

Iyashikei 201

Chapter 201:

Han Fei heeded Li Xue's lesson, when running into criminals and a fight was inevitable, then one had to incapacitate the other as fast as possible. That was exactly what Han Fei did but to his surprise, the other party was equally as fast. This was not a petty thief. Seeing as the man took out a knife-like object to stab Huang Yin, Han Fei reached to grab Huang Yin and yank him to the side. The man in black predicted that. He knew that Han Fei would definitely step in if he made Huang Yin the primary target.

Similarly, Han Fei understood the same philosophy as well. He knew he could not escape with Huang Yin who was too weak, therefore, to truly neutralize this danger, the only possible solution was to deal with the threat head on. Both parties had seen through each other. They both made their move, aiming to have the first strike.

The man in black was armed with a knife of indeterminate material. With a dangerous glint in his eyes, he pounced. However, to his shock, Han Fei's fighting capability, determination and dexterity was on par with him. This thin-looking man was far more dangerous than he appeared.

Compared to the man, Han Fei did not consider that much. He had fought with way too many opponents who were much more ruthless and relentless than the man in black. With the training from the Iyashikei game, Han Fei's actual fighting experience was not comparable to a normal citizen. His muscle tensed and his body arched like a bow before firing. The space around the front door was small. There was no choice but to have hand to hand combat. The two men were quick and ferocious. Their fight was completely from those fight scenes shown on television. When each had the chance, they would go for the kill. One strike to topple the opponent and give them no chance.

Even though the man in black was armed with a knife, Han Fei did not shrink from fear, in fact, he was much too brazen for someone in his state. After deftly evading the stabs and slashes, he used his knee to knock into the man's stomach and then tried to bring his elbow down on the man's head. If either of these attacks connected, the man in black would be disorientated and gave Han Fei the opening to deliver a final blow. Han Fei was fighting like a man with no other option. His goal was direct and simple, to incapacitate the other party.

After he missed, the man in black moved backwards, voluntarily stepping away from Han Fei. Staring into Han Fei's bloodshot eyes, the man's own gaze chilled. He could not tell what Han Fei's background was. Compared to himself, Han Fei's action was more like someone on the run from the police. His original plan was ruined, before the man could figure out his next step, Han Fei already made his move.

Han Fei picked up Huang Yin from the ground and dragged him out the front door. Han Fei wanted to escape with Huang Yin and then closed the door to lock the man in black inside Huang Yin's house!

After surviving for so long in the cryptic world, Han Fei's brain turned very fast. When the enemy realized his Plan A, Han Fei was already onto Plan B.

To be fair though, things were not that positive for Han Fei. He was under a great lot of pressure. He just died more than 10 times in the manager mission, he had not rested since he exited the game and now he had to get into a life or death combat with an unknown enemy. His stamina and physique was at their limits, Han Fei was running on pure determination. Therefore, when he saw the man in black took a step back, Han Fei immediately grabbed Huang Yin and made to retreat.

The man in black was caught by surprise. He picked up the black box and charged for the front door. Han Fei was tired and he had to carry Huang Yin with him. When he exited the front door, the man in black was close behind him. But out in the corridor, Han Fei had another plan of his own. He shouted at the top of his lungs, waking up Huang Yin's neighbours. While he cried for help, he entangled with the man in the black so that the man could not escape that easily.

The man in black had to admit his unluckiness to have run into someone like Han Fei. He knew that even if he gave it his all, he could not take down Han Fei quickly. As time moved on, the paint on the man's face started to peel. He knew time was up. He extricated himself from the battle and blasted through the safety door.

With his legs shaking, Han Fei did not give blind chase after the man. He was afraid that there might be reinforcement from Butterfly, furthermore, the most important thing was to protect Huang Yin.

"Run while you still can, I've memorized every single detail about you!" His eyes shone emotionlessly. Han Fei stared at the man as he disappeared into the city. Han Fei picked up his phone to call the police and then returned to Huang Yin's side. "Brother Huang!" Han Fei said worriedly. Huang Yin looked like he was about to pass out. With a few shakes, Huang Yin finally opened his eyes with difficulty. He grabbed Han Fei's arm weakly and said, "Han Fei, thank you... Can, can you help me grab some clothes?"

Han Fei was slightly relieved when he saw that Huang Yin was not fatally wounded. He entered the house and grabbed a shirt and bathrobe for Huang Yin. After throwing the clothes on, Huang Yin sat on

the stairs with his back leaning against the wall. He looked just like how he was when he was summoned to the cryptic world but instead of Ol' Lee, it was Han Fei beside him now.

"Shall we go to your home and wait for the police?"

"No!" Huang Yin suddenly shook his head vehemently at Han Fei. "We mustn't go back there, it's too dangerous."

"What do you mean?" Han Fei was curious. He knew that the Butterfly would come get Huang Yin but he did not expect it to be so soon. Based on Huang Yin's condition, it appeared like he had received yet another scarring trauma.

"There's a ghost... inside the house."

"A ghost? You must be seeing things because of the pressure you were under." Han Fei sighed. He remembered how he was the first day he exited the day. He seemed to recall telling the police about the presence of ghosts as well. "It's because the game was too real, that's all." When Han Fei said that, his subconscious received a warning from the black box. Hearing the robotic voice that came from deep inside his mind, Han Fei only then realized how acclimatized he was to the presence of the black box in his brain. He had learned to coexist with the thing.

"It's not the game, it's an actual ghost." Huang Yin told Han Fei about the videos and the ghosts. After hearing everything, Han Fei frowned. He walked into Huang Yin's house and took a tour. Then, he sat down beside Huang Yin and said, "Brother Huang, you've fallen for his trick. The Witness was probably the butterfly. They used that video to place impressions and implications in your mind. It's a psychological trick to make you believe that your house is haunted."

"A psychological trick? You even know about things like that?" Even though Huang Yin was himself a doctor, his specialty was in andrology.

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"In the first story, the main character was killed by ghosts because he refused to listen to his neighbour's advice, this implanted the idea in your mind that your home is not safe, and you need to escape from it.

If you do not learn from the main character's mistake, you would encounter the same fate." Han Fei swept a glance at the AI butler, "The second story worked to enhance that belief. It used a more detailed setting and method to draw you into the scene. In any case, the aim of the videos was for you to voluntarily open the front door and escape from your house."

At this point, Huang Yin was reminded of the black box the man in black held. Things started to fall in place. "I get it now. The culprit can hack into the housing system to control everything but the security system because it is not part of the housing system, only the house owner can access them with a password. So he must have been waiting outside the door for me to come out."

"The man should be one of Butterfly's people. Speaking of which, this is the first time the Butterfly has used a living person to go after someone so directly." Even Han Fei was not given that 'privilege'. Of course, there was greater police activity around Han Fei's place and that perhaps deterred the Butterfly.

"But why would they come after me? I don't even know who this Butterfly is!" Huang Yin cried indignantly. This was not a joke. He almost died in his home. With that in mind, Huang Yin was appreciative of Han Fei even more.

"Because you have spoilt his plan." Han Fei was about to go into details when the second warning came from the black box. There would be no third warning. The box would directly explode. The black box was buried deep in his mind. The moment Han Fei revealed anything related to the black box and the cryptic world, the black box would be able to capture it. Han Fei had no idea whether the explosive threat was real or not but he was not going to chance it.

Seeing the hesitation on Han Fei's face, Huang Yin did not urge, he waited quietly. Huang Yin now not only treated Han Fei as a gaming buddy but also a friend for life. When Death arrived, it was Han Fei who did everything to save him. The previous person who had done that was his mother. Actually Huang Yin had been harboring a guilt towards his mother but he wouldn't be able to do anything about that, at least not in this lifetime. Huang Yin always had a mature and confident smile for the world but there was a thorn stuck in his heart. This was a past that he could not escape from.

But earlier, there was another person who saved him from the grip of Death. When fresh air returned back into his lungs, he felt like the whole world had changed.

"The Butterfly is the true culprit behind many serial killings, they are also the supercriminal the Xin Lu citizenry database cannot identify. They represent the deepest sin within humanity." Han Fei had to give Huang Yin some intel before the police arrived. Since he could not reveal the secret of the cryptic world,

he used the Butterfly instead to warn Huang Yin. Han Fei had saved Huang Yin's life in the cryptic world, and he once again saved his life in the real world. Their friendship literally passed the test of life and death.

"Come into the house. Don't worry, there are no ghosts." Han Fei supported Huang Yin back into his room. To be honest, Han Fei was at his limits as well. After entering the room, Huang Yin discovered the AI butler was holding a set of table knives which were still in their wrappings. This was the shadowy figure who had frightened him to death in the dark. But now in the bright light, everything did not look that scary anymore.

When they reached the couch, Han Fei collapsed. Fatigue claimed him and the sores jolted through every part of his body. Forcing himself awake, Han Fei told Huang Yin everything that he could. Han Fei trusted Huang Yin implicitly for one simple reason, without Huang Yin's help, Han Fei would still have been trapped in Jin Sheng's endless nightmare.

