

Revival 891

Chapter 891 Lunatic

In the depths of the prison cell, Zhang Qing and Wan Tong heard the second chime of the clock. This time, however, the time within the old mansion did not reset but advanced forward.

Advancing forward didn't seem to change much. The two retained their memories.

But the chime brought an unimaginable, eerie transformation to the cell.

The previously empty desk now bizarrely had a shadowy figure seated before it.

The figure had their head slightly bowed, seemingly writing something into the notebook on the desk. Thick, black ink smeared across the page, forming rows of indistinct characters as the sound of scratching filled the silence around them.

This noise immediately caught the attention of the two.

They instinctively stiffened and cautiously turned toward the desk.

"Could it be human? There wasn't anyone there earlier—it must have appeared after the clock chimed..." Wan Tong's throat moved as he stared intently at the figure by the desk.

Zhang Qing began to observe carefully.

The person sitting at the desk seemed middle-aged, perhaps in their forties or fifties, with greying hair and yellowed, emaciated hands. Everything about them was fixed in a nearly rigid, corpse-like posture as they continued writing. Though nothing overtly strange could be seen at first glance, upon closer inspection, every detail exuded an indescribable eeriness.

Judging by the situation, the person seemed to have been here for a long time—an eternity, even—as if they had never left this place.

But the conditions of the mansion were wholly unsuitable for human survival. Even those afflicted by the Pendulum Clock curse seldom stayed here long—they would leave quickly when faced with danger.

"Whether it's human or not, there's something very wrong. We should leave now," Zhang Qing said gravely.

In such an environment, nothing could be considered normal; everything was tied to haunting supernatural terror.

If not for searching for the Pendulum Clock while evading Yang Jian's pursuit, they wouldn't have come to this place at all.

"You should check it out. Maybe it's an old ghost handler who got lost here. If you uncover clues, it might be helpful for you all," Liu Baimu's severed head suddenly spoke up, directing his attention toward the figure.

"Even if it's an old ghost handler, chances are they're long dead. They might even be a true vengeful spirit now. Approaching recklessly would be extremely risky," Zhang Qing hesitated and replied.

"If we don't have clues, it doesn't matter. As long as we survive and avoid Yang Jian's pursuit, all will be fine."

His ambitions were modest; he didn't dare to harbor unrealistic hopes.

"Naïve, truly naïve. Rivalries among ghost handlers are life-and-death struggles," sneered Liu Baimu. "If you don't uncover the secrets of this mansion, you won't have the leverage to fight Yang Jian. Once you leave this place, Yang Jian will keep hunting you. He's already killed you once before; to him, you're already on his death list."

"You might end up finding yourselves on the global wanted list when you go out. At that point, it'll just be a matter of time before you're finished."

"Liu Baimu is right." Wan Tong nodded in agreement.

Zhang Qing's expression shifted slightly. He had considered this possibility before but had avoided thinking deeper about it. He also understood that Liu Baimu had his own motives—he wanted to use them to locate the Pendulum Clock and restart time to bring himself back to life.

Everyone had their own agenda.

But the general aim was the same: survival.

"Then let's check it out." Zhang Qing took a deep breath, letting Liu Baimu and Wan Tong's words change his mind.

"If we're attacked by a vengeful spirit, we'll retreat immediately."

Wan Tong nodded.

Liu Baimu's severed head remained silent.

When faced with an unmanageable danger, fleeing was the only option.

As they cautiously approached.

The eerie man sitting at the desk suddenly paused his writing. He raised his head slightly and looked toward the trio.

To their surprise, though the man raised his head, his eyes remained shut.

His complexion was pale, though the nearby yellowed desk lamp obscured this detail slightly.

"Stop."

Their hearts lurched, and they immediately froze.

The man's awareness seemed drawn by their movement, but when they stopped, he appeared to fall back into a calm state.

They were now quite close.

Zhang Qing could even make out the contents of the notebook in front of the man.

The previously fragmented text, akin to ciphertext, was now clear enough to read.

Written in the notebook was a single line: Whoever reads this notebook, please close it immediately. This notebook is cursed. Do not open it again.

The message felt like a warning, yet also a plea for help.

Zhang Qing and Wan Tong paused upon reading this sentence, a wave of unnamed unease washing over them.

Moments ago, they had boldly rifled through the desk, unaware that the notebook was a cursed object.

Though they didn't know the nature of the curse, they knew it could only bring harm.

"Follow the instructions and close it. Let's see what happens," Liu Baimu's head advised immediately.

"This is reckless. It could be a trap. That man is clearly abnormal—if we touch the notebook, what if a vengeful spirit attacks us?" Zhang Qing hesitated, unwilling to take the risk.

Deep down, he feared death.

And those under the Pendulum Clock curse were known for their cowardice, always acting timidly and never making waves.

"You are ghost handlers. Even if a spirit attacks you, it doesn't mean you'll die. What are you afraid of?"

Liu Baimu scoffed, "Close the notebook and see what happens. We need to uncover the mansion's secrets—if we do nothing, we'll never gain control of this place."

"If I still had a body, I wouldn't need the help of you two. Looks like Yang Jian made the right call to kill me first, then slowly deal with you two. He knows you're worthless and pose no threat."

"Liu Baimu, don't provoke me. I'm not truly scared of vengeful spirits attacking—I just don't want to end up stuck in a bind," Zhang Qing retorted.

Though hesitant, he wasn't entirely foolish.

"So are you doing it or not?" Liu Baimu pressed.

Zhang Qing's eyes flickered, his indecision clear.

Wan Tong interjected, "We're already at this point—might as well give it a shot. Liu Baimu's right. If things go south, we just run. After all, we're not responsible ghost handlers who have to resolve paranormal events. Running away is always an option for us."

As he spoke, he began to act.

Carefully reaching for the cursed notebook in front of the eerie man, he closed it gently.

The notebook felt unnervingly cold in his grasp, like touching the lifeless body of a corpse.

Quickly.

Wan Tong set the notebook back on the desk without daring to take it.

Once the notebook was closed.

The pen-wielding man with shut eyes unexpectedly opened them.

His gaze was vacant at first, but over time, an unnatural glint of awareness began to emerge.

A chilling smile stretched across his stiff face.

"Damn it! We shouldn't have touched the notebook," Zhang Qing's face paled, bracing himself for an imminent ghost attack.

"Wrong. You should've touched it. If not, how else could I return to the present?" The eerie man suddenly spoke, his tone carrying a trace of joy.

He spoke?

If he could talk, perhaps he was human.

Zhang Qing relaxed slightly and asked, "Who are you?"

"Just an unlucky soul lost within this mansion. This desk and notebook are traps—every person who enters here feels compelled to read the notebook, but doing so traps them. They can't escape unless the correct person arrives at the correct time," the middle-aged man replied as he slowly stood up.

He seemed to have been sitting in that chair for an eternity, his bones creaking loudly as he stretched.

Zhang Qing and Wan Tong instinctively backed away from him, their vigilance heightened.

The man's attire was markedly out of place—his styling suggested he was from the 1980s.

If that were true.

Then he had been trapped here for decades...

But was it possible for an ordinary person to survive such a long time?

Even top-tier ghost handlers couldn't endure being trapped for decades.

"Hmm?"

Suddenly, the strange man's gaze shifted. He locked onto Liu Baimu's severed head.

"Interesting... Using the Pendulum Clock curse to interfere with your own time, delaying your death. Yet, with no body, you won't live much longer. Still, that wound on your neck..."

The middle-aged man strode closer, snatching Liu Baimu's head by the hair to examine the injury.

Unexpectedly.

The man let out a cold laugh, "Fascinating. That wound—it was made by the Firewood Knife. So someone did manage to take that cursed item after all."

"It was taken by someone named Yang Jian. His alias is Ghost Eye—he's the Dachang City's regional leader. We're being hunted by his team," Liu Baimu responded without hesitation, adding quickly, "If you help me, I can assist you in reclaiming that supernatural item."

Liu Baimu had deduced that this freed man must have deep knowledge of paranormal phenomena, as he could recognize the blade's origin with just a glance.

"Yang Jian? I like the name. I used to know a Yang once—a troublesome fellow. Wonder if he's dead now," the man mused grimly. "You want me to kill him for you, but I've got more pressing matters at hand."

"What generation is the Wang Family on now?"

"Third. The current heir is Wang Chaling, regional leader of Dadong City—a Captain Level figure," Liu Baimu answered briskly, seeing no point in withholding information.

At this moment, cooperation seemed to be the only way to increase the odds of survival.

"So, the kid who studied abroad ended up taking his father's path and leading the Wang Family's third generation. Only the third? Seems I haven't been trapped as long as I thought," the man remarked.

Liu Baimu felt a chill.

It was as he suspected. This individual wasn't from their era of ghost handlers—a relic of a bygone generation.

He had researched related intelligence before—though ghost resurgence was recent, there were records of people interacting with vengeful spirits 20 years ago. Back then, the information was limited and incidents weren't severe, so they weren't given much attention. Only urban legends and half-truths remained.

Most of those stories were dismissed as bedtime tales rather than evidence.

"How amusing. You're searching for the Pendulum Clock and managed to stumble into this haunted dungeon. This place is the Wang Family's prison, where their successive generations confined vengeful spirits. Judging by your state, you haven't found the clock," the middle-aged man sneered.

"Do you know where the Pendulum Clock is?" Zhang Qing asked urgently.

"Of course—it's within this mansion," the man responded.

"..."

That was infuriatingly obvious.

The man added, "The Pendulum Clock is unreachable by ordinary means. It doesn't exist in the present—it resides in the past. Only those who command the ability to restart time, or those using a vengeful spirit's power to reset, can locate it."

"So that's the truth."

Upon hearing this, everyone widened their eyes.

So, all the effort spent searching had been in vain.

"You clearly know a lot. You must also know how to obtain the clock," Liu Baimu suggested.

"Indeed, I'm seeking the clock, but it's not paramount for me. My current goal is to release the ghosts confined within this dungeon," the man replied coldly, a hint of madness in his tone.

"What?"

Everyone was stunned.

The man wanted to release the ghosts imprisoned in the dungeon.

"This dungeon can't hold those spirits forever. It's only a matter of time," he explained as he walked toward the far end of the prison. That area was shrouded in darkness, hiding the dungeon's secrets.

"This is bad."

Both Zhang Qing and Wan Tong froze in shock. The figure they freed didn't seem inclined to help them evade Yang Jian or kill their pursuer.

Instead, he was a lunatic bent on unleashing the Wang Family's jailed vengeful spirits.

Though they didn't know the exact number of ghosts confined here, it was evident there were many.

If all these spirits were unleashed, Dadong City would be doomed. What could possibly drive someone to such destructive intent?

His willingness to undertake such a self-sabotaging act baffled them.

By contrast, they would never choose to release the spirits. Keeping them locked away was safer—you wouldn't risk inviting more trouble for yourself.

"He's insane..." everyone thought to themselves.

"What do we do now? We seem to have freed someone who's going to cause a disaster," Zhang Qing muttered after a brief silence, his voice tinged with regret and helplessness.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

Before the discussion could continue, loud banging noises echoed throughout the dim dungeon.

The nearby iron bars trembled violently, as if teetering on the verge of collapse.

Chapter 892 Chen Qiaoyang

Here is the English translation of the text:

"Captain, what do you think is at the end of these stairs? The continuous supernatural phenomena earlier seem to be guiding us inside."

On the third floor of the ancient mansion, Huang Ziya fiddled with her thick black hair, her eyes fixed on the narrow, dim staircase ahead.

A certain curiosity drove her, giving her a compulsion to explore further.

"That wheelchair-bound Ghost Shepherd, Zhang Qiaoyang, along with Wan Tong, codenamed Ghost Crasher, and Liu Baimu all went in there. I sense there's great danger inside. I don't want to risk my life just to kill those two. Let's stop here. We'll pay Wang Chaling a visit and then leave Dadong City."

"After all, Dachang City is our territory, and staying away for too long isn't good."

Yang Jian carried Liu Baimu's headless corpse and started moving away.

He needed this headless corpse to make a statement to the paranormal circle—that Liu Baimu, cursed by the Pendulum Clock, had been dealt with by him.

The group nodded, showing no objections to his decision.

Immediately, they began to retreat from the ancient mansion.

However, upon reaching the first floor, Huang Ziya said again, "Captain, something strange—Li Yang's signal shows that he's here, but we haven't seen him anywhere."

"Send him messages continuously and tell him to leave the mansion. He's likely lost inside; ever since the clock rang, time in the mansion has been disrupted. Any supernatural power might affect the restart of the clock. The signal might be correct, but he isn't in this time frame," Yang Jian said.

"I'll send a message right away," Huang Ziya began typing and preparing to send a text to Li Yang.

But just then, the interior of the mansion reverberated with a dull crashing noise. It sounded as if walls were collapsing, causing the entire mansion to tremble.

Dust and debris began sifting down from above the group's heads.

"An earthquake?" Xiong Wenwen immediately crouched, holding his head.

Feng Quan and Tong Qian, meanwhile, frowned slightly and looked up at the ceiling.

Soon after, they lowered their heads again.

"The sound isn't coming from above—it's coming from below. But it's not an earthquake; it sounds like someone tearing down walls underground."

Yang Jian immediately said, "Leave this place. Don't linger any longer. I have a bad feeling—something seems to be about to happen."

The group members' expressions turned grim as they quickened their pace to escape the mansion, aiming to avoid being caught in any bizarre events.

At that moment.

Yang Jian glanced at the pocket watch in his hand.

He noticed that although the clock hadn't sounded yet, the time on the pocket watch displayed an inexplicable anomaly. The minute hand sometimes moved forward rapidly, other times frantically reversed, as if uncontrollable, failing to function normally.

Yet no matter how wildly the minute hand wavered, it always stayed within a range of thirty minutes before or after, unable to exceed this boundary.

This boundary happened to coincide with the mansion's reboot timeframe.

"In the memories of Liao Fan that I inherited, there's no record of such anomalies."

Yang Jian furrowed his brow, saying, "The clock hasn't sounded at this time. Could Zhang Qiaoyang and the others have gotten hold of the pendulum clock, controlling the mansion's time?"

"No. That's highly unlikely. The clock doesn't exist in the present; it's impossible for them to find it with just their numbers."

"Then, only two possibilities remain: the pendulum clock has lost control, or another person has manipulated the pendulum clock."

He pieced together the information to make a deduction.

