

Revival 961

Chapter 961 The Woman Among Old Lin

The ancient mansion shrouded in darkness echoed with a piercing, mournful scream, chilling to the bone.

At that moment.

Yang Jian, positioned in the rear hall, wielded the Firewood Knife, instantly activating the medium to dismember an unknown terror. He acted decisively, without the slightest hesitation.

He believed that the quicker the vengeful ghost invaded, the more dangerous it would be. If he didn't repel it now, once the ghost entered the rear hall and began its slaughter, it would be too late.

As the scream reverberated, an unexpected event unfolded.

The darkness that had invaded the rear hall began to recoil.

An obscured path emerged within the main hall, directly connecting to the courtyard, seemingly bisecting the darkness enveloping the entire mansion. Meanwhile, the split darkness started retreating into the corridors on either side.

"So that's it. This darkness is the Ghost Domain of the vengeful ghost, but now that I've dismembered it with the Firewood Knife, the ghost's power has drastically weakened—its Ghost Domain can no longer remain in its complete state," Yang Jian remarked as he observed the scene, instantly understanding.

The strike had hit the source of the darkness.

That blow had been worth it.

The ancient mansion possessed the power to suppress supernatural phenomena, yet the vengeful ghost could still invade under these circumstances—proof of its sheer terror.

If Yang Jian hadn't earlier used the Ghost Shadow to blanket the rear hall's location, it was conceivable that the ghost might have infiltrated silently, unnoticed.

However, using the Firewood Knife came at a price—a corresponding curse had to be borne.

By dismembering the ghost, Yang Jian simultaneously dismembered himself; not only would his body sustain damage, but even the Ghost Shadow was affected. Yet, since the Ghost Shadow possessed the ability to reassemble, it could temporarily recover and withstand the curse unleashed by the Firewood Knife.

Additionally, Yang Jian could erase the curse in an instant through a restart, fully restoring his state in one fell swoop.

But now.

Yang Jian realized he hadn't been afflicted with the Firewood Knife's curse.

He remained unharmed, as though the curse no longer existed.

"Another vengeful ghost has been repelled, and it seems to have suffered some sort of grievous wound—even the darkness is retreating. What happened in that instant?" someone exclaimed, their eyes wide with disbelief.

"It was Yang Jian. He swung the knife into thin air, yet it seemed to sever the ghost, eliciting a terrifying scream. It was almost like he killed the ghost outright."

"Ghosts cannot be killed. Despite the apparent impact, it must've only been a severe injury. But even achieving that is truly terrifying," Fan Xing said, his face contorted in shock as he gazed at Yang Jian.

The other messengers shared expressions of utter astonishment.

Was this what made people fear Yang Jian?

When he truly acted, he could force a vengeful ghost to retreat instantly—so much so that it dared not approach the rear hall.

"The incense has grown a lot shorter..."

Ignoring the stunned faces around him, Yang Jian noticed that two remaining sticks of incense in front of the coffin had diminished again.

One stick was nearly burned out, leaving only a small stub.

Perhaps.

The missing segment was linked to the Firewood Knife's curse.

Had it been neutralized?

Or was it transferred elsewhere?

"What happens when this incense burns out? Will we lose its protection, or will something unknown transpire?" Yang Jian murmured, slightly worried.

Three sticks of incense had originally been placed before the red coffin. Under normal circumstances, they were supposed to burn for seven days—until the completion of mourning rituals.

But with one stick already stolen and the curse of the Firewood Knife heavily depleting the remaining incense, it seemed highly possible that the incense would burn out by the third day.

As the darkness temporarily dissipated and receded, the supernatural phenomena in the main hall appeared to subside. At this moment, the hall was empty, devoid of any traces of prior disturbances. The ghosts that had wandered throughout seemed to have been forced back into the depths of the corridors.

Nevertheless, ominous signs remained on the ground.

The towering walls now bore black handprints, and the floor was scattered with damp stains, as though it had just rained.

"The ghosts seem to emerge with the enveloping darkness. Once the mansion is no longer dark, the ghosts cannot manifest," Old Lin, following the clues carefully, concluded with certainty.

He scanned the ground.

Noticing a few sticky drops of inky black blood scattered across the hall.

Residue, perhaps from the repelled vengeful ghost.

"Darkness is but a phenomenon—a sign of supernatural invasion into the mansion. When darkness descends, it signals ghostly activity. Everything comes with forewarnings; nothing happens inexplicably," Fan Xing mused aloud.

Yang Jian withdrew his gaze from the two sticks of incense—one longer, one shorter. He then commented, "The ghosts have only been temporarily repelled. Tonight is far from over. Danger could creep close at any moment; don't celebrate prematurely. And Fan Xing..."

Suddenly.

He turned to look.

Fan Xing's expression shifted. "Yang Jian, what are you trying to say?"

"The curse of that radio— isn't it targeting you? Earlier, when the ghost roamed the main hall, it didn't seem to sense anyone in the rear hall. The vicinity of this red coffin seems to obscure a ghost's perception, ensuring our safety. However, since the radio appeared, the ghosts have repeatedly charged straight into the rear hall."

"In other words, the ghosts have discovered our location. That's what caused the failure of our night watches—the arrival of danger."

Da Qiang heard this, and his temper flared instantly: "So that's how it is! No wonder the ghosts are so aggressive on the second night. It's because you've suffered curses and drawn them here!"

"The balance is broken, danger has come early. At this rate, we won't survive until the seventh day," Wang Feng stated coldly, glaring at Fan Xing.

"We could've peacefully passed the night guarding the coffin. Instead, we're forced to clash with vengeful ghosts head-on. I found it odd earlier too—the messenger's tasks are dangerous but shouldn't push us to fight for our lives on the second night. Something doesn't add up. So this is the problem," Old Lin grumbled unhappily.

From the first night's preparation to the second night's vigil.

Yang Jian's choices had been flawless. By making the right decisions, the night would've been uneventful, but the situation earlier clearly pointed toward total annihilation.

Fan Xing and several other ghost tamers nearby stirred uneasily.

They understood, but what could they do?

True, they had brought the ghosts upon themselves, but they also wanted to live. Considering whether they'd harm others was not their concern.

"In a place like this, nothing that happens would seem surprising. Yang Jian, what do you think?"

Fan Xing said, "Or are you trying to hint that if you eliminate us, you'd feel safer? But Yang Jian, you know as well as I do—if we die, this mansion will only become more perilous. The fate of that man killed last night, when his corpse was discarded outside the mansion, is the clearest example."

"Right now, our priority should be working together to overcome what lies ahead. Internal strife would be incredibly foolish."

Yang Jian's face was impassive as he replied, "You've made a mistake—it's fine. Everyone makes mistakes. But from now on, I want no signs of hesitation from any of you in critical moments. Otherwise, I'll eliminate you on the spot."

"Including me?" Fan Xing's face hardened.

"Yes, including you," Yang Jian said.

Fan Xing forced a smile. "Don't worry, such a thing won't happen. To survive, I dared to board the ghost bus. Naturally, I can confront vengeful ghosts."

"Continue the vigil."

Yang Jian spoke no further.

Meanwhile.

Outside the mansion.

A man was wandering around, carrying a white lantern with a bold black character "奠" inscribed on it. In his other hand, he held a stick of incense.

The incense burned, releasing an inexhaustible aroma.

The white lantern emanated a pale glow in the dim environment—a ghostly radiance that illuminated the path ahead.

"You think I won't take it just because you forbade it? I'll secretly snatch it anyway, and you'll never know," Zhou Deng thought to himself. "I'm already being considerate—I left some for you, didn't I?"

He didn't want to stay inside the mansion.

The mansion was rife with danger, and he couldn't search for treasures there.

That's why, on the second night, Zhou Deng had stealthily swiped one stick of incense and one lantern from the entrance.

Carrying the lantern, he made no attempt to leave the mansion entirely. Instead, he wandered around its perimeter.

"Without the ghost bus, there's really no way to leave this place," Zhou Deng muttered, following a winding path into the old forest.

This path led from the rear exit of the mansion, different from the main route.

"The mansion's former owner built this path probably as an escape route. If I keep walking, I might find a way out—or perhaps uncover treasure hidden by the owner," Zhou Deng mused, his calculating mind already at work.

Gradually.

He ventured deeper into the forest along this path.

The path itself was peculiar—it was paved with yellow earth, devoid of weeds, and the soil seemed freshly spread, as if constructed not long ago. Previously, there hadn't been a path here.

"All the trees along the way have been chopped down." Zhou Deng noticed tree stumps scattered along the route.

Clearly, significant effort had gone into carving out this yellow-earth path.

Carrying the white lantern, he ventured further, and the surroundings grew increasingly dark.

Soon.

The forest was completely engulfed in darkness, leaving only indistinct outlines. All that remained visible was the yellow-earth path stretching endlessly forward.

"A never-ending, eerie path? Should I turn back?" Zhou Deng frowned, pondering the question.

After some thought, he shook his head and discarded the idea.

He decided to press on. Returning to the mansion wouldn't guarantee safety. This haunted place was shrouded in danger—it might even be better outside.

He wasn't sure how long he had been walking—time slipped away unnoticed.

All Zhou Deng knew was that the trees gradually thinned out until he emerged into an open space.

The clearing, shaped like a circle, was paved with yellow earth surrounded by dense old forests. There were no other trails visible.

He had reached the end.

In this clearing, Zhou Deng saw several graves.

They varied in age—some looked ancient, others from recent years, and a few newly buried. Each grave had a tombstone, inscribed with a name, a photo, and some offerings placed in front—a blue and white porcelain bowl filled with white rice.

The rice was hard, as though uncooked.

Zhou Deng, holding the lantern, approached one grave. He held the lantern up to illuminate it.

The lantern's ghostly white glow dispelled the gloom, exposing the photo on the tombstone.

The image was of an unfamiliar young man—clearly not from modern times. His attire looked quaint, suggesting he'd died long ago, but his appearance remained youthful and strikingly handsome.

"Such a handsome man, dead and buried here. What a pity," Zhou Deng remarked, glancing down at the porcelain bowl of white rice before the tombstone.

He placed the lantern aside, reached out with one hand, and reached for the bowl.

But just as Zhou Deng bent over, the eyes of the man in the photograph moved eerily, following his hand downward.

"Smack!"

Zhou Deng suddenly pulled his hand back and slapped himself.

"Zhou Deng, Zhou Deng, you know this place is dangerous, yet you still reach out to grab things recklessly. What if you trigger a curse and catch the attention of a vengeful ghost? What would you do then?"

He abandoned the thought altogether, picked up his lantern, and chose not to touch the bowl of rice before the grave.

At that moment.

The man's photo quietly reverted—his gaze shifting back to its original position, as if nothing had occurred.

Zhou Deng continued to meander and stopped before a second grave.

On the second grave's tombstone was a photograph of an incredibly beautiful woman, with waist-length hair, a gentle smile, and a fitted cheongsam. The black-and-white picture made it impossible to discern the color of her gown.

Before her grave also sat a bowl of rice.

This bowl, however, seemed slightly emptier than the previous one, as though someone had taken a bite.

"Such a gorgeous woman, dead and gone. What a shame. That cheongsam seems exquisite—I wonder if it was buried along with her," Zhou Deng mused.

Then, he slapped himself again: "Zhou Deng, Zhou Deng, you can't do this. Digging up someone's grave to grab their clothing—especially a stunning lady's—is that even appropriate?"

Reluctantly, Zhou Deng left the grave behind.

He wandered past the other graves nearby.

But he found nothing particularly noteworthy—only an abandoned, rusted shovel standing upright in an empty corner.

Zhou Deng picked it up and tested it, only to discover it wasn't a supernatural artifact—just a plain, ordinary tool. Disappointed, he put it back.

"Back to square one. Searching here was such a waste of time," Zhou Deng grumbled, but before leaving, he unexpectedly found himself back at the grave of the beautiful woman.

There, he inserted his stick of incense into her grave.

"You're the most pleasing to my eyes. Here's an incense offering from me, Zhou Deng, before I leave. It's not a wasted trip after all," he muttered.

Judging by appearances, the incense didn't seem particularly unusual. It would burn out soon anyway, and since it wasn't of much use, he decided to abandon it. Consumable items like these held little value—perhaps the lantern in his hand was more practical.

Carrying the white lantern, Zhou Deng retraced his steps down the path.

However, shortly after he left the area.

The incense he had placed atop the grave began burning away rapidly, shedding ashes segment by segment. Strangely, the rising smoke didn't drift upward but sank, seeping into the grave below.

Gradually, the photograph of the woman on the tombstone underwent subtle changes—her gentle smile stretched wider.

Soon, the photo started fading, its colors growing fainter, until finally, the image disappeared altogether, leaving only a blank stone.

Moments later.

The grave collapsed inward.

A white-skinned hand, painted with vivid red nails, emerged suddenly, gripping the side of the tombstone. With a casual push, it toppled the stone, burying it within the sunken grave.

Then, she rose.

From the pit emerged an eerie woman with waist-length hair, wearing a scarlet cheongsam, her figure lithe and graceful.

The woman exuded a mysterious fragrance—a blend of the incense's aroma and an indefinable other scent.

Notably, she lacked the rotting and lifeless aura typical of the dead.

"Whoosh..."

The surrounding forest stirred as gusts of wind swept through, causing the branches to sway and rustle noisily.

"Heh, heh heh." The woman chuckled softly.

Her laughter echoed, heavy with reverberation.

The swaying forest suddenly fell silent once more.

Then, she began walking. Following the yellow-earth path, she headed toward the mansion.

From beneath the hem of her cheongsam peeked a pair of blood-red high heels. At her waist hung a rusty scarf... elegant yet sinister.

Chapter 962 Reporting the Death

"What time is it now?"

"It's 3:30 am."

In the back hall of the ancient mansion, the group had been guarding the red coffin for several hours. Ever since Yang Jian used the firewood knife to dismember an unknown vengeful ghost earlier, the darkness in the mansion had retreated into the corridors on both sides.

And for several hours, the darkness hadn't returned.

This indicates that the dismembered ghost hasn't recovered.

Or perhaps, the ghost was scattered and hasn't found all its pieces, leading to a significant reduction in supernatural power. Now, it's unable to exert greater influence on this mansion.

The old-fashioned radio still lay abandoned on the floor in the main hall.

Though static occasionally hissed from it, no signal had been received, nor had any eerie voice emerged.

During the first few hours of the night watch, the initial wave of ghost attacks was endured.

Though perilous, no one perished. That was considered good news, but this resistance had nearly consumed the incense stick burning in front of the coffin.

The remaining incense stick had to last five days.

Clearly, it would be impossible to make it to that point. Yang Jian believed the final incense stick would soon burn out.

