

Collapse 701

Chapter 701 This Real Six_1

Upon hearing these words, Gu Mian couldn't help but imagine the scene—

A high-end version of Xiao Qiao hugging his skull, smacking her lips as she sucked out his brains.

The image was too vivid.

Gu Mian shook his head, forcing the image from his mind.

"Speaking of which, that NPC named Xingyun has the same voice as Xiao Qiao. I wonder if they also look the same, Gu Mian mused.

Fatty picked up the trash bag. "Based on your description, Doctor," he said, "I feel like that NPC from the Seventh World should look similar to Miss Xiao Qiao, after all, Miss Xiao Qiao was created by her."

Since there were no living beings left in the Seventh World, Xingyun had to personally create a Guardian and send it to Earth.

Gu Mian couldn't help but feel sorry for this pitiful NPC.

This must be the most miserable core character among all seven worlds. No one was left alive in her world, yet she still had to expend immense effort to prevent its collapse.

She was a truly unlucky NPC.

Gu Mian felt that the name Xingyun didn't suit her at all. She should change her name to Misfortune instead, he thought.

At that moment, Fatty, holding a black trash bag, opened the door. "Doctor, I'm going out to take out the trash. I'll cook when I get back."

Gu Mian looked out the window. The sun in the distance was setting in the west, about to dip below the horizon.

It had been a truly thrilling and eventful day.

From the Seventh World to the train, and then from the train to a fantastical director's instance.

On this day, they had met the exceptionally fortunate Miss Xingyun and the warmly hospitable train conductor.

They had also learned the names of several core characters.

Next, they needed to try and make more allies to prevent the chain collapse of the Low-Dimensional Worlds.

After dinner, Gu Mian lay peacefully on his bed.

Xiao Hong, beside him, was clueless about his tumultuous day. In her eyes, Gu Mian had merely disappeared for a few hours and then returned.

As usual, she clutched her lychee soda, relishing it beside Gu Mian's bed.

She stayed there for a long time. Seeing that the man on the bed paid her no attention, she began to feel a little aggrieved.

Just as Xiao Hong was feeling dejected, Gu Mian suddenly reached out and patted her slightly aggrieved head. "Don't worry," he said, "I won't let you die."

Having her head patted, Xiao Hong instantly cheered up and joyfully scampered under the bed.

What a harmonious and loving day, Gu Mian thought as he pulled up his blanket and closed his eyes.

And so, the day drew to a perfect close.

「Ten days later, Xiao Qiao finally woke up.」

There was nothing seriously wrong with her body; she was just pale from sleeping so long.

Gu Mian confirmed that this was still the same Xiao Qiao with limited brain capacity; that clichéd 'possession' scenario hadn't occurred.

It's worth mentioning that the first thing Xiao Qiao did after waking up was to find Gu Mian and carefully examine the lower half of his face.

Before she fainted, the last thing she had seen was Gu Mian's chin, ravaged by the ground.

During these ten days, the wounds on Gu Mian's face had long since scabbed over and healed. Seeing the still relatively flawless lower half of his face, Xiao Qiao finally breathed a sigh of relief.

"Doctor," Fatty began hesitantly, "did Miss Xiao Qiao's brain devolve again? Shouldn't a person who narrowly escapes death typically have an emotional breakdown upon waking up? Why did she immediately worry about whether your face was disfigured as soon as she opened her eyes?"

Gu Mian touched the previously injured spot on his face. "Maybe she thinks my face is more important than her life," he said.

Fatty scratched his head. "Then, Doctor, you really need to take good care of your face."

"I would have, even if you hadn't said anything."

After confirming that Gu Mian's face was not disfigured, Xiao Qiao simply sat blankly by the window, not breaking down emotionally as Fatty had expected.

Her silhouette even seemed a bit depressed.

"What's wrong with Miss Xiao Qiao? She hasn't been herself since she woke up," Fatty said, sensing something was off. "She's never been this depressed before. She couldn't be upset because the Seventh World collapsed, could she?"

Gu Mian also found it strange. He still wanted to ask Xiao Qiao if she knew anything about Xingyun.

Just as the two of them were wondering, Xiao Qiao, by the window, suddenly stood up.

Then she began to mumble to herself, "This isn't right... it shouldn't be... why... I don't understand..."

"Have you discovered something?" Gu Mian asked. "What's wrong with you?"

Xiao Qiao finally turned her head to look at him. "I feel weird."

What?

Gu Mian found it difficult to communicate with her normally.

Before he could ask further, Xiao Qiao began to repeat her earlier words, heading towards the door as if in a daze.

Fatty looked worriedly at Xiao Qiao's retreating figure. "Doctor, do you know if there's any medicine that can increase IQ?"

"I'm afraid not."

Gu Mian watched Xiao Qiao walk away.

Fortunately, there were no cars on the road outside. Otherwise, he would have been genuinely worried that she might wander into traffic and get hit.

Given Xiao Qiao's current mental state, Gu Mian decided to ask her about the Seventh World and Xingyun in a few days.

Over the next few days, Gu Mian continuously studied the walkie-talkie he had snatched from Mr. Green.

He pressed all the strange buttons on it, but the walkie-talkie showed no reaction at all.

Could it be that only NPCs can use this thing? Gu Mian wondered, feeling a pang of regret. If I'd known, I would have tied up Mr. Green too.

After the walkie-talkie was snatched, poor Host Green disappeared. Fatty guessed he had probably found a corner somewhere to recover from his psychological trauma.

Fatty looked at the walkie-talkie Gu Mian had tossed aside. "Mr. Green must be traumatized," he said. "Doctor, you're always snatching people's things. No wonder he's too scared to show his face."

Fatty was right.

A few days later, Gu Mian found a small piece of paper that had been slipped under the door.

Mr. Green had slipped it in while they were asleep.

I've found another place to stay temporarily. Don't look for me, and don't worry about me.

Fatty examined the note Mr. Green had slipped under the door, clicking his tongue in amusement. "This is just like a note left by a child running away from home! I didn't expect Mr. Green to be so childlike."

"Speaking of running away from home," Fatty continued, picking up a calendar from the nearby table and circling a date. "In a few days, it'll be the Mid-Autumn Festival. It's supposed to be a time for reunions, but Mr. Green has just left us..."

Having been unemployed for so long, Gu Mian had almost forgotten about such holidays.

Only after Fatty's reminder did he remember that the Mid-Autumn Festival was approaching.

Isn't there going to be an event for such a major holiday? Gu Mian wondered as he opened his panel. He found the event interface was still gray; it seemed the organizers weren't planning anything.

The Lantern Festival, the dragon boat race, and the college entrance examination events had all been held on major holidays.

He had originally thought there would be new events for the Mid-Autumn Festival, yet the organizers had surprisingly made no moves.

"Yeah," Fatty said, "they're not even holding an event for the Mid-Autumn Festival. Could it be that this game is planning to shut down and skip town?"

If it really did shut down and run off, the players would probably cry tears of joy.

"Before, when the death protection mechanism was active, the Low-Dimensional Worlds held events to ensnare players," Gu Mian said, looking at the date Fatty had circled. "Now that players face real death in instances, the Low-Dimensional Worlds don't need to expend energy organizing events. We should eat mooncakes for the Mid-Autumn Festival, right?"

"Huh?"

Fatty took a moment to process Gu Mian's abrupt change of topic. "Oh, right, mooncakes. What kind do you like, Doctor?"

Gu Mian thought for a while before saying, "I don't like ones with rock sugar; they're too hard on my teeth. Anything else is fine."

Because he didn't usually celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival, Gu Mian hadn't eaten many mooncakes. Consequently, his knowledge of different mooncake types was quite limited.

Fatty clapped his hands. "I'll make them myself! I promise they won't be hard on your teeth, Doctor."

Saying this, he rushed out, presumably to buy molds and ingredients for the mooncakes.

Chu Changge, who was nearby, asked, "When do you plan to enter the next instance? After the Mid-Autumn Festival?"

Now that human order had collapsed, traditional holidays no longer held much meaning.

But Gu Mian still hoped this festival could be passed peacefully.

Yet that, too, was an extravagant hope.

We'll go in the next few days, Gu Mian mused. We can celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival when we get back. I don't know how long Xingyun can hold on; we need to hurry.

He borrowed Big Data Search from Xiao Qiao to look for core characters in the instances.

Chapter 702 Choked on Shit_1

Over the past few days, Xiao Qiao had finally started acting more normal, and Gu Mian, hoping against hope, asked if she knew anything about Xingyun.

As expected, she was just as clueless as before.

Seeing her struggle to come up with an answer, Gu Mian decided not to press her anymore; he simply left her to her own devices.

After coming out of the Seventh World, the Fortune-teller and 007 no longer needed to avoid each other intentionally. That said, even if they didn't avoid each other intentionally, they still rarely crossed paths.

007 spent her days holed up in her room, barely showing her face. She stopped looking for her mother, and Gu Mian guessed that the ending of 007's quest to find her mother might have been a sad one.

After experiencing a sad ending, only to be immediately thrust into the Seventh World, it was no surprise that 007 was emotionally drained and needed time to recover.

Gu Mian decided not to bother her.

Meanwhile, the Fortune-teller began to focus on physical fitness after nearly being run ragged by a dog.

Gu Mian often saw her running laps outside his window. She ran in the morning, in the dead of night, and even brought back a pair of dumbbells.