And Yang Jian's analysis was extremely close to the truth.

The entity affecting the pendulum clock wasn't Zhang Qiaoyang or Liu Baimu—it was an extraordinary stranger they had unintentionally released.

The anomalies in the mansion were caused by that person.

Soon.

Yang Jian led his team out of the mansion, remaining indifferent to the commotion inside the ancient mansion.

But upon stepping out, the group saw a lifeless, gray-skinned man standing stiffly at the gate of the mansion's courtyard. His vacant eyes gazed at them, unmoving.

"It's the ghost from before. It's appeared again, and now it's trying to prevent us from leaving," Feng Quan said.

The ghost's intent was abundantly clear and easy to interpret.

"The more it tries to stop us, the more determined we should be to leave. The supernatural forces here don't want us to escape, the mansion has changed further, and even the timeline is in chaos. We can't stay here anymore—even if we haven't found Li Yang, we must leave first."

"If the ghost refuses to let us go, then I'll detain it right here."

Yang Jian's eyes narrowed, his dark pupils glowing faintly red.

Since they were no longer inside the mansion, his Ghost Domain was free from interference and could function normally.

However, the Coffin Nail he was holding was driven into Liu Baimu's corpse and couldn't be used for now. But that didn't matter—he had his entire team backing him.

Without hesitation or delay, Yang Jian strode towards the unknown ghost standing in front of the iron gate of the courtyard.

Yang Jian was confident—even if he triggered the ghost's killing pattern and became its target, he could survive its attacks. After all, he was no longer merely a Ghost Shepherd but an anomalous entity himself.

But things didn't unfold as expected.

When Yang Jian approached, the ghost standing at the gate suddenly began moving—it walked away, seemingly stepping aside to clear the path.

"It moved aside? Was it a coincidence or deliberate?"

The others were astonished at the sight of the ghost stepping away.

Since when did ghosts voluntarily avoid humans?

Yang Jian frowned. Since the ghost had retreated, he didn't want to waste time investigating it. He vaguely felt that this ghost had an unusual connection to the mansion, appearing frequently within it.

However, Liao Fan's memories didn't contain any relevant information.

This added to the mystery.

Around 8 PM, Yang Jian and his team left the mansion and arrived on the streets of Dadong City.

Despite the late hour, the streets still buzzed with life. Passersby were present, streetlights illuminated the area, and the honking of cars could be heard.

This indicated they had left the paranormal zone, and the surroundings had returned to normal.

"Finally out. Exhausted! Daddy Xiong's feet are killing him. It's past 8 PM already—time to sleep. My mom says late sleepers don't grow tall!" Xiong Wenwen cheered, relieved to be away from the mansion he feared.

"The noises inside the mansion are still ongoing—it doesn't look good," Feng Quan murmured.

The loud sounds from the mansion were audible even outside, as though the building was being demolished, attracting the attention of passersby.

"Let's find Wang Chaling first. He seems to be hiding something from me," Yang Jian said, lifting his gaze.

His eyes fixed on a distant high-rise as if he could see through layers of walls to its top floor.

Just as he prepared to use his Ghost Domain to transport the group.

Something from within the mansion was flung out, landing on two passing women.

"Ouch!" One woman cried out in pain, knocked to the ground.

"Who threw something at us?" The other woman angrily complained.

But when the object rolled onto the street, illuminated by a nearby streetlight, their anger turned to terror and silence.

It was a pale, lifeless human head...

"Ah!"

Their screams echoed, drawing the attention of nearby pedestrians. Many stopped in bewilderment, looking toward the commotion.

All they saw were two women fleeing in panic, faces white with fear.

"Hmm?"

Yang Jian turned coldly, his Ghost Eyes peering at the head flung from the mansion.

The head belonged to... Liu Baimu.

He was dead.

His head, thrown out of the mansion, was pierced by the cracked, elongated weapon Yang Jian wielded.

At the same time, the eerie commotion inside the mansion ceased.

On the third floor of the mansion.

At the edge of a broken window, an eerie shadow lingered, seemingly watching something outside.

"Dong! Dong! Dong!"

Simultaneously, the familiar sound of the pendulum clock echoed again inside the mansion, though this time, it rang irregularly and out of schedule.

"Retrieve the head." Yang Jian commanded the Ghost Child.

A small child-like entity, resembling a bloodless infant, ran barefoot, grabbed Liu Baimu's severed head from the street, and quickly returned.

Yang Jian inspected it.

Liu Baimu's head was incomplete. A handprint dented his face, deforming the skull.

In other words, Liu Baimu's head had been crushed.

No human could exert enough force to crush a skull—that left only ghosts or Ghost Shepherds capable of such a feat.

Yang Jian leaned toward the latter.

Ghosts wouldn't intentionally throw a head out.

"Judging by the condition of Liu Baimu's head, he likely didn't die immediately after I struck him—he must have died later. So, there is indeed someone else in the mansion,"

Yang Jian turned his gaze toward the shadow lingering behind the window on the third floor.

He couldn't see clearly; the supernatural forces inside the mansion interfered with his Ghost Eyes, blocking his vision.

Otherwise, he would have thoroughly investigated everything within the mansion without hesitation.

"What is that?" Feng Quan noticed the shadow as well.

"A ghost?" Tong Qian speculated.

"No. A person. True ghosts wouldn't simply stare at me like that," Yang Jian replied. "But I can sense that's an extremely dangerous presence."

On the third floor of the mansion, the shadowy man standing by the shattered window peered at Yang Jian on the street outside.

The supernatural forces within the mansion seemed unable to affect him.

"So, that's Yang Jian? An impressive young man—quite resourceful. Combining the Firewood Knife and Coffin Nail into a single supernatural weapon... By intertwining their rules, ordinary people wouldn't grasp how to use it even if they owned it. Indeed, managing to acquire these two items shows his merit,"

The mysterious man chuckled meaningfully, "What a shame, though. Of all people to resemble, this kid just had to look like the one I despise most."

"No rush—the countdown has already begun. I'll soon pay him a visit to inquire about some things."

Behind him, the ticking of a clock echoed crisply. The rhythm of time was quickened, unnaturally fast.

In the shadows behind him, Zhang Qiaoyang and Wan Tong were trembling, barely breathing.

Just moments ago, Liu Baimu's head had been crushed and thrown out.

According to this man, Liu Baimu, lacking the ability to control ghosts with only his head, was useless—even his resurrection served no purpose.

Thus, Liu Baimu was exterminated.

"I need two errand boys. Do your jobs properly, and I'll let you both live—and live well." The dangerous middle-aged man turned around, smiling faintly.

He wasn't particularly frightening in appearance, but his mere presence sent chills down their spines.

This man undoubtedly belonged to the previous era—a fearsome figure who had somehow been captured and imprisoned in the Wang Family mansion's dungeon for many years.

"You better not act recklessly. Things have changed from what you once knew. Headquarters and captains are still active now—if you make a mess, there will be consequences. You should consider your family, your descendants," Zhang Qiaoyang said, forcing himself to speak.

"What I aim to do is beyond your understanding. Morality doesn't matter—only the end result does. Still, I'm curious to catch up with some old friends, provided they're alive."

"Also, I'm called Chen Qiaoyang. I don't have a codename, just an old nickname people used to call me—if I recall correctly, it's 'Ghost Shepherd.'"

"Ghost Shepherd, Chen Qiaoyang."

"You can refer to me as Ghost Shepherd or Chen Qiaoyang—I don't mind either. Just don't forget."

The dangerous man introduced himself, with a hint of nostalgia and sentiment in his tone.

This was the name and alias of someone lost to time—forgotten, erased from memory.

As nameless as someone consumed by supernatural forces, like Yang Jian's own father.

"Ghost Shepherd, Chen Qiaoyang?"

Zhang Qiaoyang and Wan Tong silently repeated the name, committing it to memory. They planned to consult their peers in the paranormal circle for its history.

In today's digital age, a name could uncover a person's entire background—a codename could unveil old paranormal files.

While they spoke.

Yang Jian had already turned away and led his team off the street, vanishing from sight.

The man named Chen Qiaoyang also turned back, re-entering the mansion.

Inside the ancient mansion.

Several eerie figures roamed and lingered.

They seemed to be targeting him specifically.

"The Wang Family's second generation husband and wife—born together, died together—how amusing. It's too bad your third-generation descendants are so timid. If one of your first-generation ghosts were here, I'd have no options left."

Chen Qiaoyang sneered coldly, his silhouette fading into the darkness.

Chapter 893 The Wooden Stool in the Way

As Yang Jian and others left the ancient mansion.

In the supernatural circle, a photograph quickly circulated. In the photo, Yang Jian is seen holding Liu Baimu's headless corpse in one hand and clutching his cold, lifeless "Dead Man's Head" in the other.

Also in the photograph are Feng Quan, Tong Qian, Huang Ziya, and others.

"Liu Baimu in the ancient mansion in Dadong City was taken down by Yang Jian. Tsk tsk, truly interesting. From the moment Yang Jian spoke till now, less than two hours must have passed."

Someone left a comment on the supernatural website, an anonymous lurker.

"Offending Ghost-eye Yang Jian and still trying to leave? Who is Liu Baimu anyway? Even President Fang from his circle was killed. What makes Liu Baimu think he could survive? Lasting two hours is already pushing his luck."

This comment was made by a user named "I Have a Plan."

"Liu Baimu is dead, and likely, the people he gathered have been wiped out too. But Team Leader Yang seems to have incurred losses as well. His photo is missing two teammates."

"One of them appears to be Zhang Han, who was taken down by Liao Fan and Xu Feng earlier. The other, Li Yang, is also nowhere to be seen. Looks like even Ghost-eye Yang Jian wasn't unscathed."

Two individuals exchanging insider information began discussing the matter.

It's hard to imagine how something that happened today could spread across the supernatural website in less than half a day.

However, such intelligence capabilities are not surprising as the focus on ghost tamers is currently at an unprecedented level. People like Yang Jian are closely monitored. Whenever they make a major move, satellites trail them, intelligence agents infiltrate Dachang City for investigations.

"So boring, I want to find someone for a fight. Anyone up for it? Choose any location, any number of people." This comment was left by a user named "Master Ye from Dahai City."

But upon seeing this ID, nobody in the circle responded to him.

At this moment.

Dadong City, top floor of Ning'an Building.

"Bang!"

A loud thud echoed as Liu Baimu's twisted, deformed "Dead Man's Head" rolled onto the floor, stopping right beneath the polished leather shoes of a man in a suit by the floor-to-ceiling window.

Wang Chaling slightly turned, glancing into the dimly illuminated space ahead.

Within the shadows, figures appeared. Yang Jian emerged from the darkness, his pitch-black pupils faintly radiating red light.

"You've been hiding something from me. You knew the grandfather clock in the mansion could restart time, which is why you deliberately gave me this pocket watch," Yang Jian said, his voice cold.

"But to Team Leader Yang, Liu Baimu still ultimately met his end at your hands, didn't he?"

Wang Chaling smiled faintly: "I knew with your abilities, Liu Baimu's group was doomed. I just hadn't anticipated your speed, Team Leader Yang."

"Did I disappoint you?" Yang Jian replied.

"Not at all, in fact, you've exceeded my expectations significantly. I clearly underestimated you, Yang Jian." Wang Chaling said.

Yang Jian threw the pocket watch towards him: "Take this back. Also, your mansion has become problematic. You should handle it yourself. I don't have time to play games with you here. I have more pressing matters to attend to."

Wang Chaling caught the pocket watch, glanced at the time displayed on it, and his expression subtly shifted.

"You're leaving. What about your teammate?" he said while tossing the pocket watch back; "Perhaps you should retrieve your teammate before you depart."

"He has the ability to survive; I'm not worried," Yang Jian replied.

Li Yang's survival capability was formidable. He simply needed to secure a room to avoid being attacked by vengeful spirits.

Wang Chaling said, "You should be concerned because the mansion has changed—it has become unsafe, extremely perilous. Someone has disrupted its balance. This is no longer just your concern."

"You think this is my fault?" Yang Jian frowned.

"At the very least, you should wait until this matter is resolved before leaving. The implications are enormous. If the mansion truly spirals out of control, not only will your teammate perish, but Dadong City will face an unimaginable supernatural catastrophe. Nobody wants to see that," Wang Chaling sighed, his tone tinged with helplessness.

"Besides, you know I'm a mere waste. My abilities don't even compare to Team Leader Yang's." He added.

"..."

A Captain Level individual calling themselves a waste wasn't humility—it bordered on being neurotic.

"Also, Li Jun has already arrived. Earlier, I discussed the mansion's situation with him. He's quite concerned about it as well," Wang Chaling suddenly added.

Upon hearing this, Yang Jian immediately frowned.

Clearly, both Wang Chaling and Headquarter-sent Li Jun were better informed about the mansion's matters than he was, which explained their heightened vigilance.

"Where is Li Jun?" Yang Jian asked.

"I only know he's somewhere in Dadong City. As for his exact location or actions, I'm in the dark. After all, I don't oversee him." Wang Chaling said while turning again to gaze out the window.

From the skyscraper's vantage point, he looked in the direction of the mansion.

This building was deliberately chosen by Wang Chaling for its perfect visibility of the mansion, allowing constant surveillance of its activities.

At this moment, his eyes narrowed, and his inner unease surged.

"Look, the streetlights on the road outside the mansion have gone out."

Yang Jian turned to look.

Indeed.

The streetlights along the road outside the mansion were no longer lit. However, lights at the very ends of the street remained on, suggesting the outage wasn't due to power or line issues but interference in the vicinity near the mansion.

"The supernatural is spreading. The mansion can no longer contain those entities inside. My worst fears have come to pass," Wang Chaling said.

"Besides Liu Baimu and his group, are there others in the mansion? Do you know what's happening?" Yang Jian asked.

This time, Wang Chaling seemed less inclined to conceal information, saying, "I've mentioned before: My Wang Family owns the mansion, but I avoid living there for a simple reason—the mansion harbors actual ghosts, true vengeful spirits. The grandfather clock manipulates time inside, turning the mansion into a prison to trap the ghosts within and prevent them from escaping."

"My greatest fear has always been someone finding the clock, restarting the mansion's time, and releasing the imprisoned ghosts. That's why I sent my father to locate the clock."

"Of course, failure to retrieve it wasn't a concern. The key was ensuring no one else finds it. However, the clock's supernatural properties exceed my expectations, causing my father to get lost and never return."

