

## 48 Hours 1171

### Chapter 1171: Discharge

Seventy-two days had passed since Zhang Heng's admission to the hospital.

The female doctor flipped through the test report in her hands, still unable to believe the numbers on it. Although there were still some variances between the numbers and ordinary people, this was because Zhang Heng's body had been bombarded by nuclear radiation, one that would permanently leave traces on his body. Other than that, there were other changes that required more time to observe.

However, for the time being, even with the most cautious scientific attitude, the female doctor had to admit that Zhang Heng was recovering very well. Most of his vitals had returned to normal, and his bodily functions were improving every day. As of now, he had already reached the stage where he was eligible to be discharged.

The female doctor nodded at Mr. and Mrs. Dima.

"Congratulations, you can now go through the discharge procedures. However, it's best you come here once every six months for a check-up. We still have a lot of things that we haven't studied clearly about radiation sickness. It might just flare-up in the future, so we can't let our guard down just yet."

As the female doctor spoke, she glanced at Mrs. Dima. The latter's face was filled with surprise. If it wasn't for the series of things she had done after Dima was admitted into the sterile ward, the female doctor would have been shocked. Now, she really looked like an excited wife, thankful for her husband's safe discharge from the hospital.

However, for a person like the female doctor who "knew the inside story," she somehow felt uncomfortable when she saw the joy on the receptionist's face.

The receptionist didn't know that she had been blacklisted by the female doctor. At the moment, she was in high spirits. Since Zhang Heng was still alive, it meant that the agreement between the two of them was still valid and her job as a translator and language teacher could continue.

She was not worried that Zhang Heng would ditch her after she lent him the dictionary because even if he understood Russian through self-study, he wouldn't be able to open his mouth. In the end, it was up to her to teach him spoken English.

Therefore, the receptionist continued to play the role of a good wife and thanked the female doctor profusely.

"You don't have to thank me. There's not much I can do. It was your man who defeated the god of death with his strong willpower and amazing physical fitness," the female doctor said lightly. "I hope you can love your man as much as he loves you."

The receptionist was a little confused by the doctor's last sentence, but then she did not intend to explain herself. She turned around and walked out of the ward until Zhang Heng was discharged. She didn't tell Zhang Heng about what she saw in the corridor. Perhaps being a doctor, she had gotten used to white lies, but she didn't know if what she was doing was the right thing.

After the doctor left, the receptionist helped Zhang Heng pack up his things while thinking about the doctor's words.

What did she mean by loving him as much as her man loved her? Wasn't their relationship purely financial? Since when did Zhang Heng show his love for her?

In order to confirm this question, the receptionist turned to look at Zhang Heng, only to find that his expressions remained the same as usual.

Could it be that when he was in the sterile ward, Zhang Heng felt that he would die, and he told the doctor about his feelings for her, no holds barred? But that didn't make sense. When she was admitted to the hospital, she had already told the female doctor that her man was mute to solve the problem of Zhang Heng being unable to speak.

The receptionist couldn't figure it out, no matter how much she thought about it. She stuffed the fashion magazines that she had bought into her suitcase and helped Zhang Heng with the discharge procedures.

When the two of them walked out of the hospital and arrived at the street in front of the door, Zhang Heng subconsciously raised his hand to block the dazzling sunlight. Looking at the busy street, he couldn't help but feel like a lifetime had passed.

In the past 70 days, he had already been on the brink of death one time too many.

"Where are we going next?" the waitress asked.

"Back to Pripyat," Zhang Heng answered without hesitation. "But there's no rush. Coming to Kiev is a rare thing, so let's just treat it as a trip. Let's go around the city first. By the way, do you know where Kiev's biggest shopping mall is? I saw you reading that coat in the magazine."

"Oh, I haven't decided if I should buy it or not," the waitress said with some hesitation. "I really like its color and style, but in terms of price... it's still a little too expensive."

Although the waitress had already earned her first pot of gold from Zhang Heng, enough to buy the coat, and that the latter had been discharged from the hospital successfully, which meant a steady stream of income, she was still considered to have become rich overnight and hadn't changed her mind about spending.

"It's okay. I'll give you a ride," Zhang Heng said. "Consider it a reward for your recent performance at the hospital."

Actually, the main reason was that Zhang Heng's medical treatment and the receptionist's salary had already depleted most of the money he had previously earned. Zhang Heng planned to find a few more wealthy customers at the mall and borrow their wallets for a while. The fee for the latter part of the trip would cost a lot, after all, so he had better be prepared.

"Really?!" The receptionist was elated. No matter the time, the things she bought with her own money would definitely not be as good as others bought with theirs. Since Zhang Heng was willing to pay, of course, she would not worry about the price anymore. Hearing that, she immediately hugged Zhang Heng's arm happily.

The next afternoon, the two returned to Pripjat by train. With the help of the receptionist, Zhang Heng chose a small-ish but well-furnished apartment. It would be his place of residence for the next four years.

After that, he started to learn a foreign language from the receptionist.

Zhang Heng first learned Russian. Since Russian was the official Soviet language, he could communicate with people wherever he went. Thus, he spent about half a year focusing on learning the language.

In the past half-year, he lived and ate with the waitress, and he had managed to practice his Russian to a level where he could communicate with others fluently.

The waitress had helped him correct some of his intonation problems, making his pronunciation sound more standard, almost on par with the Russians. Coupled with his skin color, Zhang Heng was finally able to perfectly blend into this parallel dungeon.

This also allowed him to proceed with the next step of his plan.

“What? You’re really going to work at the Nuclear Power Plant?” The receptionist was shocked when she heard someone’s next step.

“Yes, I want to truly understand Chernobyl. Not only from the future news or interviews with the parties involved, but I also want to fully understand the design and operation of the plant,” Zhang Heng said in a tone the receptionist could not understand.

## **Chapter 1172: Interview**

Zhang Heng was no stranger to Administration Building No. 1 of the nuclear power plant.

This was because nine months ago, he, Coconut, and the others had a “friendly” conversation with the plant manager, Breuhanov, and the chief engineer, Fomin, in the underground bunker of this building.

Now, Zhang Heng was here again. Wearing a suit, leather shoes, and slicked-back hair, he followed the receptionist to the small conference room on the fourth floor.

There were already many people dressed like him sitting in the corridor. Zhang Heng found the corresponding seats according to his number. From the arrangement, it could be seen that there were four people in front of him and three people behind.

Including Zhang Heng, the eight people were all here to apply for jobs at the nuclear power plant. Each wore different expressions; some were nervous, some shook their legs, some closed their eyes to rest, and some were constantly wiping their sweat.

Zhang Heng seemed to be the most relaxed of the eight. Taking advantage of the fact that the person in front of him had entered the meeting room, he stood up and went to the water dispenser at the side to get a glass of water. As he drank, he looked out the window.

The nuclear power plant now looked like it was thriving. All kinds of buildings were lined up neatly. The three reactors built one after another were in good condition, providing a steady stream of electricity to Ukraine. Also, the construction of reactor No. 4, which would cause a disaster in the future, was about

to be completed. This was also the reason the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant had to start absorbing new blood.

Of course, the new recruits would not immediately be in charge of the operation of the new reactor. Instead, they would first go to other reactors to practice and accumulate work experience.

Zhang Heng finished his glass of water, took another glass, and returned to his seat. He handed it to the man beside him who looked rather nervous. He had already begun biting his fingernails.

The man thanked him and hastily took the glass.