In Huang Yin's home, he was tired and drained, but at least he could still feel these sensations. If he had fallen into the hands of the blue butterfly and Ma Manjiang, there would be literal hell to pay. When he thought about it that way, a serenity suffused through Han Fei's heart. In a way, it was a new kind of 'energy' that was instilled in him by the Iyashikei game.

After experiencing the cryptic world himself, Huang Yin could be said to be the only living human who could understand Han Fei. It was a pure coincidence that these two became friends. It was like the meeting of one extremely unlucky person with another whose life was a series of unlucky events. In a way, they were quite similar. In fact, Huang Yin did mention that when he first saw Han Fei at the con, the latter reminded him of his younger self. At the time, Han Fei's social anxiety had not been fully cured. He would feel uncomfortable and anxious among crowds. Huang Yin had the same thing in the past. However, as he grew older, Huang Yin abandoned that self, put on a society-approved mask and started to assimilate into life.

In just a few days, the change to Han Fei couldn't be laughed at either. However, different from Huang Yin, even though Han Fei was also wearing an invisible mask, he had not abandoned his true self. Huang Yin could see a very deep glow buried in Han Fei's eyes. This young man appeared to aim to use this barely discernible glow to light up the endless night. After riding over the initial wave of fear, Huang Yin finally calmed down. Honestly, he was quite envious of Han Fei. The young man still managed to keep on walking and glowing so bright after being beaten by life for so many times. It was impressive and inspiring.

“Han Fei, I can see that there are some things that you are not at ease to tell me, I won’t press for details. I know you’ll tell me when you can.” Huang Yin did not know about the black box but he respected Han Fei’s privacy. “I will not tell any other people about this either, don’t worry.”

“That is not that important, Brother Huang. The important thing is you have to get police protection. The Butterfly is merciless and cruel, they are extremely dangerous!” After playing the Iyashikei game, Han Fei understood a valuable lesson, many things in life were fleeting, living to see the sun rise another day was the most important thing.

“Okay.” Huang Yin could feel Han Fei’s sincere concern.

“I mean it. The Butterfly never personally goes after their victims, they are experts at manipulating situations and elements to create accidental deaths.” Han Fei shared part of the information that he had gotten from Meng Changxi with Huang Yin. “Take a look at these. And you need to memorize all the details in there.”

“Must I memorize them?” Seeing the size of the file, Huang Yin did not think a human brain could possibly fit so many things.

“Of course, this information was obtained through the sacrifice of someone’s flesh and blood.” The bell came from downstairs. Han Fei slowly stood up. “We will capture the Butterfly but before that, you have to make sure that you stay alive. I only have a single friend in this world, I don’t want to have to mourn that loss.”

Seeing the sincerity on Han Fei’s face, Huang Yin gave his first genuine smile. “Don’t worry, I’m not the kind to give up easily.”

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The police cruiser arrived downstairs. The security guard immediately called his superior and led the officers to Huang Yin’s place. When the police officers saw Han Fei was also present, a shock crossed their eyes but it was soon replaced by acceptance. This was not the first time Han Fei interacted with the police. He provided them with a detailed description of the man in black’s appearance. Han Fei’s photographic memory meant that he remembered the smallest details, the police soon came up with a virtual model of the suspect based on his descriptions.

Without saying anything else beyond the term, Butterfly, the police instantly grasped the severity of the situation. This was going to be a long night for the Xin Lu police. The officers started their investigation. Their first personnel of interest were naturally the victim, Huang Yin. While that was happening, Han Fei sat on the stairs and drifted off to sleep. He was so tired that even the hard, stone steps provided no detriment to his sleep.

Just as Han Fei was about to sink into deep slumber, his phone vibrated. He frowned when he saw the caller Id. It was from the paparazzi whom he once saved. "Jin Jun? How can I help you?"

"Brother Han, are you currently in a high-class neighbourhood around Xin Lu intelligent city?"

"Yes, how did you know that?" Han Fei was openly confused.

"You need to find a secluded spot and hide. There's a paparazzi who saw you enter that area. According to the industry grapevine, Wu Wu Entertainment already got their hands on the picture of you entering that neighbourhood." Jin Jun called ahead to warn Han Fei.

"What's the problem with me being seen at this place?" Han Fei did remember someone watching him when he left his rental. But at the time, he was too concerned about Huang Yin to care about them.

"A picture can speak a thousand words but those words might not be the truth. These people are the best at framing pictures and drawing false conclusions from them. Even if your visit there is completely innocent, they can work some kind of negative angle into it."

"To be honest, I'm here for official business. The kind that they can't find any fault with." Han Fei thought about it. "If my memory does not fail me, Wu Wu Entertainment reached out to your colleague to dig up some dirt about me, right?"

"Yes, but don't you worry about him, I've warned him to stay away from Wu Wu Entertainment."

"Don't do that. In fact, I'll give you a more detailed and authentic inside scoop. You can have your colleague send the information to Wu Wu Entertainment, your colleague has to eat too, right?" Han Fei was a survivor of the cryptic world, he couldn't care less about fame and stuff, but he would not give up

this perfect opportunity to pull one over Wu Wu Entertainment. After a few more exchanges, Han Fei hung up and the tired young man continued his sleep on the stairs.

The dawning sun slowly rose. After the crime scene was investigated and recorded, Han Fei and Huang Yi were brought to the police station. Actually it was Huang Yi who was asked to come to the station to provide a more detailed report, Han Fei merely wanted to find a more comfortable place to sleep.

Sunlight caressed his face and Han Fei swore he could hear people talking about him. His head that was leaning on the table slowly raised, there was still some redness in his eyes. "Did something happen?" He asked with a sore throat. Han Fei looked rather haggard. His physical fatigue could be cleansed with a sleep but the pain from being killed repeatedly needed some more time to heal.

"Brother Han, you should stay away from the internet. In fact, why don't you go back to sleep?"

"Those people are really too much! You were there to help people!" The two officers huffed.

"That only makes me that much more curious." Han Fei took out his phone and just as he switched it on, he saw that he had logged in more than 10 unanswered calls. They were from Sister Long, Director Jiang and even Director Zhang's assistant. "Looks like Wu Wu Entertainment has made a huge splash this time." Instead of returning any of the calls, Han Fei logged onto the internet. He saw his name on the front page immediately—The secret behind Han Fei, the recent online sensation! Is he a kept man of some unknown rich sponsor?!

The front page was filled with pictures and various headlines about Han Fei. One of them was a picture of Han Fei 'sneaking' into a high-class residence after 3 am in the morning. With Han Fei's released information, he should have nothing to do with anyone staying in this neighbourhood. Everyone who stayed there was well beyond the young actor's current income bracket.

The focus of the articles was not on the truth. The fact that a public figure was caught 'sneaking' into a high-class residential area in the middle of the night was eye-grabbing enough. Han Fei knew that it would be pointless for him to explain. The rumors had gained a life of its own. Twin Flower was still at the top spot of the new movie ranking, many people were impressed by Han Fei's acting. The connotation of the term, 'kept man' was very clear. As one's popularity continued to rise, there would be more topics and rumors surrounding oneself.

There were claims that Han Fei's previous deeds of bravery were all publicity stunts. Some even went so far to say that they knew the identity of the female billionaire who was sponsoring Han Fei. Monsters and ghouls crawled out from their hiding spot. Han Fei's personal account was swamped with attacks. There were 'fans' who were there to rally the crowds, to boycott Han Fei. New actor that dropped from nowhere, a mysterious sponsor and a clandestine meeting. With intentional yet subtle pushes, the topic gathered more and more momentum. Many famous 'influencers' joined to sour Han Fei's name. The speed by which Han Fei's name became known from these unfounded gossips was much faster than when he was in the movie.

"Popularity can be quite a double-edged sword. It's scary." Even though that was what Han Fei said, he still put the phone to the side and continued to sleep. He needed to adjust his status because he still needed to game at night. Han Fei did not mind this at all, but for the people who knew the truth, they couldn't have been more indignant on his behalf. The man who had literally risked his life to save another deserved better than such slander. Where was justice?

At 10.30 am, Xin Lu police soon locked onto the suspect with the description provided by Han Fei. This man who was familiar with fighting skill and had proficiency with hacking was called Hu Wu. He was once a star guard at a high-ranking security company but he was fired due to some unspecified reason and was blackballed in his industry. The man himself had antisocial tendency. The citizenry database had a high danger rating for him. It was not until recent years that his rating dropped and people around him also found him easier to deal with.

The incident happened at 3 am plus, the suspect was determined at 10 am and the warrant was issued immediately. The police's expediency was thanks to the security camera that was everywhere around Xin Lu City as well as the detailed clues provided by Han Fei. At around 1 pm, the suspect who was on the run was captured. The man was cruel to himself too. Once he knew that escape was impossible, he chose to commit suicide. Currently the suspect was being rushed to the hospital, the police needed him alive to get information about the Butterfly.

In less than 10 hours, the case was closed. The investigators who were responsible for the case heard about the issue regarding Han Fei as they arrived at the station. The unit leader was a straightforward person. He believed that justice should not disappoint the innocent. He directly disclosed the latest capture on the official police website and added another public praise regarding Han Fei's selfless action. The police's logic was simple. Everything revolved around evidence. After they got Han Fei's permission, they released the videos that they had captured on their law enforcement app when they arrived at Huang Yin's neighbourhood.