Occasionally, Fatty would stand beside the window, looking uneasy. "Miss Fortune-Teller seems to be getting serious about her workouts," he said.

He was honestly worried he might one day come face-to-face with a muscle-bound Miss Fortune-Teller.

During this time, Gu Mian was also preoccupied. He and Chu Changge had been discussing and analyzing key characters in various worlds.

In the Seventh World, Xingyun was doing everything in his power to slow the spread of the curse.

In the First World, No. 1 had never appeared, and his whereabouts remained a mystery. Gu Mian had only heard about him through Xingyun.

In the Third World, there was an NPC called "The Divergent" who was suspected to be a key character, but they weren't sure.

In the Fourth World, there was an NPC named "Slaughter," an Evil God who was seemingly everywhere. His avatar was looking for Gu Mian, though Gu Mian didn't know why.

The key characters in the remaining worlds were still unknown; their names were also yet to be revealed.

"Right now, the easiest key character to find is the Evil God. While we're looking for him, he's also looking for us." Gu Mian passed the Big Data Search to Chu Changge, gesturing for him to store it in his inventory.

"Are you planning on entering an instance today?" Chu Changge neatly stored the Big Data Search, then took another special item that Gu Mian handed him.

"Yes," Gu Mian responded. "Thanks to Coach Che's manual, we'll be able to determine roughly which world the instance belongs to once we enter."

Then, they could use the Big Data Search to find the key character in that world.

Luckily, there were no invisible walls in the game. Once they entered an instance, Gu Mian could roam freely.

"Once we find the key character, we can engage and establish a plan to save the world. After all, if the world is saved, I won't have to work hard digging graves for you guys," Gu Mian declared, his tone full of righteous conviction.

Chu Changge turned away to look at a box of red mud salted duck eggs Fatty had left by the kitchen door.

Mid-Autumn Festival was approaching. The eggs had been carefully selected by Fatty, perfect for making lotus seed paste mooncakes with egg yolk.

On the kitchen table was a bowl of lotus seeds whose cores had been removed. Fatty had been halfway through making mooncakes when he realized the blender was broken. He was now hastily off to the supermarket to buy a new one.

As for why the blender had abruptly stopped working, it was probably because Gu Mian's hands had been itching to use it, so he'd made soy milk that morning.

At this moment, the broken blender lay in the trash can right under Gu Mian's eyes.

Gu Mian glanced guiltily at the blender in the trash can. "Anyway, for the sake of world peace, let's continue our journey to explore instances."

When Fatty returned, the house was empty, save for Xiao Hong, who sat there with a bowl, stuffing her face with lotus seeds.

Meanwhile, Gu Mian had already entered an instance, bringing along his custom-made "Simplified Portable Chu Change."

[Instance: Death Photography]

[Number of Players: 9]

[Description: This was supposed to be just an ordinary team-building event, but strange things started happening soon after. How long can you survive amidst mounting dangers?]

Another team-building event, Gu Mian thought. He recalled that a previous instance had also started as a team-building event. Team-buildings always meant trouble.

[Objective: Survive for Three Days]

Just as Gu Mian was silently cursing the habitual ill-fortune of instances paired with team-building events, their surroundings suddenly lit up.

They had entered the instance. Gu Mian had barely had time to adapt when a voice echoed from the front— "Eggplant!"

Hearing this, Gu Mian, as if conditioned to react, looked towards the direction of the voice and flashed a smile and a peace sign.

Having had his photo taken numerous times as a child, he naturally responded like this.

Not half a second after Gu Mian made the gesture, a bright light flashed in front of him. It was the flash of a camera.

After the flash, Gu Mian finally got a good look at his surroundings.

They were on a slightly flat mountaintop, with a few tall pine trees nearby.

The weather here was good. The sun was blazing overhead, making the ground hot to the touch.

A few meters in front stood the person who had shouted earlier. He held a black Polaroid camera in one hand and, with the other, reached for the photo that had just ejected from it. This was an NPC.

Aside from the NPC with the Polaroid camera, a few other people were standing around Gu Mian. They had probably been posing for a group photo. The others surrounding him were players, currently sizing each other up.

"Huh?" Just as Gu Mian was about to get a closer look at the other players, the NPC, looking at the photo, let out a confused noise. "Why does the photo look like this?"

Because the name of the instance was "Death Photography," the players were extremely sensitive to anything related to photos.

Gu Mian saw a male player named "Wenqin Tan Jiu" instantly get into character and approach the photo-taking NPC. "What happened?"

The other players also started to approach the NPC. They had no time for introductions; it was straight to looking for clues, Gu Mian observed.

Gu Mian nudged Chu Changge, who was standing next to him. "Quick, use the train conductor's manual to figure out which world this is."

He was treating Chu Changge as if he were a finely made humanoid computer.

Chu Changge adjusted his glasses. "There's no need to guess. I can sense it; this is the Second World."

They'd arrived in Chu Changge's home world.

Gu Mian looked around.

Not too far behind him was a human-sized stone tablet with "Taiying Mountain" carved into it. Next to the tablet, thick pine trees grew, creating a scenic atmosphere.

A short distance away, there was a paved road where a coach was parked.

It seemed that they hadn't climbed the mountain themselves, but had been driven up.

Gu Mian was reminded of a coach incident from a previous team-building instance. "I was recently in an instance called 'Amnesia,' which you weren't in. That one also started with a team-building activity and a coach. However, midway through the journey, the coach rolled down the mountain. No one on board survived."

So he reckoned it would be best not to take the coach.

Chu Changge looked down the incline of the paved road. "Don't worry, the slope of this mountain is moderate."

The mountain wasn't tall. Standing on the summit, they could see all the way down to the bottom. Gu Mian had also noticed this.

The paved road was built on the mountainside, with no steep cliffs nearby. Therefore, the chance of the coach overturning was less than choking to death on excrement.

Chapter 703 This is not good to eat_1

"Why do you all have such expressions when you're taking photos?" The NPC curiously looked at the photo in his hand.

The "sigh" he had just let out was not due to discovering any supernatural occurrences but was rather a comment on the strange expressions of the people in the photo.

In the photo, apart from Gu Mian, who was flashing a peace sign with a broad smile, everyone else wore an expression that screamed, Who am I? Where am I? What is this place?

This was quite normal, as most players were in such a state when first entering an instance. Those who could immediately react, smile, and flash a peace sign were the abnormal ones.

Apart from their expressions, there was nothing else unusual about the photo. Wenqin Tan Jiu, having found no clues, shifted his attention to Gu Mian.

This player adapted to the environment so quickly. He's definitely not ordinary, Wenqin Tan Jiu thought.

Gu Mian was holding the Big Data Search, considering whose name to input.

"This is the First World. Theoretically, we should search for No. 1's location," Gu Mian said, looking at the input box at the bottom of the Big Data Search. "But who knows how far he is? It'll be troublesome if he's on the other side of this world."

Besides No. 1, Gu Mian could also search for the Evil God.

It was rumored that the Evil God had created clones in various worlds.

If he searched for the Evil God, the chance of finding a nearby clone would be higher.

Maybe if he searched for an Evil God clone, he'd find one right beside him.

Just then, Chu Changge's voice came from the side, "I don't think we need to search."

What?

Gu Mian looked up at him, only to find Chu Changge staring at someone nearby.

Following Chu Changge's gaze, Gu Mian saw a man in a blue hoodie, his face beaming with a radiant smile.

Gu Mian knew this face well.

It was Xu Xingcheng.

Gu Mian looked him up and down a few times and discovered that this guy even had a player panel.

Good heavens! Are Evil God clones this advanced now? Capable of disguising themselves as players?

"It's so good to see you again!" Xu Xingcheng was very enthusiastic, immediately expressing his joy at seeing Gu Mian. He wasn't like those other flashy, insincere types.

If other NPCs saw Gu Mian, they wouldn't manage even half a smile. Their expressions would be so grim, you could place them before a grave, and they'd fit right in with the mourners.

But the Evil God was different.

Although Gu Mian had damaged some of his "small parts," he didn't mind at all. He still warmly welcomed Gu Mian's arrival and even wanted to give him a loving hug.

Gu Mian silently sidestepped, dodging Xu Xingcheng's attempted "loving hug."

"Is this really the Evil God?" he asked Chu Changge, skeptical of Xu Xingcheng's identity.

"Although his demeanor doesn't quite match the name 'Slaughter'," Chu Changge began, "he is indeed a genuine clone."

He certainly seems cheerful...

Looking at the enthusiastic Xu Xingcheng, Gu Mian thought the name "Slaughter" was a misnomer. How could such a warm and hospitable NPC be called Slaughter?

'Warm and Friendly' would be more fitting.

This hospitable Evil God had personally come over disguised as a player, saving Gu Mian the trouble of finding him.

Just as Gu Mian was about to ask how Xu Xingcheng had found him, the players who had been looking at the photo returned.

A total of nine people had been in the group photo earlier—the nine players in the instance.

Of course, among them was one fake player.

"Hello," Wenqin Tan Jiu spoke first. He looked at the green "Doctor" title above Gu Mian's head, then at Chu Changge and Xu Xingcheng beside him. "Are you three together?"

Sort of, Gu Mian nodded silently.

"The four of us are together too," Wenqin Tan Jiu said, motioning to the three people behind him.

Gu Mian looked where he pointed.

Behind him stood one man and two women.

The male player's nickname was "Dew from tonight is white."

