

Scholar's Advanced Technological System

Chapter 701: Overlooking Earth

“This is Skyglow...”

“We have a... problem.”

Nie Yun hesitated for a bit before deciding to report the situation to the ground command center.

“Professor Lu is here.”

The ground command center went silent for a bit.

Hou Guang’s voice came through after a while.

“Okay, we understand.”

Understand?

That’s it?

Nie Yun hesitated on whether he should ask what to do, but Hou Guang spoke first.

“Continue flight, flight plan remains unchanged... Make sure Professor Lu is safe.”

Changing the flight plan would increase the mission risk.

Nie Yun was well aware of this, so he nodded.

“Roger that.”

Nie Yun took a deep breath and looked at Lu Zhou, who was putting away his coffee cup.

“We’re approaching a critical altitude value, flight mode is about to change.”

Due to the pressure and temperature curve, when the altitude reached more than 20 kilometers, the outside atmospheric density would drop to a relatively low value. At this altitude, it was no longer possible to rely on the wings to provide upward power. Therefore, it was necessary to rely on the thrust of the engine to counteract the gravitational force. The space shuttle would begin to fly upward at a greater tilt angle.

At this altitude, the crew could no longer move around freely in the spacecraft.

“Okay.”

There was no need for Nie Yun to remind him. Lu Zhou already walked next to the passenger seat and opened a metal door. He dragged out a bulky spacesuit.

As Nie Yun looked at Lu Zhou struggling with the spacesuit, he asked, “Do you know... how to wear a spacesuit?”

Lu Zhou skillfully put on the spacesuit, which had various bio-security systems and cabin environmental information panels. He looked at Nie Yun and raised an eyebrow.

“Of course, I’ve practiced this at home many times.”

Nie Yun: “...”

Nie Yan: “...”

*For f*ck’s sake...*

He had this planned from the beginning!

The acceleration of this space shuttle wasn’t particularly high, so the spacesuit was only needed for protection during the landing phase. However, because this was the first flight test, there were many uncertainties, and they had to stay prepared.

In order to stay as safe as possible, they had to follow procedures. This bulky spacesuit could only be taken off after they were in the orbit.

Lu Zhou stood beside the passenger seat and looked at himself in the mirror.

Compared to the outer-spacesuit with its own power system and portable life support system, the in-cabin spacesuit was relatively lightweight but still bulky. The cost was much cheaper than outer-spacesuits, only around 10 million yuan.

Speaking of which, this was probably the most expensive piece of clothing he had ever worn before.

Lu Zhou had an idea in his mind.

Should I take a photo?

In the end, he decided not to take the photo.

As expected, it was difficult to use his phone while wearing this thing.

After reaching an altitude of around 20 kilometers, the engine output power of Skyglow gradually increased. The tip of the spacecraft began to rise, beaming toward outer space along a trajectory that was tangent to Earth...

...

Going to outer space was a long journey.

Strictly speaking, altitudes from 100 kilometers¹ to 2,000 kilometers were counted as low-Earth orbital space. The height of this test flight was based on the International Space Station's orbital height of 419 kilometers. The total flight time was about two hours, and they were expected to return to Earth after staying in low-Earth orbit for 24 hours.

This altitude was pretty good for manned spaceflights like this. Generally speaking, most manned flight activities in low-Earth orbit were completed at an altitude below 400 kilometers. Lu Zhou didn't want Skyglow to fly too high for its first flight.

The five engines at the back of the spacecraft were all turned on, and like a meteor, it left behind a blue light arc. The altitude continued to increase. The three people sitting in the cabin could definitely feel the increase in g-force. However, the g-force was weak enough that they got used to it after a while.

Lu Zhou looked at the planet from the window, and his pupils dilated. As the azure sea and thick clouds blended together, thousands of manmade lights sparkled in the distance.

It took him a while to digest the shock in his heart, and he said emotionally, “This is the best place to witness the fact that Earth is round.”

Nie Yun: “Can’t you see it from a globe?”

Lu Zhou smiled and said, “That’s a conclusion made by others, it’s different seeing it with my own eyes.”

Nie Yan also looked down at the planet, and she felt completely different from the two men. Compared to their rational thinking, she was appreciating Earth’s beauty.

After a long time of staring at the planet through the window, she said, “It’s beautiful.”

Nie Yun nodded.

“Yeah... Beautiful.”

After breaking the 100 km boundary, the spacecraft entered the thermosphere from the mesosphere. About 60 kilometers forward, they would have reached the lowest altitude for low-Earth orbit—160 kilometers.

At that point, even though they hadn’t left the exosphere, the air resistance was at a negligible level.

The blue arc of light behind Skyglow began to weaken. It went from a bright beam to a swaying candle. Lu Zhou heard “successful entry into orbit” in his headset. The Skyglow’s controllable fusion engines began to shut down and switched instead to a lithium-sulfur battery-powered system.

Even though Lu Zhou couldn’t hear anything, he could almost feel the cheering sounds from the ground command center, as well as the national anthem, and the pride of all the people on the ground.

“We’re in orbit... Jesus, this suit is easy to put on, but it’s a pain in the a*s to take off.”

Especially in a zero g-force environment...

Lu Zhou finally was able to get out of his passenger seat and take off his spacesuit. In a clumsy-looking manner, he floated off his seat and toward the space shuttle's window.

Lu Zhou looked at the blue Earth and held his breath. He took out his phone and took a picture.

The moment he pressed the camera shutter, a light blue panel appeared in his sight.

[Secondary mission: Overlooking Earth

[Description: Exploring science is more than excellent research, but also dedication and courage!

[Requirements: At an altitude of 100-2000 km, manually operate a camera and take a photo of Earth. (Has to be completed by the user himself)

[Rewards: 50,000 free experience points, one lucky draw ticket. (rewards are given after the first phase of the main mission is completed)]

This mission is...

It makes it seem like I'm dedicating my life to science.

Lu Zhou looked at the mission description and shook his head. He then shoved his phone back into his pocket.

Even though the mission description was strange, the rewards were quite satisfying.

It's just that...

The people in the ground command center are probably going crazy.

What do I tell them?

I can't just tell them that I flew up here to admire the view, right? Even though the view is pretty nice.

Emmmm...

Lu Zhou shook his head and decided to not think about it.

Forget about it, who cares.

He didn't have any obligation to explain himself.

You guys want a reason?

Well, think of one yourselves.

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Chapter 702: Silicon Valley Superstar?

COMMENT

California, United States.

Inside a mansion in Bel Air.

Musk took out two champagnes and half a box of pizza from his fridge. He placed the pizza into the microwave and sat down on the sofa with his champagne. He grabbed the robot control and turned on the TV, quietly waiting for the show to begin.

The most popular football game of the year was about to begin in an hour.

However, that wasn't where his attention was at.

Rather, it was the Columbia TV news that was playing before the game.

Even though most high-tech Silicon Valley people more often used trendy news sources, such as Twitter or Facebook, for Musk, the upcoming TV news was more important.

Because in a minute, the Space-X logo would appear at the center of the screen.

Soon the host of the Columbia TV news channel would report on his Space-X speech, well as his interviews after the press conference.

The BFR super rocket equipped with 42 Raptor engines would attract everyone's attention in Silicon Valley. The liquid methane engine technology would change the field of aerospace.

This type of feeling was more satisfying than becoming an international pop-star.

Even though he didn't know what it felt like to be an international pop-star...

"To space and beyond." Musk unscrewed the champagne bottle cap and filled his goblet. He looked at the Columbia TV news program starting to play and said, "Cheers!"

The news program began.

Just like he had expected, the concept image of the BFR rocket was placed at the center of the screen. After quoting an interview with NASA experts who had worked closely with Space-X, the program began to present a concept map of Space-X's lunar base and their plan to colonize Mars by 2024.

While Musk was drinking champagne and watching TV, he heard a ding over at the microwave.

Musk's pizza had finished heating. He reluctantly got up from the sofa and walked to the kitchen. He placed the pizza on a plate and quickly walked back to the living room.

However, the news program took an unexpected turn.

"Elon Musk, Chairman and CEO of Space-X, stated that they will conduct the first test of BFR rockets this year..."

The news reporter was cut off, and Musk could see someone hand the news reporter a piece of paper.

The news reporter read the content on the paper and looked surprised.

She took a deep breath and spoke slowly.

"Apologies, we have breaking news..."

“Around two hours and 50 minutes ago, the Skyglow space shuttle carrying China’s latest ion thruster propulsion system was successfully launched at the Jin Ling City launch site.

“This was first reported by CTV and has been confirmed by other Chinese media outlets such as Everyone Daily. We are contacting NASA to confirm the authenticity of the information. So far, we have not received a clear response... For follow-ups on this report, please keep an eye on our news...”

The hot slice of pizza fell, smearing the ground with cheese and sauce.

Musk looked at the TV with a blank face. He didn’t even pick up the slice of pizza. He had no idea what was happening.

His brain was completely shut down; he was muddled.

Skyglow?

Ion thruster propulsion?

???

Did they make a mistake?

The news program continued, the subsequent reports were still regarding Space-X and his BFR spacecraft.

However, he didn’t have an inch of interest in this news segment even though he was one of the designers of the ship...

He took out his phone and quickly went on Twitter. He began to search for information about Skyglow.

However, he wasn’t able to find any additional information. After all, until a few hours ago, Star Sky Technology didn’t even make any announcements about Skyglow. He couldn’t find any content regarding Star Sky Technology.

Instead, all of the people in Silicon Valley were talking about Skyglow in an astonished tone.

Musk turned off his phone. The news broadcast had already ended.

He then muttered, “Jesus Christ...”

He tried to take a sip from the champagne bottle but didn't realize that the cap was still on the bottle...

...

The Americans weren't the only ones who were shocked.

The ones who were most shocked by this news was still the Chinese people themselves.

The moment Skyglow was safely put in orbit, the CTV reporter waiting at the Jinling ground command center sent the news straight to Beijing. After receiving approval from the Communist Party of China, CTV began to report and congratulate Skyglow on reaching low-Earth orbit. The broadcast was sent to the entire country, almost as a New Year's Day gift.

Of course, not everyone was cheering.

There were a lot of people who were having headaches over this matter.

State Administration for National Defense.

Director's office.

Director Li was holding his phone in his hand, and he was on a call with the Jinling launch site.

When he heard that Lu Zhou was also in the space shuttle, his smile disappeared. His phone dropped onto the table and nearly fell on the ground.

Director Li quickly picked up his phone and made sure that his screen wasn't cracked. He put his phone up to his ear and spoke anxiously.

"What?! Professor Lu is on Skyglow?"

Hou Guang, who was at the other end of the phone, gulped and replied, "Yeah..."

"Did you guys even do any inspections? How did you miss a living person?"

"We did do inspections... But I think Professor Lu sneaked in."

Director Li's vision was becoming blurry, and he nearly passed out.

Thankfully, his hands were holding the table, preventing him from falling.

He sat back in his chair and asked, "Then where is he now?"

"He's on the flight."

Director Li couldn't help but say, "No sh*t! I know he's on the flight, where else could he be? I'm asking about his situation, is he healthy? Are there any problems?"

"Not really, Skyglow is very stable, and according to the pilot, Professor Lu... seemed to have trained himself at home."

Jesus...

Director Li had a throbbing headache.

He had authority over other people, but he couldn't control Lu Zhou at all.

"That's good, that's good he's safe..."

Director Li took a deep breath and hung up the phone.

He stood up and walked around the office. He slammed the table and grabbed his coat. He then looked at his assistant, who was muddled.

"Xiao Zhou, buy me a train ticket!

"I want it as soon as possible!

"To Jinling!"

Chapter 703: It's Not A Bad Thing Anyway

The train ticket was bought.

However, Director Li wasn't able to make the trip to Jinling.

The moment Director Li stepped out of the State Administration for National Defense building, he received a phone call from the higher-ups. They asked him to attend an important meeting at Chang'an Avenue.

The meeting subject was obviously related to the successful Skyglow launch.

Inside a conference room at Chang'an Avenue.

By the time Director Li arrived at the scene, many people were already there.

Director Li greeted the heads of various departments before sitting down at his desk. He looked around the room and felt surprised.

What surprised him wasn't that there were leaders, but rather the number of leaders and high-ranking officials present. The people from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were here, but those from the Ministry of Science and Technology, Air Force Equipment Department... even the chief of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were here.

This lineup was quite impressive.

Director Li didn't waste time observing other people. He reached out and picked up the one-inch thick file in front of him.

When he saw the title of the file, he finally realized what was going on.

[Air and Space Strategic Bomber Project]

I see...

No wonder this conference happened so suddenly.

The conference soon began.

There weren't many opening remarks, and the conference soon got to the main point.

The first to speak was obviously Minister Qin from the Air Force Equipment Department.

This old man stood up and said in a steady and powerful tone, "The Skyglow launch was successful, and clearly, ion thruster propulsion technology has matured. I think that with the increase in outer-space activities, the current war model that we are familiar with will change drastically. Fortunately, we are ahead in this field. I think we should maintain our advantage and use ion thruster propulsion technology for national defense. We should develop military aerospace aircraft that can cruise above 100 kilometers!

“Regarding this proposal, I have already consulted experts at the Air Force Equipment Research Institute and summarized the content into the form of a report. This report is in section 3, page 24 of the documents in your hands.

“I hope you all can seriously consider this proposal.”

Minister Qin’s words were approved by some people.

But not by everyone.

After he sat down, a representative from another department stood up and spoke carefully.

“I think this matter ought to be considered more carefully. Right now, our stance in the international community is not optimal. If we choose to apply aerospace technology for military uses and develop outer-space weapons, this will alarm other countries.”

Minister Qin’s expression didn’t change as he stood up and spoke again.

“Strategic deterrence is a part of national defense, not to mention that we are not the only ones researching aerospace weapons. The Americans have their X-37B and X-43 projects, and they even completed the first test flight years ago. The Russians have their codenamed ‘H5’ project, which also clearly states their intention of building an aerospace strategic bomber with requirements of Mach 10 speed and the ability to launch strategic strikes at ground targets at altitudes above 100 km.

“Even though we shouldn’t try to give rise to military conflicts, we should still treat these weapons seriously!”

The discussion went on for about half an hour.

A slight cough interrupted the discussion.

The president, who was sitting at the end of the conference table, nodded and said, “I agree with Minister Qin.

“We have to develop aerospace planes.

“Of course, we have to comply with international treaties.

“We should limit our development of outer-space weapons and focus on conventional weapons. We do not want to be the first to develop and deploy unconventional weapons. We should never take the initiative to send unconventional weapons to space unless other countries do it first.”

In fact, the difference between unconventional and conventional weapons was sometimes just a matter of changing the warhead, but claiming it as conventional weapons would help to reduce the pressure from the international community.

The president paused for a second before he continued, “Also, we have previously underestimated the importance of space exploration and placed a low priority on aerospace projects. I think we should make some adjustments to our strategy. Other than military-focused aerospace projects, we should prioritize aerospace-related projects, including the moon landing project.”

Almost all of the participants agreed with the president’s statement.

Even those who had doubts about the development of the strategic bomber, or those who questioned the significance of the space program, had no doubts about the importance of the moon landing project.

So far the controllable fusion negotiations had nearly come to an end. In exchange for controllable fusion, China had received many important technologies from other countries. There wasn’t any point to use aerospace engineering as a tactic to scare the United States and Europe.

Especially because of Skyglow’s recent success, anyone with half a brain could see that the space age was coming soon.

Now that the energy problem was solved, next up was the problem of resources.

Whoever controlled the moon had control of the future.

Many things were discussed in the meeting.

This included the establishment of new high-tech aerospace industrial areas along the river from Jinling to Xijiang, low-interest rates, supporting policies for private companies in the field of aerospace, etc.

Time quickly passed by, and the conference was near its end.

This time, the leader of the China National Space Administration was speaking.

The China National Space Administration was a second-level department and usually wouldn't have speaking rights. However, this time was a bit special...

"One more thing... it's about Professor Lu." The China National Space Administration leader coughed awkwardly and said, "A few hours ago, we've received information from the Jinling launch site command center. They said that... Professor Lu is on Skyglow."

Everyone: "..."

An old man in military uniform took off his glasses and muttered, "I think it's time to find him a partner."

Another kind-hearted looking old man sitting nearby shook his head and smiled.

"The times have changed, it's not the same anymore. I'm afraid that the young man wouldn't be interested. Whenever I ask my son about his partner, he gets angry at me..."

"W-why are you talking about this?!"

"What else can we do?"

The president sighed.

"Forget about it, let him do whatever he wants.

"It's not a bad thing anyway."

Chapter 704: Celebrating New Year's Day in the Sky

Moscow.

Federal Security Service.

