

48 Hours 1141

Chapter 1141: Deputy Chief Engineer

A tall, thin man with grizzled hair sat on the third bed in the ward.

He had his back to the door and was looking out the window at a pine tree. It was hard to tell what he was thinking, but when the head nurse called his name, he paused for a few seconds before slowly turning his head around.

This was also the first time Zhang Heng had seen Katarov (he had only glanced at him from the corridor outside the ward.) This was a name that would be inescapable once Chernobyl was mentioned in the future, with many news editorials regarding him as the first person responsible for the accident at the nuclear power plant. In those articles, he was described as an arrogant, greedy, and stupid leader.

However, Zhang Heng could not see much from Katarov for the time being. The man in front of him had a well-defined face, deep-set eyes, and a dull gaze.

Like his colleagues, Katarov had been exposed to high doses of radiation. His skin was red, and there were traces of vomit on the collar of his hospital gown. He looked at the five people who had entered the room without saying a word.

The head nurse had no choice but to repeat, "Mr. Katarov, the expert team is here to see you."

"I heard that," the deputy chief engineer said.

The room fell silent. Not long ago, everyone was talking about the expert group, but in the blink of an eye, the expert group had arrived in Pripjat. This also showed the significance that the higher-ups attributed to the accident.

Everyone couldn't help but worry.

The atmosphere suddenly became a little weird.

Besnova was the first to break the silence. "I'm Dalia, an engineer from the Atomic Energy Alliance. Beside me are acute radiation specialist Evelyn, nuclear physicist Valijingna, and... senior assistant prosecutor, Mr. Sergey."

The doctor and Coconut nodded at Katarov as a greeting, but Zhang Heng did not move. He merely stared coldly at the deputy chief engineer in front of him, like a venomous snake staring at its prey before a hunt.

That cold gaze made Katarov feel very uncomfortable, and his stomach sent a signal to his brain. He quickly picked up the trash can beside his bed and started vomiting again. Zhang Heng noticed Coconut trembling as well. Katarov's actions had obviously made her sick, but fortunately, she overcame her physical discomfort with her will. She gritted her teeth and left the mask on her face.

Katarov did not vomit anything either. His stomach had already been emptied several hours ago, and there was nothing left except gastric juice.

Jartolov retched for a while and rinsed his mouth with saltwater. Then he raised his head again and said weakly, "What do you want from me?"

"Everything you know about this accident, Comrade Katarov," Besnova said with a serious expression. After the initial nervousness, she gradually entered her own role. Zhang Heng was not wrong about her. This girl was indeed a very talented actor.

She was initially a nurse at Pripyat Medical Center, and Katarov was the deputy chief engineer of the Chernobyl reactor units 3 and 4. He was also a big shot in the atomic city. Besnova would never dare to speak to him in such a tone.

But now, she felt a strange feeling that she had never felt before. It was as if her hands were really in control of Katarov's fate, and she knew that the latter also knew this.

Perhaps because he knew that he had made a big mistake, that Katarov did not ask the expert group in front of him to show their identification, nor did he go to the chief engineer, Fuming, or the person in charge of the nuclear power plant, Bulihanov, to verify. Of course, more importantly, he did not expect that someone would impersonate the expert group. Courage was secondary. The main reason was that this method would not bring any benefits.

As a result, Katarov nodded. "Okay, I will tell everyone what I know."

Besnova turned to the head nurse.

"Find us a place where we can talk."

"Uhh, the hospital wards are all full now," the head nurse said awkwardly.

"Isn't there still a dressing room for the nurses?"

Besnova immediately regretted her last words. She had always worked here and was too familiar with this place, especially after hearing the head nurse said she had thought of a solution. However, her current identity was Dahlia, an engineer of the Atomic Energy Alliance. Obviously, she wouldn't be familiar with the dressing room of the medical center.

As expected, the head nurse's face revealed a strange expression. Nonetheless, she said nothing and led the group to the changing room.

Before she left, Besnova said to Akimov and Toptonov, "After you finish chatting with Mr. Katarov, it will be your turn. Therefore, better make use of this time to make some preparations in advance."

The on-duty foreman and the advanced reactor control engineer looked at each other. They could read the anxiety and worry in each other's eyes.

Three minutes later, only Katarov and the four members of the "expert group" were left in the changing room.

The doctor took out a tape recorder from the shopping mall and placed it on the table, pressing the recording button.

On the other side, Besnova had already walked to the deputy chief engineer. She was in an exceptionally good condition now. She looked into Jartolov's eyes and said in a gentle tone, "Don't be nervous, Comrade Katarov. We will start with a relatively simple question."

"You are Anatole Stepanović Katarov, deputy chief engineer of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant's reactor No.4, right?"

"That's right. It's me." Katarov appeared to be a little uneasy. He crossed his hands in front of his chest, and his voice sounded a little hoarse.

"Can you briefly explain how you came to be here?"

"Here, Chernobyl? Oh, I used to be in charge of a physics laboratory in the far east." Katarov sorted out his thoughts and continued, "To study... the physical characteristics of the core of a small reactor."

"Yes."

Besnova pretended to nod. In fact, she did not understand a single word about Katarov's research, but that did not stop her from continuing to ask.

"So, is your work here going well?"

"Generally speaking, it is relatively smooth, although there have been some minor problems with the reactor before."

"Such as?"

Katarov hesitated for a moment but still said, "In the previous report, we have actually mentioned that it is mainly about some leakage situations, most of which are in the drainage ditches and vents. The leakage of radioactive wastewater is about 50 cubic meters per hour. There are also some waste treatments. In addition, the main part of the cement structure of the nuclear power plant also needs to be strengthened. But as I said before, these are all minor problems."

Chapter 1142: Katarov's Memories

"Let's talk about what happened early this morning."

After a few questions, Besnova gradually shifted to the main topic.

Katarov subconsciously looked at the three players not far away. He could already tell that the expert group was led by the three people on the other side. They stood on the other side of the room as if playing the role of a jury, whispering to each other to exchange opinions from time to time. They spoke in a low voice, but there was a distance between the two sides, so he did not know what they were talking about.

Thus, the deputy engineer could only look away and rewind his thoughts to a few hours ago.

"In the early morning of the 26th, we were conducting a safety test," Katarov recalled. "You should be clear about the content of the experiment because in January today, factory director Breuhanov reported the test procedure to the Institute of Hydroelectric Engineering..."

However, he was rudely interrupted by Besnova, "Comrade Katarov, you just need to tell us the details in full accuracy. As for what we already know and what we don't know, you don't have to worry. In addition, if possible, please explain clearly the principles involved. Dr. Evelyn also hopes to understand the incident."

"Alright."

Although Katarov was a little puzzled by Besnova's words and did not understand why the experts of acute radiation disease would want to listen to the analysis of the accident, he still agreed. He organized his thoughts and continued, "In short, we were scheduled for a safety test. The original time was scheduled for April 25th, before the reactor was shut down for maintenance. As you know, the reactor needs to be shut for regular maintenance, and we could take the opportunity to do a straightforward safety experiment.

