

Revival 526

Chapter 526

Although this operation by the headquarters was covert, the level of attention it received was extremely high.

If everything went smoothly, of course there would be no problems; however, if the operation encountered any obstruction, the potential impact would be enormous.

After more than three hours without any good news, it had become very clear what that meant.

Perhaps the operation had not failed yet, but the hopes for success were no longer high.

The most concerned about the situation here had to be the headquarters' operation team.

Arranged by Cao Yanhua, Wang Xiaoming, and others, this operation was now under unprecedented pressure.

This was not an unexpected event but a carefully planned operation, and someone had to take responsibility for it.

Inside the conference room.

A group of people stared at the images transmitted by the drone, all falling into a deep silence.

The weighty silence that lasted for nearly dozens of minutes filled the entire conference room with an almost suffocating atmosphere.

Some looked at Wang Xiaoming, as if hoping to read something from his face, but unfortunately, Wang Xiaoming's expression remained unusually calm from beginning to end, without a hint of disturbance in his eyes—it was difficult to say whether it was his composure or his psychological resilience that was extraordinarily strong.

The silence was broken by a staff member's urgent report, "Report, it is confirmed that Li Jun, Leuk San, Ah Hong, Su Fan, and Xu Yiping have all lost contact three minutes ago."

Cao Yanhua, who had been frowning and smoking, trembled slightly in his palms upon hearing this news and swallowed before finally asking after a pause, "What's the situation on the scene now?"

"No changes at all."

The response from the staff member seemed to extinguish any sliver of hope for good fortune.

"Li Jun and the others have failed in their operation; my work experience tells me that when even the signal is affected, it means the influence of that thing has become terribly frightening. Perhaps they are still alive but it's very likely they are in too deep... after all, it's related to the Ghost Painting incident," commented Team Leader Shen Liang, his gaze shifting slightly as he made his judgment.

"I suggest we call off the operation, remove the Ghost Painting, and prevent the loss from growing."

"Zhao Jianguo, what do you think?"

Cao Yanhua did not lose his composure; instead, he turned to look at another person at the conference table.

Zhao Jianguo, who had resigned and had been assigned to a training facility as a receptionist, had lost his job again due to the Ghost Envoy invasion incident. Because of the particular importance of this incident, he was brought in as a consultant.

Although Zhao Jianguo had made mistakes, he had abundant work experience, and headquarters would not likely dismiss his services entirely.

Since resigning, Zhao Jianguo seemed to have adopted a more relaxed demeanor, and given that his previous job had been very leisurely, he spent his days reading newspapers and drinking tea.

Upon being questioned, Zhao Jianguo put down the newspaper in his hand, lifted his head slightly, and smiled, "I think this matter must also be within Professor Wang's calculations. After all, it is a prepared plan, impossible without having prepared any contingency; worrying about it now, I believe, is a bit too early."

With those words, the focus shifted back to Wang Xiaoming.

Wang Xiaoming did not keep silent at this point and stated directly, "There is an evacuation plan, the key is whether Li Jun will execute it. He has not withdrawn, which means the situation has not deteriorated to an unmanageable extent. Our focus should not be on them but should instead be near the Ghost Domain."

"Why do you say that?" asked Shen Liang.

"Unpredictable factors bring unpredictable dangers. In my eyes, anything that counts as a danger must lie outside the Ghost Domain, not within it," said Wang Xiaoming, before glancing at Zhao Jianguo, "Paying attention to the surroundings is crucial. As long as the entity inside does not spread out, there will be no problem."

"Whether it's the Ghost Envoy or the Ghost Painting, they can all be dealt with eventually."

His words conveyed confidence as well as concern.

The plan was carefully laid out; the only flaw was the uncertainty brought about by the collision of the two incidents. If this unstable factor spread, the paranormal event could become uncontrollable.

Therefore, this link in the plan was also very important.

"Shen Liang, you're in charge of the area near the scene, right?" Cao Yanhua asked.

"I've sent Zong Shan, Guo Fan, and the local head Chen Yi over. The three of them should have no problem," Shen Liang replied. "Moreover, if an emergency happens, our friends from the circle won't just sit by and watch; they're now at Ping'an Tower and can provide support within a minute if needed."

"In addition, there are other spirit-tamers in this city; if we really need to mobilize, they will also rush over immediately."

Although there were only five people in this operation, cooperation was needed from all sides.

If any problems arose, with the power of headquarters, all of Asia's top spirit-tamers could be summoned together.

Of course, under normal circumstances, this would not be done, because gathering all spirit-tamers together also poses a great risk; for the most part, headquarters intentionally distributes them.

"That's good then, let's continue to wait," Cao Yanhua said, somewhat impatient but still managing to calm down.

However, at this moment, Yang Jian had already left the scene.

He personally judged that the matter was not so simple to conclude, so he decided to go back and make some preparations, as if the operation turned adverse, others would still have to step in.

He estimated that he would also be involved.

"Paranormal incidents are becoming more difficult to handle; if this continues, even the top spirit-tamers will eventually be annihilated," Yang Jian walked alone on the street, moving away from the area shrouded by the Ghost Domain, his heart filled with worry and unease.

"We must understand the truth as quickly as possible; only then can we find the correct method," he thought.

In his mind, he thought of the Door Knocking Ghost, and the results of his recent investigations.

After dealing with the matters here, he needed to find a way to deal with the Door Knocking Ghost. At the very least, he had to make sure whether there was any important information on the Door Knocking Ghost.

However, just as he was gradually moving away, about to leave.

Suddenly.

Yang Jian stopped in his tracks.

Even though he was leaving, he didn't let his guard down; his Ghost Eye was still watching over that part of the Ghost Domain.

But now... that gray, foggy piece of the Ghost Domain was rapidly dissipating.

