

Full Time 151

Chapter 151: Every Inch Has Its Value (6th Update!)

"Every two steps I took, I came across a fork. Another fork appeared just two steps later. It surely meant that this path was a dead end or extremely dangerous ahead."

"I could only change directions, then I realized I was just going in circles in the same spot, trapped by a bunch of forks!"

Boluo was indignant. Chen Gu, without any self-reflection, asked righteously, "So, you just squatted down and didn't move? Did you never consider that it might just be a marker, or something someone drew casually and not necessarily true, and that there might not be any danger ahead?"

Chen Gu thought with disdain, No wonder he's the dimmest bulb in the Hu Ling Organization.

Boluo spoke confidently, "In such a dangerous environment, would you take the risk? Besides, I ended up meeting you all—proving that my decision to wait where I was, was the right one."

"Human-shaped whatever-needle, hurry up and lead me out."

"Oh right, Dora, how did you know he was a 'needle'?"

Dora answered honestly, "He boasted about it to me."

Chen Gu frowned. How did a simple matter become so odd once these two talked about it? What's there to boast about being a 'needle'?

Chen Gu took the lead. "Alright, follow me."

That's confidence for you!

As Boluo walked, he asked, "How did you guys make your way out?"

Dora explained everything in detail, right up to the coordinates they had calculated earlier. Boluo said, "Let me see."

Chen Gu, walking ahead, snickered. The dimmest bulb actually wants to see the coordinates? As if he could understand them.

Without overthinking, Dora shared the coordinates with him. After listening, Boluo tilted his head, thought for a moment, and said with certainty, "These aren't coordinates."

"At the very least, they're not coordinates from around here." Boluo continued, rattling off another string of numbers. "These are our current coordinates. Compare the two; there's a huge difference. If these were actual coordinates, then considering the size of Empire River Star, this location would be at least a few thousand kilometers from us, maybe even outside the Yingudusi Devil's Pit."

Chen Gu and Dora were both surprised. "How do you know our current coordinates?"

"I glanced at them while Leder was operating the device earlier," Boluo responded.

Chen Gu asked, "So you just remembered them?"

"Yep," Boluo said casually. "I've always had a good memory, ever since I was little. I can remember anything with just one glance."

Chen Gu didn't understand. This is a photographic memory, isn't it? So why is his intelligence so pitifully low?

Dora fell into contemplation. "If they're not coordinates, then what could they be?"

Suddenly, she squatted down and started scribbling on the ground—which were essentially computations Chen Gu couldn't make heads or tails of.

"Hmm? No, that's not right... it shouldn't be like this."

"This seems wrong too; it's not valid."

"If I think about it from a different angle..."

After what must have been half an hour, Dora suddenly let out a cheer. "Haha! I knew a genius beauty like me couldn't be stumped! I've figured it out!"

Chen Gu and Boluo leaned over and, as expected, they still couldn't understand a thing.

Dora had already sprung to her feet. "Let's get back there, quick!"

She was exhilarated, taking the lead and dashing out, winding this way and that, quickly returning to the base of that cliff.

Chen Gu was taken aback. He looked at Dora, then at Boluo. Seriously? You two are navigation prodigies, yet you're both relying on me, a guy with no sense of direction, to lead the way?!

Dora calculated a series of data based on that set of suspected coordinates and continuously searched over the area of formulas. She soon found a symbol and pressed it firmly.

CLICK.

The symbol sank in.

Then she found the second and third numbers or symbols and pressed them all. The stone wall rumbled and began to shake.

Chen Gu looked at the loosened stone wall and suddenly realized, "This is a door!"

Dora pushed against it. "It's stuck. Boluo, come help."

The two Professionals worked together, pushing open the stone wall that stood over ten meters tall. Behind it, a dark and gloomy cave entrance was revealed.

The cave had been crudely excavated. From certain traces, it could be deduced that the mechanism to move this stone door was a modification using parts from a spaceship's power system. It wasn't quite suitable, had since lost all its energy, and was now covered in rust.

Chen Gu muttered, "Why does it look... like a makeshift contraption?"

"The original setup must have been done in a hurry, likely leaving many traces outside. However, in an environment like the Yingudusi Devil's Pit, these traces would quickly be covered by nature—just like those formulas on the stone wall."

"So you're saying the formulas on the wall have two purposes. If someone not in the know worked out those coordinates, they'd certainly leave here to rush to that location, only to find nothing."

"The person who left the formulas hid the real information within that string of numbers. Only someone in tune with them could find the way to open the door."

"It's just that we have Big Rabbit, who's practically a game-breaker."

Chen Gu looked towards the dark cave. What exactly is hidden inside? Could it be related to Leder's real reason for coming here?

While he speculated, Dora and Boluo hesitated at the cave entrance.

Dora pulled a small luminous grenade from her tactical vest and threw it inside. As it rolled, it illuminated the cave's interior, revealing no imminent danger.

Big Rabbit glanced at the two men beside her. Boluo's abilities are clearly not suited for taking point. And Chen Gu... an ordinary person, forget it. Besides, we'll need him to lead the way later on.

Big Rabbit switched on the flashlight mounted beneath her gun and, raising her weapon in a standard tactical stance, took the lead.

Big Rabbit lamented inwardly, Just as I thought, men are unreliable at critical moments!

Boluo gave Chen Gu a pat. "You stay in the middle; I'll cover our rear. We'll protect you."

"Alright!" Chen Gu promptly agreed.

The three of them entered the cave, proceeding with extreme caution. Suddenly, Boluo blurted out, "What if we've accidentally opened the door to some powerful and dangerous creature trapped here..."

"Shut your jinxing mouth!" Chen Gu complained. Boluo, having scared even himself, promptly shut up.

Dora, at the front, shivered, her pace slowing by a third.

The cave was straight, and after about ten minutes, they arrived at a large cavern filled with rocks and debris.

Chen Gu suddenly turned to look back down the cave passage. Boluo, thinking there might be something behind them, startled and also looked back. "What is it? What is it?"

Chen Gu shook his head. "I was looking at the cave walls. Did you notice these markings? They all indicate excavation from the inside out."

Dora asked, "Are you saying someone excavated from this large cavern, digging their way outward to create this tunnel?"

Chen Gu nodded and said to Dora, "Luminous grenade."

Chapter 152: The Legendary Ship (1st Update)

The cave was too vast for the beam of Dora's flashlight to illuminate, making it impossible for everyone to fully discern its contours.

As Dora fired two flares as instructed, the bright light revealed a rugged landscape of rocks. The cavern seemed to be anything but natural.

Among those rocks, there lay an ancient-looking Starship, deeply buried in a mass of rubble.

"A Starship!" Boluo was surprised and began to imagine the possibilities. "Could it be a Starship whose crew was contaminated by Mutants, causing it to crash down from the starry sky and end up here? Doesn't that mean there might be a lot of Mutants on the Starship?"

Annoyed, Dora gave him a jab with the butt of her gun. "Can't you stop scaring yourself all the time?"

Big Rabbit's delicate body trembled slightly; she too was frightened.

Chen Gu had already noticed some marks on the Starship and shook his head. "It was brought down by an external attack. Definitely not the work of Mutants."

He moved forward. "Let's go take a look."

The trio tightened their formation, covering each other as they approached. Getting closer, they could see the Starship more clearly. Most of it was buried in the rocks, with only about one-third visible in the cave.

"Its scale is similar to the Confederation's current fourth-level Starships. However, if it fell during the great war of that era, a vessel of this size would have been equivalent to a first-level main fleet Starship."

On one side of the warship, there was a huge, elongated breach. Chen Gu frowned. "This was caused by a super life form. Damage from a ship-to-ship bombardment wouldn't look like this."

The three of them climbed in through the breach, encountering decorations typical of that bygone era, vastly different from the present style.

They searched the command center, then moved to the lower deck's cabins. Suddenly, Chen Gu came to a halt in front of one cabin and blurted out, "I know which Starship this is!"

Dora and Boluo immediately caught up. "Which one?"

Chen Gu wiped the dust from the cabin door, revealing the nameplate underneath: Sauron Scyther.

Dora was still puzzled, but Boluo had remembered. "The Sorcerer Sauron! I've seen it on the interstellar net. I'm not mistaken; it's him! This is the Four Hundred Brave!"