"Chernobyl uses a graphite-moderated boiling water reactor. Using the electricity generated, the water pump of the nuclear power plant can continuously pour cold water into the reactor, producing steam to drive the generator to generate electricity. At the same time, the high-temperature wastewater is carried away from the reactor to ensure that the core doesn't melt down.

"I believe you can also see how important the water pump is in this process. We need to do everything possible to ensure the normal operations of the water pump.

"In an emergency, even if all the power in the nuclear power plant is cut off, we still have a backup diesel generator to power the pumps, but it takes a little while for the diesel generator to start, which means we have to keep the pumps running for a short period of time."

Katarov tried to be as detailed as possible to ensure that even a layman like Dr. Yevreem could understand.

"This safety experiment is to solve this problem. We are considering using the inertia of the steam turbine—when the power is cut off, steam is still being produced, and the turbine still runs. This can generate electricity... and borrowing this part of the electricity can help us get through the difficulties.

"At 1:00 p.m., we lowered the power of the No.4 reactor to 1,600 megawatts according to the original plan and shut down a steam turbine. At 2:00 p.m., we cut off the emergency core cooling system and the multiple forced circulation circuits and were ready to carry out the safety experiment designed by Chief Engineer Fomin. However, at this time, we received a call from Kiev, saying that there was an accident at a small power station there, and the power supply in Kiev was tight, so we were asked to postpone the shutdown of the reactor.

"What could I have done? I could only suspend the experiment." Katarov spread his hands, "I also went home and slept for a few hours during this time. When I came back, it was already 11 p.m. And an hour ago, I received permission to continue reducing the power. For this, I contacted the on-duty foreman of the reactor at that time, Yuri Iliukub, and Akimov, who would take over from him. I clearly told them to continue reducing power from 1,000 to 700 megawatts according to the requirements of the experiment.

"After arranging the tasks, I left the control room and looked around to observe the situation before the power went out. Then, at 12:30, I returned to the control room. At that time, Akimov, Toptonov,

Stoliarchok were in the control room. Tregov, who was supposed to be off work, was also there, along with a few other interns and someone else.

"I noticed that the power of the reactor had dropped to 30 megawatts, far below the 700 megawatts required for the test. I asked Akimov what was going on. He said that shutting down the local automatic control system and switching to manual control should solve this problem, so I approved him to continue increasing the power.

"After that, I left the control room again to observe the situation at the turbine. When I came back, the power of the reactor had risen to about 200 megawatts. We finally decided to conduct the test under this power. I called all the participants to give a briefing, then asked them to return to their posts to get ready.

"The safety experiment started at 1:23:04. Everything went smoothly, and all the operations were carried out according to the regulations. I was busy studying the readings on the instruments, and I heard Akimov say he would shut down the reactor. With that, he reached out and pressed the emergency power reduction button. Not long after that, I heard the sound of an explosion."

"What happened?" Besnova asked.

"That's what I want to know," Katarov said. "After the explosion, I immediately left the control room to inspect the situation outside. In the end, I found that for some unknown reason, the emergency water tank of the protection and control system had exploded. That water tank was very large, 110 cubic meters. Such an explosion would have blown the roof off. If it were serious, it would blow up the entire reactor unit. Fortunately, the reactor below was still intact. I immediately ordered water to be injected into the reactor to keep the reactor stable. After that, I joined the rescue with the others.

"Around three o'clock, I received a call and went to the civil defense headquarters to report the accident to factory manager Bulihanov. Then, because I was not feeling well, I came to Pripjat Medical Center for treatment. That's all I know."

"The reactor was safe and sound. Are you sure, Comrade Katarov?"

"Yes, I am sure," the deputy chief engineer said with affirmation. "I have been around the reactor since the accident."

"What about the radiation?"

"Gorbachenko's radiometer showed that the background radiation was 1,000 micro roentgen per second."

"It doesn't sound good."

"Yes, there's no doubt that there was a radiation leak, but fortunately, it's still under control. We'll get through it," Katarov said.

"Is that so? But as far as I know, 3.6 roentgen happens to be the upper limit of small-scale radiometers," Besnova said coldly. "Why doesn't the nuclear power plant have one of a larger range?"

Katarov was silent for a moment. “Yes, there is one. We have a measuring instrument with a range of 1,000 roentgen, but it was locked in a safe and buried under the debris of the building. “But the values shouldn’t be too far off. After all, it only blew up a water tank.”

Chapter 1143: The Reactor Burns Like A Furnace

The conversation with Katarov lasted about half an hour.

Besnova had done her best. Not only did she have to convey Katarov’s words to Coconut with her mind, but she also had to ask him questions she received from Coconut. The trip was taxing, in particular, the many technical terms that confused her a lot. But in order to play her current role, she had to act as if she knew everything.

That said, she had actually taken the opportunity to learn about the power generation principle of the nuclear power plant and some related knowledge.

As a person who lived in Pripjat, Besnova naturally knew that the existence of this city was inseparable from the nuclear power plant three kilometers away. After all, the first residents here were nuclear power plant construction workers, and their lives revolved around the construction and operation of the plant. Since then, we have long been accustomed to the existence of nuclear power plants.

As for the safety of nuclear power plants, the vice-chairman of the National Nuclear Energy Utilization Commission N. Come in. That’s what Sinev said.

—a reactor is like a furnace, and the reactor operator is like a furnace driver.

Therefore, according to the understanding of Besnova and most of the regular folk, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant was simply a large furnace, not unlike other thermal power plants.

The exploration and utilization of nuclear energy in both the Eastern and Western world were now decades old, and the technology had increasingly matured. The unfortunate nuclear accident not long ago on Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania, notwithstanding, nuclear power plants were typically safe, especially in the Soviet Union itself. Besnova had hardly seen any reports of nuclear power plant accidents before.

The construction of nuclear power plants had progressed steadily, their completion greatly easing the electricity shortage everywhere in the Soviet Union. Just like the bulk of Soviets, Besnova was also proud of her country’s achievements in the use of nuclear energy.

After listening to Katarov’s answer to the group of experts, however, Besnova realized that the nuclear power plant didn’t seem as safe as she had always imagined. At least, Chernobyl’s reactor wasn’t quite the same as a boiler, but although the steam turbines that generated electricity were all driven by steam, this was perhaps the only commonality between the two.

Fortunately, according to Katarov, although the nuclear accident seemed quite serious, the final outcome was not that bad. A water tank had been blown up, the roof was destroyed, and there was a radiation leak at the scene, but the dose was not too large and was basically under control.

However, the players kept asking Katarov repeatedly if the reactor was really as intact as he said. Besnova also smelled something unusual.

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After interrogating Katarov, the players did not immediately go to Asimov and Toptonov. Instead, they first exchanged opinions. The most important thing was to let Coconut take a breather. The latter had already taken off her mask. She hugged the trash can and started to vomit.

“What do you think?” the doctor asked.

Of course, he was not asking Zhang Heng what he thought about the current situation at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant because everyone from 30 years later knew that it was the reactor that had exploded in the early morning of April 26th and not some bullsh*t water tank. Furthermore, they had been there at the time and witnessed the tragic scene with their own eyes. They, too, had been exposed to lethal doses of radiation. Coconut’s had only scratched her hand a little, but the bleeding had not stopped completely. The situation was getting worse and worse.