"But now, it seems this concern is unwarranted. I am certain the clock has been found, and the mansion's time is being restored. Examine the time on the pocket watch carefully. Although chaotic, isn't it progressively aligning with real-world time?"

Yang Jian reopened the pocket watch and inspected it.

Indeed.

Despite the time fluctuation, it gradually converged with real-world timing.

"If the mansion's time synchronizes with reality, then the supernatural will fully overlap with the present. And you know what will happen next, don't you, Team Leader Yang?" Wang Chaling said.

At this moment, Yang Jian finally understood the erratic jumps of the pocket watch's time.

"Someone is manipulating the grandfather clock, recalibrating the mansion's timeline, bringing the trapped vengeful spirits from the past into the present?" Yang Jian asked.

Wang Chaling chuckled: "Discussing matters with you is always straightforward. Yes, the current situation is indeed like that. Because the grandfather clock occasionally misfires and restarts, the trapped ghosts must avoid being active during its re-initialization."

"For example, if it's 8:00 sharp now, the mansion will be ghost-free. However, if the time is pushed forward by a minute, or even ten seconds, a ghost may appear."

"Specific moments interact with distinct ghosts—that's my family mansion's secret."

These words made not only Yang Jian but also Feng Quan, Tong Qian, and the rest of the teammates behind him feel an icy chill.

This wasn't just an ancient mansion—it was a ghost prison, with the Wang Family leveraging the grandfather clock's supernatural abilities to stagger the mansion's timeline, trapping various ghosts within discrete time slots.

Now, someone was recalibrating the time, merging the time zones, which meant all the ghosts were about to manifest in the present.

"How many ghosts are in there?" Yang Jian's face grew grave.

"In an hour excluding full-hour and half-hour slots, how many individual time points do you think remain?" Wang Chaling responded.

At this moment, the mathematically inclined Xiong Wenwen began calculating.

Sixty minutes in an hour equals 3,600 seconds. Excluding the full-hour and half-hour slots, if each second represents a time point, that leaves 3,558 distinct points.

"Wow, 3,558 points!" Xiong Wenwen exclaimed.

"My Wang Family certainly didn't fill all the slots with imprisoned ghosts, but the dangerous time points are definitely numerous. Besides, the recalibration has begun. I don't know who has gained control of the clock, but I hope Team Leader Yang will join me in taking down that person and preventing a potentially S-level supernatural event."

"No, if it spirals completely out of control, this might escalate into an SS-level supernatural event."

With that, Wang Chaling stepped closer and extended his hand to Yang Jian.

Yang Jian's gaze flickered, but he eventually reached out to shake his hand: "Joining forces isn't an issue. But I won't act rashly. Besides, this mess stems from your negligence. If you had cleared Liu Baimu's group earlier, none of this would've happened."

"You definitely had private motives."

"Everyone has private motives. Nobody in this world is wholly noble and flawless. Don't you agree, Team Leader Yang?" Wang Chaling said with a smile. "Let's hope this collaboration is fruitful."

"If you want cooperation, show sincerity. My entire team is here. Where are your people?" Yang Jian asked.

Wang Chaling replied: "My Wang Family spans three generations, just five people altogether. We're not inferior to your team."

Then.

The glass behind him reflected the eerie figures of two elderly men. Their faces were gaunt and wrinkled, their demeanor lifeless and chillingly unsettling.

"Still not enough." Yang Jian said. "The clock exists in the past. Anyone capable of manipulating it must understand restarting, or at least be connected to it. Numbers help, but they don't determine outcomes."

"What if you include me?"

A strange voice suddenly echoed, sounding like a throat scarred by burns—hoarse and grating, making one uncomfortable.

A tall, dark-complexioned, eerie man appeared from the sinister green light, his presence unnerving.

This individual emerged abruptly, almost as though he materialized out of thin air.

"Li Jun?"

Yang Jian focused his eyes on him: "You seem to have changed quite a bit since the Ghost Painting Incident."

"Not bad. You've matured too." Li Jun said in an emotionless voice.

The two were fairly acquainted from their past encounters.

"How did the aftermath of the Ghost Painting Incident go?" Yang Jian asked, "That cursed painting hasn't been dealt with yet, right?"

"Controlled for now. That's enough." Li Jun replied.

Wang Chaling interjected, "Three Captain Levels joining forces—what do you think of the odds?"

"We might all be annihilated," Yang Jian said bluntly. "The one who reset the clock won't be easy to deal with. Plus, the mansion is breaking down. We face far greater risks than we anticipate."

"You're as cautious as ever. Let's not waste time. Take action now. Solve this issue before the danger escalates," Li Jun urged.

"The more you rush, the more mistakes you make. I already warned you during the Ghost Painting Incident," Yang Jian replied harshly.

Li Jun asked, "What do you suggest?"

"Prepare enough containers for imprisoning ghosts and isolate this area," Yang Jian advised.

Wang Chaling said, "I'll delegate those tasks to others. It won't delay the operation."

"Li Jun, Yang Jian, Wang Chaling—you all wait a moment. I have something to say; not sure if it's appropriate." Suddenly, Feng Quan stepped forward from the shadows, his expression grave.

"Feng Quan? What is it?" Li Jun asked.

Feng Quan pointed toward the doorway: "That bench by the entrance—was it always part of the furniture here?"

The door at the entrance was wide open. The corridor lights further inside inexplicably dimmed, and the distant lighting flickered on and off erratically.

An old, red wooden bench now stood at the doorway, blocking the path.

Hmm?

All three men turned their attention to the dilapidated red wooden bench.

Clearly, the bench wasn't standard furniture for this floor. Its crimson hue radiated an eerie aura, suggesting links to supernatural activity.

"There's another one back there." Huang Ziya suddenly pointed behind her.

The hallway leading to the restroom had a similarly placed red wooden bench, diagonally obstructing the passage.

"One appeared here too."

Throughout the current floor, red wooden benches mysteriously filled key access points—unbidden and imperceptibly.

"Has the supernatural already seeped into this building?" Li Jun's face stiffened.

"This skyscraper harbors ghosts—exceptionally unusual ones at that," Yang Jian narrowed his eyes, heightening his vigilance.

For three Captain Levels to remain oblivious to the buildup, assuredly, such phenomena were extraordinary.

"Are we that unlucky? Dadong City is enormous, and this skyscraper has over a hundred floors. Is it mere coincidence that a supernatural event would occur right here?" Tong Qian glanced around, blending suspicion with concern.

Wang Chaling spoke calmly, "Perhaps someone drove the ghosts here from the mansion."

"Something akin to the white Ghost Candle's 'ghost-luring' effect?" Li Jun speculated aloud.

"Possibly a more potent method," Wang Chaling posited.

Yang Jian intervened: "You must know something concrete."

"It's hard to confirm specifics at this stage," Wang Chaling shook his head.

"Let's set speculation aside for now and tackle the immediate threat." Li Jun strode toward the bench at the doorway.

Yang Jian and Wang Chaling watched silently.

They both understood: Li Jun intended an initial probe.

Supernatural events require someone to first brave the unknown—it allows the group to devise strategies accordingly.

Acting collectively risks entire teams facing ghostly assaults, yielding unnecessary casualties.

The crimson bench beneath the dim hallway lighting shimmered faintly like blood. Vibrant red light seemed subtly to emanate, keeping it disturbingly conspicuous.

Approaching cautiously, Li Jun encountered no harm.

He frowned slightly, kicking the bench hard.

The force sent the bench flying to the far end of the corridor, clattering on the floor without incident.

"No ghosts encountered, nor did I face an assault. Strange indeed." Li Jun remarked.

"That's because you haven't triggered the ghost's rules for killing. Look around more thoroughly." Yang Jian pointed out.

Only then did Li Jun notice the corners of the vicinity. Noticeably, more red benches had congregated—creeping in unnoticed, lacking signs of intentional placement.

Each carved mahogany seat, harsh and vivid, stood hauntingly still.

The momentary lapse filled the room scattered with faintly glowing wooden apparitions' shadows.

Yang Jian activated Ghost-eye ability for keener insights into anomalies influencing surrounding areas.

Spreading the mystical Ghost Domain through layers distorted conceptual visibility in sub-realities associated surroundings.

Chapter 894 Separating to Take Action

Looking at the eerie, red wooden bench that was increasingly appearing across this floor, everyone felt it—the place had already been invaded by an unidentifiable paranormal force.

The malicious ghost was likely lingering nearby.

More importantly, this supernatural intrusion was silent and unobtrusive. Despite the presence of so many ghost wielders here, not a single one realized it. Only when Feng Quan noticed the red wooden bench by the door did he raise an alert.

"This paranormal incident shouldn't waste our time. Yang Jian, let your team handle this situation here while the rest of us head to the ancient house," Li Jun, who had turned back, said. He didn't want to spend more time here.

This supernatural phenomenon might only lock down one building.

But if the ancient house outside were to have issues, the entire Dadong City would face catastrophe.

"I refuse to accept that arrangement."

Yang Jian said, "I don't think this paranormal incident is that straightforward. I have a suggestion: why don't you and Wang Chaling scout the ancient house first, while I stay here with my team to deal with the current situation? If you need support, you can notify me immediately."

"That works too." Li Jun didn't object.

After all, the distance wasn't too far. Yang Jian's Ghost Domain would allow him to arrive quickly.

"Wang Chaling, what's your opinion?" Li Jun then turned to him.

"No objections. Whatever you two decide works for me." Wang Chaling smiled faintly, seemingly easygoing. "I hope Team Yang handles this quickly and joins us soon. After all, none of us would want any unforeseen events to occur, would we?"

Yang Jian remained silent.

Li Jun said, "Alright, then let's split up."

With that, he activated his Ghost Domain and prepared to leave with Wang Chaling.

However, as Li Jun's Ghost Domain spread, the red wooden bench across the corridor eerily wobbled.

The sinister green Ghost Flame attempting to spread outward was blocked, seemingly cut off. Its light could only encompass the interior of the room, unable to reach further distances. This interference restricted Li Jun's Ghost Domain to the floor, and not even fully.

"It's being disrupted—my Ghost Domain has been affected." Li Jun's expression changed.

Wang Chaling said, "It seems Yang Jian was right. This supernatural incident here is not simple. It might not be so easy to leave this place after all."

"It's merely interference with the Ghost Domain. We can still take the elevator down—it's the same thing and doesn't matter." Li Jun remarked, continuing his actions without pause as he still quickly attempted to leave for the ancient house.

Soon.

Li Jun arrived at Wang Chaling's private elevator and pressed the button.

The elevator doors opened.

Within, the lights were already extinguished, but it was still clear. A red wooden bench sat inside the elevator—both conspicuous and eerie.

"Another red wooden bench?" Li Jun pressed the elevator button again, but this time, there was no response.

The elevator had stopped working.

"Yang Jian, is your Ghost Domain experiencing interference too?" Li Jun's face darkened as he turned to Yang Jian.

In terms of the Ghost Domain, Yang Jian was considered an expert.

Though many ghost wielders possessed Ghost Domains, only a scarce few could match Yang Jian's level.

"Mine isn't suffering major interference, but it's still affected—and this interference is escalating. If I'm not mistaken, the ghost here is waking up," Yang Jian answered.

"Let me escort you two down a floor. This way, you don't waste too much time being trapped here. And take this pocket watch with you as well," he added.

Then, his Ghost Eye reopened.

The Ghost Domain enveloped the area—red light illuminated the entire floor, overtaking the gloomy Ghost Flame's glow and expanding outward, reaching from the top of the building to the ground outside.

But Yang Jian quickly noticed.

A red wooden bench appeared within his Ghost Domain—it obstructed his Ghost Eye's vision, making the Domain incomplete and giving it a torn, fragmented sensation.

Nonetheless, Yang Jian successfully escorted Li Jun and Wang Chaling out.

In the blink of an eye.

Li Jun and Wang Chaling were already downstairs.

"It seems Yang Jian's Ghost Domain was interfered with, otherwise it would've covered far more than this range," Li Jun frowned, staring at the building's lobby entrance.

At the lobby's entrance, three red wooden benches stood horizontally, blocking the path in and out.

The area was eerily silent, devoid of people, sharply contrasting with the bustling surroundings.

At some unknown point, the people inside the building began mysteriously disappearing.

"Yang Jian doesn't want to get involved with what's happening in the ancient house. He's simply looking for revenge. This sudden paranormal incident gives him the perfect excuse," Wang Chaling remarked.

"Doesn't matter. Besides, someone has to deal with things here anyway, and there needs to be someone outside overseeing matters. Yang Jian's team staying here puts me at ease. Let's go," Li Jun said.

Wang Chaling's gaze shifted slightly. He didn't object.

After all, he wanted to see what was truly happening inside the ancient house—to understand why his parents had vanished after entering, with no sign of the clock and no return of themselves. He had initially hoped to use Yang Jian's entry into the house as a chance for his mother to retrieve his father.

But Yang Jian came out, while his parents remained missing.

If this situation wasn't resolved soon, the third generation of the Wang Family might face issues too.

"The rest of you can rest for now—I'll handle things here with Feng Quan alone," Yang Jian said, making arrangements.

He instructed the others to stay on this floor and not wander around.

"Just the two of you? Will that be alright?" Tong Qian asked skeptically.

Yang Jian replied, "More people won't make a difference. If the situation can be resolved, I'll take care of it. If it can't, then having you all involved will only make things more dangerous. Your abilities aren't particularly suited to handle this, especially since you've already used your supernatural powers during previous operations. Acting recklessly now will only hasten the ghost's awakening."

"So for now, your only priority is ensuring your own safety."

"Well said! Hurry up and go—wrap this up early so we can head home soon. My mom just texted me asking when I'd be back for dinner." Xiong Wenwen waved his hand, urging Yang Jian to leave quickly.

Huang Ziya asked, "What about the Ghost Child? Aren't you bringing him along?"

"No need."

Yang Jian finished speaking and gestured. Feng Quan approached with a stoic expression.

The two of them left the rest zone, heading down the hallway toward the emergency exit. Before leaving, Yang Jian closed the hallway door.

Once the door was shut and they'd walked away for a brief time.

Behind the door, another red wooden bench had mysteriously appeared, blocking the entrance and corridor once more.

"We should be able to handle things here. Why not stick with Li Jun and Wang Chaling?" Feng Quan asked as they walked. "Surely the ancient house poses a greater threat than this place does."

