

Full Time 541

Chapter 541: Eternal Life on the Internet

Chen Gu turned and dashed back to his own private room, kicked the door open, and threw the light, single-soldier mecha stored in the Dimensional Prison Ring inside. "Quick, suit up! It's a biochemical attack!"

Bai Yunpeng's guards were taken aback. Qiao Shuangyi and Lin Xiaochen were also shocked, and they began to lament, "Why did it have to happen to us..."

Fortunately, not many people came to the site to cheer for Chen Gu today, so there were enough mechas available.

Having experienced many great trials and tribulations, Bai Yunpeng calmly donned the mecha. "Why would Xiao Yunzhan do such a thing?" He had a bright future ahead of him; it was indeed difficult to fathom his motives.

"Marshal, we will protect you and fight our way out!" His guard captain drew his weapon.

Outside, chaos reigned. People fell one after another, all exits had been blown up, and the audience ran in all directions. They were especially panic-stricken upon seeing the eerie state of the deceased.

Outside the Immeasurable Stadium, Shangguan Yuxie and Shang Qingye sensed something was wrong as soon as they heard the explosion. "The Behemoth Alliance matches are under attack! This must be a major incident. Contact the Bureau of Mystic Security immediately!"

Thanks to their decisive action, the Bureau of Mystic Security received the news in no time. Soon, a special task force, in collaboration with the action team, was dispatched.

A little over ten minutes later, Chen Gu used Quantum Teleportation several times to quietly lead Bai Yunpeng and his group out. They met up with Bureau of Mystic Security personnel outside, who were working on digging a passage to rescue those trapped inside.

Among the guards, someone suddenly said, "No way!"

"Inside, there's a biochemical attack! The substance sprayed by the Four-Headed Serpent Elephant isn't just simple venom; it's likely some unknown virus!"

"Once we open up the passageway, the virus inside will leak out, affecting an even larger area!"

Everyone fell silent, knowing he spoke the truth. But if they gave up on the rescue, would the tens of thousands of people inside all die?

Bai Yunpeng shook his head. "Continue with the rescue. Have everyone take protective measures. Notify the Biochemical Disposal Department to be fully prepared. The stadium isn't completely sealed; the virus has already been dispersing through various ducts and pipes."

"Yes!"

Human technology had advanced to the point where it could counter various types of attacks. Biochemical Disposal Department personnel arrived quickly, sealing off several nearby blocks. They then used high-power energy generators to completely barricade the area from underground to the surface.

Luckily, Shangguan Yuqing and the others had informed the Bureau of Mystic Security early on. Although the losses were heavy, the situation remained within controllable limits.

But Chen Gu felt no joy. This attack, broadcast via the Behemoth Alliance's network to all of Star Sea, had been witnessed by every viewer.

Public opinion boiled over, and panic spread. All major gatherings and events, including those of the Behemoth Alliance, were suspended. On one hand, security levels were immediately raised; on the other, an investigation into the masterminds behind the attack commenced.

The Confederation's Biochemical Disposal Department took the lead, collaborating with numerous research institutions to study the virus from the attack.

The atmosphere inside the Bureau of Mystic Security's headquarters was tense. All members of the Special Action Team were present, with Bai Yunpeng representing the military. Presiding over the meeting for the Bureau of Mystic Security was a deputy director, Ding Zhou, an Eighth Energy Level adept known as the 'Hell Titan'.

Aviloya was still undergoing Purification. Given her current state, Bureau regulations barred her from any Bureau of Mystic Security work.

The military and Bureau of Mystic Security experts had, in an extremely short time, dug into every last detail of Xiao Yunzhan's background.

"Xiao Yunzhan had been outstanding since childhood, excelling academically. He was reserved by nature and not keen on socializing with his peers."

"We suspect he came into contact with this extremist organization during his high school years and eventually became a member."

The holographic projection in front of them displayed the forum in question, Xiao Yunzhan's posts on it, and his communications with others.

"The communication records indicate he also recruited some subordinates."

"They were all low-level employees of the Crown of Thunder club—the kind who were insignificant, frequently oppressed, and harbored deep resentment."

Boluo was somewhat puzzled. "But what about Xiao Yunzhan? He always had good living conditions. Why would he be recruited by this organization?"

The Bureau of Mystic Security and the military had officially named this extremist organization the Digital Group.

Gong Shuxu asked, "Can we track their forum posts?"

The technician shook his head. "No. The forum, though unassuming, uses highly advanced technology that theoretically makes tracking impossible."

The technician then asked, "Shall we shut down the forum for now?"

"No need," Bai Yunpeng replied. "Leave it up. Let's see if we can use it as bait."

Besides the forum, the Digital Group surely has other ways to communicate. Closing the forum wouldn't help. It's better to leave it as a 'window' through which we might glimpse the Digital Group.

"Any leads from Xiao Yunzhan's parents?"

"His hometown is on Dust Cloud Star. Our special agents there have already spoken to his parents. They were shocked by Xiao Yunzhan's actions and refuse to believe it. They insist their child must have been possessed by some evil entity; otherwise, he couldn't have done such things."

"His parents have their own beliefs."

"Besides that, they couldn't provide any useful information."

Chapter 542: Eternal Life on the Internet_2

Bai Yunpeng rubbed his brow helplessly. "What about that virus? Have they found a targeted drug yet?"

"The experts are still studying it. I'm afraid it won't be that quick. Besides, even if a drug is developed, the virus acts so rapidly that once an attack occurs, we simply won't have enough time to transport large quantities of it there."

Chen Gu stood up. "I'm going to Xiao Yunzhan's place to take a look."

"Let's split up and act," Bai Yunpeng said.

At the moment, the intelligence they had was pitifully scarce; everyone could only start from the periphery, from scratch.