Zhang Heng thought about it, “Katarov lied, that’s for sure, but for the time being, we still don’t know which parts of his story are true and which parts are fabricated. Let Coconut rest a while. After that, we’ll have a chat with Akimov and Toptonov. We can compare testimonies after we get them.”

Unfortunately, now that the Vow Rings were being used on Besnova, Zhang Heng could only rely on observation and comparison to detect lies.

After a pause, he continued, “We do have an advantage in investigating Chernobyl because compared to the people of today, we already know the results in advance, and there are many analyses and speculations in the future. However, we also have a disadvantage on our side. The biggest problem is that none of us are nuclear physicists or nuclear power plant designers.

“I also listened carefully to Katarov’s introduction just now, including the working principle of the graphite-moderated boiling water reactor and also this time’s safety test. Although I have a general understanding of what they were doing, this knowledge is far from enough for us to figure out what happened in the reactor at that time and the reason for the Chernobyl accident.”

Coconut was almost done puking. She looked up and said weakly, “We’ve talked to Katarov, but I haven’t received any system notifications. What about you?”

“Me neither.” The doctor shook his head.

“Does that mean we can exclude Katarov?” Coconut asked, “At least it means that he is not the main person responsible for the accident. Although I don’t like him very much, that bastard always intentionally or unintentionally pulled himself out of the middle of the story. He was “coincidentally” not at the scene at several key points. Whether it was when the reactor power was rapidly decreasing or when he pressed the emergency power reduction button later, he was either outside inspecting the work or looking at the dashboard. But no matter what, the system did not react after talking to him.”

“It’s hard to say right now.”

The doctor frowned, “The description of the main mission this time is exceptionally simple. There’s only one sentence—find the key person. But whether it’s “find” or “key person,” there are actually many definitions, especially the word “find.” If we’re referring to our investigation identifying the main culprit,

then the conversation just now was clearly not enough to achieve this. Because according to Jartolov's own description, his responsibility in the accident is not that great."

Coconut used her uninjured hand to punch a nearby locker. "Call Akimov and Toptonov."

"Are you sure? You've only rested less than five minutes. We still have time," Zhang Heng said.

"No. I'm fine."

"Okay, if you really can't take it anymore, we can stop the interview for now," the doctor said. Then he signaled for Besnova to call the next person in.

A hint of worry flashed across Besnova's eyes. She didn't know what the players were talking about, but she could tell that the first conversation didn't go as they had expected. In fact, the female nurse was a little lost at the moment. From the moment she was kidnapped, she had been trying to guess the identity of Zhang Heng's group, but until now, she hadn't the slightest clue.

Chapter 1144: Safe and Sound

At first, Besnova thought that the players were bandits who had appeared out of nowhere. However, the other party didn't rob any of her belongings, and although they secretly pry open the doors of several shops during the night, they only took some emergency change. Most of them were daily necessities that could be used, and they did not take too much either.

In addition, they all looked Ukrainian or Russian, but strangely, none of them could speak the language. Besnova had initially thought that she could infer their identity from this.

This was most likely a group of Americans or Europeans who lived in the Western world but had Russian and Ukrainian blood. They were specially selected to carry out secret espionage activities by infiltrating the Soviet Union. However, Besnova thought about it again, and the more this didn't seem to make sense. How could a spy infiltrating an enemy country not learn their language? What kind of infiltration was this? Moreover, this group of people didn't speak English. She didn't know which country's language it was.

However, they were indeed particularly interested in the nuclear power plant. They even disguised themselves as experts to talk to its engineers. That being said, Besnova soon discovered that they didn't seem to be interested in the technology of the nuclear power plant, but the accident that happened last night. In other words, these people who pretended to be experts were indeed doing what the expert group in Moscow was supposed to do.

Thus, Besnova was completely confused. She had no idea where the players came from. She even had the illusion that they were standing together with the residents of Pripjat.

On the contrary, the nuclear power plant seemed to be hiding something.

Although Besnova knew next to nothing about nuclear physics, she was a nurse in the medical center after all, and she knew a little about radiation sickness. Seeing that the players had all been exposed to different doses of radiation, she recalled the scene when they first met. The players had rushed into the ward wearing the clothes of the nuclear power plant staff.

It happened to be shortly after the Chernobyl accident. Besnova remembered very clearly that because of the huge fire at the time of the explosion, the nurse on duty with her even pulled her to the window to look. They were guessing what happened to the nuclear power plant at that time, and not long after that, they were all captured by the players.

In other words, they were most likely at the scene when the nuclear power plant exploded last night. Did they discover something? Was that why they started to investigate? However, Besnova did not know what would happen even if they found out the results. She could tell that some of the players were not in good condition. Although the doctors could provide some treatment, they basically only focused on alleviating pain.

Coconut, in particular, was in an even worse condition than some of the nuclear power plant workers who were sent to the hospital. Right now, what she needed the most was to receive proper treatment, not forcing herself to carry out some investigation here.

However, Besnova also knew that her words would not have any effect on the players. She did not forget her current identity, that she was still a captive.

Besnova followed Coconut's request and called Akimov after Katarov. Akimov was the foreman on duty at reactor No.4 last night. Aged 33, he wore glasses and had a head of thick curly hair. He looked quite strong, but now he was extremely weak. His skin had been completely burned by the radiation and had turned dark brown. His face and hands, and even his tongue were swollen. Even speaking seemed a mighty chore.

His radiation situation was much worse than Katarov's because, according to his own account, after the accident, he had run with Toptonov to the reactor to try to restore the water supply.

When he said this, he was interrupted by Besnova, who, as she had once confronted Jartlov, confronted the foreman on duty. "Are you sure the reactor is still intact?"

Akimov obviously hesitated. He began to tremble. At the same time, he kept repeating what he had been repeating when he first entered the room, "Everything we did was right. We followed the rules in the operating manual. We didn't make a mistake, really..."

"Calm down, Comrade Akimov. We are not here to hold you accountable, at least not now. We just want to know the specific situation of the reactor to provide a scientific basis for the next decision of the higher-ups. So, you just need to tell us what you saw."

"I..." Akimov opened his mouth. "We experienced a serious radiation accident... but fortunately, the reactor is still safe and sound."

It took a lot of effort to say this, but he obviously felt better after saying it.

"What was the radiation value at that time?"

"1,000 microrentgens per second." Akimov adjusted the glasses on his face. "After the explosion, the most important thing was to inject water into the reactor to prevent the reactor from melting due to the high temperature. Therefore, we prepared to open the No.2 emergency water pump and began to inject water into the reactor according to the request of chief engineer Fomin."

“However, because we lost the power supply, the gate valve could only be opened manually. So, Toptonov and I rotated the handle along the line. We spent a few hours opening the regulating valves on the two branches, but for some reason, the reactor seemed to be leaking. At that time, we were completely exhausted and were sent to the medical center by ambulance. Our replacement was Smagin.”