"We can likely survive tonight. It looks like the mansion has returned to calm, and the ghosts have temporarily retreated. But what should we do on the third day? Since we have some time now, why don't we discuss it?"

Seeing the situation stabilize, Old Eagle initiated a discussion.

He wanted to plan their next course of action.

This was a logical thought. Anticipating danger and making decisions in advance would prevent panic when the time came.

"The first day was interment, the second day was the night watch, and the third day should be... mourning rites?" Li Yang proposed uncertainly.

"That's unlikely. In a traditional funeral, the third day should involve notifying acquaintances of the death. After the interment on the first day and the night watch on the second, the third day should be reserved for spreading the news. Mourning rites would come on the fourth day, when relatives and friends receive the news and come to pay tribute to the deceased, viewing the corpse." Wang Feng explained.

"There's a notification step? Logically speaking, shouldn't that happen on the first day?" someone asked.

"In a traditional funeral, could you notify people on the first day? Back then, there were no phones or communication devices. Deaths were sudden, and the focus on the first day was on securing the corpse in the coffin. Family members would watch the body overnight, and then the next day they would notify others." Wang Feng said confidently.

He had been pondering the funeral process during this time.

"If notification is required, how exactly should we do it? Shout throughout the mansion that someone has died here?"

Wang Feng replied, "Of course, not like that. Notification would typically involve sending out a signal, but I have no idea how to do that."

"Hold on, there's movement outside."

Suddenly, Yang Jian gestured and turned his gaze toward the back door.

The back door was slightly ajar, and through the gap in the wooden door, he could vaguely see a pale white light swaying in the distance, slowly approaching. Once it got closer, he confirmed it was a person carrying a white lantern along the path emerging from the old forest.

"It doesn't look like a ghost. It seems more like the previously missing Zhou Deng. Yes, it's Zhou Deng." Someone else noticed and immediately clenched their teeth, standing up.

"That guy's still alive?" Fan Xing was surprised.

Earlier, the mansion was shrouded in darkness, brimming with danger. Apart from the safety of the back hall, every other area was extremely life-threatening.

Even Zhou Deng, a supposed team leader, shouldn't have been able to survive in such an environment.

Crunch!

The back door was pushed open.

Zhou Deng walked into the back hall with feet covered in yellow mud and spoke curiously, "I saw someone inside earlier, so I came over to check. Didn't expect to find all of you here. Did anything happen earlier?"

"Where did you go before?" Yang Jian scrutinized him and asked.

"Obviously, checking the area nearby to see if there were any dangers," Zhou Deng replied.

Yang Jian asked, "And what did you find?"

Zhou Deng answered, "This place really isn't ordinary. In that forest, there's an old grave that felt off. I burned an incense stick near it and left."

"The lantern you're carrying—is it the one from the front door?" Yang Jian observed the familiar lantern.

"It's dark outside, so I took the lantern for light. That shouldn't be an issue, right?" Zhou Deng said. "I deliberately looked everywhere earlier and confirmed there's no other escape route. This mansion is the only place we can stay. I'm planning to check out the front area again."

Fan Xing immediately retorted, "Stop messing around, Zhou Deng. This place isn't as simple as you think. The mansion was originally the only safe area. If you cause disruptions and break the balance, you'll doom all of us. Also, you shouldn't have taken that incense—it's very special with mysterious effects and crucial for us."

"I didn't notice anything special about that incense," Zhou Deng frowned.

"Everyone, instead of arguing about the incense, can we confirm whether Zhou Deng came in alone just now?"

Suddenly, someone spoke up, pointing at the footprints on the ground.

The group looked over.

Near the back door, there were scattered footprints of various sizes, some crouched around the door. Suspiciously, the unmoving wooden door was now gently shifting back and forth on its hinges without the influence of wind.

Old Eagle stared at the muddy footprints and remarked, "There's more than just Zhou Deng's footprints—there are others mixed in. But don't you think these muddy footprints resemble the ones we saw on the fourth floor of the Post Office?"

"Now that you mention it, I recall. They likely belong not to the same ghost, but were created in a similar supernatural incident. There seems to be a connection between the Post Office and this place." Li Yang recalled.

He vividly remembered the footprints from the Post Office's fourth floor.

"Did a ghost sneak in with Zhou Deng into the back hall? It doesn't appear to have gone deeper inside but lingered at the entrance repeatedly before vanishing." Yang Jian's eyes flickered. He hadn't noticed anything earlier.

It was simply unbelievable.

"I'll check outside." Zhou Deng abruptly grabbed the lantern and walked out the back door.

Standing outside, he looked around: "There's nothing here. I don't see anything."

"Yellow mud merely serves as a medium to expose ghosts, similar to supernatural rain or certain kinds of blood. Now that most of the mud has fallen off, the ghost's traces naturally fade away." Yang Jian explained immediately.

"There's no need to overthink. Even if another ghost appears now, it doesn't matter. As long as the balance remains intact, ghosts won't easily invade this mansion."

The group exchanged surprised looks at Yang Jian.

But upon reflection, his reasoning seemed plausible.

No one could predict how many dangers lurked both inside and outside the mansion. At this point, they couldn't divert their attention to small supernatural incidents. As long as the ghosts didn't breach the safety of the back hall, everything else hardly mattered.

"If the ghost followed me from the old forest, then I'll take responsibility for leading it away." Zhou Deng said from outside, holding the lantern.

Then he moved toward the mansion's front entrance. Whether he truly intended to divert the ghost or had other motives was unclear.

"That Zhou Deng is utterly insane. Wandering with a lit lantern—he's practically courting death. I bet he'll face a ghost attack tonight. I refuse to believe he'll keep dodging harm every time." Someone said, gritting their teeth, clearly displeased with Zhou Deng.

Yang Jian said nothing. As far as he was concerned, as long as Zhou Deng didn't cause trouble for him, it didn't matter where he wandered.

At worst, he'd die out there.

Yang Jian's mission was to deliver a message on the seventh day. Aside from that, he wasn't interested in anything else.

His goal was to reach the Post Office's fifth floor.

The mansion's secrets and supernatural objects could wait.

However, one thing did pique Yang Jian's interest.

The locked room in the right corridor—what secrets were behind that door?

With the Ghost Cabinet's key in hand, he could open the door anytime.

But was now the right time?

After all, it was only the second day.

"Better to wait," Yang Jian thought, suppressing his curiosity.

The hours passed.

At 4:00 am, the mansion's supposed calm was finally disrupted. The darkness that had receded earlier began to seep back into the corridors flanking the courtyard, creeping steadily into the mansion once more. Accompanying this darkness, supernatural phenomena reemerged.

As expected.

The ghost's retreat was temporary—caused earlier by Yang Jian's firewood knife attack.

But the dismemberment's effect wasn't permanent. Given time, the ghost would recover and reawaken.

"Shhh, shhhhhh~!"

The eerie old radio in the main hall suddenly crackled again. It seemed to pick up another signal, causing everyone's hearts to clench.

"Is tonight's second wave of attacks about to begin?" Yang Jian's expression shifted slightly as he glanced at the group.

No words were needed.

Everyone braced themselves.

The darkness thickened, and the radio's static grew louder and clearer.

The supernatural intrusion was rapid.

In mere moments, it had reached the same intensity as before.

The mansion was being engulfed in darkness once more.

This signaled that Yang Jian's earlier firewood knife attack had lost its effectiveness. All it had done was buy them a short, insignificant window of time.

But the danger wasn't confined to the main hall.

This time.

After Zhou Deng left, the once-secured back door creaked open slowly, as if pushed by an unseen force.

Outside, the dim light seemed even more oppressive and terrifying. Whether it was an illusion or not, the distant old forest appeared to inch closer, as if countless eerie eyes were peering out from its depths, staring at them. It was impossible to discern whether this was a trick of the mind or that the forest truly harbored such a multitude of unsettling gazes.

"Li Yang, shut the back door." Yang Jian commanded.

Li Yang instantly walked over and closed the door.

But just as he did—

"Bang!"

The back door flew open again, forcing Li Yang back.

"What the hell is this?" The others stared in shock.

Yang Jian directed, "Don't hold back. Use supernatural powers—see if you can close it."

Li Yang's expression shifted. He immediately used the Door-blocking Ghost's supernatural power to affect the door.

He tried again to close it.

To his disbelief, an enormous force resisted his effort—as if countless invisible hands pressed against the door, stopping him.

"Creak!"

The old wooden door groaned and barely shut halfway. Despite his best efforts, Li Yang couldn't close it entirely.

"Captain, this isn't right." He growled, panic evident on his face.

"What the hell?" Yang Jian's face darkened; he was visibly shaken.

The Ghost Door Blocker's supernatural power couldn't close the door?

"You can't expect the two of us to handle this alone. Help Li Yang—if we fail, none of us will survive tonight." Yang Jian ordered.

He could sense something was off.

The incense was still burning. Based on Old Eagle's previous findings, the incense should've boosted Li Yang's supernatural powers, making them stronger than before.

What went wrong?

Yang Jian's unease grew—things seemed to spiral out of control.

Though it wasn't yet severe, the signs were undeniable.

This was his gut feeling, and he knew it was correct.

"I'll help," Old Eagle stepped forward decisively.

Wang Feng glanced at Yang Jian and then joined in as well.

Fan Xing and two other ghost-wielders approached the door, their faces grim, ready to assist.

Using supernatural forces, they resisted the entities pushing from outside and forced the door shut. However, they dared not let go, as they realized something terrifying was exerting pressure from the other side of the door.

Should they loosen their grip, the door would inevitably reopen.

"Shhh, shhhhhh..."

The old radio crackled louder, its eerie noise resonating through the darkness. It once again picked up a signal, this time broadcasting a chilling phrase: "Dead, died, finally dead... heh, heh-heh."

"The ghost is still active." Fan Xing stared into the corridor's encroaching darkness, prepared to act.

"Wait."

Yang Jian suddenly realized something.

"What's wrong?" Fan Xing asked. "If we don't stop the supernatural radio now, it'll keep summoning more ghosts."

"Something's off—the radio's last words don't make sense." Yang Jian said. "It said 'dead'? Who's dead? From earlier until now, none of us have died."

Yang Jian scanned the area.

Everyone was still alive.

Even Yang Xiaohua was standing there holding her red balloon, alive and well.

"There's only one dead person here, and that's..." Someone glanced at the red coffin.

Yang Xiaohua trembled as she spoke, "Could it be—that the death news was transmitted? According to your previous deductions, the third day involves reporting the death. If that step is expedited, what happens?"

"Reporting the death? I get it now. It's Zhou Deng. Earlier, he carried the white lantern outside—that's how he notified them. That's why the radio said what it did." Yang Jian quickly pieced it together.

"The ghosts couldn't confirm whether the old man here was dead until Zhou Deng left the back hall carrying the white lantern. That effectively 'announced' there had been a death here."

"The problem lies here."

"The back hall is no longer safe."

Fan Xing froze for a moment before swearing viciously: "Damn Zhou Deng! He's caused so much trouble. If he shows up again, I'll definitely risk my life against him."

Just as Yang Jian theorized—

The group struggling to hold the back door shut finally faltered after some time. Several members reached their limits, unable to continue channeling ghostly powers, leaving Li Yang to fend for himself, which was woefully insufficient.

The back door swung open once more.

The door was marked with numerous handprints stained with yellow mud, and the ground outside was riddled with chaotic footprints.

And now, at the threshold—

A pair of old, worn black cloth shoes appeared on the doorstep, as though preparing to step inside.

But it wasn't just the back door.

The darkness from the main hall began seeping into the back hall.

The incense burning in front of the red coffin inexplicably failed to have any effect.

Supernatural forces fully invaded the back hall.

The mansion's dangers had arrived ahead of schedule.

Chapter 963 Correcting the Date

The night vigil on the second day went awry.

As soon as Zhou Deng left the rear hall with the white lantern, the previously stable situation took a sharp turn for the worse.

This was because everyone speculated that Zhou Deng's departure had caused the mourning ritual to happen prematurely—a fatal development. With the ghost still wandering inside the ancient haunted house, starting the mourning now was akin to informing the malevolent spirit that someone had died in the rear hall.

Even though ghosts lack thoughts and cannot weigh pros and cons,

the situation in this ancient house couldn't be judged by common logic. After all, supernatural matters often defy reason.

At times, such events constantly shatter people's understanding of reality.

"The rear hall is no longer safe—the ghost is invading. Yang Jian, what should we do now?"

Fan Xing was panicking at this point. Unable to come up with a better idea, he could only place his hopes on Yang Jian.

After all, Yang Jian was a bona fide Captain Level top-tier ghost manipulator, having survived several S-class supernatural incidents. Both his abilities and the supernatural powers he wielded were leagues above what Fan Xing could compare to.

The back door was now wide open.

Outside, it was shrouded in darkness. On the doorstep sat a pair of old, worn black cloth shoes, looking as if they belonged to the malevolent ghost, poised to step inside at any moment.

Moreover, faint and eerie silhouettes seemed to loiter outside the rear door, as if waiting for the right moment to enter.

There was no longer any point in trying to close the door now.

Earlier, they had all tried together, but they still couldn't shut it. Continuing to waste time on it carried the risk of causing the ghost's resurrection. Debating whether to close the door was meaningless at this juncture.

What they needed now was a plan to respond to the current crisis.

Everyone turned to Yang Jian.

It seemed that only he could handle this situation.

"If we don't come up with a countermeasure soon, I'm afraid all of us will die here," someone said in a grave tone.

"Damn Zhou Deng! It's one thing if he wanted to seek death, but he had to drag us down with him."

"Should we abandon the vigil and hide in our rooms instead? Would that improve the situation? Or maybe I should just rush out of this back door and try to escape this haunted house?"

But as soon as this suggestion was made, the other couriers immediately rejected it.

They had to stay in the haunted house for seven days—they couldn't leave.

Zhou Deng might be able to wander in and out of the house freely, but they couldn't. Leaving too far or staying away for too long might make the Ghost Post Office consider their mission to deliver the letter a failure. If that happened, the curse of the Ghost Post Office would kick in, and their fate would be even worse.

Yang Jian's gaze flickered as he thought deeply.

Facing the malevolent ghost head-on would at best buy a little time. Eventually, many of them would die—if not the entire team. A total wipeout wouldn't be surprising.

"The mourning ritual for the third day has been triggered early. In that case, we can ignore the vigil for the second day and skip ahead to the third day. It's impossible for us to deal with both the ghost of the second-day vigil and the ghost of the third-day mourning at the same time. So the only choice is to disregard the ghost of the second-day vigil."

Yang Jian remained calm and quickly formulated a plan to break this stalemate, even if it was barely feasible.