It seemed the time of the Ghost Drawing Ghost Domain had come to an end.

After waiting for nearly half the night, some unknown change had finally occurred.

"Was the plan successful?" Yang Jian turned his head, his gaze shifted slightly. Although he was far away, his Ghost Eye could clearly see everything in the distance.

The Ghost Domain indeed had disappeared.

Just like in Dachang City before, when the Hungry Ghost was detained, the Ghost Domain naturally dissipated as well.

"Was it the Ghost Envoy who dealt with the Ghost Drawing? Or did headquarters detain the Ghost Drawing? Or was it a combined effort?" Yang Jian decided to stop and observe a little longer.

However, what he saw was strange.

The Ghost Drawing's Ghost Domain had vanished, and so had the Ghost Envoy's Ghost Domain.

In the distance, everything was empty; there was neither that coffin-like pitch-black Ghost Domain nor that gray, engulfing world.

And at the center of where the incident had occurred.

There were five figures slowly approaching.

"It's Li Jun... and that paper effigy, Leuk San, from before."

Yang Jian's Ghost Eye shifted slightly as it recognized two familiar figures among the five, though he didn't recognize the others nor knew their names.

"It seems they really were successful; that saves me a lot of trouble," he thought. Although he did not participate, seeing Li Jun and others emerge safely, he breathed a small sigh of relief. After all, too many people were involved in this matter, and he would have had to get involved if it had failed.

"In that case, I should change my plan and focus on dealing with that 'Friends' Circle' instead." Yang Jian did not go up to greet them, as there was no need.

He put his worries aside and prepared to leave.

However, in the next moment, when Yang Jian was about to retract his Ghost Eye, he noticed something. His body shuddered slightly, and with a hint of surprise, he looked towards the five figures slowly approaching in the distance.

Because he saw that both Li Jun and Leuk San, as well as the other three ghost controllers, all had a hollow in their palms.

The area around the hollow was grayish-white, as if a part was missing or as if left by a sharp tool passing through.

The eerie part was that the missing spot on each person was exactly the same size; there were no differences whatsoever.

"Ghost Drawing... those hands in the mist," Yang Jian associated it with a previous bad experience.

He had once inadvertently come across the Ghost Drawing's Ghost Domain passing through Dachang City and had seen what was suspected to be the presence of a ghost.

Yang Jian still remembered that pair of pale hands in the Ghost Drawing, pierced by a candelabrum.

The wounds seemed to be the same as the ones on Li Jun and his companions.

Yang Jian's eyes flickered with uncertainty, not fully convinced by his own judgment since the fragmentary information was hard to believe.

He needed to verify.

For that purpose, Yang Jian inconspicuously took out a white candle.

This was a Ghost Candle, different from the red one; this candle had the ability to attract ghosts.

Immediately.

He lit the Ghost Candle.

But in the next moment, all five figures in the distance, moving in unison, immediately stopped in their tracks. Five somewhat stiff heads turned in unison to look towards Yang Jian.

"Damn it."

Yang Jian met their gaze, his pupils contracted, his heart trembled, and he swiftly blew out the Ghost Candle.

These five were no longer human... all of them were ghosts.

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As he lit the white Ghost Candle, he saw the five people in the distance turn emotionlessly to look towards him, and even someone as experienced as Yang Jian broke out in a cold sweat on his forehead.

Fortunately, he extinguished the Ghost Candle in time and hadn't attracted real ghosts.

Otherwise, he might have faced an attack from five unknown ghosts.

Such a dangerous situation would be fatal.

"How could this be?" After the scare, Yang Jian's complexion changed uncertainly, his heart filled with astonishment.

Without a doubt, those five people should have been ghost handlers involved in this operation, and although he didn't recognize everyone, most of them were very familiar to him.

But now... all five ghost handlers had become ghosts.

Did they perish from the resurgence of a ferocious ghost, or was there some other unpredictable change?

"It's impossible that all five died from the resurgence of a fierce ghost. The operation must have had very meticulous arrangements, and even though there weren't many people involved, headquarters would definitely have some safety withdrawal plans. The likelihood of a complete wipeout should be very low."

"Even if they encountered terrible dangers within the Ghost Domain, at most one or two would die, not a total extermination."

Yang Jian's gaze flickered as he quickly calmed down, using the information he knew to assess the current situation.

"Moreover, there hasn't been any urgent contact from headquarters, which means the appearance of these five people here is unknown to them..."

He glanced at his satellite-positioning mobile phone.

Not a single urgent message had come through, indicating that the operation didn't require support.

In a flash, he thought of many things, but the doubts in his heart did not diminish in the slightest. Yang Jian could only vaguely surmise that something went wrong with the operation, causing some unpredictable change, and these five people who emerged from the Ghost Domain were the best proof.

No, these five could no longer be called human; they were true ghosts.

The tentative lighting of the Ghost Candle just now was the best proof, as the five immediately turned their heads in reaction.

Because the white Ghost Candle could attract ghosts, and only real ghosts would react to the flame of the white Ghost Candle.

"But now doesn't seem to be the time to think about these things... The direction in which these five people are moving now seems to be toward the city."

Yang Jian didn't hesitate for long. When he turned his attention back to the five people who were gradually moving away, he discovered they were heading toward the city. If no one intervened, by dawn these five people would have completely entered the far-off city.

It was imaginable what consequences would ensue if ghosts who emerged from the haunted painting were to enter the city.

Initially, just one Hungry Ghost almost annihilated an entire city, and with the haunted painting already defined as an S-class paranormal incident, Yang Jian had no doubt about its capability to wipe out a city.

"Should I follow them to intercept them?"

Yang Jian's eyes flickered with the thought of action, yet he hesitated.