Akimov’s account sounded as if it was full of guilt and self-blame.

Besnova could see that the man in front of her had become really upset about the trouble he’d caused, but he didn’t seem to know what he’d done wrong. He could only repeat that he didn’t do anything wrong. Everything was in accordance with the rules and so on to try to make her conscience feel better.

At one point, Besnova didn’t even have the heart to ask any more questions. She continued to exert pressure on the poor man, forcing him to recall all the details of the incident. All she knew was that this wasn’t a matter she could decide—Zhang Heng and the others had no intention of interrupting or pausing the conversation at all.

However, they did learn something. At least, from Akimov’s answer, they discovered something different from what Katarov said. For example, when the power went down, according to Akimov, Katarov was also in the control room at the time. He was so angry that he scolded Toptonov. He then rampaged on a senior reactor control engineer before demanding that Toptonov increase the power, only to Toptonov’s refusal.

Thus, Katarov brought up the safety regulations, saying that if the power levels dropped below 80%, it could only be increased after 24 hours. Now that the power was below 50%, nowhere in the safety regulations was it stated that the power couldn’t be increased immediately.

Chapter 1145: The Voice of Reason

“In order to counteract the leak, we have taken out some control rods one after another. The power of the reactor increased to 200 megawatts.”

“How many?”

“What?”

“How many control rods have you taken out?” Besnova asked.

“I don’t remember very clearly. The specific operation was completed by Toptonov.” Akimov gulped hard. He looked very nervous, and his breathing was rapid as if he was about to drown.

Besnova had to find a pack of cigarettes and lit one for him. Akimov took a puff and began to cough non-stop. The hand holding the cigarette was trembling. However, half a minute later, he took two deep puffs, and his emotions calmed slightly.

“28. In the end, there are still 28 control rods left in the reactor. This is the bottom line stipulated in the safety manual. The core needs at least 28 to 30 control rods to remain inserted during the fuel combustion process. We follow the safety manual to operate, so there should be 28 control rods left in the core at that time.”

“Okay, then let’s talk about the explosion.”

“Uh, okay.” Akimov nodded. His eyes looked a little dull, but he still forced himself to recall the situation at that time, “At 1:23, Toptunov first noticed the increase in reactor power. He told me that there was an energy surge, which meant that the nuclear fission reaction in the reactor had become very intense. Therefore, according to safety regulations, I pressed the Level-5 emergency power reduction button, and all the control rods extracted previously were reinserted into the core of the reactor.

“Can you briefly explain the operation of the control rods to Dr. Yevreem?”

“Of course, the control rods are used to stop the fission reaction. They are made of boron, which can completely absorb free neutrons. We can adjust the power of the reactor by adjusting the number of control rods in the reactor. “When I press the level five emergency power reduction button, all 211 control rods will be inserted back into the core of the reactor, which will rapidly reduce the power of the reactor.”

Akimov looked a little perturbed. He paused at this point and raised his head to look at Bensonova, “Why are you asking this? The reactor is not damaged. What exploded was only the water tank. We did everything we could to continue supplying water to the reactor. Because of this, my companions and I were also exposed to quite a bit of radiation. Don’t misunderstand. I’m not taking credit for myself. This is what we should do. I just thought, I just... I, I...”

“Calm down, Comrade Akimov.”

Seeing that the shift leader’s entire face had turned red and he was beginning to speak incoherently, Besnova quickly comforted him. “It’ll be fine. The fire has been controlled. We’re just doing a routine check, reporting to the higher-ups, and discussing the repair plan. It won’t be long before you and your colleagues can go back to work, so you don’t have to be nervous. Take two puffs of smoke and slowly exhale. Yes, that’s right... that’s it. Alright, you can leave now. Our conversation has ended. Thank you for your cooperation, Comrade Akimov.”

“Thank you, thank you.” Akimov looked relieved. He stood up from the stool and left the locker room with a hole-riddled body.

After that, the player spent another 15 minutes chatting with the operator that night, Toptunov. He was very young, only 26. He looked terrified and finished the conversation almost in tears.

The contents of his story were basically the same as what Akimov had said. Toptunov had repeatedly sworn that all the operations were done according to the safety manual. When it came to the part related to Katarov, it was obvious that Toptunov was a little afraid of the deputy chief engineer, so he had been vague about it.

When Zhang Heng and the others left the hospital, it was already 10:30 am. They drove the Volga “borrowed” from DW’s office to meet up with the other four and shared the results of their trip to the hospital with them.

Mouse’s eyes widened. “Are they blind? Why are they still talking about the explosion of the water tank at this time? They are all experts in nuclear power plants! How could they be so Shameless?”

“People will lie to themselves when faced with unsolvable difficulties and responsibilities. Just like many people who run away from a hit-and-run, they know the consequences of doing so are very serious, but

they still take the chance to gamble on that one-in-a-million chance. The same goes for the people at Chernobyl," Zhang Heng said lightly. As they talked, he could clearly sense the different degrees of entanglement in their hearts.

It was especially true for Toptonov, the youngest among them. This young man was suffering all the time, even though they kept saying that the water tank had exploded and the reactor was safe. Apparently, only such an answer would make them feel better and relinquish their minds of the fear of the future, but somewhere in their hearts... a weak voice from science and reason was constantly reminding them of the real truth, the cruel reality that they refused to believe in.

The doctor also added. "Also, don't forget that almost all of our current understanding of the dangers of a nuclear accident came from this Chernobyl incident. Before this, people couldn't have imagined that such a serious accident would happen at a nuclear power plant. Most of these people didn't even believe that the core would explode, even with all that graphite blocks everywhere."

"This is an all-out disaster. We just passed by the school gate and saw a group of children carrying school bags. They were even buying food by the roadside."

The maintenance worker handed Zhang Heng and the others a bag of biscuits and a bottle of mineral water for breakfast. They no longer dared to eat outside, nor did they dare to eat any fresh ingredients. Only the puffed food that was isolated from the packaging gave them a slight sense of security. Although it did not taste good, they would not be picky anymore at a time like this.

Zhang Heng and the Doctor endured the discomfort in their stomachs and finished the biscuits. However, Coconut only took a few bites before she put it down. She had finished the bottle of water. Because she had vomited too much earlier, she was short of water and urgently needed to replenish some.

Meanwhile, Master Kui didn't care about the lives of the 50,000 residents in the town or whether they would be exposed to radiation. She frowned, "So, you've asked the three people at the hospital, but they didn't give us the mission completion notice. Then, we'll have to look for the person behind the list. Who is it again?"

"Chief engineer Fomin and factory manager Bulihanov," the doctor said. "According to deputy chief engineer Katarov, when he left, Fomin and Bulihanov had already arrived at the administrative building No.1 of the nuclear power plant."

Chapter 1146: Returning To The Nuclear Power Plant

"We're going back to the nuclear power plant?" Mouse's expression changed slightly.

"There's a distance between the administration building and the reactor, and we don't have to go back all the way," Zhang Heng said. "If you're worried, I'll go with Coconut and Besnova."