Every online user saw for them how the fierce Han Fei described to the police the physical details of the suspect. His expression was severe. He also showed great concern for his friend, the victim. In the last

frame of the video, everyone saw how Han Fei who was both physically and mentally exhausted sat down on the harsh staircase and fell asleep.

Heavy duty acting in the day and rescuing his friend at night, even Superman would have a lighter schedule than that.

Before the evidence provided by the police, the rumors imploded. There were plenty of people who scolded Han Fei earlier but now there were even more who sided with him. It was chaos on the internet but the main character, Han Fei was still catching up on his sleep at the police station. "The human world sure is noisy..."

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The truth always prevails.

Han Fei had the best sleep he had had in a long time at the police station. The chaos from the outside world did not disturb him at all. As the Chinese saying goes, stand straight and never mind if the shadow inclines, however this was a man who did not even have a shadow. There was nothing deplorable about his personal life. At 1 pm, as the images and videos from the law enforcement were revealed, the tide of comments started to turn. By then, the searches for Han Fei had gone on a national scale. This was the first time his name appeared on the national hot search ranking. There were 2 terms attached to Han Fei, selflessness and integrity.

He was already famous, he was no longer an extra, but this actor still rushed to save his friend in the middle of the night. Seeing how tired Han Fei was in real time, many netizens were shocked. Just what sense of justice was powering this man? Was he even still a normal human being?

For most actors, their lives would change after they had a taste of fame, be it their attitude towards work or how they treated others around them but Han Fei was different. He used actual deeds to prove to everyone that he had not changed, if anything, he had only worked harder. This hard work paid off and many netizens became witness of that thanks to police intervention. It was no longer important who was the first to release the false information, the important thing was that someone wanted to ruin Han Fei but instead had worked to stabilize his popularity even more. Indirectly, they had helped Han Fei with great free publicity.

Han Fei did not give himself any sort of fixed persona like most celebrities. Now that everyone knew this young man had not let the fame go to his head, they were even more impressed by him. His actions also proved that his acts of heroism were all real, and based on current evidence, they could expect more of such deeds from this young man. A supposed dig at the young actor in the end somehow managed to earn him several ten thousand more new fans. He moved several steps higher on the actor ranking. The CEO of Wu Wu Entertainment would be kicking themselves now.

After a good night's sleep, Han Fei returned back to his optimum state. Only then he took out his phone and answered most of his missed calls. The people whom he called had a roller-coaster ride of emotions that night. They too had a hard time sleeping. This was especially true for Director Zhang. He admired Han Fei greatly and he believed the character was truly meant for Han Fei. But he valued the integrity of his work even more. He did not want a bad press to pull the attention away from the focus of his film. Therefore, if Han Fei was sucked into the whirlpool of negative comments, Director Zhang would have to consider abandoning Han Fei and search for a new replacement. Being a part of Director Zhang's movie would definitely help propel Han Fei's career. This also went to show Wu Wu Entertainment's viciousness. They wanted to ruin Han Fei's career. Based on the speed by which the negative rumor spread, Han Fei believed it was more than one company which was behind this. The companies of the other actors who auditioned for Director Zhang's movie probably joined in as well.

'For other people, being a part of Director Zhang's movie is a very rare opportunity but it is just something I use to relax. The nightly gaming sessions are too tiring and I need something stress-relieving in the day and Director Zhang offered me the perfect channel to vent.' Being among the bustling police officers, Han Fei found himself completely at ease, this was probably another change initiated by the Iyashikei game. The game did not give him much choice. In the cryptic world, only those with light in their heart could survive. Otherwise they would soon be corrupted.

At 5 pm, Han Fei was politely requested by the police to leave. Huang Yin though still had to stay a while longer. Han Fei was reassured that Huang Yin would receive police protection.

When he reached home, Han Fei finally had the chance to take a breather. The most dangerous character at Yi Ming Private Academy had been dealt with. Han Fei did not plan to leave the school so soon, he wanted to finish the rest of the horror tales at the school first. Then he would put his earlier plan into place, which was to connect Yi Ming Private Academy, Yi Ming Convenience Store and Happiness Neighbourhood.

The bride previously requested the paper doll boss to help her with something at the Ziggurat but the boss was instead entrapped by Han Fei and had his coffin stolen. Therefore, the bride probably failed to get her request fulfilled. So if the bride was still alive, there was a high chance for her to return to the

convenience store. After all, from her perspective, it was the convenience store boss who had failed her. It was its misstep at the crucial moment that caused the plan to fall apart.

Before Han Fei was sucked into the hidden map, he was actually waiting for the bride. His original plan was to 'invite' the bride to join him inside the Happiness Neighbourhood and had his neighbours try to 'convince' her of his innocence. But now his plan had changed. He planned to pick up where the paper doll had left off. He would continue to cooperate with the bride. If he needed more information about the Ziggurat, he would have to get there first. Everyone who was related to the Butterfly came from the Ziggurat, and a fragment of Fu Sheng's memory was left there as well. The tester also went insane inside that building several years ago. The place probably contained a gap that might connect the surface and cryptic world. In summary, Han Fei had plenty of reasons to head to the Ziggurats.

But this was something that needed plenty of preparation. After he reached level 10, he needed to head to Livestock street to upgrade his profession first. Han Fei's plan for his in game self was much clearer than his plan for his real self. In a way, his in game life was more important than his real life.

After filling up his stomach, Han Fei started to collect and arrange the information on Yi Ming Private Academy. Not only did he want to help the dead in the game walk out from their despair, he also wanted to help bring them justice in the real world. Punishment was coming for everyone who had sinned, none was going to escape. This included staff members like Lee Xun and Lee Jingmei as well as students who bullied Jin Sheng. Han Fei would not frame anyone, he only added their name to the list only after he had complete evidence of their crimes.

After taking a full 3 hours, Han Fei had reconstructed the tales of horror at Yi Ming Private Academy. He had 4 files corresponding to 4 victims. His investigating skill and information compiling skill was much better than a new officer, in fact, they could be filed immediately once they were cleared.

'Only the most unfortunate can yield the black box, but is that really the truth?' After sending the info to the police, Han Fei started to think back to everything that had happened since he acquired the gaming helmet. To improve his survivability in the game, he had inadvertently helped a lot of 'people', and through this process, Han Fei himself also gained something from them. Han Fei could not tell for sure what those things were but he believed that it was because of them that his heart had grown stronger, kinder and warmer. 'I've been receiving healing energy from the hellish game? That can't be real... can it? If that is really the case, is it the game that is abnormal or I'm the one who is abnormal?'

When Han Fei couldn't figure something out, he turned to the books to clear his mind. Study would help him focus. After looking through some books related to business management and education, Han Fei

picked up the gaming helmet. He connected all the wires. When midnight struck, he put on the gaming helmet.

Blood covered everything and the world appeared to be frozen in blood. Time seemed to lose its meaning then. Han Fei's consciousness was suspended in a unique state. He knew that his eyes were not open but he could 'see' certain things in the darkness.

The red city frozen in blood appeared to be changing as well. Blood red shadows crawled out from the hidden corners and they all seemed to have their eyes on Han Fei.

His eyes opened and Han Fei was still inside Yi Ming Private Academy. Before he could even look around, the robotic voice announced in his mind. "Notification for Player 0000! Due to the sudden skyrocket of numbers in non-locals, Perfect Life will implement a more in-depth open world starting from tonight to accommodate all the new arrivals. Players, please be prepared accordingly! Soon, there will be more souls who require healing, and the path to many new locations will all be opened!"

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"A more in-depth open world?" Han Fei had no idea what that meant but he had a bad feeling about it. "The paths to many areas will be opened. Does that mean there might be dangerous spirits and ghosts traveling from other areas to this district?" Han Fei already found survival incredibly difficult. He had just survived an impossible mission and the system decided to throw another challenge at him. Studying his character profile, Han Fei couldn't help but feel that he had been specifically targeted by the system, but this was the kind of attention that Han Fei did not want.

"After I completed the manager mission at Happiness Neighbourhood, my plan was to stay a bit longer inside the neighborhood to up my level but the tenants from Building 2 cleared away all the hostile enemies around the neighbourhood, and thus I had to venture out to accept the available missions. And now after clawing my way through the hidden map of Yi Ming Private Academy, the system threw me this new open world system. Threats might come over from other areas. Does the game really think that highly of me?!"

Licking his dry lips, Han Fei believed that the system was doing this because it was related to the path he had chosen. When the time came, the previous building manager chose destruction between destruction and salvation, while Han Fei chose both. Essentially he had opened the black box from both sides. "When there's a will there's a way, worrying won't solve anything. I will have to power on."

Pushing open the cubicle door, a chill wind caressed Han Fei's face. The old windows creaked noisily. Unknown objects crawled over the cracked glass. They looked like strands of hair or wiggling worms. The axle of the door squeaked. Han Fei exited the bathroom and something flashed within the darkness. The unknown presence appeared to be hiding from Han Fei. 'Is it the effect of the title, Patrolling Teacher?'

