

My House of Horrors Novel Chapter 1 To 5

Chapter 1 Dying House of Horrors

"This is the first time I've visited such an un-scary Haunted House."

"The props are too fake; I didn't feel scared. If anything, it all felt like a joke to me."

"Materialists like ourselves naturally have nothing to be afraid of! Ghosts aren't real!"

"I hate to say it, but I told you so. We should have stayed at the hostel; I was so close to gaining another level on my online game."

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A group of students grumbled with disappointment in front of Western Jiujiang City's House of Horrors before they left on their motorbikes. Chen Ge, who held a stack of advertisement flyers for the Haunted House, shook his head despondently when he saw this.

The art of scaring was a skill, but with the introduction of scary movies, many modern-day citizens' threshold for scares had been increased. A visit to the Haunted House was no different from a stroll in one's own backyard.

"Boss!"

A clear female voice erupted from behind him. Chen Ge turned around and saw a slender 'zombie' in a nurse outfit running out of the Haunted House in a fit of anger.

"What's wrong, Xiao Wan?" The zombie's name was Xu Wan; she was one of the temporary actors hired by the Haunted House.

"Those few ruffians earlier, they tried to take advantage of me!" the girl hissed through gritted teeth, her fists gripped tight.

So, it is merely to complain...

"That's horrible; they wouldn't even leave a zombie in peace." As the boss, naturally Chen Ge was on Xiao Wan's side. "Later, I'll have the amusement park manager to pull up the surveillance footage."

"There's no need for that. When I realized their intentions, my punch went flying straight at the boy's face." Xu Wan pointed at the bloodstain at the edge of her outfit and exclaimed rather proudly, "See, this isn't fake blood."

"Good, good, a girl should learn how to protect herself." Chen Ge wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. As he turned to look at the setting sun, he said, "I suppose it's time to call it a day. We probably won't have any more visitors, so help me go and tell everyone that we can get off work early today."

However, he realized the girl in zombie make-up didn't make an attempt to move away.

"Is there anything else?"

"Boss..." Xu Wan hesitated before pulling two letters out from her pocket slowly. "These are the resignation letters from Tao Ming and Xiao Wei. You've been a great boss to them, so they didn't have to the face to give these to you in person and had me pass them to you."

"They're quitting?" Chen Ge asked the obvious question as he accepted the letters, then he added, "Everyone has their own dream to chase, so be it. Xiao Wan, you can leave now if there's nothing else."

"Okay, I'll go remove the make-up first."

After the cute little zombie left, Chen Ge lit a cigarette silently. Half a year ago, when his parents mysteriously disappeared, the only thing they left him was this Haunted House. To keep their memory alive, Chen Ge had resigned from his day-job to focus on managing this Haunted House.

Alas, times were changing. Despite the niche genre, there was huge competition among Haunted Houses, and there were plenty of limitations as well. A scary scenario would lose its scare factor after the initial experience, but a constant update would require plenty of resources and money.

Starting from a few weeks ago, the Haunted House had been in the red; the income from the daily ticket sales barely covered the electricity and water expenses.

"I wonder how long I can hold on."

After extinguishing the cigarette, when Chen Ge was prepared to return to the Haunted House, a middle-aged man wearing the uniform for New Century Park walked toward him. When he saw him, Chen Ge increased his pace like a mouse spotting a cat.

"You think you can pretend to have not seen me?" The middle-aged man clamped his hands on Chen Ge's shoulders. "Today, we definitely need to talk it out. You've owed the rent and utilities for two months already. The top brass are breathing down my neck to pursue it, so pay up!"

"Uncle Xu, it's not that I don't want to pay you, but I really have nothing to pay you with. Can you please give me another month?"

"That's what you told me last month!"

"I promise, this is definitely the last time!" Chen Ge patted his chest as he promised with sincerity.

"People have already moved on from Haunted Houses. Listen to me, it's no use being this stubborn." When the middle-aged man named Uncle Xu saw the letters in Chen Ge's hand, the force on Chen Ge's shoulders gradually lightened. "You're so young; you can still begin anew with a different career, so why are you doing this to yourself?"

"Uncle Xu, I know you're just looking out for me, but this Haunted House carries a different meaning for me. I guess I'm still unwilling to let the last memory of my parents go," Chen Ge uttered in a lowered voice as if he was afraid that other people might hear him.

As the amusement park manager, the middle-aged man knew about the disappearance of Chen Ge's parents. He didn't answer immediately. After a few seconds, he sighed and said, "Fine, I can understand how you feel. I'll try my best to talk to management for you and see if they can give you a few more weeks."

"Thank you, Uncle Xu!"

"Don't thank me so soon, you'd better make sure you can increase the ticket sales or the ending will just be the same."