The two female players' nicknames were "Ningmeng Busuan" and "Yu Ji 235."

The three players nodded at him with friendly smiles, though their smiles weren't nearly as enthusiastic as Xu Xingcheng's.

Wenqin Tan Jiu curiously eyed the green "Doctor" title above Gu Mian's head. "You have a class, right?"

"Yes," Gu Mian said matter-of-factly. "I'm a healer. I specialize in saving lives and healing injuries in instances. If you're about to die, you can come to me. Of course, don't bother if you're already dead."

Wenqin Tan Jiu was slightly taken aback. "You... certainly have a unique sense of humor."

It was rare for anyone to crack such jokes in a horror instance.

He then courteously said a few more words, like, "I hope we can all work together to survive this instance," before turning his attention to the other players.

Besides Gu Mian's trio and Wenqin Tan Jiu's quartet, there were two other players.

One was a female player with glasses and an intellectual demeanor, whose nickname was "Su Lian."

She gave the group a gentle smile. "I matched into this instance solo. I hope we can all get along."

Ah, a lone wolf player, Wenqin Tan Jiu thought. He nodded and turned to look for the last remaining player.

However, after scanning the surroundings, he couldn't find them.

"Where did they go?" Wenqin Tan Jiu looked rather dumbstruck.

He remembered there were definitely nine people in the photo earlier. Why was one missing now?

Has the ghost already started killing? Has a player already fallen victim? Or could the one who disappeared be the ghost hidden among us?

Worried, Wenqin Tan Jiu stepped back a few paces, about to urge the others to leave the area.

Just then, a rustling sound came from behind the pine tree next to the stone tablet.

The players retreated alertly, looking toward the sound.

Then they saw a timid figure peeking out from behind the tree—it was the last player. Upon seeing this player's face, Gu Mian knew why he had been hiding.

He recognized this man.

Hao Laoshi.

It turned out Gu Mian had quite some history with this player, having run into him three times before. This was their fourth encounter.

Gu Mian first met him in Coach Che's driving license instance.

In that instance, this Honest Person had died mysteriously out of Gu Mian's sight.

Since he was just an insignificant bystander, Gu Mian hadn't paid much attention.

Surprisingly, he met this Honest Person again in the High School Ghost Stories instance. Back then, Hao Laoshi had fled in terror upon seeing Chu Changge, which had puzzled Gu Mian at the time.

It was worth noting that Xu Xingcheng had also first appeared in the High School Ghost Stories instance, though Hao Laoshi and Xu Xingcheng hadn't met.

Then Gu Mian met this man again during the College Entrance Exam event.

It was during the College Entrance Exam event that Hao Laoshi finally told Gu Mian why he always ran from Chu Changge.

He claimed that in the driving license instance, Chu Changge had thrown him to the ghosts. That was why he'd been terrified of Chu Changge ever since.

The Honest Person even advised Gu Mian to keep his distance from Chu Changge, lest he be silently stabbed in the back one day.

Hao Laoshi, still behind the tree, was cautiously observing them. Seeing Gu Mian next to Chu Changge, his expression clearly said, See? You'll suffer for not listening to your elders!

"What's wrong?" Wenqin Tan Jiu asked Hao Laoshi curiously, then lowered his voice. "Did you see a ghost?"

Hao Laoshi's gaze darted between Chu Changge and Gu Mian before he stammered, "N-no..."

Then what's the matter with you? Wenqin Tan Jiu wondered.

Just as he was about to press further, the large bus parked by the road suddenly honked.

Gu Mian turned to see the NPC who had taken their picture earlier now sitting in the driver's seat of the bus. He leaned out the window, looking at them. "What are you all doing? Get on the bus! Didn't you say you were tired and wanted to head back early?"

Liu Yin felt his colleagues were acting strangely.

They suddenly seemed unfamiliar, and their behavior was quite odd.

Is it because they're too tired today? he wondered.

Meanwhile, the players were also thinking about this instance.

The instance hadn't provided a specific mission, only stating they needed to survive for three days.

They had no clues for now and could only follow the unfolding events.

"Let's get on the bus first," Wenqin Tan Jiu said, glancing at the still timorous Hao Laoshi hiding behind the tree. "We can talk more on the bus."

Chapter 704 The Evil Ghost Face_1

There were ten people in total on this team-building event. Nine of them were players recognized by the instance. The remaining NPC, Liu Yin, was their coworker and the driver for their team-building trip.

After boarding the bus, the various small groups sat together. Gu Mian, Chu Changge, and Xu Xingcheng chose seats closest to the door—an ideal escape route selected by Gu Mian. Wenqin Tan Jiu's group of four sat behind them. Of the remaining two lone wolves, Su Lian sat at the front, not far from the driver's seat. Hao Laoshi, keeping as much distance from Chu Changge as possible but not daring to be too far from the others, sat near Su Lian, who was also a lone wolf.

Wenqin Tan Jiu wanted to gather all nine players to discuss the instance. However, Su Lian and Hao Laoshi were sitting so far away. He wanted to call them over, but since they were close to Liu Yin, it would seem odd to specifically ask them to move. He had no choice but to resort to using eye contact and gestures.

The two saw his signals but didn't react. Su Lian offered him a gentle smile, as if she hadn't understood his meaning. Hao Laoshi glanced at him, then immediately turned his head away and didn't look back.

What kind of people are these? Wenqin Tan Jiu was puzzled. How did these two players, who couldn't read social cues at all, manage to survive until now?

With no other option, he decided to first discuss the instance with the people nearby.

Gu Mian was about to discuss things thoroughly with Xu Xingcheng, who sat beside him, when he felt a tap on his shoulder from behind. He turned to see Wenqin Tan Jiu smiling politely.

"We should take this opportunity to discuss the instance."

Xu Xingcheng, likely participating as a player for the first time, was extremely interested in analyzing this instance. Before Gu Mian could even speak, he nodded excitedly in agreement.

Wenqin Tan Jiu found this enthusiastic player a little strange.

Why are these people so peculiar?

The player whose profession was 'doctor' was happily making a V-sign right when they entered the instance. The player with the doctor also had a rather unusual expression. And the one wearing glasses, Chu Changge, hadn't spoken at all throughout the journey, his face expressionless, as if he had facial paralysis.

Wenqin Tan Jiu couldn't help but start to suspect their identities.

Could they be patients from the same mental hospital? Stop overthinking...

He forcibly suppressed these strange thoughts and said, "The objective in this instance is to survive for three days. Therefore, we must find a Path to Survival as soon as possible."

"Since you've all survived this long, you must know some of the instance's patterns," Wenqin Tan Jiu continued, looking at the three of them hesitantly.

"What patterns?' The question was practically written on Gu Mian's face."

It wasn't his fault he didn't know. Gu Mian never survived instances by relying on 'patterns,' so he wasn't very familiar with them.

Seeing Gu Mian's clueless expression, Wenqin Tan Jiu felt his heart twitch.

What a naive fool! How on earth did he survive until now?

Beside them, Chu Changge suddenly spoke up, "Paths to Survival and Paths to Death. When players explore an instance, they might discover a Path to Survival. As long as they find it and follow its instructions, the players will no longer be in danger in this instance. But while exploring, they might trigger a Path to Death. This could be a single-player death path, or it might directly trigger a team-wipe death path."

Gu Mian knew this much.

Just like in the amnesia instance, once the players helped the female lead recover her memories, she would fly into a rage and attack all players indiscriminately. That was triggering a team-wipe death path. And in the recent court instance, if a group of players disregarded the ghost's wishes and chose to acquit the criminal, that also triggered a death path. Under normal circumstances, the ghost would only kill that group's players, which could be considered a single-player death path.

Whether it's a single-player death path or a team-wipe, once triggered, it's irreversible. The players' only outcome is death.

Except, of course, for Gu Mian. He was the kind of man who would gleefully dance on a death path, even knowing it was one.

"Barring any surprises, the initial period after entering an instance is the safest for players. As time goes on, the instance's danger level will rise, and ghosts will appear more frequently. In survival-type instances like this, if you want to find a Path to Survival, it's best to search for it quickly," Chu Changge said, pushing up his glasses.

Gu Mian, however, didn't know about this. Usually, whenever a ghost dared to show up and caper in front of him, he'd grab it, and it would kick the bucket on the spot, never to return. So Gu Mian wasn't clear on how frequently ghosts appeared; for him, they usually only showed up once or a few times.

Wenqin Tan Jiu nodded in agreement. He hadn't expected there to be at least one normal person among these three. Moreover, judging by this calm demeanor and those signature glasses, this person was likely a 'strategist' type. Presumably, the other two naive fools had survived thanks to this strategist's plans. He looked at the green text above Gu Mian's head. This person was a healer, after all; it was understandable if he wasn't familiar with instances. A healer just needed to stay behind their teammates and restore their statuses, not charge into the fray.

Meanwhile, Gu Mian was thinking that some ghosts were too fast and was considering whether to go to a supermarket to buy a large net to make a 'potent ghost-catching tool' or something.

"In instances that don't provide specific tasks, we can initially only speculate about clues based on the name. This instance is called 'Death Photography'... I guess it might be related to the group photo we

took earlier." After saying this, Wenqin Tan Jiu signaled to Dew From Tonight Is White to get the Polaroid camera and the photos.

The Polaroid camera and photos were all at the front, next to the driver's seat.

Jin Ye Bai nodded, stood up, and walked towards the front of the bus. He passed Hao Laoshi and Su Lian, arriving next to the driver's seat.