"Of course I know that. But until I'd figured things out, I'm against moving together. That Wang Chaling is hiding something—I don't trust him completely. Besides, the ancient house is extremely dangerous. In this scenario, observing first is the safest route. I didn't crawl back to life just to die again so easily, would you want that?"

Yang Jian's tone was cold.

Even though he was already akin to an anomaly himself, he remained exceedingly cautious.

Against ghost wielders, he could act arrogant. But when it came to matters involving the secrets of the Republic Era Ancient House, caution was unavoidable.

In front of the emergency exit.

Another red wooden bench blocked their path.

The eerie bench seemed to have grown in length, perfectly fitting to obstruct the corridor.

However, it wasn't high enough—one could easily step over it without being truly impeded.

"Any thoughts?" Yang Jian asked as he eyed the bench.

Feng Quan said, "The red wooden benches appearing repeatedly are manifestations of paranormal power, not the ghost itself. That's why Li Jun could touch them or even kick them over without any danger—he hasn't engaged directly with the ghost. I suspect these benches function as the ghost's medium, requiring a specific method or trigger to activate the ghost's killing rules."

He walked forward and placed his hand on the red wooden bench.

Just as he'd expected, the ghost did not appear, nor was he attacked.

"You're right. Additionally, I haven't found any trace of the ghost's passage," Yang Jian said as the Ghost Shadow beneath his feet shifted, covering the area around the bench.

Holding the cracked golden spear, he activated the Firewood Knife's medium.

However, all he saw were the figures of the building's staff—ordinary people. There were no signs of footprints left by a ghost.

Trying to locate the ghost with the Firewood Knife was futile.

"Yang Jian, do you think stepping over the bench directly would trigger the ghost's murder rules and result in an attack?" Feng Quan's eyes flickered with an idea of stepping over the red bench.

"If the ghost marked you, can you withstand it?" Yang Jian asked.

Feng Quan paused to think and replied, "I should be able to."

"Forget it. There will surely be victims in this building. I'll find someone freshly killed by the ghost to figure this out," Yang Jian said as he began to investigate the building's activity.

Soon.

Downstairs on another office floor.

Everything seemed normal—people were working overtime as usual, both men and women present.

But a terrified scream suddenly echoed, shattering the calm of the floor and attracting curious glances as people lowered their work and turned to investigate the sound.

"What happened?"

Someone walked over, curious.

At this moment, a red wooden bench had inexplicably appeared in the restroom corridor on that floor, blocking someone's intent to enter the restroom.

Nearby.

A man in a shirt, about thirty years old, had bizarrely collapsed beside the red wooden bench. His face was purple, lifeless—death unusually unsettling.

The body was discovered by a female employee, who, upon seeing this scene, screamed in horror.

"The unlucky victim has appeared," Yang Jian, atop the building, heard the commotion and immediately started moving.

He kicked aside the obstructing wooden bench and quickly hurried down the stairs toward the floor where the incident occurred.

Yang Jian didn't use his Ghost Domain, as it was already interfered with. Besides, the distance wasn't far—walking could get him there just as quickly.

Feng Quan silently followed him, glancing back at the wooden bench Yang Jian had kicked over.

At some unknown moment.

The bench had eerily righted itself.

"This is the floor," Yang Jian said, arriving at the location.

Chapter 895 The Person on the Wooden Stool

"This Wang Chaling has quite the nerve. He actually allows other companies to rent office space in the tower. Does he not realize that his presence might trigger supernatural incidents? If something goes wrong, the entire building would be in trouble."

Yang Jian stepped into this floor's office area and glanced around.

He saw quite a few ordinary people busy at work.

Unlike his own Shangtong Tower, where all employees were hired strictly to maintain operations and serve Yang Jian, this building had no such restrictions. Shangtong Tower was not open to outsiders, and the number of personnel was tightly controlled.

"Make way, make way," Yang Jian said as he moved toward the area with a crowd of people.

At the moment, many employees on this floor had abandoned their work to gather around the corridor leading to the restroom, eager to find out what had happened.

These people didn't know anything about supernatural incidents, so their curiosity led them to treat it as entertainment.

A manager who had checked out the situation returned with a thoroughly unpleasant expression, his face displaying clear terror.

"Someone's dead. Report it immediately."

Upon hearing of a death, many people gasped in shock.

"No way—I just saw him earlier, and he was perfectly fine! How did it happen? Is this for real?"

"It must be from overwork. Definitely. I've been saying this would happen sooner or later. I've already told the boss to stop these endless overtime hours. Now, look what's happened."

"I snuck a glance earlier... It doesn't look like a sudden death at all. The way he died—it's horrifying."

Amid the murmurs, the manager's hands shook slightly as he held his phone and made a call. First, he contacted his boss, and then he reported the incident to the authorities.

But just then, a chilling, imposing figure shoved through the crowd and stepped into the corridor.

"Who the hell? Can't you watch where you're going?"

The manager stumbled as he was bumped, his phone slipping from his grasp and clattering to the ground. Already in a foul mood, he immediately turned around and yelled in anger.

"Are you talking to me?" Yang Jian asked, glancing at him slightly.

The manager froze instantly. Every hair on his body stood on end as an icy chill surged from the depths of his heart.

An inexplicable instinct told him—

This man in front of him was extraordinarily, overwhelmingly dangerous.

As if he were a murderous criminal. No—this feeling was even more intense.

"You..."

The manager wanted to say something, but the words got caught in his throat.

"If you don't want to die, step back. Don't say I didn't warn you," Yang Jian said, withdrawing his gaze before focusing on the body in the corridor.

The corpse lay sprawled on the ground in an eerie position. In front of it was a long, red wooden bench, positioned in a way that felt both strange and intrusive.

Clearly.

This person triggered the ghost's killing pattern and was killed as a result.

"The body hasn't been dead long—it's still fresh. Maybe I can extract some of the memories from it."

Yang Jian's eyes flickered, and the ghostly shadow behind him began to stir. Like a living creature, it moved toward the corpse.

By simply standing there, Yang Jian's shadow covered the entire corridor. The surrounding light dimmed significantly, and the atmosphere turned dismal and foreboding.

The shadow?

Someone noticed the eerie sight, filled with disbelief. From Yang Jian's position, his shadow should logically fall behind him, not stretch out in front of him—let alone extend to such an unnatural length.

The Ghost Shadow crept across the floor, slowly encroaching on the corpse lying in its path.

The ghost was beginning to extract its memories.

Yang Jian had never attempted to retrieve memories from a corpse before, but his reasoning suggested it should work.

"There are indeed memories here, but they're fragmented and incomplete. I need to find the moments leading up to his death."

Quickly.

Yang Jian felt the dead man's memories start to flood into his mind.

He was reading them.

The deceased's name was Wang Feng, a long-time employee of this company. His family didn't live in Dadong City; he had come from out of town...

Yang Jian didn't learn much personal information about him, only scattered glimpses of his train ride to Dadong City and scenes from his childhood in a remote village.

The memories were disjointed and incomplete.

"You're not part of our company, are you? Who the hell are you? Get out of here now, or I'll call the cops!"

The manager shouted at this point, his voice forceful as he tried to expel Yang Jian and Feng Quan. Although he found the pair extremely unsettling, he hoped to play it safe by getting rid of them after a death had occurred.

"No need to report anything. We're taking over this matter," Feng Quan replied in a low, hoarse voice, taking out his credentials.

"Furthermore, I suggest you immediately instruct everyone to return to their workstations. No one is to run around or act rashly. Otherwise, more deaths like this one are bound to happen. Until we issue instructions, no one is allowed to leave."

The manager glanced at the credentials but didn't believe them. He shouted louder, "Security! Security! Get these two outsiders out of here immediately—"

These guys didn't look like law enforcement, so why should he believe their nonsense?

But before the manager could finish speaking, the scene abruptly fell into dead silence.

A cold gun barrel was pressed firmly to the manager's forehead.

Feng Quan, his tone laced with lethal intent, said, "Cooperate, and it'll be better for everyone. If you dare to cause trouble, I'll end you right here and now. Don't doubt me. There are things in this world you're completely ignorant about."

Beads of cold sweat dripped down the manager's forehead. His body seemed paralyzed; all he could feel was the icy metal against his skin.

No doubt about it.

This was a real gun.

If someone dared to brandish a firearm so casually in a well-policed city like Dadong, then their credentials were likely authentic, too.

"I—I understand. I'll cooperate," the manager stammered, his face pale from fear. He no longer dared to shout or question anything, immediately adopting a submissive demeanor.

"Good," Feng Quan said, withdrawing the gun.

He had no intention of actually killing a civilian; his goal was simply to intimidate. Wasting time on explanations wasn't an option—direct and swift methods were necessary to take control of the situation.

The reason Feng Quan didn't evacuate the premises was that the supernatural entity had already infiltrated the entire building. Hasty evacuations might only lead to more deaths. The best approach was to keep everyone stationary.

Ghosts rarely killed arbitrarily.

In most supernatural incidents, the safest way to survive was often to remain still.

After all, if a ghost decided to target someone, running wouldn't help ordinary people escape.

Quickly.

The crowd of onlookers grew too frightened to even speak in whispers. One by one, they cautiously returned to their desks, afraid of being singled out for another warning.

With the spectators dispersed, the crowded corridor quickly became quiet and spacious.

Having successfully extracted the dead man's memories, Yang Jian now held the most critical piece of information.

In the memory, Wang Feng had been working when he suddenly needed to use the restroom. Upon arriving at the corridor, he noticed a long, red wooden bench that had mysteriously appeared there.

Unaware of the supernatural nature of the situation, he felt no fear.

Though curious, Wang Feng prioritized going to the restroom and walked toward the bench without hesitation, paying no mind to the red wooden bench blocking his way.

As Wang Feng tried to step over the bench, for reasons unknown, he stumbled and ended up seated on it.

In an instant, an eerie and terrifying sight unfolded.

On the previously empty red bench, another figure inexplicably appeared.

The individual wore tattered clothes and had a stiff, icy demeanor. Their hollow eyes were wide open, and their withered legs were curled up, hovering above the ground. The figure remained motionless in a disturbingly unnatural sitting posture.

The memory abruptly ended at this point.

A dead person's memories were incomplete—they had gaps.

Yang Jian tried to recall more, but all that surfaced were fragments of Wang Feng's childhood and mundane moments from his life, such as eating, drinking, and working.

The crucial details were missing.

But it was enough.

"I see. The bench mustn't be sat on—there's a ghost on it. Sitting down establishes a dangerous connection between the person and the ghost through the wooden bench as a medium..."

"So, whoever sits on this red bench is attacked by the ghost. But how they're killed remains unknown."

"However, it shouldn't be too dangerous as long as no one sits on the bench. The ghost's threat level seems relatively low."

Yang Jian furrowed his brow slightly.

He was convinced this sinister red bench posed far more danger than it appeared.

After all, it had manifested inside the building without even alerting him. Furthermore, its presence affected the Ghost Domain in the area.

These details suggested that this was an ostensibly simple yet extraordinarily perilous supernatural incident.

"Whatever the level of threat, it needs to be dealt with. Time can't be wasted—if Old Mansion spirals out of control again, who knows what other horrors might be unleashed. The priority now is finding a way to handle the ghost on this red bench."

Yang Jian began contemplating his approach.

The ghost on the red bench couldn't be dismembered with the Firewood Knife, as the memory showed that its feet never touched the ground. Sitting on the bench, it left no traces behind.

Furthermore.

The ghost was invisible—only those seated on the bench could see it.

In other words, to confront it, a ghost-handler would need to sit on the bench themselves, willingly facing the risk of a ghostly assault.

"Feng Quan, don't let anyone interfere with me. If anything happens, handle it yourself. I'm going to deal with this ghostly thing," Yang Jian said.

Feng Quan nodded. "Understood. Leave this to me."

Ignoring the corpse on the floor, Yang Jian approached the red bench.

After a moment of thought and deliberation, he slowly sat down, deliberately inviting proximity to the ghost on top of it.

This action reflected Yang Jian's bold confidence in his unusual nature—he would never dare such recklessness otherwise.

As soon as he sat down, Yang Jian's expression changed.

An indescribable sensation engulfed him—a feeling that couldn't be gleaned from mere memories. It was something that could only be experienced firsthand.

His body was gradually losing control.

No.

It wasn't exactly losing control—it was more like the lower half of his body was rapidly losing sensation.

Not just Yang Jian's physical form, but even the Ghost Shadow was frozen in place at that moment.

"Even the complete Ghost Shadow is suppressed? As expected, the ghost on this red bench is terrifying," Yang Jian thought, maintaining his composure and calm.

And then it came.

Soon.

Directly across from where Yang Jian sat, a horrifying figure suddenly appeared without warning.

The ghost on the bench had manifested.

Chapter 896 Untouchable

Yang Jian, through stealing the lingering memory of a dead person, roughly understood the horror behind the red wooden bench appearing in the building.

At this moment, he voluntarily sat on the red wooden bench, using a certain medium to approach the ghost haunting the bench.

The ghost on the bench doesn't actually exist—or at least cannot be seen by ordinary people. Even Yang Jian's Ghost Eye cannot see it. It's a terrifying entity that cannot manifest in the real world and can only appear through the linkage with the red wooden bench.

But the moment the ghost appeared.

Yang Jian already felt something was wrong.

His lower half instantly lost sensation, as if turned to wood, pinned to the bench and utterly immobile—incapable of struggling, incapable of moving.

This suppression was not limited to his living body; even the Ghost Shadow within him was similarly immobilized.

The Ghost Shadow couldn't move either.

"This sensation is like being nailed down by a Coffin Nail. But while the Coffin Nail suppresses the ghost entirely, this only paralyzes half of my body." Sitting on the red wooden bench, Yang Jian couldn't help but take a deep breath.

Though his body couldn't break free, his upper half could still move.

The situation wasn't all bad.

But now wasn't the time to dwell on such matters.

The ghost on the bench sat right next to Yang Jian.

The terrifying figure of the ghost was almost leaning beside him, enveloped in chilling, dreadful cold—entirely devoid of human warmth. Its outdated attire radiated a sense of antiquity, but such clothing, while acceptable on a person, appeared profoundly eerie when worn by a ghost.

The most inexplicable detail was that the ghost's feet were curled up and did not touch the ground, seemingly fused with the red wooden bench, skeletal and rigid.

Yang Jian observed this horrifying ghost at close range.

The ghost remained motionless on the red wooden bench, like a corpse that had been left there for ages—lifeless and still.