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Thunder Crown Club, to which Xiao Yunzhan belonged, was located on Sky Drum Star. This time, they were staying at a five-star hotel on Capital Star. Chen Gu didn't find anything in the hotel, so he went straight to Sky Drum Star.

The club had prepared a high-end apartment for a rising star like Xiao Yunzhan, but the apartment was spotlessly clean, and it was nearly impossible to find any "personal belongings."

And when Chen Gu inquired about the other members of the club, he again felt helpless: everyone thought highly of Xiao Yunzhan's prospects, and that he was hardworking and resilient. People spoke highly of him, but when asked who he was closest to, everyone was rendered speechless.

He seemed to be on good terms with everyone, but not close enough to be considered a best friend with anyone.

Once again, Chen Gu came away empty-handed and had no choice but to return to Capital Star. While on the spacecraft, he carefully recalled his "competition" with Xiao Yunzhan.

He plunged into the other party's linker, and Xiao Yunzhan's expression at that moment kept flashing back in his mind.

Back at headquarters, Chen Gu immediately went to examine Xiao Yunzhan's body.

In the morgue, a forensic examiner from the Bureau of Mystic Security pulled the body out of the cold storage and handed Chen Gu a report. "The cause of death was him taking poison in advance. This guy really could endure. The poison would have made his death very painful. By rights, the body should be twisted in agony, yet look at this guy, utterly serene..."

Chen Gu's mind flashed again with Xiao Yunzhan's expression at that time, and he asked, "Did you find anything among his personal belongings?"

"Nothing, completely bare; even the clothes are a new set of combat uniforms from the club."

Chen Gu plucked a hair from the corpse's head and then turned to leave.

He returned to the office. Only Marcus and Chu Zheng were there; the others had gone out to investigate clues. Public opinion was fermenting, and the populace had already begun to panic.

The clean-up team at headquarters was cooperating with the biohazard disposal department to handle the mess at Immeasurable Stadium. On the day of the incident, more than seventy thousand spectators had flooded into the stadium and, even with timely rescue, only a little over six thousand were saved—the rest perished beneath that "moss virus"!

This was definitely the most catastrophic incident in the Confederation, and perhaps for all of humanity, in recent years.

Even those who were rescued had various organs removed, requiring the use of biotechnology to be made whole again, and the medical costs were exorbitant.

Even the higher-ups of the Confederation were alarmed: no one knew when or where the next attack would happen.

Marcus saw Chen Gu take out the hair. "Are you going to use Quantum Divination? Whose hair is that?"

Chen Gu said, "Xiao Yunzhan's."

Marcus was surprised. "He's already dead. What... did you find something?"

Chen Gu shook his head. "Just a feeling. I want to give it a try."

He twisted the hair between his fingertips a few times. A layer of light covered his eyes, and around him, strands of energy light began converging from different directions, seeming to reflect an infinite number of possibilities...

Mysterious and even more mysterious—Quantum Divination.

No matter how powerful a Quantum Wizard, his Quantum Divination can only offer one possibility, still subject to a certain degree of unpredictability.

About a few dozen seconds later, the hair in Chen Gu's hand turned to a wisp of ash, and the hazy light in his eyes slowly faded.

Marcus waited expectantly by his side, but after quite some time, Chen Gu showed no signs of movement, prompting Marcus to blurt out, "Chen?"

Chen Gu came to his senses as if he had just been daydreaming.

"The result of this Quantum Divination is very vague..." He had been reflecting on the result of the divination but still had no clue. He looked at Marcus. The old team leader was experienced, and it was a good opportunity to discuss it with him.

"I saw endless light, countless individual points, some shining persistently, some flickering incessantly, others alternately brightening and dimming..."

"It was like the Star Sea, yet not quite like the Star Sea. I also don't understand what the result of this divination was."

Marcus appeared somewhat cautious. "You performed the divination on someone who's already dead. Could this result be what the ancient legends refer to as... the Netherworld, the underworld?"

Chen Gu chuckled. "Why don't you think it's the Endless Realm? If we go by ancient legends, someone with sins as heavy as Xiao Yunzhan's would surely suffer all sorts of torment after death..."

Marcus scoffed. "Or maybe it's the Star Sea—think about it. He's dead, cremated, all his energy and matter returned to nature. Didn't it come from the Star Sea and return to the Star Sea?"

But Chen Gu still stubbornly shook his head. "I'm certain it's not the Star Sea."

Marcus felt the younger man was being argumentative and glared. "Then where do you say it is?"

Chen Gu thought, If I knew, I wouldn't be discussing it with you. Just as he was about to speak to Marcus, a sudden insight struck him. "I know..."

Chapter 543: Eternal Life on the Internet_3

Then he turned and ran, with Marcus swearing loudly behind him, "You little jerk, at least tell me what it is!"

Stirring up someone's curiosity like that and then just bolting—what an irresponsible scoundrel!

Chen Gu pulled Bai Yunpeng and Ding Zhou into a secret conference room, speaking gravely, "It's about the Interstellar Quantum Network!"

"Xiao Yunzhan isn't dead; he lives on in the Interstellar Quantum Network!"

Bai Yunpeng and Ding Zhou furrowed their brows in unison. "Network immortality?"

This was a taboo topic. The idea had been proposed a long time ago, with a consensus that, in theory, it was feasible: to upload one's entire memory onto the Interstellar Quantum Network and use a unique algorithm to maintain one's personality. Back then, some people were even ready to experiment with this idea. In theory, as long as there was sufficient energy, anyone could live forever on the Interstellar Quantum Network.