Unknown ghosts meant unknown dangers, and this wasn't as simple as an ordinary paranormal incident. Any careless involvement would lead to a despair-laden death. Moreover, if he died here and his ghost was resurrected, it wouldn't be as simple as an S-class paranormal incident.

After all, he himself was a very dangerous ghost.

"Ignoring it would also be troublesome. If the situation escalates, I would still have to deal with it. Now I only have the option to follow and see. With the conspicuous actions of these five people, headquarters couldn't possibly be unaware. I'll see how they plan to handle it first."

Yang Jian didn't act recklessly. He decided to trail behind discretely and observe.

Dealing with such special circumstances certainly couldn't be about showing off, especially without certainty. Acting rashly was the worst mistake.

The next moment.

Standing on the dimly lit street, Yang Jian's body emitted a sinister red glow.

After the red glow appeared, he vanished from his spot.

Meanwhile, the five people in the distance continued walking slowly and expressionlessly.

Their movements were in sync, their strides uniform, with a chilling aura wafting from them—they felt completely devoid of life, as cold as corpses. Now, under the cover of the night, they silently approached the brightly lit city in the distance.

Those immersed in the city's prosperity were utterly unaware that five unimaginable terrors were closing in.

Once these five potential real ghosts entered the city, the probability of inadvertently triggering their killing spree would increase exponentially.

Then, the true horror of the fierce ghosts would be fully revealed.

Indeed.

Just as Yang Jian surmised, the anomaly was discovered.

Countless drones flickered in the sky, buzzing over like bees.

These drones hovered above the heads of the five peculiarly acting people, their cameras frantically snapping photos and recording videos.

The urgent intelligence was transmitted out in the shortest time possible.

The first to receive the news was the headquarters' conference room.

"Are you kidding me, Li Jun, Leuk San, Su Fan, Ah Hong, Xu Yiping—did all five of them truly bite the dust? What exactly are they, human or ghost? What do they intend to do—create havoc in the city?" Seeing the projection screen, Deputy Minister Cao Yanhua could no longer remain seated.

He slammed the table fiercely, standing up both shocked and angry, his entire body trembling uncontrollably.

Underneath the anger was an unmistakable fear.

For if this situation proved to be true, this city would face an unprecedented test.

The revival of five top spirit manipulators, coupled with incidents involving Ghost Envoys and ghost paintings... It could form a huge snowball, gathering momentum, and any spirit manipulator involved would be devoured by this terrifying supernatural event, becoming a part of it.

This was no longer a question of whether the situation could be handled, but how to minimize the damage.

"Professor Wang, what do you think we should do about this situation now?"

Immediately after, he fiercely turned his gaze to Wang Xiaoming.

At this moment, Cao Yanhua regretted perhaps having agreed to Wang Xiaoming's slightly insane plan was a mistake.

They should not have attempted to control an S-level paranormal incident.

The others in the meeting room also turned their attention to Wang Xiaoming, the atmosphere was tense.

Yet, at this moment, the corners of Wang Xiaoming's mouth revealed a hint of a smile as he delivered astounding information, "It seems that the plan is going more smoothly than I had imagined."

"What?"

Cao Yanhua exclaimed, "What do you mean by that?"

"Don't focus your eyes on Li Jun and the others, look at the scene near the experimental base, the ghost domain of the ghost painting has disappeared... The ghost domain of the Ghost Envoy has also disappeared, which means the plan to limit ghosts by ghosts has already succeeded," Wang Xiaoming said slowly.

At this point, the others followed his words and looked towards the screen.

Many people's faces changed.

Indeed, just as Wang Xiaoming had said, that terrifying ghost domain had vanished, and the coffin-shaped darkness was no longer there.

The concerns from before seemed to have been resolved.

Except for the now very eerie presence of five individuals...

"If, as you say, Professor Wang, the Ghost Envoy and the ghost painting have been successfully dealt with, but what about those five individuals? Are they still alive, or have they been revived by fierce ghosts?" Shen Liang asked after a moment of contemplation.

"The life and death of Li Jun and the others has now become unimportant."

Wang Xiaoming's voice conveyed an unusual coldness, "Compared to two S-level supernatural incidents, even if all five of them were wiped out, it would be worth it. They were prepared to die when they joined this operation; I have never put their survival first. I only consider how to resolve this incident."

"..." There was a moment of silence among the people.

Although the words were cruel, there was no denying they made sense.

What supernatural event doesn't result in death?

"However, Li Jun and the others should not be dead; pay attention to the signal. These five individuals may look exactly like Li Jun, Leuk San, Su Fan, Ah Hong, and Xu Yiping, but they are without the satellite-tracking mobile phones. Moreover, if they had died due to the revival of fierce ghosts, their movements would not be so uniform," he continued.

"Look closely at the hands of those five individuals."

Wang Xiaoming pointed out the hands of the five people in the image.

"See that? All five of their hands have identical hollow wounds; these wounds are quite unusual, and they are the same on each person."

"Identical wounds, identical movements, identical expressions, different people..." Wang Xiaoming's gaze intensified, "It's almost like they were painted."

Ghost paintings?

Upon hearing Wang Xiaoming's conjecture and description, someone gasped.

"Are you suggesting that these five people are ghost paintings? How is that possible? A ghost painting is supposed to be just a painting; this is what's recorded in the files. How could it turn into five individuals?" Shen Liang furrowed his brows.

"Inertia in thinking can easily lead people down a dead end. I don't need to judge whether they are actually ghost paintings, what's important is to keep this suspicion," Wang Xiaoming stated, "Deputy Minister, it's time to prepare the next step. Follow the plan for when a ghost painting goes out of control; there's no need to worry about the life and death of Li Jun and the others. Lead these five people away, and as long as you keep this thing out of the city, that should suffice."

"As for the containment location, I suggest the Suburban Haunted House."

Suddenly, Wang Xiaoming proposed another location.