"Ah, you want to see the photos," Liu Yin said when he saw Jin Ye Bai approaching. "They're all here. There are still four sheets of film left in the camera, so you can take four more pictures."

Jin Ye Bai gave him a few nods, then took the Polaroid camera and the stack of photos from nearby.

When Jin Ye Bai returned with the photos, Wenqin Tan Jiu was stunned. "There are so many?"

Apart from the large group photo, the others had been taken before they arrived.

Looking at his own face in those photos, Wenqin Tan Jiu felt a bit uneasy.

"There must be thirty-odd photos here," Ningmeng Bumeng remarked, casually picking one up. It showed her smiling at the camera, with the interior of the bus as the background. "The instance is pretty smart; it even synthesized these photos for us."

By now, the others had started sifting through the photos, hoping to find some clues. Su Lian and Hao Laoshi still showed no sign of joining them, sitting calmly as if their bottoms were glued to their seats.

Wenqin Tan Jiu gave up on expecting those two to join the discussion and lowered his head to examine the photos.

"Since the instance is called 'Death Photography,' it's highly likely related to these photos... Have any of you seen *Yin Er House*?" he asked the others while flipping through them.

Chapter 705 A Pigeon Attempting To Accomplish Great Things Now Puts Down the Keyboard_1

"I've seen it," Yu Ji raised her hand. "I remember in that movie, the male lead was haunted by a ghost. Every time he took a photo, he would find a ghostly shadow in the background that was constantly approaching him."

"I think this instance might be the same; we might also find... ghosts in the photos." Wenqin Tan Jiu started flipping through the pictures in his hands.

"If this assumption is correct, we need to quickly find the ghost in the photos and then figure out our escape route." He put the photos he had checked aside. "Of course, this assumption could also be wrong. Perhaps these photos are just the instance's way of misleading us, causing us to focus all our attention on them and ignore the real clues."

Just as he was speaking, Ningmeng Busuan suddenly said, "Strange, isn't this different from before...?"

She had been examining the photo in her hand for a long time, and the more she looked, the stranger it seemed.

Hearing this, the others also leaned in to look at the photo in her hand.

In Ningmeng Busuan's hand was the group photo they had taken after they arrived. Wenqin Tan Jiu and a few others had seen the photo after it was developed, so they could tell the difference between how it looked then and now.

"It seems... it really is different from before." Jin Ye Bai, who was holding the Polaroid, frowned as he looked at the photo.

He pointed to the background behind the nine people in the picture. "We took the group photo in front of the stone stele inscribed with 'Taiying Mountain.' I remember the trees next to the stele weren't this dark."

Gu Mian also looked at the photo in Ningmeng Busuan's hand.

He hadn't seen what this photo looked like before, so naturally, he couldn't tell the difference.

Gu Mian just felt that the trees in the background looked rather gloomy.

Wenqin Tan Jiu nodded. "Indeed, it's different from before. I wonder if it's because of the photo paper..."

Polaroid photos are completely white when they first come out, with nothing visible. After a few seconds, the image gradually appears. The colors in the photo darken over time, and only after a while does the image become fixed.

"Let's put this one aside for now," Wenqin Tan Jiu said, placing the suspicious photo on an empty seat. To prevent it from blowing away, he even pressed a tightly capped water bottle on it. "Let's continue looking at the other photos and find all the problematic ones."

The car had already descended the mountain and was now traveling smoothly on the road.

Wenqin Tan Jiu and the other three players continued to sort through the stack of photos.

Most of the photos were snapshots of the passing scenery taken from the car; there weren't many pictures with people in them.

Gu Mian didn't join them. Instead, he turned his head to look at Xu Xingcheng, who was sitting beside him.

He hadn't had a chance to have a proper conversation with this Evil God yet.

Taking advantage of the other players' focus on the photos, Gu Mian pulled Xu Xingcheng closer and reached into his pocket.

Hmm, nothing there.

He'd wanted to shear some wool off this top-tier NPC, but who knew? The man was so poor he had nothing at all.

"You'd even fleece an Evil God." Xu Xingcheng saw through Gu Mian's intentions and covered his pockets, though there was nothing in them.

Gu Mian looked down at the leaf brooch on his chest. The items the Evil God gave him were just too useful; it made him unable to resist fleecing him again.

As this thought crossed his mind, he wiped the greedy expression off his face. "I heard you were looking for me all over the world. What's up?"

Please don't tell me he wants me to pay for the damaged statue.

Hearing this, Xu Xingcheng paused for a moment, his expression turning somewhat strange.

What kind of expression is that? Gu Mian wondered, looking at Xu Xingcheng's expression with some puzzlement.

The Evil God looked a little hesitant, then began, "Actually, I don't know why I was looking for you."

Gu Mian: "..."

Are you kidding me?

Chu Changge's voice came from the side, "He's an avatar. Not only is he weak, but he has also lost some of his main body's memories."

"Yes," Xu Xingcheng admitted his weakness frankly. "I remember my main body was in the Fourth World. You know which one the Fourth World is, right? It's the world where a group of albinos are scurrying about."

He was referring to the Upper Class People in Paradise World.

Gu Mian glanced at the players behind him, who were engrossed in the photos, then said, "I know."

"The Low-Dimensional World has been unstable recently. My main body in the Fourth World can't leave, so the only ones who can get out are these avatars of mine." Xu Xingcheng spread his hands. "Because I'm not in the same world as my main body, I've been greatly weakened."

Looking at the man before him, Gu Mian felt that this avatar of the Evil God was indeed quite weak. It seems like I could knock him over with a single finger.

"My power has been diminished, and I've lost part of my memories," Xu Xingcheng admitted. "Actually, I only know that my main body issued an order to find you; everything else is unclear. In fact, I only recently remembered that I'm an avatar."

What a fragile and ignorant avatar.

Gu Mian looked at the player nickname above Xu Xingcheng's head. "How did you manage to get a player panel for yourself?"

"Though greatly weakened, I've retained some abilities." Xu Xingcheng gave a slight smile. "Disguising myself as a player is an innate ability of mine, which awakened after I remembered I'm an avatar. Other avatars might have different abilities."

"Do the other avatars look just like you too?" Gu Mian asked, examining Xu Xingcheng's face.

"I'm not sure about that, since our memories aren't shared," Xu Xingcheng mused. "Their tasks might not involve finding you; otherwise, other avatars would have found you before I did."

A strange Evil God, creating bizarre avatars and assigning weird tasks.

Gu Mian asked him a few questions about the Low-Dimensional World and its key figures.

This peculiar avatar is even more clueless than Xiao Qiao.

Staring at Xu Xingcheng for a while longer, Gu Mian finally accepted the reality.

This guy is essentially just a mascot. Nice to look at, but that's about it.

Lacking both memories and abilities, Xu Xingcheng insisted on sticking close to him for his task, though Xu Xingcheng himself didn't know why he had to follow Gu Mian.

Gu Mian glanced at Chu Changge, whispering, "This guy is useless. Should we... saw him up and dump him on the roadside?"

Before Chu Changge could respond, Xu Xingcheng puffed out his chest. "I'm definitely useful! My memory loss is due to inter-world restrictions. Once you destroy a few more instances and destabilize these worlds further, I'll be able to retrieve more of my memories through the resulting loopholes."

If I had the spare time to help you recover your memories, I might as well go to the Fourth World and talk to the Evil God's main body directly.

Gu Mian asked directly, "Where is your main body located in the Fourth World?"

Xu Xingcheng looked up. "I really don't know."

Gu Mian wished he could just grab Xu Xingcheng, hop on a train to the Fourth World, and have him navigate. Unfortunately, the world-traversing train had broken down after Gu Mian rode it once and wouldn't be repaired anytime soon—perhaps not until pigs flew.

"Speaking of which," Gu Mian recalled the Judge's instance. "Chu Changge encountered you in the Judge's instance. Is that instance in this world too?"

"Not exactly," Xu Xingcheng said, looking at the leaf brooch on Gu Mian's chest. "This is an anchor. After I awakened, I could sense you directly through this. No need for a train; I can teleport directly to your vicinity."

So, that's how this thing found me, Gu Mian thought, also looking down at the leaf brooch on his chest. I didn't expect it to be a teleportation anchor.

"In short, the more instances you destroy, the more memories I can regain," Xu Xingcheng stated. "By then, I won't be so clueless."

Is this really an NPC from a Low-Dimensional World?

Gu Mian began to wonder why Xu Xingcheng was so enthusiastic about destroying instances.

While they were talking, Wenqin Tan Jiu and the other three players behind them had nearly finished sorting through the photographs.

"There's nothing unusual about these photos," Ningmeng Busuan said, inspecting a roadside snapshot in her hand. "No ghostly shadows and no other anomalies."

Jin Ye Bai was studying the Polaroid camera, contemplating its use.

Wenqin Tan Jiu turned his head to look at the group photo held down by the water bottle.

Just then, the bus reached a traffic light and stopped abruptly.

The water bottle holding down the photo toppled over, and Wenqin Tan Jiu quickly moved it aside.

Luckily, the bottle cap was tight, so no water spilled onto the photo.

He carefully inspected the background of the photo and noticed something else strange. "Hey! Look." He passed the photo to Jin Ye Bai. "Weren't those trees in the back very dark just now? Now they seem normal again."

The others leaned over to look.