But concerns were quickly raised. Did "life" on the Interstellar Quantum Network count as a "living person"? Did it deserve the same rights as biological humans, such as the right to vote? How could these "network-immortal" beings be prevented from engaging in illegal and criminal activities? And if, ultimately, everyone chose network immortality, would humanity be considered "extinct"? A multitude of issues emerged, inevitably leading to various paradoxes.

Before the debate could reach any conclusion, a scientist went ahead and experimented on himself, uploading his entire memory onto the Interstellar Quantum Network. The result was that this individual became almost "omnipotent" on the network. Before other Star Nations could react, the Star State took the lead. They couldn't tolerate the existence of such a "person," and with a series of viruses, the doctor was obliterated on the Interstellar Quantum Network.

Then people discovered the most realistic issue with this concept: upon transforming into this kind of "network life," there was absolutely no "immunity." Subject to any attack, one was like a lamb to the slaughter.

Later, humanity united to enact laws forbidding anyone from transforming into "network life." Additionally, a plethora of "viral mines" were deployed across the Interstellar Quantum Network. These mines swiftly obliterated lawbreakers who underwent the transformation privately, and gradually, the topic faded from discussion.

Bai Yunpeng said, "Are you suggesting that Xiao Yunzhan has transformed into a network life?"

Chen Gu, recalling Xiao Yunzhan's expression before his death, said, "Moreover, it's highly likely that he has circumvented the viral mines and is lurking within the Interstellar Quantum Network."

"Yet for many years, no one has been able to evade the viral mines," Ding Zhou remarked. "When the viral mines were deployed, every nation considered this issue, so they resorted to extreme measures. Once set, not even the four great Star Nations themselves could clear or evade them..."

Chen Gu shared his thoughts, "Xiao Yunzhan lived a happy life with a promising future. Why would he be brainwashed into becoming a member of this radical organization? At the very least, initially, something must have enticed him to approach this group.

"He consumed a large dose of poison before dying, which should have led to a painful death, yet he passed away peacefully.

"So, I speculate that a vision of a beautiful future allowed him to overcome the physical pain, making him feel that giving up his body was nothing to regret."

Still finding it hard to believe, Ding Zhou said, "This is just speculation; we need evidence. And what's even more problematic is, if he really has transformed, we have no idea how to enforce the law against a network life on the Interstellar Quantum Network!"

Bai Yunpeng looked at Chen Gu. "Since you brought it up, Chen, you must have some thoughts, right?"

Chen Gu said, "I have a plan..."

The internal operations of the Bureau of Mystic Security were divided into many divisions, the Intelligence Analysis Division being one of the largest. After the attack on the Immeasurable Stadium, the Bureau immediately collaborated with the military. They rallied the entire Confederation to gather all research materials on biochemical weapons and related projects. They also informed other Star Nations of the attack's details, asking them to join the search for research projects that might have aided the "moss virus."

Massive Star Nations initiated countless projects each year, and just as many were discontinued. Among these, projects related to biochemical weapons were incredibly numerous. The most popular were biochemical attack projects targeting the Alien Insect Race.

A few days later, several potential project documents were laid out before them.

Bai Yunpeng casually grabbed one and gestured broadly. "We'll divide into groups, each responsible for one! The military will provide you with all the support you need!"

Chen Gu picked one at random and looked it over. The project name was "Algae Preparation," originating from the discovery of a special kind of green algae. Certain elements within seemed capable of inhibiting the Insect Race's nervous system, causing them to become sluggish. The project had consumed approximately seventy million Starshields and had progressed to its later stages, but so far, no reliable results had emerged.

The project came from the Dela Research Institute, located on the planet Shedula, not far from the Thunder Crown Club on the planet Tiangu.

Inside a civilian spaceport, Robert, dressed in ragged clothing along with several researchers under his command, stood outside an exit holding a sign to pick up someone.

Chapter 544: Eternal Life on the Internet_4

Robert continuously wiped the sweat from his forehead.

Their car was parked in the free parking spaces at the aeropark, and it too was a borrowed clunker. The whole "get-up" screamed poverty and hardship in every possible way.

Yet, Robert still felt uneasy. Hadn't they already dealt with all investor inspections? Why would there suddenly emerge a review from the "Future" Project Inspection Bureau?

He had heard of the "Future" Project. It was funded by the Confederation and specifically designed to support promising endeavors within the Star Nation, especially those related to the Great War against the Insect Race.

This support program didn't even demand a return on investment. A loss wouldn't be pursued. If it made a profit, one only needed to return the principal within five years.

It was practically like giving away money.

But Robert wasn't hopeful at all because he had already prepared to flee.

This "Algae Preparation" project was nothing but a scam he had concocted to embezzle funding. It had been unsuccessful in both the Star State and the Freedom Alliance. In the Empire, he was almost exposed and nearly lost his life.

He finally managed to fool a bunch of idiots in the Confederation—not because its people were dumb, but because his continuous failures had helped Robert gain experience, making his falsified data increasingly convincing.

Simply put, with each failure, his con game had leveled up.

What he hadn't expected was the investors' lavishness; they offered seventy million right out of the gate! He had only planned on scamming a few million and slipping away quietly. However, no sooner had the seventy million arrived than the investors' personnel moved in as well.

He had no choice but to pretend to buy various equipment and start "experimental research."

Fortunately, he had been careful and thorough over the years, leaving no loopholes. Of the seventy million in funding, a little under half—over twenty million—had already found its way into their private pockets. It was time to make a getaway.

But at this very moment, his fraudulent project had caught the eye of the "Future" Project!

Robert always felt that this was a curse rather than a blessing, so he was extremely anxious.

The announcement on the broadcast stated that a flight from Capital Star had arrived. Robert instructed his subordinates, and they reminded each other, "Be careful! Once we get through this, we run. Then we're out for good: indulge in the finer things and enjoy life!"

