

Iyashikei 141

Chapter 141:

The old man bore witness to the interaction between Han Fei and Drake. He found it hard to believe that he could see something like this in the world forever enclosed in darkness.

“Family, huh?” The bloody phone lines extricated from the carcasses, the old man removed the curse from all the guests. All along, the guests had been the ones conversing with themselves on the phone. Just like the old man, their deepest desire became the curse that bound them to the hostel. The guests slowly awakened one after another. They had on different expressions, some were surprised, others looked feared. The most unusual among them was the man in the raincoat.

He hid the axe back under his coat. The dark eyes swept at Han Fei before he moved silently towards the hole. When he was about 1 metre away from Han Fei, he suddenly jumped at Han Fei!

The man was suspended in mid air as red telephone lines shot out to wrap around him.

“All I ever wanted was to be with my wife again. I could not even tell when that desire mutated but I knew why it had worsened into a curse. ‘She’ fed on their despair and came into a life of ‘her’ own.” The old man neutralized the man in the raincoat and dropped him before Han Fei. “In other words, I knew all about their inner secrets. After all, it was me who changed their desires into realities.”

“Sir, I am not a good person nor am I a saint. However, I believe in the power of justice, those who have sinned need to be punished.” Han Fei stood above the mass grave. “Why don’t you tell me the tales of all your guests? And we can decide together their future.” Some of the guests were trapped Animated Regrets, they were hypnotized and succumbed to the false happiness offered by the voices of their loved ones on the phone.

The others were pure evil animated. They had already lost their humanity, the example being the man in the raincoat. Overcome by jealousy, he murdered his ex-wife and then went after the child his ex-wife had with her new family. After the double-murders, his mind snapped. He would see his ex-wife’s faces on all the children and would assume they were bastards his wife had with other men. It was this man who injured Drake’s mother and brother. It was also because of him that Drake came to the hostel. Some of the guests were influenced by the phone’s curse while other tenants influenced the phone with their own malice, making this extremely rare cursed object even more powerful.

After knowing every guest's stories, Han Fei unleashed Weep and Lee Zai. He allowed them to feast on the unsavable guests. Weep and Lee Zai were not Han Fei's underlings, they were on equal footing. This was especially true for Lee Zai, he only chose to follow Han Fei because the latter promised him food.

Drake was heavily injured. He joined the ranks of Weep and Lee Zai, consumption would aid his healing. A gory scene occurred inside the hostel. It was even more terrifying than before.

"There are kind spirits and evil spirits in the cryptic world. For now, I do not possess the power to salvage evil spirits so the only way I can change this world is to allow the kind spirits to consume the evil spirits." Standing in the bloody rain, Han Fei turned to the remaining guests and the old man. "I am also fighting for a chance at survival. Like you, I might die at any moment, but I promise you that as long as I am still alive, I will do my best to help you search for your family and friends. Hiding at this place, waiting daily beside the phones for comfort is self-deceiving. It will never bring you closer to your dream. Only by making actual efforts that you'll get closer to them." Most of the guests had been consumed. Only 3 guests were unharmed. They were Big Head and his mother as well as the drunkard. They had never harmed anyone, they were just victims of the cursed phone lines. "Feel free to move to the Happiness Neighbourhood on the opposite street, it is safe there. But if you insist on staying here, I hope you can cooperate with the ghosts from the convenience store next door. Look after and support each other."

No one raised contention against what Han Fei said. The surviving guests looked at the man with both awe and fear. After consuming some Animated Regrets and Lingerings Spirits, Drake was much better. However, the unfortunate fact remained that his mother had already fallen victim to the raincoat man. The truth was some time after Firefly and his mother moved into this hostel, she was murdered by the raincoat man. Firefly had been talking to 'her' through the phone.

"Mom would never allow Firefly to get close to the convenience store so when I saw him around the back alley, I knew that something bad must have happened to her..." Drake blamed himself a lot even though the fault was not his. At the time, he was still under the paper doll's control. He could barely save himself, much less others. More emotions colored Drake's only eye, this was a good sign. After consoling Drake, Han Fei walked to the old man's side. He planned to wire one of the phones straight to Yi Ming Convenience Store. However, he did not plan to bring the phones to the Happiness Neighbourhood yet. Han Fei had to ensure the neighbourhood was completely safe before he allowed any external objects from entering it.

After handling everything at the hostel, Han Fei received the system update. "Notification for Player 0000!

“You have successfully completed the Grade G Normal Mission—Find the Missing Employee! Obtained rewards, 1 basic skill point and friendliness level with Drake increases by 20!

“You have successfully completed the Grade G Hidden Mission—The missing Big Brother! You have helped Firefly find his brother, Drake! Obtained rewards, 1 basic skill point, friendliness level with both Drake and Firefly increases by 20!

“Hidden Mission completion rate more than 100 percent. You’ve gained both EXP as well as additional rewards specific to Drake, Exposed Heart.

“After rescuing Drake several times, his perception of you changed permanently. Rest well in knowing that this employee will never betray you!

“You have successfully completed the Grade G hidden Mission—Midnight Hostel! Obtained 1 basic skill point and friendliness level with the hostel owner, Yan Zhong increases by 10. Obtained Grade G Cursed Object—Phone to hear the Dead.

“Phone to Hear the Dead (Grade G Cursed Object): I know I will never see you again but I still miss your voice.

“Notification for Player 0000! You have successfully reached level 8! Obtained 1 Attribute Point!”

The completion of 3 consecutive missions helped Han Fei rise directly to level 8. He placed all 3 new skill points into acting, making it Advanced Acting Level 6. It was only a matter of time until he reached Masterful Level. It was hard to imagine achieving such mastery at his young age. Han Fei himself could barely believe it.

‘According to the official website, they might add more skill levels beyond Masterful in the future. However, to improve skill mastery post Masterful level, one not only needs skill points but also to complete certain missions. However for now Advanced Acting should be good enough. I will cross paths with the most cunning sins in the cryptic world in the future. They will be as good in acting as I am, but that is for the future me to worry about.’

Chapter 142:

Han Fei had a very clear planning for his life. After he finished adding all the skill points, he applied the attribute points to his intelligence, raising it to 7. 'That should allow me to control the paper doll longer.' Han Fei felt the effect instantaneously. He felt like his brain was moving faster. His train of thought was more logical and smoother. He also believed his memory skill had improved as well. 'I understand that both stamina and intelligence are equally important, but there are only so many attribute points to go around'. Intelligence could help Han Fei resist and control cursed objects longer while stamina helped with his physical activities. The fact that Han Fei did not add the attribute point into his stamina like usual signalled a shift in his gaming attitude.

He crawled out from the mass grave. Han Fei left the hostel and returned to the convenience store. The shooting for Twin Flowers was already over so Han Fei did not hurry to quit the game. Instead with Weep and Lee Zai, he started a delivery service. Throughout the night, these three tenants from Happiness Neighbourhood brought unrivalled warmth and convenience to the nearby store patrons.

During this process, Han Fei noticed something important. It was hard for the spirits to retain their rationality especially after they consumed a certain number of souls. Both Weep and Lee Zai showed signs of going berserk during the delivery. Weep dropped down and cried without warning. His tears triggered Lee Zai who transformed into Lee Huo. He almost got into a fight with Weep. From this, Han Fei drew the conclusion that the more ghosts and monsters the spirit consumed, the harder it would be for them to remain sane. While Weep and Lee Zai could still control themselves, Han Fei brought them back to the Happiness Neighbourhood. Both Lee Zai and Weep's power increased substantially that night, so did their friendliness level with Han Fei. More importantly, with their aid, Han Fei managed to complete a few more lower level normal missions. Grade G Missions were suitable for players between level 1 and 10 so before Han Fei reached level 10, he could still get quite a lot of EXP from them. However, these missions merely provided EXP and simple exhaustibles. There were no rewards worth mentioning. 'With the amount of time I've clocked in, I would have reached middle to late game by now if I'm playing another game. But in Perfect Life, I'm not even level 10 yet.'

Han Fei stood beside the window of Room 1044 and stared out into the darkness. He was reminded of a quote—If the torch goes out, I will be my own light.

The old man at the hostel left a deep impression on Han Fei. There were many in this cryptic world who did not start with despair, they were turned into monsters via assimilation of their surroundings. They were once kind souls too. 'Is there still a chance for this world to be cured?' He too wanted to be other people's light but it was hard when surviving on his own was a difficult chore. Han Fei's head buzzed with exhaustion. He leaned against the window as he turned to glance around the haunted room.