"You're right," Yu Ji said, scrutinizing the photo in Wenqin Tan Jiu's hand. "The lighting on those trees is normal again."

As the three of them stared, puzzled, at the trees in the photo's background, Ningmeng Busuan, who had also been leaning over, suddenly turned pale and slumped back into her seat.

Startled, the three of them turned to look at her.

With a pale face, Ningmeng Busuan shakily pointed to a crucial, previously overlooked part of the photo. "Look... behind us... is there... an extra person?"

Chapter 706 Spicy September! _1

Upon hearing that, the others finally noticed the extra person in their group photo. Wenqin Tan Jiu, breaking out in a cold sweat, stared at the "person" that had unexpectedly appeared in the photo.

This "person" seemed to have appeared behind them at some unknown time, its murky eyes fixed intently on the camera. His hand holding the photo trembled slightly as he looked at these murky eyes.

Ningmeng Busuan turned pale and blurted out, "It's... It's already behind us! Won't it be able to kill us next?"

What's going on...? Wenqin Tan Jiu hadn't expected the ghost to act so quickly.

This was a three-day instance, yet the ghost had gotten behind them within an hour. Could the key to survival in this instance be not taking pictures at all? If they didn't take pictures, the ghost wouldn't be able to kill them? But how could they have reacted back then! Were they supposed to roll to the side as soon as they entered the instance?

The one who smiled and made a peace sign at the camera was already considered quick to react. As Wenqin Tan Jiu thought this, he looked up at that very person—the Doctor, who was stroking his chin, carefully studying the photo without a hint of panic on his face.

To think this extra "person" was right behind him in the photo! Having a calm teammate was a good thing, but this was too calm.

"This ghost," Gu Mian said, pointing at the figure in the photo, "does it kill people through photos? If so, it's acting way too fast."

If the ghost killed people through photographs, that would be troublesome. Gu Mian had no way to enter the photo, leaving him helpless against it.

Wenqin Tan Jiu didn't know what Gu Mian was thinking. He stared intently at the photo. "We aren't sure yet. At least, not until the first person dies. We can't be certain how it kills..."

His words sent a shiver down everyone's spine.

The death protection mechanism had long been deactivated. To figure out the instance's rules, real human lives would have to be sacrificed.

At this moment, Yu Ji, who was beside them, spoke up, "This photo changed when we weren't paying attention to it, right? If we keep staring at it, will the ghost stop acting?"

Wenqin Tan Jiu thought this suggestion was feasible. "Let's try this method. We have no clues, so we can't dismiss any hypothesis about a path to survival," he said, looking at the group photo in his hand. "We'll take turns staring at this photo. I'll go first. The rest of you, pay attention to the other photos. Ghostly images might appear on them too."

The other three promptly began observing the other pictures.

To enhance the atmosphere of the instance, Gu Mian also pretended to take a few photos and examine them carefully. He even stuffed a few into Chu Changge's hands beside him.

Meanwhile, Xu Xingcheng, lacking any awareness as an NPC, was whispering in Gu Mian's ear, urging him to quickly tear apart the instance.

"I can feel it. My original body must have an earth-shattering, world-shaking plan. As long as you cause a few more instances to collapse, I'll be able to recover my memories and tell you this plan.

"I'm very weak; you need to protect me. Although I can be revived, dying is very painful.

"I heard that Holy Daughter also placed an anchor on you. Let me see what it looks like..."

"You know about the Holy Daughter?" Gu Mian turned to look at him.

The "Holy Daughter" was from an instance related to Gu Mian and his three useless save points. Of course, the instance's name wasn't actually that improper. Gu Mian remembered that the Holy Daughter's instance seemed to be called "Angel Redemption." He had obtained his older brother in this instance.

"I vaguely know a little," Xu Xingcheng said, recalling. "After my memories awakened, some information about other NPCs appeared in my head, but it doesn't seem to be very useful."

Speaking of which, Gu Mian remembered that the "Holy Daughter" also had another title. Her other name was the Doctrine Goddess. Just like the Evil God, both were named after gods.

"Isn't this Holy Daughter a core figure of the Low-Dimensional World?" Gu Mian asked.

Xu Xingcheng pondered seriously. "My memories are all fragmented. Regarding this person, I only remember she's called Holy Daughter. I feel this name isn't as impressive as mine, so I don't think she is."

So Xu Xingcheng, having lost most of his memories, judged whether someone was a core figure by how impressive their name sounded. Truly unreliable.

So, Gu Mian ordered Xu Xingcheng to list all the NPC names he could remember. Chu Changge, taking out his pink floral notebook, jotted down a full page of names. Gu Mian glanced over and saw familiar names like "No. 1" and "The Divergent" clearly listed.

While Gu Mian and Chu Changge were recording the names Xu Xingcheng listed, Hao Laoshi, sitting in the front seat, couldn't help but keep turning back to look at them. A few times, he even met the eyes of Chu Changge, who had suddenly looked up. This scared Hao Laoshi so much that he didn't dare to casually look back anymore.

And Su Lian, the female player next to Hao Laoshi, kept her head down, seemingly looking at something. Liu Yin, in the driver's seat, also frequently observed them through the rearview mirror. He had probably also noticed that his colleagues were behaving oddly today.

The "staring at the photo" method proposed by Wenqin Tan Jiu and the others seemed effective. The vehicle continued to drive smoothly for nearly another hour, and during this time, the extra person in the photo did not move at all.

After staring at the photo in the car for an hour, Wenqin Tan Jiu started to feel a bit carsick. He kept his eyes on the photo and said to Jin Ye Bai beside him, "You watch for a while. I'm a bit dizzy."

Jin Ye Bai agreed, took the photo, and fixed his eyes tightly on the extra person behind the nine of them. Looking at the murky eyes on that figure's face, Jin Ye Bai felt somewhat uneasy. Could the path to survival in this instance really be just staring at the photo? If that were the case, it would be too easy. A sense of foreboding lingered in his heart; he felt things weren't that simple.

"Have you found anything in the other photos?" Wenqin Tan Jiu, his eyes now free, looked towards the others.

Yu Ji and Ningmeng Busuan shook their heads. "These photos are all normal. We haven't found anything special."

Wenqin Tan Jiu then looked at Gu Mian.

Gu Mian glanced at the few photos in his hand. "These don't seem to have anything wrong with them either."

It seems the ghost is only related to that group photo, Wenqin Tan Jiu mused. "Just because these photos show no abnormalities for now doesn't mean they won't later. We shouldn't let our guard down. Also, staring at the photo isn't necessarily the true path to survival. We still need to consider if there are other ways..."

While Wenqin Tan Jiu was motivating his teammates, Gu Mian placed the photos he was holding onto the car seat and sat on them. This way, it wouldn't occupy his hands, and it could also prevent the photos from being blown away by the wind.

At this moment, Liu Yin, in the driver's seat, suddenly spoke, "We'll be at the company in about ten more minutes. When you get off, don't forget to take your things. This vehicle is rented; we have to return it to the rental company. Don't let it happen that the car drives away and someone realizes they've forgotten their belongings on it."

Hearing this, Gu Mian thought for a moment, then took out the photos he had just warmed up from under his bottom and stuffed them into the guitar case behind him. This way, he wouldn't forget to take them.

Chapter 707 An Unfortunate Start An Unfortunate Start_1

Liu Yin, in the driver's seat, was still talking to himself, "We can go home once we clean up at the office. Today was really exhausting. Everyone should rest well this Saturday and Sunday."

Tomorrow was the weekend, so the nine players wouldn't have to go to work. Of course, even if it weren't the weekend, they wouldn't be going anyway.

Surviving in this horror instance was hard enough; who would want to experience the life of an office worker on top of that?

Wenqin Tan Jiu politely responded with an "Mm" to Liu Yin.

There's no way we can rest these two days, he thought. This instance lasts for three days, and I'm still not sure if I can even survive Saturday and Sunday.

Fortunately, they had found a temporary way to suppress the ghost: as long as they stared at it, it couldn't move.

But was the ghost in the photo really immobilized just by their gaze?

At this point, Ningmeng Busuan, who was holding the instant camera, spoke up, "I think this instant camera should be useful. After all, it captured a photo of the ghost... I'm wondering, if we use it to take another picture of that group photo, will we find any clues?"

Gu Mian interjected, "You know, we might just copy one ghost into two by doing that."

Originally, only the group photo had a ghost. If they took another picture of the group photo now, they might end up with two photos containing ghosts. They didn't know if this would, in turn, create two ghosts.

Wenqin Tan Jiu had also considered this point. "We should avoid acting hastily for now. If the ghost can indeed be duplicated through photographs, then taking its picture would be suicide."

"Actually, I have an idea," Gu Mian began to voice his opinion.

Wenqin Tan Jiu looked seriously at this professional player, wanting to hear what brilliant plan he had.

However, as soon as Gu Mian opened his mouth, his words made Wenqin Tan Jiu's head buzz.

"Let's cut the ghost out of the photo." Gu Mian even took out a small knife. "Doesn't it like to move around randomly in the photo? We'll just cut it out and mount it, so it has nowhere to move."

"Although only its head is visible in the photo, even just cutting off its head should lessen the ghost's threat, right?" Gu Mian held the utility knife, eager to try.

"Cut off its head?" A dumbfounded Wenqin Tan Jiu repeated the phrase.

Is that something a normal player would say? Are all professional players this terrifying? Everyone else is racking their brains trying to figure out how to escape, and you're thinking about how to cut off someone's head. And you're supposed to be a Doctor!