Dora felt incredulous, looking around. "This is the Four Hundred Brave? That legendary pirate ship? They actually fell in the Yingudusi Devil's Pit!"

Chen Gu recollected for a moment but felt confused. After the Battle of the Yingudusi Devil's Pit, there were still some records of the Four Hundred Brave's exploits.

At least, that's what the interstellar net recorded.

However, after that point in time, the tales about them had indeed dwindled significantly, eventually fading away.

And upon closer recollection, Chen Gu realized that the exploits of the Four Hundred Brave after that time were nowhere near as legendary as those before.

The Four Hundred Brave fell here... Someone must have carved out that tunnel to escape and then reformed the Four Hundred Brave. Chen Gu suddenly pieced it all together. He, or they, sealed the cave

entrance with a rock wall, leaving behind that array of formulas. It wasn't for others, but to ensure their own smooth re-entry in the future!

Why would they want to come back? There must be something inside this Starship that they couldn't take with them, yet is extremely important!

The trio moved past this deck, observing the nameplates on the cabins. In that era, these all belonged to renowned star crew members.

Chen Gu found the cabin belonging to the rebel Dilina and pushed the door open. Inside, the cabin was very plain, akin to the abode of an ascetic.

This puzzled Chen Gu even more: Dilina was a defector from the Atomic Holy Church, having absconded with the crucial artifact, the Doomsday Holy Hand.

Common sense would suggest that once she had rebelled, she should have abandoned her faith in the Atomic Holy Church.

Yet whether it was in the wreckage of the Starship Burning Tyrannosaurus or on the Four Hundred Brave, Dilina's quarters were filled with decorations indicating devout belief in the Atomic Holy Church.

Even when she was out on missions, she always carried the Holy Church's scriptures and drew its emblem on the walls.

Chen Gu conducted a search, with Dora and Boluo covering him from behind.

Chen Gu pulled open several drawers, all of which contained paper books about the Atomic Holy Church that turned to ash at the slightest touch.

Only a hardcover scripture at the bedside was intact. Its pages had already decayed, but the cover was still preserved. Chen Gu casually pocketed it.

"Let's go; there's nothing more to see here." The three emerged, puzzled that every cabin was empty. Where could all those powerful crew members have gone?

They continued their search, swiftly reaching the bottom deck, where a section of cabins was sealed by a thick armored door.

Dora and Boluo tried several times but were unable to open it.

Boluo got angry. "Move aside, I'll blow it open!"

Before Chen Gu and Dora could speak, a voice suddenly rang out from behind them. "No, no, no, you mustn't be so crude. Inside lies the true essence of the Four Hundred Brave. If you damage even the tiniest piece, the boss would be so heartbroken he'd go berserk and spend a fortune hiring assassins to hunt you across the entire Star Sea."

Boluo was taken aback and turned around. "Leder?"

Leder sauntered out with his hands behind his back, smiling. The three of them widened their eyes at the sight of the pitch-black monster following him.

"A Mutant!"

Big Rabbit instantly understood and was filled with rage. "You're working with Mutants? You traitor to humanity!"

The roots of the Mutants lay in the Endless Realm, and the Endless Realm was every professional's greatest enemy. Thus, Leder's actions naturally put him in opposition to all professionals.

Chen Gu sensed a subtle anomaly. This is no ordinary Mutant.

He almost blurted it out, but saying so would have exposed him as not an ordinary person. He cautiously stayed behind the two professionals, watching the pitch-black creature, a nagging sense of familiarity washing over him.

If I'm not mistaken, Leder must be a professional too, and that creature is even more terrifying. Dora and Boluo... they probably can't handle it.

I wonder how Qing Ruyan is doing. If she can't make it, even with me joining in, the situation will still look bleak.

That pitch-black creature, in Chen Gu's Mind Belief, radiated an intense sense of danger. It was undoubtedly extremely powerful, perhaps not inferior to a Second Energy Level professional!

Leder, unperturbed by Dora's accusation, smiled and gestured towards the black monster. "Come, let me reintroduce you. This is Hu Ling."

"What!" Boluo roared, completely in disbelief. "Captain? Impossible, this can't be! Captain wouldn't attempt to advance his Energy Level here! Not without an activator, not without super-matter... He wouldn't Fall!"

Dora also felt a sudden chill in her heart. Her gun still aimed at Leder, she asked through clenched teeth, "What have you done to him?"

Another cold voice intervened. "I'll tell you what he's done."

Qing Ruyan, her face frosty, stepped forward, her eyes locked on Leder.

Chapter 153: Brain Domain Hacker (Second Update)

"Their goal was never the remnants of super life forms, but this very ship, the Four Hundred Braves, and... all of you professionals."

Dora and Boluo were even more surprised, glancing at the armored door behind them. "What secrets are hidden inside here?"

Qing Ruyan said, "Leder, you tell them."

Leder's demeanor was quite strange. He was obviously resistant to Qing Ruyan's "order," yet he began to speak in detail. "Based on the boss's orders this time, we have two main objectives. The ultimate goal is to find the laboratory on the Four Hundred Braves."

"However, this goal is hard to achieve. Countless people have entered Yingudusi Devil's Pit before. If we can't find it, completing the second objective will suffice."

"When I handed each of you a potion upon entering Yingudusi Devil's Pit, I told you it could be used in desperate situations to greatly enhance physical fitness."

"In fact, this potion is an experimental product we developed. It's made from special substances extracted from Mutant bodies and can transform a subject into a state between a Mutant and a normal life form."

"Using it on ordinary people is a waste. Our target, from the very start, was professionals."

Dora and Boluo, furious, demanded, "You intended to turn us into test subjects from the very beginning when you issued this mission?"

Leder nodded. "Yes. You have only yourselves to blame for being too greedy. Such generous terms were like a tasty bait, and you bit without hesitation."

Chen Gu, watching from behind, inwardly criticized Qing Ruyan. That damn woman must have guessed the entire conspiracy all along and still refused to tell me; indeed, not a single truth comes from that mouth! But, one had to admit, those lips were quite appealing.

At this moment, considering Leder's behavior, Chen Gu could roughly determine Qing Ruyan's profession.

[Brain Domain Hacker].

She could invade the brain of any living being, altering its contents at will, much like a hacker tampering with a computer. Her previous modification of enemy brains displayed an ability similar to [Psychological Invisibility]. However, while this ability was effective against a small number of enemies, when faced with a swarm, she couldn't alter the brain of each individual insect quickly enough, leaving her at a loss.

Thinking this, Chen Gu suddenly wondered: If I can guess Qing Ruyan's profession, can that old fox Leder do the same?

Leder was clearly under Qing Ruyan's mental control; his body was revealing secrets he knew should remain hidden, despite his consciousness telling him not to. But... could this be a feint?

Chen Gu could choose to step forward and warn Qing Ruyan, but that would expose him. After careful consideration, he decided to hold back. His covert stance, with Qing Ruyan openly exposed, was the most advantageous situation. It shouldn't be disrupted rashly. If Qing Ruyan encountered any unforeseen incidents, he would still have a chance to turn the tables. Revealing himself prematurely would wash away this advantage.

And Leder, unlike me, didn't know from the start that Qing Ruyan wasn't the President. He might not guess that she was a [Brain Domain Hacker] instead of a [Psychological Spy].

Dora asked again, "What exactly is hidden in the laboratory on the Four Hundred Braves that makes your people pursue it so relentlessly, one wave after another?"

A conflicted expression appeared on Leder's face. He obviously did not want to reveal it.

But under the influence of Qing Ruyan's ability, he finally said, "The Four Hundred Braves is not some pirate ship."

"They were the covert enforcers for a group of ambitious individuals within the Confederation!"

"All the crew members had highly suspicious backgrounds; they were either criminals or traitors. They worked for these ambitious individuals, dealing with troublesome matters that officials found inconvenient to handle directly."

"Later, one such ambitious individual went mad, wanting to conduct terrifying live experiments—not just on humans, but also on Mutants, the Alien Insect Race, and even on super life forms!"

"Thus, the Four Hundred Braves established this laboratory. They dared to conduct any experiment in the Star Sea without restraint."

"All the major Star Nations had also secretly conducted some unethical and immoral experiments, but these were insignificant compared to what happened aboard the Four Hundred Braves. Even after hundreds of years, the achievements obtained within this laboratory far surpassed the clandestine gains of the major Star Nations."