After sending the amusement park manager off, Chen Ge returned to the Haunted House and started his daily routine of checking the equipment, maintaining the items, and cleaning.

"The fake blood in the maintenance room is almost empty; I have to buy a new batch.

"If this corridor could be made slightly more slanted to the side, it'll create a better blind spot to scare the visitors.

"Oh no, this puppet is broken already; I'll have to repair it later.

"F*ck! What happened to the lightbulb I installed here last week? Who has stolen it?"

In the eyes of an outsider, he was the owner of a Haunted House, a young entrepreneur in a way, but only Chen Ge himself could understand the difficulty behind maintaining a Haunted House. Haunted Houses were a kind of entertainment. Caught within a scary environment, one's physical and mental situation would be maintained at a heightened state, but when the stress was released, it would lead to a sense of relief and satisfaction; it was not unlike a massage in a way.

At the same time, most Haunted Houses were one-trick ponies. The most effective business method for a Haunted House was to have it be mobile so that it would constantly attract fresh batches of visitors. A Haunted House that was stuck at a certain location like Chen Ge's had to have immense popularity to lure in the crowds, or else they wouldn't be able to survive for long. The fact that he had managed to hold on for so long was already, in a way, a miracle.

Dragging the puppet that was ruined, Chen Ge entered the maintenance room. He had studied Toy Design in college, and the machinery and traps used in the Haunted House had been all personally designed and built by him. The maintenance process, which included sewing and repainting, was dry and repetitive.

"Still missing some fake blood. If I remember correctly, there's still some stock in the attic." The Haunted House was separated into three floors; the

first and second floors were for haunted scenarios while the third was a storeroom.

After pushing open the wooden door, behind the haze of wood chips and dust, there were various kinds of materials and unwanted ingredients left behind by Chen Ge's parents from when they had managed the Haunted House.

Unwilling to face the past, Chen Ge rarely came up to this place.

"Now that I think about it, it has almost been half a year already."

Looking at the various equipment, Chen Ge was reminded of his childhood. At the time, his family had managed a mobile Haunted House, so he had gotten the chance to travel the country with his parents. When the two adults were busy, they would leave Chen Ge alone backstage to accompany the various ghosts, so Chen Ge's unnatural guts had been trained since he was young.

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After all, when his friends of the same age were playing with blocks and puzzles, he was running around with a fake human head.

"These are all precious memories."

Chen Ge wandered aimlessly before finding himself back at the wooden box that kept the few things that remained of his parents. Inside sat a black cell phone and a rough-looking doll. The doll was the first toy Chen Ge made when he was a child, but he had zero recollection of the phone. Both of these items had been found in an abandoned hospital in the countryside, and regarding why Chen Ge's parents would go there in the middle of the night, even the police couldn't give him an answer.

"Where are the two of you?" Chen Ge picked up the doll and pinched its chubby face. Then, with a sigh, he told himself, "I'd better go find that fake blood. If I cannot survive this off season, I really will have to bid this Haunted House farewell."

Chen Ge was talking to himself, but when he said so, the black phone, which had been silent in the box, suddenly lit up with a dim, cold light.

"What's going on? Dark technology or supernatural phenomenon?" If this happened to someone else, that person probably would have raced out screaming bloody murder already, but in comparison, Chen Ge's reaction was much calmer. He picked up the phone and inspected it closer.

"This is weird. I've tried opening this phone more than a hundred times before, but it wouldn't work, so why did it open by itself today? This phone was found where my parents disappeared, so could it be that they know I'm in trouble and are contacting me to help?"

Chen Ge swiped the phone open, and on the front page with a black background, there was only one available app. It had the shape of a Haunted House as an icon.

"Wait... This looks so familiar, just like the front entrance of my own Haunted House!"

With a frown, Chen Ge clicked the app open, and a row of letters written in what appeared to be blood appeared on screen—Do you believe there are ghosts in this world?

Objectively speaking, this was a metaphysical philosophical question; for an engineering student like Chen Ge, it was practically unanswerable.

"There should be," Chen Ge mumbled to himself, and a few seconds later, a new sentence appeared on screen.

"What you believe is the answer. From this moment on, you will officially take over as the new owner of the Haunted House. Of course, this is not something worth celebrating. Before the end of the tutorials, please heed my last advice: suicide is the most cowardice of behavior, and try your best to survive!"

"What and what? But this pompous way of speech does resemble that father of mine."

Chen Ge clicked on the app again, and a new window appeared.