"How shall I address you?" Zhang Heng stretched out a hand.

"Yevgeny." The man also stretched out his hand, but halfway through, he realized that he was still holding the glass in his hand, so he stretched out his other hand and shook Zhang Heng's hand in an awkward position, "I used to work at the Beloyarsk nuclear power station.

"I'm Ivan. I'm from the Zapolloge Thermal Power Station No. 1," Zhang Heng introduced.

Hearing Zhang Heng's words, the man seemed to heave a sigh of relief, and the tension on his face lessened significantly.

Zhang Heng knew why Yevgeny would relax. The eight people sitting in the corridor were technically competitors. They were competing for four jobs, and the passing rate was exactly 50-50. It would be considered high in the future, but there was still no such situation where hundreds of people were competing for one job.

The recruitment process for nuclear power plants usually followed the model of recommendation. First, there would be recommendations from various parties. Then, the recruitment department of the nuclear power plant would send the candidate list to the Central Council of Nuclear Power for review. After passing, the nuclear power plant would organize an interview to confirm the final list. After that, it would be reported to the Central Council of Nuclear Power for approval. Then, the entire recruitment process would be completed.

It was apparent that the final recruitment list had been agreed upon by the nuclear power plant and the Central Council of nuclear energy. The Central Council of nuclear energy would also be in charge of the background checks, but this was not a problem for Zhang Heng, who was an illegal resident.

Instead of using his identity, he directly found a candidate who was similar in size to himself and used the latter's identity. The candidates for the nuclear power plant came from all over Soviet territory and were unfamiliar with the place in Pripyat. There was no fingerprint collection system back in that day, so it was only a resume and a photo when submitted. Something like that would be quite easy to be forged.

As long as the photo confirmed that there was no one who had seen him recently among the interviewers at the nuclear power station, Zhang Heng would be able to deal with them with his Level-2 make-up skill. Furthermore, his identity was real, so even if the Central Council of nuclear power called the place where he used to work to verify his identity, it wouldn't be a problem.

Simply speaking, he had actually replaced Ivan for an interview at the nuclear power plant. From his resume, Ivan was actually not that outstanding of a person. Unlike Yevgeny, who had worked at a nuclear power plant before, Ivan had only worked at a thermal power plant. Yevgeny was obviously aware of this, that was why he felt that he had already eliminated a competitor.

However, Zhang Heng had chosen Ivan not only because he had the most similar build to him, or it would have been meaningless to choose someone who would definitely be eliminated. In fact choosing Ivan had a lot to do with his work experience.

Yevgeny did not chat with Zhang Heng for long. Although the latter had brought him some water and the relationship between the two had become more harmonious, Yevgeny did not forget that the two were still competitors. They chatted very cautiously; all about matters outside of work.

After a while, as the candidates at the front entered the meeting room one by one, it was finally Yevgeny's turn. Zhang Heng wished Yevgeny a smooth interview, and Yevgeny also politely expressed his gratitude. Then, he adjusted his tie, he walked in.

After a full 20 minutes, Yevgeny walked out of the meeting room. When he came out, he no longer felt nervous. There was still a faint smile on his face, and he even encouraged Zhang Heng, "It's your turn, Ivan. Do your best and perform well."

"Thank you, I will."

Zhang Heng stood up and walked past Yevgeny, pushing open the door to the meeting room.

There was an oval-shaped wooden table inside, and behind it sat three people.

Zhang Heng recognized two of them. One was Bryuhanov, and the other was Fomin. Both of them looked quite well, completely different people from the shells that remained after the explosion. Fomin's square face was well-defined, and as he sat there, his deep and lively eyes seemed to be able to see through all the candidates. Bryuhanov, on the other hand, had a gentle face and an amiable smile. The upward corner of his eyes showed that everything was under his control.

As for the third person on the right, Zhang Heng searched his memory and found that he did not have any recollection. Whether it was before or after the accident, there was no sign of the third person. He should have left the Chernobyl nuclear power plant before 1986.

At this moment, he was looking at the resume in his hand with a slight frown.

"V.G. Ivan, you are from Crimea. You are 25 years old this year."

"That's right."

"Previously, you worked as a steam turbine engineer at Zapolloge Thermal Power Plant No. 1?"

"Yes." Zhang Heng nodded

"Then why do you want to work at the Chernobyl?"

“Because everyone says that thermal power represents the past and the present, and nuclear power, a clean energy source, represents the future. I want to embrace the future,” Zhang Heng answered smoothly.

### **Chapter 1173: Layman**

The third interviewer did not comment. All he did was flip through Zhang Heng’s resume.

“I admire your courage to try new things, but I noticed that you have no previous experience working in a nuclear power plant. This is a whole new field for you.”

“I can learn,” Zhang Heng replied. “My learning ability is very strong.”

“I know, I don’t doubt that. I can tell from your resume that you’ve been promoted from assistant engineer to full-time engineer within a short period of time after graduation. You’re very suitable for the job at the thermal power plant, so my suggestion is that you continue to stay there. To be honest, the salary we offer is not much higher than what you get at the thermal power plant. There’s no need for you to give up what you’re familiar with and start from scratch.”

Zhang Heng didn’t really care much about the salary, but in order to play the role of the candidate, he did learn a bit of it. The third interviewer wasn’t targeting him; it was simply that the salary at the nuclear power plant was indeed not much higher than that at the thermal power plant. However, if there was a choice, there were still many people who were willing to jump to work at the nuclear power plant.

This was mainly because under the Soviet Union’s vigorous promotion of nuclear power generation, the status of nuclear power plants was higher than thermal power plants, and it would be easier for them to be promoted in the future. Of course, this only applied to the management, but for the people below, working at a nuclear power plant would also be more prestigious and respected than working at a thermal power plant. Furthermore, the construction of nuclear power plants had been in full swing, and there was a huge demand for talents. Their chances of being promoted would also be greater.

However, this matter could not be brought to the surface. That was why Zhang Heng’s answer to embrace the future was given. However, it was obviously not the first time the third interviewer had heard such an answer, and thus, he tried his best to persuade Zhang Heng to give up on the idea.

Zhang Heng fell silent upon hearing that.

As if worried that Zhang Heng did not understand, the third interviewer simply made it clear, “The job of a nuclear power plant is not easy. I know how the public propagandizes it—peaceful atoms, clean energy, but in reality, the atoms in the reactor are not peaceful. We need experienced engineers to deal with all kinds of situations to prevent the worst from happening.”

Zhang Heng remained silent, but on the other side, Fomin spoke first. He coughed twice and then said in his pleasant baritone voice, “Oleg, I think you’re making a big deal out of nothing. It’s been more than 30 years since the first nuclear power plant was built, and there haven’t been any major accidents. I think this is enough to prove the problem. Otherwise, the higher-ups wouldn’t have pushed for the construction of the nuclear power plant.”

"We're just lucky. The nuclear accident that those Americans caused at Three Mile Island will happen to us sooner or later," Oleg lamented anxiously.

"You're too pessimistic. The reactor designed by Academician Dorezari is very safe," Bryuhanov said at this time. "It's precisely because of these nuclear power plants that we can export more oil and gas to our allies in Eastern Europe and the greedy western world."

"Academician Dorezari also warned us not to build nuclear power plants in densely populated areas, but look at Pripyat. It's only three kilometers away from us."