Soon, he saw a young man leading a few others walking out. When the man saw the sign they were holding, he immediately approached with a smile.

"Hello, I'm Gu Chen. I'm in charge of this inspection for the 'Future' Project."

"These are my secretary and bodyguards."

Robert glanced at Gu Chen's female secretary. What a lack of taste, he sneered inwardly. A secretary should be seductive and voluptuous. What use is someone like her? To scrub laundry?

Chu Zheng stood aside, displaying what she thought was an appropriately modest smile.

She had fought hard with the instructor to secure the title "female secretary." At first, he had insisted on calling her "female assistant."

But when compared, which role suggests a closer relationship to the boss? Obviously, the female secretary.

Chu Zheng showed a hint of her "ambition," but it seemed to make no difference to the instructor.

The real sense of "danger" for Robert came from Gu Chen's bodyguards. Their eyes were sharp as eagles, their presence formidable; they were clearly not to be trifled with. He couldn't help thinking that if Gu Chen ever discovered his project was just a scam, these bodyguards would immediately apprehend him and turn him over to the police.

And he had guessed right; these bodyguards weren't special agents from the Bureau of Mystic Security but professional operatives from the military.

"Welcome, welcome!" Robert greeted warmly. "Our research is at a critical juncture, and everyone else is tied up. We are the only ones who could come to meet you. Please forgive any negligence."

"It's no problem. Such dedication from your team is exactly what we like to see," Gu Chen praised casually.

Once in the car, Gu Chen began, "Can you tell me how you came to discover this amazing algae?"

Chapter 545 Sacred Lake

Robert smiled faintly as he recalled, "At that time, I was just an ordinary warrior for the Star State. Our fleet encountered the Alien Insect Race in space. You know how incredibly strong and ferocious those insects are. After a fierce battle, the warship I was on sustained heavy damage, forcing us to make an emergency landing on a desolate planet.

"But those damned insects pursued us relentlessly, forcing us to continue the bitter fight on the planet's surface.

"However, our warship had a limited number of weapons suitable for surface combat. We retreated again and again, and the entire army had fallen into despair.

"Just then, we retreated to the edge of a large lake. Swarms of insects charged at us. Preferring death to surrender, we attempted a desperate counterattack, but the enemy was too powerful. We were gradually forced back into the lake, believing it was all over. However, to our surprise, once those insects entered the water, they immediately became sluggish, and their carapaces grew weaker.

"The longer they stayed in the water, the more pronounced these changes became.

"Eventually, our warriors could kill an insect with just their military sabers. We were saved. It was that great lake that allowed us to finally turn the tables on the Insect Race and hold out until a rescue fleet arrived.

"My comrades and I all believed the lake had saved us, so in our minds, it became a sacred lake.

"We filled our containers with water from the lake and took it with us. Not long after, my term of service ended, and I was discharged from the military. I had studied biology in college, and I suspected the lake water held some secret, something that could counter the insects.

"So I began researching the lake water and discovered this extremely tiny green algae organism in it."

Robert concluded, "This is the origin of the entire project. It all started with that one magical bottle of lake water I brought back from the Saint Lake!"

Chen Gu exclaimed, "What a legendary experience! But I have to ask, you're a citizen of the Star State—why didn't you conduct your research there?"

Robert gave a wry smile. "As you know, Star State officials have always been arrogant. They refused to believe a common soldier like me could produce any significant research findings. They'd rather trust the scientists in white lab coats working in laboratories.

"I submitted my application in the Star State, but they wouldn't even look at it. They thought everything I said was a made-up story.

"My research is incredibly important. I know it can change the course of humanity's war against the Alien Insect Race! I couldn't let such findings be buried, so I left my beloved homeland and came to the Confederation.

"As long as these findings can be applied in the war against the Insect Race, then regardless of where I am, I'm making a great contribution to humanity!"

Unable to help himself, Chen Gu applauded, "I admire your noble sentiments!"

"But I still have a question: didn't any of the soldiers who fought with you discover the secret in the water? And since the Saint Lake is so miraculous, didn't you report it? Didn't the Star State's military send someone to investigate?"

Robert was clearly accustomed to such doubts and had a ready answer. "Of course we reported it. Our military immediately dispatched personnel to investigate. They even captured some insects and dropped them into the lake for testing. But strangely, the lake's magic was gone.

"Our military conducted many tests and found no weakening effect of the lake water on the Insect Race. My comrades and I refused to believe it. The military even took us back to the Saint Lake to witness a test firsthand—and it was true."

Seeing Chen Gu about to ask another question, Robert quickly interjected, "My comrades and I wouldn't lie. Even if I were lying, it's impossible that everyone would corroborate my story."

"And this brings us to the core challenge of our research. I speculate that these miraculous green algae possess a biological mechanism that only secretes the Insect Race-inhibiting substance under very specific conditions."

"We have been trying to understand this mechanism for years."

As they spoke, they arrived at the Dela Research Institute. Robert warmly welcomed them inside, guiding them on a tour and providing explanations tirelessly along the way.

It appeared to be a completely legitimate research institute, with all the researchers diligently at work.

Chen Gu and Chu Zheng exchanged a surreptitious glance. This hardly seemed like the kind of place that would manufacture the moss virus.

After the day's tour, Chen Gu and his group returned to their hotel. Once Robert had departed, they convened a meeting.

Ma Changlong, the military's special agent team leader, declared unequivocally, "This guy is a complete fraud!"

"I'm never wrong about people. He's duped his investors. This research is going nowhere; that fellow is just after the grant money."

Chen Gu nodded and casually opened a file. It contained the research institute's financial records over the years, including every equipment purchase.

Chen Gu then accessed the interstellar network, cross-referencing the file with related information he found online.