Strangely enough, Han Fei did not feel any discomfiture walking through the haunted school. It felt like he was a real member of staff there. 'After dying so many times in the manager mission, I feel weirdly connected to this place now.' If there was a new teacher, Han Fei could tell them proudly that he had died in more than 10 different ways at this school.

"Teacher Han!" Ol' Lee spotted Han Fei from afar. He dragged along the mountain of ghosts as he ran towards Han Fei, causing a draft of horrible stench in his wake. Ma Manjiang was already dead but the ghosts appeared to have gotten used to staying with Ol' Lee, they did not show any intention of leaving. They continued to shield Ol' Lee's eyes so that the senior guard could continue his life in a simple world, sparing him from the pain and despair.

"Where is your friend?" Ol' Lee was the night security, he had memory loss problems. He had lost memories of his despair but he remembered Han Fei and Huang Yin clearly.

"He's a doctor, he needs to work." Han Fei gave a random excuse and then changed the subject, "Sir, after I left yesterday night, did anything interesting happen at the school?"

"No, everything seems normal." Ol' Lee chuckled happily as he walked down the corridor with Han Fei. As they strode past the corridor, Han Fei noticed that the back of the education block had been dyed red by blood. The lingering spirits of the non-locals were strung up by rope and were left dangling high in the air. Their memory and tattoos related to the Butterfly had been brutally removed. This scene startled Han Fei quite a bit but it did not seem to register in Ol' Lee's eyes. The guard continued to walk ahead like nothing was wrong.

"You sure that everything was fine?"

"Yes, there was no one at school yesterday night." In a way, that was the truth. Han Fei knew that he would not get any information from Ol' Lee so he walked to examine the strung non-locals himself. The spirits of these non-locals had not fully dissipated, they still possessed some semblance of sentience.

Hasty handwriting could be seen on their bodies. Each of them appeared to have their individual story carved onto their bodies. The stories described the deepest sin within their corresponding souls.

‘They are barely alive but they can’t die either, the natives at Yi Ming Private Academy are quite cruel.’ Han Fei realized then he had grossly underestimated the ghosts at the school. Ma Manjiang had to collaborate with the blue butterfly to deal with them. If a normal ghost dared to venture into this school, the chance of them leaving was close to zero.

“Teacher Han? Teacher Han!” While Han Fei was reading the stories on the souls, Zhang Guanxing’s voice came from the education block. He was excited when he saw Han Fei. The kid respected Han Fei greatly and truly was appreciative of Han Fei’s help.

“Sir, I’ve been looking for you since yesterday!” Dragging his damaged body, Zhang Guanxing and Xu Yin’s pet rushed out from the education block. To be missed so dearly by a ghost, Han Fei felt like he must have done something right as a ‘teacher’.

“You’re right on time, who strung these non-locals up there?”

“It was Jin Sheng’s class teacher, she was a very tall woman. She was at the verge of a mental breakdown after Ma Manjiang died and she vented her frustration on these non-locals.”

“So it was her who took away the butterfly tattoos?”

“Yes, she tore off the tattoos to patch up a skin coat. She appears to intend to wear the coat to leave the school.” Hearing what Zhang Guanxing had to say, Han Fei had a feeling that Jin Sheng’s class teacher wanted to leave to head towards the Ziggurat. She wanted to find the Butterfly to seek revenge. “Do you know where she is now?”

“She should be patrolling the school. Yesterday, before Ma Manjiang’s death, a blue butterfly channeled all of Ma Manjiang’s malice to ram against the school’s front gate, it caused a crack on the locked gates. Also after the blue butterfly escaped, a new batch of outsiders sneaked into the school. But they’re different from the previous non-locals we’ve encountered.”

“A new batch of outsiders?” While Han Fei contemplated these new people’s possible identity, a shrill weep came from the hostel. “Wait a minute... This voice!” Han Fei, Zhang Guanxing and Ol’ Lee hurried to the hostel building. There was an intense battle happening inside the hostel. The layers of windows were shattered and a thick coat of blood lingered in the air. The sound of crying mingled with curses. The hostel corridor was covered in water stains and blood stains. The temperature was low. The ring on Han Fei’s finger chilled intensely. But strangely enough, the chill did not cause him any fear, if anything, he felt quite comforted by it. Han Fei had the black python curled around him so he could run faster. He finally reached the end of the corridor and saw the fighting parties. “Please stop! We’re all friends here!”

Combats among ghosts were often extremely vicious. Normally a sane person would not run into their midst to stop a ghostly fight but Han Fei was not exactly a sane person.

And so a living person stood in the middle of the gory fight to negotiate the conflict and stranger still, both parties did stop their aggression!

“Mr. Building Manager!”

“Teacher Han!” Lee Zai and Zhang Guanxing warned at the same time, worried about Han Fei’s safety. After hearing the other, they turned to share a confused look.

“We’re all friends here working towards the same goal! Let’s not fight due to some petty misunderstandings!” Han Fei stood among the groups of ghosts and his body shivered involuntarily. Staring at Han Fei, the two batches of ghosts who were fighting earlier could not have been more confused.

“Friends?”

On the left side of the corridor, Jin Sheng’s class teacher and Su Mengting stared at Han Fei coolly. They were not friends with Han Fei but because he had helped them kill Ma Manjiang, they did not wish to kill him either.

On the right side of the corridor, Weep was hugging a rice-cooker which had his urn inside it. Tear stains were fresh on his face. Drake stood beside Lee Zai. Their faces were plain with befuddlement, their

brains could not process this development. Their boss and building manager infiltrated the school to gather information, how did he end up becoming a teacher here?

The 3 of them found an opening yesterday night when the blue butterfly forced its way out of Yi Ming Private Academy. They were prepared to die to find Han Fei but things did not appear to be as dire as they thought. Han Fei was heavily protected by the monsters and ghosts who called Yi Ming Private Academy home. It made the 3 outsiders look like they were there to hurt Han Fei. Lee Zai and Drake shared a look. Their brains were already slow from suffering too long in despair, this situation was fully beyond their comprehension. They envisioned several scenarios before they entered the school but they definitely did not expect this.

“Mr. Manager, if you’re held against your will, blink.” Lee Zai whispered at Han Fei. He was not joking. If Han Fei blinked, he’d make his move to save Han Fei.

“What nonsense!” Han Fei took out his teacher Id and started to explain the situation. The gory, cruel and impossible path of survival somehow became an inspiring period of internship at the school. He had inherited the previous building manager’s work Id so he came to the school to take over the previous manager’s responsibility as well. He planned to use his own power and ability to nurture the students at this school, to correct and heal their pained souls.

“As long as I am here, there will not be any conflict between Happiness Neighbourhood and Yi Ming Private Academy. There are other ways to coexist in this cryptic world rather than resorting to violence.”

Zhang Guanxing nodded to Han Fei’s suggestion. No matter what Han Fei said, the young man would side with him. Seeing how the student at the school trusted Han Fei so implicitly, Lee Zai could not believe his eyes.

‘We haven’t seen him for just a few days, and he already became a teacher so well-loved by his students and tended by his colleagues, if we had come later, would he directly be promoted to the headmaster of this school?’ Rationality told Lee Zai that it was impossible but at the same time, he believed that nothing was impossible when it came to Han Fei. When he saw Han Fei carry the coffin from the convenience store into the neighbourhood, Lee Zai knew that Han Fei was unique and had huge potential. Standing there, his belief was further confirmed. Following Han Fei would only bring him benefits.

After explaining everything, Han Fei was about to put the teacher's id away, when the system announced in his mind, "Notification for Player 0000! Friendliness level with Lee Zai increases by 10, you've gained Lee Zai's basic trust!"

Turning back to look, Han Fei noticed Lee Zai was looking at him. Without thinking much of it, Han Fei raised his hand and smiled brightly at the man.

Chapter 206:

Due to the circumstances the ghosts at Happiness Neighbourhood and Yi Ming Private Academy met, it was hard for them to accept and befriend one another, thankfully, they had a shared enemy—the Butterfly. Han Fei actually was not born with the gift of the gab. The reason he gained everyone's approval was because the things he planned were able to meet everyone's requirements. The tragedies that happened at Yi Ming Private Academy was thanks to the Butterfly. The first thing Han Fei did when he arrived at the school was to heavily injure Ma Manjiang and snip down the Butterfly's wings, avenging everyone. This greatly earned him the respect of the natives at Yi Ming Private Academy. He did not need to use words to convince anyone to side with him because his actions spoke louder than words.

There had been no interaction between Happiness Neighbourhood and Yi Ming Private Academy. A sudden interaction would inadvertently result in war. But what if they were given a shared goal?

The Ziggurat was the most dangerous building in this district. For the people at Yi Ming Private Academy, the blue butterfly might have returned to the Ziggurat. Only by killing the butterfly that they could really end all the pain and despair. For the tenants of Happiness Neighbourhood, the Ziggurat might contain a gap that led to the surface world. If they could leave through it, they could see their killers being punished in person and migrate to a safer environment. The Unspeakable, the Singer appeared to have targeted Happiness Neighbourhood. Exploring the Ziggurat meant securing a back-up plan for themselves. Their hope for survival was hidden at the Ziggurat. Both parties had the same goal, Han Fei only needed to have them see that.