"This is the decision of the higher-ups; they may have their own considerations. Oleg, you know that this is something we can't control. We just need to do our job well." Bryuhanov tapped the table, looking a little helpless. "Gentlemen, can we focus on the recruitment first? Reactor No. 3 is about to be put into operation. We need people."

"Yes, we need nuclear power plant workers with rich experience. Only such people are qualified to work in nuclear power plants," Oleg insisted.

"There is a Russian proverb that says; you don't need a god to burn pottery pots. We only need a steam turbine engineer, and now you have a steam turbine engineer." Fomin pointed at Zhang Heng on the other end of the wooden table.

"What are you talking about? We're recruiting for a nuclear power plant. Isn't it a prerequisite to know about this job? What's wrong with that?"

"Ivan not only knows about this job, but he's also very experienced. He used to work in a thermal power plant, so he knows a lot about high-power generation systems, distribution systems, and transmission lines. And just like he said, he's very young. He has plenty of time to learn and grow," Fomin said. "I think he's the person we're looking for."

"He doesn't know anything about reactors other than thermal reactors, and that's the most important thing about working in a nuclear power plant," Oleg insisted. "We need experts, nuclear energy experts, not amateurs who have to learn everything from scratch."

As soon as he said that, not only did Fomin's face turn cold, but Bryuhanov also became a little unhappy, "Before Fomin came here, he worked at a thermal power station. Before I came here, I also worked at the Slayanskaya coal-fired power plant. According to you, we should be all amateurs, but aren't we doing pretty well now?"

"I didn't mean that, Bryuhanov."

Oleg realized that he was too anxious just now and said something wrong, so he quickly apologized.

Bryuhanov, the plant director, seemed to be very amiable most of the time, like a good man, but he did have some taboos. What he hated the most was the experts who secretly said that he didn't understand nuclear energy.

Then, as if in a fit of anger, he promoted Fomin, who also worked in the thermal power plant, to the head of the electrical department. Not long after, he promoted Fomin to the Deputy Chief Engineer in

charge of the Assembly and Operation Department, and when the chief engineer left, Fomin was promoted to chief engineer of the nuclear power plant.

Although the energy department clearly opposed the appointment and preferred another candidate who had worked at the nuclear power plant, Bryuhanov then used his political connections; the Ukrainian side came forward and said that Fomin was the leader they really needed. He was tough, had extremely high standards for work, and was more suitable for Chernobyl than the other candidate. In the end, Moscow gave in, the Central Council of Nuclear Energy approved the appointment, and Bryuhanov also got his right-hand man.

"I respect your professionalism, Oleg. I can understand your concern about safety." Bryuhanov softened his tone, "But we need to consider all aspects when recruiting people. It's good to understand nuclear energy, but that doesn't mean that other aspects aren't important. Besides, compared to skill proficiency, I think work attitude is more important. If a person's attitude isn't correct, then no matter how good his work ability is, it's useless. Do you think I'm right?"

"That's true, but..."

"There are no buts," Bryuhanov interrupted Oleg with a wave of his hand and turned to Zhang Heng. "Ivan, How's Your Work Attitude?"

"If I can get into the nuclear power plant, I'll definitely study hard and never slack off," Zhang Heng said.

"Very good," Bryuhanov said with satisfaction, "That's the attitude you need. Next, Fomin will ask you a few professional questions to test you. You have to answer them properly, but don't be nervous. Fomin's questions are all related to your previous work."

Chapter 1174: Entry

Next, Fomin conducted a "professional" assessment on Zhang Heng. The latter's answer went smoothly. Since Zhang Heng had decided to assume Ivan's identity, he had naturally done his homework and learned in advance about Ivan's life. In addition, Zhang Heng didn't know much about nuclear power, but he wasn't completely clueless about engineering.

On the contrary, after going through the Apollo training camp dungeon, he became someone who could even repair a space shuttle. A mere steam turbine wouldn't be a problem for him. Furthermore, his engineering knowledge improved after going through the leakers' dungeon, and at the very least, had top-notch engineering knowledge among the applicants.

Thus, Fomin and Bryuhanov were both delighted with the final assessment result. Even Oleg, who was standing at the side, had nothing to say. The way he looked at Zhang Heng had also changed, and he shut his mouth.

Seeing this, Fomin was in a good mood. A rare smile appeared on his square face.. He said to Zhang Heng, "Not bad, let's call it a day. Thank you for coming for the interview. We'll contact you again when the results are out."



Zhang Heng shook hands with each of the three and walked out of the meeting room. He knew that he could settle now.

He had chosen Ivan not only because of his stature and class but also because he was unmarried and had more interpersonal relationships. The most important reason, however, was that Zhang Heng noticed where Ivan worked before.

Zapolloge Thermal Power Station No. 1. The name sounded familiar.

He quickly recalled where he had heard this name before.

Fomin, the current Chief Engineer of Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station, had come from Zapolloge No. 1, and Zhang Heng thought it was no coincidence, even though Ivan said he and Fomin had no connection. However, when Zhang Heng was questioned by Oleg in the meeting room, it was indeed Fomin who spoke up for him first.

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The nuclear power plant still acted very quickly. It was apparent that they sorely needed manpower since reactor No. 3 was about to start operating, and should have decided on the name list on the same day, instantly reporting to the Central Council of Nuclear Energy.

Zhang Heng received his job offer on the third day.

However, when Zhang Heng entered the nuclear power plant, he realized that there was no Yevgeny who had previously worked at the Beloyarsk nuclear power plant among the people who had passed the interview. The latter looked as if he had won the interview and expected to be hired in the end. He was probably a little dumbfounded when he received the result himself.

Unlike Yevgeny, Zhang Heng had already received the names of all the candidates before the interview. He was familiar with the basic information of everyone on the list and knew that only three of the eight candidates had experience working in a nuclear power plant. During the interview, there should have been an interviewer who expressed admiration for Yevgeny.

If everything went according to plan, this person was Oleg, the deputy chief engineer of nuclear energy. This was also the reason why Yevgeny was so ambitious. Unfortunately, the people who decided the final list were Bryuhanov and Fomin.

From this point of view, Zhang Heng should be grateful to the two of them.

Although in the future, it would be ridiculous to think that two engineers from a thermal power plant would become the number one and two frontmen of a nuclear power plant, the reality was that similar things were beginning to happen around the Soviet bloc. It was no longer 30 years ago when the first nuclear power plant was built, and each and every industry practitioner had excellent professional qualities. They had unlimited enthusiasm for the nuclear power industry and were able to solve sudden and dangerous situations in a timely manner.

In fact, this was the result of many factors working together. Firstly, because the Soviets were vigorously promoting nuclear power plants and solving energy problems, the cultivation of new professionals was unable to not keep up with the expansion of the industry. Secondly, the reputation and chance of career

advancement when one entered a nuclear power plant attracted increasing numbers of “outsiders” into the industry. Thirdly, and most importantly, the Soviets hadn’t had any major atomic accidents in the past 30 years, and some minor problems had been deliberately downplayed by the higher-ups, causing confidence in nuclear energy safety to swell to an unprecedented level.

Although the recent accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania alarmed some, the President of the Soviet Science Academy included, who had previously emphasized that nuclear power plants were safe enough, at a conference a year before the Chernobyl accident, he said with a worried expression, “Comrades, we should thank fate because it has been kind enough to us. Because the same thing in Pennsylvania hasn’t happened to us yet. Yes, I am serious.”