In just half an hour, leveraging the powerful computational abilities of a "Brain Domain Hacker," Chen Gu concluded, "You're right. They're a bunch of frauds!"

Chapter 546: The Holy Lake_2

"The accounts are well done; they could deceive the majority of accountants."

"But in these few years, they embezzled at least twenty million in research funds."

Chu Zheng's spirits immediately sagged. "A wasted trip, nothing gained, ugh..."

Chen Gu closed the file. "Hand it over to the ordinary law enforcement authorities. We'll leave tomorrow; no need to waste more time here."

...

In the evening, the institute closed for the day as usual.

Whether it was the equipment or the so-called "research results," they appeared "extremely valuable" on the surface. Consequently, the institute's security measures were very stringent. Eight security guards were on duty at night, and surveillance devices were installed everywhere.

One security guard was specially stationed in the control room, monitoring the screens closely.

But in places he couldn't see, strands of electricity flowed through the network cables, silently infiltrating their system and rerouting all the surveillance feeds.

In a hidden bunker on the planet Shiedra, a person was leisurely listening to music, frying a small steak for himself.

The fat SIZZLED, and its aroma began to fill the air.

Suddenly, a DING-DONG sounded from the equipment behind him. He immediately put down his meal, turned to the equipment, and received a message from an untraceable account: The baton is passed to you.

He smiled slightly and started operating rapidly. The surveillance screens appeared on his device.

Then he established a link; with a single keystroke, these images could instantly be broadcast on various live-streaming platforms on the Interstellar Quantum Network.

He then looked at the surveillance screens with a smile of pure innocence and sent a message on the Interstellar Quantum Network to an account: No. 18 is in position.

The other party seemed to be waiting for him, as the response came quickly: Share.

So, he set up a private live stream and sent over the account and password. Soon after, a series of soft PINGS sounded, indicating one "viewer" after another was entering the live stream.

They were named: 0 Founder, No. 1, No. 2, No. 7, No. 8...

No. 8 was the first to speak, "I'm early. It seems the main event won't happen until tomorrow."

No. 11 said, "After No. 18, the agents of the Bureau of Mystic Security in other locations will definitely be on alert, making other operations a bit more difficult."

0 Founder spoke, "It's all been arranged."

So, the other numbers messaged in a rush:

Trust 0 Founder!

Trust 0 Founder!

Trust 0 Founder!

No. 18 said, "Soon all freelancers will understand that the Bureau of Mystic Security can barely protect itself in the face of destined Purification, let alone protect them!"

...

But the next morning, surveillance footage showed the institute in complete chaos. Robert and a group of people were scurrying around like headless flies, shouting, "How did this happen?"

"How did this happen?"

"How did they discover our problem so quickly? We were about to leave. Couldn't they give us a chance?"

In the live stream, the numbers were also puzzled: "What happened?"

0 Founder also appeared and instructed, "No. 21, find out what happened."

In the Interstellar Quantum Network, electrical currents swiftly gathered related information, and a conclusion was quickly reached. Suddenly, a line of text appeared in the chat room without a speaker:

Robert's scheme has been seen through. The Bureau of Mystic Security handed over all materials to the police system last night. Some fraud investigation officers are now en route to Dela Research Institute. Chen Gu and his team's flight is leaving Shiedra this afternoon.

The live stream fell silent at once. They had been planning this for a long time, especially 0 Founder, who had deliberately left "clues" much earlier. The goal was for the Bureau of Mystic Security to pursue these leads after the attack at Immeasurable Stadium and be drawn to these locations.

Had the first act of this series of linked plans failed?

Everyone had been preparing for so long, but the bait wasn't even bitten—instead, they just turned around and left!

Last night, everyone was flattering 0 Founder. Now it was a bit awkward...

0 Founder quickly spoke up, "We can't let them just leave like that. No. 18, leak something in the institute to catch the officers' attention. They will faithfully report it to the Bureau of Mystic Security, and Chen Gu will turn back!"

No. 18's eyes sparkled. "Good idea, I'll arrange it right away."

...

Collecting evidence in a commercial crime investigation is complicated. However, after the agents arrived, they immediately sealed off the entire institute and temporarily detained everyone inside.

After a morning of frantic scurrying, Robert and his group immediately prepared to flee. However, another team of agents, who were already prepared, intercepted them midway and apprehended them on the spot.

Subsequently, the agents began searching the entire institute. They were highly efficient. By noon, they had found a secret storage room. After forcibly opening a safe inside, they discovered a sealed petri dish filled with vivid green moss. The moss writhed within the dish as if it were an animal!

The agents immediately reported this finding. After being passed through several hands, the information soon reached Chen Gu.

Chen Gu, who had already arrived at the spaceport and was about to board the spaceship, watched the video. His expression changed, and he instantly said, "Go back!"

He shared this video with everyone, and they were all excited. "We've finally caught their tail!"

Chapter 547: The Holy Lake_3

Chen Gu quickly applied for the highest transportation priority, and the maglev car rushed to the research institute at top speed. In the car, Chen Gu had already made a series of calls.

His authority was now considerable—a temporary adjustment, of course, made to deal with the incident. This ensured that, in the current situation, he could quickly mobilize the surrounding military forces to tightly seal off the research institute. Simultaneously, he raised the biohazard response level to its highest.

All agents were evacuated and placed in isolation at a designated military hospital, where they would later undergo comprehensive examinations and treatment.

In less than fifteen minutes, Chen Gu appeared outside the research institute with his team. He had already grasped the general situation and there was no need to ask further.

"Where's Robert?"

"In the medical vehicle over there."

The medical vehicle had undergone biohazard processing, and Robert was locked inside. Chen Gu donned a light single-soldier Mecha and boarded the vehicle. Robert, shackled in the highest security restraints, looked blankly at the person who had boarded. He still didn't understand what had happened. It was just a case of commercial fraud, and the initial investigation procedure was familiar to him. How had it suddenly escalated into this kind of full-scale military mobilization?