Western Jiujiang Haunted House

Status: Almost Closing

Good Reputation: Zero

Daily Visitor Number: Four

Monthly Visitor Number: Ten

My Team of Ghosts and Ghouls: None

My Item Storage: None

Unlocked Achievement: None

Current Available Scenarios [Set Pieces]:

- Night of the Living Dead - Horrible prop, untrained actors, the plot has no readable storyline or logic. Scream Factor: 0 Star

- Minghun [Nether World Marriage] - Couple torn apart in the living world, bound together forever in the nether world; sharing the same grave, pursuing happiness in death. Scream Factor: 0.5 Stars

Unlockable Scenarios:

- Murder by Midnight - A dangerous psychotic patient wandered about a fallen apartment. Scissors and mallets as hands, he is just wandering outside of your room. Scream Factor: 1 Star

- The Third Sick Hall - There are unexplainable noises coming out from this abandoned hospital building every night. As a newspaper reporter, you're tasked with getting to the bottom of this dark mystery. Scream Factor: 3 Stars

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- The Haunted Hearse - Leaving with the hearse carrying the coffin, if you cannot escape within an hour, you'll stay forever inside the hearse. Scream Factor: 2 Stars

Daily Mission: Complete Daily Missions provided by the Haunted House to unlock more scary scenarios. The rewards correspond to the difficulty of the mission.

Haunted House Expansion Conditions: Monthly Visitor Numbers over 100. Good Reputation over 60 percent. (After 3 expansions, the Haunted House will upgrade to The Shivering Maze.)

Haunted Wheel of Misfortune (Expend Fright Points generated by visitors of

the Haunted House to spin the Wheel): The Decree of Life and Death is never the decision of man; fortune and misfortune are only an inch apart. We have both Spirit Fruits to increase your life span as well as hatred-filled Baleful Specters!

Other functions: Yet to be unlocked

Chapter 2 A Curious Daily Mission

The app with the Haunted House icon looked similar to many popular management mobile games; however, instead of managing a hotel, aquarium, or pet store, it was to manage a haunted house.

Chen Ge stared at the screen, and a single question was on his mind. Why would the phone left behind by my parents have this curious app on it?



He looked through the interface of the app, and all the information on it matched the conditions of his actual Haunted House like the daily visitor numbers and available scenarios. This gave Chen Ge a weird sensation, as if the Haunted House managed in-game was no different from the one he was managing in real life.

They were both down on their luck and facing closure; there were simply too many similarities between them.

"Could it be that this game is built using my Haunted House as its basis? Then does this mean that if there're changes in the game, it'll also happen in real life?" Chen Ge muttered.

Chen Ge continued to read; the current scenario of the Haunted House, Night of the Living Dead, was brutally criticized. Even the Minghun scenario that got onto the papers before only managed to get a 0.5-star rating.

"If Minghun only gets 0.5 star, I shudder to imagine how scary those unlockable scenarios are." He tried to click on the options, and when he did, a window appeared on screen, telling him that he needed to finish a certain number of daily missions before he would be able to unlock the scenarios.

"Looks like the daily missions are the key to this; it is only by completing daily missions that I'll be able to unlock the haunted scenarios. By unlocking more scenarios, I'll be able to attract more customers and, consequently, expand the Haunted House." Chen Ge was an avid player of mobile games, so he soon grasped the rules of the game—the rate of completion for daily missions was going to influence the development of the Haunted House.

After clicking on Daily Missions, three options surfaced:

Easy Mission: There are three main elements to the design of a good Haunted House—Story, Scenario, and Mood. A Haunted House without a story is a Haunted House without a soul, please complete the background story to the two scenarios, Night of the Living Dead and Minghun.

Normal Mission: Fix all the mannequins inside the Haunted House before midnight.

Nightmare Mission: I know you're still not wholly convinced about the existence of ghost in the world; in that case, how about a little game? The truth will be revealed when you open your eyes.

Daily Missions will refresh every day at midnight. User can only apply for one mission each day, and the reward corresponds to the difficulty of the mission.

(Beware! The more difficult the mission, the more dangerous it'll be, so please choose carefully!)

After looking through the mission details, Chen Ge gasped with surprise. "The missions in the game have to be completed in real life? Isn't this the perfect proof that this game can influence real life?"

To test this speculation, he decided to pick a mission. Since the reward was given according to difficulty and he could only pick one each day, for the sake of the biggest reward, he had to pick the most difficult mission. However, the warning attached to the end of the missions did make Chen Ge worry.

"This is hard to choose. The description for the Nightmare Mission is so vague; it just speaks of a trap. Why don't I start with a Normal Mission? Fixing all the props will be difficult but not impossible."

Chen Ge was a man of action, after he had made the decision, he started to move. He grabbed his toolbox and a bucket of unopened fake blood and started to inspect all the mannequins around the Haunted House.

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Night had fallen. To save electricity, Chen Ge didn't even leave the lights in the corridors open. Squeezing a flashlight in his armpit, Chen Ge twisted through the large Haunted House, fixing all the mannequins that needed his attention.