He chose to quit the game. Blood poured over everything. Then Han Fei slowly lost his consciousness.

He removed the gaming helmet and sunlight shone on his face. Han Fei stared at the clock on the wall, it was already 10 am. 'One of the big reasons I still have not lost my mind is because I can return to real life at the end of each session. There is always an immediate goal that keeps me going while I am in the despairing cryptic world, and that is to live and complete the gaming session.'

The warm rays caressed Han Fei's cheeks like soft hands. He had never realized sunlight could be so comforting before. Pulling the sheet over his head, the tired Han Fei drifted off to sleep. At 3 pm, Han Fei was awakened by knocks on his door. The moment he woke up, he reached alertly for the stun gun under his pillow. Han Fei did not have that many friends, his only visitor was the police. He sneaked to the door and looked out the peephole. He saw Director Jiang and the floor manager standing there. Opening the door, Han Fei frowned with confusion. "Director Jiang, why are you here?"

"Brother! We've called you about 20 times already but they all went unanswered, we had no choice but to come here!" The floor manager said.

"I thought since the shoot is already over, there is nothing required of me anymore. I switched my phone into silent mode and planned to take a good long rest."

"What nonsense. Hurry up and go and change. Sister Long has already contacted the nation's biggest streaming platform. Our media conference later today will be streamed on their website, we will also showcase our latest trailers." Director Jiang sighed quite helplessly. "You are the main character, you can't be absent for this event!"

"But we just had our wrap party yesterday night, and we're already having the conference today? The post-editing is already done?" Normally a movie conference would be released one week before the official release. Many celebrities and government officials would be invited but Twin Flowers was just a small budget indie movie. It did not have a conventional press release.

"We're running low on time. We've been editing the film while shooting it. We even had to outsource some of the works. They are helping us rush the deadline." Director Jiang had heavy dark circles under his eyes. The man had not had a proper rest for a long time already. "If we miss the deadline, all of our effort will be for nothing. Furthermore, you're still on the hot topic list, we should make use of that."

Han Fei was thus ushered by the duo into the bathroom to shower and change. “Okay, let’s go.”

“You’re wearing that?” Director Jiang asked when he saw Han Fei come out in T-shirt and jeans. “I should have brought Meng Changan’s movie costume with me. At least that’s a suit.”

“This’ll do. It’s comfy.” Han Fei shrugged. He did not put that much emphasis into his image management.

“Even though we will not have any important guests, it is still an official event. Wait... what was that thing you just shoved into your pocket?” Director Jiang had to stop and ask.

“A retractable fighting stick.”

“You’re bringing that to the conference?”

“Yes.” Han Fei answered matter-of-factly. Director Jiang was rendered speechless. Without time to waste, he and the floor manager shoved Han Fei into the car and they departed for the venue. Half an hour later, they finally arrived, but at first glance, Han Fei thought Director Jiang had gotten the wrong address. The VR projectors and advertising boards outside the conference hall were all about Secret Urban Romance. The parking lot was full and there were many youngsters in the crowd with placards of their idols, idols who were not part of Twin Flowers’ production.

“They have booked the main hall, we’re at the side hall. Don’t mind them. We’re doing an online broadcast so it doesn’t matter who has a bigger live crowd.” Director Jiang grumbled. Actually he was the one who booked the venue first but the crew of Secret Urban Romance forcibly squeezed their way into the venue and bumped Twin Flowers to the side hall by throwing money around.

The car eventually stopped at the entrance that led into the side hall. When Han Fei descended from the car, no one paid him any attention. They thought he was one of the venue workers. It was not until Han Fei walked towards the entrance and was demanded his work id by the security guard that Director Jiang had to step in.

“Han Fei, here is the press release script. It contains a few questions that the host might ask. Go and read through it. Then perhaps we can rehearse the Q and A.” Director Jiang left Han Fei to talk to the

host. Han Fei disappeared backstage. Zhan Yueyue and Mian Nian were there as well. Compared to them, Han Fei appeared at ease. He took a quick glance of the script before he put it down. He started to plan his gaming route instead.

The online press conference started at 8 pm sharp. Technically, this would be the first time Han Fei showed himself before the general public.

Applause rang from the stage. When Han Fei heard the host call his name, he took a deep breath and headed for the spotlight.

Chapter 143:

After the long-winded introductions by the host, Han Fei as the main character finally walked out from behind the screen. The spotlight hit him and for the first time, the man was glowing. As an actor, he walked to the centre of the stage, this was something he had dreamed of all his life. Listening to his heartbeat, his fingers clenched. It was not out of nervousness, the man simply couldn't help but be reminded of his past self, the self who would spend hours practicing smiling before the mirror.

"And we have with us the male main actor from Twin Flowers, Han Fei! He has helped the police solve the case in real life and he will be playing the two main characters in the movie! We will now have him start the Q and A sessions with questions from our online viewers." The host suddenly walked off the stage and took out his phone to message someone. Director Jiang ran over to grab the host by his collar. "This wasn't part of the rehearsal! There weren't supposed to be questions from the online viewers! You're supposed to ask the selected questions from your cue cards!"

"I'm just following my instructions on the monitor. If you have a problem with it, go and take it up with the conference manager." The host slapped Director Jiang's arms off impolitely.

"What's wrong?" Sister Long rushed over as well. She came in person because she valued this event greatly.

"Han Fei is a professional actor but he has no experience presenting himself before the public. This is the first time where he is the centre of attention. And now he has to answer unrehearsed questions from the online viewers? I'm afraid that will break him." Director Jiang fidgeted.

“With his professionalism, I’m sure he’ll be fine. Eventually he’ll have to go through this rite of passage. I’m sure he can handle a few impromptu questions just fine.” Sister Long sighed. “You made me worried for a moment there.”

“Sister Long, you don’t understand!” Director Jiang hesitated as he looked at Han Fei with concern. “Han Fei suffers from serious social anxiety, he has to go to constant psychiatric counselling. In fact, I had to make sure my proposal for him to be our main actor was cleared by his psychiatrist first before I could actually offer him the role.”

“The man has serious social anxiety?” Sister Long was shocked. “And you’re only telling me this now?!”

“If I told you earlier... would you still let him be the main character?” Director Jiang wiped away his sweat as he stared at Han Fei under the spotlight. “Initially, I only offered him a side role so that he would have something to do but he’s a genius, and his genius should be seen by everyone!”

After the host left, Han Fei was stranded alone on stage. The large monitor above the hall relayed the livestream image. There was a large screen behind Han Fei as well so that the live audience could also tune into the livestream.

‘This is different from the rehearsal.’ The script Han Fei prepared in mind was rendered useless. He lifted his head to look at the monitor at the roof of the hall. After he appeared on stage, the viewership grew from 150000 to 300000, that was highly unusual.

Suddenly, a negative comment popped on screen. “He’s just lucky. Don’t tell me you people really think he can carry a movie?!” Following that one comment, many other horrible comments floated up to the surface. It was as if these users had planned this beforehand. Instead of Q and A, the whole screen was filled with criticism and slander against Han Fei!

“He’s so ugly, he better requests for a refund from his plastic surgeon.”

“Using victims’ lives to garner popularity, disgusting!”

“An actor who refuses to focus on his job but goes about being a vigilante? Do you really think you’re the police?!”

“This man is a horrible person. I worked with him at his former agency! You people know he was fired, right? It was because he stole from our company! Do not be fooled by him!”

“What the fuck! Go and google this man! He is a certified mental patient! Nowadays even a basket case can be an actor?”

The horrible comments filled up the screen. The projector casted the livestream right on the screen behind Han Fei. The hall was not big but it was filled with people. All the live audience saw the criticism that practically surrounded Han Fei in a halo.

The comments kept on coming. The keyboard warriors attacked this man while standing on moral high ground. Han Fei’s history was dug up and exposed. He stood under the spotlight but it felt like he was naked. There was nothing about him that was a secret anymore. Every abnormal, strange, negative behavior he had done was revealed on the screen. This Q and A session was turned into a public censure on Han Fei. Anyone would find this situation hard to bear, much less someone who had serious social anxiety.