He did not lie or omit anything. He used the most direct and sincere tone to explain everything, he showed that he was doing things for everyone's benefits. His understanding was soon reciprocated. The tenants from Happiness Neighbourhood and natives from Yi Ming Private Academy stopped their conflict, in fact, they had started to work to accept one another.

"I will share my thoughts with Jin Sheng. To deal with the Butterfly, cooperation is the only way to go." Han Fei stood in the eerie corridor, surrounded by ghouls but he showed no fear. His mind was clear and his words flowed cleanly. A normal person would have a hard time imagining this was someone who suffered from severe social anxiety just weeks ago and would have breathing difficulty at crowded places. After Han Fei clarified everything and ensured that there would be no problems, he dragged Ol' Lee to the side.

Su Mengting's diary mentioned Ol' Lee, he was the only person to have helped her when she was alive. Su Mengting appeared to have retained her last kindness thanks to the night security guard. Jin Sheng's class teacher had a good impression of Ol' Lee as well. It was after Ol' Lee's death in real life that she started to harbour suspicion towards Ma Manjiang. They were all kind people before their deaths.

Without knowing much, Ol' Lee stood forth to back Han Fei. Then they all entered the infirmary on the 2nd floor of the office building. Han Fei opened the cupboard door to summon Jin Sheng. Covered in strange words and radiating intense curse energy, once Jin Sheng appeared, none of the ghosts, including the ones from Happiness Neighbourhood, dared to say anything. This went to show how scarily powerful Jin Sheng was. Unfortunately, he could only maintain his sanity 1 minute each day. After accepting Ma Manjiang's lingering spirit and taking his revenge, Jin Sheng's state was better than before.

His eyes were still filled with cursed words but underneath those words, there was a barely discernible clarity like the boy was slowly reconstructing his true self. Han Fei summarized his plan for Jin Sheng. After Jin Sheng nodded his agreement, he tossed out a piece of paper from inside the cupboard. "These are the info I got from Ma Manjiang, they should be able to help." The cupboard door closed and everything returned to normal. Only then, the 'people' behind Han Fei dared to speak.

"Sir, what did it say?" Zhang Guanxing leaned over curiously to look. He noticed the lack of color on Han Fei's face so he lowered his head to read the paper. On the wrinkled white paper, it said, "Do not enter any room with Door Number 4 at the Ziggurat."

"The people at the Ziggurat will never visit Cattle Alley."

"The butterflies that reside in people's hearts come to this world via the Ziggurat. They know the way through."

"The cowardly ones are the first to die at the Ziggurat."

“All tenants at the Ziggurat are not allowed to leave after midnight.

“Whenever a ghost enters the Ziggurat, they will be deposited at random locations.

“It is confirmed that there is at least one tenant at the Ziggurat which has already placed a curse on you. It might take as short as 7 days or as long as a month for the curse to take effect and you’ll die without warning.”

Most of the information on the paper was about the Ziggurat. Han Fei’s face was dark because he read the last 2 paragraphs. Entering the Ziggurat would teleport and drop one at random locations, that meant that no matter how many help Han Fei brought with him to the Ziggurat, they would be separated once they stepped into Ziggurat’s grounds. However, Han Fei found a loophole. ‘Ma Manjiang only mentioned the rules working on the ghosts but he did not mention it affecting cursed objects as well. In fact, the bride probably came to ask the paper doll for help because the doll was itself a cursed object. Sister Xu Qin is a curse amalgamation, so she won’t be separated from me if I bring her with me. Oh right, there’s also that Can of Wishes and the Mirror God at Happiness Neighbourhood.’

The second problem though was much harder to tackle than the first one. Han Fei had no idea how to deal with the curse which was supposedly already on him. There were so many cursed objects in the cryptic world that it was not surprising that there would be ghosts who specialized in curses. He just did not expect someone had already targeted him without him even realizing it.

‘I’m only at a mere level 9, in other games, I would be killing slimes around the starting village!’ Han Fei felt that he was not even playing the same game as the previous manager. If the previous manager had the hard difficulty, he had the hellish difficulty. The info Jin Sheng got from Ma Manjiang was immensely helpful. Han Fei knew he did not have much time to waste. His goal was to collect as many cursed objects as he could to find out the level delineation among cursed objects in preparation to head towards the Ziggurat.

After leaving the infirmary, Han Fei led the tenants of Happiness Neighbourhood on a tour of Yi Ming Private Academy. After knowing he had been cursed, Han Fei needed to do everything within his power to get stronger as fast as possible. With his title of Patrolling Teacher, he searched through the school ground carefully and he accepted any mission that he could find. After completing the Grade F Manager Mission, he had tripled the experience. However, he was still quite a way from reaching level 10.

Currently, he still had another active Grade F Hidden Mission—Jin Sheng’s Tales of Horror. Grade F Missions were for players between level 10 to 20 so if he completed the hidden mission now, he would

gain extra experience as well. Han Fei made his calculation as he checked the experience bar. If he could complete that Hidden Mission that night, he should be able to reach level 10. With that in mind, he no longer felt that nervous. For players of Perfect Life, level 10 was a dividing boundary. After gaining a profession, the player would enter a new stage of life.

With more than a few lingering spirits following him, Han Fei was a completely different person from when he first entered Yi Ming Private Academy. A normal Grade G Mission was nothing for him now. 3 hours later, Han Fei successfully finished the 3 remaining ghost stories at Yi Ming Private Academy—the Red uniform, the library book loaned from the dead, and the hand in the cafeteria counter.

After he had Lee Zai and Drake forcibly yanked the hand out from the cafeteria counter, the system voice finally arrived. “Notification for Player 0000! You’ve successfully challenged all 7 ghost stories at Yi Ming Private Academy! You’ve obtained 1 free skill points! Friendliness level with Jin Sheng increases by 10, you are the only person who knew Jin Sheng was not lying!

“Hidden Mission completion rate is over 90 percent! Congratulation for completing a mission beyond your current level, you’ve gained triple the EXP and a unique mission title, Ghost Stories Challenger

“Ghost Stories Challenger (Unique Grade F Title): Gain 1 Stamina Point! Maximum mental threshold increases by 10! Resistance against ghost stories-based cursed objects increase by 10!

“Notification for Player 0000! You’ve reached level 10. You’ve obtained 1 free attribute point. You’re one step closer to achieving your perfect life!

“Notification for Player 0000! The tab for life profession system has been officially unlocked! Please select a suitable profession for yourself as soon as possible!

“Warning! A player can have many side professions but only one main profession! Only by setting the choice profession as the main one that all of its talents and ability will be applied to the player!”

The moment Han Fei reached level 10, it felt like something had been unshackled within his mind. His brain could move quicker and his five senses became more sensitive. These were changes beyond the menu. Han Fei was now in a very curious state, a state that he had not experienced before. He felt like he had full control of things, the world was his oyster!

Chapter 207:

“Finally level 10!” Sensing the changes to his body and mind, Han Fei felt strangely close to tears. For any other games, levelling up to level 10 probably meant sitting for less than an hour before the computer, enjoying the air-conditioning and sipping on tea, but in Han Fei’s iteration of Perfect Life he had to dance at the edge of the abyss, tango with the devil and walk through hell. If he was not careful, even death would be wishful thinking. Thinking back to his adventure, Han Fei had a hard time believing it himself. Moving from level 1 to 10, he had experienced the case of the frozen body, the human jigsaw case, the toy plushie case and case of the foretold deaths. During this process, he had encountered cursed objects and spirits of differing personalities and predilections. However, somehow through all that, he had not only managed to survive, he also successfully cured his social anxiety problems!

‘It sure is not easy to get to this stage.’ After the system notification ended, Han Fei opened the menu. He added the 2 free attribute points to stamina. Combined with the 1 extra stamina point given by the Ghost Stories Challenger title, Han Fei now had 13 stamina points. That was triple the amount he had when he started the game. He could feel the power coursing through his veins. ‘If I run into that man in black again, I should be able to take him down now.’

While still at the school, Han Fei tried out some fighting skills. He realized his damage had increased but in comparison, he still could not last that long in battle. His stamina was lacking. ‘I do not have any foundation in martial arts, so in battles, I need to aim to end them as soon as possible.’ After dealing with the attribute points, Han Fei turned to the skill points. First, he raised his acting to masterful. The moment he did, Han Fei noticed a new addition in his mind, it was a button that supposedly allowed him to switch freely between personas.

If he pressed that button in his mind, Han Fei’s original memory and persona would sink deep into his subconscious so that his mind would be freed up to assume any available character. This was already more than mere acting.

Advanced acting enabled Han Fei to get into character with a snap of his finger. He could switch between emotions freely and perfectly embody them. Coupled with minute control of his facial muscles and kinesiology as well as photographic memory and immense comprehension for scripts, Han Fei could bring a character 100 percent to life.