A man in a gray leather jacket was sitting behind an office desk. He held a fountain pen in his hand while reading a report.

Suddenly, he heard knocking sounds coming from the door.

The man looked toward the door.

“Come in.”

The door was pushed open, and a skinny man walked in.

“We have our latest report from the Foreign Intelligence Service, as well as news from the Federal Space Agency,” the skinny man said as he placed the document on the table. He said, “It looks like the Chinese have indeed succeeded.”

The man sitting behind the desk began to tap his finger on the table. He picked up the document and began to flip through it.

A minute passed by.

He put down the document and looked at the agent standing in front of him.

“That’s all the intel we have?”

The agent nodded solemnly and continued, “The local army patrols are too strict, there are also reconnaissance aircraft patrolling at high altitudes in the surrounding airspace. It’s too dangerous to get close, so we can only observe at a distance.”

The man in the gray leather jacket nodded and didn’t ridicule his subordinate.

He paused for a second and stood up from his desk. He grabbed the new document, as well as the previous report he was reading.

“I will report this to Mr. Vladimir. Make sure the Foreign Intelligence Service is on the lookout. If there are any new findings, report them to me immediately.

“Especially what kind of propulsion system they’re using...

“I want to know what it is!”

There was one thing Lu Zhou guessed incorrectly.

Even though the ground command center did go into chaos after discovering he was missing, after they heard that Lu Zhou was safe and sound in Skyglow, the chaos disappeared.

After all, he was already on the spacecraft, there was no point panicking.

It wasn't like they could turn the space shuttle around and make him come back?

Therefore, after Hou Guang confirmed Lu Zhou's safety, he readjusted his mindset and continued to lead the command center.

5 hours and 27 minutes into the flight.

When Skyglow was passing on top of China, they made contact with CTV through the ground command center. Just like they had planned, Skyglow sent a 25-second congratulatory video on New Year's Day.

This video was originally going to be filmed by the two astronauts. But now there were more than two people on the flight. Nie Yun and Nie Yan didn't want to pretend that Lu Zhou didn't exist, not to mention Lu Zhou was keen to participate in an interesting thing like this. Therefore, the two-person video was changed to three people.

Lu Zhou waved at the camera. On behalf of all of the astronauts and the ground command staff members, he wished everyone in China a happy new year.

While Lu Zhou was sending this video to the ground command center, America, which was 13 hours behind Beijing, finally stepped into the new year.

However, countless people lost sleep last night because of the sudden news report by Columbia TV.

According to Twitter's official statistics, during the SuperBowl, almost a third of Americans were discussing the aerospace spacecraft that was launched from the other side of the globe.

This was extremely rare...

For a long time now, aerospace was America's pride and joy, it was even part of their culture. This wasn't only because Hollywood produced so many science fiction movies, but also because ever since the cold war, no one had ever surpassed the United States in the field of aerospace.

However, the successful launch of this weirdly named aerospace spacecraft destroyed that pride.

Especially when people heard that the rumored Skyglow was using ion thruster propulsion!

Everyone was in shock and disbelief...

Especially people in the aerospace industry, engineers at Space-X, Blue Origin, and so on. When they saw the news broadcast, they could hardly believe their eyes.

NASA's most advanced ion thruster propulsion could barely send an egg into the sky. Yet, Star Sky Technology, a company that produced lithium batteries, was able to fly a rocket using ion thruster propulsion?

Could there be anything more science fiction than this?

They wanted to believe that this was just an early April Fool's joke...

In addition to the engineers at Space-X and Blue Origin, the NASA employees were also having a horrible time.

This was their time to enjoy their comfortable vacation, like taking their family to Hawaii to enjoy the warm sunshine. However, because of that damn aerospace spacecraft from the other side of the Pacific Ocean, their vacation abruptly ended.

Not just this, but ever since last night, there had been countless reporters gathered at the headquarters of NASA. People coming to work the next morning had to squeeze through the reporters and their microphones, just to get in the building.

In order to get rid of these annoying reporters, NASA held a press conference as a last resort. They invited all of the reporters to the building reception hall and gave this daunting task to a freshly recruited intern.

In the midst of the chaos, the conference began.

Because there were so many reporters there, the entire reception hall was a mess.

There wasn't any time for the presenter to speak. The reporters crazily shoved their microphones and recording pens in the presenter's face.

"Hello, I'm a reporter from Columbia TV. I want to ask you, is it true that China's latest space shuttle is using an ion thruster propulsion system?"

"Does the successful launch of Skyglow mean that China has caught up with us in the aerospace field?"

"I want to know where the taxpayers' US\$40 billion per year is being spent on!"

"We did receive a briefing regarding the new space shuttle launch in China. However, they didn't specify what kind of launch technology they were using," the NASA spokesperson said. He twirled a pen in his hand and quickly said, "We will keep a close eye on this matter, but that's it for now.

"But I want to say that a successful initial launch doesn't mean anything. There's also the orbital operations, return to the atmosphere, etc. The entire launch has to be completed, for this to be regarded as a successful space flight."

There was a small commotion in the scene.

The New York Times reporter noticed a story he could twist, and he immediately reached out with his microphone and asked, "So what you're saying is that the ion thruster technology in Skyglow is going to fail on its return? Is this NASA's statement?"

"I never said that." The spokesman opened his mouth and expressed his views in an ambiguous way as he said, "We don't know whether or not Skyglow is actually using an ion thruster propulsion system. Also, the success of China's launch depends on whether the astronauts can make it back to Earth safely."

The New York Times reporter eyes' lit up.

It wasn't just The New York Times reporter, other media outlets reporters were doing the same.

The venue erupted in chaos.

Breaking news!

NASA predicts that there is a flaw in Skyglow's design, Skyglow will crash into the atmosphere?!

1The spokesman on stage was sweating, he didn't know what to do.

As expected, this intern was too inexperienced.

Even though he tried to make his statements ambiguous, the reporters still decided to twist his words.

However, NASA wasn't concerned that the press conference was in chaos. Compared to how media outlets viewed this matter, they obviously cared more about how Skyglow was doing...

Chapter 705: Major Defect?

NASA Headquarters.

Aiden was standing inside the satellite control room wearing a black suit. He slammed a stack of reports on the table and stood in front of a NASA expert. "Who told me that ion thruster propulsion systems can't send spacecraft to the sky, who told me it can't even send an egg?! Who! How about you explain this to me then!"

The NASA expert who previously vowed that using an ion thruster was impossible looked away awkwardly.

"We are still not sure what kind of propulsion system they're using. By looking at the engine plume, they might be using a hydrogen and methane mixture as their propellant..."

"Go eat sh*t!"

Bill Gerstenmaier looked at how emotional Aiden was. He coughed and adjusted his glasses.

“Mr. Aiden, gathering intelligence is the CIA’s responsibility. We are obligated to cooperate with your work, but that doesn’t mean we are responsible for the CIA’s mistakes.”

“You think this is our mistake?” Aiden glared at Gerstenmaier and said, “You guys told us that it was impossible for them to send a spacecraft to space using ion thruster technology.”

“But we’re still not sure what type of propulsion they’re using, right? Maybe the situation isn’t as bad as we think...” Gerstenmaier said awkwardly. He coughed and said, “Also, we didn’t say anything wrong. Traditional ion thruster technology can’t even send an egg to space. Its biggest advantage over traditional chemical rockets is its massive specific impulse... But maybe China found a more efficient way to accelerate the working medium? You would have to ask China about this, we’re not researching ion thruster propulsion after all...”

Aiden uttered coldly, “Oh yeah? But as far as I’m concerned, you guys receive quite a lot of funding from Congress for the ion thruster propulsion research.”

Gerstenmaier smoothly diverted the conversation away from funding.

“I’m not in charge of funding, go ask the director.”

Aiden took a deep breath and walked to the satellite control console.

He looked at the green dot on the screen and wished there was a missile launch button nearby so that he could blow that thing out of the sky.

He had to admit, that was a tempting idea...

It was just a bit impractical.

Forget about whether or not those anti-satellite missiles could even track a spacecraft traveling at kilometers per second, even Trump wouldn’t approve of such a stupid plan.

2Not to mention that the controllable fusion negotiations were almost finished...

He only prayed for one thing, which was for Skyglow to have a faster than expected landing when returning to Earth.

Just like what happened to Space Shuttle Columbia.

Suddenly, the NASA expert, who was berated, muttered something, "I hope they succeed."

Aiden glared at him.

The expert noticed Aiden's glare, and he knew that it wasn't the right time for him to speak. He awkwardly began to explain himself.

"I mean that... If Skyglow succeeds, and they're really using an ion thruster propulsion system, that proved that ion thrusters' power is comparable to traditional chemical thrusters. Do you know what this means? It will completely revolutionize the aerospace industry!"

"Oh, really now? Too bad it's not going to revolutionize America's aerospace industry," Aiden said as he stared at the expert with a dead stare. He snorted, "I just hope that damn spacecraft and the astronauts burn to ashes on re-entry... Wait, what did you say?"

Suddenly, Aiden realized something, and he grabbed the NASA expert's collar.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Gerstenmaier said. He wanted to help but was stopped by Aiden's subordinates.

The expert looked muddled as he stared at Aiden and said, "What are you doing? You want to fight? I'm warning you, if you touch me..."

Aiden: "You said enough power?"

"What, what power..."

"Ion thrusters!"

"Yeah... Why?"

“How much electric power would it take to send a 10-ton spacecraft into space? Tell me!”

“100 MW? Maybe 1,000 MW? I don’t know! We never even thought about putting a battery that size on a rocket, and satellites only need small batteries and solar panels!”

The moment Aiden heard the MW unit, his face changed.

He vaguely remembered a classified document.

That document mentioned that China might be researching the miniaturization of controllable fusion technology.

If Skyglow was really using an ion thruster propulsion system...

Forget about the ion thrusters, the huge energy supply device that could support the ion thruster power consumption was what they should be worrying about!

A drop of cold sweat rolled off Aiden’s forehead...

...

Jin Ling City.

Star Sky Technology headquarters.

The sky was dark, only a few offices still had their lights on.

Chen Yushan was sitting in the CEO’s office. She anxiously called the Jinling launch site. The phone rang for a while before connecting.

“What the hell is going on? Why is Lu Zhou on the space shuttle?”

Ten minutes ago, she saw the news broadcast regarding Skyglow’s successful launch. Only then, she heard about Lu Zhou being on Skyglow.

Hou Guang nervously spoke with the CEO.

“We...”

Chen Yushan was on the verge of tears as she snapped, “Why didn’t you stop him?!”

Hou Guang explained, “Who could stop Lu Zhou, he’s the boss.”

Lu Zhou had the highest security clearance in the launch site.

Lu Zhou could dismantle the space shuttle if he wanted, much less getting on the space shuttle.

Ordinary employees wouldn’t dare to ask why Professor Lu was getting on the space shuttle, they would think that he was just double-checking the shuttle.

Ordinary employees would have never thought that Lu Zhou would have stayed on the space shuttle. They only found out he was missing after the launch was over, when the shuttle was already high in the sky...

After hearing Hou Guang’s answer, Chen Yushan finally realized what was happening.

This guy...

This isn’t even the first time he’s done something like this!

Why does he never take his safety seriously?

Even though research is interesting, he shouldn’t do something like this...

Chen Yushan’s heart was thumping, and she leaned back on her office chair.

She took out her phone and began to scroll through Weibo, in hopes of calming down.

She saw the 30-second New Year’s Day congratulations video shot in space, which was released by CCTV’s official account. She read all of the exciting comments posted by netizens. She suddenly burst into a smile and felt a lot better.

She suddenly knew why Lu Zhou was doing this.

Maybe he wanted to show everyone that spaceflight wasn't an impossible thing for ordinary people, nor was it a dangerous activity... In the near future, spaceflight would be available for everyone.

There was nothing for Chen Yushan to be scared about.

She gradually calmed down. However, a news headline suddenly caught her eye.

After reading the news headline, she nearly fainted.

[Skyglow is suspected of major design flaws? Difficulties on re-entry?!]

This was the latest report from The New York Times.

Which came from the press conference at NASA...

Chapter 706: Returning From Orbit!

On New Year's Day.

Almost half of China was celebrating the launch of Skyglow, regardless of whether or not they knew anything about aerospace. Most people didn't understand the difference between ion thruster and chemical propulsion, or what a Hall effect thruster was. However, Skyglow was the first spacecraft that could travel between Earth and outer space, and this was a huge victory for China.

But on this glorious day, the sudden report from The New York Times poured an ounce of worry into everyone's head.

In this report, The New York Times manipulated the NASA spokesperson's speech while also citing opinions from the Silicon Valley aerospace engineers, which all said that Skyglow had massive design flaws.

And because of these design flaws, re-entry on earth might be fatal.

The end result could be similar to the Space Shuttle Columbia, which disintegrated during atmospheric entry...

The moment this report was released, it spread quickly across Twitter and Facebook.

After this report was spread to China, people were outraged. Especially since the 25-second New Year's Day celebration video just came out, this immediately masked the successful launch.

No one was excited anymore.

A lot of people even began to pray for Professor Lu.

[For f*ck's sake! Americans are evil! They cursed our plane!]

[Is it even possible to curse a plane? I think they're just kindly reminding us.]

[I don't know! I think the Americans are scheming something, they're not going to strike it with a missile, right?]

[MiG-25: As long as I run fast enough, missiles can't catch me.]

[Pray for God Lu (candle) (candle) (candle)]

[I hope Skyglow and God Lu return safely. (candle)]

[...]

This topic quickly went on trending.

Fortunately, Lu Zhou couldn't go on his phone. Otherwise, he would burst out laughing.

Fatal re-entry?

Impossible...

Even if they couldn't return, there was a backup escape cabin available. Lu Zhou wouldn't risk his life like this.

400 km in the sky.

Skyglow was in low-Earth orbit. The crew had already completed numerous basic operations such as orbital flight, cabin pressure regulation, sanitary

system testing, weightless sleeping, eating, etc. They also observed the possible effects of cosmic rays on 20 different plants and seeds.

After completing the series of flight tests and scientific experiments, the flight time was 23 hours 50 minutes.

Just like they had planned, the ground command center ordered Skyglow to restart its engine, in preparation for returning to Earth.

Nie Yan was sitting in the co-pilot's seat, checking the energy supply components, and she imitated the voice of a flight attendant as she said, "Professor Lu, please put on your spacesuit and sit in your seat. Our flight is landing soon..."

"I know, you don't have to remind me." Lu Zhou smiled and gave two thumbs-up as he said, "You got this, land this thing safely."

Lu Zhou was in a good mood.

This finally scratched his itch for space.

Of course, the most important thing was the 50,000 experience points and the lucky draw ticket.

The 50,000 experience points alone was worth the cost of this flight.

Nie Yun turned around and forced a smile, but his palms were drenched.

Re-entry was just as difficult as the initial launch.

Even though the Skyglow return path was theoretically safer than its launch path, there were no guarantees there wouldn't be any accidents. After all, this was his first time flying so high...

"Professor, can you promise me one thing?"

Lu Zhou: "What thing?"

"If we safely land..."

"Stop!" Lu Zhou raised his hand and interrupted Nie Yun as he said, "Don't jinx us. I'll promise you whatever you want once we land."

Just don't be too ridiculous.

Also, it can't be anything about my love life.

However, Nie Yun didn't listen.

Seeing how Lu Zhou was trying to dismiss him, Nie Yun removed his hands from the control console and spoke aggressively.

"No, I have to say it now!"

Lu Zhou: "..."

*For f*ck's sake!*

Can't you just wait an hour or two?

Lu Zhou sighed and said reluctantly, "Okay then... Say it, but I can't make any guarantees."

Nie Yun: "My request is simple, just promise me this is your last time going to space!"

Lu Zhou was stunned.

There's no way I'm agreeing!

I'm still young!

When Lu Zhou saw how determined Nie Yun was, he reluctantly compromised.

"At best, I can promise you that this is my last time flying with you."

Nie Yun thought for a second and nodded.

"Ok!"

Just don't be on my flight again.

If anything happens, my name will be shamed forever.

After spending so many years in the army, this was his first time afraid of dying.

“Okay, Brother, stop it!”

Nie Yan shook her head and pressed a few buttons on the control panel.

“Navigation system is turned on, confirm there are no malfunctions, energy supply machine has been turned on. Engine 1 and 2 are on standby.

“Ready to exit orbit.”

Nie Yun was calm, cool, and collected. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened his eyes, he said, “Let’s go home!”

...

Regardless of whether it was an aerospace plane or a space shuttle, returning from low-earth orbit was always a difficult task.

As the co-pilot, Nie Yan checked the “fuel” status of Skyglow. The remaining amounts of deuterium and tritium were sufficient. They had enough for a second round trip. The small problem was the xenon in the working medium compartment; there was only 21% remaining.