But this unsettling stasis didn't persist for long.

Perhaps sitting on the bench had attracted the ghost's attention, or perhaps it had triggered the ghost's killing pattern.

The ghost on the bench began to move at that moment.

The ghost slowly turned its head to look at Yang Jian.

What kind of face was that?

Blurry and indistinct, as if shrouded in shadow, the only visible features were the black outlines of its eyes. The indistinct facial features paired with those hollow eye sockets created a sight that made one's hair stand on end and sent a chill deep into the heart.

Faced with such a scene, the instinct of being human drives one to struggle to stand, to flee in terror.

But that wasn't possible.

Even after being targeted by the ghost, sitting side by side with it on the same wooden bench rendered escape impossible.

Yang Jian's lower body remained numb, unable to stand, let alone pull away and escape.

"This ghost is going to attack me now."

Suddenly.

A primal warning—a sense of impending danger surged forth.

Even Yang Jian, as he was now, could feel the chilling terror of being targeted by the ghost—the quivering dread running through his veins.

The premonition was accurate.

Sitting on the red wooden bench, its face blurred and eyes hollow, the ghost stared at Yang Jian for several seconds before moving again.

The ghost's dry, skeletal hand rested on the bench and began to slowly rise.

"Make a move."

But at that very moment, Yang Jian acted faster. He thrust the cracked, golden long spear clutched in his hand forward—the end of the spear embedded with a Coffin Nail.

He aimed to pin the ghost before him with the Coffin Nail.

Just one strike would resolve this supernatural attack completely.

"Bang!"

The next instant.

A loud crash echoed.

The Coffin Nail on Yang Jian's spear pierced through the ghost on the bench's body and embedded itself in the wall of the nearby corridor.

The tiles on the wall shattered, leaving a visible mark.

But the ghost remained sitting there.

The Coffin Nail couldn't hit the ghost, passing through it as though it were air—thus, the attempted suppression failed.

Soon after.

Yang Jian felt the ghost's icy touch as its hand grazed the back of his own. An invasive chill crept beneath his skin.

Before he could react, the red wooden bench beneath him suddenly cracked and splintered.

The eerie red bench seemed to collapse, splintering into pieces and scattering on the ground like broken chunks of worn wood.

"Thud!"

The abrupt change sent Yang Jian sprawling to the floor.

Simultaneously, the oppressive force exerted by the red bench dissipated.

Yang Jian's lower body regained sensation and was able to move once more.

"What just happened, did it work?" Feng Quan, who was standing guard at the corridor entrance, immediately asked upon seeing this scene.

Yang Jian's face darkened. He stood up, his eyes reflecting confusion as he glanced at the splintered bench on the floor. "I'm not sure. After I sat on the bench, the ghost appeared and attacked me. I tried suppressing it but failed. What I can't figure out is why the bench suddenly broke."

"It seems that after the ghost attacked me, the bench shattered as well."

"Yang Jian, your nose..." Feng Quan suddenly said.

My nose?

Yang Jian touched his nose. Thick, sticky blood was flowing from it—no longer fresh, slightly congealed, resembling the blood of a corpse.

His expression shifted.

Rolling up his sleeves.

Yang Jian spotted corpse-like spots on his arm alongside uncanny bruising. He touched his chest—his heart was ice-cold, and his heartbeat had long ceased.

"It seems I'm already dead, devoid of vital signs—I must've been killed by the ghost moments ago."

Feng Quan froze for a moment, then said, "Could this ghost erase the life force of living people? Maybe because we're ghost-wielders, we weren't fully killed."

"Possibly. The contact was too brief; I didn't glean much information," Yang Jian replied, simultaneously inspecting his body.

From the moment he sat down to when the bench shattered and sent him to the ground, the entire process took less than a minute.

But within that minute, Yang Jian's body looked as though it'd been lifeless for ten days.

All signs of a living person had disappeared.

Had Yang Jian not been a supernatural being himself, the ghost on the wooden bench would've assuredly killed him.

"Though in killing me, the ghost seems to have paid a price as well. The broken bench should be the result of clashing supernatural forces. But no matter what, the ghost associated with the bench is still more vicious."

Yang Jian's body couldn't withstand the ghost's attack.

Though his body had died, his consciousness remained intact, so the impact wasn't as severe.

"Follow me."

Yang Jian didn't say much, swiftly leaving the corridor to the office area outside.

At this moment.

Dozens of employees on this floor sat frozen at their desks, afraid to move or wander—the scene remaining tightly controlled.

Yang Jian scanned the room.

His gaze ultimately rested on the doorway.

From behind the glass door.

A strange, long red wooden bench remained stationary, placed at the entrance.

In the dimly lit environment, the red paint coating the bench gleamed eerily, almost faintly emitting a glow.

"Of course, the ghost is still there. The red bench is merely the medium—the true ghost is the source. If the source isn't contained, then mediums crafted by supernatural forces will continuously exist and cannot be destroyed."

"We don't yet know the extent of the red bench's appearance. If it's confined to this building, we might be able to manage it. But if it's already spread outside, the situation becomes complicated."

"So we must think of a way to access the ghost directly."

Yang Jian began considering his next move.

This was an unusual supernatural case.

The ghost manifested through the red bench, meaning connecting humans and the ghost required the bench as a medium.

Anything not touching the medium couldn't come into contact with the ghost.

Such circumstances reminded Yang Jian of the Ghost Dream he encountered back in his hometown.

The dream ghost invaded reality through rainwater as its medium.

Thus, the dream ghost could kill people soaked in rainwater. Coincidentally, people sweating profusely during nightmares also aligned with the medium's pattern.

This explained occurrences of death within nightmares.

"Neither the Coffin Nail nor the Firewood Knife can use the bench as a medium to interact with the source ghost." Yang Jian grasped why his supernatural items had been ineffective.

"To reach the ghost on the bench, the contact must be human... or another ghost."

"Clearly, this supernatural event isn't easily solvable."

After pondering for a while longer, Yang Jian began to sense the difficulty of the situation.

For ghost-wielders triggering the medium, enduring the ghost's attack was impossible. Without endurance, sitting on the red bench was tantamount to suicide.

Yang Jian had personally tested it—the ghost's Terror Level was extremely high.

"Is this a huge problem?"

Feng Quan glanced at the distant red bench and asked in a heavy tone. "Should we shelve it for now? While dangerous, the ghost doesn't seem overly active. As long as nobody sits on the bench, there shouldn't be any issues."

"That ghost is extremely well-hidden and highly dangerous. It's indeed a tough problem. Start a file for it—codename: Red Bench." Yang Jian's gaze flickered, a unique plan forming in his mind.

"Alright." Feng Quan nodded.

Just then, the company manager for this floor cautiously approached, saying, "Excuse me, gentlemen, our office hours have concluded. If there's nothing urgent, might we be allowed to clock out and leave?"

Glancing at the time.

It was, indeed, quite late.

Yang Jian glanced at the man.

The manager flinched, hastily correcting himself, "Of course, we're more than happy to cooperate. If necessary, we'd gladly work overtime."

"Leave in the morning. Tonight, you'd best stay here." Yang Jian coldly stated, "I'll only say this once—don't blame me for not warning you if something happens."

It wasn't simply about forbidding them from leaving—there were many incidents yet to unfold tonight.

Moreover, the building had already been breached by supernatural forces.

A group of ordinary people hoping to leave safely after hours?

Yang Jian might agree, but the ghost wouldn't.

"Also, stay away from that red bench. As for the corpses, they'll be handled tomorrow." After delivering his warning, Yang Jian turned and left.

The manager stood there, stunned.

Did this qualify as an investigation?

Nothing seemed to have been resolved—only odd behavior and cryptic remarks.

Puzzled, confused.

But he didn't dare ask further; after all, both men were armed and carried credentials.

Chapter 897 The Evacuating Crowd

After Yang Jian investigated the existence of the red wooden bench, he had developed a general understanding of the supernatural incident.

But the more he understood, the more uneasy he felt.

So, after leaving that office building floor, he and Feng Quan returned to the top-floor office of Wang Chaling.

"Captain, what's the situation? What's the deal with this red wooden bench? Can it be resolved?" As soon as Yang Jian appeared, Huang Ziya couldn't contain herself and stood up, asking urgently.

Xiong Wenwen yawned: "Xiao Yang, can you do it or not? Daddy Xiong is so bored I'm about to fall asleep. Can we go home tonight? My mom just called me again, asking me to be home before midnight. She also said she had something to tell you."

"It's hard to handle, isn't it? If it were easy, it'd already be resolved by now."

Tong Qian looked at Yang Jian, roughly guessing that the investigation process had hit a snag.

Someone like Yang Jian, wielding the Coffin Nail and Firewood Knife, could usually resolve ordinary supernatural incidents within minutes.

The fact that the eerie red wooden bench was still present in the building indicated that the incident had yet to be resolved.

"This supernatural incident is a bit different from others. The ghost is sitting on this red wooden bench; the problem is, you can't see it," Yang Jian said, glancing at the red wooden bench in the middle of the corridor not far away.

"The red wooden bench is the medium. Only people sitting on it can see the ghost sitting there. However, once they meet the ghost, they'll be attacked immediately. I triggered this killing mechanism deliberately to lure the ghost out, thinking I could deal with it easily. To my surprise, without the medium, I couldn't use this supernatural weapon to touch the ghost."

"The ghost, on the other hand, could touch me, and I ended up being killed by it."

As he said this, Yang Jian raised his arm.

The dull, lifeless skin resembled that of a corpse, covered in mottled patches, as if he'd been dead for some time.

"Your body is dead now?"

Tong Qian pondered briefly before coming to a conclusion.

Yang Jian had lost every characteristic of a living human. The only reason he was still alive was that his consciousness was sustained by the Ghost Shadow.

This was an anomaly.

Neither a living human nor a full-fledged ghost.

"So you guys can't fend off this attack either, including Feng Quan," Yang Jian said.

Xiong Wenwen jumped in: "Well, what about Daddy Xiong? If I pull a lucky draw, I'll definitely be fine. Right, Xiao Yang?"

"Wanna give it a try?" Yang Jian glanced at him.

Xiong Wenwen immediately shrank back: "No way!"

Who would dare try that? If things went wrong, you'd lose your life.

"If this killing mechanism works as described, then as long as no one sits on the red wooden bench, there should be no danger. This makes the level of threat for this supernatural incident relatively low,

doesn't it? Just instruct everyone in the building to avoid the bench, and the ghost killings can be prevented," Huang Ziya said.

"So it shouldn't be that nerve-wracking."

"Yeah, yeah, I agree with Daddy Xiong too," Xiong Wenwen nodded.

Yang Jian said, "The ghost is awakening. The number of red benches is increasing, and the killing mechanism is evolving. Don't oversimplify supernatural incidents."

"You have a point. So what should we do next? The clock in the mansion is still ringing, and the recalibration should still be ongoing. Someone is controlling the pendulum clock, rebooting the dangerous time sequences within the mansion. This means that every time the mansion's clock chimes, it represents a reboot, and the number of ghosts inside the mansion will increase."

"At this rate, it won't take more than a few hours before the number of ghosts inside the mansion reaches an alarming level. Dadong City will face unimaginable horrors."

Tong Qian frowned, showing visible concern.

Although Li Jun and Wang Chaling had already gone to intervene, the continued clock sounds indicated that their progress was not going well.

"I know, which is why I plan to take you all out of here," Yang Jian said.

Feng Quan asked, "What about the red wooden bench incident?"

"We'll deal with it if we can; otherwise, leave it for later. Everything will have to wait until tonight's over. If the mansion loses control, the area at risk won't just be this building... Anyway, I'll take you all out of here first."

Yang Jian spoke, his Ghost Eye scanning the surroundings, and he had already noticed that there were more and more red wooden benches in the building.

Previously, they were only scattered in corners and corridors; now, they were almost everywhere.

The signs of supernatural corrosion within the building were becoming increasingly evident.

If they stayed here any longer, Yang Jian's team could likely face danger.

"Should the ordinary people in the building also evacuate with us?" Tong Qian suddenly asked.

Yang Jian replied, "No, it's better for them to stay here and not move around. We'll deal with the situation outside first and then decide on this."

"Why?" Tong Qian asked.

At some point, Feng Quan had lit a cigarette. "Probably to avoid spreading the ghosts from this building," he said while taking a drag. "Any wandering person might take the ghost with them, which would make the situation worse."

"We can't possibly control everyone in this building. They won't listen to us," Huang Ziya added.

"We can't manage everyone, but that thing will help control them." Yang Jian pointed to the red wooden bench.

"Do you think an ordinary person has a high chance of leaving this building alive without the help of people like us?"

Tong Qian replied, "If a normal person gets targeted by a ghost, then they'll definitely die. However, there may be some people who aren't being targeted."

"If someone isn't being targeted, their leaving the building doesn't matter. But we can't interfere in that process," Yang Jian said.

"Understood." Tong Qian fell silent for a moment.

This was indeed the best solution.

If they forcibly took all the occupants of the building out, the ghost might follow one of them out too.

So, for the people here, they either stayed put for the night until the mansion situation was resolved, or they took their chances leaving on their own.

Because those targeted by ghosts had no way of escaping, only those untouched by ghostly influence would be able to leave safely.

"However, to prevent further escalation, I have an emergency plan in mind. Let's talk more about it after we leave." Yang Jian resumed his actions.

He led Feng Quan, Tong Qian, Xiong Wenwen, Huang Ziya, and the Ghost Child to evacuate the building.

The red wooden benches blocking the path seemed to have suppressed Yang Jian's Ghost Domain, forcing them to use the most mundane method to leave.

The elevator.

Yet, unfortunately, all the elevators in the building had malfunctioned.

An unknown supernatural force had interfered with the system, triggering the safety mechanism and halting the elevators mid-floor.

The team could only use the emergency stairway.

But the building was so tall that descending floor by floor might take an unknown amount of time.

"Feng Quan." Yang Jian stood at the stairway entrance and looked down.

He could see many red wooden benches placed throughout the stairwell. These benches were stationed on every floor, increasing in number as they descended, seemingly intent on blocking everyone's way.

"Let me give it a try," Feng Quan understood Yang Jian's implication.

Yang Jian's Ghost Domain was restricted, but Feng Quan's might be different.

Each person's Ghost Domain was unique. In different environments, the effects of suppression varied.

Feng Quan's expression slightly shifted.

The entire floor soon began to fill with thick fog.