Chen Gu said, "We meet again."

Robert looked at him, puzzled. "Aren't you from the Future Planning project?"

Chen Gu shook his head, then pointed outside the car window. "You realize the seriousness of the situation now, don't you?"

Robert immediately cried out in injustice, "I really don't understand what happened, Mr. Gu Chen, what exactly is going on here? Do my investors have powerful backgrounds? Did I offend someone I shouldn't have? I'm willing to pay the money back; if it's not enough, I'll find other ways..."

Chen Gu interrupted him, "It has nothing to do with that."

He played the video. "You should be very clear about what this is. Don't harbor any delusions of luck anymore."

As Chen Gu spoke, he accessed Isabella Wu's memories, silently unleashing his Brain Domain Hacker ability.

Robert was stunned as he looked at the video, his mouth agape. "There's... there's a warehouse like this in my research institute?"

"How come I didn't know?"

"Good God, what are these mosses? Are they my green algae?"

"I had no idea!"

While Brain Domain Hacker was not as adept as Psychological Spy in distinguishing lies, it was far more accurate than a regular polygraph. For Chen Gu, it merely served as a reference.

His profession told him that Robert was not lying.

Chen Gu frowned inwardly. But on second thought, this really doesn't make sense.

If Robert was really the one behind the creation of the moss virus, he wouldn't have defrauded investors of seventy million. He would certainly have had ample research funds.

According to the bureau's current profile analysis of the Digital Group, this organization operated at a very high level. Most of its members were likely what one would call part of the "social elite" class.

They were not short of funds.

The development of the moss virus was the starting point of their entire plan. They would do everything possible to ensure funding for this research.

Using commercial fraud to raise funds carried too great a risk of exposure, and it would jeopardize their entire project. They would not resort to such measures.

Yet, the moss virus was discovered inside their research institute, so there had to be a connection. Where did the issue lie?

Chen Gu opened a list. It detailed all the middle and high-level personnel at the research institute, any of whom would have had sufficient authority to set up such a warehouse without Robert's knowledge. "Tell me," Chen Gu asked, "who is most likely the real owner of this warehouse?"

Robert quickly rattled off several names. At this juncture, any slight personal grudge was enough reason for him to implicate them, as long as it shifted the focus from himself.

Chen Gu hadn't expected to find anything concrete from the clues Robert provided. He casually sent the list to the personnel outside, instructing them to interrogate and investigate.

He looked at Robert. "I'm going to ask you one last question. Think carefully before answering—this could determine your fate!"

Robert shivered and immediately replied earnestly, "Please ask. I'll tell you everything I know."

"That story you told me before about the Holy Lake, which parts were true and which were false?"

At this point, Robert genuinely had no reason to conceal anything. He immediately said, "The Holy Lake is real, but I'm not sure if it's because of the water... or something that's hidden in the lake.

"Before we were driven back into the water by those bugs, I glanced back at the lake. There was a huge shadow beneath the center of the lake's surface.

"But at that critical moment of life and death, I didn't have time to see what it was clearly.

"After we were forced into the lake, I was resistant to heading towards the center, but after diving in, I found the dark shadow had disappeared. I thought I had seen it wrong at that time.

"Later, our military also searched the lake and found nothing.

"When I thought up this scam, I felt it was better to talk about green algae than to describe a creature I wasn't sure even existed."

Chen Gu nodded, then turned and left.

Once this is over, that Holy Lake is definitely worth investigating, he decided.

He called over Chu Zheng and Ma Changlong. "Chu Zheng, you stay outside and handle communications. Ma Changlong, you come with me to take a look inside!"

Chapter 548: The Holy Lake_4

Chu Zheng immediately said, "I want to go with you."

Chen Gu glared at her. "Follow orders!"

Feeling wronged, Chu Zheng pouted, while Ma Changlong asked Chen Gu with a smile, "Is there danger? Should I bring gear?"

Chen Gu thought for a moment. "Bring it."

After finding that one culture vessel, the investigators had immediately retreated. They didn't dare explore further to see if there was anything else behind the secret warehouse.

"Okay," Ma Changlong agreed briskly. A few minutes later, he was donned in a suit of special power armor.

This thing resembled heavy Mecha but was much smaller, with extraordinary armor protection and a small energy generator on its surface creating an energy shield—its overall defense was comparable to a small ground-attack craft.

The weaponry was even more terrifying: on his back was a huge missile box, neatly arranged with sixteen special missiles, including four with yellow-painted warheads—nuclear missiles!

On each shoulder and below each rib, there was a short, thick energy cannon.

Two heavy-caliber rapid-fire energy guns were mounted on the outer sides of his lower legs.

Around his waist, there were also two energy laser sword hilts.

He was truly armed to the teeth. Even so, Ma Changlong still brought an extra ammo box, which, when opened, revealed various high-power hand grenades.

Chen Gu smiled wryly and shook his head. "Colonel Ma, we're going to investigate, not blow the entire research institute to smithereens."

Ma Changlong chuckled. "Better safe than sorry. When you get to the battlefield, you'll understand that firepower is always in short supply, never excessive—oh, right, you're the 'Valiant Champion,' you should understand this very well..."

As he spoke, he was also operating something. A buzzing sound of electric motors followed, and a four-legged weapon platform robot, only about a meter tall, trailed after him.

Chen Gu was completely speechless as Ma Changlong waved an arm encased in mechanical armor. "I'll take point!"

With his weapon platform robot, he strode into the research institute, his armor CLANKING.

This guy shared one of Chen Gu's professions: Star Battle Instructor.