"I'll go this time too," Master Kui said. "My health isn't too bad either. Are you guys still going to pretend to be experts?"

"I'm afraid that won't work this time. Fu Ming and Bulihanov are in contact with Moscow, so they might even have a list of experts. Furthermore, they're not in the hospital, so they can check with Moscow at

any time,” Zhang Heng said. “Fortunately, we’ve chatted with Katarov, Akimov, and Toptonov, so this time, we can be a little rougher.”

“Let’s go together, then.” The doctor hesitated for a moment before saying, “Let’s work together so we can take care of each other.”

However, he didn’t expect Zhang Heng to shake his head. “The nuclear power plant has been locked down, but I don’t want a direct confrontation with the town’s armed forces for the time being. After all, we don’t know how long everyone will be staying here. If possible, I want to sneak in, so it’s easier to move with fewer people.”

Zhang Heng turned to look at Coconut. “Your body...”

“My hand f*cking hurts.” Coconut raised her injured hand. She had just changed the bandage, but when she tore off the old bandage, the skin on her hand peeled off along with it. Coconut was also surprised. When she saw this, she was still stunned. She didn’t seem to understand why her skin had peeled off so easily.

“But I’m still alive, so of course I can go to the nuclear power plant with you,” she said as she reached out her hand to the repairman.

The latter raised his eyebrows. “What?”

“When we were in the supermarket, I saw you steal two bottles of vodka from the shelf,” Coconut said, “Let me have a sip.”

“This is not something a woman should drink. Are you sure you want to drink it?” the repairman muttered skeptically.

“Be straightforward. Don’t be so wishy-washy. I’ve already been exposed to radiation. Why would I be afraid of a mouthful of vodka?” Coconut scolded.

“Alright.” The maintenance man took out a bottle of vodka from his bag. “The Doctor said that you have nuclear mania in your nervous system. I won’t lower myself to a patient’s level. I’ll give you this bottle. I won’t dare to drink it even if your mouth touches the bottle’s mouth.”

“Don’t worry. If we don’t complete the main mission, everyone will die. It’s just a matter of time,” Coconut said lightly. “If you die later, it simply means that you’ll be suffering more than I am.”

“...”

“Then it’ll just be the four of us this time,” Zhang Heng said. “You can send us to the vicinity of the nuclear power plant. We’ll set up a time and place, and you can pick us up later.”

Mouse sighed with a worried look on his face. “Sigh, I wonder when we’ll be able to complete the mission and leave this godforsaken place.”

The maintenance worker drove the jeep back to the nuclear power plant. The bad start at the medical center made everyone realize that the main mission this time was not as simple as it seemed. So far, they had not received any hints. Everything came from their own fumbling, and they did not even know if they were heading in the right direction. It was as frustrating as the radioactive cloud not far away.

Especially when it came to the background of this game, the players felt that they were powerful but unable to use it. They had experienced more than one round of the game, and they had encountered all kinds of opponents, but none of the challenges had made them as powerless as they were now. They could not even find a target to retaliate. It was completely one-sided.

The maintenance workers drove the jeep carefully away from the disturbing cloud, but the residents of the town clearly did not think so. Children rode their bikes from there, all the way to the small bridge near the Yanov train station. From there, one could clearly see the destroyed reactor. Of course, the radiation in that place was also terrifyingly high.

There were also people who deliberately moved a rubber mat on the roof and stretched their limbs to lie on it. Under the radioactive cloud, they looked at their skin getting suntanned bit by bit and were probably quite satisfied. After all, the effect of the sun today was comparable to a month's worth of sunbathing. And they didn't even have to spend any money.

After the initial shock, the players had gradually become numb to this scene. They were used to it. Not too long ago, Zhang Heng saw a few people fishing by the river at the hospital. In real history, one of them later appeared on the cover of a foreign magazine and became famous throughout Europe.

In his own words,

—If you are ignorant, then curiosity will only get you into trouble, especially when you have no sense of responsibility.

At that moment in Pripjat, it was true that very few people, out of their ignorance or the lackadaisical official response, realized what had happened, and those who had relevant knowledge were terrified. For some reason, they simply didn't want to believe what their eyes saw.

Considering that there was still action to be taken, Coconut only drank a few mouthfuls of vodka to slightly ease the pain on her hands and mouth. Then, she closed her eyes and leaned against the back of the chair. There was not a single grain in her stomach now, but she still felt incredibly nauseous. To make matters worse, the metallic smell had already drifted from the nuclear power plant to the town. Fortunately, the players had already injected potassium iodide.

The maintenance workers drove the jeep back to the nuclear power plant with ease. However, the nuclear power plant was very different from when they left. The militia had set up a cordon and did not allow outsiders to enter, but they still behaved amicably. However, when they were asked what had happened, they said that they did not know and were waiting for notification from their superiors.

The firefighters had also finished their work and left, but most of them were sent to the hospital. The maintenance workers drove the jeep around the nuclear power plant and noticed that the security at the no.5 reactor, which was under construction, was relatively lax.

A group of workers stayed there. They had arrived early in the morning and noticed that there was something wrong with the no.4 reactor. They didn't continue with the construction, but no one seemed to have informed them to leave, so they just stood there, discussing something.

Zhang Heng brought Coconut and Besnova out of the car and asked Coconut, "What are they talking about?"

“How bad is the radiation situation? How long can they work here? In addition, they want a higher reward as compensation for working in such a dangerous environment,” Besnova said truthfully.

Chapter 1147: Radiation Levels Are Off the Charts

Zhang Heng had the three women wait by the side of the road. He sneaked into the side room while the workers gathered to discuss what to do next.

This was where the construction workers usually took their lunch breaks. Currently, there were only three people in the room. One was the chef and his assistant, and the other was sleeping soundly on the table. Zhang Heng lowered his body and under the cover of the dining table, quietly slipped into the room to take a few sets of work clothes from the wire bed. He changed into a set first. During this time, he even heard complaints from the chef. Then, he heard footsteps approaching the room.

Zhang Heng quickly looked around and finally rolled under a wire bed by the door.

Through the gap between the bed’s board and the floor, he saw a pair of boots walk in from outside the door. Judging from the style of the boots, it should be the assistant. He came in and mumbled something before walking out again. Just as he left, Zhang Heng rolled out from under the bed.

During the whole process, he had perfectly controlled the strength of his body. With the help of Kries’s Heart, and even though the distance between the two was less than half a meter, the worker didn’t realize that there was someone behind him. Zhang Heng even glanced at the thing in his hand. It was a box of mints.

The chef took it from the worker and opened the box as he continued to complain. He grabbed a handful of mints and threw them into his mouth to soothe his throat.

Five minutes later, Zhang Heng returned to the three women with his work clothes. Master Kui raised his eyebrows. “I now believe that you’re really the number one Simon on the leaderboard.”

On the other side, Besnova had witnessed how Zhang Heng had managed to sneak into the building under the watchful eyes of a group of workers. He then came out with his clothes in his arms. The workers looked as if they had gone blind, completely unaware of his existence. Besnova had no idea how Zhang Heng managed to do it. When she recalled how he had read her mind, she began to believe that Zhang Heng must be the devil himself.