It wasn’t difficult to see the huge change in his attitude from the beginning to the end. However, the accident happened in the distant United States, and most people still had a hard time empathizing with it. As a result, the nerves of the whole industry became more and more relaxed, and industry practitioners gradually lost their sense of danger.

Zhang Heng could also feel this more clearly after entering the nuclear power plant. People like Breuhanov and Fomin, for instance, started to hold high positions. They treated the nuclear power plant like a piece of cake, cultivating their own trusted aides while pushing away the true experts.

But to be fair, Fomin treated Zhang Heng quite well. On the first day of his appointment, Fomin came to visit him and chatted with him about the situation at the thermal power plant. At the same time, he warmly expressed that he could come to see him if he needed anything.

Having braved through so many storms, Zhang Heng naturally knew what Fomin’s real purpose was. Fomin was inspecting this batch of new recruits to see who valued being nurtured and recruited under his command. Zhang Heng was also a skilled man, and like Fomin, a member of Zaporro’s No. 1 thermal power plant. Naturally, Fomin would favor him more. In addition, during the interview, Fomin had stood up for him, perhaps, causing him to be labeled in the eyes of others as a part of Fomin’s faction.

Zhang Heng himself didn’t mind. Faction battles were the eternal theme of humanity. As long as more than three people were in a group, society would instinctively start forming factions. There were still four years before Fomin’s imprisonment, so he did not worry about any negative consequences. With Fomin protecting him, it would be easier for him to get things done at the nuclear power plant.

During their previous meeting, Zhang Heng had expressed to Fomin that he lacked basic knowledge in the field of nuclear energy. If there was a chance to further his studies in the future, he hoped that Fomin would consider his wish. Fomin seemed slightly surprised, not expecting Zhang Heng to be bold, but this did not trigger his angst. After all, it was customary for young people to be ambitious. Knowing what Zhang Heng wanted would also make it easier for him to control the other party.

Fomin, however, disagreed immediately. He only said that he would consider it. He did not want to be too nice to Zhang Heng and would only give him whatever he decided. This would only increase Zhang Heng’s appetite. Therefore, his plan was to delay it for a short while. After that, he would wait for Zhang Heng to get anxious, then, he would send him to attend the next training session. This way, not only would he be doing Zhang Heng a favor, but he was sending a clear message that Zhang Heng could not live without him.

## Chapter 1175: Safety Tests and Accident Cause

Fomin calculated well. A training session was going on right now, but it wasn't aimed at a newcomer like Zhang Heng. Rather, it was for the older workers who had been at the power plant for some time, equivalent to a refresher course. Those who were on the list were more likely to be promoted after the training ended.

Fomin did not greet the chief engineer of Zhang Heng's department, but when he received the list, he realized that Ivan's name was also on it.

Shocked, Fomin didn't know if he should laugh or cry when he saw that. He had thought that Zhang Heng wouldn't mention this, but he went straight to the head of the department, and he pulled the wool over Zhang Heng's eyes. Many people already knew that he had spoken up for Zhang Heng during the interview and spoke to Zhang Heng in private afterward.

Fomin initially wanted to show his approachable side and win over the people's hearts, but he didn't expect to be used by Zhang Heng instead. Furthermore, the latter didn't even say anything about it, only hinting that the head of the department had added his name. After all, as the chief engineer of the Nuclear Power Plant Operation Department, no department wanted to offend him.

Even those who didn't like him usually avoided clashing with him over something so trivial. It was just a training spot, and no one even came to him to ask for credit. This was also why Fomin did not know that Zhang Heng was on the list until he received it.

However, the list still needed his approval in the end. Fomin's pen paused on Ivan's name for a moment before it finally moved to the bottom right corner. He wrote the word "agreed" and left his signature.

Even though Fomin was slightly unhappy with Zhang Heng's decision, his intention to recruit him had not changed. Not greeting Zhang Heng was one thing, but taking the initiative to cross out his name was another. Doing that would've completely shunned Zhang Heng to the opposite side. Thus, Fomin finally pinched his nose and accepted the matter.

Reality proved that Zhang Heng, who had been baptized by the Pirates in the Blacksail quest, could easily handle the factional struggles of a mere nuclear power station. Even if there were ten Fomin, they wouldn't be a match for him.

In less than a year and a half, Zhang Heng had already figured out all the relevant physics, reactor design and principles, and even all the equipment and circuits of the entire nuclear power plant. Furthermore, in his second year at Chernobyl, he received a safety test proposal designed by Fomin and even witnessed the failure of the first safety test.

During the day, he worked at a nuclear power plant. At night, when he returned to his residence, he would continue to learn Russian and Ukrainian from the receptionist. In addition, Zhang Heng also took the time to go to the hospital in Kiev for two checkups. Probably because he was young and strong enough, that his body seemed to be recovering quite well. No malignant tumors were also detected, at least for now.

After Zhang Heng practiced his Ukrainian language to a level where he could normally communicate, his language proficiency skill, which had been quiet all this time, was finally upgraded from level 2 to level 3.

At this point, including his mother tongue, Zhang Heng had reached a level where he could communicate in 11 languages daily.

Furthermore, this parallel dungeon had also allowed him to gain another skill in nuclear engineering, which was now at level 2. Of course, Zhang Heng's biggest gain was still understanding the flaws in Fomin's safety experiment and reactor design.

It had to be admitted that compared to pressurized water reactors used by most countries, the RMBK had a natural flaw from the inception of its design—it compromised a part of its safety in exchange for faster construction and lower operating costs. It could be recharged without stopping the reactor and was also able to produce military-grade plutonium.

In the people's eyes at that time, if there was any flaw in the RMBK reactor, it would have to be its slightly more radioactive emissions, and it was not as clean as the VVER-type pressurized water reactor.

However, the more serious problem was the design of the control rod. Previously, Dyatlov had said that control rods were used to regulate the nuclear fission reaction because the boron it was made up of could absorb neutrons and thus reduce the reactor's power. However, the problem was that there was still a tiny graphite section at the bottom of the control rod. The graphite acted as a neutron moderator, which was the opposite of boron. This element was used to slow down fast neutrons to increase the reactor's power.

Of course, the previous designers did not design this so that reactor operators would be caught by surprise by the reversal. The graphite at the bottom also had a role—because graphite could significantly slow down neutrons, it could also appropriately use reduced-purity uranium fuel, thus saving costs.

This wasn't a problem from an economic standpoint, but the low-enriched uranium fuel would react unstably, especially when the reactor was operating at low power. At that time, the graphite at the bottom of the control rod could play a role—it would allow the reactor to be better controlled.

However, this design brought with it a potential risk. When the control rod was removed entirely from the reactor and then reinserted quickly, the graphite would first come into contact with the reactor core instead of boron. At that time, not only would the reaction power not decrease, but it would increase exponentially, even though just for a brief moment.

What surprised Zhang Heng was that according to the information he had gathered, before the accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, other nuclear power plants had already discovered the problem of the power suddenly rising before decreasing when control rods were reinserted into the reactor. Although reports had been made to the relevant authorities, it was probably because no accidents had happened yet that it was not taken seriously.

On the other hand, it had to be acknowledged that the designers of the RMBK reactor had also made a lot of efforts to ensure its safety. The safety manual, for instance, clearly stated that during any given moment of the reactor's operation, at least 28 to 30 control rods had to be inserted.