Masterful acting pushed that limit even further. With a press of a button, Han Fei would technically forget about himself. He would be turned into a blank canvas. There would be no flaw to his acting because the actor had already disappeared and the existing person was the character from the script. As a professional actor, Han Fei knew where his acting level was. As long as he was not willing, no one

would be able to read his true thoughts. This masterful acting would help him survive even further in the cryptic world.

Since his acting skill had reached the masterful level, he would need to accomplish missions related to acting to level up the skill further. Han Fei had no idea how difficult these missions would be but temporarily, he already had quite a lot to deal with on his plate and masterful acting was good enough for now. 'This might cause more pressure on the other actors in the same scene with me.'

The remaining skill points Han Fei poured into Soul Depth Touch and raised it to Beginner Level 8. With that done, Han Fei turned to the new life profession tab. Currently his main profession and side profession were left empty. But the system was kind enough to provide him with recommendations. Based on the player's innate personality and talent, the system would filter out professions that matched the players. Touching the tab, the first profession appeared on the blank window—Movie Actor.

"Movie Actor: You are a natural born actor, if you do not take this profession, it will be a loss for you and the entire entertainment industry."

Han Fei was surprised that the system's recommended profession would be an actor. He nodded. 'Well the recommendation function is indeed working.'

Han Fei tapped on the window again and the system offered the second recommendation. "Law Enforcement Archivist: An archivist manages mostly files and records, there is little interaction with others. It suits your introverted personality."

'The recommendation system has considered the player's talent and personality, it's quite amazing.' Han Fei continued to explore. But when he saw the third recommendation, his eyes twitched slightly.

"Clown of Terror: A clown sacrifices oneself to bring happiness to others, you match poorly with the profession of a clown because you will never be able to smile. However, there is a subset of clowns which is perfect for you and that is the Clown of Terror. The purpose of their existence is not to bring happiness but to spread terror and misfortune! They have lost the ability to smile and so they have to rely on heavy make-up to perfect that painted smile.

“The Stitcher: Cruel, evil, clever, cunning, heartless and crazy, this madman is now on the move. His favourite hobby is to make clothes but he is not satisfied with the fabric choices that are currently available in the conventional market. He is on the journey to make the most beautiful garment in the world, will you be willing to help him?”

“Casanova: Blessed with great empathy and an Adonis good looks, you are gentle yet insane, you are a kind killer. Your superb acting can fool any woman and yet you have never spoken a word of lie to them. You are a good listener and company. You are always true to yourself and sincere with others. If you are really that fearless, feel free to attempt this hidden profession.”

At this point, Han Fei closed the tab and exited the menu. The previous few professions were perfectly normal but it became increasingly demented, Clown of Terror, the Stitcher and even Casanova. Han Fei could not imagine that such professions would exist in an Iyashikei game but more than that, he could not understand why the system would recommend these professions to him!

‘The recommendation of an actor is understandable but a Casanova? Me? Seriously?!’ After going through the profession recommendations, Han Fei gained a basic understanding of the profession system. In Perfect Life, profession was very important. Only by having a profession that one’s life would be complete.

Han Fei who had now reached level 10 set his sight on procuring his first profession, Midnight Butcher. Compared to the recommendations by the system, Han Fei felt this profession would be more fitting for him

Chapter 208:

The non-locals at Yi Ming Private Academy had been cleared away by the natives. They hated Ma Manjiang so much that anything related to that man had to be wiped away. Han Fei could understand their feelings but it was also true that once they did that, the available missions at Yi Ming Private Academy had been halved. Han Fei spent the whole night turning the school upside down with Drake and Lee Zai, leaving no stone left unturned. Han Fei only exited the game after he ensured that there was no more mission for him to trigger. ‘Now that I’ve cleared Yi Ming Private Academy, I should turn my focus to Cattle Alley.’

Han Fei stretched lazily as he removed the gaming helmet. Staring at the pictures of victims on the wall, he felt no fear or discomfort. He did not do anything wrong by them. Even if ghosts existed in the real world, he was not afraid of them. ‘Cattle Alley is rather far from Happiness Neighbourhood, it’ll be quite

a journey to get there. Looks like the system has made it purposely difficult for me to acquire this hidden profession. However, based on the info I got from the official website, hidden professions that can only be triggered at certain locations are extremely rare. They normally come with more professional talent and skills than a normal profession.’ Reward came with risk. At least in this manner, the game was fair. After a whole night of gaming, Han Fei was tired. Before he went to bed though, he took some time to check his bank account. The payment from Twin Flower had not arrived and his bounty money from helping the police was still not enough to purchase a gaming hub.

‘O well, there’s nothing I can do but wait. I’ll be able to play longer after I have the hub.’ Han Fei put away the gaming helmet, and crawled into bed. He only slept for 3 hours when he was woken up by his phone. When he saw the caller Id, he would feel quite sorry if he did not answer it. “Assistant Xiao, how can I help you? I’ll only be joining the cast tomorrow, right?” The caller was Xiao Hui, one of Director Zhang’s assistants.

“All of the actors have already arrived at Xin Lu. Director Zhang hopes that we can all gather at the set, to get to know each other, since we’ll be spending a prolonged period of time together.” For normal actors, this was a chance to build relationships but for Han Fei, it was nothing more than a nuisance.

“Where is it held? I’ll call a taxi to get there now.”

“Call a taxi? Mr. Han, you’re already a famous actor, don’t tell me you don’t even have a manager?!” As Director Zhang’s assistant, Xiao Hui normally dealt with A-listers, Han Fei was a clear exception.

“Finding a manager is too troublesome.” Han Fei hung up after he got the address. However, he did not depart immediately. The address provided by Xiao Hui was at an intersection between the intelligent city and old city. It was extremely secluded. It was curious why Director Zhang would decide on such a place for a crew meeting. For the sake of security, Han Fei sent the info that he was headed there to Li Xue.

...

Vehicles parked beside the abandoned Fu Gui Meat Packing Factory. People in work helmets bustled about. They were setting up the set. The roaring of machines, the shouting of commands and orders, Xin Lu Northern Countryside hadn’t seen so much activity in a long time already.

“Director Zhang, the time is changing. We can easily place all these inside a virtual set. In fact, technology can help us build any kind of set we want.” A middle-aged man who looked clean-cut held his hand over his mouth as if afraid of taking in the workplace dust.

“A movie is meant to record the truth. Making a movie in a fake reality defeats its entire purpose.” Director Zhang, in a yellow safety helmet, directed the scene himself. He wanted to return this place to how it once was a decade ago.

“Still, we must move along with the pace of technology. Xiao Tong, come and help me persuade Director Zhang.” The middle-aged man took off his sunglasses to reveal a feminine yet handsome face. He turned to a fashionably dressed young man to say.

“I think Director Zhang is right.” The young man sided with Director Zhang without hesitation.

“I believe even if Director Zhang says the moon is square, he’ll agree with it as well.” A tall woman in a mask stood beside Director Zhang. Even though she was in flats, she was still taller than Director Zhang and the middle-aged man. The group of actors surrounded Director Zhang. Some of them had been in the business for a long time, others were popular celebrities, most of them had won big awards, that was the power of an influential director.

It was almost noon when Han Fei arrived. By then Fu Gui Meat Packing Factory and Fu Gui Factory Living Compound beside it had a wild transformation. For his new movie, Director Zhang had mobilized a lot of people and money to transform these two buildings. Seeing the machinery and large number of crew members that crowded the scene, Han Fei felt like a deer in the headlight. Compared to this, Twin Flower was really nothing, they were not even on the same level.

Standing quietly among the crowd, Han Fei scanned his surroundings before he closed his eyes to rest. He started to envision his gaming plan for that night.

After another 10 minutes, a trailer drove into the set. The door opened and an old man about 60 with silver hair walked out. Noting the old man’s arrival, the other actors moved to welcome him. “Elder Lee, you’re here.” “Master, good afternoon.” “Sir, you look much younger today.”

The old man was a national treasure, an actor with too many awards to count—Lee Huaiming. After Lee Huaiming arrived, Director Zhang stopped what he was doing and invited everyone to join him in the living compound.

“Our new movie, Thriller Novelist will be shot here. I’ve had the worker inspect this whole building and we’ve communicated with the remaining tenants. We will do our best to reconstruct everything and unearth the truth that has been buried here.” Director Zhang led them on a tour of the set. Thriller Novelist was based on a real person’s mental struggle. The author who had the pen name Spider, orchestrated the murders of his 8 other personas at this building to achieve self-salvation. Most of the scene would be shot here. Different from the other actors who were still laughing and chatting, Han Fei narrowed his eyes and memorized all the details that he saw.

The cryptic world had a special connection with the real world. Cattle Alley, which was Han Fei’s next destination, was also the title of Spider’s first book, thus he believed he could draw some clues from the author’s real life. Han Fei was treating this tour differently from the other actors. They were here for a paycheck while Han Fei was here because this might provide him with a greater survivability in the Iyashikei game. They were there for different goals and that naturally meant the attitude they held was completely distinct from each other.

After familiarizing themselves with the living compound, Director Zhang invited them to the resting tent set up by the workers for lunch. They would have the opening shot ceremony that afternoon. People in the entertainment industry could be quite superstitious. They went through a series of necessary rituals and when everything was done, it was already 3 pm.