After all, they had to reach a certain amount of force to escape Earth’s gravity. If they wanted to get in low-Earth orbit, they had to increase the amount of working medium ejection. They also had to lower the specific impulse but increase the engine thrust.

However, this amount of working medium was plenty for the re-entry.

With the ground command center’s guidance and Skyglow’s intelligent navigation system, Nie Yun successfully finished the orbital change and entered the transfer orbit.

At the same time, in NASA’s satellite control room, exclams were heard.

“Target began atmospheric entry”

“The Pacific Ocean is going to be their graveyard,” Aiden said while staring at the green dot on the screen. He said, “I hope the spacecraft is the only thing salvageable.”

Several workers monitoring the spacecraft movement frowned.

This was too devious for them.

Even though China was their competitor...

The engineer who was sitting in front of the console stared nervously at the green dot. When it was near the density boundary of the atmosphere, he spoke.

“Skyglow’s trajectory is abnormal...”

Aiden slammed his hands on the table and said happily, “There’s an accident?”

Did God hear my wishes?

If they really land in the Pacific Ocean, we will gladly help them salvage the spacecraft parts.

“Their return trajectory is different than what we expected...”

Aiden’s excitement faded. He frowned as he asked, “What do you mean?”

“There’s only one possibility.”

“What is it?”

“They still have fuel left...” the engineer said in disbelief, “a lot of fuel left.”

Chapter 707: Triumphant Return

Translator: Henyee Translations Editor: Henyee Translations

NASA engineers guessed correctly.

Compared to other spacecraft, Skyglow had a lot of leftover fuel for its re-entry trip.

The remaining 21% working medium might not be enough for them to fly from the surface to low-Earth orbit, but it was plenty enough for them to accelerate away from Earth-Moon’s escape velocity and go to Mars or something.

From the altitudes of 100 km to 20 km, with the help of air resistance and the engine, Skyglow’s speed decreased to Mach 7. It was flying over China’s

western airspace.

Because of this relatively slow speed, a successful landing was guaranteed. Roscosmos.

A stern-looking man wearing a black suit looked at the green dot moving on the radar screen; there was a flash of disappointment on his face.

If Skyglow landed in Russia or the Pacific Ocean, he would have gladly “helped” the Chinese. Unfortunately, God didn’t give him the chance to “help” his old Chinese friends.

There was nothing else left to see.

He was confident that at this height and speed, even he could land this thing safely.

“Cancel the Pacific fleet standby.”

A man in military uniform saluted and responded.

“Yes, sir.”

...

When the faint blue arc emerged from the clouds, the metallic silver Skyglow spacecraft appeared in people’s sights.

Cheers could be heard at the Jinling launch site command center.

Chief Engineer Hou Guang, who was standing in front of the control console, took off his headset and broke out in celebration with the staff members.

They had been on duty for the better part of the past 24 hours. Most people slept less than 2 hours, and some didn’t sleep at all.

After all, this was Skyglow’s first flight.

For them, this aerospaceplane was like their child, carrying the world’s most advanced fusion technology and ion thruster propulsion technology.

Not to mention that Professor Lu was on there as well.

A lot of people even dropped their headsets on the table and ran out of the control room, out to the launch site, waiting to meet their heroes.

Chen Yushan, who was here since last night, was in tears.

She was worried since last night.

Yan Yan was standing near the command room entrance, and she carried a portable medical box over her shoulder. She stared at Wang Peng, who was standing next to her, and asked, “That kid is a pain in the a*s for you, right?”

“It’s alright.” Wang Peng sighed and reached for the box of cigarettes in his pocket. He suddenly remembered that smoking was banned here, so he put the box of cigarettes away and said, “The higher-ups knew that this guy is difficult to control, so they’re not blaming me.”

At most, he was criticized over the phone.

Yan Yan looked at him in disbelief.

“That’s it? You’re not going to be punished? I don’t believe it.”

“I’m really not...” Wang Peng paused for a second and made a helpless

gesture. "Okay, I'm probably going to lose my end-of-year bonus... But honestly, after spending this much time with this kid, I didn't expect a bonus anyway."

Yan Yan shook her head and looked at Chen Yushan, who was walking out of the door.

"Let's go as well... Hopefully, he doesn't have hemiparesis."

Yang Guangbiao, who was standing next to them silently this whole time, coughed and said, "Please don't jinx it."

He still remembered what happened at the controllable fusion reactor site last time.

...

The engine turned off.

The landing gear was released and made a heavy impact with the ground.

The space shuttle rolled along the runway.

When the two deceleration umbrellas were released, Nie Yun's anxious heart finally relaxed a little.

He took his hands off the joystick and leaned against his seat. He suddenly realized that his entire back was soaking wet. Only then, did he realize what kind of responsibility and pressure he had to endure over the past 24 hours. But at last, the victory was here.

He could faintly see people running toward the plane.

There were launch site staff members, headquarters engineers, CTV reporters...

He managed to squeeze out a smile when he suddenly reminisced back to the day he first flew the J-20 jet.

"This is like a dream..."

Unlike Nie Yun, Lu Zhou didn't spend time being sentimental.

He already left the passenger seat. He stood in front of the porthole and looked outside. It seemed like he was thinking about something.

Nie Yun noticed his expression and asked, "Is there a problem?"

"No problem," Lu Zhou said, "but the designs of the engine and the wing have to be changed."

"I think it's pretty good."

"But it can be better." Lu Zhou looked outside and smiled as he said, "As expected, I had to fly myself to get a better understanding."

Nie Yun: "..."

Nie Yan: "..."

These two had a bad feeling about the future...

...

The three helped each other take off their spacesuits.

The moment they stepped out of the cabin, the three heroes were immediately

surrounded by people.

Lu Zhou let Nie Yun and Nie Yan handle the interviews. He was about to go to the ground command center and talk to Hou Guang about future Skyglow designs. However, he saw a man walk forward.

Lu Zhou stared at him for a while before saying in an uncertain tone, "Director Li?"

"It's me!"

Lu Zhou: "Oh Jesus, what happened to you? You look horrible."

Maybe a day in space means a year on Earth?

That doesn't make any sense.

Director Li frowned and sighed.

"It's all because of you!"

He was about to say something, but another old man walked forward.

Lu Zhou looked at him and cursed in his mind.

Yuan Huanmin?

The f*ck?

What is this guy doing here?

Lu Zhou was about to pretend he didn't see anything, but the teary-eyed old man shook his hand.

"I was wrong... Please let me apologize!"

Lu Zhou: "...?!"

Wrong about what?!

What is he talking about?

While Lu Zhou was still confused about it, a slim figure slipped through the crowd and hugged him.

"Thank god, you're okay!"

Yan Yan was watching this from a distance, and she suddenly stopped herself from walking forward.

She was happy that Lu Zhou was safe.

However, there was a twinge in her heart...

Chapter 708: You're Half Correct

The biggest breaking news this year wasn't some celebrity's wedding, nor was it Daya Bay's power generation success, but instead, it was the successful launch and return of Skyglow.

Everything from the successful launch, to the 25-second congratulatory video, to The New York Times report, and the safe return of Skyglow. Every moment grabbed everyone's attention.

There are plenty of rocket scientists.

But Lu Zhou was probably the only rocket scientist who flew in his own rocket.

3Even Elon Musk, who had been called the real-life Iron Man, said he would never fly on his Falcon 9 rocket.

This sensational flight completely changed everyone's opinions regarding aerospace.

2020 was going to be a new aerospace era.

This would revolutionize the aerospace industry.

Interestingly enough, if it wasn't for NASA's news release on Columbia TV, most people wouldn't have known that Skyglow was using an ion thruster propulsion system.

After the news came out, neither Star Sky Technology nor the Chinese government denied or confirmed the claims. For most people, this silently confirmed that Skyglow was using ion thrusters.

The people praying for Skyglow's safe return were ecstatic.

For a long time, China had been chasing the footsteps of the United States and Russia in the aerospace field. When it came to the design of high-thrust rockets and spacecraft, China was even behind Japan and Europe. When Skyglow successfully used ion thruster propulsion technology, it placed China five years ahead of everyone else.

The first step of the moon landing plan was a success.

Next was figuring out how to safely send people there.

Most people didn't care about those distant things. Skyglow's safe return proved many people wrong.

After Lu Zhou heard about what happened from Chen Yushan, he opened Weibo and posted the photo he took of Earth, along with a caption.

[Who said I'm not coming back?]

Less than 30 seconds after he posted the photo, there were hundreds of comments.

[Haha, what do the NASA experts have to say now? What happened to disintegrate on re-entry?]

[F*ck The New York Times, fake news!]

[I just want to say one thing, God Lu you're nutty!]

[Actually, Skyglow was supposed to disintegrate, but NASA jinxed it.]

[Haha, I knew that God Lu knew what he's doing!]

[God Lu, I want to have a kid with you in space ~~]

[Jesus Christ!]

[No one's talking about how handsome God Lu is, so I'll say it!]

[...]

Within half an hour, the retweets were in the tens of thousands. It was also retweeted by Everyone Daily, CTV, and other major media outlets. It quickly spread throughout Weibo and other social media sites.

A lot of people posted Lu Zhou's Weibo photo on Twitter and tagged The New York Times' account.

Interestingly enough, the first to respond wasn't The New York Times, but it was NASA's official account.

In NASA's tweet, they quickly clarified that they never said that the Skyglow could disintegrate on re-entry. And that The New York Times twisted their words at the press conference.

There was a lot of backlash on Twitter, and people were all tagging The New York Times' account.

Lu Zhou thought that this matter would be over. After all, in his opinion, this was only a test flight, nothing amazing. However, this matter was far from complete.

After interviewing the two astronauts, CTV used previously recorded material and made a documentary regarding the launch of Skyglow.

A classic CTV documentary style was used, and it highlighted the difficulty of research and the danger of the launch. The focus of attention was on Lu Zhou, who flew with the two other astronauts. He was depicted as a hero who risked his life for research.

They even quoted him.

“I’m the chief designer. If I want firsthand experience, I have to go!”

The quote made it seem like Lu Zhou was going to space to battle aliens...

Inside a special ward at 301 Hospital, Lu Zhou threw the half-read newspaper on the table and shook his head while sitting on the hospital bed.

The reason he was in the ward wasn’t that he was sick. It was because just like the two astronauts, the higher-ups asked him to undergo medical inspections.

Even though he had repeatedly stated that he was healthy, he wasn’t able to argue with the old 301 Hospital doctors.

Of course, Lu Zhou knew that they had good intentions; they were just scared he was secretly ill.

Therefore, he didn’t resist.

“It’s written pretty nicely...”

Wang Peng stared at Lu Zhou and had a weird expression on his face.

I’ve never seen you this humble before...

Yan Yan came over and said, “Objectively speaking, the news article is pretty touching.”

“You guys don’t get it,” Lu Zhou said as he shook his head.

Chen Yushan, who was standing beside the hospital bed, asked, "Can I take a guess?"

Lu Zhou sighed and said, "Go ahead."

After their hug the day he returned to Earth, his relationship with Chen Yushan became more complex.

However, Lu Zhou didn't know how to describe this complexity.

Therefore, neither of them mentioned the hug. They merely pretended as if nothing had happened.

How do I describe this?

Lu Zhou didn't know what this type of feeling was.

Maybe I've never experienced this before...

"Well... Through this launch, you want to tell people that there is no difference between space travel and normal travel, and that it is less dangerous than they imagined?"

Lu Zhou went silent for a while as his eyes drifted aside.

"Okay, you're half correct."

Actually, she was only a quarter correct.

Half of the reason was because of Lu Zhou's system mission, the other quarter was purely because he wanted to see what exactly would happen when the spacecraft was flying. He wanted to know exactly where he could improve, instead of only hearing the aviators' suggestions and studying the data.

Even though Chen Yushan was only half correct, she still smiled happily.

Yan Yan, who was standing next to her, silently pouted. She picked up the medical inspection sheet and walked out of the ward.

Lu Zhou didn't notice her subtle change. He was focused on the snowflakes falling outside of the window.

I guess it's winter.

STAR-2 experimental reactor's successful fusion ignition was around this time last year.

Time really flies...

Chapter 709: Discharge

While Lu Zhou was hospitalized, a lot of people came to visit him.

There were people from the State Administration for National Defense, China National Space Administration, and the military equipment department.

As well as higher-ups from the Communist Party.

Honestly, he could have been discharged after two days. After all, there were a lot of matters he had to take care of. 301 Hospital did a comprehensive examination as fast as possible. However, when the president came to see how Lu Zhou was doing, he smiled and said, "Stay here and rest a bit longer, remember what happened last time?"

So...

Lu Zhou's hospital stay was extended by a week.

Of course, Lu Zhou knew that the president had good intentions and only wanted him to rest instead of going back to doing research. However, staying in the hospital made him feel like his body was rotting.

Chen Yushan stayed with him in Beijing for a few days and made sure that his health was okay. She then went back to Jinling. In a sense, she was similar to Lu Zhou; she couldn't stop working.

Lu Zhou was bored staying at 301 Hospital, so he ended up playing cards with Wang Peng and Yan Yan.

Unfortunately, playing cards didn't help pass the time. Even though the two other people were pretty good, they were rookies when compared to Lu Zhou. Lu Zhou got sick of winning and let Yang Guangbiao take his spot.

At last, the week was over, and Lu Zhou only had one last round of inspections.

Coincidentally, the person who did his last examination was Academician Zhao Zhongji, the same person who led the international medical consultant team back when Lu Zhou was in a coma. The kind-hearted old man smiled at him.

"Professor Lu, we meet again."

Lu Zhou didn't know what to say, so he smiled and nodded.

"Yeah."

Academician Zhao Zhongji smiled and said, "The examination went well. There are no problems. But I still have to say that you're still young, you should take care of your body. Aerospace is suitable for people who already have kids. After all, there's no magnetic field in space, and no one knows how those cosmic rays can affect your body."

Lu Zhou: "I think science can solve those problems, but this is nothing important, there's no need to worry."

Actually, not all astronauts had kids. Astronaut Liu from China had a kid three years after her return to Earth. The claim that genetics could be altered by cosmic rays was debatable, not to mention that the current high-energy ray shielding technology was able to block most of the rays.

Zhao Zhongji had a helpless expression. He didn't try to persuade anymore.

"Okay then, I don't know as much as you, I'm just suggesting."

Lu Zhou nodded and said, "Thanks."

"You're welcome, fill out this form." Academician Zhao Zhongji handed Lu Zhou a form and said, "Oh yeah, it's almost the academician election season, are you ready?"

Lu Zhou, who was filling out the form, paused for a second before he said, "I... haven't been paying attention."

Academician Zhao Zhongji shook his head and said, "You're probably the only Chinese scholar who doesn't pay attention to this stuff."

Lu Zhou smiled awkwardly and said, "I'm not the only one. It's just that, this title doesn't matter too much for me."

Academician Zhao Zhongji: "Haha, you're right. Regardless, congratulations in advance."

Lu Zhou handed back the form and said, "You can congratulate me after I get elected... See you later."

The old academician smiled and waved his hand.

"Goodbye, hope I don't see you here again."

...

Lu Zhou handed in a form to the reception, which was on the first floor of the hospital. After he went through the discharge procedures, he went back to his ward to pack his luggage. The other two astronauts were also discharged today, but he didn't plan on going back with them.

Before going back to Jinling, he still had some things to take care of.

Lu Zhou opened the door of his ward and walked to his bed. He was surprised to see a person sitting on a chair near his bed.

"Director Li?" Lu Zhou looked at Director Li and smiled as he asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Coming to visit you before you leave the hospital, what, am I not welcome here?"

There was a tiny bit of resentment in Director Li's eyes.

It seemed like Lu Zhou's action of sneaking into Skyglow without telling anyone gave Director Li a lot of trouble.

Lu Zhou smiled and said, "What do you mean? I was just about to visit you after leaving the hospital. The ward is pretty crappy, so just sit wherever."

"This is crappy? This is the best room in the 301 Hospital!" Director Li sat down and said, "Do you plan on going back to Jinling after being discharged?"

Lu Zhou: "I'm staying in Beijing for a couple of days, why?"

Director Li: "Nothing, just wondering. Oh yeah, there's something I have to tell you."

Lu Zhou: "Aerospaceplane?"

Director Li: "Yeah."

Lu Zhou: "Okay then, I'll listen... Do you want anything to drink?"

"No, thanks. I'll keep it short." Director Li paused for a second before he said, "A week ago, after you boarded the spacecraft, the Communist Party of China had a meeting. The meeting was about placing aerospace engineering as a top national priority again. There are many specific policies. I'll only tell you the relevant ones. The specific documents won't be released for a while, so make sure you don't tell anyone."