"Captain, what should we do exactly?" Li Yang asked urgently.

Fan Xing and the others also looked at Yang Jian, as if ready to take action the moment he gave the word.

"If today is treated as the day of mourning, we proceed as we normally would on the third day—stabilize the ghost that usually appears on the third day and focus all our efforts on confronting the ghost of the second-day vigil. If we can hold on until midnight tonight, time will correct itself," Yang Jian explained quickly.

"Hold on until midnight? Good grief, Yang Jian, you've got to be joking. It's just past 4 a.m. now. From now until midnight, that's close to twenty hours. We're ghost manipulators, not Jesus—we can't possibly endure that long," someone said, his eyes widening in fear. He shivered at the thought, his whole body turning cold.

The idea sounded plausible as a way to break the stalemate, but implementing it was practically impossible—it was too difficult.

The team member known as Eagle composed himself and said, "Yang Jian, the key to the third day's mourning ritual is the lantern. We must acquire that lantern. Right now, it's hanging at the front door. To retrieve it, someone has to either circle around from the rear door to the front or make a direct run through the main hall toward the door. Either way, they'll encounter the malevolent ghost."

"In addition, someone must remain to guard this coffin. If the old man's corpse inside the coffin is disturbed, the ritual for the seventh day might be triggered prematurely. At that point, the haunted house will spiral out of control, the letter delivery mission will fail, and the Malevolent Ghost will fully return. There would be no survivors then," Wang Feng added calmly.

"So the only solution is for most of us to stay and guard this coffin against the ghost, while one person is sent to retrieve the lantern. And they must succeed. Failure means we all die."

"Now, who will take on this task?"

As soon as Wang Feng finished speaking,

everyone's expressions changed.

It wasn't that they were afraid of death; they simply lacked confidence in surviving the ordeal. To accept this task was essentially to accept death.

"If I go to get it, I can guarantee bringing back the lantern. But can you all hold out against the ghost while I'm gone?" Yang Jian said coldly.

At that, silence fell over the group once more.

The answer was obvious.

They couldn't hold out.

The moment Yang Jian left, they would quickly succumb to the malevolent ghost's resurgence. The rear hall would become a congregation point for vengeful spirits. Even if Yang Jian returned with the lantern, it would probably be too late by then.

"Li Yang, you go," Yang Jian decided immediately, looking toward him.

"Understood, Captain," Li Yang responded, taking a deep breath. He didn't hesitate and agreed immediately.

"Don't take the exterior route. Make a direct dash through the main hall. Once you get the lantern, circle back through the rear door to re-enter. Don't stray or linger outside. This way, you can use the lantern to fake the mourning ritual, warding off attacks from the ghosts outside. If you take the original path back, the ghosts inside the haunted house will surely attack you."

After Yang Jian finished speaking, he threw something to Li Yang.

It was a heavily scarred and worn-out human-like doll.

"You know how to use this, right? And you still have the last Ghost Candle with you. Don't be stingy with it," Yang Jian said. "It's a pity my substitute doll is gone; otherwise, we wouldn't be in such a dire situation."

Li Yang received the doll and nodded solemnly.

"Step on my Ghost Shadow as you proceed. I'll clear the way for you. Remember, the moment you step outside the range of my Ghost Shadow, light the Ghost Candle without delay."

With those words, the Ghost Shadow beneath Yang Jian's feet began to ripple, extending toward the direction of the main hall.

Without another word, Li Yang stepped onto the dark and icy trail formed by the Ghost Shadow and strode forward decisively. The chill beneath his feet was bone-deep, yet it gave him a faint sense of reassurance. The Ghost Shadow could repel many supernatural forces, preventing him from being marked by other ghosts.

"Ahhh~!"

Suddenly, one of the ghost manipulators turned pale, let out a pained wail, and collapsed to the ground, coughing up thick, viscous blood in large gulps. It felt as though his entire body's blood was being drained, with something writhing inside him.

He had been invaded by a malevolent ghost.

"No time to waste—move!" Yang Jian barked sharply.

Li Yang immediately sprinted forward along the shadowy, frigid path toward the main hall without hesitation.

At this moment, everyone was gambling with their lives. Even though Li Yang was acting alone, he didn't feel like the most endangered person here.

With the Ghost Candle and the human-like doll in hand, he had some confidence to rely on.

In the oppressive darkness, it was easy to lose one's sense of direction.

However, Li Yang's movements seemed guided, as he never strayed from the path.

The Ghost Shadow influenced Li Yang's steps, steering him forward along a certain route.

Yet within the confines of the haunted house, Yang Jian's Ghost Shadow was also being impacted—because the surrounding darkness belonged to a malevolent ghost's Ghost Domain. Using the Ghost

Shadow within the Ghost Domain created a clash between supernatural forces, limiting how far Yang Jian's shadow could extend.

At roughly ten meters, the Ghost Shadow reached its limit.

This happened to leave Li Yang in the middle of the main hall.

Li Yang sensed that his feet were free once again—no longer disturbed by the icy chill. He realized the Ghost Shadow's reach had ended.

"The rest of the way is up to me," he muttered, inhaling deeply before decisively lighting the Ghost Candle.

Instantly.

A sinister green flame erupted from the red wax.

As the Ghost Candle's eerie light illuminated the surrounding darkness, Li Yang's vision was restored, allowing him to discern his immediate surroundings.

But the moment the Ghost Candle was lit, Li Yang felt his hair stand on end.

He saw a stark white, lifeless face pressed close to him. The face was abnormally large—several sizes bigger than a normal human face. Though its features were blurred, its gaping mouth suggested a scream, though no sound emerged.

The Ghost Candle's flame suddenly flared, burning fiercely in response.

The next moment,

a pale, skeletal figure—not wearing any clothes—flashed past him and vanished into the darkness to his left. Whether it was driven away by the Ghost Candle or some other reason remained unclear.

"Damn it!"

Li Yang was drenched in cold sweat, his heart still racing. If his body weren't already altered, he believed he would've been scared to death just now.

No time to linger on fear, he glanced at the dwindling Ghost Candle in his hand.

Nearly half of it had already burned away.

In other words,

that confrontation had just consumed half of the Ghost Candle's power to repel the ghost.

"One attack consumed half the Ghost Candle. How terrifying,"

Li Yang thought, his heart filled with dread. Not daring to hesitate, he moved quickly toward the front door while the light of the candle still held.

He moved at a rapid pace,

but the Ghost Candle was burning equally fast.

The haunted house was rife with wandering ghosts, causing an extraordinary drain on the candle's energy.

Li Yang knew he had to exit the haunted house before the Ghost Candle burned out. Otherwise, he risked becoming lost in the darkness.

Even if he were just a step away from the front door, supernatural interference could still keep him trapped inside.

After all, the nature of these supernatural occurrences was always inexplicable and treacherous.

Li Yang crossed the main hall quickly, reaching the courtyard. From there, he advanced toward the front yard at full speed.

In the oppressive darkness,

as he hurried past the courtyard, Li Yang glimpsed a ghostly figure standing in a corridor to the side. The figure seemed somewhat familiar—a hunched old man holding a bamboo basket.

However, when he tried to confirm what he saw, the figure had already vanished.

The limited illumination from the Ghost Candle couldn't reach far enough.

Li Yang didn't want to stop, and as the distance grew, the area he had just passed fell back into darkness, making it impossible to see clearly anymore.

Chapter 964 Supernatural Game

Yang Jian felt that Li Yang had walked out of Ghost Shadow's coverage range and immediately retracted Ghost Shadow.

Now, he had to face an even more dangerous ordeal.

That was guarding this coffin, preventing the revival of the elderly man inside. If he revived prematurely, not only would they fail to last until the seventh day, but the message delivery mission would also fail.

"Be careful. His body has been invaded by a ghost."

The group stared at the ghost handler kneeling on the ground and vomiting blood, their expressions changing drastically.

Because the amount of blood he was vomiting far exceeded what a normal human would have, and beyond that, his body was visibly growing gaunt and emaciated. Mixed among the vomit was his own blood.

This man was transforming into a desiccated corpse at a speed visible to the naked eye.

Moreover, there seemed to be something writhing within the blood he vomited.

"There's no saving him. He's been corroded too deeply."

Yang Jian sprang into action, driving the cracked spear in his hand straight into the ghost handler's body.

The Coffin Nail's suppression remained overwhelmingly potent, almost insurmountable.

The ghost handler, who was transforming into a dry corpse, immediately widened his eyes and froze.

He stopped vomiting blood, but then died instantly.

The Coffin Nail suppressed the ghost within him, stripping him of his supernatural power and rendering him incapable of maintaining his living state.

Yang Jian didn't let the ghost handler keep possession of the Coffin Nail but instead flung the corpse out through the open rear door.

Though a ghost might still revive outside, as long as the rules of its killing pattern weren't triggered, the ghost wouldn't necessarily focus on their group. And even if it did, that would be a problem for later; the urgent issue needed addressing now.

"Bang!"

Eagle fired his old, worn-out gun.

He had seen a blurry silhouette emerge from the darkness in front of the corridor.

But the shot only forced the silhouette to retreat several meters. Less than ten seconds later, the indistinct shadow reappeared.

Eagle's face darkened. He had no choice but to fire repeatedly, emptying the old handgun in his hand to buy time.

Wang Feng said nothing as he sat by the rear door and took out two dice seemingly carved from bone—one black and one red. Aside from their unusual colors, they looked just like regular dice.

The moment the two dice were displayed, the eerie disturbances outside instantly quieted down.

"If you want to come in, you'll have to follow the rules of this horrifying game. Let's play. Gamble against me. If you win, I die, and you come in. If you lose, you leave."

As the fourth-floor messenger, Wang Feng had another supernatural item besides the bloodstained wooden mallet that had been taken from him—these Ghost Dice.

He retrieved them during a message delivery task on the third floor.

To acquire them, he gambled three rounds against a ghost and won them all.

The thrill of that moment still lingered vividly in his memory.

But today, he felt he could no longer afford to hold back; this item had to be used: "Da Qiang, if I lose and die, you take over. If you die, then Eagle takes over... Once this game starts, it cannot be stopped. Otherwise, the rear door will immediately spiral out of control."

The ghost handler named Da Qiang's expression shifted, but he didn't refuse.

At this moment.

A black die, influenced by some supernatural force, tilted eerily before beginning to spin. It spun faster and faster, its momentum building endlessly. The black die representing the ghost started rolling.

After countless revolutions, it finally stopped, rolling several times on the ground before revealing its outcome.

A bright red dot came into view.

One point.

Wang Feng let out a subtle sigh of relief upon seeing this. It seemed this ghost was very unlucky, rolling only a single point.

"My turn." He picked up the red die.

On the red die, the points were black, while on the black die, the points were red.

The two dice were connected, cursed, forming this deadly game between humans and ghosts.

And once the game began, it couldn't be easily ended.

Though ghosts could leave the game, humans could not. If they attempted to leave, they'd be killed by the ghost.

Thus.

For Wang Feng to survive, he had to keep the game going.

"During the game, I'm safe."

He took a deep breath, silently counting out ten seconds before tossing the red die onto the ground.

Ten seconds.

The maximum time a ghost could wait. If Wang Feng hesitated to throw the die for longer than ten seconds, every second after that would increase the ghost's chances of breaking free from the game's rules and killing him.

So whether in-game or out of the game, humans were always at a disadvantage.

After all, ghosts had the option to overturn the board, though he doubted they'd do so.

The red die spun rapidly, its path chaotic. Despite being thrown forward, it defied logic by rolling backward.

Soon.

The result appeared: Three.

Three points.

Not high, not low—an average result.

Without a doubt, Wang Feng won the first round.

The pair of weathered black cloth shoes resting on the threshold of the rear door moved, retreating back from the building's interior. But they didn't go far, stopping mere meters outside.

"This ghost is too horrifying. Winning a single round only pushed it back by five meters." Wang Feng's heart skipped a beat.

In the past, winning a round meant the ghost would stay away for at least ten minutes.

But there was no time for contemplation.

The black die began spinning again.

Another ghost was now joining the game. Though its form was invisible, its presence could be confirmed—it stood right outside the door.

The black die quickly stopped, revealing a result: Four.

Wang Feng's face paled. This number carried heavy pressure. With the dice showing values from one to six, four was already a high roll.

To win, he'd have to roll either five or six.

If he rolled four as well, it would result in a tie, meaning another round would be necessary until a winner emerged.

This was what made the Ghost Dice so frightening.

Clenching his teeth, Wang Feng picked up the red die from the ground. Following the usual ritual, he gripped it tightly for ten seconds.

He didn't dare risk exceeding the time limit by even a second, immediately tossing the die after counting down.

The red die rolled across the floor in a bizarre trajectory, breaking all semblance of logic. He threw it forward, yet it rolled backward.

Soon enough.

The number appeared: Four.

"A tie..." Wang Feng broke out in a cold sweat, his heart clenching with anxiety.

The game against the ghost hadn't ended.

After the tie, the black die representing the ghost began spinning again...

"One loss, and it's over—you're dead."

Yang Xiaohua was gripping a red balloon tightly, her face pale and tense as she watched the deadly dice game unfold.

"The fourth-floor messenger does have some tricks." Yang Jian watched the scene and made an assessment.

Wang Feng had temporarily held back the pressure at the rear door, dragging the invading ghost into a supernatural game to buy time and suppress the ghostly activity.

But the game wouldn't last long.

"If you can't use the ghost's powers, go play this game at the back door. If someone dies on my end, send another to take their place. Rotate out one by one, and when all of the four messengers on my side are dead, you'll probably be finished too," Yang Jian said.

"Alright."

Fan Xing and the others' faces shifted, but they gritted their teeth and agreed without objection.

This arrangement was fair.

Everyone rotated, leaving their lives to fate.

Yang Jian's approach left little room for reproach.

"Is it here already?" Yang Jian's expression hardened suddenly as he turned toward the main hall.

Ghost Shadow spread across the floor, triggering its medium.

He saw a pale, skeletal corpse without clothing. Its long face was chilling, and its twig-like arms seemed horrifyingly thin—essentially skin stretched over bone.

Yang Jian scrutinized the medium, his face icy, and brought down the Firewood Knife in his hand immediately.

The slash cleaved the ghost cleanly into two.

"Aah!"

Another horrible screech broke out—a high-pitched sound almost like that of a woman.

The ghost had been dismembered.

But the next moment.

The curse flared.

A fracture split Yang Jian's waist, severing him in two, with no chance of quick recovery.

However, he had no intention of recovering anytime soon.

That was why he chose to be cut at the waist. Even if he were truly severed, it wouldn't hinder his subsequent actions.

The ghost, however, was different.