Dora understood. "So, people like you, who specialize in illegal experiments, are very eager to get everything inside this laboratory."

Chen Gu did remember that part of history—not learned from middle school textbooks, as that era was the Confederation's dark history and was only briefly mentioned in college history courses. In major libraries, books on this subject were few and far between. Chen Gu saw it when searching for information about the Four Hundred Braves on the interstellar quantum network. In that era, power rested in the hands of a few—an almost dictatorial rule—and it was a very dark time. Later, several generals secretly carried out military operations, arrested those in power, and put them on trial. After decades of various struggles, the Confederation finally returned to a democratic path.

Leder said with disdain, "Do you think it's just us who want it? Why do you think VSG-47 appeared at Yingudusi Devil's Pit, and why did it retain so much data?"

"From the beginning, the Confederation's officials never intended to give up the Four Hundred Braves. The successors of those dictators also wanted this laboratory."

"And in these hundreds of years, the Confederation has never ceased its search."

"At least half of the expedition teams that came to Yingudusi Devil's Pit are backed by the other three major Star Nations."

Dora found it difficult to accept all of this at once and was at a loss for words, her mouth agape.

Qing Ruyan asked Leder, "Can you control these Mutants?"

Leder admitted, "Yes."

Qing Ruyan commanded, "Order them to destroy this laboratory!"

As Leder took out the controller, a shadow suddenly rose behind Qing Ruyan. Incredibly fast, it engulfed her!

Dora and Boluo shouted and rushed forward. The moment Qing Ruyan was attacked, Leder broke free from her control and forcefully pressed the controller he held.

A Hu Ling that had been quietly waiting to one side roared and charged at Boluo.

Boluo kept retreating, his heart aching. "Captain, it's me! Snap out of it, you're not like this..."

But all that responded to him were Hu Ling's continuous roars and its frenzied attacks.

Leder suddenly appeared in front of Dora. Nine guns materialized around her. BANG! BANG! BANG! They fired all at once, enveloping Leder in a hail of gunfire.

However, these bullets predictably passed straight through Leder's body, causing him no harm whatsoever.

He had become a smoke-like entity. The bullets only managed to disperse him slightly, but Leder quickly reformed.

Dora exclaimed in disbelief, "[Multistate Special Agent]! You're a professional too!"

Chapter 154: Ability Restraint (Third Update)

[Multistate Special Agent]

This profession allows the body to freely transform between various states. At low Energy Levels, it can shift among conventional solid, liquid, and gas states. At high Energy Levels, it can even transform into superconducting or plasma states.

As long as Leder remained in a gaseous or liquid state, Dora's abilities were completely ineffective against him.

Dora quickly wove a dense net of firepower in front of her while simultaneously retreating. She shouted loudly to Boluo, "Switch opponents!"

Pressured by Hu Ling, Boluo was retreating step by step. He found it too difficult to harden his heart and toss a bomb at his old team captain.

When Dora made this request, his eyes reddened. He gritted his teeth fiercely, turned, and crisscrossed past Dora, leaving Hu Ling to Big Rabbit.

He already had an alchemical bomb prepared in his hand. Reaching Leder, he threw it without hesitation.

BOOM!

Leder was blasted into dispersing smoke, taking quite a while to re-form.

Facing Hu Ling, Dora unleashed a formidable net of firepower without hesitation. Various types of ammunition worked in tandem, stretching the net over an area of ten square meters and mercilessly enveloping Hu Ling.

Countless wounds appeared all over Hu Ling's body. The injuries from the high-powered ammunition were horrifying, often bowl-sized, with tissue blasted in all directions.

But Hu Ling felt no pain at all. He roared, charging headfirst through the terrifying barrage, and rammed Dora, sending her flying.

Meanwhile, the shadows enveloping Qing Ruyan writhed continuously. Suddenly, with a rustling sound, the shadows dispersed. Qing Ruyan burst out, her hair disheveled and her clothes torn in several places. One of her legs bore a pitch-black scar, and she was in a terrible state overall.

Chen Gu quickly asked, "Are you okay?"

Qing Ruyan, unusually defiant, retorted, "I won't die!"

The shadow opposite her writhed and coalesced. In its center, a rotten, twisted, and anguished human face appeared—it was Lao Mo!

He had lost all human rationality and consciousness. His eyes were blood-red, and a shadowy snake-like tongue flicked from his mouth. Hissing eerily, he slithered along the ground toward Qing Ruyan, resuming his assault.

Leder, facing Boluo, was quite relaxed, a hint of pride in his tone. "When the President killed Glove, how could I not be cautious? I just didn't expect that the President wasn't a [Psychological Spy] but a [Brain Domain Hacker]. You hid your abilities well!"

So, the one controlling the three-headed energy-gathering mechanical snakes was Glove after his mutation, Chen Gu thought.

Leder must have seen Glove's corpse, so he took extra precautions. He only appeared openly with Hu Ling, keeping Lao Mo hidden in ambush.

He had likely issued an order in advance: regardless of whether he himself was controlled by Qing Ruyan's abilities, Lao Mo was to attack her.

The current states of Lao Mo and Hu Ling were ideal for confronting a [Psychological Spy]—at that time, Leder still believed Qing Ruyan was one. Mutants themselves have little concept of kinship; when truly frenzied, they might even devour each other. They only cooperated to achieve their objectives.

Therefore, the abilities of a [Psychological Spy] had little effect on them.

Qing Ruyan's [Brain Domain Hacker] abilities, however, were entirely different. With a flick of her wrist, she produced a peculiarly shaped dagger from nowhere.

The dagger was curved like a strange snake. Embedded in its guard was an eye-like gemstone that emitted an unusual energy fluctuation.

Qing Ruyan exerted her full strength, and Lao Mo suddenly froze. Instantly, she lunged forward, accurately stabbing the dagger into the center of Lao Mo's grotesque face.

PFFT!

The dagger's power erupted. Lao Mo's shadowy body thrashed chaotically, as if countless infant arms were stretching out from within it, wildly grasping for something.

From the eye-shaped gemstone on the guard, eight streams of dark blue energy flowed out, penetrating Lao Mo's body. The shadow began to gradually dissolve.

Lao Mo's shadow serpent-tongue suddenly shot out, plunging into Qing Ruyan's chest with a sickening THUD!

Qing Ruyan let out a muffled groan, her face instantly turning ashen.

But she didn't retreat. Instead, she clenched her teeth and forcefully twisted the dagger in her hand.

From the eye-shaped gemstone, dark blue energy erupted, causing Lao Mo's shadowy form to explode completely with a BANG!

Qing Ruyan stumbled and collapsed, gasping for air. Blood flowed continuously from the wound on her chest, and dark shadows quickly spread from it.

Simultaneously, the black shadow on her leg was also spreading, threatening to merge with the one on her chest.

Leder smiled faintly. "President, you truly live up to your reputation as a Second Energy Level powerhouse, managing to counterattack and kill your enemy under such disadvantageous circumstances."

"But I suppose this is the limit of your abilities, isn't it?"

"Hahaha!" Leder laughed heartily. "Excellent! We'll finally have a Second Energy Level test subject."

"Rest assured, once I deal with these little pests, I'll inject you with the serum. You'll gain power far beyond anything you've known."

Ignored, Boluo roared in anger, continuously creating alchemical bombs that exploded against Leder's gaseous form, but to no avail.

These attacks failed to inflict any substantial damage on Leder.

Big Rabbit's firepower remained fierce, but she couldn't hold back Hu Ling. Blood seeped from the corners of her mouth as she steadily retreated, forced back to Chen Gu's side.

Chen Gu had remained at the very rear the entire time, the armored alloy gate directly behind him.

With no way out, Dora clenched her teeth, preparing for a desperate last stand. Suddenly, Chen Gu took out a water bladder and smashed it onto Hu Ling.

Hu Ling, who hadn't dodged Dora's barrage of firepower, naturally didn't dodge this either.

SPLAT! The bladder burst on impact, dousing Hu Ling with a liquid. SIZZLE! SIZZLE! It corroded his body, emitting white smoke.

Hu Ling roared and staggered back several steps, clutching his head.

The liquid continued to corrode his body, momentarily preventing him from attacking Dora.

Big Rabbit paused in surprise. She hadn't expected the "stomach acid" from the avian mechanical creature, which Chen Gu had stored earlier, to be so effective.