In addition, the reactor was equipped with an emergency core cooling system. When the void coefficient in the reactor increased, the water tank of the emergency core cooling system would immediately open and inject water into the reactor. However, in order to prevent the cool water from entering the high-

temperature reactor and causing heat shock, Fomin disconnected the device, which could save lives at critical moments, through the multiple forced circulation circuits during the experiment.

After seeing Fomin's first failed experiment, Zhang Heng was almost certain that the people in the central control room did not follow the safety manual as they had previously said.

The situation on the night of the explosion was also much more complicated than the first experiment because the safety test did not go according to plan. Previously, the reactor had been operating at low power for quite some time and had fallen into the iodine pit. In order to climb out of the iodine pit, the operator pulled out too many control rods, eventually causing the reactor power to rise rapidly. The people in the central control room could only hurriedly insert all the control rods back into the reactor's core. They wanted to suppress the fission reaction, but because the safety system was cut off, it could not take effect immediately.

They did not expect that the design flaw of the reactor would eventually lead to the entire nuclear power plant declaring a GG.

Chapter 1176: White Mare

Zhang Heng changed his clothes, got off work from the power plant, and returned to his residence.

When he opened the door, he saw that the receptionist was busy killing some fish, preparing to make a Squirrel Mandarin dish. She had learned this dish from Zhang Heng. Of course, there was no Mandarin fish in Ukraine, so she could only replace it with other fish caught in the Pripyat River.

"How was work today?" the receptionist asked Zhang Heng in Ukrainian while scraping the fish scales.

"Well, it's still the same." Zhang Heng placed the paper bag in his hand on the table. "The pickles and jam you wanted. I got them for you on my way home from work."

"That's great! Just in time," the receptionist chirped happily.

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When Zhang Heng bought the pickled cucumber, he unexpectedly gained another 2 points. Up until now, he had already gained 192 points in the parallel dungeon, and the skills that needed to be upgraded were almost all upgraded. As for the Chernobyl accident, even though Zhang Heng was not in the central control room at the time, with the conversation he had with the person involved, he could basically reconstruct the events of that night. However, the strange thing was that there was still no movement from the main storyline mission.

During this period, none of the system notifications Zhang Heng received had anything to do with finding the key person for the main mission. It was as if the system had completely forgotten about it.

"Are you resting tomorrow?" The receptionist poked her head out from the kitchen. "Can you drive me to my grandmother's house? They live in the countryside, so it's quite a distance from here."

"Okay," Zhang Heng said.

He had almost finished investigating the reactor, so there was nothing else he could do for the time being. Zhang Heng didn't mind being the receptionist chauffeur, and he thought of it as a way to relax in the countryside. At the same time, he also thanked the waitress for her hard work throughout this time.

The following day, the two of them woke up early. After breakfast, Zhang Heng drove the second-hand Lada to meet the grandparents of the pretty receptionist.

In fact, this area had been inhabited long before constructing the nuclear power plant and Pripyat.

More than 10,000 people lived in the central city of Chernobyl, while the remaining 40,000 people lived in various villages. At that time, the population density was very low, and not a single family could be seen for dozens of kilometers. The farmers in the vicinity mainly relied on farming for a living, but some hunters and fishermen were also there.

The gray Lada plodded along a muddy dirt road. The surroundings were filled with short pines. It was already winter, and it had just snowed heavily three days ago. There was still a lot of white snow on the pines, and the temperature had already dropped below zero. The air outside the window, however, was very fresh.

Unlike the town, everything here was still natural and primitive. The forest was filled with mud and moss, and Zhang Heng could see small animals foraging for food from time to time. Along the way, he saw two wild deer.

They didn't need to hibernate. By autumn, they had shed their thin coverings and changed into long coats of thick fur. In addition, they had accumulated enough fat under their skin to help them withstand the cold and harsh winter. Typically, these wild deer would hide in the depths of the forest, but perhaps the heavy snowfall made them bolder, causing them to run to the edge of the forest.

Zhang Heng got out of the car and washed his face with cold water when they passed a small stream. When he looked up, he saw that a mare had appeared across the creek.

Its fur was snow-white, without a trace of impurities. Its slender body and strong muscles were filled with power and elegance. If not for the lack of sharp horns on its head, it could have easily passed off as a unicorn from the legends.

The beautiful beast was standing quietly by the river, looking at Zhang Heng.

When the latter was about to stand up, the white mare raised its hooves and turned to run into the forest.

"Did you see it?"

Zhang Heng walked back to the car and asked the receptionist in the passenger seat. The latter was confused.

"What did you see?"

"That white horse? It was standing by the river just now."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Maybe I woke up too early this morning, so I'm still a little sleepy." The receptionist yawned. "I think I took a nap just now, but I didn't see anything. Is it a white horse? It's probably from a nearby village."

"It doesn't look like one. It should be a wild horse," Zhang Heng said.

"A wild horse? That's impossible. I grew up here, and since I was a kid, I've never seen any wild horses around here." The receptionist shook her head. "Perhaps you were mistaken?"

"It's possible."

Zhang Heng didn't bother to differentiate. He sat back in the driver's seat, started the car, and drove past the stream in front of him. When he washed his face, Zhang Heng took a look around. The water level here was very shallow, so he didn't have to worry about it flooding the intakes.

After crossing the river, Zhang Heng even took a look at the spot where the white mare had stood earlier. In the end, he realized that there were no hoofprints there. It was as if the previous scene had never happened before. The white mare had appeared and disappeared without a trace like a ghost.

Around 10:30 am, Zhang Heng and the receptionist arrived at their destination.

The latter's grandfather, grandmother, sister, and brother-in-law warmly welcomed them. At noon, they were served red cabbage soup and pork sausages. After lunch, the receptionist's brother-in-law proposed to go hunting in the forest.

"We can hunt rabbits and wild deer. That way, we can have barbecued meat for dinner," the receptionist's brother-in-law said. "By the way, Ivan, do you know how to use a gun?"

"What were you thinking? Svetlana said that Ivan works in a nuclear power plant and is cultured, but it doesn't matter. You can teach him when the time comes. Maybe he will like hunting too," Svetlana's sister said enthusiastically.

"We have to find a shotgun for Ivan."

"I remember my grandfather has a double-barrel shotgun," the receptionist said.

"That was the gun my father gave me. I used this in World War II fighting Germans. But about six years ago, I wasn't in such good health, and when I was repairing the roof, I stepped on a piece of broken wood and fell down, breaking my leg. After that, I put the gun away," the old man said. "But I take it out for maintenance every month. You can bring it with you if you want to go hunting. It probably misses the days when it was outside."

"Great, let's hurry up and leave now," Svetlana urged. When they returned to the place where she had lived in the countryside, the receptionist was also very excited. She had long abandoned the reserved atmosphere in the city and wanted to run out for some wild hooliganism right away.

## **Chapter 1177: Hunting**

"Over here! Come quickly; I've found a rabbit hole!" Svetlana shouted excitedly. "My sister and I will smoke it out. You guys take aim and shoot."

However, after the waitress lit the cigarette, the rabbit did not come out. Then, just as she was feeling disappointed, she heard Zhang Heng say, "3 o'clock, under that tree."

"I see it!" Svetlana's brother-in-law was also a frequent hunter in the forest, so he immediately saw the target.

When a rabbit dug a hole, it typically wouldn't only leave one exit. This was also the origin of the saying, "A cunning rabbit has three burrows." The fire that the receptionist and her sister lit finally worked, and it smoked the rabbit out of another hole.