Once dismembered by the Firewood Knife, the ghost entered a temporary phase of suppression. It would gradually revive, searching for its "pieces." Restoring itself to its state before being cut down would take at least one hour, if not longer.

Chapter 965 The Art of Survival

The premature mourning announcement on the third day led everyone in the ancient mansion to immediately face unprecedented peril.

Originally, based on the situation during the vigil on the second day, Yang Jian and the others only needed to stay near the red coffin in the rear hall to remain safe. However, Fan Xing and the others first provoked a certain vengeful ghost's curse, causing the ghosts in the mansion to discover the group hiding in the rear hall.

If that wasn't bad enough, Zhou Deng, holding the white lantern, took a stroll outside and performed the mourning announcement for the third day ahead of time.

This act attracted the ghosts outside into the mansion.

Now, ghosts threatened both inside and outside the mansion.

With no escape, they had no choice but to fight desperately against the ghosts.

Yang Jian guarded the red coffin, preventing any ghost from approaching. His greatest worry was that the elderly person inside might be influenced by other ghosts at this critical moment, leading to an early awakening and disrupting the arrival of the seventh day.

Wang Feng and other ghost handlers guarded the back door.

By relying on a dice game, they forcibly delayed the intrusion of ghosts into the mansion.

"The key to breaking the deadlock lies with Li Yang. Only when Li Yang returns successfully can the situation here be turned around," Yang Jian thought, fully aware of what needed to happen next.

The group had to withstand the pressure of the ghosts' assault until the critical moment arrived.

If they failed.

Yang Jian would have to consider abandoning everyone, abandoning the message delivery, abandoning the mansion, and surviving alone...

He possessed the ability to live on and certainly wouldn't accompany everyone to the grave.

Meanwhile.

Li Yang walked steadily as he kept an eye on the burning speed of the red Ghost Candle in his hand. His journey so far was relatively smooth; he passed the courtyard and arrived behind the main gate.

He attempted to open the wooden gate.

But found it stuck, as if wedged shut, making it impossible to open easily.

The Ghost Candle burned ever faster.

With less than half of the candle left, at this rate of consumption, it wouldn't last even a minute.

Clenching his teeth, Li Yang shoved the Ghost Candle into the gap between the doors.

The flame of the Ghost Candle suddenly surged, and the sound of rapid footsteps came from outside, one following another. These footsteps scattered quickly.

Creeaaak!

The old, decayed wooden door opened at that moment.

The Ghost Candle wavered, leaving only a small remaining length.

"The cost of using the Ghost Candle to drive away ghosts is too high; it can't sustain such consumption," Li Yang muttered through clenched teeth as he hurriedly placed the Ghost Candle some distance away to secure the area around the door.

Then he raised his head to look at the white lantern hanging above the door.

A cold wind blew.

The pale, faded lantern swayed and emitted a dim light.

Glancing back, Li Yang saw several eerie shadows flicker near the candlelight, appearing and disappearing intermittently, their precise positions untraceable.

Ghosts roamed just outside the door.

Judging from this post-mourning outcome, ghosts weren't just at the back door but also the front; it seemed the entire mansion's surroundings were shrouded in threats.

Taking advantage of what little time remained before the Ghost Candle burned out, Li Yang quickly climbed the main gate and took down the white lantern.

All went relatively smoothly.

There was danger, but he avoided disaster.

As soon as the lantern came into his possession, the Ghost Candle flickered out completely.

There were too many ghosts nearby for the faint candlelight to sustain even a moment longer; it burned through entirely, leaving not even a trace of wax.

Without that sinister, eerie flame.

The strange shadows illuminated by the Ghost Candle instantly vanished.

The ghosts hadn't left, still lingering nearby.

But without the Ghost Candle's influence, Li Yang could no longer see them.

He felt an overwhelming chill in the air.

Even his skin tingled with cold sensations, as if the ghosts had gathered around him, ready to consume him.

Although nothing was visible, Li Yang could still smell the stench of decaying corpses and the earthy, muddy scent.

"The ghosts aren't attacking me." Li Yang gripped the white lantern tightly.

The lantern's faint, pale light illuminated the surrounding area, keeping him from losing his sense of direction.

Beyond this illuminated zone, the rest of the environment was shrouded in oppressive darkness.

"Get back quickly."

Li Yang dared not waste a single moment; any hesitation here could spell the loss of more lives back in the rear hall.

Carrying the lantern, he hurried along the mansion's side, aiming to circle back to the rear hall.

But as soon as he moved, his face froze.

Behind him, a chain of footsteps sounded, seemingly the lurking ghosts now trailing him.

Li Yang sped up his pace, and so did the footsteps behind him.

Turning to look.

There was nothing behind him, only desolation and darkness.

"Ghosts won't kill the one performing the mourning announcement, so surviving the third day hinges on this... Under normal circumstances, everyone should leave the mansion on the third day, carrying lanterns and wandering the area to keep the ghosts occupied until the mourning announcement concludes. Now I understand," Li Yang thought to himself.

Li Yang wasn't foolish; he was a survivor of previous supernatural events.

Without a certain level of cunning, he would've perished long ago during the Ghost Painting incident and never become a ghost handler or lived to this day.

"So, my task isn't to return to the rear hall with the lantern but to lure away the ghosts surrounding the mansion, allowing the captain to focus on dealing with the ghosts inside."

"The captain's judgment was correct; the second day's vigil and the third day's mourning announcement must not overlap. Now, I have to find a way to correct this."

Once Li Yang sorted through his thoughts, he quickened his pace.

He wouldn't halt his actions, no matter what eerie phenomena occurred behind or around him.

Even though he moved swiftly.

For the group in the rear hall, surviving even one minute—let alone several hours—required an immense price.

A red dice rolled several times across the floor before finally coming to a halt.

The result was: 2.

Opposite it, a black dice showed the number: 5.

The ghost's roll yielded 5, while Wang Feng's roll resulted in 2.

The game had reached its fifth round, but Wang Feng's luck had run out. His body stiffened, cold sweat dripping, his gaze fixating on his roll as if he was dazed, disbelief written across his face.

"I... I lost..." Wang Feng's lips trembled.

Soon after, his body rapidly turned cold, his complexion drained of color, and the light in his eyes extinguished, like a flickering flame snuffed out mercilessly by the brutal world.

Wang Feng froze, motionless, utterly lifeless.

Having lost the gamble, he perished inside this nameless, terrifying mansion.

"He lost, huh?" The Eagle glanced at his fallen comrade with a profound sense of sorrow.

From the moment Wang Feng endured the curse of the haunted letters and became a messenger, he struggled to survive, delivering over a dozen eerie letters, facing countless dangers. Even invading the fourth floor's ghosts failed to end him. Yet now, he succumbed at this final hurdle.

Failed to cross the fifth floor of the postal building, stopped in his tracks.

At that moment, a cold air began to infiltrate the mansion from outside the rear door.

Wang Feng had lost, and now the ghosts were about to enter.

"I'll gamble with the ghost."

At this moment, a ghost handler gritted his teeth, pushed Wang Feng's corpse aside, and took the seat. He quickly grabbed the red dice and threw it.

Seizing the moment before the ghost entered.

This man forcibly resumed the gamble, continuing what Wang Feng had started.

The red dice rolled and eventually settled, producing an unimaginable result: 6.

The highest number had appeared.

"Haha."

The ghost handler laughed, his tension evident as his face twitched unnaturally.

The game was on.

The cold air drew back, retreating from the mansion.

The ghost was compelled to participate in the game, bound by its rules.

Thus, regardless of whether the ghost won against Wang Feng, the game would persist as long as someone resumed it—until Yang Jian's team was entirely wiped out.

Soon.

The black dice rolled, and the ghost's result was: 5.

Another 5.

Previously, Wang Feng had lost to this number, but the ghost handler's roll had already produced a 6.

The first round was a win.

The cold air withdrew further, departing from the rear entrance.

"The ghost... has dispersed." The ghost handler exhaled deeply, flashing a cracked smile.

But just as this smile appeared, it quickly stiffened.

An old pair of black cloth shoes shuffled closer, stopping at the threshold of the rear hall.

Soon.

The black dice—used by the ghost—rolled again.

"Another ghost. The previous one left, beaten by Wang Feng. But in this short time, yet another has come?" The ghost handler's chest tightened sharply.

Any ghost unable to be repelled by the supernatural game was undoubtedly highly dangerous.

The second ghost participating in the game appeared to be unlucky.

The result: 2.

"Looks like I'll survive longer than you did." The ghost handler shot a glance at Wang Feng's corpse.

At this moment, Fan Xing had already dragged Wang Feng's body out the rear entrance, treating it like trash. It quickly disappeared from sight, rolling down a slope into the woods behind.

The messenger's corpse couldn't remain inside the mansion.

If something possessed the body, it would no longer be a corpse but a ghost.

Moreover, no one could guarantee that Wang Feng himself wasn't a ghost handler.

Thus, no one objected to Fan Xing's actions, remaining silent.

Despite Wang Feng's significant efforts and sacrifices, his death rendered everything meaningless; the survivors had to continue struggling to live without being affected by his corpse.

The new ghost handler learning from Wang Feng's approach held the red dice in his hand for precisely ten seconds.

Once the ten seconds passed.

Without greed for further delay, he immediately threw the red dice.

The ghost's result was 2.

The odds of winning were high.

But fate seemed to mock him, as the red dice finally stopped rolling to reveal a despair-inducing number: 1.

The result: 1.

Smaller than the ghost's 2.

"How could this happen? How could this happen? How could it be 1..."

The man instantly spiraled into madness, his rage resembling that of a gambler who had bet everything and lost. His eyes burned red, bloodshot from his fury and anguish.

"Luck works like this. You could roll a 6 or a 1; you might win a round, but the ghost never loses. The greatest injustice isn't in the game itself but in the identity of the players—humans can never truly outwit ghosts, much like gamblers can never win against the house," The Eagle remarked grimly.

The ghost handler continued to shout and vent his frustration.

But it was futile.

Soon.

He staggered and collapsed onto the floor.

His face turned ice-cold, his mouth gaping open, his eyes lifeless and dull; his life extinguished.

He had been erased by the supernatural forces tied to the cursed ghost dice.

Even as a ghost handler, he was powerless against the dice's dreadful curse.

Yet his death left no choice—the game had to be resumed by someone.

The old black cloth shoes now stepped closer to entering the rear hall.

According to Yang Jian's rules:

When a ghost handler died, a messenger had to take over.

Now, only three messengers remained.

The Eagle, Da Qiang, and Yang Xiaohua.

Da Qiang's eyes flickered, as if unwilling to involve himself so soon, while Yang Xiaohua, an ordinary person holding the red balloon, was yet to take her turn.

Thus, The Eagle stepped up without hesitation, picking up the black dice from the floor and rolling it.

The game continued.

The old black cloth shoes paused once more.

As before, since The Eagle had initiated the game, the ghost was bound by its rules and dragged back into the ongoing dice throw.

"Is Li Yang still not back? Three are dead already. At this rate, we're destined for annihilation," Fan Xing said, his mood growing increasingly agitated as he took in the dismal situation.

Everyone around him was dying one after the other.

Not from direct ghost attacks but sacrifices made to delay the ghosts' assaults.

The most draining aspect was that their efforts against the ghosts showed no signs of hope.

This was despite Yang Jian holding his ground, single-handedly resisting all ghosts advancing from the main hall without letting a single entity through.

Yet even so, it was futile.

As the pressures of ghostly invasions remained untamed, extinction seemed inevitable.

Looking back, Fan Xing cursed his own power struggle; had he obediently clung to Yang Jian's leadership and not sought to assert control, perhaps they could have survived through the seventh day.

Then there was that damned Zhou Deng.

If everyone had followed Yang Jian's orders from the start, this ordeal might have ended safely.

"Rustle... rustle..."

From the shadowy main hall, the persistent sound of the radio crackled once more.

The signal quickly connected as eerie words articulated from its static: "Hey... hehehe... you're all about to die... so close now... rustle~!"

Yang Jian's expression darkened.

His grip tightened on the Coffin Nail, his impulse tempting him to pin the thing down. Yet reason warned him that it wasn't the time to use the Coffin Nail.

If things spiraled entirely out of control and became uncontainable, he would save the Coffin Nail for the entity inside the coffin.

At the very least, he needed to eliminate the most dangerous force before leaving the rest to fate.

Yang Xiaohua trembled uncontrollably, struggling even to breathe as her fear took hold.

While she had anticipated the delivery mission to be challenging, she hadn't expected it to reach such terrifying extremes.

Her prolonged state of tension made her limbs feel stiff, almost unresponsive, forcing her to attempt small movements lest she found herself immobilized in case of imminent danger.

Yang Xiaohua took a few steps back.

But the instant after.

Her expression changed drastically.

As she retreated, her foot slipped, and she stumbled backward uncontrollably.

It felt as though a deep abyss had opened behind her.

"Ah!"

Yang Xiaohua let out a piercing scream.

Everyone nearby turned their gazes simultaneously.

Their eyes widened in horror.

Behind Yang Xiaohua, a crack had inexplicably appeared in the wall.

It resembled a fissure, resembling a bottomless pit threatening to swallow her whole.

Yang Jian, whose vigilance had been on high alert for unexpected accidents, sprang into action as Yang Xiaohua fell.

Several Ghost Hands materialized on Yang Xiaohua, invading her body.

In the next instant.

The red balloon in Yang Xiaohua's hand wrapped tightly around her arm, causing her entire body to rapidly float upward.

This was because, at this moment, her body contained ghostly entities and supernatural powers, activating the red balloon's effect.

"Even the rear hall's walls are being invaded by supernatural forces now?" Yang Jian murmured.

He remained steady, using minimal intervention to achieve optimal results.

It was still too early to resort to desperate measures—the toughest battles were yet to come.

Chapter 966 Desperate Effort

A massive black shadow appeared on the rear hall wall, like a boundless abyss, almost swallowing Yang Xiaohua whole.

But then.

A red balloon wrapped around her arm and slowly lifted her into the air, allowing her to escape the abyss and temporarily avoid danger.

That darkness wasn't a ghost, but the Ghost Domain.

The Ghost Domain enshrouding the ancient mansion had invaded the rear hall, altering the surrounding environment. In such conditions, any anomaly nearby was no longer surprising.

"Anyone left who doesn't want to die inexplicably, stay near this coffin," Yang Jian warned the others.

The ground around the red coffin was pitch black.

This was because Yang Jian's Ghost Shadow covered the vicinity. His Ghost Shadow could repel other ghosts' Ghost Domain invasions and also prevent other malevolent ghosts from approaching.