Han Fei stared quietly at the monitor above the hall. Just as the audience below the stage began to feel sorry for the man, he suddenly smiled. Ignoring the comments from the livestream, Han Fei picked up the microphone and glanced at the people in the crowd. He did not lose his composure. He saw Li Xue, Wei Youfu’s father and many other friendly faces.

“My dream is to become a comedy actor, do you guys know why?” Han Fei glanced casually at the horrible comments behind him. “I lost both of my parents when I was young. People always bullied and mocked me. Am I mad? Am I saddened? Do I want to take revenge on them? Yes, of course I do. And I figured the best way to do that was to make a job out of letting people laugh at me, at least that way, they’ll have to pay to bully me. But unfortunately, it appears like I do not have the talent to be a comedy actor.” Han Fei pointed at the wave of negative comments behind him. “They think they can bring me down with these mocking remarks but these people did not realize that in the past, I could barely get a reaction out of them, so this is already a step up.” Han Fei chuckled self-deprecatingly. “From the way I dress, you should understand that I am not like other celebrities. I do not radiate star power, there is nothing special about me. What they say is true. My life is hard. I was fired from my job, I suffer from social anxiety, I am secluded from the world, hell, I have even forgotten how to smile. But I wake up every morning, knowing that I am already at my lowest point in life so there is no way forward but up! As they say, such is life.”

Han Fei's voice echoed in the hall. Someone in the crowd started to clap and it was picked up by the others. Stranded in the sea of negativity, Han Fei was graceful and calm. Sin from the human world was nothing compared to the sin from the darkest despair. If Han Fei had not experienced that Iyashikei game, perhaps he would be defeated by these horrible comments but now, he no longer feared these remarks. Compared to the extreme pain and despair, these comments were like juvenile observations.

After giving the speech, the viewership of the stream climbed again. Some kind comments interspersed among the negative ones. More users wanted to speak out for him, even if with just a heart emoji. Han Fei noted all these small acts of kindness. He was far from being able to reveal a true smile but at least it was a start. He was ready to let go of his past and face his future. At that moment, standing at the centre of the stage which he had dreamed of all his life, he stepped out from the cage which had enclosed him all these while.

Due to the pandemic, life is quite hard. I would be eternally grateful if you could spare some small donations.

Chapter 144:

That was the shiniest moment of Han Fei's 25 years of life. He stood in the middle of the stage, highlighted by the spotlight amidst the sea of criticism. Only the most unfortunate would be given the black box, Han Fei's life had nothing to do with the definition, easy. However, the hardships that he faced helped build his character, polishing him from coal into diamond. He might not be as initially captivating as other celebrities but he had his own charm. The negative comments on the stream were gradually swept away by more neutral and positive comments. Han Fei believed that ultimately human nature was kind, as evidenced by these small voices that gathered to form a wave to wash the online negativity away.

Actually most of the casual viewers had no idea what was happening. It was not until the negative comments started to block up the entire screen that they started to research into the individual, Han Fei. Incidentally, during the press conference, Han Fei's wiki page was updated with slanderous entries. There were also a few online 'news' websites that released articles that condemned Han Fei's unprofessionalism right at the same time. But if the users went beyond the first search result page, they would find more articles and official statements released by the law enforcement.

It was Han Fei who risked his life to help the police solve cold cases, it was Han Fei who spoke on the victims' behalf and it was also Han Fei who was praised and thanked by the victims' families. Those who really knew Han Fei only had good things to say about this young man. In contrast, those who wanted to destroy his reputation were users who hid behind online anonymity.

Seeing the injustice, more neutral users dropped in to leave a word of encouragement for Han Fei. As the viewership of the livestream grew, the update speed of the negative comments slowly got taken over by the positive and normal ones. About 10 minutes later, the on-screen chatroom froze. When it returned to normal, all the negative commenters disappeared just as sudden as they had appeared.

‘I honestly can say that I have not done anything to harm others but others intend to ruin me.’ It was clear by now that this was a premeditated online slander campaign. The culprit knew about Han Fei’s background, about his social anxiety and how he would get chest angina, headache, and discomfiture in public. It was why they came up with this idea. He was left stranded on the stage to face the onslaught of critical comments from the internet. It would evoke the horrendous memories in his mind so he would make a fool of himself before hundreds of thousands of viewers online. That would deepen the emotional scar within Han Fei and made his conditions even more serious. ‘The culprit has to be someone from my former agency. Only they will know me so well. Furthermore, there’s also the thing with the Secret Urban Romance. Things wouldn’t be that coincidental...’

Soon after the hubbub on the livestream died down, the stagehand swapped the material and started to play the trailers for Twin Flowers. Those who questioned Han Fei’s acting capability had their mouths zipped after they saw Han Fei’s performance in the trailer. If people still disparaged Han Fei because of his acting, they must be blind. The well-paced plot, interesting storyline, a battle of wits through the decade, all wrapped up in a final monologue by Meng Changan. The two minutes short video stunned everyone!

After the trailer ended, the promotional poster for Twin Flowers appeared on screen. Meng Changan and Meng Changxi played by Han Fei stood in light and darkness. Meng Changan in a three-breasted suit bathed under the sun. A graceful and calm smile hung on his face but madness spoke in his eyes; in contrast, the disfigured Meng Changxi struggled to stand straight in the dark. His body was covered in wounds but his eyes shone with determination and hope. The poster was captivating and incidentally, the spotlight also casted Han Fei on stage in half light and half-darkness. The three individuals who were tied together in this unique case presented themselves in a mirage of shadows and light.

The atmosphere in the livestream chat hit a peak. Many viewers screen-captured this moment. This was the perfect example of life mimicking art. The negative comments did not defeat Han Fei but allowed people to witness his gentle and firm constitution. This actor was indeed distinct from other celebrities. How Han Fei presented himself that day earned him many new fans.

It was right at the moment that the host returned to the stage. He snatched the microphone away from Han Fei. As he was about to push the agenda forward, he met Han Fei's eyes. There was a demon living inside there. A glance at it and the host's scalp numbed. The microphone almost slipped from his grasp.

"It's not right of you to abandon me on stage like that, knowing that I do not have much public speaking experience. That was quite nerve-wrecking, wasn't it?" Han Fei patted the man's shoulders and disappeared backstage. Director Jiang and Sister Long were there to meet him.

"Han Fei, are you alright?!" Director Jiang grabbed hold of Han Fei. His eyes filled with concern. When the criticisms swamped the screen earlier, Director Jiang almost fainted, much less Han Fei who was the target of the attack.

"Sure, I'm alright. It feels quite nervous to be on stage for the first time but I'm fine." Han Fei said with ease. It felt as if a weight had been taken off his shoulders.

"Jiang Yi said you suffer from social anxiety, we were ready to rush onstage to drag you back." Sister Long was given quite a fright too. This was after all a live broadcast.

"I did suffer from serious social anxiety, it was hard for me to even converse with others in the past but my condition is slowly being cured." Han Fei knew that Director Jiang and Sister Long worried about him and he appreciated that.

"That was definitely a targeted attack on you. Someone wants to take you down." Sister Long's admiration towards Han Fei grew after his performance on stage. She then added in a roundabout way. "Your main problem now is that you are not attached to any company, it's too easy for others to come after you. They can perjure you with false information or through other methods. You need someone to help you manage these things." Sister Long was being honest. "No matter how good your projects are, people will always find ways to drag you down. In our industry, acting skill is not the only yardstick to see how far an actor can go, instead capital and background are the most reliable dream makers."

"I understand that but I do not plan to join any agency at the moment." Han Fei knew that his schedule would be limited after he signed a contract, for now, gaming was more important.

“Han Fei, our industry is not unlike other fields, not everyone is a fair player. If you do not wish to join any agency, then you have to watch yourself. Of course, know that we You Long Culture will always be your backbone.” Sister Long promised. She still hoped that they could cooperate together in the future.

“Thank you, Sister Long but don’t worry about me, I have my own plan.” Han Fei had a light smile on his face, no one knew what he was thinking. “I’ve always been a kind person but if they force my hands, then they’ll have no one to blame but themselves.” Han Fei was a principled person. He would not drag any innocent people into the cryptic world but being principled did not mean that he did not have a bottomline. At that moment, he was thinking about something else. ‘If they like to play dirty that much, I’ll bring them to a world filled with filth and obscenity, for them to witness the real meaning of despair and unfairness.’