Chen Gu suspected that if it weren't for the limited space inside the research institute, this guy would have brought even more weapons. Chen Gu followed behind. The place had been cleared out long before, so there was no danger at all—at least, not until they reached that secret warehouse.

The surrounding surveillance equipment faithfully recorded all actions of the two men inside the empty research institute and then transmitted the footage back to the livestream room.

The Numbers were very excited: as expected, Zero Creation had lured them back with a small scheme. Compared to Zero Creation, they were like imbeciles.

Number 1 said, "Whatever Number 18 has prepared for them, let's hope it doesn't disappoint us."

Number 18 sent a smiley face emoji and then said, "Don't worry, my darlings, it will definitely satisfy everyone."

Zero Creation reminded, "Don't forget our main objective."

"Don't worry," Number 18 assured. "As soon as they enter that warehouse, I'll start the livestream."

...

The secret warehouse was hidden behind the power distribution room of a test workshop. Ma Changlong soon arrived outside this workshop, and Chen Gu quietly activated his Radiation Field.

Soon, the entire structure of the building took shape in Chen Gu's mind. Just as I thought, he mused. Behind the secret warehouse, some space had been "concealed" using architectural techniques.

Similar to this warehouse, anyone not versed in architectural design would hardly notice such a trick hidden inside this workshop.

These spaces were all narrow, forming a passageway that led to the center of the workshop, right below the largest piece of equipment.

This equipment was generally installed in a fixed location and not moved. Below it, another "workshop" had been excavated, cleverly designed so it could secretly use the equipment above.

With a thought from Ma Changlong, the weapon platform robot stepped forward and extended a thin mechanical arm to push open a door. At the same time, the figures of the two men appeared on several livestreaming platforms across the Stellar Web.

But there weren't many viewers.

Chapter 549 Complete Infected Body

Creator said, "Number 21, it's your turn."

As a result, many bored users who kept wandering from one live stream to another would mysteriously keep coming across this broadcast. The number of viewers in each live stream was skyrocketing.

On the screen, Ma Changlong had already found the secret passage behind them as instructed by Chen Gu. Ma Changlong sent a robotic weapon platform ahead to scout. Chen Gu also felt it was beneficial to bring more equipment at this time.

Yet Ma Changlong still felt it was "not quite safe." From a hatch on the robotic weapon platform, six bee-sized flying drones BUZZED out, scouting even further ahead of the robot.

The robotic weapon platform then raised four thick energy cannons!

The flying drones sent back images from all angles. The narrow passage only allowed one person to pass through at a time. Ma Changlong was in front and Chen Gu behind. They were just approaching a corner when the drones had barely rounded it. Suddenly, Chen Gu perceived something and swiftly pulled Ma Changlong to a stop.

Ma Changlong was surprised because those drones were ten meters ahead of them and had not detected any anomaly.

He was about to ask Chen Gu when the images from the drones vanished simultaneously!

Ma Changlong's eyes hardened. This meant the flying drones had been swiftly and simultaneously destroyed. Following Ma Changlong's brainwave commands, the robotic weapon platform moved forward quickly, its four thick energy cannons raised, and then suddenly dashed past the corner.

The energy cannons were fully charged, but the robot's scanning and lock system, despite using various frequency bands to scan and capture, consistently received empty feedback.

Only the debris of the flying drones lay scattered on the ground. Other than that, the passage was eerily empty.

Ma Changlong was filled with doubt and intrigue. "What on earth is it?"

Chen Gu's Radiation Field was always active, allowing nothing within a radius of over a hundred meters to escape his perception.

However, the entity was too fast. Just then, he only had time to stop Ma Changlong, not enough to retract the drones.

Chen Gu walked past Ma Changlong. The military special operative still felt they should proceed with caution. "Let the robot handle anything."

Chen Gu waved his hand dismissively, walked in front of the robotic weapon platform, and looked up at a vent above.

Ma Changlong watched in bafflement as Chen Gu suddenly said to him, "Here it comes..."

Before his words had faded, the walls, floor, and ceiling around them burst and shattered simultaneously. A vast mass of green surged out from behind at incredible speed.

Ma Changlong didn't hesitate to open fire, unleashing powerful energy from various weapons. His robotic weapon platform maintained a relentless barrage, and explosions occurred continuously amidst the green. However, this powerful firepower couldn't stop the green mass. It swarmed forward, slowing only where it met the gunfire; but where it was unchecked, it moved as fast as green lightning.

In the blink of an eye, it was about to engulf Ma Changlong.

Suddenly, a strong light burst forth from Chen Gu's body—a light that burned like fire, emitting faint CRACKLES.

Radiation Missionary's thermal-melt effect caused the advancing green to wilt instantly upon entering the light's glow. This wilting also seemed to be "contagious," continually eroding the intact parts behind it.

The green mass was enormous and moved so quickly that it suffered a great loss when it encountered Chen Gu's light. It promptly withdrew, vanishing back into the broken walls and floor in an instant.

The entire process lasted less than a second; it was all too fast. Before Ma Changlong could react, the various weapons on his Mecha were still firing wildly, even though the attack was already over.

He was shaken, his weapons still primed to fire at any moment. He executed several tactical maneuvers to check their surroundings.

"What the hell is that thing!?" Ma Changlong gritted his teeth and asked.

Chen Gu bent down and gently brushed a black scorch mark on the shattered floor with his hand. These were the remnants of the green, scorched and withered by his thermal-melt radiation. It gave him an intense urge to eat!

Chen Gu quickly suppressed this bizarre urge and flicked away the black ash. "It's very likely to share the same origin as those moss viruses."

Without further concern, he strode forward and opened the large door to the underground space.