If there were any outsiders who saw this, they would probably be so spooked that they would call the cops directly.

"I really didn't expect so many mannequins will require maintenance; I should not have slacked off earlier!"

At 11:45 pm, Chen Ge received the mission completion alert on his phone. "You've completed the Normal Mission. Paying attention to details will

contribute to the perfect scary atmosphere. Congratulations, you've gained the mission reward—Background Music, Black Friday."

"Wait, wasn't Black Friday a banned song in foreign countries? According to rumors, it has the uncanny ability to instill suicidal tendencies in its listeners, and the original score was lost a long time ago." Chen Ge discovered the picture of a CD in his item storage. "What kind of mission reward is this, don't tell me this is all some kind of prank?"

He clicked on the CD image, and a melody that he had not heard of started playing beside his ears. The melody spoke of darkness, melancholy, and loneliness. Chen Ge felt the world around him falling away, and he had landed himself in a long corridor with no end in sight.

When the song ended, Chen Ge's back was drenched in cold sweat. He was thankful he didn't choose to have the song on repeat or else he really didn't think he would have been able to escape the influence of the music on his own.

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"F*ck, this is real! This should be the original track!" After completing the game mission, he really did acquire a reward that he could use in real life. This gave Chen Ge a ray of hope. He stopped the music and saved it carefully. After dealing with everything, Chen Ge returned to the break room to rest.

Lying in bed, even though he was tired, he didn't feel at all sleepy. After all, the things that he had experienced that day required a bit of time to digest.

Without knowing it, it soon passed midnight, and Chen Ge was still staring aimlessly at the ceiling.

"Can't sleep at all!" The man who was bored out of his mind pulled out the

black phone. "Midnight has passed, so there should be a new set of Daily Missions, right?"

He opened the app, and as he expected, there were some changes on the Daily Missions screen.

Easy Mission: If you want to provide the visitors a scary experience, then first you have to pay notice to the rhythm and tempo of their experience in the Haunted House. Setting off the scare too early might cause the visitors to lose their interest, so I suggest you install some sound detectors or surveillance cameras in the Haunted House to keep track of your visitors' progress.

Normal Mission: A single hand cannot clap; a good Haunted House requires a good team to run it. Recruit more talents to aid in your journey.

Nightmare Mission: I know you're still not wholly convinced about the existence of ghost in the world; in that case, how about a little game? The truth will be revealed when you open your eyes.

Daily Missions will refresh every day at midnight. User can only apply for one mission each day, and the reward corresponds to the difficulty of the mission.

(Beware! The more difficult the mission, the more dangerous it'll be, so please choose carefully!)

The three new Daily Missions put some kinks in Chen Ge's plan.


The easy mission was to install new surveillance devices in the Haunted House; this could be done with money, but the issue was... Chen Ge's budget was currently limited.

The normal mission also wasn't that easy for Chen Ge. His two senior workers, who had been through thick and thin with him, had just resigned. Even if he went to set up a recruitment ad right this moment, it would require days to complete the training. When the new employee could help at the Haunted House, the place probably would have closed already.

Since the easy mission and normal mission were impossible, Chen Ge's eyes settled on the last Daily Mission.

"Since the harder the mission, the better the reward, shall I give this Nightmare Mission a try?"

Chapter 3 Nightmare Mission

"I know you're still not wholly convinced about the existence of ghost in the world; in that case, how about a little game? The truth will be revealed when you open your eyes." 

As mentioned earlier, the description of the Nightmare Mission was incredibly vague; it did, however, give off a creepy vibe.

"Looking at the introduction, it should involve some kind of game, but how can playing a game be a Nightmare Mission?"

To finish the Normal Mission, Chen Ge had worked non-stop for several hours. He had barely managed to finish fixing all the mannequins. As he toyed with the phone, Chen Ge's sense of curiosity was aroused. "Shall I try it out?"

The moment the thought appeared, it grew and expanded like vines invading every corner of his mind.

"Nightmare Missions give the best reward, and since I can't accomplish the Easy and Normal Missions provided today, this is my best bet."

The Haunted House would close if he was unable to survive this off season. Chen Ge knew how precarious his situation was. It was a pure stroke of luck that he had stumbled upon this ray of hope, so of course, he wouldn't let any opportunities pass by easily.

"So be it. After all, eventually, I'll have to apply for a Nightmare Mission, so why not now?" Sitting up in bed, Chen Ge clicked on the last mission.

"Are you sure you wish to accept the Nightmare Mission? After acceptance, unknown circumstances might occur."

"Yes."

The phone flashed, and the real mission details surfaced.