Chapter 145:

A normal movie press conference was quite boring, mainly it was about the introduction of the movie, actors and teams. However, the conference for Twin Flowers was wildly different. Once Han Fei stepped onto the stage, the stream was swarmed by online hecklers. This kind of ‘celebrity treatment’ was extremely rare so it attracted the attention of normal viewers. Han Fei’s reaction at the conference added more flair to the already trending conference livestream. The man did not appear to be that interested in common popularity but he had his pulse inadvertently on public interest. When the viewership was at its peak, the team released the prepared trailers.

To be honest, most netizens had little anticipation of such indie films. After all, how good could it be with a limited budget? But when the high quality trailers were released, the netizens were stunned. Be it plot quality, or character acting, the indie film could rival or even surpass most AAA films. This horror flick was an unexpected dark horse!

The response from the netizens was extremely positive. Zhan Yueyue and Director Jiang handled the later part of the press conference, they fielded the questions from both the online and live audience as well as shared some bloopers on scene. The atmosphere was joyful as if the hitch with Han Fei earlier did not happen at all. Most audience expressed anticipation of the movie, but there were some that had a carved frown on their faces.

Hidden at the back of the crowd, there was a middle-aged man whose eyes darkened. He stared at Han Fei’s face in the trailer and his lips curled with dissatisfaction. He took out his phone and deleted the messages that the host just sent him. He then swapped out his normal sim card for a secondary one. He reached out to a mysterious individual through social media. “I need you to help me dig up all the dirt you can on an actor.”

“Who is the poor victim this time?”

“His name is Han Fei. He’s the star in the upcoming movie, Twin Flowers.”

“You know what to do. Mail me the deposit and I’ll have my people watch over him 24/7.”

“You better don’t let me wait too long this time.” After the middle-aged man sent the last message, he stood up and left the hall. He headed silently towards the exit, not realizing Han Fei, at the backstage, had been following his moves.

The movie conference ended successfully. Throughout the event, the viewership was maintained at over 50000 people, that was a positive news for the crew. This was Han Fei’s first public appearance and it marked a new chapter in his life. In just 2 hours, Han Fei’s social media fans rose up to 30000. To his surprise, he realized his name was finally on the top Chinese actor ranking!

Currently, Han Fei was placed at the 10000th spot but he was the only actor who did not have any actual completed projects under his belt. He was the only one to get on the ranking with just popularity and movie trailers. The ranking was arranged by the photon computer based on various factors like fan numbers, project numbers and clicks. It was the most objective way to inspect a celebrity’s clout for it could not be manipulated by people and agencies. Han Fei’s dream was to get on the ranking because only then he’d be recognized as an actual actor.

‘I’m at the 10000th spot? I believe it’ll continue to rise after Twin Flowers is released.’ When the movie conference ended, it was already 9.30 pm. Han Fei was backstage packing when his phone rang. ‘Why is Jin Jun calling me all of a sudden?’ Han Fei had once rescued this senior paparazzi and thus had each other’s contact.

After the call was accepted, Jin Jun fired off, “Someone just offered my subordinate a high price to dig up your dirt. The person used an untraceable number but he has used my people’s service before. He always goes after celebrities who have had conflict with Wu Wu Entertainment. Therefore, I suspect this is someone important from Wu Wu Entertainment.” Jin Jun was a man of his words, he not only warned Han Fei of someone targeting him, he also provided his own analysis to whom this person was.

“Wu Wu Entertainment’s parent company is my former agency. This person appears to have it out for me.”

“That’s to be expected, Twin Flowers is going to be released at the same time as their Secret Urban Romance. Their budget is about 10 times your crew’s budget but they fail to garner the same amount of popularity as you do. Definitely, they’ll have to do something about that!” Jin Jun was the go-to person to find out about this insider information. “Also, listen to this. You were supposed to play the second male character in Secret Urban Romance but your role was replaced by another actor. But now that you have gained so much popularity by helping the police, you’re in direct competition with Secret Urban Romance’s first main character. Can you blame them for being mad? The more popular Twin Flowers become, the angrier they’ll be. If Twin Flowers becomes a box office hit, they’ll never leave down this humiliation. Furthermore, the actor who stole your original role will have a hard time surviving in this industry in the future. After it was his fault that Secret Urban Romance lost a talent as big as you, Brother Han.”

“I don’t really care about how they feel. I only wish to live my own life in peace.” Han Fei still remembered what Huang Yin said. Perfect Life would enter OB soon. This game would become a second life for most citizens. The game after OB would be handled fully by the photon computer so if these people crossed the line, Han Fei would not hesitate to summon their souls to the cryptic world. Even though his Spirit Farer talent was still quite low, no one knew how it would grow in the future.

After hanging up, before Han Fei could put his phone away, another call came. When he saw the caller id, Han Fei was quite shocked. He answered it immediately. “Did those ruffians come back to harass you?” It was Qu Wenhong who called Han Fei, his mother, Qu Yun was a tenant at Happiness Neighbourhood Apartment 2.

“Brother, how come you never told me that you’re a celebrity?! I cannot believe I have had the honor of sharing cup noodles with you!” Qu Wenhong sounded so excited.

“You didn’t know I’m an actor? What kind of business did you think I was in?”

“I thought you’re with the Yakuza. You knew where to spot the surveillance blind spot and you’re such a good fighter. You’re much realer than the mafia portrayed on the tv!”

“Ha ha. You sure have a great imagination. In any case, help me keep that info to yourself, okay?” Han Fei lowered the volume. “I’m leaving the venue soon. Is there anything else, Wenhong?”

"I saw the livestream earlier. I tried to defend your name on your behalf but no matter what I said, they refused to believe me."

"You argued for me?" Han Fei's heart warmed. He approached Qu Wenhou just to get information about Qu Yun. He did not expect to cultivate this friendship out of it.

"If it was me on that stage, I would have cried. I don't know how you manage to keep your head up high even after going through so many things. Not only that, you will not hesitate to help others along the way as well." For a moment, Qu Wenhou sounded far beyond his years. "In any case, thank you for everything you've done! I will go back to school tomorrow, thank you for being such an inspiration!"

"Good luck, study hard and get into a good university. Make your mother proud and leave those bullies in the dust!"

Han Fei chatted a few minutes longer with the young man. After he hung up, a strange feeling bubbled within him. He never expected that one day, others would see him as inspiration. All along, he thought he was someone who radiated negative energy. There was nothing about himself that was worth replicating in others. 'When did this change happen to me? Was it from the moment I picked up that lyashikei game?'

Chapter 146:

The game at Han Fei's home had no connection to an lyashikei game other than the logo that was pasted on the side of the helmet, but that logo appeared to be added by the shop owner later on his own.

However, it was a game like that which had changed Han Fei's life. With the threat of death dangling over his shoulders, Han Fei was forced to make friends and open his heart to others. Due to unexpected visits from the crazed murderers, Han Fei learned how to communicate with his roommate. To survive, Han Fei started to form new relationships with his neighbours. In the end, the man with social anxiety even became the representative of a whole apartment. Even though the method used by this game to cure people was 'questionable', Han Fei indeed had been healed. He had become a better version of himself, proven by the fact that he finally got to stand on the stage which he always dreamed of.

At the end of the day, Perfect Life did live up to its iyashikei genre.

Staring at his reflection in the backstage mirror, Han Fei tried to smile. He could still see the fakeness but one day, he believed that a real smile would appear on his face as long as he continued to try. 'It is undeniable that I have been changed by Perfect Life.' Han Fei felt like he shouldn't keep such a life-altering game to himself. There were many poor individuals with broken personalities in this world. He could use the same method to cure others, to make the world a better place.

After packing up, Han Fei was ready to go home. But as he opened the backstage door, he was intercepted by Li Xue and a detective in plainclothes. "How can I help you?" There were police officers guarding outside his door. A normal celebrity would not be able to enjoy such 'privilege'.

"Han Fei, all this time I believe you'll be a better police officer but today you proved me wrong. That was some serious acting skills. Just from the trailers alone..." Before Li Xue finished, the detective beside her coughed to cut her off. "We're here today not only to attend your movie release conference, but also we have some questions for you..." The detective walked into the backstage dressing room and closed the door. After ensuring there was no one around, he continued, "It was you who caught the fugitive of the Toy Plushie Case, right?"

"That's right. The reporter told you that already, no?"

"Can you tell me in detail what happened that day? When you saw him, what was the father's mental state?" Just as the detective asked that question, Han Fei immediately realized the fugitive must have acted strangely while in police custody.