The Suburban Haunted House!

Cao Yanhua's expression changed.

This was one of the few peculiar places in the city that was impossible to deal with and, due to its non-spreading nature, the Suburban Haunted House was permitted to exist by default.

"Is it possible to attempt containment?"

Cao Yanhua wanted to solve this ghostly problem once and for all.

Wang Xiaoming seemed to ponder before replying a moment later, "I cannot offer an opinion; you'll have to make that judgment yourself, Deputy Minister."

Testing was risky, but it could also yield rewards.

In Wang Xiaoming's view, the pros and cons were nearly the same; that's why he didn't offer his own suggestion.

"I understand."

Cao Yanhua appeared to make a quick decision, "Shen Liang, notify Chen Yi and the others on the scene to prepare for the next step of action."

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"Alright, I've got it, I'll do my best to handle things here, but I can't make any guarantees. We should still prepare emergency measures... Okay, that's it for now; we've already got a situation on our hands," he said.

On a cordoned-off street.

Chen Yi put down his phone, his brow deeply furrowed, the loose skin creating layers of wrinkles, giving him a rather ominous appearance in the dim light.

As one of the three officials in charge of the city and in cooperation with the operation, he had even set aside his work to spend the night here, maintaining vigilance.

If everything went smoothly, he wouldn't have to do anything at all and could just go home at dawn.

But as he feared, the very thing he worried about came to pass.

Anomalies had occurred.

From the recent call, Chen Yi was briefed on the situation up ahead.

So far, there were five ghosts closing in... and the level of danger was extremely high.

"Chen Yi, looks like we won't get off easy today. With this situation, a few of us probably won't be able to hold them off," said Zong Shan, setting down his own phone.

They had received the news almost simultaneously.

"Ghosts that emerge from an 'S-grade' paranormal event, unpredictable, and who knows, maybe just one encounter with them and we could all end up dead here. And this time, it's not just one ghost; they outnumber us. This is serious," said Guo Fan, his body as cold and terrifying as if he were a corpse hauled out from a refrigeration unit, his gaze dull and lifeless.

For those who manipulate ghosts and come into actual contact with real fierce ghosts, they are at an absolute disadvantage. If they don't have the advantage in numbers, the probability of being completely annihilated is at least ninety percent.

The more ghosts there are, the easier it is to trigger their killing conditions. There might even be a moment when two ghosts attack you at once. Such a scenario is simply unimaginable.

"Numbers don't mean much in this situation. The more people, the more likely there'll be problems. You think headquarters can't summon dozens of ghost manipulators?"

Chen Yi spoke up, "It's just that very few of those mobilized in situations like this are actually up to the task. We need those who have the ability to survive, are mentally stable, and have ample experience dealing with paranormal incidents. If we let unstable elements come, should we be watching out for these ghosts attacking or for accidents caused by our colleagues?"

"Besides, the more people there are, the greater the chance of being targeted by a ghost, the higher the likelihood of death, and the more catastrophic the resulting chain reaction. That's why no team of ghost manipulators, whether domestic or international, ever exceeds five members."

"Our task this time is simple, to change the direction of those five ghosts and lead them to the Haunted House."

"Simple? Guiding five ghosts, no less to the Haunted House. If the slightest thing goes wrong on the way, we're done for," Guo Fan glanced at him, his expression a bit sinister.

When Chen Yi heard him say this, his already fiery temper flared up. He stormed over, grabbed Guo Fan by the collar, and snapped angrily, "If you're afraid to die, then get lost! Why are you complaining to me now? Since you chose to stand here, then just follow the plan. Let me make it clear: if you cause any trouble later, I won't let you off easily."

"Chen Yi, are you threatening me?"

Guo Fan wasn't intimidated; his blank, lusterless eyes looked at him numbly.

All of them were people who had survived various terrifying paranormal events. Even though there were differences in abilities, none were cowards.

"I'm not threatening you. I'm reminding you," Chen Yi said, glaring.

"Alright, alright, let's all calm down. We're colleagues; why fight over such trivialities? Chen Yi, don't be mad at Guo Fan. His condition isn't as good as it used to be. If something unexpected happens this time, he might not survive, so it's natural he's a bit worried..." Zong Shan stepped forward to mediate.

As one who frequently interacted with Guo Fan, Zong Shan was well aware that Guo Fan's current condition was indeed not good.

The resurgence of fierce ghosts is an issue that can never be avoided.

"Your poor state is no excuse for refusing to act, and do you think you're the only one facing the danger of being eroded by fierce ghosts bit by bit?"

Chen Yi remained uncompromising and offered no sympathy for Guo Fan.

Because everyone here was in the same situation, though perhaps some were slightly better off.

But when actually facing a ghost, no one could ensure they'd survive an attack.

Guo Fan's face was cold. As he was about to speak, he abruptly stopped, his head turned slightly, and he looked anxiously over Chen Yi's shoulder.

Chen Yi too sensed something and quickly let go of Guo Fan, turning around swiftly.

"They're here..."

Zong Shan said in a hushed tone. Suddenly, silence enveloped the area, and the atmosphere turned oppressively terrifying.

Obviously.

Whether it was some instinct of a ghost manipulator or some anomaly manifesting within their bodies, such signals meant ghosts were drawing near.

This time it wasn't about dealing with just an ordinary paranormal event.

From the previous information, it was already known that five ghosts had walked out of the Ghost Domain of the Ghost Drawing...

The details of the five ghosts were unclear, with no discernible pattern.

They could be newly emerged ghosts, or they might even be the origin of the S-class paranormal incident known as the Ghost Drawing.

It was even possible they were Ghost Envoys.

In such a situation, anything could happen, and it might be that upon meeting, they would be killed by the fierce ghosts without any chance to resist.