However, Zhang Heng did not seem to feel anything. It was as if he had done something insignificant. He told the three of them, “Change your clothes. We’re going to meet Fu Ming and Bulihanov.”

After going through the Roman dungeon, Zhang Heng’s assassin skill had reached Lv.3. This level of stealth was no longer a problem for him.

In reality, if they had still been wearing their white clothes when they first entered the dungeon, it would have been easier to disguise themselves as workers from the nuclear power plant. However, considering the radiation suffered last night, the players had already thrown those clothes away. Now, they could only settle for the second-best and change into the construction worker’s clothes.

After the three women changed, Zhang Heng and the others passed through reactor No.5 that was still under construction. They climbed over the guardrail by the roadside and entered the nuclear power plant.

“Where is the No.1 Administrative Building?” Master Kui frowned.

“Find someone and ask. Just say that we’re the worker representatives and we’re here to ask if the construction of reactor No.5 is still going on,” Zhang Heng said to Coconut.

The latter nodded and communicated with Besnova through Whispers. However, before the group could find anyone, they saw a figure walking toward them from afar. A tall and strong man, the muscles on his body and the movements of his hands and feet showed he once served in the military.

He opened his mouth from a long distance and said with a serious expression, “You shouldn’t be here. Leave now!”

“Sir, we are the construction workers of reactor number five. We are here to see plant manager Bulihanov to ask if our work is still going on as usual.”

“Since when did reactor number five have female workers?” the person frowned.

“Uhh... actually, we are the management staff of the construction site,” Besnova appeared a little flustered and stuttered.

Fortunately, the person who came did not dwell on this point. He just waved his hand to chase the four away. “I don’t care where you come from, just leave this place as soon as possible. The further the better.”

He waved the equipment in his hand and said with a straight face, “I am S.S. Vorobyov, the director of the Civil Defense Department of the Nuclear Power Plant. I have just measured the radiation value of the nuclear power plant. The radiation here is very strong. In many places, it has exceeded 250 roentgen.”

“250 roentgen?” Besnova was surprised. “Didn’t you say that the measuring limit of the instrument is only 3.6 roentgen?”

“That’s a normal measuring instrument.” Vorobyov looked very angry. “They still have a measuring instrument with a range of 1,000 roentgen, but it’s buried under the ruins. The one in my hand is from the Civil Defense Department, and it has a measuring range of 250 roentgen.”

“That’s great. Did you tell the others about this result?”

“I reported it to Bulihanov, but he said that my instrument had a malfunction, so it’s impossible for it to have such a high radiation value. He also asked me to throw the equipment into the garbage.” Vorobyov shook his head, “He and Fomin have both lost their minds. The situation here is very critical. You should leave immediately.”

“But we haven’t received the order. The workers are still waiting at the construction site,” Besnova pretended to insist.

“Then get them to go home together. The current radiation level is not suitable for outdoor work. I’m planning to go to the DW’s office. I have to warn the others.” Vorobyov displayed the inherent integrity of a soldier.

“But this job is very important to us. I still hope to meet with factory director Bulihanov before I leave,” Besnova pleaded.

“You guys are really...” Vorobyov was a little speechless, but in the end, the director of the Civil Defense Department still gave in. “Alright, I’ll take you to Bulihanov. I know that the radiation at the nuclear power plant is relatively low now, so you will get less exposure if you follow me. But remember, once you meet Bulihanov, call your people immediately, and no matter what he says, leave the nuclear power plant.”

It could be seen that Vorobyov was already starting to distrust plant manager Bulihanov. The conversation between the two parties must have been unpleasant, and this was not surprising. With Vorobyov’s headstrong and stern personality, he was clearly more willing to believe the readings his eyes saw.

Everyone carefully passed through the two buildings in front of them. The explosions spewed fuel and graphite everywhere, not only on the ground, but also on the roof. In addition, they had also caused a few small fires elsewhere. Fortunately, the workers of the nuclear power plant put them out immediately. The players now knew what the black objects on the ground were.

It was the graphite that wrapped the fuel rods. If they were close enough, they could even see the grooves or the holes in the middle of the fuel rods. Without exception, these graphite blocks were quite very radioactive. According to Vorobyov, if you got close enough, the meter would go off the charts.

Chapter 1148: The Death Journey of a Nuclear Physicist

Wolobiyov also noticed that among the strange group of workers, only Besnova kept talking to her. The others had been silent or whispered from a distance.

If it were any other time, Vorobiyov would have been suspicious of the identities of the four of them, but now his mind was not on it. He did not have the time to care about the origins of the four on the team. All he could think about was how to solve this matter quickly. After that, he went to the DW office to warn the others that Pripyat might have already been exposed to radiation, and the people in the town might not even know anything about it.

When Vorobiyov thought of this, he too became angry. Bouluhanov was simply lying through his teeth, turning a blind eye to the numbers on the radiation meter. For the factory director to do this, it was better not to have any at all.

The five of them were preoccupied, so they did not talk much on the way.

The director of the Civil Defense Department brought the four of them to the front of administrative building No..1 and said, “Burhanov is in the underground bunker of the administrative building. Go down the stairs directly, and you will find him soon.”

Vorobiyov's words meant that he intended to break up with the four of them here. It seemed that he did not want to see Burhanov's face again.

At that time, a figure staggered out of the administrative building.

The person's skin was red, and he was accompanied by a violent cough. It was obvious that he had just been exposed to high doses of radiation. However, compared to his physical condition, the worse thing was the state his mind was in. He looked very absent-minded, and when he walked to the front of the steps, his legs went soft, and he sat directly on them. At the same time, he muttered, "It's over, it's all over."

"Anatoly!" Warlow Biyov recognized the person and said in surprise, "Why are you here?"

Hearing this, Anatoly raised his head. His eyes seemed to be a little hesitant. Then, after a moment, he recognized the person in front of him and squeezed out a smile that was uglier than a cry. "Warlow Biyov, are you still here?"

"Yes, I just measured the radiation values in various places again and recorded it down to prepare to go to the DW office to warn the people in town. You look very uncomfortable. Did Something Happen?"

Anatoly sighed, "Sigh, you reported the radiation meter explosion to Breuhanov and warned him that there was a serious nuclear accident and that the reactor was leaking radiation, but Breuhanov didn't believe it, so he found me after that. He told me that he wanted me to be one of the most experienced physicists in the nuclear power plant. Moreover, I'm the Deputy Chief Engineer of the first phase of the construction project. I'm considered a neutral outsider in this accident. He asked me to climb to the roof of area V to see what was going on in the central hall."

"You promised him?" Vorobiyov was shocked. "The radiation near the reactor is too high. I can't get close to it. Just a little closer, and the meter won't stop buzzing."

"I can't refuse. After all, he is the plant manager, and most importantly, I want to know what happened and whether there are any problems with our current response plan," Anatoly said. "I passed through the unit and went to the central hall. I knew that the reactor was doomed. But to further prove this point, I climbed up to the roof of area V according to Breuhanov's request. I saw that the reactor's lid had been blown open by the explosion. It probably flew over the roof and smashed down the concrete wall.

