

I SCARE MYSELF SOMETIMES

深表遺憾，我病起來連自己都怕

The latest work from award-winning writer Deer Lee, this offbeat thriller topped Taiwan's Kingstone and Books.com.tw bestseller lists.

The world changed forever with the appearance of the “psychers”: people whose mental disorders unlock superhuman abilities within them. The realms of science, international relations, and crime were utterly transformed by these powerful individuals who became highly coveted assets. Chi Ching-Hsia is the only person who understands how to produce new psychers, and she disappeared two years ago following a deadly massacre.

Her younger sister, Chi Yu-Tung and a boy named Chi Wu were the only survivors. Currently imprisoned in the subaquatic “psychers institute” where the massacre took place, they are racing to relocate Chi Ching-Hsia when murder strikes the facility again. Now Chi Wu must use his synaesthetic powers to try and uncover the killer before they can claim any more victims. As their investigation leads them deeper into the past, Chi Wu and Chi Yu-Tung realize that the events of two years ago are not all that they seem – and that Chi Ching-Hsia may still be somehow involved in the present-day danger they are facing.

In *I Scare Myself Sometimes*, Deer Lee extrapolates a fantasy world from the minutia of mental disorder to produce a zany thriller that remains rooted in the real world.

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Deer Lee is a renowned novelist whose work dominates the bestseller lists. His novels include *When Love Becomes a Transaction*, which won the Kadawowa Mandarin Light Novel and Illustration Bronze Award in 2013.



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Prologue

“Ah ha ha ha!”

My older sister, Chi Ching-Hsia, suddenly burst out laughing, scaring me so much I nearly fell off my chair.

“Ching...Ching...What are you laughing at?”

“Chi Wu, my little bro! I just discovered something!”

“What is it?”

“Something astonishing!” Chi Ching-Hsia grabbed hold of my hand in her excitement, dancing and spinning us around.

“Congratulations Ching. But, what did you find out?”

“I discovered that humankind is on the verge of extinction.”

“What...?”

“Humankind will go extinct!”

“Ching, is what you’re saying true?”

“Of course it is. Didn’t your little sister and I promise you? We’d never lie to our little Wu.”

“So humankind really will go extinct?”

“Yeah! Woo!” She made a victory-sign gesture to me.

“This isn’t something to be laughing at!”

“Of course it is!” With a big grin, Chi Ching-Hsia continued “It’s only because we discovered it early that we can do something to prevent it!”

“...”

I suppose I admired Ching’s optimism.

“But Wu, I know there’s no way someone with such a thick skull as you can understand what I just said. So I’ll try explaining it in a way that makes sense for someone with such a low IQ.”

“Thick skull...Low IQ...”

I knew that the only reason Chi Ching-Hsia promised to always tell me the truth was that she was trying to put my mind at ease. But sometimes her words hurt me.

Taking no notice of my disappointment, Chi Ching-Hsia gently coughed twice and then said “Wu, have you ever been afraid of heights?”

“Heights?”

“Yeah, are you afraid of heights?”

“A little bit.”

“It’s said that hidden within a fear of heights is an omen of humankind’s extinction. You understand what I’m saying, right Wu?”

“ ... ”

Who knew what she was talking about. Not everyone was a genius like her.

Perhaps realizing I hadn't understood, Ching-Hsia sighed helplessly and continued. “Okay...How about this, I'll ask you a question which no one has ever thought about before, despite how simple it is.” She moved her face close to mine. “Why do you think people are scared of heights?”

“Eh...because they're scary. Take one wrong step and you'll fall to your death.”

“Well then, are you scared of cars in the street?”

“Huh...?”

“If a car hits you, you'll be dead in a moment.”

“If I was in the middle of cars in traffic, I reckon I'd be scared too.”

“Wrong, wrong. You know yourself, being scared of heights and being scared of cars are two completely different kinds of fear.”

“Right.”

Speaking honestly. The fear of heights is an instinctive fear. You're scared, because you're human.

“When standing up high and looking down, you'll be gripped, come over in a cold sweat, and want to get away from there as soon as possible, right?”

“Why is there a difference?”

“Because heights are ancient.”

“Ancient?”

“Since ancient times, humans have always been afraid of falling to their death from a high place, and people who witnessed this happen have had the fear of heights engraved in their genes.”

“It became something humans are instinctively afraid of, because it's ancient?”

I understood then the difference between the fear of heights and of cars. Since cars are a modern thing, they've not been around long enough to become engraved in human genes through evolution.

“Right, and the same thing happens to people around snakes and fire. People see these two things and subconsciously recoil. Too afraid to go near, they wish they could eliminate them.”

“I understand what you're saying sis. But, where's the link between a fear of heights and human extinction?”

“From a fear of heights we can understand that there are two essential factors which determine how something can evolve into a fear that is engraved in our genes. One, it must be ancient enough and two, it must have killed enough people.”

“Right.”

“So Wu, which do you think has killed more people? Humans, or snakes and fire?”

I was speechless. I was intimidated by what Chi Ching-Hsia was saying, despite her calm tone of voice, and I'd subconsciously taken a step back. I knew, vaguely, where she was going with this. And instinctively I felt afraid.

“Wu, because of wars, the number of humans killed by humans long ago outstripped snakes, fire and heights. Plus, humans have been killing humans for the entirety of human history.”

She moved closer to me, her azure blue eyes twinkling.

“Humans’ fear of humans was carved into our instincts a long time ago. If one day this fear reawakens, and humans begin to subconsciously dread other humans, and want to eliminate the human species...”