Verbal disputes seemed trivial at this time.

The eyes of the three were fixed intently ahead.

The dim night was only lit by a weak light reflecting in the distance. The road was deserted, eerily silent, and the green belts and forests around them were devoid of even the sound of an insect, making the chill that was gradually encroaching upon them all the more penetrating just by standing there.

Taking advantage of the fact that the real ghosts had not yet appeared, Guo Fan, Chen Yi, and Zong Shan immediately made preparations according to the plan arranged in advance.

The task was simple: at all costs, keep the ghosts out of the city and absolutely prevent them from entering.

The headquarters plan was to use Ghost Candles to lure the ghosts and take them to a Haunted house.

The backup plan was: improvise.

Because when facing ghosts, anything could happen; the ghost-leading plan also had a high risk of failure, which required the three of them to come up with their own solutions.

In the brief silence, clear, dull footsteps began to echo across the empty road.

The footsteps weren't loud, but in such an environment, they seemed particularly grating, each step as if stomping on the hearts of the three, suffocating.

As the sound grew nearer,

At last, at the dark end of the road, the silhouettes of five people walking side by side appeared within their line of sight.

They moved stiffly, like lifeless corpses, yet their movements were astonishingly odd—as if they were five marionettes, each lift of the leg, each swing without a hint of deviation.

From a distance, Chen Yi and the others, although perceiving the five people's odd behavior as harmless, knew very well that once targeted, their deaths would be gruesome.

"At least there's one piece of good news—the ghosts haven't formed the Ghost Domain. The leading plan might be feasible," Zong Shan noted in a hushed voice after observing for a moment.

"Guo Fan, it's your turn," Chen Yi then turned to look at him.

The ghost-leading plan had to be carried out by Guo Fan because he possessed a unique ability that could, under certain circumstances, prevent any ghost from attacking him.

Only then could Guo Fan, holding the Ghost Candle, lure the ghosts; anyone else attempting it would be committing suicide.

Guo Fan was clearly not pleased, his expression dark and dreadful, his eyes more sinister with the absence of life.

Without a word, he silently advanced to meet the five gradually approaching terrifying figures.

The first contact with an unknown ghost was the most dangerous; almost always, the ghost charmer risked their life for the attempt.

No one could guarantee that the ghosts wouldn't kill on sight.

Yet, as Guo Fan walked forward, he reached into his clothes.

His face twisted in agony, accompanied by the sound of flesh tearing. A scent resembling rotten flesh and organs spread, blanketing the surrounding area with a thick stench of death.

The next moment,

He seemingly pulled out an old, darkened plaque made of wood from his body, as if it were torn from within.

In the middle of the aged plaque was a strange black-and-white photograph.

The person in the photograph looked almost identical to Guo Fan, the only difference being that the photo's Guo Fan seemed injured, half of his face sagging as if it had been viciously torn.

Such an injury would have killed an ordinary person, but the person in the picture still had a calm and serene expression, emitting an eerie tranquility.

Guo Fan, holding the plaque in both hands, became heavier with each step he took, and the deathly smell about him became stronger.

Finally, in the blink of an eye,

The face of the person in the photo on the plaque changed, showing no flaws, exactly like Guo Fan's.

And Guo Fan, who was walking on the road, now had half of his face hanging, eerie and terrifying.

At that moment, the one walking was no longer Guo Fan, but a real ghost.

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Guo Fan was a very special necromancer, too, his uniqueness lay in his ability to swap places with the "person" in the spirit tablet photo he held in his hand.

It would be more accurate to say he swapped with a ghost rather than a person.

The old and eerie spirit tablet concealed a real ghost, no one knew where he had found such a terrifying object, nor did anyone understand why he had become a necromancer; they only knew his ability was extremely valuable under certain circumstances.

While holding the spirit tablet and walking forward, Guo Fan, having transformed into a true ghost, could handle almost any dangerous situation.

Because ghosts do not die.

Even when faced with S-class paranormal events, he was completely confident he could survive.

Never underestimate the significance of these three words: to survive.

Even the most skilled necromancers had a high probability of being killed when they were in actual contact with ghosts, thus any ability that could save a life was extremely precious.

Chen Yi, who stood beside him, watched as Guo Fan, now a ghost, walked forward with an especially grave expression.

He just hoped that no accidents would occur during the process, otherwise things would become exceedingly troublesome, and it was quite possible that he himself would die here.

"All that's needed is to cautiously lead away the ghost that emerged from the ghost painting, there should be no problem, although it's not far from the ghost inside him awakening, as long as the mission is completed successfully, the headquarters will definitely protect Guo Fan, and using the ghost's power just once, he should still be able to withstand it," Zong Shan silently thought to himself.

Guo Fan dared to take such risks because he was fighting for a chance to live.

Unlike others, he was a necromancer who had harnessed two ghosts and was close to the phase of a fierce ghost's revival, so the cost and price of wanting to continue living far exceeded those of someone controlling a single ghost.

Without significant achievements, Professor Wang wouldn't spend too much resources on Guo Fan.

On the silent street.

The frightening silhouettes of five figures approaching from afar were getting closer and closer.

Guo Fan continued to walk slowly forward, his body cold and dreadful, his person reeking of the stench of decay. His face, slightly different from his own, was tattered and ferocious, and what was most eerie were those dim, dead gray eyes which seemed numb but emitted a strange gleam.

It was as if a person who had long been dead was assessing the world.

If an ordinary person were to make eye contact with such a figure at night, they'd likely be trapped in nightmares for life.

However, using the power of a fierce ghost was not without its costs.

As the ghost continued to move forward, the Guo Fan within the spirit tablet photo was looking increasingly ill, his face not just pale and bloodless, but now also darkening as if about to rot away.

Moreover, scars began to slowly appear on Guo Fan's face, as though they were brutally clawed by some terrifying entity.