At this point, Wenqin Tan Jiu had pretty much figured Gu Mian out.

This guy's nuts. It's better to ignore his suggestions, he thought, silently turning his head and dismissing Gu Mian's proposal.

"Um..." Yu Ji, who was nearby, spoke up, "Everyone knows that we players can't harm ghosts. So even if we cut the ghost's head out of the photo, it won't do any good. We might also accidentally cut the other people in the photo."

"I have a theory," Yu Ji continued, glancing at the group photo in Jin Ye Bai's hand as she spoke. "I suspect we're somehow linked to our images in the photograph. The ghost might kill people by killing their likeness in the photo. If the ghost kills someone in the photo, the corresponding person in reality will also die."

Wenqin Tan Jiu nodded in agreement. So far, Yu Ji's hypothesis was the most reasonable one.

If Yu Ji's speculation is correct, then they are in a very dangerous situation right now. Because the ghost is already behind them in the photo. Its next step will be to kill. The people in the photo can't move; if the ghost starts killing in there, they won't even be able to run.

Thinking of this, Wenqin Tan Jiu felt a deep sense of powerlessness. "Fortunately, we can temporarily hold this ghost off, so it can't kill anyone for now..."

Just then, Jin Ye Bai, who had been staring at the photo, suddenly said, "The ghost... it doesn't seem to kill through the photo."

Wenqin Tan Jiu looked at Jin Ye Bai strangely. "What's wrong? Did you discover something?"

As he spoke, he lowered his gaze to the group photo.

The moment he saw the photo, his scalp began to tingle.

It's different again! The ghost moved again!

The ghost in the photo had moved in front of the nine people, its eyes staring straight at the lens.

Its entire body was blurry, but its terrifying face was exceptionally clear.

Wenqin Tan Jiu looked at its venomous gaze and shivered. "What happened? Were you distracted just now?"

"No!" Cold sweat dripped from Jin Ye Bai's forehead. "It suddenly moved to the front! Just now, while you were all talking, I swear I didn't even blink, and it just suddenly came to the front!"

"Were you really staring at the photo the whole time?" Yu Ji asked, looking anxiously at Jin Ye Bai.

"Yes!" Jin Ye Bai was somewhat agitated, but his eyes never left the photo. "When I blinked, I alternated between my left and right eye!"

Gu Mian imagined the scene and couldn't help but laugh out loud.

His laughter was jarringly out of place in the tense atmosphere, and everyone looked at him as if he were mad.

Receiving their gazes, Gu Mian reined in his laughter and put on a frightened expression.

Wenqin Tan Jiu had no time to deal with this crazy teammate and his strange sense of humor. He kept his eyes glued to the photo, not daring to look away for even a second.

What's going on? Was our speculation wrong? Staring at the photo doesn't stop the ghost's movements? Also, the ghost doesn't seem interested in the people in the photo; it moved right past them to stand at the front. So the ghost doesn't kill by killing the people in the photo?

For a moment, Wenqin Tan Jiu's mind was a complete muddle; all their previous theories had been overturned.

Just as he was frowning in thought, the ghost's figure in the photo seemed to twitch again.

He immediately held his breath and stared intently at the photo.

The next second, the ghost standing in front of the nine people suddenly moved forward another short distance.

It was getting closer and closer to the lens.

This movement was almost instantaneous; none of them staring at the photo saw how the ghost moved.

Ningmeng Busuan, watching the ghost in the photo draw nearer, said in a trembling voice, "Don't you guys feel... it's getting closer to us...?"

Jin Ye Bai's hand, which held the photo, was trembling; it was clear he desperately wanted to throw the thing away. "Yes, it's getting further from the *us* in the photo, but closer to the *us* in reality."

It seemed as if it wanted to crawl out of the photo.

Yu Ji unconsciously edged backward. "I think it's going to crawl out! Just like that ghost girl from *The Ring*! Let's throw it away!"

Wenqin Tan Jiu hesitated. I have the same idea, but I'm afraid this guess might be wrong. This group photo is crucial; I don't dare to just throw it away.

Just then, Jin Ye Bai suddenly shouted, "Quick, look!"

The others immediately looked at the photo in his hand.

They saw that the ghost in the photo had somehow drawn even nearer. It was now so close to the lens that it almost completely obscured everyone behind it.

Wenqin Tan Jiu opened his mouth to say something, but before he could speak, the ghost in the photo moved again!

This time, it practically pressed against the lens, its terrifying face filling the entire photograph.

"HOLY CRAP!" Jin Ye Bai couldn't hold onto the photo any longer. He flung it in a panic, and it slapped Gu Mian—who had been watching the unfolding drama with amusement—right in the face.

Chapter 708 Damn it! _1

Jin Ye Bai's move was something no one had expected.

They stared in horror at Gu Mian, whose face was covered by the photo, afraid he would be dragged into it by a ghostly hand stretching out the next second.

Under the crowd's horrified gazes, Gu Mian peeled the picture from his face. "It stuck on pretty tight."

Wenqin Tan Jiu took a large step back. "You... Are you okay...?"

Isn't that obvious?

Gu Mian looked down at the photo in his hand. "Getting hit by a photo isn't going to kill me."

Of course, Wenqin Tan Jiu wasn't worried that Gu Mian would be killed by the impact. He hesitantly looked at Gu Mian's face, which the photo had just touched. "The... the ghost... didn't do anything to you?"

But Gu Mian's reply was, as always, beyond anyone's expectations. "What could it do to me? Steal a kiss?"

Wenqin Tan Jiu pursed his lips, increasingly convinced this person was a lunatic.

The others nearby who heard this were also speechless for a moment.

While they were speechless, Gu Mian suddenly raised the photo in his hand. "It's gone."

"What?"

The others looked at the photograph in his hand.

The group photo had returned to normal; the eerie figure was gone.

What's going on... Wenqin Tan Jiu stared at the group photo, wide-eyed. Did the ghost inside disappear just from being stuck to Gu Mian's face for a moment?

The other few people were also completely baffled, not quite understanding the current situation.

At this moment, Yu Ji, who was cowering to one side, suddenly spoke. "Weren't we just suspecting the ghost could come out of the photo? Now that it's not in the photo, does that mean... the ghost has already come out...?"

Her words sent shivers down everyone's spines.

They immediately looked around, checking for any extra people.

The car wasn't large; it could be taken in at a glance.

Nothing extra had appeared in the car.

"This is really strange." Wenqin Tan Jiu was quite puzzled.

The ghost had suddenly vanished, and it hadn't appeared near them either.

"I want to look at it again." He quickly calmed himself and looked at the group photo in Gu Mian's hand.

Gu Mian handed the photo over. "Go ahead."

Wenqin Tan Jiu wanted to observe it more closely, to see if the ghost was hiding in other parts of the photo.

But just as he took the photo and looked down, he saw the image on it suddenly change.

A huge hand appeared, blocking most of the picture.

The fingers of this hand were slightly parted, revealing a pair of bloodshot eyes through the gaps between them.

The ghost is pressed against the lens!

It looks like it could crawl out any second!

A jolt went through Wenqin Tan Jiu, and he quickly threw the photo out of the car window.

"What happened?" Jin Ye Bai stood up in surprise. "Why did you throw it away?"

The others also showed puzzled expressions.

They hadn't seen the image on the photo just now.

Wenqin Tan Jiu wiped sweat from his brow. "The ghost suddenly appeared... it almost crawled out from inside!"

Hearing this, the others gasped.

Ningmeng Busuan leaned against the window, looking at the road behind them. "So it **can** crawl out of the photo and then kill people. If we had destroyed that photo earlier, would the ghost have been unable to get out?"

"Perhaps." Wenqin Tan Jiu steadied himself with the car seat and sat down. "The ghost isn't interested in our images in the photo, which means it can't accomplish its killing by killing the people depicted **in** the photo. In that case, we have no connection to the people in the photo, so destroying it would have been completely feasible."

But they had overthought things at first and missed their chance to destroy the photo.

There are no 'ifs' in this world. They couldn't go back, retrieve the photo, and destroy it now; the ghost had most likely already crawled out of it.

"If destroying the photo was the path to survival, doesn't that mean we've already missed our chance?" Jin Ye Bai's eyes widened.

Wenqin Tan Jiu felt a headache coming on. An instance where they'd lost their path to survival from the very beginning... how were they supposed to live through this...?

"In this situation, all we can do is run," he said, looking at the others. "Quick, run! The farther we get from where I threw the photo, the better. The ghost crawled out of the photo there; we absolutely must not go back."

Yu Ji suddenly raised her hand. "I have a question. If the ghost can crawl out of a photo, isn't it possible it can also go back into one? If it returns to a photo, could it then crawl out through other photos, right?"

"Shit," Jin Ye Bai cursed, edging farther away from the pile of photos on the nearby seat.

Wenqin Tan Jiu frowned. "That's possible. These photos are likely a misdirection from the instance. The instance is called 'Fatal Shot'; any normal person would assume the photos are crucial clues, right? And crucial clues, of course, should be carried with you.

"If the ghost can really travel between photos and reality, then we're essentially carrying a ticking time bomb."

"Let's destroy these photos first," Wenqin Tan Jiu decided.

The others agreed with his decision.

They didn't dare to play with fire openly in the car, especially since there was still an NPC present.