"It requires plenty of courage, incredible luck, and a bit of help to see the hidden world. The game we're playing is called 'Another You in the Mirror'. Enter the bathroom alone at 2:04 am, close the door, and turn off the lights. Face the mirror and light a candle between yourself and it. Then, close your eyes and focus; you can then begin by slowly chanting your name.

"Anything can happen in the dark; perhaps there will be an unfamiliar face that appears in the mirror, or there might be a pair of eyes lurking in the corner watching you, or blood might drip from the ceiling or walls. No matter what happens, all you must do is make sure that you stay silent and stand before the mirror quietly.

"After half an hour, the mission will be auto-completed, provided that you do not open your eyes no matter what happens in that half-hour."

After reading the mission introduction, Chen Ge's heart twinged with fear. "Could there really be a world hidden from normal eyes?"

It was still some time before the allocated 2:04 am. Instead of moving to the bathroom, Chen Ge started doing his research online. Chen Ge did manage to find some extra information on this supposed game, and they were all ghost stories. Some said they were cursed after they played this game, while others mentioned missing friends or family members, convinced that they were pulled into the mirror world.

"Every single one of these sounds so authentic." The more he read, the more interested Chen Ge became. He was, after all, the operator of a Haunted House; his daily exercise was to come up with new ways to scare people, within a safe environment of course. As he read up on the information to this game, he felt as if a new world was opening before his eyes.

"It's weirdly exciting to play a scary game in the middle of the night inside a Haunted House!"

He checked the battery level of his phone; he felt like recording this momentous occasion.

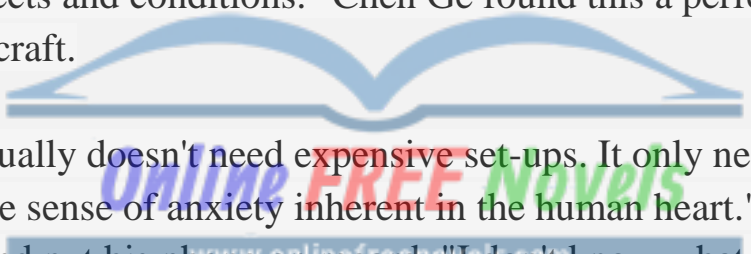
"Later, I'll put the whole thing on recording; if it is as scary as these people say, then perhaps I can add a new scenario to the Haunted House!"

He scoured the room for a candle and lighter. When the clock struck 2am, he carried the prepared objects and moved toward the bathroom on the first floor of the Haunted House.

The reason he carried out this 'game' at the first floor's toilet was also a

calculated decision on Chen Ge's part. If anything dangerous did occur during the process, at least he could jump directly out the window to save himself. The Haunted House was eerily quiet at night. A young man who refused to turn on the lights to save electricity entered the cramped and narrow toilet with a flashlight and candle.

"A dark and claustrophobic environment is the best at evoking the feeling of fear within a person's heart. The toilet is usually the place that has the most yin energy within the building. Mirrors and cisterns, these items couldn't have been more mundane, but these everyday items can often be used to increase psychological pressure. The person behind this game is very clever; they know how to make use of the weakness often found within the human heart, and consequently, they are able to create a scary atmosphere with the simplest of objects and conditions." Chen Ge found this a perfect opportunity to improve his craft.



"Real terror actually doesn't need expensive set-ups. It only needs to highlight and heighten the sense of anxiety inherent in the human heart." Chen Ge took a deep breath and put his phone on record. "I don't know what kind of effect this game will bring, but if anything happens to me, I hope the person who finds this phone will preserve this video because it is a key, a valuable key to unlocking the many layers of deceit."

Then, Chen Ge placed the phone beside the cistern. He adjusted the angle until the camera could capture his person and the mirror opposite him.

"It's 2:01 am already, three more minutes."

The wait for death was scarier than death itself. The silence of the toilet amplified all sorts of noises or echoes in the room. As the seconds ticked by, Chen Ge's heart started to race.

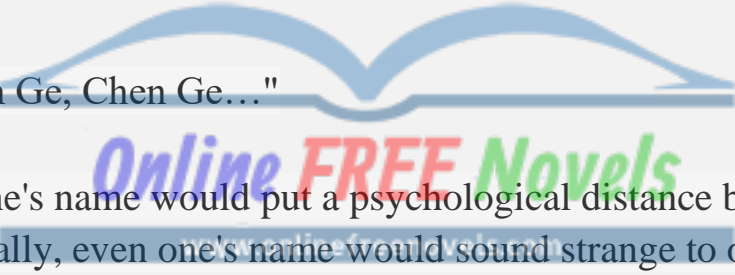
He looked at the time on the phone. When the minute hand pointed at the four, he switched off the flashlight and lit up the candle. Following the instructions, he placed it between the mirror and himself.