The fog engulfed everyone's figures, becoming denser and denser before gradually dissipating. When the fog vanished, the group had disappeared along with it.

The fog descended.

It seeped down the building from the upper floors.

"My Ghost Domain is also affected. The red benches are like a wall, blocking even the Ghost Fog. However, the blockade isn't total; I'm still able to operate within a limited area. But the suppression deepens as we go down," Feng Quan's voice echoed faintly as his figure flickered within the fog.

At the same time, the environment within the fog was rapidly shifting.

"This indicates the supernatural intrusion is coming from the lower floors. We just noticed it late because we're on the upper floors," Yang Jian analyzed from within the dense fog.

"But it seems the ghost hasn't completely blocked off the building. We still have a chance to get out."

His speculation proved correct.

The Ghost Fog descended from the upper floors and finally stopped at the building's ground-floor lobby.

The fog dispersed.

The figures of Yang Jian, Feng Quan, and the others emerged.

They immediately scanned their surroundings, instinctively staying alert.

"No wonder the elevators stopped; they were blocked here," Yang Jian said.

Turning back, he saw several elevators with open doors. The inside lights flickered erratically.

Within the elevator cabins.

Red wooden benches were crammed in like random stacks of building blocks, filling every inch.

Among them were several twisted corpses wedged into the gaps between the benches.

These were ordinary people from the building, victims of the supernatural attack, who had died inside the elevators.

However, the group's attention was not on the broken elevators but on the lobby itself.

Where it had once been empty, the lobby was now full of seated figures.

No.

It was full of corpses.

Each corpse sat stiffly upright on a red wooden bench, their skin pallid and lifeless.

Their sitting postures were peculiar—it wasn't centered on the benches but off to one side, as if purposely leaving space for someone else to sit.

"So the supernatural occurrence has indeed evolved. Judging by this, it seems the ghost is inviting us to take a seat," Feng Quan said, inhaling deeply, his already grim face looking even darker.

"I think these red benches are more of an obstruction. They've been blocking our way since the beginning, trying to trap us here," Tong Qian suggested.

Xiong Wenwen shrank behind Yang Jian: "Who's going to scout ahead?"

At this point.

The Ghost Domain couldn't extend further; the nearby red benches had impeded its growth. To leave, the only choice was to physically move the benches and exit via the main door.

Everyone turned to look at him.

"Don't look at me. I'm not going," Xiong Wenwen said.

"Maybe you should try foreseeing the outcome—see what happens if we charge straight ahead," Huang Ziya proposed.

Xiong Wenwen replied, "Using my supernatural foresight for an as-yet untriggered supernatural event isn't reliable. Don't blame me if something unexpected happens."

It wasn't that he couldn't foresee events, but predicting the outcome of a supernatural incident directly was imprecise. He'd faced this challenge before at the Caesar Hotel.

As a result, most of Xiong Wenwen's foresight was focused on predicting the life or death of ghost tamers, using individual survival as a medium to assess nearby dangers or ghost presence.

So his foresight required a person as the medium.

Predicting ghosts directly was a challenge.

"Let it go scout," Yang Jian suggested, remaining cautious and not reckless. He pointed at the barefoot Ghost Child standing nearby with its head tilted.

"That's actually a good idea," the others agreed.

Everyone knew that the Ghost Child was wearing the Ghost Shroud.

The Ghost Shroud itself was both a ghost and a horrifying supernatural artifact. When worn by a living person, it could fend off attacks from malevolent spirits. But as a trade-off, it could never be removed, the wearer would be eroded, and eventually become a ghost in the shroud.

Thus, Yang Jian had dressed the Ghost Child in the Ghost Shroud.

Thanks to this, no ghost had yet managed to harm the Ghost Child.

"Go forward and leave this building," Yang Jian ordered the Ghost Child.

The Ghost Child, an enigmatic being with traits of both a ghost and a living creature, never hesitated to follow Yang Jian's commands.

At the command.

The Ghost Child immediately began running barefoot towards the building's entrance.

It ran straight ahead, without pausing or hesitating even as it passed rows of corpses seated on the eerie red benches.

The group watched the Ghost Child closely, anticipating its encounter with any further developments.

Chapter 898 - The Burning Old Mansion

Just as Yang Jian was about to lead his team to evacuate Ning'an Building.

Meanwhile, elsewhere.

Outside the ancient mansion in Dadong City.

Wang Chaling and Li Jun had already passed through the iron gate and entered the premises of the mansion. However, they didn't venture inside immediately; rushing in recklessly would be foolish. Instead, they began discussing and observing the surroundings carefully.

"So this is your Wang Family's ancient mansion? What's the deal with those coffins at the entrance? Are they holding ghosts? Doesn't seem like it. If they were, the place would've been uninhabitable by now."

Li Jun's voice was hoarse, as if his throat had been scorched—it was grating, strange, and unsettling, hard for anyone to get used to.

His eyes lingered on the coffins scattered throughout the courtyard, some old, some new.

The sheer number of coffins in such a place was something no one could afford to ignore.

"The coffins contain the dead members of my Wang Family."

Wang Chaling said, "Did you think I was the only one left in my family? The Wang Family used to be a large clan. But having dealt with supernatural events for so long, we gradually perished, one by one. The deceased members of the Wang Family were placed in these coffins and left in the courtyard of the mansion."

"Why not cremate them and bury them properly?" Li Jun frowned and asked.

"For... certain reasons," Wang Chaling avoided elaborating, sidestepping the topic. "Li Jun, do you plan to just barge right in?"

Li Jun was holding a pocket watch.

Yang Jian had given it to him before their departure. The watch was synchronized to the time inside the mansion.

But now, it seemed to have lost its purpose.

The reason? The time on the pocket watch fluctuated unpredictably, and the constant chiming of the pendulum clock inside the mansion added to the chaos. In this situation, there was no longer any correct sense of time within the mansion.

"Rushing in won't achieve much. If solving the problem inside the mansion were viable, Yang Jian would have done it already. His absence is proof that venturing deeper into the mansion is meaningless. Besides, time within the mansion is now under someone else's control. If we go in, we'll just get lost—there's no other possibility."

Li Jun analyzed rationally. He had evidently matured and improved.

Wang Chaling squinted slightly. "It seems Yang Jian didn't bother warning you about this."

"We're all team leaders; we're adults. Everyone knows what they should and shouldn't do. Besides, his choice to stay out is the biggest warning of all."

Li Jun said, "If you can't see through this, then with Yang Jian's philosophy, you'd deserve to die anyway—better now than becoming a liability later on. Honestly, it's good he stayed outside. Dachang City needs someone like him to hold down the fort. I can't do it—I'm not as ruthless as Yang Jian. And you can't either—you're not as decisive as he is."

"That's true. The odds are against us. Entering the mansion is suicide. Yang Jian made the right call by staying out... unless we can find the right timeline to enter in." Wang Chaling smiled faintly, glossing over Li Jun's remarks about Yang Jian.

"What's the current time outside?" Li Jun asked.

Wang Chaling replied, "9:20."

"At exactly this time, we'll burn the mansion to the ground. Whoever's inside, trying to sync the clocks and lure the ghosts to 9:20, I won't let them succeed. We may not be able to deal with the ghost, but we can deal with the one manipulating the pendulum clock."

Behind Li Jun's sunglasses, his scorched, hollow eye sockets flickered with eerie Ghost Flames.

The flames carried no heat—instead, they radiated a chilling coldness, yet they could ignite the living and burn them to death.

"What about me? What should I do?" Wang Chaling asked with a sly smile. "I'm more than happy to take orders from you."

"Be vigilant of our surroundings. The moment I take action, I'll stir up the hornet's nest. If anyone moves against me from inside, you handle them. I don't want to manage burning down the mansion while also fending off ambushes." Li Jun replied.

"No problem. I'd be happy to assist." Wang Chaling responded.

Li Jun shot him a long, scrutinizing glance. "Whatever your motives are, control the situation first. If the mansion spirals out of control, headquarters will hold you accountable. Even someone from the third generation of the Wang Family can't escape blame."

This was both a caution and a reminder.

Team leaders with ulterior motives were plenty. Li Jun was well aware. That's why he preferred dealing with Yang Jian over someone like Wang Chaling.

Headquarters' assessments and reports described Yang Jian as someone with a deeply rooted, traditional farmer's mentality—content to guard his small territory in Dachang City and live a modest life. He disliked creating trouble, only taking up arms when his "crops" were threatened. Beyond that, he had neither dreams nor ambition.

"You're overthinking it, Captain Li. I fully support headquarters. We should interact more often in the future to dispel misunderstandings and grievances." Wang Chaling said with a faint smile.

"Let's move."

Li Jun didn't waste time. He strode toward one of the mansion's windows.

The old window frame was already rotten, leaving behind only an empty space through which the interior of the mansion could be seen.

Dim, decrepit, abandoned, oppressive.

The atmosphere reeked of something disturbingly eerie.

With the recurring chimes of the pendulum clock from within, some sort of equilibrium had been disrupted. Supernatural phenomena were intensifying.

Li Jun lightly rested a hand on the windowsill.

In the next moment—

A ghostly green flame began spreading from his arm outward.

The window ignited, followed by the decayed blue bricks of the wall. The Ghost Flame began rapidly consuming everything.

The walls burned. The main hall of the mansion burned. The corridors burned. Even the depths of the darkness were being driven out by the flames.

In no time, the entire mansion was engulfed by Ghost Flames, blazing fiercely.

"Ah!"

A piercing scream echoed through the mansion, filled with agony.

A humanoid silhouette cloaked entirely in Ghost Flames flailed in torment, running back and forth in the mansion's main hall. Charred footprints accompanied a nauseating stench of burnt corpses. Yet, suddenly, the flaming figure vanished into thin air, as if its presence had been nothing more than an illusion.

It was likely a powerful ghost.

Under attack from the Ghost Flames, the ghost was being suppressed.

Within the mansion—

A gaunt middle-aged man with graying temples sat in an old rocking chair, his eyes closed, as if calmly awaiting a certain moment.

Nearby, Zhang Qing, back in his wheelchair, wore an expression of unease, frequently glancing at the man in the rocking chair.

Wan Tong squatted nearby, chain-smoking, cigarette after cigarette.

Then, suddenly—

Chen Qiaoyang, the man in the rocking chair, abruptly opened his eyes and stood up.

In the next moment—

The rocking chair he had just vacated was suddenly set ablaze by an eerie green flame. At the same time, fire began seeping out from cracks in the floor and walls.

In no time—

The floor was aflame.

The walls and the ceiling were engulfed by fire.

Everything around them was consumed by inexplicable flames.

"This is... Ghost Flame? Damned Ghost Flame! Li Jun is here. He means to burn the entire mansion and incinerate us!" Zhang Qing cried out in alarm, panic written all over his face.

As one of the team leaders from headquarters—

It was standard practice for ghost tamers to gather intelligence on their own kind.

Going against headquarters meant that any day they might face a team leader's purge. Naturally, they were well-informed about Li Jun.

"So he didn't die in the Ghost Painting incident after all." Wan Tong stood up abruptly. He could already smell the burnt scent of his own body.

The strangest part was that he didn't feel any pain.

Somehow, it felt entirely natural, as though it were meant to be.

"Ghost Flame Li Jun? Who's that? Fall asleep for a bit, and suddenly someone shows up looking for a fight. These young folk really don't let us rest, do they?" Chen Qiaoyang straightened his hair and clothes unhurriedly, his expression serious.

"He's a team leader from headquarters, same rank as that Yang Jian. He was formerly a senior officer, deeply vindictive against evil. Running into Yang Jian might not be too bad—so long as we don't provoke him, he won't bother us. But encountering Li Jun means he's already marked us for death." Zhang Qing explained.

"Oh? A senior officer, you say?"

Chen Qiaoyang blinked briefly. His eyes shifted as though weighing his options.

"What a predicament. I'd rather face that young Yang fellow than deal with Li Jun. It just wouldn't sit right if a man of such stature perished at the hands of a nobody like me."

Zhang Qing glanced at him, surprised.

Who would've thought this old fox harbored such a sentimental side?

Chen Qiaoyang paced back and forth, hands clasped behind his back, visibly anxious.

Yet, behind him, several unnerving footsteps echoed.

The steps varied in size, and wherever they tread on the Ghost Flames, scorch marks were left on the ground. Strangely, the flames in those areas were extinguished and didn't ignite again.

The spectral Ghost Flames spread like wildfire.

The only exception was the area around Chen Qiaoyang, which remained unaffected as if an invisible force suppressed the flames' expansion.

Thus, a safe zone temporarily formed.

"Chen Qiaoyang, we're already targeted by three team leaders—Yang Jian, Wang Chaling, and Li Jun. If we don't come up with something, we're dead. There's no way they'll let the mansion's events go unchecked." Zhang Qing and Wan Tong hurriedly moved closer, entering the safe zone.

Yet the Ghost Flames continued to spread.

At this moment, faint green sparks speckled the air.

The flames seemed to ignite the very air, engulfing the entire space.

"Is Li Jun insane? Using Ghost Flames like this—doesn't he fear the resurrection of his own ghost?" Zhang Qing's heart pounded wildly. He felt that soon even this safe zone would become perilous.

"We should just fight our way out. With your abilities, escaping here shouldn't be too difficult. There's no way Li Jun could stop you."

He anxiously urged Chen Qiaoyang to lead an escape.

In a scenario like this, regardless of the outcome, both he and Wan Tong, as surviving Pendulum Clock Cursors, were practically already dead.

"No rush. As capable as today's youngsters are, they're still inexperienced. It's too early for any of them to take me down here." Chen Qiaoyang seemed unfazed by the widespread, all-consuming Ghost Flames.

He appeared to be contemplating something else, not even acknowledging the imminent danger.

"Dong! Dong! Dong!"

Suddenly—

The mansion's pendulum clock chimed again.

Time was being manipulated once more.

The Ghost Flames engulfing the mansion abruptly vanished into nothingness.

"The mansion's been reset. Indeed, the one controlling the pendulum clock is a tough adversary. The mansion, once ignited, was displaced to another timeframe." Wang Chaling observed as the scene unfolded.

"It's now 9:21."

"The pocket watch still reads 9:20. The person controlling the clock has rewound time by one minute."

Li Jun rasped, "So the Ghost Flames persist—they've just been delayed by one minute."

Wang Chaling's eyes narrowed. "That confirms the person we're after is inside the mansion. If we enter now, we'll be in the same timeframe as them. If they reset time, we'll reset too. If they rewind, we'll also rewind. Time won't be relevant to us anymore."