Her brother-in-law immediately raised the shotgun in his hand. His marksmanship was not bad, and one could tell from how he held the gun that he had practiced quite a few times. Considering the current tension between the Soviet Union and the Western world, no one knew when the war would start again, so there was no harm in a bit of marksmanship practice.

This was also why her sister told Zhang Heng that her man could teach him how to hunt.

However, this time, his opponent was also very alert. After coming out of the hole, he only stood there for a moment. As if he had sensed something dangerous, he immediately dashed out again.

Almost at the same time, the sound of a gun was heard.

The bullet grazed its fur and hit the short pine beside it.

"Damn it!" Svetlana's brother-in-law cursed. The first bullet missed, and he hurriedly reloaded the gun. However, by the time he raised the gun again, the wild rabbit had already run quite a distance away. Probably shocked by the loud gunshot, it hadn't stopped running for its life.

Facing the moving prey, Svetlana's brother-in-law had no choice, especially since the hare's fur and the color of the snow on the ground were very close, making it almost impossible for him to aim.

Just as he was about to give up, he heard a gunshot.

"It's a hit!" Svetlana cheered.

When she saw the rabbit with her own eyes, her body shook, and she fell to the ground. "Vesta, how did you become so good at shooting after a few months?!"

"I only fired once." Vesta was also confused. He turned to look at Zhang Heng, who had already put away the antique double-barreled shotgun.

"Ivan was the one who fired the shot just now." Svetlana's sister was standing between Vitas and Zhang Heng, so she clearly heard where the second shot came from. She asked curiously, "Ivan, you must've practiced shooting before, and you're so accurate."

"Yes, I met a hunter from the mountains. She taught me how to shoot," Zhang Heng said.

Vitas found it hard to believe. "What kind of hunter could teach you to shoot like that? Or is it because you have a talent in shooting?"

"No, she taught me well. She's much better than me," Zhang Heng answered truthfully.



From the expression on Vitas' face, it was apparent he didn't believe a single word Zhang Heng said. According to Zhang Heng, the hunter who taught him how to shoot was probably unbeatable. However, since Zhang Heng was a guest, after all, he did not question him directly.

Svetlana ran to pick up the rabbit that had been shot, and the four of them continued to walk into the mountains.

On the way, Zhang Heng was also chatting with Vesta, asking him about the white mare.

"A pure-white horse? I've never seen one before," Vesta shook his head. "There aren't many people who raise horses in the village. The only two families that do raise working horses. The kind of horse you're talking about should be costly, not something the people here would raise."

"Okay."

Of course, Zhang Heng had guessed what Vesta would say, but to be on the safe side, he still asked again. Zhang Heng himself could not imagine the origin of the white horse, so he could only try his luck with Vesta. The other thing was to see if they could run into it again during the hunt.

Unfortunately, although the four of them had gained a lot after that, they had caught two rabbits and a deer. The white mare Zhang Heng had met by the stream would never appear again.

After catching the deer, the four of them looked at the sky and decided not to go any further. Vitas and Zhang Heng carried the prey into the trunk of the car.

"I know a way to get home as soon as possible, but..."

"But what?"

"When you pass a place in the middle, you'd better slow down," Vesta said.

"Hmm?"

"Is it Aunt Sauk's residence?" Hearing this, Svetlana interjected. "Her temper has always been bad. It is said that the man died very early. After that, she lived alone and did not interact much with the people in the village. The only thing she kept a close watch on was her vegetable patch. I remember when I was young, some children went to play in her field. She directly rushed out with a gun, scaring the children and their parents! My mother even used her to scare me later. How is she now? Is she any better?"

"No, it's even more exaggerated. A week ago, a car passed by her door, and she directly shot through her window. Fortunately, the people inside were fine. After that, she said that she heard wrong and thought that the villagers were driving a tractor to steal her vegetables."

"That scary? We'd better not pass by her door, then," Svetlana said worriedly.

"It's fine. We just need to stay away from her. Although that old woman has a heart of stone and a weird personality, it's a good thing that her marksmanship isn't as good as Ivan's. If we go that way, we can go home before nightfall."

"It's decided then," Zhang Heng finally decided.

About 20 minutes later, Zhang Heng drove the car to the edge of a field. Vitas pointed in a direction. "Look, that's where Aunt Sauk lives."

Zhang Heng looked in the direction he was pointing and saw a dilapidated small house. The side of the house was half-collapsed, and it looked like a cave. It was hard to imagine that anyone would want to live in it.

"Aunt Sauk's man died early, and they didn't have a child. The villagers saw her and wanted to help her repair the house for free, but after the gun incident, it was over. She's been living here alone ever since. "Speaking of which, she's in her eighties. Everyone thinks that she won't survive the winter, but they'll still see her next year. At least she's in good health."

"Is that so?" Zhang Heng looked at the small house again. Although the place looked dark and run down, it was of quite the grand design. Whether the floor area or the height of the building, it was bigger than the average house in the village. It was also why Aunt Sauk could still live in the house, although half of it had collapsed.

### **Chapter 1178: The Return Journey**

Zhang Heng followed Vesta's instructions and slowed the car down. The gray Lada slowly rolled past Aunt Sauk's door. Fortunately, the thing that everyone was worried about didn't happen. The house was very quiet, and there was almost no movement.

Although it wasn't night yet, the sky had already started to darken. Zhang Heng looked in the direction of the window. It was pitch-black there, and the curtains were tightly drawn, covering the inside. No one knew what the weird old woman called Sauk was doing inside.

Zhang Heng took a look, and then he heard the voice of Svetlana behind him. "Let's go. We'll go back early to eat barbecue."

Zhang Heng nodded and looked away. Then he stepped on the accelerator, and the car started to speed up, leaving the hut on the hillside behind.

.....

Zhang Heng and Svetlana, the receptionist, spent two days in the countryside. Other than hunting, they also went fishing by the river.

Initially, she wanted to show off in front of Zhang Heng. Hunting was a male-dominated sport, after all, and she had been fishing with her grandfather since she was very young, so she had pretty respectable skills.

However, never did she expect that she couldn't beat a certain someone when fishing.

Zhang Heng seemed to have picked a random place and dropped the bait. Soon, a fish would bite the hook. After a whole morning, she looked at the fish in Zhang Heng's bucket and then looked at the fish in her own bucket; the Kiev meat pie prepared by her grandmother instantly lost its fragrance.

"This is too unfair." Svetlana threw away the fishing rod and protested, "It's one thing to learn languages so quickly, but how are you so good at hunting and fishing?"

"I don't have any tricks. I just practice a lot." Zhang Heng lifted the fishing rod, took the freshly caught fish from the hook, and put it into his wooden bucket. Previously on the island, if he weren't good enough at catching fish, he would have starved to death.

He had to admit that life in the countryside was quite comfortable.

Other than the white mare he had met by the stream and the old woman named Sauk, who lived alone in the west of the village, Zhang Heng didn't encounter anything strange.

Everything here was beautiful. The people were simple, and the air was fresh. It was no wonder that many residents of Pripyat were willing to go to the nearby villages to relax during weekends and holidays.

Unfortunately, in less than two years, nuclear radiation would contaminate the place and become desolate. Even the wild animals would be cleaned up by the militia as a mobile source of radiation until decades later, where only animals would return to settle down. Trees and vegetation would grow again. Some residents, having greatly cherished their homeland, even ignored warnings and secretly returned to settle down here.

However, the radiation would also plague this land for a long time, like a curse.