So, a few of them moved to the back seats, held the photos and a lighter out the window, and set them alight outside.

Fortunately, Liu Yin was concentrating wholeheartedly on driving and didn't notice what the people in the back were doing.

Jin Ye Bai, struggling with the lighter, said, "The wind is too strong; the flame goes out too easily. I have to light it several times. What is this photo paper made of? It's so hard to ignite..."

Actually, they could have just thrown the photos away, but for peace of mind, they decided to destroy them thoroughly.

Gu Mian propped his head on his hand, watching his teammates play with fire, and sighed inwardly at the harsh reality of players struggling to survive in an instance.

While burning the photos, the group was still discussing what had just happened.

"That group photo turned normal after I threw it, right?" Jin Ye Bai looked at Wenqin Tan Jiu beside him. "It was after it stuck to... what's-his-name's... face that the ghost disappeared. The ghost only reappeared when you took the photo back. Why did it suddenly disappear then?"

Wenqin Tan Jiu recalled the horrifying scene from earlier. "It was probably the ghost's sick sense of humor. Disappearing suddenly to make us think we're safe, then reappearing— isn't that terrifying? It's like in those horror movies where the protagonist hides under the bed, hears the ghost leave, and crawls out only to find the ghost lying on the bed, staring right at him."

Jin Ye Bai imagined himself in that situation and found it truly terrifying.

They managed to finish dealing with the photos just before arriving back at the company.

Because they were rushed, some photos weren't completely burned, with some leaving behind half a picture or a small fragment.

This wasn't a major issue, as long as they didn't carry these remnants on their person.

After Liu Yin got out of the car, he curiously asked where all the photos had gone.

Wenqin Tan Jiu spun a lie, saying he'd put them in his bag, and managed to fob him off.

Liu Yin seemed to want to say more, but Wenqin Tan Jiu had already signaled for the others to leave quickly.

Hao Laoshi hastily followed them.

The female player named Su Lian also went along.

Gu Mian and his two companions were the last to get out of the car.

Chapter 709 You really dare to think!_1

The amnesiac Evil God was useless.

Gu Mian was considering whether or not to input the name "No. 1" into the Big Data Search.

At this moment, the people up front noticed that Gu Mian and his group weren't keeping up, so they stopped and looked back to wait for them.

Liu Yin, who was standing by the car, had a strange expression. "Where are you all rushing off to?"

"The bathroom," Gu Mian gave a perfunctory reason, put away his Big Data Search, and walked forward.

Hao Laoshi, seeing Chu Changge approach, moved aside fearfully.

Wenqin Tan Jiu glanced toward the rear. "We should get as far away as possible from where the photos were dropped earlier. The farther, the better. I'm thinking, should we split up...?"

When this global game first began, players lacked experience and preferred to huddle together for comfort. After all, many horror films followed the rule that anyone separated from the group was doomed to die.

But as players experienced more and more instances, they discovered that splitting up actually increased their survival rate. If they stuck together and a ghost caught them, an entire group would be wiped out at once. Splitting up could greatly slow down a ghost's killing efficiency and significantly reduce the death toll.

However, there was one drawback to splitting up: players couldn't relay information to each other in a timely manner. Once separated, if a player found a path to survival within the instance, they couldn't quickly share it with the others.

"Do you have phones?" Ningmeng Busuan fumbled in her pockets but found no communication devices.

The others shook their heads too.

"My suggestion is that we form groups of two or three and flee separately," Ningmeng Busuan said after confirming no one else had a mobile phone. "The instance duration is three days, and it's impossible for us to remain highly alert the entire time. In smaller groups, we can take turns resting. If the ghost appears, we can spot it immediately and escape."

"The path to survival in this instance has already been cut off," Yu Ji said. "So, we won't need to communicate about it later. Splitting up is indeed the most advantageous approach."

Wenqin Tan Jiu looked at Gu Mian. "What do you think?"

Although he thought this Doctor was not right in the head, he was still a teammate in this instance, so he had to ask for his opinion.

Gu Mian was just thinking of slipping away to play some forbidden games with a few NPCs; this proposal suited him perfectly.

"The three of us will form a group. You all can decide for yourselves," Gu Mian said, grouping Chu Changge and Xu Xingcheng with himself.

Wenqin Tan Jiu nodded. He had been worried this Doctor would want to team up with him. He breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing Gu Mian's decision.

In theory, players with professions were very popular, especially professions like Healer.

But Wenqin Tan Jiu felt this Doctor was too unreliable. Teaming up with him meant constantly worrying if he might suddenly go mad and reveal their position. He knew that those who had survived until now all possessed some skills. Some might seem unreliable but could be incredibly powerful. However, this man had too many uncertainties; Wenqin Tan Jiu didn't dare team up with him. In an instance where death was real, he couldn't afford any mistakes.

"Let's team up," Jin Ye Bai said, approaching him. "It's more reassuring to be with someone familiar."

Wenqin Tan Jiu nodded in agreement.

Hao Laoshi also crept over quietly. He didn't dare look at Gu Mian's group, only looking pleadingly at Jin Ye Bai and Wenqin Tan Jiu. "Can I join you? I'm very reliable. I won't shout, I won't act on my own, I'm not curious, and I won't touch things recklessly. I promise I won't hold you back."

This person wasn't the type to cause trouble, unlike that Doctor, Wenqin Tan Jiu thought.

Jin Ye Bai and Wenqin Tan Jiu exchanged glances and nodded in agreement.

Yu Ji and Ningmeng Busuan had also formed a team.

Ningmeng Busuan looked at the other female player, Su Lian. "Yu Ji and I are teaming up. Do you want to join us?"

Currently, Su Lian was the only one not in a team.

In a horror instance, everyone preferred to be with people they knew. After all, one couldn't know the character or temperament of strangers. They might be good people, or they might be selfish individuals who would push their teammates toward a ghost to save themselves. Normally, players wouldn't proactively invite strangers to join their team.

Yu Ji didn't want to accept a stranger, so she subtly shook her head at Ningmeng Busuan.

But the other two teams were already at capacity.

Ningmeng Busuan thought that if she didn't invite Su Lian, Su Lian would be left all alone.

However, Su Lian shook her head in refusal. "Thank you, but I'm used to being alone. I can manage without a team."

Ningmeng Busuan was somewhat surprised, looking at the rather scholarly and quiet female player before her.

Appearances can be deceiving. Who would have thought such a gentle-looking person was a complete lone wolf?

At this time, Wenqin Tan Jiu looked towards the intersection up ahead. "Let's split up when we reach that intersection. Remember, the farther away from the place where the photos were dropped, the better. The ghost crawled out from there. Don't ever go near that place."

There was still some distance to the intersection, so they quickened their pace.

Just then, Hao Laoshi curiously sidled up to Su Lian and asked, "Don't you need to rest for three consecutive days?"

He then considered that this instance might not even last three days, so he fell silent.

Hao Laoshi recognized Gu Mian. Back in the driver's license instance, Gu Mian hadn't yet obtained the Evil God's brooch, so his nickname hadn't been concealed.

When he saw Gu Mian, he felt somewhat relieved but also a bit scared. Relieved that he might leave the instance earlier, but scared because the fearsome Chu Changge was also here. When they were forming teams, he had actually wanted to team up with Gu Mian. However, he wasn't sure about Gu Mian's personality. Besides, Chu Changge, radiating a peculiar aura, was nearby, which scared Hao Laoshi from taking even a single step closer.

At this moment, Su Lian answered his question, "I can barely hold on for three days."

She was a woman of few words, answering only when asked.

Considering her previous behavior, Hao Laoshi suddenly asked in a strange tone, "Are you socially anxious?"

It really did seem like it. She entered instances by herself, sat far from others after boarding the vehicle, opted to be in her own group during team formation, and wouldn't utter a word unless spoken to. These were all typical symptoms of social anxiety disorder.

Su Lian fell silent, turning her head away without answering the question.

Hao Laoshi had heard of this disorder before, but he hadn't expected someone with social anxiety to remain so true to form, even in a horror instance.

Just as he was about to say something else, he noticed that Chu Changge, who was radiating that peculiar aura, had slowed down at some point and was slowly moving closer.

Hao Laoshi was so startled that he immediately dashed forward.

Then, Wenqin Tan Jiu came up to Gu Mian. He wanted to ask what skills the Doctor profession entailed.

"This is my first time seeing a player with a profession," Wenqin Tan Jiu said. "Do you professionals have any special skills?"

If you came to my place, you could see three players with professions at once, Gu Mian thought, recalling 007 and the Fortune-teller.

"Yes," he replied, snapping out of his reverie. "If you break your leg, coming to me for treatment would shorten your recovery time."

What a lovely analogy, Wenqin Tan Jiu thought. It sounded like the Doctor profession wasn't very useful. In an instance, a ghost wouldn't stop mid-kill to let someone go find a Doctor for treatment.

"Do you have any resurrection skills or something?" Wenqin Tan Jiu asked. He felt it was a bit of a stretch, but he still couldn't help but ask.

Hearing this, Gu Mian looked at the man in front of him. "You sure have a wild imagination."

This is a horror instance, not a fantasy one. Resurrection skills? Does he want me to conjure up some overwhelmingly powerful battle aura next?

Wenqin Tan Jiu laughed awkwardly and walked away.

Taking advantage of the moment when no one was around Gu Mian, Hao Laoshi seized the opportunity to approach.