The scars slowly multiplied, but conversely, as the ghost holding the spirit tablet continued to move forward, the scars on his face began to vanish.

The ghost was gradually eroding Guo Fan.

This ability to swap with a ghost also came with a price.

In times when Guo Fan was in good condition, he could release the ghost from the spirit tablet to replace himself when in danger, to withstand other ghosts' attacks, or even transfer parts of his damaged body to the ghost, thus ensuring he wouldn't die easily.

But as time passed, Guo Fan discovered that the ghost in the spirit tablet was becoming increasingly similar to himself.

Every time he swapped places with the ghost, the ghost also swapped with him.

Ultimately, Guo Fan could foresee that he would be trapped in the eerie spirit tablet, and the ghost would completely take his place, emerging from it.

"If it weren't for that attack at the airport last time because of Yang Jian, I wouldn't be in such bad shape right now," Guo Fan thought coldly while inside the spirit tablet photo, recalling the attack.

That attack was fatal.

The scratch on his face was caused by another ghost.

Though the injury seemed small, its impact was vast, and Guo Fan hadn't recovered to this day, even the ghost within the spirit tablet was unable to repair it.

Ordinarily, even if he had an arm amputated or his body run over dozens of times by a car, his injuries might immediately heal after one swap with the ghost.

Indeed.

Only a ghost can deal with another ghost.

A ghost's attack, however minor the damage, far exceeds the injuries caused by some conventional physical means.

After a brief advancement, those five figures who had emerged from the ghost painting finally came within a very dangerous distance.

Whether it's Guo Fan or the bystanders Zong Shan and Chen Yi, they could now clearly see the attire, appearance, and even facial expressions of those five figures.

"It's them."

But when they recognized the somewhat familiar faces, all three were taken aback for a moment.

They had previously assumed that the figures emerging from the ghost painting were five unknown ferocious ghosts, yet when they actually began to make contact, they were shocked to discover that these five individuals were colleagues who had participated in headquarters meetings before.

Li Jun, Leuk San, Su Fan, Ah Hong, Xu Yiping... Chen Yi could even name all five.

...

"How could it be like this?" Zong Shan's face showed changing expressions.

Although surprised, he was beginning to realize what the situation was.

The headquarters had had an operation before.

Now, five people appeared before him in such a bizarre posture, the outcome was obvious.

Li Jun and the others had been obliterated.

By now they might have died at the hands of resurgent evil spirits, turned into real ghosts, or possibly controlled by some incomprehensible paranormal force, becoming like Ghost Slaves.

Either way, it wasn't good news.

"A team like this was taken down? You've got to be kidding me."

Zong Shan's mouth twitched fiercely, though the brutal reality was before him, he still couldn't quite believe it.

He was more experienced than Yang Jian, and knew a thing or two about the standout ghost manipulators from headquarters.

Not to mention Li Jun, Professor Wang's personal bodyguard, who was amongst the first at headquarters to possess the Unsolvable Ghost Realm.

And there was Leuk San, codename: Paper Man, shrouded in mystery, a veteran older than he was, one of the first ghost manipulators to join the headquarters and still alive, never showing any sign of ghost resurgence.

Su Fan was even more remarkable; it was said that he survived to the end unscathed in every paranormal incident he handled, and those who had partnered with him had changed over a dozen times.

...

It could be said that each one had top-notch survival skills.

If a team like theirs was completely wiped out, Zong Shan really didn't believe anyone could survive this level of paranormal event.

No, maybe a few people could.

For some reason, Zong Shan thought of someone at that moment.

Yang Jian.

The one codenamed Ghost Eye, who had resolved the Hungry Ghost incident all by himself.

Some said he was just lucky, with fluke success, but Zong Shan knew well that for an incident classified as S-level by Professor Wang, there was no fluke involved.

The case with the Ghost Envoy was the best proof.

If not for Yang Jian, the training base would've faced much more than a few casualties; those involved in the operation later would probably have been annihilated too.

"Something isn't right." Suddenly, Chen Yi's solemn voice rose beside him.

The voice wasn't loud, but in that environment, it was especially clear.

"It's more than not right, those five have become real ghosts, don't be deceived by their appearances." Zong Shan immediately snapped back to reality and seriously warned, "We continue with the plan."

"I know well that Li Jun and the rest are no longer human, but what I mean is the problem isn't with them, it's with Guo Fan," said Chen Yi.

Of course, he wasn't naive enough to think the ones walking towards them were still alive.

"Guo Fan... he hasn't lit the Ghost Candle..."

Huh?

Zong Shan was jolted with shock and immediately focused on Guo Fan.

Though it was only a silhouette, it was clear that Guo Fan didn't have a lit Ghost Candle in his hand.

According to the previous plan, they were meant to light the white Ghost Candle to lure away the ghosts from the ghost painting and ensure the safety of the city behind them.

But now, Guo Fan had stopped moving.

"Damn, something has gone wrong," Zong Shan's complexion turned grave.

The thing he feared most had happened; Guo Fan might have lost the ability to control his ghost, thus failing to act as agreed.

However, the most pressing issue was that Guo Fan walking forward was about to come into contact with those five ghosts.

"What are they trying to do?"

At that moment.

Under an unlit streetlamp, Yang Jian hid in the darkness, his Ghost Eye flickering with eerie red light, observing from afar.

Yang Jian had been watching these people all along.

He couldn't understand why, knowing how dangerous the ghosts coming out of the ghost painting were, these people would still risk getting closer.

Did they have some preparation? Or perhaps, they were already in danger.

Chapter 530

"The ghosts are starting to get out of control."

On that old spirit tablet, the eerie photo that now displayed Guo Fan's appearance had changed at some point, showing an expression of shock, unease, and the kind of fear and fright only a living person could possess.