Chen Gu patted Dora's shoulder. "You handle this big guy." He then charged toward Leder.

Dora was startled. "What are you doing—?"

Chen Gu plunged into Leder's swirling smoke.

Leder sneered, "Seeking your own death!"

Chen Gu spread his arms wide. "Bring it on!"

CRACKLE! FIZZ!

Amidst the strange, though not overwhelming, sounds, the [Radiation Scouring] ability activated. Leder's gaseous form immediately showed signs of instability. He was shocked. "You... you... how can you... you're a Professional too?!"

Chen Gu sneered. "A Profession specifically designed to counteract your [Multistate Special Agent] abilities!"

Chapter 155: Behind the Black Hand There is Another Black Hand (4th Update!)

The hissing and crackling of radiation continued, and Leder felt his state becoming extremely unstable. He roared in anger as he transformed from a gaseous state into a liquid, but he still couldn't withstand Radiation Scouring.

He swiftly flowed away, trying to escape Chen Gu.

But how could his speed possibly compare to Chen Gu's? Among Professionals, Chen Gu's physical abilities were exceptional, his speed incredibly quick. Leder simply couldn't get away.

Chen Gu reached into his backpack and executed a slash with Sky's Edge.

Drawing his blade, he slashed as if to sever water.

Leder wasn't truly water. This slash, utilizing the remnants of a super lifeform within Sky's Edge, unleashed the power of Radiation Scouring to its fullest. The skill's power spread from the blade's edge like a storm, sweeping to both sides.

BOOM...

Leder's liquid body was immediately split into two parts.

He struggled to merge his body back together, but to no avail.

"Damn it—" he roared. With a BANG, his liquid body reverted to a gaseous state. Chen Gu took a deep breath and exhaled; the power of Radiation Scouring surged forth, immediately dispersing the two clouds of smoke.

Leder kept roaring, but his gaseous body continued to dissipate, beyond his control.

Chen Gu didn't give Leder another glance. He turned, retrieved his blade, and moved, leaving an afterimage in the air. In the blink of an eye, he was by Hu Ling's side. Hu Ling's outer skin had already been corroded away by stomach acid. Chen Gu executed another slash.

SWISH—

Hu Ling's massive body was cleaved in two, collapsing to either side.

Dora watched in stunned silence as Chen Gu displayed his mighty power, forgetting to control the nine guns around her, which clattered to the ground one after another.

The stomach acid was terrible, still corroding continuously, until it completely dissolved the two halves of the corpse into two puddles of solution.

Qing Ruyan breathed a sigh of relief and, with a groan, said to Chen Gu, "Hurry over and help."

Chen Gu rushed over and asked, "How are you? Are you contaminated?"

Qing Ruyan grimaced with pain, saying, "You... first turn off Radiation Scouring."

Chen Gu offered an apologetic smile and deactivated the skill.

"The pocket on the right side of the backpack, quick."

Chen Gu retrieved a silver test tube from inside. Qing Ruyan instructed, "Drink half of it and sprinkle the rest on the wounds."

After drinking half of the potion, Qing Ruyan seemed to be in great discomfort. Chen Gu sprinkled the remaining half on her two dark spots.

With a SIZZLE, the dark spots emitted thick black smoke, twisting violently as if they were alive—an exceptionally eerie scene.

Qing Ruyan let out a scream and fainted.

Boluo slowly approached the two puddles of solution and, with a THUD, knelt powerlessly, her head hanging low.

Dora carefully approached Chen Gu and asked in a low voice, "Are you a Professional too?"

Chen Gu, keeping an eye on Qing Ruyan's condition, nodded. "Yes."

"Then..." Dora asked somewhat coyly, "among your abilities, do you have anything like X-ray vision?"

Chen Gu was perplexed. "No, I don't."

"Oh." Dora was even more puzzled. How did he know it was red?

Chen Gu glanced at her and Boluo. "You two treat your injuries." He stood up, Sky's Edge in hand, and positioned himself at the cave entrance to guard it.

After a while, Chen Gu suddenly perked up his ears. Footsteps were approaching from inside the cave.

Liu Shichan arrived with a few of her subordinates. Chen Gu's eyebrows furrowed slightly. Ever since entering the Yingudusi Devil's Pit, the team had continually lost members. Even Qing Ruyan had faced situations she couldn't handle.

But Liu Shichan's small team had remained unharmed from beginning to end!

Moreover, whenever danger arose, they would become "separated" from everyone else. After the danger passed, they would reappear completely unscathed.

Liu Shichan was startled when she saw the blade in Chen Gu's hand. Upon noticing the three injured people behind him, she asked in surprise, "What danger did you encounter that even you, Chen Gu, an ordinary person, had to join the battle?"

Chen Gu, in a grave voice, recounted what had happened with Leder but didn't mention that he had been the one to end the battle.

Liu Shichan exclaimed in shock, "Leder... They are so utterly depraved!"

Chen Gu asked, "Your Liu Family was completely unaware?"

"Of course, we didn't know!" Liu Shichan asserted decisively.

A middle-aged man behind her removed his helmet's visor and looked toward the starship wreckage in the cave, appearing somewhat excited. "Is that... the Four Hundred Braves?"

Chen Gu nodded, subtly shifting his body to block their path.

The middle-aged man exhaled and smiled. "We finally found it."

He turned and yelled back toward the cave, "Master, we've found it!"

Liu Shichan was taken aback. "Grandfather?"

From within the cave came a flurry of footsteps, and a group of people emerged, surrounding an elderly man.

The moment they appeared, they quickly took up strategic positions, aiming various weapons at Chen Gu and his companions!

Liu Shichan asked in surprise, "Grandfather, your illness is cured?"

The elder cracked a slight smile and affectionately stroked Liu Shichan's hair. "Grandfather was never sick. Sorry to have worried you."

"But..." Liu Shichan tried to say more, but the elder patted her shoulder. "Let Grandfather talk with this young classmate of yours."

Protected by the middle-aged man, he stepped forward, and he and Chen Gu exchanged measured gazes.

Chen Gu asked, "Liu Jianrong?"

He was the head of the Liu Family.

The elder nodded, smiling. "You're quite remarkable, young man. Joining the Bureau of Mystic Security at such a young age and managing to kill a Second Energy Level individual like Leder—your potential is boundless."

Chen Gu asked cautiously, "What do you want?"

Liu Jianrong pointed to the Four Hundred Braves. "I want to retrieve some things from inside."

Liu Shichan gasped in shock. "Grandfather, that ship contains the results of the most evil experiments in the entire Star Sea!"

Liu Jianrong turned to look at her. "Shichan, the evil within is already history. Countless lives were sacrificed to obtain those experimental results. If they remain sealed here, wouldn't that be a waste?"

"Since the evil has already occurred, why not use these results to create some value? At least we can ensure that those evils weren't meaningless."

Chen Gu didn't know how to respond to this twisted logic.

Liu Shichan still found it difficult to accept. "But Grandfather..."

Liu Jianrong interrupted her. "Shichan, this matter concerns the entire family. Don't be childish."

He glanced at Chen Gu and smiled. "I know what you're thinking. Rest assured, leave it to Grandfather to handle." Then, his tone softening as he addressed Liu Shichan, he added, "Grandfather has always cherished you the most."

He turned to Chen Gu and pointed to the middle-aged man beside him. "He is a Second Energy Level Relative Arbitrator." Then he pointed to the several individuals who had protected Liu Shichan throughout the journey. "They are all Professionals: an Abyssal Blacksmith, a Resonance Council Celebrity, an Electro-Communicator..."

"The only unforeseen event this time was that my dearly beloved granddaughter truly believed I was ill and insisted on joining the operation. I was very concerned for her, so I sent out all the Professionals in the family to protect her."

Chapter 156: Both Perish (1st Update)

"Before this operation, I had already made comprehensive arrangements. If we can find the laboratory, our entire family will immediately board a spaceship and leave the Confederation. I've already planned our escape route."

"If we can't find it, we will continue to lie low within this Star Nation, waiting for the next opportunity."

"For little Shichan's sake, I'll give you a choice. Join us, and leave the Confederation together."

"I'm old now, and among the third generation of the Liu Family, there's only Shichan. Her parents don't want to have any more children."

"If you treat Shichan well, the whole Liu Family will be yours in the future."