Director Zhang handed every actor their own script. He hoped that they could run over the lines among themselves at the living compound that night. The actors wouldn’t have agreed to such a demand if it did not come from Director Zhang. Most of the actors returned to their trailers to read the script. Compared to the old living compound, their trailers were more comfortable.

Comfort though was never Han Fei’s concern. He accepted the script and walked towards the living compound. Touching the rusted iron gates and scanning the mottled walls and corridors stuffed with trash, it felt like he was back at Happiness Neighbourhood. He took the stairs up and looked around. Spider once called this place home. This place was very secluded. Ever since the meat packing factory shut down, more and more tenants moved away. It was rare for even a car to pass by this place nowadays.

“As technology continues to propel forward, old factories with low market competition shut down one after another. 30 percent of employment will be taken over by machinery and human lifestyle will be

forever changed by this.” Han Fei stared quietly at the meat packing factory. There was a line in his script, it was most likely lifted directly from Spider’s book—The men slaughter the livestock day after day, the endless gore numbed the men to the knowledge that they too are food for the others. Regarding this ‘others’, there were many interpretations. It could be this rapidly expanding city, or the forever moving cog of time.

‘The view at the rooftop is amazing, I wonder if Spider has once enjoyed this view as well...’ For others, this was just an acting gig, but for Han Fei, his life was on the line. He held the script and placed himself fully into the character of Spider.

Han Fei who played the role of Spider was just a side character in Thriller Novelist. This was because even in real life, Spider was also an easily-overlooked side character in his own life. Since he was young, he lived in the shadows of his other, more vibrant personas. Even after death, no one knew much about his story, much less appreciated his genius.

‘Cattle Alley, the House of the Butcher, I’m getting more and more curious about the world in Spider’s mind.’ Han Fei stood at the rooftop and memorized all the lines. Then he walked down the stairs to head to the 4th floor. Spider lived in Room 401. After he died, everyone on the 4th floor moved away. No one really knew why they left. But now as Han Fei entered the floor, he noticed that all of the rooms were plastered with tattered talismans and twined with fraying red threads. Spider’s neighbours appeared to be warding against something evil before they eventually were forced to move.

‘Could these things be meant to ward against Spider?’ The empty floor felt quite hollow and discomfiting. Han Fei strode towards door 401 and pushed it open.

‘It’s locked?’ Han Fei was confused. When Director Zhang led the tour earlier, he even opened this room for them to have a quick look so how could it be locked so soon? ‘Did one of the workers lock it?’

Han Fei was contemplating this when a light breathing sound came from behind him. He turned to look. Standing at the landing between the 4th and 5th floor was an old man. He stood there silently, staring at Han Fei’s back, not saying a word.

Chapter 209:

“Sir, was it you who locked this door?” Han Fei turned to the old man on the stairs with the kindest expression on his face. His hand though reached into his pocket to grab the taser. The old man appeared to not have heard Han Fei. He was old with age spots on his face. He kept one hand behind his back while holding an empty bird cage with the other. “Sir, can you hear me?” As Han Fei made to move towards the old man, the latter instantly turned around and headed back upstairs. While the old man made his retreat, Han Fei noticed that there were 2 stray feathers stuck to the old man’s empty hand. That explained why the cage was empty.

‘Such a strange man.’ Encountering such an individual, most people would ignore it but Han Fei was not most people. He chose to chase after the old man. “Sir, do you need help to get back home?” Han Fei offered like a Good Samaritan as he caught up to the old man. When he reached out to hold the man’s body, the old man flinched.

“I’m here for a movie. I apologize on the crew’s behalf if we have created any trouble for you.” Han Fei’s approach was brimming with kindness so even if the old man felt discomfited by his presence, it would feel wrong to chase this kind young man away. Han Fei accompanied the old man up to the 5th floor. Strangely enough, the old man stopped before his door and did not go in. Instead he turned around to look at Han Fei who showed no sign of leaving either.

“Sir, can you remember anything about the writer who once lived on the 4th floor?” Han Fei stood his ground and appeared like he would not be moving until he got his answer. The old man stared at Han Fei for a long time before saying, “He died more than 10 years ago.” The old man’s voice was low and hoarse. It sounded like nails scratching on glass.

“I know he’s dead but did he do anything strange when he was alive? You were neighbours with him so you should know him well, right?”

“I can’t remember things from more than a decade ago.” The old man lowered his head to avoid eye contact.

“Really?” Han Fei was an acting master, that meant that he could easily tell when someone was acting as well. “Did someone also come to ask you about Spider recently?”

“Yes.” The old man’s voice was so weak that Han Fei could barely hear him.

“What did they enquire about?”

“I can’t remember anymore.”

“Do you have their contact info?”

“He too is dead.” The air froze as the old man suddenly lifted his head. He pointed his crooked finger right above them. “He jumped down from this place. Like you, he was not afraid of anything but curiosity kills the cat.” The old man’s voice lowered even further. Fear started to color his muddled eyes. “Certain things are definitely real, you can choose to believe them or not, that is your prerogative but do not wander around the 4th floor after dark, or you might be the next one jumping down from the rooftop.”

“Sir... have you seen something?” Han Fei was not only a good actor, he had also studied psychology and had a wealth of ‘clinical’ experience. He could discern many things from the old man’s expressions alone. When the old man heard that question, his eyes which had been darting about focused on Han Fei. His cracked lips slowly open to reveal yellowed teeth. Just as he was about to say something, the sound of bell tingling came from one of the rooms on the 4th floor. Almost the same moment the tingling happened, the old man abandoned the conversation, opened the door and scurried into his room. It was like something bad would happen if he stayed outside any longer. Han Fei did not stop the old man. Instead, after the old man escaped into his room, Han Fei very naturally followed behind him and even helped the old man close the door.

“Sir, what was that sound earlier?” There was supposedly no one staying at the 4th floor anymore and all the doors were locked so where did the tingling come from?

“It was the wind chime. When the author was alive, the wind chime at his home would often ring around dusk.” The old man stood inside the living room holding the empty bird cage. He did not expect Han Fei to follow him home. He now suspected that Han Fei was someone with ulterior motives who had infiltrated his way into the film crew, that was because be it from his appearance or demeanor, the young man before him did not present himself like an actor.

“Is that so?” Han Fei memorized this detail about the wind chime. His gaze slowly strayed away from the old man and looked around the room. There were many altars placed inside the rather small room. The altars were of different sizes and most of them were draped under a black cloth so Han Fei could not tell what divinity they were for.

"Sir, why do you pray to so many different gods? One should be more than enough." Han Fei had encountered an altar in the Iyashikei game so he was quite familiar with them.

"I don't really pray to them. It's just that these altars keep mysteriously appearing inside the building, no one knew who left them there. Whenever I come across one, I would bring them home with me out of respect." Seeing that Han Fei showed no intention of leaving, the old man sighed, "I really mean you no harm. I stared at you in the staircase earlier because I wanted to warn you from getting too close to that author. Anyone who got entangled with him would have a bad ending. In fact, many strange events at this place are related to him." When he was in the comfort of his own home, the old man was clearly more willing to share.

"Bad endings? What do you mean?" Han Fei was instantly reminded of the Butterfly's MO. He now suspected the Butterfly had been killing off people who came to investigate the Spider. If that was the case, that meant that the Butterfly had something to hide, perhaps the Spider knew some weaknesses of the Butterfly!

"Looks like you really don't know anything." The old man shook his head. "10 years ago, many strange events occurred at the meat packing factory.

"When the factory started its business, everyone loved their product because their meat had this alluring fragrance about them. But later, there were rumors that the fragrance came from the fact that their machines had killed some hapless worker."

"That has to be a false rumour, right?"

"Of course, but a rumour can still be quite powerful. People started to question their cleanliness and stopped purchasing their product." The old man looked out the window and the view allowed him to look right into the factory next door. "After their sales dropped, the quality of their meat suffered as well. Instead of fragrance, their meat began to have this rancid staleness to them. No one knew where the new smell came from, in any case, their business plummeted. Eventually they could not keep the business running anymore and were forced to close. Right about then, the partner of their boss suddenly disappeared. People said the boss had him removed to cut losses.

"The police were called in to search for the man but they could not find him. However, when they checked the warehouse inventory, they realized that the number did not match. There was one extra

living pig in the pigsty. Perhaps this was just a coincidence but that did not stop the gossip mill from rolling. Everyone stayed even further from the factory.” The old man sighed. “Eventually the factory closed and the boss became the first to commit suicide at the meat packing factory. He jumped from the rooftop and landed on his secondhand car.”

“There was no concrete evidence to suggest that the boss had anything to do with the disappearance, why did he kill himself?”

“It was due to public pressure and oppressive rumours. To be honest though, people like us who were familiar with the actual man knew that he was innocent, he was a fine young man. Who would have thought his life would end up like this.” The old man sighed. Then his voice dipped as if the things he was to speak next shouldn’t be uttered loudly, “But that was just the beginning. After the boss’ death, even this living compound started to play host to weird occurrences.”