However, the area his Ghost Shadow could cover was limited in such an environment, so he only protected the area around the red coffin, ignoring the rest.

With a casual motion.

Yang Jian swung the Firewood Knife, severing the thin string of the red balloon.

Yang Xiaohua was freed from the balloon's grip and dropped down.

At the same time, Yang Jian retrieved the ghost that had entered Yang Xiaohua's body, allowing her to grab hold of the red balloon which had almost floated away again.

After skirting the edge of death for a while, Yang Xiaohua no longer dared to be careless. She quickly stood near the red coffin, not daring to move even half a step, fearing that the surrounding paranormal forces would claim her life again.

Ordinary people were far too fragile in such an environment.

"Yang Jian, if you don't think of something fast, Eagle won't last long either. This game is terribly unfair. If the ghost wins, one of us dies immediately. But if we win, the ghost merely retreats a few steps," Da Qiang approached, his face grim.

At this rate, based on the pace of deaths, it wouldn't even be five minutes before it was his turn to play the dice game.

Participating in this game was essentially walking to the gallows; one wouldn't survive for long.

Fan Xing also stared expectantly at Yang Jian.

They hoped he could come up with some method to alleviate the crisis.

"I do have a backup method. I initially wasn't planning to use it at this stage—after all, we still need to survive until the seventh day. If we exhaust all our trump cards at the start, there'll be no way out if another crisis occurs later. But looking at things now, most of you won't even make it past today, let alone tomorrow or the following days," Yang Jian spoke calmly, still holding something in reserve.

A real solution?

The few remaining survivors widened their eyes at Yang Jian.

They had only been hoping for a shred of luck by asking him, never expecting Yang Jian to deliver an actual glimmer of hope.

Yang Jian didn't speak further. Instead, he pulled out his phone.

After unlocking it, he tapped on a game app on the screen. The game's icon resembled a piano.

A game?

The group was puzzled by this display.

What was this supposed to accomplish?

Wasn't this just an ordinary mobile game?

Yet Yang Jian said nothing. He opened the app and began to play.

It was a piano simulation game where, by tapping the piano keys on the screen, one could produce sounds similar to a real piano.

The game was dull and tedious, something no one ordinarily enjoyed playing.

But as Yang Jian's fingers clicked swiftly on the screen, an eerie and ethereal melody reverberated through the rear hall.

The melody was a medium; it wasn't meant to be heard.

At that moment, a terrifying curse was unleashed by Yang Jian.

The curse of the Eight-Tone Music Box.

The curse had been lying dormant within Yang Jian since it awakened from the coffin last time. He hadn't used it since because this curse was exceedingly dangerous. Even the one who activated it—Yang Jian—couldn't dispel it. Once cursed, without special methods, one was almost certain to perish.

Now, the Eight-Tone Music Box curse was released, and its target was Eagle, who was currently playing the dice game.

Eagle was sitting on the ground, his eyes glued to the third round of the game in front of him.

The black dice representing the ghost had rolled a 4.

His luck was evidently abysmal; his dice landed on a 2.

The outcome was settled; defeat was inevitable.

By the third round of the dice game, he had already lost.

Eagle seemed to have resigned himself to the result. A slight, bitter smile crept to his lips as he gently shook his head, ready to let the terrifying game claim his life.

After seeing the fate of the previous dice players, the moment he picked up the red dice to fend off the ghost, his end was already determined.

"This is it. Maybe dying here counts as a form of release." He accepted his fate, hoping for a peaceful departure.

But at that moment.

A strange, ethereal melody wafted from behind him, lingering in the air and showing no signs of fading. Instead, it seemed to invade his consciousness, endlessly echoing in his mind.

Suspicious, he glanced back.

"Yang Jian, what did you do to me?" Eagle instantly sensed that something was off about himself.

"The curse of the Eight-Tone Music Box. As long as this melody doesn't stop, you're in a state of temporary safety. But once the music ends, you will die without question. The duration ranges from a few days to a week—it depends on your luck," Yang Jian calmly explained as he put his phone away.

The Eight-Tone Music Box curse?

Such a thing existed?

Eagle's expression shifted, but then he realized with astonishment: he hadn't died yet. Despite losing the dice game, unlike the previous two victims, he was still alive.

Now.

Apart from the persistent melody resonating in his mind, nothing else seemed to affect him.

"Unbelievable. Eagle lost the dice game and still survived," Da Qiang observed, his face filled with disbelief.

Yang Xiaohua also looked at Eagle, equally astonished.

"It seems that compared to the Ghost Dice's curse, the Eight-Tone Music Box curse is slightly superior. If that's the case, let the game continue," Yang Jian declared.

Eagle's eyes flickered as he nodded silently, understanding the situation.

Without hesitation, he picked up the dice and resumed the game with the ghost.

Now that neither he nor the ghost could die, the game was finally fair.

"The Eight-Tone Music Box curse? I see. If you had this method, why didn't you use it earlier?" Fan Xing questioned, "Why wait until now?"

"Do I need to explain myself to you?" Yang Jian glared at him coldly.

Fan Xing was at a loss for words.

Yang Jian indeed didn't owe him an explanation.

"The curse can only save someone under specific conditions. Under normal circumstances, it's a killing curse. Releasing it now seems to be a last resort. Besides, arguing about this now is pointless—soon, we're all going to die together. Even if we survive today, tomorrow, or the day after, making it through to the later days will be virtually impossible..." Da Qiang interjected from the side.

Yang Xiaohua remained silent. She knew there was nothing she could change. Strictly speaking, she wasn't even considered a Messenger of the Fourth Floor.

The main reason Yang Jian had been reluctant to use the Eight-Tone Music Box was that its curse could only be applied to one person. If he had used it earlier, he would afterward have no way to use it himself in an emergency.

Furthermore, while the Eight-Tone Music Box curse could provide protection, it was also extremely fatal.

Recklessly unleashing it might have an adverse effect.

For this reason, he hadn't used it to save Wang Feng earlier, hoping Li Yang could return before things spiraled out of control.

But now, it seemed there was no choice but to use the Eight-Tone Music Box's curse. Continuing to withhold it would likely result in everyone's demise.

The paranormal force outside the rear door had temporarily been stabilized due to the Eight-Tone Music Box.

But the ghost invading from the mansion's main hall had never ceased its march. The Ghost Domain's influence was expanding, and now it affected not just the walls but also the ceiling and corridors. The surroundings seemed to dissolve into nothingness, as though consumed by a bottomless abyss.

The familiar environment was vanishing, as if being erased from existence—including themselves.

"Is the ghost attempting to use the Ghost Domain to invade the rear hall and kill us all? That's indeed a nearly insoluble method. If the ghost appeared directly, it'd leave behind a medium for me to dismember using the Firewood Knife. But this way, the ghost avoids my attacks, making it impossible for me to trigger the medium," Yang Jian realized.

His Ghost Shadow was hindered by the paranormal interference, unable to extend its range further.

This ghost's Ghost Domain was terrifying.

And this was while the ancient mansion imposed some level of suppression. If it were outside, this ghost's Ghost Domain would undoubtedly be the most formidable Yang Jian had ever encountered, exceeding even his five-layer combined Ghost Domain.

Yang Jian's five-layer Ghost Domain could banish certain lesser paranormal entities, but this ghost's Ghost Domain could engulf everything—people and buildings alike.

"Continuing to hold out here offers no way out," he exhaled deeply and scanned the others.

Li Yang hadn't returned, and even if he did, it would only draw away the ghost at the rear door. The ghosts within the ancient mansion would still need to be dealt with by him alone.

"So, what do we do?" the last remaining stranger among the ghost controllers asked, his voice trembling.

It was a mix of fear and extreme tension.

Yang Jian glanced at him. "Da Qiang, you have a Ghost Domain, correct?"

"That's right," the Messenger named Da Qiang nodded.

Yang Jian instructed, "I need you to take my place, at least for ten seconds. During those ten seconds, I'll charge into the main hall alone to dismember the ghost responsible for invading the rear hall. If we don't act now, we'll be ground down to death."

"Ten seconds?"

Da Qiang's face turned pale. "I'm not sure I can do it. Is there no other way?"

"There isn't. If the Ghost Domain engulfs the rear hall, everyone will vanish—including the red coffin. Then we'll all die. Right now, the ghost isn't directly visible to me, so I can't pinpoint its location. Therefore, I must attack proactively. But if I leave, the encroaching Ghost Domain requires someone to hold the fort.

"You're the only one left here with a Ghost Domain, so you have no choice but to endure for ten seconds, even if it means risking ghostly revival," Yang Jian added grimly. "This is our only shot."

"And you must do it; refusing isn't an option."

Clenching his teeth, Da Qiang growled, "Fine. Ten seconds. I'll do my best."

Ten seconds sounded brief, but only those with ghost-controlling abilities knew how terrifying and dangerous this kind of paranormal confrontation was.

"After the count of three, I'll act," Yang Jian stated, locking eyes with him.

At this moment, he didn't doubt Da Qiang.

Because if Da Qiang didn't give his all, he too would die along with everyone else. This wasn't just for others; it was for himself.

"Alright, understood," Da Qiang said, slapping his face in an attempt to calm his nerves and steel his resolve.

"Let's begin."

Beads of cold sweat already formed on his forehead, and his nerves stretched to their limits.

"One." Yang Jian raised a finger.

Da Qiang nodded.

Fan Xing, Yang Xiaohua, and the last remaining stranger watched them intently, their eyes glued to every move.

"Two."

Yang Jian gripped the Firewood Knife tightly, knowing it was his time to act.

Da Qiang's face turned ghastly pale, his expression transforming into that of a corpse. The living man was transitioning into the appearance of the dead.

This was the precursor to activating a ghostly power—his body was being invaded by the ghost.

"Three!"

As Yang Jian's voice rang out, the Ghost Shadow covering the area around the red coffin retracted in an instant, and Yang Jian, like a wild beast, charged out. He left the rear hall, heading straight for the main hall.

"It's happening."

As soon as the Ghost Shadow pulled back, Da Qiang's Ghost Domain took over.

But in that split second of transition, the surrounding darkness surged forward. There was no longer any safe ground to stand on. Only a small perimeter around the red coffin remained secure.

"Get on top of the coffin!" Fan Xing yelled in terror, scrambling to climb onto the red coffin.

The other ghost controller and Yang Xiaohua didn't have time to react and could only cling to the coffin, desperate not to fall into the surrounding abyss.

Eagle, who was still engaged in the dice game with the ghost, was unaffected. The game's rules shielded him from all paranormal influence, including the Ghost Domain's encroachment.

"Damn it."

Da Qiang roared, his body contorting from the strain. His veins bulged as he fought against his own ghostly powers trying to consume him. The pain was maddening enough to drive anyone insane.

His Ghost Domain strained to resist the all-consuming darkness.

No matter how hard he pushed, the range of his Ghost Domain kept shrinking. He could barely maintain its coverage over the red coffin, and even that boundary steadily contracted.

"Ten seconds. I just need to last ten seconds. I can do this," Da Qiang muttered to himself, his overwhelming will to survive keeping him from breaking under despair.

Meanwhile, Yang Jian stormed into the main hall with the Firewood Knife in hand. He had bided his time for this, hoping to stabilize the situation until the seventh day. But now that the ghost had pushed them to the brink, he knew there was no point in holding back anymore.

If this required risking everything, so be it.

He wasn't afraid.

"Leave nothing in reserve. Trigger all the mediums left by the ghosts and dismember every one of them that appears. Turn the situation around in one fell swoop."

Yang Jian's eyes glinted with a mix of ferocity and determination.

As his Ghost Shadow stretched out beneath him, forming a safe path, he sprinted to the center of the main hall. There, he unleashed his Ghost Shadow outward, letting it spread across the hall.

Wherever the Ghost Shadow extended, any traces left behind by the ghosts would activate.

Suddenly.

Countless eerie and terrifying phantom figures materialized around Yang Jian.

A sea of ghosts.

The once-empty main hall became densely packed in an instant.

Every one of them was a ghost medium.

As the Ghost Shadow spread further, more phantom figures emerged. Many of the mediums were repeated traces left by the same ghost.

"Let's do this."

Yang Jian gave a low growl, raising the Firewood Knife and swinging it down toward a cluster of ghost mediums.

There was no flair or hesitation.

One swing severed the mediums of four ghosts simultaneously.

"Aaaah—!"

Chilling and disturbing screams instantly echoed throughout the dark mansion, sending shivers down anyone's spine.

"Next."

Yang Jian swung a second time, slicing through the mediums of another three ghosts in a single strike.

The unknown, terrifying ghosts connected to those mediums would fall victim to the Firewood Knife's curse, dismembered instantly.

However, as he prepared for a third strike.

The curse from his first slash erupted.

The first swing had severed the mediums of four ghosts. This unleashed a commensurate and even more terrifying curse back onto Yang Jian.

Deep fissures split across Yang Jian's body, the largest spanning nearly half his torso.

These cracks weren't only physical but also appeared on his Ghost Shadow.

The injuries were so severe that even the regenerative properties of his Ghost Shadow couldn't heal them quickly.

And the second strike's curse was already beginning to take effect.

Yang Jian's body now looked like shattered porcelain, his form utterly fractured.

Even his Ghost Shadow seemed on the verge of collapsing entirely.

"Restart."

Yang Jian murmured, his voice low and strained from the agony of being dismembered.

His ghostly eyes snapped wide open, emitting a blood-red glow that engulfed his entire body.

In less than a second, Yang Jian's fragmented body and Ghost Shadow reassembled, back to their original state.

"Let's go again." His gaze turned icy and menacing.

Wielding the Firewood Knife, he swung once more.

This time, he found it.

The source of the Ghost Domain within the ancient mansion.

A horrifying, distorted figure of a malevolent ghost.

It was a familiar presence—one he'd attacked before. The ghost had invaded the rear hall and collided with his Ghost Shadow, leaving behind a detectable medium.

After that collision, however, the medium disappeared, preventing Yang Jian from triggering a follow-up attack.

"I've got you now." Ignoring the other mediums around him, Yang Jian swung his weapon directly at the terrifying ghostly figure, slicing it clean in two.

The Firewood Knife's curse cleaved through the ghost with such precision that the entire mansion seemed to shudder slightly.

It wasn't a physical tremor but a shift in the pervasive darkness, as though the blackness itself began to writhe in torment.

A crack emerged, like a sliver of light piercing through the ancient mansion's gloom.

This was Yang Jian's third time wielding the Firewood Knife that night. He had used it extravagantly, each time ensuring its effects targeted this formidable ghost. There was no longer room for hesitation.

Because if this ghost's Ghost Domain wasn't dismantled, it would soon consume everything in the rear hall—including the red coffin.