Lu Zhou: "Go ahead."

Director Li looked toward the door and lowered his voice. He said quietly, "We plan on establishing an aerospace science and technology park from Jinling and Xijiang."

Lu Zhou looked strangely at this guy.

"Shouldn't this be a local policy? Why is the central government taking the lead?"

Director Li coughed and said, "Do you think a small local government can handle something related to the aerospace field?"

Lu Zhou nodded thoughtfully.

"You're right."

He didn't know a lot about politics, so he decided to stay quiet.

However, there was something else he didn't understand...

"What does the aerospace park have to do with me?"

"It has a lot to do with you." Director Li sat upright in his chair and said, "When all of the supporting policies are approved, that place will be the largest aerospace incubation area in China, and a large number of aerospace and military enterprises will move in. High-level officials want to focus on researching the ion thruster propulsion system you developed, as well as a wide range of fields such as aerospace and national defense."

He looked a little embarrassed as he smiled at Lu Zhou.

"We hope that you can provide technical support to the enterprises in the park. Of course, your profits will also be protected in the form of defense patents and research and development subsidies."

"Sure thing." Lu Zhou smiled and said, "Once the policies are approved, just call me. Is there anything else?"

Attracting a large number of aerospace companies was beneficial for Star Sky Technology. This meant that the space shuttle assembly center would no longer have to find parts from all over the country; they would have everything at their fingertips.

Lu Zhou had control of the core aerospace technology, but he didn't need to have total control over the entire space shuttle production process as it was neither realistic nor economical. He only needed to manufacture the most important components, such as the ion thrusters.

"Okay then, that's all." Director Li patted his thighs and said, "There's one thing people keep asking me. You're quite old now, there are 25-year-old adults with toddlers already. Aren't your parents worried?"

"Fate can't be rushed."

Director Li smiled and said, "Fate doesn't wait for you? Do you want me to introduce you to someone?"

Lu Zhou said, "Let's talk about it later."

Research is so fun, why would I want to do anything else?

If I really end up having a family...

I probably won't be able to spend as much time in the laboratory anymore.

He always tried to hide from this problem.

Director Li shook his head, but he didn't say anything else.

He was about to stand up and leave when he suddenly patted his head as if he forgot about something.

"Oh wait, I nearly forgot something. This morning, the China Western Military Division called us. The troops stationed in the Junggar Basin area found the thing you were looking for. Do you want them to send it to Beijing or directly to the Jinling research institute?"

Lu Zhou immediately became energetic, and he responded quickly, "Where is it approximately?"

Director Li paused for a second before replying, "I think it's on a hamada."

Lu Zhou said, "Tell them to stay where they are! I'll personally go there with some of my guys."

Chapter 710: Desert in the Basin.

The wind howled along the endless wasteland, sand dunes, and a few oil wells that were barely visible. There wasn't any sign of living things.

Two desert-colored military jeeps drove on the sand-covered highway, one in front of the other.

This was the center of the Junggar Basin, the second largest desert in China—Dzoosotoyn Elisen Desert.

There was no life to be found here.

As Wang Peng looked into the distance, he squinted and said happily, "The weather is pretty nice today."

Lu Zhou: "... You call this nice?"

"At least there's no sandstorm, it's pretty nice," Wang Peng said while holding the steering wheel. He smiled at Lu Zhou, who was sitting in the back seat, and said, "Do you know what Dzoosotoyn Elisen means?"

Lu Zhou didn't know a lot about liberal arts, so he asked, "What does it mean?"

Wang Peng: "In Mongolian language, it means infested with wild boars."

Lu Zhou looked out the car window and said, "How come I'm not seeing any boars?"

Forget about boars, he couldn't even see a cockroach.

There were only camelthorn bushes and half-dead tree branches.

Wang Peng: "The meaning came from a long time ago."

Lu Zhou: "You know so much."

Wang Peng smiled and said, "I just heard about it from someone else."

Director Li was also sitting in the backseat with Lu Zhou. His face was tightly wrapped with a desert neck scarf. He coughed and said, "Are we there yet?"

Wang Peng looked at the car navigation system and said, "It says that there's ten kilometers left, so we'll be there soon."

Director Li sighed in relief.

His old body couldn't handle this trip any longer.

It took a whole day to take the train from Beijing to Wushi. Then it took another half a day to go from Wushi to this desert.

Honestly, Lu Zhou had never been to this area. If he didn't have something important to do, he would have gladly vacationed here for a bit. However, it was not the time for vacation yet; there was a very important research task waiting for him.

The jeep was borrowed from the local Wushi army. Wang Peng was in the driver's seat, Doctor Yan was in the passenger seat, Lu Zhou and Director Li were in the backseat.

The jeep in front of them was filled with soldiers from Regiment 150. They were here to lead the way and escort them.

Even though this area was rural, it wasn't safe.

Not only did Wang Peng have a QBZ-95 gun next to him, but even Yan Yan also had a pistol.

Lu Zhou wanted to borrow a pistol for fun. Even though he wasn't interested in weapons, he was still curious.

However, Wang Peng didn't let him. He insisted that it would be more dangerous for Lu Zhou to carry a gun, but he promised to let Lu Zhou play with the gun when no one else was around.

...

They quickly completed the ten-kilometer journey.

They got off the main highway and drove on the hamada until they reached a temporary campsite.

Wang Peng followed the jeep to the main gate. He then opened the window and took out his credentials.

After the gun-carrying soldier checked everyone's credentials, he saluted and pointed toward the direction of the checkpoint. After the boom barrier was raised, the jeeps drove inside.

On the way to the center of the camp, Lu Zhou looked out the window and saw soldiers patrolling. He then asked in surprise, "Why is the security here so strict?"

"It has to be strict," Wang Peng said as he followed the jeep in front of him. He skillfully parked the jeep and turned off the engine. He then said, "The Jinling launch attracted the attention of the entire world. The thing you threw from low-orbit couldn't be seen by ordinary people, but it didn't escape

satellites and radar. Guess how much your stuff was priced on the black market?”

“How much?”

“Two hundred million.”

“Two hundred million?!”

Lu Zhou couldn’t help but think.

*F*ck...*

Is it really that expensive?

Why did no one tell me?

I would make a fortune selling it on the black market.

Wang Peng didn’t know what Lu Zhou was thinking, but he did see how surprised Lu Zhou was as he got out of the car. He smiled and said, “It’s also in USD.”

“That’s right,” a man in military uniform said. He walked over to the jeep and smiled. He said, “Yesterday, we caught some criminals disguised as tourists.”

Lu Zhou looked at him and said, “There are people that come here?”

“Ah, guess what we found in their van?” The man in military uniform smiled and gestured with his hands. “Two RPG-7s, quite a bit of firepower.”

Yan Yan naturally asked, “No one was hurt, right?”

“No, of course not,” said the man. He looked at Wang Peng and opened his arms. “Long time no see! It’s been so long since you were discharged, how have you been?”

Wang Peng hugged his old friend and patted him on the shoulder. He said, “I’m good, I’m a lot paler now! You’ve been doing pretty well over the last four years, and you even made it to the battalion commander rank.”

Lu Zhou wasn’t very interested in their small talk, so he looked around and asked, “Where is the stuff?”

“It’s in the middle of the camp, I’ll bring you guys there.” Battalion Commander Li smiled at Lu Zhou and reached out with his hand. He said, “Let me introduce myself. I’m Li Gaoliang.”

Lu Zhou shook Battalion Commander Li’s hand and said, “Lu Zhou. You can call me Professor Lu.”

“I know, we all watched the news on New Year’s Day, and I also saw you on TV a few days ago.” Battalion Commander Li smiled and said, “How was space? Was it fun?”

“It’s pretty interesting.”

Battalion Commander Li was an interesting person. Even though he had been in the military for a long time, he was easy to talk to. They chatted while talking. Shortly thereafter, they arrived at the center of the camp.

In the center of the camp, there was a fenced-off sand dune. On the west slope of this sand dune, there was an “iron coffin”, which was around 2.5 meters high.

Four parachutes of different sizes lay quietly next to the iron coffin. The troops tried not to touch the iron coffin, but in order to stop the sandstorm from blowing it away, the troops placed some fixed weights for stability.

Wang Peng looked at this strange thing and murmured, “What’s this...”

Lu Zhou smiled and replied, “Lightning... Escape capsule. Remember when I talked about the thousand-kilometer sky-dive? This makes it possible.”

Chapter 711: “Lightning” Escape Capsule

“Lightning” escape capsule.

The whole capsule body was dark, and it was made of a titanium alloy. The surface was coated with a high-temperature resistant ceramic. It could allow one person to safely land from low-Earth orbit. There was a payload fairing at the top of the capsule, but it was abandoned on its way back to earth.

Even though the height of this test was not 1,000 kilometers, the 100-kilometer height was still record-breaking.

This escape capsule was installed on Skyglow.

On its re-entry, at an altitude of around 100 kilometers, Skyglow tested the escape capsule while it was flying over China's western area. It released the "lightning" escape capsule from the spacecraft, and it landed at the center of the Junggar Basin.

This was the final task in Skyglow's 24-hour flight.

This thing wasn't actually that high-tech; it was just a smaller version of a manned spacecraft return capsule. Other than accommodating an adult, it also stored some essential survival tools such as food, water, and medicine, which could help someone survive for ten days.

The shape was a bit peculiar, but it was nowhere near worth as much as US\$200 million. Even though the data collected was important, it wasn't worth that much money, not to mention that it was a one-use item...

That was why Lu Zhou was so surprised when he heard someone was offering US\$200 million on the black market to buy this thing.

It turned out that people were willing to pay for garbage.

Wang Peng stared at the iron coffin for a long time, and it took him a while to realize what Lu Zhou had said.

"... Wearing this?"

"Yeah."

Lu Zhou did not give much of an explanation, he put on a pair of gloves and walked forward.

Satellites that fell from the sky might contain a little bit of radiation, but they had been orbiting in space for a long time, which could cause radiation-related health damages.

Skyglow only spent 24 hours in orbit, and this thing was thrown out of the spacecraft at an altitude of 100 kilometers. Therefore, he didn't have to worry about any radioactive residue.

Lu Zhou didn't open the hatch just yet. He first observed the damage done to the parachute's connection port, as well as the damage to key components such as the high-temperature resistant ceramic shield and alloy protection plate. He then used the emergency switch on the outside of the capsule to open the hatch.

The sound of gas leaking was heard as the hatch slowly opened. A plastic dummy was lying in the protective cushion with its hands across its chest.

Yan Yan stared at the escape capsule and whispered, "You really do 'wear' it..."

Director Li didn't say anything. He merely stared at Lu Zhou's movement.

Lu Zhou didn't care about the people behind him. His attention was completely focused on the dummy lying on the air cushion. He took out his phone and connected the data capsule to the dummy. He then pressed his Bluetooth headset and spoke quietly.

"Xiao Ai, it's all yours now."

Soon a line of text popped up on the screen.

[Okay, Master! (๑•̀ㅂ•́)و✧]

The data transfer bar on the screen progressed quickly.

Various data, such as the temperature, pressure, G value, as well as the time and altitude changes, were all presented on the mobile phone screen. The phone automatically presented line graphs for these values.

Lu Zhou looked at the data and pressed the save button. He disconnected the data cable and plugged it into the capsule itself to copy its flight data.

“... Around 174 meters away from the original landing spot, an acceptable error.”

Lu Zhou looked at the data on his phone and smirked.

Roughly speaking, this escape capsule did its job perfectly. However, it wasn't too comfortable for the astronaut lying inside. This was due to the large G

values, which could cause vision loss or even coma. However, this could still save someone's life.

Also, these disadvantages could be corrected in future versions.

Director Li looked at Lu Zhou and quickly asked, "How is it? Does this thing work?"

Lu Zhou was in a good mood as he said, "It works, judging from the sensor data, if someone were actually sitting inside, they should be alive."

Director Li then quickly asked, "Are there strict requirements for the physical fitness of someone who wants to use the escape capsule?"

"Strict? Not too strict." Lu Zhou thought for a bit and said, "As long as they don't have heart disease or high blood pressure, after some training, they should be able to use this equipment. Depending on the individual, there might be some side effects, but there won't be permanent damage."

Director Li then asked, "Is it possible to use this to airdrop soldiers..."

Lu Zhou thought for a bit and smiled.

"It should be possible... but the cost is a bit high."

Director Li: "How much does this cost?"

Lu Zhou said, "Ten to twenty million USD."

This wasn't considered expensive for astronaut equipment, but it still wasn't cheap.

Using this to deliver special forces was still too expensive, not to mention it could only be used once.

Also, if they were to improve the capsule and use some kind of ion thruster deceleration technology, they would have to worry about keeping the equipment confidential.

However, mastering this technology was quite significant.

This meant that Chinese special forces could land at any corner of the earth within an hour... or even less. This equipment could be used for search and rescue, hostage, or terrorist situations.

Lu Zhou looked at Director Li and smiled.

“Let’s go, there’s nothing else to see here.”

Director Li was stunned. “That’s it?”

“Basically, my work here is done.” Lu Zhou looked at the jeep and said, “Next, we have to wait for Jinling researchers to come here and do a more comprehensive inspection of the landing area and the escape capsule... That might take a couple of days. After that, you guys will have to find a way to ship this thing back to Jinling.”

Director Li frowned and couldn’t help but mutter.

“You came all the way here for this?”

Anyone could have copied the data for you!

“I didn’t only come here for this.” Lu Zhou stared at the distant yellow sands outside the camp and said, “I mainly came here to examine the environment of this desert.”

Director Li paused for a second.

“Examine the environment?”

“Yeah,” Lu Zhou nodded and said, “for the location of China’s Biosphere 2!”

Chapter 712: Garden Plan

In the 1990s, the Americans tried to build a miniature artificial ecological system in the desert north of Tucson, Arizona. Its purpose was to conduct ecological and environmental research in a closed environment as well as to help humans understand how Earth operates by simulating its ecological environment.

This plan was originally proposed by a rugby player and received investments from several consortiums, including Rockefeller, totaling US\$150 million. It was quite a commotion at that time.

Unfortunately, the final experiment results weren't as sensational as the proposal. A year after the experimental team started their work at the Biosphere 2, they declared the project a failure. They had to withdraw from the project.

The only conclusion drawn from the experiment was that Earth might be the only suitable planet for humans.

Overall, this plan was undoubtedly a failure. Not only did Biosphere 2 fail to form a stable and independent ecosystem, but it was even transformed into an ecological hotel after the project was abandoned.

However, back then, this idea was quite groundbreaking. A lot of technologies were invented because of this project, which had been applied to many other fields.

Judging from the missions arranged by the system, there was a 90% chance that the third stage of the mission chain was to establish a permanent or semi-permanent research station on the Moon. Even though Lu Zhou hadn't completed the Moon landing yet, that didn't stop him from preparing for the future.

Not to mention that there were side missions in the first stage, such as "planting on the Moon".

Therefore, after some discussion with the experts from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the China National Space Administration, and the Ministry of Science and Technology, the "Garden" artificial biosphere project was born.

Compared to China's Biosphere 2, the "Garden" plan had a clearer goal, which was to pave the way for space colonization.

Based on a series of external factors such as climate and environment, the location of the Garden Biosphere A was chosen to be in the Dzoosotoyn Elisen Desert and at the center of the Junggar Basin. The biosphere would be contained in a semi-spherical building, and it would be completely isolated from the outside world.

Of course, because of various factors, Lu Zhou didn't plan on copying Biosphere 2's plan, which was to establish a complete ecosystem copy of Arizona. Instead, Lu Zhou's plan was to set "limited input of minerals, freshwater, and biological resources". The goal of his experiment was to reduce the input of resources by as much as possible.

Even though Lu Zhou had a specific implementation plan for this project, he wasn't personally responsible for this project. Instead, he chose to cooperate with several universities such as the Chinese Academy of Sciences and China Agricultural University. He also selected one person from China Agricultural University to be in charge of research...

After Lu Zhou stayed at the 150 Regiment Camp for the night, he met with Jinling researchers the next day. He gave them a brief explanation of the work. He received a call from China Agricultural University, which informed him that the researchers had arrived in Wushi.

Junggar Basin was quite far from Wushi, but Lu Zhou wasn't in a hurry. After lunch, Wang Peng drove Lu Zhou and an army guide around the desert area to examine the terrain around the area.

When it was almost night time, a desert-colored military jeep and water truck appeared on the desert horizon. They slowly approached the checkpoint.

Coincidentally, Lu Zhou just came back from his terrain examination. He got out of the car and walked toward the desert-colored jeep. When he walked up to the car, a slim, middle-aged man who was wearing glasses and a windproof coat walked out of the car while carrying a dirty rucksack.