“What do you mean?”

“For example, the tenants could hear inexplicable footsteps at midnight. There would be a strange smell of stale meat that drifted into the rooms. Many people said that it was the dead boss who had returned.” The old man did not give Han Fei any opening to cut in, he continued in one breath. “Everyone was so afraid, well, most of us were anyway. There were some youngsters who did not believe in such things. They decided to form a night patrol.

“They kept up the patrol for several nights and did not encounter the boss. However, they did manage to follow the trail of the stale meat smell to the author’s room on the 4th floor. The smell originated from his room. The tenants normally left the author alone. He rarely left his room and when he was seen outside his room, he acted strangely. He was occasionally kind and passionate, other times aloof and cold. Depending on his mood, he would be strangely confrontational but also caring like a woman.

“Normally the tenants gave a wide berth to his presence, we rarely communicated with him. But now that the evidence pointed towards him, people started to suspect this strange man. However, suspicion was merely that, a suspicion. No one had any actual proof so the investigation halted.

“However, 3 days later, one of the young men who formed the night patrol suddenly committed suicide at this building. He died the same way as the boss, jumping from the rooftop. The young man was single and there was nothing wrong with him mentally. His suicide was completely unexpected. Officially, the Xin Lu Police deemed his death as suicide but the tenants all knew that this was the doing of the meat packing factory boss.

“Those who were able instantly moved away from this place, while the remaining tenants had to resort to homemade wards.” The old man glanced at the altars surrounding them. “Some of the tenants collected money to hire a sensei. After the sensei heard about the exaggerated stories about the author, he inadvertently came to the conclusion that the author’s house was haunted. He needed to enter his room to exorcise the demon.

“The author refused him entry and so the sensei forced his way in. He finished the ceremony that afternoon and claimed that he had dealt with the spirit of the factory boss. With the tenants begging him, the sensei agreed to stay one night at the living compound. In the mood of celebration, they drank quite a bit that night. Right after midnight, they found the sensei missing. The tenants only found him the next morning outside the 2nd floor window. The man appeared to have gotten too much to drink. He stumbled his way over to the 2nd floor balcony and tripped over the edge. On his way down, he got his neck entangled between the electric lines and was strangled to death.”

The old man glanced at the setting sun outside the window. No matter how hard Han Fei urged, he refused to continue the story. It was as if it would bring tragedy to tell these tales after dark. Seeing how adamant the old man was, Han Fei did not force him anymore. However, he did remember that they were supposed to rehearse their script at the living compound that night and the content of the script was based on Spider’s own life.

‘I wonder what will happen if we greatly discuss the script within this building after dark...’ Gripping the script tightly, while feeling the pressure, there was also a glow of anticipation in Han Fei’s eyes.

Chapter 210:

“I’ve already told you everything I know. Get too close to the Spider and you’d be caught in his web.” The old man coughed. He stood in such a way that stopped Han Fei from venturing deeper into his home. “Making a movie out of his story is no different from seeking death. If your crew does not stop this now, eventually someone will die.” The muddled pupils moved slowly as if already seeing that scene in his mind’s eye. “I know you don’t believe me but soon you’ll see the truth. This building is a lot more different in the night than when it is in the morning.”

Seeing the determination on Han Fei’s face, the old man stopped his persuasion but the way he looked at Han Fei had changed, like he was already looking at a dead man.

"Sir, other than yourself, who else is still living at this building?" Han Fei wished to visit the other tenants.

"Those who are able have already left, the remaining ones are the old and the sick. We're already dying so it doesn't matter what happens to us. Frankly, we mind our own business. Even if one of us keels over and dies, the rest of us will only find out when the smell starts to get to you." Compared to the Xin Lu cities, the countryside was dilapidated and forgotten. The elderly that stayed here had been completely disconnected from the outside world.

"It is quite scary to die alone with no one around you." Han Fei sought out a newspaper and wrote down his phone number on it. "Sir, this is my phone number. If you run into any danger, or if you need any help, don't hesitate to call me." Knowing that he was not going to get anymore info, Han Fei turned to leave. But just as he reached the door, the old man who held the piece of newspaper suddenly called after him and said, "A few days before the author died, he received some letters. No one knew who they were from, perhaps he wrote them to himself."

"Letters?" Han Fei was not familiar with letters. It was already a thing of the past.

"My son had once accidentally opened one of the envelopes. The envelope had a letter filled with strange and incomprehensible writing. Other than that, there were also several cut pieces of butterfly wings." The old man said as if to himself. "I've told others about this before and they've all died in freak accidents, I hope you'll be the exception."

The old man shuffled back to the living room. He peeled back the black cloth from one of the altars and mumbled something about sins and repentance. Han Fei could not hear him clearly. The old man's body blocked Han Fei's view of the altar, he could only see that there were some traces of blood and bird feathers on the black cloth. The old man appeared to have sacrificed the bird to the God inside the altar.

After leaving the room, Han Fei came back to the 4th floor with the script. In the few minutes he had been away, someone had already unlocked the door to Spider's room. 'Wasn't it locked earlier? Was someone hiding on the 4th floor while I was here?' This strange incident attracted Han Fei's attention. He slowly pushed the door open and took in all the details. 'From known information, it is clear that there is some kind of relationship between Spider and Butterfly. Perhaps Spider knows Butterfly's real identity and because of that, whoever that got too close to the Spider would be killed by the Butterfly.' Han Fei couldn't be sure if ghosts existed in the real world or not, but the description of the deaths provided by the old man was similar to Butterfly's MO. All the deaths had been disguised as accidents or suicides. 'Since the human jigsaw case, I've gotten so much closer to the Butterfly.'

Han Fei stepped into Room 401. From the decoration alone, this did not look at all like an author's writing studio. On the floor and dining table, as well as inside the drawers and cabinets, there were scattered medicine bottles and pill boxes.

When Director Zhang first entered Spider's house, he was shocked as well. According to the director, other than simple dust removal, the room had been kept the same way he found it. Fu Gui Meat Factory Living Compound was Spider's last but not his first address. He moved here specifically to seek writing inspiration. In other words, he had chosen this place as the graveyard for his other 8 personas. He recorded the death of his other 8 personas with this place as the background. In the eyes of a normal person or even a professional doctor, Spider was mad, he was categorically crazy but the man himself did not think he was crazy. He saw reason behind the existence of his other 8 personas, he did not see them as a manifestation of his mental illness, they were as real as he was.

Walking into the Spider's study, the table was also covered in medicine bottles. Three giant locks hung from the study table drawer. It was clear that Spider did not want to share the secret inside it with anyone. However, the locks had long since been pried open after the owner's death. Pulling open the drawer, a mountain of envelopes poured out. The envelopes did not have any returning or forwarding address. They weren't addressed to anyone either. Looks like the old man was right that the Spider was writing to himself.

Han Fei opened some of the envelopes. They were apparently fan letters, they were written to Spider to discuss with him the plot of his books and questions about life. Han Fei, who knew that Spider did not have many readers, believed that Spider was conversing with himself. However, to be sure, he continued to open more envelopes to read. When he reached the 34th letter, he realized this one was slightly different.

The yellowed envelope came with a pair of broken butterfly wings. They seemed to shatter in perfect pieces. Han Fei eased out the letter carefully. The handwriting on the letter was similar to the ones from the others but the content was wildly different. It contained only a single question—Who are you?

When he saw the question, Han Fei couldn't help but turn around to look. He felt like he was being observed and the question was directed at him. Putting away the letter, Han Fei continued to skim through the other envelopes. Soon he found another strange one. This time, the letter also only consisted of a single question—Do you believe in ghosts?

'It feels like he is having a conversation with me.' Standing alone inside the room of the dead author, Han Fei felt no fear. Then he discovered a third envelope with the butterfly wings inside it. Similarly, the letter posed another question—Guess where I am hiding.

3 strange letters, 3 strange questions. From these, Han Fei was unable to discern the relationship between the Spider and Butterfly. However, he did use his powerful memory to remember all the letter content.

'It feels like the Butterfly and Spider has gotten into a fight and the Spider appeared victorious. Perhaps the reward was knowledge of the Butterfly's real identity but for that victory, the Spider had paid heavily.' Director Zhang and the rest believed that the Spider's enemies were his other 8 personas but Han Fei did not hold the same view. He felt like everything that happened to Spider could be traced back to the Butterfly. After he put all the letters and envelopes back into place, Han Fei turned to look at the bookshelf inside the study. There was a book that seemed to have just been moved. He took down the book and flipped through it. A page was bookmarked and a sentence was highlighted—I know your name, I know your looks, I have been watching you, this place will be your grave.

The quote felt like it was picked out just for Han Fei. He slowly turned around and the various scenes flashed in his mind. 'When I first arrived at the 4th floor, the room was locked. Probably someone was inside the room then, this particular quote was left for me to find.'

The crew had booked the whole building. To be able to move around unnoticed, the culprit had to be one of the actors or crew members. 'The Thriller Novelist is shot at a secluded location. It is far away from the city and the closest police station is about 2 km away. This is indeed a perfect opportunity for the Butterfly to do away with me.'