Without that red coffin, their mission to deliver the message would fail.

Chapter 967: Turning the Tide

The ancient mansion enshrouded in darkness.

In order to reverse the despairing situation, Yang Jian gave up on the plan to hold out in the rear hall. Alone, he charged into the main hall, Ghost Eye activated, gripping the Firewood Knife, and triggered the medium to locate the ominous ghost's silhouette before decisively cutting off the mediums without hesitation.

Once a medium is severed, the ominous ghost in the unknown location will be dismembered as well.

Moreover, the dismembered ghost would be suppressed for a period of time, rendering it incapable of movement.

Three times.

In less than ten seconds, Yang Jian wielded the Firewood Knife three times.

The first time, he severed the mediums of four ominous ghosts. The second, three. For the final cut, just one medium—but this time, Yang Jian had chosen deliberately because this ghost was the source of the Ghost Domain. To eliminate the danger, this ghost had to be dismembered again; otherwise, everyone in the rear hall would perish.

But the price of such indiscriminate action was steep.

After using the Firewood Knife twice, Yang Jian had to use a restart once; otherwise, his disintegrating body wouldn't have been able to hold up long enough for him to make the third swing.

"It's done."

Only after Yang Jian slashed the twisted, blurry figure of the ominous ghost from top to bottom, severing it fully in two, did a faint sense of relief pass through his mind.

The darkness in the main hall began to split open, as though he had cleaved it apart.

And the spreading darkness was retreating to the sides.

Clearly, after the Firewood Knife dismembered the ghost, the ghost fragmented into "puzzle pieces," and the supernatural power carried by these pieces could no longer affect the entirety of the ancient mansion, causing the Ghost Domain to dissipate—just like it had before.

But this was only temporary.

At most, after a few hours, the fragmented ghost would recover, and the Ghost Domain would once again engulf the mansion.

Therefore.

The Firewood Knife's strikes were merely meant to buy time and delay.

A crimson crack appeared on Yang Jian's forehead, extending downward as though it were dividing his entire body into two halves, even slicing into the Ghost Shadow beneath his feet, where it also bore an irreparable fissure.

"Dismembering this ghost just once isn't enough. It has to be fragmented to an even greater degree to permanently stop it from reviving after several hours."

Yang Jian ignored the erupting curse from the Firewood Knife on his body.

After restarting, he had only dismembered the ghost once.

At this level, Yang Jian could still handle it.

Now, his gaze quickly swept around.

Under the coverage of the Ghost Shadow, countless eerie, terrifying ghost figures appeared around him—each grotesque and distinct.

Yang Jian urgently searched for the medium of the ghost he had just faced.

Soon.

He found it again.

The twisted, blurry silhouette of the ominous ghost reappeared not far away.

He strode forward. Though his body was splitting apart, he paid it no heed, ignoring the mediums of the other ghosts along the way.

Now.

His sole objective was to dismember that ghost a second time.

Yet, midway through his strides, Yang Jian suddenly halted. His pupils shrank, as though witnessing the most inconceivable sight.

Yang Jian saw a peculiar medium.

It was an elderly woman, her face wrinkled, her back slightly hunched. She stood motionless, her dim, lifeless eyes fixed ahead. She wore an old-fashioned cloth garment, and a bamboo basket hung from her arm.

"That elderly woman from the bus? She's made her way into the mansion as well?"

Yang Jian's expression turned particularly grim.

This elder was unusual and ominous.

Not only did she appear on the bus, but she was also the ghost involved in the supernatural incident in Dachuan City's Room 301.

Back then, the elderly woman was already dead—a decayed corpse lying on a bed.

But now, this woman seemed alive.

Despite this, Yang Jian still couldn't determine if she was human or ghost.

However, when she boarded the bus, the bus had counted the ghosts, and the number was: 2.

According to the bus's logic, this elder was categorized as a ghost.

From Yang Jian's perspective, the bus's judgment wasn't always accurate. Zhou Deng, after wearing the Human Skin Mask, was also classified as a ghost by the bus, yet he was human—albeit a ghost wielder.

Ghost wielders aren't supposed to be judged as ghosts.

"Don't mess with me now." Yang Jian glared at the woman, gripping his cracked spear tightly.

Based on the logic from Room 301's event, this medium activated just as Yang Jian spotted the elder—and the elder, in turn, seemed capable of invading through the medium.

"No movement?"

Yang Jian paused briefly to observe. He saw that the elderly woman made no motion—not even shifting the gaze of her dim, cloudy eyes. Immediately, Yang Jian chose to ignore her.

At once.

His Firewood Knife struck for the fourth time.

This time, Yang Jian dismembered the ghost horizontally.

Combined with the prior cut, this effectively divided the ghost into four sections.

Under such conditions, recovery would prove far more difficult than anticipated.

Moreover, within the vicinity, the mediums of other ghosts were also impacted by his strike; they, too, were severed, and a small section of the area's mediums was forcibly cleared.

Unsurprisingly, the curse continued to explode across his body.

"Second restart."

Without hesitation, Yang Jian employed the power of the Ghost Eye to restart himself, restoring his body from the verge of disintegration to perfect condition once again.

Within one day.

Yang Jian had restarted twice.

Although the intervals were short, the frequency was excessively high.

Still, he persisted and showed no adverse effects from the mere two restarts. It seemed even a third restart within the day wouldn't pose an issue.

While Yang Jian frantically dismembered ghosts in the mansion's main hall.

In the rear hall.

The crisis had been temporarily resolved.

The darkness retreated rapidly, and the vanished floor, walls, and ceiling returned. Everything reverted to its previously familiar yet unfamiliar state.

"Yang Jian succeeded." Fan Xing's eyes widened as he heard the commotion from the main hall.

Meanwhile, Da Qiang had already retracted the Ghost Domain at the very moment the supernatural phenomenon subsided.

His expression was particularly grim; a stench of rot emanated from his entire body, making him resemble a lifeless corpse, his aura deathly and oppressive. Simultaneously, an inexplicable pain churned within him.

Da Qiang was undergoing ghostly intrusion.

Should the intrusions deepen too far, he would die from ghost resurrection—just like other ghost wielders.

However.

From the rear hall's doorway, a panting voice emerged. Li Yang stumbled in, clutching a pale lantern and leaning against the wall, his expression a mix of uncertainty and doubt: "I... I'm back... I found the lantern... What's the situation inside?"

Around the pale lantern, shadows danced anomalously, and eerie signs emerged constantly.

"Not late—you're still alive." The old man ("Eagle") spoke, observing the black dice symbolizing the ominous ghost no longer moving.

The ghosts seemingly participating in this game were departing, with no new ghosts entering.

Li Yang scanned the interior, spotting Da Qiang, the Eagle, Yang Xiaohua, Fan Xing, and another stranger wielding ghosts—but Yang Jian was nowhere in sight.

"Where's the captain?" Li Yang asked urgently.

"Up front, battling the ghosts. He single-handedly held off every ghost in the mansion. If not for him, we wouldn't have lasted until you arrived." The Eagle replied.

Li Yang's arrival was prompt, nearly simultaneous with Yang Jian's actions—a difference of mere thirty seconds.

But even those thirty seconds were enough to doom everyone in the rear hall.

Because Li Yang's pale lantern only stabilized the ghosts outside the mansion—it didn't affect those inside.

"How severe was the situation just now?" Li Yang's complexion changed.

Even the captain had to fight to the death—implying the events earlier were utterly catastrophic.

"No choice. Being able to survive was already a stroke of luck." The Eagle shook his head helplessly and eyed the dice on the ground.

His roll yielded three points.

The ghost's final roll was four.

He lost the final round, yet the ever-present melody of the Eight-Tone Music Box in his mind refused to fade, protecting him from the dice's curse. Even in defeat, he continued to play the ghost's game indefinitely.

"I can't linger here; I must swiftly lead the ghosts away and complete the mourning ritual. Otherwise, these entities will keep invading the mansion." Li Yang spoke quickly.

"We'll leave the rest to the captain."

Without further delay, he carried the pale lantern and departed.

As he left.

All supernatural occurrences in the rear hall faded, including the eerie pair of old black cloth shoes—a sign vanishing inexplicably.

Everything returned to a superficial calm.

"The mourning ritual starting prematurely on the third day... It seems our guess was correct. Unfortunately, this is only the second day—if it weren't, fewer lives would've been lost."

The Eagle stoically picked up the ghost dice from the ground.

It was sure to be used later.

"Looks like we're out of danger for now." Fan Xing exhaled deeply, then leaped off a nearby bright red coffin.

Meanwhile, Yang Xiaohua, who had been perched on the coffin, finally dared to lower her feet from the air.

The sensation of standing on solid ground offered her a minuscule comfort.

"I can't fathom how Yang Jian managed it. The main hall was teeming with supernatural anomalies; he stabilized everything in mere moments..." Fan Xing cast a glance towards the main hall.

With such terrifying powers, it was no wonder the supernatural community harbored such reverence and fear for Ghost Eye Yang Jian.

Unassuming in times of peace, his abilities in crisis truly had the power to overturn dire situations.

"It seems Yang Jian has ceased his actions. Did he manage to resolve it?" asked the stranger wielding ghosts in a tense tone.

He felt anxious, worried whether Yang Jian had already succumbed.

"Uncertain." The Eagle voiced his thoughts, "Yang Xiaohua, go check."

"Me?"

Yang Xiaohua's expression shifted drastically.

Fan Xing chimed in, "Go ahead and take a look; we need to stay here and guard the coffin without budging an inch. We can't risk any stray anomalies cropping up."

"Don't worry—nothing will happen. The hall's path is short; you'll be fine. Just follow Yang Jian's tracks—it's completely safe."

Yang Xiaohua held her tongue tightly, gripping a red balloon in her hands. With no alternative, she steeled herself and moved away from the vicinity of the coffin, heading for the main hall.

Her nerves were frayed.

The danger had only just abated.

Even now, verifying the situation carried immense risk; a single misstep could cost her life.

However, the logic was sound.

With so many deaths in the rear hall, survivors were needed for vigil duty around the coffin. Yang Xiaohua—a seemingly useless presence—was the least critical to the group.

If she perished, it wouldn't influence the team's mission.

Soon.

Yang Xiaohua entered the main hall.

She saw nothing. The entire hall felt oppressively dim, its floor cloaked in pitch black—like a shadow layer. However, the shadow was incomplete, intersected by jagged, chaotic cracks, like a shattered mirror struggling to piece itself together but failing to heal.

At the hall's center, Yang Jian sat motionless, gripping a cracked spear tightly in his hands.

There were no ghosts nearby.

No supernatural phenomena lingered.

Only Yang Jian remained.

"Yang Jian, are you alright? They sent me to check on the situation—are you okay?"

Yang Xiaohua swallowed dryly, her throat feeling parched.

"I'm fine. I'm already aware of the situation on their side. Li Yang successfully retrieved the pale lantern; he's now roaming outside, diverting the ghosts from the rear hall, eliminating its invasion threat. As for my end, I've stabilized things."

Yang Jian said, "Our earlier speculation was correct—the third day is indeed the mourning ritual."

"Tell the others not to worry. We've made it through the second day; the mansion's ghosts should remain dormant for now. As for what happens afterward—to that, I cannot give guarantees."

"You don't look well."

Hearing about safety, Yang Xiaohua gathered her nerve and approached. But her eyes widened in alarm when she saw Yang Jian up close.

His face bore numerous terrifying cracks, his entire being seeming like a mosaic of corpse fragments barely stitched together—on the verge of falling apart completely with the slightest movement.

"I'm fine. It's just a minor injury; a little rest will have me healed." Yang Jian's expression was stoic as he spoke. But the words pulled at his wounds, causing a grim gash to open anew.

Unable to hold back entirely.

He had utilized the Firewood Knife to dismember ghosts as much as possible while deliberately withholding from restarting to heal himself, opting instead for the slow recovery of the Ghost Shadow.

Because he needed to preserve his restarts.

Using them all up would spell certain death.

"You sure it's not serious?" Yang Xiaohua nervously pressed, unable to shake off her unease.

Rather than focusing on me, spend more time analyzing how to survive the fourth day." Yang Jian responded.

Chapter 968 Successfully Corrected

The time within the ancient mansion ticked by, little by little.

The remaining people were momentarily safe.

On the second night of keeping watch, Yang Jian alone managed to forcibly withstand the attack of the vengeful ghost and correct the error in the sequence of time. If nothing unexpected happened next, both the second and third days would pass peacefully.

But the cost was devastating.

Now, there were very few survivors left in the ancient mansion.

The survivors included the Eagle, Yang Xiaohua, Da Qiang, Fan Xing, and an unfamiliar ghost tamer.

Adding Yang Jian and Li Yang, there were only seven people left—even though there were nearly twenty passengers who got off the bus at the beginning.

However, Zhou Deng and Leuk Qingqing were missing.

No one knew if they had died outside the mansion or were still alive somewhere.

During this brief moment of calm, everyone rested for a while.

During this time, no more vengeful ghosts appeared.

The only movement came from Li Yang, who was pacing around the mansion holding the white lantern, ensuring that no vengeful ghost from outside broke into the mansion prematurely and lost control.

Although it was exhausting to walk continuously for several hours, at least it was safe.

Moreover, as a ghost tamer, Li Yang didn't have the problem of physical exhaustion—his physical condition was sustained by his supernatural power.

"It seems the ghost won't reappear in the short term."

Fan Xing sat idly in the corridor between the back hall and the main hall, body and mind incredibly fatigued. He glanced toward the direction of the back hall.

The Eagle was on guard there.

The others needed time to recuperate and quickly adjust their conditions. There was no need for everyone to stay on constant edge guarding that red coffin.

"If the third day is just for reporting the death, it should go smoothly. After all, we still have the white lantern. As long as we leave the main hall on time and stay outside for the day, it'll be fine," the Eagle remarked.

"But looking at the situation, our chances of surviving all seven days seem bleak. I think we should find a way to leave this mansion and return to the bus."

The unfamiliar ghost tamer was, at this point, showing an urgent desire to leave.

This thought was entirely reasonable, and no one else opposed it. The group remained silent.

"Leaving is impossible," Fan Xing shook his head. "No one knows the route that the supernatural bus takes. Watching for it to appear outside offers even less of a chance. Staying in this mansion gives us at least a slim chance as long as we survive all seven days."

After speaking, he looked toward Yang Jian's location in the main hall.

Yang Jian was still seated in the middle of the main hall, his eyes closed, motionless. He looked like a lifeless corpse.

But he was alive.

The cracks on his face continued to heal as time passed.

It was now exactly six in the evening on the second day.

The cracks on Yang Jian's body had mostly healed. The curse left by the last use of the Firewood Knife was weakening.