Chen Gu and Liu Shichan both widened their eyes in astonishment. Old man, you must be under some kind of misunderstanding, right?

Liu Jianrong looked coldly at Qing Ruyan and the other two on the ground. "Of course, to ensure your sincerity, you must personally deal with these three."

Qing Ruyan's voice suddenly rang out, "Why did you choose to cooperate with Leder—every year several exploration teams enter the Yingudusi Devil's Pit. Why did you specifically choose him?"

Liu Jianrong looked at her and said indifferently, "Not only does the Bureau of Mystic Security conduct investigations, I do as well. I know exactly what Leder and his group are up to."

"I'm filled with anticipation for their drug. If he can turn all the Practitioners accompanying him into controllable Mutants, then the chances of success will greatly increase."

"Leder wants to exploit our Liu Family, but we are also using him."

Chen Gu silently mourned for Leder for a moment. The young fox had ultimately failed to outsmart the old fox.

Leder and his group wanted to use the influence of the Liu Family on Empire River Star, without realizing that at the first sign of danger, the Liu Family would protect Liu Shichan and disappear without a trace. Moreover, they had arranged for a powerful backup plan, waiting for the dust to settle before coming out to reap the fruits of victory.

The situation was extremely unfavorable. Dora and Boluo, both limping, moved next to Qing Ruyan. The three of them looked at Chen Gu together.

The Liu Family had four Practitioners, including one Second Energy Level Practitioner.

On their side, they only had Chen Gu as their intact combatant, and he had already used a skill once.

Of the remaining three, Qing Ruyan had already lost her fighting ability. Dora and Boluo were seriously injured, their combat effectiveness likely less than thirty percent.

Liu Jianrong seemed a little impatient, staring straight at Chen Gu. "Alright, we've wasted too much time. Tell me your decision!"

Chen Gu seemed somewhat hesitant and asked, "Could you... spare the three of them?"

Liu Jianrong shook his head coldly. "Absolutely not. Our vast family needs time to leave the Confederation, and what happened here must not be leaked. Keeping them alive would very likely lead to a leak."

Chen Gu said, "We can capture them and take them with us, then let them go after we leave the Confederation. I promise you, I will be completely devoted to Shichan for a lifetime, making her the happiest girl in the Star Sea!"

As he spoke, he walked toward Liu Shichan, his eyes filled with a tenderness that made the formidable Liu Shichan shudder involuntarily.

Liu Jianrong laughed, seemingly wanting to agree to Chen Gu's request, but the words that came out of his mouth doused Chen Gu with a bucket of cold water. "Step back!"

"Young man, I am 140 years old this year. I have witnessed far more scheming and plotting than you could imagine, ten times more."

"You intend to pretend to compromise with me, to get close, and then capture me, aiming for a grand reversal by 'capturing the leader to catch the gang'?"

"Hehehe, my young friend, your performance is remarkable. Unfortunately, I'm an old timer, and I learned to be cautious long ago. I won't give you such an opportunity."

Old Man Liu still had a smile on his face, as if he weren't discussing a cruel life-or-death situation for both sides, but rather having a casual chat between an elder and a beloved junior.

But even such lighthearted words continued to crush Chen Gu's last hope. "And, little friend, you probably haven't seen a Third Energy Level Practitioner, have you? Now you have. The one standing before you is."

Liu Shichan's grandfather, Liu Jianrong, is a Third Energy Level Practitioner?!

Chen Gu sighed inwardly in disappointment. Clearly, there was no problem with my act; it was quite convincing, and Liu Jianrong even acknowledged it. But his life experience is too vast; he simply wouldn't give me the chance.

Chen Gu did indeed have a plan to "catch the leader first." He had already secretly switched to the Quantum Wizard profession and was manipulating a [Fire Flag] flying knife with Entanglement Control.

I planned to lull Liu Jianrong into a false sense of security through negotiation, and then suddenly attack, holding a [Fire Flag] to his neck from a distance. As for the consequences of exposing this ability, I can't worry about that now. Alternatively, I could use Quantum Teleportation to suddenly appear behind Liu Jianrong and hold him hostage. But now both plans seem unfeasible. Liu Jianrong is very vigilant, and he's a Third Energy Level Practitioner. Even if I succeeded in teleporting behind him, I wouldn't be confident I could subdue him.

The "friendly" smile on Liu Jianrong's face gradually disappeared as he suddenly shouted, "Kill them, or die with them! Make your choice!"

Chen Gu was also extremely infuriated and fiercely flipped off Liu Jianrong. "Fuck you!"

Qing Ruyan had been very calm behind him, and it wasn't until now that she slowly showed a barely noticeable smile.

Chen Gu sighed as if talking to himself, "I really regret it. I shouldn't have chosen this thick-headed, simple-minded profession..."

"I don't want to do this either. I'm not that noble!"

"That old fox has really left me no choice!"

Chen Gu gritted his teeth and glared fiercely at Liu Jianrong. These disconnected words left Liu Jianrong utterly confused.

Suddenly, Chen Gu forcefully raised the [Wings of the Blue Sky] in his hand!

The two [Fire Flag] blades in his backpack and even the super life-form remains inside him that had not yet been fully absorbed—all started to glow simultaneously. The light intensified with extreme speed, becoming exceptionally blinding in an instant!

The Relative Arbitrator next to Liu Jianrong was shocked and quickly pulled Liu Jianrong back. "This is bad! This damn kid is going to take us all out with him! He's going to trigger a Biological Nuclear Explosion using himself!"

Chen Gu, who was able to kill Leder, a Second Energy Level Practitioner, was of course not using his own Radiation Missionary powers, but was drawing on Milna Katerina's memories possessing him. In this state, he could wield the Second Energy Level power of the Nuclear Explosion Nun!

He had been suppressing the various strange impulses from the Nuclear Explosion Nun within his body.

At this moment, a thought suddenly emerged: If I'm going to make a noble sacrifice, I have to die with style.

He raised a hand to flick his bangs, then made a gesture as if to adjust something on his chest...

Stop!

Chen Gu roared inwardly. I almost wanted to ask Qing Ruyan for her makeup kit just now!

"The space here is sealed. You simply can't escape in a hurry!" Chen Gu roared through gritted teeth, "Let us go, or we'll all die together!"

Chen Gu yelled at Liu Jianrong and the others as they retreated, "Don't run, or I'll detonate now!"

Chapter 157: Into the Net (2nd Update)

The Arbitrator, Liu Jianrong, no longer dared to make a move. In such an environment, even at the Third Energy Level, he couldn't bet on whether he could withstand Chen Gu's desperate release of the Biological Nuclear Explosion.

But the head of the Liu Family looked at Chen Gu with distinct appreciation. "Not bad, not bad. My Little Chan certainly has a keen eye."

"Who would have thought that in such a desperate situation, you could still secure a sliver of hope."

The old patriarch, ever decisive, said, "Fine, I'll let you go, but the 400 Braves is mine."

Chen Gu agreed immediately. "Deal!"

He waved vigorously at Qing Ruyan. "Run!"

The three of them supported each other as they fled. The Liu Family members, signaled by Liu Jianrong, cleared a path.

Chen Gu covered their retreat. The four of them staggered out of the cave. Chen Gu shouted, "Big Rabbit, close the door!"

Dora forcefully pushed the stone wall back into place. With a CLICK, it locked.

Chen Gu frantically patted the light glowing from his body. "Stop, stop..."

The situation was spiraling out of control. He yelled to Qing Ruyan and the others, "You guys go first!"

But the three didn't move. Big Rabbit gritted her teeth, turned her back to him, and crouched down. "Get on!"

"Just go!" Chen Gu was frantic. "This has gone too far! I've really overdone it this time! I can't control it anymore..."

The brilliance of the light didn't diminish in the slightest. Chen Gu had indeed initiated the Biological Nuclear Explosion. He knew that when facing a crafty old fox like Liu Jianrong, mere posturing wouldn't be enough to fool him.

Big Rabbit was stubborn. "Get on. I'll carry you as I run."

Boluo was anxiously wringing his hands at the side, continuously shouting, "Hang in there, Chen Gu! Keep it up!"

Boluo's apparent cluelessness nearly made Chen Gu faint from exasperation—this fellow was the type who, in a crisis, had no solutions and could only offer useless encouragement from the sidelines.

Qing Ruyan suddenly raised her hand. With a SWISH, her serpent-shaped dagger plunged into Chen Gu's chest!