"At the time, I noticed he was tailing the reporter so I decided to tail him instead. The fugitive was agitated but it was a frantic kind, like he was afraid of something." Han Fei tried his best to think back to that day.

"Afraid?" The detective's eyes glowed.

"Is something wrong with that man?"

“To be honest, the man lost his mind after he was apprehended. He said he heard the voice of Death and saw the most horrible things in the world.” The detective stared at Han Fei for a long time before he continued, “We performed a full medical check-up on him. He was physically fine. We invited a sketch artist to sit down with him. Based on his description, we reconstructed this ‘Death’ that he saw, it looked rather similar to you.”

“Me? Are you sure he’s not trying to frame me for hitting him?” Han Fei sighed helplessly. “That day was the first time I ever saw that man. He was holding a knife at the time. He wanted to attack me, I was so scared that I responded on instinct. I hit back as hard as I could.”

“We’re not saying that you were wrong to defend yourself, it’s just that...” The detective arranged his thoughts. “You’ve been a great help to the law enforcement in many cases. Initially we do not want to trouble you anymore regarding this Toy Plushie Case but after the family of 3 was captured, all of them have gone insane. Their symptoms are getting worse so our captain wishes for you to come down to the detention centre with us. He wants to get your thoughts.”

“Sure, but it’s already quite late already, do you mind if we do it tomorrow?” Han Fei wanted to head home to play the game but that was not an excuse he could tell the police.

“Please come with us. The car is already here. It won’t take long, at most an hour.”

“It’s that urgent?”

“Our Vice Captain is already there, when you see the family of 3 in person, you’ll understand our urgency.” The detective had on a bitter smile. “They’ll get worse at night that they require medication.” Glancing at the time on his phone, Han Fei decided to follow the police for now. The trio got into the car and headed to the detention centre at the old city.

“After some criminals know that they’ve been given the death penalty, they’ll act insane for a more lenient punishment but the condition of this family is quite different. We even had experts to come in here to inspect them.” The detective swiped his key card and led Han Fei and Li Xue into the centre.

“Is it really necessary to try to treat these criminals who have maliciously tried to claim other people’s lives?”

"This case is quite complicated. The mother and daughter have pushed the blame fully onto the father and now all 3 of them have gone insane. To get to the bottom of the truth, we had no choice but to try to treat them. Only by having them admit their guilt that we can return the victim their justice." Walking past 2 doors, the trio entered the innermost building at the detention centre. The smell of medicine was thick in the air. Down the bright corridor, Han Fei spotted a doctor talking to an officer.

"Captain Si, I've brought Han Fei with me." The detective shouted at the officer. The latter responded by coming over to shake Han Fei's hands.

"You've been such a great help to the Xin Lu Police during the human puzzle case. I've been meaning to meet you in person, today I finally get the chance. Kid, you look as handsome as they say." Captain Si shared some pleasantries with Han Fei before his expression turned serious, "Xiao Wei should have briefed you about the condition of the family already. We are now attempting ways to get them to talk." Captain Si and the doctor opened the door. Ming Mei's father was tied to the bed. To prevent the man from harming himself, the police had made a lot of effort as well. Hearing the footsteps, Ming Mei's father's eyes flew open. The bloodshot eyes darted about and he shouted like his life depended on it. "Ghost! Ghost! Ghost!"

No one knew what was his trigger. When Han Fei walked to his side, he ignored Han Fei which was strange considering Han Fei was supposed to be 'Death' in his mind. "We meet again." Han Fei stared at the man's face. His expression was raw with madness but there was no recognition in his eyes. 'Is this the aftereffect of Spirit Farer? But how come it did not affect Huang Yin?' Narrowing his eyes, Han Fei once attempted Spirit Farer on this man. He wrote his name on a ghost face but the attempt failed. The ghost face with his name shattered and melted back into the sea of blood. 'Is this the result if the Spirit Farer fails?'

Han Fei felt a sense of relief. If the man had truly gone mad, then his secret would be safe. He cooperated with the police and stayed with Ming Mei's father for a long time but they could not get anything from the crazed man. Captain Si sighed and finally allowed Han Fei to go.

Han Fei hurried down the corridor as he rushed home. However, when he passed one of the cells, he noticed a girl was being kept inside it. The girl was kneeling at the corner of the room and mumbled something on her lips. There was a gaming helmet that sat on her bed.

"Captain Si, the criminals now even have gaming privilege?" Han Fei was very sensitive around gaming helmets.

"That is not a gaming helmet. It's a medical assistance helmet meant to help juvenile offenders to help treat their psychological problems." The doctor answered.

"A medical assistance helmet?"

"Have you heard of sandplay therapy? Many years ago, psychiatrists came up with sandbox-like toys, they used various colors and objects to mimic items in everyday life to turn the sandbox into an imagined world. Through games, the child could express their inner world and the psychiatrists would be able to make their observation based on the child's interaction with their sandboxes." The doctor explained patiently. "With new technology, we can use these medical assistance helmets to construct a room specific for the patient. The room will keep on changing as it tracks the patient's emotional fluctuation, it will give us a view of the child's subconscious world."

"A helmet that can cure psychological illness?" Han Fei stared at the helmet for a long time.

"This is a new technology made by Deep Space Tech and Immortal Pharma, they were only introduced into the market a few years ago."

"Is the treatment effective?"

"So far... no." The doctor coughed. "The girl is extremely well-guarded, she has never once opened up her heart."

"Do you mind if I go talk to her?" Han Fei already recognized the girl in custody. She was the girl who poured Ying Yue's parents' cornea into the aquarium and stuffed Ying Yue's body parts into the plushies.

"Sure." Captain Si nodded. Han Fei opened the door and entered the small room. The season was deep winter. There appeared to be malfunction with the floor heating because the room was much colder than outside. The girl was curled up at the corner, looking as fragile as ever.

"Are you Ming Mei?" Han Fei stopped before the girl. Hearing the question, the girl lifted her head. But when she saw Han Fei, her face blanched. Her lips quivered. She pointed at Han Fei's face and then squeezed out the following, "Ying Yue, Ying Yue, she is lying on your head!"

Ming Mei's voice was small. She was clearly frightened as she tried to curl deeper into the corner. Han Fei did not leave. As he lowered himself down to Ming Mei's level, while ensuring his back was to the doctor and Captain Si, his expression suddenly turned ghastly, "You can see Ying Yue on me? You really can see her? Do you know how much she misses you?!" Han Fei's tone was intimidating. It caused Ming Mei to cry. The girl kept shaking like a leaf. "Interesting, if you do not suffer from hallucination, then that means you have spiritual affinity."

Han Fei rubbed his neck. Way back when, Wei Youfu's father said that he could see Youfu's image on him, now with this episode with Ming Mei, this phenomenon did not appear to be a coincidence.

Ming Mei cowered in the corner. Her eyes were fixed on the spot behind Han Fei, her eyes filling with fear. 'I get it now.'

Han Fei stood up and turned to leave the room. The doctor noticed the strange way Ming Mei was acting. He asked, "What's wrong with the girl? Why is her body shaking so hard?"

"The floor heater is broken. It needs to be repaired. The poor thing is probably too cold." Han Fei said softly.

"This girl is not the innocent child that she appears. Don't be fooled by her appearance." Captain Si warned.

"No matter what, she is still a child. We need to protect her rights. If she has made a mistake..." Han Fei turned back to glance at Ming Mei and uttered the last sentence under his breath, "She'll simply need to make sure that she does not make the same mistakes again in her next life."

Chapter 147:

Captain Si was afraid that Han Fei would be fooled by Ming Mei's appearance so he told Han Fei the crimes the girl had committed. Han Fei reacted with appropriate shock. "A girl as sweet as her has done so many scary things? But shouldn't she be about 7 when this happened?"

"Never underestimate the sin in people. One of the reasons the child has psychological illness is because she is haunted by the deeds she did when she was young. She is traumatized by the vision of the girl

whom she had harmed.” Captain Si said seriously, “It is true that they are still humans and we should respect their rights but we shan’t show them mercy, that will be putting salt on injury for those that they have wronged.”

“Understood. How long will she serve if she gets sentenced?” Han Fei asked.

“The girl is still young and she suffers from psychological illness. For her to be convicted, we need her to confess to her crimes first.”