The dancing flame became the only source of light in the dark. It flickered and twirled between the real world and the mirrored world. It acted perhaps like some kind of guidance light, pointing the way for whatever existed in the mirror.

Chen Ge looked at his reflection in the mirror, and he felt strangely weirded out. "Has the game started."

He lowered his head and closed his eyes before starting to mumble his name softly.

"Chen Ge, Chen Ge, Chen Ge..."



Repetition of one's name would put a psychological distance between it and oneself. Eventually, even one's name would sound strange to one's ears. This theory was similar to how after looking at a particular Chinese character repeatedly, one would end up forgetting how to write it when asked.

To prevent that psychological effect from befalling himself, every time Chen Ge chanted his name, he would leave a three seconds space. This way, he was also counting down the time.

After all, the condition for a successful mission was to keep his eyes closed for half an hour no matter the distraction.

Standing in front of a mirror and playing a game that involves only a candle at 2 am inside a Haunted House alone... If I was not doing this myself, even I wouldn't believe someone would willingly do something this dumb. Chen Ge

continued to chant his name as the various random thoughts entered his mind.

This game is filled with psychological terror; the most difficult part is not facing those supposed ghosts or legends but stopping your mind from straying and forming scary scenarios to scare yourself. As long as you don't open your eyes, everything should be fine.

However, that was easier said than done, because ten minutes after the game started, something did happen.

Chapter 4 Surprise Reward

It seemed that the toilet's windows were not closed because Chen Ge could feel a cold draft enter the room. It was like an invisible hand was brushing past his face.

The door of the toilet cubicles creaked as they were moved by the wind. The water that had gathered at the corner of the ceiling fell onto the floor, causing the insects to scatter. The sound made Chen Ge feel like they were crawling all over his skin.

All sorts of noises were amplified by the general silence, which would have heightened the sense of anxiety in most people, but not Chen Ge, who had been trained to have a strong heart since he was young and had a slightly slower than normal sense of perception.

He cleared his mind of thought to focus on counting down the time.

About twenty minutes had passed, and for some reason, Chen Ge could sense the temperature of the room dropping like someone had placed several blocks of solid ice around him, causing him to shiver involuntarily.

Calm yourself! Don't overthink it and scare yourself! There's only ten minutes left; Chen Ge, you can do this! There was a curious draft flowing beside his ear like something was circling him. He gripped his hands so tightly that the veins on their backs were protruding, but his body seemed to have petrified into immobile stone.

"Chen Ge, Chen Ge, Chen Ge..."

He continued to mumble to himself. At only five minutes left, Chen Ge could tell the flickering light of the candle had died off, and there seemed to be another presence in the dark calling his name.

Echo? Impossible!

"Chen Ge..." The voice seemed to be summoning him, and it felt urgent like it had something crucial to tell him.

The voice seems to be coming from outside the door, shall I go to take a look? However, very soon, Chen Ge rejected this thought from his mind. The rules were explicit; he was required to stand before the mirror and not do anything else.

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He continued the count-down in his heart, and the voice beside his ear started to warp. He was now certain that there was someone else calling his name, and that person was standing outside the toilet door.

The person sounds so urgent, but I'm the one playing this game, so why do they sound so damn hurried? This is obvious a trap, such a cheater. Chen Ge turned his lips down with disapproval. The set-up and atmosphere are not bad, but alas, the scare tactic is too straightforward and simple.

During the final three minutes, there was a shrill noise coming from the toilet door like someone was scratching their nails against it or gnawing their teeth on it. The door creaked subtly like it was about to open at any moment.

1,798 seconds, 1,799 seconds, 1,800 seconds! The half an hour limit was up; all the noises disappeared at once, and silence reigned once more.

To prevent miscalculation, Chen Ge did not open his eyes immediately. He counted for an extra three hundred before he took a step back, placed both his hands over his chest, and fluttered his eyes open.

The candle in the toilet had been extinguished, and the place was dark. For some reason, Chen Ge felt like something had shifted. He turned on the flashlight, and when light appeared once more in the cramped area, he was stunned.

The mirror before him was filled with cracks, and several images of himself stared back at him. It looked extremely hallucinogenic, but the thing that gave him a bigger scare was the appearance of a broken doll in front of the mirror!

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The eyes that were made from buttons were shining, and the patchwork body was filled with cotton. The doll was not by any means new, but it held a special meaning for Chen Ge; it was his very first creation and something left at the scene of his parents' disappearance.

The doll was leaning against the mirror like it was trying to stop the thing in the mirror from coming out.

"Wait, but the toilet door was already locked, how did you come in? Through the window? No wait, the bigger issue is how you moved on your own!"

