance's name and was pulled into it, that would be disastrous.

"Are there any NPCs in the Seventh World that can be contacted?" Gu Mian asked. He didn't hold much hope for NPCs in the Seventh World. Xiao Qiao had said that her world had no living people, so there were probably no living NPCs either.

As expected, Mr. Green shook his head. "No, but legend says there's a very high-level NPC in that world. I've only heard rumors; there's no way to make contact."

Fatty's face was flushed red with frustration. "What do we do? We don't know the instance's name, and we can't contact any NPCs. We can't just leave it to fate!"

"No," Gu Mian shook his head. "I still have one more way to enter the Seventh World."

Mr. Green had once said that there was a train in a certain instance that connected all worlds.

He could use that train to enter the Seventh World.

The train was located in the 'Wacky Great Train Escape' instance, the very one Gu Mian had wrecked.

"Has that train of yours been fixed?" Gu Mian asked, looking at Mr. Green.

Mr. Green also immediately thought of this, and his expression soured. "It's fixed, but we've been worried about potential accidents, so it hasn't been reopened yet."

That was a very important train. The NPCs were also afraid that Gu Mian might pull another stunt, so it hadn't been reopened.

"Tell them to open it immediately!" Gu Mian demanded.

"Alright, alright!" Mr. Green said, pulling out a walkie-talkie-like device from somewhere. "The train conductor is already traumatized by him. Be gentle this time, don't scare the poor guy..."

As he spoke, he pressed a few buttons on the walkie-talkie and then put the receiver to his ear, waiting.

A few seconds later, the call seemed to connect. He turned, gesticulating wildly with his free hand, animatedly telling the person on the other end to open the train instance and to ensure the train conductor was mentally prepared.

The call ended quickly; Mr. Green had settled the matter in about twenty-odd seconds.

He turned back excitedly. "Done! Go quickly!"

But when he turned around, Gu Mian was already gone, leaving only a dumbstruck Fatty on the couch.

Mr. Green was also taken aback. "He went in that quickly?"

"No," Fatty said, looking at the unused instance admission ticket on the table. "He didn't go into that instance."

He... had simply disappeared.