“Looks like we’ll have to cure her as soon as possible.” Han Fei turned to the doctor. “Doc, I’m not trying to question your professionalism but are you sure the treatment helmet will work? Doesn’t Deep Space Tech work in communications?”

“Deep Space Tech is also the pioneer in neuroscience. I’m sure you’ve heard about their upcoming game, Perfect Life, right?”

“I do, the ads for it are everywhere.”

“This treatment helmet is connected to Perfect Life’s photon computer, it is the latest instrument acquired by our organization. Using the photon computer’s powerful calculation and analytical ability, it can capture the patient’s mental world within less than 1 second. Through this device, we can technically pinpoint the source of the patient’s trauma and try to resolve that fear at its source.”

“In other words, this treatment helmet shares the same server as Perfect Life?” Han Fei was not a computer engineer, he asked to clarify.

“There is no server. Currently all the products released by Deep Space Tech surround their 8th generation photon computer. It is the core of their company. If you want to use their company’s latest products, you’ll have to connect to that 8th generation photon computer. I suppose this is their way of cornering the market.” The doctor in the white coat explained patiently.

“Doc, aren’t you a psychiatrist, why are you so familiar with the working of Deep Space Tech?” Han Fei latched onto this inconspicuous detail. Everything was interconnected and the man could not be too careful. His experience proved that sometimes coincidences could be fatal.

“Times are changing, technology nowadays can help us identify ourselves better. Embracing technology is the correct choice in every field.”

“Doc, that is an interesting perspective to have. By the way, I have not gotten your name yet.” Han Fei remembered Li Xue’s teacher warning him about the two professions, teacher and doctor.

“My name is Hu Wei.”

When Han Fei reached home, it was already 11 pm. He had a simple supper, connected the wires and put on the helmet. Blood dripped over everything and the world as Han Fei knew it changed...

The log in notification just ended when Han Fei felt his body being shoved to the ground. His eyes opened and he felt a chill running down his face. He realized his mouth was being clamped together by a pair of pale hands. Chills rose on the back of his neck. Han Fei slowly turned around and realized Wei Youfu was the one who pressed him to the ground. With confusion in his eyes, Han Fei extended his hand to point at the door, asking non-verbally, ‘Is there someone outside the door?’

Wei Youfu did not seem to get Han Fei, however he did loosen his grip around Han Fei’s jaw. Wei Youfu put his finger to his lips, signaling Han Fei to keep quiet. An oppressive silence blanketed not only Room 1044 but the entire Happiness Neighbourhood. There was not one sound that could be heard.

After a full 10 minutes, Wei Youfu slowly climbed up from the ground. He glanced out the window through the gaps. Suddenly a woman’s singing echoed inside the quiet Happiness Neighbourhood. It was that strange nursery rhyme with off-beat rhythm. It was also slowly approaching Apartment 1!

The moment Han Fei heard that voice, his heart squeezed. He silently removed the landlord’s ring and stored it inside his inventory. He huddled under the window and remained motionless. Han Fei heard this similar singing at the shop next to the convenience store before. If not for his ability to quit the game, he would be dead already. Since he had a close interaction with the singer, he understood how scary it was. ‘Why has it appeared inside the Happiness Neighbourhood?’

The singing reverberated like an echo. There was a moment where the song was right outside the window even though they were hiding on the 4th floor. Holding his hands over his mouth, Han Fei

curled next to Wei Youfu, who had sat back down. He tried to make an eye contact with Youfu but the latter only shook his head slightly, warning Han Fei from doing anything stupid.

The song kept on going, and to make things worse, about 10 minutes later, the song appeared inside the stairwell of Apartment 1. The voice-activated lights came on one floor after another. Han Fei's heart threatened to rise out of his throat as well.

Bang! A door on the 2nd floor was shoved open and then it was followed quickly by more doors being opened!

The song soon arrived on the 4th floor!

Bang! Bang! The doors to Room 1041 and 1042 were opened at the same time. The anti-theft doors slammed heavily on the wall. Then the song floated upstairs. When the door to Room 1041 was pushed open, Han Fei could barely breathe. He held his breath and did not dare to make any noise. The sound of door slamming echoed around the building. Other than the banging and the singing, there were no other voices. The world suddenly became audibly-deprived.

The song soon descended from the top floor. When it passed the 4th floor, the door to Room 1043 flew open. It was just next door!

The song gradually faded away until it disappeared fully.

Collapsing to the ground, Han Fei noticed his shirt was soaked, it was like he was just hauled out from a cold pool. Patting Han Fei lightly on his back, Wei Youfu took out a pen and paper. He wrote something and passed it to Han Fei—let's not speak first, in case of the return.

Wei Youfu did not specify whose return but Han Fei knew the meaning. When Drake warned that the entity above the Pure Hatred could not be mentioned, it seemed like he meant it quite literally. Han Fei nodded. Half an hour later, when other sounds returned to the streets below, Wei Youfu climbed up from the ground. He placed his hand over his heart and said softly, "It's okay now. You guys can come out already." As he said so, pairs of hands appeared behind Wei Youfu. The victims from the human jigsaw case materialized and they formed a circular shield around Little Eight.

"We barely escaped that but I'm not sure we'll be so lucky next time." Wei Youfu's face was paler than usual. He went to open the front door. Other than Room 1044, all the other 3 rooms on the 4th floor were busted open.

"That thing can enter the neighbourhood?" Han Fei took a long time before he found his breath.

"That was the first time." Wei Youfu frowned. "When the previous manager was still around, the song would appear outside the neighbourhood but it never came in here."

"This was the first time and I was so lucky to be around for it?" Han Fei leaned weakly against the wall and looked outside the door. "It feels like it was looking for something, wasn't it?"

"It should be looking for Little Eight. As the previous manager once said, the 8th victim is a key. Hence, procuring Little Eight might help them to open the door to leave this world."

Chapter 148:

The system also did mention that Little Eight was a key but other than that, it provided no other details. Knowing Little Eight was the key but not the lock she corresponded to was positively unhelpful. "Did the previous manager give any other information?" Han Fei studied his roommates, the living room was silent. "I'll take that as a no."

"Even though the previous manager looked kind and was a nice person, I can feel that he did not really trust us or rather he refused to believe anything about this world is real." Wei Youfu began slowly. "You are different from him in essence." Han Fei was reminded of the Manager Mission. He remembered the last manager chose the path to destroy this cryptic world but he failed and his memory was shattered into pieces. 'Someone with a goal to destroy this world would not have trusted its inhabitants fully.'

The previous manager did not share much information with his tenants. To get to know the truth about this world, Han Fei had no choice but to search for more of the manager's memory fragments. 'Thankfully, I've copied down the manager's map. The Yi Ming Private Academy was specifically marked out, there's a high chance that one of his memory fragments can be found there.' Han Fei took out the teacher's id. 'There has to be a reason why he purposely left this for me.'

Han Fei had no idea what to do with the singer. This meant that the Happiness Neighbourhood was in deep danger. To solve this problem, he had to place his hope on the previous manager's memory fragments.

"We have no idea if, or when, the song will return. We need to be prepared for it just in case." Han Fei had a new understanding of how despairing the world was. He thought after clearing all out the threats, Happiness Neighbourhood would be his safehouse but today's visit from the singer changed everything... Unless of course he had a presence stronger than Pure Hatred on his side, which according to Drake was those who could not be mentioned, or the Unmentionables.

"This is going to be hard." Han Fei led Wei Youfu out of Room 1044. "Let's go check up on our neighbours for now. Hopefully everyone is fine."

"When the song was faraway, I already notified all of our neighbours, if they trust me, they should be at Apartment 2 now." Wei Youfu was a kind and reliable 'person'. He hadn't changed after death. Han Fei thus made a detour to Apartment 2. When he failed to notice Xu Qin among the crowd, Han Fei panicked. He rushed back to Apartment 1's 5th floor. Xu Qin appeared to be out still. Her room was destroyed. The containers for her 'food' were shattered and a heavy curse lingered inside the room. However, the real disaster was in Room 1051. Xu Qin's pet appeared to be dead. Only rotten bones were seen inside the dark room. The shadow had disappeared. "Where did the shadow in this room disappear to?"

Han Fei and Wei Youfu entered Room 1051. The darkness faded away and horrifying curses covered every surface. The song was a horrible entity. When Han Fei had lost all hope, a whine came from the corner of the inner room. Entering the room, Han Fei poked his head out the window where the whine came from earlier. He noticed there was a shred of shadow about the size of a strand of hair squeezed in the corner of the window ledge.