Chen Ge felt like his world was falling apart; he needed some time to process the situation. The man and the doll were locked in this stare for about three minutes before Chen Ge felt more like himself again. He moved his cold fingers and slowly moved toward the doll.

For some reason, it felt like the button eyes of the doll seemed to be following him. Chen Ge's lips twitched involuntarily as he looked at this doll of his. He gave the doll a wide berth to pick the phone next to it. "Thankfully, I was clever enough to prepare for this."

The phone had finished recording. Chen Ge made a second copy before starting to look through the video.

The video quality was not that great. The single candle fire danced in the darkness, and while the Chen Ge in front of the mirror looked rather cautious, the Chen Ge in the mirror seemed weirdly at ease.

The first ten minutes were fine, but things started to turn weird at the eleven-minute mark.

The sound of the wind wasn't captured by the phone, but one could see the cubicle door moving in the video.

Then the video was interrupted by white noise. It was a video that was at most a bit curious, but for some reason, it was weirdly scary. Perhaps this was humanity's inherent fear of darkness and the unknown.

As the video continued to play, Chen Ge's face turned increasingly pale. He remembered clearly that he had not moved when his eyes were closed, but on the video, he saw his body slowly leaning forward like he was trying to lean into the mirror.

At the twenty-five-minute mark, his upper body was already at a seventy-degree angle, and the tip of his nose almost touching the surface of the mirror.

Several seconds later, without any warning, spidery cracks started to form on

the mirror. It caused even Chen Ge's heart to skip a beat. Then, the most unbelievable thing happened. The Chen Ge in the mirror's expression changed. He grinned wickedly as he slammed crazily against the mirror!

Right at that minute, the candle went out and the video ended.

Due to the camera angle, the video did not show any scene relating to the doll, and Chen Ge himself had no idea what really went down in that last five minutes.

"From the looks of things, the thing in the mirror wanted to get out, but it was stopped by this doll? In that case, the doll saved me?" Chen Ge picked the doll up from the counter and asked in a serious tone, "Can you understand me? Do you know what happened to my parents?"

Naturally, the doll did not answer, but its button eyes seemed to glow in the dark.

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He cradled the doll in his arms and turned to look at the toilet door. Afraid of going out, he shrunk underneath one of the windows and pulled out his phone. The mission success message was waiting for him.

"It has to be said that you're incredibly lucky. Congratulations for completing the Nightmare Mission! Obtained Mission Reward—Elementary Skill: Mortician's Make-up.

"Mortician's Make-up: I hope you will treat this talent with the respect it deserves. Unlike beauty make-up, a mortician only deals with the make-up of the dead. Your hands breathe life into death visages, bringing them everlasting beauty.

"First Nightmare Mission completed, unlocked the title: Newcomer at

Nightmare Town. Obtained additional reward: Unlocked the Trial Mission for the 1 Star scenario, Murder by Midnight! Completion of this Trial Mission will add this scenario to your Haunted House!"

Looking at the messages on screen, Chen Ge thought to himself, the success of a Haunted House had plenty to do with a good make-up artist. Be it actors or props, they needed a make-up artist to make them come to life, a good make-up artist can easily create authentic effect to add to the overall scare factor.

Chapter 5 25 Minutes and 14 Seconds!

"Skill and talent? Looks like the reward for Nightmare Mission is different in the sense that the reward is directly beneficial to myself!"

Making a mental note of this important point, Chen Ge's heart burned with anticipation. He had seen the existence of the other world, the world of terror, fear, darkness, and danger. Perhaps that world was where his parents had gone, but based on his current power, keeping himself safe was a big enough issue, let alone looking for them. Thankfully, with the black phone by his side, there was still a chance.

"In any case, that is still quite far in the future. The thing I need to focus on is to stabilize the Haunted House business and survive this imminent financial crisis." He pulled out his phone. "That was close; something disastrous could have happened. This shows that Nightmare Missions aren't so easily completed. Then again, there's no reason for me to go about this alone; in an information age like ours, help can be reached at the tip of one's fingers."

He logged into a few famous national supernatural forums and uploaded the original video.

A few seconds later, his video was dubbed, 'Who is that in the mirror?'

It was rapidly viewed and shared. Perhaps people were so bored of the usual host of gossip and news that they wanted to switch it up. The popularity of the video shot up like an arrow; every time Chen Ge refreshed the page, there would be at least ten new comments.

"25:14. You all can thank me later."

"Has the uploader lost his mind? Who would do something like this in the middle of the night?"

"Why did the cracks appear on the mirror on their own? Also, what was that thing that knocked into the mirror near the end there?"

"The cracks are mostly caused by temperature manipulation inside the room."

"No, you guys are all wrong, in Daoism, mirrors are items of pure yin energy. I suggest the video's title be changed from 'Who is that in the mirror?' to 'The Ghost in the mirror!'"