Because just now,

Guo Fan, a ghost controller, began to realize that the ghost he was driving was rapidly losing control.

In the past, Guo Fan could control the ghost's actions at any time, even replacing part of the ghost's body with his own whenever he wished.

But now, he felt as if he were trapped within the photo, completely severed from any contact with the ghost.

It was as if the ghost had completely taken over, no longer in need of him, the living, as a vessel for revival.

A powerful ghost's revival?

A terrifying problem that could not be ignored seemed to have arisen at this crucial moment.

"No, that's impossible, according to my estimations the powerful ghost's revival shouldn't be happening this fast, there should absolutely be no problem using the ghost's power at least one more time..." The appearance of Guo Fan in the photo changed again; his facial scars increased continuously, and his skin color turned more and more towards that of a rotting corpse.

It was as if he was the real ghost, while the thing holding the spirit tablet was human.

The identities and positions of human and ghost had been switched at this moment.

"Guo Fan, can you hear me? What on earth is going on with you? If you can still move, then give me a response," Zong Shan said, immediately sensing that something was amiss.

But the Guo Fan ahead just continued walking forward, ignoring them completely.

This silence and lack of response caused Zong Shan's scalp to tingle.

Because if Guo Fan were to die at this time, the person before them would no longer be a teammate, but a real ghost.

"He's probably undergone a powerful ghost's revival."

Chen Yi's face twisted into a grimace: "Damned bastard, why does trouble come now rather than sooner or later? Always stirring up problems for me. Luck is truly against me when it comes to teammates like this. Since that's the case, let's proceed to the next step."

After speaking, he took out a candlestick from his body.

Atop the golden candlestick was a pale white candle, appearing to be made from some kind of fat, carrying with it an eerie aura.

The operation was of great importance, so all the necessary resources were supplied.

"Wait, Guo Fan is not dead yet. I'll try to contact him once more, just pressing down the ghost inside his body could make him recover, if we ignore him now, he's definitely dead this time," Zong Shan said with a change in his expression and immediately spoke.

"It's too late, the ghost is right there, even if you pull him back from the brink of revival, he won't be able to help us now, and your approach could bring about unexpected changes," Chen Yi rejected his suggestion: "We can't afford the consequences of losing control."

"One ghost as a guide, two ghosts as a guide, since Guo Fan can no longer stand it, then lead both him and the ghost away."

Zong Shan's face showed hesitation, but he still asked, "What are you planning to do? If you're the one to draw these ghosts, the moment the Ghost Candle is lit you could be killed. Without Guo Fan's ghost, an ordinary ghost controller can't hold up."

The most crucial part of the operation was Guo Fan.

Only he dared to light the Ghost Candle, unafraid of ghostly assaults. For others, holding the Ghost Candle was akin to courting death.

Chen Yi's gaze shifted, and a rather insane idea immediately appeared in his mind: "If I can control the distance properly, there should be no issue..."

Without waiting for Zong Shan to ask any further, Chen Yi immediately rushed out.

He was like Yang Jian when it came to dealing with paranormal events; once he thought of a strategy, he would execute it without hesitation. Fear and fright would be temporarily put aside, and the result would depend entirely on the operation.

Chen Yi acted quickly.

After a short dash forward, he had already caught up with Guo Fan ahead.

But now, Guo Fan had lost connection and was no longer a ghost controller, and was very likely just a ghost.

However, Chen Yi approached this ghost.

This risky move was also like a gamble because even if something had gone wrong with Guo Fan, it had just happened recently; the ghost probably hadn't fully revived yet, so taking action at this moment seemed dangerous, but was actually the safest.

If delayed, the level of danger would only skyrocket.

As expected.

The guess was correct.

As Chen Yi approached Guo Fan from behind, he felt an extraordinarily cold chill envelop him, with a thick stench of decaying flesh mixed in the air. Besides that, he couldn't sense the slightest bit of a living person's presence.

"No reaction?"

With a halt in his step, he stared intently at the back of Guo Fan's head, his body tensed to the max, ready to counter at a moment's notice if this "person" made any move.

Otherwise, he could be killed by the ghost in an instant.

After all, there were numerous instances where ghost controllers were killed by a ghost without having a chance to use their abilities.

"Since there's no reaction, then Guo Fan... I'm sorry," Chen Yi silently said to himself, and immediately picked up the candlestick in his hand.

At one end of the candlestick was a candle, and at the other end a long golden needle.

This design was meant to facilitate planting the candlestick into the ground to prevent it from being knocked over by the wind or similar accidents.

But Chen Yi didn't hesitate as he directly stabbed the candlestick into "Guo Fan's" shoulder.

The needle pierced into the flesh, and a sickening odor emanated forth.

The blood that came out was dark and coagulated.

Yet the ghost holding the spirit tablet still showed no reaction.

The first contact was safe.

At this moment, Chen Yi breathed a slight sigh of relief; it seemed that Guo Fan's ghost had some unique killing patterns. Getting this close and even stabbing the ghost with no repercussions was very rare in paranormal events.

Of course, it couldn't be ruled out that Guo Fan still had some control over the ghost.

After the candlestick was deeply driven into "Guo Fan's" shoulder, Chen Yi quickly lit the Ghost Candle and retreated.

Zong Shan immediately understood Chen Yi's thinking.

Since Guo Fan couldn't light the Ghost Candle to control the ghost, they would light it for him.

But now...

What was Chen Yi going to do next?

After all, Guo Fan might have become uncontrollable by now.

However, at this moment, the next move was no longer the concern, because the Ghost Candle had been lit.

The eerie candle flame rose, and this flame was black.

The already dim surroundings became even darker because of the candlelight, dark shadows flickering everywhere, as if countless terrifying things were hidden within the shadows cast by the firelight, invoking a chilling fear. Under the light of the candle, the figure of "Guo Fan" with a candle on his shoulder was reduced to a sinister silhouette.