This also implied that the vengeful ghost he had dismembered within the mansion was slowly reviving.

But it definitely wasn't regaining its form as quickly as the Ghost Shadow.

"I can fully recover before the clock strikes midnight, but the ghost won't," Yang Jian thought as he observed the healing wounds, mentally calculating the rate at which the vengeful ghost in the mansion was reviving.

The effort he had put in today was worth it.

Regardless of how he calculated it, he would survive past midnight tonight.

After midnight, the mansion would enter the third day.

The third day was for reporting the death.

So as long as they completed the required tasks for the third day, everything would be fine.

"Zhou Deng is probably dead by now," Yang Jian thought to himself. "He hasn't appeared in the mansion, and Li Yang outside hasn't run into him either. He was most likely attacked by a vengeful ghost halfway and died in some unknown place."

"If he's dead, that's fine too. Having a troublemaker like him around would inevitably lead to more problems sooner or later."

"Yang Jian, aren't you going to eat something?"

At this moment, Yang Xiaohua approached. She looked exhausted, her eyes bloodshot, as she carried water and some compressed biscuits.

"For the few of us left, the remaining food and water should be enough for seven days."

Yang Jian took a bottle of water and drank it all in one gulp. "Take advantage of the current safety to rest as much as possible. You won't have the stamina to endure tomorrow when we report the death."

"I know, but I can't sleep. I seem to have insomnia. Still, that's a small issue. If I can survive and return home this time, it'll all be worth it."

Yang Xiaohua shook her head. She felt her mental state deteriorating, but her desire to leave the mansion alive kept her holding on.

If not for her strong will to live, she might have collapsed and taken her own life long ago.

This experience was nothing short of torment.

"Whether we survive seven days or not hinges on the next three days. Judging by the current situation, there shouldn't have been any risk of direct contact with the vengeful ghost during the first three days—'entering the coffin,' 'keeping vigil,' and 'reporting the death.' The dire state we're in now is entirely due to mistakes and the disruption of the mansion's balance."

Yang Jian continued, "If the first three days had been handled according to the calculated steps, no one would've died."

Yang Xiaohua nodded, then suddenly asked, "Yang Jian, have you considered abandoning the delivery task and leaving the mansion early? You have a way to leave, don't you?"

"Leaving means abandoning the delivery task, and failure in the task also means death for us. It's pointless."

Yang Jian glanced at her, knowing that everyone was now harboring thoughts of retreat.

After all, this was only the second day.

There were still five days to go.

Everyone knew, deep down, that surviving all seven days was almost impossible—unless a miracle happened.

Faced with that inevitability, leaving the mansion, enjoying a few days of peace outside, and then taking their own lives seemed far less painful and desperate a choice.

"I was just asking," Yang Xiaohua murmured.

Yang Jian replied, "Once the delivery task is complete, you can burn the letter and return to the Ghost Post Office. I can't guarantee that using the letter here will create a passage to the Post Office, but I've made backup preparations. If we survive until then, leaving won't be an issue."

He rarely spoke much ordinarily.

But now, he had started talking more.

Perhaps it was a way to alleviate the pressure and stave off the tension.

The group chatted, rested, and repeated this cycle a few times.

Time passed quickly.

Night fell.

Midnight arrived.

The second day of keeping vigil came to a close, marking the start of the third day: reporting the death.

As the third day began, nothing out of the ordinary occurred in the mansion. Everything was eerily calm.

"Yang Jian, the third day has begun. What's your plan?" Fan Xing walked over from the back hall, asking him.

Da Qiang's face was ashen, devoid of life, and he said, "According to the rules for reporting the death, don't we all need to leave the mansion today? If we don't, there's a high risk of encountering other dangers."

"That's the assumption, but I can't be certain. Regardless, it's not something we can gamble our lives on," Yang Jian said, rising from the ground.

His fragmented body had now healed.

The curse of the Firewood Knife had been endured, and with the dawn of a new day, his Ghost Eye could also be activated again.

"What if someone also has to keep watch here? I need to check the back hall and confirm the situation before making a decision," Yang Jian explained. He then headed back to the rear of the mansion toward the red coffin.

At this moment.

The red coffin remained silent, standing there quietly with no anomalies.

In front of the coffin, the two sticks of incense in the Incense Burner—one long, one short—had also stopped burning. It seemed they had extinguished on their own after the failure during the vigil on the second day.

"Captain, I believe the rule for the third day's reporting of the death requires us to leave the mansion," Li Yang said suddenly, appearing at the back door with the white lantern.

He was alone.

But the pale glow of the lantern cast strange, eerie shadows nearby.

Ghosts.

They had always been following him, but had not yet fully revealed themselves.

"Alright, I trust your judgment."

Yang Jian did not reject Li Yang's suggestion, since in his heart, he also leaned toward the idea of leading everyone out of the mansion. He simply wasn't entirely reassured.

Li Yang had been wandering with the lantern for such a long time without incident, which strongly suggested that the area outside was safe.

However, Yang Jian was worried that if a new supernatural occurrence arose within the mansion, the red coffin might be lost in the process.

"Perhaps I've been thinking about this the wrong way. The delivery task only mentioned that someone would arrive to collect the letter after seven days. The target for the letter doesn't necessarily have to be the old man inside the coffin. Even if it is, it doesn't matter either. As long as we survive all seven days, it's irrelevant what state the old man's corpse is in."

After some thought, Yang Jian signaled for everyone to follow.

The others had already prepared themselves. With Yang Jian's agreement, they promptly began to leave the mansion.

"As long as we stay near this white lantern, we won't be attacked by ghosts. Though there are minor paranormal phenomena around us, there's no need to worry too much," Li Yang reassured the group as he held the lantern, guiding them.

Before long.

Everyone gathered together.

"Captain, I think you should take the lantern," Li Yang suggested.

Without hesitation, Yang Jian nodded, taking the lantern and moving to the front of the group.

Chapter 969 Rice

The second day of the sleepless vigil ended in chaos, but by the third day of funeral announcements, the erroneous timeline finally corrected itself.

Yang Jian carried the pale white lantern as he wandered around the ancient mansion. Behind him followed Fan Xing, Li Yang, and Old Lin, among others. The journey was silent and uneventful, yet up to this point, everyone remained safe without encountering any supernatural phenomena.

The mansion was currently devoid of people.

As for what might happen inside, Yang Jian no longer had the energy to care.

He couldn't afford to waste time guarding the old man's corpse. Surviving until the seventh day was the priority.

"Let's not forget, the Ghost Cabinet's task is still waiting for me to complete," Yang Jian muttered, touching the old, worn key he carried with him.

He decided that after today, he would open that mysterious door.

To find out exactly what lay inside that room.

Though it might pose a risk, if he waited any longer, the opportunity would likely vanish entirely—the danger here intensified with each passing day. Yang Jian preferred not to face the room during the peak of peril.

Because dangers undoubtedly lurked within that room as well.

Yang Jian couldn't bear the weight of two simultaneous threats.

"The route for funeral announcements on the third day is indeed safe. It appears ominous, but the ghost hasn't attacked us at all." Fan Xing glanced around, his eyebrows furrowed as he caught glimpses of eerie and unsettling supernatural manifestations around them.

Yet, so far, no real danger had descended.

"It seems we should start peeling back the layers on what to expect for the fourth day. The third is dedicated to funeral announcements; personally, I suspect the fourth will involve a formal visitation."

"After funeral announcements, tradition dictates that those notified attend the ceremony, and the first part of the ritual is visitation of the departed."

"A visitation, huh?"

Old Lin's expression shifted slightly. "That does seem likely. But if the fourth day revolves around visitation, how can we evade danger? In other words, what should we do on visitation day to ensure survival?"

Da Qiang offered, "While visiting, don't forget the family's duty to mourn. Perhaps mourning loudly might be the key to survival."

"But doesn't that strange crying already occur on the first day?" Fan Xing countered.

"Perhaps we're required to don mourning garments. Traditionally, the family wears sackcloth and filial bands during visitation, and this might be the way to survive," another unfamiliar ghost-handler chimed in.

Old Lin interjected, "Not realistic. The mansion hasn't provided mourning attire for us, and there's no way we could've anticipated the elderly resident's death before arriving here. Thus, wearing mourning clothes to survive doesn't seem plausible, though I won't entirely dismiss the idea."

"If it's neither the mourning cries nor the mourning wardrobe, then surviving the fourth day becomes tricky," Fan Xing murmured, deep in thought.

The others also contemplated.

Desperately seeking a method to survive the fourth day.

The clues to survival were all related to the funeral, revolving entirely around the deceased elder in the ominous red coffin.

Guess correctly, and you may live.

Guess incorrectly—

The mansion's delicate balance would crumble, unleashing the vengeful ghosts to kill.

The previous day's mistake was already costly.

No one wished to endure such horrors again. Thus, discovering the correct method for the fourth day became crucial to avoiding another ghostly attack.

On the path of funeral announcements,

The group continued their discussion, sharing their individual thoughts and opinions.

Though their numbers were small, the prior successes offered a clearer sense of direction, bypassing aimless tangents and narrowing their focus.

The third day ticked by, moment by moment.

1 AM.

The group circled the mansion several times, encountering no danger.

2 AM.

The group decided to rest in place, yet still no threats emerged.

It became evident that as long as they held the white lantern, whether stationary or walking, they remained safe under the ritual of funeral announcements.

3 AM.

Yang Jian proposed expanding the funeral announcement's range, reasoning that exploring the mansion's vicinity now might reveal crucial details before their window of opportunity closed.

The group offered no objections and embarked on their first intentional trek beyond the mansion's surroundings, venturing further into uncharted terrain.

They started by inspecting the yellow dirt road behind the mansion.

Previously, Zhou Deng had ventured there and returned without incident. Still, driven by curiosity, Yang Jian chose to investigate.

Yang Jian and the group traversed the yellow dirt path, reaching its end where a cluster of old graves stood.

One grave had collapsed.

"The photograph on the headstone has disappeared. Judging by the state of this grave, it seems to have just recently fallen into ruin... Something's off." Yang Jian scoured the area, eventually noticing a peculiar shoe print faintly imprinted on the yellow dirt.

It was the mark of a high-heeled shoe—a small depression, a partial print.

The distinct footprint was easy to recognize, as it differed from everything else.

"A woman in high heels traveled from here and followed this yellow dirt path towards the mansion. Moreover, it seems she was trailing Zhou Deng," Yang Jian voiced his startling conjecture.

Old Lin exclaimed, "But we never saw any woman in high heels... Wait, hang on. There is someone who loves walking around in high heels."

"Leuk Qingqing?"

Yang Xiaohua and Li Yang echoed in unison.

Indeed.

Leuk Qingqing had once worn a red cheongsam with matching red high heels, a combination both sultry and alluring—but beneath that exterior lay an inexplicable aura of unease.

"Could Leuk Qingqing have lost her way, wandering through the old forest before ending up here?"

Li Yang pondered aloud, "Though this forest connects to the area, it's highly unlikely. Leuk Qingqing wouldn't have the ability to survive and reach this place. Besides, the forest isn't as vast or disorienting as to lead her astray for long."

"Supposing the high-heels belong to a ghost—then where was this ghost when we encountered Zhou Deng earlier? And where might it have gone now?" Yang Jian stared at the collapsed grave in silence.

A flash of insight flickered through Li Yang's mind: "Jigsaw theory. The ghost is after Leuk Qingqing, much like how Leuk Qingqing unexpectedly merged memories during the Room 301 incident. Based on those peculiar recollections, she harnessed two ghosts and managed to stay alive."

"Exactly. That's my thought as well. Leuk Qingqing harbors secrets even she isn't aware of. Her role as a messenger likely wasn't incidental but predetermined. After receiving her red cheongsam during the mail mission, then the Puppet People during the Room 301 incident, now this mansion introduces high heels... The pieces seem almost to be part of a preordained puzzle—waiting for their moment of resurrection." Yang Jian elaborated.

"Still, now isn't the time to delve into this. Leuk Qingqing's fate remains uncertain, and her situation should be addressed later. For now, I've had a flash of inspiration about the tasks for the fifth day," Old Lin abruptly shifted the topic, locking his gaze upon the white rice bowls before the gravestones.

The others followed his line of sight.

"What's on your mind?" Fan Xing asked.

Old Lin responded, "If the fourth day involves visitation, then the fifth day undoubtedly entails setting up a banquet. Banquets require offerings for attendees. But no living beings will join this feast—the guests will surely be ghosts. We lack food tailored for the dead, but here it is."

Each grave bore a bowl of white rice.

It seemed these could be items needed for the fifth day.

"The fifth day is the Ghost Banquet?" Yang Jian muttered, weighing the possibility carefully.

"Regardless, we should take them back. They might prove useful," Da Qiang suggested immediately.

Fan Xing objected, "Are you mad? If you take the rice bowls their corresponding ghosts rely on during the third day, what will happen? Those spirits may emerge to kill us."

Da Qiang's expression turned grim.

True.

Premature actions might disrupt the mansion's fragile balance.

"Then let's claim the bowl from the collapsed grave—the ghost there might have already emerged," Yang Jian proposed after a brief pause.

"Captain, if the fifth day really revolves around the Ghost Banquet, a single bowl might not suffice," Li Yang voiced his concern.

Yang Jian replied, "I realize that, but taking the others poses risks as well."

"Should we take just one bowl to gauge the situation later? If the fifth day truly involves hosting a Ghost Banquet, we could grab more at that point." Fan Xing suggested tentatively.

Old Lin swiftly interjected, "Absolutely not! From my past mail delivery encounters, choices must be made precisely once. This time, we exploited the safety afforded by funeral announcement rituals to reach this point. Once these announcements cease, that lantern may no longer offer protection. Venturing far out again to retrieve the rice will likely become unbearably dangerous."

"A level of danger certain to plunge us into despair."

"I feel the same," Li Yang concurred. "Judging by prior events, everything in this mansion seems orchestrated. Today, the third day, securing the rice for the fifth day's Ghost Banquet may be the actual purpose behind permitting us to roam freely. Were we to remain timid, sticking near the mansion or failing to arrive here at all, the fifth day would mark a dead end."

"No food for the ghosts, and the ghosts turn to feast on us instead."

"Still, claiming several bowls is in itself a gamble."

"Taking all of them might pose no issues—or it might unleash a vengeful ghost upon us. Conversely, being cautious and claiming just one bowl might not suffice during the Ghost Banquet, leading to another disaster. The quantity we decide upon requires careful calculation."

Yang Jian's eyes narrowed. "Earlier challenges tested our courage; now, our intellect is being pushed to the limit."

He revisited the mansion's layout in his mind.

Hoping to uncover some crucial hints or warnings.