"Only half of the reactor is still covered. The reactor is still burning down there, and the nuclear fission reaction is still happening. Vorobiyov, my bones can feel it," Anatoly smiled bitterly, "It's the scariest thing I've seen. I saw graphite everywhere on the roof. The graphite came from the reactor core. It's not a water tank, but the core of the reactor exploded!"

"Did you tell Breuhanov what you saw?"

"Of course, I told him everything I saw, but he was very angry. He just... refused to believe that the core had been destroyed. He and Fomin were still getting people to fill the reactor with water, but from what I saw, all the low-level water communication lines had been blown off. In order to restore the water supply, Akimov, Toptonov, and the others worked down there for a few hours. Their courage was commendable, but unfortunately, the water flowed into the underground compartment, flooding the

cable room and the high-voltage switchgear. Instead of fixing things, it might have just caused the other three reactors to lose power as well.”

“Brekhanov and Fomin are no longer reliable. We should inform the others immediately,” Vorobiyov said seriously.

“Baldasarov has already shut down reactor No.3. Although Fomin did not allow him to do so, he shut it down anyway when he noticed that the water level in the degassing tank getting lower. Fomin is probably furious about this, but he will thank Baldasarov one day. If Baldasarov had not shut down reactor No.3, its core would’ve melted down by now.”

As Anatoly spoke, he coughed violently again. “It’s so uncomfortable. I feel like my lungs are on fire. Vorobiyov, I don’t think I can survive this.”

“Hang in there, buddy. I’ll take you to the medical center now.” Vorobiyov no longer cared about Zhang Heng and the others. He stepped forward and helped Anatoly up, letting the latter lean on his shoulder. They then walked quickly toward the parking lot.

The players looked at each other. Even though they had more or less realized that Breuhanov and Fomin were suspected of negligence, this was still beyond everyone’s expectations, in particular, the fact that Breuhanov had sent his top nuclear physicist to investigate the reactor with his life. However, once the results were different from what he had imagined, he refused to believe the facts before him.

On the other hand, Vorobiyov and Anatoly’s words shocked Besnova even more. Even though Zhang Heng had told her that the reactor had exploded when they first met, she did not know nuclear physics at that time, so she had no idea how serious the situation was.

As she came into contact with more and more nuclear power plant workers, from Katarov to Anatoly, her understanding of the reactor grew deeper and deeper. However, it was still far from being comparable to those nuclear physicists. Nevertheless, it was also because of this that she understood what she was facing now.

This was a catastrophe of apocalyptic proportions!

And now she was following the players, trying to piece together the cause of this disaster like a jigsaw puzzle.

Chapter 1149: Bryuhanov

After Vorobyov and Anatoly left, Zhang Heng and the other two walked into administration building No.1.

Compared to the usual, the administration building looked a little deserted, especially the part on the ground. There were almost no souls left.

The underground bunker, on the other hand, was still quite busy. Due to the radiation, many people who worked there had moved to this place. Besnova pulled a passing woman who looked like a secretary and asked her where Bouluhanov and Fomin were.

“There are two offices at the end of the corridor. One is for Chief Engineer Fomin, and the other is for factory manager Bryuhanov.” The woman who looked like a secretary adjusted the glasses on her face and sized up the four of them. She asked, puzzled, “Who are you?”

“We’re from the construction company. We’re asking when reactor No.5 can start work.” Besonova had been completely corrupted by the players, not blushing the least even though she was lying through her teeth.

“Then I’ll help you ask.” The woman who looked like a secretary turned around and walked to Bryuhanov’s door. However, before she knocked on the door, she heard a voice coming from inside. Bryuhanov seemed to be talking to someone.

His posture was very low, and his voice sounded like he was trying to curry favor, “Okay, I got it. Don’t worry. The situation is not serious. We are supplying water to the reactor. Currently, the number of deaths caused by the accident is two. I know, I’m definitely responsible...”

After saying this, Bulihanov paused. “And the thing I said earlier, just in case, you see...” However, before he could finish his words, he was interrupted by the other party. After that, he heard Bryuhanov repeatedly say yes.

The atmosphere in the corridor was a little awkward.

The woman who looked like a secretary waited until the call ended. Then, she stood outside the door for about half a minute before she knocked on the door.

“Come in.”

“Factory manager, the workers’ representative from reactor No.5 is here to see you... he wants to ask if the project on your side is still going on?”

“Didn’t I tell their supervisor to wait for the news? We can’t be sure yet.” Bryuhanov sounded very tired. He had rushed to the nuclear power plant right after the explosion, first calling the Secretary of the Central Nuclear Energy Department, Marlin, who was still at home. Then he reported the news to the Ministry of Energy and Electricity. He was also the one who had contacted the Ukrainian side.

Not only was he looking for people, but people from different departments were also looking for him after the explosion. They asked him what exactly happened and Bryuhanov had no choice but to explain to appease them again and again. Thus, he hadn’t caught a wink of sleep until now... he didn’t even have time to eat breakfast. He was in a terrible mood, and he really didn’t have the energy to care about the workers at reactor No.5 anymore.

However, as soon as he finished speaking, he heard a scream from his female subordinate.

“Factory manager Bryuhanov hasn’t let you in yet.”

However, no one paid attention to her. Zhang Heng and the others had already squeezed past her, and Master Kui was at the back. After entering, he even closed the door behind him.

“What are you guys trying to do?” Bryuhanov was stunned.

Behind the desk was a short man with curly hair. He looked quite smooth, and his skin was slightly tanned. There were many wrinkles on his face, probably due to his dizziness from the morning, and it wasn't until Grandpa Kui gave him a sinister smile that he realized something was wrong. He picked up the phone next to him and prepared to call the nuclear power plant security. However, he didn't expect his head to be pressed against the table first.

Zhang Heng stuck the knife he had gotten from the shop in front of Bryuhanov's face, less than a centimeter away from his eyes.

The secretary-like woman wanted to scream when she saw this, but the next moment, her mouth was covered by Master Kui. She attempted to struggle, only to be warned quickly by Kui. "If you value your life, don't move."

"Who exactly are you people?" Bryuhanov looked at the knife that was about to cut open his eyelids and asked in fear.

"Tell him that we just want to ask him a few questions. After that, we'll check with chief engineer Fomin, so he'd better be honest. Or else..."

Zhang Heng reached out to grab the knife on the table again and cut off a part of Bryuhanov's finger.

Bryuhanov's eyes widened in disbelief. He could not believe that he had become a disabled person so quickly. The pain from his broken finger made him want to scream, but at least he had not lost his mind. Seeing Zhang Heng placing the bloody knife against his throat, he swallowed the pain.

Then, Besnova translated Zhang Heng's message to Bryuhanov.

The bridge of Bulihanov's nose was starting to sweat from the pain. He only looked at his severed finger. He couldn't even hear what Besnova was saying.

Coconut took out a pack of gauze from her pocket and tossed it to Bryuhanov. The latter quickly wrapped it around his bleeding severed finger. Then, he raised his head and looked at Zhang Heng's group once more.