Chen Gu was stunned. Qing Ruyan's movements were steady as she pulled the dagger down, then gouged something out. She extracted the piece of super life-form remains from inside Chen Gu's body.

Chen Gu's eyes rolled back as he fainted, collapsing onto Big Rabbit. Blood gushed out like a fountain, dyeing her entire back red.

Qing Ruyan then snatched the Wings of the Void and the Flame Banner from Chen Gu's hands, threw them toward the stone wall, and yelled, "Run!"

Big Rabbit clenched her teeth and ran for her life.

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

In the Yingudusi Devil's Pit, three huge mushroom clouds rose one after another. The ground shook. Terrifying forces, like invisible bulldozers, rolled over the terrain and through the void, leaving nothing but powder in their wake.

The heavy electromagnetic storm clouds in the sky were also affected. Moments later, various forms of lightning and magnetic storms erupted and intertwined, creating a scene like the end of the world.

Several kilometers away, the fleeing group was caught by the shockwave. Big Rabbit twisted her body, embracing Chen Gu tightly, using her own body to protect him.

Then, they were both blown hundreds of meters away.

It took a full ten minutes after the explosion for the area to slowly return to calm. The dense electromagnetic storm clouds seemed to stabilize once again. However, within them, various extraordinary reactions were still taking place, brewing a dreadful storm that threatened to sweep across the entire Yingudusi Devil's Pit.

A massive flying mechanical creature spread its wings and soared in the sky. It was a ruler of these heavens, its body structure perfectly adapted to this environment, usually impervious to any electromagnetic influence.

From afar, its special mechanical eyes detected several unusual protrusions on the ground. It accurately judged that prey must be hidden below.

So, it dove into that area... Suddenly, furious lightning erupted, centering on the creature. A wild dance of golden serpents followed, and explosions filled the sky!

The unfortunate ruler of the sky gave a WHIRR and then its systems failed. Its huge body spun, emitting black smoke as it plunged toward the ground.

When Boluo regained consciousness, his head was ringing, and his whole body felt incredibly heavy. He forced himself up, thick dust flaking off him.

Before he could fully come to his senses, a gust of wind WHOOSHED over his head. It lifted him into the air, flipped him over, and smashed him face-down onto the ground.

Boluo tasted something sweet and metallic in his nose and throat; he had nearly passed out again just after waking.

He lay motionless on the ground for a long while before slowly getting up. Stars danced before his eyes. When he could finally see clearly, he was startled by the massive figure beside him!

It was bigger than the mechanical avian they had killed previously and looked even more ferocious. But for some reason, it was smoking all over, as if it had crashed by itself?

He touched his head. He felt incredibly lucky to be alive—death seemed to have missed him!

Suddenly, he remembered: Chen Gu! What about Chen Gu?

Although that rascal always came up with tactics that put him in a tight spot, he was a good kid.

He looked around and found two more mounds of dirt. He struggled toward one and, brushing away the dust, found Qing Ruyan. Ignoring her for the moment, he moved on to the next.

Chen Gu was pinned under Dora, the two of them tangled in an embrace.

Boluo even suspected that if he hadn't dug these two out, some archaeological team, years later, discovering their corpses, would concoct a passionate love story with a tragic end: they died in a lovers' suicide pact!

He checked them. Both were in terrible condition, especially Chen Gu, who was barely breathing, his pulse almost imperceptible.

A conflicted expression appeared on Boluo's face.

There was still time to run.

The President and this kid were clearly undercover agents of the Bureau of Mystic Security! Although the Confederation was the most lenient towards freelancers among the four major Star Nations, once used to 'freedom,' who would willingly submit to constraints?

What good could come of falling into the hands of the Bureau of Mystic Security?

But if he left now, it would mean leaving these three here to die.

After hesitating for three seconds, Boluo sighed deeply. "I always knew I wasn't a smart man..."

He squatted down and took out a life-saving injectable from a pocket close to his body.

Then, with an expression that clearly showed the pain of using such a valuable item, he injected Chen Gu. He then rummaged through Dora's backpack and found some medical supplies. They weren't as effective as his own, but they would be enough to bring Dora and the President back from the brink of death.

By the time he had done all this, he could already hear the roar of an approaching vehicle convoy. He calmly put down what he was holding, turned around slowly, and raised his hands.

On the horizon, a convoy of vehicles was rapidly advancing in a fan-shaped formation.

Leading the convoy were four formidable experts, who arrived on the scene a few seconds ahead of the main group.

Boluo smiled wryly. Third Energy Level! It really is the Bureau of Mystic Security. Such powerful backing.

Boluo might not be the sharpest, but he understood that two Bureau of Mystic Security special agents on such a mission would undoubtedly have substantial backup. Having missed the initial chance to escape, he could only expect to spend the rest of his days in one of the Bureau's special prisons.

Chapter 158: I Will Survive! (3rd Update)

Qing Ruyan was the first to awaken. In her snowy-white hospital room, a graceful figure stood by the bedside.

Qing Ruyan squinted slightly and said faintly, "You've come."

"I'm here," came a voice strikingly similar to Qing Ruyan's.

Then the person by the bed smiled slightly, her appearance and stature exactly like Qing Ruyan's!

"The Director-General has an important mission for you and has sent me to take your place," the Qing Ruyan by the bedside said with a hint of emotion. "Ultimately, she still trusts you more."

The Qing Ruyan in the bed responded indifferently, "If you could lose the bad habit of freezing up at the sight of a handsome guy, she would trust you just the same."

The Qing Ruyan at the bedside pouted. "Can't a person have a hobby? With life's pace so fast and the pressure so great, we all need an outlet."

The Qing Ruyan in the bed closed her eyes again. "If there's nothing else, I'm going to rest. Go and coordinate the handover with the people at the sub-bureau."

The Qing Ruyan by the bedside looked at 'herself' on the sickbed and cheekily asked, "Hey, hey, hey, how is the target hunk? Did you reveal that you're not actually me?"

Images of herself straddling Chen Gu's waist at the Moonship Hotel, and later, Chen Gu riding on her neck in the Yingudusi Devil's Pit, flashed through the mind of the Qing Ruyan in the bed. Such 'contacts'... to claim they weren't intimate, even I wouldn't believe it. Yet, truly, there was nothing!

For a moment, she found the situation absurdly comical, yet also felt... a pang of wistful loss.

She glanced at the Qing Ruyan by the bedside and answered, "Don't worry, I won't blow your cover. When I first met him, I behaved just like you, then gradually started to change."

Upon hearing "behaved just like you," the Qing Ruyan by the bedside showed visible disdain, pursing her lips unhappily.

"What's wrong with me? I love passionately and hate ardently. Like is like, dislike is dislike. Is there anything wrong with that?"

The Qing Ruyan in the bed didn't want to argue. "Alright, I need to rest."

The Qing Ruyan by the bedside made a 'menacing' grimace at her, then turned to leave. She pulled the door open, paused in the doorway, then looked back and said softly, "When you go back this time, try to visit home. Mom and Dad miss you a lot."

"I know," was the faint reply from the Qing Ruyan in the bed.

The Qing Ruyan in the doorway looked as if she wanted to say more, but ultimately just shook her head and left in silence.

Chen Jixian stood behind the window, arms crossed. His perpetually half-lidded eyes looked no different than usual, but only he knew how tense he was.

Marcel and Mei Lixue stood on either side behind him. Marcus was practically plastered against the glass, peering anxiously into the operating room and muttering ceaselessly, "You blockhead, I told you over and over, safety first, safety first... How did it still turn out like this?"

The third surgery ended, and the doctors emerged, their expressions still grave.

Marcus slumped into a chair, his eyes somewhat vacant. "Hang in there, kid... I still owe you merit points."

Chen Jixian left without a word, silently turning away.

Chen Gu's most troublesome injury wasn't from the Biological Nuclear Explosion, nor was it the backlash from attempting to forcefully terminate his skill. Instead, it was the damage caused when Qing Ruyan ultimately had to forcibly remove the super-lifeform remnant from his body.

That remnant had fused with him.

Experts from the Directorate had already concluded that forcibly removing it would be fatal.

But in that situation, the Biological Nuclear Explosion was unstoppable. If Qing Ruyan hadn't decisively removed the remnant, Chen Gu would have died right then.