"What a headache this is." Old Lin rubbed his temple, visibly conflicted.

The decision would determine survival or death on the fifth day.

No margin for error.

Though the fourth day's tasks remained unclear, the fifth day's preparations might truly hinge on Li Yang's observation: the rice seemed obtainable only under the third day's funeral announcement rituals. Miss this chance, and the next would vanish entirely.

Chapter 970 Exchange

The group held white lanterns, standing within the clearing in the Old Lin.

In this clearing, there were five old tombs, one of which had collapsed. Its tombstone had toppled to the ground, but judging by the traces, this collapse appeared to have occurred recently.

Other than this.

In front of the tombstones of all five tombs, there was a blue-and-white porcelain bowl filled with white rice. The grains of rice were distinct, semi-cooked, neither rotting nor spoiled, and spotless without a speck of dust.

Clearly.

The white rice was an offering prepared for the dead.

Yet now, Yang Jian, Li Yang, Old Eagle, and the others faced the question of how many bowls of white rice they should take today.

Because according to earlier assumptions, the fifth day in the haunted mansion was likely to involve the Ghost Banquet. And the white rice required for the fifth day must be taken today; otherwise, there would be no chance to return here later.

Everyone agreed with this reasoning.

To wait until the fifth day at the Ghost Banquet to collect the white rice would likely mean no opportunity at all.

"We still have plenty of time; we can think this through carefully. There's no need to rush," Yang Xiaohua said, trying to reassure the group.

Old Eagle nodded slightly from the side. "There's certainly enough time, but wasting time over this question isn't particularly worthwhile. We'll need to scout other locations later; we can't stay here deliberating over the number of bowls."

"Five tombs, five bowls of rice. Li Yang's suggestion is sound—one bowl certainly won't be enough. At the very least, taking two bowls seems necessary," Fan Xing mused aloud.

Da Qiang interjected, "We dare not take less rice; we need more, not less. If we fall short, the fifth day might leave us defenseless against the ghosts in the haunted mansion, and we'll face another attack. We mustn't waver on this decision."

"Let's not forget, if these tombs lose control, our next visit here will be even more perilous. As for the haunted mansion's seven days, I reckon the sixth or seventh day will inevitably involve a burial process—placing that coffin into this Old Lin and adding a sixth tomb," Old Eagle reminded the group.

If the fifth day is the Ghost Banquet, then one of the sixth or seventh days is surely related to burials.

The burial place is here.

This clearing even has shovels prepared, clearly meant for digging graves.

Thus, the group would undoubtedly revisit this place.

However, taking the white rice now and disrupting the balance here would make the route for the burial process exceedingly dangerous next time.

"Then take three bowls of rice; that number seems more balanced," Fan Xing suggested, looking at Yang Jian. "Yang Jian, what do you think of this proposal?"

The group turned to Yang Jian.

He was the sole decision-maker at this moment. No matter the suggestions posed, the final say lay with him.

Yang Jian pondered, recalling a previous happening.

It involved Zhou Deng, who had taken a stick of incense from the coffin earlier and said he left it here upon arriving at the back hall.

Now one of the old tombs had collapsed, and it seemed the high-heeled ghost had emerged from it.

So, could this clue link to exchanging incense for rice?

Incense was for ghosts, while rice was for the living.

"If one stick of incense equals one bowl of rice, does this mean we'd need to return to the haunted mansion to collect the remaining two sticks of incense?" Yang Jian muttered, his thoughts shifting.

Yet, to confirm this hypothesis, he began searching through the collapsed old tomb, ignoring the group's inquiries.

"Captain, what are you looking for?" Li Yang asked.

"Found it."

Yang Jian quickly unearthed a small wooden stick from the yellow soil. Though only a small portion remained, it was evident that this was a burnt-out incense stick.

"The incense Zhou Deng took from the haunted mansion is here?" The others' expressions shifted upon seeing this.

"Ah, so that's it. One stick of incense for one bowl of rice—the three sticks of incense at the coffin were prepared for this exact purpose." Old Eagle had an awakening, speaking in surprise.

Yang Jian said, "It's not certain yet, but at least we know that rice can safely be removed once the tomb collapses. However, earlier incense usage appears to have prematurely released a ghost. If the incense exchange theory is true, releasing two more ghosts?"

"Captain, didn't you forget—the remaining two sticks of incense are extinguished, no longer burning. Zhou Deng took the incense from the second day," Li Yang noted.

Yang Jian frowned slightly. "So, Zhou Deng's timing was off? He shouldn't have brought the incense here so early?"

"Zhou Deng handled the third day's duties on the second day, causing imbalance in the haunted mansion—resulting in nighttime specters and grief processing converging. According to the proper sequence, we should've collected the incense on the third day and brought it here to exchange for three bowls of rice to prepare for the fifth day's Ghost Banquet."

The sequence broke and caused the imbalance, leaving the lingering incense prematurely to incite uncontrolled specters here.

"Makes sense." Fan Xing, Old Eagle, Da Qiang nodded in unison.

Though varying in personality, they shared a mutual understanding of Li Yang's observations.

"Accurately timing tasks is vital in preserving safety here. Disorder breeds danger. Survival in this haunted mansion hinges on abiding by rules," Yang Jian contemplated aloud.

"Let's retrieve the incense."

Choosing his course of action, Yang Jian reversed his path without hesitation.

The group quickly arrived at the haunted mansion's back hall again.

The door to the back hall was already open.

A striking red coffin plate rested there conspicuously.

Near the coffin was an incense burner with two sticks of incense inside—one long and barely scorched, the other short and almost fully burnt.

Both sticks were extinguished, their fragrance long gone.

"You hold the lantern," Yang Jian handed the white lantern to Li Yang before striding into the back hall.

The area was secure.

Being the third day, the ghosts that emerged on the second day during the night watch wouldn't reappear. Remaining threats persisted outside the mansion.

However, as long as the white lantern was kept intact, the group would remain safe.

Yang Jian's return journey posed no risk.

He retrieved the two remaining sticks of incense and led the group back to the clearing within the Old Lin.

Each of the two incense sticks was planted atop a tomb, and two bowls of white rice were taken from the fore of the tombstones.

Cautiously, the group monitored the scene for half an hour.

If anything irregular had occurred, they were prepared to return the items immediately.

"The logic holds. Three sticks of incense for three bowls of rice—this was a calculated exchange with the dead. The haunted mansion's arrangements seem to bear deeper significance, far beyond a mere funeral ritual," Yang Jian assessed aloud, surveying the tombstones. "Let's go; we still need to explore other areas."

The group nodded in agreement.

On the way, Da Qiang suddenly posed a question: "What happens if the incense burns out entirely during the second night's vigil?"

"Then there'll be no rice to trade. Burning a stick of incense means forfeiting one bowl of rice—incense protects us but at the cost of the fifth day's safety," Yang Jian responded.

Fan Xing remarked, "In a roundabout way, Zhou Deng actually helped us, didn't he? If he hadn't disrupted the setup by prematurely announcing grief and breaking the mansion's equilibrium, causing the incense to extinguish, we wouldn't have preserved the remaining two incense sticks."

"But he caused trouble too—without me standing firm against the ghost in the main hall on the second day, all of you would've perished," Yang Jian retorted coldly.

"Leaving Zhou Deng aside, the dangers we faced have indeed provided valuable intel and clues, sparing us blind ignorance like on the first day when no one even understood how they died," Old Eagle commented. "Yet, on the second day, without Yang Jian, we all would've died in the back hall. Our subsequent actions must be calculated more meticulously."

"Since we've collected three bowls of rice for the fifth day's Ghost Banquet, what's the plan for surviving tomorrow—the fourth day's condolence rituals?" Da Qiang asked.

"That'll require further discussion," replied Old Eagle.

The group's mood remained heavy.

As the seventh night drew closer, the dangers that awaited undoubtedly surpassed those faced earlier. Once the seventh night arrived, the harrowing task of delivering the death-message letter would begin.

Additionally, no one yet knew to whom the letter's recipient was. The only certainty was that the intended receiver would appear in the haunted mansion.

At that moment, one person—or ghost—would emerge, marking the letter's recipient.

"Time is still early. Let's stop circling the mansion and venture into the front section of the Old Lin for a closer look," Yang Jian suggested. "We should map out the terrain while time allows."

The group agreed wholeheartedly.

They circled the haunted mansion's front gates, following a small path leading deeper into the Old Lin's modestly sized area.

The route mirrored their earlier passage, unaltered.

Yang Jian led the way, lantern in hand, carefully observing the Old Lin. An uneasy sense of ominousness settled within his heart.

The Old Lin seemed exceptionally hazardous.

Yet, scanning around, he couldn't perceive any evident threat.

"Once past the mansion's boundary, the restraining effect on my ghostly eyes dissipated," Yang Jian remarked, activating his ghost eyes to survey the surroundings.

The dimness within the forest posed no obstacle to his vision.

Soon.

The group approached the forest's edge.

A modern asphalt road stretched forth, incongruous against the mansion's backdrop. Gazing both directions, the road vanished into the horizon, shrouded in mist and lending a feeling of confinement to the world itself.

"The bus is gone," Fan Xing noted the spot where it parked previously.

The paranormal bus had long disappeared, leaving only patches of bloodstains and scattered personal items behind, evidence of a previous group that disembarked and met ruin.

"Even the bodies are missing," Old Eagle murmured. "And..."

"And what?" Li Yang prompted.

Old Eagle replied, "It's nothing—I feel as though a few trees along the roadside weren't here earlier when we disembarked. It's probably just my imagination, though—I'm overthinking it."

"If there's nothing worthwhile here, let's head back," Yang Jian decided. "Waiting around won't summon the bus again."

The group was about to agree.

Suddenly, Yang Xiaohua halted abruptly, her expression stiffening slightly. "Yang Jian, wait a moment. I—I think I stepped on something."

"Hmm?" Yang Jian turned his gaze toward Yang Xiaohua's feet.

Yang Xiaohua was wearing running shoes, but the ground where she stepped appeared slightly elevated, as if there was something beneath.

Stepping gingerly aside, she discovered she had trodden on a pale hand.

"A dead hand?" Old Eagle's instincts instantly sharpened.

Passing the lantern to Li Yang, Yang Jian moved toward the spot, gesturing for Yang Xiaohua to step further away.

Yang Xiaohua promptly hopped aside and kept her distance.

Yang Jian used his splintered ghost spear to poke at the hand.

Nothing happened; the hand remained motionless, with no signs of corpse spots or decay. Though unnaturally pale, it appeared fairly fresh.

If it belonged to a corpse, it had likely been dead shortly.

Following the direction of the arm, he spotted the hand reaching out from the edge of the Old Lin.

"It's probably one of those ghost tamers who died here earlier," Yang Jian speculated before crouching down, extending his black Ghost Hand to grasp the cold arm.

A quick tug.

A deathly body emerged from the soil beneath.

The corpse looked vaguely familiar.

Yet something eerie struck—a large piece of yellow paper was plastered across its face.

The paper covered nearly the entire visage but was torn in parts, leaving fragments of the facial features exposed.

"It's Zhou Deng!" Fan Xing exclaimed in shock.

Fan Xing recognized Zhou Deng—the two had interacted on the paranormal bus earlier, given their shared status as ghost tamers under the same headquarters. Even with yellow paper obscuring Zhou Deng's face, Fan Xing could identify him immediately.

"His outfit and physique match Zhou Deng. He's dead," Yang Jian confirmed, inspecting the body. Zhou Deng's skin was cold—not yet stiffened but utterly devoid of life.

"Wandering recklessly—serves him right. Such a nuisance even in death," Da Qiang spat. "We ought to dump his body far away to rid ourselves of bad luck."

Old Eagle argued, "Give him some slack—he was just trying to survive without knowing what the haunted mansion had in store. He didn't intend harm; he simply died from misguided actions."

Old Eagle bore no grudge toward Zhou Deng, believing the man didn't act maliciously but was merely an overly curious seeker.

In fact, Zhou Deng had drawn away a ghost by holding a lantern last he disappeared—not exactly causing deliberate chaos for others.

"He's dead already, so it matters little now."

Yang Jian remarked, "But why did he end up like this? Last I saw, he was still holding a lantern in his hand—and according to what we know, keeping the lantern guarantees safety from ghost attacks."

"Who can say in this place—anything's possible here," Li Yang shook his head.

Yang Jian fell silent, gazing at the yellow paper stuck to Zhou Deng's face. After considering for a moment, he grabbed the paper with his Ghost Hand and tore it off.

The yellow paper, though firmly attached, wasn't tightly stuck, peeling away with ease.

The moment the paper was removed.

A strange face was revealed—completely unlike Zhou Deng's.

And an instant later, Zhou Deng's eyes flew open. Gasping for air like someone suffocating, he breathed heavily.

The group recoiled, startled, reflexively retreating several steps.

Yang Jian, however, steadied his ghost spear—the splintered Coffin Nail poised above Zhou Deng's brow, ready to strike.

"W-wait!" Zhou Deng raised a hand urgently.

Yang Jian froze the Coffin Nail mere inches from Zhou Deng's skull.

A fraction blind, Zhou Deng would have been pinned to the ground without reprieve.

"You're alive?" Yang Jian's expression shifted slightly, surprised.

"I wasn't dead—I swear, if you'd let fly, I'd have been done for real," Zhou Deng breathlessly scrambled to sit up, clawing the human skin mask off his face to reveal his original appearance.

"Not dead? No problem—I'm more than happy to make it happen," Yang Jian replied coldly.

"C'mon Yang Jian, we're colleagues—no need to be so heartless, yeah? I've done nothing to incur your wrath—have I?" Zhou Deng pleaded.

Fan Xing growled, "Nothing to incur wrath, you say? You nearly got all of us killed, you bastard! Who told you to haul that white lantern everywhere, disturbing the haunted mansion's equilibrium? Yesterday, death loomed over us all—we're lucky anyone's even alive now!"

Zhou Deng surveyed the group.

The count was dismal compared to the survivors from Day One—the party had been reduced by nearly sixty percent.

"See? Even I barely escaped death—how could I harbor intent to harm you lot? If anything, I wasn't scheming against anyone; it was pure misfortune," Zhou Deng explained, brushing dirt off his body.

Yang Jian regarded Zhou Deng coldly.

The man did indeed seem unintentional in his chaos, evidenced by his burial in the forest—an unexpected turn of events mid-way through.

"Care to elaborate? What happened here exactly?" Yang Jian asked.

"This isn't the place for lengthy discussions—let's leave this forest first," Zhou Deng proposed.

"Where's your lantern?" Old Eagle inquired.

"It got taken," Zhou Deng replied, visibly shaken by the memory.