"Jesus Christ, the poor thing." The shadow was originally as large as the entire room. But now only a strand was left of it. And it barely managed to escape death by hiding outside its own room. Using Soul-Depth Touch, Han Fei extended his hand towards the shadow. The shadow cautiously unspooled itself out from the crack onto Han Fei's finger. Han Fei could feel fear, helplessness and memories of Xu Qin from the shadow. When Xu Qin was around, the shadow was the one who consumed others, it had never been so humiliated in its life.

"Notification for Player 0000! You have discovered a unique unknown object."

“Unique Unknown Object (???): A unique presence containing both curse and resentment. No one knew how it came into being. It is an entity between an object, a life and a lingering spirit.”

Staring at the strand that curled around his finger, Han Fei was shocked. Even the system could not identify this pet of Xu Qin. ‘Just what kind of food Xu Qin has been feeding this thing? How did she manage to turn a room into such a monster?’ Han Fei tried to place the shadow inside his inventory but the system forbade him from doing so because the shadow was not an object. Han Fei thus allowed the shadow to continue curling around his finger. ‘Did this thing see me as his male owner or it feels the safest around me because I’m the weakest at this building?’

Han Fei exited Room 1051 and entered Room 1054. The human cocoons that Xu Qin kept here were lucky. The song opened the door at random, it did not check Room 1054. To Han Fei’s surprise, there was competition between the cocoons. One of the cocoons was dying while the others turned bright red. The thing inside the latter appeared like it was about to birth anytime soon. ‘These human cocoons are from the non-locals and the non-locals have the butterfly tattoos. This means the cocoons might be related to the butterfly.’ Han Fei temporarily had no idea what the cocoons were for, so he placed them in his inventory for now.

He continued his inspection. There was not much damage done to the building. To Han Fei’s surprise, the mirror on the 7th floor survived the onslaught too. ‘No wonder this mirror is one of the earliest tenants at this place, it is quite powerful.’

After the song left, all the tenants gathered together. The Happiness Neighbourhood was no longer safe, everyone started to take Han Fei more seriously. With the threat of the song, the tenants finally reached a consensus. What Han Fei incidentally made up before had come true. None of the tenants knew when the song would return next. That understandably worried them. This time Apartment 2 was spared but who knew what would happen next time. Furthermore, they also noticed that the song appeared more often around the neighbourhood recently.

‘An outside threat is unfortunately the best way to achieve unity.’ After a discussion with the tenants, he had some of them move to the convenience store while those who could not leave stay behind to guard the neighbourhood. He planned to explore the school’s vicinity with his neighbour’s help tonight.

At late midnight, Han Fei and a few of his neighbours arrived at the back alley behind the convenience store. By then he had completed a Grade G Normal Mission so he could quit at any time. Han Fei was most confident in times like this. He could even curse at the singer when he encountered it from faraway.

“Is everyone ready? Be on your guard. Recently, there have been some inexplicable changes at Yi Ming Private Academy, the place has become very dangerous. The non-locals might have infiltrated the school as well. This time we are only scooping out the place from the outside. But if we run into any students needing aid, we’ll try to save them.” Han Fei needed to get information about the school. Taking a deep breath, Han Fei hugged Weep’s urn while Lee Zai carried Big Head’s schoolbag. They emitted an air of misfortune. When everyone was in place, Han Fei and Lee Zai ran out from the back alley, they crossed the street. But when they stepped on the sidewalk that was before the school’s front gate, something unexpected happened. Han Fei felt pulled out of the air and suddenly the world around him changed!

“Player 0000 has acquired Yi Ming Private Academy’s Educator Id! Congratulations for finding the hidden map—Yi Ming Private Academy! Your mission interface has been updated! Please take a look at it!”

A bad omen rose within Han Fei when he heard the notification. He had heard the term hidden map from Huang Yin before but he did not expect himself to run into one while he was already inside a hidden version of the game.

Studying the cracked urn he held, Han Fei called Weep’s name but Weep did not appear to be inside the urn. ‘How is this a hidden map when it is quite openly situated by the street?!’

Chapter 149:

Then again, considering how many Hidden Missions he had ‘stumbled’ across so far, Han Fei realized having a hidden map right by the street was not that unusual anymore. Han Fei shook the ceremonial urn, hoping that a spirit would tumble out but there was nothing. Getting down to the ground, Han Fei habitually leaned towards the wall. He felt safer with something solid behind him. Han Fei had the teacher’s id in his pocket. For all he knew, the moment he stepped on the sidewalk in front of the school, he had already entered the hidden map. And before he could react, he was deposited inside the school. He took out the teacher’s id and realized his own black and white picture was already on the id.

‘I can leave the game any moment I want, that is my lifeline. But for now, I need to figure out my exact location first.’ After getting over the initial shock, Han Fei swiftly accessed his situation. Someone had done something to the previous manager’s educator id. Han Fei who carried the id was immediately transported to an unknown location inside the school once he was within the territory of the hidden map. ‘The previous manager has placed all of his hope on me, he wouldn’t harm me for no reason. Is it possible that he has made this id to work in such a way that it’ll transport me to a spot closest to the manager’s memory fragment when I reach this hidden map?’ The more Han Fei thought about it, the

more convinced he became. Even though the previous manager's memories were shattered, the fragments belonged to the same person, there should be a bond between them, but of course, this was based on the premise that the manager's memory fragment did exist inside the school.

Han Fei studied his environments carefully. There was a simple single bed and a wooden table painted yellow. On the table, scattered an attendance booklet, a bag of fruits and several pens. The room was small. A work report was hung unevenly on the wall. A hair dryer and electric stove were pressed up against the corner. They looked too dusted to have seen recent use. Han Fei moved to the table to open the drawer. It was filled with unopened envelopes. The envelopes were drawn with hearts and thank you's.

"I appear to be inside the room of a hostel manager. Does this mean the previous manager's memory fragment is inside a hostel?" Han Fei checked the attendance booklet. He noticed that it had both male and female names. "The names on the first and second floor are males and the names on the 3rd and 4th floors are females. This is a shared hostel? Is there only one hostel at this boarding school?" Han Fei did check up on Yi Ming Private Academy in real life but he found little useful information. He knew that Yi Ming Private Academy was a boarding school, but it had horrible management and less than stellar education performance.

With his impressive memory skill, Han Fei looked through the attendance booklet and memorized the names of each student and their rooms. He put down the booklet and turned to the envelopes inside the drawer. "These look like notes of appreciation. This hostel manager must be beloved by their care..." Opening the envelope, Han Fei's expression froze when he saw the content. Someone used a red pen to write on a cute cartoon note inside, Go to hell! Go to hell! Go to hell!

The person must have been angry when they wrote this because the pen marks had scratched through the paper note. The note was not signed. Han Fei opened the other envelopes and the hatred became even more intense. "The handwritings are all different. They appear to come from different students." From the words alone, Han Fei could feel the thick resentment behind them. "What could the hostel manager possibly do to them to deserve such harassment?"

Han Fei expected a comforting discovery but now he was only chilled. He placed the notes back into the envelopes before he turned to the bag of fruits. He picked out a banana and studied it closely. Han Fei noticed there was a very tiny hole near the stalk. He peeled off the skin and did not notice any problem. But when he pinched the top part of the banana off, Han Fei noticed there was a needle that was stuck in there!

The needle was pointing upwards. If someone had eaten this banana like normal, they would have the roof of their mouth punctured through. "This has gone beyond a prank."

Han Fei replaced the banana and left the other fruits alone. He picked up the bag and moved to sit on the single bed. When his hand touched the bedding, Han Fei stood up again. With a frown, Han Fei noticed there was still warmth under the bed, meaning someone was just lying in it not too long ago. 'Normally there should be spare keys to the hostel rooms inside the manager's office but there is none that I can see. Looks like the manager has just gone out for a patrol.'