If Boluo hadn't forgone his chance to escape and provide critical treatment, Chen Gu would also have died before the Bureau of Mystic Security's reinforcements arrived.

Their two crucial decisions had secured Chen Gu a sliver of hope.

But this time, Great Actor Chen's situation was truly dire. Despite three major surgeries, he still wasn't out of danger.

The matter had even alarmed the Director-General. Though it went against her personal inclinations, she issued an impartial order: "Spare no expense! Employ the most advanced medical technology! Chen Gu must be saved!"

Chen Gu was placed in a life support chamber, his eyes shut tight, completely unconscious.

Members of Special Task Force Unit Five took turns watching over him. Marcus was first, staying for five hours before Melincha came to relieve him.

The team leader left, his worry palpable. Melincha looked at Chen Gu inside the life support chamber and sighed softly, "You foolish boy."

Gazing at him for a moment, she then smiled gently. "You're indeed foolishly adorable."

Everyone in the Bureau with sufficient security clearance already knew what had transpired in the Yingudusi Devil's Pit. This included the final moments when Liu Jianrong tempted Chen Gu with her fortune and beauty, forcing him to make a choice.

Who wouldn't like such a teammate?

Suddenly, Melincha sensed someone entering and turned around in surprise. "Qing Ruyan?"

Qing Ruyan nodded at her. "I came to see how he's doing."

She fell silent, her gaze complex as she looked at Chen Gu in the life support chamber. The surroundings were quiet, as if time itself had frozen.

Qing Ruyan's breathing grew faint. Flashes of events from the Yingudusi Devil's Pit crossed her mind: some moments left her unsure whether to laugh or cry, some made her silently cheer, others deeply moved her, and some filled her with a shy embarrassment.

After this, we probably won't see each other again.

Looking at Chen Gu, she thought, You have to get better. I rarely root for anyone.

I would only deceive you for a mission's sake.

But the 'me' of the future... she'll probably get along with you quite well.

For some reason, Qing Ruyan felt an uncomfortable sense of loss at that moment. She hated this feeling and, gritting her teeth, turned and left.

"Leaving already?" Melincha called out from behind. "Won't you speak to him?"

Qing Ruyan paused but didn't turn. "Tell him I'm very sorry."

"Hey—" Melincha began, but Qing Ruyan had already pushed open the door and departed.

"Strange," Melincha muttered. "Are all people from the Directorate like this...?"

It hurts so much...

That was Chen Gu's only lingering impression: the sensation when Qing Ruyan unhesitatingly tore the super-lifeform remnant from his body. It was as if a piece of his own heart had been forcibly ripped out.

They didn't even give me anesthesia! How inhumane!

After that, his consciousness drifted in a vague state. At times, he would hazily sense something happening, but he had no idea what.

After an unknown period, a startling realization struck him: I'm... not dead yet?

Why should I die?!

He didn't need any firm conviction to support him. Merely by life's most primal instinct, Chen Gu felt an incredibly strong desire: I'm gravely injured, but I'm not dead! I don't want to die!

I don't want to die! I want to live!

I haven't won the Great Actor award yet! I still have a son who's always testing me, waiting for fatherly love! I still have such an adorable granddaughter and an arrogant grandson!

I still have so many flamboyant strategies as a Professional that I haven't had a chance to use yet!

For example, Charles and his 'Starwind Commander'—I have so many bold ideas for that!

Don't rush, don't panic. Let me think... I have to save myself. Yes, self-rescue! What can I do?

I have 'Atomic Life'!

Chapter 159: Mysterious Difficulties (Fourth Update!)

Melincha was idly scrolling through the interstellar network when suddenly the equipment beside her beeped. Without thinking, she looked up and saw all the monitoring instruments of the life-support capsule beeping incessantly!

Melincha was startled for a moment, then burst into ecstasy, pressing the communication button and shouting, "Someone come quick, Chen Gu seems to be coming back to life!"

The entire sub-bureau was startled.

Marcus was the first to rush over, followed quickly by Director Mei and Marcel. The ladies from the internal affairs group crowded the outside of the ward.

The director of the sub-bureau arrived belatedly, with droopy eyelids, looking as if he "didn't really care about him" all that much. But when he reached the outside, he was blocked by the group of ladies. His adjutant, now the deputy director, shouted, "Make way," but it was not very effective in clearing a path. Chen Jixian took a step forward, jostling the ladies, who cried out and stumbled. With two steps, he broke into the ward.

The medical experts were watching the various monitoring instruments, letting out exclamations, "The bioelectrical data is also returning to normal."

"It's truly a miracle!"

"I originally thought there was no saving him. I just followed the Director-General's orders, did what we could, and left the rest to fate..."

The medical expert who said this immediately felt the icy glares of many Professionals, sharp as blades, and hastily retracted his neck, swallowing the rest of his words.

Mei Lixue smiled and said to Chen Jixian, "Director, our little hero has returned."

Old troublemaker, she was really thinking.

Chen Jixian's eyelids twitched, and he shot Mei Lixue a glare. Mei Lixue inwardly cursed her own stupidity. This is the Director's father... 'Little hero'—what kind of mental slip made me blurt out such a term!

The others, however, were confused. What had Director Mei said wrong?

Inside the life-support capsule, Chen Gu's body was slowly recovering. Compared to when he had previously used the "Atomic Life" skill, his recovery was more than ten times slower, but it was still much better than his previous state.

A medical expert said, "At this rate, he should be able to leave the life-support capsule in another two days."

"However, after he comes out, various checks must be performed to confirm whether he has truly recovered fully."

"And..." the medical expert said with some concern, "he's a Professional. Whether this injury will adversely affect his future development still needs further observation."

Regardless, the guy had come back to life.

...

Tonight, Xiao Jiangxia specially prepared several dishes her husband loved. Although he had not mentioned it, she knew he must have been under a lot of pressure at work lately, and his appetite had not been great.

She knew that after her husband's career change, his dream of being a general was shattered, and his mood had been low. Added to the stress of his job, it was a time when he needed family care and comfort the most.

Her children were clearly not up to the task, so it was up to her alone.

When Chen Jixian came back in the evening, he indeed had a hearty appetite, displaying a Professional's capacity for food. Xiao Jiangxia was smiling and very happy. I am indeed a virtuous wife! So proud!

...

Two days later, Chen Gu finally stepped out of the life-support capsule. Qing Ruyan approached him eagerly, extending her hands. "Let me help you."

Chen Gu looked at her, puzzled. What's going on?

There must be something fishy!

"No need, I can manage on my own."

Qing Ruyan, having missed the chance to take advantage, reluctantly stepped back. After all, I can't just force myself on him like I'm helping an old lady across the street, can I?

Tilting her head in thought, she saw no reason why not and stepped forward to offer support under Chen Gu's arm. "Your wounds haven't fully healed. Be careful."

Such resilient chest muscles! she thought.

Chen Gu always felt that this deceitful woman must have some unspeakable scheme!

All members of Special Service Team Five were present; even Director Mei showed up. But Chen Gu scanned the crowd and didn't see his adult son. Unfilial child! he muttered in disappointment.

Melincha clapped vigorously, her eyes filled with happy smiles. The new recruit, Joseph, immediately started bootlicking by joining in enthusiastically.

Charles snorted through his nostrils. "If you're not strong enough, don't try to act tough."

The little demon girl kept a straight face, yet inwardly she was relieved. Finally, I can go out and have some real fun! I've been so out of sorts at the nightclubs lately, not at all like the dance queen I usually am.

Marcus babbled on like an old parent, "Safety first, safety first! How many times do I have to say it? Can't you all learn from your experiences? Don't think I'm only talking to Chen; this applies to all of you!"

The team members felt unfairly blamed.

...

Chen Gu inquired about the follow-up to their mission. The Director-General's office had already started to round up the culprits, tracing the connections from Leder and dismantling the entire illegal human experimentation and modification syndicate, including the factory in Looking Star Corner City.

However, the big boss behind the scenes had escaped, and his true identity remained uncertain, which was indeed a great disappointment.

Qing Ruyan confided to him in private, "The people from the Liu Family have escaped."

"We excavated the 'Four Hundred Brave' and found that all important data inside the lab had been moved out."

"Later, we discovered a newly excavated tunnel beneath the 'Four Hundred Brave'. It seems that while we were negotiating with Liu Jianrong, their people hiding outside had already started digging."