The middle-aged man instantly recognized Lu Zhou. He threw his rucksack over his shoulder and smiled.

"Nice to meet you, Professor Lu! It's an honor!"

"You're too kind," Lu Zhou shook his hand and made an inviting gesture. "This isn't the place to talk, let's go inside."

Other than the guy carrying survival necessities and food, there were two other PhD students in the car. They didn't look very good, and it seemed like they didn't sleep well.

Due to the strong wind and sand outside, everyone in the group was tired. Lu Zhou invited them to a warehouse and went to find the tea set. Yan Yan, who was wearing a military green casual outfit, walked in the warehouse.

“The water is boiling, go sit down, I’ll help you.”

Lu Zhou nodded toward Yan Yan and said, “Thanks so much.”

“No worries.”

Yan Yan flipped her hair and poured a cup of tea for each of the four people sitting in the room. She then left the teapot on the table, turned around, and walked out of the door.

Lu Zhou was sitting at a desk. He pulled out a resume and looked at the middle-aged professor, who was sitting professionally on the sofa. He compared the professor with the photo on the resume.

The professor was somewhat embarrassed by Lu Zhou judging him, so he coughed and asked, “Is there a problem?”

“Nothing, I’m just confirming.” Lu Zhou smirked and put down the resume. He looked at the professor and said, “Welcome to Dzoosotoyn Elisen Desert.”

The Agricultural University professor sitting in front of Lu Zhou was called Hu Yang. He had a down-to-earth and diligent demeanor.

Lu Zhou hadn’t met him prior to this; he had only seen Hu Yang’s photo on the resume, and he had a brief understanding of Hu Yang’s research direction and academic background.

Generally speaking, his resume was relatively standard. Just like most scholars who were in unpopular research areas, he wasn’t in the Changjiang Scholars Program, nor did he have a chance of becoming an academician... But this wasn’t the stuff Lu Zhou cared about.

After all, it would be strange for an agricultural researcher to have a stacked resume.

After Lu Zhou briefly looked at his resume, he decided to let him manage the project.

The reason was that not only was this area Hu Yang's expertise, but Hu Yang was able to stay in this research area for many years, which meant he had a certain amount of persistence and tenacity.

This job was very difficult, and one would have to stay in the hamada desert for years, which would take away their youth and life.

Other than him, no one else applied here.

Therefore, Lu Zhou didn't have a lot of choices.

After two minutes of small talk, Lu Zhou put down the teacup and went into the main topic.

"I'll skip the formalities, I'm sure the Agricultural University has already told you about the Garden project."

"Yeah," Hu Yang nodded and said in a serious tone, "I received the project two days ago, and I immediately came here."

"Thanks for coming in such short notice."

"No worries," Hu Yang smiled nervously and said, "I have to travel to test fields all the time, whether it's the desert or city, it's the same to me!"

Lu Zhou nodded and continued, "It's admirable that you think that way. It's not easy to make a decision like this, you must have thought about it for a long time. But I still have to emphasize some things. This project is important to China's future aerospace industry. It will not be easy."

Lu Zhou paused for a second before he continued, "Before you decide to take on this scientific research project, I hope you know that for the next few years, or even decades, you will be isolated from the world, and I'm afraid you'll only be able to take a vacation once or twice a year."

The two PhD students sitting next to Hu Yang held their breath, but they soon relaxed.

Even though they were in a difficult field, they didn't have to work as hard as their boss.

After all, they would graduate in a few years. At most, they would only stay here for two years.

As for Hu Yang, his expression didn't change.

He nodded and spoke without hesitation.

"I've thought it through."

Lu Zhou looked at him solemnly.

"Then... please take care of this project."

Chapter 713: Academician Primary Elections

The entire Garden project was divided into three phases.

The first phase of the project was the foundation. Welded stainless steel was used to isolate the ground of the enclosed area. The second phase of the project was mainly regarding the construction part of it. A six-grid steel skeleton would be supported by compression-resistant steel for the entire hemispherical artificial biosphere. As for the third phase of the project, the hemisphere would be equipped with double-layered special glass, where the outer layer would be coated with a special coating material to control the temperature.

There would also be biosphere B, C, D, etc. This would be to simulate other special outer-space environments, such as Mars. It could also be used for developing life support devices for people to use on other planets.

Because any small amount of interference could lead to unpredictable results in the experiment, the biosphere must be built in a life-restricted zone, away from living things.

Fortunately, China was quite big, so it was easy to find a place like this.

There wasn't a better place for this artificial biosphere than the middle of the desert in the basin.

It took three days for Lu Zhou to inspect the nearby geological environment. After consulting Professor Hu and other geologists, Lu Zhou finally made a decision and chose the location of the Garden Biosphere to be near a road and a sand dune.

The total investment of the project was 1.5 billion yuan; 1.3 billion of which would be supported by 41 different government project funds, and the remaining 200 million yuan would be provided by Star Sky Technology. This funding was small compared to the entire moon landing project, but it was still significant.

After Lu Zhou finished planning the general outline for the Garden project, he didn't stay in the desert for too long. He still had things to do in Jinling. The next day he left the camp and boarded a train in Wushi, returning to Jinling.

Coincidentally, the second he got off the train, Lu Zhou received emails from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Academy of Engineering, and Jin Ling University. He read that his name was on the primary election list for the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Academy of Engineering.

Lu Zhou looked at these three emails and didn't know what to do.

His original idea was to be an academician at the Academy of Science. After all, he was a mathematician. However, he didn't expect that the old folks at the Academy of Engineering nominated his name.

According to the academician selection process, after the recommendation stage, the committees of the academic departments will review and select the candidates.

This selection process was standardized; it had to fairly and objectively evaluate one's scientific results.

As long as someone didn't violate academic conduct or break major laws, they should be able to pass the review process. After the review process was the anonymous voting stage. As long as the person received more than two-thirds of the votes, and there was space in the faculty, they would be elected.

The election results would then be checked and confirmed by the standing committees of the respective academic departments, which was the so-called "final review". After being reviewed and approved by the leadership team of the Academician Assembly, all of the successful academicians would be notified in writing.

Jin University hadn't had a new academician for many years, and the few academicians from the physics department were more than 70 years old. This

time, Lu Zhou's name was nominated for two different academies; this was undoubtedly something worthy of Jin University's celebration.

Even though it was worthy of celebration, Lu Zhou didn't put much attention to the academician selection. He replied to the congratulation emails from Wang Zengguang, Li Jiangang, and several other old academicians from the Fuyang Institute Construction Material Laboratory.

There was no doubt that these people were the ones who nominated him.

Even though he didn't really care about the nomination, he still had to thank the people who nominated him.

Lu Zhou placed most of his attention on the space shuttle.

Even though the Skyglow launch was successful, there were still many things that needed to be improved.

The next launch was scheduled to be before the Chinese New Year, which was around two months away. He didn't have any time to waste.

Even though Lu Zhou casually placed the academician selection matter aside, a lot of other people were tangled with this issue.

Lu Zhou was in Jinling, conducting a meeting with the Skyglow designers. On the other hand, Academician Wang Shicheng, the director of the mathematical physics department, who was responsible for the academician elections, was inside the Chinese Academy of Sciences human resource department office.

Director Qian, who was sitting behind his desk, stopped writing and asked his assistant to pour a cup of tea for Academician Wang.

"What brings you here today?"

Wang Shicheng sipped some tea and sighed.

"What else can it be?"

"Let me guess..." Director Qian smiled and said, "It's because of Lu Zhou?"

Wang Shicheng didn't say anything. He placed the teacup on the table and spoke.

“This matter is not easy to deal with.”

The academician elections were a troublesome matter for the standing committees of various academic departments.

The Chinese academic community was relatively isolated and had its own system. For most Chinese-grown scholars, it was quite difficult for them to obtain an international honor that was higher than the academician title. Therefore, the title of academician was the ultimate goal of 99% of domestic scholars.

Having the title of an academician doubled their power and status, and they could basically work at any research institute or university they wanted.

Not to mention that there were only a small number of academician spots available.

Therefore, there was a lot of fierce competition between the candidates.

However...

Lu Zhou's situation was different.

All of the candidates left him alone. In theory, this should be a good thing. Everyone would vote for him, and the title would be his.

However, the thing was that this guy was too nutty. He was on the primary election list for both the Academy of Engineering and the Academy of Science.

It went without saying that the chief designer of the fusion energy project should be in the Department of Energy. If everything went well, Lu Zhou would be the department's head after a few years, or at least the director.

After that, the problem was that, since the Academy of Engineering was definitely going to give him the academician title, was there still a point for the Academy of Science to give him one as well?

There had been scholars who held two academician titles, but to be awarded two in the same year...

That was a bit ridiculous.

There were many accomplished old professors still waiting in line, and some of them had produced major research results. It was a bit inappropriate to let someone else take two academician titles at once.

Wang Shicheng looked at Director Qian, who was sitting behind his desk, and said, "I heard that the people from the Academy of Engineering also elected his name. I wonder if we should ask them to stay low this year and elect Lu Zhou next time instead. This way, Lu Zhou won't receive both titles at once."

"Oh," Director Qian smiled and said, "then tell me, what young talent from Yan University is a better choice than Professor Lu?"

Wang Shicheng didn't say anything.

This was the other thing that was giving him trouble.

Deferring Lu Zhou for a term was a good idea...

But the Fields Medal and the Nobel Prize were too big to be ignored. Not to mention the Ling Yun medal. Lu Zhou couldn't be replaced. Forget about the domestic community, there wasn't anyone in the world that was a better candidate than him.

"I don't know what to do, so I'm here discussing with you. We'll do whatever you think is appropriate," Wang Shicheng said.

Director Qian shook his head and said, "I think you're overcomplicating this issue."

Wang Shicheng: "Overcomplicating?"

"That's right." Director Qian nodded and said, "This academician title isn't important for him. His opinions are highly regarded by the government. The academician title is at most the icing on the cake."

There was a flash in Wang Shicheng's eyes, and he said, "You mean... It's fine if we defer it until the next term?"

Director Qian: "No I mean... This doesn't matter to him, but it matters a lot to us."

Wang Shicheng: "..."

Chapter 714: Blueprint for a Tiltrotor Aerospaceplane

After the Skyglow launch, Lu Zhou moved the space shuttle assembly center research department to the Jinling Institute for Advanced Study, turning it into its separate “Aerospace Science and Technology Institute”. This research institute was responsible for researching aerospace-related technologies, including ion thruster propulsion systems.

Because there were many top-secret projects, the building of the institute had the highest level of security.

Unlike other institutes at the Jinling Institute for Advanced Study, the Aerospace Science and Technology Institute’s main customer was the Star Sky Technology space shuttle assembly center. The vast majority of funding also came directly from Star Sky Technology’s account. This was different from the Jinling Institute of Computational Materials, which received funding from other companies.

The director of the Aerospace Science and Technology Institute was obviously Hou Guang, the designer of Skyglow.

Because of his past experience in the 863 Program, there wasn’t anyone else more suitable for this position than him. There wasn’t anyone else in the entire research institute who was more familiar with the structure and overall design of Skyglow. Asking him to coordinate the project teams was undoubtedly a wise decision.

Hou Guang lived up to Lu Zhou’s expectations. During the time when Lu Zhou wasn’t in Jinling, not only did he speedily complete the relocation of the research institute, but he didn’t stop researching.

On one hand, he organized technicians to modularly dismantle the Skyglow aerospaceplane, On the other hand, he evaluated the damaged equipment areas and systematically performed analysis on the test flight data. He summarized all of the data in a 20-page report.

After Lu Zhou spent two days reading the report and finished his PowerPoint presentation for the conference. He called Hou Guang and had a meeting with the people from the Aerospace Science and Technology Institute.

“First of all, I would like to thank you all for your hard work. I can’t speak on behalf of this country, but as the president of the Institute for Advanced Study, I would like to give my most sincere thanks.”

After the brief opening remarks, there was a round of applause in the conference room.

Lu Zhou nodded and the applause subsided.

He cleared his throat and gently placed the 20-page report on the multimedia desk.

“I have already read the contents of the report.

“The Skyglow design was successful, but I think there are many areas that can be improved.

“Looking at the analysis of the overhaul, the wing and the belly of the spacecraft received more heat than we expected during re-entry. Our brilliant engineers deduced that the main reason is that the spacecraft entered the dense part of the atmosphere too quickly.

“I’ve thought about this problem for a long time, and I have also exchanged opinions with experts. I think that because ion thruster is relatively ‘stable’ compared to chemical engines, we can abandon the ‘rocket’ design of traditional chemical rockets. We can move four of the ion thrusters to the wings of the shuttle, leaving only one main engine at the tail.

“Also, we should add a pair of bi-axle ailerons to the aerospaceplane. This can be used to suspend and control the engine’s ejection direction.”

Whispers were heard in the conference room; a lot of people looked surprised.

This design was nothing novel. It referenced the tiltrotor design, which had the advantages of both fixed-wing aircraft and vertical take-off aircraft. Even though this type of design wasn’t rare, this was the first time someone had heard of using this design in the field of aerospace.

After Lu Zhou paused for a second, he continued, "By improving the design, we can use the deceleration engine to decelerate upon re-entry and balance out the effect of gravity. We can reduce the flight speed before the aircraft reaches the dense section of the atmosphere, which reduces friction."

After hearing Lu Zhou's explanation, Hou Guang stood up and spoke.

"This design is interesting... I will study the feasibility with my team."

"I've already studied the feasibility, but it was simulated." Lu Zhou smiled and clicked the mouse. He opened a folder and presented a 3D composition image on the projector.

He paused for a second and continued, "This is for reference only."

Shining on the center of the curtain was a professional conceptual graphic of this tiltrotor aerospaceplane. Next to it were the altitude of the aircraft, the atmosphere density, speed, and various other parameters, which were all presented in a graph.

These calculations were all done by Lu Zhou alone.

Xiao Ai helped him with the models and the flight simulation.

Hou Guang stared at the image on the projector and adjusted his glasses. He spoke in astonishment.

"Which... company's software is this?"

He had been in this industry for many years, and he had worked with many companies that made simulation software. However, he had never seen such precise physical dynamics simulation before... In his opinion, this software was perfect.

Lu Zhou didn't explain anything. Instead, he said, "I asked people from the Information Technology Research Institute to code it for me. I'll send you a copy after the meeting."

The second Lu Zhou finished speaking, his phone in his pocket began to vibrate.

Lu Zhou knew that it was Xiao Ai complaining.

However, there was no way Lu Zhou could disclose Xiao Ai's existence and give it credit.

After hearing Lu Zhou's explanation, Hou Guang mouth was wide open

Even though he wasn't sure what kind of person could make such a perfect simulation program, this program would make his work a lot easier.

Hou Guang said, "Forget about the software... If we move the engine from the tail to the wing, it will impact the failure rate. If we're just doing this to improve maneuverability, isn't this a bit excessive?"

Lu Zhou shook his head and said, "It's not just maneuverability. With this new design, we can significantly reduce the speed of an aerospaceplane at altitudes above 30 kilometers. Not only will this reduce the risk of re-entry, but it will also reduce each mission's maintenance costs.

"As for the failure rate, there are definitely risks, but I think we can solve them by improving the design."

Even though this sounded simple on paper, Lu Zhou was well aware that it was no piece of cake to make this blueprint a reality.

Adding two electric drive shafts to the aileron wings would significantly increase structural risk on the wing itself.

Also, in order to maintain coordination between the two engines, he also needed to develop a more sophisticated electric drive system to prevent the engine from deviating from the original course due to direction adjustment errors.

There was also the crucial junction materials, as well as the control system. These things all needed to be improved.

It was no exaggeration to say that this was as difficult as conducting the Skyglow project from scratch.

Hou Guang frowned and raised his hand. He then asked, "What about the bidding projects at the State Administration for National Defense and China National Space Administration?"

“We’ll use Skyglow to bid,” Lu Zhou said. “This is our new goal for next year. We’re in no rush. We have enough time to prepare.”

After hearing this, Hou Guang was relieved.

At last, Professor Lu set more realistic deadlines.

The manned moon landing project was happening soon. The State Administration for National Defense and China National Space Administration would announce their bidding results soon. Conducting new research was not a good idea, but it would be fine to take on this project next year.

Since Lu Zhou and Hou Guang were in agreement, there was nothing left to debate about.

Lu Zhou continued to present the PowerPoint, and he briefly talked about the new aerospaceplane design.

The engineer who was taking notes raised his hand.

“I have a question.”

Lu Zhou said, “Go ahead.”

Engineer: “What should the new design be called? Skyglow 2?”

Using the old name didn’t sound nice.

Not to mention that the new aerospaceplane was unrecognizable from the old one.