With the bread and sausages made by Svetlana's grandmother, she and Zhang Heng set off on their return journey.

There were still about 400 days left in the parallel dungeon, and Zhang Heng had basically learned everything he could from the nuclear power plant. Due to his excellent skills, he even managed to become the director of the Steam Turbine Department.

After that, Bryuhanov also spoke to him, hinting that once he had accumulated another three to five years of experience, he would be promoted to the vice chief engineer position in the operations department. At that time, Zhang Heng was only in his early thirties, and such a promotion rate could be considered heaven-defying. He would also be the youngest vice chief engineer in the history of the nuclear power plant.

However, Zhang Heng himself was not too interested in the appointment. He entered the parallel dungeon to look for a solution to the main mission, not to play the role of Du Lala's promotion. The reason he wanted to become the director of the steam turbine department was also to become part of the higher-ups of the nuclear power plant. Only then would accessing core documents be more convenient.

Now that his work at the nuclear power plant was basically completed, he naturally didn't care about whether he was promoted or not. Furthermore, according to Bryuhanov, the parallel dungeon would have already ended by that time, and he wouldn't be here anymore.

Thus, in the following days, Zhang Heng also announced that he had become a salted fish. The work within his scope was still very well done, but he didn't really care other than that.

The waitress was pleasantly surprised to find that Zhang Heng seemed to have a lot more time since returning from the countryside. The two of them would wander around the town whenever they had

nothing to do, from shopping malls to restaurants, and Zhang Heng even led her on a tour of the newly built amusement park.

Furthermore, when they went shopping, the waitress realized that she was no match for Zhang Heng. The latter would often walk around for a whole day, not even sparing some corner of the town. In addition, Zhang Heng seemed to be particularly concerned about the construction of the city. Whenever he heard that a construction project had started, he would run over to take a look.

She found it hard to understand the innate passion that men had for excavators. However, overall, she was quite satisfied with her current life. Even though Zhang Heng had completed his language studies, he was still paying her salary on time, which made her feel a little embarrassed. She took the initiative to do all the grocery shopping and housework.

However, she would occasionally see Zhang Heng standing by the window in the middle of the night, looking at the city under his feet. It was hard to tell what he was thinking.

Once he stopped calculating the time on purpose, time would fly by.

In the blink of an eye, Zhang Heng had stayed in the parallel dungeon for the 1440th day. That morning, she and her friends went to the stadium to watch the game, leaving Zhang Heng alone at home. He looked at the clock on the wall.

He looked at the starfish in his hand again. There was only one second left until 24 o'clock. Zhang Heng adjusted his breathing and lay down on the sofa.

When he opened his eyes again, he was back in the hammock, and a sense of weakness washed over him.

—it was the long-awaited nuclear fatigue.

Zhang Heng knew that his physical condition had been reset back to before he entered the parallel dungeon. The good news was that he already knew his current physical condition, including the schedule for the subsequent deterioration. Still, the bad news was that he had to experience the pain of his body being destroyed by the nuclear radiation again.

Zhang Heng did not want to experience what he had experienced in the hospital room again. Even though he could endure and handle the pain better than the average person, he was unsure if the treatment would be as smooth this time. No, in fact, Zhang Heng was almost certain that this time would not be as smooth as the last. Therefore, he needed to clear the dungeon quickly before his body deteriorated to the point he could not move.

However, Zhang Heng knew that it would not be an easy task. Fortunately, after the four-year parallel dungeon, he was ready.

## **Chapter 1179: The Final Mission**

At that moment, the room became exceptionally quiet.

Everyone knew all too well that tonight's mission was a gamble. Scherbina was their last hope of completing the main mission.

If there were no results even after they investigated him, they could still choose to leave Pripyat and wait for the official investigation.

However, considering everyone's current physical condition, only Zhang Heng, who was in the best shape, could still wait until then. Thus, for the other three players, tonight's actions would be equivalent to the final verdict.

Probably because no one had spoken for too long, Mouse could not stand the silence, and he took the initiative to start the conversation. "I wonder how Coconut is doing now."

It would be all fine if he didn't speak, but when he opened his mouth, the atmosphere became even more solemn.

After a moment, the youth in the uniform waved his arm that was almost unable to be raised. "Good question. I'll help you take a look after I go in too."

"..."

"Sorry, I'm just a little nervous," Mouse apologized.

"Who isn't? I feel like I'm now back to the day of the college entrance exam."

"This dungeon is too strange," Mouse said. "I've never encountered a dungeon with such a vague main storyline quest. It's like..."

"It's like the dungeon's designer deliberately doesn't want the players to find the answer," Master Kui said.

"Is that really okay? I feel like the difficulty of this dungeon is far higher than that of a normal dungeon," the youth in the uniform frowned.

"There's no need to feel anything. I just participated in the proxy war dungeon." Master Kui's eyes flashed. "I can very responsibly say that the difficulty of this dungeon has far surpassed the proxy war dungeon."

"Is there a bug in the game?" Mouse asked. "But it seems that up until now, no player has encountered any bugs."

"Whether it's a bug or not, we have no choice now. We only have the path of completing the mission," Master Kui said. After saying that, she looked at the watch on the wall. The time was now 11:37 pm.

When they arrived at Pripyat Hotel, it should be almost midnight. Scherbina should have returned to his room, which meant that they could start to move.

"Bring your things. If everything goes well, we probably won't have to come back," Master Kui said.

"Even if it doesn't go well, we probably won't have to come back too." The uniformed boy still maintained the attitude of making the best out of a bad situation.

"I'll put the rest of the food and water into the traveling bag by the wall," Mouse reminded.

"I'll take it," Zhang Heng said lightly. He was the only one in good health among the four of them. The young man's arms, Mouse's legs, and even Master Kui had vomited a few times not too long ago; therefore, the task of moving things fell to Zhang Heng.

"You guys go downstairs first. I'll be right behind you," Zhang Heng said.

Five minutes later, the four of them gathered in front of the Volga. Zhang Heng threw the bag and his Pestilence Bone Bow into the trunk. Then, he sat in the driver's seat and started the car, the seal hanging on the rearview mirror swaying along with it.

Then, Zhang Heng drove the car onto the road.

During the day, the entire Pripyat looked empty and desolate, but at night, the loneliness became even more apparent. All the buildings were pitch black, and there was almost no light on the streets except for the headlights. In addition, it was a moonless night, so everyone's line of sight was limited to the headlights.

This feeling was very similar to a horror movie where they were sweeping around with a flashlight, not knowing what would appear in front of them in the next moment.

They did not know if it was to fulfill the players' ominous premonition, but then they saw something really appear in front of the headlights.

It was a white mare with not a single hair on its body. It was as beautiful as a statue, standing quietly in the middle of the road with its neck raised.

No one knew when it appeared there. When they found it, the car was less than 10 meters away from the white mare. It was already too late to step on the brakes. The Volga was about to hit the white mare, and what awaited them was the destruction of the car.

Mouse, in the passenger seat, had his eyes go from shock to confusion to fear. He reached out to prepare for the impact, but the expression on Zhang Heng's face did not change.

He did not slow down immediately. As if he did not see the white mare in front of him, he turned the steering, and at the same time, waiting for an opportunity to pull the handbrake. He held the rear wheel tightly to reduce the lateral grip of the car.

The Volga's body drew an arc, almost brushing past the white mare's body. In the end, it came to a safe stop on the road ahead.