He now knew that the other party had come with ill intentions. The ferocity of this group of people was beyond his imagination.

In that short span of time, many guesses flashed through Bryuhanov's mind. Most of them were related to the origins of the four people. He even thought of a certain secret department, but he could not understand why Chernobyl was worth the trip.

"Who were you on the phone with?" Besnova asked.

"Ah, ohh... I was on the phone with Shelbina, the vice-chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers," said Bulihanov. "In fact, he called me to ask about the current situation of the nuclear power plant."

"What did you tell him?"

"I just told him the truth," said Bulihanov. "The water tank exploded, and we have been supplying water to the reactor according to the instructions from above. Chief engineer Fomin is in charge of this work. If you don't believe me, you can ask him."

“You’re lying!” This time, before Coconut could pass the question to Besnova, the latter exploded first. “The reactor is finished! Didn’t Vorobyov tell you the readings of the measuring instrument? and Anatoly, who was sent to his death by you, was sent to the roof according to your orders. Why don’t you want to believe it?!”

“You are the director of the nuclear power plant. Shouldn’t you do something?”

“Your wife and children are also in Pripyat Town, right? Do you want to see them being exposed to radiation with your own eyes?!”

“What can I do?!” Bulihanov looked sad. “I just proposed to Shelbina to evacuate the residents of Pripyat, but he rejected me. He told me not to cause panic.”

Chapter 1150: Life-Saving Straw

“Did you tell him the real situation here? Did you tell him what the explosion of reactor No.4 reactor means?” Besnova asked.

“The explosion of the reactor? That’s impossible. Nothing like this has ever happened before. The reactor is not an atomic bomb. How could it explode?” Boulihanov shook his head.

“Then how do you explain the graphite fragments on the ground?”

“I don’t know. There is still some graphite in storage at the incomplete Reactor No.5. Maybe it came from there,” Boulihanov quibbled.

“Then why did you suggest to Shelbina that he should evacuate the residents of Pripyat?” Besnova continued coldly, “Is it because of a voice in your heart telling you that it wasn’t the water tank that exploded but the reactor itself? You don’t believe your own nonsense, do you?”

“I asked Dyatlov and the shift leader Akimov that night. They told me that it was the water tank that exploded, and the radiation was 3.6 roentgen. I’ve confirmed with them again and again that they are all experienced engineers in the power plant. When it came to such times, I needed to trust my subordinates. After that, I called Moscow. The higher-ups told us to continue pouring water into the reactor, and we have been doing that ever since.”

Bryukhanov looked very aggrieved. “I called Moscow every hour to report the reactor’s situation. Fomin was also trying to find water to pour into the reactor. Then, suddenly, Vorobyov came to me and told me that the radiation was over 250 roentgen. Now, who do you want me to believe? My men? Or the cold instrument in Vorobyov’s hands?”

“If you’ve been working in my line long enough, you’ll know that machines break down from time to time. That’s why we hired experienced engineers.”

“F*ck your experienced engineers!” Besnova didn’t resist her urge to swear. “Didn’t you send Anatoly to his death? He’s also an experienced engineer, so why didn’t you listen to him?”

“I...”

Bulihanov was speechless.

While Besnova was asking questions, Zhang Heng was also observing Bryukhanov coldly. Like Katarov and Akimov, Bryukhanov's heart was obviously suffering. His rationality had already detected what had happened at the nuclear power plant, but he refused to admit it.

In particular, it was too difficult for that man to reverse what he had just said a few hours ago, in front of his boss. He simply lacked the courage to do so.

It wasn't as if there hadn't been some minor accident at the previous nuclear power plant. Because it was not too serious, Bulihanov's suppressed the issue using some little tricks of his own. This had made his resume very beautiful, and he had been working hard recently. He wanted to go further. Thus his heart was more inclined to trust what Katarov and Akimov said.

He kept comforting himself in his heart. It was just that the water tank had exploded. Although he drove around the reactor once and saw the terrible situation there, Katarov and Akimov's explanation was like a life-saving straw to him. Once he grabbed it, he could not let go anymore.

He could only repeat the original lie over and over again until he was completely overwhelmed by it.

When he realized that the radiation was more serious than he had imagined, he finally summoned up his courage and proposed to Moscow that they should evacuate Pripyat. This was also probably the only useful thing he did amid the lengthy time after the explosion.

Shelbina, however, rejected him. With the reactor intact and the radiation under control, the state wasn't willing to evacuate Pripyat. In his view, this was fabricating nuclear panic, not to mention that this stab in the Soviets' push for nuclear energy was likely to trigger public resistance to it. The energy plan that had been previously drawn up would probably have to be put on hold for a while.

This was also the reason why Shelbina had rejected the evacuation proposal from Bryukhanov. However, even after receiving the "whitewashed" report from Bryukhanov, Moscow still immediately set up an accident investigation committee.

"Ask him about the group of experts," Zhang Heng said to Coconut.

"The first group of experts boarded the plane at 9 am. I just received news that they have already arrived at the Kiev Airport and are rushing to Chernobyl. The leader is the chief engineer of the Atomic Energy Alliance, B.Yaprussens. Other than that, there is also the vice-chairman of the foundation, Ignajenko, the vice-president of the Hydroelectric Engineering Research Institute, V.S.Kowitz. The reactor design and the Atomic Energy Research Institute have also sent people. There are also some other people." Bryukhanov was very honest on this matter.

After a pause, he continued, "The second group is of a higher rank. Among them are senior assistant prosecutors, civil defense ministers, chemical warfare force commanders, and several other ministers and academicians. Their plane will take off in half an hour. But I have received news that it is not easy to contact them during the weekend, and the takeoff time may be delayed. "It's said that Shelbina will fly over after he's done with work."

"Then, how are you going to explain all this to them?" Besnova sneered.

"Enough." Zhang Heng Interrupted Besnova. After realizing that the team of experts would arrive at any moment, he didn't want to waste any more time.

Zhang Heng didn't forget that their goal was to investigate the cause of the nuclear power plant explosion. He could understand Besnova's anger at the fact that Bryukhanov had concealed the truth. She was a true-blue Pripyat resident and lived in that beautiful town. Her friends and loved ones all resided there, and now, just because of Bryukhanov's refusal to believe the truth, these people were exposed to deadly radiation.

However, this was not a problem that the players were concerned about. Compared to the disaster Bryukhanov had condemned Pripyat and the nuclear power plant workers to, Zhang Heng was more concerned about his role in the explosion.

"Ask him how much he knows about the safety experiment," Zhang Heng said to Coconut.

The latter nodded, and after a moment, Basonova spoke again.

Bulihanov hesitated for a moment, "The safety test was designed by chief engineer Fomin. I'm actually not too sure about the specific steps, and I just briefly understood what the experiment was about. We wanted to simulate an emergency power cut and use the inertia of the steam turbine to power the pump. We've done this test before, but it didn't succeed. It didn't cause any danger, though, and since Chief Engineer Fomin felt that the conditions were right, he wanted to try again. I swear I didn't know it would turn out like this, or I would have stopped the test before it even started."