As Ching-Hsia spoke, a potential future emerged before my eyes. On seeing another human, people would be overcome with dread. People would start committing suicide and killing each other....

As if able to see exactly what I was thinking, Chi Ching-Hsia concluded my thoughts:

“If this happens – then humankind will be destroyed.”

When I’d finished speaking to Chi Yu-Tung, I suddenly received a summons from the head of the Psychers Institute – the Director.

On the way to the Director’s office, I saw many researchers dressed in white gowns rushing around the institute. This scene started to become commonplace across the world two years ago.

All since my sister, Chi Ching-Hsia, developed her “Theory of Psychers”.

A theory that has changed the face of the world.

Many seemingly superhuman “psychers” appeared. Taking part in medical treatments, wars and criminal activities, they started to cause unrest across the globe. Psychers are those who suffer from mental disorders, who then – following medication and training – learn to store their original “abnormal perception” within their bodies.

Put simply, psychers can store their illness inside their bodies and are free to choose whether or not to release it.

The power of countries nowadays is dictated not by the amount of weapons they possess, but by the number of psychers they have. The more psychers a country has, and the better their quality, the stronger and richer it will be. As a result, every country has begun researching new technologies, working to train their own psychers.

The Psychers Institute where Chi Yu-Tung and I were being held was precisely that kind of facility. Located at the bottom of the sea, it was about the same size as a normal institute, but covered by a transparent bowl of light. From a distance it looked like a hut on the seabed. The institute only had one passage leading to the surface, to prevent outsiders getting in and stealing any data. Security was extremely strict, so there was no way any non-approved persons could burst in.

However, despite the massive amount of money that had been spent, and the several hundred researchers working within, not a single psycher had been developed.

No one except Chi Ching-Hsia was able to produce psychers. In the two years since her disappearance, not a single country had managed it.

“You’re here, Chi Wu.”

Inside the Director's office, a delicate girl sat opposite me on a wide chair, holding a wooden paper fan and smiling.

"Why did you send for me? Director."

The girl in front of me was the director of the institute. She was just 1.4m tall, and her name and age were unknown. The only thing known about her was that everyone called her Director. Her baby face, short stature and slight frame meant that people mistook her for a primary school student at first glance.

She always wore a formal kimono. But she made an outfit that should have appeared graceful look like layers of clothes hung on a coat hanger.

However, these were not her most eye-catching features; that was the blue butterfly on her left cheek. The butterfly mark that every psycher has somewhere on their body.

"For the past two years, the whole world has been searching for Chi Ching-Hsia. Do you know why?" The Director continued without waiting for my reply. "Because finding her will mean mastering the techniques of the psychers – and mastering the world."

"I know."

"Only you and Chi Yu-Tung know of her whereabouts. Right?"

I said nothing.

"Where is she?"

"I don't know."

"Is there nothing that can make you talk?"

"I told you. I don't know."

"And how about now?"

There was a loud bang: the Director had opened her fan.

"Huh?"

"Open 'psychic domain'."

As she spoke these words, the butterfly mark on her face disappeared, turning into specks of light that filled the office.

I looked around. All I could see were these particles of light gradually fusing into a blue cage around the edge of the room.

"Now the whole office is within my psychic domain. In other words, I've cast my abnormal perception throughout the room."

"Right..."

"But you needn't be afraid, my 'disorder-source' is OCD. It's completely harmless."

"OCD...?"

OCD: obsessive compulsive disorder. Sufferers have abnormal impulses. Only being able to accept odd numbers, for example, or constantly checking if they're clean, or being compelled to tidy and sort everything in their house. It's as if they're being 'compelled' to follow some set of rules. If they don't keep to the rules they've set for themselves, they feel incredibly uneasy, to such an extent that it makes normal life impossible for them.

“In other words, anyone within your psycher domain will suffer from OCD just like you, right?”

“Right. Isn’t that the way psychers do battle?”

First they open their psycher domain. Next, they infect those within the domain using their abnormal awareness.

“Of course I know that.” After all I’m a psycher too. The very first in the world, in fact. “So Director, what is your psycher-power?”

“Inability to lie.”

She put away her fan, revealing a graceful smile.

“As long as you’re within my domain, you cannot lie.”

“I see...”

Those with OCD are compelled to follow a certain set of rules. And now, within this domain, the rule that had to be followed was, “you cannot lie.”

“So then...”

The Director was looking at me. She asked the key question: “Two years ago, what exactly happened to Chi Ching-Hsia?”

I instinctively gave my standard reply: “I don’t know...” And then my body began to shake. My breathing intensified. It was as if I’d been struck by lightning! Was this right? Had my answer been untrue? I was utterly incapable of saying anything that wasn’t completely truthful. No way!

I was panting. It was a struggle to breathe, and my heart was beating so fast it felt like it would explode.

If I wanted to say a lie...

It’d be better off just dropping dead.

“Do not fight my psycher-power.” The Director smiled. “This perception is intense enough to affect your physiology. If you lie, you’ll cause yourself to suffer organ failure and die.”

“Well then...” I bit the inside of my cheek: “I know what happened two years ago, but I don’t want to tell you.”

As I spoke the truth, the pressure pushing down on my body immediately dissipated.

“That old trick.” The Director furrowed her brow.

I smiled at her as if I’d won.

If I’m only unable to lie, then it’d be better for me to answer indirectly and avoid breaking the rules.

In fact, if I just kept completely silent then she wouldn’t be able to do anything about it.

“Let me ask you another way then.”

“It doesn’t matter how you ask, I won’t tell you what happened two years ago.”

“Let’s not be so sure about that.” The Director smiled.