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"Jesus Christ, who dares do something this crazy so late at night? I'm impressed by the uploader's bravery."

"This video has definitely been tampered with; if not, take down my ID, I'll stand on my hand and eat shit!"

"Am I the only one who noticed this? The profile of the uploader is the owner of a Haunted House in Western Jiujiang. Don't get all wrapped up over this; this is nothing more than a fabricated advertisement."

Chen Ge's inbox instantly filled with private messages. Some came with questions, others with suspicion, but Chen Ge ignored them all. He knew his

video was real; he didn't think he owed any of these people any explanation. Those in the know would realize its authenticity, and as for those who just wanted to undermine him, why should he waste his time on them?

Looking at the video's meteoric rise in popularity, Chen Ge realized with a start that this was actually not a bad opportunity. He spliced the original video, only taking the last 14 seconds, and uploaded it to the nation's biggest video-sharing app.

Amid the videos that showcased food, dances, or singing, his haunted video was definitely one of a kind!

In just less than ten seconds, people had started to fall for his trap. Unlike the users on supernatural forums who went searching for stuff like this, these random users started leaving inflammatory comments under the video from being scared for no reason.

Sadly, on the internet, conflict and controversy bring in more viewers than praise does, so the wave of online censure only brought in more viewers. Scrolling through the comments, Chen Ge could practically sense the hatred and anger directed his way. He shrugged it off with a laugh.

To be fair, he did understand why these people reacted the way they did. Most of them were probably preparing for bed, all wrapped up in their blankets, and were probably just looking through some light-hearted videos in preparation to settle down for the night. This scary video of a man wreathed in candlelight had the complete opposite effect than what they were hoping for.

The "best" feature of the video was that it was only 14 seconds, so before they realized what was happening, the scare had already happened. The mirror shattered, and the thing appeared like it was trying to rush out of the

mirror and then through the phone screen itself!

This was truly a masterful set-up!

Based on how lively the comment section is, the popularity of this video looks like it's not going to drop any time soon... This means that everyone likes my video, yes? A certain someone asked a shameless and rhetorical question. The number of followers has already increased by a hundred. If I don't make use of this opportunity to advertise the Haunted House, then I'll feel I've disappointed all of my new fans and followers!

Chen Ge edited the title of the video and attached the address of the Haunted House at the user info section. He even added in brackets: A Completely Not-Scary Haunted House.

Chen Ge was satisfied with his updated user page. He remained seated under the window to look through the stream of messages and eventually fell asleep.

...

Chen Ge was woken up by the sunlight that fell on his face. He stretched his tired body and stood up from the corner of the toilet.

"It's 8.30 am already?" He dusted his clothes and pocketed both the doll and the phone before leaving the toilet.

He noticed there were obvious scratch marks on the edges of the wooden toilet door, like it had been munched on by rodents.

"Just what was the thing outside the door last night?" Looking at this, Chen Ge suddenly felt thankful he did not move from the mirror last night and go

out to take a look.

"Nightmare Missions might cause unexpected circumstances. I need to be more careful in the future." Since there was not any discernible change to the Haunted House, Chen Ge shrugged it off and prepared to welcome a new day.

The New Century Park opened at 9 am. At 8.45 am, a slender and lithe figure that was disproportionate to her chest size ran toward him carrying a backpack.

"Boss!" The girl radiated an aura of youthfulness. Her exquisite features practically glowed in the sun. Her skin was taut and supple like fresh apricot that one could not help but wish to take a bite of.

"Xiao Wan, your timing is perfect. I've just added a new background track to our song database. Listen to it and tell me what you think." Before Chen Ge could finish his sentence, Xu Wan gripped his hand tightly. On reflex, he asked, "What are you doing?"

"I just saw a big crowd gathered at the entrance of the park! They're discussing the Haunted House! We have people coming here just to experience the Haunted House!" Xu Wan exclaimed excitedly. "Boss, we seem to have plenty of customers waiting!"

"Shouldn't that be expected? Is this your first time at the park?" Chen Ge pretended to be unaffected. He pulled out his phone to look at the video sharing app. His current number of followers had broken through five hundred, and the popularity of his video had reached the top ten of the app. He scanned through the comments, and unlike other comment sections which were filled with XOXO or '<3's, his was filled with endless reprimands, rebukes, and threats. Some of them even said that they had prepared the knife

to slay Chen Ge and that they were on the way to his address.

"Er, this seems to have gotten slightly out of hand." Chen Ge coughed awkwardly before dragging Xu Wan with him into the Haunted House. "We have fifteen more minutes to the official opening time of the park. Since we're the only two left protecting this Haunted House, be prepared for the imminent war!"