What should I call it...

Lightning? The escape capsule is called that already.

Meteor? Sounds a bit tacky.

Lu Zhou contemplated for a while, and a light bulb suddenly went off in his head.

“... We’ll just call it Starlight.”

Chapter 715: Waiting For Me

After the meeting finished, the Starlight aerospaceplane project was green-lighted, with Hou Guang in charge.

The days quickly went by, and it was soon the end of January.

After the long wait, the State Administration for National Defense, China National Space Administration, and other government units jointly announced the winning results of the manned moon landing bid.

Just like everyone had expected, the 50-ton low-Earth orbit delivery capable Skyglow won the bidding competition. This was the most important project of the entire manned moon landing project—the space launch vehicle.

Actually... the bet didn't even matter anymore.

After seeing Skyglow's excellent performance, anyone with a normal IQ would make the correct decision.

With 10 billion yuan of funding, Star Sky Technology's urgent need for cash was quickly resolved.

According to the contract with Alibaba, Star Sky Technology repaid all of its debt and used the remaining funds to start making final preparations for the upcoming manned moon landing plan.

As for the lunar module, command module, service module, extravehicular spacesuit, lunar rover, moon communication satellite, and other components necessary for the moon landing project, these bids were won by dozens of other aerospace companies, such as China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation.

Many of these projects had already been completed. For example, the most important command module and the lunar module were completed in December last year. The big and powerful China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation had already displayed module samples.

As long as they had a large-thrust rocket with a delivery capacity of more than 24 tons, the moon landing project could be started.

Judging from Skyglow's current carrying capacity, there was no doubt that this condition was met.

After some high-level discussion between departments, the moon landing launch was set to be a day before 2021 Chinese New Year.

There was less than a month until Chinese New Year. Star Sky Technology had to discuss and formulate specific launch plans with other companies that participated in the moon landing project.

This time, state funding was quite sufficient. The eye-catching performance of Skyglow during the test flight greatly boosted the confidence of domestic aerospace companies. All of the participating parties were moving forward with great momentum, preparing to give the country a special gift on Chinese New Year.

Early morning at the end of January.

Sun Chengping, CEO of China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation, arrived in Jinling with several other experts.

A black sedan parked quietly at the entrance of the space shuttle assembly center. Sun Chengping got out of the car and reached out his right hand enthusiastically.

"Nice to meet you, Professor Lu, I've heard many good things about you."

"You're too kind, CEO Sun." Lu Zhou smiled and released his hand. He made an inviting gesture and said, "Let's talk later, follow me first."

The command module and the lunar module of this launch were both completed by China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation. There was a very important issue to be resolved. This issue was the compatibility of the lunar module and the command module with the Skyglow aerospaceplane.

Whether the equipment could smoothly exit the cabin, whether the equipment could be successfully recovered, and whether there would be satellite interference during the mission... These issues had to be discussed and researched by professionals. If they didn't solve these problems, the spacecraft might not be able to come back from the Moon, which would be pretty awkward.

The group of people followed Lu Zhou, and they soon came to the giant object parked in the shuttle center.

The experts from the Air Force Equipment Research Institute were shocked.

Especially when they saw the five ion thruster propulsion engines.

The bright metal shell represented the dreams of every aerospace scientific researcher...

Sun Chengping was stunned for a couple of seconds. He then asked emotionally, "This is Skyglow?"

Lu Zhou smiled and said, "First time seeing it?"

"Not quite." CEO Sun shook his head and said, "I've seen it a few times on TV, but it wasn't as shocking on the TV screen."

Lu Zhou smiled and said, "Do you want to sit inside? I promise it's more exciting."

Sun Chengping coughed and said, "... I'm good, I'm scared of heights."

On the other hand, next to Skyglow, experts from the Institute for Advanced Study had already started to talk to the China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation experts.

"... What is the highest carrying capacity for an Earth-Moon transfer orbit?"

Hou Guang: "The maximum is theoretically 25 tons."

"25 tons?" An expert from the China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation asked, "What plan do you think is the best?"

Hou Guang: "So far, the most reliable way is still lunar orbit rendezvous. Our suggestion is to integrate the command module to Skyglow and only extend the lunar module after entering lunar orbit. This will decrease the recovery process risks."

There were four main methods for landing on the Moon—direct takeoff, lunar orbit rendezvous, earth orbit rendezvous, and Earth-Moon orbit rendezvous. In terms of safety, methods were ranked 1>4>2>3, and in terms of rocket performance, it ranked 2>4>3>1.

In fact, the Apollo spacecraft chose method 4, which was the lunar orbit rendezvous. The entire spacecraft was launched to lunar orbit, where one section—the lunar module—landed on the Moon, while the other—the command module—remained in orbit. After performing tasks on the Moon, the lunar module returned to orbit and entered Earth together with the command module.

After hearing Hou Guang's explanation, the engineer nodded and rubbed his chin.

"Integrating the command module on the spacecraft? Interesting idea, we will consider it..."

Sun Chengping looked at the engineers standing next to Skyglow as he spoke emotionally, "I didn't expect that I would be able to witness Chinese footprints on the Moon."

Lu Zhou smiled and said, "The Moon is only a beginning; we will go even farther in the future."

Sun Chengping looked at Lu Zhou and asked in a confused tone, "Can I ask a question?"

Lu Zhou said, "What question?"

Sun Chengping: "Just out of curiosity, you have always claimed to be a mathematician, but your contributions in other fields have far exceeded your achievements in mathematics."

Lu Zhou smiled and said, "Is that so?"

Sun Chengping: "Isn't it?"

Lu Zhou thought for a while and said, "Whether it is controllable fusion or aerospace, these futuristic technologies will be developed by society sooner or later. All people need is a lot of resources, time, trial, and error. However, mathematics is a completely different beast. Even if a mathematical tool is invented, if there is no one to use that tool, the mathematics problems will never be solved."

Sun Chengping smiled and said, "Then I'm even more confused."

“Confused about what?”

Sun Chengping: “If you think mathematics is so important, why are you interested in aerospace?”

Lu Zhou: “Are you interested in my motivation behind researching this stuff?”

Sun Chengping nodded.

“I guess.”

Lu Zhou smiled and answered in a relaxed tone.

“That isn’t important.

“The important thing is that the problem is here, and it’s waiting for me to solve it.”

Chapter 716: White House Countermeasure

The center of the Junggar Basin.

A row of heavy industrial equipment was on the Dzoosotoyn Elisen Desert highway, and they were currently being driven deep into the desert.

After the Garden plan was completed, the funding from the Ministry of Science and Technology quickly arrived. The second the construction bidding was over, the construction equipment was moved from Wushi to the construction site.

Rows of mobile homes had been set up on the construction site near the military site. Workers wearing small yellow hats quickly finished loading and unloading the equipment and supplies. They set up basic living facilities near the mobile home. Heavy construction equipment had already begun to work on the site.

Every big project had to start from the foundation; Biosphere A was no exception.

Before setting up a reinforced steel frame, the construction company would first hollow out this area and dig a large pit with a depth of three to four meters. After that, they would insert steel rods into the ground, pour cement, and finally lay down the stainless steel plates.

Professor Hu, who was wearing a hard hat, stood nearby while looking at the construction site. He meticulously read the engineering drawings and construction plans in his hand and listened to the person in charge of construction talk to him.

“... This is our construction plan. Right now, we are laying the foundation. If there are any problems, feel free to tell me. I’ll try my best to solve them.”

Professor Hu carefully read the drawings and blueprint, and after making sure that there were no mistakes, he nodded.

“Should be fine, when can it be completed?”

The person in charge stared at the distant sand horizon and said, “The first phase should take three months, and all three phases should take at least six months, at most eight months. It depends on the weather. If there are sandstorms every day, then the construction is going to be delayed.”

It wasn’t just the sandstorm.

There were also sudden high temperatures and other extreme weather.

There were many unpredictable factors that could happen on a desert construction site.

“The speed is not important; it doesn’t matter if it takes longer.” Hu Yang handed the drawings back to the person in charge and said in a serious tone, “Please make sure to focus on quality, as a small mistake can fail the whole experiment.”

“Don’t worry.” The person in charge tapped their cigarette and said, “This is a national-level project, and our quality is guaranteed. Otherwise, our a*ses would be on the line.”

If they decided to cut corners on a project like this, their careers would be over.

The construction company had to put in 120% effort.

While the Garden construction was going on, news regarding Biosphere A spread like wildfire.

Even though the Dzoosotoyn Elisen Desert was considered a classified zone, it was impossible to keep a huge project like this a secret.

In fact, there was no need to keep the Garden project confidential at all. After all, there wasn't any national defense technology involved. Fields like biology, ecology, meteorology, hydrology, etc belonged to the field of natural sciences. Therefore, they had to cooperate with other international research institutes.

The news that China was constructing an artificial biosphere quickly spread throughout the international academic community, and it caused a huge sensation in the environmental protection organization and the scientific community.

Ever since America's Biosphere 2 program failed, people had always been talking about building a Biosphere 3. However, no one wanted to invest in this high-risk, low-return project.

There was no way the Americans would invest in this area again.

But now, China was willing to pay for a biosphere, built in the center of the Junggar Basin. This was undoubtedly fantastic news for scholars who were studying artificial ecosystems.

After all, China's investment in the natural sciences had always been limited. International scholars gained much respect for China after China decided to invest so much into the research of natural sciences.

Interestingly enough, unlike the international academic community, many major international media outlets had more nuanced opinions.

Some people thought that this was yet another brave challenge initiated by mankind to control nature. Others had tried to relate this with China's recent actions in aerospace and determined that it was very likely that China was trying to pave the way for space development.

The New York Times and The Washington Times used phrases such as "military involvement" and "unclear intentions" to describe China's project.

They didn't want to give China the title of "leading in space development". The media outlets told scholars to participate in this project cautiously.

Even though these opinions were a bit absurd, they still attracted NASA's attention.

Or rather, NSC's attention.

Three years ago, after the United States announced its plan to return to the Moon, Trump signed an executive order to reestablish the National Space Council.

The difference this time was that the re-established National Space Council was directly under the president's office. This was similar to the National Security Council, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Intelligence Advisory Board.

Obviously, America had demonstrated its new interest in space.

Inside a conference room in the white house.

The president gathered some of the senior officials from the relevant departments. He slammed his hands on the desk and spoke solemnly.

"The Chinese have displayed a considerable amount of interest in the development of outer space resources. We must examine our own space program. It doesn't matter what we achieved in the past! We have to maintain our advantage in aerospace!"

A voice was heard in the conference room.

"Can I give my two cents?"

The president looked at the person and nodded.

"Of course."

Everyone in the room stared at the NASA director, who stood up slowly and spoke.

"China is still trying to catch up to us, so I don't think we need to worry. Of course, I'm not saying we should sit on our a*s. We have to increase our own pace to keep our lead."

The NASA director continued to speak.

“I propose that we continue our plan on returning to the Moon, but we should also set new plans, such as Mars.”

The president frowned.

“Mars?”

Whispers were heard around the conference room.

The NASA director ignored the whispers as he nodded and spoke in a serious manner.

“That’s right, you heard me. We have the ability to explore Mars. We have many excellent aerospace companies that are capable of doing so. We only need to provide them with some help and combine their powers together.”

He paused for a second and raised his voice.

“I propose to launch the Ares program!

“If they really think they can surpass us just by walking on the Moon, we will send our men to Mars!”

Chapter 717: Ares Project

[Shocked! American Begins “Ares” Project, Their Goal Is Mars!]

Inside the office at the end of the corridor, Jin Ling University mathematics department.

Lu Zhou was sitting at his desk drinking coffee while browsing the Internet. He happened to read this eye-catching headline.

After he read the full article, he shook his head and smiled.

“It looks like the Americans are intrigued.”

According to the news article, NASA would begin the “Ares” Mars-colonization project within this year, and they would dismantle the entire project into

several sub-projects and allocate them to Space-X, Blue Origin, and other aerospace companies around the United States and the world.

According to the disclosed information, the entire project was divided into three parts. The first part was to deliver life-supporting machines to the surface of Mars.

After they confirmed that the life-supporting machines would work properly, the second launch plan would begin.

Which was, to launch a manned spacecraft to Mars and send 2-3 astronauts to prepare for future colonization plans.

Lu Zhou was surprised to see this sudden announcement from NASA. He was shocked that the United States Congress approved the budget so quickly.

However, he also knew why this was happening.

Not only had China implemented a series of aerospace policies, but Skyglow's ion thruster propulsion technology had been wildly successful. This definitely triggered the United States.

Not to mention the Garden project and the manned moon landing project happening in mid-February. Not only did the White House witness China's determination to explore space resources, but the White House was also frightened by it.

After all, space technology wasn't just about national defenses; it was also about honor and glory.

Therefore, NASA didn't have any problems with the United States Congressional Budget Office.

On the other hand, even though NASA was being overly ambitious, Lu Zhou still had to admit that the United States was a strong aerospace opponent.

In the 1960s, they completed the initial flight for Saturn V, with a low-Earth orbit carrying capacity of up to 140 tons and a success rate of 13/13. As a substitute for the Saturn V, the SLS system was known as the strongest launch vehicle in history.

In contrast, the Long March V, which China flew for the first time in 2016, only had a low-Earth orbit carrying capacity of 25 tons and a 1/2 success rate.

Even though the ion thruster propulsion system used by Skyglow was a huge achievement, the low-Earth orbit carrying capacity was only 50 tons. Due to the relatively lower thrust from the ion thrusters, it was very difficult to increase the carrying capacity.

More importantly, he wasn't the only one researching ion thrusters.

Before he left Princeton, the PPPL was working on the development of Hall-effect thrusters for deep space navigation beyond the Moon...

Lu Zhou put down his coffee cup. He was about to end his lunch break and get back to work when he heard footsteps from outside the room. Soon after, he heard knocking sounds.

Before Lin Yuxiang could get up and open the door, a clear voice traveled through the office.

"Long time no see, Professor Lu."

"Secretary Yang?" Lu Zhou stopped writing and looked toward the office door. He stood up and asked, "Why are you here?"

Secretary Yang was the second highest-ranked official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Lu Zhou briefly interacted with him at the state's dinner. The Blue Hall party in Stockholm and the international controllable fusion conferences invitations were sent by him, on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to Lu Zhou.

Unfortunately, Lu Zhou wasn't able to go.

"I'm here to see you." The old man smiled and walked into the office. "I purposely came during lunch break. I'm not interrupting your work, am I?"

"No, please sit down... Lin Yuxiang, get us some tea."

"Okay!"

Assistant Lin had worked at the office for more than a year, so she knew exactly what to do.

Within five minutes, a cup of hot tea and a cup of instant coffee were placed on the coffee table.

Secretary Yang sat across from Lu Zhou. He took a sip before saying, "This is good tea."

Lu Zhou smiled awkwardly and didn't say anything.

He didn't know what to say.

After all, he normally didn't drink tea. Every year, he would bring back some tea from Beijing for the mathematics department professors.

The tea in the office was actually cheap tea bought in the supermarket...

Secretary Yang put the teacup down and looked at Lu Zhou. He then smiled and said, "You like coffee?"

Lu Zhou coughed and said, "Kind of, tea is too weak for me. I like the strong taste of the coffee."

Secretary Yang smiled and said, "Haha, I knew you liked coffee, that's why I brought some of the coffee beans my international friends gave me."

Lu Zhou quickly said, "Don't do this. I'm not used to grinding coffee beans. I only drink instant coffee."

"You have quite a unique taste. Okay then, I'll keep the coffee beans for myself." Secretary Yang smiled and shook his head. He paused for a second and said, "The reason why I came to Jinling is that there's an important diplomatic summit here. Also, I wanted to ask you some questions on behalf of the Communist Party of China."

Lu Zhou put down the cup of coffee and looked surprised.

Ask me some questions?

What questions?

"It's regarding the recent rumors about the Garden project. You must have heard them." Secretary Yang paused for a second and added, "The international rumors."

Lu Zhou nodded and said, "I've heard some... Why?"

Secretary Yang waved his hand and said, "It's nothing big. It's just regarding the international academic community. Two days ago, the International Union of Biological Sciences and International Council for Science sent us letters. They want to participate in our artificial biosphere program."

Lu Zhou vaguely knew what was going on. He nodded thoughtfully and asked, "What does the state want?"

"The state hasn't decided, but it hasn't rejected the offer either." Secretary Yang looked at Lu Zhou and said, "The state is in a dilemma. Even though we welcome international scholars to participate in this project, this project is related to aerospace. The risks involved are difficult to assess. Since I happened to be in Jinling, the higher-ups want me to ask for your opinions."

He solemnly looked at Lu Zhou and continued, "What do you think we should do?"