"Then let's stop waiting." Li Jun understood immediately and charged into the mansion.

"Wait!" Wang Chaling wanted to stop him, but it was too late.

Li Jun had already rushed through the mansion's open doors.

The next moment—

The pendulum clock chimed.

Li Jun disappeared.

The mansion's timeline was scrambled again.

"What recklessness." Wang Chaling sighed eerily.

He had only been analyzing the situation, but Li Jun couldn't restrain himself and acted prematurely.

Wang Chaling had a lingering concern: this particular timeframe might be a deliberate trap left by the enemy. Entering without caution might mean confinement alongside vengeful spirits.

Even if it wasn't a trap, if the enemy exposed a vulnerability, it was likely because they were prepared. The outcome was still uncertain—whether they'd overcome the enemy or be outmaneuvered remained to be seen.

Chapter 899 - The Most Terrifying Taboo

Inside and outside the old mansion, the actions of Li Jun and Wang Chaling continued.

Meanwhile, in the first-floor lobby of the Ning'an Building in Dadong City, Yang Jian and his team were still deliberating on how to resolve the supernatural incident codenamed "Red Wooden Bench."

At this moment.

The empty lobby was filled with rows of long red wooden benches, and on each bench sat an eerie corpse. These bodies seemed to have died not long ago, yet their appearances were grotesque—some were blue-black with bruising, others twisted and flushed red, and some even preserved rigid expressions of terror.

They were all ordinary people who had triggered the ghost's killing pattern and died within the building.

But whether they were still "human" now was unsure.

At this instant.

The Ghost Child, wearing ceremonial burial robes stripped from a corpse and barefoot, ran straight toward the lobby doors. It passed the first red wooden bench that stood in its way.

The corpse seated on the bench remained motionless, as if completely indifferent, showing no reaction.

The Ghost Child continued forward.

It weaved its way through the gaps between the red wooden benches.

"Is it deliberately avoiding contact with those red benches?" Yang Jian observed and noticed that even the Ghost Child—an existence akin to a ghost—actively avoided the benches.

This indicated that the benches were dangerous—extremely dangerous.

Previously, when he had voluntarily risked a ghost's attack, it was indeed reckless. If he hadn't already become an anomaly himself, he'd likely have been playing with his own death.

The Ghost Child's pace slowed as it advanced.

The gaps between the benches became fewer and fewer, and when it approached the entrance, the Ghost Child came to a complete stop.

It stood frozen in place, as if suddenly stuck.

There was no way forward.

The red benches seemed to have connected, forming a barrier in front of it.

"It stopped?" Tong Qian frowned.

Feng Quan said in a deep voice, "Because there's no path ahead."

"Why no path? The way isn't completely blocked. It could just step over, couldn't it? Maybe this thing just lacks brains and can't think of a solution," Xiong Wenwen chimed in, peering in and giving his opinion.

Feng Quan shot him a glance. "The way ghosts perceive things is different from humans. The Ghost Child is a product that exists between a ghost and a Ghost Slave. If it has stopped, it means only one thing: the way forward has been completely blocked by the ghost. You might think stepping over is possible, but for all you know, the moment you cross, the ghost might target you."

"At that moment, forget escaping—staying alive will be a problem."

"But... Yang Jian, with all of us here and two Ghost Domains on hand, there's no reason we should be stumped by some wooden benches, is there?" Feng Quan evaluated.

Yang Jian replied, "Getting out isn't hard, but getting out safely requires caution. There's no rush; we're not entirely trapped. Taking our time might even help us figure out a way to resolve this supernatural incident."

"Now, since the Ghost Child can't make it through, this shows there are no loopholes in the path forward. We'll need a more forceful approach."

He adjusted his strategy.

"How do we do that?" asked Tong Qian.

"Just watch. I'll handle this myself. These red wooden benches are far too dangerous for you all. Once you're targeted—whether you're a ghost handler or not—it's almost certain death."

With that, he gestured for the others to step aside.

It wasn't about showing off—rather, no one else could contribute much to solving this situation.

Yang Jian walked up to the nearest red wooden bench.

The corpse seated there was cold, unmoving, with closed eyes, as if in a deep sleep.

But Yang Jian could clearly sense the presence of an unfathomable supernatural force within that body.

It was as if an invisible, malevolent ghost were silently influencing everything around it.

"The ghost tied to the bench can't be detected through traditional mediums and doesn't exist in the real world. Thus, neither the Firewood Knife nor the Coffin Nail can affect it. Furthermore, it only attacks those also sitting on the bench. Its killing pattern is relatively straightforward and not easily triggered."

"So, the best way to suppress this red wooden bench temporarily is to make another ghost sit on it."

"A ghost attacking another ghost—this kind of supernatural interference should neutralize the phenomenon temporarily. After all, ghosts are unkillable."

This was Yang Jian's contingency plan.

However, this method could only contain the paranormal briefly; it couldn't completely erase it.

Now the critical question—where to find a ghost that could be made to sit on the bench?

The ghost also needed to be controllable, without any risk of going out of control. Otherwise, one incident would multiply into two.

"Can that Ghost Child handle it?" Yang Jian's gaze shifted to the Ghost Child, which was hesitating near the benches.

Probably not.

The Ghost Child wasn't a real ghost, but a unique creation—it might not share the same unkillable trait as a true ghost.

If it died on the bench, the loss would be disastrous.

"Then there's the headless corpse of Liu Baimu I locked away earlier. That's also a ghost, already in the process of resurrection and extremely dangerous... no, that won't work. Liu Baimu's body is too wild and wouldn't just obediently sit on the bench."

Yang Jian quickly eliminated several options in his mind.

Finally.

His gaze fell on the tall Ghost Shadow beneath his own feet.

Previous tests had proven one thing:

Even after he sat on these benches and experienced the ghost's attack, though his body had been "killed," the Ghost Shadow remained largely unaffected.

Whatever entity resided within the benches couldn't kill the Ghost Shadow.

"Guess I'll have to give this a try. Let's see just how far the Ghost Shadow's limits extend—and pray I don't end up killing myself in the process," Yang Jian thought to himself, feeling a mix of caution and eagerness.

He needed to know whether his newfound resilience was as reliable as he'd hoped.

He hadn't been an anomaly for long, and many of his abilities still required testing through experience.

This was an opportunity.

Moreover, the prior cases gave him at least some measure of confidence.

Yang Jian remained unmoving, and the black Ghost Shadow beneath his feet rose.

The Ghost Shadow loomed tall—over two meters as it enveloped Yang Jian's relatively slender frame.

Once upright, it moved with lifelike intent, taking several steps forward before sitting on the nearest red wooden bench.

Yes, it sat down by choice.

The ghost-killing pattern instantly took effect.

Suddenly.

The icy corpse already seated on the bench jerked. It opened its dull, lifeless eyes wide and twisted its head toward the Ghost Shadow, as though truly coming back to life to stare down its target.

But the Ghost Shadow was a ghost too.

The ghost targeted another ghost.

The killing pattern had been triggered.

Yet, the next moment.

Before anything catastrophic occurred, the red wooden bench beneath them snapped and exploded. The corpse resting there toppled, seemingly losing the supernatural force that had sustained it.

"What just happened?" This sudden development left Tong Qian, Huang Ziya, and Xiong Wenwen wide-eyed.

Having witnessed something similar before, Feng Quan sneered faintly. "A clever maneuver. He used the Ghost Shadow to activate the ghost's killing pattern, leveraging the unkillable traits of ghosts to force a supernatural clash. The red wooden bench, as a medium, couldn't withstand such a conflict and broke apart."

After destroying the first bench, Yang Jian didn't stop. He advanced, and the Ghost Shadow sat down again, once more enduring the ghost's attack.

But the attack had scarcely begun before the bench exploded, unable to endure the clash between the two entities.

Step by step, Yang Jian's Ghost Shadow cleared a path. One by one, the red wooden benches shattered, reduced to scattered wood chips and debris.

"Damn, that's it? Xiao Yang, you're amazing!" Xiong Wenwen exclaimed in awe.

"There's definitely risk. Each time, it's equivalent to enduring a deadly ghost attack. Yang Jian is gambling each time—if he couldn't withstand it, he'd truly be dead by now," Feng Quan said gravely.

"The Ghost Shadow's Terror Level might not be as high as expected, but its perfect ghost traits make it unmatched. Just the fact that it can't be killed allows me to move with near-absolute freedom," Yang Jian thought as even he felt some surprise.

This was his boldest experiment yet.

And the results were promising.

The Ghost Shadow, retaining a living consciousness, was unkillable. Even when subjected to the killing patterns of other ghosts, it remained resilient.

Unless he encountered a ghost capable of erasing his living consciousness or stealing its fragments, Yang Jian appeared untouchable.

Step by cautious step.

The benches were all destroyed, and the corpses atop them collapsed without their supernatural foundations.

Yang Jian had forcibly carved a path out of the building.

"Let's go. This route is safe now," Yang Jian said.

He walked out of the haunted building, taking the Ghost Child and Xiong Wenwen with him.

Once outside.

The oppressive supernatural atmosphere that had been suffocating them vanished—Yang Jian felt an inexplicable lightness wash over him.

"Looks like it was just a scare. I thought it'd be a much bigger problem, but it turned out to be relatively easy," Huang Ziya commented, toying with her hair while stealing glances at Yang Jian.

Having someone of Captain Level lead them certainly made a difference.

The nickname "Brother Tui" was well-deserved.

Xiong Wenwen frequently calling him "Xiao Yang" had to stop—it was clearly a habit that would eventually get him punched.

Yang Jian turned to glance back at the building.

Most of the lights in the Ning'an Building had gone out. Those that remained flickered erratically, as though impacted by some unseen force.

This proved that the ghost was still within the building, influencing its entirety.

"Tong Qian, Huang Ziya, seal this area off, including the location of the old mansion. Make the perimeter as large as possible—headquarters should assist with this as well. Feng Quan, I want you to monitor this building. The ghost will eventually spread its influence, but not tonight. Your task is to ensure these red wooden benches don't appear elsewhere."

After taking one last look, Yang Jian began issuing orders.

"Got it. We'll take care of it right away," Tong Qian nodded.

Xiong Wenwen asked, "Xiao Yang, what about me? Am I free to go back and sleep now?"

"You're coming with me to check on the old mansion and see what's happening on Li Jun and Wang Chaling's end. Also, we need a way to retrieve Li Yang. He's likely stuck somewhere since he hasn't regrouped by now," Yang Jian answered.

At this point, Yang Jian didn't really need many companions—just the Ghost Child and Xiong Wenwen, with his precognition, sufficed.

"What? No, absolutely not—I'm not going there! That place is haunted," Xiong Wenwen protested immediately, shaking his head fervently.

Without hesitation, Yang Jian grabbed Xiong Wenwen. "You're going whether you like it or not. With you like this now, are you seriously still afraid of dying? Worst case, I'll just revive you."

Xiong Wenwen's body felt unnaturally light, as though it had no real weight.

His "body" was merely a curious paper effigy, no longer human flesh.

"Revive me?" Xiong Wenwen's eyes widened. "Seriously?"

"Of course," Yang Jian replied. With that, red light began to envelop them as his Ghost Domain expanded.

The next moment.

Yang Jian, Xiong Wenwen, and the Ghost Child vanished into thin air.

At the entrance of the building, only Feng Quan, Tong Qian, and Huang Ziya remained.

The three exchanged glances before scattering to carry out their respective tasks.

Shortly thereafter, dense fog began to roll in around the Ning'an Building. Headquarters swiftly issued orders to seal off the entire area. Anyone within the perimeter was evacuated, though no new entries were allowed.

Meanwhile, the bells from the old mansion had begun to chime less frequently.

This suggested that the time synchronization was gradually stabilizing.

Progress was faster than anticipated.

Within the old mansion, Li Jun now stood alone in the desolate space. Wearing sunglasses, he tilted his head slightly, scanning his surroundings.

Ghost Flames flickered.

The eerie green glow of the flames cast haunting reflections all around.

"Who's causing chaos in Dadong City? Show yourself," Li Jun demanded, his raspy voice echoing through the stillness with forcefulness and righteousness.

His voice reverberated throughout the old mansion like a solemn command, reaching into shadowy depths.

At first, there was no response, but unexpectedly, someone soon replied: "Li Jun, seeing as you're a young Special Forces Major General, I'll let this slide. Leave now. My grudge with the Wang Family is a personal matter. When it's settled, I'll find time to visit headquarters."

"Perhaps we might even have the opportunity to collaborate in the future."

The voice belonged to Chen Qiaoyang, though its source was indeterminate.

It seemed to echo from upstairs—or was it nearby?

Yet Li Jun could only hear the voice, not see the figure.

"Playing games, are we? The Wang Family's old mansion is rife with hidden perils. My duty is to seal this place. If you don't want to be listed as a wanted criminal, surrender now and step out. Whatever personal matters you have with the Wang Family can be explained to headquarters—they'll ensure justice is served. But if you think you can cause a supernatural incident because of personal grudges—"

"I'll take you down right here and now."

Li Jun, known for his hot temper, had no patience for lawless individuals prone to stirring trouble.

"Why are you youngsters so stubborn these days? I'm already showing goodwill, yet you still don't get it," Chen Qiaoyang's voice carried a trace of exasperation.

"You won't even reveal yourself. Why should I trust you? Let me make this clear: this is not a negotiation, but an order. Comply, cease resistance, and step out. Otherwise, prepare to be neutralized. The word 'compromise' doesn't exist in my vocabulary."

Li Jun's unwavering sense of duty was clear.

He understood this mansion presented significant danger. Allowing the clocks to synchronize and reset the mansion's time would result in catastrophe.

The safety of the entire Dadong City rested on his decisions.

Thus, he knew exactly how to proceed against such a criminal.

"Talking big about killing me... as if it's that simple. The Wang Family's second generation couldn't do it back then—they had to lure me into their dungeon and trap me there. What's your basis for thinking you can kill me, Chen Qiaoyang?" Chen Qiaoyang's tone grew colder, clearly irritated.

"Just because I respect your rank doesn't mean I won't put you down."

Li Jun retorted firmly, "Then try me. Let's see who takes down whom."

"Hah! Bold and brash. Trying to bait me into revealing myself? 'Capture the king to win the game,' right? Fine, I'll oblige. Your straightforwardness deserves some respect—I won't play coy."