"After the Biological Nuclear Explosion caused the original passageway to collapse, they transported the items through this tunnel and then took the opportunity to flee in the chaos."

The image of Liu Shichan's proud and aloof face, one that seemed to proclaim, "In all the rivers and lakes, who else but I?", flashed in Chen Gu's mind, leaving a complicated feeling in his heart.

That old fox is truly cautious to the extreme, he thought.

He then asked, "Do we know where they fled to?"

"We're trying to track them. Preliminary findings point toward either the Star State or the Empire."

After speaking, Qing Ruyan gently offered, "How are you feeling? Shall I help you go for a walk?"

Forcing assistance on an 'old lady' crossing the road +1, Chen Gu thought.

Everything seemed to be progressing in a positive direction, but on the highest floor of the sub-bureau building, the atmosphere in the Director's office was heavy.

Chen Jixian sat in an armchair behind a large desk, his eyelids half-closed, his shoulders broad, emanating an aura of authority.

In front of the desk stood three people: Director Marcel from Department One, Director Gascolin from Department Two, and Director Mei Lixue from Department Five.

Gascolin, seemingly oblivious to the displeased expressions on Chen Jixian's and Mei Lixue's faces, went on, "If we were a regular police bureau, then what Chen Gu did would be considered error-free, and he would even be commended. However, we are the Bureau of Mystic Security. They aren't ordinary people; they are Professionals, they are special agents!"

"He was only concerned with saving his own skin and, by making an agreement with Liu Jianrong, allowed him to take away the highly dangerous 'Four Hundred Brave' lab! This is a serious dereliction of duty, unforgivable!"

"I don't understand why the Director-General's office would spend a vast amount of medical resources to save him. However, since he has survived, he should take responsibility for his mistakes. Moreover, he should bear the costs of this treatment himself—he and Qing Ruyan are different. He accepted the mission from the Atomic Holy Church, not an official operation from the bureau. All expenses incurred should therefore be his own responsibility."

Chapter 160: Dereliction of Duty Investigation

Mei Lixue couldn't help but sneer. "What do you mean by that? At that time, Liu Jianrong was surrounded by many professionals, several of whom were at the Second Energy Level, and Liu Jianrong himself was even at the Third Energy Level! Chen Gu was alone with three severely injured comrades. It was already incredibly difficult for him to survive and ensure everyone else got out alive. With what do you expect him to have protected that laboratory?"

Gascolin said coldly, "Whether it's possible to do it is one thing; whether one tries is another. If it couldn't be done, then he should have fought to the death and fulfilled his duty!"

Mei Lixue laughed in anger. "Are you saying Chen Gu shouldn't have come back alive? That he should have died beneath the 'Four Hundred Heroes'?"

Gascolin did not respond directly, instead saying, "If he had died delaying Liu Jianrong, perhaps when the reinforcements arrived, we might have been able to capture Liu Jianrong."

Just as Mei Lixue was about to retort, the secretary's anxious voice came from outside. "Inspector Qing, you can't go in... The Director and the others are in a meeting..."

The office door was pushed open forcefully, and Qing Ruyan strode in. A helpless secretary followed her. Chen Jixian waved his hand at the secretary, who then exited, closing the door.

Qing Ruyan marched up to Gascolin and stated, word by word, "The lives of special agents are lives too!"

"Chen Gu didn't know we had backup. I didn't tell him because it was a highly confidential mission. He was just a regular special agent and wasn't cleared to know that much."

"On this mission, all of us narrowly escaped death, and it was thanks to Chen Gu that we returned alive. At that moment, he indeed acted with the resolve to fight to the death, knowing full well he might die. His survival was purely due to good luck—and you want to condemn him for being alive?"

"It was the Director-General's direct order to spare no effort in treating Chen Gu, and you strongly oppose the Director-General's decision. I will report this truthfully to the Director-General."

"I admire your courage—ignorant and arrogant as it is. But let me tell you, Vice Director-General Li Zhengji cannot protect you!"

After speaking, Qing Ruyan nodded to Chen Jixian in acknowledgment, then turned sharply and left, slamming the door behind her with a BANG.

Gascolin's and Marcel's faces turned ugly. Their new backer was Vice Director-General Li Zhengji, a fact few people knew—specifically, this alliance had formed shortly after Qing Ruyan was sent as reinforcement.

If not for the ripple effects of Qing Ruyan's arrival, the high-and-mighty Vice Director-General would likely never have even known of the existence of these minor division chiefs in the small Wuzhaoyin City branch.

It was precisely because of such a powerful backer that, while they previously only dared to scheme behind Chen Jixian's back, they now had the audacity to question him openly and publicly oppose the Director-General's decisions.

However, the two had not expected that their status as mere pawns for the Vice Director-General would become known to the Director-General's faction so quickly.

Mei Lixue watched them from the side with a mocking expression, making Gascolin's face burn even more.

Chen Jixian, without even shifting his posture in his chair, said indifferently, "All of you, get out."

Marcel and Gascolin scurried out. In the corridor, they muttered to each other, "Increase surveillance on Chen Gu, Gao Mengjiu, and Man Suling."

"I refuse to believe we can't dig up some dirt on them!"

Having crossed the Rubicon and become pawns, there was no turning back; they had to see this path through to the end.

「Two days later,」

An administrative order came from the General Bureau, transferring three key professionals from the Second Special Service Team to a secret mission, citing the necessity of their specific professional abilities for the task.

Furthermore, three veteran special agents were assigned to the Second Team as replacements, easily rendering Gascolin a figurehead.

「On the third day,」

The General Bureau's Constitutional Unit reopened an investigation into a case Gascolin had personally overseen three years prior.

In that case, the suspect had ultimately escaped. A routine investigation had been conducted at the time, concluding with "no fault found."

Yet, at this critical juncture, the investigation was reopened. Gascolin was repeatedly summoned for questioning by the Constitutional Unit, under investigation for the charge of "dereliction of duty."

「Five days later,」

Chen Gu completed all his medical examinations. The medical experts confirmed his injuries had fully healed. That evening, Chen Gu finally returned to his own home.

As soon as his personal system connected to the house's security system, it notified him of a parcel.

I haven't bought anything, Chen Gu wondered. Who sent this to me?

He selected "receive immediately," and shortly thereafter, a delivery robot brought him a box.

Chen Gu was stunned when he opened it. Inside was a beautifully bound roster. Its cover was deep red, with a gold-embossed phoenix totem.

To the left, a line of elegant script read:

Dead Phoenix Gang's Heroine Register!

There was another item in the box: a phoenix brooch inlaid with multicolored gemstones. Chen Gu turned it over and saw an inscription on the back: Dead Phoenix Gang Leader Emblem.

Is this... entrusting the Dead Phoenix Gang to me?

Chen Gu quickly checked the sender's name and address, but, as expected, found nothing.

Looking at these two items, Liu Shichan's earnestness regarding the "gang" she had founded seemed somewhat anachronistic, almost laughably so. Yet, this final entrustment stirred complex emotions within him. Chen Gu realized he would likely never again see this "big sister" leader, a figure of legendary loyalty, at school, and for a moment, he found it hard to articulate his feelings...

In the end, Chen Gu solemnly stored the two items, accepting Liu Shichan's silent entrustment.

Ten days had passed since Chen Gu first entered the Yingudusi Devil's Pit. After taking a shower, he took a deep breath, mentally prepared himself, and then opened the gaming pod to enter "Infinite."

As expected, a pile of messages had accumulated.

But, somewhat to Chen Gu's surprise, the majority were not from "Mirror, Sword, and Makeup," but from Zhao Zhenhuai.

Deputy Director Zhao Zhenhuai, a long-time "capital drifter," had been humbled by "Idol Actor" and intimidated several times. He declared he would never concede—not in this lifetime!

But I'm an adult; I know when to yield and when to stand firm.

I'll feign compliance!

Waiting for a chance to turn the tables and take him down!

This time, the messages from "Mirror, Sword, and Makeup" were filled with joy. The new tactics were proving very effective against the Insect Mutants, and everyone in the Central Operations Room was greatly elated.

However, some issues still needed to be addressed and perfected.

So, "Mirror, Sword, and Makeup" was naturally urging him. However, since "Idol Actor" often disappeared, she had grown accustomed to it. She would habitually send a single message—"Still alive?"—and then leave it at that.