Chapter 718: Space Plant Unit

After hearing Secretary Yang's question, Lu Zhou paused for a second. He couldn't help but smile.

"If they want to participate, then we should let them participate. Do you really need to ask me about this?"

Secretary Yang said in a serious manner, "But what about confidentiality?"

Lu Zhou shook his head and spoke.

"There's no need to be so nervous. The Garden project is different from STAR-2. There's nothing to keep confidential. If we receive help from international organizations, a lot of problems will become a lot easier to deal with."

Back in the day, the Biosphere 2 project created a large number of advanced technologies such as “temperature control systems”, and it also trained a large number of outstanding ecology and biology scholars.

Even though the Biosphere 2 project failed in the end, the experience and the knowledge gained were valuable.

Not to mention that people had been begging for a “Biosphere 3” project. These past scholars had summarized their failures, and they were ready to challenge this futuristic scientific project again. Therefore, there was no reason why the Garden project should exclude these talents.

Even though there might be a chance of espionage, the risks were acceptable.

Secretary Yang rubbed his chin and said, “So what you’re saying is, we should let the international scholars participate?”

Lu Zhou nodded and said, “I strongly recommend doing this, not just the Garden project, but we should cooperate with the international community for other projects, like the manned moon project. As long as it doesn’t involve sensitive technologies.”

This reduced the surveillance of other countries on China’s aerospace industry. Also, it could attract more talents to do research in China, or even stay there long-term.

Also, China could focus on cooperating with its ally countries.

This was extremely beneficial for enhancing China’s influence in the international academic community.

Lu Zhou was well aware of this, but Secretary Yang, who was from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wasn’t aware.

After hearing Lu Zhou’s explanation, he went silent for a couple of seconds. He then stood up from the sofa.

“Your opinion is very valuable. I will convey it to the higher-ups.”

Lu Zhou: “Are you leaving? Let’s have dinner or something?”

“No, thanks. I still have to go back.” Secretary Yang smiled and said, “Let’s have dinner some other time. I’ll treat you in Beijing.”

Lu Zhou smiled and walked him out of the office.

China had plenty of experience in large-scale scientific research projects, but they lacked experience in large-scale international projects. This cooperation would be a great opportunity.

Lu Zhou sat back down at his desk and took out a couple of blank paper from his drawer. He contemplated for a second before writing down his opinion, which was from the perspective of a scholar, on this matter.

Scientific research was inevitably going to be globalized.

Just like the already globalized manufacturing industry, as humans’ understanding of nature deepened, huge scientific research projects would no longer be taken on by one country alone.

Whoever took on the most responsibility in these cooperation projects would lead the future...

The tip of the pen smoothly glided across the paper as he quickly finished writing five pages.

Lu Zhou read the letter from start to finish. Satisfied, he nodded. He then shoved it in his pocket and planned on mailing it later.

At this moment, he still didn’t know that this letter would have profound impacts on Asia and the entire world’s politics.

In a sense, this letter had more impact than controllable fusion...

Lu Zhou leaned back on his chair and contemplated on whether or not he should order takeout. His phone on his desk suddenly began to vibrate.

He picked up the phone and saw that Chen Yushan was calling. He stood up from his chair and picked up the call while walking out to the corridor.

The moment the phone connected, he heard a familiar and pleasant voice travel through the phone.

“The China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation just called me. Their plant growth unit that they designed in cooperation with Agricultural University has been completed. They can deliver to our launch site in a week.”

Lu Zhou had a look of surprise on his face.

“Already finished? This soon?”

The plant growth unit wasn't a sub-project in the government manned moon project. It was a private project conducted by Star Sky Technology. The reason why Lu Zhou made this arrangement was obviously because of the “Take Control of the Earth and Moon” system mission chain.

The first phase of the mission chain had two interesting mission branches. One was the deployment of a 10 square meters unmanned planting module on the surface of the Moon, and the other was the breeding and observation of ten mice on the Moon.

Since the Moon landing project was happening soon, Lu Zhou asked the China National Space Administration to green light this project.

After receiving Lu Zhou's application, the China National Space Administration quickly approved the project.

Skyglow's Earth-Moon transfer orbit had a carrying capacity of 25 tons. After subtracting the 17 tons required for the moon landing program, there was still 8 tons of carrying capacity left remaining. This 8-ton carrying capacity was going to be wasted, so it would be better for them to make use out of it.

As long as Lu Zhou didn't apply to go on the Moon himself, China National Space Administration would agree with anything.

The application happened in July or August last year. After Lu Zhou received approval from the China National Space Administration, he immediately contacted the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Agricultural University, and the Research Institute of Technical Biology and Agricultural Engineering for the space plant growth unit project.

Even though the name sounded fancy, it was actually just an automated plantation device. In order to reduce the size, the growth medium was separated from the hardware, with a foldable design. It wasn't even considered “high tech”.

Even then, being able to research and produce the device within six months, with less than 10 million yuan of funding, was quite impressive. That was why Lu Zhou was so surprised.

“Not as fast as your spacecraft building. It’s been almost six months.” Chen Yushan smirked and said, “Just like you requested, the plant growth unit is using hydroponics technology. After the device is fully unfolded and the culture medium is filled, the planting area is exactly ten square meters and the total weight is about 5 tons. As long as there is sufficient power, the stored nutrients can catalyze the first stage of the crop growth.”

Lu Zhou nodded and said, “Not bad, what about the technical specifications?”

“I’ve sent them to your email.”

“Ok, I’ll read them right away.”

After Lu Zhou hung up the phone, he returned to his office and sat at his desk. He opened his email on his laptop and opened the email.

After Lu Zhou read the email in its entirety, he couldn’t help but smile.

I knew it.

This 50,000 experience points is in the bag!

Chapter 719: Prepare for the Moon!

Beijing.

Press conference held by a news outlet.

A spokesman wearing a suit stood in front of the cameras as he spoke in a clear and solemn voice.

“... After taking into account the eagerness of the international community, our higher management has decided that cooperation applications will be opened for the Garden project. We welcome the international community to participate in this global, futuristic cause.”

The second the spokesman finished speaking, there was a commotion in the press conference center.

Letting the international community participate in the Garden project?

This was different from their expectations.

Prior to this, international media had framed the Garden project as a scheme from China for colonizing space. The related research projects were expected to be kept private. However, they didn't expect China to open the door to the Garden project for the international community.

As long as someone was a professional, they could apply to the relevant department, and after they got approved, they could participate in the research plan.

1.5 billion yuan of investment was more than US\$200 million. For most poorly-funded natural science researchers, China's plan was extremely lucrative.

Just like Lu Zhou had expected, after the Ministry of Science and Technology opened the gates for the Garden project, many participation applications were received. Due to the sheer number of applications, the Ministry of Science and Technology had set up a special department to assist the Garden project.

The international academic community approved and welcomed China's Garden project.

However, not everyone thought that way.

For many patriotic Americans, China taking the lead in the space race was an act of war.

On an American talk show set.

They happened to start talking about this project.

The host in a black suit was sitting on the sofa. He handed the microphone to his guest and asked, "Jim, you work at a bank, correct?"

"Yeah, why?"

"I think you're a person that has been around the block. Can I interview you?"

“Of course you can, as long as it’s something that I can answer.”

“We all know that China is building a biosphere, and they’re also inviting many scholars to participate in this project. What do you think about this?”

The guy named Jim had a playful smile on his face.

“What do I think about this? It’s as if your dodgy neighbor suddenly asked you to grab a beer. He either wants to steal your car or bang your wife.”

The audience members laughed.

Political humor was the norm on this show.

However, this time, the joke was more explicit.

But this was just how American media was.

For example, in the latest issue of The New York Times, it stated that China opening the gates for the Garden project was an act of trying to gain domination over the space industry. It told Americans research institutes and scholars to participate at their own risk.

After reading the article, Lu Zhou chuckled.

There was a reason why the Americans thought this way.

After all, space domination established from the Cold War era had become part of the United States patriotism. Now that this pride was being challenged by China, it was normal for American media to act in such a hostile manner.

However, these conservative articles barely had any impact at all.

Unlike those conservative people, most scholars in natural science research were liberals, and their research was mainly beneficial to the entire world, not just America. They were happy to work for whoever that gave them research funding.

After the news of the Garden cooperation application was made public, scholars actually began to apply before the media even began to report on it.

If the Americans planned on creating a Biosphere 3, then the scholars might be persuaded. However, because of the lack of funding, most American scholars were happy to research in other countries.

Unfortunately, the United States Congress wasn't going to pay for a natural science research project like this.

Both the California experimental reactor and NASA's "Ares" projects were money-hungry projects. Even the United States would have difficulty in funding another biosphere project, especially with the two pre-existing large-scale scientific research projects.

Even though the biosphere project would cost a lot less than the other two...

On the other hand, there was no chance Wall Street was going to fund this project.

The Rockefeller Financial Group lost money funding the Biosphere 2. Unless there was a special reason, no investment company would be willing to take this risk.

The days quickly passed by, and it was soon Chinese New Year.

All of the launch preparations were completed. The equipment that needed to be delivered had already been loaded on the Skyglow spacecraft. Skyglow was ready to give everyone a unique gift on Chinese New Year.

48 hours before launch.

Director Li from the State Administration for National Defense took the train to Jinling. The first thing he did was to head to the launch site, where he found Lu Zhou, who was delegating work at and managing the launch site.

When Lu Zhou saw Director Li walking toward him, he smiled and spoke.

"... Director Li? Why are you here?"

Director Li angrily stared at him.

"Do you really have to ask!"

Lu Zhou: "...?"

How would I know?

What's wrong with asking?

Director Li stared at the oblivious Lu Zhou. He sighed and said, "Stop pretending, do you really not know why I'm here? Tell me the truth, you're ready, aren't you?"

Lu Zhou was muddled. He said, "... Ready for what?"

Director Li thought Lu Zhou was still pretending to be oblivious, so he tried to persuade him.

"Landing on the Moon is very different from a low-Earth orbit space flight! We have experience in sending people up and bringing them back safely, but we have no experience bringing people back from the Moon. Zero. Do you understand? No one knows what will happen up there, maybe you'll never come back again! Go ask Nie Yun or anyone else in the astronaut team. They all have written their wills!

"I know you are confident in your research, but I hope you care about your safety more! Think about your parents! You're their only son! If something happens to you, what do you want me to tell them?"

Oh, so this is why...

I thought it was some huge problem!

Lu Zhou coughed and replied, "Don't worry, I went up with Skyglow last time, I've had my fun. I won't go up this time."

Director Li nearly passed out.

You said you went up there for science!

You only did it to have fun?!

Director Li stared at Lu Zhou in the eye for a while.

"I don't want to hear your promises, I will follow you on launch day. If you're flying, then I'm flying with you!"

Lu Zhou: "..."

Jesus, I only flew once, do you really have to follow me?

So unnecessary...

Chapter 720: Reunion

Even though Director Li wanted to follow Lu Zhou for the next 48 hours, that was obviously not possible.

Other than Lu Zhou's own family, he had never invited anyone to stay at his mansion even though he had plenty of spare bedrooms.

After promising Director Li he wouldn't go on the spaceship, he finally was able to get rid of him.

Lu Zhou worked at the space launch site until four o'clock in the afternoon. He asked Wang Peng to send him back to his Zhongshan International mansion. He was about to take a bath and get some food, but his doorbell suddenly began to ring.

Lu Zhou walked to the door and looked at the security camera footage near the mansion entrance. He was shocked.

He quickly opened the door.

"Dad, Mom, Xiao Tong? Why are you guys here?"

Lu Bangguo carried a suitcase through the door and smiled.

"If I don't come, you'll end up in space again!"

Lu Zhou smiled and said, "Why didn't you guys tell me, I would have picked you up."

Fang Mei sighed and said softly, "You're so busy with your work. We didn't want to disturb you, that's why we came all the way here from Jiangling. Families should stay together for the holidays. You shouldn't be alone."

Lu Zhou stared at his parents and went silent for a while. He had a guilty smile on his face.

“Sorry... It’s almost Chinese New Year, and I haven’t even called you guys.”

Old Lu didn’t say anything. He just reached out and patted his son’s shoulder.

“It’s fine, I understand.”

Sometimes, men didn’t have to communicate with words.

Lu Zhou could feel that his father was understanding. He also felt that his father was proud of him.

Xiao Tong, who was wearing a backpack, squeezed between her parents and rushed next to her brother.

“Brother, Brother, I heard you went on a rocket?”

Lu Zhou smiled and said, “Well, not a rocket, it’s an aerospaceplane.”

Xiao Tong’s eyes lit up as she asked, “Wow! Is it fun?”

Lu Zhou smiled and said, “It’s fun, I’ll bring you up there some time... But not this time. This time is a bit risky. I don’t even plan on flying.”

When Old Lu heard that Lu Zhou was going to take his baby daughter to space, he suddenly said, “Forget about it! Give me a grandson, then we can talk about going to space!”

Fang Mei stared at her husband and said, “What do you mean grandson, what about a granddaughter?”

Old Lu immediately said, “Granddaughter is good too! Two grandchildren are better!”

Xiao Tong stuck her tongue out and stopped talking.

I can’t go to space until my brother gets married and has kids...

I guess I’ll have to wait a while.

It was nearly six o’clock at night.

There was still some grocery in the fridge. After Fang Mei took a look, she told Old Lu to buy two pounds of braised meat and some vegetables. She then put on an apron and started to cook.

Lu Zhou didn't want his mom to cook. After all, she just got off a tiring train ride to Jinling. However, he wasn't able to convince her otherwise, so he gave up persuading and just sat down at the living room sofa instead.

Their parents were both busy, and Xiao Tong and Lu Zhou were the only two in the living room.

Lu Zhou turned on the rarely used TV, in hopes of killing some time. In a classic big brother fashion, he began to ask Xiao Tong about her school.

"How's studying in Britain?"

Xiao Tong's feet were placed on the coffee table as she replied while playing on her phone, "It's alright, the school isn't as lively as in China. I don't really like to party, so I just hit the library with my roommates."

Lu Zhou said, "Speaking of which, you're graduating next year, right?"

Xiao Tong said, "Yeah, pretty much."

Lu Zhou said, "Have you thought about what you plan on doing after graduation?"

Xiao Tong turned off her phone and thought for a while. She then scratched her head.

"I plan on doing a PhD at Oxford, or work at HSBC."

Lu Zhou said, "You have an offer from HSBC? HSBC accepts master's students?"

Because Lu Zhou had never borrowed money from a bank before, he didn't know a lot about finance. If he recalled correctly, HSBC was the biggest bank in the UK and had a lot of influence around the world.

Xiao Tong awkwardly rubbed her nose and replied, "Of course they take master's students. My supervisor helped me get an internship over the summer. My job prospects are looking pretty good. HR asked me if I planned

on working there after graduating. Even though I'll be starting from the bottom, I quite like the environment there."

Lu Zhou said, "I guess you'll have to choose either academic or corporate. If you choose academic, then PhD is obviously a good choice, but if you want to get into corporate, then HSBC's offer is quite attractive."

Lu Zhou couldn't help but feel a little down.

He thought back to his experience as an undergraduate student. Even with the system helping him, he had to put in a considerable amount of effort to get here.

Of course, Xiao Tong also worked hard to get where she was today. Even though Lu Zhou did help her with a letter of recommendation, she was still the one who utilized her opportunities.

This was like how if an idiot student were given the system, they wouldn't be able to achieve much...

Xiao Tong blinked and asked in a serious manner.

"Then, Brother, what path do you think I should go with?"

"You're asking me?" Lu Zhou smiled and said, "I don't know anything about finance, so my opinion doesn't matter... Ask Ms. CEO."

"Ms. CEO?"

"Yeah, Chen Yushan."

Xiao Tong saw Lu Zhou's slightly embarrassed face. She smirked and poked her brother's arm.

"Hey, Brother, tell me honestly, which stage are you guys at?"

Lu Zhou angrily stared at her.

"What do you mean which stage, you're still young, don't ask about this stuff."

Xiao Tong was suddenly interested in this gossip, and she said, "I'm not young! Think about it, Chen Yushan is 26 years old, and she's still single, she has to be waiting for you."

“... You don’t know sh*t.”

Xiao Tong wasn’t happy.

“Ah, I obviously know women better than you. What a minute, Brother...”

Xiao Tong suddenly had a weird look on her face.

Lu Zhou stared at the ceiling and sighed.

“What now...”

Xiao Tong looked at her brother strangely and asked, “Are you... homosexual?”

“F*ck off!”

The news broadcast began to play on the TV.

The report was regarding the upcoming launch mission.

Xiao Tong looked at the screen and pointed at it.

“Brother.”

“What now?”

“Will this launch be successful?”