"Be careful," Chen Gu warned Ma Changlong behind him. He had already sensed that many cultivation vessels were placed within this section of the underground space, but he could not be certain of the state of their contents; they seemed to be somewhere between life and death.

The interior was pitch dark. The robotic weapon platform came up from behind and switched on two beams of light. The beams scanned around and quickly located the cultivation vessels.

The first cultivation vessel was five meters long and two meters in diameter. The giant transparent cylinder was filled with a dazzlingly vibrant green. The color was unusually vivid. Generally, green gives a sense of life and hope, comfortable to behold—but this green, for some reason, was as disquieting as blood, evoking an unsettling feeling.

When the light beam settled on this vessel, the green inside seemed to be disturbed and started wriggling, making a RUSTLING sound like worms.

Chapter 550 Complete Infected Body_2

Following a loud POP, the gigantic culture dish exploded from the inside, spilling countless green streams. In Chen Gu's 'Radiation Field' perception, the contents of the culture dish switched instantly from a state between life and death to one brimming with vitality.

Countless green ribbons surged out of the culture dish like a tide. Upon reaching the spacious area outside, the green strands dispersed, turning into palm-wide green ribbons—resembling strips of 'kelp'.

However, the sheer number of these 'kelp'-like strands was enormous. They were five meters long and two meters thick when confined within the culture dish, but once released, they instantly occupied an area tens of meters wide.

Amid the endless 'kelp', a figure emerged.

When Ma Changlong saw the state of that figure, he was rendered speechless in astonishment.

It was a half-figure; her long hair *was* those 'kelp' strands! Her lower body, however, was a mass of green 'roots'.

She fiercely opened her eyes, which also shone with a piercing green.

Her 'roots' moved rapidly, her speed astonishing!

Outside the research institute, Chu Zheng also watched all of this unfold via the live feed. One of Ma Changlong's special agents, standing by her side, suddenly remembered something upon seeing the bizarre creature. The agent quickly opened a file, searched through it, and indeed found a record. The file showed a young, beautiful woman whose appearance was identical to that of the bizarre creature.

Only, the file described a woman, while the one fighting was a strange and eerie creature.

"This is a female research graduate who resigned from the institute a year ago!" the agent reported.

Ma Changlong firmly believed firepower could solve everything; if it didn't, it just meant there wasn't enough firepower!

And thanks to his experience with steel, Ma Changlong had adjusted all his energy weapons to "high-temperature combustion" mode before entering.

His heavy Mecha shuddered violently as various energy weapons fired wildly. His weapon platform robots immediately coordinated with him.

Under such fierce firepower, those green 'kelp' strands immediately ignited, burning all over. The eerie creature let out a piercing shriek as the infinite 'kelp' strands lashed out frantically towards Ma Changlong.

Her speed was incredibly fast, and Ma Changlong was struck by dozens of 'kelp' strands in quick succession, sending him flying.

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP...

Ma Changlong crashed to the ground, rolling over and over.

The advanced design of his Mecha ensured he was unharmed, but red lights flashed all over it, continuously blaring alarms.

Ma Changlong inspected his Mecha, his eyes widening in disbelief. This is perverse—

This Mecha possessed not only thick, sturdy armor but also an energy shield generated by a miniaturized power generator. Its defensive capabilities were comparable to those of a small ground-assault ship.

Yet, those seemingly soft and feeble 'kelp' edges were incredibly sharp. A series of lashes not only cut through the energy shield but also left deep gashes on his armor. They had almost sliced through the armor plating and shredded him to pieces!

Ma Changlong shouted a warning to Chen Gu, "Be careful, this thing is too powerful!"

On the live streams, the audience was instantly thrilled.

They didn't know what exactly the live stream was about, but Mecha, monsters, and supernatural abilities—these were the selling points of any era's blockbuster popcorn flicks.

People watched live streams for entertainment, and this stream's "realism" was more thrilling than any movie.

Consequently, various messages of praise flooded the live stream chats.

Among these people, a small number of freelancers were also hidden, not commenting but silently watching everything unfold.

Some had already recognized Chen Gu as a 'Radiation Missionary' and Ma Changlong as a 'Star Battle Instructor'. Such a lineup seems somewhat insufficient against this monster... they thought. What exactly is this thing? Anxiety began to stir in their hearts.

Chen Gu did not need Ma Changlong's warning. The intense nuclear fusion glow radiating from him suddenly doubled in intensity. The 'kelp' strands sweeping towards him barely touched this glow. Instantly, their vibrant green turned to a blackish-grey. They became patches of char that, with a SNAP, shattered and scattered.

Chen Gu was like a burning 'holy object,' and that eerie creature was the evil that needed to be 'purified'!

Chen Gu stepped forward, his pace seemingly unhurried, while the surrounding vibrant green 'kelp' danced and fluttered, yet lashed down relentlessly—its speed like lightning.

Yet, she posed no danger to Chen Gu. Instead, he chased her until she was scrambling all over the place!

Ma Changlong had already recalibrated his status and readied the various cannons—large and small, long and short, thick and thin—mounted on his Mecha. Although the creature had nearly breached his defenses at the onset, he was duty-bound. He still took a position in a corner, prepared to provide support to His Excellency the 'Volunteer Soldier King.'

But just as he readied himself, he saw His Excellency, wreathed in flames, pursuing the fiend in the manner of a deity descending, causing it to scurry about in disarray.

The fiend's 'kelp' tentacles were continuously charred black, enraging it so much that it shrieked incessantly.

The shrieking also seemed to possess some offensive power, making Ma Changlong feel somewhat dizzy. However, Chen Gu, who directly faced the assault, seemed unaffected and relentlessly pursued the fiend, chasing her all over.

This level of spiritual power interference was barely a drizzle. You've clearly never witnessed how 'Brain Domain Hackers' fight.