When Zhang Heng got out of the car and turned on the flashlight, he saw that the white mare had disappeared just like last time.

"Is... is that thing a horse?" Mouse asked, still in shock.

"That's right, but I've never seen a horse like that before. It's looking at us like it's a human," Master Kui said.

"Think that horse is the god behind this dungeon?" The boy asked. "Is it a horse god? But why would it appear in the Chernobyl dungeon to protest against human destruction of the environment? It's quite environmentally friendly."

While everyone was discussing the scene before them, Zhang Heng had already returned to the car. He did not say anything. He just switched off the flashlight and started the car again.

After he drove the Volga back on the road, the other three people's expressions became a little strange.

"Uh... Don't you want to say something?"

"Say what?" Zhang Heng asked.

"That horse, that's a supernatural phenomenon, isn't it?"

"Yes, it should be. A normal horse wouldn't appear and leave so suddenly, and it didn't react much when we were about to hit it. This isn't in line with biological instincts."

Mouse really wanted to say, "You don't fit with biological instincts either." Then, when they were about to hit, he glanced at Zhang Heng and realized that the latter's expression was almost as calm as the horse's. However, he held himself back in the end and said, "Don't you think that the horse's appearance might mean something?"

Zhang Heng shook his head. "I know what you're thinking, but since it can appear in front of us when we're completely unaware, then we won't be able to find it when it doesn't want to appear in front of us."

"Hmm, I just think that it might be related to the main storyline mission that we haven't made any progress on yet."

"That's not ruled out," Zhang Heng said with a nod.

"So..."

"I can promise you that even if we turn back now and do a thorough search, you won't be able to find any trace of the white horse."

## **Chapter 1180: Old Friend**

00:04 pm.

Zhang Heng parked the Volga outside the entrance of the Pripyat Hotel. Other than the white mare that had appeared again, the group did not encounter any other strange incidents along the way and successfully arrived at their destination.

There were no security measures outside the hotel. Although many important people were inside, after Pripyat DW announced the evacuation, most of the chefs and service staff had boarded their cars and left, not to mention the guards and security guards.

In fact, even if there were still people there, they wouldn't be squatting on the streets to soak up the radiation. In addition, the entire city had been evacuated, and the only ones that remained were in charge of disaster relief. Thus, in the eyes of Scherbina and the others, their living quarters weren't in any danger.

However, tonight, Pripyat Hotel will be welcoming a group of uninvited guests.

Zhang Heng got out of the car, taking out the Pestilence Bone Bow from the trunk and slinging it over his back, followed by Master Kui and the young man in black. After that, Besnova held onto Mouse.

The five of them remained silent. They walked past the red carpet outside the door and entered the hotel lobby.

It was pitch black now, and there was no one around. Zhang Heng deliberately shone his flashlight at the front desk. The doctors and maintenance workers had already taken Svetlana away before they left. Even if she didn't leave, she wouldn't have remembered what had happened in the parallel dungeon.

Zhang Heng only took one look before turning away. He was about to continue forward when he suddenly stopped.

"What's Wrong?" Master Kui asked.

"There's something missing here."

"Something? What is it?" Mouse looked around, but he couldn't figure out what Zhang Heng was talking about, so he asked, "Could those people have taken it away when they left?"

"Impossible, that thing can't be taken with them."

Zhang Heng walked to the front desk as he spoke. He held the flashlight in front of his eyes and waved it inside. Soon, he found the target.

Then, he reached out and took out a phone receiver from behind the potted plant.

Mouse was still a little confused, but Master Kui and the young man changed their expressions when they saw this.

The earpiece was not attached to the base. In other words, if someone used a room's phone to call the front desk switchboard, then turned the switchboard's earpiece toward the outside, they could hear the commotion coming from the lobby.

"Looks like someone knew we're coming," Zhang Heng said calmly as he reattached the earpiece.

"Someone from the committee?" the uniformed teenager asked. "Is it because we've held Kovitz hostage before, so he was alerted?"

"Kovitz is just a technician. Even if he was alerted, he wouldn't be able to do that," Zhang Heng said.

"For someone to be able to use the receiver to listen in, he has to possess investigative and anti-investigative abilities."

"Then who is targeting us?" Master Kui frowned. "Could it be that the people from that place are really here?"

Even though Master Kui didn't give a name, Zhang Heng and the others knew what she was talking about. The Soviet Intelligence Agency, better known as the KGB, was as famous as the CIA, MI6, and Mossad. Previously, Zhang Heng had used KGB's tiger flag to scare Bryuhanov and Dyatlov. Could the real KGB agents have really come to Chernobyl this time?

"If it's just to deal with us, isn't it making a big deal out of nothing?" Mouse asked hesitantly.



Even though the players weren't exactly law-abiding ever since they entered the dungeon—stealing, threatening, kidnapping., they had done it all—but so far, they had not caused too much commotion in the town. At most, it was a two-star bounty by GTA standards, so there was no reason for the KGB to take action.

“Since we can't figure it out, we might as well go up and take a look.” Zhang Heng was still as calm as ever.

However, considering that their actions might have already been discovered by the higher-ups, Zhang Heng changed plans slightly. He split up with the other four and climbed up the third floor from the outer wall. After that, they would meet up at the entrance of the fire escape—if there was an ambush there, Zhang Heng would be able to kill them in advance.

After agreeing on the next step of their plan, Master Kui and the others waited for about two minutes before walking up the stairs. They didn't walk very fast, mainly because Mouse's thighs were swollen like carrots, and although he had Besnova's support and found a walking stick, he still walked with great difficulty.

If it wasn't for the fact that he still needed to be the interpreter, he would have been waiting in the car. And when he thought of the possibility that the legendary KGB was waiting for him above his head, Mouse became even more anxious. If the battle wasn't going well, he didn't know whether he would escape.

The four of them carefully explored the second floor with their flashlights. Fortunately, they didn't encounter any danger. Just as they wanted to continue climbing up, an accident happened.

Master Kui and the young man in the uniform had only taken two steps when they heard Mouse and Besnova behind them here breathing heavily.

The two of them turned around and saw a man tightly wrapped windbreaker and a hat. He held a TT-33 pistol in one hand and pointed it at Mouse's temple while his other covered Besnova's mouth. This stopped the latter from screaming.

The attacker should have been hiding behind the stairs on the second floor, and it wasn't until the four had passed him that he quietly jumped out and held two hostages.

When Master Kui saw this, she was about to ask the other party about his intentions when he unexpectedly spoke up. He said in a low and hoarse voice, “Don't speak loudly. It's me!”

Master Kui felt that the voice was a little familiar. Then, Mouse reacted first, exclaiming in joy and surprise.

“Doctor?!”

“That's right.”

“Didn't you leave Pripyat? Why are you back? You're here. Where's the maintenance man? Is He back too?” the young man asked.

“He's in the hospital and didn't come back. In fact, if you see him, you'll know why he didn't come back,” the Doctor said.

The Doctor put away the pistol in his hand and took off his hat as he spoke. When they saw the face under the hat, they couldn't help but gasp.

It couldn't even be called a face anymore because it had swelled to 1.5 times its normal size. Moreover, the skin had begun to fester, hanging on it one by one, as if it was severely burned.

It was only then that the others noticed that the Doctor's two hands were also wrapped in bandages. Obviously, his face wasn't the only part festering.

"Didn't you and the maintenance worker leave Pripjat? How did you end up like this?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to ask Simon about this." Anger and pain flashed in the doctor's eyes.