"Will it be useful?"

Chen Yi, who had retreated, stared intently at the five vaguely visible dreadful figures in the darkness.

Could the Ghost Candle attract all five ghosts in one go?

After all, this was an S-level paranormal event, and the product manufactured in the lab might not achieve the desired effect.

But it seemed that luck was returning.

Chen Yi and Zong Shan saw the dim and deep candlelight formed by the Ghost Candle, the shadows cast on the road as if they formed a path to the netherworld.

The five faintly visible dreadful figures slowly stepped onto the sinister path paved by shadows, and these figures began to approach the position of "Guo Fan" along this road.

"Success, the five ghosts have been lured over," Chen Yi said with some excitement at that moment.

Thus, the plan had been half successful, and the most dangerous contact had been avoided.

With Guo Fan, who had already become a ghost, taking point, the two of them could be safe and sound.

"Even if we use Guo Fan's ghost to carry out the plan successfully, without Guo Fan's control, those five ghosts won't follow the expected route," Zong Shan said in a low voice, also clenching his fists tightly, extremely nervous.

Now was not the time to be concerned about the resurgence of Guo Fan's ghost, but how to resolutely carry out the plan and achieve success.

"It's easier to deal with him now that he has become a ghost. Just use another Ghost Candle to lead Guo Fan's ghost onward," Chen Yi said through clenched teeth. "We'll lead Guo Fan, and Guo Fan will lead the five ghosts behind him. As long as nothing unexpected happens, this plan should succeed."

After speaking, he turned to Zong Shan and handed him a white Ghost Candle.

"It's your job to ensure the first Ghost Candle lasts," Zong Shan said with a wry smile as he took the candle. "It looks like all three of us will have to risk our lives this time. Hopefully, nothing goes wrong; otherwise, we won't be able to withstand an attack from so many ghosts."

Guo Fan's ghost holding a Ghost Candle was safe, but it was different for Zong Shan.

Yet he had no complaints. The danger he faced as the guide was significant, but the risk Chen Yi faced in ensuring the candle flame on the ghost's body didn't go out was great, too.

Because the Ghost Candle could burn out.

"No more wasting words, there's no time left. Those ghosts are about to approach Guo Fan, and we have to keep them at a distance. Otherwise, I might die the next time I switch the Ghost Candle," Chen Yi said anxiously.

"Then let's move," Zong Shan hesitated no longer, gritting his teeth and immediately walking over with the Ghost Candle.

The next moment.

On the dim path, another Ghost Candle was lit.

Zong Shan held the ghastly white candle above his head to ensure the light from the Ghost Candle was unobstructed and could attract Guo Fan.

Despite being mentally prepared, sweat still covered his forehead, fear overtaking him, as he felt as if his body temperature had been drained.

After all, he was to guide a group of ghosts.

The Guide never found it surprising if he were to be killed by a ghost at any time.

"The first time lighting the Ghost Candle is the most dangerous. If the ghost behind Guo Fan overtakes him and comes to my side, then I'm done for," Zong Shan thought to himself, unable to resist looking back to check the situation.

Chen Yi immediately stopped him, "Don't look back, do you want to die? The five ghosts, along with Guo Fan, are all behind you watching you. What if you turn around and the ghost sees you, triggering the ghost's killing rule? The current situation is good. At least you can be sure they haven't attacked you."

"Maintain this state and minimize any other actions."

At this very moment.

On the road not far from him.

The ghost holding the spirit tablet had already turned around, its pale numb face facing Zong Shan, and in those hollow, expressionless eyes was an indescribable eeriness.

This eerie gaze seemed to be fixed on the flame of the Ghost Candle above Zong Shan's head.

And behind this ghost, the others who had emerged from the ghost paintings—Li Jun, Su Fan, Leuk San... and others—were all attracted to the candlelight on the candlestick on its shoulder.

The Guide Zong Shan, the middle ghost Guo Fan, and the last five ghosts.

At this moment, the candlelight seemed to create a delicate balance among the three.

"Damn it," Zong Shan didn't turn his head back, but he already felt his scalp exploding and a chill over his entire body.

Just thinking about it sent shivers down his spine.

Five ghosts, no, six ghosts were staring at him from behind at this moment, and this was just the beginning.

From now on, this group of ghosts would follow him all the way until the end of this task.

Looking at the long road ahead, Zong Shan felt somewhat desperate, thinking, "Can I really make it out alive?"

"Zong Shan, it's time to hit the road," Chen Yi whispered over the phone.

"Can't you say something auspicious for once?" Zong Shan's mouth twitched harshly.

Under the fear and immense psychological pressure, he felt his walking became unsteady. For the first time in his life, he realized that moving his legs forward was not at all easy.

But he still maintained his composure and walked forward.

Once he moved, the "Guo Fan" behind him moved as well, following him.

And when "Guo Fan" moved, the last five ghosts also moved.

"What a crazy action plan. Thank goodness these ghosts don't have a Ghost Domain, or we'd all be dead," Yang Jian emerged from under the gloomy streetlight in a place no one was paying attention to.

His restless ghostly eyes swiveled, watching Zong Shan, Chen Yi, and Guo Fan leave.

"But the plan ultimately succeeded. Chen Yi doesn't seem to be in a good mood, but he's talented. No wonder he's one of the heads of J City. His adaptability is indeed commendable. Since he can handle it well, I'll save myself the trouble of cleaning up after them. Even if the operation fails afterward, as long as the ghosts don't show up in the city, that's fine," Yang Jian thought indifferently.

If ghosts don't appear in the city, they won't cause a major event.

In the wilderness, a lockdown would suffice, just like the previous response to the Ghost Envoy.