As his words fell.

An echo of sharp, deliberate footsteps resonated from the upstairs corridor.

A blurry figure began to materialize.

Chen Qiaoyang stepped out onto the second-floor balcony.

He could have subdued Li Jun without showing himself. But out of an odd sense of respect, he chose to confront him face-to-face.

In the past, Ghost Shepherds never revealed themselves lightly.

The living could only see ghosts; they never saw the Ghost Shepherds behind the scenes.

"Strike."

Upon spotting Chen Qiaoyang, Li Jun wasted no time, identifying him as the culprit responsible for winding the clocks and attempting to restart the mansion. He intended to neutralize him immediately to bring an end to the incident.

Ghost Flames erupted.

Once again, they enveloped the entire old mansion.

The light distorted their surroundings, blurring their forms. Li Jun vanished entirely from sight.

His Ghost Domain could still function inside the mansion.

It's worth noting Yang Jian had previously been unable to deploy his Ghost Domain here.

"Alright, I'll indulge this youngster. The mansion's time has stabilized for now. Use whatever tricks you like—let's see what makes the current captains so remarkable."

Chen Qiaoyang seemed intent on testing his own prowess against Li Jun, eager to assess modern ghost handlers' capabilities.

He wanted to confirm whether his Ghost Shepherding methods had been rendered obsolete by time.

Pushing around lackeys like Zhang Qing and Wan Tong meant nothing. Only battling top-tier ghost handlers could provide clarity.

Li Jun vanished, leaving no trace behind.

Meanwhile, Chen Qiaoyang's body erupted into green flames—the Ghost Flames ignited him inside-out, as though he were spontaneously combusting.

"Intrusive Ghost Domain? That's an outdated tactic. Don't you know that while invading others, you yourself become vulnerable to invasion?" Chen Qiaoyang chuckled, the flames on his body now dimming.

But no.

They weren't dimming—they were being contained.

The Ghost Flames twisted unnaturally, forming the vivid impression of a face—Li Jun's face—on Chen Qiaoyang's skin.

Li Jun, now trapped, struggled mightily, seemingly shouting in fury, though no sound escaped.

Gradually, his resistance weakened—a profoundly oppressive force appeared to be overwhelming him.

Li Jun had been subdued.

Imprisoned within Chen Qiaoyang's very body.

Soon after.

The chaos quieted. The mansion returned to eerie silence.

"Ghost Flame Li Jun, that's all it took?" Zhang Qing and Wan Tong, hiding inconspicuously on the third floor, froze in disbelief.

They were well aware the man they had helped release—Chen Qiaoyang—was terrifying. But they'd never imagined he could be this dreadful.

Li Jun, a Captain Level expert, had been restrained in mere moments.

It was absurd—like Yang Jian chasing down lackeys, effortlessly crushing them.

"So this era's ghost handlers amount to this much. Seems my Ghost Shepherding isn't obsolete yet," Chen Qiaoyang remarked with a faint smile. "Pity about Li Jun—so fearless, yet now gone."

Yet suddenly, something caught his attention, freezing his smile.

In the central hall of the mansion.

A woman in red appeared. Her hands were impossibly pale, and her features were blurred, leaving only a faint suggestion of beauty.

Her feet were indistinct, as though she hovered above the ground—her presence unnervingly unnatural.

"That cursed painting... it's still here..." Chen Qiaoyang muttered, his voice trembling.

Before he could react further, the shadows around the mansion thickened unnaturally. From above, it resembled a black coffin encasing the entire structure.

"The coffin..."

Chen Qiaoyang shuddered. His earlier composure was entirely shattered.

Some nightmare-like terror had descended upon the mansion.

Chapter 900 - The Skyscraper in Hand

"The clock in the ancient mansion has stopped? Could it be that Li Jun and Wang Chaling's actions are starting to show results?"

Near the ancient mansion.

On the rooftop of a high-rise building.

Yang Jian stood here with Xiong Wenwen and the Ghost Child, surveying the scene of the ancient mansion from above. Although he couldn't see much from the outside, certain changes provided enough clues to judge whether the situation was good or bad.

Earlier.

He saw the entire mansion engulfed in flames, surrounded by an eerie green glow—that must have been Li Jun's Ghost Flame.

But soon, as the clock in the mansion chimed, the blazing fire disappeared.

Yang Jian speculated.

This must have been another reset for the mansion.

But after that instance, the clock never chimed again.

"Most likely, the confrontation inside the mansion has already begun. However, this isn't a good sign. The lack of the clock chiming means the one triggering the pendulum hasn't been pushed to the point of resetting yet. The opponent still has strength left. If the clock repeatedly chimed and the mansion kept resetting, then it would mean the opponent had run out of options."

Yang Jian's eyes glimmered faintly, emitting a subtle red glow.

"They're in danger."

Based on his experience, Yang Jian came to a less-than-favorable conclusion.

At this moment.

The battle inside the mansion was indeed ongoing—danger and horror intertwined, and an unimaginable eerie event was emerging.

Inside the desolate and dimly lit hall.

A woman in a red dress, her facial features blurry and indistinct, stood quietly. Utterly motionless, her figure lacked a sense of reality, as if she didn't belong to the mansion but had intruded from some other unknown supernatural realm.

She merely stood there silently.

But the ancient mansion began to experience an incomprehensible transformation.

From above, ashes resembling paper residue began to drift down, coating the ground. These ashes behaved like a corrosive dye, gradually spreading and eating away at every corner.

Meanwhile.

The darkness within the mansion deepened—thick like a viscous fog that refused to dissipate, coalescing into a distinct shape. The shape resembled a massive coffin placed in the center of the mansion.

No.

Or rather, the entire mansion seemed like one giant coffin, enveloping everything inside.

Chen Qiaoyang's face turned pale as he stared intently at the woman standing in the hall.

There was no doubt about it.

It was that terrifying cursed painting.

But why? Why had the woman in the cursed painting appeared here? Wasn't the painting taken overseas back then? Even if it had been poorly maintained over the years and the ghost within had resurfaced, shouldn't it be causing havoc abroad?

How did it end up in the Wang Family's ancient mansion?

And so abruptly?

Then there was the black coffin.

Rumors said countless people had died because of that coffin. Although Chen Qiaoyang wasn't involved, he had heard the stories.

Later, the coffin disappeared—no one knew its whereabouts. It was thought that this supernatural incident had vanished from the world, but now, right after escaping one catastrophe, he found himself facing another.

"These things didn't appear here without reason. It must be connected to Li Jun. There's something unusual about him."

Chen Qiaoyang's thin, gaunt face twitched. Gritting his teeth, he lifted his shirt and dragged his nail across his chest.

His nail was unexpectedly sharp—tearing open the skin on his chest, exposing a gash.

Once the layer of skin split, beneath it there were no organs. Instead, viscous, pitch-black blood oozed out, reeking of the stench of rotting corpses.

Within the thick, black blood, flickering green flames danced.

Chen Qiaoyang reached into his abdomen and clawed into the darkness. Black blood churned as he pulled out a smoldering Ghost Flame.

Along with it came a person.

Li Jun, crushed and distorted, his body hollow—devoid of bones or flesh—reduced to little more than a grotesque human skin. From within the head of this macabre skin, the Ghost Flame flickered, strange and terrifying.

"Let's see what's truly going on with you," Chen Qiaoyang muttered, gripping Li Jun by the neck. He could feel no resistance or bone beneath his grasp.

His neck caved inward, limp and fleshy—it felt less like holding a man and more like clutching an empty shell.

Li Jun wasn't dead. His sunglasses had fallen away, revealing empty, charred eye sockets devoid of eyeballs. Within the hollow void, Ghost Flame danced.

"The real me has long since died. What stands here now is merely a temporary state. I don't even know how long I can maintain this condition. But if I can take down a dangerous person like you today, it's worth it." Li Jun's thin lips quivered as he uttered his hoarse words.

He was alive.

The dry skin gradually plumped—like an inflated balloon lit from within by Ghost Flame.

Ghost Flame couldn't burn through Li Jun's human skin.

Because this wasn't just ordinary human skin, but the skin of a ghost.

The Ghost Skin didn't belong to the ghost Li Jun wielded; it came from Chen Yi during the ghost painting operation.

Ghost Skin Chen Yi.

One of Big J City's three heads, who perished during the ghost painting operation.

Now, that Ghost Skin covered Li Jun, suppressing the resurgence of Ghost Flame. Yet, it seemed the situation wasn't so simple.

Chen Qiaoyang touched Li Jun's face, smearing some oily residue—a brightly colored dye resembling mortuary makeup applied to corpses by embalmers.

"You're not human. You're a man painted onto a piece of Ghost Skin. You're right; the real you has long been dead. Someone used this ghostly makeup to paint you back to life, making you replace Li Jun. Once I smear away the makeup, you'll disappear, triggering the ghost hidden within the skin to awaken."

"Do you dare to make me disappear here?" Li Jun showed no fear of death, glaring at Chen Qiaoyang intensely.

The increasingly thick skin formed a pair of hands, grasping Chen Qiaoyang's arm tightly.

Li Jun was no longer truly Li Jun; he had been created by a Headquarters officer named Ah Hong. Code name Ghost Makeup—Ah Hong could paint someone to turn them into another, even giving them possession of abilities identical to the target.

This Ghost Makeup could even paint images of ghosts.

Before the makeup was removed, an ordinary person could temporarily wield its ghostly abilities.

However, while ghost-replication lasted only briefly, painting a living human could persist for much longer.

Thus, Ah Hong had painted Li Jun onto Chen Yi's Ghost Skin.

In doing so, Li Jun had been resurrected.

This resurrection was a forbidden act so extreme that even Ah Hong couldn't tell if what she'd resurrected was a ghost identical to Li Jun, or a facsimile of him.

It didn't matter.

The painted Li Jun had replaced the dead man while retaining his memories.

The only drawback was that every so often, Ah Hong had to retouch his makeup, lest it smudge and disappear.

Chen Qiaoyang froze, unwilling to smear away Li Jun's Ghost Makeup out of fear. If something spiraled out of control, he'd have to face both the ghost painting and the black coffin—a prospect far too dangerous.

"You're utterly insane. If I'm not mistaken, that painting is on you."

Frustrated, he grabbed at Li Jun's shirt and tore it off.

On Li Jun's Ghost Skin, besides the face painted by the makeup, there was another eerie painting embedded—a scene of a darkened world resembling a city. Most parts of the city, however, were blurred, except for a collapsed skyscraper missing several floors.

On the skyscraper, an unmistakable name gleamed—four characters read: Ping'an Tower.

Had Yang Jian been present, he would have recognized it as the Headquarters building, where he had clashed with Fang Shiming.

Now, the building was deserted—a mere background element of the painting.

In that background should have been an oil painting of a figure, yet the figure was missing.

No, it hadn't truly disappeared.

Rather, the ghostly figure from the painting had left Li Jun's Ghost Skin and was now standing in the hall of the mansion.

Clearly.

Li Jun's Ghost Skin contained a derivative ghost painting—but not the original source. It was a secondary supernatural image.

But don't forget.

The derivative ghost painting was still connected to the authentic ghost painting.

And the original ghost painting resided within the background structure of the painting—the abandoned Ping'an Tower.

"Unlucky as hell," Chen Qiaoyang muttered, both startled and furious. He tossed Li Jun aside.

For now, the man couldn't die.

If he did—

The ghost painting would spiral out of control, perhaps unleashing the coffin, reducing the Wang Family mansion into a true forbidden zone too perilous even for him.

His plans weren't complete. Losing the mansion wasn't an option.

Li Jun fell from the third floor, but then the flames surged again. Ghost Domain enveloped him, placing him firmly back in the center of the hall.

"Chen Qiaoyang, dangerous figures like you can no longer be allowed to wreak havoc. Today, I will seal you away and erase you from this world forever," he rasped, his voice filled with determination.

"You're no match for me. Don't get carried away, youngster. Your body is linked to extremely perilous objects. I hold back only to avoid encountering ill fortune. Had I not restrained myself earlier, you'd be done for already. Everything—the Ghost Flame, the Ghost Skin—is powerless against me."

Chen Qiaoyang's face remained icy as he spoke.

"Besides, you're just a painted figure. Smudge your makeup and you'll vanish. You're so fragile—do you think you can stand against me?"

"I know my own strength is limited. Alone, I can't defeat you. But this... this is something altogether different," Li Jun murmured, taking a deep breath as the flames on his body receded. Then, he stretched out his palm.

A chilling Ghost Flame flared to life.

Within the fire, an ominous, desolate building emerged—like a hallucination.

At the same time.

The background skyscraper in the ghost painting embedded on his Ghost Skin vanished.

It seemed Li Jun had extracted the skyscraper from the painting using Ghost Flame.

Ghost Domain connected Ghost Flame to the ghost painting, and the ghost painting linked to the building within. Li Jun bypassed the intermediate steps, directly wrangling the background building from the ghost painting.

The Ping'an Tower, wrapped in countless yellow seals, bore numerous red prohibition and danger markings.

At the building's entrance.

A worn wooden staircase bridged the interior and exterior, shrouded in eerie mystery.

Within a certain floor of the tower hung a peculiar sign bearing three characters: Huanggang Village.

Through the building's glass panels and windows, hints of terrifying supernatural phenomena could faintly be seen.

Li Jun knew exactly what he was dealing with—this tower captured the original ghost painting and even housed the dread-inducing Ghost Envoys.

His Ghost Skin's painting was merely a derivative of the source artwork.

Like a portal connecting to the true ghost painting, it was now under his control.

And this portal was the only one left.

Old Qin had intentionally left it for him.

All other portals had been erased.

Which meant the painting embedded in Li Jun's Ghost Skin was the last remaining fragment of the ghost painting out in the world.

"This...?" Chen Qiaoyang stared at the illusory building erupting from the Ghost Flame.

He'd never seen such a technique.

This was a new way of manipulating ghosts.

Yet, his instincts warned him—the building was perilous. No, terrifyingly hazardous.

Step inside, and he'd never emerge for the rest of his life. He'd surely die within.

"Dealing with that coffin and the source of the ghost painting—those are things not to be trifled with," Chen Qiaoyang cautiously retreated a few steps.

Li Jun's hand burned brighter, the flames swelling wildly, consuming even the hallucinated skyscraper within. It expanded as if trying to engulf the entire mansion.

The path to unimaginable terror was being opened—personally unlocked by Li Jun.