Lu Zhou began to contemplate, and after a while, he had a smirk on his face.

“Of course it will.

“A hundred percent.”

The entire country was looking forward to the moon landing project.

Billions of hopeful eyes were watching.

Lu Zhou couldn’t let them down.

Chapter 721: Combine the Tables?

It was night time.

The aerospace launch site was still brightly lit.

Most people had started to plan their vacations and look forward to the new year. However, there wasn't an ounce of festival vibes here.

The ground crew was busy walking around the take-off runway. They were doing a final inspection of the launch site and Skyglow's hardware.

The launch plan was finalized, and the launch was set at 12 o'clock midnight.

Based on the weather observational data provided by the meteorological department, this was the most suitable time for the launch mission.

The astronauts and the launch site staff members were working at their respective positions.

Inside the astronaut resting room.

The atmosphere was quiet.

The launch was in three hours, and they had to board the spacecraft in an hour.

Nie Yun sighed and broke the silence.

"Are you ready?"

Nie Yan smirked and bumped his fist with his chest.

"I was born ready."

Nie Yun was infected by her enthusiasm, and he couldn't help but smile.

However, that smile only lasted a few seconds.

After a moment of silence, he spoke again.

“... You should think about this seriously. This is different from the last launch mission. We have no idea what is waiting for us on the Moon.”

Nie Yan smiled and jokingly said, “What’s the point of thinking about it? It’s not like we can find other astronauts to fly instead.”

Nie Yun said, “We have backup astronauts.”

Nie Yan said without hesitation, “Don’t even think about it.”

Nie Yun knew what type of person his sister was, so he didn’t try to convince her.

Actually, because they were related, they couldn’t fly the spacecraft together. Therefore, Nie Yun was selected as the only pilot for the flight.

However, Nie Yan asked her superiors for permission to fly as well. Because of her outstanding performance in the military, her superiors approved her request.

Nie Yun didn’t think this was a good idea.

Because if anything were to happen, their parents would be devastated to lose both of their children.

In addition to the siblings, there was someone else flying.

He was different from the other two astronauts; he wasn’t an ex-military pilot. He was a researcher at the Institute of Geochemistry at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and used to work at the Chinese Lunar and Planetary Laboratory, working in planetary exploration and research. He passed multiple rounds of interviews and tests before he was finally selected to join the moon landing project.

Prior to this, he had only received two months of professional training. He didn’t realize how serious this was until his senior officer asked him to write a will...

Nie Yan noticed his hands were fidgeting, so she asked, “Hey, what’s your name?”

The man was startled by her voice, and he replied while stuttering, “Liu... Liu Zhengwen.”

“Nervous?”

“Yeah... Kind of.”

Liu Zhengwen forced a smile. He took a deep breath and looked at his fist. After a while, he said, “I thought I was prepared, but now... I’m afraid of dying.”

Nie Yun said, “Everyone is afraid of dying, it’s nothing to be ashamed about.”

“Are you scared as well?”

Nie Yun nodded, then shook his head.

“Being scared and afraid are two different things.”

Suddenly, a bell rang was heard in the astronaut lounge.

It was time for them to head to the locker room and put on their spacesuits with help from other staff members.

Nie Yun stood up and quietly walked next to Liu Zhengwen. He reached out and patted him on the shoulder.

“Relax, there are millions of people praying for us.

“We got this.”

...

The launch site was filled with military troops. Barriers had been set up on nearby highways to prohibit all vehicles and personnel from entering the area. Some people were taking photos nearby, and they were warned and escorted by police and military personnel.

The launch site was like a fortress; not even a cockroach could sneak in.

Inside the launch site.

A CTV van was parked at the launch site. It had obtained filming permits.

A camera was aimed at the three pilots who were walking toward the spacecraft. An excited reporter lady spoke loudly toward the microphone.

“... Right behind me on the runway are the three astronauts who are about to board Skyglow. In less than an hour, Skyglow’s second flight will begin. According to the staff at the Jinling launch site, the spacecraft will reach the Moon’s orbit. Our astronauts’ footprints will be on the Moon! They will wish us a happy Chinese New Year from the Moon!”

The reporter lady took a deep breath.

If everything went well, the footage recorded by the camera would be broadcasted on the news channel tomorrow.

If something went wrong...

She had no idea what would happen.

The only thing she could do was to pray.

On the runway, a tall boarding platform slowly connected with the aerospaceplane entrances.

Lu Zhou stood on the boarding platform and watched the three astronauts boarding the plane. He smiled and waved at them.

Director Li was standing behind Lu Zhou with a serious look on his face. Even though the boarding platform was disconnected from the spacecraft, he still kept his eyes on Lu Zhou.

Director Li really was a man of his words. He had been following Lu Zhou for the past hour, even to the bathroom.

At least he didn’t go into the stalls with Lu Zhou...

Lu Zhou looked at his nervous face and sighed.

“... I thought about it.”

Director Li said, “Thought about what?”

Lu Zhou awkwardly said, “The lunar module can only take two people. So one person is going to stay on the spacecraft alone.”

“... So?”

“It’s pretty boring for them to be there alone. We should fly with them so that we can play cards with them.”

Director Li’s eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. Lu Zhou almost began to worry about his blood pressure.

“I’m just kidding... Go... Let’s head back to the ground command center. The show is about to begin.”

Before Director Li could answer, Lu Zhou dragged him toward the command center.

Chapter 722: c

The spacecraft hatch closed.

Nie Yun sat down at the pilot’s seat.

After Nie Yun attached the bio-safety system and seatbelt on his spacesuit, he took a deep breath and slowly shifted his center of gravity on the seat’s backrest.

The electronic clock quietly ticked.

“It’s almost time.”

“Yeah.”

Nie Yun fist-bumped Nie Yan. He then looked at the control console. He heard someone say “all units ready” in his headset. He turned on the safety lock for the sound fusion device before twisting the ignition knob.

The moment the knob was turned, a huge amount of energy came out of the nuclear core. It was like the entire aerospaceplane was an awakening giant monster.

Liu Zhengwen, who was sitting in the passenger’s seat, felt the vibrations on his feet. He gulped and asked nervously, “Are we about to ignite?”

The communication channel wasn't open, so no one could hear him speak.

Nie Yun stared at the rising energy dial, and he reached out and tapped his headset. He spoke in a clear voice.

"This is Skyglow, fusion ignition is successful. We are ready to fly. Requesting approval."

Soon, the ground command center replied.

"Request approved, begin launch in one minute."

"Roger that."

Nie Yun clenched the joystick with both of his hands. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. His thumb pressed the switch, which turned on the engine thrusters.

The moment he opened his eyes, he could hear a countdown in his ear...

"5.

"4.

"3.

"2.

"1.

"0.

"Lets go!"

Last time Lu Zhou let Hou Guang do the countdown, but this time, Lu Zhou was the one counting down.

The five gigantic ion thrusters attached to the aerospaceplane began to fire, leaving behind a blue flame-like substance. The aerospaceplane was slowly being pushed forward on the runway.

The moment the blue lights burst out of the thrusters, the ground crew near the runway, the army soldiers, and the engineers were all completely taken away.

This amazing view would never get old.

Director Li stood next to Lu Zhou as he stared at the big screen in the command center.

After a while, he spoke emotionally.

"I finally know why you want to go up there."

Lu Zhou smiled and asked, "Let's fly together some time?"

Director Li answered without hesitation, "Don't even think about it!"

While the two were talking, the aerospaceplane on the runway was getting faster and faster.

Finally, the silver spacecraft slowly took off from the ground, disappearing at the skyline. The blue lights shined brightly in the dark, like an aurora.

As the ground crew watched the spacecraft disappear into the night, they burst into excited cheers. The aerospace experts in the ground tower were in tears.

Even though the journey to the Moon had only just begun, this successful launch would be remembered in history.

As for whether or not they could successfully land on the Moon and return safely...

That would depend on the astronauts...

"Skyglow, this is ground command center, please report on your status."

After a short pause, the co-pilot's voice was heard.

"... This is Skyglow, we are at an altitude of 5 km, speed is 1,000 km per hour, acceleration is 1.25 G. Temperature sensors are looking good. Everything is normal."

“Good, please keep in contact. The ground command center will provide navigation instructions.”

“Roger that.”

Skyglow vanished from sight.

Director Li looked at the ground crew on the launch site clearing the runway and taking away the equipment. He suddenly spoke to Lu Zhou.

“If it takes two hours to reach low-Earth orbit, how long does it take to reach the Moon.”

Even though the estimated arrival time was written on the launch plan, the launch plan was sent directly to the China National Space Administration, and the State Administration for National Defense wasn't responsible for specific project details. However, Star Sky Technology did send a copy to the State Administration for National Defense, but Director Li had to urgently get to Jinling, so he didn't get the chance to read it.

Lu Zhou stared at the green dot on the radar. He smiled and replied, “Around 56 hours.”

“Only 56 hours?” Director Li looked at Lu Zhou with a shocked expression, and he said, “If I recall correctly, the Americans' Saturn V took more than 70 hours, right?”

“If the distance were longer, we could have accelerated to an even faster speed.” Lu Zhou smiled and said, “The launch is over. I'm going to take a nap, and you should go rest already. The spacecraft is already in the sky, so there's no way for me to fly anymore.”

Before Director Li could reply, Lu Zhou took off his headset and gave it to Hou Guang.

“You're in charge now.”

Hou Guang took the headset from Lu Zhou and nodded solemnly.

“Roger that.”

...

In the blue sky.

Skyglow had already reached a height of 20 kilometers. The pilot smoothly changed the engine mode, and the spacecraft began to fly toward outer space, with a trajectory tangent to earth.

Liu Zhengwen could feel the change to the center of gravity. He took a deep breath and tapped his helmet, which gave him access to the crew communication channel.

“... Have we left the atmosphere?”

After a while, Nie Yan’s voice traveled through the communication channel.

“Not yet. If you are nervous, you can sleep for a bit.”

“... I just woke up a few hours ago. I can’t fall asleep again now.”

It’s not like I can fall asleep in an environment like this anyway!

Nie Yan smiled and said, “Stop acting like a little girl, you’re a grown-ass man. Professor Lu is also a researcher, and he wasn’t scared at all when he sneaked on here.”

Most young Chinese scholars viewed Lu Zhou as a role model or even an idol.

After remembering Lu Zhou also flew in this spacecraft, Liu Zhengwen calmed down.

“What was Professor Lu like when he was on here?”

Nie Yun already switched Skyglow to automatic flight mode. He smiled and replied, “He? He was nuts. Even us professional astronauts were a bit nervous, but he wasn’t nervous at all. He even took a selfie in space.”

Liu Zhengwen: “...”

I guess Lu Zhou really is a god.

Other than wanting to post “God Lu is nuts” on his Weibo, he didn’t know what to say.

Nie Yun noticed that Liu Zhengwen was staying silent, so he thought Liu Zhengwen was still scared. He tried to encourage Liu Zhengwen.

“Actually, you should relax a little and think about the positive. Once we come back from the Moon, we will become heroes, and that’s something to be proud of for the rest of your life.”

Liu Zhengwen looked up and said, “What if we don’t come back?”

Nie Yun smiled.

“Then we’ll still be heroes.”

Chapter 723: We Need A Win

Midnight in Beijing.

It was 8 am in Washington.

For most Americans, the day had just begun.

Inside a home in the suburbs of New Jersey, a couple and their four-year-old child enjoyed breakfast at the dining table.

Julia added some dressing into the salad bowl. She glanced at the news on the TV, which was about the Ares project. She couldn’t help but say, “I don’t get it, why do we have to spend money to compete with China on this. Can’t the money be better used elsewhere?”

Brad was munching on a bacon sandwich. He grinned at the TV and spoke.

“You don’t get it, this is what guys do.”

Julia rolled her eyes at her husband.

“Yeah, a truck driver cares about space. It’s not like they’re going to let you drive a truck on Mars.”

Brad raised his eyebrows and smiled as he said, “It might happen one day. Apparently, Ares is recruiting volunteers, so maybe I’ll be like Han Solo...”

“Don’t even think about it!”

Brad looked at his serious-faced wife, and he tried to calm her down.

“Relax, sweetheart... I was just kidding. I’m not actually going to sign up.”

Suddenly, a piece of breaking news was being shown on TV.

“Nine minutes ago, NASA’s observation satellite found that Skyglow with a lunar module took off from China’s Jinling launch site. As of right now, it has left the stratosphere and is on its way to low-Earth orbit.”

Brad stared at the image on the screen, and his mouth was wide open. He didn’t even notice his bacon slices dropping from his sandwich.

“Oh my God... The Chinese are going on the Moon.”

Julia was flicking the salad in her bowl with a fork as she glanced at her husband.

“So what?”

Brad didn’t answer his wife. He stared intently at the TV as he muttered, “F*ck, what is NASA even doing! We haven’t done anything in the past couple of decades!”

The news broadcast continued to play.

The original news segment was disrupted by this breaking news.

After reporting on the press release, the TV host immediately connected with an expert, Professor Slade, from Cornell University. He was also a consultant for NASA’s Ares program, so there was no doubt he was a professional.

“... After receiving this breaking news, we immediately contacted NASA expert Professor Slade... Professor Slade, hello!”

Professor Slade: “Hello.”

A picture of Professor Slade appeared on the screen.

Through a telephone connection, the host conducted an on-site interview.

“What do you think of China’s moon landing plan?”

Professor Slade thought for a couple of seconds and spoke cautiously, “China didn’t disclose the technical information for Skyglow. Our guesses are there may be advanced Hall-effect thrusters and miniaturized controllable fusion reactors on board... Of course, other people think that they have adopted an advanced lithium-sulfur battery technology. After all, Star Sky Technology’s main business is the battery industry.”

TV host: “I think the majority of the audience doesn’t care about the technology they’re using. Can you make a simple prediction for us?”

“Prediction?”

The host nodded and said, “Yeah, we all want to know what the probability success is.”

Professor Slade: “I can’t give you a clear answer. I don’t have information about Skyglow.”

He paused for a second and spoke in a reluctant tone.

“But if I had to estimate, China’s chances of success are higher than the Soviets.”

“You think China’s odds of success are higher than the Soviets?” The host’s eyes were wide open as he said in disbelief, “So what you’re saying is, they will succeed?”

“I didn’t say that. I’m just saying that their chances of success are either 50% or 30%...” Professor Slade said in a vague manner, “Of course, even if they land on the Moon, they are still behind us in the aerospace field. After all, we have landed on the Moon many times. Also...”

Brad was watching the news.

He sighed in relief, and he felt a lot better.

I guess there’s only a 30% chance the Chinese are landing on the Moon.

NASA experts are more trustworthy than Columbia TV.

The little four-year-old boy poked his omelet with a fork. He raised his fork high above his head.

“Dad, I want to go to the Moon.”

Brad smiled and rubbed the little guy’s head.

“One day you will. Our president is going to make our country great again! When you grow to be as tall as me, going to Mars will be as easy as going to Hawaii... Remember to bring your dad some souvenirs from Mars.”

The little boy blinked and nodded.

“Ok, Dad.”

Julia smiled, and she shook her head and continued to eat her salad.

She didn’t care if America became great again.

She just hoped it wouldn’t become worse.

...

Most Americans’ worries were coming to life.

Ever since the success of the Pangu fusion reactor, energy costs in China had sharply decreased.

NASA headquarters.

Satellite control room.

Three days before Skyglow’s launch, observation satellites in orbit had been pointed at Jinling. Now, this “annoying” spacecraft was inching toward the Moon.

Aiden stared at the green dot on the screen and muttered under his breath, “We’re just going to sit on the sideline and watch them?”

The NASA director stared at him.

“Yeah.”

Aiden was pissed off.

“We should take some countermeasures.”

The NASA director ignored the CIA official and looked at his assistant.

“How’s the life support system at Space-X?”

The assistant immediately said, “They’re in the testing phase.”

“How long is the testing going to take?”

The assistant paused for two seconds and quickly said, “Due to the landing window on Mars and other factors, our colonists must live there for two years... Of course, the testing won’t take that long. According to Elon, it will take nine months.”

“We can’t wait for nine months.” The NASA director shook his head and stared at the green dot on the radar. “The Chinese are catching up to us. We have to put the Ares project on the highest priority.”

He took a deep breath and spoke to his assistant.

“Listen, contact Elon Musk for me and ask if he can shorten the testing time. I know this is difficult, but we need a victory; a victory that we can give to Congress!”

The assistant took a deep breath and spoke.

“Sir... What do you mean by victory?”

The NASA director spoke with a poker face.

“Deliver life support systems to Mars within six months.

“If the Chinese think that they have caught up to us just by walking on the Moon, then we have to tell them and our fellow Americans how insignificant their achievement is!”