Calculating the time, Han Fei had a feeling the manager might return soon. He moved silently to the window and looked out. Through the window, he could see the corridor outside. There was no one at the dark corridor, the atmosphere was oppressive. 'There are stairs on both sides of the corridor.' One has to pass through a wooden door to reach the stairwell. Currently they were open and hence Han Fei was able to look through them. Han Fei surmised that the doors would be present at each floor, leading to the two staircases, as this was a mixed hostel. This was to prevent the students from wandering to the floors of their opposite gender. 'At the corner near the left staircase, there appears to be the bathroom and toilet...' Han Fei was still making his observation when footsteps came from upstairs. 'The manager has returned?' The footsteps came from the right staircase and it was moving quickly. Han Fei grabbed the needle he found inside the banana, opened the door and hurried to the left staircase. 'Since the banana has been peeled, the manager would know someone has been in their room! It's unsafe to hide inside the bathroom, I need to find a better hiding spot! The exit on this floor is locked, perhaps I should try my luck upstairs!' Han Fei's mind was not muddled by panic.

Since the footsteps came from the right, he had to go left. Han Fei's plan was good but it was interrupted. When he entered the left stairwell, he heard another footstep coming down the stairs. The two footsteps were wildly different, the footsteps on the right staircase were powerful as if announcing to others about their presence; the footsteps on the left were soft as if someone was walking on tip toe.

Han Fei did not plan to expose his existence just yet but he was already inside the stairwell. It was too late to exit the door and run into the bathroom now. The footsteps from the right had exited the stairwell and were echoing down the corridor. It was coming closer and closer. With no better hiding place, Han Fei chose to stay behind the stairwell door.

The footsteps slowly approached. In the darkness, Han Fei only had the protection of the wooden door. If someone pulled the door open, he'd be exposed. Holding his breath, Han Fei did not dare to quit now because he'd log in next time still at this spot, it would be too dangerous. Thankfully, the footsteps from the right slowly softened before disappearing altogether. The person probably had opened the door to the manager's office and entered it.

The footsteps on the left neared Han Fei before disappearing right before the door.

'The person has stopped beside me?' Han Fei froze behind the door. Moments later, he heard a boy's voice saying, "Strange, the manager auntie didn't take her fruits today?"

Chapter 150:

"Did you guys hear about what happened in Room 401?" A boy's voice came out from Bed No. 3. He poked his head out to look at the other beds in the room.

"What? I only know that a few rooms on the 4th floor are sealed up and no one will be moving into them." Another boy's voice came from Bed No. 2.

"The four girls who stayed in that room have died!" The boy said in a whisper. "All the adjacent rooms are sealed up because of it. To protect the school reputation, the admin squashed the news. They even provided an official statement for the hostel manager and the girls to say if they were ever asked about it."

"But why the cover up?" The boy from Bed No. 1 asked. He was very timid, he hid his head under the comforter after asking his question.

"Of course, there's no need for a cover up if it's natural death but the problem is the girls' deaths are very weird." Boy 3's whispering became softer. "You've heard about the back to back ghost story, right? It's about these two best friends. One of them went out late at night and never returned. The other called because she was worried but the calls went unanswered. The girl grumbled about her friend's disloyalty because she assumed her friend had abandoned her to seek fun on her own. But later the girl found out that her friend was nailed to death under her bed and they were sleeping back to back throughout the night."

"Can you please just go back to bed? Enough with the nonsense already!" Boy 1 curled deeper into his bed. He disliked these stories.

"Ignore him. What is the ghost story's relation to the four girls?" Boy 2's interest though was piqued.

“Apparently, the first girl to die in Room 401 was found pinned under Bed No. 1. That was her bed and she was the first to die but according to rumors, she was the last to be found.” Boy 3 said creepily.

“My goodness, doesn’t that mean the other girls had spent most of the night with the dead girl inside the room with them? Didn’t they notice her under the bed?”

“Would you have noticed if that was you? Would you pull open other people’s beds and look under them for no reason?” Once Boy 3 said that, a rustling came from Bed No. 1. Boy 1 appeared to have crawled out from his bed to look under it.

“You’re right, I probably would not have noticed. Even if there’s blood dripping, I would think it was the pipe leaking.” Boy 2 was the courageous and inquisitive one. “And then? How did the other 3 girls die?”

“The second to die was the girl in Bed No. 2. She had the most inexplicable death. During the night, she suddenly sat up from bed and stayed in that seated position for a long time. Then she heard someone call her name and she walked out from the room barefooted.”

“So did someone really call her?”

“Who knows. When the girl exited the door, the sound of the door opening woke up the girl in Bed No. 3. The latter thought the former was going to the bathroom so she did not pay her much attention but then Girl 2 had been gone for too long that Girl 3 got up from bed and went to the toilet to find her roommate.” Boy 3 slowed for tension. “As you all know, the layout of all the hostels is the same. The toilets are on the left side of the building. Room 401 is close to the left staircase and thus it is close to the bathroom as well. Girl 3 only took a few steps to reach the bathroom door. It was quiet inside the bathroom. She eased the door open and saw Girl 2 had her head under the shower, like she was washing her hair. But the shower was not on.

“Girl 3 was worried about her roommate. She thus called Girl 2’s name assuming she was sleep-walking but the latter did not give her any response. With confusion, she walked to Girl 2’s side. She reached out to shake her roommate’s shoulder and was surprised to find that Girl 2’s hair and shoulders were wet. She thought Girl 2 just finished showering but the problem was Girl 3 did not hear any sound of running water. Based on the distance between their bedroom and the bathroom, she would have heard the water if Girl 2 used the shower. Girl 3 slowly leaned forward until she was hit by a horrible smell. Only then Girl 3 realized her hands were stained with blood.” Boy 3 paused again for effect.

“Why did you stop? What happened to Girl 3?” Now even Boy 1’s attention was hooked.

“She was stunned into disbelief. She opened her mouth to scream but no voice came out. She turned to run towards the bathroom but Girl 2 was standing there blocking the exit!

“Girl 3 felt her body getting heavier. She whipped around and ran into one of the shower cubicles to hide. She locked the door. Through her panic, she remembered that she still had her phone with her. She took it out to call for help. Before she could make any call though, she saw the light from her phone fading away as if a pair of hands were closing over her eyes. She turned back to look and saw Girl 2 leaning on her shoulders and smiling at her.” Boy 3 was a master storyteller. His tone and cadence carried the story well. The content itself might not be that scary but the way he told it could send shivers down people’s spines.

“The girl who slept in Bed No. 4 was woken up by her phone. She answered it blurrily. She could hear the sound of dripping coming from the other end but no one said anything. She thought it was a prank call. Just as she was about to hang up, she heard the voice of Girl 3. She sounded very weak and she appeared to implore Girl 4 to run. However, the voice soon disappeared. Instead it was replaced by raucous laughter of Girl 2 and Girl 3. It was like they were sharing some kind of joke and could not stop laughing. Girl 4 was already annoyed that she was disrupted from her sleep. She wanted to shout into her phone and give them a piece of her mind when the call got cut off.

“Then the door to Room 401 creaked open. In the dark, 3 shadows crawled into the 3 beds which had just been cleared out that night.” Boy 3’s voice lowered even more.

“And then? How did Girl 4 die in the end?” Boy 2 asked.

“Girl 4 assumed it was her roommates returning so she did not mind it that much. But gradually she noticed something was not quite right. Instead of sleeping, the 3 figures in the other 3 beds kept staring at her and whispering among themselves, like there was something wrong with her. Being scrutinized so intently, Girl 4 was unable to sleep. She turned away from her roommates and tried to listen to what they were saying.” Boy 2’s voice dipped with eeriness. “But to Girl 4’s consternation, the other 3 figures were discussing her roommates’ deaths. The more she listened to them, the more afraid she became. She was already awake and her body shook but she gritted her teeth and pretended to be asleep.”

The comforters were pulled back. The irises had gone from the eyes of the children in Bed 1, 2 and 3. They stood up and walked deeper into the room. "The 3 figures who sneaked into Room 401 stood beside Bed No. 4. They reached their heads through the mosquito net. Girl 4 found herself unable to move. While she thought frantically about what to do, a strange nursery rhyme rang out behind her. Then Girl 4's stomach twisted with pain, like she was suffering from appendicitis."

The 3 children's faces were pressed against the mosquito net. They had on horrible smiles as they reached their hands towards the girl's stomach. Their lips sang that nursery rhyme in unison.

"Daddy look, mommy look, look at how pretty the baby's hands are.

"Daddy look, mommy look, where have the baby's hands disappeared to?

"Daddy look, mommy look, the baby's hands have returned."

...

Han Fei hid behind the door at the 1st floor stairwell. By now he had confirmed that there was someone standing right on the opposite side of the door. Just as he thought he was going to stay there through the night, suddenly a girl's horrifying scream came from the 4th floor!