Gu Mian silently observed the person beside him. He'd noticed that people in this instance seemed to enjoy taking turns approaching him.

Hao Laoshi had always known Gu Mian's identity, but he had never considered revealing it to others.

Gu Mian had a rather good impression of this Honest Person.

Hao Laoshi nervously looked back. Seeing Chu Changge wasn't paying attention to him, he then said to Gu Mian, "You two get along well, right?"

Seeing that Gu Mian was unharmed, not murdered by the sly and crafty Chu Changge, Hao Laoshi felt he understood something.

"Yes," Gu Mian said, thinking of the floral-patterned little skirt Chu Changge wore as a child. "He's like my dear little sister."

Hao Laoshi's face twitched, and for a moment, he didn't know what to say.

"Do you need something?" Gu Mian asked. He knew Hao Laoshi hadn't come over just to ask about his relationship with Chu Changge.

Hearing Gu Mian's question, Hao Laoshi hesitated for a moment before saying, "I know that all the instances you've entered have been obliterated... I just came to ask... Can you destroy this instance as soon as possible? I'm afraid I won't survive if it takes too long. My wife and kids are still waiting for me outside."

As he spoke, he cautiously looked up to observe Gu Mian's expression.

He didn't know much about this Gu Shiwan's personality. Hao Laoshi was a bit scared that Gu Mian might suddenly burst out with a sinister cackle when no one was around, pull out a knife, and stab him to death to silence him—all while muttering something like, "All who know my identity must die!" After all, that Chu Changge was a psycho. "One is influenced by one's company," as they say. This Doctor might not be normal either.

Gu Mian had no idea that in Hao Laoshi's mind, he had become a maniac who let out sinister cackles. He was stroking his chin, considering Hao Laoshi's unreasonable demand.

Are players these days all so bold? This was the first time he'd heard a player make such a demand of him. Breaking an instance wasn't that easy. At least he needed to find the instance's crucial point to resolve the problem from its root. They had just entered the instance and had no clues yet. Asking him to break the instance now was indeed asking too much.

Chapter 710 My Dream is to Earn Ten Thousand a Day_1

As Gu Mian was thinking, Hao Laoshi began his woeful tale.

"I'm lucky to have survived this long. As you can see, I'm a straightforward, timid man with no ulterior motives. I'm not very intelligent; I can't think of those survival strategies you all suggest.

"But I'm careful and quick to react. The moment I notice something is off, I instantly run. My luck isn't that bad either. I've run into you twice in the instances and received some compensation, allowing me to accumulate a small amount of Game Coin.

"Back when we first started venturing into instances, we wouldn't actually die. I frequently went in with my child's mother, hoping to earn more Game Coins to buy food. Sometimes, when we died, the game would deduct money and items. It would cause my heart to wrench.

"Then later, when death became a real possibility in the instances, I stopped letting my child's mother enter them. I figured I should go in first since I react quickly and am less likely to die. I asked her to wait for me at home, so if I never returned, there would still be someone to take care of our kid."

Hao Laoshi teared up as he spoke.

"Every time I go into an instance, I don't know if I'll make it out alive. If I die in there, they won't even get to see my body. I really, really want to make it out alive..."

"Alright, alright, I get it," Gu Mian said, looking with disgust at Hao Laoshi, who was on the verge of sniveling. "I heard your wish." He felt like a wish-granting machine.

Hao Laoshi managed a smile through his tears, realizing Gu Mian wasn't what he'd imagined.

"What's wrong?" Noticing Hao Laoshi's odd behavior from a distance, Ningmeng Busuan walked over and offered him a tissue.

"Nothing," Hao Laoshi said, wiping his tears. "I was just thinking about my family back home."

"Oh, I see." Ningmeng Busuan nodded, her expression somewhat dazed.

Just then, Hao Laoshi noticed Chu Changge approaching from the rear of the group and immediately scurried away, snot and tears streaking his face.

Watching Hao Laoshi's hasty retreat, Gu Mian locked eyes with Chu Changge, who was approaching from behind.

"What did he say?" Chu Changge asked. He still didn't know that Hao Laoshi had complained to Gu Mian about him, calling him insidious and cunning.

Gu Mian summarized briefly, "He made a wish to me."

Chu Changge didn't ask further, silently rejoining the group as they walked on.

They soon reached the intersection. Including the lone wolf Su Lian, the nine of them split into four teams:

Gu Mian, Chu Changge, and Xu Xingcheng formed one team.

Wenqin Tan Jiu, Jin Ye Bai, and Hao Laoshi formed another.

Ningmeng Busuan and Yu Ji were a team.

Su Lian formed a team by herself.

The four teams went their separate ways here. Wenqin Tan Jiu's team took the left path.

Ningmeng Busuan and Yu Ji chose the right path.

Gu Mian, Chu Changge, and Xu Xingcheng continued straight ahead.

Su Lian hesitated for a moment looking at the three paths, then also chose to go straight.

She didn't stay close to Gu Mian's group, instead keeping her distance further away.

Chu Changge glanced back at Su Lian but said nothing.

Gu Mian also glanced at the female player trailing behind them. He saw her holding a small notebook in her left hand, occasionally jotting something down. She was probably mapping the area.

Gu Mian had originally planned to turn back right after they split up to retrieve the discarded photos and use them directly.

However, with another player still following their path, Gu Mian didn't want to turn back so obviously.

"We'll lose her at the next intersection and then go back for the photos," Gu Mian said to Chu Changge.

Chu Changge nodded.

Xu Xingcheng, standing nearby, brightened. "That's great! If we destroy a few more instances, my memory will gradually recover. Then I can tell you all about my grand plan!"

Gu Mian seriously doubted this unreliable Evil God could come up with any coherent plan. He just found Xu Xingcheng's voice incredibly grating.

They quickly reached the next intersection.

Su Lian took the right path first.

Gu Mian, leading Chu Changge and Xu Xingcheng, pretended to continue straight for a few more minutes before stealthily turning back.

"You know, this Second World is quite well-developed, not much different from Earth," Gu Mian remarked, observing the shops lining the streets.

He'd been so focused on losing the other players earlier that he hadn't paid any attention to the shops along the road.

Chu Changge also glanced at the roadside.

This street had many snack shops. He quickly spotted three dessert shops and two bubble tea stores.

There were also vendors selling shaved ice and sculpted sugar candies.

"Actually, if it weren't for the ghosts, living in this world wouldn't be bad at all," Gu Mian said, scanning the bustling streets. "But players just treat instances like game data; they don't really experience these worlds."

Xu Xingcheng interjected, "But there **are** ghosts in the instances! Do you think everyone is like you, treating instances as sightseeing trips?"

He was right.

Unlike other players, Gu Mian thoroughly enjoyed entering instances. He felt at home in them—so much so that he'd often destroy one home before finding another.

The ghosts and NPCs in these instances often wailed in misery because of him.

Many NPCs didn't have a very good impression of Gu Mian.

They often used phrases like "slaughtering the donkey after it's done grinding" or "smashing the pot after eating" to describe him.

There was even a "Gu Mian Prevention Handbook" circulating in the NPC world.

Though called a prevention handbook, it offered no actual preventative measures.

It was mostly filled with the lamentations of NPCs who had suffered under Gu Mian, along with other NPCs' assessments of him.

Xu Xingcheng remembered this book existed, but he couldn't recall its contents, only the cover.

He remembered a starkly accurate sentence on its cover—

"Gu Mian: A person who, if unable to complete an instance mission, just takes out the instance itself."

And now, this very person who struck fear into the hearts of all NPCs was contemplating trying some street-side shaved ice.

But, lacking money, he had to abandon the thought.

"We'll get Fatty to make some when we get back," Gu Mian said, withdrawing his gaze.

Meanwhile, the other participants were not in such high spirits.

Wenqin Tan Jiu and Jin Ye Bai were hurrying down the street, trying to get as far as possible from where they had discarded the photo.

Jin Ye Bai currently had a Polaroid camera around his neck—the same one used to take the photo earlier.

"It should be fine to carry this, right?" Jin Ye Bai frowned. "The ghost can't crawl out of this, can it?"

"We still need to be careful," Wenqin Tan Jiu said, glancing at the Polaroid. "This camera can capture ghosts in photos. I think it must have other uses... If there's another way to survive this instance, I believe it's connected to this camera."

The street teemed with people, and cars streamed along the road.

The two of them deliberately chose crowded areas to walk through, hoping the bustle would lessen their fear.

But they knew that if the ghost decided to kill, no amount of crowd or bustle would help.

"We didn't destroy the photo in time; the ghost must have crawled out by now," Jin Ye Bai said, examining the camera as they walked. "What if, when the ghost finds us, we take another picture of it? Could that lock it back into the photo?"

Could this be another way out? Wenqin Tan Jiu mused. If we take a picture of the ghost, will it really be sealed back into the photo? He recalled that the ghost needed time to emerge from a photo; it had taken about an hour from when they took the group shot until the ghost appeared before the lens.

If the ghost found them, and they photographed it and then immediately destroyed that new photo, would that stop the ghost from materializing?

No, even if they destroyed that one, the ghost could still use other photos. The main group photo was still out there.

Still, even if the ghost could emerge again via other photos, this would buy them precious time to escape.

The ghost needed time to come out, and it would also need time to find them.

"If your method works," Wenqin Tan Jiu said, frowning, "we might be able to use the remaining four exposures to survive for three days. But that's just a hypothesis. We'd need to test it once to see if it's viable."